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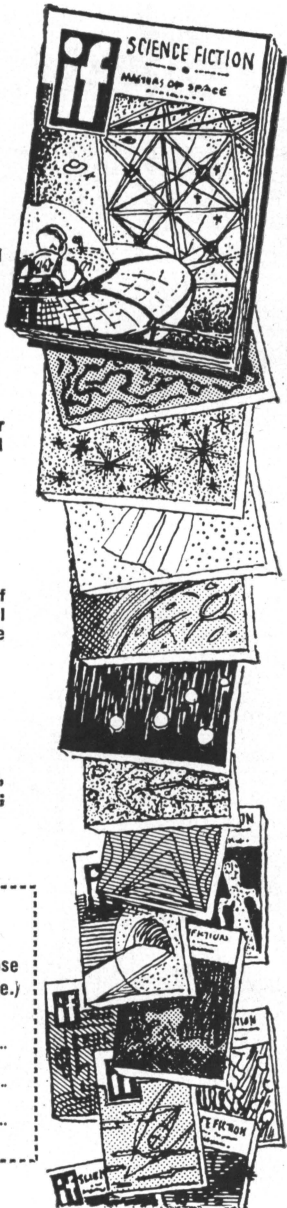
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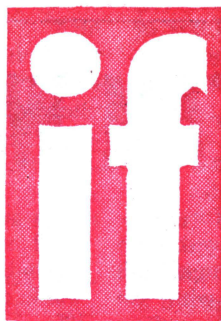
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worlds of



MARCH 1963
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science fiction

Vol. 13, Number 1

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THIS DREAM WE HAVE...

Fantasize along with us for a moment. The Chairman wakes up to a phone call, the four hundredth in a matter of weeks, with yet another complaint that the collective farms just aren't producing enough food; the natives are restless, and putting another locomotive into orbit is not going to cheer them up any more.

Gloomily the Chairman sits on the edge of his bed fondling his shoe. He reasons that while the Western world is falling into decay, it seems to be taking forever to do it and in the meantime, most everyone seems to have enough to eat. So in the West they have something that really works, and it's not just seed-corn.

So the Chairman suddenly says (in Cyrillic characters), "Well, hell!" and reaches for the phone. And from this point on, the world is amazed to learn that the collectives have been dissolved and the land given to the peasants, to work for their own profit.

Before you can say borscht, the cabbages start rolling in and there's *babka* for everyone. But about this time the typographers and the furniture-makers and the little old potatoface in the vodka mill all get a look at the fins on the cars the far-

mers are driving, and they set up a howl envied by all the banshees in Ireland, until by Michaelmas, the whole country turns capitalistic. Got it?

Now ask yourself this question. If the Soviet Union overnight went capitalist, do you think there would be any easing of international tensions?

If the answer is yes, everything's jolly. If the answer is no, then there seems to be an aching vacuum in the general thinking. Because communism is supposed to be the Enemy and the defeat of communism the goal. We even seem to be making some progress in that direction in many ways. But nobody seems to be telling us what we're supposed to do if we achieve total victory over communism and still find that we have to live under the shadow of the Big Boom.

We suppose that it is necessary (although it is irritating to feel that it is necessary) to say here that totalitarian communism is bad stuff, and we want no part of it. The only thing is, people keep calling it the Enemy as if it was the Only Enemy, and we keep having this fantasy. The Chairman wakes up to a phone call, and —

THIS

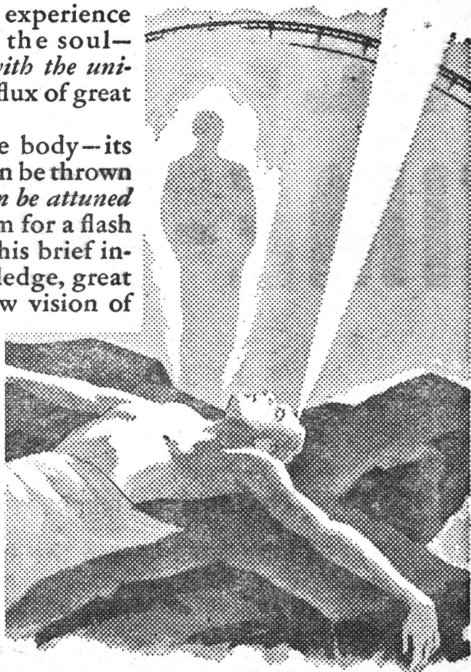
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THE TIME-TOMBS

BY J. G. BALLARD

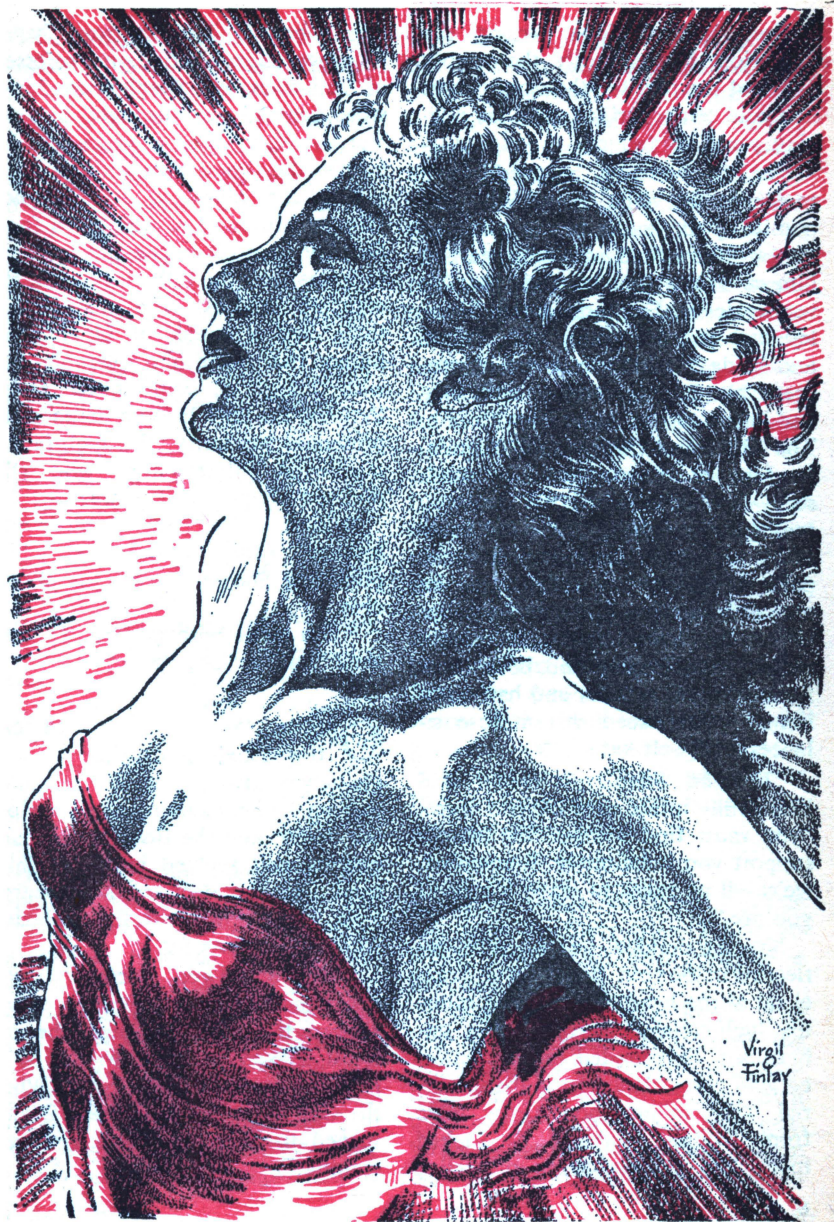
**The ancient Martians were
long dead — but the legacy
they left would never die!**

I

Usually in the evenings, while Traxel and Bridges drove off into the sand-sea, Shepley and the Old Man would wander among the gutted time-tombs, listening to them splutter faintly in the dying light as they recreated their fading personas,

the deep crystal vaults flaring briefly like giant goblets.

Most of the time-tombs on the southern edge of the sand-sea had been stripped centuries earlier. But Shepley liked to saunter through the straggle of half-submerged pavilions, the warm ancient sand playing over his bare feet like wavelets on some



Virgil
Finlay

endless beach. Alone among the flickering tombs, with the empty husks of the past ten thousand years, he could temporarily forget his nagging sense of failure.

Tonight, however, he would have to forego the walk. Traxel who was nominally the leader of the group of tomb-robbers, had pointedly warned him at dinner that he must pay his way or leave. For three weeks Shepley had put off going with Traxel and Bridges, making a series of progressively lamer excuses, and they had begun to get impatient with him. The Old Man they would tolerate, for his vast knowledge of the sand-sea — he had combed the decaying tombs for over forty years and knew every reef and therm-pool like the palm of his hand — and because he was an institution that somehow dignified the lowly calling of tomb-robber, but Shepley had been there for only three months and had nothing to offer except his morose silences and self-hate.

"Tonight, Shepley," Traxel told him firmly in his hard clipped voice, "you must find a tape. We cannot support you indefinitely. Remember, we're all as eager to leave Vergil as you are."

Shepley nodded, watching his reflection in the gold finger-bowl. Traxel sat at the head of the tilting table, his high-collared velvet jacket unbuttoned. Surrounded by the battered gold plate filched from the tombs, red wine spilling across the table from Bridges' tankard, he looked mode like a Renaissance princeling

than a cashiered Ph.D. from Tycho U. Once Traxel had been Professor of Semantics, and Shepley wondered what scandal had brought him to Vergil. Now, like a grave-rat, he hunted the time-tombs with Bridges, selling the tapes to the Psycho-History Museums at a dollar a foot. Shepley found it impossible to come to terms with the tall, aloof man. By contrast Bridges, who was just a thug, had a streak of blunt good humor that made him tolerable, but with Traxel he could never relax. Perhaps his cold laconic manner represented authority, the high-faced, stern-eyed interrogators who still pursued Shepley in his dreams.

Bridges kicked back his chair and lurched away around the table, pounding Shepley across the shoulders.

"You come with us, kid. Tonight we'll find a mega-tape."

Outside, the low-hulled, camouflaged half-track waited in a saddle between two dunes. The old summer palace was sinking slowly below the desert, and the floor of the banquet hall shelved into the white sand like the deck of a subsiding liner, going down with lights blazing from its staterooms.

"What about you, Doctor?" Traxel asked the Old Man as Bridges swung aboard the half-track and the exhaust kicked out. "It would be a pleasure to have you along." When the Old Man shook his head Traxel turned to Shepley. "Well, are you coming?"

"Not tonight," Shepley demurred hurriedly. "I'll, er, walk down to the tomb-beds later myself."

"Twenty miles?" Traxel reminded him, watching reflectively. "Very well." He zipped up his jacket and strode away towards the half-track. As they moved off he shouted: "Shepley, I meant what I said!"

Shepley watched them disappear among the dunes. Flatly, he repeated: "He means what he says."

The Old Man shrugged, sweeping some sand off the table. "Traxel... he's a difficult man. What are you going to do?" The note of reproach in his voice was mild, realizing that Shepley's motives were the same as those which had marooned himself on the lost beaches of the sand-sea four decades earlier.

Shepley snapped irritably. "I can't go with him. After five minutes he drains me like a skull. What's the matter with Traxel, why is he here?"

The Old Man stood up, staring out vaguely into the desert. "I can't remember. Everyone has his own reasons. After a while the stories overlap."

They walked out under the proscenium, following the grooves left by the half-track. A mile away, winding between the last of the lava-lakes which marked the southern shore of the sand-sea, they could just see the vehicle vanishing into the darkness. The old tomb-beds, where Shepley and the Old Man usually walked, lay between them, the pavilions arranged in three lines along a low basaltic ridge. Occasionally a

brief flare of light flickered up into the white, bone-like darkness, but most of the tombs were silent.

Shepley stopped, hands falling limply to his sides. "The new beds are by the Lake of Newton, nearly twenty miles away. I can't follow them."

"I shouldn't try," the Old Man rejoined. "There was a big sand-storm last night. The time-wardens will be out in force marking any new tombs uncovered." He chuckled softly to himself. "Traxel and Bridges won't find a foot of tape—they'll be lucky if they're not arrested." He took off his white cotton hat and squinted shrewdly through the dead light, assessing the altered contours of the dunes, then guided Shepley towards the old mono-rail whose southern terminus ended by the tomb-beds. Once it had been used to transport the pavilions from the station on the northern shore of the sand-sea, and a small gyro-car still leaned against the freight platform. "We'll go over to Pascal. Something may have come up, you never know."

Shepley shook his head. "Traxel took me there when I first arrived. They've all been stripped a hundred times."

"Well, we'll have a look." The Old Man plodded on towards the mono-rail, his dirty white suit flapping in the low breeze. Behind them the summer palace—built three centuries earlier by a business tycoon from Ceres—faded into the dark-

ness, the rippling glass tiles in the upper spires merging into the starlight.

Propping the car against the platform, Shepley wound up the gyroscope, then helped the Old Man onto the front seat. He pried off a piece of rusting platform rail and began to punt the car away. Every fifty yards or so they stopped to clear the sand that submerged the track, but slowly they wound off among the dunes and lakes, here and there the onion-shaped cupola of a solitary time-tomb rearing up into the sky beside them, fragments of the crystal casements twinkling in the sand like minuscule stars.

Half an hour later, as they rode down the final long incline towards the Lake of Pascal, Shepley went forward to sit beside the Old Man, who emerged from his private reverie to ask quizzically: "And you, Shepley, why are you here?"

Shepley leaned back, letting the cool air drain the sweat off his face. "Once I tried to kill someone," he explained tersely. "After they cured me I found I wanted to kill myself instead." He reached down to the hand-brake as they gathered speed. "For ten thousand dollars I can go back on probation. Here I thought there would be a freemasonry of sorts. But then you've been kind enough, Doctor."

"Don't worry, we'll get you a winning tape." He leaned forward, shielding his eyes from the stellar glare, gazing down at the little cantonment of gutted time-tombs on the

shore of the lake. In all there were about a dozen pavilions, their roofs holed, the group Traxel had shown to Shepley after his arrival when he demonstrated how the vaults were robbed.

"Shepley! Look, lad!"

"Where? I've seen them before, Doctor. They're stripped."

The Old Man pushed him away. "No, you fool, about three hundred yards to the west, in the shadow of the long ridge where the big dunes have moved. Can you see them now?" He drummed a white fist on Shepley's knee. "You've made it, lad. You won't need to be frightened of Traxel or anyone else now."

Shepley jerked the car to a halt. As he ran ahead of the Old Man towards the escarpment he could see several of the time-tombs glowing along the sky-line, emerging briefly from the dark earth like the tents of some spectral caravan.

II

FOR ten millenia the Sea of Vergil had served as a burial ground, and the 1,500 square miles of restless sand were estimated to contain over twenty thousand tombs. All but a minute fraction had been stripped by the successive generations of tomb robbers, and an intact spool of the 17th Dynasty could now be sold to the Psycho-History Museum at Tycho for over 3,000 dollars. For each preceding dynasty, though none older than the 12th had ever been found, there was a bonus.

There were no corpses in the time-tombs, no dusty skeletons. The cyber-architectonic ghosts which haunted them were embalmed in the metallic codes of memory tapes, three-dimensional molecular transcriptions of their living originals, stored among the dunes as a stupendous act of faith, in the hope that one day the physical re-creation of the coded personalities would be possible. After five thousand years the attempt had been reluctantly abandoned, but out of respect for the tomb-builders their pavilions were left to take their own hazard with time in the Sea of Vergil. Later the tomb-robbers had arrived, as the historians of the new epochs realized the enormous archives that lay waiting for them in this antique limbo. Despite the time-wardens, the pillaging of the tombs and the illicit traffic in dead souls continued.

“**D**octor! Come on! Look at them!”

Shepley plunged wildly up to his knees in the silver-white sand, diving from one pavilion to the next like a frantic puppy.

Smiling to himself, the Old Man climbed slowly up the melting slope, submerged to his waist as the fine crystals poured away around him, feeling for spurs of firmer rock. The cupola of the nearest tomb tilted into the sky, only the top six inches of the casements visible below the overhang. He sat for a moment on the roof, watching Shepley dive about in the darkness, then peered through

the casement, brushing away the sand with his hands.

The tomb was intact. Inside he could see the votive light burning over the altar, the hexagonal nave with its inlaid gold floor and drapery, the narrow chancel at the rear which held the memory store. Low tables surrounded the chancel, carrying beaten goblets and gold bowls, token offerings intended to distract any pillager who stumbled upon the tomb.

Shepley came leaping over to him. “Let’s get into them, Doctor! What are we waiting for?”

The Old Man looked out over the plain below, at the cluster of stripped tombs by the edge of the lake, at the dark ribbon of the gyro-rail winding away among the hills. The thought of the fortune that lay at his finger tips left him unmoved. For so long now he had lived among the tombs that he had begun to assume something of their ambience of immortality and timelessness, and Shepley’s impatience seemed to come out of another dimension. He hated stripping the tombs. Each one robbed represented, not just the final extinction of a surviving personality, but a diminution of his own sense of eternity. Whenever a new tomb-bed emerged from the sand he felt something within himself momentarily rekindled, not hope, for he was beyond that, but a serene acceptance of the brief span of time left to him.

“Right,” he nodded. They began to cleave away the sand piled around the door, Shepley driving it down

the slope where it spilled in a white foam over the darker basaltic chips. When the narrow portico was free the Old Man squatted by the time-seal. His fingers cleaned away the crystals embedded between the tabs, then played lightly over them.

Like dry sticks breaking, an ancient voice crackled:

*Orion, Betelgeuse, Altair,
What twice-born star shall be my
heir,
Doomed again to be the scion—*

"Come on, Doctor, this is a quicker way." Shepley put one leg up against the door and lunged against it futilely. The Old Man pushed him away. With his mouth close to the seal, he rejoined:

Of Altair, Betelgeuse, Orion.

As the doors accepted this and swung back he murmured: "Don't despise the old rituals. Now, let's see." They paused in the cool, unbreathed air, the votive light throwing a pale ruby glow over the gold drapes parting across the chancel.

The air became curiously hazy and mottled. Within a few seconds it began to vibrate with increasing rapidity, and a succession of vivid colors rippled across the surface of what appeared to be a cone of light projected from the rear of the chancel. Soon this resolved itself into a three-dimensional image of an elderly man in a blue robe.

Although the image was transparent, the brilliant electric blue of the robe revealing the inadequacies of the projection system, the intensity of the illusion was such that Shepley almost expected the man to speak to them. He was well into his seventies, with a composed, watchful face and thin gray hair, his hands resting quietly in front of him. The edge of the desk was just visible, the proximal arc of the cone enclosing part of a silver ink-stand and a small metal trophy. These details, and the spectral bookshelves and paintings which formed the backdrop of the illusion, were of infinite value to the Psycho-History institutes, providing evidence of the earlier civilizations far more reliable than the funerary urns and goblets in the anteroom.

Shepley began to move forward, the definition of the persona fading slightly. A visual relay of the memory store, it would continue to play after the code had been removed, though the induction coils would soon exhaust themselves. Then the tomb would be finally extinct.

Two feet away, the wise unblinking eyes of the long dead magnate stared at him steadily, his seamed forehead like a piece of pink transparent wax. Tentatively, Shepley reached out and plunged his hand into the cone, the myriad vibration patterns racing across his wrist. For a moment he held the dead man's face in his hand, the edge of the desk and the silver inkstand dappling across his sleeve.

Then he stepped forward and

walked straight through him into the darkness at the rear of the chancel.

Quickly, following Traxel's instructions, he unbolted the console containing the memory store, lifting out the three heavy drums which held the tape spools. Immediately the persona began to dim, the edge of the desk and the bookshelves vanishing as the cone contracted. Narrow bands of dead air appeared across it, one, at the level of the man's neck, decapitating him. Lower down the scanner had begun to misfire. The folded hands trembled nervously, and now and then one of his shoulders gave a slight twitch. Shepley stepped through him without looking back.

The Old Man was waiting outside. Shepley dropped the drums onto the sand. "They're heavy," he muttered. Brightening, he added: "There must be over five hundred feet here, Doctor. With the bonus, and all the others as well—" He took the Old Man's arm. "Come on, let's get into the next one."

The Old Man disengaged himself, watching the sputtering persona in the pavilion, the blue light from the dead man's suit pulsing across the sand like a soundless lightning storm.

"Wait a minute, lad, don't run away with yourself." As Shepley began to slide off through the sand, sending further falls down the slope, he added in a firmer voice: "And stop moving all that sand around! These tombs have been hidden here for ten thousand years. Don't undo all the good work, or the wardens

will be finding them the first time they go past."

"Or Traxel," Shepley said, sobering quickly. He glanced around the lake below, searching the shadows among the tombs in case anyone was watching them, waiting to seize the treasure.

III

The Old Man left him at the door of the next pavilion, reluctant to watch the tomb being stripped of the last vestige of its already meager claim to immortality.

"This will be our last one tonight," he told Shepley. "You'll never hide all these tapes from Bridges and Traxel."

The furnishings of the tomb differed from the previous one's. Somber black marble panels covered the walls, inscribed with strange gold-leaf hieroglyphs, and the inlays in the floor represented stylized astrological symbols, at once eerie and obscure. Shepley leaned against the altar, watching the cone of light reach out towards him from the chancel as the curtains parted. The predominant colors were gold and carmine, mingled with a vivid powdery copper that gradually resolved itself into the huge, harp-like head-dress of a reclining woman. She lay in the center of what seemed to be a sphere of softly luminous gas, inclined against a massive black catafalque, from the sides of which flared two enormous heraldic wings. The woman's copper hair was swept

straight back off her forehead, some five or six feet long, and merged with the plumage of the wings, giving her an impression of tremendous contained speed, like a goddess arrested in a moment of flight in a cornice of some great temple-city of the dead.

Her eyes stared forward expressionlessly at Shepley. Her arms and shoulders were bare, and the white skin, like compacted snow, had a brilliant surface sheen, the reflected light glaring against the black base of the catafalque and the long sheath-like gown that swept around her hips to the floor. Her face, like an exquisite porcelain mask, was tilted upward slightly, the hooded, half-closed eyes suggesting that the woman was asleep or dreaming. No background had been provided for the image, but the bowl of luminescence invested the whole persona with immense power and mystery.

Shepley heard the Old Man shuffle up behind him

"Who is she, Doctor? A princess?"

The Old Man shook his head slowly. "You can only guess. I don't know. There are strange treasures in these tombs. Get on with it, we'd best be going."

Shepley hesitated. He started to walk towards the woman on the catafalque, and then felt the enormous upward surge of her flight, the pressure of all the past centuries carried before her brought to a sudden focus in front of him, holding him back like a physical barrier.

"Doctor!" He reached the door

just behind the Old Man. "We'll leave this one, there's no hurry!"

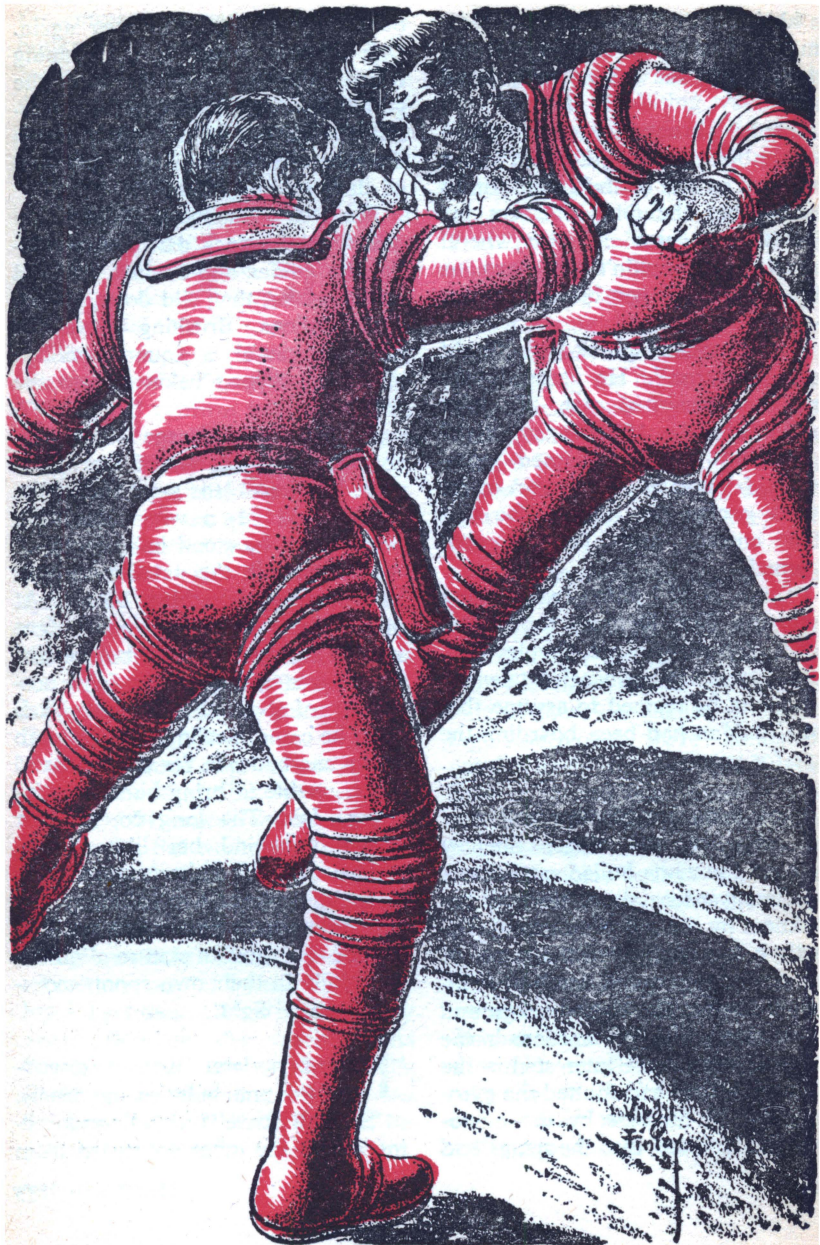
The Old Man examined his face shrewdly in the moonlight, the brilliant colors of the persona flickering across Shepley's youthful cheeks. "I know how you feel, lad, but remember, the woman doesn't exist, any more than a painting. You'll have to come back for her soon."

Shepley nodded quickly. "I know, but some other night. There's something uncanny about this tomb." He closed the doors behind them, and immediately the huge cone of light shrank back into the chancel, sucking the woman and the catafalque into the darkness. The wind swept across the dunes, throwing a fine spray of sand onto the half-buried cupolas, sighing among the wrecked tombs.

The Old Man made his way down to the mono-rail, and waited for Shepley as he worked for the next hour, slowly covering each of the tombs.

On the Old Man's recommendation he gave Traxel only one of the canisters, containing about 500 feet of tape. As prophesied, the time-wardens had been out in force in the Sea of Newton, and two members of another gang had been caught red-handed. Bridges was in foul temper, but Traxel, as ever self-contained, seemed unworried at the wasted evening.

Straddling the desk in the tilting ballroom, he examined the drum with interest, complimenting Shepley



on his initiative. "Excellent, Shepley. I'm glad you joined us now. Do you mind telling me where you found this?"

Shepley shrugged vaguely, began to mumble something about a secret basement in one of the gutted tombs nearby, but the Old Man cut in: "Don't broadcast it everywhere! Traxel, you shouldn't ask questions like that—he's got his own living to earn."

Traxel smiled, sphinx-like. "Right again, Doctor." He tapped the smooth untarnished case. "In mint condition, and a 15th Dynasty too."

"Tenth!" Shepley claimed indignantly, frightened that Traxel might try to pocket the bonus. The Old Man cursed, and Traxel's eyes gleamed.

"Tenth, is it? I didn't realize there were any 10th Dynasty tombs still intact. You surprise me, Shepley. Obviously you have concealed talents."

Luckily he seemed to assume that the Old Man had been hoarding the tape for years.

Face down in a shallow hollow at the edge of the ridge, Shepley watched the white-hulled sand-car of the time-wardens shunt through the darkness by the old cantonment. Directly below him jutted the spires of the newly discovered tomb-bed, invisible against the dark background of the ridge. The two wardens in the sand-car were more interested in the old tombs; they had spotted the gyrocar lying on its side by the monorail, and guessed that the gangs had

been working the ruins over again. One of them stood on the running board, flicking a torch into the gutted pavilions. Crossing the monorail, the car moved off slowly across the lake to the northwest, a low pall of dust settling behind it.

For a few moments Shepley lay quietly in the slack darkness, watching the gullies and ravines that led into the lake, then slid down among the pavilions. Brushing away the sand to reveal a square wooden plank, he slipped below it into the portico.

As the golden image of the enchantress loomed out of the black-walled chancel to greet him, the great reptilian wings unfurling around her, he stood behind one of the columns in the nave, fascinated by her strange deathless beauty. At times her vivid luminous face seemed almost repellent, but he had nonetheless seized on the faint possibility of her resurrection. Each night he came, stealing into the tomb where she had lain for ten thousand years, unable to bring himself to interrupt her. The long copper hair streamed behind her like an entrained time-wind, her angled body in flight between two infinitely distant universes, where archetypal beings of superhuman stature glimmered fitfully in their own spontaneously generated light.

Two days later Bridges discovered the remainder of the drums.

"Traxel! Traxel!" he bellowed, racing across the inner courtyard from

the entrance to one of the disused bunkers. He bounded into the ballroom and slammed the metal cans onto the computer which Traxel was programming. "Take a look at these — more Tenths! The whole place is crawling with them!"

Traxel weighed the cans idly in his hands, glancing across at Shepley and the Old Man, on lookout duty by the window. "Interesting. Where did you find them?"

Shepley jumped down from the window trestle. "They're mine. The Doctor will confirm it. They run in sequence after the first I gave you a week ago. I was storing them."

Bridges cut back with an oath. "Whaddy mean, storing them? Is that your personal bunker out there? Since when?" He shoved Shepley away with a broad hand and swung round on Traxel. "Listen, Traxel, those tapes were a fair find, I don't see any tags on them. Every time I bring something in I'm going to have this kid claim it?"

Traxel stood up, adjusting his height so that he over-reached Bridges. "Of course, you're right — technically. But we have to work together, don't we? Shepley made a mistake, we'll forgive him this time." He handed the drums to Shepley, Bridges seething with barely controlled indignation. "If I were you, Shepley, I'd get those cashed. Don't worry about flooding the market." As Shepley turned away, sidestepping Bridges, he called him back. "And there are advantages in working together, you know."

He watched Shepley disappear to his room, then turned to survey the huge peeling map of the sand-sea that covered the facing wall.

"You'll have to strip the tombs now," the Old Man told Shepley later. "It's obvious you've stumbled on something, and it won't take Traxel five minutes to discover where."

"Perhaps a little longer," Shepley replied evenly. They stepped out of the shadow of the palace and moved away among the dunes; Bridges and Traxel were watching them from the dining room table, their figures motionless in the light. "The roofs are almost completely covered now. The next sandstorm should bury them for good."

"Have you entered any of the other tombs?"

Shepley shook his head vigorously. "Believe me, Doctor, I know now why the timewardens are here. As long as there's a chance of their being resurrected we're committing murder every time we rob a tomb. Even if it's only one chance in a million it may be all they themselves bargained on. After all, one doesn't commit suicide because the chances of life existing anywhere are virtually nil."

Already he had come to believe that the enchantress might suddenly resurrect herself, step down from the catafalque before his eyes. While a slender possibility existed of her returning to life he felt that he too had a valid foothold in existence, that there was a small element of

certainty in what had previously seemed a random and utterly meaningless universe.

IV

As the first dawn light probed through the casements, Shepley turned reluctantly from the nave. He looked back briefly at the glowing persona, suppressing the slight pang of disappointment that the expected metamorphosis had not yet occurred, but relieved to have spent as much time awaiting it as possible.

He made his way down to the old cantonment, steering carefully through the shadows. As he reached the monorail—he now made the journey on foot, to prevent Traxel guessing that the cache lay along the route of the rail—he heard the track hum faintly in the cool air. He jumped back behind a low mound, tracing its winding pathway through the dunes.

Suddenly an engine throbbed out behind him, and Traxel's camouflaged halftrack appeared over the edge of the ridge. Its front four wheels raced and spun, and the huge vehicle tipped forward and plunged down the incline among the buried tombs, its surging tracks dislodging tons of the fine sand Shepley had so laboriously pushed by hand up the slope. Immediately several of the pavilions appeared to view, the white dust cascading off their cupolas.

Half-buried in the avalanche they had set off, Traxel and Bridges leapt from the driving cab, pointing to the

pavilions and shouting at each other. Shepley darted forward, put his foot up on the mono-rail just as it began to vibrate loudly.

In the distance the gyro-car slowly approached, the Old Man punting it along, hatless and disheveled.

He reached the tomb as Bridges was kicking the door in with a heavy boot, Traxel behind him with a bag full of wrenches.

"Hello, Shepley!" Traxel greeted him gaily. "So this is your treasure trove."

Shepley staggered splay-legged through the sliding sand, brushed past Traxel as glass spattered from the window. He flung himself on Bridges and pulled the big man backwards.

"Bridges, this one's mine! Try any of the others, you can have them all!"

