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**SHORT STORIES**

**C. M. Kornbluth**

# SHORT STORIES

C. M. KORNBLUTH

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# The Marching Morons

**In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man, of course, is king. But how about a live wire, a smart businessman, in a civilization of 100% pure chumps?**

Some things had not changed. A potter's wheel was still a potter's wheel and clay was still clay. Efim Hawkins had built his shop near Goose Lake, which had a narrow band of good fat clay and a narrow beach of white sand. He fired three bottle-nosed kilns with willow charcoal from the wood lot. The wood lot was also useful for long walks while the kilns were cooling; if he let himself stay within sight of them, he would open them prematurely, impatient to see how some new shape or glaze had come through the fire, and—*ping!*—the new shape or glaze would be good for nothing but the shard pile back of his slip tanks.

A business conference was in full swing in his shop, a modest cube of brick, tile-roofed, as the Chicago-Los Angeles "rocket" thundered overhead—very noisy, very swept-back, very fiery jets, shaped as sleekly swift-looking as an airborne barracuda.

The buyer from Marshall Fields was turning over a black-glazed one liter carafe, nodding approval with his massive, handsome head. "This is real pretty," he told Hawkins and his own secretary, Gomez-Laplace. "This has got lots of what ya call real est'etic principles. Yeah, it is real pretty."

"How much?" the secretary asked the potter.

"Seven-fifty each in dozen lots," said Hawkins. "I ran up fifteen dozen last month."

"They are real est'etic," repeated the buyer from Fields. "I will take them all."

"I don't think we can do that, doctor," said the secretary. "They'd cost us \$1,350. That would leave only \$532 in our quarter's budget. And we still have to run down to East Liverpool to pick up some cheap dinner sets."

"Dinner sets?" asked the buyer, his big face full of wonder.

"Dinner sets. The department's been out of them for two months now. Mr. Garvy-Seabright got pretty nasty about it yesterday. Remember?"

"Garvy-Seabright, that meat-headed bluenose," the buyer said contemptuously. "He don't know nothin' about est'etics. Why for don't he lemme run my own department?" His eye fell on a stray copy of *Whambozambo Comix* and he sat down with it. An occasional deep chuckle or grunt of surprise escaped him as he turned the pages.

Uninterrupted, the potter and the buyer's secretary quickly closed a deal for two dozen of the liter carafes. "I wish we could take more," said the secretary, "but you heard what I told him. We've had to turn away customers for ordinary dinnerware because he shot the last quarter's budget on some Mexican piggy banks some equally enthusiastic importer stuck him with. The fifth floor is packed solid with them."

"I'll bet they look mighty est'etic."

"They're painted with purple cacti."

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The potter shuddered and caressed the glaze of the sample carafe.

The buyer looked up and rumbled, “Ain’t you dummies through yakkin’ yet? What good’s a seckertary for if’n he don’t take the burden of *de-tail* off’n my back, harh?”

“We’re all through, doctor. Are you ready to go?”

The buyer grunted peevishly, dropped *Whambozambo Comix* on the floor and led the way out of the building and down the log corduroy road to the highway. His car was waiting on the concrete. It was, like all contemporary cars, too low-slung to get over the logs. He climbed down into the car and started the motor with a tremendous sparkle and roar.

“Gomez-Laplace,” called out the potter under cover of the noise, “did anything come of the radiation program they were working on the last time I was on duty at the Pole?”

“The same old fallacy,” said the secretary gloomily. “It stopped us on mutation, it stopped us on culling, it stopped us on segregation, and now it’s stopped us on hypnosis.”

“Well, I’m scheduled back to the grind in nine days. Time for another firing right now. I’ve got a new luster to try....”

“I’ll miss you. I shall be ‘vacationing’—running the drafting room of the New Century Engineering Corporation in Denver. They’re going to put up a two hundred-story office building, and naturally somebody’s got to be on hand.”

“Naturally,” said Hawkins with a sour smile.

There was an ear-piercingly sweet blast as the buyer leaned on the horn button. Also, a yard-tall jet of what looked like flame spurted up from the car’s radiator cap; the car’s power plant was a gas turbine, and had no radiator.

“I’m coming, doctor,” said the secretary dispiritedly. He climbed down into the car and it whooshed off with much flame and noise.

The potter, depressed, wandered back up the corduroy road and contemplated his cooling kilns. The rustling wind in the boughs was obscuring the creak and mutter of the shrinking refractory brick. Hawkins wondered about the number two kiln—a reduction fire on a load of lusterware mugs. Had the clay chinking excluded the air? Had it been a properly smoky blaze? Would it do any harm if he just took one close—  
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Common sense took Hawkins by the scruff of the neck and yanked him over to the tool shed. He got out his pick and resolutely set off on a prospecting jaunt to a hummocky field that might yield some oxides. He was especially low on coppers.

The long walk left him sweating hard, with his lust for a peek into the kiln quiet in his breast. He swung his pick almost at random into one of the hummocks; it clanged on a stone which he excavated. A largely obliterated inscription said:

**UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
LOGICAL LABORATORY  
BELOVED MEMORY OF  
KILLED IN ACT**

The potter swore mildly. He had hoped the field would turn out to be a cemetery, preferably a once-fashionable cemetery full of once-massive bronze caskets moldered into oxides of tin and copper.

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Well, hell, maybe there was some around anyway.

He headed lackadaisically for the second largest hillock and sliced into it with his pick. There was a stone to undercut and topple into a trench, and then the potter was very glad he'd stuck at it. His nostrils were filled with the bitter smell and the dirt was tinged with the exciting blue of copper salts. The pick went *clang!*

Hawkins, puffing, pried up a stainless steel plate that was quite badly stained and was also marked with incised letters. It seemed to have pulled loose from rotting bronze; there were rivets on the back that brought up flakes of green patina. The potter wiped off the surface dirt with his sleeve, turned it to catch the sunlight obliquely and read:

**“HONEST JOHN BARLOW**

“Honest John,” famed in university annals, represents a challenge which medical science has not yet answered: revival of a human being accidentally thrown into a state of suspended animation.

In 1988 Mr. Barlow, a leading Evanston real estate dealer, visited his dentist for treatment of an impacted wisdom tooth. His dentist requested and received permission to use the experimental anesthetic Cycloparadimethanol-B-7, developed at the University.

After administration of the anesthetic, the dentist resorted to his drill. By freakish mischance, a short circuit in his machine delivered 220 volts of 60-cycle current into the patient. (In a damage suit instituted by Mrs. Barlow against the dentist, the University and the makers of the drill, a jury found for the defendants.) Mr. Barlow never got up from the dentist's chair and was assumed to have died of poisoning, electrocution or both.

Morticians preparing him for embalming discovered, however, that their subject was—though certainly not living—just as certainly not dead. The University was notified and a series of exhaustive tests was begun, including attempts to duplicate the trance state on volunteers. After a bad run of seven cases which ended fatally, the attempts were abandoned.

Honest John was long an exhibit at the University museum, and livened many a football game as mascot of the University's Blue Crushers. The bounds of taste were overstepped, however, when a pledge to Sigma Delta Chi was ordered in '03 to “kidnap” Honest John from his loosely guarded glass museum case and introduce him into the Rachel Swanson Memorial Girls' Gymnasium shower room.

On May 22nd, 2003, the University Board of Regents issued the following order: “By unanimous vote, it is directed that the remains of Honest John Barlow be removed from the University museum and conveyed to the University's Lieutenant James Scott III Memorial Biological Laboratories and there be securely locked in a specially prepared vault. It is further directed that all possible measures for the preservation of these remains be taken by the Laboratory administration and that access to these remains be denied to all persons except qualified scholars authorized in writing by the Board. The Board reluctantly takes this action in view of recent notices and

photographs in the nation's press which, to say the least, reflect but small credit upon the University.”

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It was far from his field, but Hawkins understood what had happened—an early and accidental blundering onto the bare bones of the Levantman shock anesthesia, which had since been replaced by other methods. To bring subjects out of Levantman shock, you let them have a squirt of simple saline in the trigeminal nerve. Interesting. And now about that bronze—

He heaved the pick into the rotting green salts, expecting no resistance and almost fractured his wrist. *Something* down there was *solid*. He began to flake off the oxides.

A half hour of work brought him down to phosphor bronze, a huge casting of the almost incorruptible metal. It had weakened structurally over the centuries; he could fit the point of his pick under a corroded boss and pry off great creaking and grumbling striae of the stuff.

Hawkins wished he had an archeologist with him, but didn't dream of returning to his shop and calling one to take over the find. He was an all-around man: by choice and in his free time, an artist in clay and glaze; by necessity, an automotive, electronics and atomic engineer who could also swing a project in traffic control, individual and group psychology, architecture or tool design. He didn't yell for a specialist every time something out of his line came up; there were so few with so much to do....

He trenched around his find, discovering that it was a great brick-shaped bronze mass with an excitingly hollow sound. A long strip of moldering metal from one of the long vertical faces pulled away, exposing red rust that went *whoosh* and was sucked into the interior of the mass.

It had been de-aired, thought Hawkins, and there must have been an inner jacket of glass which had crystalized through the centuries and quietly crumbled at the first clang of his pick. He didn't know what a vacuum would do to a subject of Levantman shock, but he had hopes, nor did he quite understand what a real estate dealer was, but it might have something to do with pottery. And *anything* might have a bearing on Topic Number One.

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He flung his pick out of the trench, climbed out and set off at a dog-trot for his shop. A little rummaging turned up a hypo and there was a plastic container of salt in the kitchen.

Back at his dig, he chipped for another half hour to expose the juncture of lid and body. The hinges were hopeless; he smashed them off.

Hawkins extended the telescopic handle of the pick for the best leverage, fitted its point into a deep pit, set its built-in fulcrum, and heaved. Five more heaves and he could see, inside the vault, what looked like a dusty marble statue. Ten more and he could see that it was the naked body of Honest John Barlow, Evanston real estate dealer, uncorrupted by time.

The potter found the apex of the trigeminal nerve with his needle's point and gave him 60 cc.

In an hour Barlow's chest began to pump.

In another hour, he rasped, “Did it work?”

“*Did it!*” muttered Hawkins.

Barlow opened his eyes and stirred, looked down, turned his hands before his eyes—“I’ll sue!” he screamed. “My clothes! My fingernails!” A horrid suspicion came over his face and he clapped his hands to his hairless scalp. “My hair!” he wailed. “I’ll sue you for every penny you’ve got! That release won’t mean a damned thing in court—I didn’t sign away my hair and clothes and fingernails!”

“They’ll grow back,” said Hawkins casually. “Also your epidermis. Those parts of you weren’t alive, you know, so they weren’t preserved like the rest of you. I’m afraid the clothes are gone, though.”

“What is this—the University hospital?” demanded Barlow. “I want a phone. No, you phone. Tell my wife I’m all right and tell Sam Immerman—he’s my lawyer—to get over here right away. Greenleaf 7-4022. Ow!” He had tried to sit up, and a portion of his pink skin rubbed against the inner surface of the casket, which was powdered by the ancient crystalized glass. “What the hell did you guys do, boil me alive? Oh, you’re going to pay for this!”

“You’re all right,” said Hawkins, wishing now he had a reference book to clear up several obscure terms. “Your epidermis will start growing immediately. You’re not in the hospital. Look here.”

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He handed Barlow the stainless steel plate that had labeled the casket. After a suspicious glance, the man started to read. Finishing, he laid the plate carefully on the edge of the vault and was silent for a spell.

“Poor Verna,” he said at last. “It doesn’t say whether she was stuck with the court costs. Do you happen to know—”

“No,” said the potter. “All I know is what was on the plate, and how to revive you. The dentist accidentally gave you a dose of what we call Levantman shock anesthesia. We haven’t used it for centuries; it was powerful, but too dangerous.”

“Centuries ...” brooded the man. “Centuries ... I’ll bet Sam swindled her out of her eyeteeth. Poor Verna. How long ago was it? What year is this?”

Hawkins shrugged. “We call it 7-B-936. That’s no help to you. It takes a long time for these metals to oxidize.”

“Like that movie,” Barlow muttered. “Who would have thought it? Poor Verna!” He blubbered and sniffled, reminding Hawkins powerfully of the fact that he had been found under a flat rock.

Almost angrily, the potter demanded, “How many children did you have?”

“None yet,” sniffed Barlow. “My first wife didn’t want them. But Verna wants one—wanted one—but we’re going to wait until—we *were* going to wait until—”

“Of course,” said the potter, feeling a savage desire to tell him off, blast him to hell and gone for his work. But he choked it down. There was The Problem to think of; there was always The Problem to think of, and this poor blubberer might unexpectedly supply a clue. Hawkins would have to pass him on.

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“Come along,” Hawkins said. “My time is short.”

Barlow looked up, outraged. “How can you be so unfeeling? I’m a human being like—”

The Los Angeles-Chicago “rocket” thundered overhead and Barlow broke off in mid-complaint. “Beautiful!” he breathed, following it with his eyes. “Beautiful!”

He climbed out of the vault, too interested to be pained by its roughness against his infantile skin. “After all,” he said briskly, “this should have its sunny side. I never was much for reading, but this is just like one of those stories. And I ought to make some money out of it, shouldn’t I?” He gave Hawkins a shrewd glance.

“You want money?” asked the potter. “Here.” He handed over a fistful of change and bills. “You’d better put my shoes on. It’ll be about a quarter-mile. Oh, and you’re—uh, modest?—yes, that was the word. Here.” Hawkins gave him his pants, but Barlow was excitedly counting the money.

“Eighty-five, eighty-six—and it’s dollars, too! I thought it’d be credits or whatever they call them. ‘E Pluribus Unum’ and ‘Liberty’—just different faces. Say, is there a catch to this? Are these real, genuine, honest twenty-two-cent dollars like we had or just wallpaper?”

“They’re quite all right, I assure you,” said the potter. “I wish you’d come along. I’m in a hurry.”

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The man babbled as they stumped toward the shop. “Where are we going—The Council of Scientists, the World Coordinator or something like that?”

“Who? Oh, no. We call them ‘President’ and ‘Congress.’ No, that wouldn’t do any good at all. I’m just taking you to see some people.”

“I ought to make plenty out of this. *Plenty!* I could write books. Get some smart young fellow to put it into words for me and I’ll bet I could turn out a best-seller. What’s the setup on things like that?”

“It’s about like that. Smart young fellows. But there aren’t any best-sellers any more. People don’t read much nowadays. We’ll find something equally profitable for you to do.”

Back in the shop, Hawkins gave Barlow a suit of clothes, deposited him in the waiting room and called Central in Chicago. “Take him away,” he pleaded. “I have time for one more firing and he blathers and blathers. I haven’t told him anything. Perhaps we should just turn him loose and let him find his own level, but there’s a chance—”

“The Problem,” agreed Central. “Yes, there’s a chance.”

The potter delighted Barlow by making him a cup of coffee with a cube that not only dissolved in cold water but heated the water to boiling point. Killing time, Hawkins chatted about the “rocket” Barlow had admired, and had to haul himself up short; he had almost told the real estate man what its top speed really was—almost, indeed, revealed that it was not a rocket.

He regretted, too, that he had so casually handed Barlow a couple of hundred dollars. The man seemed obsessed with fear that they were worthless since Hawkins refused to take a note or I.O.U. or even a definite promise of repayment. But Hawkins couldn’t go into details, and was very glad when a stranger arrived from Central.

“Tinny-Peete, from Algeciras,” the stranger told him swiftly as the two of them met at the door. “Psychist for Poprob. Polasigned special overtake Barlow.”

“Thank Heaven,” said Hawkins. “Barlow,” he told the man from the past, “this is Tinny-Peete. He’s going to take care of you and help you make lots of money.”

The psychist stayed for a cup of the coffee whose preparation had delighted Barlow, and then conducted the real estate man down the corduroy road to his car, leaving the potter to speculate on whether he could at last crack his kilns.

Hawkins, abruptly dismissing Barlow and the Problem, happily picked the chinking from around the door of the number two kiln, prying it open a trifle. A blast of heat and the heady, smoky scent of the reduction fire delighted him. He peered and saw a corner of a shelf glowing cherry-red, becoming obscured by wavering black areas as it lost heat through the opened door. He slipped a charred wood paddle under a mug on the shelf and pulled it out as a sample, the hairs on the back of his hand curling and scorching. The mug crackled and pinged and Hawkins sighed happily.

The bismuth resinate luster had fired to perfection, a haunting film of silvery-black metal with strange bluish lights in it as it turned before the eyes, and the Problem of Population seemed very far away to Hawkins then.

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Barlow and Tinny-Peete arrived at the concrete highway where the psychist’s car was parked in a safety bay.

“What—a—boat!” gasped the man from the past.

“Boat? No, that’s my car.”

Barlow surveyed it with awe. Swept-back lines, deep-drawn compound curves, kilograms of chrome. He ran his hands futilely over the door—or was it the door?—in a futile search for a handle, and asked respectfully, “How fast does it go?”

The psychist gave him a keen look and said slowly, “Two hundred and fifty. You can tell by the speedometer.”

“Wow! My old Chevy could hit a hundred on a straightaway, but you’re out of my class, mister!”

Tinny-Peete somehow got a huge, low door open and Barlow descended three steps into immense cushions, floundering over to the right. He was too fascinated to pay serious attention to his flayed dermis. The dashboard was a lovely wilderness of dials, plugs, indicators, lights, scales and switches.

The psychist climbed down into the driver’s seat and did something with his feet. The motor started like lighting a blowtorch as big as a silo. Wallowing around in the cushions, Barlow saw through a rear-view mirror a tremendous exhaust filled with brilliant white sparkles.

“Do you like it?” yelled the psychist.

“It’s terrific!” Barlow yelled back. “It’s—”

He was shut up as the car pulled out from the bay into the road with a great *voo-ooo-oom!* A gale roared past Barlow’s head, though the windows seemed to be closed; the impression of speed was terrific. He located the speedometer on the dashboard and saw it climb past 90, 100, 150, 200.

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“Fast enough for me,” yelled the psychiatrist, noting that Barlow’s face fell in response. “Radio?”

He passed over a surprisingly light object like a football helmet, with no trailing wires, and pointed to a row of buttons. Barlow put on the helmet, glad to have the roar of air stilled, and pushed a pushbutton. It lit up satisfyingly and Barlow settled back even farther for a sample of the brave new world’s super-modern taste in ingenious entertainment.

“TAKE IT AND STICK IT!” a voice roared in his ears.

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He snatched off the helmet and gave the psychiatrist an injured look. Tinny-Peete grinned and turned a dial associated with the pushbutton layout. The man from the past donned the helmet again and found the voice had lowered to normal.

“The show of shows! The super-show! The super-duper show! The quiz of quizzes! *Take it and stick it!*”

There were shrieks of laughter in the background.

“Here we got the contes-tants all ready to go. You know how we work it. I hand a contes-tant a triangle-shaped cut-out and like that down the line. Now we got these here boards, they got cut-out places the same shape as the triangles and things, only they’re all different shapes, and the first contes-tant that sticks the cutouts into the board, he wins.

“Now I’m gonna innaview the first contes-tant. Right here, honey. What’s your name?”

“Name? Uh—”

“Hoddaya like that, folks? She don’t remember her name! Hah? *Would you buy that for a quarter?*” The question was spoken with arch significance, and the audience shrieked, howled and whistled its appreciation.

It was dull listening when you didn’t know the punch lines and catch lines. Barlow pushed another button, with his free hand ready at the volume control.

“—latest from Washington. It’s about Senator Hull-Mendoza. He is still attacking the Bureau of Fisheries. The North California Syndicalist says he got affidavits that John Kingsley-Schultz is a bluenose from way back. He didn’t publistat the affydavits, but he says they say that Kingsley-Schultz was saw at bluenose meetings in Oregon State College and later at Florida University. Kingsley-Schultz says he gotta confess he did major in fly-casting at Oregon and got his Ph.D. in game-fish at Florida.

“And here is a quote from Kingsley-Schultz: ‘Hull-Mendoza don’t know what he’s talking about. He should drop dead.’ Unquote. Hull-Mendoza says he won’t publistat the affydavits to perfect his sources. He says they was sworn by three former employes of the Bureau which was fired for in-com-petence and in-com-pat-ibility by Kingsley-Schultz.

“Elsewhere they was the usual run of traffic accidents. A three-way pileup of cars on Route 66 going outta Chicago took twelve lives. The Chicago-Los Angeles morning rocket crashed and exploded in the Mo-have—Mo-javy—what-ever-you-call-it Desert. All the 94 people aboard got killed. A Civil Aeronautics Authority investigator

on the scene says that the pilot was buzzing herds of sheep and didn't pull out in time.

"Hey! Here's a hot one from New York! A Diesel tug run wild in the harbor while the crew was below and shoved in the port bow of the luck-shury liner *S. S. Placentia*. It says the ship filled and sank taking the lives of an es-ti-mated 180 passengers and 50 crew members. Six divers was sent down to study the wreckage, but they died, too, when their suits turned out to be fulla little holes.

"And here is a bulletin I just got from Denver. It seems—"

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Barlow took off the headset uncomprehendingly. "He seemed so callous," he yelled at the driver. "I was listening to a newscast—"

Tinny-Peete shook his head and pointed at his ears. The roar of air was deafening. Barlow frowned baffledly and stared out of the window.

A glowing sign said:

**MOOGS!  
WOULD YOU BUY IT  
FOR A QUARTER?**

He didn't know what Moogs was or were; the illustration showed an incredibly proportioned girl, 99.9 per cent naked, writhing passionately in animated full color.

The roadside jingle was still with him, but with a new feature. Radar or something spotted the car and alerted the lines of the jingle. Each in turn sped along a roadside track, even with the car, so it could be read before the next line was alerted.

**IF THERE'S A GIRL  
YOU WANT TO GET  
DEFLOCCULIZE  
UNROMANTIC SWEAT.  
"A\*R\*M\*P\*I\*T\*T\*O"**

Another animated job, in two panels, the familiar "Before and After." The first said, "Just Any Cigar?" and was illustrated with a two-person domestic tragedy of a wife holding her nose while her coarse and red-faced husband puffed a slimy-looking rope. The second panel glowed, "Or a VUELTA ABAJO?" and was illustrated with—

Barlow blushed and looked at his feet until they had passed the sign.

"Coming into Chicago!" bawled Tinny-Peete.

Other cars were showing up, all of them dreamboats.

Watching them, Barlow began to wonder if he knew what a kilometer was, exactly. They seemed to be traveling so slowly, if you ignored the roaring air past your ears and didn't let the speedy lines of the dreamboats fool you. He would have sworn they were really crawling along at twenty-five, with occasional spurts up to thirty. How much was a kilometer, anyway?

The city loomed ahead, and it was just what it ought to be: towering skyscrapers, overhead ramps, landing platforms for helicopters—

He clutched at the cushions. Those two 'copters. They were going to—they were going to—they—

He didn't see what happened because their apparent collision courses took them behind a giant building.

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Screamingly sweet blasts of sound surrounded them as they stopped for a red light. "What the hell is going on here?" said Barlow in a shrill, frightened voice, because the braking time was just about zero, he wasn't hurled against the dashboard. "Who's kidding who?"

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded the driver.

The light changed to green and he started the pickup. Barlow stiffened as he realized that the rush of air past his ears began just a brief, unreal split-second before the car was actually moving. He grabbed for the door handle on his side.

The city grew on them slowly: scattered buildings, denser buildings, taller buildings, and a red light ahead. The car rolled to a stop in zero braking time, the rush of air cut off an instant after it stopped, and Barlow was out of the car and running frenziedly down a sidewalk one instant after that.

*They'll track me down, he thought, panting. It's a secret police thing. They'll get you—mind-reading machines, television eyes everywhere, afraid you'll tell their slaves about freedom and stuff. They don't let anybody cross them, like that story I once read.*

Winded, he slowed to a walk and congratulated himself that he had guts enough not to turn around. That was what they always watched for. Walking, he was just another business-suited back among hundreds. He would be safe, he would be safe—

A hand tumbled from a large, coarse, handsome face thrust close to his: "Wassamatta bumpinninna people likeya owna sidewalk gotta miner slamya inna mushya bassar!" It was neither the mad potter nor the mad driver.

"Excuse me," said Barlow. "What did you say?"

"Oh, yeah?" yelled the stranger dangerously, and waited for an answer.

Barlow, with the feeling that he had somehow been suckered into the short end of an intricate land-title deal, heard himself reply belligerently, "Yeah!"

The stranger let go of his shoulder and snarled, "Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah!" said Barlow, yanking his jacket back into shape.

"Aaah!" snarled the stranger, with more contempt and disgust than ferocity. He added an obscenity current in Barlow's time, a standard but physiologically impossible directive, and strutted off hulking his shoulders and balling his fists.

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Barlow walked on, trembling. Evidently he had handled it well enough. He stopped at a red light while the long, low dreamboats roared before him and pedestrians in the sidewalk flow with him threaded their ways through the stream of cars. Brakes screamed, fenders clanged and dented, hoarse cries flew back and forth between drivers and walkers. He leaped backward frantically as one car swerved over an arc of sidewalk to miss another.

The signal changed to green, the cars kept on coming for about thirty seconds and then dwindled to an occasional light-runner. Barlow crossed warily and leaned against a vending machine, blowing big breaths.

*Look natural, he told himself. Do something normal. Buy something from the machine.*

He fumbled out some change, got a newspaper for a dime, a handkerchief for a quarter and a candy bar for another quarter.

The faint chocolate smell made him ravenous suddenly. He clawed at the glassy wrapper printed “CRIGGLIES” quite futilely for a few seconds, and then it divided neatly by itself. The bar made three good bites, and he bought two more and gobbled them down.

Thirsty, he drew a carbonated orange drink in another one of the glassy wrappers from the machine for another dime. When he fumbled with it, it divided neatly and spilled all over his knees. Barlow decided he had been there long enough and walked on.

The shop windows were—shop windows. People still wore and bought clothes, still smoked and bought tobacco, still ate and bought food. And they still went to the movies, he saw with pleased surprise as he passed and then returned to a glittering place whose sign said it was THE BIJOU.

The place seemed to be showing a quintuple feature, *Babies Are Terrible*, *Don't Have Children*, and *The Canali Kid*.

It was irresistible; he paid a dollar and went in.

He caught the tail-end of *The Canali Kid* in three-dimensional, full-color, full-scent production. It appeared to be an interplanetary saga winding up with a chase scene and a reconciliation between estranged hero and heroine. *Babies Are Terrible* and *Don't Have Children* were fantastic arguments against parenthood—the grotesquely exaggerated dangers of painfully graphic childbirth, vicious children, old parents beaten and starved by their sadistic offspring. The audience, Barlow astoundedly noted, was placidly champing sweets and showing no particular signs of revulsion.

The *Coming Attractions* drove him into the lobby. The fanfares were shattering, the blazing colors blinding, and the added scents stomach-heaving.

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When his eyes again became accustomed to the moderate lighting of the lobby, he groped his way to a bench and opened the newspaper he had bought. It turned out to be *The Racing Sheet*, which afflicted him with a crushing sense of loss. The familiar boxed index in the lower left hand corner of the front page showed almost unbearably that Churchill Downs and Empire City were still in business—

Blinking back tears, he turned to the Past Performances at Churchill. They weren't using abbreviations any more, and the pages because of that were single-column instead of double. But it was all the same—or was it?

He squinted at the first race, a three-quarter-mile maiden claimer for thirteen hundred dollars. Incredibly, the track record was two minutes, ten and three-fifths seconds. Any beetle in his time could have knocked off the three-quarter in one-fifteen. It was the same for the other distances, much worse for route events.

*What the hell had happened to everything?*

He studied the form of a five-year-old brown mare in the second and couldn't make head or tail of it. She'd won and lost and placed and showed and lost and placed without rhyme or reason. She looked like a front-runner for a couple of races and then she looked like a no-good pig and then she looked like a mudder but the next time it rained she wasn't and then she was a stayer and then she was a pig again. In a good five-thousand-dollar allowances event, too!

Barlow looked at the other entries and it slowly dawned on him that they were all like the five-year-old brown mare. Not a single damned horse running had the slightest trace of class.

Somebody sat down beside him and said, "That's the story."

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Barlow whirled to his feet and saw it was Tinny-Peete, his driver.

"I was in doubts about telling you," said the psychiatrist, "but I see you have some growing suspicions of the truth. Please don't get excited. It's all right, I tell you."

"So you've got me," said Barlow.

"Got you?"

"Don't pretend. I can put two and two together. You're the secret police. You and the rest of the aristocrats live in luxury on the sweat of these oppressed slaves. You're afraid of me because you have to keep them ignorant."

There was a bellow of bright laughter from the psychiatrist that got them blank looks from other patrons of the lobby. The laughter didn't sound at all sinister.

"Let's get out of here," said Tinny-Peete, still chuckling. "You couldn't possibly have it more wrong." He engaged Barlow's arm and led him to the street. "The actual truth is that the millions of workers live in luxury on the sweat of the handful of aristocrats. I shall probably die before my time of overwork unless—" He gave Barlow a speculative look. "You may be able to help us."

"I know that gag," sneered Barlow. "I made money in my time and to make money you have to get people on your side. Go ahead and shoot me if you want, but you're not going to make a fool out of me."

"You nasty little ingrate!" snapped the psychiatrist, with a kaleidoscopic change of mood. "This damned mess is all your fault and the fault of people like you! Now come along and no more of your nonsense."

He yanked Barlow into an office building lobby and an elevator that, disconcertingly, went *whoosh* loudly as it rose. The real estate man's knees were wobbly as the psychiatrist pushed him from the elevator, down a corridor and into an office.

A hawk-faced man rose from a plain chair as the door closed behind them. After an angry look at Barlow, he asked the psychiatrist, "Was I called from the Pole to inspect this—this—?"

"Unget updandered. I've dee-probed etfind quasichance exhim Poprobattackline," said the psychiatrist soothingly.

"Doubt," grunted the hawk-faced man.

"Try," suggested Tinny-Peete.

“Very well. Mr. Barlow, I understand you and your lamented had no children.”

“What of it?”

“This of it. You were a blind, selfish stupid ass to tolerate economic and social conditions which penalized child-bearing by the prudent and foresighted. You made us what we are today, and I want you to know that we are far from satisfied. Damn-fool rockets! Damn-fool automobiles! Damn-fool cities with overhead ramps!”

“As far as I can see,” said Barlow, “you’re running down the best features of time. Are you crazy?”

“The rockets aren’t rockets. They’re turbo-jets—good turbo-jets, but the fancy shell around them makes for a bad drag. The automobiles have a top speed of one hundred kilometers per hour—a kilometer is, if I recall my paleolinguistics, three-fifths of a mile—and the speedometers are all rigged accordingly so the drivers will think they’re going two hundred and fifty. The cities are ridiculous, expensive, unsanitary, wasteful conglomerations of people who’d be better off and more productive if they were spread over the countryside.

“We need the rockets and trick speedometers and cities because, while you and your kind were being prudent and foresighted and not having children, the migrant workers, slum dwellers and tenant farmers were shiftlessly and short-sightedly having children—breeding, breeding. My God, how they bred!”

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“Wait a minute,” objected Barlow. “There were lots of people in our crowd who had two or three children.”

“The attrition of accidents, illness, wars and such took care of that. Your intelligence was bred out. It is gone. Children that should have been born never were. The just-average, they’ll-get-along majority took over the population. The average IQ now is 45.”

“But that’s far in the future—”

“So are you,” grunted the hawk-faced man sourly.

“But who are *you* people?”

“Just people—real people. Some generations ago, the geneticists realized at last that nobody was going to pay any attention to what they said, so they abandoned words for deeds. Specifically, they formed and recruited for a closed corporation intended to maintain and improve the breed. We are their descendants, about three million of us. There are five billion of the others, so we are their slaves.

“During the past couple of years I’ve designed a skyscraper, kept Billings Memorial Hospital here in Chicago running, headed off war with Mexico and directed traffic at LaGuardia Field in New York.”

“I don’t understand! Why don’t you let them go to hell in their own way?”

The man grimaced. “We tried it once for three months. We holed up at the South Pole and waited. They didn’t notice it. Some drafting-room people were missing, some chief nurses didn’t show up, minor government people on the non-policy level couldn’t be located. It didn’t seem to matter.

“In a week there was hunger. In two weeks there were famine and plague, in three weeks war and anarchy. We called off the experiment; it took us most of the next generation to get things squared away again.”

“But why *didn't* you let them kill each other off?”

“Five billion corpses mean about five hundred million tons of rotting flesh.”

Barlow had another idea. “Why don't you sterilize them?”

“Two and one-half billion operations is a lot of operations. Because they breed continuously, the job would never be done.”

“I see. Like the marching Chinese!”

“Who the devil are they?”

“It was a—uh—paradox of my time. Somebody figured out that if all the Chinese in the world were to line up four abreast, I think it was, and start marching past a given point, they'd never stop because of the babies that would be born and grow up before they passed the point.”

“That's right. Only instead of ‘a given point,’ make it ‘the largest conceivable number of operating rooms that we could build and staff.’ There could never be enough.”

“Say!” said Barlow. “Those movies about babies—was that your propaganda?”

“It was. It doesn't seem to mean a thing to them. We have abandoned the idea of attempting propaganda contrary to a biological drive.”

“So if you work *with* a biological drive—?”

“I know of none which is consistent with inhibition of fertility.”

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Barlow's face went poker-blank, the result of years of careful discipline. “You don't, huh? You're the great brains and you can't think of any?”

“Why, no,” said the psychiatrist innocently. “Can you?”

“That depends. I sold ten thousand acres of Siberian tundra—through a dummy firm, of course—after the partition of Russia. The buyers thought they were getting improved building lots on the outskirts of Kiev. I'd say that was a lot tougher than this job.”

“How so?” asked the hawk-faced man.

“Those were normal, suspicious customers and these are morons, born suckers. You just figure out a con they'll fall for; they won't know enough to do any smart checking.”

The psychiatrist and the hawk-faced man had also had training; they kept themselves from looking with sudden hope at each other.

“You seem to have something in mind,” said the psychiatrist.

Barlow's poker face went blanker still. “Maybe I have. I haven't heard any offer yet.”

“There's the satisfaction of knowing that you've prevented Earth's resources from being so plundered,” the hawk-faced man pointed out, “that the race will soon become extinct.”

“I don't know that,” Barlow said bluntly. “All I have is your word.”

“If you really have a method, I don’t think any price would be too great,” the psychiatrist offered.

“Money,” said Barlow.

“All you want.”

“More than you want,” the hawk-faced man corrected.

“Prestige,” added Barlow. “Plenty of publicity. My picture and my name in the papers and over TV every day, statues to me, parks and cities and streets and other things named after me. A whole chapter in the history books.”

The psychiatrist made a facial sign to the hawk-faced man that meant, “Oh, brother!”

The hawk-faced man signaled back, “Steady, boy!”

“It’s not too much to ask,” the psychiatrist agreed.

Barlow, sensing a seller’s market, said, “Power!”

“Power?” the hawk-faced man repeated puzzledly. “Your own hydro station or nuclear pile?”

“I mean a world dictatorship with me as dictator!”

“Well, now—” said the psychiatrist, but the hawk-faced man interrupted, “It would take a special emergency act of Congress but the situation warrants it. I think that can be guaranteed.”

“Could you give us some indication of your plan?” the psychiatrist asked.

“Ever hear of lemmings?”

“No.”

“They are—were, I guess, since you haven’t heard of them—little animals in Norway, and every few years they’d swarm to the coast and swim out to sea until they drowned. I figure on putting some lemming urge into the population.”

“How?”

“I’ll save that till I get the right signatures on the deal.”

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The hawk-faced man said, “I’d like to work with you on it, Barlow. My name’s Ryan-Ngana.” He put out his hand.

Barlow looked closely at the hand, then at the man’s face. “Ryan what?”

“Ngana.”

“That sounds like an African name.”

“It is. My mother’s father was a Watusi.”

Barlow didn’t take the hand. “I thought you looked pretty dark. I don’t want to hurt your feelings, but I don’t think I’d be at my best working with you. There must be somebody else just as well qualified, I’m sure.”

The psychiatrist made a facial sign to Ryan-Ngana that meant, “Steady *yourself*, boy!”

“Very well,” Ryan-Ngana told Barlow. “We’ll see what arrangement can be made.”

“It’s not that I’m prejudiced, you understand. Some of my best friends—”

“Mr. Barlow, don’t give it another thought. Anybody who could pick on the lemming analogy is going to be useful to us.”

And so he would, thought Ryan-Ngana, alone in the office after Tinny-Peete had taken Barlow up to the helicopter stage. So he would. Poprob had exhausted every rational attempt and the new Poprobattacklines would have to be irrational or sub-rational. This creature from the past with his lemming legends and his improved building lots would be a fountain of precious vicious self-interest.

Ryan-Ngana sighed and stretched. He had to go and run the San Francisco subway. Summoned early from the Pole to study Barlow, he’d left unfinished a nice little theorem. Between interruptions, he was slowly constructing an n-dimensional geometry whose foundations and superstructure owed no debt whatsoever to intuition.

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Upstairs, waiting for a helicopter, Barlow was explaining to Tinny-Peete that he had nothing against Negroes, and Tinny-Peete wished he had some of Ryan-Ngana’s imperturbability and humor for the ordeal.

The helicopter took them to International Airport where, Tinny-Peete explained, Barlow would leave for the Pole.

The man from the past wasn’t sure he’d like a dreary waste of ice and cold.

“It’s all right,” said the psychiatrist. “A civilized layout. Warm, pleasant. You’ll be able to work more efficiently there. All the facts at your fingertips, a good secretary—”

“I’ll need a pretty big staff,” said Barlow, who had learned from thousands of deals never to take the first offer.

“I meant a private, confidential one,” said Tinny-Peete readily, “but you can have as many as you want. You’ll naturally have top-primary-top priority if you really have a workable plan.”

“Let’s not forget this dictatorship angle,” said Barlow.

He didn’t know that the psychiatrist would just as readily have promised him deification to get him happily on the “rocket” for the Pole. Tinny-Peete had no wish to be torn limb from limb; he knew very well that it would end that way if the population learned from this anachronism that there was a small elite which considered itself head, shoulders, trunk and groin above the rest. The fact that this assumption was perfectly true and the fact that the elite was condemned by its superiority to a life of the most grinding toil would not be considered; the difference would.

The psychiatrist finally put Barlow aboard the “rocket” with some thirty people—real people—headed for the Pole.

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Barlow was airsick all the way because of a post-hypnotic suggestion Tinny-Peete had planted in him. One idea was to make him as averse as possible to a return trip, and another idea was to spare the other passengers from his aggressive, talkative company.

Barlow during the first day at the pole was reminded of his first day in the Army. It was the same now-where-the-hell-are-we-going-to-put-you? business until he took a

firm line with them. Then instead of acting like supply sergeants they acted like hotel clerks.

It was a wonderful, wonderfully calculated buildup, and one that he failed to suspect. After all, in his time a visitor from the past would have been lionized.

At day's end he reclined in a snug underground billet with the 60-mile gales roaring yards overhead, and tried to put two and two together.

It was like old times, he thought—like a coup in real estate where you had the competition by the throat, like a 50-per cent rent boost when you knew damned well there was no place for the tenants to move, like smiling when you read over the breakfast orange juice that the city council had decided to build a school on the ground you had acquired by a deal with the city council. And it was simple. He would just sell tundra building lots to eagerly suicidal lemmings, and that was absolutely all there was to solving the Problem that had these double-domes spinning.

They'd have to work out most of the details, naturally, but what the hell, that was what subordinates were for. He'd need specialists in advertising, engineering, communications—did they know anything about hypnotism? That might be helpful. If not, there'd have to be a lot of bribery done, but he'd make sure—damned sure—there were unlimited funds.

Just selling building lots to lemmings....

He wished, as he fell asleep, that poor Verna could have been in on this. It was his biggest, most stupendous deal. Verna—that sharp shyster Sam Immerman must have swindled her....

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It began the next day with people coming to visit him. He knew the approach. They merely wanted to be helpful to their illustrious visitor from the past and would he help fill them in about his era, which unfortunately was somewhat obscure historically, and what did he think could be done about the Problem? He told them he was too old to be roped any more, and they wouldn't get any information out of him until he got a letter of intent from at least the Polar President, and a session of the Polar Congress empowered to make him dictator.

He got the letter and the session. He presented his program, was asked whether his conscience didn't revolt at its callousness, explained succinctly that a deal was a deal and anybody who wasn't smart enough to protect himself didn't deserve protection—"Caveat emptor," he threw in for scholarship, and had to translate it to "Let the buyer beware." He didn't, he stated, give a damn about either the morons or their intelligent slaves; he'd told them his price and that was all he was interested in.

Would they meet it or wouldn't they?

The Polar President offered to resign in his favor, with certain temporary emergency powers that the Polar Congress would vote him if he thought them necessary. Barlow demanded the title of World Dictator, complete control of world finances, salary to be decided by himself, and the publicity campaign and historical writeup to begin at once.

"As for the emergency powers," he added, "they are neither to be temporary nor limited."

Somebody wanted the floor to discuss the matter, with the declared hope that perhaps Barlow would modify his demands.

“You’ve got the proposition,” Barlow said. “I’m not knocking off even ten per cent.”

“But what if the Congress refuses, sir?” the President asked.

“Then you can stay up here at the Pole and try to work it out yourselves. I’ll get what I want from the morons. A shrewd operator like me doesn’t have to compromise; I haven’t got a single competitor in this whole cockeyed moronic era.”

Congress waived debate and voted by show of hands. Barlow won unanimously.

“You don’t know how close you came to losing me,” he said in his first official address to the joint Houses. “I’m not the boy to haggle; either I get what I ask or I go elsewhere. The first thing I want is to see designs for a new palace for me—nothing *unostentatious*, either—and your best painters and sculptors to start working on my portraits and statues. Meanwhile, I’ll get my staff together.”

He dismissed the Polar President and the Polar Congress, telling them that he’d let them know when the next meeting would be.

A week later, the program started with North America the first target.

Mrs. Garvy was resting after dinner before the ordeal of turning on the dishwasher. The TV, of course, was on and it said: “Oooh!”—long, shuddery and ecstatic, the cue for the *Parfum Assault Criminale* spot commercial. “Girls,” said the announcer hoarsely, “do you want your man? It’s easy to get him—easy as a trip to Venus.”

“Huh?” said Mrs. Garvy.

“Wassamatter?” snorted her husband, starting out of a doze.

“Ja hear that?”

“Wha’?”

“He said ‘easy like a trip to Venus.’”

“So?”

“Well, I thought ya couldn’t get to Venus. I thought they just had that one rocket thing that crashed on the Moon.”

“Aah, women don’t keep up with the news,” said Garvy righteously, subsiding again.

“Oh,” said his wife uncertainly.

And the next day, on *Henry’s Other Mistress*, there was a new character who had just breezed in: Buzz Rentshaw, Master Rocket Pilot of the Venus run. On *Henry’s Other Mistress*, “the broadcast drama about you and your neighbors, *folksy* people, *ordinary* people, *real* people”! Mrs. Garvy listened with amazement over a cooling cup of coffee as Buzz made hay of her hazy convictions.

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MONA: Darling, it’s so good to see you again!

BUZZ: You don’t know how I’ve missed you on that dreary Venus run.

SOUND: *Venetian blind run down, key turned in door lock.*

MONA: Was it *very* dull, dearest?

BUZZ: Let's not talk about my humdrum job, darling. Let's talk about us.

SOUND: *Creaking bed.*

Well, the program was back to normal at last. That evening Mrs. Garvy tried to ask again whether her husband was sure about those rockets, but he was dozing right through *Take It and Stick It*, so she watched the screen and forgot the puzzle.

She was still rocking with laughter at the gag line, "Would you buy it for a quarter?" when the commercial went on for the detergent powder she always faithfully loaded her dishwasher with on the first of every month.

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The announcer displayed mountains of suds from a tiny piece of the stuff and coyly added: "Of course, Cleano don't lay around for you to pick up like the soap root on Venus, but it's pretty cheap and it's almost pretty near just as good. So for us plain folks who ain't lucky enough to live up there on Venus, Cleano is the real cleaning stuff!"

Then the chorus went into their "Cleano-is-the-stuff" jingle, but Mrs. Garvy didn't hear it. She was a stubborn woman, but it occurred to her that she was very sick indeed. She didn't want to worry her husband. The next day she quietly made an appointment with her family freud.

In the waiting room she picked up a fresh new copy of *Readers Pablum* and put it down with a faint palpitation. The lead article, according to the table of contents on the cover, was titled "The Most Memorable Venusian I Ever Met."

"The freud will see you now," said the nurse, and Mrs. Garvy tottered into his office.

His traditional glasses and whiskers were reassuring. She choked out the ritual: "Freud, forgive me, for I have neuroses."

He chanted the antiphonal: "Tut, my dear girl, what seems to be the trouble?"

"I got like a hole in the head," she quavered. "I seem to forget all kinds of things. Things like everybody seems to know and I don't."

"Well, that happens to everybody occasionally, my dear. I suggest a vacation on Venus."

The freud stared, open-mouthed, at the empty chair. His nurse came in and demanded, "Hey, you see how she scrambled? What was the matter with *her*?"

He took off his glasses and whiskers meditatively. "You can search me. I told her she should maybe try a vacation on Venus." A momentary bafflement came into his face and he dug through his desk drawers until he found a copy of the four-color, profusely illustrated journal of his profession. It had come that morning and he had lip-read it, though looking mostly at the pictures. He leafed through to the article *Advantages of the Planet Venus in Rest Cures*.

"It's right there," he said.

The nurse looked. "It sure is," she agreed. "Why shouldn't it be?"

"The trouble with these here neurotics," decided the freud, "is that they all the time got to fight reality. Show in the next twitch."

He put on his glasses and whiskers again and forgot Mrs. Garvy and her strange behavior.

“Freud, forgive me, for I have neuroses.”

“Tut, my dear girl, what seems to be the trouble?”

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Like many cures of mental disorders, Mrs. Garvy's was achieved largely by self-treatment. She disciplined herself sternly out of the crazy notion that there had been only one rocket ship and that one a failure. She could join without wincing, eventually, in any conversation on the desirability of Venus as a place to retire, on its fabulous floral profusion. Finally she went to Venus.

All her friends were trying to book passage with the Evening Star Travel and Real Estate Corporation, but naturally the demand was crushing. She considered herself lucky to get a seat at last for the two-week summer cruise. The space ship took off from a place called Los Alamos, New Mexico. It looked just like all the spaceships on television and in the picture magazines, but was more comfortable than you would expect.

Mrs. Garvy was delighted with the fifty or so fellow-passengers assembled before takeoff. They were from all over the country and she had a distinct impression that they were on the brainy side. The captain, a tall, hawk-faced, impressive fellow named Ryan-Something or other, welcomed them aboard and trusted that their trip would be a memorable one. He regretted that there would be nothing to see because, “due to the meteorite season,” the ports would be dogged down. It was disappointing, yet reassuring that the line was taking no chances.

There was the expected momentary discomfort at takeoff and then two monotonous days of droning travel through space to be whiled away in the lounge at cards or craps. The landing was a routine bump and the voyagers were issued tablets to swallow to immunize them against any minor ailments. When the tablets took effect, the lock was opened and Venus was theirs.

It looked much like a tropical island on Earth, except for a blanket of cloud overhead. But it had a heady, other-worldly quality that was intoxicating and glamorous.

The ten days of the vacation were suffused with a hazy magic. The soap root, as advertised, was free and sudsy. The fruits, mostly tropical varieties transplanted from Earth, were delightful. The simple shelters provided by the travel company were more than adequate for the balmy days and nights.

It was with sincere regret that the voyagers filed again into the ship, and swallowed more tablets doled out to counteract and sterilize any Venus illnesses they might unwittingly communicate to Earth.

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Vacationing was one thing. Power politics was another.

At the Pole, a small man was in a soundproof room, his face deathly pale and his body limp in a straight chair.

In the American Senate Chamber, Senator Hull-Mendoza (Synd., N. Cal.) was saying: “Mr. President and gentlemen, I would be remiss in my duty as a legislature if'n I didn't bring to the attention of the au-gust body I see here a perilous situation which is fraught with peril. As is well known to members of this au-gust body, the perfection of space flight has brought with it a situation I can only describe as fraught with peril. Mr. President and gentlemen, now that swift American rockets now

traverse the trackless void of space between this planet and our nearest planetarial neighbor in space—and, gentlemen, I refer to Venus, the star of dawn, the brightest jewel in fair Vulcan’s diadome—now, I say, I want to inquire what steps are being taken to colonize Venus with a vanguard of patriotic citizens like those minutemen of yore.

“Mr. President and gentlemen! There are in this world nations, envious nations—I do not name Mexico—who by fair means or foul may seek to wrest from Columbia’s grasp the torch of freedom of space; nations whose low living standards and innate depravity give them an unfair advantage over the citizens of our fair republic.

“This is my program: I suggest that a city of more than 100,000 population be selected by lot. The citizens of the fortunate city are to be awarded choice lands on Venus free and clear, to have and to hold and convey to their descendants. And the national government shall provide free transportation to Venus for these citizens. And this program shall continue, city by city, until there has been deposited on Venus a sufficient vanguard of citizens to protect our manifest rights in that planet.

“Objections will be raised, for carping critics we have always with us. They will say there isn’t enough steel. They will call it a cheap giveaway. I say there is enough steel for *one* city’s population to be transferred to Venus, and that is all that is needed. For when the time comes for the second city to be transferred, the first, emptied city can be wrecked for the needed steel! And is it a giveaway? Yes! It is the most glorious giveaway in the history of mankind! Mr. President and gentlemen, there is no time to waste—Venus must be American!”

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Black-Kupperman, at the Pole, opened his eyes and said feebly, “The style was a little uneven. Do you think anybody’ll notice?”

“You did fine, boy; just fine,” Barlow reassured him.

Hull-Mendoza’s bill became law.

Drafting machines at the South Pole were busy around the clock and the Pittsburgh steel mills spewed millions of plates into the Los Alamos spaceport of the Evening Star Travel and Real Estate Corporation. It was going to be Los Angeles, for logistic reasons, and the three most accomplished psycho-kineticists went to Washington and mingled in the crowd at the drawing to make certain that the Los Angeles capsule slithered into the fingers of the blind-folded Senator.

Los Angeles loved the idea and a forest of spaceships began to blossom in the desert. They weren’t very good space ships, but they didn’t have to be.

A team at the Pole worked at Barlow’s direction on a mail setup. There would have to be letters to and from Venus to keep the slightest taint of suspicion from arising. Luckily Barlow remembered that the problem had been solved once before—by Hitler. Relatives of persons incinerated in the furnaces of Lublin or Majdanek continued to get cheery postal cards.

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The Los Angeles flight went off on schedule, under tremendous press, newsreel and television coverage. The world cheered the gallant Angelenos who were setting off on their patriotic voyage to the land of milk and honey. The forest of spaceships

thundered up, and up, and out of sight without untoward incident. Billions envied the Angelenos, cramped and on short rations though they were.

Wreckers from San Francisco, whose capsule came up second, moved immediately into the city of the angels for the scrap steel their own flight would require. Senator Hull-Mendoza's constituents could do no less.

The president of Mexico, hypnotically alarmed at this extension of *yanqui imperialismo* beyond the stratosphere, launched his own Venus-colony program.

Across the water it was England versus Ireland, France versus Germany, China versus Russia, India versus Indonesia. Ancient hatreds grew into the flames that were rocket ships assailing the air by hundreds daily.

Dear Ed, how are you? Sam and I are fine and hope you are fine. Is it nice up there like they say with food and close grone on trees? I drove by Springfield yesterday and it sure looked funny all the buildings down but of coarse it is worth it we have to keep the greasers in their place. Do you have any truble with them on Venus? Drop me a line some time. Your loving sister, Alma.

Dear Alma, I am fine and hope you are fine. It is a fine place here fine climate and easy living. The doctor told me today that I seem to be ten years younger. He thinks there is something in the air here keeps people young. We do not have much trouble with the greasers here they keep to theirselves it is just a question of us outnumbering them and staking out the best places for the Americans. In South Bay I know a nice little island that I have been saving for you and Sam with lots of blanket trees and ham bushes. Hoping to see you and Sam soon, your loving brother, Ed.

Sam and Alma were on their way shortly.

Poprob got a dividend in every nation after the emigration had passed the halfway mark. The lonesome stay-at-homes were unable to bear the melancholy of a low population density; their conditioning had been to swarms of their kin. After that point it was possible to foist off the crudest stripped-down accommodations on would-be emigrants; they didn't care.

Black-Kupperman did a final job on President Hull-Mendoza, the last job that genius of hypnotics would ever do on any moron, important or otherwise.

Hull-Mendoza, panic-stricken by his presidency over an emptying nation, joined his constituents. The *Independence*, aboard which traveled the national government of America, was the most elaborate of all the spaceships—bigger, more comfortable, with a lounge that was handsome, though cramped, and cloakrooms for Senators and Representatives. It went, however, to the same place as the others and Black-Kupperman killed himself, leaving a note that stated he "couldn't live with my conscience."

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The day after the American President departed, Barlow flew into a rage. Across his specially built desk were supposed to flow all Poprob high-level documents and this thing—this outrageous thing—called Poprobterm apparently had got into the executive stage before he had even had a glimpse of it!

He buzzed for Rogge-Smith, his statistician. Rogge-Smith seemed to be at the bottom of it. Poprobterm seemed to be about first and second and third derivatives, whatever

they were. Barlow had a deep distrust of anything more complex than what he called an “average.”

While Rogge-Smith was still at the door, Barlow snapped, “What’s the meaning of this? Why haven’t I been consulted? How far have you people got and why have you been working on something I haven’t authorized?”

“Didn’t want to bother you, Chief,” said Rogge-Smith. “It was really a technical matter, kind of a final cleanup. Want to come and see the work?”

Mollified, Barlow followed his statistician down the corridor.

“You still shouldn’t have gone ahead without my okay,” he grumbled. “Where the hell would you people have been without me?”

“That’s right, Chief. We couldn’t have swung it ourselves; our minds just don’t work that way. And all that stuff you knew from Hitler—it wouldn’t have occurred to us. Like poor Black-Kupperman.”

