The Deviates

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by RAYMOND F. JONES

One man alone had any woman—
every woman—in his power!

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The DEVIATES

by

Raymond F. Jones

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I. THE HATED MAN

1.

THEIR KIND could communicate.

On the granite butte the boy sat against the sky. Below him, the river grumbled in distant patience. A pair of crows spun solemnly against the puffy clouds. He was not watching these; there was other motion far below and distantly—the rustle of brush, the clatter of stones.

He turned his face to the sky and whispered, "They'll soon be here." And then, like one praying, he murmured, "There's nothing else I can do, is there?"

The answering voice was low with tenderness and compassion. It gave him strength, being inside him as it had been from the first moment he could remember. He was not alone now or ever.

"There is nothing else that you can do. This is the sum of all our lives, that the Children might live. You will not fail them, Son."

"No—I will not fail them."

He looked down. It was five hundred feet to the brown, crawling water, almost a sheer drop. He would jump far out to make sure he went all the way. The river would crush his body; if they ever found him, there would be little testimony of who or what he had been.

There was a little while yet. He didn't want to hurry, in spite of the agony that followed three days without food, of hands and legs that bled from too fast flight

through the miles of brush and up the armored crags.

He reached out into the blue web of sky again. "Barron!"

"Yes, Sammy."

"What became of the others? Did they catch Tommy and Howard?"

"No one was caught. Tommy burned himself to death. It was just a little while ago. He wouldn't let anyone listen, but we know he's gone. Howard took the medicine we sent out; it changes all the cells before they die."

"I wish I had some."

"I wish so, too. We're sending it out as fast as we can. You're not afraid, are you, Sammy?"

"Yes, I'm afraid! I keep feeling what it's like to be falling, and falling— I keep feeling the river—like a giant grinding his teeth over me. I don't want to go, Barron!"

"Sammy." The strong voice of their Father whispered like far thunder. "You must do only that which you wish to do. You can go down the hill and into their arms. But they will not let you live, not very long. And if they get you, all of us may be lost. We would help you if there were anything in the world that we could do, but there are many things that even I, your Father, cannot do.

"The choice is yours, Sammy. What will you do?"

The boy was crying, as if accused of treachery. He answered in a half-rage. "I'll jump, of course. But I *want* to stay. I don't want to rot at the bottom of the river. I want to keep the sky and the wind and the hills. I want to know what tomorrow is like!"

"We know," said Barron softly. "And Tommy and Howard wanted to see tomorrow, too."

"They're coming!" said Sammy. "They're out of the brush and into the open rock. They are trying to swing around to get a shot that will not drop me into the river."

"Goodbye," said Barron.

"Goodbye, Sammy," said the Father.

He looked far down to the ugly, crawling river.

2.

The biological processes of man and nature, mused Robert Wellton, lack the precision that is found in the world of metal and stone and lumber, in astronomical calculations, and in commerce, where goods are exchanged according to the numbers attached to them. The world of biology is a dark labyrinth. Footsteps here cannot be mapped for others, who would come exactly the same way. Here, only raw chance, or fortuitous circumstance, can be depended upon to change the age-old pattern of life to some original creation, which can be nurtured and fed and coaxed into continued existence.

In the tower at Central Genetic Institute, there are hundreds of geneticists, but there is only one name the people of Kansas City bother to know: Robert Wellton, Chief of the Bureau of Genetic Control, Director of the Central Genetic Institute. The Institute was a gray, sprawling block of reinforced concrete with multiple wings spreading over a square city block, from which the spire rose thirty stories in the air.

For thirty-five years, Wellton had been its Director, and it was said that Wellton was the Institute, and the Institute was Wellton. Only Wellton himself knew how untrue that really was. He held his post because he knew more of genetics than any other man alive, and applied that knowledge with the brutal insistence that everyone liked to see applied—to his neighbor. He was responsible to the citizens for his duties, responsible to them through the Congress, and through the genetic sub-committee headed by Dr. Carlos Rossi. The position was dedicated to Robert Wellton freely, as long as he pleased Rossi and the committee.

Wellton occupied an office on the third floor of the eastern wing of the Institute. He could have had a re-

mote aerie high in the tower, far from the human stampede he served and passed judgment upon, but he wanted to be close to that stream.

From his window he could see them. Although there were local centers within easy reach in every land, the rejected applicants for parenthood had the right of final appeal to Central in Kansas City. They took it. The Institute had the capacity to process four thousand applications daily, and it was overloaded always.

The day was one of shimmering midsummer heat that burned across the dry prairies, once alive with wheat and corn. Now, only thin bands of fields followed the broken transcontinental highways across the horizon.

Wellton stood by the window in the afternoon when the long shadow of the tower spread across the city like a protecting arm. He seemed remote and gaunt, his eyes on something that could not be seen through the window, his attention fixed as if listening to a far-away sound. He was a tall man, but not thin. A rapier scar on his right cheek ran horizontally almost to his mouth; it gave his face on that side a deep shadow.

He stood now, erect with a steel-like narrowness, his face rigid. Then all at once he slumped, as if melting from some internal fire. He hid his face from the sky, with a hand whose fingers spread harshly into his eyes.

He was standing thus when a commotion sounded beyond the closed door of his office. He turned, wiping away the pity that marred his face and moved toward his desk.

3.

A man and a woman burst through the door—a boy and a girl, really—followed by Wellton's secretary, Miss Tolleson. The two stopped just inside the office, the boy's

arm about the girl's waist, wrath and despair emanating from them.

Miss Tolleson scraped past them. "I'm sorry, Dr. Wellton. They forced their way through before we could stop them. The guards will be here in a moment."

He waved her away. "We won't need the guards. I'll talk to them."

"But Dr. Wellton, you can't; they take all your time!"

He dismissed her with his hand and she closed the door behind her while the young couple stood immobile. Wellton beckoned them forward and sat down behind his desk.

"What is it you wanted to see me about?"

The sound of his voice loosened their dead limbs. They moved forward and stood before him.

"What do you want?" he said again. "Please sit down."

The girl's lips were pale and thin with an unnatural tightness, as if they would collapse if she did not keep them so stiffened. "You know what we want," she answered.

They wanted what the whole world wanted. They were afraid of living and of not living, of death that for them would be final. "Did you bring your charts with you?" Wellton asked.

The girl shook her head.

"What are your names?"

"Florence Crane and James Ash."

Wellton began scribbling. Halfway through, he laid down the pencil and flung the sheet into the wastebasket beside him. "I can't tell you any more than you've already been told," he said with an irritation he regretted. He tried to soften his voice. "You know that I can't; you knew it before you broke in here. What is it you want of me that I can give you?"

The girl broke down then. She lay her head on her arms at the edge of Wellton's desk and her hair spilled across it, almost touching his hands. He moved his fin-

gers forward. It was fine and golden, and smoky prairie dust marred its light.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"Washington State," James Ash said. "Our car broke down. We hitched rides most of the way, walked a lot of it. I told Florence it was no good—the Center here would give us the same answer as back home; but she had to know. I'm sorry we bothered you, Dr. Wellton. Upstairs, I guess we both just sort of went a little crazy. Somehow, we'd always planned on our own children."

Wellton drew some change from his pocket and passed over a couple of checks. "Get something to eat in the commissary," he said. "And get a good room before you start back."

Florence raised her head suddenly. He thought for a moment she was going to spit in his face. Then her lips opened and she began to curse him. He listened, and kept his hands folded on the desk between them.

James Ash sat rigid, as if she were drawing upon him for the power that was flowing out of her. He knew he should move to stop her, but he waited for Wellton to command her into silence. Her fire was brief. It burned out even sooner than Wellton had supposed. When she was quiet, he watched the redness in her face slowly pale to a sickly bleach. She stared at him, awaiting the condemnation he would deliver out of the omnipotence of his office.

"What class are you?" he said finally.

There seemed a delay, as if it took time to realize he had not returned her rage. Then she answered in a mechanical voice, "M-18."

He nodded to James Ash. "You?"

"Breeder—no potential deviations."

Wellton paused a moment, turning uncertainly as if someone had spoken. An illusion, he thought. His attention returned to the couple.

"You are certainly more fortunate than many young

people," he said. "In so many couples, both members are Deviate carriers and neither can be a parent. In your case it will be quite easy for you, James, to father your own children. I'm sure, Florence, that you will give them all the love that is in you."

"I won't! It's wicked," she cried. "Jim would rather die childless than have someone else as the mother of his children."

"You surely understand," said Wellton kindly, "that all such conceptions are by artificial insemination. Neither you nor James will ever be required to see the mother of the children. It will be quite easy to find a suitable woman of breeder class who does not wish to keep all her children. Very few do, as a matter of fact."

James Ash moistened his dry lips. "I guess a lot of people dream of having their own children. It's hard to get used to any other idea."

"We won't do it," said Florence. "I'll have my own children, not the offspring of some other woman, even if they *are* Jim's."

Wellton looked at her sadly for a moment, then reached behind him and opened the door of a bookcase. He drew a wide folio from the shelf and opened it to a page in the middle. Turning it around, he put his finger over a column of pictures.

"Type M-18 Deviates," he said.

Florence did not look at them. She stared over his shoulder and through the window beyond, seeing nothing. "I know about them," she said. "They showed us the pictures upstairs. They said any child of mine would be like one of them. But it wouldn't!"

Her eyes shifted to his face. "I know it wouldn't! Don't ask me how I know, I'm just sure of it. Inside me, here." She put a hand against her breast. Wellton closed the folio.

"You can't always be sure," she said. "You can never be *sure* what will happen inside a human being. Jim's all

right; there wouldn't be a chance of anything filthy from him. I know there's nothing wrong with me. My parents were all right; my grandparents were all right. All I want is a baby, my own baby. Who are you to say that I shall not have one? We're not afraid of you."

She turned to her companion, whose eyes continued to stare at Wellton. She shook his arm. "Are we, Jim? Tell him we're not afraid of him. We're not, are we, Jim?"

Wellton reached over and took her right hand in his. He turned the palm up and spread the flesh until the purple markings there stood out in clear relief. "You can never get away," he said softly. "Please don't try it, Florence. Compulsory sterilization isn't possible; that can come only after breaking a law. You couldn't hide a child, not for long anyway. Even if it wasn't a monstrosity, it would be found, because it wouldn't have a mark upon its hand. You're trapped, Florence. We're all trapped, and there's no way out for any of us." He released her hand and it flopped over lifelessly.

"It was the dust," he said. "No one knows why generations of normal human beings can come through all right, and then suddenly bring a wild variant that we cannot even call human. When the bombs destroyed the cities, radioactive dust was spread to finish the work. It's still here, in the earth, in the air, and in the seas. It's in all of us. We can't escape it. And we don't know yet whether it's going to finish us off.

"Our program of compulsory, artificial insemination is the only way we know to keep mankind from vanishing from the face of the earth. It is the way you were conceived, and your grandparents before you. They did not know each other. Your parents did not. Now, your line has to stop. Why, I cannot tell you. Perhaps someday we'll know the answers to these questions. We do not know them now.

"What we do know is that less than one per cent of our male population is capable of passing on Normal

characteristics. Fortunately, almost eight per cent of our female population can. A woman who can be allowed to reproduce is required by law to produce at least twelve children in order to replace herself and a fraction of one father. And still the population shrinks."

"Then maybe it's meant to be that way," said Florence. "Maybe nature is trying to tell us that we're through and it's time for a new kind of people to take our place. How do you know that some of these"—she gestured towards the closed folio—"are not a new kind of human being who will be better than the old?"

Her face was shining, her eyes bright and hard with a light that made Wellton feel suddenly heavier and older. James Ash gripped her arms to quiet her; then he saw her eyes and backed away.

"She'll be all right," said Wellton. "In a few days she'll be all right." He reached for the button that would summon Miss Tolleson.

II. DAY OF THE UGLY

1.

WHEN THEY had gone away, Wellton sat down again behind his desk. He felt as if someone called, but with a distant, inaudible voice. He frowned and looked about him. The feeling passed.

His gaze fell upon the folio, with its pictures of what could happen to a man when nature lost control. Malevolent Deviates, the geneticists called them; but the public had a simpler name: Uglies.

He remembered the day when he had first seen one. He was six, and it was a day in spring when even the sky seemed alive with its tumbling sheep-clouds racing about the prairie. His father's place was an old suburban farm on a half-dozen acres at the edge of Kansas City. There were cherry trees and apple trees, nursed through howling winters that sometimes killed and stunted; but every spring—and especially this spring—they repeated the miracle of resurrection. He had almost forgotten the two others with him in the trees, fat little Bill Watts, and Jeremy Hale. Jeremy was the envy of all the neighborhood because his parents were both his own real parents; he had eight brothers and sisters, and would have more.

For several weeks, there had been rumors that one of the families in the neighborhood was hiding an Ugly

at home. Robert had asked his parents repeatedly, "What is an Ugly? When can I see one?"

He had been told by his father that soon he would be old enough to go down to the Institute and see an Ugly.

But this day he saw one. A dirt alley ran along the rear of the orchard, separating it and the property opposite; down this alley they saw it coming. A flopping half-animal thing, wearing human clothes and shrieking like a soul in hell. Wellton remembered the moment. The day ceased. Time stopped. No one had told them what an Ugly was like, but now they knew. Nothing else could have so stopped time and the world.

It flopped toward them faster, in a half-crawl, half-run. And then they heard another sound, the more familiar sound of a human cry. Far down the road the running figure of a woman came through a back gate. The boys recognized her: Mrs. Llewellyn. The woman was crying and whimpering, and calling out a name they did not know. She called it Danny.

Their eyes rested again upon the Ugly. It seemed repulsive to call the creature by a human name, but some of the woman's anguish seemed to touch Robert Wellton. He sorrowed with her, and time began to flow again. He started climbing down from the tree. He did not know what he was going to do, but somehow he had to let the woman know that she was not alone.

Bill and Jeremy followed, somewhat reluctantly, and the three moved slowly toward the back of the field without speaking. The Ugly had fallen in the dust; it lay whimpering and moaning, unable to get up.

At the fence they stopped. Their combined strength was not great enough to force them closer. They could see the Ugly plainly now, what was visible of it outside the shapeless bag of clothes it wore. Its face had no symmetry. It bulged like a thick, brown potato, and only after a moment's staring could they tell where the eyes

might be—one high and one low, deeply indented in puffy folds of flesh. They glimpsed a hand momentarily, as a sleeve drew back on a flopping limb. There were no fingers, only a webbed paddle.

Mrs. Llewellyn reached the Ugly, stumbling toward it, breathless, her face moist with tears. Her dress was dusty where she had fallen in her frantic race. She scooped the Ugly from the dust, in a gesture of incredible love, and the boys realized now that it was the size of a small child of three or four years. Mrs. Llewellyn stood swaying with it in her arms, moaning and crooning to it, her face pressed against its puffy neck.

Others were coming now. Neighbors advanced slowly from their own houses to persecute one who had dared break a law that all their own yearning had not broken. For the first time Mrs. Llewellyn seemed to see them; she glanced up with horror on her face. From every direction they came, and she knew the look in their eyes.

She turned and ran back the way she had come, her sobbing audible all the way. Once she stumbled and fell to her knees, but she kept the Ugly from hitting the ground. And then, when she had nearly reached her gate, the boys saw the car turn into the street from the avenue beyond. Mrs. Llewellyn had seen it, too, but she ran as if she had not. She ran straight into the arms of the silver-coated men who got out of the car to receive her.

The boys turned away from the fence and from the eager neighbors following down the alley. Something was gone from this day, and from all the spring days they would ever know.

"I don't want to play this old game any more," said Jeremy. "I think I'll go home."

Wellton couldn't remember their going, but he remembered being alone the rest of the afternoon. Thinking about it now, he felt the old grief that was forever with him, because of the treachery and deceit that lay in all living things.

He had studied it all his life, but his greatest lesson was learned that day when he saw Mrs. Llewellyn's Ugly. There were no words for what he felt, but he possessed then the knowledge of his kinship with the Ugly. Of the kinship between it and every man in the deep primitive cells where lay the genesis of each of them, the potentiality to be man or beast.

And what was it that determined *which* they should be?

He remembered trying to feel what it would be like to be an Ugly. He imagined himself with that misshapen face and whimpering voice; and, for just a moment that day, he knew that he could speak its own language.

He leaned back and returned the folder to the bookcase. Uglies: It was the name that remained among the people in the street. The geneticists called them Deviates, but Robert Wellton knew that there was yet another name by which all men might know them: Brother.

2.

The buzzer sounded and the voice of Miss Tolleson rattled on the interphone as Wellton answered.

"Yes?" he said.

"Dr. Rossi is calling," said Miss Tolleson. "He wants to know if you are free for a conference."

Wellton exhaled the hot air from his lungs. "Tell him that if he wants to come in tomorrow, we can arrange it."

"He's there now," said Miss Tolleson.

"It's late and I'm on my way home. Tell him I've already gone."

"He said he would be pleased to meet you at your home if you found it inconvenient this late in the afternoon."

Wellton gave up. "Show him in. You can go whenever

you like, Miss Tolleson; there will be nothing more this afternoon."

"Thank you, Dr. Wellton."

The door opened in a moment. Wellton fixed his expression with precise control, and faced his visitor.

Rossi was a round red little man, who constantly showed clenched teeth through lips kept mobile by irregular twitching of his neck cords. His gray double-breasted suit was immaculate and carried its inevitable white carnation. He advanced with both hands outstretched.

"My dear Dr. Wellton! I hope you will forgive this late intrusion. I had meant to see you when I came to the Institute early this morning, but I became involved in some technical discussions with some of the younger members of the staff and they had to be straightened out. I never realized that the entire day had passed." He smiled apologetically and spread his hands as he sat down.

Wellton understood the gesture. Rossi had spent the entire day at the Institute, refusing him even the courtesy of a telephone call, and wanted him to know that he had done this.

"I could have perhaps offered you some assistance, had I known you were here," said Wellton blandly. "Has anything unusual come up?"

He looked at Rossi and kept his distaste from showing. Wellton had never made the mistake of underestimating his technical ability, or political ingenuity. Rossi could have served in either Congress—Political or Technical.

He said, "I can tell you now, because it will be given to the public within a few days, that the Committee has completed its three-year intensive study of the results of genetic control. Needless to say, there is much dissatisfaction with the program. The Committee believes that the time has come to do something drastic about it."

"And what do they believe?" said Wellton. "That every woman breeder should be forced to have two dozen children, instead of merely one?"

Rossi smiled indulgently. "Our Committee members are not simpletons. We know that the compulsory birth-rate has reached its saturation point. Our problem and its solution obviously lay elsewhere.

"Look, Dr. Wellton: Our Normal population is divided into the two broad categories of breeders and non-breeders, the latter so classed because they are Deviate carriers whose offspring would be Deviates.

"Our problem is: Why do so many breeder lines suddenly run out—vanish as non-breeding Deviate carriers? Why do the great majority of so-called Normal unions result in the production of offspring who are apparently Normals, but whose gene maps show them to be Deviate carriers, so that they have to be prohibited from reproducing themselves?

"By repeatedly narrowing our human breeding stock, we have tried to purify it; but the only tangible result is that it is getting narrower and narrower until, if it continues, we shall have passed the point of extinction within a matter of generations. Somehow, Deviate stock is still getting mixed with the pure stock, and progressively diminishing it."

"Your Committee still refuses, of course," said Wellton cautiously, "to consider the possibility of Beneficent Deviates?"

"We still refuse," said Rossi icily, his eyes watching Wellton intently. "No such thing exists; there are no Beneficent Deviates. The matter was settled a good many years ago. I hope, for your sake, Dr. Wellton, that we are in complete agreement on that."

"To be sure. And the cure for the present situation is then—?"

"A re-check. A world-wide re-check."

"For what, precisely?"

"For normal-appearing Deviates whose true characteristics are hidden. We've never had the authority to demand a complete check of the general population at any time. We've got to have it. The gene check, to license or bar them from reproduction, is not enough; Deviates are slipping through, getting into the breeding stream.

"We'll go through and check the whole population, one by one; we'll root out the false Normals, wherever they are found. Although our primary concern will be with the breeding population, we shall have to check Deviate carriers as well as breeders. And when we are through, we shall be absolutely certain that our population is clean!"

"How are they to be detected—supposing that our gene mapping has failed to properly identify the Deviates you suspect?"

"The means is available: the Kolberg analysis." Rossi looked at Wellton challengingly for a moment, then continued, "There is another aspect of the problem, which may be of especial interest to you, since it is a purely technical matter. As you may know," he said in cautious, confidential tones, "we have been making an occasional spot check in some of the rural areas for some time, now. I've just had a report from my men concerning three boys they found traveling across country in Colorado. These three fled, and finally committed suicide, rather than submit to a check by my men—who, incidentally had properly identified themselves to the boys.

"Indirectly, we accomplished our purpose in eliminating these three; but there's no doubt about *their knowing* their own condition, and what we intend to do about it!"

"There could be other reasons why they fled," said Wellton. "This culture of ours hardly breeds confidence in the approach of strangers, regardless of their identification."

Rossi smiled and his head moved slowly from side to side. "No, my dear Wellton, it is not so simply explained

as that. It is not the first time such an incident has occurred, you see. Always, the pattern is the same: they commit suicide *in such a way as to make gene mapping impossible.* We believe that these Deviates, who have the physical appearance of Normals, are in close communication with each other, may actually be organized for mutual protection! You can see why there is no time to be lost in eliminating them from our population."

"Yes—and by what means?"

"For such as these, the Law already provides the penalty of death."

The scarred side of Wellton's face darkened heavily. At the sight of it, Rossi's mouth jerked downward impulsively, as if to reassure himself of the righteousness of the thing he had just said.

"You'll get the details through routine channels," he said somewhat sullenly. He got up from his chair. "I thought you would like to know ahead of time what the Committee proposed."

Wellton continued to stare at him as Rossi stood a moment and drummed his fingernails on the desk top.

"Sit down," said Wellton.

"I have an early dinner engagement tonight," said Rossi. "There will be need for further conference before the program is put into effect, but that can be scheduled later. The details—"

"Sit down," Wellton repeated.

"Really, Dr. Wellton—" Rossi complied. He rested on the edge of the chair, his elbows propped on the edge of the desk. "I'm sorry I have so little time," he murmured.

"A witch hunt!" said Wellton. "You know that's what it will be, don't you, Rossi? You know the defects of the Kolberg analysis; you're too good a technician not to know them. Perhaps the rest of the committee is ignorant in this respect, but not you.

"You wanted a re-check three years ago, when your

Committee began its work; I told you then what the results would be. I told you there was no known method of making an irrefutable analysis, of detecting deviations of the kind you mean, so that a man could be judged for his life.

"Nothing has changed; the Kolberg methods are still useless. I told you then that I would make a public statement of my position and resign, rather than be part of such a murderous program. I shall still do so, if you insist on forcing the issue. I shall tell them that I will have no responsibility for hounding every man and woman on the face of the earth and challenging their right to live, because of the heredity that is in them. If the success of the genetics program depends upon this course, then the program itself is not worthy to survive."

"I would be careful about expressing such views to those whom you do not count among your friends," said Rossi. "Extremely careful!"

"If there are any who doubt the wisdom of what I have just said, it is not important that they be counted among my friends. There must be a line which marks the uncrossable barrier between the man and the animal."

Rossi arose now with determination. "I think I had best say goodbye at this time, Dr. Wellton." He extended a hand across the desk. "But we must talk again, and very soon."

III. RETREAT

WELLTON WAS grateful for the maliciousness that had sent Rossi to him. There was a remote possibility that he had come to bait Wellton into action, to see what he would do. Rossi was hardly that subtle, but it would be worth bearing in mind.

There was action to be taken; Wellton had planned for it long ago, but had expected to choose his own moment, not to be pushed into it.

He tried to fix his mind on the things that Rossi had said, and on what had to be done, but all seemed to slip from his attention. The inconsequential details of the room intruded forcibly . . .

On the desk was a picture of Anne. He had never removed it, as if keeping it there were some talisman that would somehow insure her return to him. He smiled at the image gently now, wondering where she was.

Wellton reached for the phone and called to the top levels of the tower.

A dry, croaking voice answered. "Maynard speaking."

"George, this is Bob. I wondered if you had gone home yet."

"In a few minutes. I've got time to talk."

"I want to come up to see you. Wait for me."

The elevator took him to the thirtieth floor where headquarters of the genetic research laboratories were located. Its Section Director was George Maynard, a dry leaf of a man who could conceivably have no other

object in life than the one he was carrying out. As Wellton entered the office, he looked up from a set of gene maps he had been examining while waiting. His hat was on the desk beside them.

Wellton sat down in a deep chair across from Maynard before he spoke. "I didn't mean to hold you tonight. This couldn't wait."

Maynard waved dismissal with a bony arm covered with putty skin. "What plans would I have? See a show, read a book—that can wait. What's on your mind?"

"Rossi was in to tell me about the re-check program he's bringing into the open at last. He came to enjoy a little gloating. At the same time he was probably looking for what information he could get. He told me about their illegal rural checks, hoping I'd react, I think."

