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Operation ARES

by GENE WOLFE

A BERKLEY MEDALLION BOOK
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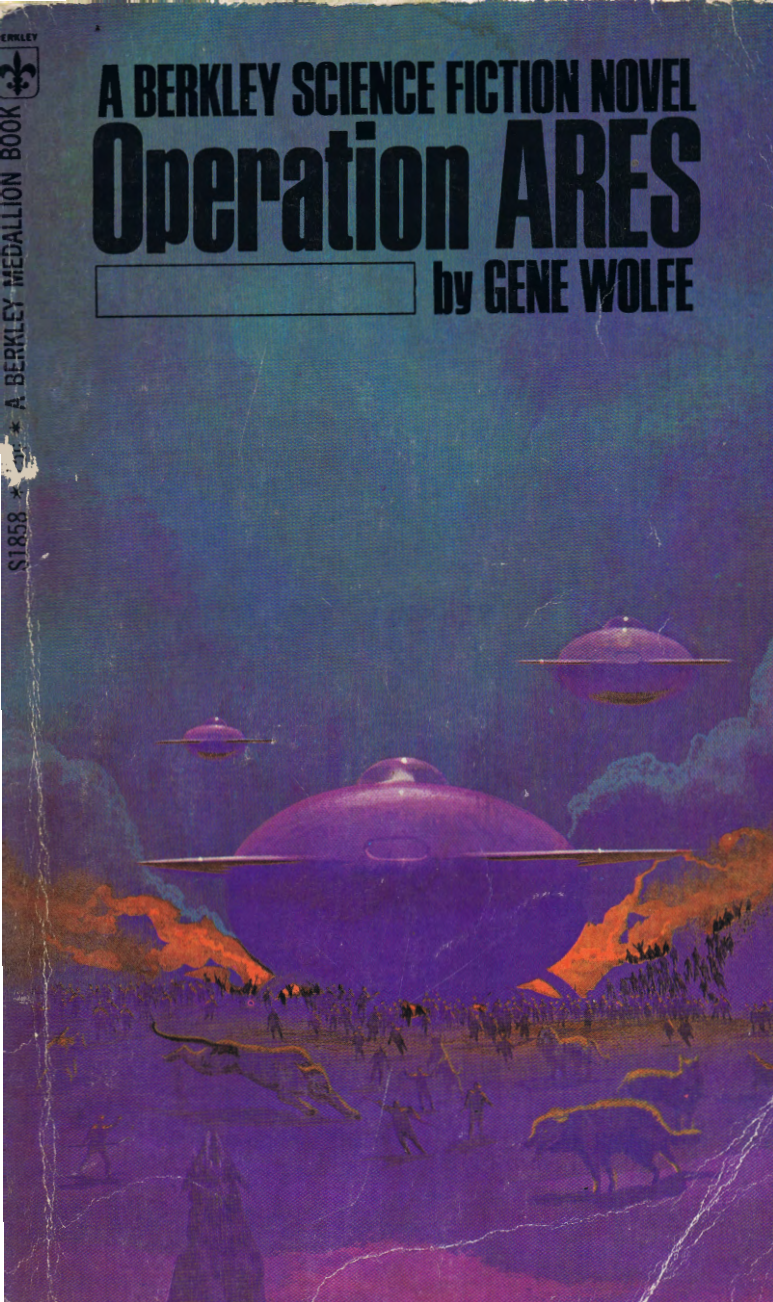

THE INVASION FROM MARS

came in the early years of the 21st century. And all over America were people praying for it to succeed. . . .

For two decades, the United States had been slipping into a primitive past, turning its back on technology—and abandoning its Martian colony. Its "emergency" government was kept in power by repression, food was scarce, life grim . . . and killer packs of wild animals prowled at night, making curfews a vital need.

Then the "Martians" came back. An obscure teacher, John Castle, was among the first to see the invaders—and made a desperate try to aid them. He failed then, but there was a strange role waiting for Castle to play. . . .

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A BERKLEY MEDALLION BOOK
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To my mother and father,
who never read fiction

With the exception of such historical personages as Presidents Lincoln and Johnson, no resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is intended.

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OPERATION ARES

CHAPTER I

"SUPPOSE THEY COME AT NIGHT . . . ?"

The wind blew dust past the tall man as he wrestled to open the gate. It was set in a fence, a fortification erected by the very poor, high and thick as a wall and spined with trash treasure of salvaged barbed wire. Its contorted stakes were sharpened at the top; rusted chicken mesh had been interwoven in the design. Every third wire was cut, and the points bent outward, like the tips of the scavenged nails driven through the boards of the gate.

As the gate swung open he ran his eyes critically over the weathered farmhouse beyond, paying particular attention to the roof line. Carefully he replaced the bars behind him. Only a sliver of sun was still glinting above the hills when he knocked on the farmhouse door.

Quick steps, light and almost silent, responded at once. "It's John!" he called. "Is everything all right?"

She was nodding as she opened the door. Anna seldom spoke when a gesture would do as well.

"Bunk in the usual place?" he asked.

She nodded again and smiled, drinking him in with her dark eyes in a way that made him feel uncomfortable about his long, knobby limbs and shabby clothing.

"You're late, John." It was not the girl who spoke but her brother, coming down the narrow hall that ran to the front of the house from the kitchen. "We were scared something happened to you; Anna's been worried to death."

"Mars won't be up for nearly two hours yet," John answered calmly. "And you don't have to worry about me, Japhet." The girl touched his sleeve and he added, "None of you do. Besides, the curfew doesn't begin for another hour."

"Without you we're finished," Anna's brother said. "The whole thing would be down the hole. A girl and a kid and a wakey like me could never handle it. You got to stop taking chances like this. Being big and carrying a stick ain't enough."

"*Isn't,*" John said automatically, then flushed. "Listen to me—Ichabod Crane, the country schoolmaster."

"That's your trade. We don't any of us mind; set me straight."

Looking at him John wondered if he could be unconscious of the irony of what he said, for Japhet was a hunchback.

In the parlor of the old house, set at the focus of the room like an altar, hung the smiling photograph of a man in a bubble-helmet and a bulging, ungainly suit which trailed wires. Sunlight had faded the picture to a sepia tone, but the germ plasm Space had touched lived on in Japhet, and perhaps (the thought was like the touch of ice) covertly in Anna.

A "wakey," Japhet endured a life without sleep. The tensions and frustrations others relieved in dreams, accumulated in Japhet until after weeks or months they produced a collapse and coma. The bent back was not the result of a deformed spine but of the convulsive contractions of back and chest muscles rebelling against the perpetual vigil. John's liking, pity, and repulsion had fused inseparably and though he knew the pity was offensive and the repulsion undeserved, it did not help.

"Come on back," Japhet was saying. "Have something to eat." His eyes, dark as Anna's, were the alert, sad eyes of a laboratory monkey.

The kitchen was plain but homelike, the most attractive room in the house. Working feet had worn through the linoleum to the boards, but color lingered in corners and lent cheerfulness to the smooth wooden furnishings and Anna's polished utensils. A fire blazed on the brick hearth. The boy, Nonny, who sat eating stew from a cracked cup, was so clearly delighted to see him that John could not help feeling flattered. "Everything's ready, Mr. Castle," Nonny said respectfully. "I checked it all out before they made me eat this."

"Aerial all right? I was worried about it Monday when we had the big storm."

"Well, you don't have to worry," Japhet put in. "I set that up there to stay. Can't no one see it from the road either, no matter what you say."

"You can see a bit over the top of the north gable," John answered calmly, "and you yourself are the one who tells me the patrol cruiser goes past here at least once nearly every night."

"The tip end of one dipole." A puff of breath blew it to contempt.

From the distance, nearly lost in the wilderness of limestone and pines, there came a sound, a strangled scream broken into many parts—like the laughter of a madman or a demon, bereft of all hope, all joy, and at last of meaning. They froze, John Castle as unmoving as the others as he watched them. Anna said, "Suppose they come at night, Japhet? They do sometimes, you know."

Later, when the red spark of Mars showed above the hills, all four ascended to the attic of the farmhouse. The generator Japhet had converted with laborious ingenuity to partnership with a small, charcoal-fired steam engine squatted compactly in the angle between floor and roof.

When the generator was humming the picture tube glowed to life at the touch of a switch. The colors were like gems, the primary paintbox reds and blues giving an effect of newness and gaiety to the clothing of the woman who had been the principal broadcaster for as long as they had been able to bring in a picture.

". . . ship, if any of you are really listening out there. Listen, please, any of the cities of Earth! If you will blink the lights of your city in three short flashes, any time Mars is in the sky, we will know we have communicated with you. Mars is now about fifteen degrees above the horizon to the east as seen by an observer on the east coast of North America. Mars looks like a star, but has a reddish cast and does not twinkle. If you have very good vision or optical aids you will be able to discern a slight disk, which you cannot do with any star . . ."

"I wish she'd get to the technical tape," said Nonny, who had already settled down with his clipboard and pencil.

Anna signaled for silence as the woman on Mars began the taped electronics talk—one of a series on the construction of a maser transmitter with which communication with Mars could be established. After the first few minutes all four were leaning forward in their seats as they strained to extract every possible fact and inference. Nonny sketched each diagram as

it appeared on the screen with the rapidity that was his special skill.

In two hours the Martian tape had run. It ended, as usual, with a statement to the effect that it would be repeated for a period of seven days before the next tape in the series was begun. Only when they reached the actual point in the live explanation at which their set had been energized did they turn it off and troop back downstairs to sleep.

Nonny shook John Castle awake after midnight. "Mr. Castle, they're outside, right outside. I think you'd better be awake."

"Outside the fence, you mean." He tried to project reassurance.

"No, sir. Inside the fence. Some on the back porch, I think. Mr. Trees and Anna are in the kitchen."

The kitchen was bright with candles. Japhet had lit every taper in the cupboard, positioning them on the windowsills; the fire was half smothered under a double load of fresh wood.

Anna said, "I'm glad Nonny got you." With a blanket wrapped about her shoulders and her black hair tumbling loose, she looked as fully Cherokee as some distant forebear must surely have been.

Her brother, fully dressed as always, turned away from the back door. "They got through the fence," he said, "and there must be a hundred of them." He was holding an ax, the closest thing to a weapon anyone was permitted to own.

"It always sounds like more than there are," John said. "Just don't do anything foolish and we'll be all right."

"I couldn't let everybody sleep, could I? Suppose one comes in through a window?"

"You've got bars on the windows." John tried to comb his hair with his fingers.

"I had a fence too."

There was a scrabbling of claws on the boards of the porch outside. A wet, snuffling nose explored the crack of the door, and brought with it a fetid reek. John kicked the bottom panel. The snuffling stopped.

"I think we ought to make some guns," Japhet said. He was trying to sound foresighted and responsible, but the underlying hysteria could not be concealed. "If we can make all that stuff upstairs we could make guns too." From outside, as

though he had been overheard, came a shriek of laughter.

No one got any more sleep that night except Nonny, who between disturbances laid his head on his arms on the kitchen table. John left half an hour after dawn—after determining as well as he could by peering through the windows that their night visitors had gone. The Civic Center, where he and every other man in White City unable or unwilling to maintain his own home was compelled to live, served a breakfast free to its tenants, and he preferred not to impose on the Trees.

It had been a dry autumn, leaving the road deep in dust where the old asphalt had disappeared. As always when he walked, his stride lengthened as he allowed his mind to drift, with a feeling of luxury into ordered, complex fantasies of war, research, and exploration. His father had been an army officer, shuttling between Cape Kennedy and the great, half-empty pile of the Pentagon, before the suspicion of political activity had forced him to retire in exile to this rural town. Before he died John had learned from his reminiscences the glory of knowledge won in the laboratory and on the testing ground, for the armed services had been the last supporters of the Mars Stations and the space program. That lesson had never left him; he seldom tramped a road without the roar of rockets in his ears and the shout of a division behind him.

It was country to be thoughtful in, masculine and silent. Only knowing eyes would notice once in two miles a telltale pile of chalky droppings or a pawmark in the dust of some sheltered spot. Without interrupting his thoughts he watched the margins of the road for places of probable ambush and, if his eyes could not penetrate the shadows, reversed his stick in his hands and walked wide.

On his right Cemetery Hill marked the beginning of the town. Old marble monuments crowned the hill, leaving the lower slopes to the newer burials—mere mounds blackened in the center where relatives had built protective fires. The wrought iron fence looked impenetrable, but John recalled the morning when he had come with fresh fuel for his father's grave, and shuddered.

At the Civic Center he found every other man in the place already seated for breakfast. That left him the end of the table farthest from the kitchen, where the platters came after everyone else had served himself, and he found himself facing the Captain down the long sweep of the board. Massively im-

pressive in his pale blue uniform with the clusters of doves denoting his rank, the Captain had the habit of tapping his glass with the edge of his spoon before he spoke; he did so now, and thirty hungry men fell silent at the chime.

"Mr. Castle: we missed you. We feared the loss of your erudition." The Captain's eyes ran slowly down the ranked men on either side of the table. "It's hog-slaughtering time, isn't it?" "Hog" was the current government term of opprobrium for persons thought to favor the expenditure of resources on scientific or educational "adventures." No one at the table could miss the point.

One of the waitresses deferentially placed a pewter tray of scrambled eggs in front of the Captain and he clashed his fork on his plate as a signal that others might speak.

When the tray reached John it held only a few scraps and puddles of a watery yellowish fluid. He poured this over his slice of rough bread and wondered sourly how much the Captain saved from his generous Peaceguard living allowance by boarding at the Civic Center. It appeared to be a pleasant as well as a lucrative arrangement. The Captain took the best of everything in double quantity, and had only to look past his plate to find objects for his suspicions.

A government perpetually short of revenues had discovered a means of maintaining the teachers who staffed its schools without drain on the treasury. In return for teaching physics, mathematics, and chemistry to its high-school students in the morning, it granted John Castle a local monopoly on the same subjects at adult education classes in the afternoon, permitting him to charge whatever fees he could wheedle from his students. For the use of the school's classroom he paid a minute monthly rent.

He looked away as Anna Trees, who steadfastly refused his offers of free tuition, handed him her worn coin. Working ten hours a day at the pottery for seventy-two cents (old style), she paid him twenty a week for chemistry and physics. Silver was harder to come by every year, but living at the Center he had little use for produce and was forced to require it from his students whenever a wave of distrust had forced the value of government scrip to zero again. Anna's dime showed no impression on either side—year and motto and President's head all obliterated by wear.

Eight students sat in the broad-armed writing chairs, all that

remained of the September enrollment of twelve. John cleared his throat. "Today we are going to suspend the first twenty minutes of Adult Physics One-oh-one to watch an educational broadcast from Arlington." While the classroom set was warming up, he added, "I understand that this is to be on practical mechanics."

The lecturer, seated comfortably behind his desk at the "temporary" capital, at least possessed a cheerful voice and a relaxed and engaging lectern personality. John had apparently switched on the talk a half-minute too late, for by the time the audio circuits became functional the lecture had clearly begun: "Thus although you may not feel the subject matter deals directly with your course of study, your course deals directly with our subject matter. A trap is in effect a machine, sometimes simple, sometimes quite complex, employed to catch or kill an animal; but even the most sophisticated traps when analyzed prove to be arrangements of levers, planes, screws, and the other classic mechanisms of mechanics.

"Now before we go into the types of mechanisms in detail I should like to review briefly the background of wildlife management in this country."

Someone in the class snorted.

"Ever since the first civilized men reached our continent wildlife has been a problem to some degree. Deer ate the crops of the earliest settlers just as they do ours, and pumas and other predators raided their stock in a fashion which would be quite familiar to the modern farmer. In short, the control problem is an old problem, neither much better nor much worse today than it has been in times past.

"There is one misconception I should particularly like to set right. About thirty years ago, as we all know, it was decided to reclaim certain strip-mined areas and utilize the lands as nature preserves. Since the ecology of central and southern Africa appeared at the time to be on the point of complete disintegration, some of those preserves were stocked with the most hardy African species in an attempt to save them from extinction.

"Inevitably some native species invaded the African areas; and, since the average man is remarkably unfamiliar with the other occupants of his biosphere, these came to be confused with the imported fauna. When the African preserves were discontinued the non-native varieties were destroyed or sent to zoos, but the idea that certain objectionable animals are

'foreign' has proved harder to kill. I would like to state once and for all that the ocelot, the baboon, the grizzly bear, the black bear, the hyena, and the puma are native to this continent, however troublesome we may find them.

"Now here"—he held up a metal contrivance while the camera panned in—"is a most efficient type of trap. Some of you may already be familiar with the mechanism, since our grandfathers used them extensively and they are quite durable. The jaws—see the little teeth?—are set like this, so the spring cannot act until this trigger plate is depressed." (Turning away from the set for a moment John noted that his class appeared at least mildly interested.)

"Traps of this design," the lecturer continued, "are effective against all our most troublesome animals except the baboon. Unfortunately this is not a type which can be made in the home, and the needs of the economy dictate that manufacturing facilities be used for more urgently needed items. There are, however, many . . ."

Everyone started as the voice and picture faded without warning. John Castle saw that the single classroom light he had left burning had gone out too. "Power failure again," he said cheerfully. "If someone will light a couple of candles from the supply box, we'll go on with the regular lecture."

Someone at the back of the class said petulantly, "Why didn't they put windows in this building anyway? Didn't they know the lights would always be going on and off? You're sort of a scientist, Mr. Castle; what's wrong with the generating station anyway?"

Another student followed up the question. "I've wondered about that too . . . Is there something they knew in the old times that we've forgotten? Do they have something connected wrong?"

John fumbled for words. A question like this brought everyone to the borderline of political trouble, and there were no firm zones of demarcation between the acceptable and the deviant. Anything which might appear to proceed from a philosophy opposed to the accepted but unformalized premises of ruling thought at Arlington would make him suspect—more suspect, he corrected himself—for the remainder of his life.

At length he said carefully, "We lack none of the technical information which was available when the station was built, but the losses of trained personnel suffered during the

disastrous attempts to set up scientific stations on the inner planets have still not been completely made up. They are reflected in parts shortages." He stopped himself just short of alluding to the fear-inspired confinement of the manual technical skills to the politically reliable, and the rioting "Street Senate" of the overurbanized Atlantic belt cities that kept the government on the verge of crisis. Fortunately his painstaking choice of words had alerted the class and he was able to shift the subject to the well-worn grooves of the curriculum for the remainder of the period.

After each class the temptation to follow Anna when she left, to see her safe, at least, past Cemetery Hill, was so great that he had to force himself to remain behind in the empty classroom until he could be certain she would be out of sight when he left the building; and each time he was disappointed to find that she was gone. This evening a cold wind made him turn up the collar of his shabby suitcoat while he dawdled for a moment on the street.

The days were growing rapidly shorter. The sun was already setting in a welter of red, and the roads would be relatively safe for no more than another hour at most. With a sudden feeling of revulsion he wondered if some statistician might not be able to calculate the exact point among the darkening minutes at which Anna's danger in being seen with him would be overbalanced by the hazards of the coming night.

At first he thought the dim lobby of the Center empty. Perhaps because it was one of the few buildings with electric power, it was always one of the worst lit during the frequent failures. When he was halfway to the stair, there was a creak from one of the sagging armchairs and a dry cough. "Mr. Castle." It was the familiar, thinly disguised command. "Won't you come here, please?"

The Captain was sitting in the most shadowed corner, with the chromed rod of his electric goad—the symbol of his and every other peaceguard's authority as well as a practical semi-weapon—lying across his thick knees. "You've nothing to do until dinner, do you, Mr. Castle?"

Knowing the futility of evasion John said he did not.

"Then fetch the chessboard from the matron and we'll have another game."

John forced himself to smile. "I suppose I owe you a

chance to get even after that last one."

"Oh, no, no, no." The Captain shook his head deprecatingly. His immobility was such as to make it almost appear that only his head lived. "I don't play you to win, Mr. Castle; only to educate myself." He paused long enough for John to turn away, then added, "What was our wager before? I mean, in the event that you lost?"

"I was to sign a statement you read to me—and pledge not to repudiate it afterward. It was in your left breast pocket and I should imagine it's still there."

"How could I have forgotten?" He touched the pocket with swollen fingers. "Yes, it's still there, I can feel it. You admit, Mr. Castle, that it is very trusting of me to accept your promise not to repudiate."

"Very. Particularly since you haven't evidence to make the accusations stick."

The Captain's smile faded, then returned, enigmatic as ever. "But accept it I do."

"Because I won't be given time to repudiate?"

"Are you implying we would silence you as soon as you had confessed? Confessed merely to speaking ill-advisedly? Don't be absurd, Mr. Castle—a minor charge like that!—and as a teacher you should know better than most that the Peaceguard is forbidden to take life."

He paused. "Mr. Castle, if you will play me again tonight I will accept the same stake, putting up a stake of my own of equal value: Mr. Castle, I know something of great moment to you. Will you accept my assurance that when—and if—you learn it you will agree to its importance? Will you play me? The information concerns one of your pupils."

The Captain opened with the queen's knight, and John settled himself to a slow, careful game. The Captain was a defensive player, a hedging fortress-builder whose pieces supported one another in shifting systems of labyrinthian complexity. At some point during the game, John knew, this phalanx would deploy and in three or four moves launch from its ranks an almost irresistible attack; the trick was to anticipate the nature and direction of this and counter effectively before he lost the initiative.

They played for two hours. The Captain had lamps brought when the last light vanished from the windows, and ordered his supper and (to John's surprise) John's own brought in

from the messroom. When there was no longer any hope, the Captain continued to fight on, pondering five minutes over every sacrifice that delayed the teacher's tightening net. About them at a distance, obtrusively unobtrusive, hovered the other boarders. Even those whom John knew to be ignorant of the moves and the names of the chessmen seemed to suck up the silent sense of conflict.

John shifted a bishop, bringing the pattern a step nearer its conclusion. Lightly he said, "You don't understand the clergy, Captain; I believe it's your chief weakness."

"That may be true; but tell me, Mr. Castle, are you sure you comprehend the knight?" Outside a howl rose to the moon, then degenerated into a yammering laugh. As though at a signal the Captain struck his glass three times with his spoon, and the mutter of conversation in the room died. "I concede, Mr. Castle," he said heartily. "Would you do me the favor, however, of telling me the time?"

"Seven fifty-five, Captain. Almost eight o'clock."

"It is late then." The Captain's voice rang loud. "Do you think the others will be leaving us for bed soon? Or should you and I seek some more private place?"

John did not bother to reply. The shuffle of feet told him the Captain's implied order was being obeyed.

"Now then, Mr. Castle, I owe you a debt. Do you know you're the only man in the Center who will give me an honest game? The others all fumble deliberately if they are in danger of winning—not that many of them have to."

"I can well imagine."

"So I have every reason to wish to keep you here to play me. The information I have for you is that one of your students is involved in serious breach of the peace; if you value your reputation for political stability—already a bit shaky, if I may say so—and your post as a teacher, you had better fight shy of this person as best you can."

"Then I'll have to know a name." John's voice sounded unnaturally flat to his own ears.

"It is an afternoon pupil of yours, a Miss Trees. It seems Miss Trees has been stealing parts from your communications equipment at the school; stealing in order to construct an unauthorized set on the farm where she lives, apparently. You are aware that Mars is still beaming propaganda at us?"

"Of course. I have to switch off the school set whenever they jam our educational programs, although since transmis-

sion has to be line-of-sight they can only bother us when Mars is in the day sky. What has this to do with me?"

"We will raid the Trees' place tomorrow morning; the search should give us the evidence we need for convictions of your pupil and her brother." The Captain allowed his slight smile to deepen. "You understand, I couldn't tell anyone, even the men who'll be making the raid, even you, Mr. Castle, whom I trust, until it was too dark for an accomplice to warn them. Now it's quite safe. My patrol cruisers are the only things that dare move this late."

"Their being the only ones with shock sticks and gas projectors might have something to do with that; if the government trusted you people enough to let you have guns your men might even get out of their vehicles." Under the mockery his mind was frantically seeking a way out of the snare. If the Peaceguard knew of Nonny's and Anna's involvement, it surely knew of his as well; he was the obvious link between the school's parts bins and the Trees' farm. If the Captain had wished, he could simply have ordered the raid on the evening of the day before and taken them all. The result, for him, would probably have been years in prison and a reduction to manual labor.

Instead, the Captain was offering him a gamble in the hope that he would lose his life. If he could reach the farmhouse before sunrise it might be possible to conceal the evidence before the patrol cruisers came.

Almost bringing the fight into the open, John asked, "Why don't you make your raid tonight? You could, I know."

The Captain chuckled. "I find my men do a more thorough job on barns and outbuildings by daylight, Mr. Castle."

"Still amateurs after twenty years, Captain?" It had been that long since rioting had made possible the suspension of the Constitution and the installation of a President Pro Tem chosen from among the bureaucrats administering welfare programs.

"Now, Mr. Castle, that is just the sort of thinking that will get your name on a little slip like mine. When the old police were dissolved by the public will, our agency came into being to offer something better."

"What you mean is that the people who put you in power wouldn't stand for a real police force so they got you—too weak to protect, but strong enough to oppress. If the armed

forces hadn't been gutted at the end of the Cold War it could never have happened."

The Captain sighed and began dropping the chess pieces back into their box. "Mr. Castle," he said, "I enjoy talking but it is getting late and you may have errands to do. I have told you of Miss Trees. Our cruisers will not arrive much before seven tomorrow. Now, even if I wished, even if I knew someone was sending a warning, I could not communicate with my patrols. The power failure has lost us our radio, you realize."

Something exploded from the ground at John Castle's feet in a clatter of tumbling stones. For a split second he saw outlined against the faint radiance the antlers of a buck, then with a rattle of hoofs it shot away from him. Momentarily its tail was a ghostly, dancing patch of white in the dimness. He began to run, knowing that every second was now precious. Ahead he saw the buck mount the bank, then heard the tapping of its gallop upon the road.

Above and behind him there rose a concerted yell. Surprise, hunger, elation, and ferocity blended into a cry half shout and half laugh. As the buck had, John scrambled up to the road, but instead of cutting across to the meadows of the far side he ran straight down it, long legs flying.

Far down the sweeping curve he could see a house and barn, silver-gray and silent in the moonlight. Once he looked behind him at his pursuers, strung out on the moonlit highway and running with an odd, loping canter. He did not look again; but shifting his stick from one hand to the other, slipped out of his jacket and dropped it behind him.

The house was silent and dark. He shouted as he ran, single-syllabled words that rang loud against the blind walls. No light showed. The fence was a common stock fence, good enough to discourage the casual prowlings of predators but no serious obstacle to the pack behind him. He vaulted it by putting one hand on a post, sensing as he did so that the closest pursuer was less than twenty feet behind.

The farmyard in the shadow of the barn was littered with debris; oddly shaped masses that might have been broken chicken coops or peach baskets, but nothing big enough for him to get into or climb on. As he rounded the corner the moon was in his face again, and against it he saw the twin

ropes of a hay lift: black lines dangling from the extended ridgepole. He leaped and caught them, kicking as he swarmed up. At the top a rectangular hole gave access to the loft, and he swung himself in.

Only after he had thrown himself down on the still day-warm hay and stared out at the raging animals pouring into the farmyard did he comprehend how frightened he had been. A few minutes afterward he was sufficiently recovered to chuckle when he discovered that he had not dropped his staff during the climb.

The beasts nosed about below, shifting, and occasionally lifting their heads as though they could see him even in the pitch-dark shelter of the loft. Once one found what appeared to be a piece of old harness, and four fought for it with blood-curdling screams. There was no sign of life from the house.

The sweat cooled on him and he burrowed into the hay for warmth, throwing armloads over his back. Through the square hatch he watched and named the stars to himself, estimating the passage of time by their motion. It was the first time he had actually experienced the awesome patience of hunting animals, and it amazed and at last infuriated him. He had known the chance he was taking when he had slipped out of his bedroom window at the Center for this desperate journey to the Trees' farm . . . *known* but not *felt* it.

At last he withdrew into the loft, striking a match for light. A lantern—not the kind that consumed precious kerosene, but a glassed-in box for a tallow candle—hung from one of the roof beams. He lit it and began an inspection of the barn.

The loft ran the length of the building, having at its other end a wooden lattice for ventilation. A ladder led to the main floor below, where chickens perched on a harrow and a wagon. The only other creature was a bony workhorse in a stall.

The barn was strongly built, as barns had to be to keep out foraging bears. The only entrance other than the hay-hatch was through stout double doors at the same end. These were now padlocked from outside, as he could see by peering through the crevice between them. A workbench held a few simple, worn tools.

John climbed back into the loft and returned to the hatch. Ignoring the intent watchers below, he leaned out until he could grasp a strand of the hay-lift rope and pull it into the loft. Unreeling it from its block he carried it to the opposite

end and tied an end to a beam, kicked the lattice out, and tossed the free end of the rope through the hole. Then he returned to the floor below.

From the workbench he got a hacksaw, and working through the crack between the big doors began to cut away the hasp. The creatures outside became frantic at the noise and the nearness of their prey, shrieking and pushing for the position nearest the crevice. By the time the hasp was nearly sawn through, it would have been difficult to open the doors because of the pressure of their bodies against it. In the glimmer of the lantern John traced his path to the loft ladder with his eyes before he cut the last thread of steel.

Kicking with all his strength at one door he was able to widen the space enough for one of the animals to get its muzzle through. For three breaths he watched, waiting until he could be certain it would be able to force its way in, then he raced for the loft.

The sleepy chickens, who had been growing ever more alarmed as he worked, exploded into an ecstasy of fear just as he reached the top of the ladder. A moment later the barn was full of yelling demons and John Castle was sliding down his rope.

He ran the first two hundred yards, then dropped to a jog trot to save his wind. He was looking over his shoulder at the barn when the horse came out. It had jumped its stall door or broken the latch; now it was kicking and plunging in the barnyard, made distinct by some trick of the moonlight while its attackers were only leaping shadows.

In the barn he had relied upon the presence of the horse to procure him a clean escape. Prey of that size should have occupied his pursuers for the rest of the night. Even now, if they could pull it down, he would be safe; but before he had gone another ten yards the horse had fought its way to the road. Its iron shoes drummed behind him.

Hoping it might double back as he knew fleeing animals often did, John kept to the road. Then it was too late. The horse pounded past him, its mouth flecked with foam and a dark stain on its flank.

With the blood pounding in his temples and every gasped breath rasping in his lungs it was several seconds before he realized the rising metallic whine he heard was real. Then he was flooded from behind by yellow light, so that he beheld his own enormously elongated shadow floundering along a quar-

ter mile of dirt road. He stopped running, turning, gulping for breath, to wait for the blue Peaceguard cruiser now roaring down the slope from Cemetery Hill.

From its turret a peaceguard was aiming the stubby barrel of a gas projector at him, ignoring the yelping brutes who fled to either side as the vehicle passed. Dropping his stick, John held up his hands, and when the two peaceguards who sprang from the wheeled tank had searched him they hustled him inside, slamming the armored door behind him.

The burly man whose striped sleeve showed him to be the cruiser commander prodded him in the chest. "It's a lucky thing for you that you stopped, mister. If you'd have took off for the woods—know what we'd have done?"

Still gasping for breath, John nodded.

"Gassed you and run you down, that's what. This baby drives them a foot deep in the mud and they don't get up."

John forced himself to speak. "Believe me, Sergeant, I wasn't considering running away." He gulped air. "I was never so happy to see anyone. I keep a fire over my Mom's—her resting place, you know. I started worrying about it tonight . . . I don't know why. But I thought I'd just go close enough to see it . . ."

"Well, that was dumb of you; very risky." The sergeant seemed a little mollified.

"I certainly realize that now." The cruiser lurched as the driver maneuvered to turn it back toward town. "It was just that I don't usually sleep so near the cemetery, you see. Tonight I'm staying at my girl's. It's a farm just a little way up the road, and if you could take me back there . . . ?"

"Not a chance. Anybody we pick up, we turn right around and take them back to the lockup. That's the rule and everybody knows it."

"It really isn't far," John said despairingly.

"You spend the night in a cell, and in the morning talk to the Captain," the peaceguard said harshly. Misinterpreting the expression on his prisoner's face he added a little more kindly, "It ain't really so bad. He won't do more than give you a chewing-out and a fine."

John sat silent for the remainder of the ride. Overpowering the four-man crew of the cruiser was clearly hopeless, and for someone in his financial circumstances bribery was impossible. Before they reached the Peace Station he was close to wishing he had tried to evade the cruiser, though he knew that

under the circumstances it would have been suicide.

The sergeant was almost jovial as he led John in to be booked. In a flash of insight John realized that the sergeant now had a story to tell, and a break in the routine of night patrol. He turned to him as they stood before the elevated desk. "Listen," he said, "I'm very grateful to you for having rescued me."

"Just doing our job."

"All the same I want to do something for you, Sergeant. And there's someone who's treated me pretty badly that I'd like to get even with. Do you know where the Trees' farm is?"

"Sure." The burly peaceguard had become suddenly alert at the hint of forthcoming information.

"Well, Japhet Trees hasn't paid his non-voting levy in two years."

"Is that square?" Avarice shone on the cruiser commander's face.

"Absolutely. Ask him to show you his receipts if he can. And listen, Sergeant. Tell him it was John Castle that tipped you off; I want him to know he can't get by with cheating me." The peaceguard was already striding out the door as John called after him, "Tell him John Castle sent you!"

"Don't worry," the man at the desk said, "the Sarge'll burn up the road getting out there; that fellow'll get your message all right."

And by the time John had paid his fine to the Captain late the next morning, he had already learned that the deskman had been perfectly correct.

CHAPTER II

"A MAN OF *THIS* PLANET . . ."

"So you see"—John Castle's chalk scraped across the blackboard—"a quadratic equation always has two roots, although the two may be numerically equal, as in the case $X^2 + 4X + 4 = 0$. This is actually merely a special case of the fundamental lemma—the rule that says any equation of order *n* has *n* roots." He stopped writing and turned to look at the class.

As he had expected, only Nonny and one or two others who possessed the true mathematical turn of mind were listening to him. The majority of the class were frankly bored, and some were openly doing civics homework, aware that a teacher who protested the sacrifice of a "dirt course" like math to civics would be laughed out of the principal's office. Several were talking; he could at least put a stop to that.

He let his eyes run over the room, then realized that the noise he was hearing originated in the hall outside or in one of the neighboring classrooms. A student runner thrust his head through the doorway and shouted, "Warm up your set! Mr. Clark says Arlington's going to be on in two minutes."

The swelling pomp of "Hail to the Chief" in the background had announced the speaker before the government flunky who was supposed to had opened his mouth, but even so John Castle found the flunky's little setpiece interesting. At the end it had contained a unique element mingled with the usual platitudes: "Our respected leader . . . a great and a good man . . . A man of *this* planet; fellow citizens, I present to you President Pro Tem Fitzpatric Boyde!"

The music increased in volume. The flunky with his

background of limp flags and bunting vanished, replaced by an empty desk in an almost repulsively cozy office. For a quarter-minute the camera played upon the signed pictures and group photographs dotting the paneled walls and the clutter of mementoes on the desk: bronze statuettes, a paperweight which was a rose embalmed in glass, an ear of corn. Then a man with a heavy, square face slipped easily into the chair behind the desk, leaned forward, and began to speak. "Neighbors, I am not going to take a great deal of your time today. I know that every one of you—like those of us here who by your permission make up your government—is busy keeping our society progressing. But I have asked you to come together now so that I could talk with you about a little problem we've had to deal with in the past, and which now seems as if it might get worse before it gets better.

"Most of you my age or more can remember a time when a small group of people drained away most of our country's wealth—the money that might have been used to buy milk for children or to pay poor people's rent—on schemes to put together what they called A New Frontier In The Sky." The speaker paused to chuckle. "A New Frontier In The Sky—I bet that brings back unpleasant memories to a lot of us; I know it does to me. Anyway, when the tenth or twentieth deadline they set for their New Frontier to start paying back something passed, and it still looked like nothing more than a hole in the sky, some of us did something about it. We told them they could just keep all the wonderful things they were always telling us they had up there—and all the treasure of America we'd sent them, too—but we weren't going to send anything else. Some of the people down here who should have been up there didn't like that, and we had to get a little rough with them, but I think most all of us are glad now we did it.

"That was twenty years ago, but it seems those people still don't like sand and no air—in spite of what they'd said before we cut them off. A lot of you have probably been bothered by their cutting in on our educational and social service programing." He glanced at a note on his desk. "Our people in the Communications Authority tell me that a program about neighborhood relations called *Secret Storm* was interrupted last week. But in the past we have considered it below the dignity of your government to take too much notice of this kind of harassment.

"Now a new element has been added. It appears that those

people up there have decided they weren't bothering us enough. Up until now they could only interfere with the programs we wanted to see when their world was in the sky over our country. Now . . ." The speaker reached for something behind his desk and produced a poster in guady colors. It showed a blue ball apparently intended for Earth, with the United States centered upon it. A small red dot crisscrossed with slender lines occupied a corner of the poster, and three other dots almost as large circled the Earth in a way that was somehow threatening.

"Now they have put these relay stations where one of them will be over our country all the time. They haven't done anything with them yet—we only found out they were there yesterday—but they probably intend to make things as uncomfortable for us as they can, unless we are willing to begin bleeding ourselves white for them again.

"Well, we're not, and we never will be. And to show them that we mean business, your government intends to begin a series of special broadcasts to educate our younger citizens—yes, and to refresh the minds of us older ones as well—in the principles for which we fought twenty years ago. I have appointed one of the most able men in your government to manage this series, and he tells me that the first broadcast will be shown"—he glanced at his paper again—"at nine tonight, Eastern Time. I hope all of us will be watching it. I know I will."

The buzz of talk in the classroom had begun even before the President Pro Tem had finished, and there was no hope of silencing it, John Castle knew, before it had at least partially worked itself out. One of his pupils demanded, "Why nine o'clock, Mr. Castle? Why not in school time when most of us could see it? Will they tape it and show it over tomorrow?"

He answered, "I suppose so. I imagine they want to show it as soon as it's ready, for fear the Martians will jam it." The sound of his voice, speaking authoritatively about the subject they were all interested in, did something to quiet the class. "At least I certainly hope it will be rebroadcast. I've been invited out for dinner tonight, and the house where I'll be staying doesn't have a set."

Someone said, "Who does, besides the mayor?"

"Well, the Civic Center does. That's where I live, as a great many of you know; and any of you could come to watch the broadcast there if you wanted to."

A voice from the back of the room called, "You won't be able to get close to that set!" and a girl wailed, "We'll never see it!" Another boy commented bitterly, "It's safer in cities. *They* can walk home from the Centers after dark."

John rapped his desk for order as a third boy began argumentatively, "Oh, no, they can't! My father says . . ."

That afternoon when his adult classes were over, he picked up his bedding at the Civic Center and made the familiar hike to the Trees' farm. Anna had already brought the news of the President Pro Tem's speech to her brother, and both of them were excited and jubilant when he got there.

The broadcast began routinely enough. After a brief announcement of the purpose of the program Fitzpatric Boyde's talk was replayed in full. When it was over a portly, incisive man at a podium flashed onto the screen and announced himself ready to answer the questions put to him by the press. This, presumably, was the "able man" referred to by Boyde. In reply to what were clearly prepared and rehearsed inquiries, he stated that because of the impossibly long supply line involved it would be quite out of the question for Mars to mount an operation of a warlike character against the United States, that the satellites (he felt it necessary to explain in some detail what satellites were) were presumably merely communications stations, unmanned, which would enable the Martian broadcasts to be . . . And so forth. It was all elementary, reassuring, and rather dull.

At school the next day John was able to make use of the students' newly formed interest in orbiting bodies in his physics class, but the excitement soon died away, leaving only an increased awareness of the Martians' existence. As the days passed, jamming of government broadcasts became almost incessant; then the "Education Team" arrived.

In the cramped world of White City the arrival of any stranger aroused interest; the Education Team created a sensation. Two of the half-dozen men and women in the team were not even Americans. It arrived in, and on, a truck that glittered with new paint and sported a powerful crane and winch arrangement, which they parked in the town square; and in a few days the square was transformed. Banners and posters hung everywhere, a bear-proof pen had been built to hold two yoke of the best oxen the area afforded, and a towering elevator to nothing, a cableless cage to run up and down a scaffolding, had been erected.

But even though the Education Team had been busy with this construction work they had not neglected their propaganda duties. On the third evening John could hear their loudspeakers, although they were blocks away, as soon as he stepped out of the school. He stopped for a moment to listen.

A voice at his shoulder said, "Ah, Mr. Castle. A penny for thoughts, Mr. Castle."

He turned around carefully. "I was thinking, Captain, about the first interruption of a government broadcast by ARES. I'm really sorry that I missed it; I feel a bit out of touch with our culture now."

"That organization—if it exists—will be a very minor footnote to history in ten years' time, Mr. Castle. I wouldn't worry about it."

"If it exists? That's rather optimistic, isn't it?"

"I meant, if there is anything an intelligent man could seriously call an organization. When we turn them up—and we will, Mr. Castle—we may very well find there are fewer members than letters in the name. I visualize it as a handful of fanatical people."

"Still, what they've done would be a rather big order for such a small group, wouldn't it?"

"Not necessarily. But come, Mr. Castle, there's really no need for you and I to discuss it here. It's nearly dark already; let's go into the lounge."

Before John Castle could reply the Captain had taken his arm and was steering him toward the Civic Center. After an instant of distaste he allowed himself to be led.

"Four fanatical people, Mr. Castle, under the leadership of a brilliant electronics technician. A scientist who would sympathize with the scientists on Mars and would betray the people of this country as the scientists always have."

He really believes, or at least half-believes, that it's us, John Castle thought. Or does he only want me to think he does? "Granting," he said aloud, "that even one man—if he had the equipment—could interrupt a broadcast. But according to what my students tell me—I am reporting this for your information, by the way, and would never repeat it to someone not in an official capacity—the letters ARES are being chalked up everywhere. A student whose father has just returned from a trip says he saw it all down the Atlantic seaboard."

The lounge was empty. Its electric lighting made John feel

that he had walked onto a sort of stage, on which the many shabby chairs and few shabby people were merely props and only the Captain and himself actors.

"Children would do that, Mr. Castle, and any dissatisfied persons, once they had seen the broadcast. No doubt some of those students of yours have scratched up ARES on a few walls themselves."

"Dissatisfied persons, Captain? How could any one be dissatisfied today?"

"Sit down, Mr. Castle." The Captain lowered himself into his favorite seat. "That's rather a naive question, surely; I don't believe even President Boyde himself would ever claim that everyone is satisfied today. President Boyde is dissatisfied because not enough is being done for the poor, for example." The Captain smiled. "Even I, Mr. Castle, am not wholly content. For example, I believe our laws—intended as they are to protect the rights of even the meanest citizen—make it too difficult to apprehend criminals who are a severe menace to the nation."

"I suppose we would all be safer if you could put people to the torture."

The Captain's smile broadened. "Even I would not ask so much, Mr. Castle. But it is frustrating to watch day after day as some murderer, or even some traitor, walks free.

"But enough of the gloomy subject of discontent, Mr. Castle. What do you think of the demonstration tomorrow?"

"I think it will be fascinating," John replied honestly. "I fully intend to be present."

"Really? I should think that a professor of physics would find the whole thing a bit infantile."

"Not professor, Captain. I'm only a high-school teacher."

