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AND CHAOS DIED

by JOANNA RUSS

His name was Jai Vedh; he was an Earthman. But his ship had blown up on a star voyage and now he was a castaway on an uncharted Earth-like planet.

There were people here: humans, apparently an Earth colony that had lost contact with the home world centuries before. They had developed telepathy, telekinesis, teleportation—and the damnedest social system you could imagine had grown out of those abilities.

Jai Vedh gradually came to understand what they were . . . but it took him much longer to realize what they were doing to him.

AND CHAOS DIED is a novel about psi powers seen from the inside. It will amaze you, it will challenge you: and you will never forget it.

JOANNA RUSS was born in 1937. She writes: "I spent my childhood half in the Bronx Zoo and half in the Botanical Gardens. I remember being enchanted with dinosaurs, mammoths, the Planetarium, all sorts of wild empty lots around my house (the Bronx was wilder then). I was one of the top ten Westinghouse Science Talent Search Winners in my last year in high school . . . I decided that I would rather go on with poetry. People told me: why don't you become a science fiction writer? I just laughed."

Joanna Russ's short stories have appeared frequently in the major science fiction magazines, as well as in literary magazines, and a number of her short plays have been performed, with good notices. Her first novel, PICNIC ON PARADISE, was published in 1968 as an Ace Science Fiction Special and was a nominee for the Nebula Award as best sf novel of the year. AND CHAOS DIED, her second novel, is certain to add to her rapidly growing reputation.

Meanwhile she teaches creative writing at Cornell, including a special class in science fiction.

AND CHAOS DIED

by JOANNA RUSS

AN ACE BOOK

Ace Publishing Corporation
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To Sidney J. Perelman
and Vladimir Nabokov

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The eye is a menace to clear sight, the ear is a menace to subtle hearing, the mind is a menace to wisdom, every organ of the senses is a menace to its own capacity. . . . Fuss, the god of the Southern Ocean, and Fret, the god of the Northern Ocean, happened once to meet in the realm of Chaos, the god of the center. Chaos treated them very handsomely and they discussed together what they could do to repay his kindness. They had noticed that, whereas everyone else had seven apertures, for sight, hearing, eating, breathing and so on, Chaos had none. So they decided to make the experiment of boring holes in him. Every day they bored a hole, and on the seventh day, Chaos died.

— Chuang Tzu*

There is a point beyond which you can't go without the aid of the machine . . . there is a limit to how loud you can shout. After that, you have to get yourself an amplifier.

— *Limiting Factor*, by
Theodore R. Cogswell

*translated by Arthur Waley

1

HIS NAME was Jai Vedh.

There was some Hindi in the family, way back—a father, for they still used fathers' names—but he did not look it, being yellow-haired with blue eyes and a dark yellow beard, a streaked beard, as if stained or dyed. Since he was a civilian, he wore turquoises, sandals, silver, leather, old charms, rings, ear-rings, floating stones, bracelets, and the industrial jewels that do not last. He was a desperate, quiet, cultured, and well-spoken man. He had been in the minor arts for some years, but was still young when his business required him to take a trip, and so for the first time he traveled up off the surface of Old Earth—on which every place was then like every other place—and into the vacuum that is harder than the vacuum in any machine or toy or kitchen sink, a void not big or greedy or black (as the literature issued to the passengers emphatically denied it was) but only something hard and flat, absolutely hard and absolutely flat, hard through the very walls and flattened right up against all the ship's portholes—provided by the company for the convenience of viewing. He played water-polo; he drank beer. Proper, healthful things were piped through the air. He used the library and listened to modern music. Alone

among thirty-five hundred, he felt a vacuum inside himself, a spot like the spot inside a solid-state graph that makes the lights jump around and up and down or wink on and off or trace a dying curve to the bottom of the page, a spot barely contained by the strong walls of his chest that were so used to swimming, walking, wrestling, to struggling in bed. He endured the sensation, finding it not new. Passengers, glancing in, saw him in the library, his sandaled feet crossed, his neck muscles moving only a little. On the seventeenth day it got worse, he felt them pulling at each other through the walls, and he thought to go see the ship's doctor but did not; on the nineteenth day he threw himself against one of the portholes, flattening himself as if in immediate collapse, the little cousin he had lived with all his life become so powerful in the vicinity of its big relative that he could not bear it. Everything was in imminent collapse. He was found, taken to sick bay, and shot full of sedatives. They told him, as he went under, that the space between the stars was full of light, full of matter—what was it someone had said, an atom in a cubic yard?—and so not such a bad place after all. He was filled with peace, stuffed with it, replete; the big cousin was trustworthy.

Then the ship exploded.

He was lying on his back, one knee thrust up, an arm bent under him. Diffuse, glaring brightness. In the corner of his eye an ant teeter-tottered over something. The milky stuff was sky, and hurt; he tried to loosen his arm, turn his head, and that hurt worse; then a sudden blow across the back from neck to the bottom of the spine, an avalanche of blows, pains splitting down his

marrow and the green fuzz tilting; he was looking at the side of an abyss made of grass-tangles and blades and someone was holding him up.

"Coward," said a woman's voice. Someone pulled back his head.

"Come on now!" said his companion. "Come on now, I pulled you out of that, come on now!" and turning around with infinite care, he saw the face of some concerned person, the Captain probably, for he had seen that idiotic face somewhere in the past, somewhere before, somewhere on top of something equally idiot—

"—alone," said Jai Vedh.

"Come *on!*"

And the person shook him.

"You're full of the stuff," said the Captain, "full of it. Come on," and deliberately he slapped him again and again, across the mouth.

"Called me coward," said Jai, reasonably.

"Still full of it," said the Captain. "Oh, for God's sake!" and pulling him to his feet, he began dragging him through the grass, around in a circle until they made their own track, sweating under his weight, for there was no third person present.

"Who called me—" said Jai, and then he stopped, stumbling backwards for a moment, but on his own feet; around were trees, a lake through them, a path, hills on the left. The lake shimmered a little in the afternoon sun.

"Where's the—thing?" he said. "The thing we escaped in, the—in the—brochure. I read about it. Where are we?"

"On the ground," said the Captain, "so *you* needn't worry, damn you! The motor blew out in the woods.

And I hope the man who put us two together makes it to the—"

"What ground?" said Jai Vedh.

"Where we can stay until we die of old age. March!

"Damned civilian coward," he added under his breath. But his voice was not the first voice.

The path led nowhere. It went around the lake and then stopped where they were, as if inviting them. They tried it several times the first day, then again on the second, even on the third, until the Captain declared in stupefied fury that it could not have been made by anything human.

"Human beings are not particularly rational," said Jai Vedh apologetically, his back to a tree-trunk and his knees under his chin. "I've made many paths like that myself; I'm a decorator. Paths around ponds, through gardens, under waterfalls. People like to look at things."

"*A pleasure garden?*" said the other man, and he strode off down the path again, only to reappear an hour later. The sun shone low through the trees; afternoon shadows stretched across the ground. The lake itself glittered brilliantly through the tree-trunks: pale dazzle, bars and ripples of fire.

"A professional job," said Jai.

"I can't see," said his companion. He groped forward a few steps, then sank to his knees and rocked back powerfully until he was squatting on his heels. "Bloody sun," he said.

"It's a good view all the way around the lake," said Jai. "Too good."

"Placeaworship," said the other.

"Yes, calculated," said Jai. "I'd stake my life on it."

"You *are* staking your life on it, buddy."

"I know my job."

"What a job! Civilian job."

"I make a living; do I ask you—"

"Shitless!"

A barefoot woman appeared on the path leading to the lake. Jai, first to see her, scrambled to his feet; but the Captain launched himself down the path with a roar. The woman waited and then stepped aside. She said:

"I am not going any."

Jai saw fingers flashing among cards, for some reason, someone picking out words, lips moving, looking over her shoulder and laughing: *yes, that's it—*

"I am not going any where," corrected the woman. She shook hands abruptly with the Captain. She said "Galactica, yes?" Again the words were perfect, slightly separated. "*Ja?*" she said, then shook her head. "Sorry. I am not used." She made a face. She stepped toward Jai, twitching down the skirt of her short, sleeveless shift, brown. (*Russet,* he thought professionally. *Spice, chocolate, sand, taupe, Morocco. What nonsense.*) She sat down abruptly on the grass, crossing her knees. "I'm not used to talking this at all," she finally said, rather quickly. "My hobby. You fit well, yes?"

"Galactica!" said the Captain.

(*Ordinary,* thought Jai, *unobtrusive, hair hacked off, dark hair, never make a model, of course, no effort to do anything to herself, impossible girl, nothing but part of a crowd. Anonymous and uninteresting.*)

"Listen," the Captain was saying, "this is very important. I want you to tell me—"

But that's impossible. Anonymous, here?

"You," she said to Jai, laying a hand on his arm, "you, I like the way you fit together, mm?" raising her voice in a little chirrup at the end, like a bird's tail, impudent, sleek, leaning towards him with eyes half shut, lazy, silky hair blown across her mouth, her skull and beating veins showing somehow through her face, all the bones wired together and moving under the skin of her woman's limbs and body. His mind closed instantly. "I understand," she said, nodding. "Yes. All right. Come on," and rising to her feet, quite serious, she said "I am very sorry you had to wait."

"It must have taken you some time to get here," said the Captain as they walked back to the path; the sun now sinking, their flesh turning orange, shadows crossing the path entirely and rising between the trees on each side. They started around the lake, where the light remained as if in a well, under the light in the sky; the Captain said, "Where are the others?"

"Oh, they didn't want to bother," she said.

"Not important, eh?" said the Captain. "I suppose you have refugees every day of the week, is that it?"

"No," said she. And she stopped to scratch one foot with the other.

"Who made your dress?" said Jai suddenly, breaking the silence.

"*If you don't mind—*" the Captain began.

"It's cut on the bias," said Jai Vedh, "did you know that? Did the person who made it know that? It's lined, too; that's not exactly a primitive way of proceeding. Or perhaps you didn't make it; perhaps someone else wore it before you did. Someone on a wrecked ship!"

"No ship is wrecked," said the woman. "It was made

for me. Turn here, this is my house," and she walked off the path into the trees.

"Where?" said the Captain, squinting in the gloom.

"Here," she said, lying down on the almost invisible grass. "This is my home. I live here.

"In the morning," she said equably, "I'll take you to that machine you came in. But it's broke."

And before their astonished eyes, in the count of two, she had fallen asleep.

"Sorry. Didn't mean to say that. You know," said the officer, first words of the next day. He was doing a ballet: zipping his fly, settling trousers, polishing boots with the side of his arm, shrugging everything into place and making faces. Jai Vedh, whose eyelids the gray light had penetrated several hours before, who had, between sleeping and waking, jerked himself up and sunk down a hundred times since then, mumbled something and lifted himself on one arm. He was shaking from the lack of sleep. "Warm all night," said the other. "Asked her. Always warm," and he began to run around the clearing, an ordinary clearing amid ordinary trees, with a light sprinkle of dead leaves on the grass. *Deciduous? Impossible!* said Jai Vedh's other self, the commenting self; and the first self sat up and said coolly, "We all make mistakes." The Captain stopped, his mouth open. Their hostess appeared between two trees and stepped on to the grass with the air of one quite at home, tracing a path across her living-room rug and peering out between the branches, crossing the rest of the room and sitting down with her skirt hiked over her knees; "Well now!" said the Captain.

"Somebody went to call somebody," said the woman.

"We'll get a little action now!" said the Captain.

"Action on what?" said Jai. He turned suddenly, seeing movement at the corner of his eye: the woman was slowly plucking blades of grass out of the ground and putting them in her mouth. She looked dumb and blind. The Captain leaned toward Jai, whispered, "Not bad, not bad really; and they speak Galactica. The devil, the way she sits—!" Her eyelids fell, stupidly; the Captain walked over and tentatively pulled the brown skirt up a little higher. She sat like a statue, scarcely breathing, her legs crossed and her palms on her knees. "They're idiots," said the Captain uncertainly. "Maybe they don't wear clothes." He laughed suddenly. "Beyond the carnality of the flesh," he said; "take a look," and almost unwillingly he put out both hands and hiked the skirt roughly to her waist. The dress split open in his hands. "Ah, look!" he said breathlessly, "Ah, look at that!" trying to turn away and simultaneously taking the dead doll by its shoulders. The breasts bobbed.

"I don't like women," said Jai Vedh's second self, the cool one, "and I like you less. I'll split your head open." It seemed to him that the clearing echoed with a terrific roar of good humor. The Captain, whose face said *I must stop, stop me,* put one terrified hand under the doll's breast and another on its belly; Jai hooked one leg under the man's knee and brought him down three yards to the side; he knelt efficiently on the bigger man's back and twisted both his arms.

Ah, good! Lovely! said the clearing, full of eyes. He let the Captain go. The big man stood up, brushed himself off, ran one hand over his hair and folded his arms severely. "What's the matter with you! you don't look

well," said the Captain simply, and then his eyebrows went up a fraction as the meditating woman opened her eyes, got up abruptly, and casually stripped herself. She hung the violated dress on the branch of a tree. "I'm tired of this dress," she announced off-handedly. "I'm going to get a new one.

"My friend will make me a real Coco Chanel," she said.

"—eel oh oh ah Nell"

"veil as well," she said. "Come on," and, nude, she stepped easily out of the clearing, all moving buttocks and knees, each side a balancing line to the armpit, feet like hands or limpets holding on to the turf, and swaying ankles.

"She's not bad-looking," said the Captain impersonally, following her. "They're well-nourished, apparently."

"Oh, it's real enough!" said someone out loud and then into his ear, intimately, making his head swim in a rapture of mischief, *But what a drama, what a drama! You eye people, you're unbelievable!*

"I don't like women," said Jai Vedh suddenly and dryly. "I never have. I'm a homosexual."

"Oh?" said the Captain, taken aback for a moment, giving a repelled jerk of the head, something flickering in his eyes for an instant and then gone. "Well—that's life, I suppose."

I *beg* your *pardon!* added the clearing like an offended schoolgirl and then it kept touching him on the back with hysterical joy until they were half-way around the lake.

There were people around the escape capsule, some sitting near it, one sitting on it. Some stood around it,

on the grass or under the trees; no one turned; no one spoke. A man lay flat on his face on the ground. Jai saw children in the branches of trees, squatting or hanging by their knees as if there were no up or down—when the woman, who had drifted behind the Captain, suddenly ran ahead of him and called out something clearly, with that little chirrup or laugh, the children began chattering excitedly, like parrots. They hung, squatted, ran along the branches, as before. They talked upside down. The adults did not move, except for the man sitting on the capsule, who got off it, said something slowly to no one in particular with a singularly impressive earnestness of accent, turned on heel like a ballet dancer, facing Jai Vedh and the Captain, scratched his crotch, and gazed at them with perfect composure. No one wore clothes. Bits of looks, glances, shoulders moving, a little sigh. They all looked, attentively but with a certain civilized reserve, at the two men, from boots to hair and down again, up for a further look and another travel down until the Captain, who had been standing with his legs apart and his arms folded, smiling grimly, began to redden. Everyone looked away.

"I've been gawked at before," said the Captain.

"They're not gawking," said Jai.

"Primitives," said the Captain.

These people, thought Jai, *have the most expressive backs in the world* and from the grass at his feet there sprang a shiver of twitching, as if somebody or something were shrugging back into his clothes, the bearded young man who had sat on the escape machine, for example; shrugging back into a leather jacket, a toga, a djellabah, a cape, a sheet, a gaberdine, a bathing suit, shin guards, a bathrobe, complete and fretted coat-armor.

Someone was sneering, too. A few tan, pink, brown, black, pale or otherwise intershaded people remained. The woman came out of the escape-capsule—half in, half out, carrying a load of books; she dumped the armload out and smiled a dazzling smile; she came out again with another load, dressed in her shift again. She announced:

"Do you know how much time I have spent in here? I have spent days in here. I am perfectly exhausted."

"Where the—" began the Captain.

"My friend made me *two* dresses," she said, shrugging. "Besides, I came here last night; that is what I mean by spending days in here. Besides, I don't mean days; I mean a long time. Never mind. I haven't got it all down yet, you know."

"Hours are not days," said Jai Vedh.

"Oh no, they're not, are they?" said she. "You're clever; of course," and with another delightful smile, she settled to the ground and began sorting out the books, her hands still working busily, she still looking Jai straight in the face.

"Do you mean that you learned to speak—" said the Captain.

"I—only got better," she said, turning to the Captain a face empty of anything but sincerity, a face presented on outstretched neck, as simple a look as that with which she had first met them. "I told you it was my hobby," she continued abruptly, diving down into the books, "and so it was; it was my avocation. I'm a doctor; what do you think of that?" She smiled strangely, to herself, running her tongue along her upper lip; then she repeated twice, with exactly the same cadence, "I'm a doctor; what do you think of that?" and with a little

letting-out of breath, she fastened her gaze on one book in her hand, gave a kind of shiver of delight, scratched her head furiously with her free hand, giggled, and tossed the book on a pile. She bent down and gathered them all in her arms.

"Someone was remarkably foresighted in putting all these in with you, don't you think?" she said. "There is nothing like an arbitrary set of symbols to fix the operations of the mind." A few dropped out of her arms and three children (they might have been dropped from the trees themselves, they appeared so neatly and suddenly) scooped up the fallen books and stood around her, hugging them eagerly to their chests, shifting from foot to foot, pleased and violently embarrassed: a statuary group of Culture comforting the arts.

Tsung-ka! she said, and immediately the children took them all from her and ran off, each in a different direction. She picked up from the grass, which was not exactly green, a book covered with shed autumn leaves, heart-shaped leaves like the leaves of the ailanthus, but oddly stippled green, red, purple, a sugar-maple purple; she picked up the book and brushed off the leaves and said, thoughtfully looking through the pages:

"This is a grammar. Strange. I wonder why it was included. At any rate, it's amusing, isn't it? I think we will teach everyone your language."

"Who is we?" said Jai tensely, before the Captain could speak.

"Everyone," she said, surprised. "Who else?"

"Teach everyone our language!" said the Captain. "Teach—" and he put his hand on Jai's shoulder, to steady himself, Jai thought, for the hand was trembling. The Captain looked round, at the blue sky (a little

overcast), the trees, fallen twigs in the grass, a flowering weed, the edge of a twin path leading, branching—*They all must go somewhere,* thought Jai.

"Teaching everyone our langauge—that would take—"

"You have books of your own, of course," Jai broke in.

"Why . . . no," said the woman.

"Are you going to duplicate any of ours?" said Jai.

"No . . . No, of course not; we can't," said the woman, moving back. "Of course—we can't. We have not got the—machinery."

"Then you can't teach everyone our language," said Jai, "can you? Only a few people, because you must teach it yourself and you haven't that much time."

"Why—no. That is perfectly logical," said she.

"And yet you will?"

"Ah—we will not," she said, and suddenly dropping the book, she added irrelevantly "It's going to rain," and raced around the escape capsule, to disappear within the forest in seconds.

"What in the name of Everything is going on?" said the Captain. "What? Do you know?"

"Everything," said Jai Vedh.

"Huh?"

"I don't mean I know everything; I know nothing. I mean that everything is going on. No, nothing. I don't know." And he sat down and buried his face in his hands.

"Books!" said the Captain, somewhat more steadily. "Books, *not tapes.* There can't be three dozen in the library, they're that rare. And here they are. Who the devil puts *real books* in an escape capsule?"

"The same person who put you and me in it together," said Jai Vedh.

"Someone in the ship!" exclaimed the Captain.

"No. Yes. Someone here, someone there. The planet itself. That woman. I don't yet know who's running whom."

"You're mad," said the Captain, quite unnecessarily. He climbed inside the capsule and was out a moment later, saying "There's nothing else in there. The webbing, the motors, the usual drugs. Food."

"Can we use it?" said Jai Vedh.

"No, the shell's cracked. Wide open."

"Would it—would it leak air—whatever you call it?"

"An understatement," said the Captain. "The only thing that seals is the door."

"Then," said Jai, "I'm going to sleep behind that door. Live there, rather. And I suggest you do the same."

"You *are* mad," said the Captain solemnly.

"My dear, over-confident friend," said Jai, pointing to the grass, "take a look at that book. You may even pick it up if you like, for I won't touch it. I think I'd go to pieces. It's a Chinese grammar, not Galactica, that's the first thing; and in the second place it's not the new Chinese or even the various intermediate alphabets; it's the good old Mandarin—half a million separate written symbols. That's what our little savage recognized the moment she picked it up!"

"Good God, man, she didn't say they were going to teach everyone Chinese! She only said that it was a grammar and that it was amusing."

"How did she know it was amusing?"

"Because it looked strange, I suppose! For heaven's—"

"How did she know it was a grammar?"

"My boy, even for a civilian you are too—"

"Pick it up."

Then, inside the broken machine, surrounded by white, hard walls, sitting on the padding, the whine of the fluorescents steadying up to their operating level, the tubing and webbing also white—what a blessing! —the Captain whispered, gray, shaking, holding on to the edge of his couch with both big hands:

"How did you know? How did you know?"

"It's my book," said Jai, lying back. "It's my hobby. I've studied it fifteen years; I know about ten thousand words. I brought it along in my personal baggage. The front—that is, the back, of course—is a grammar and the last few pages are selections from the *Chuang Tzu.* It took me six months to learn to read the title page.

"I had it made up especially for myself," he added. "By hand. That's how I know that there's not a word of Galactica in it. Or anything else but Chinese."

It was the Captain who locked the door.

They lay side by side in the narrow place: chests on a level, thighs almost touching from the separate bunks, neither lying quite still, each shifting around a little from time to time. There was hardly room to stand. The one small window was at the Captain's head; Jai could see the Captain's profile against it. Jai was smoking a cigarette, reflectively, one arm under his head. He thought idly:

I wish I knew what it feels like to be a man who loves a woman.

The Captain turned his head to the window like a corpse in hospital; the light was hospital light, or lounge light, or fluorescent bedroom light, the kind that had surrounded both of them since they were born.

Even with this piece of dead bully-beef, I know what

it feels like to be a woman who wants a man. The mischief of it! The viciousness. Like that old film with the hand coming out of the camera: come on, dear, come on, dear, and when you get them close enough, wham them in the teeth. How he'd sweat—terrified!—I could drive him out of here with ten words. Or a touch. If I don't get hot. He's a beautiful man, I could ride him like a toy. Take the other way—work like hell, flare up for five seconds—and then, rolling over, covered with sweat, milky, feed forever and ever amen off the look in the poor bastard's humiliated eyes. And he'd come. I know that.

"May I have a cigarette?" said the Captain.

Tell me about youth camp, twelve years old. Confessions. Protests. Tears. And then come back for more. I itch with the very idea.

If it were worth it.

"De-nicotinized?" said the Captain abruptly, sitting up.

"Yes, if you'll take a light from mine," said Jai Vedh, and the two men sat, knees touching, transferring the fire from one cigarette to the other. Then the Captain swung his legs back on to the bunk and frowned furiously at the ceiling.

"Goddamn egg," said the Captain.

"Small enough," said Jai Vedh. *What do I want with an idiot like that?*

"Goddamn stainless steel egg!" exclaimed the Captain in a sudden fury, hitting the wall and turning over. "Why can't they build the things so a man can stand up in them!"

"Calm down." *I'm not going to commit an assault upon your person, blockhead.*

"I'm going out," and the Captain got up, bent to avoid hitting the ceiling, sat down, put his head in his hands, and lay down again.

"I won't touch you," said Jai tiredly, "not even in your sleep. Calm down," and shutting his eyes, he saw a long procession of women appear in front of him under the fluorescent lights, all naked as the woman had been outside and all the wrong shape: inquiring, secretive, curious, like animals of some other species, so weak that to touch them was to hurt them, so strong that they could kill. They floated up to him and burst over his belly like popped balloons. Pale. Treacherous, Unnatural. Mindless. Soft. Lopsided and shapeless. *I'm old and my own inventions bore me.*

Thunder rumbled outside the hull. The window was growing dark.

"I can't—" said the Captain suddenly, half-audibly, into the wall.

"Can't what?"

"Shut up, mister."

"Can't stay here?" said Jai.

"Shut up, mister!"

"You're hard to please," said Jai dryly. "This morning you nearly raped a woman and now you can't stay in the same cell with me; make up your mind."

"I can stay here alone," said the Captain thickly. "I can throw you out."

"Try it."

"Look, civvy," said the Captain, turning around and half-rising, "look, I've eighty pounds over you and no soft-headed—"

"Is that what you call us now?"

"Get out of here, mister!"

"Is it anger now?" said Jai, doubling into a corner of the bunk, "is it now?" on his feet and ready to spring, bracing himself against the wall, grinning uncontrollably. "Is it?" he said, "is it?

"Or is it my baby-blue eyes?"

As the Captain threw himself forward, as Jai's sandal caught him in the face (steaming on the lights, obscuring the window, darkening the bunks and the walls and the floor), a sheet of water broke into the stainless steel egg, knocking them both down, making the room rock like a cannon. The outside lit up, ultraviolet. The door slammed to, then opened again to the wind and the rain; in the doorway, gleaming with phosphor or rain, stood the woman from outside. She was wearing white ostrich plumes on her head, her breasts, and tied to her feet, and around her wrists and neck something that blurred like diamonds: raindrops shook off in the light. She was wet through and too excited to speak; she jerked her head at Jai, then reached out and caught him by the wrist, pulling him out through the door of the capsule. The Captain lay half-sitting, half-lying against the wall. Rain hit them in the face; he slipped in the wet grass and mud of the outside, and then the sky lit up again. She pulled him farther away from the ship. The noise was deafening. In the following dark he could half see her: sparkles in the blackness and a faint, jingling sound under the pouring rain; he tried to pull away but someone caught his other hand and began pulling him first forward and then back. They were dancing. Another flash of lightning lit the field from horizon to horizon. It was a carnival, an inferno, a Hell's-mouth full of people dancing, a plain of grotesque masks and robes, and all in perfect silence except for

the thunder and the rain. He felt himself thrown from one circle of dancers to the next. As the storm passed, it became lighter; the rain slowed to a torrent and the dancers dropped off one by one, some to lie in the wet and some to roll in it, like dogs. The surface of the lake was pockmarked with falling rain. They stood in mud up to the ankles. He found himself laughing and staggering, with his arms around her, then slid to the ground to roll over in it and sit up, still laughing. He began to weep, senselessly. Next to him was someone in a long, black robe who sat cross-legged, his head thrown back his mouth open, drinking the rain. Thunder walked in the distance. At the margin of the lake, half in and half out of the water, a round dance was trampling the shore into shapelessness, floating bits of grass off it into the water. They had dug a circular trench almost up to their knees: demons, trees, skulls, a naked figure with an elongated head that topped the others by three feet, one man dressed as a bear, another dressed as a woman. They heaved forward, wordlessly, jerked and heaved back. Their eyes seemed to be shut. They stumbled on, heads dragging, holding on to each other's hands, while the rain pelted them, first one way into the lake-water, then *jerk!* staggering back the other way into the ploughed muck of the shore. Pieces of grass stuck to them. They looked exhausted or dead.

Jai Vedh put his hands over his eyes. He wished first to pull the sleeve of the black-robed fakir next to him; then he wanted to go to sleep; then he retched suddenly. He got to his feet, almost helpless with nausea, and began wandering painfully towards home, shivering whenever he passed a line of dancers. Some had fallen out of the dance and were lying on the ground, their cos-

tumes crumpled around them; some on their hands and knees, staring or whispering at nothing. Two were playing cards. He beat on the door of the steel egg until he thought his strength was gone; in a revulsion of feeling he pushed at it and turned around, falling on his knees. He was going to the dancers. A moment later he saw his own shadow on the grass; the flooded field tilted and the doorway of the egg rolled over him; abruptly the sound of the rain stopped.

He was inside. The bedding was dry but still cold. The light blinded him. The Captain's face, inches from his own, was enormous: mouth open like a captive balloon, flesh turned mauve under the fluorescent lights, a lake of fear in each eye. The rain sound came back; the Captain, holding both Jai's hands in his, jumped to a crouch, facing the door. The woman was there.

A *chanteuse* from the old Folies Bérgère, her feet and ankles caked with mud, her ostrich plumes draggled with mud and rain, the diamonds on her wrists, her hair, her throat and her ankles turned into berries or drops of rain or tears. She was dead with fatigue. She hung on the side of the doorway with her dirty arms, her face and breasts pressed against the metal. Her eyes shut. She opened her mouth once or twice, as if to speak, and then the metal door-latch that was welded to the wall began to say in a high, thin, unoiled voice:

Sorry . . . Too tired. Easier to talk directly.

"My God, my God, my God!" moaned the Captain.

My apologies, squeaked the door-latch. The woman clung to the doorway like a fish.

Frontal attack . . . too much stress . . . inconvenience to you . . . try in morning . . . next week . . . next month . . . time cures all things . . . you'll forget.

She began to bend at the knees.

Weech dukkur! screamed the door-latch. *Which ducker! Whach doctor! Witch doctor!*

Psychiatrist, it enunciated clearly.