Bridges jerked himself to his feet, staring down angrily at Shepley. Traxel peered suspiciously at the other tombs, their porticos still flooded with sand. "What's so interesting about this one, Shepley?" he asked sardonically. Bridges roared and slammed a boot into the casement, knocking out one of the panels. Shepley dived onto his shoulders, and Bridges snarled and flung him against the wall. Before Shepley could duck he swung a heavy left cross to Shepley's mouth, knocking him back onto the sand with a bloody face.

Traxel roared with amusement as Shepley lay there stunned, then knelt down, sympathetically examin-

ing Shepley's face in the light thrown by the expanding persona within the tomb. Bridges whooped with surprise, gaping like a startled ape at the sumptuous golden mirage of the enchantress.

"How did you find me?" Shepley muttered thickly. "I doubletracked a dozen times."

Traxel smiled. "We didn't follow you, chum. We followed the rail." He pointed down at the silver thread of the metal strip, plainly visible in the dawn light almost ten miles away. "The gyro-car cleaned the rail, it led us straight here. Ah, hello, Doctor," he greeted the Old Man as he climbed the slope and slumped down wearily beside Shepley. "I take it we have you to thank for this discovery. Don't worry, Doctor, I shan't forget you."

"Many thanks," the Old Man said flatly. He helped Shepley to sit up, frowning at his split lips. "Aren't you taking everything too seriously, Traxel? You're becoming crazed with greed. Let the boy have this tomb. There are plenty more."

The patterns of light across the sand dimmed and broke as Bridges plunged through the persona towards the rear of the chancel. Weakly Shepley tried to stand up, but the Old Man held him back. Traxel shrugged. "Too late, Doctor." He looked over his shoulder at the persona, ruefully shaking his head in acknowledgment of its magnificence. "These 10th Dynasty graves are stupendous. But there's something curious about this one."

He was still staring at it reflectively a minute later when Bridges emerged.

"Boy, that was a crazy one, Traxel! For a second I thought it was a dud." He handed the three canisters to Traxel, who weighed two of them in one hand against the other. Bridges added: "Kinda light, aren't they?"

Traxel began to pry them open with a wrench. "Are you certain there are no more in there?"

"Hundred per cent. Have a look yourself."

Two of the cans were empty, the tape spools missing. The third was only half full, a mere three-inch width of tape in its center. Bridges bellowed in pain: "The kid robbed us. I can't believe it!" Traxel waved him away and went over to the Old Man, who was staring in at the now flickering persona. The two men exchanged glances, then nodded slowly in confirmation. With a short laugh Traxel kicked at the can containing the half reel of tape, jerking the spool out onto the sand, where it began to unravel in the quietly moving air. Bridges protested but Traxel shook his head.

"It is a dud. Go and have a close look at the image." When Bridges peered at it blankly he explained: "The woman there was dead when the matrices were recorded. She's beautiful all right — as poor Shepley here discovered — but it's all too literally skin deep. That's why there's only half a can of data. No nervous system, no musculature or internal

organs — just a beautiful golden husk. This is a mortuary tomb. If you resurrected her you'd have an ice-cold corpse on your hands."

"But why?" Bridges rasped. "What's the point?"

Traxel gestured expansively. "It's immortality of a kind. Perhaps she died suddenly, and this was the next best thing. When the Doctor first came here there were a lot of mortuary tombs of young children being found. If I remember he had something of a reputation for always leaving them intact. A typical piece of highbrow sentimentality — giving immortality only to the dead. Agree, Doctor?"

Before the Old Man could reply a voice shouted from below, there was a nearby roaring hiss of an ascending signal rocket and a vivid red star-shell burst over the lake below, spitting incandescent fragments over them. Traxel and Bridges leapt forwards, saw two men in a sand-car pointing up at them, three more vehicles converging across the lake half a mile away.

"The time-wardens!" Traxel shouted. Bridges picked up the tool bag and the two men raced across the slope towards the half-track, the Old Man hobbling after them. He turned back to wait for Shepley, who was still sitting on the ground where he had fallen, watching the image inside the pavilion.

"Shepley! Come on, lad, pull yourself together! You'll get ten years!"

When Shepley made no reply he reached up to the side of the half-

track as Traxel reversed it expertly out of the moraine of sand, let Bridges swing him aboard. "Shepley!" he called again. Traxel hesitated, then roared away as a second star-shell exploded.

Shepley tried to reach the tape, but the stampeding feet had severed it at several points, and the loose ends, which he had numbly thought of trying to reinsert into the projector, now fluttered around him in the sand. Below, he could hear the sounds of flight and pursuit, the warning crack of a rifle, engines baying and plunging, as Traxel eluded the time-wardens, but he kept his eyes fixed on the image within the tomb. Already it had begun to fragment, fading against the mounting sunlight. Getting slowly to his feet, he entered the tomb and closed the battered doors.

Still magnificent upon her bier, the enchantress lay back between the great wings. Motionless for so long, she had at last been galvanized into life, and a jerking syncopated rhythm rippled through her body. The wings shook uneasily, and a series of tremors disturbed the base of the catafalque, so that the woman's feet danced an exquisitely flickering minuet, the toes darting from side to side with untiring speed. Higher up, her wide smooth hips jostled each other in a jaunty mock tango.

He watched until only the face remained, a few disconnected traces of the wings and catafalque jerking

faintly in the darkness, then made his way out of the tomb.

Outside, in the cool morning light, the time-wardens were waiting for him, hands on the hips of their white uniforms. One was holding the empty canisters, turning the fluttering strands of tape over with his foot as they drifted away.

The other took Shepley's arm and steered him down to the car.

"Traxel's gang," he said to the driver. "This must be a new recruit." He glanced dourly at the blood around Shepley's mouth. "Looks as if they've been fighting over the spoils."

The driver pointed to the three drums. "Stripped?"

The man carrying them nodded. "All three. And they were 10th Dynasty." He shackled Shepley's wrists to the dashboard. "Too bad, son, you'll be doing ten yourself soon. It'll seem like ten thousand."

"Unless it was a dud," the driver rejoined, eyeing Shepley with some sympathy. "You know, one of those freak mortuary tombs."

Shepley straightened his bruised mouth. "It wasn't," he said firmly.

The driver glanced warningly at the other wardens. "What about the tape blowing away up there?"

Shepley looked up at the tomb spluttering faintly below the ridge, its light almost gone. "That's just the persona," he said. "The empty skin."

As the engine surged forward he listened to the three empty drums hit the floor behind the seat.

END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, JULY 2, 1946, AND JUNE 11, 1960 (74 STAT. 208) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF

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SOL COHEN, Publisher

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 21st day of September, 1962.

Jacques N. Glick, Notary Public (Commission expires March 30, 1963)

SALINE SOLUTION

BY KEITH LAUMER

Blast you, Retief! Your violent ways are the disgrace of Earth's diplomatic corps — but your salty jokes are worse!

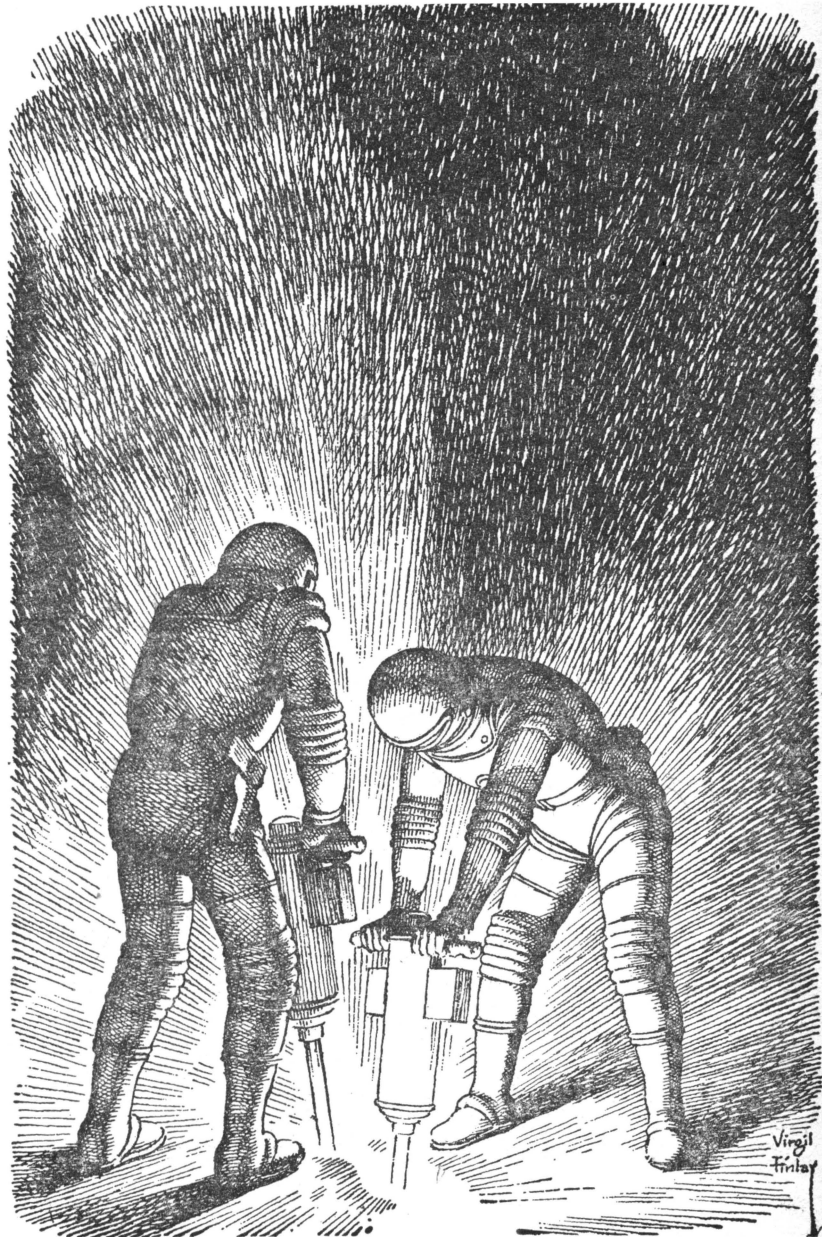
I

Consul-General Magnan gingerly fingered the heavily rubber-banded sheaf of dog-eared documents. "I haven't rushed into precipitate action on this claim. Retief," he said. "The Consulate has grave responsibilities here in the Belt. One must weigh all aspects of the situa-

tion, consider the ramifications. What consequences would arise from a grant of minerals rights on the planetoid to this claimant?"

"The claim looked all right to me," Retief said. "Seventeen copies with attachments. Why not process it? You've had it on your desk for a week."

Magnan's eyebrows went up.



Virgil
Finlay

"You've a personal interest in this claim, Retief?"

"Every day you wait is costing them money. That hulk they use for an ore-carrier is in a parking orbit piling up demurrage."

"I see you've become emotionally involved in the affairs of a group of obscure miners. You haven't yet learned the true diplomat's happy faculty of non-identification with specifics — or should I say identification with non-specifics?"

"They're not a wealthy outfit, you know. In fact, I understand this claim is their sole asset — unless you want to count the ore-carrier."

"The Consulate is not concerned with the internal financial problems of the Sam's Last Chance Number Nine Mining Company."

"Careful," Retief said. "You almost identified yourself with a specific that time."

"Hardly, my dear Retief," Magnan said blandly. "The implication is mightier than the affidavit. You should study the records of the giants of galactic diplomacy: Crodfoller, Passwyn, Spradley, Nitworth, Sternwheeler, Rumpwhistle. The roll-call of those names rings like the majestic tread of...of..."

"Dinosaurs?" Retief suggested.

"An apt simile," Magnan nodded. "Those mighty figures, those armored hides —"

"Those tiny brains —"

Magnan smiled sadly. "I see you're indulging your penchant for distorted facetiae. Perhaps one day you'll learn their true worth."

"I already have my suspicions."

The intercom chimed. Miss Gumble's features appeared on the desk screen.

"Mr. Leatherwell to see you, Mr. Magnan. He has no appointment —"

Magnan's eyebrows went up. "Send Mr. Leatherwell right in." He looked at Retief. "I had no idea Leatherwell was planning a call. I wonder what he's after?" Magnan looked anxious. "He's an important figure in Belt minerals circles. It's important to avoid arousing antagonism, while maintaining non-commitment. You may as well stay. You might pick up some valuable pointers technique-wise."

The door swung wide. Leatherwell strode into the room, his massive paunch buckled into fashionable vests of turquoise velvet and hung with the latest in fluorescent watch charms. He extended a large palm and pumped Magnan's flaccid arm vigorously.

"Ah, there, Mr. Consul-General. Good of you to receive me." He wiped his hand absently on his thigh, eyeing Retief questioningly.

"Mr. Retief, my Vice-Consul and Minerals Officer," Magnan said. "Do take a chair, Mr. Leatherwell. In what capacity can I serve today?"

"I am here, gentlemen," Leatherwell said, putting an immense yellow briefcase on Magnan's desk and settling himself in a power rocker, "on behalf of my company, General Minerals. General Minerals has long been aware, gentlemen, of the aus-

tere conditions obtaining here in the Belt, to which public servants like yourselves are subjected." Leatherwell bobbed with the pitch of the rocker, smiling complacently at Magnan. "General Minerals is more than a great industrial combine. It is an organization with a heart." Leatherwell reached for his breast pocket, missed, tried again. "How do you turn this damned thing off?" he growled.

Magnan half-rose, peering over Leatherwell's briefcase. "The switch just there — on the arm."

The executive fumbled. There was a *click*, and the chair subsided with a sigh of compressed air.

"That's better." Leatherwell drew out a long slip of blue paper.

"To alleviate the boredom and brighten the lives of that hardy group of Terrestrials laboring here on Ceres to bring free enterprise to the Belt, General Minerals is presenting to the Consulate — on their behalf — one hundred thousand credits for the construction of a Joy Center, to be equipped with the latest and finest in recreational equipment, including a Gourmet Model C banquet synthesizer, a forty-foot sublimation chamber, a five thousand tape library — with a number of choice items unobtainable in Boston — a twenty-foot Tri-D tank and other amenities too numerous to mention." Leatherwell leaned back, beaming expectantly.

"Why, Mr. Leatherwell. We're overwhelmed, of course." Magnan smiled dazedly past the briefcase.

"But I wonder if it's quite proper. . ."

"The gift is to the people, Mr. Consul. You merely accept on their behalf."

"I wonder if General Minerals realizes that the hardy Terrestrials laboring on Ceres are limited to the Consular staff?" Retief said. "And the staff consists of Mr. Magnan, Miss Gumble and myself."

"Mr. Leatherwell is hardly interested in these details, Retief," Magnan cut in. "A public-spirited offer indeed, sir. As Terrestrial Consul — and on behalf of all Terrestrials here in the Belt — I accept with a humble awareness of —"

"Now, there was one other little matter." Leatherwell leaned forward to open the briefcase, glancing over Magnan's littered desktop. He extracted a bundle of papers, dropped them on the desk, then drew out a heavy document and passed it across to Magnan.

"Just a routine claim. I'd like to see it rushed through, as we have in mind some loading operations in the vicinity next week."

"Certainly Mr. Leatherwell."

Magnan glanced at the papers, paused to read. He looked up. "Ah —"

"Something the matter, Mr. Consul?" Leatherwell demanded.

"It's just that — ah — I seem to recall — as a matter of fact . . ." Magnan looked at Retief. Retief took the papers, looked over the top sheet.

"95739-A. Sorry, Mr. Leatherwell. General Minerals has been anti-

culated. We're processing a prior claim."

"Prior claim?" Leatherwell barked. "You've issued the grant?"

"Oh, no indeed, Mr. Leatherwell," Magnan replied quickly. "The claim hasn't yet been processed."

"Then there's no difficulty," Leatherwell boomed. He glanced at his finger watch. "If you don't mind, I'll wait and take the grant along with me. I assume it will only take a minute or two to sign it and affix seals and so on?"

"The other claim was filed a full week ago —" Retief started.

"Bah!" Leatherwell waved a hand impatiently. "These details can be arranged." He fixed an eye on Magnan. "I'm sure all of us here understand that it's in the public interest that minerals properties go to responsible firms, with adequate capital for proper development."

"Why, ah," Magnan said.

"The Sam's Last Chance Number Nine Mining Company is a duly chartered firm. Their claim is valid."

"I know that hole-in-corner concern," Leatherwell snapped. "Mere irresponsible opportunists. General Minerals has spent millions — millions, I say — of the stockholders' funds in minerals explorations. Are they to be balked in realizing a fair return on their investment because these . . . these . . . adventures have stumbled on a deposit? Not that the property is of any real value, of course," he added. "Quite an ordinary bit of rock. But General Miner-

als would find it convenient to consolidate its holdings."

"There are plenty of other rocks floating around in the Belt. Why not —"

"One moment, Retief," Magnan cut in. He looked across the desk at his junior with a severe expression. "As Consul-General, I'm quite capable of determining the relative merits of claims. As Mr. Leatherwell has pointed out, it's in the public interest to consider the question in depth."

Leatherwell cleared his throat. "I might state at this time that General Minerals is prepared to be generous in dealing with these interlopers. I believe we would be prepared to go so far as to offer them free title to certain GM holdings in exchange for their release of any alleged rights to the property in question — merely to simplify matters, of course."

"That seems more than fair to me," Magnan glowed.

"The Sam's people have a clear priority," Retief said. "I logged the claim in last Friday."

"They have far from a clear title." Leatherwell snapped. "And I can assure you GM will contest their claim, if need be, to the Supreme Court!"

"Just what holdings did you have in mind offering them, Mr. Leatherwell?" Magnan asked nervously.

Leatherwell reached into his briefcase and drew out a paper.

"2645-P," he read. "A quite massive body. Crustal material, I imagine. It should satisfy these squatters'

desire to own real estate in the Belt."

"I'll make a note of that," Magnan said, reaching for a pad.

"That's a Bona Fide offer, Mr. Leatherwell?" Retief asked.

"Certainly!"

"I'll record it as such," Magnan said, scribbling.

"And who knows?" Leatherwell said. "It may turn out to contain some surprisingly rich finds."

"And if they won't accept it?" Retief asked.

"Then I daresay General Minerals will find a remedy in the courts, sir!"

"Oh, I hardly think that will be necessary," Magnan said.

"Then there's another routine matter," Leatherwell said. He passed a second document across to Magnan. "GM is requesting an injunction to restrain these same parties from aggravated trespass. I'd appreciate it if you'd push it through at once. There's a matter of a load of illegally obtained ore involved, as well."

"Certainly Mr. Leatherwell. I'll see to it myself."

"No need for that. The papers are all drawn up. Our legal department will vouch for their correctness. Just sign here." Leatherwell spread out the paper and handed Magnan a pen.

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to read that over first?" Retief said.

Leatherwell frowned impatiently.

"You'll have adequate time to familiarize yourself with the details later, Retief," Magnan snapped, taking the pen. "No need to waste Mr. Leatherwell's valuable time." He

scratched a signature on the paper.

Leatherwell rose, gathered up his papers from Magnan's desk, dumped them into the briefcase. "Riff-raff, of course. Their kind has no business in the Belt."

Retief rose, crossed to the desk, and held out a hand. "I believe you gathered in an official document along with your own, Mr. Leatherwell. By error, of course."

"What's that?" Leatherwell bridled. Retief smiled, waiting. Magnan opened his mouth.

"It was under your papers, Mr. Leatherwell," Retief said. "It's the thick one, with the rubber bands."

Leatherwell dug in his briefcase, produced the document. "Well, fancy finding this here," he growled. He shoved the papers into Retief's hand.

"You're a very observant young fellow." He closed the briefcase with a snap. "I trust you'll have a bright future with the CDT."

"Really, Retief," Magnan said reprovingly. "There was no need to trouble Mr. Leatherwell."

Leatherwell directed a sharp look at Retief and a bland one at Magnan. "I trust you'll communicate the proposal to the interested parties. Inasmuch as time is of the essence of the GM position, our offer can only be held open until 0900 Greenwich, tomorrow. I'll call again at that time to finalize matters. I trust there'll be no impediment to a satisfactory settlement at that time. I should dislike to embark on lengthy litigation."

Magnan hurried around his desk

to open the door. He turned back to fix Retief with an exasperated frown.

"A crass display of boorishness, Retief," he snapped. "You've embarrassed a most influential member of the business community — and for nothing more than a few miserable forms."

"Those forms represent somebody's stake in what might be a valuable property."

"They're mere paper until they've been processed!"

"Still —"

"My responsibility is to the Public interest — not to a fly-by-night group of prospectors."

"They found it first."

"Bah! A worthless rock. After Mr. Leatherwell's munificent gesture —"

"Better rush his check through before he thinks it over and changes his mind."

"Good heavens!" Magnan clutched the check, buzzed for Miss Gumble. She swept in, took Magnan's instructions and left. Retief waited while Magnan glanced over the injunction, then nodded.

"Quite in order. A person called Sam Mancziewicz appears to be the principal. The address given is the Jolly Barge Hotel; that would be that converted derelict ship in orbit 6942, I assume?"

Retief nodded. "That's what they call it."

"As for the ore-carrier, I'd best impound it, pending the settlement of the matter." Magnan drew a form from a drawer, filled in blanks, shoved the paper across the desk. He

turned and consulted a wall chart. "The hotel is nearby at the moment, as it happens. Take the Consulate dinghy. If you get out there right away, you'll catch them before the evening binge has developed fully."

"I take it that's your diplomatic way of telling me that I'm now a process server." Retief took the papers and tucked them into an inside pocket.

"One of the many functions a diplomat is called on to perform in a small consular post. Excellent experience. I needn't warn you to be circumspect. These miners are an unruly lot — especially when receiving bad news."

"Aren't we all." Retief rose. "I don't suppose there's any prospect of your signing off that claim so that I can take a little good news along, too?"

"None whatever," Magnan snapped. "They've been made a most generous offer. If that fails to satisfy them, they have recourse through the courts."

"Fighting a suit like that costs money. The Sam's Last Chance Mining Company hasn't got any."

"Need I remind you —"

"I know. That's none of our concern."

"On your way out," Magnan said as Retief turned to the door, "ask Miss Gumble to bring in the Gourmet catalog from the Commercial Library. I want to check on the specifications of the Model C Banquet synthesizer."

An hour later, nine hundred miles

from Ceres and fast approaching the Jolly Barge Hotel, Retief keyed the skiff's transmitter.

"CDT 347-89 calling Navy FP-VO-6."

"Navy VO-6 here, CDT," a prompt voice came back. A flickering image appeared on the small screen. "Oh, hi there, Mr. Retief. What brings you out in the cold night air?"

"Hello, Henry. I'm estimating the Jolly Barge in ten minutes. It looks like a busy night ahead. I may be moving around a little. How about keeping an eye on me? I'll be carrying a personnel beacon. Monitor it, and if I switch it into high, come in fast. I can't afford to be held up. I've got a big meeting in the morning."

"Sure thing, Mr. Retief. We'll keep an eye open."

Retief dropped a ten-credit note on the bar, accepted a glass and a squat bottle of black Marsberry brandy and turned to survey the low-ceilinged room, a former hydroponics deck now known as the Jungle Bar. Under the low ceiling, unpruned *Ipomoea batatas* and *Lathyrus odoratus* vines sprawled in a tangle that filtered the light of the S-spectrum glare panels to a muted green. A six-foot trideo screen, salvaged from the wreck of a Concordiat transport, blared taped music in the style of two centuries past. At the tables, heavy-shouldered men in bright-dyed suit liners played cards, clanked bottles and shouted.

Carrying the bottle and glass, Retief moved across to an empty chair at one of the tables.

"You gentlemen mind if I join you?"

Five unshaven faces turned to study Retief's six foot three, his close cut black hair, his non-committal gray coverall, the scars on his knuckles. A redhead with a broken nose nodded. "Pull up a chair, stranger."

"You workin' a claim, pardner?"

"Just looking around."

"Try a shot of this rock juice."

"Don't do it, Mister. He makes it himself."

"Best rock juice this side of Luna."

"Say, feller—"

"The name's Retief."

"Retief, you ever play Drift?"

"Can't say that I did."

"Don't gamble with Sam, pardner. He's the local champ."

"How do you play it?"

The black-browed miner who had suggested the game rolled back his sleeve to reveal a sinewy forearm, put his elbow on the table.

"You hook forefingers, and put a glass right up on top. The man that takes a swallow wins. If the drink spills, it's drinks for the house."

"A man don't often win outright," the redhead said cheerfully. "But it makes for plenty of drinkin'."

Retief put his elbow on the table. "I'll give it a try."

The two men hooked forefingers. The redhead poured a tumbler half full of rock juice, placed it atop the two fists. "Okay, boys. Go!"

The man named Sam gritted his teeth; his biceps tensed, knuckles grew white. The glass trembled. Then it moved — toward Retief. Sam hunched his shoulders, straining.

"That's the stuff, Mister!"

"What's the matter, Sam? You tired?"

The glass moved steadily closer to Retief's face.

"A hundred the new man makes it!"

"Watch Sam! Any minute now. . ."

The glass slowed, paused. Retief's wrist twitched and the glass crashed to the table top. A shout went up. Sam leaned back with a sigh, massaging his hand.

"That's some arm you got, Mister," he said. "If you hadn't jumped just then. . ."

"I guess the drinks are on me," Retief said.

Two hours later Retief's Marsberry bottle stood empty on the table beside half a dozen others.

"We were lucky," Sam Mancziewicz was saying. "You figure the original volume of the planet; say 245,000,000,000 cubic miles. The deBerry theory calls for a collapsed-crystal core no more than a mile in diameter. There's your odds."

"And you believe you've found a fragment of this core?"

"Damn right we have. Couple of million tons if it's an ounce. And at three credits a ton delivered at Port Syrtis, we're set for life. About time, too. Twenty years I've been in the

Belt. Got two kids I haven't seen for five years. Things are going to be different now."

"Hey, Sam; tone it down. You don't have to broadcast to every claim jumper in the Belt."

"Our claim's on file at the Consulate," Sam said. "As soon as we get the grant —"

"When's that gonna be? We been waitin' a week now."

"I've never seen any collapsed-crystal metal," Retief said. "I'd like to take a look at it."

"Sure. Come on, I'll run you over. It's about an hour's run. We'll take our skiff. You want to go along, Willy?"

"I got a bottle to go," Willy said. "See you in the morning."

The two men descended in the lift to the boat bay, suited up and strapped into the cramped boat. A bored attendant cycled the launch doors, levered the release that propelled the skiff out and clear of the Jolly Barge Hotel. Retief caught a glimpse of a tower of lights spinning majestically against the black of space as the drive hurled the tiny boat away.

III

Retief's feet sank ankle deep into the powdery surface that glinted like snow in the glare of the distant sun.

"It's funny stuff," Sam's voice sounded in his ear. "Under a gee of gravity, you'd sink out of sight. The stuff cuts diamond like butter — but

temperature changes break it down into a powder. A lot of it's used just like this, as an industrial abrasive. Easy to load, too. Just drop a suction line, put on ambient pressure and start pumping."

"And this whole rock is made of the same material?"

"Sure is. We ran plenty of test bores and a full schedule of soundings. I've got the reports back aboard *Gertie* — that's our lighter."

"And you've already loaded a cargo here?"

"Yep. We're running out of capital fast. I need to get that cargo to port in a hurry—before the outfit goes into involuntary bankruptcy. With this, that'd be a crime."

"What do you know about General Minerals, Sam?"

"You thinking of hiring on with them? Better read the fine print in your contract before you sign. Sneakiest bunch this side of a burglar's convention."

"They own a chunk of rock known as 2645-P. Do you suppose we could find it?"

"Oh, you're buying it, hey? Sure, we can find it. You damn sure want to look it over good if General Minerals is selling."

Back aboard the skiff, Mancziewicz flipped the pages of the chart book, consulted a table. "Yep, she's not too far off. Let's go see what GM's trying to unload."

The skiff hovered two miles from the giant boulder known as 2645-P. Retief and Mancziewicz looked it

over at high magnification. "It don't look like much, Retief," Sam said. "Let's go down and take a closer look."

The boat dropped rapidly toward the scarred surface of the tiny world, a floating mountain, glaring black and white in the spotlight of the sun. Sam frowned at his instrument panel.

"That's funny. My ion counter is revving up. Looks like a drive trail, not more than an hour or two old. Somebody's been here."

The boat grounded. Retief and Sam got out. The stony surface was littered with rock fragments varying in size from pebbles to great slabs twenty feet long, tumbled in a loose bed of dust and sand. Retief pushed off gently, drifted up to a vantage point atop an upended wedge of rock. Sam joined him.

"This is all igneous stuff," he said. "Not likely we'll find much here that would pay the freight to Syrtis — unless maybe you lucked onto some Bodean artifacts. They bring plenty."

He flipped a binocular in place as he talked, scanned the riven landscape. "Hey!" he said. "Over there!"

Retief followed Sam's pointing glove. He studied the dark patch against a smooth expanse of eroded rock.

"A friend of mine came across a chunk of the old planetary surface two years ago," Sam said thoughtfully. "Had a tunnel in it that'd been used as a storage depot by the Bodeans. Took out over two ton of hardware. Course, nobody's discov-

ered how the stuff works yet, but it brings top prices."

"Looks like water erosion," Retief said.

"Yep. This could be another piece of surface, all right. Could be a cave over there. The Bodeans liked caves, too. Must have been some war—but then, if it hadn't been, they wouldn't have tucked so much stuff away underground where it could weather the planetary breakup."

They descended, crossed the jumbled rocks with light, thirty-foot leaps.

"It's a cave, all right," Sam said, stooping to peer into the five-foot bore. Retief followed him inside.

"Let's get some light in here." Mancziewicz flipped on a beam. It glinted back from dull polished surfaces of Bodean synthetic. Sam's low whistle sounded in Retief's headset.

"That's funny," Retief said.

"Funny, hell! It's hilarious. General Minerals trying to sell off a worthless rock to a tenderfoot—and it's loaded with Bodean artifacts. No telling how much is here; the tunnel seems to go quite a ways back."

"That's not what I mean. Do you notice your suit warming up?"

"Huh? Yeah, now that you mention it."

Retief rapped with a gauntleted hand on the satiny black curve of the nearest Bodean artifact. It clunked dully through the suit. "That's not metal," he said. "It's plastic."

"There's something fishy here," Sam said. "This erosion; it looks more like a heat beam."

"Sam," Retief said, turning, "it appears to me somebody has gone to a great deal of trouble to give a false impression here."

Sam snorted. "I told you they were a crafty bunch." He started out of the cave, then paused, went to one knee to study the floor. "But maybe they outsmarted themselves. Look here!"

Retief looked. Sam's beam reflected from a fused surface of milky white, shot through with dirty yellow. He snapped a pointed instrument in place on his gauntlet, dug at one of the yellow streaks. It furrowed under the gouge, a particle adhering to the instrument. With his left hand, Mancziewicz opened a pouch clipped to his belt, carefully deposited the sample in a small orifice on the device in the pouch. He flipped a key, squinted at a dial.

"Atomic weight 197.2," he said. Retief turned down the audio volume on his headset as Sam's laughter rang in his helmet.

"Those clowns were out to stick you, Retief," he gasped, still chuckling. "They salted the rock with a cave full of Bodean artifacts—"

"Fake Bodean artifacts," Retief put in.

"They planed off the rock so it would look like an old beach, and then cut this cave with beamers. And they were boring through practically solid gold!"

"As good as that?"

Mancziewicz flashed the light around. "This stuff will assay out at a thousand credits a ton, easy. If the vein doesn't run to five thousand tons, the beers are on me." He snapped off the light. "Let's get moving, Retief. You want to sew his deal up before they get around to taking another look at it."

Back in the boat, Retief and Mancziewicz opened their helmets. "This calls for a drink," Sam said, extracting a pressure flask from the map case. "This rock's worth as much as mine, maybe more. You hit it lucky, Retief. Congratulations." He thrust out a hand.

"I'm afraid you've jumped to a couple of conclusions, Sam," Retief said. "I'm not out here to buy mining properties."

"You're not — then why — but man! Even if you didn't figure on buying. . ." He trailed off as Retief shook his head, unzipped his suit to reach to an inside pocket, take out a packet of folded papers.

"In my capacity as Terrestrial Vice-Consul, I'm serving you with an injunction restraining you from further exploitation of the body known as 95739-A." He handed a paper across to Sam. "I also have here an Order impounding the vessel *Gravel Gertie II*."

Sam took the papers silently, sat looking at them. He looked up at Retief. "Funny. When you beat me at Drift and then threw the game so you wouldn't show me up in front of the boys, I figured you for a right

guy. I've been spilling my heart out to you like you were my old grandma. An old-timer in the game like me." He dropped a hand, brought it up with a Browning 2mm pointed at Retief's chest.

"I could shoot you and dump you here with a slab over you, toss these papers in the john and hightail it with the load. . ."

"That wouldn't do you much good in the long run, Sam. Besides you're not a criminal or an idiot."

Sam chewed his lip. "My claim is on file in the Consulate, legal and proper. Maybe by now the grant's gone through."

"Other people have their eye on your rock, Sam. Ever meet a fellow called Leatherwell?"

"General Minerals, huh? They haven't got a leg to stand on."

"The last time I saw your claim, it was still lying in the pending file. Just a bundle of paper until it's validated by the Consul. If Leatherwell contests it. . .well, his lawyers are on annual retainer. How long could you keep the suit going, Sam?"

