

Space Relations

Donald Barr

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A Slightly Gothic
Interplanetary Tale

"I could make you the Commandant of this place if I wanted to," said Lady Morgan languidly. "But I'm not finished with you yet. What was your name?"

"John Smith."

"What was your real name?"

A long pause. "John Smith."

She laughed. "I shall let you have your little mystery. And because you're now going to be, as we say, 'attached to my person'—because it really wouldn't do, you know, to have you running about the mines and talking around after you've killed free-men and taken liberties with your mistress—I shall give you the name, um, Smitty."

She was poised above him. The pale gold hair cascaded over her face. Her whisper fell on his skin. "I shall sleep in my other room tonight, and you can sleep across the foot of my bed . . . in case I need anything."

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space relations

a slightly gothic interplanetary tale

donald barr

a fawcett crest book

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*SPACE RELATIONS: A SLIGHTLY GOTHIC
INTERPLANETARY TALE*

THIS BOOK CONTAINS THE COMPLETE TEXT OF THE
ORIGINAL HARDCOVER EDITION.

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To M.A.B.

with thirty years' love

Tannhäuser:

Stets soll nur dir, nur dir mein Lied ertönen!
Gesungen laut sei jetzt dein Preis von mir!
Dein süßer Reiz ist Quelle alles Schönen,
und jedes holde Wunder stammt von dir.
Die Glut, die du mir in das Herz gegossen,
als Flamme lodre hell sie dir allein!
Ja, gegen alle Welt will unverdrossen
fortan ich nun dein kühner Streiter sein.

Doch hin muss ich zur Welt der Erden,
bei dir kann ich nur Sklave werden;
nach Freiheit doch verlangt es mich,
nach Freiheit, Freiheit dürste ich;
zu Kampf und Streite will ich stehn,
sei's auch auf Tod und Untergehn:
Drum muss aus deinem Reich ich fliehn—
O Königin, Göttin! Lass mich ziehn!

—RICHARD WAGNER

I did not hear the preacher say
That Eros was like Agapē;
In fact, he hinted it was not.
And yet the teat-besotted tot,
The humping lover, and the old
Voyeur remembering in the cold
Have inklings of a tenderness
That smacks of friendship, more or less.

—J. J. UNFERTH

Human Sacrifice, Human Slavery are instances of great intuitions of religion and of civilized purposes expressing themselves by means of inherited brutalities of instinctive behaviour.

—ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD

part one

Naked, wincing, waiting, John Craig lay on his back on the cold examination table, his knees raised, his feet on either side of the big pedals, his hands palm-up beside him, in a thicket—no, it was a Gorgon's chevelure—of wires: green wires, white wires, cerise wires, black wires, yellow wires: wires leading from probes tamped into every orifice of his body, from electrodes sucking at his pallid skin in thirty-one places, from catheters threaded along four arteries and two veins, to a sleek, gray cabinet, the terminal.

"Medusa loves me, hardening my flesh," Craig quoted in a mumble around two fat white wires; he gagged.

Four kilometers away, in Bethesda, the Health Executive's North American computer retrieved the thirty-eight-year record of John Craig's physiology.

Back to back with the gray, a large, blue cabinet rattled briefly and, like an idiot belching and sticking out his tongue, pushed forth several inches of paper.

MD8 Krause, scuttling back and forth in the traditional

white smock of his guild, glanced at the paper, checked the anal and urethral probes with a plastigloved finger ("*Son of a bitch*," mumbled Craig), said heartily, "We're on the line. Relax, John," peeled off the plastiglove, slid a brace of plump, gray earphones over Craig's damp, sandy hair and a single white one over his own white bristles, ran a thumb over the soft inside of Craig's left forearm and peered with a half smile at the "MS43985" neatly branded there, keyed digits into the PSB on the cabinet, and pressed the blue "Start Program" button.

"Oh, I'm wholly relaxed," mumbled Craig.

"Breathe in," said the earphones in a warm, female voice. "Hold your breath. Release your breath. Breathe naturally. In. Out. In. Expel *all* your breath: force it out. Stop breathing. Breathe naturally. Place your feet on the pedals. Begin pedaling. . . ."

The LHVM series lasted four minutes. Krause pressed the green "Continue Program" button.

"You will now experience," said the warm female voice, "a series of mild stimuli from some of the electrodes on your skin. Please do not be alarmed. They will be very mild, like a momentary tickling. Please do not try to suppress your reactions. Please do not scratch or try to remove the electrodes. . . ."

The NRN series was, as promised, like being teased with a huge, invisible feather; it lasted a minute and a half.

When it was over, Craig raised his eyes expectantly to Krause, but the physician shook his head, held up a warning hand, turned to the gray cabinet, keyed four digits into the PSB, pressed the blue "Start Program" button, and turned back again with a countenance totally blank of expression. Craig's eyes narrowed.

A new voice in the earphones, a metallic tenor instantly recognizable as synthesized speech of four or five parameters at best, said: "I am going to pronounce some ordinary words. Listen, but do not reply. Simply remain relaxed. Close your eyes if it helps you to relax. Now,

please pay attention: Duty." A pause of two seconds. "Average." Pause. "Cut . . . Protect . . . Eat . . . Shame . . . Leisure . . . Warm . . . Exquisite . . . Control . . . Pink . . . Nighttime . . . Teeth . . . Essence . . . Relief . . . Wild . . ." The robot-voice intoned forty words and then said, "Thank you for listening."

Krause busied himself with the PSB for a moment. The blue cabinet whirred, belched twice, and vomited paper. The physician waited a few moments after the seizure was over, pulled the long print-out loose, and studied it, chewing his upper lip.

"You are a crafty old quack, aren't you?" mumbled Craig, and gagged.

"Crafty enough to winkle what I want to out of the likes of you," said Krause equably. "I have everything we need. Let's disconnect you."

The buzzer sounded on a wall vidiphone at the other side of the room. "Sorry, John," said Krause. "Just let me get rid of this." He hurried to the 'phone and thumbed the switch. A young man in medical white looked anxiously out of the screen and said, "Krause, Frederic, MD8?"

"Yes," said Krause.

The young man held something outside vidicam range and compared it with Krause. "All right. Go to July code five-zed, please." Abruptly, the image eddied into streaks. Krause pulled a flimsy from his smock pocket, peered at it, and punched a sequence into the keyboard. The young man in white reappeared. "Walters, Carl, HT4, at Bethesda," he said. "Is that your patient on the table, sir? The one you had on line?"

"Yes. Craig, John Armbrüster, CDE16. MID—ah—NA-111-22-6257."

"Right, sir. Well, I have to report a tap—that is, an *attempt* to tap his examination—uh—somewhere."

"Somewhere?"

"Yes, sir."

"Remarkable! Right in good old Somewhere!"

"Not here in Bethesda, I mean."

"You say 'attempt,'" snapped Krause. "Was it successful?"

"We—we don't know, sir. It *could* have been. Depends on who . . . on whether . . ."

Krause glanced over his shoulder at Craig. Craig grinned mirthlessly. Krause said, "You mean, young man, it depends on whether this was a government tap."

"Yes, sir."

"And if it was, it was probably successful."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, my young friend," said the physician firmly, "you may as well forget the matter. What's a little snooping between friends?"

"That *is* a point of view, sir."

"That's *precisely* what it is. My patient has nothing to hide. Etcetera. Put it out of your mind, HT4 Walters."

"Yes, sir."

"Let your natural optimism have full scope."

"Yes, sir."

"Expand the ventral and contract the dorsal aspects of your frame, as the great Dr. James said."

"Yes, sir."

Krause blanked the screen and swore. He came back to Craig and stood looking down at him. Craig smiled. The physician said, "All right, let's unhook you."

The catheters out, the blood vessels sealed, the skin patched with dermaton, throat, nostrils, ears, arms, and urethra cleared, and the thirty-one electrodes abruptly weaned, John Craig scrubbed the contact-paste off his body with aromatic tissue and began to put on his clothes. MD8 Krause sat on the examination table, swinging his short legs and studying the print-out.

"What's it all about, John?" he asked without looking up.

"It could be almost anybody."

"In other words, you won't tell me."

"In other words, I honestly don't know. Fritz, it could be my own shop. Perhaps they're worried about me. Perhaps they think I can't handle this mission to Kossar."

"Perhaps you can't."

Craig ignored that. "Or it could be somebody working for the Plith. Or somebody working for Kossar. *Or* perhaps it's my erstwhile friends, the merry Liberals. They control OIP and most of ETS, and they have plenty of people in Justice. *They* sure as hell don't want me going on this trip."

"I'm not sure *I* want you going on this trip." Krause produced a pen and ticked off two lines of the print-out, hesitated, and then ticked off two more.

"Ah, that reminds me. Fritz, Fritz, you devious old charlatan," said Craig. "*Where* did that last little series come from?"

"The words?"

"The words."

"I *thought* you'd like them. They're rather Neofreudian."

"I noticed."

"It's not a new idea, but it's just recently become available to us little quacks out in the field. Up to now, all we had for two hundred years was the word-association test Jung designed for Freud. You know: 'knife—fork. Beauty—beast.' Two hundred years. It tells something, if the doctor has lived with his patient a long time. Otherwise, it tests the doctor; the patient is the inkblot, the doctor is the patient. Of course, various characters tried to mechanize it. Very crude stuff, mixed up with polygraphy and the like." Krause waved a hand. "But all the hardware could do, do you see, was to detect gross changes in, well, general affect. No specificity as to affect-cluster. Subject heard 'Knife.' It excited him. But *where* did it get to him? Here?" Krause clapped his hand

on his crotch. "Castration anxiety? Or what? You know that shrinking feeling? At least the *old* word-test sometimes gave us a clue. Now, you see—"

"I see." Craig turned a hard, bright gaze on the physician. "But what do *you* see, Fritz?"

"I see a boy with a problem. . . ."

"Have you ever seen a 'boy' *without* a problem?"

"Stop fending it off," said Krause sharply. He consulted the print-out and spoke without raising his eyes. "Yesterday's blood was good. No cancers. Thyroid fine. Parathyroids fine. You have good endocrines. The spinal amino-acid balances were—well, there were no anomalies; no psychosis in the near future. Sperm count in the excellent range. Motility, etcetera, likewise. Lungs fine. Heart fine. Vascular systems still fine. Macrometabolic processes fine; very efficient for an ex-fatso. Nerves anatomically sound. Primary and secondary reflexes all right; especially the primary. Neuro-analogies in the normal range. Differentiation adequate. Resolution good and quick. Impedances a bit high in the genital and rectal clusters." He paused.

"Good heavens!" said Craig, "I'm going to Kossar to negotiate a treaty, not—"

"Be still. . . . And"—the physician looked up—"this brings us to a—a certain *sense* I have. John, I intuit something wrong. I was an engineer before I became a charlatan—did you know that?—and there is something in John Armbruster Craig that's out of whack. Each system is fine, but there is something, well, not aesthetic about the way they work together. Diverted energies? Binding energy? Compensating for some kind of functional strain? I think so. . . . Now we come to the forty words. You noticed, didn't you? that many of them were ambiguous. 'Duty,' for instance; a childish term for feces; also refers to superego constraint, as well as to a military assignment. 'Eat' is an interesting word, isn't it, John? So is 'pink,' apparently. Something pink has been heavily

cathected here. And this is at the *adult* level. You do *not* have a castration anxiety in the ordinary sense; no marked signs of it with 'cut.' On the other hand, with 'teeth' . . . I have your attention now, do I?"

"You do," said Craig evenly.

"Eight years ago, before you went to the Betelgeuse Conference, you were a nice, soft young man, brighter than most, but normal, depressingly normal. It's all here, as a baseline." He flapped the print-out. "*At* the Conference, you were able. Everyone said so. But no one said you were brilliant. Not brilliant. No. Then, coming home, you had your—your experience. I know what you told your Department. And that's *all* I know. And not even the prigs of the Extraterrestrial Service think you told them the whole story, the real story. Two years as a slave in the mines of—wherever it was."

"Treglast."

"Treglast. A melodramatic name. This Kossar seems to be a melodramatic *place*. I looked it up last night. Settled by the Carlyle Society. The idea of exiling political extremists to the stars was asinine to begin with; anyone with any historical sense should have seen what would happen. Humane, but asinine. And what a ripe lot the Carlyle Society were! Sociology was a Gothic tale. Now we've had five generations of inbred schizoid popinjays. Delightful! Kossar. Whatever happened to you there, it changed you. Changed utterly, as the poet says. 'A terrible beauty is born.' I notice that you are fingering your left forearm. You come home, oh, a very sick young fellow. All sorts of sick. I remember *that* print-out. Organically, you've recovered. Slowly."

"Be reasonable, Fritz. I've done well."

"You've done brilliantly. The whole MIPTO development is your baby. Everyone says so. You're in line for Secretary. Everyone says so. Even Liberals. *That*, do you see, is the point: your brilliancy. Your brilliancy is like a symptom. It *is* a symptom. Not that I ever see any of it

around here," he added as an afterthought. "But I hear about it—and some other things. . . . Speaking of poetry. Let me fetch something. Excuse me."

He scuttled out of the room, returned with three thin volumes bound in cloth-covered cellulose boards in precious mimicry of the nineteenth century, waved them at Craig with a smile, leafed through one, and began to read:

*" 'All that in April-happens in the earth
Happens in me when your hand touches me. . . . ' "*

Craig nodded.