"Still . . . Oh, the truck is interesting enough, I admit. A wonderful demonstration of what American ingenuity is capable of accomplishing now that the generation which was stunted by the cramped disciplines of science has mostly faded away."

John Castle said, "Dirt courses."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Dirt courses. That's what my students call that sort of thing I try to teach. Because they have to do with matter, or the students think they do—which shows how little they know of mathematics, come to think of it."

"I understand your complaint, Mr. Castle. No doubt your

students laud the interpersonal and intergroup fields in conversation, but they'll come flocking tomorrow to see that truck raise a crude elevator holding four oxen. The spectacular has an irresistible appeal to youth."

"They would have been better off to lift the animals with the winch directly, instead of running the cable up over the pulley on top of that high framework."

"Your point is well taken, Mr. Castle. I told the leader of the Education Team myself that to raise them an inch proves—to a logical mind, at least—as much as hoisting them twenty feet into the air as he intends. He held, however, that a spectacular demonstration was what was required. You knew that his group performed in Frankfort before they came here?"

"No," John said, a little startled. "No, I didn't. The same thing, lifting the oxen in the elevator, and so on?"

"I don't think we ought to place too much emphasis on that, Mr. Castle. The educational work, the distribution of pamphlets, and the lectures are the heart of the program."

"Don't give in to the hogs from space."

"Precisely. An excellent slogan, although a bit verbose. The point of this is, however, that in Frankfort only a rather short scaffolding was built—only slightly higher than the roof of the truck, as a matter of fact. Naturally the animals could be lifted only a few feet, and I understand that the effect on the crowd was not as marked as could be wished. Apparently either some education, or a really theatrical demonstration, is required before the utility of a powerful, winch-equipped truck like the new design is appreciated."

"It's a GMC tow-truck, and I would say it dated from about the mid-nineteen-eighties."

"Mr. Castle!"

"You won't arrest me for saying that, Captain. A number of older people must have recognized it already, and picking me up will just turn the whispers into shouts. Anyway, you must know it yourself. You can't have been much younger than twenty or so when that was built."

"Mr. Castle, this is so absurd that I refuse to refute it."

"What you mean is that even you aren't shameless enough to defend it. It's all so damned obvious, anyway. So far ARES has only played up the ideal of a return to a scientifically directed technology. But sooner or later they're going to get down to the real issue: that people today live worse than they

did twenty years ago. Do they actually think they can hide that by parading a repainted truck?"

"That is dangerous talk, Mr. Castle."

"Not as dangerous as you and the people like you would like us to believe, Captain. When the constitutional government was suspended the men the mob forced into office really were humanitarians, even if they were often badly misdirected. Even with this Martian scare the provisions for public trial are still operative."

The Captain seemed to relax. "For a moment, Mr. Castle, I thought you were going to say that we have a police state."

"I would say, Captain, that in spite of the great and growing prevalence of people like yourself we have a state in which mankind is loved with utter idealism and human nature forgotten. Some of us think that a little more attention to facts would result in less human suffering in the end."

Boot heels were clicking against the terrazzo floor of the lounge in measured steps. John looked over his shoulder.

A uniformed peaceguard was walking across the room with papers in his hand. For a moment he thought that the Captain might have decided to arrest him after all; that the papers might be some sort of warrant or complaint; but the peaceguard merely saluted and handed the sheaf to the Captain who leafed slowly through the five or six sheets. "Mr. Castle," he said slowly, "I believe that a couple known to you—a brother and sister, actually—have very recently come into our little town from one of the outlying farms?"

He nodded.

"Do you know why?"

He told a half-truth. "If you mean Miss Trees and her brother, they became too frightened of the animals who took to raiding their place almost every night. Japhet has been talking of leaving this area altogether. If you are interested in them, Captain, you must know that."

"They came here immediately after it was announced that the Education Team from Arlington was coming."

"They haven't sold their farm yet. They're staying with a relative here."

"Which makes things still more interesting, doesn't it?"

John Castle said nothing. Japhet felt certain that ARES would attempt to sabotage the demonstration tomorrow, and John knew that he hoped to be able to contact them when they made the attempt. And absurd as it was to suppose that

this obscure town should be made the site of any such sensational event, he, also, had occasionally been guilty of hoping the same thing.

"Have you ever experimented with explosives, Mr. Castle?"

"That's an abrupt change of subject, isn't it, Captain? No, never."

"But your father was an army officer. And you are a physicist and a chemist as well. Could you disarm a bomb, Mr. Castle? If you had to?"

"I doubt it."

The Captain smiled, and reaching out laid one hand briefly on John Castle's knee. "I don't blame you for feeling just a trifle reluctant, Mr. Castle. Let me approach the subject from a somewhat different angle.

"Now a moment ago I believe you alleged that the winch-utility truck the Educational Team brought for its demonstration tomorrow possessed certain points of similarity with older models."

"I said it *was* an old model. Nearly twenty years old at least. They have straightened up the body, repainted it, and replaced some parts. I imagine there was quite a bit of scurrying after presentable old equipment when it was decided to send out these so-called Education Teams, and no doubt the cities got machines that were a little more difficult for the average man to recognize."

"Yet you yourself can hardly have been more than a year or two old at the time you say the truck was made."

"I'm twenty-four, Captain, as you must know from my dossier. And I took a great interest in machines as a boy. Some people still thought then that every healthy boy did."

"The interior, the engine and so forth, as well as the exterior?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then you are, as I originally suspected, precisely the man to whom I wish to speak. Mr. Castle, I wish to make a request of you for which I can urge two opposite arguments."

Two men who lived in the Center came into the lounge. They were talking loudly, but when they saw the Captain and the uniformed peaceguard standing behind his chair their voices dropped suddenly. John caught enough of their conversation to infer that they had been taking a stroll before twilight gave way to night, and had seen a light in the sky

which they half believed to have been a Martian spacecraft. He hoped they were correct, but his judgment told him it had been a meteorite.

"Are you listening to me, Mr. Castle?"

"Avidly."

"You need not be jocose. Mr. Castle, I am requesting that prior to the demonstration tomorrow—in fact, tonight—you examine the truck the Education Team will employ, reporting to me any signs of sabotage you may discover."

The teacher leaned back in his chair, trying to assess the situation.

"You are surprised."

"Let's say I'm flattered by your confidence in me. I had no idea I enjoyed so much trust."

The Captain said to the man standing behind him, "Go into the kitchen and get me a large mug of black coffee with an ounce of brandy in it. It should take you at least ten minutes to find one."

John Castle could not resist the impulse to say, "Bring me one too." The peaceguard did not appear to have heard him.

"I should not be so flippant if I were you, Mr. Castle. The danger is real. You may be blown up."

"Hardly likely, since I have no intention of complying with your order."

"I said 'request,' but you are substantially correct; I employed the word in its formal sense. Which brings us to the cogent arguments which you found so much less interesting than the conversation of loiterers a moment ago. Have you heard of Public Ordinance 53.104, Mr. Castle?"

"No."

"Scarcely surprising, since we were informed of it at my headquarters only a few hours ago, and President Pro Tem Boyde's signature carries yesterday's date. The ordinance provides that where emergency conditions exist public officials of a certain rank—a rank which includes my own grade—may compel technical assistance from qualified experts. Reasonable compensation is to be tendered the experts. I believe the chief intent of the law is to provide assistance to the authorities endeavoring to prevent the jamming of broadcasts by the Martians. The penalties for noncompliance are severe."

"Who passes on the qualifications of the experts? You?"

"The courts, I assume, after the expert has refused. I must

say that I feel it unlikely that a man who professes to teach the subjects you do should be found ill qualified to inspect a truck. And in the event of a bomb threat an emergency surely exists."

"You said you had two arguments. What's the other?"

"The origin of the threat I just mentioned, Mr. Castle. As it happens it was made by the man we were so recently discussing, Japhet Trees. I assure you that if it develops that the threat was earnest—that there actually is such a bomb and it explodes—Mr. Trees will be sent to prison."

"Japhet told you that he had put a bomb in that truck?"

"Oh, nothing so crude as that, Mr. Castle. But among the papers just handed me—here, I'll show them to you—were the sworn affidavits of three witnesses who heard him state that someone would do so. They are also willing to swear that he spoke in such a manner as to imply that the identity of the person in question was known to him, and one is prepared to say he feels certain that the vague pronoun was intended merely as a cloak for his own identity. See for youself."

"Suppose there is a bomb. It could have been put there by ARES."

"It could indeed, and I fear in that case a court would conclude that Mr. Trees is a member of that conspiracy."

"And if I found it, it would still be a bomb."

"But it is obvious, isn't it, Mr. Castle, that a bomb which did not explode would be a far less serious matter than a bomb which did. Besides, I am prepared to offer you a pact."

"I thought it would come to that."

"And I honor my pacts, Mr. Castle. Remember our famous chess game."

"What's your offer?"

"Also recall, please, that your friend is in a delicate position. His actions recently have been suspicious, to say the least; and it is known that as a result of the very sort of activity our enemies would recommend to us, he suffers from an impairment to the sleep center of his brain. If he were so unfortunate as to fall into the hands of a really humane judge, instead of prison he might find himself confined to an institution for life."

Around them, the few men who had dared remain in the lounge were emerging from their remote corners for supper. From the messroom a triangle tinkled loudly, but neither the

portly peaceguard nor the teacher paid any attention.

"I've sometimes thought that might be the best thing for Japhet," John Castle said at last.

"Even if it occurs through your own indifference? And would you also consider it a boon to Miss Trees?"

"I take it that if I do find something you won't arrest him?"

"I will not. Nor will I arrest you, as I intend to do if you refuse."

"Suppose the test fails anyway? Simply through the inadequacy of the equipment?"

"Although I hardly think that likely, I give you my word that in such an eventuality I will take no action against either of you."

"All right, when do you want it done?"

"Immediately."

"I'll need a powerful flashlight for myself, and all the light you can throw on the truck."

"I intend to see that you have every assistance, Mr. Castle. It will be quite cold out, now that the sun is down; would you like to go upstairs to get a heavier coat?"

"I suppose I should. Do you want me to wait until your goon comes back with the coffee so that he can see that I don't get into any trouble?"

The Captain shook his massive head. "I sent him away originally for fear that his presence during our little talk might embarrass you, Mr. Castle. There is no need for you to consider yourself under detention."

"That is all?" the Captain asked.

Putting the screwdriver into a pocket, John made a gesture in the direction of the small pile of stones which was all his search had netted. "That's all. No mine. Also no bomb in the truck, and I can't for the life of me see how a bomb could be put on that lifting platform without being utterly obvious. Do you want me to search the cattle?"

"No, Mr. Castle, I think that what you have done is quite enough. I must say I admired your fortitude in starting the truck." The Captain began to turn away, then swung his bulky figure to face John Castle again. "Let me add that whatever you may suspect, this was no mere harassment upon my part. Like you, I have missed half the night's sleep; that

should be sufficient proof. You may ride back to the Center in my cruiser if you wish."

Even here in the middle of White City there would be some danger from scavenging animals this late at night. And he was very tired. Wanting to refuse, John accepted the invitation.

In the morning, the street outside the Center was filled with bright, wintry sunshine, and he found it stimulating. The Captain had not been at breakfast—presumably because he was catching up on the sleep he had lost the night before—and as a result the meal had been more than normally relaxed and friendly. Besides, there was a holiday air which neither the normal bleakness of White City nor chill of approaching winter could affect as long as the sunshine remained.

Banners shouting the slogans of the Education Team had been stretched across all the principal streets, and it did not make much difference that the banners, like the slogans, had been brought by the team from Arlington. The lettering was in every bright color to ripple in the wind. In addition the sides of buildings everywhere displayed huge cartoons. Crudely done with kitchen paint on cheesecloth, they were nonetheless amusing. They showed men in space helmets with pigs' faces, and long-nosed men labeled ARES who wore sinister-looking slouch hats and had rats' tails trailing from under their coats. They had been done as class projects by the schools.

"John!"

He turned and saw Anna and Japhet Trees coming toward him. He greeted them both warmly, and, like everyone else, the three of them began drifting down the sidewalk in the direction of the square.

The Education Team had set up a loudspeaker in the square and were already using it to harangue the crowd. No one paid much attention; people were milling about looking at the truck, the cattle, the elevator scaffolding, the banners, the cartoons (the prize-winners were here in the square), and the scant goods in the store windows. Women found their friends, and uncles and aunts yodeled and waved at nieces and nephews. There were a great many children—despite a government campaign necessitated by the diminishing efficiency of agriculture—and they dodged between the legs of the adults and stepped on their shoes. A grim-faced man who seemed to

be a member of the Education Team but who had a vaguely foreign look moved through the crowd distributing handbills printed on yellowish paper. John Castle took one and read:

WHY!!??

WHY DO THEY DO IT?

Why do a tiny group of people who for twenty years have luxuriated in fifty billion dollars of supplies and expenditures (that is, in figures, $50,000,000,000) now wish to begin the whole insane witches' sabbath of waste again?

Because after the long convalescence our country is growing strong again. Under the direction of FITZPATRIC BOYDE our mills and factories and farms are again flowing with wealth. *Never before has the standard of living been so high! Never before has there been such bright promise for our land!*

THEY WANT TO TAKE THAT AWAY!!

DON'T LET THEM!!!

DON'T LISTEN TO THEM!!!

He handed the paper to Japhet, who had been reading over his shoulder, and said casually, "Somebody ought to blow their damn truck up." He kept his voice low enough that the blare of the loudspeakers would drown it out for everyone except the wakey.

"Look!" Anna said excitedly. "They're going to put the cattle in."

Two self-conscious-looking farmers, apparently the owners of the oxen, had opened the gate of the pen and were leading their docile animals out. A member of the Education Team had one hand on the tow-truck's hook and was standing by to carry it up the scaffolding when the winch began to pay its cable out, and atop the truck the man with the microphone had launched into a fervid description of the thousand and one ways in which "the winch-utility truck" could be a boon

to the man on the soil. Looking over the heads of the crowd, John Castle was able to see a third member of the team open the door, climb into the cab, and slam the door importantly. He could even observe when the man bent forward to turn on the ignition. There was a crashing explosion.

CHAPTER III

". . . AS YOU MUST SURELY HAVE ANTICIPATED—"

The prisoners were at the doors of their cells as John Castle passed, watching him with blank faces. He wanted to wave at them or make some gesture to let them know that his assurance had not been completely broken, but the peaceguards were pinioning his arms now. Unceremoniously they pushed him into his cell and slammed the bars closed behind him. For a moment he listened to the sound of their retreating steps, then he sat down on his bunk and removed his shoes. His feet were cold, and he rubbed the toes to warm them.

"Hey, teacher!"

He recognized the hoarse whisper of Paoli, a husky, not very bright young man who occupied the cell next to his, but for the moment he did not bother to reply.

"Hey, teacher, you got it, huh?"

From farther down the corridor came the voice of Stennis, an older prisoner. "Sure he got it. Can't you shut up?" And after a pause, "Hey, Mr. Castle, we heard something about a ghost that came to the trial."

John stepped to the door of his cell. "I didn't think news traveled that fast even here."

"One o' the guard's went just for kicks and had to come back early to do his trick. He said something about it. What happened, huh?"

He tried to tell them, although he doubted his own ability to make it clear to them.

Japhet, wearing, to John's astonishment, the armband of a sergeant in the newly formed volunteer militia, had been testi-

fying; and he had been asked if he had not noticed that the defendant seemed to expect the explosion.

The wakey had stretched his legs forward and looked contemptuous. "Hell, everybody knows what happened. The peacies put the bomb in after John went away."

Then there had been pandemonium. Some of the watchers in the grandstands erected around the square for the open-air public trial had whistled and yelled; others booed. The Captain had advanced toward the witness stand, followed by three of his men gripping their long electric goads.

He had kept his voice low, but he had forgotten he was within range of the P.A. microphones when he stood in front of Japhet. His threatening voice had been carried clearly by the loudspeakers: "Mr. Trees, that is the end of you. Get out of that chair, take off that armband, and get out." Japhet had said nothing, apparently stunned by his own temerity and the rage in the Captain's eyes. "You are through as a summer soldier, Mr. Trees, and you are through in this whole area as well; I said get down!"

Perhaps it was because John, almost alone among all the people in the square, had been neither a noisemaker nor a quieter of noise that he was the first to notice that there was suddenly a man standing in a spot which a moment ago had been empty.

The man was a stranger, almost freakishly tall and very slender; he had a narrow but extremely high forehead over a small and somehow compressed-looking face. And he was dressed, in utter disregard for the cold, in shorts and a short-sleeved-shirt.

"Friends!" The stranger threw up his long arms, hands open and palms out, and turned himself in a complete circle. His eyes seemed focused on nothing.

"Friends!" the stranger said again, "I am a Martian. My name is Emil Lothrop and I have something to say to you."

It had quieted the crowd as nothing else could have.

"Perhaps you are wondering how I came here so quickly, or how it is that I am unable to respond, except with the expression of goodwill you hear now, to your greetings."

"Take him!" the Captain barked. Half a dozen peaceguards moved forward.

"Perhaps you have also noticed, unless it is quite dark where you are, that I appear slightly transparent. Would you be surprised to hear that at the same moment I am addressing

you I am also speaking to over twenty other groups in various parts of the United States?"

The peaceguards had been all around the stranger now, although his tremendous height still allowed his face to be seen. One of them called suddenly, "You can't feel him, Captain. We can't even feel nothing when we stick our hands in him."

"He's been telling you that. Get away from him."

"You see," the stranger's cultured, unruffled voice continued, "we Martians have a means of detecting outdoor groupings of human beings when they occur in cool climates. It relies upon communication mosaic analysis of the pattern of individual heat dots appearing in an infrared scanner field. There is some possibility of error—you might be amused to know that one of the groups I am addressing may actually be a herd of cattle—but generally the typical human patterns are reasonably distinct."

From the bench one of the judges had grumbled, apparently to the court at large, "Do we have to listen to this drivel? Isn't there something we can do?"

And the Captain had answered, "It would seem that our only recourse is to move the court indoors."

To the men in the jail listening to him, John tried to repeat as much as he could remember of the Martian's speech. Much of it concerned legal questions involved in the suspension of constitutional government which had preceded the disassociation of the United States from the research stations on Mars, and they were not much interested in it. But the phantom's references to ARES (he had to explain to them that the word was the name of the Greek god corresponding to the Romans' Mars, although they were already familiar with it as the acronym of the American Reunification Enactment Society) and the support the Martians were promising it evoked a hundred questions, most of which he was unable to answer.

Shortly before lights-out one of the warders appeared at his cell door and pushed a folded piece of paper through the bars, then turned away before John could ask him any questions.

The note was in Anna's handwriting, instantly recognizable from the various class papers she had submitted to him as a student in his adult physics course. There was no salutation, and it appeared to have been hastily written—as if she had been afraid permission to send it might be withdrawn if she hesitated over it too long:

We have been trying to get in to see you, but they will not let us, so J. and I are going back to where we've stayed since we moved to town. Remember your case can still be appealed; we will try to get something done for you if we can, but I am not sure how long we are going to be let alone. They have fined J. for contempt for what he said for you, and told him he would go to jail if he didn't resign from the militia, so he did. I wanted to too, but his Nibs wouldn't let me. He talked to me and he did not seem angry or anything but I could see he was thinking of something. J. is still wild—you know how he is. I love you.

ANNA

He read the letter twice, then folded it into a small square and hid it in a tear in the lining of his coat.

Somewhere a guard threw a switch and the lights went off in his cell and in all the others. Those in the hall outside remained lit, so that the bars that made up his cell door cast long, sharply defined shadows on the floor. He hung the coat on a peg and lay down.

Two hours later when a burly peaceguard unlocked his cell and motioned for him to come out, he was still awake. He put his shoes back on and started to reach for his coat and his little bundle of personal belongings, but the peaceguard knocked his arm aside.

He had never been higher in the building than the first floor before. The paneled and carpeted offices he glimpsed as the guard led him down a corridor of the third were a revelation. The titles lettered on the glass of the doors were those of officials, mostly minor, of whose existence he had long been aware and of whose functions he had been rather contemptuous: Clerk of Courts, Bond Commissioner, Chief Sanitary Engineer. But these men were in working quarters far more commodious and luxurious than those of the principal of the high school or either of the town's two government-assigned physicians.

It was to the Captain's office that he was led at last, as he had expected from the beginning. There were Oriental rugs scattered over the carpeting, with the best and largest of them forming with its heavy border a sort of enclosure for the Captain's desk. Without waiting to be asked, John seated himself

in a leather chair. The guard waited until the Captain looked up from his papers and waved him away.

"Good evening, Mr. Castle," the Captain said as the guard closed the door behind him. "I trust you have enjoyed a restful evening; for myself I confess I have been working very hard. It was a day of surprises for us both, wasn't it?"

"It was no surprise to me to find out that an innocent man can be convicted if the authorities are hostile to him."

"Innocent, Mr. Castle?"

"As Japhet said today in open court, Captain, you put that bomb there yourself, or had it done. Haven't you guts enough to admit it even in private?"

The Captain smiled. "Certainly I do, Mr. Castle. What I will not admit is your innocence. You were convicted today of malicious destruction of government property; technically you are not guilty of that particular charge in this particular instance—but won't *you* admit that you have done far worse? Let's hear about *your* intestinal fortitude."

"I have done nothing morally criminal."

"Oh, come now, Mr. Castle. That's begging the question and you know it. It is not morally criminal to be an avowed enemy of the state? Of the people? Of the poor?"

"I have never sent an innocent man to prison."

The Captain picked up a sheaf of papers from his desk. "Do you see this, Mr. Castle? It is a report which I wrote about you and forwarded to my superiors in Arlington while you were awaiting trial."

"Yes?"

"In it I made the statement that in my opinion you are a leader—perhaps *the* leader—of ARES. I was scoffed at, Mr. Castle."

"I should imagine you were."

"I am not in the habit of having my reports greeted with scorn, Mr. Castle. I have a good record at Arlington and I intend to keep it."

"What has that to do with me?"

"I am endeavoring to explain to you my reasons for treating you as I have. Fifteen years is not a long sentence, and unless I can uncover more evidence I do not intend even to imprison your accomplices."

"Because your bosses in Arlington would think you were riding a private theory?"

"Precisely. A theory I have been instructed to abandon. But

a theory in which I still believe, Mr. Castle; and if I am right, your punishment is only a fraction of what you deserve. Arlington has organized this armed rabble of a militia—we saw the quality of its discipline today when your friend Japhet Trees was on the stand—and thus violated the principle of abjuration of lethal weapons by which the government has lived for twenty years; yet Arlington still withholds from us the power to deal effectively with people like yourself."

"Ironic."

The Captain released his breath in an exhalation somewhere between a sigh and a snort. "Yes, I find it so, Mr. Castle. A few days ago I received a directive stating—*promising* was the way it was put—that only in the event of an actual Martian invasion would the Peaceguard be armed. Yet men like Japhet Trees who join only to get them are issued rifles."

"I had been wondering what brought Japhet and Anna in. I'm surprised you let them."

"I had nothing to do with it, Mr. Castle. The militia has its own officers, and I suppose I must count myself lucky that I was able to secure Mr. Trees' dismissal, even after today."

"And Anna?" He had been waiting for an opportunity to slip that into the conversation, but the Captain was not deceived. Smiling again he shook his head.

"Not she. After all, she has done nothing—nothing provable—has she? I might even say that much as I detest the whole militia concept I am beginning to feel grateful to her brother for persuading her to enlist and to our modern Russophilia for dictating a corps of women soldiers."

The Captain sighed and shifted his usually immobile hands from his lap to the top of his desk. "But we are dawdling, and I wish to speak to Lieutenant Harper once more before I leave for the night. He is the officer who will be charged with escorting our prisoners to the East Coast; the march will be very hard, Mr. Castle, and when you reach your destination your labors will be severe."

John was silent.

"There is a means of helping yourself, however. Are you familiar with PREST?"

"Vaguely. From what I've heard of it I'm surprised that you'd allow me to apply—if that is what you intend. A sort of cross between a literary tea and a chain gang."

"The Penal Reformatory Establishment for Social Tasks is

an organization dedicated to utilizing for the good of the poor the education and abilities of criminals of a certain class."

"I'll bet that's right out of the manual."

"You would win, Mr. Castle. PRESTmen are convicts holding college degrees who volunteer to do whatever educational and counseling work is assigned them. Only first offenders, not convicted of violent offenses or offenses against decency, are eligible. All of which fits you."

"You don't call a bomb violent? That's generous of you."

"No one was injured in the explosion; your conviction was only for malicious destruction of property. And to be perfectly frank, since your obvious eligibility for PREST will appear necessarily on your record, I would as soon have your enlistment go to my credit rather than to that of the director of your ultimate penal institution in the East. We are under considerable pressure now to engage more men, and educated men of any sort, let alone educated convicts, are at a premium in our area.

"You have only to sign this paper"—the Captain was pushing it toward him across his desk—"to avoid the status of an ordinary prisoner. Harper is commendably eager to begin the rehabilitation of his men on the way east, and he was quite disappointed earlier tonight when I told him I had none here."

John reached out for the paper. "I'll read it first, if you don't mind."

"Not at all. You'd have the privileges of PREST as soon as you leave here—I believe it tells you that in there somewhere—although you couldn't get your indoctrination until you reach the East."

The pen the Captain extended to him was a soft-point, the kind made in the Deep South with a tip of Virginia cane and intended mostly for export to the Far Eastern countries whose hard currencies the United States so badly needed. It made a sound like rustling silk.

"Very good." The Captain tapped the papers back into a neat, thin sheaf. "I'm certain Lieutenant Harper thanks you just as I do. For myself"—he leaned forward over his desk, his eyes gleaming like two polished stones as he spoke—"I shall give my gratitude form by tendering you advice. In the letter Miss Trees sent you a few hours ago—a letter which was brought to me for approval before it was delivered, as you must surely have anticipated—there was mention of appealing the very mild sentence passed upon you today. Do

you intend to do that, and has it occurred to you that your status as a PRESTman would make a stable platform for such an appeal?"

John said warily, "Yes to both."

"Then let me warn you that if you reopen your case one thing is certain to happen. My decision to prosecute you only for malicious destruction of government property, a decision forced upon me, as I have explained to you, will be set aside. You will be subject to retrial on a charge of attempted homicide, and should you be convicted at this second trial your sentence would undoubtedly be far more harsh since under the circumstances the charge would be considered equivalent to constitutionalism. Your status as a PRESTman would be revoked. As it also will be, naturally, should you attempt to escape.

"You may also be interested to learn"—the Captain rapped lightly on his desk and the guard opened the office door—"that it is rumored that the privilege of time remitted for good behavior will soon be revoked, as least so far as PREST social workers are concerned. The government, it seems, feels the need of every available hand to soothe the economically disadvantaged sections of our great cities." He smiled. "I trust you will enjoy your work nonetheless, Mr. Castle, but please be careful of the knives."

CHAPTER IV

"I KNOW WHERE MY DUTY LIES"

The little cluster of buildings constituting the empty feed mill furnished enough fuel, from its dirty corners for the cooks to build an outdoor fire. While a detail guarded by two militiamen brought water from a creek a hundred yards or so distant the cooks prepared a stew of salt meat and potatoes. Like the others John squatted on his heels to eat from the wooden bowl he carried with his clothing.

Lieutenant Harper's order was that, as a PRESTman, he be fed first at all meals, but the officer had never made a point of enforcing it, and John customarily fell in line with the other prisoners. Tonight—well into the second week of the slow march from White City, with the weather turning colder each day—there was an unusually large chunk of meat in his bowl, and he recalled uneasily that there had been a similar outsized piece the night before. He offered to share it with the man squatting next to him, who after a moment of nervous hesitation accepted.

"Thanks, teacher. Thanks a lot." The man paused, swallowing the bit of boiled beef and seeming to gauge John from the corner of his eye. "You heard about that guy we picked up in Lynx? The guy from Ironton?"

John shook his head. They had passed through the village of Lynx only the day previous and he had not even been aware that they had gleaned another prisoner there.

"Well, this guy's not from Lynx, y'see. He's *from* Ironton an' he was just passin' through Lynx when he got busted."

"All right, he's from Ironton."

"An' he says in Ironton there's people sellin' these books that was written on Mars!"

John Castle could not conceal his interest. "He does? Does he have one?"

"Naah, but he can tell you about it. You want me to bring him over to talk to you?"

Questioning the Ironton man produced little more information. He had seen these books and they were all about the same size—his hands described a rectangle about six inches by eight—with black-striped red covers. They were said to be "about politics or somethin' " but he had never read any. He "didn't never read much." Various places "like sell dirty books too" sold them and he had been given to understand that they were paid to do so, in addition to any profit made on the sales. They would have to be, everyone thought, because the books themselves were very cheap—almost given away. The Ironton man was obviously nervous and rather stupid; after John had gone over the ground often enough to make certain he had learned what there was to be known from him he sent him away.

"Well," his informant crowed, "what did you think of that, teacher?"

"What did you think of it yourself? What's your name, anyway?"

"Fred Pike. You notice how he said the peacies was all worked up on this? Was those books really made up on Mars and sent down on a spaceship?"

"I would imagine they were written on Mars but printed on Earth by ARES. Shipping printed material from Mars would be prohibitively costly."

"Shuddup." Pike nudged him violently. "Peacy."

A little cold stew was left in the bottom of his bowl. John spooned at it attentively until the burly figure in pale blue was actually standing over him.

"PRESTman Castle?" The question was a formality.

John nodded.

"Lieutenant Harper says you're gonna have a class over there. Readin'." The peaceguard jerked his thumb in the direction of one of the smaller buildings. "He says get movin'. We already put a lamp up for ya."

As John stood up the guard bawled, "OKAY . . . All ya dumb bastards that can't read—over there!" John's neighbor, Pike, who had not previously been a member of this or any other of his classes, fell into step behind him. He was a bandy-legged man with a lantern jaw, and studying him John

found himself wondering what he had been arrested for.

The remedial reading class possessed no textbooks; so John made do by having the students read in turn from his pocket PREST manual, reflecting that unless some of the sections had been written with this possible use in mind Arlington's opinion of PRESTmen must be quite low. Stennis, one of the best pupils in the class, was reading now with obvious pride. "Russier is a great nation . . . uh, larger in both . . . uh."

Stennis gulped, making his gray-bristled Adam's apple bob up and down. He was a man of at least sixty, but he had clearly never seen the word confronting him before. "Sound it out," John Castle said, "it's perfectly phonetic."

"X-tent and pop-u-lation than our own great country. Russier sends us men to teach us and we send Russier men." Stennis sat down with relief. *Extent* had shaken him.

John Castle hesitated momentarily before calling on the next reader. Was there something sinister in that last sentence? "We send Russia men." Not to teach, the manual seemed to say; we just send them men. Could that be why so many prisoners were being herded toward the Atlantic coast?

Outside something howled and one or two of the students moved nervously. Projecting reassurance he said, "That's only a wolf. Surely all of you've heard wolves before."

From the back of the class someone said contemptuously, "Wait'll Lake Erie freezes an' them s.o.b.'s can come down from Canada."

The teacher cleared his throat. "I dare say we'll have arrived in New York by then. Now then, Stennis, we are supposed to be able to understand what we have read as well as read it. Tell the class a little about the paragraph you have just completed." As ignorant as these men were, he had discovered they were intensely alert to shifts of government policy considering police administration and criminal law. If there *were* any shipment of prisoners to the U.S.S.R. it was quite likely that they were already aware of it.

Stennis rose again. "Well, like it says, those Russians know more about machin'ry than what people here do, so they get them to come over here to learn us."

"And what kind of Americans go over there in return?"

That had not been in Stennis's paragraph, and he looked nonplused.

Pike said, "Mostly doctors is what I hear, only they go to learn too."

To get himself off the hook John said, "Yes, I believe that's correct." Running his eyes over the class he spotted a familiar face from the White City jail. "Paoli, will you read next? Come over here to the light, and I believe you can conclude this section and the class session too."

There was a rustle of movement at the back of the room, and an unfamiliar voice said, "Oh, are you nearly finished? I'm sorry if I've come in too late."

As he moved into the lamplight John saw a heavy-set man in his late forties; he wore plain, dark clothing, but it was well-cut and looked expensive. "I had hoped to hear more of this very valuable work you're accomplishing here, but if you really must be . . ." He finished the sentence with a smile, showing small teeth in a mouth framed with heavy, slablike cheeks.

"Yes, I'm afraid we must," the teacher said. "Paoli, I don't think we'll even have time for you tonight. I'll see all of you shortly."

The universal code of prisons prevented any questions. Although the convicts were undoubtedly as curious as John himself they filed out with hardly so much as a sidelong glance.

When the last of them had left, the stranger, who had been standing with his back to the light, turned. "Can we be overheard?"

"We certainly can if we talk loudly enough; it doesn't take much of a psychologist to know that there are ears against that door. Is there any reason why we shouldn't be?"

The stranger made a fluttering gesture with hands not much larger than a woman's. "You'll pardon my sudden entrance I hope, Mr. Castle . . . That is your name, isn't it?"

The teacher nodded.

"I had planned to wait outside until you finished, but I heard an animal. I'm afraid I'm no countryman; the idea of something slinking through the dark to bite me bothers me."

"But the sentries don't?"

Another gesture. "Oh, don't worry about that, Mr. Castle. I've seen Lieutenant Harper and shown my credentials."

"Then it won't hurt to tell me who you are, will it?"

The stranger made a squeaking noise, which after a few seconds John recognized as a giggle. "I think we ought to leave the information split up, Mr. Castle. Lieutenant Harper will know who I am, but not what I've come to say to you, and

you'll know the reverse. Of course I realize you might be able to get his information from him, but second-hand knowledge is never as potent, is it? Perhaps I'll tell you, though, when we've talked a bit more."

The teacher shrugged. "All right, you're a government official—they're the only ones with enough money these days to have the kind of clothing you're wearing. You've got the physique and soft hands of a pencil pusher, and you don't have the presence of a teacher or public speaker, so you're a bureaucrat. Since there's something about you that suggests a third-rate clergyman who's come into money and authority, I'd guess you to be a welfare administrator. You don't have the eastern accent, so since we're close to Portsmouth I'd assume you come from there."

The stranger showed his small teeth again. "You do very well, Mr. Castle; I can see from whence your formidable reputation springs. You are mistaken on some points, however. For example: I have not come out from Portsmouth to meet you. I followed you from Aberdeen."

"May I ask why?"

The stranger leaned closer. "Need you? You must realize that the country today is in a state of crisis, Mr. Castle."

"If you mean that it doesn't distribute its food well enough to prevent part of the population's starving, and that it's doing its best to demoralize its productive workers, I do; but when did that ever upset an American government?"

"Mr. Castle, this is serious. Do you know that at this very moment there are phantom Martians hawking booklets on the street corners in Aberdeen? Can you imagine what it must be like in Arlington?"

"No, but I'd like to know how a phantom Martian can sell a solid book."

The stranger brushed the objection aside. "Oh, the books they're actually holding are nebulous, of course. But they tell you about the books and hint of places where they can be bought. And the Pro Tem Government's bringing back the army! Mr. Castle, I was in this profession before the constitution was suspended and I can tell you just how much face they're losing among their own people just by that.

"Now, Mr. Castle"—the stranger dropped his voice still more and edged forward until his face was no more than a foot from John's—"a little after your column passed through Aberdeen certain rumors began to circulate. They were

strongest among what we call the disprivileged element, and since I have dealings—as you guessed, I admit—with them . . ."

"What rumors?"

"Shall we put our cards on the table, Mr. Castle? From what I've heard all your fellow prisoners must know, and that young army man must as well; I'm told he treats you almost as a friend."

"He wants someone who can discuss the theatre with him; that seems to be all he's interested in. Know what?"

"That you are an ARES agent, Mr. Castle. My heavens, I understand the prisoners positively boast of it—their PRESTman is from ARES."

For a moment John was nonplused, then he burst out laughing. It was obvious enough once it had been suggested. Paoli and the rest from White City would certainly have known of the Captain's suspicions. It would have been irresistible, no doubt, to drop hints to the other prisoners as they joined the column and thus increase their self-importance.

The stranger was still talking. "We are on the point of a second American civil war, Mr. Castle. The Martians and ARES actually produce their own television programs on a regular schedule now, and there are reports—only rumors, I admit, but persistent rumors—of Martian landings." He drew himself up. "Mr. Castle, as I said, I was a minor official of the old constitutional government as a young man; I know where my duty lies."

John Castle stared at him. It seemed grotesque to be talking nonsense in this unheated room where the kerosene lamp left all the corners in shadow. "You mean that assuming I'm an ARES agent you want me to enlist you as one?"

"Precisely."

"And just what talents do you offer us? Are you clever with a strangling wire, for example?"

The stranger made a jerking withdrawal of his head, like a turtle hurriedly retreating to its shell. "Well, hardly. What I had in mind was more of an intelligence operation, Mr. Castle. Information and communications; that sort of thing."

"In other words the same thing you did twenty years ago for the mobs who were your clients, when they were upset because the money they wanted to put up posters and buy drugs was being sent to Mars. All kept carefully under cover so that

you could continue in your job no matter who won—still Vicar of Bray."

"I take it this is a refusal?"

"It can't be, because I lack the authority to accept. I'm not a member of ARES; like you I would join it if I could, but I like to think my motives would be better."

"I suppose, then, that there is little point in my further wasting your time, Mr. Castle." The stranger seemed unwilling to go. "You appear to be an honest young man, Mr. Castle."

"Yes?"

"In the event that the Martians win, you will testify to your superiors that I attempted to join you? That I offered my services, even though you did not value them?"

"If I had any such superiors I suppose I'd have to."

"Fine! Thank you, Mr. Castle." Before John could jerk his hand back the stranger had grasped it and given it a swift vertical shake. As he watched the wide, black-clad back slip almost furtively through the door he hardly knew whether to laugh or swear; but after waiting a few seconds for the man to get clear he forwent both, turned down the lamp and blew it out, and left to keep his appointment with Lieutenant Harper.

The officer had set up his headquarters in the building that had once been the office of the feed mill. John found him sprawled on the folding cot which formed a prominent part of his personal baggage; he was smoking an overlong cigarette and looked worried, but he sat up and smiled cheerfully enough when the teacher entered. "Well, how'd it go?"

"How did what go?"

"Your class. Did you put on a good show for the big pot from Aberdeen?"

"I don't think there'll be any complaints. What was it you wanted to see me about?"

"Just things in general. Well, really, one thing specifically . . . Will you level with me, Castle? I've never tried to snow you."

"If it doesn't involve informing on other prisoners, certainly."

"What you told my militiamen about the machine gun—was that straight? That it was Austrian, left over from some old European war?"

John could not suppress a smile recalling how he had gulled the soldiers with a plausible-sounding bit of nonsense

backed by his teacher's air of authority. "No. It's a water-cooled Browning; they were used by this country in the First World War and to a lesser extent in the second. It's really a fine weapon for defending a fixed position, although the cooling jacket makes it too clumsy for mobile warfare."

"But it should fire okay?"

"If the ammunition is good. The army abandoned the .30-'O6 round back in the fifties, so there's a possibility you might have some duds if that stuff's been in storage since then."

"Well, that's a load off my mind. Listen, would you like a drink? I've still got a bit left that I brought with me." He rummaged among a pile of belongings which had been dumped beside the cot.

"Sure, if you don't mind splitting it."

"We can both use it. It's going to be cold tonight." He extended a brown bottle. "What kind of machine gun did you say it was?"

"A Browning. He was from Utah."

"Good. I'm going to tell the men that tomorrow. Of course, I won't tell them you told me—you understand, don't you?"

"Certainly." There was only an inch or so of whiskey left in the bottle; John took a fairly stiff swallow, correctly guessing that he wouldn't get any more. It was good bourbon.

"Swell. You know, some of those militia clowns are so dumb I have to stop them from running the sights on their rifles up because they think the numbers are supposed to control how fast the bullet goes. Hell, I only had two weeks' training, but I know better than that."

With the whiskey still in his throat John nearly choked. "You only had two weeks' training?"

"It's what they call the Emergency Officer program. They shipped us to an old military school up on the Hudson and we got a crash course. The place had been closed, but they opened it up again; we got the whole bit—Military Courtesy, Close-Order Drill, Rifle Marksmanship—all in the two weeks, and I'm telling you it was hell. They're supposed to be opening these Emergency Officer Centers all over, but I understand the one I went to is supposed to be about the best."

There was no use in fighting against the inevitable. John asked, "West Point?"

"Yes. You heard of it?"

"Vaguely."

"It's not a bad deal if they'll take you and you can stand

the two weeks; of course with a record you couldn't go. I was an actor, on and off, before I got into it."

John stood up. "I suppose I should have guessed that," he said dully. "You still have some of the mannerisms."

"Oh, I haven't been away from it too long."

The teacher shrugged. "Long enough to be promoted, apparently."

"Oh, this?" The officer twisted his head about to look at the silver bar on his shoulder. "Don't let this fool you. Out of our class they made the top ten percent captains right away, then the rest of the upper half of the class got this. Going to turn in?"

"I suppose I'd better. All of a sudden I feel tired."

"Well, pleasant dreams."

"The same to you, sir," John Castle said.

John Castle was awakened by one of his fellow prisoners who had been designated whistleman. Like everyone else he dressed hurriedly and fell out to the space in the center of the cluster of buildings where the cooks had relit their outdoor fire. Not only would late sleepers get a jab from a peaceguard's goad, but they might well get no breakfast.

Breakfast was a thick, hot porridge that was probably oatmeal but tasted like wallpaper paste. Like the rest he ate it eagerly, knowing there would be nothing more until they camped again in the evening. Pike, the lantern-jawed prisoner who had eaten with him the evening before, seated himself next to him again; whether because he hoped to get extra food or because of the supposed connection with ARES John did not know or care.

He was scraping the last lumps of gummy starch from his bowl when Pike jogged his elbow. He looked up a little alarmed, but Pike was grinning and gesturing at the sky. "Have a look there, teacher. When was the last time you seen a airplane?"

The sky was roofed with clouds, but they were high, and when he looked where the convict pointed he could catch a silver glitter where the level rays of the sun were reflected on metal. Several other prisoners were looking and pointing, and within half a minute nearly every face was turned upward. The plane was making a wide circle with its center somewhere near their own position. A buzz of talk broke out.

After it had completed two circles and the talk had had

time to die down, someone rattled a ladle against the cooks' blackened pot. Lieutenant Harper was standing in the center of the crowd with an armed militiaman on either side. "All right," he said loudly, "all right!" He raised both hands like an Indian chief proposing peace, then clapped them over his head. "What you've been watching," he announced in his clear, carrying voice, "is one of the modern aircraft our government has recently acquired as a gift from the U.S.S.R. I'm sure we'll all see many others like it as we get closer to New York."

Around the edges of the crowd peaceguards were jabbing lightly with their goads at those prisoners who continued to stare at the sky. "But today we've all got some traveling to do! Our next stop's at Hitchcock, and that means at least twenty-five miles. If we have to do the last part after dark, that's all right with me. There are headlights on the truck."

He had everyone's attention now. Some of the prisoners groaned and others swore.

"Now it's time to get going. The truck's out on the road already and I want everyone lined up behind it in five minutes!"

John Castle allowed the drift of moving men to carry him along; but as he walked out to find a station in the line, he found himself glancing over his shoulder at the circling object high above. It seemed slightly, but perceptibly, lower.