Mancziewicz closed his helmet with a decisive snap, motioned to Retief to do the same. He opened the hatch, sat with the gun on Retief.

"Get out, paper-pusher." His voice sounded thin in the headphones. "You'll get lonesome, maybe, but your suit will keep you alive a few days. I'll tip somebody off before you lose too much weight. I'm going back and see if I can't stir up a little action at the Consulate."

Retief climbed out, walked off fifty yards. He watched as the skiff kicked off in a quickly dispersed cloud of dust, dwindled rapidly away to a bright speck that was lost against the stars. Then he extracted the locator beacon from the pocket of his suit and thumbed the control.

Twenty minutes later, aboard Navy FP-VO-6, Retief pulled off his helmet. "Fast work, Henry. I've got a couple of calls to make. Put me through to your HQ, will you? I want a word with Commander Hayle."

The young naval officer raised the HQ, handed the mike to Retief.

"Vice-Consul Retief here, Commander. I'd like you to intercept a skiff, bound from my present position toward Ceres. There's a Mr. Mancziewicz aboard. He's armed, but not dangerous. Collect him and see that he's delivered to the Consulate at 0900 Greenwich tomorrow.

"Next item: The Consulate has impounded an ore-carrier, *Gravel Gertie II*. It's a parking orbit ten miles off Ceres. I want it taken in tow." Retief gave detailed instruction. Then he asked for a connection through the Navy switchboard to the Consulate. Magnan's voice answered.

"Retief speaking, Mr. Consul. I have some news that I think will interest you —"

"Where are you, Retief? What's wrong with the screen? Have you served the injunction?"

"I'm aboard the Navy patrol vessel. I've been out looking over the situation, and I've made a surprising discovery. I don't think we're going

to have any trouble with the Sam's people; they've looked over the body — 2645-P — and it seems General Minerals has slipped up. There appears to be a highly valuable deposit there."

"Oh? What sort of deposit?"

"Mr. Mancziewicz mentioned collapsed crystal metal," Retief said.

"Well, most interesting." Magnan's voice sounded thoughtful.

"Just thought you'd like to know. This should simplify the meeting in the morning.

"Yes," Magnan said. "Yes, indeed. I think this makes everything very simple. . ."

At 0845 Greenwich, Retief stepped into the outer office of the Consular suite.

" . . . fantastic configuration," Leatherwell's bass voice rumbled, "covering literally acres. My xenogeologists are somewhat confused by the formations. They had only a few hours to examine the site; but it's clear from the extent of the surface indications that we have a very rich find here. Very rich indeed. Beside it, 95739-A dwindles into insignificance. Very fast thinking on your part, Mr. Consul, to bring the matter to my attention."

"Not at all, Mr. Leatherwell. After all—"

"Our tentative theory is that the basic crystal fragment encountered the core material at some time, and gathered it in. Since we had been working on—that is, had landed to take samples on the other side of the

body, this anomalous deposit escaped our attention completely."

Retief stepped into the room.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Has Mr. Mancziewicz arrived?"

"Mr. Mancziewicz is under restraint by the Navy. I've had a call that he'd be escorted here."

"Arrested, eh?" Leatherwell nodded. "I told you these people were an irresponsible group. In a way it seems a pity to waste a piece of property like 95739-A on them."

"I understood General Minerals was claiming that rock," Retief said, looking surprised.

Leatherwell and Magnan exchanged glances. "Ah, GM has decided to drop all claim to the body," Leatherwell said. "As always, we wish to encourage enterprise on the part of the small operators. Let them keep the property. After all GM has other deposits well worth exploiting." He smiled complacently.

"What about 2645-P? You've offered it to the Sam's group."

"That offer is naturally withdrawn!" Leatherwell snapped.

"I don't see how you can withdraw the offer," Retief said. "It's been officially recorded. It's a Bona Fide contract, binding on General Minerals, subject to —"

"Out of the goodness of our corporate heart," Leatherwell roared, "we've offered to relinquish our legitimate, rightful claim to asteroid 2645-P. And you have the infernal gall to spout legal technicalities! I have half a mind to withdraw my offer to withdraw!"

"Actually," Magnan put in, eyeing a corner of the room, "I'm not at all sure I could turn up the record of the offer of 2645-P. I noted it down on a bit of scratch paper —"

"That's all right," Retief said, "I had my pocket recorder going. I sealed the record and deposited it in the Consular archives."

There was a clatter of feet outside. Miss Gumble appeared on the desk screen. "There are a number of persons here —" she began.

The door banged open. Sam Mancziewicz stepped into the room, a sailor tugging at each arm. He shook them loose, stared around the room. His eyes lighted on Retief. "How did you get here. . .?"

"Look here, Monkeywits or whatever your name is," Leatherwell began, popping out of his chair.

Mancziewicz whirled, seized the stout executive by the shirt front and lifted him onto his tiptoes. "You double-barrelled copper-bottomed oak-lined son-of-a —"

"Don't spoil him, Sam," Retief said casually. "He's here to sign off all rights — if any — to 95739-A. It's all yours — if you want it."

Sam glared into Leatherwell's eyes. "That right?" he grated. Leatherwell bobbed his head, his chins compressed into bulging folds.

"However," Retief went on, "I wasn't at all sure you'd still be agreeable, since he's made your company a binding offer of 2645-P in return for clear title to 95739-A."

Mancziewicz looked across at Re-

tief with narrowed eyes. He released Leatherwell, who slumped into his chair. Magnan darted around his desk to minister to the magnate. Behind them, Retief closed one eye in a broad wink at Mancziewicz.

"...still, if Mr. Leatherwell will agree, in addition to guaranteeing your title to 95739-A, to purchase your output at four credits a ton, FOB his collection station —"

Mancziewicz looked at Leatherwell. Leatherwell hesitated, then nodded. "Agreed," he croaked.

"...and to open his commissary and postal facilities to all prospectors operating in the belt . . ."

Leatherwell swallowed, eyes bulging, glanced at Mancziewicz's face. He nodded. "Agreed."

"...then I think I'd sign an agreement releasing him from his offer."

Mancziewicz looked at Magnan.

"You're the Terrestrial Consul-General," he said. "Is that the straight goods?"

Magnan nodded. "If Mr. Leatherwell agrees —"

"He's already agreed," Retief said. "My pocket recorder, you know."

"Put it in writing," Mancziewicz said.

Magnan called in Miss Gumble. The others waited silently while Magnan dictated. He signed the paper with a flourish, passed it across to Mancziewicz. He read it, re-read it, then picked up the pen and signed. Magnan impressed the Consular seal on the paper.

"Now the grant," Retief said. Magnan signed the claim, added a

seal. Mancziewicz tucked the papers away in an inner pocket. He rose.

"Well, gents, I guess maybe I had you figured wrong," he said. He looked at Retief. "Uh. . .got time for a drink?"

"I shouldn't drink during office hours," Retief said. He rose. "So I'll take the rest of the day off."

"I don't get it," Sam said signaling for refills. "What was the routine with the injunction—and impounding *Gertie*? You could have got hurt."

"I don't think so," Retief said. "If you'd meant business with that Browning, you'd have flipped the safety off. As for the injunction—orders are orders."

"I've been thinking," Sam said. "That gold deposit. It was a plant, too, wasn't it?"

"I'm just a bureaucrat, Sam. What would I know about gold?"

"A double-salting job," Sam said. "I was supposed to spot the phoney hardware — and then fall for the gold plant. When Leatherwell put his proposition to me, I'd grab it. The gold was worth plenty, I'd figure, and I couldn't afford a legal tangle with General Minerals. The lousy skunk! And you must have spotted it and put it up to him."

The bar-tender leaned across to Retief. "Wanted on the phone."

In the booth, Magnan's agitated face stared at Retief.

"Retief, Mr. Leatherwell's in a towering rage! The deposit on 2645-P; it was merely a surface film, bare-

ly a few inches thick! The entire deposit wouldn't fill an ore-boat." A horrified expression dawned on Magnan's face. "Retief," he gasped, "what did you do with the impounded ore-carrier?"

"Well, let me see," Retief said. "According to the Space Navigation Code, a body in orbit within twenty miles of any inhabited airless body constitutes a navigational hazard. Accordingly, I had it towed away."

"And the cargo?"

"Well, accelerating all that mass was an expensive business, so to save the taxpayer's credits, I had it dumped."

"Where?" Magnan croaked.

"On some unimportant asteroid— as specified by Regulations." He smiled blandly at Magnan. Magnan looked back numbly.

"But you said —"

"All I said was that there was what looked like a valuable deposit on 2645-P. It turned out to be a bogus gold mine that somebody had rigged up in a hurry. Curious, eh?"

"But you told me—"

"And you told Mr. Leatherwell. Indiscreet of you, Mr. Consul. That was a privileged communication; classified information, official use only."

"You led me to believe there was collapsed crystal!"

"I said Sam had mentioned it. He told me his asteroid was made of the stuff."

Magnan swallowed hard, twice. "By the way," he said dully. "You were right about the check. Half an

hour ago Mr. Leatherwell tried to stop payment. He was too late."

"All in all, it's been a big day for Leatherwell," Retief said. "Anything else?"

"I hope not," Magnan said. "I sincerely hope not." He leaned close to the screen. "You'll consider the entire affair as . . . confidential? There's no point in unduly complicating relationships."

"Have no fear, Mr. Consul," Retief said cheerfully. "You won't find me identifying with anything as specific as triple-salting an asteroid."

Back at the table, Sam called for another bottle of rock juice.

"That Drift's a pretty good game," Retief said. "But let me show you one I learned out on Yill. . ."

END

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JAY'S CORNER

6401 24th Ave., Brooklyn 4, N. Y.

THE ABANDONED OF YAN

BY DONALD F. DALEY

**The Abandoned have nei-
ther rights nor hopes.
They only have revenge!**

After her husband left her, Mari-gold filed a protection-request form and an availability form.

She did not do this immediately. She stayed up for the better part of the night, hoping that he would come back. She could not bring herself to believe that he would really walk out on her and leave her available for confiscation, or for the slavery pool. She also thought for quite a while about the possibility of somehow getting back to Earth, where she would not be available for either.

She even went to the fantastic expense of televiewing there to talk with her father and mother. They had been shocked and unfriendly.

They had said good-by with a finality which left little room for doubt as to what they thought of an Abandoned. They had never had one in their family, they had pointed out, neither of them, and they did not intend to have one in their family now. They had warned her that they intended to report the call to the Beta III Protection People.

This did not worry her much. The call almost certainly had been monitored anyway. If they wanted to go to the considerable extra expense of reporting it, in order to impress the Protection People with their loyalty, that was their own lookout. She understood that, now, she had no fam-

ily. She thought for a moment of going up-ramp to say good-bye to the children, but she knew that this would not help.

Besides, it was illegal. They were no longer hers. She was an Abandoned.

She had never known what a tremendously harrowing experience filling out an availability form could be. Name, age, Sector, race, size-classification, beauty-index, fertility tests, personality scores, aptitudes, psyche-rating and so on, and so on and so on. It was like undressing for an auction. The protection-request form was much simpler, except for that one question: STATUS? Her hand shook almost uncontrollably as she wrote. *Abandoned.*

After that she did not know what to do. She had stood for nearly twenty minutes before the document file, listening, thinking desperately that he would come back; that if she only waited a few minutes more he would come back. She had made herself refreshment. She had sat with the filled-out documents on her lap looking, from time to time, longingly at the entrance-ramp. But he had not come back. Finally, with a low moaning sound, she had pushed the papers through the document file slot. She made the deadline by a scant three minutes.

Now she knew that whatever else happened, the Protection People would be there in the morning to pick up the children. She knew that it could show in her favor if she were to get together the things they

THE ABANDONED OF YAN

would need to take with them. She could do this without seeing them and without talking to them, which was forbidden, but she could not bring herself to move.

The red light on the atmosphere control blinked warningly. Soon it would let out a piercing scream. She was tempted to just let it. Another of Clytia's suns must have set. She found that she had no sense of time. She had only the conviction that this would be her last night. The last night that mattered to her at all. She wanted it to be a long one. She had adjusted the atmoset. She had done this every night for the seven years of their marriage. She began to sob uncontrollably. She took her Status Married card and tore it in half. Then she held the halves to her cheeks, her face wet and wretched between them.

After a while she dialed the credit balance at her account. The figures came back indicating a balance of 1300. He had left her quite a lot, when you considered that she had televiewed to Earth. She cried hard again because she knew that he had not had to leave her anything at all. This made her certain (although she had known it already) that he was not coming back.

She sat for quite a while studying the 1300 credit indicator. She thought about using the money to buy a "pick-up-immediately advertisement" on the omnivision. She was not sure of the rates, but she thought the amount might even

stretch to include a picture of her. She did not know. She did not even know if she would be expected to be nude or dressed for the picture. In the end, she decided not to try an advertisement because there would not be time enough to employ a reply-receiving address. All that would be accomplished would be to put every predator within miles in possession of the address of an Abandoned.

She took a dictator and said into it: "Dear children, I am leaving you 1300 credit." She stopped then and shook her head. The tears made it so that she could not see, and she did not seem to be able to think. "Correction," she sobbed. "Erase preceding. Dear Children of Yan, I make you this gift of 1300. I am sure that your excellence will continue to deserve much more than so small a gift. I send love with this small gift."

There could, of course, be no signature. An Abandoned had none.

She wished that she had not made the Earth call. There would have been much more to leave them then. He had left an astonishing amount in her account. It was almost as though he had expected her to try to get away. She wished now that she had thought before taking action. There might have been some way out.

She must have fallen asleep. The morning announcements came on as usual, waking her. She listened to the instructions for that day, and the areas announced as forbidden.

She made no effort, however, to indicate them on the day-map. She knew that, now, none of this applied to her.

With a very great effort she got up and shut off the children's ramp, so that they could not come down. She knew how much this would count in her favor. Then she began, as hurriedly as she could, to collect the things they would need. She knew that she could not possibly get the things together in time, and that so late an effort was more likely to count against her. She was not even close to finished when the announcer flashed on.

Without asking who it was, she pressed the admitter. She was glad that they had troubled to announce themselves.

She offered to go into another room while they removed the children. They did not answer. One of them threw a sack over her. After a moment, they took it off again and, rather apologetically, asked her to indicate where the child-ramp control was. She showed them. Their leader said that perhaps it would be all right for her to go into another room if one of them went with her. When she saw the one chosen, she put the sack back on herself. They laughed so hard at this that she did not hear the children leave.

When the children had been taken out, the leader came back and removed the sack from around her. He asked if she had applied for protection. She showed her card.

"Well, that's too bad," he said. "Do you have any refreshment left?"

She did not dare to lie to him. She showed him. He helped himself.

"How about credits?" he asked.

"I gave it all to the ones who were here," she answered carefully. She felt quick panic because she remembered that she had not so instructed her account. She had merely dictated it to the children. If he didn't find out, though, that would be all right. The dictation was proof enough. But while she was still in this house, the credits were still in her control.

"My credit indicator is here," she said, holding it out. He didn't take it.

"Thanks for the refreshment," he said, getting up. "Make yourself comfortable. The others will be here shortly."

She had nothing to do to make herself ready. She could not take anything from this house. Sometimes they let you wear what you were wearing, if it did not look as though you had put on your best things. They did not always allow it, but they did sometimes. She remembered that she had expressed strong disapproval of that to Yan, when they were newly married. Then they both felt the same way about Abandoned.

She indicated to her account how she wanted the 1300 disposed. Then she waited. After a while, the Protection People came and led her out of the house. They did not touch her or speak to her, they merely formed a square in the center of which she

walked. They led her to a records room where an interview apparatus prepared a report on her.

"You have filed availability papers?" it asked.

"Yes," she said, and gave the file number.

"This is being checked," the apparatus said. "Have you any claims upon the State?"

She came very close to mentioning the children. "None," she said in a very small voice. It was difficult to remember that the interview apparatus was not at all sensitive.

"Have you credits in your possession?" the machine asked.

"None," she said.

"You are eligible for exclusion from the slave classification in what way?" That part of the recording seemed a bit worn. At least she did not hear it very well.

"In no way," she replied.

"You will wait," said the machine, "until we have a report on the availability petition which you have filed. Please take a seat."

There were no seats. This was an older machine which they had not bothered to replace, or even to correct. She stood in horror as the long minutes passed.

Her number was finally called.

"I am here," she said as the machine hummed, and she gave her number.

"Your availability petition has been taken up," said the machine. "You are however to receive twenty-eight demerits for disposing of

6300 credit after having been abandoned. Do you accept?"

"I accept," she said. She was so dizzy that she could hardly stand. The machine whirred and produced a reception-area card. She read it, and walked as in a daze to the indicated reception area. Yan waited for her there.

"You look terrible," he said as he put his arm around her. "I'm sorry. You made me do this to you. I didn't want to. It's all over now, don't cry."

She thought that she was going to faint.

"Thank you for receiving me," she said, according to the formula. "I am the Abandoned of Yan, of the Estate . . ."

"Stop it!" he said. "I know who you are! Stop it!"

"Do you have children at your estate?" She asked it as one asks a polite, social question.

"They'll be there when we get home," he said. "Don't do this. I didn't know it would hurt that much. I wouldn't have done it if I had. They're your children again now." He held her shoulders as he looked at her.

"I came to you with twenty-eight demerits," she said. "Shall I work them off before I come to your estate?"

"Please, stop it!" he said. "They were paid when you accepted. I waited here all night. No one else could have claimed you. Please, come on home now?" He handed her a brand-new wife-status card.

"Thank you," she said. "I shall try to deserve the opportunity which you restore to me." He smiled as she recited the formula and took his arm. Yet he did not look as if he felt like smiling.

"Come home," he said. "Come home now. I'll not hurt you again." He led her back to their estate.

That night, feeling entirely justified, she abandoned him.

"Mommy," the children shouted. They ran to her and hugged her. They had missed her, and had resented the disturbance in their routine. "Mommy!" They danced and shouted, "Mommy! Mommy, Mommy!"

When it was their bed time, he left her alone with them. He said good night to them himself, kissed them and squeezed her shoulder. "It's good to have you home again!" he said. His eyes filled with tears and he hurried from the room.

"Tell us a story, Mommy." It was the custom of the household.

There were tears in her eyes and her voice trembled a little, but she said in what seemed to them a perfect narrative style:

"Once upon a time there were two very good and loving children who found that it was their duty to denounce their father to the state and to see him publicly flogged to death. You must listen very carefully to this," she said, "both of you.

"At first, they thought that this was a very sad duty . . ."

END

THE WISHBOOKS

BY THEODORE STURGEON

It had been suggested that if we ever want to tip the Soviet economy on its edge and give it a good scraping, all we need is a few million Sears, Roebuck catalogs and some helium balloons to tote them. The theory is that Ivan would drool over them just so long, and then start making noises like, "It can't happen here, and why the hell not?"

Actually, there is a great deal more to the catalog — any catalog — than mere showcasing. It's a Santa sack; it's the glitter of Have to all Have Nots; it dwells in the bittersweet short spectrum between What If and If Only. But there's another aspect, one which clasps this department by its wonder-and-awe organ, and squeezes. For a catalog is a sort of portable museum, a graph of progress in many 'ologies. What it lists is the needed and the wanted; and what is wanted and what is needed are, each in its way, a measure of the culture to which the catalog is addressed. These items have been screened and filtered by men who know what they are doing, to fill needs which they know exist, as well as to create wants which they deduce are ripe and ready. And what a culture wants, or needs, or what

the purveyors think it needs, would be marvelous to a Martian. I have one catalog which offers you artificial vomit. Fool your friends. Oh boy.

Much more important, though, is that the catalog — especially the scientific and technological catalog — is a parade of serious achievements. Some of them are the sort of things that pop up in the "Why don't they make —" feature of the mechanical magazines, things that somebody has up and *made*. Some of these are things you've always wanted, but in new designs more attractive, more efficient and a darned sight cheaper than you ever dreamed you'd see them. Some items meet very special needs. Some will flabbergast you.

Did you know, for example, that you can now determine the speed of light in less than two minutes? Yes, *you*. And you can do it with an apparatus weighing under ten pounds, requiring no setup time, usable in full daylight while mounted on anybody's card table. It might take you eight minutes to learn to operate the gadget, which can be used to measure the velocity of light in air or in a solid or in any liquid

you care to pour into a cylinder which is an optional extra. You will not, of course, pick this item up at a one-cent sale — it costs \$550. It's designed for classroom physics demonstrations, and can be found in the Cenco catalog.

Cenco is the Central Scientific Co., and its wishbook is a joy to have and hold. It contains, of course, what you would expect of a major educational scientific supply house—pages and pages of chemicals (including specimens of safety-mounted radioactives,) biologicals (including microscope slides of human tissues) and laboratory glassware and other supplies. But the things that fascinated this department were the demonstration kits, like the light-velocity instrument mentioned above; a self contained demonstration of the Zeeman effect, or interaction of magnetic fields with light, and another for the Faraday Effect, showing the rotation of the plane of polarized light in a magnetic field; a two-page spread of really fascinating "Physics Paradoxes" designed by Julius Sumner Miller (i.e.: Two identical metal rods. One is a magnet. Without using accessories, find out which one, and *prove it*. Another: Connect two bubble-pipes stem to stem with unequally-sized bubbles hanging from them. What will happen? . . . you know something, Jack? You're wrong! One more: Make a semi-circle of large-diameter plastic tubing. Mount it, open ends upward, on a turntable. Drop in two wooden balls. They'll roll to the bottom.

climb to the top. Okay so far: now fill the tube with water and put in the balls. They'll float at the top. Spin the table; *they'll sink to the bottom*. Say why, and prove it.) There are eight of these Paradoxes in the catalog.

Climbing down from the high-budget area of demonstration materials, and leafing past the jars of frogs, starfish and worms for dissection and the pages of listings of physics and electrical supplies, we come to something worth reaching into the jeans for right now. We've all heard of teaching machines and the remarkable results they have obtained. Well, Cenco has one for \$2.95. Programs for it, running to about 500 frames each on a roll which feeds through the machine, and come in a respectable variety — Science I and II, arithmetic, algebra I and II, American history, spelling, grammar and vocabulary-building, with other subjects forthcoming.

Constant companion on our desk for years has been the big Lafayette Radio and Electronics catalog. Not long ago we built an intercom between house and studio with one of their kits, with our blackbanged Marion doing most of the soldering. It made a baby-listener so efficient that you could hear him breathing while he slept, and it set us back all of \$14.95. Their immense wishbook covers everything you can think of, and a lot you can't, in electrical, electronic, hi-fi, amateur, stereo, multiplex and citizen's band parts, kits and equipment — plus tools,

scientific and educational materials, microscopes, records and technical books

Lafayette's two deadly rivals, Allied Radio and Radio Shack, have somewhat similar services, and each something special of its own — kits, for example. We have recently ordered, from Allied, a \$29.95 "100-in-1 Lab Kit" for our 10-year-old; it builds photo-electric devices, a dozen different radios (tube, transistor, crystal, hybrid), amplifiers, broadcasters, a metronome and so on and on, all without soldering or extra parts. If you would like a sort of consumer's report on our trials and triumphs with this device, or others, on these pages, we will yield to enough requests.

No one could speak with awe and wonder about wishbooks without mentioning Edmund Scientific chunky little tome, about the size and shape of a sex novel but far more lasting. They specialize in science, math and optics, and can supply an absolutely fabulous variety of gadgets, gimmicks, and gewgaws. If you're building a do-it-yourself spinthariscopes or opaque projector, a reflecting telescope or a spectrometer, an abacus (yes, they have a kit for it) Edmund will sell you the parts. Dealing a lot (although not exclusively) in surplus, Edmund are past masters at the high art of using materials for purposes for which they are not intended. Because of this, you can get front-surface mirrors, polarizing lens assem-

blies, specialized prisms and the like at really astonishingly low prices. But far and away the best feature of the Edmund catalog is that it is also a handbook. All through its pages are generous blocks of type with diagrams, defining and describing, in very clear language, the varieties and functions of lenses and complex optical systems, such matters as "power" in microscopes and telescopes, and what it really means; suggestions for Science Fair projects, the psychology of teaching-aids and "learning games", and more.

Noting briefly, if geology or gemology is your kick, you'll like the big fat Grieger's Catalog of Rockhounding. It's a veritable education in dopsticks and jump-rings, cabochons and rutilated quartz. And they advertise one thing which we have been led to understand couldn't happen. It's called *Attack*, and, under the slogan, "what man has joined together can be cast asunder," it dissolves epoxy cements. If you are both handy and musical — and a surprising number of scientifically-minded people are — here are two items which should bring a sparkle to the eye: Heathkit has just announced an electronic organ kit. It's a double-manual, 10-voiced, 13-bass instrument with real big-organ performance. And Zuckermann will send you a very nicely produced little booklet on their do-it-yourself harpsichord.

If you'd like us to continue covering the Great American Wishbook for you, just ask!

END

THE TEN - POINT PRINCESS

BY J. T. MC INTOSH

**She was a Princess of Love —
so the aliens said. But what
she did spoke only of hatred!**

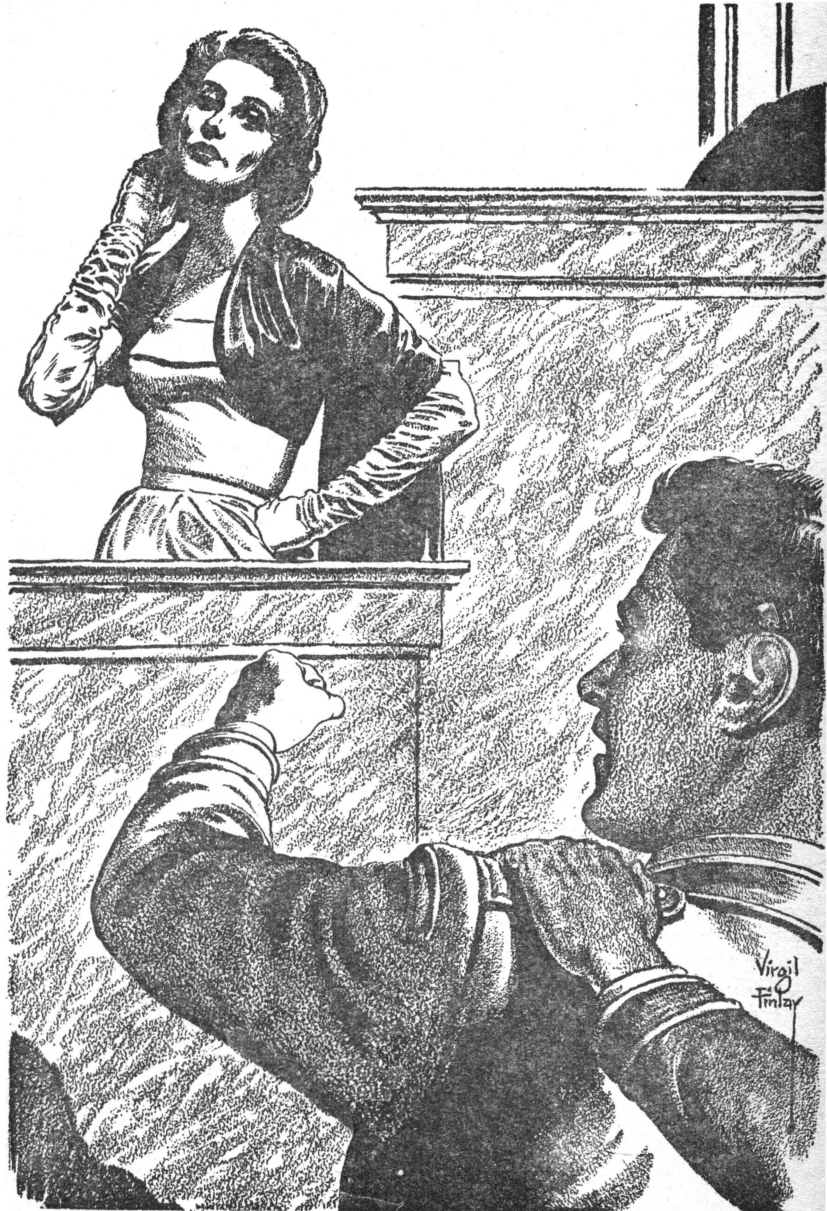
I

The Leisure Club in Leonta City claimed with some justice to cater to all tastes. On the night of April 7th two hundred Leontans and a hundred Terrans, all Army or Naval personnel, were making use of its facilities.

In one small room four men were attempting to play Beethoven's seventh string quartet, Op. 59, No 1. The cellist, a colonel, was sweating over his solos. He didn't mind that the leader of the quartet was a sergeant. But that his technical supre-

macy should be so overwhelming seemed hardly fair. Not for the first time, the colonel considered withdrawing from the quartet in the interests of discipline. The disciplinary problems of the Terran occupying forces on Leonta were bad enough without adding to them.

In another room five men, all Terran Army officers, played poker for high stakes. In the bar the inevitable hard drinking was going on, with the stern Leontan bartenders watching silently to make sure that nobody however drunk, got out of line.



The Leisure Club was not a dive. The Terran occupation troops who wished it was were out of luck. There wasn't a dive in Leonta City. Serving-men's wants were not supplied on Leonta as soldiers' simple needs usually are. The local standard of living being high, the strangers' money for once didn't shout in tones which demanded attention.

Army and Navy personnel of all ranks were freely admitted to the Leisure Club, but only on Leontan terms. It had already been demonstrated several times that the Club was quite prepared to bar all troops if the requisite standard of behavior was not observed. And some individuals were barred permanently.

Over twenty men were in the writing room, writing home. The variety theater, though small, didn't have quite a full house, and soldiers comprised less than half of the audience, the majority being Leontans. Leontan variety was too deep, subtle and serious for most serving-men. There weren't enough belly-laughs and there weren't nearly enough girls. On most other worlds the entertainment would quickly have been changed to appeal more to the large occupying forces. On Leonta everything stayed exactly as it was. If the uninvited visitors didn't like what was on offer, they didn't have to come.

Most civilized forms of relaxation were catered for under the roof of the Leisure Club. But there was no dancing, because there weren't enough girls. There were never enough girls.

The fact that there were some Terran nurses didn't help much, the ratio of men to girls being about twenty to one. It would almost have been better if there had been no Terran girls at all.

Usually, again, the local population of any ten-point human world would have eagerly supplied the deficiency. But Leonta's situation was not usual. Leonta was a highly civilized world at least as rich as Earth, and with the planet's wealth better distributed. Leonta, although beaten in three wars and compelled to put up with an army of occupation, had lost none of her pride and self-respect. Any low-grade Leontans who would have bowed and scraped in order to fleece the Terrans were kept firmly in line by the other ninety-five per cent.

The Number One deficiency of lonely men far from home was therefore more deeply felt on Leonta than it had ever been anywhere else.

Yet there was one small, surprising slit in the curtain. . .

The heavy drapes over an alcove in the bar slid smoothly open to reveal a girl reclining on a sofa. Every male head turned instantly.

She could have been Terran but for the uncanny perfection of her pale skin. Her combination of intelligence, cool aloofness and conscious provocation was enough to drive most men to anything short of murder — and some men, perhaps, all the way.

Her natural attractions were augmented by every artifice to raise her sales appeal, for the alcove was a shop window. That any girl in that particular shop window would have a perfect figure could be taken for granted. It was therefore unnecessary for the revelation of her charms to be vulgarly ostentatious. A few dramatic slits and plunges showed that she wore nothing but her bubble-thin black dress; the remarkable shape she revealed was all her own. Bright white lighting which few Terran women could have stood told frankly the truth and the whole truth about her natural talent.

Naturally she wasn't in the shop window long. Soon she was with a young Army captain, smiling and sipping a glass of wine. A sergeant who tried to butt in was warned by a small, cold look from the girl to keep his distance. The captain also waved him away irritably.

When he failed to heed either brush-off, the girl nodded to the bartenders. The sergeant was promptly deposited on the sidewalk outside. He protested bitterly but quietly, well aware that if the Leisure Club was cleared on his account he would suffer far more at the hands of resentful Army and Navy officers than his official punishment for creating an incident, which would be severe.

The girl Oeea remained in the bar with the captain for about an hour, then they disappeared together. It was only then that the envious officers and men who had been looking on became really jealous.

The opportunity to talk to a girl like Oeea was open to all. Most Love Princesses worked their way conscientiously through the entire list of bidders, Terran and Leontan, before making their choice. Oeea, however, had obviously made up her mind already. All the others were going to be unlucky.

Why didn't the Leontans, such sticklers for convention, stick to their own rules?

Half an hour later, the sergeant who had been ejected from the club, having managed to get into the building again somehow, found the captain beating Oeea brutally, sinking his fists into her body in an ecstasy of sadism.

Oeea was bearing this in silence, but the sergeant did not. With a roar of rage he seized a metal ornament and hit the captain with all his strength. Before the stricken man reached the floor he was dead.

II

The pilot on the landing barge made a fast, unnecessarily showy landing. Major Nigel Duke stepped onto solid earth, albeit Leontan earth, with some thankfulness. Traditionally the Army didn't altogether trust the Navy, and this mistrust had been carried into space. On solid ground, anywhere, any Army officer felt at least two inches taller.

Duke didn't get a chance to see anything of Leona. He was whisked straight to General Bailey, or at least to General Bailey's waiting-

room, without an opportunity to learn anything about the planet beyond the fact that it was cold. Not icy cold, just windy-rainy cold. The kind of world which forced its inhabitants, if they happened to be human, to be hard-working and brisk and efficient, because there was no temptation to lie in the sun, drink long, cool drinks and do as little as possible else.

