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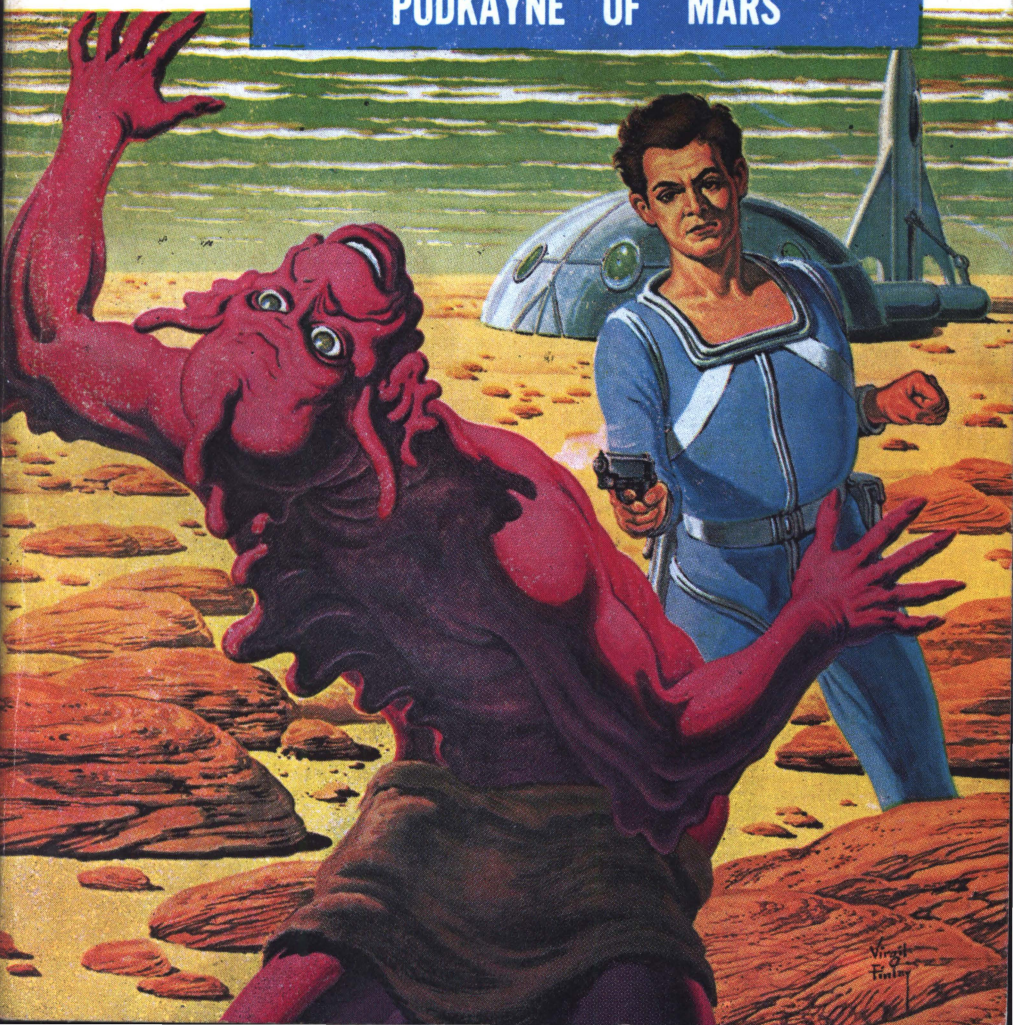

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worlds of if science fiction

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MOST PERSONAL

BY THEODORE STURGEON

THEODORE Sturgeon, your Feature Editor, deposes and says:

I seize this space for my own and personal asons, writing before the events at the Pick-Congress in Chicago on Labor Day, where the World Science Fiction Convention has invited me to be Guest of Honor. Certain of these sentiments will be expressed in my speech, but it is my great desire to unload them now, suffused with anticipation.

Now I know that the most acceptable public posture is a politician's mixture of humility with a confident, "well, of course." There is something mildly obscene about someone who publicly gloats (unless he's an Asimov, and who can possibly be an Asimov?)... and as for humility, it's usually phoney and necessary.

When Earl Kemp called me and told me his Committee had chosen me, I said, "I have waited twenty-three years for this phone call." I repeat that here. I am grateful and I am proud, and I don't think I am altogether humble.

The Good Book says "Love thy neighbor as thyself." I believe that most people follow this precept. I believe further that most people don't like themselves very much—which accounts for the rather frightening lack of love in the world.

Low self-esteem takes a frightening toll. A guy who, at base, thinks little of his personal worth, meets a girl who thinks quite as little of hers. In the springtime of their association, the sap runs strong and warm, and she sud-

denly tells him he is a good dancer. He, startled, responds with the statement that she has beautiful eyes. Something happens then, something which is the surrogate of love: it feels like it, tastes and sounds like it. On each other's compliments, they build a rosy pyramid of mutual esteem—and no one realizes that it is based on the fact that each of them has a low opinion of himself.

THIS kind of thing happens all the time, in many areas.

There is a reason for this epidemic. Moral teachings from many sources have long urged us on in the pursuit of guilt. If you are ordered to take a good look at yourself, it's defects you think of first. If your friend says to you, "Can I be frank?" you don't brace yourself for anything nice.

We have, therefore, very largely disqualified ourselves from the right, and even the ability, to make honest self-appraisals, and inventory the good. It pays to learn this knack. It helps at the times when all the world's agin you —you know the world is mistaken—you *know* it. And it helps, too, when all the world's on your side, when, for example, someone calls you up and asks you to be Guest of Honor at the World Science Fiction Convention.

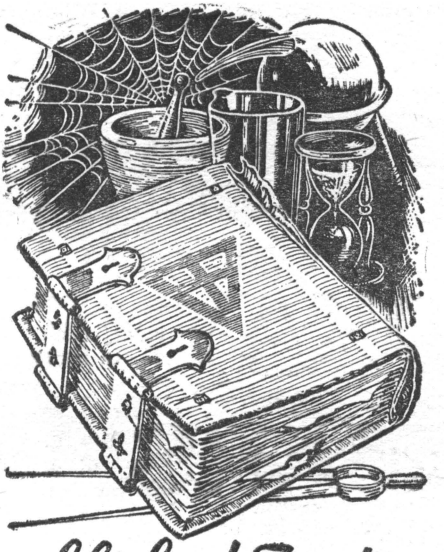
I know why world science fiction, in the person of Earl Kemp, called me up. It's because I have a great facility with words, an odd kind of detachment, and an unabashed way of putting them together. These things all put into one word make a thing called Talent. A better word for it is Gift.

Now there are some people who are six foot six and go around bragging about it all the time. There are few things more foolish. I would be foolish to brag about my gift. I was born with it; I didn't create it and I didn't earn it. It's this gift which is being honored at the Convention, not me, and I honor it too. If this be humility, make the most of it.

Before the Convention, I have one more thing to say; and it has to do with science fiction.

We're still trying to define sf, and I guess we always will. The reason that it's so hard, in these specializing times, to say what sf is about is that it isn't about anything—it's about *everything*. It begins at the most remote horizons of any other form of expression except, possibly, poetry. As such, it is big enough for a talent—a gift—like mine. Sf has been the only place for it, and what I'm most grateful for is that sf coexisted with its birth and growth.

The Gift knows where it wants to be. It is at home there. **END**



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BY ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

ILLUSTRATED BY VIRGIL FINLAY

The first Podkayne was a Martian and a saint. The second Podkayne was not — precisely — either one!

PODKAYNE OF MARS

ALL my life I've wanted to go to Earth. Not to live, of course—just to see it. As everybody knows, Terra is a wonderful place to visit but not to live. Not truly suited to human habitation.

Personally, I'm not convinced that the human race originated on Earth. I mean to say, how much reliance should you place on the evidence of a few pounds of old bones plus the opinions of anthropologists who usually contradict each other anyhow when what you are being asked to swallow so obviously flies in the face of all common sense?

Think it through. The surface acceleration of Terra is clearly too great for the human structure; it is known to result in flat feet and hernias and heart trouble. The incident solar radiation on Terra will knock down dead an unprotected human in an amazingly short time—and do you know of any other organism which has to be artificially protected from what is alleged to be its own natural environment in order to stay alive? As to Terran ecology—

Never mind. We humans just *couldn't* have originated on Earth. Nor (I admit) on Mars, for that matter—although Mars is certainly as near ideal as you can find in this planetary system today. Possibly the Missing Planet

was our first home—even though I think of Mars as "home" and will always want to return to it no matter how far I travel in later years... and I intend to travel a long, *long* way.

But I do want to visit Earth as a starter, not only to see how in the world eight billion people manage to live almost sitting in each others' laps (less than half of the land area of Terra is even marginally habitable) but mostly to see oceans...from a safe distance. Oceans are not only fantastically unlikely but to me the very thought of them is terrifying. All that unimaginable amount of water, unconfined. And so deep that if you fell into it, it would be over your head, incredible!

But now we are going there!

Perhaps I should introduce us. The Fries Family, I mean. Myself: Podkayne Fries—"Poddy" to my friends, and

we might as well start off being friendly. Adolescent female; I'm eight plus a few months, at a point in my development described by my Uncle Tom as "frying size and just short of husband high"—a fair enough description since a female citizen of Mars may contract plenary marriage without guardian's waiver on her ninth birthday, and I stand 157 centimeters tall in my bare feet and mass 49 kilograms. "Five feet two and eyes of blue" my Daddy calls me, but he is a historian and romantic. But I am not romantic and would not consider even a limited marriage on my ninth birthday; I have other plans.

Not that I am opposed to marriage in due time, nor do I expect to have any trouble snagging the male of my choice. In these memoirs I shall be frank rather than modest because they will not be published until I am old and famous, and I will certainly revise them before then. In the meantime I am taking the precaution of writing Anglish in Martian Oldscript—a combination which I'm sure Daddy could puzzle out, only he wouldn't do such a thing unless I invited him to. Daddy is a dear and does not s n o o p e r v i z e me. My brother Clark would pry, but he regards Anglish as a dead language and would never b o t h e r his head with Oldscript anyhow.

PERHAPS you have seen a book titled: *Eleven Years Old: the Pre-Adolescent Adjustment Crisis in the Male.* I read it, hoping that it would help me to cope with my brother. Clark is just six, but the "Eleven Years" referred to in that title are Terran years because it was written on Earth. If you will apply the c o n v e r s i o n factor of 1.8808 to attain real years, you will see that my brother is exactly eleven of those undersized Earth years old.

That book did not help me much. It talks about "cushioning the transition into the social group"—but there is no present indication that Clark ever intends to join the human race. He is more likely to devise a way to blow up the universe just to hear the bang. Since I am responsible for him much of the time and since he has an I.Q. of 160 while mine is only 145, you can readily see that I need all the advantage that greater age and maturity can give me. At present my standing rule with him is: Keep your guard up and *never* offer hostages.

Back to me. I'm colonial mongrel in ancestry, but the Swedish part is dominant in my looks, with Polynesian and Asiatic fractions adding no more than a not-unpleasing

exotic flavor. My legs are long for my height, my waist is forty-eight centimeters and my chest is ninety—not all of which is rib cage, I assure you, even though we old colonial families all run to hypertrophied lung development; some of it is burgeoning secondary sex characteristic. Besides that, my hair is pale blonde and wavy and I'm pretty. Not beautiful. Praxiteles would not have given me a second look. But real beauty is likely to scare a man off, or else make him quite unmanageable, whereas prettiness, properly handled, is an asset.

Up till a couple of years ago I used to regret not being male (in view of my ambitions), but I at last realized how silly I was being. One might as well wish for wings. As Mother says: "One works with available materials"... and I found that the materials available were adequate. In fact I found that I *like* being female. My hormone balance is okay and I'm quite well adjusted to the world, and vice versa. I'm smart enough not unnecessarily to show that I am smart; I've got a long upper lip and a short nose, and when I wrinkle my nose and look baffled, a man is usually only too glad to help me, especially if he is about twice my age. There are more ways of computing a ballistic than by counting it on your fingers.

That's me: Poddy Fries, free citizen of Mars, female. Future pilot and someday commander of deep-space exploration parties. Watch for me in the news.

Mother is twice as good looking as I am and much taller than I ever will be; she looks like a Valkyrie about to gallop off into the sky. She holds a system-wide license as a Master Engineer, Heavy Construction, Surface or Free Fall, and is entitled to wear both the Hoover Medal with cluster and the Christania Order, Knight Commander, for bossing the rebuilding of Deimos and Phobos. But she's more than just the traditional hairy engineer. She has a social presence which she can switch from warmly charming to frostily intimidating at will, she holds honorary degrees galore, and she publishes popular little gems such as *Design Criteria with Respect to the Effects of Radiation on the Bonding of Pressure-Loaded Sandwich Structures.*

IT is because Mother is often away from home for professional reasons that I am, from time to time, the reluctant custodian of my younger brother. Still, I suppose it is good practice, for how can I ever expect to command my own ship if I can't

tame a six-year-old savage? Mother says that a boss who is forced to part a man's hair with a wrench has failed at some point, so I try to control our junior nihilist without resorting to force. Besides, using force on Clark is very chancy. He masses as much as I do, and he fights dirty.

It was the job Mother did on Deimos that accounts for Clark and myself. Mother was determined to meet her construction dates; and Daddy, on leave from Ares U. with a Guggenheim grant, was even more frantically determined to save every scrap of the ancient Martian artifacts no matter how much it delayed construction. This threw them into such intimate and bitter conflict that they got married and for a while Mother had babies.

Daddy and Mother are Jack Spratt and his wife. He is interested in everything that has already happened, she is interested only in what is going to happen, especially if she herself is making it happen. Daddy's title is Van Loon Professor of Terrestrial History, but his real love is Martian history, especially if it happened fifty million years ago. But do not think that Daddy is a cloistered don given only to contemplation and study. When he was even younger than I am now, he lost an arm one chilly night in the attack on the Company Offices during the Revolution—and he can still shoot straight and fast with the hand he has left.

The rest of our family is Great Uncle Tom, Daddy's father's brother. Uncle Tom is a parasite. So he says. It is true that you don't see him work much, but he was an old man before I was born. He is a Revolutionary veteran, same as Daddy, and is a Past Grand Commander of the Martian Legion and a Senator-at-Large of the Republic, but he doesn't seem to spend much time on either sort of politics, Legion or public. Instead he hangs out at the Elks Club and plays pinochle with other relics of the past. Uncle Tom is really my closest relative, for he isn't as intense as my parents, nor as busy, and will always take time to talk with me. Furthermore he has a streak of Original Sin which makes him sympathetic to my problems. He says that I have such a streak, too, much wider than his. Concerning this I reserve my opinion.

That's our family and we are all going to Earth. Wups! I left out three—the infants. But they hardly count now and it is easy to forget them. When Daddy and Mother got married, the PEG board—Population, Ecology & Genetics—pegged them at five and

would have allowed them seven had they requested it, for, as you may have gathered, my parents are rather high-grade citizens even among planetary colonials all of whom are descended from, or are themselves, highly selected and drastically screened stock.

But Mother told the Board that five was all that she had time for. Then she had us as fast as possible, while fidgeting at a desk job in the Bureau of Planetary Engineering. Then she popped her babies into deep-freeze as fast as she had them, all but me, since I was the first. Clark spent two years at constant entropy, else he would be almost as old as I am. (Deep-freeze time doesn't count, of course, and his official birthday is the day he was decanted.) I remember how jealous I was. Mother was just back from conditioning Juno and it didn't seem fair to me that she would immediately start raising a baby.

Uncle Tom talked me out of that, with a lot of lap sitting, and I am no longer jealous of Clark—merely wary.

SO we've got Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon in the subbasement of the creche at Marsopolis, and we'll uncork and name at least one of them as soon as we get back from Earth. Mother is thinking of revivifying Gamma and Epsilon together and raising them as twins (they're girls) and then launch Delta, who is a boy, as soon as the girls are housebroken. Daddy says that is not fair, because Delta is entitled to be older than Epsilon by natural priority of birth date. Mother says that is mere worship of precedent and that she does wish Daddy would learn to leave his reverence for the past on the campus when he comes home in the evening.

Daddy says that Mother has no sentimental feelings—and Mother says she certainly hopes not, at least with any problem requiring rational analysis—and Daddy says let's be rational, then...twin older sisters would either break a boy's spirit or else spoil him rotten.

Mother says that is unscientific and unfounded. Daddy says that Mother merely wants to get two chores out of the way at once—whereupon Mother heartily agrees and demands to know why proved production engineering principles should not be applied to domestic economy?

Daddy doesn't answer this. Instead he remarks thoughtfully that he must admit that two little girls dressed just alike would be kind of cute... name them "Margret" and "Marguerite" and call them "Peg" and "Meg"—

Clark muttered to me,

"Why uncork them at all? Why not just sneak down some night and open the valves and call it an accident?"

I told him to go wash out his mouth with prussic acid and not let Daddy hear him talk that way. Daddy would have walloped him properly. Daddy, although a historian, is devoted to the latest, most progressive theories of child psychology and applies them by canalizing the cortex through pain association whenever he really wants to ensure that a lesson will not be forgotten. As he puts it so neatly: "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

I canalize most readily and learned very early indeed how to predict and avoid incidents which would result in Daddy's applying his theories and his hand. But in Clark's case it is almost necessary to use a club simply to gain his divided attention.

So it is now clearly evident that we are going to have twin baby sisters. But it is no headache of mine, I am happy to say, for Clark is quite enough maturing trauma for one girl's adolescence. By the time the twins are a current problem I expect to be long gone.

Interlude

HI, Pod.

So you think I can't read your worm tracks.

A lot you know about me! Poddy—oh, excuse me, "Captain" Podkayne Fries, I mean, the famous Space Explorer and Master of Men— Captain Poddy dear, you probably will never read this because it wouldn't occur to you that I not only would break your "code" but also write comments in the big, wide margins you leave.

Just for the record, Sister dear, I read Old Anglish just as readily as I do System Ortho. Anglish isn't all that hard. I learned it as soon as I found out that a lot of books I wanted to read had never been translated. But it doesn't pay to tell everything you know, or somebody comes along and tells you to stop doing whatever it is you are doing. Probably your older sister.

But imagine calling a straight substitution a "code"! Poddy, if you had actually been able to write Old Martian, it would have taken me quite a lot longer. But you can't. Shucks, even Dad can't write it without stewing over it and he probably knows more about Old Martian than anyone else in the Solar System.

But you won't crack my code—because I haven't any.

Try looking at this page under ultra-violet light—a sun lamp, for example.

II

OH, *Unspeakables!* Dirty ears! Hangnails! Snel-frockey! *Spit!*

WE AREN'T *GOING!*

At first I thought that my brother Clark had managed one of his more charlatanous machinations of malevolent legerdemain. But fortunately (the only fortunate thing about the whole miserable mess) I soon perceived that it was impossible for him to be in fact guilty no matter what devious subversions roil his id. Unless he has managed to invent and build in secret a time machine, which I misdoubt he *would* do if he could ...nor am I prepared to offer odds that he can't. Not since the time he rewired the delivery robot so that it would serve him midnight snacks and charge them to my code number without (so far as anyone could ever prove) disturbing the company's seal on the control box.

We'll never know how he did that one, because despite the fact that the company offered to Forgive All and pay a cash bonus to boot if only he would *please* tell them how he managed to beat their unbeatable seal—despite this, Clark just looked blank and would not talk. That left only circumstantial evidence. I.e., it was clearly evident to anyone who knew us both (Daddy and Mother, namely) that I would never order candy-stripe ice cream smothered in hollandaise sauce, or—no, I can't go on; I feel ill. Whereas Clark is widely known to eat anything which does not eat him first.

Even this clinching psychological evidence would never have convinced the company's adjuster had not their own records proved that two of these obscene feasts had taken place while I was a house guest of friends in Syrtis Major, a thousand kilometers away. Never mind. I simply want to warn all girls not to have a Mad Genius for a baby brother. Pick instead a stupid, stolid, slightly subnormal one who will sit quietly in front of the solly box, mouth agape at cowboy classics, and never wonder what makes the pretty images.

But I have wandered far from my tragic tale.

We aren't going to have twins.

We already have triplets.

Gamma, Delta and Epsilon, throughout all my former life mere topics of conversation, are now Grace, Duncan and Elspeth in all too solid flesh —unless Daddy again changes his mind before final registration; they've had three sets of names already. But what's in a name?—they are here, already in our home with a nursery room sealed on to shelter

them...three helpless unfinished humans about canal-worm pink in color and no features worthy of the name. Their limbs squirm aimlessly, their eyes don't track and a faint, queasy odor of sour milk permeates every room even when they are freshly bathed. Appalling sounds come from one end of each—in which they heterodyne each other—and even more appalling conditions prevail at the other ends. (I've yet to find all three of them dry at the same time.)

AND yet there is something decidedly engaging about the little things. Were it not that they are the proximate cause of my tragedy I could easily grow quite fond of them. I'm sure Duncan is beginning to recognize me already.

But, if I am beginning to be reconciled to their presence, Mother's state can only be described as atavistically maternal. Her professional journals pile up unread, she has that soft Madonna look in her eyes and she seems somehow both shorter and wider than she did a week ago.

First consequence: she won't even discuss going to Earth, with or without the triplets.

Second consequence: Daddy won't go if she won't go—he spoke quite sharply to Clark for even suggesting it.

Third consequence: since they won't go, we *can't* go. Clark and me, I mean. It is conceivably possible that I might have been permitted to travel alone (since Daddy agrees that I am now a "young adult" in maturity and judgment even though my ninth birthday lies still some months in the future), but the question is formal and without content since I am not considered quite old enough to accept full responsible control of my brother with both my parents some millions of kilometers away (nor am I sure that I would wish to, unless armed with something at least as convincing as a morning star) and Daddy is so dismayingly fair with us that he would not even discuss permitting one of us to go and not the other when both of us had been promised the trip.

Fairness is a priceless virtue in a parent—but just at the moment I could stand being spoiled and favored instead.

But the above is why I am sure that Clark does not have a time machine concealed in his wardrobe. This incredible contretemps, this idiot's dream of interlocking mishaps, is as much to his disadvantage as it is to mine.

How did it happen? Gather ye round. Little did we dream that, when the question of a

family trip to Earth was being planned in our household more than a month ago, this disaster was already complete and simply waiting the most hideous moment to unveil itself. The facts are these: the creche at Marsopolis has thousands of new-born babies marbelized at just short of absolute zero, waiting in perfect safety until their respective parents are ready for them. It is said, and I believe it, that a direct hit with a nuclear bomb would not hurt the consigned infants. A thousand years later a rescue squad could burrow down and find that automatic, self-maintaining machinery had not permitted the tank temperatures to vary a hundredth of a degree.

In consequence, we Marsmen (not "Martians," please!— Martians are a non-human race, now almost extinct)— Marsmen tend to marry early, have a full quota of babies quickly, then rear them later, as money and time permit. It reconciles that discrepancy, so increasingly and glaringly evident ever since the Terran Industrial Revolution, between the best biological age for having children and the best social age for supporting and rearing them.

A couple named Breeze did just that, some ten years ago. They married on her ninth birthday and just past his

tenth, while he was still a pilot cadet and she was attending Ares U. They applied for three babies, were pegged accordingly and got them all out of the way while they were both finishing school. Very sensible.

The years roll past, he as a pilot and later as master, she as a finance clerk in his ship and later as purser—a happy life. The spacelines like such an arrangement. Married couples spacing together mean a taut, happy ship.

Captain and Mrs. Breeze serve their ten-and-a-half (twenty Terran) years and put in for half-pay retirement, have it confirmed—and immediately radio the creche to uncork their babies, all three of them.

The radio order is received, relayed back for confirmation; the creche accepts it. Five weeks later the happy

couple pick up three babies, sign for them and start the second half of a perfect life.

So they thought—

But what they had deposited was two boys and a girl. What they got was two girls and a boy. Ours.

BELIEVE this you must—it took them the better part of a week to notice it. I will readily concede that the difference between a brand-new boy baby and a brand-new girl baby is almost irrelevant. Nevertheless there is a difference. Apparently it was a case of too much help. Between a mother, a mother-in-law, a temporary nurse and a helpful neighbor, and much running in and out, it seems unlikely that any one person bathed all three babies as one continuous operation that first week. Certainly Mrs. Breeze had not done so—until the day she did ...and noticed...and fainted —and dropped one of our babies in the bath water, where it would have drowned had not her scream fetched both her husband and the neighbor lady.

So we suddenly had month-old triplets.

The lawyer man from the creche was very vague about how it happened. He obviously did not want to discuss how their "foolproof" identification system could result in such a mix-up. So I don't know myself. But it seems logically certain that, for all their serial numbers, babies' footprints, record machines, et cetera, there is some point in the system where one clerk read aloud "Breeze" from the radioed order and another clerk checked a file, then punched "Fries" into a machine that did the rest.

But the fixer man did not say. He was simply achingly anxious to get Mother and Daddy to settle out of court—accept a check and sign a release under which they agreed not to publicize the error.

They settled for three years of Mother's established professional earning power while the little fixer man gulped and looked relieved.

But nobody offered to pay me for the mayhem that had been committed on my life, my hopes and my ambitions.

Clark did offer a suggestion that was almost a sensible one, for him. He proposed that we swap even with the Breezes. Let them keep the warm ones, we would keep the cold ones. Everybody happy—and we all go to Earth.

My brother is far too self-centered to realize it, but the Angel of Death brushed him with its wings at that point. Daddy is a truly noble soul... but he had had almost more than he could stand.

And so have I. I had expected today to be actually on my

way to Earth, my first space trip farther than Phobos—which was merely a school field trip, our "Class Honeymoon." A nothing thing.

Instead, guess what I'm doing.

Do you have any idea how many times a day *three* babies have to be changed?

III

HOLD it! Stop the machines! Wipe the tapes! Cancel all bulletins—

WE ARE GOING TO EARTH AFTER ALL!

Well, not *all* of us. Daddy and Mother aren't going, and of course the triplets are not. But— Never mind; I had better tell it in order.

Yesterday things just got to be Too Much. I had changed them in rotation, only to find as I got the third one dry and fresh that number one again needed service. I had been thinking sadly that just about that moment I should have been entering the dining saloon of S.S. *Wanderlust* to the strains of soft music. Perhaps on the arm of one of the officers...perhaps even on the arm of the Captain himself had I the chance to arrange an Accidental Happy Encounter, then make judicious use of my "puzzled kitten" expression.

And, as I reached that point in my melancholy day dream, it was then that I discovered that my chores had started all over again. I thought of the Augean Stables and suddenly it was just Too Much and my eyes got blurry with tears.

Mother came in at that point and I asked if I could *please* have a couple of hours of recess?

She answered, "Why, certainly, dear," and didn't even glance at me. I'm sure that she didn't notice that I was crying. She was already doing over, quite unnecessarily, the one that I had just done. She had been tied up on the phone, telling someone firmly that, while it was true as reported that she was not leaving Mars, nevertheless she would not now accept another commission even as a consultant. No doubt being away from the infants for all of ten minutes had made her uneasy, so she just had to get her hands on one of them.

Mother's behavior has been utterly unbelievable. Her cortex has tripped out of circuit and her primitive instincts are in full charge. She reminds me of a cat we had when I was a little girl— Miss Polka Dot Ma'am—and her first litter of kittens. Miss Pokie loved and trusted all of us, except about kittens. If we touched one of them, she was uneasy about it. If a kitten was taken out of her box and placed on the floor to be admired, she herself would hop out, grab the kitten in her teeth and imme-

diately return it to the box, with an indignant waggle to her seat that showed all too plainly what she thought of irresponsible people who didn't know how to handle babies.

Mother is just like that now. She accepts my help simply because there is too much for her to do alone. But she doesn't really believe that I can even pick up a baby without close supervision.

So I left and followed my own blind instincts, which told me to go look up Uncle Tom.

I found him at the Elks Club, which was reasonably certain at that time of day, but I had to wait in the ladies' lounge until he came out of the card room. Which he did in about ten minutes, counting a wad of money as he came. "Sorry to make you wait," he said, "but I was teaching a fellow citizen about the uncertainties in the laws of chance and I had to stay long enough to collect the tuition. How marches it, Podkayne mavourneen?"

I tried to tell him and got all choked up, so he walked me to the park under the city hall and sat me on a bench and bought us both packages of Choklatpops and I ate mine and most of his and watched the stars on the ceiling and told him all about it and felt better.

He patted my hand. "Cheer up, flicka. Always remember that when things seem darkest they usually get considerably worse." He took his phone out of a pocket and made a call. Presently he said, "Never mind the protocol routine, Miss. This is Senator Fries. I want the Director." Then he added in a moment, "Hymie? Tom Fries here. How's Judith? Good, good... Hymie, I just called to tell you that I'm coming over to stuff you into one of your own liquid helium tanks. Oh, say about fourteen or a few minutes after. That'll give you time to get out of town. Clearing." He pocketed his phone. "Let's get some lunch. Never commit suicide on an empty stomach, my dear. It's bad for the digestion."

Uncle Tom took me to the Pioneers Club where I have been only once before and which is even more impressive than I had recalled. It has *real waiters*...men so old that they might have been pioneers themselves, unless they met the first ship. Everybody fussed over Uncle Tom and he called them all by their first names and they all called him "Tom" but made it sound like "Your Majesty" and the master of the hostel came over and prepared my sweet himself with about six other people standing around to hand him things, like a famous sur-

geon operating against the swift onrush of death.