"What does he suspect?"

"He *suspects* everything. So far, I believe he knows nothing," said Wellton. Then he added soberly, "Three of the boys died today. Caught by Rossi's agents in the mountains out in Colorado while trying to contact a pickup."

Maynard breathed noisily. "He would only have to catch one, and he would know the pattern. Sometimes I wonder how we've managed all these years. Did the boys have the gene-masking pills Barron made?"

"Only one of them. One burned himself to death. The other went over a five-hundred-foot cliff into the river."

Wellton rose from the chair and paced to the window, his eyes and face dark. "You should have heard them. The poor little devils didn't have a chance, but they never whimpered at the last. One of them said, 'I want to know what tomorrow is like.'"

"The whole world wants to know that," said Maynard gently.

"Yes," said Wellton, "and we'll give them the answer. And when we do, I wonder if anyone will remember the

names of Sammy and Tommy and Howard, and all the rest of them?"

"We'll see that they remember; that will be part of it. You'll be going, now, ahead of time. This will force you out."

"Yes. I'll resign tomorrow. I'll make a public announcement of what is coming, and my opposition to it."

"I wonder if we can stop him. He must be pretty sure of himself. The Deviate carriers are so apathetic that I think they may actually feel a rather malicious delight that the privileged breeders are to get it in the neck."

"You're too pessimistic," said Wellton. "They're not that bad. They hate me and they hate the Institute, but on the whole that is good. It means they are *not* apathetic. They don't hate themselves and mankind; they'll fight Rossi's plan. With the Children, I have a hammer with which to beat every senseless, ugly thing from the face of the earth. This is the vision my father saw, and this is the thing for which the Children have been created."

"I'm thinking of the Children," said Maynard, after a time. "You are capable of doing your part, but are they? You have never seen a single one of them."

"That's of no importance to telepaths. I wish you were one of us, so that you could understand what it is like."

"I hope it works, Bob," said Maynard fervently. "I hope it works out the way you've planned."

"It will. But so much of it depends on you. As we've planned, they will come to you for official gene mapping, so they will be free to take part in public activity. Proper falsification of those gene maps is a link in the entire chain. They must not be identifiable as siblings, nor must they be connected with me."

"I'll do my job," Maynard said. "Don't forget: It's my dream, too."

Wellton had never forgotten the day that George Maynard invited Adam Wellton to the laboratory and showed him proof of the potential existence of Beneficent Devi-

ates. Maynard coined the term. He did not know that any had been born, that Adam Wellton was one, nor his son, who was a junior technician at the time.

Robert Wellton recalled Maynard's bitterness when the Normals looked upon his finding with horror and called him a fool, demanding his blood. Adam Wellton had allowed him to announce the discovery as a trial balloon, to test public reaction. Maynard withdrew his announcement, recanted, and called his great discovery an error.

But Robert Wellton worked with him after that. And when Wellton began his lifelong project of creating the Children, out of his own seed, Maynard became his only confidant and assistant.

"If you can live with your head in a noose for thirty-five years, I can take all the risks I need to, now," Maynard said. "But I'm old, Bob; I'm not one of you Beneficent Deviates. I've wished for a long time that there were someone else who could help on this end. I might not last long enough to finish it."

"We have to depend on that," said Wellton. "Within four or five years at the most, they should all be back. We'll try to hurry it as much as possible, but they will have to be trained and oriented in much that they do not know. They have faculties of which they are not even aware, yet. As for the work here, there's no one else I'd dare trust with this knowledge. No one else knows, except . . ."

"Rossi," said Maynard drily.

"Rossi doesn't *know*. He only guesses. We'll see that he continues to guess."

Maynard shifted so that he could see the city through the window, bright with the orange light of the late sun. "It must be wonderful," he said in a low voice, "to be able to send your thoughts halfway around the earth, to know that you can live almost as long as you want to, to grasp in moments what it takes a Normal years to learn—"

Wellton had no answer. "I'll have to be going," he said. Then he stopped, listening as if for a sound too faint and far away for his ears.

Maynard watched his face. "What is it?"

"I don't know!" Wellton shook his head irritably. "For several days there's been a faint sensation that I can't place. I've felt it three times, this afternoon. It's like a telepathic call that's too feeble, but there's no such thing. The only similar possibility is a call being blocked by another telepath, and that is completely irrational. No one would do that.

"It has made me worry about the possibility of Rossi's technicians having developed a telepathic detector, but I don't really believe that is possible. Actually, it seems like the call of a new infant; and that is equally impossible. An infant telepath calls only to its parents for a long time, and I have fathered no Children for at least twelve years. I don't understand it."

IV. JAMES ASH

1.

THE ELEVATOR dropped them to the main lobby of the building, where they separated. Wellton hurried toward the parking area. Beyond the lobby, he passed the glass windows of the commissary with a brief glance towards the evening diners. Abruptly he stopped. Leaning against the panel of the window was the young man who had been in his office that afternoon. James Ash. Momentarily, Wellton resumed his stride; they had nothing to say to each other now.

Then he changed the direction of his steps, remembering that the last word is never said between human beings who are lost, and unable to help each other.

"Hello, Jim," Wellton said quietly.

The young man jerked, his gaunt face growing leaner in automatic readiness for attack; then he relaxed and smiled wanly in recognition.

"Hello, Dr. Wellton."

"Did Florence get taken care of all right?"

James Ash nodded. "They said I couldn't come back for a week."

Wellton understood his stare at the diners beyond the window, now. There was nothing a man could do to save himself from starvation, if he had not brought the means with him. Not when there were tens of thousands like James Ash pouring through the city every week.

There were government hand-outs, but a man like James Ash would starve before they got to him. Any man with pride would.

Wellton told himself it was no concern of his. There were hundreds of others in the same condition this night. But he hadn't personally felt the pity and the terror that was in them. That made a difference.

"I would like you to come home with me," he said. "I've got a good deal of room, and I live alone now. You can eat on my ticket while you are there. Tonight, however, I have a dinner invitation from one of my neighbors. They will be delighted to have you come, and you'll enjoy them. They're both breeders, and they have ten children."

A momentary outflowing of gratitude seemed to shrink James Ash, but he straightened quickly. "I couldn't do that, Dr. Wellton. It's kind of you."

"Suppose we say we'll both do this because of Florence," said Wellton.

Jim's eyes softened. "All right. Maybe it will help her to understand that you did what had to be done."

Wellton put in a call to Mrs. Marchant.

Her voice was a housewife's voice, a different voice from that of the other women. "We'll be delighted to have your friend, Dr. Wellton," she said. "Bring him with you. The children will have quite a story to tell you tonight. There was an attempted kidnapping at the apartment this afternoon."

"I'm sorry to hear that. No one was hurt?"

"No. We came through all right. But you'll hear about it later. You won't be able to keep from it. I wanted to warn you in case you mind."

"It'll do them good to tell it. I'll be happy to listen. We'll be there within an hour and a half."

2.

They picked up the bag which James Ash had checked and went out to Wellton's car, which the parking attendant had brought. The apartment was across town, but they had to detour around long fingers of contamination that split the city nearly in two.

The rubble was scraped to the ground and carried away; but there was still an impregnation of radio-activity that could not be destroyed except by excavating millions of cubic yards of earth. The area had been sealed off, instead. Wellton sometimes wondered why the site had not been abandoned altogether and a new city built elsewhere. There was little enough of the old to salvage.

They had been forced to do that at Chicago and New York, which had been dusted so thoroughly they would never be habitable within historical periods. But elsewhere—in Los Angeles, and San Francisco, as well as here—the urge to stay was too great to abandon the ruin.

Wellton's apartment was part of a communal group occupying a full block. It presented blank white walls to the city on all sides, except for the broad entrance in the center of one. A small fortress in itself, as were thousands of others of its kind, it represented the architecture of the Genetic Age. The solitary householder was no longer competent to man his own castle, or safe within it. A competent, sullen worker by day, the forever childless man or woman might be seized with the obesession by evening to steal or kill the offspring of his more fortunate neighbor.

The communal groups formed tight little societies of their own, the largest group in which men fully trusted one another.

A double row of apartment units crossed at right angles through the center of the block, forming four

large courts, grassy retreats and playgrounds. The units were separate from each other, and single-storied.

Wellton drove through the broad gates and parked in the area in the center of the block. The court was almost miraculously cool and green. Walking beside Wellton, James Ash paused, staring in fascination that was clouded by envy and longing. A group of children were playing on the lawn in front of Wellton's place.

Wellton spoke quickly. "They're the Marchants. Our prize specimens. Ten of them, with their own two parents."

Jim swallowed hard. "I've never seen anything like them before. It's what Florence used to talk about all the time."

The apartment which Wellton opened to him was not the typical single man's apartment that James Ash had expected. It showed the touch of a woman. The pictures of forest scenes and children on the wall were of Anne's choosing; and one picture of Anne herself boldly commanded the room from above the mock fireplace. An air of understanding came over James Ash as his gaze came to her image.

"Your room will be here, through this doorway," Wellton said. "You can clean up and rest, if you like. Dinner will be a half hour yet."

In his own room, while he changed and bathed, Wellton wondered why the thought of Anne had been so much with him the past few hours. He had always carried the blind hope that she would come back. That was why he had kept her picture in the office, why he had not changed the apartment since she left.

But it would have been more devastating, he thought, if their parting had had to be made under present conditions. She couldn't have come with him; she was not one of the Beneficent Deviates like him and the Children. She was a Normal.

She had been gone only a year, but already it seemed longer than the five Anne had been with him.

When Wellton went out, James Ash was standing by the window of the living room watching the children playing in the dusk of the courtyard.

"I wonder what it was like," he said, as he heard Wellton approaching, "when everyone and anyone could have a family."

"You *can* have a family," said Wellton. "You will be required to participate in the artificial insemination program anyway, you know. As I told you and Florence this morning, it's quite easy for some of the children to be assigned to the father."

James Ash shook his head. "You saw how Florence was. She told me if we ever had to have them that way, she'd feel like killing them."

"She'll feel different," said Wellton kindly. "We have cases of this kind all the time, and they come through with changed ideas. She had set herself an impossible goal; escape into psychosis was her only outlet when she realized that she could not attain it. When her psychosis is lifted, her unyielding postulates will be gone, also. You can go through with your marriage plans."

"I don't know. There's something revolting and unclean about this whole business. Sometimes I think everybody ought to go on strike and quit having children, and just let this mess die out naturally."

"A lot of people agree with you," said Wellton. "Too many, unfortunately. The law requires that when a breeder class individual is identified, he *must* contribute to the reproduction of the race. But he is not required to have a genetic check; that is the one choice that is left to him, and far too many choose to remain in the dark."

He sighed and moved closer to the window. "Before the dust, families were taken for granted; but a large percentage of people voluntarily decided to have no

children at all, and others limited themselves to a negligible two or three."

"We've read about that. Florence says they must have been crazy."

"And they would have said the proud Marchants are absolutely insane with their ten! It's all in the point of view. When any of our human dynamics are prohibited, or denied natural expression, the potential of that dynamic rises. That's why we have our present state of crime. Before the dust it was sometimes perilous—but at least not uncommon—for a woman to be able to walk the streets near her home after dark. Only a few bothered with weapons to defend themselves. Today, a girl is taught to carry her pair of knives when she is six; and if she is not as deadly as a tigress with them by the time she is thirteen, her education has been very poor indeed."

James Ash nodded with grim knowledge. "Florence has had to use hers a dozen times or more already. She's killed three."

"We can't police the world enough," said Wellton. "We can't do enough to prevent hundreds of thousands of kidnappings and murders of children." He glanced up to the roofline of the apartments opposite. Silhouetted against the sky, the mother on duty there with a crossbow was preparing to leave her post as the children were called in.

"We spend all our energies policing the lines of heredity through which these criminals come," he said.

There was a tiny knock on the door, and five-year-old Susan Marchant called to them. "Uncle Bob, Mommie wants to know if you're coming over. Supper's all ready. Did you know we had a kidnapping today, Uncle Bob?"

V. THE FAMILY

THE LITERATURE of the past was replete with the glories of harvesting and feasting. Food had belonged to the great arts in the days of the family, when Sunday dinners and holiday rituals of stuffed turkey and pumpkin pie were taken for granted. Food was generally good enough now. It was nourishing and tasteful, but the art was gone out of it.

Except among the few remaining true families. The Marchants, and most of those like them, held to the old rites of mealtime and special feasts.

Exchange of mealtime invitations was common; those who had no family were figuratively adopted into the families of the group.

Ted Marchant greeted Wellton and James Ash as they lifted Susan between them to the doorway. Marchant was surprisingly young, with pinched, clerical eyes that squinted through ponderous glasses. He grinned warmly, as if trying to make them feel he was not too much more fortunate than they.

Lela Marchant was warm and big, and equally startling in her youthfulness. James Ash had come to think of prolific breeds as old and worn-out people. Some of them were; but not the Marchants.

Their apartment was not nearly as large as it needed to be to accommodate them all; Ted Marchant's income as a clerk at the Institute would not allow him to provide better. There had been a lot of talk about subsidies for

families, in which both parents were breeders, who wished to keep all their offspring; but nothing had come of it.

Breeding mothers who had their quota of a dozen children seldom had husbands willing to care for all of them. But when both were breeders, the situation was vastly different. Here in the apartment group, the Marchants were the pride of the whole unit. They were literally adopted by the group, who saw to it that they were not in want of anything essential. There were other children, too, besides the Marchants; and all of them were more honored because of the presence of the one natural family in their midst.

The noise in the house was incredible. While three of the older girls were busy with last-minute touches to the enormous table, a pair of the youngsters roared by with a siren sound. Three others huddled in a corner over some mechanical game that clanked infernally.

Through all the racket, Mrs. Marchant seemed to maintain a calm command, as if listening simultaneously to each separate sound, and able at once to distinguish any cry of tragedy from the exuberance of unrestrained growth.

It was wonderful bedlam, and James Ash seemed to breathe with a new freedom as they surrounded him curiously for a moment, then fired a thousand questions simultaneously.

"Where do you live?"

"Why haven't you been to see us before? We know all of Uncle Bob's friends."

"What work do you do?"

"When will you come back and see us again?"

"We're glad to have you," said Ted Marchant, taking his hand. "Any friend of Dr. Wellton's is a friend of ours."

William, an owl-eyed boy of thirteen, who was swiftly growing into his father's image, shook hands solemnly

when introduced. "We had a kidnapping attack today. Did you hear about it?"

"I'm going to tell it! Uncle Bob said I could tell it when we got over here," screamed Susan. "Uncle Bob said—"

William offered a look of long-suffering patience, while James Ash clapped him on the back and followed him to the table. "Maybe we'll hear a piece of it from everybody," he said, laughing.

"You will," said William. "You sure will."

There was roast beef and thick brown gravy on snowy potatoes. It was a meal such as James Ash had seldom seen.

"We save up all week for Uncle Bob's night," said an eight-year-old with freckles, whose name he didn't catch. "We don't have to eat no synthetics tonight, and we have two kinds of pie for dessert."

"We had a kidnapping today," shouted Susan, "and they almost took me away. I'm going to tell about it. Uncle Bob said I could. Mommie killed a kidnapper. You can see his blood all over the lawn in the next yard."

A sudden quiet diffused through the room. Susan glared about defiantly. "Well, you did, didn't you, Mommie?"

"Suppose we talk about it later," said Ted Marchant. "I think Mommie and everyone else would rather not talk about it at the table. After dinner, you take Uncle Bob over in the corner and just tell him all about it. Will you do that?"

"And can I take a light outside and show him where the blood is?"

"If he wants to see it," said Ted Marchant grimly.

"We have to live with these things, Ted," said Lela, with a bitter smile. "It hardly matters whether we live with them at the dinner table or elsewhere, I'm afraid. There's no place we can escape them. While we eat,

there's a special guard at the gate, as an extra precaution."

"Then perhaps you'd like to relate all the gory details yourself," said Ted a little grumpily.

"No, dear; I wasn't trying to contradict you. Just remarking on some of the facts of life."

"Did the police finally captured all of the men?" Wellton asked.

"Police!" snorted young Maxine. "You should have seen how much good *they* were. If it hadn't been for Mama, they would all have gotten away—and probably taken Susy and me and the two Hines kids next door. One of them was carrying Susy out to the car. That was when Mama put an arrow right through his neck. It came within three inches of Susy."

"You're not letting me tell it!" Susan began crying now.

Ted Marchant laughed in resignation and wiped her face and took her on his lap. "All right, Susy. We're all ears. Shoot the works!"

"It was one of the commercial rings," said Mrs. Marchant, when the little girl had finished. "The police said they believed this would break up its operations—for the time being, anyway."

"I've never heard of such a thing," said James Ash. "What do you mean?"

"Surely you don't have a land free of kidnappers out in Washington, do you?" said Ted Marchant. "If you do, we're moving there tomorrow."

"Of course not, but these commercial rings you mention —that is something new to me."

"They are comparatively new here, but they operate on a wholesale basis. They kidnap and sell children for a profit, usually somewhere halfway around the world. It's highly organized. They're said to be able to erase and forge palm tattoos.

"Susy would bring them perhaps ten thousand dollars,

the police said. We're going to have to increase our precautions. It was almost like an army attack, the way they came up this afternoon and cut down the guard at the gate. Our rooftop guard posts were the only thing that saved us; evidently, they were new to the kidnappers. Now, we'll have to reinforce them. I'm afraid that one of these days they will show up with guns, and then we will be helpless—unless we can have them, too."

"They'll never do that!" said Ted. "Nobody will ever make firearms again for *any* reason. Even the bloodiest criminals are agreed on that point. Their own kind would turn on them if any dared to try to make some. A lot of people were even opposed to the crossbows. It shows you how deep our reactions penetrated after the War."

"I'm afraid I can't be that confident," said Wellton. "Somewhere, someday, a small group will take to the manufacture of firearms again, and when that happens only one thing will stop them: other firearms. So it has always been, and always will be—unless a change takes place in man himself."

"Is that possible?" said Lela Marchant.

"We never know," said Wellton evasively. "We never know."

For a while after dinner, the bedlam increased. There were disputes concerning whose games Uncle Bob was going to play, and whose would be shared by James Ash, who had been adopted with solemn affirmation by William and Maxine.

Gradually, it quieted as bedtime came for one after the other of the younger ones. The older girls, Ellyne and Joan, were pleased when they were called upon to demonstrate a new technique they had learned with the knives in fencing school.

During the evening, Wellton felt twice more the al-

most unbearable sensation of a distant voice calling out to him in words too faint to be understood.

When it came time for them to leave, Ted and Lela Marchant stepped outside the door with them, keeping an eye on the interior of the house as if fearful that some menace would creep in behind their backs.

"Sometimes I don't think I can stand it any longer, Dr. Wellton," said Lela Marchant. Ted's arm moved about her waist. "You'd think the government would do *something* to help us. It seems like we can't do anything but take on the fight ourselves, and it's more than we can endure."

She began to cry quietly. "Non-breeders don't know what it's like being here day after day, fearful every minute of attack. They don't know what it's like, and they don't care! They're the ones, after all, who provide the market for the kidnappers! The government wants us to produce the children, and we want them, too. Why can't they do more to help us protect them? I feel like I can't endure this constant guarding any longer. Can't you think of anything to help us, Dr. Wellton?"

"I can't, Lela. Anything I can conceive involves years or generations of time. I can't even say that I understand how you feel, because I'm not in your position; but I know that you are strong enough to go through with your watching until the children are grown. And you have strength to give them to endure the same, if need be. It's just for tonight that it seems beyond any more enduring.

"You will always have the help of your neighbors and friends, as you have had today. You are not alone; you never are. Besides us, there are ten thousand generations of the past who look to you to pass on what you have received from them. There were times when they did not believe it possible to endure, either; but they did."

VI. UGLY

1.

James Ash was exhausted when they reached Welton's apartment, and readily agreed to the suggestion that he retire. But it was a pleasant exhaustion, which had burned out some of the hopelessness of a few hours ago. He stood for a moment by the window, watching the lights of the Marchant apartment until they blinked out.

"They're a different *kind*," he said. "They're alive. The rest of us haven't a chance, with nothing but a test tube for a papa. We're half dead to begin with!"

Wellton remained up. He sank into his easy chair in the living room, to close his eyes a moment against his own fatigue. There was so much that needed doing at this moment, and his energies seemed inadequate to spread so thinly as they must. He *did* understand how Lela Marchant felt, but she would never believe him. He wondered if she could comprehend the responsibility of not merely ten children, but three thousand.

He thought of her, and of Florence, who would never have any children at all, and of James Ash who wondered what it would be like to live in a world where anyone could love and create life.

A younger Robert Wellton had wondered that same thing, that night, after he had seen the Ugly. He told his mother and father about his own feelings, and it was here that he saw his father's face change. Robert stopped and stared.

"I didn't do anything wrong, Father!" he blurted suddenly. "I couldn't help seeing it!"

"Of course you couldn't, Robert. I'm not blaming you for anything in this incident. Tell me again how it seemed when you were looking at the Ugly."

He recalled a second time for his father that moment of immense pity and grief, when he knew what it was like to be an Ugly in a world of men called Normal. When he had finished his father said, "Do you often have the feeling of being able to look into the mind of someone and understand him deeply?"

"I don't know. I never noticed it before, not like today."

"Robert, look at me and listen. Do you know what I am feeling and saying inside myself at this moment?"

He stared at his father's face and realized Adam Wellton's lips were not moving—hadn't been moving for several minutes. The world crashed down.

"Father!"

The man reached out and took him in his arms. "Don't be afraid, Robert. It's a great thing that you have, and one to be proud of all the days of your life."

"But I'm an Ugly," he sobbed. "They'll come and take me away. Don't let them come after me! Please don't let them take me!"

There was pain in his mother's voice. "How did he find out?" she said. "Why did you tell him?"

"When he saw the Llewellyn Deviate, he got a flash of communication with it. He had to know."

He felt himself lifted gently in his mother's arms. She crossed the room with him and sat down before the fireplace. His father came over and sat on the couch beside them.

"People who are different," said his father in a low, careful voice, "are called Deviates by the people who call themselves Normal. The Uglies are one kind of Deviate—the unfinished kind.

"But there are other kinds of Deviates, successful ones

who are even better than the Normals. They will live much longer; they can do more things, and are able to make a better world than the Normals ever could. The Normals don't know this. They don't want anyone to live who is changed in any way from themselves, either better or worse.

"You and I, Bobby, are Deviates; but we are the successful kind, not like poor Danny."

He glanced quickly and with apprehensive longing to his mother's face. She smiled and shook her head slowly.

He wanted to cry anew. He could feel her disappearing across a wide gulf which he knew could never be bridged.

She wasn't actually his mother. He knew that, but he loved her as if she were. His real mother was a breeder; she had given him away to his father. Sometimes she came to see them, his real mother and his half brothers and sisters.

There was a longing inside him that reached out to them all; and he felt sometimes that he must find a way to bind them all together forever, lest he be split apart and lost from himself.

In the days and months that followed, his father taught him and helped him train some of the faculties that had lain dormant. He had never learned he was a telepath, because his first infant cries had never been answered. Adam Wellton had not wanted him to carry the burden of the deviation until he was much older than six.

His training became intense, in order that he might learn to live in a world where he was different, and where his life would be forfeit if his difference were exposed. He learned first of all to become expert in telepathic communication, which was so swift that a thousand thoughts could be exchanged while the slow and lazy tongue was being instructed in the conformation of sounds it was to generate.

It grew to be fun after a while, when his father was busy in the office in the great tower and he was high in the cherry trees in the back orchard.

He learned to walk warily among others; he ceased the close intimacies with the playmates he had known. But for whatever loss he had, there was a slowly accumulating compensation in the unfolding of his father's dream to build a world where Normals could no longer crush those who were different.

It was shortly after Maynard's discovery, and its rejection by the Normals, that Adam Wellton finished the final outline of his proposal and arranged to put it into action.

A week later, he was killed by an assassin as he walked a darkened street.

The death of Adam Wellton caused a long delay in the plans he had made, but Robert Wellton cherished them carefully and laid his own plans to become Chief in his father's place. His superior accomplishments and abilities were not long in outdistancing all others who also sought the post.

Carlos Rossi was one of those passed by; he had never forgotten his defeat. He had known Adam Wellton, and he knew George Maynard. He knew of the theory of Beneficent Deviates.

There was no doubt in Wellton's mind that Rossi suspected the exact thing that had been done; but until he got a gene map of the Children, for comparison with Wellton's, he would have no proof.

Wellton arose from his chair and went into the small den where he worked at home. At his desk he hesitated, then slipped a sheet of paper into the typewriter. Slowly he began writing out his resignation to present to the Board of Trustees and to the public tomorrow.

He told them of Rossi's witch hunt, and of the futility of the Kolbert analysis, which might condemn a Normal almost as readily as a Deviate. When he finished, he hadn't said all that needed to be said. But he had said

enough, he hoped, to inflame the whole populace against Rossi's planned purge, enough to assure the Children their chance.