Once the march was under way it was like every other. The road was frozen, and he was conscious of the thinness of his shoe-soles. The familiar loads of supplies had been distributed to the other prisoners by the militiamen and peaceguards as they lined up, and they now walked bowed under then, seeing no farther than the next man's heels. In the truck a knot of militiamen crouched over the machine gun. He wondered whether they had put antifreeze of some sort into the cooling water, or if, indeed, they had bothered to fill the jacket at all. Idly he looked for the plane they had seen earlier.

To his surprise he found it. It was much lower now, misshapen, swollen, flattened, and—he looked again, blinking, to make sure—there were no wings. Fat-bellied, flat-topped, the plane seemed to have no more business in flight than a brick, but it flew.

Or, he decided, to be more precise it glided. There was certainly no propeller, and he could see no sign of a jet. He looked at the men around him to see if any of the others,

prisoners or guards, were watching it. He could see none. Impossibly the thing flew on, silently and now so low that for a few seconds it was out of sight behind the next range of hills.

Then it was back and coming straight over the road.

There was a vast gasp as the men in the column saw it, its bowed belly whistling over them at no more than fifty feet; then almost instantly the column dissolved. Prisoners on every side dropped their packs and dove for the ditches. He ran with them, not so much from fear of the plane as from fear that the militiamen would panic and open up on the swarming men. Behind them, the flying thing was making a steep bank.

It returned at a slight angle to the road and dropped behind some trees on the left. Abruptly the soft whistling of its flight stopped and he could hear the crackling of brush. It was now or never at all; he was on his feet again, holding his body low and running for all he was worth. A few other prisoners were running too.

The first shot did not come until they had almost reached the trees. It was a rifle shot, apparently, and it clipped off a branch that rattled down through the other branches until it became entangled. He had never been shot at before, had often wondered about it, and now found it strangely unfrightening. Two other bullets followed in close succession; then silence.

The woods had clothed a little ridge. He topped it and sped down the other side, knowing that it would protect him from any further shooting until the militiamen reached the crest themselves. Through the trees he could now see the silver bulk of the plane.

An amplified voice, a public address system but a very good one, had begun to boom over the frozen landscape. He caught a few words, *Americans . . . Mars . . . endeavor . . .* But he was too busy running to listen.

There . . . Alongside the plane (or whatever it was) a loudspeaker stood on skinny metal legs. Beside it a tall young man in shorts was talking into a hand microphone. John shouted, "Hey! Hey there!" and the Martian stopped speaking and looked for him. "Here, over here!" he yelled. "Have you got any weapons? We can set them all free."

"*That's what I'm trying to do,*" the Martian said. His voice was mild, but he inadvertently spoke into his microphone so that his voice was amplified, then realizing what had happened jerked his hand away from his face.

Winded, John pulled up short in front of him and gestured

toward the ridge. "Whole column of prisoners over there," he gasped.

"I know, I saw you from the LBV. Did you overpower your guards?"

Still gasping for breath the teacher shook his head.

"*Now is a favorable time to free yourselves, prisoners. Several of you are already free. It is mathematically demonstrable that over short distances the more numerous group of combatants will have a low casualty rate in assaulting where the proportions in opposition are as one to five or greater.*"

Other prisoners, the other runners he had heard, were beginning to cluster around them, most of them familiar faces to which he could not put names. "You're never going to get them to rush the guards that way," he said. "Don't you have any weapons? We're going to need them in a minute." The Martian looked startled.

One of the convicts who had just come up panted, "You a real Martian? C'mon, let's get the bastards."

"If the prisoners would only . . . That is a forced labor unit, isn't it?"

"They'll never do it like this," John Castle snapped. "Is that propaganda setup self-powered?"

The Martian nodded, offering the microphone. John snatched at it, grabbing a leg of the tripod with his other hand. It was fairly heavy and very ungainly, but two prisoners picked up the other legs and moved forward with them obediently. "If you've got anything in there that'll shoot, get it and come on," John said hurriedly. "Maybe if we can get this to where we can see them we can do some good."

One of the men who were helping with the tripod asked breathlessly, "What do you think's happenin' over there?" It was (unexpectedly) old Stennis.

John told him, "I don't know but nobody else is coming over the ridge. That looks bad."

The third man said, "Maybe we oughta just run for it."

Stennis answered, "If there ain't a lot of us they'll just hunt us down," before John could think of a reply; he felt grateful. Some of the other men were following them; but others, he felt certain, had already disappeared into the brush.

Into the mike he said, "*Those militiamen and peacegurads who surrender prior to the first of our air strikes will not—we repeat, will not—be turned over to their former prisoners for*

punishment. You have our word." That ought to give them something to think about.

The young Martian had come up behind them now; he was carrying something that looked like a cross between a rifle and a motion picture camera with a zoom lens. Covering the face of the microphone with his palm, John asked, "Is there any real chance of making an air strike with that thing of yours?"

"The Lifting Body Vehicle? No, it's not armed."

The third tripod carrier said bitterly, "Then why the hell'd you bring it?"

The young Martian looked pleased. "Because of this planet's thick atmosphere; they won't work on Mars, of course, but they were developed for the Apollo program way back, and they're just the thing for landing from an orbiter here. We dug out the old records."

They had reached the crest of the ridge, but their view was still far from ideal. On the road and in the fields to either side men could be seen milling around. After staring for a moment the Martian asked. "What are they doing?"

John Castle said grimly, "Well, the man in charge's only an actor, but if he's got any sense he's rounded up the prisoners who didn't stray too far and he's organizing the peaceguards to hold them while he comes after us with his militia. Will that thing actually shoot?"

"The rifle laser? Certainly."

"Okay, see the truck down there? Follow the way my arm's pointing."

"I see it."

"Then knock it out. Destroy it if you can."

The Martian stared at him in disbelief. "But someone could be killed."

"I sincerely hope so!"

"It could even be one of your comrades; a fellow member of the labor force."

"That would be better than nothing, but if it'll make you feel better I'll broadcast a warning. Shoot as soon as I'm through." Into the microphone he said, "*Prisoners, leave the area of the truck. We are going to destroy it.*"

The Martian had raised the strange-looking weapon to his shoulder in a way that was reassuringly competent. John Castle did not see him pull a trigger, and the laser rifle produced

no sound, but a tree on the line between the Martian and the truck in the valley suddenly smoked, then erupted in flames. "Shift to your left," the teacher said urgently, "and try it again."

"It will take two hundred and ninety-seven seconds for the capacitors to charge again."

"What!"

The Martian was apologetic. "You see, it operates by discharging a set of capacitors to obtain an almost instantaneous high voltage; but it will take . . ."

A rifle bullet glanced off a tree somewhere near them and went yelling off into the chill air.

"That's nearly five minutes," John Castle said bitterly. "You'd better make that next shot a good one."

"Well, you see we didn't really come here to fight. We feel that if we can take our case to the people they'll see the logic of our position."

John Castle was about to answer him when a rattle of fire cut him off. Instinctively they all ducked. "What was that?" the Martian asked worriedly.

"The machine gun. They had it on the truck, but they must have gotten it off before we got up here. You've never heard one before, have you?"

The Martian shook his head.

"I haven't either, not since I was a child and my father used to take me to the range." He noticed that the Martian was watching a tiny red jewel-light on the laser rifle's stock, and pointed to it. "That the signal?"

"Yes, when that goes off the capacitors are fully charged and accepting no more current. I think it's about ready; shall I try for the truck again?"

"No. I only asked you to shoot at it before because I thought it likely they still had the machine gun in there. Now we have to locate it; I wish it would fire again."

Stennis said, "Well, by God I don't!" and even the Martian smiled.

Into the microphone John said, *"Men, are you going to let four dumb peacies hold you together like cattle until the Martian air strikes come in and kill you all?"* A long burst of machine-gun fire cut off the sound of his voice. It stopped suddenly and indistinctly, far to their left, he could hear someone wrestling the bolt to clear what was probably a burst cartridge.

"I wouldn't talk like that," old Stennis said quietly. "They'll know it's you. Make out you're Martian."

"What do I care if they know who I am?"

Stennis spat, "Listen, I was up to Quentin in eighty-three when they had the big riots. There was some that was right in the thick, but the guards never knowed it. When the thing was put down they got back in their cells and there wasn't never nothing did to them."

"We're not going to be put down," John said. Two rifle shots whisked by, close together. Before John could stop him the Martian had his laser rifle up; halfway down the slope another fire started.

"I saw him!" the Martian said excitedly.

"So did I, but you didn't have to waste your shot on him," John said. "Come on, now we have to get out of here." He looked around for the third man who had helped with the tripod, but he was gone.

"He was standing up, shooting at us!"

"So you set another bush on fire. You'd better grab that other leg if you want to save this thng. We're going back down the hill—that laser gun may have looked great on the Martian flats but it's not worth a constitutional dollar in these woods."

"What are we going to do, then?" The Martian's face was already drawn under the strain of struggling with the tripod.

"Could a passenger fire from the open door when that lifting body plane of yours is airborne?"

The Martian shook his head. "Wind pressure on the door would be too great; besides to stay up I'd have to be going too fast for you to hit anything."

The machine gun was rattling now, apparently cleared, but its fire was still directed toward the crest of the ridge.

"But you could get another man in the plane? How about two?"

This time the Martian's head-shake was decisive. "One would have to be sitting in my lap, just about, and I'm not certain I could take off from here with the added weight."

John Castle frowned for a moment, then came to a decision. "Here's what we'll do, then. Let's set this tripod down right here; we're far enough away from the ridge already and I don't think we want to get out into the open with it where it can be easily seen. You stay here with it. I'll take the laser gun, and Stennis and I will try to outflank the militia and

knock out the machine gun. If we can do that, it will probably take the heart out of the militia and there's a chance you might actually accomplish something with a propaganda appeal."

The Martian accepted the microphone he had given up a few minutes before and crouched in the winter-killed brush with it, looking nervously from John Castle to his plane and then back to the teacher. "Shouldn't he," he gestured toward Stennis, "stay with me since he won't have a weapon?"

John shook his head. "If I'm hit he can use this, and if we get the machine gun he can arm himself." The second time the Martian had fired the laser rifle he had located the tiny switch on the underside of the stock. Now, taking the clumsy weapon into his own hands, he checked it again.

"That's it," the young Martian said. He grinned unexpectedly. "Lots of luck."

"We're gonna need it," Stennis said. Half-crouching, he followed the teacher, who was already moving among the trees that formed the skirt of the wood.

The Martian suddenly found himself alone, listening to the faint crackling the two made as they moved through the brush and to the occasional shots of the other Earthmen, who were still shooting blindly at the ridge line.

There was a new burst of firing, somehow sounding more purposeful than the others. He stiffened. From the end of the ridge, where the enemy must be, he heard shouts. Smoke from the fires started by the laser rifle had drifted over that area, making it difficult to see what was happening. It seemed probable, though, that the two friendly Earthmen would welcome a distraction. He whispered into the microphone and his voice went booming among the trees: *"Soldiers of the illegitimate government, lay down your arms. This is your last opportunity."*

The quick-firing missile projector sounded. It was not destroyed, then.

As he tried to locate it, new flames spurted up in the same area. That would be the blond Earthman's shot, and he too had missed. There was another uneven flurry of rifle fire. *"Lay down your arms,"* he said again.

Someone was coming toward him, forcing a path through the crackling growth. He tensed himself to make a dash for the LBV. Then he saw them; it was the blond Earthman, and he was supporting the older man as the two of them stumbled

forward. Blood was staining the older one's coat. He ran forward to help.

"Can you take him in the plane?" the blond man asked. "Get him to a doctor?"

He nodded, taking the wounded man, who protested feebly. "What are you going to do?"

"Circle around the ridge there and try to come up behind the men the peaceguards are holding, then mix with them. I doubt if anybody was watching me close enough to identify me when I ran off, and with four men guarding three hundred it should be possible to slip back in."

They were at the LBV now; he climbed in, then with the Earthman's help pulled the wounded man in as gently as he could. The skin of his face was the same gray color as his stubble of beard.

"The machine gun's over there," the blond man said, gesturing. "You'd better try to cut away from it as soon as you've got enough altitude."

He nodded, his hand on the door handle. "You should go."

The blond man smiled briefly. "When you go up you'll distract them for me." He tossed the laser rifle into the LVB. The Martian shut the door and waited a few seconds to give him time to get clear before he ignited the jets. The roar drowned out all other noises, so that he found himself suddenly returned to the familiar, with only the bleeding man he held and the outline of the trees in the viewscreen to remind him of his brief entry into the struggles of the home planet's surface.

With the extra weight to consider he shoved the throttle fully forward on takeoff. The upper branches of the trees vanished under him. The Earthmen would be shooting at him. He banked hard, hoping to pick up the running figure of the blond man in his screen—but there was only a confusion of trees.

CHAPTER V

". . . WHERE THE LION SLEEPS"

"Sit down, Castle," the man in tweeds said. "Let me explain right now that I'm just as much a prisoner as you are. Does that surprise you?"

John Castle nodded. The miles he had walked since slipping back into the column after the Martian raid had not prepared him for this. That morning when he had been separated from the rest and packed aboard a truck with two dozen would-be PRESTmen like himself he had imagined they would be taken to some compound only slightly better than a prison camp. But the towering, glass-fronted building in which he now found himself had all the earmarks of a center of authority, and the man in tweeds looked like an administrator. He was well-fed and well-groomed, and his suit was better than ninety-nine percent of the free people in the nation could afford.

"Well, I am a prisoner. Seventeen years ago I was convicted of mail fraud. I still have three years to serve."

"Really?" The teacher seated himself gingerly in one of the cleanly functional office chairs. "May I ask how long your sentence was?"

"I just told you, twenty years."

"And you've gotten this position, but no time off? I was told that there was talk of denying it to PRESTmen, but I thought that was a new development."

"I refused it," the man in tweeds said smiling. "Even if they don't do away with it there's a good chance you'll refuse yours too. Most of us do."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I know you'd like to get out of those filthy rags first and get yourself a bath, but the washing facilities here are overcrowded with all you new arrivals, so since you're going to be in my bunch I thought we could have a little orientation meeting.

"All right, here I am; orient me. To start with, you could tell me where *here* is."

"I take it you know you're in New York?"

"That's what I was told, yes."

The man in tweeds smiled. "Never trust 'em, eh? Well you can trust me. Right this moment you are in New York, in the PREST Headquarters Building, and that crummy-looking water you see out the window is the East River. I personally am your new boss—the official term is Group Leader. Name's Frank Colby." He extended his hand and John rose to take it.

"John Castle."

"Well." The man in tweeds rubbed his hands together as soon as John released the one he had shaken; it was as though he had just completed a shrewd bargain. "Well, now that we've met formally may I ask what your degree's in? We're all college men in PREST, you know."

"General Science."

"You're putting me on."

John shook his head. "Afraid not."

"Well, that is going to be a bit of a problem." With the tips of his fingers Colby smoothed the strands of white hair at his temples, a gesture apparently indicative of distress. "Don't misunderstand me, I'm not a bit prejudiced myself. But you take the average man—what you might call the man in the street—and tell him that and it's going to be like you spit on the flag. An engineer or something like that's bad enough . . ."

"When you say the man in the street," John interrupted, "do you mean the people with whom I'll be working in PREST? Or am I going to keep on with my prisoners?"

"Lord no!" Colby looked shocked. "Listen, you've got to be around here eight years or better before you get to work on prisoners. Just because you had it soft on the way up you shouldn't expect it to keep on now that you're here."

When he had taken a bath and changed into new, clean clothing (a prestige-conferring business suit, although he

noted wryly that the material was not nearly as good as Colby's), he was introduced to the other members of the group in which he was to work. There were several B.A.'s, a physical educationalist, an industrial artist, and a non-Newtonian naturopath. The naturopath, who seemed to have been assigned to serve as his sponsor, introduced him to the others as "John Castle, master of educational skills," and John sensed Colby's hand in this concealment of his scientific background, but he did not bother to correct it. He was too busy informing himself about the work in which he would be involved.

These men in the PREST Headquarters Building (it had been the United Nations Building, he learned, before the members of that touchy organization became disturbed at the frequency with which their diplomats were assaulted on the streets and moved their center to peaceful Cairo) were charged with implementing various social programs in vast areas of old New York. They investigated claims for benefits, and advised their clients as to the benefits they might qualify to receive. They administered social clubs and art groups whose nominal officers lacked the knowledge necessary to keep supportive funds flowing. And because the Pro Tem Government remembered very well that it was the dissatisfaction of the "economically deprived" that had destroyed the constitutional government, the PRESTmen, as well as the free civil service welfare administrators, were paid in privileges and autonomy for keeping the "economically deprived" quiet.

This much of the picture emerged clearly during the group meeting: When a PRESTman obtained a new benefit for a client he withheld the first payment in its entirety, keeping half for himself and passing the other half up to his Group Leader, who in turn retained half and passed the remainder higher up. Thereafter he kept a quarter. "Inherited" clients, those whose benefits had previously been obtained by some other PRESTman or social worker, paid only ten percent. Once a client "belonged" to a PRESTman, however, the relationship endured even if the client moved, and an old PRESTman might don his fistfink (whatever that was; he would find out later) and call on clients as far apart as Harlem and Mineola.

With capital accumulated from his percentages a PRESTman could enter the money-lending business as long as he adhered to the unwritten agreement governing the competition between PREST and the out-and-out loan sharks: a

PRESTman lent only to his own clients and (this was important) never charged less than ten percent a week. He could not, however, sell "chem"—the "chemical" synthetic drugs—run any kind of gambling operation, or receive stolen goods. These things were the prerogatives of the street gangs.

Beyond these restrictions a PRESTman, once he had been checked out to leave the Headquarters Building, was perfectly free as long as he returned before nightfall. If he did not, "a squad of peacies will home in on your fistfink. And a good thing, too. You'll probably be glad to see them by the time they get there."

Last but not least, he would be expected to pay a hundred dollars per man to the other members of his group to "buy his place" as soon as his first earnings began to come in. Unless, of course, he had it now?

That night he slept in a real bed for the first time in six weeks. To his surprise it seemed unnatural and he did not sleep well.

The next morning he attended classes on welfare procedures; and he spent the evening in his room poring over a massive looseleaf notebook of procedural bulletins.

For the two days following he did "In Buildings." This consisted of monitoring interviews conducted by an experienced PRESTman in his office. On the third day he reported to the checkout desk in the basement to be fitted with a Personal Movement Telltale, a "fistfink," for the first time. A dull-eyed peaceguard grasped his arm and snapped the claws of a case-hardened metal crab around his left wrist, then clipped a smaller set around his thumb.

"See? You can't get that off no way, so don't bother to try. And even if you do, it'll tell on you soon's you get away from it so you can't have no lead time."

"That's interesting," John Castle said. "How does it do that?"

"It can tell whether you got it on or not."

John nodded sagely, as though this constituted a complete explanation. A spring-loaded micro-switch which pressed against the back of the wearer's hand? That seemed too simple; besides, he could see other fistfinks on the shelves in back of the peaceguard, and their bottoms were of plain smooth metal.

"You might be glad you got that on one of these days," the peaceguard was saying. "Just swing like this." He illustrated a

backhanded blow. "Really smashes 'em. Lots of the boys tell me they've used it."

"I really should have it on my right, then. I'm right-handed."

"Naw, them pinchers that goes around your thumb makes things to clumsy to hold. You'll be writing reports and stuff with it on."

As the teacher turned to go he said as casually as he could, "I bet you chase out on a lot of false alarms because of these, don't you?"

The peaceguard took this as a personal affront: "Listen, they ain't never wrong! When we get a call the guy either got it off or he's dead or knocked out."

"If you say so."

The guard thumped the desk in front of him for emphasis. "All you got to remember is you come down here, and get one whenever you're goin' out—and you come back here and turn it in soon's you come back so you don't mess up the detector gear. This here room's shielded, see?"

John went back up to the main floor deep in thought. He signed the checkout sheet at the door and showed his fistfink. Staring at the thing's faintly mottled surface he reflected that the easiest way to escape from PREST might well be by breaking out of the building in the evening when he had returned from seeing his clients, or in the morning before he was scheduled to leave. Evening, of course, carried the disadvantages of fleeing through the streets after dark with all the danger that entailed. And morning or evening he could not hope for more than a half-hour's start before he was missed . . .

One of the addresses on his list would not be more than a mile or so from PREST Headquarters; he decided to walk. It would give him time to think, and the orientation lectures he had attended had stressed that walking, if it were done during daylight hours on open, busy streets, was the safest way to travel in New York. Of course, as the lecturer had added, there were streets and streets.

But it all reduced to the question of whether or not escape was wise. In a few years' time the Martians might be able to restore constitutional government, in which case he might be able to secure a full pardon and go back to teaching. And in those few years nothing at all might happen to endanger Anna Trees. True, everything he had heard indicated that the ca-

sualty rate among PRESTmen was extraordinarily high (otherwise why were civilians so reluctant to take a job offering opportunities for lucrative graft?) but he was reasonably confident of his ability to take care of himself, and firmly resolved to run no unnecessary risks.

For a block of swift walking he was able to make himself believe it, slipping easily among the other early morning pedestrians and noting with satisfaction that they paid him no particular attention. Then he recognized the idea as pure self-deception. He could no more remain a model prisoner, busily defrauding poor people while the Martians wrestled the Pro Tem Government, than he could have stayed comfortably in his room knowing the Captain was going to raid the Trees' farm in the morning. This week or the next, within a month or two at most, he must escape.

He could, of course, have slipped away from Lieutenant Harper's Criminal Labor Battalion many times; but something better than that was needed, or he would be recaptured in a few days just like the men who had run when the Martian landed. He would need money, identity papers, and a place to hide. And—he found himself looking grimly at the fistfink—to be free of this. Pausing for a moment in his swift walk he stepped into a doorway to examine the device better.

In principle it had to be a radio transmitter. He studied the swirled surface, holding it close to his eyes until he found what he sought—a tiny loop of plain metal set in metallic gray epoxy to isolate it electrically from the rest of the case. The antenna, surely. He could silence the fistfink by digging it out, but that would be no better than smashing the whole unit, and would presumably bring a squad of peaceguards on the double.

Yet it depended on consciousness. If the wearer was unconscious the unit reacted. It could not, then, be sensing his pulse, and something as ticklish as skin temperature seemed quite unlikely.

Perhaps more investigation at the Headquarters Building was needed. He gave it up and resumed his walk, looking for a mailbox in which to drop the letters he had written Anna and Japhet and smuggled past the lax security of PREST.

It was very formal and rather silly, Anna Trees thought. A unit compounded of precisely six Caucasians, two Negroes, an Oriental (Sarah Yoshida from Hawaii), and an American

Indian was bound to seem absurd; when it was also half men and half women . . . It was no more absurd, though, than her career so far since her enlistment in the militia, which had brought her East to this ceremonial duty.

" 'Ten-hut!"

Anna stiffened with the others, throwing her breasts forward and her shoulders back. The uniforms were a smart parody of a soldier's fatigues, custom-tailored to each wearer.

"P'sent Harms!"

The ten machine pistols leaped up to positions aslant their owners' chests. It was a little like being a dancer, she decided, on a television show. She wanted to smile at that, but did not. No speak-um when boss inspect, she said to herself half-seriously; I'm supposed to be an eighth Cherokee and Robert Runninghorse is a full-blooded Navaho. That makes this bodyguard eleven and a quarter percent Indian. Surely that can't be representative of the population.

He came down the line slowly, as he always did, looking at each of them; but not at the clean weapons nor the shined boots or starched uniforms. His mild little eyes looked at each face, and she had the impression that he was afraid someone had taken the familiar ones away this time and substituted look-alike strangers.

If he reviewed them five times in one day he always looked at them like that, and she felt sorry for him. They said Fitzpatric Boyde had five hundred of each sex in his elite bodyguard; couldn't he have allowed this old man more than ten?

The brief review finished, he climbed into his waiting car and they into it and on it with him. Two on the jump seats facing him. One on each front fender and two in the front seat with the chauffeur. Two on the right running-board and two, she and Sarah, on the left. They hung onto the tops of the doors with one hand and flourished their burp guns with the other while the car rolled sedately through the streets.

Since the crisis caused by the news that Mainland China intended to give aid to the Martians in order to balance the aid given "the present illegal and illegitimate American government by the Soviet crypto-revisionists," it had become fashionable for government officials to travel this way. Close advisers of the President Pro Tem could muster cars swarming with militia to precede and follow their own; it seemed unlikely that the blasé citizens of Washington would be im-

pressed by two girls on the running-board of an ancient limousine. Bob Runninghorse said, though, that the bodyguard was the only thing that put the boss above the head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs; and because of that the boss was bound to have them go everywhere with him—the Bureau of Indian Affairs was as low as you could get. Sergeant Runninghorse had been trying to impress Sarah Yoshida ever since the bunch of them had been picked out of their militia units, and now Sarah was afraid he might get in the way.

Leaning forward Anna said, "I'm freezing! We shouldn't have to do this until summer."

The Japanese-American girl answered primly, "This is south. Very warm." But after a moment she looked back at Anna to ask, "Where do you suppose we're going?"

Anna made a face to indicate that she neither knew nor cared. Once they got out of the city they would be allowed to crowd into the car to warm up; and when they got there, wherever it was, either she or Sarah would use the miniature communicator each carried in a pouch of her cartridge belt to inform the Martians of the boss's current location. Not that it would matter, probably.

"Your situation is bad," John said soothingly. "I understand that. But it isn't hopeless."

The young man sitting on the rumpled bed stared at the floor, letting his arms dangle limply on the sour sheets, not speaking. He would probably speak in two or three minutes' time, and if John tried to leave he might stab him to prevent him. He had a greasy knife that looked as if it might have been stolen from a restaurant. It lay loose in the palm of his right hand; and the skin of his left wrist, skin clear yellow-brown like wild honey, showed two shallow cuts.

"You," the young man said slowly, mouthing the words and continuing to stare at the floor as though he were talking to himself, "are a messenger of deceit. You're an afreet, an' sent from realms of fire to be my undoing."

"I'm a caseworker from PREST and I was here last week when I took over you and your wife as clients along with a lot of others. Remember? I told you that was my first day, and you told me you had just gotten a job: selling flowers." John walked over to the window, half to see if the young man on the bed would protest and half in hope of seeing the young man's wife in the street. They were eight floors up; the view

with the sun streaming straight in watery winter brightness showed black, moving dots that were the heads of children against snow too new-fallen to be soot-stained.

From the doorway of the room someone said, "Hey, man," and giggled. The interruption was so unexpected that John whirled to see who had spoken.

As if the quick motion had been a signal the young man on the bed grasped his knife, shot his arm out to its full length, and drove it back toward himself in a wild stab. John leaped for it, the man in the door grabbed for it too, and they rolled on the bed in a mass of thrashing arms and legs.

After a moment of frantic resistance the young man went limp, and John was able to tear the knife away from him and stand. "Hey, man," the stranger said, "you got lotsa icky ol' blood on your shirt."

John nodded absently. He was examining the stab wound in the young man's chest; it did not appear serious. Apparently the point of the knife had struck a rib and glanced sidewise.

"He's real dragged out, isn't he?" The stranger was bending over John's client too. He was a man of about the same age, just out of the teens. Curly black hair contrasted abruptly with the white skin of his forehead, and his cheeks were disfigured with purplish-red pustules of acne. His black sweater and jeans were slick with greasy dirt. "Re-eel dragged down! He's got hung up in that death-bag thing."

"He wants to kill himself, if that's what you mean."

The young man on the bed said thickly, "The sand blows across the trail the lion walks. Only the lizard knows where the lion sleeps."

The curly-haired stranger told him, "Sure, man." Then to John, "You ought to have covered him. There's no heat in here, man. You his caseworker?"

"Yes, and I should have thought of that myself." He dropped the knife on a scratched chest of drawers and looked around for some garment, ending by taking a blanket from the foot of the bed and draping it over the young man's shoulders.

"Won't no cat like him warm himself for himself, you know. Don't you care if he gets pneumonia?"

"No, not much." John was cleaning the wound as well as he could with his handkerchief.

The answer was plainly unexpected. The curly-haired man straightened up. "If you don't care, square, what're you doin' here? Somebody's got to help him, don't they?"

"You're here now. You help." For a moment John played with the idea of actually leaving before the young man's wife returned, but he knew he could never forgive himself if he did. To give himself an excuse for staying he asked, "What was all that about a lion, anyway? Was that supposed to mean anything?"

"He's a Hunter, man. Least his woman is, an' she makes him go to the meetings sometimes. Those Hunters don't like no one blowin' ol' happy bubbles on chem cubes, so Mama Mona figures maybe it'll catch on him."

"Do you have to talk like that?"

"No man, I *like* to. I'm pullin' in the station, man, but my trip is *not* run out. When you're all feather inside an' this world looks so good, you *like* it. You think like I'm a square ol' Hunter with a spear in my closet to carry 'round at night?"

John Castle found himself intrigued in spite of his distaste. "The Hunters are a religious organization?"

"Man, ol' Mona would be wroth with you! They say they're prophetical students. How do you like that, man?"

"Whose prophecies do they study?"

" 'Cause you see, man, if they're a study group they don't have taxes to pay when they pass that ol' basket. An' if you don't have bubblety fun with cubes, those tax things worry you."

Sharp footsteps sounded in the hall and a slender, sad-looking girl came in. She wore a torn cloth coat, but nothing over her brown hair, and her bare legs seemed to have been given a permanent bluish tint by the cold. Shiny plastic on the purse she carried was peeling away from its cheesecloth backing. Without attempting a smile she said, "Thank you for staying. I was afraid you wouldn't."

"He nearly didn't, Mona baby. I said don't you care if Charley get pneumonia? And he said, man, let that cat die." There was something vicious in the curly-haired boy's voice.

The girl said, "Get out of here, Paul." She had slipped off her coat, throwing it carelessly on the bed.

The curly-haired boy left, closing the door gently. "Won't you leave too?" the girl asked. "There's nothing more you can do here, although you've been just awfully good."

"I want to see what you're going to do for him," John Castle told her. "I might have to do it for someone myself before long, and it's time I learned the ropes."

She shrugged and opened the peeling purse. From a tiny

white paper bag she took an ampul ending in a hair-slender needle. "Just what any doctor would prescribe for him," she said apologetically. "They call it End-Euphor, but nobody uses it to cut the happiness. Just to cut the purple afterward. He'll be kind of funny for a while though." She allowed him to look at the ampul, then drove the needle into the young man's arm.

"You get it from a drugstore?"

She nodded. "They're not supposed to sell it without a prescription; that's why I didn't want you to see at first. But everybody knows, anyway. I could only get one and I'm afraid it won't last long enough. But . . ."

"How long was he out on the streets?"

"Two nights." Her shoulders slumped. "No sleep, no eating or nothing. And they tear each other up out there sometimes just for fun. You go back to your nice big building before it's dark, Mr. Castle. You ought to stay here some night and listen to them laughing."

The young man on the bed looked up suddenly. "Mr. Castle, that's a good name for you. You go back to that castle on the East River, and you walk in nice straight lines on our crooked streets. I've seen you. Do you know everybody in the neighborhood thinks you're flipped?"

He was smiling and John Castle smiled back. "You seem to be a lot better all of a sudden. You play chess, don't you?"

"I used to. I guess with a name like that you've been hearing chess jokes all your life."

John shook his head. "To put it mildly, most people don't have the right sort of imagination for chess jokes. I'm going to get you to give me a game sometime."

"I'm heating you some soup, Charley," the girl put in. "You ought to have something before the End-Euphor wears off and you get to feeling a little bad again."

The young man nodded solemnly. To John Castle he said, "I think most of what we call the purples is just the effect of the hunger and the tiredness."

Mona had pulled the easy-opening top off a can of soup, igniting the tiny charge of fuel under its false bottom. As she handed it to him she said, "No it isn't. If it was just being hungry and tired you'd just eat and fade out for a day. You wouldn't need the End-Euphor, and it wouldn't work if you did."

Ignoring her, her husband drank the soup from the can.

"Mr. Castle, you're going to fix me up again on the welfare, aren't you? Now that I lost my job?"

"Yes, of course." The teacher paused, embarrassed by what he wanted to ask. "Want to tell me how you lost it, Charley? I'll have to put that on the new application, you know."

The young man's face was suddenly bitter. "I just lost it, that's all. Let's see, I worked two days before you came the first time . . ."

"That was Monday a week ago."

"Sure. Then the next day around six the boss got a call, and the guy said I was a chem-head, I guess, and he fired me."

"Did he tell you who the caller was?"

"He just came over when I was getting some cut stuff out of the icebox and said was I a chem-head. I told him no, and he said he had a call that said I was and had I ever used the stuff?"

"And you admitted you had?"

"Hell no. I told him I had enough of those crazy creeps just seeing them when I got off the bus nights."

"So you lied to him. But he fired you anyway."

"Well, what do you want? Why should I tell him the truth and give him the satisfaction of knowing he was right all the time."

John Castle sighed. "Well, for one thing he might have kept you on."

The young man said, "Oh for God's sake!" and threw the can in a corner.

"It's the truth, Charley."

"Listen, you're an ARES man, aren't you?"

"No."

Mona said, "Everybody knows. Some of the people around on the block even say you talked that Martian stuff to them."

John Castle said slowly, "I happen to believe there is something to be said for the Martian point of view, but I am not a member of ARES."

"Well, you tell me this: what would these Martians do about someone like me, about all of us here, if they did take over? You tell me that."

"In the first place, I think you'd have to realize that your problems are not in the forefront of their thinking. The Martian philosophy, as I understand it, is mostly concerned with the exploration of truth. However I would imagine that an integrated view of psychology would suggest means of dealing

with personality problems such as your chem habit."

"In other words you'd roboticize us. You don't need Martians to do that for you, Mr. Castle. The Russians are doing that to their own people already; don't you know that?"

John Castle absently tried to smooth the wrinkles in his cheap suit. A baby had begun to cry in the next apartment and he was becoming anxious to be on his way. "I know the Chinese have been saying that for some time," he replied, "and since they threw their support behind the Martians, the Martians have been saying it too, although I imagine they are simply accepting what their allies have told them on faith."

Charley said vehemently, "Mr. Castle, they do it! I've talked to guys that have seen them, Russian soldiers with faces just like window dummies they said. Right here in the city."

"Listen, I've got to be going," John Castle said. He picked up his briefcase and stepped out into the hall, closing the door behind him.

On the building opposite a poster had been pasted up. He had not noticed it when he came in, and it looked so new that it seemed quite possible it had been put there while he was upstairs. Side by side it showed a Chinese and what was meant for a Martian. The Chinese had skin the color of saffron and wore a formal blue silk robe embroidered with sayings from the works of Mao; his face bloated with fat, was twisted into an expression of fiendish cruelty and he held a knife dripping with blood.

The "Martian," underneath an inverted fishbowl meant for a space helmet, had been conceived as an insect man with bulging eyes and cranium and a tiny, sucking mouth. The compression of the lower part of his face suggested to John a caricature of the man whose projected image had interrupted his trial.

Somewhere down the street a child was shouting, and he turned. An untidy-looking little girl was running toward him. "Hey, Mr. Castle, will you wait right there? You wasn't going nowhere, was you?"

He grinned at her and said, "Why?" He could not quite place her, but seemed to remember her as one of the innumerable children attached to the families on his case list.

"A man'll give some money to whatever kid brings him to you. Stay there, huh?"

Before he could ask any question or offer to go with her she was gone, running down the snow-blanketed sidewalk.

Diagonally across the street was a dingy sandwich shop. He decided to go there and have a sandwich and a cup of coffee for lunch and keep an eye out for the little girl through the window. If she had not brought around her mysterious principal by the time he finished he could go on with his rounds.

He had almost finished when they came. The little girl was skipping in front of a bulky, stooped man of medium height who wore a heavy, shaggy, rather countrified-looking coat and a lumberjack's cap. He took another swallow of the tepid, bitter coffee and went out to meet them.

"Japhet!"

Japhet Trees waved one mittened hand. "Hi, John. How you doing?"

"This is him, ain't it?" the little girl asked excitedly. "This is Mr. Castle?"

"It sure is, honey," Japhet said. "Here's your four bits." He gave her a tattered yellow bill. "John, come on. You got to let me buy you a drink."

"I guess I do," John Castle said weakly. "And after that I'll buy you one. I wrote letters to you and Anna a week ago, but I can't believe you got yours this fast if it was forwarded from White City."

"I never got no letter." Japhet shook his head. "But people in this town keep good track of you PREST guys." He gestured toward a flight of steps leading from the snowy sidewalk to the basement of one of the grimy tenement buildings.

"What's this? You live here?"

"Hell no. This here's a King Kong joint. You know what a King Kong is?"

They sat at a bench mounted like a shelf to the wall, with a small, battered-looking table in front of them. A sleepy man in an apron brought them drinks tasting like gin in fruit juice.

"Nope," Anna's brother said, "I never got no letter. But people around here watch out for you guys and talk about a new one when he comes, so I heard it was you."

"Yes. Well, I'm glad you found me, Japhet. Listen, how about finishing your drink so I can go home with you and see Anna for a few minutes before I have to get back to work?"

Japhet looked startled. "Anna's not with me. We got busted up way the hell back in White City."

For a moment John could not believe it. From the time he had recognized Japhet standing on the sidewalk he had taken it for granted that once the social preliminaries were disposed of he would see Anna; even that it would be possible for him to see her every day, meeting her for lunch, perhaps, as he made his rounds. He tightened his hand around the chipped glass. "Where is she then?"

"In the militia somewhere in Pennsy, I guess. Damn it, don't look at me like that, John. I couldn't go with her, and I couldn't have done her any good if I had."

"All right." John Castle relaxed, consciously bringing himself back under control. "Tell me just what's happened since the end of my trial."

Haltingly, using a great many more words than necessary, Japhet told. He had been forced out of the militia by the Captain and threatened with arrest on several charges if he remained in White City. Anna had tried to resign as well, but the Captain had refused to accept her resignation, sending her instead to a "called-up" unit in Pennsylvania which was supposed to be blocking an expected Martian landing. He had received one letter from her there—the Captain had magnanimously granted him a few weeks in which to try to dispose of his farm—just before he left.

Since then, looking for work and taking odd jobs, he had drifted east, lured by the stories he had heard of easy access to the unemployment rolls in the great cities where the Pro Tem Government was frightened of the street mobs. Hitchhiking on trucks and the horse-drawn wagons that were coming more and more into use as irreplaceable motor vehicles wore out, he had not made it much faster than Lieutenant Harper's toiling column of prisoners. He had now been in New York just over two weeks.

"I got a place down on a Hundred and Forty-fifth," he finished. "You like to come down and see it?"

"I don't have time today. I'd like to come some other time, though. Where are you working?"

"Right there." Japhet looked a little embarrassed. "It's right in the same building, is what I mean. Downstairs. Naturally I'm on relief too, and all that, and I'm in the goonies—that's what they call the militia here—so you can see I'm doing pretty good."

"Wait a minute." John wished they were out of the stuffy cellar, where the fumes of cheap alcohol gave a woozy, late-

night feeling to the early afternoon. "You said you're in the militia here?"

"Sure. See, they didn't have anything really against me on my record at home. The skipper's trying to get me my old rank back. That'll mean a few more bucks on drill nights and if we should get called up."

John rose. "There's a great deal I want to ask you," he said, "but I've got to be getting on with my rounds or I'll never get caught up. Can I meet you tomorrow?"

"Sure," Japhet said. "I guess I'm lucky, working at night. I got all day to goof around in if I want to."

They arranged to meet the next day at a café Japhet indicated served passable food, then parted.

It was early evening by the time he finished, and he walked rapidly along the darkening streets until he reached the PREST Building. He went to the peaceguard's basement cubbyhole to have his fistfink removed and wearily entered the elevator again. At least PRESTmen did not have to climb stairs in their own building. He pushed the button for Colby's floor.

The Group Leader was still in his office. There was an odd tension in his face.

"Come in, Castle. Sit down. You got the message I left for you?"

"No, I haven't been to my room yet. I had something to talk to you about, so I came directly up here. What is it?"

As though he were relieved, Colby leaned back in his swivel chair, making a steeple of his fingers. "We'll get your business out of the way first, then. Shoot."

John Castle drew a deep breath. "If I'm wrong about this—I want to say this in advance, because I realize I may very possibly be wrong—I apologize, because you won't like being suspected of what I'm going to ask you about."

"Sounds pretty bad."

"I think it is. Last week one of my first calls was on a man named Charley Clark. He told me he'd gotten a job as a florist's assistant and I put in a form to have him taken off relief since he was now gainfully employed."

A slight smile played around Colby's lips. "Quite right."

"The day after I filed that form someone called his employer on the telephone and informed him that Charley had used drugs. He was fired."

"All right, put in a Twenty Twenty-one on him. Reinstatement of an established case. I think the form's white with a purple stripe at the top."

"I know that." John Castle stared steadily at the Group Leader.

"Then what is it you want?"

"I want you to tell me, man to man, that you didn't make that call and that it wasn't made at your suggestion or on your authority."

In an expressionless voice Colby said, "I did make it."

John felt his muscles relax, and only then knew how great the strain had been.

"I made that call," Colby was saying, "because it was my duty to make it."

"You made it because you had a two-and-a-half percent share in that man's check to protect."

"That man was a narcotics addict and the citizen who had given him employment did not know it. He had a right to be informed."

"Chem isn't addictive."

"Its use is habitual; you know that. The people who have used it once or twice just can't wait to get back into that pretty-pretty fun world of theirs again."

"We could argue about that all night—for one thing, it would seem obvious that if they weren't fired from such work as they can get this world might seem a little better to them—but I think you've led me past the point. You did it for the money: for two and a half cents out of every dollar of a relief check. For government money at that, money most people won't even accept in any quantity for anything valuable."

"Okay. Now are you going to do anything about it, Castle?"

"Yes; I'm going to offer my resignation."

For an instant a look of astonishment flitted across Colby's face, then he was in control of himself again, leaning forward over his desk. "I see. You think you've got yourself a shrewd move there, don't you, Castle?"

"I think it is better for me to go to prison than to pretend to help my clients with one hand while I help pull them down with the other. In the long run, for the sake of my soul or character or whatever you want to call it, I think that's shrewd; yes. But I didn't think you would agree."

Colby stood up, silhouetting himself against the big window

that formed the rear wall of his office. "Since nobody ever resigns from PREST you thought that would make quite a stir, didn't you? You'd take your little bitch 'way upstairs and probably wind up in my job. Well, it won't work. See this?"

Bending he splayed his fingers on a flimsy sheet of paper and pushed it across toward John. "I didn't want to tell you about this; I've been dreading it all day, sitting here trying to talk myself into delegating the job someway. But now, by God, I'm going to enjoy it. You know what this is?"

John picked up the sheet. In smudged type it read:

ORDER TO REMAND

You are hereby instructed to remand John Castle, a prisoner now under your care, to the authority of original arrest. It is understood that he has been implicated in the confession of one Norman Cooper and is consequently required for trial on new charges arising from the above confession.

In the remote corner of his mind not occupied with what must have happened to Nonny, John Castle heard Colby saying, "You can sleep here tonight in your regular room, Castle, but in the morning I'm turning this over to the peacies."

He had gone to bed early and lain awake long, then slept badly. In dreams he climbed dark stairs interminably, looking for the boy but somehow aware that all the rooms of all the floors of all the buildings were empty. Then on the uppermost landing he saw a hyena, shifting its feet and snuffling as it worked itself to the necessary pitch of courage to attack him. He tried to shout to frighten it, but his throat was dry. Then it sprang, knocking him down and seizing his shoulder in its jaws.