Duke was a young major, a tall, tow-haired skeleton with whom nobody ever took any chances, because he looked the kind of officer who would relax only after the proper formal foundations had been laid. This impression was correct. Major Duke, an expert in military law, carried legalistic caution into every department of his life.

General Bailey didn't keep him waiting long. And when he was admitted, the general wasted no time at all. Duke knew why he had been sent for before he completed the act of sitting down.

"I want you to get a man shot, Major," Bailey said abruptly. "You're to be trial judge advocate at a general court-martial on Friday. And I want a verdict of guilty and a death sentence."

Duke, who had said practically nothing so far, said nothing now. With General Bailey, obviously, you very soon knew exactly where you stood.

Bailey was a small, bullet-headed man with all the aggressiveness of small men in high positions. tempered by a blunt correctness. "I guess

you know Leonta's historical background," he said, "so I won't bother you with that. Have you spoken to anyone who's served here recently?"

"No, sir."

"You're straight out from Earth?"

"I've been with the fleet law pool for ten months. During that time I've been temporarily assigned to Araminta, Deeswood and Hermitage. Never Leonta."

"I know that. I fought here and I've been in command of the occupying troops since the armistice six years ago. Well, I guess you're wondering why I sent for a hot-shot trial lawyer to prosecute. The truth is, Major, the only law man I've got whom I might trust with this case is already in it — defending. Morgestern asked for Major Francis, and in the circumstances he had to get him."

Bailey paused as if willing Duke to ask questions. Duke waited for him to make his own explanations in his own way.

"Cigarettes in that box, Major," Bailey said. "I don't use them, but—"

"I don't either, sir."

"Don't you? Good. Well, Major, here's the situation. The Leontans have fought three tough wars with us and they only stopped because they realize now that we're too big for them. They're not scared of us. And they don't hate us. They just want rid of us. The situation here is moderately stable but uneasy. They stick to all the military and civil agreements and never fail to point out every infringement on our part, ma-

jor or minor, by anybody from me down to the rawest rookie from Earth."

Duke nodded. He had heard about the Leontans: proud, independent, hard-working, cultured. They might have been super-Germans.

"The Leisure Club in Leonta City is open to all ranks, but only just. If anybody doesn't behave, he gets thrown out. The Leontans organize their entertainments as they organize most things — with more organization than entertainment. They don't put on a special show for us. They run their world their way, and we have to conform.

"In the Leisure Club you can drink, gamble, listen to classical music, paint, sculpt, take arty photographs, read, write, put on amateur theatricals. It's a recreation center catering for everything but with a strong bias toward culture. Guys who like string quartets and long-hair stuff get on fine. The ordinary Joe who can't see past women and booze isn't so happy. He can drink, but he isn't supposed to get stinko. And as for women . . ."

"The local girls won't play?" said Duke, because this time the general's silence positively commanded some response.

"As a rule, no. There's no outright ban."

Duke suspected from the general's tight-lipped reluctance to continue along this line that he was something of an ascetic. Just as Duke was deciding, however, that if in-

formation on this head was going to be necessary he'd have to get it from somebody else, Bailey plunged resolutely on.

"Some of our boys are fixed up fine, which is all right from everybody's point of view so long as they have the sense to keep quiet about it. But in general—no girls, except for one rather curious Leontan custom."

Bailey's mouth set disapprovingly, and his words came out like little icicles. "I like the Leontans all right, Major. I guess I even respect them. But this one thing I can't approve or even understand. . . They run a sort of high-class prostitution, clean and tidy and clinical. A very beautiful, intelligent and talented girl is chosen as a Princess of Love — so they call her. She goes on show like a prize heifer and then works her way through the list of bidders. Some men she rejects at a glance, some after five minutes' conversation. Eventually she meets someone she likes."

"And the price is astronomical?" Duke suggested.

"No, it isn't like that. On the contrary, the price isn't particularly important. She has to like the guy."

"Sounds rather like what we've got back at home. Only we don't call it prostitution. What do you dislike about the way the Leontans do it, General?"

Bailey looked slightly surprised, as if he thought he had successfully concealed his feelings about the system. But he answered the question.

"I guess the organization, the cold-bloodedness, the deadpan seriousness

of it. And the way they run it side by side with art and music and drama. . .

"Well, Major, all this is background. Ten days ago Sergeant Morgenstern and Captain Slater were in the Leisure Club. So were over a hundred other officers and men, and two hundred Leontans. A girl called Oeea became available as a Princess of Love. She joined Slater. Morgenstern tried to intervene but was thrown out.

"Later Morgenstern found Slater beating up the girl and killed him. There's no doubt about the facts of the killing. The girl saw the whole thing, and so did two other Leontans. In any case, Morgenstern admits it himself. Major, I want you to suppress any feelings of sympathy you may have for Morgenstern and get him hung."

"Why. General?" Duke asked quietly.

"Because he's a murderer, for one thing. Maybe it would be best if you stuck to that, Major Duke. But since you're sure to find out some of the undercurrents of this business, I'll talk to you again once you've studied the file. Here it is."

"You want me to read this and then report back?"

"No, read the file, go to the Leisure Club yourself tonight, and come back and talk to me tomorrow."

Duke nodded. It had not escaped him that he was being afforded no opportunity to refuse the case.

"Sergeant Bowler will show you to an office you can use," Bailey said. "Glad to have you with us, Major."

Major Duke settled himself in the small, bare room into which Bowler had led him and started his investigation of the Morgenstern affair.

Sergeant Isaac Morgenstern was twenty-five and there were no black marks in his record.

At 10:20 on the night of April 7, two Leontans in the back of the bar saw an Army sergeant rushing along a back corridor. Although they were aware of no reason why he shouldn't be there, not having noticed him being turned out earlier, his manner was strange enough to make them follow him. They were only a few yards behind him when he burst into a room, and they both clearly saw everything which happened in the next few seconds.

In the room a man who was later identified as Slater was punching the girl Oeea in the ribs. She made no outcry, but tried desperately to protect herself from the blows. One of the Leontans said Slater was laughing like a maniac. The other didn't hear this. (A small point which Duke found very convincing: when evidence is trumped-up, witnesses always agree to the finest detail).

Morgenstern shouted, seized a heavy metal lamp and hit Slater on the head with it. Slater pitched on the floor and lay still.

Morgenstern then dropped the lamp and fell on his knees beside the fallen man, seizing him by the throat. But Slater was already dead.

Afterwards, Morgenstern gave no trouble and denied nothing. He made

a statement of which Duke had a copy before him. But Duke put it aside for the moment, reading everything else first.

Morgenstern had been pronounced sane. Statements by other Leisure Club patrons that night, Terran and Leonan, corroborated the facts as Duke already knew them. Morgenstern had tried to interrupt Slater and Oeea earlier in the evening, and had been ejected on the girl's order. Morgenstern had been seen during the next hour prowling around outside the building. Twice he had tried to get in with a party of new arrivals. Shortly before the killing he had been seen going down a dark lane which led to the back of the club.

A confidential report by Slater's colonel stated that Slater was not well liked. He was extremely tough on all inferiors, and particularly on Jews and Negroes. He frequently referred to the Leontans as "stinking natives." Two years before he had been charged with beating up a girl on Araminta, but acquitted.

There was a medical report by an Army doctor who had examined the girl shortly after the incident. Her injuries were detailed: extensive bruises all over the front of the torso and on the arms. The doctor's summing-up was that the girl had suffered a barbarous attack which amounted to torture, inflicted in his opinion by a compulsive sadist.

Although he was trying to read the file with professional detachment, Duke was conscious of an in-

creasing feeling of bafflement. About Morgenstern's guilt there was no conceivable doubt, unless it arose out of the fact that the three vital witnesses, those who had seen the actual killing, were all Leontans. Yet it looked the kind of case in which the accused, having been found guilty on a reduced charge, would get a comparatively light sentence. Morgenstern appeared to have had the utmost provocation, and the killing was anything but a cold, premeditated murder. On all he had read so far, Duke would rather have been defending Morgenstern than prosecuting him, and would have given himself a fair chance of getting the sergeant off altogether.

Why, then, did General Bailey want Morgenstern shot? Why had he given Morgenstern his best legal officer as defense counsel and sent for a fleet law pool outsider to prosecute? Did he — an uncomfortable thought, this — expect his own top law man, Major Francis, to tie Duke in knots and get Morgenstern off, with General Jerome Bailey absolutely in the clear, whatever questions might be asked later?

Duke picked up Morgenstern's statement thinking that it might give a clue to the general's attitude. But it only increased Duke's bafflement. It read:

Oeea is my girl. She's no prostitute. She must have been forced to offer herself the way she did. We've been lovers for weeks, and we mean to get married. We nev-

er quarreled. I saw her only the night before and she didn't say anything about this Princess of Love business. I just couldn't understand it when I saw her in that alcove. Did I know what it meant? Of course I knew what it meant. Everybody knows.

I know all about Slater. He's a skunk. If Oeea had to give herself to somebody, I'd rather it was anybody else at camp than Slater. I can't understand why she went with him. There's something funny going on somewhere.

I got into the club through a cellar. I wanted to see Oeea. After thinking about things for an hour the only thing that made any sense to me was that Slater had got some hold on her, threatening her family or something like that.

When I found them he was hitting her like he was trying to kill her. I don't know what I did then. When I knew what was going on again, Slater was dead. Yes, I guess I killed him. Anybody else who saw what he was doing to Oeea would have, too.

Duke read this several times. He was beginning to wish he had never come to Leonta. He had never had a case he liked less.

III

On closer acquaintance Duke found Leonta's climate as cold and unfriendly as he expected. Be-

fore he reached the Leisure Club he knew why such an institution was necessary. On such a world there was no fun in going for night walks, in sitting in a car, in going from one place of entertainment to another. What was needed was a nice warm place with everything you wanted under one roof.

He expected some difficulty in being admitted to the Leisure Club. But when he gave his name to the two Leontans at the door he was passed inside at once. "General Bailey called and said you'd be coming," one explained.

It was the first time Duke had heard a Leontan speak, the first time he had seen a Leontan close at hand.

They were one hundred per cent human. They didn't even differ as much from Europeans and Americans as, say, Chinese did. The only thing which showed at once that they weren't Terran was their skin, which was pale, very faintly brown, and smooth as matt paper. The men appeared effeminate because Leontan men had exactly the same smooth skin as the women. The girls, although their skin texture showed instantly that they weren't Terran, didn't give the same slightly forbidding impression of belonging to another race. They were, indeed, more attractive than a cross-section of Terran girls, because of their perfect complexions, because they were rarely fat and because their features were never coarse.

Leontan native speech, Duke knew, was liquid, consisting entirely

of vowel sounds, of which there were over a hundred. Terran ears couldn't distinguish all these, and therefore no Terran had ever been able to speak or fully understand Leontan. The Leontans, however, found English fairly easy and many of them spoke it quite perfectly.

Duke found he was allowed to wander anywhere he wished in the Club so long as he was quiet and didn't disturb anybody.

There must have been fifty rooms, ranging up to small halls. The temperature was a steady seventy everywhere, except in the sport courts, which were kept cooler. Duke estimated that there were about three hundred people in the club, of whom perhaps a hundred were soldiers and sailors and six or seven were Terran nurses. Of the Leontans, a hundred fifty were women.

There was no obvious tension between Leontans and Terrans. But parties almost always consisted of one or the other. The only mixed groups were the permanent ones—the theatrical company, the bridge teams, the music groups, the tennis players. Even the drinkers in the bar were segregated in quiet, low-voiced groups of Terrans or Leontans.

It surprised Duke that it was possible to keep Terran Army and Navy personnel so subdued in a club on a beaten world. Yet after all—there was nowhere else in Leonta City to go, and if anyone stepped out of line the Leontans were within their rights in closing the Club to all Terrans. In such circumstances, Terran trouble-

makers would be squashed by Terrans, not Leontans.

Duke sat in the bar for some time just watching before he ordered a drink.

It was a sick spectacle. The Terrans sat around staring gloomily, hungrily at the Leontan and Terran girls who were present, all heavily engaged. Why, Duke wondered, didn't the Army have the sense to recognize this need in places like Leonta? Women could be occupying troops as well as men. Why not send out a thousand women in uniform?

The answer, presumably, was that the Army and Navy were blind to exceptions. Traditionally, armies on foreign, but human-occupied, soil managed to make do with the local talent. The Army did not, would not recognize that on Leonta, a proud, independent, wealthy world, the local talent could and did say No, thank you. The Army, which could be very foolish sometimes, didn't realize how it could lower its own prestige and efficiency on Leonta by not supplying one vital, priceless commodity.

And incidents like the Morgestern-Slater case became inevitable. Sooner or later such things were bound to happen.

Duke went thoughtfully back to the bar at last.

"I've just arrived," he said to the bartender. "I don't know what you drink here. Wine? Beer? Hard liquor?"

"All are available, sir." The Leon-

tan's manner was impeccably polite without being friendly.

"Then I'll try your wine."

"White or red, sir? Perhaps you'd tell me the Terran type you prefer. Barsac, Graves, Sauternes, Chablis, Moselle? Or Beaujolais, Beaune, Medoc, St. Julien?"

Rather startled, Duke said: "I like a good Rhine wine."

"Then let me recommend Aoeau, sir. I'll give you a glass, not a bottle. If you wish it again, ask for Spring Water — a free translation, but anyone will understand what you mean."

"Thank you."

"You're Major Duke, aren't you?"

Duke managed to conceal his surprise this time. "Yes."

The bartender said no more, but handed him a quite conventional wine glass half full of pale yellow wine. The charge was equivalent to ninety cents. The cost of living on Leonta was not low.

Duke sat down again and sipped his drink. It was a pleasant young wine, more like a light Moselle than a Rhine wine. Possibly the bartender was insulting his taste. And yet, a cool world like Leonta could hardly produce rich wines. There must be warmer areas than this one or Leonta wouldn't produce wine at all.

Without warning a curtain across one wall slowly opened. In a recess a girl reclined. The Terran men present jumped and stared and moved restlessly. The spreading undercurrent would have been felt by a blind man.

So this was how they did it. The

girl, presumably, was not Oeea. According to the medical report which Duke had seen she would still be nursing a good many nasty bruises.

Duke's interest remained detached. It was hardly surprising that the girl was exceedingly beautiful. The cruel effect she had on the Terrans present was not surprising either. Although Duke was trying to retain an open mind about the Leontans, he couldn't help forming a judgment. It was sadistic, and probably deliberately sadistic, to offer an entire garrison of woman-hungry men one or two exquisite courtesans a week, with no guarantee that some Leontan wouldn't win them in the end. It was a million times more cruel than to forbid such relations altogether.

"Ten days ago I was a Princess of Love," a soft voice said.

Duke turned his head. A girl had quietly sat beside him, a girl so like the girl in the alcove that he glanced quickly from one to the other. He now saw that there were differences. The two Leontan girls resembled each other, with the same measurements, the same clothes, the same make-up, the same hairdo.

"You're Oeea?" he said.

"Oeea," she said patiently. The name sounded subtly different, but he couldn't have done any better with it the second time.

Like the girl in the alcove and unlike all the other Leontan girls he had seen, she wore a transparent black dress with slits through which pale flesh peeped wickedly. Already, it seemed, her bruises had healed.

None of the skin her careless gown revealed was discolored. He remembered a hint in the medical report that Leontans healed more quickly than Terrans.

As in his interview with General Bailey, he refrained from starting the ball rolling. She knew who he was and had something to say, obviously; he let her get on with it.

"You're going to prosecute Isaac, aren't you?"

"It's possible."

"Do you mind if I talk to you?"

"You're doing it."

"But not here. Will you come with me?"

He rose, picking up his glass. "May I get you something?"

She looked at the glass. "What's that you're drinking?"

"Spring Water."

"And what do you think of it?"

"Pleasant, light, tolerable."

"The barkeep was testing your taste. I'll get you something better." She led him to the bar, spoke in liquid Leontan to the barman and took a bottle and two glasses from him. She shook her head at Duke when he offered to pay.

"Sorry, sir," said the bartender.

"What for?"

"You *did* know the difference."

Oeea led him to a small room which had low, soft, comfortable furniture. As she poured a glass of wine for him, he found to his annoyance that he was not immune to her physical presence.

"Must you wear a dress like that?"

She stood back to let him see it properly. "I thought you'd like it."

The neckline plunged past her navel. Pale flesh showed at hip, stomach and thigh. Even where the cloth covered her flesh it merely veiled it. And her slim, taut figure was superb.

"Why did you think I'd like it?"

"Most men do — Leontan'or Terran. If you like I'll change it."

"Please do."

She didn't expect that and hesitated for a moment. Then she went out.

Duke tasted the wine. It was fuller, richer, decidedly superior to the Spring Water.

Oeea was back in only a few seconds. She was now dressed, like the other Leontan women Duke had seen, in a short neat garment which hugged the figure and left most of her arms and legs bare. Compared with her black dress it was eminently respectable.

"I have already spoken to Major Francis," she said. "I've told him everything I know which will help Isaac. I promised to testify to it all."

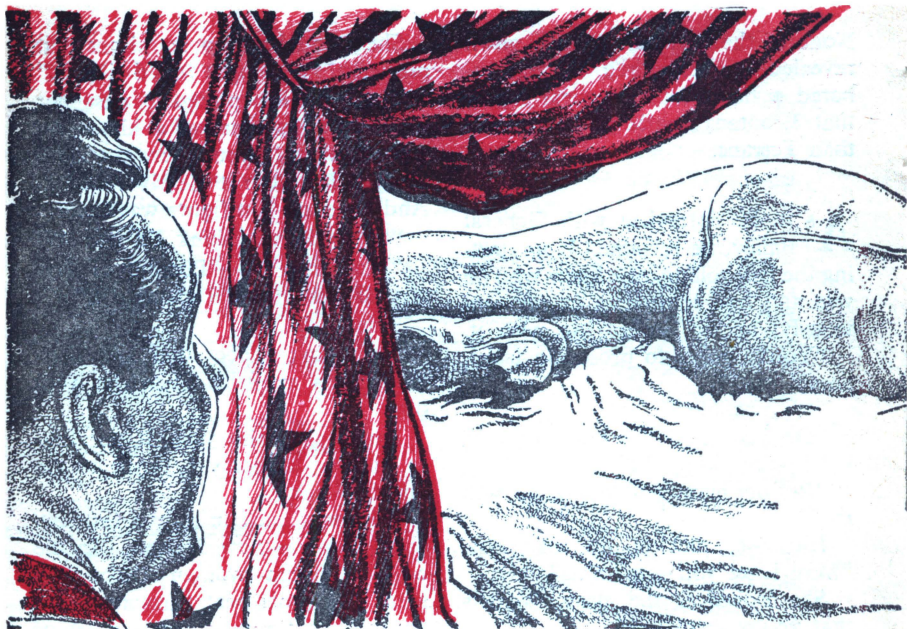
"Why tell me this?"

She poured herself a glass of wine and sipped it. "I don't understand your legal system. Must Isaac be tried? Can't you and Major Francis talk things over and release him?"

Duke thought of many answers and chose the simplest. "No."

"Don't you have a system, as we have, of forgiving even murder if the victim thoroughly deserved death?"

"There must be a trial. If the pro-



vocation was great, the sentence may be light.”

“Couldn’t Isaac be declared not guilty?”

“According to your own evidence, he killed Slater. Therefore he must be guilty of something.”

“And there must be a punishment?”

“Theoretically, yes. In practice, no. He might be awarded some punishment which is no punishment at all.”

“And who will decide that? General Bailey?”

There was venom in the way she pronounced Bailey’s name. Duke decided instantly to prove this.

“What do you have against General Bailey?”

“He’s a hard man. The wrong man to be in charge here. The wrong

Terran. If we must have a Terran general in command here, it should not be General Bailey.”

“Why not?”

“He doesn’t understand us and doesn’t want to understand us. He wants us to persecute Isaac because he is a Jew and because Isaac loves me.”

“What do you know about Morgenstern being a Jew?”

“What Isaac told me. Some Terrans, like Slater and General Bailey, hate Jews. Do you?”

“No. You can rest assured that Morgenstern won’t be treated unfairly because he is a Jew. About the other thing — why do you say General Bailey hates Morgenstern because he loves you?”



"General Bailey fought us. He doesn't trust us. He still dislikes us, if he doesn't hate us. And things which he doesn't understand, he hates. He hates and despises me because I was a Princess of Love. He thinks I'm nothing more than a prostitute."

"And are you?"

"Isaac told me what you on your own world understand by prostitution. It's dirty there because you make it dirty. Here it is different. Major Francis is going to get me to explain our system at the trial. He thinks it's very important to his case."

Legal ethics made Duke say: "Ocea, if you want to help Morgestern perhaps you shouldn't talk to me at all. Help Major Francis all you like, but don't tell me his case."

"You mean you don't want to understand either? Like General Bailey?"

"I don't mean that at all. I mean —"

"Listen. Even Isaac doesn't understand. Major Duke, we are a cultured, artistic people. Please don't misunderstand me when I say we're more cultured than you are. I mean that among us the general, the average level of cultural awareness and attainment is higher."

"I must admit that the way you speak my language impresses me very much."

"That's one example. If we study a thing at all, first we decide how to study it. We take the best models. Thus I don't speak your language like a London or New York gutter-

snipe, but more as it's spoken at Princeton. But that's a digression. Isn't it only to be expected that a cultured people brings art to more and more pursuits? A savage, primitive society has few arts. A highly civilized culture has many. With us, love is an art. Not all of us study it, any more than every Terran studies all your arts. Women study it more than men, and beautiful, healthy people of both sexes study it more than plain people of moderate health and strength."

"Study can stultify," Duke remarked thoughtfully.

"Of course. Do you think we don't know that too? We know the dangers, and guard against them. Among us, Major Duke, a girl is proud to be invited to be a Princess of Love. It is a great honor. No girl, no matter how beautiful and talented, can be a Love Princess more than three times at most."

"Please," Duke protested. "I understand that you're telling me that among Leontans your exclusive, high-grade Princess of Love system is part of your culture and that a girl who figures in it isn't reckoned to have lost her respectability. Granting all that, I can't see what it has to do with Morgenstern and Slater."

"It has a great deal to do with General Bailey," the girl said in a low, serious voice. "He regards what happened as a vulgar, sordid affair, and his disgust over the whole business is his real reason for wanting to execute Isaac."

She might well be right, Duke

thought. But he kept this conclusion strictly to himself.

IV

"Did you go to the Leisure Club last night?" General Bailey asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you going to get Morgenstern shot for me?"

"May I be frank, sir? I can find no reason why the death penalty should be sought in this case. For my own part, I'd much rather be defending Morgenstern than prosecuting him. And I think I could get him off."

Bailey was thunderstruck. When at last he could speak, he said in a voice in which the grating of ice could be heard: "It seems I've been very much mistaken in you, Major."

"Yes, sir. You wish to appoint another officer as trial judge advocate?"

Bailey already had himself in command again. "Wait, sir. You're going too fast. I asked for the best prosecutor the fleet law pool could provide, and you were the man who was sent. Exactly why are you in such an all-fired hurry to duck out of this case?"

"Because, sir, my preliminary investigations suggest that you're allowing your own prejudices to sway you."

"That what you think, is it?"

Bailey's sudden calmness was the last thing Duke expected. What he had expected had been a burst of fury in the course of which General

Bailey would have blasted him off Leonta and back to the fleet. Making Bailey furious, Duke calculated, was the quickest and surest way of extricating himself from the Morgenstern case.

"Suppose I tell you," said Bailey, "that you're right, and that I still don't feel a twinge of conscience that I want to get Morgenstern shot?"

"Then I'd want to hear what else you have to say, sir."

"That's more like it," said Bailey grimly. "Listen, then. Major, unless you're blind and have never studied any history you must know that every century since the Middle Ages internal military discipline has weakened."

"That's a tenable point of view."

"It's more than that. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries all soldiers obeyed all orders instantly, blindly. Injustices were borne quietly, as being in the nature of things. In the twentieth century, psychiatry gave every troublemaker the excuse that everything wrong he did was somebody else's fault. And kids, teenagers, criminals, neurotics and ordinary enlisted men all learned that they could get away with anything if they put on a good enough act. By the twenty-second century a private could sue his colonel for persecution and get a hundred thousand dollar settlement."

"Only in a very clear, very extreme case, and in peacetime, sir."

"I said it could happen, didn't I? In the nineteenth century, could any private sue his colonel for any damn

thing? This is a trend, Major, and it's still growing. The trouble is, we still need armies. We still even need *peacetime* armies. And in peacetime, on jobs like this occupation of Leonta, the problem of discipline is at its worst. I've got to watch everything I do and say all day and every day in case some disgruntled sergeant or lieutenant or captain decides to get me kicked out of my job."

"Yes, sir. Am I to understand you have serious disciplinary problems here on Leonta?"

"Hell, Major, you only had to open your eyes to see we must have. The Leontans don't like us, don't want us here. So they do all they can to make things awkward. Mostly they back the rights of the underprivileged, as you might say. Treat privates just like colonels. Act as if we're all Terrans, all soldiers, and what's the difference? Don't you see how that can make things tough?"

"Yes, I — do see," said Duke. He was mentally kicking himself. There was more to the Morgenstern case than met the eye. He should have been the last man to make up his mind before all the evidence was in.

"Now, the Leisure Club. I wanted a separate club for officers, but the Leontans said they'd open the club to all or none. Could I have given orders that the Leisure Club was for officers only? I could not. Then, this Love Princess business. You think it's okay, Major? You think I'm prejudiced?"

Duke hesitated. "Ethically, it doesn't seem so —"

"Major, as far as I'm concerned ethical considerations don't come into it. What concerns me is the effect on my garrison. What do you think of that?"

Duke admitted that the effect must be wholly bad.

Bailey shrugged impatiently. "I could have said all this yesterday, but I wanted you to look around first. Now, let's get down to this case. So you've got a lot of sympathy for Morgenstern? Morgenstern is a sergeant. He's been here quite long enough to know the ropes. Apparently he thought he had a Leontan girl, one of the few lucky enough to be in that position. The Leontans don't like it, but it happens. So long as the two of them keep it under cover, nobody does anything about it.

"Then he saw his girl on offer as a Princess of Love. Sure, that shook him up a bit. But it only proved what he should have known all along — that his girl was a Leontan, and liable to act like a Leontan. It gave him no license to kill a Terran Army captain."

Duke got the first hint of what Bailey was really getting at. He looked at him sharply, wondering if the blunt general was that shrewd.

And Bailey promptly proved he was. "Morgenstern is either a cunning fool or a stupid fool, Major, but a fool anyway. See what I mean?"

"Yes, sir," Duke whispered. "I guess I do see what you mean."

"And though we don't execute

crazy people any more, we often have to execute fools."

"Yes." said Duke quietly. "Yes, we do."

Duke had a busy time before the trial opened. There was a lot of work to be done, and nobody but himself to do it. Neither he nor Major Francis had been provided with an assistant.

Duke didn't meet either Morgenstern or Francis until the court-martial opened. Five officers presided over by General Hebbenton sat at a long table. Duke had a small table set at one end at right-angles. At the corresponding table at the other end Morgenstern sat with Major Francis.

Morgenstern was not at all as Duke had pictured him. He was a good-looking cheerful young man who didn't look the type to kill an officer in a fit of rage. He didn't look the type to kill anyone. There was one thing, however, in his appearance which particularly interested Duke. He looked a cunning fool rather than a stupid fool — if he was a fool at all.

Duke opened his case with the three witnesses of the killing, with Oeea herself last. All three were good, clear witnesses. They knew what they had seen and they weren't going to be inveigled into saying they had seen any more or any less.

Duke was very careful in his questions to Oeea, opening as few doors as possible for Major Francis to barge through in cross-examination.

Duke knew that Oeea was also being called as a witness for the defense. Before Francis had any opportunity to start putting on his case, however, Duke wanted to get all the facts in the record.

Major Francis, rather surprisingly, did not cross-examine. Certainly he would have his chance later. Duke had expected, however, that he would lose no time in bringing out some of the facts which were obviously in Morgenstern's favor.

After Oeea, Duke brought on a Captain Harry Burns who testified that Slater was not well liked, that he hated Jews and Negroes and that there had been trouble before between Slater and Morgenstern. While this witness was before the court, Francis several times objected on various grounds, but none of his objections were sustained.

Duke got the impression that several members of the court were very curious about Slater's previous relations with Morgenstern, and since Burns was the only witness who was going to tell them anything at all about this feature of the case they thought they'd better hear all he had to say.

Then Duke put Lieutenant Sam Borke on the stand.

"You were in the Leisure Club on the night of the killing, Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir."

"Alone?"

"I was in the bar with several friends."

"Please give their names."

"Captain Bob Morrice, Lieutenant

Tom Rora, Ensign Bill Teiger of the Navy, and a nurse, Marge Brown."

"All Terrans, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was there any contact between your party and any Leontans, apart from the bartenders?"

"How do you mean, contact?"

"Did any Leontans speak to you?"

"Not till that guy came over."

"What guy, Lieutenant?"

"I can't say his name, the guy who saw the killing."

"Two Leontans saw the killing."

"I know, the other guy was with him. They were both there. Anyway, the first guy said —"

"Objection," said Francis, on his feet.

"Objection sustained," said Hebbenton. "You cannot elicit hearsay evidence, Major Duke. And please establish which of the Leontans spoke to the witness."

"Yes, sir. Lieutenant, was it the Leontan Eoae who spoke to you?"

"Yes, that's the guy. The big one."

"What did Eoae do after he spoke to you?"

"Went out to the toilet."

"Are you of your own knowledge aware that he went to the toilet?"

"No. But he said he was going."

With some difficulty, for the lieutenant was not a good witness, Duke managed to establish that the two Leontans who saw the killing had talked to Borke's party just before going out of the bar and that this must have been before they saw Morgenstern murder Slater.

Then he closed his case.

Hebbenton's eyebrows shot up and he asked Francis and Duke to approach.

"Is that your entire case, Major Duke?" he demanded.

"I have shown that Sergeant Morgenstern killed Captain Slater, sir, and that ill-feeling had existed between the two men for some time. What more can I do?"

"That remark comes perilously close to insolence, Major."

"It isn't intended, sir."

Hebbenton struggled with himself. Then he said quietly: "You know the circumstances, Major Duke. All Leontans must, in the circumstances, be considered hostile witnesses. Is Sergeant Morgenstern to be convicted, entirely on Leontan testimony, with no evidence from Terran personnel?"

"Most certainly, sir," said Duke coolly, "if you will not permit me to ask Terran officers what Leontans said to them."

The remark was deliberately rude. Hebbenton nearly hit the roof. Then he realized that rude or not, it was wholly justified. The court had the choice of making no distinction whatever between Terran and Leontan witnesses, or allowing hearsay evidence from Terran officers about what Leontans said.

"But...you didn't even ask your Leontan witnesses about this matter, Major."

"No, sir. Shall we recall them and ask them now?"

Eoae was recalled and asked

about the incident. He said yes, he had spoken to some Terran officers just before leaving the bar. He had offered to show them over the club and had been surprised when they refused. His motives had been purely friendly.

After the Leontan had left the stand, Duke was called before the president again. Hebbenton asked why he had not brought the matter up when the Leontan first gave evidence.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Duke blandly.

On the point of saying more, Hebbenton checked himself. Perhaps it occurred to him too that a cautious witness would be more likely to make an admission on being recalled after others had testified than otherwise.

V

Major Francis put Captain Hinton, an army doctor, on the stand to testify to Oeae's condition after the assault on her by Slater. Hinton took ten minutes and a good deal of medical jargon to say she'd been comprehensively beaten up.

Cross-examining, Duke said: "Exactly how do Leontans differ from Terrans, doctor?"

Francis objected on the grounds that this raised a subject not covered in direct examination. Hebbenton overruled the objection without asking Duke for an explanation.

Hinton said that Leontans were medically exactly the same as Terrans except that they healed more

quickly. Minor cuts, abrasions and bruises cleared up in just over half the time Terrans would take to heal, and there was less risk of scars.

"I don't know whether this is the result of heredity or environment," the doctor, a plump, red-faced man, declared. "In my view, far too little research has been done into this."

"Quite, doctor. But the fact is that Leontan flesh normally is less flawed than Terran partly because skin eruptions are rarer, partly because injuries heal more quickly, and partly because the healing is generally more complete?"

"Exactly so."

"So if you were to examine Oeea again now, she'd probably be completely healed?"

"Very likely."

"Now, doctor, you said you found traces of previous injuries?"

"Very faint. Almost gone."

"Yet according to your own evidence, Leontans heal fast? Therefore the previous injuries could have been caused as recently as two weeks before April 7?"

"Possibly."

"These faint traces of previous injuries you found. Were they visible?"

"No. They showed up in examination with a machine which shows subcutaneous damage. Nothing showed on the surface. Of course, Major, these injuries were of absolutely no medical importance whatever, compared with the quite considerable damage I was primarily concerned with."

"Of course, doctor."

On redirect Francis brought out the fact that although Leontans healed far more quickly than Terrans, injuries they suffered were just as painful at the time. Francis thus squashed any idea that Oeea, being a Leontan, had suffered any less pain at Slater's hands than a Terran girl would have done.