Presently Uncle Tom belched behind his napkin and I thanked everybody as we left, while wishing that I had had the forethought to wear my unsuitable gown that Mother won't let me wear until I'm nine and almost made me take back. One doesn't get to the Pioneers Club every day.

We took the James Joyce Fogarty Express Tunnel and Uncle Tom sat down the whole way. So I had to sit, too, although it makes me restless; I prefer to walk in the direction a tunnel is moving and get there a bit sooner. But Uncle Tom says that he gets plenty of exercise watching other people work themselves to death.

I didn't really realize that we were going to the Marsopolis Creche until we were there, so bemused had I been earlier with my own tumultuous emotions. But when we were there and facing a sign reading: OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR — PLEASE USE OTHER DOOR, Uncle Tom said, "Hang around somewhere; I'll need you later." and went on in.

The waiting room was crowded and the only magazines not in use were *Kiddie Kapers* and *Modern Homemaker*, so I wandered around a bit and presently found a corridor that led to the Nursery.

The sign on the door said that visiting hours were from 16 to 18.60. Furthermore it was locked, so I moved on and found another door which seemed much more promising. It was marked: POSITIVELY NO ADMITTANCE—but it didn't say "This Means *You*" and it wasn't locked, so I went in.

You never saw so many babies in your whole life!

Row upon row upon row, each in its own little transparent cubicle. I could really see only the row nearest me, all of which seemed to be about the same age—and much more finished than the three we had at home. Little brown dumplings, they were, cute as puppies. Most of them were asleep, some were awake and kicking and cooing and grabbing at dangle toys that were just in reach. If there had not been a sheet of glass between me and them I would have grabbed me a double armful of babies.

THERE were a lot of girls in the room, too—well, young women, really. Each of them seemed to be busy with a baby and they didn't notice me. But shortly one of the babies nearest me started to cry, whereupon a light came on over its cubicle and one of the nurse girls hurried over,

slid back the cover, picked it up and started patting its bottom. It stopped crying.

"Wet?" I inquired.

She looked up, saw me. "Oh, no, the machines take care of that. Just lonely, so I'm loving it." Her voice came through clearly in spite of the glass—a hear & speak circuit, no doubt, although the pick-ups were not in evidence. She made soft noises to the baby, then added, "Are you a new employee? You seem to be lost."

"Oh, no," I said hastily, "I'm not an employee. I just—"

"Then you don't belong here, not at this hour. Unless—" she looked at me rather skeptically— "just possibly you are looking for the instruction class for young mothers?"

"Oh, no, no! Not yet." Then I added still more hastily, "I'm a guest of the Director."

Well, it wasn't a fib. Not quite. I was a guest of a guest of the Director, one who was with him by appointment. The relationship was certainly concatenative, if not equivalent.

It seemed to reassure her. She asked, "Just what did you want?"

"Uh, just information. I'm making a sort of a survey. What goes on in this room?"

"These are age six-month withdrawal contracts," she told me. "All these babies will be going home in a few days." She put the baby, quiet now, back into its private room, adjusted a nursing nipple for it, made some other sort of adjustments on the outside of the cubicle so that the padding inside sort of humped up and held the baby steady against the milk supply, then closed the top, moved on a few meters and picked up another baby.

"Personally," she added, "I think the age six-months contract is the best one. A child twelve months old is old enough to notice the transition. But these aren't. They don't care who comes along and pets them when they cry...but nevertheless six months is long enough to get a baby well started and take the worst of the load off the mother. We know how, we're used to it, we stand our watches in rotation so that we are never exhausted from being 'up with the baby all night'...and in consequence we aren't short tempered and we never yell at them. And don't think for a minute that a baby doesn't understand a cross tone of voice simply because he can't talk yet. He knows! And it can start him off so twisted that he may take it out on somebody else, years and years later. There, there, honey," she went on but not to me, "feel better now?

Feeling sleepy, huh? Now you just hold still and Martha will keep her hand on you until you are fast asleep."

She watched the baby for a moment longer, then withdrew her hand, closed the box and hurried on to where another light was burning. "A baby has no sense of time," she added as she removed a squalling lump of fury from its crib. "When it needs love, it needs it right now. It can't know that—" An older woman had come up behind her. "Yes, Nurse?"

"Who is this you're chatting with? You know the rules."

"But...she's a guest of the Director."

The older woman looked at me with a stern no-nonsense look. "The Director sent you in here?"

I was making a split-second choice among three non-responsive answers when I was saved by Fate. A soft voice coming from everywhere at once announced: "Miss Podkayne Fries is requested to come to the office of the Director. Miss Podkayne Fries, please come to the office of the Director."

I tilted my nose in the air and said with dignity, "That is I. Nurse, will you be so kind as to phone the Director and tell him that Miss Fries is on her way?" I exited with deliberate haste.

THE Director's office was four times as big and sixteen times as impressive as the principal's office at school. The Director was short. He had a dark brown skin and a gray goatee and a harried expression. In addition to him and to Uncle Tom, of course, there was present the little lawyer man who had had a bad time with Daddy a week earlier—and my brother Clark. I couldn't figure out how he got there...except that Clark has an infallible homing instinct for trouble.

Clark looked at me with no expression; I nodded. The Director and his legal beagle stood up. Uncle Tom didn't but he said, "Dr. Hyman Schoenstein, Mr. Poon Kwai Yau—my niece Podkayne Fries. Sit down, honey. Nobody is going to bite you. The Director has a proposition to offer you."

The lawyer man interrupted. "I don't think—"

"Correct," agreed Uncle Tom. "You don't think. Or it would have occurred to you that ripples spread out from a splash."

"But— Dr. Schoenstein, the release I obtained from Professor Fries explicitly binds him to silence, for separate good and sufficient consideration, over and above damages conceded by us and made good! This is tantamount to blackmail. I—"

by Robert A. Heinlein

Then Uncle Tom did stand up. He seemed twice as tall as usual and he was grinning like a fright mask. "What was that last word you used?"

"I?" The lawyer looked startled. "Perhaps I spoke hastily. I simply meant—"

"I heard you," Uncle Tom growled. "And so did three witnesses. Happens to be one of the words a man can be challenged for, on this still free planet. But, since I'm getting old and fat, I may just sue you for your shirt instead. Come along, kids."

The Director spoke quickly. "Tom...sit down, please. Mr. Poon...please keep quiet unless I ask for your advice. Now, Tom, you know quite well that you can't challenge nor sue over a privileged communication, counsel to client."

"I can do both or either. Question is: will a court sustain me? But I can always find out."

"And thereby drag out into the open the very point you know quite well I can't afford to have dragged out. Simply because my lawyer spoke in an excess of zeal. Mr. Poon?"

"I tried to withdraw it. I do withdraw it."

"Senator?"

Uncle Tom bowed stiffly to Mr. Poon, who returned it. "Accepted, sir. No offense meant and none taken." Then Uncle Tom grinned merrily, let his pot-belly slide back down out of his chest, and said in his normal voice. "Okay, Hymie, let's get on with the crime. Your move."

DR. SCHOENSTEIN said carefully, "Young lady, I have just learned that the recent disruption of family planning in your home—which we all deeply regret—caused an additional sharp disappointment to you and your brother."

"It certainly did!" I answered, rather shrilly I'm afraid.

"Yes. As your uncle put it, the ripples spread out. Another of those ripples could wreck this establishment, make it insolvent as a private business. This is an odd sort of business we are in here, Miss Fries. Superficially we perform a routine engineering function, plus some not unusual boarding nursery services. But in fact what we do touches the most primitive of human emotions. If confidence in our integrity, or in the perfection with which we carry out the service entrusted to us, were to be shaken—" He spread his hands helplessly. "We couldn't last out the year. Now I can show you exactly how the mishap occurred which affected your family, show you how wildly

unlikely it was to have it happen even under the methods we did use...prove to you how utterly impossible it now is and always will be in the future for such a mistake to take place again, under our new procedures. Nevertheless—" he looked helpless again— "if you were to talk, merely tell the simple truth about what did indeed happen once...you could ruin us."

I felt so sorry for him that I was about to blurt out that I wouldn't even *dream* of talking!—even though they had ruined my life—when Clark cut in. "Watch it, Pod! It's loaded."

So I just gave the Director my Sphinx expression and said nothing. Clark's instinctive self-interest is absolutely reliable.

Dr. Schoenstein motioned Mr. Poon to keep quiet. "But, my dear lady, I am not asking you not to talk. As your uncle the Senator says, you are not here to blackmail and I have nothing with which to bargain. The Marsopolis Creche Foundation, Limited, always carries out its obligations even when they do not result from formal contract. I asked you to come in here in order to suggest a measure of relief for the damage we have unquestionably—though unwittingly—done you and your brother. Your uncle tells me that he had intended to travel with you and your family... but that now he intends to go via the next Triangle Line departure. The *Tricorn,* I believe it is, about ten days from now. Would you feel less mistreated if we were to pay first class fares for your brother and you—round trip, of course—in the Triangle Line?"

Would I! The *Wanderlust* has, as her sole virtue, the fact that she is indeed a spaceship and she was shaping for Earth. But she is an old, slow freighter. Whereas the Triangle Liners, as everyone knows, are utter palaces! I could but nod.

"Good. It is our privilege and we hope you have a wonderful trip. But, uh, young lady...do you think it possible that you could give us some assurance, for no consideration and simply out of kindness, that you wouldn't talk about a certain regrettable mishap?"

"Oh? I thought that was part of the deal?"

"There is no deal. As your uncle pointed out to me, we owe you this trip, no matter what."

"Why—why, Doctor, I'm going to be so busy, so utterly rushed, just to get ready in time, that I won't have *time* to talk to anyone about any mishaps that probably weren't

your fault anyhow!"

"Thank you." He turned to Clark. "And you, son?"

Clark doesn't like to be called "son" at best. But I don't think it affected his answer. He ignored the vocative and said coldly, "What about our expenses?"

DR. Schoenstein flinched. Uncle Tom guffawed and said, "That's my boy! Doc, I told you he had the simple rapacity of a sand gator. He'll go far—if somebody doesn't poison him."

"Any suggestions?"

"No trouble. Clark. Look me in the eye. Either you stay behind and we weld you into a barrel and feed you through the bunghole so that you *can't* talk—while your sister goes anyhow—or you accept these terms. Say a thousand each—no, fifteen hundred—for travel expenses, and you keep your snapper shut forever about the baby mixup...or I personally, with the aid of four stout, black-hearted accomplices, will cut your tongue out and feed it to the cat. A deal?"

"I ought to get ten per cent commission on Sis's fifteen hundred. She didn't have sense enough to ask for it."

"No cumshaw. I ought to be charging *you* a commission on the whole transaction. A deal?"

"A deal," Clark agreed.

Uncle Tom stood up. "That does it, Doc. In his own unappetizing way he is as utterly reliable as she is. So relax. You, too, Kwai Yau, you can breathe again. Doc, you can send a check around to me in the morning. Come on, kids."

"Thanks, Tom. If that is the word. I'll have the check over before you get there. Uh... just one thing—"

"What, Doc?"

"Senator, you were here long before I was born, so I don't know too much about your early life. Just the traditional stories and what it says about you in *Who's Who on Mars*. Just what were you transported for? You *were* transported? Weren't you?"

Mr. Poon looked horror-stricken, and I was. But Uncle Tom didn't seem offended. He laughed heartily and answered, "I was accused of freezing babies for profit. But it was a frameup—I never did no such thing nohow. Come on, kids. Let's get out of this ghouls' nest before they smuggle us down into the sub-basement."

Later that night in bed I was dreamily thinking over the trip. There hadn't even been the least argument with Mother and Daddy; Uncle Tom had settled it all by phone before we got home. I heard a sound from the nursery, got up and paddled in. It

was Duncan, the little darling, not even wet but lonely. So I picked him up and cuddled him and he cooed and then he was wet, so I changed him.

I decided that he was just as pretty or prettier than all those other babies, even though he was five months younger and his eyes didn't track. When I put him down again, he was sound asleep; I started back to bed.

And stopped—

The Triangle Line gets its name from serving the three leading planets, of course, but which direction a ship makes the Mars-Venus-Earth route depends on just where we all are in our orbits.

But just where were we?

I hurried into the living room and searched for the *Daily War Whoop*—found it, thank goodness, and fed it into the viewer, flipped to the shipping news.

Yes, yes, *yes!* I am going not only to Earth—but to Venus as well!

Venus! Do you suppose Mother would let me—no, best just say nothing now. Uncle Tom will be more tractable, after we get there.

I'm going to miss Duncan—he's such a little doll.

IV

I haven't had time to write in this journal for *days*. Just getting ready to leave was almost impossible—and would have been truly impossible had it not been that most preparations—all the special Terran innoculations and photographs and passports and such—were mostly done before *Everything Came Unstuck*. But Mother came out of her atavistic daze and was very helpful. She would even let one of the triplets cry for as much as a minute rather than disappear and leave me half pinned up.

I don't know how Clark got ready or whether he had any preparations to make. He continued to creep around silently, answering in grunts if he answered at all. Nor did Uncle Tom seem to find it difficult. I saw him only twice during those frantic ten days (once to borrow baggage mass from his allowance, which he let me have, the dear!) and both times I had to dig him out of the card room at the Elks Club. I asked him how he managed to get ready for so important a trip and still have time to play cards?

"Nothing to it," he answered. "I bought a new toothbrush. Is there something else I should have done?"

So I hugged him and told him he was an utterly utter beast and he chuckled and mussed my hair. Query: Will I ever become that blase about space travel? I suppose I must if I am to be an astronaut.

But Daddy says that getting ready for a trip is half the fun...so perhaps I don't want to become that sophisticated.

Somehow Mother delivered me, complete with baggage and all the myriad pieces of paper—tickets and medical records and passport and universal identification complex and guardians' assignment-and-guarantee and three kinds of money and travelers' checks and birth record and police certification and security clearance and I don't remember—all checked off, to the city shuttle port. I was juggling one package of things that simply *wouldn't* go into my luggage, and I had one hat on my head and one in my hand. Otherwise everything came out even.

Good-by at the shuttle port was most teary and exciting. Not just with Mother and Daddy, which was to be expected (when Daddy put his arm around me tight, I threw both mine around him and for a dreadful second I didn't want to leave at all), but also because about thirty of my classmates showed up (which I hadn't in the least expected), complete with a banner that two of them were carrying reading:

BON VOYAGE
PODKAYNE

I got kissed enough times to start a fair-sized epidemic if any one of them had had anything, which apparently they didn't. I got kissed by boys who had never even *tried* to, in the past—and I assure you that it is not utterly impossible to kiss me, if the project is approached with confidence and finesse, as I believe that one's instincts should be allowed to develop as well as one's overt cortical behavior.

The corsage Daddy had given me for going away got crushed and I didn't even notice it until we were aboard the shuttle. I suppose it was somewhere about then that I lost that hat, but I'll never know. I would have lost the last-minute package, too, if Uncle Tom had not rescued it. There were photographers, too, but not for me—for Uncle Tom. Then suddenly we had to scoot aboard the shuttle *right now* because a shuttle can't wait. It has to boost on the split second, even though Deimos moves so much more slowly than Phobos. A reporter from the *War Whoop* was still trying to get a statement out of Uncle Tom about the forthcoming Three-Planets conference but he just pointed at his throat and whispered, "Laryngitis"—then we were aboard just before they sealed the airlock.

It must have been the shortest case of laryngitis on record. Uncle Tom's voice had

been all right until we got to the shuttle port and it was okay again once we were in the shuttle.

ONE shuttle trip is exactly like another, whether to Phobos or Deimos. Still, that first tremendous *whoosh!* of acceleration is exciting as it pins you down into your couch with so much weight that you can't breathe, much less move—and free fall is always strange and eerie and rather stomach-fluttering even if one doesn't tend to be nauseated by it, which, thank you, I don't.

Being on Deimos is just like being in free fall, since neither Deimos nor Phobos has enough surface gravitation for one to feel it. They put suction sandals on us before they unstrapped us so that we could walk, just as they do on Phobos. Nevertheless Deimos is different from Phobos for reasons having nothing to do with natural phenomena. Phobos is, of course, legally a part of Mars. There are no formalities of any sort about visiting it. All that is required is the fare, a free day and a yen for a picnic in space.

But Deimos is a free port, leased in perpetuity to Three-Planets Treaty Authority. A known criminal, with a price on his head in Marsopolis, could change ships there right under the eyes of our own police. We couldn't touch him. Instead, we would have to start most complicated legal doings at the Interplanetary High Court on Luna, practically win the case ahead of time and, besides that, prove that the crime was a crime under Three-Planet rules and not just under our own laws. Then all that we could do would be to ask the Authority's proctors to arrest the man if he was still around —which doesn't seem likely.

I knew about this, theoretically, because there had been about a half page on it in our school course *Essentials of Martian Government* in the section on "Extraterritoriality." But now I had plenty of time to think about it because, as soon as we left the shuttle, we found ourselves locked up in a room misleadingly called the "Hospitality Room" while we waited until they were ready to "process" us.

One wall of the room was glass. I could see lots and lots of people hurrying around in the concourse beyond, doing all manner of interesting and mysterious things. But all we had to do was to wait beside our baggage and grow bored.

I found that I was growing more furious by the minute, not at all like my normally sweet and lovable nature. Why, this place had been built by my own mother! And here I was, caged up in it like

white mice in a bio lab.

(Well, I admit that Mother didn't exactly build Deimos. The Martians did that, starting with a spare asteroid that they happened to have handy. But some millions of years back they grew tired of space travel and devoted all their time to the whichness of what and how to unscrew the inscrutable—so when Mother took over the job, Deimos was pretty run down; she had to start in from the ground up and rebuild it completely.)

IN any case, it was certain that everything that I could see through that transparent wall was a product of Mother's creative imaginative and hard-headed engineering ability. I began to fume. Clark was off in a corner, talking privately to some stranger. "Stranger" to me, at least. Clark, for all his anti-social disposition, always seems to know somebody, or to know somebody who knows somebody, anywhere we go. I sometimes wonder if he is a member of some vast underground secret society; he has such unsavory acquaintances and never brings any of them home.

Clark is, however, a very satisfactory person to fume with, because, if he isn't busy, he is always willing to help a person hate anything that needs hating. He can even dig up reasons why a situation is even more vilely unfair than you thought it was. But he was busy, so that left Uncle Tom. So I explained to him bitterly how outrageous I thought it was that we should be penned up like animals—free Mars citizens on one of Mars' own moons!—simply because a sign read: "Passengers must wait until called by order of Three-Planets Treaty Authority."

"Politics!" I said bitterly. "I could run it better myself."

"I'm sure you could," he agreed gravely, "but, flicka, you don't understand."

"I understand all too well!"

"No, honey bun. You understand that there is no good reason why you should not walk straight through that door and enjoy yourself by shopping until it is time to go inboard the *Tricorn*. And you are right about that, for there is no need at all for you to be locked up in here when you could be out there making some free port shopkeeper happy by paying him a high price which seems to you a low price. So you say, 'Politics!' as if it were a nasty word—and you think that settles it."

He sighed. "But you *don't* understand. Politics is not evil. Politics is the human race's most magnificent achievement. When politics is good, it's wonderful...and

when politics is bad—well, it's still pretty good."

"I guess I don't understand," I said slowly.

"Think about it. Politics is just a name for the way we get things done...without fighting. We dicker and compromise and everybody thinks he has received a raw deal, but somehow after a tedious amount of talk we come up with some jury-rigged way to do it without getting anybody's head bashed in. That's politics. The only other way to settle a dispute is by bashing a few heads in...and that is what happens when one or both sides is no longer willing to dicker. That's why I say politics is good even when it is bad. The only alternative is force—and somebody gets hurt."

"Uh...it seems to me that's a funny way for a revolutionary veteran to talk. From what I've heard, Uncle Tom, you were one of the bloodthirsty ones who started the shooting. Or so Daddy says."

HE grinned. "Mostly I ducked. If dickering won't work, then you have to fight. But I think maybe it takes a man who has been shot at to appreciate how much better it is to fumble your way through a political compromise rather than have the top of your head blown off." He frowned and suddenly looked very old. "When to talk and when to fight— That is the most difficult decision to make wisely of all the decisions in life." Then suddenly he smiled and the years dropped away. "Mankind didn't invent fighting; it was here long before we were. But we invented politics. Just think of it, hon. Homo sapiens is the most cruel, the most vicious, the most predatory and certainly the most deadly of the time, get along well enough so that we usually don't kill each other. So don't let me hear you using 'politics' as a swear word again."

"I'm sorry, Uncle Tom," I said humbly.

"Like fun you are. But if you let that idea soak for twenty or thirty years, you may— Oh, oh! There's your villain, baby girl. The politically appointed bureaucrat who has most unjustly held

you in durance vile. So scratch his eyes out. Show him how little you think of his silly rules."

I answered this with dignified silence. It is hard to tell when Uncle Tom is serious. He loves to pull my leg, always hoping that it will come off in his hand. The Three-Planets proctor of whom he was speaking had opened the door to our bull pen and was looking around exactly like a zookeeper inspecting a cage for cleanliness. "Passports!" he called out. "Diplomatic passports first." He looked us over, spotted Uncle Tom. "Senator?"

Uncle Tom shook his head. "I'm a tourist, thanks."

"As you say, sir. Line up, please. Reverse alphabetical order"—which put us near the tail of the line instead of near the head. There followed maddening delays, for fully two hours—passports, health clearance, outgoing baggage inspection. Mars Republic does not levy duties on exports, but just the same there is a whole long list of things you can't export without a license, such as ancient Martian artifacts (the first explorers did their best to gut the place and some of the most priceless are in the British Museum or the Kremlin; I've heard Daddy fume about it), some things you can't export under *any* circumstances, such as certain narcotics, and some things you can take aboard ship only by surrendering them for safekeeping by the purser, such as guns and other weapons.

Clark picked outgoing inspection for some typical abnormal behavior. They had passed down the line copies of a long list of things we must not have in our baggage. A fascinating list; I hadn't known that there were so many things that were illegal, immoral or deadly. When the Fries contingent wearily reached the inspection counter, the inspector said, all in one word: "'Nything-t'-d'clare?" He was a Marsman and as he looked up he recognized Uncle Tom. "Oh. Howdy, Senator. Honored to have you with us. Well, I guess we needn't waste time on your baggage. These two young people with you?"

"Better search my kit," Uncle Tom advised. "I'm smuggling guns to an out-planet branch of the Legion. As for the kids, they're my niece and nephew. But I don't vouch for them; they're both subversive characters. Especially the girl. She was soap-boxing revolution just now."

The inspector smiled and said, "I guess we can allow you a few guns, Senator. You know how to use them. Well, how about it, kids? Anything to declare?"

I said, "Nothing to declare," with icy dignity—when suddenly Clark spoke up.

"Sure!" he piped, his voice cracking. "Two kilos of happy dust! And whose business is it? I paid for it. I'm not going to let it be stolen by a bunch of clerks." His voice was surly as only he can manage and the expression on his face simply ached for a slap.

THAT did it. The inspector had been just about to glance into one of my bags—a purely formal inspection, I think—when my brattish brother deliberately stirred things up. At the very word "happy dust" four other inspectors closed in. Two were Venusmen, to judge by their accents, and the other two might have been from Earth.

Of course, happy dust doesn't matter to us Marsmen. The Martians use it, have always used it, and it is about as important to them as tobacco is to humans, but apparently without any ill effects. What they get out of it I don't know. Some of the old sand rats among us have picked up the habit from the Martians. But my entire botany class experimented with it under our teacher's supervision and nobody got any thrill out of it and all I got was blocked sinuses that wore off before the day was out. Strictly zero squared.

But with the native Venerians it is another matter—when they can get it. It turns them into murderous maniacs. They'll do anything to get it. The (black market) price on it there is very high indeed ...and possession of it by a human on Venus is at least an automatic life sentence to Saturn's moons.

They buzzed around Clark like angry jetta wasps.

But they did not find what they were looking for. Shortly Uncle Tom spoke up and said, "Inspector? May I make a suggestion?"

"Eh? Certainly you may, Senator."

"My nephew, I am sorry to say, has caused a disturbance. Why don't you put him aside—chain him up, I would—and let all these other good people go through?"

The inspector blinked. "I think that is an excellent idea."

"And I would appreciate it if you would inspect myself and my niece now. Then we won't hold up the others."

"Oh, that's not necessary." The inspector slapped seals on all of Uncle's bags, closed the one of mine he had started to open and said, "I don't need to paw through the young lady's pretties. But I think we'll take this smart boy and search him to the skin and X-ray him."

"Do that."

So Uncle and I went on and checked at four or five other desks—fiscal control and migration and reservations and other nonsense—and finally wound up with our baggage at the centrifuge for weighing in. I never did get a chance to shop.

TO my chagrin, when I stepped off the merry-go-round the record showed that my baggage and myself were nearly three kilos over my allowance. That didn't seem possible. I hadn't eaten more breakfast than usual—less actually—and I hadn't drunk any water because, while I do not become ill in free fall, drinking in free fall is very tricky. You are likely to get water up your nose or something and set off an embarrassing chain reaction.

So I was about to protest bitterly that the weightmaster had spun the centrifuge too fast and produced a false mass reading. But it occurred to me that I did not know for surely certain that the scales Mother and I had used were perfectly accurate. So I kept quiet.

Uncle Tom just reached for his purse but the weight-master shook his head. "Forget it, Senator. I'm minus on a couple of other things; I think I can swallow it. If not, I'll leave a memo with the purser. But I'm fairly sure I can."

"Thank you. What did you say your name was?"

"Milo. Miles M. Milo—Aasvogel Lodge number seventy-four. Maybe you saw our crack drill team at the Legion convention two years ago. I was left pivot."

"I certainly did, I certainly did!" They exchanged that secret grip that they think other people don't know and Uncle Tom said, "Well, thanks, Miles. Be seeing you."

"Not at all— Tom. No, don't bother with your baggage." Mr. Milo touched a button and called out, "In the *Tricorn!* Get somebody out here fast for the Senator's baggage."

It occurred to me, as we stopped at the passenger tube sealed to the transfer station to swap our suction sandals for little magnet pads that clipped to our shoes, that we need not have waited for anything at any time—if only Uncle Tom had been willing to use the special favors he so plainly could demand.

But, even so, it pays to travel with an important person—even though it's just your Uncle Tom whose stomach you used to jump up and down on when you were small enough for such things. Our tickets simply read "First Class"—I'm sure, for I saw all three of them—but where we were placed was in what they call the "Owner's Cabin," which is actually a suite with three

bedrooms and a living room. I was dazzled!

But I didn't have time to admire it just then. First they strapped our baggage down, then they strapped us down—to seat couches which were against one wall of the living room. That wall plainly should have been the floor, but it slanted up almost vertically with respect to the tiny, not-quite-nothing weight that we had. The warning sirens were already sounding when someone dragged Clark in and strapped him to one of the couches. He was looking mussed up but cocky.

"Hi, smuggler," Uncle Tom greeted him amiably. "They find it on you?"

"Nothing to find."

"That's what I thought. I trust they gave you a rough time."

"Naah!"

I wasn't sure I believed Clark's answer; I've heard that a skin & person search can be made quite annoying indeed, without doing anything the least bit illegal, if the proctors are feeling unfriendly. A "rough time" would be good for Clark's soul, I am sure. But he certainly did not act as if the experience had caused him any discomfort. I said, "Clark, that was a very foolish remark you made to the inspector. And it was a lie, as well. A silly, useless lie."

"Sign off," he said curtly. "If I'm smuggling anything, it's up to them to find it; that's what they're paid for. 'Any-thing-t'-d'clare?'" he added in a mimicking voice. "What nonsense! As if anybody would declare something he was trying to smuggle."

"Just the same," I went on, "if Daddy had heard you say—"

"Podkayne."

"Yes, Uncle Tom?"

"Table it. We're about to start. Let's enjoy it."

"But— Yes, Uncle."

THERE was a slight drop in pressure, then a sudden surge that would have slid us out of our couches if we had not been strapped—but not a strong one, not at all like that giant *whoosh!* with which we had left the surface. It did not last long. Then we were truly in free fall for a few moments...then there started a soft, gentle push in the same direction, which kept up.

Then the room started very slowly to turn around...almost unnoticeable except for a slight dizziness it gave one.

Gradually, gradually (it took almost twenty minutes) our weight increased, until at last we were back to our proper weight...at which time the floor, which had been all wrong when we came in, was where it belonged, under us, and almost level.

Here is what had happened. The first short boost was

made by the rocket tugs of Deimos Port picking up the *Tricorn* and hurling her out into a free orbit of her own. This doesn't take much, because the attraction between even a big ship like the *Tricorn* and a tiny, tiny satellite such as Deimos isn't enough to matter. All that matters is getting the very considerable mass of the ship shoved free.

The second gentle shove, the one that kept up and never went away, was the ship's own main drive—one-tenth of a standard gee. The *Tricorn* is a constant-boost ship. She doesn't dilly-dally around with economical orbits and weeks and months in free fall. She goes very fast indeed... because even 0.1 gee adds up awfully fast.

But one-tenth gee is not enough to make comfortable passengers who have been used to more. As soon as the Captain had set her on her course, he started to spin her and kept it up until the centrifugal force and the boost added up (in vector addition, of course) to exactly the surface gravitation of Mars (or 37% of a standard gee) at the locus of the first-class staterooms.