He returned to the living room and read the resignation through carefully. Then he laid the sheets down and closed his eyes, with his head resting against the back of the chair. He reached out across the invisible distances of night. "Barron," he said gently.

It was only a moment until the answer came. "Yes, Father."

"The time has come for me to join the Children," said Wellton. "Circumstances have made it necessary long before the time planned. You will arrange for my transportation as we have agreed?"

There was a long and inexplicable pause. "Barron—" Wellton repeated.

"Yes, I hear you, Father. I do not know what to say. We had not planned—we are not ready for your coming. We have quarters built, but there is so much that we had hoped to do before you come."

"It is of no importance," said Wellton. "Ceremony is not important to me. I shall live with you, and be one with you, while I teach and instruct you in the things that you are to do."

"Yes, Father," said Barron obediently. "Whatever you wish shall be done, and your coming will be the fulfillment of our lives. But you cannot deny us our desire that we might provide for you as befits the Father of the Children."

"I am grateful," said Wellton. "But there is no time to delay. You will prepare my transportation as planned?"

"Yes, Father. When do you wish it?"

"Immediately. I shall leave on the plane from Kansas City tomorrow night. Your charter man will contact me at North Platte."

"We shall arrange it," said Barron.

When contact with Barron was broken, Wellton con-

tinued to sit there. He reached out again into the night, searching for the touch of a mind that called out in words or symbols too faint to be understood—that persistent, mysterious mind that had sought his incessantly through the recent days.

And then he caught it. At once, he knew that it was a mind, a human mind. Asleep at the moment, but he prodded gently, disturbing it into life. Almost at once, he felt an extraneous barrier attempt to close down between him and the other mind. But the other mind fought through, reaching for him with unspeakable yearning that knew no words. An infant mind, no more than a month old.

Wellton struck a sudden, savage blow at the interfering mind that was attempting to destroy the contact. It parried easily, keeping its own shield closed, revealing no clue to its identity.

But one thing came through: They were coming toward him at this very moment. Tonight, he would have visitors.

2.

He withdrew, half content with the knowledge that this mystery would be uncovered within a matter of minutes. He got up and went to the door, opening it; he turned to the closet behind the door and buckled on his rapier, withdrawing it from the scabbard as he stepped out and moved across the shadowy yard.

Under the brilliant lights of the barred gate, he approached the watch post. One man sat in his usual corner, urging the hours on; another stood alert and watchful in the shadows by the gate.

Wellton flashed his blade and called out to them, identifying himself.

"You must be looking for excitement tonight, Dr. Wellton," said the man at the guard post.

"Just a breath of air," said Wellton. "We've had enough of the wrong kind of excitement around here today, I am told."

"Indeed we have. Poor Mrs. Marchant. I feel sorry for her and Ted. I wish we could do more to help. Young Pete Drago did his part, though. We got word he died a little while ago."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Wellton. "He came just because of the Marchants. He was a breeder; he hoped to find a breeder girl, he said, and have a brood just like Ted and Lela."

At that moment, a glare of car lights turned the corner of the apartment block and came slowly toward them. Instantly, the guards were alert.

"Better get far back, Dr. Wellton," said Manning. "Keep out of the lights."

"I'm expecting a visitor," said Wellton. "That is why I came down to the gate. I am sure this is he. But be alert; I don't know his identity."

Cautiously, the car turned until its lights flared through the bars and whitened the driveway inside. Manning called out from behind the wall. "Show yourself at the gate and make identification."

After a moment the car door opened. It was a woman's figure that emerged. The silhouette was partly shapeless with the bulk of the infant that was carried, as if there were fear of leaving it for an instant.

Wellton heard the voice call out: "I wish to see Dr. Robert Wellton. Please notify him of my presence."

"Who wishes to visit?" said Manning.

But Wellton had no need of the answer that came. An aching flood of recognition came over him. It was Anne.

VII. THE GOD

He seemed unable to move, remaining stupidly there in the shadows while Manning went out into the light and talked with her. Then the guard was calling to him:

"Dr. Wellton, will you identify your guest, please?"

If Manning hadn't been new, Wellton thought with dumb slowness, he wouldn't have had to question Anne's identity.

He moved out into the tubes of light pouring along the drive. Manning had the gates open and she ran through to him.

He caught her in his arms. "Anne," he murmured. "Anne." She turned the bundle of the infant aside and rested in utter stillness, as if she had reached safe haven after long flight.

"Shall I put the car in your stall, Dr. Wellton?" Manning said.

"Yes—yes, please put it away."

It was like that day in the cherry tree, Wellton thought, when time resumed after its sudden halt. She stirred in his arms. The familiar scent of her hair filled his nostrils. Then they were walking over the grassy yard.

"You shouldn't have come at night like this," he said inanely. "It's a wonder you got here safely."

"Have you forgotten I was the best knife girl in Section 33 at the Institute? I didn't want to be seen coming here if it turns out that my coming is—unsatisfactory."

They were at the door of the apartment. What did she mean by such a word—unsatisfactory?

"I'd like to lay Timmy down," she said.

"Yes, of course. In the bedroom there—"

She moved through the doorway and turned on the light with old familiarity. She lay the sleeping baby on the bed, propping chairs and pillows to prevent his sliding off, should he waken. It was sweetly strange to see Anne in such an attitude.

She had pleaded with him for so long when they had been together, pleaded for a baby of his. By the altered gene maps at the Institute, she knew him to be a breeder, but he had not dared risk giving Anne one of the Children.

Now she had one of her own. It was her first one. She had only determined her own breeder status before leaving him.

She looked older. A tiny streak of gray was in her hair. But she was only thirty-seven, he thought; she was still young.

She threw off her black cape and laid it across the foot of the bed, then turned out the light and returned to the living room and Wellton, who had watched through the open doorway.

"Sit down," he said almost self-consciously. "I can get some refreshments from apartment service. What would you like?"

She drew him to the couch beside her. "Don't bother, Robert. It's been so long, and we have so much to talk about." She glanced around the room. "You haven't changed it at all since I left."

"I liked things the way you had them." He shifted and faced her. "Where have you been, Anne? You never told me where you were going."

"Waiting—for Timmy to grow and be born. He's a month old today."

"What are you going to do now?" he said. "Where are

you living with the baby? Are you with anyone else?"

She shook her head. "Do you think there could ever be anyone else after you? I have been alone. There is just Timmy and I. Don't you like him, Robert?"

He laughed a little too readily. "How should I know? We've just met, and he hasn't even acknowledged our introduction yet."

"Are you sure? I thought your meeting took place a number of days ago."

He felt his face go stiff, in spite of his effort to control it. "I don't understand. I don't know what you mean," he said.

"Of course you do! Robert"—her hand touched the moist back of his—"I know all about you. I know who are you are. You wouldn't have told me, would you? But Timmy is the final proof."

He seemed unable to move. "I'm trying hard to understand what you're saying," he managed finally. "You'll have to bring me up to date, Anne."

She moved closer. "There's only one thing in which you need to be brought up to date! I'm one of you, Robert."

He tried to believe it possible, but he could not take the chance. "What do you mean: 'I'm one of you.' One of whom?"

"Oh, you fool! What must it take to convince you? Listen to me—" Suddenly she hurled a wave of telepathic force at him that jolted the nerve endings in the remotest parts of his body. His shield had been part way down; he threw it up again in a fraction of a microsecond, but not before she had discerned his reaction of anger and dismay.

Her face sobered. "Perhaps now, after so long, we can understand each other, Robert."

It seemed suddenly that everything was going a thousand times too fast for him.

"The baby can't be mine, Anne. You know that. Timmy isn't mine."

"Isn't he?" Her eyes were asking how much longer he was going to pretend to this farce. "There's no mystery about it," she said. "At the Institute I found the secret supply of semen specimen. That is how Timmy came about."

"You must have hunted desperately to find it."

"I did."

"Why? Why, Anne?"

"Because I loved you," she said. "It's no more complicated than that. I wanted Timmy, and I wanted him to be yours, truly yours.

"Is it asking too much to ask to come back, and ask you to accept Timmy, after you refused him existence for so long?" She put her hands upon him and tried to draw him closer to her, but he yielded only a little. His hands closed over hers, but his arms remained stiff and unyielding.

"You know all about me, you said. What else do you know—besides the fact that I am a Deviate?"

"I know Barron," said Anne. "I know the Children. I know that you are the Father."

"How could you know of these things?" he whispered. "They have never told me of you. Barron would have told me if he knew."

She shook her head. "They were afraid to tell you. I am like you, and like your father must have been—a sudden, wild Beneficent Deviate with no previous history of deviation. As a child, I found no one like myself except the Children. They took me in. I lived with them for many years."

"You have seen the Children," he murmured. Suddenly he envied her because her knowledge of them was at least different, if not greater, than his. "I should have thought you would have stayed. None of them has ever left the group."

"It was different with me. I had no contact with you. I was not truly one with them. In their worship of you, they have a common bond that holds them. I could not reach you even when I tried; I didn't have full control of my telepathic abilities then."

"They don't worship me!" exclaimed Wellton.

"Do you *know* how they feel? You can't possibly know," said Anne. "You are their god. They fear you and worship you like some ancient tribe of aborigines."

"They're not that way! They're the most intelligent individuals left upon the earth."

"Is it impossible for men of intelligence to worship?"

"But I am no more than a man like themselves. I'm one of them!"

"You have not taken pains to make this clear to them. You are only a voice in their minds, out of the invisible. A voice that helped them and gave them answers when they were small, that guides and gives them knowledge now. They worship that unknown voice."

Wellton felt a sense of shock; this could change the whole aspect of his relationship with the Children.

"Because my attitude was less worshipful, I suspected something of what the truth might be. It was not entirely pure accident that I found you. I believed the answer lay somewhere in the Institute . . ."

He remembered the day of their first meeting. He was doing his own interviewing to find a technical liaison assistant between his office and the vast laboratories of the Institute. When she appeared in person he understood the thing that had led her to him, the thing that no one in personnel, or anywhere else, could put on paper. He judged that she was there for the same purpose that had brought men like Maynard, and others who were determined to have the secrets of life before they died.

He jerked up from the couch where he sat and strode

a step away. His back was toward her. Still, he could feel her gaze upon him; he could feel her presence within the room. The house was alive, because of her, now. He had forgotten how much of it had died when she left.

"Tomorrow, I am resigning from the Institute," he said. "I am going where you cannot come."

Her mouth opened with surprise. "Where?" she murmured.

"To the Children. You must have heard them speak of my promise to come to them. I made it long ago. I'm going to keep it now."

"But I *could* go!" she exclaimed. "I have lived with them. Why couldn't I go?"

"Things have changed since you were there."

He tottered on his feet with uncertainty, aware of his great need of her.

"I am resigning," he said, "because of Rossi. You remember Rossi? Perhaps you never knew him."

"I knew him. He hates you because you do the work he believes he should do, but never can."

"He knows me for what I am, though he lacks the proof he needs. Did you know that?"

"I know that he tried to find the records of you and your father. I knew they were camouflaged, but I don't think Rossi ever understood that it could be done. He didn't find out while I was there."

"He suspects the existence of the Children. If he ever caught one, and compared gene maps with mine, he would understand the camouflaging. He plans a deliberate campaign of extinction in the form of the Kolbert analysis. That it will mean the death of innocent hundreds or thousands is of no concern to him, as long as it flushes out the Children.

"Do you see now what you have done? You can't go with me—the conditions in the villages of the Children are not what you once knew. But neither can you stay.

Rossi knows of our association. When he learns of Timmy's existence, the baby will be seized—legally or illegally—and at one stroke he will have the gene pattern he needs to link me and the Children!"

He continued to look at her, his lips not moving. The telepathic barrier was tight about his mind, but Anne leaped up against that wave of accusation that came from him. She clutched the fabric of his coat and dug her fingers into the flesh beneath.

"Don't hate me that much, Robert! Don't hate me for what I have done!" She felt the steely flesh soften beneath her fingers. She felt him shrink and grow older. "I haven't done anything that can't be undone. I won't stand in your way. All I wanted was to come back to you. Forgive me, Robert. I'll take Timmy myself, so far that Rossi's executioners will never find him. I'll go tonight, if you'll say that you do not hate me for what I have done."

His face softened and the accusation faded. He brought his hands up and rested them on the delicate incurving of her waist. "I don't hate you, Anne. Do you really suppose I ever could? You didn't know; it's my fault for not telling you. I should have let you have Timmy when you wanted him. Things would have been different—and better. Now, I just don't know. I've got to have time to think."

"Tell me now, then," she begged. "It's not too late, if you can say that you don't hate me."

He sat down again with her on the couch, and his eyes seemed to focus on something far away in time and space.

"The thing I should have told you is that a new race is being born. For thirty-five years I have carried out a program of substituting my own deviate sperm in suitable instances, instead of the normal kind stocked by the Institute. All deviations are dominant.

"My Children have been born in every part of the

land. On the day of their birth they have heard my voice, and have learned the comfort of one of their own kind. They know me as the Father. If they have come to worship me as a mysterious, unseen entity, it is unfortunate, but that shall be corrected.

"As you have seen, they are organized in groups and sub-groups, each subject to their own leadership, under the general command of my first son, Barron. He has been my administrator, and intermediary where necessary, to lighten the burden of carrying out my wishes toward the Children. Now, they are coming back."

"Back?" exclaimed Anne. "How can you bring them back? You talk of *our* peril in escaping Rossi. How can you think of bringing all the Children here?"

"Rossi's plan will fail. The Children will not come all at once, or in a group. One by one, they will come to the Institute to obtain gene maps, properly falsified by Maynard. Then they will go out. With their talents, they will creep into places of leadership. An administrator here, a congressman there, a genetic expert elsewhere. Slowly, without anyone but themselves aware of their work, they will lessen the objections to Beneficient Deviates. They will proclaim, in time, the necessity of introducing them into the population. Within a generation, they will be in the great majority. The old kind of man will scarcely be aware that he is dying. He will only know that the world seems to be getting to be a more comfortable place to live in; crime is lessening; he sees happier people than he used to when he was young. He will even die happy and quite content!"

While he talked, he felt a great stillness descend upon her. She turned from him and in her profile there was something new, a fleeting expression that a stranger might not have noticed.

"I must tell you something that you do not know," she said quietly. "But first let me ask you: What is it going

to be like when you first see the Children? How do you think of their greeting you?"

He laughed shortly. "That's not very hard. I have talked with each of them a good many times during their lives; I know them. Our meeting will be a reunion of a kind that no one has ever imagined."

"Could you believe," said Anne coldly, "that some of them might welcome you only to dispose of your influence over the rest?"

"Anne!"

"I have been among the Children. I know them. I know what they will do when you come."

"That's insane! The intimacy of my contact has been a thousand times greater than any you might have had. I know what is in their minds and hearts."

"You don't know what they have hidden from you."

"There's not one of the Children I would not trust with my life."

"You had better not trust Barron."

He looked at her, a slow smile of regret forming on his lips. "Barron. For thirty-five years I have watched over Barron. More than anyone else, he has obeyed and carried out my wishes toward the Children. You could hardly have picked a more loyal one to accuse."

"I do accuse him," said Anne. "He leads a movement among the Children to depose you and replace you. I could not tell you this until I was sure you were the Father.

"Barron awaits your coming more anxiously than you know, in order to lead them away from you. As a fallen god, you cannot combat him.

"You say you know him. I tell you you have no concept of what his mind is like. It is strong and it is brilliant, but it is bitter beyond words. He hates the whole world for the outcast that he is, and he hates you for making him what he is. Believe me, Robert—do not go to the Children!"

He sat a moment, stunned by her outburst; whatever the truth behind this wild accusation, she believed it with all her heart.

"How long have you been away from the Children?" he said.

"Almost eleven years."

"And you have had no contact with them since then?"

"No. I have not tried to reach them."

He could smile more easily now. "Do you not think they would have sought me out if Barron were the usurper you describe? Would he have gone this long and made no move against me?"

She said, "Barron is a patient and a clever man. He has laid his plans, not for a year or two or three, but for a lifetime."

"And what of mine?" said Wellton, in sudden irritation. "Even if every word of what you have said should be true, do you suppose I would abandon all *my* father and I have dreamed? This began long before Barron was born, before I was born. Do you suppose I would give it up in the face of any opposition?" He stood up and paced stiffly to the center of the room. Then he whirled and faced her. "Did you suppose that?"

"No," she said softly, shaking her head, "I didn't suppose that you would, Robert, but I had to tell you."

"I'm sure you did. Someday I shall know why. When we are both face to face with Barron, perhaps."

"I shall go with you?"

He hesitated. There was nothing else to be done. "Tomorrow," he said. "We leave tomorrow evening."

"How shall I ever know that you do not hate me for having to take me with you?"

"By this," he said. He bent down and swept her up in his arms. He kissed her with the hunger and loneliness that was his share in the unnatural age to which he was born.

At that moment, a loud squall erupted from the other room. He threw back his head and laughed. "Do you hear that, darling? We're a family, Anne! We're a family!"

VIII. ROSSI TAKES OVER

He put her down and watched her cross the room as he had watched a thousand times before. But it had never been at a moment like this. He suddenly understood the lean, hungry yearning on the countless faces parading the corridors and examination rooms of the Institute. He understood fully now the rage of Florence Crane, her despair and her insanity. He understood the girl suicides who crowded the nameless graves of Kansas City.

In the bedroom Anne was cuddling the baby, holding him up for Wellton to see. There were tears in her eyes.

"Let me hold him," he said.

Anne held the baby out. Wellton took him awkwardly in his arms. A strange disbelief came upon his face. "It's the first time," he said. "My whole life has been the study of human creation, and this is the first time I have ever held a human baby."

His mind touched the baby's, which responded with yearning, radiant warmth. Wellton thought of James Ash lying asleep in the other room; of Florence, who had given up all reality but this; of the Marchants, envied, loved and hated because they had life in a dying world.

"I thought I knew," he said, "and I didn't really know at all."

In the morning, James Ash betrayed only a moment's surprise at the presence of Anne and Timmy. Wellton

gave him a half-fictitious story of dissention and reunion, and the young man accepted it understandingly. He accepted also, as a matter of course, that he could not remain at the apartment, now.

Wellton apologized for this. "In other times and amid other customs, it would be different," he said. "I'm sorry, Jim."

James Ash shrugged. "I'm grateful for your hospitality, and for your good wishes. And if they were mine"—he smiled toward Anne and Timmy—"I also would guard them with every precaution."

"I want to make you a loan," said Wellton.

"You have done enough for me. I'll manage somehow."

"You know how it will be," said Wellton. "Tonight will be the same as last night. When Florence is well, you want to be in good health and good spirits to go to her. We will do this also for her, eh, Jim?"

"All right. You'll get it back, and you'll never know how grateful we both are for what you have done."

Wellton's lips were tight as he reached his own office. At once, he called for a meeting of the small group of newsmen who handled Institute publicity, to be held in his office at ten o'clock.

When the time came, he plugged his office intercom microphone into a line that spread throughout the building. Then slowly and deliberately he read the text of his resignation that he had written the night before. As he read, he watched the faces of the newsmen. The same tired look came across them as he had seen on the faces of the staff workers whispering that morning in the hallways.

Within a matter of minutes, it would be that way the world around, he thought.

When they were gone he wondered to himself if he had made any progress at all. That was a thing he would know only when he saw the Children. He knew they

were not finished; they were as yet only the raw materials of the finished products he hoped to make of them.

A buzz from Miss Tolleson brought him sharply to the present. "Dr. Rossi is on the phone," she said.

"Put him on."

Rossi's voice held an overtone that seemed to Wellton like the warning touch of a sharp knife.

"I called to express my regrets," said Rossi. "I have just heard the news of your resignation. You could not be induced to withdraw that resignation, Dr. Wellton?"

"I fear not. I have made it quite final."

"Yes, you seem to have," said Rossi. "Again, may I say I am very sorry to see you go. I had hoped that you would be an enthusiastic assistant in our new program. I am sorry you have expressed your opposition to it."

"Your program will never go into effect, Dr. Rossi; I mean to see that it doesn't. We have to be honest with ourselves."

"I respect your honesty. Naturally, it is the one thing that we must possess above all else. If we are to salvage mankind, we must not misrepresent ourselves in any way. May I offer my best wishes for your future undertakings?"

"Thank you. You understand I plan to retire. I have completed a normal lifetime of work. I have felt for a long time that this post should go to a younger man. I hope you will feel able to continue some of the policies I have instituted and continue the appropriations on the presently uncompleted research projects that are under way."

"I suppose you *have* been at the Institute a long time," said Rossi meditatively. "I had never realized until the other day how long it was. I overheard some of the fellows talking about how little you have changed in the past thirty years, while they have become old men. While time does creep up on us, you are to be con-

gratulated on how well you carry your years. I'll look you up again when I'm in Kansas City, and we will have lunch together."

"I hope we may," said Wellton.

Almost instantly, as he put the phone down, he heard a sharp, ringing call within his mind. It was Anne.

"Robert, can you talk to me now?"

"What is it?" he said.

"I had to call you. I talked with a friend in the apartment where I live. I called to see if I had been missed. She said the checkers had been there. She didn't know who they were, but from her description and what you have said, I know they must be Rossi's checkers. They know about me, Robert; they suspect Timmy. We've got to get away quickly, before they come here for us!"

"Go to the Marchants' at once," said Wellton. "Clean up everything in the apartment that might give the slightest indication that you have been there. Turn the ventilators on full, to remove any trace of your perfume or the odor of Timmy. Be careful, but be fast. How long has it been since you talked?"

"About two minutes."

"Don't take more than five more. I'll call you or send word at Marchants' as soon as I can."

"Robert—will it be all right? Would you rather I took Timmy and tried to get away alone?"

"Do exactly as I tell you, and nothing else, until we are safely out of here!"

Rossi was that sure of himself! Wellton felt moisture on the backs of his hands as he broke off. He looked beyond the windows of the office to the glaring dust haze lying over the city. Above the distant airport, a single plane circled reluctantly to a landing.

Wellton's plans for flight had consisted of an announced vacation trip to a Rocky Mountain fishing resort, a last-minute change to a Canadian lodge, and then an escape through the forest where a boat would be

waiting to take him downstream to a rendezvous with the Children. They would pick him up in the helicopter they used for bringing in new additions and supplies to the group.

He wondered how much of it could be followed now.

Wellton picked up the phone. He had made arrangements for an apartment for James Ash, and had taken the address to which he had been assigned. Ash might still be there. In a moment there was the answering voice that Wellton recognized.

"Jim," said Wellton, "I wonder if you could come over to my office right away. I'd like to see you."

"Of course. Is there something I can do for you?"

"Yes, there is."

It was a little unfair, he thought. James Ash would feel obligated, but that couldn't be helped. He was the one individual who might be of assistance at this time.

Ash entered the office a few minutes after Wellton's call.

"Please sit down, Jim," the geneticist said. He hesitated. The fingers of his hands curled together tensely for a moment, and then he leaned back.

"I'm going to make a request—or an offer. Either way you want to look at it is all right. And I want you to feel free, above all, to turn it down if you wish."

"What do you want?"

"My wife and I have had a particularly difficult situation to endure, as have the majority of couples today. Our decision to renew our association has presented unforeseen obstacles. As I told the press this morning, I intend to go into retirement, and to take a vacation. I want to take my wife with me.

"As you can readily imagine, I have many enemies as a result of my position here at the Institute. Some stop at little to harm me, as others of their kind murdered my father. If they knew of my reunion with my wife, they would strike at me through her. I have reasons to be-

lieve that preparations for an abduction are already under way, if there's evidence of our reconciliation. I wish to avoid any public appearance together. Therefore, I would like you to go with her in my place, and guard her. Obtain a certificate and leave by plane this afternoon noon."

"You will trust me?" James Ash asked in astonishment.

"I trust you. In case of any faint possibility of my erring, I should also warn you that she is adept with the knives; but questions of that nature were settled in my mind before I called you. As it is, you will likely be called upon to defend her somewhere along the route. For this I will pay you very well.

"You will take her to the Canadian lodge, according to the directions I will give you. I will join you a day or two later, coming by a more circuitous way. You will then return and cancel the certificate. There should be no need for explanations of any length, but you can give the usual ones if questions are asked. Do you wish to do this for me?"

James Ash nodded without hesitation. "I will take your money because I need it; but I want you to know that I would be equally willing to help if you could not pay me. You have shown me kindness in a city where a man has no right to expect it."

"Thank you," said Wellton. "I hope that no harm comes to you through your willingness to help. Let me give you the details now."

To his surprise, when he told Anne of his plan, she was not angry at all. She only asked, "Is he a good fighter?"

"He would have to be," said Wellton, "to bring Florence halfway across the country by himself."

She was annoyed only by the necessity of taking out a certificate with James Ash, which required the cancellation of the one on record between her and Wellton.

The re-transfer of certificates could be made at the end

of the trip. That was one advantage of the current culture, at least. No cumbersome waiting, Wellton thought, as described in the old cultures. Certificates and allegiances could be shuffled like a pack of cards, in about the same length of time.