"That sonnet, if you will remember, is from your first volume, eleven years ago. Pretty. Very pretty. We shall designate that 'Before.' . . . Now, as to 'After.' Where's that thing you were quoting on the table? Ah. Here:

*'Medusa loves me, hardening my flesh.
She salts my dying childhood with her fury. . . . '*

Also very pretty. But in a different vein, am I right? A somewhat *different* vein? The Medusa Sonnets are—didn't someone once call them '*faisandé*'?"

"I did," said Craig.

"Then you agree with me. And it isn't only the Medusa Sonnets. Here's a later effusion of yours. My goodness!" He wagged his head over it. "I *particularly* like the ending:

*'The snowy serviette, the dainty hand,
And Hansel screaming in the even teeth.'*

John, why must you go to Kossar? You say you spent two years as a slave on Kossar; yet for some reason you've pushed and pushed to bring Kossar into MIPTO, even though the Man-Inhabited Planets Treaty has a clause against alliances with slaveowning societies. *You* wrote

the clause. Of course, you were the darling of the Liberals then. And now—"

Craig interrupted calmly. "Fritz, take it from me: Earth *needs* Kossar in the Treaty Organization. I can't tell you precisely why, but—"

"Oh, I know *why*, John. I know how scared you all are of the Plith."

"Aren't you scared of the Plith, Fritz?"

"Of course. I'm a Liberal, but unlike many of my party—you see, I admit that—I don't like ant-empires any more than I like people-empires. Very well, then, let's assume Earth *needs* Kossar in the Treaty Organization. Can't someone else represent Earth at the signing? Why can't the Secretary do it?"

"Why can't I?"

"Because," said Krause slowly, "because I'm truly afraid of what might happen to you. You're holding yourself together by an unconscious effort. What if the binding energy fails?"

"I have to go. Whom would *you* send instead, Fritz? A doddering old narcissist who thinks himself a master of Realpolitik and would sell off Clause Eighteen—that antislavery clause you think so highly of?"

"Might you be describing your distinguished superior?"

"Yes, the Secretary. Or maybe you'd send a hand-wringing missionary from the tall corn who would scold naughty little Kossar and abolish its slavery?"

"I recognize the leader of my party. But, John, isn't that the idea, to abolish slavery?"

"No. My idea is to abolish slaves and slaveowners."

"Oh? Is that different?"

"Yes, it's different." Craig glared at the MD8 but seemed not to see him. "You can't just abolish the master-slave relation. You have to put some other relation in its place. . . . When I got home from Kossar, I was angry. I wanted to go up to Kossar with an army at my back and abolish slavery. It wouldn't have abolished the

slavery in *me*. But I didn't think that mattered, not then. And when I wrote Clause Eighteen, I was still angry. It took me a long time to learn from my own sickness. . . . I know a little about slaveowners, too. No one *forces* them to be cruel. . . . We're all Liberals, you know. We like to think institutions distort people. But slavery is a frightful institution because it doesn't. It allows the most direct and unrestrained expression of human nature, Fritz. Believe me. . . . When I was first captured, on the way back from Betelgeuse, it flashed through my mind that my only chance to survive was to tell little lies, pick little fights, play little tricks, provoke little punishments. Every lie they believe is a victory; every punishment that doesn't kill you is a victory; the word is '*weisenheimer*.' Beware the separate peace. Accommodate, and you're done for. And it gets harder and harder and harder *not* to accommodate, especially if—" He broke off and seemed suddenly to focus on the man he was talking to. "No, no, Fritz, I have to go—for the sake of my health."

Krause's eyebrows lifted.

"I have unfinished business on Kossar," said Craig.

"In other words," said Krause, "you want to get back to the delicatessen."

Craig, shortly: "Yes."

Krause: "Who is the remarkable lady?"

"No one you know, Fritz. I know her slightly. *Amo ut intellegam*."

"Which means?"

Craig: "I love in order that I may understand. You try to do it backwards, and you never make it. I'm a Trad. You're a Prog."

"Drivel, John, drivel, drivel, drivel. Ideologized drivel. If you're so sure of these things, why do you say them in dead languages?"

"To remind myself that such things have been said before, and doubted before. And also that the men who said them are dead. That keeps me honest, instead of sincere."

Krause: "This is all very sententious but does you no good whatever."

Craig smiled thinly. "I'm telling you as unbrilliantly as I can. I was made sick on Kossar, and on Kossar I can be made well . . . perhaps."

"Don't try to cure yourself, John. I know these self-arranged abreactions. Get help. If you don't want mine, I can refer you."

"Thank you for pleading with me, Fritz. But—no."

"I won't sign your medical release for this mission, John."

"Yes, you will, Fritz. I'd give anything to be that nice, plump, mediocre John Craig again. Anything at all. I don't like this new one. And you're going to help me; you're going to sign off on that form. Yes, you are, damn you!"

part two

The High Council of Kossar was in session, a noble spectacle. Each member was panoplied and accoutred according to the tradition of his own domain.

The Master of Orme, beefy but sly-looking, wore a slash-sleeved jacket and breeches of saffron velvet, with a curious square black-and-yellow cap that he declined to remove even in the Council Chamber.

The Lord Wynther, whom many believed to be one hundred and fifty years old, peered with eyes like bubbles of dark grease out of a narrow, pouchy, lipless countenance. He wore a beetlelike costume modeled on the "frock coat" of an Earth gentleman of the nineteenth century.

General Falkendire was in uniform, complete with spaceboots and laser pistol, but a uniform bedizened with fanciful splashes of color of the General's own devising. The ribbons of thirty-seven medals—most of them, it was said, also of the General's devising—crowded the slightly concave chest.

Alastair, Tenth Baron Ewbold, wore a hunting costume of green suede. His smooth, wide face bore a look of patrician oafishness, which an elaborate coiffure only emphasized.

The Count of Lyme looked like the preeminent intellectual of the gathering. His glittering black eyes, thin, straight nose, and thin but well-shaped lips might have suggested some sort of aesthete or abstracted sensuality, but the high, bulging forehead suggested a massive and powerful brain. Only the faintest aura of theater about the man attenuated the effect. He wore a cassock of dull black silk.

Sir Osman Parad was a small, vivid creature. His wrinkled brown skin had curious bluish highlights. His lips were very red. He wore a flowing plum-colored robe and a sickly green turban.

And the Lady Morgan Sidney, heiress of the great fens of Treglast, wore a fluted white gown with a simple cincture of gold that perfectly matched her hair. High breasts and long thighs printed themselves on the chaste cloth. Her gaze was steady and intent, but there was a tiny continual ebullition of angry humor in the gray eyes. The mouth was obstinate.

The seven rulers of Kossar swept back into the Council Chamber after a recess—Orme striding, Wynther tottering, Falkendire marching, Ewbold drifting, Lynne pacing, Parad mincing, and Lady Morgan moving with a kind of restless restraint. The gaudy retinues and feverish hangers-on were shooed away. The great bronze doors were closed.

Parad, chairman for the session, said, "We had reached—had we not?—agenda item five, dealing with General Clause Eighteen of the proposed Treaty. Is there discussion? My Lord of Orme."

Orme: "Why waste time discussing the General Clauses? They're part of the organic law of the Treaty Organization, aren't they? If we get into the Organization,

they get into the Treaty. I say we ought to be talking about the Special Clauses, which we *can* negotiate."

Lyme: "With all respect, my dear Orme—"

Lady Morgan: "I agree with Orme."

Parad: "The Count is speaking."

Lyme: "With all respect, my lady and my lord, General Clause Eighteen is—ah—peculiar in its bearing on this world. It is the only General Clause that undertakes to legislate the internal affairs of the member planets, and it proscribes an institution that is part of the fabric of society on Kossar. This—"

Lady Morgan: "We can read."

Parad: "My lady, please!"

Lyme: "This leaves us with three alternatives: First, of course, we can refuse to join the Treaty Organization. Second, we might conceivably persuade the Treaty Organization to delete the Clause in question from *our* treaty. Third, we could abolish slavery."

Wynther: "May I speak? Thank you, Sir Osman. Our good friend Lyme has clarified the question for us very well—no, no, Morgan my dear, sometimes it is helpful to state the obvious. Let us think about his three alternatives. Let us ask two questions about them: First, are they mutually exclusive? And second, do they exhaust the possibilities? My answer to both questions is: no."

Ewbold: "You're talking in riddles."

Orme: "What's the use of talking about it at all? We asked them here so we could sign the Treaty, didn't we? This is part of the Treaty."

Ewbold: "We asked them here to *talk* about signing the Treaty. That's different from signing it."

Falkendire: "I'm a military man, not a diplomat, and certainly not a logic-chopper. If we don't sign this damned Treaty, we'll face the Plith alone. If we face the Plith alone, we'll lose. If we lose, we'll be destroyed. I mean *destroyed*."

Parad: "Devoured, in fact."

Wynther: "I doubt that even the Plith would enjoy picking my stringy old carcass, but Lady Morgan here would be a great delicacy. In fact, my dear, you almost make me wish I were a Plith."

Lady Morgan: "Ah, my Lord, I wish I'd known you when you had your teeth."

Lyme: "I must protest, Sir Osman. This is not in good taste. We are here to discuss serious matters."

Parad: "Absolutely. Lord Wynther? Lady Morgan?"

Wynther: "The General has given us a simpler set of alternatives than the Count did. Sign or be eaten. But I will ask my questions about these choices as well: Are they mutually exclusive, and are they exhaustive?"

Ewbold: "I see what you mean. We might sign and then be eaten anyway."

Wynther: "Or we might refuse to sign and still get help from the Treaty Organization if the Plith attack. Earth may not sit by and watch the Plith gobble up the galaxy sun by sun."

Falkendire: "I'd rather not take that chance, Wynther. They'd let our deaths buy time for them."

Orme: "Anything that adds to our risk is intolerable."

Wynther: "Very well. We've disposed of Lyme's first alternative. We will *not* refuse to sign. That leaves us with his other two choices, persuasion and abolition. I ask again. Are they mutually exclusive, and are they exhaustive?"

Ewbold: "Oh, I see what you mean. We try to persuade them, and then if that doesn't work, we abolish slavery."

Wynther: "As usual, you are almost right, Alastair. We *try* to persuade them. If that doesn't work, we *promise* to abolish slavery."

Lyme: "Let me summarize your argument, my dear Wynther. I had posited three alternatives: isolation, persuasion, and abolition. You have added a fourth: deceit."

Wynther: "A fair summary, and much briefer than most of your summaries."

Lyme: "Let me now comment on the second and fourth alternatives, my lady, my lords. The man who will, we are told, represent Earth in these transactions—this, ah, John Craig—happens, I am informed by my, ah, representatives on Earth, to be the author of General Clause Eighteen. You seem surprised, my Lord Wynther."

Wynther: "I am surprised you knew, Lyme."

Lyme: "Under the circumstances, the probability of successfully persuading this, ah, John Craig to forego this Clause is virtually negligible."

Wynther: "Not quite, Lyme, not quite. Craig is the author of Clause Eighteen. But he is also thought to be the author of the original plan for the Man-Inhabited Planets Treaty Organization. His pride of authorship in Clause Eighteen may be less than his pride of authorship in the whole Organization."

Lyme: "It may be. It is certainly an interesting speculation. But I call on you to note that abandoning the Clause for us would destroy the Clause for all, while abandoning us would not destroy the Organization for anyone else. As to my Lord Wynther's fourth alternative, deceit, I can scarcely conceive that an institution like slavery could be maintained in a clandestine manner. Our domestic arrangements—"

Orme: "Let me get something straight, Lyme. Just what are you trying to get us to do, anyway?"

Parad: "A good question. My dear Count, we have already ruled out isolation, and now you are telling us that persuasion and deceit are hopeless. What remains is abolition. Are you proposing it?"

Pause.

Lady Morgan: "Why don't you answer, Lyme?"

Lyme: "I am proposing nothing. I am merely trying to examine the alternatives."

Lady Morgan: "You are naming them, not examining them. None of us is examining anything. If we were examining, we would not be talking about slavery; we would talk about slaves and slaveowners. What we call slavery is not a 'domestic arrangement'—it is what we do to men and women. My house was built by slaves. My lands are drained and worked by slaves. Who would go down into the mines of Blindmarsh but slaves? Either I am a slaveowner or I am a pauper. I will not engage in the squeed trade. . . . And I will tell you something else: *I enjoy being a slaveowner.*"

Orma: "So I hear."

Lady Morgan: "Everything you hear is true, Orme my boy."

Parad: "Are we not getting away from the subject?"

Lady Morgan: "Slavery is the subject. You all know abolition is impossible. The day you are no longer masters, you will be killed. Butchered. And not by Plith. By your former slaves."

Lyme: "You carry conviction by your manner, but I do not follow your logic. What physical defenses will we lose, what physical powers will the workers gain, when they cease to be chattel-slaves and become wage-slaves? Slave rebellions are not unknown on this planet. Several of us have put them down. Even Treglast—"

Lady Morgan: "Not in *my* time."

Lyme: "Granted. You were a child when the High Council put down the rebellion against your late father. But the fact remains, it was put down, and every revolt ever since has been put down. No one has proposed to disband the armed forces, or to place them under any control but our own. Clause Eighteen does not touch on it."

