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by CALVIN M. KNOX

DREAMBOAT

by A. Bertram Chandler

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SHORT STORIES

SERIAL NOVEL

DEPARTMENTS

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Do You Laugh Your Greatest Powers Away?

THOSE STRANGE INNER URGES

You have heard the phrase, "Laugh, clown, laugh." Well, that fits me perfectly. I'd fret, worry and try to reason my way out of difficulties—all to no avail; then I'd have a hunch, a something within that would tell me to do a certain thing. I'd laugh it off with a shrug. I knew too much, I thought, to heed these impressions. Well, it's different now—I've learned to use this inner power and I no longer make the mistakes I did, because I do the right thing at the right time.

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Here is how I got started right. I had heard about hypnosis revealing past lives. I began to think there must be some inner intelligence with which we were born. In fact, I often heard it said there was; but how could I use it, how could I make it work for me daily? That was my problem. I wanted to learn to direct this inner voice; master it if I could. Finally, I wrote to the Rosicrucians, a world-wide fraternity of progressive men and women, who offered to send me, without obligation, a free book entitled *The Mastery of Life*.

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The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC) (Not a Religious Organization) San Jose, California, U. S. A.

DELIVERY GUARANTEED

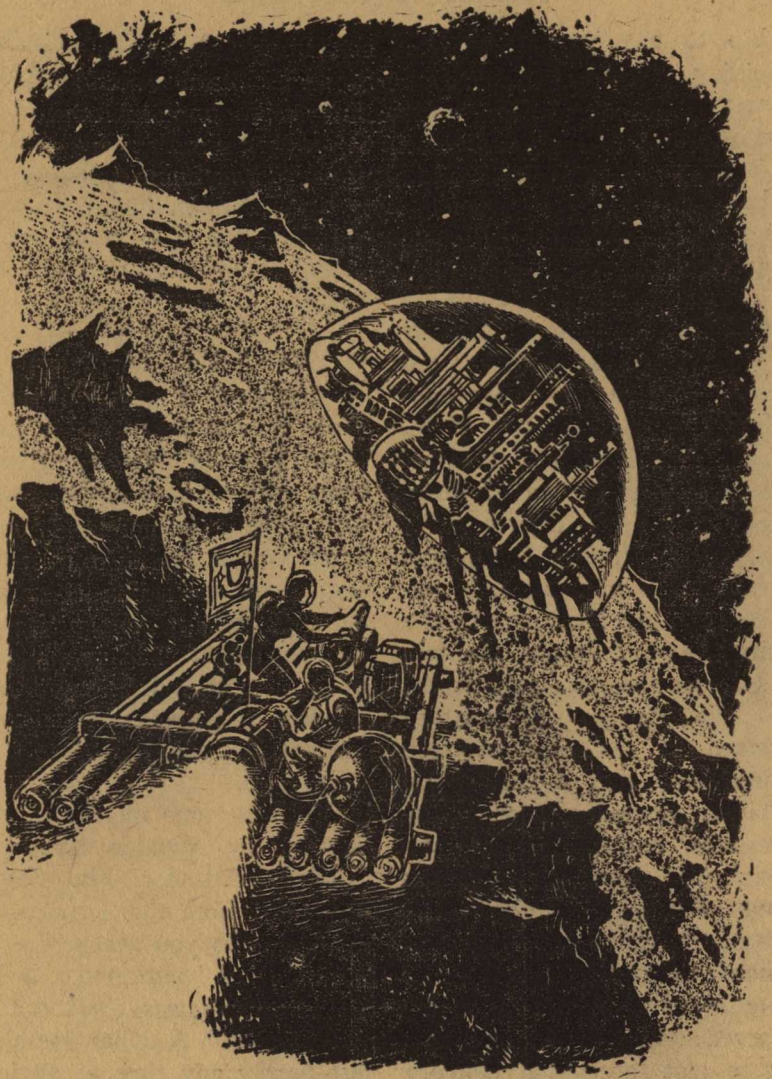
by Calvin M. Knox

illustrated by EMSH

We were off course, and there wasn't enough fuel for making corrections — not without jettisoning everything on board, ourselves included. And I had guaranteed delivery of Erna's cargo!

THERE AREN'T many free-lance space-ferry operators who can claim that they carried a log cabin half way from Mars to Ganymede, and then had the log cabin carry *them* the rest of the way. I can, though you can bet your last tarnished megabuck that I didn't do it willingly. It was quite a trip. I left Mars not only with a log cabin on board, but a genuine muzzle-loading antique cannon, a goodly supply of cannonballs therefrom, and various other miscellaneous antiques—as well as the Curator of Historical Collections from the Ganymede Museum. There was also a stowaway on board, much to his surprise and mine—he wasn't listed in the cargo vouchers.

Let me make one thing clear: I wasn't keen on carrying any such cargo. But my free-lance ferry operator's charter is quite explicit that way, unfortunately. A ferry operator is required to hire his



The Ganymede dome lay before us. Now if my braking calculations had been right...

ship to any person of law-abiding character who will meet the (government-fixed) rates, and whose cargo to be transported neither exceeds the ship's weight allowance nor is considered contraband by any System law.

In short, I'm available to just about all comers. By the terms of my charter I've been compelled to ferry five hundred marmosets to Pluto, forced to haul ten tons of Venusian guano to Callisto, constrained to deliver fifty crates of fertilized frog's eggs from Earth to a research station orbiting Neptune. In the latter case I made the trip twice for the same fee, thanks to the Delivery Guaranteed clause in the contract; the first time out, my radiation shields slipped up for a few seconds, not causing me any particular genetic hardships but playing merry hell with those frog's eggs. When a bunch of four-headed tadpoles began to hatch, my clients served notice on me that they were not accepting delivery and would pay no fee—and, what's more, would sue if I didn't bring another load of potential frogs up from Earth, and be damned well careful about the shielding this time.

So I hauled another fifty crates of frog's eggs, this time without mishap, and collected my fee. But I've never been happy about carrying livestock again.

THIS NEW offer wasn't livestock. I got the call while I was laying over on Mars after a trip up from Luna with a few colonists and their gear. I had submitted my name to the Transport Registry, informing them that I was on call and waiting for employment—but I was in no hurry. I still had a couple of hundred megabucks left from the last job, and I didn't mind a vacation.

The call came on the third day of my Martian layover. "Collect call for Mr. Sam Diamond, from the Transport Registry. Do you accept?"

"Yes," I muttered, and $30,000 more was chalked to my phone bill. A dollar doesn't last hardly any time at all in these days of system-wide hyperinflation.

"Sam?" a deep voice said.

It was Mike Cooper of the Transport people.

"Who else would it be at this end of your collect call?" I growled. "And why can't you people pay for a phone call once in a while?"

COOPER SAID cheerfully, "You know the law, Sam. I've got a job for you."

"That's nice. Another load of marmosets?"

"Nothing live this time, Sam, except your passenger. She's Miss Vanderweghe of the Ganymede Museum. Curator of Historical Collections. She wants someone to ferry her back to Ganymede with some historical relics she's picked up along the way."

"The Washington Monument?" I asked. "The Great Pyramid of Khufu? We could tow it alongside the ship, lashed down with twine..."

"Knock it off," Cooper said, unamused. "What she's got are souvenirs of the Venusian Insurrection. The log cabin that served as Tangay's headquarters, the cannon used to drive back the Bluecoats, and a few smaller knicknacks along those lines."

"Hold it," I said. "You can't fit a log cabin into my ship. And if it's going to be a tow job, I want the 'Delivery Guaranteed' clause stricken out of the contract. And how much does the damn cannon weigh? I've got a weight ceiling, you know."

"I know. Her entire cargo is less than eight tons, cannon and all. It's well within your tonnage restrictions. And as for the log cabin, it doesn't need to be towed. She's agreed to take it apart for shipping, and re-assemble it when it gets to Ganymede."

THE LAYOVER had been nice while it lasted. I said, "I was looking for some rest, Mike. Isn't there some angle I can use to wiggle out of this cargo?"

"None."

"But..."

"There isn't another ferry free in town tonight. She wants to leave tonight. So you're the boy, Sam. The job is yours."

I opened my mouth. I closed it again. Ferries are considered public services, under the law. The only way I could get a vacation that was sure to last

was to apply for one in advance, and I hadn't done that.

"Okay," I said wearily. "When do I sign the contract?"

"Miss Vanderweghe is at my office now," Cooper said. "How soon can you get here?"

I WAS IN a surly mood as I rode downtown to Cooper's place. For the thousandth time I resented the casual way he could pluck me out of some relaxation and make me take a job. I wasn't looking forward to catering to the whims of some dried-up old museum curator all the way out to Ganymede. And I wasn't too pleased with the notion of carrying relics of the Venusian Insurrection.

The Insurrection had caused quite a fuss, a hundred years back. Bunch of Venusian colonists decided they didn't like Earth's rule—the taxation-without-representation bit, though their squawk was unjustified—and set up a wildcat independent government, improvising their equipment out of whatever they could grab. A chap name of Jud Tangay was in charge; the insurrectionists holed up in the jungle and held off the attacking loyalists for a couple of weeks. Then the Venusian local government appealed to Earth; a regiment of Bluecoats was shipped to Venus; and inside of a week Tangay was a prisoner and the Insurrection ended. But some die-hard Venusians still venerated the insurrectionists, and there had been a few murders and ambushes every year since Tangay's overthrow. I could have done without carrying Venusian cargo.

I was going to say as much to Cooper, too, in hopes that some clause of my charter would get me out of the assignment and back on vacation. But I didn't get a chance. I went storming into Cooper's office.

THERE WAS a girl sitting in the chair to the left of his desk. She was about twenty-five, well built in most every way possible, with glossy short-cropped hair and an attractive face.

Cooper stood up and said, "Sam, I'd like you to meet Miss Vanderweghe, this is

Sam Diamond, one of the best ferry men there is. He'll get you to Ganymede in style."

"I'm sure of that," she said, smiling.

"Hello," I said, gulping.

I didn't bother raising a fuss about the political implications of my cargo. I didn't grouse about weight limits, space problems aboard ship, accommodation difficulties, or anything else. I reached for the contract—it was the standard printed form, with the variables typed in by Cooper—and signed it.

"I'd like to leave tonight," she said.

"Sure. My ship's at the spaceport. Can you have your cargo delivered there by—oh, say, 1700 hours? That way we can blast off by 2100."

"I'll try. Will you be able to help me get my goods out of storage and down to the spaceport?"

I started to say that I'd be delighted to, but Cooper cut in sharply, as I knew he would. "I'm sorry, Miss Vanderweghe, but Sam's contract and charter prohibit him from any landside cargo-handling except within the actual bounds of the spaceport. You'll have to use a local carrier for getting your stuff to the ship, I'm afraid. If you want me to, I'll gladly arrange for transportation..."

MY MOOD was considerably different as I returned to the hotel Deimos to check out. My tub would need five days for the journey between Mars and Ganymede. Now, conditions aboard my ship allow for a certain amount of passenger privacy, but not a devil of a lot. Log cabin or no log cabin, I was going to enjoy the proximity of Miss Erna Vanderweghe. I could think of worse troubles than having to spend five days in the same small ferry with her, and only a log cabin and a cannon for chaperones.

I was grinning as I walked over to the desk to let them know I was pulling out. Nat, the desk clerk, interpreted the grin logically enough, but wrongly.

"You talked them out of giving you the job, eh, Sam? How'd you work it?"

"Huh? Oh—no, I took the

job. I'm checking out of here at 1800 hours."

"You *took* it? But you look *happy!*"

"I am," I said with a mysterious expression. I started to saunter away, but Nat called me back.

"You had a visitor a little while ago, Sam. He wanted me to let him into your room to wait for you, but naturally I wouldn't do it."

"Visitor? Did he leave his name?"

"He's still here. Sitting right over there, next to the potted palm tree."

FROWNING, I walked toward him. He was a thin, hunched-up little man with the sallow look of a Venusian colonist. He was busily reading some cheap dime-novel sort of magazine as I approached.

"Hello," I said affably. "I'm Sam Diamond. You wanted to see me?"

"You're ferrying Erna Vanderweghe to Ganymede tonight, aren't you?" His voice was thinly whining, nasty-sounding, mean.

"I make a practice of keeping my business to myself," I told him. "If you're interested in hiring a ferry, you'd better go to the Transport Registry. I'm booked."

"I know you are. And I know who you're carrying. And I know *what* you're carrying."

"Look here, friend, I..."

"You're carrying General Tangay's cabin, and other priceless relics of the Venusian Republic—and all stolen goods!" His eyes had a fanatic gleam about them. I realized who he was as soon as he used the expression "Venusian Republic." Only an Insurrectionist-sympathizer would refer to the rebel group that way.

"I'm not going to discuss my business affairs with you," I said. "My cargo has been officially cleared."

"It was stolen by that woman! Purchased with filthy dollars and taken from Venus by stealth!"

I started to walk away. I hate having some loudmouthed fanatic rant at me. But he followed, clutching at my elbows, and said in his best conspiratorial tone, "I warn you, Diamond—cancel that contract or

you'll suffer! Those relics must return to Venus!"

Whirling around, I disengaged his hands from my arm and snapped, "I couldn't cancel a contract if I wanted to—and I don't want to. Get out of here or I'll have you jugged, whoever you are."

"Remember the warning..."

"Go on! Shoo! Scat!"

HE SLINKED out of the lobby. Shaking my head, I went upstairs to pack. Damned idiotic cloak-and-dagger morons, I thought. Creeping around hissing warnings and leaving threatening notes, and in general trying to keep alive an underground movement that never had any real reason for existing from the start. It wasn't as if Earth oppressed the Venusian colonists. The benefits flowed all in one direction, from Earth to Venus, and everyone on Venus knew it—except for Tangay's little bunch of ultranationalistic glory-hounds. Nobody on Venus wanted independence less than the colonists themselves, who had dandy tax exemptions and benefits from the mother world.

I forgot all about the threats by the time I was through packing my meager belongings and had grabbed a meal at the hotel restaurant. Around 1800 hours I went down to the spaceport to see what was happening there. The mechanics had already wheeled my ferry out of the storage hangars; she was out on the field getting checked over for blastoff. Erna Vanderweghe and her cargo had arrived, too. She was standing at the edge of the field, supervising the unloading of her stuff from the van of a local carrier.

THE LOG cabin had been taken apart. It consisted of a stack of stout logs, the longest of them some sixteen feet long and the rest tapering down.

"You think you're going to be able to put that cabin back the way it was?" I asked.

"Oh, certainly. I've got each log numbered to correspond with a diagram I've made. The re-assembling shouldn't be any trouble at all," she said, smiling sweetly.

I eyed the other stuff—several crates, a few smaller packages, and a cannon, not very big. "Where'd you get all these things?" I asked.

She shrugged prettily. "I bought them on Venus, of course. Most of them were the property of descendants of the insurrectionists—they were quite happy to sell. There weren't any ferries available on Venus, so I took a commercial liner on the shuttle from Venus to Mars. They said I'd be able to get a ferry here."

"And you did," I said. "In five days we'll be landing on Ganymede."

"I can't wait to get there—to set up my exhibit!"

I frowned. "Tell me something, Miss Vanderweghe. Just how did you manage to—ah—make such an early start in the museum business?"

She grinned. "My father and grandfather were museum curators. I just came by it naturally, I suppose. And I was just about the only colonist on Ganymede who was halfway interested in having the job!"

I chuckled softly and said, "When Cooper told me I was ferrying a museum curator, I pictured a dried-up old spinster who'd nag me all the way to Ganymede. I couldn't have been wronger."

"Disappointed?"

"Not very much," I said.

WE HAD THE ship loaded inside of an hour, everything stowed neatly away in the hold and Miss Vanderweghe's personal luggage strapped down in the passenger compartment. Since there wasn't any reason for hanging around longer, I recomputed my takeoff orbit and called the control center for authorization to blast off at 2000 hours, an hour ahead of schedule.

They were agreeable, and at 1955 the field sirens started to scream, warning people of an impending blast. Miss Vanderweghe—Erna—was aft, in her acceleration cradle, as I jabbed the keys that would activate the autopilot and take us up.

I started to punch the keys. The computer board started to click. There was nothing left for me to do but strap myself in and wait for the brenn-

schluss. A blastoff from Mars is no great problem in astronautics.

As the automatic took over, I flipped my seat back, converting it into an acceleration cradle, and relaxed. It seemed to me that the takeoff was a little on the bumpy side, as if I'd figured the ship's mass wrong by one or two hundred pounds. But I didn't worry about the discrepancy. I just shut my eyes and waited while the extra gees bore down on me. The sanest thing for a man to do during blastoff is to go to sleep, and that's what I did.

I WOKE UP half an hour or so later to discover that the engines had cut out, the ship was safely in flight, and that a bloody and battered figure was bent over my controls, energetically ruining them with crowbar and shears.

I blinked. Then the fog in my head cleared and I got out of my cradle. The stowaway turned around. He was quite a mess. The capillaries of his face had popped during the brief moments of top acceleration, and fine purplish lines now wriggled over his cheeks and nose, giving him a grade-A rum blossom, and bloodshot eyes to go with it. He had some choice bruises that he must have acquired while rattling around during blastoff, and his nose had been bleeding all over his shirt. It was the little Venusian fanatic who had threatened me at the hotel.

"How the hell did you get aboard?" I demanded.

"Slipped through the security checkers...but the ship took off ahead of schedule. I did not expect to be on board when blastoff came."

"Sorry to have fouled up your plans," I told him.

"But I regained consciousness in time. Your ship is ruined! You refused to heed my warning, and now you will never reach Ganymede alive. So perish all enemies of the Venusian Republic! So perish those who have desecrated our noble shrines!"

He was practically foaming at the mouth. I started toward him. He swung the crowbar and might have bashed my head in if he had known how to handle himself under no-grav conditions, but he didn't,

and the only result of his exertion was to send himself drifting toward the roof of the cabin. I yanked on his leg as it went past me and dragged him down. The crowbar dropped from his numb hand. I caught it and poked him across the head with it.

THERE ISN'T any hesitation in a spaceman's mind when he finds a stowaway. Fuel is a precious thing, and so is air and food; stowaways simply aren't allowed to live. I didn't feel any qualms about what I did next, but all the same I was glad that Erna Vanderweghe wasn't awake and watching me while I went about it.

I slipped into my breathing-helmet and sealed off the cabin. Opening the airlock, I carried the unconscious Venusian out the hatch and gave him a good push, imparting enough momentum to send him out on an orbit of his own. The compensating reaction pushed me back into the airlock. I closed the hatch. The Venusian would have died instantly, without ever knowing what was happening to him.

Then I had a look-see to determine just how much damage the stowaway had been able to do before I woke up and caught him.

It was plenty.

All our communication equipment was gone, but permanently. The radio was a gutted ruin. The computer was smashed. Two auxiliary fuel tanks had been jettisoned. We were hopelessly off course in asteroid country, and the odds on reaching Ganymede looked mighty slim. By the time I finished making course corrections, we'd be down to our reserve fuel supply. Ganymede was about 350 million miles ahead of us. I didn't see how we were going to travel more than a tenth that distance before fuel, air, and food troubles set in.

It was time to wake Miss Vanderweghe and tell her the news, I figured.

SHE WAS lying curled up tight in her acceleration cradle, asleep, with a child-like, trusting expression on her face. I watched her for perhaps five minutes before I

woke her. She sat up immediately.

"What—oh. Is everything all right? Did we make a good blastoff?"

"Fine blastoff," I said quietly. "But everything isn't all right." I told her about the stowaway and how thoroughly he had wrecked us.

"Oh—that horrible little man from Venus! I knew he had followed me to Mars—that's why I wanted to leave for Ganymede so soon. He made all sorts of absurd threats, as if the things I had bought were holy relics..."

"They are, in a way. If you worship Tangay and his fellow rebels, then the stuff you carried away is equivalent to the True Cross, I suppose."

"I'm so sorry I got you into this, Sam."

I shrugged. "It's my own fault all the way. Your Venusian friend approached me at the hotel this afternoon and warned me off, but I didn't listen to him. I had my chance to pull out."

"Where's the stowaway now? Unconscious?"

I SHOOK my head, jerking my thumb toward the single port in her cabin. "He's out there. Without a suit. Stowaways aren't entitled to charity under the space laws."

"Oh," she said quietly, turning pale. "I—see. You—ejected him."

I nodded. Then, to get off what promised to be an unpleasant topic, I said, "We're in real trouble. We're off course and we don't have enough fuel for making corrections—not without jettisoning everything on board, ourselves included."

"I don't mind if the cargo goes. I mean, I'd hate to lose it, but if you have to dump it..."

"Uh-uh. The ship itself is the bulk of our mass. The problem isn't the cargo. If there were only some way of jettisoning the *ship*..."

My mouth sagged open. *No,* I thought. *It won't ever work. It's too fantastic to consider.*

"I have an idea," I said. "We *will* jettison the ship. And we'll get to Ganymede."

LUCKILY our saboteur friend hadn't bothered to rip up my charts. I spent half an hour feverishly thumbing through the volume devoted to asteroid orbits, while Erna hovered over my shoulder, not daring to ask questions but probably wondering just what in blazes I was figuring out.

Pretty soon I had a list of a dozen likely asteroids. I narrowed it down to five, then to three, then to one. I missed the convenience of my computer, but regulations require a pilot to be able to get along without one in a pinch, and I got along.

I computed a course for the asteroid known as (719)-Albert. Luck was riding with us. (719)-Albert was on the outward swing of his orbit. On the basis of some extremely rough computations I worked out an orbit for our crippled ship that would match Albert's in a couple of hours.

Finally, I looked up at Erna and grinned. "This is known as making a virtue out of necessity," I said. "Want to know what's going on?"

"You bet I do."

I leaned back. "We're on our way to a chunk of rock known as (719)-Albert, which is chugging along not far from here on its way through the asteroid belt. (719)-Albert is a rock about three miles in diameter. Figure that it's half the size of Deimos—and Deimos is about as small as a place can get."

"But why are we going there?" she said, puzzled.

"(719)-Albert has an exceedingly eccentric orbit—and I mean eccentric in its astronomical sense: not a peculiar orbit, just one that's very highly elongated. At perihelion (719)-Albert passes around 20 million miles from the orbit of Earth. At aphelion, which is where he's heading now, he comes within 90 million miles of the orbit of Jupiter. Unless my figures are completely cockeyed, Jupiter is going to be about 150 million miles from Albert about a week from now."

I SAW I HAD lost her completely. She said dimly, "But you said a little while ago that we hardly had enough fuel to take us 50 million miles."

"In the ship," I said. "Yes. But I've got other ideas. We'll land on Albert and abandon the ship. Then we ride pickaback on the asteroid until its closest approach to Jupiter—and blast off without the ship."

"Blast off—*how?*"

I smiled triumphantly. "We'll make a raft out of your blessed logs," I said. "Attach one of the ship's rocket engines at the rear, and shove off. Escape velocity from Albert is so low it hardly matters. And since the weight of our raft will only be six or seven hundred pounds—Earth-side weight, of course—instead of the thirty tons or so that this ship weighs, we'll be able to coast to Ganymede with plenty of fuel left to burn."

She was looking at me as if I'd just delivered a lecture in the General Theory of Relativity. Apparently the niceties of space travel just weren't in her line at all. But she smiled and tried to look understanding. "It sounds very clever," she said with an uncertain grin.

I FELT PRETTY clever about everything myself, three hours later, when we landed on the surface of an asteroid that could only be (719)-Albert. It had taken only one minor course correction to get us here. Which meant that my rule-of-thumb astrogation had been pretty good.

We donned breathing-suits and clambered out of the ship to inspect our landfall. (719)-Albert wasn't very impressive. The landscape was mostly jagged upthrusts of a dark basalt-like rock. But the view was tremendous—a great backdrop of darkness, speckled with stars, and much closer the orbiting fragments of other lumps of rock. Albert's horizon was on the foreshortened side, dipping away almost before it began. Gravitational attraction was so meager it hardly counted. A healthy jump was likely to continue indefinitely upward, as I made clear to Erna right at the start. I didn't want her indulging in the usual hijinks that greenhorns are fond of when on a low-gravity planetoid such as this. I could visualize

only too well the scene as she vanished into the void as the result of an overenthusiastic leap.