He glanced at the clock. James Ash and Anne had a bare two hours to get ready. His own plane did not leave until sundown, but he had much to do; he had to say goodbye to the tower somehow, and he didn't know how to do it.

The elevator halted with heavy deceleration, and he stepped out into the massive rooms eight stories below ground level.

Anne had worked down here just before resigning and leaving Wellton because he refused her a baby. He wondered how she had managed to identify the proper specimen in the restricted storage section used only for experimental semen specimens—including his own. Identified by an elaborate code, the specimen could have been found only after endless hours of secret searching, matching hundreds of gene maps, eliminating the impossible ones—and guessing past the falsifications he had put into his own gene map on file there. He thought of Timmy and was glad she had succeeded.

He went on into the refrigerated vaults, past tier on tier of receptacles. In their special, red-tabbed sections he came to the experimental specimens. Making sure no one was working nearby, he approached his own among the thousands, and unlocked the red cover that guarded the disposal button. Almost reluctantly, he pushed it. Automatically the chamber was emptied and sterilized. The white tab came up, indicating that the chamber was available for re-use—that the giant plan of creating the Children had come to an end.

It was the last thing that he had to do at the Institute.

IX. THE TRAP

WITH A single large suitcase containing all of civilization that he intended to take with him, Wellton took a car to the airport.

He had given up the apartment and left instructions for his books and papers to be taken over by the Institute library. He said goodbye to Lela Marchant and the children, and learned that Anne had departed earlier in the company of James Ash.

The moment he left the apartment and started for the airport, Wellton felt a change come over him. It was like a signal for the start of a game, but a far more deadly one than he cared to play. Rossi intended that he should reveal the way to the Children, or not reach the rendezvous alive. Now, like the Marchants and their children, he had no protection except that which he could provide for himself.

It was awkward to carry a rapier while traveling, but he was armed with twin coat knives.

At the airport he took a final glimpse of the tower of the Institute. He felt it reach out with cementing fingers and ghostly voice, telling him that forty years in the Institute had not made him equal to the raw elements of nature that the Children had learned to fight.

This was one thing that Anne had tried to tell him, he thought.

Over the field the prairie wind raised a brown mist that all but hid the single hangar a few hundred feet from

the passenger office. Wellton had read old accounts of the aeronautical network that had spanned the land long ago. That was a remote ancestor of this desiccated field and the bumbling two-engined planes that roamed perilously now in the skies. The accounts of six-engined monsters carrying scores of passengers, or great jets spanning continents at supersonic speeds were as dreamy now as the magic carpet.

The thrill of engines, of speed and precision, had been bred out of the race. There was only one precision that mattered any more: The matching of gene line to gene line, to bring about a human being instead of a monster.

The ship was coughing along the dusty gap from the hangar as he came out of the passenger building with his ticket. Its wings shuddered slowly with the threatening uncertainty of the right engine. Neither the passengers nor the pilot seemed dismayed. It was as if it were far too much to expect both engines of the airplane to function well at the same time. If one gave way in mid-air, they could coast on the other; if both ceased, the prairies of Kansas were flat.

Wellton moved forward through the wire gate and through the wind blast that struck back from the propellers. The engines were not stopped while the passengers embarked. Starting them was a mechanic's job done in the hangar, and once done, they were kept going in the shaky realization that it might not be possible to start them again.

As he handed his bag to a porter at the entrance to the short ramp, he noticed his fellow passengers glancing at him. They had recognized him, and most of them hated him . . .

The ship was suffocating with the mixture of heat and dust and oil fumes. The green plastic seats were worn and cracked. In spots the dirty stuffing appeared. The once-carpeted floor was now barren, its metal scuffed and shiny.

Wellton wished that he might have a seat alone, but that seemed a futile hope. There were eleven passengers for the twelve seats. He wondered which of them were Rossi's men.

He drew for his partner an enormous man whose bulk spilled over the arm rest and pressed against Wellton. The man removed a handkerchief from his back pocket and mopped his neck.

"Hot day," he muttered. "Name's Fenway; expect to go to Denver if this old trap doesn't break up before it gets that far. Going all the way yourself?"

Wellton nodded mutely, wondering how long it would take the man's conversation to run down. He reached out desperately for a contact with Anne. He had previously refrained because it could be dangerous to become preoccupied with telepathic contact that demanded all their attention; but he could not resist now.

"Annie." He sent her name across the soundless miles.

Almost instantly, she responded. "Yes, Robert."

The cabin became livable. The suffocating heat and dust and fumes died away.

"I'm just leaving," he said. "Are you all right?"

"Our plane broke down and we had to stay a while in Des Moines. We're all right now."

"Timmy?"

"Yes. He's been a little sick from traveling, but he'll be all right."

"How's Jim acting?"

"Nervous. There are two of Rossi's agents aboard the plane, I think. In the waiting room, one of them kept us always in sight. They exchanged conversation with Jim, and poked Timmy in the ribs. What do you think they might do?"

"They are probably instructed to follow you to the lodge, to establish your connection with me. They'll try to take us together."

"Then we might as well have gone together," Anne pro-

tested. "If Rossi suspects we're going to meet, all this attempt to throw him off the track is futile."

"No," said Wellton. "If we were together, they could take us any time—or try to. As it is, we will have the advantage of reaching the lodge; we can dispose of the agents there much easier than at any other point. But tell Jim to stay alert, in case I might be wrong. Call me if necessary. I had to talk to you for just a moment."

"I'm glad you did," said Anne.

They parted with the illusion of tremendous flight. The interior of the shaky cabin, the sweating fat man bulging against him became more apparent to Wellton's senses. He realized the ship was bumping along the runway.

As it took to the air, Wellton eased back and closed his eyes, becoming as comfortable as possible.

Which one of them? he asked himself again. Which one of them was assigned to kill him when the time came? There were four young girls, a middle-aged woman with a four-year-old girl, and an older woman. The three other men were of varying ages, businessmen apparently. They all seemed to be alone.

"Excuse me." Fenway was stirring massively in his seat again, taking off his coat. He folded it carefully, lining side out, exposing his pair of coat knives hanging hilt down. Wellton glanced at them.

The fat man smiled blandly. "I don't expect I'll be needing those here." He put the folded coat on the rack over their heads. "It's been a long time since I've really used them, but I keep in practice twice a week down at Ken's gym and armory. You never know, these days. You carry a knife?"

"Generally," murmured Wellton.

It could be Fenway. But if this were so, there had to be another one, also. Fenway was too conspicuous.

It was dark when the plane reached North Platte. Miraculously, the beaten ship had both engines still func-

tioning as it rolled the length of the bumpy runway and jerked to a stop in front of the passenger building.

"Thirty-minute dinner stop," the pilot said.

Wellton entered the cafeteria and ate a scant and hurried supper. He saw that Fenway ate alone at a small table; a man in a gray suit sat by a window, nervously gulping his food with a companion from the plane.

Wellton got up and went out into the dusty night air of the landing field. He didn't look back, but was aware of a glance from the passenger in the gray suit as he went through the door.

Near the communication office, he paused in the shadows. A man stepped away from the wall. "Charter for Mr. Stevens," he said in a quiet voice.

"Mr. Stevens," said Wellton.

They went directly to the field, passing as far from the lighted windows of the cafeteria as possible. Wellton stole a quick glance. Fenway and the man in gray were still at their tables, their eyes averted from the windows.

The pilot, who had been sent through the Children, was leading him now to a small single-engined cabin plane far down the field. When they reached it, he opened the door. Then Wellton knew why it had seemed too easy. A figure lay sprawled on the rear of the two seats.

"Who's that?" he demanded. "This was to be a private charter."

The pilot shrugged. "I couldn't do it that way, mister. This flight was arranged two days ago; I only got your word this morning." Then, in a whiny voice, he added, "I have to make a buck where I can. It will be all right. This guy won't give no trouble."

Sweat moistened Wellton's face. He called out to Barron while he stood there.

"Yes, Father," his first son answered at once.

Wellton told Barron of the situation at hand.

"Something must have gone wrong," said Barron. "Our man was trustworthy. He would not have taken another passenger."

"Is he a tall, thin man with bad teeth?"

"No," Barron said. "He's short and chunky. His plane is a yellow one."

"This is Rossi's man, then," said Wellton. "This plane is red and black. They've done away with our man."

"What will you do, Father?"

"Go with them," said Wellton.

He began climbing into the ship. The conversation had been so rapid that the pilot observed only a short hesitation. He touched Wellton's arm.

"Weapons," he said. "They must be locked in the compartment." He indicated a compartment under the control panel. "I have a right to require it," he whined.

Wellton deposited his knives without argument. He felt he had a margin of time until the agents trailing Anne knew her final destination.

In a moment, the ship took off in the darkness without instruments other than compass and radio. The engine sounded better than those in the airline plane.

Wellton felt better. He knew who these men were, but they didn't know he knew. It gave him a little advantage, at the moment. He looked out at the darkness sweeping by the ship. So far, his flight had accomplished nothing except the bringing of an army of Rossi's men nearer the Children. His plan had failed with the capture of the charter man at North Platte.

"How about my getting a little sleep in the back?" he said. "I was kind of figuring on that."

"Another hour," whined the pilot. "Let him be another hour and then you can trade places. I told him he could do that. You know how it is when you have to pick up a buck."

Wellton slumped down in the seat as best he could.

He knew he must have dozed a little, but it could

have been only for a moment. He jerked awake with Anne's cry of alarm in his mind.

"What is it?" he exclaimed.

"Robert, I am at the Minneapolis airport. Jim has been killed! I stepped inside the cafeteria for a moment and when I came out a fight had begun. I think he must have started it. The two men I suspected had been following closely. Jim was so nervous he had been almost shaking for the past hour."

"Rossi's men," said Wellton. "What happened to them?"

"Jim killed one and wounded the other so badly he was taken to the hospital. What shall I do? What can I do about Jim?"

"Nothing," said Wellton. "Nothing at all. Get back aboard the plane as fast as you can and continue to Winnipeg. Pick up a charter for Marimee there. Watch for any new agents. There may be a substitute near you.

"Jim must have provoked the attack. I don't think they would have made a move this side of the Lodge. The poor devil was too anxious to do what was expected of him."

"We can't just leave him here!" exclaimed Anne. "Others on the plane know we were together. They'll ask questions; they'll expect me to—"

"All right," said Wellton wearily. "Stay where you are and arrange for Jim to be taken care of. Tell them you are going to wait at the airport for your brother to arrive; don't leave the waiting room!"

"My brother?" said Anne. "What are you going to do?"

"This charter I'm flying is manned by two of Rossi's men. They ought to be more than delighted to stop and pick up you and Timmy. I should have no trouble persuading them."

X. *ATTACK*

He drew back from her and lay for a moment in the darkness, trying to see through the black wall of time. It ought to work. He and Anne were both very good with the knives. He was rusty in his flying, but he could handle a plane like this. There was nothing else to do.

He thought of Florence Ash. She probably would never come out of her state when she heard about Jim. She'd stay in her world of make-believe . . .

He touched the pilot on the shoulder. "I've decided I want to make a little change in our flight. Will it take much longer if we go through Minneapolis?"

The man hesitated, then half-turned to him. "I figured on gassing in Huron. Minneapolis wouldn't be a great deal out of the way. Why didn't you say something about this before we started?"

"I just got to thinking that maybe my sister would like to spend a week at the Marimee. She lives alone in Minneapolis and would go on the spur of the moment. Name's Anne Mason. I haven't seen Anne in a long time. Yes, let's go that way and pick her up; I can talk her into it."

He pretended to be staring through the cabin window, but he looked askance at the other passenger when he mentioned Anne's name. Wellton felt a bitter satisfaction as the man flicked a finger to signal the pilot.

"I guess it's all right," the pilot grumbled. "I'll have

to charge an extra fifty. Ten for going out of the way and forty for the extra fare."

"It will be worth it to see Anne again," said Wellton.

He slept a while and when he awoke the morning sun was shining. Twenty minutes out from the airport, Wellton spoke to Anne again.

"We're almost in," he said. "I'll pretend to call you on the phone. Keep out of sight. I'll try to herd the pilot and the other passenger into the cafeteria. You can pretend to arrive while they are there. Did you get through the business of Jim all right?"

"Yes," said Anne. "They tried to get me to go away from the airport. I don't know whether they were any of Rossi's men or not."

The plane circled low over the ancient ruins that clustered on the outskirts of the modern city and swung into a straight, downward glide that took it over the dilapidated slums adjacent to the airport. The wheels touched and rolled. Wellton loosened his belt.

"I'll call my sister on the phone," he said. "We can have some breakfast while we're waiting for her."

Neither of the two agents were communicative as they stepped from the plane. For the first time Wellton got a good look at the other passenger, and learned his name was Dexter. His suit was rumpled from the night spent on the plane and his felt hat was crumpled and dirty. A familiar telltale sag betrayed twin coat knives. They went into the cafeteria and Wellton looked about for a phone.

"Over there," the pilot said.

Wellton entered the booth and remained three or four minutes, then joined the others at the counter.

"She's coming," he said. "I told you she'd be glad to go. Anne's like that; go anywhere at the drop of a hat."

"I think I'll use the phone myself," said the pilot. "Used to know a guy here in Minneapolis."

He vacated the center seat between the other two. Wellton glanced at the clock and slipped from the counter stool. "I'll see if my sister has shown up yet."

He sauntered toward the doorway, watching the pilot's return from the phone booth. Dexter muttered something to him as he came up. Now Rossi would know they were together, Wellton thought.

In the waiting room, Anne was nowhere to be seen. Foolishly he stood in the middle of the waiting room and called silently, "Where are you, Anne? I'm here."

There was gentle laughter in her reply. "I'm waiting as you told me to do. I'll be right with you."

In a moment the door of the ladies' room opened and she emerged with Timmy in her arms. His mind touched hers and told her what had to be done. The two men at the counter turned as he approached with her.

"Our pilot, Mr. Shipley, and our fellow passenger, Mr. Dexter," he said. "This is my sister, Anne."

They nodded. Shipley protested, "You didn't tell me there was a baby! I've got to have more for that. That'll cost you an extra twenty, anyway."

"It's all right," said Wellton.

Grumbling, the pilot led them out to the plane. He checked the servicing and signed the service slip and opened the door of the ship.

"You're carrying arms, Miss Mason," he said.

"Of course," said Anne.

He hesitated. "I always get them deposited when we're in flight," he said. "Air-carrier rules on that."

"The transports don't require it," said Wellton hotly. "I agreed last night, to keep from making a fuss, but no one ever challenges a lady's right to go armed. Furthermore, I observe that you didn't make the same requirement of Mr. Dexter. I suggest that at this point you require Mr. Dexter to deposit his weapons alongside mine, and that you apologize for your insult to Miss Mason."

The two men exchanged glances. "I kind of forgot

about that last night—in the hurry to locate you, Wellton. I sort of slipped over Dexter. I guess you'll have to put them up," he said.

Reluctantly, the other man deposited his knives in the compartment, which Shipley relocked. Then, with Anne glaring at him, he moved back and allowed her to enter.

"You've got to sit in the front seat, anyway," he said. "Don't ever allow an armed passenger to sit behind me while I'm flying."

"You're very rude, Mr. Shipley," said Anne. "I'm sure that we could find other means of transportation, couldn't we, Robert?"

"It would make it much later," said Wellton. "I'm sure that Mr. Shipley means no offense. We don't have enough money to hire another charter. Mr. Dexter and I will sit in the back."

In the air again, the plane headed north toward Winnipeg. It was awkward, the way they were riding; it would have been so much simpler with Anne beside him. In his mind's eye he visualized the coming moments, the first motion required. His muscles tensed experimentally. Then word came from Anne.

"Timmy's ready," she said.

Wellton breathed deeply and then answered, "All right."

Anne squirmed suddenly in the front seat. She turned and looked about, holding Timmy gingerly from her lap. "Mr. Dexter," she said, "would you mind opening my bag there beside you? I've got to have some things for Timmy."

Dexter fumbled distastefully and reached for the bag which Anne had placed at his feet, directly behind her seat. He fumbled with the catch and laid it open. There was not room for it between him and Wellton; he had to hold it to keep it from falling while Anne squirmed about further. She laid Timmy on the seat and knelt on the edge of it in front of him.

"Lady, you're going to cause trouble," Shipley muttered disgustedly. "Can't you settle down a bit?"

"Haven't I got a right to change the baby's diaper?"

Anne reached with one hand toward the bag Dexter held. With the other, she steadied Timmy for a moment, then moved it from Timmy to the leg sheath beneath her skirt. Her hand whipped up. She was aware of a sense of awful recognition in Dexter's flaring eyes. He tried to raise his hand; but already, the knife was buried blade-deep in his side.

He screamed loud and horribly there in the tiny cabin. Anne grasped his clawing hands and held them fiercely while the man died. Simultaneously, Wellton clamped an arm about Shipley's throat. The pilot reared back, his feet kicking the controls. Wellton bent his neck sharply over the back of the seat until the bone cracked and the pilot's body went limp.

The plane banked and dipped. Anne reached for the wheel and tried to steady it with one hand, while she braced her feet and held Dexter from falling on her.

"Pull it back. Get his feet off the pedal," said Wellton desperately.

"I can't— Timmy—"

"I've got Dexter. Lay Timmy on the floor."

Swiftly she did as he instructed and slipped into the pilot's position, shifting the feet of the dead man as she did so. Slowly the plane straightened and pulled out of its dip.

"Hand Timmy to me," said Wellton then, "and get the door open."

Anne set the plane on level flight and reached for Timmy. Wellton took him. She twisted the handle; together, they got Shipley's body moved over against the door. They shoved hard against the force of the air outside. Unable to turn her eyes away, Anne watched the body plummet to the green mass of the earth below. Dexter followed, and when they were gone she sat trem-

bling in the seat, staring at the green and blue horizon.

"Have you got some water in Timmy's bottle?" said Wellton. "You'll have to wipe your hands and face; you're covered with blood."

She laughed—a shaky, hysterical giggle. "You should see yourself. You'll have to get it out of your clothes before we get to the Lodge."

He crawled over the seat and slipped into the pilot's position while Anne took Timmy, soothed him, and finished the changing she had begun.

Wellton reached out into the blue sheet of sky ahead of them. "Barron."

"Yes, Father."

"We are free and alone," said Wellton. "We have no need of carrying out the remainder of our plan for traveling from the Lodge to the helicopter." He related what had happened to Rossi's agents. "We can come directly to you, now," he said.

Barron hesitated. "Are you sure it is completely wise to do that? Forgive my questioning your wisdom, Father, but we must be certain that our location is not discovered."

Wellton could not think after the violence of the killings. "Perhaps you are right," he admitted. "But we cannot go to the Lodge in our present condition; we need clothes and supplies. I had to abandon all of mine."

"You can land the plane and hide it in the small clearing near the point where we've left the boat," said Barron. "You couldn't take off again, but there is room for landing. Also, with the boat, there are sufficient supplies for you both at better than half rations during the journey downstream."

"We will do as you suggest. Give us the course and landmarks to the clearing." Wellton glanced at the fuel gauge and set the course as Barron gave it to him.

Timelessness set in. The drone of the plane's motor, the gentle rocking of its wings, the squirming and small

noises of Timmy, the quiet nearness of Anne, these made a fixed and unchanging picture where the frantic pace of his flight had vanished.

"I'm glad you're going to be with me," he said to Anne.

They came to the vicinity of the clearing while the sun was still high in the west. Wellton renewed contact with Barron until they were positive of their identification of the spot. He murmured when he saw the diminutive size of it; he had forgotten about the limitations of his own skill when Barron warned it would not allow a take-off.

Decisively he banked the plane and circled in an ever-tightening spiral over the treetops. He throttled back and lost as much speed as he dared. Then he straightened and gunned the motor to keep the plane controllable. Swiftly the green meadow flared up in their faces. The plane hit hard and bounced, and rolled and bounced again.

In the rear seat, Anne arched her body protectingly over the baby. The dark avenues between the trees rolled at them. Wellton cut the ignition, checked his belt, and raised both arms before his face. The plane sheared off its right wing against a tree and heeled over. The tearing, crumpling sound drained away in an enormous vacuum of forest silence. Then Timmy's frail cry brought back the world of earthly sounds and anxieties.

"Are you all right?" Wellton called, struggling from his belt.

"My back is bruised. Help me with Timmy," said Anne.

Wellton kicked out the panels of the windshield and took the baby from her arms, laying it on the pine needles while he helped her from the wreckage. Timmy squealed impatiently when they returned and stood together looking down at him.

"Thirty-five years," said Wellton, "and now we're almost there."

XI. THE HIDDEN COLONY

1.

He found the boat where Barron had told him it would be. There were provisions which seemed more than adequate.

Wellton was somewhat astonished by the construction of the boat. It was a sturdy metal canoe. He supposed that the Children had made it, but it seemed better than anything he had expected to find of their manufacture. Items such as their helicopter and farm machines were, of course, brought in from the cities where they were purchased with great care and subterfuge.

Within a short time he had the boat in the water and the provisions lashed down. Anne bundled Timmy carefully and tied him to her by a line, in case of an upset. She glanced apprehensively at the water as she stepped into the boat.

"Barron told me the first dangerous rapids are about twenty miles from here," said Wellton. "I'd like to make it by nightfall."

"How far do we have to go altogether?"

"About two hundred miles, I believe."

Anne used the waterproof covering that had protected some of the supplies to make a bed for Timmy on the slats between her feet. Wellton sat on his bloodstained coat, not wanting to dispose of it in case Rossi's men should come to this spot.

With a final glance at the wrecked ship, he pushed away from shore and paddled into the green, swift waters. The current gripped them with a tender hand. Ahead of them a fish leaped, and spears of golden light arched through the trees above them.

"Has this always been here?" said Wellton.

"Since the beginning," said Anne.

Sunlight disappeared earlier in the forest, but dusk found them almost at the head of the first rapids that required portage. Wellton felt reasonably secure in stopping here, although they would have to forego the comfort of a fire. That would betray their position to a possible patrol from the air.

He hoped the provisions sent by the Children did not require cooking, but as he opened them, he was startled. There was a small, chemical radiant heater provided for cooking the food. He set it up and its warm, invisible outpouring was soon pleasant against the chill of the forest evening.

"Anne," said Wellton, "did you ever see one of these things before? I have taught them nothing that would enable them to make such a device."

"I haven't seen that particular device, but they do not live as savages. I'm sure they have produced this easily enough."

The heater irritated him, but it was impossible to detract from the pleasure of the meal it helped them prepare. Dried meat and vegetables they found in the packages were superior to any synthetics to be had in the cities.

While Wellton prepared camp, Anne sat on the ground with her back against the upturned boat and nursed Timmy. Wellton watched her and found himself moving with noiseless steps and hushed sounds.

Again he had the feeling that, after all, he knew nothing about the thing he had sought all his life.

After they ate, he sat down beside Anne, leaning

against the bottom of the boat, with a blanket between them and the cold metal. In front of them the chemical heater continued to pour out its invisible warmth. Timmy slept in Anne's arms and made soft, gurgling noises over his thumb.

Wellton could see Anne's face dimly in the light of the sky; her eyes were closed and her head tilted back. He bent over and kissed her gently. She smiled and opened her eyes to look at him.

"Thank you, Robert."

"What were you thinking about so soberly?"

"I was thinking that we mustn't ever let it end. So much has been wasted. We mustn't let anything change what we've got now, must we, Robert? Not even the Children."

She felt him tighten, although he was not touching her. "They'll not change us. This is the beginning for all of us."

Then, after a moment, he said, "There's more than you told me back at the apartment, more than your belief that Barron will challenge me. You don't like the Children, Anne. Why?"

She shook her head vigorously. "It's not that; it's— I guess it's because I'm afraid of them."

"You shouldn't be; you're like them."

"No. They're a family, your family. Sometimes I think they hate me as much as the Normals would. I am simply a wild Deviate, with no one I can call my own—except Timmy. And through him, you. Sometimes I dream I am in a strange world where I am the only living thing."

He put his arm about her shoulders and drew her closer. "We're all that way," he said.

Adam Wellton had not discovered his own telepathic powers until Robert was born, he had once said. It was not until then that he had begun the great dream.

With the Children it was different. From the first moment, they were aware; he had learned this from Barron.

By the seventh month he was able to contact the feeble, whispering impulses of emotion transpiring in that unborn mind.

He felt all the inhuman tragedy of birth as Barron reached out wildly with his telepathic mind that no one could hear and answer except his father. Since then, he had heard many hundred such cries and had answered them all, giving the assurance and love that no Normal parent could ever bestow. Across the breadth of the continent, he had calmed the birth terrors of his multitude of Children, and assured them that he was with them always, that their destiny was great, and that presently he would come to them.

He sensed in the years that followed that they clung desperately to the comfort of that promise.

When Barron was fifteen, Wellton had commanded him to call together the score or more of his brothers and sisters who were in the same city and set out upon the long trek into the North. There, they learned to hide and live from the land, until they were strong enough and many enough to conquer it.