Francis then put Oeea on the stand. Duke was ruefully aware that her very appearance, especially directly after the doctor's evidence, was all in Morgenstern's favor. She was slim as a wand, fragile and very beautiful. Every man in the room — and everyone in the room but herself was a man — must be thinking: If I found anybody beating up this little honey, I guess I'd be pretty mad too.

Francis didn't call her "Miss." "Oeea, the Leontan custom of displaying a Princess of Love has a considerable bearing on this case. Describe the system."

Oeea, demure and composed, made much the same defense of the custom which she had already made to Duke. But this time she made far more of it.

She gave the Leontan name and explained that the translation Princess of Love was only an approximation. Goddess would be nearer than Princess, she said, except that there was no suggestion of actual divinity, only of supreme quality. And the other word in the title included Beauty as well as Love. The title meant, in fact, that a girl had everything. When any girl was invited to

be a Princess of Love she knew that she'd been awarded top marks for looks, personality and intelligence.

"Even among us," she said, "many girls say they'd refuse to act as a Princess of Love if they were ever asked. We *are* a rather strait-laced people, you know. But hardly anyone ever refuses the tests, and I've never heard of anybody actually chosen refusing the honor. . . ."

"You're a strait-laced people?" Francis queried.

"Well, aren't we? A lot of you Terrans disapprove of the Love Princess system. Yet you have hundreds of prostitutes operating in every city, all the time, in the most sordid conditions. Among us, one Love Princess or at most two offer themselves in a week, openly, proudly. . . and that's all the extra-marital adventure that's legally and morally allowed among us. The present case can't be taken as typical. I made a bad mistake with Slater."

"Please confine your answers to the questions. You say no girl ever refuses the honor?"

"I've never heard of it happening." She looked appealingly at the president of the court. "I can only explain this if I'm allowed to speak freely."

Hebbenton said nothing. Taking silence as assent, she said: "Perhaps I can explain our attitude best like this. If in one of the countries on Earth where girls are still supposed to be modest, Spain for instance, a highly respectable girl is asked to parade in a bathing cos-

tume, she'll probably decline. But if she's told she's been chosen Miss Spain and is asked to go to America to compete in a Miss World or a Miss Universe or a Miss Galaxy competition, she'll find it very hard to say no. Suppose — and this must be theoretical, but please bear with me — she is told that if she competes she will certainly be chosen Miss Galaxy. Could any girl refuse? Remember, if she *does* refuse, no one will ever know the offer was made, that she *could* have been Miss Galaxy. . . . Well, perhaps that gives you some idea of a Leontan girl's feelings on being asked to be a Princess of Love and Beauty. If she refuses, a time will soon come when nobody will ever believe that this supreme honor, this accolade of her womanhood and beauty, was ever offered. If she accepts, she gains something which nobody can ever take away from her. When I am old and ugly, I'll always be able to say that once I was a Princess of Love."

"Thank you, Oeea. You've been very lucid and illuminating. Now it seems that when you were offered this honor you didn't immediately tell Sergeant Morgenstern."

"No."

"Before I ask you why, I want to clarify your relations with Sergeant Morgenstern. Were you in love with him?"

"Yes. I still am."

"You had not previously been a Princess of Love, however? You didn't meet him in this way?"

"No. I'd met him as a very ordi-

nary girl with no thought of ever being invited to be a Love Princess."

"I see. Are you going to marry him?"

"Yes."

"Why, when you were invited to be a Love Princess, did you not tell Sergeant Morgenstern about it?"

"Well, he's a Terran. Suppose the Spanish girl who knew she could be Miss Galaxy was engaged to a handsome, moody, exceedingly jealous man. Suppose she knew he'd be furious if she entered the contest, and would forbid her to go through with it. Might she not decide to have her cake and eat it, if she could? Get the Miss Galaxy title and afterwards try to make her peace with her fiance? That's what I tried to do."

"In other words, you thought you take the honor and afterwards make your peace with Sergeant Morgenstern?"

"Yes."

"Although it meant being unfaithful to him?"

"Leontan girls don't consider election as a Princess of Love ordinary infidelity."

"But Sergeant Morgenstern might?"

"Yes. He did." She and Morgenstern exchanged glances. "But," she added, with what might have been a note of warning, "any Terran who wants to marry a Leontan ought to be clear in his own mind what he's doing. If he wants her to be exactly like an Earthgirl, he should marry an Earthgirl."

"Oeea, we've heard medical testi-

mony about the injuries you suffered at the hands of Captain Slater. How did that situation come about? I mean, how did it happen that you chose to bestow yourself on a man who proceeded to assault you?"

"That was mainly my fault, but partly due to my unfamiliarity with Terrans. Naturally I didn't expect what happened. Sergeant Morgenstern approached me while I was with Captain Slater, whom I had chosen as a possible partner. I knew nothing of Slater, not having met him before. He was a handsome man... When Sergeant Morgenstern approached me, I warned him off, as I had to do. Then, realizing perhaps for the first time exactly what I was doing, I became impatient to get it all over with. Provided I fulfilled my obligation, I was a Princess of Love. A Love Princess may not take her title and refuse her love. I had to love a man or I was not a Love Princess. Stupidly I decided that I'd stick with Slater and conclude the business immediately. I didn't take the care that a Love Princess should take, and usually does take. I didn't make certain that the man I had chosen was worthy of me. I simply decided to keep Slater and be released from my obligation that night."

"What happened?"

She shrugged. "We talked. We went to my room and he started to beat me, There's nothing more to it than that. but I'll relate all the details if you wish."

"I don't think that will be neces-

sary." Major Francis turned to Duke. "You may cross-examine."

Duke rose. "Why didn't you fulfil your obligations with Sergeant Morgenstern?"

Oeea frowned. "Pardon?"

"Since you wanted, as you said, to have your cake and eat it, why didn't you do so by accepting the invitation to be a Princess of Love and choosing Morgenstern as your partner?"

The girl's brow cleared. "That isn't allowed. If it were, the system would be a farce. Girls would always choose their own lovers. No, a Princess must make her choice from the men she actually meets after she accepts the honor—from the men who see her at the Leisure Club and sue for her."

"You implied that there are tests?"

"Yes. There is a series of examinations."

"Then it can hardly be a complete surprise to anyone who finds herself chosen as a Love Princess, surely?"

"You're mistaken. Practically all pretty Leontan girls do the preliminary tests. It's still a surprise to be chosen."

"But doesn't a Love Princess have more than preliminary tests? Doesn't she have to pass a very rigorous examination? How, then, if she's undergone all this testing, can it be a great surprise when she's chosen?"

"I could express it in figures, Major. For every fifty girls who are tested, one is chosen. A conceited girl would expect to be the one. A comparatively modest girl is always surprised."

Duke nodded as if satisfied. "When you are chosen, Oeea, do you have to appear at the club on a particular night?"

"No."

"Are you given warning?"

"Yes."

"Then you could have appeared on April 4 or April 6 instead of April 7?"

"Yes."

"Why did you pick April 7?"

"No reason."

"It wasn't because both Morgenstern and Slater were at the Leisure Club that night?"

"No."

"You could have chosen April 4, when Slater was there and not Morgenstern. Or April 5, when neither was there. Or April 6, when Morgenstern was there and not Slater."

Oeea, who had shown no indication of concern, distress or annoyance, didn't seem to think any answer was called for.

"Why." Duke persisted. "did you pick a night when Morgenstern was present?"

Oeea raised her eyebrows inquiringly. "Do you want me to give you a lecture on feminine psychology?"

"No. Just answer the question."

"But that's exactly what I'd need to do to answer the question. I hadn't told Sergeant Morgenstern what was going to happen. I'd seen him the night before and still hadn't told him. But of course I wanted him to know sometime. I wanted him to see me as a Princess of Love. I look rather nice as a Princess of Love. Don't I, Major?"

After a recess. Francis put Morgenstern on the stand. He took Morgenstern right through the events of the evening of April 7 — his surprise and shock when Oeea made her appearance as a Princess of Love, his unavailing attempts to talk to her, his ejection from the club, his impatient prowling round the building, his entry through a cellar, his discovery of Oeea with Slater, who was apparently trying to kill her.

The recital couldn't fail to make a good impression as far as Morgenstern's chances were concerned. Adroitly Major Francis, having already tried to show that the Princess of Love system was not as evil as Terrans were liable to think, now shifted ground slightly and presented his case to say in effect: "Anyway, can you blame Sergeant Morgenstern? How would you feel if you suddenly and unexpectedly found your girl acting as a prostitute? And not only that, but associating herself with a man you had good reason to dislike and distrust? Wouldn't you try to save her? And, when you found her being treated as Oeea was treated, 'wouldn't you lose all self-control?"

When Duke rose to cross-examine, he knew that in a sense he was the judge in this case. If he failed to make any impression on Morgenstern, the sergeant was going to get off with a comparatively light sentence. And if General Bailey's fears about the situation of the occupying

force were justified, discipline would suffer such a blow that the Terran troops would be off the planet within six months. If on the other hand Duke could tear Morgenstern to shreds, the situation would at any rate get no worse.

Duke was prepared to admit that Francis was showing himself a very competent defense counsel. But Francis had made one mistake. In putting Morgenstern on the stand and covering practically all the events of April 7, Francis had given Duke all the scope he could possibly want.

"Sergeant Morgenstern," said Duke, "you entered the club through a cellar? Was it a coal cellar?"

Morgenstern answered confidently. "Yes, the Leontans use a lot of coal. There's hardly any oil left. Coal is used for heating the Leisure Club."

"Is there a door or hatch or what?"

"There's a sort of trapdoor with a chute below it. I prised up the trapdoor and went down the chute."

"Rather risky, wasn't it?"

"I figured the drop couldn't be too abrupt, or the sacks would burst open. And it was okay. I landed in the dark on a pile of coal sacks."

"Very clean sacks, surely?"

"Huh?"

"Your appearance after the killing has been described by several witnesses. Nobody mentioned coal dust."

"Oh, the Leontans like things to be clean. The chute was spotless. I saw that before I lowered the trapdoor over my head and let myself slide down."

"Are you aware that many of the thousands of men in this garrison have made repeated and unsuccessful attempts to get into the Leisure Club? Men who have been barred temporarily or permanently? Men who knew there were Leontan girls in the Club and would have tried anything to get at them?"

"They just didn't go about it the right way."

"Although all these attempts have failed, on the night when you were ejected you simply scouted around and found a way in?"

"Maybe I'm smarter than most."

"Isn't it true that the trapdoor is generally locked so that it couldn't possibly be prised up."

"I don't know."

Morgenstern was so confident he appeared to be enjoying this. Duke's questions about coal dust worried him so little that Duke, who hadn't been quite sure, became convinced that he had actually gone down the chute as he said. If Morgenstern had entered any other way it would have worried him that Duke seemed to be catching him out. Having actually gone down the chute, however, he felt that Duke couldn't shake his story.

Duke moved on. "You knew Oeea's room in the club?"

"Yes. At least. I knew the room she'd be in. She doesn't have a room of her own there. but there's an arrangement."

"You'd been in that room with her before?"

"Yes."

"On the evening of April 7, once you emerged from the coal-cellar, you rushed straight to Oeea's room and flung the door open?"

"Yes."

"Why wasn't it locked?"

Morgenstern had been expecting this. He almost laughed. "There are no locks in the Leisure Club. You can search all over the place and never see a single key."

"When on previous occasions you and Oeea were in that room, didn't anyone ever try to get in? Think, now, Sergeant."

Morgenstern hesitated and for the first time looked momentarily uneasy. Duke's warning suggested that there was something behind the question, that Duke wanted him to say no and was then going to produce evidence to prove him a liar.

"I seem to recall somebody rattled the door once. What's that got—"

"Are you not aware that although there are no keys in Leontan locks, the doors can be locked by a certain manipulation of the door handle?"

"Oh, sure. Yes, I remember something about that. Never paid much attention, because it was always Oeea who locked the door."

"Locked the door?"

"Well, shut it, then."

"But on April 7, having entered that room with Captain Slater and wishing to be extremely private, she didn't bother to lock the door?"

"I don't know that she didn't. May be I worked the lock. . . I was so mad I don't know what I did."

"So mad that you were able to operate a complicated lock the secret of which you didn't know?"

"I don't know that it was locked. Probably it wasn't."

"So Oeea neglected to lock the door that night?"

"I don't know."

"Sergeant, the evidence of the two witnesses and yourself concurs absolutely on this point. You rushed along the corridor and burst into the room. No one mentioned even a momentary hesitation to fumble with the lock."

"Okay, the door wasn't locked, then."

"So the coal trapdoor, which is normally locked, was left open that night. And when Oeea entered her room with Slater for the purpose of making love to him, she left the door open. Although that door, according to the evidence we have heard, was freely accessible to anyone passing by."

Morgenstern said nothing. He wasn't so confident now.

"You testified that when you saw Slater hitting Oeea you were so mad you just grabbed the first thing available and hit him with it?"

"Yes."

"That object being a metal lamp weighing thirteen pounds?"

"I don't know the weight of it. But sure, it was heavy."

"It was an oil lamp, Sergeant?"

"Yes."

"The Leisure Club uses electric light, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"And didn't you just say that the club uses coal for heating because the planet has hardly any oil left?"

"It's an old oil lamp. It isn't used any more. It's kept there as an ornament."

"I see. A useless lamp weighing thirteen pounds is kept on the bedside table. the only object on it?"

"Yes."

"It wasn't by any chance deliberately put there because when you picked up such an object and hit somebody on the head with it you could be pretty sure you'd killed him?"

Major Francis jumped to his feet with an objection which General Hebbenton sustained. The president ordered the last question to be stricken from the record.

Duke turned back to Morgenstern. "Sergeant, when you burst into this unlocked room, Slater was hitting the girl?"

"Yes."

"On what part of the body was he hitting her?"

"Everywhere. Under the ribs, in the belly, on her arms when she tried to defend herself."

"You saw this, Sergeant?"

"Some of it."

"So when you burst into the room, Slater, instead of turning in surprise — for *he* must have thought the door was locked, surely? — went on hitting her while you and the two Leontans behind you watched?"

"His back was to us. And I guess I didn't make any noise at first, not

till I got furious and shouted. And . . . and Slater was making a noise himself, driving his fists into Oeea. And she was gasping—”

“Gasping, but not moaning, shouting or screaming, Sergeant?”

“No.”

“She was in a room with a sadist who was beating her brutally. She had already sustained painful injuries and as far as she knew was going to go on being hurt for a considerable time. The door was unlocked and there were over three hundred people in the club, not counting the staff. But she didn’t cry out?”

“No.”

“Although Slater had his back to you, Oeea could see you?”

“No, I guess not. She was doubled up. . . Slater had been working her in the gut. . . Didn’t the doctor tell you what she was like afterwards?”

“The doctor’s report wasn’t available to you then, Sergeant. All you knew of Oeea’s condition was what you saw. And it seems she wasn’t being hurt enough to bother crying out.”

“Hell, you heard what the doctor said! And I told you I saw Slater half killing her.”

“But she didn’t scream.”

“You keep saying that! How do I know why she didn’t scream? Why don’t you ask her?”

“Maybe we will, Sergeant. On the other hand, maybe you could tell us. The doctor’s report mentioned previous injuries which the girl had suffered. Did you inflict them, Sergeant?”

“Me? Me huh? What are you talking about?”

“Leontans are great artists, Sergeant Morgenstern. They make arts of a lot of things we wouldn’t glorify with the name. The art of making love with a complete stranger, for example. Don’t they also make a special study of maochism?”

Morgenstern was sweating. He looked desperately at the court president and then at his counsel. Francis was frowning at some papers in front of him.

“Did you, too, inflict pain on Oeea with her sanction, Sergeant?”

“Me? No, never.”

“Then who was responsible for the previous injuries?”

“I don’t know.”

“Sergeant, about two weeks before April 7 Oeea had suffered injuries comparable to those which Slater later inflicted. Surely you must have known about them? According to her evidence you were very close at around that time. According to your own evidence, you were lovers at that time. How is it possible that —”

“I remember now,” said Morgenstern quickly. “We had a fight. A quarrel. Yes, I did hit her.”

“Quite extensively?”

“Maybe.”

“This was at the Leisure Club, in that same room?”

“Yes.”

“Yet once again she didn’t cry out, didn’t scream, didn’t —”

Major Francis interrupted. Addressing General Hebbenton, he said that it was hard to see the relevance

of this matter. "We are concerned with the night of April 7. On direct examination, I covered nothing else. The events of some unspecified date prior to April 7 are not in question."

"The court takes note of your remarks, Major Francis," Hebbenton said. "Nevertheless, I am going to permit the judge advocate to continue this line of questioning."

Francis shrugged and sat down.

"Is it not a fact," said Duke, "that the Leontan girl Oeea takes pleasure in pain and cannot or will not make love unless an element of masochism is present? Didn't you frequently beat her, Sergeant?"

"Only twice."

"And on those two occasions did she remain silent?"

"Well, she didn't scream."

"No, because if she had screamed you'd have been interrupted, wouldn't you? And why should she scream, because she enjoyed being hurt, didn't she?"

"Why don't you ask her?" Morgenstern said desperately.

Francis was standing to object again. The officers of the court were staring intently at Morgenstern.

Hebbenton rapped on the table and called the two counsels to confer with him.

"Major Duke," he said quietly, "what do you wish to establish by this line of questioning?"

"Morgenstern's defense is that he was so justifiably enraged at the sight of his girl being tortured that he lost control and killed Slater. If it is true that the girl is a masochist, then she

may have deliberately incited Slater to do what he did. And if Morgenstern knew all about it, the case for conspiracy is strengthened."

"Conspiracy?"

"This is my case, sir."

"To establish that," said Major Francis slowly, "even if it's well founded, another trial would be necessary."

Hebbenton turned to him. "I propose to recall Oeea, Major."

"Yes, sir."

"You have no objections?"

"I have many objections to a great many things in this trial, sir. I have bowed to your judgment because the circumstances are, after all, unusual."

VII

Oeea was as cool as ever when she was recalled. She refused to lie. Yes, she was a masochist. Every time Morgenstern and she had made love he had beat her. This had happened on four occasions. She had not known on April 7 that any trace remained of the last of these occasions. She had thought herself completely recovered.

She denied everything else. But the writing was on the wall.

When Duke made his closing address, he linked together all the little pieces of evidences he had managed to prise out of unwilling witnesses.

Oeea, a masochist, had been chosen as a Princess of Love. Duke cast doubt on the allegation that Morgenstern had known nothing of this until

the curtains were drawn back to reveal her in the alcove. Morgenstern's previous hatred of Slater was well established.

Ejected from the club, Morgenstern knew how to get back in. A trapdoor was left open.

"Now we come to the two Leontans who testified," Duke said. "I submit that they were to be in the back regions at a predetermined time. We have heard how they tried to take a Terran party with them. Morgenstern's justifiable homicide was to be observed by so many witnesses, Leontan and Terran, that no doubt about any of the circumstances could possibly exist. But the Terrans didn't go, and the Leontans had to go by themselves.

"Oeea left her door unlocked, incited Slater to beat her, and kept him turned with his back to the door. The time schedule must have been arranged rather carefully. And everything worked out neatly. Morgenstern arrived and struck Slater with a metal lamp. I have already remarked on the coincidence of such an instrument being readily available. As it happened, Morgenstern only had to strike once. Had it been necessary, he could have finished Slater off, still in his alleged mad rage.

"Morgenstern first said he had never deliberately inflicted pain on the girl. Then he said he had done it once, in a quarrel. His written statement says they never quarreled. Then he admitted he had beaten her twice. The girl herself said this happened on four occasions.

"I must now say a word about the motives of the people concerned. It is a truism that a trial on a capital charge should never be swayed by the political consequences involved. But the motives on the Leontan side are all political.

"Morgenstern merely hated Captain Slater and saw, or was offered, an opportunity to kill him without having to suffer the usual consequences.

"When we come to the Leontans, we have to consider the whole Terran situation here. Discipline is always a difficult problem for an occupying army. Solders wish to be on friendly terms with the local people. But the Leontans aren't particularly friendly. And they exacerbate most disciplinary actions by taking the side of the participant who holds less rank.

"Here the Leontans saw a chance to have a sergeant murder a captain and more or less get away with it. Now as you can all see for yourself, the actual outcome of the case didn't worry them at all. Morgenstern was only a tool to create dissension."

Morgenstern started at this and stared angrily at Duke.

"If he was found guilty of murder and shot," Duke went on, "on the evidence which was supposed to be before us, the verdict would seem cruel and unjust, and the occupying army would have seethed with unrest. If he was given a light sentence or released not guilty, the verdict would be practically a mandate for any disgruntled corporal or private

to plot the death of a colonel or major he didn't like — with Leontan assistance, of course. For something like this which worked once would be well worth trying another time."

He paused to let that sink in. And he didn't say much more. The officers at the table had to make up their own minds whether a conspiracy had been established. There was nothing more he could do.

Francis made the best of a bad job. He pointed out the circumstantial nature of the prosecution case. And he stressed that Morgenstern was on trial, not Oeea and the other Leontans. Even if there was something in the prosecution's theories, Sergeant Morgenstern was, as the judge advocate said, no more than a tool. Morgenstern had killed a man who was beating up his girl. Nothing which anybody said could ever cloud that clear issue. If there was a sinister background, the court could not eradicate it or punish those concerned by harshness toward Morgenstern.

Francis had a good legal point there, Duke thought. But in the defense counsel's place he doubted if he'd have made it. For to make that point he had to accuse his own client of conspiracy with the enemy... of treason.

The court retired for four hours. Morgenstern was found guilty and sentenced to death.

Duke switched out the light and composed himself for sleep. His barge left at six the next morn-

ing, and he was practically ready to step on it. He had one of the four bedrooms at the landing field post.

General Bailey had thanked him gruffly. Duke had done the job for which Bailey had sent for him. To Duke's question whether the verdict would do any real good, Bailey said grimly:

"Major, it's only in storybooks that a situation is solved in an instant. I've never in my army career seen any awkward situation that could be cleared up like switching on a light. Sometimes situations like this clear themselves up, sometimes they die from lack of ammunition. All I know is, my personal position is a little more secure today than it was before. Morgenstern killed Slater. And if you'd failed, it would have been much worse. To that extent, this has been a victory and not a defeat."

Morgenstern had already been shot. Duke wasn't sorry for him. Duke at least was convinced of the soundness of his own case, and satisfied that Morgenstern deserved death.

Nothing could be done about the Leontans, unfortunately. They hadn't murdered anybody. They had hardly even told any lies. They were as pure as the driven snow.

Duke was on the point of dropping off when he heard a knock at the door. "Who is it?" he demanded sleepily.

"It's me, Sergeant Brown."

Duke got out of bed and put a dressing gown over his pajamas. He

switched on the light again and opened the door.

"There's a lady to see you, sir," the sergeant said.

"A lady?"

"A Leontan girl, sir."

That could only be Oeea.

If he hadn't already had to get out of bed, he'd probably have told the sergeant to send her away. But Duke was as curious as the next man. Why should Oeea want to see him?

"Send her up," he said.

She came in wearing a heavy coat. Before saying a word to him she shed this, and then the woolen jacket she wore beneath it, and then her thick slacks.

"You plan to stay?" said Duke politely.

"Yes." She took off her heavy shoes and put on a pair of slippers she had brought with her. She was now dressed in nothing in particular.

"Now, wait a minute," said Duke, frowning. "Oeea, I got your lover shot. I also spoiled a good plan. You can't make me believe I'm high on your list of favorite characters."

"You're not," she said coolly, sitting on a couch and arranging her bare legs provocatively, one on the seat and the other along the back.

"Then why are you here?" For a moment he had a horrible dread that she was going to tell him triumphantly that he'd been wrong all along, that there was no conspiracy, that Morgenstern had been shot when some lesser punishment would have been more appropriate.

He needn't have worried. "Because

you're leaving Leonta. Because I can't believe a man like you can be without influence among his own people. Would you like to beat me, Major?"

"No."

She saw he meant it, and shrugged. "Well, you don't have to. It's an acquired taste, pleasure in pain. I can stay with you and we'll be as tender toward each other as you could wish."

"I don't want you to stay with me."

"No? Maybe you'll change your mind. Major, you don't like me, do you?"

"No."

"Perhaps you'll like me less when I tell you I never cared much for Sergeant Morgenstern. I used him, as you said."

Duke remained silent.

"Major, I still want you to understand me. And us. I know a lot about your people. Like us, they would never submit to dominion by anyone else."

"I seem to remember that when Leonta and Earth fought, Leonta was the aggressor."

"When two peoples have to fight, what does it matter who strikes the first blow? You know that occupation is no good, Major. If Leonta and Earth are ever really at peace, it will have to be as equals."

Duke nodded reluctantly. "I've read Terran history. When you fight a war, you support partisans, don't you? You make use of

guerrilla warfare? Sabotage? Espionage? You use fools and traitors?" "Yes."

"Then you must understand the Morgenstern affair now, Major. You must open your eyes to it. As a people we're not perfect. Neither are you. Perhaps we have both made mistakes, ethical and logical. At the moment, Earth has an army of occupation on Leonta. We want rid of it. By every means in our power. And on the face of it we haven't many — and most of them dirty."

Duke now had no difficulty in seeing what she meant or in understanding why she had come to him. And reluctantly he concurred.

Leonta was not the kind of world to accept even civilized, convention-

al, treaty-bound slavery. Leonta, like Earth, had pride. Leonta had to fight and go on fighting.

And Ocea simply wanted him to understand. That was all. She couldn't believe he was without influence, she said. Well, perhaps he wasn't. So it was worth while for her to spend an hour with him, perhaps a night with him, so that Major Nigel Duke would understand Leonta better. It might pay.

"You'd do the same if you had to, wouldn't you?" she said softly.

"Yes," he admitted. "I'd do the same."

"Do I go or stay?" she asked even more softly.

He sighed. "You stay."

END

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The moment is at hand —
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10 years of uneasy peace, since the Hour of Tragedy . . . ten apprehensive, uneasy years pungent with fear, with hatred, distrust . . . ten years like ten thousand in the past of man . . . ten units out of the infinite, out of time the eternal, immutable, nonexistent dimension. . .

9 planets spinning . . . nine spawn of the sun, one of them nascent, a hairsbreadth from its heritage. But which heritage? It could choose. The fertile warmth of the parent star . . . or the star's pure fire?

8 periods, in the gibberish of the sifters of chaos . . . eight: Pre-Cambrian to Triassic — while flame cooled and became stone and lay latent, lambent, pent awaiting release — before from the fetid Jurassic darkneses the beasts of warm blood crawled

7 seas, once the womb of life, then too long its caul . . . the

common birthplace, then a strangling wall between. (Once too, briefly a high road for the courageous, now a new kind of night for marauders, shadowed shapes armed with pieces of the sun.)

6 masses of land, cradles for the genesis of a myriad species . . . and one of them Man. Man the Creator, the Protector, the Destroyer: builder of shrines, burner of saints, good father, good soldier, good killer . . . Man, the creature of choice.

5 nations remaining, sparse ruddy fruit of a thousand wars, nurtured by a billion dead. Five, the bloody consequence of union into pack, into tribe, into fief, to kingdom, empire and nation. The threads of history gathered finally into five flags, entwined in alliance at this point in time by a searing wind:

Pan-American, Sino-Russian, Afro-Arabian . . . racial armies, sons of the first beast to kill from anger, fathers of the unborn. Armies in the terrible truce of the fusion bomb . . . waiting.

4 farflung networks: metal wire and machines, and vacuum. Interlinked webs of detection and retaliation or attack, within the webs bombs . . . within the bombs targets, mapped and doomed by a spark. Each alliance a network of aimed and armed missiles, in deserts, on mountaintops, hidden deep and in the surrounding seas. Each alliance a pattern of targets, always an instant from obliteration.

(Such had come to Britain in its Hour of Tragedy when the last savage hope of Empire Regained dissolved into vapor, and the Isles became slag. There the fourth network corroded under a shroud of ash; but the surviving three ceaselessly hummed.)

3 men, of one species but riven somehow at this point in time by pigment, tongue and details of dress: a man from Brownsville, a man from Vladivostok, a man from Khartoum . . . buried deep in the hearts of the networks, each already entombed, and so safe from death. Each chosen by his masters to be the nock of the arrow, the final factor; yet not an arrow, for each network of course was aimed at both the others. A moment's trust is fatal once the truce is broken, the masters reasoned, and so the bombs and the men were trained.

2 buttons, a choice under the fingers of each of these men: one, red, to loose deliberately the double pronged torrent of bombs if the masters so decreed. The other, white, to cancel the launching command broadcast automatically if massive radiation spewed across the homeland . . . a vast, vicious death reflex. Each man, then, if the detectors tolled, had the decision: error or attack. Fail or be unable to press the white instantly, and the counter-attack, if such it was, began. This, then, was the masters' last concession to the human factor, their grudging one to humanity.

And like most of the masters' concessions to the masses, it was false. Identically, in each network, the white button was a dummy. The real choice was as it always was — red button, kill . . . or wait yet a while more. The men in the tombs, unknowing, knew this was the choice.

1 man's brain, whosoever, however carefully masters may mold it, is a fragile thing. Ten thousand years have not fitted man to live with himself; could a single man live with the lives of two billion? The choice, distillate of a hundred centuries of pain, the weariness of a species with race: blame them, blame all. One of the men sitting in a cold tomb sweated. His finger hovered over the red button, trembled . . . and fell.

0

END



PODKAYNE OF MARS

BY ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

**On Venus, there really are fairies
at the bottom of one's garden. One
flits there now, ready to kill me!**



I reswallowed my heart. "Why a bomb? And what did you do with it?"

He shrugged. "They were stupid. They paid me this silly amount, see? Just to sneak this little package aboard. Gave me a lot of north wind about how it was meant to be a surprise for the captain — and that I should give it to him at the captain's party, last night out. Gift wrapped and everything. 'Sonny,' this silly zero says to me, 'just keep it out of sight and let him be surprised, be-

SYNOPSIS

Imagine me, Poddy of Mars, on Venus! Not only me but my brother Clark (that dryland imp of Satan) and also my Uncle Tom — and not only on Venus, but living like an empress and squired to all that planet's lovely, foolish, extravagant Best Places by Dexter Kurt Cunha, who is next in line to become practically an emperor in fact!

Of course there are a few drawbacks. I do miss Mom and Dad — and the new babies who were too little to travel — and I do have one cross to bear — namely Clark. It isn't bad enough that he should have a typical small-boy crush (how he would hate me for saying that!) on my good and beautiful friend Girdie, whom we met on the ship. (Girdie is older than I am, but doesn't make me miserable for it. On the ship, where the other females were either Utter Beasts like Mrs. Garcia and Mrs. Royer or friendly but ancient grandmas like Mrs. Grew, she was my Best Friend.) It isn't enough that he should be beating the house regularly at the Venusburg gambling salons. Worse, he has just admitted that he used me to smuggle something aboard ship and onto Venus. What did he smuggle, you ask? Oh, nothing serious. Just a small (but very lethal) atomic bomb — bribed to do it, you see, by a couple of shifty-eyed strangers!

CONCLUSION

cause last night out is not only the captain's party, it's his birthday.'

"Now, Sis, you know I wouldn't swallow anything like that. If it had really been a birthday present they would just have given it to the purser to hold. No need to bribe me. So I just played stupid and kept jacking up the price. And the idiots paid me. They got real jumpy when time came to shove us through passport clearance and paid all I asked. So I shoved it into your bag while you were yakking to Uncle Tom — then

saw to it you didn't get inspected.

"Then the minute we were aboard I went to get it — and got held up by a stewardess spraying your cabin and had to do a fast job and go back to relock your bag because Uncle Tom came back in looking for his pipe. That first night I opened the thing in the dark — and opened it from the bottom; I already had a hunch what it might be."

"Why?"

"Sis, use your brain. Don't just sit there and let it rust out. First

they offer me what they probably figured was big money to a kid. When I turn it down, they start to sweat and up the ante. I kept crowding it and the money got important. And more important. They don't even give me a tale about how a man with a flower on his lapel will come aboard at Venus and give me a pass word. It *has* to be that they don't care what happens to it as long as it gets into the ship. What does that add up to? Logic."

He added, "So I opened it and took it apart. Time bomb. Set for three days after we space. *Blooeey!*"

I shivered, thinking about it.

"What a horrible thing to do!"

"It could have turned out pretty dry," he admitted, "if I had been as stupid as they thought I was."

"But why would anybody want to do such a thing?"

"Didn't want the ship to get to Venus."

"But *why?*"

"You figure it out. I have."

"Uh. . . what did you do with it?"

"Oh, I saved it. The essential pieces. Never know when you might need a bomb."

And that's all I got out of him — and here I am stuck with a Saint Podkayne oath not to tell. And nineteen questions left unanswered. Was there *really* a bomb? Or was I swindled by my brother's talent for improvising explanations that throw one off the obvious track? If there was, *where is it?* Still in the *Tricorn?* Right here in this suite? In an innocent looking package in the safe

of the Tannhauser? Or parked with his private bodyguard, Josie? Or a thousand other places in this big city? Or is it still more likely that I simply made a mistake of three kilograms in my excitement and that Clark was snooping just to be snooping? Which he will always do if not busy otherwise.

No way to tell. So I decided to squeeze what else I could from this Moment of Truth — if it was one. "I'm awful glad you found it," I said. "But the slickest thing you ever did was that dye job on Mrs. Garcia and Mrs. Royer. Girdie admires it, too."