Parad: "You advert to slave rebellions. I believe I have as much experience with them as anyone at this table. I can inform you, they are not actuated by love. They are a sign of something else, something that I for one do not wish to—set loose."

Wynther: "Ah, Sir Osman, you are missing our friend's point. He is restating a classic principle: '*Oderint dum metuant.*' It is a sound principle: 'Let them hate me, so long as they fear me.' The author of the principle came to a bad end; at least, I do not recall that the reign of the Emperor Caligula was long. But let us pass that over. What does the principle tell us? It tells us that we must continue to be feared. What slave will fear us if we make what to any slave is the greatest of possible concessions, emancipation?"

Falkendire: "What people fear is force. If we keep the superior force, we'll be feared all we want to be."

Orme: "We're—we're wasting time."

As if to dramatize the Master of Orme's words, a buzzer sounded. Parad switched on the communicator viewscreen. A lean, punctilious face appeared; the seven rulers of Kossar could see the flicker of agitation in the eyes.

Parad: "Yes, Macwith?"

The Confidential Secretary of the High Council of Kossar said tensely: "The Earth representative is now on arrival orbit, sir. He will be here in less than two hours."

Parad: "Thank you, Macwith." He switched off the viewscreen.

Ewbold: "Now what?"

Lady Morgan: "Very simple. We do the following things, *one after another*: We try to persuade the earthman to leave our little domestic arrangements alone. If we can't persuade him, we sign provisionally anyway and try to fool the Organization into thinking that we are *planning* to abolish slavery. If we can't fool them, we meet again and then decide whether to get out of the Treaty Organization or—to give up our slaves and our lives."

Wynther: "Beautifully stated."

Lyme: "Let me comment on one aspect of what Lady Morgan has just said—"

Orme: "I don't think we should let you. You take so long, Lyme."

Parad: "Please!"

Orme: "We have a lot to talk about before this fellow Craig gets here. For instance, who's going to do the persuading? And who's to decide whether Craig can or can't be persuaded? Then we have all the Special Clauses to plan."

Falkendire: "Just one thing. *While* we're palavering with this Earthman, we have pretty much the same protection *as if* we belonged to the Treaty Organization, but Clause Eighteen doesn't apply till we actually sign off on the damn thing."

Lyme: "That, my dear General, is what I had intended to say a moment ago."

Orme: "Good. He saved you the trouble. No, all this means we're going to need a persuader or negotiator who can go on persuading this fellow for a long time without his getting too impatient. I nominate Lady Morgan Sidney."

Lady Morgan: "I'm not sure I'm flattered." She laughed.

Wynther: "I second the nomination."

It was two and a half hours later that John Craig, exhausted from his trip, still queasy from coming out of infraspaces, and suffering from an unease that was not physical, was ushered into the Council Chamber. The punctilious Macwith began to pronounce the introductions: "My Lady and Lords of the High Council! His Excellency the Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of the Planetary Federal Republic of Earth, and Principal Delegate of the Organization of Signatories to the Treaty of the Man-Inhabited Planets, the Honorable John Craig. Your Excellency! Her Excellency the Lady Morgan Sidney, Suzerain of Tregbast and Blindmarsh, Hereditary Member of the High Council of Kossar. His Excellency Sir Osman Parad, High Feudatory of Jellak, Suzerain of—"

The dry old voice of Lord Wynther cut in: "Will someone fetch Lady Morgan's aide-de-camp? She appears to be overcome."

part three

John Craig, on his way home from the Betelgeuse Conference with the praises of his superiors ("Solid work, John!" "Neat but not gaudy.") still running through his mind, dawdled in the tiny, ingenious shower that belonged to his stateroom. The shower itself, sending scratchy little jets of hot water over his plump body, was satisfying. The fact of the shower was more so. It was a sign of the impressive eminence to which he had already risen. The *Star Queen* was a luxury liner, but only four staterooms had their own showers. *And* he was only thirty-one. Rubbing a cake of soap sensuously over his chest, he amused himself by counting the names of men who stood between himself and the Secretaryship and trying to guess their retirement dates. He was more than a little amused at his own complacency.

The water and the dream engulfed him, and for several moments he did not hear the howl of the alarm. When the klaxon made its way into his consciousness, he did

not know what it meant, but he dried himself hastily and began to dress.

"All passengers, all hands!" an authoritative voice honked from the little speaker over the bunk. "All passengers, all hands! This is the Captain. This is the Captain. In thirty seconds, we will break out of infraspace. In thirty seconds we will break out of infraspace. Lie down at once in the nearest bunk or webbing station. Lie down at once in the nearest bunk or webbing station. Strap yourself in. Strap yourself in. Do not panic. Do not panic. Stand by for further orders. Stand by."

Half dressed, Craig lay down on his bunk and tightened the webbing around his thighs, thorax, and forehead. He wondered peevishly what had broken down and how long it would take to repair it. He was anxious to get back to earth. . . .

The loathsome, disorienting stress of the space-shift began. Then, as the *Star Queen* passed into real space and acquired real velocity, the apparent acceleration squeezed him against the bunk with crushing force. He struggled for breath and sanity. Then it was over, and he retched a little and fumbled at the webbing.

"All passengers, all hands!" Even over the low-fidelity speaker, there was a new note in the voice, almost a tremor. "All passengers, all hands! This is the Captain. This is the Captain. All passengers will go at once to their own staterooms and await orders. All passengers will go at once to their own staterooms and await orders. All hands will go at once to their duty stations and await orders. All hands will go at once to their duty stations and await orders. Stand by. Stand by."

Craig was swaying confusedly on his feet, still half dressed, when the boron-beryllium door to the stateroom clanged open and five men stepped in. One Craig recognized as an officer of the *Star Queen*. He was in impeccable uniform, but his hands were shackled behind his back. The other four were dressed in segments of spacesuits and

of the military uniforms of a dozen planets. One was a huge, grizzled old man with a deep scar across his face. Two were sallow, younger men. One was a veiny-faced little man with a shock of white hair.

In the presence of plain disaster, Craig found his wits were clear. The ship's officer stood with lowered head, not looking at Craig. Craig decided to say nothing.

"Who's this?" snapped the little man.

"Dunno," mumbled the officer.

"He's got to be rich," said the big man. "Look at this layout."

The little man glanced at Craig. "What's your name?"

Craig muttered, "Smith." The trim briefcase full of his private notes on the Betelgeuse Conference was lying on the workshelf, three feet away, in plain view.

The little man wiped his nose with the back of his hand.

"You rich?" asked the big man.

"I was," said Craig. "That is, my wife was. But she left me. Went off with—" He lunged at the briefcase. One of the sallow men caught his shoulder, and the little man backhanded him savagely across the mouth, but he got to the briefcase and hammered the fat corner of it with the base of his hand. There was a sizzle and a puff of acrid yellow smoke. The contents of the case—Craig's notes and his identification—were incinerated. He wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth.

The big man nodded. The sallow man held Craig by the upper arms. The big man punched him in the stomach.

"Who are ya?" yelled the little man.

"John Smith," said Craig.

The big man slapped him in the temple.

"Watch it, Rick," said the little man. "He ain't worth *anything* dead."

The big man said to Craig, "Who are you? Are you rich?"

"John Smith," said Craig. "No." His head was ringing, but he could still think. What if these outlaws traded him to the dissident colonies? There were drugs, hypnotechniques, tortures. He had destroyed the written material on the Conference, but the facts were still in his head, and the routine protective conditioning he had had was light.

The little man said, "What was in there?"

Craig said, exaggerating his dizziness, "My girl's letters . . ."

The big man laughed coarsely. One of the sallow men snickered. The little man looked suspicious, but then jerked his head toward the door.

"All right, stow him away. We got to get back into *infra*."

They shoved him out into a shuffling procession of passengers and crewmen and trundled him, still half dressed, through the airlocks and into the raider's hold.

2

Piracy in space was rare when man first went out to the planets in real-space ships. Ships were too hard to come by, and even after mutiny had put several spacecraft into the hands of desperate men, ports with maintenance facilities were closed to them.

Then an engineer named da Silva found a way to burst into what had been Chandra Gopal's merely theoretical infraspaces, and men went to the stars, traveling one light-year in three hours and fourteen minutes.

The colonizing of a thousand worlds scattered over the galaxy gave marauders and privateersmen bases enough,

but interception in infraspaces was a technical problem beyond the engineering ability of pirates. Pirates preyed on ships just going out or coming in, but the real space around the habitable planets was fairly easy to patrol.

Then someone discovered how to intercept in infraspaces, and soon pirate ships hunted, usually in pairs, between the stars.

There was little that could be done. No one had found a way to propagate electromagnetic waves through infraspaces. Electron and neutron streams were quickly dragged back into real space by the density of orthogonal gravitational fields. Gravitation propagated in infraspaces but could not be modulated. Thus no SOS's could be sent faster than light. A starfaring ship was on its own. It arrived at port, or it did not.

The pair of raider ships that plucked the liner *Star Queen* out of infraspaces were more businesslike and less vicious than most. One, the one that waited in a tight, precessing trajectory in infraspaces to block the victim's escape, was a rough but deadly combat ship. The other, which followed the victim into real space, was a great hollowed-out tub, armed only for close fighting, and with room in the hold for twelve hundred slaves.

3

The hold. A ringing, howling metal cavern, sliced across by circular metal decks seven feet apart. Over toward the perimeter of the decks, a slender helix of stars drilled down through them. At the center of the booming metal circles, a metal bole held them up. The bole contained the waste-lines. The lights, naked floods, were

mounted on it and blazed radially. They were never turned off.

There were eight shallow troughs in the deck, like the radii of a spider web, and eight radial aisles between them, and metal benches between the aisles and over the troughs like the circling fibers of the web. The benches were just wide enough for two men to lie side by side on them, and running from aisle to aisle over the center of each bench, twenty centimeters above it, was a shiny metal pipe. On this slid rings, each with a sixty-centimeter chain attached. At the end of each chain was the wrist-manacle of a captive.

The numb shuffling, the smothered sobbing of the few newly captured women, and the clangor of the decks were more terrifying than voices. Craig felt himself prodded, and kned along an aisle. The fetor was stomach-turning.

"Right-handed or left-handed?" It was one of the sal-low men, and the question was to Craig.

"Right," muttered Craig.

The manacle ratcheted closed on his left wrist.

"I call this 'the stacks,'" remarked the sal-low man cheerfully. "I used to be a librarian—in Cincinnati, Earth. I like this better." He grinned. "Your buddy will tell you the rules." He jerked his head toward a man on the other side of the pipe-rail and turned away to prod another captive into place.

The new captives were being mixed in among old ones. Some of the old ones eyed the newcomers, but most of them sat listlessly, and some slept.

The man whose manacle-ring was next to Craig's watched him over the rail. "I'm Robbins," he said. He had once been paunchy. His yellowing skin hung over his jowls and bare chest.

"I'm Smith," said Craig.

"They feed you twice a day. That's your dish." He nodded toward a plexic bowl inverted on Craig's side of

the bench. "It's also your pillow. No blankets. Four times a day they blow whistles, and we all pull down to this end of the rail, and then we go in the trench, two by two."

"Go? Oh, I see," said Craig, and gagged.

"Yes. It's the Call. Then they hose it into the drains over there by the stem. No other times, or it just stays here," the man said. Anxiety showed in his voice.

"I'll be careful," said Craig.

"That's about all, then." Robbins was silent for a moment, then added, with no change of voice, "I was the best sales engineer Universal Thermo ever had. Heat pumps."

"We live and learn," said Craig.

"The women on this tier are all over there," said Robbins. "You can get a real good view from right here when the Call comes. We're lucky."

"We sure are," said Craig.

4

"Robbins?"

"What?"

"Where's the fellow who had my place before?"

"I don't know. He—he got sick."

"*Ubi sunt*," said Craig, and after a time murmured:

"Ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt?"

Ubi sum qui nomen iam amisi?

The answer to the first is quite apparent,

The answer to the second not so easy."

"What?" said Robbins.

"Nothing. I was doing an imitation of a man I used to know, name of Craig. Thinking, you know, what would he do in my place?"

5

A man died the next day. The little rummy-nosed, blustering old man who had interrogated Craig aboard the *Star Queen* came and looked at the body.

"Yep," he said. He wiped his rum-blossom on his sleeve.

Robbins was staring at the little mottled slaver. "I heard he used to be an obstetrician," he whispered.

"Probably made more than he's making now," said Craig.

"Don't you believe it," whispered Robbins. "They get a lot for us."

"You, maybe," said Craig politely. "Anyway, he was probably a failure as an obstetrician. I mean, if you were a woman, would you like him poking that running nose up your works?"

Two guards kick-rolled the body to the stairs and dragged it down out of sight.

"For a minute I thought they were going to shove it in the drain," said Robbins.

"Oh, they have to break it up before they recycle it," Craig explained to him.

Robbins studied him a moment. "That was a joke," he said, "wasn't it?"

"Then why didn't you laugh?" said Craig.

6

A whistle cut into Craig's sleep. "It's the Call," he thought, "but it can't be."

It was one of the pirates, the big scarred man who had beaten Craig. He was wildly drunk.

"Everybody up!" he roared. "I don't want you to miss a thing."