He woke. A hard-faced man in light blue was shaking him violently by the shoulder. "Stop fighting, damn it, and get up. Come on, wake up!"

Behind him another peaceguard said, "Some dream he must be having."

John sat up in bed. "Is it morning already?"

"You kidding?" The first peaceguard looked more sour than ever. "It's two thirty. Come on, get dressed."

The other added, "Just put on your pants. We got to get

out of here quick." He picked up Castle's trousers from the chair and tossed them into his lap.

"What is this?" the teacher asked.

"Some guy's got his wife up on top of a buildin' and he says he's goin' to throw her off and jump himself if we don't get you down there."

In a racing Peaceguard cruiser with siren screaming they traversed the brief route John had walked every day for the past week. It seemed astonishingly short.

From where they had come it was impossible to say; but they were there, jostling, sometimes shouting as they craned their necks upward. Some had the dilated eyes of chem-heads; others, obviously just out of bed, drew blankets and robes about themselves to shut out the cold. There were even a few wakeys with pale, sickly faces and hysterical eyes that reminded John Castle of Japhet.

Overhead a helicopter threshed the air uselessly, hanging in one spot so as to direct its floodlights on the man and woman who stood on a cornice of the building. It seemed miraculous that the lights did not blind them and make them fall.

An officer of the Peaceguard, a tall man in immaculate blues, strode up to the cruiser as it stopped. "You Castle?" he asked. He did not offer to shake hands.

John nodded. "Is the building open? Can we get up on the roof?"

"There's a fire escape in back. That's how they got up. I've got a couple men there now, but he says if they get any closer he'll jump with her, and right now he means it. He said if we didn't get you here inside half an hour he'd jump; and I think he meant that too."

"I see." They were already walking, almost trotting, toward the rear of the building. Peaceguards ahead of them cleared the way with their goads.

"The thing to do is stall. He's in the last stages now. He's depressed, but not too depressed to act. Not catatonic like he would have been earlier."

"How long, do you think?"

The officer twitched his shoulders. "Two hours. Maybe less."

Above them the fire escape wound up the grimy brick wall like the skeleton of a dragon dead in agony. For a moment the officer looked quizzically at John. "You're a PRESTman, aren't you?"

The teacher followed the direction of his eyes and held up his bare left wrist, slightly embarrassed. "No fistfink. I guess your peacemen didn't think there was time for one."

"That's against regulations, but it's too late to do anything about it now," the officer said. "You fellows never try to get away anyway."

"You coming up with me?"

"No." The officer shook his head. "I'll be needed down here; besides, we peacies only seem to irritate him. I'm going to radio my men that they're to come down too if you advise it. We'll be watching the bottom of the fire escape here, and there's only one other way down."

At the top of the fire escape a six-foot ladder of U-shaped steel bars driven into the masonry led to the roof. As soon as his eyes came above the level of the parapet he saw them. The beams of the helicopter's lights poured down around them as though they were on a stage, their backs toward him, their arms about each other's waists.

Some vainglorious architect had given the building an overhanging cornice at the center of the facade. They stood on this, and from here it seemed that their toes must project over the edge. The whir of the helicopter gave a constant background, like the sound of the sea, to the faintly audible shouts of the crowd below; the backwash blew not quite roughly at the woman's hair.

He climbed the last rungs of the ladder and swung his leg over to step on the composition roof. Two peaceguards he had not seen until then stood up in the shadow of a chimney. One of them carried a radio, the other a dark bundle.

"Hi," one of them said. "You're the PREST guy?"

He nodded, then called out, "Charley, it's me, John Castle. You wanted to see me?" Gravel crunched beneath his feet.

They turned around, he lithely, she slowly and carefully. Because their backs were toward the light he still could not see their faces, only their mute silhouettes against the glare. Under his breath he said to the peaceman with the radio, "Tell them to get that chopper up more so the light isn't level onto us."

The peaceguard nodded. The other gesticulated with his bundle to call attention to it. "Get 'em in a little an' I can toss this over them, huh?"

The helicopter was already beginning to rise, lessening the glare. Looking at the bundle John saw that it was a net with

small lead weights sewn around the edges, no different, probably, from the ones used by Roman *retiarii* two millennia before.

"I can use it, too," the peaceguard said. "Some guys can't, but I can."

From the far side of the roof Charley called, "Well, what're you going to do, Mr. Castle?"

John whispered, "I hope we don't need it. I'm going to try and stall." Turning away from the peacemen he walked slowly toward the couple on the cornice. "What should I do?" he asked loudly. "You're the one who got me here. What do you want with me?"

"I want you to go over the edge with me and Mona."

"Louder." He had stopped twenty feet away; now he cupped a hand over one ear. "That helicopter makes so much noise I can't hear you, Charley."

"You heard me, but come in a little closer."

John advanced a few steps. "Promise you won't jump?"

"I won't until I can grab you and take you with me."

"You won't ever go, then, Charley. I'm stronger than you are."

"Then come on up." The man on the cornice extended his arm in a horrible parody of an offer to shake hands. "All you gotta do's come up here and pull me down."

"You don't think I can do it?"

"Try it. This damn curb thing I'm standing on's about a foot high—just right for you to trip over. Then down we all go."

"You want to kill Mona too?"

Her voice husky with fear, the girl said, "I'm concentrating my thought, Mr. Castle. I'm asking for the King to come and save us all." It was the first time she had spoken.

"That Hunter business," her husband said, "that stupid crud. Can't you ever stop playin' that?"

"Is that why you want to kill her, Charley? Because she's in the Hunters?"

From behind him one of the peaceguards called, "Hey, Castle! The guy in the copter says he's gotta come down a little. They got a truck here now to gas him up and his hose won't reach from where he is. He says he's almost out."

On the brink of the drop Charley Clark craned his neck to look down, half turning. For an instant John considered

rushing him, then abandoned the idea; it was too far, too risky. With mild wonderment the chem-head exclaimed, "Hey, look at that. They got a real gas truck down there."

John took a step nearer. Already the helicopter was easing downward, putting its lights into his eyes once more. From its belly a silver-gray hose had begun to uncurl. Charley straightened up, facing him again. "Say, you were movin' in, weren't you? Going to rush me?"

"No, I'm going to wait until the poison in your blood dies enough for you to want to live again. Then I'm going to steady you when you step down off there so you don't fall."

Mona whispered, "The King will come. Already the Great Bear is high in the sky." She was staring over John Castle's shoulder as she spoke, and after a moment of confusion he realized that she was referring to the constellation called the Big Dipper.

Charley made an ugly sound with his mouth. "It's not going to work, Castle. I been all through this before, and when that down there doesn't look quite as good to me as it does now—when I feel that little tickle of wanting to cop out on it—I'm going to jump. If you're close I'll take you too, and I'll take Mona anyway. I already told her if she tries to skip I'm taking her right off." Behind him the helicopter's lights fidgeted as it maneuvered to make the hose connection. Its wind was whipping Mona's hair now, and blowing Charley's over his eyes so that he was constantly pushing it away with one hand. John edged toward them.

"You know why?"

"No." The teacher shook his head.

"Because I like you both. You're both of you only ninety-nine percent rotten, and you showed me today I'm pretty rotten too."

"And every one else's a hundred percent?"

"Now you got it." Charley leaned forward, apparently sincere. "I'm going to do you the biggest favor anybody ever did anybody in the rotten world. I'm going to take you out of it forever without any little dope-up sugar cubes."

They had all grown accustomed to the shouts and jeers of the crowd in the street below, scarcely audible over the sound of the helicopter rotor; but now, unexpectedly, John realized there was a new note in those voices—a confused, shrill babbling that spoke more convincingly of fear than any screams

could have. Then, incredibly, a wholly new sound tore through the clamor; slow, almost lazy, threatening. Mona said simply, "It is the King."

Charley turned completely around, and John saw him teeter and nearly fall as he looked. His arm was away from his wife now, and John lunged toward him with every ounce of thrust he could give his legs.

Charley tried to turn and lost his balance, but John was there in time. He jerked him back, pulling him from the cornice at the same time Mona stepped down. For a split second he thought he had won.

Then Charley came alive in his hands, a writhing, clinging thing that held him as though with talons while it kicked at his ankles. He felt the edge of the cornice press against his shins, and for an instant glimpsed people running frantically in the street below. Fear came in a flood, snatching at his breath. Then Charley, still holding him in that inescapable grip, threw his body backward over the edge. He felt himself going and grabbed wildly, clawing for anything his hands could grasp.

One hand touched something and closed upon it with a strength he had never known he possessed. He felt his feet scrape over the edge of the cornice, felt himself swing out and out as the world below him whirled sickeningly under his eyes. Something—some still-functioning corner of his mind identified it as the peaceguard's net—flashed by them and dropped uselessly. Then Charley's hands were tearing away and he saw him turn, almost as though he were rolling over in bed, before he struck the concrete below.

The swing ended and the force of deceleration pulled at his own grip; his hands were sliding. He tried to throw his legs around the thing he held, and as he did so understood that it was the hose—the helicopter pilot, seeing them about to go over, had done the only thing which could possibly have helped. He had edged his craft forward until the fuel hose was nearly touching the front of the building.

Now the rubber, smooth as it was, was burning his hands with friction. He clamped his legs to try to slow himself. Then something hard rowelled them, raked his body, and tore past his hands—and there was nothing holding him up at all.

The pavement rose and struck him. In the shock everything vanished so quickly he was unaware of the going.

He woke with the knowledge that something was horribly

wrong with his body. Pain came swarming into his mind, and for a moment he could only surrender wretchedly to it. Then he opened his eyes, tried to lift his head, found his mouth was filled with blood.

He spat it out and felt hard fragments of two teeth go with it. He was able to draw his left arm under his chest, but his right would not respond and was doubled into an impossible angle. Hardly knowing what he did, he raised himself to a crouch and picked it up with his left hand, holding it pressed against his chest so that it need not support its own weight. One side of his face felt thick and swollen, and burned.

The street was clear. There were no onlookers and no traffic. A scarlet gasoline truck stood at the curb not far from where he had fallen, and farther down several Peaceguard cruisers stood, but there were no peaceguards. Bewildered, he looked around for Charley Clark's body without finding it.

For a moment he wondered if it had been spirited off by whatever had routed the peaceguards and thrill-seekers; then he realized it must lie on the other side of the truck, between the truck and the building. He had been carried farther out, over the street, by his swing on the fuel hose. He looked up in time to see the helicopter disappear behind the tall buildings of the old financial district. He could not have been unconscious long.

He limped toward the gasoline truck, then around the back bumper to look for Charley's body.

It was there, in a splash of blood and brains.

And standing over it was a huge, four-legged shape of dingy yellow. As he stood frozen it raised its great head and looked at him with confident amber eyes that held all the dignity and unthinking ferocity that belong to the beasts.

He turned and ran, while behind him its roar shook the concrete canyons of the streets.

CHAPTER VI

". . . PRESIDENT CHARLES H. HUGGINS!"

Among the myriad scattered stars a metal cylinder swung, catching the sun's light so that it appeared a star itself, then vanishing in blackness. In it was thin air, some heat, light, and coffee.

The coffee had been brewed from beans grown under glass out where the sun was a small golden coin in a black sky. The man who drank it had been born there and had never set foot on the cradle-planet of his race, although he had been seen walking there by tens of thousands. Now he was fatigued, though he had not yet taken the second of his twice-walking sessions in the centrifuge. The coffee tasted good.

"Anything else?" he said to the machine on his desk.

"Random coincident occurrences, sir. One percent sample."

He had made a practice of checking this fraction of double-data occurrences ever since he had left Mars. It was recommended by the mathematics of hyper-game theory, but thus far the theory had not paid off and as their information sources increased, the double instances were multiplying like bacteria. He thought of skipping the whole procedure. "Many tonight?" he asked.

"Three hundred coincident occurrences, sir. Three in the sample."

That wasn't so bad. Last night there had been twelve. "All right," he said, "let's have them."

"In order of occurrence today: *Rose*, by the Baltimore *Sun* in an end-of-column item as a source of vitamin C, and *rose* by the Mainland Chinese Ambassador to Great Britain in the form of a jade and ivory carving to be given the Prime

Minister as a token of regard from the Regent of Mao."

The coincidence was obviously meaningless, but the second half of the item interested him. "Does the rose have any special significance to the Chinese or the British?"

The machine buzzed for a half-second. Then: "We have no information as regards Mainland China. The variety York and Lancaster, known as the Tudor Rose, is the national flower of Britain."

"No action. Next item."

"*Logan, Ohio* mentioned in a Bureau of Mobilization Work Order as the site of an aircraft plant to be reopened, and *Logan, Ohio* mentioned in a Department of the Interior Memorandum as a town to be inundated by the Hocking Dam."

A month ago they had begun a project to gain access to the channels of communication of the Pro Tem Government. Now, he reflected, they had more than they could possibly process. At dinner the day before, one of his aides had remarked a little bitterly that if they lost it might be because they knew much too much about their enemy. "No action."

"*Castle, John,* identified by volunteer Stennis, George, as a political prisoner of the P.T.G., thought by him (Stennis, George) to be a leader of ARES, and *Castle, John,* mentioned by volunteer Trees, Anna, as her former leader in a cell now destroyed."

"That's all?"

"That is the sample, Mr. Lothrup."

"No action."

His desk computer turned itself off, as evidenced by the extinction of a tiny light. That wounded Earthman, Stennis, was finally well enough to be debriefed, then. The pilot's experience had been interesting, although he had come in on it rather late. How long ago had that been, anyway? Surely at least three weeks.

He stuck his coffee-bulb back into its gripper and kicked himself away from the desk where he had been held by the minute suction holes in his chair seat. Hadn't someone said something about a man in the infirmary dying three times in one day? That must have been Stennis. As he glided down the corridor to the centrifuge he wondered how it felt to have the doctors keep starting you up over and over again.

"Stand straight!"

The boy's face twitched uncontrollably.

"Somebody worked you over quite a bit, huh?"

The boy still said nothing, though the pain showed in his eyes. The guard squinted at him professionally, then nodded. "You talked too, didn't you?"

After a moment the boy's head moved a fraction of an inch. Up, then down.

"I can always tell. Besides, you probably wouldn't be comin' in here on your feet if you hadn't. They're taking the kid gloves off with you political offenders." The guard lifted himself from his chair as he spoke. He was a big man grown gray-haired and paunchy, but still powerful. "What's your name?"

The boy took an involuntary step backward. "Cooper," he said. "Norman Cooper."

"Ya see that number on your shirt? That Eight-five-four-oh?"

Nonny nodded.

"That's your case number. Around here we use the case number, because you're probably gonna forget your name. We got these Russian fellas here at the farm now, and they'll see to that. When you're ready to go out we'll tell you what it is all over again, see? Meantime you use the number, understand?"

"Yes."

"What's your name, kid?"

The boy's eyes flickered briefly down to the tape sewn on his shirt. "Eight-five-four-oh."

"Okay, you'll do. C'mon, we got to get you a bunk yet."

He watched the guard put on his slicker. The slicker was yellow, exactly the same shade as some terminal ends he had used years ago when he had built a little radio from junked parts. Looking at the slicker as he walked out into the rain he could see them gleaming, down in the magic tangle of wires, and remember that he had never really believed the radio would work, because he'd had no printed circuits, and everything he was familiar with that did work used them. His feet sank in the mud until it was over the tops of his shoes.

For as long as he could remember he had been vaguely aware of the existence of this place. Once, when he was quite small, his mother had taken him on a visit to an aunt who lived some distance away, and they had traveled by bus. He recalled looking out the window at men in blue work clothing hoeing a field which seemed to stretch on for miles. The field

had been separated from the highway by a high wire fence, but it seemed to him that even then he had not had to ask Mother who the men were or why the fence was there. He knew.

When he was older he had sometimes read of prisons in books, and once his family had gone as a group to the Civic Center to watch the television there when an old motion picture about prisons was shown. (His father, who was old enough to remember the constitutional times, had wanted to see some favorite actor, now dead.)

But neither what he had read of what he had seen was at all like the actual place he was in now. There were no frowning stone walls, no guard towers. Only this mud and the barbed-wire fence and the barracks-like brick dormitories.

"Here's where you bunk," the guard said, stopping at a door. "You goin' to be able to get your clothes off by yourself?"

Nonny held up his hands, looking by the light of the yellow bulb over the dormitory door at the tips of his fingers. They were dark with blood where the nails had been pulled off, and he found himself unable to guess whether they would still function or not.

"Well, if you can't"—the guard pushed open the splintering door—"ask somebody to help you. Don't be afraid of them, they're all just like you in there."

In a way, John Castle admitted to himself, it was fun. If there were nothing at stake, if he had no responsibilities and the Peaceguard could not possibly find him here, he might actually come to enjoy what he was doing.

His right arm had been encased in plaster by the "special" doctor Tia Marie had called for him; but the fingers were clear and of some help as he laced the top back on the little drum.

As he tied the last knot, tightening the thongs with his teeth, he heard slow, firm steps in the hall outside his door and knew whom to expect.

She opened the door and stepped into the room she had given him, her wide brown face as impassive as a statue's.

He rose. "Good morning, Madame."

"You will call me by my name, John. I have told you that before. We are all one in siblinghood, we Hunters. There are no titles."

"Of course," he said, and added, "I keep forgetting, Tia Marie." While he spoke he studied her, wondering at the mixture of races that could have given so dark a complexion with her clear blue eyes, and combined that ageless hawk-face with the stature of a giantess.

He got a chair for her after clearing it of a litter of small prisms and lenses he had left on it the night before. It was an old kitchen chair, but she accepted it as though it were a throne, gathering her voluminous skirt about her with the motion of a queen settling herself in her coronation robes. The skirt was scarlet, and she wore a scarlet cloth over hair he suspected might be graying but had never seen. Her breasts were bare.

"In the future, John, you are to ask me to be seated when it becomes apparent I am going to stay more than a brief time. We are all one family as I have told you, and the courtesies prevent family quarrels."

"I'll be happy to, but since it is your chair, in your room, and you don't bother to knock when you come into any room in your building, it's a bit difficult to remember."

"You should keep in mind, John, that it is of more importance that I do not quarrel with you, than that you do not quarrel with me."

He nodded gravely.

"Have you studied the books I lent you?"

"Yes, I have."

"You have still an interrogative in your mind. What is it?"

He rummaged among the books lying on his bed.

"*Tante,* not *tia,* is the French word for *aunt*; and this book has the name Maria de Alarcón written on the flyleaf. *Tia* is Spanish."

"So you are asking if Maria de Alarcón is my real name? No, it is not, John. You may find anything written inside the cover of an old book. Would you be satisfied if I told you that I was born of French-speaking parents among the Spanish-speaking people of South America?"

"I'm afraid not. I'd want to ask a great many more questions, Tia Marie."

She gave him one of her very rare smiles. "Understand that I do not so tell you, John. Because it is not true and I never say anything but the truth. When Japhet brought you to me, all bleeding, you had no questions. You only wanted a place to hide and perhaps someone to bandage you. I have told you

before that only Hunters can stay here, and my Hunters do not ask always, who is she? From where does she come?"

John shrugged apologetically and gestured toward the pile of books. "I'm trying to learn."

"To try is nothing. To succeed," she leaned forward slightly in her chair and a hint of animation came into her broad impassive face, "is all! You read, but you do not say, that may be so, I shall think about that. You say, prove, prove! Why do you believe the King came when Mona, a nothing, a silly child, wished he should? You would not have gotten free of those peacemen were it not for that, would you John?"

"All right, how's this?" He smiled, hoping that what he was about to say would not precipitate a serious quarrel, but stung into replying. "You Hunters parade the streets at night—you call it Hunting, but let that pass—with your spears. On big occasions you let your pet lion out of his cage and take him with you. No leash or chain or anything—"

Tia Marie interrupted to ask, "And how do I do that, ha?"

"Training, I assume. But on that night—and it was after midnight, the time you usually lead the Hunters out—he got out of control. He's accustomed to dark streets with no one on them but a few chem-heads. This time there were people and lights and a lot of noise. He got curious and ran ahead of you to investigate. No peaceguard is going to tackle a lion with nothing but an electric goad, so everyone ran. The lion smelled Charley's blood; he wasn't hungry, but he was curious so he stayed around."

"You have an answer for everything, John, but we shall make a Hunter of you yet. Your friend Japhet has done well for me, and you will also. He knows much of traps and woodcraft, yet he says that you are cleverer than he."

"Not at those things," John Castle said. On the day after Charley's death, while he had lain almost helpless in a hidden room in this maze of a building Tia Marie owned and used as the temple of her cult, Japhet had explained the "job" he had mentioned over drinks the day before. By some instinct for talent Tia Marie had located him shortly after he had come to New York and engaged him to teach her followers to set snares for small game and the tricks of tracking. John suspected that she had even loaned him reference material, but he had heard Japhet give his informal lectures since and they were impressive.

"But at others. Like that drum. Does it work?"

For some reason he did not want to show it yet. He shook his head. "It will by tonight, though."

"I would be very pleased, John, if it did. We will have important company tonight." She stood up, and though she gave no other indication of excitement he knew somehow that the excitement was there. "I will tell you, and you only, so that you will have my drum for me. But you must tell no one else. It is the President himself, President Huggins."

"Who?"

"I tell you the President of the Republic, President Charles H. Huggins!"

"Oh," he said. "You mean the constitutional president."

She looked at him closely. "Ah, you are as foolish about this as you are about Hunting, John. You think this emergency one, this Boyde is the only reality."

"So far the emergency's lasted twenty years," John said dryly.

"And I," Tia Marie tapped herself just above the point where her large brown breasts met, "have lasted much longer than that. You see only the substance of things, John, and never the shadow—but shadows are as real as substances, only more difficult to see."

"Any physicist would have to agree with that, but the fact remains that the presidency today, the elective constitutional presidency, is a farce. Boyde uses it as a happy pasturing ground for old bureaucrats; they get to run for president and live in old Washington, where they won't be in the way."

"Does it not strike you, John, that there may be something ironic about this?" Tia Marie laid her hand on the doorknob. "You, a hunted criminal, explaining to me who am called a Huntress, the impotence of the President of the United States? Last week, before you came, we were all so pleased a man who owns a clothing store joined us. You see, such a man is a very important person in the eyes of my people."

She paused and looked at him, her broad face impassive. "In any case, John, I want you to meet President Huggins at our door and escort him into the Chamber. It is a great honor for you; I hope you realize that."

He nodded, taken aback. "Why me?" he asked. "Wouldn't it be better if someone more knowledgeable . . ."

"Everyone else I have now to send would perhaps repel such a man with incoherent talking, or make him laugh. You have said in the past you were grateful to me because I took

you into my house and did not tell; now I want your big payment. You think this man is nothing. Very well, so be friendly and respectful and make him interested. For me."

With grace which never failed to surprise him in so massive a woman, she was through the door and gone. He could hear her bare feet padding away down the hall.

Somehow her departure left him feeling that he had been defeated. For a few minutes he poked around the little room in frustration, pushing at the heaps of parts and tangles of wire that littered it. The Hunters, he knew by now, *were* Tia Marie. Without her overpowering personality the organization could not survive a month; but strangely that knowledge made him think better, not worse, of the views she taught her disciples. The popular, easy, "sensible" theory, as he had learned from his scientific reading, is nearly always wrong.

Tia Marie believed, or pretended to believe, that the entire structure called civilization was an illusion cast by man upon mankind. She told the people who came to the twilight meetings held in this tenement that they were savages living amid canyons of stone, and that they had never been and could never be anything else. It made no difference that the canyons had been built by other savages like themselves. The fact that the concrete upon which they stood had once been a green fertile island meant only that there was less game now. Even so, she pointed out, there were still far more animals than humans on the island; rats, cats, stray dogs, starlings, sparrows, pigeons. Peregrine falcons nested a thousand feet above the ground.

On this simple concept she grafted a whole structure of witchdoctor-craft and shamanism. The books she had lent him—he picked one up, then threw it back on the bed in disgust— dealt mostly with this phase of the cult. Astrology and animism, spiritualism and the Seven Works.

And this phase of Hunting, he knew, was mostly spurious.

Tia Marie, who said she never spoke untruth, had not the slightest scruple against staging a miracle. He was forced to admit to himself that he sometimes rather enjoyed helping her.

He decided it was time to go downstairs and check the night's preparations and find out just when he was to greet President Huggins. Holding the tom-tom carefully upright and ignoring the twinges of pain he still felt in his right ankle, he

made his way down to the Great Council Chamber.

John Castle was waiting at the curb when the oversized black limousine pulled up. Six militiamen with machine pistols rode on and in it, and jumped out to form a bristling protective corridor between car and building before the chauffeur ushered out the man who (John realized with something of a shock) was in fact the lineal successor of Washington and Lincoln.

President Charles Huggins was a portly man of more than seventy. He had a round, white face, colorless eyes behind old-fashioned gold-rimmed glasses, and something of the stooping and hesitant manner of an old clerk. Looking at the teacher, first at the cast on his arm, then at his face and very ordinary, rather shabby, clothing, he asked, "This is . . . ?" His voice was the weak sighing of old age and poor health.

"We are the Hunters," John said as impressively as he could. "I have been delegated to guide you to the Great Council Chamber, Mr. President."

"Ah, good." The old man peered about him shortsightedly. "You don't mind if my guards here go with me, do you?"

"Whoever you wish to bring comes to us as an honored guest. We welcome them."

The President bobbed his head. "Fine, fine . . . There will be four more later on." With one of his frail hands he gripped John's left arm at the biceps. "Earlier this evening I dined with an old friend, a man who was with me at the Bureau of Commerce, and he asked me to lend them to escort him home, since it was getting so late. They'll be along."

"I will have a brother assigned to lead them to us," John said, as he steered the old man.

"I hear you do some marvelous things here."

"We have seen through the veil. Consider how marvelous the works of the sighted must seem to the blind." Privately John wondered where the President's information had come from. Some White House servant, perhaps.

"You can even talk to the dead?"

"They are not dead," John intoned. "What once has had existence has always existence, though you do not see it. But we see it." They had reached the door of the Great Council Chamber and he paused before it impressively. "Now I must warn you that the Council has already begun. It is timed to the stars and cannot be hastened or delayed for even the most

illustrious man. When you go in remember what I have told you. The past lives, the great trees of the forest you would say was *once* here still surround you upon all sides."

He opened the door of the firelit chamber. The cultists thronged it, but a place had been cleared near the fire for the President and his bodyguards. John led them to it, then stepped away, intending to join Japhet near the wall. "Wait," Huggins said in a hoarse whisper. He motioned John to sit beside him. A militiawoman, an Oriental girl, gave him her place.

The cultists ignored them. Their attention was fixed on the fire, and on Tia Marie who stood behind it with a rattle made from a human skull and thighbone in her hands. "What is she doing?" the President whispered.

In point of fact John did not know what she was doing, so he said only, "She is our leader, our great Huntress."

In a shocked voice President Huggins said suddenly, "All these people have spears!"

"They are Hunters. The spears are ritual implements."

Suddenly and loudly Tia Marie's deep voice dominated the room. "He is here."

The cultists replied in a murmuring chorus, "He is here."

For a moment John thought they were referring to the President; then he realized that this was something begun earlier, before they had entered.

"He is standing beside me."

"He is standing beside her."

Suddenly a woman in the back of the room shrieked, "I sees him! I sees him! He's big, tall an' got a feather in his hair, feathers on his spear!"

Tia Marie, with a motion like a dancer's, picked up the tom-tom which had been standing concealed behind one of the fire stones. She passed it over the fire, and as she placed it on top of the stone a rhythmic thudding filled the room. John heard Huggins say under his breath, "That's just a recording."

Now Tia Marie was holding up a new object, a black mask no wider than a human face but a yard long, with pouched, mysterious eyes. She put it on and stepped onto one of the fire stones, beside the tom-tom. "In the forests," she said, "the animals have come back to us."

"They have come back."

"They grow."

"They grow."

"The great bears were gone, but they have returned."

"They have returned."

There was a disturbance at the back of the room, and John Castle turned his head to look. Dimly he could see four more military caps moving into the room, and remembered that he had forgotten to send someone to guide the remainder of Huggins' bodyguard down. Obviously they had found their way in without help.

"They said they were gone. They dug their dry bones and put them in glass cases, but they are here."

"They are here."

Gradually the sounds of animals were beginning to be heard with the tom-tom. A bird whistled, then a frog croaked its deep spring song.

"They said the leopards went away with the retreat of the ice, but they are here."

"They are here."

"They say the hyenas went, but they are here."

"They are here."

In an angry whisper, Huggins said to John, "Those are African animals." He had apparently forgotten the Pro Tem Government's position that all troublesome animals were native.

"They were American animals during the Pliocene," John whispered, "and they're back again."

"They said the King was gone, but the King is here."

"The King is here."

The roar of a lion seemed to shatter the air of the Chamber. It ended in a bone-rattling snarl of fury. In John's ear the President hissed, "Why that's nothing but a record; you people are a bunch of frauds."

Even while he spoke a sour, fetid odor was joining the wood-smell of the fire. There was a discontented grunting. In a sweeping gesture Tia Marie pulled off her mask and holding it at arm's length spun completely around on her stone. Then there was a lion beside her, snarling and spitting, looking first at her, and then with terrible eyes at the cultists. The bodyguard on the President's left leveled his machine pistol at the lion; John leaned across the President and slapped the muzzle down, then pulled three pieces of burning wood from the fire, giving one to Huggins and one to the bodyguard. Around them the cultists who were close enough to the fire were doing the same thing.

The King was no toothless old relic. There was a serious danger that he might attempt to leap the burning brands. He paced back and forth, twice gathering himself to spring. At John's side Huggins was rigid with fear.

Tia Marie bent forward, thrusting her face toward the lion. "King," she shouted, "bring us game!"

With the rest of the cultists John shouted, "Bring us game!"

"Bring deer!" The tom-tom throbbed.

In the dim room the firelight seemed to vibrate with the demanding voices. "Bring deer!"

"Bring buffalo!"

"Bring buffalo!"

"Wild cattle!"

The lion was gathering himself a third time, every muscle rippling. As the cultists began the response he shot diagonally upward, over the torches. Women screamed and men shrieked like women.

Then, incredibly, he was gone—and instead of a lion a bull was behind the fire, tossing his horns as his hooves clattered on the floor.

Tia Marie leaped aside as the first of the spears buried its head in the bull's shoulder. He bellowed, and twenty more sliced the air above the fire. Dying, the bull lurched around the circle of stones. The cultists scattered before him, but a few men with spears and knives closed upon his flanks. Huggins had clambered to his feet and was backing away, drawing John and the bodyguards with him. The yelling crowd, pressing forward now for the kill, crushed them all together in a helpless mass. The noise drowned out even the beating of the tom-tom.

One of the bodyguards had begun to shoot, "Room! Make room for the President!" John's broken right arm was being painfully wrenched by the motion of the crowd; he tried to raise it past the shoulders of the militiawoman pushing against him, but his cast struck her cap, knocking it off so that her dark hair tumbled suddenly down her shoulders. She turned to look at him, and the firelight illuminated her face. It was Anna Trees.

There had been no time, he reflected afterward, and it had been, at least potentially, too dangerous. But would she understand?

They had not spoken more than three sentences to one

another, sentences shouted, but in the din more secret than any whisper. Then the pandemonium had subsided, the ritual meal of the bull's flesh had begun, and President Huggins, much shaken, had departed with his guards.

It would be dangerous, militiawoman or not, armed or not, for Anna to come tonight. Hours before he had cleared his one chair for her, the same chair in which Tia Marie had sat. Now it seemed impossible that she should ever sit there and he on the bed, or that they should meet at all in this small, smelly room.

He stopped, listening. Very faintly he seemed to hear voices; then, unmistakably, though it was at the edge of hearing, Japhet's raucous laugh. She would talk to him, she would have to—he was her brother after all—before she came up. Should he go out, meet her on the stairs? Before he could open the door he heard soft steps outside. He paused a moment, then threw away caution and opened the door, letting a long shaft of yellow light fall upon her.

Her arms were around his neck. He kissed her, holding her to himself with his left arm, touching her waist clumsily with the cast on his right.

Then it was over and she drew away from him, smiling as she motioned toward someone behind her. "This is Sarah Yoshida, John. I was afraid to go through the streets alone, and Sarah was wonderful enough to come with me." Seeing the worry in his eyes, she added, "You can trust her absolutely, John. I'll tell you about her by and by."

He tried to smile at the other girl. She was small, with delicate Oriental features and the composed expression he associated with them; like Anna she wore a heavy military coat and carried a machine pistol. She nodded her head in acknowledgment, then gave him an unexpected smile of her own. "You two want to talk, I know, Mr. Castle. Anna's brother will take me somewhere now, and we will leave you alone for a while."

"John," Anna said almost before they were gone, "how did you break your arm?"

He told her, finding that it was a longer story than he had thought. She listened silently, her eyes rapt, only occasionally interrupting for a question or a little exclamation of dismay. When he had finished she said, "I'm glad you got away. They're doing terrible things to prisoners now."

"They must be, if they could make Nonny implicate us. But what about you? That was what worried me most—that you were in the militia and they could find you if they wanted to."

"I suppose I was lucky, although the message only said I was wanted for questioning. Bob showed it to me. I told him I must be the wrong Anna Trees, that I didn't know anything about it. I think he knew I was lying, but he sent a message back asking if they were sure they had the right person. Things move so slowly now that that's bought me a little time."

"Who is Bob?" he asked.

"Sergeant Runninghorse, the head of the bodyguard. He's Sarah's fiancé, more or less, and because Sarah and I are very close he's nice to me."

"You don't plan to stay in the militia, do you? You can't."

"I know." She nodded seriously. "I'm hoping to leave very soon. That's something else I wanted to tell you." Suddenly she grinned at him, looking as pleased as a child. "I don't know why this makes me so happy, it could get me killed I suppose. John, I'm in ARES." She saw his look of incredulity and grinned wider. "I really am."

"You're actually in communication with the Martians?"

"Whenever I want and it's safe. Look." From her cartridge belt she took a black case no longer than a pack of cigarettes. "This is my little radio. What have you got to say to that?"

Before he could say anything she added, "You think it's too dangerous. Don't bother saying it because it won't do any good."

"All right," he said, "I won't. But please consider that I have said it. A moment ago we agreed that this bodyguard thing was too dangerous and you said you were leaving that, at least. If you're in ARES, it's doubly dangerous. I want you to get me accepted if you can, naturally, but I'd also like to know if you're going to some place where I can stop worrying about you."

The grin had faded to an enigmatic smile. "Where is a safe place, John? Here in New York? White City?"

He shrugged hopelessly.

"But you, John; you want to join ARES too?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then I'm going to tell you about my assignment. I'm not supposed to, but the Martians will take you unless they're

crazy, and they're not; they're very smart. I'm supposed to win President Huggins over to our side."

He looked at her blankly. "Him? The man who was here tonight? What in the world for?"

"Because he's the President of the United States."

"He doesn't have a shred of authority."

"Don't you understand?" She leaned forward patiently. "The Martians' whole objective is to restore the Constitution. When they first began trying to come back they thought people really cared about it. Now they know better, but they're trying to make them care. And if they do, Huggins will *be* the President—at least until his term's up and they can hold an election."

It was a rather frightening thought. John said slowly, "I see."

"I wasn't picked for this job really, but Sarah was. ARES got her on his bodyguard, and when she found out how I felt she got me taken in to help her. He's a nice old man really, and I think we may do it."

John stroked his chin thoughtfully. "Do you think there's a chance?"

Anna nodded. "He's old, John, and that helps. He was over fifty when it happened. Think of that. He told me once when we were driving around Arlington in that big old-fashioned car that he joined the civil service when Kennedy was President. The constitutional presidency was the biggest thing in the world to him for most of his life, and now he's President himself and he looks at those old pictures in the White House, but he can't do anything."

"You haven't told him, have you?"

"No, but Sarah and I have sort of planted ideas and sounded him out. We've already decided to come out with it the next time we get a good chance, and I think he'll go."

"The Martians will pick him up some way?"

"Yes. They'll pick you up too, to examine you after I recommend you. They've got an orbiting headquarters. It will have to be abandoned soon—the people in Arlington are trying to put together a rocket good enough to shoot it down— but meanwhile they've got it. They took me up there to test me when I came in."

"That must have been a thrill." He felt himself suddenly warm at the prospect of kicking dirty, squabbling old Earth

away, even if it would be only for a few hours.

"It was. Do you know anything about the waterfront here?"

"No."

"Sarah does, and she made a little sketch map for me. Here." She produced a soiled slip of paper. "I told her you'd want to join, and enough about you so that she could be sure they'd want you, and she says this is the regular pickup point. I'll meet you there if I can, but if I don't, the spaceship will pick you up anyway. They'll land out at sea and come up the Hudson like a boat, only very quietly, after dark."

He nodded to show he understood. There was a light tap at the door. Japhet's voice asked, "Okay if we come in now?"

"Wait a minute." He took Anna in his arms and kissed her again, savoring the half-forgotten perfume of her hair and the texture of her lips once more. When the kiss was over and they had looked for a moment at one another he told Japhet and Sarah to come in.

Anna said hesitantly, "I suppose we'd better go now."

Sarah Yoshida objected vociferously. "Not at all! Anna, your man-friend here has to answer a question for me, absolutely, before I'll go. Your brother has told me a great deal, but he says he can't help me with the tom-tom. He says this John made it."

Japhet said proudly, "John wired up the place for all those sound-effect things. They used to have people doing them with bird calls and that kind of thing, but he put speakers all over to make it sound real and we borrowed tapes from the Natural History Museum."

Anna looked confused. "I thought the business with the lion and the bull was really marvelous—I wanted to ask about it, and I would have if seeing you again hadn't driven it all out of my mind. But—"

The other girl said excitedly, "Oh, your brother told me all about those, but I want to know about the tom-tom. I looked at it before it stopped and you could actually see that someone was beating it! The skin on the top, you know, going up and down. No wonder all those people think that big woman has supernatural power."

John said, "Well, the tom-tom's easy enough. There's a miniature tape recorder inside it, controlled by a gravity switch. It plays when Tia Marie turns it over one way and

stops when she turns it back. Since a tom-tom beat is repetitive I only needed a very short tape and I just ran it around in a loop. That saved a lot of rewinds and whatnot."

"But making the skin go up and down!" Sarah looked imploringly at Anna Trees. "Make him tell us how he did that."

"I didn't have to do anything. Naturally the tom-tom's in resonance with the tape, since it made the sound I recorded in the first place. The speaker's only a fraction of an inch away from the drumhead, so the head vibrates just like a tuning fork does if another fork of the same pitch is held near it."

Anna asked, "But where did the lion go? Now that you've got me thinking about it again it's maddening for you to go on about the drum and not tell me about the lion and the bull."

Japhet said, "That's pretty slick stuff, ain't it? It flat floored me the first time I seen it."

In an elaborate gesture, Sarah Yoshida pretended to make the fingers of her right hand vanish by passing her left over them. "Haven't you ever seen a magician on a stage, Anna? It was done like that except that the animals—the lion at least—were trained."

"She's got a trapdoor beside her, see?" Japhet was enjoying himself. "The people underneath got a prod and when she's ready for old King to come out they open the trapdoor and make him come out quick. Upstairs she's doing that whirl-around business so you'll be looking in the wrong place . . . Ain't that right, John?"

John Castle nodded. "It's much harder to see past a fire than you'd think, unless the thing you're trying to see is quite close to the flames. Your eyes adjust to the brightness of the fire.

"The sacrificial animal, the bull tonight, comes in the same way as the lion while you're watching the lion vanish, and the vanishing is only the same trick played in reverse. A lion can spring a tremendous distance, and this one's been taught that the only way for him to get out of that room—which he hates because of the fire and the noise—is by springing through another trapdoor in the ceiling. The room above is kept dark so the people in the Council Chamber won't notice when it's opened, but of course King can see as well in the dark as any other cat. Besides, he's watching for it and knows just where to look."

"But everyone was looking at him when he jumped up," Anna objected. "I was myself."

"Yes, but your eyes anticipated the trajectory you thought he'd follow, an arching curve down to the floor again. With the ceiling smoky and dark, by the time you realized he hadn't come down he was gone and the trapdoor closed."

CHAPTER VII

". . . WHERE ONLY DELIGHT LIVES . . ."

For Japhet the visit had made the night seem shorter than most, but afterward when John Castle had gone to bed he found himself once again alone. At the farm where he had lived with Anna, these night periods, though sometimes disturbed by prowling animals, had been largely periods of quiet work. While Anna slept he had mended the harnesses of his two wretched draft horses, sharpened tools, rolled himself cigars from his own leaf, and done a hundred other small tasks—many of them not strictly necessary but created to fill the slow hours until daylight.

Now, in mid-winter, daylight came late. People were waking and stirring, running water and making the pipes rattle in the cracked walls, while the street was still shadowed. Soon now, trucks and wagons would be carrying newspapers through the city; the papers could only tell what the government wanted said, but they would tell something.

There were no newsstands here in the residential slums, but a few blocks away, where wider streets and more important businesses brought a certain amount of Peaceguard protection, a shabby, red-faced man operated one. Japhet was nearly always his first customer, but he had always read or at least scanned the news before Japhet got there and was always ready to discuss it. Today he only gestured significantly at the black headline: *ENEMY LANDS.*

When Japhet had had time to absorb it the news vendor asked, "You're from around there, ain't you?"

"I don't know." Japhet was still bent over the page. "Where 'bouts did they hit?"

"Map's right there on the front page." The news vendor tapped it with his finger

"Brownsville." Japhet read slowly "Bee Springs Naw, I come from further north. I wonder what they want there, anyway? There's nothin' much around Bee Springs but woods."

"This guy in the paper says maybe them Martians and Chinese—more'n half's Chinks is what it says—are maybe goin' to try for Fort Knox. He figures they're after the gold."

Japhet snorted. "There hasn't been enough gold in this country to fill a tooth for forty years. Everybody knows that."

"Anyway it looks like the real thing. See here where it's got a box drawed around it? It says they got a hundred thousand goonies surroundin' them and there's another quarter million on the way, so they ain't got a chance. Now you know when they say something like that and don't say they already been run off, whether they was or not, our side's in bad shape. Ain't that right?"

"Yeah," Japhet was smiling as he continued to read. "It sure is."

"And like it says where these Martians have these burrowin' things and armor they wear that's run by motors inside, but countermeasures have been took—well, you know that means them things are giving them a rough time. They gonna call up the goonies around here, you think?"

Japhet shook his head. "I don't know."

"Well, you ought to find out. Didn't you tell me you were in it one time?"

Scarcely listening, Japhet said, "That don't matter." He was thinking hard. He had come all the way to New York because with John and his sister gone, and himself forbidden to remain on the farm where their equipment had been stored, it had seemed impossible that he could do anything more to help the cause he had been taught from childhood to revere. Now "our people" (as his family had once called them in conclaves Japhet dimly remembered) were only a few hours' travel from the area he knew so well. What was more, as the news vendor had inadvertently reminded him, if he did not act he might find himself fighting "our people"—the men like himself, so he imagined, who loved machinery and clever devices built with hands.

Laying down his scrap of yellow scrip he walked away with the paper, still brooding over the front page. He felt no loyal-

ty to the militia he had twice joined. It had been a way of getting money, of becoming armed. He had found it eminently satisfactory to be important in it, to recruit others, and as soon as he had learned the fundamentals, to drill recruits. But he felt to his depths, without verbalizing it, how much more satisfactory now it would be to join "our people."