"She does?" he said eagerly.

"She certainly does. But I never let on you did it. So you can still tell her yourself, if you want to."

"Mmm. . ." He looked quite happy. "I gave Old Lady Royer a little extra, just for luck. Put a mouse in her bed."

"Clark! Oh, wonderful! But where did you get a mouse?"

"Made a deal with the ship's cat."

I wish I had a nice, normal, slightly stupid family. It would be a lot more comfortable. Still, Clark has his points.

But I haven't had too much time to worry about my brother's High Crimes and Misdemeanors; Venusberg offers too much to divert the adolescent female with a hitherto unsuspected taste for high living. Especially Dexter.

I am no longer a leper; I can now go anywhere, even outside the city,



Virgil
Finlay

without wearing a filter snout that makes me look like a blue-eyed pig — and dashing, darling Dexter has been most flatteringly eager to escort me everywhere. Even shopping. Using both hands a girl could spend a national debt here on clothes alone. But I am being (almost) sensible and spending only that portion of my cash assets earmarked for Venus. If I were not Firm with him, Dexter would buy me anything I admire, just by lifting his finger. (He never carries any money, not even a credit card, and even his tipping is done by some unobvious credit system.) But I haven't let him buy me anything more important than a fancy ice cream sundae; I have no intention of jeopardizing my amateur status for some pretty clothes. But I don't feel too compromised over ice cream and fortunately I do not as yet have to worry about my waistline — I'm hollow clear to my ankles.

So, after a hard day of sweating over the latest Rio styles, Dexter takes me to an ice cream parlor — one that bears the same relation to our Plaza Sweet Shoppe that the *Tricorn* does to a sand car — and he sits and toys with cafe au lait and watches in amazement while I eat. First some little trifle like an everlasting strawberry soda, then more serious work on a "sundae" composed by a master architect from creams and syrups and imported fruits and nuts of course, and perhaps a couple of tens of scoops of ice cream in various flavors and

named "The Taj Mahal" or "The Big Rock Candy Mountain" or such.

(Poor Girdie! She diets like a Stylite every day of the year. Query: Will I ever make that sacrifice to remain svelte and glamorous? Or will I get comfortably fat like Mrs. Grew? Echo Answereth Not and I'm afraid to listen.)

I've had to be firm with him in other ways, too, but much less obviously. Dexter turns out to be a master of seductive logic and is ever anxious to tell me a bedtime story. But I have no intention of being a Maid Betrayed, not at my age. The tragedy about Romeo and Juliet is not that they died so young but that the boy-meets-girl reflex should be so overpowering as to defeat all common sense.

My own reflexes are fine, thank you, and my hormonal balance is just dandy. Dexter's fruitless overtures give me a nice warm feeling at the pit of my stomach and hike up my metabolism. Perhaps I should feel insulted at his dastardly intentions toward me. And possibly I would, at home, but this is Venusberg, where the distinction between a shameful proposition and a formal proposal of honorable marriage lies only in the mind and would strain a semantician to define. For all I know Dexter already has seven wives at home, numbered for the days of the week. I haven't asked him, as I have no intention of becoming number eight, on any basis.

I talked this over with Girdie and asked why I didn't feel "insulted."

Had they left the moral circuits out of my cybernet, as they so obviously did with my brother Clark?

Girdie smiled her sweet and secret smile that always means she is thinking about something she doesn't intend to be fully frank about. Then she said, "Poddy, girls are taught to be 'insulted' at such offers for their own protection. It is a good idea, quite as good an idea as keeping a fire extinguisher handy even though you don't expect a fire. But you are right. It is not an insult, it is never an insult—it is the one utterly honest tribute to a woman's charm and femininity that a man can offer her. The rest of what they tell us is mostly polite lies. . .but on this one subject a man is nakedly honest. I don't see any reason ever to be insulted if a man is polite and gallant about it."

I thought about it. "Maybe you're right, Girdie. I guess it is a compliment, in a way. But why is it that that is all a boy is ever after?—nine times out of ten anyhow."

"You've got it just backwards, Poddy. Why should he *ever* be after anything else? Millions of years of evolution is the logic behind every proposition. Just be glad that the dears have learned to approach the matter with hand-kissing instead of a club. Some of them, anyhow. It gives us more choice in the matter than we've ever had before in all history. It's a woman's world today, dear. Enjoy it and be grateful."

I had never thought of it that way. When I've thought of it at all, I've

mostly been grouched because it is so hard for a girl to break into a "male" profession, such as piloting.

I've been doing some hard thinking about piloting—and have concluded that there are more ways of skinning a cat than buttering it with parsnips. Do I *really* want to be a "famous explorer captain"? Or would I be just as happy to be some member of his crew?

Oh, I want to space, let there be no doubt about that! My one little trip from Mars to Venus makes me certain that travel is for me. I'd rather be a junior stewardess in the *Tricorn* than President of the Republic. Shipboard life is fun. You take your home and your friends along with you while you go to romantic new places—and with Davis-drive star ships being built those places are going to be newer and more romantic every year. And Poddy is going to go, somehow. I was born to roam.

But let's not kid ourselves, shall we? Is anybody going to let Poddy captain one of those multimegabuck ships?

Dexter's chances are a hundred times as good as mine. He's as smart as I am, or almost. He'll have the best education for it that money can buy. (While I'm loyal to Ares U., I know it is a hick college compared with where he plans to go.) And also it is quite possible that his Daddy could *buy* him a Star Rover ship. But the clincher is that Dexter is twice as big as I am and male. Even if you

leave his father's wealth out of the equation, which one of us gets picked?

But all is not lost. Consider Theodora, consider Catherine the Great. Let a man boss the job...then boss that man. I am not opposed to marriage. (But if Dexter wants to marry me—or anything—he'll have to follow me to Marsopolis where we are pretty old-fashioned about such things. None of this light-hearted Venusberg stuff!) Marriage should be every woman's end—but not her finish. I do not regard marriage as a sort of death.

Girdie says always to "be what you are." All right, let's look at ourselves in a mirror, dear, and forget "Captain Podkayne Fries, the Famous Explorer" for the nonce. What do we see?

Getting just a touch broad-shouldered in the hips, aren't we, dear? No longer any chance of being mistaken for a boy in a dim light. One might say that we were designed for having babies. And that doesn't seem too bad an idea, now does it? Especially if we could have one as nice as Duncan. Fact is, all babies are pretty nice even when they're not.

Those eighteen miserable hours during the storm in the *Tricorn*, changing infants—weren't they just about the most fun you ever had in your life? A baby is lots more fun than differential equations.

Every star ship has a creche. So which is better? To study creche engineering and pediatrics — and be a department head in a star ship? Or

buck for pilot training and make it...and wind up as a female pilot nobody wants to hire?

Well, we don't have to decide now —

I'm getting pretty anxious for us to shape for Earth. Truth is, Venusberg's fleshpots can grow monotonous to one of my wholesome (or should say "limited") tastes. I haven't any more money for shopping, not if I am to have any to shop in Paris; I don't think I could ever get addicted to gambling (and don't want to; I'm one of those who lose and thereby offset in part Clark's winning); and the incessant noise and lights are going to put wrinkles where I now have dimples. And I think Dexter is beginning to be just a bit bored with my naive inability to understand what he is driving at.

If there is any one thing I have learned about males in my eight and a half years (Mars years, of course), it is that one should sign off before he gets bored. I look forward to just one last encounter with Dexter now: a tearful farewell just before I *must* enter the *Tricorn's* loading tube, with a kiss so grown up, so utterly passionate and all-out giving, that he will believe the rest of his life that Things Could Have Been Different if Only He Had Played His Cards Right.

I've been outside the city just once, in a sealed tourist bus. Once is more than enough. This ball of smog and swamp should be given

back to the natives, only they wouldn't take it. Once a fairy in flight was pointed out, so they said, but I didn't see anything. Just smog.

I'll settle now for just one fairy, in flight or even perched. Dexter says that he knows of a whole colony, a thousand or more, less than two hundred kilometers away, and wants to show it to me in his Rolls. But I'm not warm to that idea. He intends to drive it himself—and that dratted thing has automatic controls. If I can sneak Girdie, or even Clark, into the picnic—well, maybe.

But I have learned a lot on Venus and would not have missed it for anything. The Art of Tipping, especially, and now I feel like an Experienced Traveler. Tipping can be a nuisance but it is not quite the vice Marsmen think it is. It is a necessary lubricant for perfect service.

Let's admit it; service in Marsopolis varies from indifferent to terrible. I simply had not realized it. A clerk waits on you when he feels like it and goes on gossiping with another clerk until he does feel like it.

Not like that in Venusberg! However, it is not just the money—and here follows the Great Secret of Happy Travel. I haven't soaked up much Portuguese and not everybody speaks Ortho. But it isn't necessary to be a linguist if you will learn just one word—in as many languages as possible. Just "Thank you."

I caught onto this first with Maria and Maria—I say, "Gob-

ble-gobble" to them a hundred times a day, only the word is actually "Obrigado" which sounds like "Gobble-gobble" if you say it quickly. A *small* tip is much more savoir-fairish—and gets better, more willing service—when accompanied by "Thank you" than a big tip while saying nothing.

So I've learned to say "Thank you" in as many languages as possible and I always try to say it in the home language of the person I'm dealing with, if I can guess it, which I usually can. Doesn't matter much if you miss, though. Porters and clerks and taxi drivers and such usually know that one word in several languages and can spot it even if you can't talk with them at all in any other way. I've written a lot of them down and memorized them:

Obrigado
Donkey-Shane
Mare-see
Key Toss M'Goy
Graht-see-eh
Arigato
Spawseebaw
Grathee-oss
Tock

Oh "Money Tock" and Clark says this one means "Money talks." But Clark is wrong; he has to tip too high because he won't bother to say "Thank you." Oh, yes, Clark tips. It hurts him, but he soon discovered that he couldn't get a taxi and that even automatic vending machines were rude to him if he tried to buck the local system. But it infuriates him so much that he won't be pleasant about it and that costs him.

If you say "Tock" instead of "Key Toss" to a Finn, he still understands it. If you mistake a Japanese for a Cantonese and say "M'goy" instead of "Arigato" — well, that is the one word of Cantonese he knows. And "Obrigado" everybody understands.

However, if you do guess right and pick their home language, they roll out the red carpet and genuflect, all smiles. I've even had tips refused — and this in a city where Clark's greediness about money is considered only natural.

All those other long, long lists of hints on How to Get Along While Traveling that I studied so carefully before I left turn out not to be necessary. This one rule does it all.

Uncle Tom is dreadfully worried about something. He's absent-minded and, while he will smile at me if I manage to get his attention "not easy", the smile soon fades and the worry lines show again. Maybe it's something here and things will be all right once we leave. I wish we were back in the nappy Three-Cornered Hat with next stop Luna City.

Things are really grim. Clark hasn't been home for two nights and Uncle Tom is almost out of his mind. Besides that, I've had a quarrel with Dexter — which isn't important compared with Brother being missing, but I could surely use a shoulder to cry on.

And Uncle Tom has had a real quarrel with Mr. Chairman — which

was what led to my quarrel with Dexter, because I was on Uncle Tom's side even though I didn't know what was going on and I discovered that Dexter was just as blind in his loyalty to his father as I am to Uncle Tom. I saw only a bit of the quarrel with Mr. Chairman. It was one of those frightening, cold, bitter, formally polite, grown-men quarrels of the sort that used to lead inevitably to pistols at dawn.

I think it almost did. Mr. Chairman arrived at our suite, looking not at all like Santa Claus, and I heard Uncle say coldly, "I would rather your friends had called on me, sir."

But Mr. Chairman ignored that and about then Uncle noticed that I was there — back of the piano, keeping quiet and trying to look small — and sent me to my room.

But I know what part of it is. I had thought that both Clark and I had been allowed to run around loose in Venusberg — although I have usually had either Girdie or Dexter with me. Not so. Both of us have been guarded night and day, every instant we have been out of the Tannhauser, by Corporation police. I never suspected this and I'm sure Clark didn't or he would never have hired Josie to watch his boodle. But Uncle did know it and had accepted it as a courtesy from Mr. Chairman, one that left him free to do whatever these things are that have kept him so busy here, without riding herd on two kids, one of them nutty as Christmas cake. (And I don't mean me.)

As near as I can reconstruct it Uncle blames Mr. Chairman for Clark's absence — although this is hardly fair, as Clark, if he knew he was being watched, could evade eighteen private eyes, the entire Space Corps and a pack of slaving bloodhounds. Or is it wolfhounds?

But, on top of this, Dexter says that they disagree completely on how to locate Clark. Myself, I think that Clark is missing because Clark wants to be missing, because he intends to miss the ship and stay here on Venus where (a) Girdie is and where (b) all that lovely money is. Although perhaps I have put them in the wrong order.

I keep telling myself this, but Mr. Chairman says that it is a kidnapping, that it has to be a kidnapping and that there is only one way to handle a kidnapping on Venus if one ever expects to see the kidnappee alive again.

On Venus, kidnapping is just about the only thing a stockholder is afraid of. In fact they are so afraid of it that they have brought the thing down almost to a ritual. If the kidnapper plays by the rules and doesn't hurt his victim, he not only won't be punished but he has the Corporation's assurance that he can keep any ransom agreed on.

But if he doesn't play by the rules and they do catch him, well, it's pretty grisly. Some of the things Dexter just hinted at. But I understand that the mildest punishment is something called a "four-hour death." He wouldn't give me any

details on this, either — except that there is some drug that is just the opposite of anesthesia. It makes pain hurt worse.

Dexter says that Clark is absolutely safe — as long as Uncle Tom doesn't insist on meddling with things he doesn't understand. "Old fool" is one term that he used, and that was when I slapped him.

Long sigh and a wish for my happy girlhood in Marsopolis, where I understood how things worked. I don't here. All I really know is that I can no longer leave the suite save with Uncle Tom — and must leave it and stay with him when he does and wherever he goes.

Which is how I at last saw the Cunha "cottage" — and would have been much interested if Clark hadn't been missing. A modest little place only slightly smaller than the Tannhauser, but much more lavish. Our President's Rose House would fit into its ballroom. That is where I quarreled with Dexter while Uncle and Mr. Chairman were continuing their worse quarrel elsewhere in that "cottage."

Presently Uncle Tom took me back to the Tannhauser and I've never seen him look so old — fifty at least, or call it a hundred and fifty of the years they use here. We had dinner in the suite and neither of us ate anything and after dinner I went over and sat by the living window. The view was from Earth, I guess. The Grand Canyon of El Dorado, or El Colorado, or whatever it is.

Grand, certainly. But all I got was acrophobia and tears.

Uncle was just sitting, looking like Prometheus enduring the eagles. I put my hand in his and said, "Uncle Tom? I wish you would spank me."

"Eh?" He shook his head and seemed to see me. "Flicka! Why?"

"Because it's my fault."

"What do you mean, dear?"

"Because I'm responsible for Clark. I always have been. He hasn't any sense. Why, when he was a baby I must have kept him from falling in the Canal at least a thousand times."

He shook his head, negatively this time. "No, Poddy. It is my responsibility and not yours at all. I am in loco parentis to both of you. Which means that your parents were loco ever to trust me with it."

"But I *feel* responsible. He's my Chinese obligation."

He shook his head still again. "No. In sober truth no person can ever be truly responsible for another human being. Each one of us faces up to the universe alone—and the universe is what it is and it doesn't soften the rules for any of us. . . and eventually, in the long run, the universe always wins and takes all. But that doesn't make it any easier when we *try* to be responsible for another—as you have—as I have—and then look back and see how we could have done it better." He sighed. "I should not have blamed Mr. Cunha. He tried to take care of Clark, too. Of both of you. I knew it."

He paused and added, "It was just that I had a foul suspicion, an un-

worthy one, that he was using Clark to bring pressure on me. I was wrong. In his way and by his rules, Mr. Cunha is an honorable man. His rules do not include using a boy for political purposes."

Uncle looked around at me, as if surprised that I was still in the room. "Poddy, I should have told you more than I have. I keep forgetting that you are now a woman. I always think of you as the baby who used to climb on my knee and ask me to tell her 'The Poddy Story.'" He took a deep breath. "I still won't burden you with all of it. But I owe Mr. Cunha an abject apology—because I was using Clark for political purposes. And you, too."

"Huh?"

"As a cover-up, dear. Doddering great uncle escorts beloved niece and nephew on pleasure tour. I'm sorry, Poddy, but it isn't that way at all. The truth is I am Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary for the Republic. To the Three Planets Summit. But it seemed desirable to keep it a secret until I present my credentials."

I didn't answer because I was having a little trouble soaking this in. I mean, I *know* Uncle Tom is pretty special and has done some important things. But all my life he has been somebody who always had time to hold a skein of yarn for me while I wound it and would take serious interest in helping me name paper dolls.

But he was talking. "So I used

you, Flicka. You and your brother. Because — Poddy, do you really want to know all the ins and outs and snarls of the politics behind this?"

I did very much. But I tried to be grown up. "Just whatever you think best to tell me, Uncle Tom."

"All right. Because some of it is sordid and all of it is complex and would take hours to explain. And some of it really isn't mine to tell; some of it involves Bozo—Sorry, the President. Some of it has to do with promises he made. Do you know who our Ambassador is, now, at Luna City?"

I tried to remember. "Mr. Suslov?"

"No, that was last administration. Artie Finnegan. Artie isn't too bad a boy, but he thinks he should have been President and he's certain he knows more about interplanetary affairs and what is good for Mars than the President does. Means well, no doubt."

I didn't comment because the name "Arthur Finnegan" I recognized at once—because I had once heard Uncle Tom sound off about him to Daddy when I was supposed to be in bed and asleep. Some of the milder expressions were "a head like a sack of mud," "larceny in his heart" and a "size twelve ego in a size nine soul."

"But even though he means well," Uncle Tom went on. "he doesn't see eye to eye with the President — and myself—on matters that will come before this conference. But, unless

the President sends a special envoy —me, in this case—the Ambassador in residence automatically speaks for Mars. Poddy, what do you know about Switzerland?"

"Huh? William Tell. The apple."

"That's enough, I guess, although there probably never was an apple. Poddy, Mars is the Switzerland of the Solar System — or it isn't anything at all. So the President thinks, and so I think. A small man (and a small country, like Mars or Switzerland) can stand up to bigger, powerful neighbors only by being willing to fight. We've never had a war and I pray we never do, because we would probably lose it, But if we are willing enough, we may never have to fight."

He sighed. "That's the way I see it. But Mr. Finnegan thinks that because Mars is small and weak Mars should join up with the Terran Federation. Perhaps he's right and this really is the wave of the future. But I don't think so. I think it would be the end of Mars as an independent country and a free society. Furthermore, I think it is logical that, if Mars gives up its independence, it is only a matter of time until Venus goes the same way. I've been spending the time since we got here trying to convince Mr. Cunha of this, cause him to have his Resident Commissioner make a common cause with us against Terra. This could persuade Luna to come in with us, too, since both Venus and Mars can sell to Luna cheaper

than Terra can. But it wasn't at all easy; the Corporation has such a long-standing policy of never meddling in politics at all. 'Put not your faith in princes'—which means to them that they buy and they sell and they ask no questions.

"But I have been trying to make Mr. Cunha see that if Luna and Mars and Terra—the Jovian moons hardly count—if those three were all under the same rules, in short order Venus Corporation would be no more free than is General Motors or I.G. Farbenindustrie. He got the picture, too, I'm sure—until I jumped to conclusions about Clark's disappearance and blew my top at him." He shook his head. "Poddy, I'm a poor excuse for a diplomat."

"You aren't the only one who got sore," I said, and told him about slapping Dexter.

He smiled for the first time. "Oh, Poddy, Poddy, we'll never make a lady out of you. You're as bad as I'm."

So I grinned back at him and started picking my teeth with a fingernail. This is an even ruder gesture than you might think—and utterly private between Uncle Tom and myself. We Maori have a very blood-thirsty history and I won't even hint at what it is we are supposed to be picking out of our teeth. Uncle Tom used to use this vulgar pantomime on me when I was a little girl, to tell me I wasn't being ladylike.

Whereupon he really smiled and mussed my hair. "You're the blondest, blue-eyed savage I ever saw. But

you're a savage, all right. And me, too. Better tell him you're sorry, hon, because, much as I appreciate your gallant defense of me, Dexter was perfectly right. I was an 'old fool.' I'll apologize to his father, doing the last hundred meters on my belly if he wants it that way. A man should admit it in full when he's wrong and make amends. And you kiss and make up with Dexter. Dexter is a fine boy."

"I'll say I'm sorry and make up—but I don't think I'll kiss him. I haven't yet."

He looked surprised. "So? Don't you like him? Or have we brought too much Norse blood into the family?"

"I like Dexter just fine and you're crazy with the smog if you think Svenska blood is any colder than Polynesian. I could go for Dexter in a big way—and that's why I haven't kissed him."

He considered this. "I think you're wise, hon. Better do your practice kisses on boys who don't tend to cause your gauges to swing over into the red. Anyhow, although he's a good lad, he's not nearly good enough for my savage niece."

"Maybe so, maybe not. Uncle... what *are* you going to do about Clark?"

His halfway happy mood vanished. "Nothing. Nothing at all."

"But we've got to do something!"

"But what, Podkayne?"

There he had me. I had already chased it through all the upper and



lower segments of my brain. Tell the police? Mr. Chairman *is* the police—they all work for him. Hire a private detective? If Venus has any (I don't know), then they all are under contract to Mr. Cunha, or rather, the Venus Corporation.

Run ads in newspapers? Question all the taxi drivers? Put Clark's picture in the sollies and offer rewards? It didn't matter what you thought of, *everything* on Venus belongs to Mr. Chairman. Or, rather, to the corporation he heads. Same thing, really, although Uncle Tom tells me that the Cunha's actually own only a fraction of the stock.

"Poddy, I've been over everything I could think of with Mr. Cunha—and he is either already doing it, or he has convinced me that here, under conditions he knows much better than I do, it should not be done."

"Then what do we do?"

"We wait. But if you think of anything — *anything* — that you

think might help, tell me and if it isn't already being done, we'll call Mr. Cunha and find out if it should be done. If I'm asleep, wake me."

"I will." I doubted if he would be asleep. Or me. But something else had been bothering me. "If time comes for the *Tricorn* to shape for Earth—and Clark isn't back—what do you do then?"

He didn't answer; the lines in his face just got deeper. I knew what the Awful Decision was—and I knew how he had decided it.

But I had a little Awful Decision of my own to make...and I had talked to Saint Podkayne about it for quite a while and had decided that Poddy had to break a Saint-Podkayne oath. Maybe this sounds silly but it isn't silly to me. Never in my life had I broken one...and never in my life will I be utterly sure about Poddy again.

So I told Uncle all about the smuggled bomb.

Somewhat to my surprise he took it seriously—when I had about persuaded myself that Clark had been pulling my leg just for exercise. Smuggling—oh, sure, I understand that every ship in space has smuggling. But not a bomb. Just something valuable enough that it was worthwhile to bribe a boy to get it aboard...and probably Clark had been paid off again when he passed it along—

But Uncle wanted me to describe exactly the person I had seen talking to Clark at Deimos Station.

"Uncle, I can't! I barely glanced at him. A man. Not short, not tall, not especially fat or skinny, not dressed in any way that made me remember. I'm not sure I looked at his face at all. Uh, yes, I did but I can't call up any picture of it."

"Could it have been one of the passengers?"

I thought hard about that. "No. Or I would have noticed his face later when it was still fresh in my mind. Mmm. . . I'm almost certain he didn't queue up with us. I think he headed for the exit, the one that takes you back to the shuttle ship."

"That is likely," he agreed. "Certain — *if* it was a bomb. And not just a product of Clark's remarkable imagination."

"But, Uncle Tom, *why* would it be a bomb?"

And he didn't answer and I already knew why. Why would anybody blow up the *Tricorn* and kill everybody in her, babies and all? Not for insurance like you sometimes find in adventure stories; Lloyd's won't insure a ship for enough to show a profit on that sort of crazy stunt—or at least that's the way it was explained to me in my high school economics class.

Why, then?

To keep the ship from getting to Venus.

But the *Tricorn* had been to Venus tens and tens of times.

To keep somebody in the ship from getting to Venus (or perhaps to Luna) *that* trip.

Who? Not Podkayne Fries. I

wasn't important to anybody but me.

For the next couple of hours Uncle Tom and I searched that hilton suite. We didn't find anything, nor did I expect us to. If there was a bomb (which I still didn't fully believe) and if Clark had indeed brought it off the ship and hidden it there (which seemed unlikely, with all of the *Tricorn* at one end and all of the city at the other end to choose from), nevertheless he had had days and days in which to make it look like anything from a vase of flowers to a — an *anything*.

We searched Clark's room last on the theory that it was the least likely place. Or, rather, we started to search it together and Uncle had to finish it. Pawing through Clark's things got to be too much for me and Uncle sent me back into the salon to lie down.

I was all cried out by the time he gave up. I even had a suggestion to make. "Maybe if we sent for a Geiger counter?"

Uncle shook his head and sat down. "We aren't looking for a bomb, honey."

"We aren't?"

"No. If we found it, it would simply confirm that Clark had told you the truth, and I'm already using that as least hypothesis. Because— Well, because I know more about this than the short outline I gave to you. . . and I know just how deadly serious this is to some people, how far they might go. Politics is neither a game nor a bad joke the way some

people think it is. War itself is merely an extension of politics...so I don't find anything surprising about a bomb in politics. Bombs have been used in politics hundreds and even thousands of times in the past. No, we aren't looking for a bomb, we are looking for a man — a man you saw for a few seconds once. And probably not even for that man but for somebody that man might lead us back to. Probably somebody inside the President's office, somebody he trusts."

"Oh, gosh, I wish I had really looked at him!"

"Don't fret about it, hon. You didn't know and there was no reason to look. But you can bet that Clark knows what he looks like. If Clark — I mean, *when* Clark comes back, in time we will have him search the I.D. files at Marsopolis. And all the visa photographs for the past ten years, if necessary. The man will be found. And through him the person the President has been trusting who should not be trusted." Uncle Tom suddenly looked all Maori and very savage. "And when we do, I may take care of it personally."

Then he smiled and added, "But right now Poddy is going to bed. You're up way past your bedtime, even with all the dancing and late-sleeping you've been doing lately."

"Uh. . .what time is it in Marsopolis?"

He looked at his other watch. "Twenty-seventeen. You weren't thinking of phoning your parents? I hope not."

"Oh, no! I won't say a word to them unless — until Clark is back. And maybe not then. But if it's only twenty-seventeen, it's not late at all, real time, and I don't want to go to bed. Not until you do."

"I may not go to bed."

"I don't care. I want to sit with you."

He blinked at me, then said very gently. "All right, Poddy. Nobody ever grows up without spending at least one night of years."

We just sat then for quite a while, with nothing to say that had not already been said and would just hurt to say over again.

At last I said, "UnkaTom? Tell me the Poddy Story."

"At your age?"

"Please." I crawled up on his knees. "I want to sit in your lap once more and hear it. I need to."

"All right," he said, and put his arm around me. "Once upon a time, long, long ago when the world was young, in a specially favored city there lived a little girl named Poddy. All day long she was busy like a ticking clock. Tick tick tick went her heels, tick tick tick went her knitting needles, and, most especially, tick tick tick went her busy little mind. Her hair was the color of butter blossoms in the spring when the ice leaves the canals, her eyes were the changing blue of sunshine playing down through the spring floods, her nose had not yet made up its mind what it would be, and her mouth was shaped like a question mark. She greeted the world as an un-

opened present and there was no badness in her anywhere.

"One day Poddy —"

I stopped him. "But I'm *not* young any longer. . . and I don't think the world was every young!"

"Here's my hanky," he said. "Blow your nose. I never did tell you the end of it, Poddy; you always fell asleep. It ends with a miracle."

"A truly miracle?"

"Yes. This is the end. Poddy grew up and had another Poddy. And then the world was young again."

"Is that all?"

"That's all there ever is. But it's enough."

I guess Uncle Tom put me to bed, for I woke up with just my shoes off and very rumped. He was gone but he had left a note saying that I could reach him, if I needed to, on Mr. Chairman's private code. I didn't have any excuse to bother him and didn't want to face anyone, so I chased Maria and Maria out and ate breakfast in bed. Ate quite a lot, too, I must admit. The body goes on ticking anyhow.

Then I dug out my journal for the first time since landing. I don't mean I haven't been keeping it; I mean I've been talking it instead of writing it. The library in our suite has a recorder built into its desk and I discovered how easy it was to keep a diary that way. Well, I had really found out before that, because Mr. Clancy let me use the recorder they use to keep the log on.

The only shortcoming of the re-

recorder in the library was that Clark might drop in most any time. But the first day I went shopping I found the most darling little minirecorder at Venus Macy — only ten-fifty and it just fits in the palm of your hand; you can talk into it without even being noticed if you want to and I just couldn't resist it. I've been carrying it in my purse ever since.

But now I wanted to look way back in my journal, the early written part, and see if I had said *anything* that might remind me of what That Man had looked like.

I hadn't. No clues. But I FOUND A NOTE FROM CLARK.

It read:

Pod,

If you find this at all, it's time you read it. Because I'm using 24-hr ink and I expect to lift this out of here and you'll never see it.

Girdie is in trouble and I'm going to rescue her. I haven't told anybody because this is one job that is all mine and I don't want you or anybody horning in on it.

However, a smart gambler hedges his bets, if he can. If I'm gone long enough for you to read this, it's time to get hold of Uncle Tom and have him get hold of Chairman Cunha. All I can tell you is that there is a news stand right at South Gate. You buy a copy of the *Daily Merchandiser* and ask if they carry Everlites. Then you say, "Better give me two — it's quite dark where I'm going."

But don't *you* do this, I don't want it muffed up.

If this turns out dry, you can have my rock collection.

Count your change. Better use your fingers.

Clark

I got all blurry. That last line — I know a holographic last will and testament when I see one, even though I had never seen one before. Then I straightened up and counted ten seconds backwards including the rude word at the end that discharges nervous tension, for I knew this was no time to be blurry and weak.

So I called Uncle Tom right away, as I agreed perfectly with Clark on one point: I wasn't going to try to emulate Space Ranger Stalwart, Man of Steel, the way Clark evidently had. I was going to get all the help I could get! With both Clark and Girdie in some sort of pinch I would have welcomed two regiments of Patrol Marines and the entire Martian Legion.

So I called Mr. Chairman's private code — and it didn't answer; it simply referred me to another code. This one answered all right. . . but with a recording. Uncle Tom. And this time all he said was to repeat something he had said in the note, that he expected to be busy all day and that I was not to leave the suite under any circumstances whatever until he got back. Only this time he added that I was not to let anyone into the suite, either, not even a repairman, not even a servant except those who were already there, like Maria and Maria.

When the recording started to play back for the third time, I switched off. Then I called Mr. Chairman the public way, through the Corporation offices. A dry deal that was! By pointing out that I was Miss Fries, niece of Senator Fries, Mars Republic, I did get as far as his secretary, or maybe his secretary's secretary.

"Mr. Cunha cannot be reached. I am verree sorree, Miss Fries."

So I demanded that she locate Uncle Tom. "I do not have that information. I am verree sorree, Miss Fries."

Then I demanded to be patched in to Dexter. "Mr. Dexter is on an inspection trip for Mr. Cunha. I am verree sorree."

She either couldn't, or wouldn't, tell me when Dexter was expected back — and wouldn't, or couldn't, find some way for me to call him. Which I just plain didn't believe, because if I owned a planetwide corporation there would be some way to phone every mine, every ranch, every factory, every air boat the company owned. All the time. And I don't even suspect that Mr. Chairman is less smart about how to run such a lash-up than I am.

I told her so, using the colorful rhetoric of sand rats and canal men. I mean I really got mad and used idioms I hadn't known I even remembered. I guess Uncle is right. Scratch my Nordic skin and a savage is just underneath. I wanted to pick my teeth at her, only she wouldn't have understood it.



But would you believe it? I might as well have been cussing out a sand gator; it had no effect on her at all. She just repeated, "I'm-veree-sorree-Miss-Fries," and I hung up.

Do you suppose Mr. Chairman uses an androidal Tik-Tok as his phone monitor? I wouldn't put it past him. Any live woman should have shown *some* reaction at the some of the implausibilities I showed on her, even if she didn't understand most of the words. (Well, I don't understand some of them myself. But they are not compliments.)

I thought about phoning Daddy. I knew he would accept the charges, even if he had to mortgage his salary. But Mars was eleven minutes away; it said so, right on a dial of the phone. And the relays via

Hermes Station and Luna City were even worse. With twenty-two minutes between each remark it would take me most of the day just to tell him what was wrong, even though they don't charge you for the waiting time.

But I still might have called except — well, what could Daddy *do*, three hundred million kilometers away? All it would do would be to turn his last six hairs white.

It wasn't until then that I steadied down enough to realize that there had been something else amiss about that note written into my journal—besides Clark's childish swashbuckling.

Girdie!

It was true that I had not seen Girdie for a couple of days; she was



on a shift that caused her to zig while I zagged. Newly hired dealers don't get the best shifts. But I had indeed talked to her at a time when Clark was probably already gone even though at the time I had simply assumed that he had gotten up early for some inscrutable reason of his own, rather than not coming home at all that night.