Most of the captives sat up, blinking. A few wavered to their feet.

"Ladeees and gen-tell-men," bellowed the scarred man. "The managemunt takes pride in pree-senting *for* the first time anywhere—" (he belched) "—ay *new* extravanganzah entitled 'The Pop-ping of Lit-tull Carrot-Top' and star-ring that *dashing debonair darling* of *two* hundred worlds . . . Rick! Bastigliano! Ta-dah!" He half-pranced, half-reeled in a circle, grinning and shaking hands with himself above his head. "And! A talen-ted newcomurr to the threedee tanks, *ay* little girl you will all love . . . Miss *Cherry Carrot-Top!*" He advanced, applauding and cheering, on a young girl chained at the end of the row in the women's section. She was auburn-haired and prettyish, and could not, Craig thought, have been more than fifteen. She cringed away from the man.

"*Give* the little *girl* a great! big! hand!" The man lunged down and seized her free arm, pulling her into the aisle so that she was stretched between his huge fist and her chain. He took the neck of her frock and wrenched. The light material ripped away. "Ta-dah!"

The girl whimpered. She had old-fashioned delicate pink underclothing. The man belched again and tore at

the remaining fabric. "Ta-dah! *Give* the little *girl* a great! big! hand!"

For a moment there was no sound except the keening of the da Silva Drive.

Craig shut his eyes, but could not shut his ears.

7

Breaking out of infraspaces, lying on a bench, with a single chain on instead of webbing . . .

Craig's back was numb for a moment, and then the return of feeling left him with a maddening, fiery, itching bruise from shoulder blades to heels. The delusional-horror in his mind cleared more slowly. Nausea came as a clue through squirming tunnels, a thread of sanity. He lay trembling. He opened his eyes. The floodlights were still off. The darkness was full of the sounds of retching, of terror, seemingly of death.

The lights flared on. Craig forced himself to look around him. Robbins lay still. Unconscious? Dead? There was something wrong about the set of his body.

Some slavers were making their way around the benches, led by the small, white-thatched man whom Robbins had said was an ex-obstetrician. The ex-librarian from Cincinnati was among them, referring to a sheaf of papers on a clipboard.

"A-twelve. Female, about forty," said the ex-librarian. "From the *Pegasus*."

"Left arm broken," said the little man. The ex-librarian marked his list.

"A-thirteen," he said. "Female, about fifteen. From the *Sirius Clipper*."

"What seems to be the trouble?" The little man addressed the red-haired girl directly; his voice dropped, as if by habit, into the intonation of a doctor on ward rounds. Evidently Robbins had been right.

The girl said something in a low voice, and the little man's face darkened. "Describe him." The girl spoke more softly still. "Bastigliano. I knew it," said the obstetrician to the librarian. "That's the *second* one he's spoiled on this run. It's a hundred and thirty-eight credits more out of his share. Write it down. And write down 'D and C' on this one."

"B-four," said the librarian. "Male, about sixty. From the *Pegasus*."

"Dead," said the little man. "He wasn't worth keeping, anyway."

Robbins was E-8.

"Dead," said the little man, annoyed. "We must be running nearly ten percent dead this time. What do you have?" he asked the librarian.

"Eight percent, anyway. Maybe ten."

Craig could now see what had happened: Robbins' dish had slid out from under his head as they came into real space, and he had broken his neck. "You lost a good one there, doctor," he said loudly to the little man. "He was the best sales engineer Universal Thermo ever had. I'd complain if I were you."

"Shut up, weissenheimer," said the little man.

The librarian backhanded Craig across the side of the head. "Shut up, weissenheimer," he said.

Three or four hours later, a shuddering howl filled the hold, and the slave ship touched down somewhere.

8

*They died as embryos would die,
E-8, B-4: They were asleep
In space. Without a chance to cry,
They failed—and who will weep?*

*The sparks fly upward and the Dark
Devours them as the whale devours
The frisking minnows—not a mark
To show where passed the hours.*

“I’m not sincere enough,” said Craig to Robbins’ empty place.

9

He came lightly down the helical stairs, this delicate apparition with the rugose powdery face, holding a folded handkerchief—“Scented, no doubt,” said Craig aloud to no one in particular, Robbins being dead—before his nostrils and pointing the toe as he descended, just as the whistles blew for the Call; and he put on a pair of heavy antique spectacles to examine the proceedings. Craig, squatting over the trench, watched him approach, and the old queen somehow picked up that watchfulness and came

closer, manipulating the spectacles with his tinted left claw as if they were a quizzing glass.

Craig bent to his task and when the visitor was standing almost over him, said in a hoarse, conspiratorial whisper, without looking up and through unmoving lips, "Sir? There's a rumor here that B-four is a hermaphrodite. Is that true?"

"Oh?" said the visitor in a low reedy voice and, after a quick, intent inspection of Craig, moved casually away toward two crewmen—they were the librarian and the burly rapist Bastigliano—nearby. A moment's talk passed between the three; the crewmen looked puzzled, and the librarian consulted his clipboard; then the three shrugged, one after the other, and the visitor moved on. Craig could not make out any of their conversation but did catch what appeared to be a proper noun, "Kossar." It was the first time he had heard this name.

10

The air of the planet seemed sweet, cold, and thin—of course. Craig inhaled it hungrily, listened to the icy clarity of the sounds, and felt his eyes fill with meaningless tears. Minutes passed before he became aware of what was happening.

Captives were being led by twos and threes from the locks of the great, dark, pitted ship that loomed over them: men and women, manacled, gulping air, blubbering. There was a high, incredulous wail—"But I can't leave my daughter. I just can't. Oh, my baby! I won't go, I won't!"—and the sound of a slap. The sallow ex-librarian checked the slaves off on his clipboard; the ex-

obstetrician scanned them for rashes and gross defects; a dozen crewmen manhandled them into lots of ten. "Raise your arms! Higher! I said higher!" A heavy ten-foot metal pole was passed through the center-links of ten pairs of shackles, and the ends locked. "Pole Two ready!" "Pole Five ready!" "Pole Four ready!" "I'm short one on Pole Three!" "Pole Seven ready!" "Short two on Pole One!" "Here's your last on Pole Three. Where's H-seven? Pole Five, you have one wrong. Get H-seven off there! Pole One, take H-seven and here's your last." "Pole One ready!" "Pole Three ready!" "Pole Ten ready!"

"Commercial polyphony," said Craig down the scabby neck of the man in front of him in the middle of Pole Four.

"You can say *that* again," grunted the man.

"No talking, cargo!"

There was a scuffling sound, and someone broke loose. A man running. A weaving, pumping figure moving out and out, smaller and smaller, across the scarred, lion-colored flats of the spaceport. No one at the staging area moved. A faint droning, which Craig had not noticed before, rose to a snarl; a small skimmer, a one-seater, swooped from above the ship and streaked after the diminishing black shape of the fugitive. The escaping slave turned, zigzagged, darted this way and that, stumbled, rolled over, and ran again. The skimmer stayed easily above him, settling lower and lower, until it seemed to pounce on him, caught him in some jawlike contrivance under the nose, soared upward with him waving his legs and arms like an impaled beetle, buzzed the throng at the ship so they could hear the man's yells, and flew off toward the walled compound.

"Pole Nine, was that yours?" "That was our S-fourteen." "You'll see him later, Pole Nine. Go in one short." "Pole Nine ready, then!" "Pole Six ready!" "All poles ready. Move out!"

With a slaver in front and a slaver in back of each pole, the groups of men and women began to stumble across the vacant field toward the compound, stepping confusedly on one another's feet, reeling, colliding, growling, sobbing, apologizing. A man fell heavily, pulling down his whole group; the two slavers walked among the sprawling men and women, kicking them cheerfully and indiscriminately until the heap righted itself.

Pole Four, eight men and two women, swayed crazily for a few yards. Craig, sixth from the front, said in a clear, casual voice, "Put the pole on your right shoulders, everybody."

The slaver in front whirled and came around beside them. "*Who said that?*"

"I did," Craig answered promptly. The slaver dealt him a crack on the cheekbone and returned to the front. Craig began to stamp his feet slightly as he walked and to whisper rhythmically, "Left . . . left . . . left . . . left . . ." Someone behind him took it up, and a large-boned old woman near the head of the pole began to growl softly, "Left . . . left . . . *Had* a good job but I *left* . . . left . . ." With the requisite skippings and shufflings, the group fell into an easy marching gait. The slaver in front turned around again, but this time remained in position, walking backward and glaring; he opened his mouth, closed it, turned back, and walked on; a moment later Craig judged from the swing of his shoulders that he was in step, too. "Left . . . left . . . leadership potential *poor*," whispered Craig, "left . . . left . . ."

There were two compounds at the edge of the field, a large one, relatively open and conventional, and a small one enclosed by a high black wall. The ten poles converged on the gate of the walled compound, Pole Four far in the lead. The gate, a vast, primitive construction of wooden boards, creaked slowly open, hinging inward.

"Halt!" yelled the slaver in front. The pole shuffled jerkily to a standstill.

A lone figure slouched out of the gate. Craig craned to get a look at the second denizen of this planet he had seen, a top-heavy man with faded mahogany hair, a puce embroidered shirt blotched with sweat, white riding pants with a brownish red stain on one thigh, and bedroom slippers. The slaver handed him a piece of paper. The gatekeeper glanced at it, nodded, and stood aside. The slaver bellowed, "All right, *move!*" Craig at once called out, "Left! . . . left! . . . left! . . . left! . . ." until the pole was in step again. The slavers ignored the matter. Passing in, Craig gave the gatekeeper a cheery smile and said distinctly, "Good to see you again!"

The gatekeeper nodded sociably, looked startled, and came galloping alongside the pole, shouting, "Hey! you there! fifth from the front, no sixth from the front, you been here before?"

"Nice of you to remember," Craig called back.

"Hey! you there! you up front in charge, I got to ask you something."

The slaver barked, "Halt!"

The pole staggered to a halt, the front end stopping first, the back swerving to the right; somebody slipped, and the front end fell down. "Needs work," said Craig loudly. The front slaver said to the gatekeeper, "What's the matter with *you?*"

"This one says he been here before. How can he of been here before? He must of escaped. So, he got to go back to his last owner."

"Nobody escapes from Kossar," said the slaver. "You buggers on Kossar is always saying nobody escapes from Kossar yourself."

"You could of stole him," said the gatekeeper.

The slaver's reply was forestalled by a vexed clamor from the gate. Three poles were waiting to present their pieces of paper.

"Excuse me, I am needed elsewhere," said the gatekeeper with dignity; he hobbled around looking for a slip-

per he had lost, found it, hopped about putting it on, and slouched back to the gate.

All the poles were assembled in a large shed opened on the sides. At one end, which seemed to house an enclosed chamber, a door opened. Through it Craig glimpsed fabrics in soft colors. A figure walked lightly out: it was the old queen who had visited the slavers' hold. He wore a short black leather jacket studded with silver, and very tight sky-blue trousers over his knobby shanks, and carried an object like antique visible-light field glasses, but unusually small and finished in some opalescent substance with gold ornaments; he held this to his eyes and surveyed the mass of slaves. Craig could have sworn that as the optical device pointed toward him it hesitated in its sweep.

A group of slavers came into the shed from a ground-contact vehicle outside, and Craig could hear the queen say in precise accents to one of these, "Get them sideways to the block, please. I want them to see." After a flurry of shouting and kicking, the poles were arranged so that every slave had a clear view of the crude platform.

Three figures appeared and silently oscillated toward the platform: it was the man who had been hunted down on the field, struggling ineffectually between two black-clad men. They dragged him up, fastened his wrist-manacles to a hook dangling from a cable above the platform, and hoisted him until his toes could barely touch the wooden boards. The queen swayed over, walked around him twice as if he were a piece of sculpture, and nodded. Craig, studying the wrinkled, pursy face with its pale-green dancing eyes, thought a mischievous look passed over it. One of the men in black produced a whip like a huge quirt; the other ripped the already ragged clothing from the back of the dangling man. One. A sigh ran through the massed slaves. The lash left a streak across the back that slowly welled red. Two. Three. Craig shut his eyes, then peered between the lids at the queen; the

optical device was up and trained on Craig; Craig opened his eyes and subdued his face. Six. Seven. There was no sound but the hoot and crack of the whip, the grunting of the flogged man, and the rasping breath of the slaves. Ten. Eleven. Twelve. Craig felt the sweat beginning to prickle on his forehead; he fought for control. Fifteen. The man had slumped; his body began to revolve slowly. The man with the whip paused, broke his rhythm. His colleague tried to arrest the motion, but the man began to revolve in the other direction. There was an instant of fury between the two executioners. The queen raised his hand delicately. He handed his optical device to the man with the whip, took a small white case from his pocket, opened it, took out an old-fashioned hypodermic syringe, caressed the arm of the unconscious man, inserted the needle, and pressed the plunger. After a moment, the hanging figure shuddered and began to writhe. The queen returned the white case to his pocket, gently pulled open the hanging man's eyelids to check his reflexes, resumed his optical device, and nodded. His eyes expressed more amusement than ever. Sixteen. A gurgling cry from the hanging man. Seventeen. Eighteen. Nineteen. Twenty. Craig found himself bracing for Twenty-one, but Twenty-one did not come; the flogging was over.