Good night, it added sensibly, and with this the woman lost her hold, slid out of the ship, and disappeared below the level of the door.

Dimly aware of the terrified man who was holding his hands, Jai Vedh plunged immediately into sleep.

THEY CAME DOWN in the escape capsule the next morning: Jai Vedh safely strapped in and trying to control his air-sickness. Outside the round porthole, the cloud strata streamed by; the ship bucked like a freight elevator. They blasted a crater in the woods and around that a good, flat, rock rim—fused rock and mud with the steam driven out of it. Not even the ashes of the burnt grass remained. They stepped out on to the orange grass under the yellow-leaved trees—it was autumn. The Captain shook hands unaffectedly with the young woman in the simple brown dress who had been delegated to welcome them.

"A lost colony?" he said.

"A lost colony," she said.

"How long does it take the grass to turn this color?" said Jai Vedh (his idle curiosity).

"Months," she said.

They walked past the lake, talking idly about what could happen to a colony in a hundred and fifty years. "I am the community doctor," she said apologetically. There were stone huts on the hill overlooking the lake. The young woman carried nothing and her feet were bare; she climbed the hill with hardened, bare soles, stepping on twigs and pebbles, not even bothering to

pick her way among the rocks. At the first hut she stopped for a moment to show them that there was no door, only a doorway—"because the autumn is so dry," she said. Jai Vedh remarked, looking around:

"I have seen something like this before."

"Oh, no doubt," said she. "It's very old. It was my great-grandmother's."

"I didn't mean—" Jai began.

"We build everything the old way here," she said. "Come in," and stepping after her, they stopped—momentarily blinded—inside the hut. There was a stream running through it and a pile of leaves in one corner. On a flat-topped rock sat an unglazed crockery dish with a wick swimming in yellow water. The only light came from the doorway. She excused herself for a moment, went out the front way, and came back in holding a green apple out in each hand. They had no stems and were flattened, like mangoes; she said impatiently, "Don't stare at me; the germ plasm doesn't change so much in a hundred and fifty years." The Captain, with a questioning glance at Jai, took them both.

"They are not fruit," she said, as he put them down on the rock. "They're plant cancers." She pointed to the dish. "That's oil. We trade that."

"And for heat?" said the Captain.

"It's never cold," she said. "I'll bring you more food when you need it. This is your place now, unless you want to stay out in the open as some of us do. Come on.

"We have no leader," she said. "You'll meet everybody. Come on."

"Young woman," said the Captain.

"I know, I know," she interrupted, suddenly ducking

round the doorway into the sun. "You must go back to your ship and cannibalize the motor for a radio. That's what one always does, isn't it? You have trite ideas." She was swinging by one hand, into visibility and out of it; she added, "If you wait, you know, we'll bring you the equipment *we* came down with."

"Your *what*?" said the Captain.

"Our equipment," she said. "If you work hard, you can make your ship over in six months and not wait the rest of your life for a rescue. You would find that dull, I think."

"And you never rescued yourselves!" said Jai Vedh suddenly. "Because you didn't want to. Am I right?"

"You would guess eggs if you saw the shells," said the woman; "That's a compliment. Come on," and she led them out of the stone hut on to a hillside. The Captain was stumbling in the loose shale at the crown of the hill.

"Doctor," said Jai Vedh, "you're the doctor. Am I sick?"

"Very," said the woman dryly. "In the head. Both of you."

"Then cure me," said Jai Two, the one who noticed, and he watched intently as she sat down cross-legged on the pile of loose rock, as her eyes shut and her head jerked forward. She opened her eyes and got up an instant later.

"I can't," she said matter-of-factly. "This is Olya's house."

"They've gone to hell," said the Captain. "Trances and black magic." She paid no attention.

"Do you hear? You're decadent," said Jai One, who almost agreed.

"I think you are rude," said the woman after a moment's silence, and as they came to "Olya's house," she grabbed him by the wrist and with an ostentatious impoliteness, headed through the doorway.

"By the way," she said in a low voice, "I know what it means to cannibalize; it means to eat something. I heard about that." She seemed to hesitate in the half-dark.

"But tell me, please," she said, "what does it mean exactly—*radio*?"

Olya, the one who spoke Slovenian, was out; so was the one who spoke German and the brothers who spoke Chinese; they had gone somewhere or other to do something and nobody knew when they would be back. "They'll be back sometime," she said. She went from house to house in the heat of the afternoon, always telling them who lived there, and when the houses above the lake all proved to be empty, they followed her down along the shore and up back of the hill. The afternoon got quieter and quieter. An insect or a saw sounded off in the distance. Heat waves rose from the piled shale. Sitting down on it (*for lack of a better torture,* Jai thought sourly), the young woman clasped her hands loosely in her lap, stretched out her bare legs, and stared out over the little valley. Yellow trees stood in ranks down to the shore. Everything in the place was small, from the trees to the paths to the lake itself; it was like looking out over somebody's back yard, and the whole place shivered in the heat as if it were about to disappear, as if it were a painted canvas stretched loosely over something else.

He realized he had been sitting and staring at his

own feet for some time. The heat was making him drowsy. He shook his head and heard, coming along the curve of the lake, a faint *toink-toink* like the call of the Brazilian bird that imitates pebbles being struck together. Nothing moved. The sun's reflection burned stilly on the lake, the shale sweated, the houses stood and made shadows, and then in a blast of light, in a shrill whistle as the fabric of creation ripped from sky to rock, the universe bent in on itself and produced a naked twelve-year-old boy. He was tapping a gourd against a stone and whistling. He came out from behind one of the houses, continuing to whistle tonelessly as he walked up to them.

Toink! and he stopped, gourd lifted in one hand, stone in the other. The woman asked him a question.

He answered expressionlessly in two syllables.

She asked him another question.

He answered the same way.

And another.

He seemed to imitate a cat.

"I am sorry," she said, turning to the men. "He says Olya is out hunting something, he thinks plants, and the Chinese brothers are making pottery. He says he doesn't know where. He says the devil has entered into everyone and driven them all to the four corners of the earth in a relentless rage for novelty, from which only he is exempt, to wander in this deserted village, producing beautiful sounds and listening to the catabolism of the rocks."

"He's quite a poet," said the Captain heavily.

"He thinks he is," said she. "He is very sarcastic. Will you come in, please?"

"What for?" said the Captain, not attempting to rise.

"It's getting hot," she said, and the two of them got up and went into the nearest hut, dislodging fragments of shale that glittered in rivulets in the sun. Jai got up.

"Tell me," he said to the boy, "can you say all that stuff in one word?" Sweat was running down the back of his neck.

"Sure," said the boy.

"You speak Galactica?"

"Sure," said the boy. "Olya has a mole. Black hair. Okay. Sit. Up and down."

Jai made a face. He turned to go but a dry, erratic clattering broke out behind him mixed with a loud, resonant beating of the gourd; he turned back to see the little boy jumping up and down in a wild war-dance on the loose rocks, throwing himself from side to side with his head bobbing and making faces as if he were screaming.

"All right," said Jai Vedh. "I notice you." The boy stopped.

"That's Olya," said the boy. He came closer, suddenly timid, with his head bent down. Without looking at Jai, he put out one finger and touched him gently on the arm; he said "There, there."

"There what?" said Jai, trying to be patient.

"There, there," said the boy soothingly, patting Jai's bare arm. "There, there, there." Jai took a step backwards.

"Where is everyone?" Jai said sharply.

The boy looked unhappy.

"If you're putting something over on us," said Jai, "by God, you'll be sorry!"

The boy shrugged uncomfortably, made a distressed face, and tapped softly on the gourd. He began to shuf-

fle slowly down the hill. Jai stepped forward with what he hoped was a threatening gesture and the boy, whose eyes had unaccountably filled with tears, turned and ran for the nearest trees. A sad *toink-toink* sounded from behind them. *A pre-adolescent Pan with a belly-ache,* thought Jai, running his palm tiredly over the back of his neck. *When I was his age, I didn't bawl.* He pictured the boy, lost in a thicket somewhere and weeping, face pressed to the ground. He forced himself to straighten up and wiped his forehead and his neck. "Lost in this place with a fool military man," he said. He started towards the stone hut, rubbing a muscular spasm that had developed in the back of his neck and wondering whether he would ever see civilization again —or whether he wanted to—when a small, naked girl fled out of the hut and pattered past him down the hill. Another child ran through the doorway and around the back. And another. He broke into a run.

The inside of the hut was full of them.

The chattering stopped as soon as he came in. The place seemed at first to be twice its natural size, but he realized immediately that was because someone had lit the oil-dip and the walls were covered with shadows. The children had frozen in wonder, except for two still kicking in the pile of leaves, but as these came up with leaves on their heads, they too fell quiet. Someone sneezed. A tall woman, a beauty with a glossy black braid around her head and a dark mole on her upper lip, magnificently buxom and with nothing on but a skin skirt tied around her waist, darted after the two children in the leaves, and snatching one under each arm, shot them out the door past Jai Vedh. He heard them screech and giggle behind him. She chased around the room

after the others, hauling one from behind the woman in the brown dress—who was sitting cross-legged near one wall—and another, a staring toddler, away from the Captain, who was holding out a piece of cracker to it. She walloped some of them and threw them out the door. Jai thought of the boy's wild war-dance and his mad faces: that's Olya. Her face was Slavic, her eyes black as pitch, and her manner flashing and peremptory; the last child out the door, she wiped her forehead, then took her big breasts in her hands, and, leaning forward, laid them on the stone table. Next to her the woman in the brown dress was hardly a woman at all. "I'm amazed you didn't hear us come in," said the woman in the brown dress.

"*Evne, Kai Kristos!*" said the other, fanning herself with one hand. She threw a dazzling smile at Jai and the Captain, a smile that bloomed and collapsed instantly. Seeing the cracker still in the Captain's hand, she leaned over the stone and took it from him. She began to nibble at it.

"This is Olya," said the woman in the brown dress.

"That is Evne," said Olya, around the cracker.

"Don't talk with your mouth full," said Evne—the woman in the brown dress—"It's bad manners."

"Why? I smiled, didn't I?" said Olya, perplexed, and then (with a soft exhalation of breath, half *akh!* half sigh) she straightened up, dusted her hands against her hips, and went over to the pile of leaves in the back of the hut. The Captain was watching her. *He wants a bottomless well,* thought Jai Vedh with a shudder. She stuck her hand in and drew something out; coming back to them she knelt and opened her fist to show a

salamander on her palm: plump hand, tapered fingers, turned wrist. The Captain coughed self-consciously—

And there's another, thought Jai, trying to make out the pile of leaves in the bad light.

"I had some emergency rations with me," said the Captain in a low voice, to Jai. "Crackers. Tried to interest the children in them."

"Really, I am not a pet doctor," said Evne, irritated. Olya shrugged, a spectacular sight. The Captain coughed again.

"All right, give it to me," said Evne then, and holding the little beast in her hand, she suddenly collapsed forward, her head on her knees, only the hand holding the salamander still carefully held up in the air. Olya looked on, mildly interested, rubbing the wisps of hair at the back of her neck. The Captain jerked his head towards the doorway of the hut, and after he and Jai had both got up and gone outside, he said—after walking back and forth impatiently several times, blinking in the sunlight—

"God damn it, I don't want to watch two grown women practicing black magic over a frog!"

"Salamander," said Jai automatically.

"Colony women," said the Captain. "Human women. No traditions, no sense, twenty languages. All in a century and a half!"

"They were probably a multi-national group," said Jai.

"Yes," said the Captain, "and so everything went to pot."

By a pot, thought Jai, *do you mean by chance the big woman?*

"They were too lucky," the Captain added, his lips

tightening, "too lucky, civilian. They didn't have to work. While you were gone, I couldn't get a word of sense out of that Evne woman—nobody works, nobody does anything, everything just grows. Where do they get oil? They find it. Where do they get food? They find it. Everything's around for the taking. Nothing's any trouble. The climate's too damn good even. If it rains you get wet, that's all. The Evne woman inherited her dress from her great-grandmother, her house from her great-grandmother, and I suspect whatever slender stock of ideas she may have came from her great-grandmother, too."

"Damned are the lucky," said Jai, "for they shall rot. Is that what you mean?"

"You know what I mean, mister," said the Captain. "Sit a man on his ass with nothing to do but eat and the first thing that goes is his mind. It never fails. This place is rotten through. I was talking to our little doctor while you were outside and the only thing that keeps her patients from dying is that she doesn't have any. And the men are no better. I got the daily gossip about eighteen or nineteen of them. 'What does he do?' 'He's picking wildflowers today.' 'What does he do?' 'He's watching the squirrels.' Jesus Christ! No books, no records, no work, no life! Spending their days comparing the taste of this fruit and that fruit, like the last of the Roman Emperors!"

"Yes . . . yes, you're right," said Jai Vedh helplessly.

"To think of a *man*—" muttered the Captain, and then, "Pray, civilian, just pray that they've got that equipment and that we can use it. I'm going to the ship. I'll meet you there before sundown."

"Yes," said Jai Vedh, and turning aside from the path

down the hill, he walked in among the trees. Too much like a garden, everything smooth. Even the creepers and the ground trash cushiony under your feet. An autumn in dry-point: clear, hot, still. He felt unutterably depressed. Perhaps it was a human garden, an experiment someone was trying, perhaps someone collected children, or men, or bred them for types, or watched with an indulgent chuckle as two pet women knelt over a pet salamander . . .

But language is work, thought Jai. *Language is hard, hard work. I know that. A hundred and fifty years without records or broadcasts and with the best will in the world a colony develops at least a regional accent.*

Here they have no will. And no accent.

And Doctor Evne, with no patients and no medicine, has at the same time a polished, literary style. The catabolism of the rocks. A relentless rage for novelty. The devil drives them . . .

Galactica is my hobby, said something near him or around him or under him. He could not remember where he had heard it before. He could no longer remember what she had said or what she hadn't said. He stood still with his fists clenched, trying to remember everything: the noise the children must have made, going into the hut, for it was impossible—you couldn't shut up toddlers!—and what had the woman Evne said when they first landed, had she said anything or did he only think so? something about how things change in one hundred and fifty years, something commonplace and inexplicable, just as her "black magic" was so commonplace and so inexplicable, no rituals, no emotion, no chanting, no dramatics. Cut-and-dried. *And that little*

boy, he found himself saying to himself, *that sentimental, sarcastic, ultra-sophisticated, poetical little Nero!*

There was a squeaky whistle and the boy himself stepped out from behind a tree, gourdless and stoneless. His hair—reddish-brown like a South American Indian's—hung below his shoulders. It had not been bleached by the sun. The boy himself was only a little tanned. Jai stepped forward and took him by one shoulder.

"Where did you come from?" he said quietly. "Is there a trap door behind that tree?"

The boy said nothing, only looked up (big, innocent, dark eyes) and tried with childish singleness of purpose to pry the fingers off his arm. Jai tightened his grip.

"Is there," said Jai, with a softness whose hatred surprised even himself, "a *city* under that tree?"

The boy said nothing. Jai increased the pressure of his hand until it hurt him but the child's face did not change. Abruptly, Jai let him go. The boy—who was standing ankle-deep in dead leaves—began to rub his shoulder; he gave a yelp of surprise as Jai grabbed one of his feet and pulled it up. Under the foot had been pebbles, stubble, broken twigs; the sole itself was as thick and hard as horn. The boy had never worn shoes in his life.

"Child of nature," said Jai Vedh, half venomously, half dully. "Yes, child of nature. You. Go away."

But the boy did not move. Instead he bent down and picked up a twig. Then he inspected his own soles carefully, one at a time, as if to see what was so interesting about them. He looked puzzled.

"Leave me alone," said Jai simply, and turning, he began to climb towards the path. Halfway there he

heard a rustling behind him. At the path the boy leapt in front of him and planted himself in the same attitude as Jai: right hand clenched, feet spread, knees bent, the twig in his fist, his face an absurd caricature of hate, his teeth showing and his eyes completely crossed.

I am ready to—thought Jai, cursing, *you will drive me to—*

"War!" shrieked the boy wildly. "War! War! War!" (like a parrot) and capering madly around the man, he at length settled at his right side, where he wound his naked arm around Jai's, clasped his hand, and settled his head on Jai's shoulder.

Jai Vedh burst into tears.

Pushing the boy from him, he sat down on the path and gave himself up to it, not gratefully but in hard fits, so that his teeth rattled; he had not given himself up to anything before and he did not want to; he hid his face and dug his fingers into the skin. He felt himself poked in the ribs with a twig and laughed, which made him weep worse until he began to cough. He felt the silky tingle of child's flesh as the boy leaned against him, the hot breath in his ear saying "rah tah tah tah TAH!" and the heels drumming and bouncing on the path. And the bones and elbows. He made himself recover himself. He got up, holding the boy by the hand, and started along the path, with the boy hanging on to his arm the way much smaller children will, and now and then poking at him annoyingly with the twig.

"Look here," said Jai, "stop poking me. And what's your name? I can't call you Nature Baby."

"Nature Baby," said the boy, his face suddenly serene and enigmatical.

"Well, Nature Baby, and how old are you?"

The boy made a sound like steam escaping from a bad valve.

"Mm hm. And how many of you people are there?"

"*Ftun*," said the boy.

"Very informative."

"Sure," said the boy. "*Ftun* is—for number."

"How much number, three?" said Jai. The boy looked at him oddly.

"No," he said (and here he concentrated and seemed to murmur to himself), "it's—it's—" Here he stopped.

"Many many?" said Jai, rising his eyebrows indulgently.

"Yes," said the boy, his face expressionless.

"*Very* many many?"

"Eleven thousand nine hundred and seventy-seven.

"Not large," the boy added carefully, "but optimum. So they tell me." He averted his eyes.

Then he slipped his arm from Jai's and dashed off the path, pausing only to turn around once with a look that might have been imploring and might have been nothing. He disappeared behind the trees. *Fool! Fool!* Jai cried to himself in horror, *You fool!* and ran after him.

But the boy was gone.

Back at the ship the Captain was sitting on the ground with his lap full of small, transparent plastic plates. There was a tangle of silver wire near him and a wire-cutter, but he did not appear to be using these; he was balancing the plates one on top of the other like a house of cards and plugging into their edges jewels,

boxes, rings, little blue cubes. The grass was full of them. When he noticed Jai, he vaulted to his feet, knocking over what he had been doing. The thing fell on to its side: rigid.

"Why do they stick together?" said Jai.

"Pre-formed modules," said the Captain. "Radio." Then he said, "Good God, man, what happened?"

"Prime number," said Jai Vedh, "eleven thousand nine hundred and seventy-seven. Can't be factored." He sat down by the Captain's house of cards: winking, flashing, lost, fabricated in a place so far away it didn't even show up in the night sky from Earth. The thing was lying on its side in the grass with the transparent plastic plates showing various roughnesses within, structures of wire, ceramic bases, striations, dots. He said: "It's not a round number."

"Are you cracking again, mister?" said the Captain.

"No. It's not a round number. Not in our decimal system, obviously. Not in the duodecimal system. I tried everything up to nineteen. It won't factor. I think it's a prime number."

"Mister—" began the Captain.

"It's the number of people on this planet. It's not a round number. It's prime. It's a large number. The names for numbers like that are long, very long. For the round numbers we say: one hundred, ten million, nine thousand; that's short. But not a prime, not a big prime, you can't say that in one syllable."

"And?"

"Eleven thousand, nine hundred and seventy-seven is *Ftun*. I give you my own, improper, accented version. One syllable. What is eleven thousand, nine hundred and seventy-eight? Or four million, two hundred thous-

and, three hundred and eighteen? I leave it to your imagination."

"You believe," said the Captain, "whatever any damn fool tells you," and he sat down again and began to work again on the radio.

"I don't believe in that number," said Jai, "and I don't believe in the population. But I believe in that word. I believe the boy was translating from one number system to another, and I try, I try very hard, military man, to conceive a language in which every number up to more than ten thousand has its own, separate name."

"And?" said the Captain.

"I think this colony is much more than a hundred and fifty years old. And I think that thing you're making is going to broadcast about as well as a Christmas tree."

"Why, civilian?" said the Captain, laughing.

"Because they don't want us to leave. They don't want anyone to know."

"Know?" said the Captain. "Know what? We'll leave. By Christmas." He looked up, grinning. "By Christmas, civilian. The three hundred and fifty ninth day of the three hundredth year. A.B. After Beginning. Or bomb, as they say. Put it into six calendars: Mohammedan, Jewish, Indian, Gregorian? And every little settlement that doesn't take Earth time. But still Christmas." He grinned even wider. "Only two syllables, eh? Like *ftun*," and he burst out laughing all over again.

"You stupid, stupid bastard!" said Jai Vedh, leaning over the radio. "You stupid, smug bastard, can't you see—"

"Take your hands off that," said the Captain, in a surprisingly emotional voice. "Don't touch that." He got to his feet and moved the radio to one side with his

foot. "And don't be so impressed, mister, with—*little boys.*"

Jai hit him, as he had been taught (for he had many hobbies), solidly under the jaw, snapping the man's head back. The Captain staggered. He lunged at Jai and Jai helped him over on to his back, wrenching his arm for good measure. He watched the big man get up, wishing he himself were not in sandals; his feet slipped in the thongs and something, some chronic humiliation, weighed on him, hurt him, made him slow. He couldn't take his eyes off the Captain's boots. Now that the first round was over. The Captain was circling carefully, face very serious, shuffling in the leaves, crushing them, crushing the grass. *Now God help me!* thought Jai.

You're the best student I've had but you'll never win a real fight . . .

He woke, excruciatingly nauseated, lying on his side and seeing two of everything. Someone, kneeling over the Captain, seemed to be beating the hell out of him with one of his own boots. He shut his eyes again. When he opened them he saw two faces above him that moved together and jumped apart, blurred, lengthened as if in a bad mirror, tried to fuse. The pain in his head was unbearable. "Shut your eyes," said the voice. He tried to talk. The two Hottentots, with their twin pale-brown faces, their flat noses, their identical black beards, both put out a hand, both spoke, "Shut your eyes," and the hands came down, one on top of another, on his eyes. The pain began to go away. His nausea ebbed. He could feel the hand moving over the side of his head. "All right," said the voice quietly, "you're all right. Open your eyes," and Jai Vedh opened them to see one face—

with its aggressively jutting beard and eyes like balls of pitch—inches from his own. A hard, thin, Negro face and all business. *Carnivore,* thought Jai Vedh. The man's lips twitched. "Sit up," he said, "but be slow," and he helped Jai to manage it. He was wearing, and not as if it were fanciful, a monk's black robe. A few yards off, the Captain lay sprawled on the ground, his face bloated and bloody, snoring as if asleep. One of his boots lay near him, the top tied in a knot.

"You were hitting him," said Jai Vedh.

"Yes," said the other calmly. "He made me angry. He kicked you in the head. That man is a cesspool," and helping Jai to his feet, he went over and knelt next to the Captain. The Captain sighed and muttered something in his sleep. His limbs straightened. From across the clearing a woman came walking; it was Olya in her skin skirt; the man in the monk's robe rose, and stepping over the Captain's body, met her half-way. It seemed to Jai for a moment that Olya's skirt dropped to the ground, that the man's robe melted away, that he had wound his arms strongly around her and was crushing with his teeth the nipple of her prima donna breast, while she, cradling his head in her arms, rolled up her eyes, bent backward, shivered amorously, swooned. The vision passed as soon as it had come. The couple, arms around each other's waists but otherwise behaving with complete propriety, were standing in front of Jai Vedh.

"How do you feel?" said the man.

"I— Shaky," said Jai.

"He should sleep," said Olya, with kind interest, "and wake up in time for the play, yes?"

The man nodded. "Sleep," he said. He nodded towards the Captain. "I've put him under for at least four

hours. We will see you tonight." And they walked across the clearing and into the woods. Jai lay down, very tired. He could not find the place on his head which had been hurt. He looked across the grass at the Captain, who had begun to snore, then at the trees, then turned on his back and looked into the sky. He felt his head again but couldn't find the place. He thought of Olya. As he began to drift off, Olya—in his dream—came to lie down beside him, dressed only in her long hair. She stretched out her arms and opened her knees, offering to him all her Russian beauty: her sparkling black eyes, her hair, her teeth, her strong arms and belly, and all that temperament between shoulder and thigh.

Go away, he said. *You know what I am.*

I know better, said dream-Olya, embracing him, and grabbing her by the long, tangled hair, he spread her out and plunged into her as into a storm-cloud, terrified, sweating, overwhelmed, suffocated by Olya, gripped in frightful spasms of pleasure as she grew to the size of a giantess, a mountain goddess, with the fatal lightning of the heights playing around her and killing trees right and left.

Why, Olya, he said, *you have a black mole over your lip.*

That is not I! she answered in her strange, slightly hysterical contralto, a dark voice with a light swoop on the top. *No—ah! oh!—that is my friend, Evne!*

And for a moment before he slept, the woman who received the climax of his pleasure was Evne: delicate, flushed, dim-eyed and shivering, with his lips laid against the black mole above her mouth.

My dear, she said. *Oh my dear, my dear.*

He woke shortly before sunset, and feeling that he deserved some mild recompense for having been kicked in the head, dragged off the Captain's other boot and fed both of them to the ship's disposal unit. He woke the Captain by kicking him in the side.

"What? What?" cried the Captain, sitting up convulsively. There were faint marks on his face and his upper lip was swollen. He blinked as the setting sun shone directly into his eyes, put up one hand to shield them, and finally focused his gaze on Jai Vedh.

"Uh . . . we had a fight," he said.

"Yes. We did that," said Jai dryly.

"Sorry," said the Captain. "Sorry. You—forgive?" and lumbering to his feet, he blinked around the clearing. The sun was almost at the foot of the tree-trunks. Pieces of the broken radio lay glinting in the blood-colored grass; blue cubes had turned black in the red evening light. With a movement of his shoulders that was half a tic and half a shudder, the Captain made for the scattered parts and began to gather them up. He sat down in the grass and addressed himself again to the task of sticking one piece to another.

"We're not in the trade lanes," said Jai quietly. "Don't waste your time."

The Captain said nothing.

"They're going to imprison you," said Jai carefully. "For study." He leaned over the man. "*They told me.*" Still nothing. The Christmas tree grew slowly out of the red grass: crystalline, metallic, flashing like a jewel in the last gleams of the setting sun.

"That's beautiful," said Jai. The Captain looked up, surprised and gratified. He smiled. "Yes, it's lovely," he said, "it's very lovely, isn't it?" and he bent back down,

like an ape over a needle. He adjusted a metal ring and felt blindly in the grass among the loose plastic plates. Jai Vedh kicked off his sandals, and slinging them over his shoulder by the thongs, began walking towards the edge of the clearing. He turned at the edge of the forest to see the radio, like an improbable parlor trick, grown higher than the Captain's head. The Captain was reaching up to place something on it. From somewhere in the forest came the sleepy good-night call of a bird. The first time. There were rustling noises in the underbrush. Shadows stretched across the clearing.

He's worshipping it, thought Jai, and barefoot in the warm evening air, his sandals slapping his back lightly as he walked, he turned into the darkness between the trees.

He saw no one until the moon came out. He wandered through the woods in the dark for a while, not worrying about treading on something, or putting his foot in a hole and breaking his neck, or walking into a tree; and none of these things happened. He went down to the lake for a while and sat there because the water took its colors from the evening sky and it was lighter in the open. A fat planet appeared low in the West in the afterglow, and began moving swiftly across the sky in the wrong direction; he thought it must be the signal satellite their lifeboat had come in by. It made him think, oddly and affectionately, of a fat, running cat—no natural celestial object could be that plump or that fast or that wrong-headed, spinning so low above the atmosphere with the invisible sun reflecting off its bottom side. The thing faded as it went

higher and the real stars came out. He watched their reflections in the water. It got very dark. The stars were much denser and much brighter than those he was used to. He got up abruptly, sensing some visual confusion at his back; for a moment he saw nothing but more darkness, and then a kind of faint aurora at the horizon. He thought: *there's going to be a moon.* He had often seen the moon from Old Earth. Not knowing why, he got up and began walking around the lake, then into the woods and up a hill, guiding himself by the auroral glow. The stars were extremely brilliant now, like pearls. The lake looked like their seedbed. No wonder the ancients spent so much time watching the night sky! He had heard of tropical stars. Bending down, picking up a pebble, he held it up to the sky to watch the light on it, then held it down near the grass, watching it roll away downhill until it faded into the ground. He heard it click lightly against something long after he could no longer see it. He could see his own feet clearly. And the shadows of the tree-trunks. The stars, oppressive now to a city-dweller, hung silently blazing over his head, so thick that he could pick out every detail in his own hands, on the ground, in the twigs of trees fifteen feet away. He remembered: *bright enough to read by.* The auroral glow still covered only one quarter of the sky. He parted the tree-branches ahead of him like a veil, walked out into a clearing, through the trees, into another, and so by a succession of rooms, ever lighter and lighter, into a sort of natural amphitheatre he could have sworn he had not seen during the day. The walls were massive and quicksilver, ready to topple. The last stars turned into pinheads and disappeared. The sky, cloudless from horizon to horizon, was a pale, deep, regular blue.