Uniformly, they had disappeared in adolescence, and gone to the various communities of their hiding. It was easy for them to disappear in a world where kidnapping or murder was the common peril of every child. Wellton regretted the sorrow of the mothers of the Children, because they were among the finest and most sensitive of all the Normals; but it was unavoidable.

Timmy was different, with both parents Deviates.

"When did you first become aware that you were a telepath?" he asked Anne abruptly.

"Early," she answered vaguely.

"You blanked Timmy out so that I couldn't hear him at first," said Wellton.

"Yes. It was difficult to do. A few days ago I knew that I was failing, and that I would have to come to you at once and let you know what I had done."

"It was so faint. For a little while, I wondered if my own powers were failing. I hated to think of myself as getting old."

"When will you be old?" she said.

"Maybe in a hundred years. I hope not that soon."

"How long will the Children live?"

"Two hundred and fifty, maybe three hundred years, on the average," he said.

"I wonder if I'll live that long," said Anne. "I wish I could, but I don't have the same deviations." Her voice was wistful.

"You'll live forever," he said.

2.

They broke camp when the stars began to fade. By sunrise they had started their portage through the forest beside the angry water of the rapids. The boat was light. They distributed the weight of their supplies in it, with Timmy in the middle. Grasping it by the handholds at either end, they trekked through light underbrush. It was not a difficult portage, but their urgency made it seem long. Wellton kept in touch with Barron, notifying him when they finally reached the end of the rapids a little before noon.

"You should be able to make it by tomorrow night," said Barron. "You have four more rapids requiring portage. They're all shorter than the one you have just passed. If you agree, we will have the helicopter brought in tomorrow night at the place we planned on. Have you seen any signs of planes in the air, showing evidence of pursuit?"

"None at all," said Wellton. "We'll meet your ship as planned."

Wellton was not too unwilling for this part of the

journey to be prolonged. It was the first experience of its kind he had ever known. He watched the forest flow past now on either side of the river. If he needed any final conviction that spring and growth would come again, it was here, he thought. The great wooden pillars of the forest had no doubt about it.

One more short portage brought them to a camp-site late in the evening. As he prepared it, Wellton almost regretted that there would not be others like this, where he and Anne were so completely alone with each other. It might never come again in their whole lifetimes.

After supper, they sat as before, against the upturned bottom of the boat. When they were together they talked with words almost entirely.

"What is he like?" Wellton asked. "What is Barron like?"

Anne seemed as reluctant to speak as she had the night before when he had asked about her own experiences near birth. "I tried to tell you that first night at the apartment, Robert," she said. "You would not listen when I tried to tell you about Barron."

This was not what he wanted. Her words seemed to strip down the curtain of magic from the forest and the sky and the river.

"Do you still believe that?" he said. "Do you still believe the things you told me that night?"

"Let us wait and see. Perhaps you are right; it has been too long since I knew the Children."

"Tell me what Barron is like," he demanded. "I want to know everything about him. How he looks. How he walks. What he tells the rest of the Children when I am not listening."

Anne recognized his anger and suddenly understood.

"Barron is quite tall," she said quietly. "A little taller than you. He is straight and hard and muscular. He's dark, also. Much darker than you, with black hair. He

smiles a great deal and he is very handsome when he smiles."

"It would be from his mother," Wellton said thoughtfully. "She was dark and very beautiful. I remember her very well."

"Did you know her?"

"No. I only saw her twice, but I studied her history and her gene maps for weeks before deciding to use her. Most of the others I have forgotten, but I remember her because she was the first. . . . But what does Barron want?"

"I don't know," said Anne. "I think he has a purpose, a very definite plan, but I never learned what it was. He enjoys the pleasures of living; but underneath he is bitter. I have seen him stand and curse the world, the rest of mankind, and his own life."

"It is understandable," said Wellton thoughtfully; "I haven't taught them what they are. They consider themselves in prison. Barron will change when he learns what I have planned for him."

"I hope you are right. I'd rather not talk about it any more tonight. I'm tired and I'd like to turn in."

Wellton was beginning to understand now, he thought. Much bitterness could be generated in an outcast life as long as Barron's had been.

"I'll make it right, Barron," he murmured to himself.

The next afternoon was marred by a heavy thunderstorm, but they continued down the river, even after it grew dark. Finally, they came abreast of the small clearing where the helicopter was to be.

Wellton saw the shadow of its awkward wings against the darker trees. And nearby, two vague figures moved toward the bank of the river. One of them caught the bow of the boat and drew it close. The other helped Anne and Timmy. Wellton stepped up and took their hands.

An exhilaration possessed him. All the grief of the anxious years drained away.

"You are the Children," he said softly. "And I have kept my promise."

XII. THE WORSHIPPERS

1.

THE PILOT of the helicopter was Tom Calvin, first advisor to Barron. He was a lanky, serious man of Barron's own age. His wide jaw and massive cheekbones gave a rough, boxlike appearance to his face. But there was reverence in his manner as he came forward. He accepted Wellton's handclasp and released it quickly, almost fearfully.

"I remember when you called upon me," said Wellton. "It was when you were twelve and fell from a horse. You were alone and needed help."

"Yes. Yes, I did," said Tom. He seemed astonished that Wellton should have remembered. "I must have been stunned so that I couldn't call out to anyone but you. I'm sorry that I bothered you with so trivial a thing."

"No," said Wellton. "Don't be sorry for the times we have been able to help one another."

He turned to the co-pilot, William Rogers, much younger and somewhat gnomelike in build. "I remember you wanted me to deal with Barron when you were twelve, and he was making you milk the cows endlessly. "Do you still have trouble getting along with the cows?"

"No, Father. I'm in charge of dairy production now. I have a good deal to do with the cows."

"But you don't milk them any more."

"No, Father; I have others delegated to do that."

They joined Wellton in laughter, which eased the uncertainty within them. Anne knew both of the men, but she and they kept a distant regard for one another which disturbed Wellton.

"We'd better get started," Tom suggested. "The sooner we have you within the group the safer we'll feel."

"We are ready," said Wellton. "But just one thing: You feel a strangeness in meeting me for the first time. I have been only as a voice out of the unknown. You have prayed to me when you were children, because I could help; and I have done what I could.

"But now I am one of you. I have come to tell you of the things I have planned for you. We need not be strangers any more."

The boat was dismantled and stowed in the helicopter, as were the remnants of their supplies. Wellton considered the heavily loaded ship. "Wouldn't it be better to abandon these things?"

"One of our primary rules," said Tom deferentially, "is to never throw away anything that may have later value. We use them until there is no more use left in them. But in this case a more important reason is that we do not wish to leave any kind of trail showing where you have been. I hope you left no refuse in your trip down the river."

"I'm afraid we may have," said Wellton. "There were food tins and covers. To hide them did not occur to me."

"It cannot be helped now," said Tom. "We should have cautioned you earlier."

Wellton felt a trifle ill at ease.

They squeezed into the cabin of the ship, which was filled to capacity. The ship jerked as the blades beat the air furiously; then slowly they arose and began moving forward.

Wellton caught his breath as he saw that Tom was

going to fly along the river bed, scarcely above treetop level in the darkness.

"This is far out of our territory, Father," Tom said. "We have no idea what facilities there may be for spying on us here. We are used to this sort of thing. Please don't be uneasy."

They moved slowly through the darkness. Wellton leaned back and put his arm about Anne, who was nursing Timmy. She drew closer and laid her head against him.

As dawn came, they rose higher out of the canyon of trees and increased their speed. "We're on home territory now," said William. "We patrol this area ourselves and know everything that's in it. We'll soon have you where you can rest. I hope it hasn't been too difficult a journey, especially for the baby."

"He's fine," said Anne. "I think he knows he's coming home."

"He can probably sense the presence of a multitude of minds similar to his own," said William. "Almost all the young ones say it's like coming out of a den of animals to leave the cities."

They were in a land of lakes. The ship passed over scores of them, unbelievably blue amid the solid green surrounding them. At last the ship began losing altitude over a lake, near a region of crags.

As yet, Wellton had observed no sign of habitation; but when they were almost over their destination, he saw a cluster of cabins set back from the water, under the protection of the pines. One of them was much larger and centrally located. He guessed its purpose at once.

"We've kept it in readiness for many years," said Tom, pointing downward. "It was the first thing we built when we came here; you could have come at any hour of the day or night and found a place to rest, and food ready to prepare. We have kept a long vigil, Father."

Tom's eyes were on the landing, but Wellton turned

his head sharply, wondering if Tom was bitter or resentful over the long wait. He could not tell; it was a flat statement of fact, in which he could detect no reverence.

As the ship settled before the house, Wellton thought about the statement Tom had just made. Barron had said they were not prepared.

The house was a six-room, slab-sided structure set back from the beach on piles to protect it against the drifting sand and water. The natural bark-brown hue provided an almost perfect camouflage against the brown forest floor. Wellton glanced over the building closely as he mounted the steps with Anne, and with the two pilots escorting them. It was expertly built, with pleasing lines and good craftsmanship. He felt a father's pride over a child's work well done.

Tom opened the door and ushered them in. "In behalf of the Children, we hope that you are pleased with what has been provided," he said.

"I *am* pleased," said Wellton. "Very much so. But a major inconvenience is that we could bring no luggage of any consequence. I was obliged to abandon mine, entirely, and Anne has only the essentials for taking care of Timmy."

"That has been anticipated," said Tom. "A daughter who is a seamstress will be attached to your group here by the lake. We have provided other assistants who are skilled in technology and secretarial work and in handicraft. All things that you will require will be provided to the best of our skill and ability, and we will await your commands in all things."

It sounded like a formal announcement. "Thank you very much, Tom," said Wellton quietly. "I'm sure that I shall lack nothing while I am among you."

He glanced about the pine-paneled room into which they had come. The furnishings were rustic, but built with a cabinetmaker's skill.

A young woman appeared from the rear of the house.

Tom beckoned her toward them. "This is Julia," he said, "who has been assigned as your maid."

She bowed her head toward Wellton. "I am pleased to be of service, Father."

"Thank you, Julia," said Wellton. "And this is Anne and Timmy."

Julia's expression changed. "I remember Anne," she said.

"It's good to see you again," said Anne.

Julia's face was stiff. Wellton watched her attitude reflected momentarily in Tom's. Anne had not been wrong, he thought; they were hostile toward her.

"Julia's cabin is next to the house," said Tom. "All her time and energies are yours."

He showed them through the remainder of the house. The rooms were alike in their rustic comforts of pine-paneled walls and hand-woven rugs on the floor.

"We have a hand pump that brings water from a well at the rear of the house," said Tom. In the kitchen he showed them this with special pride. Wellton smiled at his pleasure in this crude device.

"Where do you get such things as this and the boat?"

"They are our own. We have built a smelter, and are able to do castings and considerable machine work. Enough for devices like this and for keeping the plane and farm equipment in repair."

"The tractors and the helicopter and machine tools—you buy those in the cities, do you not?"

"Yes. They are very expensive. Not only from the standpoint of goods and materials exchanged for them, but in their actual transport here. Our tractors are run overland for a thousand miles. It is difficult. That is how some of us have been caught.

"But you will wish to rest now," said Tom with finality. "We will leave you and await your call and instructions. Barron awaits and will come at a moment's notice."

Julia turned to go, also. "I will be at your call unless there is something I may do at this time."

"No," said Wellton. "Right now, we are very tired and will find things for ourselves and rest. Thank you, Julia."

Alone in the house, Wellton felt a curious sense of anti-climax. For a moment he thought how right Anne had been. He didn't know the Children; they were like strangers when they stood before him.

He remembered Julia now: When she was six, she had been sick over the loss of a doll. He had taught her how to reach out carefully with her mental reception and detect where the doll had last been placed. Her joy over the discovery that she could do this was minor compared with the pleasure of having her doll again.

She had sent him a prayer of grateful thanks, and he remembered even now his own yearning to take her on his lap and comfort her as a child had the right to be comforted. And now she was grown—and bitter, he thought.

Somehow he would have to lift them all out of it.

2.

He was disappointed that Barron had not come, but Wellton understood that it would be a point of formality to him to wait until he was called. Wellton called him now, when the pilots had gone.

"I want to see you, Barron," he said. "Will you come to me, please, if you are not far away?"

"I'm pleased that you have arrived, Father," said Barron. "I am not far. I shall come at once."

The first born was always different, with any man, Wellton thought. There was some magic there that was never repeated in so great a degree. He told Anne of Barron's coming.

"I overheard," she said. "I would rather you saw him

alone; I'll be taking care of Timmy while you talk." She turned away and then hesitated for a moment. "Never forget," she said, "there are some things none of us can ever change—least of all our own children."

She closed the bedroom door behind her, and Wellton faced the window overlooking the lake. A landing pier extended from a small boat house into the blue waters. A few canoes and a small motorboat were tied to it. There was an air of luxury about this which jarred Wellton. It seemed incongruous with the frontier life the Children were living.

In a few moments, a solitary figure emerged from the woods in the distance and moved along the curve of the sandy beach toward the cottage. Without reaching out, Wellton knew Barron. His eyes concentrated on that figure; his heartbeat increased as it came nearer.

Barron was tall and lean, as Anne had said, and it gave Wellton pleasure to watch him. His stride was determined, yet slower than it might have been, Wellton thought. And then he realized that Barron, too, anticipated their meeting with a degree of apprehension.

When he reached the first porch step, Wellton flung the door open.

"Barron," he said.

For a moment the two looked at each other with a hungry intensity. They made no attempt to touch each other's minds; they had done that ten thousand times in the past. Now their eyes drank in the sight of the bodily form that was a stranger to them.

A great pride filled Wellton. Barron was full of strength. Wellton had known it was in his mind, and now he saw that it was in his body also. His face was narrow and firm, darkened by the sun and wind. He had the appearance of not smiling very often; but while he looked upon Wellton now there was a flash of reverence, and a reminder of a boy's yearning for his lost father.

Wellton took him by the shoulders, his eyes searching

each line and plane of his son's face to mark it forever in his memory. "Barron," he said again.

Barron's hands touched his arms. "It's been a long time, Father. We've waited a very long time, those of us who have been here from the first."

"I wish it could have been sooner." Wellton held him a moment more and then turned toward the house. "Come in. We should have many things to say to each other."

They sat down overlooking the lake. Some of the Children belonging to the group serving Wellton were in the water now, swimming and splashing. They heard the motorboat start.

"Do many of them hate me," said Wellton abruptly, "for bringing them out here to this wilderness?"

"We do not hate the wilderness," said Barron. "This is our home. We go to the cities often enough to remind us of their ugliness and terror. None of us would go back there to live."

"You do not mind the hardships?"

"We have reduced the hardships to a minimum. We live quite comfortably, as you will see when you visit the main villages."

"Then there is no real discontent among the Children?"

"Not with our present circumstances."

Wellton smiled faintly. "I had hoped to find a little discontent. Just the right amount to make the Children welcome what is in store."

"Just what *is* in store for us, Father?" said Barron. "Can you tell me now—or is it improper that I should ask at this time?"

"No." Wellton shook his head slowly. "It is not improper. I want you to understand it, Barron, for through you must come much of the leadership that will guide the others. Have you ever realized why you have had to run and hide?"

"Not fully, perhaps; not in the way you mean," said Barron. "We know we are different. We don't know why Normals should want to hunt us down and kill us because of that. The thing we know best of all, however, is that the men of the cities do hate us. You may be sure we return that hate a thousand-fold."

Wellton was saddened by the change that came over Barron's face as he spoke. It grew darker and his eyes hardened.

He saw disapproval in Wellton's eyes. "I'm sorry if you find our attitude reproachful, Father," he said. "I see no reason why it should be otherwise. And you have given us good example in the destruction of Rossi's agents who tried to follow you here. You have told me you were going to see Rossi destroyed."

But Wellton was shaking his head. "It is not Rossi, nor his agents, or any particular group of men I would destroy. Killing is justified only by the immediate necessity of saving our own lives and goals from destruction. In the long view, the purpose for which I have hidden away my Children is to be a force with which to change the world. Our goal is to help mankind."

"I think you will find, Father, that most of the Children would prefer to let mankind find its own destiny—or destruction, if that is what is ahead for it—and let us live as we are."

"*You* are mankind," said Wellton. "The Normals are dying. Did you know that, Barron? They are going down year by year, and they will never rise again."

"What has that to do with us? Let them die, and we shall remain to inherit the whole earth!"

"That is the obvious answer; it might be the right answer, if it were going to be quick. But it will drag out over a thousand years or more, in which they will dwindle and die of slow paralysis. And, for you, a thousand years of waiting.

"But there would come a time when you could no

longer hide, when your numbers would equal those of the rest of the world. There would be a division, and you would fight them; and the ugly story would be played over once again."

"And the Children are to do something about that?"

"Yes; millions like the Children would be alive now if the Normals did not keep them from coming into existence. Instead of three thousand of you hiding here in the forest, there could be cities of your kind over all the earth."

Slowly and carefully then, he told the plan in detail. The gradual infiltration of the Children into places where their influence would change the pattern of fear, where they could peaceably assure the reproduction of their own kind, where they could preserve all that men had struggled for since the dark years of the ancient caves and forests.

He told Barron for the first time something of that long story. He told of the hot, bloody plains of the Tigris and Euphrates, the murderous dream of Egypt's Pharaoh, the long Roman highways that wound searchingly for something the builders never found.

He told him of the earnest little men who seized with glad, mindless joy upon the unhappy secrets of the atom, and built the bombs and perfected the dust.

When he was through, Barron drew a long breath and rose and stood by the window looking out at the swimmers. He turned and said, "Are the Children to have no choice? Suppose—just suppose they should wish to reject this destiny that is thrust upon them?"

Wellton shook his head. "It is indeed thrust upon them. They have no choice. The destiny is theirs whether they accept it or not."

They talked of other things that were familiar to them, trivial things to cover the strain between them. Barron's face had changed, since coming into the room, in a way that was impenetrable.

Wellton tried to read into it some of the things that Anne had said of Barron. But they didn't fit; not now, anyway. Barron was quiet and remote, as if at the sudden brink of a vast abyss; but there was no rebellion in his manner that Wellton could read.

XIII. THE PLAN

WELLTON CALLED a meeting to be held as soon as the entire group could be gathered. Barron told him this would require a week; some of them had to come from distant farm and mining locations, and preparations for being absent had to be made in some of these places.

During this week, Wellton spent his time exploring the village and the forest about. The main village of the Children was located a mile back from the lake shore. There had been no general clearing of the trees, which would have made the site obvious from the air. Rather, there were very small clusters of dwellings which had required almost no clearing. Neat, winding roads joined the separate units, following the random growth of the larger trees.

The houses were similar in design to the one in which Wellton and Anne lived, although smaller and simpler in construction generally. They exhibited a uniform, clean pioneer instinct for craftsmanship and thrift.

There were a number of cars among the Children, for the long trips between this village and smaller units elsewhere, and to the farms and mines. But mostly, travel was by horseback and wagons because of the fuel problem.

Commerce was carried on with the cities by trade in farm products and minerals. An elaborate scheme of camouflage was carried out, in which products were trucked to the nearest towns, then transferred to opera-

tions run by Children on the outskirts of towns on a semi-permanent basis. None of them had yet been caught, although they had been forced to abandon their property and flee, at times.

Wellton determined to visit every house in the village. It was not possible to go to them all in the week before the meeting, but he made as many visits as he could.

During the first day, he became acquainted with those living in the little group at the lake shore to serve him. He tried to recall a little of what he knew of each of them; this was possible to his encyclopedic memory in most cases.

There was Dorothea, the seamstress Barron had mentioned. She undertook at once to make additional clothing for Wellton. She was all but overcome at the opportunity to serve him. He reflected on her skills, in comparison with a Normal's, as she measured him. This consisted of his standing straight and turning slowly while she watched, photographing every detail of his bearing in her mind. Likewise, in cutting cloth, she had no need of measuring tape. Her eyes measured as her hands cut.

"I will work all night," she said. "It will be ready for you in the morning!"

He found the reverence, the worship and adulation of which Anne had spoken. It was like a wall around each of them, shutting him out from the human contact he desired. They avoided him in the streets of the village, spreading the word of his coming and fleeing like forest creatures to their warrens.

It astonished, then angered him. But he understood that he must move carefully and never betray their worship.

He stopped at the first house on the edge of the village. He did not know who occupied it. A wide-eyed young man of twenty-five opened the door. He inclined his head and stepped aside.

"Father," he murmured.

Wellton frowned and strode into the house. Inside, there were others. The man said, "Perhaps you know that I am Daniel, and this is my wife, Helen. These two are our own sons and the three sitting there are those whom you have given us out of the city."

Solemnly, Wellton extended a hand of greeting to each of them. His three younger Children sat stiffly on the sofa, unsmiling and sober. He gave up any attempt at jocularity, or easy comradeship.

It wouldn't work. He was the patriarch.

And here, for the first time, he was seeing his own grandchildren. The second generation of Beneficent Deviates. His eyes scanned them intently, but he did not attempt to touch their minds with telepathic probing.

"How old are they?" he said.

"Two and four," said Helen proudly.

Wellton nodded in satisfaction and patted them on the shoulders. They would do. He would have supposed them to be a year and a half or two years older. Their development was considerably ahead of that of the Children, he thought. And at least *their* respect for him was scant. They grinned impish challenge as he touched them.

"We have refreshments," said Helen. "If you will sit here—" She scurried about with an excess of motion.

"I would like to show you through the house. I built it myself," said Daniel. "It will take only a minute, while Helen makes things ready."

"Of course," said Wellton.

With obvious pride, Daniel showed the fine handwork of the cabinets and furniture. And although the place was smaller than the lake cottage, a small room in the back had been partitioned off to make a shop. Daniel led Wellton here as quickly as possible.

"These are the things I most wanted to show you," he said proudly.

It was a craftsman's paradise. Small machine tools oc-

cupied the benches, and hand tools hung neatly from their racks. The man held up a small object for Wellton's examination.

"Steam," he said. "It runs on steam made by a small chemical heater."

Wellton weighed it in his hands. His son had built it, he thought. His son, who worshipped him, had built a steam engine in the wilderness.

"You do not like it?" the man said anxiously.

"I think it is very beautiful," said Wellton.

"I saw such engines in the cities, and we have them at the mines. But this is finer than any engine I ever saw. It delivers twice the power from the same amount of heat. Soon we will build a full-sized one to use at the mine and to run our generators at the smelter."

Wellton returned to the cottage late in the afternoon and sank down in the big chair in the living room. Anne brought him a glass of some herb and root drink that Julia had taught her to make. It was not iced, but the water from the well was almost as cold as if it were.

Wellton coughed once and drank appreciatively. "It does have a certain potency. I hope I don't come to snake rattles at the bottom of the glass."

Anne sat down beside him. "How did the visiting go?"

"Like a nightmare," he said. "All these years I have dreamed of how it would be when I came to them. But we're strangers. They want me to be god."

"Are you entirely sure," said Anne, "that you don't want to be?"

He turned and stared at her. "What do you mean?"

"How have you felt during all these years, knowing that the Children were tucked away in a corner of the world, looking to you for guidance, depending utterly on your decisions and planning? Has it not been a little godlike?"

He took a deep drink from the glass. "What a thing to say! I hope you are not serious."

"I am," said Anne. "How have you felt?"

"Like the manager of an orphans' home," he said irritably, "if you must know."

"Robert, tell me."

He put the glass down and looked directly at her. "Do you think you could understand what it has really been like? Can you understand fully what it means to have created this family actually and literally? I have made them in the same sense that another man might take wire and glass and sheets of metal and build some instrument or machine. Perhaps it has seemed a trifle godlike to me, at times. But never have I introduced such a fantastic conception to them.

"Somewhere this error has crept in. I came here, expecting to meet the Children as one human being meets another. You warned me, and you were right: I have found religious fanaticism, instead. Nothing could have led me to expect that."

"Your genius is so great in some respects," said Anne, "but so blind in others."

"What do you mean?"

"All their lives they have lived with a mysterious and invisible creature whom they called Father, who promised to come and live with them and teach them on a future, distant day. What else could they make of this creature, except a god? It is so obvious!"

"Perhaps you're right," said Wellton slowly. "I've been so busy thinking from my own viewpoint that I haven't tried to see it from theirs. But their intelligence index is invariably between two and three hundred. How could they become prey to superstition?"

"And I would ask you: what is the meaning of 'intelligence'?"

"The ability to assimilate data and abstract pictures of the real world from it."

"And this they have done," said Anne. "They have taken the data of an unembodied messenger, advising them, comforting them, and of it they have made a god. As the data increases, and becomes assimilated, the more real picture you desire will form in their minds. Then you may wish for a return to their previous concept."

"You say the damnedest nonsense sometimes!" said Wellton.

A large auditorium in the center of the community was used by the Children for dancing and festivals and parties. They were not accustomed to meeting merely for communication. Seating was inadequate for all of them, but they made up for it by improvising benches and bringing chairs from their homes. The hall was lit by pressure lanterns devised by the Children. It was the lighting they used in their own homes. Electricity had been mentioned to Wellton, but he saw no use of it in the villages.