But the floors will not be quite level until we approach Earth, because the inside of the ship had been constructed so that the floors would feel perfectly level when the spin and the boost added up to exactly one standard gravity—or Earth-Normal.

Maybe this isn't too clear. Well, it wasn't too clear to me, in school. I didn't see exactly how it worked out until (later) I had a chance to see the controls used to put spin on the ship and how the centrifugal force was calculated. Just remember that the *Tricorn*—and her sisters, the *Trice* and the *Triad* and the *Triangulum* and the *Tricolor*—are enormous cylinders. The thrust is straight along the main axis. It has to be. Centrifugal force pushes away from the main axis—how else? The two forces add up to make the ship's "artificial gravity" in passenger country. But, since one force (the boost) is kept constant and the other (the spin) can be varied, there can be only one rate of spin which will add in with the boost to make those floors perfectly level.

For the *Tricorn* the spin that will produce level floors and exactly one Earth gravity in passenger country is 5.42 revolutions per minute. I know because the Captain told me so...and I checked his arithmetic and he was right. The floor of our cabin is just over thirty meters from the main axis of the ship, so it all comes out even.

AS soon as they had the floor back under us and had announced the "all clear" I unstrapped me and hurried out. I wanted a quick look at

the ship; I didn't even wait to unpack.

There's a fortune awaiting the man who invents a really good deodorizer for a spaceship. That's the one thing you can't fail to notice.

Oh, they try, I grant them that. The air goes through precipitators each time it is cycled. It is washed, it is perfumed, a precise fraction of ozone is added and the new oxygen that is put in after the carbon dioxide is distilled out is as pure as a baby's mind. It has to be, for it is newly released as a by-product of the photosynthesis of living plants. That air is so pure that it really ought to be voted a medal by the Society for the Suppression of Evil Thoughts.

Besides that, a simply amazing amount of the crew's time is put into cleaning, polishing, washing, sterilizing—oh, they *try!*

But nevertheless, even a new, extra-fare luxury liner like the *Tricorn* simply reeks of human sweat and ancient sin, with undefinable overtones of organic decay and unfortunate accidents and matters best forgotten. Once I was with Daddy when a Martian tomb was being unsealed. I found out why xenoarcheologists always have gas masks handy. But a spaceship smells even worse than that tomb.

It does no good to complain to the purser. He'll listen with professional sympathy and send a crewman around to spray your stateroom with something which (I suspect) merely deadens your nose for a while. But his sympathy is not real, because the poor man simply cannot smell anything wrong himself. He has lived in ships for years; it is literally impossible for him to smell the unmistakable reek of a ship that has been lived in. And, besides, he *knows* that the air is pure; the ship's instruments show it. None of the professional spacers can smell it.

But the purser and all of them are quite used to having passengers complain about the "unbearable stench"—so they pretend sympathy and go through the motions of correcting the matter.

Not that *I* complained. I was looking forward to having this ship eating out of my hand, and you don't accomplish that sort of coup by becoming known first thing as a complainer. But other first-timers did, and I certainly understood why. In fact I began to have a glimmer of a doubt about my ambitions to become skipper of an explorer ship.

But—

Well, in about two days it seemed to me that they had managed to clean up the ship quite a bit, and shortly thereafter I stopped thinking about it. I began to understand why the ship's crew can't smell the

things the passengers complain about. Their nervous systems simply cancel out the did familiar stinks—like a cybernetic skywatch canceling out and ignoring any object whose predicted orbit has previously been programmed into the machine.

But the odor is still there. I suspect that it sinks right into polished metal and can never be removed, short of scrapping the ship and melting it down. Thank goodness the human nervous system is endlessly adaptable.

BUT my own nervous system didn't seem too adaptable during that first hasty tour of the *Tricorn*. It is a good thing that I had not eaten much breakfast and had refrained from drinking anything. My stomach did give me a couple of bad moments, but I told it sternly that I was busy. I was very anxious to look over the ship; I simply didn't have time to cater to the weaknesses to which flesh is heir.

Well, the *Tricorn* is lovely all right—every bit as nice as the travel folders say that she is...except for that dreadful ship's odor. Her ball room is gorgeous and so big that you can see that the floor curves to match the ship...only it is not curved when you walk across it. It is level, too. It is the only room in the ship where they jack up the floor to match perfectly with whatever spin is on the ship. There is a lounge with a simulated sky of outer space, or it can be switched to blue sky and fleecy clouds. Some old biddies were already in there, gabbling.

The dining saloon is every bit as fancy, but it seemed hardly big enough—which reminded me of the warning in the travel brochure about first and second tables, so I rushed back to our cabin to urge Uncle Tom to make reservations for us quickly before all the best tables were filled.

He wasn't there. I took a quick look in all the rooms and didn't find him—but I found Clark in *my* room, just closing one of my bags!

"What are you doing?" I demanded.

He jumped and then looked perfectly blank. "I was just looking to see if you had any nausea pills," he said woodenly.

"Well, don't dig into my

things! You know better." I came up and felt his cheek. He wasn't feverish. "I don't have any. But I noticed where the surgeon's office is. If you are feeling ill, I'll take you straight there and let him dose you."

He pulled away. "Aw, I'm all right—now."

"Clark Fries, you listen to me. If you—" But he wasn't listening. He slid past me, ducked into his own room and closed the door; I heard the lock click.

I closed the bag he had opened—and noticed something. It was the bag the inspector had been just about to search when Clark had pulled that silly stunt about "happy dust."

My younger brother never does anything without a reason. Never.

His reasons often are inscrutable to others. But, if you just dig deeply enough, you will always find that his mind is never a random-choice machine, doing things pointlessly. It is as logical as a calculator—and about as cold.

I now knew why he had made what seemed to be entirely unnecessary trouble for himself at outgoing inspection.

I knew why I had been unexpectedly three kilos over my allowance on the centrifuge.

The only thing I didn't know was: *What* had he smuggled aboard in my baggage?

And *why?*

Interlude

WELL, Pod, I'm glad to see that you've resumed keeping your diary. Not only do I find your girlish viewpoints entertaining but also you sometimes (not often) provide me with useful bits of information.

If I can do anything for you in return, do let me know. Perhaps you would like help in straightening out your grammar? Those incomplete sentences you are so fond of indicate incomplete thinking. You know that, don't you?

For example, let us consider a purely hypothetical case: a delivery robot with an unbeatable seal. Since the seal is in fact unbeatable, thinking about the seal simply leads to frustration. But a complete analysis of the situation leads one to the obvious fact that any cubical or quasi-cubical object has six sides, and that the seal applies to only one of these six sides.

Pursuing this line of thought one may note that, while the quasi-cube may not be moved without cutting its connections, the floor under it may be lowered as much as forty-eight centimeters — if one has all afternoon in which to work.

Were this not a hypothet-

ical case I would now suggest the use of a mirror and light on an extension handle and some around-the-corner tools, plus plenty of patience.

That's what you lack, Pod —patience.

I hope this may shed some light on the matter of the hypothetical happy dust. Do feel free to come to me with your little problems.

V

CLARK kept his stateroom door locked all the time the first three days we were in the *Tricorn*. I know, because I tried it every time he left the suite.

Then on the fourth day he failed to lock it at a time when it was predictable that he would be gone at least an hour, as he had signed up for a tour of the ship—the parts passengers ordinarily are not allowed in, I mean. I didn't mind missing it myself, for by then I had worked out my own private "Poddy special" escort service. Nor did I have to worry about Uncle Tom. He wasn't making the tour, it would have violated his no-exercise rule, but he had acquired new pinochle cronies and he was safely in the smoking room.

Those stateroom door locks are not impossible to pick. Not for a girl equipped with a nail file, some bits of this and that, and free run of the purser's office—me, I mean.

But I found I did not have to pick the lock. The catch had not quite caught. I breathed the conventional sigh of relief, as I figured that the happy accident put me at least twenty minutes ahead of schedule.

I shan't detail the search, but I flatter myself that the Criminal Investigation Bureau could not have done it more logically nor more quickly if limited, as I was, to bare hands and no equipment. It had to be something forbidden by that list they had given us on Deimos—and I had carefully kept and studied my copy. It had to mass slightly over three kilos. It had to bulk so large and be sufficiently fixed in its shape and dimensions that Clark was forced to hide it in baggage. Otherwise I am sure he would have concealed it on his person and coldly depended on his youth and "innocence," plus the chaperonage of Uncle Tom, to breeze him through the outgoing inspection. Otherwise he would never have taken the calculated risk of hiding it in my baggage, since he couldn't be sure of recovering it without my knowing.

Could he have predicted that I would at once go sightseeing without waiting to unpack? Well, perhaps he could, even though I had done so on the spur of the moment. I must reluctantly admit that Clark can outguess me with

maddening regularity. As an opponent, he is never to be underrated. But still it was for him a "calculated risk," albeit a small one.

Very well. Largish, rather massy, forbidden. But I didn't know what it looked like and I had to assume that *anything* which met the first two requirements might be disguised to appear innocent.

And so to work—

Ten minutes later I knew that it had to be in one of his three bags, which I had left to the last on purpose as the least likely spots. A stateroom aboard ship has many cover plates, access holes, removable fixtures, and the like, but I had done a careful practice run in my own room; I knew which ones were worth opening, which ones could not be opened without power tools, which ones could not be opened without leaving unmistakable signs of tampering. I checked these all in great haste, then congratulated Clark on having the good sense not to use such obvious hiding places.

THEN I checked everything readily accessible—out in the open, in his wardrobe, etc. —using the classic "Purloined Letter" technique, i.e., I never assumed that a book was a book simply because it looked like a book, nor that a jacket was simply that and nothing more.

Null, negative, nothing. Reluctantly, I tackled his three pieces of luggage, first noting carefully exactly how they were stacked and in what order.

The first was empty. Oh, the linings could have been tampered with, but the bag was no heavier than it should have been and any false pocket in the linings could not have held anything large enough to meet the specifications.

The second bag was the same. And the bag on the bottom seemed to be the same... until I found an envelope in a pocket of it. Oh, nothing nearly massy enough, nor gross enough; just an ordinary envelope for a letter—but nevertheless I glanced at it.

And was immediately indignant!

It had printed on it:

Miss Podkayne Fries
Passenger, S.S. *Tricorn*
For delivery in ship

Why, the little wretch! He had been intercepting my mail! With fingers trembling with rage so badly that I could hardly do so I opened it—and discovered that it had already been opened and was angrier than ever. But, at least, the note was still inside. Shaking, I pulled it out and read it.

Just six words—

Hi, Pod. Snooping again, I see.

—in Clark's handwriting.

I stood there, frozen, for a long moment, while I blushed scarlet and chewed the bitter realization that I had been hoaxed to perfection—*again.*

There are only three people in the world who can make me feel stupid—and Clark is two of them.

I heard a throat-clearing sound behind me and whirled around. Lounging in the open doorway (I had left it closed) was my brother. He smiled at me and said, "Hello, Sis. Looking for something? Need any help?"

I didn't waste time pretending that I didn't have jam all over my face; I simply said, "Clark Fries, what did you smuggle into this ship in my baggage?"

He looked blank—a look of malignant idiocy which has been known to drive well-balanced teachers to their therapists. "What in the world are you talking about, Pod?"

"You know what I'm talking about! Smuggling!"

"Oh!" His face lit up in a sunny smile. "You mean those two kilograms of happy dust. Goodness, Sis, is that still worrying you? There never were any two kilos of happy dust. I was just having my little joke with that stuffy inspector. I thought you knew that."

"I do not mean any 'two kilos of happy dust'! I am talking about at least three kilos of something else that you hid in my baggage!"

He looked worried. "Pod, do you feel well?"

"Oooooh—*dandruff!* Clark Fries, you stop that! You know what I mean! When I was centrifuged, my bags and I weighed three kilos over my allowance. Well?"

He looked at me thoughtfully, sympathetically. "It *has* seemed to me that you were getting a bit fat—but I didn't want to mention it. I thought it was all this rich food you've been tucking away here in the ship. You really ought to watch that sort of thing, Pod. After all, if a girl lets her figure go to pieces— Well, she doesn't have much else. So I hear."

Had that envelope been a blunt instrument I would have blunted him. I heard a low growling sound, and realized that I was making it. So I stopped. "Where's the letter that was in this envelope?"

Clark looked surprised. "Why, it's right there, in your other hand."

"This? This is all there was? No letter from somebody else?"

"Why, just that note from me, Sis. Didn't you like it? I thought that it just suited the occasion... I knew you would find it your very first chance." He smiled. "Next time you want to paw through my things, let me know and I'll help. Sometimes I have

experiments running. You might get hurt. That can happen to people who aren't very bright and don't look before they leap. I wouldn't want that to happen to *you*, Sis."

I didn't bandy any more words. I brushed past him and went to my own room and locked the door and bawled.

Then I got up and did very careful things to my face. I know when I'm licked; I don't have to have a full set of working drawings. I resolved never to mention the matter to Clark again.

But what was I to do? Go to the Captain? I already knew the Captain pretty well; his imagination extended as far as the next ballistic prediction and no further. Tell him that my brother had been smuggling something, I didn't know what—and that he had better search the entire ship most carefully, because, whatever it was, it was not in my brother's room? Don't be triple silly, Poddy. In the first place, he would laugh at you; in the second place, you don't *want* Clark to be caught. Mother and Daddy wouldn't like it.

Tell Uncle Tom about it? He might be just as unbelieving... or, if he did believe me, he might go to the Captain himself—with just as disastrous results.

I decided not to go to Uncle Tom—at least not yet. Instead I would keep my eyes and ears open and try to find a workable answer myself.

IN any case I did not waste much time on Clark's sins (if any, I had to admit in bare honesty). I was in my first real space ship—half way to my ambition thereby—and there was much to learn and do.

Those travel brochures are honest enough, I guess, but they do not give you the full picture.

For example, take this bit right out of the text of the Triangle Line's fancy folder: "Romantic days in ancient Marsopolis, the city older than time; exotic nights under the hurtling moons of Mars."

Let's rephrase it into everyday language, shall we? Marsopolis is my home town and I love it—but it is as romantic as bread and butter with no jam. The parts people live in are new and were designed for function, not romance. As for the ruins outside town (which the Martians *never* called "Marsopolis"), a lot of high foreheads including Daddy have seen to it that the best parts are locked off so that tourists will not carve their initials in something that was old when stone axes were the latest thing in super-weapons. Furthermore, Martian ruins are neither beautiful, nor picturesque, nor impressive to human eyes. The way to appreciate them is to read a really good book

with illustrations, diagrams, and simple explanations—such as Daddy's *Other Paths Than Ours.* (Adv.)

As for those exotic nights, anybody who is outdoors after sundown on Mars other than through sheer necessity needs to have his head examined. It's *chilly* out there. I've seen Deimos and Phobos at night exactly twice, each time through no fault of my own. And I was so busy keeping from freezing to death that I wasted no thought on "hurtling moons."

That advertising brochure is just as meticulously accurate—and just as deceptive in effect—concerning the ships themselves. Oh, the *Tricorn* is a palace; I'll vouch for that. It really is a miracle of engineering that anything so huge, so luxurious, so fantastically adapted to the health and comfort of human beings, should be able to "hurtle" (pardon the word) through space.

But take those pictures—

You know the ones I mean: Full color & depth, showing groups of handsome young people of both sexes chatting or playing games in the lounge, dancing gaily in the ballroom—or views of a "typical stateroom."

That "typical stateroom" is not a fake. No, it has simply been photographed from an angle and with a lens that makes it look at least twice as big as it is. As for those handsome, gay, young people—well, they aren't along on the trip I'm making. It's my guess that they are professional models.

In the *Tricorn* this trip the young and handsome passengers like those in the pictures can be counted on the thumbs of one hand. The typical passenger we have with us is a great grandmother, Terran citizenship, widowed, wealthy, making her first trip into space—and probably her last, for she is not sure she likes it.

Honest, I'm not exaggerating. Our passengers look like refugees from a geriatrics clinic. I am not scoffing at old age. I understand that it is a condition I will one day attain myself, if I go on breathing in and out enough times—say about 900,000,000 more times, not counting heavy exercise. Old age can be a charming condition, as witness Uncle Tom. But old age is not an accomplishment. It is just something that happens to you despite yourself, like falling downstairs.

And I must say that I am getting a wee bit tired of having youth treated as a punishable offense.

OUR typical male passenger is the same sort, only not nearly so numerous. He differs from his wife primarily in that, instead of looking down his nose at me, he is sometimes inclined to pat me in a "fatherly" way that I do

not find fatherly, don't like, avoid if humanly possible—and which nevertheless gets me talked about.

I suppose I should not have been surprised to find the *Tricorn* a super-deluxe old folks' home, but (I may as well admit it) my experience is still limited and I was not aware of some of the economic facts of life.

The *Tricorn* is expensive. It is *very* expensive. Clark and I would not be in it at all if Uncle Tom had not twisted Dr. Schoenstein's arm in our behalf. Oh, I suppose Uncle Tom can afford it, but, by age group though not by temperament, he fits the defined category. But Daddy and Mother had intended to take us in the *Wanderlust,* a low-fare, economy-orbit freighter. Daddy and Mother are not poor, but they are not rich. After they finish raising and educating five children it is unlikely that they will ever be rich.

Who can afford to travel in luxury liners? Ans.: Rich old widows, wealthy retired couples, high-priced executives whose time is so valuable that their corporations gladly send them by the fastest ships—and an occasional rare exception of some other sort.

Clark and I are such exceptions. We have one other exception in the ship, Miss—well, I'll call her Miss Girdle FitzSnugglie, because if I used her right name and perchance anybody ever sees this, it would be all too easily recognizable. *I* think Girdie is a good sort, I don't care what the gossips in this ship say. She doesn't act jealous of me even though it appears that the younger officers in the ship were all her personal property until I boarded—all the trip out from Earth, I mean. I've cut into her monopoly quite a bit, but she isn't catty to me. She treats me warmly woman-to-woman, and I've learned quite a lot about Life and Men from her... more than Mother ever taught me.

(It is just possible that Mother is slightly naive on subjects that Girdie knows best. A woman who tackles engineering and undertakes to beat men at their own game might have had a fairly limited social life, wouldn't you think? I must study this seriously...because it seems possible that much the same might happen to a female space pilot and it is no part of my Master Plan to become a soured old maid.)

Girdie is about twice my age, which makes her awfully young in this company. Nevertheless it may be that I cause her to look just a bit wrinkled around the eyes. Contrariwise, my somewhat unfinished look may make her more mature contours appear even more Helen-of-Troyish. As may be, it is certain that my presence has relieved the

pressure on her by giving the gossips two targets instead of one.

And gossip they do. I heard one of them say about her: "She's been in more laps than a napkin!"

If so, I hope she had fun.

Those gay ship's dances in the mammoth ballroom! Like this: they happen every Tuesday and Saturday night, when the ship is spacing. The music starts at 20:30 and the Ladies' Society for Moral Rectitude is seated around the edge of the floor, as if for a wake. Uncle Tom is there, as a concession to me, and very proudsome and distinguished he looks in evening formal. I am there in a party dress which is not quite as girlish as it was when Mother helped me pick it out, in consequence of some *very* careful retailoring I have done with my door locked. Even Clark attends because there is nothing else going on and he's afraid he might miss something—and looking so nice I'm proud of him, because he has to climb into his own monkey suit or he can't come to the ball.

Over by the punch bowl are half a dozen of the ship's junior officers, dressed in mess jacket uniforms and looking faintly uncomfortable.

THE Captain, by some process known only to him, selects one of the widows and asks her to dance. Two husbands dance with their wives. Uncle Tom offers me his arm and leads me to the floor. Two or three of the junior officers follow the Captain's example. Clark takes advantage of the breathless excitement to raid the punch bowl.

But *nobody* asks Girdie to dance.

This is no accident. The Captain has given the Word (I have this intelligence with utter certainty through My Spies) that no ship's officer shall dance with Miss Fitz-Snugglie until he has danced at least two dances with other partners—and I am not an "other partner," because the proscription, since leaving Mars, has been extended to me.

This should be proof to anyone that a captain of a ship is in sober fact the Last of the Absolute Monarchs.

There are now six or seven couples on the floor and the fun is at its riotous height. The floor will never again be so crowded. Nevertheless nine-tenths of the chairs are still occupied and you could ride a bicycle around the floor without endangering the dancers. The spectators look as if they were knitting at the tumbrils. The proper finishing touch would be a guillotine in the empty space in the middle of the floor.

The music stops. Uncle Tom takes me back to my chair, then asks Girdie to dance—since he is a Cash

Customer, the Captain has not attempted to make him toe the mark. But I am still out of bounds, so I walk over to the punch bowl, take a cup out of Clark's hands, finish it, and say, "Come on, Clark. I'll let you practice on me."

"Aw, it's a waltz!" (Or a "flea hop," or a "chasse," or "five step"—but whatever it is, it is just too utterly impossible.)

"Do it—or I'll tell Madame Grew that you want to dance with her, only you're too shy to ask her."

"You do and I'll trip her! I'll stumble and trip her."

However, Clark is weakening, so I move in fast. "Look, Bub, you either take me out there and walk on my feet for a while—or I'll see to it that Girdie doesn't dance with you at all."

That does it. Clark is in the throes of his first case of puppy love, and Girdie is such a gent that she treats him as an equal and accepts his attentions with warm courtesy. So Clark dances with me. Actually he is quite a good dancer and I have to lead him only a tiny bit. He likes to d a n c e—but he wouldn't want anyone, especially me, to think that he likes to dance with his sister. We don't look too badly matched, since I am short. In the meantime Girdie is looking very good indeed with Uncle Tom, which is quite an accomplishment, as Uncle Tom dances with great enthusiasm and no rhythm. But Girdie can follow anyone. If her partner broke his leg, she would fracture her own at the same spot. But the crowd is thinning out now; husbands that danced the first dance are too tired for the second and no one has replaced them.

Oh, we have gay times in the interplanetary luxury liner *Tricorn!*

Truthfully we *do* have gay times. Starting with the third dance Girdie and I have our pick of the ship's officers, most of whom are good dancers, or at least have had plenty of practice. About twenty-two o'clock the Captain goes to bed and shortly after that the chaperones start putting away their whetstones and fading, one by one. By midnight there is just Girdie and myself and half a dozen of the younger officers—and the Purser, who has dutifully danced with every woman and now feels that he owes himself the rest of the night. He is quite a good dancer, for an old man.

Oh, and there is usually Mrs. Grew, too—but she isn't one of the chaperones and she is always nice to Girdie. She is a fat old woman, full of sin and chuckles. She doesn't expect anyone to dance with her but she likes to watch. And the officers w h o aren't dancing at the moment like to sit with her; she's fun.

About one o'clock Uncle Tom sends Clark to tell me to come to bed or he'll lock me out. He wouldn't, but I do —my feet are tired.

Good old *Tricorn*!

VI

THE Captain is slowly increasing the spin of the ship to make the fake gravity match the surface gravitation of Venus, which is 84% of one standard gravity or more than twice as much as I have been used to all my life. So, when I am not busy studying astrogation or ship handling, I spend much of my time in the ship's gymnasium. I want to harden myself for what is coming, for I have no intention of being at a disadvantage on Venus in either strength or agility.

If I can adjust to an acceleration of 0.87 gee, the later transition to the full Earth-normal of one gee should be sugar pie with chocolate frosting. So I think.

I usually have the gymnasium all to myself. Most of the passengers are Earthmen or Venusmen who feel no need to prepare for the heavy gravitation of Venus. Of the dozen-odd Marsmen I am the only one who seems to take seriously the coming burden. The handful of aliens that are aboard the ship with us we never see; each remains in his specially conditioned stateroom. The ship's officers do use the gym. Some of them are quite fanatic about keeping fit. But they use it mostly at hours when passengers are not likely to use it.

So, on this day (Ceres thirteenth actually but the *Tricorn* uses Earth dates and time, which made it March ninth. I don't mind the strange dates but the short Earth day is costing me a half-hour's sleep each night) —on Ceres thirteenth I went charging into the gym, so angry I could spit venom and intending to derive a double benefit by working off my mad (at least to the point where I would not be clapped in irons for assault), and by strengthening my muscles, too.

And found Clark inside, dressed in shorts and a massy bar bell.

I stopped short and blurted out, "What are *you* doing here?"

He grunted, "Weakening my mind."

Well, I had asked for it. There is no ship's regulation forbidding Clark to use the gym. His answer made sense to one schooled in his devious logic, which I certainly should be. I changed the subject, tossed aside my robe and started limbering exercises to warm up. "How massy?" I asked.

"Sixty kilos."

I glanced at a weight meter on the wall, a loaded spring scale marked to read in frac-

tions of standard gee. It read "52%." I did a fast rough in my mind—fifty-two thirty-sevenths of sixty—or unit sum, plus nine hundred over thirty-seven, so add about a ninth, top and bottom for a thousand over forty, to yield twenty-five...call it the same as lifting eighty-five kilos back home on Mars. "Then why are you sweating?"

"I am not sweating!" He put the bar bell down. "Let's see *you* lift it."

"All right." As he moved I squatted down to raise the bar bell—and changed my mind.

NOW, believe me, I work out regularly with ninety kilos at home and I had been checking that weight meter on the wall each day and loading that same bar bell to match the weight I use at home, plus a bit extra each day. My objective (hopeless, it is beginning to seem) is eventually to lift as much mass under Venus conditions as I had been accustomed to lifting at home.

So I was certain I could lift sixty kilos at 52% of standard gee.

But it is a mistake for a girl to beat a male at any test of physical strength...even when it's your brother. Most especially when it's your brother, and he has a fiendish disposition and you've suddenly had a glimmering of a way to put his fiendish proclivities to work. As I have said, if you're in a mood to hate something or somebody, Clark is the perfect partner.

So I grunted and strained, making a good show, got it up to my chest, started it on up—and squeaked, "Help me!"

Clark gave a one-handed push at the center of the bar and we got it all the way up. Then I said, "Catch for me," through clenched teeth, and he eased it down. I sighed. "Gee, Clark, you must be getting awful strong."

"Doing all right."

It works. Clark was now as mellow as his nature permits. I suggested companion tumbling...if he didn't mind being the bottom half of the team?—because I wasn't sure I could hold him, not at point-five-two gee...did he mind?

He didn't mind at all; it gave him another chance to be muscular and masculine—and I was certain he could lift me; I massed eleven kilos less than the bar bell he had just been lifting. When he was smaller, we used to do quite a bit of it, with me lifting him. It was a way to keep him quiet when I was in charge of him. Now that he is as big as I am (and stronger, I fear), we still tumble a little, but taking turns at the ground and air parts—back home, I mean.

But with my weight almost half again what it ought to be I didn't risk any fancy capers. Presently, when he had me in

a simple handstand over his head, I broached the subject on my mind. "Clark, is Mrs. Royer any special friend of yours?"

"Her?" He snorted and added a rude noise. "Why?"

"I just wondered. She—Mmm, perhaps I shouldn't repeat it."

He said, "Look, Pod, you want me to leave you standing on the ceiling?"

"Don't you dare!"

"Then don't start to say something and not finish it."

"All right. But steady while I swing my feet down to your shoulders." He let me do so, then I hopped down to the floor. The worst part about high acceleration is not how much you weigh, though that is bad enough, but how *fast* you fall. And I suspected that Clark was quite capable of leaving me head downwards high in the air if I annoyed him.

"What's this about Mrs. Royer?"

"Oh, nothing much. She thinks Marsmen are trash, that's all."

"She does, huh? That makes it mutual."

"Yes. She thinks it's disgraceful that the Line allows us to travel first class—and the Captain certainly ought not to allow us to eat in the same mess with decent people."

"Tell me more."

"Nothing to tell. We're riff-raff, that's all. Convicts, you know."

"Interesting. Very, very interesting."

"And her friend Mrs. Garcia agrees with her. But I suppose I shouldn't have repeated it. After all, they are entitled to their own opinions. Aren't they?"

Clark didn't answer, which is a very bad sign. Shortly thereafter he left without a word. In a sudden panic that I might have started more than I intended to, I called after him but he just kept going. Clark is not hard of hearing, but he can be very hard of listening.

WELL, it was too late now. So I put on a weight harness, then loaded myself down all over until I weighed as much as I would on Venus and started trotting on the treadmill until I was covered with sweat and ready for a bath and a change.

Actually I did not really care what bad luck overtook those two harpies. I simply hoped that Clark's sleight-of-hand would be up to its usual high standards so that it could not possibly be traced back to him. Nor even guessed at. For I had not told Clark half of what was said.

Believe you me, I had never guessed, until we were in the *Tricorn,* that anyone could despise other persons simply over their ancestry or where they lived. Oh, I had encountered tourists from

Earth whose manners left something to be desired. But Daddy had told me that all tourists, everywhere, seem obnoxious simply because tourists are strangers who do not know local customs...and I believed it, because Daddy is never wrong. Certainly the occasional visiting professor that Daddy brought home for dinner was always charming, which proves that Earthmen do not have to have bad manners.

I had noticed that the passengers in the *Tricorn* seemed a little bit stand-offish when we first boarded, but I did not think anything of it. After all, strangers do not run up and kiss you, even on Mars—and we Marsmen are fairly informal, I suppose; we're still a frontier society. Besides that, most passengers had been in the ship at least from Earth. They had already formed their friendships and cliques. We were like new kids in a strange school.