Ahead of him, as if under theatrical lighting, the wall of the amphitheatre solidified; the grass covering it suspected orange, hinted at orange, caught the first oozings of the ghostliest color, while his own hands and arms changed under his very eyes, assuming more and more the color of life until he could just be certain of it, just be certain of everything, although all of it remained strangely confused, strangely mercurial, everything overlaid with a theatrical shine. Something down at the bottom of the amphitheatre caught the light and flashed it brilliantly; he turned to see the source and there above the tops of the trees swam something broad and deep, now a globe, now a flat sheet of white, now a globe again. The moon had come up and it was full.

It was larger than the moon he was used to, and it seemed so very much larger that for a moment it gave him vertigo. He thought he could see clouds in its own atmosphere around it. He thought he could see continents. He thought he was going to fall into it. He knew at about what distance from his eye he could cover Earth's moon with his hand and tried it with this one: closer. A few more degrees of arc. Twice? He thought: *You numskull, you wouldn't know a degree of arc if it bit you.* Then he saw that there was someone in the amphitheatre, not twenty yards away, and waved, feeling relieved; there was no answering sign but someone else moved on the edge of his field of vision, and someone else, and someone else, and more and more other people as if they had been statues until that moment, as if they had remained invisibly still until the moon came out, hiding in the uncertainty of the

light, and as if they had all decided to move at the same time. There was not a sound in the place.

He thought, *They walked in while I was staring at the sky like a fool,* and knew that he was wrong.

At the bottom of the amphitheatre there was a gout of flame, which quickly disappeared; then a natural exclamation of some kind, and a giggle, and a few vehement whispers. Somebody backed away from the knot of people at the bottom, nursing his hand. People were walking in from all sides, sitting down, changing positions, traversing the slopes, people shifting seats, people coming in from the woods more every moment, people stepping over people, some lying down. It was a gigantic picnic, a theatre crowd, a May Day parade, a holiday colonial party outing with skins of every shade from moonlit pink to moonlit black and no sound of conversation whatsoever.

An old man next to Jai, skinny and stubble-chinned with white hair reaching to his shoulders, was eating plums off the tunic pulled over his knees. He was picking them from his knees and sucking them noisily. Jai put one hand on his shoulder.

"Can you tell me—" said Jai.

He never got to finish his sentence. As if the words or the touch contained some energizing vision or were some fantastic dare, the old man leapt to his feet and threw himself down the slope—end over end like a diver, and all of it in the air. At the bottom of the theatre he continued the motion, springing around the level circle in backward somersaults: regular, dead-faced, conscientious. Little flames sprang up at his heels. He made the circuit of the theatre some dozens of times, each time exactly the same, and then—as if the strength he had

been using had suddenly deserted him—modulated into the trembling and graceful movements of old age. He lifted one foot uncertainly and put it down; then the other; he spread his wavering arms and turned around slowly; he bent with great difficulty first to one side and then to the other. The whole place sighed. Jai felt tears in his eyes. Placing one hand against the back of his neck for support, the old man dropped his head forward and stretched it back; shaking with effort, he kneeled down and got up, and then without the slightest look at anyone, walked to the side of the amphitheatre to where someone helped him sit down.

Then someone else began to sing. It was topographical music, music built from a table of random numbers, as full of unexpected stops as if the speaker were giving a demonstration of a contour map. It was impossible to tell the age or sex of the singer. Near the end of the music, the singer went up to the top of his or her range and screamed there violently for several minutes, but the voice came down finally with an exquisitely seductive intonation into the realms of human possibility, and ended very prosaically with a kind of blat.

Then nothing happened for thirty minutes.

Then the colors in the amphitheatre began to go bad slightly as if somebody were tuning a film; this went on for some time while the air in the place seemed to blow a little hot or a little cold; twice Jai felt a change of pressure in his ears. The people on either side of him swayed lightly in their seats, first down, then up; he thought it was community dancing until he felt the blood rush to his head. The walls of the amphitheatre tilted steeply up while all the crowd fell forward, fell back, threads of laughter running through it, the am-

phitheatre deepening into a tube while the people fell down and flattening as the people fell up: most of it imagination, he knew, not nearly as bad as a fast elevator, the merest mild playfulness with the planet's gravitational field. Community dancing. He thought he was going to throw up. His neighbors on either side tried to link arms with him and he twisted aside; he had a vision of himself out in space, curled like a fetus and attached to the planet with a string, whirling like a toy. Did the children ever . . . Awful to treat a human . . . Child's play. Something was systematically elongating and foreshortening his heart. The wall of the amphitheatre gave a lurch and turned abruptly to the right, becoming the side of a cliff; he shouted *That's enough!* clinging to the grass and trying to crawl up it or down it *You bastards!* while the hill shifted instantaneously under him. He was vaguely aware that the earth had settled and that he was continuing it himself with his rage and panic but it did not stop until he got to the trees. There was some sort of violent discussion going on behind him. Perhaps, he thought, they would have a comedy now, a dancer pretending that she was not levitating herself but that it was all honest effort, like a woman in a farce who doesn't know that the back of her dress has been torn off. Telepathy. Telekinesis. Teleportation. Telehallucination. Telecontrol. Teleperception. Telecide? He thought:

Everyone's watching me.

I must get back to the ship.

He was standing among the fringes of the woods, trying to strap his sandals on one-handedly, with the other hand clasped idiotically around his head to prevent his thoughts from leaking out, when somebody's

hot hand grabbed his, and looking down, he saw a small girl of nine or ten holding on to him and looking up into his face. She was very like Evne, with long, dark hair, wearing only a fancy headdress made out of a tucked kerchief. She said:

"Mister, stay?"

He said nothing, finishing his sandals and pulling himself away. She held on to his sleeve and followed him into the woods, and after a while he slowed down, seeing that she was stumbling.

"Please?" said the little girl.

Jai Vedh thought thoughts of murder.

"I can talk," said the little girl. There was a moment's silence.

"Actually," she continued with sudden fluency, "it's because they're *grown-ups*. *Grown-ups* are *horrid*. They say 'Oh, he'll be all right.' They haven't the slightest *compassion*. This is because they can whatchamacallit. I can't whatchamacallit because I'm nine. I can talk, however, as you see. Now *you* say something."

"Telepath," said Jai Vedh automatically.

"No," said the little girl. "Talk, not telepath. Say 'how do you do.'

"Oh my hat, my hat!" she cried in sudden exasperation, and clutching it and tearing it off her head, she threw herself down on the grass and burst into tears.

"I'm missing the Baby Parade!" wailed the child.

"The *what!*"

"The Baby Parade," she sniffled. "Everything big has to end with a Baby Parade. The grown-ups don't like it but the babies do; we like to show ourselves off.

"You're a baby until you're pubescent," she added.

"Good God!" said Jai, between horror and laughter.

There was another moment of silence.

"Actually," said the girl coldly, "it is *all your fault.* You were in such an emotional disorder that it gave me a headache. I simply *had* to follow you. And now I'm going to *miss—I*" and she kicked her headdress savagely away.

"My name," said Jai solemnly, "is Jai Vedh. Then we do what's called 'shaking hands.' " He put his out. She held out hers.

"Up and down?" she said. "How very interesting. I am Evne's daughter, my name is Evniki, that means little Evne and I am parthenogenetic.

"I am not haploid, however," said Evniki, picking up her toque and slamming it back on her head. "I have complete genetic material. I'm a duplicate, self-fertilized. Talking is my hobby, especially Galactica, just like my mother. I have a heterozygous brother and sister, but they won't be born for ten years yet. They're only fertilized eggs. They're in Limbo. Mother is a genetic surgeon."

She got to her feet.

"While you gather your thoughts," she said, dusting herself off, "I will tell you more. I am nine and can feed myself, so I don't live with anyone. I cannot notice thoughts, of course, because I am nine, but I can read feelings and move about and tell where people are and so forth. Anyone can do that. If the infants could actually *do* anything, we'd all be murdered in our beds.

"I'm nine," she went on pedantically, "but actually I'm fifteen. I've slowed myself down. That's called 'dragging your feet.' Mother keeps telling me 'Evniki, don't drag your feet,' but catch *me* hurrying into it! I want

to get the good of it. Of course I have to let myself grow up before I become a permanent dwarf, you know, but I think I'll wait another year before I take the plunge. I wish to develop intellectually. This is the way you do it. Although it's getting pretty boring, actually; the other nineses are so dull, you can't imagine, and nobody else will speak to me. That's why I talk my head off. Besides, I am very verbal. I think I will go into the verbal arts and be considered esoteric. Do you feel more settled now?"

"Yes," said Jai, surprising himself.

"Good," said Evniki, "you're better than the other one. You laugh and cry and get over things. Are you even more settled *now*?"

"Evniki, if you know how much I'm settled, why do you *ask* me how much I'm settled!"

"Because I love to talk and to keep in touch," said the child, smiling a dim, thoughtful, un-nine-ish smile. She pressed herself against his side. "Nobody talks," she said; "The grown-ups hardly even have names," and she slid one arm around his neck and looked at him soulfully.

"Are all the children in this place afflicted with twining creeperism?" said Jai dryly, trying to detach her from him. She slid back in under his hands, bending around them.

"Don't you," she cooed, half her face hidden by a fold of her hat, "*like* little girls?"

"Good God, no!" said Jai, exasperated.

"Oh, every man does," said Evniki, rubbing her knee against his. "And every little girl likes men. Nobody would be surprised. You can't push me away or you'll hurt me. Mother knows, too. Actually she's jealous. I

can feel it. Right now. Mother is mad as anything. We detest each other."

"Stop it, Evniki," said Jai severely. "Just because I'm laughing—"

"You're not laughing," said Evniki softly. "You forget; I can tell." Her face changed. "You're stirring," she said dreamily. "I can feel it, it's so good. I'm wavering in and out of your mind. I'm turning into dozens of people. Now it's coming on."

"Evniki, don't tease—"

"It's really happening," said the child unnoticing, as if in a trance. "How amazing! Really happening! You think I am dozens of people. And anything will draw you, anything, because you are so shut up. Not like other men. You think I'm a handsome child. Now I'm beginning to glow in your mind, all over, like a reed, like a candle, oh make me glow, I love to watch myself glow . . ."

"Evne," whispered Jai in horror, "if I were to take you right now—"

"Evne," murmured the little girl, gliding out of his reach, "is my *mother's* name! Faithless man!" and she disappeared into the woods.

The moon had gone down; the light between the trees was beginning to fail. Above, the unnatural sky. He knelt with his head in his hands. The night, entering its fifth or sixth phase, crept in between the tree-trunks over the living-room carpet of the grass: new insect noises, stridulations, a sudden patter of blows, repeated creaks in the shrubbery like the creakings of a door. Someone, somewhere, was directing all this past him. Someone—miles away—in the dark—saw Jai Vedh as if Jai Vedh were the focus of all the search-lights in all the theatres

of all the performances on Earth; someone talking to someone else (miles away, in the dark) skillfully, absent-mindedly kept the dangers of the night away from Jai Vedh, possibly playing a game of chess at the same time. The adults (he thought) were gods and the children heartless. He lay down. In the dark a daisy at the foot of the nearest tree, without ceasing to be a daisy, began to take on the unmistakable aura of Evne, an attitude so acutely familiar that he leapt to his feet and tore a branch from the tree itself, prepared to defend his life. He said:

"This is not you! This is a metaphor my mind is making up to account for the things you put in my head!"

The daisy went back to being a plant.

He lay down and went to sleep, finally, because he was no safer there than anywhere else, and in his dream the daisy (which did not in fact have the proper leaves for a *bellis perennis*) hovered over his head like a vampire, silent, unstoppable. And told him everything.

Olya, who had just finished walloping and throwing out one of the children who hung around her like some kind of plague, was kneeling, dipping her hands in the inside stream and arranging her hair; Jai had his back to one of the inside corners of the stone hut and the Captain's sedation rifle across his knees, and the Captain—who had not been able to get it back since he had missed it when he woke up that morning—was lounging on the flat-topped rock with a guilty and embarrassed smile. The morning sun coming through the door made everything seem preposterous.

"Infants," said Jai tightly, shifting his grip on the rifle,

"cannot do anything because if they did we'd all be murdered in our beds. By nine one can read feelings and control one's own glandular secretions to slow one's own growth. One can locate people then and move around instantaneously but not read thoughts, for one still talks. Grown-ups can do everything. Grown-ups can do it so well that they hardly talk at all."

Olya wiped her hands on her skirt, arching at Jai Vedh her very fine eyebrows.

"*I* not talk?" she said in astonishment.

"No," said Jai Vedh. "You are well past adolescence. It develops in adolescence. It allows you to know where everyone is, what everyone is thinking and feeling. Everyone else knows what you are thinking and feeling. You can transport yourself from place to place instantaneously, you can levitate, you can perceive and manipulate objects at a distance, from what size I don't know but it goes down to the microscopic—no, the sub-microscopic—size. And I think you can perceive everything directly: mass, charge, anything. And you play with them. You play with the wavelength of light.

". . . and with gravity . . ." he added. His hands were cold. She flashed a smile at the Captain and held out her hand, gaily, but Jai was already on his feet.

"I play with lights?" said Olya, puzzled a little but still smiling. "I play with gravity? I don't have a ship. I don't have colored lights, yes?"

"I don't think," said Jai carefully, settling into his corner, "that any teleport would care to materialize inside a stone wall."

"Tcha!" said Olya, annoyed, shrugging her shoulders.

"I've been hearing this," said the Captain between his teeth, "since—"

"A little plant told me," said Jai, and he addressed to her one unspoken question, too strong for words, that could be summarized as: *HOW MUCH?*

"Do I have machines?" said Olya angrily. "Do I have metal things? Do I have lights? Do I—"

He hit her with the butt of the rifle.

He felt a furious resistance in it as if she were pulling at it or trying to turn it aside and then his own feet suddenly went completely from under him, but the blow went home all the same and caught her on the side of the head; she fell over and lay still. He had to trip the Captain and fire a slug into him. He watched intently, not daring to help, as she opened her eyes; from under her hair there was a trickle of blood which stopped much too soon, and a momentary sagging of her face as the blood—and the smear of dirt around it from the stone floor—disappeared. Olya said faintly:

"I can do this, please. It is not serious."

"Forgive me, forgive me—" began Jai. "Oh, no, no," she said politely. The muscles of her face collapsed again. He watched her so long that he jumped with nervousness when she came out of it; she sat up briskly, dusting her hands together and directing at the Captain (who was slumped against the flat rock with his head hanging) a look of unmistakable amusement. Then she coughed into her fist and patted herself on the throat with a proprietary air; she beamed at him, settled her skirt under her and announced with condescension:

"Your little plant told you that we cannot think of so many things at once, eh?"

"You're a teacher," said Jai. "Aren't you?"

"Ah yes, yes," Olya mused. "That is true. We cannot think of so many things. We cannot think so fast. I

myself can only travel a mile in one—hop. Is it hop?"

"It'll do," said Jai.

"You must forgive me," she said severely, drumming her fingers on her knee. "I forget, so I take it from your mind. In one hop. If I were good, three miles. Chuang Tzu speaks of *ming*, generalized internal perception; this is *ming*. You and I are like the ivy plant and the squirrel, this is an old fable, the squirrel on the branch runs down to where the branches join and up again, but the ivy plant, which is bound to the branch, cannot see where the squirrel went and says: 'How did you get from here to there instantaneously? How did you move a nutshell from here to there instantaneously?' The squirrel explains. The ivy plant says 'Branch? What are you talking about, "branch"? There is no "branch"; there is no "down"; there is only this.' So. We go below this—this part—reach the join and come up the other side. We see everything, we do everything. There are many joins, deeper and deeper; one sits, one shuts the eyes, one lies down, one goes into a coma. You see?"

"Yes," said Jai Vedh. "Yes, yes, oh lord God!"

"It's not so much," said Olya, shrugging. "After all, you have traveled much farther and faster than I have, Jai Vedh, haven't you? And you people do more. Except for the traveling it's just the same: I call unaided as far as I can with my voice, not much more, I cannot lift unaided what I cannot lift with my body, roughly this is true." She cleared her throat again. "And the medicine, too, you have that. So it is not so good, eh?"

"I would give my right arm—!" he burst out.

"Pooh, Jai Vedh! For what? For sculpturing air? Of course not. To share thoughts? It's very dull!" and she shrugged in clumsy, exaggerated unconcern.

To share thoughts, he said, *yes. And you people are not very practiced at hiding them, by the way.* He realized with a queer, electric thrill that he had not spoken at all. Olya had tilted her head, as if listening for something; her eyes were out of focus and her lips wide; she looked frightened and perplexed. *Like a pane of glass,* he thought. "Glass!" cried Olya, startled, not looking at him, "What is glass?" and swiftly rising to her feet, she went to the stupefied Captain and began shaking him as if in irritation.

"Windows," said Jai helplessly. "Would you mind tell—" but as he tried to cross the small, indoor stream, a brown apparition appeared sitting in it, naked, spare, bearded, smiling, the Hottentot of the previous day. He had one arm around his knees and was smoking a cigarette.

"How do you do?" he said politely. "I suppose we ought to shake hands, but my brother is taking your cigarettes away from the children. They are eating them. I will put a geas on your possessions or you will have nothing left. A geas, man, a piseog, a charm, a spell, a—an electrostatic charge, more or less. For the children."

Standing, also naked, almost the color of milk, blue-eyed and blond, a younger man appeared at the edge of the stream.

"My brother," said the first. He grinned wickedly. "I will call myself Joseph K and he will be Franz. You have a well-stocked mind. We like you," and as the two brothers shook hands solemnly with each other, something almost imperceptible passed between them and Olya (although her back was turned), a lightning flash that had circled the stone walls almost before Jai was

aware of it, the most complicated communication he had ever met in his life; he put his hands over his ears and shut his eyes.

"Cut it out!" he shouted.

There was absolute silence. When he opened his eyes the two men had gone. There was a line of wet footprints leading out the door, sophisticated and archaic footprints like the painted handprints found on rocks in Australia on Old Earth, handprints that might have been made by a dawn woman like Evne, a placid little woman with God knew what superhuman intentions behind that simple face. It was people like Olya (he thought) who were common. He wished to hell common Olya would put her arms around him and make him ten years old. He needed earplugs. No, mindplugs. He turned around. Olya, unbearably kittenish, was fending off the Captain with little giggles and tiny motions of her hands. She screamed gaily as he tried to kiss her on the neck. "You!" shouted Jai. The Captain recovered himself, letting go of the woman—reddening and furious—and strode over to Jai, taking hold of the rifle with both hands so that the two of them stood face to face like partners in a ballet, each holding on rigidly and neither moving. The Captain said:

"Mister, you keep your goddamn snot to yourself!"

Slowly, one foot braced behind him, Jai was taking the rifle away from him; a film seemed to pass over the Captain's eyes. Then he said, chuckling:

"No need to fight, mister. No need at all."

Jai wrested the rifle from the man's hands. The Captain did not appear to notice.

"Yes," he said, "lucky I thought of coming here. Lucky

that I noticed certain things. Civilian, these people are telepathic."

Jai stared.

"Degenerate, though," said the Captain. "It's too perfect that way, you know. Too easy," and he brushed past into the opening of the stone hut, stooped under the doorway, and was gone. Jai turned to look at Olya —common Olya—who watched him with the intent look of the old manageress who used to keep the family business in some out-of-the-way parts of the Earth, who kept the books and sat at the cash register and let nothing in heaven or hell get past her.

Did you do that? he asked. Her face softened a little. In her eyes was just a touch of the brown man's wit, that immense, secret amusement at the good joke, the one joke, the only joke.

"Akh! I only gave him a little nudge," said Olya carelessly. "He was glad of an excuse." She sighed. She pulled on to her skin skirt a pile of the green plant cancers like loaves of flat bread; making a tsk-ing sound with her tongue and teeth, she began breaking the things across her knees. He brought up the rifle and pointed it at her. He stood so for a few moments, watching her, and wondering why his fear had turned to sadness, why he ached so. He tilted the dart capsules into his hand: Christmas beads a tenth-of-an-inch long planted on continuous ribbon. *Destroy these,* he said. They vanished. "You have only stopped a fight," he said aloud. "I ought to be grateful to you." *Closed to me. Forever closed to me.* Olya looked up brightly from her work.

"Not," she said pedantically, one forefinger raised as if to emphasize her point, "necessarily."

He was outside before it occurred to him that he had never learned how to unload a sedation rifle.

In the mornings the Captain jury-rigged a testing device and put it around the heads of the adults until the adults excused themselves on the grounds of business; the children at first liked to have patches of their hair shaved off and the electrodes taped to their skulls with emergency bandage, but they rapidly got tired of it. Some disappeared from underneath the device itself. The Captain (who had gotten no results from his improvised experiments) then planned a series of exploratory trips but was seriously frustrated by his distrust of the native foods; then one day Olya turned up, beaming, "to explain things," and Jai took discreetly to the brush.

For the first two days he was bored and met no one. On the third day, now sure that he was being watched, he began to eat whatever intruded itself on his notice (berries, bark, plant galls, grass), to remain still for long periods of time, to fall asleep in the afternoon. Something kept him doubling back close to the lake, as he suspected it kept most of the children. On the fifth day he waded into the lake and swam out, diving down to pull reeds from the bottom; through the curtain of plants and fine dirt he had stirred up someone darted in and away: adult, adolescent, fish, merman or Watcher of Strangers. He had begun to talk to himself. He towed the reeds to shore and made a flute with the blade of the Men's Traveling Manicure Set that he still kept in one of his pockets. He picked the hinge of it apart with his teeth and nails and scattered the parts

on a wet rock; when he looked up the rock was dry and every implement but the blade was missing.

He attempted to play on the flute and somebody came and took it away from him. He fell asleep. He did not get sunburned.

On the evening of the eighth day, with the paths into the woods about the lake very prominent in the slanted evening light, Jai Vedh realized that he was surrounded by people. He had been doing nothing all day. A sleek, wet head like a seal's appeared across the lake, towing a trail of ripples, there was a jump in his visual field like a missed heartbeat, and then people were moving on the hills, out from behind the trees, children with their feet in the water, a group of women wringing water out of their hair, couples going up the paths, some in a trance, none touching. Except for a loud, gossipy hum from the children's section, everyone was quiet. *Keep still, keep still,* he said to himself. Like an illustration in an anthropology textbook the naked women put up their hair; the babies played and pushed each other into the water with screams; the couples turned to each other their composed, unhuman faces. A baby was catapulted backwards out of the lake and on to the land, where it started to crawl about, absorbed. He reminded himself that telepaths have no use for facial expression: for frowns, for winks, for looks, for nods and becks and wreathed smiles or signs in general.

Joseph K, grinning like the devil, appeared in front of him, naked. "So you finally decided to notice us!" said Joseph K triumphantly.

"I have been stalking you," said Jai with lazy dignity. "Like wild animals." Joseph K roared with laughter.

"Winning our trust?" he said, and abruptly his face changed. For a moment he had no expression at all. Then he threw his arms around Jai and kissed him vigorously on both cheeks. There were tears standing in his eyes.

"Welcome," he said. "Welcome, welcome, twenty times welcome!"

Several minutes after the black man had disappeared, Jai—panic-stricken, trembling, suddenly cold with sweat—threw one arm violently across his face as if to ward off a blow. The feeling passed. A vagrant drift of air wrapped itself around him and then slipped off, leaving behind it the vaguest of vague impressions, which he could not quite form into words. The lake rippled evenly in the sunset. He had been loved, and he still lived. It was a miracle.

He forgot about it.

In the mornings the Captain went on exploratory tours; in the evenings he came back. Jai saw him do it. The man also wrote, by the light of the oil dip in Olya's cabin, a journal of his discoveries, which Jai saw him at also: the ogre writing painfully and meticulously while behind his back little children flashed silently into and out of existence, disappearing into his shadow, the bolder ones touching him (but only just), flickering through the cabin like bats or spirits. A civilized man, the Captain had had little practice at writing by hand. He did not believe in the doctoring of a woman that he had seen, as Jai knew, but he believed in telepathy and telekinesis. For some reason he believed that teleportation was impossible. He said to Jai, "They say you are able

to see some things yourself. Is this true? Are you picking some things up mentally?"

"I don't know," said Jai. "It's hard to distinguish from feelings and fantasies. I think so, but I think not." He added:

"There's this first, that it's a matter of paying attention. In the right way, they say. It's not hereditary. They always talk about paying attention. Myself, I think it's direct perception of mass. If mass is energy, that means everything. They attend exclusively, as in hypnotism; then you go down to where the subjective and the objective meet. Then you can do anything, you see? There's no inside; there's no outside. Mass affects space-time instantaneously and at a distance. This is all instantaneous and at a distance. You have to learn it, grow up where everything makes you pay attention in the right way, to the right things. You have to start as a child. I think with other people around you. You have to be taught. It's a skill. It's tied to the body; there's something about the limits of the body; you can't do more than a certain thing. Or a kind of thing. There isn't much—if you look at it—there isn't much they can do that we can't do. In another way. Except know each other."

"They can put thoughts in people's minds, mister," said the Captain, still writing.

"So can you," said Jai. "Why do you write in this abominable light and not in the ship? To avoid hurting Olya's feelings?" The Captain looked up. The plastic pen shivered in his fingers.

"If I want to, I can keep the book of my mind shut!" he said vehemently.

"How? When you are the book," said Jai.

"Just remember," answered the other man, "that the radio is still sending. Just remember that," and he bent again to his work. Through the hut passed a middle-aged man leading a little girl by the hand, both naked. They disappeared before they reached the far wall of the hut.

People like Olya, said Jai interestedly. *This place has pleasant associations. It's some kind of terminus. Did it ever occur to you that they can see not only your body but also your internal organs? Do you think of that often? How does it make you feel?*

But the other man was deaf. It was not the first time Jai had forgotten to speak out loud.

It was from Evne (whom he had not seen for weeks) that he learned about the existence of a library, and with Evne that he went there. They walked; it took them several weeks. He understood that the country was to change as they went through it, and that for those who wanted there was snow, cold, mountains, even the sea; going from the lake was going out of doors. The idea of the sea came to him several days out, in the middle of rolling hills studded with what looked like gooseberry bushes, and he sat down to think about it, Evne trailing around him over the springy ground-cover, running her fingers through the bushes and then putting her hands to her mouth, again and again. She was eating. She had discarded her dress when they set out. He started to get up, cross-legged, and she pulled strongly at his hands but slipped and pitched forward over him. With no change in her face. He pulled them both to their feet. She gave him perpetually handfuls of things to eat: whitish-green things with fuzz, slightly

crushed, slightly damp; and she watched him gravely while he ate them. But the gravity was not a human gravity. Her skull bulged above the brows; her spine twisted like a ladder; where any self-respecting animal has a facial expression she had a trance, an intent vacancy, an idiocy of contemplation; and her feet were deformed hands, horribly thickened, with the fingers reduced to stubs, Two days more and he grabbed her by the hair: *"Talk!"*

She screamed in alarm and began to cry. She laid her head against his chest and sobbed. She put her arms around his neck and patted him on the head, patted him on the shoulders, on the face; she kissed his shirt; she cried uncontrollably and began to hiccough; then she pushed him angrily in the chest and kicked his foot. "Hold your goddamn breath!" shouted Jai.

I know (traveled from the edge of her mouth to her cheekbones to the bridge of her nose to one eye) *how to —!— cure —!— this —!—*

"Hold your breath!" (shaking her) "And talk! Talk! Talk!"

"No!" screamed Evne. "Can't! Forgot!" and she flung herself away into the bushes and the heather, rolling over and over, then tearing things up and hitting her knees with her fists, and finally—with a kind of return to sanity—deliberately and vehemently beating her head against the ground. Jai felt pain in his temples until his head rang. He shut his eyes. He remembered, years ago, seeing someone waked up suddenly and powerfully by the electrical amplification of his brain waves. Perhaps, he thought, it was not good form to talk in this part of the country. Perhaps it was taboo. Perhaps, for a telepath, it was very difficult. Where the subjective and

the objective came together, even the grass might have thoughts, a huge mass of vegetable thoughts; he saw before him the endless surges of a land-locked sea, heaving with life, bound down to the massive core of the planet, a heavy, heavy organism rolling one foot on to the land and rolling back, liquid rock, complaining in its sleep.

"There is no taboo," said a voice next his ear. "There is no good form. It is very difficult. Look," and opening his eyes he saw Evne, a little flushed, standing next to him. She took his arm. Her palm was moist. She pointed —with difficulty—looking at her own hand to make sure she was doing it properly. The grass rolled to the horizon, whispering and light, feathery around their ankles, concealing small things that chirped, rustles, movements, insects hopping high for a moment into the sun, then back into the little world. The sky was pale and enormous. *If one lost one's soul into this,* he thought, *it would fade out in a great fan, into vapor, right out of one's breast. One could spread oneself pretty thin in this country.*

"Evne," he said, "take my hand. I intend to lose my soul, like you."