He felt uneasy on the night of the gathering. He paced the floor and stared out the windows toward the hills, purpled by the dusk. A feeling of what was wrong was growing within him. A dream could be fulfilled only by one who had dreamed it. He had to make it their dream as well as his.

The hall was filled when he went to the small platform and stood before them. The only sound was the faint hissing of the lanterns. From the gathered Children he felt a wave of expectancy, of willingness, of doubt. He wore the new suit that Dorothea had made for him.

It was hot. The scar on his cheek stood out brightly.

"My Children," Wellton began very slowly, "tonight I fulfill the promise I made to each of you on the day you were born. In the past few days, I have talked with half of you in your homes, and have learned some of the things that you did not tell me when I was far away from you—some of the doubts and fears and regrets that

you have known. Some of you doubt that you should have left the cities in the first place. Some of you doubt that you should return. Some of you doubt the wisdom of my having come to you."

A gasp of protest made a whisper through the assembly; each one tried to reassure his neighbors that it was not he who was guilty.

"I do not censure you for these things," Wellton said. "I understand them. It is a hard thing to know that you are outcast upon the face of the earth—unlike other men, who would kill you if they could. That has been your lot, and you have seen no purpose in it. Tonight I shall tell you what that purpose is."

In careful tones, he told them the story of the great war which had turned all people into caricatures of human beings. He told of the dust which still lingered, and rendered more than half the world unfit for habitation. He told the full story of the Deviates, the Uglies, and the Normals. He told of the slow extinction which had already begun.

"That is man's fate," he said, "if no intervention is made to prevent it. That intervention *has* been made; each of you is a product of it."

He told them the story of Central Genetic Institute and its efforts to control the flow of Normals. But most of all now, he told the story of the dream . . .

He paused, watching their eyes upon him. He lifted his shield just a little, to feel the aura within the room. For a moment they had caught it, he thought. He had made most of them feel it in the deep, hungry places within them.

He told them what they had to do, then. The return to the cities, the slow infiltration . . .

"I need a hundred, who will be the first to go back. I will choose those whom I want, and if any refuse, I will choose from among volunteers. There are new skills you must learn. To go back, you must be precise in the use

of enforced telepathy. It is latent in some of you, and you must be taught how to use it. Others have potential distant vision, which is not developed in any as yet. There are scores of similar faculties—dormant, undeveloped. I have seen your gene maps and I can tell you what is within you.

"Our first step will be a school in which you will train. You will learn to use your every faculty. You will learn the history and heritage of the world, and will understand why you must go back."

He retreated from them a step as he finished. They did not applaud, sitting only in mute reverence and astonishment. After a moment, he asked quietly, "Does anyone wish to speak?"

There was silence, then a stirring and shuffling in the rear of the hall where Wellton could not see clearly.

"I am Michael Ferguson," the man said. He had come in from the distant mines.

"We are grateful for your coming, Father," Michael Ferguson said. "More than we can ever express to you. Perhaps we do not fully comprehend the great plans you have made; I am sure we do not. But I should like to ask: what if some of us are never able to understand? What if there are some of us whose desires are still to be isolated from the cities and the Normals? At this moment I feel no obligation to them. I have no desire to help them. My only desire is to remain as far from them as I am able to go. Do not condemn me for my blasphemy, Father. Tell me what I am to do if I can never comprehend the purposes of the things you wish us to do."

He sat down again. There was an uneasy stirring in the group. Those whose eyes had been most worshipful now tensed expectantly for Wellton's rage.

But he spoke slowly and quietly as he looked toward the rear of the room. "Let me make it clear again: It is

not for the Normals that you do these things, but for yourselves and your kindred.

"I understand your questions. Barron asked me the same the day I arrived, and I told him then. You belong to the race of men. If you try to escape the obligations of that belonging, you become less than men. This is a terrible thing to choose; but if any of you wish to make such a choice, I will not stand in your way.

"I do not condemn you for asking, Michael. I know that you speak honestly for yourself, and for others who feel likewise. I only tell you what choice is open to you. In the coming days we will speak again of this and attempt to come to an understanding; but for now you must be aware of that choice."

No one else offered to speak. "Tomorrow," said Wellton, "the leaders of hundreds will convene and to them I will give the details . . ."

There was dancing and feasting afterwards. Wellton remained for a time, looking on with fatherly approval, but their gaiety was strained in his presence. Shortly he left with Anne and Timmy in the car which they had provided for him.

"What do you think?" Wellton asked abruptly. "Has my coming drawn them toward me, or put them farther away?"

"I think Mike Ferguson answered that," said Anne. "He spoke for more than you know."

"But he was cautious. He didn't speak of opposition."

"He's still afraid of you, like all the rest. He hasn't as much reverence as most. But neither fear nor reverence will last forever."

"But while it's there, I'll use it. I'll use it to whip them into obedience," Wellton murmured bitterly, "if that is necessary. And when it is gone they'll have sufficient understanding to follow of their own accord."

He grew silent as Anne said nothing. Then he resumed

after a time. "It would be easier if they had love for me instead of reverence. Why haven't they, Anne?"

"Perhaps you have received as much as you have given," said Anne. "Can you transmit love by telepathy?"

He faced her for a moment while the car slowed. "I don't know. Can we?"

She shook her head and touched his hand with her own fingers, cool from the night wind. "You have believed your deviations were everything. You have forgotten that ordinary men have many senses that have served well for a long time; some can never be substituted by deviate abilities."

"Such as what?" he demanded irritably.

"This." She pressed his hand lightly. "For a baby, no amount of telepathic reassurance will replace a parent's arms. For lovers, telepathy is a poor substitute for a kiss or a holding of hands."

He sighed. "I suppose you are right, but I have done what I could. It will have to be enough."

XIV. LOVE OR FEAR?

IT RAINED during the night, leaving the forest glossy and new. Wellton arose before Anne was awake and went out to the porch overlooking the lake shore. Although the air was cool, and the waters of the lake must be icy, several of the Children were already playing on the beach and splashing near the shore. He was glad they had not isolated him to the extent of abandoning the beach. On the other hand, perhaps he should demand it—for the sake of the dignity and remoteness which he should assume before them.

He discarded the notion at once. You didn't bring children closer by forbidding them to come near.

He considered joining them on the beach, when a sudden frantic call shook his mind. The intensity of its fear was almost painful. Automatically, he thrust out, answering. "Who are you? What is the matter?"

"I am Joe," came the instant response, "Joe Petric. I didn't mean to call you, Father. I've been talking with Barron about my coming to the Children, and now I'm trapped. I'm scared, Father. I couldn't help calling out to you."

Instantly, Wellton reached in another direction.

"Barron," he called, "what of Joe Petric? Are you in communication?"

Almost as the thought went out, Barron's figure appeared distantly on the lake shore. He broke into a run toward the cottage as he answered, "He was all right

last night . . . Joe—this is Barron. Tell me what happened."

"Slim grew suspicious. He decided maybe I was a Deviate, for some reason. He went to call the police, and I thought he was only trying to scare me. But they're coming down the street now. I can see their silver uniforms. They'll take me. What shall I do?"

"You have the white pills," said Barron. "We got them through to you, didn't we?"

"Yes, but I don't want to die! I don't want to take them, Barron. Father, tell me there's some other way. Tell me what to do!"

Like a thin, cold veil over his face, the fear in the boy touched Wellton. "Are you sure it's the Genetic Police? You're not mistaken?"

"No. I can see them. Slim is leading them to the house."

"Joe," said Wellton, "take the pills. Put them in your mouth and chew them quickly. There is nothing else for you to do."

"I can't! I can't, Father. You can't make me."

"They'll kill you anyway, Joe. It will be slower and more terrible. Take them quickly, Joe."

There was moisture now on Wellton's face. He scarcely noticed that Barron had come up and was standing at the foot of the steps.

"All right. I'll do it!" The boy's thoughts were like a faint gasp heard beneath the shrill whine of terror that his mind emitted. "I'll take them," he said again. "They're trying to break down the door. The pills make my stomach hot. My head hurts, Father. I can't reach you any longer—"

The message broke as if a wire had been cut. The after-silence was like a glass wall enclosing Wellton and Barron. Wellton could see the beach and the swimming Children, but for a moment it was like something far away and only half real.

"Tell me about Joe Petric, Barron," he said.

Barron sat down heavily on the step below him. "Joe's only thirteen," he said. "We've been trying to get him for almost two weeks. We got him to run away from home, but he had the bad luck to be picked up by a kidnapper who has had him imprisoned. Evidently the man grew suspicious and feared punishment, or hoped to get a reward by turning Joe in."

"He didn't swallow the gene collapser in time," said Wellton. "They are almost sure to get his pattern. Rossi has them on guard for that."

Barron nodded, but he seemed to be thinking of something else. "Can you imagine what it was like? Thirteen years old. Even younger than Sammy."

"I heard," said Wellton. "He had no shield at all. He was sending everything. I heard what it was like."

"Is the dream worth *that*?" said Barron.

"You think I'm to blame," said Wellton.

"I don't know whose fault it is. If I did, maybe I'd know what to do about it. I've heard all that you've told us, but I still don't understand why they should hunt us down like animals."

"Isn't it enough that they do?"

"It's enough to blind me to any reason whatever for returning to the cities."

"Men have always been afraid of those who were different from themselves. Let us hope that we, in our turn, will not be like that. But what matters now is that Rossi will have our basic gene pattern."

"What does it mean?" said Barron. "What will they do?"

"It means they can at last identify me with the Children. My gene map at the Institute was altered to show no deviations. But, when compared with Joe's, the alterations will be exposed and the whole thing blown wide open."

"As long as you're not there it will do them little good."

"For the moment, yes. But there is more to it than

that; we will shortly be the object of an extremely concentrated hunt. All possible guard measures should be taken."

"They will be," said Barron. "We'll be careful."

He remained silent then for a long time. Wellton watched him, tempted to reach out and touch the hidden thoughts, but Barron's shield was tight about his mind.

At last he said, "I came to tell you that I am opposing the plan you have brought us, Father. I have to oppose any plan to return us to the cities. I can't believe in it. For myself, I will not go. I will use all the influence at my command to keep my brothers and sisters from going."

The morning sounds became a roar in Wellton's ears. He forced himself with great effort to speak quietly. "Why, Barron? Why have you decided this?"

The quietness of the question startled Barron, but he forced the heat of rebellion to his eyes.

"I hate the Normals. That is reason enough. You have given us no adequate proof that we are obligated to make this insane risk of returning to the cities. I reject the reasons you have given.

"I have long dreamed of your coming among us, Father, I had supposed that you would rule us and teach us wisdom, here in the forest to which you had led us. Our disappointment is great, Father, because of what you have asked. You will never know what it does inside me to be face to face with you and say that I oppose you."

Wellton knew that his face was white. "I told you before that you had no choice. In the end, the Children will master the earth as my father dreamed."

"Then you cannot possibly object to my withdrawal."

"I do object. I had hoped that you might come to know me as I knew my own father, that I might bring to each of the Children something in which your lives have

been quite empty. I still hope there will not be many who follow your lead."

"There will be as many as I can persuade," Barron said hotly. "With scarcely enough wisdom to plan for our own lives, we have little right to plan for future generations. Let them take care of themselves." He stood up and began to move away.

"We'll meet this afternoon as planned," said Wellton. "You are still the senior son. Please be there. I have much yet that I hope to teach you."

"I am afraid there is nothing more, Father, that I wish to learn from you." He stood a moment while they looked into each other's eyes. Then he turned and strode away along the beach.

Wellton continued to sit on the steps after Barron was gone. He was a little surprised to be aware again of the water and the sky and the sound of the playing Children. The world had seemed closed in while he and Barron talked.

Barron had lied, Wellton thought. He wondered why. He had spoken as if to indicate that his opposition was sudden. Anne had told the truth. Barron had always opposed the Father. Now he was finding reason to do it openly.

Barron had a following, and it might be large. It must be. Who among them would choose a stranger over their brother whom they had known all their lives?

After a time, he got up and went into the house. Anne was awake, but still in bed. She had brought Timmy from his crib and was holding him at arm's length above her and bringing him down in gentle swoops, which made him grimace fiercely. She laughed joyously at his owlish, protesting countenance and laid him gently beside her.

Wellton told her about Joe Petric. "So they have your gene pattern," she said.

"It's a big step for Rossi. But there's more than that.

Barron talked with me. You were right, he does oppose me. He says it's because of my plan to go back, but he's lying. What is his reason, Anne? Do you know?"

She slumped against the pillows and turned her face to the window so that the bright sunlight lit her hair with radiance. But it was as if she had suddenly gone out of the room.

Not you, Anne, he thought. Not you, too.

"Tell me," he said almost harshly. "What is Barron after? What did he want? What did he hope to do, back in those days when you first knew him?"

She turned reluctantly to face him again. "I honestly don't know, Robert. He hated you then because of the hold you had on the Children. He seemed to feel that you were an anchor to something that had nothing to do with their lives. He kept speaking constantly of going forward to the future. He accused the rest of being unwilling to do this because they were holding back, depending on you."

"What did he want them to go forward to? What kind of a future did he have in mind for them?"

"That's what I don't know," said Anne.

"How did they react to his attempts to draw them away?"

"As if they liked what he said, as near as I could tell. But they were afraid. Your words, coming from invisible distance, gave you a mystery that held them to you. It was something that Barron could not fight; that is why I begged you not to come."

"What greater thing can I give them than the goal of remaking the world?"

"I am afraid," said Anne, "that the Children just don't give a damn about the world, as you see it. If they obey you, it will be only because of the remaining reverence not yet dispelled by your presence."

"If it will hold them, it's all that I need."

XV. THE DISSENTERS

He met with the leaders of hundreds that afternoon in one of the small rooms of the auditorium building. His manner had changed somehow since the night before. Even he could not have told them exactly what it was: that his great yearning was gone.

Barron was in the center of the group, his face unreadable. Wellton wondered how many would eventually follow Barron in taking the long way. He stood up before them.

"Barron has been honest in telling me this morning of his opposition to my plans. He tells me there are many others who feel likewise. You are all free to follow your own desires, but take care in what you decide.

"We belong to the past, just as the future belongs to us. When time is finished, an unbroken chain will exist from the last man to the first. No one breaks his own link out of that chain, but the penalty for trying is very great."

He shifted and looked at each of them. "You know what I need of you," he said. "I want to know, of those who are here, who are with me and who are against me?"

There was the quiet of sudden shock. Some of them turned their eyes away, some remained staring in mute reverence.

One of them stirred, a young girl, Lucy Colt. "Don't put it that way, Father. None of us are against you. Say that we are selfish, that we are rebellious, that we

are ignorant. In the end, it means that we don't understand you. You wouldn't want us to follow an ideal in which we didn't believe."

"No," said Wellton softly. "I want you to believe in the ideal."

"We'll never believe it," said Wilma Thurston, who was a physician to the Children. Her blonde hair trembled. "We'll never believe it because it's not true. We know about the cities and about the Normals. We lived with them. I was kidnapped and fought over.

"I prayed to you then as somewhere I was taught to pray to the Father; but I got no answer until I was finally brought here. Now I have a freedom and peace that you can't take away from me. Let the Normals die! What does it matter to any of us?"

They persisted in their refusal to see what he meant. And they had talked it over, and drawn courage from each other to defy him.

"I want you to show me," he said. "How many will help? And how many will go your own way?"

It was better than he had hoped. Three fourths of them were with him. If that were representative of the whole group of Children, it would be more than enough to begin.

The faces of the dissenters were dark and embarrassed. To these, he said, "Return to your groups. You will not be displaced because they have elected you to speak for them. Choose an alternate who is willing to cooperate with me and hand down the instructions which I give."

The hundred were chosen. He had selected these before leaving the Institute, and the response was better than he had hoped. More than eighty of those selected were willing.

It was late summer when he began the long task of teaching them the truths about the Normals. They

scarcely believed, even when he was through. But because they were loyal, because they remembered the comfort he gave in their early lost years, they went through the autumn and the early months of winter learning what he had to teach.

Then they began the long return. One by one, they made their way to Kansas City and sought out Maynard for the voluntary mapping, and went on to the place that Wellton had assigned to them. They gained places in the medieval kinds of schools that were in existence. They dethroned minor politicians in local disputes of incredible turmoil.

Slowly, they began fighting their way up.

Winter closed in about the lake cottage and the villages of the Children, its whiteness all but smothering them. Great stores of provisions and firewood had been accumulated by the Children. They greeted the coming of the cold with a kind of fierce joyousness, daring it to drive them before it. Anne, who had lived through it before, seemed to welcome it as much as the Children.

Barron had made himself almost entirely absent during the golden fall months, but now he returned. He seemed resigned, Wellton thought, as if he had drawn behind a still more remote inner wall.

Wellton did not ask him about his personal doings or feelings. He hoped that somehow Barron might throw himself open, but his reserve never lifted.

Anne spent a good deal of her time on skis, with Julia to watch Timmy. Wellton saw her when he occasionally went out on snowshoes to tramp in the woods.

Barron accompanied Anne often, and taught her the grace and skill he had learned through many winters in the forest. But Anne continued to remain distant from the other Children; there seemed to be a gap that could never be closed.

She was entirely content, however, at the lake-shore

cottage, giving her attentions to Timmy and Wellton, and confining her other associations almost entirely to the Children who served them in the little group by the lake. Anne had made a campaign of winning Julia over, and she had partially succeeded. There was more light in Julia's eyes than at any time since they had come, and she seemed anxious to accept Anne as one of them.

With the coming of winter, Anne did join a little more in the social life of the village. Scarcely a night passed without some frolic or pageantry or dance in the auditorium, and in the daytime there were excursions into the hills on skis and snowshoes. Wellton and Anne went together to the hall occasionally, but he left her to the others when she went skiing.

On a day when the sky was a cloudless blue, but the low sun was helpless against the cold powdered snow on the trees and the hills, Barron came to the house and asked for Anne.

"She's almost ready," Wellton said. "Sit down for a moment. We've been watching Timmy this morning. He's finally mastered the technique of the crawl."

"Thanks," said Barron. He kicked the snow from his boots and followed Wellton into the house. "I wish you were going with us, Father," he said.

Wellton shook his head. "I have trouble sparing time to eat. They are doing well in the cities. Sometimes too well; I have to hold them back.

"Here's Timmy!" He leaned down suddenly and scooped the baby off the floor and held him out to Barron.

Barron took the baby carefully, his face almost wistful now. "There's quite a gap between you and me, isn't there, fella?" he said quietly.

"Not so much as you think," said Wellton. "Not nearly so much as you think."

"I appreciate your saying it," said Barron. "I hope you never change that feeling, no matter what I do."

Wellton smiled confidently and took Timmy again. "Who is going this morning?"

"Mike Ferguson and his wife. Sally Drake and a couple of the girls from Mineral Village. Tom Houston and Fremont Baker. Some others may show up before we get under way. Sure you won't go with us?"

Wellton shook his head again. "I'll listen in. It's more fun eavesdropping on your parties from a quiet fireside than it is to be out there shaking snow out of my own collar."

"All right." Barron laughed. "We'll try to give you a good time this morning!"

Anne came through the room, kissed Wellton, and called out some last-minute instructions to Julia about feeding Timmy if she didn't get back.

Wellton watched them from the window as they marched away from the lake shore to the hills.

They would all come through, he thought with pleasant warmth. Even Barron.

He worked through the morning; a little before noon, while he rested a moment, he gave close attention to Anne.

"Look!" she called. "I'm going to come down Fat Man's Hill. Can you see me?"

Barron's reply was instantaneous and colored by fear. "Don't, Anne! You're not ready yet. Please don't try to come down there."

Fat Man's Hill. Wellton had gone around there on snowshoes, on one of his excursions. He remembered it as a treacherous, winding curve with trees and a ravine on one side of the ski run. He almost added his own warning to that of Barron's.

Anne cried out, "I'm coming!"

Wellton could feel the radiation of exultation from her mind, and intense and horrified watching from Bar-

ron's. He felt all his muscles go hard, as if he were standing beside Barron while Anne streaked down the dangerous hill.

Then Barron's cry: "Slow down, Anne! You can't make the curve at that speed."

Almost instantly, she uttered a single word, "Barron—!"

Only a tangled cry of terror and pain followed, and then for a moment there was nothing. Wellton waited, unable to move; then Barron was calling frantically:

"Anne, I can't see you. Anne, darling—"

"You fool!" she answered. "The whole village will hear you. I'm all right!" And then she was silent and Wellton knew she had not merely dropped her shield. She had fainted from the pain that radiated from her mind like a blaze of summer heat.

XVI. BARRON'S SECRET

It was almost an hour before they got her back to the cottage on a litter made of skis and coats. Wellton called Wilma Thurston and went with her to meet the group. Anne had regained consciousness by the time they met the party. Pain clouded her eyes, but she smiled a welcome to him and closed her fingers tightly over his.

The Children made a great show of solicitation and urgency concerning Anne, until they reached the house. But once in the big warm living room, their heads bare, there was no urgency that kept their eyes from him. Still, they avoided his direct glance.

They had heard, he thought; they had heard the indiscreet word. It was as if Barron and Anne had screamed at the tops of their voices.

"I think we can manage now," Wellton said. "If we need any more help, we'll call for you."

Relieved, they donned their coats and hoods again and stomped out onto the porch, with much urging that Wellton called them at once for any additional assistance.

Barron remained behind. Wellton wondered dully how far his effrontery would go. It didn't matter very much.

He approached Wellton. "I'm sorry it happened, Father. I tried to get her not to come down the hill. She would have made it except for a broken ski strap on the worst turn."

Wellton nodded absently, hearing Barron's vocal speech as if from a great distance. "She'll be all right,"

he said. "Wilma says it's a badly twisted ankle, but it's not broken. You'd better join the rest of them. Anne won't be wanting to talk for a while."

But as Barron turned to the door, they both heard Anne's call from the bedroom. "Robert—Barron. I want you. Please come to me now."

With a moment's questioning look into each other's eyes, they turned back and went to the other room. Anne was lying propped up slightly, the pain deadened and her face free of its torment.

Wellton wished she wouldn't speak, but he didn't know how to stop her. She turned to Wilma. "Thanks for helping, Wilma. We'd like to be alone now; I'll let you know if I need more help."

"I think you'll be all right, but I'll call again this evening anyway. If you need me earlier, don't hesitate."

She left, Wellton accompanying her to the door. When he returned, Anne and Barron were not looking at each other.

"You were listening, weren't you, Robert? When I fell, you were listening to us."

"Yes," he said, "I heard your outcry."

"And you heard Barron's call, and the thing he forgot to hide in his mind."

"We don't have to talk of this now, Anne. You have always been free. You went from me once, and you are free to go again."

"No, I'm not," said Anne. "This thing today means nothing of what you think. Barron is going to tell you what it does mean."

Wellton looked from his wife to his son. Barron glanced up uneasily. "It's true," he said. "It means nothing to Anne. There is no one in the world for her, except you. I tried to make her think there could be. I love Anne.

"Among us, there is a different code from the one the Normals know. We live our family life as they did in the

old days you have told us about. But you have tried so hard to force us into the ugly culture of the Normals that I told myself it was fair enough if I could take her away from you. I can't. No one ever can.

"I recognize that there will never be an end now to your hate for me, so I won't say that I'm sorry. I'm not. I would still take her if I could. That's all I have to say. All that needs to be said."

He turned abruptly to leave the room. The door had remained open after Wellton accompanied Wilma out. Now, as Barron turned, there was an abrupt and frantic cry, and a nervous figure stood wildly in the doorway.

"It's a lie, Father," Julia cried. "Don't let them get away with it. They're telling you a lie!"

For a moment they stared. They had forgotten Julia.

"You've been listening to us," said Wellton.

"Yes, Father, I have been listening." She spoke breathlessly, and the whites of her eyes were enormous and red. "I heard them lying to you, Father," she said. "And I'm going to make them tell you the truth, or tell it for them.

"There's not one of us Children who has not been holding in this lie ever since you came. You wondered why Anne would never go out among the rest of us as much as you would have wished. I'll tell you why. We all know why she went to Kansas City."

"Shut up, Julia," said Barron harshly.

Wellton turned his eyes to Anne, who seemed to have sunk down into the pillows by some immeasurable distance.

"They thought they could tell you a little lie," said Julia. "They thought they would be so noble, and Barron would take all the blame, so that they could make you go on believing the bigger lie."

"Anne—Barron—what is she talking about?" Wellton's voice was savage.

Barron did not speak. His hands had tightened upon

the footboard of the bed. Now he glanced hastily at Anne's face.

"Anne—" said Wellton.

She nodded. "We know, Robert. It's not the way Julia thinks it is. But I don't know how I can make you believe it."

"Let me make my own judgment. There seems to have been a great many attempts to form it for me. Tell me, Anne!"

"I'll tell you," said Julia, "if they won't tell. I'm going to see that you know, Father."