But he would have to return to his room—there were some things there which would be useful to him: his militia insignia, his rifle, a little money. For a moment he considered leaving a note for John, then rejected the idea. With him having a broken wing, Japhet reflected to himself, and the peacies after him anyway, the best thing I can do for him is everything I can that'll make him stay right where he is. He stuffed the paper in a garbage can and began to trot down the shadowy street.

Three hours later the slender blond girl who was one of Tia Marie's assistants rapped at John Castle's door and asked if he knew where Japhet was. John said he had not seen the wakey since the evening before.

"He was here this morning," the girl said. "I saw him on the stairs . . . I guess he went out somewhere."

"I wish my center here to be evacuated. I feel it is most urgent." The chief Russian technician paused. "I make official representation to you."

The Captain pursed his lips, secretly chagrined. He had himself decided that the Russians' experimental "rectification" facility should be shifted to a point farther from the expanding Martian-controlled area—that was why he had come; he had wanted to inspect the place personally with an eye to relocation. Perhaps he might even recommend that the center be merged with the enormous new facility being built on the East Coast. He had hoped, however, that the Russian would object, giving him an opportunity to exert his authority.

"General Grant," the Captain said, "has placed full control of the removal of civilians from the combat zone in the hands of his chief of civil police."

"And who is that?"

Nestling his head more comfortably into its supporting ring of flesh, the Captain smiled slightly. "I have the honor of that position at present."

"Good. Then you can have us moved at once."

"I am not yet satisfied that such a disruption of your important work is necessary, Aleksandr Vasilievich. Do you realize, for example, that our best intelligence indicates that this landing consists of no more than a hundred Martians and three times that number of Chinese? It may well be nothing more than a feint."

"I realize that they are pushing your soldiers back wherever they desire to, Captain."

"That was true, of course, early in the battle. After all, you could hardly expect a district like this to be strongly held; there are no worthwhile military objectives here. Now, however, we are tightening our grip—at least so General Grant assures me. My country, Aleksandr Vasilievich, already boasts twenty million men and women under arms. One out of every fifteen Americans. It is a force to exhaust the imagination."

The Russian made a disgusted sound. "You have a rabble. Most of this you speak of is not even army, civilians with every kind of rusted gun your government was not able to destroy in the years before. Now some have not even that. Only bottles of gasoline—what do you call them?"

"Molotov cocktails."

"Yes. In the U.S.S.R. that is something we read about in histories. And these Martians are terrifying your men. They make every war machine they have seem a thousand with these projections they make, so that you waste what shells you have."

"Let us admit there may be some ground lost—some flexing of the lines, as it were—before the final victory. It may well, as you say, be advisable that this facility be relocated in a more secure area."

"That is what I want. When will you have trucks for us?"

The Captain sipped his tea. "I wish to see what there is to be moved before we discuss transport, Aleksandr Vasilievich."

"Then let us inspect."

"Perhaps we should have lunch first."

"If you wish. I will arrange for sandwiches."

"For my men also, naturally. And you might ask your assistant to report to me whether or not they are exercising my horse as they should to let him cool gradually. I'm afraid I used him rather hard." The Captain paused to make his next words more impressive. "You spoke of trucks a moment ago;

the fact that I came on horseback should make you realize how few there are. In this emergency the military have commandeered everything."

He watched the director leave. While his errands were being run he could sit here and get his feet warm again and contemplate the good fortune of the past few weeks.

He was now (he took a mouthful of the tea, slightly cooler now, and swished it through his teeth) a person of more than local importance. Chief of Civil Police. The revival of that old term *police* was a measure of the seriousness of the emergency, and of the weight of new power and responsibility that was his. He was armed now; there was a pistol under his tunic.

And now the coddling was over. Every enemy, every sympathizer, would be struck down. Providentially—he did not believe in providence, call it fate—the Martians had chosen his area in which to land. He had been there, organizing support and offering excellent advice, in writing, which the militia officers had largely ignored, in the first frantic days when nothing at all had been made public even locally. The militia had attacked in bits and pieces and come running out, what was left of them, twice as fast as they had charged in. And when Grant had come—Grant had been Director of the Free Clothing Administration until a few months ago, but a Martian attack of this magnitude was obviously too important to leave to a mere career soldier—he had been the one local official unstained by the succession of defeats. Now (he smiled to himself), he had shown himself knowledgeable and energetic, and already he detected a readiness on Grant's part to assign him tasks not strictly within the Peaceguard's province.

Today it had at last been admitted that this was no mere raid. The Martians and Chinese had come in the hope of staying, and the news had been released to the country at large. This was going to be a theater of war (savory phrase!) and yet still there was no talk of replacing him . . .

The Russian had come in again, interrupting his reverie: "I am sorry. The lunch cannot be for a few minutes yet."

"Oh?"

"I thought we might begin to inspect now. It would save time."

He got to his feet. "I had hoped to discuss the fighting here with you at more length, Aleksandr Vasilievich, but perhaps we can do that over our meal. You are a scientist in your

way, I suppose; what do you think of these burrowing things the Martians are said to have?"

"In my country," the Russian said stiffly, "to be a scientist is an honor. It is not like here. As for these"—he searched for a word—"golems, I have never seen one."

"Golems?"

The Russian shrugged. "It is an old folk tale—I think originally from the Polish People's Republic, perhaps. A man of clay who becomes alive and very strong when a bit of paper on which a secret name has been written is put into his mouth. I do not think your Martians call them that, though; it was only something which came into my mind." He led the way from the Spartan sitting room down a drafty hallway to a dim room like a small theater.

"You were here before, Captain. You know what we do here?"

"Yes, but I am still interested. You gave me a demonstration but they were not here then." He gestured toward the still figures that sat staring at what appeared to be a flickering, empty screen.

"You need not whisper; they wear earphones, as you see. They cannot hear even if you shout, just as they cannot avoid hearing what we wish them to." The Russian walked to the nearest of the silent, seated figures and pointed. "The head is held in a clamp, the arms strapped to the chair. The eyelids are held open—nothing elaborate, only gummed so they cannot be pulled shut. Once each minute a weak salt solution is atomized from the tips of the headrests; you see the little nozzles? Otherwise they would go blind."

"And they are drugged." The Captain passed his hand across the eyes of the young man to see if there was any reaction. He could detect none.

"Oh yes, of course. A hypnotic to make the mind more receptive. It also speeds the perceptions, so that we make better use of the time. That is why you see nothing on the screen; if I were to put these earphones on your head you would only hear a chatter, like a little squirrel. It is all too fast for you and me."

"These soldiers your country is supposed to have," the Captain inquired, "isn't this the way—?"

"No, no." The Russian waved the idea aside. "This you see here is merely Rectification. The other is more serious; it in-

volves"—he made a gesture toward his head—"cutting of the brain. Surgery. This that you see here, in the U.S.S.R. we do to everyone."

"To everyone?" The Captain was startled.

The Russian smiled. "I know what you are thinking, *tovarich.* Yes, to me too, some years ago when I was stopping to be a child. Once we had much crime, discontent. In high places there was disagreement and self-seeking. Now those things are gone and everyone lives and works for the Motherland. It is not so bad. I have talked to these American guards they have given me, and I know what you expected. Wires . . . helmets to go over the head with little spikes to drill through inside. You see, it is not like that at all. Would you like to try it? Then you would know from experience too." Seeing the Captain's expression he added, "I do not mean a whole course of treatments like these here. It would last only, perhaps, ten minutes; but you would feel it to be much longer. Like two hours, you would think."

The Captain shook his head. "I think not."

"It is what you believe already. Nothing more." The Russian bent over to read the tape on the young man's shirt. "This new one here—eight-five-four-oh; when the drug wears off he would talk to you just as anyone else might. Only four hours a day they sit here. The rest of the time they move about, work a little. It is like a hospital, especially for those your people have hurt so much before we get them."

"It would only last ten minutes?"

"Yes; I will prepare an injection for you now."

It would be a unique experience; something no one else had done. In the future he would be able to speak with unquestionable authority when the Rectification Process was under discussion . . . .

"You can wait here," the Russian was saying. "I will come back with it in just a moment."

"Why don't you just slow down the sound track and the pictures for me." Now that he had said it, it seemed like an inspired idea. Something inside him groped toward his heart with icy hands when he thought of having his mind tampered with.

"That would not do at all. Without the drug you would not be suggestible. They do not simply see pictures; they walk in a whole world made by their own minds because the pictures and sounds suggest it to them. Each one—this is the great

strength of it—is a little different because each has made a world for himself."

The Captain tried to hold his voice to its usual smooth timbre. "All right. Bring the injection."

The Russian had told the truth, the Captain realized. The flickerings were pictures, and by concentrating he could get at least a vague idea of what they were. That row of jumping, dark objects, appearing and almost instantly vanishing again, was perhaps a line of trees. Whizzing shapes that might be people crossed and recrossed the screen while the squeaking became a high-pitched voice. Fright was absent, but it had a swift urgency that reminded him of the voice of a prisoner whose nerve was about to run out: "Overfivehundredannuallyperdisadvantagedpersonofwhich two hundredandfortygotopayadministrativecosts . . ."

The flickering picture was definitely scenery now. The camera raced at incredible speed along a mountain road, and he felt that he himself was racing with it while stunted trees and rocky outcrops reeled past. The urgent voice was silent now.

Gradually the pace was slowing enough for him to see detail: leaning, weathered cabins that looked abandoned but had emaciated children clustering in their doorways. Occasional fields where yellowing crops grew spottily, leaving large bare spots of sterile clay.

At a hovel even more wretched than the others he halted. A man no larger than a child was sitting on the warped boards of its tiny porch. His head was buried in his hands, but as though he had heard the sound of steps he lifted it, looking up with a face saintly in its acceptance of suffering and its unquenchable hope, imbecilic in its incompetence for any practical activity. "I knew you'd come," the man said. It was the tone a dog able to speak would use to its master.

He was aware of no effort, but his own voice, resonant and virile, answered. "We are going to get you out of here. You will have a fine new home with a roof that doesn't leak and walls that keep out the cold."

The man said, "I'll hate to leave here, all my kin live here," but the protest was submission.

"Your relatives will be with you," he heard himself saying. "Your Father in Arlington has built you all a wonderful farm—he calls it a Community Farm. There is milk there for

your children; and you will have a bathroom, but you must learn to close the faucets when you do not need the water."

"Yes, sir," the man said. "I promise I will."

"There will be a man there like me to help you and tell you what to do. You must do whatever he says."

The man's wife, in a dress sewn of dirty feed sacks, had appeared in the doorway of the hovel behind him. She wiped her hands on the cloth in a nervous, suppliant gesture and he saw that her body was as sexless as a lizard's. "Oh yes, sir, we will," she said. "Tom and I will work at the farm very hard."

In some remote corner of his mind it occurred to the Captain that the Russian had been right; it was just what he had always believed.

When would the Martians come? Anna had only said it would be after dark. Presumably that meant full darkness, not the mere twilight that was now falling over the derelict riverside park where John Castle waited. Anna had also said that the spacecraft would come down at sea and go up the river like a boat or an amphibian plane. How far out, he wondered. Twenty miles off shore? Thirty? If so, and they waited until full darkness to land, they might not arrive here for two or three hours.

Also, Anna had said she would try to come herself. Thus far there was no sign of her. What if she had been attacked on the street?

He had once read that the Arabs defined night as the time at which a white thread could not be distinguished from a black one. It must be nearly that dark now; he noticed that a few windows in the buildings around the park were illuminated. Mostly they were in the upper floors. A boat showing running lights went by on the river and he watched until it was out of sight. The breeze was off the water now and it was growing much colder. He thrust his good hand into the pocket of his coat.

Because of the cast on his right arm he had not been able to put it into the coat sleeve, so on that side he wore the coat merely thrown over his shoulder like a cloak. He tried to draw it together better in the front.

Faintly, very far off, he heard the sound of sirens. He forced himself to relax. Fear was no defense, and the fires occasionally started by roving bands of chem-heads were the

most common explanation for sirens at night. They were drawing closer, however.

Exposed as he was he was almost certain to be questioned if seen. He began walking rapidly, hoping to find a less exposed spot from which he could still watch the river. As he walked he tried to count the sirens. How many fire trucks? Many, he decided; a big fire. But there was no glow in the sky, no redness. One of the buildings flanking the park had a deep doorway, which he entered gratefully.

The sirens were coming closer, but now he heard mingled with them another sound—one he found oddly evocative. A sort of steady fluttering. A helicopter, of course. He had heard just that sound as he stood on the roof trying to wait out Charley Clark's suicidal despondency. The helicopter noise too was coming closer, and much faster than the sirens.

During one instant he was standing in the shadowed doorway listening to it and watching the park; in the next the park was blazing with cruel light. The fluttering became a roar of wind that shook the bare trees. He retreated into the doorway as far as he could, uncertain whether to hide or bolt. The light, which a moment before had reached almost to the doorway, was concentrating now as the sound of the rotors became louder—a brilliant white radiance centered on the clear space between the two trees and the river.

Then it went out. With his good hand he rubbed his eyes, trying to readjust them to the darkness that had returned so swiftly. A black bulk was descending into the clear space, riding the roaring wind. It had two huge rotors, and was by far the largest helicopter he had ever seen, much bigger than the one whose hose had saved him from dashing his brains on the pavement with Charley Clark. By the time it had settled and the doors in its sides had been thrown open his vision had returned sufficiently for him to be almost certain that the men silhouetted against its lighted interior were peaceguards. They appeared to be carrying rifles and submachine guns, something peaceguards were never permitted to do in his experience, but they were peaceguards nonetheless. Already they were swarming out of the helicopter's belly, filling the park and moving out toward the streets in every direction. It was too late to run.

In the forlorn hope that he might be able to force the lock he grasped the knob of the door behind him—only to feel it

turn without resistance. He pushed the door open. A woman's voice spoke in a language he did not understand; then, "Who is that?"

As he closed the door, John found himself in a narrow corridor lit faintly by pink bulbs. Facing him was a slender girl in a knee-length evening dress. He sensed that she was frightened of him, but she did not allow herself to show it. "Who are you?" she asked. "I said before: *Who is that*? Why did you say nothing?" The "is" was almost *iz*, and the "nothing" *nuzzing*.

"Only someone like yourself," John told her. It seemed the safest thing he could think of to say.

"You mean you are come to this horrible place too."

He nodded as confidently as he could, and to change the subject asked, "Are you Russian, Miss . . . ?"

The girl shook her head, "I am Czech. I came with some Russian women, but there is no one else to go anywhere with. This door is supposed to be locked, I was told. No one is to come in after it is dark."

"I was late," John said in a tone of formal apology. "It was good of you to open for me."

"I did not know you were there." The girl giggled. Now that she was no longer sobered by tension it was apparent she had been drinking. "I heard noises, but upstairs the windows are black. You know? So I went to look."

"No, I don't know. This is the first time I've been here—a friend advised that I drop in. Can you tell me where I'm supposed to hang my coat?"

The girl shrugged her bare shoulders. "There was a man here who took them when we came in. I think he puts them back there." She gestured toward an alcove farther down the hall and walked with him as he went to dispose of the garment that marked him, if not as an intruder, at least as a newcomer.

"It was this man who told us of the door being locked, and that we would have to stay all night until the outside was safe again. Of course we knew that before we came—in Russian this place is called the Inn Where Only Delight Lives, and that is because of the staying over, I suppose—but I thought it would be nice."

"But it isn't?"

"No, it is horrible. I was told there would be friendly boys here, and I thought we could drink wine and dance and sing,

then sleep; but they want to do horrible things. . . . Oh, you have broken your arm!"

"An accident in the street," he said casually.

"Are they really so dangerous then?" She did not wait for him to answer. "Listen, are you here with no one? Would you wish to sit at our table with me?"

He could not help feeling flattered, and he smiled at her. "That would be very nice. Thank you."

She smiled back. "Very nice for me too. I will sit on your right side, so that you cannot reach and do things like that horrible boy with the perfume did. If I want you to do things later I will move to your left."

The girl guided him up a steep, sybaritically carpeted stair. He could hear music leaking past the leather-covered door which closed the stairs. The notes were thin and reedy, interspersed with a rhythmic twanging. The girl stood back to let him open the door for her, and he saw that the room they were entering was indeed even darker than the hall below, although the illumination was still pink-tinted.

It was also surprisingly high-ceilinged, as though an entire floor of the building had been removed to form a huge room twice as high as the original apartments the builders had planned. The furnishings, as nearly as he could make out as the girl led him among the scattered tables, were of the red velvet and gilded wood Russians were supposed to like. There was a stage in the center of the room, but for the moment he was too preoccupied to pay attention to what was going on there.

At a table occupied by six other couples someone pressed a glass into his hand and disappeared into the dimness. Several of the women were arguing in Russian; after a moment the Czech girl joined in. There was a crackling sound and a blue flash from the stage and a few people applauded. He craned his neck to see what was happening.

From beyond the woman on his left a voice said, "She's quite good, isn't she?" It was a young man's from the tone, nasally affecting refinement.

"What's she doing?" John Castle asked. The woman between him and the speaker conveniently laid her head on the table.

"The serpent is an automaton; see it? I understand there are little fooleries in its head which make it try to find any

warm object. It's Soviet-made, naturally—couldn't get anything like that in this country." The face was a pinkish blur in the darkness. "I'm told the two girls are from the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic."

They were both quite pretty; and, John saw with something of a shock, very young. With their heavy, dark braids and heart-shaped faces they might have been sisters. One squatted cross-legged in the background, a syrinx to her mouth and an unfamiliar stringed instrument in her lap. The other crouched in front of the "serpent," moving her hands hypnotically. Both the girls wore gaudy slit and split costumes, indecent and tasteless as simple nakedness could not have been.

The serpent was a fluid column of steel, a living chain. It issued from a basket which probably concealed additional machinery, but at least eight feet of it was visible. Like a cobra it reared until its blind head was four feet above the floor, swaying slightly as it followed the performer's motions. Over the heavy smell of mingled perfumes and spilled wine was an odor of burning hair. This, as well as the twanging music, seemed to come from the stage.

"I don't think I've seen this done before," John said, hoping to draw the man on his left into further conversation.

"I hadn't either until they came here, but this is their third night. They're going to stay over the weekend."

"It's very unusual."

The disembodied voice dripped self-satisfaction. "Oh, we're getting all the best acts from Russia now. *They* like to say they've been abroad, you know. And in New York where can they play but here? This is where the money is, after all."

On the stage the second girl had taken a rabbit—a fat white animal which seemed confused at being suddenly drawn out into the light—from a box someone had handed her.

"You don't seem to have much of a crowd tonight."

"Oh, we don't want a lot. They don't like it."

"These Russians?"

"Yes—it's where the big money in New York is today. Their standard of living's so much higher than ours, you know, and then they get wonderful salaries even by their standards for volunteering to come over here. We have American girls for the Russian boys, of course, and we American boys for the Soviet girls." From the darkness a slender masculine hand reached out and caressed the back of the unconscious woman. "There are competitive places springing up, but this is

one of the oldest and the best."

On his right the Czech girl suddenly nudged him. "Watch her now!"

The mechanical serpent was rearing and arching into a great bow as if staring at the performer's hands. The music of syrinx and strings had become more urgent.

The hands wove a pattern of fluid motion about the rabbit, sometimes rubbing one another as though to create more heat by friction, sometimes stroking the soft fur. The serpent followed each movement with a ripple of steel as it almost imperceptibly drew closer to the little animal.

"It is—don't you know—electric," the Czech girl said, suppressing a hiccup. "Isn't it terrible? It would kill you to touch."

As she spoke the serpent made a plunging strike toward the performer's hands, but the hands were snatched away. There was a brief, intense electric arc.

The serpent withdrew as rapidly as it had struck, leaving a huddle of blackened debris where the white rabbit had been. The spectators applauded politely, and the girl who had petted the rabbit began dancing in circles around the serpent's basket. The fluid steel, apparently as deadly as ever, followed the gyrations of her hips with the same intent, blind motions with which it had tracked the rabbit. Someone, perhaps the musician-sister, had released white pigeons which fluttered about the stage, unwilling to leave its brighter illumination.

John Castle stiffened in his chair, then looked around to see if the others had noticed anything. There was no change in the atmosphere of the room, but faintly from outside he had heard a brief rattling; and he believed he knew what it had been.

Abruptly the girl musician stopped strumming her instrument long enough to toss grain in a shower over the serpent, so that it fell all around the basket.

From outside there was a dull thudding—a remote and muffled explosion; then the rattling again. How long had he been in here? Five minutes? Ten? For the first time he sipped the drink that had been given him. On the stage the serpent struck one of the pigeons, destroying it in a flash of blue, and the dancer moved about it closer and faster with every circle. To the Czech girl he said, "Did you hear that?"

She was talking in Russian to a woman farther down the table and only glanced uncomprehendingly at him. Outside,

the rattling was almost continuous now, and knew what it was. Not the slow drumming of a heavy machine gun like the one which had been under Lieutenant Harper's command, but the eight- or nine-hundred-round-per-minute bursts of submachine guns or machine pistols.

The dancer was now within a few feet of the serpent, which stood surrounded by the bodies of dead pigeons. Three times it struck at her, then she sprang away and made her bow. Her forehead was beaded with perspiration, and her costume clung stickily to her. People clapped, and a few stood up shouting something in Russian apparently intended as praise.

And then nothing happened. The applause died away, and the dancer looked helplessly about her. The other girl too now seemed helplessly waiting. There was an impression of embarrassment.

The unseen young man on John's left asked rhetorically, "Where in the world's the M.C.? There's no one there to take them off and introduce the next act."

From outside the building John heard another muffled boom, and felt that he could make a reasonable guess as to where the master of ceremonies had gone—or at least as to what was now diverting his attention.

"Well," the young man said, "I can do it myself, if no one else will." John sensed that he was sliding back his chair. A moment later he was springing up onto the stage smiling and bowing, and John could really see him for the first time. Slightly built and professionally young, he waved and smiled at acquaintances in the audience and pretended to blow kisses when they cheered him. "Hi, Sasha, hi, Mishka . . ." When this new applause had passed its peak he cut it off with a self-confident downward gesture of his arms and began an announcement in Russian.

He got no further than the first sentence. As though a giant hand had shaken its steel frame, the building trembled. Shadows raced as the lighting fixtures swayed; loose objects dropped to the floor, thudding on the soft carpet. Slowly the room began to tilt sideways, as if it were a ship heeling in a storm. Outside, still dull but louder than those that had preceded them, there were three explosions. Suddenly everyone was standing up, overturning chairs and tables. A light fell with a crash and a tinkle of glass.

John saw the basket with the robot "serpent" in it go sliding across the stage, the serpent still upright like a questioning

finger of steel. The girl musician scrambled to get out of its way but she was too slow. When the basket was three feet from her the finely-jointed metal thing plunged down and arced.

Exactly how he survived the collapse of the building John never knew. The lights had gone out within seconds of the entertainer's death, and the air filled with the dust of falling plaster. Outside he heard a great section of brick wall crashing into the street. Then the floor seemed to give way completely.

When he crawled out of the rubble, pieces of the building were still crashing to the ground. It was pitch-black, but he looked around for survivors as best he could and found two, a hysterical woman and a man too dazed to do more than stand where he was put. Somewhere not far away, perhaps no more than a few blocks, what sounded like a full-scale battle was taking place; he could hear the booming of artillery and the strange singing of ricocheting bullets. Whatever was happening, however, was not likely to be more dangerous than remaining near the collapsing building. Herding the other two in front of him, he forced them out into the street.

The building which had housed the night club was canted at an angle more than twenty degrees from the vertical, and in places the moon shone through its steel skeleton. The helicopter he had seen was still in the park, but in ruins. It had burned, and a score of dead men lay around it. As he stared the solid asphalt of the street itself began to lift; at a point twenty yards away it heaved itself into something like a dome, then burst.

An arm fantastically thick in proportion to its length stretched out of it. All around them now other domes were forming, and from somewhere a voice ordered, "You three stand right where you are." A moment later a man whose articulated armor made him appear a robot was playing a light on them, so that they stood in an elliptical pool of radiance around which creatures grotesque beyond belief sprang from the ground.

CHAPTER VIII

"POWER DWELLS IN THE HEART"

"Sit down," the Martian said. "You look as though you're ready to drop. You know it's a good thing you gave our people your real name; if you hadn't they probably would have left you where you were, and the Pro Tem forces would have picked you up when we pulled out. It would have meant prison for you instead of PREST this time."

John allowed himself a slight smile. "You seem to know a lot about me, Mr. Lothrop."

"Doctor, if you don't mind. Some of my colleagues are touchy about academic standing, and if you implied that we'd headed a project this size with anything less than a Ph.D. it would seem like a slap in the face." The Martian paused, stroking his chin. "No, I know very little about you, Mr. Castle. Miss Trees, who has been an active and valuable agent for us, told me what she knew of you, including the fact that you were wanted by the Peaceguard; but the testimony of a woman in love is hardly the most reliable source for learning about a man."

"Is she here? Miss Trees?"

Lothrop shook his head. "Do you know what that scuffle in New York was about?"

"All I know is that Anna told me she would meet the ship with me if she could, and that we'd be taken to an orbiting headquarters. She didn't come, and your men blindfolded me, but either this is the largest orbiting body ever put up—and you've mastered the problem of artificial gravity—or this headquarters is on Earth."

The Martian chuckled. "Gravity is a property of the warp of the space-time continuum by matter, I'm afraid. We'll have to have a lot more physics before we can introduce an artificial warp to produce our own. No, Mr. Castle, you're not in Orbiter One. As a matter of fact, you are quite close to your

native heath; you're in Mammoth Cave. Does that surprise you?"

"Of course." John studied the walls and ceiling with new interest. They were smooth sheets of a brown material which might have been wood but was not. He walked over to one wall and rapped it with a knuckle. The sound was sharp and hollow.

"Ticky-tacky," Lothrop told him. "We synthesized it out of whatever vegetable matter we could find the day before yesterday; damp stone walls make for a pretty poor working environment—and besides we had to put something down to smooth out the floors. They were covered with broken rock fallen from the ceiling."

"I had a sensation of going down in an elevator."

"You did. You're now in the third level of the cave, two levels below the one the tourists used to see. You may be interested to learn that if they want to set off a hundred-megaton warhead in the center of the United States, the Pro Tem Government could still wipe us out down here."

"But not otherwise."

Lothrop chuckled again. "Only with great difficulty. The information Miss Trees gave you was correct up until a few days ago, by the way, and our old headquarters is still in orbit. Since the P.T.G. is devoting time and attention to putting together a rocket good enough to knock it down, we don't want to interfere with their pleasure. We got a little nervous, though, after observing their last test-firing. It's disconcerting watching every hundred and seventy-three minutes as someone builds a fly-swatter for you, so we came down quietly."

"You said Anna wasn't here?"

"Yes, I did. She isn't in the old headquarters either, if that's what you're thinking. No one is now. And when I said we came down quietly I only meant that the P.T.G. doesn't know this is our nerve center—"

John interrupted. "They know something's here. The papers today—if this is still today—spoke of troops being moved against you. Do you know where Anna is?"

"No."

"Just that? No?"

"She reported to us late yesterday afternoon. That would be six hours before you were picked up. We have every reason to believe that she's been captured."

"Or killed?"

"I didn't want to say it, but yes. Possibly killed."

John nodded. He had known it, he now realized, since Lothrop had first told him Anna was not there. Perhaps before that, when she had not come to meet the Martian pickup ship with him. Now there was no more pushing the thought into the dark portions of his mind.

"I want you to get some rest now," Lothrop was saying. "Then we'll have one of our physicians look at that arm. After that we want you to run through some tests; they won't take long and I hope you'll cooperate. By that time we'll probably have some solid news for you."

He had not heard a door open, but a tall woman, slender and rather tired-looking, had come up behind him. Lothrop said, "I'll be seeing you in half a day or so, sooner if we get any news."

There seemed to be nothing more to say. He stood and followed the woman down a corridor whose walls abruptly ended, leaving it a crooked crevice between two masses of limestone. Bare electric bulbs replaced the corridor's indirect illumination.

"I'm sorry we can't give you better quarters," the woman said, "but Dr. Lothrop's orders were that you be kept near him, and of course he made them finish off the section where his own office was last. Are you very tired?"

He thought of the long march from White City to New York. "I've felt worse," he said.

"Well, you'd better rest while you can. You'll want to be fresh for the testing."

And rest he did, in a room that was a pocket water-carved from the rock but had a bed and a small heater to keep off the chill. When he awakened it was to have his arm X-rayed in a small hospital which seemed more advanced than any he had ever seen before. The cuts and bruises he had suffered in the collapse of the Inn Where Only Delight Lives were salved again and he was given a meal; and then the tests.

The purposes of some were obvious. Questions from half a dozen different sciences, including a few, like botany, about which he knew very little. There were psychological tests as well: pictures to caption, and captions for which he was to sketch pictures. Hypothetical situations, in which all possible decisions were bad, and he was to choose one; then defend it in a short discussion with his examiner; then defend another he had not chosen.

Questions whose utility seemed, at best, obscure. "Who wrote *Advice to a Raven in Russia*? What was the advice? Have you read *Ashenden*? What games or sports do you play really well? Do you like food cooked outdoors? Why do you think Pompey lost?"

The questioning was so intense that he was startled to be told suddenly that it was over, and that he was to lunch with Dr. Lothrop. In the timeless artificial light of the cavern it seemed to him that the tests had lasted a full day, but Lothrop's secretary told him that he had slept late into the morning, and the testing had taken only three hours.

Lothrop ushered him in. "I usually eat in the commissary," the Martian said apologetically, "but I'm afraid we may want more privacy today than we could get there. Our food here will probably be cold, but I can warm it with some good news: it seems almost certain that Miss Trees is alive."

John looked at him sharply, half afraid to believe. "How do you know that?"

"We don't know it. I said we had good reason to believe it. We've learned that she entered the part of Manhattan where the fighting was last night, and we've gotten an agent into the place where the bodies of the people killed in that fighting were taken. He reports that none of the dead fit her description. When she talked to you did she tell you her assignment?"

"Yes. She was helping another militiawoman named Sarah Yoshida persuade President Huggins to join you."

Unexpectedly Lothrop smiled. "Would you be willing to say, 'to join us'!?"

"Certainly, if you'll have me."

"We'll have you—I want to talk about that in a minute." Lothrop paused, stroking his chin. "Well, they succeeded. When I talked to you last night I told you that she had reported that afternoon. That was to tell us that she would be at the pickup point with President Huggins."

"And the message was intercepted?"

"I doubt it very much. We use quite a sophisticated scrambling system to prevent that. I think it's more likely she was overheard when she was making her report, or that Huggins was being followed. In any case the Pro Tem Government couldn't catch them when they were leaving; they had to turn out a great deal of force in order to get them on the way to the pickup. We got wind of the troop movement and sent a

force of our own—luckily for you—but it seems we were too late. I understand you ran into some of our delvers."

John made a wry face. "The things that go underground? Yes, I did. Were they responsible for wrecking the building I was in?"

Lothrop nodded. "Yes, but not intentionally. This was the first time we've used them in a built-up area, and no one thought of what they might do to the foundations of a building. They can't go through stone or concrete the way they go through soil, but they seem to have smashed any concrete footings that got in their way easily enough."

Despite his worry about Anna, John was interested. "What are they, anyway? Something you developed on Mars?"

"I don't understand their life processes myself," Lothrop admitted. "We used them mostly to prospect for minerals, including water, on Mars; here they've been one of our most effective instruments of war. They seem to scare the deuce out of the Pro Tem militia, and they can reach up through the road to grab a truck's tires as it goes past. They can't see when they're in the dirt, of course, but they feel the vibrations when a vehicle passes over them."

John shook his head. "I've seen them," he said, "but it's still hard to believe they exist."

"They are no more than giant moles, in a way. That's what their ancestor was—a sort of Martian mole. Because their interior organs are rather unspecialized they are difficult to kill, and I suppose that also helps contribute to the fear they inspire in the militia . . ."

Lothrop broke off as his secretary entered and laid an envelope on his desk. With a nod of apology to John he glanced at the card it contained. "This is the tabulation of your test scores; I'd show it to you, but unless you understood the system it wouldn't mean anything. When Miss Trees told us about you she said you wanted to join ARES. Do you still?"

"Certainly. More than ever if there's any chance of getting Anna freed."

"I thought so. Well, you're going right to the top, John. You are now officially chief of ARES; I'll put out a memorandum to that effect as soon as you're settled in your new job."

John Castle looked at the Martian incredulously. "Are you joking?"

"I have seldom been more serious. The leadership of ARES

has been one of my many hats, and I'm delighted to be able to delegate the job."

"Merely on the basis of that test? Your psychologists may be good, but it seems to me you may be putting an unwarranted amount of trust in them."

For the first time since John had met him Lothrop looked annoyed. "No, not just on the basis of the test, although it's very good considering your limited education. We're not quite that foolish." He smiled suddenly, the irritation vanishing. "Look at your record. On Miss Trees' testimony you were one of our early sympathizers back in the days when we were asking Terrestrial cities to blink a signal to us, in the hope of discovering a secret ally among the nations who might value their relations with the Pro Tem Government too highly to send us openly friendly messages—that was the original reason for founding the fiction of ARES, by the way. We hoped some regional American official would flip the switch for us a few times, and we wanted to give him someone to blame it on when he had to explain things to his superiors."

"The fiction of ARES?"

"That's right. Since you'll be taking it over, I might as well tell you that ARES has never had anything near the size and power we've liked to pretend. Our Chinese friends would call it a paper tiger; there has never been an indigenous pro-Martian movement on Earth. We faked the broadcasts, and the books ARES was supposed to have printed were actually done in Portugal by a publisher who was happy to keep quiet if he was well paid. I might add that we've been peddling scientific discoveries to every country on Earth with a hard currency—the U.S.S.R. excepted—in order to finance ARES and some of our other enterprises. Are you startled?"

"A little," John admitted. "I've never headed up a paper tiger before."

"Well, don't go to the other extreme now, and think that ARES is valueless. By a lot of hard work we've built an organization of a hundred and fifty agents, some of them as good and as brave as Sarah Yoshida. We're expecting them to make a tremendous contribution during the next few months, and it will be your job to see that they don't disappoint us."

"I'll do my best."

"I know you will. I was talking about your record a few minutes ago and there were two things in it that convinced me

you were the right man for the job. Would you like to know what they were?"

"Of course."

"They were the two occasions on which I observed you personally. Most recently when you were giving President Huggins what could be termed a soft sell. You showed diplomatic ability, I thought, and a talent for deception. We have need of both."

"Wait a minute. You were there?"

"Mentally, not physically. I know I've given you an overdose of surprises today, but this is the last. We have developed a device by which one human being may enter another's mind as an observer, adviser, and if the other consents and the 'rider' has the strength, even as director for a short time. Unfortunately a massive sending apparatus is required, so that the rider has to operate from a fixed base. The receiver is amenable to miniaturization, however, and we implant one in the neck of every ARES agent. That's one of the reasons we insist that every new man be brought here."

"Wait a minute. Do you mean Anna's wearing one of these things? Can't you contact her?"

Lothrop shook his head. "She was given one, as I told you; but we haven't been able to bring her in at all. Actually when she reported that Huggins was defecting to us, I had one of my assistants try to contact her, but she was unable to do so. It is possible, naturally, that this was because Miss Trees was dead. I think now that it is much more likely that there is some other explanation. The unit may have failed, as they do sometimes. She may be unconscious. If she has been captured, the unit may have been removed surgically, although as far as we know we've been successful so far in keeping the enemy unaware of their existence. It's even possible that for some reason she herself has turned it off. That can be done, for privacy, by pinching the unit in the right spot through the wearer's skin."

"The other girl, Sarah—"

"She doesn't know what happened; although we haven't gone into her mind to question her, if that's what you're thinking. 'Riding,' as you'll find out, isn't as easy as flipping a switch on a radio; it takes quite a bit of preparation and effort, even though it was through her eyes that I watched your friends make a lion vanish for President Huggins."

"She didn't go with Anna?"

"No. Since there was some danger that Miss Trees might be returned to her home area and imprisoned, it was decided that she should be the one to accompany Huggins. Miss Yoshida might continue to be useful where she was, so she remained there. She tells us that Miss Trees and Huggins left without a hitch, and that's all she knows."

"I see."

"You'll want to read the file when you take up your new duties. You won't object, yourself, to having the unit implanted?"

John shrugged. "I can see the advantages. Do many prospective agents turn it down?"

"No, very few. The people willing to risk their lives for constitutional government are highly motivated, as a rule. Besides, once you become accustomed to the idea it's rather comforting to realize that someone may come in to share your troubles when you're in a tight spot."

"You said you observed me twice. What was the other time?"

"A time when I wasn't paying any particular attention to you as an individual, I'm afraid. One of our people had set out to win over a column of prisoners he had spotted from his LBV. I was told he was in trouble, but by the time they got me set up it was nearly over. You and a man whose name we found out later was Stennis had set out to try to outflank a machine-gun position. I saw you when you came back carrying Stennis and put him in the ship."

"The pilot? I don't remember noticing anything strange about him."

"There was no reason why you should. I was merely a passive observer, and in the excitement he didn't even realize I was there himself. Later Miss Trees mentioned you to us, but it was pure coincidence that I was present when you were talking to Huggins; it was he that interested me at the time, and not yourself."

"And I take it you're still interested in him, as well as in getting Anna back."

"We are. According to the Constitution he *is* the President. Fitzpatric Boyde hasn't had Huggins publicly disavow our campaign to restore the Constitution yet, because he doesn't want to give *any* appearance of influence to the constitutional presidency, but as long as he has him he can do it any time he wants."

John smiled. "Which could be embarrassing."

"Which could be disastrous. There is one facet of this project which no one here seems to think of. At least the P.T.G.'s don't seem to, and even some of my own subordinates seem to prefer to ignore the whole thing. You remember our ignorance and idealism when we began this project? The way we thought we could walk in with an appeal to reason and fair play and gain all kinds of support?"

John nodded.

"Well, that attitude is *still* the one held by a great many people on Mars. They think that if the case for the support of science and man's reach for the stars can be put before the people at all, support will come in droves. We've done the best we can to tell them what conditions here are really like, but a lot of them still cling to the old ideas."

"That's pretty hard to believe."

Lothrop touched his own chest with one long-fingered hand. "I came to Mars myself twenty years ago; just before the cutoff. I had been a child prodigy, with a Ph.D. at seventeen, and I still hold the record as the youngest man ever to land on Mars: nineteen. Every other person you'll see working on this project was born there—the others, the older people who came originally across space from Earth, could not have stood Terrestrial gravity again after twenty years of living on Mars."

John said, "I see," meaning that he did not.

"*They* are the ones who have authority on Mars, however. And their political ideas were formed thirty years ago. Because we needed something to sustain us during the years after cutoff, we evolved a theory to explain the events on Earth. It was chewed over night after night, and as people's memories of what the U.S. was really like dimmed, it became less and less realistic." Lothrop paused.

"Because the people in those bull sessions were intelligent themselves, they made the stupid mistake of coming to assume that everyone here is; and because all of us had lived under the Constitution all our lives we couldn't conceive of its being really overthrown. Many people on Mars still have the idea that the President could do away with the whole Pro Tem Government if he wanted to." He gave one of his sudden smiles.

"You and I try to think of Huggins abolishing Fitzpatric Boyde and realize how absurd it is, but those people aren't

thinking of Huggins. They've scarcely heard of Boyde, and *President* to them means a powerful figure like Lincoln. Can you imagine how they'll feel if Huggins is made to repudiate us? And they are our support, and—in the ultimate sense—our base.

"Getting Huggins for us would be the most valuable contribution you could make in your new job. And if it's at all possible I'd like you to do it without calling on us. If you can't get him any other way I'll give you everything I can—but if it's at all possible, do it without our help."

"You're hard-pressed militarily?"

"Yes, we are. There are very few of us, John. Less than a hundred here in all."

John winced. "I hadn't realized it was that bad."

"It is, and while technology will do a great deal to stretch manpower, it will only stretch so far. The Chinese have lent us five hundred of their ablest technicians and we are training them now on some of the easier weapons, but although five hundred Chinese is more than most of us like—it gives this almost the air of a Chinese expedition—it is less than we need."

"Won't the Chinese give us more if we ask for them?"

"Frankly," Lothrop said, "they've been trying to press them on us. So far we've resisted the temptation. We have no more weapons to give them, anyway; but I could have a hundred divisions of semi-illiterate Orientals armed with burp guns and hand grenades if I wanted them and could find some way to get them here. You are an Earthman, and you're from this part of the country. Would you like to see a force like that turned loose here?"

John shook his head. "I'd almost rather go over to Fitzpatric Boyde."

"So would I. And so until we have the five hundred trained we are going to be woefully weak. I want Huggins before then, if it is at all possible. There is another reason for not using our people, as well."

"Political?"

"Yes. You have to understand that I can't, and won't, lie to the men and women who have sent us out; moral questions aside, I couldn't get away with it. But if I could truthfully report that the President was being held prisoner, and that he had been rescued by Earth-born Americans—and that he was now backing us . . ."

"I see," John Castle said.

"Are you ready, Mr. Castle?"

John nodded. The technician made a final, almost fussy adjustment of one of the electrodes, then touched a switch.

The transmitter room, with all its multiplicity of display panels and chart recorders, vanished as if it had never been. Bodiless he rushed through an abyss.

The first time he had been terrified; like an animal whose life had been spent in the tiny cage in which it was born, once outside he found himself frantic to encyst his mind in flesh again, convinced that freedom was death.

Now—he had tried five times before contacting her, and this was to be his third such contact—he reveled for a moment in liberation from the pounding of his own heart and the dictatorial emotions of his glands. Like a man who has risen early in the morning and goes out into his garden for a few moments of enjoyment of the freshness of dawn before gently awakening the woman he loves, he paused before seeking the human warmth of Anna's mind.

Now—he moved into her mind with a deft, nondimensional twist which suddenly gave him a heart smaller and swifter than his own—he had come to tell her what they planned to do and the part she might have to play.

Here I am again, Anna; are you better now?

He felt her start of joy, then her consciousness reached toward his.

He remembered that mental caress two weeks later as he lay belly-down listening to the pounding of the distant waves. He thought to himself: If we don't make it he'll have to use Martian forces. He'll send the ships then, with laser cannon and the delvers and he'll get them all out.

It was somehow incidental that he would almost certainly be dead. In the gathering twilight a gull mewed, a lonely sound over the cold, thrashing water. The twilight would be night soon, and it would be time for action—no more raking over old memories.

Carefully, so as not to attract the attention of the guard in the little wooden cubicle in front of the gate, he raised himself until he could see the road. It was empty; they should come soon, but they had not come yet. Gingerly he lowered himself again. The Martian doctors had performed miracles on his

broken arm, clamping the fracture with bands of uncorrodible alloy which could remain in place for the rest of his life, but he was still chary of trusting it with his weight.

He risked another look, although the light blue Peaceguard uniform he was wearing was far from ideal camouflage for this hiding and spying.

The road was still empty. Since it served no other purpose but to supply the vast Rectification Center behind the chain-link fence, it was unlikely that it would have any traffic other than that he was waiting for. As he dropped again he wondered how well Carter and Morgan were standing this long wait. Better than he was himself, very likely. They had each other to talk to, and they were both experienced ARES agents. He had withdrawn them from their regular assignments in Arlington, and now he found himself wishing he had strengthened the group with more such veterans.