"Plants do have thoughts," she said, "and the hills too. They do. They do."

The ground was covered with old names: sweet heather, alyssum, verdigris on the stones, wheat, heated flat stones at midday. A broken column once. The sun stirred it all up. It would be hot and still in the trough between waves, the smells very strong, small white blossoms giving off a choking cloud of scent like face powder, parching and heavily sweet; then up into the

sweating, tickling side of the hill and at the top some air to take it all away. Rings and brooches in the night sky, vibrating a little in the morning like the afterimage of seasickness. Green grapes with whitish threads and a bottom frill, veined red globes. Sticks and grassheads. Handfuls of cotton batting wound around bushes. A green lizard ran away, afraid of being eaten, then ran back, climbed over Jai's feet, up his knee; clutched there changing colors and blowing out the bubble at its throat, climbed down, and ran away. Birds exploded out of the grass in the distance, once three at a time, once a whole flight at sunset, making against the sky a long calligraphic word. To the south, very far to the south, the smell of lions. There was no water. The trunks of bushes sometimes bulged and broke, letting out a wave, a heavy wave, a slow, gelatinous wave that could be taken into the hands and poured. He stripped and wet his chest, his genitals, his armpits, his head, and his beard. A jumping insect rose into the sky, floated to its zenith, stopped, glittered, flashed, and waving lazily, descended into the grass. Evne, who smelled like Evne, smiled like Evne, her eyes drawing her up into the sky. It was the same light, crystallized and turned about. She swam through the long afternoon, leaning on his hand; breathing, moving, sweating. Her hair flowed. Her lashes rose and descended lazily. The pull from his head to his feet, along a turned neck, his curved arm, down the back and the back of the knees: up the hill. Plunging on bended knees: down the hill. "Biblioteca," said Evne. "Bibliothèque. Grave. Bookworms," and suddenly she crumpled to her knees. Something snapped underfoot and an insect whizzed by. Jai's head was ringing. He took her hands and pulled her up; the

long column of their own odor that had stood behind them, winding over the hills, whipped around them, behind them, and vanished. The wind began to blow steadily. Below them the land, that had rolled itself up and up like a heavy sea, flooded out into sand, into flats, scrub, yellow rock—and off in the distance a circle of stones, red shadows beginning to lengthen in the sunlight.

"The Henge," said Jai.

The sand hurt their feet. Evne made a face like an animal. Jai shivered. He could not remember when he'd taken off his clothes. He felt like putting both hands over his genitals. He turned suspiciously aside to avoid the nearest boulder (it was as tall as he was) but Evne was shuffling up to it with her eyes sleepily shut—she was walking into it—Jai grabbed her shoulder and was pitched head over heels, while Evne whirled round and round the rock in a violent wind, backwards.

Henge magic! someone cried out satirically. *Wicked, vicious henge magic! And me with no trousers.*

He sat up; there was dust on his knees. The floor, with his footprints on it, was white marble and a little dusty; the ceiling was a plain dome, the walls white with openings half-way up; the whole place looked like a gymnasium.

There were racks upon racks upon racks of books.

He picked one up and discovered that the shelves were stone also, built into the floor, and that the book drooped limply over his hand, like a membrane. His fingers left, on the page, black marks that faded slowly; apparently the thing was heat-sensitive. He found he couldn't tear it. Breathing on it clouded the pages. He could not read it, of course, but he drew his finger

vividly under one line, underlining (though possibly not in the right direction) in a black storm-cloud; then when the texture grew unpleasant, he put it down.

Silent, satirical cheers from behind the rack. Evne was there, moving invisibly. The next book rattled like dry leaves: incised, golden metal through and through. The pages couldn't even be bent. He compared the characters with those in the first, and put the second down. The third and fourth were also engraved on metal, the fifth had drawings that he could not make out at all, then a sixth, seventh and eighth like the first, which he was reluctant to touch. The ninth book appeared to be a collection of anatomical sketches and cross-sections; the binding cracked loudly as he opened the book, and the open page said to him in a whisper:

Everyone understands a picture.

He gave it to know that this was not entirely true.

But take you, for instance, said the page in a soft, flattering voice. *You—*

He shut the book. Opened again to the same page, it at once began, softly, *Everyone understands a picture,* and he shut it and put it under his arm. It was a machine. It had not, of course, spoken in words. He checked down the rest of the rack as best he could, although many of the shelves were above his head, finding nothing else that spoke, or that looked like a grammar or a schoolbook. The metallic books were very light, the membraneous ones very heavy. He did not ununderstand how metallic tissue could take such deep incising. A few racks later, near the floor and against the wall, he ran into a hodge-podge of talking books, a miscellaneous whispering gallery, each radiating different degrees of fascination and expectancy, but each

simpler than the last, too, so it came to him finally that these were children's books. They said:

Oh, you are nice!
Let's have fun together.
You can play this game.
You're smart.
I like you.

He carried as many as he could. He tried to think of the words for them, or what they were good for, but he couldn't; and coming around the last rack where the membraneous books were piled up like collected fungi, he saw the door, shut, with a bar passing through two metal brackets in the wall, and next to it Evne sitting on the floor. She had crossed her legs and was reading a book, which lay limply in the junction of her ankles, like water.

He said:

He said then:

He dropped the books and said:

She was watching him intently, shrinking a little, her eyes on her book, her fingers grasping the edge of it. A black stain spread on to the page. He shouted. He made a megaphone of his hands. He bent over with his head between his knees and howled, trying to force the word out, to fill up his head. From the long trip. What's *a long trip*? Everything was slowing down again. Evne threw her book aside, alarmed, but he made her stay out of it; he turned his back on her and there was the library, shelves upon shelves of language. The sun came in through the windows on the language, the different language, there was dust on the floor, white walls, and on the language. The shelves swarmed with sound. Even these people. For what?

"Technical matters," he said, without turning round. "You need words for technical matters, Evne." The word, thus taken up, struck all the books dead, pushed back the walls and killed the ceiling; it put things in their place. Like a spring under sand, words flooded his mind, sank, remained a little damp, vanished, and flooded again. He made himself go back and forth several times. He felt Evne sigh. She had settled back into the mists of her childhood, something to do with the book she was reading, something to do with the pleasant memories here. She liked the gymnasium. She turned the damp leaf of her book. He sat down beside her, holding at the same moment and with considerable effort both the worlds: to know everything and be able to say nothing and to have all the sayings and not one thing to say. They welled into each other. Two liquids. And not mix. He put his head on her shoulder, groaning with tiredness. Evne closed the book, leaving fingermarks on it. She raised her eyebrows; she looked frightened or surprised. She then pointed first to the membrane books and then to the metal books, saying with a little nudge:

"These are grown, those are made."

"What's the matter?" said Jai.

She got to her feet in one movement, uncrossed her ankles, and began to move stealthily down the aisle of books, swaying like a snake trying to walk on its tail. She said "Umm" evasively and looked over her shoulder with a weak, idiotic smile; she looked uncomfortable and unpleasant, as if she were being polite. When he followed her and took hold of her by the waist, she politely disengaged herself; she pushed him in the stomach with her book. The touch of it nauseated him.

"That's dead skin," he said, "throw it away," and taking her by the wrists, forced her to drop it. She smiled worriedly. He walked forward automatically, making her back up until she backed into one of the book racks; it then occurred to him to bend her back over one of the shelves and see if perhaps they could make a go of it if he went quickly enough. He began talking very fast, his teeth on edge; he pushed her down into the books, trying to get one knee between her legs, and still holding her by both wrists, put one arm across her neck to force her to bend. She turned her face away. Unable to enter her without losing his balance, he half-came, half-didn't against her belly, the hard local knot between his legs loosening reluctantly in a series of minor shocks. He was trembling with unspent excitement. Evne, her face flushed and indecisive, leaned against the shelf and fingered her back. She turned and walked away from him, rubbing it. He thought he saw her appear between the books in her brown dress and then again naked. She looked thoughtful and pained. She stopped and looked back at him, then walked on, stopped and looked back again, arching her back, her eyelids drooping.

Excitement, discomfort, he thought. *Like a mirror.*

"I want to go out," she said in a small voice.

Piling books into her arms; they vanished and she held out her arms obediently for more, sending them on, too (so the floor advised him). Her female submissiveness like the LaBrea tar pits. And his own smell, very strong.

"Go on!" said Jai Vedh.

She opened the door, backed out, and disappeared. Taking one last look around at her childhood gymnasium

and library, white and dusty like someone's dream of Greek architecture made prosaic, he bent under the lintel of the door, watching the high walls vanish and turn back to boulders, the floor into sand. The rocky ground was fiery from the day's heat of the sun. He followed Evne, who was wandering into the grassy hills; he took hold of her forearm.

"Lie down."

She stood obstinately still.

"I'm not going to be eaten alive," he said. "I'm not going to spend the rest of the week walking with my knees bowed as if I had rickets. I think you're as crazy as I am; I think you'd copulate with a goat. Lie down."

She smirked at him.

Furious, he kicked her feet out from under her and fell on top of her, careful to protect himself from her knees. Yellow grass-heads closed over him; she was lying on crushed grass; an inquisitive ant walked over his knuckles and into the jungle. *Plants have thoughts,* she said, and the plants nodded and sighed and bowed. A subversive intention, born in the basalt layer miles below them, broke surface into the earth, flooded through the grass, through her, into him; tears started from under her closed eyelids and she whispered *Aren't you scared?* and kissed him, a dab on the point of the jaw.

He said, "It's all this goddamned nature. It's making me do it."

But aren't you? she said, *aren't you?* moving stealthily beneath him, sliding her arms around his neck. *I'm like you. I came here when I was two, by accident. I'm vicious. Aren't you afraid?*

I'm going to die, he said, and in order to prolong his death and his terror, caressed her until he couldn't see,

until the continent under him swelled and closed around him, entangled him, dragged him into the swamps. He was terrified all over, in his hands and his feet, his joints, his belly; there were vultures over his head. The swamp crooned over him, licked him, sucked at him; of his own free will he dove into it and ploughed it, hammered it, ruined himself, gathered himself together to run headfirst into a stone wall, groaning with pain, and stumbling past, doubled up on the ground, gigantically squeezed, pulled out of shape like a topological map, fed into a series of long-distance explosions too deep for human hearing, where the disturbed earth rains slowly and majestically down for miles, rattling his teeth. He relaxed only at the very last, and the last was soft, quite soft, *like* (he thought) *being mauled to death with pillows.* Just a bit of a bruise but very nice, very proper: sweet and hot. The offending member quite weightless. He cursed himself, cursed Evne, cursed his prick which was a digging tool for loosening all the muck in his mind; he rolled over and shuddered, laughed, tried to cry, thought: *You're a fool.*

Evne sat on him and yanked at his ears. He laughed again.

"I'm no longer a virgin," he said.

"Some repertoire for a virgin!" She made a face. He saw clearly somewhere in the back of her mind a lake whose dirt and algae, loosened twice a year, rose, turned over at the surface and drifted to shore. He said "Don't moralize." She pulled his hair. She put her tongue in his ear and whispered:

"I want to do it again. Lie back."

"Can't."

Can. Don't men ever cry? she added, poking him.
He cried for a lifetime and came twice.

Afterwards they were embarrassed and walked over the hills separately, he remembering too well where he had learned some of the things in his repertoire. The climb was hot and uncomfortable. High cirrus clouds appeared toward evening, streaks from north to south like vapor trails, and lasted into the sunset; in one of the hollows they came upon a black, dwarfed thorn tree that was covered with green buds; these tasted fresh and bitter. They slept at the foot of the tree, huddling together until dawn, waking to fog and rain. Evne followed her nose across the hills, dripping, immodestly naked, reminding him of a civilized, naked person getting cleaned. From time to time he tentatively put his arms around her, nipped her a little where she was sleek and wet; and with her eyes shut, she sighed comfortably. Every bush rang, chimed, nodded. Everything they ate was flavored with cold water. By noon the ground had become boggy and Jai's skin was numb from the repeated light blows of the rain; the mist had begun to slant across the hills in drifts and opening curtains, and the grass was bending in billows, half weighted, half beaten down. He persuaded her to stop under another dwarf tree that still had most of its leaves, although there was not much shelter, and took hold of her, coaxed her, talked softly to her, made her giggle with his nonsense, and thrust himself into her, twisting on the wet grass to keep from slipping. He forgot who she was. He came to with a woman under him, his organ tamed and domesticated inside her. A woman's face next to his. He could not remember his own name. She

was shivering in the rain and all goose-pimples, so he rolled off her and helped her to her feet, putting his arms around her. Her breasts poked him and her knees dug into his; they rocked back and forth clumsily, they were dancing, he muttering he didn't know what and she: *Jai Vedh Jai Vedh Jai Vedh Jai.* He kissed the top of her head, which had pieces of grass sticking on it. He thought of taking the long way home, he thought of days and nights, he thought of lots of copulation. He thought through her eyes of the ways they could take, of the hills rippling down into sand, into pebbles, into pebbly beaches dotted with gigantic boulders standing in the shallow water, mussels growing on the seaward side, the ones below the water open and the ones above the water shut. And the sun going down over immense tidal flats, it stretches for miles, flaming litter of shells, seaweed, colorless shore-grass, dead jellies, salt, rotten wood, the low-tide stench. You copulate as the moon comes out of the sea, the huge moon three times the size of Earth's; the salt stings; there is the beautiful, horrible vertigo.

Evne turned white, turned into a stone woman.

Some information, emphatic but inexplicable, about the relation of a (complex) to a (complex) to a (complex) shot at him out of the Northwest, crossed the sky, and disappeared below the Southeastern horizon.

She said:

"It's your radio. They've come."

It took them two days to get back to the village. So crowded with messages it sagged (her face). Heavy and bullying. Intent as a trained pig. The second day: walk according to invisible interesections, turn around, head the other way, stop (expressionless), poke the

woman and she doesn't move, like an old stone; the old idea come back, *If this is an animated compass, who's moving it?*

"I'm *thinking*," replies Evne in the voice of a golem. "I love you," she croaks. She wheels about, heads in another direction; one arm (alive) tremblingly pleads with him, walks itself up his arm into his armpit and nests there in great fear of the world outside, cozily snoozing, singing We two, We two. They went into new country, gullies choked with scrub, elderberry bushes, things that whipped back into their bodies and faces. Evne talked to herself in a series of unintelligible nasalities like those of the drowned, bubbles like a corpse's voice. "Don't be alarmed," she says in a voice of scraped lead and walks into a bees' nest; no one was stung. There were heaps of shale, beads like black belladonna shining and nodding in the woods, things that scratched and things that bit, thorns on some. There was a streambed cut into clayey soil, hung with tangling vines, familiar patches of shale that slipped when stepped on, white-stemmed trees that looked like ghosts. It was, he believed, *Adventure Country.* It was, he thought, *The Back Yard.* Several miles from the village Evniki rocketed from the woods, spared them one dumb, anguished glance, and vanished like a snuffed wick. She left behind her the idea of a long house, a very long house, stood on end. A year-old baby boy was levitated, sitting, across the path and between the trees, swiftly and smoothly as if drawn on a string. He wore a bead necklace and was absorbed in playing with some pebbles on his lap. He gathered speed as he went. A male fourteen-year-old flickered in front of them, dodged (admiring glance at Jai's beard) and was

gone. The female golem of Jai Vedh, who was covered with scratches, bruises, and dried blood, and who staggered instead of walked, here gave a terrible, loud groan and fell on the ground. He held her head in his lap until she recovered, not knowing what else to do. He himself was smarting in a dozen places. She opened her eyes, said "Oh, lord" in a weak voice and shut them again; he saw her wounds close and new pink ribbons of skin extrude from the breaks, flattening out as his own pains eased. Someone was doing the same for him. The grass got softer. He hauled protesting Evne to her feet: *you're as bad as your daughter,* and said, in answer to her unspoken question, "It's the little one, a ferry, The Big One's in orbit," glancing up as he spoke (she glanced up, too) though he saw nothing but the tops of the trees. They held hands as they walked. The lake lay on his right, unseen and heavy, rocking unequally in its clay basin; he could feel it like a cold stain all over his right side. Someone shot through and surfaced, leaving agitated ripples. Trouble, worry and doubt, a menace to all the senses, beat on him steadily from in front, from the ferry parked in the village at the end of the path, giving him an ache in his chest; there were five men there, standing in the scorched clearing. Unaware and unconcerned, in superb postures of casual pride, they walked about glowing with the glamor of the children's excitement, stepping on the dead ash as if it were the palm of the hand of the adult community, which might suddenly close on them and of which they were also unaware. They were being picked bone from bone as they walked around; they grinned and their vitals were instantaneously transfixed by crooked electric bolts of thought; they strolled around with these

things sticking out of them. It was highly comic. He parted the burned branches for Evne at the edge of the clearing and he felt the ash rain down on her skin; through her eyes he saw himself streaming, transpiring, circulating, giving off atoms into the air; then with a convulsive effort he was looking through the eyes of the five men at five mad mannequins, each smeared with sweat and ash, each in a slightly different position (five separate snapshots of the same thing) and each with a beard gone wild like an exploded haystack. His fool's luck and his beginner's luck held as he met the eyes of the lead man; he saw the five insane uniforms get scared, he watched the sympathetic nervous systems fire off (one was a little quicker than the rest). The men with the stun guns smiled ingratiatingly, wrinkling the corners of their eyes. One put out his hand. Jai Vedh's beginner's luck told him that the Captain was inside the ferry, sweating to get away. He was constipated. He was on his knees. He had told the men everything. All the villagers within ten miles were *Sieg Heil*-ing him. The man who had put out his hand now advanced one foot in front of the other also, and when Jai Vedh drew back from this unaccountable paralysis, the deaf madman only drew up the corners of his eyes further and remained in this position, like a nervous and smiling dog. Eventually Jai shook his hand.

I'll kill you, you crazy sonofabitch, I'll kill you! cried the madman fearfully.

"Speak slowly," said Jai. Behind him Evne was fabricating a dress from the atoms of the air, pulling it on with her teeth, so to speak. There was a jolt of male fear in the clearing, then a vague ease. The five men forgot and relaxed. The one who had shaken hands

blinked, grinned tolerantly, and lounged back, folding his arms.

"Well, you certainly have gone native and that's a fact," said the man humorously.

"Yes, I have," said Jai

"Welcome back," said the man.

Bomb them from the air! cried the Captain, praying on his knees. *Wipe them out! Peril to decent people!*

"It's nice to be back," said Jai.

The man shot him.

3

THE BIG ONE was obviously one of those epoxy-and-metal eggs produced by itself—the Platonic Idea of a pebble turned inside out, born of a computer and aspiring towards the condition of Mechanical Opera. It was a big, discreet, muffled luxury liner. Jai felt towards it a recklessness that scared him; he knew how to foul up the life-support system and deform navigation, and it was only strength of character that kept him sane in the blind halls, walking barefoot on carpets (on the walls, on the ceiling), feeling the slow, hissing pressure of the air outflow from the private rooms. The Big One was economical, unlike cargo ships, which are collections of girders like the exploded views of fruits. The Big One was (modestly) a globe. He had attacks of wishing to get outside it and cling to the skin, so the thing's vanity might be satisfied by being seen from the outside; it was unnatural to make a beautiful outside for no one. It seemed to him unlikely, if he could feel so clearly in the interstices of his jaw the pressures around him (the air, the massive fiber shell, the abrupt slippage into near-nothing shot through with gleams of extraordinary and fascinating particles) that he could not—once there—do something about them. He did not want to go home. He had always, somewhere on the

back of his neck, a feeling for where they had come from. Carefully, thoughtfully one day, out of curiosity, he lifted from a guard some yards away a handarm with a tight beam and attacked the outermost wall with it, resin boiling away in a rush of happily lightened molecules, the very, very limited awareness of inanimate matter, so soothing and lovely. Far out, so far that he could make out no detail, was the twist-in-space of the nearest sun. This coincided with a blurred point of heat. The center of The Big One was wine: spices, dried matter, congeners. Eleven floors below the center, with boxes and barrels packed above their heads, officers discussed with a sober Captain the military uses of the think-folk, to study, to duplicate, to betray. *We've got to.* There had been days and days of this. Floating with his chin on his knees, Jai kept firing into the wall in a ragged circle. The air was getting even more lively in the compartment because of the heat. Many floors below (or above) the Captain was saying, "I didn't like it there. It's not in my nature. Is that my fault? It's not in nature!" when, with an inaudible whistle, the air found a tiny fissure in the circle and streamed outward, cooling down instantly almost to stupefaction. Jai's ears hurt. He concentrated on keeping himself together and keeping air around him. He continued to fire. With his eyes shut, he saw the violent transfer of matter from the inside to the outside, and the ragged circle sail out into nothing with majestic slowness. As if from a great distance up (or down) he saw a crumb thrown from the surface of a little toy globe, and a puff of vapor like a tiny bomb blast, like one of the moves in the game of "Destruction" he had played years ago with his sister on a two-foot globe of the world.

A slightly hysterical adult joke. The air did not want to go all one way. Matter was willful out here. Contracting into the fetal position, drawing in all the heat and all the air he could, Jai Vedh (barefoot and almost naked) felt for the lines that twisted and tangled past The Big One, lines and directions not in nature—no, in nature—that lumped up back there where he thought he wanted to go. Everything, he thought, had to turn into lines, even the molecules of air, everything could be expressed in lines, even The Big One itself, hills and valleys, like someone fiddling with a quill pen on a scratchboard. There were lines on lines. He couldn't tell one from the other. They sharpened themselves on his skin and veered off. Getting confused, and feeling vaguely that he was both cold and probably suffocating, he picked out the heaviest, the steepest glide; and stopping (by some instinct) before he hit the midmost knot, opened his eyes to find himself spread-eagled in the space between two enormous plastic tanks of dried wine, which slowly tumbled (or did not) above and below him (or below and above him) in the low-temperature, airless hold. This time it was hard to concentrate. There were no lines on anything, or everything was too massive; there was no way to get out. Far, far above him the officers were talking. Even farther the ship ended; dimly he could feel the sudden drop from atmosphere into nothing. He shut his eyes again, suffocating acutely. A safety device of some sort (jury-rigged: intentions left all over it) lay out that way; if he could—

could get into some air without getting into a wall—or water—

Safest would be just below the ship's skin. He con-

centrated, as he had when levitating the handarm. Nothing happened. *Not far enough down the tree,* he thought. *Don't panic.* And his suffocation dimming, bodily senses disappearing, felt again for the lines in everything, this time up the curve, but fell (*down the gravity well,* he thought, *into the tanks*), got shoved—good and hard—from below, and stopped just after a quirk that someone had told him was a wall. Up on the sensory level his body was oaring its sides up and down like a stranded fish. He drifted up, curious about the warmth, curious about the smells and the softness, clung a little to the shapes above him and popped through the surface, his legs on someone's bed and his arms around the luggage container that snapped to a magnetic lock on the wall. The room was pink. He was still panting rapidly, blessed oxygen, and the luggage container was beginning to press into his chest; The Big One seemed to be going into spin. If he had still been in the cargo hold, of course, he would have been both asphyxiated and crushed. Not that it mattered. He thought, *It can't be teleportation; it's too damned slow. Two minues at least. Time to get out of breath.*

"Sunday driver," said someone behind him. He scrambled over. A middle-aged man, big, fat and bald, zipping up the front of a brocade coverall, flesh in sloppy creases but very powerful, and holding between his teeth one of Jai Vedh's cigarettes in somebody else's jeweled cigarette holder. He held up his hands, covered with finger-rings. "Jewels, too," he said. "Stoopid!" he added, making pop-eyes. He flipped Jai's upper body on to the bed; infrared lights in the curved wall came on. "Baby," said the man, "when you can tell human sperm from starfish sperm by density—and nothing else

—you try that stuff again, but until then you leave it alone, see?" and grinning widely he answered Jai's unspoken thought by peeling from his face a thin, flexible, colored mask (cigarette holder and all) which showed his face underneath to be exactly the same (cigarette holder and all). He had started on a second thin, flexible, colored mask when Evne appeared behind him and whacked him on the back, not kindly. "Put your faces on and go home," she said.

"Barbarously naked," said the other, "in this civilized place, you slut."

"Get!" said Evne, pushing him toward the wall, where he disappeared. "Practical joker!" she shouted. "Can't tell a visual from a moron! Go home!"

A visual is an eye person. Not that you are one any more. There, that was a good insult: out loud. They're the ones that count. He saved your life, you know. He was the one on duty at the time.

"I know, but I have—a keen—intellectual—regret—" gasped Jai, with as much voice as he could muster. "How'd you get here?" he added in sudden amazement. Her eyes narrowed.

By on duty, she said, (*not that you asked*) *I mean a small corps of friends and relations. That one I can't stand, though.*

And I got here, she added, *because eleven thousand people . . . pushed me.*

At first she tried on all the clothes in the clothes-closet (good up to 2.5 G) and then she wanted to make love. She lay on the bed with Jai, cooing and "kissing the frostbite" while he tried to tell her about the Captain's daily conversations. She would only laugh. They

had gotten pretty cozy—though it was hard for him, he noticed, very hard among these sterile and abominable people, flashes of whose thoughts kept intruding into the room, very hard and maybe impossible for her as well as for him in this room whose occupant's fashionable personality was deposited all over the walls. There was more anxiety in the bed in particular than he dared to cope with. The luggage container was a good second. He sat up, sweating, and Evne backed off: a sly, terrified, uncontrollable smile; she bolted into the closet. He could feel her stepping delicately and restlessly around the things inside. He pressed his palms against the sliding panel, so as to be nearer her skin, and then his whole body; he said *Evne, come out, come out,* while kissing the sliding panel.

I don't like it here—a ghostly radiation from behind the clothes.

If you're an ambassador, (said Jai reasonably) *then you have to come out whether you like it or not.*

I'm a victim.

"Evne," he whispered aloud, "the owner is coming," and as the ship reached its prearranged position, was destroyed and instantly re-created, stretched along its vertical axis three or four thousand times its own length, reduced along its horizontal axis to nothing (but this was only mechanics and didn't even interest Evne), at that time, far away—then coming closer—tip-tapping through the corridors of The Big One, winding about, having taken an elevator, having gone swimming, having something something: a strongly proprietary attitude toward this particular room. She had milk-blue eyes, cropped straw hair, a butcher's smock, and spiked sandals. She had enormous breasts, two wells of silicone

jelly, enormous buttocks, a faked, crowded waist, dyed eyes, dyed hair, and no uterus. Jai forced himself to concentrate on the unaltered parts that interlaced with the rest, the pearly organs that budded around her lungs and in her abdomen, lacy strips of flesh marking repeated surgical scars, some normal circulation left; you could, after all, think of her as the victim of a bad accident.

Evne came out of the closet, saying aloud (in her preoccupation) "What, is this clothing?" hidden under a nightfall of jet beads that fell from a crown on her head, everything hidden but her arms, which she waved uncertainly back and forth, stumbling over the ends of the beads. She said, "How do they see?"

"They don't," said Jai Two. "It shows off the arms. You're supposed to be guided." *Worse since I left,* said Jai One, shaken. Evne sent a flick of attention into the corridor and froze; Jai One and Jai Two embraced her, absorbing her odor for comfort. The owner of the room was now close enough to nauseate him; her sandal-spikes dug microscopic holes in the corridor; these, he supposed, were for holding on in low gravity. The owner of the room stopped outside, palmed the door for identification. There were lines of artificially reinforced tissue under each breast, to hold it up.

"You can't have too much of a good thing," said Jai.

Evne threw up.

There was, in the room, a vacuum-and-ultrasonic cleaner into which he held her, then laid her on the bed without her clothes and lay next to her, looking over her bent head at the door. *Evne is cursing, Evne is raging,* he said. She made a loud and miserable sound. The sliding panel to the room opened, and he put his

arms around Evne, confronting the lady who owned the room as one half of a naked couple on her bed. It occurred to him that he had never met any of the passengers before. He had been kept out of their way, in the wrong places, at the wrong times. He hadn't tried to, or cared to, meet them. The woman with the bleached eyes stepped into the room, her bags bulging ahead of her; her eyesight had been at first deteriorated and then partly restored; her expression didn't change; she slid shut the panel door and walked over to the bed, putting one hand on Evne's rump and one on Jai's genitals. She pushed Evne, saying in a tiny, feeble voice, "Go on. Why don't you go on?" Jai decided to do nothing. She smiled encouragingly, a little brighter because there were people in her room. Near the luggage container there was a slot in the wall; she inserted her hands into this slot and they came out covered with rings: elaborate things, they did not look lasting to him. She reached in and pulled out many more things: necklaces, bracelets, toe-rings, clips, fingernail-shields, nose-rings, gilt for her eyes, jewels that stuck to her skin. She took off her smock and put jewels on her nipples. She giggled—"Club members!" Jai stared. She pulled out from the wall (her hands were small and awkward) an elaborate seat like an old bicycle seat surrounded with a jungle of metal pipes. There was a horn in the middle of the seat; she fitted herself on to it gingerly and said apologetically in her tiny voice (had something happened to her vocal cords?):

"Well, go on. It's spontaneous, isn't it?" She stretched forward and rested her cheek on the framework. "It's real, isn't it?" she said. "You're not implanted, are you? You mean it, don't you?"