"Hush, Julia," said Wellton as if to a child.

Anne's eyes were closed now. She lay utterly still in her whiteness. Only her lips moved ever so faintly as she spoke. "The Children rescued me from a kidnapper, who kept me for over eight years. I couldn't remember my mother. My first years were a blank. I lived hidden and sick, scarcely ever seeing the sun. Somewhere I learned to pray. Not from the woman who kept me prisoner. She couldn't have known how.

"Most of the time it was only to myself in my thoughts. I didn't dare pray aloud, but I said silent prayers for hours every day. One night I heard an answer coming inside me, the same way I had spoken my prayer. It terrified me. I didn't know you got answers that way.

"It was Barron. He calmed me, and told me who he was, and how he heard me. It took me a long time to understand what telepathy was. I had never heard the word, but I had been using it without knowing. Barron asked if I were one of the Children, if I knew the Father. I didn't understand what he meant.

"He told me to try to reach the Father, and I did try; but I never succeeded in contacting you. I didn't know why. We talked each day from then on, and when you commanded them to leave the city in that first group, I was with them. They knew I was different, because I could not contact the Father; but they kept me with them

until we reached the forests. Only later, when I met you, did I understand that my telepathic powers were not fully developed. Only because they were so close had the Children been able to exchange with me.

"The rest should not be hard for you to understand, Robert. Barron and I learned to love each other as we grew up, or we thought we did, at least. We were the first among the Children to be married."

"Anne!" Wellton moved involuntarily and looked toward his son.

"We hoped we could live together always," said Anne. "But something was wrong. I wasn't like the others. Barron and I hoped that we might have children of our own, but we did not. We were married for four years, and then I left.

"During the time of our exile together, there was a burning ambition in all of the Children to know who the Father was. With Barron, it became an obsession to find out. Because I was not truly one of them, he thought perhaps I could find out. I promised that I would."

"Tell them why," said Julia bitterly. "Don't leave that out. Tell him why Barron wanted to know so badly who the Father was."

"He wanted to know," said Anne, "because he wanted to replace the Father. He hated the world that he had known; he wanted to lead it and destroy it all at the same time.

"He asked me to go out and find you and somehow bring you here that they all might see you were but a man. He believed that once they had seen you, your power over them would be gone—because there would be no more mystery."

She lay quietly, silently.

"And so you have brought me back," said Wellton. "You have accomplished what you set out to do so long ago."

Anne opened her eyes now and turned to look up at

him. "Don't you remember my warning?" she said. "I asked you not to come back. I told you that Barron wanted to destroy your power with the Children. Does that sound as if I have done what I promised Barron I would do? Nothing on earth would have kept you from coming. Not even if I had told you this."

"I might have changed my plans in other ways. Why didn't you tell me all of it then, Anne?"

"Because I was a coward," she said. "Because I had found that which I had been unable to find with Barron. He knows that there is no one in the world for me, except you. But I was afraid you would not believe it. I knew the Children would not tell. Their strict code is to let things like this work themselves out.

"Julia has told, and I suppose she doesn't care that we all know why she has told. I won what she could never hope to have."

Wellton turned with pity and watched the smouldering eyes of his daughter.

"You didn't win," she murmured. "You didn't win a thing!"

He turned to Barron. "And this is why you have opposed me. You care nothing for what is right and good; you want to be the chief of the tribe—"

Barron stopped him. "All that was true once, Father. But long ago I abandoned any expectation of Anne's returning to us, either with or without you. I was shocked when she told me she was coming.

"The dream I had when she knew me was a strange and immature one. It has long since become a shadow. I desire now only to live my own life as I wish, to find someone to take Anne's place if I can, and to see that all the Children have the same privilege.

"One thing I have, Father, is the same pride and anxiety for all of the Children that you know, because I was the first. I have a right to be concerned for their wel-

fare also, and you can't take this away from me even if you wished.

"Except for today, we have already reached an equilibrium, where we can live together. One thing I did say was a lie: I have not tried to take Anne from you. Julia was right. I hoped you would believe the smaller lie to spare you further unhappiness. We have not known how we could do it, but now we can explain. I hope there will be no further—"

He was cut off by Julia's sudden forward lunge. Her arm projected in front of her, and she drove an accusing finger almost into his face.

"They're still lying!" she screamed. "Make them tell you the whole truth, Father. Make them tell you about the space ship!"

Barron lurched as if an explosion had taken place within him. He stepped back; his head darted about to touch each one of them with a stabbing glance. He spoke with a suppressed power that Wellton had never heard in him before.

"From this moment, until I say otherwise," he said, "you will consider yourselves prisoners in this house. Do not attempt to leave it."

He turned and flung himself past Julia, racing to the front door and out of the house.

XVII. REBELLION

1.

In a single moment's illumination, Wellton understood all that had mystified him in the weeks that had passed.

He stood at the foot of the bed, where Barron had been. "Tell me the rest of it," he said to Anne. "I want to hear it from you."

"Is there anything that you can't guess? They are going. Barron is going to take the Children away. To the planets—to the stars. That was the dream he had when we first came here. Now, they are almost ready.

"You believe the Children capable of things far beyond the capacities of Normal men. They have gone beyond the wildest imaginings you could have had about them. They have learned to build atomic engines, starting with only the faint scraps of knowledge they brought with them from the cities when they were fifteen.

"They have built a ship that can go to the stars. They don't want anything that's left here on earth. You have created a new branch in the Children, Robert, but you are wrong about the old tree. The new shoot has greater strength than the old roots ever possessed.

"The Children will not be mere inhabitants of earth, they will be citizens of the whole Galaxy. You dreamed of repeopling the earth. They have dreamed of peopling a thousand planets—younger and newer and better than this one."

Wellton's face was gray. He seemed to lean upon the foot of the bed like an old man whose bones have already been touched by eternal coldness.

"The ship—" His voice sounded almost like a gasp to him. "Is the ship ready now? Have they finished it?"

"I don't know how nearly complete it is." Anne turned to Julia in inquiry.

"A few more weeks and they'll be ready for the first flight," said Julia.

"How many will it hold?" said Wellton. "Surely not all of them."

"Only ninety on this first trip," said Julia. "They will go to Mars to set up an experimental colony. The ship will come back for more. They will build other ships, too, until they are all gone. All who want to go."

"Do they all want to?" said Wellton.

"I'm staying," said Julia. "There are a few who don't believe in this wild thing Barron has done. A few haven't made up their minds yet. But nearly all will go. They hate earth too much to stay."

She crumpled a little as her hands went to her face. "Oh, Father, if you were going—then I think I, too, should go. I want to do only what you want me to do."

Wellton turned back to Anne. "And you knew all of this?" he said.

"Yes."

"Why did you let me go on so blindly? Why didn't you let me know what I was fighting?"

"They have to have their chance," she whispered. "They have the right to see if this is what they want!"

He remained motionless, as if stunned. "You don't see it, either," he murmured. "How can you fail to see it? They do *not* have the right to go. Not until they have paid their debt to the earth that gave them life. They would rob earth of the heritage that is in them. They have no right to go, and I will keep them from it!"

"You can't, Robert. You don't know the strength that

is in them. Nothing you can do will stop them. You have never dreamed of such men and women as you have caused to be born into the world!"

They stopped talking, and the silence that grew about them was almost a physical thing.

Wellton went out to his study and closed the door behind him. He sat at the desk with his hands folded before him, staring across the frozen lake. He must lack something, he told himself. A something that was like an anchor for others to reach out to and cling.

No one had ever clung to him. He had been unable all his life to be an object to which others reached for security, or affection, or even mere communication in time of need. The Children had, of course, but only because of the mystery in him, as Anne had called it. And even that was gone now, he supposed.

Yet, he had obtained a hundred who were willing to go to the cities, he thought. And another hundred were in training. Perhaps the mystery had not entirely faded.

But they had never truly reached out to him for support.

He wondered what Barron had meant by his fantastic statement that they would consider themselves prisoners in the house. It didn't matter for the moment. There was nowhere he wished to go. To the space ship? But he didn't know where it was. And he couldn't destroy it with his bare hands. But somehow he *would* destroy it. He *would* make them see.

He sat there for a long time listening to the small sounds in the house and in the earth. And then he heard a distant engine sound, growing louder as if approaching. With it came the hiss of runners on the crystal snow. He got up and looked through the window in the direction of the village. Startled, he saw one of the motor-driven sleds overloaded with a dozen of the Children. Barron was there. The vehicle stopped before the house and the

men dismounted with the swift, stealthy air of actors in some fantastic drama.

Wellton made no effort to reach out and touch their minds, but watched them, unbelieving. He watched while they brought planks from the bed of the sled toward the house. He watched and listened while they nailed the timbers like bars across the windows and doors. The thunder of their hammers was a sound out of a sick dream.

Anne heard it, too. "Robert, what are they doing?" she cried. "Ask them what they're doing!"

He flung open the door of the study and went to the front door of the house, jerking at the latch with all his might. Already they had barred and secured it. He took his hand away and looked dully for a moment at the handle.

He went in to Anne. "My son has kept his word," he said. "We are to be his prisoners until it suits his pleasure to release us. Until, I presume, his ship takes off for Mars."

"This is insane! Ask him how long this farce is to go on."

"No," Wellton snapped. "I shall have no communication with Barron, and I forbid you to—unless you wish to join him. The next time Barron and I find occasion to speak will be at the points of our swords."

2.

The Children established a ring of guards about the house. In the nighttime Wellton watched through the cracks between the planks that barred the windows. Like dark ghosts on the moonlit snow, the Children stood there. He wondered what thoughts were in their minds, but he forbade himself any reaching out to them.

Supplies were passed through portals opened by the

guards. These consisted mostly of firewood, and such provisions as had not been stocked in the house in quantity. Julia always received them. Wellton refused to come face to face with those who took part in this daily chore.

Wilma Thurston was permitted entry. Her skill, and Anne's vitality, healed the injury rapidly; Anne was soon hobbling about with a crutch, and then making her way slowly without one.

A change had come over Wellton by the time she was up. He moved about the house like a man who cannot be wakened from a dream. It frightened Anne. He seemed not to notice her. Julia served, and they ate their meals together; and in the night he lay huddled and silent far from her. She did not know what he was thinking, until he called her to him one day in the study.

She thought it was a joke at first, but he made her sit across the desk from him. It made her think of the first time she had seen him, when she applied for work at the Institute. He looked stern now, as he had then; but where his eyes had been appraising and speculating before, they were blank. She was almost unaware when he started to speak.

His words slowly became meaningful in her mind as if she approached them through a fog. "I think you had better leave, Anne," he said. "I think you had better go to Barron. I haven't any claim upon you. The only thing I have claim to is Timmy, and I can't have him without you. I want you to take him and go."

Her throat seemed afire as she tried to answer. "Suppose I don't want to go? Will you make me, Robert? Do you hate me so much?"

"Why should you stay?" he said. His face was lowered, but he was looking up at her, as if on the defensive against some new blow.

"Is it so hard to understand that there are only two things in the world that I want? I want them together, you and Timmy; I don't want one without the other.

Do you suppose I would have come if I had believed you would send me back to Barron?"

"What about what I want?" he said.

"You've got that, too," she cried. "Only you don't know it. You won't see it. The only wealth a man ever holds are the other human beings he can claim as his own; but he has to give them freedom, not chains."

"And that is exactly the wealth I don't have. For a great space of time I believed I was the richest man upon the earth. I was the poorest. I always have been, and in my delusion I could not see it. There is not anything in me that would enable me to make a claim upon another being. You don't know what it's like, Anne. You will never know, because you are not so deformed as I, spiritually."

The stiffness in her throat made it difficult to speak. She wanted to cry, because she dared not let her thoughts go out to him.

If there had been pity for himself in his voice, it would have given her a point at which she could touch him to lift him up, but he had placed himself wholly beyond the range of human affection.

"I won't go," she said. "I won't leave you, Robert." And then through the doorway she caught a glimpse of the squirming mound that was Timmy, inching forward in his new mobility. He crawled across the rug to the side of the desk. Anne saw the momentary glow in Wellton's eyes as he watched the baby, a glow that seemed to bring him almost from death to life again.

"Touch his mind, Robert," said Anne eagerly. "Timmy can tell you what a lie you have made yourself believe! You have never found any repulsion in him. Try to find it now. Try to find any refusal to cling to you and believe in you. Timmy can tell you the truth about yourself."

For a moment he stared at her, his eyes dead, still refusing to respond to any suggestion from her. But he glimpsed Timmy again, moving toward the bright strip

of light that came between the window planks and spread across the floor. His eyes could not stay bleak.

"Touch him," Anne whispered.

Wellton's face relaxed, and the wide stare of his eyes dwindled to softness. She knew he could find his answer, if he would only recognize it. She saw the shifting lines of his face. It seemed for a moment that the strain and self-hate struggled to return, then collapsed under the wave of grief. He gave a single broken sob and his shoulders hunched with the explosion of his grief.

Anne reached forward quickly and clutched his arm, digging her fingers into his flesh. "Wait," she said. "That is not all."

He glanced up, almost resentful of her intrusion.

"Ask me," she said. "Search in me and see if you can find any of the thing you have feared."

Suddenly she lay her mind open to him with a completeness and nakedness that sent a wave of pity through him. He wanted to tell her to close up the vision, as if he had no right to it, but he could not. He had to do as she had said; and he searched in terror and passion for some evidence that she had forsaken him, and he could not find it.

He got up from the chair and rounded the desk. He dropped to the floor before her, his great hands crushing her waist between them; he buried his head against her.

"Forgive me, Anne, for not knowing. Forgive me—"

3.

It was as if a curtain had been lifted somewhere in his mind, and he could think once again.

He called Julia to him in the afternoon. Alone, with her sitting across the desk from him, he seemed to see her for the first time. She hadn't demanded attention. Rather, there was something in her that repelled it. She

lacked the strength that was in Barron and his kind. She seemed nervous and supplicating, as she sat across from Wellton.

"Julia," he said, hardly knowing how to speak with this strange and unhappy daughter, "I want you to know that I appreciate your forcing me to understand the true nature of the Children's opposition, and their plans to escape earth in their space ship."

She kept her eyes lowered. "I've always tried to do what's right. I broke the code of the Children in telling you. Most of them will despise me for it. But they had not been honest with you; they should have asked if they could go. But I guess the real reason I told was because I hated Barron and Anne; and when I thought they were lying to you, I knew I had to tell."

There was nothing he could say. She would know he was lying if he told her it was a thing to be proud of. She saw through her own bitterness and vindictiveness as well as he.

"Perhaps you would be willing to do something else now," he said. "Not to hurt someone, but because you are willing to help me."

She looked up for the first time, with moist, reddened eyes. "Yes. Tell me what I can do to help you, Father."

"Do you know of others who feel as you do, that Barron should have consulted with me before going ahead with the plans to leave earth?"

"Oh, yes. Almost all of them believe that!"

His eyes widened. "I don't understand. What do you mean? They have gone ahead with the ship. The whole community must have had a hand in it. It couldn't have been built by only a fraction of them."

"It's the way we believe," said Julia. "There was always the feeling that you should be consulted in everything, but we have always respected each other's desires, too. We felt that Barron had a right to his dream, if that was what he wanted.

"Nevertheless, all but a few like Barron refused to go until you had come and given your approval, or your reasons for disapproval. That is why Barron wanted you found. He was too busy with the building of the ship itself to spend much of his resources in searching for you. He thought Anne might have a chance, but he didn't really expect it. What he was counting on was your voluntary coming, by the time the ship was ready. If you had not come, he would have made an increased effort to discover you.

"He felt that once you were seen by the Children, they would make their choice to go with him to the stars."

"And so, when I came, they judged me, and chose the stars," said Wellton.

"Yes," said Julia.

"But there are none who believed they should obey me? What of those who have gone, and are willing to go, to the cities?"

"They are going because they chose to follow you, because they believed it was right. Many of them—almost all of them—*want* to go to the stars; but they believe it is right to do as you ask."

"And how many do you suppose would aid me in actually preventing Barron from going? How many would help to destroy the ship itself?"

Julia drew back. "That is something different, Father; entirely different. You've got to understand how we believe. Barron would not lift his hand to stop those who are going to the cities; nor would they stand in his way of going to the stars. It is each man to his own dream. No one must force the other."

Wellton stopped. He closed his eyes a moment in sudden heavy weariness.

No one must force the other. Ten thousand years of human history had tried to reach that goal, he thought. The long centuries were finished, and man was what he

started out to be. And to what end, if it died in the cold of a Mars desert?

He took his hand away from his face and Julia was startled. In an instant he seemed to have grown older.

"I don't ask you to understand," he said. "But that ship must never leave the earth. It has to be destroyed. I will destroy it. How many will help me, Julia? Can you tell me that?"

She seemed to shrink further into her puny self, as if he had shown her an adventure she dared not look upon. Her face worked nervously. "I can name some," she said. "There are some who are shocked by what Barron has done to you. They feel that he has broken the code, and it no longer applies to him."

"Why have none of them tried to contact me?"

"They have been afraid to. They believe you may somehow punish the whole group for what Barron has done."

"Give me the names of those who might help."

He waited while she thought, and he wrote down each name she gave after careful reflection. There were forty-seven when she said, "I believe that's all, Father. There are some who might be doubtful, but I did not include their names. These you can trust."

For a long time after Julia left him, Wellton studied the list. He reflected carefully on all that he knew of each of the Children represented there. He compared their strength with that of Julia, and with the strength of Barron and his followers. Among the weakest were some of these whom Julia had named.

It took strength to lead a rebellion. Barron had that strength. But it took equal or greater strength to maintain the persistent drive that achieved its goal without rebellion.

But he was not without strong ones on the list. The best of these appeared to be Tom Calvin, the helicopter pilot, and Barron's assistant. He wondered if Julia could

be right. There was strength in Tom Calvin; but would he follow the Father against Barron, with whom he had worked so long?

Decisively, he reached out beyond the confines of the house for the first time since their imprisonment. He found Tom flying the helicopter on a shuttle mission twenty miles away. He sent his thoughts on a tight field that could not be intercepted or detected by any but Tom.

"Tom Calvin," he called gently.

High over the forest, the pilot trembled a little as he recognized that unexpected call.

"I hear you, Father."

For a moment, Wellton scarcely knew what to say. "You have heard what happened?"

"About you, and what Barron has done?"

"Yes. How do you feel about it?"

"How could we feel, Father? Barron had no right to do such a thing. It was a traitorous thing to do."

"You have not called or offered to help."

"Forgive me if I have given you cause to think me negligent," said Tom humbly. "I was afraid of your anger, as are the others who are ashamed of Barron. We supposed that you would ask for our help if and when you wished it. What can we do?"

"What would you do?" said Wellton.

"Anything you ask," said Tom Calvin.

"Would you fight Barron? Would you destroy the ship he has built?"

"Barron is our brother," said Tom slowly. "Brothers ought not to fight. There should not be differences which require them to fight. But Barron has done wrong; one man ought not to force another. We will destroy the ship if that is your wish."

"Do not misunderstand me," said Wellton. "This is not a punishment for what Barron has done. This imprisonment is nothing. I would have demanded that the ship be

destroyed, and the flight to space abandoned, regardless of any other consideration. The Children must not go to space because they owe a debt to earth that has not been paid."

Tom Calvin was silent for a long time and Wellton did not press him. At last he answered. "I do not understand all that you have tried to teach us. Perhaps those who have gone to the cities have learned. Nevertheless, I will do whatever you ask of me."

"Why?"

"Because you are the Father."

There was no more to it than that, he thought.

"Yes," said Wellton, "I am the Father. Will you give me the names of others whom you believe I can rely on?"

There was a moment of silence while Tom gave attention to his piloting. Then he began a slow recital of names. Wellton checked them against Julia's list. There was almost complete agreement; Tom omitted two of Julia's and added one.

As he finished, he said, "I am coming in for a landing, Father. I need my attention here. May I call you later?"

"This is all for now. I will contact the others and talk to you again."

He withdrew with Tom's reverent salutation ringing in his mind. He chose the next most needed name on the list, an important engineer on the space-ship project, they had told him.

Wellton reached out with the fingers of his mind. "Claude," he said. "Claude Drummond."

A startled reply was almost instantaneous. "Father!"

Cautiously, Wellton approached him, but the engineer was hesitant. "I am at work on the ship now. I will leave it if you wish, or would you prefer a later time?"

"Finish your task. Call me when you are free. No one must know of our contact."

"As soon as I am free, Father."

Wellton got up wearily from the desk, startled to see that the afternoon had gone and evening had come. He went out to the living room. Dinner was being readied by Julia and Anne in the kitchen. Timmy played under the table in the dining alcove. It was a scene from two hundred years in the past, Wellton thought. For a moment it reduced the urgency of the present. He bent down and scooped Timmy from beneath the table and put him in the high chair. But the meal had only begun when Claude Drummond called.

"It's one of the children," Wellton murmured to Anne. "I want to be alone in the study while I talk."

He went to his desk and sat in the half-darkness. It was more difficult to find a beginning with the engineer than it had been with Tom.

"Tell me about this ship you are building, Claude," Wellton said.

"It's a beautiful thing," the engineer said reverently. "The most beautiful thing men have ever made. I wish you could see it now, Father. It's standing in its launching rack in a tiny valley protected by steep cliffs. It's a silver spire in the moonlight, showing against the snow and dark cliffs beyond it. It almost reaches the tops of the cliffs two hundred and fifty feet high.

"It will take us anywhere we want to go in all space. We won't be afraid of anything when we're aboard her."

"But if you don't go?" said Wellton.

Claude hesitated. "That will be according to your will, Father."

"Suppose I should ask you to destroy this beautiful ship you have built? What would be your answer then?"

"Is this your command?"

"Yes," said Wellton, "this is my command."

A surge of emotion burst along the telepathic beam and exploded like a great sob within Wellton. "Is this necessary?" the engineer cried. "Can it not be preserved somehow? It is impossible for some of us to go? The

stars, Father—can you imagine what it is like to have dreamed all your life of the stars? We have always known that we could go; there has been only your permission that has been in doubt."

"The ship must be destroyed," said Wellton. "I cannot permit it to exist. Will you obey my will?"

"Yes. I will obey."

Wellton felt suddenly as if he were in contact with a dead man. "How can this be done?" he said.

"The motors," said Claude. "In a few weeks they will be installed and functioning on test. The quickest, most sure destruction would be to explode the atomic piles of the ship's motors. We could remove the moderating rods, and fission would go forward in a chain reaction."

"What will be necessary in order to gain access to the ship and accomplish this?"

"The whole operation lies in a narrow valley," said Claude. "The ship itself, with tool sheds and equipment, is in the small bulge I have mentioned. Farther down the valley, a mile from the ship, are the flats on which the construction village is located. The upper end of the valley is also open. It could be approached from that end most successfully."

"One trusted man alone on the ship could not do this?"

"No. It would not be possible to anticipate a time when I could accomplish this alone. There are always others who could overpower me before I could succeed. An attack on the ship would be required. We would have to be in full control for several minutes."

"Is it well guarded?"

"Only against detection by chance from the outside, or by deliberate searchers—such as agents of Rossi."

"What about dissenting Children and myself? Doesn't Barron anticipate any attempt by me?"

"He is careful about this. Since your imprisonment, all workmen on the ship are in pairs; and their attitude to-

ward the ship must be open to the other. One of the pair is always in contact with a separate checker outside the ship who monitors several different pairs. The pairs are rotated every day."

"What about yourself?" said Wellton. "Can you go near the ship without betraying our intention now?"

"My attitude has not changed," said Claude slowly. "My attitude toward the ship is the same; I have agreed only to obey you in its destruction. My attitude or agreements with you are not monitored." His message remained that of a dead man.

"You must not fail," Wellton warned. "You must be sure you are right in this."

"I will, Father."

"Can you suggest a time when our opportunity would be greatest?"

"After the engines are put into operation, they will be allowed to run for several days while auxiliary engines and circuits in the ship are being tested and given a final check. During this time, workers aboard the ship will be at a minimum.

"A school of indoctrination will be held in the construction village for those making the first voyage. But all the Children—with only a few exceptions—will be on hand during those days. There will be nightly gatherings to discuss the future planning and organization, as the group on earth becomes smaller and new ships are built to carry them away.

"This will be the time to attack. Attention will be concentrated on affairs in the village, and momentarily away from the ship itself. A few of us could rush the ship, overpower those remaining aboard, and draw the moderators."

"And what of those who do this?"

"They will die," said Claude. "There will be no chance to get away."

XVIII. WHO HAS WON?

1.

WELLTON OBTAINED the names of those the engineer considered able to help with the plan. The list checked well with the recommendations of Tom and Julia. One by one, during the next few days, he contacted these Children. He told them what he wanted, not trying to make them understand the reason, but asking only for the same allegiance he had received from Claude and Tom and Julia. Without exception, they offered it, not questioning the wisdom of his request.