They were in a fair-sized machine shop at the end of a slight upward incline. It was cold. Rogge-Smith pushed a button that started a motor, and a flood of arctic light poured in as the roof parted slowly. It showed a small spaceship with the door open.

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Barlow gaped as Rogge-Smith took him by the elbow and his other boys appeared: Swenson-Swenson, the engineer; Tsutsugimushi-Duncan, his propellants man; Kalb-French, advertising.

“In you go, Chief,” said Tsutsugimushi-Duncan. “This is Poprobtorm.”

“But I’m the world Dictator!”

“You bet, Chief. You’ll be in history, all right—but this is necessary, I’m afraid.”

The door was closed. Acceleration slammed Barlow cruelly to the metal floor. Something broke and warm, wet stuff, salty-tasting, ran from his mouth to his chin. Arctic sunlight through a port suddenly became a fierce lancet stabbing at his eyes; he was out of the atmosphere.

Lying twisted and broken under the acceleration, Barlow realized that some things had not changed, that Jack Ketch was never asked to dinner however many shillings you paid him to do your dirty work, that murder will out, that crime pays only temporarily.

The last thing he learned was that death is the end of pain.

## The Adventurer

**For every evil under the sun, there's an answer. It may be a simple, direct answer; it may be one that takes years, and seems unrelated to the problem. But there's an answer—of a kind....**

President Folsom XXIV said petulantly to his Secretary of the Treasury: “Blow me to hell, Bannister, if I understood a single word of that. *Why* can't I buy the Nicolaides Collection? And don't start with the rediscount and the Series W business again. Just tell me *why*.”

The Secretary of the Treasury said with an air of apprehension and a thread-like feeling across his throat: “It boils down to—no money, Mr. President.”

The President was too engrossed in thoughts of the marvelous collection to fly into a rage. “It's *such* a bargain,” he said mournfully. “An archaic Henry Moore figure—really too big to finger, but I'm no culture-snob, thank God—and fifteen early Morrisons and I can't begin to tell you what else.” He looked hopefully at the Secretary of Public Opinion: “Mightn't I seize it for the public good or something?”

The Secretary of Public Opinion shook his head. His pose was gruffly professional. “Not a chance, Mr. President. We'd never get away with it. The art-lovers would scream to high Heaven.”

“I suppose so.... *Why* isn't there any money?” He had swiveled dangerously on the Secretary of the Treasury again.

“Sir, purchases of the new Series W bond issue have lagged badly because potential buyers have been attracted to—”

“Stop it, stop it, *stop* it! You know I can't make head or tail of that stuff. Where's the money *going*?”

The Director of the Budget said cautiously: “Mr. President, during the biennium just ending, the Department of Defense accounted for 78 per cent of expenditures—”

The Secretary of Defense growled: “Now wait a minute, Felder! We were voted—”

The President interrupted, raging weakly: “Oh, you rascals! My father would have known what to do with you! But don't think I can't handle it. *Don't* think you can hoodwink me.” He punched a button ferociously; his silly face was contorted with rage and there was a certain tension on all the faces around the Cabinet table.

Panels slid down abruptly in the walls, revealing grim-faced Secret Servicemen. Each Cabinet officer was covered by at least two automatic rifles.

“Take that—that traitor away!” the President yelled. His finger pointed at the Secretary of Defense, who slumped over the table, sobbing. Two Secret Servicemen half-carried him from the room.

President Folsom XXIV leaned back, thrusting out his lower lip. He told the Secretary of the Treasury: “*Get* me the money for the Nicolaides Collection. Do you understand? I don't care how you do it. *Get* it.” He glared at the Secretary of Public Opinion. “Have you any comments?”

“No, Mr. President.”

“All right, then.” The President unbent and said plaintively: “I don’t see why you can’t all be more reasonable. I’m a very reasonable man. I don’t see why I can’t have a few pleasures along with my responsibilities. Really I don’t. And I’m sensitive. I don’t *like* these scenes. Very well. That’s all. The Cabinet meeting is adjourned.”

They rose and left silently in the order of their seniority. The President noticed that the panels were still down and pushed the button that raised them again and hid the granite-faced Secret Servicemen. He took out of his pocket a late Morrison fingering-piece and turned it over in his hand, a smile of relaxation and bliss spreading over his face. *Such* amusing textural contrast! *Such* unexpected variations on the classic sequences!

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The Cabinet, less the Secretary of Defense, was holding a rump meeting in an untapped corner of the White House gymnasium.

“God,” the Secretary of State said, white-faced. “Poor old Willy!”

The professionally gruff Secretary of Public Opinion said: “We should murder the bastard. I don’t care what happens—”

The Director of the Budget said dryly: “We all know what would happen. President Folsom XXV would take office. No; we’ve got to keep plugging as before. Nothing short of the invincible can topple the Republic....”

“What about a war?” the Secretary of Commerce demanded fiercely. “We’ve no proof that our program will work. What about a war?”

State said wearily: “Not while there’s a balance of power, my dear man. The Io-Callisto Question proved that. The Republic and the Soviet fell all over themselves trying to patch things up as soon as it seemed that there would be real shooting. Folsom XXIV and his excellency Premier Yersinsky know at least that much.”

The Secretary of the Treasury said: “What would you all think of Steiner for Defense?”

The Director of the Budget was astonished. “Would he take it?”

Treasury cleared his throat. “As a matter of fact, I’ve asked him to stop by right about now.” He hurled a medicine ball into the budgetary gut.

“Oof!” said the Director. “You bastard. Steiner would be perfect. He runs Standards like a watch.” He treacherously fired the medicine ball at the Secretary of Raw Materials, who blandly caught it and slammed it back.

“Here he comes,” said the Secretary of Raw Materials. “Steiner! Come and sweat some oleo off!”

Steiner ambled over, a squat man in his fifties, and said: “I don’t mind if I do. Where’s Willy?”

State said: “The President unmasked him as a traitor. He’s probably been executed by now.”

Steiner looked grim, and grimmer yet when the Secretary of the Treasury said, dead-pan: “We want to propose you for Defense.”

“I’m happy in Standards,” Steiner said. “Safer, too. The Man’s father took an interest in science, but The Man never comes around. Things are very quiet. Why don’t you invite Winch, from the National Art Commission? It wouldn’t be much of a change for the worse for him.”

“No brains,” the Secretary for Raw Materials said briefly. “Heads up!”

Steiner caught the ball and slugged it back at him. “What good are brains?” he asked quietly.

“Close the ranks, gentlemen,” State said. “These long shots are too hard on my arms.”

The ranks closed and the Cabinet told Steiner what good were brains. He ended by accepting.

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The Moon is all Republic. Mars is all Soviet. Titan is all Republic. Ganymede is all Soviet. But Io and Callisto, by the Treaty of Greenwich, are half-and-half Republic and Soviet.

Down the main street of the principal settlement on Io runs an invisible line. On one side of the line, the principal settlement is known as New Pittsburgh. On the other side it is known as Nizhni-Magnitogorsk.

Into a miner’s home in New Pittsburgh one day an eight-year-old boy named Grayson staggered, bleeding from the head. His eyes were swollen almost shut.

His father lurched to his feet, knocking over a bottle. He looked stupidly at the bottle, set it upright too late to save much of the alcohol, and then stared fixedly at the boy. “See what you made me do, you little bastard?” he growled, and fetched the boy a clout on his bleeding head that sent him spinning against the wall of the hut. The boy got up slowly and silently—there seemed to be something wrong with his left arm—and glowered at his father.

He said nothing.

“Fighting again,” the father said, in a would-be fierce voice. His eyes fell under the peculiar fire in the boy’s stare. “Damn fool—”

A woman came in from the kitchen. She was tall and thin. In a flat voice she said to the man: “Get out of here.” The man hiccupped and said: “Your brat spilled my bottle. Gimme a dollar.”

In the same flat voice: “I have to buy food.”

“*I said gimme a dollar!*” The man slapped her face—it did not change—and wrenched a small purse from the string that suspended it around her neck. The boy suddenly was a demon, flying at his father with fists and teeth. It lasted only a second or two. The father kicked him into a corner where he lay, still glaring, wordless and dry-eyed. The mother had not moved; her husband’s handmark was still red on her face when he hulked out, clutching the money bag.

Mrs. Grayson at last crouched in the corner with the eight-year-old boy. “Little Tommy,” she said softly. “My little Tommy! Did you cross the line again?”

He was blubbering in her arms, hysterically, as she caressed him. At last he was able to say: “I didn’t cross the line, Mom. Not this time. It was in school. They said our name was really Krasinsky. God-damn him!” the boy shrieked. “They said his

grandfather was named Krasinsky and he moved over the line and changed his name to Grayson! God-damn him! Doing that to us!”

“Now, darling,” his mother said, caressing him. “Now, darling.” His trembling began to ebb. She said: “Let’s get out the spools, Tommy. You mustn’t fall behind in school. You owe that to me, don’t you, darling?”

“Yes, Mom,” he said. He threw his spindly arms around her and kissed her. “Get out the spools. We’ll show him. I mean them.”

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President Folsom XXIV lay on his death-bed, feeling no pain, mostly because his personal physician had pumped him full of morphine. Dr. Barnes sat by the bed holding the presidential wrist and waiting, occasionally nodding off and recovering with a belligerent stare around the room. The four wire-service men didn’t care whether he fell asleep or not; they were worriedly discussing the nature and habits of the President’s first-born, who would shortly succeed to the highest office in the Republic.

“A firebrand, they tell me,” the A.P. man said unhappily.

“Firebrands I don’t mind,” the U.P. man said. “He can send out all the inflammatory notes he wants just as long as he isn’t a fiend for exercise. I’m not as young as I once was. You boys wouldn’t remember the *old* President, Folsom XXII. He used to do point-to-point hiking. He worshipped old F.D.R.”

The I.N.S. man said, lowering his voice: “Then he was worshipping the wrong Roosevelt. Teddy was the athlete.”

Dr. Barnes started, dropped the presidential wrist and held a mirror to the mouth for a moment. “Gentlemen,” he said, “the President is dead.”

“O.K.,” the A.P. man said. “Let’s go, boys. I’ll send in the flash. U.P., you go cover the College of Electors. I.N.S., get onto the President Elect. Trib, collect some interviews and background—”

The door opened abruptly; a colonel of infantry was standing there, breathing hard, with an automatic rifle at port. “Is he dead?” he asked.

“Yes,” the A.P. man said. “If you’ll let me past—”

“Nobody leaves the room,” the colonel said grimly. “I represent General Slocum, Acting President of the Republic. The College of Electors is acting now to ratify—”

A burst of gunfire caught the colonel in the back; he spun and fell, with a single hoarse cry. More gunfire sounded through the White House. A Secret Serviceman ducked his head through the door: “President’s dead? You boys stay put. We’ll have this thing cleaned up in an hour—” He vanished.

The doctor sputtered his alarm and the newsmen ignored him with professional poise. The A.P. man asked: “Now who’s Slocum? Defense Command?”

I.N.S. said: “I remember him. Three stars. He headed up the Tactical Airborne Force out in Kansas four-five years ago. I think he was retired since then.”

A phosphorus grenade crashed through the window and exploded with a globe of yellow flame the size of a basketball; dense clouds of phosphorus pentoxide gushed from it and the sprinkler system switched on, drenching the room.

“Come on!” hacked the A.P. man, and they scrambled from the room and slammed the door. The doctor’s coat was burning in two or three places, and he was retching feebly on the corridor floor. They tore his coat off and flung it back into the room.

The U.P. man, swearing horribly, dug a sizzling bit of phosphorus from the back of his hand with a pen-knife and collapsed, sweating, when it was out. The I.N.S. man passed him a flask and he gurgled down half a pint of liquor. “Who flang that brick?” he asked faintly.

“Nobody,” the A.P. man said gloomily. “That’s the hell of it. None of this is happening. Just the way Taft the Pretender never happened in ‘03. Just the way the Pentagon Mutiny never happened in ‘67.”

“‘68,” the U.P. man said faintly. “It didn’t happen in ‘68, not ‘67.”

The A.P. man smashed a fist into the palm of his hand and swore. “*God-damn*,” he said. “Some day I’d like to—” He broke off and was bitterly silent.

The U.P. man must have been a little dislocated with shock and quite drunk to talk the way he did. “Me too,” he said. “Like to tell the story. Maybe it was ‘67 not ‘68. I’m not sure now. Can’t write it down so the details get lost and then after a while it didn’t happen at all. Revolution’d be good deal. But it takes people t’ make revolution. *People*. With eyes ‘n ears. ‘N memories. We make things not-happen an’ we make people not-see an’ not-hear....” He slumped back against the corridor wall, nursing his burned hand. The others were watching him, very scared.

Then the A.P. man caught sight of the Secretary of Defense striding down the corridor, flanked by Secret Servicemen. “Mr. Steiner!” he called. “What’s the picture?”

Steiner stopped, breathing heavily, and said: “Slocum’s barricaded in the Oval Study. They don’t want to smash in. He’s about the only one left. There were only fifty or so. The Acting President’s taken charge at the Study. You want to come along?”

They did, and even hauled the U.P. man after them.

The Acting President, who would be President Folsom XXV as soon as the Electoral College got around to it, had his father’s face—the petulant lip, the soft jowl—on a hard young body. He also had an auto-rifle ready to fire from the hip. Most of the Cabinet was present. When the Secretary of Defense arrived, he turned on him. “Steiner,” he said nastily, “can you explain why there should be a rebellion against the Republic in your department?”

“Mr. President,” Steiner said, “Slocum was retired on my recommendation two years ago. It seems to me that my responsibility ended there and Security should have taken over.”

The President Elect’s finger left the trigger of the auto-rifle and his lip drew in a little. “Quite so,” he said curtly, and, turned to the door. “Slocum!” he shouted. “Come out of there. We can use gas if we want.”

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The door opened unexpectedly and a tired-looking man with three stars on each shoulder stood there, bare-handed. “All right,” he said drearily. “I was fool enough to think something could be done about the regime. But you fat-faced imbeciles are going to go on and on and—”

The stutter of the auto-rifle cut him off. The President Elect's knuckles were white as he clutched the piece's forearm and grip; the torrent of slugs continued to hack and plow the general's body until the magazine was empty. "Burn that," he said curtly, turning his back on it. "Dr. Barnes, come here. I want to know about my father's passing."

The doctor, hoarse and red-eyed from the whiff of phosphorus smoke, spoke with him. The U.P. man had sagged drunkenly into a chair, but the other newsmen noted that Dr. Barnes glanced at them as he spoke, in a confidential murmur.

"Thank you, Doctor," the President Elect said at last, decisively. He gestured to a Secret Serviceman. "Take those traitors away." They went, numbly.

The Secretary of State cleared his throat. "Mr. President," he said, "I take this opportunity to submit the resignations of myself and fellow Cabinet members according to custom."

"That's all right," the President Elect said. "You may as well stay on. I intend to run things myself anyway." He hefted the auto-rifle. "You," he said to the Secretary of Public Opinion. "You have some work to do. Have the memory of my father's—artistic—preoccupations obliterated as soon as possible. I wish the Republic to assume a war-like posture—yes; what is it?"

A trembling messenger said: "Mr. President, I have the honor to inform you that the College of Electors has elected you President of the Republic—unanimously."

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Cadet Fourth-Classman Thomas Grayson lay on his bunk and sobbed in an agony of loneliness. The letter from his mother was crumpled in his hand: "—prouder than words can tell of your appointment to the Academy. Darling, I hardly knew my grandfather but I know that you will serve as brilliantly as he did, to the eternal credit of the Republic. You must be brave and strong for my sake—"

He would have given everything he had or ever could hope to have to be back with her, and away from the bullying, sneering fellow-cadets of the Corps. He kissed the letter—and then hastily shoved it under his mattress as he heard footsteps.

He popped to a brace, but it was only his roommate Ferguson. Ferguson was from Earth, and rejoiced in the lighter Lunar gravity which was punishment to Grayson's Io-bred muscles.

"Rest, mister," Ferguson grinned.

"Thought it was night inspection."

"Any minute now. They're down the hall. Lemme tighten your bunk or you'll be in trouble—" Tightening the bunk he pulled out the letter and said, calvishly: "Ah-hah! Who is she?—" and opened it.

When the cadet officers reached the room they found Ferguson on the floor being strangled black in the face by spidery little Grayson. It took all three of them to pull him off. Ferguson went to the infirmary and Grayson went to the Commandant's office.

The Commandant glared at the cadet from under the most spectacular pair of eyebrows in the Service. "Cadet Grayson," he said, "explain what occurred."

"Sir, Cadet Ferguson began to read a letter from my mother without my permission."

“That is not accepted by the Corps as grounds for mayhem. Do you have anything further to say?”

“Sir, I lost my temper. All I thought of was that it was an act of disrespect to my mother and somehow to the Corps and the Republic too—that Cadet Ferguson was dishonoring the Corps.”

*Bushwah*, the Commandant thought. *A snow job and a crude one.* He studied the youngster. He had never seen such a brace from an Io-bred fourth-classman. It must be torture to muscles not yet toughened up to even Lunar gravity. Five minutes more and the boy would have to give way, and serve him right for showing off.

He studied Grayson’s folder. It was too early to tell about academic work, but the fourth-classman was a bear—or a fool—for extra duty. He had gone out for half a dozen teams and applied for membership in the exacting Math Club *and* Writing Club. The Commandant glanced up; Grayson was still in his extreme brace. The Commandant suddenly had the queer idea that Grayson could hold it until it killed him.

“One hundred hours of pack-drill,” he barked, “to be completed before quarter-term. Cadet Grayson, if you succeed in walking off your tours, remember that there is a tradition of fellowship in the Corps which its members are expected to observe. Dismiss.”

After Grayson’s steel-sharp salute and exit the Commandant dug deeper into the folder. Apparently there was something wrong with the boy’s left arm, but it had been passed by the examining team that visited Io. Most unusual. Most irregular. But nothing could be done about it now.

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The President, softer now in body than on his election day, and infinitely more cautious, snapped: “It’s all very well to create an incident. But where’s the money to come from? Who wants the rest of Io anyway? And what will happen if there’s war?”

Treasury said: “The hoarders will supply the money, Mr. President. A system of percentage-bounties for persons who report currency-hoarders, and then enforced purchase of a bond issue.”

Raw materials said: “We need that iron, Mr. President. We need it desperately.”

State said: “All our evaluations indicate that the Soviet Premier would consider nothing less than armed invasion of his continental borders as occasion for all-out war. The consumer-goods party in the Soviet has gained immensely during the past five years and of course their armaments have suffered. Your shrewd directive to put the Republic in a war-like posture has borne fruit, Mr. President....”

President Folsom XXV studied them narrowly. To him the need for a border incident culminating in a forced purchase of Soviet Io did not seem as pressing as they thought, but they were, after all, specialists. And there was no conceivable way they could benefit from it personally. The only alternative was that they were offering their professional advice and that it would be best to heed it. Still, there was a vague, nagging something....

Nonsense, he decided. The spy dossiers on his Cabinet showed nothing but the usual. One had been blackmailed by an actress after an affair and railroaded her off the Earth. Another had a habit of taking bribes to advance favorite sons in civil and

military service. And so on. The Republic could not suffer at their hands; the Republic and the dynasty were impregnable. You simply spied on everybody—including the spies—and ordered summary executions often enough to show that you meant it, and kept the public ignorant: deaf-dumb-blind ignorant. The spy system was simplicity itself; you had only to let things get as tangled and confused as possible until *nobody* knew who was who. The executions were literally no problem, for guilt or innocence made no matter. And mind-control when there were four newspapers, six magazines and three radio and television stations was a job for a handful of clerks.

No; the Cabinet couldn't be getting away with anything. The system was unbeatable. President Folsom XXV said: "Very well. Have it done."

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Mrs. Grayson, widow, of New Pittsburgh, Io, disappeared one night. It was in all the papers and on all the broadcasts. Some time later she was found dragging herself back across the line between Nizhni-Magnitogorsk and New Pittsburgh in sorry shape. She had a terrible tale to tell about what she had suffered at the hands and so forth of the Nizhni-Magnitogorskkniks. A diplomatic note from the Republic to the Soviet was answered by another note which was answered by the dispatch of the Republic's First Fleet to Io which was answered by the dispatch of the Soviet's First and Fifth Fleets to Io.

The Republic's First Fleet blew up the customary deserted target hulk, fulminated over a sneak sabotage attack and moved in its destroyers. Battle was joined.

Ensign Thomas Grayson took over the command of his destroyer when its captain was killed on his bridge. An electrified crew saw the strange, brooding youngster perform prodigies of skill and courage, and responded to them. In one week of desultory action the battered destroyer had accounted for seven Soviet destroyers and a cruiser.

As soon as this penetrated to the flagship, Grayson was decorated and given a flotilla. His weird magnetism extended to every officer and man aboard the seven craft. They struck like phantoms, cutting out cruisers and battlewagons in wild unorthodox actions that couldn't have succeeded but did—every time. Grayson was badly wounded twice, but his driving nervous energy carried him through.

He was decorated again and given the battlewagon of an ailing four-striper.

Without orders he touched down on the Soviet side of Io, led out a landing party of marines and bluejackets, cut through two regiments of Soviet infantry, and returned to his battlewagon with prisoners: the top civil and military administrators of Soviet Io.

They discussed him nervously aboard the flagship.

"He has a mystical quality, Admiral. His men would follow him into an atomic furnace. And—and I almost believe he could bring them through safely if he wanted to." The laugh was nervous.

"He doesn't look like much. But when he turns on the charm—watch out!"

"He's—he's a *winner*. Now I wonder what I mean by that?"

"I know what you mean. They turn up every so often. People who can't be stopped. People who have everything. Napoleons. Alexanders. Stalins. Up from nowhere."

“Suleiman. Hitler. Folsom I. Jenghis Khan.”

“Well, let’s get it over with.”

They tugged at their gold-braided jackets and signalled the honor guard.

Grayson was piped aboard, received another decoration and another speech. This time he made a speech in return.

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President Folsom XXV, not knowing what else to do, had summoned his cabinet. “Well?” he rasped at the Secretary of Defense.

Steiner said with a faint shrug: “Mr. President, there is nothing to be done. He has the fleet, he has the broadcasting facilities, he has the people.”

“People!” snarled the President. His finger stabbed at a button and the wall panels snapped down to show the Secret Servicemen standing in their niches. The finger shot tremulously out at Steiner. “Kill that traitor!” he raved.

The chief of the detail said uneasily: “Mr. President, we were listening to Grayson before we came on duty. He says he’s de facto President now—”

“Kill him! Kill him!”

The chief went doggedly on: “—and we liked what he had to say about the Republic and he said citizens of the Republic shouldn’t take orders from you and he’d relieve you—”

The President fell back.

Grayson walked in, wearing his plain ensign’s uniform and smiling faintly. Admirals and four-striper flanked him.

The chief of the detail said: “Mr. Grayson! Are you taking over?”

The man in the ensign’s uniform said gravely: “Yes. And just call me ‘Grayson,’ please. The titles come later. You can go now.”

The chief gave a pleased grin and collected his detail. The rather slight, youngish man who had something wrong with one arm was in charge—*complete* charge.

Grayson said: “Mr. Folsom, you are relieved of the presidency. Captain, take him out and—” He finished with a whimsical shrug. A portly four-striper took Folsom by one arm. Like a drugged man the deposed president let himself be led out.

Grayson looked around the table. “Who are you gentlemen?”

They felt his magnetism, like the hum when you pass a power station.

Steiner was the spokesman. “Grayson,” he said soberly, “We were Folsom’s Cabinet. However, there is more that we have to tell you. Alone, if you will allow it.”

“Very well, gentlemen.” Admirals and captains backed out, looking concerned.

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Steiner said: “Grayson, the story goes back many years. My predecessor, William Malvern, determined to overthrow the regime, holding that it was an affront to the human spirit. There have been many such attempts. All have broken up on the rocks of espionage, terrorism and opinion-control—the three weapons which the regime holds firmly in its hands.

“Malvern tried another approach than espionage versus espionage, terrorism versus terrorism and opinion-control versus opinion-control. He determined to use the basic fact that certain men make history: that there are men born to be mould-breakers. They are the Phillips of Macedon, the Napoleons, Stalins and Hitlers, the Suleimans—the adventurers. Again and again they flash across history, bringing down an ancient empire, turning ordinary soldiers of the line into unkillable demons of battle, uprooting cultures, breathing new life into moribund peoples.

“There are common denominators among all the adventurers. Intelligence, of course. Other things are more mysterious but are always present. They are foreigners. Napoleon the Corsican. Hitler the Austrian. Stalin the Georgian. Phillip the Macedonian. Always there is an Oedipus complex. Always there is physical deficiency. Napoleon’s stature. Stalin’s withered arm—and yours. Always there is a minority disability, real or fancied.

“This is a shock to you, Grayson, but you must face it. *You were manufactured.*

“Malvern packed the cabinet with the slyest double-dealers he could find and they went to work. Eighty-six infants were planted on the outposts of the Republic in simulated family environments. Your mother was not your mother but one of the most brilliant actresses ever to drop out of sight on Earth. Your intelligence-heredity was so good that we couldn’t turn you down for lack of a physical deficiency. We withered your arm with gamma radiation. I hope you will forgive us. There was no other way.

“Of the eighty-six you are the one that worked. Somehow the combination for you was minutely different from all the other combinations, genetically or environmentally, and it worked. That is all we were after. The mould has been broken, you know now what you are. Let come whatever chaos is to come; the dead hand of the past no longer lies on—”

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Grayson went to the door and beckoned; two captains came in. Steiner broke off his speech as Grayson said to them: “These men deny my godhood. Take them out and—” he finished with a whimsical shrug.

“Yes, your divinity,” said the captains, without a trace of humor in their voices.

# The Syndic

**There have been a thousand tales of future Utopias and possible civilizations. They have been ruled by benevolent dictatorships and pure democracies, every form of government from extreme right to absolute left. Unique among these is the easy-going semi-anarchistic society ruled by THE SYNDIC.**

“It was not until February 14th that the Government declared a state of unlimited emergency. The precipitating incident was the aerial bombardment and destruction of B Company, 27th Armored Regiment, on Fort George Hill in New York City. Local Syndic leaders had occupied and fortified George Washington High School, with the enthusiastic co-operation of students, faculty and neighborhood. Chief among them was Thomas ‘Numbers’ Cleveland, displaying the same coolness and organizational genius which had brought him to pre-eminence in the metropolitan policy-wheel organization by his thirty-fifth year.

“At 5:15 A.M. the first battalion of the 27th Armored took up positions in the area as follows: A Company at 190th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue, with the mission of preventing reinforcement of the school from the I.R.T. subway station there; Companies B, C, and D hill down from the school on the slope of Fort George Hill poised for an attack. At 5:25 the sixteen Patton tanks of B Company revved up and moved on the school, C and D Companies remaining in reserve. The plan was for the tanks of B Company to surround the school on three sides—the fourth is a precipice—and open fire if a telephone parley with Cleveland did not result in an unconditional surrender. There was no surrender and the tanks attacked.

“Cleveland’s observation post was in the tower room of the school. Seeing the radio mast of the lead tank top the rise of the hill, he snapped out a telephone order to contact pilots waiting for the word at a Syndic field floating outside the seven mile limit. The pilots, trained to split-second precision in their years of public service, were airborne by 5:26, but this time their cargo was not liquor, cigarettes or luggage. In three minutes, they were whipping rocket bombs into the tanks of Company B; Cleveland’s runners charged the company command post; the trial by fire had begun.

“Before it ended North America was to see deeds as gallant and strategy as inspired as any in the history of war: Cleveland’s historic announcement—‘It’s a great day for the race!’—his death at the head of his runners in a charge on the Fort Totten garrison, the firm hand of Amadeo Falcaro taking up the scattered reins of leadership, parley, peace, betrayal and execution of hostages, the Treaty of Las Vegas and a united Mob-Syndic front against Government, O’Toole’s betrayal of the Continental Press wire room and the bloody battle to recapture that crucial nerve center, the decisive march on Baltimore....”

B. Arrowsmith Hynde,

*The Syndic—a Short History.*

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“No accurate history of the future has ever been written—a fact which I think disposes of history’s claim to rank as a science. Astronomers quail at the three-body

problem and throw up their hands in surrender before the four-body problem. Any given moment in history is a problem of at least two billion bodies. Attempts at orderly abstraction of manipulable symbols from the realities of history seem to me doomed from the start. I can juggle mean rain-falls, car-loading curves, birth-rates and patent applications, but I cannot for the life of me fit the recurring facial carbuncles of Karl Marx into my manipulations—not even, though we know, well after the fact, that agonizing staphylococcus aureus infections behind that famous beard helped shape twentieth-century totalitarianism. In pathology alone the list could be prolonged indefinitely: Julius Caesar’s epilepsy, Napoleon’s gastritis, Wilson’s paralysis, Grant’s alcoholism, Wilhelm II’s withered arm, Catherine’s nymphomania, George III’s paresis, Edison’s deafness, Euler’s blindness, Burke’s stammer, and so on. Is there anybody silly enough to maintain that the world today would be what it is if Marx, Caesar, Napoleon, Wilson, Grant, Wilhelm, Catherine, George, Edison, Euler and Burke—to take only these eleven—were anything but what they were? Yet that is the assumption behind theories of history which exclude the carbuncles of Marx from their referents—that is to say, every theory of history with which I am familiar....

“Am I then saying that history, past and future, is unknowable; that we must blunder ahead in the dark without planning because no plan can possibly be accurate in prediction and useful in application? I am not. I am expressing my distaste for holders of extreme positions, for possessors of eternal truths, for keepers of the flame. Keepers of the flame have no trouble with the questions of ends and means which plague the rest of us. They are quite certain that their ends are good and that therefore choice of means is a trivial matter. The rest of us, far from certain that we have a general solution of the two-billion body problem that is history, are much more likely to ponder on our means....”

F. W. Taylor,

*Organization, Symbolism and Morale*

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## I

Charles Orsino was learning the business from the ground up—even though “up” would never be very high. He had in his veins only a drop or two of Falcaro blood: enough so that room had to be made for him; not enough for it to be a great dearth of room. Counting heavily on the good will of F. W. Taylor, who had taken a fancy to him when he lost his parents in the Brookhaven Reactor explosion of ‘83, he might rise to a rather responsible position in Alky, Horsewire, Callgirl, recruitment and Retirement or whatever line he showed an aptitude for. But at 22 one spring day, he was merely serving a tour of duty as bagman attached to the 101st New York Police Precinct. A junior member of the Syndic customarily handled that job; you couldn’t trust the cops not to squeeze their customers and pocket the difference.

He walked absently through the not-unpleasant routine of the shakedown. His mind was on his early-morning practice session of polo, in which he had almost disgraced himself.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Orsino; a pleasure to see you again. Would you like a cold glass of beer while I get the loot?”

“No, but thanks very much, Mr. Lefko—I’m in training, you know. Wish I could take you up on it. Seven phones, isn’t it, at ten dollars a phone?”

“That’s right, Mr. Orsino, and I’ll be with you as soon as I lay off the seventh at Hialeah; all the ladies went for a plater named Hearthmouse because they thought the name was cute and left me with a dutch book. I won’t be a minute.”

Lefko scuttled to a phone and dickered with another bookie somewhere while Charles absently studied the crowd of chattering, laughing horseplayers. (“Mister Orsino, did you come out to make a monkey of yourself and waste my time? Confound it, sir, you have just fifty round to a chukker and you must make them count!” He grinned unhappily. Old Gilby, the pro, could be abrasive when a bone-head play disfigured the game he loved. Charles had been sure Benny Grashkin’s jeep would conk out in a minute—it had been sputtering badly enough—and that he would have had a dirt-cheap scoring shot while Benny changed mounts. But Gilby blew the whistle and wasn’t interested in your fine-spun logic. “Confound it, sir, when will you young rufflers learn that you must crawl before you walk? Now let me see a team rush for the goal—and I mean *team*, Mr. Orsino!”)

“*Here* we are, Mr. Orsino, and just in time. There goes the seventh.”

Charles shook hands and left amid screams of “Hearthmouse! Hearthmouse!” from the lady bettors watching the screen.

High up in the Syndic Building, F. W. Taylor—Uncle Frank to Charles—was giving a terrific tongue-lashing to a big, stooped old man. Thornberry, president of the Chase National Bank, had pulled a butch and F. W. Taylor was blazing mad about it.

He snarled: “One more like this, Thornberry, and you are out on your padded can. When a respectable member of the Syndic chooses to come to you for a line of credit, you will in the future give it without any tom-fool quibbling about security. You bankers seem to think this is the middle ages and that your bits of paper still have their old black magic.

“Disabuse yourself of the notion. Nobody except you believes in it. The Inexorable Laws of Economics are as dead as Dagon and Ishtar, and for the same reason. No more worshippers. You bankers can’t shove anybody around any more. You’re just a convenience, like the non-playing banker in a card game.

“What’s real now is the Syndic. What’s real about the Syndic is its own morale and the public’s faith in it. Is that *clear*?”

Thornberry brokenly mumbled something about supply and demand.

Taylor sneered. “Supply and demand. Urim and Thummim. Show me a supply, Thornberry, show me a—oh, hell. I haven’t time to waste re-educating you. Remember what I told you and don’t argue. Unlimited credit to Syndic members. If they overdo it, *we’ll* rectify the situation. Now, get out.” And Thornberry did, with senile tears in his eyes.

At Mother Maginnis’ Ould Sod Pub, Mother Maginnis pulled a long face when Charles Orsino came in. “It’s always a pleasure to see you, Mr. Orsino, but I’m afraid this week it’ll be no pleasure for you to see me.”

She was always roundabout. “Why, what do you mean, Mrs. M.? I’m always happy to say hello to a customer.”

“It’s the business, Mr. Orsino. It’s the business. You’ll pardon me if I say that I can’t see how to spare twenty-five dollars from the till, not if my life depended on it. I can go to fifteen, but so help me—”

Charles looked grave—graver than he felt. It happened every day. “You realize, Mrs. Maginnis, that you’re letting the Syndic down. What would the people in Syndic Territory do for protection if everybody took your attitude?”

She looked sly. “I was thinking, Mr. Orsino, that a young man like you must have a way with the girls—” By a mighty unsubtle maneuver, Mrs. Maginnis’ daughter emerged from the back room at that point and began demurely mopping the bar. “And,” she continued, “sure, any young lady would consider it an honor to spend the evening with a young gentleman from the Syndic—”

“Perhaps,” Charles said, rapidly thinking it over. He would infinitely rather spend the evening with a girl than at a Shakespeare revival as he had planned, but there were drawbacks. In the first place, it would be bribery. In the second place, he might fall for the girl and wake up with Mrs. Maginnis for his mother-in-law—a fate too nauseating to contemplate for more than a moment. In the third place, he had already bought the tickets for himself and bodyguard.

“About the shakedown,” he said decisively. “Call it fifteen this week. If you’re still doing badly next week, I’ll have to ask for a look at your books—to see whether a regular reduction is in order.”

She got the hint, and colored. Putting down fifteen dollars, she said: “Sure, that won’t be necessary. I’m expecting business to take a turn for the better. It’s sure to pick up.”

“Good, then.” To show there were no hard feelings, he stayed for a moment to ask: “How are your husbands?”

“So-so. Alfie’s on the road this week and Dinnie’s got the rheumatism again but he can tend bar late, when it’s slow.”

“Tell him to drop around to the Medical Center and mention my name, Mrs. Maginnis. Maybe they can do something for him.”

She glowed with thanks and he left.

It was pleasant to be able to do things for nice people; it was pleasant to stroll along the sunny street acknowledging tipped hats and friendly words. (That team rush for the goal had been a sorry mess, but not his fault—quite. Vladek had loosed a premature burst from his fifty caliber at the ball, and sent it hurling off to the right; they had braked and backed with much grinding of gears to form V again behind it, when Gilby blew the whistle again.)

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A nervous youngster in the National Press Service New York drop was facing his first crisis on the job. Trouble lights had flashed simultaneously on the Kansas City-New York, Hialeah-New York and Boston-New York trunks. He stood, paralyzed.

His supervisor took it in in a flash and banged open the circuit to Service. To the genial face that appeared on the screen, he snapped: “Trace Hialeah, Boston and Kansas City—in that order, Micky.”

Micky said: “Okay, pal,” and vanished.

The supervisor turned to the youngster. “Didn’t know what to do?” he asked genially. “Don’t let it worry you. Next time you’ll know. You noticed the order of priority?”

“Yes,” the boy gulped.

“It wasn’t an accident that I gave it to him that way. First, Hialeah because it was the most important. We get the bulk of our revenue from serving the horse rooms—in fact, I understand we started as a horse wire exclusively. Naturally the horse-room customers pay for it in the long run, but they pay without pain. Nobody’s forcing them to improve the breed, right?”

“Second, Boston-New York trunk. That’s common-carrier while the Fair Grounds isn’t running up there. We don’t make any profit on common-carrier service, the rates are too low, but we owe it to the public that supports us.

“Third, Kansas City-New York. That’s common carrier too, but with one terminal in Mob Territory. No reason why we should knock ourselves out for Regan and his boys, but after the other two are traced and closed, we’ll get around to them. Think you got it straight now?”

“Yes,” the youngster said.

“Good. Just take it easy.”

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The supervisor moved away to do a job of billing that didn’t need immediate doing; he wanted to avoid the very appearance of nagging the boy. He wondered too, if he’d really put it over, and decided he hadn’t. Who could, after all. It took years on the wires to get the feel. Slowly your motivation changed. You started by wanting to make a place for yourself and earn some dough. After years you realized, not with a blinding flash, but gradually, that you were working for quite another reason. Nice gang here that treats you right. Don’t let the Syndic down. The customers pay for their fun and by God, you see that they get it or bust a gut trying.

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On his way to the 101st Precinct station house, the ears of Charles Orsino burned as he thought of the withering lecture that had followed the blast on Gilby’s whistle. “*Mister Orsino*, is it or is it not your responsibility as team captain to demand that a dangerous ball be taken out of play? And did or did not that last burst from Mister Vladek beat the ball out of round, thus giving rise to a distinct possibility of dangerous ricochets?” The old man was right of course, but it had been a pocked and battered practice ball to start with; in practice sessions, you couldn’t afford to be fussy—not with regulation 18 inch armor steel balls selling for thirty dollars each at the pro shop.

He walked between the two green lamps of the precinct station and dumped his bag on the sergeant’s desk. Immediately the sergeant started a tale of woe: “Mr. Orsino, I don’t like to bother you with the men’s personal troubles, but I wonder if you could come through with a hundred dollar present for a very deserving young fellow here. It’s Patrolman Gibney, seven years in the old 101st and not a black mark against him. One citation for shooting it out with a burglar and another for nabbing a past-post crook at Lefko’s horse room. Gibney’s been married for five years and has two of the cutest kids you ever saw, and you know that takes money. Now he wants to get married again, he’s crazy in love with the girl and his first wife don’t mind, she says she can use a helping hand around the house, and he wants to do it right with a big wedding.

“If he can do it on a hundred, he’s welcome to it,” Charles said, grinning. “Give him my best wishes.” He divided the pile of bills into two orderly stacks, transferred a hundred dollars to one and pocketed the other.

He dropped it off at the Syndic Building, had an uninteresting dinner in one of its cafeterias and went to his furnished room downtown. He read a chapter in F. W. Taylor’s—Uncle Frank’s—latest book, *Organization, Symbolism and Morale*, couldn’t understand a word he read, bathed and got out his evening clothes.

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A thin and attractive girl entered a preposterously-furnished room in the Syndic Building, arguing bitterly with a white-bearded, hawk-nosed old man.

“My dear ancestor,” she began, with exaggerated patience.

“God-damn it, Lee, don’t call me an ancestor! Makes me feel as if I was dead already.”

“You might as well be for all the sense you’re talking.”

“All right, Lee.” He looked wounded and brave.

“Oh, I didn’t mean to hurt your feelings, Edward—” She studied his face with suddenly-narrowed eyes and her tone changed. “Listen, you old devil, you’re not fooling me for a minute. I couldn’t hurt your feelings with the blunt edge of an axe. You’re not talking me into anything. It’d just be sending somebody to his death. Besides, they were both accidents.” She turned and began to fiddle with a semi-circular screen whose focus was a large and complicated chair. Three synchronized projectors bore on the screen.

The old man said very softly: “And what if they weren’t? Tom McGurn and Bob were good men. None better. If the damn Government’s knocking us off one by one, something ought to be done. And you seem to be the only person in a position to do it.”

“Start a war,” she said bitterly. “Sweep them from the seas. Wasn’t Dick Reiner chanting that when I was in diapers?”

“Yes,” the old man brooded. “And he’s still chanting it now that you’re in—whatever young ladies wear nowadays. Promise me something, Lee. If there’s another try, will you help us out?”

“I am so sure there won’t be,” she said, “that I’ll promise. And God help you, Edward, if you try to fake one. I’ve told you before and I tell you now that it’s almost certain death.”

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Charles Orsino studied himself in a three-way mirror.

The evening suit was new; he wished the gunbelt was. The holster rode awkwardly on his hip; he hadn’t got a new outfit since his eighteenth birthday and his chest had filled out to the last hole of the cross-strap’s buckle since then. Well, it would have to wait; the evening would cost him enough as it was. Five bodyguards! He winced at the thought. But you had to be seen at these things and you had to do it right or it didn’t count.

He fell into a brief reverie of meeting a beautiful, beautiful girl at the theater, a girl who would think he was interesting and handsome and a wonderful polo player, a

girl who would happily turn out to be in the direct Falcaro line with all sorts of powerful relations to speak up for him....

Someone said on his room annunciator: “The limousine is here, Mr. Orsino. I’m Halloran, your chief bodyguard.”

“Very well, Halloran,” he said casually, just as he’d practiced it in the bathroom that morning and rode down.

The limousine was a beauty and the guards were faultlessly turned out. One was democratic with one’s chief guard and a little less so with the others. As Halloran drove, Charles chatted with him about the play, which was Julius Caesar in modern dress. Halloran said he’d heard it was very good.

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Their arrival in the lobby of the Costello created no sensation. Five bodyguards wasn’t a lot of bodyguards, even though there seemed to be no other Syndic people there. So much for the beautiful Falcaro girl. Charles chatted with a television director he knew slightly. The director explained to him that the theater was sick, very sick, that Harry Tremaine,—he played Brutus—made a magnificent stage picture but couldn’t read lines.

By then Halloran was whispering in his ear that it was time to take their seats. Halloran was sweating like a pig and Charles didn’t get around to asking him why. Charles took an aisle seat, Halloran was across the aisle and the others sat to his side, front and rear.

The curtain rose on “New York—A Street.”

The first scene, a timekiller designed to let fidgeters subside and coughers finish their coughing, was a 3-D projection of Times Square, with a stylized suggestion of a public relations consultant’s office “down in one” on the apron.

When Caesar entered Orsino started, and there was a gratified murmur around the auditorium. He was made up as French Letour, one of the Mobsters from the old days—technically a hero, but one who had sailed mighty close to the wind. This promised to be interesting.

“Peace, ho! Caesar speaks.”

And so to the apron where the soothsayer—public relations consultant—delivered the warning contemptuously ignored by Letour-Caesar, and the spotlight shifted to Cassius and Brutus for their long, foreboding dialogue. Brutus’ back was to the audience when it started; he gradually turned—

“What means this shouting? I do fear the people will choose Caesar for their king!”

And you saw that Brutus was Falcaro—old Amadeo Falcaro himself, with the beard and hawk nose and eyebrows.

Well, let’s see now. It must be some kind of tortured analogy with the Treaty of Las Vegas when Letour made a strong bid to unite Mob and Syndic and Falcaro had fought against anything but a short-term, strictly military alliance. Charles felt kind of sore about Falcaro not getting the title role, but he had to admit that Tremaine played Falcaro as the gutsy magnifico he had been. When Caesar re-entered, the contrast became clear; Caesar-Letour was a fidgety, fear-ridden man. The rest of the conspirators brought on through Act One turned out to be good fellows all, fresh and

hearty; Charles guessed everything was all right and he wished he could grab a nap. But Cassius was saying:

“Him and his worth and our great need of him—”

All very loyal, Charles thought, smothering a yawn. A life for the Syndic and all that, but a high-brow version. Polite and dignified, like a pavanne at Roseland. Sometimes—after, say, a near miss on the polo field—he would wonder how polite and dignified the great old days actually had been. Amadeo Falcaro’s Third Year Purge must have been an affair of blood and guts. Two thousand shot in three days, the history books said, adding hastily that the purged were unreconstructed, unreconstructable thugs whose usefulness was past, who couldn’t realize that the job ahead was construction and organization.

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And Halloran was touching Charles on the shoulder. “Intermission in a second, sir.” They marched up the aisle as the curtain fell to applause and the rest of the audience began to rise. Then the impossible happened.

Halloran had gone first; Charles was behind him, with the four other guards hemming him in. As Halloran reached the door to the lobby at the top of the aisle, he turned to face Charles and performed an inexplicable pantomime. It was quite one second before Charles realized that Halloran was tugging at his gun, stuck in the holster.

The guard to the left of Charles softly said: “Jesus!” and threw himself at Halloran as the chief guard’s gun came loose. There was a .45 caliber roar, muffled. There was another that crashed, unmuffled, a yard from Charles’ right ear. The two figures at the head of the aisle collapsed limply and the audience began to shriek. Somebody with a very loud voice roared: “Keep calm! It’s all part of the play! Don’t get panicky! It’s part of the play!”

The man who was roaring moved up to the aisle door, fell silent, saw and smelled the blood and fainted.

A woman began to pound the guard on Charles’ right with her fists, yelling: “What did you do to my husband? You shot my husband!” She meant the man who had fainted; Charles peeled her off the bodyguard.

Somehow they got into the lobby, followed by most of the audience. The three bodyguards held them at bay. Charles found he was deaf in his right ear and supposed it was temporary. Least of his worries. Halloran had taken a shot at him. The guard named Weltfisch had intercepted it. The guard named Donnel had shot Halloran down.

He said to Donnel: “You know Halloran long?”

Donnel, not taking his eyes from the crowd, said: “Couple of years, sir. He was just a guy in the bodyguard pool.”

“Get me out of here,” Orsino said. “To the Syndic Building.”

In the big black car, he could almost forget the horror; he could hope that time would erase it completely. It wasn’t like polo. That shot had been *aimed*.

The limousine purred to a halt before the titanic bulk of the Syndic Building, was checked and rolled on into the Unrestricted Entrance. An elevator silently lifted the

car and passengers past floors devoted to Alcohol Clerical, Alcohol Research, and Testing, Transport, Collections Audit and Control, Cleaning and Dying, Female Recruitment and Retirement, up, up, up, past sections and sub-sections Charles had never entered, Syndic member though he was, to an automatic stop at a floor whose indicator said: *enforcement and public relations*.

It was only 9:45 P.M.; F. W. Taylor would be in and working. Charles said: "Wait here, boys," and muttered the code phrase to the door. It sprang open.

F. W. Taylor was dictating, machine-gun fashion, to a mike. He looked dog-tired. His face turned up with a frown as Charles entered and then the frown became a beam of pleasure.

"Charles, my boy! Sit down!" He snapped off the machine.

"Uncle—" Charles began.

"It was so kind of you to drop in. I thought you'd be at the theater."

"I was, Uncle, but—"

"I'm working on a revision for the next edition of *Organization, Symbolism and Morale*. You'd never guess who inspired it."

"I'm sure I wouldn't, Uncle. Uncle—"

"Old Thornberry, President of the Chase National. He had the infernal gall to refuse a line of credit to young McGurn. *Bankers!* You won't believe it, but people used to *beg* them to take over their property, tie up their incomes, virtually enslave them. People *demand*ed it. The same way they demanded inexpensive liquor, tobacco and consumer goods, clean women and a chance to win a fortune and our ancestors obliged them. Our ancestors were sneered at in their day, you know. They were called criminals when they distributed goods and services at a price people could afford to pay."

"Uncle!"

"Hush, boy, I know what you're going to say. You can't fool the people forever! When they'd had enough hounding and restriction, they rose in their might.

"The people demanded freedom of choice, Falcaro and the rest rose to lead them in the Syndic and the Mob and they drove the Government into the sea."

"Uncle Frank—"

"From which it still occasionally ventures to annoy our coastal cities," F. W. Taylor commented. He warmed to his subject. "You should have seen the old boy blubber. The last of the old-time bankers, and they deserved everything they got. They brought it on themselves. They had what they called *laissez-faire*, and it worked for awhile until they got to tinkering with it. They demanded things called protective tariffs, tax remissions, subsidies—regulation, regulation, regulation, always of the other fellow. But there were enough bankers on all sides for everybody to be somebody else's other fellow. Coercion snowballed and the Government lost public acceptance. They had a thing called the public debt which I can't begin to explain to you except to say that it was something written on paper and that it raised the cost of everything tremendously. Well, believe me or not, they *didn't* just throw away the piece of paper or scratch out the writing on it. They let it ride until ordinary people couldn't afford the pleasant things in life."

“Uncle—”

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A cautious periscope broke the choppy water off Sea Island, Georgia. At the other end of the periscope were Captain Van Dellen of the North American Navy, lean as a hound, and fat little Commander Grinnel.

“You might take her in a little closer, Van,” said Grinnel mildly.

“The exercise won’t do you any lasting damage,” Van Dellen said. Grinnel was very, very, near to a couple of admirals and normally Van Dellen gave him the kid-glove treatment in spite of ranking him. But this was *his* ship and no cloak and dagger artist from an O.N.I. desk was telling him how to con it.

Grinnel smiled genially at the little joke. “I could call it a disguise,” he said patting his paunch, “but you know me too well.”

“You’ll have no trouble with a sea like this,” Van Dellen said, strictly business. He tried to think of some appropriate phrase to recognize the danger Grinnel was plunging into with no resources except quick wits, a trick ring and a pair of guns. But all that bubbled up to the top of his head was; thank God I’m getting rid of this bastardly little Sociocrat. He’ll kill me some day if he gets a clean shot and the chance of detection is zero. Thank God I’m a Constitutionist. We don’t go in for things like that—or do we? Nobody ever tells me anything. A hack of a pigboat driver. And this little bastard’s going to be an admiral some day. But that boy of mine’ll be an admiral. He’s brainy, like his mother.

Grinnel smiled and said: “Well, this would be it, wouldn’t it?”

“Eh?” Van Dellen asked. “Oh. I see what you mean. Chuck!” he called a sailor. “Break out the Commander’s capsules. Pass the word to stand by for ejection.”

The Commander was fitted, puffing, into the capsule. He growled at the storekeeper: “You sure this was just unsealed? It feels sticky already.”

A brash jayee said: “I saw it unsealed myself three minutes ago, Commander. It’ll get stickier if we spend any more time talking. You have”—he glanced at his chronometer—“seventeen minutes now. Let me snap you in.”

The Commander huddled down after a searching glance at the jayee’s face which photographed it forever in his memory. The top snapped down. Some day—some happy day—that squirt would very much regret telling him off. He gave an okay sign to Van Dellen who waved back meagerly and managed a smile. Three crewmen fitted the capsule into its lock.

Foomf!

It was through the hatch and bobbing on the surface. Its color matched the water’s automatically. Grinnel waggled the lever that aimed it inshore and began to turn the propellor crank. He turned fast; the capsule—rudders, crank, flywheel, shaft and all—would dissolve in approximately fifteen minutes. It was his job to be ashore when that happened.

And ashore he’d be practically a free agent with the loosest sort of roving commission, until January 15th. Then his orders became most specific.

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**III**

Charles Orsino squirmed in the chair. “Uncle—” he pleaded.

“Yes,” F. W. Taylor chuckled, “Old Amadeo and his colleagues were called criminals. They were called bootleggers when they got liquor to people without worrying about the public debt or excise taxes. They were called smugglers when they sold cheap butter in the south and cheap margarine in the north. They were called counterfeiters when they sold cheap cigarettes and transportation tickets. They were called high-jackers when they wrested goods from the normal inflation-ridden chain of middlemen and delivered them at a reasonable price to the consumers.

“They were criminals. Bankers were pillars of society.

“Yet these bankers who dominated society, who were considered the voice of eternal truth when they spoke, who thought it was insanity to challenge their beliefs, started somewhere and perhaps they were the best thing for their day and age that could be worked out....”

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Father Ambrosius gnawed at a bit of salt herring, wiped his hands, dug through the litter in his chest and found a goose quill and a page of parchment. He scrubbed vigorously with a vinegar-soaked sponge, at the writing on the parchment and was pleased to see that it came off nicely, leaving him a clean surface to scribble his sermon notes on. He cut the quill and slit it while waiting for the parchment to dry, wondering idly what he had erased. (It happened to be the last surviving copy of Tacitus’ *Annals*, VII. i-v.)

To work then. The sermon was to be preached on Sexagesima Sunday, a prelude to the solemn season of Lent. Father Ambrosius’ mind wandered in search of a text. Lent ... salt herring ... penitence ... the capital sins ... avarice ... usury ... delinquent pew rent ... fat-headed young Sir Baldwin in his tumbledown castle on the hill ... salt herring now and *per saeculae saeculorum* unless Sir Baldwin paid up his delinquent pew rent.

At the moment, Sir Baldwin came swaggering into the cell. Father Ambrosius rose courteously and said, with some insincerity: “*Pax vobiscum.*”

“Eh?” asked Sir Baldwin, his silly blue eyes popping as he looked over his shoulder. “Oh, you meant me, padre. It don’t do a bit of good to chatter at me in Latin, you know. The king’s Norman is what I speak. I mean to say, if it’s good enough for his majesty Richard, it’s good enough for me, what? Now, what can I do for you, padre?”

Father Ambrosius reminded him faintly: “You came to see me, Sir Baldwin.”

“Eh? Oh. So I did. I was huntin’ stag, padre, and I lost him after chasin’ the whole morning, and what I want to know is, who’s the right saint chap to ask for help in a pickle like that? I mean to say, I wanted to show the chaps some good sport and we started this beast and he got clean away. Don’t misunderstand me, padre, they were good chaps and they didn’t rot me about it, but that kind of talk gets about and doesn’t do one a bit of good, what? So you tell me like a good fellow who’s the right saint chap to put the matter in the best light for me?”