But I said, "Good morning!" to anyone I met in the passageway. If I was not answered I just checked it off to hard-of-hearing—so many of them obviously *could* be hard of hearing. Anyhow, I wasn't terribly interested in getting chummy with passengers. I wanted to get acquainted with the ship's officers, pilot officers especially, so that I could get some practical experience to chink in what I already knew from reading. It's not easy for a girl to get accepted for pilot training; she has to be about four times as good as a male candidate—and every little bit helps.

I got a wonderful break right away—we were seated at the Captain's table!

Uncle Tom, of course. I am not conceited enough to think that "Miss Podkayne Fries, Marsopolis" means anything on a ship's passenger list (but wait ten years!)—whereas Uncle Tom, even though he is just my pinochle-playing, easy-going oldest relative, is nevertheless senior Senator-at-Large of the Republic, and it is certain that the Marsopolis General Agent for the Triangle Line knows this. No doubt the agent would see to it that the purser of the *Tricorn* would know it if he didn't already.

As may be. I am not one to scorn gifts from heaven, no matter how they arrive. At our very first meal I started working on Captain Darling. That really is his name, Barrington Babcock Darling—and does his wife call him "Baby Darling"?

But of course a captain does not have a name aboard ship. He is "the Captain," "the Master," "the Skipper" or even "the Old Man" if it is a member of the ship's company speaking not in his august presence. But never a name—simply a majestic figure of impersonal authority.

(I wonder if I will someday be called "the Old Woman" when I am not in earshot? Somehow it doesn't sound quite the same.)

CAPTAIN Darling is not too majestic nor impersonal with *me.* I set out to impress him with the idea that I was awfully sweet, even younger than I am, terribly impressed by him, overawed...and not too bright. It does not do to let a male of any age know that one has brains, not on first acquaintance. Intelligence in a woman is likely to make a man suspicious and uneasy, much like Caesar's fear of Cassius's "lean and hungry look." Get a man solidly on your side first. After that it is fairly safe to let him become gradually aware of your intellect —he may even feel unconsciously that it rubbed off from his own.

So I set out to make him feel that it was a shame that I was not his daughter. (Fortunately he only has sons.) Before that first meal was over I confided in him my great yearning to take pilot training . . . suppressing, of course, any higher ambition.

Both Uncle Tom and Clark could see what I was up to. But Uncle Tom would never give me away and Clark just looked bored and contemptuous and said nothing, because Clark would not bother to interfere with Armageddon unless there was ten per cent in it for him.

But I do not mind what my relatives think of my tactics; they work. Captain Darling was obviously amused at my grandiose and "impossible" ambition...but he offered to show me the control room.

Round one to Poddy, on points.

I am now the unofficial ship's mascot, with free run of the control room. And I am almost as privileged in the engineering department. Of course the Captain does not really want to spend hours teaching me the practical side of astrogation. He did show me through the control room and gave me a kindergarten explanation of the work—which I followed with wide-eyed awe—but his interest in me is purely social. He wants to not-quite hold me in his lap (he is much too practical and too discreet to do anything of the sort!)—so I not-quite let him and make it a point to keep up my social relations with him, listening with my best astonished-kitten look to his anecdotes while he feeds me liters of tea. I really am a good listener because you never can tell when you will pick up something useful. And all in the world any woman has to do to be considered "charming" by men is to listen while they talk.

But Captain Darling is not the only astrogator aboard.

He gave me the run of the control room; I did the rest. The second officer, Mr. Savvonavong, thinks it is simply amazing how fast I pick up mathematics. You see, he thinks he taught me differential equations. Well, he did, when it comes to those awfully complicated ones used in correcting the vector of a constant-boost ship, but if I hadn't worked hard in the supplementary course I was allowed to take last semester, I wouldn't know what he was talking about. Now he is showing me how to program a ballistic computer.

The junior third, Mr. Clancy, is still studying for his unlimited license, so he has all the study tapes and reference books I need and is just as helpful. He is near enough my age to develop groping hands...but only a very stupid male will make even an indirect pass unless a girl manages to let him know that it won't be resented. Mr. Clancy is not stupid and I am very careful to offer no opportunity.

I may kiss him—two minutes before I leave the ship for the last time. Not sooner.

They are all very helpful and they think it is cute of me to be so dead serious about it. But, in truth, practical astrogation is *much* harder than I had ever dreamed.

I had guessed that part of the resentment I sensed—resentment that I could not fail to notice despite my cheery "Good mornings!"—lay in the fact that we were at the Captain's table. To be sure, the "Welcome in the Tricorn!" booklet in each stateroom states plainly that new seating arrangements are made at each port and that it is the ship's custom to change the guests at the Captain's table each time, making the selections from the new passengers.

But I don't suppose that warning makes it any pleasanter to be bumped. I don't expect to like it when I'm bumped off the Captain's table at Venus.

But that is only part of the trouble.

Only three of the passengers were really friendly to me: Mrs. Grew, Girdie and Mrs. Royer. Mrs. Royer I met first and at first I thought that I was going to like her, in a bored sort of way, as she was awfully friendly and I have great capacity for enduring boredom if it suits my purpose. I met her in the lounge the first day. She immediately caught my eye, smiled, invited me to sit by her and quizzed me about myself.

I answered her questions, mostly. I told her that Daddy was a teacher and that Mother was raising babies and that my brother and I were traveling with our uncle. I didn't boast about our family. Boasting is not polite and it often

is not believed—far better to let people find out nice things on their own and hope they won't notice any unnice things. Not that there is anything unnice about Daddy and Mother.

I told her that my name was Poddy Fries.

"'Poddy'?" she said. "I thought I saw something else on the passenger list."

"Oh. It's r e a l l y 'Podkayne,'" I explained. "For the Martian saint, you know."

But she didn't know. She answered, "It seems very odd to give a girl a man's name."

Well, my name *is* odd, even among Marsmen. But not for that reason. "Possibly," I agreed. "But with Martians gender is rather a matter of opinion, wouldn't you say?"

She blinked.

I started to explain how a Martian doesn't select which of three sexes to be until just before it matures...and how, even so, the decision is operative only during a relatively short period of its life.

But I gave up, as I could see that I was talking to a blank wall. Mrs. Royer simply could not imagine any pattern other than her own. So I shifted quickly. "Saint Podkayne lived a very *long* time ago. Nobody actually knows whether the saint was male or female. There are just traditions."

OF course the traditions are pretty explicit and many living Martians claim descent from Saint Podkayne. Daddy says that we know Martian history of millions of years ago much more accurately than we know human history a mere two thousand years ago. In any case most Martians include "Podkayne" in their long lists of names (practically genealogies in synopsis) because of the tradition that anyone named for Saint Podkayne can call on him (or "her"—or "it") in time of trouble.

As I have said, Daddy is romantic and he thought it would be nice to give a baby the luck, if any, that is attached to the saint's name. I am neither romantic nor superstitious. But it suits me just fine to have a name that belongs to me and to no other human. I like being Podkayne "Poddy" Fries. It's better than being one of a multitude of Elizabeths or Dorothys or such.

Anyway, I like it.

But I could see that it simply puzzled Mrs. Royer, so we passed to other matters. Speaking from her seniority as an "old space hand" based on her one just-completed trip out from Earth, she told me a great many things about ships and space travel. Most of them weren't so, but I indulged her. She introduced me to a number of people and handed me a large quantity of gossip about p a s s e n g e r s, ship's officers, et cetera. Between times she filled me in

on her aches, pains and symptoms, what an important executive her son was, what a very important person her late husband had been and how, when I reached Earth, she really must see to it that I met the Right People. "Perhaps such things don't matter in an outpost like Mars, my dear child, but it is Terribly Important to get Started Right in New York."

I tabbed her as garrulous, stupid and well intentioned.

But I soon found that I couldn't get rid of her. If I passed through the lounge—which I had to do in order to reach the control room—she would snag me and I couldn't get away short of abrupt rudeness or flat lies.

She quickly started using me for chores. "Podkayne darling, would you mind just slipping around to my stateroom and fetching my mauve wrap? I feel a tiny chill. It's on the bed I think, or perhaps in the wardrobe—that's a dear." Or, "Poddy child, I've rung and I've rung and the stewardess simply *won't* answer. Would you get my book and my knitting? Oh, and while you're at it, you might bring me a nice cup of tea from the pantry."

Those things aren't too bad; she is probably creaky in the knees and I'm not. But it went on endlessly...and shortly, in addition to being her personal stewardess, I was her private nurse. First she asked me to read her to sleep. "Such a blinding headache and your voice is so soothing, my sweet."

I read to her for an hour and then found myself rubbing her head and temples for almost as long. Oh well, a person ought to manage a little kindness now and then, just for practice. And Mother sometimes has dreadful headaches when she has been working too hard; I know that a rub does help.

That time she tried to tip me. I refused it. She insisted. "Now, now, child, don't argue with your Aunt Flossie."

I said, "No really, Mrs. Royer. If you want to give it to the fund for disabled spacement as a thank-you, that's all right. But I can't take it.

She said pish and tosh and tried to shove it into my pocket. So I slid out and went to bed.

I didn't see her at breakfast; she always has a tray in her room. But about midmorning a stewardess told me that Mrs. Royer wanted to see me in her room. I was hardly gruntled at the summons, as Mr. Savvonavong had told me that if I showed up just before ten during his watch, I could watch the whole process of a ballistic correction and he would explain the steps to me. If she wasted more than five minutes of my time, I would be late.

But I called on her. She was as cheery as ever. "Oh, there you are, darling! I've been waiting ever so long! That stupid stewardess. Poddy dear, you did such wonders for my head last night...and this morning I find that I'm positively *crippled* with my back—you can't imagine, dear; it's *ghastly!* Now if you'll just be an angel and give me a few minutes massage—oh, say a half hour—I'm sure it'll do wonder for me. You'll find the cream for it over there on the dressing table, I think...and now if you'll just help me—"

"Mrs. Royer."

"Yes, dear? The cream is in that big pink tube. Use just—"

"Mrs. Royer, I can't do it. I have an appointment."

"What, dear? Oh, tosh, let them wait. No one is ever on time aboard ship. Perhaps you had better warm your hands before—"

"Mrs. Royer, I am not going to do it. If something is wrong with your back, I shouldn't touch it. I might injure you. But I'll take a message to the Surgeon if you like and ask him to come see you."

Suddenly she wasn't at all cheery. "You mean you *won't* do it!"

"Have it your way. Shall I tell the Surgeon?"

"Why, you impertinent—*Get out of here!*"

I got.

I met her in a passageway on my way to lunch. She stared straight through me, so I didn't speak either. She was walking as nimbly as I was; I guess her back had taken a turn for the better. I saw her twice more that day and twice more she simply couldn't see me.

The following morning I was using the viewer in the lounge to scan one of Mr. Clancy's study tapes, one on radar approach & contact. The viewer is off in a corner, behind a screen of fake potted palms, and perhaps they didn't notice me. Or perhaps they didn't care.

I stopped the scan to give my eyes and ears a rest, and heard Mrs. Garcia talking to Mrs. Royer:

"—that I simply can't stand about Mars is that it is so *commercialized.* Why couldn't they have left it primitive and beautiful?"

Mrs. Royer: "What can you expect? Those *dreadful* people!"

The ship's official language is Ortho but many passengers talk English among themselves—and often act as if no one else could possibly understand it. These two weren't keeping their voices down. I went on listening.

Mrs. Garcia: "Just what I was saying to Mrs. Rimski. After all, they're all criminals."

Mrs. Royer: "Or worse. Have you noticed that little Martian girl? The niece—or

so they claim—of that big black savage?"

I counted ten backwards in Old Martian and reminded myself of the penalty for murder. I didn't mind being called a "Martian." They didn't know any better and, anyhow, it's no insult; the Martians were civilized before humans learned to walk. But "big black savage"! Uncle Tom is as dark as I am blonde; his Maori blood and desert tan make him the color of beautiful old leather...and I love the way he looks. As for the rest—he is learned and civilized and gentle...and highly honored wherever he goes.

Mrs. Garcia: "I've seen her. Common, I would say. Flashy but cheap. A type that attracts a certain sort of man."

Mrs. Royer: "My dear, you don't know the half of it. I've tried to help her. I really felt sorry for her, and I always believe in being gracious, especially to one's social inferiors."

Mrs. Garcia: "Of course, dear."

Mrs. Royer: "I tried to give her a few hints as to proper conduct among gentle people. Why, I was even *paying* her for little trifles, so that she wouldn't be uneasy among her betters. But she's an utterly ungrateful little snip. She thought she could squeeze more money out of me. She was rude about it, so rude that I feared for my safety. I had to order her out of my room, actually."

Mrs. Garcia: "You were wise to drop her. Blood will tell. Bad blood or good blood, blood will always tell. And mixed blood is the Very Worst Sort. Criminals to start with...and then that Shameless Mixing of Races. You can see it right in that family. The boy doesn't look a bit like his sister, and as for the uncle— Hmmm...my dear, you half way hinted at something. Do you suppose that she is *not* his niece but something, shall we say, a bit *closer?*"

"I wouldn't put it past either one of them!"

"Oh, come, 'fess up, Flossie. Tell me what you found out."

Mrs. Royer: "I didn't say a word. But I have eyes—and so have you."

Mrs. Garcia: "Right in front of everyone!"

Mrs. Royer: "What I *can't* understand is why the Line permits *them* to mix with *us.* Perhaps they have to sell them passage—treaties or some such n o n s e n s e—but we shouldn't be forced to associate with them...and certainly not to *eat* with them!"

Mrs. Garcia: "I know. I'm going to write a very strong letter about it as soon as I get home. There are limits. You know, I had thought that Captain Darling was a gentleman ...but when I saw those creatures actually seated at the Captain's table—well, I didn't

believe my eyes. I thought I would faint."

Mrs. Royer. "I know. But after all, the Captain does come from Venus."

Mrs. Garcia: "Yes, but Venus was never a prison colony. That boy...he sits in the very chair I used to sit in, right across from the Captain."

(I made a mental note to ask the Chief steward for a different chair for Clark; I didn't want him contaminated.)

AFTER that they dropped us "Martians" and started dissecting Girdie and complaining about the food and the service, and even stuck pins in some of their shipboard coven who weren't present. But I didn't listen. I simply kept quiet and prayed for strength to go on doing so —because if I had made my presence known I feel sure that I would have stabbed them both with their own knitting needles.

Eventually they left, to rest a while to fortify themselves for lunch. I rushed out and changed into my gym suit and hurried to the gymnasium to work up a good sweat instead of engaging in violent crime.

It was there that I found Clark and told him just enough—or maybe a little bit too much.

Mr. Savvonavong had told me that we were likely to have a radiation storm almost any time. The solar weather station on Mercury reported "flare" weather shaping up and warned all ships in space to be ready for it. I knew that when I told Clark, but I didn't think there would be any connection.

I was wrong.

TO BE CONTINUED

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Stacks of hundred-dollar bills — but sadly, almost all of them were genuine!

THE REAL THING

BY ALBERT TEICHNER

"EVERYTHING in this wing is genuine *old* fake," Stahl told the two tourists while his wife clung proudly to his arm. Like him, she was tall, blonde and impossibly good-looking.

"Even this strongbox money is finest American counterfeit," she said.

"May I see it?" asked Smith. The lifeless face of the mathematician brightened as he peered through the quartz top at a dollar bill marked W8265286A. "I can only get the worthless real stuff. Ancient governments always destroyed counterfeits. But you're in Economic Planning, so it must be easier to get good fakes."

"Only the merest imperfection, that slight Mongoloid fold in Washington's left eyelid," Stahl replied, tightly encircling his wife's waist as if showing off all his finest possessions simultaneously. He glanced at Tinker, a cybernetticist who, like Smith, had sent several requests to see the famous Suite of Artifices. "Ever try collecting?"

"Not money," Tinker answered, eyes still on Mrs. Stahl.

"Got the 'Mongoloid' bill five years ago, same year as I got Mary." He gave his wife an even more ostentatious squeeze. Smith stared at her, too, but more with dull dissatisfaction than desire. "Fifteen bills in the box now—but I've still only one wife."

"Fifteen!" exclaimed Smith. "The rich get richer and the poor stay poor."

"The wallpaper," Stahl smoothly proceeded, "is a replica of Italian murals. If you adjust your focus properly the flat columns become solids through the art of vanishing-point perspective."

"Excellent period distortion of Greek styles," said Tinker, studying the columns. "And those three chairs are fine copies of Chippendale. You're to be complimented on your taste in everything, Stahl."

"You really know ancient designs," Stahl said. "Genuine old copies are even scarcer than their originals. And originals, of course, can never be quite as good."

"Sometimes I don't see why," Smith muttered.

They all looked shocked. "Smith, you need a checkup," Tinker advised. "You sound rundown. How can we progress without imitating past achievements?"

"A little rundown," Smith admitted, "but... Oh, let's forget it."

"Let's," Stahl nodded, striving to recapture the pair's attention as they went on through the Suite. "Notice the paintings. Those two are excellent pseudo-Braques and in the last room were fine fakes of Van Gogh, Picasso and Chardin. In fact," he pointed toward a Gauguin-like nude, all flattened sensuousness, "that one's as close to a real Gauguin as an imitation can go without being a mere reproduction."

They all gasped and even Smith shook his head reverently. "To be *that* close to the real thing! It's all you'd ever need."

"Becoming more possible all the time." Tinker grinned suggestively at Mrs. Stahl. She looked back, mildly interested. "We'll get there eventually."

Happily oblivious to everything but his collections, Stahl led them into the library. One wall, covered with rows of book spines, swung around to reveal a well-stocked bar. There was also a large bar across the room which quickly became a library of real books and recording systems.

"I'm not much for eating and drinking," Smith protested feebly.

"Who is?" Mrs. Stahl laughed. "But this must be a special occasion for you."

Eyes bulging nervously, Smith ran his fingers through his luxuriant hair and sighed, "Special it is. All right."

Stahl casually mixed drinks for them all and sipped an Old Fashioned. "I've concentrated somewhat more on the twentieth century of the Old Times than any other," he said. "A particularly intriguing century, I find, although not crucial like the twenty-first, of course."

"*The* crucial one," Tinker protested.

"As a fellow antiquarian, I must beg to differ, sir."

"What about rocket travel, Mr. Stahl? When did that begin?"

"Old hat," he yawned.

"And atomic energy?"

"Same applies there. Look, Tinker, don't get me wrong. I love the period. But, objectively viewed, the twenty-first makes the great difference."

"And what about duplication of life functions, like the mechanical heart? That really got started in the twentieth."

"Absolutely right," Smith nodded vigorously.

"All strictly mechanical," Stahl sighed. "But the twenty-first turned the study of pain and pleasure itself from an art into a true science."

"No, no," scoffed the cybernetic ist.

Stahl pounded the bar. "All right, I'm going to prove it by putting on an All-Sense Feeliescope of Thomas Dyall. It's fully sense-adapted, so it should pick up perfectly."

"Hope it isn't noisy," said Smith.

"It's *beautiful,*" answered Mary Stahl. "I could listen to it all day."

The odor of damp, new-mown grass filled the room and another more elusive scent mingled with it. *Entry of June 3rd, 2068,* said an impersonal, mechanical voice, *from the journal of Thomas Dyall, elected World's First Poet Laureate in 2089.* A warm rich bass took over:

This morning I rode far out to reach open countryside in the preserved areas to replenish my stock of sensory experiences. As I was walking along through the woods, the most delicious scent struck my nostrils. I immediately recognized new-mown grass in it but the factor making the true difference escaped me until I realized the faint odor belonged to roses. At that point, my senses reeling with delight, I composed in my mind most of my long poem, *The Nature of Nature,* grasping intuitively an experience more intense, more valuable, than any "real" one. I say *intuitively* because I still thought the odor was merely that of grass and roses. A minute afterwards, though, I came into a clearing, spotted a forest ranger's cottage there and discovered that the scent was from a recently-improved insecticide that the ranger's wife was using in the living room. There was little grass in the area and not a single rose!

The following note, interrupted the monotone voice,

was added by the author in the year 2116:

> Here in "real" life the great guiding principle of my future was brought home to me. The well-done imitation of a thing was better than the thing itself! This was the lesson I had to disseminate for all humanity.

"Interesting," Tinker said, "although we all know now that one thing cannot be substituted for. Also—"

"No discussion now," pleaded Smith. "You need a while to consider all that. Anyway, I've been thinking about your bill, Stahl. That wasn't a fold on Washington's eyelid, just a tiny inkstain. It's *genuine*."

"It can't be," Stahl snapped and angrily led them back to the first room. "Tinker, I want you as my witness."

He handed the bill around and Smith had to concede it was really counterfeit. "What's that next one?" he asked.

"A ten." Stahl hesitated, then took it off the pile along with three others and passed them to the visitors, showing off fine points of imitation. When he collected the bills he carefully made certain there were still five and locked them up again.

"What about another drink?" Smith asked hastily.

"No." Tinker sat down in a large chair. "Let's straighten out something right now, Stahl. Dyall was making the first crude statement of an obvious truth. If we have a pleasant sensation it doesn't matter whether it's caused by a rose or a chemical imitation of a rose or by making a brain imagine a rose—doesn't matter except that the real rose itself is the hardest thing to control. So it can't be as intensely real as its imitations."

"Mr. Tinker, isn't that crucial enough for you?" Mrs. Stahl asked. Her voice was so rich and warmly rounded that Smith stared wonderingly at her, as if trying to fathom an alien tongue.

"Not quite," Tinker shrugged. "Stahl, you're discussing the smallest aspect of the three-part equation, Stimulus + Stimulated Body = Experience. Your poet was saying certain changes in Stimulus would still give a Stimulated Body the same Experience as the original. But the philosophers and cyberneticists, they already suspected something more radical. If the Stimulated Body was properly changed the same Stimulus could give different Bodies the same Experience. In other words, a properly-arranged process would have the same Experience as the life function for which it was substituted."

"Now then," he went on, "all life reproduces itself, right? Well, they finally fig-

ured the most important thing to reproduce was a man's Experience itself, not any particular form of Stimulated Body. Of course we have higher ideals. We want the Stimulated Body to be as nearly like what it was as possible—then we can have the best of *all* possible worlds."

"Some people," Smith grumbled, "don't get their fair share of that best."

"Anyway I hate *all* theories," said Mrs. Stahl.

Stahl disregarded them as he stared at his cashbox. "My money," he said ominously, "has been changed!"

The two visitors exchanged nervous glances. "That's not possible," said Tinker.

"It *is*. Somebody's palmed a real one as a substitute!"

"That's very unfair," Smith protested. "We came here as guests, strangers to you and to each other. We've given you the correct degree of envious admiration and now you show your gratitude for our human reaction by saying we're deranged!"

Stahl was unmoved. "I still say it's been stolen." He opened the box. "See—the dollar's different! When the people of the Old Times made us their heirs and children they left piles of this real stuff around along with almost everything else they'd made. It's practically worthless!"

Tinker frowned uncertainly. "If it makes you feel better I'll submit to a lie-detector. I hope you're capable of feeling shame when it proves my innocence!"

"Good enough," said Stahl, turning expectantly to his other guest. As he waited, Smith pulled back a little.

"Well?" Mary smiled, moving a little toward him.

Smith leaped away from her, heading toward an open window, but the others moved faster and grabbed him before he reached the wall.

"What's the matter with you anyway?" Tinker grunted, straining to hold him. "The window's *painted* on the wall!"

Smith slumped forward in despair as Stahl triumphantly wormed the valued counterfeit from his pocket. "I can't do anything right," Smith wailed. "I heard about this collection and thought I could manage to get one little thing for myself. I haven't been given much else by life."

"You—you defective!" Stahl shouted.

Smith only slumped further forward. "How can I help it? The Monte Carlo computer gave me one of the last places for advanced altering and I have to wait and wait. Compared to you, I'm still a half-breed!"

"Don't hand me that," Stahl snapped. "I didn't mean physical defects. You look as normal as anyone else."

"No, darling, I think he's

telling the truth," Mary said sympathetically. "When altering began it was only skin-deep for all of us."

"I'll bet you're sixty per cent altered already," Smith cried out. "It's my bad luck to be only twenty-five per cent so far. All I can do is look at her and wonder why the two of you make such a fuss."

The cyberneticist tried to calm him. "Your turn's coming."

"I have to find out what it's about sooner than that!"

Tinker sighed. "I'll try to get your number advanced."

"Let him wait his turn," Stahl said coldly. "He's faking a lot anyway."

At that Smith broke free from them and pressed his back to the optical illusion window. "Don't come closer," he warned. "I don't have much to lose."

They stopped a few feet away and waited. Suddenly he raised his left hand to his face and dug the long nails in a semicircle into his flesh. As a thin stream of locally circulated blood gushed out, he dug deeper and the eyeball fell forward, quivering, on his cheek.

"He was telling the truth!" Stahl gasped, pointing at the glittering metal bits within the eyesocket. A glowing wire was slowly evaporating on the retinal plate as optical feedback collapsed.

Tinker, all professional competence now, helped Smith to a chair. "We'll be able to repair you in a month," he said, "because you've a simpler arrangement, and I can promise you'll have as good an electro-chemical near-cortex as anybody. And the other more interesting changes too."

Stahl glanced at his wife, then, as she nodded back, slowly put his precious counterfeit into the dangling hand. He was pleased to see enough consciousness was still functioning enough for the fingers to close greedily around it. "Keep it," he said, "you deserve it more than me."

Suddenly he realised he was feeling not only shame but pity too! It was the first time for pity—and that meant he was one step further on his own journey.

How far that journey had already taken him! For, when their brilliant labors had dehumanized them, the humans had possessed sufficient understanding to pass the dead world on to the superior wisdom of their creations. If *they* had been unable to foresee what would eventually happen, Stahl and his fellow robots could. Some day the supreme knowledge and the supreme feeling would be perfectly wedded, the day they became truly humanoid copies of their makers.

He moved forward, Tinker following him, to help his fellow creature closer to that common final destiny. **END**

THE RELUCTANT IMMORTALS

There they were, on the threshhold of life — a life that might be unbearably, terribly long!

BY DAVID R. BUNCH

SO they went on down there, with all along the big fat glove signs pointing at them, squirting—not blood—merely reminder in color, out of something like beet juice or wine—and the highway signs saying constantly SLOW, SLOW DOWN, CURVE, CAREFUL, BEWARE. They had the little metal teardrop held down at two hundred, just "cruising 'er" on the nylon strip designed to hold them at four hundred, or, in emergency, better still.

"I hope," he said through his fine white-metal teeth, "that the quota is filled. So much to do tomorrow—and tomorrow."

"Yes!" she said through lips that had been sculpted by surgery until now they resembled a red rose bouquet, "so much to do—tonight!" She was his bride of five days.

They rolled under the dancing signs where two super Whooshies crashed at each other on a ribbon-road of silk until legs and arms piled out and a red fluid filled the multiple lanes. She laughed low and chesty from a larynx that had been done in gold-x against cancer long ago and said, "What'll they think of next to remind us? Too many of us now, heaven knows. But all the time they keep pleading with us not to kill ourselves."

"If we get by the quota," he said, "sometime we'll take a run across on that new Super they're building in the north. They say they really got signs up there!" He eased the little Whooshie up to two-fifty and still they were

just crawling. Two super Speartakes, a dozen or so of the Flashbugs and a hundred Windstars swept past them as though they were standing aside. "I want our next one to be a Caddiscat," she said. "Everybody's getting a Caddiscat."

He looked at her and thought he detected again something he had feared a long time ago, right at first, ten days ago, when it had started. But in the fogged flush of romance he had forgot. And now after the long five-day courtship they were bride and groom five days. And he had to admit that the nights had all been wonderful, with their great love between them, and the novel gadgets and attachments they had both brought to the marriage, to stimulate and relax them together. But now that nagging doubt again as he looked at the rather grim set of the red roses that were her lips. Was she just another scheming, ambitious woman? He began to dream of a possibility of her filling the quota, alone. And he felt guilty. But glancing at her as he expertly held the Whooshie to a curve above which two purple sign ambulances danced, he had to admit that after the fourth night, even with all the tricks, it had grown a little stale.

"Hungry?"

She bounced on her white-nyloned bottom in the little seat of the Whooshie. It was plain that his abrupt question had brought her back from a long way out. "No—no," she stammered. "I couldn't eat."

"What were you thinking of, so far away?"

THE roses climbed over each other for a little while like a pile of snakes as she licked her lips and could not speak. And when she said, "I was just thinking how awful if they had took only one of us on the quota," he wasn't at all sure she was telling the truth.

"Was he awfully interesting?"

"Who?"

"The one you were remembering, away out there."

The rose bouquet swirled and she was all woman when she said, "You are the most interesting I've ever met."

"Thanks," he said.

"Not as many tricks, maybe. But what you do know, you know better."

"Gee, thanks!" he said.

So the little Whooshie rolled on down toward the place where the quota was. The quota man for their district sat behind a bright orange desk, his horn-rims modern slant and jeweled very nicely. His chair was pale green. On his desk were objects of quaint joy—dancing flowers, little girls going to school, cats in the sun, barefoot boys in a melon patch, a mother spreading

rash powder on a dry diaper; above him his ceiling was all pink lights.

"We're here about the quota," the man said. "We got our notice for the quarterly check-in." She nodded in agreement and her lips were a little scared.

"Names?"

He gave his name; she gave hers. Then the husband helpfully explained how the wife had changed her name but five days ago, and he told loud and clear what her old name had been. Perhaps she was on the list by her old name.