A wave of reaction swept through the slaves. There were sobs and curses. A man began to laugh idiotically. A few meters from Craig, a man yelled, "What's the big idea puking down my back? What's the big idea? You could of turned your head." Then he said in a reasonable tone to his neighbors, "He could of turned his head." Then he started to cry.

The punished man had been taken down and lay on the platform. One of the black-clad men rolled him over with a kick. The punished man had an erection. Craig said to his neighbor, "I wonder what vitamin he gave him." The optical device was trained steadily on Craig. Craig spat.

Then the slaves were marched to another building, unshackled, and herded into a bare, lofty chamber lined with gray ceramic. High up on one wall was a railed balcony. The old queen appeared on this, followed by several slavers. Another figure joined them, a small, brightly colored man in a long mauve robe and pea-green turban. Then a slim, fair, young woman in a gray military jacket and jodhpurs, and next to her a shiny, hugely obese man in a white suit. Then a group of men, mostly in various uniforms reminiscent of off-Earth police forces and armies.

The queen produced his optical device and nodded. A slaver stepped to the rail and bellowed: "*Strip down!*" A few men and one or two women began timidly to undress. "*Hurry it up!*" More obeyed, but most stood gaping and undecided. The slaver in command turned, and two other slavers pulled hoses up the rail. Water burst from the nozzles, and the slavers played it at random on the men and women below. It was scalding. There were screams. The slaves threw off their garments and dropped them on the sloshing floor. The streams of water ceased. "*Kick the clothes over to the door.*" The naked slaves obeyed. Craig, kicking soggy, ordurous garments and shoes along the floor with the others, hit his toe painfully against a small, hard object in a pocket. He tried to dislodge it by kicking. It would not come free. He hooked the trousers on one foot and shook, awkwardly hopping on the other. The object was caught in wet, stubborn cloth; then it slid

out onto the floor. It was a little metal-bladed pocket knife.

Craig covered it with his bare left foot and managed, by shuffling, to slide it along while kicking clothing with his right. The door opened; technicians removed the clothing in refuse bins. Craig shuffled away toward the wall below the balcony: here the spectators would have to lean over the rail to observe him.

For several minutes, the slavers played hot but tolerable water, evidently with disinfectants and emulsifiers in it, on the naked men and women. Craig noticed that the slaves avoided looking at one another's bodies; it was the only help they could give one another. In the steam, he bent over and picked up the knife.

The water ceased. "*Step over to the walls! Raise your arms!*" Rows of holes at knee height, waist height, and shoulder height emitted hot, parching air. The slaves were dried for three or four minutes. The balcony was empty, save for one slaver leaning on a laser-carbine and picking his nose.

The door opened. A slaver leaned in and called, "S-thirteen. Plato Xenatis." A man walked to the door, his feet slapping a hesitating rhythm on the ceramic floor. "E-four. Billy Henderson." A boy, hardly past puberty. "A-six. Mavis Peace." A scrawny young girl. "A-thirty-one. Ismael Makalah." . . .

They were being called out by poles. After each ten, the doors would close for a quarter of an hour or so, then open for the summoning of the next lot.

"B-ten. Jane Doe." It was the raw-boned old marching woman from Craig's pole. She passed Craig, grinned, and growled, "I feel simply *naked* without my tiara. . . . Keep smiling, young-fellow-me-lad!"

"M-eight. Pierre Khalidi." Then: "E-nine. John Smith."

Craig padded toward the door. He had the little knife in his left hand, which he held half open and let hang at his side. There was small hope of his being able to keep it

and great danger in trying to, but it was a recourse; it was something.

Along one side of a corridor ran a row of crude wooden platforms, about a meter square and half a meter high. B-10 was standing alone on one, M-8 on another. Next to each platform was an armed slaver and around each was a knot of Kossarians. Most of these were the miscellaneous military and police types, but some were more colorful. Craig saw the turbaned man and the fat man in the white suit examining B-10, and the handsome young woman in jodhpurs scanning M-8. A slaver seized Craig by his elbows from behind and pushed him onto a platform, where he stood passively, his back to the little group that was forming, his guilty left hand slightly in front of him. "Turn around," snapped the slaver guarding his platform. Craig turned, and hooked his hands together behind him, so that if need be he could shift the knife easily; he was aware that this put him in a somewhat flaunting posture and he slouched as much as he could.

A slaver slightly cleaner than the others, and accompanied obsequiously by the ex-obstetrician and the ex-librarian, had appeared and taken up a position near B-10. The auction started: "Terran female, sixty-three. Highly educated. Bidding starts at two hundred credits. Do I hear two hundred? I have two hundred. Do I have two-ten? Two-ten? Going *once* at two hundred—I have two-ten. Do I have two-twenty-five? I have two-fifteen. Two-fifteen. Do I have two-twenty-five? Thank you. I have two-twenty-five. Do I hear two-fifty? Highly educated! Two-fifty? Going *once* at two-twenty-five. Going *twice*—I have two-fifty. . . ." The old woman was sold for 310 credits. The successful bidder was the man in the green turban, whom the others addressed respectfully as "Sir Osman."

M-8 went for 765 to a tight-faced brown man in a mixture of the uniforms of the Sirius Confederation police and the Terran marines; but during the bidding the fat

man in white and the young blond woman—evidently his employer—showed interest for a time, and as the bids climbed, Craig could hear the man say in a mezzo-soprano voice to the woman, "Too expensive for the mines, my lady. Have you anything else in mind? Nothing? So."

The group came to Craig. Several of the half-uniformed men peered at him. One reached for his left arm—the knife went into his right hand smoothly enough—and thumbed the muscles, shaking his head. The fat man looked interrogatively at the blonde female. She moved in and scanned him, looking momentarily at his pudenda; the fat man reached out a small plump white hand and jabbed his fingertips into the side of Craig's scrotum, saying, "Cough!" Craig coughed and gagged. The other side. "Again!" Craig coughed. The man reached for Craig's right hand—there was barely time to shift the knife—and examined the writer's callus on the side of the middle finger. The man and the woman consulted by a glance, and the woman shrugged.

"Terran male, about thirty," said the auctioneer. "Highly educated. Bidding starts at two-fifty. Do I hear two-fifty? Two-fifty? I'll take two hundred. Do I hear two hundred? I have two hundred." This was Sir Osman. "Do I have two-ten? I hear two-oh-five." This was a man in uniform. "Do I have two-ten? Going *once* at two-oh-five—I have two-ten." This was the fat man. "Do I have two-ten? Two-twenty? Going *once* at two-ten. Going *twice* at two-ten. *Sold* at two-ten."

So it was to be "the mines."

Craig felt himself pulled off the platform; someone threw some gray, scratchy clothing at him; he put it on—shapeless trousers with a drawstring waist, a loose pull-over shirt. There were pockets in the trousers; Craig slid the knife into one of them. A penknife in the mines. Attention, everyone: a man with a penknife is known to be at large in this mine; unarmed men with pickaxes and

jackhammers are warned not to stray too far from the guards.

The brave old woman had said, "Keep smiling, young-fellow-me-lad!"

She had brought a hundred credits more than he had.

There was a stir. Nearby, the auctioning of a Terran male, thirty-five, experienced in personal combat, had begun routinely, but back at Craig's platform, some sort of functionary in a black uniform was in vigorous but impassive conversation with the white-suited fatty. "I'm sorry, Doctor Khoory," the functionary was saying. "Mister Pursuivant understands that the slave is now yours entirely. He only asks at this time whether you would permit him to interview the slave."

Dr. Khoory asked, in his unchanged voice, "What for? Is he going to make Lady Morgan an offer for *this* specimen?"

"I think we are talking too loud," whispered the functionary, with a pained look around.

Dr. Khoory's boyish mezzo-soprano and undiminished. "If this is in line with his usual interests, he is quite mistaken. Quite. I am surprised. This is—inert."

The functionary persisted. "It can scarcely take more than a moment or two."

"Very well. If he will confine himself to verbal questioning this time. . . . I have no guard to spare."

"Thank you. I will borrow a guard from Captan Van-Dam. We shall be no more than five minutes."

Dr. Khoory looked skeptical.

The functionary disappeared for a moment into the press around the auction, emerged with the hulking Bastigliano, collected Craig, and led the way out of the building, across the dusty compound baking in midday radiation, and into the shed where the flogging had taken place. They went to the office at the end.

Bastigliano took up a position outside. The functionary knocked, opened the door, said, "Here's what you want-

ed, *sir*," pushed Craig in, and, remaining outside, slammed the door violently.

The old queen stood up behind his desk. He looked around—Craig following his glance—at the dove-gray silks, the lilac velvet, the slate-blue leather.

"You will not change your mind?" he asked in his bassoon voice.

Craig returned his gaze steadily. "I will not."

The light eyes hardened. Mr. Pursuivant floated to the door and opened it. "Return this. It prefers the mines of Treglast."

12

Mr. Pursuivant closed the door delicately behind Craig. The functionary, whose expression had changed in a few seconds from pouting hatred to surprise to boredom, said idly to Bastigliano, "Take him back to Khoory, Rick honey; that's a dear."

The slaver's scarred face split in a derisive grin. "Come along, wholesome one," he said to Craig. "Not in your line, huh?" he resumed as they recrossed the dusty compound.

Craig checked his pocket for the knife and answered mincingly, "Oh, an old prune like that!"

Bastigliano glanced at him sidewise and after a moment said tentatively, "Don't I remember you from the *Sirius Clipper*—no, it was the *Star Queen*? You burned your girlfriend's letters?"

"Well, she wasn't a *girl*," said Craig.

"You *don't* say. . . . Hold it up." The two halted and

regarded each other. "Want some action?" asked the slaver.

Craig managed a giggle. "Right here?"

"I got a place."

"I have to be back. I mean, right now, almost. You heard what that old fatty *said*, didn't you?"

"I got a place right near here," said the slaver. "A few yards from where we're standing. Khoory don't mind. *I* know Khoory."

"And suppose we get caught," Craig whined. "I mean, it's all very well for *you*, but they'll *kill me*."

"Nobody's gonna catch *nobody*."

"Well," said Craig, registering coy resignation, "let's see the place."

Bastigliano led off in a new direction. Craig hurried along, his bare feet burning. With one hand he was working the blade of the knife open in his pocket. They wove around several sheds and, after the slaver had worked furtively on a door lock, entered what seemed to be a warehouse. There were no signs of life. There was a smell of quiet dust that stirred in Craig the thought of vanished summers. The slaver switched on a single set of lights, yellow and remote above them. They made their way among dimly looming piles of crates and sacks until Craig found that they had entered a narrow hollow, like a crevasse, between two towering piles of sacks; the sacks, made of a porous fabric, were filled with some sort of dried root stuff that emitted a musky, winery odor. "Here we are," said the slaver breathily; "here's where the action is."

"What if someone hears us?"

"Nobody can hear us."

"I don't *like* it here," said Craig in a shaky voice. "What if you k-kill me afterward?" He took a grip on the open knife in his pocket.

"Aw," said Bastigliano. "Why should I do that? I

wouldn't destroy her ladyship's property. If I did," he added candidly, "she'd have the hide off me, that hoor. I'd never get out of this compound alive." There was a clink; the opening of a belt buckle. In the shadows Craig could see the slaver's pants slide down and the indistinct gleam of flesh. Then a huge hand descended on Craig's head and pressed him ruthlessly down. "Don't stall, kid." The slaver's voice now had a vicious edge. "And better make it good."

Craig let himself be pushed to his knees. With a swift movement, he drew the little knife and sliced at Bastigliano's naked groin, severing the femoral artery where it came out over the rim of the pelvis. The slaver screamed. The yell sounded curiously weak among the glossy piles of merchandise. At the same instant, Craig flung himself sideways to escape the spurt of blood, grasped at a column of socks and, wedging his body behind them, with a desperate exertion toppled it onto Bastigliano.

The shrieks abruptly ceased. Craig was afraid for an instant that the heavy sacks had killed Bastigliano outright, but then heard a muffled groaning. He peered. The slaver's head, thorax, and arms were buried under several huge bags of roots. "I do hope you can hear this, Mister Rick Bastigliano. You will now bleed to death. The special virtue of this particular wound is that one part of the severed artery tends to retract into the pelvic bowl, making it impossible to staunch the blood. That's for Miss *Cherry Carrot-Top*, whom you may remember. This is in *addition* to the one hundred and thirty-eight credits you've already paid." Craig could not make out the faint reply. "If it makes you feel better," he added, "you've also taken my virginity—you're the first man I ever killed."

He found that his bare feet were copiously wet with blood; he cut up some sacking and wiped them as clean as he could, cleansed his knife, and left, remembering to

turn out the lights before emerging into the dazzling sunlight of the compound. One step outside, he was suddenly possessed by an idiotic desire to go back and explain things to Bastigliano more clearly. A fit of trembling overtook him, and for a moment, aware of the danger of loitering, he leaned against the wall of the warehouse.

A few moments later, he shuffled up to where the gross Dr. Khoory was bidding on a "Sirian colonist, male, forty."

The slim, blonde young woman—presumably "her ladyship"—asked Craig in a whisper, "What did Eustace Pursuivant want?"

"Who, ma'am? Oh, the old queer? Me, I suppose ma'am."

There was a flash of amusement in her face. "And what did he get?"