Father Ambrosius repressed an urge to grind his teeth, took thought and said: “St. Hubert, I believe, is interested in the stag hunt.”

“Right-oh, padre! St. Hubert it is. Hubert, Hubert. I shan’t forget it because I’ve a cousin named Hubert. Haven’t seen him for years, poor old chap. He had the

fistula—lived on slops and couldn't sit his horse for a day's huntin'. Poor old chap. Well, I'm off—no, there's another thing I wanted. Suppose this Sunday you preach a howlin' strong sermon against usury, what? That chap in the village, the goldsmith fellow, has the infernal gall to tell me I've got to give him Fallowfield! Forty acres, and he has the infernal gall to tell me they aren't mine any more. Be a good chap, padre, and sort of glare at him from the pulpit a few times to show him who you mean, what?"

"Usury *is* a sin," Father Ambrosius said cautiously, "but how does Fallowfield enter into it?"

Sir Baldwin twiddled the drooping ends of his limp, blond mustache with a trace of embarrassment. "Fact is, I told the chap when I borrowed the twenty marks that Fallowfield would stand as security. I ask you, padre, is it my fault that my tenants are a pack of lazy, thieving Saxon swine and I couldn't raise the money?"

The parish priest bristled unnoticeably. He was pure Saxon himself. "I shall do what I can," he said. "And Sir Baldwin, before you go—"

The young man stopped in the doorway and turned.

"Before you go, may I ask when we'll see your pew rent, to say nothing of the tithes?"

Sir Baldwin dismissed it with an airish wave of the hand. "I thought I just told you, padre. I haven't a farthing to my name and here's this chap in the village telling me to clear out of Fallowfield that I got from my father and his father before him. So how the devil—excuse me—can I pay rent and tithes and Peters pence and all the other things you priest chaps expect from a man, what?" He held up his gauntleted hand as Father Ambrosius started to speak. "No, padre, not another word about it. I know you'd love to tell me I won't go to heaven if I act this way. I don't doubt you're learned and all that, but I can still tell you a thing or two, what? The fact is, I *will* go to Heaven. You see, padre, God's a gentleman and he wouldn't bar another gentleman over a trifle of money trouble that could happen to any gentleman, now would he?"

The fatuous beam was more than Father Ambrosius could bear; his eyes fell.

"Right-oh," Sir Baldwin chirped. "And that saint chap's name was St. Hubert. I didn't forget, see? Not quite the fool some people think I am." And he was gone, whistling a recheat.

Father Ambrosius sat down again and glared at the parchment. Preach a sermon on usury for that popinjay. Well, usury *was* a sin. Christians were supposed to lend to one another in need and not count the cost or the days. But who had ever heard of Sir Baldwin ever lending anything? Of course, he was lord of the manor and protected you against invasion, but there didn't seem to be any invasions anymore....

Wearily, the parish priest dipped his pen and scratched on the parchment: RON. XIII ii, viii, XV i. "Whosoever resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God ... owe no man any thing ... we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak...." A triple-plated text, which, reinforced by a brow of thunder from the pulpit should make the village goldsmith think twice before pressing his demand on Sir Baldwin. Usury *was* a sin.

There was a different knock on the door frame.

The goldsmith, a leather-aproned fellow named John, stood there twisting his cap in his big, burn scarred hands.

“Yes, my son? Come in.” But he scowled at the fellow involuntarily. He should know better than to succumb to the capital sin of avarice. “Well, what is it?”

“Father,” the fellow said, “I’ve come to give you this.” He passed a soft leather purse to the priest. It clinked.

Father Ambrosius emptied it on his desk and stirred the broad silver coins wonderingly with his finger. Five marks and eleven silver pennies. No more salt herring until Lent! Silver forwarded to his bishop in an amount that would do credit to the parish! A gilding job for the image of the Blessed Virgin! Perhaps glass panes in one or two of the church windows!

And then he stiffened and swept the money back into the purse. “You got this by sin,” he said flatly. “The sin of avarice worked in your heart and you practiced the sin of usury on your fellow Christians. Don’t give this money to the Church; give it back to your victims.”

“Father,” the fellow said, nearly blubbering, “excuse me but you don’t understand! They come to me and come to me. They say it’s all right with them, that they’re hiring the money the way you’d hire a horse. Doesn’t that make sense? Do you think I *wanted* to become a moneylender? No! I was an honest goldsmith and an honest goldsmith can’t help himself. All the money in the village drifts somehow into his hands. One leaves a mark with you for safekeeping and pays you a penny the year to guard it. Another brings you silver coins to make into a basin, and you get to keep whatever coins are left over. And then others come to you and say ‘Let me have soandso’s mark to use for a year and then I’ll pay it back and with it another mark’. Father, they beg me! They say they’ll be ruined if I don’t lend to them, their old parents will die if they can’t fee the leech, or their dead will roast forever unless they can pay for masses and what’s a man to *do*?”

“Sin no more,” the priest answered simply. It was no problem.

The fellow was getting angry. “Very well for you to sit there and say so, father. But what do you think paid for the masses you said for the repose of Goodie Howat’s soul? And how did Tom the Thatcher buy his wagon so he could sell his beer in Glastonbury at a better price? And how did Farmer Major hire the men from Wealing to get in his hay before the great storm could ruin it? And a hundred things more. I tell you, this parish would be a worse place without John Goldsmith and he doesn’t propose to be pointed at any longer as a black sinner! I didn’t want to fall into usury but I did, and *when* I did, I found out that those who hoist their noses highest at the moneylender when they pass him in the road are the same ones who beg the hardest when they come to his shop for a loan!”

The priest was stunned by the outburst. John seemed honest, the facts were the facts—can good come out of evil? And there were stories that His Holiness the Pope himself had certain dealings with the Longobards—benchers, or bankers or whatever they called themselves....

“I must think on this, my son,” he said. “Perhaps I was over hasty. Perhaps in the days of St. Paul usury was another thing entirely. Perhaps what you practice is not *really* usury but merely something that resembles it. You may leave this silver with me.”

When John left, Father Ambrosius squeezed his eyes tight shut and pressed the knuckles of both hands to his forehead. Things *did* change. Under the dispensation of the Old Testament, men had more wives than one. That was sinful now, but surely Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were in heaven? Paul wrote his epistles to little islands of Christians surrounded by seas of pagans. Surely in those days it was necessary for Christians to be bound closely together against the common enemy, whereas in these modern times, the ties could be safely relaxed a trifle? How could sinning have paid for the repose of Goodie Howat's soul, got a better price for brewer Thatcher's ale and saved the village hay crop? The Devil was tricky, but not *that* tricky, surely. A few more such tricks and the parish would resemble the paradise terrestrial!

Father Ambrosius dashed from his study to the altar of the little stone church and began furiously to turn the pages of the huge metal-bound lectern Bible.

*"For the love of money is the root of all evil—"*

It burst on Father Ambrosius with a great light that the words of Paul were in reference not to *John Goldsmith's* love of money but to *Sir Baldwin's* love of money.

He dashed back to his study and his pen began to squeak over the parchment, obliterating the last dim trace of Tacitus' *Annals*, VIII i.v. The sermon would be a scorcher, all right, but it wouldn't scorch John Goldsmith. It would scorch Sir Baldwin for ruthlessly and against the laws of God and man refusing to turn Fallowfield over to the moneylender. There would be growls of approval in the church that Sunday, and many black looks directed against Sir Baldwin for his attempt to bilk the parish's friend and benefactor, the moneylender.

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"And that," F. W. Taylor concluded, chuckling, "is how power passes from one pair of hands to another, and how public acceptance of the change follows on its heels. A strange thing—people always think that each exchange of power is the last that will ever take place."

He seemed to be finished.

"Uncle," Orsino said, "somebody tried to kill me."

Taylor stared at him for a long minute, speechless. "What happened?" he finally asked.

"I went formal to the theater, with five bodyguards. The chief guard, name of Halloran, took a shot at me. One of my boys got in the way. He was killed."

Taylor's fingers began to play a tattoo on his annunciator board. Faces leaped into existence on its various screens as he fired orders. "Charles Orsino's chief bodyguard for tonight—Halloran. Trace him. The works. He tried to kill Orsino."

He clicked off the board switches and turned grimly to Orsino. "Now you," he said. "What have *you* been up to?"

"Just doing my job, uncle," Orsino said uneasily.

"Still bagman at the 101st?"

"Yes."

"Fooling with any women?"

"Nothing special, uncle. Nothing intense."

“Disciplined or downgraded anybody lately?”

“Certainly not. The precinct runs like a watch. I’ll match their morale against any outfit east of the Mississippi. Why are you taking this so heavy?”

“Because you’re the third. The other two—your cousin Thomas McGurn and your uncle Robert Orsino—didn’t have guards to get in the way. One other question.”

“Yes, uncle.”

“My boy, *why* didn’t you tell me about this when you first came in?”

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#### IV

A family council was called the next day. Orsino, very much a junior, had never been admitted to one before. He knew why the exception was being made, and didn’t like the reason.

Edward Falcaro wagged his formidable white beard at the thirty-odd Syndic chiefs around the table and growled: “I think we’ll dispense with reviewing production and so on. I want to talk about this damn gunplay. Dick, bring us up to date.”

He lit a vile cigar and leaned back.

Richard W. Reiner rose.

“Thomas McGurn,” he said, “killed April 15th by a burst of eight machine gun bullets in his private dining room at the Astor. Elsie Warshofsky, his waitress, must be considered the principal suspect, but—”

Edward Falcaro snapped: “Suspect, hell! She killed him, didn’t she?”

“*I was about to say*, but the evidence so far is merely cumulative. Mrs. Warshofsky jumped—fell—or was pushed—from the dining room window. The machine gun was found beside the window.

“There are no known witnesses. Mrs. Warshofsky’s history presents no unusual features. An acquaintance submitted a statement—based, she frankly admitted, on nothing definite—that Mrs. Warshofsky sometimes talked in a way that led her to wonder if she might not be a member of the secret terrorist organization known as the D.A.R. In this connection, it should be noted that Mrs. Warshofsky’s maiden name was Adams.

“Robert Orsino, killed April 21st by a thermite bomb concealed in his pillow and fuzed with a pressure-sensitive switch. His valet, Edward Blythe, disappeared from view. He was picked up April 23rd by a posse on the beach of Montauk Point, but died before he could be questioned. Examination of his stomach contents showed a lethal quantity of sodium fluoride. It is presumed that the poison was self-administered.”

“Presumed!” the old man snorted, and puffed out a lethal quantity of cigar smoke.

“Blythe’s history,” Reiner went on blandly, “presents no unusual features. It should be noted that a commerce-raider of the so-called United States Government Navy was reported off Montauk Point during the night of April 23rd-24th by local residents.

“Charles Orsino, attacked April 30th by his bodyguard James Halloran in the lobby of the Costello Memorial Theater. Halloran fired one shot which killed another

bodyguard and was then himself killed. Halloran's history presents no unusual features except that he had a considerable interest in—uh—history. He collected and presumably read obsolete books dealing with pre-Syndic Pre-Mob America. Investigators found by his bedside the first volume of a work published in 1942 called *The Growth of The American Republic* by Morison and Commager. It was opened to Chapter Ten, The War of Independence!"

Reiner took his seat.

F. W. Taylor said dryly: "Dick, did you forget to mention that Warshofsky, Blythe and Halloran are known officers of the U. S. Navy?"

Reiner said: "You are being facetious. Are you implying that I have omitted pertinent facts?"

"I'm implying that you artistically stacked the deck. With a rumor, a dubious commerce-raider report and a note on a man's hobby, you want us to sweep the bastards from the sea, don't you—just the way you always have?"

"I am not ashamed of my expressed attitude on the question of the so-called United States Government and will defend it at any proper time and place."

"Shut the hell up, you two," Edward Falcaro growled. "I'm trying to think." He thought for perhaps half a minute and then looked up, baffled. "Has anybody got any ideas?"

Charles Orsino cleared his throat, amazed at his own temerity. The old man's eyebrows shot up, but he grudgingly said: "I guess you can say something, since they thought you were important enough to shoot."

Orsino said: "Maybe it's some outfit over in Europe or Asia?"

Edward Falcaro asked: "Anybody know anything about Europe or Asia? Jimmy, you flew over once, didn't you? To see about Anatolian poppies when the Mob had trouble with Mex labor?"

Jimmy Falcaro said creakily: "Yeah. It was a waste of time. They have these little dirt farmers scratching out just enough food for the family and maybe raising a quarter-acre of poppy. That's *all* there is from the China Sea to the Mediterranean. In England—Frank, you tell 'em. You explained it to me once."

Taylor rose. "The forest's come back to England. When finance there lost its morale and couldn't hack its way out of the paradoxes that was the end. When that happens you've got to have a large, virile criminal class ready to take over and do the work of distribution and production. Maybe some of you know how the English were. The poor beggars had civilized all the illegality out of the stock. They couldn't do anything that wasn't respectable. From sketchy reports, I gather that England is now forest and a few hundred starving people. One fellow says the men still wear derbies and stagger to their offices in the city.

"France is peasants, drunk three-quarters of the time.

"Russia is peasants, drunk *all* the time.

"Germany—well, there the criminal class was *too* big and *too* virile. The place is a cemetery."

He shrugged: "Say it, somebody. The Mob's gunning for us."

Reiner jumped to his feet. “I will *never* support such a hypothesis!” he shrilled. “It is *mischievous* to imply that a century of peace has been ended, that our three-thousand-mile border with our friend to the West—”

Taylor intoned satirically: “*Un*-blemished, my friends, by a *single* for-ti-fi-ca-tion—”

Edward Falcaro yelled: “Stop your damn foolishness, Frank Taylor! This is no laughing matter.”

Taylor snapped: “Have you been in Mob Territory lately?”

“I have,” the old man said. He scowled.

“How’d you like it?”

Edward Falcaro shrugged irritably. “They have their ways, we have ours. The Regan line is running thin, but we’re not going to forget that Jimmy Regan stood shoulder to shoulder with Amadeo Falcaro in the old days. There’s such a thing as loyalty.”

F. W. Taylor said: “There’s such a thing as blindness.”

He had gone too far. Edward Falcaro rose from his chair and leaned forward, bracing himself on the table. He said flatly: “This is a statement, gentlemen. I won’t pretend I’m happy about the way things are in Mob Territory. I won’t pretend I think old man Regan is a balanced, dependable person. I won’t pretend I think the Mob clients are enjoying anywhere near the service that Syndic clients enjoy. I’m perfectly aware that on our visits of state to Mob Territory we see pretty much what our hosts want us to see. But I cannot believe that any group which is rooted on the principles of freedom and service can have gone very wrong.

“Maybe I’m mistaken, gentlemen. But I cannot believe that a descendant of Jimmy Regan would order a descendant of Amadeo Falcaro murdered. We will consider every other possibility first. Frank, is that clear?”

“Yes,” Taylor said.

“All right,” Edward Falcaro grunted. “Now let’s go about this thing systematically. Dick, you go right down the line with the charge that the Government’s responsible for these atrocities. I hate to think that myself. If they are, we’re going to have to spend a lot of time and trouble hunting them down and doing something about it. As long as they stick to a little commerce-raiding and a few coastal attacks, I can’t say I’m really unhappy about them. They don’t do much harm, and they keep us on our toes and—maybe this one is most important—they keep our client’s memories of the bad old days that we delivered them from alive. That’s a great deal to surrender for the doubtful pleasures of a long, expensive campaign. If assassination’s in the picture I suppose we’ll have to knock them off—but we’ve got to be *sure*.”

“May I speak?” Reiner asked icily.

The old man nodded and re-lit his cigar.

“I have been called—behind my back, naturally—a fanatic,” Reiner said. He pointedly did not look anywhere near F. W. Taylor as he spoke the word. “Perhaps this is correct and perhaps fanaticism is what’s needed at a time like this. Let me point out what the so-called Government stands for: brutal ‘taxation,’ extirpation of gambling, denial of life’s simple pleasures to the poor and severe limitation of them to all but the wealthy, sexual prudery viciously enforced by penal laws of appalling barbarity, endless regulation and coercion governing every waking minute of the day. That was its record during the days of its power and that would be its record if it returned to

power. I fail to see how this menace to our liberty can be condoned by certain marginal benefits which are claimed to accrue from its continued existence.” He faltered for a moment as his face twisted with an unpleasant memory. In a lower, unhappier voice, he went on: “I—I was alarmed the other day by something I overheard. Two small children were laying bets at the Kiddy Counter of the horse room I frequent, and I stopped on my way to the hundred-dollar window for a moment to hear their childish prattle. They were doping the forms for the sixth at Hialeah, I believe, when one of them digressed to say: ‘My Mommy doesn’t play the horses. She thinks all the horse rooms should be closed.’

“It wrung my heart, gentlemen, to hear that. I wanted to take that little boy aside and tell him: ‘Son, your Mommy doesn’t have to play the horses. Nobody has to play the horses unless he wants to. But as long as one single person wants to lay a bet on a horse and another person is willing to take it, nobody has the right to say the horse rooms should be closed.’ Naturally I did not take the little boy aside and tell him that. It would have been an impractical approach to the problem. The *practical* approach is the one I have always advocated and still do. Strike at the heart of the infection! Destroy the remnants of Government and cauterize the wound so that it will never re-infect again. Nor is my language too strong. When I realize that the mind of an innocent child has been corrupted so that he will prattle that the liberties of his brothers must be infringed on, that their harmless pleasures must be curtailed, my blood runs cold and I call it what it is: *treason*.”

Orsino had listened raptly to the words and joined in a burst of spontaneous applause that swept around the table. He had never had a brush with Government himself and he hardly believed in the existence of the shadowy, terrorist D.A.R., but Reiner had made it sound so near and menacing!

But Uncle Frank was on his feet. “We seem to have strayed from the point,” he said dryly. “For anybody who needs his memory refreshed, I’ll state that the point is two assassinations and one near miss. I fail to see the connection, if any with Dick Reiner’s paranoid delusions of persecution. I especially fail to see the relevance of the word ‘treason.’ Treason to what—us? The Syndic is not a government. It must not become enmeshed in the symbols and folklore of a government or it will be first chained and then strangled by them. The Syndic is an organization of high morale and easy-going, hedonistic personality. The fact that it succeeded the Government occurred because the Government had become an organization of low morale and inflexible, puritanic, sado-masochistic personality. I have no illusions about the Syndic lasting forever, and I hope nobody else here has. Naturally I want it to last our lifetime, my children’s lifetime, and as long after that as I can visualize my descendants, but don’t think I have any burning affection for my unborn great-great grandchildren. Now, if there is anybody here who doesn’t want it to last that long, I suggest to him that the quickest way to demoralize the Syndic is to adopt Dick Reiner’s proposal of a holy war for a starter. From there we can proceed to an internal heresy hunt, a census, excise taxes, income taxes and wars of aggression. Now, what about getting back to the assassinations?”

Orsino shook his head, thoroughly confused by now. But the confusion vanished as a girl entered the room, whispered something in the ear of Edward Falcaro and sat down calmly by his side. He wasn’t the only one who noticed her. Most of the faces there registered surprise and some indignation. The Syndic had a very strong tradition of masculinity.

Edward Falcaro ignored the surprise and indignation. He said placidly: “That was very interesting, Frank, what I understood of it. But it’s always interesting when I go ahead and do something because it’s the smart thing to do, and then listen to you explain my reasons—including fifty or sixty that I’m more than positive never crossed my mind.”

There was a laugh around the table that Charles Orsino thought was unfair. He knew, Edward Falcaro knew, and everybody knew that Taylor credited Falcaro with sound intuitive judgment rather than analytic power. He supposed the old man—intuitively—had decided a laugh was needed to clear the air of the quarrel and irrelevance.

Falcaro went on: “The way things stand now, gentlemen, we don’t know very much, do we?” He bit a fresh cigar and lighted it meditatively. From a cloud of rank smoke he said: “So the thing to do is find out more, isn’t it?” In spite of the beard and the cigar, there was something of a sly, teasing child about him. “So what do you say to slipping one of our own people into the Government to find out whether they’re dealing in assassination or not?”

Charles Orsino alone was naive enough to speak; the rest knew that the old man had something up his sleeve. Charles said: “You can’t do it, sir! They have lie-detectors and drugs and all sorts of things—” His voice died down miserably under Falcaro’s too-benign smile and the looks of irritation verging on disgust from the rest. The enigmatic girl scowled. *Goddam them all!* Charles thought, sinking into his chair and wishing he could sink into the earth.

“The young man,” Falcaro said blandly, “speaks the truth—no less true for being somewhat familiar to us all. But what if we have a way to get around the drugs and lie-detectors, gentlemen? Which of you bold fellows would march into the jaws of death by joining the Government, spying on them and trying to report back?”

Charles stood up, prudence and timidity washed away by a burning need to make up for his embarrassment with a grandstand play. “I’ll go, sir,” he said very calmly. *And if I get killed that’ll show ‘em; then they’ll be sorry.*

“Good boy,” Edward Falcaro said briskly, with a well—that’s that air. “The young lady here will take care of you.”

Charles steadily walked down the long room to the head of the table, thinking that he must be cutting a rather fine figure. Uncle Frank ruined his exit by catching his sleeve and halting him as he passed his seat. “Good luck, Charles,” Uncle Frank whispered. “And for Heaven’s sake, keep a better guard up. Can’t you see the old devil planned it this way from the beginning?”

“Good-bye, Uncle Frank,” Charles said, suddenly feeling quite sick as he walked on. The young lady rose and opened the door for him. She was graceful as a cat, and a conviction overcame Charles Orsino that he was the canary.

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## V

Max Wyman shoved his way through such a roar of voices and such a crush of bodies as he had never known before. Scratch Sheet Square was bright as day—brighter. Atomic lamps, mounted on hundred-story buildings hosed and squirted the happy mob with blue-white glare. The Scratch Sheet’s moving sign was saying in fiery letters seventy-five feet tall: “11:58 PM EST ... December 31st ... Cops say two million

*jam NYC streets to greet New Year ... 11:59 PM EST ... December 31st ... Falcaro jokes on TV 'Never thought we'd make it' ... 12:00 midnight January 1st ... Happy New Year ..."*

The roar of voices had become insane. Max Wyman held his head, hating it, hating them all, trying to shut them out. Half a dozen young men against whom he was jammed were tearing the clothes off a girl. They were laughing and she was too, making only a pretense of defending herself. It was one of New York's mild winter nights. Wyman looked at the white skin not knowing that his eyes gloated. He yelled curses at her, and the young men. But nobody heard his whiskey-hoarsened young voice.

Somebody thrust a bottle at him and made mouths, trying to yell: "Happy New Year!" He grabbed feverishly at the bottle and held it to his mouth, letting the liquor gurgle once, twice, three times. Then the bottle was snatched away, not by the man who had passed it to him. A hilarious fat woman plastered herself against Wyman and kissed him clingingly on the mouth, to his horror and disgust. She was torn away from him by a laughing, white-haired man and turned willingly to kissing him instead.

Two strapping girls jockeyed Wyman between them and began to tear *his* clothes off, laughing at their switcheroo on the year's big gag. He clawed out at them hysterically and they stopped, the laughter dying on their lips as they saw his look of terrified rage. A sudden current in the crowd parted Wyman from them; another bottle bobbed on the sea of humanity. He clutched at it and this time did not drink. He stuffed it hurriedly under the waistband of his shorts and kept a hand on it as the eddy of humanity bore him on to the fringes of the roaring mob.

*"Syndic leaders hail New Year ... Taylor praises Century of Freedom ... 12:05 AM EST January 1st ..."*

Wyman was mashed up against a girl who first smiled at his young face invitingly ... and then looked again. "Get away from me!" she shrieked, pounding on his chest with her small fists. You could hear individual voices now, but the crowd was still dense. She kept screaming at him and hitting him until suddenly Scratch Sheet Square Upramp loomed and the crowd fizzed onto it like uncorked champagne, Wyman and the screaming girl carried along the moving plates underfoot. The crowd boiled onto the northbound strip, relieving the crush; the girl vanished, whimpering, into the mob.

Wyman, rubbing his ear mechanically, shuffled with downcast eyes to the Eastbound ramp and collapsed onto a bench gliding by at five miles per hour. He looked stupidly at the ten-mile and fifteen-mile strips, but did not dare step onto them. He had been drinking steadily for a month. He would fall and the bottle would break.

He lurched off the five-mile strip at Riverside Downramp. Nobody got off with him. Riverside was a tangle of freightways over, under and on the surface. He worked there.

Wyman picked his way past throbbing conveyors roofed against pilferage, under gurgling fuel and water and waste pipes, around vast metal warehouses and storage tanks. It was not dark or idle in Riverside. Twenty-four hours was little enough time to bring Manhattan its daily needs and carry off its daily waste and manufactures. Under daylight atomics the transport engineers in their glass perches read the dials and turned the switches. Breakdown crews scurried out from emergency stations as

bells clanged to replace a sagging plate, remag a failing ehrenhafter, unplug a jam of nylon bales at a too-sharp corner.

He found Breakdown Station 26, hitched his jacket over the bottle and swayed in, drunk enough to think he could pretend he was sober. “Hi,” he said hoarsely to the shift foreman. “Got jammed up in the celebration.”

“We heard it clear over here,” the foreman said, looking at him closely. “Are you all right, Max?”

The question enraged him. “Smatter?” he yelled. “Had a couple, sure. Think ‘m drunk? Tha’ wha’ ya think?”

“Gee,” the foreman said wearily. “Look, Max, I can’t send you out tonight. You might get killed. I’m trying to be reasonable and I wish you’d do as much for me. What’s biting you, boy? Nobody has anything against a few drinks and a few laughs. I went on a bender last month myself. But you get so Goddammed *mean* I can’t stand you and neither can anybody else.”

Wyman spewed obscenity at him and tried to swing on him. He was surprised and filled with self-pity when somebody caught his arm and somebody else caught his other arm. It was Dooley and Weintraub, his shift-mates, looking unhappy and concerned.

“Lousy rats!” Wyman choked out. “Leas’ a man’s buddies c’d do is back’m up....” He began to cry, hating them, and then fell asleep on his feet. Dooley and Weintraub eased him down onto the floor.

The foreman mopped his head and appealed to Dooley: “He always like this?” He had been transferred to Station 26 only two weeks before.

Dooley shrugged. “You might say so. He showed up about three months ago. Said he used to be a breakdown man in Buffalo, on the yards. He knew the work all right. But I never saw such a mean kid. Never a good word for anybody. Never any fun. Booze, booze, booze. This time he really let go.”

Weintraub said unexpectedly: “I think he’s what they used to call an alcoholic.”

“What the hell’s that?” the foreman demanded.

“I read about it. It’s something they used to have before the Syndic. I read about it. Things were a lot different then. People picking on you all the time, everybody mad all the time. The girls were scared to give it away and the boys were scared to take it—but they did anyway and it was kind of like fighting with yourself *inside* yourself. The fighting wore some people out so much they just couldn’t take it any more. Instead of going on benders for a change of pace like sensible people, they boozed *all* the time—and they had a fight inside themselves about *that* so they boozed harder.” He looked defensive at their skeptical faces. “I *read* it,” he insisted.

“Well,” the foreman said inconclusively, “I heard things used to be pretty bad. Did these alcoholers get over it?”

“I don’t know,” Weintraub admitted. “I didn’t read that far.”

“Hm. I think I’d better can him.” The foreman was studying their faces covertly, hoping to read a reaction. He did. Both the men looked relieved. “Yeh. I think I’d better can him. He can go to the Syndic for relief if he has to. He doesn’t do us much good here. Put some soup on and get it down him when he wakes up.” The foreman, an average kindly man, hoped the soup would help.

But at about three-thirty, after two trouble calls in succession, they noticed that Wyman had left leaving no word.

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The fat little man struggled out of the New Year's eve throng; he had been caught by accident. Commander Grinnel did not go in for celebrations. When he realized that January fifteenth was now fifteen days away, he doubted that he would ever celebrate again. It was a two-man job he had to do on the fifteenth, and so far he had not found the other man.

He rode the slidewalk to Columbus Square. He had been supplied with a minimum list of contacts. One had moved, and in the crazily undisciplined Syndic Territory it was impossible to trace anybody. Another had died—of too much morphine. Another had beaten her husband almost to death with a chair leg and was in custody awaiting trial. The Commander wondered briefly and querulously: why do we always have such unstable people here? Or does that louse Emory deliberately saddle me with them when I'm on a mission? Wouldn't put it past him.

The final contact on the list was a woman. She'd be worthless for the business of January fifteenth; that called for some physical strength, some technical knowledge, and a residual usefulness to the Government. Professor Speiser had done some good work here on industrial sabotage, but taken away from the scene of possible operations, she'd just be a millstone. He had his record to think of.

Sabotage—

If a giggling threesome hadn't been looking his way from a bench across the slidewalk, he would have ground his teeth. In recent weeks, he had done what he estimated as an easy three million dollars worth of damage to Mob Territory industry. And the stupid fools hadn't *noticed* it! Repair crews had rebuilt the fallen walls, mechanics had tut-tutted over the wrecked engines and replaced them, troubleshooters had troubleshot the scores of severed communications lines and fuel mains.

He had hung around.

"Sam, you see this? Melted through, like with a little thermite bomb. How in the hell did a thing like that happen?"

"I don't know. I wasn't here. Let's get it fixed kid."

"Okay ... you think we ought to report this to somebody?"

"If you want to. I'll mention it to Larry. But I don't see what he can do about it. Must've been some kids. You gotta put it down as fair wear and tear. But boys will be boys."

Remembering, he did grind his teeth. But they were at Columbus Square.

\*\*\*

Professor Speiser lived in one of the old plastic brick faculty houses. Her horsy face, under a curling net, looked out of the annunciator plate. "Yes? What is it?"

"Professor Speiser, I believe you know my daughter, Miss *Freeman*. She asked me to look you up while I was in New York. Have I come much too late?"

"Oh, dear. Why, no. I suppose not. Come in, Mr.—Mr. Freeman."

In her parlor, she faced him apprehensively. When she spoke she rolled out her sentences like the lecturer she was. “Mr. Freeman—as I suppose you’d prefer me to call you—you asked a moment ago whether you’d come too late. I realize that the question was window-dressing, but my answer is quite serious. You have come too late. I have decided to dissociate myself from—let us say, from your daughter, Miss Freeman.”

The Commander asked only: “Is that irrevocable?”

“Quite. It wouldn’t be fair of me to ask you to leave without an explanation. I am perfectly willing to give one. I realize now that my friendship with Miss Freeman and the work I did for her stemmed from, let us say a certain vacancy in my life.”

He looked at a picture on her desk of a bald, pleasant-faced fellow with a pipe.

She followed his eyes and said with a sort of shy pride: “That is Dr. Mordecai, of the University’s Faculty of Dentistry. Like myself, a long-time celibate. We plan to marry.”

The Commander said: “Do you feel that Dr. Mordecai might like to meet my daughter?”

“No. I do not. We expect to have very little time for outside activities, between our professional careers and our personal lives. Please don’t misunderstand, Mr. Freeman. I am still your daughter’s friend. I always shall be. But somehow I no longer find in myself an urgency to express the friendship. It seems like a beautiful dream—and a quite futile one. I have come to realize that one can live a full life without Miss Freeman. Now, it’s getting quite late—”

He smiled ruefully and rose. “May I wish you every happiness, Professor Speiser?” he said, extending his hand.

She beamed with relief. “I was so afraid you’d—”

Her face went limp and she stood swaying drunkenly as the needle in the ring popped her skin.

The Commander, his face as dead as hers, disconnected his hand and sheathed the needle carefully again. He drew one of his guns, shot her through the heart and walked out of the apartment.

Old fool! She should have known better.

\*\*\*

Max Wyman stumbled through the tangle of Riveredge, his head a pot of molten lead and his legs twitching under him as he fled from his shame.

Dimly, as if with new eyes, he saw that he was not alone. Riveredge was technically uninhabited. Then what voices called guardedly to him from the shadows: “Buddy—buddy—wait up a minute, buddy—did you score? Did you score?”

He lurched on and the voices became bolder. The snaking conveyors and ramps sliced out sectors of space. Storage tanks merged with inflow mains to form sheltered spots where they met. No spot was without its whining, appealing voice. He stood at last, quivering, leaning against a gigantic I-beam that supported a heavy-casting freightway. A scrap sheet of corrugated iron rested against the bay of the I-beam, and the sheet quivered and fell outward. An old man’s voice said: “You’re beat, son. Come on in.”

He staggered a step forward and collapsed on a pallet of rags as somebody carefully leaned the sheet back into place again.

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## VI

Max Wyman woke raving with the chuck horrors. There was somebody there to hand him candy bars, sweet lemonade, lump sugar. There was somebody to shove him easily back into the pallet of rags when he tried to stumble forth in a hunt for booze. On the second day he realized that it was an old man whose face looked gray and paralyzed. His name was T. G. Pendelton, he said.

After a week, he let Max Wyman take little walks about their part of Riverside—but not by night. “We’ve got some savage people here,” he said. “They’d murder you for a pint. The women are worse. If one calls to you, don’t go. You’ll wind up dumped through a manhole into the Hudson. Poor folk.”

“You’re *sorry* for them?” Wyman asked, startled. It was a new idea to him. Since Buffalo, he had never been sorry for anybody. Something awful had happened there, some terrible betrayal ... he passed his bony hand across his forehead. He didn’t want to think about it.

“Would I live here if I weren’t?” T. G. asked him. “Sometimes I can help them. There’s nobody else to help them. They’re old and sick and they don’t fit anywhere. That’s why they’re savage. You’re young—the only young man I’ve ever seen in Riveredge. There’s so much outside for the young. But when you get old it sometimes throws you.”

“The Goddammed Syndic,” Wyman snarled, full of hate.

T. G. shrugged. “Maybe it’s too easy for sick old people to get booze. They lose somebody they spent a life with and it throws them. People harden into a pattern. They always had fun, they think they always will. Then half of the pattern’s gone and they can’t stand it, some of them. You got it early. What was the ringing bell?”

Wyman collapsed into the bay of the I-beam as if he’d been kicked in the stomach. A wave of intolerable memory swept over him. A ringing bell, a wobbling pendulum, a flashing light, the fair face of his betrayer, the hateful one of Hogan, stirred together in a hell brew. “Nothing,” he said hoarsely, thinking that he’d give his life for enough booze to black him out. “Nothing.”

“You kept talking about it,” T. G. said. “Was it real?”

“It couldn’t have been,” Wyman muttered. “There aren’t such things. No. There was her and that Syndic and that louse Hogan. I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Suit yourself.”

He did talk about it later, curiously clouded though it was. The years in Buffalo. The violent love affair with Inge. The catastrophic scene when he found her with Regan, king-pin mobster. The way he felt turned inside-out, the lifetime of faith in the Syndic behind him and the lifetime of a faith in Inge ahead of him, both wrecked, the booze, the flight from Buffalo to Erie, to Pittsburgh, to Tampa, to New York. And somehow, insistently, the ringing bell, the wobbling pendulum and the flashing light that kept intruding between episodes of reality.

T. G. listened patiently, fed him, hid him when infrequent patrols went by. T. G. never told him his own story, but a bloated woman who lived with a yellow-toothed

man in an abandoned storage tank did one day, her voice echoing from the curving, windowless walls of corrugated plastic. She said T. G. had been an alky chemist, reasonably prosperous, reasonably happy, reasonably married. His wife was the faithful kind and he was not. With unbelievable slyness she had dulled the pain for years with booze and he had never suspected. They say she had killed herself after one frightful week-long debauché in Riveredge. T. G. came down to Riveredge for the body and returned after giving it burial and drawing his savings from the bank. He had never left Riveredge since.

“Worsh’p the grun’ that man walks on,” the bloated woman mumbled. “Nev’ gets mad, nev’ calls you hard names. Give y’a bottle if y’ need it. Talk to y’ if y’ blue. Worsh’p that man.”

Max Wyman walked from the storage tank, sickened. T. G.’s charity covered that creature and him.

It was the day he told T. G.: “I’m getting out of here.”

The gray, paralyzed-looking face almost smiled. “See a man first?”

“Friend of yours?”

“Somebody who heard about you. Maybe he can do something for you. He feels the way you do about the Syndic.”

Wyman clenched his teeth. The pain still came at the thought. Syndic, Hogan, Inge and betrayal. God, to be able to hit back at them!

The red ride ebbed. Suddenly he stared at T. G. and demanded: “Why? Why should you put me in touch? What is this?”

T. G. shrugged. “I don’t worry about the Syndic. I worry about people. I’ve been worrying about you. You’re a little insane, Max, like all of us here.”

“God damn you!”

“He has....”

Max Wyman paused a long time and said: “Go on, will you?” He realized that anybody else would have apologized. But he couldn’t and he knew that T. G. knew he couldn’t.

The old man said: “A little insane. Bottled-up hatred. It’s better out of you than in. It’s better to sock the man you hate and stand a chance of having him sock you back than it is just to hate him and let the hate gnaw you like a grave-worm.”

“What’ve you got against the Syndic?”

“Nothing, Max. Nothing against it and nothing for it. What I’m for is people. The Syndic is people. You’re people. Slug ‘em if you want and they’ll have a chance to slug you back. Maybe you’ll pull down the Syndic like Samson in the temple; more likely it’ll crush you. But you’ll be *doing* something about it. That’s the great thing. That’s the thing people have to learn—or they wind up in Riveredge.”

“You’re crazy.”

“I told you I was, or I wouldn’t be here.”

The man came at sunset. He was short and pudgy, with a halo of wispy hair and the coldest, grimmest eyes that Wyman had ever seen. He shook hands with Wyman, and the young man noted simultaneously a sharp pain in his finger and that the stranger

wore an elaborate gold ring. Then the world got hazy and confused. He had a sense that he was being asked questions, that he was answering them, that it went on for hours and hours.

When things quite suddenly came into focus again, the pudgy man was saying: "I can introduce myself now. Commander Grinnel, of the North American Navy. My assignment is recruiting. The preliminary examination has satisfied me that you are no plant and would be a desirable citizen of the N. A. Government. I invite you to join us."

"What would I do?" Wyman asked steadily.

"That depends on your aptitudes. What do you think you would like to do?"

Wyman said: "Kill me some Syndics."

The commander stared at him with those cold eyes. He said at last: "It can probably be arranged. Come with me."

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They went by train to Cape Cod. At midnight on January 15th, the commander and Wyman left their hotel room and strolled about the streets. The commander taped small packets to the four legs of the microwave relay tower that connected Cape Cod with the Continental Press common carrier circuits and taped other packets to the police station's motor pool gate.

At 1:00 A.M., the tower exploded and the motor pool gate fused into an impassible puddle of blue-hot molten metal. Simultaneously, fifty men in turtle-neck sweaters and caps appeared from nowhere on Center Street. Half of them barricaded the street, firing on citizens and cops who came too close. The others systematically looted every store between the barricade and the beach.

Blinking a flashlight in code, the commander approached the deadline unmolested and was let through with Wyman at his heels. The goods, the raiders, the commander and Wyman were aboard a submarine by 2:35 and under way ten minutes later.

After Commander Grinnel had exchanged congratulations with the sub commander, he presented Wyman.

"A recruit. Normally I wouldn't have bothered, but he had a rather special motivation. He could be very useful."

The sub commander studied Wyman impersonally. "If he's not a plant."

"I've used my ring. If you want to get it over with, we can test him and swear him in now."

They strapped him into a device that recorded pulse, perspiration, respiration, muscle-tension and brainwaves. A sweated specialist came and mildly asked Wyman matter-of-fact questions about his surroundings while he calibrated the polygraph.

Then came the pay-off. Wyman did not fail to note that the sub commander loosened his gun in his holster when the questioning began.

"Name, age and origin?"

"Max Wyman. Twenty-two. Buffalo Syndic Territory."

"Do you like the Syndic?"

“I hate them.”

“What are your feelings toward the North American Government?”

“If it’s against the Syndic, I’m for it.”

“Would you rob for the North American Government?”

“I would.”

“Would you kill for it?”

“I would.”

“Have you any reservations yet unstated in your answers?”

“No.”

It went on for an hour. The questions were re-phrased continuously; after each of Wyman’s firm answers, the sweated technician gave a satisfied little nod. At last it ended and he was unstrapped from the device.

Max was tired.

The sub commander seemed a little awed as he got a small book and read from it: “Do you, Max Wyman, solemnly renounce all allegiances previously held by you and pledge your allegiance to the North American Government?”

“I do,” the young man said fiercely.

In a remote corner of his mind, for the first time in months, the bell ceased to ring, the pendulum to beat and the light to flash.

Charles Orsino knew again who he was and what was his mission.

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## VII

It had begun when the girl led him through the conference room door. Naturally one had misgivings; naturally one didn’t speak up. But the vault-like door far downstairs was terrifying when it yawned before you and even more so when it closed behind you.

“What is this place?” he demanded at last. “Who are you?”

She said: “Psychology lab.”

It produced on him the same effect that “alchemy section” or “Division of astrology” would have on a well-informed young man in 1950. He repeated flatly: “Psychology lab. If you don’t want to tell me, very well. I volunteered without strings.” Which should remind her that he was a sort of hero and should be treated with a certain amount of dignity and that she could save her corny jokes.

“I meant it,” she said, fiddling busily with the locks of yet another vault-like door. “I’m a psychologist. I’m also by the way, Lee Falcaro—since you asked.”

“The old man—Edward Falcaro’s line?” he asked.

“Simon pure. He’s my father’s brother. Father’s down in Miami, handling the tracks and gaming in general.”

The second big door opened on a brain-gray room whose air had a curiously dead feel to it. “Sit down,” she said, indicating a very unorthodox chair. He did, and found that

the chair was the most comfortable piece of furniture he had ever known. Its contact with his body was so complete that it pressed nowhere, it poked nowhere. The girl studied dials in its back nevertheless and muttered something about adjusting it. He protested.

“Nonsense,” she said decisively. She sat down herself in an ordinary seat. Charles shifted uneasily in his chair to find that it moved with him. Still no pressure, still no poking.

“You’re wondering,” she began, “about the word ‘psychology’. It has a bad history and people have given it up as a bad job. It’s true that there isn’t pressure nowadays to study the human mind. People get along. In general what they want they get, without crippling effort. In your uncle Frank Taylor’s language, the Syndic is an appropriately-structured organization of high morale and wide public acceptance. In my language the Syndic is a father-image which does a good job of fathering. In good times, people aren’t introspective.

“There is, literally, no reason why my line of the family should have kept up a tradition of experimental psychology. Way, way back, old Amadeo Falcaro often consulted Professor Oscar Sternweiss of the Columbia University psychology faculty—he wasn’t as much of a dashing improviser as the history books make him out to be. Eventually one of his daughters married one of Sternweiss’ sons and inherited the Sternweiss notebooks and library and apparatus. It became an irrational custom to keep it alive. When each academic school of psychology managed to prove that every other school of psychology was dead wrong and psychology collapsed as a science, the family tradition was unaffected; it stood outside the wrangling.

“Now, you’re wondering what this has to do with trying to slip you into the Government.”

“I am,” Charles said fervently. If she’d been a doll outside the Syndic, he would minutes ago have protested that all this was foolish and walked out. Since she was not only in the Syndic, but in the Falcaro line, he had no choice except to hear her babble and *then* walk out. It was all rot, psychology. Id, oversoul, mind-vectors, counseling, psychosomatics—rot from sick-minded old men. Everybody knew—

“The Government, we know, uses deinhbiting drugs as a first screening of its recruits. As an infallible second screening, they use a physiological lie-detector based on the fact that telling a lie causes tensions in the liar’s body. We shall get around this by slipping you in as a young man who hates the Syndic for some valid reason—”

“Confound it, you were just telling me that they can’t be fooled!”

“We won’t fool them. You’ll *be* a young man who hates the Syndic. We’ll tear down your present personality a gray cell at a time. We’ll pump you full of Seconal every day for a quarter of a year.... We’ll obliterate your personality under a new one. We’ll bury Charles Orsino under a mountain of suggestions, compulsions and obsessions shoveled at you sixteen hours a day while you’re too groggy to resist. Naturally the supplanting personality will be neurotic, but that works in with the mission.”

He struggled with a metaphysical concept, for the first time in his life. “But—but—how will I know I’m *me*?”

“We think we can put a trigger on it. When you take the Government oath of allegiance, you should bounce back.”

He did not fail to note a little twin groove between her brows that appeared when she said *think* and *should*. He knew that in a sense he was nearer death now than when Halloran's bullet had been intercepted.

"Are you staying with it?" she asked simply.

Various factors entered into it. *A life for the Syndic*, as in the children's history books. That one didn't loom very large. But multiply it by *it sounds like more fun than hot-rod polo*, and that by *this is going to raise my stock sky-high with the family* and you had something. Somehow, under Lee Falcaro's interested gaze, he neglected to divide it by *if it works*.

"I'm staying with it," he said.

She grinned. "It won't be too hard," she said. "In the old days there would have been voting record, social security numbers, military service, addresses they could check on—hundreds of things. Now about all we have to fit you with is a name and a subjective life."

It began that spring day and went on into late fall.

The ringing bell.

The flashing light.

The wobbling pendulum.

You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory. You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory. You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic....

Mom fried pork sausages in the morning, you loved the smell of pumpernickel from the bakery in Vesey Street.

Mr. Watsisname the English teacher with the mustache wanted you to go to college—

*Nay, ye can not, though ye had Argus eyes,*

*In abbeyes they haue so many suttyll spyes;*

*For ones in the yere they have secret vvsytacyons,*

*And yf ony prynce reforme....*

—but the stockyard job was closer, they needed breakdown men—

You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory. You are—

The ringing bell.

The flashing light.

The wobbling pendulum.

And the pork sausages and the teacher with the mustache and poems you loved and  
*page 24, paragraph 3, maximum speed on a live-cattle walkway is three miles per hour: older walkways hold this speed with reduction gears coupled to a standard 18-inch ehrenhafter unit. Standard practice in new construction calls for holding speed by direct drive from a specially-wound ehrenhafter. This places a special obligation in breakdown maintenance men, who must distinguish between the two types, carry two sets of wiring diagrams and a certain number of mutually-uninterchangeable parts, though good design principles hold these to a minimum.*

*The main difference in the winding of a standard 18-incher and a lowspeed ehrenhafter rotor—*

Of course things are better now, Max Wyman, you owe a great debt to Jim Hogan, Father of the Buffalo Syndic, who fought for your freedom in the great old days, and to his descendants who are tirelessly working for your freedom and happiness.

And bow-happiness is a girl named Inge Klohbel now that you're almost a man.

You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory. You are Max Wyman of Buffalo Syndic Territory.

And Inge Klohbel is why you put away the crazy dream of scholarship, for her lips and hair and eyes and legs mean more to you than anything, more than

*Later phonologic changes include palatal mutation; i.e., before cht and hs the diphthongs eo, io, which resulted from breaking, became ie (i, y) as in cneoht, chieht, and seox (x equalling hs), siex, six, syx....*

the crazy dream of scholarship, what kind of a way is that to repay the Mob and  
The ringing bell.

The flashing light.

The wobbling pendulum.

repay the Syndic and young Mike Hogan all over the neighborhood suddenly and Inge says he did stop and say hello but of course he was just being polite.

so you hit the manuals hard and one day you go out on a breakdown call and none of the older men could figure out why the pump was on the blink; a roaring, chewing monster of a pump it was, sitting there like a dead husk and the cattlefeed backed up four miles to a storage tank in the suburbs and the steers in the yards bawling with hunger, and you traced the dead wire, you out with the spot-welder, a zip of blue flame and the pump began to chew again and you got the afternoon off.

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And there they were.

*Lee Falcaro: (Bending over the 'muttering, twitching carcass) Adrenalin. Brighter picture and louder sound.*

*Assistant: (Opening a pinch cock in the tube that enters the arm, increasing video contrast, increasing audio): He's weakening.*

*Lee Falcaro: (In a whisper) I know. I know. But this is IT.*

*Assistant: (Inaudibly) You cold-blooded bitch.*

You are Max Wyman, you are Max Wyman,

and you don't know what to do about the Syndic that betrayed you, about the girl who betrayed you with the living representative of the Syndic, about the dream of scholarship that lies in ruins, the love that lies in ruins after how many promises and vows, the faith of twenty years that lies in ruins after how many declarations.

The ringing bell.

The flashing light.

The wobbling pendulum.

And a double whiskey with a beer chaser.

*Lee Falcaro: The alcohol. (It drips from a sterile graduate, trickles through the rubber tubing and into the arm of the mumbling, sweating carcass. The molecules mingle with the molecules of serum: In seconds they are washed against the cell-walls of the forebrain. The cell-walls their structure as the alcohol molecules bumble against them; the lattices of jelly that wall in the cytoplasm and nuclear jelly become thinner than they were. Streams of electrons that had coursed in familiar paths through chains of neurones find easier paths through the poison-thinned cell-walls. A “Memory” or an “Idea” or a “Hope” or a “Value” that was a configuration of neurones linked by electron streams vanishes when the electron streams find an easier way to flow a New “Memories,” “Ideas,” “Hopes” and “Values” that are configurations of neurones linked by electron streams are born.)*

Love and loyalty die, but not as if they had never been. Their ghosts remain, Max Wyman and you are haunted by them. They hound you from Buffalo to Erie, but there is no oblivion deep enough in the Mex joints, or in Tampa tequila or Pittsburgh zubrovka or New York gin.

You tell incurious people who came to the place on the corner for a shot and some talk that you’re the best breakdown man that ever came out of Erie; you tell them women are no God-damn good, you tell them the Syndic—here you get sly and look around with drunken caution, lowering your voice—you tell them the Syndic’s no God-damned good, and you drunkenly recite poetry until they move away, puzzled and annoyed.

*Lee Falcaro: (Passing a weary hand across her forehead) well, he’s had it. Disconnect the tubes, give him a 48-hour stretch in bed and then get him on the street pointed towards Riveredge.*

*Assistant: Does the apparatus go into dead storage?*

*Lee Falcaro: (Grimacing uncontrollably) No. Unfortunately, no.*

*Assistant: (Inaudibly, as she plucks needle-tipped tubes from the carcass’ elbows) who’s the next sucker?*

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## VIII

The submarine surfaced at dawn. Orsino had been assigned a bunk and, to his surprise, had fallen asleep almost at once. At eight in the morning, he was shaken awake by one of the men in caps.

“Shift change,” the man explained laconically.

Orsino started to say something polite and sleepy. The man grabbed his shoulder and rolled him onto the deck, snarling: “You going to *argue*?”

Orsino’s reactions were geared to hot-rod polo—doing the split-second right thing after instinctively evaluating the roll of the ball, the ricochet of bullets, the probable tactics and strategy of the opposing four. They were not geared to a human being who behaved with the blind ferocity of an inanimate object. He just gawked at him from the deck, noting that the man had one hand on a sheath knife.

“All right, buster,” the man said contemptuously, apparently deciding that Orsino would stay put. “Just don’t mess with the Guard.” He rolled into the bunk and gave a

good imitation of a man asleep until Orsino worked his way through the crowded compartment and up a ladder to the deck.

There was a heavy, gray over-cast. The submarine seemed to be planing the water; salt spray washed the shining deck. A gun crew was forward, drilling with a five-incher. The rasp of a petty-officer singing out the numbers mingled with the hiss and gurgle of the spray. Orsino leaned against the conning tower and tried to comb his thoughts out clean and straight.

It wasn't easy.

He was Charles Orsino, very junior Syndic member, with all memories pertaining thereto.

He was also, more dimly, Max Wyman with *his* memories. Now, able to stand outside of Wyman, he could recall how those memories had been implanted—down to the last stab of the last needle. He thought some very bitter thoughts about Lee Falcaro—and dropped them, snapping to attention as Commander Grinnel pulled himself through the hatch. “Good morning, sir,” he said.

The cold eyes drilled him. “Rest,” the commander said. “We don't play it that way on a pigboat. I hear you had some trouble about your bunk.”

Orsino shrugged uncomfortably.

“Somebody should have told you,” the commander said. “The boat's full of Guardsmen. They have a very high opinion of themselves—which is correct. They carried off the raid in good style. You don't mess with Guards.”

“What are they?” Orsino asked.

Grinnel shrugged. “The usual elite,” he said. “Loman's gang.” He noted Orsino's blank look and smiled coldly. “Loman's President of North America,” he said.

“On shore,” Orsino hazarded, “we used to hear about somebody named Ben Miller.”

“Obsolete information. Miller had the Marines behind him. Loman was Secretary of Defense. He beached the Marines and broke them up into guard detachments. Took away their heavy weapons. Meanwhile, he built up the Guard, very quietly—which, with the Secretary of Information behind him, he could do. About two years ago, he struck. The Marines who didn't join the Guard were massacred. Miller had the sense to kill himself. The Veep and the Secretary of State resigned, but it didn't save their necks. Loman assumed the Presidency automatically, of course, and had them shot. They were corrupt as hell anyway. They were owned body and soul by the southern bloc.”

Two seamen appeared with a folding cot, followed by the sub commander. He was red-eyed with lack of sleep. “Set it there,” he told them, and sat heavily on the sagging canvas. “Morning, Grinnel,” he said with an effort. “Believe I'm getting too old for the pigboats. I want sun and air. Think you can use your influence at court to get me a corvette?” He bared his teeth to show it was a joke.

Grinnel said, with a minimum smile: “If I had any influence, would I catch the cloak-and-dagger crap they sling at me?”

The sub commander rolled back onto the cot and was instantly asleep, a muscle twitching the left side of his face every few seconds.

Grinnel drew Orsino to the lee of the conning tower. “We’ll let him sleep,” he said. “Go tell that gun crew Commander Grinnel says they should lay below.”

Orsino did. The petty officer said something exasperated about the gunnery training bill and Orsino repeated his piece. They secured the gun and went below.

Grinnel said, with apparent irrelevance: “You’re a rare bird, Wyman. You’re capable—and you’re uncommitted. Let’s go below. Stick with me.”