"We use drugs," said Jai, out of a sudden memory of long, very long ago. He thought he had forgotten about it. The woman's face clouded over. "Oh, that's too bad," she said, and she fiddled with something behind her ear. *A control?* Jai thought. She looked disappointed. "It's nice to have visitors," she said finally. "Thank you. Please start up. You can be sure I'll watch you all through because my eye reflexes have been altered. No trouble there. Beat her up, please," and spreading her fingers over a bar in the metal framework, with a polite smile to hide her disappointment, she commenced pressing herself heavily against the metal tangle. Earnestly. Determinedly. Resignedly. Working hard. A slight glaze on her face. It would be shocking to laugh. Evne sat straight up on the bed, purely vindictive; the heroic exercises were taking the lady of the house up and down now (though without much sucess); "Go on!" she shouted impatiently. "What are you waiting for?" Evne merely drew her knees under her chin and stared. The woman began, "Don't look at me, for goodness' sakes; *I'm* supposed to look at *you—*" but a phantom man, the bare idea of a handsome, faceless man, formed on the exercycle, replaced it, received her, cradled her, loved her, whispered, crooned, bit—

"It's not working quite right today," said the woman, oddly worried. "I don't like it. I think it's your fault." Evne put her arms around her knees. *That could be a real man,* she said, and Jai saw—or thought he saw—the smoky body around the woman settle and thicken, press her, acquire features. The exercise seat plunged and rose, plunged and rose. The woman herself stiffened, knees together.

It was a real, true idea. It was a real thought. It was

inside her head. She couldn't think of herself but only of a man, not of her own body, her lovely twin sister, but only of a man who had skin, bones, teeth, fingers, a penis, a brain, and whose lungs were breathing air into her own.

Worst of all, he would have a face.

Her name is Mrs. Robins, said Evne. *Can you imagine? She has a name.*

Vicious, provincial bitch! shouted Jai, diving after her into the lines that swarmed through the ship.

Worst of all, he would have a mind.

From far, far away, Jai heard Mrs. Robins screaming.

He made her settle Mrs. Robins' mind. He argued with her, pulling her hair; Evne, like a woman of salt, fled into the walls in metal crystalhood, where he followed her, turned into a bee (all eyes), a fountain (all mouth), wrapped herself around her own bones inside out, spread herself one molecule thick along all the lines in the ship: the two of them, pulsing miles across, breathing with the lungs of incurious strangers, seeing through other eyes, petrifying in flashes, pursuing each other in the shapes of walls, floors, volumes of contained air. He followed her.

Evne lay face down in an airless space, sobbing.

She was round, like a porthole.

She twisted his little fingers, sat on his head, screamed as he slapped her, ran away on glass feet in which he could see the frightened convulsing of her organs.

She surrounded him and bit him, a daisy with a single stomach/eye. With arms turned to clouds, Jai seized a cloudy woman, and meaning to beat her, billowed into her instead, his forehead an elongated dome, his body

furrowed with windy spaces, his limbs weeping rain. *So THAT'S a quarrel!* he sighed into Evne's cowering, cavernous ear, holding her even as she dissolved into a sea of blue air, holding her as she turned into a dry desert wind.

Far away Mrs. Robins shuddered satisfactorily and then dozed off.

They were seated on the corridor carpet, upside down, sideways, sprawling between the ceiling and the wall. The spin was off. Evne said:

I will not put myself out any more for any woman. I will not live among these people. I will not think of them as people. I will not listen to you. I'm going home. God made these people on the eighth day, out of scraps.

You don't believe in God, said Jai, and reading her thoughts, which were the thoughts of a Swan Princess when the fisherman is standing on her clothes, he added, "Don't be frightened. Don't be foolish." The Big One—three weeks from destination—reached its coordinates, was instantly destroyed and instantly created; contracted to its own size, with the spin coming on. They tumbled slowly down the wall. Foolish Evne, as she fell, developed a leathery hide and starfish's prickles; her brains got hungry, her fingers tough; she could spin resource from a hard vacuum the way the girl in the story was supposed to have spun gold. Far down the curving corridor a door opened and through the door came six stupid people: five men and a woman with a notebook. Strange particles were killing themselves in a blaze of glory on the outside hull of The Big One. One of these blind, deaf, anesthetized, insensitive, ambulating corpses cried with false heartiness, "Ah, there you are!" and took out a sedation pistol.

With a wink, Evne put on an act and passed out.

He himself was dragged along the corridor, pretending to be unconscious, for a quarter of a mile; he enjoyed the luxury of his position. If that was what they wanted, that was what they got: his beard scraping the floor, eyes turned to whites, eighty kilos of lead and a traitor—a grim business. There was an interesting layer of sweat between themselves and their clothes. He was wrapped in a sheet, like a Roman emperor, and strapped into a seat in sick bay, lolling. Evne was horizontal under a spray of drugged mist: flat out. There were also in the room the six frowning objects, five standing and the lady with the notebook sitting. *A long way to go,* he thought. *First you understand biology, then you understand mood, then you understand expectations, Then intentions, then ideas.* It occurred to him that perhaps really abstract ideas, like numbers, might be beyond anyone's interpretation. Evne said no. He pantomimed waking up and instantly one of the medical officers gave him a shot in the neck, a spray through the skin and into the artery, before he could get rid of most of the stuff. Enough to make him massively dizzy. Right up into the brain. Had he ever—? Yes, once. Terrified of drugs, but he had once. TruthTell.

"Counteract that," he said thickly, "or I'll black myself out." The six things were shocked. Evne, in her cage of air, was singing like Danaë, high as a kite on TruthTell. He saw her toes pointing straight up under the aerosol. She was breathing greedily in and out. He slumped forward, trying to trust her, wishing he could understand her mind as well as see it, hoping they asked him no questions until he got well under, diving down

to the center in a sudden surge of rage, staying under while the sub-vocal mutterings prompted by the drug slowly disappeared. Something jolted him awake; a medical technician was moving away from him. The crook of his arm stung. TruthTell? RealJob? Settle? ALert? Nothing felt odd.

"What's your name?" someone said to Evne.

"Haven't got one, haven't got one, you're an ass," Evne chanted.

"Where do you live?"

"Here, obviously," and she began snapping her fingers in time to the pauses in *Celeste Aida*, which was being played four miles away, in the swimming pool.

"She's a telepath," said Jai, "a levitator, a teleport, for God's sake. They live everywhere. Use some sense." He directed this to no one in particular; he could easily tell them apart but it seemed pointless to do so.

"Describe your social system. Use Galactica."

She remained silent, the finger snapping stopped. Then her eyes closed. Finally she said with difficulty, "Just —a lot. Of people."

"Families?"

"No, no families."

"Professions?"

"No, no professions."

"Hereditary distinctions?"

"No, no distinctions."

"Differences in rank?"

"No, no rank."

"What rank are you?"

"No, no rank."

"What family are you?"

"No, no family."

"What profession?"

"No profession, no profession."

"Where are you?"

"Three point oh six four eight five oh nine two up-down, two-seven oh right-left, three three three three back-front," Evne parroted. "Commanding officer to control room. Control room to commanding officer. Commanding officer to—"

"Stop. Are you lying?"

"No."

"Is it hard to translate your thoughts into Galactica?"

"No."

"Is it easy?"

"No."

"Is it between hard and easy?"

"No."

Someone else said, "What is it, then?"

"Impossible." said Evne, and she opened her eyes. She said, "How do you expect me to think with all this junk in my head?"

She added: "TruthTell, RealJob, Settle, ALert, Mind-Blow, SexAll, BadJob, Remember, Cactus, Expand-A, Colors, Cocoon, I sympathize with Mrs. Robins," and cleaning up her mind and disconnecting the tanks beyond the back wall, she sat up and waited for the aerosol to clear. She said:

"I'll tell you everything you like. I'm a doctor, a genetics surgeon. I was put on your ship before you got too far away. It took eleven thousand people to do it. Galactica is a lousy language." She waited, but nobody said anything.

"I'm willing," she said with a sigh, "to explain any-

thing you like and undergo any tests you like. I've come here out of curiosity, to visit. Also to cure."

"Cure—?" whispered someone in the room.

"Sure," she said. "I'm a social scientist, too, yes? Too many people even four hundred years ago. You import microbiota, nitrogen fixers, food, phosphorus, metals, power. Too many people. Eating fungi, bacteria, yeasts, the metabolism doesn't give you O_2. Also the water table way, way down, surface water all salinized now. You lose phosphorus; no more big flowers soon. Everything to be bred small. Yes? Very bad weather and no money to fix. You export craziness. Things are ready to pop. You export social structure, disease, drugs, pretty clothes. Sterilization. Art. Homosex. Visions. Castration. Mrs. Robins. Still too many people. The horrors of an almost contracting economy, everybody on the edge. We think it will blow up very soon. Very soon."

One of the medical officers threw his hand up to defend his forehead.

"It does not take a mind reader to read that," said Evne charmingly. "No, I can't read minds. Not unless I concentrate very, very hard."

Which was, of course, an awful lie.

Thereafter Evne ate at Prime Shift (with some clothes on) and with the ship's Commander. There were spyholes, snoopers, peep-scapes and bull's-eyes everywhere. Jai could not help seeing them in the audible sculpture that decorated the place: windsong, cows' lowing, dolphins, amplified bee-buzz, all the sentimental nature stuff that masked the sound of one table and one gallery from another. The glass floors of the galleries lined the walls and almost met at the roof of the dome—vul-

gar, overdone, intolerably crowded, and out-of-date. In the central space, its roots sheathed in a glassy nutrient membrane, hung a live tree. Jai ate in public twice and then returned to his former cell, Evne saying charmingly:

"I don't like you. I don't want to see you again. You're too gloomy." She was smiling.

"Goodbye," he said, leaving the table. *Liar.*

Thoughts of murder, thoughts of suicide, a terrible tiredness pursued him; there was a halo around himself. He was astounded to see himself so beautiful and so strong. He said aloud (he was now alone in his room) "You *are* a liar!"

Stay with me, said Evne (there were rotten webs in her mind, streaks of black mold, something was falling to pieces). *All this is intolerable.*

"Why did you come with me?" said Jai quietly and carefully. "Are you a social scientist? Was all that true?" The answer came slowly:

I can't tell you. At the same time she was saying brightly to the stupefied Commander:

"There are only four elements. Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. That is the scientific view."

She was the privileged parrot; he was the memory bank. He stayed in his room, with the wall murals turned off, and she picked his brains. He spent his time reading through the ship's tape library at twice normal speed; this was not something recent but a trick he had learned in childhood. He went around without his shoes. He lay face down on the bed sometimes, suffering a little at the thought of his past life. Under the walls and around the door was a slight, flat vacuum,

with air frilling out into the corridor; this was himself: traveling club, professional club, reading club, theatre club, clothing club, eating club, sports club, rent club, experience club, and of course The Nation, into which he had been born. Without your clubs, nobody even spoke to you. He lay on his face. With much care on his part, the hull of The Big One resolved itself into prickles embedded in hardened goo, very economical and elegant, and for a while he was crystals in a matrix, and then, in his left shoulder blade—though still far away—Earth appeared. He wept a little.

". . . into which you were born," said the Commander.

"Oh, is she fooling you," said Jai. "Earth, air, fire, and water! Good God."

"Does she put ideas into your mind?" said the Commander. (Idle and sad, actually.)

"No," said Jai. (Idle and sad.) "I put them into hers."

"Be honest," said the medical technician. "What is she capable of?" (Shining Ideal, far in the distance on a mathematical plain, made of foil and listing in the wind.) "Why has she left you alone?"

"Earth," said Jai, in tears, "is in my left shoulder blade. It is sentimentally stronger than the sun. There's another star there, too, but I don't know what you call it. The other one's a little higher. This seems to me to answer all the questions you might reasonably ask."

"I'll give you a shot," said the medical technician to the mental patient, who was:

without shoes

without a belt to hold up his pants

idle, shambling and sulky.

The mental patient, weeping, kicked them both out of the compartment. By the time their souls had re-

joined their bodies (or vice versa) he had re-set the lock and was crying shamelessly on the bed, abandoning himself to every grief he could pick up on the ship, crying over the past, crying over outrages and trivia, crying over inventions. He lay in the position of crucifixion and cried over that. Then it got serious and he tried to stop by flipflopping from one man to another: yesterday's man, last week's man, the man in the past, the boy, agonizingly into the child, into the future's man, writhing into the baby, the now man, the if man, twisting convulsively out of the body's man to find Evne.

Who was gone. A tearful and sniffy smile hung in the air. Outside The Big One and to one side was a great gush in space, a great bend, a geyser coming out of nowhere and falling over the edge; this was the sun; and to the other side, fingertips locked under the spray (but very big because very close), Luna-Earth. Lights blazed on the moon's dawn-line; Earth he dared not look at yet. Evne's old smile, spiraling under the door like a damp wreath, led there. He felt his way tentatively. Earth's surface, infected with billions of traces, filmed, smeared, and cross-hatched. She was somewhere on the night side of the planet. Jai Vedh withdrew into his own body (which had lain all this while like a corpse) and became aware that four *things* were standing around him.

Mean, low, ponderous, four-legged, armed with frills of bone and bony plates, heavy, drag-tailed and indecent: Dinosauria. He wished his imagination would not take so impressionistic a turn. Inside them something flowed and gibbered like the specter of a big-headed monkey: the ghosts of fingers, the ghosts of buttocks, glowing ectoplasmic bellies, skin, ears, ribbed

knuckles, little bits of fur. The ghost in the machine. Trying to shake its way out, grabbing the cage.

You've turned yourselves inside out, he said.

His eyes obligingly presented him with four steel springs, each gently swaying.

You must be people, cut it out.

Some more effects with the springs, dried liver and lights hanging inside, a heart that rattles like a dried pod.

He cursed, frightened, and sat up, feeling with his feet for his sandals, which were under the bed. Closing his eyes, with that nice, effortful division between monkey and machine, the ghost in the machine which was supposed to be the consciousness in the body, but here we have instead the body trapped in its own booby-trap, poor thing, gently mourning all those little touches that used to be—catching the thoughts of the monkey here, not the machine, poor thing—the straps of the sandals closed on his feet—*and although the mass of them is human, if I open my eyes, I shall probably see chimpanzees. Too deep. The saurians must be "muscle armor," involuntary tension in the big muscles. Focus on that. Grade up. Be superficial.*

He opened his eyes. He saw four steel springs who looked like people. (Or vice versa.)

"Lady," he said politely, "and gentleman." They had:

Human skeletons, the human lymph-tree, the raying out of the human nervous system, irregular breathing, musculature, four rivers of blood, some minor internal repairs, tremors in the long arch of the foot (The Big One was starting to spin) and four pairs of human eyes.

First he told them their names, their secret names,

or nicknames, or the names they had given themselves as children, then their adult names. He said:

"*You* are supposed to question me, *you* are supposed to control me, *you* are supposed to watch *you*, and *you* are to watch *you*."

He said, with interest:

"Those are strobe lights in your hands, but they don't work. I'm not getting epilepsy. I'm not hypnotized. I'm confused but that's something else. I suppose you could distract me if you tried. Though what she and I do, that's no area of the brain, it's not one single thing. Do you understand?"

What am I saying? he thought in amazement. Their childish names were on their foreheads, plain as could be written: Miriamne, Bat, Lucifer, Haze, in elegant script. In phosphor? Daylight fluorescence? He thought he might be going mad. He rehearsed in his mind, *First you understand biology, then you understand mood, then you understand expectations. Then intentions, then ideas.* It didn't seem to work that way.

"Miriamne is four," he says without thinking, rummaging through the closet to find something to put on besides his pants, "and Miriamne calls herself Miriamne because of the talking doll Miriamne who talks all the time Miriamne, Miriamne—" *Bat, Lucifer, Haze,* he thinks as he rambles on. *What marvelous names!*

"Let us go!" screams the woman, Bat. "Let us go! We're professionals! We're scientists!"

Yes, go. Go ahead. What do you think I want to do to you?

"I'm looking for a shirt," he says, apologetically. "Just a minute."

Get a gun, says someone. *Get something. We're professionals.*

Jai Vedh is very interested.

"What," he says, "is a professional?"

After they left it took Jai Vedh several minutes to remember his own name. He had to work it by way of a mnemonic through the motor regions and catch his own subvocalizing; he rediscovered that his name was Jai Vedh. He also remembered what a professional was, and a gun. He began to sweat badly. He left the room, which was full of thoughts of contagion and monstrosity and all kinds of panicked jumble, through the zigzag of a wall, and worked his way into the next compartment. The smaller distances were worse, he found. There was another bed, to hide under, and no occupant. He could easily slide through to the center of the ship—and beyond, to die in space, homing in on Earth or Luna, the ship a little gravity bead between two buckets.

What begins in play and ends in work? said the wall behind him snottily, merely a nasty reflection of his own thoughts, and from somewhere else, *Can't you keep your mouth shut, you snot?* He foresaw with great clarity that the time would come after one of these quantum jumps when whatever the heart thought, that the tongue would speak instanter and then no more Hi, Vedh. Is the electron thrilled after the jump? Does it play? Is it rebellious? Is work play? Is play work? Is there nothing better to do with the faculty of walking through walls than have a good time with it, and get in trouble?

Beast, beast, beastie, beastly! said the wall. From somewhere else, far on Earth's night side, came the thread of an idea, a vague wisp winding miles and

miles up from that dirtied window-pane of a planet: *work is play is work is play is—*

"Love, can you hear me!" he shouted desperately, knowing that he had no faculty of putting thoughts into other people's heads, not at two inches, let alone twenty thousand miles. "Love, can I ride it down? Will it take too long? Will I die?" The echoes of his own voice deafened him. There were people running along the corridor outside, new people with souls so bad, so murderously professional, that it stood the hair up on his head. There were things whose purpose he did not even want to guess at. He bellowed again.

God will provide, said the wisp, playfully or prudishly.

So he jumped.

He came down in a park, at night. There was nobody near. He could not remember having traversed the intervening space. Under the broad leaves of a pandanus he lay and listened to the darkness, breathing unpleasantly warm and slightly stinking air and wondering why the layer of earth under him was so thin. Like a garden: topsoil over sand over pebbles over crushed rock. Below that were nests of boxes and foxes' tunnels, containers for air, clouds of water vapor, everything jumbled over everything else like a subterranean junkyard. This went down quite a way. He probed further.

Got it.

Lost it.

Damn!

People's houses, you nit. There goes one now. Triple-schedule, high-density area. Spreading, unfortunately.

Plant on top to reduce the oxygen debt and pipe the heat up. Tropical.

He got up, hitting his head against the screw pine, which he had forgotten about. Far below his feet things stirred in the rock, faraway people like little dots of contaminated water. The air smelled bad. He began to trace the structural parts of the city below him, a vast layer of hollows and nothings, the exact opposite of what would be seen by the eye, until he felt he was standing on top of an ants' nest and going to fall through. He lay down and put his fingers in his ears. *Patterns which once the spectator sees, he cannot again unsee.* He put his hands over his eyes. He turned over, clasping his hands around the trunk of the pandanus, which promptly plummeted with him into the abyss.

"Goddamn it!" shouted Jai Vedh, violently jumping to his feet. "How am I going to get any *sleep!*"

Gravity, said the tree prudently, the second bounce-back of the day. A branch nudged him. He knew all this came from himself but stared, fascinated; then he chuckled and obediently lay down. The gravity of the earth was enormous. It was very, very big. From far enough away the biosphere was only a thin film, Jai and all, everything and Jai, practically a single molecule, inexorably flat, you'd be lucky not to get crushed to death.

It's hollow down there, said Jai Two.

Go to sleep, said One.

Wake you at dawn? said Two.

Yes, said One sourly, *and we'll go out and conquer the world.*

He dreamed all night that he was falling through the nine layers of the ruins of Troy.

At dawn it rained. He woke with his head in a lukewarm puddle. Under the broad-leaved cycads that made up the top layer of the greenery were smaller plants and bushes that transferred the water, and under these ground-cover that collected it; a fine rain was seeping and sliding down everything. The pandanus was at the bottom of a small hollow. Stiff and wet through, he got up, grabbing the trunk and bringing a shower down on himself, thinking *Gravity is busy today.* There were no paths anywhere. He started off at random, crossing the mist that drifted above the heat ducts, at first looking for a path, then trying to probe below for an elevator, finally settling for a gradient to the underground city, or a change in density, or anything that would signal The End. Nothing came. His head hurt. It looked as if it might rain all day. He tried to find the edge of the city, but it was beyond his range. Or there was no edge. He toiled on and on, slipping over the hillocks, fine dirt clinging to his sandals. The sun rose under mist, sending clouds of invisible moisture into the air. Toward the middle of the morning the city canted up to the right; Jai immediately set out that way, hoping he would come to the end of it, but nothing changed; ground creepers tore at his sandals until he was forced to go barefoot. There was a lot of activity down below. At mid-morning he saw his first person coming out of an elevator five hundred yards away—the elevator building a fairytale hut buried in vines—and leapt forward, meeting a grand tangle of creeper and going down in a heap. The other man did not even seem to hear him.

Stoo-pid! said the creeper. He lay, considering. He was hungry enough to feel sick. On the other hand, what

do you say to somebody: hello, I dropped out of the sky, where am I? And the customary way of exchanging addresses was to match wristplates. Not to mention paying bills. And travel. *If I haven't forgotten everything.*

Think, think, think! (he thought) *Is the elevator edible? The elevator says Welcome to Winnetka. Where is Winnetka? Can I eat English? Do they have food for transients in the street in Winnetka? Beyond the elevator is a brace of elevators and beyond that a ring of elevators and beyond that a ramp that stretches in a circle, everything planted with poppies, pineapple, sugar cane, and Mariposa lilies. And beyond that a solid city coming to the surface—no, not solid, hidden in vines; the eye would make nothing of it: boxes upon boxes embowered in greenery, the invisible Garden City of your dreams, the grandest suburb on earth. Leaf-bearing houses. Watch out for poison ivy.*

Jai Vedh (who could see with his eyes shut) worked his way between two elevators and (with his eyes shut) read the sign, which went:

WELCOME TO WINNETKA
78° W., 39° N.
founded by Marius
Winnetka, 2134 A.D.

*

DO NOT ENTER INNER CITY PRESERVE

*

THESE PLANTS ARE DANGEROUS

Below there were solidographs of poison ivy, poison sumach and *Atropa belladonna n.*, or new deadly nightshade.

There were, he now recalled, other things in the inner city preserves that might be called dangerous, including himself. Slipping into his sandals, he made it past the second ring of elevators and over the roof of the ramp. He dropped into the middle of the crowd, beard, sweat, dirt stains, and all. Some people laughed and applauded. Most did nothing at all.

"Hey!" said somebody. "I know you!"

More laughter, cheers and whistles. A girl in green body paint threw her arms around him spontaneously and stared intently into his eyes. "I love you," she said. "It came over me suddenly. Do you want to fuck? Is that all right?"

"You're in my sensitivity club," said a tall, bald fellow in overalls and glasses, "aren't you? Seriously?" No one had worn glasses (seriously) for three hundred years.

"No," said Jai in sudden inspiration. "I'm in another club. I was in there, experiencing. And I got lost."

"Alone?" said the other man, shocked.

"It's a new idea," said Jai.

"I'd better go and share it with the club before I become rigid and defensive about it," he added hastily.

"I'll go with you," said the other man. He was very serious and polite. He was also naked under his conservative overalls, which no one had worn (seriously) for over three hundred years, and his eyeglasses bore no glass, *which*, thought Jai, *reminds me of why I always lived underground and never in the suburbs.* He disengaged himself from the girl. He ought to be able to lose the other character before it asked him for his address or decided to share a meal or a blow-off job. Credit, both. *Or invite his sensitivity group to see my*

sensitivity group's place. The girl had thrown her arms around another passer-by and was saying, "You have disappointing eyes. I don't like you. Do you want to fuck? Is it all right?" Jai smiled, which was the proper thing to do in any and all circumstances, and the other man smiled back, exposing his teeth. A circle of people around them also smiled broadly. Smiling, the two men entered one of the paths leading off the entrance ramp. Gourds and moonflower hung about them. The fellow in the overalls—still smiling—had a curiously fast heartbeat. A hidden sea of people surrounded them.

"It's rather exciting," he said, "what you did."

"Oh no," said Jai. "Though it was a real experience and increased my sensitivity."

"That girl," said the man in the overalls, drumming his fingers on his shoulder straps and shaking his head. "That girl! Keep to your club, I say."

"Mm," said Jai.

"She'll be found disemboweled some day."

Jai kicked the man in the stomach. Before he knew why, before he knew what for, he had sprinted forward, dodged between the houses, and was four paths away behind a waterfall of scarlet leaves, stripping off his clothes. He was terrified. The bald man had hypodermics in his fingertips. The bald man had a metal-finder in his belt. He had no memory, and no conscience, and what had been done to his mind was awful. *Where is the metal on me?* He found one sender in the leg of his pants and one in his left sandal; he levitated them out. The air was too dirty with sendings of all sorts for him to have noticed them casually. He wondered if they would make a garbage disposal in the city blow up. He wondered if he used non-visual cues

when he moved objects. He searched his own skin for odd emanations of any kind but found none. Inside he apparently couldn't go. He felt for the sun (which was easy) and aimed the senders into it; at least they would fall some distance away. Gone. Into the sun, for all he knew. He began to run, then stopped, between two walls. *Stop. Think.* The bald man was off to one side, holding his stomach. People detoured around him. *Thinkthinkthink.* Sparkles of pain. Jai thought:

What do I want?

Evne. Go back.

That's future. Now?

Stay alive.

Relax.

He lay down, put his arms under his head, and let the world translate into masses around him. Three streets back the crouching form of a human man still whimpered with pain, half-a-mind, all confusion, singularity branded on the forehead and on the belly; he would recognize that shape among a thousand million. Houses stretched off on all sides, sometimes dipping below the ground and sometimes emerging out of it, piling themselves into pyramids, into almost toppling waves, never one rooftree more than eighty yards from the next. The planet was covered. There were the old, open-air cities planted with whatever would grow, mountains honeycombed, resorts in Antarctica, covered roads crammed with carrier traffic only, hovercraft, sea-craft, masses, structures, and installations under the sea, nets of algae towed in the air, some insects and no animals whatever, but people, people, people, everywhere.

What's the opposite of the Garden of Eden?

The man in overalls was three strides behind him. He deformed to the North, flowing over Old Earth become a black tangle of densities. A city went by: sudden, panicked cross-hatchings of zigzags and teardrops. Thunderstorm: black knots on white, tremendous fluctuations in the air. The sea: a writhing mass. Straight down: center-of-the-earth. Magma at the core oscillated in a long, leisurely, heavy infra-bass, miles too slow for human ears. The planet sang.

So frightened, so fascinated, so awed and exalted was Jai Vedh that he almost missed the ground. He materialized ten feet above it and hit with a crash that stunned him. When he came to he was in another inner city preserve, lying on top of the thin smear that disguised factories, farms, workshops, clubs, laboratories, transportation, industries, administration, places of public excess, and drug bars provided with advertising. His left side was atrociously bruised. He muttered dizzily, *The old man sang. The old man sang to me.* Jai One and Jai Two were carrying on a lively conversation about disguises, fake IDs, club membership, and wristplates.

Want?

Food.

Respectability?

Food.

In a credit world the only thing to steal would be commodities themselves. He searched for a transport pipe, fell asleep, woke up ravenous and exhausted, and fell asleep again. It was evening when he came to himself. The first underground tube he found was sewage and the second water, which he thought he could transport directly into his stomach until there was—luckily—

a little accident about that. He did not drown. He threw up. Quantities were hard to estimate. He tried to remember what he had seen in the cities—so many years ago!—and snitched a robe from a passing hovercraft, also a gross of children's toys and some underwear. He dried himself, wrapped himself up, and dumped the toys in the sea. It was getting very cold in the microclimate above Charmian, North Canada Province. The fifth line he tapped was bags of yeast flour, which he could not eat; the sixth was a covered carrier highway, roofed with grasses. He waited.

Brandname's (———? unfamiliar) Smacks, Gulps, and Messes.

Algae cheese, processed.

Palm spices. (What?)

Pine nuts.

Crackles, Luxuries, Goodlets.

He ate dinner in the dark and smelled everything before he touched it, tasting for the first time the omnipresent base of yeast and algae culture. The pine nuts were molded soy flour, the palm spice processed yeast, the luxuries mostly marine. There was one square of dried mushrooms. *Don't we eat dolphins by now?* But all the cetaceae were extinct, of course. He lifted some self-heating packs of soup from another rail truck, opened them, and drank. It was very cold. He was too tired to move, too bruised and aching to sleep. He got up and plodded to the nearest heat duct, where it was a little warmer, waiting for a truck of blankets or a truck of explorers' arctic underwear; he had to content himself with a bale of display flags, in which he buried himself, invisibly proclaiming bargains and holidays to the frosty stars. Among the coarse grasses on the highway roof

something whispered and stirred: wild ground blueberries, tiny as nails and sour as the ghosts of their ancestors. He gathered a few and held them in the dark hollow of his hand, but could not eat them. *Virus? Bacteria? Arsenic? Lead compounds?* He was sure of only one thing.