"So you're here about our Emergency Program quota?" The smile that flickered out and the jut-jawed careful pose reminded a little of glory pictures there had once been of dictators in the world. But his eyes were smiling brightly as he flicked the switch and the list climbed down the wall. It was plain that he wished this to be, if not a time of joy, at least not a time of scenes. "It is much better than it used to be," he said as the list raced on in the wall viewer, "much changed. Some people are volunteering now for the Emergency Program quota. To get a rest from a mate, to relax from a business, or dozens of other good reasons. And every volunteer, of course, releases a draftee." He looked at them as if pleading for understanding. "It's congestion on the civil highways, really, as much as the awful climb of the rate that makes the Program so necessary. So maybe when we get more highways things will be better. When the surface is all taken up, which it will be soon now, there's no reason in the world we can't go upstairs with our tough light alloys and build any number of layers of highways. Flying's all right, rockets and all, but we'll always need good old leisurely wheels down there zipping on terra firma." He seemed to be keeping up his patter to relax them.

THE list flowed on in the wall, mile after mile of it, while they watched tensely but could not read the names moving swiftly. The quota man, not watching, twirled half-circles on his green swivel, his finger tips seeming to meet around some very definite ball of air. His eyes, detached, were loafing in some far country, but his attitude otherwise was one of listening casually as he talked on of the Program and why it had to be. When the sharp *pheep* came out of the wall, he stopped the list at once. There, bracketed by two green stars, was her name, her name of five days ago. "That'll do it for now," he said, big-voiced and cheerful, smiling his eyes hopefully at her from the green swivel. "Fills the quota! Apparently your husband has just got out

by David R. Bunch

on a volunteer, ha ha. You see, I didn't have to watch the list, because when you spoke your names, the list knew, ha ha."

When the screams broke from her lips and the roses writhed in torture, he took the necessary things from his desk drawer and raced to her. He had seen them do this before, many times, usually from a lack of preparation and gross unfamiliarity with the Program. "It will be the most restful ten years of your life," he insisted soothingly as he expertly pumped green fluid through a puncture he had made in her left arm. "And once a year," he talked on as he soothed and petted her with the frozen relaxer pad, "usually in June, in our new improved system, we bring them back and allow them one visitor, the visitor of their choice, if possible. In a very private little cell for a full hour! Now, isn't that fine?" His eyes leered at the husband. "Usually in cases like this there's no doubt who the visitor will be. Unless of course he too has been drafted. But it's just for the ten years, after all, and then someone else takes your place in this necessary rotation. So much better, we feel, than either of the other two possible ways of solving the problem—drastic regimentation of the rate or outright reduction through perma-sleep, ha ha. And, who knows, with the new building program and a fuller enlistment in Volunteers for Rate Control, we might be able to reduce the time."

THEN, because of the rate, and the highway condition especially, he led her away, dazed and wooden now from the green fluid and the numbing relaxer pad. Her husband of five days, having escaped the draft by the grace of a volunteer, left fast in his little Whooshie. As he headed north toward the new Super, he waved vaguely in the direction of the place where she would be for ten years. Actually he was so tired of her already that right now he doubted if he would ever be back. But up on the northern Super, and getting a little lonely, he decided it would probably be fun once a year to be able to go back and supplement other activities with a wife. But wait! Just as he was wheeling his Whooshie past an animated sign that showed two sports Caddiscats battling in boxing shorts the dread fear seized him anew. With the birth rate what it was and had been and with the highways becoming more and more congested all the time no doubt he too would soon be drafted into the Program. There, with the special fluids, to lie like an egg, like a cold stick of wood, like a dead man ...for ten years...maybe longer...maybe forever...in the crowded earth's Cold Storage Program! **END**

THE DESERT AND THE STARS

The Aga Kaga wanted peace — a piece of everything in sight!

BY KEITH LAUMER

ILLUSTRATED BY GAUGHAN

"I'M not at all sure," Under-Secretary Sternwheeler said, "that I fully understand the necessity for your.. ah...absenting yourself from your post of duty, Mr. Retief. Surely this matter could have been dealt with in the usual way—assuming any action is necessary."

"I had a sharp attack of writer's cramp, Mr. Secretary," Retief said. "So I thought I'd better come along in person—just to be sure I was positive of making my point."

"Eh?"

"Why, ah, there were a number of dispatches," Deputy Under-Secretary Magnan put in. "Unfortunately, this being end-of-the-fiscal-year time, we found ourselves quite inundated with reports. Reports, reports, reports—"

"Not criticizing the reporting system, are you, Mr. Magnan?" the Under-Secretary barked.

"Gracious, no," Magnan said. "I love reports."

"It seems nobody's told the Aga Kagans about fiscal years," Retief said. "They're going right ahead with their program of land-grabbing on Flamme. So far, I've persuaded the Boyars that this is a matter for the Corps, and not to take matters into their own hands."

The Under-Secretary nodded. "Quite right. Carry on along the same lines. Now, if there's nothing further—"

"Thank you, Mr. Secretary," Magnan said, rising. "We certainly appreciate your guidance."

"There is a little something further," said Retief, sitting solidly in his chair. "What's the Corps going to do about the Aga Kagans?"

The Under-Secretary turned a liverish eye on Retief. "As Minister to Flamme, you should know that the function of a diplomatic representative is merely to...what shall I say...?"

"String them along?" Magnan suggested.

"An unfortunate choice of phrase," the Under-Secretary said. "However, it embodies certain realities of Galactic politics. The Corps must concern itself with matters of broad policy."

"Sixty years ago the Corps was encouraging the Boyars to settle Flamme," Retief said. "They were assured of Corps support."

"I don't believe you'll find that in writing," said the Under-Secretary blandly. "In any event, that was sixty

years ago. At that time a foothold against Neo-Concordiatist elements was deemed desirable. Now the situation has changed."

"The Boyars have spent sixty years terraforming Flamme," Retief said. "They've cleared jungle, descummed the seas, irrigated deserts, set out forests. They've just about reached the point where they can begin to enjoy it. The Aga Kagans have picked this as a good time to move in. They've landed thirty detachments of 'fishermen'—complete with armored trawlers mounting 40 mm infinite repeaters—and another two dozen parties of 'homesteaders'—all male and toting rocket launchers."

"Surely there's land enough on the world to afford space to both groups," the Under-Secretary said. "A spirit of co-operation—"

"THE Boyars needed some co-operation sixty years ago," Retief said. "They tried to get the Aga Kagans to join in and help them beat back some of the saurian wild life that liked to graze on people. The Corps didn't like the idea. They wanted to see an undisputed anti-Concordiatist enclave. The Aga Kagans didn't want to play, either. But now that the world is tamed, they're moving in."

"The exigencies of diplomacy require a flexible policy—"

"I want a firm assurance of Corps support to take back to Flamme," Retief said. "The Boyars are a little naive. They don't understand diplomatic triple-speak. They just want to hold onto the homes they've made out of a wasteland."

"I'm warning you, Retief!" the Under-Secretary snapped, leaning forward, wattles quivering. "Corps policy with regard to Flamme includes no inflammatory actions based on outmoded concepts. The Boyars will have to accommodate themselves to the situation!"

"That's what I'm afraid of," Retief said. "They're not going to sit still and watch it happen. If I don't take back concrete evidence of Corps backing, we're going to have a nice hot little shooting war on our hands."

The Under-Secretary pushed out his lips and drummed his fingers on the desk.

"Confounded hot-heads," he muttered. "Very well, Retief. I'll go along to the extent of a Note; but positively no further."

"A Note? I was thinking of something more like a squadron of Corps Peace Enforcers running through a few routine maneuvers off Flamme."

"Out of the question. A stiffly worded Protest Note is the best I can do. That's final."

Back in the corridor, Mag-

nan turned to Retief. "When will you learn not to argue with Under-Secretaries? One would think you actively disliked the idea of ever receiving a promotion. I was astonished at the Under-Secretary's restraint. Frankly, I was stunned when he actually agreed to a Note. I, of course, will have to draft it." Magnan pulled at his lower lip thoughtfully. "Now, I wonder, should I view with deep concern an act of open agression, or merely point out an apparent violation of technicalities..."

"Don't bother," Retief said. "I have a draft all ready to go."

"But how—?"

"I had a feeling I'd get paper instead of action," Retief said. "I thought I'd save a little time all around."

"At times, your cynicism borders on impudence."

"At other times, it borders on disgust. Now, if you'll run the Note through for signature, I'll try to catch the six o'clock shuttle."

"Leaving so soon? There's an important reception tonight. Some of our biggest names will be there. An excellent opportunity for you to join in the diplomatic give-and-take."

"No, thanks. I want to get back to Flamme and join in something mild, like a dinosaur hunt."

"When you get there," said Magnan, "I hope you'll make it quite clear that this matter is to be settled without violence."

"Don't worry. I'll keep the peace, if I have to start a war to do it."

ON the broad verandah at Government House, Retief settled himself comfortably in a lounge chair. He accepted a tall glass from a white-jacketed waiter and regarded the flamboyant Flamme sunset, a gorgeous blaze of vermillion and purple that reflected from a still lake, tinged the broad lawn with color, silhouetted tall poplars among flower beds.

"You've done great things here in sixty years, Georges," said Retief. "Not that natural geological processes wouldn't have produced the same results, given a couple of hundred million years."

"Don't belabor the point," the Boyar Chef d'Regime said. "Since we seem to be on the verge of losing it."

"You're forgetting the Note."

"A Note," Georges said, waving his cigar. "What the purple polluted hell is a Note supposed to do? I've got Aga Kagan claim-jumpers camped in the middle of what used to be a fine stand of barley, cooking sheep's brains over dung fires not ten miles from Government House—and upwind at that."

"Say, if that's the same barley you distill your whiskey

from, I'd call that a first-class atrocity."

"Retief, on your say-so, I've kept my boys on a short leash. They've put up with plenty. Last week, while you were away, these barbarians sailed that flotilla of armor-plated junks right through the middle of one of our best oyster breeding beds. It was all I could do to keep a bunch of our men from going out in private helis and blasting 'em out of the water."

"That wouldn't have been good for the oysters, either."

"That's what I told 'em. I also said you'd be back here in a few days with something from Corps HQ. When I tell 'em all we've got is a piece of paper, that'll be the end. There's a strong vigilante organization here that's been outfitting for the last four weeks. If I hadn't held them back with assurances that the CDT would step in and take care of this invasion, they would have hit them before now."

"THAT would have been a mistake," said Retief. "The Aga Kagans are tough customers. They're active on half a dozen worlds at the moment. They've been building up for this push for the last five years. A show of resistance by you Boyars without Corps backing would be an invitation to slaughter—with the excuse that you started it."

"So what are we going to do? Sit here and watch these goat-herders take over our farms and fisheries?"

"Those goat-herders aren't all they seem. They've got a first-class modern navy."

"I've seen 'em. They camp in goat-skin tents, gallop around on animal-back, wear dresses down to their ankles—"

"The 'goat-skin' tents are a high-polymer plastic, made in the same factory that turns out those long flowing bullet-proof robes you mention. The animals are just for show. Back home they use helis and ground cars of the most modern design."

The Chef d'Regime chewed his cigar.

"Why the masquerade?"

"Something to do with internal policies, I suppose."

"So we sit tight and watch 'em take our world away from us. That's what I get for playing along with you, Retief. We should have clobbered these monkeys as soon as they set foot on our world."

"Slow down, I haven't finished yet. There's still the Note."

"I've got plenty of paper already. Rolls and rolls of it."

"Give diplomatic processes a chance," said Retief. "The Note hasn't even been delivered yet. Who knows? We may get surprising results."

"If you expect me to supply a runner for the purpose, you're out of luck. From what

I hear, he's likely to come back with his ears stuffed in his hip pocket."

"I'll deliver the Note personally," Retief said. "I could use a couple of escorts—preferably strong-arm lads."

The Chef d'Regime frowned, blew out a cloud of smoke. "I wasn't kidding about these Aga Kagans," he said. "I hear they have some nasty habits. I don't want to see you operated on with the same knives they use to skin out the goats."

"I'd be against that myself. Still, the mail must go through."

"Strong-arm lads, eh? What have you got in mind, Retief?"

"A little muscle in the background is an old diplomatic custom," Retief said.

The Chef d'Regime stubbed out his cigar thoughtfully. "I used to be a pretty fair elbow-wrestler myself," he said. "Suppose I go along...?"

"That," said Retief, "should lend just the right note of solidarity to our little delegation." He hitched his chair closer. "Now, depending on what we run into, here's how we'll play it..."

II

EIGHT miles into the rolling granite hills west of the capital, a black-painted official air-car flying the twin flags of Chief of State and Terrestrial Minister skimmed along a foot above a pot-holed road. Slumped in the padded seat, the Boyar Chef d'Regime waved his cigar glumly at the surrounding hills.

"Fifty years ago this was bare rock," he said. "We've bred special strains of bacteria here to break down the formations into soil, and we followed up with a program of broad-spectrum fertilization. We planned to put the whole area into crops by next year. Now it looks like the goats will get it."

"Will that scrubland support a crop?" Retief said, eyeing the lichen-covered knolls.

"Sure. We start with legumes and follow up with cereals. Wait until you see this next section. It's an old flood plain, came into production thirty years ago. One of our finest—"

The air-car topped a rise. The Chef dropped his cigar and half rose, with a hoarse yell. A herd of scraggly goats tossed their heads among a stand of ripe grain. The car pulled to a stop. Retief held the Boyar's arm.

"Keep calm, Georges," he said. "Remember, we're on a diplomatic mission. It wouldn't do to come to the conference table smelling of goats."

"Let me at 'em!" Georges roared. "I'll throttle 'em with my bare hands!"

A bearded goat eyed the Boyar Chef sardonically, jaw working. "Look at that long-

nosed son!" The goat gave a derisive bleat and took another mouthful of ripe grain.

"Did you see that?" Georges yelled. "They've trained the son of a—"

"Chin up, Georges," Retief said. "We'll take up the goat problem along with the rest."

"I'll murder 'em!"

"Hold it, Georges. Look over there."

A hundred yards away, a trio of brown-cloaked horsemen topped a rise, paused dramatically against the cloudless pale sky, then galloped down the slope toward the car, rifles bobbing at their backs, cloaks billowing out behind. Side by side they rode, through the brown-golden grain, cutting three narrow swaths that ran in a straight sweep from the ridge to the air-car where Retief and the Chef d'Regime hovered, waiting.

Georges scrambled for the side of the car. "Just wait 'til I get my hands on him!"

Retief pulled him back. "Sit tight and look pleased, Georges. Never give the opposition a hint of your true feelings. Pretend you're a goat lover—and hand me one of your cigars."

The three horsemen pulled up in a churn of chaff and a clatter of pebbles. Georges coughed, batting a hand at the settling dust. Retief peeled the cigar unhurriedly, sniffed at it and thumbed it alight. He drew at it, puffed out a cloud of smoke and glanced casually at the trio of Aga Kagan cavaliers.

"Peace be with you," he intoned in accent-free Kagan. "May your shadows never grow less."

THE leader of the three, a hawk-faced man with a heavy beard, unlimbered his rifle. He fingered it, frowning ferociously.

"Have no fear," Retief said, smiling graciously. "He who comes as a guest enjoys perfect safety."

A smooth-faced member of the threesome barked an oath and leveled his rifle at Retief.

"Youth is the steed of folly," Retief said. "Take care that the beardless one does not disgrace his house."

The leader whirled on the youth and snarled an order. He lowered the rifle, muttering. Blackbeard turned back to Retief.

"Begone, interlopers," he said. "You disturb the goats."

"Provision is not taken to the houses of the generous," Retief said. "May the creatures dine well ere they move on."

"Hah! The goats of the Aga Kaga graze on the lands of the Aga Kaga." The leader edged his horse close, eyed Retief fiercely. "We welcome no intruders on our lands."

"To praise a man for what he does not possess is to make him appear foolish," Retief

said. "These are the lands of the Boyars. But enough of these pleasantries. We seek audience with your ruler."

"You may address me as 'Exalted One'," the leader said. "Now dismount from that steed of Shaitan."

"It is written, if you need anything from a dog, call him 'sir'," Retief said. "I must decline to impute canine ancestry to a guest. Now you may conduct us to your headquarters."

"Enough of your insolence!" The bearded man cocked his rifle. "I could blow your heads off!"

"The hen has feathers, but it does not fly," Retief said. "We have asked for escort. A slave must be beaten with a stick; for a free man, a hint is enough."

"You mock me, pale one. I warn you—"

"Only love makes me weep," Retief said. "I laugh at hatred."

"Get out of the car!"

Retief puffed at his cigar, eyeing the Aga Kagan cheerfully. The youth in the rear moved forward, teeth bared.

"Never give in to the fool, lest he say, 'He fears me,'" Retief said.

"I cannot restrain my men in the face of your insults," the bearded Aga Kagan roared. "These hens of mine have feathers—and talons as well!"

"When God would destroy an ant, he gives him wings," Retief said. "Distress in misfortune is another misfortune."

The bearded man's face grew purple.

Retief dribbled the ash from his cigar over the side of the car.

"Now I think we'd better be getting on," he said briskly. "I've enjoyed our chat, but we do have business to attend to."

The bearded leader laughed shortly. "Does the condemned man beg for the axe?" he enquired rhetorically. "You shall visit the Aga Kaga, then. Move on! And make no attempt to escape, else my gun will speak you a brief farewell."

The horsemen glowered, then, at a word from the leader, took positions around the car. Georges started the vehicle forward, following the leading rider. Retief leaned back and let out a long sigh.

"That was close," he said. "I was about out of proverbs."

"You sound as though you'd brought off a coup," Georges said. "From the expression on the whiskery one's face, we're in for trouble. What was he saying?"

"Just a routine exchange of bluffs," Retief said. "Now when we get there, remember to make your flattery sound like insults and your insults sound like flattery, and you'll be all right."

"These birds are armed. And they don't like stran-

gers," Georges said. "Maybe I should have boned up on their habits before I joined this expedition."

"Just stick to the plan," Retief said. "And remember: a handful of luck is better than a camel-load of learning."

THE air car followed the escort down a long slope to a dry river bed and across it, through a barren stretch of shifting sand to a green oasis set with canopies.

The armed escort motioned the car to a halt before an immense tent of glistening black. Before the tent armed men lounged under a pennant bearing a lion *couchant* in crimson on a field verte.

"Get out," Blackbeard ordered. The guards eyed the visitors, their drawn sabers catching sunlight. Retief and Georges stepped from the car onto rich rugs spread on the grass. They followed the ferocious gesture of the bearded man through the opening into a perfumed interior of luminous shadows. A heavy odor of incense hung in the air, and the strumming of stringed instruments laid a muted pattern of sound behind the decorations of gold and blue, silver and green. At the far end of the room, among a bevy of female slaves, a large and resplendently clad man with blue-black hair and a clean-shaven chin popped a grape into his mouth. He wiped his fingers negligently on a wisp of silk offered by a handmaiden, belched loudly and looked the callers over.

Blackbeard cleared his throat. "Down on your faces in the presence of the Exalted One, the Aga Kaga, ruler of East and West."

"Sorry," Retief said firmly. "My hay-fever, you know."

The reclining giant waved a hand languidly.

"Never mind the formalities," he said. "Approach."

Retief and Georges crossed the thick rugs. A cold draft blew toward them. The reclining man sneezed violently, wiped his nose on another silken scarf and held up a hand.

"Night and the horses and the desert know me," he said in resonant tones. "Also the sword and the guest and paper and pen—" He paused, wrinkled his nose and sneezed again. "Turn off that damned air-conditioner," he snapped.

He settled himself and motioned the bearded man to him. The two exchanged muted remarks. Then the bearded man stepped back, ducked his head and withdrew to the rear.

"Excellency," Retief said, "I have the honor to present M. Georges Duror, Chef d'Regime of the Planetary government."

"Planetary government?" The Aga Kaga spat grape seeds on the rug. "My men have observed a few squatters

along the shore. If they're in distress, I'll see about a distribution of goat-meat."

"It is the punishment of the envious to grieve at anothers' plenty," Retief said "No goat-meat will be required."

"Ralph told me you talk like a page out of Mustapha ben Abdallah Katib Jelebi," the Aga Kaga said. "I know a few old sayings myself. For example, 'A Bedouin is only cheated once.'"

"We have no such intentions, Excellency," Retief said. "Is it not written, 'Have no faith in the Prince whose minister cheats you'?"

"I've had some unhappy experiences with strangers," the Aga Kaga said. "It is written in the sands that all strangers are kin. Still, he who visits rarely is a welcome guest. Be seated."

III

HANDMAIDENS brought cushions, giggled and fled. Retief and Georges settled themselves comfortably. The Aga Kaga eyed them in silence.

"We have come to bear tidings from the Corps Diplomatique Terrestrienne," Retief said solemnly. A perfumed slave girl offered grapes.

"Modest ignorance is better than boastful knowledge," the Aga Kaga said. "What brings the CDT into the picture?"

"The essay of the drunkard will be read in the tavern," Retief said. "Whereas the words of kings..."

"Very well, I concede the point." The Aga Kaga waved a hand at the serving maids. "Depart, my dears. Attend me later. You too, Ralph. These are mere diplomats. They are men of words, not deeds."

The bearded man glared and departed. The girls hurried after him.

"Now," the Aga Kaga said. "Let's drop the wisdom of the ages and get down to the issues. Not that I don't admire your repertoire of platitudes. How do you remember them all?"

"Diplomats and other liars require good memories," said Retief. "But as you point out, small wisdom to small minds. I'm here to effect a settlement of certain differences between yourself and the planetary authorities. I have here a Note, which I'm conveying on behalf of the Sector Under-Secretary. With your permission, I'll read it."

"Go ahead." The Aga Kaga kicked a couple of cushions onto the floor, eased a bottle from under the couch and reached for glasses.

"The Under-Secretary for Sector Affairs presents his compliments to his Excellency, the Aga Kaga of the Aga Kaga, Primary Potentate, Hereditary Sheik, Emir of the—"

"Yes, yes. Skip the titles." Retief flipped over two pages.

"...and with reference to the recent relocation of persons under the jurisdiction of his Excellency, has the honor to point out that the territories now under settlement comprise a portion of that area, hereinafter designated as Sub-sector Alpha, which, under terms of the Agreement entered into by his Excellency's predecessor, and as referenced in Sector Ministry's Notes numbers G-175846573957-b and X-7584-736 c-1, with particular pertinence to that body designated in the Revised Galactic Catalogue, Tenth Edition, as amended, Volume Nine, reel 43, as 54 Cygni Alpha, otherwise referred to hereinafter as Flamme—"

"Come to the point," the Aga Kaga cut in. "You're here to lodge a complaint that I'm invading territories to which someone else lays claim, is that it?" He smiled broadly, offered dope-sticks and lit one. "Well, I've been expecting a call. After all, it's what you gentlemen are paid for. Cheers."

"Your Excellency has a lucid way of putting things," Retief said.

"Call me Stanley," the Aga Kaga said. "The other routine is just to please some of the old fools— I mean the more conservative members of my government. They're still gnawing their beards and kicking themselves because their ancestors dropped science in favor of alchemy and got themselves stranded in a cultural dead end. This charade is supposed to prove they were right all along. However, I've no time to waste in neurotic compensations. I have places to go and deeds to accomplish."

"At first glance," Retief said, "it looks as though the places are already occupied, and the deeds are illegal."

THE Aga Kaga guffawed. "For a diplomat, you speak plainly, Retief. Have another drink." He poured, eyeing Georges. "What of M. Duror? How does he feel about it?"

Georges took a thoughtful swallow of whiskey. "Not bad," he said. "But not quite good enough to cover the odor of goats."

The Aga Kaga snorted. "I thought the goats were overdoing it a bit myself," he said. "Still, the graybeards insisted. And I need their support."

"Also," Georges said distinctly, "I think you're soft. You lie around letting women wait on you, while your betters are out doing an honest day's work."

The Aga Kaga looked startled. "Soft? I can tie a knot in an iron bar as big as your thumb." He popped a grape into his mouth. "As for the rest, your pious views about the virtues of hard labor are as childish as my advisors' faith in the advantages of

primitive plumbing. As for myself, I am a realist. If two monkeys want the same banana, in the end one will have it, and the other will cry morality. The days of my years are numbered, praise be to God. While they last, I hope to eat well, hunt well, fight well and take my share of pleasure. I leave to others the arid satisfactions of self-denial and other perversions."

"You admit you're here to grab our land, then," Georges said. "That's the damnedest piece of bare-faced aggression—"

"Ah, ah!" The Aga Kaga held up a hand. "Watch your vocabulary, my dear sir. I'm sure that 'justifiable yearnings for territorial self-realization' would be more appropriate to the situation. Or possibly 'legitimate aspirations for self-determination of formerly exploited peoples' might fit the case. Aggression is, by definition, an activity carried on only by those who have inherited the mantle of Colonial Imperialism."

"Imperialism! Why, you Aga Kagans have been the most notorious planet-grabbers in Sector history, you—you—"

"Call me Stanley." The Aga Kaga munched a grape. "I merely face the realities of popular folk-lore. Let's be pragmatic; it's a matter of historical association. Some people can grab land and pass it off lightly as a moral duty; others are dubbed imperialist merely for holding onto their own. Unfair, you say. But that's life, my friends. And I shall continue to take every advantage of it."

"We'll fight you!" Georges bellowed. He took another gulp of whiskey and slammed the glass down. "You won't take this world without a struggle!"

"Another?" the Aga Kaga said, offering the bottle. Georges glowered as his glass was filled. The Aga Kaga held the glass up to the light.

"Excellent color, don't you agree?" He turned his eyes on Georges.

"It's pointless to resist," he said. "We have you outgunned and outmanned. Your small nation has no chance against us. But we're prepared to be generous. You may continue to occupy such areas as we do not immediately require until such time as you're able to make other arrangements."

"And by the time we've got a crop growing out of what was bare rock, you'll be ready to move in," the Boyar Chef d'Regime snapped. "But you'll find that we aren't alone!"

"QUITE alone," the Aga said. He nodded sagely. "Yes, one need but read the lesson of history. The Corps Diplomatique will make expostulatory noises, but it will accept the *fait accompli*. You, my dear sir, are but a very small nibble. We won't make the mistake of excessive

greed. We shall inch our way to empire—and those who stand in our way shall be dubbed warmongers."

"I see you're quite a student of history, Stanley," Retief said. "I wonder if you recall the eventual fate of most of the would-be empire nibblers of the past?"

"Ah, but they grew incautious. They went too far, too fast."

"The confounded impudence," Georges rasped. "Tells us to our face what he has in mind!"

"An ancient and honorable custom, from the time of *Mein Kampf* and the *Communist Manifesto* through the *Porcelain Wall* of Leung. Such declarations have a legendary quality. It's traditional that they're never taken at face value."

"But always," Retief said, "there was a critical point at which the man on horseback could have been pulled from the saddle."

"*Could* have been," the Aga Kaga chuckled. He finished the grapes and began peeling an orange. "But they never were. Hitler could have been stopped by the Czech Air Force in 1938; Stalin was at the mercy of the primitive atomics of the west in 1946; Leung was grossly over-extended at Rangoon. But the onus of that historic role could not be overcome. It has been the fate of your spiritual forebears to carve civilization from the wilderness and then, amid tearing of garments and the heaping of ashes of self-accusation on your own confused heads, to withdraw, leaving the spoils for local political opportunists and mob leaders, clothed in the mystical virtue of native birth. Have a banana."

"You're stretching your analogy a little too far," Retief said. "You're banking on the inaction of the Corps. You could be wrong."

"I shall know when to stop," the Aga Kaga said.

"Tell me, Stanley," Retief said, rising. "Are we quite private here?"

"Yes, perfectly so," the Aga Kaga said. "None would dare to intrude in my council." He cocked an eyebrow at Retief. "You have a proposal to make in confidence? But what of our dear friend Georges? One would not like to see him disillusioned."

"Don't worry about Georges. He's a realist, like you. He's prepared to deal in facts. Hard facts, in this case."

The Aga Kaga nodded thoughtfully. "What are you getting at?"

"You're basing your plan of action on the certainty that the Corps will sit by, wringing its hands, while you embark on a career of planetary piracy."

"Isn't it the custom?" the Aga Kaga smiled complacently.

"I have news for you, Stanley. In this instance, neck-wringing seems more in order than hand-wringing."

The Aga Kaga frowned. "Your manner—"

"Never mind our manners!" Georges blurted, standing. "We don't need any lessons from goat-herding land-thieves!"

The Aga Kaga's face darkened. "You dare to speak thus to me, pig of a muck-grubber!"

WITH a muffled curse Georges launched himself at the potentate. The giant rolled aside. He grunted as the Boyar's fist thumped in his short ribs; then he chopped down on Georges' neck. The Chef d'Regime slid off onto the floor as the Aga Kaga bounded to his feet, sending fruit and silken cushions flying.

"I see it now!" he hissed. "An assassination attempt!" He stretched his arms, thick as tree-roots—a grizzly in satin robes. "Your heads will ring together like gongs before I have done with you!" He lunged for Retief. Retief came to his feet, feinted with his left and planted a short right against the Aga Kaga's jaw with a solid smack. The potentate stumbled, grabbed; Retief slipped aside. The Aga Kaga whirled to face Retief.

"A slippery diplomat, by all the houris in Paradise!" he grated, breathing hard. "But a fool. True to your medieval code of chivalry, you attacked singly, a blunder I would never have made. And you shall die for your idiocy!" He opened his mouth to bellow—

"You sure look foolish, with your fancy hair-do down in your eyes," Retief said. "The servants will get a big laugh out of it."