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He followed the fat little commander into the conning tower. Grinnel told an officer of some sort: “I’ll take the con, mister. Wyman here will take the radar watch.” He gave Orsino a look that choked off his protests. Presumably, Grinnel knew that he was ignorant of radar.

The officer, looking baffled, said: “Yes, Commander.” A seaman pulled his head out of a face-fitting box and told Wyman: “It’s all yours, stranger.” Wyman cautiously put his face into the box and was confronted by meaningless blobs of green, numerals in the dark, and a couple of arrows to make confusion complete.

He heard Grinnel say to the helmsman: “Get me a mug of joe, sailor. I’ll take the wheel.”

“I’ll pass the word, sir.”

“Nuts you’ll pass the word, sailor. Go get the coffee—and I want it now and not when some steward’s mate decides he’s ready to bring it.”

“Aye, aye, sir.” Orsino heard him clatter down the ladder. Then his arm was gripped and Grinnel’s voice muttered in his ear: “When you hear me bitch about the coffee, sing out: ‘Aircraft 265, DX 3,000’. Good and loud. No, don’t stop looking. Repeat it.”

Orsino said, his eyes crossing on double images of the meaningless, luminous blobs: “Aircraft 265, DX 3,000. Good and loud. When you bitch about the coffee.”

“Right. Don’t forget it.”

He heard the feet on the ladder again. “Coffee, sir.”

“Thanks, sailor.” A long sip and then another. “I always said the pigboats drink the lousiest joe in the Navy.”

“Aircraft 265, DX 3,000!” Orsino yelled.

A thunderous alarm began to sound. “Take her down!” yelled Commander Grinnel.

“Take her down, sir!” the helmsman echoed. “But sir, the skipper—”

Orsino remembered him too then, dead asleep in his cot on the deck, the muscle twitching the left side of his face every few seconds.

“God-damn it, those were aircraft! *Take her down!*”

The luminous blobs and numbers and arrows swirled before Orsino’s eyes as the trim of the ship changed, hatches clanged to and water thundered into the ballast tanks. He staggered and caught himself as the deck angled sharply underfoot.

He knew what Grinnel had meant by saying he was uncommitted, and he knew now that it was no longer true.

He thought for a moment that he might be sick into the face-fitting box, but it passed.

Minutes later, Grinnel was on the mike, his voice sounding metallically through the ship: “To all hands. To all hands. This is Commander Grinnel. We lost the skipper in that emergency dive—but you and I know that that’s the way he would have wanted it. As senior line officer aboard, I’m assuming command for the rest of the voyage. We will remain submerged until dark. Division officers report to the wardroom. That’s all.”

He tapped Orsino on the shoulder. “Take off,” he said. Orsino realized that the green blobs—clouds, were they?—no longer showed, and recalled that radar didn’t work through water.

He wasn’t in on the wardroom meeting, and wandered rather forlornly through the ship, incredibly jammed as it was with sleeping men, coffee-drinking men and booty. Half a dozen times he had to turn away close questioning about his radar experience and the appearance of the aircraft on the radar scope. Each time he managed it, with the feeling that one more question would have cooked his goose.

The men weren’t sentimental about the skipper they had lost. Mostly they wondered how much of a cut Grinnel would allot them from the booty of Cape Cod.

At last the word passed for “Wyman” to report to the captain’s cabin. He did, sweating after a fifteen-minute chat with a radar technician.

Grinnel closed the door of the minute cabin and smirked at him. “You have trouble, Wyman?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“You’d have worse trouble if they found out for sure that you don’t know radar. I’d be in the clear. I could tell them you claimed to be a qualified radar man. That would make me out to be pretty gullible, but it would make you out to be a murderer. Who’s backing you, Wyman? Who told you to get rid of the skipper?”

“Quite right, sir,” Orsino said. “You’ve really got me there.”

“Glad you realize it, Wyman. I’ve got you and I can use you. It was a great bit of luck, the skipper corking off on deck. But I’ve always had a talent for improvisation. If you’re determined to be a leader, Wyman, nothing is more valuable. Do you know, I can relax with you? It’s a rare feeling. For once I can be certain that the man I’m talking to isn’t one of Loman’s stooges, or one of Clinch’s N.A.B.I. ferrets or anything else but what he says he is—

“But that’s beside the point. I have something else to tell you. There are two sides to working for me, Wyman. One of them’s punishment if you get off the track. That’s been made clear to you. The other is reward if you stay on. I have plans, Wyman, that are large-scale. They simply eclipse the wildest hopes of Loman, Clinch, Baggot and the rest. And yet, they’re not wild. How’d you like to be on the inside when the North American Government returns to the mainland?”

Orsino uttered an authentic gasp and Commander Grinnel looked satisfied.

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## IX

The submarine docked at an indescribably lovely bay in the south of Ireland. Orsino asked Grinnel whether the Irish didn't object to this, and was met with a blank stare. It developed that the Irish consisted of a few hundred wild men in the woods—maybe a few thousand. The stupid shore-bound personnel couldn't seem to clean them out. Grinnel didn't know anything about them, and he cared less.

Ireland appeared to be the naval base. The government proper was located on Iceland, vernal again after a long, climatic swing. The Canaries and Ascension were outposts.

Orsino had learned enough on the voyage to recognize the Government for what it was. It had happened before in history; Uncle Frank had pointed it out. Big-time Caribbean piracy had grown from very respectable origins. Gentlemen-skippers had been granted letters of marque and reprisal by warring governments, which made them a sort of contract navy. Periods of peace had found these privateers unwilling to give up their hard earned complicated profession and their investments in it. When they could no longer hoist the flag of England or France or Spain, they simply hoisted the Jolly Roger and went it alone.

Confusing? Hell, yes! The famous Captain Kidd thought he was a gallant privateer and sailed trustingly into New York. Somewhere he had failed to touch third base; they shipped him to London for trial and hanged him as a pirate. The famous Henry Morgan had never been anything but a pirate and a super-pirate; as admiral of a private fleet he executed a brilliant amphibious operation and sacked the city of Panama. He was knighted, made governor of a fair-sized English island in the West Indies and died loved and respected by all.

Charles Orsino found himself a member of a pirate band that called itself the North American Government.

More difficult to learn were the ins and outs of pirate politics, which were hampered with an archaic, structurally-inappropriate nomenclature and body of tradition. Commander Grinnel was a Sociocrat, which meant that he was in the same gang as President Loman. The late sub commander had been a Constitutionist, which meant that he was allied with the currently-out "southern bloc." The southern bloc did not consist of southerners at this stage of the North American Government's history but of a clique that tended to include the engineers and maintenance men of the Government. That had been the reason for the sub commander's erasure.

The Constitutionists traditionally commanded pigboats and aircraft while surface vessels and the shore establishments were in the hands of the Sociocrats—the fruit of some long-forgotten compromise.

Commander Grinnel cheerfully explained to Charles that there was a crypto-Sociocrat naval officer primed and waiting to be appointed to the command of the sub. The Constitutionist gang would back him to the hilt and the Sociocrats would growl and finally assent. If, thereafter, the Constitutionists ever counted on the sub in a coup, they would be quickly disillusioned.

There wasn't much voting. Forty years before there had been a bad deadlock following the death by natural causes of President Powell after seventeen years in office. An ad hoc bipartisan conference called a session of the Senate and the Senate elected a new president.

It was little information to be equipped with when you walked out into the brawling streets of New Portsmouth on shore leave.

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The town had an improvised look which was strange to Orsino. There was a sanitation reactor every hundred yards or so, but he mistrusted the look of the ground-level mains that led to it from the houses. There were house flies from which he shied violently. Every other shack on the waterfront was a bar or a notch joint. He sampled the goods at one of the former and was shocked by the quality and price. He rolled out, his ears still ringing from the belt of raw booze; as half a dozen sweated Guards rolled in, singing some esoteric song about their high morale and even higher venereal rate. A couple of them looked at him appraisingly, as though they wondered what kind of a noise he'd make if they jumped on his stomach real hard, and he hurried away from them.

The other entertainment facilities of the waterfront were flatly ruled out by a quick inspection of the wares. He didn't know what to make of them. Joints back in Syndic Territory if you were a man, made sense. You went to learn the ropes, or because you were afraid of getting mixed up in something intense when you didn't want to, or because you wanted a change, or because you were too busy, lazy or shy to chase skirts on your own. If you were a woman and not too particular, a couple of years in a joint left you with a considerable amount of money and some interesting memories which you were under no obligation to discuss with your husbands or husband.

But the sloppy beasts who called to him from the windows of the joints here on the waterfront, left him puzzled and disgusted. He reflected, strolling up Washington Street with eyes straight ahead, that women must be in short supply if they could make a living—or that the male citizens of the Government had no taste.

A whiff from one of those questionable sewer mains sent him reeling. He ducked into another saloon in self-defense and leaned groggily against the bar. A pretty brunette demanded: "What'll you have?"

"Gin, please." He peeled a ten off the roll Grinnel had given him. When the girl poured his gin he looked at her and found her fair. In all innocence, he asked her a question, as he might have asked a barmaid back home. She could have answered, "Yes," "No," "Maybe," or "What's in it for me?"

Instead she called him a lousy bastard, picked up a beer mug and was about to shatter it on his head when a hand caught her and a voice warned: "Hold it, Mabel! This guy's off my ship.

"He's just out of the States; he doesn't know any better. You know what it's like over there."

Mabel snarled: "You better wise him up, then, friend. He can't go around talking like that to decent women." She slapped down another glass, poured gin and flounced down the bar.

Charles gulped his gin and turned shakily to his deliverer, a little reactor specialist he had seen on the sub once or twice. "Thanks," he said feeling inadequate. "Maybe you better wise me up. All I said was, 'Darling, do you—'"

The reactor man held up his hand. "That's enough," he said. "You don't talk that way over here unless you want your scalp parted."

Charles, buzzing a little with the gin, protested hotly: "But what's the harm? All she had to say was no; I wasn't going to throw her down on the floor!"

It was all very confusing.

A shrug. “I heard about things in the States—Wyman, isn’t it? I guess I didn’t really believe it. You mean I could go up to any woman and just ask her how’s about it?”

“Within reason, yes.”

“And *do* they?”

“Some do, some don’t—like here.”

“Like hell, like here! Last liberty—” and the reactor man told him a long, confusing story about how he had picked up this pig, how she had dangled it in front of him for one solid week while he managed to spend three hundred and eighty-six dollars on her, and how finally she had bawled that she couldn’t, she just hated herself but she couldn’t do anything like *that* and bang went the door in his face, leaving him to finish out the evening in a notch joint.

“Good God!” Charles said, appalled. “Was she out of her mind?”

“No,” the reactor man said glumly, “but I must have been. I should of got her drunk and raped her the first night.”

Charles was fully conscious that values were different here. Choking down something like nausea, he asked carefully: “Is there much rape?”

The little man signalled for another gin and downed it. “I guess so. Once when I was a kid a dame gave me this line about her cousin raped her when she was little so she was frigid. I had more ambition then, so I said: ‘Then this won’t be anything new to you, baby,’ I popped her on the button—”

“I’ve got to go now,” Charles said, walking straight out of the saloon. He was beginning to understand the sloppy beasts in the windows of the notch joint and why men could bring themselves to settle for nothing better. He was also overwhelmed by a great wave of home sickness.

The ugly pattern was beginning to emerge. Prudery, rape, frigidity, intrigue for power—and assassination? Beyond the one hint, Grinnel had said nothing that affected Syndic Territory.

But nothing would be more logical than for this band of brigands to lust after the riches of the continent.

Back of the waterfront were shipfitting shops and living quarters. Work was being done by a puzzling combination of mechanization and musclepower. In one open shed he saw a lathe-hand turning a gunbarrel out of a forging; the lathe was driven by one of those standard 18-inch ehrenhaft rotors Max Wyman knew so well. But a vertical drillpress next to it—Orsino blinked. Two men, sweating and panting, were turning a stubborn vertical drum as tall as they were, and a belt drive from the drum whirled the drill bit as it sank into a hunk of bronze. The men were in rags, dirty rags. And it came to Orsino with a stunning shock when he realized what the dull, clanking things were that swung from their wrists. They were chained to the handles of the wheel.

He walked on, almost dazed, comprehending now some cryptic remarks that had been passed aboard the sub.

“No Frog has staying power. Give a Limey his beef once a day and he’ll outswear a Frog.”

“Yeah, but you can’t whip a Limey. They just go bad when you whip a Limey.”

“They just get sullen for awhile. But let me tell you, friend, don’t ever whip a Spig. You whip a Spig, he’ll wait twenty years if he has to but he’ll *get* you, right between the ribs.”

“If a Spig wants to be boiled, I should worry.”

It had been broken up in laughter.

*Boiled!* Could such things be?

Sixteen ragged, filth-crusted sub-humans were creeping down the road, each straining at a rope. An inch at a time, they were dragging a skid loaded with one huge turbine gear whose tiny herringbone teeth caught the afternoon sun.

The Government had reactors, the Government had vehicles—why this? He slowly realized that the Government’s metal and machinery and atomic power went into its warships; that there was none left over for consumers, and the uses of peace. The Government had degenerated into a dawn-age monster, specialized all to teeth and claws and muscles to drive them with. The Government was now, whatever it had been, a graceless, humorless incarnate ferocity. Whatever lightness or joy survived was the meaningless vestigial twitching of an obsolete organ.

Somewhere a child began to bawl and Charles was surprised to feel a profound pity welling up in him. Like a sedentary man who after a workout aches in muscles he never knew he owned, Charles was discovering that he had emotions which had never been poignantly evoked by the bland passage of the hours in Syndic Territory.

Poor little bastard, he thought, growing up in this hellhole. I don’t know what having slaves to kick around will do to you, but I don’t see how you can grow up a human being. I don’t know what fear of love will do to you—make you a cheat? Or a graceful rutting animal with a choice only between graceless rutting violence and a stinking scuffle with a flabby and abstracted stranger in a strange unloved room? We have our guns to play with and they’re good toys, but I don’t know what kind of monster you’ll become when they give you a gun to live with and violence for a god.

*Reiner was right*, he thought unhappily. *We’ve got to do something about this mess.*

A man and a woman were struggling in an alley as he passed. Old habit almost made him walk on, but this wasn’t the playful business of ripping clothes as practiced during hilarious moments in Mob Territory. It was a grim and silent struggle—

The man wore the sweater of the Guards. Nevertheless, Charles walked into the alley and tore him away from the woman; or rather, he yanked at the man’s rock-like arm and the man, in surprise, let go of the woman and spun to face him.

“Beat it,” Charles said to the woman, not looking around. He saw from the corner of his eye that she was staying right there.

The man’s hand was on his sheath knife. He told Charles: “Get lost. Now. You don’t mess with the Guards.”

Charles felt his knees quivering, which was good. He knew from many a chukker of polo that it meant that he was strung to the breaking point, ready to explode into action. “Pull that knife,” he said, “and the next thing you know you’ll be eating it.”

The man's face went dead calm and he pulled the knife and came in low, very fast. The knife was supposed to catch Charles in the middle. If Charles stepped inside it, the man would grab him in a bear hug and knife him in the back.

There was only one answer.

He caught the thick wrist from above with his left hand as the knife flashed toward his middle and shoved out. He felt the point catch and slice his cuff. The Guardsman tried a furious and ill-advised kick at his crotch; with his grip on the knife-hand, Charles toppled him into the filthy alley as he stood one-legged and off balance. He fell on his back, floundering, and for a black moment, Charles thought his weight was about to tear the wrist loose from his grip. The moment passed, and Charles put his right foot in the socket of the Guardsman's elbow, reinforced his tiring left hand with his right and leaned, doubling the man's forearm over the fulcrum of his boot. The man roared and dropped the knife. It had taken perhaps five seconds.

Charles said, panting: "I don't want to break your arm or kick your head in or anything like that. I just want you to go away and leave the woman alone." He was conscious of her, vaguely hovering in the background. He thought angrily: *She might at least get his knife.*

The Guardsman said thickly: "You give me the boot and I swear to God I'll find you and cut you to ribbons if it takes me the rest of my life."

*Good*, Charles thought. *Now he can tell himself he scared me. Good.* He let go of the forearm, straightened and took his foot from the man's elbow, stepping back. The Guardsman got up stiffly, flexing his arm, and stooped to pick up and sheath his knife without taking his eyes off Charles. Then he spat in the dust at Charles' feet. "Yellow crud," he said. "If the goddam crow was worth it, I'd cut your heart out." He walked off down the alley and Charles followed him with his eyes until he turned the corner into the street.

Then he turned, irritated that the woman had not spoken.

She was Lee Falcaro.

"Lee!" he said, thunderstruck. "What are you doing here?" It was the same face, feature for feature, and between her brows appeared the same double groove he had seen before. But she didn't know him.

"You know me?" she asked blankly. "Is that why you pulled that ape off me? I ought to thank you. But I can't place you at all. I don't know many people here. I've been ill, you know."

There was a difference apparent now. The voice was a little querulous. And Charles would have staked his life that never could Lee Falcaro have said in that slightly smug, slightly proprietary, slightly aren't-I-interesting tone: "I've been ill, you know."

"But what are you *doing* here? Damn it, don't you know me? I'm Charles Orsino!"

He realized then that he had made a horrible mistake.

"Orsino," she said. And then she spat: "*Orsino! Of the Syndic!*" There was black hatred in her eyes.

She turned and raced down the alley. He stood there stupidly, for almost a minute, and then ran after her, as far as the alley's mouth. She was gone. You could run almost anywhere in New Portsmouth in almost a minute.

A weedy little seaman wearing crossed quills on his cap was lounging against a building. He snickered at Charles. "Don't chase that one, sailor," he said. "She is the property of O.N.I."

"You know who she is?"

The yeoman happily spilled his inside dope to the fleet gob: "Lee Bennet. Smuggled over here couple months ago by D.A.R. The hottest thing that ever hit Naval Intelligence. Very small potato in the Syndic—knows all the families, who does what, who's a figurehead and who's a worker. Terrific! Inside stuff! Hates the Syndic. A gang of big-timers did her dirt."

"Thanks," Charles said, and wandered off down the street.

It wasn't surprising. He should have *expected* it.

*Noblesse oblige.*

Pride of the Falcaro line. She wouldn't send anybody into deadly peril unless she were ready to go herself.

Only somehow the trigger that would have snapped neurotic, synthetic Lee Bennet into Lee Falcaro hadn't worked.

He wandered on aimlessly, wondering whether it would be minutes or hours before he'd be picked up and executed as a spy.

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**X**

It took minutes only.

He had headed back to the waterfront, afraid to run, with some vague notion of stealing a boat. Before he reached the row of saloons and joints, a smart-looking squad of eight tall men overtook him.

"Hold it, mister," a sergeant said. "Are you Orsino?"

"No," he said hopelessly. "That crazy woman began to yell at me that I was Orsino, but my name's Wyman. What's this about?"

The other men fell in beside and behind him. "We're stepping over to O.N.I.," the sergeant said.

"There's the son of a bitch!" somebody bawled. Suddenly there were a dozen sweated Guardsmen around them. Their leader was the thug Orsino had beaten in a fair fight. He said silkily to the sergeant: "We want that boy, leatherneck. Blow."

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The sergeant went pale. "He's wanted for questioning by the O.N.I.," he said stolidly.

"Get the marine three-striper!" the Guardsman chortled. He stuck his jaw into the sergeant's face. "Tell your squad to blow. You marines ought to know by now that you don't mess with the Guard."

A very junior officer appeared. "What's going on here, you men?" he shrilled. "Attention!" He was ignored as Guardsman and marines measured one another with their eyes. "I said *attention!* Dammit, sergeant, *report!*" There was no reaction. The officer yelled: "You men may think you can get away with this but by God, you're wrong!" He strode away, his fists clenched and his face very red.

Orsino saw him stride through a gate into a lot marked *Bupers Motor Pool*. And he felt a sudden wave of communal understanding that there were only seconds to go. The sergeant played for time: "I'll be glad to surrender the prisoner," he started, "if you have anything to show in the way of—"

The Guardsman kicked for the pit of the sergeant's stomach. He was a sucker Orsino thought abstractedly as he saw the sergeant catch his foot, dump him and pivot to block another Guardsman. Then he was fighting for his life himself, against three bellowing Guardsmen.

A ripping, hammering noise filled the air suddenly. Like cold magic, it froze the milling mob where it stood. Fifty-caliber noise.

The jaygee was back, this time in a jeep with a twin fifty. And he was glaring down its barrels into the crowd. People were beginning to stream from the saloons, joints and shipfitting shops.

The jaygee cocked his cap rakishly over one eye. "*Fall in!*" he rasped, and a haunting air of familiarity came over Orsino.

The waiting jeep, almost bucking in its eagerness to be let loose—Orsino on the ground, knees trembling with tension—a perfect change of mount scene in a polo match. He reacted automatically.

There was a surrealist flash of the jaygee's face before he clipped him into the back of the square little truck. There was another flash of spectators scrambling as he roared the jeep down the road.

From then on it was just a question of hanging onto the wheel with one hand, trying to secure the free-traversing twin-fifty with the other, glancing back to see if the jaygee was still out, avoiding yapping dogs and pedestrians, staying on the rutted road, pushing all possible speed out of the jeep, noting landmarks, estimating the possibility of dangerous pursuit. For a two-goal polo player, a dull little practice session.

The road, such as it was, wound five miles inland through scrubby woodland and terminated at a lumber camp where chained men in rags were dragging logs.

Orsino back tracked a quarter-mile from the camp and jolted overland in a kidney-cracking hare and hounds course at fifty per.

The jeep took it for an hour in the fading afternoon light and then bucked to a halt. Orsino turned for an overdue check on the jaygee and found him conscious, but greenly clinging to the sides of the vehicle. But he saw Orsino staring and gamely struggled to his feet, standing in the truck bed. "You're under arrest, sailor," he said. "Striking an officer, abuse of government property, driving a government vehicle without a trip-ticket—" His legs betrayed him and he sat down, hard.

Orsino thought very briefly of letting him have a burst from the twin-fifty, and abandoned the idea.

He seemed to have bitched up everything so far, but he was still on a mission. He had a commissioned officer of the Government approximately in his power. He snapped: "Nonsense. *You're* under arrest."

The jaygee seemed to be reviewing rapidly any transgressions he may have committed, and asked at last, cautiously: "By what authority?"

"I represent the Syndic."

It was a block-buster. The jaygee stammered: “But you can’t—But there isn’t any way—But how—”

“Never mind how.”

“You’re crazy. You must be, or you wouldn’t stop here. I don’t believe you’re from the continent and I don’t believe the jeep’s broken down.” He was beginning to sound just a little hysterical. “It can’t break down here. We must be more than thirty miles inland.”

“What’s special about thirty miles inland?”

“The natives, you fool!”

The natives again. “I’m not worried about natives. Not with a pair of fifties.”

“You don’t understand,” the jaygee said, forcing calm into his voice. “This is The Outback. They’re in charge here. We can’t do a thing with them. They jump people in the dark and skewer them. Now fix this damn jeep and let’s get rolling!”

“Into a firing squad? Don’t be silly, lieutenant. I presume you won’t slug me while I check the engine?”

The jaygee was looking around him. “My God, no,” he said. “You may be a gangster, but—” He trailed off.

Orsino stiffened. Gangster was semi-dirty talk. “Listen, pirate,” he said nastily, “I don’t believe—”

“*Pirate?*” the jaygee roared indignantly, and then shut his mouth with a click, looking apprehensively about. The gesture wasn’t faked; it alarmed Orsino.

“Tell me about your wildmen,” he said.

“Go to hell,” the jaygee said sulkily.

“Look, you called me a gangster first. What about these natives? You were trying to trick me, weren’t you?”

“Kiss my royal North American eyeball, gangster.”

“Don’t be childish,” Charles reproved him, feeling adult and superior. (The jaygee looked a couple of years younger than he.) He climbed out of his seat and lifted the hood. The damage was trivial; a shear pin in the transmission had given way. He reported mournfully: “Cracked block. The jeep’s through forever. You can get on your way, lieutenant. I won’t try to hold you.”

The jaygee fumed: “You couldn’t hold me if you wanted to, gangster. If you think I’m going to try and hoof back to the base alone in the dark, you’re crazy. We’re sticking together. Two of us may be able to hold them off for the night. In the morning, we’ll see.”

Well, maybe the officer did *believe* there were wildmen in the woods. That didn’t mean there *were*.

The jaygee got out and looked under the hood uncertainly. It was obvious that in the first place he was no mechanic and in the second place he couldn’t conceive of anybody voluntarily risking the woods rather than the naval base. “Uh-huh,” he said. “Dismount that gun while I get a fire started.”

“Yes, sir,” Charles said sardonically, saluting. The jaygee absently returned the salute and began to collect twigs.

Orsino asked: “How do these aborigines of yours operate?”

“Sneak up in the dark. They have spears and a few stolen guns. Usually they don’t have cartridges for them but you can’t count on that. But they have ... witches.”

Orsino snorted. He was getting very hungry indeed. “Do you know any of the local plants we might eat?”

The jaygee said confidently: “I guess we can get by on roots until morning.”

Orsino dubiously pulled up a shrub, dabbed clods off its root and tasted it. It tasted exactly like a root. He sighed and changed the subject. “What do we do with the fifties when I get them both off the mount?”

“The jeep mount breaks down some damn way or other into two low-mount tripods. See if you can figure it out while I get the fire going.”

The jaygee had a small, smoky fire barely going in twenty minutes. Orsino was still struggling with the jeep gun mount. It came apart, but it couldn’t go together again. The jaygee strolled over at last contemptuously to lend a hand. He couldn’t make it work either.

Two lost tempers and four split fingernails later it developed the “elevating screw” really held the two front legs on and that you elevated by adjusting the rear tripod leg. “A hell of an officer you are,” Orsino sulked.

It began to rain, putting the fire out with a hiss. They wound up prone under the jeep, not on speaking terms, each tending a gun, each presumably responsible for 180 degrees of perimeter.

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Charles was fairly dry, except for a trickle of icy water following a contour that meandered to his left knee. After an hour of eye-straining—nothing to be seen—and ear-straining—only the patter of rain—he heard a snore and kicked the jaygee.

The jaygee cursed wearily and said: “I guess we’d better talk to keep awake.”

“I’m not having any trouble, pirate.”

“Oh, knock it off—where do you get that pirate bit, gangster?”

“You’re outlaws, aren’t you?”

“Like hell we are. *You’re* the outlaws. You rebelled against the lawfully constituted North American Government. Just because you won—for the time being—doesn’t mean you were right.”

“The fact that we won does mean that we were right. The fact that your so-called Government lives by raiding and scavenging off us means you were wrong. God, the things I’ve seen since I joined up with you thugs!”

“I’ll bet. Respect for the home, sanctity of marriage, sexual morality, law and order—you never saw anything like that back home, did you gangster?” He looked very smug.

Orsino clenched his teeth. “Somebody’s been telling you a pack of lies,” he said. “There’s just as much home and family life and morality and order back in Syndic Territory as there is here. And probably a lot more.”

“Bull. I’ve seen intelligence reports; I know how you people live. Are you telling me you don’t have sexual promiscuity? Polygamy? Polyandry? Open gambling? Uncontrolled liquor trade? Corruption and shakedowns?”

Orsino squinted along the barrel of the gun into the rain. “Look,” he said, “take me as an average young man from Syndic Territory. I know maybe a hundred people. I know just three women and two men who are what you’d call promiscuous. I know one family with two wives and one husband. I don’t really know any people personally who go in for polyandry, but I’ve met three casually. And the rest are ordinary middle-aged couples.”

“Ah-*hah*! Middle-aged! Do you mean to tell me you’re just leaving out anybody under middle age when you talk about morality?”

“Naturally,” Charles said, baffled. “Wouldn’t you?”

The only answer was a snort.

“What are bupers?” Charles asked.

“Bu-Pers,” the jaygee said distinctly. “Bureau of Personnel, North American Navy.”

“What do you do there?”

“What *would* a personnel bureau do?” the jaygee said patiently. “We recruit, classify, assign, promote and train personnel.”

“Paperwork, huh? No wonder you don’t know how to shoot or drive.”

“If I didn’t need you to cover my back, I’d shove this MG down your silly throat. For your information, gangster, all officers do a tour of duty on paperwork before they’re assigned to their permanent branch. I’m going into the pigboats.”

“Why?”

“Family. My father commands a sub. He’s Captain Van Dellen.”

*Oh, God. Van Dellen.* The sub commander Grinnel—and he—had murdered. The kid hadn’t heard yet that his father had been “lost” in an emergency dive.

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The rain ceased to fall; the pattering drizzle gave way to irregular, splashing drops from leaves and branches.

“Van Dellen,” Charles said. “There’s something you ought to know.”

“It’ll keep,” the jaygee answered in a grim whisper. The bolt of his gun clicked. “I hear them out there.”

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## XI

She felt the power of the goddess working in her, but feebly. Dark ... so dark ... and so tired ... how old was she? More than eight hundred moons had waxed and waned above her head since birth. And she had run at the head of her spearmen to the

motor sounds. A motor meant the smithymen from the sea, and you killed smithymen when you could.

She let out a short shrill chuckle in the dark. There was a rustling of branches. One of the spearmen had turned to stare at the sound. She knew his face was worried. “Tend to business, you fool!” she wheezed. “Or by Bridget—” His breath went in with a hiss and she chuckled again. You had to let them know who was the cook and who was the potatoes every now and then. Kill the fool? Not now; not when there were smithymen with guns waiting to be taken.

The power of the goddess worked stronger in her withered breast as her rage grew at their impudence. Coming into *her* woods with their stinking metal!

There were two of them. A grin slit her face. She had not taken two smithymen together for thirty moons. For all her wrinkles and creaks, what a fine vessel she was for the power, to be sure! Her worthless, slow-to-learn niece could run and jump and she had a certain air, but she’d never be such a vessel. Her sister—the crone spat—these were degenerate days. In the old days, the sister would have been spat when she refused the ordeal in her youth. The little one now, whatever her name was, she would make a *fine* vessel for the power when she was gathered to the goddess. If her sister or her niece didn’t hold her head under water too long, or have a spear shoved too deep into her gut or hit her on the head with too heavy a rock.

These were degenerate days. She had poisoned her own mother to become the vessel of power.

The spearmen to her right and left shifted uneasily. She heard a faint mumble of the two smithymen talking. Let them talk! Doubtless they were cursing the goddess obscenely; doubtless that was what the smithymen all did when their mouths were not stuffed with food.

She thought of the man called Kennedy who forged spearheads and arrowpoints for her people—he was a strange one, touched by the goddess, which proved her infinite power. She could touch and turn the head of even a smithyman. He was a strange one. Well now, to get on with it. She wished the power were working stronger in her; she was tired and could hardly see. But by the grace of the goddess there would be two new heads over her holy hut come dawn. She could hardly see, but the goddess wouldn’t fail her....

She quavered like a screech-owl, and the spearmen began to slip forward through the brush. She was not allowed to eat honey lest its sweetness clash with the power in her, but the taste of power was sweeter than the taste of honey.

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With frightful suddenness there was an ear-splitting shriek and a trampling rush of feet. By sheer reflex, Orsino clamped down on the trigger of his fifty, and his brain rocked at its thunder. Shadowy figures were blotted out by the orange muzzle-flash. You’re supposed to fire neat, spaced bursts of eight he told himself. I wonder what old Gilby would say if he could see his star pupil burning out a barrel and swinging his gun like a fire hose?

The gun stopped firing; end of the belt. Twenty, fifty or a hundred rounds? He didn’t remember. He clawed for another belt and smoothly, in the dark, loaded again and listened.

“You all right, gangster?” the jaygee said behind him, making him jump.

“Yes,” he said. “Will they come back?”

“I don’t know.”

“You filthy swine,” an agonized voice wheezed from the darkness. “Me back is broke, you stinking lice.” The voice began to sob.

They listened to it in silence for perhaps a minute. At last he said to the jaygee: “If the rest are gone maybe we can at least—make him comfortable.”

“Too risky,” the jaygee said after a long pause.

The sobbing went on. As the excitement of the attack drained from Orsino, he felt deathly tired, cramped and thirsty. The thirst he could do something about. He scooped water from the muddy runnel by his knee and sucked it from his palms twice. The third time, he thought of the thirst that the sobbing creature out in the dark must be feeling, and his hand wouldn’t go to his mouth.

“I’m going to get him,” he whispered to the jaygee.

“Stay where you are! That’s an order!”

He didn’t answer, but began to work his cramped and aching body from under the jeep. The jaygee, a couple of years younger and lither than he, slid out first from his own side. Orsino sighed and relaxed as he heard his footsteps cautiously circle the jeep.

“Finish me off!” the wounded man was sobbing. “For the love of the goddess, finish me off, you bitches’ bastards! You’ve broke me back—*ah!*” That was a cry of savage delight.

There was a strangled noise from the jaygee and then only a soft, deadly thrashing noise from the dark. Hell, Orsino thought bitterly. It was my idea. He snaked out from under the jeep and raced through wet brush.

The two of them were a tangled knot of darkness rolling on the ground. A naked back came uppermost; Orsino fell on it and clawed at its head. He felt a huge beard, took two hand-fulls of it and pulled as hard as he could. There was a wild screech and a flailing of arms. The jaygee broke away and stood up, panting hoarsely. Charles heard a sharp crunch and a snap, and the flailing sweaty figure, beneath him lay still.

“Back to the guns,” the jaygee choked. He swayed, and Orsino took him by the arm.... On the way back to the jeep, they stumbled over something that was certainly a body.

Orsino’s flesh shrank from lying down again in the mud behind his gun, but he did, shivering. He heard the jaygee thud wearily into position. “What did you do to him?” he asked. “Is he dead?”

“Kicked him,” the jaygee choked. “His head snapped back and there was that crack. I guess he’s dead. I never heard of that broken-wing trick before. I guess he wanted to take one more with him. They have a kind of religion.”

The jaygee sounded as though he was teetering on the edge of breakdown. Make him mad, intuition said to Orsino. He might go howling off among the trees unless he snaps out of it.

“It’s a hell of way to run an island,” he said nastily. “You beggars were chased out of North America because you couldn’t run it right and now you can’t even control a lousy little island for more than five miles inland.” He added with deliberate, superior amusement: “Of course, they’ve got witches.”

“Shut your mouth, gangster—*I’m warning you.*” The note of hysteria was still there. And then the jaygee said dully: “I didn’t mean that. I’m sorry. You did come out and help me after all.”

“Surprised?”

“Yes. Twice. First time when you wanted to go out yourself. I suppose you can’t help being born where you were. Maybe if you came over to us all the way, the Government would forgive and forget. But no—I suppose not.” He paused, obviously casting about for a change of subject. He still seemed sublimely confident that they’d get back to the naval base with him in charge of the detail. “What ship did you cross in?”

“Atom sub *Taft*,” Orsino said. He could have bitten his tongue out.

“*Taft*? That’s my father’s pigboat! Captain Van Dellen. How is he? I was going down to the dock when—”

“He’s dead,” Orsino said flatly. “He was caught on deck during an emergency dive.”

The jaygee said nothing for a while and then uttered an unconvincing laugh of disbelief. “You’re lying,” he said. “His crew’d never let that happen. They’d let the ship be blown to hell before they took her down without the skipper.”

“Grinnel had the con. He ordered the dive and roared down the crew when they wanted to get your father inboard. I’m sorry.”

“Grinnel,” the jaygee whispered. “Grinnel. Yes, I know Commander Grinnel. He’s—he’s a good officer. He must have done it because he had to. Tell me about it, please.”

It was more than Orsino could bear. “Your father was murdered,” he said harshly. “I know because Grinnel put me on radar watch—and I don’t know a God-damned thing about reading a radarscope. He told me to sing out ‘enemy planes’ and I did because I didn’t know what the hell was going on. He used that as an excuse to crash-dive while your father was sleeping on deck. Your good officer murdered him.”

He heard the jaygee sobbing hoarsely. At last he asked Orsino in a dry, choked voice: “Politics?”

“Politics,” Orsino said.

Orsino jumped wildly as the jaygee’s machine gun began to roar a long burst of twenty, but he didn’t fire himself. He knew that there was no enemy out there in the dark, and that the bullets were aimed only at an absent phantom.

“We’ve got to get to Iceland,” the jaygee said at last, soberly. “It’s our only chance.”

“Iceland?”

“This is one for the C.C. of the Constitutionists. The Central Committee. It’s a breach of the Freiberg Compromise. It means we call the Sociocrats, and if they don’t make full restitution—war.”

“What do you mean, *we*?”

“You and I. You’re the source of the story; you’re the one who’d be lie-tested.”

You’ve got him, Orsino told himself, but don’t be fool enough to count on it. He’s been light-headed from hunger and no sleep and the shock of his father’s death. You helped him in a death struggle and there’s team spirit working on him. The guy covering my back, how can I fail to trust him, how could I dare not to trust him? But

don't be fool enough to count on it after he's slept. Meanwhile, push it for all it's worth.

"What are your plans?" he asked gravely.

"We've got to slip out of Ireland by sub or plane," the jaygee brooded. "We can't go to the New Portsmouth or Com-Surf organizations; they're Sociocrat, and Grinnel will have passed the word to the Sociocrats that you're out of control."

"What does that mean?"

"Death," the jaygee said.

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## XII

Commander Grinnel, after reporting formally, had gone straight to a joint. It wasn't until midnight that he got The Word, from a friendly O.N.I. lieutenant who had dropped into the house.

"What?" Grinnel roared. "Who is this woman? Where is she? Take me to her at once!"

"Commander!" the lieutenant said aghast. "I just got here!"

"You heard me, mister! At once!"

While Grinnel dressed he demanded particulars. The lieutenant dutifully scoured his memory. "Brought in on some cloak-and-dagger deal, Commander. The kind you usually run. Lieutenant-Commander Jacobi was in Syndic Territory on a recruiting, sabotage and reconnaissance mission and one of the D.A.R. passed the girl on him. A real Syndic member. Priceless. And, as I said, she identified this fellow as Charles Orsino, another Syndic. Why are you so interested, if I may ask?"

The Commander dearly wanted to give him a grim: "You may not," but didn't dare. Now was the time to be frank and open. One hint that he had anything to hide or cover up would put his throat to the knife. "The man's my baby, lieutenant," he said. "Either your girl's mistaken or Van Dellen and his polygraph tech and I were taken in by a brand-new technique." *That* was nice work, he congratulated himself. Got in Van Dellen and the tech.... Maybe, come to think of it, the tech *was* crooked? No; there was the way Wyman had responded perfectly under scop.

O.N.I.'s building was two stories and an attic, wood-framed, beginning to rot already in the eternal Irish damp.

"We've got her on the third floor, Commander," the lieutenant said. "You get there by a ladder."

"In God's name, why?" They walked past the Charge of Quarters, who snapped to a guilty and belated attention, and through the deserted offices of the first and second floors.

"Frankly, we've had a little trouble hanging on to her."

"She runs away?"

"No, nothing like that—not yet, at least. Marine G-2 and Guard Intelligence School have both tried to snatch her from us. First with requisitions, then with muscle. We hope to keep her until the word gets to Iceland. Then, naturally, *we'll* be out in the cold."

The lieutenant laughed. Grinnel, puffing up the ladder, did not.

The door and lock on Lee Bennet's quarters were impressive. The lieutenant rapped. "Are you awake, Lee? There's an officer here who wants to talk to you."

"Come in," she said.

The lieutenant's hands flew over the lock and the door sprang open. The girl was sitting in the dark.

"I'm Commander Grinnel, my dear," he said. After eight hours in the joint, he could feel authentically fatherly to her. "If the time isn't quite convenient—"

"It's all right," she said listlessly. "What do you want to know?"

"The man you identify as Orsino—it was quite a shock to me. Commander Van Dellen, who died a hero's death only days ago accepted him as authentic and so, I must admit, did I. He passed both scop and polygraph."

"I can't help that," she said. "He came right up to me and told me who he was. I recognized him, of course. He's a polo player. I've seen him play on Long Island often enough, the damned snob. He's not much in the Syndic, but he's close to F. W. Taylor. Orsino's an orphan. I don't know whether Taylor's actually adopted him or not. I think not."

"No—possible—mistake?"

"No possible mistake." She began to tremble. "My God, Commander Whoever-You-Are, do you think I could forget one of those damned sneering faces. Or what those people did to me? Get the lie detector again! Strap me into the lie detector! I insist on it! I won't be called a liar! Do you hear me? Get the lie detector!"

"Please," the Commander soothed. "I do believe you, my dear. Nobody could doubt your sincerity. Thank you for helping us, and good night." He backed out of the room with the lieutenant. As the door closed he snapped at him: "Well, mister?"

The lieutenant shrugged. "The lie detector always bears her out. We've stopped using it on her. We're convinced that she's on our side. Almost deserving of citizenship."

"Come, now," the Commander said. "You know better than that."

Behind the locked door, Lee Bennet had thrown herself on the bed, dry-eyed. She wished she could cry, but tears never came. Not since those three roistering drunkards had demonstrated their virility as males and their immunity as Syndics on her ... she couldn't cry any more.

Charles Orsino—another one of them. She hoped they caught him and killed him, slowly. She knew all this was true. Then why did she feel like a murderess? Why did she think incessantly of suicide? Why, why, why?

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Dawn came imperceptibly. First Charles could discern the outline of treetops against the sky and then a little of the terrain before him and at last two twisted shadows that slowly became sprawling half-naked bodies. One of them was a woman's, mangled by fifty-caliber slugs. The other was the body of a bearded giant—the one with whom they had struggled in the dark.

Charles crawled out stiffly. The woman was—had been—a stringy, white haired crone. Some animal's skull was tied to her pate with sinews as a head-dress, and she

was tattooed with blue crescents. The jaygee joined him standing over her and said: “One of their witches. Part of the religion, if you can call it that.”

“A brand-new religion?” Charles asked dubiously. “Made up out of whole cloth?”

“No,” the jaygee said. “I understand it’s an *old* religion—pre-Christian. It kept going underground until the Troubles. Then it flared up again all over Europe. A filthy business. Animal sacrifices every new moon. Human sacrifices twice a year. What can you expect from people like that?”

Charles reminded himself that the jaygee’s fellow-citizens boiled recalcitrant slaves. “I’ll see what I can do about the jeep,” he said.

The jaygee sat down on the wet grass. “What the hell’s the use?” he mumbled wearily. “Even if you get it running again. Even if we get back to the base. They’ll be gunning for you. Maybe they’ll be gunning for me if they killed my father.” He tried to smile. “You got any aces in the hole, gangster?”

“Maybe,” Orsino said slowly. “What do you know about a woman named Lee—Bennet? Works with O.N.I.?”

“Smuggled over here by the D.A.R. A goldmine of information. She’s a little nuts, too. What have you got on her?”

“Does she swing any weight? *Is she a citizen?*”

“No weight. They’re just using her over at Intelligence to fill out the picture of the Syndic. And she couldn’t be a citizen. A woman has to marry a citizen to be naturalized. What have you got to do with her, for God’s sake? Did you know her on the other side? She’s death to the Syndic; she can’t do anything for you.”

Charles barely heard him. That had to be it. The trigger on Lee Falcaro’s conditioning had to be the oath of citizenship as it was for his. And it hadn’t been tripped because this pirate gang didn’t particularly want or need women as first-class, all-privileges citizens. A small part of the Government’s cultural complex—but one that could trap Lee Falcaro forever in the shell of her synthetic substitute for a personality. Lie-tests, yes. Scopolamine, yes. But for a woman, no subsequent oath.

“I ran into her in New Portsmouth. She knew me from the other side. She turned me in....” He knelt at a puddle and drank thirstily; the water eased hunger cramps a little. “I’ll see what I can do with the jeep.”

He lifted the hood and stole a look at the jaygee. Van Dellen was dropping off to sleep on the wet grass. Charles pried a shear pin from the jeep’s winch, punched out the shear pin that had given way in the transmission and replaced it. It involved some hammering. Cracked block, he thought contemptuously. An officer and he couldn’t tell whether the block was cracked or not. If I ever get out of this we’ll sweep them from the face of the earth—or more likely just get rid of their tom-fool Sociocrats and Constitutionists. The rest are probably all right. Except maybe for those bastards of Guardsmen. A bad lot. Let’s hope they get killed in the fighting.

The small of his back tickled; he reached around to scratch it and felt cold metal.

“Turn slowly or you’ll be spitted like a pig,” a bass voice growled.

He turned slowly. The cold metal now at his chest, was the leaf-shaped blade of a spear. It was wielded by a red-haired, red-bearded, barrel-chested giant whose blue-green eyes were as cold as death.

“Tie that one,” somebody said. Another half-naked man jerked his wrists behind him and lashed them together with cords.

“Hobble his feet.” It was a woman’s voice. A length of cord or sinew was knotted to his ankles with a foot or two of play. He could walk but not run. The giant lowered his spear and stepped aside.

The first thing Charles saw was that Lieutenant (j.g.) Van Dellen of the North American Navy had escaped forever from his doubts and confusions. They had skewered him to the turf while he slept. Charles hoped he had not felt the blow.

The second thing he saw was a supple and coltish girl of perhaps 20 tenderly removing the animal skull from the head of the slain witch and knotting it to her own red-tressed head. Even to Orsino’s numbed understanding, it was clearly an act of the highest significance. It subtly changed the composition of the six-men group in the little glade. They had been a small mob until she put on the skull, but the moment she did they moved instinctively—one a step or two, the other merely turning a bit, perhaps—to orient on her. There was no doubt that she was in charge.

A witch, Orsino thought. “It kept going underground until the Troubles.” “A filthy business—human sacrifices twice a year.”

She approached him and, like the shifting of a kaleidoscope, the group fell into a new pattern of which she was still the focus. Charles thought he had never seen a face so humorlessly conscious of power. The petty ruler of a few barbarians, she carried herself as though she were empress of the universe. Nor did a large gray louse that crawled from her hairline across her forehead and back again affect her in the slightest. She wore a greasy animal hide as though it were royal purple. It added up to either insanity or a limitless pretension to religious authority. And her eyes were not mad.

“You,” she said coldly. “What about the jeep and the guns? Do they go?”

He laughed suddenly and idiotically at these words from the mouth of a stone-age goddess. A raised spear sobered him instantly. “Yes,” he said.

“Show my men how,” she said, and squatted regally on the turf.

“Please,” he said, “could I have something to eat first?”

She nodded indifferently and one of the men loped off into the brush.

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His hands untied and his face greasy with venison fat, Charles spent the daylight hours instructing six savages in the nomenclature, maintenance and operation of the jeep and the twin-fifty machine gun.

They absorbed it with utter lack of curiosity. They more or less learned to start and steer and stop the jeep. They more or less learned to load, point and fire the gun.

Through the lessons the girl sat absolutely motionless, first in shadow, then in noon and afternoon sun and then in shadow again. But she had been listening. She said at last: “You are telling them nothing new now. Is there no more?”

Charles noted that a spear was poised at his ribs. “A great deal more,” he said hastily. “It takes months.”

“They can work them now. What more is there to learn?”

“Well, what to do if something goes wrong.”

She said, as though speaking from vast experience: “When something goes wrong, you start over again. That is all you can do. When I make death-wine for the spear blades and the death-wine does not kill, it is because something went wrong—a word or a sign or picking a plant at the wrong time. The only thing to do is make the poison again. As you grow in experience you make fewer mistakes. That is how it will be with my men when they work the jeep and the guns.”

She nodded ever so slightly at one of the men and he took a firmer grip on his spear.

Death swooped low.

“No!” Charles exploded. “You don’t understand! This isn’t like anything you do at all!” He was sweating, even in the late afternoon chill. “You’ve got to have somebody who knows how to repair the jeep and the gun. If they’re busted they’re busted and no amount of starting over again will make them work!”

She nodded and said: “Tie his hands. We’ll take him with us.” Charles was torn between relief and wonder at the way she spoke. He realized that he had never, literally *never*, seen any person concede a point in quite that fashion. There had been no hesitation, there had been no reluctance in the voice, not a flicker of displeasure in the face. Simply, without forcing, she had said: “We’ll take him with us.” It was as though—as though she had re-made the immediate past, un-making her opposition to the idea, nullifying it. She was a person who was not at war with herself in any respect whatever, a person who knew exactly who she was and what she was—

The girl rose in a single flowing motion, startling after her day spent in immobility. She led the way, flanked by two of the spearmen. The other four followed in the jeep, at a crawl. Last of all came Charles, and nobody had to urge him. In his portable trap his hours would be numbered if he got separated from his captors.

Stick with them, he told himself, stumbling through the brush. Just stay alive and you can outsmart these savages. He fell, cursed, picked himself up, stumbled on after the growl of the jeep.

Dawn brought them to a collection of mud-and-wattle huts, a corral enclosing a few dozen head of wretched diseased cattle, a few adults and a few children. The girl was still clear-eyed and supple in her movements. Her spearmen yawned and stretched stiffly. Charles was a walking dead man, battered by countless trees and stumbles on the long trek. With red and swollen eyes he watched while half-naked brats swarmed over the jeep and grownups made obeisances to the girl—all but one.

This was an evil-faced harridan who said to her with cool insolence: “I see you claim the power of the goddess now, my dear. Has something happened to my sister?”

“The guns killed a certain person. I put on the skull. You know what I am; do not say ‘claim to be.’ I warn you once.”

“Liar!” shrieked the harridan. “You killed her and stole the skull! St. Patrick and St. Bridget shrivel your guts! Abaddon and Lucifer pierce your eyes!”

An arena formed about them as the girl said coldly: “I warn you the second time.”

The harridan made signs with her fingers, glaring at her; there was a moan from the watchers; some turned aside and a half-grown girl fainted dead away.

The girl with the skull on her pate said, as though speaking from a million years and a million miles away: “This is the third warning; there are no more. Now the worm is

in your backbone gnawing. Now the maggots are at your eyes, devouring them. Your bowels turn to water; your heart pounds like the heart of a bird; soon it will not beat at all." As the eerie, space-filling whisper drilled on the watchers broke and ran, holding their hands over their ears, white-faced, but the harridan stood as if rooted to the earth. Charles listened dully as the curse was droned, nor was he surprised when the harridan fell, blasted by it. Another sorceress, aided it is true by pentothal, had months ago done the same to him.

The people trickled back, muttering and abject.

Just stay alive and you can outsmart these savages, he repeated ironically to himself. It had dawned on him that these savages lived by an obscure and complicated code harder to master than the intricacies of the Syndic or the Government.

A kick roused him to his feet. One of the spearmen grunted: "I'm putting you with Kennedy."

"All right," Charles groaned. "You take these cords off me?"

"Later." He prodded Charles to a minute, ugly block house of logs from which came smoke and an irregular metallic clanging. He cut the cords, rolled great boulders away from a crawl-hole and shoved him through.

The place was about six by nine feet, hemmed in by ten-inch logs. The light was very bad and the smell was too. A few loopholes let in some air. There was a latrine pit and an open stone hearth and a naked brown man with wild hair and a beard.

Rubbing his wrists, Charles asked uncertainly: "Are you Kennedy?"

The man looked up and croaked: "Are you from the Government?"

"Yes," Charles said, hope rekindling. "Thank God they put us together. There's a jeep. Also a twin-fifty. If we play this right the two of us can bust out—"

He stopped, disconcerted. Kennedy had turned to the hearth and the small, fierce fire glowing on it and began to pound a red-hot lump of metal. There were spear heads and arrow heads about in various stages of completion, as well as files and a hone.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Aren't you interested?"

"Of course I'm interested," Kennedy said. "But we've got to begin at the beginning. You're too *general*." His voice was mild, but reproving.

"You're right," Charles said. "I guess you've made a try or two yourself. But now that there are two of us, what do you suggest? Can you drive a jeep? Can you fire a twin-fifty?"

The man poked the lump of metal into the heart of the fire again, picked up a black-scaled spear head and began to file an edge into it. "Let's get down to essentials," he suggested apologetically. "What is escape? Getting from an undesirable place to a desirable place, opposing and neutralizing things or persons adverse to the change of state in the process. But I'm not being specific, am I? Let's say, then, escape is getting *us* from a relatively undesirable place to a relatively desirable place, opposing and neutralizing the aborigines." He put aside the file and reached for the hone, sleeking it along the bright metal ribbon of the new edge. He looked up with a pleased smile and asked: "How's that for a plan?"

“Fine,” Charles muttered. Kennedy beamed proudly as he repeated: “Fine, fine,” and sank to the ground, born down by the almost physical weight of his depression. His hoped-for ally was stark mad.

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### XIII

Kennedy turned out to have been an armorer-artificer of the North American Navy, captured two years ago while deer-hunting too far from the logging-camp road to New Portsmouth. Fed on scraps of gristle, isolated from his kind, beaten when he failed to make his daily task of spear heads and arrow points, he had shyly retreated into beautifully interminable labyrinths of abstraction. Now and then, Charles Orsino got a word or two of sense from him before the rosy clouds closed in. When attempted conversation with the lunatic palled, Charles could watch the aborigines through chinks in the palisade. There were about fifty of them. There would have been more if they hadn't been given to infanticide—for what reason, Charles could not guess.

He had been there a week when the boulders were rolled away one morning and he was roughly called out. He said to Kennedy before stooping to crawl through the hole: “Take it easy, friend. I'll be back, I hope.”

Kennedy looked up with a puzzled smile: “That's such a *general* statement, Charles. Exactly what are you implying—”

The witch girl was there, flanked by spearmen. She said abruptly: “I have been listening to you. Why are you untrue to your brothers?”

He gawked. The only thing that seemed to fit was: “That's such a *general* statement,” but he didn't say it.

“Answer,” one of the spearmen growled.

“I—I don't understand. I have no brothers.”

“Your brothers in Portsmouth, on the sea. Whatever you call them, they are your brothers, all children of the mother called Government. Why are you untrue to them?”

He began to understand. “They aren't my brothers. I'm not a child of the government. I'm a child of another mother far away, called Syndic.”

She looked puzzled—and almost human—for an instant. Then the visor dropped over her face again as she said: “That is true. Now you must teach a certain person the jeep and the guns. Teach her well. See that she gets her hands on the metal and into the grease.” To a spearman she said: “Bring Martha.”

The spearman brought Martha, who was trying not to cry. She was a half-naked child of ten!