We surveyed our holdings, and found that there was enough food for two people for sixteen days—so we would make it with some to spare. The air supply was less abundant, but there was enough so we didn't need to begin worrying just yet.

We set about building the raft.

Erna dragged the logs out of the cargo hold—their weight didn't amount to anything, here, though I had to caution her about throwing them around carelessly; mass and weight aren't synonymous, and those logs were sturdy enough to knock me for a loop regardless of how much they seemed to weigh. She fetched, and I assembled. We used the thirteen longest logs for the body of the raft, trussed a couple across the bottom, and a couple more at the top. To make blastoff a little easier, we built the raft propped up against a rock outcropping, at a 45-degree angle.

I UNSHIPPED the smallest rocket engine and fastened it securely to the rear of the raft. I strapped down as many fuel tanks as the raft would hold.

Then—chuckling to myself—I asked Erna to help me haul the cannon out.

"The cannon? Whatever for?"

"To mount at the front of the raft."

"Are you figuring on meeting space pirates?"

"I'm figuring on using the cannon as a brake," I told her. It was perfectly acceptable for that function, after all. We fastened it at the front of the raft, strapped down the supply of cannonballs and powder nearby it. The cannon would make an ideal brake. All we needed was something that would eject mass in a forwardly direction, pushing us back by courtesy of Newton's Third Law. Why waste fuel when cannonballs would achieve the same purpose?

It took us forty-eight standard Earthtime hours to build the raft. I don't know how many thousands of (719)-

Albert days that was, but the little asteroid spun on its axis like a yo-yo, and it seemed that the sun was rising or setting every time we took a breath.

AFTER I had bound the last thong around the rocket engine, Erna grinned and dashed into the ship. She returned, a few moments later, waving a red flag with some sort of blue-and-white design on it.

"What's that?"

"The flag that flew over Tangay's cabin," she explained. "It's a rebel flag, and we're not strictly insurrectionists, but we ought to have some kind of flag on our ship."

I was agreeable, so she mounted the flag just fore the rocket engine. Then we returned to the ship to wait.

We waited for three days, Earthtime—maybe several centuries by (719)-Albert reckoning. And in case you're wondering how we passed the time on the barren asteroid for three days, just one reasonably virile ferry pilot and one nubile museum curator,. the answer is no. We didn't. I have an inflexible rule about making passes at passengers, even when we're stranded on places like (719)-Albert and when the passengers are as pretty as this one is.

That isn't to say I didn't feel temptation. Erna's breathing-suit was of the plastic kind that looked as though it was force-molded to her body. I didn't have to do much imagining. But I staunchly told Satan to get behind me, and—to my own amazement—he did. I resisted temptation and resisted it manfully.

Meanwhile Jupiter swelled bigger and bigger as (719)-Albert plunged madly along its track toward its rendezvous with Jove. If luck rode with us—translated, if my math had been right—we would find Ganymede midway in her 7-plus day orbit round the big planet.

TIME CAME when the mass detectors in my ship informed me that Jupiter had stopped getting closer and was now getting further away. That meant that (719)-Albert had passed its point of aphelion and was heading back to-

ward Earth. It was time to get moving.

"All aboard," I told Erna. "Make sure everything we're taking is strapped down tight —food, fuel, air tanks, cannonballs, flag."

She checked off as if we were running down meters and gauges at a spaceport. "Food. Fuel. Air tanks. Cannonballs. Flag. All set to blast, Captain."

"Okay. Get yourself flattened out and hang onto the raft while we blast."

Blastoff was a joke. I had computed the escape velocity of (719)-Albert at approximately .0015 miles/sec. We could have shoved off with a good rearward kick.

But we had fuel to burn. *"Allons!"* I cried, slamming the rocket engine into action. A burst of flame hurled us upward into the night. *"A la belle etoile!"* I shouted. "To the stars!"

The raft soared off into space. Erna laughed with delight. As (719)-Albert slowly sank into the sunset, we plunged forward toward giant Jupiter. The only thing missing was soft music in the background.

WE RODE the raft for three days at constant acceleration. Jupiter grew, and grew, and gleaming Ganymede became visible peeking around the edge of the great planet. Erna became worried when she saw it.

"Shouldn't we head the raft over toward Ganymede?" she asked. "We're pointed too far forward."

I sighed. "We aren't going to reach Ganymede for another couple of days," I said. "We want to head for where Ganymede's going to be *then,* not where it happens to be right now. Isn't that obvious?"

"I suppose so," she replied, pouting.

We were right on course. Two days later, we were heading downward toward the surface of Ganymede. It was like riding a magic carpet. I controlled our landing with the rockets, while Erna gleefully fired ball after ball to provide the needed deceleration. If Ganymede had had an atmosphere, of course, we'd have been whiffed to cinders

in a moment—but there was no atmosphere to contend with. We made a perfect no-point landing, flat on the glistening blue-white ice. Lord knows what we must have looked like approaching from space.

We had landed a hundred miles or so from the nearest entrance to the Ganymede Dome. I was dourly considering the prospect of trekking on foot, but Erna was certain we had been seen, and, sure enough, a snowcrawler manned by three incredulous colonists came out to fetch us. I never saw human eyes bulge the way those six eyes bulged at the sight of our raft.

Part of the service I offered was guaranteed delivery, and so, a couple of weeks later, I rented a ship and made a return journey to (719)-Albert to pick up the remaining historical relics we had been forced to leave behind—some tattered uniforms and a few boxes of pamphlets. A week after that, a repair ship was despatched to pick up my ferry, and she was hauled to the dockyard on Ganymede and put back in operating shape at a trifling cost of a few thousand megabucks.

THESE DAYS I run a ferry service between the colonized moons of Jupiter and Saturn, and Erna is head curator of the Ganymede Museum. But I don't take kindly toward getting employment, because it means I have to spend time away from home—and Erna. We were married a while back, you see.

It's a funny thing about General Tangay's log cabin. Despite Erna's careful diagram, the cabin never got put back together. It seems that the people of Ganymede decided it was of no great value to display the cabin of some Venusian rebel.

So they wouldn't let Erna take the raft apart, and I had to buy myself a new rocket engine. You can see the raft in the museum on Ganymede, any time you happen to be in the neighborhood. If the curator's around, she won't mind answering questions. But don't try to get playful with her. I'm awfully touchy about guys who make passes at my wife.

★

LET THE READER BEWARE

NOT LONG after the September *Science Fiction Stories* went on sale, I was confronted by a reader who informed me that I'd written a very good editorial—but that there was a whing-ding of a scientific error in it. Black, he assured me, is *not* a "blending of all the colors" as he pointed to the paragraph which opened:

> If we decide, for example, that we mean "blending of all the colors" when we say "black" in a given instance, then..."

I don't know how many readers fell into that trap for the unwary, but I know that this one person did.

We have here what is known as the *"if ... then"* proposition, a very useful device within its limitations. *(If* we have sufficient sun and rain this summer, *then* the corn will be good. Limitation: the corn may be ruined by other

factors than the absence of sufficient sun and rain. But note that, assuming no other limitations, the proposition can be meaningful.)

To refute an "if ... then" proposition one must show either that the "then" does not follow at all from the "if" *or* that it does not *necessarily* follow from the if, *even when all other factors are ignored.*

"If I pray for sufficient sun and rain this summer, then the corn will be good." Refutation: my prayers will not necessarily be answered in such a positive fashion. "If the — are elected this year, the corn will be good." Refutation: election returns do not determine the weather.

NOW LET'S examine the full "if ...then" proposition in that editorial:

> If we decide, for example, that we mean "blending of all the colors" when we say "black" in a given instance, then something which *looks black* may be only approximately so.

The key lies in *"if we decide ... that we mean"*. You see I did not say "since 'black' means blending of all 'colors' "; I made a conditional proposition and drew implications from it—implications which, even if valid within the proposition, are applicable to reality *only* if the "if" proposition itself is applicable.

Science fiction is largely constructed on "if ... then" propositions; and many authors have been discomfited by the demonstration that the "then" parts of their imaginings either had no bearing upon their "if" propositions or did not necessarily follow. In this frame of reference, we should be a little more liberal, perhaps, in the "necessarily" qualification. An author can be credited with a "then" which holds up under examination as "probable" even if the critic can show something else equally probable, so long as the author makes a convincing case, and there are not too many other equally probable points. The author faults when, time after time, the reader is aware that various other "then" points would follow just as well, and that only plot necessities made

the author select the "then" he did select.

MY CRITIC found no fault with the "then" part of the "if ... then" proposition quoted from the September editorial. So now let's look at it again. *Is there in reality* any frame of reference where "black" actually does represent a "blending of all the colors?"

There is indeed, and therein lay the second trap for the unwary. *In the three-color engraving process, you get "black" by a superimposition of three solid colors: red, yellow and blue.* If any of the three colors are not solid, then the best you can get is approximate black, within the area of this definition of "black". You do not get "true" black—but I never said anything about "true" black in that proposition; I referred to something "we decide" to call "black". (And, in a good job of blending three solid colors, an engraver produces an effect which looks black to the eye.)

"Logical statements" then, like the three-color black of engravers, can serve a useful purpose; but unless the limitations are kept in mind, they can also be a trap for the unwary. The sensible procedure is not to proscribe "logic" but to bear its limitations in mind when using or encountering it.

RAWL

Novelet

DREAMBOAT

by A. Bertram Chandler

Ship's bio-chemists weren't supposed to experiment on their own — but all of them did. And the effect of Diego Ribiera's dehydrated mushrooms was out of this world ...

THAT WAS the voyage that I found Lynn, and the voyage that I lost her. That was the voyage that we carried the little Mexican Bio-Chemist, Diego Ribiera was his name, who was partly responsible for all that happened. Partly responsible, I say—the greater degree of re-

sponsibility should have been borne by certain crew members who let their dislike of the little man lead them into an act of spitefulness that imperiled the ship.

Ribiera was blamed, of course, and is no longer with us. His first voyage as an officer of the Interstellar Transport Commission was also his last. Had it not been for the pressure brought to bear by the Rhine Institute—and the Commission is utterly dependent upon the Institute for the supply of Psionic Communications Officers—Diego would have faced trial. As it was, he escaped with dismissal from the Service, and a severe reprimand—and is now working quite happily at Duke University. No doubt the results of his research will be published eventually, but I have no intention of waiting that long.

I am writing this mainly to get myself into the right frame of mind and also, I suppose, as an apology for what I am about to do. Legally speaking, it will be desertion; furthermore, I shall be committing the unforgivable sin of putting my woman before my ship. I'd like to apologize, Captain Saunders, for any inconvenience that I shall be causing. I assure you, though, that all my papers are up to date and that young Ferguson—he will make as good a Chief Officer as he does a Second, I hope that he will be allowed to hold his acting rank—is quite capable of taking over. After all, no one man aboard a spaceship is indispensable. You might, too, forward this manuscript to the Institute after you have read it. It may give them a useful lead in their research.

IT WAS ON the morning of Departure Day that I first met Ribiera. I was in my cabin, my slipstick running hot, trying to work out the exact location of the center of gravity with all cargo, stores, propellant, crew and passengers on board. I was in the middle of the tricky calculations when I heard a timid tap at my door, which was open. I ignored it. After a second or so it was repeated. I swung around in my swivel chair to see who it was.

Even in his too-new uniform Diego Ribiera looked like

anything but a spaceman. He was small—although that was nothing exceptional; the Commission is apt to consider that the physical advantages of small stature outweigh the psychological disadvantages—and dapper, too dapper. His complexion was too sallow, his black hair too glossy.

"Excuse me," he said getting off on the wrong foot at once, "are you the First Officer of this boat?"

"I am the *Chief* Officer," I snapped. "And this is not a boat."

"What is it, then?"

"She," I told him, "is a *ship."*

I relented then. He was so obviously a first-tripper, straight from the College of Astronautical Ecology at Kew, and could not be expected to know any more about ships than I would know about, say, Mycology. I got up from my seat, stuck out my hand.

"My name's Gordon," I told him. "Bill Gordon. And you'll be Mr. Ribiera, our new Bio-Chemist."

"Yes, Mr. Gordon," he replied. "I couldn't find any of the other officers, except a lady with zig-zag stripes on her epaulettes, and she said that she was far too busy to show half-baked farmers around the boat—ship, I mean. So I wondered if you would be so good..."

I TOLD HIM, "That will have been our Mary McCarthy you met. Our Chief Steward. She's always far too busy to do anything for anybody. Anyhow, I think I can spare a few minutes. I'll show you where your cabin is first—I suppose you've brought all your gear to the spaceport?—and then I'll take you to Hydroponics."

"This is a big boat—ship," he said as I led him through the alleyways.

"Wait till you get in the Alpha Class liners. The old *Game Fish* is a boat compared with them."

"The *Game Fish?* I don't understand."

"You signed on the *Gamma Pisces,* but nobody calls her that. This is your dogbox. Small but palatial, and handy to the Farm to cut down walking time. The Farm, of course,

is your own private territory. You're a departmental head, and a very important one. You'll let the Chief Steward and the Chef have what *you* think they should have, not what *they* think they should have. You are responsible for the balanced ecology of the ship."

We left this little cabin, walked along the alleyway to the Hydroponics Room.

"They still call it Hydroponics," I said. "It's a relic of the days when all the Bio-Chemist had to worry about was plant life. Spacemen used to call it The Garden, then. Now we call it The Farm." I pulled the key out of the pocket of my shorts. "This is yours now," I said, handing it to him. "The key to your kingdom."

HE OPENED the door, darted inside like a little, eager animal.

"They have one at Kew," he said, "but it's so different seeing it aboard a real bo—ship. And the lay-out's not quite the same..."

"You'll soon get used to it. That's the Sewage Farm over there—the algae tanks. This," I said, patting the side of the vat, "is Ferdinand..."

"Ferdinand?"

"The Bull. Finest beef tissue culture, guaranteed to melt in mouth—except after our Chef's been murdering it."

"And those will be the yeast vats there?"

"Yes. The Brewery."

"The Brewery?"

"Your predecessor, Karl Gerling, used to brew beer for the boys. Good stuff, too. Far better than the dishwater supplied in the stores."

"But, Mr. Gordon—surely that is against the Commission's Regulations."

"Of course it is—but every Bio-Chemist does it. We had one in the *Virgin Betty—Beta Virginis*—who used to make vodka. Good stuff it was, too. Others have specialized in wine..."

"Tequila, perhaps," he murmured. "But no. I am sorry. There are not the materials. Beer it must be."

"Don't say that I told you," I warned him. "It's just one of those things that everybody does and everybody ignores."

"I have read the Commission's Regulations," he said,

"and I note, too, that they forbid private experiments. I am carrying out some...seeds to a friend on Montezuma. I should like to try to grow some during the voyage."

"As long as it's nothing poisonous," I told him.

"No. It is nothing poisonous."

"As long as it's not man-eating orchids, nobody will worry about it," I assured him. "Anyhow, she's all yours. Come and see me again in half an hour's time and I'll take you in to morning coffee, and introduce you to the others. The Old Man should be down at about that time, too."

I left him to it, and returned to my room and my interrupted calculations.

DEPARTURE Day is always the same. Everything that can go wrong does go wrong. Small, but important, orders of stores go a-missing—and everybody, of course, comes to worry the Mate about them. Every time that I picked up my slipstick there would be somebody new at my door—Evan Lloyd, the Reaction Engineer, moaning about a missing cadmium damper for his Pile; George Broderick, in charge of the Interstallar Drive, worrying me about lubricating oil for his complexity of cock-eyed gyroscopes; Mary McCarthy expecting me to drop everything and do something about the dehydrated mushrooms that had not been delivered. Every five minutes, of course, the Old Man would buzz and demand the CG—and get more and more hostile as the answer was not forthcoming.

THEN THERE was the final checking of everything by ship's staff and the Commission's inspectors, after which the passengers boarded. At this time I was already in the Control Room, in the nose of the ship, looking out through the big ports and the yellow wastes of the South Australian desert. There's one thing about Port Woomera—you never feel very sorry to blast up and away from it.

The others were all at their stations—the Old Man sitting at his controls, the Second Mate at the radar altimeter, the juniors at their telephones.

Radio and Psionic Communications offices were manned, as were Reaction and Mannschenn Drive engine rooms. Down in the passenger deck the Purser, the Chief Steward and the Stewardesses would be looking to the comfort and safety of the passengers, with the Doctor and the Nursing Sister standing by in case required. Little Diego Ribiera would be in The Farm, worrying about the effects of acceleration upon his precious plants and tissue cultures. I found myself hoping that he would prove as good a brewer as had his predecessor. Yes, Sterling had been a good Brewer, but a poor Bio-Chemist. He had allowed the Chief Steward and the Chef far too much of a free run in Hydroponics...

I looked at the chronometer, saw that it was time for the last formalities.

"*Gamma Pisces* to Port Control." I said into the microphone. "*Gamma Pisces* to Port Control Request permission to proceed."

"Permission granted," came the voice of Captain Hall, the Port Master.

"Permission granted, sir," I told the Old Man.

"Thank you, Mr. Gordon. Sound the alarms, and then count her up and out."

I SOUNDED the alarm bells for the regulation twenty second clangour. When I switched off, I could hear faintly—through the shell of the ship—the wailing of the Port Woomera sirens. One last truck was scuttling over the sand, like a frightened beetle, for the shelter of the blast walls.

"Thirty," I said into the microphone, watching the sweep second hand. "Twenty five... Twenty... Fifteen... Ten... Nine... Eight... Seven.."

On the word *Zero*, we lifted, slowly at first and then with increasing acceleration. The desert and the buildings below were blotted out by a cloud of smoke and dust. Overhead, the sky darkened and the stars began to appear. My body was heavy, sinking deeply into the padding of my chair, and I wondered—as I always wondered—what it must have been like in the days when space-

men and passengers had to endure really brutal accelerations, before atomic power had replaced the inefficient chemical fuels.

The rest was routine—the cutting of the Drive and the swinging of the ship to her correct heading, the short resumption of rocket power to give her impetus in the right direction and then, at last, the starting of the Mannschenn Drive unit. The stars winked out, and outside our ports was the formless nothingness that we all knew and that we all, somehow, feared.

The voyage had begun.

II

IT HAS BEEN absurd, perhaps, to have written so much about the routine commencement of a routine voyage. You gentlemen at the Rhine Institute will know all about it; even if you have never been in Deep Space yourselves you will have seen films and read books, and those of you who are telepaths will have shared the thoughts and impressions of your graduates who are Psionic Communications Officers.

It has been absurd, perhaps—but it has been deliberate.

Its aim has been the recreation of a mood—and that is essential to my plans. I have had to recall all the details, and the setting of them down on paper has helped. I have to remember how I felt when I pulled myself along the guide rails to the saloon, there to take my seat at my table for the first meal of the voyage.

I was in no mood to deal with passengers. It had been a long day, and a tiring one. I knew already the silly questions I should be asked by the customers sharing my board. "Why can't you keep the rockets running all the way to Montezuma so as to give us a substitute for gravity? Why are the shutters up over all the viewports? How does the Interstellar Drive really work? I read a story once about a ship where the I. D. went wrong, and they all got caught up in a Time Cycle... Could that happen here?" And so on. And so on.

The two men at my table

were already there, already seated, when I came in. I pulled myself to my seat, adjusted the lapstrap over my thighs, introduced myself. One of the passengers was in early middle age—a farmer, I imagined, probably from Castoria, our next planet of call after Montezuma. The other one was a beardless youth. He was, I learned, also going out to Castoria—an emigrant. He looked the type who would ask all the stock silly questions. He did.

WHILE I was coping with the first one—the one about keeping the Interplanetary Drive running all the way to Montezuma—Lynn came in. She swam to the table with the ease of an experienced traveler, acknowledged the half bows that are the only form of courtesy possible in Free Fall—if one rose from the table one would be liable to rise too far and too fast—and slid gracefully into the chair on my right.

I looked at her, and decided that I didn't like her. She was, I thought, a little too sleek, a little too self-contained, a little too elegant. She would, I was sure, find a ship's officer, a farmer and a migrant very boring company and would—although not blatantly—let us know it.

"I'm sorry I interrupted," she said sweetly. "Do carry on, Mr. Gordon. It is Mr. Gordon, isn't it?"

"It is," I said. "Have you met Mr. Wells and Mr. Taine, Miss Verity?"

"Yes. The Purser introduced us all in the Lounge during switchover. But don't let me interrupt you. I'm sure that Mr. Taine must be anxious to hear all about how the Drive works and all the rest of it."

One of the stewardesses came and took our orders.

WHEN THE interruption was over, I said, "We can't run the Reaction Drive for two reasons, Mr. Taine. One is that we just don't carry sufficient reaction mass. The other one is that if we did so we should be changing the mass of the ship, and that, when the Mannschenn Drive is working, would be asking for trouble."

"Just like in the story I

read," he said eagerly. "There was this ship, you see, and somebody fired off the rockets while the Mannschenn Drive was working and got her all caught up in a Time Cycle. They'd go so far—say to next Wednesday—and then find themselves back at last Thursday and have to go through the week again. It was the hero who got them out of it—he had a rocket motor unmounted and carried forward so it would fire out through the nose of the ship..."

"I'm afraid it's nothing so glamorous," I told him. "It's just that if we change the ship's mass while the Drive is running it throws the Drive's automatic controls out of kilter—after all, it's set to deal with a certain, definite mass—and things run hot and start blowing fuses. Then the whole business of lining the ship up for her destination has to be gone through again—which is not exciting, but just hard work."

"I can see how the plates stay on the table," he said. "It's done by magnets. But why should the food stay on the plates?"

"Why shouldn't it?" I countered. "It's just a case of cohesion. Of course, a certain amount of care is necessary whilst wielding one's fork..."

I was careless as I wielded mine. A gob of the Chef's special pat (opinions differed—some said that it was made from processed algae, others that it was made from the ship's sewage before the algae had a chance to get to work on it) flew from my plate and hit Miss Verity under the right eye.

"Thank you for the demonstration," she said coldly. "It helps so much to have an experienced spaceman to advise in these matters."

THE ABSURD incident had the effect of setting the mood for the rest of the meal, and dinner, that night, was one of the Chef's less inspired efforts in any case. It is the custom that the first meal of the voyage shall consist of traditional fare—yeasts and algae—so as to give passengers an idea of what it was like in the old days, before the Hydroponics Room became, in effect, a farm. I'll say this for

our Chef—he always contrived to destroy any false ideas about the glamor of the Good Old Days.

I wasn't sorry when dinner was over.

As soon as I could, I drifted along to the Purser's office, found Kennedy enjoying a surreptitious sip from his own private stock of brandy. He opened a drawer, tossed me a plastibulb.

"I suppose you'd better have one," he said.

"Thanks, although I didn't come for that. I'd just like to skim through the passenger data sheets. It helps with conversation if I have some idea of the backgrounds of the people at my table."

"Help yourself," he replied, handing me the file.

I LEAFED through it.

"Taine," I said, reading aloud. "George. Birthplace Birmingham, England, Terra.... Occupation—c i r c u i t spotter. What *is* a circuit spotter, Ralph?"

"Search me. The engineers might know."

"Wells, Herbert. Grazier, of Hamersham, Castoria..."

"Why didn't you look up Verity, Lynn, first? Rather funny that. Verity Lynn sounds just as good as Lynn Verity. But I'll tell you about her. Born on Caribbea, but educated on Terra. Freelance journalist, and a successful one. Writes a lot for the women's magazines and appears on their video programmes. Specializes in travelogues of planets that have specialized in the revival of old, moribund Terran cultures—such as, for example, Montezuma. Satisfied?"

"Yes, thanks. I know what I can talk about now. Farming on Castoria. Freelance journalism. Circuit spotting. I must see one, or both, of the Chiefs and find out what it's all about."

"As though you cared," he said, smirking.

"It's my business to find out," I said virtuously.

(As a matter of fact I still don't know what a circuit spotter is or does.)

I left Kennedy then, made my way back to the Lounge. I

saw Lynn. She was at one of the small tables, with Wells and Taine in close attendance. Her Caribbean origin was obvious—she was smoking a cigar instead of one of the small, jewelled pipes without which the majority of colonial women would not consider themselves properly dressed. I considered joining them, then decided against it. The affair of the mishandled pat had done little to endear me to her.

I SAW THAT little Ribiera was not among the officers present, so wandered along first to his cabin, then to the Farm. He opened the door of the Hydroponics Room when I sounded the buzzer, let me in.