They were contaminated.

To the north, human habitation stretched as far as the land, to the east was the sea, and to the west the luxuriously spaced homes of the great central desert. To the south, the human race slipped more and more under the sea along the continental shelf of the Atlantic; thickly settled three hundred, four hundred, even five hundred feet down, and further out the "floating cities," though few of these, and a prodigal scattering all the way across of ore-sweeps, floating refineries, and food manufactories. To the computers on the Moon the dawn-line revealed only more of the same and the sunset-line concealed more of the same; up to an altitude of twenty thousand feet people lived, died, bred, and analyzed themselves, and it was the same in Copernicus, in Tsiolkovsky, and the Lunar Apennines. The tops of the Himalayas were covered with hotels, as was the Gobi, as was the Moon, as was every inch of coastline on all continents.

Only at the bottom of the Pacific Trench, thought Jai Vedh, *could I be alone.*

And lo! he looked, and it was not so.

Jai Vedh walked about and slept above the city of Charmian for two nights in an outsize bathrobe, and then he moved south and west, reasoning that his pilferings were less likely to be detected if he did them in

more than one place. He stayed above the inner city preserves of New Anglia, Orange, Los Padres, Bottleneck, and Place; then a long jump into the South Temperate Zone—the sea-level Tropics were mainly suburban, the heat from a city in such a climate making planting impossible. Only in the central desert were there any animals at all: insects, and toads, and of course some birds. There was a chameleon farm built into a hotel near the suburb of Nevada, America Province. He passed it on his way back north and stole one of the chamelons to take with him, but freed it when he reached Oregon. It had lain, quiescent or stunned, in his bathrobe pocket for half an hour. When he took it out, it was unhappy and had turned an uncomfortable rust-red.

You don't want to keep me company, he said. It flicked its second eyelid sluggishly up and down.

Are you cold? said Jai. *You shouldn't be. All these cities are alike. Suburbs, too. That's why I'm getting claustrophobia. And in exile, too.* He put the little beast on his knee, with his hands around it to keep it warm, and tried to get a look at its insides, but he couldn't concentrate properly; he kept shivering for some reason, stroking its back, and got a waft of a strong, acrid smell, and a sudden, awful feeling of motion sickness—or the lack of a proper place to put his feet—

Four feet?

He put it down hastily and watched it run to a heat duct where it stood motionless and slowly turned green again, blowing out the bubble at its throat. He could see the cells under its skin open and change. O blissful heat. O proper ground. God's in His heaven. I'm hungry.

And I'm in the mind of a reptile, thought Jai Vedh, more than a little shaken. He moved off to find the supply lines for Center Section, Oregon. Behind him continued the simple, inexpressive, ignorant chant: heat ground heat hungry heat ground. Now there was something strong and vague all around him, too, I lie, I lie down, we lie down, we lie down, *without the consciousness of the higher orders, of course: the birds' hysterical, nervous emotion, the mammals' sharp, explicit, detailed curiosity, but not the simplest of all, the rocks' unchanging and inanimate Am . . .*

Evne! cried Jai. *How do I turn this off!*

Am, the rocks said, the clay, the sand, the soil, Am, Am, the stems and roots in waves I lie, I lie down, the leaves I lie down, I lie down, and as for the people of Center Section, Oregon—

For a moment of sheer panic he thought he would split and spill his brains if he had to listen to the hundred and thirty million people of Center Section, Oregon, he would never be alone again, his mind would never be his own again; except it didn't come as a flood, thank God, but quite naturally, only as a faint taste of oddness, of all that discrepancy, the timebinding today-tomorrow-yesterday, *this paint will not be dry,* the physical world half in and half out of the mind (which is impossible), *the sky looks like a wedding veil,* and some curls of symbolic thought so eerie that they vanished like springs into the fourth dimension, *that's me in the mirror, one shouldn't generalize, there'll be pi in the ski when you di it's a li,* pictures where a column leads to a space leads to a column which is part of a column that is a space. He tried to follow these last and nearly turned himself inside out. Then

it faded away, leaving behind: *this is people's thoughts.*

I am looking at myself.

I am looking at myself looking at myself.

I am looking at myself looking at myself looking at myself.

I am looking at myself looking at myself looking at myself looking at myself.

And oh, the lies! The concealments! Not one part in a thousand was open. He put his ear to the ground, as he had once put his ear to a bee-hive in a museum, and watched below the deceptions and self-deceptions of Center Section, Oregon, until the picture he had of the minds and the meaning he had of the minds moved together, maved apart, drifted close again, and finally —blurrily—joined. He thought first:

The social structure was not so rigid when I was here before.

He then thought:

I did not think the social structure was so rigid when I was part of it.

It was impossible to pick anyone out of the mass. He moved aimlessly toward the edge of the city, trying for the third time to think ahead, truly to think ahead, how to find Evne, how to get back where he belonged or at least where he wanted to belong. (*I could wander around like this forever.*) He squatted on the ground to think, balancing effortlessly, snapping leaves off the semi-tropical groundstuff. All the ones he recognized were perennials; he assumed that plants from other latitudes would not bloom and seed here; several times he had had to dodge repair squads who were replanting areas. Inefficient repair squads. He rolled the leaves into little balls. *Computers are beyond me. I couldn't*

spook the computers in a thousand years. But I have to get inside, get an ID, find traces, I could pick that up in a crowd. I could follow, find. Who? The Commander, the Captain, others who know, the real people. Bad people. All the things I didn't know when I led my sheltered life here. Go in. Buy an ID.

He smiled fleetingly.

I won't even have to ask questions.

The singer who attains E in alt finds it such a peculiar achievement that once her range is opened up she cannot get rid of it, even voluntarily. She practices all the time, without thinking of it. First comes the possibility of the whole range, then the separate notes, then the making them good. Then she is stuck with it. Nothing but long disuse can undo E in alt. Jai Vedh, who could not yet pick strangers out of a crowd or always understand explicitly what it was he knew, traveled to Bombay (because he had been there once) and dodging among the suburban streets of Bombay, tracked the Industrial Distributor for Bombay, through him the Traffic Control of Southern Region, through her Himalayan Hotels, Middle Region, and through him the name and address of the man he wanted. He followed the Hotels man for hours to get this. Once he thought he knew the man he wanted (Population Control, Alaska, North Canada Province), he went to the man's apartment and lived there for three days, waiting for him. The man had a stun gun in his desk and a gas bomb. Jai touched nothing, not even the food. It had been hard to get the address; people's thoughts were not permanent and oscillated a lot; also his own mind presented him with some strange equivalents: sounds, squeaks, pathological

grins or sneezes, repeated geometric doodles. He thought he knew what he was doing. When the man came through the coded door, alone, Jai said:

"Come in. Sit down." The bomb in the desk glowed vehemently.

"You can't," said Jai, "I am here," meaning he was in the way. The professional, in his gray silk trousers and his gray slip-on jacket, sat down gingerly, estimating his chances of getting at the gun. There was caution, surprise, fear, stiffness, brains, almost a treat to be near after what had been in the streets. Jai said, with difficulty, because it was hard to talk and pay attention at the same time:

"I come for . . . for something. Will not harm. I would like to take something and to give you something. It would be to your advantage, I think."

"What are you on?" said the professional tightly. "Real-Job?"

"I'm not on drugs," said Jai. "I saw that in the street." *The euphoriac, the melancholic, the insulated, the significant, the satyriasts, the compulsive talkers, the sleepwalkers, the energetic, the wholly cocooned, the full-of-love, those In Touch With The All, the aestheticized, the weeping fever, the repeated little deaths with their repeated jolts of fear and flight and loss.*

"Don't press for the machine," he added, looking up. "It won't come. I shorted it." *Keeps a plastic police dog, the idiot.*

"What do you want, civilian?" said Population Control for Alaska. He was thinking of what Jai was thinking, good, let him go on. He was thin, vicious enough, corrosive enough, brown-eyed, and middling-looking; he dialed a drink and the desk began dancing.

"There will be MindBlow in that," said Jai mildly. "I won't have it."

"God!" said the man. "You're—" *Now he knows.*

"What I really want," said Jai conversationally, sighing a bit and rubbing his beard, "is to find her and get out. No harm to any of you. I need a new ID and the usual credit. A few hobbies, say. That's what I want, really."

"But I can't do that!" cried Victor Liu-Hesse, tenth-generation Alaskan, unmarried, childless, successful, slightly agoraphobic. *Funny how people think of their own names.*

"Sure you can," said Jai. "I know you can. It's called 'blackmail'; I found it in the library. It says there has been no case for two hundred and fifty years."

"I won't, fool," said Liu-Hesse shortly. Something flashed up in him, vanished, flashed up, vanished. The professionals one could tell miles off, it was unmistakable: the hard exoskeleton and all the intent personal hatreds, the love of tools, the care, the fastidiousness.

"You're not successful enough," said Jai, and the man did not change his expression but he took his own drink from the desk and was going to drink it.

"MindBlow," said Jai. Liu-Hesse set the drink down.

"No," said Jai, "you're not successful enough. You're not as successful as you deserve to be. You deserve much, much more. I know what it's like, believe me."

Illegal, said Hesse. *Omigod. Illegal. Lose everything. Lose job.*

"I'm not entirely a civilian," said Jai. "I've had to fight in the last year. I know what it's like. Outside in the street there are people dying of tuberculosis, for

kicks; this is disgusting. I don't want to be part of it. I don't think you want to be part of it."

Job! screamed the man.

"Oh, the things I've seen!" said Jai tolerantly, crossing his legs and swinging one sandaled foot (he was in a green Greek chiton). "The things I've seen! People who eat wax, people who race in the street and nobody remembers who's won, people who believe in poltergeists, people who strangle birds, people who insist on living in museums, tea-fanciers, insect-fanciers, eunuchs, people who sacrifice virgins to Satan, homicidal maniacs, thrill-killers, looters, vandals, sadists. It's almost as bad as 'back to the soil' groups, such nonsense. Like a private business."

"Get out!" said Liu-Hesse. "I'll report you to the police."

"Knowing that nothing you do will ever count," said Jai.

"Nothing you do," he added helpfully. "No meaning." *Silence, oh long silence!* The endless waves of Alaska, North Canada, its winding lanes of foliage, its peach trees that would never bear, its wild strawberries, its mosquitoes, its Godawful anxiety. At length Hesse said:

"I can't give you the full thing."

"Yes you can," said Jai.

"But, man, be reasonable—there are miles of records—clubs—cross-references—"

"No one remembers, no one cares," said Jai. "They're civilians. You know? You give me a name, a place of birth, a whole history. You can do it."

"In ten days," said Hesse sulkily.

"One," said Jai, "or I go somewhere else. I'll go to Himalayan Hotels. There is still illegality in this world,

it seems. There is still profit." *Now he's thinking it might not be a bad idea.*

"I will," said Jai, "repay you, of course. In information. You should be more of a success, you know. You could be."

I could be, said Hesse. "I could be. Assuming you haven't a recorder on you and just for the sake of fancifulness, yes. What do I get?"

"There are no scandals among civilians," said Jai. "Isn't that interesting? But there are here. I'll tell you," and he told him—*you've known it all along, but here's the proof. And there's something jerky about these professional types; they don't take pleasure smoothly; the man is being pulled apart by his own triumph, hurts the blood vessels and intestines. And look at his face!*

"Now you'll do it," said Jai.

"Now I do it," said the other man.

"To get the boss, O.K.?" said Jai. Hesse raised his glass, laughed, and put it down. He reached into the desk, found that his bomb and gun had flown to the ceiling, and laughed again. "Put them back," he said. Jai did so. "What I wonder," said Hesse, "is why didn't you go looking for organized crime? Or perhaps you did and couldn't find it. There is no organized crime, you know. We've done that much."

"I'm aware," said Jai.

"There is no gambling," said Hesse. "It's impossible to transfer credit to another person. Gambling one's possessions is risky but not very; there's hardly anything that can't be duplicated or replaced. Credit is practically unlimited, actually. Things change hands, that's all; very respectable."

"Uh-huh," said Jai, watching him. *Professional.*

"Theft, of course, is in the same category. It may lead to hair-pulling or sulking—these people are very labile—but nothing else. And their sexual arrangements, however I may disapprove of them, are their own affair. And competition is dead; people can start businesses if they like, but they can't compete with us, and if they do it for pleasure, who cares? There have been some valuable discoveries made that way, by the by. And a cultural efflorescence. But it's nothing illegal or even harmful."

Jai drew his knees under his chin and put his sandals square on Liu-Hesse's colorless furniture. It was a chair —or a table—or a combination. He could not care. The place was dead. Victor Liu-Hesse, who would have been a man-in-a-crowd without his gray, official silk suit, cocked one eyebrow, inordinately gay.

"I'm going now. You'll come with me?"

"No," said Jai, intending to leave as soon as the other had left, "I'll watch. From here. I don't want a place to live, just credit. Leave the wristplate on your city sign, an hour before dawn. I'm serious." Hesse shrugged. "I'll watch you," said Jai. "And if you fool with anything you shouldn't, I'll tear the tape out of your hands from here, so help me God!"

"Ah, you don't know computers," said Hesse.

"I know you," said Jai, "and that's better. Remember: I watch."

"Goodbye then," said the other, at the door. "And remember, I watch too. Every time you use that plate, I'll know where you are."

"Try anything," said Jai, "and I stop your heart. At a distance, remember. Happy hunting," and he watched the man out. Liu-Hesse went with spring in his step,

fairly safe; there was no one in particular about. From the street there floated back a little tune: *At least it's harmless. "Organized crime!" What's that? Historical curiosity? Couldn't find it, I should think so!*

But I did, said Jai. *Sure I found it.*

Government.

He waited in another part of the area, with such a fix on Hesse that he went numb all over, between two houses so that no one would bother him, staring into nothing and now and then shifting his position blindly. He tried to keep some vague attention on his surroundings, but Population Control had not set anyone on to him. Population Control was buoyant. *How these bastards keep secrets!* When it was over he moved several miles away, stiff from head to foot, to wait until dawn, telling Jai Two to keep an eye on Hesse. But Jai Two seemed to be asleep. He sat with his feet in a patch of weeds and the mosquitoes tormented him. He wondered if there were still cockroaches. Must be. Hesse was asleep. Everyone else was asleep. He dozed for a few hours while people stepped over his feet, surrounded by all the murders of Alaska, the hesitant and garbled anxieties, the perpetual taking stock: am I spontaneous enough? am I creative? do I respond? while unnamed people sent vague fears trickling into the gutters, the exudate of the communal mind, Alaska's cold virus. "The kids" were "at it" again. "They" had "done it" again. "Someone" had done "something horrible." He dozed, started, woke, fell asleep, woke again. There were the sexual arrangements that so shocked him now. Two people out of ten could read. He too had worried about his creativity, his spontaneity; now he wor-

ried about staying alive. *Which has its points.* A man who had bought a four-month fetus from the government was carrying it comfortably home, to "kill" and eat it. Jai yawned and stretched; he had developed a neuralgic ache under his right eye. *Grim.* He rubbed it absently. Hesse—Good Lord!—no, it was all right. He had thought Hesse was up to something. He began to walk under the night-time fluorescents, partly to ease his stiffness and partly to kill time. There were dark pits of shadow between the soundproofed houses; he hid there to avoid groups of people coming along the streets. Dawn was still a scarce time. Ninety miles from the edge of the inner city he allowed himself to travel faster, over the complex of underground transportation tubes and the single monorail, Alaska's Monument. The sleeping countryside was jammed with houses. He let himself down two miles from the city limits and walked the rest of the way; he had no intention of approaching too near the city sign. He looked for Liu-Hesse but could not find him, he thought he must be too tired, then he stopped paying attention to the area right around the sign and Liu-Hesse was half a mile away, having just got out of a personal hovercar, and he was strolling. He was enjoying the night air. He looked jaunty. On impulse Jai walked closer so that only the length of a few fields separated them; weeds climbed up the roof of the ramp and trailed over the sign. The wilderness over the inner city was black under the night sky. Invisible solidographs proclaimed the dangers of poison ivy to no one. Jai saw that Victor Liu-Hesse had an extra wristplate and a gun. The man's head came up suddenly as he saw Jai against the lights of the suburb, but it did not seem to be alarm; he was

still buoyant, still secure. Something got sharper and stretched thin. They walked toward one another and Liu-Hesse draped the wristplate over the sign. There was barely enough light to see by. Jai examined the thing, to make sure there was nothing in it that should not be there, and then touched it, and then buckled it on his left wrist.

"You're right-handed," said Hesse. Curious, springy exhilaration the man had. Jai nodded.

"Tell me," said Hesse. "How do you do it? Do you concentrate? Or do you let go?"

He doesn't think I can do it at all, thought Jai in a flash. *He's decided it must be a joke, an Experience for him, a clever bluff.*

"You got out of my place pretty fast," said Hesse, laughing. *And not worried at all.* "It's a long walk from there to here. Did you hide around the corner? Did you fly? Not that it concerns me."

Jai said nothing. There was some confusion but he was too tired to know; it could not be real trouble or the man would have done something by now; at least it could wait. He'd have to move another hundred miles before he could sleep.

"Thank you," said Hesse vacantly, "it's a good joke," and touching his gun, he turned and walked away stiff-legged. *He wants to go home, too. He's nervous, of course. He believes, yet doesn't believe.* Jai turned his back on the man. *I'll have to keep checking him. Will I have to keep threatening him?* Hesse was thirty feet away and lost in the dark. Jai's eyes were temporarily blinded by the fluorescent lights. Thirty feet away in the dark Hesse took out his gun, and a second before it happened Jai saw it happen; the man's image

cracked in half and collapsed like a photographer's trick, half his face and body running into the other half in a tremendous explosion of fright; insanely stupid, Liu-Hesse shot at *the man who would take his job away, the civilian who had put him in danger, the fool who had power.* He stood there with his mismatched face and body, ruled by his gun hand, firing away, while Jai Vedh—who had dropped to the grass—pushed hard at the spewing fissure in Liu-Hesse's mad mind, clumsily batting at it to make it stop, agonizingly awkward because he was so startled and so tired.

Hesse disappeared. Like a mathematical transformation going into simpler and simpler terms. Jai called aloud "Victor?" but only grass-consciousness and stone-consciousness answered him and the little, hot points of fire pellets in the grass. The field was full of them. Jai went over to the dead man, whose brain was already becoming simpler, whose body had already begun to be degraded, and touching him on his chest, his arms, his face, his belly, tried to think what it was he had done when he had killed him and whether he could undo it. Hesse lay sprawled in the grass, his mouth and eyes wide open. It was a pitiful and frightening mechanism. Jai gathered the fire pellets and put them into a pouch of papers Hesse had worn around his neck; he then carried the body to the hovercar and propped it inside. The flesh was still soft but funny things were happening inside. Jai knew enough about machines to get the car up and head in a straight line; with that funny thing for his passenger, he headed south to the Pacific, the car's air-stream skirt trailing over mile after endless mile of houses, all buried in leafage, the car itself zigzagging occasionally to avoid other traffic, the

Recordit buzzing every five minutes. "You are now over Blank," the Recordit kept saying. "You have just passed Blank. You are coming to Blank. We must detour to avoid Blank." Jai slept uneasily, the funny thing getting stiffer and stiffer next to him. He could feel decay beginning to work in it. Twelve hours later and five hundred miles out over the North Pacific, he shorted the power and drove the car underwater, strapping the body in and staying with the car until it filled and began to sink. Victor Liu-Hesse could be traced and he might be found; but by the time he could be found, no one would be able to tell how long he had been dead. Or how he had died.

Jai made it back to the California coast where it would be warm, and crying stupidly on the artificial sand for a little while, stopped, and began to retch over and over again. He had had nothing to eat for a day. He had to move away from his own vomit in order to sleep. It was seventeen o'clock in the late afternoon of a summer's day; it was a public resort beach, as all beaches were, and crowded with people: with copulators, with nudists, with families, with protective devices and cleaning devices and electric fences which the bolder and more athletic could short-circuit or climb over. There were security booths where people could hide to call the police, and many, many Groups. Jai slept naked except for his expensive wristplate, in a huddle next to a sour-smelling patch of sand.

No one paid him the slightest attention.

Noise. Music. Wretched lights. He thought he had been taken inside by someone. They were going to fight over his body. He was on the floor or on the

sand, sprawled asleep, part of a ritual like a piece of wood, the thought: hold him, hold him, and somebody stroking him, supporting his head and saying (over and over) "Sleep, torn man, sleep. Yang only. Sleep, torn man, sleep. Yin only." The lights passed over his closed eyes with exaggerated slowness, vanishing off his chin: purple, green, blue, red, yellow, white, with pictures, too, a very old-fashioned and silly piece of stuff. Last year's. He was lying in a woman's lap, in some sort of barn with a lot of smoke around and people shuffling. *Jingle-bonk.* And could not open his eyes. *Jingle-jingle-bonk.* Foolishness. It occurred to him that he must have been drugged, for the naked woman whose lap he was in had as much mind or as much sex as a puppet, though he could smell her strongly. That is, she had been drugged. (*I've been drugged!*) Although he did not think that he usually thought that way. Perhaps he would wake up entirely. He did not want to lie forever in the lap of the Earth-Mother listening to her say "Yang-Yin" like a tape recorder; it was too damned degrading. There was a small, irritated, hopping-mad part of her mind, too, somewhere; he noted that with interest. He guessed it was the smoke and began to fend it away from him—big, bumbling molecules, as complicated as antique steamships—to let through the little, keen, live ones.

I am no chemist.

I bet the big, fat ones are the stuff.

Unfortunately these people are too gassed to remember what they're gassed on. It's probably better near the floor.

In a zone of pure air, he crawled off the Earth-Mother's lap on to the sand while she gasped and

hiccoughed; like a snake, with his eyes shut for better concentration, he crawled through the dancers and sifted his air. Someone kicked him. He inhaled, reflexively, thought abruptly *These people intend to murder me,* and before the fog got dissolved in his lungs, ripped open the inflated dome above him from side to side. It was the kind sold in camping kits. He thought, *I could have set fire to it, too.* He was surrounded by rhythmically clapping hands. He giggled. He had a flash vision of himself spread-eagled and his heart torn smoking raw from his chest; cold air from the sea whirled in the smoke and a naked dancer fell on him; Jai rolled clumsily away. Staggering to his feet, he kicked the man sideways and drove his head into the stomach of another. Surprisingly, the man fell down. Jai ducked between the dancing people, as his akido master had once taught him, and crashed into the light projector, whose tiny tripod got between his legs. He saw himself again as a sacrificed Aztec prisoner; the vision contracted to a point; Jai was ploughing senselessly toward the water with the fiery point behind him when it erupted into a man and his pursuer sat down and began petulantly to pick at a target arrow embedded shallowly in his calf. The thing had had a bad, weaving flight. One of the drummers cried dramatically, "No, no, no—" and then stopped as if he did not know what to do next. The dancing stopped. The naked people—hesitant—looked around them and one or two began to drift away. Some ran. Some vanished into security booths. Then others. The man with the arrow in his leg limped away, mindless, but another arrow wobbled up and hit him in the back, making him fall. Out of the dark between the green night-lights of

the security booths and the faraway glow of other domes, other fires, something came stalking with a great pretense of secrecy, aiming a target bow. A brazier flamed and smoked on the deserted sand but Jai did not need his night-blinded eyes. There was a cluster of adolescent intelligences, like fireflies, somewhere nearby, clinging behind the rocks. They adored hiding out. The secretive one, a detached spark nearly breathless with excitement, crunched heavily behind Jai, to the accompaniment of a loud mental twitter from his friends. He pulled back on the string. He said (in his mind):

My man, those are neo-Aztecs. They would have killed you.

They deserve to die.

Do you deserve to live?

Off-shore the tide crashed against other rocks, white ones in the dark. Jai let the boy come within a few yards of him and then moved aside as if it were natural. He moved again as soon as the boy had corrected his aim. It would be best not to be spectacular. He turned, as if he had just heard something, and looked the boy steadily in the face although he could not see a thing; his field of vision writhed black from the flame of the brazier and before him a palimpsest of ghost-flames swarmed on nothing. A slender, invisible boy in a gray suit wanted to kill him. Through the boy's eyes he saw the silhouette of a cave man in front of a fire, a naked, adult male.

"You," he said, "wolf-cub! Put a security marker on that man." There was a moment's silence and then an impossibly cool young voice remarked:

"I have got you covered, man."

"Nitwit!" said Jai involuntarily. The boy raised his

bow again and drew back the string; Jai Vedh—phenomenally ill at ease all of a sudden in this world of events—gave an extra touch to the bow and the boy screamed. The arrow, which was too short for his arm, had wavered free and gone through his left hand. He stood paralyzed, making little moaning sounds. The shaft stood two inches out from the back of his hand. Jai ran forward, horrified.

"Don't touch me!" the boy shouted. He drew a knife and backed away. His friends, more than ever like insects in a marsh, started to drift toward the beach: bobbing globules of light, lazy and erratic. They were very interested but they were not coming fast. With his teeth set and his eyes on Jai, the youngster attempted to hack the plastic feathers from his arrow, but the pain forced him to give up; he was bleeding badly. He stood erect and still, presenting the point of his knife at Jai. When the others drew near he fainted. They stood around in a circle, intently watching him bleed; one said gravely, "Everyone must take care of himself." Another said, "You overcame him. You can be one of us," and giggled, nudging the dying boy with her toe. Jai saw in their minds nothing out of the ordinary; in their pockets, bandages; he took these suddenly from the youngster nearest him, knelt by the boy, pulled out the bloody arrow, and dressed the boy's hand.

"You can't do that!" said somebody, astonished. They all looked at each other. "Ivat was the best," said a girl. "Poor Ivat." Somebody else said, shrugging elaborately, "That's the way it goes." Jai picked the boy up and they closed ranks around him, nocking their arrows. "Aren't you the lousy shots!" he said, showing his teeth. *Put those down.* He shut his eyes, instantly transforming

the circle of visual blots into blazing noonday; he walked, in a rage, through their paralyzed arms, holding them down with his heel as he moved away and letting them go when he reached the hut of a security booth: pre-formed polymer, room for one, that rode on rockers on the sand. Inside, the screen said:

THERE WILL BE A SHORT DELAY AS YOUR SECURITY FORCE IS NOW BUSY SERVING YOU THROUGHOUT METROPOLITAN CALIFORNIA. IF YOU WISH TO WAIT, LEAVE YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS AND YOUR SECURITY FORCE WILL EXTEND A SECURITY LINE TO YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. OTHERWISE PLEASE VACATE THIS BOOTH AS IT MAY BE NEEDED BY OTHERS. Next to the screen was the usual wristplate receiver, pursed. He thought about the automatic armaments he had turned on by entering the booth and then about the dying child on his knees; he fed the receiver with his plate (with a shudder), dialed a hovercar, a hospital, a residence, punched the VACANT button so the booth would not tear him to pieces on his way out. He went out when he heard the hovercar set itself down outside. Now they had him if they wanted him. He supposed that Ivat must belong to something or somebody, but the under-age tag around the boy's neck read AFFILIATIONS REMOVED BY REQUEST and the one name: Ivat. You did as you liked on Old Earth, even if you were fourteen. The ground-car ripped across the beach, kicking up a storm of sand. *My God I'm hungry,* thought Jai. He looked at his wristplate, to remind himself of who he was supposed to be, and after an instant's terrifying lurch (the near-corpse next to him was sickeningly familiar) almost groaned with laughter. Victor Liu-Hesse had been a learned man. Greek and French, not bad; the plate itself was right and honest, not bad. It

had been Liu-Hesse's private joke. The words rested under the instrument panel of the car, winking at the sheet-pale, bloodstained arm of almost anonymous Ivat. So unintentionally apt, but few would recognize.

TELE LANDRU

But my God, what an appalling sense of humor!

He saw Ivat delivered into the hospital like a package into a slot, then went to his residence. He ate, dialed 80 degrees F, provided himself with clothes, reviewed his friends, hobbies, and past year's purchases, punched maximum silence and visual cut-off, slept, woke, cleaned himself with the hand ultrasonic, dressed, slept, and woke again. He was finishing breakfast next to a holographic wall view of White Lake in the Gobi, its repeated wheeling and flutter of birds, when the corridor outside became occupied and the blank over the bed lit up. There had been people walking over his head and under his floor all night, and next door, but this was somebody new. He indicated quickly that the place was locked. A thought spiraled under the door, sneering indescribably, and he laughed. He slipped the visual ON and lifted the OPEN switch and Ivat—whose shadow now flattened over the bed—transferred himself to the person of the stranger and appeared outside the sliding panels. He immediately crowded through, with his bow. His hand was bandaged. He punched CLOSED: LOCKED over Jai's breakfast and held out his bandaged hand.