The witch girl abruptly left them. Her guards took Martha and bewildered Charles to the edge of the village where the jeep and its mounted guns stood behind a silly little museum exhibit rope of vine. Feathers and bones were knotted into the vine. The spearmen treated it as though it were a high-tension transmission line.

“*You* break it,” one of them said to Charles. He did, and the spearmen sighed with relief. Martha stopped scowling and stared.

The spearman said to Charles: “Go ahead and teach her. The firing pins are out of the guns, and if you try to start the jeep you get a spear through you. Now teach her.” He and the rest squatted on the turf around the jeep. The little girl shied violently as he took her hand, and tried to run away. One of the spearmen slung her back into the circle. She brushed against the jeep and froze, white-faced.

“Martha,” Charles said patiently, “there’s nothing to be afraid of. The guns won’t go off and the jeep won’t move. I’ll teach you how to work them so you can kill everybody you don’t like with the guns and go faster than a deer in the jeep—”

He was talking into empty air as far as the child was concerned. She was muttering, staring at the arm that had brushed the jeep: “That did it, I guess. There goes the power. May the goddess blast her—no. The power’s out of me now. I felt it go.” She looked up at Charles, quite calmly, and said: “Go on. Show me all about it. Do a good job.”

“Martha, what are you talking about?”

“She was afraid of me, my sister, so she’s robbing me of the power. Don’t you know? I guess not. The goddess hates iron and machines. I had the power of the goddess in me, but it’s gone now; I felt it go. Now nobody’ll be afraid of me any more.” Her face contorted and she said: “Show me how you work the guns.”

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He taught her what he could while the circle of spearmen looked on and grinned, cracking raw jokes about the child as anybody anywhere, would about a tyrant deposed. She pretended to ignore them, grimly repeating names after him and imitating his practiced movements in loading drill. She was very bright, Charles realized. When he got a chance he muttered, “I’m sorry about this, Martha. It isn’t my idea.”

She whispered bleakly: “I know. I liked you. I was sorry when the other outsider took your dinner.” She began to sob uncontrollably. “I’ll never see anything again! Nobody’ll ever be afraid of me again!” She buried her face against Charles’ shoulder.

He smoothed her tangled hair mechanically and said to the watching, grinning circle: “Look, hasn’t this gone far enough? Haven’t you got what you wanted?”

The headman stretched and spat. “Guess so,” he said. “Come on, girl.” He yanked Martha from the seat and booted her toward the huts.

Charles scrambled down just ahead of a spear. He let himself be led back to the smithy block house and shoved through the crawl hole.

“I was thinking about what you said the other day,” Kennedy beamed, rasping a file over an arrowhead. “When I said that to change one molecule in the past you’d have to change *every* molecule in the past, and you said, ‘Maybe so.’ I’ve figured that what you were driving at was—”

“Kennedy,” Charles said, “please shut up just this once. I’ve got to think.”

“In what sense do you mean that, Charles? Do you mean that you’re a rational animal and therefore that your *being* rather than *essense* is—”

“*Shut up or I’ll pick up a rock and bust your head in with it!*” Charles roared. He more than half meant it. Kennedy hunched down before his hearth looking offended and scared. Charles squatted with his head in his hands.

*I have been listening to you.*

Repeated drives of the Government to wipe out the aborigines. Drives that never succeeded.

*I'll never see anything again.*

The way the witch girl had blasted her rival—but that was suggestion. But—

*I have been listening to you. Why are you untrue to your brothers?*

He'd said nothing like that to anybody, not to her or poor Kennedy.

He thought vaguely of *psi* force, a fragment in his memory. An old superstition, like the id-ego-superego triad of the sick-minded psychologists. Like vectors of the mind, exploded nonsense. But—

*I have been listening to you. Why are you untrue to your brothers?*

Charles smacked one fist against the sand floor in impotent rage. He was going as crazy as Kennedy. Did the witch girl—and Martha—have hereditary *psi* power? He mocked himself savagely: that's such a *general* question!

Neurotic adolescent girls in kerosene-lit farmhouses, he thought vaguely. Things that go bump—and crash and blooie and *whoo-oo-oo!* in the night. Not in electric lit city apartments. Not around fleshed-up middle-aged men and women. You take a hyperthyroid virgin, isolate her from power machinery and electric fields, put on the pressures that make her feel alone and tense to the bursting point—and naturally enough, something bursts. A chamberpot sails from under the bed and shatters on the skull of stepfather-tyrant. The wide-gilt-framed portrait of thundergod-grandfather falls with a crash. Sure, the nail crystallized and broke—*who crystallized it?*

Neurotic adolescent girls speaking in tongues, reading face-down cards and closed books, screaming aloud when sister or mother dies in a railroad wreck fifty miles away, of cancer a hundred miles away, in a bombing overseas.

Sometimes they made saints of them. Sometimes they burned them. Burned them and *then* made saints of them.

A blood-raw hunk of venison came sailing through one of the loopholes and flopped on the sand.

*I was sorry when the other outsider took your dinner.*

Three days ago he'd dozed off while Kennedy broiled the meat over the hearth. When he woke, Kennedy had gobbled it all and was whimpering with apprehension. But he'd done nothing and said nothing; the man wasn't responsible. He'd said nothing, and yet somehow the child knew about it.

His days were numbered; soon enough the jeep would be out of gas and the guns would be out of ammo or an unreplaceable part lost or broken. Then, according to the serene logic that ruled the witch girl, he'd be surplus.

But there was a key to it somehow.

He got up and slapped Kennedy's hand away from the venison. "Naughty," he said, and divided it equally with a broad spearblade.

“Naughty,” Kennedy said morosely. “The naught-class, the null-class. I’m the null-class. I plus the universe equal one, the universe-class. If you could transpose—but you can’t transpose.” Silently they toasted their venison over the fire.

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It was a moonless night with one great planet, Jupiter he supposed, reigning over the star-powdered sky. Kennedy slept muttering feebly in a corner. The hearthfire was out. It had to be out by dark. The spearmen took no chance of their trying to burn down the place. The village had long since gone to sleep, campfires doused, skin flaps pulled to across the door holes. From the corral one of the spavined, tick-ridden cows mooded uneasily and then fell silent.

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Charles then began the hardest job of his life. He tried to think, straight and uninterrupted, of Martha, the little girl. Some of the things that interrupted him were:

The remembered smell of fried onions; they didn’t have onions here;

Salt;

I wonder how the old 101st Precinct’s getting along;

That fellow who wanted to get married on a hundred dollars;

Lee Falcaro, damn her!

This, is damn foolishness; it can’t possibly work;

Poor old Kennedy;

I’ll starve before I eat another mouthful of that greasy deer-meat;

The Van Dellen kid, I wonder if I could have saved him;

Reiner’s right; we’ve got to clean up the Government and then try to civilize these people;

There must be something wrong with my head, I can’t seem to concentrate;

That terrific third-chukker play in the Finals, my picture all over town;

Would Uncle Frank laugh at this?

It was hopeless. He sat bolt upright, his eyes squeezed tensely together, trying to visualize the child and call her and it couldn’t be done. Skittering images of her zipped through his mind, only to be shoved aside. It was damn foolishness, anyway....

He unkinked himself, stretched and lay down on the sand floor thinking bitterly: why try? You’ll be dead in a few days or a few weeks; kiss the world good-bye. Back in Syndic Territory, fat, sloppy, happy Syndic Territory, did they know how good they had it? He wished he could tell them to cling to their good life. But Uncle Frank said it didn’t do any good to cling; it was a matter of tension and relaxation. When you stiffen up a way of life and try to fossilize it so it’ll stay that way forever, then you find you’ve lost it.

Little Martha wouldn’t understand it. Magic, ritual, the power of the goddess, fear of iron, fear of the jeep’s vine enclosure—cursed, no doubt—what went on in such a mind? Could she throw things like a poltergeist-girl? They didn’t have ‘em any more; maybe it had something to do with electric fields or even iron. Or were they all

phonies? An upset adolescent girl is a hell of a lot likelier to fake phenomena that produce them. Little Martha hadn't been faking her despair, though. The witch-girl—her sister, wasn't she?—didn't fake her icy calm and power. Martha'd be better off without such stuff—

“*Charles,*” a whisper said.

He muttered stupidly: “My God. She heard me,” and crept to the palisade. Through a chink between the logs she was just visible in the starlight.

She whispered: “I thought I wasn't going to see anything or hear anything ever again but I sat up and I heard you calling and you said you wanted to help me if I'd help you so I came as fast as I could without waking anybody up—you *did* call me, didn't you?”

“Yes, I did. Martha, do you want to get out of here? Go far away with me?”

“You bet I do. *She's* going to take the power of the goddess out of me and marry me to Dinny, he stinks like a goat and he has a cockeye, and then she'll kill all our babies. Just tell me what to do and I'll do it.” She sounded very grim and decided.

“Can you roll the boulders away from the hole there?” He was thinking vaguely of teleportation; each boulder was a two-man job.

She said no.

He snarled: “Then why did you bother to come here?”

“Don't talk like that to me,” the child said sharply—and he remembered what she thought she was.

“Sorry,” he said.

“What I came about,” she said calmly, “was the ex-plosion. Can you make an explosion like you said? Back there at the jeep?”

What in God's name was she talking about?

“Back there,” she said with exaggerated patience, “you was thinking about putting all the cartridges together and blowing up the whole damn shebang. Remember?”

He did, vaguely. One of a hundred schemes that had drifted through his head.

“I'd sure like to see that ex-plosion,” she said. “The way *she* got things figured, I'd almost just as soon get exploded myself as not.”

“I might blow up the logs here and get out,” he said slowly. “I think you'd be a mighty handy person to have along, too. Can you get me about a hundred of the machine gun cartridges?”

“They'll miss 'em.”

“Sneak me a few at a time. I'll empty them, put them together again and you sneak them back.”

She said, slow and troubled: “*She* set the power of the goddess to guard them.”

“Listen to me, Martha,” he said. “I mean *listen*. You'll be doing it for me and they told me the power of the goddess doesn't work on outsiders. Isn't that right?”

There was a long pause, and she said at last with a sigh: “I sure wish I could see your eyes, Charles. I'll try it, but I'm damned if I would if Dinny didn't stink so bad.” She

slipped away and Charles tried to follow her with his mind through the darkness, to the silly little rope of vine with the feathers and bones knotted in it—but he couldn't. Too tense again.

Kennedy stirred and muttered complainingly as an icy small breeze cut through the chinks of the palisade, whispering.

His eyes, tuned to the starlight, picked up Martha bent almost double, creeping toward the smithy-prison. She wore a belt of fifty-caliber cartridges around her neck like a stole. Looked like about a dozen of them. He hastily scooped out a bowl of clean sand and whispered: "Any trouble?"

He couldn't see the grin on her face, but knew it was there. "It was easy," she bragged. "One bad minute and then I checked with you and it was okay."

"Good kid. Pull the cartridges out of the links the way I showed you and pass them through."

She did. It was a tight squeeze.

He fingered one of the cartridges. The bullet fitted nicely into the socket of an arrowhead. He jammed the bullet in and wrenched at the arrowhead with thumb and forefinger—all he could get onto it. The brass neck began to spread. He dumped the powder into his little basin in the sand and reseated the bullet.

Charles shifted hands on the second cartridge. On the third he realized that he could put the point of the bullet on a hearth-stone and press on the neck with both thumbs. It went faster then; in perhaps an hour he was passing the re-assembled cartridges back through the palisade.

"Time for another load?" he asked.

"Nope," the girl said. "Tomorrow night."

"Good kid."

She giggled. "It's going to be a hell of a big bang, ain't it, Charles?"

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#### **XIV**

"Leave the fire alone," Charles said sharply to Kennedy. The little man was going to douse it for the night.

There was a flash of terrified sense: "They beat you. If the fire's on after dark they beat you. Fire and dark are equal and opposite." He began to smile. "Fire is the negative of dark. You just change the sign, in effect rotate it through 180 degrees. But to rotate it through 180 degrees you have to first rotate it through one degree. And to rotate it through one degree you first have to rotate it through half a degree." He was beaming now, having forgotten all about the fire. Charles banked it with utmost care, heaping a couple of flat stones for a chimney that would preserve the life of one glowing coal invisibly.

He stretched out on the sand, one hand on the little heap beneath which five pounds of smokeless powder was buried. Kennedy continued to drone out his power-series happily.

Through the chinks in the palisade a man's profile showed against the twilight. "Shut up," he said.

Kennedy shivering, rolled over and muttered to himself. The spearman laughed and went on.

Charles hardly saw him. His whole mind was concentrated on the spark beneath the improvised chimney. He had left such a spark seven nights running. Only twice had it lived more than an hour. Tonight—tonight, it *had* to last. Tonight was the last night of the witch-girl's monthly courses, and during them she lost—or thought she lost, which was the same thing—the power of the goddess.

Primitive aborigines, he jeered silently at himself. A life time wasn't long enough to learn the intricacies of their culture—as occasional executions among them for violating magical law proved to the hilt. His first crude notion—blowing the palisade apart and running like hell—was replaced by a complex escape plan hammered out in detail between him and Martha.

Martha assured him that the witch girl could track him through the dark by the power of the goddess except for four days a month—and he believed it. Martha herself laid a matter-of-fact claim to keener second sight than her sister because of her virginity. With Martha to guide him through the night and the witch-girl's power disabled, they'd get a day's head start. His hand strayed to a pebble under which jerked venison was hidden and ready.

“But Martha. Are you sure you're not—not kidding yourself? Are you *sure*?”

He felt her grin on the other side of the palisade. “You're sure wishing Uncle Frank was here so you could ask him about it, don't you, Charles?”

He sure was. He wiped his brow, suddenly clammy.

Kennedy couldn't come along. One, he wasn't responsible. Two, he might have to be Charles' cover-story. They weren't too dissimilar in build, age, or coloring. Charles had a beard by now that sufficiently obscured his features, and two years absence should have softened recollections of Kennedy. Interrogated, Charles could take refuge in an imitation of Kennedy's lunacy.

“Charles, the one thing I don't get is this Lee dame. She got a spell on her? You don't want to mess with that.”

“Listen, Martha, we've *got* to mess with her. It isn't a spell—exactly. Anyway I know how to take it off and then she'll be on our side.”

“Can I set off the explosion? If you let me set off the explosion, I'll quit my bitching.”

“We'll see,” he said.

She chuckled very faintly in the dark. “Okay,” she told him. “If I can't, I can't.”

He thought of being married to a woman who could spot your smallest lie or reservation, and shuddered.

Kennedy was snoring by now and twilight was deepening into blackness. There was a quarter-moon, obscured by over-cast. He hitched along the sand and peered through a chink at a tiny noise. It was the small scuffling feet of a woods-rat racing through the grass from one morsel of food to the next. It never reached it. There was a soft rush of wings as a great dark owl plummeted to earth and struck talons into the brown fur. The rat squealed its life away while the owl lofted silently to a tree branch where it stood on one leg, swaying drunkenly and staring with huge yellow eyes.

As sudden as that, it'll be, Charles thought abruptly weighted with despair. A half-crazy kid and yours truly trying to outsmart and out-Tarzan these wild men. If only the little dope would let me take the jeep! But the jeep was out. She rationalized her retention of the power even after handling iron by persuading herself that she was only acting for Charles; there was some obscure precedent in a long, memorized poem which served her as a text-book of magic. But riding in the jeep was *out*.

By now she should be stringing magic vines across some of the huts and trails. "They'll see 'em when they get torches and it'll scare 'em. Of course I don't know how to do it right, but they don't know that. It'll slow 'em down. If *she* comes out of her house—and maybe she won't—she'll know they don't matter and send the men after us. But we'll be on our way. Charles, you *sure* I can't set off the explosion? Yeah, I guess you are. Maybe I can set off one when we get to New Portsmouth?"

"If I can possibly arrange it."

She sighed: "I guess that'll have to do."

It was too silent; he couldn't bear it. With feverish haste he uncovered the caches of powder and meat. Under the sand was a fat clayey soil. He dug up hands-full of it, wet it with the only liquid available and worked it into paste. He felt his way to the logs decided on for blasting, dug out a hole at their bases in the clay. After five careful trips from the powder cache to the hole, the mine was filled. He covered it with clay and laid on a roof of flat stones from the hearth. The spark of fire still glowed, and he nursed it with twigs.

She was there, whispering: "Charles?"

"Right here. Everything set?"

"All set. Let's have that explosion."

He took the remaining powder and with minute care, laid a train across the stockade to the mine. He crouched into a ball and flipped a burning twig onto the black line that crossed the white sand floor.

The blast seemed to wake up the world. Kennedy charged out of sleep, screaming, and a million birds woke with a squawk. Charles was conscious more of the choking reek than the noise as he scooped up the jerked venison and rushed through the ragged gap in the wall. A hand caught his—a small hand.

"You're groggy," Martha's voice said, sounding far away. "Come on—fast. *Man*, that was a great explosion!"

She towed him through the woods and underbrush—fast. As long as he hung on to her he didn't stumble or run into a tree once. Irrationally embarrassed by his dependence on a child, he tried letting go for a short time—very short—and was quickly battered into changing his mind. He thought dizzily of the spearmen trying to follow through the dark and could almost laugh again.

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Their trek to the coast was marked by desperate speed. For twenty-four hours, they stopped only to gnaw at their rations or snatch a drink at a stream. Charles kept moving because it was unendurable to let a ten-year-old girl exceed him in stamina. Both of them paid terribly for the murderous pace they kept. The child's face became skull-like and her eyes red; her lips dried and cracked. He gasped at her as they

pulled their way up a bramble-covered 45-degree slope: “How do you do it? Isn’t this ever going to end?”

“Ends soon,” she croaked at him. “You know we dodged ‘em three times?”

He could only shake his head.

She stared at him with burning red eyes. “This ain’t hard,” she croaked. “You do this with a gut-full of poison, *that’s* hard.”

“*Did* you?”

She grinned crookedly and chanted something he did not understand:

*“Nine moons times thirteen is the daughter’s age*

*When she drinks the death-cup.*

*Three leagues times three she must race and rage*

*Down hills and up—”*

She added matter-of-factly: “Last year. Prove I have the power of the goddess. Run, climb, with your guts falling out. This year, starve for a week and run down a deer of seven points.”

He had lost track of days and nights when they stood on the brow of a hill at dawn and looked over the sea. The girl gasped: “Sall right now. *She* wouldn’t let them go on. She’s a bitch, but she’s no fool.” The child fell in her tracks. Charles, too tired for panic, slept too.

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Charles woke with a wonderful smell in his nostrils. He followed it hungrily down the reverse slope of the hill to a grotto.

Martha was crouched over a fire on which rocks were heating. Beside it was a bark pot smeared with clay. As he watched, she lifted a red-hot rock with two green sticks and rolled it into the pot. It boiled up and continued to boil for an astonishing number of minutes. That was the source of the smell.

“Breakfast?” he asked unbelievably.

“Rabbit stew,” she said. “Plenty of runways, plenty of bark, plenty of green branches. I made snares. Two tough old bucks cooking in there for an hour.”

They chewed the meat from the bones in silence. She said at last: “We can’t settle down here. Too near to the coast. And if we move further inland, there’s *her*. And others. I been thinking.” She spat a string of tough meat out. “There’s England. Work our way around the coast. Make a raft or steal a canoe and cross the water. *Then* we could settle down. You can’t have me for three times thirteen moons yet or I’d lose the power. But I guess we can wait. I heard about England and the English. They have no hearts left. We can take as many slaves as we want. They cry a lot but they don’t fight. And none of their women has the power.” She looked up anxiously. “You wouldn’t want one of their women, would you? Not if you could have somebody with the power just by waiting for her?”

He looked down the hill and said slowly: “You know that’s not what I had in mind, Martha. I have my own place with people far away. I want to get back there. I thought—I thought you’d like it too.” Her face twisted. He couldn’t bear to go on, not

in words. "Look into my mind, Martha," he said. "Maybe you'll see what it means to me."

She stared long and deep. At last she rose, her face inscrutable, and spat into the fire. "Think I saved you for that?" she asked. "And for *her*? Not me. Save yourself from now on, mister. I'm going to beat my way south around the coast. England for me, and I don't want any part of you."

She strode off down the hill, gaunt and ragged, but with arrogance in her swinging, space-eating gait. Charles sat looking after her, stupefied, until she had melted into the underbrush. "Think I saved you for that? And for *her*?" She'd made some kind of mistake. He got up stiffly and ran after her, but he could not pick up an inch of her woods-wise trail. Charles slowly climbed to the grotto again and sat in its shelter.

He spent the morning trying to concoct simple springs out of bark strips and whippy branches. He got nowhere. The branches broke or wouldn't bend far enough. The bark shredded, or wouldn't hold a knot. Without metal, he couldn't shape the trigger to fit the bow so that it would be both sensitive and reliable.

At noon he drank enormously from a spring and looked morosely for plants that might be edible. He decided on something with a bulbous, onion-like root. For a couple of hours after that he propped rocks on sticks here and there. When he stepped back and surveyed them, he decided that any rabbit he caught with them would be, even for a rabbit, feeble-minded. He could think of nothing else to do.

First he felt a slight intestinal qualm and then a far from slight nausea. Then the root he had eaten took over with drastic thoroughness. He collapsed, retching, and only after the first spasms had passed was he able to crawl to the grotto. The shelter it offered was mostly psychological, but he had need of that. Under the ancient, mossy stones, he raved with delirium until dark.

Sometimes he was back in Syndic Territory, Charles Orsino of the two-goal handicap and the flashing smile. Sometimes he was back in the stinking blockhouse with Kennedy spinning interminable, excruciatingly boring strands of iridescent logic. Sometimes he was back in the psychology laboratory with the pendulum beating, the light blinking, the bell ringing and sense-impressions flooding him and drowning him with lies. Sometimes he raced in panic down the streets of New Portsmouth with sweated Guardsmen pounding after him, their knives flashing fire.

But at last he was in the grotto again, with Martha sponging his head and cursing him in a low, fluent undertone for being seven times seven kinds of fool.

She said tartly as recognition came into his eyes: "Yes, for the fifth time, I'm back. I should be making my way to England and a band of my own, but I'm back and I don't know why. I heard you in pain and I thought it served you right for not knowing deathroot when you see it, but I turned around and came back."

"Don't go," he said hoarsely.

She held a bark cup to his lips and made him choke down some nauseating brew. "Don't worry," she told him bitterly. "I won't go. I'll do everything you want, which shows that I'm as big a fool as you are, or bigger because I know better. I'll help you find her and take the spell off her. And may the goddess help me because I can't help myself."

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“... things like sawed tree-trunks, shells you call them ... a pile of them ... he looks at them and he thinks they’re going bad and they ought to be used soon ... under a wooden roof they are ... a thin man with death on his face and hate in his heart ... he wears blue and gold ... he sticks the gold, you call a coat’s wrist the cuff, he sticks the cuff under the nose of a fellow and yells his hate out and the fellow feels ready to strangle on blood ... it’s about a boat that sank ... this fellow, he’s a fat little man and he kills and kills, he’d kill the man if he could...”

A picket boat steamed by the coast twice a day, north after dawn and south before sunset. They had to watch out for it; it swept the coast with powerful glasses.

“... it’s the man with the bellyache again but now he’s sleepy ... he’s cursing the skipper ... sure there’s nothing on the coast to trouble us ... eight good men aboard and that one bastard of a skipper...”

Sometimes it jumped erratically, like an optical lever disturbed by the weight of a hair.

“... board over the door painted with a circle, a zig-zag on its side, an up-and-down line ... they call it office of intelligent navels ... the lumber camp ... machine goes chug-rip, chug-rip ... and the place where they cut metal like wood on machines that spin around ... a deathly-sick little fellow loaded down and chained ... fell on his face, he can’t get up, his bowels are water, his muscles are stiff, like dry branches and he’s afraid ... they curse him, they beat him, they take him to a machine that spins ... *they ... they—they—*”

She sat bolt upright, screaming. Her eyes didn’t see Charles. He drew back one hand and slammed it across her cheek in a slap that reverberated like a pistol shot. Her head rocked to the blow and her eyes snapped back from infinity-focus.

She never told Charles what they had done to the sick slave in the machine shop, and he never asked her.

Without writing equipment, for crutches, Charles doubted profoundly that he’d be able to hang onto any of the material she supplied. He surprised himself; his memory developed with exercise.

The shadowy ranks of the New Portsmouth personnel became solidier daily in his mind; the chronically-fatigued ordnance-man whose mainspring was to get by with the smallest possible effort; the sex-obsessed little man in Intelligence who lived only for the brothels where he selected older women—women who looked like his mother; the human weasel in BuShips who was impotent in bed and a lacerating tyrant in the office; the admiral who knew he was dying and hated his juniors proportionately to their youth and health.

And—

“... this woman of yours ... she ain’t at home there ... she ain’t at ... at home ... *anywhere*. ... the fat man, the one that kills, he’s talking to her but she isn’t ... yes she is ... no she isn’t—she’s answering him, talking about over-the-sea...”

“Lee Falcaro,” Charles whispered. “Lee Bennet.”

The trance-frozen face didn’t change; the eerie whisper went on without interruption: “... Lee Bennet on her lips, Lee Falcaro down deep in her guts ... and the face of Charles Orsino down there too...”

An unexpected pang went through him.

He sorted and classified endlessly what he had learned. He formed and rejected a dozen plans. At last there was one he could not reject.

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## XV

Commander Grinnel was officer of the day, and sore as a boil about it. O.N.I. wasn't supposed to catch the duty. You risked your life on cloak-and-dagger missions; let the shore-bound fancy dans do the drudgery. But there he was, nevertheless, in the guard house office with a .45 on his hip, the interminable night stretching before him, and the ten-man main guard snoring away outside.

He eased his bad military conscience by reflecting that there wasn't anything to guard, that patrolling the shore establishment was just worn out tradition. The ships and boats had their own watch. At the very furthest stretch of the imagination, a tarzan might sneak into town and try to steal some ammo. Well, if he got caught he got caught. And if he didn't, who'd know the difference with the accounting as sloppy as it was here? They did things differently in Iceland.

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They crept through the midnight dark of New Portsmouth's outskirts. As before, she led with her small hand. Lights flared on a wharf where, perhaps, a boat was being serviced. A slave screamed somewhere under the lash or worse.

"Here's the doss house," Martha whispered. It was smack between paydays—part of the plan—and the house was dark except for the hopefully-lit parlor. They ducked down the alley that skirted it and around the back of Bachelor Officer Quarters. The sentry, if he were going his rounds at all, would be at the other end of his post when they passed—part of the plan.

Lee Falcaro was quartered alone in a locked room of the O.N.I. building. Martha had, from seventy miles away, frequently watched the lock being opened and closed.

They dove under the building's crumbling porch two minutes before a late crowd of drinkers roared down the street and emerged when they were safely gone. There was a charge of quarters, a little yeoman, snoozing under a dim light in the O.N.I. building's lobby.

"Anybody else?" Charles whispered edgily.

"No. Just her. She's asleep. Dreaming about—never mind. Come on Charles. He's out."

The little yeoman didn't stir as they passed him and crept up the stairs. Lee Falcaro's room was part of the third-floor attic, finished off specially. You reached it by a ladder from a second-floor one-man office.

The lock was an eight-button piccolo—very rare in New Portsmouth and presumably loot from the mainland. Charles' fingers flew over it: 1-7-5-4-, 2-2-7-3-, 8-2-6-6- and it flipped open silently.

But the door squeaked.

"She's waking up!" Martha hissed in the dark. "She'll yell!"

Charles reached the bed in two strides and clamped his hand over Lee Falcaro-Bennet's mouth. Only a feeble "mmm!" came out, but the girl thrashed violently in his grip.

“Shut up, lady!” Martha whispered. “Nobody’s going to rape you.”

There was an astonished “mmm?” and she subsided, trembling.

“Go ahead,” Martha told him. “She won’t yell.”

He took his hand away nervously. “We’ve come to administer the oath of citizenship,” he said.

The girl answered in the querulous voice that was hardly hers: “You picked a strange time for it. Who are you? What’s all the whispering for?”

He improvised. “I’m Commander Lister. Just in from Iceland aboard atom sub *Taft*. They didn’t tell you in case it got turned down, but I was sent for authorization to give you citizenship. You know how unusual it is for a woman.”

“Who’s this child? And why did you get me up in the dead of night?”

He dipped deeply into Martha’s probings of the past week. “Citizenship’ll make the Guard Intelligence gang think twice before they try to grab you again. Naturally they’d try to block us if we administered the oath in public. Ready?”

“Dramatic,” she sneered. “Oh, I suppose so. Get it over with.”

“Do you, Lee Bennet, solemnly renounce all allegiances previously held by you and pledge your allegiance to the North American Government?”

“I do,” she said.

There was a choked little cry from Martha. “Hell’s fire,” she said. “Like breaking a leg!”

“What are you talking about, little girl?” Lee asked, coldly alert.

“It’s all right,” Charles said wearily. “Don’t you know my voice? I’m Orsino. You turned me in back there because they don’t give citizenship to women and so your de-conditioning didn’t get triggered off. I managed to break for the woods. A bunch of natives got me. I busted loose with the help of Martha here. Among her other talents, the kid’s a mind reader. I remember the triggering shocked me out of a year’s growth; how do you feel?”

Lee was silent, but Martha answered in a voice half puzzled and half contemptuous: “She feels fine, but she’s crying.”

“Am not,” Lee Falcaro gulped.

Charles turned from her, embarrassed. In a voice that strove to be normal, he whispered to Martha: “What about the boat?”

“Still there,” she said.

Lee Falcaro said tremulously: “Wh-wh-what boat?”

“Martha’s staked out a reactor-driven patrol speedboat at a wharf. One guard aboard. She—watched it in operation and I have some small-boat time. I really think we can grab it. If we get a good head-start, they don’t have anything based here that’ll catch up with it. If we get a break on the weather, their planes won’t be able to pick us up.”

Lee Falcaro stood up, dashing tears from her eyes. “Then let’s go,” she said evenly.

“How’s the C.Q.—that man downstairs, Martha?”

“Still sleepin’. The way’s as clear now as it’ll ever be.”

They closed the door behind them and Charles worked the lock. The Charge of Quarters looked as though he couldn't be roused by anything less than an earthquake as they passed—but Martha stumbled on one of the rotting steps after they were outside the building.

“Patrick and Bridget rot my clumsy feet off!” she whispered. “He’s awake.”

“Under the porch,” Charles said. They crawled into the dank space between porch floor and ground. Martha kept up a scarcely-audible volleyfire of maledictions aimed at herself.

When they stopped abruptly Charles knew it was bad.

Martha held up her hand for silence, and Charles imagined in the dark that he could see the strained and eerie look of her face. After a pause she whispered: “He’s using the—what do you call it? You talk and somebody hears you far away? A prowler he says to them. A wild man from the woods. The bitches bastard must have seen you in your handsome suit of skin and dirt, Charles. Oh, we’re *for* it! May my toe that stumbled grow the size of a boulder! May my cursed eyes that didn’t see the step fall out!”

They huddled down in the darkness and Charles took Lee Falcaro’s hand reassuringly. It was cold. A moment later his other hand was taken, with grim possessiveness, by the child.

Martha whispered: “The fat little man. The man who kills, Charles.”

He nodded. He thought he had recognized Grinnel from her picture.

“And ten men waking up. Charles, do you remember the way to the wharf?”

“Sure,” he said. “But we’re not going to get separated.”

“They’re mean, mad men,” she said. “Bloody-minded. And the little man is the worst.”

They heard the stomping feet and a babble of voices, and Commander Grinnel’s clear, fat-man’s tenor: “Keep it quiet, men. He may still be in the area.” The feet thundered over their heads on the porch.

In the barest of whispers Martha said: “The man that slept tells them there was only one, and he didn’t see what he was like except for the bare skin and the long hair. And the fat man says they’ll find him and—and—and says they’ll find him.” Her hand clutched Charles’ desperately and then dropped it as the feet thudded overhead again.

Grinnel was saying: “Half of you head up the street and half down. Check the alleys, check open window—hell, I don’t have to tell you. If we don’t find the bastard on the first run we’ll have to wake up the whole Guard Battalion and patrol the whole base with them all the goddam night, so keep your eyes open. Take off.”

“Remember the way to the wharf, Charles,” Martha said. “Good-bye lady. Take care of him. Take good care of him.” She wrenched her hand away and darted out from under the porch.

Lee muttered some agonized monosyllable. Charles started out after the child instinctively and then collapsed weakly back onto the dirt. They heard the rest.

“Hey, you—it’s him, by God! Get him! Get him!”

“Here he is, down here! Head him off!”

“Over there!” Grinnel yelled. “Head him off! Head him—good work!”

“For God’s sake. It’s a girl.”

“Those goddam yeomen and their goddam prowlers.”

Grinnel: “Where are you from, kid?”

“That’s no kid from the base, commander. Look at her!”

“I just was, sarge. Looks good to me, don’t it to you?”

Grinnel, tolerant, fatherly, amused: “Now, men, have your fun but keep it quiet.”

“Don’t be afraid, kid—” There was an animal howl from Martha’s throat that made Lee Falcaro shake hysterically and Charles grind his fingernails into his palms.

Grinnel: “Sergeant, you’d better tie your shirt around her head and take her into the O.N.I. building.”

“Why, commander! And let that lousy little yeoman in on it?”

Grinnel, amused, a good Joe, a man’s man: “That’s up to you, men. Just keep it quiet.”

“Why, commander, sometimes I like to make a little noise—”

“Ow!” a man yelled. There was a scuffle of feet and babbling voices. “Get her, you damn fool!” “She bit my hand—” “There she goes—” and a single emphatic shot.

Grinnel’s voice said into the silence that followed: “That’s that, men.”

“Did you *have* to shoot, Commander?” an aggrieved Guardsman said.

“Don’t blame me, fellow. Blame the guy that let her go.”

“God-dammit, she bit me—”

Somebody said as though he didn’t mean it: “We ought to take her someplace.”

“The hell with that. Let ‘em get her in the morning.”

“Them as wants her.” A cackle of harsh laughter.

Grinnel, tolerantly: “Back to the guardhouse, men. And keep it quiet.”

They scuffled off and there was silence again for long minutes. Charles said at last: “We’ll go down to the wharf.” They crawled out and looked for a moment from the shelter of the building at the bundle lying in the road.

Lee muttered: “Grinnel.”

“Shut up,” Charles said. He led her down deserted alleys and around empty corners, strictly according to plan.

The speedboat was a twenty-foot craft at Wharf Eighteen, bobbing on the water safely removed from other moored boats and ships. Lee Falcaro let out a small, smothered shriek when she saw a uniformed sailor sitting in the cockpit, apparently staring directly at them.

“It’s all right,” Charles said. “He’s a drunk. He’s always out cold by this time of night.” Smoothly Charles found the rope locker, cut lengths with the sailor’s own knife and bound and gagged him. The man’s eyes opened, weary, glazed and red while this was

going on and closed again. “Help me lug him ashore,” Charles said. Lee Falcaro took the sailor’s legs and they eased him onto the wharf.

They went back into the cockpit. “This is deep water,” Charles said, “so you’ll have no trouble with pilotage. You can read a compass and charts. There’s an automatic dead reckoner. My advice is just to pull the moderator rods out quarter-speed, point the thing west, pull the rods out as far as they’ll go—and relax. Either they’ll overtake you or they won’t.”

She was beginning to get the drift. She said nervously: “You’re talking as though you’re not coming along.”

“I’m not,” he said, playing the lock of the arms rack. The bar fell aside and he pulled a .45 pistol from its clamp. He thought back and remembered where the boat’s diminutive magazine was located, broke the feeble lock and found a box of short, fat, heavy little cartridges. He began to snap them into the pistol’s magazine.

“What do you think you’re up to?” Lee Falcaro demanded.

“Appointment with Commander Grinnel,” he said. He slid the heavy magazine into the pistol’s grip and worked the slide to jack a cartridge into the chamber.

“Shall I cast off for you?” he asked.

“Don’t be a fool,” she said. “You sound like a revival of a Mickey Spillane comedy. You can’t bring her back to life and you’ve got a job to do for the Syndic.”

“You do it,” he said, and snapped another of the blunt, fat, little cartridges into the magazine.

She cast off, reached for the moderator-rod control and pulled it hard.

“Gee,” he gasped, “you’ll sink us!” and dashed for the controls. You had seconds before the worm-gears turned, the cadmium rods withdrew from their slots, the reactor seethed and sent boiling metal cycling through the turbine—

He slammed down manual levers that threw off the fore and aft mooring lines, spun the wheel, bracing himself, and saw Lee Falcaro go down to the deck in a tangle, the .45 flying from her hand and skidding across the knurled plastic planking. But by then the turbine was screaming an alarm to the whole base and they were cutting white water through the buoy-marked gap in the harbor net.

Lee Falcaro got to her feet. “I’m not proud of myself,” she said to him. “But she told me to take care of you.”

He said grimly: “We could have gone straight to the wharf without that little layover to pick you up. Take the wheel.”

“Charles, I—”

He snarled at her.

*“Take the wheel.”*

She did, and he went aft to stare through the darkness. The harbor lights were twinkling pin-points; then his eyes misted so he could not see them at all. He didn’t give a damn if a dozen corvettes were already slicing the bay in pursuit. He had failed.

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## XVI

It was a dank fog-shrouded morning. Sometime during the night the quill of the dead reckoner had traced its fine red line over the 30th meridian. Roughly half-way, Charles Orsino thought, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. But the line was straight as a string for the last four hours of their run. The damn girl must have fallen asleep on watch. He glared at her in the bow and broke open a ration. Blandly oblivious to the glare, she said: "Good morning."

Charles swallowed a mouthful of chocolate, half-chewed, and choked on it. He reached hastily for water and found the tall plastic column of the ion-exchange apparatus empty. "Damn it," he snarled, "why didn't you refill this thing when you emptied it? And why didn't you zig-zag overnight? You're utterly irresponsible." He hurled the bucket overside, hauled it up and slopped seawater into the apparatus. Now there'd be a good twenty minutes before a man-sized drink accumulated.

"Just a minute," she told him steadily. "Let's straighten this out. I haven't had any water on the night watch so I didn't have any occasion to refill the tube. You must have taken the last of the water with your dinner. And as for the zig-zag, you said we should run a straightaway now and then to mix it up. I decided that last night was as good a time as any."

He took a minute drink from the reservoir, stalling. There was something—yes; he had *meant* to refill the apparatus after his dinner ration. And he *had* told her to give it a few hours of straightaway some night....

He said formally: "You're quite right on both counts. I apologize." He bit into a ration.

"That's not good enough," she said. "I'm not going to have you tell me you're sorry and then go scowling and sulking about the boat. In fact I don't like your behavior at all."

He said, enormously angry: "*Oh, you don't do you?*" and hated her, the world and himself for the stupid inadequacy of the comeback.

"No. I don't. I'm seriously worried. I'm afraid the conditioning you got didn't fall away completely when they swore you in. You've been acting irrationally and inconsistently."

"What about you?" he snapped. "You got conditioned too."

"That's right," she said. "That's another reason why you're worrying me. I find impulses in myself that have no business there. I simply seem to do a better job of controlling them than you're doing. For instance: we've been quarreling and at cross-purposes ever since you and Martha picked me up. That couldn't be unless I were contributing to the friction."

The wheel was fixed; she took a step or two aft and said professorially: "I've never had trouble getting along with people. I've had differences, of course, and at times I've allowed myself displays of temper when it was necessary to assert myself. But I find that you upset me; that for some reason or other your opinion on a matter is important to me, that if it differs with mine there should be a reconciliation."

He put down the ration and said wonderingly: "Do you know, that's the way I feel about you? And you think it's the conditioning or—or something?" He took a couple of steps forward, hesitantly.

“Yes,” she said in a rather tremulous voice. “The conditioning or something. For instance, you’re inhibited. You haven’t made an indecent proposition to me, not even as a matter of courtesy. Not that I care, of course, but—” In stepping aft, she tripped over the water bucket and went down to the deck with a faint scream.

He said: “Here, let me help you.” He picked her up and didn’t let go.

“Thanks,” she said faintly. “The conditioning technique can’t be called faulty, but it has inherent limitations....” She trailed off and he kissed her. She kissed back and said more faintly still: “Or it might be the drugs we used.... Oh, Charles, what *took* you so long?”

He said, brooding: “You’re way out of my class, you know. I’m just a bagman for the New York police. I wouldn’t even be that if it weren’t for Uncle Frank, and you’re a Falcaro. It’s just barely thinkable that I could make a pass at you. I guess that held me off and I didn’t want to admit it so I got mad at you instead. Hell, I could have swum back to the base and made a damned fool of myself trying to find Grinnel, but down inside I knew better. The kid’s *gone*.”

“We’ll make a psychologist of you yet,” she said.

“Psychologist? Why? You’re joking.”

“No. It’s not a joke. You’ll *like* psychology, darling. You can’t go on playing polo forever, you know.”

Darling! What was he getting into? Old man Gilby was four-goal at sixty, wasn’t he? Good God, was he hooked into marriage at twenty-three? Was she married already? Did she know or care whether he was? Had she been promiscuous? Would she continue to be? He’d never know; that was the one thing you never asked; your only comfort, if you needed comfort, was that she could never dream of asking you. What went on here? Let me out!

It went through his mind in a single panicky flash and then he said: “The hell with it,” and kissed her again.

She wanted to know: “The hell with what, darling?”

“Everything. Tell me about psychology. I can’t go on playing polo forever.”

It was an hour before she got around to telling him about psychology: “The neglect has been criminal—and inexplicable. For about a century it’s been *assumed* that psychology is a dead fallacy. Why?”

“All right,” he said amiably, playing with a lock of her hair. “Why?”

“Lieberman,” she said. “Lieberman of Johns-Hopkins. He was one of the old-line topological psychology men—don’t let the lingo throw you, Charles; it’s just the name of a system. He wrote an attack on the *mengenlehre* psychology school—point-sets of emotions, class-inclusions of reactions and so on. He blasted them to bits by proving that their constructs didn’t correspond to the emotions and reactions of random-sampled populations. And then came the pay-off: he tried the same acid test on his *own* school’s constructs and found out that they didn’t correspond either. It didn’t frighten him; he was a scientist. He published, and then the jig was up. Everybody, from full professors to undergraduate students went down the roster of the schools of psychology and wrecked them so comprehensively that the field was as dead as palmistry in twenty years. The miracle is that it hadn’t happened before. The flaws were so glaring! Textbooks of the older kind solemnly described syndromes,

psychoses, neuroses that simply couldn't be found in the real world! And that's the way it was all the way down the line."

"So where does that leave us?" Charles demanded. "Is it or isn't it a science?"

"It is," she said simply. "Lieberman and his followers went too far. It became a kind of hysteria. The experimenters must have been too eager. They misread results, they misinterpreted statistics, they misunderstood the claims of a school and knocked down not its true claims but straw-man claims they had set up themselves."

"But—*psychology!*" Charles protested, obscurely embarrassed at the thought that man's mind was subject to scientific study—not because he knew the first thing about it, but because *everybody* knew psychology was phony.

She shrugged. "I can't help it. We were doing physiology of the sensory organs, trying to settle the oldie about focusing the eye, and I got to grubbing around the pre-Lieberman texts looking for light in the darkness. Some of it sounded so—not sensible, but *positive* that I ran off one of Lieberman's population checks. And the old boy had been dead wrong. *Mengenlehre* constructs correspond quite nicely to the actual way people's minds work. I kept checking and the schools that were destroyed as hopelessly fallacious a century ago checked out, some closely and some not so closely, as good descriptions of the way the mind works. Some have predictive value. I used *mengenlehre* psychology algorithms to compute the conditioning on you and me, including the trigger release. It worked. You see, Charles? We're on the rim of something tremendous!"

"When did this Lieberman flourish?"

"I don't have the exact dates in my head. The breakup of the schools corresponded roughly with the lifetime of John G. Falcaro."

That pin-pointed it rather well. John G. succeeded Rafael, who succeeded Amadeo Falcaro, first leader of the Syndic in revolt. Under John G., the hard-won freedom was enjoyed, the bulging store-houses were joyously emptied, craft union rules went joyously out the window and builders *worked*, the dollar went to an all-time high and there was an all-time number of dollars in circulation. It had been an exuberant time still fondly remembered; just the time for over-enthusiastic rebels against a fusty scholasticism to joyously smash old ways of thought without too much exercise of the conscience. It all checked out.

She started and he got to his feet. A hardly-noticed discomfort was becoming acute; the speedboat was pitching and rolling quite seriously, for the first time since their escape. "Dirty weather coming up," he said. "We've been too damned lucky so far." He thought, but didn't remark, that there was much to worry about in the fact that there seemed to have been no pursuit. The meager resources of the North American Navy wouldn't be spent on chasing a single minor craft—not if the weather could be counted on to finish her off.

"I thought we were unsinkable?"

"In a way. Seal the boat and she's unsinkable the way a corked bottle is. But the boat's made up of a lot of bits and pieces that go together just so. Pound her for a few hours with waves and the bits and pieces give way. She doesn't sink, but she doesn't steam or steer either. I wish the Syndic had a fleet on the Atlantic."

"Sorry," she said. "The nearest fleet I know of is Mob ore boats on the great lakes and they aren't likely to pick us up."

The sea-search radar pinged and they flew to the screen. “*Something* at 273 degrees, about eight miles,” he said. “It can’t be pursuit. They couldn’t have any reason at all to circle around us and come at us from ahead.” He strained his eyes into the west and thought he could see a black speck on the gray.

Lee Falcaro tried a pair of binoculars and complained: “These things won’t work.”

“Not on a rolling, pitching platform they won’t—not with an optical lever eight miles long. I don’t suppose this boat would have a gyro-stabilized signal glass.” He spun the wheel to 180; they staggered and clung as the bow whipped about, searched and steadied on the new course. The mounting waves slammed them broadside-to and the rolling increased. They hardly noticed; their eyes were on the radarscope. Fogged as it was with sea return, they nevertheless could be sure after several minutes that the object had changed course to 135. Charles made a flying guess at her speed, read their own speed off and scribbled for a moment.

He said nothing, but spun the wheel to 225 and went back to the radarscope. The object changed course to 145. Charles scribbled again and said at last, flatly: “They’re running collision courses on us. Automatically computed, I suppose, from a radar. We’re through.”

He spun the wheel to 180 again, and studied the crawling green spark on the radarscope. “This way we give ‘em the longest run for their money and can pray for a miracle. The only way we can use our speed to outrun them is to turn around and head back into Government Territory—which isn’t what we want. Relax, Lee. Maybe if the weather thickens they’ll lose us—no; not with radar.”

They sat together on a bunk, wordlessly, for hours while the spray dashed higher and the boat shivered to hammering waves. Briefly they saw the pursuer, three miles off, low, black and ugly, before fog closed in again.

At nightfall there was the close, triumphant roar of a big reaction turbine and a light stabbed through the fog, flooding the boat with blue-white radiance. A cliff-like black hull loomed alongside as a bull-horn roared at them: “Cut your engines and come about into the wind.”

Lee Falcaro read white-painted letters on the black hull: “*Hon. James J. Regan, Chicago.*” She turned to Charles and said wonderingly: “It’s an ore boat. From the Mob great lakes fleet.”

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## XVII

“Here?” Charles demanded. “*Here?*”

“No possible mistake,” she said, stunned. “When you’re a Falcaro you travel. I’ve seen ‘em in Duluth, I’ve seen ‘em in Quebec, I’ve seen ‘em in Buffalo.”

The bull-horn voice roared again, dead in the shroud of fog; “Come into the wind and cut your engines or we’ll put a shell into you.”

Charles turned the wheel and wound in the moderator rod; the boat pitched like a splinter on the waves. There was a muffled double explosion and two grapnels crunched into the plastic hull, bow and stern. As the boat steadied, sharing the inertia of the ore ship, a dark figure leaped from the blue-white eye of the searchlight to their deck. And another. And another.

“Hello, Jim,” Lee Falcaro said almost inaudibly. “Haven’t met since Las Vegas, have we?”

The first boarder studied her coolly. He was built for football or any other form of mayhem. He ignored Charles completely. “Lee Falcaro as advised. Do you still think twenty reds means a black is bound to come up? You always were a fool, Lee. And now you’re in real trouble.”

“What’s going on, mister?” Charles snapped. “We’re Syndics and I presume you’re Mobsters. Don’t you recognize the treaty?”

The boarder turned to Charles inquiringly. “Some confusion,” he said. “Max Wyman? Charles Orsino? Or just some wild man from outback?”

“Orsino,” Charles said formally. “Second cousin of Edward Falcaro, under the guardianship of Francis W. Taylor.”

The boarder bowed slightly. “James Regan IV,” he said. “No need to list my connections. It would take too long and I feel no need to justify myself to a small-time dago chisler. Watch him gentlemen!”

Charles found his arms pinned by Regan’s two companions. There was a gun muzzle in his ribs.

Regan shouted to the ship and a ladder was let down. Lee Falcaro and Charles climbed it with guns at their backs. He said to her: “Who is that lunatic?” It did not even occur to him that the young man was who he claimed to be—the son of the Mob Territory opposite number of Edward Falcaro.

“He’s Regan,” she said. “And I don’t know who’s the lunatic, him or me. Charles, I’m sorry, terribly sorry, I got you into this.”

He managed to smile. “I volunteered,” he said.

“Enough talk,” Regan said, following them onto the deck. Dull-eyed sailors watched them incuriously, and there were a couple of anvil-jawed men with a stance and swagger Charles had come to know. Guardsmen—he would have staked his life on it. Guardsmen of the North American Government Navy—aboard a Mob Territory ship and acting as if they were passengers or high-rated crewmen.

Regan smirked: “I’m on the horns of a dilemma. There are no accommodations that are quite right for you. There are storage compartments which are worse than you deserve and there are passenger quarters which are too good for you. I’m afraid it will have to be one of the compartments. Your consolation will be that it’s only a short run to Chicago.”

Chicago—headquarters for Mob Territory. The ore ship had been on a return trip to Chicago when alerted somehow by the Navy to intercept the fugitives. *Why?*

“Down there,” one of the men gestured briskly with a gun. They climbed down a ladder into a dark, oily cavern fitfully lit by a flash in Regan’s hand.

“Make yourselves comfortable,” Regan told them. “If you get a headache, don’t worry. We were carrying some avgas on the outward run.” The flash winked out and a door clanged on them.

“I can’t believe it,” Charles said. “That’s a top Mob man? Couldn’t you be mistaken?” He groped in the dark and found her. The place did reek of gasoline.

She clung to him and said: “Hold me, Charles.... Yes that’s Jimmy Regan.

“That’s what will become top man in the Mob. Jimmy’s a charmer at a Las Vegas Hotel. Jimmy’s a gourmet when he orders at the Pump Room and he’s trying to overawe you. Jimmy plays polo too, but he’s crippled three of his own team-mates because he’s not very good at it. I kept telling myself whenever I ran into him that he was just an accident, the Mob could survive him. But his father acts—funny. There’s something with them, there’s some—

“They roll out the carpet when you show up but the people around them are afraid of them. There’s a story I never believed—but I believe it now. What would happen if my uncle pulled out a pistol and began screaming and shot a waiter: Jimmy’s father did it, they tell me. And nothing happened except that the waiter was dragged away and everybody said it was a good thing Mr. Regan saw him reach for his gun and shot him first. Only the waiter didn’t have any gun.

“I saw Jimmy last three years ago. I haven’t been in Mob Territory since. I didn’t like it there. Now I know why. Give Mob Territory enough time and it’ll be like New Portsmouth. Something went wrong with them. We have the Treaty of Las Vegas and a hundred years of peace and there aren’t many people going back and forth between Syndic and Mob except for a few high-ups like me who have to circulate. Manners. So you pay duty calls and shut your eyes to what they’re really like.

“*This* is what they’re like. This dark, damp stinking compartment. And my uncle—and all the Falcaros—and you—and I—we aren’t like them. Are we? *Are we?*” Her fingers bit into his arms. She was shaking.

“Easy,” he soothed her. “Easy, easy. We’re all right. We’ll be all right. I think I’ve got it figured out. This must be some private gun-running Jimmy’s gone in for. Loaded an ore boat with avgas and ammo and ran it up the Seaway. If anybody in Syndic Territory gave a damn they thought it was a load of ore for New Orleans via the Atlantic and the Gulf. But Jimmy ran his load to Ireland or Iceland, H.Q. A little private flier of his. He wouldn’t dare harm us. There’s the Treaty and you’re a Falcaro.”

“Treaty,” she said. “I tell you they’re all in it. Now that I’ve seen the Government in action I understand what I saw in Mob Territory. They’ve gone rotten, that’s all. They’ve gone rotten. The way he treated you, because he thought you didn’t have his rank! Sometimes my uncle’s high-handed, sometimes he tells a person off, sometimes he lets him know he’s top man in the Syndic and doesn’t propose to let anybody teach him how to suck eggs. But the spirit’s different. In the Syndic it’s parent to child. In the Mob it’s master to slave. Not based on age, not based on achievement, but based on the accident of birth. You tell me ‘You’re a Falcaro’ and that packs weight. Why? Not because I was born a Falcaro but because they let me stay a Falcaro. If I hadn’t been brainy and quick, they’d have adopted me out before I was ten. They don’t do that in Mob Territory. Whatever chance sends a Regan is a Regan then and forever. Even if it’s a paranoid constitutional inferior like Jimmy’s father. Even if it’s a giggling pervert like Jimmy.

“God, Charles, I’m scared.

“At last I know these people and I’m scared. You’d have to see Chicago to know why. The lakefront palaces, finer than anything in New York. Regan Memorial Plaza, finer than Scratch Sheet Square—great gilded marble figures, a hundred running yards of heroic frieze. But the hovels you see only by chance! Gray brick towers dating from the Third Fire! The children with faces like weasels, the men with faces like hogs, the women with figures like beer barrels and all of them glaring at you when you drive

past as if they could cut your throat with joy. I never understood the look in their eyes until now, and you'll never begin to understand what I'm talking about until you see their eyes...."

Charles revolted against the idea. It was too gross to go down. It didn't square with his acquired picture of life in North America and therefore Lee Falcaro must be somehow mistaken or hysterical. "There," he murmured, stroking her hair. "We'll be all right. We'll be all right." He tried to soothe her.