"Putting the cows to bed?" I asked fecetiously.

"No, Mr. Gordon. It is that Chef. He came tonight for the material for the meal, and I let him dip his own yeast and algae from the vats. When his dipper was last cleaned I do not know. One vat of algae I cannot save, I have to destroy."

"Considering what they live on," I said, "you wouldn't think that they'd be fussy. Still—I suppose that there are micro-organisms *and* micro-organisms. ."

"Then," he said, "I remembered what you told me, about the activities of my predecessor."

He handed me a plastibulb.

"What's this?"

"Beer," he said, grinning whitely.

"Already?"

"It is a poor Bio-Chemist," he told me, "who cannot accelerate natural processes."

I raised the nipple to my lips and sipped. I restrained myself from spitting, restrained myself from remarking that he seemed to have been successful in accelerating the natural process of decay.

"You do not like?" he asked.

"I hate hurting your feelings," I said, "but I do not like. It's even worse than the dishwater they sell at the bar. You'll have to do better than this, Diego."

"I'll try," he said, looking miserable.

"Don't take it so much to heart. This beer-making is only

a sideline, just something that you do as a favor to the Old Man and the senior officers, in return for the favors they can do you. If you can't make beer—there's always wine. We had one farmer—Lorenzini was his name—who used to turn out Chianti and Vermouth, both of which were as good as any I've had in Italy."

"Yes, there is always wine," he said, brightening.

"There's always wine—but don't let it worry you. Your job is to maintain a balanced ecology, not a Deep Space distillery."

I LET MYSELF drift lazily around the Farm, enjoying the smell of growing things, the warm radiance of the big, artificial sunlight lamps, the musical tinkling of water. I pulled up at one of the tanks, looked curiously at the plants that were growing on some sort of black humus.

"What the hell are these, Diego? Toadstools?"

"No, Mr. Gordon. They are mushrooms. You said yourself that private experiments were allowable."

"Well, not exactly allowable, but... So they're mushrooms, are they? So the Old Man will be able to have his traditional steak dinner, with all the trimmings, after all on Halfway Night."

"They are mushrooms, but they are not for eating."

"So they *are* poisonous."

"No, Mr. Gordon. They are not poisonous. It is just that they are not the eating kind."

"Seems odd to me. But I've known people to keep some queer vegetable pets—aspidistras and so forth."

"Would you like some more beer, Mr. Gordon?"

"No thank you," I said hastily.

I LEFT THE Farm, made leisurely rounds of the vessel. I looked in on the Duty Engineer in the Reaction Drive engine room, yarned with him for a while while he kept his eye on the Pile and the generators. I dropped into the Mannschenn Drive room, being careful not to look too long and too closely at the complexity of spinning, processing wheels while I passed the time of day with the watchkeeper. There was nobody in the Radio Of-

fice—light speed communications are, of course, useless when the FTL Drive is in operation. The Psionics Communication Office was manned, and I hung around in there for a while, listening, at second hand. to the conversations that Phil Kent our Rhineman, was holding with his opposite numbers aboard other ships in space and in the various spaceports. Then we discussed, half-seriously, what would happen if Fido—the big dog's-brain-tissue-culture psionic amplifier—should become infected with rabies.

Then I went back to my own cabin—by-passing the Lounge—and turned in.

It was a restless sleep, made all the more so by the way in which I dreamed, very vividly, of Lynn Verity.

III

THAT DREAM should have been regarded as what, in fact, it was—a clear indication of the state of affairs in my subconscious mind. My Subconscious knew that I had fallen in love with Lynn at first sight, but it was weeks before I would admit it. It's obvious enough now. At table, conversation became little more than a duet, with neither Wells nor Taine able to get a word in edgewise. Even worse, so far as our companions were concerned, our conversation took on a sort of shorthand quality. It was no more than the sketchy outlines of a conversation—but we, Lynn and I, were able to fill in all the gaps.

I was attracted and, at the same time, scared. Subconsciously I knew what we were heading into, and I didn't like it. I had seen it happen too many times before. I had seen too many officers falling in love, either with a passenger or some girl on one of the planets of call and, shortly thereafter, resigning from the Service. Deep Space is no life for a married man.

You run across them quite often, these ex-Deep Spacers. You find them as pilots of little, Fourth of July rockets, running short hop ferry services from some dull planet to its even duller satellite. You find them as Assistant Port Masters at minor spaceports. You meet a few who have con-

trived—usually with the aid of their wife's money or connections—to sever their connections with Space entirely. They all tell you the same thing—that they're very happy and wouldn't come back for all the gold of Dorado—but you can see from their eyes that they'd sell their souls for a tall ship and the Long Haul.

That's what I used to think, anyhow. Do I still?

I don't know.

BUT I HAD more worries than the way in which things were building up between Lynn and myself. As well as my own worries, there were all the other ones that were dumped on my plate by one and all. There was Mary McCarthy trotting along to my room or to Control at all hours, mainly to complain about the Bio-Chemist. She was locked out of the Farm, she would say, and that was a thing that never happened in Mr. Sterling's time. Mr. Sterling had let her have a duplicate key, so that she could take supplies of green salads and such at any time that was convenient to her.

The real trouble, as I well knew, was that Karl Sterling had kept her well supplied with beer, in return for favors rendered. Karl Sterling liked Rubenesque women—even when, as in Mary McCarthy's case, their eyes are too small and set too close together, their faces more porcine than human.

The Chef—and he was a friend of Mary's—was always complaining to me about the the same thing. Mr. Sterling, he told me, had always let him help himself to the tissue cultures and the yeasts and algae, had let him use his own discretion. All I could tell him was what I told McCarthy—that Ribiera was the head of his own department and would have to carry the can back if anything went wrong with the ecology of the ship.

RIBIERA was beginning to get into my hair too.

"Nobody likes me, Mr. Gordon," he would complain. "Nobody, except you. It is the beer, I think. I try to make them the beer—but it is not my national drink."

"Your beer wouldn't be any-

body's national drink," I told him unkindly. "Not even a Venusian swamp trotter's."

He ignored this.

"I tried to make them the wine..."

"It had," I admitted, "a certain medicinal value..."

"And then there are the Chief Steward and the Chef. They think that they should be free to come and go as they please in *my* Farm. The Chef tried to take my mushrooms, and was very annoyed when I stopped him. He ate one before I could stop him. He was drunk at the time."

"Oh? Was he? I wonder where *he* gets it from?"

"The Captain doesn't like me. The officers don't like me. The passengers don't like me. They call me Dago."

I was annoyed. Racial animosity should have been dead generations ago—yet it still keeps cropping up. The Master of an Interstellar vessel has the power to take disciplinary action against anybody—crew member or passenger—who raises the old, ugly ghosts. I decided that I'd see the Old Man on the subject as soon as little Diego left me.

"Anything else?" I asked.

"No, Mr. Gordon, but that is plenty."

"Have a gin, then." I waited until he had taken the first sip from the bulb. "Now, seeing that you can't make either wine or beer, what about trying your hand at gin?"

"I'll try, Mr. Gordon," he promised.

HE TRIED, but the result did no more to endear him to his shipmates than had his other efforts. I am sure that his ineptitude in this unofficial branch of his calling was the cause of Captain Saunders' refusing to take seriously the complaints that I laid before him regarding racial animosity. Poor little Ribiera was still Dago, and was treated with contempt by crew and passengers alike, almost without exception.

Oh, yes, there were exceptions. Kent, our First Psionics Communications Officer, was one; Evan Lloyd, the Reaction Engineer, was another. "There's no vice in the little man, Bill," he assured me. "He's not like some people in this ship who take it as a per-

sonal affront if some pump or fan, or whatever, packs up and who expect me to drop everything and rush to fix it...."

"Meaning, of course, our Mary McCarthy and her pal, the Chef."

"Yes. Meaning Little Mary and the Head Poisoner. Anyone would think that the ship exists only to carry the Catering Department from star to star."

"Whereas," I said, "any spaceman knows that the ship exists only to carry the rocket motors from planet to planet."

"Of course. Joking apart, though, what I like about Diego is that he has no delusions of grandeur. He knows that we're all parts of a whole, and have to work together."

LYNN, OF course, was yet another exception. I think that it was the persecution of the little Mexican that drew us together. We were both sorry for him. We both did what we could to make life easier for him. In the evenings, we encouraged him to come and sit with us in the Lounge, and we were often joined by Phil Kent and Evan Lloyd. He loved to hear us talk of our travels, of ships and strange planets and stranger peoples. He was longing to be assured that he was one of us, a spaceman.

"You will be," said Evan, "after the Halfway Day."

"The Halfway Day?" he asked. "Oh, yes. I had forgotten. It is like the Crossing the Line Ceremony that they have aboard surface ships on planets where there are seas."

"It is," I said.

"But could you tell me, Mr. Gordon, what is the symbolism. What is the...the *meaning?*"

"The central character of Crossing the Line ceremonies," I said, "is, of course, King Neptune—neptune being the god of the Sea in one of the old religions. He grants permission for the new hands, those who have not crossed the Equator before, to proceed without let or hindrance over and through his territory. We, of course, make Father Time our central figure. We are, in effect, flouting Time when we make our faster-than-light passages.

"Halfway Day itself is a very important day in the

voyage. For weeks we have seen nothing, have been running on whatever information we've been able to get from our mass indicators—and they're far from accurate except at close range. So, on Halfway Day we stop the Drive. We see the stars again—and the sight is welcome, believe me. We take our observations and find out if we're where we should be. We make any necessary adjustments to our course. The Mannschen Drive is allowed to cool down and is given a thorough overhaul. In this ship it is the custom to celebrate with a steak dinner. I hope, by the way, that Ferdinand is in good health..."

DIEGO smiled. "He is so. But what I was wondering about was this—will there be any sort of...of ordeal? I have read of these things."

"Oh, you'll be accused of trespass, and tried by Father Time's court. There'll be a bit of horseplay, and at the finish of it you'll be given a certificate authorizing you to exceed the speed of light without fear of precession or contraction between any two stars in the known universe. You won't be the only one to go through the mill. There're two cadets and four or five passengers. And Father Time himself gets what's coming to him at the finish."

"All very childish," said Lynn, "but fun. Tell me, Bill—do you run to a swimming bath in this ship?"

"Yes. We clear the Lounge so that we can rig it. We fill it and we hold the ceremony while the ship is accelerating at a half gravity or so. We have to build up speed again after the Mannschen Drive shutdown and before we restart."

"I suppose that it is necessary," said Ribiera.

"The swimming bath? The building up speed?"

"No. The...the ceremony."

"If ever you're to think of yourself as a real spaceman, it is," said Evan Lloyd.

THAT WAS one of the nights that we had the usual family party after dinner. That was one of the nights that we drank our coffee together

and smoked and talked, and pulled little Ribiera's leg and then played cards.

There was the night, a little later, when there were just Lynn and myself. Phil wasn't with us—he had a heavy rush of traffic to cope with. Evan wasn't with us—he was having generator t r o u b l e. Ribiera wasn't with us—it seemed that the Chef had made some sort of mess in the Hydroponics Room that had to be cleared up without delay.

For some reason there were very few people in the Lounge that night. The ship was very quiet, only the soft whining of the Drive and the occasional cough of a pump breaking the silence. The lights seemed dimmer than usual. Come to think of it—they *were* dimmer. Owing to the generator trouble, non-essential circuits were being starved so as to maintain a full supply of power to essential machines and instruments.

We sat in our chairs, Lynn and I, our lapstraps giving us the illusion of weight, of gravity. I looked at her, at her thin, finely featured face, her dark hair with the coppery sheen.

"A penny for them," she said.

I held out my hand. She opened her bag, extracted a one cent piece. I took it.

"I was thinking," I said, "that I shall be sorry when this voyage is over."

"So shall I," she said. "We get on rather well—although at first I never thought that we should. I thought—a typical spaceman, who thinks that his uniform makes him first cousin to the Almighty."

"And doesn't it?"

"Some of the others, yes. The Old Man. That poisonous Chief Steward of yours. One or two of the juniors. But not you."

"Thanks," I said.

THERE WAS a silence.

"We're both of us civilized people, Bill. We're not living in the dark days of the Twentieth Century. What we do is our own concern. We want each other. Well—I know that I want you, and I'm pretty sure that you want me. And...Damn it all, Bill do I have to rape you?"

"I'm scared," I said slowly.

"Scared? *You?* The stories

I've heard about you you don't scare easily—not of anything in skirts, that is."

"Not of the usual silly wenches who think that the cost of their passage covers an affair with one of the ship's officers. Of you—yes."

"Why?" she asked.

"It's a case of being frightened of getting involved too deeply. I'm happy here, in Deep Space. It's my life. The ship is a mistress to me, a wife. In the old days of surface ships on Earth's seas they used to call the Mate the ship's husband. Did you know that? A husband can have the odd, casual affair without leaving his wife. But it's the affair that turns out to be anything but casual that breaks up marriages."

"If that's the way you feel about it," she said.

"That's the way I feel about it. When I marry—as I suppose that I shall, some day—it will be to somebody who can take second place to the ship, to the Service."

"God help her," she said.

She unsnapped her lapstrap, drifted up and out from the chair. I made as though to follow her.

"Don't bother, Mr. Gordon," she said. "And thank you for being so honest. At least you've spared me the humiliation of being dropped, as you would have dropped me, at the behest of an insensate construction of metal, a *thing*. I can find my way to my cabin, thank you."

I watched her go. I watched the slimness of her, the grace of her, as she floated towards one of the alleyways leading out of the Lounge. I cursed myself for having been so honest—but knew that by being honest I had saved both of us from deep involvement, had, perhaps, saved her from serious hurt.

I finished the brandy in my plastibulb, tossed the empty container towards a disposal chute—and missed—and then made my way to my own quarters.

IV

HALFWAY Day was, as it always is, a busy day.

In some ships, the Captain

plays the major part in the Halfway Day ceremonies; in others, such as *Gamma Pisces,* it is the Mate. It is not every shipmaster who cares to expose his sacred person to the risk of being mauled either by passengers or by his junior officers. It is, of course, essential that someone of senior rank be present, lest affairs develop into a serious brawl.

So I was sitting in the Lounge—really sitting, as the Interstellar Drive was off and the Reaction Drive in operation—in one of the big chairs placed around the plastic pool. The shutters over the big viewports had been withdrawn, and through the thick transparencies gleamed the bright, multitudinous stars, grouped in half familiar constellations. The passengers were enjoying the glorious spectacle outside the ship; I was pretending to be engrossed in a book.

THEN CAME the sound that I was waiting for—a steady tap-tap-tapping. There was a scream from one of the women, a cry of "Look!"

I got up and looked. Outside the nearer viewport were three spacesuited figures, three human forms in gleaming white armor. One of them, with a luminous crayon held in his gloved hand, scrawled carefully on the outside of the glass:

WE DEMAND ENTRY

I sighed. Young Jevons, the Senior Cadet, could never get his "E"s the right way round on these occasions.

"Mr. Craig," I said to the Fourth Officer, "go to the airlock and see who these people are and what they want."

"Ay, ay, sir!" he replied smartly.

"I hope that your *wife* finds all this amusing," said somebody.

I turned round, saw that it was Lynn.

"This could, I suppose, be regarded as a sort of anniversary," I said.

"How touching," she replied.

From outside the Lounge came the sound of the beating of a gong—twelve slow, solemn strokes. Over the intercommunication system came the chiming of a ship's clock—eight bells, repeated after a short interval. Again the strokes of the

gong sounded, closer, much closer.

A FANTASTIC figure marched into the Lounge. He was wearing a parody of uniform that had, pinned to the left breast, a half dozen fob watches in lieu of medals. On each arm were at least six wrist watches. He carried before him a velvet cushion, on which reposed a cheap, tin alarm clock whose ticking was clearly audible.

It was the Senior Watchkeeper.

"Attention all! Attention all!" he cried. "It has come to the notice of my royal master, King Chronos, Lord of the Split Second, Grand Marshal of the Millenia, that certain of his subjects are seeking to contravene his inflexible laws and, without having paid their just dues, have had the temerity to outrun light itself. Therefore, my master, Father Time, has deigned to visit in person the good ship *Game Fish* to ensure that these miscreants realize that it is later than they think!"

He did something to the alarm clock and it shrilled loudly, then ceased. "Father Time!" he cried.

Father Time was as impressive as a bedsheet, a long white beard, a bald wig, and a cardboard scythe could make him. He was attended by the Houris—four stewardesses, suitably attired—and the Seconds, in long, black trousers, white turtle-necked sweaters. I wished that we could have carried our punning symbolism to its logical extreme and had twenty four of the one and sixty of the other—but even the Alpha Class ships can't run to that.

"And who," demanded Father Time, "is in charge of this rust bucket?"

"I am, Your Majesty."

"Don't they teach you manners in the Space Academy these days? Where is the moth-eaten carpet? Where is the worm-riddled throne?"

And why can't you *stick to the script?* I thought.

"The carpet has finally disintegrated with age," I said, "and the throne has collapsed. Will Your Majesty be seated?"

HE LET ME lead him to the black velvet draped chair at the edge of the pool. His Court arranged itself more or less decoratively around him. The Senior Watchkeeper handed the alarm clock to his master, drew from a pocket a sheet of paper.

"Can you," he said, addressing me, "deny that the persons named herein are intruders in Deep Space, unlicensed beneficiaries of the FTL Drive, planet lubbers of the most miserable category?"

He read the names.

"Seconds!" cried Father Time. "Seconds out of the ring! The hour has struck! There's no time like the present! Bring me these temporal trespassers! I'll stop their clocks for them!"

And so it went on. It was all, at first, good harmless fun. The victims' heads were shaved—in the case of the women it was only a symbolical shaving—and suffered the make-believe administrations of the court dentist. A vile-tasting fluid—the Elixir of Youth—was forced down their throats. They were thrown into the pool. They all enjoyed it—until it came to the turn of Ribiera.

Something ugly crept in then.

PARTLY, it was Ribiera's own fault—he was the sort of victim who makes things so much worse for himself. He was frightened, and he was hating his persecutors, and they were hating him. I looked at him as he was dragged into the Lounge by two brawny Seconds. His uniform shirt was torn, his face was white and his eyes were gleaming fiercely. I liked the little man, but at this moment I found it hard to feel sympathy for him. The Halfway Day rites were something that we all had to go through—and, after all, it's only once in a lifetime of spacefaring.

"And what," demanded Father Time, "is this?"

"A farmer, Your Majesty," replied the Senior Watchkeeper. "He was found lurking among his lettuces, seeking cover behind the adamantine flanks of Ferdinand the Bull."

"Macerate him and feed him to his own algae," growled Father Time. "Thrash him

with sticks of celery until his screams would rend even the heart of a lettuce. Drown him in a butt of his own vile beer. But first, we would remind him that youth is fleeting and that Time takes his toll of all men. Proceed with the depilation!"

Two of the Seconds held the Bio-Chemist firmly. A third, who was also the Court Barber, advanced with the electric clippers. Ribiera was proud of his hair. He screamed something in his native tongue; it sounded like a curse. He began to struggle madly. It was all, of course, very amusing. It was even more amusing when the three Seconds and Ribiera fell into the pool with a loud splash.

IT WASN'T so amusing when the electric clippers, the flex of which had become wound around the little Mexican's neck, shorted with a bright blue flash. It was even less amusing when the limp body of the Bio-Chemist was lifted out of the pool and the Surgeon and the Nursing Sister pushed their way through the frightened passengers and officers to kneel by his side.

"It's nothing serious, Bill," said the Surgeon to me. "He'll live—but he'll not be able to enjoy his Halfway Day dinner tonight. Organize a stretcher party for me, will you? We'll get him along to his cabin."

So that was the finish of the Halfway Day ritual. I left the juniors to do the clearing up, went up to the Control and reported to Captain Saunders what had happened.

"It was my fault," I said. "I should have stopped it."

"Yes," he agreed, "it was your fault—but it was his fault, too. Ribiera will never be a spaceman if he can't take a little innocent horseplay."

"Horseplay?" I asked. "There was rather too much of a lynching feel to the whole sorry business."

"Rubbish," he said. "The man's not pulling his weight, and that's why people don't like him. Meanwhile—how are things in Hydroponics?"

"I checked up, sir," I told him. "There's nothing that can't run itself until tomorrow, and Ribiera should be on his feet again then. I'll be on hand when the Chef slices the

wherewithal for tonight's dinner off Ferdinand, and see that he leaves things clean and tidy."

"You might be a little less niggardly than Ribiera is," he told me.

V

IT IS AXIOMATIC that locks and keys exist only to inconvenience honest men. Those who are not honest will either have on hand the means for forcing locks, or duplicate keys. Either the Chief Steward or the Chef had a duplicate key to Hydroponics, but that was their own little secret. They were waiting patiently outside the Farm when I went along, and drew the issue of beef and the green salads under my supervision.

I had to hurry back to Control then. All the necessary observations had been taken and the final adjustments of course made, and the Reaction Drive was about to be shut down and the Mannschenn Drive restarted. There was no real need for me in Control, but the Commission's Regulations state that on such occasions every senior officer shall be present.

We sat in our chairs and listened to the whine of the Interstellar Drive rising in pitch, watched the stars wink and slicker and vanish. We satisfied ourselves that all was well, then left the Control Room to the Officer of the Watch.

It was almost dinner time.

I went straight to my cabin, showered in the little, adjoining toilet cubicle, then dressed in mess uniform. I looked in to see Ribiera. He was conscious, but was looking rather sick and sorry for himself.

He said, "Mr. Gordon, please tell the Doctor that I must go see that all is well in Hydroponics."

"The Doctors says that you are to stay here until tomorrow," I told him. "Everything is all right in Hydroponics. I saw to it myself that the Chef and the Chief Steward took only what was needed for tonight's meal. The Farm is locked up now, and will stay that way until you get back to it."

"But the algae. . ."

"They're doing fine. Evan made a good job on that pump

you were complaining about—it's running without a murmur."

The gong sounded then, and I left him.

THE PASSENGERS at my table were already seated when I pulled myself into my chair. Lynn inquired about Ribiera, and I told her that there was nothing wrong with him that rest wouldn't cure. She said something unkind about the serious consequences of childish games, and I replied that no Service could be run without traditions, and before the stewardess had served the first course we were snarling at each other like a couple of strange dogs—Wells and Taine were listening with keen enjoyment.

The pat was followed by steak. Tissue culture steak is always good—provided that the culture is not so old that the cells are beginning to lose their specialization—and even our Chef couldn't ruin it completely. Moreover, he had contrived to provide with it a mushroom sauce. There was a vague memory in my mind of Mary McCarthy's having complained to me before the start of the voyage that the dehydrated mushrooms had not arrived, but I assumed that she must eventually have found them.

"From the Farm?" asked Lynn.

"The steak? Of course."

"No. The mushrooms."

"As a matter of fact, no. They're dehydrated. The Commission has some very old-fashioned ideas about what can be done and what can't be done in Hydroponics. The Regulations state that only plants that play their part in the air conditioning may be grown. There is an amendment that covers yeasts but nobody's gotten around towards making one in favor of mushrooms."

"How absurd."

"I don't think so. Dehydrated mushrooms, after all, weigh very little, and why take up tank space for something that can be carried in dehydrated form?"

THEN, WITH dinner over, the Old Man made his usual Halfway Day speech, and

shortly thereafter we all adjourned to the Lounge. There was music, a good recording of one of my favorites—Bronstein's *Nine Planets Suite*. You know it, of course. You know the fire music of the first movement, Mercury—although I am assured by one of the few men I know who has visited that inhospitable planet that Bronstein most certainly did not have the Dark Hemisphere in mind. There is the second movement—all tumbling, crashing surf and shrieking winds—and the third movement, that echoes the rhythmic clangour of machines. The one that I love most of all is the last movement, the tenth, the Deep Space theme. It was better that night than I have ever heard it. The faintly-heard whine of the Drive was part of the music, and the music was part of it. It was as Bronstein must have imagined it, must have intended it—four dimensional. It was a nobody, not even Bronstein, could ever have heard it played.

ALL THE emptiness was there, all the loneliness. The glimmer of distant stars was there and the brief flare of rocket drive, and all the wonder of the frail metal shells, with their human freight, driving across the vast reaches of the night.