Slowly he raised his body again, and this time he saw the marchers straggling down the road. They looked tired but determined, which was the way they were supposed to look, but he doubted if either the fatigue or the determination were faked. They had walked from Strathmere.

Tia Marie was in the lead. In a dark, heavy coat and wool slacks her size made her seem almost a man, a big man with an overrefined, cruel face. She carried her sign like a banner. The group that followed her was diverse, as he had intended. With the single exception of Japhet Trees, they had been chosen solely for their fanatic devotion to their leader. There were women of all ages, old men and young. Some of them would be killed tonight and he knew he should feel guilty, but he did not. Better men and women were being killed in the defense of the Mammoth Cave headquarters, and when the big push came the numbers would jump whether it succeeded or failed.

Peering through the windblown dune grass, he looked at the faces of the marchers and saw no indication that any of them were sorry they had come. They were doing something important, making themselves felt. After untold years of waiting without purpose or hope they had been given something to do.

Most of them carried signs like Tia Marie's, and as they neared the gate they straightened them up. LET HIM GO. RELEASE OUR PRESIDENT. RUSSIAN GO HOME.

He wanted to be back at the telephone tap when the call came, but he waited a moment longer to see the guard come out to confront Tia Marie. Japhet was beside her, waving his sign and shouting. There was no use waiting to see more. Bending low to hide himself behind the dunes, he ran.

When he was out of sight of the center he cut onto the road. A quarter mile farther on, two ruts leading into the scrubby trees branched off it; he turned down it, his run now an easy jog. The wires spliced to the telephone lines were occasionally visible in the grass, but he had more important things to worry about. As he rounded a bend he saw the two men crouched beside the ramshackle bus he had managed to buy. He looked a question, and Carter, wearing earphones, shook his head. Not yet.

John stopped beside them, a little breathless, and put on another set. Like himself both the men wore Peaceguard uniforms.

Carter asked softly, "How's it look, Chief?"

He shrugged. Morgan, big and red-haired, laid a finger to his lips and looked at Carter significantly.

After that the silence of the pine barrens was broken only by the sound of the ocean. At the gate the guard would temporize and argue, but at last he would appeal to higher authority: the director of the center or some assistant. Possibly he too would go out to argue with Tia Marie and her followers for a time, but the call would come.

Then he heard it—the whirring noise which was the signal to ring. Morgan flipped a switch and said into his chest mike laconically, "Peace Station."

A flustered voice asked, "Hello, who is there?"

"You got the Cape May Peace Station. This is the desk."

"I am Koltsov at the Criminal Rectification Center."

Morgan made his voice a shade more respectful. "Yes, Mr. Koltsov, what can we do for you?"

When Koltsov was finished Morgan asked, "You want these people arrested, huh? I better transfer you to the lieutenant. Hold on a minute." He began to remove his earphones and chest mike, but John stopped him with a gesture and gave his own set to Carter.

"Hello," Carter said, depressing the button on the mike. "This's Lieutenant Coogan." (They had been at some pains to learn the name of the officer actually commanding the Cape May station.) He fell silent then, nodding occasionally and

once winking. Apparently Koltsov was again describing the actions of Tia Marie's demonstrators.

At length Carter said, "Hey, have you really got *him* there?" The Russian's disclaimers were audible even to John.

"Well, listen, you got guards of your own, don't you? I shouldn't have to send men out from here."

He paused to listen, then looked significantly at John. "Only ten for the whole thing, huh?" From the contacts with Anna, John had learned that there were at least a platoon of soldiers, from their uniforms men of the newly revived regular army, guarding Huggins; it was interesting that Koltsov was unwilling to admit even to a peaceguard that they were there.

"Well, listen," Carter began again, feigning reluctance, "every cruiser I got's out on assignment right now—you know how it is around here at night." He paused, listened intently, then putting his hand tightly over his mike, whispered to John, "He's reminding me of a letter from Arlington I'm supposed to have on file. To hear him tell it this says I'm supposed to do just about anything he tells me."

"That will make our pitch sound that much more probable then."

Carter nodded and said into his mike, "Mr. Koltsov, like I said, I don't have any vehicles to spare now, but then we couldn't take that many people away in a cruiser anyhow. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll round up a truck or something that'll hold quite a few and I'll strip the Peace Station here of personnel for you." He paused, listening.

"No, I can't come myself. That would be strictly against regulations—there has to be an officer here." They had agreed upon this in advance. The possibility that Koltsov might know the real Coogan by sight was too great. Later, when they had reached the center, Carter would try to speak as little as possible so that his voice would not be recognized while he played his new role as John's subordinate. "That's the best I can do, Mr. Koltsov," he said with finality. "Now the sooner you let me get busy finding you a vehicle, the sooner I can get someone out there for you." He flipped the switch.

Morgan said anxiously, "How do you think it went?"

"Pretty good." Carter looked at John. "We going now, Chief?"

John shook his head. "It's ten miles to the center from Cape May Court House, but only a half mile from here.

Don't you think they'd get a little suspicious if we got there in five minutes?"

Carter nodded reluctantly. He was a wiry, dark man with the look of a famished hound. After a moment he asked, "Do you think he was telling me the truth when he said he only had ten men for the whole thing—I mean even leaving out the soldiers they've brought in to watch Huggins? It's an awfully big layout."

"Ten uniformed American guards," John said. "The sort of men who were civil-service state prison guards under the old system. I doubt if they do much more than watch the gate and perhaps patrol the grounds at night. He's probably got a hundred or so Russians to handle the prisoners, but he won't be much more anxious to show those to our demonstrators than he would be to show the soldiers; perhaps less."

Morgan looked thoughtful. "Chief, do you really think those Hunters will fight?"

"They will if they're well-led." He could visualize the scene as if it were being acted out before him. "Don't let them pause; if anything holds us up we're dead, but if you can lead the whole bunch along in a rush we'll take them." He thought of barbarians storming a Roman camp, and then rejected the picture; it would not mean enough to Morgan and Carter. "It's like the Indians fighting the settlers, really," he said. "After all, savages like the Indians represent the ideal to these people. The more disorganized everything is and the faster it goes the better off we'll be."

"I guess you've done this kind of thing before," Carter said, "but it makes me and Mike nervous. We're first-timers." He chuckled.

Morgan said suddenly, "While we're waiting maybe I ought to go check the explosives."

"I wouldn't do that," Carter told him. "Once you light the fuse on something like that you shouldn't go near it again."

"It's not a fuse, it's a timer."

"You climbed the tower and put it close to the wires?" John asked.

"Sure."

"And set the timer?"

"For nine thirty, just like you told me." Instinctively all three men looked at their watches. It was seven twenty.

"Then it will be all right, Mike. An explosion and no more power."

Unexpectedly Carter said, "Power dwells in the heart."

Even in the dim moonlight that filtered through the pines John could see Morgan's head snap around. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

" 'Power dwells in the heart'; it was something my mother used to say. Usually it meant the city wouldn't fix the street . . . She always said it when she was talking about how much better ordinary people were than bigwigs. I guess she read it somewhere. I don't know why I thought of it just now."

"Because we are setting out to humble the powerful, in a sense," John told him. "And I think we can leave now if we take it slowly enough."

He and Morgan swung on board the ancient bus and took seats just behind Carter, who was fumbling at the instrument board in the darkness. After half a minute the starter ground. The engine backfired, then wheezed into life. The bus lurched forward.

"Here we go," Carter said.

The road (a rusted steel sign nearer Strathmere still proclaimed it to be state route 585) ran parallel to the Atlantic a hundred yards to their right. In places sand was creeping up through holes in the paving, and once the bus stuck in one of these for a moment, making them catch their breath until Carter eased it out. Then the lights of the Rectification Center gate were in front of them, Tia Marie's demonstrators swirling in them like moths.

"Everybody out," John said. "Don't forget your goads." As he stepped from the bus he shouted, "All right, what's going on here?"

Well-rehearsed, the Hunters answered in a babble of complaint, brandishing their signs. From somewhere near the guard shed an accented voice called, "Arrest these people, Peaceman! They are trespassing and destroying the people's property." John saw a youngish-looking Russian in a white lab tunic.

As a peaceguard would, John brandished his goad. "You Mr. Koltsov?" he called.

The Russian pushed his way between a bulky woman and a slender young Hunter with a sign reading DROP DEAD RED. "No, I am Comrade Koltsov's assistant. My name is Ivan Golov." He extended his hand, which John ignored.

"You want these people arrested, huh?"

"Definitely yes. Comrade Koltsov has instructed me that he

intends to file charges against them with your government."

"Okay, if you'll have your guards help my men, we'll take them back to Cape May," John told him. To the seething crowd of Hunters he shouted, "Show's over now, folks. Lay down those signs and get on the bus and you won't get hurt." Carter and Morgan moved among the demonstrators, shoving them in the direction of the bus door. Japhet refused to give up his sign, and there was a brief scuffle and the sound of a blow before Morgan snapped its stick across his knee. A few of the women sniffled as John pushed them up the step. "You see," he said to the Russian, "they don't give you much trouble if you know how to handle them."

"You and your men do very well," the Russian acknowledged. "We could not control them half so well with four times more."

"It's all in knowing how," John told him. On the dark bus, he knew, the Hunters were pulling out weapons. As Carter kicked the last man in, John flipped a salute at the Russian. "You tell Koltsov to come into Cape May in the morning if he's serious about pressing charges."

Golov nodded. "I will. This will be a great relief to him."

Carter took his place behind the wheel while Morgan pretended to cow the demonstrators, standing in a threatening posture between the first two seats. John ordered, "Okay, let's roll!"

Carter had the choke handle pulled out and his foot pumping the accelerator pedal before he turned on the ignition, but there was no way for Golov to see that. Once the engine coughed and John was afraid it would actually start; the cough died immediately. The growlings of the starting motor became weaker and weaker. "Can't he get it to run?" Golov asked through the open door.

"I guess not. Can't you get it going, Carter?"

Carter shook his head and stopped trying. "I'd better have a look at it."

He climbed out and raised the hood. John knew that he was mispositioning the sparkplug wires, but he smiled hopefully at the Russian. In the bus the Hunters were beginning to jeer. Carter got back in and stepped on the starter again.

When the battery was completely dead, John told the Russian, "Well, it looks like you're going to have to put us up for the night."

Golov looked startled. "What do you mean?"

"We can't march them back to Cape May Court House in the dark; we'd lose three-quarters of them. Haven't you got an empty barracks in there where we can pen them up for the night?"

The Russian put up more objection than John had anticipated, eventually bringing his own men to push the bus when the prisoners seemed determined to shirk the job even under frantic bullying. When Carter contrived to drop one wheel into the ditch at the side of the road, however, the Hunters were installed in a building at one corner of the center grounds, John promising solemnly that he and his men would stay awake all night to watch them. By the time they were settled and Golov had left, it was nine twenty-one.

The Hunters formed their previously assigned groups with more discipline than John had thought possible, fingering their blowguns, bows, and spears: five men and five women for Morgan's diversionary attack on the administration building. Besides his laser pistol Morgan had two concussion grenades.

Eight men and seven women for Carter to assault the gate—which should be easy—and to hold it, which could prove difficult. It had been decided not to press firearms upon the Hunters, who like almost all Americans had lost all traditions of their use; but in addition to the weapons which they had made themselves, Carter's people had Martian-supplied wirecutters. As soon as the gate was taken they would begin destruction of the cyclone fence, so that even if they were driven away later, it would be difficult to entrap the other parties.

John's group, eighteen men and ten women, included Tia Marie and Japhet. It would make the main effort, storming the hospital where Huggins and Anna were held after the other attacks had drawn off some of the soldiers stationed there. Every man and woman carried pictures of the three people they were to rescue.

Softly John asked, "Is anyone disoriented? Anyone not sure where his group's objective is?"

No one spoke. It was nine twenty-six.

"Everyone know where the hospital is? On our left as we came in—a big, three-story building."

Someone in back said, "Yes, man, we saw it." The center was meshed with white gravel paths now illuminated with

overhead lights. As they had tramped down them, John had had the sensation of walking on a vastly enlarged version of one of the aerial photos he had studied so long. Warehouse, hospital, administration building, treatment buildings, and barracks all laid out in orderly fashion. When darkness fell on the camp the order might not seem so obvious.

"Everyone know where the gate is?"

The same voice answered, "Oh, do we!" and there was a general chuckle.

"All right then. Gate group, that's Carter's group, move out. Remember—hit it as soon as the lights go out, but don't make more noise than you can help."

There was no one in sight to stop them, but John's throat was tight as he listened to their feet on the gravel path. They should be in position by the time Morgan's bomb severed the power lines.

Tia Marie had been checking the equipment of her subgroup; they had agreed that she, personally, would conduct the rescue of President Huggins. What ambitions she nourished for her cult when Huggins was no longer a prisoner, John had thought it best not to inquire. Now, satisfied that everything was as it should be, she asked, "Straight out the gate to the ocean pickup?"

"They'll take their landing time from the darkening of the center," he answered patiently. "Ten minutes after that, the Martians will come down out at sea where the water's deep, then taxi up to the beach just opposite the gate. They won't show lights, but if you go straight out you can't miss the Lifting Body Vehicle in the moonlight."

They had practiced this several times on a deserted stretch of Texas coast a few days before. He could sense them nodding in the dimness of the barracks.

Far away, faintly, there was a boom like distant thunder. Every light went out. For a moment no one breathed; then there was a general surging toward the door—but over the sound of the pushing men and women and the creaking of the floorboards there was a new sound, distant but clear. It was the steady thumping of a large internal combustion engine, rising faster and faster at first, then slowing as a governor brought it under control. The lights on the paths came back on.

From the direction of the gate came the sound of two shots.

A presence in John's mind, which he recognized as the thought of Emil Lothrop, inserted into the pattern of his own thoughts the message that the Lifting Body Vehicle overhead would be informed of the difficulty; then it removed itself, only slightly more noticeable in its going than it had been in coming.

"We've got to turn that thing off just the same," John said. He was not aware that he had spoken aloud until he saw Tia Marie and Morgan looking toward him.

"You think they got trouble at the gate?" Morgan asked nervously.

"I think it's very likely. And the best thing we can do is to give them the darkness they were counting on originally. Your group is diverted from the administration building to the generator. You ought to be able to home in on the noise of that diesel—it sounds as though it's about in the middle of this place."

Morgan suddenly grinned. " 'Power dwells in the heart,' like Carter said, huh, Chief?" With a gesture that was restrained rather than flamboyant he waved his followers forward. "Come on, gang. Let's go put out the lights."

The lights were still burning, however, when John Castle's group reached the center's hospital, and as they left the narrow spaces between the smaller buildings, shots came from the roof and the upper windows. The Hunters hesitated. Then there were more shots and a woman sprawled on the grass under the harsh electric light. The rest turned and ran back to shelter.

John found Japhet beside him, gripping a bow. "Any idea how long you think it'll take for those other guys to get the light off?"

"I don't know, but I'm not going to wait." He raised his voice so they could all hear him. "You bowmen! Those lights are only incandescent bulbs in shades. One good shot should put them out." He looked around, tracing in his mind the best route to the warehouse which stood flanking the hospital. Arrows were flying already.

Tia Marie came striding up to him, moving as calmly as if she were crossing a street. "Where are you going?" she asked.

"We're getting a breeze now from the sea—feel it?"

She nodded.

"I'm going to set fire to that warehouse. The smoke ought to blow across here, and by that time your people ought to

have most of these lights out."

The big woman nodded with satisfaction. "You want me to lead them across?"

"I want anyone who can to lead as many as they can. The important thing is that we get all our strength over there."

He wondered as he dodged between buildings if Tia Marie realized just how explosive the situation was. Most of the prisoners at the center seemed still asleep, although he saw a few blurred faces at windows as he ran past; but they constituted an enormous factor in everything. Presumably many were so nearly bent to the Pro Tem Government's will that if armed and organized they might crush the feeble force of Hunters. Many others might still cling to whatever political deviations had sent them here, and were potential allies.

The side of the warehouse, lined with unloading docks and freight doors loomed in front of him. He ran up a ramp and found a door of normal size; a shot from his laser pistol reduced the lock to slag and he kicked it open.

Five minutes later stifling black smoke was pouring from the building. He had found cans of cooking oil to dump on bales of clothing before he set them alight, and the fire spread so quickly that for a few moments he had been afraid he would not get out.

As he had hoped, the smoke was blowing toward the hospital. The lights that had stopped them before were only dim balls of radiance in it now, giving no illumination to the ground under them. Trying not to breathe, he plunged in, heading as well as he could toward the front entrance.

The Hunters had been there before him. Two soldiers in olive-drab lay speared in the reception room. He leaped over them and sprinted down the hallway. Anna's room had been on the second floor. He found a stair and went up the steps two at a time.

It was empty. He left it and made for the back of the building where Huggins' room was, but at a turn in the corridor the foot of someone lying just around the angle, protruded enough for him to see it, and it was a foot shod in a worn tenhis shoe without a sock. The wall that faced the new direction showed bullet pocks. Death, almost certainly, lay around the turn.

Except, he suddenly realized, for him. He had left his electric goad and uniform cap behind at the barracks, but he could do without them. He straightened his Peaceguard's

blues and stepped boldly out into the new corridor.

A Hunter lay sprawled, as he had expected, at his feet. At the other end of the corridor a soldier was leveling an automatic rifle at him. John raised his hand as though he were stopping traffic: "Don't shoot!" Then, remembering that Russian expressions were becoming popular in Arlington, he added, "Comrade." The soldier lowered his rifle and John walked confidently toward him.

But there was something wrong. He watched the soldier's face, and it should either have been suspicious or relaxed and friendly. It was neither, but as blank as a mask. "I've come to see if Huggins is all right," John said.

The soldier said nothing. People in the graceless nightshirts provided by hospitals everywhere were beginning to thrust their heads from doorways, looking curiously at John. "There's no reason why I shouldn't go in, is there?"

The soldier said, "Go in," in a guttural accent.

One of the patients, a thin man with pop-eyes, said suddenly, "He isn't in there, whoever he was. They got him."

John stopped. "What do you mean?"

"My room's next to his and I saw them from my window. Some fellows climbed up there and let him down with a sheet looped under his arms; it was just after he"—the patient gestured toward the dead man in the hall—"was shot."

"Ragged men like him? With spears and bows?"

The patient nodded.

"Was there a girl with them?"

"There were several women, one very tall and—"

"I know her. A slender, dark girl with a bandaged head?"

"I don't think so. The only person with bandages was one of us who jumped down to join them, a boy . . ."

John was not interested. "But Huggins is gone? What's the sentry still here for then?"

"I think he was only told to protect the door. You know what you've done to him, don't you?"

"What I've—?"

The patient's face was suddenly contorted. "Never mind. Why am I giving you information anyway? I should have joined them, whoever they are, like the boy did."

John took him by the arm. "If you're serious about that, come on." He pulled the man down the hall with him. The robotized soldier stood immobile, still protecting his doorway.

"You mean"—the man's face was bewildered—"you're ar-

resting me just for saying that? For God's sake, what are you going to do with me? I'm already *here*."

"No, I'm going to get you out. What's wrong with you anyway? Why do they need a hospital in this place?"

"I tried to kill myself. About twenty percent of us do, sooner or later. They set me to painting our barracks and I drank the paint. I suppose they need the hospital for us, and for the times things go wrong—an eyespray getting clogged or something. It's overcrowded now because some of the smaller centers have been evacuated." The man paused, shaking his head as though to clear it. "But listen, are you on their side? The police?"

"I'm not supposed to be a policeman," John said brusquely. "This is a Peaceguard uniform; no wonder they locked you up."

"But if you're on their side it's a counterrevolution. I thought . . ."

Finding a stair, John pulled him down it. The smoke was becoming thicker in the halls, and he was eager to get outside and see if Tia Marie had found Anna as well as Huggins. "I'm not a peaceguard," he said between coughs. "I'm a school teacher, actually."

"Oh," the thin man said vaguely. "An intellectual. That fits, then." As he spoke, the corridor was plunged into darkness.

Outside, the warehouse was a pillar of fire, but the area it illuminated seemed deserted. There were dead men, soldiers and Hunters, piled around the gate, but no living. John and the thin man stumbled toward it. As they took the first steps, like goblins materializing out of the smoke, twenty or more soldiers appeared to spread themselves in a loose skirmish line in front of it. Whether they did not see the Peaceguard uniform or disregarded it John never know, but several opened fire. Grabbing the thin man, he dropped to the ground.

"Look," the thin man said urgently. "Behind them, who are they?"

John looked, and saw hundreds of running figures, each dressed in white and wearing a white hat or helmet, and each carrying an automatic rifle. They ran through the deploying soldiers without pausing and came dashing down toward the two of them.

And each was a girl in a hospital gown. Each was Anna Trees.

CHAPTER IX

". . . OVER BEFORE SUNRISE"

"Perhaps you haven't had the events surrounding your rescue explained to you fully, Mr. President." Lothrop looked tired, but he allowed no hint of irritation to creep into his tone. "I employed a technique we have developed to produce a large number of simultaneous simulations of Miss Trees. I hoped to distract the soldiers who were in a position to block the escape of John and a patient he was taking out with him, and of the so-called diversionary group—the people who destroyed the generator. I also hoped by this means to inform John that Miss Trees was still alive; I think I succeeded in doing that, at any rate."

They were in one of the prefabricated structures the Martians could throw up so swiftly. It stood under towering sycamores on a wooded knoll, and in summer would have been a pleasant spot. Now the trees lifted naked white arms around it, seeming to sift the blowing snow between their fingers. One wall was an unbroken sheet of plastic so clear and thin that it was practically invisible; John Castle could see the trees through it, and beyond them, miles of snow-buried uplands. The other walls and the roof were of grayish-white expanded foam, looking like old limestone but having the texture of Neoprene rubber. All of them wore thick parkas, the opened fronts showing rich artificial fur so that the men resembled medieval burgomasters, and Anna, her hood still pulled up over her bandaged head, some dark Borgia princess.

"What I want to know," the President was saying, "is why we have been brought here"—(He had been assigned the most comfortable quarters in the caves, and appeared to resent having been routed out of them.) "—and what the meaning of that broadcast was."

"I thought it was pretty clear," John said. "They're not going to admit they've lost you, that's all."

"But that wasn't me!"

Emil Lothrop moved his fingers across a small control panel and the transparent wall became again as opaque as it had been a few minutes before, when it had served as a projection screen for a magnified television picture. Now the picture came again; but it was still, neither moving nor speaking. It was the face of a kindly-looking man with white hair and bright blue eyes—a shaven Santa Claus.

"Here again," Lothrop said, "is the man you just saw claiming to be President Huggins. This view, of course, is about fifty times larger than he would appear on a normal screen. Look particularly at the area where his face shades into his neck and at the wrinkles around his eyes."

Anna snapped her fingers. "It's makeup. Heavy makeup." She looked at John as if for confirmation.

"That's correct." Lothrop touched a button and the wall disappeared again. "I believe that if we could see the man under that, we would find him much younger than he appears, Miss Trees."

"I don't understand, though. He didn't really say anything, just that everyone ought to be good and that better times were coming."

"He didn't want to say anything this time. Or at least the Russians didn't want him to. He merely established himself in the minds of his viewers as the constitutional President. I dare say they will have several things for him to say later."

"The Russians?" John asked sharply. "Isn't it more likely he's working for Fitzpatric Boyde?"

"We don't think so. That broadcast—according to one of my own electronics men who studied the slight shifts in color values—was originally taped on Russian equipment; and the man who introduced the imposter has been identified as a translator from their embassy. Would you care for my own analysis of what's happened here?"

"Of course," Huggins said. "Get on with it."

"Then I would say that our little coup of last night was very embarrassing for them, but that someone highly placed made a quick decision to save everything he could from the wreck. President Huggins was gone, but who knew it other than the Russian technicians? The robotized soldiers guarding him seem to have been Russians in American uniforms—we've had several reports of similar bodies of Red army troops around Arlington—but even supposing for the

sake of argument that we are mistaken, and that they were Americans under an American officer, how much would he know? He could only report that we came, killed some of his men, and burned the warehouse. Neither he nor his men normally stood guard alongside your bed, you say; their duty seems to have been to provide general security for the hospital area."

"You mean that they're not even going to tell President Boyde—I mean President Pro Tem Boyde—that I'm gone?"

"Why should they? By confessing it they would lose a great deal of their prestige with the P.T.G. By concealing it they have a valuable puppet to manipulate. How long has it been since you've been active in the bureaucracy in Arlington?"

"Why . . . almost seven years." Huggins looked at John Castle. "What's the date now anyway? I've lost track since Miss Trees and I had our accident."

"January fifteenth."

"More than seven years then. Let's see . . . I retired in November, but I was still more or less around until I took the oath of office. A lot of my old friends would still know me. Why, I was visiting one of them in New York—he retired too last year—when I decided to join you people and restore the Constitution."

Lothrop cleared his throat. "I doubt if as many people would recognize the impostor as you imagine, then. A few close friends might, perhaps, but I doubt if many of them will be eager to call official attention to themselves by lodging any sort of complaint. Fitzpatric Boyde and the others, who have seen you only occasionally will probably make allowances for the makeup normally worn for television, and whatever changes the Rectification they believe you to be undergoing might make in your appearance, and correct their memories of you to the new picture, so to speak. They will conclude that you have recanted and that the Soviets are ready to make hay of your recantation. We should have acted faster to put you on the air with the truth. To a certain degree we have been undercut."

Huggins looked horrified. "Then can't we . . . shouldn't we . . . ?"

"Go on immediately with a counterbroadcast? Yes, or if not immediately in a few hours. That is one of the things I wanted to talk to you about.

"You see, in one respect the Russians moved a little faster

than they should. What you just saw was broadcast at ten this morning, and there is not a large audience at that hour. Most people do not gather in the Civic Centers or other places having sets until their day's work is over. Also, we were able to jam a good deal of the transmission . . ."

John was no longer listening. Outside, a dark object like an enormous spider was striding over the snow toward them. It seemed to cover a hundred yards at a step.

Lothrop followed the direction of his eyes. "I think that will be General Lee," he said. "He was to meet us here. If you look out past the line of the Green River there, you can see the area in which his troops are engaged."

The spider crouched, and John saw that its body was an armored cylinder mounting a laser cannon. A soldier with a broad Mongolian face leaped from it and held the door for a man in bulky quilted clothing.

He came in stamping the snow from his boots, nodding and smiling first to Lothrop and the others at the table and then to John. In passable English he said, "Good morning, Dr. Lothrop. I would rejoice to hear that I am not too much delayed."

"Not at all, General. I'm afraid I've never studied protocol, but—"

The Chinese held up both hands in a motion of polite deprecation; now that he had removed his sheepskin-flapped cap, John saw that he wore a broad band of scarlet silk embroidered in gold with ideographic characters across his forehead. "It is not needed. Though other duties have pressed me this morning I have not been wholly idle in the thought of this meeting. Were it not that we as a revolutionary society have utterly destroyed the rotten conventions of bourgeois politeness I should confess myself utterly unworthy to reflect the light of your exalted president. And since there is here no other but my poor self to convey to him the heartfelt congratulations of the thousand millions of the Chung Hua Jen Min Kung Ho Kua, I shall do my poor best."

Huggins nodded in a stilted manner he apparently intended to be gracious. Color had come into his pendulous cheeks, and John sensed that he was at last tasting the reward for which he had screwed up his courage—no easy matter, probably, after a lifetime spent in the stifling atmosphere of filing cabinets—to escape with Anna, and afterward to escape again

with Tia Marie and her wild followers.

"And further," the Chinese continued, "I am filled with happiness at the thought that the entrance of this gracious abode was permitted me by that very hero who contrived an exit for the illustrious personage from the claws of the running dogs of revisionism, even as I was transported with delight to learn earlier that the hero was to be honored with an exalted responsibility in the revolutionary legitimist government." He bowed toward John Castle, then, seeing surprise on his face as well as Anna's, added apologetically, "But perhaps I have anticipated the illustrious person's announcement; if so, I tender a thousand pardons."

The President looked abashed. "I hadn't made any announcement yet, as a matter of fact, but your information is correct. Mr. Castle, I intend to form a skeleton government in exile here; and on consulting with my—hurrph!—my advisors, I am appointing you Secretary of Defense. You are empowered to take your organization, ARES as I believe it is called, into your department as a branch of military intelligence."

"Thank you very much," John said dryly.

"And now won't you sit down with us, General?" Lothrup asked.

The Chinese declined the invitation. "I could not, not yet. I have not greeted and congratulated the fourth of your number who should, but for the great reverence I bear the revolutionary legitimist government, have been first; the beautiful and virtuous lady of the lovely name." He bowed deeply to Anna. "My joy lacks only the added vigor it would receive from the presence of the other two gentlemen so gallantly rescued. Was not one of them a former associate of yours? A Mr. Cooper?"

Lothrop looked significantly at John Castle. "You can see that the General has his own military intelligence."

"As for myself," the Chinese continued as though he had not heard the Martian's aside, "I have no title, despite the kind words sometimes addressed to me; the jade name, in his revolutionary wisdom, abolished all ranks in the People's Liberation army shortly before the still-lamented death. In our own Kuo-yu, the national language, I am humble Lee Shaw Tong. To facilitate contact with the as-yet-unimproved, the word sometimes assigned to me is permitted to be used."

Still smiling, the Chinese seated himself at the table.

"Tell me . . ." Anna began, then hesitated, overcome by her own boldness.

"Yes?" The Chinese general's eyes nearly disappeared into his cheeks with the energy of his courtesy.

"Well, I don't suppose I should be asking this, but why do you say 'revolutionary legitimist government'? It is the legitimate government, of course . . ."

General Lee inclined his head. "Is it not as rain that falls into a clean basin? Your people by a revolution freed your country from the imperialist-colonialists of Great Britain. That is nation now very friendly with my own, but in past times were they not notorious?"

Anna nodded. "I suppose so."

"So, revolutionary, then. That the forces now seeking to destroy you over the resistance of my own poor troops are counterrevolutionary is shown beyond argument by their attachment to the neo-reactionaries of Moscow."

Interested in spite of himself, John asked, "These are the Martian-armed Chinese I've heard about?"

The general nodded solemnly. "The jade name said: 'We defeat the many with the few.'"

"They are holding the line of the Green River?"

"Beyond it, actually," Emil Lothrop put in.

"Can they continue to hold?"

The Chinese spread his hands. "The jade name also said: 'Mobile warfare or positional warfare? Our answer is mobile warfare.' Although," he added, "many of our men would take it as an omen were we driven back across that river."

Lothrop raised his eyebrows and the Chinese explained, "It was the name of the fourth and last bride of the jade name; Chiang Ching, which is Green River. In the Central Glorious People's United Country her memory is unwithered."

President Huggins was plainly disquieted by the turn the conversation had taken. To Lothrop he said testily, "Don't you think it's time you explained why you've brought us here? What is the purpose of this meeting?"

"I want to arrange a counterbroadcast to the one you monitored a few minutes ago, Mr. President. As you have probably heard, now that General Lee's men are trained, we will soon commit our reserves to an offensive. I intend to match that with an informational campaign. All of you as well as myself will be involved."

"All of us?" Anna Trees asked.

"You are a beautiful girl, Miss Trees, lately escaped from one of those Rectification Centers whose name the public is already coming to dread. The rest of us, I suppose, are obvious enough. President Huggins is the legitimate leader of the American nation. General Lee is the chief of the military 'advisors' "—Lothrop smiled briefly—"loaned us by Mainland China. John is chief of ARES and I am director of the Martian expedition. What I wanted to discuss this afternoon was the content of this first broadcast . . ."

The meeting droned on, with Lothrop, Lee, and Huggins doing most of the talking, and John grew certain that the Martian had had far more in mind in calling it than he had admitted. He was clearly sounding out and gauging both the Chinese and the elderly bureaucrat, and not always liking what he found. General Lee wanted his corps of "advisors" expanded to match the size of the Pro Tem Government militia, and control of the Martian forces as well. He was polite and circuitous, but that was what he wanted. Huggins felt quite simply that he was in charge of everything, ARES, the Martians, and the Chinese, whether anyone else was willing to admit it or not. And as ineffectual and impractical as the old man might be, it was soon apparent that he was not an utter fool. He understood the political situation very well, and he was determined to use it to his own best advantage.

At last John and Anna excused themselves and slipped out of the meeting. They had reached the building in small, ducted-fan hovercraft of a simple type he had learned to fly while preparing for the raid on the Rectification Center; it was a pleasure to leave the confusion of words and watch the snow swirl in the downdraft from the blades as they rose above the highest branches of the sycamores.

Below them the snow-covered countryside spread itself like a map on white paper, the hills indicated mostly by the bluish shadows they cast in the light of the setting sun.

"Look!" Anna said suddenly, and gestured. "I saw flashes of light over there. Is that where they're fighting?"

He nodded.

"How many men are there? Just over there, I mean."

Unexpectedly he felt tension he had not even known existed creeping out of his shoulder and neck muscles. It was good to be alone with Anna again; although they had spent part of the morning together there had been no privacy, and the hurried

flight from the caves to meet General Lee had been too brief for them to do more than take off, kiss self-consciously, and land again. "Ours or theirs?" he asked, mostly to hear her speak again.

"Both. Are ours all General Lee's Chinese?"

"In that sector they're all Chinese, yes. But they're not all the men Lee has by any means. Three weeks ago when I first came here there were only five hundred Chinese. Now there are fifteen hundred, including about three hundred over there where you were looking."

"That doesn't seem like very many."

"It isn't, with the enemy massing hundreds of thousands against those few miles of front; but three weeks ago Dr. Lothrop was saying that we couldn't absorb or arm more than the five hundred. Now look at us." He edged the hovercraft a little farther from the fighting area, going deliberately slowly to prolong the flight.

"Then he was wrong?"

John shrugged, wanting to put his arm around her but somehow hesitating to do so. "He was wrong about arming them. New weapons were made; sometimes by converting existing equipment they had brought for other purposes, sometimes from components bought from Europe or Canada. I wouldn't say he was wrong about absorbing them; the tail's getting ready to wag the dog already—you must have heard it in there—or perhaps we're the tail now."

Anna nodded solemnly. "President Huggins is worried about it too. I can tell."

"He's not the only one."

Suddenly Anna smiled and laid her hand in his. "Wasn't it wonderful of him to make you Secretary of Defense? You'll go down in history."

"Frankly," John said, "I'd trade my place in the record books, whatever that may be, for the pleasure of hearing that Lothrop's going to drop this whole idea of setting up a rump constitutional government."

Anna stared at him, startled. "You don't mean that."

"I do, and I'm going to tell Lothrop so at the first opportunity." He realized that he had shocked her, and tried to soften it. "In my opinion the correct time for setting up a constitutional government would be after the war is won. Right now it can do nothing but cause difficulties."

She withdrew her hand. "What a rotten thing to say after

President Huggins was so good to you."

"I think even he would have to admit that I was a little good to him first. But listen, Anna darling, I don't have anything against the old man. It's simply that it's insane for us to give any real importance to somebody of no special ability, selected by chance."

He waited for her to answer; but she said nothing, and in the lengthening silence he knew sickly that she was genuinely angry with him and that it was because he had somehow failed to live up to the ideals she had imagined him to feel.

Now that the Pro Tem Government forces had been pushed back until the caves were out of range of their artillery, a hangar had been set up near one of the entrances. Creating a miniature blizzard, he maneuvered the hovercraft into it and cut the engine, his feeling of hopelessness increasing as it whirred to a stop. A familiar figure came over to help him push it into the rank of other waiting vehicles. It was Japhet, grinning with transparent happiness at their return and perfectly incapable of sensing that anything was wrong.

To his sister he said, "Well, how'd it go, huh? What was the big pother about anyway?"

She made a deprecatory motion. "Just a lot of talk . . . One good thing, though; President Huggins has made John the Secretary of Defense in his cabinet. When you remember that John was merely obeying Dr. Lothrop's orders when he rescued us, I think that was very generous of him."

Japhet exclaimed, "Hey, that's great!" and while he was wringing John's hand and asking him questions, Anna disappeared into the caves. John knew her well enough to realize that it was useless to try and follow her.

He would have liked to be free that evening—his low spirits left him with no inclination to work—but that was impossible. Plans and reports had been piling up on his desk while he was planning the raid on the East Coast Rectification Center. All or nearly all were urgent and some were vital. He got a sandwich and a plastic cylinder of soup from the commissary to eat while he worked.

Once he was settled, his office door locked against casual intruders and his desk light on, he felt a sudden peace. The papers before him were only symbols, but they were tangible symbols; they could be dealt with and dismissed. Working quickly, he brushed to one side those dated five days or more ago—he would read them later for background, but most of

their information was probably obsolete. The newer ones he sorted into two stacks: routine reports from agents on the left, summaries and messages marked for his immediate attention on the right.

The most interesting-looking of these was an assessment of the "voluntary enlistments by terrestrials including deserters" and had apparently been written by a Martian with a laconic style developed from technical reports. He scanned it to pick out the nuggets of valuable intelligence.

> . . . giving reasons for desertion which are more often economic or patriotic than political. A great many of these men are familiar with the terminology of the social sciences and especially with those terms common to the Marxist and Fabian schools, while having only limited comprehension of their meaning and rejecting many of their premises . . .

With wry amusement John thought of the man he had freed almost by accident from the Rectification Center. At the time he had assumed that his prattle about what was "revolutionary" and "counterrevolutionary" to be due to the conditioning implanted before he had tried to take his own life; now he reflected that possibly, even though he was embittered against the Arlington government, the man had thought in those terms before his arrest.

> . . . several of whom mention open and violent resistance to the militia by villagers and small farmers who have been repeatedly required to furnish food, draft animals, etc. for forced payment in P.T.G. yellow scrip.

That was interesting and even important. He would make use of it during the broadcast later that night.

> . . . accordingly selection is being made on the basis of intelligence, with five percent assignments to Force A.

That was the end of the paper, without any explanation of what "Force A" was supposed to be, but he felt certain he could guess.

It was almost an open secret that Lee Shaw Tong's fifteen

hundred Chinese, their power multiplied a thousandfold by Martian weaponry, reinforced by a hastily organized corps of "volunteers and deserters," were readying for a drive eastward. They would be supported by delvers rising from underground in the enemy's rear and by air strikes by the LBV's. Already, John had heard, the Chinese were speaking of their new doctrine of Three Roads Envelopment, by which they meant underground, surface, and air.

Even among the Martians, however, not more than a fraction realized that a second force was being set up as well. Its objective was to be Arlington itself, and it would descend from space. This, almost certainly, was what the writer of the report referred to as Force A. No doubt the Chinese-Terrestrial army was Force B.

And he himself, he reflected, was readying Force C.

From all over the country he was drawing his agents toward Arlington. The attack would be coming soon, although its exact date was a secret Lothrop still held to himself; perhaps some of the ARES men would not reach the city on time, but many of them were already there and the vital assignments had been parceled out. What was it Franco was supposed to have said? "Four columns converge on the city, but there is a fifth column already within it." The phrase had become a synonym for treachery, yet the Spaniards who had formed that original fifth column had considered themselves patriots. The name of his own organization might in the future be equated with treason if they lost. Or even if, like those Falangists, they won.

Emil Lothrop, in describing the plan to him, had said, "We'll have no bombardment or other preparation that might warn them; strike at dusk and win or lose, it will be over before sunrise."

He found he was still holding the report, but before he could lay it aside there was a rap at the door and a voice called, "Mr. Castle? Dr. Lothrop wants you."

"All right," he answered. "I'm coming."

Lothrop's slender secretary was waiting for him. "I'll have to guide you," she told him. "They're going to tape the broadcast in one of the unfinished chambers, and it's way down."

He followed her through winding corridors whose wandering curves betrayed the fact that in spite of their neat walls and floors they were not part of any architecture of man; then

the pretenses ended and they went down a series of slopes floored only with unpainted planks. "We didn't put anything down here when we first moved in," the woman told him, "because we were afraid these levels would flood in a wet spring season. Now Dr. Lothrop thinks it will be more impressive if the people watching can see that we really are in a cavern."

The cameras had been set up in an enormous domed room floored with hard clay. The air was cool, almost cold, and moved with a scarcely perceptible circulation that suggested the silent motions of the buried waters which had made the caves. Lothrop, standing with a little knot of others just outside the illumination of the powerful klieg lights, motioned them to come over. "General Lee and I have already finished," he told John in the tone of the survivor of an ordeal, "and President Huggins is ready to start. If you've got anything down on paper, there's just time for the boys to letter up cue cards for you."

"I thought I'd just talk extemporaneously; it will be bad, but I'm afraid if I tried to read it that would be worse. Where's Anna?"

"Not here yet. I've sent someone after her." Lothrop looked toward President Huggins, who was seating himself in a folding chair someone had set up in front of the cameras. "He's not using any cards either," he said, "but I understand Miss Trees assisted him in putting together something and he's going to give it from memory. Quiet now."

A young Martian girl, speaking to Huggins, explained, "When the red light goes on, we're recording you. Whatever camera has its light lit is the one we're using, but we'll use this one in the middle first. There's no need to be nervous, because we can edit this or shoot it over if it isn't good. Are you ready?"

The old man nodded, and a red bulb on top of the center camera came on.

"My friends," Huggins began slowly, "like the men who preceded me I am speaking to you from the underground fortress which is now the only stronghold of constitutional government in our nation. The Constitution itself, as many of you know, has gone underground.

"The rule of law envisioned by Jefferson and the other members of the Federal Constitutional Convention of 1787 has been overthrown now for twenty years, and in its place

authority is exercised now by a cabal. For twenty years I have lived among that cabal and I know it for what it is: cowardly, weak, and cunning. Bankrupt of ideas, yet unwilling to give place or even consider the ideas of others." Huggins paused to clear his throat.

"Now a pivotal point has been reached, and as your President I have felt it my duty even though I am long past the age for such adventures to investigate and to report to you the nature of that pivotal point. Even those of you to whom the Constitution is little more than a myth may be interested to know what I have found, for I am to the best of my knowledge the only person to have moved in the highest circles of both the great alliances now contending for the mastery of our nation.

"So let me say this to you: act now! There will be no later chance, no second guess, no hope once this point has passed. For twenty years the cabal calling itself the Pro Tem Government has bribed or destroyed every group which might have resisted it. Weak, it has ruled by infecting others with its own weakness; but I say to you that whatever happens, that rule is now doomed. Whatever happens, the America you have known for the twenty years past is already destroyed.

"I need not tell you who the people you call Martians are. Dr. Lothrop has already done so more ably than I could. Nor need I tell you the identity of the Chinese whose aid Dr. Lothrop has been forced to accept as a counterweight to the aid tendered the Pro Tem Government by the Soviet Union. Nor, I think, need I explain the identity of those Russians. But I wish to tell you one fact about these Martians, and it is a fact upon which you may rely. As you know them now, they will not come again."

For a few seconds Huggins was silent, and the breath could be heard rasping faintly in his lungs. Then he continued. "They will not come thus again. They have stripped their world bare of its youth, save for a very few children. If this youth is destroyed here, a hundred years will not suffice for a new people to breed there.

"But by the same token, if they are destroyed and our cause fails, the Pro Tem Government will perish without us. Fifteen hundred years ago the Britons brought fighting men from Saxony to defend their island, and lost it forever. The Pro

Tem Government, now, can only lose—whether to us or to its supposed allies.