She twisted out of his arms and raged: "I *won't* be humored. They're mad, I tell you. Dick Reiner was right. We've got to wipe out the Government. But Frank Taylor was right too. We've got to blast the Mob before they blast us. They've died and decayed into something too horrible to bear. If we let them stay on the continent, with us their stink will infect us and poison us to death. We've got to do something. We've got to do something."

"What?"

It stopped her cold. After a minute she uttered a shaky laugh. "The fat, sloppy, happy Syndic," she said, "sitting around while the wolves overseas and the maniacs across the Mississippi are waiting to jump. Yes—do what?"

Charles Orsino was not good at arguments or indeed at any abstract thinking. He knew it. He knew the virtues that had commended him to F. W. Taylor were his energy and an off-hand talent for getting along with people. But something rang terribly false in Lee's words.

"That kind of thinking doesn't get you anywhere, Lee," he said slowly. "I didn't absorb much from Uncle Frank, but I did absorb this: you run into trouble if you make up stories about the world and then act as if they're true. The Syndic isn't somebody sitting around. The Government isn't wolves. The Mobsters aren't maniacs. And they aren't waiting to jump on the Syndic. The Syndic isn't anything that's jumpable. It's some people and their morale and credit."

"Faith is a beautiful thing," Lee Falcaro said bitterly. "Where'd you get yours?"

"From the people I knew and worked with. Numbers-runners, bookies, sluts. Decent citizens."

"And what about the scared and unhappy ones in Riveredge? That sow of a woman in the D.A.R. who smuggled me aboard a coast raider? The neurotics and psychotics I found more and more of when I invalidated the Lieberman findings? Charles, the North American Government didn't scare me especially. But the thought that they're lined up with a continental power does. It scares me damnably because it'll be three against one. Against the Syndic, the Mob, the Government—and our own unbalanced citizens."

Uncle Frank never let that word "citizens" pass without a tirade. "We are not a government!" he always yelled. "We are not a government! We must not think like a government! We must not think in terms of duties and receipts and disbursements. We must think in terms of the old loyalties that bound the Syndic together!" Uncle Frank was sedentary, but he had roused himself once to the point of wrecking a bright young man's newly installed bookkeeping system for the Medical Center. He had used a cane, most enthusiastically, and then bellowed: "The next wise guy who tries to sneak punch-cards into this joint will get them down his throat! What the hell do we need punch-cards for? Either there's room enough and doctors enough for the

patients or there isn't. If there is, we take care of them. If there isn't, we put 'em in an ambulance and take them someplace else. And if I hear one goddammed word about 'efficiency'—" he glared the rest and strode out, puffing and leaning on Charles' arm. "Efficiency," he growled in the corridor. "Every so often a wise guy comes to me whimpering that people are getting away with murder, collections are ten per cent below what they ought to be, the Falcaro Fund's being milked because fifteen per cent of the dough goes to people who aren't in need at all, eight per cent of the people getting old-age pensions aren't really past sixty. Get efficient, these people tell me. Save money by triple-checking collections. Save money by tightening up the Fund rules. Save money by a nice big vital-statistics system so we can check on pensioners. Yeah! Have people who might be *working* check on collections instead, and make enemies to boot whenever we catch somebody short. Make the Fund a grudging Scrooge instead of an open-handed sugar-daddy—and let people *worry* about their chances of making the Fund instead of *knowing* it'll take care of them if they're caught short. Set up a vital statistics system from birth to death, with numbers and finger-prints and house registration and maybe the gas-chamber if you forget to report a change of address. You know what's wrong with the wise guys, Charles? Constipation. And they want to constipate the universe." Charles remembered his uncle restored to chuckling good humor by the time he had finished embroidering his spur-of-the-moment theory with elaborate scatological details.

"The Syndic will stand," he said to Lee Falcaro, thinking of his uncle who knew what he was doing, thinking of Edward Falcaro who did the right thing without knowing why, thinking of his good friends in the 101st Precinct, the roaring happy crowds in Scratch Sheet Square, the good-hearted men of Riveredge Breakdown Station 26 who had borne with his sullenness and intolerance simply because that was the way things were and that was the way you acted. "I don't know what the Mob's up to, and I got a shock from the Government, and I don't deny that we have a few miserable people who can't seem to be helped. But you've seen too much of the Mob and Government and our abnormals. Maybe you don't know as much as you should about our ordinary people. Anyway, all we can do is wait."

"Yes," she said. "All we can do is wait. Until Chicago we have each other."

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## XVIII

They were too sick with gasoline fumes to count the passing hours or days. Food was brought to them from time to time, but it tasted like avgas. They could not think for the sick headaches that pounded incessantly behind their eyes. When Lee developed vomiting spasms that would not stop, Charles Orsino pounded on the bulkhead with his fists and yelled, his voice thunderous in the metal compartment, for an hour.

Somebody came at last—Regan. The light stabbed Charles' eyes when he opened the door. "Trouble?" Regan asked, smirking.

"Miss Falcaro may be dying," Charles said. His own throat felt as though it had been gone over with a cobbler's rasp. "I don't have to tell you your life won't be worth a dime if she dies and it gets back to Syndic Territory. She's got to be moved and she's got to have medical attention."

"Death threat from the dago?" Regan was amused. "I have it on your own testimony that the Syndic is merely morale and people and credit—not a formidable organization. Yes, there was a mike in here. One reason for your discomfort. You'll be

gratified to learn that I thought most of your conversation decidedly dull. However, the lady will be of no use to us dead and we're now in the Seaway entering Lake Michigan. I suppose it can't do any harm to move you two. Pick her up, will you? I'll let you lead the way—and I'll remind you that I may not, as the lady said, be a four-goal polo player but I am a high expert with the handgun. Get moving.”

Charles did not think he could pick his own feet up, but the thought of pleading weakness to Regan was unbearable. He could try. Staggering, he got Lee Falcaro over his shoulder and through the door. Regan courteously stood aside and murmured: “Straight ahead and up the ramp. I'm giving you my own cabin. We'll be docking soon enough; I'll make out.”

Charles dropped her onto a sybaritic bed in a small but lavishly-appointed cabin. Regan whistled up a deckhand and a ship's officer of some sort, who arrived with a medicine chest. “Do what you can for her, mister,” he told the officer. And to the deckhand: “Just watch them. They aren't to touch anything. If they give you trouble, you're free to punch them around a bit.” He left, whistling.

The officer fussed unhappily over the medicine chest and stalled by sponging off Lee Falcaro's face and throat. The deckhand watched impassively. He was a six-footer, and he hadn't spent days inhaling casing-head fumes. The trip-hammer pounding behind Charles's eyes seemed to be worsening with the fresher air. He collapsed into a seat and croaked, with shut eyes: “While you're trying to figure out the vomiting, can I have a handful of aspirins?”

“Eh? Nothing was said about you. You were in Number Three with her? I suppose it'll be all right. Here.” He poured a dozen tablets into Charles' hand. “Get him some water, you.” The deckhand brought a glass of water from the adjoining lavatory and Charles washed down some of the tablets. The officer was reading a booklet, worry written on his face. “Do you know any medicine?” he finally asked.

The hard-outlined, kidney-shaped ache was beginning to diffuse through Charles' head, more general now and less excruciating. He felt deliciously sleepy, but roused himself to answer: “Some athletic trainer stuff. I don't know—morphine? Curare?”

The officer ruffled through the booklet. “Nothing about vomiting,” he said. “But it says curare for muscular cramp and I guess that's what's going on. A lipid suspension to release it slowly into the bloodstream and give the irritation time to subside. Anyway, I can't kill her if I watch the dose....”

Charles, through half-opened eyes, saw Lee Falcaro's arm reach behind the officer's back to his medicine chest. The deckhand's eyes were turning to the bed—Charles heaved himself to his feet, skyrockets going off again through his head, and started for the lavatory. The deckhand grabbed his arm. “Rest, mister! Where do you think you're going?”

“Another glass of water—”

“I'll get it. You heard my orders.”

Charles subsided. When he dared to look again, Lee's arm lay alongside her body and the officer was triple-checking dosages in his booklet against a pressurized hypodermic spray. The officer sighed and addressed Lee: “You won't even feel this. Relax.” He read his setting on the spray again, checked it again against the booklet. He touched the syringe to the skin of Lee's arm and thumbed open the valve. It

hissed for a moment and Charles knew submicroscopic particles of the medication had been blasted under Lee's skin too fast for nerves to register the shock.

His glass of water came and he gulped it greedily. The officer packed the pressurized syringe away, folded the chest and said to both of them, rather vaguely: "That should do it. If, uh, if anything happens—or if it doesn't work—call me and I'll try something else. Morphine, maybe."

He left and Charles slumped in the chair, the pain ebbing and sleep beginning to flow over him. Not yet, he told himself. She hooked something from the chest. He said to the deckhand: "Can I clean the lady and myself up?"

"Go ahead, mister. You can use it. Just don't try anything."

The man lounged in the door-frame of the lavatory alternately studying Charles at the wash-basin and Lee on the bed. Charles took off a heavy layer of oily grease from himself and then took washing tissues to the bed. Lee Falcaro's spasms were tapering off. As he washed her, she managed a smile and an unmistakable wink.

"You folks married?" the deckhand asked.

"No," Charles said. Weakly she held up her right arm for the washing tissue. As he scrubbed the hand, he felt a small cylinder smoothly transferred from her palm to his. He slid it into a pocket and finished the job.

The officer popped in again with a carton of milk. "Any better, miss?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Good. Try to drink this." Immensely set up by his success in treatment, he hovered over her for a quarter of an hour getting the milk down a sip at a time. It stayed down. He left trailing a favorable prognosis. Meanwhile, Charles had covertly examined Lee's booty: a pressurized syringe labeled *morphine sulfate sol*. It was full and ready. He cracked off the protective cap and waited his chance.

It came when Lee grimaced at him and called the deckhand in a feeble murmur. She continued to murmur so indistinctly that he bent over trying to catch the words. Charles leaned forward and emptied the syringe at one inch range into the taut seat of the deckhand's pants. He scratched absently and said to Lee: "You'll have to talk up, lady." Then he giggled, looked bewildered and collapsed on the floor, staring, coked to the eyebrows.

Lee painfully sat up on the bed. "Porthole," she said.

Charles went to it and struggled with the locking lugs. It opened—and an alarm bell began to clang through the ship. *Now* he saw the hair-fine, broken wire. An alarm trip-wire.

Feet thundered outside and the glutinous voice of Jimmy Regan was heard: "Wait, you damn fools! You in there—is everything all right? Did they try to pull something?"

Charles kept silent and shook his head at the girl. He picked up a chair and stood by the door. The glutinous voice again, in a mumble that didn't carry through—and the door sprang open. Charles brought the chair down in a murderous chop, conscious only that it seemed curiously light. There was an impact and the head fell.

It was Regan, with a drawn gun. It had been Regan. His skull was smashed before he knew it. Charles felt as though he had all the time in the world. He picked up the gun

to a confused roar like a slowed-down sound track and emptied it into the corridor. It had been a full automatic, but the fifteen shots seemed as well-spaced as a ceremonial salute. Regan, in his vanity, wore two guns. Charles scooped up the other and said to Lee: "Come on."

He knew she was following as he raced down the cleared corridor and down the ramp, back to the compartment in which they had been locked. Red danger lights burned on the walls. Charles flipped the pistol to semi-automatic as they passed a red-painted bulkhead with valves and gages sprouting from it. He turned and fired three deliberate shots into it. The last was drowned out by a dull roar as gasoline fumes exploded. Pipe fittings and fragments of plate whizzed about them like bullets as they raced on.

Somebody ahead loomed, yelling querulously: "What the hell was that, Mac? What blew?"

"Where's the reactor room?" Charles demanded, jamming the pistol into his chest. The man gulped and pointed.

"Take me there. Fast."

"Now *look*, Mac—"

Charles told him in a few incisive details where and how he was going to be shot. The man went white and led them down the corridor and into the reactor room. Three white-coated men with the aloof look of reactor specialists stared at them as they bulled into the spotless chamber.

The oldest sniffed: "And what, may I ask, are you crewmen doing in—"

Lee slammed the door behind them and said: "Sound the radiation alarm."

"Certainly not! You must be the couple we—"

"*Sound the radiation alarm.*" She picked up a pair of dividers from the plot board and approached the technician with murder on her face. He gaped until she poised the needle points before his eyes and repeated: "*Sound the radiation alarm.*" Nobody in the room, including Charles, had the slightest doubt that the points would sink into the technician's eyeballs if he refused.

"Do what she says, Will," he mumbled, his eyes crossing on the dividers. "For God's sake, do what she says. She's crazy."

One of the men moved, very cautiously, watching Charles and the gun, to a red handle and pulled it down. A ferro-concrete barrier rose to wall off the chamber and the sine-curve wail of a standard radioactivity warning began to howl mournfully through the ship.

"Dump the reactor metal," Charles said. His eyes searched for the exit, and found it—a red-painted breakaway panel, standard for a hot lab.

A technician wailed: "We *can't* do that! We can't *do* that! A million bucks of thorium with a hundred years of life in it—have a heart, mister! They'll crucify us!"

"They can dredge for it," Charles said. "Dump the metal."

"Dump the metal," Lee said. She hadn't moved.

The senior technician's eyes were still on the bright needle points. He was crying silently. "Dump it," he said.

“Okay, chief. Your responsibility, remember.”

“Dump it!” wailed the senior.

The technician did something technical at the control board. After a moment the steady rumbling of the turbines ceased and the ship’s deck began to wallow underfoot.

“Hit the panel, Lee,” Charles said. She did, running. He followed her through the oval port. It was like an open-bottomed diving bell welded to the hull. There were large, luminous cleats for pulling yourself down through the water, under the rim of the bell. He dropped the pistol into the water, breathed deeply a couple of times and began to climb down. There was no sign of Lee.

He kicked up through the dark water on a long slant away from the ship. It might be worse. With a fire and a hot-lab alarm and a dead chief aboard, the crew would have things on their mind besides looking for bobbing heads.

He broke the surface and treaded water to make a minimum target. He did not turn to the ship. His dark hair would be less visible than his white face. And if he was going to get a burst of machine-gun bullets through either, he didn’t want to know about it. Ahead he saw Lee’s blonde hair spread on the water for a moment and then it vanished. He breathed hugely, ducked and swam under water toward it.

When he rose next a sheet of flame was lightening the sky and the oily reek of burning hydrocarbons tainted the air. He dove again, and this time caught up with Lee. Her face was bone-white and her eyes blank. Where she was drawing her strength from he could not guess. Behind them the ship sent up an oily plume and the sine-curve wail of the radioactivity warning could be faintly heard. Before them a dim shore stretched.

He gripped her naked arm, roughened by the March waters of Lake Michigan, bent it around his neck and struck off for the shore. His lungs were bursting in his chest and the world was turning gray-black before his burning eyes. He heaved his tired arm through the water as though each stroke would be his last, but the last stroke, by some miracle, never was the last.

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## **XIX**

It hadn’t been easy to get time off from the oil-painting factory. Ken Oliver was a little late when he slid into the aseptic-smelling waiting room of the Michigan City Medical Center. A parabolic mike in the ceiling trained itself on the heat he radiated and followed him across the floor to a chair. A canned voice said: “State your business, please.”

He started a little and said in the general direction of the mike: “I’m Ken Oliver. A figure man in the Blue Department, Picasso Oils and Etching Corporation. Dr. Latham sent me here for—what do you call it?—a biopsy.”

“Thank you, please be seated.”

He smiled because he was seated already and picked up a magazine, the current copy of the *Illinois Sporting News*, familiarly known as the Green Sheet. Everybody in Mob Territory read it. The fingers of the blind spelled out its optimism and its selections at Hawthorne in Braille. If you were not only blind but fingerless, there was a talking edition that read itself aloud to you from tape.

He riffled through the past performances and selections to the articles. This month's lead was—*Thank God I am Dying of Throat Cancer*.

He leaned back in the chair dizzily, the waiting room becoming gray mist around him. *No*, he thought. *No*. It couldn't be that. All it could be was a little sore on the back of his throat—no more than that. Just a little sore on the back of his throat. He'd been a fool to go to Latham. The fees were outrageous and he was behind, always a little behind, on his bills. But cancer—so much of it around—and the drugs didn't seem to *help* any more.... But Latham had almost promised him it was non-malignant.

"Mr. Oliver," the loudspeaker said, "please go to Dr. Riordan's office, Number Ten."

Riordan was younger than he. That was supposed to be bad in a general practitioner, good in a specialist. And Riordan was a specialist—pathology. A sour-faced young specialist.

"Good morning. Sit here. Open your mouth. Wider than that, and relax. *Relax*; your glottis is locked."

Oliver couldn't protest around the plastic-and-alcohol taste of the tongue depressor. There was a sudden coldness and a metallic *snick* that startled him greatly; then Riordan took the splint out of his mouth and ignored him as he summoned somebody over his desk set. A young man, even younger than Riordan, came in. "Freeze, section and stain this right away," the pathologist said, handing him a forceps from which a small blob dangled. "Have them send up the Rotino charts, three hundred to nine hundred inclusive."

He began to fill out charts, still ignoring Oliver, who sat and sweated bullets for ten minutes. Then he left and was back in five minutes more.

"You've got it," he said shortly. "It's operable and you won't lose much tissue." He scribbled on a sheet of paper and handed it to Oliver. The painter numbly read: "... anterior ... epithelioma ... metastases ... giant cells...."

Riordan was talking again: "Give this to Latham. It's my report. Have him line up a surgeon. As to the operation, I say the sooner the better unless you care to lose your larynx. That will be fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars," the painter said blankly. "But Dr. Latham told me—" He trailed off and got out his check book. Only thirty-two in the account, but he would deposit his paycheck today which would bring it up. It was after three so his check wouldn't go in today—he wrote out the slip slowly and carefully.

Riordan took it, read it suspiciously, put it away and said: "Good day, Mr. Oliver."

Oliver wandered from the Medical Center into the business heart of the art colony. The Van Gogh Works on the left must have snagged the big order from Mexico—their chimneys were going full blast and the reek of linseed oil and turps was strong in the air. But the poor beggars on the line at Rembrandts Ltd. across the square were out of luck. They'd been laid off for a month now, with no sign of a work call yet. Somebody jostled him off the sidewalk, somebody in a great hurry. Oliver sighed. The place was getting more like Chicago every day. He sometimes thought he had made art his line not because he had any special talent but because artists were relatively easy-going people, not so quick to pop you in the nose, not such aggressive drunks when they *were* drunks.

Quit the stalling, a thin, cold voice inside him said. Get over to Latham. The man said “The sooner the better.”

He went over to Latham whose waiting room was crowded with irascible women. After an hour, he got to see the old man and hand him the slip.

Latham said: “Don’t worry about a thing. Riordan’s a good man. If he says it’s operable, it’s operable. Now we want Finsen to do the whittling. With Finsen operating, you won’t have to worry about a thing. He’s a good man. His fee’s fifteen hundred.”

“Oh, my God!” Oliver gulped.

“What’s the matter—haven’t you got it?”

To his surprise and terror, Oliver found himself giving Dr. Latham a hysterical stump speech about how he didn’t have it and who did have it and how could anybody get ahead with the way prices were shooting up and everybody gouged you every time you turned around and yes, that went for doctors too and if you did get a couple of bucks in your pocket the salesmen heard about it and battered at you until you put down an installment on some piece of junk you didn’t want to get them out of your hair and what the hell kind of world was this anyway.

Latham listened, smiling and nodding, with, as Oliver finally realized, his hearing aid turned off. His voice ran down and Latham said briskly: “All right, then. You just come around when you’ve arranged the financial details and I’ll contact Finsen. He’s a good man; you won’t have to worry about a thing. And remember: the sooner, the better.”

Oliver slumped out of the office and went straight to the Mob Building, office of the Regan Benevolent Fund. An acid-voiced woman there turned him down indignantly: “You should be ashamed of yourself trying to draw on the Fund when there are people in actual want who can’t be accommodated! No, I don’t want to hear any more about it if you please. There are others waiting.”

Waiting for what? The same treatment?

Oliver realized with a shock that he hadn’t phoned his foreman as promised, and it was four minutes to five. He did a dance of agonized impatience outside a telephone booth occupied by a fat woman. She noticed him, pursed her lips, hung up—and stayed in the booth. She began a slow search of her hand-bag, found coins and slowly dialed a new number. She gave him a malevolent grin as he walked away, crushed. He had a good job record, but that was no way to keep it good. One black mark, another black mark, and one day—bingo.

General Advances was open, of course. Through its window you could see handsome young men and sleek young women just waiting to help you, whatever the fiscal jam. He went in and was whisked to a booth where a big-bosomed honey-voiced blonde oozed sympathy over him. He walked out with a check for fifteen hundred dollars after signing countless papers, with the creamy hand of the girl on his to help guide the pen. What was printed on the papers, God and General Advances alone knew. There were men on the line who told him with resignation that they had been paying off to G.A. for the better part of their lives. There were men who said bitterly that G.A. was owned by the Regan Benevolent Fund, which must be a lie.

The street was full of people—strangers who didn't look like your run-of-the-mill artist. Muscle men, with the Chicago style and if anybody got one in the gut, too goddamned bad about it. They were peering into faces as they passed.

He was frightened. He stepped onto the slidewalk and hurried home, hoping for temporary peace there. But there was no peace for his frayed nerves. The apartment house door opened obediently when he told it: "Regan," but the elevator stood stupidly still when he said: "Seventh Floor." He spat bitterly and precisely: "*Sev-enth Floor.*" The doors closed on him with a faintly derisive, pneumatic moan and he was whisked up to the eighth floor. He walked down wearily and said: "Cobalt blue" to his own door after a furtive look up and down the hall. It worked and he went to his phone to flash Latham, but didn't. Oliver sank instead into a dun-colored pneumatic chair, his 250-dollar Hawthorne Electric Stepsaver door mike following him with its mindless snout. He punched a button on the chair and the 600-dollar hi-fi selected a random tape. A long, pure melodic trumpet line filled the room. It died for two beats and then the strings and woodwinds picked it up and tossed it—

Oliver snapped off the music, sweat starting from his brow. It was the Gershwin *Lost Symphony*, and he remembered how Gershwin had died. There had been a little nodule in his brain as there was a little nodule in Oliver's throat.

Time, the Great Kidder. The years drifted by. Suddenly you were middle-aged, running to the medics for this and that. Suddenly they told you to have your throat whittled out or die disgustingly. And what did you have to show for it? A number, a travel pass, a payment book from General Advance, a bunch of junk you never wanted, a job that was a heavier ball and chain than any convict ever wore in the barbarous days of Government. Was this what Regan and Falcaro had bled for?

He defrosted some hamburger, fried it and ate it and then went mechanically down to the tavern. He didn't like to drink every night, but you had to be one of the boys, or word would get back to the plant and you might be on your way to another black mark. They were racing under the lights at Hawthorne too, and he'd be expected to put a couple of bucks down. He never seemed to win. Nobody he knew ever seemed to win. Not at the horses, not at the craps table, not at the numbers.

He stood outside the neon-bright saloon for a long moment, and then turned and walked into the darkness away from town, possessed by impulses he did not understand or want to understand. He had only a vague hope that standing on the Dunes and looking out across the dark lake might somehow soothe him.

In half an hour he had reached the deciduous forest, then the pine, then the scrubby bushes, then the grasses, then the bare white sand. And lying in it he found two people: a man so hard and dark he seemed to be carved from oak and a woman so white and gaunt she seemed to be carved from ivory.

He turned shyly from the woman.

"Are you all right?" he asked the man. "Is there anything I can do?"

The man opened red-rimmed eyes. "Better leave us alone," he said. "We'd only get you into trouble."

Oliver laughed hysterically. "Trouble?" he said. "Don't think of it."

The man seemed to be measuring him with his eyes, and said at last: "You'd better go and not talk about us. We're enemies of the Mob."

Oliver said after a pause: "So am I. Don't go away. I'll be back with some clothes and food for you and the lady. Then I can help you to my place. I'm an enemy of the Mob too. I just never knew it until now."

He started off and then turned. "You won't go away? I mean it. I want to help you. I can't seem to help myself, but perhaps there's something—"

The man said tiredly: "We won't go away."

Oliver hurried off. There was something mingled with the scent of the pine forest tonight. He was half-way home before he identified it: oil smoke.

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## XX

Lee swore and said: "I can get up if I want to."

"You'll stay in bed whether you want to or not," Charles told her. "You're a sick woman."

"I'm a very bad-tempered woman and that means I'm convalescent. Ask anybody."

"I'll go right out into the street and do that, darling."

She got out of bed and wrapped Oliver's dressing gown around her. "I'm hungry again," she said.

"He'll be back soon. You've left nothing but some frozen—worms, looks like. Shall I defrost them?"

"Please don't trouble. I can wait."

"Window!" he snapped.

She ducked back and swore again, this time at herself. "Sorry," she said. "Which will do us a whole hell of a lot of good if somebody saw me and started wondering."

Oliver came in with packages. Lee kissed him and he grinned shyly. "Trout," he whispered. She grabbed the packages and flew to the kitchenette.

"The way to Lee Falcaro's heart," Charles mused. "How's your throat, Ken?"

"No pain, today," Oliver whispered. "Latham says I can talk as much as I like. And I've got things to talk about." He opened his coat and hauled out a flat package that had been stuffed under his belt. "Stolen from the factory. Brushes, pens, tubes of ink, drawing instruments. My friends, you are going to return to Syndic Territory in style, with passes and permits galore."

Lee returned. "Trout's frying," she said. "I heard that about the passes. Are you *sure* you can fake them?"

His face fell. "Eight years at the Chicago Art Institute," he whispered. "Three years at Original Reproductions, Inc. Eleven years at Picasso Oils and Etchings, where I am now third figure man in the Blue Department. I really think I deserve your confidence."

"Ken, we trust and love you. If it weren't for the difference in your ages I'd marry you *and* Charles. Now what about the Chicagoans? Hold it—the fish!"

Dinner was served and cleared away before they could get more out of Oliver. His throat wasn't ready for more than one job at a time. He told them at last: "Things are

quieting down. There are still some strangers in town and the road patrols are still acting very hard-boiled. But nobody's been pulled in today. Somebody told me on the line that the whole business is a lot of foolishness. He said the ship must have been damaged by somebody's stupidity and Regan must have been killed in a brawl—everybody knows he was half crazy, like his father. So my friend figures they made up the story about two wild Europeans to cover up a mess. I said I thought there was a lot in what he said." Oliver laughed silently.

"Good man!" Charles tried not to act over-eager. "When do you think you can start on the passes, Ken?"

Oliver's face dropped a little. "Tonight," he whispered. "I don't suppose the first couple of tries will be any good so—let's go."

Lee put her hand on his shoulder. "We'll miss you too," she said. "But don't ever forget this: we're coming back. Hell won't stop us. We're coming back."

Oliver was arranging stolen instruments on the table. "You have a big order," he whispered sadly. "I guess you aren't afraid of it because you've always been rich and strong. Anything you want to do you think you can do. But those Government people? And after them the Mob? Maybe it would be better if you just let things take their course, Lee. I've found out a person can be happy even here."

"We're coming back," Lee said.

Oliver took out his own Michigan City-Chicago travel permit. As always, the sight of it made Charles wince. Americans under such a yoke! Oliver whispered: "I got a good long look today at a Michigan City Buffalo permit. The foreman's. He buys turps from Carolina at Buffalo. I sketched it from memory as soon as I got by myself. I don't swear to it, not yet, but I have the sketch to practice from and I can get a few more looks later."

He pinned down the drawing paper, licked a ruling pen and filled it, and began to copy the border of his own pass. "I don't suppose there's anything I can do?" Lee asked.

"You can turn on the audio," Oliver whispered. "They have it going all the time at the shop. I don't feel right working unless there's some music driving me out of my mind."

Lee turned on the big Hawthorne Electric set with a wave of her hand; imbecilic music filled the air and Oliver grunted and settled down.

Lee and Charles listened, fingers entwined, to half an hour of slushy ballads while Oliver worked. The news period announcer came on with some anesthetic trial verdicts, sports results and society notes about which Regan had gone where. Then—

"The local Mobsters of Michigan City, Indiana, today welcomed Maurice Regan to their town. Mr. Regan will assume direction of efforts to apprehend the two European savages who murdered James Regan IV last month aboard the ore boat *Hon. John Regan* in waters off Michigan City. You probably remember that the Europeans did some damage to the vessel's reactor room before they fled from the ship. How they boarded the ship and their present whereabouts are mysteries—but they probably won't be mysteries long. Maurice Regan is little-known to the public, but he has built an enviable record in the administration of the Chicago Police Department. Mr. Regan on taking charge of the case, said this: 'We know by traces found on the Dunes that they got away. We know from the logs of highway patrols

that they didn't get out of the Michigan City area. The only way to close the books on this matter fast is to cover the city with a fine-tooth comb. Naturally and unfortunately this will mean inconvenience to many citizens. I hope they will bear with the inconveniences gladly for the sake of confining those two savages in a place where they can no longer be a menace. I have methods of my own and there may be complaints. Reasonable suggestions will be needed, but with crackpots I have no patience."

The radio began to spew more sports results. Oliver turned and waved at it to be silent. "I don't like that," he whispered. "I never heard of this Regan in the Chicago Police."

"They said he wasn't in the public eye."

"I wasn't the public. I did some posters for the police and I knew who was who. And that bit at the end. I've heard things like it before. The Mob doesn't often admit it's in the wrong, you know. When they try to disarm criticism in advance ... this Regan must be a rough fellow."

Charles and Lee Falcaro looked at each other in sudden fear. "We don't want to hurry you, Ken," she said. "But it looks as though you'd better do a rush job."

Nodding, Oliver bent over the table. "Maybe a week," he said hopefully. With the finest pen he traced the curlicues an engraving lathe had evolved to make the passes foolproof. Odd, he thought—the lives of these two hanging by such a weak thing as the twisted thread of color that feeds from pen to paper. And, as an afterthought—I suppose mine does too.

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Oliver came back the next day to work with concentrated fury, barely stopping to eat and not stopping to talk. Lee got it out of him, but not easily. After being trapped in a half dozen contradictions about feeling well and having a headache, about his throat being sore and the pain having gone, he put down his pen and whispered steadily: "I didn't want you to worry friends. But it looks bad. There is a new crowd in town. Twenty couples have been pulled in by them—*couples* to prove who they were. Maybe fifty people have been pulled in for questioning—what do you know about this, what do you know about that. And they've begun house searches. Anybody you don't like, you tell the new Regan about him. Say he's sheltering Europeans. And his people pull them in. Why, everybody wants to know, are they pulling in couples who are obviously American if they're looking for Europeans? And, everybody says, they've never seen anything like it. Now—I think I'd better get back to work."

"Yes," Lee said. "I think you had."

Charles was at the window, peering around the drawn blind. "Look at that," he said to Lee. She came over. A big man on the street below was walking, very methodically down the street.

"I will bet you," Charles said, "that he'll be back this way in ten minutes or so—and so on through the night."

"I won't take the bet," she said. "He's a sentry, all right. The Mob's learning from their friends across the water. Learning too damned much. They must be all over town."

They watched at the window and the sentry was back in ten minutes. On his fifth tour he stopped a young couple going down the street studied their faces, drew a gun on them and blew a whistle. A patrol came and took them away; the girl was hysterical. At two in the morning, the sentry was relieved by another, just as big and just as dangerous looking. At two in the morning they were still watching and Oliver was still hunched over the table tracing exquisite filigree of color.

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In five days, virtually without sleep, Oliver finished two Michigan City-Buffalo travel permits. The apartment house next door was hit by raiders while the ink dried; Charles and Lee Falcaro stood waiting grotesquely armed with kitchen knives. But it must have been a tip rather than part of the search plan crawling nearer to their end of town. The raiders did not hit their building.

Oliver had bought clothes according to Lee's instructions—including two men's suits, Oliver's size. One she let out for Charles; the other she took in for herself. She instructed Charles minutely in how he was to behave, on the outside. First he roared with incredulous laughter; Lee, wise, in psychology assured him that she was perfectly serious. Oliver, puzzled by his naivete, assured him that such things were not uncommon—not at least in Mob Territory. Charles then roared with indignation and Lee roared him down. His last broken protest was: "But what'll I do if somebody takes me up on it?"

She shrugged, washing her hands of the matter, and went on trimming and dying her hair.

It was morning when she kissed Oliver good-bye, said to Charles: "See you at the station. Don't say good-bye," and walked from the apartment, a dark-haired boy with a slight limp. Charles watched her down the street. A cop turned to look after her and then went on his way.

Half an hour later Charles shook hands with Oliver and went out.

Oliver didn't go to work that day. He sat all day at the table, drawing endless slow sketches of Lee Falcaro's head.

Time the Great Kidder, he thought. He opens the door that shows you in the next room tables of goodies, colorful and tasty, men and women around the tables pleasantly surprised to see you, beckoning to you to join the feast. We have roast beef if you're serious, we have caviar if you're experimental, we have baked alaska if you're frivolous—join the feast; try a little bit of everything. So you start toward the door.

Time, the Great Kidder, pulls the rug from under your feet and slams the door while the guests at the feast laugh their heads off at your painful but superficial injuries.

Oliver slowly drew Lee's head for the fifteenth time and wished he dared to turn on the audio for the news. Perhaps he thought, the next voice you hear will be the cops at the door.

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## XXI

Charles walked down the street and ran immediately into a challenge from a police sergeant.

"Where you from, mister?" the cop demanded, balanced and ready to draw.

Charles gulped and let Lee Falcaro's drilling take over. "Oh, around, sergeant. I'm from around here."

"What're you so nervous about?"

"Why, sergeant, you're such an exciting type, really. Did anybody ever tell you look well in uniform?"

The cop glared at him and said: "If I wasn't in uniform, I'd hang one on you sister. And if the force wasn't all out hunting the lunatics, that killed Mr. Regan I'd pull you in for spitting on the sidewalk. Get to hell off my beat and stay off. I'm not forgetting your face."

Charles scurried on. It had worked.

It worked once more with a uniformed policeman. One of the Chicago plain-clothes imports was the third and last. He socked Charles in the jaw and sent him on his way with a kick in the rear. He had been thoroughly warned that it would probably happen: "Count on them to over-react. That's the key to it. You'll make them so eager to assert their own virility, that it'll temporarily bury their primary mission. It's quite likely that one or more pokes will be taken at you. All you can do is take them. If you get—*when* you get through, they'll be cheap at the price."

The sock in the jaw hadn't been very expert. The kick in the pants was negligible, considering the fact that it had propelled him through the gate of the Michigan City Transport Terminal.

By the big terminal clock the Chicago-Buffalo Express was due in fifteen minutes. Its gleaming single rail, as tall as a man crossed the far end of the concourse. Most of the fifty-odd people in the station were probably Buffalo-bound ... safe geldings who could be trusted to visit Syndic Territory, off the leash and return obediently. Well-dressed, of course, and many past middle-age, with a stake in the Mob Territory stronger than hope of freedom. One youngster, though—oh. It was Lee, leaning, slack-jawed, against a pillar and reading the Green Sheet.

Who were the cops in the crowd? The thickset man with restless eyes, of course. The saintly-looking guy who kept moving and glancing into faces.

Charles went to the newsstand and put a coin in the slot for *The Mob—A Short History*, by the same Arrowsmith Hunde who had brightened and misinformed his youth.

Nothing to it, he thought. Train comes in, put your money in the turnstile, show your permit to the turnstile's eye, get aboard and that-is-that. Unless the money is phony, or the pass is phony in which case the turnstile locks and all hell breaks loose. His money was just dandy, but the permit now—there hadn't been any way to test it against a turnstile's template, or time to do it if there had been a way. Was the probability of boarding two to one?

The probability abruptly dropped to zero as a round little man flanked by two huge men entered the station.

*Commander Grinnel.*

The picture puzzle fell into a whole as the two plainclothesmen circulating in the station eyed Grinnel and nodded to him. The big one absent-mindedly made a gesture that was the start of a police salute.

Grinnel was Maurice Regan—the Maurice Regan mysteriously unknown to Oliver, who knew the Chicago police. Grinnel was a bit of a lend-lease from the North American Navy, called in because of his unique knowledge of Charles Orsino and Lee Falcaro, their faces, voices and behavior. Grinnel was the expert in combing the city without any nonsense about rights and mouthpieces. Grinnel was the expert who could set up a military interior guard of the city. Grinnel was the specialist temporarily invested with the rank of a Regan so he could do his job.

The round little man with the halo of hair walked briskly to the turnstile and there stood at a military parade rest with a look of resignation on his face.

How hard on me it is, he seemed to be saying, that I have such dull damn duty. How hard that an officer of my brilliance must do sentry-go for every train to Syndic Territory.

The slack-jawed youth who was Lee Falcaro looked at him over her Green Sheet and nodded before dipping into the Tia Juana past performances again. She knew.

Passengers were beginning to line up at the turnstile, smoothing out their money and fiddling with their permits. In a minute he and Lee Falcaro would have to join the line or stand conspicuously on the emptying floor. The thing was dead for twenty-four hours now, until the next train—and then Grinnel headed across the floor looking very impersonal. The look of a man going to the men's room. The station cops and Grinnel's two bruisers drifted together at the turnstile and began to chat.

Charles followed Grinnel, wearing the same impersonal look, and entered the room almost on his heels.

Grinnel saw him in a wash-bowl mirror; simultaneously he half turned, opened his mouth to yell and whipped his hand into his coat. A single round-house right from Charles crunched into the soft side of his neck. He fell with his head twisted at an odd angle. Blood began to run from the corner of his mouth onto his shirt.

“Remember Martha?” Charles whispered down at the body. “That was for murder.” He looked around the tiled room. There was a mop closet with the door ajar, and Grinnel's flabby body fitted in it.

Charles walked from the washroom to the line of passengers across the floor. It seemed to go on for miles. Lee Falcaro was no longer lounging against the past. He spotted her in line, still slack-jawed, still gaping over the magazine. The monorail began to sing shrilly with the vibration of the train braking a mile away, and the turnstile “unlocked” light went on.

There was the usual number of fumlbers, the usual number of “please unfold your currency” flashes. Lee carried through to the end with her slovenly pose. For her the sign said: “incorrect denominations.” Behind her a man snarled: “for Christ's sake, kid, we're all waiting on you!” The cops only half noticed; they were talking. When Charles got to the turnstile one of the cops was saying: “Maybe it's something he ate. How'd *you* like somebody to barge in—”

The rest was lost in the clicking of the turnstile that let him through.

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He settled in a very pneumatic chair as the train accelerated evenly to a speed of three hundred and fifty miles per hour. A sign in the car said that the next stop was

Buffalo. And there was Lee, lurching up the aisle against the acceleration. She spotted him, tossed the Green Sheet in the Air and fell into his lap.

“Disgusting!” snarled a man across the aisle. “Simply disgusting!”

“You haven’t seen anything yet,” Lee told him, and kissed Charles on the mouth.

The man choked: “I shall certainly report this to the authorities when we arrive in Buffalo!”

“Mmm,” said Lee, preoccupied. “Do that, mister. Do that.”

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## XXII

“I didn’t like his reaction,” Charles told her in the anteroom of F. W. Taylor’s office. “I didn’t talk to him long on the phone, but I don’t like his reaction at all. He seemed to think I was exaggerating. Or all wet. Or a punk kid.”

“I can assure him you’re not that,” Lee Falcaro said warmly. “Call on me any time.”

He gave her a worried smile. The door opened then and they went in.

Uncle Frank looked up. “We’d just about written you two off,” he said. “What’s it like?”

“Bad,” Charles said. “Worse than anything you’ve imagined. There’s an underground, all right, and they are practicing assassination.”

“Too bad,” the old man said. “We’ll have to shake up the bodyguard organization. Make ‘em de rigeur at all hours, screen ‘em and see that they really know how to shoot. I hate to meddle, but we can’t have the Government knocking our people off.”

“It’s worse than that,” Lee said. “There’s a tie-up between the Government and the Mob. We got away from Ireland aboard a speed boat and we were picked up by a Mob lakes ore ship. It had been running gasoline and ammunition to the Government. Jimmy Regan was in charge of the deal. We jumped into Lake Michigan and made our way back here. We were in Mob Territory—down among the small-timers—long enough to establish that the Mob and Government are hand in glove. One of these day’s they’re going to jump us.”

“Ah,” Taylor said softly. “I’ve thought so for a long time.”

Charles burst out: “Then for God’s sake, Uncle Frank, why haven’t you *done* anything? You don’t know what it’s like out there. The Government’s a nightmare. They have slaves. And the Mob’s not much better. Numbers! Restrictions! Permits! Passes! And they don’t call it that, but they have taxes!”

“They’re mad,” Lee said. “Quite mad. And I’m talking technically. Neurotics and psychotics swarm in the streets of Mob Territory. The Government, naturally—but the Mob was a shock. We’ve got to get ready, Mr. Taylor. Every psychotic or severe neurotic in Syndic Territory is a potential agent of theirs.”

“Don’t just check off the Government, darling,” Charles said tensely. “They’ve got to be smashed. They’re no good to themselves or anybody else. Life’s a burden there if only they knew it. And they’re holding down the natives by horrible cruelty.”

Taylor leaned back and asked: “What do you recommend?”

Charles said: “A fighting fleet and an army.”

Lee said: “Mass diagnosis of the unstable. Screening of severe cases and treatment where it’s indicated. Riveredge must be a plague-spot of agents.”

Taylor shook his head and told them: “It won’t do.”

Charles was aghast. “It won’t *do*? Uncle Frank, what the hell do you mean, it won’t do? Didn’t we make it clear? They want to invade us and loot us and subject us!”

“It won’t do,” Taylor said. “I choose the devil we know. A fighting fleet is out. We’ll arm our merchant vessels and hope for the best. A full-time army is out. We’ll get together some-kind of militia. And a roundup of the unstable is out.”

“Why?” Lee demanded. “My people have worked out perfectly effective techniques—”

“Let me talk, please. I have a feeling that it won’t be any good, but hear me out.

“I’ll take your black art first, Lee. As you know, I have played with history. To a historian, your work has been very interesting. The sequence was this: study of abnormal psychology collapsed under Lieberman’s findings, study of abnormal psychology revived by you when you invalidated Lieberman’s findings. I suggest that Lieberman and his followers were correct—and that you were correct. I suggest that what changed was the makeup of the population. That would mean that before Lieberman there were plenty of neurotics and psychotics to study, that in Lieberman’s time there were so few that earlier generalizations were invalidated, and that now—in our time, Lee—neurotics and psychotics are among us again in increasingly ample numbers.”

The girl opened her mouth, shut it again and thoughtfully studied her nails.

“I will not tolerate,” Taylor went on, “a roundup or a registration, or mass treatment or any such violation of the Syndic’s spirit.”

Charles exploded: “Damn it, this is a matter of life or death to the Syndic!”

“No, Charles. Nothing can be a matter of life or death to the Syndic. When anything becomes a matter of life or death to the Syndic, the Syndic is already dead, its morale, is already disintegrated, its credit already gone. What is left is not the Syndic but the Syndic’s dead shell. I am not placed so that I can say objectively now whether the Syndic is dead or alive. I fear it is dying. The rising tide of neurotics is a symptom. The suggestion from you two, who should be imbued with the old happy-go-lucky, we-can’t-miss esprit of the Syndic that we cower behind mercenaries instead of trusting the people who made us—that’s another symptom. Dick Reiner’s rise to influence on a policy of driving the Government from the seas is another symptom.

“I mentioned the devil we know as my choice. That’s the status quo, even though I have reason to fear it’s crumbling beneath our feet. If it is, it may last out our time. We’ll shore it up with armed merchantmen and a militia. If the people are with us now as they always have been, that’ll do it. The devil we don’t know is what we’ll become if we radically dislocate Syndic life and attitudes.

“I can’t back a fighting fleet. I can’t back a regular army. I can’t back any restrictive measure on the freedom of anybody but an apprehended criminal. Read history. It has taught me not to meddle, it has taught me that no man should think himself clever enough or good enough to dare it. *That* is the lesson history teaches us.

“Who can know what he’s doing when he doesn’t even know why he does it? Bless the bright Cromagnon for inventing the bow and damn him for inventing missile warfare. Bless the stubby little Sumerians for miracles in gold and lapis lazuli and

damn them for burying a dead queen's hand-maidens living in her tomb. Bless Shih Hwang-Ti for building the Great Wall between northern barbarism and southern culture, and damn him for burning every book in China. Bless King Minos for the ease of Cnossian flush toilets and damn him for his yearly tribute of Greek sacrificial victims. Bless Pharaoh for peace and damn him for slavery. Bless the Greeks for restricting population so the well-fed few could kindle a watch-tower in the west, and damn the prostitution and sodomy and wars of colonization by which they did it. Bless the Romans for their strength to smash down every wall that hemmed their building genius, and damn them for their weakness that never broke the bloody grip of Etruscan savagery on their minds. Bless the Jews who discovered the fatherhood of God and damn them who limited it to the survivors of a surgical operation. Bless the Christians who abolished the surgical preliminaries and damn them who substituted a thousand cerebral quibbles. Bless Justinian for the Code of Law and damn him for his countless treacheries that were the prototype of the wretched Byzantine millenium. Bless the churchmen for teaching and preaching, and damn, them for drawing a line beyond which they could only teach and preach in peril of the stake.

“Bless the navigators who, opened the new world to famine-ridden Europe, and damn them for syphilis. Bless the red-skins who bred maize, the great preserver of life and damn them for breeding maize the great destroyer of topsoil. Bless the Virginia planters for the solace of tobacco and damn them for the red gullies they left where forests had stood. Bless the obstetricians with forceps who eased the agony of labor and damn them for bringing countless monsters into the world to reproduce their kind. Bless the Point Four boys who slew the malaria mosquitoes of Ceylon and damn them for letting more Sinhalese be born than five Ceylons could feed.

“Who knows what he is doing, why he does it or what the consequences will be?”

“Let the social scientists play with their theories if they like; I'm fond of poetry myself. The fact is that they have not so far solved what I call the two-billion-body problem. With brilliant hindsight some of them tell us that more than a dozen civilizations have gone down into the darkness before us. I see no reason why ours should not go down into the darkness with them, nor do I see any reason why we should not meanwhile enjoy ourselves collecting sense-impressions to be remembered with pleasure in old age. No; I will not agitate for extermination of the Government and hegemony over the Mob. Such a policy would automatically, inevitably and immediately entail many, many violent deaths and painful wounds. The wrong kind of sense-impressions. I shall, with fear and trembling, recommend the raising of a militia—a purely defensive, extremely sloppy militia—and pray that it will not Involve us in a war of aggression.”

He looked at the two of them and shrugged. “Lee, so stern, Charles so grim,” he said. “I suppose you're dedicated now.” He looked at the desk.

He thought: *I have a faint desire to take the pistol from my desk and shoot you both. I have a nervous feeling that you're about to embark on a crusade to awaken Syndic Territory to its perils. You think the fate of civilization hinges on you. You're right, of course. The fate of civilization hinges on every one of us at any given moment. We are all components in the two-billion-body problem. Somehow for a century we've achieved in Syndic Territory for almost everybody the civil liberties, peace of mind and living standards that were enjoyed by the middle classes before 1914—plus longer life, better health, a more generous morality, increased command*

*over nature; minus the servant problem and certain superstitions. A handful of wonderfully pleasant decades. When you look back over history you wonder who in his right mind could ask for more. And you wonder who would dare to presume to tamper with it.*

He studied the earnest young faces. There was so much that he might say—but he shrugged again.

“Bless you,” he said. “Gather ye sense impression while ye may. Some like pointer readings, some like friction on the mucous membranes. Now go about your business; I have work to do.”

He didn't really. When he was alone he leaned back and laughed and laughed.

Win, lose or draw, those two would go far and enjoy themselves mightily along the way. Which was what counted.

## The Psychological Regulator

The nurse at the desk of Floor 24, Ward 5, flexed a smooth, tan arm and looked at the hall chronometer. She sighed inaudibly. 20:13:09, said the dial. Two more hours on duty for Miss Markett Travenor, F-2349464-23a-10-256W-26. Which was to say that her file was Female number 2349464 in the Register of Persons, that she lived in apartment 23 on floor 10 in building 256 on the West side of parkzone 26.

Examination of her face and figure would have convinced you that one as lovely as she could have existed by accident only in the Twentieth Century. Happily, however, by the year 2046 (in which she was born), scientific mating was no dream of a few forward-looking visionaries, but a reality: she was the lovely offspring of a couple carefully paired.

Markett looked down from her chronometer, her green eyes darkly thoughtful. Dr. Ward Alfred (M-2536478-13a-20-358E-22) was late. She looked down the white-enameled corridor, then at the indicating finger of an elevator. It had not moved. Easily she pressed a communicator attached to a strap of her uniform. Immediately a voice spoke:

“Entrance hall speaking—Central Information Desk.”

Markett snapped a button. “Lee?”, she asked. “Is the hotter down there yet?” “Hotter,” in the year 2066, meant boy-friend.

“Dr. Alfred,” replied the voice, “is going up now with Patient—just a moment—Patient sixty-six-twenty-five.”

“Thanks,” replied Markett, snapping off the contact. She picked a card from the full-view files before her. Patient sixty-six-twenty-five, Psycho Clinic. “Marked degeneration,” read the card. “Cowardly tendencies—fear of falling, fear of floating, fear of slipping, fear of standing still. Three attempted suicides unsuccessful due to lack of creative technique. Prognosis: doubtful. Use of Psychological Regulator suggested. E. B.” All that, and the date for the operation—today.

She rose and faced the elevator as sharp-tuned ears caught the almost imperceptible hum of doors opening. Dr. Alfred nodded cheerfully to her, twitched his head for her benefit toward the man whose arm he was grasping. Patient sixty-six-twenty-five, no doubt, she thought, glancing again at his card. Name was Clark Stevens (M-3972677-234a-150N-190), she saw. Tall, too, and well-built. But, somehow, his posture and bearing were almost utterly lacking in masculinity; at the moment he looked the role of a weak, vacillating subject of a rehabilitation test, and he shocked Markett’s sense of what was right and decent with his overclad body. He wore a shirt and trousers, seemingly improvised from a number of the one-piece, short-sleeved suits worn by the world as fashion and comfort decreed. Yet there was something about him—? She wrenched her eyes back to the figure of the doctor, small, compact, and natty in leatheret bandolier. Pity, she thought with professional coldness, must not interfere with her operative functions. However, the sight of Stevens could not help but make her think of pictures she had seen of nurses in the old days, hideously overclad, their freedom of movement hampered. She, as all nurses of this enlightened era, wore only a bandolier, to which was attached a harness carrying the various items which must always be on her person, regulation shorts, and shoes.

Dr. Alfreed took the patient's card from her and scribbled notations. She turned to take the patient's arm, but, with a cry of fear, he cowered from her.

"Now," she said soothingly. "Let's come along and not have—" she was backing him into the arms of the doctor, of course. He pinioned the patient, and winked at Markett. "Sorry," he said. "He's afraid of women too. Forgot to tell you. Let's take him in." And the little doctor lifted the big-boned patient easily to his shoulders, holding him helplessly balanced, and trotted down the enameled corridor into a high-walled, darkish room. He dumped the psychotic into one of many deep, padded chairs, and Markett promptly slapped thick, strong bands of a tough plastic across the man's knees and chest. Patient sixty-six-twenty-five began to weep.

The doctor busied himself with a little projector and screen that constituted the equipment of the room. "What reel?" he called to Markett.

She wrinkled her nose. "Are you going to do it in one shot or work him up to it?" she asked.

"One shot. Might kill him, of course. But if it doesn't, we'll have reclaimed a citizen—and from all accounts a good one. He used to be an organizer for a coal-mine before this happened to him. Pathetic, isn't it?"

"Yeah," agreed Markett, busy fastening meshes of pure copper about the limbs and head of the now quiet patient. "But how about these—these *swathings* of his? Do the bus-bars have to contact his skin?"

"No," said the doctor. "We'll just turn the stuff on and see what happens. It's as strong as they come—you wouldn't understand it; I've studied ancient history, so it's a little clearer to me."

"Well," said Markett, uncertainly, as the doctor turned off the lights and started the projector. She settled herself in a comfortable double seat, and the doctor joined her, while Experimental Reel Seven, Full Power, went clicking through the camera and onto the screen. But they, being otherwise absorbed, paid little or no attention to it.

The patient—sixty-six-twenty-five—whimpered and tried to scrape off the copper bus-bars that confined him. Then his eyes drifted to the screen, and he beheld a marvelously real landscape, not frozen in paint on canvas but quivering with life. A rabbit started, and the patient, who had never seen a rabbit, recognized the little creature, and worked his jaws. There was an unfamiliar taste in his mouth, as though he were champing something tough-fibred, like a woven cloth or bit of soft wood. He had never eaten meat, so to the still-dominant presence of his ego there was no connotation.

As though he were slowly turning he saw the landscape move, and a walled city came into view. What a walled city was he couldn't say, but the words were in his brain; and quivering with rage, he wanted to tear down the massive bastions with his own hands, and rend the mailed men who were pacing the ramparts. He clenched his right fist, and felt the hilt of Al Azaaf, his scimitar. Slowly Roald stood up from the grass and settled his greaves about his thighs. "Rouse up, sons of Yggdrasil," he hissed fiercely, and his men—his terrible Norse, scourge of the coast—appeared from bushes and brakes, drawing axes from belts and fitting pikes to shafts.

"Seventy-and-nine of us there be," growled Roald without preamble, "and of them an hundred and eighty or more. Who complains?" There was silence on the moor, save for the clank of metal as when dirk touched against breastplate.

Roald grinned savagely and swept aside his long red beard to spit. “The less men the more booty,” he snarled. “Eh? And women—?” He laughed tremendously. Then, whirling his sword he roared, “By the hammer of Thor—*Come on!*” Roaring wildly Roald and his red-bearded band made across the common at a dead run.