The loneliness was there, but I was not alone. Lynn was with me. I repeat—she was *with* me. We were together, but we were not in the ship; we were floating slowly over a landscape that glowed in the light of a golden sun, over the surface of an unspoiled world that was, we knew, an Eden before the Fall.

I held her bright body in my arms. and her slim arms were around me, and what we did was of a deep completeness that I had never known before, that I shall never know again.

Unless...

Then she was falling from me, down through the lucent air towards a golden beach by a blue sea. I knew that I should follow, that I must follow. I knew that if we set foot on this world together—where is it? *when* is it?—there would be no going back, ever, for either of us.

I saw her falling, her slen-

der, glowing body turning slowly. She held out her arms to me. I knew that only a small effort of will was necessary for me to follow her—but I could not make it.

I remembered too much. I remembered all the little things left undone, all the loose ends yet to be tucked in. I remembered the unfinished Maintenance Reports and the Mate's Log that was all of seven days in arrears. I remembered all that would have to be put in hand before our arrival at Montezuma.

I remembered that I was, as I had told her, the ship's husband.

I remember that I was a fool.

SHE WAS gone then, and the bright, perfect world was gone with her. I looked dazedly around my cabin.

She was gone.

And, it seemed, I was the only sober person in the ship. All the others were, I thought at first, drunk—but it was not drunkenness. They were singing in the Lounge—a strange, rhythmic chant accented by hand clappings. I found Captain Saunders and shook him, trying to bully him into a state of awareness.

"The glory," he said. "The glory. The mountains of ice with the twin suns behind them, and the caravan, with its softly beating bells, winding through the pass..."

I left him in despair, tried to pummel some sense into Evan Lloyd. He babbled, of the cloudy, fiery pillar, of the crystal fountains and the healing stream.

I remembered then how my own sense of responsibility had pulled me back from the world of unreality—or reality. I made for the axial shaft, pulled myself along to Control. I punched the General Alarm button. In a matter of only seconds, it seemed, the Old Man was with me, wanting to know what was wrong and the officer of the watch was blinking bewilderedly at his two seniors, a badly frightened young man.

THAT WAS when the stink started, the big stink.

Poor little Diego was the scapegoat. It was his mushrooms that had done the dam-

age—the hallucinogenic fungi, the spawn of which he was carrying to his friends on Montezuma, some of which he had grown experimentally in Hydroponics. Neither the Chef nor the Chief Steward had any right, of course, to be in possession of a duplicate key to the Farm, and certainly they had no right to take anything from Hydroponics without Ribiera's knowledge.

They're odd things, those mushrooms. For centuries they have been known as producers of dreams and visions, as stimulators of the psionic powers. This, however, was the first time that they had ever been eaten in Deep Space, away from all Terrestrial influence. This was the first time that they had ever been eaten in a ship running with the time twisting, dimension warping Mannschenn Drive in operation.

But Lynn was gone. Not a trace remained of her. She could, in her drug-induced trance, have gone out through the airlock—but had she done so she would have stayed in the field of the ship; her body would have accompanied us until the first change of acceleration. Too, Evan Lloyd assured us that the airlock door had not been opened since Father Time and his party went outside for the beginning of the Halfway Day ceremony.

Lynn was gone.

CLAD IN A spacesuit I crawled over every inch of the hull, searching in vain for some trace of her. With the others helping, I went through the ship from stem to stern, leaving no possible hiding place, however absurd, uninvestigated. The Old Man, I know still thinks that she went outside. He still thinks that she, a slim and fragile woman, went into the airlock and—all this with no spacesuit—opened the outer door and then still had sufficient strength to make one mighty leap into nothingness, carrying her frozen and asphyxiated body clear of the gravitational field of the ship and the temporal field of the Drive.

But this is not so bad as what he thought at first. He thought that I took her to the airlock and threw her out. Evan Lloyd, the strongest man

on board, went into the airlock with a bundle of the same mass as the average adult human body and proved that this was impossible.

And Ribiera?

He was lucky. He was to have faced trial on Montezuma on charges of barratry and sabotage, to name just two, but Phil Kent had been in telepathic communication with his friends in the Rhine Institute, and the Institute, as far as I can gather, demanded that Diego be dismissed at once from the Service and enrolled as a member of its research staff.

"You will find her," he said to me, as he walked ashore. "You will find her. I am sure of that, Mr. Gordon. And this will help you."

I looked at what he had given to me. It was a half dozen dried mushrooms.

I know what to do.

On the homeward passage, when the ship is, as nearly as I can judge, where she was on Halfway Night, I shall eat them. I shall make sure that all my papers are in order. I shall remind myself that no man is indispensable. I shall tell myself that the ship is only a thing, and that the Commission is neither father nor mother but merely an employer of labor, an employer to whom I owe nothing.

THIS IS the time, and the place.

I have dreamed of Lynn, and I know that she is there, on that golden beach, waiting. I know that the world on which she waits for me is perfect as no planet in this Galaxy could ever be—but, even if it were not, her presence would make it so.

I must apologize to you gentlemen of the Rhine Institute. I know that you have been looking forward to hearing my story at first hand.

But you will have one consolation.

If this manuscript comes into your possession, you will know that my desperate experiment was successful.

★ PARADOX LOST ★

Vignette by George H. Smith

THE FAT little 23rd Century official said to Steven Polson, "I'm afraid that I don't believe you."

"What do you mean you don't believe me? I'm here, aren't I?" Steven demanded. "I appeared before you in a locked room, didn't I? Do you believe that I'm a time traveler from the 20th Century or do you prefer to think I'm some sort of ghost?"

"Frankly I prefer to think that you're some sort of ghost."

"What utter nonsense!" Steven snorted. "Are you or are you not an official of the government? Is this or is it not a time of scientific achievement? A time in which superstition has disappeared."

The little man glanced at the door of his office as though afraid someone might enter at any moment. "Yes, I'm a government official. I'm the head of the B.F.P.P. and..."

"Well! I see that governments are still afflicted with alphabetitis," Steven sneered. "I might say I had expected something more advanced but I suppose bureaucrats are always the same."

The man at the desk looked hurt but attempted to go on. "...and this is a time of scientific achievement..."

"Then why don't you believe in time travel?" Steven interrupted again. "Why won't you believe that I'm from the past?"

"Well, you see, sir... I'm the head of the B.F.P.P. and the policy of the B.F.P.P. is to..."

"I'm not interested in your bureaucrat boondoggling. I asked you a question. Answer it."

"I'm sorry, but..."

"Why don't you believe that I'm a time traveler?"

"Because time travel is impossible, sir."

"Impossible? Nonsense! I'm here, am I not?"

"Yes, you're here but..."

"But you think I'm a ghost. How ridiculous! I'm from the past I tell you."

THE LITTLE man shifted in his chair again before he said gently, "Wouldn't you juts as soon admit that you're a ghost and go away? It would mean so much less trouble for everyone."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. Why should I?" Steven demanded.

"Well... I just thought... you see, I'm the head of the B.F.P.P. and..."

"You public servants are all alike...can't keep a civil tongue in your heads. Answer my question," Steven said.

"I'm sorry, sir, but time travel is impossible because it would be a paradox, and a paradox could change the whole matrix of time—resulting in the disappearance of our civilization."

"My good man," Steven said trying to control his exasperation, "I am Steven Polson from the 20th Century. Time travel has happened and it is *not* a paradox."

"If it had actually happened, it would have been in the history books. It would have stated that Steven Polson of the 20th Century invented a time machine and interviewed an official named Donald Jackson..."

"What do I care what the history books say or don't say? I'm here and here's my time machine," Steven said, reaching one hand into nothingness and pulling into view a cage-like device.

"Well, now, that does look like a time machine," the little man agreed. "But time machines are impossible, for they would be paradoxes—and paradoxes are bad."

"That is about the silliest thing I've ever heard," Steven snapped.

THE LITTLE man stood up and shook his head sadly. "But you see, we of the 23rd Century have made a very careful study of the phenomena of time travel, and its possible effects on mankind. As far back as 1999, it was discovered that the beings known

to our ancestors as ghosts were people who traveled in time and...died outside of their time, thus being doomed to exist in a half-world of time forever. In later years, it was discovered that it was a good thing that these people have always failed and died in the attempt, because successful time travel would lead to paradoxes which might mean disaster for the human race."

"What do you mean?"

"Well...you're sure you wouldn't like to admit you're a ghost and just disappear?"

"No, I definitely would not!"

"I was afraid that you wouldn't," the little man said sadly. "Our scientists reasoned that if time travel were possible, we would have heard from the future. Well, we haven't—so it follows that time travel is impossible. That is why it is so fortunate that all time travelers are really ghosts."

"But I'm *not* a ghost—I'm here. I don't know what happened to the others but *I made it.*"

"No one knew for a great many years what happened to the others. In fact, it is only in our times that the truth has become known."

"Well—do you admit that I'm from the past and that I'm alive?"

"Yes...you're from the past and you're alive—and that makes you a paradox."

"So what are you going to do about it?"

"Well, you see, our scientists take the matter very seriously and have even gone so far as to have a government agency set up to prevent paradoxes. Hence, we have no paradoxes."

"But I exist. You said yourself that I'm a paradox because I'm from the past."

DONALD JACKSON smiled and said patiently, "But you see, sir, you couldn't be—not really—or your discovery would have gotten into the history books."

"Ha!" Steven exclaimed triumphantly. He reached into the time machine and scooped out an armful of papers. "See this? These are my records. As soon as I get back I'll publish them, and..."

"Those are all your records? You brought them all with you?"

"Of course, you idiot. You don't think I'd take a chance on leaving them behind for someone else to steal, do you?"

The little bureaucrat reached into his desk drawer. "No, I don't suppose you would, sir," he said unhappily.

"And as soon as I do that, I'll be in all the history books, and you'll have a whole ton of your blasted paradoxes."

Donald Jackson slowly lifted a small tube from his open drawer. "There really aren't any paradoxes," he said as a golden pencil of fire leaped from the tube and reduced Steven Polson, time machine and record to a small pile of ashes. "Because you see we've found that we prefer ghosts to paradoxes!"

As he sat back down again, his eyes lingered on the ashes and muttered, "Too bad, too bad." Then he reached for the phone, dialed a number and said briskly, "This is Jackson of the Bureau for the Prevention of Paradoxes. Will you please send a robot janitor up to my office to sweep up some paradoxical ashes?"

Second of Four Parts

CADUCEUS WILD

by Ward Moore & Robert Bradford

illustrated by FINLAY

Who had betrayed Cyrus Tarn, Virginia Carling, and her brother, Henry, to the medarchy? The first problem, now, was to escape the subcutes, but the riddle of a traitor in the underground loomed before them, too . . .

Synopsis

DR. RAPHAEL TREE was neither a mad scientist nor a megalomaniac. "You don't allow children to play with live bombs, or neurotics to indulge delusions. We have seen what happened when they were so allowed. If we had taken over earlier, we would certainly have averted the third world war—and perhaps some of those that went before."

In this day, when the medarchy was supreme, such a statement almost sounded believable. CYRUS TARN could not deny that certain benefits had come from the rule of caduceus, where every citizen had to report to his doctor for a health check-up regularly, and where the doctors' decisions were the law. People weren't oppressed in the old-fashioned way; they had freedom of speech, of the press, of vote on political

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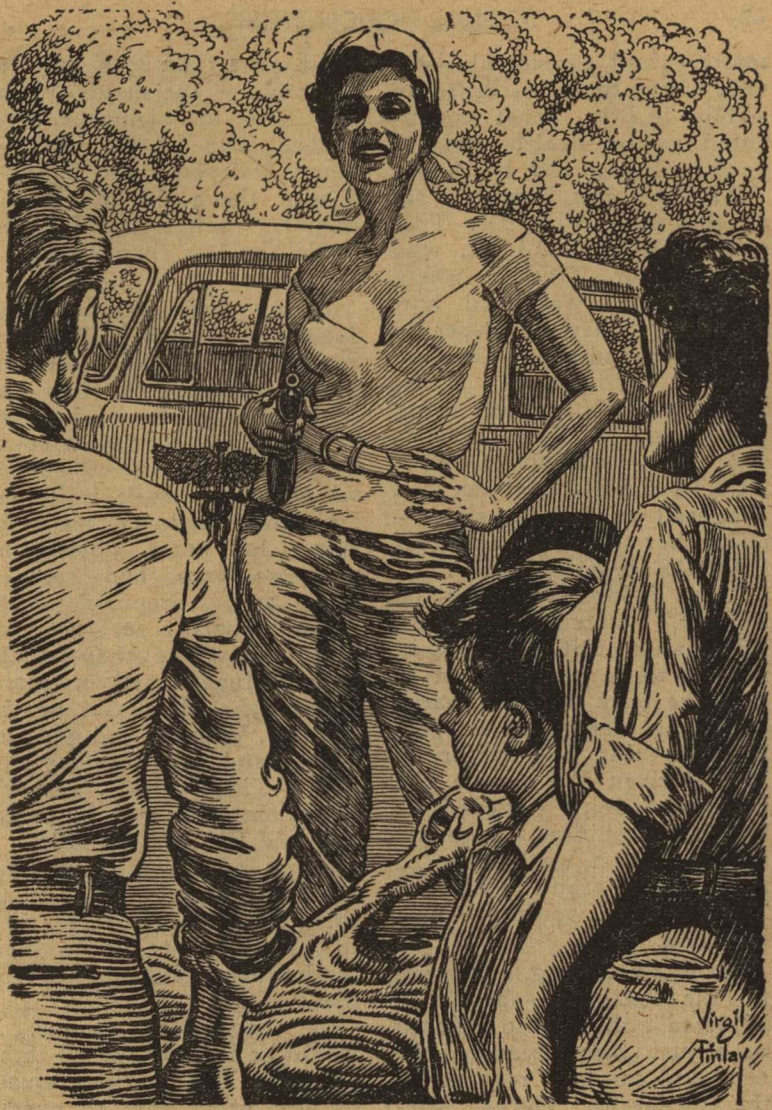

"I'm sure the three of you can lift a tree out of the way of my car," Dr. Tavistock said.

matters, and of worship—except where these infringed on public health. What constituted public health was, of course, determined by Ama.

TARN (alias Tennick) sat at the table with Dr. Tree and CHRIS MALLUP, who worked for Tree, drinking whiskey and wondered how much they knew or suspected about him and about his companions. Ten-year-old HENRY CARLING was being passed off as Tarn's grandson; the boy's sister, VICTORIA CARLING, was still supposed to be his sister—only her name was now CARRIE GOODSPEED.

"Man brings suffering on himself," stated Dr. Tree. "He insists on it, cherishes it, refuses to be parted from it. And the only thing he learns is that suffering never gets him anything but suffering. We've given the people the utopia so long dreamed-of: health, happiness, security, freedom from war. Some of them still aren't satisfied. The ones who would never be satisfied."

He was referring, of course, to the "mallies"—the "maladjusted", those who refused to adjust themselves to the sane and sanitary regimen of the medarchy. Cyrus, Victoria, and Henry were all members of that ubiquitous minority—which could do little more than rebel, and try to convince the majority that the rule of caduceus wild robbed man of all dignity. They believed—that denying a man the right to make a mistake, even a harmful one, made him less than a man.

Henry had just escaped from a medarchy raid on the mallie school with which he was connected—the boy had been kidnapped and brought to a hospital. Before he could be given treatment—drugs which would make it impossible for him to conceal anything he knew about the mallies—Cyrus had rescued him and, prepared with forged charts, set out for Mallups', where they would have refuge until a plane would take them out of the country. Victoria had gone on ahead, and was waiting for them. Their local "doctor", to whom they would refer, was ALEX CALLIGGS, a member of the underground. He was supposed to bring them new charts before they left Mallups', to go to their rendezvous with the escape plane.

If they were caught, it would be the end for all three of them. Not a firing squad, or any other sort of execution chamber, no overt torture. Just treatment—electro-tranquilization and whatever

else the medarchy's wisdom might prescribe for their maladjusted states. No marriage between Cyrus Tarn, age fifty, and Victoria Rald, age twenty-nine, slightly crippled, could possibly be approved. They would be treated and—what happened to the flame when the candle was blown out? Urgency and emotion would be part of an unremembered past, blotted out, destroyed, non-existent. They'd never recognize each other afterward. For Henry, the process would be less drastic, but the result would be the same. And before it was over, the medarchy would know everything each one of them knew or suspected about the mallie underground.

Mallup was an eccentric, who put up a show of outward conformity, thumbed his nose at the medarchy in private, and did pretty much as he pleased—and got away with it. He had a private library of books prohibited by Ama, most of them quack literature; but he never tried to get anyone else to read them, he said, didn't sell them—and didn't agree with most of the stuff in them himself. He just liked to have them, that was all. It was a position, Cyrus thought, which made Chris Mallup ideal for a medarchy counter-mallie agent. And something was definitely wrong; there was a traitor—at least one—in the underground. First the school had been raided; then the promised new charts for the three fugitives hadn't come through. Perhaps a change of decision, Dr. Calliggs suggested, when Cyrus telephoned him.

Yes, Alex Calliggs might be a traitor. Or Mallup. Dr. Tree might be learning important things through his protection and friendship with the old eccentric. And he mustn't forget JUDY LARCH, Mallup's sixteen-year-old granddaughter, fanatic in her support of the caduceans, unswerving in her faith in anything the doctors said. She was upset by the grandfather's flouting of health regulations, was certain that he ought to be in a home for the aged. There could be no doubt that if Judy suspected, she wouldn't hesitate a moment to turn Cyrus and the others in. She'd probably get in touch with the medarchy lieutenant at the station—who had given Cyrus and Henry cursory examinations, and looked over their charts. Traveling without a chart meant immediate and thorough examination in the nearest hospital.

Victoria had been upset

over what had appeared to be Cyrus' undue attention to this ripe, pretty sixteen-year-old, and Tarn was worried. Such extreme jealousy on so little grounds was unlike Victoria. She was waiting for him upstairs, now.

At length, Dr. Tree finished his whiskey sampling and said goodnight—not an evil man, which was the worst of it, Tarn thought. Few, if any, of them were malicious—they believed they were doing good, bringing health, happiness, and security to all. But one thing Tree had said stuck in Cyrus' mind. An ex-wife of the doctor's was personal physician to Horace Whitelands, editor of the all-important *Medical Journal*. DR. GRACE TAVISTOCK was an extremist, a member of the small faction in the medarchy which believed in immediate and thorough measures in dealing out the mallies. Whitelands must be warned before their suspicion that he was too liberal—favoring a moderate, gradual course against the maladjusted—exposed that fact that he was loosely connected with the underground, too.

Victoria was feeling better, though still upset. Then, in the night, something awoke Cyrus. Had someone entered the next room? Had Mallup come upstairs? He had thought that Mallup was listening in on them before. He awoke Victoria, who at once awoke the boy; all three began to dress quietly. The door opened, to reveal at least three men behind the one in the doorway who was holding them in the glare of his flashlight. "There's no good in moving—we're prepared to use gas if we have to. Come with us."

"Are you orderlies?" Victoria asked as she shoved Cyrus toward the window. Tarn managed to take them by surprise, as they obviously did not realize that the three were fully awake, or would dare to resist. Victoria and Henry got safely out the window. Cyrus was not so lucky—the impact of landing was on his knee.

"Cyrus!"

He tried to get up, and almost collapsed. Knee—sprained or broken? He tried to be sure of the direction of her whispered voice. He had to know; separation now would be separation forever.

V

THIS TIME Cyrus got to his feet, dizzy, noting without passion how the pain grew. His knee was not broken anyway, because some-

how he was running in a lopsided, hobbling fashion. Another moment and they'd have gotten away easily. Easily, easily. *Victoria, where are you?*

The revolver again, nervous, vindictive, reptilian. The pursuers were not fooling. Not when they dropped the constantly-publicised pretense of being armed only with the means of subduing recalcitrant patients, never lethal weapons. They wanted Cyrus Tarn alive, but better dead than not at all. He braced himself for the next shot. If it hit him, would he hear it first? Or not at all?

He managed a stumbling turn, around the corner of the house, out of the moonlight and the line of fire. Her hand touched his; relief blotted his fear. "Victoria. Oh, Victoria..." His knee was now a focus of agony.

HE FELT her mouth against his ear. "There's trees and shadow all the way to those buildings." She pointed to the agglomeration of sheds and servants' quarters he had noted when they came.

"No," he whispered back, "we'd only trap ourselves. Mallup has a still on the other side of the fence. Keep to cover—try to find it."

What good would it do them to get to the still, unless there was a way out—a secret, unknown, illicit way out—on the other side from Secarros? Nothing could be more unlikely. Way out or not, the idea of the still represented—at least for the frantic moment—safety, a refuge.

Run! screamed part of his mind. *Never mind the gun, never mind your leg, never mind logic—run, run, run!* But they were invisible for the moment; perhaps the moment could lengthen out, second by second, conferring greater and greater immunity all the time.

No, no—how foolish. Don't stand still, petrified, transfixed. Go by stealth, noiseless step by step. Not hard in bare feet. Victoria had managed to get her shoes. Hank?

Cyrus walked ahead, scouting, assuming leadership. (Why? Elder male; the Old Man who knows, guardian of women and children. Weak reed.) The shelter of the house ended too soon, leaving only its

shadow thrust angularly into the moonlight as a fragile, deceitful protection. He stood poised on the edge, unsure, awaiting some unknown impetus.

"There they are! Stop! You can't get away!"

Maybe not, but they would try. His irresolution dropped; the patch of open ground—Mallup's vegetable garden? yes, it must be—between them and the line of cultivated shrubbery was large, a yawning gap, not to swallow but expose. No choice. Cyrus ran, stumbling, stones and stubble lacerating his feet, hunching his shoulder reflexively, expecting another bullet, steeling himself for the noise.

Then the texture of the ground changed. Clods to trip, furrows to throw him off balance, plants to whip themselves around his legs and cling. The torment of his knee could not blot out his fear, nor his shame that he was not seeing Victoria and Hank to safety while he held back to face the subcutes. "Brave, brave," he muttered between his teeth— "Women and children last."

WOULD THE patch never end? Mallup's indifference must be false; the old man must have worked like mad to cultivate so large an area. Mallup? Was he sleeping through all this, or observing their flight and pursuit—the informer watching with satisfaction? Mallup? Judy, righteously doing her duty? Or Tree? Being humane. Run. Run from Mallup, Judy, Tree. Run from humanity.

The promise of the shrubbery was false; what had seemed solid cover turned out to be only shoulder high, with wide spaces between the bushes. "Come on."

They must make perfect targets. Surely they must be seen; surely the gun must be aimed by now; surely a finger must be pressing on the trigger...

Beyond — infinitely beyond the shrubbery—were real trees, growing where they willed, clustered, shouldering. Have...to ...dodge...out...of... The words came to his mind in gasps, as though he were trying to pant them aloud. In time to the jolting of his heart, the whistling of his breath.

The shadow of a tall pine was like a pool; he dropped flat into it, knowing it offered only brief concealment. He heard the others drop beside him, allowed himself the faint lessening of tension afforded by the sight of Victoria before dutifully turning back to watch for their pursuers.

THE SHORT, illusory pause allowed his mind to open, to half withdraw from the intense, searing concentration of waiting, watching, forcing his uncooperative body to suppress its rebellion against the shaky dominion of his will. How had it happened?

Tree? Mallup? The girl? If one of them had called in the subcutes, would they have been shot at? The shot seemed to argue that their identity was known, that the attempt to capture them was a follow-up to the first raids. But if not Tree, if not someone at Galentry, what had gone wrong? What had gone wrong so quickly? Accident? Routine? They had known there were three mallies in the room. Known they were man, woman, child. Alex had not been caught and made to talk. Or had he—between the time of the telephone conversation and the raid...?

Two men were suddenly where no one had been. Two men were coming swiftly, trampling over the open ground, swaying slightly from side to side as they ran. Two: one must have waited for the other to join him; any mallie dangerous enough to be shot if he couldn't be taken alive was too dangerous for a single subcute. Even as the taste of fear filled his mouth, Cyrus Tarn was aware of the curious, suicidal satisfaction the fact brought. It vanished as they slowed, coming as though by instinct straight toward the tree.

A NUMBING tinge of relief edged his despair. It was clearly impossible to escape discovery for more than another heart-beat. They were caught. And it was just as well; for what was to be gained by running and hiding, running and hiding, hour after gasping hour, only to be taken at last? Let there be an end to it now; now, this moment. They might

let him rest, they might let him sleep, before they began questioning him. They might even do something for his knee. And...