With a choked yell, the Aga Kaga dived for Retief, missed as he leaped aside. The two went to the mat together and rolled, sending a stool skittering. Grunts and curses echoed as the two big men strained, muscles popping. Retief groped for a scissors hold; the Aga Kaga seized his foot, bit hard. Retief bent nearly double, braced himself and slammed the potentate against the rug. Dust flew. Then the two were on their feet, circling.

"Many times have I longed to broil a diplomat over a slow fire," the Aga Kaga snarled. "Tonight will see it come to pass!"

"I've seen it done often at staff meetings," said Retief. "It seems to have no permanent effect."

The Aga Kaga reached for Retief, who feinted left, hammered a right to the chin. The Aga Kaga tottered. Retief measured him, brought up a haymaker. The potentate slammed to the rug—out cold.

GEORGES rolled over, sat up. "Let me at the son of a—" he muttered.

"Take over, Georges," Retief said, panting. "Since he's in a mood to negotiate now, we may as well get something accomplished."

Georges eyed the fallen ruler, who stirred, groaned lugubriously. "I hope you know what you're doing," Georges said. "But I'm with you in any case." He straddled the prone body, plucked a curved knife from the low table and prodded the Aga Kaga's Adam's apple. The monarch opened his eyes.

"Make one little peep and your windbag will spring a leak," Georges said. "Very few historical figures have accomplished anything important after their throats were cut."

"Stanley won't yell," Retief said. "We're not the only ones who're guilty of cultural idiocy. He'd lose face something awful if he let his followers see him like this." Retief settled himself on a tufted ottoman. "Right, Stanley?"

The Aga Kaga snarled.

Retief selected a grape and ate it thoughtfully. "These aren't bad, Georges. You might consider taking on a few Aga Kagan vine-growers —purely on a yearly contract basis, of course."

The Aga Kaga groaned, rolling his eyes.

"Well, I believe we're ready to get down to diplomatic proceedings now," Retief said. "Nothing like dealing in an atmosphere of realistic good fellowship. First, of course, there's the matter of the presence of aliens lacking visas." He opened his briefcase, withdrew a heavy sheet of parchment. "I have the document here, drawn up and ready for signature. It provides for the prompt deportation of such persons, by Corps Transport, all expenses to be borne by the Aga Kagan government. That's agreeable, I assume?" Retief looked expectantly at the purple face of the prone potentate. The Aga Kaga grunted a strangled grunt.

"Speak up, Stanley," Retief said. "Give him plenty of air, Georges."

"Shall I let some in through the side?"

"Not yet. I'm sure Stanley wants to be agreeable."

The Aga Kaga snarled.

"Maybe just a little then, Georges," Retief said judiciously. Georges jabbed the knife in far enough to draw a bead of blood. The Aga Kaga grunted.

"Agreed!" he snorted. "By the beard of the prophet, when I get my hands on you..."

"Second item: certain fields, fishing grounds, et cetera, have suffered damage due to the presence of the aforementioned illegal immi-

grants. Full compensation will be made by the Aga Kagan government. Agreed?"

THE Aga Kaga drew a breath, tensed himself; Georges jabbed with the knife point. His prisoner relaxed with a groan. "Agreed!" he grated. "A vile tactic! You enter my tent under the guise of guests, protected by diplomatic immunity—"

"I had the impression we were herded in here at sword point," said Retief. "Shall we go on? Now there's the little matter of restitution for violation of sovereignty, reparations for mental anguish, payment for damaged fences, roads, drainage canals, communications, et cetera, et cetera. Shall I read them all?"

"Wait until the news of this outrage is spread abroad!"

"They'd never believe it," Retief said. "History would prove it impossible. And on mature consideration, I'm sure you won't want it noised about that you entertained visiting dignitaries flat on your back."

"What about the pollution of the atmosphere by goats?" Georges put in. "And don't overlook the muddying of streams, the destruction of timber for camp fires and—"

"I've covered all that sort of thing under a miscellaneous heading," Retief said. "We can fill it in at leisure when we get back."

"Bandits!" the Aga Kaga hissed. "Thieves! Dogs of unreliable imperialists!"

"It is disillusioning, I know," Retief said. "Still, of such little surprises is history made. Sign here." He held the parchment out and offered a pen. "A nice clear signature, please. We wouldn't want any quibbling about the legality of the treaty, after conducting the negotiation with such scrupulous regard for the niceties."

"Niceties! Never in history has such an abomination been perpetrated!"

"Oh, treaties are always worked out this way, when it comes right down to it. We've just accelerated the process a little. Now, if you'll just sign like a good fellow, we'll be on our way. Georges will have his work cut out for him, planning how to use all this reparations money."

The Aga Kaga gnashed his teeth; Georges prodded. The Aga Kaga seized the pen and scrawled his name. Retief signed with a flourish. He tucked the treaty away in his briefcase, took out another.

"This is just a safe-conduct, to get us out of the door and into the car," he said. "Probably unnecessary, but it won't hurt to have it, in case you figure out some way to avoid your obligations as a host."

The Aga Kaga signed the document after another prod from Georges.

"One more paper, and I'll be into the jugular," he said.

"WE'RE all through now," said Retief. "Stanley, we're going to have to run now. I'm going to strap up your hands and feet a trifle; it shouldn't take you more than ten minutes or so to get loose, stick a band-aid on your neck and—"

"My men will cut you down for the rascals you are!"

"By that time, we'll be over the hill," Retief continued. "At full throttle, we'll be at Government House in an hour, and of course I won't waste any time transmitting the treaty to Sector HQ. And the same concern for face that keeps you from yelling for help will insure that the details of the negotiation remain our secret."

"Treaty! That scrap of paper!"

"I confess the Corps is a little sluggish about taking action at times," Retief said, whipping a turn of silken cord around the Aga Kaga's ankles. "But once it's got signatures on a legal treaty, it's extremely stubborn about all parties adhering to the letter. It can't afford to be otherwise, as I'm sure you'll understand." He cinched up the cord, went to work on the hands. The Aga Kaga glared at him balefully.

"To the Pit with the Corps! The ferocity of my revenge—"

"Don't talk nonsense, Stanley. There are several squadrons of Peace Enforcers cruising in the Sector just now. I'm sure you're not ready to make any historical errors by taking them on." Retief finished and stood.

"Georges, just stuff a scarf in Stanley's mouth. I think he'd prefer to work quietly until he recovers his dignity." Retief buckled his briefcase, selected a large grape and looked down at the Aga Kaga.

"Actually, you'll be glad you saw things our way, Stanley," he said. "You'll get all the credit for the generous settlement. Of course, it will be a striking precedent for any other negotiations that may become necessary if you get grabby on other worlds in this region. And if your advisors want to know why the sudden change of heart, just tell them you've decided to start from scratch on an unoccupied world. Mention the virtues of thrift and hard work. I'm confident you can find plenty of historical examples to support you."

"Thanks for the drink," said Georges. "Drop in on me at Government House some time and we'll crack another bottle."

"And don't feel bad about your project's going awry," Retief said. "In the words of the prophet, 'Stolen goods are never sold at a loss.'"

"A remarkable about-face, Retief," Magnan said. "Let this be a lesson to you. A stern Note of Protest can work wonders."

"A lot depends on the method of delivery," Retief said.

"Nonsense. I knew all along the Aga Kagans were a reasonable and peace-loving people. One of the advantages of senior rank, of course, is the opportunity to see the big picture. Why, I was saying only this morning—"

The desk screen broke into life. The mottled jowls of Under-Secretary Sternwheeler appeared.

"Magnan! I've just learned of the Flamme affair. Who's responsible?"

"Why, ah... I suppose that I might be said—"

"This is your work, is it?"

"Well... Mr. Retief did play the role of messenger."

"Don't pass the buck, Magnan!" the Under-Secretary barked. "What the devil went on out there?"

"Just a routine Protest Note. Everything is quite in order."

"Bah! Your over-zealousness has cost me dear. I was feeding Flamme to the Aga Kagans to consolidate our position of moral superiority for use as a lever in a number of important negotiations. Now they've backed out! Aga Kaga emerges from the affair wreathed in virtue. You've destroyed a very pretty finesse in power politics, Mr. Magnan! A year's work down the drain!"

"But I thought—"

"I doubt that, Mr. Magnan, I doubt that very much!" The Under-Secretary rang off.

"This is a fine turn of events," Magnan groaned. "Retief, you know very well Protest Notes are merely intended for the historical record! No one ever takes them seriously."

"You and the Aga Kaga ought to get together," said Retief. "He's a great one for citing historical parallels. He's not a bad fellow, as a matter of fact. I have an invitation from him to visit Kaga and go mud-pig hunting. He was so impressed by Corps methods that he wants to be sure we're on his side next time. Why don't you come along?"

"Hmmm. Perhaps I should cultivate him. A few high-level contacts never do any harm. On the other hand, I understand he lives in a very loose way, feasting and merrymaking. Frivolous in the extreme. No wife, you understand, but hordes of lightly clad women about. And in that connection, the Aga Kagans have some very curious notions as to what constitutes proper hospitality to a guest."

Retief rose, pulled on the powder blue cloak and black velvet gauntlets of a Career Minister.

"Don't let it worry you," he said. "You'll have a great time. And as the Aga Kaga would say, 'Ugliness is the best safeguard of virginity.'"

END

by Keith Laumer

THE MAN WHO FLEW

BY CHARLES D. CUNNINGHAM, JR.

The Man Who Flew could not exist — but he had committed a foul crime!

CLOUDS hung low over the city, gray and dismal. The shining metal thruway partially reflected their somber visage. A few vehicles scurried nervously through the city.

Keller turned away from the window dismally. His conscience was bothering him, and it affected his every movement. Looking over his humbly furnished office, he entertained the thought, not for the first time, that he

should change jobs if he wanted to eat.

A buzz sounded—the intercom system. That would be Sally, his secretary. It was a mystery what she would want. Usually she never bothered him except in case of an emergency, and the last client Keller had had dropped his case three months ago.

Apparently it was another customer, unlikely as it seemed. Keller heard voices outside, Sally's irritated and protesting, and a nervous baritone. Abruptly the door opened, disclosing a rugged, bushy-haired C-3 (average intelligence and advanced extra-sensory perception, but unexercised), who was in a bad state of nerves.

He seemed to have forced his way past Sally into the inner office.

Keller flashed a thought at Sally: **How does he look?**

Not so hot, she answered. **I didn't bother to scan much—don't want to lower myself to that depth—but he seems to be a big paver. He's impatient, though. And he wants everything run his way.**

Oh, fine, thought Keller. My first victim in three months, and it has to be the Big Shot type.

He made the usual Q-R opening; curtly and efficiently:

"Your name?"

"Uh— Harold Radcliffe."

"Why the hesitation?" But Keller had scanned it already. The man was simply cautious. He continued without letting Radcliffe answer:

"Age?" 33. "Occupation?" Hesitation: Salesman. "Residence?" After writing this and Radcliffe's telephone number down, he closed his grimy black notebook and sat back.

"And now, Mr. Radcliffe, why exactly did you come here?"

Radcliffe, unsure of himself at first, gathered confidence as he noticed Keller's interest growing. He began:

"Well sir, for this job I need one of the best detectives—" he paused at Keller's grimace—"and since you're one of the few detectives in the city who can read minds, and the only A-2 'tec in the state—" He shrugged, and finished, "I figured you'd be the man for me."

Keller saw that he was telling the truth, after a quick check into the man's mind. "All right, Mr. Radcliffe. What's your problem?"

RADCLIFFE seemed to not be able to focus his thoughts. His mind, Keller saw, was a loose stream of unconnected thoughts, trying to merge into a whole. Keller could read no message out of them. He suspected a block—

by Charles D. Cunningham, Jr;

an unusual thing for a C-3, but not impossible.

He gave up, sat back and awaited the other's response. Finally it came, jerking Keller out of his chair.

"It's murder, Mr. Keller. The murder of my wife."

Murder!

It was the first suspected murder in thirteen years. Ever since the Ricjards case in '04, peace and tranquility reigned in a calm and placid nation. For thirteen peaceful years there had been no hint of manslaughter other than accidental. It had been conditioned out of humans at the prenatal stage, and unless there was a violent, all-encompassing urge to kill, murder was completely out of the question.

It was hard to believe. But it was not a lie; no non-tele could block a lie, and Keller scanned the truth in Radcliffe's brain.

"Wait a minute, Radcliffe. Are you sure it's not murder by accident—unintentional manslaughter, as the police term it? Or it could be suicide. Had you thought of that?"

Radcliffe shook his head impatiently. He rose out of his chair, pacing the floor nervously. "It could not possibly be accident. You'll see that when you investigate the case. Suicide? It's possible. Anything is possible, I suppose, but I would lay any kind of odds against it. We had just been to the theater. We returned to our apartment at about five minutes to eleven.

"After undressing and showering, I started to turn in. I noticed a light on in her room—we sleep in separate rooms—and called to her, to see if anything was wrong. There was no answer.

"I figured that she had gone to sleep with the light on, and went into the room to turn it off. That was when I saw her on the floor." He stopped. Keller read grief, fear and love in his memory.

"How had she been killed?"

"It was a handgun, Mr. Keller. Her face was all blackened and charred. Barely recognizable. But I knew it must be her. Our rooms connect, you see. There are two other doors to each room; one to the outside hall, and one to each bathroom.

"When she was shot, my door was locked on the inside—triple-locked, I remember, because I felt like being left alone that night. It was locked by chain, bar and bolt. It's a fairly ancient apartment house. We like it that way. Her bathroom door was open and there was no one hiding inside. The same went for my bathroom. And both hall doors were locked and bolted.

"The windows were locked on the inside, and there is no opening to shoot through that would not leave traces. I checked.

"Even if the killer had gotten in some way or other, there was no way he could get out and still leave the doors and windows locked up tight."

Keller thought, there is one way, Mr. Radcliffe. But he kept it to himself for the moment.

HE looked up and smiled as confidently as he could. "I'll be glad to take your case, Mr. Radcliffe. Of course you want me to spare no expenses," he added hopefully. At Radcliffe's harassed nod, he relaxed.

Next came the most dangerous part of the job. It was a part which had eliminated several competent detectives from their jobs—the Probe phase. This involved plunging into the subject's mind, and sorting out relevant details which could furnish extra clues. Several Probers had got themselves trapped in the subject's mind, unable to get out because of a mental block or insanity.

It might, however, be unnecessary. He flashed a thought to the girl in the adjoining room: **Sal, should I give him the H-R treatment?**

Answer: **Emphatically! He's hiding something. Not intentionally, but it needs to be uncovered. A superficial scanning of the preconscious doesn't get the job done.**

Keller sighed. The Probe (also called the H-R treatment; because a certain amount of hypnotism was involved) was trying on not only the subject but also the scanner. He said:

"Now, Mr. Radcliffe, I'm going to go into your subconscious mind and get your impressions of last night. I want you to concentrate on...let's say...the moment when you saw your wife." He shut off all of his five senses, and took the plunge.

The image formed:

Shrieking terror. A tinge of ozone in the air. The Creature creeping up from behind. A beheaded teddy bear lying full length on the floor. A hole in the air near the door, colored red. Floating demon—where? Nonononono! The Creature bending over him. Terror—heat. No! THE MAN WHO FLEW. Melting walls. The door (now violet) disintegrating. The teddy bear shriveling now—turns into a snake—

He emerged.

Before he could take full control of his body, a thought came:

Rick? How did you come out?

He flashed her the image. **Lousy. I can't get a true impression-picture to save my life. Just a lousy nightmare, fantasy-symbolism deal. But I did get something out of that mess. I'll let you know about it as soon as I verify it.**

TO Radcliffe, since the time when Keller had stopped talking until right now, as

Keller opened his eyes and frowned in thought, no time had elapsed. In actuality, the time taken was one and one-half microseconds.

Keller flashed: **Sally, tune in on this conversation, please.**

"Radcliffe," he said slowly, "When did you lose your sight?"

The other man sat up rigidly, then relaxed.

"How did you find out? Did you scan it?"

"No. When I was receiving your impressions, I caught an idea of melting walls. Then there were nameless creatures and demons floating around. I examined your senses when I came out, and saw that you were blind. What is it—sort of a sight perception-tuning sense?"

Radcliffe nodded. "I can sense everything except colors. Everything seems black, white and gray to me." He paused wearily. "Otherwise, there's no difference. No one else knew about it. Not even my wife."

Keller nodded. "Now, let's try it again. Concentrate on the moment when you entered here and saw me for the first time."

He flashed a thought to Sally. **Those Creatures were his fear of the unknown. He's got a lot of fright in there. Probably afraid that the killer would jump out at him from some shadowy corner. I don't quite see how he could visualize different colors, having never seen them before—but that's probably my interpretation of them. Here goes.**

The image:

Heat. Light. The teddy bear rising up again. Fear. THE MAN WHO FLEW. The snake again—coiling—striking—missing. Fleeing. Dying. Melting walls. Voices around him — laughing — shrieking. Colors of the rainbow. The creature d y i n g—dead—dissolving. No more...

Voices again. Talking to him. Telling him—what? His life flashing before him—stopping. His brain—*undressing?* Hole in the air at—the desk? Fear. THE MAN WHO FLEW. Fear-terror-hate-revenge ... determination...

Sally? Did you catch all that mess?

Unfortunately.

Something's wrong, Sally. I should be seeing something akin to the actual events through his eyes. Instead all I get is this meaningless stuff—unless—oh, God, now I see! Pause. **I wonder who the Man Who Flew is?**

You've got me. And how about the dissolving creature?

That shows his confidence in having someone to tell his story to. All his unknown fear is vanishing.

And then there's the hole in the air.

**Yeah. I think I'll surface

again, and try some straight questions on him.**

"RADCLIFFE," began Keller, "you haven't reported this to the police, have you?"

Radcliffe grinned. "Hardly. That would start the biggest scandal in years. I want it kept quiet until we found out who killed her."

"Well, we've ruled out accidental murder. You found no hand-gun in the room when you searched it?"

"No firearm of any kind."

Keller nodded. He let his mind drift back over four years—

To a time when he was in love with Mildred Simmons and had proposed to her... and she had rejected him, saying she loved Harold Radcliffe.

He had walked away, a bitter man. She had had many enemies, he mused, and almost as many friends. He did not know of anyone who knew her who was not either violently for or violently against her and all that she stood for.

He looked up.

"How old was your wife when she died?"

"Thirty-one. Two years younger than I am."

"Do you know of anyone who would want to kill her?" It was a routine question, but to Keller it was very important.

"No. I knew many people who disliked her intensely—I'm not denying that—but not to the point of murder. Of course, she wasn't around me half the time. I might not know."

"Well, Radcliffe, I think that'll be all for today. Mind if I go with you back to your apartment to look it over?"

"I don't live there any more. I moved out after I had disposed of her body. I couldn't stand to live there any longer."

Radcliffe shook hands and departed. Keller read confidence and positiveness that he, Keller, would come through. Keller was not so sure. He decided to have a look around Radcliffe's apartment.

He strolled aimlessly around the apartment for a few moments, pausing here and there to check details which might or might not help him in analyzing the Radcliffes' character: furniture design, carpeting, thermostat setting, toilet articles and so on. Then he got down to a thorough examination of the room.

There were no secret panels or trapdoors of any kind. So entrance by a hithertofore unknown passageway was completely out. He checked the air conditioner to see if any rigmarole could be fixed up with it to make it appear that

the victim had been shot with a handgun, but this, too, drew a blank.

After a few more minutes' examination, he decided to return.

On an impulse, he decided to see where Radcliffe had gone. Attuning his mind to the already-recorded pattern of Radcliffe's brain, he received direction, distance and motion—acceleration, direction, rate.

To his surprise he noted that Radcliffe had turned back and was heading toward Keller's office again.

Hastily, Keller returned to the office before him.

IN about twenty minutes, Radcliffe barged in as before. "Keller," he said, "I think I'm going to be called out of town tonight. So if you want any more information directly from me, you'll have to get it now."

Keller flashed: **Sally. Watch his conscious thoughts, and also his impressions. I'm going to try some unconscious identification-response. Wish me luck. Or do you want to burrow around in his subconscious with me a little more?**

I think I will. I'm actually beginning to enjoy it, to tell the truth.

Keller said aloud, "I'll go under again. That'll be the last time."

Image:

Nonono. Fire. Flame. Gun. Fearhateterrorlove.

Radcliffe, I am the creature.

No! Dead. You're not— I hate you—gone. Disbelief. Hate. No fear. Forgetfulness. Block. Withdrawal.

Radcliffe.

Me.

I'm the melting walls.

Terror? Uncertainty. Indecision. Realization. Contemptpityscorn. Sharp mental block. Withdrawal.

Radcliffe.

Me.

I'm the teddy bear. (This was, he thought, Radcliffe's wife-image.)

Indecision. Realization. Withdrawal. Blank.

Radcliffe, I'm the hole in the air.

But Keller's reply was cut short by a cry of terror in his brain.

RICK!

It was Sally.

KELLER went down immediately.

What? No response. **WHAT?** Still no response. Then he could hear her cry—fading in depth—now dying—gone.

Radcliffe.

Mememe.

Sally.

Memeususwetwowetwo...

It had happened. Sally was trapped in his preconscious,

absorbed by his dominating mind block. Gone.

Forever.

Determination, savage and enraged. A desperate shot in the dark:

RADCLIFFE!

Mememememememe...

Radcliffe, I am the MAN WHO FLEW.

Nononono. Fear. Terror. Hate. Block. Withdrawal, but incomplete...

Coming out of his Probe, Keller saw the result of his last implanted thought: Radcliffe, now in a tight fetal ball, lay on the floor.

His face was absolutely devoid of expression. His conscious mind was a constant *gobble-gobble-gobble.*

Keller entered the next room, to find Sally sprawled limply across her desk. Mindless, soulless, as if she had never had a mind or soul—Keller lifted her tenderly onto the floor and chose the most merciful way out, disintegrating her body with an atomic gun from the closet.

Then, again, the Probe...

Radcliffe.

Mememe.

I'm Sally.

Nonono. (Gloating.) Gonegonegone.

Radcliffe, *where's Sally*?

Gone. Satisfaction. Triumph. Laughter. Delirious happiness.

Radcliffe, I'm everything. I'm the creature. The snake, THE MAN WHO FLEW, the hole in the air, the flames, everything you've hated, feared and dreaded.

Withdrawal. Thunderbolt! More and more now.

Frantically, Keller defended himself, throwing up block after block, only to have it torn down by the ever-spreading bolts of pure mental energy. Finally he withdrew into his own body in haste, realizing that Radcliffe's conquest would mean his revival.

WHEN he opened his eyes, Radcliffe was sitting in the chair, yawning.

Probably, Keller thought, he had no knowledge of his fetal state. Good. "Well, Radcliffe," he said, "I need only one more thing to complete the picture. Now focus again on 11:17 last night, when you found your wife dead on the floor."

Image:

Fear. Terror. Anxiety. Nonono. Hole in the air. THE MAN WHO FLEW. Pain. Withdrawal. Complete mental block.

With a shock, Keller realized that in seven hours Radcliffe had been turned into an A-3—just below Keller—thanks to...Sally.

He analyzed the symbols. Impressions: No teddy bear (no real concern for the wife, then). No creature (no more

unknown fears). No snake or demon or flames, signifying evil and terror. Just the hole in the air and the man who flew.

Strange...he realized that meant one thing—he had to go down one last final time—to end it all...

Radcliffe.

Me.

Radcliffe, who is Sally?

Memeusususwetwowetwo.

Shut up! Radcliffe, I know who killed your wife.

Terror. Shock. Ordeal. Decision. Determination. Yes. We hear you.

THE MAN WHO FLEW RADCLIFFE! THE MAN WHO FLEW KILLED YOUR WIFE. THE HOLE IN THE AIR IS WHAT YOU SENSED—THE VACUUM THAT HE LEFT WHEN HE TELEPORTED HIMSELF OUT OF THE THE MELTING WALLS ARE, RADCLIFFE. THE WALLS THAT COULDN'T HOLD THE MAN WHO FLEW—THE MAN WHO KILLED YOUR WIFE.

I, I, I, I...

RADCLIFFE, WHO KILLED YOUR WIFE? WHO KILLED YOUR WIFE WITH THAT HANDGUN, AND THEN APPARENTLY DISAPPEARED INTO THIN AIR?

Nonono...

IT'S ME, RADCLIFFE. I AM THE MAN WHO FLEW. HOW ELSE WOULD I KNOW THAT IT WAS AT 11:17 THAT YOU FOUND YOUR WIFE DEAD? HOW ELSE COULD I GO FROM HERE TO YOUR APARTMENT WITHOUT KNOWING IT WAS RAINING?

Youyouyou...

THAT'S RIGHT, RADCLIFFE. BUT IT'S TOO LATE NOW. ISN'T IT? YOU'RE GONE, AREN'T YOU? NO. RADCLIFFE! DON'T! NONOnonono... Radcliffe...

Memeusus...

Wethreewethreewethree ...

END

THE POPOFF

BY THEODORE STURGEON

WE are an inveterate, habitual, addicted radio listener: were you able to absorb all that passes through this wrinkled bearded jelly as it crystallizes these syllables on the paper for you, you might be hard put to it to separate the science, science fiction, science-fantasy and sheer opinion which is intended for you, from the cascade of cacaphonies cavorting coincidentally amongst the selfsame cerebral viscosities. Working without the radio long ago became a total impossibility, and others beside ourselves have assigned various reasons to this. One says we set up a barrier of noise between us and the world, and then mentally tune the noise out, leaving us a species of tomblike (or womblike) privacy. Another says chronic radio-listening is due to anxiety: it indicates that we want to be forewarned when the whole shebang wheebangs. Still another suggests that given a choice between work and distraction, we probably prefer distraction and use the perpetual purr as instant interruption, as convenient as our omni-present coffee automatic pot.

We know, of course, which of these analyses are correct: they all are. There is, however, another reason not readily apparent unless you see our personal cave for yourself. For attached to the ubiquitous radio is a tape recorder, also always in the "on" condition. A function switch ties in the radio, a microphone, the television and the intercom to the

house; the recorder is therefore a p.a. system and a second speaker, or poor man's stereo. However, to record anything of interest to self, wife, friends, children or local organizations, all that is needed is to reach out and pull the handle. A surprising potpourri gradually gathers on the tape, until at last it is full and needs to be erased. Wiping the tape is always an interesting duty. Among fragments of battle between Jack Paar and William F. Buckley, a couple of long cadenzas from a bass-player named Slam Stewart, a thumping attack on the United Nations by an organization called Lifeline, an extemporaneous bed-time story by our 5-year, old about a duck who liked horses so much she ate three before lunch and our brother arguing with Lester del Rey about intelligence tests on an all-night talkfest called The Long John Nebel Show; amongst all these and others, then, are snatches of overseas radio—Prague, Rome, Saudi Arabia, Ecuador and Radio Moscow.

Radio, you know, (and if you don't, Moscow will often inform you) was invented by a Russian named Popoff. Whether Popoff ever heard of Marconi, Hertz, Armstrong, Edison, Crookes or Sarnoff is not known. That Radio Moscow never heard of them is certain. Anyway, they put out a monstrous signal on seven frequencies or more, and they let you in on wonderful worlds of science, of fiction and of fantasy. Their tone is that of rectitude and certainty. You'd think from listening to a single program that never in life had they contradicted themselves.

WIPING the tape one day in May, we ran across one recording we'd like to share with you, because perhaps you'd like to venture an opinion as to whether it's science, science fiction, just plain fiction or fantasy.

We wish we could share the voice as well. It is female, well modulated, with an almost indescribable slight accent. Know how certain Englishmen speak without moving the upper lip? This gal sounds as if she doesn't move her lower lip, and we'd love to see how she does it:

"Now we'd like to tell you how Soviet Scientists propose to de-charge the radiation zone around the earth for purposes of space flight. Until recently it was believed that the principal danger to space flight was collision with a meteorite. However, the most recent research has shown that this danger was overestimated. However, another danger has become apparent. That is the radiation zone around the earth containing the high-energy particles known as protons. Authors of science fiction in de-

scribing their heroes' flights through interplanetary space often write of their attempts to protect themselves from this danger. As a rule, the methods used are on the principle of creating a powerful protective field around the rocket. This is not the best solution of the problem. A better idea is to do away with the r a d i a t i o n altogether, thereby changing the conditions of space flight. Such a proposal is based on perfectly practical calculations... The radiation zone...is created by the very same protons which are the basis of hydrogen atomic nucleus. They need only to be supplied with electrons to be converted into electrically neutral atoms.

These will not be subject to any pull by the earth's gravitic field and will become rapidly diffused throughout space. Electrons can be supplied by [sic] the protons in the radiation zone by using what is called an electronic cannon which, as it were, fires them at great speed in the required direction. An electronic cannon with a capacity of only fifty kilowatts could do away with the radiation zone in 24 hours. The electronic cannon could be placed best on an artificial satellite and supplied with energy from solar batteries, and since the radiation zone apparently is capable of being restored, t h e cannon would have to be put in action periodically by signals from earth."

Now the Popoff (a term of endearment used slangily by Russians, as once we referred to "the Marconi") here performs some fantasy greater even than the fact that it never heard of Van Allen either. For at this writing, the news is full of Russian objections to our high-altitude atomic tests over Johnson Island. And one of the reasons for their objection is—and we assure you, it's as flatly, as positively stated as any of the above—that their calculations show that such explosions could damage the belt!