"Take this off!" he demanded.

"No," said Jai. "But come in."

"I *am* in!" and the boy sprawled angrily on the bed. The bed looked like a fish and Jai's chair like a mush-

room; there was nothing else in the room but part of the wall that folded down to eat on and the routine controls (they were underground) for the power, the wastes, five lines to atmosphere, communications and travel, and sixteen to purchasing. They could have reached over each other and touched the opposite walls.

"Coward!" Ivat shouted. "Did you think my ghost would haunt you?"

"Yes," said Jai. "Want some food?"

"No," said Ivat. He was dissatisfied with the wall view and switched it restlessly back and forth, making Jai uncomfortably aware of the depths of the wall tracking back into clusters of dots. Jai wondered what Liu-Hesse had meant about "valuable discoveries" coming from anyone's work, as there was nothing in the residence that would not have been there five years before in another form. Except himself, perhaps. Ivat pushed minimum silence, to hear his enemies coming. He frowned at Jai.

"I told you," he said in a low, dangerous voice, "to take off this bandage. You got me into it!" *His gray suit's an imitation.* "Goddammit! Goddammit!" the boy screamed. *It's odd that no one ever calls the professionals by name, as a class.* Ivat threw himself on his stomach, whimpering a little as his bandaged hand hit the wall. He lay there, satisfied, for several minutes. Then he said:

"What've you been doing?"

"Sleeping," said Jai. "Watching the news. Eating."

"Anything on?"

"All cultural and social," said Jai, with his eyes half-closed. "Nothing else. There was a riot. And a panel arguing about art. Nothing." *A lot of colored dots.*

"We have decided," said Ivat, "that you have psi, my man."

Ah?

"Yes," said Ivat, oblivious. "It is clear that Aries ruled at your birth and you therefore have psi. Have you had any psi experiences?"

"Aries?"

"In *our* society," said the boy irrelevantly, (*he's wondering if he can ever look his friends in the face again*) "everyone must take care of himself. It is not permitted to meddle. You have discredited me temporarily, but I can take care of that. To the rational mind it is not permitted or even possible to be illogical. If you're not an Aries, you are clearly a Scorpio strongly influenced by Aries and that involves psi power. Have you had any experiences?"

"Well," said Jai, "I don't believe so, no." Ivat fell silent. Eventually he said:

"Huh! You've really been away for a while, haven't you!"

"Yes," said Jai, "I've been away. I'm out of touch," and he reached past Ivat to settle the wall on a tourist's view of the Palmer Archipelago. "I'm looking for someone," he said. He could see through Ivat's eyes that the wall was a convincing picture, but to him—with its no mass, no smell, and no touch—it was less than a ghost. His brain kept turning it into moiré patterns. He said, "Someone from off-planet," and Ivat cried *I'll go with you! I'll go with you!* but Jai, without looking at the shape in front of him, consulted his wristplate to review the names and addresses of his fictional friends, and his hobbies: free-fall psychotherapy, cuisine, and Demonism. He said, "May I check with you? This person be-

lieves in psi. She believes that if you control heat you can control motion, if you control motion you can control mass, that the control of mass means the control of energy, and that both mean the control of gravity. Is she correct?"

"No," said Ivat. "Bad theory. Sounds likes a Pisces. What's she like?"

"Playful," said Jai, "very playful and untrustworthy, actually. Not a Pisces, though. You'd better go your own way now," and he turned off the wall, which was beginning to bother him, and folded up the breakfast ledge. He followed the food down the waste line until he felt that he had stuck his own head in it with a taffy-stretching neck, way, way down, and then he said:

Note. Man is a fetalized ape, not solemn. This is progress.

Am I getting more playful? Warn me!

They played and lied and amused themselves. And they were all like that. Fooling the hell out of us. Why, I compare dates and I find I was on whatsitsname two years, not one. Full of it. "I can travel a mile in one hop," one said, when I can do better now myself.

Note. Maybe I won't try to find her.

Lies and lies!

"I must admit to you," Jai said then, "that I have no particular desire for your company. Business is business. I'm glad to see you well. Goodbye."

"Hell! I don't care," said Ivat.

Jai took the first elevator to the surface, aware that the boy was following him. Ivat was hurt and intensely baffled about something. He craned his head and looked around. He was restless. He muttered and

gnawed his lip. He gripped the rail with both hands when the platform shot up and closed his eyes so as not to see the wall. He grinned when it stopped. He had a stomach-ache. He fermented his way up the ramp, bouncy-footed, jerking his head around, going zigzag to look at people and estimate their deadliness, narrowing his eyes intently, practicing getting the bow off his shoulder, fretting a little about his hand. *He even smells adolescent.* A birthday floated up from Ivat's kidney and along his spine like a wisp of phosphor. Fourteen. Other memories, other boasts, specially altered for personal consumption by busy Ivat, extruded from the boy like ectoplasm; Jai sees him wreathed and frilled from head to foot in an armor of playing cards; only the eyes show. Ivat peers out hotly. He used to have buck teeth. *Rather hard to fasten my attention on people's outsides.* Jai, already bored, stopped at a private stand outside a private house. They sold hand-printed books; he ran his eyes down the list on the wall: Aviation, Archery, Alabaster, Agnosticism, Aconite. The ever-present vegetables were exasperating, no pattern and no sense. Someone had planted a row of carrots in the grass by the stand. Someone else would come along and rip up the books; they'd make more. The girl behind the stand was high as Heaven on love, love, love; *the books would be taken but they'd make more, that's what it was for, that was the core . . .* Ivat, fascinated by the books, stopped to look at her for a moment. "What's that?" "Art," she said, barely opening her lips. She tried to touch Ivat but he recoiled. Jai, oppressed, wished to look only at the sky, but felt that he might begin to levitate unconsciously into people's backs; his shoulders hurt from collisions, his sinuses stung. *I'm out of touch.* Ivat

finally got up the nerve to confront him by the wall of a drug center which was aboveground because there were houses belowground, a little forest of flimsies, fringes, banners, plastics, daytime lights, roofed with turf and twined with lianas like a fairy carousel. Except for the few drug-store huts that showed, and the decorations, it was undistinguishable from any place else. Ivat held out a hand-bound book which was falling apart in his damp fingers; he said:

"JustimagineIranintoyou. What's that?"

"A book," said Jai.

"What?" said Ivat.

"Like a tape," said Jai patiently, "but I know someone who does better. It's a pretty cover, though, pressed gold lilies. See?" and he took the book and began to leaf through it. Pages fell out: bad glue. "It's handwritten," said Jai. "Copied from something."

"It's crud," said Ivat flatly. "I tried to read it. Why don't they buy something that'll hold together?"

"They're creative," said Jai. "They make it themselves," and he stripped the hand-pressed plastic sheets from the inside. He kept the cover. It was an imitation of something he remembered dimly having seen in a museum. The memory became stronger than the cover itself, which now looked like a sketchy, amateurish job, and he let the thing slip through his fingers to the grass.

"Ah! the irrational creative mind," said Ivat. There was a moment's embarrassing silence. Jai thought the boy was going to cry. "Excuse me," said Ivat, "for my hand," and he darted into one of the drugstores. Jai saw him, a bee in the hive, back into a painshot and put something in his mouth; Ivat came out chewing, rubbing

his buttock; he said with a considering frown, "Arvetinol isn't a *drug* exactly."

"ClearThought," said Jai. "Of course not." He wished he could not see into the boy's head so well. He had a sane fear of touching the boy's mind and an astonished conviction that he was becoming too sympathetic to live; he felt Ivat's tears rise in his eyes and Ivat's swaggery dizziness seize his limbs; he did not want to smell, or hear, or walk with, or be close to such a pathetic thing.

"Helps me bear the pain," said Ivat, too loud. "Stay rational, y'know." He muttered a moment later, "Once in a while." Jai took his elbow and the boy rambled on about astrology, stopping to piss against a wall and explaining that it would make the grass grow. He looked doubtfully at his penis and Jai said, "Come on. It's big enough." Ivat shook his head. He swayed on his feet. He waited doggedly until Jai had uncovered himself—"Look. See?"—and letting go his anxious genitals, stretched out his hand halfway to his friend's. And stopped in mid-air. He grimaced earnestly, *pulling himself together* (this is Jai), like a grinning dog, with great strain, the cords of his neck standing out, with a "heh!" at the end of it. He kicked grass idly over his puddle. Sober Ivat had not taken that much ClearThought, which makes everything seem like wisdom. He imagines Jai crowding him into his trousers, zipping him up and himself crying; he imagines Jai's hands in his trousers. They are idle, analytical, reasonable imaginings. He decides to vanish them.

"Why are you wearing a sheet?" he says.

"Disposable," said Jai, dropping it. He made as if to take Ivat by the elbow again, but Ivat zipped up care-

lessly and started down the path, past the people, along the houses, past the flowers, always the same. High-stepping, an eye out for danger. Jai saw him vanish into fog banks of people and reappear, shining steadily; he wove in and out of the other walkers; but the impression persisted that they were alone together in a deserted street, an echoing, weed-grown, moss-grown, grass-grown alley. It was endless. Ivat said:

"Well, when are you going to start finding that friend?"

Jai, having no answer, did not answer.

"What d'you want her for anyway?" said Ivat, and when there was no reply, stopped and coughed into his hand. He beat himself melodramatically on the chest. "I'm going to die," he said. "I don't take care of myself because other things are more important. You see?" but receiving no reply from Jai's smooth face, he felt a guilty dip in his spirits and kicked the walk. His inside hurt him. Jai's face itself was godawful to him: sun-bleached beard, dark skin, immobile, staring, light-blue eyes. It went with him everywhere like a shield; it appeared on buildings when he looked at them. Sulky because the expression was so untrustworthy and suspicious because it hurt to look at the face, Ivat (*who is having again,* thought Jai, *the usual suspicion that someone he loves can read his mind*) turned away from the face and said with affected casualness:

"So long, sun nut."

And Jai, realizing for the first time that he had picked up the expressionlessness of Evne and the rest, made himself smile, made himself say to the boy who was metaphorically groaning and weeping: "But I don't want to lose you."

"True, you're helpless," said Ivat.

"My name is Landru," said Jai.

"You're the Sun Nut," said Ivat, and then after a long pause, miserably swamped by terror, "Do you like parties, Sun Nut?

"People get tired after twenty-five," said Ivat then. "They're not good for anything. You're too damn old." Jai waited patiently. "Oh, all right," said the boy, "let's go to some parties," and they shook hands formally, with Ivat laughing. "What do you live for?" said Jai, feeding him his line, and Ivat, still laughing, answered, "Control and power," while his soul showed its teeth like an ape. There was something about that answer that was true. Jai, the powerful one, felt himself lose his transparency with this, lose his simplicity, found himself smiling amiably in a sudden half-crouch. He knew what he would do to Ivat. The boy turned over mentally without the slightest effort or the slightest awareness and showed his other side: silly, boastful, defensive, swamped in affection. He whistled feebly. "Wait'll you see the nits at that party," he said. Jai was admiring and amused.

"Where are your parents?" said Jai, curious, and the boy (shrugging) answered simply, "Don't know any more. Where are yours?"

"I don't know, either," said Jai. They laughed. Houses went by and houses went by, vines, signs, home-made shops, home-made streamlets, home-made bridgelets in ruins. Jai, sunk in thought, saw between the boy's lungs a small, dark shadow like the spot in an X-ray photograph, something solid, something hard, something hanging in the sweet flesh that moved with it and lived with it, that fed on what Ivat's fears fed on and suffered

what his shame suffered, but made of these something stony, something unteachable: a second, ageless Ivat. He was shot through with it. It was growing. Perhaps the professionals would pick him up some day and teach him what he already thought he knew. They'd make a real killer out of him. Jai, in reverie, saw the boy's face darken, the path darken, the walls themselves catch the stain; he saw Power and Control infect the sun. Then Ivat whistled again—even more feebly than before—and it all collapsed.

What eyes! thought Jai. *Half the time I don't see and half the time I can't interpret what I see.*

"Hoo! Wait till you meet those marshmallow cream people," said Ivat.

The first people they visited were a couple who wanted to reform Ivat, a conservative couple who lived in an underground tunnel, who put lead in their walls and who drank distilled water. They had raised one of their own children but it had died after a few years. The second place was a giveaway center for fancy groceries, which you had to get by visiting one of the underground factories; there was a real party there and the hostess, who looked like Olya, said they were please to be serious about eating, and she was for lend to anyone. Ivat snickered. They left when the guests started turning on with Cocoon on the rug because it made the boy uncomfortable. In the third place there was confetti coming from the ceiling: bone-white shapes in a dim light, very classical and severe, and the walls covered with grainy, black-and-white pictures of dead children. There was music in the infra-bass, BadJob (he could have sworn) in the air.

"If you feel horror," said someone slowly, drugged, "then you are alive."

"I feel it," said another. "Awful, awful. I feel it."

"Theorists!" whispered Ivat contemptuously. The room smelled of blood. He dipped his fingers in something warm on the way out and came out sucking the salt off them. Jai said, a little shaken:

"What do they do next?"

"They sit and talk," said Ivat. From an adjacent house, insufficiently shielded, came a chorus of voices:

Are we like sheep

Are we like sheep

and surprise of all surprises, a baby crawling in the yard. Jai, with all his might, wished it back inside, not to be transported back inside but to apprehend with all its own mind the dangers of staying outside. He did not dare to look too closely into the house. He pushed the baby but the baby did not move; then he put his cheek against it (from a distance) and nudged it (from a distance) and then slipped into it, next to it, little unformed blob in diapers (which had not changed in hundreds of years) so there were two crawling around in the yard, with their diapers eating the excrement and humming and drying the ingoing air. He felt the fright, he put the fright out there, he made the fright exist between him and the baby.

"Look at it go!" said Ivat, impressed. Then he said, "Let's go see some sensible people."

"No," said Jai.

"You'll like them," said Ivat.

"We'll walk," said Jai.

But there was no place to go that was public. He had forgotten about that. Ivat's fourth set of friends, in

a fairy cottage like everyone else, had covered their outside wall with plastic plates. Ivat stared at these a long time before he would go in. He insisted on leading the way, palming the walls to make them open. A bell rang inside the labyrinth of rooms. The living room was a meadow. Lucky Ivat, who couldn't see through anything, sat down on the unsteady, sparkling *tsunami* hologram that hid the place where the floor projected a sittable shelf; there were, on the fake grass of the floor, a giant toadstool, a boulder, a cherry tree in full flower, and a spouting whale, all home-made. Jai sat on the whale. Ivat blinked. He propped his bow between his knees. He knocked on the wall and it dilated; thrusting his hand into the opening, he took out a tobacco cigarette and an alcoholic drink. He said, "Conservative. Want one, Landru? They're real," and when Jai shook his head, flicked the one alight with his thumbnail and sipped the other. He coughed. To Jai, used to the synthetic, the smoke in Ivat's throat tasted like paint and weeds. In the bowels of the house someone braked a lathe; on the fringes someone turned off a sewing machine; washing his/her hands, he took the elevator up and she palmed door after door coming in. She was carrying a sleeping baby. She came in smiling, carrying her fresh, pretty face before her, presenting the baby like a picture of Serene Maternity under the electric stars in the ceiling; Jai could have sworn the baby had said that. She smiled meaningfully at Ivat's bow and he smirked; she put the baby down, slipped an industrial jewel from her sarong and wreathed it around her neck, this one an oily yellow doughnut with sparks in it, already half dead. Jai remembered that they were not supposed to be pretty.

Her man, with his doctored profile, wore the same jewel; he stood in the iris of the doorway with a home-made rifle in his hands, a stun gun big enough for an elephant. She said:

"We're glad Ivat's come, aren't we?"

"Heh! I know about your schedule," said Ivat.

"We have a schedule," said the lady. "We do everything at certain times. We don't do things simply to follow our impulses, you know."

"This is their time for visits," Ivat whispered.

"Rational people," said the man, "realize that their lives must be made meaningful. Meaning isn't just given us."

Jai could not think of anything to say so he nodded politely. The man stood his rifle against the cherry-tree-in-full-flower and sat down on the boulder, disappearing partway into it. "My wife," he said, indicating the woman whose steady, comfortable, firm, autonomous smile shaped the words "He fought for me and won me" with perfect composure.

There was a short silence. No one was uncomfortable.

"You will notice," said the man at length, "that we've reproduced natural objects inside our home. Photographically. This is important. It's possible to live thoughtlessly or sloppily now; everyone has all his time free since the Great Work Change of a century and a half ago, and people's lives are entirely what they make of them. The stupid and the slovenly disintegrate. We don't."

"My husband—" said the woman.

"Be quiet," he said. "This isn't your role. You've performed the woman's social role and that's over now. This is abstract thinking; this is the man's role." She

nodded, without acrimony. She smiled and made an inviting gesture toward Jai and Ivat; when Ivat grinned, she rapped on the wall and took out a tray of Goodlets. She offered them wordlessly to the guests; then she said, as if hesitant, "Do have some," and when they refused (Ivat was getting solemnly drunk) she put the tray back. The wall closed on it. The man polished his stun gun with the end of his sarong and there was another minute's silence.

"In the morning," said the man, looking up, "we eat, and then we practice. I practice my marksmanship and she her cooking and cleaning. Then we eat again. She cultivates flowers. It's important for a woman to keep in touch with growing things. We watch the news—not that there's anything to see—and then we work on the interior of the house. The interior of the house is changed every three months. Then we work on the fortifications—you would have been killed without your friend's palm print—and in the evening she makes our clothes. Our clothes are changed every week. I spend three evenings a week in live combat, armed or unarmed, though to do this I must associate with people I would not ordinarily speak to. She plays with the baby. Ordinarily, except during visiting times, the baby is taken care of by a crèche. We don't believe—" (here he turned to his wife, without moving, asking *What is it I don't believe?* and the phantom of the woman said)

"In neglecting the advantages given us by a mechanized society," said the woman. "It was about the baby," she added hastily. "That's mine." Then she said, "Once a month we watch entertainments." *The day will come,* said the man silently, referring to the fools and slovens in the world. Ivat (mournful because he was drunk)

asked, "Will you help me with my shooting?" and the man, hefting his rifle, pushed the boy in front of him, announcing—as soon as they were out of sight—"You can't shoot when you're drunk. I'm going to dial a vomitory." There was nothing in the minds of either man or woman; they were ordinary; they were a little bored. It was a commonplace day. The wife looked sidelong at Jai and unwound her sarong from around her breasts; she picked the baby up as if to nurse him and then put him down; she said archly to Jai:

"A mother likes a male child best, don't you agree?"

He thought for a minute, finding nothing inside her, no strangeness inside her, nothing extraordinary. He said, "No."

"Oh, a male child is special," she said, drawing out her words, and then, without the slightest preamble, she threw herself on him, on the holographic whale, twisting her breasts against him and speaking hoarsely. She had no desire at all. She urged him to take her before her husband came back; she promised him she would do it a hundred times; she would give him unspeakable pleasures; she ripped off her sarong and clawed at his clothes, and in all this athleticism he could find in her only the faintest stirring of excitement. A thought he had not noticed because it was not erotic:

Do this so my husband can kill you.

And then, anxiously:

He wants to fight you. He has to. This is a woman's role. Please!

As he had with the baby, so he did with her: *the thought is not in the other person but between the two of us, but in her, but also between us . . .* She forgot what she had been doing. Back in her sarong, she had the

idea again; she looked sidelong at him and picked up the baby. She put the baby down.

"Male children are best," she said. "Don't you agree?"

"Here comes your husband," said Jai Vedh, perched on the spouting whale and on the edge of unmanly hysteria. Ivat, coming in (very pale) said sharply, "What are you laughing at, Landru?" The husband (*who affects not to know it,* thought Jai, *but he does, he does*) nodded curtly. "Time for privacy," he said. *Now you copulate!*

"What do you do now?" said Jai aloud, the polite guest fulfilling an obligation.

"After visiting times," said the husband, "we eat and work on the interior of the house. I do the heavy work. A woman must bear her part, though. Copulation is for—" and he stopped. Jai put his hand over his own mouth in amazement. *Was that me?* The man frowned in vexation. "Visiting time is over," he announced, and to Ivat: "Work on your aim."

"Tell me," said Jai, putting his whole mind into it, "if you didn't work on the interior of the house today, would it matter, particularly?

"I mean," said Jai, with Ivat trying to shush him, "—and just to be obliging, I'll try to make it clear—that if you didn't work on the house today, you could, of course, work on it tomorrow. Or the day after. Your schedule isn't necessary. And with the climate as it is now, so near the inner city, there's no natural reason to try to match the seasons, so what does it matter what the house looks like? A professional could do it for you in half an hour. As you've said, you don't please your friends—"

"Shut up, Landru!" hissed Ivat.

"—and you certainly don't please yourselves. So just who *are* you pleasing? The man in the moon? It seems to me—"

The man picked up his rifle.

—said Jai, giddy with success and neatly flipping the man's mind away from his hands, "that the walls are automatically set to clean up after you, so you can't make the place uninhabitable, can you? So why practice cleaning, either? And why cooking? It's entirely a time-killer. Your schedule—" (the woman was in a panic) "which, as you admit," he went on, "is an entirely artificial creation—" and here Ivat, who was not laughing, pulled him through the labyrinth of doors, swearing in a cracked, adolescent voice, and jumped up and down in a rage on the path outside while Jai Vedh roared. There were tears in the boy's eyes.

"Oh!" screamed Ivat. "You! You . . . You!"

Jai caught him by the throat.

"I will turn your mind inside out," he whispered. "I will tear you in pieces. Your friends are fakes, my boy, and I am twenty times as powerful! Twenty times to the twenty-thousandth power!"

Ivat gurgled with rage.

"You have found in me," said Jai with low cunning, "a guru of the very highest order who will make your elephant guns and your arrows look like child's play. Bless your luck!"

"Shit!" cried Ivat furiously.

"Bless it!" shouted Jai, laughing again. "Bless it and praise it till the end of your life! I will love you and teach you to be a dragon and a tiger, what do you say? I will make you a man, a man, a happy man who can laugh in anyone's face and break every weapon and

every schedule and every rule on this wide earth! Man, you will *love* your way to Heaven! Now we're going somewhere."

"Yah!" said Ivat, but he was tempted.

"We are going," said Jai, breathing deep, casting around, pointing, "over there. Come along or I'll make you come along."

"No, I won't," said Ivat, clearly intrigued.

"Yes, you will," said Jai.

They took the elevator down to the underground and transferred, linking arms to show the underground that they were together. The walls came down fast on either side of them as they sat face to face and the door slid shut behind them; they were in a little room. Jai felt tremors in the rock as they were fed to the main vacuum line, and the sudden shock of the air fleeing away. There were ninety-seven people in the entire module. Ivat squirmed, trying to fit his bow between his knees.

"Say," said Ivat timidly, "what would you do with a murderer, Landru? What would you do with a murderer? Do you know?" The module was drawn under the sea.

"Don't know," said Jai. *Be quiet. God, am I horny. that ice-cold woman—*

"You would distract him," said Ivat. "That's what you would do. Murderers have no persistence. Statistics show that 98 per cent of murderers are psychotic, so if you distract them, they lose the impulse. Where are we going?"

Jai gave the coordinates. The sea fled away; the rock screamed.

"Hm," said Ivat. "That means our traveling time is thirty-two minutes, forty-eight seconds. Did you know

that? When we reach the next station we transfer and take the elevators up and then we walk oh-point-seven miles. We could take a hovercar but there are never hovercars available because everybody wants to take a hovercar, even in the middle of the night. There are a lots of lights at night to encourage photosynthesis, but it encourages the people, too. I saw a bunch of people pulling up grass, yesterday, for no reason at all. Are you all right, Landru?"

Be quiet, said Jai, opening his eyes. He had not meant to do it to Ivat, he did not want to do it to Ivat, and it scared him. Ivat was nice. *I like his chatter.* But Ivat was quiet.

There was, when they got there, what Ivat's dull friends could not provide—a crowd. It was the first crowd Jai Vedh had ever seen. For a quarter of a mile in every direction the houses were open and brilliantly lit, as if nobody lived there or nobody cared, or perhaps those people had run away. There were bonfires every thirty feet, inside and outside the houses; flames melted furniture and choked people with the smoke of burning plastic; people fell into the flames and came out staggering, with bright patches waving on them; bushes died. Air pollution roiled over the place like a roof. Hours before, someone had thrown sacks of powdered metallic salts on the fires, scarce and useful stolen stuff, to burn in gouts of colors; Jai could tell there were patches of ore under people's feet for the cleanups to mine in the morning. He imagined they would hospitalize the burned. He had never seen so much destruction and drunkenness with so much silence; the fucking was inexhaustible, the food an avalanche (being thrown

and stepped on), at the edge of the party there was one voice, one voice only, singing.

Of course. The noise is deafening everyone but me. It's the minds I can't hear, and switching from his mental ears to his ears

("Waste! Waste!" Ivat was shouting, tears on his cheeks. "Horrible!")

was almost knocked down by the appalling

(He pushed the boy on to a patch of already scorched grass. *Stay there!*)

wondered why the crowd-mind is so flat, drug-bound, silence, individuality all lost, found he could not tune out either the silence or the blast of sound, an unpleasant business of tearing his brain to pieces, falls over a couple in continuous orgasm, a drug thing, lasts hours and hours until the nervous system is used up (he's heard about it,) clutches at his groin, and thinks:

That's bad. That's usual. It's no party. Why is it no one knows really what to do? and wandering in the crowd, feels with horror its uncertainty, its tentativeness, almost its boredom. *The cleanups will fix it in the morning. Nobody cares anyway, except the dead. Stupidity takes the edge off sadism.*

Nothing here for me.

In the nearest house a young lady, taking off her clothes, steps with a wink into boiling sulfur and lasciviously dies; this is a fantasy and what is really happening is that some dozen people are pulling down the walls and feeding them to a fire; when they finish, they'll have nothing left to do. A man whose clothes have caught on fire wanders away from them into the next house, into dancers who don't see him. It's a hodgepodge of fancies. Jai wonders why fancies are so impos-

sible to enact. What is there about hanging by your knees from a rafter, as someone is doing? He finds himself saying this to a woman as she passes, rammed into her as she struggles and pulls at him, and on the edge of a lightning bolt of satisfaction, queasily withdraws, racked in two, unable to let himself go into a bag with a mind like this one. *I'll retch,* he says, and goes off with a feeble pop into slime and swamp, bent over, unrelieved, while he tries to know only the healthy body. *Metal teeth.* She is medicated to extinction. He can't walk when he stands up. Without hate, without love, without memory, without a face or a thought (*Less mind than a chipmunk*), she remains lying because she is unable to think of getting up, only grinds her buttocks on the ground for no conscious reason, eyes unfocused, not even waiting for the next man. Someone will find her. At the edge of the crowd, the one voice keeps on singing.

He passed all the people who were soberly busy, like ants, tearing things off the houses and burning them; and the people who were snappish because it was going to end so soon; and the many places where people were driving nails and splinters into other people (into their eyes, say) or pushing them into the fire, not out of cruelty but to see what would happen, because people were (after all) things, too. People could be destroyed, too. This he did not join. There was a two-year-olds' concentration about it for which he was almost grateful. There was very little pain; one victim, quite insensible, grinned vacuously as the nail approached his undamaged eye, jumped a little as it happened, cried "I can't see!" in great surprise, and then, imitating the sound, said in a pleased voice, "Ulch, I heard an ulch" until

the whole crowd took it up, again not happily or cruelly but almost automatically. No one danced or sang. People were sleeping in odd corners. He felt no hatred from anywhere. As he threaded his way between the fires, there were more asleep, more exhausted, more who had dimmed to ashes. He had to look twice at these to see that they were dead. The voice at the edge kept on singing.

Near a house that was inhabited and locked (Jai thought instantly of the other householders who were in security shacks or security posts, those who were less stubborn, those who were more frightened and less annoyed) near that house, which had its walls covered with pictograms and hexes, smears in classical style, figures from ancient Egypt and microcephalic heads from the pre-dawn Solomon Islands of Man the Machine-less—all mythological, of course—the voice, which was of course in his head and not in the air, began to flick around the walls and paths, running away from him. It was a note-perfect memory of a recent piece of popular music. It blossomed out with eight instruments in more-or-less counterpoint, but Jai had never cared for popular music; he found the body that was darting about, with the mind inside it like a fish, and stalking her from behind a wall, leapt into her way. She gasped, totally human. Then she sang inside her head, this large, solid, unpretty, naked girl:

O blue! O nursery! O films, gravity, confusion, confusion! Then she made something up. It went:

You just jumped.
Jump! Jump!
It is fun to jump.

"Good God, who let you out!" said Jai before he knew

he had spoken aloud, and grasping her by the arm, read the tag around her neck. The bonfires were beautiful in her eyes. So was he. She said, "Pretty! Pretty!" and throwing her arms around him, gazed into his eyes at the reflection of the beautiful fires.