From the slatted prison windows, Wellton watched the snows disappear that year. Julia told him it was earlier than usual. The Children who stood guard about the house watched the spring come, too. They turned more often with apprehensive glances toward the barred doors and windows. They had not heard of Wellton's communication with anyone, and began to fear the wrath that might someday emerge from that house.

They were armed, and they had been instructed to harm no one in the house if it were possible to avoid it. But they had little confidence now in the power of any weapon against the Father.

Wellton saw them talking, huddling close in the morning sunlight, and about their campfires at night. He caught flashes of the fear that was in them. He knew they

suffered the old fear of mankind—that one does not easily imprison a god.

Tom and Claude had learned that the guards would abandon their watch on the afternoon of the day before the flight. On the preceding day, Claude Drummond would take the bulk of his followers, and go by a roundabout way to the upper end of the valley where the space ship lay. A few would remain near the lake cottage while Tom took Wellton in the helicopter to the construction village.

There, Wellton planned to divert Barron and the Children with him while the ship was attacked. It had been carefully planned through the preceding weeks, and their program had changed to match the occasional shift in Barron's plans. Now there was little to do but wait.

Wellton awoke on a morning when the air itself seemed glistening, and the sky was a kind of blue that did not exist over Kansas City. He glanced at it through the slots between the planks. Almost at once he saw that the surrounding area was deserted. The guards had gone during the night.

"Tom," he called.

"Yes, Father."

"The guards are gone. Do you know what it means?"

"Yes," said Tom. "I was about to call you. They are not gone, not all of them anyway. A few are in the woods to observe the cottage and see what you do. Barron is worried by your lack of action, and he has been trying to determine whom of the Children you may have contacted, and what plans you may have made. I don't believe he has found out anything. I think it would be well for you to break out, but we should not show near the cottage yet."

"The flight," said Wellton. "Has he scheduled the hour for the take-off?"

"Near dawn tomorrow. We have twenty-four hours."

"Are the rest of our people in a position to move quickly?"

"They are already on their way to the upper mouth of the valley. We will pick you up in the helicopter as soon as it is dark. The watchers will notify Barron, of course; but he will have no idea what you intend, since there will be only you and the two of us in the plane."

"It sounds satisfactory. Be sure I am notified if you detect any change in Barron's plans—especially if he should advance the time of take-off."

2.

It was difficult breaking out of the house; there was no tool to pry loose the heavily spiked planks. Wellton finally broke off one of the massive table legs and used it to batter what seemed to be the weakest of them. After ten minutes of heavy pounding, one end was battered free; he twisted it aside and stepped out.

He stood a moment on the porch, looking over the lake and the forest, hesitating under the impact of sudden freedom. He jerked the plank completely free and Anne followed him through. She stood close with an arm about him.

"I wish tonight didn't have to come," she said.

"It has to if we want to face tomorrow, and the days after that."

"What if you should kill Barron—or he should kill you?"

"I have no intention of allowing either to happen."

"He's fast," said Anne. "And he's so much younger. I've never seen you fight, Robert. Are you good?"

He smiled and shrugged. "I've held the championship at the Institute for the past three years. There are lots of younger and faster men on the staff there."

"I would rather you gave the Children up, and let them go."

He found an axe in one of the smaller cottages and finished the work of tearing the planks from the house. They went swimming in the afternoon, and Timmy played in the sand on the beach. Wellton felt rather grateful to Barron for this peaceful interlude before the struggle that was to come.

The day chilled quickly with the afternoon wind that blew across the lake. Thin streamers of cloud turned the sky milky above them.

"Time to get in, old man." Wellton dug Timmy out of the sand and raised him high; the baby giggled and sputtered with alternate joy and terror.

"Put him down!" said Anne. "You know he doesn't like that."

Wellton lowered him and cradled the round baby form against his own flesh. The warmth of Timmy was an immense and pleasurable mystery that he enjoyed for a moment. Anne scolded them into the house, against the chilling wind.

If he could have held Barron like that, Wellton thought, tonight would never have come.

Their tension increased as evening neared. There had been no further word from Tom or Claude, and Wellton assumed their plans were going well.

"Barron's watchers will probably leave, after they see me take off with Tom," he told Anne. "When they do, some of our own group will move up to be near the house. Don't leave it until you hear word from me about what decisions have been made. I don't know what kind of turmoil may exist after the ship is destroyed. They may go wild."

Within moments, they heard the whir of wings overhead and Tom's signal came to them. "We are approaching the house," he said. "We will be ready to pick you up within a couple of minutes."

Wellton took his rapier, carrying it in his hand because it would be awkward in the plane. The helicopter settled with a rush of wind in front of the house. He kissed Anne quickly. She held his arm for an instant before he broke away from her. "Robert," she murmured.

Then he was down the steps and moving toward the waiting ship. He climbed in beside Tom and the co-pilot. He waved once toward the dark shadow on the porch where Anne was, and then he closed the door.

"We have a couple of men in Barron's group," said Tom as the ship lifted. "The whole group is in a state of anxiety and apprehension. They can't believe that the ship is actually going to get away, without some action from you. They'll know soon that you are on the way. I think the bulk of them are tremendously frightened by what they have done, now that its culmination is about to take place."

The dark shapes of the forest sped beneath them. Wellton stared out at the night, his eyes unseeing, until the lighted area of the construction village appeared ahead of them. For a moment, before it was lost in the curve of the valley, he glimpsed the ship itself.

He caught his breath at the sight of that slender, incredible spire that symbolized all the yearning of the Children for a happy land. For just an instant he imagined the exultation in a man who was one with the stars, while the chains of earth's bitterness dropped forever below him.

The spire disappeared quickly from sight and they were dropping toward the village that neared below them. A few Children were clustered in the open, pointing upward. Tom Calvin turned his landing lights on and settled slowly into an open square before the construction building where they were all gathered.

He clasped Wellton's hand in a quick grip as the motor died. "We're with you, Father," he said.

Wellton stepped from the ship and buckled his rapier

to his waist. For an instant he reached out to Claude. "I am approaching the gathering," he said.

"We are ready, Father," the engineer replied.

"Begin your approach. I am entering."

Boldly he strode to the wide doors of the structure, Tom following a pace or two to his left. Those few standing watch in the street had gathered quickly about the helicopter. Now they recognized its passenger and fell back.

"Father!" the word swept them like a wave.

Wellton caught the sudden flash of terror that shot through their minds. He strode on, not giving recognition to any as he came to the doors of the building.

He took a step inside. Barron was on a platform addressing the Children vocally, as was so rarely done among them. Wellton advanced, so that the nearest of the Children saw him. A score of them arose with a sudden cry: "*Father!*" It swept with the speed of flame through the assembly.

Ahead of Wellton, they crowded into the aisle. Those nearest tried to fall back, but the ones behind pushed them forward. On the platform Barron stood silent and still.

Wellton felt the tearing surge of emotions in conflict. He sensed surprise, dismay, reverence, rebellion, and relief. But slowly growing through the mass of them was the necessity to defend that which they had done.

His progress became impossible in the clogged aisle. As yet he had not spoken, nor did any address him. In silence, he drew the rapier and held it before him, hilt to his chest.

"Stand back," he commanded.

For an instant, he felt a half-determined impulse from some to rush him. He hurled it back upon those who conceived it. "Stand back!"

Slowly he passed through the narrow lane that opened. All sound was gone from the hall except for the audible

breathing of the occupants. Then Wellton's deliberate footsteps echoed from the platform steps.

He stood on a level with Barron. His hand still grasped the unsheathed sword. With it, he faced Barron.

On Barron's face triumph was clouded by regret. "It is too late," he said. "Our ship is finished. Tonight we go, Father; there is nothing that can stop us now."

"I can stop you," said Wellton. "Draw."

Barron's eyes widened. He backed involuntarily. "No! There is no need. You have lost. Don't you understand it yet, Father? The Children have made their choice; they have chosen the stars instead of you."

"If you refuse to draw, I have won. I will command them to destroy the ship bolt by bolt, and plate by plate, and they will obey me. You have wanted to discard all that men have gained in ten thousand years, and that is the way it shall be—just for tonight. In the beginning it was decided, as you and I shall decide the leadership of the family tonight. The young prince contends for the throne of the tribe's chieftain. You shall have it as you have wanted it, Barron. Draw."

Barron's hand went desperately to the hilt of the weapon by his side. "I have only my short knife."

"Ask that your sword be brought."

Barron hesitated. His face changed with grief, as if for worlds lost, and then hardened. He reached out his hand as someone brought his weapon from a side room of the hall. He withdrew it swiftly.

"On guard!" cried Wellton. He lunged with savage fury upon his son.

Then, across the distance from the great ship, a warning cry flashed from the guards who had been left within it. Barron's eyes went wide with horror and astonishment as he understood their message. He fought Wellton's lunges with frantic despair and cried out to the Children in the hall: "The ship! Go to the ship!"

But not a single man or woman moved. They stared

at the figures of Barron and the Father, retreating and advancing from one side of the platform to the other, lunging, parrying desperately. The swords cast crazy, darting streaks of light across the walls and ceilings, and clashed with sounds that rang, echoing, out of all the lost, sick ages of the world.

"They will not go to save the ship, Barron," Wellton said telepathically. "They will not move now until they know whom they are to follow. You have lost. My loyal sons are already at the ship; Claude is even now drawing the moderators. Your beautiful ship will die. It had no right to live, because you have not paid your debt. Acknowledge me now, and we will sheath our swords. It is not too late for you to learn the purpose for which you were born."

"I'll follow my own purpose and see any man in hell who stands in my way," said Barron. "May God forgive me that it is you, Father."

He lunged viciously. Wellton parried and recovered with a stroke that drew blood on Barron's sword arm.

Barron. Timmy. My sons. My sons. "Acknowledge me, and put up your sword!"

"I did not ask to draw!"

They fought in silence, but now there were sounds from those who watched. A woman sobbed in sudden hysteria. "My Father, my Brother!"

Others took up a rising plea for them to cease. Sweat coated their bodies, and from a forehead wound blood drained slowly into Wellton's left eye. He clawed it wildly to clear his sight.

Barron bled on his cheek and his footing was uneven now from a gash in his thigh. An agony of exhaustion crept upward along Wellton's sword arm. Would Claude never reach the motors?

Risking divided attention for a fraction of a moment, he shot an inquiry toward Claude and those in the ship. But the answer was not from Claude; it came from Mc-

Donald, the second in command of the raiding party.

"Claude is down," said McDonald. "He's alive and crawling to the engine room. He says he will live long enough to draw the moderators if we can hold off the rest of the guards. Eight of our men have been lost, and six of the guards."

Wellton drew back. He could spare no more of his attention, but an imagined scene of the bloodshed within the ship would not leave him.

My sons, he cried inwardly.

Then sharp fire exploded in his shoulder. He retreated and parried frantically, while Barron pressed his advantage.

It happened then, the far-off thunder of raging atoms. The angle in the valley broke the direct blast, but it funneled the air wave like a torrent of water. The Children heard it, and for them time stopped.

For Barron, it was the signal of his own personal defeat; his reflexes were set to surrender at that awful sound.

It was only a momentary thing, but it slowed the guard which he meant to raise against Wellton's lunge that had started before the blast came. Barron's blade did not rise far enough; Wellton's struck.

Barron's sword dropped from his open fingers. He sagged to his knees as wave after wave of sound and air smashed against the building.

Wellton stared dumbly at the fantasy before him. Something he could not understand had occurred. Barron was falling, while blood gushed from his side. Wellton tried to brace his legs against the waves that rocked the floor. He went down upon his knees. A moan of terror arose from the assembled Children.

They cried for the stricken ship, and for their fallen leader. They cried out for their own sin of having forsaken the Father. They acknowledged his wrath, and the

justice of his punishment, as the building twisted and its bolts screamed in the timbers.

It ceased. Wellton was crawling slowly to the side of his son. His tears washed the blood from his eye. "Barron," he cried.

The wound was a fearful thing that began in the lower center of Barron's chest and angled upward into his back. It seemed impossible that it could have escaped his heart.

For long, dumb moments, it seemed, Wellton knelt there watching that torrent of blood. And then Wilma Thurston was beside him. Two or three others, who were also physicians, crowded near her, their minds walled in by the horror of what they had seen, but they tried to function through it.

Wilma spoke with deference, and with the edge of terror in her thoughts. "Do you wish us to attend him, Father? If anything is to be done, it must be done quickly."

"I want him to live. See that he lives, Wilma; don't let him die."

He stood up and moved away while they attended swiftly to the wound and prepared to move Barron to the surgery in the village. He stood back in the full glare of the lights, watching. He had his triumph, he thought. In all the minds about him, there was no rebellion now. He had proved himself and overcome them all. The tribal chieftain had put down the challenge of the son for his throne.

He knelt before them and wept.

When the litter was brought for Barron, Wellton followed behind the slow procession of bearers. They passed through the assembly of Children, in which no one stirred. Wellton looked straight before him, never taking his eyes from the gray face of Barron, streaked with blood and sweat. He thought of the other sons who had died at the ship. He sent out a question directed at any who might have survived; there was no answer.

They came out into the black open night that was stifling with the smell of dust and shattered rock. Wellton wondered if radiation products in strength enough to damage them had been born upon the wind. He didn't believe so. There was nothing to be done, in any case; the stifling dust settled all about them and choked in their throats and lungs.

Tom Calvin fell silently in step beside Wellton as they emerged from the building. Someone produced a light and led the way to the medical building of the village. Behind them, the Children followed slowly out of the hall. Tom said nothing, but Wellton faltered once as he walked and Tom took his arm to steady him.

They went alone into the small, neat building. The crowd waited outside. Wellton and Tom halted in the anteroom while Barron was carried into the surgery. Tom led his father to a deep chair, where he sank down in silence, and took one beside him.

"I tried not to hurt him," Wellton said after a time. "I knew he was going to parry that lunge. The explosion threw him off, and I wasn't fast enough to recognize it and hold back my thrust."

"He would have killed you," said Tom. "He meant to kill you from the very first. He thought he could command Claude to leave the ship if he could kill you before they reached it. That was what he was trying for."

"But I wouldn't have killed him," Wellton said. "He knew I didn't intend to; he knew what I was doing. I don't think he would have killed me if he had had the chance."

"Yes," said Tom. "He meant nothing to stand in the way of his going to space. The lives of any of us meant nothing beside that dream. We knew that. We all knew it from the beginning."

It didn't matter, Wellton thought wearily. It didn't matter what any of them had meant to do. All that mattered was that Barron was dying. This was truly the end

of the dream that had begun long ago in the top of a cherry tree swaying in the wind.

The sting of his own wounds mounted, but no one offered him help. They were too busy or too afraid, he thought. He seemed to drift into a kind of stupor in which he re-lived a thousand times the hour just passed.

And then Tom was shaking him. Wilma was standing near.

"You may see him, Father," she said. "Barron is not going to live. We have done all we can. He has only a little while."

Wellton went to the door behind which Barron lay and Wilma opened it for him and closed it again softly, leaving him alone with Barron. There was a dim light over the bed. It threw a gentle glow over Barron's face, but left his eyes in shadow.

"Barron," Wellton murmured.

The wounded man opened his eyes in a wild, unseeing stare at first. Gradually they came to focus on Wellton's dimly lighted face.

"You won, didn't you, Father?" he murmured. "You were too strong for me. All my life you've been too strong for me."

"No, Barron, it hasn't been that way!"

"When I was fifteen you drove me away from the home I had. It was a good home; you didn't know that, did you? I wanted to stay. You made me gather the others and sneak across the open country with them. I wonder if you ever imagined what that was like. Even Anne had it almost better when she was with her kidnapper.

"It took us a year and a half to reach these northern forests, a year and a half of hunger and cold and terror, and of not knowing why we were fleeing except that you commanded it. I was sick when I got here, and Anne helped me get well again. I didn't tell you that because I hated you so much, even then. You never told us why we had to flee, but we were afraid not to.

"While I was in Kansas City I had the chance to absorb a lifetime of knowledge. I read every book I could find, including hundreds of the forbidden ones. When we got to the wilderness, I knew what I wanted to do. I knew that someday we would go to the stars and Anne would go with me.

"But first you took her away from me, and now my ship. And tonight, my life—which I wish to heaven you had never given me. Please go out of the room now, Father; leave me. I don't want to die in your presence. Don't ask me to give you that final triumph over me!"

Wellton felt as if he were trying to hold with childish hands the terrible opening doors of death. In only these few moments he had to make Barron understand.

"I love you," he said. "You were my first son, and I loved you with all my heart. Our only difference was that my dream was the greater one. It was for all the world."

"You taught me nothing of the world," said Barron. "From it, I learned nothing but hate." His eyes shifted suddenly, and his expression changed. "I thought of something the other day, Father. The day when I came to the house and you picked up Timmy and held him close. It might all have been very different, I know it would have been different if I could have had the memories that Timmy will have."

His eyes closed suddenly as weakness came over him. Wellton touched his hand anxiously. He sank down on the chair beside the bed, watching the strong, slender hands of Barron, the clean lines of his face—sensitive, yet somehow wary, as if there were no thing in all the world he could completely trust.

3.

It seemed that he had been in the room for a very long time. A call from Tom outside in the anteroom stirred him.

"Father, Anne has called," said Tom. "Something has happened at the cottage. She delayed calling for fear of endangering you."

"What has happened?" demanded Wellton.

"Rossi," said Tom. "His men have found the village. They landed at the lake shore and attacked the cottage."

Wellton cut off and hurled a desperate cry toward Anne. She answered at once, but faintly as if in pain. "I am all right, Robert. What of you?"

"I'm not hurt. What has happened to you, Anne?"

"A large helicopter with eight men landed shortly after you left. They came up to the house and demanded entrance. When they told me who they were, I called for the Children who had remained behind to watch the cottage. We killed all of them. I was wounded, but not seriously. I'll be all right. But, Robert—"

"What is it?"

"Timmy is dead. They killed Timmy."

He was looking at Barron while she said it. He made no reply. He felt somewhere in the depths of his most secret cells a stirring of something terrible and changing. He hadn't recognized it before, but now he knew it had begun hours ago, at the moment Barron crumpled with blood wetting his shirt.

He saw all his blindness, and the mistakes of a lifetime. It lay before him on the hospital bed, and somewhere back at the cottage.

"You were right, Barron," he said. "It is you who were right; my dream has been the false one. I'll come back and tell you that when you can understand it, Barron. You are not going to die until I can come back and tell you."

He went out to Tom. "We've got to go back. Anne's hurt. Maybe some of the others. I don't know how badly."

He explained to Wilma what had happened. "Can you leave Barron in the hands of the others?"

"There is nothing anyone can do for Barron," she answered. "I will go with you. Get Tom to help with some of the supplies. I don't know what we might need."

The helicopter had been protected from the main force of the blast by the construction building in which the Children met. It had been blown aside, but Tom found it undamaged.

They got aboard. Like a dark ghost, it rose above the valley and turned toward the lake.

You were right, Barron—it echoed in Wellton's mind. All the years seemed to fall upon him with the smothering weight of their useless and misguided action. He had dreamed a false dream. Only Barron had known what the answer truly was: Escape. Leave earth to its own damnation; let the old race die in its own rot.

He felt the compassion of those who were with him, Tom and Wilma. They pitied him, and they understood him. All the Children had understood. Their weakness was the fear that gave him power over them. They could build a ship that would reach the stars; but they would follow him blindly now, because he had proved himself before them—by the oldest and crudest method known to man. Never would they be able to shake off the reverence, the superstitious torment of their childhood, that made them subject to his will.

He was hardly aware of the descent of the helicopter. The jar of its landing on the beach stirred him and he flung the door open and raced headlong up the beach toward the lighted windows of the house.

In the living room, a half dozen of the Children were lying or sitting about with hastily bandaged wounds. He went on to the bedroom. Anne lay on the bed, her face and right arm bandaged. Wellton dropped to one knee beside her. "Anne—Anne— Everything has gone wrong tonight! The whole world has gone wrong!"

Her hand pressed his shoulder. "You have come back, and I was afraid you would never come back."

"Timmy. Tell me about Timmy. I want to see him. I want to see what they did to him."

"Maybe you shouldn't," she said. But he followed her glance to the crib where an irregular sheeted bundle lay, an ugly, seeping stain upon it. He unwrapped the sheet and looked upon Timmy.

"They did it deliberately," said Anne. "They came into the house and tried to take us away. I called to the Children outside. When they rushed up to the porch, the agents turned. I fought them with my knives.

"And then Timmy crawled into the room from the bedroom where Julia was trying to hide him. One of the agents stooped down and cursed at him—and killed him."

Wellton looked at the wound, long and ugly. Then he wrapped Timmy in a clean sheet and went back to Anne. His eyes had grown hard and bright. He knelt beside her again.

"Barron was right. Did you know that, Anne? He was right. We owe no debt to earth. If we ever did, it has long since been paid. We'll build another ship. Barron's dream was the one. Somewhere there's another world more worthy of the Children than this one.

"But before we go we'll dare them to come and find us. If they want bloodshed, we'll show them what it is really like. The Children are mine now. Their genius can build weapons more terrible than the dust. We'll build them, and we'll invite the whole world to come and rout us out of our homes and mountains. We'll let them come until their dead are piled higher than the treetops, and their stench reaches around the earth itself.

"Then we'll go; and when we do, the debt that earth owes for the lives of Barron and Timmy will be a fraction paid. That is a dream and a goal worthy of an earthman, now!"

He stood up as he spoke; before Anne could reply, he left the room and signaled Wilma to come in. He spoke

to the wounded Children. They told him the same story that Anne had given.

There was nothing to be done, nothing he could do at all. He turned and walked out of the house into the night.

He felt only half aware that he was moving, but he walked along the lake shore at an ever-increasing rate, until he was driving himself at a madman's pace. He stumbled in the loose sand, falling down to lie shaken by great explosive sobs, then rising after a time and plunging on into the darkness.

As he drove himself, reality began to creep in again. He had left the lake shore. Now he was climbing, half-crawling up the mound of a grassy hill where the trees thinned; and he could see the distant sunrise bursting in the sky.

He clawed his way to the top of the hill and sank down upon the green surface, moist with virgin dew. He wiped the red smear from his eye, and all his pores opened and welled out their salt moisture, though the morning air was cold and he trembled as it blew upon him.

He turned slowly on his back and lay sprawled, face upturned. Deepening sheets of crimson unrolled across the sky above him. It was day. He began remembering Sammy from so long ago. "I want to see tomorrow," Sammy had said. And Joe and Claude and Timmy—most of all, Timmy—they had wanted to see tomorrows that would never come.

My lost sons, he thought. *I have taken your tomorrow from you. But if I can't give it back to you, I shall take it from all those who have no right to it.*

But the dawn was like a sound; and it seemed to carry the host of far lost voices that cried out to him: *"You can give it back, Father. You can give it back."*

How? he asked of the wind and the sky.

And then the voices of his sons seemed to be joined by a million-throated chorus. *"Don't lay waste our lives.*

Don't leave to death the earth, which we have nurtured with our bones and with our living flesh."

Wellton cried aloud in his agony at the sight of him who stood before him. Barron was there, blood upon his breast, but he stood erect, his hand outstretched; and in his eyes he pled forgiveness.

His fingers touched the bleeding wound. *"This is as it should be, Father. I would have betrayed the dream you borrowed from these who stand behind me. I did not know; I could not understand. Your wisdom was greater than mine.*

"But now I know, for I am one of them, and it is our dream, not theirs alone. The earth is man's, not the stars. Not until he has made the earth his own. He would die amid the splendor of the golden worlds if he went out to them before he learned to walk upon the clay that is his own. Take our dream, Father, and give us our tomorrow!"

The vision faded. Wellton groaned and tried to rise. Day gleamed in the sky above where rosy curtains gave way to the white lace of cirrus.

He sat up and turned about and listened for the far voices again. They were gone and he knew that they would never come again. He stumbled down the hillside, falling to his knees, half rolling, then rising once again until he came to the shore of the lake.

Tom met him on the beach before the house. "Father! We've been calling and searching all morning for you. You didn't answer. We thought something had happened to you."

"I didn't hear you," murmured Wellton. "I'm all right. Take me to the house; I must go in to Anne."

Leaning heavily upon Tom, he climbed the steps. Anne was waiting inside the doorway, in a chair, facing him as he entered. He stumbled to her and dropped, with his head upon her lap. She bent over and rocked him like a child. Her tears felt cool upon his fevered neck.

"My darling, my darling," she murmured. "I thought you had gone! I called out to you and there was no answer."

He raised his head. "I was listening—to someone else," he said. "I'll tell you soon, but now there's so much to do. Rossi will come again. We'll have to leave the villages; go deeper in the forest; hide again for a time, until the Children grow strong and learn the meaning of the dream.

"And for Timmy, and for Barron, and for all of earth, make sure that tomorrow comes."

the DEVIATES

formerly

the Secret People

by Raymond F. Jones

"Science-Fiction at its Best"

When human genes go wild, reproduction can no longer be left to chance—and it is Robert Wellton, Chief of the Genetics Bureau, the most feared and hated man in the world, who decides who will mate with whom.

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