There were screams from the city, and much blowing of horns. Arrows began to smack into the clayey soil about them, and Roald raised his buckler. He saw the gates of the city swinging shut; yelling inarticulately he tore a blazing torch from the fist of a companion and hurled it into the knot of porters and marketmen that was struggling with the heavy bar and hinges; they scattered in terror, only a second before the red demons were within the gates, slashing and clubbing with keen swords and murderous axes.

Roald was the spearhead of the attack, and as he and his men plowed contemptuously through the rabble ... tradesmen and shopkeepers ... he laughed wildly. “Guard ho!” he yelled. “Who will come to do battle with the chosen of Odin. The curse of Cornwall and the damned, stinking Isle of Britain? Guard ho!” Slash! through the shoulder of a boy with a pike. He drove a mailed fist into the face of a gammer who was struggling aside, unwilling to leave her heavy basket of turnips behind.

Roald grinned savagely in the eyes of an archer. “Draw,” he shouted, and as the Englishman reached he spitted him on the curve of Al Azaaf. A new blade crossed his, and with dirk and sword he ranged up and down the length of a square with his foe, a dark-eyed young man who fought precisely and quietly. Behind him he felt the spearhead break into bits and the body of the guard charged the Norse. The youth extended his body in a strange thrust, and Roald cursed the queer, slim weapon he used—a thing like a dart with a hilt. The Viking slashed once, and the youth parried. Roald slashed again, and there was the shock known to swordsmen as steel clashed steel. The youth was weaponless, and Roald cut him down where he stood, kicked the body in the ribs, then spun to defend himself against an assault from a clumsy pike.

The Viking grinned savagely, and swept aside his beard. “With this draught,” he roared to his men, “I name this city fief to the Vikings and to Roald, and all its values, be they goods or women or children, fief also to their conquerors.” He glared about him from the eminence in the walled city’s central square, on the scene of desolation and butchery. He stood among his Norse having left not one of the hundred and eighty defenders. “*Skoal!*” he roared, and drank.

And Six-six-twenty-five, otherwise known as Clark Stevens (M-3972677-234a-150N-190), shuddered violently, stared at the screen that had just run blank. “What—?” he began, sitting erect. “Damn!” said Stevens, finding himself strangely trammled by webworks of pure copper. He wrenched his hands free and tore the wires from his ankles and head. “You!” he roared at a couple snuggled in an easy chair.

“Quite recovered?” smiled Dr. Alfred, unfastening the plastic bands that were restraining Stevens. “A little dizzy?”

Stevens glared at him, and the Doctor backed away. There was a blinding flash about three inches away from the doctor’s chin, and he went down and out. The patient, rubbing his fist, squinted through the gloom and perceived Miss Travenor. “Ah,” he said gutturally. He stepped out of his improvised shirt and trousers; Markett saw with relief that he was wearing the conventional shorts and bandolier beneath. More unconventional than his former attire, however, was the patient’s new behavior. He

spurned the doctor's body with one foot and picked up the nurse. "Excuse me—" she began plaintively.

"Shut up!" growled Stevens, slinging her over his shoulder.

And that was that.

Dr. Alfreed awoke to realize that he had committed a serious breach of experimental technique. It had been a mistake not to observe the screen during the process of rehabilitation, and it had been a grievous mistake not to check on the patient's reactions. He cursed softly to himself when he saw clearly enough to be sure that neither patient nor nurse were anywhere in the room.

Alfreed was a thoughtful man; he realized that, in the old days, someone would have gotten hell for a blunder of this nature and scope. In the old days technical superiors would have fired the responsible party for the incompetency when revealed, so Alfreed was thankful that these were not the old days. But further than that he did not think. Perhaps, therefore, he was the truly responsible party for what was to happen to his snug little world of file numbers, ventilated houses, air-conditioned clinics, amiable objectives and pneumatically complacent nurses.

He wasn't spectacularly worried, having no technical superiors to whom to answer. But he had failed in a social duty. Enough of his careful conditioning had remained to remind him of that.

"Oh, Hell!" he swore softly, thinking of the consequences.

He reached over to his hyper-typer, banged out a full report of the affair and shot it into a tube system, one of whose many mouths gaped from a nearby wall. This, too, was routine. If anything worked to correct his mistakes this would. Section headquarters all over the city would be semi-automatically notified, bulletins flashed to rural districts. Within half an hour millions of citizens would be informed—*not* alarmed—by the quick-changing public information screens.

And with a sense of duty well done he retired to his quarters on the same floor and stared for a while at a forbidden bottle of wine. Then he got drunk.

Clark Stevens carried Markett Travenor as far as the elevator door. Glancing back at the prostrate form of the man he had hit in the jaw his eyes narrowed. Something of cold reason was coming back. Then, suddenly, he became aware—but acutely—of the girl he was carrying in his arms. "Ah," he said. Abruptly he shifted one of his hands a trifle; the girl shivered and giggled.

Slowly awareness returned to Stevens. Then he let her drop to the floor. She looked at him again, quizzically, like a trusting child. This man, she thought, is masculine. But not with the familiar air of equality to which I am accustomed—but overbearingly male. A sort of aura covered his body—she sensed something brutish, irresponsible, uncivilized. Everything he did confirmed this idea:

"What—?" said the girl. She scrambled to her feet, not taking her eyes off Stevens.

The man shook his head dazedly. "I won't hurt you," he said. "I'm all right." He hesitated. "I'm—different." Markett nodded. "What I did back there in England—" he said slowly, and paused. "Do you know?" he asked. "Could you see what I did?"

"No," said Markett. "I should have watched and checked, but the doctor and I let it go."

“The doctor,” said Stevens. “The man I hit?” She nodded, half smiling. “And you’d better be getting out of here,” said Markett. “He might wake up angry.” She pushed the button of the elevator, and the doors rolled open. “Come on,” she said, as the man stood silently. “You’re not afraid any more, are you?”

“Afraid?” Stevens laughed. “I was. It was something that happened in the mine—” He drew a hand across his eyes; the elevator’s doors rolled shut, and they began their ascent to the roof.

“Explosion?” asked Markett. “They happen, I hear.”

“Maybe. What the hell?” he said, grinning happily. “I’m here, you’re here, and I’m just after storming a castle in England with my Norsemen. It was terrible, but somehow—I don’t know. I shouldn’t be proud of the things I did.” He shuddered a little. “Killing. Maiming. And I burned the town when there was nothing left I could take from it.”

The doors of the elevator rolled open, and a flood of sunlight poured into the tiny cage. “There,” said the man, pointing out a plane. “That’s the one we’ll take.”

“Did you fly here?” asked the girl. “I thought you were afraid.”

“No,” said Stevens, confidently opening the unlocked door of the plane. “This doesn’t belong to me.”

Markett gasped, as her twenty-odd years of inculcated respect for property came down on her head like a ton of bricks. “You can’t!” she cried. “It isn’t yours—you said so.” Her voice trailed off as she saw the baffled stare in his eyes.

“Come in,” he offered, making room for her beside the pilot’s seat. Limply she entered and closed the door. “Now,” said Stevens, “what did you say?”

“The plane isn’t yours, Clark!” Oddly, she flushed as she called him by his given name.

“Well,” said Stevens, puzzlement written over his face, “it is now.” He started the motor with one kick at the pedal and the plane snapped into the air, hovered for a moment, and shot diagonally up, through and above low-hanging cumulus clouds that glittered in the afternoon sun.

“Why did you come here?” asked Markett. Somehow she felt safe.

“More beautiful,” said Stevens. “And I have plans.”

“Plans?” asked the girl. “For yourself?”

“For the world,” said Stevens. He nodded his head over the control board, and a shaft of light was caught in his hair; made it shine like little curly brass wires. “I must ask you questions,” said the man. “I am different. Can you see it?”

“I can,” said the girl. And at that moment she felt that it would be a better thing for man if she were to seize the controls, send their ship tearing down to smash into the ground.

Traffic control ship seven (for the district) swooped three times on the hovering plane. Pilot Petersen scratched his head. “What’s he doing?” he asked Engineer Handel.

“I dunno. Hold it,” said Handel, bending over his radio set.

“Report from hospital,” said the radio. “Psychotic escaped in plane. Give warnings. The plane will be identified later; its owner is undergoing a serious operation and no records are immediately available. Be advised.”

“That must be it,” said Handel practically. “He’s out of all accepted zones and he hasn’t got any right to hover over a residential district. Call him, Pete.”

Petersen aimed his short beam radio antenna in the general direction of the disputed plane. “Calling Monoplane of class ten,” he said into the mike. “You with the brown body and blue wings. Can y’ hear me?”

Harshly a voice answered. “We hear. What is it?”

“Sorry,” said the pilot, “but you’re hovering over a residential area. That’s not allowed. What’s your number, pilot?”

“I have no number,” said the voice, “and I have no license. Stand off or take the consequences!”

“It’s him—the psycho,” hissed Petersen to Handel. “Call HQ on your set while I keep him busy.”

“Right,” snapped the engineer, tuning in the traffic center.

The pilot turned to his set, his brow wrinkled. How do you handle a psycho? Humor him. “What was that you said?” asked Petersen, smooth as silk.

“Stand off, you fool, or take the consequences! I’ll give you five seconds to get away.”

“Wait,” said Petersen. “Why don’t you—” Then he gasped, as his plans crumbled. The psycho’s ship had winged over with terrible speed and was heading for his ship nose-on. “Stop!” he shrilled into the mike, his hand on the throttle. Then he sent his own plane into a loop that made his bones bend, and streaked for altitude, with the demon plane and its demon pilot on his tail. “I warned you,” ground out of the speaker. “You’ll do well to tell the world that there’s one man alive who’s not afraid to kill or be killed to achieve his ends. Spread the word, friend!” And, when Petersen looked around, the plane was a vanishing speck in the north, as he watched it reach the blending point and vanish in the sky.

Handel, gibbering in a corner of the traffic ship where the last loop had flung him, cried, “What happened to it?”

“I don’t know,” said the pilot soberly. “Did you get HQ?”

“Yes, but the loop smashed my set. What do we do now?”

“Fly back, but fast,” said Petersen, giving his ship the gun.

“Pete,” said Handel.

“Yeah?”

“What do we do with a thing like that? I mean how do you finally get rid of them?”

“I don’t know,” said the pilot slowly. “Lock them up once you catch them, I suppose.”

“Catch *that*? He tried to ram us! As he said—he’s not afraid to kill or be killed.” The engineer shuddered. “Do you think,” he asked, “we’ll have to kill him?”

Petersen frowned. “I hope not,” he said, his eyes ahead of him as he prepared to land. “But if there’s no other way—what else can we do?”

“How long since they killed a man—purposely, I mean?” The ship was rolling to a stop.

“I dunno. Maybe a hundred years; maybe more. And who that was, I don’t know either.”

The two left the plane and headed for the manager’s office, their faces wry. Petersen was thinking of blood. He was hoping that if they had to kill the psycho they’d do it some dry, quiet way. And Handel, nursing a bruised lip, was hoping exactly the same thing. Mankind, after many years of mutual hatreds had at last reached unanimity, and an idealistic one at that.

The stolen plane crashed to a halt through the brush and bracken of the abandoned clearing. Markett looked about her.

“Do you know where we are?” asked Stevens.

“I think so,” said the girl slowly. “It must be a park district that’s being allowed to lie fallow. Probably it won’t be touched by anyone for a few years. Or wouldn’t have been.”

Stevens stared at her. “You mean—?” he asked.

“I mean that in a matter of hours the world will be down on you. Sheer force of numbers will make you yield to them. Oh, Clark, can’t you see that you’re *wrong*?” Her eyes suddenly widened with dread as she saw his hands work convulsively.

“Get out,” he ordered, and she obeyed, thinking wildly of a dash to safety. Safety among the trees? Without a man to help her for perhaps hundreds of miles! Meekly she stood, waiting for what might happen. She could not believe that her life was to end at the hands of a madman. She found it hard, indeed, to believe that Stevens was mad. Confused, rather, by the overdose of the Regulator to which he had been subjected.

“Brave woman,” he said. “I see you do not fear my madness. *That* is well. You are to be my mate—no, my wife.”

“Wife?” she replied calmly. “But marriages are no longer customary. And, even when they do happen, it is only through consent of the bride.”

“All this,” he said slowly, “must be changed. There is no life in this world, no struggle.” He thought further. “Men must fight—if not each other, as I did in England, then something bigger. We must fight now to bring life to this silly paradise we’re in. Even if it means the spilling of blood.”

She, the nurse, shuddered at the thought of blood. For radio-knife surgery had made incisions a dry affair, without confusion or infection. Accidents were few; many lived their entire lives without seeing their own blood. “Can you do it alone?” she asked.

“I can start alone,” he decided. “I shall find my warriors in the mad-houses and the clinics. Many of the inmates of these institutions are no more mad than I; they’ve merely been put away because they saw clearly, as I do.”

“But they’ll find us. They’ll find you!” she cried in sudden anguish. “They’ll find you! Kill you!” Suddenly sobs choked her.

“They will forget me after awhile. They will think I was a fool and drove my plane into the ground or a hillside. So I shall wait. And then, when it is clear, and they have grown weary of looking, or expecting an attack from me, I’ll go out after my men and

women. We'll place them where best suited; some in transportation; some in utilities, and some in communication. And some with the Psycho Regulators. Then we strike, strike *there*, and the world is free again!"

Markett grew white as she realized that this dream of power could be more than a dream. She looked up into his face, quiet now. What had happened to him? Would he become more and more obsessed, more violent? Perhaps if she could persuade him to wait—to stay there quietly with her while he worked out plans—the influence of the Regulator would begin to wear off.

Over the course of some two hundred years the white man of North America had lost what backwoods skill he once possessed. The little party snapped twigs and stumbled over stones as they advanced through the wilderness at the dead of night.

"How long?" asked a neuro-muscular specialist.

"About ten minutes more," said a general practitioner.

"Excuse me," said the specialist, who became violently sick in a bush. Returning he said, "M not ordinarily weak like this, but—"

"I understand," said a civil engineer. "It's a pretty revolting notion at best." He hefted a pick in his hand, and sighed.

"I don't see why—" began the specialist in loud and irritated tones, only to be cut off by a terrified chorus of "shh!"

"Sorry," he whispered. "I was saying that I don't see why there aren't special bodies of men for this sort of thing. I mean, why pick men like us to do work we haven't studied?"

"Haven't had the opportunity," said a pianist. "And there's good reason why we haven't a body of men as you suggested."

"I can't think of it," whispered the specialist.

"Assume," said the pianist, "that there is a group chosen—by lot, I suppose—to keep in line all eccentrics like the gentlemen on whom we are about to call. Then how do we keep this group in line?"

The general practitioner pondered, and, still pondering, fell into a brook. "Sorry," he gasped, being helped out. "But I have the answer to your question. How to keep them in line, I mean—if they misbehave you stop their salaries. Right?"

"No," said the pianist. "Because if they're trained to inflict suffering as a negative bribe to good conduct how are we to keep them from utilizing their training as a negative bribe to the end of exacting tribute?"

A historian unexpectedly spoke up: "In ancient days that technique was known as the 'shakedown racket'."

"Indeed," said the general practitioner, pondering again. "There must be some way of insuring good conduct," he brooded. "Why not set up two rival bodies of men to check on each other?"

"Because," said the specialist, now quite won over, "they would either join forces—disastrous to the common welfare—or they would struggle openly for supremacy and the victor would assume that he had the *right* to oppress common folk."

"I see," sighed the general practitioner. "How much farther?"

“As I remember it,” said a radio engineer, “the message came from the plane as it lay half wrecked by their dwelling. That makes it about—there.” He pointed, and silhouetted in the starlight they could see the outlines of a monoplane. “Type ten,” said a transportation engineer, regretfully tightening his grip on an electric drill’s ponderous bit. “Shall we kill him first or get the girl to safety?”

“Kill him first, I say,” volunteered the historian. “All in favor?” There was a soft chorus of assent. “Well, then,” said the historian, “let’s get as close as possible before he wakes up.”

Stealthily they crept into the clearing and approached the little shack of boughs and trunks which had been flung together.

“Not bad,” whispered a structural operator. “Well chinked, ventilated—in a primitive way one couldn’t wish for anything better.”

The neuro-muscular specialist took a heavy pair of operative forceps from his bandolier, and pushed on the door. It swung open after offering only a slight resistance. The seven others crowded into the large room and distributed themselves strategically. The pianist squinted through the dark and whispered, “There he is. I mean they are.” Lying on a sort of semi-permanent bower were the two outlanders, side by side.

“I saw,” whispered the transportation engineer, “I hadn’t thought it was anything like *that*—”

“He probably threatened her,” said the specialist. “That *must* be it.” He raised his forceps and said uncertainly, louder than he had meant to, “Well!”

And Clark Stevens awoke. “Now,” he muttered, and his eyes opened. Like a shot from a gun, his lean body snapped into steely action. The specialist he grasped by the wrist, flung away like a rat.

There was a shrill intake of breath in the room, and the men with weapons poised were frozen where they stood. Every man there knew what should be done, what had to be done for the safety of their civilization, and had spent time studying the use of the weapon he carried. But they couldn’t do it. The genteel conditioning, in which all thoughts of physical violence had been carefully weeded out from birth, left them helpless before this man.

Stevens rose before them, and, in the gloom of the hut, his eyes blazed like twin embers of a burning city. He uttered one inarticulate roar, and started for them. That galvanized them into action; they were capable of as swift motion as he, but in another direction. They dropped their weapons and fled.

Stevens watched the last of them vanish, then felt a hand take his.

“They—they didn’t hurt you?”

Silently he drew her through the door and their bare feet felt the loam of the clearing. The night wind fanned their faces. He turned to her. “I made them run,” he laughed, and she smiled. Markett was used to the bursts of childlike glee, and she loved her husband. He had insisted upon some sort of ceremony which apparently was tied up with Roald. And beside the usual broad grin was a kind of shrewd, calculating glint.

“*They* can’t fight. They’ve forgotten how. But now they know it.”

“Then,” she whispered, “we’re safe.”

“Safe,” he repeated broodingly. “From men, yes. But they have their machines. And machines can be set to kill as well as to build. We must move on.”

Markett turned slowly and looked at the lean-to where they had been living. She laughed, a little nervously.

“Strange,” she said. “At first I didn’t like our—home. It was small—smaller than any of the apartments in the District Dwellings. And we always had to go outdoors for water—cold water that I couldn’t drink because it hadn’t been distilled so that all the salts and taste had been removed. Must we go, Clark?”

He held her tighter. “It was our home,” he said, “but we must go on!”

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Far to the north, where sane men did not go, where enormous trees guarded the silent paths of animals to the water-hole, there was a fire, man-built, cunningly piled against the bole of a tree and slanted away from the wind so that it would burn through the long night as a bed of glowing embers, little tongues of blue flame leaping up now and again to warn off any bear or wildcat that might seek easy pickings among the silent forms huddled in a circle. Men they were, big men with gnarled beards and knotted shoulder-muscles, sleeping restlessly and lightly, with one hand lying near cunningly constructed spring-guns and flat, gleaming backwords, into whose steel blades had been let threads of blue and red enamel in glowing, wide designs.

The crack of a twig broke the stillness of the forest night. With a grunt, the largest of the men sat up, his fist closing tight around the hardwood hilt of his sword.

“Hibron?” he called softly. “Is it you?”

Through the dusk strode a figure—a huge-boney male whose hair and beard were like twisted, golden wires, whose loins were girded in the pelt of a lynx, and who carried a hardwood staff a weaker man could not have lifted. He thundered: “Who’re you and who d’ye take me for?”

Around the fire men sprang to their feet, gripping weapons and raising bows. Their leader held his sword at guard and eyed the stranger coldly. “I mistook you for a missing member of our party,” he said. “Name yourself, stranger.” There was an angry growl from the men around the fire; they advanced, their weapons twitching.

“Are you Fotchy?” spoke up a man in the background.

“Not Hibron nor Fotchy nor any of your people,” answered the stranger, surveying them. “I’m Clark Stevens, wildman and sworn enemy of the city people. Who are you?”

The bearded man lowered his sword. “Come by the fire, enemy of the Fotchy, for their enemies are our friends. Are you alone?”

Stevens beckoned into a brush and a slim, firm-muscled woman dressed briefly in patched remnants of cloth came forth. “Markett, my wife,” he explained. Then to her: “These men are our friends, but who they are, I do not know. They are honest people, I think. Let us sit by their fire.”

He and the woman crossed their legs before the blaze, and one of the band piled wood on top. As the flames rose, the forest shadows were driven back, and every pebble in the little clearing cast its long shadow on the ground. The black-bearded

man seated himself before the two strangers and his people arranged themselves in council behind him.

“Selim, Stevens,” began the leader. “I am Isral, one of the judges of the clan of Hebers, expelled and hunted down by the accursed Fotchy these seven generations and more. Are you, too, hounded by the murderous, invading swine?” The firelight gleamed on his nose and played about his curly beard and hair.

“These Fotchy,” said Stevens slowly. “I have never heard of them. But I am hounded by another kind, perhaps. I have forsworn the cities of gleaming metal and glass, with their tasteless water and pulpy food. This I have left to live in the wilderness with my wife, and for that reason, they seek to kill me. These Fotchy—who were they?”

Isral spat. “They came from over the ocean and conquered all things. They imprisoned women and tortured men. Their leaders grew fat and luxurious while the common people were ground into the earth. The Hebers (those who we are) were singled out for destruction, though no one seems to know why. All this have I heard from my father, and there is much in the story that is strange.

“The Hebers were driven into the wilderness one winter to die, but even then we were a hardy people and most of us survived the snow and sleet of the first season. There was trouble as the isolated people met and formed clans, and much struggling for power. In the midst of this they neglected to store up sufficient food for the next winter and many died. For years—twenty, thirty, perhaps—they lived as brutes, with little more than fire to aid them. But, as a new generation grew up, they learned to make things with their hands, to build crude machines, and to turn the laws of nature to the common welfare. And from this time, we have risen in numbers and the enjoyment of life.”

Isral held up a gleaming sword. “We work with iron and pottery and wood, as well as such metals as we can find in the mountains of the north; we have flocks of goats, sheep and bison. Although we live close to nature, we are not helpless before natural forces, though wholly dependent upon them. We whom you see here are a hunting party sent far south to capture living deer for breeding purposes.”

He fell silent and stared inquiringly at Stevens, who cast his eyes over the man, and solemnly extended his hands. The gold-bearded man grinned and said: “You are a *real* people. I will be your friend.” From the group behind Isral was a pleased murmur. “Then,” said Isral, “you will come with us to the North and live with us, and tell us all you can about the world you have left. There may be much that we can put to good use.”

“I will,” said Stevens. And he was thinking, “These men can fight!”

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Dr. Alfred had begun by discussing the Stevens affair hotly in the Medicos Club; a colleague had mildly objected to his neglect of duty. Alfred had flared up and called the colleague a dirty name. From then onward Alfred’s progress was spectacular. There was a challenge to debate the question, and Alfred had won hands down. His opponent had presented his case clearly and logically, then retired from the stage. Alfred had walked on with a sneer, the subconscious necessity of defending himself boiling in his breast.

His speech was like nothing that had been heard from the debating platform for a hundred years or more, for he began by lashing out bitterly at the private life of his

opponent. Patiently the audience waited for him to get around to the issue in question, finding themselves strangely stirred by the wild denunciation. One man yelled from the floor: "He's right! I'm for Alfred!" and the cry was repeated in the hall.

At this the doctor frowned heavily on the audience. "Enough of this!" he barked. "You, my friend, have seen the menace of this wildman loose in our midst. I say to you: '*Hunt him down! Clark Stevens must be destroyed!*'"

The abrupt switch in logic disturbed the crowd not at all. For a hundred years or more they had lain fallow, ready for the first demagogue who came along with a phony cause and a platform technique. In a tremendous burst of enthusiasm the doctor was cheered off the platform and carried through the streets in a spontaneous demonstration, and the cry of the first man to rise had been mutilated into "Right for Alfred!" which rang all over the city by nightfall.

Deposited at his doorstep the doctor made a gracious speech, referring to the menace of Clark Stevens, and, passing a hand before his eyes, begged to be excused. Once in his apartment, Alfred fell into a chair, astonished at himself. As he analyzed the matter there had been a psychological necessity to excuse his own mistake by violence misdirected, or not directed at all. But it was a good thing at any rate. Knowing in his heart of hearts that what he told himself was not true, he pledged himself to release what he already thought of as "his men" as soon as the menace of Stevens was eliminated. Then he went to bed. But all night there rang beneath his window the cry or challenge: "Right for Alfred!"

When he woke, it was to find that his men had been working fast, ranging over the city, spreading the news to their friends—news of this wonderful Dr. Alfred who had emerged from public obscurity to denounce the dangerous maniac who had been permitted to menace the city by the softlings in administrative control.

His door-signal flashed. "Come," he called luxuriously from his bed. "Lo, Winters," he greeted an agitated colleague who strode into the room.

"Alfred," snapped Winters, "how did you do it? And how are you going to stop them? It isn't healthy, this concentration on the death of one man."

"One ruthless, murdering maniac," said the doctor coldly. "Do you call unhealthy the operation that removes a cancer?" He sat up in bed and brought his fist down emphatically on his knee. "No! The day that Clark Stevens dies I shall rest from my labors, but until then it must and shall be my only thought—and not mine alone but all the people in the city. And those who say otherwise shall be *crushed!*"

Winters stared him in the eye. "If you're not mad," he said, "you're giving a very accurate imitation of megalomania. But, for the sake of the record, I assure you that I shall never be a Rightman, and that many others have told me the same. Alfred, you'll never get a majority in any election, so why continue a futile opposition?"

The doctor frowned. "Get out," he said. "You will see how a *man* gets what he wants. He *takes* it!"

As the door closed on Winters' back he relaxed in bed. "*Rightman,*" did the old fool say? Not bad. Not bad at all. He leaped out of bed and dressed. He was nervous, almost hysterically so. As he strode down the corridor of the dwelling, his friends greeted him with cries of "Right!" They were on his side, he thought.

He had to make a speech in the breakfast room of the dwelling and left with the cry of “Right for Alfred!” crashing in his ears. Time to organize now, he thought. The enthusiasm must not be allowed to die down, for once cold reason was permitted to set in, his cause was lost. There could be no such thing as full debate; he must imbue his followers with such a sense of their truth and right that they would, unthinkingly, stamp on the first murmur of opposition, without listening to what the opposer had to say. Had he really been fooling when he intimated to Winters that he would take over by force? Maybe. He didn’t know yet. First thing the Rightmen would need, he decided, would be some sort of identification. Badges—stars? No, these were too flimsy; they might get lost easily, or then some scoundrel who had no right to them, who did not swear allegiance to the cause, might get hold of them.

What was needed was an ensign more substantial—a staff, perhaps. How about a rod, he thought. A nice, heavy one, of course—it’d look better that way—and it should be painted with bright colors. They could even wear bandoliers and shorts of the same color. Red, of course. Red stood out, attracted attention, and was the color of enthusiasm and violence. The sight of solid red ranks would at once intimidate opposition and attract recruits. “Right Red,” it should be called. “Right Red” for the “Rightmen.” It is the duty, he thought, of the Rightman to defend his person against irresponsible attacks, that he may be preserved for the good of the state.

And, a few hours later, these same words thundered through a microphone to all parts of the city: “It is the Duty of the Rightman to defend his person against irresponsible attacks that he may be preserved for service to the state!” And a thousand bright Red staffs swung up in salute, while from the throats of the bearers came the chant: “Right for Alfred! *Right! Right! RIGHT!*”

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Isral pointed. “See, Stevens, the sharpened tops of the stockade; logs half buried, upright, ten feet out of the ground showing, so close together that a rabbit couldn’t squeeze through. We’re safe here from any animal or man, I think.”

“I see,” said Stevens, shifting his rucksack. “It’s most ingenious. But shouldn’t you have sentries posted there by the gates?”

“We usually do,” said Isral, puzzled. “I don’t understand—” He broke off sharply as his eyes caught something. “Thundering heavens! *The gate’s open!* Somebody’s going to catch hell from the judges for this. Come on!” he shouted at the straggling column of men carrying, in a sort of palanquin cage, the live deer they had gone so far South to capture. “I can’t understand it,” he mused fretfully as he and Stevens and Markett ran on the double. They halted before the picketed gate and Markett wrinkled her nose. “What’s that smell?” she asked.

Stevens grimaced at the foul stench that drifted over the high palisade, and turned to Isral for an answer. The Heber had forced his face into lines of composure, but beneath his weather-beaten tan, his skin was white with shock. “Fever,” he said, pushing open the gate. “But twice before it has come, and both times we were able to combat it. Now—look—” Hopelessly he stretched forth his hand, and Stevens turned his head.

There was a long street of neat little houses, log houses, punctuated here and there by little shops of artisans. At the end of the street was a meeting-hall on which, in wood contrasting with the rough, unfinished logs on the outside, was nailed the six-pointed star, tribal symbol of the Hebers. But the pottery wheels and grindstones and forges

before the shops were untended, and there was no smoke of cooking from the neat little chimneys of the houses. Lying in the street, or half hidden in doorways, were drawn, gaunt figures, women, children and old people.

With a little cry of alarm, Markett bent over the form of a child and felt its pulse and skin. "Still alive," she said anxiously. "How do you combat this?"

"A kind of berry," replied Isral. "But there were none growing this year when we left. They were small and bitter."

"I know the general type," said Markett. "The bark does just as well, if you soak it in water. Have you any of the wood about?"

"Here," replied the Heber, pointing to a bush outside the gate. "This is the kind that grows the berries. And there are others in the forest." He turned to the bearers.

"You!" he barked. "Go pull up every fever-bush you can find and bring it here. You, Samel, draw clean water from the Old Well and fill some tubs. Wash them first. You three, dig a trench. Some of our people are past any service save that."

"That settles it," broke in Stevens grimly. "You can't live here any longer."

"Why not, friend?" asked Isral, his eyes on the men who were carrying out his orders.

"This sort of thing might strike you any moment. To save those who are still here, we have to kill every fever-bush by uprooting and stripping the bark. How many people live here?"

"There are about two thousand in this suburb. Of these, one thousand may already have died; others have fled to our other cities and towns. In them, if the plague has not been spread; and we have means of keeping it down if there is time for warning; we have seventy thousands in all."

"Seventy thousand," Stevens whispered to himself. Then, with a great roar, he cried: "We'll do it!"

"What?"

"Go South—all of us, men, women and children. We can do it easily—take the city from which I fled and live there, peacefully and healthily."

Isral stared at him. "How can we take a great city of the South?"

"Isral," answered Stevens, "you don't know what has happened to men in the great cities. They have become soft and helpless. A score of them, all armed, came after me, and fled at the first sign of opposition. A band of determined infants could take the city, for these city-dwellers are incapable of violence. What do you say to that, friend?"

"I say," declared Heber slowly, "that we'll do it!"

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The Historian faced the little group of men, sweeping the small room with a glance. "Where's Denning?" he asked.

The General Practitioner coughed. "The Rightmen got him," he said. "Since Alfreed linked up the entire scientific council with what he calls the subversives, none of us have been able to appear in public safely. Denning's apartment was raided last night and I think he's been liquidated."

The Neuro-specialist drummed the table-top nervously. “It’s incredible the way this psychopathia has spread all over the city. In three short months Alfred and his followers have become so powerful that they do not need to intimidate opposition; they’re a majority.”

“You’re wrong there,” said the Historian. “They make a lot of noise. But the investigation has shown—well, let’s hear it from first hand sources. Would you please repeat what you told me this morning, Gallacher?”

A tall, thin man arose. “Despite appearance to the contrary,” he began, “Alfred has only succeeded in winning over a certain part of the population. Those people who have succumbed, and become Rightmen, are those whose social position has been such as to require a minimum training in social consciousness and responsibility, those whose functions are such to require the minimum application of intelligence.

“These people, despite the facilities that the city offers, have been leading very narrow, cramped lives. Their emotional attainment has been very low, frustrated in many cases. Thus, the terrific emotional appeal of Alfred’s insane program has swept them away, made them willing followers.”

“What,” asked the Practitioner, “has been the actual range of violence and intimidation on the part of the Rightmen?”

“Enough to have a demoralizing effect upon the city as a whole. In fact, enough to make many feel insecure to such an extent that they would join the Rightmen sheerly for self-protection. The cases of violence against citizens, although still small in number, have been increasing, and have been sufficiently ferocious to paralyze, almost completely, any attempt at public opposition.”

“Quite right,” agreed the Historian. “You were correct in one sense,” he said to the Neuro-specialist. “Alfred does not *need* a majority to win an election, or to seize power now. He can either intimidate the citizens into voting for him, or to refrain from voting at all.”

“What has been done to combat Alfred, without using his own methods, of course?” asked an engineer.

“Rightmen have been captured by the ambulance squads, interrogated, then treated with Regulators. The interesting thing is that, once removed from Alfred’s influence, they return to normal very quickly, and a bit of Regulating makes them permanently immune.”

“The difficulty is,” he went on, “that, so far, the psychopathia has spread more quickly than the antidote. What we must do is set machines to capture the Rightmen, Alfred in particular, and regulate them. We cannot afford to use violence ourselves because of the deadly effects it has upon those involved in its use.”

The Historian nodded. “We must move quickly,” he stated, “because I greatly think that Alfred will make an open bid for full power very shortly. Unless there is something else to come up, gentlemen, I suggest we adjourn and get to work.”

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A tent camp for women, children and the animals had been pitched far outside the city, and the forty-thousand armed men of Heber were swinging down one of the great, out-moded superhighways which led into the city. Overhead circled spotting planes, a vivid red in hue, marked with symbols strange to the Hebers, and even to

Markett and Stevens. "Something must have happened in the city," the girl hazarded. They could see it not far off, and from it issued along the highway men marching in ragged file, with none of the snap and precision of the Hebers.

"Fools!" spat Stevens. "If they want to reduce our numbers why don't they drop weights from those planes?" Markett was shocked. "That's a very clever idea," she said. "I wonder that nobody's thought of it before."

"They haven't the military mind," said Stevens. "Such things do not occur to them." The men from the city were drawing nearer; calmly the Hebers unshipped their weapons, front ranks armed with spring-bows, rear ranks with throwing darts and the savage backwords that could cut down a grizzly bear in midcharge.

An especially large plane roared overhead, and, from it, thundered a great voice. "Halt your forces!"

"Dr. Alfred!" cried Markett. "That little fool's trying to order us around."

"Ignore that," advised Stevens. "Go straight ahead. Meet that mob and you won't find any resistance worth speaking of."

"I have arranged for everything," said Isral serenely. "Quarter will be given when asked; corpses will not be mutilated, and no vengeance for our own casualties will be taken once resistance has stopped. We will accept them as equals once we have the city in our hands." He fell silent and the tension grew as the two armies marched toward one another at a steady gait. The huge red plane of Dr. Alfred yawped hysterical injunctions at the advancing Hebers, who didn't even look up.

Then, suddenly, there was a brief exchange of throwing-weapons and the armies made contact. Automatically they split up into groups, clubbing and slashing. Stevens waded into the thick of it, swinging a broadsword. He was startled to see that all the enemy were wearing vivid red shorts and bandoliers and were uniformly armed with heavy, short clubs. Remembering the timorous party that had first sought to kill him, he was dazed at the savagery with which the city men came to attack, with a suicidal disregard for their own safety and lives.

Further speculation he could not indulge in, for he was hard-pressed by a piquet of men who charged with strange cries of "*Right for Alfred!*" One he spitted on his point; another's legs were cut away from beneath him, and a third landed a wild blow on Stevens' shoulder before the sizzling sweep of the backsword cut him down.

Stevens' head was curiously clear in the midst of the turmoil. With a mental start, he realized that something had happened; that this sort of thing no longer seemed glorious. He was not afraid; he saw it as a necessity, but now he realized that his only desire was to get it over with as soon as possible and have done with violence and fighting fellow men. Mechanically he fell in line with a spearhead of Hebers and worked his way along it to the apex; there he stayed, slashing and parrying till a concerted attack from behind dissolved it into skirmishing knots of men.

But now, from the city, came forth things that made the warriors gasp in amazement. Metal cylinders, upright, wheeled, each equipped with tentacle-like projections. They bore down upon the fray, plunging into the ranks of the red-clad fighters. For a moment, Stevens thought them to be reinforcements, but, now, he saw that the machines were for another purpose. The tentacles lashed out and seized the red-clad warriors firmly, yet, it appeared, carefully, so as not to do them harm, and, when their arms were full, turned and made back for the city.

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Stevens swung wide of a head that bobbed, and a red club came down on his head, while another crashed into his ear. The world spun around, then the ground reached up and struck him sharply. And, suddenly, it was night.

“Hold your head up,” said a voice.

Stevens opened his eyes. “Markett,” he whispered. “What is it?”

“Concussion. You’ve been unconscious for three days. And what days!” She rolled her eyes.

“Exciting? What happened?”

“We were on the verge of losing the battle—they had us outnumbered—when the pursuit machines attacked the Rightmen—that’s what the red-clad fighters are called. That completely demoralized them, and they broke and fled back toward the city. We were almost too amazed to know what to do, but Isral ordered us on, so we advanced after them. When we were almost upon the entrance, a voice came through calling me.”

“You?”

“Yes. The council was watching the whole affair through tele-screens in the control room. They asked us what we wanted, who we were, and so forth. Isral and I explained, and they offered to take us in if we would lay down our weapons and promise to come peacefully; if we did not, they said they had a sort of gas which would make us all lose consciousness.”

“So you agreed?”

“Certainly. You see, they explained about the Rightmen, too. The people we were fighting are not the city’s army; they were a sort of club taking orders from Dr. Alfreed. A historian told me that it was what you call a dictatorship. They had seized control of the city (although the council had escaped and continued to work opposition, preparing the pursuit machines, etc.) and were beating down the people, not allowing any freedom of speech, so when they saw that we were losing, the people came out and attacked the Rightmen from behind. At the same time the pursuit machines came out, because, of course, no one except the council knew that there was a weapon which could be used against Alfreed’s army.

“It was really the citizens who won because there were not enough of the pursuit machines to beat the Rightmen; all they could do was to create confusion in the Rightmen ranks, and work demoralization by carrying off fighters.”

Stevens was silent for a moment, then: “What happened to the Rightmen—those who weren’t killed?”

“They were Regulated, Alfreed among them, and all came out sane again.”

“And Isral—the Hebers?”

“Doing fine; they’re going into arts and crafts, something which the Chief Historian says has been a lost function with us. We needed them badly.”

He scratched his head. “Somehow,” he said, “I feel different. I’m not the old, frightened Clark Stevens that I once was; and I’m not the man I was when I first ran away with you.

“I want to live here, in the city. Yet I’m still not satisfied with it. It has to be changed.”

He broke off as the Neuro-specialist came in. “Hello,” he said, “what’s up?”

“Lo, Stevens,” replied the man. “Feeling all right?”

“Yes.”

“We want you on the council. There was a faction that wanted to regulate you again, but most of us agree that we need men of your kind here, so long as they’re not extremists. You seem to have levelled off to just the right point to make you valuable.”

He nodded. “Strange, Clement, but I feel the same about you fellows. At one time, I thought you were all fit for scrapping, but now I see that the city needs you as much as it does me. I think that’s the answer: we need all kinds of people; no one kind can be permitted to dominate, but no one kind can be suppressed, either.”

“Of course,” said Markett. “After that one big burst of violent battle, you worked the ego of Roald the Viking almost completely out of your psychology. Only the part that I like, that I love, is left—and I think that will stay put.”

Stevens reached out and took her hand.

“I—I’d like to wear cloth again instead of leather, Clark.” Markett said—and both men laughed.

## The Altar at Midnight

HE had quite a rum-blossom on him for a kid, I thought at first. But when he moved closer to the light by the cash register to ask the bartender for a match or something, I saw it wasn't that. Not just the nose. Broken veins on his cheeks, too, and the funny eyes. He must have seen me look, because he slid back away from the light.

The bartender shook my bottle of ale in front of me like a Swiss bell-ringer so it foamed inside the green glass.

"You ready for another, sir?" he asked.

I shook my head. Down the bar, he tried it on the kid—he was drinking scotch and water or something like that—and found out he could push him around. He sold him three scotch and waters in ten minutes.

When he tried for number four, the kid had his courage up and said, "I'll tell *you* when I'm ready for another, Jack." But there wasn't any trouble.

It was almost nine and the place began to fill up. The manager, a real hood type, stationed himself by the door to screen out the high-school kids and give the big hello to conventioners. The girls came hurrying in, too, with their little makeup cases and their fancy hair piled up and their frozen faces with the perfect mouths drawn on them. One of them stopped to say something to the manager, some excuse about something, and he said: "That's aw ri'; get inna dressing room."

A three-piece band behind the drapes at the back of the stage began to make warm-up noises and there were two bartenders keeping busy. Mostly it was beer—a midweek crowd. I finished my ale and had to wait a couple of minutes before I could get another bottle. The bar filled up from the end near the stage because all the customers wanted a good, close look at the strippers for their fifty-cent bottles of beer. But I noticed that nobody sat down next to the kid, or, if anybody did, he didn't stay long—you go out for some fun and the bartender pushes you around and nobody wants to sit next to you. I picked up my bottle and glass and went down on the stool to his left.

He turned to me right away and said: "What kind of a place is this, anyway?" The broken veins were all over his face, little ones, but so many, so close, that they made his face look something like marbled rubber. The funny look in his eyes was it—the trick contact lenses. But I tried not to stare and not to look away.

"It's okay," I said. "It's a good show if you don't mind a lot of noise from—"

He stuck a cigarette into his mouth and poked the pack at me. "I'm a spacer," he said, interrupting.

I took one of his cigarettes and said: "Oh."

He snapped a lighter for the cigarettes and said: "Venus."

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I WAS noticing that his pack of cigarettes on the bar had some kind of yellow sticker instead of the blue tax stamp.

“Ain’t that a crock?” he asked. “You can’t smoke and they give you lighters for a souvenir. But it’s a good lighter. On Mars last week, they gave us all some cheap pen-and-pencil sets.”

“You get something every trip, hah?” I took a good, long drink of ale and he finished his scotch and water.

“Shoot. You call a trip a ‘shoot’.”

One of the girls was working her way down the bar. She was going to slide onto the empty stool at his right and give him the business, but she looked at him first and decided not to. She curled around me and asked if I’d buy her a li’l ole drink. I said no and she moved on to the next. I could kind of feel the young fellow quivering. When I looked at him, he stood up. I followed him out of the dump. The manager grinned without thinking and said, “G’night, boys,” to us.

The kid stopped in the street and said to me: “You don’t have to follow me around, Pappy.” He sounded like one wrong word and I would get socked in the teeth.

“Take it easy. I know a place where they won’t spit in your eye.”

He pulled himself together and made a joke of it. “This I have to see,” he said. “Near here?”

“A few blocks.”

We started walking. It was a nice night.

“I don’t know this city at all,” he said. “I’m from Covington, Kentucky. You do your drinking at home there. We don’t have places like this.” He meant the whole Skid Row area.

“It’s not so bad,” I said. “I spend a lot of time here.”

“Is that a fact? I mean, down home a man your age would likely have a wife and children.”

“I do. The hell with them.”

He laughed like a real youngster and I figured he couldn’t even be twenty-five. He didn’t have any trouble with the broken curbstones in spite of his scotch and waters. I asked him about it.

“Sense of balance,” he said. “You have to be tops for balance to be a spacer—you spend so much time outside in a suit. People don’t know how much. Punctures. And you aren’t worth a damn if you lose your point.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Oh. Well, it’s hard to describe. When you’re outside and you lose your point, it means you’re all mixed up, you don’t know which way the can—that’s the ship—which way the can is. It’s having all that room around you. But if you have a good balance, you feel a little tugging to the ship, or maybe you just *know* which way the ship is without feeling it. Then you have your point and you can get the work done.”

“There must be a lot that’s hard to describe.”

He thought that might be a crack and he clammed up on me.

“You call this Gandytown,” I said after a while. “It’s where the stove-up old railroad men hang out. This is the place.”

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IT was the second week of the month, before everybody's pension check was all gone. Oswiak's was jumping. The Grandsons of the Pioneers were on the juke singing the *Man from Mars Yodel* and old Paddy Shea was jiggling in the middle of the floor. He had a full seidel of beer in his right hand and his empty left sleeve was flapping.

The kid balked at the screen door. "Too damn bright," he said.

I shrugged and went on in and he followed. We sat down at a table. At Oswiak's you can drink at the bar if you want to, but none of the regulars do.

Paddy jiggled over and said: "Welcome home, Doc." He's a Liverpool Irishman; they talk like Scots, some say, but they sound almost like Brooklyn to me.

"Hello, Paddy. I brought somebody uglier than you. Now what do you say?"

Paddy jiggled around the kid in a half-circle with his sleeve flapping and then flopped into a chair when the record stopped. He took a big drink from the seidel and said: "Can he do this?" Paddy stretched his face into an awful grin that showed his teeth. He has three of them. The kid laughed and asked me: "What the hell did you drag me into here for?"

"Paddy says he'll buy drinks for the house the day anybody uglier than he is comes in."

Oswiak's wife waddled over for the order and the kid asked us what we'd have. I figured I could start drinking, so it was three double scotches.

After the second round, Paddy started blowing about how they took his arm off without any anesthetics except a bottle of gin because the red-ball freight he was tangled up in couldn't wait.

That brought some of the other old gimps over to the table with their stories.

Blackie Bauer had been sitting in a boxcar with his legs sticking through the door when the train started with a jerk. Wham, the door closed. Everybody laughed at Blackie for being that dumb in the first place, and he got mad.

Sam Fireman has palsy. This week he was claiming he used to be a watchmaker before he began to shake. The week before, he'd said he was a brain surgeon. A woman I didn't know, a real old Boxcar Bertha, dragged herself over and began some kind of story about how her sister married a Greek, but she passed out before we found out what happened.

Somebody wanted to know what was wrong with the kid's face—Bauer, I think it was, after he came back to the table.

"Compression and decompression," the kid said. "You're all the time climbing into your suit and out of your suit. Inboard air's thin to start with. You get a few redlines—that's these ruptured blood vessels—and you say the hell with the money; all you'll make is just one more trip. But, God, it's a lot of money for anybody my age! You keep saying that until you can't be anything but a spacer. The eyes are hard-radiation scars."

"You like dot all ofer?" asked Oswiak's wife politely.

"All over, ma'am," the kid told her in a miserable voice. "But I'm going to quit before I get a Bowman Head."

“I don’t care,” said Maggie Rorty. “I think he’s cute.”

“Compared with—” Paddy began, but I kicked him under the table.

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WE sang for a while, and then we told gags and recited limericks for a while, and I noticed that the kid and Maggie had wandered into the back room—the one with the latch on the door.

Oswiak’s wife asked me, very puzzled: “Doc, w’y dey do dot flyink by planyets?”

“It’s the damn govermint,” Sam Fireman said.

“Why not?” I said. “They got the Bowman Drive, why the hell shouldn’t they use it? Serves ‘em right.” I had a double scotch and added: “Twenty years of it and they found out a few things they didn’t know. Redlines are only one of them. Twenty years more, maybe they’ll find out a few more things they didn’t know. Maybe by the time there’s a bathtub in every American home and an alcoholism clinic in every American town, they’ll find out a whole *lot* of things they didn’t know. And every American boy will be a pop-eyed, blood-raddled wreck, like our friend here, from riding the Bowman Drive.”

“It’s the damn govermint,” Sam Fireman repeated.

“And what the hell did you mean by that remark about alcoholism?” Paddy said, real sore. “Personally, I can take it or leave it alone.”

So we got to talking about that and everybody there turned out to be people who could take it or leave it alone.

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IT was maybe midnight when the kid showed at the table again, looking kind of dazed. I was drunker than I ought to be by midnight, so I said I was going for a walk. He tagged along and we wound up on a bench at Screwball Square. The soap-boxers were still going strong. Like I said, it was a nice night. After a while, a pot-bellied old auntie who didn’t give a damn about the face sat down and tried to talk the kid into going to see some etchings. The kid didn’t get it and I led him over to hear the soap-boxers before there was trouble.

One of the orators was a mush-mouthed evangelist. “And, oh, my friends,” he said, “when I looked through the porthole of the spaceship and beheld the wonder of the Firmament—”

“You’re a stinkin’ Yankee liar!” the kid yelled at him. “You say one damn more word about can-shootin’ and I’ll ram your spaceship down your lyin’ throat! Wheah’s your redlines if you’re such a hot spacer?”

The crowd didn’t know what he was talking about, but “wheah’s your redlines” sounded good to them, so they heckled mush-mouth off his box with it.

I got the kid to a bench. The liquor was working in him all of a sudden. He simmered down after a while and asked: “Doc, should I’ve given Miz Rorty some money? I asked her afterward and she said she’d admire to have something to remember me by, so I gave her my lighter. She seem’ to be real pleased with it. But I was wondering if maybe I embarrassed her by asking her right out. Like I tol’ you, back in Covington, Kentucky, we don’t have places like that. Or maybe we did and I just didn’t know about them. But what do you think I should’ve done about Miz Rorty?”

“Just what you did,” I told him. “If they want money, they ask you for it first. Where you staying?”

“Y.M.C.A.,” he said, almost asleep. “Back in Covington, Kentucky, I was a member of the Y and I kept up my membership. They have to let me in because I’m a member. Spacers have all kinds of trouble, Doc. Woman trouble. Hotel trouble. Fam’ly trouble. Religious trouble. I was raised a Southern Baptist, but wheah’s Heaven, anyway? I ask’ Doctor Chitwood las’ time home before the redlines got so thick—Doc, you aren’t a minister of the Gospel, are you? I hope I di’n’ say anything to offend you.”

“No offense, son,” I said. “No offense.”

I walked him to the avenue and waited for a fleet cab. It was almost five minutes. The independents that roll drunks dent the fenders of fleet cabs if they show up in Skid Row and then the fleet drivers have to make reports on their own time to the company. It keeps them away. But I got one and dumped the kid in.

“The Y Hotel,” I told the driver. “Here’s five. Help him in when you get there.”

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WHEN I walked through Screwball Square again, some college kids were yelling “wheah’s your redlines” at old Charlie, the last of the Wobblies.

Old Charlie kept roaring: “The hell with your breadlines! I’m talking about atomic bombs. *Right—up—there!*” And he pointed at the Moon.

It was a nice night, but the liquor was dying in me.

There was a joint around the corner, so I went in and had a drink to carry me to the club; I had a bottle there. I got into the first cab that came.

“Athletic Club,” I said.

“Inna dawghouse, harh?” the driver said, and he gave me a big personality smile.

I didn’t say anything and he started the car.

He was right, of course. I was in everybody’s doghouse. Some day I’d scare hell out of Tom and Lise by going home and showing them what their daddy looked like.

Down at the Institute, I was in the doghouse.

“Oh, dear,” everybody at the Institute said to everybody, “I’m sure I don’t know what ails the man. A lovely wife and two lovely grown children and she had to tell him ‘either you go or I go.’ And *drinking!* And this is rather subtle, but it’s a well-known fact that neurotics seek out low company to compensate for their guilt-feelings. The *places* he frequents. Doctor Francis Bowman, the man who made space-flight a reality. The man who put the Bomb Base on the Moon! Really, I’m sure I don’t know what ails him.”

The hell with them all.

## With These Hands

### I

Halvorsen waited in the Chancery office while Monsignor Reedy disposed of three persons who had preceded him. He was a little dizzy with hunger and noticed only vaguely that the prelate's secretary was beckoning to him. He started to his feet when the secretary pointedly opened the door to Monsignor Reedy's inner office and stood waiting beside it.

The artist crossed the floor, forgetting that he had leaned his portfolio against his chair, remembered at the door and went back for it, flushing. The secretary looked patient.

"Thanks," Halvorsen murmured to him as the door closed.

There was something wrong with the prelate's manner.

"I've brought the designs for the Stations, Padre," he said, opening the portfolio on the desk.

"Bad news, Roald," said the monsignor. "I know how you've been looking forward to the commission—"

"Somebody else get it?" asked the artist faintly, leaning against the desk. "I thought his eminence definitely decided I had the—"

"It's not that," said the monsignor. "But the Sacred Congregation of Rites this week made a pronouncement on images of devotion. Stereopantograph is to be licit within a diocese at the discretion of the bishop. And his eminence—"

"S.P.G.—slimy imitations," protested Halvorsen. "Real as a plastic eye. No texture. No guts. *You* know that, Padre!" he said accusingly.

"I'm sorry, Roald," said the monsignor. "Your work is better than we'll get from a stereopantograph—to my eyes, at least. But there are other considerations."

"Money!" spat the artist.

"Yes, money," the prelate admitted. "His eminence wants to see the St. Xavier U. building program through before he dies. Is that a mortal sin? And there are our schools, our charities, our Venus mission. S.P.G. will mean a considerable saving on procurement and maintenance of devotional images. Even if I could, I would not disagree with his eminence on adopting it as a matter of diocesan policy."

The prelate's eyes fell on the detailed drawings of the Stations of the Cross and lingered.

"Your St. Veronica," he said abstractedly. "Very fine. It suggests one of Caravaggio's care-worn saints to me. I would have liked to see her in the bronze."

"So would I," said Halvorsen hoarsely. "Keep the drawings, Padre." He started for the door.

"But I can't—"

"That's all right."

The artist walked past the secretary blindly and out of the Chancery into Fifth Avenue's spring sunlight. He hoped Monsignor Reedy was enjoying the drawings and was ashamed of himself and sorry for Halvorsen. And he was glad he didn't have to carry the heavy portfolio any more. Everything seemed so heavy lately—chisels, hammer, wooden palette. Maybe the padre would send him something and pretend it was for expenses or an advance, as he had in the past.

Halvorsen's feet carried him up the Avenue. No, there wouldn't be any advances any more. The last steady trickle of income had just been dried up, by an announcement in *Osservatore Romano*. Religious conservatism had carried the church as far as it would go in its ancient role of art patron.

When all Europe was writing on the wonderful new vellum, the church stuck to good old papyrus. When all Europe was writing on the wonderful new paper, the church stuck to good old vellum. When all architects and municipal monument committees and portrait bust clients were patronizing the stereopantograph, the church stuck to good old expensive sculpture. But not any more.