"Nothing, ma'am."

Her ladyship: "Not much of a difference."

The bidding finished and the doctor turned. "Where is Bastigliano?"

Craig: "Who, sir?"

"The crewman who took you to Mister Pursuivant."

"He met a man on the way back. This man said he had a bottle of real squeed. Then the two of them said they would give me some if I would commit improper acts with them. But I declined, of course, ma'am, and they slapped me several times and gave me a nosebleed. Then they pushed me in here and went away, sir."

"Squeed," said Dr. Khoory. "He possessed squeed?"

"I didn't actually *see* the bottle, sir. Sir? I don't know what it is about me that makes me so attractive to abnormal people. It worries me, sir. I do hope I won't be meeting any more of them where I'm going." He ended on a pleading note.

The young woman laughed. "Perhaps they were vegetarians," she said.

13

"Next," said the man in the black smock. Craig stepped forward.

Dr. Khoory consulted his list. "E-nine, Smith, John, Terran male, thirty, yes?"

"Yes."

"Yes, *what?*" the man in the black smock broke in reprovingly.

"Yes, *massa*," said Craig. Dr. Khoory looked at him sharply, then passed the matter over.

The man in the black smock strapped Craig's left forearm to the top of the black cabinet, soft side down.

"M-S-4-3-9-8-5," Dr. Khoory dictated, and the man poked at the keyboard on the cabinet.

"M.S. 43985," he repeated.

"Correct," said Dr. Khoory.

The man punched a button. Craig felt a blaze of pain in his arm, opened his mouth soundlessly, and began to sag on his feet. The man slapped him across the cheek. Craig straightened. Dr. Khoory said, "The pain will go away. The brand will never go away. There will be no infection. Do not trouble to complain about your arm." He marked his list.

"Next."

"Sir? Excuse me, sir," said Craig.

Dr. Khoory looked up, surprised.

"What does M.S. stand for, sir?"

"Curiosity is the hunger of Reason. So. They are the

initials of the Lady Morgan Sidney. You are now her property."

"Next," said the man in the black smock impatiently.

14

The mines of Treglast were cut into a range of low, sour hills that bounded the fen country, and the newer workings extended down into the water table. Even the whirring and sucking of the pumps that, every hundred meters or so, drew water into the fat, pulsing hoses along the galleries could scarcely be heard over a general noise of wetness that filled the dark tunnels; wherever the naked electric globes threw patches of light, moisture glistened on the rock face; there was a soft, insistent counterpoint of dripping; between the sumps, puddles splashed underfoot; a kind of perpetual shushing, like the sound of a distant rapids, echoed and re-echoed; and throughout his first days in the mines Craig was gripped at intervals by the conviction that something had given way somewhere and a rush of water was coming.

The new workings had sapped the old. Craig had been underground less than an hour when a distant thudding roar, followed by its sullen echoes and pierced by a long wail of horror, came through the passageways; there was an alarm like a demented child playing a penny whistle; overseers and guards ran past with phosphor torches, shouting questions. . . . Craig learned afterward that a section of an older gallery on the level where he was at work had fallen through into a new one that crossed

under it; pulling away the shoring had in turn undercut a gallery above; falling rock had sheared through a hose, so that the pumps were filling the mine instead of draining it; and eight slaves had been killed. From then on, Craig could always *feel* the rock above him and *feel* the hollow galleries beneath him. Sometimes at night, he would wake, sweating, and lie on his hard, musty pallet, straining to see into the darkness above him until it became a vacancy instead of a falling mass.

Even according to Craig's slight knowledge, the technology of these mines was antiquated. They were not much different from the mines of Mount Laurion twenty-five hundred years before. The long-conventional ultrasounds and discontinuity-followers were not used: human muscle and the crudest compressed-air concussers drove the tunnels. Human muscles were cheap. Two hundred and ten credits and little upkeep—two bowls of olla podrida a day.

Every day or two—"day" was an abstraction in the mines—the slaves were all shifted from location to location and partner to partner, so that no conspiracies could form. Most of the overseers plied the cat-o'-nine-tails scientifically, to maintain a steady rhythm of work and to prevent talking; but a few were manifestly aesthetes of the whip.

Craig was a failure with the pick. He was whipped for that, but given a shovel; his partner broke the lumps of pinkish ore out of the veined rock and Craig shoveled them into the tiny electric rail cars that took them to the lift. The cars were simple: they rattled along the sides of triangular trestles that were assembled from portable lengths; rattled out to the slaves on one side, rattled back to the lift on the other; voracious, relentless. Occasionally, explosives were used to shatter the rock face, and then Craig labored desperately, his body trembling with fatigue.

On his third day, Craig asked the gaunt man with whom he was teamed, "What *is* this stuff?"

The slave rested his pick and coughed. "Weinsteinite," he said between long, gasping seizures. "High-grade beryllium ore. The highest grade"—he doubled over as his system fought to expel the death from his lungs—"in all the bleeding universe."

"You ought to have that looked at," said Craig.

"Oh, I will. My specialist is"—a laugh turned into more coughing—"vacationing on Aldebaran III just now."

"Don't they have an M.D. or M.T. for this mine?"

"Only for the *real* human beings."

The *swoosh* and explosive pain of a cat-o'-nine-tails took Craig by surprise. "Running off at the mouth again, Smith? *Get* to work." The overseer's cat screamed and clawed at Craig's back again, and the squat, grim man walked quickly away.

"He's actually a decent sort, isn't he?" said Craig softly. "He let you alone."

"Ostroff? He's the best down here." The gaunt man hefted his pick. "*That's* a distinction."

"What's your name?"

"My name used to be Douglas Whiteside."

"Wait till you feel better, Douglas Whiteside," said Craig. "Give me the pick."

"Till I feel better? You mean, when I'm dead?"

15

It did not occur to Craig to count the days off into weeks or months—in the mines there were neither days of rest nor seasons—but gradually he became aware that more and more daylight remained after he emerged from the pit-head and half-staggered down the central street of the laager to Barracks L. There was, then, a summer of sorts on Kossar. Not that it mattered.

The laager, enclosed by a high mesh fence instead of a standing wave, was like a vast zoological cage canted on a hillside; the fence was electrified, and once a rumor spread through the barracks that a man from Barracks E (or some said G) had been killed trying to burrow under it. These were various descriptions of his corpse: bones in a shiny black crust; or a body unmarked but arrested in a posture of agony. . . .

In time, Craig noticed another change as well: his body hardened. Once every morning had begun with an aching torpor that during the day had intensified to anguish; now exhaustion set in rarely and only after hours of work. Craig could not find a mirror, but the murky reflection of his face in the metal mess kits suggested that his jaw too had thinned to a youthful hardness.

With the lengthening of daylight, there was barracks talk of escape: nocturnal whisperings punishable by five with the cat; hypnagogic schemes building into nonsense. No one had a practical way of getting past the electrified fence. There were to be ingenious catapults, clothing of marvelous insulating properties, circuitry that would short

out sections of the fence without, somehow, tripping the alarm. And once past the fence, there were to be kindly folk, idealists who would smuggle them to the spaceport; or there were to be bands of half-wild outlaws roaming the hills. Craig listened and contributed nothing. It was plain that not one of the slaves in Barracks L had ever seen one centiare of Kossar—except for the compound at the spaceport and the laager at the mine.

And yet Kossar *could* not have an economy based entirely on imported slaves. Slaves who did not breed more slaves *must* be dyseconomic; machines, even unsophisticated machines, could perform practically all the physical tasks a human worker could perform, but it took human labor to make such a machine, or to make machines that would make such a machine; surely what made slavery profitable was the fact that—Craig remembered his first economics course at the Institute, and The Redoubtable Redding with his eloquent white eyebrows and scathing wit—that *God* built the human machines. . . . Why were there no second-generation slaves here?

16

“Ah, Mister Whiteside,” said Craig.

“Ah, Mister Smith,” said Whiteside.

Chance reshuffling had brought them together again. This time, Craig stood his turn with the pick and tried to spare the older slave as much as possible. Whiteside’s face was more cavernous than ever, and sometimes the reflection of the naked lights glistened in his eyes in such a way that Craig thought he saw a deathly brightness there; but

the cough seemed no worse. "I feel better than I have in some time," said Whiteside, protesting against Craig's solicitude.

They were cutting ore from a small vein low on the gallery wall in one of the deepest levels. The lights were sparsely strung. The pumps were farther apart than usual. Few wagons came rattling along the portable trestle. There seemed to be few work teams behind them and none ahead. Craig judged that they must be near the end of a gallery that had lost the vein. The overseers—among them a yellow-eyed, lopsided hulk called Pornack who had the reputation of whipping for sport—came along infrequently and never went on past them. No guards came.

It was while Pornack was standing by, however, that Whiteside began to cough. The spell was a bad one and did not stop. Whiteside doubled over, leaning against the rock wall to keep from falling, and coughed from deep in his thin chest. Craig, seeing that the droplets of fluid that spattered the old slave's drawstring trousers were red, put down his pick to help support his partner.

"Who gave you leave to drop that pick?" The cat screamed, and Craig gasped at the burst of pain in his back. "And you," said Pornack fiercely to Whiteside, "you get back to work, too!" He raised the cat-o'-nine-tails. Craig, from the habit of obedience, had retrieved his pick and straightened up in time to see the overseer slash at the helpless Whiteside. He repeated the stroke, and the old slave toppled but continued to cough. "You old fake!" said Pornack, and kicked the fallen man; "You want medicine for that cough? I'll give you the *best* medicine." He whipped him twice more, using his full strength, while gout of blood poured from Whiteside's mouth and nose onto the wet rock.

Craig drove the point of his pick deep into the base of Pornack's skull. The overseer crumpled without a sound.

From Whiteside came a hard, gasping inhalation and

then no cough. He lay still. Craig felt for the pulse. There was none. The old slave was also dead.

Craig put his pick down so that the bloody point lay in the puddle of Whiteside's blood. He rolled Pornack over, stuck the cat-o'-nine-tails in the overseer's belt, and dragged the big body by the feet as fast as he could, deeper into the mine.

The gallery turned sharply. Craig came to the end of the trestle, then to the last of the pumps, then to the last of the lights. A few steps farther on, a crude lattice of shoring strips blocked the way. Craig dropped the corpse's feet and examined the obstacle. It was only wedged into place. He wrenched it aside, dragged Pornack's body past it, and set the barrier loosely in place again. Barely enough light filtered through the lattice from the distant globe to show Craig the pile of rubble just ahead.

It could not have been more convenient. He moved chunks of rock aside, scooped a hollow in the small fragment (skinning his hands painfully in his hurry), tumbled the corpse into the hollow, and pulled the debris over it until, as far as he could see in the faint, patchy light, it was hidden.

He wished it had been harder to kill Pornack.

He started back to the barrier, paused, and turned again toward the rubble. "Curiosity," he murmured, "is the hunger of Reason. . . . Excelsior!" He added, as he began to climb the rubble.

A moment later, he confirmed the fact that the rubble had fallen from above: There was a gap in the ceiling of the gallery. This, very likely, was the result of the cave-in he had heard—how long?—months ago, when he had first arrived.

He merged in the level above, to find it closed off, like the gallery he had just left, with a lattice. His eyes were now sufficiently accustomed to the feeble light, so that he

could see that yet another level above was open to him. It was harder to make this ascent, but after several minutes of scrambling, he managed it, feeling his way. His head now protruded above the floor of the upper gallery.

The light was different here: faint still, but even. And—whiter.

To one side of him was a barrier, not a makeshift lattice but a solid metal wall. To the other side, from which the light was coming, the tunnel curved away, the source of the light just hidden around the bend.

Craig closed his eyes, reconstructing the direction of the gallery just below him, and the gallery from which he had started, and the ways he had come to that gallery; and then he quickly hoisted himself up, ran along the tunnel, and stopped, dazzled. In front of him was the surface—open air. Shading his eyes, he looked out. Away before him stretched a valley under the midday sky. It was a barren valley, with rust-colored scrub growing in reddish soil; at the bottom of the valley, a few meters below him, a river was winding, shimmering in a kind of dappled laziness. On the facing acclivity, which swept upward and upward to a vast hog's back bristling with a vegetation-like giant whin, there was no sign of human encroachment. This, then, was the other side of the hill.

"A good thing to know," said Craig aloud.

He ran back into the abandoned adit and scrambled blindly down two levels, wincing as he arrived where he had started and felt a curious *give* to the rocks beneath his feet; he ran to the barrier, slipped through, rammed it into place, and pelted along the gallery; if there were overseers or guards with Whiteside's body, he would have to say that he had panicked, run for help in the wrong direction; that might work.

But the old slave's corpse lay alone, a puddle of blood and water by its face.

"Overseer!" shouted Craig. "O—ver—seeer! Help! Heellp!"

After a few moments, there was a thudding of boots, and an overseer dashed along the gallery, followed by a guard carrying a laser-carbine at the ready.

"Overseer," said Craig, trembling violently, "something's wrong with him. He fell over and started bleeding. I think he's—he's—"

The overseer shone his torch at Whiteside's eyes and opened them.

"Dead. What's the matter, you never saw a dead *body* before?" said the overseer. "Heinie," he addressed the guard, "go tell them to send the stiff-wagon down the line." The overseer turned back to Craig. "How did he die?"