But it need not be the end for Victoria and Hank. If he went forward now with his arms raised, the others would have a chance to get away. An infinitely greater chance than in their keeping all together. And Cyrus would be giving up nothing not lost already.

"There they go!"

They? Who? The voice was by the house; the shout came from behind the others.

"Up the hill—by the big house!"

A third subcute, evidently confused by the moonlight's distortion of some innocent object, or any one of the sudden sounds so alien and disturbing to the urban ear. The realization that there was a boundary to the opposition's efficiency, that they were fallible, capable of being misled by trivial circumstances, gave Cyrus a hope he knew to be as undependable as his resignation of the moment before. Still, it remained: the pursuers were men who could make mistakes; he must be a man who could take advantage of them.

He broke cover as the two spun around to follow the shouted injunction. Again the trees, which had looked so close, were suddenly far off. Had the pursuers already found that the alarm was false? Were they even now turning to take cool aim at the retreating backs? Running, his flesh shrank from the anticipated impact of the lead slug—shrank triply: Vicky, Hank, himself.

MIRACULOUSLY, the trees closed around, sheltered them at last. He touched Victoria lightly, reassuring himself, and put his hand on Hank's shoulder. Leaning against a tree, Cyrus Tarn eased his trembling leg, and peered back. There were lights in Mallup's house at last, downstairs and up; they silhouetted no forms, nor could he see the subcutes in the garden or anywhere beyond.

Again the shouts came, this time from a greater distance. The hunters were evidently shielded from view by the

house; they must be going directly away from them. Were they chasing a phantom, or could there be still another fugitive hidden on the place? Or ...could Alex somehow have learned of what was about to happen, and organized a diversion? If not Alex, then Mallup? No, no; either was impossible. The excited pursuers had been bemused by a fleeting shadow, an odd shape manufactured by the treacherous moonlight; Cyrus' desperation, his guilt at his own inadequacy, strained to infuse hope into the impossibility.

The detailed map of Galentry, so meticulously committed to memory, failed him now. A fence ran through these woods, bounding the estate in long, angular slashes—but was it a hundred or five hundred yards from where they stood? A few hours ago, he had known; now he could not bring up the topographical lines for examination. And even if he could, where were the holes Mallup had cut in the fence—to the east or to the west? Suppose they were in completely exposed places, suppose the fence were impenetrable elsewhere; as soon as the subcutes recovered from the shock of the escape, they had only to organize a methodical beating of the grounds to end the chase. Mallup's still had been Cyrus' decision; was it the wisest one? What happened after they got there, supposing they did? A dead end, in all likelihood, from which they could neither reconnoiter nor return.

HAD HE BEEN right in automatically rejecting the thought of taking refuge with Alex? Was the rejection overzealous, quixotic? Or timorous? Again the riddle: why had the subcutes shot at him? That fact almost clinched the certainty of Alex' having been taken. Almost, not quite. It was a tormenting puzzle.

If he dared—if he were truly the dashing, swashbuckling, dramatic figure of Hank's imagination—perhaps he would have led them straight to the big house, to hide in one of the many spare rooms, to take shelter right under the roof of Dr. Raphael Tree. Where he could incidentally find shoes

and shirt and jacket... Shame caught him: did the boy have anything on his feet?

Suppose Tree had not called in the subcutes; was there any hope of mercy from him if they were discovered? Not that they need be discovered in a place like that; it was really an inspired solution, a logical follow-up, a pinpointing of Victoria's choice of Secarros...

Even as he calculated, Cyrus knew he didn't possess that kind of gamblers' courage. It was not simply that they could expect no mercy from Tree: let him once suspect that three notorious mallies were in his house, and he would personally lead the search. And if he didn't, if they found some presumably secure retreat, what guarantee was there against some officious servant coming in to clean? Or the subcutes deciding routine required an extra thorough search?

"Guess we gave them the slip this time." Hank's exultant whisper had an undertone of doubt.

"Shush, Henry!" Victoria warned. "Sounds carry."

YET...THE idea of doubling back and hiding in the typhoon's eye was solid sense. Not the big house, perhaps, but... The servants' quarters were out; they would be combed minutely—if not for them specifically, then on the principle that where one group of criminals hide, there might well be others. The garages were too easy to search. The barn—there was one, and now Cyrus remembered its location, at the point of a triangle whose base was a line from Galentry to Mallup's—might be an ideal place.

Or the stables, where they might steal a horse as soon as the clamor died down. A car could not leave Secarros, but a horse... Unfortunately his information included no knowledge of whether Dr. Tree kept horses or not. Tree didn't seem the equestrian type, but he might provide mounts for visitors...

Romantic! Cyrus cursed himself back to reality. He was standing there dreaming, bemusing himself with pleasing mirages. It was time, and more than time, to move on. The re-

luctance he felt to abandon their present vulnerable spot must be the same as that which made men in snowstorms lie down to sleep and freeze to death.

Paralysis of the will. Will power. Force himself to go on. Hare and tortoise. Dogged tortoise, a turtledog. Who appointed him leader anyway; what divine accolade? Victoria was better suited a hundred times. Mind getting woozy. Sleepiness? Terror? Pain? "Come on," he muttered.

He tried to ignore the stiffening leg, but it was impossible; the pain grew worse steadily. He could not put any weight on it; he longed for a crutch as he might have longed for some rare treasure. The ground was getting rougher, too; did that mean they were coming closer to the fence? For all he knew they could be wandering in circles.

A CLOUD crawled over the face of the moon; it might be quite dark for ten minutes or so. If he were only sure of his bearings this would be an ideal opportunity. Cyrus stepped hard on his good leg and walked forward.

"There's something over there, Si." The boy's low voice was anxious.

"Where?"

He felt rather than heard Victoria leave them and move forward. He wanted to hold her back, or say, *Wait*—but dared not. In the crisis she took over naturally, protecting them, exposing herself. In a moment she was back. "It's the fence," she whispered. "What do we do now?"

"Find one of Mallup's holes. We've got to get through it." He looked back again, but now everything was hidden by the trees. The moon was still covered. He limped ahead; suddenly the steel links of the fence caught the faint light.

"I can climb that," said Hank.

"Not in your bare feet. Anyway, I couldn't," said Victoria quickly. Too quickly; she was so evidently prompted by the knowledge that whatever she or Hank might be able to manage, Cyrus now could not.

If only the darkness would last, a blanket to cover them

while they puzzled their way to the still, unharrassed by man as well as nature. But in a few minutes the cloud would drift unheedingly away; the moon would be mercilessly bright again.

The clearing made for the erection of the fence was not yet overgrown; it offered a straight and easy path. Too straight and too easy: as soon as the moon came out again they would be revealed in terrifying clarity. As they walked —Victoria delicately; Hank nimbly, acknowledging a stone or sharp stick only by a quick, "Ow!"; himself trying to avoid hazards to feet and knee without keeping his eyes always on the ground—Cyrus Tarn scrutinized the diamond links of the fence. He had no way of knowing whether Mallup had cut recklessly or neatly, whether his thoroughfares would be visible from far off, or whether they would be skillfully concealed as careful mends. But perhaps there were other ways through the barrier beside Mallup's.

THE LINKS ran up and down, they ran diagonally in an infinite number of saltires. Never a broken one; never a sag in the three strands of barbed wire running along the top; never a gap between the lower edge and the earth. Dig under (with what?); burrow, like a—what was it?—badger. Have to find Mallup's triumphs over the fence's invincibility.

A new sense of impending danger pivoted him sharply. A strange pinpoint of light showed for a moment from the direction of the big house, then blossomed into a blinding glare as the beam swung around grandly, moving up and down, pausing, retracting, always probing. It passed high over their heads; on the next sweep it was cut off from them by the trees. On one of its circuits it would be on the right level, and there would be no trees between it and them.

"Fast work," he mumbled.

"What?"

"Getting a searchlight here and rigging it up so quickly. Unless it was here all along. Could be—war relic. Remember how everyone was sure the Russians were bound to land on the downcoast? No, of course

you don't. You were too young."

"Is it very bad, Cyrus?"

He knew he should evade, answer equivocally, if only for Hank's sake. "It's not good. They're efficient." And that was something mallies weren't, not even organized mallies—with or without quotes around the adjective. (Was it only such a little while before that he had taken heart from the opposition's fallibility?) What chance had they now? The pursuers might become confused, as they had earlier, blundering away from their quarry; but eventually numbers and resources, training and all the intangibles which aided authority and hindered those opposed to it, would tip the balance. More than tip it; pull it down swiftly and surely. (*Now, Miss Carling, for your own good...*) Aloud, he said, "Still, they're looking for three needles in a large and scattered haystack."

WERE THEY following the fence in the right direction for sure? Cyrus had taken it for granted that Mallup would have his still toward the western side of Galentry, where the vast hogback—which was the ridge on which Secarros stood—sloped down into canyons and arroyos to the ocean. He had taken it for granted, but there was no absolute reason why the old man should not perversely have set it up closer to the road. And if he had, they were getting deeper with each step into a corner from which there would be no escape except into the arms of the subcutes.

The searchlight was unnerving him. No longer making majestic revolutions, its course had become erratic, moving in jerks, stopping short for long seconds, wavering on—only to double back swiftly. It was a game of russian roulette, played over and over: sooner or later the beam would catch them as they crossed one of the spaces aligned in an open path to its source.

Then, as though to prove complete aberration, it outlined the figure of a man standing by the fence not more than a hundred feet ahead of them. Outlined, and held him in its

glare. Cyrus Tarn ducked, and pulled Victoria and Hank to lie beside him on the ground. He heard the boy's teeth chatter, felt the girl trembling uncontrollably.

It was impossible to distinguish the man's features. Subcute? Neutral? Or friend? Ascending order of unlikeliness. But if a subcute, why was he waiting, exposed and useless instead of hidden to ambush them as they came along? Was this all a game of double blindman's bluff with all contestants blundering around?

NO SHOTS. Did that mean they had identified the figure? (Someone standing by the searchlight with binoculars?) Or was this some kind of subtle trap? Perhaps it was not so subtle, Cyrus' suddenly-wakened mind reflected. Perhaps the subcute had been deliberately stationed there, deliberately caught in the light, in order to drive them away from the fence, back to where they would be captured.

No... He acted as though he were searching, too; could they have learned of Mallup's tampering with the fence? But of course they could; even if Tree or Mallup had not summoned them, either would have told the subcutes right away. Especially if, as they had suspected, there was a trail out of Secarros down the mountainside from the still. At any rate, Mallup's breaks in the fence would have been the only unguarded exits from Galentry. Unguarded at first; now they were too late.

The man in the light moved, signalling with his arms. The light followed him; when he stopped, so did it. He must have found at least one of the cuts then, and was inspecting it. To determine if they had gone through it? How could they tell? And if they couldn't tell, wasn't it possible they might assume the three of them had got through the fence ahead of the pursuit? That they were even now on their way down the mountain?

It was a fascinating subject for speculation. Or would be, if so much didn't depend on guessing right. Cyrus tried to hold himself down to a calm appraisal, ignoring everything

but the problem. (*Let A equal the subcute at the fence,* his mind mocked.)

IF HE ONLY knew how many of them there were. Three? Five? Seven? Again it depended on who had betrayed them; whether they were merely trying to round up three suspected mallies, or whether they were angrily searching for Tarn alias Tennick and the children of Boyd Carling. A logical mind, given the essential data, could figure out anything. Either Cyrus' mind wasn't logical or he didn't have the data...

He knew there were at least three, but that didn't help; there might be two or six or none surrounding the house when the three had routed them out of the bedroom. Try it another way: there was the man in sight, there was another at the searchlight; could there be only a single one exploring the grounds? No— Unless they were firmly convinced they knew exactly where their quarry was.

A rectangular patch of the links sagged, slithering and collapsing in the light. The man walked through, was hidden by the trees. The searchlight resumed its probing swing.

What now? Their concealment was only a trifle less precarious than their earlier one had been; they had nothing to depend on but the black shadow created by the blinding light. If others were to follow the man through the fence, or look for Mallup's other ways in and out...

Once more it would be sensible to be greatly daring—to pursue the pursuer, to follow him to the still, to make their way out of Secarros behind him while he thought of them as being ahead. And if he turned? Or if his companions joined the chase?

THERE WAS only one course, and to succeed it must be followed soon. Cyrus put his mouth to her ear. "Victoria..."

"We must go back," she whispered. "We must try for Alex'."

"It won't do—at least not for all of us. There's too big a chance that he's been taken, and they'd be waiting in his

place. But you're right, we must go back. Part way. Then we'll have to split up."

"No," she said.

"Listen to me: I've thought it all out. When that subcute comes back through the fence, you and Hank must run for the still as fast as you can. It's pretty obvious now that there's a trail from there. It probably leads to the coast highway. You go north..."

"No," she repeated. "It's no use, Cyrus. We're not going to separate."

He simulated anger. "Don't be a fool. This is no time for sentimentality."

"No, it isn't. And the rankest sentimentality of all is self-sacrifice."

"What do you mean? No one's suggesting self-sacrifice. Separating doubles our chances because it divides the subcutes. You must make your way to the airfield..."

He calculated rapidly. About twenty-five miles—less than thirty, anyway. They couldn't possibly walk it, but there was a chance of getting a ride from a motorist on the highway. Even if—even when they captured him, they might not send out an alarm for Hank and Victoria. Again, it all depended on whether the subcutes knew their identity or not. The medarchy never liked to appear oppressive, or give mallies undue public notice. Anyway it was the best—or the least bad—chance. Only he must warn her to scout the airfield, to be wary of entrapment at the last moment. "...the airfield," he repeated. "You go north..."

"Cyrus!" She made no attempt to whisper now. "I won't do it. I can't do it."

THE SEARCHLIGHT passed them, sweeping the ground short of where they were. "Come on back," he whispered. "That's what we have to do, whatever happens."

His knee had stiffened while they rested and argued. He staggered to his feet in a flopping, fishlike motion, jolted by pain and unbalanced by the useless leg. It would have been impossible for him to descend any rough trail in this condition; it was next to it to cover the short distance allowed by the revolution of the light. He

sank to the ground again, grateful to be halted, more determined to put his plan into effect.

"Listen," he whispered sternly, "you must be logical. Our chances will be doubled. While they're chasing me, you and Hank can get away. We'll meet at the airfield."

"No."

"Don't you understand? I can dodge them better alone."

The light passed over them again. He must force them to leave him. Then he would give himself up. Immediately. And demand to be taken to Dr. Tree, to relieve his knee. Maybe they would let him rest, even sleep, before they began questioning him. He was almost sure they would. And it was the only course. Self-indulgence, like suicide? Why not?

"I can dodge them better alone," he repeated.

"With a limp?"

"Your limp is a handicap, too," he said harshly. "We can make it separately, or at least have two chances instead of one."

"I don't want chances that don't include you."

"This is no time to be romantic."

"Isn't it? Cyrus, do you know why I was ill today?"

"What has that got to do with it?" But he knew, even as his mind struggled feverishly to deny the knowledge. No, not now. Not now.

"I'm pregnant, Cyrus."

THE INCREDIBLE irony of it; the overwhelming incongruity of the news and the situation. The responses which bubbled up were equally incongruous. This was no time to ask, *Are you sure?* Or, *How far along...?* Or, *Why didn't you tell me before?*

Four lives instead of three. And this time it was a life in the meaning of actual existence which was in raw danger of extinction; no matter how far along she was, they would abort the child, kill it. Mallies must not be permitted to marry, must not reproduce. "Mistakes mustn't be allowed to happen," said Dr. Tree gravely—"society must be protected against predisposition toward maladjustment." And who could be better predisposed

than Boyd Carling's grandchild?

So Cyrus Tarn would not have the ultimate luxury of giving himself up, the relief of resigning from the struggle. Now they would have to go on for another hour, another two hours, another three or four, until they were shot or taken. A duty to his never-to-be-born child.

"So you see we must go to Alex after all," she said.

"Yes." But he didn't see it at all. The odds were vastly that Alex had been taken. How else...? But the alternative— any alternative— which ought to be forming so readily and smoothly in his mind refused to come. "Yes, I suppose so."

My child; my son; my daughter; a mere blob of matter. Terminated pregnancy. Unless... Was there a chance they would finish treating Victoria and let her go before they discovered her condition? Could she hold back the fact in spite of parapentathol; the instinct to protect unborn life was supposed to override all others. Believe any absurdity in order to hope...

At this moment he ought to have his arms around her, be comforting her, sharing with her. Instead, there was the nearest to antagonism that there had ever been between them. She had cheated him out of surrendering, out of yielding; forced him back into responsibility.

BETWEEN swings of the light, they paralleled the fence back toward the road. How far was it? If he could only recall that map, so clear only a few hours before—what a mind for conspiratorial work! You learned to impress every detail of a bogus personality, a forged history, or a chart for reconnaissance on your memory; and then at the moment of acute need, the impression failed.

It was no use to tell himself the subcutes had proved their fallability; they would certainly have a guard posted where the fence joined the stone wall. It was such an obvious escape route. Unless they didn't have enough men. Unless they were convinced the fugitives had already got out by Mallup's still.

(In that case, why the searchlight? Mere extra insurance?) Unless they were sure...

Her pregnancy— Wasn't that all the more reason why Cyrus should try to hold back the subcutes while she and Hank got away? A father was the most expendable member of the group, especially at this period. He began to marshal the arguments: Victoria, the child— No, it would be useless.

A looming shape outlined by the light dropped them panting. He had known they would not have neglected to post someone in so obvious a place. What now? The big house seemed to be the only answer. But how could they make it?

The light's next sweep showed the figure exactly as before. "It's a bush," Victoria whispered, but he was not satisfied until the beam had come around again to confirm her discovery.

How could she retain her control? But then she had known, even when the subcutes came. She must have planned to tell him later, when they were on their way to freedom —when it would have been joyful instead of horrible news.

THEY OUGHT to have covered the distance along the fence to the corner by now. Perhaps not; the combination of the moon and searchlight was doubly deceptive. And add that each step Cyrus Tarn took seemed like four. Like four? Like five. Still, surely there ought to be some sign of the landscaping he had noticed behind the stone wall. Surely it wasn't possible they had become so disoriented in flight— no; they had to be going in the right direction.

A new set of sounds—muffled—caught his ear. Hank was crying, softly, fighting it, and Victoria was comforting him. "Monstrous," Cyrus muttered —"monstrous." But the word was utterly inadequate. Just as the word fear was inadequate. They were beyond terror or rage or hope. All they had left was dogged, helpless persistence.

The wall? Where was the wall? Suppose they came to it finally; suppose it stayed stationary at last and stopped re-

treating before them? What then? Alex's house was not far as the crow flies (do crows with bad knees fly straight?); perhaps half a mile—could they make it? It was inconceivable that the wall would be left unpatrolled. And if they evaded the guard or guards, there were still two roads to cross: double danger. Reason said, *Swing around, come upon Alex from the opposite direction.* The railroad tracks? Reason was utterly unreasonable.

Hank had stopped crying. What time was it? Cyrus didn't know when they'd gone to bed, how long they'd slept. But dawn could not be too far off. And dawn...

"There's the wall," whispered Victoria.

VI

KNOWN TO one group of his associates as Monty, and to another as Alex, Marchmont Caliggs, MD, smiled a dimple into one cheek—a cheek looking as though it had been shaved only an hour or two earlier, yet would need shaving again an hour or two hence—and rubbed the stem of his pipe gently against the cleft of his chin. "It was my mistake from the beginning," he admitted. "I should have insisted on all of you coming here, instead of depending on something so undependable as a friend of Rald's."

Cyrus Tarn felt divided, segmented, unable to draw his mind back into a cohesive unity. Alex not taken, after all; Victoria pregnant. There was a possible chance they might get to the airfield...his damnable knee... He tried to shut out the vital things, clutching at the comparatively unimportant. "No. The decision was right. If we could only know what went wrong. And where. Or who."

"Who... Yes, who?" Alex looked at him earnestly, large brown eyes serious, lips parted to show bright teeth. "Whoever or whatever it was, Vicky would have been better off here."

One of the smaller segments inside Cyrus smiled, recalling what Victoria had said about Alex. "No," he said aloud. "One thing we can't afford is to have the faintest suspicion

fall on you—one doctor on our side is worth a hundred ex-Patients. I wouldn't have come here, even tonight—this morning—if I hadn't been panicked by the thought of them getting Victoria and Hank. I still don't understand how they could have got the dope on us without knowing you had helped us."

ALEX FROWNED. "One of those puzzles—so clear when you know the answer that you wonder how you could have missed it. As far as I can see, the only thing that fits is that someone has been planted on us."

"It's possible. Yet Tree, the girl, or Mallup all had motive and opportunity. And if one of them called the cutes, everything is simple."

"If it was one of them, why did the subcutes shoot?"

"I don't know. The shot supposes they knew who we were. But if they knew who we were, that assumes someone beside you, John, and Stuart knowing we were here."

"Does it?"

Victoria is pregnant; at any moment the subcutes will burst in; meanwhile Alex and I will reason. "I don't know—my logic seems to have got jolted around. Coming here is evidence of that. I was panicked." *(I had an easy way out, and then Victoria said...)*

"You did the only possible thing," insisted Alex. "'Panicked'! I'd have been scared out of a year's growth and grown a long white beard if I'd been in your shoes."

"No shoes," Cyrus reminded him. How easy and pleasant they were chatting together, as though disaster didn't and couldn't threaten. He looked down at his feet, easy at last in a pair of Alex' slippers, too big for him. He touched his sore knee questioningly and winced. Alex had diagnosed it as a bad sprain half an hour earlier, and bound it tightly. Too tightly for comfort—but then it was not comfort he was looking for, but ability to use his leg. And he was able to use it better; the discomfort of the tight bandage was nothing to the pain he had felt before.

HE LOOKED over toward Victoria, resting on the

only bed beside the sleeping Hank. There were shadows under her eyes, and a smudge of dirt across her cheek. He knew that the appearance of fragility was deceptive; it belied her strength and stamina. *Had belied,* he corrected himself; how did he know what her new anxieties had done to her resiliance? It was no use telling himself women gained fresh buoyancy in the first months of pregnancy; women in the first months of pregnancy were not usually hunted down and pursued with the threat of having the child taken from the womb.

Her eyes were closed, but Cyrus was sure that she was awake, listening. They had escaped last night; they were still free, thanks to their own luck and the blunders of the subcutes. But they could not depend on the combination. They should be planning now, planning carefully, getting ready to move on—no, moving on; at any moment the subcutes might pick up the trail. This had been a deceptive refuge; that they had had no other only pointed up its vulnerability.

People did hide, and for long periods, in odd places: attics, closets, under floors. There were none of these facilities here; Alex's large but unpartitioned cabin revealed everything blandly to the first glance. Anyway, they couldn't wait; if one of the three at Galentry had turned them in, the plane would still show up and they could make it if his knee held out. And if it had not been Tree or Judy or Mallup—well, they had to get out still faster.

ALEX ASKED hospitably, "More coffee? I'd better not, either. It's incredible that the subcutes missed you on both roads."

"I think they didn't bring up enough men. They must have expected an easy capture, knowing exactly where to find us. They didn't anticipate having to comb the country. And that's what they'll do, because by now they'll have gone through our stuff and found enough to identify us if they didn't already know. There's probably a dozen more of them on the way to Secarros right now."

For the first time since their arrival Alex showed apprehension. "That means they'll be here eventually."

Cyrus nodded. "For one thing, the MP at the depot asked for my referral here, and I had to give your name. They're bound to check back and come to that. On the other hand, if they knew everything they'd have been here by now. They would have come for you at the same time they went for us. But if they are just following up the referral, or making a methodical search, they won't start this early. Doctors—especially doctors in Secarros—aren't treated as casually as Patients."

"I don't like it," said Alex fretfully. "The whole apparatus is crumbling. I don't like being tied in with nuts or fanatics. Some chiropractor or religious maniac is bound to buckle and spill his guts."

"You don't usually find subversives among the calm and reasonable."

"Don't get huffy—I wasn't talking about ordinary neurotics, or even psychos. I can work with you and Vicky, but what about Rald and some of the others? How can I feel easy with my safety—my practice, my license—in the hands of some featherbrain who doesn't believe that germs cause disease, or thinks that research is flying in the face of providence, or that the way to cure the common cold is to pummel the spine, or that matter simply doesn't exist?"