But Uncle Tom had talked to her just before we had gone to the Cunha cottage the day before, asked her specifically if she had seen Clark—and she hadn't. Not as recently as we had.

So she wasn't missing.

So it was Clark—

I didn't have any trouble reaching Dom Pedro—not the Dom

Pedro I met the night I met Dexter but the Dom Pedro of that shift. However, by now all the Dom Pedros know who Poddy Fries is; she's the girl that is seen with Mr. Dexter. He told me at once that Girdie had gone off shift half an hour earlier and I should try her hilton. Unless—he stopped and made some inquiries; somebody seemed to think that Girdie had gone shopping.

As may be. I already knew that she was not at the little hilton she had moved to from the stylish (and expensive) Tannhauser. A message I had already recorded there was guaranteed to fetch a call back in seconds, if and when.

That ended it. There was no one left for me to turn to, nothing at all left for me to do, save wait in the

suite until Uncle returned, as he had ordered me to do.

So I grabbed my purse and a coat and left.

And got all of three meters outside the door of the suite. A tall, wide, muscular character got in my way. When I tried to duck around him, he said, "Now, now, Miss Fries. Your uncle left orders."

I scurried the other way and found that he was awfully quick on his feet, for such a big man. So there I was, arrested! Shoved back into our own suite and held in durance vile. You know, I don't think Uncle entirely trusts me.

I went back to my room and closed the door and thought about it. The room was still not made up and still cluttered with dirty dishes because, despite the language barrier, I have made clear to Maria and Maria that Miss Fries becomes quite vexed if *anybody* disturbs my room until I signal that I no longer want privacy by leaving the door open.

The clumsy, two-decker, roll-around table that had fetched my breakfast was still by my bed, looking like a plundered city.

I took everything off the lower shelf, stowed it here and there in my bath, covered the stuff on top of the table with the extra cloth used to shield the tender eyes of cash customers from the sight of dirty dishes.

Then I grabbed the house phone and told them I wanted my breakfast dishes cleared away fast.

I'm not very big. I mean, you can fit forty-nine mass kilos only one hundred fifty-seven centimeters long into a fairly small space if you scrunch a little. That lower shelf was hard but not too cramped. It had some ketchup on it I hadn't noticed.

Uncle's orders (or perhaps Mr. Cunha's) were being followed meticulously, however. Ordinarily a pantry boy comes to remove the food wagon; this time the two Marias took it out the service entrance and as far as the service lift. In the course of it I learned something interesting but not really surprising. Maria said something in Portuguese; the other Maria answered her in Ortho as glib as mine: "She's probably soaking in the tub, the lazy brat."

I made a note not to remember her on birthdays and at Christmas.

Somebody wheeled me off the lift many levels down and shoved me into a corner. I waited a few moments, then crawled out. A man in a well-spotted apron was looking astonished. I said, "Obrigado!" handed him a deuce note and walked out the service entrance with my nose in the air. Two minutes later I was in a taxi.

I've been catching up on this account while the taxi scoots to South Gate in order not to chew my nails back to the elbows. I must admit that I feel good even though nervous. Action is better than waiting. No amount of bad can stonker me but not knowing drives me nuts.

This spool is almost finished, so

I think I'll change spools and mail this one back to Uncle at South Gate. I should have left a note, I know—but this is better than a note. I hope.

XIII

Well, I can't complain about not having seen fairies. They are every bit as cute as they are supposed to be—but I don't care greatly if I never see another one.

Throwing myself bravely into the fray against fearful odds, by sheer audacity I overcame —

It wasn't that way at all. I fubbed. Completely. So here I am, some nowhere place out in the bush, in a room with no windows and only one door.

That door isn't much use to me, as there is a fairy perched over it. She's a cute little thing and the green part of her fur looks exactly like a ballet tutu. She doesn't look quite like a miniature human with wings. But they do say that the longer you stay here the more human they look. Her eyes slant up, like a cat, and she has a very pretty built-in smile.

I call her "Titania" because I can't pronounce her real name. She speaks a few words of Ortho, not much, because those little skulls are only about twice the brain capacity of a cat's skull. Actually she's an idiot studying to be a moron and not studying very hard.

Most of the time she just stays perched and nurses her baby—the size of a kitten and twice as cute.

I call it "Ariel" although I'm not sure of its sex. I'm not dead sure of Titania's sex. They say that both males and females do this nursing thing, which is not quite nursing but serves the same purpose; they are not mammalians. Ariel hasn't learned to fly yet, but Titania is teaching it—tosses it into the air and it sort of flops and glides to the floor and then stays there, mewing piteously until she comes to get it and flies back to her perch.

I'm spending most of my time (a) thinking, (b) bringing this journal up to date, (c) trying to persuade Titania to let me hold Ariel (making some progress; she now lets me pick it up and hand it to her—the baby isn't a bit afraid of me) and (d) thinking which seems to be a futile occupation.

Because I can go anywhere in the room and do anything as long as I stay a couple of meters away from that door. Guess why? Give up? Because fairies have very sharp teeth and claws; they're carnivorous. I have a nasty bite and two deep scratches on my left arm to prove it—red and tender and don't seem to want to heal. If I get close to that door, she dives on me.

Completely friendly otherwise. Nor do I have anything physically to complain about. Often enough a native comes in with a tray of really quite good food. But I never watch him come in and I never watch him take it away—because Venusians look entirely too human to start with and the more you look at them

the worse it is for your stomach. No doubt you have seen pictures but pictures don't give you the smell and that drooling loose mouth, nor the impression that this *thing* has been dead a long time and is now animated by obscene arts.

I call him "Pinhead" and to him that is a compliment. No doubt as to its being a "him" either. It's enough to make a girl enter a nunnery.

I eat the food because I feel sure Pinhead didn't cook it. I think I know who does. She would be a good cook.

Let me back up a little. I told the news vendor: "Better give me two—it's quite dark where I'm going." He hesitated and looked at me and I repeated it.

So pretty soon I am in another air car and headed out over the bush. Ever make a wide, sweeping turn in smog? That did it. I haven't the slightest idea where I am, save that it is somewhere within two hours flight of Venusberg and that there is a small colony of fairies near by. I saw them flying shortly before we landed and was so terribly interested that I didn't really get a good look at the spot before the car stopped and the door opened.

Not that it would have done any good.

I got out and the car lifted at once, missing me up with its fan . . . and here was an open door to a house and a familiar voice was saying, "Poddy! Come in, dear, come in!"

And I was suddenly so relieved that I threw myself into her arms and hugged her and she hugged me back. It was Mrs. Grew, fat and friendly as ever.

And looked around and here was Clark, just sitting—and he looked at me and said, "Stupid," and looked away. And then I saw Uncle sitting in another chair and was about to throw myself at him with wild shouts of glee—when Mrs. Grew's arms were suddenly awfully strong and she said soothingly, "No, no, dear, not quite so fast," and held me until somebody (Pinhead, it was) did something to the back of my neck.

Then I had a big comfortable chair all to myself and didn't want it because I couldn't move from my neck down. I felt all right, aside from some odd tingles, but I couldn't stir.

Uncle looked like Mr. Lincoln grieving over the deaths at Waterloo. He didn't say anything.

Mrs. Grew said cheerfully, "Well, now we've got the whole family together. Feel a bit more like discussing things rationally, Senator?"

Uncle shook his head a half a centimeter.

She said, "Oh, come now! We do want you to attend the conference. We simply want you to attend it in the right frame of mind. If we can't agree—well, it's hardly possible to let any of you be found again. Isn't that obvious? And that would be such a shame. Especially for the children."

Uncle said, "Pass the nemlock."

"Oh, I'm sure you don't mean that."

"He certainly does mean it!" Clark said shrilly. "You illegal obscenity! I delete all over your censored!"—and I knew he was really worked up, because Clark is contemptuous of vulgar idioms; he says they denote an inferior mind.

Mrs. Grew looked at Clark placidly, even tenderly. Then she called in Pinhead again. "Take him out and keep him awake till he dies." Pinhead picked Clark up and carried him out. But Clark had the last word. "And besides that," he yelled, "*you cheat at solitaire!* I've watched you!"

For a split second Mrs. Grew looked really annoyed. Then she put her face back into its usual kindly expression and said to Uncle, "Now that I have both of the kids I think I can afford to expend one of them. Especially as you are quite fond of Poddy. Too fond of her, some people would say. Psychiatrists, I mean."

I mulled that over . . . and decided that if I ever got out of this mess, I would make a rug out of her hide and give it to Uncle.

Uncle ignored it. Presently there was a most dreadful racket, metal on resounding metal. Mrs. Grew smiled. "It's crude but it works. It is what used to be a water heater when this was a ranch. Unfortunately it isn't quite big enough either to sit down or stand up in—but a boy that rude really shouldn't expect comfort. The noise comes from pounding on the outside of it

with a club." She smiled and then looked thoughtful. "I don't see how we can talk things over with such a racket going on. I think I should have the tank moved farther away. Or perhaps our talk would march even more quickly if I had it brought nearer, so that you could hear the sounds he makes inside the tank, too. What do you think, Senator?"

I cut in. "Mrs. Grew!"

"Yes, dear? Poddy, I'm sorry but I'm really quite busy. Later we'll have a nice cup of tea together. Now, Senator—"

"Mrs. Grew, you don't understand my Uncle Tom at all! You'll never get anything out of him this way."

She considered it. "I think you exaggerate, dear. Wishful thinking."

"No, no, no! There isn't *any* way you could possibly get my Uncle Tom to do anything against Mars. But if you hurt Clark—or me—you'll just make him more adamant. Oh, he loves me and he loves Clark, too. But if you try to budge him by hurting either one of us, you're just wasting your time!" I was talking rapidly and just as sincerely as I know how. I seemed to hear Clark's screams. Not likely, I guess, not over that infernal clanging. But once when he was a baby he fell into a wastebasket . . . and screamed something dreadful before I rescued him. I was hearing that again.

Mrs. Grew smiled pleasantly. "Poddy dear, you are only a girl and your head has been filled with nonsense. The Senator is going to do just what I want him to do."

"Not if you kill Clark, he won't!"

"You keep quiet, dear. Do keep quiet and let me explain, or I shall have to slap you a few times to keep you quiet. Poddy, I am not going to kill your brother."

"But you said—"

"*Quiet!* That native who took your brother away didn't understand what I said. He knows only trade Ortho. a few words, never a full sentence. I said what I did for the benefit of your brother. . . so that, when I do have him fetched back in, he'll be grovelling, begging your uncle to do anything I want him to do."

She smiled warmly. "One piece of nonsense you've apparently been taught is that patriotism, or something silly like that, will overpower a man's own self interest. Believe me, I have no slightest fear that an old political hack like your uncle will give any real weight to such a silly abstraction. What *does* worry him is his own political ruin if he does what I want him to do. What he is going to do. Eh, Senator?"

"Madam," Uncle Tom answered tightly, "I see no point in bandying words with you."

"Nor do I. Nor shall we. But you can listen while I explain it to Poddy. Dear, your uncle is a stubborn man and he won't accomplish his own political downfall lightly. I need a string to make him dance—and in *you* I have that string, I'm sure."

"I'm not!"

"Want a slap? Or would you rather be gagged? I like you, dear; don't

force me to be forceful. In *you*, I said. Not your brother. Oh, no doubt your uncle goes through the solemn farce of treating his niece and his nephew just alike—Christmas presents and birthday presents and such like pretenses. But it is obvious that no one could love your brother... not even his own mother, I venture to say. But the Senator *does* love you. Rather more than he wants anyone to suspect. So now I am hurting your brother a little—oh, just a smidgen, at worst he'll be deaf—to let your uncle see what will happen to *you*. Unless he is a good boy and speaks his piece just the way I tell him to."

She looked thoughtfully at Uncle. "Senator, I can't decide which of two methods might work the better on you. You see, I want to keep you reminded—after you agree to cooperate—that you *did* agree. Sometimes a politician doesn't stay bought. After I turn you loose would it be better for me to send your nephew along with you, to keep you reminded? Or would it be better to keep him here and work on him just a little each day—with his sister watching? So that she would have a clear idea of what happens to her . . . if you try any tricks at Luna City. What's your opinion, sir?"

"Madam, the question does not arise."

"Really, Senator?"

"Because I will not be at Luna City unless both children are with me. Unhurt."

Mrs. Grew chuckled. "Campaign

promises, Senator. I'll reason with you later. But now—" she glanced at an antique watch pinned to her gross bosom—"I think I had better put a stop to that dreadful racket. It's giving me a headache. And I doubt if your nephew can hear it any longer, save possibly through his bones." She got up and left, moving with surprising agility and grace for a woman her age and mass.

Suddenly the noise stopped.

It was such a surprise that I would have jumped if anything below my neck could jump. Which it couldn't.

Uncle was looking at me. "Poddy, Poddy," he said softly.

I said, "Uncle, don't you give in a millimeter to that dreadful woman!"

He said, "Poddy, I *can't* give in to her. Not at all. You understand that? Don't you?"

"I certainly do! But look—you could fake it. Tell her anything. Get loose yourself and take Clark along, as she suggested. Then you can rescue me. I'll hold out. You'll see!"

He looked terribly old. "Poddy . . . Poddy darling . . . I'm very much afraid . . . that this is the end. Be brave, dear."

"Uh, I haven't had very much practice at that. But I'll try to be." I pinched myself, mentally, to see if I was scared—and I wasn't, not really. Somehow I couldn't be scared with Uncle there, even though he was helpless just then. "Uncle, what is it she wants? Is she some kind of a fanatic?"

He didn't answer because we both heard Mrs. Grew's jolly, belly-deep laugh. "Fanatic!" she repeated, came over and tweaked my cheek. "Poddy dear, I'm not any sort of fanatic and I don't really care any more about politics than your uncle does. But I learned many years ago when I was just a girl—and quite attractive, too, dear, much more so than you will ever be—that a girl's best friend is cash. No, dear, I'm a paid professional and a good one."

She went on briskly, "Senator, I think the boy is deaf but I can't be sure. He's passed out now. We'll discuss it later, it's time for my nap. Perhaps we had all better rest a little."

And she called in Pinhead and I was carried into the room I am in now. When he picked me up, I really was truly aghast!—and found that I could move my arms and legs just a little bit—pins and needles you wouldn't believe!—and I struggled feebly. Did me no good, I was dumped in here anyhow.

After a while the drug wore off and I felt almost normal, though shaky. Shortly there after I discovered that Titania is a very good watchdog indeed. I haven't tried to reach that door since; my arm and shoulder are quite sore and getting stiff.

I instead I inspected the room. Not much in it. A bed with a mattress but no bed-clothes, not that you need any in this climate. A sort of a table suspended from one wall and a chair fastened to the floor by

it. Glow tubes around the upper corners of the room. I checked all these things at once after learning the hard way that Titania was not just a cutie with gauzy wings. It was quite clear that Mrs. Grew, or whoever had outfitted that room, had no intention of leaving anything in it that could be used as a weapon, against Titania or anybody. And I no longer had even my coat and purse.

I particularly regretted losing my purse, because I always carry a number of useful things in it. A nail file, for example. If I had had even my nail file I might have considered taking on that bloodthirsty little fairy. But I didn't waste time thinking about it; my purse was where I had dropped it when I was drugged.

I did find one thing very interesting. This room had been used to prison Clark before I landed in it. One of his two bags was in it — and I suppose I should have missed it from his room the night before, only I got upset and left Uncle to finish the search. The bag held a very odd collection for a knight errant venturing forth to rescue a damsel in distress: some clothing — three T-shirts and two pairs of shorts, a spare pair of shoes — a slide rule, and three comic books.

If I had found a flame gun or supplies of mysterious chemicals, I would not have been surprised — more Clarkish. I suppose, when you get right down to it, for all his brilliance Clark is just a little boy.

I worried a bit then about the

possibility — or probability — that he was deaf. Then I quit thinking about it. If true, I couldn't help it. He would miss his ears less than anything, since he hardly ever listens anyhow.

So I lay down on the bed and read his comic books. I am not a comic-book addict but there were quite entertaining, especially as the heroes were always getting out of predicaments much worse than mine.

After a while I fell asleep and had heroic dreams.

I was awakened by "breakfast" (more like dinner but quite good). Pinhead took the tray away, and light plastic dishes and a plastic spoon offered little in the way of lethal weapons. However I was delighted to find that he had fetched my purse!

Delighted for all of ten seconds, that is. No nail file. No pen knife. Not a darn thing in it more deadly than lipstick and hanky. Mrs. Grew hadn't disturbed my money nor my tiny minirecorder but she had taken everything that could conceivably do any good (harm). So I gritted my teeth and ate and then brought this useless journal up to date. That's about all I've done since — just sleep and eat and make friends with Ariel. She reminds me of Duncan.

Oh, not alike really — but all babies are sort of alike, don't you think?

I had dozed off from the lack of anything better to do when I was awakened. "Poddy, dear."

"Oh! Hello, Mrs. Grew."

"Now, now, no quick moves," she said chidingly. I wasn't about to make any quick moves; she had a gun pointed at my belly button. I'm very fond of it, it's the only one I have.

"Now be a good girl and turn over and cross your wrists behind you." I did so and in a moment she had them tied, quite firmly. Then she looped the line around my neck and had me on a leash — and if I struggled, all I accomplished was choking myself. So I didn't struggle.

Oh, I'm sure there was at least a moment when she didn't have that gun pointed at me and my wrists were not yet tied. One of those comic-book heroes would have snatched that golden instant, rendered her helpless, tied her with her own rope.

Regrettably, none of those heroes was named "Poddy Fries." My education has encompassed cooking, sewing, quite a lot of math and history and science, and such useful tidbits as freehand drawing and how to dip candles and make soap. But hand-to-hand combat I have learned sketchily if at all from occasional border clashes with Clark. I know that Mother feels that this is a lack (she is skilled in both karate and kill-quick, and can shoot as well as Daddy does) but Daddy has put off sending me to classes. I've gathered the impression that he doesn't really want his baby girl to know such things.

I vote with Mother, it's a lack.

There must have been a split second when I could have lashed out with a heel, caught Mrs. Grew in her solar plexus, then broken her neck while she was still helpless — and run down the Jolly Roger and run up the Union Jack, just like in *Treasure Island*.

Oppernockity tunes, but once — and I wasn't in tune with it.

Instead I was led away like a puppy on a string. Titania eyed us as we went through the door, but Mrs. Grew clucked at her and she settled back on her perch and cuddled Ariel to her.

She had me walk in front of her down a hallway, through that living room where I had last seen Uncle Tom and Clark, out another door and a passage and into a large room —

— and I gasped and suppressed a scream!

Mrs. Grew said cheerfully, "Take a good look, dear. He's your next roommate."

Half the room was closed off with heavy steel bars, like a cage in a zoo. Inside was — well, it was Pinhead, that's what it was, though it took me a long moment of fright to realize it. You may have gathered that I do not consider Pinhead handsome. Well, dear, he was Apollo Belvedere before, compared with the red-eyed maniacal horror he had become.

Then I was lying on the floor and Mrs. Grew was giving me smelling salts. Yes, sir, Captain Podkayne Fries the Famous Explorer had



keeled over like a silly girl. All right, go ahead and laugh; I don't mind. You haven't ever been shoved into a room with a thing like that and had it introduced to you as "your new roommate."

Mrs. Grew was chuckling. "Feel better, dear?"

"You're not going to put me in there with him!"

"What? Oh, no no, that was just my little joke. I'm sure your uncle will never make it necessary actually to do it." She looked at Pinhead thoughtfully — and he was straining one arm through the bars, trying again and again to reach us. "He's had only five milligrams, and for a long-time happy-dust addict that's barely enough to make him tempery. If I ever do have to put you — or your brother — in with him, I've promised him at least fifteen. I need your advice, dear. You see, I'm about to send your uncle back to Venusberg so that he can catch his

ship. Now which do you think would work best with your uncle? To put your brother in there right now, while your uncle watches? He's watching this, you know. He saw you faint, and that couldn't have been better if you had practiced. Or to wait and —"

"My uncle is watching us?"

"Yes, of course. Or to —"

"UNCLE TOM!"

"Oh, do keep quiet, Poddy. He can see you but he can't hear you and he can't possibly help you. Hmm. You're such a silly billy that I don't think I want your advice.

She walked me back to my cell.

That was only hours ago; it merely seems like years.

But it is long enough. Long enough for Poddy to lose her nerve. Look, I don't have to tell this, nobody knows but me. But I've been truthful all through these memoirs and I'll be truthful now. I have made up my mind that as soon as I get a chance to talk with Uncle I will beg him, plead with him, to do *anything* to keep me from being locked up with a happy-dusted native.

I'm not proud of it. I'm not sure I'll ever be proud of Poddy again. But there it is and you can rub my nose in it. I've come up against something that frightens me so much I've cracked.

I feel a little better about it to have admitted it baldly. I sort of hope that, when the time comes, I won't whimper and I won't plead. But I . . . just . . . don't . . . know.

And then somebody was shoved in with me and it was Clark!

I jumped up off the bed and threw my arms around him and lifted him right off his feet and was blubbing over him. "Oh, Clarkie! Brother, brother, are you hurt? What did they do to you? Speak to me! Are you deaf?"

Right in my ear he said, "Cut out the sloppy stuff, Pod."

So I knew he wasn't too badly hurt, he sounded just like Clark. I repeated, more quietly, "Are you deaf?"

He barely whispered in my ear, "No, but she thinks I am, so we'll go on letting her think so." He untangled himself from me, took a quick look in his bag, then rapidly and very thoroughly went over every bit of the room — giving Titania just wide enough berth to keep her from diving on him.

Then he came back, shoved his face close to mine and said, "Poddy, can you read lips?"

"No. Why?"

"The hell you can't, you just did."

Well, it wasn't quite true. Clark had barely whispered — and I did find that I was "hearing" him as much from watching his mouth as I was from truly hearing him. This is a very funny thing, but Clark says that almost everybody reads lips more than they think they do. . . and he had noticed it and practiced it and can really read lips — only he never told anybody because sometimes it is most useful.

He had me talk so low that I

couldn't hear it myself and he didn't talk much louder. He told me, "Look, Pod, I don't know that Old Lady Grew—" (he didn't say "Lady") — "has this room wired. I can't find any changes in it since she had me in it before. But there are at least four places and maybe more where a mike could be. So we keep quiet — because it stands to reason she put us together to hear what we have to say to each other. So talk out loud all you want to. . . but just static. How scared you are and how dreadful it is that I can't hear anything and such like noise."

So we did and I moaned and groaned and wept over my poor baby brother. And he complained that he couldn't hear a word I was saying and kept asking me to find a pencil and write what I was saying — and in between we really did talk, important talk that Clark didn't want her to hear.

I wanted to know why he wasn't deaf. Had he actually been in that tank? "Oh, sure," he told me, "but I wasn't nearly as limp by then as she thought I was, either. I had some paper in my pocket and I chewed it up into pulp and corked my ears." He looked pained. "A twenty-spot note. Most expensive earplugs anybody ever had, I'll bet. Then I wrapped my shirt around my head and ignored it. But stow that and listen."

He was even more vague about how he had managed to get himself trapped. "Okay, okay, so I got hoaxed. You and Uncle don't look so

smart, either. And anyhow, you're responsible."

"I am not either responsible!" I whispered indignantly.

"If you're not responsible, then you're irresponsible, which is worse. Logic. But forget it, we've got important things to do now. Look, Pod, we're going to crush out of here."

"How?" I glanced up at Titania. She was nursing Ariel but she never took her eyes off us.

Clark followed my glance. "I'll take care of that insect when the time comes. Forget it. It has to be soon and it has to be at night."

"Why at night?" I was thinking that this smoggy paradise was bad enough when you could see a little, but in pitch darkness —

"Pod, let that cut in your face heal; you're making a draft. It's got to be while Jojo is locked up."

"Jojo?"

"That set of muscles she has working for her. The native."

"Oh, you mean 'Pinhead.'"

"Pinhead, Jojo, Albert Einstein. The happy-duster. He serves supper, then he washes the dishes, then she locks him up and gives him his night's ration of dust. Then he stays locked up until he sleeps it off, because she's as scared of him when he's high as anybody else is. So we make our try for it while he is caged. And maybe she'll be asleep, too. With luck the bloke who drives her sky wagon will be away, too; he doesn't always sleep here. But we

can't count on it and it has got to be before the *Tricorn* shapes for Luna. When is that?"

"Twelve seventeen on the eighth, ship Greenwich."

"Which is?"

"Local? Nine-sixteen Venusberg, Wednesday the twentieth."

"Check," he answered. "On both."

"But why?"

"Shut up." He had taken his slide rule from his bag and was setting it. For the conversion, I assumed, so I asked, "Do you want to know the Venus second for this Terran year?" I was rather proud to have it on the tip of my tongue, like a proper pilot; Mr. Clancy's time hadn't been entirely wasted even though I had never let him get cuddly.

"Nope. I know it." Clark reset the rule, read it and announced, "We both remember both figures the same way and the conversion checks. So check timepieces." We both looked at our wrists. "Mark!"

We agreed, within a few seconds, but that wasn't what I noticed; I was looking at the date hand. "Clark! Today's the nineteenth!"

"Maybe you thought it was Christmas," he said sourly. "And don't yip like that again."

"But that's tomorrow!" (I did make it soundless.)

"Worse. It's less than seventeen hours from now...and we can't make a move until that brute is locked up. We get just one chance, no more."

"Or Uncle Tom doesn't get to the Conference."

Clark shrugged. "Maybe so, maybe not. Whether he decides to go — or sticks around and tries to find us, I couldn't care less."

Clark was being very talkative, for Clark. But at best he grudges words and I didn't understand him. "What do you mean? 'If he sticks around?'"

Apparently Clark thought he had told me, or that I already knew — but he hadn't and I didn't. Uncle Tom was already gone. I felt suddenly lost and forlorn. "Clark, are you sure?"

"Sure, I'm sure. She darn well saw to it that I saw him go. Jojo loaded him in like a sack of meal and I saw the wagon take off into the smog. Uncle Tom is in Venusberg by now."

I suddenly felt much better. "Then he'll rescue us!"

Clark looked bored. "Pod, don't be stupid squared."

"But he will! Uncle Tom...and Mr. Chairman...and Dexter —"

He cut me off. "Oh, for Pete's sake, Poddy! Analyze it. You're Uncle Tom, you're in Venusberg, you've got all the help possible. *How do you find this place?*"

"Uh..." I stopped. "Uh —" I said again. Then I closed my mouth and left it closed.

"'Uh,'" he agreed: "Exactly 'uh.' You don't find it. Oh, in eight or ten years with a few thousand people doing nothing but searching you could find it by elimination. Fat lot of good that would do. Get this through your little head, Sis: nobody

is going to rescue us, nobody can possibly help us. We either break out of here tonight, or we've had it."

"Why tonight? Oh, tonight's all right with me. But if we don't get a chance tonight —"

"Then at nine-sixteen tomorrow," he interrupted, "we're dead."

"Huh? Why?"

"Pod, put yourself in old Gruesome's place. Tomorrow the *Tricorn* leaves. Figure it both ways: Uncle Tom leaves in it, or Uncle Tom won't leave. Okay, you've got his niece and nephew. What do you do with them? Be logical about it. *Her* sort of logic."

I tried. I really tried. But maybe I've been brought up wrong for that sort of logic; I can't seem to visualize killing somebody just because he or she had become a nuisance to me.

But I could see that Clark was right that far: after ship's departure tomorrow we will simply be nuisances to Mrs. Grew. If Uncle Tom *doesn't* leave, we are most special nuisances — and if he *does* leave and she is counting on his worry about us to keep him in line at Luna City (it wouldn't, of course, but that is what she is counting on anyway), in that case every day she risks the possibility that we might escape and get word to Uncle.

All right, maybe I can't imagine just plain murder; it's outside my experience. But suppose both Clark and I came down with green pox and died. That would certainly be convenient for Mrs. Grew — now, wouldn't it?

"I scan it," I agreed.

"Good," he said. "I'll teach you a thing or four yet, Pod. Either we make it tonight. . . or just past nine tomorrow she chills us both. . . and she chills Jojo, too, and sets fire to the place."

"Why Jojo? I mean 'Pinhead.'"

"That's the real tipoff, Pod. The happy-duster. This is Venus. . . and yet she let us see that she was supplying dust to a duster. She won't leave any witnesses."

"Uncle Tom is a witness, too."

"What if he is? She's counting on his keeping his lip zipped until the conference is over. By then she's back on Earth and has lost herself among eight billion people. Hang around here and risk being caught? Pod, she's going to wait here only long enough to find out whether or not Uncle Tom catches the *Tricorn*. Then she'll carry out either Plan A or Plan B—but both plans cancel us out. Get that through your fuzzy head."

I shivered. "All right. I've got it." He grinned. "But *we* don't wait. We execute our own plan—my plan—first." He looked unbearably smug and added, "You fubbed when you came out here without doing any of the things I told you to. . . and Uncle Tom fubbed just about as badly, thinking he could make a straight payoff. . . but I came out here prepared!"

"You did? With what? Your slide rule? Or maybe those comic books?"

Clark said, "Pod, you know I

never read comic books. They were just protective coloration."

(And this is true, so far as I know. I thought I had uncovered his Secret Vice.)

"Then what?" I demanded.

"Just compose your soul in patience, Sister Dear. All in good time." He moved his bag back of the bed, then added. "Move around here where you can watch down the hallway. If Lady Macbeth shows up, I'm reading comic books."

I did as he told me to but asked him one more question—on another subject, as quizzing Clark when he doesn't want to answer is as futile as slicing water. "Clark? You figure Mrs. Grew is part of the gang that 'muggled the bomb?'"

He blinked and looked stupid. "What bomb?"

"The one they paid you to sneak aboard the *Tricorn*, of course! 'What bomb' indeed!"

"Oh, that. Golly, Poddy, you believe everything you're told. When you get to Terra, don't let anybody sell you the Pyramids. They're not for sale." He went on working and I smothered my annoyance.

Presently he said, "She couldn't possibly know anything about any bombs in the *Tricorn*, or she wouldn't have been a passenger in it herself."

Clark can always make me feel stupid. This was so obvious (after he pointed it out) that I refrained from comment. "How do you figure it, then?"

"Well, she could have been hired by the same people and not have

known that they were just using her as a reserve."

My mind raced and another answer came up. "In which case there could be still a third plot to get Uncle Tom between here and Luna!"

"Could be. Certainly a lot of people are taking an interest in him. But I figure it for two groups. One group — almost certainly from Mars — doesn't want Uncle Tom to get there at all. Another group — from Earth probably, at least old gruesome actually did come from Earth — wants him to be there but wants him to sing their song. Otherwise when she had Uncle Tom, she would never have turned him loose. She would just have had Jojo shove him into a soft spot and wait for the bubbles to stop coming up." Clark dug out something and looked at it. "Pod, repeat this back and don't make a sound. You are exactly twenty-three kilometers from South Gate and almost due south of it — south seven degrees west."

I repeated it. "How do you know?"

He held up a small black object about as big as two packs of cigarettes. "Inertial tracker, infantry model. You can buy them anywhere here. Anybody who ever goes out into the bush carries one." He handed it to me.

I looked at it with interest. I had never seen one that small. Sand rats use them, of course, but they use bigger, more accurate ones mounted in their sand buggies — and, anyhow, on Mars you can al-

ways see either the stars or the Sun. Not like this gloomy place! I even knew how it worked, more or less, because inertial astrogation is a commonplace for space ships and guided missiles — vector integration of accelerations and times. But whereas the *Tricorn's* inertial tracker is supposed to be good for one part in a million, this little gadget probably couldn't be read closer than one in a thousand.

But it improved our chances at least a thousand to one!

"Clark! Did Uncle Tom have one of these? 'Cause if he did —"

He shook his head. "If he did, he never got a chance to read it. I figure they gassed him at once; he was limp when they lifted him out of the air wagon. And I never had a chance to tell him where this dump is because this has been my first chance to look at mine. Now put it in your purse; you're going to use it to get back to Venusberg."

"Uh. . . it'll be bulky in my purse, it'll show. You better hide it wherever you had it. You won't lose me, I'm going to hang onto your hand every step of the way."

"No."

"Why not?"

"In the first place I'm not going to drag this bag with me and that's where it was hidden, I built a false bottom into it. In the second place we aren't going back together."

"What? Why not? We certainly are! Clark, I'm responsible for you."

"That's a matter of opinion. Your opinion. Look, Poddy, I'm going to

get you out of this silly mess. But don't try to use your head, it leaks. Just your memory. Listen to what I say and then do it exactly the way I tell you to — and you'll be all right."

"But —"

"Do you have a plan to get us out?"

"No."

"Then shut up. You start pulling your Big Sister act now and you'll get us both killed."

I shut up. And I must confess that his plan made considerable sense. According to Clark there is nobody in this house but us, Mrs. Grew, Titania and Ariel, Pinhead and sometimes her driver. I certainly haven't seen nor heard any evidence of anybody else and I suppose that Mrs. Grew has been doing it with an absolute minimum of witnesses. I know I would if I were (God forbid!) ever engaged in anything like this.

I've never seen the driver's face and neither has Clark — on purpose, I'm sure. But Clark says that the driver sometimes stays overnight, so we must be prepared to cope with him.

Okay, assume that we cope. As soon as we are out of the house we split up. I go east, he goes west, for a couple of kilometers, in straight lines as near as bogs and swamps permit, which may be not very.