What is it in the Communist mentality that makes it behave with such transparent childishness—the childishness which always wins in its reports of its adventures, which actually believes that its listeners selectively forget the lies and the contradictions, and is so sure that they can really see pictures drawn with all light and no shade? The worst of our comic books tell this sort of story.

S o m e view-with-alarmists point out that Soviet radio, in sheer coverage, outpoints us 12 or 14 to 1, and that they spend more money jamming our broadcasts than we do in sending them. Maybe on sober second thought we should leave them to it. All we need to do to reduce their propaganda to zero is to list to it.

END

Everybody likes fried eggs for breakfast — but would a chicken?

TOO MANY EGGS

BY KRIS MELVILLE

COXE, an unusually phlegmatic citizen, came to buy the new refrigerator in the usual fashion. He was looking for a bargain. It was the latest model, fresh from the new production line in Los Angeles, and was marked down considerably below standard. The freezing compartment held 245 lbs. of meat.

"How come so cheap?" Coxe wanted to know.

"Frankly," the salesman said, "I asked myself that. Usually there's a dent in them or something, when they have that factory tag on them. But I checked it over and I can't find anything wrong with it. However, she goes as is."

"At that price," Coxe said, "I'll take it."

It arrived, refinished in a copper color to his specifications, the following Tuesday. It was plugged in and operated perfectly. He checked it out by freezing ice cubes.

Wednesday evening, when he opened the door to chill some beer, there was a package in the freezing compartment. He took out the package.

It was some sort of plastic and appeared to contain fish eggs.

Coxe had not seen fresh

fish eggs, considered by some a delicacy, for a number of years.

He chilled the beer and fried the eggs.

Both tasted about right.

The following Friday, his girl friend came over to fix dinner for him, and when she looked in the freezing compartment, she said, "What's this?"

"Fish eggs," Coxe said. "How many of them?"

"Two packages."

"We'll fry them up for breakfast," he said.

Saturday morning, there were three packages of eggs in the refrigerator.

"Where do they come from?" his girl friend wanted to know.

"They just appear. I ate some and they're very good."

She was reluctant, but he talked her into preparing a package.

She agreed they were very good.

"What are you going to do about it?" she asked.

"I don't think there's anything to do about it," he said. "I like fish eggs."

On Sunday, the package they had eaten Saturday had been replaced. They were coming in at a steady rate of one a day. Coxe cooked a package for breakfast and took the other two to his parents.

By Tuesday, he was getting tired of the eggs, and by the end of the week, he had four more packages. He succeeded in giving two packages to the neighbors.

At the end of another week, he had eight packages.

He explained to his girl friend. She suggested they visit all their friends, leaving a package with each of them.

At the end of another two weeks, this method for disposing of the eggs had worn thin. They finally managed to give the last two packages to the landlady.

At the end of still another week, there were seven more packages. Otherwise, the refrigerator was a good buy.

Coxe calculated that, at the present rate, had he left the packages in the compartment, it would have been filled by the end of the month. He felt that once that point was reached, the eggs would stop coming. Should this prove to be incorrect, he was prepared to arrange for some method of commercial distribution for the product.

On schedule, the eggs stopped coming.

He waited two days. No more came. It was over.

He ate the last package.

THE refrigerator worked perfectly, and he began to stock it with things freezers

are conventionally stocked with.

It was almost two weeks after the last package had appeared, early one Sunday morning, when the doorbell rang.

At the door was a small, nondescript man with a vaguely—and really indefinably—unpleasant aspect. His head was bandaged.

"Mr. Coxe?" he asked.

"That's me."

"May I come in?"

"Come on."

The man seated himself. "Something terrible has happened," he said. "A horrible mistake has been made."

"I'm sorry to hear that. You look as if you were in an accident."

"I was. I've been in the... hospital...for nearly two months. But to come to the point, Mr. Coxe. I've come about the refrigerator you recently purchased. It was a special refrigerator that was erroneously shipped out of the plant as a second. When I didn't come in, it got shipped out and sold."

"Good refrigerator," Coxe said.

"Perhaps you've noticed... ah...something unusual about it?"

"It runs okay. For a while there were a bunch of packages of fish eggs in it."

"Fish eggs!" the little man cried in horror. After he had recovered sufficiently, he asked, "You do, of course you do, I'm sure you still have all the...little packages?"

"Oh, no," said Coxe.

"NO? Oh, my God. What did you do with them, Mr. Coxe?"

"Ate them."

"You...ate...them? Ate—? No. You didn't. Not all of them. You couldn't have done that, Mr. Coxe. Please tell me that you could not have done that."

"I had to give a lot of them away, and everybody said they were delicious. And really... Uh, Mr.—? Mr., uh..."

The little man got unsteadily to his feet. His face was ashen. "This is horrible, horrible." He stumbled to the door. "You are a fiend. All our work...all our plans... and you, you..." He turned to Coxe. "I hate you. Oh, I hate you."

"Now, see here."

"...Mr. Coxe, you'll never realize the enormity of your crime. *You've eaten all of us!*" With that, he slammed the door and was gone.

Coxe went back to the other room.

"Who was it, honey?"

"Ah, some nut. Seems he had first claim on the refrigerator."

"I'll bet it was about the fish eggs."

"Yeah, he wanted them."

"Oh, dear. Do you think he can do anything to us?"

"I don't think so, not now. It's too late," Coxe concluded. "We ate them all." **END**

Robot IZK-99 was built for man-killing work on Mercury — but it had notions of its own!

THE CRITIQUE OF IMPURE REASON

by Poul Anderson

ILLUSTRATED BY GIUNTA

THE robot entered so quietly, for all his bulk, that Felix Tunny didn't hear. Bent over his desk, the man was first aware of the intruder when a shadow came between him and the fluoroceil. Then a last footfall quivered the floor, a vibration that went through Tunny's chair and into his bones. He whirled, choking on a breath, and saw the blue-black shape like a cliff above him. Eight feet up, the robot's eyes glowed angry crimson in a faceless helmet of a head.

A voice like a great gong reverberated through the office: "My, but you look silly."

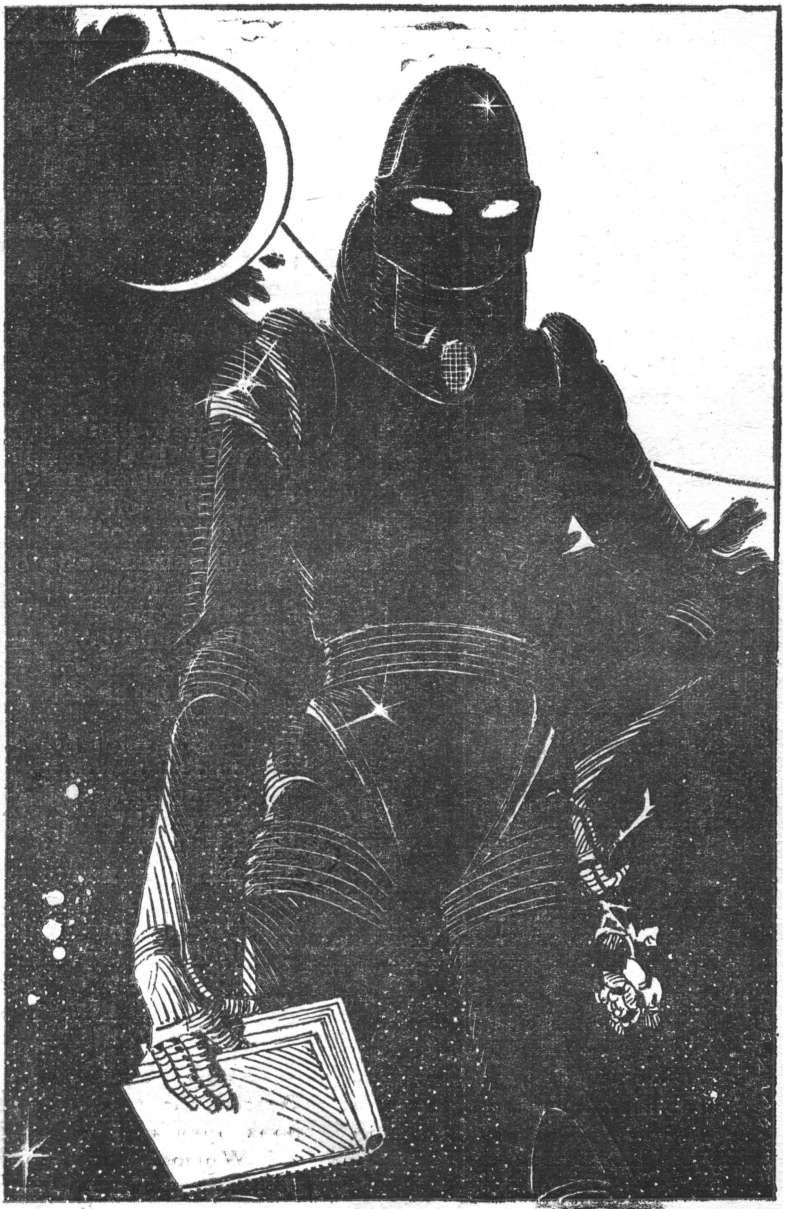
"What the devil are you doing?" Tunny yelped.

"Wandering about," said the Robot IZK-99 airily. "Hither and yon, yon and hither. Observing life. How deliciously exquisite Brochet is!"

"Huh?" said Tunny. The fog of data, estimates and increasingly frantic calculations was only slowly clearing from his head.

IZK-99 extended an enormous hand to exhibit a book. Tunny read *The Straw and the Bean: a Novel of Modern Youth by Truman Brochet* on the front. The back of the dust jacket was occupied by a color-pic of the author, who had bangs and delicate lips. Deftly, the robot flipped the book open and read aloud:

"'Worms,' she said, 'that's what they are, worms, that's what we-uns all are, Billy



Chile, worms that grew a spine an' a brain way back in the Obscene or the Messyzoic or whenever it was.' Even in her sadnesses Ella Mae must always make her sad little jokes, which saddened me still more on this day of sad rain and dying magnolia blossoms. 'We don't want them,' she said. 'Backbones an' brains, I mean, honey. They make us stiff an' topheavy, so we can't lie down no more an' be jus' nothin' ay-tall but worms.'

"'Take off your clothes,' I yawned." The robot closed the book reverently.

"WHAT has that got to do with anything?" Tunny asked.

"If you do not understand," said IZK-99 coldly, "there is no use in discussing it with you. I recommend that you read Arnold Roach's penetrating critical essay on this book. It appeared in the last issue of *Pierce, Arrow! The Magazine of Penetrating Criticism.* He devotes four pages to analyzing the various levels of meaning in that exchange between Ella Mae and Billy Child."

"Ooh," Tunny moaned. "Isn't it enough I've got a hangover, a job collapsing under me because of you and a fight with my girl, but you have to mention that rag?"

"How vulgar you are. It comes from watching stereovision." The robot sat down in a chair, which creaked alarmingly under his weight, crossed his legs and leafed through his book. The other hand lifted a rose to his chemosensor. "Exquisite," he murmured.

"You don't imagine I'd sink to reading what they call fiction these days, do you?" Tunny sneered, with a feeble hope of humiliating him into going to work. "Piddling little experiments in the technique of describing more and more complicated ways to feel sorry for yourself—what kind of entertainment is that for a man?"

"You simply do not appreciate the human condition," said the robot.

"Hah! Do you think you do, you conceited hunk of animated tin?"

"Yes, I believe so, thanks to my study of the authors, poets and critics who devote their lives to the exploration and description of Man. Your Miss Forelle is a noble soul. Ever since I looked upon my first copy of that exquisitely sensitive literary quarterly she edits, I have failed to understand what she sees in you. To be sure," IZK-99 mused, "the relationship is not unlike that between the nun and the Diesel engine in *Regret for Two Doves*, but still... At any rate, if Miss

Forelle has finally told you to go soak your censored head in expurgated wastes and then put the unprintable thing in an improbable place, I for one heartily approve."

Tunny, who was no mama's boy—he had worked his way through college as a whale herder and bossed construction gangs on Mars—was so appalled by the robot's language that he could only whisper, "She did not. She said nothing of the sort."

"I did not mean it literally," IZK-99 explained. "I was only quoting the renunciation scene in *Gently Come Twilight.* By Stichling."

Tunny clenched fists and teeth and battled a wild desire to pull the robot apart, plate by plate and transistor by transistor. He couldn't, of course. He was a big blond young man with a homely candid face; his shoulders strained his blouse and the legs coming out of his shorts were thickly muscular; but robots had steelloy frames and ultrapowered energizers. Besides, though his position as chief estimator gave him considerable authority in Planetary Developments, Inc., the company wouldn't let him destroy a machine which had cost several million dollars. Even when the machine blandly refused to work and spent its time loafing around the plant, reading, brooding and denouncing the crass bourgeois mentality of the staff.

SLOWLY, Tunny mastered his temper. He'd recently thought of a new approach to the problem; might as well try it now. He leaned forward. "Look, Izaak," he said in the mildest tone he could manage, "have you ever considered that we need you? That the whole human race needs you?"

"The race needs love, to be sure," said the robot, "which I am prepared to offer; but I expect that the usual impossibility of communication will entangle us in the typical ironic loneliness."

"No, *no,* NO—um—that is, the human race needs those minerals that you can obtain for us. Earth's resources are dwindling. We can get most elements from the sea, but some are in such dilute concentration that it isn't economically feasible to extract them. In particular, there's rhenium. Absolutely vital in alloys and electronic parts that have to stand intense irradiation. It always was scarce, and now it's in such short supply that several key industries are in trouble. But on the Dayside of Mercury—"

"Spare me. I have heard all that ad nauseam. What importance have any such dead, impersonal, mass questions, contrasted to the suffering, isolated soul? No, it is useless

to argue with me. My mind is made up. For the disastrous consequences of not being able to reach a firm decision, I refer you to the Freudian analyses of *Hamlet*."

"If you're interested in individuals," Tunny said, "you might consider me. I'm almost an ancestor of yours, God help me. I was the one who first suggested commissioning a humanoid robot with independent intelligence for the Mercury project. This company's whole program for the next five years is based on having you go. If you don't, I'll be out on my ear. And jobs are none too easy to come by. How's that for a suffering, isolated soul?"

"You are not capable of suffering," said Izaak. "You are much too coarse. Now do leave me to my novel." His glowing eyes returned to the book. He continued sniffing the rose.

Tunny's own gaze went back to the bescribbled papers which littered his desk, the result of days spent trying to calculate some way out of the corner into which Planetary Developments, Inc. had painted itself. There wasn't any way that he could find. The investment in Izaak was too great for a relatively small outfit like this. If the robot didn't get to work, and soon, the company would be well and thoroughly up Dutchman's Creek.

In his desperation Tunny had even looked again into the hoary old idea of remote-controlled mining. No go—not on Mercury's Dayside, where the nearby sun flooded every teledevice with enough heat and radiation to assure fifty per cent chance of breakdown in twenty-four hours. It had been rare luck that the rhenium deposits were found at all, by a chemotrac sent from Darkside Base. To mine them, there must be a creature with senses, hands and intelligence, present on the spot, to make decisions and repair machinery as the need arose. Not a human. No rad screen could long keep a man alive under that solar bombardment. The high-acceleration flight to Darkside, and home again when their hitch was up, in heavily shielded and screened spaceships, gave the base personnel as much exposure as the Industrial Safety Board allowed per lifetime. The miner had to be a robot.

But the robot refused the task. There was no way, either legal or practical, to make him take it against his will.

Tunny laid a hand on his forehead. No wonder he'd worried himself close to the blowup point, until last night he quarreled with Janet and got hyperbolically d r u n k. Which had solved nothing.

THE phone buzzed on his desk. He punched Accept. The face of William Barsch, Executive Vice President, leaped into the screen, round, red and raging.

"*Tunny!*" he bellowed.

"I-yi-yi!— I mean hello, sir." The engineer offered a weak smile.

"Don't hello me, you glue-brained idiot! When is that robot taking off?"

"Never," said Izaak. At his electronic reading speed, he had finished the novel and now rose from his chair to look over Tunny's shoulder.

"You're fired!" Barsch howled. "Both of you!"

"I hardly consider myself hired in the first place," Izaak said loftily. "Your economic threat holds no terrors. My energizer is charged for fifty years of normal use, after which I can finance a recharge by taking a temporary position. It would be interesting to go on the road at that," he went on thoughtfully, "like those people in that old book the Library of Congress reprostated for me. Yes, one might indeed find satori in going, man, going, never mind where, never mind why—"

"You wouldn't find much nowadays," Tunny retorted. "Board a transcontinental tube at random, and where does it get you? Wherever its schedule says. The bums aren't seeking enlightenment, they're sitting around on their citizen's credit watching Stee-Vee." He wasn't paying much attention to his own words, being too occupied with wondering if Barsch was really serious this time.

"I gather as much," said Izaak, "although most contemporary novels and short stories employ more academic settings. What a decadent civilization this is: no poverty, no physical or mental disease, no wars, no revolutions, no beatniks!" His tone grew earnest. "Please understand me, gentlemen. I bear you no ill will. I despise you, of course, but in the most cordial fashion. It is not fear which keeps me on Earth— I am practically indestructible; not anticipated loneliness— I enjoy being unique; not any prospect of boredom in the usual sense—talent for the work you had in mind is engineered into me. No, it is the absolute insignificance of the job. Beyond the merely animal economic implications, rhenium has no meaning. Truman Brochet would never be aware the project was going on, let alone write a novel about it. Arnold Roach would not even mention it en passant in any critical essay on the state of the modern soul as reflected in the major modern novelists. Do you not see my position? Since I was manufactured, of

necessity, with creative intelligence and a need to do my work right, I *must* do work I can respect."

"Such as what?" demanded Barsch.

"When I have read enough to feel that I understand the requirements of literary technique, I shall seek a position on the staff of some quarterly review. Or perhaps I shall teach. I may even try my hand at a subjectively oriented novel."

"Get out of this plant," Barsch ordered in a muted scream.

"Very well."

"No, wait!" cried Tunny. "Uh... Mr. Barsch didn't mean that. Stick around, Izaak. Go read a criticism or something."

"Thank you, I shall." The robot left the office, huge, gleaming, irresistible and smelling his rose.

"WHO do you think you are, you whelp, countermanding me?" Barsch snarled. "You're not only fired, I'll see to it that—"

"Please, sir," Tunny said. "I know this situation. I should. Been living with it for two weeks now, from its beginning. You may not realize that Izaak hasn't been outside this building since he was activated. Mostly he stays in a room assigned him. He gets his books and magazines and stuff by reprostat from the public libraries, or by pneumo from publishers and dealers. We have to pay him a salary, you know—he's legally a person—and he doesn't need to spend it on anything but reading matter."

"And you want to keep on giving him free rent and let him stroll around disrupting operations?"

"Well, at least he isn't picking up any further stimuli. At present we can predict his craziness. But let him walk loose in the city for a day or two, with a million totally new impressions blasting on his sensors, and God alone knows what conclusions he'll draw and how he'll react."

"Hm." Barsch's complexion lightened a bit. He gnawed his lip a while, then said in a more level voice: "Okay, Tunny, perhaps you aren't such a total incompetent. This mess may not be entirely your fault, or your girl friend's. Maybe I, or someone, should have issued a stricter directive about what he ought and ought not be exposed to for the first several days after activation."

You certainly should have, Tunny thought, but preserved a tactful silence.

"Nevertheless," Barsch scowled, "this fiasco is getting us in worse trouble every day. I've just come from lunch with Henry Lachs, the news-

magazine publisher. He told me that rumors about the situation have already begun to leak out. He'll sit on the story as long as he can, being a good friend of mine, but that won't be much longer. He can't let *Entropy* be s c o o p e d, and someone else is bound to get the story soon."

"Well, sir, I realize we don't want to be a laughingstock—"

"Worse than that. You know why our competitors haven't planned to tackle that rhenium mine. We had the robot idea first and got the jump on them. Once somebody's actually digging ore, he can get the exclusive franchise. But if they learn what's happened to us...well, Space Metals already has a humanoid contracted for. Half built, in fact. They intended to use him on Callisto, but Mercury would pay a lot better."

Tunny nodded sickly.

Barsch's tone dropped to an ominous purr. "Any ideas yet on how to change that clanking horror's so-called mind?"

"He doesn't clank, sir," Tunny c o r r e c t e d without forethought.

Barsch turned purple. "I don't give two squeals in hell whether he clanks or rattles or sings high soprano! I want results! I've got half our engineers busting their brains on the problem. But if you, yourself, personally, aren't the one who solves it, we're going to have a new chief estimator. Understand?" Before Tunny could explain that he understood much too well, the screen blanked.

II

HE buried his face in his hands, but that didn't help either. The trouble was, he liked his job, in spite of drawbacks like Barsch. Also, while he wouldn't starve if he was fired, citizen's credit wasn't e n o u g h to support items he'd grown used to, such as a sailboat and a cabin in the Rockies—nor items he'd hoped to add to the list, such as Janet Forelle. Besides, he dreaded the chronic ennui of the unemployed.

He told himself to stop thinking and get busy on the conundrum—no, that wasn't what he meant either—oh, fireballs! He was no use at this desk today. Especially remembering the angry words he and Janet had exchanged. He'd probably be no use anywhere until the quarrel was mended. At least a diplomatic mission would clear his head, possibly jolt his mind out of the rut in which it now wearily paced.

"Ooh," he said, visualizing his brain with a deep circular rut where there tramped a tiny replica of himself, bowed under a load of pig iron and

shod with cleats. Hastily, he punched a button on his recep. "I've got to go out," he said. "Tell 'em I'll be back when."

The building hummed and murmured as he went down the hall. Open doorways showed offices, laboratories, control machines clicking away like Hottentots. Now and then he passed a human technie. Emerging on the fifth-story flange he took a dropshaft down to the third, where the northbound beltway ran. Gentle gusts blew upward in his face, for there was a gray February sky overhead and the municipal heating system had to radiate plenty of ergs. Lake Michigan, glimpsed through soaring gaily colored sky-scrapers, looked the more cold by contrast. Tunny found a seat on the belt, ignoring the aimlessly riding mass of people around him, mostly unemployed. He stuffed his pipe and fumed smoke the whole distance to the University of Chicapolis.

Once there, he had to transfer several times and make his way through crowds younger, livelier and more purposeful than those off campus. Education, he recalled reading, was the third largest industry in the world. He did read, whatever Izaak said—nonfiction, which retained a certain limited popularity; occasionally a novel, but none more recent than from fifty years ago. "I'm not prejudiced against what's being written nowadays," he had told Janet. "I just don't think it should be allowed to ride in the front ends of streetcars."

SHE missed his point, having a very limited acquaintance with mid-twentieth century American history. "If your attitude isn't due to prejudice, that's even worse," she said. "Then you are congenitally unable to perceive the nuances of modern reality."

"Bah! I earn my money working with the nuances of modern reality: systems analyses, stress curves and spaceship orbits. That's what ails fiction these days. And poetry. There's nothing left to write about that the belles-lettrists think is important. The only sociological problem of any magnitude is mass boredom, and you can't squeeze much plot or interest out of that. So the stuff gets too, too precious for words—and stinks."

"Felix, you can't say that!"

"Can and do, sweetheart. Naturally, economics enters into the equation too. On the one hand, for the past hundred years movies, television, and now SteeVee have been crowding the printed word out of the public eye. (Hey, what

a gorgeous metaphor!) Apart from some nonfiction magazines, publishing isn't a commercial enterprise any longer. And on the other hand, in a society as rich as ours, a limited amount of publishing remains feasible: endowed by universities or foundations or individual vanity or these authors' associations that have sprung up in the past decade. Only it doesn't try to be popular entertainment. It's abandoned that field entirely to SteeVee and become nothing but an academic mutual admiration society."

"Nonsense! Let me show you Scomber's critical essay on Tench. He simply tears the man to pieces."

"Yeah, I know. One-upmanship is part of the game too. The whole point is, though, that this mental inbreeding—no, not even that: mental—uh, I better skip *that* metaphor—anyhow, it never has and never will produce anything worth the time of a healthy human being."

"Oh, so I'm not a healthy human being?"

"I didn't mean that. You know I didn't. I only meant, well, you know...the great literature always was based on wide appeal, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Dickens, Mark Twain—"

But the fat was irretrievably in the fire. One thing led at high speed to another, until Tunny stormed out or was thrown out—he still wasn't sure which—and went to earth in the Whirling Comet Bar.

It wasn't that Janet was stuffy, he reminded himself as he approached the looming mass of the English building. She was cute as a kitten, shared his pleasure in sailboats and square dancing and low-life beer joints and most other things. Also, she had brains, and their arguments were usually spirited but great mutual fun. They had dealt with less personal topics than last night's debate, though. Janet, a poet's daughter and a departmental secretary, took her magazine very seriously. He hadn't realized how seriously.

The beltway reached his goal. Tunny knocked out his pipe and stepped across the deceleration strips to the flange. The dropshaft lifted him to the fiftieth floor, where University publications had their offices. There was more human activity here than most places. Writing and editing remained people functions, however thoroughly automated printing and binding were. In spite of his purpose, Tunny walked slowly down the hall, observing with pleasure the earnest young coeds in their brief bright skirts and blouses. With less pleasure he noted the earnest young men. There wasn't much about them

to suggest soldierly Aeschylus or roistering Marlowe or seagoing Melville or razzmatazz Mencken. They tended to be pale, long-haired and ever so concerned with the symbolic import of a deliberately omitted comma.

THE door marked *Pierce, Arrow!* opened for him and he entered a small shabby office heaped with papers, books, microspools and unsold copies of the magazine. Janet sat at the desk behind a manual typer and a stack of galleys. She was small herself, pert, extremely well engineered, with dark wavy hair that fell to her shoulders and big eyes the color of the Gulf Stream. Tunny paused and gulped.

"Hi," he said after a minute.

She looked up. "What—Felix!"

"I, uh, uh, I'm sorry about yesterday," he said.

"Oh, darling. Do you think I'm not? I was going to come to you." She did so, with results that were satisfactory to both parties concerned, however sickening they might have been to an outside observer.

After quite a long while, Tunny found himself in a chair with Janet on his lap. She snuggled against him. He stroked her hair and murmured thoughtfully: "Well, I suppose the trouble was, each suddenly realized how dead set on his own odd quirk the other one is. But we can live with the difference between us, huh?"

"S u r e l y," Janet sighed. "And then, too, I didn't stop to think how worried you were, that robot and everything, and the whole miserable business my fault."

"Lord, no. How could you have predicted what'd happen? If anyone is responsible, I am. I took you there and could have warned you. But I didn't know either. Perhaps nobody would have known. Izaak's kind of robot isn't too well understood as yet. So few have been built, there's so little need for them."

"I still don't quite grasp the s i t u a t i o n. Just because I talked to him for an hour or two—poor creature, he was so eager and enthusiastic—and then sent him some books and—"

"That's precisely it. Izaak had been activated only a few days before. Most of his knowledge was built right into him, so to speak. But there was also the matter of ...well, psychological stabilization. Until the end of the indoctrination course, which is designed to fix his personality in the desired pattern, a humanoid robot is extremely susceptible to new impressions. Like a human baby. Or

perhaps a closer analogy would be imprinting in some birds: present a fledgling with almost any object at a certain critical stage in its life, and it'll decide that object is its mother and follow the thing around everywhere. I never imagined, though, that modern literary criticism could affect a robot that way. It seemed so alien to everything he was made for. What I overlooked, I see now, was the fact that Izaak's fully humanoid. He isn't meant to be programmed, but has a free intelligence. Evidently freer than anyone suspected."

"Is there no way to cure him?"

"Not that I know of. His builders told me that trying to wipe the synapse patterns would ruin the whole brain. Besides, he doesn't want to be cured, and he has most of the legal rights of a citizen. We can't compel him."

"I do so wish I could do something. Can this really cost you your job?"

"'Fraid so. I'll fight to keep it, but—"

"Well," Janet said, "we'll still have my salary."

"Nothing doing. No wife is going to support me."

"Come, come. How mid-Victorian can a man get?"

"Plenty," he said. She tried to argue, but he stopped her in the most pleasant and effective manner. Some time went by. Eventually, with a small gasp, she looked at the clock.

"Heavens! I'm supposed to be at work this minute. I don't want to get myself fired, do I?" She bounced to her feet, a sight which slightly compensated for her departing his lap, smoothed her hair, kissed him again and sped out the door.

Tunny remained seated. He didn't want to go anywhere, least of all home. Bachelor apartments were okay in their place, but after a certain point in a man's life they got damn cheerless. He fumbled out his pipe and started it again.

Janet was such a sweet kid, he thought. Bright, too. Her preoccupation with these latter-day word games actually did her credit. She wasn't content to stay in the dusty files of books written centuries ago, and word games were the only ones in town. Given a genuine literary milieu, she might well have accomplished great things, instead of fooling around with—what was the latest guff? Tunny got up and wandered over to her desk. He glanced at the galleys. Something by Arnold Roach.

"—the tense, almost fetally contracted structure of this story, exquisitely balanced in the ebb and flow of words forming and dissolving images like the interplay of

ripples in water, marks an important new advance in the tradition of Arapaima as modified by the school of Barbel. Nevertheless it is necessary to make the assertion that a flawed tertiary symbolism exists, in that the connotations of the primary word in the long quotation from Pollack which opens the third of the eleven cantos into which the story is divided, are not, as the author thinks, so much negative as—"

"Y i n g l e, yingle, yingle," Tunny muttered. "And they say engineers can't write decent English. If I couldn't do better than that with one cerebral hemisphere tied behind my back, I'd—"

At which point he stopped cold and stared into space with a mountingly wild surmise. His jaw fell. So did his pipe. He didn't notice.