ALEX SHOOK his head. "You can't rely on such people because they never have clear motives you can put your finger on and say, 'Joe Doakes is in this up to his neck—if he pulls out he'll leave it behind.' But how do you know that someone, whose actions are based on the firm conviction that Christ will come again next March Fifteenth at precisely 2:36 AM, Mountain Standard Time—and therefore it's sacrilegious to bother with the ills of the flesh—won't suddenly get a new revelation to the effect that the second advent has been postponed for a couple of hundred years and therefore a little medication—and consequently a little infor-

mation to the Ama—is permissable?"

Victoria spoke from the bed without opening her eyes. "I don't understand, Alex. Where do you and Dr. Yester fit in with this reasoning?"

How can she lie there and talk so calmly? How can I sit here and listen so placidly, when our nerves—mine, anyway—are screaming a warning of all the dangers around us?

Alex tapped the dottle out of his pipe against the rung of his chair. "I don't know about Stuart Yester—I've often wondered exactly what makes him tick. He's always so busy with the underground I don't see when he gets time to practise medicine. I know why I'm in this myself, though, and there's nothing mystic or altruistic about it. I was in on perfecting a technique of transplanting adrenal glands. It was a big thing, what with the necrosis to the adrenal caused by irradiation in the war. We worked like hell building up a bank of healthy adrenal glands, and if you think that's just like adding five dollars every month to your Christmas savings club, you couldn't be wronger. And then the Ama decided it was against medical ethics for us to keep the technique for our exclusive use.

ALEX FILLED his pipe, his eyes smouldering. "Can you beat it? We did the work, and surgeons who didn't have the ability or persistence to develop such a thing themselves got in on the gravy. They don't even give us a rebate on our dues to the Ama—more than the old income tax—or the Credit Bureau's big cut as a reward for our contribution to science. Now there's a chance we may be on the track of doing something like with kidneys and other glands. Before we get cheated out of that I want good old free enterprise, and I'll even work with mallies—pardon me, individualists—to get it back. But that doesn't mean I've got to feel happy about the chance that some osteopath—or 'psychologist' who calls himself doctor by virtue of a PhD and knows I've been working against the Ama—can ruin me by stooling."

Cyrus Tarn had never heard him talk so much before. He decided that Alex must be nervous—and who could blame him? *If I were a very young man I'd call his attitude cynical. Funny how the word disappears from your vocabulary at about forty.* It wasn't because one grew disillusioned, but because you began to understand how complex motives really are, and how impossible it is to pin a simple label on them and let it go. Alex could brag about his unenlightened self-interest, but certainly that wasn't the whole story. (*My knee hurts—damn.*) What was the whole story? What was anyone's whole story? Anatole France: all history in one sentence. But what about Stuart Yester? He was no medical entrepreneur, too greedy for his own good. Why should he oppose the Ama?

Maybe he doesn't.

Cyrus' stomach revolted at the thought. Stuart? Nonsense! Ridiculous! A b s u r d! He'd worked with Stuart too long and too intimately...

Exactly. How did Stuart manage to make a living, and yet have time for all his subversive activities? When did he tend to his practice? Stuart...

YESTER knew that Cyrus Tarn had gotten Hank out of the hospital and how, because Yester had planned it and given vital help. (*Then why? To cover up treachery? To catch more important mallies?*) Yester knew they were to meet Victoria in Secarros—at Galentry. Yester, in fact, knew more than anyone beside Tarn himself, of necessity. Even Alex and John Rald didn't know the location of the airfield. If it were just the three of them, through betrayal at Galentry, what had happened to the new charts? Yester had the opportunity of giving everything away to the subcutes. Maybe he wouldn't turn in Alex: the bond of medical ethics... Motive? Who was Cyrus to probe motives?

Again Victoria spoke from the bed. "You think Stuart...?"

Alex shook his head doubtfully. "Why Yester? Why not some nut, to get out of a routine sedation for a disturbed state?"

"Because only he had the information they seem to have acted on."

Alex considered this. "You can't go on that. You can't tell what may have come up to make him take someone else into his confidence."

"What about the missing charts?" demanded Cyrus. "That points to a collapse of the organization. But then—how did they miss you?"

Alex shrugged. "Perhaps the crackpot stooling decided we'd been brothers in a former incarnation."

His flippancy reacted on Cyrus to make him remember guiltily his own responsibility to others besides Victoria, Hank, and himself. "If it wasn't Tree or one of the others, there's certainly a stooge close to us. And if it isn't Yester, we'll have to find out who it is and see that he or she doesn't get any more correct information."

"Or eliminate him," said Alex.

FOR THE first time, Cyrus Tarn was annoyed with their ally. "Nonsense. Murder isn't only foolish—it's futile. Amateur conspirators are always talking about killing—old hands know better."

"I'm not exactly enthusiastic at being classed as an amateur," said Alex stiffly.

"Then don't talk airily of 'eliminating' human beings. Euthanasia is approved by the medarchy, not by its opponents."

"Have we really time to wrangle?" asked Victoria. "Shouldn't we be doing something? What about telephoning?"

Cyrus understood how he could diffuse his own thoughts and emotions, but how could she, at such a time? But Victoria was the calmest of them—even calmer than Alex, who had the least to lose. Telephone? No. "Too dangerous. Even yesterday's call was risky, and that was only local. Alex better get back to the city and get in touch. Feel his way around."

"All right. I suppose it's the only thing. Meanwhile, what are your plans?"

"The airfield. We've got to make it. There's a good chance

it's a fool's errand, but we can't just write it off."

"Right," agreed Alex. "How're you going to get there."

"Partly on foot," said Cyrus cautiously. "That reminds me—neither Hank nor I have shoes."

Alex glanced down at the slippers. "Too big, but I have a smaller pair of boots that won't be too bad with heavy socks. I don't know what we can do for the kid, though."

VICTORIA got up. "If you have a couple of pair of those heavy socks, a needle and thread, and an old suede jacket..."

"I haven't one that's very old." He went to a clothesrack and took down an immaculate gray and black garment.

"It's a shame to cut that into soles..."

Alex handed it to her. "I'm afraid I have no sewing stuff, though."

"What about suturing equipment?" asked Cyrus.

"Oh—sure. Surgical needle and so forth."

"That'll do," said Victoria. "It *is* a shame to cut this jacket up. I wouldn't do it for anyone but Hank. If we get away, I'll send you one just like it. And scissors, if you have them. Oh yes, and I could do with something more convenient than a dress. If you have a pair of levis I could cut them down."

Alex supplied her with the various items. "I'm doubtful about your using that knee," he said to Cyrus. "I don't know how far it is to the airfield..."

"Be glad you don't. The medarchy would give a lot for the information. They'd inject you with every drug in the pharmacoepia to get it out of you."

"I'm above suspicion. I hope."

"I hope so, too. You're a key man, and the subcutes would be happy to learn all you know. It wouldn't be smart to put any more eggs in your basket. Just in case you were suddenly put through a routine check-up."

"All right. I'll stay ignorant."

"I don't know where the airfield is either, Alex, if that makes you feel any better,"

said Victoria. "Only Cyrus and some others. I don't even know who they are."

Stuart Yester's one of them, thought Cyrus grimly. *If he's the tipoff man it'll just be too bad.* But they'd have to walk into the trap anyway. *Except that this time I won't discuss Victoria's escape with her before I act.*

VICTORIA said, looking up from her sewing, "We'll need some other things if you have them around."

"What things?"

"A flashlight," said Cyrus. "A canteen, a couple of cans of food."

"Matches," added Victoria, "and a canopener."

"Got them. What about blankets?"

"We won't need them."

"The plane's coming tonight, then?"

"We just can't load ourselves down," Cyrus said shortly. Alex had the curiosity of the scientist, all right.

"I could... Never mind. Are you really going to walk all the way? I have the use of a copter over at the community field."

"Copters are out," said Cyrus firmly, using the voice of authority he always heard with surprise when it came from his own lips. "Don't you have a little car you use around here?"

"Sure. My Midget. But there's no road..."

"The Midget will do if you think three of us can get in the back seat."

"It'll be crowded, especially with that knee. Why all in the back?"

"In case we're seen or stopped, it won't look quite so much as though you were voluntarily driving us."

"But... Very well, General. When do you want to leave? It's seven now."

Cyrus looked over toward Victoria and the sleeping boy. They needed all the rest they could get, but they dared not gamble. The subcutes might be here any minute. "Right away."

Alex shook his head. "That knee..."

"It'll only stiffen more," said Cyrus, not relishing the thought of walking on it."

VICTORIA took a final stitch; snipped the gut.

"Hank, wake up." The boy burrowed into the pillow. "Henry! Up with you."

"All right, all right."

"I mean it, Henry."

Alex was assembling their supplies on the table, adding cans of beans. "Not so much," Cyrus objected. "It'll just weigh us down."

Alex put half the cans back on the shelf. "I suppose you know what you're doing, but it's certainly against my advice."

"Do you think his knee will get worse?" Her voice was anxious.

"It could."

"Can't be helped," said Cyrus. "Let's go. If we should be stopped, step on the gas—hard. Don't try to bluff by them. Afterwards, report immediately that we kidnapped you. I held a gun at your back all the time."

"It would be good if you had a gun to make it more convincing," said Victoria.

"Sorry I can't oblige." Alex was likeable enough in spite of his moral code, but so... youthful. *He must be forty,* thought Cyrus, *but he's eternally playing cops and robbers while being realistic and objective about making money.* "Don't forget that pair of boots you promised me. Bedroom slippers aren't recommended for the well-dressed fugitive."

HE LEFT the table and began rummaging underneath the hanging clothes. "Yes, sure. Here they are... No. Mmmm. All I can find's a pair of riding boots."

"Riding boots aren't so good for walking," frowned Victoria. "Henry, get up."

"Relax, relax."

"They're good enough," said Cyrus, putting on the second pair of socks and wrestling his feet into the high boots, new, stiff. At least they weren't western, with high heels.

"What am I going to put on?" asked Hank. "And my feet are still sore from walking on things. When do we eat?"

She held up the heavy socks to which she had sewn two thicknesses cut from Alex' jacket as soles. "Wear these. We'll eat after a while."

"But I'm hungry now."

"Later, Henry." She picked up the levis and cut a length off each trouserleg. "If you have a shirt I can wear, Alex?"

"This do?"

"Thanks."

Cyrus Tarn stood up. The stiff boot reinforced the tight bandage to make him feel as though his leg were in a plaster cast. "I'm going to take a look outside and see if there are a few subcutes ready to pounce."

"Better let me." Alex moved toward the door.

"If they..." began Cyrus. "Oh well. Go ahead."

Alex lit his pipe again, using several matches before it was going. "You have guilt written all over you," commented Victoria. "Relax, as Hank says, and stop looking like a man harboring three paranoids."

The specialist in adrenal and other glands put his hands in his jacket pockets, thumbs out, and smiled broadly, deepening his dimple more than ever. "How's this?" He opened the door and left.

VICTORIA slipped the levis on under her dress. Then she pulled the dress up over head, standing for a moment with her young bosom bare before she put on the plaid shirt Alex had tossed her. "Do you really think..."

"Not now." He stopped with a warning glance in Hank's direction. Even she never seemed to realize fully that the less you knew—if only as hints—the better off you were if you fell into the hands of the orderlies. Involuntarily he strained his ears, waiting for the sound of voices outside, or the noise of Alex' return.

How could he have suffered that fog and forgetfulness last night? Now, with no intervening sleep to help, the map, not merely of Galentry, but of all Secarros, was clear and distinct in his mind again. The railroad ran behind Alex's cabin, shielded only by a wild hedge of mountain lilac, its thorny, grazing branches possibly impregnable, possibly not. In front, the short, rutted driveway clove through a tangle of second growth brush, fiercely competitive, unruly. The driveway led to Secarros' main road, that contrived toy, deliberately double dead-ended so no wander-

ing motorist could accidentally intrude. A bad—and good—place to hide out; a bad and good place to keep under surveillance.

"Cyrus?"

"Ay?"

"Isn't—isn't he gone a long time?"

He walked over and took her in his arms. If the miracle happens and we get away, he vowed with an earnestness approaching rage, I swear I'll never let anything worry her again. His kiss had the same angry determination. Hank, who had been lost in some meditation apparently essential to the process of dressing, murmured, "Break and go to a neutral corner."

CYRUS SPOKE gruffly, still holding her against him. "He's probably making a thorough check. The scientific mind. No loopholes." Yet it did seem as though Alex' absence was unduly protracted. If he had been taken out front, they would have to try breaking through the tangle in back—a thousand to one chance. He went to the plank door—it was not really one, but a slab carefully simulating planks, typical of Secarros—and turned the lock softly, opening a slight crack. Alex was hurrying up the driveway, looking pale. "It's all right, I think—he's coming now."

Alex shut the door behind him. "Sorry. Old J. J. Blunteagle—Aunty Blunteagle—antibiotics and antitoxins till he retired to hoard his millions—out for his morning constitutional. Talk your ear off. I didn't dare break away too abruptly."

His knee was making Cyrus irritable and unreasonable. "Shall we go before anyone else stops for a chat?"

"I ought to look at that leg again."

"Let's go."

"Let's see, have you got everything? I thought I..."

"We've got everything," said Cyrus. "Come on."

"No, but just a minute..."

"Damn it to hell," exclaimed Cyrus, now thoroughly on edge, "are we going to dally all day?"

Alex looked confused. "Sorry. I didn't mean to hold you

up. I only wanted to make sure we were ready."

"I didn't mean to yell," apologized Cyrus. "We're ready. Come on."

IT WAS A snug fit in the Midget. Victoria curled in the back seat, Hank and Cyrus crouching on the minute scrap of floor. "Fun," said Hank, and Cyrus reflected bitterly on the perverse tastes of youth.

Alex warmed the motor with care. Long after it was humming smoothly, he continued to let it idle. "What're we waiting for?" asked Hank.

"Can't score the pistons," explained Alex. "These things are as finely made as a watch."

At last he let the clutch in. Cyrus waited till the slow bumping over the driveway ended in a pause, indicating they had come to the road. "Turn right," he ordered.

"Right? Going north?"

"Turn right," repeated Cyrus. "And remember, don't stop for subcutes or MPs." He tried to shift his leg to ease the cramp, and only succeeded in setting up a trembling in it. That bandage was too tight; Alex might be a fast man with a gland, but he must have lost his fine touch with a sprain since his internship.

He felt the car slow; this must be a crossroad. Was there another one, further on? He tried to remember, but this end of Secarros was an area he hadn't studied with the intensity of the other. A roadblock could be set up at any crossroad, would almost certainly be at the major ones. He would rather have gone left, south, away from the airfield and doubled back. It would have been better policy, but there wasn't time. And if there was a block, would it be an impassable barrier, or could Alex follow his instructions and drive through? He felt his heartbeat quicken; if Alex stopped, he must push Victoria out...

HE TRIED to quell his impatience with reason: it was only intelligent to make the customary stops, to drive casually. It was hard, with his pain, fear, discomfort and apprehension, to hold a judicial mind. *Get on with it, get on with it, get going,* he wanted

to shout; only by grating his teeth together could he manage to keep silent. The sound of the tires altered; they had left concrete for macadam. Unable to bear it longer, he straightened up recklessly. "If they stop us now, to hell with them."

"I don't think there'll be anything before road's end," said Alex over his shoulder. "But they'll certainly miss a bet if they haven't someone stationed there."

"Don't worry." (The calm and resolute leader of the underground made his calm and resolute decisions calmly and resolutely in the face of imminent peril. We owe our glorious success, he modestly told reporters, to my calmness and resolution.) "Just keep on going."

THERE WERE fewer side-roads and still fewer fences now; this was the less settled, less fashionable area. The road worsened rapidly too, slowing down the little car. A roadrunner darted over the shoulder and zigzagged madly ahead of them. Stands of tall trees interrupted the syruppy sunlight. Cyrus wished his calmness and resolution had extended to noting the speedometer reading when they left; now he would have to guess how much of the twenty miles to road's end they had covered. Seven, eight possibly. His mental map was far less detailed for this section; he had never contemplated the possibility of any excursions here.

"Bet we could hide out here for years and years," Hank dreamed happily. "No houses, no doctors, no hospitals. Real gone."

"No grocery stores either," Victoria pointed out.

"Who cares? We could shoot things and catch fish, like Mr. Mallup."

I wouldn't mind, thought Cyrus; *escape to the primitive.* One could build a new society in the shell of the old; have half a dozen kids without benefit of gynaecology. Twenty years ago— Twenty years ago Victoria was just out of diapers. Now she was with child, with his child, both in deadly danger, and he was thinking airily of some romantic, sylvan retreat.

He looked closely at the twisting road ahead, studied the dust puffs settling behind them and the trees on either side. "I think you can stop here, Alex," he said casually.

"Here?"

"Good a place as any."

"But..." Alex' surprised voice died away.

HANK PUSHED open the door on his side, and ran in circles: a young goat suddenly set free. "Say, these things you made aren't bad," he called to Vicky. "Wait till I show them to the fellows."

Cyrus got out gingerly, suppressing a groan as he stood up. He stretched, bent over and reached in for the shopping bag of supplies. Victoria already had it; she shook her head at him when he attempted to relieve her of it. Chivalry, fragile flower, can't survive a drop from a window; every man for himself and the equality of the sexes. Limping Horse has strong woman; carries her own weight in buffalo chips.

"Sure you know what you're doing?" asked Alex.

"Sure he does," boasted Hank. "You should've seen him in the hos—I mean, you should've seen him."

Alex looked inquiringly at Cyrus, who said shortly, "Let's not waste any more time. So long. Don't forget to warn them about the leak."

"But..."

Cyrus waved his arm with an airiness he was far from feeling, and scuffled through the clustering weeds. He knew very well how completely reckless it was to venture down the mountainside like this without even a compass. And suppose Victoria weakened, as she had yesterday? Experienced hunters got lost in the Santa Lucias; any wild hope of coming upon a trail or a creekbed was a chance so remote as to be imperceptible. It wouldn't be so bad, up here in the trees; but lower down they would run into brush and sheer drops. Should he have let Alex use a copter after all? A copter...

COPTERS. As soon as the subcutes discovered they had left Secarros—and how long could that be?—*they'd* think of using copters. Of

course they'd be at their poorest here where there was so much natural cover, but they would be better than men on foot. And the pursuers had already shown themselves both efficient and determined; witness the searchlight last night. (Only last night? Had he lost a day somewhere? No, it had been last night they began running. They were still running. Figuratively anyway.)

Or dogs. If they hadn't. But surely, if they had it would be all over by now. They'd have got them at Alex'. Anything was available to subcutes; the medarchy rested on their vigilance and thoroughness. Perhaps not in Secarros. No, you can't take my dog. I must have your dog; I represent the medarchy. Young man, I am the medarchy. Subcute baffled; no dog.

Fly them in. A delay—but for how long? A chill: fear. Dogs would follow the trail from Galentry to Alex' in no time. Nice thing to do to him. Him, an individual? The organization, the many, many others. Ah, reasoning like Dr. Tree; gross numbers are what count. Dr. Tree; Dr. Caliggs. I am Dr. Caliggs; above suspicion. They forced me with a gun. Armed, desperate; homicidal maniacs, ay? Thank you, Doctor; we can pick up the scent again. Here boy; here, Towser, Rover, Prince, Spotty! Get a smell of this! His shoes, Hank's jacket, Victoria's stockings. Good old free enterprise; fastest dog gets the mallie. Yoicks. Tallyho.

"We'll have to stick close together and travel as fast as we can. Can't risk time by getting separated. We've got a long way to go."

"Would it be disastrous if we didn't get to the airfield in time?"

HE THOUGHT of the plane landing, with no one to give warning of the danger; the invaluable machine captured. Of continued ignorance of the betrayer within. Of themselves cut off from contact with their comrades. Of Victoria... "It would be disastrous."

"We'll make it," she said.

If only his knee. "Got to loosen this bandage," Cyrus announced.

"Do you think it's wise? Alex knows what he's doing."

"Doctors always know what they're doing until they make mistakes." He sat down on a fallen log, pulling up his trouserleg, dragging it high on his thigh, easing the riding boot down on his calf. The wide adhesive was cutting into the flesh. Instant relief overcame the smart left by the ripped tape. He massaged his leg gratefully, tender at the puffy, swollen part. He wound the bandage back into place, much more loosely this time; it slipped and fell away as he tried to reapply the adhesive. Then she was kneeling in front of him, her fingers warm and comforting.

"Is this too tight?"

He shook his head, wondering again at her loving; thankful but still puzzled. *Oh, Victoria—you deserve so much better.*

It was good to sit on the log, not moving, weight off the knee. Once, some hours ago, he'd sat comfortably—perhaps not very comfortably, but the discomfort hadn't been physical—carrying on a philosophic discussion of the medarchy with Dr. Raphael Tree. Before a Surgical-Bactericidal-Custodial Technician tried to kill him. Before Victoria had told him she was carrying a child. Before their plans were revealed as flawed.

"Try it," she said.

He stood up awkwardly, not using the leg till the last moment. The pain came back, but it was much less. "I can make it now."

THE TREES were old and the trunks well-spaced; neither fire nor man had come ravaging through. The down slope was gentle, the heavy leafmold was soft under their feet. The sun came through in little warm puddles edged with broken shade. Insect noises, tuneless bird chirps, rustlings which might have been the sound of cautious squirrels, dispelled the stillness of the air.

At Galentry. In Secarros. Had that been the mistake? Or was the basic mistake farther back? In an underground too loosely knit, too undisciplined, too idealistic in its rejection of violence to function well?

Stuart Yester or another—betrayal was too easy, too immune from retribution.

Too simple. Too facile. Like Mallup or Alex: look at the outside. Blind man and the elephant. The medarchy served a fundamental purpose, responded to a deep need. It was not the doctors who were out of tune with the times, but Cyrus Tarn and the other mallies. Maladjusted. They truly were. Men shrank from freedom, learned a thousand devious tricks to avoid it. Greek democracy was, of course, not. Even that minimum was gladly jettisoned. And the Romans: senatus populusque—first the triumvirates, then Caesar Augustus, god-imperator.

Security. Civilization. Good roads. Caledonia to Parthia. The barbarians were free, so they immediately enslaved themselves to the strongest robbers, the most successful pirates. Liege lord and vassal. John and Magna Charta; Charles I and the chopping block in the window at Whitehall—but then, "You have sat here long enough; in God's name, go!" The Rights of Man, the Goddess of Reason, the Republic One and Indivisible giving way to the First Consul. Father, dear Father. Always. The old Wobbly cry, *We are all leaders,* lost in a sea of incomprehension.

A PROOF OF it was that so very few went even so far as Mallup in defying the medarchy. The Ama's authority rested on more than mere sullen acquiescence. It had active and widespread support. Not freakish groups like the Church of the Caduceus and the Ahas; their counterparts could always be found in the most unpopular dictatorships, fawning and being kicked as a reward. Most people took the press releases of the Authorized Public Enlightenment Service—the Healthfare State was dogged by initial misfortunes; evidently it was above being annoyed by them—as absolute truth. Father knows best, Father will take care of me. Father Cop. Father Censor; Father Doctor. In Doc We Trust. Turn and rend the doubters, the blasphemers, the parricides.

On the other hand, man's spirit was never quelled once

and for all. Revolution might lead to reaction, but reaction bred revolution. It was impossible to look upon tyranny as a permanent condition. Was it the grandeur of their surroundings, the peacefulness of the moment, or the decreased pain in his knee that made Cyrus suddenly confident? A quite uncharacteristic optimism crept warmly over him. "This is wonderful country," he exclaimed. "What a day for a nice, long walk."

"I'm hungry," complained Hank. "You said we could eat when we got out of the car."

"Can you hold out a little while longer?" asked Victoria. "If you eat now you'll get thirsty, and we haven't got a lot of water."

"Heck, why can't I drink out of the creek? That wouldn't use up any of your old water."

"Creek? Where?"

"Over there. I thought you saw it. We've been walking near it for a long time."

A PROVIDENCE takes care of old fools who sprain their knees and children, too impatient to travel in a straight line, who dart this way and that to discover a creek which can only lead to the ocean. *My optimism wasn't just relief, it was foresight based on Hank's powers of divination.*

The thin stream disappeared periodically in gravel, but its course remained always clearly marked. Later they would have to walk in the bed itself; here there was still fairly easy going on the bank. Hank skidded up and down the edge, pausing now and then to balance on a smooth boulder or shy a flat stone into the shallow, ruffling water.