Then we both turn north. Clark says that the ring road around the city is just three kilometers north of us; he drew me a sketch from memory of a map he had studied before he set out to "rescue Girdie."

At the ring road I go right, he goes left — and we each make use of the first hitch-hike transportation, ranch-house phone or whatever, to reach Uncle Tom and or Chairman Cunha and get lots of reinforcements in a hurry!

The idea of splitting up is the most elementary of tactics, to make sure that at least one of us gets through and gets help. Mrs. Grew is so fat she couldn't chase anybody on a race track, much less a swamp. We plan to do it when she doesn't dare unlock Pinhead for fear of her own life. If we are chased, it will probably be the driver — and he can't chase two directions at once. Maybe there are other natives she can call on for help. Even so, splitting up doubles our chances.

So I get the inertial tracker because Clark doesn't think I can maneuver in the bush without one, even if I wait for it to get light. He's probably right. But he claims that he can steer well enough to find that road using just his watch, a wet finger for the breeze and polarized spectacles — which, so help me, he has with him.

I shouldn't have sneered at his comic books. He actually did come prepared, quite a lot of ways. If they hadn't gassed him while he was still locked in the passenger compartment of Mrs. Grew's air buggy, I think he could have given them a very busy, bad time. A flame gun in his bag, a Remington pistol hidden on his person, knives, stun bombs —

even a *second* inertial tracker, openly in the bag along with his clothes and comic books and slide rule.

I asked him why? — and he put his best superior look. "If anything went wrong and they grabbed me, they would expect me to have one. So I had one — and it hadn't even been started. . . poor little tenderfoot who doesn't even know enough to switch the thing on when he leaves his base position. Old Gruesome got a fine chuckle out of that." He sneered. "She thinks I'm half-witted and I've helped the idea along."

So they did the same thing with his bag that they did with my purse — cleaned everything out of it that looked even faintly useful for mayhem and murder, let him keep what was left.

And most of what was left was concealed by a false bottom so beautifully faked that the manufacturer wouldn't have noticed it.

Except, possibly, for the weight. I asked Clark about that. He shrugged. "Calculated risk," he said. "If you don't bet, you can't win. Jojo carried it in here still packed and she searched it in here — and didn't pick it up afterwards; she had both arms full of junk I didn't mind her confiscating."

(And suppose she had picked it up and noticed? Well. Brother would still have had his brain and his hands — and I think he could take a sewing machine apart and put it back together as a piece of artillery. Clark is a trial to me, but I have great confidence in him.)

I'm going to get some sleep now — or try to — as Pinhead has just fetched in our supper and we have a busy time ahead of us, later. But first I'm going to back-track this tape and copy it. I have one fresh spool left in my purse. I'm going to give the copy to Clark to give to Uncle, just in case. Just in case Pod turns out to be bubbles in a swamp, I mean. But I'm not worried about that; it's a much nicer prospect than being Pinhead's roommate. In fact I'm not worried about anything. Clark has the situation well in hand.

But he warned me very strongly about one thing: "Tell them to get here well before nine-sixteen. . . or don't bother to come at all."

"Why?" I wanted to know.

"Just do it."

"Clark, you know perfectly well that two grown men won't pay any attention unless I can give them a sound reason for it."

He blinked. "All right. There is a very sound reason. A half a kiloton bomb isn't very much. . . but it still isn't healthy to be around when it goes off. Unless they can get in here and disarm it before that time — up she goes!"

He has it. I've *seen* it. Snugly fitted into that false bottom. That same three kilograms of excess mass I couldn't account for at *Deimos*. Clark showed me the timing mechanism and how the shaped charges were nestled around it to produce the implosion squeeze.

But he did not show me how to dis-

arm it. I ran into his blankest, most stubborn wall. He expects to escape, yes. And he expects to come back here with plenty of help and in plenty of time and disarm the thing. But he is utterly convinced that Mrs. Grew intends to kill us — and if anything goes wrong and we don't break out of here, or die trying, or anything. . .well, he intends to take her with us.

I told him it was wrong, I said that he mustn't take the law in his own hands. "What law?" he said. "There isn't any law here. And you aren't being logical, Pod. Anything that is right for a group to do is right for one person to do."

That one was too slippery for me to answer so I tried simply pleading with him and he got sore. "Maybe you would rather be in the cage with Jojo?"

"Well. . .no."

"Then shut up about it. Look, Pod, I planned all this out when she had me in that tank, trying to beat my ears in, make me deaf. I kept my sanity by ignoring what was being done to me and concentrating on when and how I would blow her to bits."

I wondered if he had indeed kept his sanity, but I kept my doubts to myself and shut up. Besides I'm not sure that he's wrong; it may be that I'm just squeamish about bloodshed. "Anything that is moral for a group to do is moral for one person to do." There must be a flaw in that, since I've always been taught that it is wrong to take the law in your own

hands. But I didn't find the flaw and it sounds axiomatic, self evident. Switch it around. If something is wrong for one person to do, can it possibly be made *right* by having a lot of people (a government) agree to do it together? Even unanimously?

If a thing is wrong, it is wrong — and vox populi can't change it.

Just the same, I'm not sure I can nap with an atom bomb under my bed.

I guess I had better finish this. This is Clark speaking.

My sister got right to sleep after I rehearsed her in what we were going to do. I stretched out on the floor but didn't go right to sleep. I'm a worrier, she isn't. I reviewed my plans, trying to make them tighter. Then I slept.

I've got one of those built-in alarm clocks and I woke just when I planned to, an hour before dawn. Any later and there would be too much chance that Jojo might be loose, any earlier and there would be too much time in the dark. The Venus bush is chancy even when you can see well. I didn't want Poddy to step into something sticky, or step on something that would turn and bite her leg off. Nor me, either.

But we had to risk the bush, or stay and let old Gruesome kill us at her convenience. The first was a sporting chance. The latter was a dead certainty, even though I had a terrible time convincing Poddy that Mrs. Grew would kill us. Poddy's greatest weakness — the really soft

place in her head, she's not too stupid otherwise — is her almost total inability to grasp that some people are as bad as they are. Evil. Poddy never has understood evil. Naughtiness is about as far as her imagination reaches.

But I understand evil, I can get right inside the skull of a person like Mrs. Grew.

Perhaps you infer from this that I am evil, or partly so. All right, want to make something of it? Whatever I am, I knew Mrs. Grew was evil before we ever left the *Tricorn* . . . when Poddy (and even Girdie!) thought the slob was just too darling for words.

I don't trust a person who laughs when there is nothing to laugh about. Or is good-natured no matter what happens. If it's that perfect, it's an act, a phony. So I watched her . . . and cheating at solitaire wasn't the only give-away.

So between the bush and Mrs. Grew,

Unless the air car was there and we could swipe it. This would be a mixed blessing, as it would mean two of them to cope with, them armed and us not. (I don't count a bomb as an arm, you can't point it at a person's head.)

Before I woke Poddy I took care of that alate pseudo-simian, that "fairy." Vicious little beast. I didn't have a gun. But I didn't really want one at that point; they understand about guns and are hard to hit, they'll dive on you at once.

Instead I had shoe trees in my spare shoes, elastic bands around my spare clothes and more elastic bands in my pockets, and several two-centimeter steel ball bearings.

Shift two wing nuts, and the long parts of the shoe trees become a steel fork. Add elastic bands and you have a sling shot. And don't laugh at a sling shot; many a sand rat has kept himself fed with only a sling shot. They are silent and you usually get your ammo back.

I aimed almost three times as high as I would at home, to allow for the local gravity, and got it right on the sternum, knocked it off its perch — crushed the skull with my heel and gave it an extra twist for the nasty bite on Poddy's arm. The young one started to whine, so I pushed the carcass over in the corner, somewhat out of sight, and put the cub on it. It shut up. I took care of all this before I woke Poddy because I knew she had sentimental fancies about these "fairies" and I didn't want her jittering and maybe grabbing my elbow. As it was — clean and fast.

Poddy was still snoring, so I slipped off my shoes and made a fast reconnoitre.

Not so good. Our local witch was already up and reaching for her broom. In a few minutes she would be unlocking Jojo if she hadn't already. I didn't have a chance to see if the sky car was outside; I did well not to get caught. I hurried back and woke Poddy.

"Pod!" I whispered. "You awake?"
"Yes."

"Wide awake? You've got to do your act, right now. Make it loud and make it good."

"Check."

"Help me up on the perch. Can your sore arm take it?"

She nodded, slid quickly off the bed and took position at the door, hands ready. I grabbed her hands, bounced to her shoulders, steadied, and she grabbed my calves as I let go her hands — and then I was up on the perch, over the door. I waved her on.

Poddy went running out the door, screaming, "Mrs. Grew! Mrs. Grew! Help, help! My brother!" She did make it good.

And came running back in almost at once with Mrs. Grew puffing after her.

I landed on Gruesome's shoulders, knocking her to the floor and knocking her gun out of her hand. I twisted and snapped her neck before she could catch her breath.

Pod was right on the ball, I have to give her credit. She had that gun before it stopped sliding. Then she held it, looking dazed.

I took it carefully from her. "Grab your purse. We go, right now! Stick close behind me."

Jojo was loose. I had cut it too fine. He was in the living room, looking, I guess, to see what the noise was about. I shot him.

Then I looked for the air car while keeping the gun ready for the driver. No sign of either one — and I didn't

know whether to groan or cheer. I was all keyed up to shoot him but maybe he would have shot me first. But a car would have been mighty welcome compared with heading in to the bush.

I almost changed my plan at that point and maybe I should have. Kept together, I mean, and headed straight north for the ring road.

It was the gun that decided me. Poddy could protect herself with it — and I would just be darn careful what I stepped on or in. I handed it to her and told her to move slowly and carefully until there was more light — but get going!

She was wobbling the gun around. "But, Brother, I've never shot anybody!"

"Well, you can if you have to."

"I guess so."

"Nothing to it. Just point it at 'em and press the button. Better use both hands. And don't shoot unless you really need to."

"All right."

I smacked her behind. "Now get going. See you later."

And I got going. I looked behind once, but she was already vanished in the smog. I put a little distance between me and the house.

And I got lost.

That's all. I needed that tracker but I had figured I could get along without it and Pod had to have it. I got hopelessly lost. There wasn't breeze enough for me to tell anything by wetting my finger and that polarized light trick for finding the

Sun is harder than you would think. Hours after I should have reached the ring road I was still skirting boggy places and open water and trying to keep from being somebody's lunch.

And suddenly there was the most dazzling light possible and I went down flat and stayed there with my eyes buried in my arm and started to count.

I wasn't hurt at all. The blast wave covered me with mud and the noise was pretty rough but I was well outside the real trouble. Maybe half an hour later I was picked up by a cop car.

Certainly I should have disarmed that bomb.

I had intended to, if everything went well; it was just meant to be a "Samson in the Temple" stunt if things turned out dry. A last resort.

Maybe I should have stopped to disarm it as soon as I broke old Gruesome's neck — and maybe Jojo would have caught both of us if I had, and him still with a happy-dust hangover.

Anyhow I didn't, and then I was very busy shooting Jojo and deciding what to do and telling Poddy how to use that gun and getting her started. I didn't think about the bomb until I was several hundred meters from the house — and I certainly didn't want to go back then, even if I could have found it again in the smog, which is doubtful.

But apparently Poddy did just that. Went back to the house. I mean. She was found later that day, about

a kilometer from the house, outside the circle of total destruction — but caught by the blast.

With a live baby fairy in her arms. Her body had protected it; it doesn't appear to have been hurt at all.

That's why I think she went back to the house. I don't *know* that this baby fairy is the one she called "Ariel." It could have been one that she picked up in the bush. But that doesn't seem at all likely; a wild one would have clawed her and its parents would have torn her to pieces.

I think she intended to save that baby fairy all along and decided not to mention it to me. It is just the kind of sentimental stunt that Poddy would pull. She knew I was going to have to kill the adult — and she never said a word against that; Pod could always be sensible when absolutely necessary.

Then in the excitement of breaking out she forgot to grab it, just as I forgot to disarm the bomb after we no longer needed it. So she went back for it.

And lost the inertial tracker, somehow. At least it wasn't found on her or near her. Between the gun and her purse and the baby fairy and the tracker she must have dropped it in the bog. Must be, because she had plenty of time to go back and still get far away from the house. She should have been ten kilometers away by then, so she must have lost the tracker fairly soon and walked in a circle.

I told Uncle Tom all about it and was ready to tell the Corporation

people, Mr. Cunha and so forth, and take my medicine. But Uncle told me to keep my mouth shut. He agreed that I had fubbed it, mighty dry indeed—but so had he—and so had everybody. He was gentle with me.

I wish he had hit me.

I'm sorry about Poddy. She gave me some trouble from time to time, with her bossy ways and her illogical ideas. But just the same I'm sorry.

I wish I knew how to cry.

Her little recorder was still in her purse and part of the tape could be read. Doesn't mean much, though. She doesn't tell what she did. she was babbling, sort of:

“—very dark where I'm going. No man is an island, complete in himself. Remember that, Clarkie. Oh, I'm sorry I fubbed it but remember that; it's important. They all have to be cuddled sometimes. My shoulder— Saint Podkayne! Saint Podkayne, are you listening? U n k a T o m, Mother, Daddy— is anybody listening? Do listen, please, because this is important. I love—”

It cuts off there. So we don't know whom she loved.

Everybody, maybe.

I'm alone here, now. Mr. Cunha made them hold the *Tricorn* until it was certain whether Poddy would die or get well, then Uncle Tom left and left me behind— alone, that is, except for doctors, and nurses, and Dexter Cunha hanging around all the time, and a whole platoon of guards.

I heard part of what Uncle Tom told Dad about it.

“Nonsense, sir! I am not dodging my own load of guilt. It will be with me always. Nor can I wait here until you arrive and you know it and you know why—and both children will be safer in Mr. Cunha's hands and *not* close to me...and you know *that*, too! But I have a message for you, sir, one that you should pass on to your wife. Just this: people who will not take the trouble to raise children should not have them. You with your nose always in a book, your wife gallivanting off God knows where—between you, your daughter was almost killed. No credit to either of you that she wasn't. Just blind luck. You should tell your wife sir, that building bridges and space stations and such gadgets is all very well...but that a woman has more important work to do. I tried to suggest this to you years ago...and was told to mind my own business. Now I am saying it. Your daughter will get well, no thanks to either of you. But I have my doubts about Clark. With him it may be too late. God may give you a second chance if you hurry. Ending transmission!”

I faded into the woodwork then and didn't get caught. But what did Uncle Tom mean by that?—trying to scare Dad about *me*? I wasn't hurt at all and he knows it. I just got a load of mud on me, not even a burn...whereas Poddy still looks like a corpse.

I don't see what he was driving at.

END

I, EXECUTIONER

BY TED WHITE AND TERRY CARR

**I am the executioner of the
law, terrible in my majesty.
The doomed felon is—myself!**

I always shook when I came out of the Arena, but this time the tension wrapped my stomach in painful knots and salty perspiration stung my neck where I had shaved only a little over an hour earlier. And despite the heavy knot in my stomach, I felt strangely empty.

I had never been able to sort out my reactions to an Execution. The atmosphere of careful boredom, the strictly business-as-usual air failed to dull my senses as it did for the others. I could always *taste* the ozone

in the air, mixed with the taste of fear—whether mine, or that of the Condemned, I never knew. My nostrils always gave an involuntary twitch at the confined odors and I felt an almost claustrophobic fear at being packed into the Arena with the other nine hundred ninety-nine Citizens on Execution Duty.

I had been expecting my notice for several months before it finally came. I hadn't served Execution Duty for nearly two years. Usually it had figured out to every fourteen

months or so on rotation, so I'd been ready for it. A little apprehensive—I always am—but ready.

At 9:00 in the morning, still only half awake (I'd purposely slept until the last minute), vaguely trying to remember the dream I'd had, I waited in front of the Arena for the ordeal to begin. The dream had been something about a knife, an operation. But I couldn't remember whether I'd been the doctor or the patient.

Our times of arrival had been staggered in our notices, so that a long queue wouldn't tie up traffic, but as usual the checkers were slow. and we were backed up a bit.

I didn't like waiting. Somehow I've always felt more exposed on the streets, although the brain-scanners must be more plentiful in an Arena than almost anywhere else. It's only logical that they should be. The scanners are set up to detect unusual patterns of stress in our brain waves as we pass close to them, and thus to pick out as quickly as possible those with incipient or developing neuroses or psychoses—the potential deviates. And where else would such an aberration be as likely to come out as in the Arena?

I had moved to the front of the short line. I flashed my notification of duty to the checker, and was waved on in. I found my proper seat on the aisle in the "T" section. It was a relief to sink into its plush depths and look the Arena over.

Once this had been a first-run Broadway theater—first a place

where great plays were shown, and then later the more degenerate motion pictures. Those had been times of vicarious escape from reality — times when the populace ruled, and yet the masses hid their eyes from the world. Many things had changed since then, with the coming of regulated sanity and the achievement of world peace. Gone now were the black arts of forgetfulness, those media which practiced the enticement of the Citizen into irresponsible escape. Now this crowded theater was only a reminder. And a place of execution for those who would have sought escape here.

Perhaps thirty people were sitting on the floor of the Arena, where once there had been a stage. They sat quietly in chairs not so different from mine, strapped for the moment into a kind of passive conformity. I looked at them with interest. Strangeness has as much attraction as the familiar at times. As usual, most of them were young—from about ten to the early twenties. But at whatever age, they were rebels. They were potential enemies of society. Criminals. Probably some of them hadn't yet realized it. But they were on the verge of anti-social insanity, and the brain-scanners had singled them out.

They were so young . . . How long does it take a boy to become neurotic, psychotic. dangerous?

A flurry of movement at the gates caught my eye. Apparently at least one of them was a full-fledged Reb-

el. He struggled furiously, and the three proctors were having an awkward time carrying him into the Arena without hurting him.

Then, as they moved into the floodlights, I saw with a faint shock that it was a girl.

She was dressed in man's clothing, but betrayed by her neurotic and unsanitary long hair.

Long, blonde hair. For a moment I forgot where I was, and allowed myself to revel in this nearly forbidden sight. The soft waves fell allway down her neck, disarrayed now. The floodlights shined on it, a strangely gentle mockery of sunlight. Something within me stirred, and I almost remembered . . .

Then they were strapping her into one of the chairs, carefully pulling the soft leather straps with their attached metal electrodes around her, pinioning her. One set joined her arms to the armrests, another her legs to the specially devised footrests. Her tunic was opened, and a third set was passed around her chest, the metal plate fastened just under her left breast.

And then she was alone.

I stared at her, drawn at first to her hair, and then, as my vision focused across the distance, to her eyes.

Strange eyes; light blue irises, surrounded by a ring of dark blue, and flecked with gold. They were shining. She had been crying. Her eyes seemed to melt, like a pool of clear water growing deeper; I could almost see into them, into the darkness

beneath. I was no longer aware of the chair in which I sat . . . only of her, alone before me, so close.

Her eyes widened for just an instant when she recognized me.

"Bob."

"Hello, Roscbud."

"I knew you'd be here. I knew."

"It's been a long time . . . I think I was trying to forget."

"Don't," she said. "Don't ever forget."

Sun drenched me, and I was rocked back into time.

"Hey, you pushed me!" I shouted at her.

"Yes," said a faint voice, and then, "I'm sorry," the little golden-haired girl said.

I sat up. Mother was going to be mad at me again, I knew. I wiped the seat of my pants with my hand, and then stared at the muddy hand with interest.

"Look," I said to her, and showed her my hand. When she stepped forward to look closely at it, I pushed it at her, and smeared mud onto her face. Then I laughed . . .

★ ★ ★

My laughter faded, blending with hers . . . and then . . . and then we were no longer standing separately in the sun.

It was a dark night, the air fresh and cool to my skin, and the leaves of the trees which stretched over us rustled with a faint wind.

I laughed again, a soft girlish sound that brought discomfort to the boy's face before me.

"Your mother says. Your father says. Don't you ever say anything for yourself, Bob?"

"Look, Rosalie, I'm sorry. Maybe I just don't think the way you do. My father says sex at our age is just another escape from reality. You've got to face yourself as an adult first. He—"

"Your father is a bigger nincompoop than you are!" I shouted at him. "I thought you said you loved me. I thought you had some *feelings* buried under that so-called rational mind of yours! Or does your father say you're too young to *love* somebody?"

He tried to say something, but I was right. He pressed his lips together and looked away. I was almost enjoying it now; with deliberate coolness I buttoned up my tunic, feeling the soft fibers on my skin.

"How long does it take to love somebody?" I said, but my voice was beginning to tremble. I turned away from his still figure in the night, and began the slow walk back along the path to the house. Tears stung my eyes, and spilled onto my cheeks; I started to run through the dark.

I slammed the door when I ran in, and went directly to my room. At one end of it was a small studio, where an easel was lit coldly by a fluorescent light. Almost blindly I began beating my fists on the still-wet canvas, blurring and then ripping the nearly finished portrait of a young man.

I was crying quietly when the low, calm voice stopped me on the street.

"Just a moment, Miss."

I felt the sudden skip in my heart which signaled danger, and when I turned I saw the light green uniform of a proctor in the vague street light. My eyes were still blurred with tears. I couldn't make out his face.

"I'm sorry, but I'll have to ask you a few questions."

Shielding my face from the light, I tried to make my voice calm. I hoped my homesick tears were hidden, that my cheeks wouldn't glisten in the light. I wanted very badly for him not to see I had been crying.

"Yes?"

"I'll have to know why you're out on the streets at this time of the morning," the proctor said. "There's a curfew, you know. Unless you can show cause . . ."

Oh God; I had completely forgotten the city's curfew!

"I—I'm sorry, Officer. I'm new to the city and I didn't realize . . ."

"You're transient? Where are you staying?"

"The Statler Dormitory for Women," I answered meekly.

"And why are you out at this hour, so far from the dorm? That's down near 34th Street, almost thirty blocks south."

"I know. I couldn't sleep—" His eyes narrowed at that; had I made a mistake? I plunged on: "—and I wanted to see Central Park. I didn't realize there was any harm . . ."

"I guess not this time, Miss, but

you'd better get back to your dorm. Take this pass." He scribbled a few words on a pad and then detached a slip of green paper for me. "You can take a train down to 34th Street. Now."

"I'd just as soon walk, sir."

He stared at me for a moment and then I turned and started for the nearest subway entrance.

It had been horrible, those first few days in the Dorm. I'd never dreamed that a sane society could be so . . . not cruel, but *unthinking*. Back home in Woodstock we were all supposed to be sane too, but neither Father nor Mother had ever forced any rigid rules on me. They had let me roam the woods, scuffing the dry leaves in autumn, drinking water from the creeks in my cupped hands. They hadn't objected when I was gone for hours. Usually I was just sitting on a log and staring into the sky, and what harm was there in that?

They had encouraged my painting. "It's supposed to be a sign of escapism," Dad said, "but there are a lot worse ways of escaping." He made an easel for me, and I used tubes of house-paint tint-colors and stretched canvas and burlap over frames Dad made. He even gave me a book of reproductions of the Old Masters that he'd saved.

Life in Woodstock had been pleasant for me, I realized now, even if it had often seemed lonely. I couldn't have told the proctor that I'd really woken up from a dream about Bob before I'd gone out walking.

I'd seen Bob's face so clearly, standing in the night, unable to say anything to me. Suddenly it had seemed that my voice was stopped too, and I'd woken up gasping . . .

I boarded a local train, not caring that an express would be much faster, and began the trip back to my cubicle at the Statler Dorm. If only they hadn't taken my parents . . .

★ ★ ★

I had succeeded in setting up a makeshift easel in my room at the Dorm, and was working on a painting, wearing some of Dad's old clothes, when the proctors broke in.

One of them pointed a small indicator at me, glanced at it and nodded.

"She's the one. Instability and escapism. And look at the kind of clothes she wears."

"What are you doing?" I whispered. This was how they'd taken my parents!

"You're under detention as a criminal against society. Miss," one of the proctors said. "We're all sorry."

Another one stepped forward and held out a hand to me as one might a child. "Come along now."

"No!" I backed away from them, and when they trapped me in the corner I kicked and screamed at them. "Leave me alone, leave me alone! You're killers!" One of them grabbed me and held me around my waist, my arms pinned to my sides.

"We're not killers, Miss," he said, and his voice was incredibly calm. "We have nothing to do with it."

I twisted free and struck at him, tearing skin from his face with my nails. "Weren't my parents enough?"

One of them pointed another device at me, and I blacked out.

When I came to, I was being carried by three proctors through a door and down a hall. My head was fuzzy and throbbing. I caught a glimpse of a stenciled sign in the corridor, lettered nearly over an arrow pointing in the direction we were going. The words leaped out at me: *Execution Arena Floor.*

One of the proctors saw that I was conscious and looked down at me pleasantly. "No sense struggling now," he said. "It'll be over soon."

I stared back at him for a moment, not understanding. But then the kindness in his face became clear. He pitied me! The proctors were carrying me as gently as possible, as though I were a dog with a broken leg.

I felt incredibly sad, and so tired that I was sure I must suddenly weigh twice as much. But they carried me through the door and out onto the floor of the Arena, and there were a thousand people up in the dark waiting for me. There were floodlights on the chairs where the others of the Condemned were strapped. They sat quietly, dully, as though they were the Executioners and the people above were waiting for *them* to press the buttons.

But it was insane! How could they take it so calmly—were they dead already? Did they *want* to die?

Or was I really insane? Where was the sanity in this Arena?

I couldn't lie still while they carried me to that chair. I was frightened. I was terrified! They were all so silent, so calm, so kindly. As though nothing at all were happening—nothing at all!

I struggled, trying to fight my way free. I kicked and screamed; I had to make some noise in that black silence. But they held me, and strapped me into the chair. And still there was no sound in the Arena.

I felt a shock, a tension, and I looked up.

There, in the audience, sitting before his little panel with the blue light and the red Executioner's button, was a young man staring at me.

I could feel his stare, like a cool hand touching me. It drew me up, into the dimness . . .

I felt my eyes widen with recognition.

"Bob," I said

His reply sounded deep inside my mind "*Hello, Rosebud.*"

"*I knew you'd be here,*" I said, and then I drew him close to me.

"*It's been a long time.*"

"*Don't ever forget,*" I said, and opened myself to him at last.

The lights in the Arena dimmed, rose, dimmed again. The first signal I pressed against the straps, but they were firm and unmoving. Yet I—we—leaned forward, and watched the panel with its blue light. Our stomach was knotted like tight leather cords.

The blue light flashed. I reached out a hand to the small red button. The straps bit into our flesh. The panel was dim, ghostly beneath the glaring lights from the dark above.

A thousand hands touched a thousand red buttons.

One of them was the first to touch the button, the first to complete the circuit. No one knew who he was. No one even knew if every button was connected, but someone touched a button and somewhere the circuit was completed.

Shock! Pain jerked our body rigid! We *screamed*; our skin blistered as hair singed and fell away. And there was a greater shock, a pain somewhere else, as our images cleaved and I fell away from her. I reached out my hand to her, and almost felt her touch . . . but my hand was on the button, and she was slumped in her chair on the floor of the Arena.

I jerked my hand away from the button as though it were hot electricity. My whole body was moist with perspiration.

I stared about me, suddenly and deeply frightened. Which of us had screamed? I'd felt it surging up in me, felt it tearing at my throat, bursting from my mouth—but next to me the others were unconcernedly wait-

ing for me to rise from my seat so that we could file in an orderly fashion from our places in the Arena. They had noticed nothing.

When I stood up my legs were trembling. I could still feel where the leather straps had bitten into them. I stepped carefully up the stairs and went out into the morning sunshine. Though the floodlights had been bright in the Arena, still the sunlight hurt my eyes. I paused at the door, and looked at my ring-watch. It was nine-thirty. Only half an hour had passed.

How long does it take to destroy a few spoiled lives?

It was over. I forced my breathing into a more normal rate and stepped onto the sidewalk. Don't think about it, I told myself. After all, it had been years earlier that I had really lost her . . .

I had almost made it to the corner when I felt the tap on my shoulder, began to turn, saw the green-sleeved arm extending toward me a familiar black indicator, and heard the proctor say:

"This is the one. Definite case: schizoid condition, latent telepath."

"We're all sorry," said another of them.

And they led me away to face it again

END

In the February Galaxy —

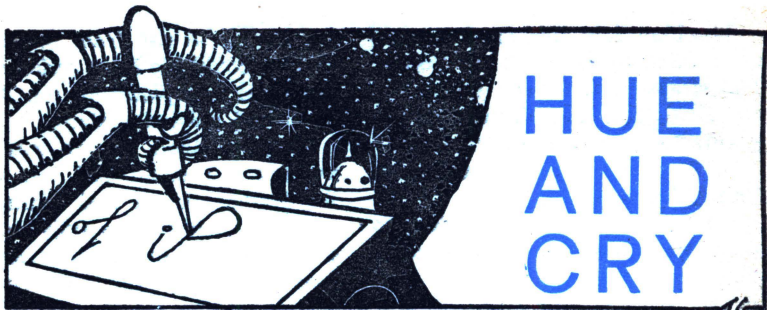
GORDON R. DICKSON

JEROME BIXBY

CORDWAINER SMITH

BRIAN W. ALDISS

Still on Sale!



The Place Where Readers And Editor Meet...

Dear Editor:

Having received and read the January issue, I thought that I should write in and let you know how well I liked it. The idea of adding a background tint to the illos certainly is an improvement, and having the titles printed in red or blue makes them stand out much better. Hope you can keep it up ...

Changing the printers is probably the greatest improvement that you will ever make. It used to be a challenge to try to read some of the horribly misprinted words.

The more Virgil Finlay illos you get, the better I'll like it. I think he's one of the all-time greats at s-f illustration. You could get rid of Schelling, though. As an sf artist he isn't helping to advance the cause of science fiction any. His work is *very* poor.

Since F. Pohl took over *If* it has been on the upswing. Now if it only had book reviews . . .

Could the new sf mag mentioned on page 91 be a companion to *If*? The two titles are very similar—

Worlds of If and *Worlds of Tomorrow*. If it is, it should be a success.

Paul Brague
Box 12
Eldrec, New York

• We like Finlay, too—as witness this issue! *Editor*.

* * *

Dear Editor:

Just picked up the January issue of *If*, and was I surprised! A truly tremendous improvement. Color interiors, smaller yet easier-to-read type-face, an extra staple in the binding to make for better handling, and for authors: Heinlein, Simak, Sturgeon, even Pohl! *If* may well hit the top.

And what's more, you announce a new sf magazine, *Worlds of Tomorrow*, the first in some five years, plus the *Galaxy Magabook* series (possibly a quasi-revivication of *Galaxy Novels*?). You may count on me to shell out the purchase price when they arrive at the newsstand.

Suggestions: enlarge lettercol,

eject Retief and run longer action-adventure yarns.

Douglas Taylor
419 East 11th Ave.
Hutchinson, Kansas

* * *

Dear Editor:

In your November issue you printed a letter by William Howell requesting the name and author of a story. It is *The Most Dangerous Game* by Richard Connell. It was published by Alfred Hitchcock in a paperback entitled *13 More They Wouldn't Let Me Do on TV*.

Pat Lamey
832 8th Street
Havre, Montana

* * *

. . . this story appears in *Adventures in American Literature*, a high-school textbook published by Harcourt, Brace. The author would not benefit from it being made into a movie as he died in 1949.

Allen Wick
427 East Center Street
Manchester, Connecticut

* * *

. . . in *101 Years' Entertainment: The Great Detective Stories 1841-1941* . . .

Gerard Giannattasio
1130 Park Boulevard
Massapequa Park, N. Y.

* * *

. . . in the anthology *Great Tales of Terror and the Supernatural* . . .

Rosemary Allen
554 East Rosalie Street
Philadelphia 20, Penna.

. . . original publication by Brandt & Brandt . . .

Carleton C. Arnes
Route No. 1, Box 371
Oakton, Virginia

• And thanks for identifying the

story too to: John C. Henderson, Alan William Bollen, Preston Jones, Charles Scott, Jeff Renner, Scott Lawson . . . and they're still coming in! *Editor*.

* * *

Dear Editor:

Instead of columns, we're getting articles now on Theodore Sturgeon. The articles are preferred by this reader but if Mr. Sturgeon doesn't write stories and you, editor, don't print them, the sf world will be in a sorry state.

Bill R. Wolfenbarger
103 East Gladden
Farmington, New Mexico

* * *

Dear Editor:

1. Please don't bring back the book review column.

2. Let's face it, the art in and on the November issue was pretty BAD.

3. Is it possible for you to get some of the all time greats (like Asimov and Ray Bradbury) to write for you?

Lew Litzinger III
211 South Chester Road
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

• What do you say, Isaac & Ray? Is it possible or isn't it?

We're hoping it is . . . and meanwhile we've nailed down Hal Clement, Lester del Rey, Algis Budrys, Poul Anderson, Robert Silverberg, Fritz Leiber and a healthy quorum of other all-time favorites to grace near-future issues. Also Sturgeon's witty and informative features. Also our one-an-issue "first story" discoveries, like this issue's Donald F. Daley.

All in all, we like the looks of the upcoming issues of *If!*

—*Editor*

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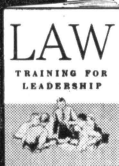
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