Five minutes later he exploded into action.

FOUR hours later, her secretarial stint through for the day, Janet returned to do some more proofreading. As the door opened, she reeled. The air was nearly unbreathable. Through a blue haze she could barely see her man, grimy, disheveled, smoking volcanically, hunched over her typer and slamming away at the keys.

"What off Earth!" she exclaimed.

"One more minute, sweetheart," Tunny said. Actually he spent eleven point three more minutes by the clock, agonizing over his last few sentences. Then he ripped the sheet out, threw it on a stack of others and handed her the mess. "Read that."

"W h e n my e y e s h a v e stopped s m a r t i n g," Janet coughed. She had turned the air fresher on full blast and seated herself on the edge of a chair to wait. Despite her reply, she took the manuscript. But she read the several thousand words with a puzzlement that grew and grew. At the end, she laid the papers s l o w l y down and asked, "Is this some kind of joke?"

"I hope not," said Tunny fervently.

"But—"

"Your next issue is due out when? In two weeks? Could you advance publication, and include this?"

"What? No, certainly I can't. That is, darling, I have to reject so many real pieces merely for lack of space, that it breaks my heart and...and I've got obligations to them, they trust me—"

"So." Tunny rubbed his chin. "What do you think of my essay? As writing."

"Oh...hm...well, it's clear and forceful, but naturally the technicalities of criticism—"

"Okay. You revise it, work-

ing in the necessary poop. Also, choose a suitable collection of your better rejects, enough to make up a nice issue. Those characters will see print after all." While Janet stared with bewildered though l o v e l y blue eyes, Tunny stabbed out numbers on the phone.

"Yes, I want to talk with Mr. Barsch. No, I don't give a neutrino whether he's in conference or not. You tell him Felix Tunny may have the answer to the robot problem... Hello, boss. Look, I've got an idea. Won't even cost very much. Can you get hold of a printing plant tonight? You know, someplace where they can run off a few copies of a small one-shot m a g a z i n e? ...Sure it's short notice. But didn't you say Henry Lachs is a friend of yours? Well, presume on his friendship—"

Having switched off, Tunny whirled about, grabbed Janet in his arms, and shouted, "Let's go!"

"Where?" she inquired, not unreasonably.

III

THE pneumo went *whirping!* and tossed several items onto the mail shelf. IZK-99 finished reading *Neo-Babbitt: the Entrepreneur as Futility Symbol in Modern Literature,* crossed his room with one stride and went swiftly through the envelopes. The usual two or three crank letters and requests for autographs—any fully humanoid robot was news—plus a circular advertising metal polish and...wait...a m a g a z i n e. Clipped to this was a note bearing the letterhead of the Manana L i t e r a r y Society. "—new authors' association... foundation-sponsored quarterly review...sample copies to a few persons of taste and discrimination whom we feel are potential subscribers..." The format had a limp dignity, with a plain cover reading:

p Volume One
i Number One
p
e
t
t
e
the journal of
analytical criticism

Excited and vastly flattered, IZK-99 read it on the spot, in one hundred and forty-eight seconds: so fast that he did a double take and stood for a time lost in astonishment. The magazine's contents had otherwise been standard stuff, but this one long article—

Slowly, very carefully, he turned back to it and reread.

THUNDER BEYOND VENUS, by Charles Pilchard, Wisdom Press (Newer York, 2026), 214 pp., UWF $6.50.

Reviewed by Pierre Hareng
Dept. of English,
Miskatonic University

For many years I have been analyzing, dissecting and evaluating with the best of them, and it has indeed been a noble work, Yet everything has its limits. There comes to each of us a bump, as Poorboy so poignantly says in *Not Soft Is the Rock*. Suddenly a new planet swims into our ken, a new world is opened, a new element is discovered, and we stand with tools in our hands which are not merely inadequate to the task, but irrelevant. Like those fortunate readers who were there at the moment when Joyce invented the stream of consciousness, when Kafka plunged so gladly into the symbolism of absolute nightmare, when Faulkner delineated the artistic beauty of the humble corncob, when Durrell abolished the stream of revolution.

Charles Pilchard has not hitherto been heard from. The intimate details of his biography, the demonstration of the point-by-point relationship of these details to his work, will furnish material for generations of scholarship. Today, though, we are confronted with the event itself. For *Thunder Beyond Venus* is indeed an event, which rocks the mind and shakes the emotions and yet, at the same time, embodies a touch so sure, an artistry so consumate, that even Brochet has not painted a finer miniature.

The superficial skeleton is almost scornfully simple. It is, indeed, frankly traditional — the Quest motif in modern guise — dare I say that it could be made into a stereodrama? It is hard to imagine the sheer courage which was required to use so radical a form that many may find it incomprehensible But in exactly this evocation of the great ghosts of Odysseus, King Arthur and Don Juan, the author becomes immediately able to explore (implicity; he is never crudely explicit) childhood with as much haunting delicacy as our most skilled specialists in this type of novel. Yet unlike them, he is not confined to a child protagonist. Thus he achieves a feat of time-binding which for richness of symbolic overtones can well be matched against Betta's famous use of the stopped clock image in *The Old Man and the Umbrella*. As the hero himself cries, when trapped in that collapsing tunnel which is so much more than the obvious womb/tomb: "Okay, you stupid planet, you've got me pinched where it hurts, but by heaven, I've had more fun in life than you ever did. And I'll whip you yet!"

The fact that he does then indeed overcome the deadly Venusian environment and goes on to destroy the pirate base and complete the project of making the atmosphere Earthlike (a scheme which an engineer friend tells me is at present being seriously contemplated) is thus made infinitely more than a mechanical victory. It is a closing of the ring: the hero, who being strong and virile and proud, returns to that condition at the end. The ironic overtones of this are clear enough, but the adroit use of such implements along the way as the pick which serves him variously as tool, weapon and boathook when he and the heroine must cross the river of lava (to take only one random example from this treasure chest) add both an underscoring and a commentary which must be read repeatedly to be appreciated.

And on and on.

When he had finished, IZK-99 went back and perused the article a third time. Then he punched the phone. "Public library," said the woman in the screen.

TUNNY entered the office of *Pierce, Arrow!* and

stood for a moment watching Janet as she slugged the typer. Her desk was loaded with papers, cigarette butts and coffee equipment. Dark circles under her eyes bespoke exhaustion. But she plowed gamely on.

"Hi, sweetheart," he said.

"Oh... Felix." She raised her head and blinked. "Goodness, is it that late?"

"Yeah. Sorry I couldn't get here sooner. How're you doing?"

"All right— I guess—but, darling, it's so dreadful."

"Really?" He came to her, stopped for a kiss, and picked up the reprostat page which she was adapting.

The blaster pointed straight at Jon Dace's chest. Behind its gaping muzzle sneered the mushroom-white face and yellow slit-pupilled eyes of Hark Farkas. "Don't make a move, Earth pig!" the pirate hissed. Jon's broad shoulders stiffened. Fury seized him. His keen eyes flickered about, seeking a possible way out of this death trap—

"M-m-m, yeah, that is pretty ripe," Tunny admitted. "Where's it from? Oh, yes, I see. *Far Out Science Fiction, May 1950.* Couldn't you do any better than that?"

"Certainly. Some of those old pulp stories are quite good, if you take them on their own terms." Janet signaled the coffeemaker to pour two fresh cups. "But others, ugh! I needed a confrontation scene, though, and this was the first that came to hand. Time's too short to make a thorough search."

"What've you made of it?" Tunny read her manuscript: *The gun opened a cerberoid mouth at him. Behind it, his enemy's face was white as silent snow, secret snow, where the eyes (those are pearls that were) reflected in miniature the sandstorm that hooted cougar-colored on the horizon.* "Hey, not bad. 'Cougar-colored.' I like that." *There went a hissing: "Best keep stance, friend-stranger-brother whom I must send before me down the tunnel," Jon's shoulders stiffened. Slowly, he answered—* "Uh, sweetheart, honest, that cussing would make a bulldozer blush."

"How can you have intellectual content without four-letter words?" Janet asked, puzzled.

Tunny shrugged. "No matter, I suppose. Time's too short, as you say, to polish this thing, and Izaak won't know the difference. Not after such a smorgasbord of authors and critics as he's been gobbling down...besides having so little experience of actual, as opposed to fictional humans."

"Time's too short to *write* this thing," Janet corrected,

her mouth quirking upward. "How did you ever find the stuff we're plagiarizing? I'd no idea any such school of fiction had ever existed."

"I knew about it vaguely, from mention in the nineteenth and twentieth century books I've read. But to tell the truth, what I did in this case was ask the Library of Congress to search its microfiles for adventure story publications of that era and stat me a million words' worth." Tunny sat down and reached for his coffee. "Whew, I'm bushed!"

"HARD day?" Janet said softly.

"Yeah. Keeping Izaak off my neck was the worst part."

"How did you stall him?"

"Oh, I had his phone tapped. He called the local library first, for a stat. When they didn't have the tape, he called a specialty shop that handles fiction among other things. But at that point I switched him over to a friend of mine, who pretended to be a clerk in the store. This guy told Izaak he'd call Newer York and order a bound copy from the publisher. Since then the poor devil has been chewing his fingernails, or would if a robot were able to, and faunching...mainly in my office."

"Think we can meet his expectations?"

"I dunno. My hope is that this enforced wait will make the prize seem still more valuable. Of course, some more reviews would help. Are you positive you won't run one in *Pierce?*"

"I told you, we're so short of space—"

"I talked to Barsch about that. He'll pay for the additional pages and printing."

"Hm-m-m...literary hoaxes do have an honorable old tradition, don't they? But, oh, dear— I just don't know."

"Barsch has gotten around Henry Lachs," Tunny insinuated. "There'll be a review in *Entropy*. You wouldn't want to be scooped by a lousy middlebrow news magazine, would you?"

Janet laughed. "All right, you win. Submit your article and I'll run it."

"I'll submit to you anytime," Tunny said. After a while: "Well, I feel better now. I'll take over here while you catch a nap. Let's see, what pickle did we leave our bold hero in?"

"This novel at once vigorous and perceptive...the most startling use of physical action to further the development that has been seen since Conrad, and it must be asserted that Conrad painted timidly in comparison to the huge, bold, brilliant and yet minutely executed splashes on

Pilchard's canvas...this seminal work, if one will pardon the expression...the metrical character of the whole, so subtle that the fact the book is a rigidly structured poem will escape many readers..."
— *Pierce, Arrow!*

"Two hundred years ago, in the quiet, tree-shaded town of Amherst, Mass., spinster poetess Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) wrote of the soul:

Unmoved, she notes the chariot's pausing
At her low gate;
Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling
Upon her mat.

In the brief poem of which these lines are a stanza, she expressed a sense of privacy and quiet independence which afterward vanished from the American scene as thoroughly as Amherst vanished into the Atlantic metropolitan complex

"It may seem strange to compare the shy, genteel lady of Puritan derivation to Charles Pilchard and his explosive, intensely controversial first novel. Yet the connection is there. The *Leitmotif* of *Thunder Beyond Venus* is not the story itself. That story is unique enough, breathtakingly original in its use of physical struggle to depict the dark night of the soul. Some would say almost too breathtaking. Dazzled, the reader may fail to see the many underlying layers of meaning. But Emily Dickinson would understand the aloof, independent soul which animates hero Jon Dace.

"Tall (6 ft. 3½ in.), robust (225 lbs.), balding Charles Pilchard, 38, himself a fanatical seeker of privacy, has written a master's thesis on Rimbaud but never taught. Instead he has lived for more than ten years on citizen's credit while developing his monumental work, [Cut of Charles Pilchard, captioned "No charioteer he."] Twice married, once divorced, he does not maintain a fixed residence but describes himself, like Jon, as 'swimming around in the ocean called Man.' He has probed deeply into the abysses of that ocean. Yet he has not emerged with the carping negativism of today's naysayers. For although he fully appreciates the human tragedy, Pilchard is in the end a triumphant yea-sayer..."

IV

THE robot entered so noisily that Felix Tunny heard him halfway down the corridor. The engineer turned from his desk and waited. His fingers gripped chair arms until the nails turned white.

"Hello, Izaak," he got out. "Haven't seen you for a couple of days."

"No," said the robot. "I have been in my room, thinking. And reading."

"Reading what?"

"*Thunder Beyond Venus,* of course. Over and over. Is anybody reading anything else?" One steel finger tapped the volume. "You have read it yourself, have you not?" Izaak asked.

"Well, you know how it goes," Tunny said. "Things are rather frantic around here, what with the c o m p a n y ' s plans being disrupted and so forth. I've been meaning to get around to it."

"Get around to it!" Izaak groaned. "I suppose eventually you will get around to noticing sunlight and the stars."

"Why, I thought you were above any such gross physical things," Tunny said. This was the payoff. His throat was so dry he could hardly talk.

Izaak didn't notice. "It has proven necessary to make a re-evaluation," he said. "This book has opened my eyes as much as it has opened the eyes of the critics who first called my attention to its subtlety, its profundity, its universal significance and intensely individual analysis. Pilchard has written the book of our age."

"Bully for Pilchard."

"The conquest of space is, as the article in *pipette* showed, also the conquest of self. The microcosm opens on the macrocosm, which reflects and re-reflects the observer. This is the first example of the type of book that will be written and discussed for the next hundred years."

"Could be."

"None but an utter oaf would respond to this achievement as tepidly as you," Izaak snapped. "I shall be glad to see the last of you."

"Y-y-y o u ' r e going away? W h e r e?" (Hang on, boy, countdown to zero!)

"M e r c u r y. Please notify Barsch and have my spaceship made ready. I have no desire to delay so important an experience."

Tunny sagged in his chair. "By no means," he whispered. "Don't waste even a single minute."

"I make one condition, that for the entire period of my service you send to me with the cargo ships any other works by Pilchard that may appear, plus the quarterlies to which I subscribe and the other exemplars of the literary mode he has pioneered which I shall order on the basis of reviews I read. They must be transcribed to metal, you realize, because of the heat."

"Sure, sure. Glad to oblige."

"When I return," Izaak crooned, "I shall be so uniquely qualified to criticize the new novels that some college will doubtless give me a lit-

erary quarterly of my own to edit."

He moved toward the door. "I must go arrange for *Thunder Beyond Venus* to be transcribed on steelloy."

"Why not tablets of stone?" Tunny muttered.

"That is not a bad idea. Perhaps I shall." Izaak went out.

WHEN he was safely gone, Tunny whooped. For a while he danced around his office like a peppered Indian, until he whirled on the phone. Call Barsch and tell him—

No, to hell with Barsch. Janet deserved the good news first.

She shared his joy over the screens. Watching her, thinking of their future, brought a more serious mood on Tunny. "My conscience does hurt me a bit," he confessed. "It's going to be a blow to Izaak, out there on Dayside, when his brave new school of literature never appears."

"Don't be too certain about that," Janet said. "In fact—well, I was going to call you today. We're in trouble again, I'm afraid. You know that office and clerk we hired to pretend to be Wisdom Press, in case Izaak tried to check up? She's going frantic. Calls are streaming in. Thousands of people already, furious because they can't find *Thunder Beyond Venus* anywhere. She's handed them a story about an accidental explosion in the warehouse, but—what can we do?"

"Oy." Tunny sat quiet for a space. His mind flew. "We did run off some extra copies, didn't we?" he said at length.

"Half a dozen or so. I gave one to Arnold Roach. He simply had to have it, after seeing the other articles. Now he's planning a rave review for *The Pacific Monthly*, with all sorts of sarcastic comments about how *Entropy* missed the whole point of the book. Several more critics I know have begged me at least to lend them my copy."

Tunny smote the desk with a large fist. "Only one way out of this," he decided. "Print up a million more."

"What?"

"I have a hunch that commercial fiction has been revived as of this week. Maybe our book is crude, but it does touch something real, something that people believe in their hearts is important. If I'm right, then there's going to be a spate of novels like this, and many will make a whopping profit, and some will even be genuinely good... Lord, Lord," Tunny said in awe. "We simply don't know our own strength, you and I."

"Let's get together," Janet suggested, "and find out."

END

THE DRAGON-SLAYERS

Got any dragons to kill? Here's the fastest—and wildest—way!

BY FRANK BANTA

IN a gleaming chrome and glass federal building located at the center of Venusport, Division Chief Carl Wattles wearily arose from his office couch. He had been taking his usual two-hour, after-lunch nap, but today it had brought him little refreshment. Earlier he had received an unexpected report that made sleep impossible.

"John?" he mumbled.

John Claxson, the generously padded assistant division chief, stopped drilling out his earwax but did not remove his feet from the blotter of his desk. "Yeah, Chief?"

"I've heard from the Kentons again."

"I thought something was deviling you, the way you was carrying on in your sleep." He raised thick eyebrows. "Is their production down again?"

"Worse than that, John. Kenton has had the gall to request time off to build a new house!"

"No! I can't believe it."

"I can't either, John. They know it's not in the Manual."

"Certainly it's not, Chief. The nerve of those people wanting to do something that's not in the Manual!"

"People like us wrote the Manual, John," the Chief added with simple modesty. "That is why it is so good, good, good."

"I know," said John, accepting the weight. Then he complained bitterly, "Wanting to build a new house! They are supposed to do personal stuff at night, or when it's raining."

The Chief allowed his rage to climb. "They've got nothing to do but go out into the jungle and pick a little old bale of pretzins every day, but do you think they are going to do it? No. They want *me* to go and do it for them!"

"You can't *do* it, Chief!" protested John.

"You know I can't, John," agreed Wattles as he

stretched. "I got all I can manage right here. More."

"What you got to do, Chief?" John asked curiously, forgetting caution for a moment.

"P l e n t y!" retorted the Chief.

"I guess you have at that," John admitted, getting back aboard.

"Time was," brooded the Chief, "when that Kenton was a fair pretzin finder. But all he can think of to do now is to find excuses to goldbrick. Wait until he sees the stiff memorandum I'm sending him..."

BLISS Kenton had not gone far from their Venusian jungle cabin that morning before the vacuum snake hung one on her. The thick, two-foot-long pest lay very still on the ground, and she only got a glimpse of it before it jumped. Out it whipped to its full, slim, six-foot length and wrapped around her throat. Fangs struck, and in three seconds—with a loud *slurp*—it had withdrawn a quart of her blood. Then it unwrapped just as swiftly as it had come, and leaped into the cover of the jungle.

The hefty young matron wobbled back to the cabin.

"Pole!" she called as she h u r r i e d in. "I've been slurped!"

"Again?" her lanky husband asked, looking up from the reports on his desk.

"I'm so sorry, Pole," she said contritely.

"Well, sit down and start recovering, Bliss," he said in a kindly manner. "You can't pick any pretzins today."

"But I wanted to pick pretzins, Pole. Darn that vacuum snake and his fast draft."

"I just hope the neighborhood dragon doesn't come around while you're in that weakened condition, Bliss," Pole worried as he totaled up the month's production on his reports. He decided, "I had better take time off from pretzin hunting today so I can be handy to help you with your getaway, if need arises."

"Oh, the dragon never bothers us," Bliss said uneasily.

"He has gotten close enough to burn up several of our pretzin patches, though. He may get to this cabin some day."

"He doesn't mean a n y harm," defended Bliss. "I'm sure he wouldn't want to eat us. They are known to be strictly vegetarians."

"No, he won't eat us. He'll cook us, unless we can run away fast enough—but he'll never eat us."

T h e y heard a faraway sound.

"What is that crisp crackling that sounds like a dank forest burning?" wondered Bliss.

Pole scrambled to the door. "The dragon is coming! He's headed straight for this cabin!"

"Shall we be going?" asked Bliss, grabbing her clothes.

A few minutes later, at a distance of a thousand yards, Pole and Bliss, loaded with all their portable possessions, watched their cabin burst into flames as a roaring, forty-foot lizard, with fifty-foot flames gouting from his mouth, ambled through their clearing.

"There, he's gone," said Pole as the dragon passed on. "I'd better put out the fire."

Dipping water from a nearby pond with a bucket, Pole had, after fifty-three fast buckets, a blackened ruin of what had formerly been their rude jungle cabin.

Pole moved a new, nearly finished split-pole settee he had been working on back in the jungle to their front porch. As they seated themselves, he complacently surveyed the slits burned between the charred boards of the walls and roof. "The roof will leak a mite when it rains, but it will let in lots of light," he observed optimistically.

"There's nothing like lots of light," Bliss agreed.

"Charcoal is healthful, too."

"It absorbs poison like nobody's business!"

"However, since it rains every day on Venus we will have to have a new cabin." He sighed resignedly. "And you know what that means: Lower production, fewer of the magical, antibiotic pretzins. I'd better radio the Division Chief."

AS the jet plane flashed across their vision, the Kentons saw a tiny bundle drop from it. Pole ran out into the jungle and was under the parachute when it landed. He came back into the clearing unwrapping a package.

"It sure was thoughtful of Mr. Wattles to answer so fast," said Pole, as he opened the little package. "And will you look here in the middle! He even sent us a present!"

"It's a beautiful, plain white, rectangular carton of approximately three by seven inches," she said breathlessly.

"But we mustn't be selfish," Pole reminded hastily. "Let's see what Mr. Wattles has to say in his memorandum here first." They both read the green memorandum.

To: Napoleon B. Kenton, Special Agent, Pretzin Division, Venus
From: Chief, Pretzin Division, Venusport, Venus
Subject: Personal Problems of Special Agents

In a radio message dated January 25, 1982 you related certain personal problems you were experiencing, and you stated that delays might be encountered in your harvesting of pretzins. regret your difficulties. However, it is believed

these misfortunes may be overcome during leisure hours and should be soon resolved without loss of a measurable part of your productive time.

Pole interrupted his reading to beam at his wife. "He's sorry for us, Bliss, and he hopes things will be better for us soon."

"Isn't he the nicest man?" They read on.

In your radio message you refer to difficulties you are having with a snake and a lizard (which you colloquially refer to as a dragon). It is believed that the enclosed package, serial number 93G-18, will cope with the matter, and that no further report will be necessary with respect to snakes and lizards.

Carl Wattles
Chief, Pretzin Division

Eagerly Bliss Kenton opened the plain white carton bearing the serial number 93G-18. She slid out the two and three-quarter by six and one-half inch fumigation bomb can.

Bliss read the label. "'Lizards and snakes go 'way and stay. Only $1.19 F.O.B. U.S.A.' Why, it rhymes!" she said, a wondering smile lighting her face.

"Does it say how long the lizards are that go 'way and stay?" Pole asked anxiously, thinking of the neighborhood's forty-foot hellion.

"*All* lizards, it says. And only $1.19.

"Good! But how about snakes that can jump ten feet and wrap around your throat?"

"I read that wrong," she amended. "All lizards *and* snakes. And only $1.19."

"I'm glad," said Pole, choking up.

"The Division Chief has been thinking of us," said Bliss, wiping away a tear.

"He knows we field personnel have our problems."

"He knew just what we needed," lauded Bliss.

Pole looked up from the canister as he heard a sound. "And here comes the dragon back! Our lizard repellent arrived just in the nick of time!"

Down the rain-forest aisle the roaring mammoth rapidly waddled. Its flames—even longer than its body—withered into blackened ruin all that stood before it. This time, instead of snatching up their possessions and fleeing to safety, the Kentons stood their ground with their pocket-size fumigation bomb that had been designed for pocket-sized lizards. When the dragon was within throwing distance, Pole flipped on the spray jet of the tiny bomb and threw it as straight as he could. Then both of them sped away, leaving all their pos-

sessions at the mercy of the advancing, ravening flames...

"OH, Pole! Isn't our new home just the dandiest that a Venusian pretzin-gathering couple ever had?"

"It *is* dandy," concurred Pole. "Who'd ever have thought we would have a cabin that was only an inch thick, and yet was absolutely water tight?"

"The table makes a dandy smokestack too, when it's propped up. Fireproof."

"How about the mouth when it's propped open?" challenged Pole. "Who could beat a front porch like that?"

"You can't. You just can't!"

"Correct." He ruminated, "We'd never have been able to cut the hide. Not a tough, inch-thick one like this one."

"I'll never get over the way you gutted the dragon. You cut him loose inside, just below the tonsils—"

"And after I lassoed them, I gave a run—"

"And all his guts came stringing out!"

"Had him cleaned to the bone within an hour!" said Pole proudly.

"We would never have had it so good if it hadn't been for Mr. Wattles' helpfulness," reminded Bliss. "That fumigation bomb, besides making a horrible stink—"

"—explodes when it enters a dragon's flaming mouth—and blows his methane tanks."

END

by Frank Banta

HUE AND CRY

Dear Editor:

I would like to congratulate you on an excellent issue—cover to cover. And speaking of covers, this is the nicest one I've seen yet this year from anyone. More of this sort, please, please?

Enjoyed the editorial no end. All interesting ideas. I will say however that it will remain ever incomprehensible to me that anyone *(especially* Schweitzer) should think that the mass of people were thinkers and for some reason had given it up. Fat chance.

Pat McLean
P.O. Box 401
Anacortes, Wash.

* * *

Dear Editor:

I would greatly appreciate your help in running down the title, author and publisher of the story I have outlined below. (I might add that this story is being considered as a feature film and the author would benefit greatly if the film were done.)

A man lives on an island, and practices the art of hunting to the ultimate degree. He hunts live men. He gets his prey, as I remember, by causing shipwrecks on the island. An elaborate hunt is arranged with the victim given various aids, such as a knife, map, etc. As I remember, the hunter uses bow and arrow; and I believe too that dogs are used in tracking the victim.

William Howell
8240 Babcock Avenue
Hollywood, Calif.

* Any long-memoried readers care to help out on this one?—*Editor.*

* * *

Dear Editor:

In your magazine you have been running a series of Keith Laumer's "Retief" novelettes. Can you tell me which issues contained them?

James P. Jackson
R. D. #1
Danville, Penna.

* Every issue from September 1961 to date had a Retief novelette. More upcoming, though not in every future is-

sue (next Keith Laumer story will probably be a non-Retief novelette, *The Long Remembered Thunder.*)—*Editor.*

* * *

Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading *Jots and Tittles.* That Sturgeon guy sure has an imagination! Maybe, maybe, maybe...but don't get me wrong. He's one of my favorite writers, and he is feature editor of my favorite science fiction magazine.

To prove what I said about *If* being my favorite magazine, I am sending a check for a subscription with this letter.

Kent McDaniel
620 Metropolis St.
Metropolis, Ill.

* * *

Dear (?) Editor:

How come the Groaci illustrations for the Retief stories in the July & March issues are completely different in appearance?

Jack Baldwin
405 N. Alisos St.
Santa Barbara, Calif.

* Because we goofed and gave the stories to different artists. We'll watch that.
—*Editor.*

* * *

Dear Editor:

Leaving aside Unbreakable Custom, why is it universal in sf magazines to put the title and author of the story running at the bottom of the page, instead of at the top where it would be easier to read?

2. What is the significance of the "K" on the cover near the price?

David B. Jodrey, Jr.
JAPO Box 38, FPO 510
New York, N.Y.

* (1) Well, it seems to us to look better that way. Anybody else have a strong feeling? (2) "K" stands for our distributor, Kable News Company.—*Editor.*

* * *

Dear Editor:

Why did you take away the book review column, and *why* can't we have it back? I think it is something that most SF fans appreciate. Why not have the fans write in their opinions on the subject?"

Paul Brague
Box 12
Eldred, N.Y.

* * *

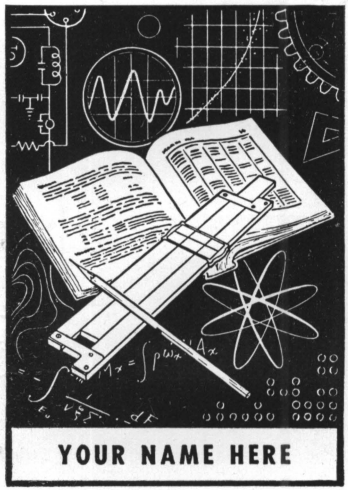
Sorry to be so brief this time—no room! We'll try to do b e t t e r next issue...in many ways...you'll see some changes in *If* that we think you'll welcome in near-future issues...

By the way, our "first" story for the month is Charles Cunningham's *The Man Who Flew.* Next issue we introduce another new writer, Gary Wright, with a novelette we like very much indeed.

—*The Editor.*

The BEMs in your neighborhood

won't run off with your books if you put inside the front cover of each book... a gummed bookplate with your name printed on it!



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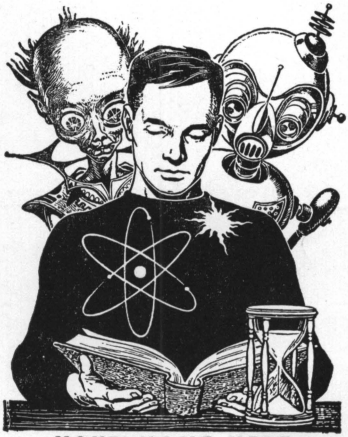

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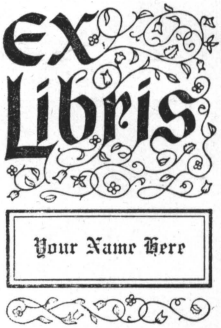

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