"I have already asked that you act. Let me tell you then what the result may be if you do not act. The scientific powers of the Martians are very great, but their numbers are very few and only a few hundreds of us have yet joined them. Because of their science they can never be dislodged—not by hundreds of thousands or even by millions. But a few hundreds cannot control the vast extent of our country.

"If we are not joined by great numbers we shall be contained, though not crushed. And eventually, by slow attrition, overcome. And when we are overcome, this country which is already poor will become destitute. We have no freedom now, though at least our tyrants are our countrymen; but we will lose that satisfaction together with our language and our heritage. As a people we have been entrapped by our desire that *someone else* do for us the things we should have done for ourselves. At first that *someone else* was to be our own government; then, when that government did not in our opinion do enough, we threw it down and put in its place that fraction of its employees who offered us the greatest bribe. If we wait now for *someone else* to restore our freedoms to us, we will wait forever."

Huggins paused again, blinking in the bright lights. "I have already spoken too long," he finished in a different tone, "and there are two other speakers who will follow me and whom I think you will be interested to hear. I hope to be able to address you again shortly." He looked at the Martian girl who had been aiming the cameras. "That's all," he said.

Lothrop and several others applauded politely.

"That was very good," John said. "Frankly, Mr. President, I didn't realize that you were such an accomplished speaker."

Huggins stood up. He had removed his glasses before going in front of the cameras and he took them out of his breast pocket now and dabbed at them with a handerchief. "I'm afraid I got it all turned around," he said diffidently. "Private Trees and I made it up, but I got myself lost in it after the first few sentences and put things in the wrong order."

A man who had joined them during the last few minutes of Huggins' talk drew John aside. "Dr. Lothrop sent me to get Miss Trees," he said, "but she wasn't in her room. I found this on her bed."

He handed over an envelope with John's name written

across the front of it. Inside it was a single sheet of paper covered with Anna's familiar script:

John,

I have been talking to the President, and he feels—as I do too—that if the war isn't ended very soon the whole United States will be destroyed. He asked me to ask you for someone who could go to President Boyde and propose an arrangement to end the fighting. (I believe he senses that you dislike him and hoped I could talk you into it.) Since I know what his ideas are and the people in Arlington and Washington, if they remember me at all, will think I have been *rectified*, I am going to go myself. I am not brave but I know that you and Dr. Lothrop only want to win the war, not end it. I watched you operate the flyer today and it looked easy. It should get me most of the way there. I have already turned off the thing in my neck, so you will not be able to talk me out of doing this that way. Say good-bye to J. for me. I love you.

Anna

He was running down the miles of corridors which led up at last to the hovercraft hangar before he had finished the letter, but he knew he would be too late.

The ninety-five percent (who did not know they were the ninety-five percent) were called the Constitutional Legion. They comprised the principal reserve of the Chinese force General Lee had named the Dawnward Marching Army, and at ten o'clock on the morning of January 19th, four days after Anna Trees had stolen a hovercraft and (according to the most reliable spottings) crossed the lines at a point where they were separated by an arm of Lake Cumberland, and four hours after the Dawnward Marching Army had attacked along the line of the old U.S. 80 highway, they were sheltering in a deeply cut valley while the Chinese attempted to dislodge the fifty thousand or so militia who stood between them and the small city of Hazard. John Castle, watching them on a screen which displayed in perfect detail the array of their fighting machines as it was viewed by a robot observation craft hovering over them, felt almost as though he

were focusing his vision on a single piece in a game of chess; yet Anna's brother Japhet was there.

He touched one of the buttons before him and the Constitutional Legion vanished, replaced by another craft's view of the battle itself. Straddling the highway, which ran through it in a deep cut, a stony ridge dominated the land for ten miles to westward. The militia, apparently on the instructions of some foresighted commander, had fortified this line of hills with an extensive complex of trenches and bunkers. Their artillery, more of it than John had ever realized they possessed, dotted the countryside behind it, firing over the ridge to support the troops there.

As he watched, a hand touched his shoulder and Emil Lothrop's voice said, "Well, we've done one thing at least."

John swiveled in his seat to look up at the Martian's face. "What's that?"

"We've restored some respect for the sciences and engineering. Ever since we showed up, the P.T.G. has had to de-mothball apparatus it had been happily forgetting for twenty years."

John knew the Martian was trying to make a friendly overture, but he had no desire to accept it. "Guns?" he asked bitterly. "Intermediate range missiles with atomic warheads. We know they've got them too."

The friendliness dropped from Lothrop's voice. "I know they do. Strike time for Force B is set for seven-twenty tonight. Will your people be ready?"

Some of the dislike he had been cultivating for Lothrop since Anna's departure slipped away from John as he reviewed the complex plan he had been developing, but he answered stubbornly, "I still think we should wait at least one extra day. Two would be better."

"You are still afraid the attack hasn't drawn off enough force from around Arlington?"

"It can't have." John knew he was correct and tried to put that certainty into his tone; this was probably the last chance to win the necessary postponement. "Even if the Pro Tem Government is panic-stricken, and even if they started moving when Lee attacked this morning, they can't possibly have shifted everything they've got. They haven't the transportation facilities."

He watched the Martian's face hopefully, but it was still unmoved. Desperately he added, "Besides, why should they be

that alarmed? Sure, Lee ate up ground for the first few hours, but he's stalled now. Don't you know that right this moment Fitzpatric Boyde's generals are telling him they've got the drive stopped?"

"We've ordered more air strikes. LBV's with optically guided air-to-ground rockets."

"Earthworks like those can absorb enormous amounts of conventional explosives, and you haven't enough air—especially with some of your best pulled off for Force B. It will take weeks."

"Which is why we will assault Arlington tonight," Lothrop said coldly.

Precisely on schedule at seven-twenty, thirteen rocket-driven Martian Lifting Body Vehicles landed in Arlington Cemetery, unloaded the living soldiers of Force B upon the graves of dead soldiers far more numerous, and took off again to join six others in making rocket strikes around the periphery of the city—some as far away as the Naval Ordnance Laboratory on the far side of old Washington, some as close as the half-ruined Pentagon Building just southeast of the cemetery. The ancient F-111's and F-111A's, which had been all Arlington could raise in its own air defense, had already been almost casually smashed.

But in Arlington itself, fighting had been going on for more than an hour before the LBV's came. Michael Morgan, a red-haired man with freckles on his arms who had been born and reared in Richmond a hundred miles to the south, had died in the attempt to seize the broadcasting facilities from which the Pro Tem Government's news and propaganda transmissions originated. He had died with two minds sharing his large skull, his own and John Castle's. Morgan had known he was dying, and as the hot blood filled his lungs and came trickling out his nostrils and his mouth John Castle had felt an almost irresistible desire, a famishing like the ache of a drowning man for air, to leave the dying body and be only his own living self again; but Morgan had begged him in his anguish to remain, and he had stayed until the final darkness closed in and he had found himself connected to no one.

Force B had moved due west from the cemetery toward the nerve centers of the Pro Tem Government, meeting little resistance until it had left the openness of the burial grounds and entered the maze of streets beyond. Then there had been

sniping from armed peaceguards and regular army troops, who fired from the windows and roofs of buildings at the spiderlike armored vehicles. This had not been serious, but it had forced the spiders to button up, and caused a few casualties among the infantrymen in powered armor who accompanied them, when bullets struck vulnerable spots.

Carter had reported by radio that trucks and personnel carriers loaded with troops were entering the fighting zone from the southwest. John Castle relayed the information to the Martian officer commanding Force B and asked Carter to investigate further. Twelve minutes later a second transmission from Carter added the information that the new soldiers wore the rounded helmets and long-skirted greatcoats of the Soviet army. John then attempted mental contact with Carter but was unable to complete, and no further radio messages from him were ever received.

Six minutes after that, at 8:08 p.m., Force B reported that it was under attack by suicide troops armed with satchel charges and that a few similar charges had already been thrown down from the building tops. The report added that cannon lasers were being used to destroy the buildings to prevent this. At eight fifteen a second report confirmed that the suicide troops included many men in Russian uniform, and added that eight spiders and twenty-three infantrymen had already been lost. Close-in support from the LBV's was requested.

By eight seventeen these were making rocket strafing runs on the area west of the Interstate 66 right-of-way. As nearly as John was able to reconstruct the events afterward, these runs killed at least twelve hundred of the Russian troops and more than sixteen thousand Americans—militia, army, and civilians. Among those thus destroyed were Sarah Yoshida and more than twenty other ARES agents.

At eight thirty-five Force B reported that it had lost another seventeen spiders and pointed out that these, with the eight previously lost, amounted to more than half its force. (Infantry losses were not given.) It further reported that antitank devices such as hand-launched short-range rockets and magnetic grenades were in use by the enemy. It requested and received permission to withdraw to the cemetery.

Two LBV's landed at 9:05 to evacuate the survivors of Force B, but one of these was destroyed on the ground. It was then still nearly ten hours until sunrise.

CHAPTER X

". . . STAND BACK AND BE STATESMEN"

The square of Heavenly Peace seemed crowded, enormous as it was. Girls by the hundreds of thousands passed without cease from right to left; they wore blouses and trousers of white canvas, and red sashes, and each girl carried a large bouquet of scarlet flowers which were almost certainly paper. From time to time a slightly older girl in the center of the mass struck a gong she carried on a pole like a flag; when she did so, every other girl immediately performed a back flip—leaping up, grasping her shins without dropping her bouquet, momentarily turning a snowy-white canvas posterior to the gray winter sky of North China, landing one pace behind her starting point. It seemed that the ground should shake when they all came down together, but they did it very quietly so that the clanging of the gong was almost the only sound.

The girls did not look cold, but John Castle felt certain his own feet were frozen and wondered how well the others were taking it. As inconspicuously as he could he looked at them from the corners of his eyes. Tia Marie stood as straight as a gymnast at attention; in her heavy coat and fur hat (a gift of the Chinese) she looked Russian, he thought, but not Soviet—there was something too imperious about her. She was Huggins' Secretary of State now, the first woman Secretary of State in American history, and she looked like some proud and masculine White baroness.

Beyond her Huggins himself seemed a trivial figure, peering from under the brim of the black homburg he removed whenever a flag went past—and there had been hundreds of them already.

Those flags had caused a moment of wretched embarrassment, though now that it was over John found himself able to smile at it. Since the Pro Tem Government had retained the

Stars and Stripes, the Chinese had apparently felt that displaying it might give offense, and no one in the caves had ever found time to design a new flag to distinguish the Constitutionalists. So the Chinese had done it for them, superimposing an orange-red disk streaked with black canals over the striped portion of the official flag of the United States. Emil Lothrop had uncovered without a shadow of expression on his face, but Huggins had waited through paralyzing seconds before slowly doffing the homburg.

The tumbling girls were gone from the square; in his brief reverie, John realized gratefully, he had missed their exit and perhaps the marching unit immediately following them as well. Young men in blue filled the square now, young men carrying banners with Chinese characters and huge pictures on sticks. Mao Tse-tung appeared over and over again, but the Regent of Mao was also there, resembling his master (at least to Western eyes) with his round cheeks and high forehead. Smaller pictures dodged among the great ones: Marx, Engels, Stalin. Also more rarely the guests: Lothrop, Huggins, and even Tia Marie and John himself once. But always, Mao, Mao, Mao.

When the parade was over, he and Huggins and Tia Marie were escorted back to the hotel where they had been allowed to halt just long enough to refresh themselves after leaving the LBV which had flown them from the caves to Peking. There the Chinese army officer who had been escorting them turned them over to a slender and quite pretty girl who spoke excellent English. She in turn guided them to a dining room where they were able to warm their feet while eating roast duck and sipping a thin, aromatic wine.

"Do you like the food?" the girl asked President Huggins politely.

He nodded. "Yes, very much. I'm sorry, young lady, but I didn't catch your name when we were introduced."

"Chinese names are hard to recall when one does not speak the national tongue, I am told." The girl smiled charmingly. "In your language my name would be Flowering Quince. You may call me that. After you have eaten, will you wish to rest, or shall I show you some of the points of interest in our ancient city? I am told that the thrice-fortunate Dr. Lothrop, your leader, may be all the remainder of the day in conferring with the Regent," she bowed her head perfunctorily, "of Mao."

Before Huggins could say anything John asked, "What sights are there?"

The girl smiled again. "I could show you the parks and gardens around the ancient Summer Palace. Although it is winter still, they are yet very lovely. There are carts, and the keepers of the parks have men to propel them for you while you sit in robes with your feet upon warm charcoal stoves."

"I like gardens," Huggins said reflectively. "They seem to tell us something about the way the world ought to be." He looked to Tia Marie for confirmation.

"In our country," the big woman told Flowering Quince, "we rent nature when we were strong, and now that we are weak nature rends us. We hope that when the war is over we can teach our people to harvest instead of destroying."

"The war is going well? I have heard that the peasants are rising against the revisionist imperialists."

"They are rising against your people too," John told her. "Not as much, because they don't control as much territory as the Russians, but wherever they can reach them." He knew that whatever he said would be reported shortly to the Chinese government, but he found that he no longer greatly cared.

"That is unfortunate," the girl said, "since we have only come to free your country." Huggins immediately agreed with her and the conversation drifted into less dangerous areas.

The carts proved to be something more like double bath chairs than the rickshaws John had expected. Each seated two persons and was pushed from behind by a single operator in the mud-stained clothing of a laborer. Tia Marie was seated in one cart with Huggins, and John found himself beside Flowering Quince, an honor he felt certain he owed to his indiscretion at lunch. "Do you like gardens," she asked, "or is it only for the elderly man's sake you come?"

John shrugged.

"Perhaps it too strongly reminds you of another place?"

It was a moment before John caught the interpreter's meaning, then he looked at her sharply.

"It was not wise of me to say that, I think," the girl added, "but I wished you to know that here you are spoken most highly of because you commanded in that battle, even by the foolish persons who say that it was because only Chinese can fight well against the revisionist-imperialists that you lost. I

have not seen your cemetery at Arlington, but I have seen others of your burial places, and in winter they must be much like this."

"I suppose so."

"It does not surprise you that I have been to your country? Very few Chinese go."

"I know," he said, "but you speak English too well to have learned it here."

"I learned in Britain, and under a British passport I was able to visit New York for a few weeks in summer. Have you also been there?"

"You know I have."

A winding path circled a large artificial lake fringed with willow trees whose trailing branches chafed in the bitter Mongolian winds. John felt suddenly cold in spite of the heavy robes he had been given. Beside him the Chinese girl said, "It was something to speak about, and it is more polite to ask. Would you rather I told you about this garden instead?"

"Whatever you want."

"It is very old. It was built first for the emperors, and they collected strange beasts here. The present Regent," she gave the customary bow, "of Mao has restored that ancient custom and installed a zoological garden. I do not show you the beasts because in this cold most will be in their cages."

"Speaking of the Regent of Mao," John said, "where is he conferring with Dr. Lothrop anyway?"

"Ah!" Flowering Quince flashed her smile again. "Now we will play turnabout and you question me; is that not so?"

"What's the harm in asking that? I was merely curious."

"Suppose this man pushing the cart were an assassin? He would know then where to go."

"I think it's a good deal more likely he's an agent who speaks English nearly as well as you do. If I were running your organization he would be."

"You are too clever for me. If I tell you that the exalted conversation is being held in the Summer Palace in whose gardens we are enjoying ourselves, will you tell me of the fighting for Arlington? Then I will have something to report to my superior, who is almost as clever as you yourself."

"Was that why we were brought here? So we'd be close at hand? What if we had wanted to stay in the hotel?"

"Then you would have been allowed to do so, of course. But it was intimated to me that should you desire entertain-

ment it would be well to bring you here, where you could be summoned if you are needed." She paused momentarily, apparently to think of a question that would catch his interest. "What is the sensation, to view a battle through the eyes of others? To be a disembodied spirit?"

"Like being an embodied one, except thinner." He tried again to change the subject: "Aren't these gardens open to the people? Why don't we see anyone else?"

"No, they are kept for the Regent of Mao only. I am told that in the old time, once a flood destroyed part of the wall and the people came in, and because there was a famine caused by the flood they killed the animals and ate them." She hesitated. "I think your country is something like that now, is it not?"

"The other way around. The animals eat the people."

She slipped a slender, cool hand into his under the robes. "And our people and the imperialist-revisionists are using your land as a battleground. No wonder your eyes are as an old man's."

There was the crunching sound of someone running on the gravel behind them, and John twisted his head to see a military officer in the rather grand Chinese full dress come panting up behind them. He spoke to Flowering Quince in their own language and she in turn spoke sharply to the men who pushed the chairs. Abruptly they turned and started back the way they had come. President Huggins, sounding somewhat alarmed, called out, "What is this? What's the matter?"

"The treaty has been agreed to," the Chinese girl called back to him, "and we must go there so the signing can be photographed."

Huggins tried to stand up in his chair-cart. "But I haven't even been consulted."

"Sign first," John shouted to him. "Consult afterward."

The Summer Palace was an impressive stone building in the old, rambling Chinese style, but they got to see very little of it as they were whisked down halls with uneven flooring and across sad, winter-stripped courtyards. Huggins protested vigorously at first, but after Lothrop had spoken to him privately he took the seat assigned him at the conference table, gray-faced.

For the cameras the Regent of Mao did most of the talking, speaking in the modernized Mandarin the Chinese now called

"national language." He signed the thin sheets of rice paper with a flourish, then passed them to Lothrop and Huggins, who each spoke a few platitudes and affixed their own names. Within an hour afterward they were back on the LBV that had brought them to Peking less than eight hours ago, all of them no doubt feeling as John did that there had been something a bit unreal about the whole trip.

Huggins seemed sunk in depression, while Tia Marie was as silent as John had ever known her, staring from one of the small windows at the Sea of Japan far below. As they rose, the sky on the north side of the strangely shaped craft darkened until stars shone in it, and on the south the automatic action of photosensitive glass darkened the ports to protect their eyes from the sun's ultraviolet.

John had seated himself two places behind Lothrop. Now that they were well into the great ballistic arc which would return them to the east-central United States, he was a little surprised to see the Martian stand up and make his way back to him. Relations between them had been more strained than ever since the debacle at Arlington, sometimes to a point that made John wonder, after the bitter exchanges were over, why Lothrop continued him as chief of ARES when he could have replaced him so easily.

None of this was apparent in Lothrop's bearing now as he settled himself beside John. "I suppose you're wondering," he said offhandedly, "what this was all about. It's been rather sudden, I know."

"Nobody has bothered to tell me anything, but it seems pretty clear that you've just signed a mortgage on the family farm. I'd be happy to know what you got in exchange."

"Actually the treaty, as worded, was entirely favorable to us. We got a great deal, and only agreed to do the things that would make it possible for us to receive the benefits."

"In other words we bought a free lunch?"

Lothrop leaned back in his seat, resting his head upon the high back of it and appearing about to address the ceiling of the LBV. John could not help noticing how fatigued he looked. At length he said, "Suppose I ask you a few hypothetical questions; but before I begin, do you know why I brought you on this trip instead of leaving you in the caves to run things in my absence—and where no doubt you're badly needed just now?"

"Because you needed window dressing for this and didn't

trust me to watch the store while you were gone, I suspect."

The Martian swiveled his head to look at him. "That was quite unnecessary. You're no traitor and I know it. If I didn't I wouldn't leave you where you are in spite of all your ability. I brought you because you have the finest tactical and strategic mind this war has yet produced, and if we got into military planning with the Chinese I wanted to be able to consult you at first hand."

"I hardly showed that at Arlington."

"You came close to winning against forces overwhelmingly more powerful than those at your disposal. Every one of the pre-landing objectives assigned was taken by your ARES people and not one man of Force B was lost in landing."

"Let's get to the point. Whatever may have actually impelled you to take me on this jaunt, you haven't consulted me at all."

"I'm doing that now. Suppose, hypothetically, the Chinese wanted to invade the continental United States. How could they best go about it?"

"With or without starting an open war with Russia? The two of them are practically there now anyway."

"Without."

"In that case China would necessarily have to ally itself with some nation owning a merchant fleet, since she doesn't have the sea transport something like that would require. Politically I suppose the best choice would be Great Britain; strategically it would be Japan. I asked about a war with Soviet Russia because, if you had wanted to take that into consideration, it would have brought in the possibility of jumping the Bering Strait after seizing eastern Siberia."

"Turn it around now and suppose the U.S.S.R. wanted to do it. Could they come in American ships?"

John snorted. "The Chinese have a better merchant marine than that themselves; even before the Constitution was overthrown, American commercial shipping was allowed to rot away to nothing. But the Russians wouldn't have to; they're the world's largest tonnage carriers themselves."

"All right, now what if I tell you that the Chinese are planning to invade—with an army of more than three million men."

"Are you serious?"

"I was never more serious in my life. That was what that agreement was about." Reaching into a pocket of his coat,

Lothrop produced a small, flat can, of the type used to store motion-picture film. "It's all down here, if you wanted to get the Chinese translated, I suppose. The Regent of Mao told me he was going to read the entire agreement aloud, and it appeared that he did."

"You realize what something like that will do to the country?"

Lothrop shrugged. "I had no choice. General Lee Shaw Tong was under orders to seize our headquarters if we refused."

"I would have refused anyway," John said angrily. "What are we supposed to do now? Seize a beachhead for them on the West Coast?"

"You, that is ARES specifically, are to furnish one thousand guides and interpreters. The interpreters are to be given a crash course in Chinese before the landing."

"I haven't that many people."

"So I informed the Regent of Mao. He indicated that you are to recruit them."

"Have the Chinese got ships?"

Lothrop shook his head.

"Then maybe I'll have time enough. It ought to take them a good ten years to build a fleet big enough to take three million men and their supplies across the Pacific."

"They plan to land before midsummer."

"Stop playing cat and mouse. How do they hope to do that?"

"By air—or more correctly, by space. They wanted me to have sufficient transport for their army and I told them I would need until midsummer to build it. They were very understanding."

"We haven't the industrial establishment. Can we get the ships built abroad?"

Lothrop shook his head.

"So we've got until midsummer, say July or August I suppose, to somehow maneuver ourselves into a position where Lee can't grab us when we default? Is that it?"

"We have until midsummer to end the war and get General Lee and his men withdrawn; let's put it that way. I have a plan for doing that, a great deal of the implementation of which is going to be up to you."

As Lothrop's voice droned on, John found himself becoming aroused almost in spite of himself. The plan was a grand

gamble, as great as any in history, and the fact that it was being forced upon them did not and could not destroy the thrill of it.

Six weeks later, he was standing on the bridge of a blacked-out Indian freighter talking to its captain.

It had been an almost unendurable six weeks. Besides implementing the Plan, he had had to work frantically day after day and night after night simply in order to stave off a decisive defeat which would have made it impossible to put the Plan into effect. And there had been no word whatever from Anna.

Militarily their position had steadily worsened since the defeat at Arlington. Much of the ground gained by Lee Shaw Tong's Dawnward Marching Army had been lost in bitter inch-by-inch fighting which left the field carpeted with dead men and wrecked machines; and though the Chinese "advisors" lost by attrition had been replaced and more than replaced, until there were now nearly ten thousand, the Pro Tem Government forces had become daily better organized, armed, and led, and their Russian allies more numerous.

Politically the situation had somewhat improved, if only because of the increasing hatred generated by the brutality and coercion practiced by their enemies. It gave the Martians something to hang their propaganda on; and they had learned at last to stop talking about the glory of pure science and speak instead of the positive benefits it could produce: wealth, unthought-of leisure, longer life. The Constitutionalist Legion had grown and was to some extent a counterweight to the Chinese . . .

But they were losing.

The ship moved under him, responding to the long Atlantic swell, and he grasped a railing to brace himself. The ride out in the launch had not been long enough to give him sea legs.

"You'll take it now?" Captain Saha asked. It was not so much a question as a hopeful statement.

"Yes."

"You counted it? You're satisfied it's all there?" Saha was a powerful-looking man with skin the color of coffee, but there was nothing particularly Indian in his appearance; in his slightly frayed blues he might have been a merchant officer of almost any nation.

"I've counted it," John said. "You can put it on the

launch." In point of fact he had examined the chests only superficially; the Plan was too important to be delayed for one or two missing bars.

Captain Saha nodded significantly to the mate who had been waiting at the far side of the bridge, and the man now hurried away. "I don't mind telling you, it's been a strain," Saha said. "I'm going to be glad to wash my hands of it. What do you people want with a thousand kilos of gold anyway? And why not fly it to where you want it?"

"I follow my orders," John told him stonily, "and I assume you follow yours. Shall we watch them put it on the launch?"

"We can see them from here. They'll be bringing the chests along the foredeck there; just look down."

There was no moon, but the night was clear and in the soft starlight he could see two lascars come out on deck carrying one of the twenty-five forty-kilogram chests between them. One of his own men walked beside them with a submachine gun cradled in his arms.

Behind him Saha muttered, "The launch ought to hold the weight, but it's more than a ton."

"You ought to know, it's your launch."

"It'll hold it."

"Good." John adjusted the clumsy straps that supported the laser-pistol under his left arm. "I'm going down on deck."

Captain Saha followed him down, and together they supervised stowing the heavy chest on board the boat now riding alongside Saha's small freighter. When the work was finished John asked, "Who's coming with us? My orders state that in addition to your boat crew we are to have an officer of your ship with us until the bullion is safe ashore."

In a low voice Saha answered, "I thought I'd go myself, but do you think you should talk about it so openly?"

"I imagine your crew has guessed some time ago what's in those chests, and my men have been told. Do you have a revolver?"

"In my stateroom," Saha said. "I'll get it."

John raised his hand. "Don't. I asked that because I want to make certain that neither you nor any of your subordinates are armed. My own people are going to be the only ones with guns on this trip." It would never do, he reflected, for the Indians to put up a real battle when the staged theft of the gold took place. His own men would drop their weapons on command, and it should be possible to make the entire charade

look real enough without a shot being fired.

A few minutes later he was following Saha down a swaying Jacob's ladder to the launch. The sea had been almost glassily smooth when they had put out from the little fishing port of Belhaven a few hours ago, but the wind had been rising slowly ever since and now whitecaps glowed phosphorescently in the darkness. As he settled himself into a seat close to the gold, he asked Saha, "How long is it going to take us to get to the inlet, loaded down like this?"

"Not long." The Indian captain seemed to read his mind. "She's not going to capsize just because the water's a little choppy. You worry about the coast guard and I'll worry about the boat."

With his face hidden in the darkness John smiled to himself. The coast guard had been one thing, almost the only thing, against which they could really protect themselves. At a height above the reach of any airplane two Martian LBV's were circling over the launch, and no coast guard cutter would be allowed to approach within ten miles of it.

After the open Atlantic, Pamlico Sound seemed as calm as a swimming pool; the launch stopped the irritating pitching motion it had exhibited earlier, the coxswain revved up the engine, and they made better time. An Indian sailor muttered something in a language John could not understand, and he asked Saha what the man had said.

"He sees the channel buoy that marks the mouth of the river. So do I." The Captain gestured. "Those lights will be Swanquarter."

John could not see the buoy, but he nodded. Thus far everything was running smoothly, and soon the show he had planned so carefully would begin. When they tied up to the wharf at Belhaven a light would flash on them and five ARES agents dressed as militia would arrest them and seize the gold India was paying for a mutated rice strain which would double her growing capacity. After an argument Captain Saha and his men would be released to spread the word—first to their own government, then no doubt to the world at large—that the normally bankrupt Pro Tem Government had suddenly acquired wealth.

Now the engine was slowing a little and he braced himself. Like many small American towns Belhaven no longer boasted much in the way of lighting facilities, but he thought he could make out the dark line of the wharf where it thrust out into

the harbor. It was always possible for something to go amiss at the last moment. One of the Indians might decide to be a hero, one of his own men might overplay his part . . .

The launch bumped the wharf and an Indian sailor jumped out to make a rope fast. John stood up, trying to appear casual and stretching his cramped joints after the long, cold trip. Captain Saha stood up too, saying something in Hindi.

Then the launch was flooded with light and a harsh voice barked a command. Turning his eyes away from the glare John raised his hands, hearing the sound of his men's guns clattering into the bilges. One of the men then put a hand on the wharf and vaulted up as the Indian sailor had done. A pistol cracked flatly and he fell backward into the boat.

The man who had been shot—his name was Tolle and he had a good if undistinguished record as an observer and saboteur—moaned and whimpered through most of the night; but just before the first thin knives of dirty gray light filtered through the cracks of the shed in which he was imprisoned, John realized that he had not heard him for some time. He listened intently. The only sounds were the lapping of water around the piers—the shed was actually on one of the wharfs and as it grew lighter he found he could see the water through crevices in the floor—and the shuffling boots of the sentry outside when he grew tired of lounging in one position and lounged in another.

They had tied his wrists and ankles with wire, very tightly. Long before he realized Tolle was no longer making the noises that proved him still alive, his wrists and arms had become numb. He could feel their weight on his back, as though two sausages lay there with their ends touching at his backside.

Saha and his Indian sailors had been marched into the town somewhere—he had been able to deduce that much from the talk he had heard when he was first put into the shed—but he did not know just where his own men were being held, although it was obviously nearby.

The sunlight was bright through the cracks before he heard the sentry outside snap to attention and bring his weapon to present-arms. A moment later the door was kicked open. He found himself blinking up at a lieutenant of the Peaceguard, a thin, hawk-faced man with a pistol belt worn over his blue greatcoat. It was the same officer who had directed the cap-

ture the night before, the man who had shot Tolle.

He thrust the toe of one boot under John's shoulder and turned him over, then squatted to compare John's face with a small photograph. After a moment he asked, "What's your name?"

John gave him the name which corresponded to the forged identity papers in his pocket.

"That's a lie. Your name is John Castle."

"I can prove who I am," John said.

The peaceguard snorted; to the sentry still standing by outside he said curtly, "Untie his legs."

There was only one card left to play. "Do you know what's in those boxes? It would make you and every one of your men rich for life, and with our help . . ." The officer kicked him in the face, then again in the head.

He regained consciousness slowly, the thought circling through his mind that Lothrop must come soon—that Lothrop must know. Before he was aware of the pain of his cheek and temple, or the numbness of his arms and the filthy flooring pressed against his mouth he was somehow conscious of the implanted mechanism—no larger than a postage stamp and no thicker than the worn dimes Anna had pressed into his hand before each lecture . . .

Then he was aware, as he must have been subconsciously earlier, of the contact. Because he was no more than semiconscious, perhaps, it seemed tentative; weakly and unskilfully groping, feeling for his mind.

The Peaceguard officer was kicking him in the ribs. Each kick hurting brought him nearer to full consciousness, and he could hear the man saying, "Get up. Come on, get up," two or three times in succession. With his arms still bound behind him he tried to flounder to his feet; and as he did so he felt something come gladly, seating itself in the back of his skull. Not Lothrop. The thought was emotion-charged and somehow younger.

"On your feet," the sentry said. The officer had stepped aside for him, and he slipped one hand under John's arm and pulled him to his feet. He staggered and would have fallen except for the wall of the shed.

"Come on, Castle," the officer said. "You're wanted."

"By whom?" The circulation was returning painfully to his legs.

"Top brass," the lieutenant told him. To the sentry he added, "When they heard what we had here they drove all night to get here. The General came himself." The sentry looked suitably impressed.

John said, "You didn't think they'd trust you with the gold long enough for you to wake up, did you?" and received a shove.

The "top brass" had taken over the best hotel in Belhaven. Three Peaceguard cruisers with machineguns and flamethrowers patched onto their gas-projector turrets stood in front of it, and a Peaceguard corporal in an immaculate uniform was polishing the windshield of a sleek blue staff car. He stopped his work just long enough to give the lieutenant a casual salute which implied that he was a familiar of officers far more exalted.

The visitor in John Castle's brain was throbbing with excited questions: *Are you all right? . . . where? . . . what (happened?) are you going to do?/they to you?*

He told it: Be quiet. Just watch for now; I'll need my wits.

And could not help thinking to himself, "Such as they are."

A Peaceguard major received them. Half a minute later John was being ushered into the hotel's so-called Presidential suite, or at least into its reception room, a place originally furnished in the grandiose style of the 1970's but now grown frayed and impure as the original pieces had given way to cheaper replacements. No one occupied the sprawling, puffy chairs, but they could hear the sound of a running water tap. Raising his voice slightly the major called, "I have him here, sir."

"He's secured?"

Faint as it was, muffled with distance and obscured by the sound of the water, there was something hideously familiar about the voice.

"His feet are free, General."

"I believe" (there was something faintly humorous in the purring note of the reply) "that I can shoot well enough to prevent him from kicking me."

The man who came into the reception room had silver stars on the shoulders of his blue tunic and a silver-plated Makarov pistol in his right hand; the stars and the pistol John had never seen before, but the man's round and fleshy face had returned from an old nightmare.

"Sit down, Mr. Castle," the General told him. "Only my

honored subordinates are required to stand in my presence."

With a coldly professional backhand blow, the major sent him reeling into one of the chairs.

"That is sufficient, Major Avery. You may go."

The General lowered his heavy body into a chair facing John's. "Good morning, Mr. Castle."

John nodded in reply.

"You don't appear happy to see me."

"I was trying to decide how to congratulate you on your numerous promotions. I suppose that as a matter of courtesy I should say that I am pleased that you became a major, thrilled about your lieutenant colonelcy, delighted with your eagle . . ."

"That will do, Mr. Castle, you need not strain your invention."

"Transported with ecstasy at your star."

"For a moment, when I saw the blood running down your face, Mr. Castle, I actually feared that your insouciance would have left you; and looking forward as I am to removing it myself, I was gravely disappointed. I see I concerned myself uselessly."

Hatred burned in the back of John's skull and he shook his head to clear it.

"You might be interested to hear," the General was saying, "that you yourself are largely responsible for my present eminence; although I flatter myself that my own excellent record and General Grant's recommendation had something to do with it as well." He had laid the pistol in his lap now, and with his hands clasped over his paunch watched John with bright, intent eyes; his immobile face could not conceal that he was enjoying himself.

"I am?"

"Yes indeed. As your duties with the enemies of the poor will no doubt have required you to keep informed of such developments, it will have come to your attention that for a time I filled the office of Chief of Civil Police in our old locality . . ."

John said evenly, "I believe the Constitutional armies have about taken over your old bailiwick now."

The General smiled. "And more, at one time. But I think you have been out of touch for a while, Mr. Castle. A day or a day and a half, perhaps. We have been pressing you very hard lately."

Iwhat I was going to tell! I'm the only one (and the technician who runs the transmitter) here . . .

"Congratulations. Still I don't see why I should be held guilty of your promotion."

The General chuckled. "It's really an excellent anecdote, Mr. Castle. You don't know how much I've looked forward to telling it to you. It concerns a rather amateurish theatrical performance of yours . . ."

"Well?"

After smoothing his tunic and picking up the pistol again, the General gestured. "If you will accompany me to the next room?"

It was a smaller room, and it had been darkened by closing thick drapes over the windows. At one end stood a portable motion-picture screen and at the other a small projector with sound equipment. Looking at the reels John saw that the film had already been run partway. He took the chair which had been set for him well in front of the projector. Behind him the General touched a switch.

The screen was suddenly lit with the earnest, aging face of President Huggins: "At first that *someone else* was to be our own government; then, when that government did not in our opinion do enough, we threw it down and put in its place that fraction of its employees who offered us the greatest bribe. If we wait now for *someone else* to restore our freedoms to us we will wait forever."

There was a pause, the old man blinking slightly out into the dimness. "I have already spoken too long, and there are two other speakers who will follow me whom I think you will be interested to hear. I hope to be able to address you again shortly."

President Huggins disappeared leaving silver blankness, and a disembodied voice announced, "It is our pleasure now to present the Chief of ARES." John's own face flashed onto the screen, and he heard himself deliver the brief extemporaneous talk he had made after all attempts to intercept Anna had failed. Behind him another switch clicked and his image on the screen froze, mouth open, in the act of speech.

"Imagine my feelings on first viewing this, Mr. Castle. My chagrin; the bitter self-reproach with which I recalled that you had once been in my power, but that I had forborne to kill you."

John said nothing; he was attempting to move his arms to

some position that would restore at least partial circulation to his numb hands, but the wire held them and he could not.

"I will not run the rest of this for you and force you to endure young Norman Cooper's juvenile tirade; and I must apologize for the quality of the film, which as you can see was obtained by photographing the screen of a television set. But I will now ask you also to consider the emotions of our President, Mr. Boyde, and of the men around him when this was first shown. They recognized that the so-called Huggins was an impostor, of course. And Dr. Lothrop's face was already familiar from many insubstantial appearances. The boy whom you and I know to be young Cooper could be safely ignored—he had obviously been added to the broadcast for mere emotional appeal. But who, they asked themselves, was this utterly unknown man, the Chief of ARES? They investigated.

"And they found, Mr. Castle, that he was an escaped criminal whose original captor—myself—had had the temerity to suggest that he might actually be the leader of ARES. A suggestion which was ridiculed by his superiors at the time."

"So I made you look good," John grunted.

"You did indeed. I may add that the President also found that that formerly obscure officer had since been highly praised by the military for his work in organizing civilian cooperation. The combined effort was so powerful that it was decided to make him Provost General of the United States. A happy ending, don't you think?"

The projector made a high, fluttering sound as the General began to rewind his film.

"I have another picture to show you, Mr. Castle; but while we are preparing to see it you may wish to contemplate whether or not Mr. Boyde and his friends have reason to be displeased with their selection for the office now. I have already informed them, by the way, of your presumed capture—and of the seizure of over two thousand pounds of gold."

John remained silent. The voice in his mind was saying, . . . *yes, Nonny . . . I'm Nonny . . . Dr. Lothrop's not here . . .*

"Now this"—there was a subtle change in the General's voice—"is a spool of film found in the possession of one of the men captured with you. Since you appear in it, we think

you should be able to tell us what it is about."

The screen fluttered into life. A large room, looking bleak and cold in black-and-white photography. In the center of the picture a plump Oriental with a lettered label across his forehead stood reading a prepared speech from a sheet of paper he held in his hand, but there was no sound.

"That," the General said ominiously, "is the Regent of Mao, the dictator of China. He wears the so-called red rag, the ribbon around his head which designates him as Warrior Generalissimo of the Order of Red Guards. You may know that it is worn only on occasions of state."

"No," John said flatly, "I wouldn't know." His mind was racing. He had never seen the photographs before, but he had no difficulty in identifying the scene they depicted. The question . . .

"Now the camera is going to back off a little to take in the entire group around him," the General was saying. He stopped the film as he had before. "The figures are a little distant, but readily identifiable nonetheless. Again we see Dr. Lothrop and the impersonator who claims to be constitutional president; also several Chinese dignitaries well-known to us. But I direct your attention to the extreme right—" He paused as though for a comment from John.

"Very well, it's directed."

"There we see a woman whom neither my aides nor myself have been able to identify; and on *her* right"—the General snapped the switch to advance the film a few more feet, then stopped it again—"is a man with fair hair. You will notice that someone has seen fit to encircle his head to call attention to him. I take it that you see the futility of denying you are the man pictured?"

Looking at his image on the screen, John said nothing. In a darkroom somewhere a narrow white ring had been drawn around his own head, and he wondered briefly whether it might not have been done at the General's orders as a part of some maneuver of entrapment.

"We wondered, naturally, why an Indian sea captain would have such a thing as this in his possession, and how he came to get it. Have you ever seen it previously, Mr. Castle?"

"No."

"I believe you. That is, in fact, one of the few bits of intelligence we have been able to extract from Captain Saha thus far. But it was not difficult for us to form a theory which

explained his possession of this. Would you like to hear it?"

"I'd prefer to have my arms untied."

"So I imagine. As you are probably aware, although his country had been very friendly with the people calling themselves Martians, it has a long history of enmity with China; a history going back to 1962, in fact. They are known to maintain an elaborate espionage apparatus in China.

"Now let us suppose that through that apparatus they obtained this film, which is obviously an official Chinese propaganda effort. It may concern them, and they will wish to know if it is authentic or not. Also they are about to transfer to their supposed friends—who have recently been drawing closer and closer to their enemies—an enormous sum of gold. What harm can there be in making a small additional verification of the identity of the man sent to take charge of that vast sum? You see how easy it is, Mr. Castle? They give their captain this film and a projector to use on board his ship. For the entire trip he will study your picture, and when he returns to India—or by a coded radio message earlier—he can tell his superiors if the person who appeared to take the gold was the man whose pictures he had been studying."

"Very plausible."

"We believe so. And now, Mr. Castle, we—or at least I—would be interested in hearing your explanation of the meeting of which we have this interesting photographic record."

He did not hear it that day except in the vaguest terms. Not because John felt it particularly important to keep the Sino-Constitutionalist agreement secret, but because it served as a shield to things which were important. As long as they worried him with questions about it, for that long he was not questioned about more important matters. After eight hours or so of interrogation, mixed with beatings and a few more subtle torments, he was locked for the night in a room in the hotel basement which had once been a coal cellar.

In the course of the day his arms had been untied, but they still felt half-paralyzed and there were raised welts of blue flesh about his wrists. Nonny had left him, at his vehement order, during the first beating; he had told himself that the boy had already suffered far too much, and that he did not want him to have to endure what he himself had endured when he remained in Morgan's mind until death. Only now was he willing to admit that he had also been afraid that he would break in some shameful way, groveling before his tor-

mentors or soiling himself in an excess of fear.

Before the boy had left, he had learned a great deal about recent events at the caves, and what he had learned was disquieting. On the previous day, Russian troops in uniform had been employed openly in conjunction with the army and the Pro Tem militia for the first time since the Battle of Arlington. Although Dr. Lothrop was supervising the defense in person, a savage drive aimed at reducing the caves was gaining ground, and it seemed probable it would succeed. Apparently no one but Nonny and a few other ambulatory hospital patients had been left in the lower cave levels where the telepathic transmitter was; every other defender, Martian, Chinese, or Terrestrial American, had already been drawn into the fighting.

Lothrop had left a message for him, however, and Nonny had delivered it. The Chinese government had consented to the employment of the desert wastes of Sinkiang as a pickup point, when Lothrop had told them that the fusion drives necessary on really large spacecraft were too dangerous to land in populated areas. That much at least was accomplished.

Very soon, perhaps already, the advance units would be moving. He fell asleep seeing on the inside of his forehead an endless double line of drably clad little men with weapons slung on top of their bulky packs, toiling forward under a yellow sky. The monotonous singing he had once or twice heard from the soldiers of the Dawnward Marching Army seemed to fill his ears—*Hai, hai, hoa, hoa, hai hai . . .* !

He was awakened the next morning ungently but not brutally. The General, he gathered, had decided to postpone transporting the gold to Arlington and safety no longer. John himself was handcuffed and pushed into one of the cruisers, where he found a seat on one of the chests. By listening to the gossip of the peaceguards around him he deduced that Captain Saha and his sailors had been released during the night in response to a message from the capital, and that his own men were to remain under guard in Belhaven for the present. Apparently the General was not going to risk a rising of prisoners which might endanger his precious loot.

It was still early morning when they left. The observation ports of the cruiser were open, letting the brief March sunshine in as well as a crisp wind. Relaxing on his jolting seat as

well as he could, he rubbed his bruises and exercised his fingers. After the preceding day it seemed a wonderful privilege to have his hands, even though they were still pinioned, in front of him where he could see them and do simple tasks with them. He found himself moving them as unobtrusively as he could. He had had no breakfast and had not eaten at all the day before, but he found he did not feel particularly hungry—only thristy, and, as one mile faded into another, rather cold. From time to time he searched his mind for a hint of telepathic contact; there was none.