"Better not do that," Cyrus cautioned. "Leaves too good a trail."

"Aw, they're no place behind us."

"I hope you're right," said Victoria. "But we have to go on as though you were wrong."

"MPs and subcutes are so dumb they can't find beans."

"Don't ever believe it, Hank. Don't underrate them. They're trained, careful, shrewd. And they don't give up."

"But they're wrong. That's what counts, isn't it?"

"We think they're wrong," corrected his sister. "They think they're right."

"And we're wrong," added Cyrus. "Not only wrong, treasonable. Until we win. 'Treason doth never prosper; what's the reason? Why, if it prosper, none dare call it treason.' " He smiled wryly to himself; was it all as simple as Sir John Harington's couplet? What about the rewriting and re-rewriting of history?

"Anyway, what about eating?" Hank demanded.

Victoria looked an inquiry at Cyrus, who nodded. "Why not? Have to eat sometime."

SHE OPENED three of the cans from Alex' store, discovered he had provided only two spoons. She gave one to the boy; she and Cyrus shared the other, passing it back and forth between mouthfuls. For some reason, this added to the picnic atmosphere and lightened the tension still further. "How do you feel?" he asked her.

She looked down shyly. "Fine. Yesterday... I don't know what it could have been."

A father. A father for the first time. Fatuous? Ridiculous? Or just a few years overage? Was he glad? Honesty forced him to say, No, not under the circumstances. But if they got away? They *had* to get away...

Hank took his empty can and aimed it carefully. "Don't!" ordered Cyrus.

"Huh?"

"Let's bury them." He thought himself he was being overcautious, but surely that was better than being careless. He collected the three cans and flattened them roughly with a rock. Then he found a place in the creek just a little deeper than the surrounding bed. He sunk them and piled stones on top till they were covered. When the silt stirred up by the operation subsided, they were invisible. "Let's go."

The stream no longer disappeared at intervals, but ran steadily. The ground was changing its character, getting steeper, with outcroppings of rock, and places where the trees—no longer so tall or far apart—had not been able to find a foothold in the loose

soil but gave way to coarse grass and wild flowers.

VICTORIA halted abruptly. "It must be Stuart Yester!"

"Ay? Oh... Yes, it adds up, but what struck you just then?"

"Don't you remember what you told me? That he tried to persuade you to let someone else get Hank out of the hospital?"

"Because he thought it was an unnecessary risk for me to go myself. Anyway, he did help in the end, and I couldn't have made it without him. I'm afraid he may be the finger-man, all right—but if he is I can't quite understand why he let the rescue go through."

"He would have given himself away if he hadn't. And this way they would have got all three of us if everything had worked out."

The thought of Yester quenched the feeling of well-being, and he was again aware of the fiery pain in his knee. "I wish there was a bare hill around here so I could see the ocean. Just for reassurance. This creek might wander around for miles. In fact I have a feeling we're working southwest instead of northwest."

"I can climb a tree," offered Hank.

"Be careful," urged Vicky. "A third bad leg wouldn't be funny."

"Aw, these trees are simple. Just boost me up to the first branches."

Cyrus started to bend down. Vicky said, "Your knee. Let me."

He made a step out of his laced hands. "My knee—your child. Come on, Hank."

"What child?" asked Hank, his foot poised.

"Come on," said Cyrus. "We haven't got all day." The boy's weight multiplied the pain in his knee almost beyond endurance, but he felt a triumph over the weakness of his flesh, and an added triumph in forcing Victoria to care for hers. She was the stronger; he'd never denied it; he'd leaned on her, using her strength. Now he could contribute as much as he drew; the relationship would not be reversed, but equalized. If... The foreboding if...

HANK'S foot hesitated in his hand, left it with a final, kicking push as he drew himself upward. Cyrus sat down, wiping the sweat from his forehead, leaning back to watch the quick progress from branch to branch. "See if you can tell if the creek goes down fairly straight," he called up—"or if it wanders all around."

"Can't see anything yet. Hay, Vicky, your moccasins—or whatever they are—keep slipping down. Darn it. Wait a minute... There's a sort of smoky blue over there. Must be the ocean, I guess. I can't see the creek through the trees. Hay! There's a trail or something."

A trail would be heaven-sent. "Try to remember exactly where it is, so we can find it."

"I can find it all right. It's easy. Say, this would be a great place to have a tree house."

"Come down now," ordered his sister.

"I want to go just a little higher. I might see something important."

"Now!" she insisted.

HE CLIMBED down reluctantly and jumped to the ground. "I just wanted to look a little farther."

"We'll have to try for that trail," said Cyrus. "It may be just a cowpath. Or it may be a better way down."

"I'll show you where it is," cried Hank confidently. "Just you follow me."

"Don't get too far ahead," warned Victoria.

But the boy had already darted off, even before Cyrus reproached himself for resting his knee and allowing it to stiffen again. He did not protest when Victoria preceded him; he was content to bring up the rear.

Silence settled down on them. Then Victoria called, "Henry—what are you doing now?"

Cyrus heard but could not see Hank. "Got to go up again. I lost it. But this is a good tree—don't need a boost."

Cyrus followed to where Victoria had halted beneath a pine with low-hanging branches. "Probably just an excuse to climb again," she said. And then, raising her voice, "Henry!"

He came down rapidly, almost falling, his face frightened. "There's two men in leather jackets on the trail. One of them's got a gun."

HIS FIRST thought, before the chill worm crawled through his belly, that it had been such a fine, peaceful morning. It had been too easy, too natural to hope. Unless you repressed the sentiment constantly and sternly, it bubbled up at every chance.

He had been so complacent; patronizingly approving when Victoria warned Hank not to underrate the enemy. And it had been Cyrus Tarn himself, the old hand, the hardened conspirator, who had acted as if there were nothing before them but a strenuous hike. Searching for an easy way down, blithely failing to look back and discover the relentless pursuit.

How had they gotten so close so quickly? An old-fashioned posse, fanning out in every direction from Secarros would have achieved this result, but so far as he knew the subcutes never recruited lay help. That they had brought in great numbers of their fellows was so unlikely that it could be ruled out: the Ama wanted them, but not so badly that it would be willing to cripple its watchdog. Accident, then? Or had Alex been forced to reveal where he had taken them? What difference did it make? They were defeated.

Defeated, but... "Have to make better time."

Easy to say; he didn't need Victoria's doubtful expression as confirmation. Hank could make better time; the tireless young legs could take him out of sight and back again, silently urging them on, incredulous of their slowness. But Victoria's pace was determined by her ankle, his own by his knee. He tried to increase the length of his stride, felt his leg give way, steadied himself.

They were not a third of the way down, he was sure. Even if he could somehow get Victoria to go on while he gave himself up, there was little possibility she could make it the rest of the way to the airfield before being apprehended. They might as well have waited the inevitable with dignity in Alex' cabin.

THE CREEK bed widened for a short, deceptive stretch, then narrowed to drop in precipitous steps. The rocky outcroppings increased in number, became larger, bolder. The tall trees were fewer, the lower, closer growth sprang up between them. There was only one possible course to take if they were to preserve the illusion of hope. They must leave the creek—if the subcutes followed every trail downward, they would eventually follow every stream also—and strike out as nearly straight north as they could. Literally beat their way...

He winced and shrank as he felt in imagination his feet stumbling on the rough ground, with its never-anticipated obstacles; the clinging branches, the innumerable, shrewd hindrances which would baffle, trip, and ultimately exhaust him. It was more than he could face. Dangerous as the creek was, they would have to follow it.

"Did they have dogs?" he asked Hank.

The boy shook his head. "Didn't see any."

No dogs—yet. That meant they didn't have to walk through the water so long as the going was easier on the bank. Which probably wouldn't be very long. And they would be at an even greater disadvantage, discovered slopping along in the stream. Greater disadvantage?

How did you measure the advantage of a man with a gun over a man who hadn't one. If he had: shoot it out with them. Bang! You're dead. And you, and you. Now we're free; yipee. All the subcutes and MPs are lying in precise rows with arms crossed over their chests. Bugles sound taps as Chris Mallup, hastily summoned, removes his hat. The Personal Physician resigns, after laying a wreath on the tomb inscribed, *Beneath this spot lies a dead subcute, Shot by a mallie doing his dute. "They Thought They Were Right"*. Vocal solo by our own Judy Larch.

"They had to take their chances." Another solo? Fatigue, pain, and fear; bad combination when you were trying to move fast.

AN EXPOSED root caught his toe; Cyrus tripped, and was unable to catch his balance. He fell; a rock punched into his ribs.

"Cyrus!"

"M all right," he mumbled. "Keep going. Just. Lost. My. Wind."

Cyrus, you can't keep it up!"

"Uh? Choice? Like Mallup? No, have to."

Have to; ineluctable. Why? To prove Boyd Carling had been right when they tried to take his children from him? Boyd was dead; had died before they realized he could have married them, whether or not the Ama recognized religious ceremonies. Anyway, no: not give up Victoria. And the unborn. Not unwanted, unlawful, unviable. Unprescribed. When Adam delved and Eve span; where was the medical man? Dr. Tree. No more mutants. Too many victims of irradiation; affects the genes for generations. The Reverend Malthus and all the little neomalthusians, so malthusuastic. Too many people; too little space. A malthusimatical problem in division and subtraction. Take away one from one; answer, one. The world is saved; who weeps for a foetus?

The stream turned sharply to widen and level out. Another peaceful, meadowlike landscape, framed by the woods all around. Woods from which might break at any second, men with guns leveled. Come with us. Be my guest. Try a drop of this. Oh, not on your palate. In your veins.

Another turn, and the water funnelled into a natural flume, chewing its way roughly between suddenly narrowed, jagged banks on which there was no foothold. Hank looked back inquiringly at him. He waved his hand. "In the creek; there's no place else."

THE BOY ran ahead, kicking his way through the water with great slurps. How long would the thin soles of the homemade moccasins stand up against usage like that? Worry about the minor and put the major out of your mind. He felt the cold wet soak around his ankles and into his boots with an unpleasant shock. Without noticing it,

he must have cut the leather through on the rocks.

Victoria, steadying herself against the bank, took off her shoes, tying the laces together to hang them around her neck. The push of the current against his heels and the clammy, squelching chill of the stream was harsh and dismal. He could ease his discomfort by removing the increasingly absurd riding boots. In dogged, disdainful misery he refused the final indignity of standing on one foot to tug at the watersoaked, reluctant leather.

If he only had some way of knowing how close they were. Perhaps the trail and creek were miles apart at this point? Ought he to get Hank to climb a tree once more? It would lose time. And what good would it do? Whether they saw their pursuers or not they would have to keep going exactly as they were. "Only faster," he muttered aloud.

"What?"

"Nothing," he said shortly, saving breath.

"Can't you rest a little?"

He shook his head. He was not morally strong enough to rest; once down, he wouldn't be able to force himself on again. Ashamed, he plodded on.

"Cyrus, I'm afraid we'll have to slow down. I can't keep this pace up."

SHE WAS covering for him; Cyrus Tarn knew she could keep up any pace necessary, but she was trying to favor his knee. Did that mean she, too, thought the flight was hopeless now? If Victoria had given up... The big plane would locate the field (instrument flying? dropping flares? or was there some other way of finding the place without help—beacons, radio, landing lights automatically activated by a timeclock—from the ground?), circle and come down. What then? Ambushing subcutes coming forward, not too swiftly, but implacably nevertheless; surrounding, menacing, triumphant. All lost because the three of them had given up, because they recognized the inevitable.

Surrendered. Separated. Interrogated. (This manuscript that was in your possession, Miss Carling. Your father's?

Mmm. Mmm. An interesting case. Subject to hallucinations, wasn't he? Believed he had—mmm—divine sanction for an antisocial attitude? You feel I'm mistating his position? Sorry, sorry. Let's say he had a pathological rejection of all authority... And so on and on inexorably; ever cool, ever kindly, never revealing—quite possibly never having—anything but a patient wish to assist, to cure, to bring contentment.) Made ready to be quieted down and fitted into a society greater than the sum of its parts.

Perversely, he felt a new surge of determination. "We've got to make time."

Time. Time was a mystic conception. Time was a sailing ship with a bone in her teeth. Ship—ocean. *Smoky,* Hank had said. Ought to be fairly close. Mare Pacificum. The Great South Sea. Stout Cortez. Poets can afford mistakes; other mallies can't. Not get too close. Highway. "Can you see it yet?"

"See what?"

"Highway." He knew she couldn't; the question had been purely compulsive.

"Nothing around here but us rocks," said Hank.

"But the ground's leveling off, isn't it?" asked Victoria.

HIS DIZZINESS left him again, and Cyrus looked around. The character of the landscape had changed once more; the open spaces were growing bigger, and there were stands of yellowed grass, dotted with weeds still green. Cattle country—or would be, a very little further down. They dared not follow the creek further; they would not only be exposed, but imprisoned within it. "Listen," he heard himself saying; "we'll head north. Watch the sun. Stay close to cover."

He scrabbled at the edge of the bank. It was an easy climb; Hank and Victoria were already out; she was drying her feet on the grass and getting ready to put on her shoes. He rested his elbow on the top, tried first to put his good knee up while bearing his weight on the hurt one. Then he reversed the process. It was absurd and humiliating to be defeated by a palisade of

crumbling earth not more than four feet high. He felt the tears of shame and weakness, and then her hand caught his, giving him the hold he needed.

"Sorry..." What could be more inadequate?

Immediately they ran into heavy brush. He tried to shoulder his way through, to break into another clearing, but the obstinate resistance wore him out, turned him back. "We're still too high," he muttered. "Try lower down."

He knew they were wasting time now, covering far more ground than they needed to, going yards to advance feet. He lapsed into a barely conscious state. He felt his way around a bush, his feet seeking firm footing between the unstable rocks. "Bad place—careful." The warning came out begat by the situation, not his vocal cords. Left, right; one, two. The rhythm failed to come out right because of his leg. Left, right; one, one-and-a-half...

Victoria said, "Just a second. Something in my shoe."

HE SLUMPED down, listening, willing his ears to greater keenness, straining to catch... What? An advertisement of the pursuers' presence? All he heard was the tap as she shook out her shoe. What did he expect? For the first time he thought of the hunters in direct, personal terms. Not faceless representatives of the Ama but men, keenly relishing the job of chasing them through their endless flight. He understood the despairing joy of standing at last, of turning to fight, no matter how hopeless the struggle would be.

"I'm r e a d y," whispered Victoria.

He got up heavily, relinquishing the fantasy of crashing a handy rock on a subcute's skull. He took the lead again; what seemed to be a clear way between two bushes ended in a dense wall. He backed out, searched again. These detours not only took invaluable time and energy, they made him uncertain of direction. The sun was no help now; it was too high. He was no longer sure they were heading north. Circling around

barriers a few more times would get them lost completely; even now they might be going straight toward the subcutes.

His eyes stung with the chaff and grit torn loose from the brush by their passage. He knew about this plateau only in the most general way. At this point it might slope gently all the way to the ocean, or it might take giant steps, dropping fifty or a hundred feet at a time.

"Come on," he urged, aware how often he had said it, and how it lost more and more force at each repetition. *Come on*—the exhortation was superfluous, the vocal badge of an equally superfluous leadership. They would go on just as well without him or his command— But then he realized it was himself who needed the prodding. *Cyrus to Cyrus: come on; if you hesitate, you've given up.*

HE DIDN'T see the ford at first; when he finally noticed that the banks on either side were broken down to the level of the water he failed to recognize it for what it was. It was only when Victoria pointed, whispering. "That must be the trail," that he looked closely.

"No, it's a road. An old one. I don't think it's been used for years." It was deeply leached where the ruts must have run at some time; and there were large holes where the ground had given way beneath pools of water. He could see no signs of tracks, but that didn't mean they weren't there, or in the heavy grass alongside. Pursuers might even now be watching them from behind rocks or brush.

"Bet it leads to an old mine," said Hank. "We could hide in it, and if the cutes come we can go down in the tunnel. There might be another way out and we could leave them behind. Or a landslide might happen behind us."

Follow the road? Not to Hank's harboring mine, but in all probability to some long abandoned shack. They would be exposed—out in the open—but they could not stay with the creek much longer. And at least they would be going

north. He turned helplessly to Victoria. "I'm not sure..."

"I think we'd better take it," she said decisively, and led the way.

He felt a guilty relief, rid—at least for the moment—of the burden of responsibility. For all its dilapidated state, the going was not so arduous, though his knee now felt like a mass of sensitive jelly stuck through with steel slivers. He should never have loosened Alex' bandage...

"Hey, wait," exclaimed Hank, "this hooks on to another road."

"There's something looks like fresh tire-marks," added Victoria. "Cyrus, what do we do?"

WEARILY, he walked forward. The new road angled into the old, absorbed it. It was in much better condition, and clearly used quite recently. What did they do now? It was too late to ask; what could they do but keep on? The subcutes might have ignored the disused way; they were bound to explore this one; the fresh danger seemed to clear his head. "If they come, separate," he ordered.

He did not look at her to note if, even now, she would refuse. He walked on, again taking the lead. Had the car that made the tracks been going toward the highway or away from it? There was no way of telling since the road was running parallel. Perhaps it didn't join the highway at all. But that was impossible...

"Let's walk quietly as possible."

It was not any noise they made which betrayed them, but an unexpected curve bordered by equally unexpected trees. Rounding it, they came within a few feet of a dead tree, stripped of its bark and twigs by the weather, fallen to block the road. Just beyond it was the nose of a station-wagon. He motioned quickly with his hand, and began back-tracking softly, but it was too late.

A woman got out swiftly, a rifle in her hands.

"Hey, don't shoot," exclaimed Hank. "We're not doing anything."

She rested the riflestock under her arm, her finger still

on the trigger, the muzzle unwaveringly pointed. With her free hand she tucked a lock of wiry black hair under her tight scarf. "I'm sure you're not. Please come a little closer."

HER AIR of authority made the gun almost superfluous. She was tall as Cyrus, in her late thirties or very early forties, dressed in a bright plaid shirt and faded denim levis. Her rude vigor and imperious tone seemed almost as shocking as the leveled gun.

"I'm sorry if we're trespassing," apologized Cyrus.

"Are you? I'm not sure I am."

"We were just out for a walk," said Victoria.

"Really? The gentleman has rather a bad limp for that."

"I stumbled back there. I'll see a doctor as soon as we get to town."

Her smile showed very white teeth, just faintly too large, set off by her high complexion. "How lucky for you. I'm a doctor. Dr. Tavistock."

"I wouldn't think of bothering you, Doctor."

"No trouble at all. I'll help you—you'll help me. I'm sure the three of you can lift that tree out of the way."

"We'll be glad to help," offered Victoria. "You needn't keep that pointed at us, though."

"I suppose I needn't. It just makes me feel more comfortable. Just call it an eccentricity."

Cyrus looked the tree over. Using the butt end as a pivot, it ought not be too difficult to swing it around. Seizing hold of a likely place, he motioned Hank to take another, shook his head at Victoria.

"Don't be silly," she said, "I'm not brittle. All right, Doctor—we're ready."

"Go ahead then."

"Aren't you going to help?"

"I'm afraid not. Please hurry."

CYRUS OPENED his mouth to argue; then shut it. He tried to remember what little he had ever known about women miscarrying. Nothing at all. He heaved, feeling it in his knee. The tree moved upward, twisted painfully. The jagged edge of a

broken bough dug into the ground. And then it was pivoting almost as he had planned, around, and enough out of the way to permit the car to pass. He looked anxiously at Victoria: she was smiling slightly and seemed none the worse for the exertion.

"There you are," he said with false cheeriness. "Now we'll be on our way."

"No. Please get in the car, all of you."

"Now, see here..." began Cyrus.

The pleasant expression disappeared briefly, then returned. "This is a lonely road, and it's on my property. Believe me, I'm quite capable of using this rifle. Let's not have any bother—just do as I tell you and get in the car."

"Do you always greet strangers like this?" asked Victoria.

"When I think they may be useful. Particularly if they happen to be three notorious mallies whose description I've just heard on the car radio."

"How do you like that?" murmured Hank. "'Notorious'!"

"Be quiet, Hank. Doctor, there must be some mistake."

"There often is. Let's you and I get cozily in the back seat. The young woman can drive, and the boy sit beside her. That way I can shoot either one if need be. Oh, by the way: it's not my intention to turn you over to the orderlies —if you do as I say."

"I can't drive," protested Victoria.

"Really? Then I'm afraid you're going to learn awfully fast. Get in and follow instructions."

SHE WAITED until Victoria was behind the wheel, then she motioned Cyrus in, taking her own place with the gun on Hank, who got in last of all. "Start the motor. If you actually don't know how to drive..."

"I'll drive."

"Good. Back up. There's a wide space where you can turn around close by."

"But you were going out," said Hank.

"I was. I met you. Now I don't need to. Clear?"

Victoria started the motor. The car moved uneasily in reverse.

"And not too fast. It would

be too bad if you tried to jolt the rifle out of my hands, and it went off and shot your brother. It is your brother, isn't it, Miss Mmmmmm...? I never can remember names on a broadcast."

Victoria drove slowly. The beating of Cyrus' heart slowed, then speeded up again. Naturally she had thrown off the remark about the orderlies in order not to make them desperate. Should he make a quick lunge and try to wrench the gun away? Dr. Tavistock looked efficient, capable. He might or might not get the gun from her; she would almost certainly be able to shoot Hank first. What had his blundering done to them? Now they would not only be turned over to the subcutes, but by a doctor who might well take a personal interest in their adjustment.

"Say, you've got a lot of room around here," commented Hank. Bravado, wondered Cyrus, or sheer unbelief that Dr. Tavistock would carry out her threat?

"Ten or twenty thousand acres, I forget which," she said carelessly. "My husband gave it to me instead of alimony."

Tavistock, Tavistock? Land instead of alimony? Of course! This was the "Grace" Mallup had referred to, the ex-wife of Dr. Tree. And Tree had spoken of her as one of the group who wanted to euthanize all mallies.

THE TREES alongside the road grew taller, further-spaced, deeper-shadowed. "Now you can turn," said Dr. Tavistock.

As Victoria maneuvered the stationwagon, he watched feverishly to see if the woman would relax her vigilance for a moment—it would be so easy. But no opportunity developed; the car was turned around, and the road began to wind steeply upward. A break in the trees showed the ocean, blue and far off. Then, without warning, they were in front of the house.

It was surprisingly large and urbane—there was a suggestion, almost a satirical suggestion, of H. H. Richardson in its lines—for so remote a spot. Hank started to open the door and then looked back

questioningly. The woman nodded; he and Victoria got out. Dr. Tavistock took a key from her pocket and threw it toward Victoria. "Open the front door."

Victoria stooped. *How graceful she is,* marveled Cyrus; *graceful with a grace learned of necessity, to compensate.* How unbelievable—how impossible—to think that they would cut or manipulate, shock or drug part of his mind; that he would forget her, or remember only in a hazy, apathetic way.

The picture of Victoria seen through a witless fog, a woman on whom he would look with indifference, without that edge of desire just short of pain, was unbearable. He closed his eyes to shut it out; the vision of a strange creature with a faint limp was on his retina. He dug his fingernails into his palms. No! He would fight. Kill. Kill this insolent woman; she could not hold her rifle on them indefinitely. Kill her...

THERE WAS the predictable large living room with exposed rafters and wide-mouthed stone fireplace. Without consultation Cyrus, Victoria, Hank moved apart. "No!" said the woman sharply. "In there."

She motioned them through a door, into a space too dim to make out details. Should he jump her now, he asked himself as he stood sidewise, waiting for the next command, measuring the distance, tensing his muscles. *Shall I throw myself on her suddenly,* hoping...

The moment was lost when she pressed the switch. He saw bare, pastel-tinted walls, austere and windowless. There were cabinets of shining stainless steel, some glassfronted, showing an array of instruments within, others bluntly uncommunicative of their contents. Overhead were batteries of fluorescent lights. There were no chairs, only an operating table; behind it, short and tall cylinders, and a tubular coil ending in a mask.

"Everything for a quiet weekend in the country." Cyrus' eyes searched for something—anything—to use as a weapon. So sterile, utilitarian; nothing lying around loosely.