He was passing an S.P.G. salon now, where one of his Tuesday night pupils worked: one of the few men in the classes. Mostly they consisted of lazy, moody, irritable girls. Halvorsen, surprised at himself, entered the salon, walking between asthenic semi-nude stereos executed in transparent plastic that made the skin of his neck and shoulders prickle with gooseflesh.

*Slime!* he thought. *How can they—*

"May I help—oh, hello, Roald. What brings you here?"

He knew suddenly what had brought him there. "Could you make a little advance on next month's tuition, Lewis? I'm strapped." He took a nervous look around the chamber of horrors, avoiding the man's condescending face.

"I guess so, Roald. Would ten dollars be any help? That'll carry us through to the 25th, right?"

"Fine, right, sure," he said, while he was being unwillingly towed around the place.

"I know you don't think much of S.P.G., but it's quiet now, so this is a good chance to see how we work. I don't say it's Art with a capital A, but you've got to admit it's *an* art, something people like at a price they can afford to pay. Here's where we sit them. Then you run out the feelers to the reference points on the face. You know what they are?"

He heard himself say dryly: "I know what they are. The Egyptian sculptors used them when they carved statues of the pharaohs."

"Yes? I never knew that. There's nothing new under the Sun, is there? But *this* is the heart of the S.P.G." The youngster proudly swung open the door of an electronic device in the wall of the portrait booth. Tubes winked sullenly at Halvorsen.

"The esthetikon?" he asked indifferently. He did not feel indifferent, but it would be absurd to show anger, no matter how much he felt it, against a mindless aggregation of circuits that could calculate layouts, criticize and correct pictures for a desired effect—and that had put the artist of design out of a job.

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"Yes. The lenses take sixteen profiles, you know, and we set the esthetikon for whatever we want—cute, rugged, sexy, spiritual, brainy, or a combination. It fairs

curves from profile to profile to give us just what we want, distorts the profiles themselves within limits if it has to, and there's your portrait stored in the memory tank waiting to be taped. You set your ratio for any enlargement or reduction you want and play it back. I wish we were reproducing today; it's fascinating to watch. You just pour in your cold-set plastic, the nozzles ooze out a core and start crawling over to scan—a drop here, a worm there, and it begins to take shape.

“We mostly do portrait busts here, the Avenue trade, but Wilgus, the foreman, used to work in a monument shop in Brooklyn. He did that heroic-size war memorial on the East River Drive—hired Garda Bouchette, the TV girl, for the central figure. And what a figure! He told me he set the esthetikon plates for three-quarter sexy, one-quarter spiritual. Here's something interesting—standing figurine of Orin Ryerson, the banker. He ordered twelve. Figurines are coming in. The girls like them because they can show their shapes. You'd be surprised at some of the poses they want to try—”

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Somehow, Halvorsen got out with the ten dollars, walked to Sixth Avenue and sat down hard in a cheap restaurant. He had coffee and dozed a little, waking with a guilty start at a racket across the street. There was a building going up. For a while he watched the great machines pour walls and floors, the workmen rolling here and there on their little chariots to weld on a wall panel, stripe on an electric circuit of conductive ink, or spray plastic finish over the “wired” wall, all without leaving the saddles of their little mechanical chariots.

Halvorsen felt more determined. He bought a paper from a vending machine by the restaurant door, drew another cup of coffee and turned to the help-wanted ads.

The tricky trade-school ads urged him to learn construction work and make big money. Be a plumbing-machine setup man. Be a house-wiring machine tender. Be a servotruck driver. Be a lumber-stacker operator. Learn pouring-machine maintenance.

*Make big money!*

A sort of panic overcame him. He ran to the phone booth and dialed a Passaic number. He heard the *ring-ring-ring* and strained to hear old Mr. Krehbeil's stumping footsteps growing louder as he neared the phone, even though he knew he would hear nothing until the receiver was picked up.

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*Ring—ring—ring.* “Hello?” grunted the old man's voice, and his face appeared on the little screen. “Hello, Mr. Halvorsen. What can I do for you?”

Halvorsen was tongue-tied. He couldn't possibly say: I just wanted to see if you were still there. I was afraid you weren't there any more. He choked and improvised: “Hello, Mr. Krehbeil. It's about the banister on the stairs in my place. I noticed it's pretty shaky. Could you come over sometime and fix it for me?”

Krehbeil peered suspiciously out of the screen. “I could do that,” he said slowly. “I don't have much work nowadays. But you can carpenter as good as me, Mr. Halvorsen, and frankly you're very slow pay and I like cabinet work better. I'm not a young man and climbing around on ladders takes it out of me. If you can't find anybody else, I'll take the work, but I got to have some of the money first, just for the materials. It isn't easy to get good wood any more.”

“All right,” said Halvorsen. “Thanks, Mr. Krehbeil. I’ll call you if I can’t get anybody else.”

He hung up and went back to his table and newspaper. His face was burning with anger at the old man’s reluctance and his own foolish panic. Krehbeil didn’t realize they were both in the same leaky boat. Krehbeil, who didn’t get a job in a month, still thought with senile pride that he was a journeyman carpenter and cabinetmaker who could make his solid way anywhere with his tool-box and his skill, and that he could afford to look down on anything as disreputable as an artist—even an artist who could carpenter as well as he did himself.

Labuerre had made Halvorsen learn carpentry, and Labuerre had been right. You build a scaffold so you can sculp up high, not so it will collapse and you break a leg. You build your platforms so they hold the rock steady, not so it wobbles and chatters at every blow of the chisel. You build your armatures so they hold the plasticine you slam onto them.

But the help-wanted ads wanted no builders of scaffolds, platforms and armatures. The factories were calling for setup men and maintenance men for the production and assembly machines.

From upstate, General Vegetables had sent a recruiting team for farm help—harvest setup and maintenance men, a few openings for experienced operators of tank-caulking machinery. Under “office and professional” the demand was heavy for computer men, for girls who could run the I.B.M. Letteriter, esp. familiar sales and collections corresp., for office machinery maintenance and repair men. A job printing house wanted an esthetikon operator for letterhead layouts and the like. A.T. & T. wanted trainees to earn while learning telephone maintenance. A direct-mail advertising outfit wanted an artist—no, they wanted a sales-executive who could scrawl picture-ideas that would be subjected to the criticism and correction of the esthetikon.

Halvorsen leafed tiredly through the rest of the paper. He knew he wouldn’t get a job, and if he did he wouldn’t hold it. He knew it was a terrible thing to admit to yourself that you might starve to death because you were bored by anything except art, but he admitted it.

It had happened often enough in the past—artists undergoing preposterous hardships, not, as people thought, because they were devoted to art, but because nothing else was interesting. If there were only some impressive, sonorous word that summed up the aching, oppressive futility that overcame him when he tried to get out of art—only there wasn’t.

He thought he could tell which of the photos in the tabloid had been corrected by the esthetikon.

There was a shot of Jink Bitsy, who was to star in a remake of *Peter Pan*. Her ears had been made to look not pointed but pointy, her upper lip had been lengthened a trifle, her nose had been pugged a little and tilted quite a lot, her freckles were cuter than cute, her brows were innocently arched, and her lower lip and eyes were nothing less than pornography.

There was a shot, apparently uncorrected, of the last Venus ship coming in at La Guardia and the average-looking explorers grinning. Caption: “Austin Malone and crew smile relief on safe arrival. Malone says Venus colonies need men, machines. See story p. 2.”

Petulantly, Halvorsen threw the paper under the table and walked out. What had space travel to do with him? Vacations on the Moon and expeditions to Venus and Mars were part of the deadly encroachment on his livelihood and no more.

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## II

He took the subway to Passaic and walked down a long-still traffic beltway to his studio, almost the only building alive in the slums near the rusting railroad freightyard.

A sign that had once said "F. Labuerre, Sculptor—Portraits and Architectural Commissions" now said "Roald Halvorsen; Art Classes—Reasonable Fees." It was a grimy two-story frame building with a shopfront in which were mounted some of his students' charcoal figure studies and oil still-lives. He lived upstairs, taught downstairs front, and did his own work downstairs, back behind dirty, ceiling-high drapes.

Going in, he noticed that he had forgotten to lock the door again. He slammed it bitterly. At the noise, somebody called from behind the drapes: "Who's that?"

"Halvorsen!" he yelled in a sudden fury. "I live here. I own this place. Come out of there! What do you want?"

There was a fumbling at the drapes and a girl stepped between them, shrinking from their dirt.

"Your door was open," she said firmly, "and it's a shop. I've just been here a couple of minutes. I came to ask about classes, but I don't think I'm interested if you're this bad-tempered."

A pupil. Pupils were never to be abused, especially not now.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said. "I had a trying day in the city." Now turn it on. "I wouldn't tell everybody a terrible secret like this, but I've lost a commission. You understand? I thought so. Anybody who'd traipse out here to my dingy abode would be *simpatica*. Won't you sit down? No, not there—humor an artist and sit over there. The warm background of that still-life brings out your color—quite good color. Have you ever been painted? You've a very interesting face, you know. Some day I'd like to—but you mentioned classes.

"We have figure classes, male and female models alternating, on Tuesday nights. For that I have to be very stern and ask you to sign up for an entire course of twelve lessons at sixty dollars. It's the models' fees—they're exorbitant. Saturday afternoons we have still-life classes for beginners in oils. That's only two dollars a class, but you might sign up for a series of six and pay ten dollars in advance, which saves you two whole dollars. I also give private instructions to a few talented amateurs."

The price was open on that one—whatever the traffic would bear. It had been a year since he'd had a private pupil and she'd taken only six lessons at five dollars an hour.

"The still-life sounds interesting," said the girl, holding her head self-consciously the way they all did when he gave them the patter. It was a good head, carried well up. The muscles clung close, not yet slacked into geotropic loops and lumps. The line of youth is heliotropic, he confusedly thought. "I saw some interesting things back there. Was that your own work?"

She rose, obviously with the expectation of being taken into the studio. Her body was one of those long-lined, small-breasted, coltish jobs that the pre-Raphaelites loved to draw.

“Well—” said Halvorsen. A deliberate show of reluctance and then a bright smile of confidence. “*You’ll* understand,” he said positively and drew aside the curtains.

“What a curious place!” She wandered about, inspecting the drums of plaster, clay and plasticene, the racks of tools, the stands, the stones, the chisels, the forge, the kiln, the lumber, the glaze bench.

“I *like* this,” she said determinedly, picking up a figure a half-meter tall, a Venus he had cast in bronze while studying under Labuerre some years ago. “How much is it?”

An honest answer would scare her off, and there was no chance in the world that she’d buy. “I hardly ever put my things up for sale,” he told her lightly. “That was just a little study. I do work on commission only nowadays.”

Her eyes flicked about the dingy room, seeming to take in its scaling plaster and warped floor and see through the wall to the abandoned slum in which it was set. There was amusement in her glance.

*I am not being honest, she thinks. She thinks that is funny. Very well, I will be honest.* “Six hundred dollars,” he said flatly.

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The girl set the figurine on its stand with a rap and said, half angry and half amused: “I don’t understand it. That’s more than a month’s pay for me. I could get an S.P.G. statuette just as pretty as this for ten dollars. Who do you artists think you are, anyway?”

Halvorsen debated with himself about what he could say in reply:

*An S.P.G. operator spends a week learning his skill and I spend a lifetime learning mine.*

*An S.P.G. operator makes a mechanical copy of a human form distorted by formulae mechanically arrived at from psychotests of population samples. I take full responsibility for my work; it is mine, though I use what I see fit from Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Augustan and Romantic and Modern Eras.*

*An S.P.G. operator works in soft, homogeneous plastic; I work in bronze that is more complicated than you dream, that is cast and acid-dipped today so it will slowly take on rich and subtle coloring many years from today.*

*An S.P.G. operator could not make an Orpheus Fountain—*

He mumbled, “Orpheus,” and keeled over.

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Halvorsen awoke in his bed on the second floor of the building. His fingers and toes buzzed electrically and he felt very clear-headed. The girl and a man, unmistakably a doctor, were watching him.

“You don’t seem to belong to any Medical Plans, Halvorsen,” the doctor said irritably. “There weren’t any cards on you at all. No Red, no Blue, no Green, no Brown.”

“I used to be on the Green Plan, but I let it lapse,” the artist said defensively.

“And look what happened!”

“Stop nagging him!” the girl said. “I’ll pay you your fee.”

“It’s supposed to come through a Plan,” the doctor fretted.

“We won’t tell anybody,” the girl promised. “Here’s five dollars. Just stop nagging him.”

“Malnutrition,” said the doctor. “Normally I’d send him to a hospital, but I don’t see how I could manage it. He isn’t on any Plan at all. Look, I’ll take the money and leave some vitamins. That’s what he needs—vitamins. And food.”

“I’ll see that he eats,” the girl said, and the doctor left.

“How long since you’ve had anything?” she asked Halvorsen.

“I had some coffee today,” he answered, thinking back. “I’d been working on detail drawings for a commission and it fell through. I told you that. It was a shock.”

“I’m Lucretia Grumman,” she said, and went out.

He dozed until she came back with an armful of groceries.

“It’s hard to get around down here,” she complained.

“It was Labuerre’s studio,” he told her defiantly. “He left it to me when he died. Things weren’t so rundown in his time. I studied under him; he was one of the last. He had a joke—‘They don’t really want my stuff, but they’re ashamed to let me starve.’ He warned me that they wouldn’t be ashamed to let *me* starve, but I insisted and he took me in.”

Halvorsen drank some milk and ate some bread. He thought of the change from the ten dollars in his pocket and decided not to mention it. Then he remembered that the doctor had gone through his pockets.

“I can pay you for this,” he said. “It’s very kind of you, but you mustn’t think I’m penniless. I’ve just been too preoccupied to take care of myself.”

“Sure,” said the girl. “But we can call this an advance. I want to sign up for some classes.”

“Be happy to have you.”

“Am I bothering you?” asked the girl. “You said something odd when you fainted—‘Orpheus.’”

“Did I say that? I must have been thinking of Milles’ Orpheus Fountain in Copenhagen. I’ve seen photos, but I’ve never been there.”

“Germany? But there’s nothing left of Germany.”

“Copenhagen’s in Denmark. There’s quite a lot of Denmark left. It was only on the fringes. Heavily radiated, but still there.”

“I want to travel, too,” she said. “I work at La Guardia and I’ve never been off, except for an orbiting excursion. I want to go to the Moon on my vacation. They give us a bonus in travel vouchers. It must be wonderful dancing under the low gravity.”

Spaceport? Off? Low gravity? Terms belonging to the detested electronic world of the stereopantograph in which he had no place.

“Be very interesting,” he said, closing his eyes to conceal disgust.

“I *am* bothering you. I’ll go away now, but I’ll be back Tuesday night for the class. What time do I come and what should I bring?”

“Eight. It’s charcoal—I sell you the sticks and paper. Just bring a smock.”

“All right. And I want to take the oils class, too. And I want to bring some people I know to see your work. I’m sure they’ll see something they like. Austin Malone’s in from Venus—he’s a special friend of mine.”

“Lucretia,” he said. “Or do some people call you Lucy?”

“Lucy.”

“Will you take that little bronze you liked? As a thank you?”

“I can’t do that!”

“Please. I’d feel much better about this. I really mean it.”

She nodded abruptly, flushing, and almost ran from the room.

*Now why did I do that?* he asked himself. He hoped it was because he liked Lucy Grumman very much. He hoped it wasn’t a cold-blooded investment of a piece of sculpture that would never be sold, anyway, just to make sure she’d be back with class fees and more groceries.

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### III

She was back on Tuesday, a half-hour early and carrying a smock. He introduced her formally to the others as they arrived: a dozen or so bored young women who, he suspected, talked a great deal about their art lessons outside, but in class used any excuse to stop sketching.

He didn’t dare show Lucy any particular consideration. There were fierce little miniature cliques in the class. Halvorsen knew they laughed at him and his line among themselves, and yet, strangely, were fiercely jealous of their seniority and right to individual attention.

The lesson was an ordeal, as usual. The model, a muscle-bound young graduate of the barbell gyms and figure-photography studios, was stupid and argumentative about ten-minute poses. Two of the girls came near a hair-pulling brawl over the rights to a preferred sketching location. A third girl had discovered Picasso’s cubist period during the past week and proudly announced that she didn’t *feel* perspective in art.

But the two interminable hours finally ticked by. He nagged them into cleaning up—not as bad as the Saturdays with oils—and stood by the open door. Otherwise they would have stayed all night, cackling about absent students and snarling sulkily among themselves. His well-laid plans went sour, though. A large and flashy car drove up as the girls were leaving.

“That’s Austin Malone,” said Lucy. “He came to pick me up and look at your work.”

That was all the wedge her fellow-pupils needed.

“*Aus-tin Ma-lone! Well!*”

“Lucy, darling, I’d love to meet a real *spaceman*.”

“Roald, darling, would you mind very much if I stayed a moment?”

“I’m certainly not going to miss this and I don’t care if you mind or not, Roald, darling!”

Malone was an impressive figure. Halvorsen thought: he looks as though he’s been run through an esthetikon set for ‘brawny’ and ‘determined.’ Lucy made a hash of the introductions and the spaceman didn’t rise to conversational bait dangled enticingly by the girls.

In a clear voice, he said to Halvorsen: “I don’t want to take up too much of your time. Lucy tells me you have some things for sale. Is there any place we can look at them where it’s quiet?”

The students made sulky exits.

“Back here,” said the artist.

The girl and Malone followed him through the curtains. The spaceman made a slow circuit of the studio, seeming to repel questions.

He sat down at last and said: “I don’t know what to think, Halvorsen. This place stuns me. Do you *know* you’re in the Dark Ages?”

*People who never have given a thought to Chartres and Mont St. Michel usually call it the Dark Ages,* Halvorsen thought wryly. He asked, “Technologically, you mean? No, not at all. My plaster’s better, my colors are better, my metal is better—tool metal, not casting metal, that is.”

“I mean *hand* work,” said the spaceman. “Actually working by *hand*.”

The artist shrugged. “There have been crazes for the techniques of the boiler works and the machine shop,” he admitted. “Some interesting things were done, but they didn’t stand up well. Is there anything here that takes your eye?”

“I like those dolphins,” said the spaceman, pointing to a perforated terra-cotta relief on the wall. They had been commissioned by an architect, then later refused for reasons of economy when the house had run way over estimate. “They’d look bully over the fireplace in my town apartment. Like them, Lucy?”

“I think they’re wonderful,” said the girl.

Roald saw the spaceman go rigid with the effort not to turn and stare at her. He loved her and he was jealous.

Roald told the story of the dolphins and said: “The price that the architect thought was too high was three hundred and sixty dollars.”

Malone grunted. “Doesn’t seem unreasonable—if you set a high store on inspiration.”

“I don’t know about inspiration,” the artist said evenly. “But I was awake for two days and two nights shoveling coal and adjusting drafts to fire that thing in my kiln.”

The spaceman looked contemptuous. “I’ll take it,” he said. “Be something to talk about during those awkward pauses. Tell me, Halvorsen, how’s Lucy’s work? Do you think she ought to stick with it?”

“Austin,” objected the girl, “don’t be so blunt. How can he possibly know after one day?”

“She can’t draw yet,” the artist said cautiously. “It’s all coordination, you know—thousands of hours of practice, training your eye and hand to work together until you can put a line on paper where you want it. Lucy, if you’re really interested in it, you’ll

learn to draw well. I don't think any of the other students will. They're in it because of boredom or snobbery, and they'll stop before they have their eye-hand coordination."

"I *am* interested," she said firmly.

Malone's determined restraint broke. "Damned right you are. In—" He recovered himself and demanded of Halvorsen: "I understand your point about coordination. But thousands of hours when you can buy a camera? It's absurd."

"I was talking about drawing, not art," replied Halvorsen. "Drawing is putting a line on paper where you want it, I said." He took a deep breath and hoped the great distinction wouldn't sound ludicrous and trivial. "So let's say that art is knowing how to put the line in the right place."

"Be practical. There isn't any art. Not any more. I get around quite a bit and I never see anything but photos and S.P.G.s. A few heirlooms, yes, but nobody's painting or carving any more."

"There's some art, Malone. My students—a couple of them in the still-life class—are quite good. There are more across the country. Art for occupational therapy, or a hobby, or something to do with the hands. There's trade in their work. They sell them to each other, they give them to their friends, they hang them on their walls. There are even some sculptors like that. Sculpture is prescribed by doctors. The occupational therapists say it's even better than drawing and painting, so some of these people work in plasticene and soft stone, and some of them get to be good."

"Maybe so. I'm an engineer, Halvorsen. We glory in doing things the easy way. Doing things the easy way got me to Mars and Venus and it's going to get me to Ganymede. You're doing things the hard way, and your inefficiency has no place in this world. Look at you! You've lost a fingertip—some accident, I suppose."

"I never noticed—" said Lucy, and then let out a faint, "Oh!"

Halvorsen curled the middle finger of his left hand into the palm, where he usually carried it to hide the missing first joint.

"Yes," he said softly. "An accident."

"Accidents are a sign of inadequate mastery of material and equipment," said Malone sententiously. "While you stick to your methods and I stick to mine, *you can't compete with me.*"

His tone made it clear that he was talking about more than engineering.

"Shall we go now, Lucy? Here's my card, Halvorsen. Send those dolphins along and I'll mail you a check."

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#### IV

The artist walked the half-dozen blocks to Mr. Krehbeil's place the next day. He found the old man in the basement shop of his fussy house, hunched over his bench with a powerful light overhead. He was trying to file a saw.

"Mr. Krehbeil!" Halvorsen called over the shriek of metal.

The carpenter turned around and peered with watery eyes. "I can't see like I used to," he said querulously. "I go over the same teeth on this damn saw, I skip teeth, I can't

see the light shine off it when I got one set. The glare.” He banged down his three-cornered file petulantly. “Well, what can I do for you?”

“I need some crating stock. Anything. I’ll trade you a couple of my maple four-by-fours.”

The old face became cunning. “And will you set my saw? My *saws*, I mean. It’s nothing to you—an hour’s work. You have the eyes.”

Halvorsen said bitterly, “All right.” The old man had to drive his bargain, even though he might never use his saws again. And then the artist promptly repented of his bitterness, offering up a quick prayer that his own failure to conform didn’t make him as much of a nuisance to the world as Krehbeil was.

The carpenter was pleased as they went through his small stock of wood and chose boards to crate the dolphin relief. He was pleased enough to give Halvorsen coffee and cake before the artist buckled down to filing the saws.

Over the kitchen table, Halvorsen tried to probe. “Things pretty slow now?”

It would be hard to spoil Krehbeil’s day now. “People are always fools. They don’t know good hand work. Some day,” he said apocalyptically, “I laugh on the other side of my face when their foolish machine-buildings go falling down in a strong wind, all of them, all over the country. Even my boy—I used to beat him good, almost every day—he works a foolish concrete machine and his house should fall on his head like the rest.”

Halvorsen knew it was Krehbeil’s son who supported him by mail, and changed the subject. “You get some cabinet work?”

“Stupid women! What they call antiques—they don’t know Meissen, they don’t know Biedermeier. They bring me trash to repair sometimes. I make them pay; I swindle them good.”

“I wonder if things would be different if there were anything left over in Europe....”

“People will still be fools, Mr. Halvorsen,” said the carpenter positively. “Didn’t you say you were going to file those saws today?”

So the artist spent two noisy hours filing before he carried his crating stock to the studio.

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Lucy was there. She had brought some things to eat. He dumped the lumber with a bang and demanded: “Why aren’t you at work?”

“We get days off,” she said vaguely. “Austin thought he’d give me the cash for the terra-cotta and I could give it to you.”

She held out an envelope while he studied her silently. The farce was beginning again. But this time he dreaded it.

It would not be the first time that a lonesome, discontented girl chose to see him as a combination of romantic rebel and lost pup, with the consequences you’d expect.

He knew from books, experience and Labuerre’s conversation in the old days that there was nothing novel about the comedy—that there had even been artists, lots of them, who had counted on endless repetitions of it for their livelihood.

The girl drops in with groceries and the artist is pleasantly surprised; the girl admires this little thing or that after payday and buys it and the artist is pleasantly surprised; the girl brings her friends to take lessons or make little purchases and the artist is pleasantly surprised. The girl may be seduced by the artist or vice versa, which shortens the comedy, or they get married, which lengthens it somewhat.

It had been three years since Halvorsen had last played out the farce with a manic-depressive divorcee from Elmira: three years during which he had crossed the midpoint between thirty and forty; three more years to get beaten down by being unwanted and working too much and eating too little.

Also, he knew, he was in love with this girl.

He took the envelope, counted three hundred and twenty dollars and crammed it into his pocket. "That was your idea," he said. "Thanks. Now get out, will you? I've got work to do."

She stood there, shocked.

*"I said get out. I have work to do."*

"Austin was right," she told him miserably. "You don't care how people feel. You just want to get things out of them."

She ran from the studio, and Halvorsen fought with himself not to run after her.

He walked slowly into his workshop and studied his array of tools, though he paid little attention to his finished pieces. It would be nice to spend about half of this money on open-hearth steel rod and bar stock to forge into chisels; he thought he knew where he could get some—but she would be back, or he would break and go to her and be forgiven and the comedy would be played out, after all.

He couldn't let that happen.

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## V

Aalesund, on the Atlantic side of the Dourefeld mountains of Norway, was in the lee of the blasted continent. One more archeologist there made no difference, as long as he had the sense to recognize the propellor-like international signposts that said with their three blades, *Radiation Hazard*, and knew what every schoolboy knew about protective clothing and reading a personal Geiger counter.

The car Halvorsen rented was for a brief trip over the mountains to study contaminated Oslo. Well-muffled, he could make it and back in a dozen hours and no harm done.

But he took the car past Oslo, Wennersborg and Goteborg, along the Kattegat coast to Helsingborg, and abandoned it there, among the three-bladed polyglot signs, crossing to Denmark. Danes were as unlike Prussians as they could be, but their unfortunate little peninsula was a sprout off Prussia which radio-cobalt dust couldn't tell from the real thing. The three-bladed signs were most specific.

With a long way to walk along the rubble-littered highways, he stripped off the impregnated coveralls and boots. He had long since shed the noisy counter and the uncomfortable gloves and mask.

The silence was eerie as he limped into Copenhagen at noon. He didn't know whether the radiation was getting to him or whether he was tired and hungry and no more. As though thinking of a stranger, he liked what he was doing.

*I'll be my own audience, he thought. God knows I learned there isn't any other, not any more. You have to know when to stop. Rodin, the dirty old, wonderful old man, knew that. He taught us not to slick it and polish it and smooth it until it looked like liquid instead of bronze and stone. Van Gogh was crazy as a loon, but he knew when to stop and varnish it, and he didn't care if the paint looked like paint instead of looking like sunset clouds or moonbeams. Up in Hartford, Browne and Sharpe stop when they've got a turret lathe; they don't put caryatids on it. I'll stop while my life is a life, before it becomes a thing with distracting embellishments such as a wife who will come to despise me, a succession of gradually less worthwhile pieces that nobody will look at.*

*Blame nobody*, he told himself, lightheadedly.

And then it was in front of him, terminating a vista of weeds and bomb rubble—Milles' Orpheus Fountain.

It took a man, he thought. Esthetikon circuits couldn't do it. There was a gross mixture of styles, a calculated flaw that the esthetikon couldn't be set to make. Orpheus and the souls were classic or later; the three-headed dog was archaic. That was to tell you about the antiquity and invincibility of Hell, and that Cerberus knows Orpheus will never go back into life with his bride.

There was the heroic, tragic central figure that looked mighty enough to battle with the gods, but battle wasn't any good against the grinning, knowing, hateful three-headed dog it stood on. You don't battle the pavement where you walk or the floor of the house you're in; you can't. So Orpheus, his face a mask of controlled and suffering fury crashes a great chord from his lyre that moved trees and stones. Around him the naked souls in Hell start at the chord, each in its own way: the young lovers down in death; the mother down in death; the musician, deaf and down in death, straining to hear.

Halvorsen, walking uncertainly toward the fountain, felt something break inside him, and a heaviness in his lungs. As he pitched forward among the weeds, he thought he heard the chord from the lyre and didn't care that the three-headed dog was grinning its knowing, hateful grin down at him.

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## VI

When Halvorsen awoke, he supposed he was in Hell. There were the young lovers, arms about each other's waists, solemnly looking down at him, and the mother was placidly smoothing his brow. He stirred and felt his left arm fall heavily.

"Ah," said the mother, "you mustn't." He felt her pick up his limp arm and lay it across his chest. "Your poor finger!" she sighed. "Can you talk? What happened to it?"

He could talk, weakly. "Labuerre and I," he said. "We were moving a big block of marble with the crane—somehow the finger got under it. I didn't notice until it was too late to shift my grip without the marble slipping and smashing on the floor."

The boy said in a solemn, adolescent croak: "You mean you saved the marble and lost your finger?"

"Marble," he muttered. "It's so hard to get. Labuerre was so old."

The young lovers exchanged a glance and he slept again. He was half awake when the musician seized first one of his hands and then the other, jabbing them with stubby fingers and bending his lion's head close to peer at the horny callouses left by chisel and mallet.

"*Ja, ja,*" the musician kept saying.

Hell goes on forever, so for an eternity he jolted and jarred, and for an eternity he heard bickering voices: "Why he was so foolish, then?" "A idiot he could be." "Hush, let him rest." "The children told the story." "There only one Labuerre was." "Easy with the tubing." "Let him rest."

Daylight dazzled his eyes.

"Why you were so foolish?" demanded a harsh voice. "The sister says I can talk to you now, so that is what I first want to know."

He looked at the face of—not the musician; that had been delirium. But it was a tough old face.

"*Ja,* I am mean-looking; that is settled. What did you think you were doing without coveralls and way over your exposure time?"

"I wanted to die," said Halvorsen. There were tubes sticking in his arms.

The crag-faced old man let out a contemptuous bellow.

"Sister!" he shouted. "Pull the plasma tubes out before more we waste. He says he wants to die."

"Hush," said the nurse. She laid her hand on his brow again.

"Don't bother with him, Sister," the old man jeered. "He is a shrinking little flower, too delicate for the great, rough world. He has done nothing, he can do nothing, so he decides to make of himself a nuisance by dying."

"You lie," said Halvorsen. "I worked. Good God, how I worked! Nobody wanted my work. They wanted me, to wear in their buttonholes like a flower. They were getting to me. Another year and I wouldn't have been an artist any more."

"*Ja?*" asked the old man. "Tell me about it."

Halvorsen told him, sometimes weeping with self-pity and weakness, sometimes cursing the old man for not letting him die, sometimes quietly describing this statuette or that portrait head, or raving wildly against the mad folly of the world.

At the last he told the old man about Lucy.

"You cannot have everything, you know," said his listener.

"I can have her," answered the artist harshly. "You wouldn't let me die, so I won't die. I'll go back and I'll take her away from that fat-head Malone that she ought to marry. I'll give her a couple of happy years working herself to skin and bones for me before she begins to hate it—before I begin to hate it."

“You can’t go back,” said the old man. “I’m Cerberus. You understand that? The girl is nothing. The society you come from is nothing. We have a place here.... Sister, can he sit up?”

The woman smiled and cranked his bed. Halvorsen saw through a picture window that he was in a mountain-rimmed valley that was very green and dotted with herds and unpainted houses.

“Such a place there had to be,” said the old man. “In the whole geography of Europe, there had to be a Soltau Valley with winds and terrain just right to deflect the dust.”

“Nobody knows?” whispered the artist.

“We prefer it that way. It’s impossible to get some things, but you would be surprised how little difference it makes to the young people. They are great travelers, the young people, in their sweaty coveralls with radiation meters. They think when they see the ruined cities that the people who lived in them must have been mad. It was a little travel party like that which found you. The boy was impressed by something you said, and I saw some interesting things in your hands. There isn’t much rock around here; we have fine deep topsoil. But the boys could get you stone.

“There should be a statue of the Mayor for one thing, before I die. And from the Rathaus the wooden angels have mostly broken off. Soltau Valley used to be proud of them—could you make good copies? And of course cameras are useless and the best drawings we can do look funny. Could you teach the youngsters at least to draw so faces look like faces and not behinds? And like you were saying about you and Labuerre, maybe one younger there will be so crazy that he will want to learn it all, so Soltau will always have an artist and sculptor for the necessary work. And you will find a Lucy or somebody better. I think better.”

“Hush,” warned the nurse. “You’re exciting the patient.”

“It’s all right,” said Halvorsen eagerly. “Thanks, but it’s really all right.”

## The Luckiest Man in Denv

May's man Reuben, of the eighty-third level, Atomist, knew there was something wrong when the binoculars flashed and then went opaque. Inwardly he cursed, hoping that he had not committed himself to anything. Outwardly he was unperturbed. He handed the binoculars back to Rudolph's man Almon, of the eighty-ninth level, Maintainer, with a smile.

"They aren't very good," he said.

Almon put them to his own eyes, glanced over the parapet and swore mildly. "Blacker than the heart of a crazy Angel, eh? Never mind; here's another pair."

This pair was unremarkable. Through it, Reuben studied the thousand setbacks and penthouses, of Denv that ranged themselves below. He was too worried to enjoy his first sight of the vista from the eighty-ninth level, but he let out a murmur of appreciation. Now to get away from this suddenly sinister fellow and try to puzzle it out.

"Could we—?" he asked cryptically, with a little upward jerk of his chin.

"It's better not to," Almon said hastily, taking the glasses from his hands. "What if somebody with stars happened to see, you know? How'd *you* like it if you saw some impudent fellow peering up at you?"

"He wouldn't dare!" said Reuben, pretending to be stupid and indignant, and joined a moment later in Almon's sympathetic laughter.

"Never mind," said Almon. "We are young. Some day, who knows? Perhaps we shall look from the ninety-fifth level, or the hundredth."

Though Reuben knew that the Maintainer was no friend of his, the generous words sent blood hammering through his veins; ambition for a moment.

He pulled a long face and told Almon: "Let us hope so. Thank you for being my host. Now I must return to my quarters."

He left the windy parapet for the serene luxury of an eighty-ninth-level corridor and descended slow moving stairs through gradually less luxurious levels to his own Spartan floor. Selene was waiting, smiling, as he stepped off the stairs.

She was decked out nicely—too nicely. She wore a steely hued corselet and a touch of scent; her hair was dressed long. The combination appealed to him, and instantly he was on his guard. Why had she gone to the trouble of learning his tastes? What was she up to? After all, she was Griffin's woman.

"Coming *down*?" she asked, awed. "Where have you been?"

"The eighty-ninth, as a guest of that fellow Almon. The vista is immense."

"I've never been...." she murmured, and then said decisively: "You belong up there. And higher. Griffin laughs at me, but he's a fool. Last night in chamber we got to talking about you, I don't know how, and he finally became quite angry and said he didn't want to hear another word." She smiled wickedly. "I was revenged, though."

Blank-faced, he said: “You must be a good hand at revenge, Selene, and at stirring up the need for it.”

The slight hardening of her smile meant that he had scored and he hurried by with a rather formal salutation.

Burn him for an Angelo, but she was easy enough to take! The contrast of the metallic garment with her soft, white skin was disturbing, and her long hair suggested things. It was hard to think of her as scheming something or other; scheming Selene was displaced in his mind by Selene in chamber.

But what was she up to? Had she perhaps heard that he was to be elevated? Was Griffin going to be swooped on by the Maintainers? Was he to kill off Griffin so she could leech onto some rising third party? Was she perhaps merely giving her man a touch of the lash?

He wished gloomily that the binoculars-problem and the Selene-problem had not come together. That trickster Almon had spoken of youth as though it were something for congratulation; he hated being young and stupid and unable to puzzle out the faulty binoculars and the warmth of Griffin’s woman.

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The attack alarm roared through the Spartan corridor. He ducked through the nearest door into a vacant bedroom and under the heavy steel table. Somebody else floundered under the table a moment later, and a third person tried to join them.

The firstcomer roared: “Get out and find your own shelter! I don’t propose to be crowded out by you or to crowd you out either and see your ugly blood and brains if there’s a hit. Go, now!”

“Forgive me, sir! At once, sir!” the latecomer wailed; and scrambled away as the alarm continued to roar.

Reuben gasped at the “sirs” and looked at his neighbor. It was May! Trapped, no doubt, on an inspection tour of the level.

“Sir,” he said respectfully, “if you wish to be alone, I can find another room.”

“You may stay with me for company. Are you one of mine?” There was power in the general’s voice and on his craggy face.

“Yes, sir. May’s man Reuben, of the eighty-third level, Atomist.”

May surveyed him, and Reuben noted that there were pouches of skin depending from cheekbones and the jaw line—dead-looking, coarse-pored skin.

“You’re a well-made boy, Reuben. Do you have women?”

“Yes, sir,” said Reuben hastily. “One after another—I *always* have women. I’m making up at this time to a charming thing called Selene. Well-rounded, yet firm, soft but supple, with long red hair and long white legs—”

“Spare me the details,” muttered the general. “It takes all kinds. An Atomist, you said. That has a future, to be sure. I myself was a Controller long ago. The calling seems to have gone out of fashion—”

Abruptly the alarm stopped. The silence was hard to bear.

May swallowed and went on: “—for some reason or other. Why don’t youngsters elect for Controller any more? Why didn’t you, for instance?”

Reuben wished he could be saved by a direct hit. The binoculars, Selene, the raid, and now he was supposed to make intelligent conversation with a general.

“I really don’t know, sir,” he said miserably. “At the time there seemed to be very little difference—Controller, Atomist, Missiler, Maintainer. We have a saying, ‘The buttons are different,’ which usually ends any conversation on the subject.”

“Indeed?” asked May distractedly. His face was thinly filmed with sweat. “Do you suppose Ellay intends to clobber us this time?” he asked almost hoarsely. “It’s been some weeks since they made a maximum effort, hasn’t it?”

“Four,” said Reuben. “I remember because one of my best Servers was killed by a falling corridor roof—the only fatality and it had to happen to my team!”

He laughed nervously and realized that he was talking like a fool, but May seemed not to notice.

Far below them, there was a series of screaming whistles as the interceptors were loosed to begin their intricate, double basketwork wall of defense in a towering cylinder about Denv.

“Go on, Reuben,” said May. “That was most interesting.” His eyes were searching the underside of the steel table.

Reuben averted his own eyes from the frightened face, feeling some awe drain out of him. Under a table with a general! It didn’t seem so strange now.

“Perhaps, sir, you can tell me what a puzzling thing, that happened this afternoon, means. A fellow—Rudolph’s man Almon, of the eighty-ninth level—gave me a pair of binoculars that flashed in my eyes and then went opaque. Has your wide experience—”

May laughed hoarsely and said in a shaky voice: “That old trick! He was photographing your retinas for the blood-vessel pattern. One of Rudolph’s men, eh? I’m glad you spoke to me; I’m old enough to spot a revival like that. Perhaps my good friend Rudolph plans—”

There was a thudding volley in the air and then a faint jar. One had got through, exploding, from the feel of it, far down at the foot of Denv.

The alarm roared again, in bursts that meant all clear; only one flight of missiles and that disposed of.

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The Atomist and the general climbed out from under the table; May’s secretary popped through the door. The general waved him out again and leaned heavily on the table, his arms quivering. Reuben hastily brought a chair.

“A glass of water,” said May.

The Atomist brought it. He saw the general wash down what looked like a triple dose of XXX—green capsules which it was better to leave alone.

May said after a moment: “That’s better. And don’t look so shocked, youngster; you don’t know the strain we’re under. It’s only a temporary measure which I shall discontinue as soon as things ease up a bit. I was saying that perhaps my good friend Rudolph plans to substitute one of his men for one of mine. Tell me, how long has this fellow Almon been a friend of yours?”

“He struck up an acquaintance with me only last week. I should have realized—”

“You certainly should have. One week. Time enough and more. By now you’ve been photographed, your fingerprints taken, your voice recorded and your gait studied without your knowledge. Only the retinascope is difficult, but one must risk it for a real double. Have you killed your man, Reuben?”

He nodded; It had been a silly brawl two years ago over precedence at the refectory; he disliked being reminded of it.

“Good,” said May grimly. “The way these things are done, your double kills you in a secluded spot, disposes of your body and takes over your role. We shall reverse it. You will kill the double and take over *his* role.”

The powerful, methodical voice ticked off possibilities and contingencies, measures, and countermeasures. Reuben absorbed them and felt his awe return. Perhaps May had not really been frightened under the table; perhaps it had been he reading his own terror in the general’s face. May was actually talking to him of backgrounds and policies. “Up from the eighty-third level!” he swore to himself as the great names were uttered.

“My good friend Rudolph, of course, wants the five stars. You would not know this, but the man who wears the stars is now eighty years old and failing fast. I consider myself a likely candidate to replace him. So, evidently, must Rudolph. No doubt he plans to have your double perpetrate some horrible blunder on the eve of the election, and the discredit would reflect on me. Now what you and I must do—”

You and I—May’s man Reuben and May—up from the eighty-third! Up from the bare corridors and cheerless bedrooms to marble halls and vaulted chambers! From the clatter of the crowded refectory to small and glowing restaurants where you had your own table and servant and where music came softly from the walls! Up from the scramble to win this woman or that, by wit or charm or the poor bribes you could afford, to the eminence from which you could calmly command your pick of the beauty of Denv! From the moiling intrigue of tripping your fellow Atomist and guarding against him tripping you to the heroic thrust and parry of generals!

Up from the eighty-third!

Then May dismissed him with a speech whose implications were deliriously exciting. “I need an able man and a young one, Reuben. Perhaps I’ve waited too long looking for him. If you do well in this touchy business, I’ll consider you very seriously for an important task I have in mind.”

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Late that night, Selene came to his bedroom.

“I know you don’t like me,” she said pettishly, “but Griffin’s such a fool and I wanted somebody to talk to. Do you mind? What was it like up there today? Did you see carpets? I wish I had a carpet.”

He tried to think about carpets and not the exciting contrast of metallic cloth and flesh.

“I saw one through an open door,” he remembered. “It looked odd, but I suppose a person gets used to them. Perhaps I didn’t see a very good one. Aren’t the good ones very thick?”

“Yes,” she said. “Your feet sink into them. I wish I had a *good* carpet and four chairs and a small table as high as my knees to put things on and as many pillows as I wanted. Griffin’s such a fool. Do you think I’ll ever get those things? I’ve never caught the eye of a general. Am I pretty enough to get one, do you think?”

He said uneasily: “Of course you’re a pretty thing, Selene. But carpets and chairs and pillows—” It made him uncomfortable, like the thought of peering up through binoculars from a parapet.

“I want them,” she said unhappily. “I like you very much, but I want so many things and soon I’ll be too old even for the eighty-third level, before I’ve been up higher, and I’ll spend the rest of my life tending babies or cooking in the creche or the refectory.”

She stopped abruptly, pulled herself together and gave him a smile that was somehow ghastly in the half-light.

“You bungler,” he said, and she instantly looked at the door with the smile frozen on her face. Reuben took a pistol from under his pillow and demanded, “When do you expect him?”

“What do you mean?” she asked shrilly. “Who are you talking about?”

“My double. Don’t be a fool, Selene. May and I—” he savored it—“May and I know all about it. He warned me to beware of a diversion by a woman while the double slipped in and killed me. When do you expect him?”

“I really *do* like you,” Selene sobbed. “But Almon promised to take me up there and I *knew* when I was where they’d see me that I’d meet somebody really important. I really do like you, but soon I’ll be too old—”

“Selene, listen to me. Listen to me! You’ll get your chance. Nobody but you and me will know that the substitution didn’t succeed!”

“Then I’ll be spying for you on Almon, won’t I?” she asked in a choked voice. “All I wanted was a few nice things before I got too old. All right, I was supposed to be in your arms at 2350 hours.”

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It was 2349. Reuben sprang from bed and stood by the door, his pistol silenced and ready. At 2350 a naked man slipped swiftly into the room, heading for the bed as he raised a ten-centimeter poignard. He stopped in dismay when he realized that the bed was empty.

Reuben killed him with a bullet through the throat.

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“But he doesn’t look a bit like me,” he said in bewilderment, closely examining the face. “Just in a general way.”

Selene said dully: “Almon told me people always say that when they see their doubles. It’s funny, isn’t it? He looks just like you, really.”

“How was my body to be disposed of?”

She produced a small flat box. “A shadow suit. You were to be left here and somebody would come tomorrow.”

“We won’t disappoint him.” Reuben pulled the web of the shadow suit over his double and turned on the power. In the half-lit room, it was a perfect disappearance;

by daylight it would be less perfect. “They’ll ask why the body was shot instead of knifed. Tell them you shot me with the gun from under the pillow. Just say I heard the double come in and you were afraid there might have been a struggle.”

She listlessly asked: “How do you know I won’t betray you?”

“You won’t, Selene.” His voice bit. “You’re *broken*.”

She nodded vaguely, started to say something and then went out without saying it.

Reuben luxuriously stretched in his narrow bed. Later, his beds would be wider and softer, he thought. He drifted into sleep on a half-formed thought that some day he might vote with other generals on the man to wear the five stars—or even wear them himself, Master of Denv.

He slept healthily through the morning alarm and arrived late at his regular twentieth-level station. He saw his superior, May’s man Oscar of the eighty-fifth level, Atomist, ostentatiously take his name. Let him!

Oscar assembled his crew for a grim announcement: “We are going to even the score, and perhaps a little better, with Ellay. At sunset there will be three flights of missiles from Deck One.”

There was a joyous murmur and Reuben trotted off on his task.

All forenoon he was occupied with drawing plutonium slugs from hyper-suspicious storekeepers in the great rock-quarried vaults, and seeing them through countless audits and assays all the way to Weapons Assembly. Oscar supervised the scores there who assembled the curved slugs and the explosive lenses into sixty-kilogram warheads.

In mid-afternoon there was an incident. Reuben saw Oscar step aside for a moment to speak to a Maintainer whose guard fell on one of the Assembly Servers, and dragged him away as he pleaded innocence. He had been detected in sabotage. When the warheads were in and the Missilers seated, waiting at their boards, the two Atomists rode up to the eighty-third’s refectory.

The news of a near-maximum effort was in the air; it was electric. Reuben heard on all sides in tones of self-congratulation: “We’ll clobber them tonight!”

“That Server you caught,” he said to Oscar. “What was he up to?”

His commander stared. “Are you trying to learn my job? Don’t try it, I warn you. If my black marks against you aren’t enough, I could always arrange for some fissionable material in your custody to go astray.”

“No, no! I was just wondering why people do something like that.”

Oscar sniffed doubtfully. “He’s probably insane, like all the Angelos. I’ve heard the climate does it to them. You’re not a Maintainer or a Controller. Why worry about it?”

“They’ll brainburn him, I suppose?”

“I suppose. *Listen!*”

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Deck One was firing. One, two, three, four, five, six. One, two, three, four, five, six. One, two, three, four, five, six.

People turned to one another and shook hands, laughed and slapped shoulders heartily. Eighteen missiles were racing through the stratosphere, soon to tumble on Ellay. With any luck, one or two would slip through the first wall of interceptors and blast close enough to smash windows and topple walls in the crazy city by the ocean. It would serve the lunatics right.

Five minutes later an exultant voice filled most of Denv.

“Recon missile report,” it said. “Eighteen launched, eighteen perfect trajectories. Fifteen shot down by Ellay first-line interceptors, three shot down by Ellay second-line interceptors. Extensive blast damage observed in Griffith Park area of Ellay!”

There were cheers.

And eight Full Maintainers marched into the refectory silently, and marched out with Reuben.

He knew better than to struggle or ask futile questions. Any question you asked of a Maintainer was futile. But he goggled when they marched him onto an upward-bound stairway.

They rode past the eighty-ninth level and Reuben lost count, seeing only the marvels of the upper reaches of Denv. He saw carpets that ran the entire length of corridors, and intricate fountains, and mosaic walls, stained-glass windows, more wonders than he could recognize, things for which he had no name.

He was marched at last into a wood-paneled room with a great polished desk and a map behind it. He saw May, and another man who must have been a general—Rudolph?—but sitting at the desk was a frail old man who wore a circlet of stars on each khaki shoulder.

The old man said to Reuben: “You are an Ellay spy and saboteur.”

Reuben looked at May. Did one speak directly to the man who wore the stars, even in reply to such an accusation?

“Answer him, Reuben,” May said kindly.

“I am May’s man Reuben, of the eighty-third level, an Atomist,” he said.

“Explain,” said the other general heavily, “if you can, why all eighteen of the warheads you procured today failed to fire.”

“But they did!” gasped Reuben. “The Recon missile report said there was blast damage from the three that got through and it didn’t say anything about the others failing to fire.”

The other general suddenly looked sick and May looked even kindlier. The man who wore the stars turned inquiringly to the chief of the Maintainers, who nodded and said: “That was the Recon missile report, sir.”

The general snapped: “What I said was that he would *attempt* to sabotage the attack. Evidently he failed. I also said he is a faulty double, somehow slipped with great ease into my good friend May’s organization. You will find that his left thumb print is a clumsy forgery of the real Reuben’s thumb print and that his hair has been artificially darkened.”

The old man nodded at the chief of the Maintainers, who said: “We have his card, sir.”

Reuben abruptly found himself being fingerprinted and deprived of some hair.

“The f.p.s check, sir,” one Maintainer said. “He’s Reuben.”

“Hair’s natural, sir,” said another.

The general began a rear-guard action: “My information about his hair seems to have been inaccurate. But the fingerprint means only that Ellay spies substituted his prints for Reuben’s prints in the files—”

“Enough, sir,” said the old man with the stars. “Dismissed. All of you. Rudolph, I am surprised. All of you, go.”

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Reuben found himself in a vast apartment with May, who was bubbling and chuckling uncontrollably until he popped three of the green capsules into his mouth hurriedly.

“This means the eclipse for years of my good friend Rudolph,” he crowed. “His game was to have your double sabotage the attack warheads and so make it appear that my organization is rotten with spies. The double must have been under post-hypnotic, primed to admit everything. Rudolph was so sure of himself that he made his accusations before the attack, the fool!”

He fumbled out the green capsules again.

“Sir,” said Reuben, alarmed.

“Only temporary,” May muttered, and swallowed a fourth. “But you’re right. You leave them alone. There are big things to be done in your time, not in mine. I told you I needed a young man who could claw his way to the top. Rudolph’s a fool. He doesn’t need the capsules because he doesn’t ask questions. Funny, I thought a coup like the double affair would hit me hard, but I don’t feel a thing. It’s not like the old days. I used to plan and plan, and when the trap went *snap* it was better than this stuff. But now I don’t feel a thing.”

He leaned forward from his chair; the pupils of his eyes were black bullets.

“Do you want to *work*?” he demanded. “Do you want your world stood on its head and your brains to crack and do the only worthwhile job there is to do? Answer me!”

“Sir, I am a loyal May’s man. I want to obey your orders and use my ability to the full.”

“Good enough,” said the general. “You’ve got brains, you’ve got push. I’ll do the spade work. I won’t last long enough to push it through. You’ll have to follow. Ever been outside of Denv?”

Reuben stiffened.

“I’m not accusing you of being a spy. It’s really all right to go outside of Denv. I’ve been outside. There isn’t much to see at first—a lot of ground pocked and torn up by shorts and overs from Ellay and us. Farther out, especially east, it’s different. Grass, trees, flowers. Places where you could grow food.

“When I went outside, it troubled me. It made me ask questions. I wanted to know how we started. Yes—started. *It wasn’t always like this*. Somebody built Denv. Am I getting the idea across to you? *It wasn’t always like this!*”

“Somebody set up the reactors to breed uranium and make plutonium. Somebody tooled us up for the missiles. Somebody wired the boards to control them. Somebody started the hydroponics tanks.

“I’ve dug through the archives. Maybe I found something. I saw mountains of strength reports, ration reports, supply reports, and yet I never got back to the beginning. I found a piece of paper and maybe I understood it and maybe I didn’t. It was about the water of the Colorado River and who should get how much of it. How can you divide water in a river? But it could have been the start of Denv, Ellay, and the missile attacks.”

The general shook his head, puzzled, and went on: “I don’t see clearly what’s ahead. I want to make peace between Denv and Ellay, but I don’t know how to start or what it will be like. I think it must mean not firing, not even making any more weapons. Maybe it means that some of us, or a lot of us, will go out of Denv and live a different kind of life. That’s why I’ve clawed my way up. That’s why I need a young man who can claw with the best of them. Tell me what you think.”

“I think,” said Reuben measuredly, “it’s magnificent—the salvation of Denv. I’ll back you to my dying breath if you’ll let me.”

May smiled tiredly and leaned back in the chair as Reuben tip-toed out.

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What luck, Reuben thought—what unbelievable luck to be at a fulcrum of history like this!

He searched the level for Rudolph’s apartment and gained admission.

To the general, he said: “Sir, I have to report that your friend May is insane. He has just been raving to me, advocating the destruction of civilization as we know it, and urging me to follow in his footsteps. I pretended to agree—since I can be of greater service to you if I’m in May’s confidence.”

“So?” said Rudolph thoughtfully. “Tell me about the double. How did that go wrong?”

“The bunglers were Selene and Almon. Selene because she alarmed me instead of distracting me. Almon because he failed to recognize her incompetence.”

“They shall be brainburned. That leaves an eighty-ninth-level vacancy in my organization, doesn’t it?”

“You’re very kind, sir, but I think I should remain a May’s man—outwardly. If I earn any rewards, I can wait for them. I presume that May will be elected to wear the five stars. He won’t live more than two years after that, at the rate he is taking drugs.”

“We can shorten it,” grinned Rudolph. “I have pharmacists who can see that his drugs are more than normal strength.”

“That would be excellent, sir. When he is too enfeebled to discharge his duties, there may be an attempt to rake up the affair of the double to discredit you. I could then testify that I was your man all along and that May coerced me.”

They put their heads together, the two saviors of civilization as they knew it, and conspired ingeniously long into the endless night.

THE END

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**I'm Julie, the woman who runs [Global Grey](#) - the website where this ebook was published. These are my own formatted editions, and I hope you enjoyed reading this particular one.**

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