About ten o'clock, as nearly as he could judge, the cruiser ground to a stop. Theirs was the third vehicle in the line, behind the staff car and another cruiser, so that even by inching forward until he was just behind the driver and could look over his shoulder, John could not tell what the difficulty was. The cruiser commander got out and walked up ahead to consult, presumably, with the General and the other vehicle bosses. For a time the sound of their muffled voices drifted in through the ports.

When the commander returned he made a circling motion to the driver to indicate that they were to turn around, and lowered himself glumly into his seat. John decided to risk asking him what the trouble was.

"Bridge out." The commander was a warrant officer with a grim, sunburned face. He did not seem inclined to talk.

"You came down this way, didn't you? Night before last?"

The commander did not answer, but the driver said over his shoulder, "That's prob'ly what did it. These swamp hoppers around here been left pretty much alone so far, and they didn't like us highballin' along their roads."

The commander looked at him with distaste. "Shut up."

Several miles back from the bridge, they made a sharp turn and started along a new route. From the increased jolting of the cruiser John could guess that it was a secondary road, perhaps hardly more than a track. After a time the driver asked rather irritably, "Hey, where's this thing supposed to end up?"

The commander shrugged. "Some little town. We're supposed to get something to eat there."

"We'd better get diesel there too." The driver gestured at his instrument panel. Leaning forward, John saw that the needle was nearly on empty.

Half an hour later they stopped once more, and this time

he was allowed to leave the vehicle. With six of the twenty-five gold chests on the floor between the cruiser's three normal passenger-prisoner seats, it had been tight quarters inside and he was glad of the chance to stretch and move about.

The town where they had halted was hardly more than a village, but there was a flyblown café. He was led into it and seated with the peaceguard assigned to watch him at a small table. Another, larger, table held the General, Major Avery, and another officer, a lieutenant colonel, whom John recognized as having been present during part of his interrogation. Several other peaceguards were seated at a counter, but John estimated that about half the men in the convoy were remaining in the cruisers to protect the gold. Through the dirty plate glass of the window he could see the conning tower of his own vehicle with the head and shoulders of the commander protruding from it.

They were waited on by a thin girl in a faded dress that made no pretense of being a waitress's uniform. Without asking or being asked she brought John a damp cloth with which he wiped his face and hands. There were no local people in the café.

After a short wait the girl brought out plates, serving the men nearest the kitchen first without regard to rank. To John, and all the others, she gave ham and a pile of broad butter beans with a scoop of hominy grits on the side, and a mug of scalding coffee. He suddenly discovered that he was ravenously hungry.

He had eaten half his meal before he so much as looked up, and he did so then only because his attention was attracted by a movement outside the window. The turrets of the three cruisers were rotating to face across the street. Following the direction of the gas-projector tubes, he saw half a dozen men in overalls and straw hats lounging against the buildings there, apparently only gawking at the unaccustomed sight of the great, wheeled tanks. To his guard he commented, "You people don't trust anyone, do you?" It was the first time he had spoken since they had turned back at the demolished bridge.

The guard shrugged, a little sheepishly. "You can't trust these people."

"You suppose they know you've got all that gold in there?"

From the counter another peaceguard ordered him to keep quiet.

"They know." It was the waitress, and for a moment it

seemed as miraculous as a statue's speaking. "Y'all got it down at Belhaven is what everybody heard." Before any of the peaceguards could reply she closed her thin lips and disappeared into the kitchen. After a moment John began stabbing at his beans again.

He had almost finished before he noticed that a folded corner of buff-colored paper was protruding from under the edge of his plate. When the peaceguard who was supposed to be watching him was distracted for a moment he was able to pull it out unobserved and put it into his shirt.

For the time being it seemed unlikely that he would get a chance to read it. His guard chose to wait outside the cruiser while the second shift ate, taking the opportunity to stretch his legs in the sunlight. John walked with him, noticing that the General and his two senior advisors were in close conference beside their staff car. He could not get near enough to overhear what was being said, but he felt able to make some reasonably good guesses when Major Avery left the group and walked across the road to talk to the loungers there.

He returned empty-handed, and a few minutes later he and a younger officer were supervising the unloading of gold chests from one of the cruisers. When all the chests had been re-stowed in the other two, the General spoke earnestly to the young officer, who saluted and climbed nto his vehicle. After a few seconds the engine thundered into life and the cruiser roared away.

By evening it had still not returned. They had left the center of the village where they had eaten and set up a bivouac on the northern fringe of it, on a flat stretch of ground near the road which resisted for a time the prevailing marshiness. The two cruisers and the staff car formed a triangle in the center of which four or five peaceguards had built a fire of brush and deadwood; the wind whipped its acrid smoke at random and the men were constantly shifting to avoid it.

John squatted with his guard a little apart from the others. He did not need to overhear the whisperings of the various cliques which had formed around the fire to know the uneasiness that had spread, as the afternoon wore on, throughout the group. As he stared into the dancing pattern of the flames, more vividly than if the man had stood before him, Emil Lothrop's personality said: *I am here.*

I've been wondering when you were going to come.

things are deteriorating here . . . that's what I came to tell you? where are you?

About two hundred miles due south of Arlington, as nearly as I can tell. A LVB shouldn't have much trouble spotting this fire from the air.

no.

Listen, with any planning five men could do it . . .

It's not going to happen, John.

Put a small bomb right down where the fire is, then land and pick up the gold.

you'd be killed yourself.

You could tell me when you were coming. I'd make a break for the swamp just before the bomb hit.

I'm sorry.

For the love of . . .

two reasons. we need everything we have right here, John. we're pulling out.

Pulling out?

back into orbit . . . we can't hold on here for more than another twelve hours at most. and we can't take much back up except people, the transmitter I'm using now is going to be left here—we'll seal the caves with explosives so it won't fall into the hands of the enemy.

I see.

you know I'd take it if I could.

I still think you could recapture the gold.

we can't afford to.

A thousand kilograms of gold?

we could have left it in India if we were only concerned for its safety . . . we wanted the world to believe they had it.

Yes.

well, now they do, and the world knows. if we were to take it back the world might learn that too.

The man in England?

tomorrow. I must go now. We are buying victory or peace at least, with the gold . . . remember that. I will tell your men . . . those within reach of your position now . . . what your situation is, and ask them to free you if they can. but I will also tell them that the gold must remain with the P.T.G. whatever happens.

Tell them we're nearly immobilized for lack of diesel oil. They've sent a cruiser off after some, but that was ten or

twelve hours ago and it hasn't come back.

I understand.

Also, there's something going on among the local people. At lunch today one of your leaflets—blue print on buff paper—was slipped under my plate. Someone had written on it, "Keep down, there is nothing against you."

For a second or more he could feel Lothrop waiting, then the consciousness of his presence evaporated. He found his eyes were watering from staring sightlessly into the heat of the fire. Clumsily he wiped them with his sleeve, forced by the handcuffs to raise both hands in order to do it. His guard was yawning beside him.

A blanket was found for him a short time later, and he bedded down on the gold chests in one of the cruisers. With his guard sleeping just outside the door and three peaceguards standing watch constantly, it seemed unlikely that any escape attempt had much chance of succeeding; and though he disliked admitting it even to himself, for the moment he was too exhausted to try.

It was well after midnight when he was awakened by being dragged bodily out of the cruiser. There had been frost and all the metal surfaces of the cruisers, as well as the grasses and weeds around them, were covered with a fine filigree of ice. Out of long habit, as soon as he had realized that it was only his guard who had awakened him and that he need probably expect nothing worse than another interrogation, he lifted his head to the night sky. The stars were bright and close, as hard as diamonds, and Mars' disk hung between them and Earth like the landing light of some incoming craft.

"Looking for your friends?" the peaceguard asked. There was a note of bitterness in his usually disinterested voice.

"Maybe."

"You don't have to look so far then."

John looked at the man inquiringly; but he said nothing more, clamping his mouth closed as he hustled him along.

The General had had a hut built for himself from brush in the area just in front of his staff car. Its entrance faced the fire, so that John could see him inside it sitting on the rear seat, which had been removed to make him a cot. There was another man with him, lying at his feet, a man in a faded blue denim shirt and work pants; after a moment John realized that the man was tied hand and foot.

"Mr. Castle," the General looked up from his prisoner, "I have a friend of yours with whom you might like to converse."

"I don't know him."

"This is no time for jests, Mr. Castle. I assure you your life is at stake"

John studied the new prisoner again. He was a young man, perhaps still in his late teens, with a long, windburned face. At the moment it held only an expression of fixed hostility.

"You see," the General purred, addressing the man at his feet, "I told you no untruths. Your leader is our prisoner, and any violence offered us will be revenged upon him."

The man pursed his mouth and the General jerked his head backward in an attempt to avoid the flying gobbet of saliva, but he was too slow. It struck his cheek and oozed down in a long dribble until it wet the shoulder of his uniform coat.

"Good shot," John said.

The General gestured toward the still-smoldering fire, and the peaceguard selected a stick an inch in diameter with a glowing coal at the end and handed it to him. On the prisoner's cheek it left a circle of livid red whose center was scorched black.

"If you think this man is an ARES agent, I promise you he is not," John said firmly. "Where did you get him?"

The General moved his head an eighth of an inch toward the marsh. "Spying on us, Mr. Castle. There are quite a number of them out there; this one made the error of coming too close. I had set a trap for him."

"I was frog-stickin'," the prisoner said weakly in a Tarheel drawl. He had not made a sound when the burning stick was applied to his face, but his forehead was covered with tiny droplets of perspiration and there was a tremor in his voice.

The General lifted up a spearlike gig with a double, barbed head which had been lying on the ground near his seat. "He had this and a kitchen knife, you see, Mr. Castle, but no frogs, nothing to put them in if he had caught any, and no light. I will forbear mentioning that a frosty night in the middle of March would not be the season selected by an experienced sportsman."

"You think there are more out there?"

"We know there are, Mr. Castle. We have heard them."

"So what are you going to do about them?"

The General handed the gig to John's guard, who tossed it

into the fire. "We are going to release this man shortly, Mr. Castle, now that he has seen you are here. I take it that he is not himself in charge; he seems a mere spy sent out by whoever is. He can report to that gentleman that you will be maimed severely if we are molested before the vehicle I sent out for additional fuel returns."

The prisoner seemed to bare his teeth as he spoke. "Who says it's comin'?" There was a note of satisfaction in his voice which told more than his words.

The General looked at him contemptuously. "You stopped it? I don't believe you."

The elementary ruse worked. "I didn't, but what I heard is some fellers up the road did. They dug them a big hole and covered her up to look just like solid ground, and when that big thing was coming back with the oil it went right down in. They killed all that was in it and one of ours was killed too was what I heard."

John said, "Sounds as though you may have a few firearms turned against you before long, General."

"Who is your leader?" the General asked savagely, but the prisoner was through talking; his lips tight. After a moment the General ordered, "Cut him free."

They left with the first light, the cruisers groaning under the weight of a thousand pounds of gold each, as well as their normal loads of crew and ammunition. A peaceguard on foot preceded the three vehicles, probing at the ground ahead of him with a stick as he walked. Almost as soon as they had pulled away from their campsite the convoy swung due east, so that the rising sun shone in their faces.

Looking at it, John tried to guess the time. Sunrise would still be rather late although the winter was fading. Seven, perhaps. That would make it late morning in London where a man from the Pro Tem Government embassy would already, possibly, have spoken to the British Minister of Marine about the hiring of ships, promising this gold in payment.

He heard the driver say softly to the grizzled warrant officer in command of the cruiser, "We only got enough for about another five miles. Do they know that?"

The warrant officer nodded. He had been scanning the fields of marsh grass alongside the road through an observation slit in the side of the cruiser. "They know it. They were

busy on the radio to Arlington this morning just before we left."

"Well, hell, can't Arlington send us something?"

"They are sending us something. Why do you think we're heading east today instead of north?"

Theirs was the lead vehicle in the convoy now, although the staff car, with its armored sides and bulletproof glass, was nearly as formidable as one of the cruisers. For a time the road ran straight and smooth, and although they were limited to a walking pace they rolled steadily forward; then, closer than seemed possible because of the dazzle of the sunlight, there was a dark line across the road at a point where thickets of second-growth timber crowded it from both sides. The peaceguard who had been probing the ground ahead of them waved them to a stop, then after advancing a hundred feet or so, gestured to indicate that they should come forward carefully.

As they edged toward it, the dark line became a barricade of logs. It completely blocked the road, stretching from wood to wood at a point where the land was just on the point of dipping down to become true marsh again. Some of the trees on either side had been cut to build it, but the stumps had been left high enough to make them as good an obstacle as the original trees.

Having reached the barricade, the peaceguard grasped the end of one of the smaller logs and heaved at it as though he hoped to dismantle the whole structure single-handed. The crack of a small-caliber rifle, hardly audible over the throttled-down rumble of the cruiser engines, came from the woods.

The convoy stopped and for a few moments no one said or did anything. Even John, lying flat upon the gold chests which now filled the central space of the cruiser almost completely, found himself unable to predict what either side would do next. Then he heard the hissing of transmission in the intercom shortwave headphones the commander wore. After perhaps ten seconds the commander said, "Yes, sir," into his chest mike, then turned in his seat to speak to John. "The General wants to see you back at the staff car. He says you're supposed to go alone; but I'm going to be up in the turret covering you with the machinegun there, so watch your step."

He swung himself out of the cruiser clumsily, feeling suddenly that he was trespassing in a strange country as he left

the dim closeness of the vehicle for the cold wind and sunlight outside. Walking erect, quickly, but not running, holding his handcuffs over his head in a gesture he hoped might identify him, he went back to the staff car. As he approached it, one of the rear doors swung open to let him in.

The General was sitting on the rear seat with the Lieutenant Colonel whose name John had still not learned. Major Avery was on a jump-seat facing them, and he motioned John to another beside it. John took it, as the door closed behind him with a solid sound like the shutting of a safe. "Well?" he asked.

"You were ahead of us, Mr. Castle," the General said slowly. "No doubt you are somewhat better apprised of the situation than we."

"There's a timber obstacle and a dead peacy ahead of you, if that's what you mean."

"I am aware of that. Can the obstacle be crashed, in your opinion, by one of my cruisers?"

"I don't know."

The General sighed. "But you will find out, Mr. Castle. I have abandoned the hypothesis that you are the leader of the rebels now opposing us—they seem too poorly armed for ARES, and it is more than doubtful if they would proceed thus against us in spite of my threats if you were."

"That's nice," John said. Major Avery clenched his fist at the sarcasm but the General dissuaded him with a look.

"It was an outside hope at best, Mr. Castle. But these rebels are at least aware that you are not one of us; that you are our prisoner. They may allow you to approach that barricade without killing you."

"And what do I do then? Try to tear it down myself?"

"You return and report to me what may be done against it, and whether or not it masks a pit beyond. I need not tell you, I hope, what your fate will be if you attempt to make a dash for freedom."

As he had before, he walked with his manacled hands high. The woods were of pine, and as he approached them more closely he saw that they were carpeted with fallen needles so that even if a hundred men were concealed in them they might wait there without making a sound. Like an eye behind him he could sense the muzzle of the machinegun pointed at his back.

The peaceguard was dead, although the hole in his temple

was smaller than the end of a pencil. His uniform cap had rolled away, but John picked it up after he had pulled the man to the side of the road, and carefully laid it over his face, incidentally keeping his back to the convoy as he did so. It seemed unlikely that the warrant officer would fire at him for thus arranging the body of his fallen comrade. When he stood up, it was with the comforting weight of the dead man's pistol in the waistband of his trousers under his shirt.

When he went to the barricade again, a voice from the woods called, "Hold it. Right there's far enough."

"I can't tear it down. My hands are fastened."

"Well, what are you goin' to do then? We figured you was supposed to bring the dead one back, and that was all right. If you ain't, what was you sent out for?"

"To talk to you," John improvised. "Do you know that's the Provost General of the United States back there? He wants you to let him through."

There was the sound of laughter from many voices, quickly muffled. When it had died out the original speaker said, "You go back there and tell the Preevo Gen'ral or whatever he is that we know he's got a ton of gold in them big tanks of his. You tell him all he has to do to get by us is unload it alongside this here road."

"Otherwise you'll stop him with frog gigs and pitchforks?"

"There's a few of us still have our dads' old twenty-two's, like you seen."

A new voice called out, "And there'll be a sight better here soon."

The original voice said, "Shet up," almost inaudibly, then continued to John, "We got him stopped good enough with them now, it seems like."

"Would it make any difference to you to know that ARES and President Huggins, the rightful President of this country, both want this gold to go through?"

"Mister," the voice from the thicket said, "we want that gold for ourselves and we don't give one rap what anybody else on this earth wants with it. We're goin' to get it too, and divvy it up amongst us, and try to get out of here to some decent country like maybe Canader. Now you git back there and tell him that or we'll put a bullet in you too."

A few minutes later John was sliding into the staff car's jump-seat again, this time trying to hold himself so that the pistol under his shirt did not show. Fortunately it was an

automatic, flat and not very large.

Before the General had a chance to speak, Major Avery asked nervously, "Well, what about it?"

"I think it's too well-built to crash," John told the General, ignoring him, "especially loaded like we are. But the individual logs are mostly small; I believe it might be possible to burn it with napalm from the flamethrowers."

"There is no pit behind it, Mr. Castle?"

John shook his head.

"Farther, perhaps?"

"I doubt it. Not for quite a distance, anyway. Beyond the woods the ground's so low, anything deeper than a couple of feet would probably start filling with water while they were still digging. My guess is that by cutting east we've thrown their plans out of whack, and that the log obstacle and the men watching it here were never intended as more than a precaution against what they considered a remote contingency. They spoke as though—"

"You talked with them?"

"Just shouting back and forth. I tried to get them to let us through; they wouldn't, of course."

"You told them that this gold belongs to the poor?"

"No, I told them it belonged to the Pro Tem Government. They *are* the poor. And as I was saying a moment ago, they seem to be expecting some better weapons soon, which I would imagine means the ones they've stripped off the cruiser you sent out after fuel. It seems likely another party was waiting for us farther north, but that the boys here have gotten word to them that they were watching the wrong hole. If we're going to do anything I'd advise doing it fast."

It took the barricade almost half an hour to burn itself out, even under the stimulus of repeated squirts of napalm; but the men in the thickets on either side of it made no effort to halt the convoy as it rolled through, and they made good time afterward, dispensing with a walking scout ahead and moving along the fairly good dirt road at thirty or forty miles an hour. The leading cruiser ran out of fuel just as they came in sight of a small village about four miles from where they had been stopped. For another thousand yards or so the second cruiser was able to push it; then it too coughed to a halt.

The driver of the command car looked back at the General, then, receiving no instructions, switched off the ignition. The

silence of the southern swamp country seemed to pour through the windows.

At length Major Avery asked, "What are we going to do?"

Almost imperceptibly the General shook his head. His composure seemed unaffected by the series of disasters which had fallen upon them. "I don't know, Major. I would like to have the opinions of all three of you before I act. You first, I think."

The Major fidgeted.

"Very well. And yours, Colonel."

"Treat with them," the Colonel said explosively. "Offer them a deal—part of the gold—for oil."

Very gently the General asked, "How much?"

"A chest."

"When they have such a good chance of getting it all? I doubt that they can be bought so cheaply."

"Half then."

The General sighed and looked toward John. "Mr. Castle, may we hear from you? Knowing me as you do from old times, I'm certain that you have already realized that you will be shot should it appear that you might be freed by that rabble who are besieging us, and that I have no intention of turning over to them even so much as an eighth of the gold, much less half."

John recalled the telepathic conversation he had had the night before with Emil Lothrop.

"Come," the General was saying, "I take it you don't wish to lose your life, Mr. Castle. What is your advice?"

"First, that you take the chests out of the cruisers."

Major Avery sputtered a curse, but the General silenced him with an upraised hand. "To what purpose?"

"With the gold out, you should be able to move the cruisers with their starter motors. Enough, anyway, to jockey them into position. Form a three-sided enclosure with the cruisers and this car, and putty up the cracks with the gold chests."

"They'll kill us," the Colonel stormed. "They'll shoot any man who steps out of the cruisers."

"From where?" John gestured toward one of the windows. "There aren't any woods around here, that's open swamp. And you've got two men up in those turrets who've got a bird's-eye view of the whole area, and machineguns."

The General interposed, "And then what, Mr. Castle?"

John spread his hands. "We wait it out. They can't do any-

thing to us as long as the daylight lasts, and you've talked to Arlington by radio, I know. We've had a lot of bad luck, now maybe it's time for us to get a break."

Once the little circle of vehicles was complete they had nothing more to do, but time did not seem to pass slowly in spite of their idleness. The sun seemed to move five degrees across the sky every five minutes, and soon the village to the east was bathed in its almost horizontal rays.

"Do you think they'll rush us in the dark?" the Colonel asked, coming up behind John Castle.

Without turning his head John said, "Yes."

The Colonel shrugged hopelessly. "Just looking out there at all that dead grass shivering in the wind, you wouldn't think there was a living thing within a hundred miles of here."

"There's someone much closer than that. A man's working his way toward us about a hundred and fifty yards out."

"A spy?"

"I doubt it. He just waved to me." Swinging about, John got off the chest. "I think you'd better tell the men in the turrets not to shoot at him, Colonel. They're bound to see him soon."

Ten minutes later the man was standing in the center of the little circle of vehicles. He seemed a rawboned man of about thirty-five. "That was tricky," he said, addressing the three senior Peaceguard officers. "I was feared y'all would shoot me, and I was feared them others might too."

"Then you are not with them?" the General asked quickly.

The farmer shook his head and spat. "Naw. There was three of us wanted to be, when we heard what was goin' on, but they wouldn't let us have no share in it. Said they had enough already and there was too many to divvy up with as it is."

"But *we* would reward you if you helped us."

The farmer spat again. "That's about what we was figurin'. There's three of us in this, and we've got the three barr'ls of o'l them others left in that tank of yourn they wrecked. How much is each one of them barr'ls worth to you?"

"Delivered here?" the General asked sharply.

For a moment the farmer's glance touched John's. "Nope, in the village yonder." He jerked a thumb in the direction of the little town to the east. "This here's the deal. We can't get it out here—them fellers would see us and shoot us if we tried to bring them barr'ls any further in the wagon; and besides

that, you here might just take it into your heads not to pay if'n we brought it out here. But y'all still got that and it'll still go." With another gesture he indicated the staff car.

"You seem to know a great deal."

"Well, I know it don't run on diesel o'l; it runs on gas. Ain't that right?" He looked at the General, who nodded reluctant assent. "And I figure it'll still go, because when you sent that other big tank out after o'l they didn't take no gas, even when they could have got that easier. So I reckon that fancy car there ain't so thirsty as the tanks is, and she's got miles in her yet."

"You're right," John told him quickly. "The staff car's still mobile. And solid enough to stop small-arms fire, even though it doesn't mount any guns. What do you want us to do?"

"We want the Gen'ral himself here to go—his driver and him and me and three of them boxes of gold and not nobody else. Me and my two will help unload it and put the o'l on. Simple as that."

The General sniffed. "And may I ask why I personally am required?"

The farmer gave him a look of sly cunning. "First off, them friends of mine want to hear it from your own mouth that there isn't goin' to be any arresting for this here deal later. We're just helpin' the law and gettin' paid for it."

"And secondly?"

"Second we figure if you was to send somebody else you just might tell him to fight us for it; but if you come yourself . . ." He let the words trail off into a grin.

"How do we know you've really got it?" the Colonel demanded suddenly.

Still grinning, the farmer drew a flat bottle from his hip pocket and uncorked and tilted it. John and the three officers watched the thick fluid soak slowly into the ground.

There was no further argument. When the staff car had left, the Colonel stationed himself at one of the cruisers' radios. He did not object when John took the empty seat beside him. Outside, the cruisers' crews were shifting the remaining twenty-two gold chests to plug the gap left by the missing car.

At last the General's voice, strangled but recognizable, came from the speaker: "Hello? Hello, cruisers! Colonel . . ."

"He's going to tell you," John said, drawing the dead peaceguard's automatic from under his shirt and aiming at the Colonel's face, "he's been captured and wants to make a deal.

You see, he thought the man he caught last night was one of mine; but the man who caught him today really is. If it's any satisfaction to him, you can tell him you've been captured too."

President Pro Tem Fitzpatric Boyde looked up from the report he was reading to study the hard-faced young man sitting before him. "According to this, Mister Secretary, the entire thousand kilograms of gold would have passed out of our hands had it not been for three of your men who brought fuel oil to the stranded convoy."

" 'Mister Secretary'?"

"You are the Secretary of Defense of the United States, I believe."

John Castle shifted slightly in his chair. "I'm well aware that I am; but I was not aware that you were willing to recognize the fact that the legitimate president has gone over to us."

"Privately I am; yes." Boyde's square, rather florid face revealed nothing. "I want to talk about that further in a moment."

"Whatever you like."

"No, sir. Whatever we both like. You are here as my guest, not as a prisoner. I assure you I intend to honor the agreement you and your followers extorted from my Provost General; after all, you carried out yours with him. You gave him the oil and released him after capturing the entire convoy by what I must admit was a very clever ruse."

"Thank you."

"I would be interested to know, however, why you did not attempt to make off with the gold."

John smiled. "To where?"

"Oh, come, Secretary Castle, an organization as resourceful as yours has shown itself to be could surely have devised something. Even if you had merely turned it over to the farmers who were so greedily trying to snatch it, you would at least have deprived us of it."

"I would also have deprived myself of this opportunity of talking to you. We are anxious to end the war."

"Since you're losing it, I imagine you are. So are we, even though we're winning."

"We," John said carefully, "are no worse off right now

than we were late in the fall, before the Martians landed at the caves."

Boyde stood up and came out from behind his desk. His office was very large, and luxuriously furnished, but so cluttered with bric-a-brac that it seemed more like a trophy room. The fire in the big fireplace looked pale in the sunlight. "That is true, I know," he admitted. "In fact in certain respects you are better off." From the mantel he took an object like a small mace of black iron fitted with a wood handle. Holding it by the handle he thumped the palm of his other hand with the egg-shaped head. "Do you know what this is?"

John nodded. "It's a Chinese hand grenade. I see that some writing has been engraved on the case, but I can't read it from here."

"It is the grenade which was thrown into General Everett Grant's headquarters at the climax of the last suicide attack of the Dawnward Marching Army. Or at least so he says. Fortunately it failed to explode. Grant had it disarmed, suitably engraved, and sent it to me. It arrived this morning. Perhaps you are wondering what it has to do with the subject we are discussing."

"Frankly, yes."

"Just this: its arrival coincided with the arrival of a translation of the film my peaceguards captured at the same time they got you and the gold. The sound track had been obliterated from that film, as you may know; but we were able to locate an interpreter who could also read the lips of the speaker. It seems that the Regent of Mao has promised you an army. The grenade seemed symbolic of that, I thought."

"I see."

"When you say *we* want peace, Secretary Castle, for whom do you speak? Merely for Huggins?"

"No. For the Martians and ARES."

"Then you may go back to them, now if you wish, with these terms: I will recognize the existence of Mars and the Martians and supply them with sufficient goods of whatever kind they require to let them leave Mars and return home, assuming, of course, that the Martians already here render me sufficient technical assistance. I will hold no grudges and issue a blanket pardon for all treasonable activities of the last year—ringleaders excepted."

"Meaning that you are not particularly frightened of three hundred Chinese divisions."

"We are not. If they come we have been promised sufficient help by the Soviet Union to deal with them."

"Which you won't get."

"So you say, Secretary Castle."

John stood up, and reaching out unexpectedly, took the grenade from the President Pro Tem. "You think you have a blanket offer of military assistance from the Russians," he said. His voice was as hard and cold as he could make it. "I advise you to test it. We will have three hundred Chinese divisions in this country by August. I would make certain, if I were you, that you can get even thirty Russian ones." He slammed the grenade down on Boyde's desk.

Suddenly Boyde laughed. "There's no need for us to threaten one another, Secretary Castle. A minute ago we were getting on quite well."

"I'm not threatening you. I am urgently warning you that the promises you have been given will not be fulfilled. If you like, I am trying to save you."

Boyde smiled. "At least that's more original than trying to save the country, which is what the other negotiator you people sent me is always talking about. You're a friend of Miss Trees, aren't you? She's forever mentioning you."

"Yes, I know her."

"I can see you do. You jumped perceptibly when I mentioned her name."

"I wasn't aware that she was in your hands."

Boyde nodded complacently. "She came to us several weeks ago, and I thought it might be convenient to have a possible go-between uniting Huggins and myself. She gave me her word that she would not attempt to communicate with any of you without my permission, and I am glad to see that she kept it. Would you like to talk to her?" His tone was polite, but there was a note of dismissal in the question.

"Very much," John said.

"I'll have someone take you up then."

The headquarters of the Pro Tem Government were in a building sometimes said to be modeled on the Washington Monument. The thousands of windows were narrow vertical slits like those provided for archers in the Middle Ages, and there were so many of these narrow and closely spaced aper-

tures that they seemed not interruptions but a texturing of this towering limestone shaft that dominated the west bank of the Potomac.

Inside all the grace and grandeur vanished. Offices were stacked upon offices, all reached by narrow, low-ceilinged halls, cramped and slightly dirty stairs of concrete, emptily echoing, and self-service elevators no bigger than closets. The page girl told John that three times during the past year employees working late—one of them an executive of fairly high rank—had been assaulted in the corridors by "people from across the river; you know, all those slums over in old Washington. How can anyone do a thing like that, anyway?"

John did not feel in the mood for an argument, but he found himself saying, "How can they do anything else? For years the people who work in this building have been telling all of us we're entitled to a high standard of living—which we don't have, although the people here do. So they come here to take some of it."

"Oh," the girl said, "I forgot you're one of *them*." She was quite pretty in her page's blouse and navy blue skirt, and for a moment John wondered what politician had wrangled her appointment for her, pulling her away from some wheat town in the Middle West.

"For a while I was a sort of involuntary social worker," he told her, and let it go at that.

Anna's door was locked, but it was not a jail door, and the apartment into which John was ushered might have been in any of the better buildings catering to stenographers and the immaculate young women who tend computers. She welcomed him with her eyes and then with her mouth, and he never heard the page girl close the door as she left.

When they parted, a little breathless, Anna looked at him as though he were a jinn who had suddenly materialized from the carpet at her feet. "What are you doing here? I mean . . . oh darling, it's wonderful that you're here; but I heard you were a prisoner, then you weren't, that they had to let you go or something . . ."

"I'm here under a flag of truce, so to speak. Fundamentally for the same reason you are."

Her lips began to form a question, but he cut it off with a significant look and gesture which took in the room. Aloud he said, "President Boyde paroled you to my custody. We can go out and walk around the city if we're back here before dark."

When they were well away from the building, he asked, "Did they give you anything? A pencil or a compact, for instance?"

Anna shook her head. "Nothing I've got on now. I suppose you're right though, my room is probably monitored. I knew it, of course, but I was so glad to see you I forgot. You think it's safe here?"

"As long as we keep walking. If you see anyone who seems to want to get in too close, tell me."

"They've had to go back, haven't they? Back to the satellite bases. That's what I was told." She looked at him anxiously.

"That wasn't your fault." He sensed her mood. "Don't think that way."

"I hope not. How is my brother? Is he all right?"

"He was when I left the caves."

"But there's been a lot of fighting since then, hasn't there? How long is it since you left?"

"This is the fifteenth day."

"They said something about your coming here on a ship, but I thought they were trying to trick me in some way."

"On the *Houston*." He smiled suddenly. "I never thought I'd so much as see a real surface warship in this day and age, much less be protected by one. It was built during the seventies as an antiaircraft heavy frigate, but it's got eight-inch guns; I suppose it's nearly the only thing the navy has afloat these days." He paused.

"John, go on! They told me they'd captured you and a whole lot of Martian gold; and then the next thing I heard was that you were on this ship, but somehow you weren't supposed to be a prisoner any more."

"I'm afraid it's complicated. You see we—Lothrop and I—set out to make everyone think that the Pro Tem Government had just gotten a thousand kilograms of gold bullion. Unfortunately they got wind of the shipment, I suspect from the other end, which was India, and turned our make-believe seizure into the real thing. We might have been able to get it back, but Lothrop decided it would be smarter just to let them have it."

"He *wanted* them to have it?"

"Remember when you used to play chess with me? There are times when a queen sacrifice will win the game."

Anna looked perplexed.

"Do you know that the Chinese are going to try to give us

three million men? Whether we want them or not?"

"I'd heard a rumor. It's because of that kind of thing that President Huggins and I feel there *must* be peace soon."

"And the Russians are—or at least have been—ready to match whatever the Chinese put up; in quality if not in quantity."

"But they aren't now?"

"I very much doubt it. When Dr. Lothrop agreed to transport three million Chinese here, he stipulated that the pickup point was to be Sinkiang Province."

Anna shook her head. "I don't understand."

"Sinkiang is the logical jumping-off point for a Chinese invasion of Russia, and the Chinese fought a border war with India nearly fifty years ago to improve their communications with it. A force moving north from there could cut off all the Asiatic Soviet Union. It's difficult to remember that it's not much farther from Moscow than Paris is, but I imagine the Russians are keeping it in mind."

"I see."

They walked on in silence for a time until they reached the section of the city which had been destroyed by the strafing LBV's when Force B had tried to take the capital. Looking at the rubble, Anna asked suddenly, "Will the Russians really be alarmed enough? And even if they are, won't the Chinese still want to come here?"

"As soon as the Russians get wind of the Chinese troop movement they'll move part of their own army to the border to oppose them—at least that's the theory. And when they do the Chinese will push in still more men of their own. Also, there's the business with the gold. That depends on a sort of ace in the hole we've acquired: a diplomat in the Pro Tem embassy in London who's come over to us secretly."

Anna looked up at him, her dark eyes serious. "What can he do?"

"Go to the British and pretend he's authorized to hire shipping to transport Russian troops. If things are going according to schedule he's already done it, and since Great Britain is one of China's principal listening posts, they probably got the news the same day."

"That more Russians are coming here? I don't see how that will help us."

"That more Russians aren't coming. Russia has the largest merchant navy in the world. The Chinese—and the British

too, for that matter—will think the Pro Tem Government is desperate for more help and that the Russians are alleging lack of transport as an excuse for not sending it. Of course the obvious reason for not sending it will be that the troops are needed in the east for an invasion of China. By this time the Chinese ought to be convinced that their troops in Sinkiang are going to be needed right there."

Fitzpatric Boyde's office seemed less cluttered the next time John saw it, perhaps because there was no fire and the narrow windows were open to let in the fresh spring breeze. He sat in the same chair he had used on his first visit, but he had sensed something new in Boyde's attitude toward him. The President Pro Tem's face was set in an expression of aggressive confidence John somehow felt certain was spurious.

When the pleasantries had been completed Boyde picked up a bronze paperweight from his desk and balanced it on the tips of three fingers. It was a statuette of a snarling bear. "To begin with, Secretary Castle," he said, "I want you to know that I took your advice and asked our Soviet allies about the possibility of obtaining more aid. They are eager to give us everything we require."

John inclined his head an eighth of an inch.

"However," Boyde continued, "in the hope of sparing the nation we both love I want to propose a peace plan for your consideration and for Dr. Lothrop's."

"Go ahead."

"Well, first," Boyde set the bear down, "as regards the social planning of this country. I understand your people want certain changes. What would satisfy you? Aside from Constitutionalism?"

John ticked off the points on his fingers. "We want an end to the harassment of scientific and technical people, and the immediate release of everyone imprisoned for scientism or on similar charges."

Boyde nodded. "We've already had to do pretty much that to get their help with our war effort. What else?"

"We want the right to possess arms restored to everyone except minors and those with a record of narcotics addiction or criminal activity."

"I'm afraid forming the militia the way we did has already taken care of that," Boyde said. He smiled with a trace of bitterness. "I believe the old Bill of Rights says something to the

effect that since a militia is necessary to defense, the people have a right to go armed. It ought to add that if you need the militia you can't stop them. In the six months it's been in existence the militia has already lost or had stolen as many guns as it has right now, and those missing ones are all floating around somewhere."

"We want a complete end to the system of welfare payments. We feel that the chief reason this country has been sliding downhill for the past half-century has been the practice of bribing the people—you call them 'the poor'—not to work."

The President Pro Tem, who had been sitting erect behind his desk, suddenly slumped. "You can't do that."

"We think we can," John said. "Why not?"

"Humanity in the first place," Boyde told him, "and in the second, politics. A great many of those people you say are being bribed not to work simply can't. If they don't get the money from us they'll have to become criminals or beggars. I've read your record, Secretary Castle, and I know you were a PRESTman in New York for a few weeks."

John nodded.

"Well, I was a caseworker there and in Chicago for over ten years before the Constitution was set aside. I could tell you a hundred—hell, a thousand—sob stories about widows with health problems and four or five or more little kids dependent on them, but I won't. Let's take another kind of case: say, a twenty-three-year-old man with no particular health problem except drug addiction. There are probably a hundred thousand boys in this country who fit that description."

"I know it."

"Sure, we offer free treatment, but it's terrifically expensive and it only helps those who want to be helped. This boy I'm speaking of doesn't, and his behavior is so erratic he can't hold a job. If you cut off his welfare he's either going to steal or starve; the only thing we can do is to try and run the system as economically as we can." Boyde paused for breath. "I said the other reason was political. You're too young to remember when the Constitution went out, but do you think that happened just because everyone got tired of the old game and wanted something new? We'd had major riots in every city every summer since the Los Angeles riot of 1965, but that was the year they pulled out all the stops. There were

cars and buses burning in the streets all across the country. What do you think is going to happen now"—he leaned forward, pointing a finger at John—"if we take everything they've got away? Why do you think we disarmed our police originally and changed the name?"

John said nothing.

"We did it to protect them. There were hundreds of neighborhoods where a policeman who went in with a gun on his hip had no chance at all of coming out alive. And believe me, those areas are still there."

"I know they are. You've had them for twenty years—set aside the Constitution, and bankrupted the nation, but they are still there."

"I had hoped this would be a friendly meeting."

"I think it still can be. We have an alternative to propose."

Boyde looked at him.

"I said before that you bribed people not to work. I could have added that you bribe women to desert their husbands and fathers to desert their children. And you've taken everyone who in desperation has accepted a handout of your yellow money and hung a tag around their necks that made them *The Poor*—someone to be experimented with by your sociologists and bossed and spied on by anyone who can read and write and is willing to take that dirty job."

"All right, who are you going to replace those people with?"

"No one. We'd rather see people doing something useful. We intend instead to set up—by constitutional amendment, as a right—an irrevocable income for every citizen. The people whose income taxes exceed that amount will simply take it off their tax. The rest will get the money in the form of a weekly check in the mail, and it will be *their* money to do whatever they think best with. No one looking over their shoulder to take it away if they get a job."

Boyde pursed his lips. "Half of them will just use it to kill themselves one way or another."

"We know that; but we also know that the ones who don't will have an aid they can depend on and don't have to be ashamed of. Something they can use to pull themselves out of the mud."

Silent, Boyde sat staring at his desk top and the statuette of the snarling bear. A gust of wind entering through the narrow windows stirred the striped flag behind him.

"Perhaps you're wondering how we are going to finance this."

Boyde looked up. "I *know* how you're going to try. You're going to do the same thing my administration has done on several occasions: print the stuff as fast as you can and hope you can keep ahead of the inflation long enough for the program to catch hold. It isn't going to work. Your money will be blowing in the streets like garbage before the thing gets off the ground."

"We plan to do this with hard currency. Money that will hold its value."

Boyde was suddenly alert. "You've got gold on Mars?"

"No, and even if we did, it wouldn't be economically feasible to bring it here. Only concepts are really valuable enough to ship across space, and our money will have to come from much closer."

"Where?"

"From Russia and China. In the form of foreign aid." John leaned forward. "Don't you sense the desperate rivalry that is building up there? If we—you and I—can hammer out a peace that leaves both sides intact, both Russia and China will feel they still have a chance of gaining a position of paramount influence. And with the Martian technology and a battle-trained army, America will be potentially able to tilt the balance of power between them. They'll bid against each other, and with a little diplomacy we should be able to keep the bidding running for years."

Boyde remained silent for nearly a half-minute this time, and watching him, John felt he could almost hear the swift thoughts coursing through his mind.

"All right," he said at last, "I think we can live with that."

John felt himself relax. "That leaves the Constitution itself the only issue between us, then. I think you know that we can't make any compromise there."

"I told you when you came in that I had a peace plan."

"Yes."

"First let me say that it includes restoration of the Constitution."

"Go on."

"But before that occurs we will admit fifty new states. These new states—all of them—will be on Mars. To put it another way, we will introduce one hundred new Senators, all Martians, into the Senate; we will also amend the rules to

allow them to vote and to enter the debates without leaving their constituencies. Television can make that possible and I feel it is the only practical way." Boyde was watching John intently as he spoke.

"So far you're giving everything away. What do you want in return?"

"I realize," Boyde continued slowly, "that Huggins is accepted as a leader in your organization. But the Constitution—the same one you people are swearing up and down you want to defend—limits him to eight years in office. Two four-year terms. That time is almost up; this is his last year."

John looked a question.

"I intend to run for the Presidency myself, as soon as the Constitution goes back into effect. I want solemn commitments from all of you that you won't run your own candidate against me; and that I will have your active support." Boyde leaned back in his swivel chair. "Well?"

John said nothing, trying to sort out his thoughts.

"Well, will you buy it? Will Lothrop?"

He looked at Boyde's square, florid face. It was a face as superficially trustworthy as a certain type of actor's, yet he knew Boyde could not be trusted. Unbidden, the thought entered his mind that Boyde was watching him in just the same way, and that to him or to the General he himself must seem the same sort of man: a wily enemy, tenacious of advantage.

Boyde was saying, "You want to take a while to think it over?"

Perhaps because Emil Lothrop had been telepathically inside his consciousness and yet had been also a kind of enemy at times, he found the Martian's spare figure easy to conjure up in imagination. It was not telepathy, but he felt as though he could hear Lothrop's voice: "Just as every scientist sometimes feels the urge to cheat—to shade his data to show a favorable result—evey politician occasionally is tempted not to. Given a situation in which dishonesty is very dangerous and the rules are apt to produce the desired result without tinkering, worse men than Boyde have been known to stand back and be statesmen."

He cleared his throat. "I'll buy it, President Boyde. I'll need your help to communicate with Dr. Lothrop, but I think there's a good chance he will too."

Boyde looked relieved, then puzzled. "You'll need our help to get in touch with him? Frankly, the excellence of your

communications has always been something of a mystery to us. I'll be glad to do whatever I can, but I'm surprised it's necessary."

"Nonetheless," John said, "I think it would be best if tonight you arranged to have the lights of Arlington blink three times."

THE INVASION FROM MARS

came in the early years of the 21st century. And all over America people were praying for it to succeed. . . .

For two decades, the United States had been slipping into a primitive past, turning its back on technology — and abandoning its Martian colony. Its "emergency" government was kept in power by repression, food was scarce, life grim . . . and killer packs of wild animals prowled at night, making curfews a vital need.

Then the "Martians" came back. An obscure teacher, John Castle, was among the first to see the invaders — and made a desperate try to aid them. He failed then, but there was a strange role waiting for Castle to play. . . .