"Do you want to go there?" he said involuntarily. "Do you think you mustn't?" "Pretty," she said again. He was stroking her back. She said, "Pritt, pritt," like a cat, believing this to be part of the other-all-important word, and turning to him excitedly, stood on tiptoe with her back bent, and pushed her pelvis into his. She clung to him, her mouth pursed for a kiss, her body working frankly; he remembered how well they were educated, these feebleminded, and was not surprised. She had been watching the couples. Even as she got down awkwardly on her back and spread her knees, her face was turned wistfully toward the fires. He remembered how the schools painfully taught them manners, taught them elementary courtesy; he was afraid she was accustomed to being masturbated but could find nothing clear in her memories. She might be frightened. He got down on his knees and tried again to find something clear in her mind but could not, and he was so hot (and she so annoyed and impatient) and heard, when he entered her, one clear, curious note of surprise: *teacher doesn't do this,* before he exploded in white-hot ruins that rattled his teeth.

When he came to himself, she wished to go on, but Jai could not do what teacher did because he hadn't the equipment, except on his own person. Mouth or hands she would not allow; they scandalized and frightened her. She lay, weeping quietly, while Jai tried to explain, and giving up the explanation, stroked her as

she wept, and lay with her cheek-to-cheek. Her heavy face was flushed, her eyes fixed mournfully on the far-away party. When he could, he began again, carefully and patiently, wooing her for her pleasure, courting not her body but her mind, a little discommoded by her clumsiness, but dissolving with enormous relief into that fragrant soul stretched limb for limb under him. She blotted out the party.

"You're human," said Jai when she had opened her eyes; "You're human, did you know that?" and she smiled at his tone.

When he left her in the security hut, she wept all over again, but he was glad that in a few minutes she had begun to forget and was singing again, with her amazing rote memory, another popular song.

On his way back to Ivat, there was a gang wrecking a house. He put his back into it, helping them strip the delicate plastic paneling with the built-in hum and the unexpectedly tough plates of the ceiling. These had to be pried off with bars, so then he stood on heaps of the things that gave way under his feet, the whole ceiling collapsing around him in a roar of old insulating dust and ornamental wires. He bullied the others, who were too drunk to think, dragging them by the hair and throwing them on the things they were to break, kicking them in a fury, driving them backward by cuffing them in the face until they fell over the molded glass boards where, like insects, they began to rip and tear. He backed against the outer wall, and wrapping his arms around the main beam, pulled until it screamed. He could not, of course, bring it down. As he let go and stumbled back, a man crawled out from under one of the fallen ceiling plates, looking absurdly like

a turtle, half dragging the plate with him, and Jai hit him in the face. He stubbornly continued to crawl, bleeding over the rubble of glass boards and glass brick. *I'll batter you again,* thought Jai, and did it, *And again,* and did it, *And again,* and did it. The man crawled on, dragging one leg and whispering unpleasantly. He seemed to have no nose. Someone slowly stooped and picked up a brick to throw at Jai Vedh, but before the blurred soul could move, Jai had dodged and was gone. Everything was so amusingly slow. Off in the distance Ivat was boiling furiously about something so Jai went in that direction, avoiding the dying bonfires and the ten or twelve or twenty bodies in one linked spasm, the gutted houses, the sharp edges of broken plastic on the grass. There wasn't much to burn in the houses. He sidestepped the dead. By the time he reached Ivat he was laughing. Just before, there was someone in a doorway, a contented man like a man in a picture, lounging with a smile, with twenty bright, soft knots waving on his clothes and hair, as if he were growing seaweed in living clumps. It took Jai some time to realize that the man was on fire. He clapped his hands over his eyes and the flames sprang to life as radiant, vaporous generosities; the man's utter, drugged peace followed him like an ineradicable taste. The doorway blackened and crumbled. *Put it out!* cried Jai to the doorway but nothing stirred. He reached Ivat with his hands over his eyes: on the edge of the party, where the sick grass still lived, in shadow, with the green, shadowy, vine-covered alleys beyond. He stood uncertainly in front of the boy, blinded.

"They tried to make me take drugs," said the boy. "Did you know that?"

Jai said nothing.

"They tried to burn me up!" shouted Ivat. "They put me in a corner and tried to kill me with a nail! They tried to make me use SexAll! They tried to put glass dust in my mouth!

"Goddamn you, where were you!" he screamed. "Goddamn you! Goddamn you! Goddamn you!"

Yes, I'm a miserable sinner. For a moment he didn't know what to do. He opened his eyes, and when Ivat began to cry, he picked the boy up and ran with him away from the noise and the firelight, past the ring of locked houses that surrounded the party, the zone where there wasn't anybody, into the ordinary suburban traffic of the night. For a hundred yards along the sides of the alley, people were industriously pulling up grass. It was the newest thing. Ivat wriggled out of his arms and slipped to the ground like a serpent; he was in convulsions of hatred; Jai watched him torment himself, beat his breast, eat himself up.

A girl, said Jai.

"Girls! Girls!"

A feeble-minded girl. Ivat had taken the bow off his back and was nocking an arrow; now he raised it, his hands shaking wildly, and aimed at Jai. The head of the arrow moved back and forth like a snout. It was impossible to let him shoot and impossible to stop him; Jai took the arrow in the chest, stopping it at the last minute with his hands around the shaft. He saw himself in Ivat's eyes, a martyred Sebastian dying of love, and prevented the boy's screaming by breaking bow, arrow, quiver and all, in his hands. The whiplash of the burst plastic cut Ivat's skin. The boy's eyes rolled up in his head. Ivat performed a difficult mental

convulsion and started to fall; Jai caught him as he turned inside out, forced his head between his knees, laid him mumbling on the grass, rubbed his hands. With the pressure gone, Ivat immediately flexed back into himself, right-side-up, and as he opened his eyes, Jai said:

"You have had SMOKE POISONING."

Ivat remembered something about his father, long ago, something that went by so fast it left only a confused, empty halo: I've lost him. Ivat said, "Huh?"

"SMOKE POISONING," said Jai. "Try to stand up," and Ivat docilely got off the grass and staggered forward. "Yes, it was bad," said Jai as he helped the boy along. Ivat announced:

"Thanks Landru."

"No sweat," said Jai; he had one arm around Ivat's shoulders; "Take it easy," and as Ivat began to remember, held him harder. The boy shivered and was silent. There was, on his ignorant back, a pack of things he had forgotten, and the weight was distorting his spine; Jai—who did not want to see this—tried to reach Ivat's mind and failed; he put his other arm around Ivat with some idea of lifting the thing off but his hands went right through it, and Ivat, spine bent like taffy, whispered (gray-faced and sweating):

"Don't get hysterical, Landru." The secrets were seeping back into him. Affection was nauseating him. With his discolored face, with his long-drawn-out gut and his limbs twisted like wires, he addressed himself to Tele Landru's heart. Jai Vedh had never seen anything so monstrous. He closed his arms around the boy. For a moment Ivat laid his suffering head on Tele Landru's mythical breast like a little moon; for a moment he

breathed; he shivered and said it in a flood of crimson, he ducked his head and muttered it.

So! you love me. Nice, thought Jai.

Ivat had already forgotten it.

In awe Jai watched him take up his load again, take up those shadowy sins as if they weighed nothing, and bent over like a hunchback, strapped in like a lunatic, go dancing down the alley. God-killer Ivat. Ivat the Arrogant. Slew nine flies at one blow. *He's crazy. He broke my bow,* thought Ivat. Around the corner of the alley he headed for an Autovend, and then (with a smirk) put the tag around his neck against the Autovend screen. The alley was ringed with phantoms of Ivat's giggly adolescent friends. Jai saw them lounging against the machine in a thousand silly postures; he heard the steely, complacent tinkle of demand and Ivat's contemptuous dismissal; he knew, too, that a new box and new arrows were in the Autovend, bladed hunting arrows. Ivat took them out with the care of someone handling the newborn. Ivat the Expert, bland and cold, nocked the arrow.

"I'm going to shoot you," he said.

Jai laughed.

"I'm going to shoot you," said Ivat, "because you are a hysterical babbler; and because of your sloppiness, Landru; and because I detest you to the soul."

You don't mean it.

"I don't," said Ivat, "but I'll do it. Stand back," and as the street echoed him, lisping from corner to corner (yes, you are right, you are right) he aimed and raised and drew.

"But you," said the man matter-of-factly, "love me."

So Ivat shot him through the heart. It was a purely

disinterested exercise of power. Jai destroyed the arrow instantly, and holding Ivat by the eyes, made the boy see him die; there was nothing but vacancy up there, and red runnels of mad tears and baby-boy screaming; Ivat would have crushed his own head against the cobbled border of the street. The wickedness in the blades of the dead arrow. Jai shook him until his brains rattled.

"Tele Landru's dead," he said. "But I'm not. Shut up and listen to me."

Four days later, in the sea bed off Netherlands City, which is the center of the world, Jai spoke through a closed door to a man who was determined to keep him out.

"I'm giving myself up," he said.

He could sense the panic in the room beyond. The door began to stutter to him, "What? What? Did you s—that—come? Come? What? Wh—"

"I'm giving myself up," he said.

The door screamed at him.

He repeated his statement.

UNDER THE massive pressure roof of the Atlantic, dragging mad Ivat with him: pathologically silent, mutters sometimes, a lackluster, sick little boy. To a door to a room to a hall to a cave hidden in a bank of ooze. A public building. Ivat, three thousand miles away, plucks at Jai's sleeve. *Don't you have a certain feeling for children?*

While Evne, half a world away, whispered in his ear, *I think I'm done.*

He made them jump. He made them lie down. He took his warders to the Gobi Desert Hotels, where extra-terrestrials go and Earth people for reasons of health; he made them take him to the Lands End Museum in the English Isles; he made them think it was their own idea. The world was made of glass. Having been fooled into it, they took him to the only store in the world, to meet Evne—you went there on your feet, and only if you were a pro. There were living human servants there. Underground, where the pros liked to be. He put his arm around her back and led her away, past the windows in the corridors that displayed different kinds of goods: small animals, piles of frozen fruit, all off-world stuff. They stood privately for a while, staring blindly at the

wall, while human hands scooped at a heap of beans behind the glass and were then withdrawn overhead. It was phenomenally uninteresting. He could not even see her any more, but could only feel her in the corner of his arm, running up his skin, a sneaky little neuter with a complicated mind, the most forgettable person in the world. Evne beckoned slyly through a shimmer of misdirection until she flowed over him from head to foot, until she came clean all at once, until she began to cry. She leaned on him and leaned on him. The relationships inside the store had the superficial cleanliness of a money contract. Evne was resting on that, on the blessed only store in the world, and on him.

He reached into the only store in the world and recalled his men; he then arranged them in artistically satisfying positions against the wall. Evne was sucking her thumb. The men, one carrying a tarsier, one an orange, one an embossed canister of tobacco, still dumb with the stupefying publicity of the only store in the world, the piles of goods (arranged on little tables), the glare, the blaze, the glamor.

"The point," said the first, "is not the small luxuries that we purchase in this way, but the thrilling necessity of the contractual bond, for what greater luxury can there be than impersonality between people?"

"God's handiwork is in this tarsier," said the second, "metaphorically speaking, and in this orange, and in this tobacco. I think I could worship unprepared, natural things."

"Our store," said the third, "can serve twenty at a time, it is a new discovery and the greatest landmark in the world. It is too good for the masses."

Evne burst out laughing. Within her sphere of in-

fluence the tarsier vanished, reappearing inside the animal window with its paws and mouth pressed against the glass. It read her that way. Then it said:

You must have a conference.

"How can there be a conference between telepaths and us?" said the man with the orange. "We are going to kill you all."

"When we can't lie," said the man with the tobacco, "we are dumbfounded. We are even more dumbfounded when we don't understand. We can't use you, you see. But you might use us. In fact, you probably will."

"Bombs were sent to your planet long ago," said the man who had held the tarsier. He smiled blurrily, in the mildest of wonder. "You are all dead. Does the lady find it hard to sleep among so many minds?"

She does, said the tarsier. *She came here to find out if she could adapt but she can't and you had better have that conference anyway.* It started to climb the wall of the animal window, suction cups making a gentle dimple in the world. It said, *We're not warlike; how can we be warlike? We feel what everyone feels. We can't bear to hurt anyone,* and reaching the top, hanging upside-down silently, its big night-eyes radiating confidence.

(Jai touched Evne.)

Not warlike.

(He found he could touch her again and again, getting something each time, just as if she were a teleprompter.)

Not warlike?

(She almost jumped out of her skin.)

He smiled, losing her for a moment, and leaned over

to touch her physically, to clear his mind again; there was a moment of intense warmth, and homesickness, and dishonesty, and then Evne—who was making the tarsier say such awful things—was gone.

"I want," said one guardian, "to go back into that store. Its sophistication impresses me. It is the masterpiece of the ages." The second guardian, stimulated into extra-sensory memory, remarked, "Fake suns. There are stores so big you have to light them with fake suns," and the third (grinning foolishly) advanced the proposition that *You need a teacher . . .*

"God damn it, Evne!" shouted Jai. "Come back here and tell the truth!"

"Nice guys finish last," enunciated the third guardian, none too clearly, and with the air of one who has made his masterpiece and has picked up all he ever will pick up from the luminiferous ether, this one (the one with the orange), confused by too many messages, damaged by too much control, fell flat on his face. To meet the astonished stares of the other two, who had come out of it.

He was happy, but he was dead.

She did it.

North of the Gobi, high plains that are cold and dry all year round, the world's last wild-life preserve. Earth people have already forgotten it. Metals-poor, poor in everything, Gobi Desert Hotels is open to professionals only and vigilantly guarded; those who come here pay: in metals, in rare earths, in algae, in viruses that keep the ocean flora alive. White Lake is a saucer of crystallized salt miles across, and the birds have to be fed. It is the most expensive place in the world. In automated

shacks that will not hold two, professionals who have gambled for power over continents look out at the dozen water birds around Tengri Nor, at the few blades of grass, at the cold, high, desert sky, at the miles of dead land lying before the Altai Mountains, and reflect with emotion:

Once it was all like this.

The conference was held in the open, to please the foreigners. Jai Vedh stood naked in the weather bubble in the middle of the plain under a high scud of cirrus and tried to ignore the mutter of human crowding below the horizon. The temperature was fifty degrees below freezing and gusts of wind shook the bubble soundlessly; beneath his feet were the corridors of Hotel Six and for the convenience of the insulation a special floor set under the bubble, cutting it off from the rock and shifting grit of the rest of the Gobi. Jai Vedh sat in the plain, padded chairs set on the rock and watched his flat, dead, mathematical selves in the long mirrors propped against the sides of the bubble: each set in a frame of stainless steel, one a projection from the side, one a reflection of the back, one a double reflection off the top. For those who suffered from agoraphobia. Clouds passed between the mirrors; it was going to snow, high up where it was warmer. He watched with no particular interest a group of people walk through the corridors of the hotel under him, as they had for several days; looking down on the tops of their heads, he watched them toil slowly closer to the surface; in the strange stillness he could hear them speaking to one another. They were waiting for Evne, who had freakishly decided to get dressed and was doing so in Hotel

Five; they traveled suddenly upwards with the elevator, became foreshortened as the elevator stopped, and then (four men, three women) popped through the floor and got out. They were clever and good. They saw themselves as clever and good. Evne's troupe shot through the tunnel between hotels; their liaison man's receiver could have been taken for a grain of dust if it had not (implanted behind his ear) radiated so furiously. They were on the horizon. They were a mile away. The computer liaison of Jai's group, who wore his computer console strapped to his shoulder to leave his hands free, hunched intimately over his own shoulder, talking to it in a rapid, snake-like whisper. He straightened up and smiled quickly, saying "Meet the network," but Jai had been through that before and there was nothing there anyway, just a lot of technicians gossiping. *It's to put me at my ease,* he thought. They talked from screen to screen to screen and the computer itself, with its set of on-offs, gave him astigmatism. Evne's group next flashed into view in the foundations of Hotel Six; they took the elevator and came out in the center of the bubble, and at that moment—with the air of a tremendous joke—the bubble disappeared.

It remained as warm as ever.

Far off on the horizon, almost where the regular houses began, five dots sprang into existence following a leader dot: Joseph K leaning on a staff, a sheepskin tied around his neck, led them through the freezing gale, and leaving the prints of their naked feet in the grit of the desert floor, they walked across the Gobi for eleven miles and then into the weather bubble as if it no longer existed, as indeed it did not. There was only a dome of hot air and a collection of chairs and

mirrors that some madman had put out on the high plains in mid-November.

And they, too, saw themselves as clever and good.

Can you, said dark Joseph K (visions of frills, innocent delight, childish dancing) *provide us with clothes? With food?* (primitives make slobbering spectacles of themselves) *People to meet, perhaps?* (unthinkably sadistic.)

Aloud, about decorative Franz, his alabaster-pale-marble-milkglass-fairy-bottle brother:

"Mama meant us for book-ends."

"We've few extreme racial types left," said the man with the computer console. He spoke after a hair's-breadth hitch, as he always did when receiving instructions from the computer network; *a good servant,* he had told Jai Vedh, *but a bad master.* Echoes upon echoes wrapped him round, the endless gossip of the machines, an awful clattering; he looked out through the flashing plaid of his instructions with genuine agony; pale, he put his hand to his heart, excused himself, and sat down. Franz, the scholar, was pulling the stuffing out of a chair. The third dot, a handsome, naked old woman with collapsed breasts, a bagful of bones as if on stilts, a mass of wrinkles with the face of an old hawk, says, "Sit down. All sit," and they do. They're at home. They were, to Jai, so fat, so round, so skinny, so tall, that they were obviously meant to be part of the cosmic joke: the tall, pale, lax girl with big hands and feet, the globular, buck-toothed boy (The Memory Zip) and a young girl who had no name at all, an exquisite Chinese figurine about whom somebody had been very, very careless; she had a bad scar on her face. She smiled beautifully, turning her head from side to side as if she were slightly deaf. Evne, who had gotten herself into

white feathers and diamonds, an incredible costume considering where she was, was to Jai (who knew her) luxurious as an eel; she was going to be seductive and civilized. She was thinking of huge populations, planet-wide cities, millions of salons, a life of stupefying publicity.

She said, "My, what a lovely silence."

Winds of gale force, fifty degrees below freezing, play with the top of the airy weather dome.

"What you call psionics," said Evne, handling her feathers, "is the result of perception and education, nothing more, although you don't believe that. The silent areas of our brains are really silent. There are no extra radio programs. If it were radiation, you would have found it out long ago. I have told you the fable of the Squirrel and the Ivy; now I will tell you the fable of the Inside and the Outside; Inside is Outside and Outside is Inside. Action at a distance. Isn't that too bad? Any system of organization must be tied to an organic body, so there are limits, which you think you know; the rules are the rules of the Inside and that's too bad, too. I am Adelina Patti and I sing: O Space, Time, and Mass! This is an actor. Space, time, and mass. He's a dancer. Space, time, and mass. Here's to you. Space, time, and mass."

"We hitched a lot of rides to get here," said The Memory Zip in the voice of a slow and homesick saw. "You can't beam things close to a planet because of the gravity. The gravity of what would happen. We hitched a ride on the Erewhon. We hitched a ride on the Constellation. We hitched a ride on the Elizabeth IV. We hitched a ride on—"

Another lovely silence, said Evne the Dressed-Up.

Oh, learn to concentrate, gentlemen! she added. *Learn to sing!*

"They're ineducable," said Joseph K, and bringing back the weather dome with a group flip of the wrist, they all got up. Laced arms.

"My considered opinion," said Joseph K. "Bad environment."

But the pros were hard, the pros were tough and tragic; in their seated ranks, so walled off from each other, so lonely, every last one of them, they nonetheless thought (impelled by the irresistible likeness of their prisons) the same thought.

"War!" said one. "I speak aloud for convenience's sake."

"Hell, you can't find us," said Joseph K. "Now can you? That thing you bombed, that was nothing, that was uninhabited. But you thought it was us."

We can be distracted, thought Evne reasonably.

"You can be distracted," said another. "You can't pay attention to everything at once. Now can you?"

"We'll manage," said Joseph K. "We'll move."

"Teach us or be damned," said a third. "You can't read a computer's mind," and rising all together (*They're right,* said Evne. *It's in code. It would take too long*), directed their—but no, it was coming through the computer console, mad with flip-flops, directing a radio beam to all those bloody antique mirrors, which Jai knew had been there for some other reason, and what do you want with micro-circuitry on the backs of mirrors anyhow? Machines have no feelings. Machines don't leave traces.

No one at the meeting had known anything about it.

He saw, with no emotion, Evne go up in smoke, and the black man who had kissed him turn black indeed,

indistinguishable from his brother, and so on with all the other dots. The pros died in panic. He watched the sand fuse and heat run up the weather dome, which burst into nothing like a bubble, peeling back from the mass of excited air with a roar that rushed up into the momentarily empty sky. A few snowflakes drifted down. It was the oddest sight in the world to see Evne, dressed like a dancer, catch them on her finger. She crossed one foot over the other, in perfect fifth position. She blew on the snowflakes.

Bodies they want and bodies they get.

Franz and the others have gone home, she added.

She cocked her head at him.

Shall I destroy this planet?

She smiled. She sat cross-legged on the sand, and out of it began to make a cup, melting the hot rock with her hands. She made it lopsided, with a fluted edge. Sneaky little liar. Leaps tall buildings at a single bound. Eyes that pierce lead and so forth. His heart trembled and broke for the dead ones, the experts, oh-so-hard-as-nails, his own people. *And you killed that man, my guard.*

You did, said Evne, enjoying him. *You need a teacher.*

She threw the cup away and got up, Eros lending extra edges to her teeth, a shivery desire to pinch and be stabbed; *O thou dear body!* (throwing her arms around him) *dear*—(it all coming out patchy) *had to be found, found innocent—natives—sooner or later. Why not now?* And going mentally into a region that only a bat could love, blasting up to an impossible, stretched shriek, she staggered, went "hunh!", lost the focus of her eyes, and fell on the desert like a dead woman. He backed off. The black mole above her lip was cancerous,

it shifted, and the power stunned him. One of Evne's thousand arms propped up her corpse by the nape of the neck; another flicked the glass cup, which spoke in the thick, heavy, sobbing voice of bad glass: "Let me go," it said. "I hurt. I hurt."

Her thousand arms elongated, locked *ftun* light-years with *ftun* others, the optimal number for anything. A parliament.

"Which it is not nice," said the sand, "to murder someone before he tries to murder you. It's not ethical."

So first you let him try, said the cup.

And there are machines and machines, said the mole, made by Evne, planned by Evne, soloed by Evne in Limbo where you can't hurt anybody but there is great danger of getting lost. Everyone does it. Her right wrist stiffened: fear of metal machines. Her left wrist jerked: a solar nova. A drop of Nothing fell from her lips to the sand, Nothing spreading and rushing with immense speed to the horizon, meeting on the other side of the globe, the single indestructible drop.

There was nobody left. The green above the inner cities sang and stridulated. The air in Jai's ears vibrated sweetly, one side a little behind the other, for harmony, *Ftun is none;* and then the animals vanished, and the birds vanished, and the trees vanished, and the fungi and the single-cells vanished; and a chorus so vaporous as to be indistinguishable from the spread of the visible stars (invisible now, in the daytime) the *ftun* of a vast matrix of persons, a gigantic smoke-ring, drifted over Jai, settled on his shoulders, contracted to a point and whispered ironically:

In Limbo.

She smiled, opened her eyes, and sat up. Her thous-

and arms shrank; her mole shifted. She had wanted to kill them quickly, not put them away. She had wanted to drive a flier with somebody who got a stomach pain because he was agoraphobic; she had wanted him to scream when she flew it upside down with her eyes shut. She knew she couldn't.

You're better than I. You'll have to get used to it. Change me, and touching Jai Vedh with the tip of one finger, anxiously, maternally, making shift beneath her skin the parts of that amplifier she had built with such care in adolescence, when she was just learning, *Change us,* naively, dropping down into it, turning in, turning inside-out, and in that instantaneous, half-lit world, he ballooned until he looked down thousands of miles at his invisible feet, lost somewhere on the spinning globe, until he bent and diffused like a column of smoke, flattened and slid with his arms spiraling into the next galaxy, until he was thinner than a ghost, until he had only mathematical position. Evne was singing, singing for aeons. He tried to paint; he tried to solve mathematical problems; he even took them out of their way with his efforts.

The man in the railroad car had a paper.

It was an old-fashioned car, like the one at the Lands End Museum, red plush and wood veneer. It was going very fast. The gentleman, who was Jai Vedh's father, had hidden his face behind a newspaper so that at first it was difficult to tell who he was until Jai Vedh twitched the newspaper away. Things were rattling and banging with the excessive speed. The man (weak and unkind) turned his face away—"I'm not your father!" —and there in the corner, near the water-cooler, something clung to the glass; something watched the land-

scape rush by. He conceived that it must be a pet. Little weeping noises were coming from it (it looked like a starfish or an amoeba) and in pity for the distressed, doleful, foolish clump of a thing, which had no proper face, only a few features mixed at random under the surface (and which was now crying and wailing openly), he tried to pry it loose from the glass, but it resisted him. It felt like jelly and was cold and really pretty unpleasant. He had just got his hands under it for a good pull, he was looking around for his father (who had disappeared) when the railroad car swerved as if it were going round a turn, and the thing was jerked out of his hands.

I'm a ghost, it said dolefully, *don't you know me?* and falling down the seat and rolling uncontrollably along the aisle, it displayed to him—in a burst of extraordinary bad taste—the face of every living person he had ever known. It had eaten his father and was now preparing to deal with the newspaper. *Grow old along with me!* screamed the creature, *the best is yet to be!* trying to climb Jai by rolling up him and yipping, but he had lost all patience and when it reached his chest he plucked it up and threw it out the window. Glowing gas rushed past the train car. Walking along the aisle to the outside door—for the Lands End Museum had not distinguished well between train cars with compartments and train cars without—Jai stepped out onto the hills above the lake where so long ago he had first seen the stone huts erected by the people who were pretending to be savages. And yet they hadn't laughed at him.

Evne was there, in her feathers. He knew where he had seen them before. From a pearl, from a seed, from

a germ, Ivat grew and grew out of Limbo until he lay on the ground in front of them, all curled up. Ivat the Hedgehog. He was sick to death, he was going to die. His soul was shriveled up. Not laughing and not weeping, but with serious interest, Evne laid her hands on the boy; Jai could feel the current from womb to diaphragm to spine to nipples. Nothing went from her hands into Ivat, as in faith healing; she was feeling the boy because she liked him. She wanted to have him. Ivat, rearranged, whimpered like a puppy and stirred on the ground; he uncurled and sneezed in his sleep. He flopped out and Evne kissed him on the neck; then she rubbed his sides and kissed him through his clothes on the navel. One eye winked. *Fuck.* The other eye. *Mama.* He sighed and groaned loudly. *One more out of Limbo. Our work is cut out for us.* Jai felt, as if folded over his eyes, the radiating daisy in her belly; that was what was making Ivat forget; he saw also her sadness, some strange, incurable sadness, odd in one so fortunate, half-forgotten even; and he remembered the fifteen bodies on the floor of the Altai Mountains. *I have not his divine trust.*

You are right not to, said Evne.

Who are you? said Jai.

"People, dear soul," said Evne softly. "We're Earth people, my dear. Someone took us from your planet long, long ago and taught us the rudiments of going Inside, for such things don't come by nature. They were once an organic species, but they wanted to live forever, I think, so they arranged for themselves to be very long-lived and very slow; their body parts were made of metal on a million different planets and their nerve impulses were light; this makes a big, big beast.

Think of having your brain thousands of years from your toes and an arm made of magnetic fields! And so slow. We think they made us for a joke or a trick, for they themselves couldn't go Inside; one needs a body for that sort of thing and a body can't live long. You must understand, Jai Vedh, that we do not live much longer than you do. It was a grand trick. But when we found them, we found that we couldn't tell why they had made us or what they were going to do with us. There was no understanding them. And that was no joke. They are all dead now, of course."

"Why?" said Jai, though of course he knew why.

We killed them, said Evne. *What else?*

And she bent down and kissed Ivat. He opened his eyes slowly and beamed at Landru; like a baby bird in a nest he lay between them: so bright, so calm, so snug.

"Won't you introduce us?" said perky Ivat.

Idyllic! cries Jai Vedh at his potter's wheel, hands in his molten glass, in the middle of the glade, on the world's sunlit side.

Not quite, says Joseph K (not quite to be trusted for there is this irreducible minimum) but loving, amused, at ease, grown one moment into the trees, one moment out of them, whispering in the grass, part of the autumn afternoon which is unbearably hot and still between the hills, out of which will come eventually a boy with two sticks, a little girl to seduce Ivat, a woman in a skin dress. Jai feels Olya nearby. Someone is bathing in the lake, children who breathe water.

Well, it's a living, says Joseph K.

Just life, says Joseph K.

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