If her attention flagged or was somehow distracted he might get something out of one of the cases. Providing he were fast and she slow... "And so delightfully private," he added, with a wild notion of provoking her, distracting her into letting down her guard.

VICTORIA picked it up instantly. "In a Patient," she wanted to know, "wouldn't it be diagnosed as neurotic? Isolated, antisocial, a compulsive desire for secrecy? To cover guilt...?"

Dr. Tavistock smiled. "In a Patient," she agreed. "Suppose we drop formalities now, and get down to business? What were you planning when I found you?"

"Planning? I told you we were just out for a walk."

"Don't irritate me. What's your name—it's short and easy to remember—hmm... hmmm ... Lake ... Pool...? No. Well, it doesn't matter. You were hiding out at Rafe's. *Rafe's!*" Her laughter sputtered for a moment, then her face became set. "All right. If you want to be three innocent hikers, I don't care. Three hikers without charts. I could shoot you, or I could turn you over to the subcutes, or I could..."

She paused. "You could what?" asked Hank.

"I could help you."

It was Victoria's turn to laugh. "Why?"

The woman gave her a contemptuous look and turned back to Cyrus. "Quid pro quo," she said. "I have something I want done. Do it, and I'll..."

Hank broke in. "I hear a car."

"What?"

He nodded his head. "Sure. Coming up the hill."

This is the moment, thought Cyrus; *right now.* He bent his knees slightly, ignoring the hot twinge of pain, preparing to leap. The sprained one buckled; he had to grab the edge of the operating table to prevent himself sprawling forward.

THE WOMAN'S voice was hoarse with tension. "Listen. I'll shoot the boy if you don't do what I say."

"Murder's still a crime—they're coming."

"Too late to save him. You!" she motioned to Victoria. "Open that closet. Get out two smocks, caps, masks. Put one set on. Now you," she said to Cyrus. "If these are subcutes, I'll turn you over unless you do as I say. Take off your shirt and get on that table."

"Why should I?"

"Because you hope to get away. I'll help you—if you obey. If you don't, I'll shoot the boy first and turn you both in. Quickly, now."

If his knee hadn't given way at the critical moment...but it had. Try again? When she put down the rifle, as she must? Could he hope to shoot his way out? And then there was the faint hope she really might help them...

He lifted himself onto the table, stripped off his shirt. Dr. Tavistock snatched it from him, opened another closet, tossed it in. "Crawl in here," she ordered Hank. "Don't make a sound."

Without waiting to see if he obeyed, she leaned the rifle in a corner, slipped into the smock and cap, adjusted the mask over her mouth and nostrils. Cyrus heard footsteps in the big room. Was he being unbelievably foolish in trusting—no, not trusting—in putting them all at her mercy? But...

She came briskly to the table. He tried to read the expression in her eyes, but they conveyed nothing to him above the forbidding mask. She threw a sheet over the lower part of his body. "Relax. Pretend you're under the influence of cyclopane. Close your eyes. You'll have to put yourself completely in my hands, no matter what I seem to be doing. If you show consciousness, it will be all up with the three of you."

THERE WAS a rap on the door. Not loud, but very assured.

"No," she cried sharply. "No one can come in here now!"

Cyrus Tarn willed himself to lie still, hunching his shoulders into place, putting his ankles gingerly together, forcing his hands to lie limp against his hips under the sheet. "Hold this over his face," she directed Victoria. "It's turned off," she whispered.

Again the knock. There was

impatience in it now. "Authorized medical business. You'll have to let us in."

Cyrus felt the gauzy weight on his face. A strong overhead light beat against his closed eyelids. He heard a gasp which he knew came from Victoria, then something made a long sting down his chest. He felt metal nick and pinch his flesh together on either side. *She has cut me with a scalpel—no, an electronic knife—but very superficially, and then applied surgical clamps. Why? It doesn't make sense.*

Her voice was as steady as her hand. "Authorized or not, you can't come in here. I'm a licensed physician and surgeon, and I have a patient undergoing operation."

"Sorry, Doctor. If you don't open this door, we'll have to break it in."

He heard her pull open and close some drawers, and there was the soft sound of a rubber-tired dolley moving across the floor. "You will indeed be sorry, whoever you are. Open the door, Miss."

This would be hardest of all; not only to stay rigid when they came in, but to lie there with Victoria under their searching eyes. He heard footsteps, faint upon the linoleum floor.

"I'm sorry to disturb..."

"Then don't. Get out."

"...disturb you, Doctor, but three dangerous mallies are loose arund here."

HE FELT her fingers through the thin rubber gloves on the clamps, pair by pair. "Find them, then. You have my permission to search the grounds. The house, too, if you think they might have been foolish enough to sneak in. But get out of this room or I won't answer for the consequences. My patient is a critical cardiac case. If this intrusion causes complications, the responsibility will be yours and I'll see that you accept it."

"We'll accept it, Doctor. I notice you are using an old, an obsolete technique. And you have only one nurse. No anaethetist, no standby physician."

"Observant, aren't you? Subcute?"

"Surgical-Bactericidal-Custodial Technician. And you

haven't answered my implied questions."

Cyrus felt the exquisite stab of a needle drawn through his flesh. "Implied questions receive implied answers. I'm busy."

"The surgery you've been performing is nearly finished?"

"No surgery is finished till the patient is discharged." The needle worked relentlessly. He was sure his chest must be rising agonizedly with each stitch. Even the most skilled surgeon can be balked by interruptions and annoyances. You are free to look for your mallies anywhere on my property. What else do you want?"

"May I have the name of your patient?"

"Certainly not."

THE SUBCUTE'S voice took on a note of reproof. "Doctor, you're not very cooperative. We technicians are essential to the Healthfare state. It is the duty of every qualified medical man to assist, not hinder us."

"A little more cyclopane, Nurse. Watch his pulse."

"May I have the name of your patient, Doctor?"

"What for?"

"The man on the table may be one of those we're searching for."

"What? You stupid oaf! You think this patient, whose pleural cavity I opened less than an hour ago, just jumped on the table in time to be sewn up?"

She's overdoing it, thought Cyrus. I *should have...*

"Doctor, we have no proof you opened his pleural cavity an hour ago. Incidentally, his chest doesn't seem to have been recently shaved. And your stationwagon—I assume it's yours since it has your name on the white slip—is still warm."

"Why shouldn't it be? It was hot—boiling—when my nurse drove it up. As for the pleural cavity, look in this basin. What do you see?"

"Shreds of tissue, blood, and some sort of fluid. What does that prove?"

"What do you expect to see when someone dives into a man's insides? Gizzards and a craw?"

THERE WAS a strained silence. Was she wearing

them down, overawing them?

"You still haven't answered my questions or told me your patient's name."

"I don't think you're entitled to know. If you think you are, why don't you take me in for observation? And my nurse for good measure? Watch that pulse, Nurse."

"Yes, Doctor." Victoria's voice: calm, dutiful. Her fingers on his wrist: faith, love.

"Look, Dr. Tavistock, I'm just trying to do my job. It's an important job, especially important to the doctors who speak and think sneeringly of us as subcutes—we get under their skins. But every doctor knows, or ought to, that our function is to take some of the burden of responsibility off his shoulders. Most Technicians at one time dreamed of being doctors ouselves—I made it to the second year of medical school. No one has deeper respect for the profession. I would not have been accepted as a Technician in the first place if I hadn't had it. I'd be separated immediately if I lost it."

The man's voice took on a tone of gentle dignity. "I'm hurt by your implication that I could suspect an accredited physician of unethical conduct. If you can imagine a 'subcute' being hurt. At the moment, we are after a dangerous psychopath—Cyrus Tarn, alias Silas Tennick, alias Simon Thompson, alias a dozen other names. He needs treatment desperately, as does his woman companion. And the child he kidnapped from a hospital when he was about to undergo some very important tests. They were last seen near your property. It's my duty—my duty to you, Doctor, among other people—to account for everyone in this vicinity. Your patient must be checked as well as everyone else."

The needle went in and out and stopped. "My patient will not be out of the anaesthetic for some time; he cannot be questioned for at least twenty-four hours."

"Very well, Doctor. One of us will be here to interview him then. Meanwhile. I'd like to see his chart."

"I can't stop you. It's there."

"Thank— What! Oh... Now I understand the absence of additional witnesses. You

have a terrible responsiblity."

"You aren't making it any less by keeping me from giving full attention to my patient."

"But why weren't Technicians called in as guards? Where are his regular orderlies?"

"Secrecy. A policy decision which concerns neither you nor me. That's why his identity must not be known."

"I'll report it only to my chief."

CYRUS COULD no longer control his trembling. He heard the retreating steps; the cone was lifted from his face. Victoria was taking off her cap and mask; Dr. Tavistock had already removed hers. "The door is self-locking. But he's undoubtedly waiting close to it."

"What now?"

"A short conference is indicated."

"Can't I let Hank out first?"

The woman gave Victoria a contemptuous nod. "Very well." To Cyrus she said brusquely, "Lie back."

"What for?"

"Do you want to go around with those unnecessary stitches? Hold still now. There. Just a minute. All right." She wiped off the blood with a swab. "A little alum and you'll be as good as new—even the scratch is hardly visible. While you're here I might as well look at that leg. Here, pull off that boot."

HE OPENED his mouth to protest, but Victoria was already working the riding boot down. Dr. Tavistock took hold of his trouserleg; his knee was so swollen the cloth would barely go over it. "Hmm. Hurt when I press here? Here?"

"Ouch," exclaimed Cyrus. "Yes. It's a sprain."

"How do you know?"

"A doctor looked at it," said Victoria.

"Nonsense. A doctor would have bound it."

"He did," said Cyrus. "Too tightly. I had to take it off."

"Some mallie quack. Don't call him doctor."

"But he's..." Victoria stopped in mid-sentence.

She was more deft, more assured in her actions than Alex had been. "Tarn. I knew I had it on the tip of my tongue.

Have you a chart to go with that name?"

"Of course."

"But you aren't carrying 'it on your person at all times' as medical regulations prescribe. I suppose the Surgical, Bactericidal rigamaroles have it. You're putting them to a lot of trouble—they won't forget it."

"Why don't they leave us alone, then?" asked Hank.

She finished the bandaging. "There. Try out that leg now."

He let himself off the table. Except for a slight twinge, the pain was miraculously gone. The tape was firm, but nowhere near as tight as Alex had made it. He was able to flex his leg and still feel the comforting support of the bandage. "Thanks."

SHE LIT a cigaret. "I won't even put a bill through for it. The Credit Bureau will want seven dollars less that you wouldn't have paid, anyway. What do the subcutes want you three for, anyway?"

"For our own good—you heard the man. We're dangerous to ourselves and the profession. We must be observed, diagnosed, treated."

"You object? You didn't object when I fixed your knee. Why should you object..."

"To having my mind fixed? Bound tightly so I can feel no pain?"

"Not bound. Healed. However, that's your business."

"That's not what the Ama thinks."

"The Ama has been taken over by sentimental snufflers. You may have gathered that I'm not in complete symptahy with its present policies. I agree with you mallies that a man with part of his brain stultified isn't worth keeping alive."

"That's not a mallie contention," said Victoria sharply. "Far from it. That's the sort of thing the Mercifuls believe."

"Mallie, Merciful." She was indifferent. "Psychopaths are psychopaths, whether you diagnose them as maladjusted individuals or megalomaniacs. The Ama has coddled them too long and too much. Those who object to treatment ought to be eliminated before they pass on their weak genes or infect others by suggestion."

"Then the only difference between you and the Mercifuls

is one of motive," Victoria said. "They think they're being kind by murdering those they put out of their misery. You want to murder anyone differing from an arbitrary norm as the easiest way of preserving it."

DR. TAVISTOCK answered Cyrus, as though it were he who had spoken. "Euthanasia isn't murder. Any physician can administer lethal matter at his discretion. I would merely make it mandatory to thanatize uncooperative mallies instead of optional."

"I wonder why you didn't give me a fatal injection while I was on the table."

"Because there's something I want done, as I told you. You can do it for us."

" 'Us'?"

"A slip of the tongue. Me."

"And if I do whatever you want, you can dispose of me afterward."

"I said I'd help you in return, and I'll keep my part of the bargain. If you do what I want, you'll be provided with a new chart with any name and case history you choose."

"That 'you' was singular?"

"Oh, if you want charts for them I can arrange it. Every man to his taste."

He glanced at Victoria. "Thanks."

"I can also put my hands on several thousand dollars."

"Money's not a problem at the moment. There's another way you could be useful to us."

HER NOSTRILS flared disdainfully. "What is it?"

"Let's hear what you have in mind, first," Cyrus said.

"I want a man killed."

Victoria snapped, "We're not murderers."

"I was talking to Tarn."

"I'm not a killer," Cyrus replied.

"You can learn. It's not hard."

Yes, I suppose, you could, especially if you thought of it as thanalizing or eliminating.

"And if I don't want to learn? You can't very well call in the subcutes and say you made a slight mistake—it was me on the table, after all."

"Don't play with me, Tarn. I've been easy on you so far. Just believe me—I have resources."

How many refusals would convince her he was sincere when he finally gave in? The idea of overpowering her was out; if they got away, their chance lay in her help. "What's the name of the man you want killed?"

"Do you want them to hear it?" She nodded toward Victoria and Hank.

"Why not?"

"Whitelands."

"Horace Whitelands? Of the *Medical Journal?"*

"Also Assistant to Dudley Higginson. Yes."

Cyrus' look crossed Victoria's. Did Hank know about Whitelands? Not likely. "Well," he said, "at least you're not asking me to go after Higginson himself."

"No—that wouldn't be necessary. That subcute was anxious to know the name of the patient you impersonated. I terminated the Personal Physician on this operating table, yesterday afternoon."

(to be continued)

The struggle for power among the rulers of the medarchy has begun, as the extreme fanatics take their first step. What will this mean to the underground? In particular, what will it mean to Cyrus, Victoria, and Hank—who are forced to trust Dr. Tavistock—for the moment, at least. You cannot afford to miss the next suspenseful installment of "Caduceus Wild", which appears in our March *Science Fiction Stories*—on sale early in January. Reserve your copy today at your newsstand—or, better still, take advantage of our money-saving subscription offer.

A. Vignette

The Last Unicorns

by Edward D. Hoch

THE RAIN was still falling by the time he reached the little wooden shack that stood in the center of the green, fertile valley. He opened his cloak for an instant to knock at the door, not really expecting a reply.

But it opened, pulled over the roughness of the rock floor by great hairy hands. "Come in," a voice commanded him. "Hurry! Before this rain floods me out."

"Thank you," the traveler said, removing the soggy garment that had covered him and squeezing out some of the water. "It's good to find a dry place. I've come a long way."

"Not many people are about in this weather," the man told him, pulling at his beard with a quick, nervous gesture.

"I came looking for you."

"For me? What is your name?"

"You can call me Shem. I come from beyond the mountains."

The bearded man grunted. "I don't know the name. What do you seek?"

Shem sat down to rest himself on a pale stone seat. "I hear talk that you have two fine unicorns here, recently brought from Africa."

The man smiled proudly. "That is correct. The only such creatures in this part of the world. I intend to breed them and sell them to the

farmers as beasts of burden."

"Oh?"

"They can do the work of strong horses and at the same time use their horn to defend themselves against attack."

"True," Shem agreed. "Very true. I... I don't suppose you'd want to part with them...?"

"Part with them! Are you mad, man? It cost me money to bring them all the way from Africa!"

"How much would you take for them?"

The bearded man rose from his seat. "No amount, ever! Come back in two years when I've bred some. Until then, begone with you!"

"I *must* have them, sir."

"You *must* have nothing! Begone from here now before I take a club to you!" And with those words he took a menacing step forward.

SHEM RETREATED out the door, back into the rain, skipping lightly over a rushing stream of water from the higher ground. The door closed on him, and he was alone. But he looked out into the fields, where a small, barn-like structure stood glistening in the downpour.

They would be in there, he knew.

He made his way across the field, sometimes sinking to his ankles in puddles of muddy water. But finally he reached the outbuilding and went in through a worn, rotten door.

Yes, they were there... Two tall and handsome beasts, very much like horses, but with longer tails and with that gleaming, twisted horn shooting straight up from the center of their foreheads. Unicorns—one of the rarest of God's creatures!

HE MOVED a bit closer, trying now to lure them out of the building without startling them. But there was a noise, and he turned suddenly to see the bearded man standing there, a long staff upraised in his hands.

"You try to steal them," he shouted, lunging forward.

The staff thudded against the wall, inches from Shem's head. "Listen, old man..."

"Die! Die, you robber!"

But Shem leaped to one side, around the bearded figure

of wrath, and through the open doorway. Behind him, the unicorns gave a fearful snort and trampled the earthen floor with their hoofs.

Shem kept running, away from the shack, away from the man with the staff, away from the fertile valley.

After several hours of plodding over the rain-swept hills, he came at last upon his father's village, and he went down among the houses to the place where the handful of people had gathered.

And he saw his father standing near the base of the great wooden vessel, and he went up to him sadly.

"Yes, my son?" the old man questioned, unrolling a long damp scroll of parchment.

"No unicorns, father."

"No unicorns," Noah repeated sadly, scratching out the name on his list. "It is too bad. They were handsome beasts..."

(Yours, of course, Gentle Reader)

The Reckoning

TWO STORIES brought forth extreme reaction this time. As the point scores show, Ted Thomas' novelet was very well received and only one voter rated it lower than third place—he just didn't like it, with considerable enthusiasm in the dislike. The other tale is, of course, the Scortia short story which was roundly condemned by some and greatly praised by others. Those in favor seemed to feel that the author did a good job of solving the problem raised in Arthur C. Clarke's now-famous short story, "The Star", which appeared some years back, in another magazine. Those opposed didn't like anything about the story at all. My own opinion is that the author combined two themes rather ingeniously.

The cover seems to have been approved about 2 to 1, which means that one third of the voters didn't like it. We're still trying to find the optimum—an approach to covers which will sell the magazines to non science fictionists without alienating the faithful. (Just what all the editors are trying to do, of course!)

One reader wonders why a magazine dated "September" goes on sale in July. That is a very complicated problem, having to do with distribution and newsstand display, rather than editorial decisions. I can't give

[*Turn To Page* 127]

either a full or accurate answer to this question, but will merely state that, for a couple of decades, it has been customary in the trade to predate magazines. The date you see on the cover of these magazines indicates the time when the issue goes off sale. (In other words, unsold copies—sob!—should be returned by the date on the cover.)

The stories came out this way:

1. The Destroyers (Thomas) 1.64
2. Star Ways (Hensley) 2.80
3. The Outcasts (G. H. Smith) 2.96
4. The Avengers (Scortia) tied with Fourth Factor (Aldiss) 3.08

And it was a close race for second place all the way. Every story received at least one "A" and one "X" rating.

FRANSON TO MACKLIN

Dear Mr. Lowndes;

The articles on scientific errors in science fiction stories are very instructive, but I wonder why Macklin keeps picking on stories of 1930 vintage? This is like getting into a time machine and going back to beat up Floyd Patterson when he was a little boy, and then boasting that you beat the champ.

After all, writers of the thirties didn't know much about space travel (and how many people did, in the thirties?) but at least they tried to explain the problems and come up with solutions they invented themselves, being without the wealth of space travel literature we have today.

Anyone now reading an interplanetary story of that many years ago does so with respect and perhaps an amused tolerance. But before we feel too superior to the dimwitted pioneers of the Hawk Carse era, look in the May, 1958, issue of this magazine, right after Dr. Macklin's article.

There is a space story, otherwise authentic-sounding, that contains, on page 74, the popular boner that it would take about ten hours to go to the moon after attaining escape velocity—25,000 miles per hour—since the moon's dis-

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tance is about ten times that amount.

But as Willy Ley keeps repeating (fruitlessly)—and as even Jules Verne knew in 1865—the time is closer to 100 hours. A rocket doesn't keep up escape velocity all the way to the moon, as it is coasting and gravity slows it down. True, more powerful ships could go to the moon in less time, but the story is laid in 1959 and the moon missile is a modified ICBM.

Accurate science in science fiction is called for, especially today, when authors have many references to consult. Yet we shouldn't criticize natural mistakes unmercifully, because then we should scare authors back to writing "people-fiction", with no science whatsoever. We had an era of this, we are getting away from it, and I hope we do not go back to it. By "people-fiction" I mean stories where the advice "people are more important than science in science fiction" has been taken too literally.

But it would be valuable to have criticism of science in re-

cent science fiction magazines (books seem to be well taken care of by damon knight, et al), so that current authors could profit thereby. A criticism of a magazine story does not hurt an author, anyway—except for his honor—because by the time the criticism comes out, the story is in a back number.

Donald Franson, 6543 Babcock Avenue, North Hollywood, Calif.

Dr. Macklin is something of an iconoclast. There has long been a legend that, back in the "golden days" of the 20s and early 30s in science fiction magazines, science fiction was *really scientific*—sound extrapolations on valid scientific data, by authors who knew their science. Dr. Macklin has shown that this legend is more of a myth than anything else; a great many of the "ideas" brought forth in those days were utter nonsense *on the basis of general scientific knowledge available at the time.* (Macklin has never censured an author whose story was reasonable when written, but silly in the light of scientific discovery since, even if he's had occasion to

[*Turn Page*]

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state the fact. For example, he shows why Edmond Hamilton cannot be blamed for the impossibility of the space station in the story Macklin mentions in "Satellites in Fact & Fiction"; the information available to him was faulty.)

Many of the howlers are just curiosities these days—but a lot of nonsense has been sanctified, as it were, by tradition. So many authors have used a device or gimmick, etc., that it is taken for granted as part of science fiction's stock in trade. Now a good many of such things derive from those old issues, which are assumed to be reliable because "back in those days, science fiction was really scientific".

So far, Macklin has been exploring general fields of science fiction ideas and devices —such as "invisibility", "size", "gravity", etc. Of course there are current errors—and I blush to acknowledge that you found one right in the same issue with Macklin's article. No excuse for it. However, the Macklin series is covering more general grounds; we expect discerning and knowledgeable readers, such as your goodself, to beat us over the head when we make a slip, allowing an author to get an error in.

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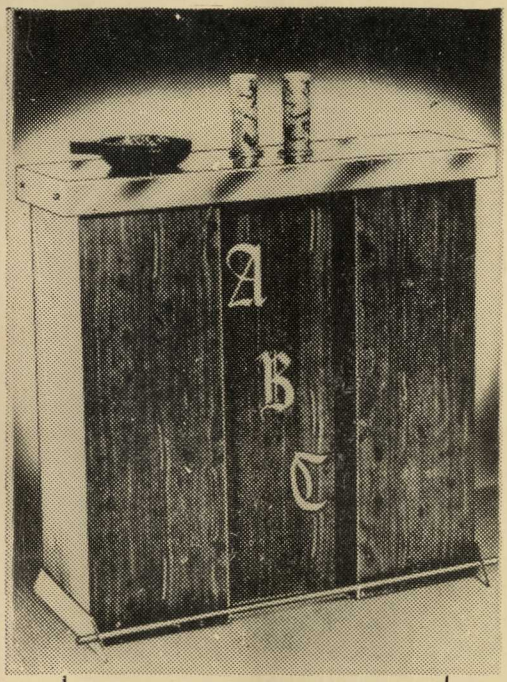

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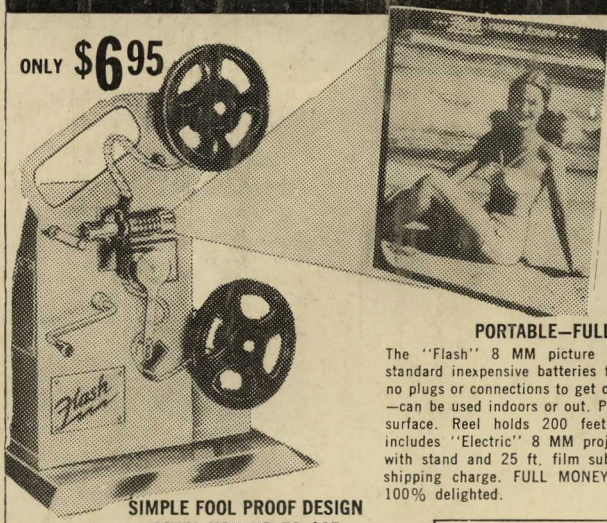

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