"He fell over and started bleeding."

"Just like that?"

"He coughed a lot first," said Craig.

"Oh, *him!*" said the overseer. "I didn't recognize him like this." Then he frowned and asked, "Where in hell's Pornack—that is, where's Overseer Pornack?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, sir," said Craig obsequiously. "He hasn't been by in some time."

17

It was curious that no one in the mines or in Barracks L had mentioned that Kossar—or at least Treglast—had a rainy season, but when morning after morning the slaves trudged up to the pit-head through flowing mud under a limp plash, and evening after evening trudged down to the barracks in the same, uncooling vertical downpour, stories of old prodigies began to spring up among slaves who had been in the laager for a number of

years: of mudslides that swept barracks off their foundations, of great fungi growing on pallets, of poisonous vapors that crept up from the fens, of the water in the mines gaining on the pump until it was knee-deep and work had, for once, to stop. Craig, who had seen the river on the far side of the hill flowing in dry weather a few meters below the open adit of the mine, knew of a worse danger and knew that he could not speak about it. Too many of the slaves were on edge; someone would blurt out his fear, the back exit to the mine would be rediscovered and closed off, and Craig would be found and—there was no reason at all to hope otherwise—put to death.

But if he did *not* speak, and if the water sluiced into the adit, down the broken drifts, and into the main workings during the work day, then hundreds of slaves might die for his silence. . . .

The rain intermitted, and the frowning nimbus cloud overhead sometimes fractured to let Kossar's sun—setting or rising when Craig saw it—shine redly through, but the intervals were brief. At night, Craig listened to the drum-roll of rain on the barracks roof; all during the day he strained to detect the first sounds of a killing inundation from the back of the old workings.

18

Craig lay awake. The night was torrential. In the darkness, so thick that not even the outline of the bars on the windows could be seen, and with the hollow percussion of the roof and the stench of sweat, the long upper

room of Barracks L could have been the hold of the slave ship. Craig half expected to hear the whistles for the Call.

There was a tangle of voices—soft, yet not furtive—outside the locked door; the noise of a key; two phosphor torches like the eyes of a nervous monster, turning this way and that, and moving along between the dense rows of pallets picking out the naked, recumbent bodies; four men, by the footsteps.

Had they found Pornack?

A voice, not a man's but a young woman's—Craig remembered it—said, "I feel quitè the little mother."

A man's voice, unknown to Craig: "How can your ladyship stand the smell?"

"My dear Commandant, it's a delightful smell. It's the smell of my food, my standard of living."

Another voice—Khoory's mezzo-soprano—added, "*And yours.*"

The Commandant: "Well, I don't hang around the stockyards before lunch every day."

Khoory: "How then can you run them well, Commandant? We are not latifondisti."

Evidently her ladyship was holding one torch, the Commandant the other. The fourth member of the party remained silent: probably a guard. Every slave lay as if asleep.

Craig began in a conversational tone, "My lady, I think you ought to know that there is—"

Both torches turned on him. In the beam of one, the snout of a guard's laser-carbine appeared. The other torch, the Commandant's, threw its beam wildly upward and then fell like a club on Craig's temple. Through the gush of pain, Craig heard her ladyship say sarcastically, "Neatly done, Commandant. Thank you. Now, what do *you* think I ought to know?" Then he must have passed out.

19

He woke up next morning at the usual time, ate, relieved himself, and stumbled through the drenching rain to the pit-head entirely as usual. Lady Morgan Sidney, Dr. Khoory, and the Commandant were nowhere to be seen. He was not summoned. He was not questioned. No slave mentioned the episode. Only a headache and a painful swelling showed that it had even occurred.

"How tactful you all are!" he said cheerfully to some barracks-mates as the lift cracked downward. They stared dully in various other directions. "What's the matter? Cat get your tongue?"

The pumps labored against the increasing seepage; the puddles grew deeper, merged, grew deeper still; a film of water slipped continuously over the rock faces; the slaves were pulled back from one drift and then another as the water deepened and the wet hewn ore became too heavy for the trestles; the light shorted out in one gallery and then another; here and there a pump failed or a hose parted. Craig wielded his pick and listened for a sound he had never heard, that of an inundation.

What he did hear, suddenly, was the same trio of voices he had heard in the night. Dressed in a guard's helmet and a sleek, clinging black waterproof suit, her ladyship led the group. The Commandant still carried his phosphor torch. Dr. Khoory, bulbous, epicene, was dressed in a white suit, but his trousers were tucked into black boots. Three massive guards with laser-carbines and stun-pistols brought up the rear. The party splashed

along the gallery toward Craig. Craig, glancing at them as he pulled his pick from the vein, found his eyes engaged at twenty meters' distance with those of the Lady. He pulled his glance away as if he were freeing his pick.

They reached him, and he spun to face them, dropping his pick, and remarked, "As I was saying, your ladyship should have been warned that there is an open passageway into this mine from the far side of the hill, and we may be flooded at any moment." As he spoke, the Commandant was reaching back to take a laser-carbine from one of the guards.

The Lady said evenly, without turning her head, "Don't make the same mistake twice, Commandant Fentriss," and to Craig, "Continue."

Craig put on the diplomatist's manner that—when was it?—had earned him the sobriquet The Insufferable Boy; "Some time ago, my lady, there was a cave-in, and a drift above this fell into one at this level, and a drift above that fell into that. The uppermost of the three galleries runs all the way to the far side of the hill and opens on the slope, only two or three meters above the surface of a river—in the dry season, that is to say. If the river rises very far, this mine is done for. The water will come in the adit and down into the lower drifts. I do not consider your ladyship safe at this moment."

"Is this true, Commandant?"

"Of course not, your ladyship." The Commandant paused and then seemed to feel that he ought to support his assertion. "D'you think if there was a back way out of the mine the workers wouldn't all have escaped?"

Her ladyship transferred her gaze to Craig.

"My lady, the upper gallery that led to the opening is sealed off by a heavy metal partition, but the cave-in took place *behind* that partition, so the way is quite clear from here to the opening. I should be very happy, my lady, to lead you to it." He flicked a glance at the smol-

dering Commandant and smiled into the lady's wide, ambiguous eyes. "I—I frequently take the air out on the slopes on nice days."

"That's—" began the Commandant.

"It sounds interesting," her ladyship cut in. "Lead on. And Doctor, see to it that Commandant Fentriss restrains his exasperation."

The expedition set out: Craig in front, the Lady second, Dr. Khoory and the Commandant together, and the three taciturn guards. Craig led as directly as he could to the tunnel where he had killed Pornack. The water was ankle-deep. They came to the end of the trestle, the end of the hose, the end of the lights.

"You're walking into a trap, your ladyship," said the Commandant.

"You'll rescue me, won't you, Commandant?" her ladyship answered. "Meanwhile, lend me that versatile torch of yours. I mustn't drop it in the water, must I? I do hope," she added sweetly, "that this is as advertised, slave."

Craig said nothing. They came to the flimsy barrier. Craig pulled it aside. They came to the rubble. "Would your ladyship mind," said Craig, "shining her torch slightly upward? Thank you, my lady." He put his foot on the debris that covered Pornack's corpse, set his face, and began to climb. The Lady proved nimble enough in following, the Commandant less so, Dr. Khoory graceful but wheezy, and the stolid guards, impeded by their weapons, clumsy.

"The air here is remarkably foul," said Dr. Khoory. "I would almost have said, decomposing organic matter."

"The ventilation is adequate," said the Commandant.

The group struggled in single file to the uppermost level and rested for a moment without speaking. Craig gestured to the heavy partition. The Lady nodded. The

Commandant looked at it with narrowed eyes. Craig turned and started off toward the pale light that entered from the outside, stopped, and looked down. A small steam of water was crawling along the floor from ahead of them, and as Craig stared at it, it seemed to fill out and quicken.

"We'd better hurry, my lady," he said. "We may be too late." He plunged onward and the rest ran after him. "There!" he said.

They came up and crowded into the opening.

"As advertised," said the Lady softly.

The daylight was gray; the sky lowered; the valley was filled with rain and scudding haze; the run-off had gouged out soil and scrub on the facing slope, leaving vertical gashes in which the mud streamed down; and the river, reddish-brown, swirling, lapped busily at the sill of the entrance in which they stood. A wave sent a small rush of water among their feet and along the adit, and another, and then a larger wave; and even as they watched, it was clear that the river was rising steadily.

"Commandant Fentriss," said her ladyship, "you lose."

"My lady," Craig began, and then shouted, "*Watch out!*" A great wave-front like a comber was rolling down the river; something had happened upstream—a dam-break, or a rock-slide—and a mass of water was on its way. One end of the comber boiled along the hillside next to them and then was on them—water up to their waists struck them numbingly. The Lady was flung backward and down; her head went under water. The Doctor floundered and hung on a guard. Another guard fell. Craig groped in the seething flow, seized the Lady under the armpits, pulled her up, and held her against him, bracing himself against the side of the tunnel. The first surge passed; the level of the inflow subsided to ankle level and steadied; and as the noise of the river's onslaught abated,

they could hear the progress of the water into the mine—a booming gurgle, a vastly amplified retching sound, a muttering resonance.

Craig released her ladyship and began again, "My lady—"

"We had better make our way up *this* slope," said Dr. Khoory. "We have a better chance on the outside."

"My lady—" said Craig.

"Right. We'd best get moving," said the Commandant.

Craig said loudly, "There are hundreds of—of your slaves in that mine. Are you going to drown them, my lady? Along with your overseers? With your guards?"

Her ladyship watched the bubbles riding swiftly on the current down the adit. There was a kind of preliminary fury in her eyes.

"Give me one of the guards," said Craig, "whichever is the least stupid. Let me go in and warn them."

She answered, "Commandant Fentriss will go. They will believe him. He will take charge."

"Your ladyship," said the Commandant, "it would be suicide to go back in there now."

The Lady reached out and took the laser-carbine out of the hands of the guard who had managed to keep his weapon. She pointed it at the Commandant. "Possibly. So you have a choice between possible suicide and certain execution. Guards, remove the Commandant's weapons and your own. Good. Throw them in the river. Well done. Now, Commandant Fentriss and you three guards will go back the way you came and clear the mine. Guard, take this torch. I shall be perched on the slope above this entrance. If you come back, I shall kill you with this impressive piece of ordnance. Forward, *march!*"

The Lady, Dr. Khoory, and Craig watched them splash—desperately intent, diminishing figures in black—along the tunnel and past the curve.

The Lady turned to Craig. "As the Commandant ob-

served, we'd best get moving. I know you can lift *me*, but can you also lift the Doctor?"

Inside the slick waterproof, the Lady's body was full and soft but for the most part slim, and Craig had no difficulty in holding her aloft until she could be sure of a footing above the lintel of the entrance. The Doctor was another matter. Craig could not lift him, but managed to remain upright and steady while the obese creature stood on his shoulders and scrambled up, the Lady dragging at the white suit, Craig pushing at the huge buttocks. By this time the water was at Craig's knees.

He looked up expectantly, but no hands were extended down for him.

"Are you two all right up there?" he called.

"Yes," came the doctor's high voice.

Craig waited a few moments.

"Are you going to leave me down here?" he called.

"Yes," said the Doctor's voice.

20

"Well," said Craig aloud, "there it is. Do a favor and you lose a friend." The water was well over his knees and pressing him back into the adit. He held on to the jamb of the entrance and listened: at one moment, he thought he could hear the whistle of the alarm deep in the workings; the next moment, he was sure it was only one of the noises of the water cascading down the broken rock.

An object came rustling down the unseen slope over his head, and for an instant he thought it might be her ladyship, but it was only a small object, a round black

shape that rolled and soared out over the lintel, plopped into the river a couple of meters away, and floated like a buoy. It was a guard helmet. Her ladyship had lost her hat.

Craig watched it move slowly away from him, revolve in an eddy, and then move hesitantly into the current entering the mine; it approached; he lifted it out of the water. It was too small for him to wear. He loosened the chin strap as far as it would go and slipped his left arm through it; it hung securely behind his shoulder without rubbing the abrasions left by the Doctor's boots.

He turned his attention to the jamb. It was made of heavy timber, weathered and cracked, and there was a large mortise about waist height where a lock-bar had fit. He grasped the timber in both hands and jumped up, trying to catch his right foot in the mortise, but slipped down, scraping his foot. He tried again, this time getting his foot in at an angle. Slowly he worked one hand up and then the other, forcing his right leg straight, until he got a good hand-hold on the lintel; he supported himself diagonally with his left hand and right foot, scrabbling the dirt away from behind the lintel with his right hand; no one interfered from overhead; finally, he made a solid purchase for both hands back of the lintel, hoisted himself up, and lay exhausted on the slope, bracing his toes in the crevices he had dug for his fingers.

He looked up the slope. The pair had begun to climb the steep hill and had made some thirty meters' progress. It was evidently dangerous going, and they had had no chance or no stomach to look back; tufts of wet furze, moreover, gave him fair cover.

The rain had thinned to a drizzle. The sky had brightened somewhat. Craig lay and studied the advance of the pair above him. The enormous backside of Dr. Khoory heaved and rolled incessantly in the most dramatic fashion. Her Ladyship's winsome fundament moved

more efficiently and only occasionally. The Doctor, then, was slowing them down nicely.

Craig drew himself to his knees behind a clump of gorse, stood up, surveyed the terrain as far as he could, and dropped quickly back to the prone position. From the direction of the gullies washed out by the rains, Craig guessed that the two were headed straight for one of the highest points on the crest of the ridge. There was, he was sure, a low saddle to the right of this point. By climbing diagonally to the right, then, he could get over the hill with a much gentler climb than they. The danger would come if they reached their high point in time to see him cresting the ridge to their right and below them. They would be in a position to enfilade him neatly with the laser-carbine. For the Lady still had that.

He began to crawl upward and rightward.

The wet vetch, or whatever it was, was extraordinarily slippery, and Craig understood why the man and the girl above him continued to crawl painfully instead of attempting to walk: any slide might well end up in the river, as the helmet must have shown them.

After a few minutes, he saw the Doctor roll over to a sitting position and the Lady, held steady by her companion, rise shakily to her feet. She scanned the slope below her. Craig had been traversing a deep gully, and the gingerliness of their movements gave him time to arrange himself in it so that no part of him, not even the helmet behind his shoulder, showed. He waited and then cautiously raised his head. The pair were climbing again.

Craig found that, following his shallower gradient, and in his bare feet, he could manage a crouching lope without slipping and without undue noise. He advanced by darting from bush to bush, resting in gullies. He drew almost level with them.

They were sixty or seventy meters to his left now and sitting up, resting, their heels dug into the ground. The

rain had plastered down the girl's fair hair and the exertion had heightened her color, so that she looked very young—a schoolgirl picnicking with her uncle. The fat man looked woebegone in his drenched white suit, and his small, podgy hands wandered over himself, scratching, and pulling the fabric away from his skin. Craig, behind some whin, had to lie flat if he was not to be seen, but managed to move crabwise into a gully; a trickle of water coursed down it; he slipped the helmet off his shoulder and let the rainwater run into it until he had enough for a few swallows.

The pair were turning over to resume their climb when the girl slipped. The Doctor made a frantic grab to catch her, but it had happened too suddenly. She slid back, rolling over and flailing with her hands to catch sprigs of furze or vetch, but the slide toward the swollen river continued, meter after meter; she tumbled down the vast, tilted wasteland like a child's doll flung away, a doll with a furious life. The vegetation gave her no traction; it ripped her glossy black suit, so that areas of golden skin appeared, streaked with red. She caught at a shrub and lost it, caught at another and held on; its roots began to pull out; but she had broken her slide; she dug in with a toe and lay still. She had not uttered a sound.

Slowly she raised herself on hands and knees and drew one knee up; then she lurched upward into a wild digging run, her arms flung wide; upward and upward, almost dancing: a display of nervy grace that made Craig's eyes smart with tears. She reached Dr. Khoory, who still sat in terrified stasis, his eyes staring, his lips drawn back from his teeth. She flung herself down and rolled over on her back; she slammed her heels into the ground; she crowed with laughter. "Oh, Khoory-Khoory," she shouted, "did you see me? Oh, it was wasted on you, you poor old capon!" She lay back.

Craig lay back in his gully, trembling, and let relief spread through his body. Then he resumed his watch.

The girl sat up, said something to the fat man, and wiped her hands on his white jacket, leaving bright smears of red. The Doctor seized her hands and examined them. She pulled them away with a shake of the head; wiped the water off her face with the back of one hand; decorously tucked one jaunty white breast into her torn suit; slung the laser-carbine over her shoulder; and gave a command. The two resumed their climb.

Craig said to himself: "What is it? Not sadism, not exactly. Grace, joy, arrogance, and—and pain." He began to work his way up the gully he had lain in. The slope of the hill was noticeably less steep now: he was approaching the crest. He paused to check the Lady and the Doctor. They were nowhere to be seen.

Craig hunkered down in a wet, sandy hollow among some bushes. By herself, the girl might conceivably have reached the hilltop and disappeared behind the crest; the fat man could not have moved that fast; the two must show themselves somewhere soon.

Rustling. Craig crouched. He could not determine the direction. More rustling, and nearer; there was no stealth about it, but the climbers could not be seen. Wheezing.

The girl's voice, quite near: "Isn't this easier?"

The eunuch's alto: "Not noticeably."

The girl: "Maybe not for you. You have your suit. I'd rather get sand in my bellybutton than thorns."

Khoory: "Cannot we rest?"

The Lady: "What, again? When we get back to the Castle, I'm going to put you on strict regime of exercise."

Khoory: "At the rate we are going . . . Look here, I have *got* to rest."

The Lady: "All right. Up there, where this ravine ends."

Khoory: "I told you, it is not a ravine; it is a gulch."

The Lady: "Pooh. I've seen gulches. Maybe it's a fosse."

Khoory: "That is possible. Oof! A-a-h!" The Doctor

exhaled a large, countertenor sigh of relief. "Why do you go on lugging this popgun?"

The Lady: "Because you're too weak to."

Khoory: "It looks very heavy, and we will not need it."

The Lady: "What makes you think that?"

Khoory: "You are thinking of the incompetent Commandant?"

The Lady: "If you were in his position, wouldn't you be afraid to have me reappear? You'll see. He'll be sitting on a guard-tower with a high-powered ray."

Khoory: "Such a thing has not happened since—well, since your father. The new punishment-drugs . . ."

The Lady: "Quite so. The new punishment-drugs. What has he got to lose?"

Khoory: "You would use those for *incompetence*? On a *free-man*?"

The Lady: "Why not? Is it worse than using them on slaves? Matter of fact, I've often thought of using them on *you*."

Khoory: "Please. The joke is in poor taste. But you are right. The problem in owning slaves is that you cannot get excellent work from free-men. If all the horrid labor is done by slaves, what can happen to the incompetent free-man? . . . It is too bad we did not bring that slave. We could have run him out to draw the Commandant's fire."

The Lady: "No use crying over spilt milk. . . . The Commandant can say he thought we were escaped slaves. We don't *look* like Proprietors."

Craig had now located the speakers' voices. They had crossed behind him—somehow failing to spot him—and were now to his right and below, hidden from view in what must be a deep gully. He thought he could make his way over quietly enough to take them by surprise.

The Lady: "Did you hear something?"

Khoory: "I was not listening. What was it?"

The Lady: "Well, listen now."

Khoory: "I heard something."

The Lady: "What?"

Khoory: "What's *that*?"

The guard-helmet dropped to the ground a few meters below them and rolled into a small hollow.

"Good afternoon," said Craig pleasantly, jumping down from behind them; the unslung laser-carbine lay between the two; he rolled over on it and scrambled away with it in his hands, covering them. "Forgive my dropping in like this. . . . I had hoped to create more of a sensation. But your ladyship figured out the helmet too quickly: you're a very shrewd young ladyship. Doctor, would you be good enough to fetch the Lady her hat? Thank you. Please continue with your discussion. I was about to suggest that we run the *Doctor* out to draw the Commandant's fire, as presenting a better target."

Khoory said: "You are bargaining, then. A good Ter-ran. What are your terms?"

Craig: "Not bargaining, no. You wouldn't keep your end of the bargain: no reason to—a good Kossarian. No, I'm just going to live from minute to minute. *I* won't get down the other side alive unless you help me, and you won't get down the other side alive unless I let you."

The Lady, to Khoory: "I *told* you he was dangerous."

Craig: "Thank you, my lady. I shall endeavor to give satisfaction."

21

"'Child Rowland to the dark tower came,'" quoted Craig. "'His word was still, Fie, foh, and fum.' I smell the blood of a Commandant. But *which* tower?"

The three lay prone, side by side, on the crest of the

ridge, Craig on the right and just far enough separated so that he could bring the laser-rifle into play against the others if necessary. They were all screened, thinly, by patches of gorse. The drizzle had ceased. The sky was an even white.

Below them, the laager was full of scurryings and tramlings. The pit-head at the near end hid much of the central street; Craig could, however, see slaves carrying stretchers, and what appeared to be a neat row of corpses in gray slave-uniforms. The Commandant, then, *had* cleared the mine, though not quite soon enough.

Four towers stood outside the perimeter fence, one at each corner. Each was a simple guard-cabin mounted on a tapering openwork structure inside of which was the slender tube of a lift.

"We can assume," said Dr. Khoory, "that he is in one of the two nearer towers. *If* he is doing what your Ladyship thinks he is."

The Lady said: "Too bad the rain has stopped."

Craig: "You mean, he would have a body-heat gun-sight."

The Lady: "Yes. They have them."

Craig: "In that case—*Back!*"

The shrub to the left of the Doctor burst explosively into flame. All three threw themselves backward and scuttled away until the top of the hill cut them off from the sight of the towers. The Doctor's face was mottled but impassive.

The Lady: "That's proof for you, Doctor. And that was good shooting, at a half-kilometer."

Craig: "Did your ladyship see which tower it came from?"

The Lady: "The left, I think."

Dr. Khoory: "I thought it was the right."

Craig: "I couldn't tell. The Doctor would be the most visible on a body-heat 'scope. Not that your ladyship's temperature is anything to sneer at, but there's more of

him. . . . I don't think we have very long. Our friend can just bring up a little mortar or two and lay a barrage right on us. Or he can take up a skimmer and strafe us."

The Lady: "What other good ideas have you got?"

Craig: "Those should suffice. . . . As I say, the Doctor is too good a target. Besides, his professional services—you *are* a physician, I take it—splendid—will be needed in the laager. You, my lady, could deal with our friend if you could get into the laager: I don't think he's going to ask any free-man to turn a gun on Lady Morgan Sidney. On the other hand, if I get you into the laager, you might persuade them to turn a gun on *me*. On the third hand, if I got you into the laager, I could use the Doctor as a hostage for your good behavior. I take it you are fond of the Doctor in your own way? Good. I will get you into the laager."

The Lady: "If you had one *more* hand, I could have you killed later, anyway."

Craig: "I might just have *two* more hands, my lady. Your ladyship must make me one promise: when you've dealt with the Commandant, please have his corpse thrown from the tower. That will be our signal that the Doctor can come down safely—with me behind him. I'm sorry, but you won't have time to dose the Commandant with those drugs."

The Lady: "I promise."

Craig: "I suggest, my lady, that you swing wide around the left. Move *behind* the crest till you see me create a diversion on the right. Watch the towers as closely as you can. If you can tell which one he's firing from, head for the base of that one. Doctor, sit back here. I'll call you when I need you. There seem to be eight charges left in this laser. I'll save one for you, Doctor. My lady, kindly lend me your hat. Time to move, my lady. Keep your ladyship's head down."

Craig and the girl ran off, bending low, in opposite directions. Craig threw himself on his stomach and crawled

nearer the crest. He looked to his left. Her ladyship had done likewise and was watching him. He put the helmet on the ground to his left and nudged it toward the crest with the snout of his laser-carbine, holding the weapon at arm's length.

There was the snort and a crackle of flame a few centimeters to one side of the helmet; Craig quickly jerked the helmet into cover with the front sight of the weapon. He repeated the maneuver on his right side; this time a charred groove opened in the helmet's side. The Commandant was a crack shot—when he had time to aim. He might, however, have been fooled for a few moments into thinking that the Lady was where Craig was.

Craig left the helmet on the ground, doubled into a runner's crouch, and catapulted over the brow of the hill. He ran as the hopeless fugitive at the spaceport had run, zigzagging wildly; he dropped to one knee, aimed at the left-hand tower, loosed a shot at the embrasure, lunged sideways, rolled over, and ran back toward the shelter of the hilltop. Two raybolts in succession struck near him. He glanced over toward the Lady. She was over the crest and running steadily, crouching, and swerving in a wide arc among the shrubs. She was committed; he would continue the diversion. He whirled and plunged downhill again, loosing another shot, this time at the right-hand tower. Under cover of a tumbling fall, he glanced at the girl; she was looking at him and raised her left hand. So it was the left-hand tower. And she had signaled him on her own. He had not asked her to.

He danced off toward the right and threw himself into a gully that gave him partial cover. Several bolts seared the ground near him, one passing over his head. At any moment, the marksman in the tower would think of widening the raygun aperture, crippling him with a spray, and then finishing him off. He checked his own weapon, stood up coolly, put a shot into the embrasure, and

dropped back into cover. The enemy did not reply for a few moments, and then his next shot struck a meter away.

Craig wriggled down the gully and fired, lying on his side. He saw the streak of flame from the embrasure and a fraction of a second later heard the snapping howl of the ray; but no bolt struck near him. He turned, saw smoke gush from the vetch at the crest of the hill, and saw the top of the helmet bobbing rapidly along nearby: the Doctor was making a contribution.

The girl was running erect now, her legs twinkling, her fists clenched.

Craig stood up again and squeezed off three more shots at the Tower. He had one left—which he had said was for the Doctor.

The enemy turned his fire back on Craig. Two bolts were short; the third grazed his left shoulder; searing pain blinded him for a moment; he shook his head clear, forced the laser-carbine into position, aimed meticulously, and fired his last shot.

He drove back into the gully; the jar made his left shoulder blaze with agony; he looked for the girl. She was near the tower now, but still in the field of fire if the enemy should look her way.

The Commandant, however, had now thought of widening the aperture on his weapon, and began raying Craig's gully systematically from the upper end. Craig scuttled down the gully and, reaching the end, picked himself up and ran to another, hoping it would be deeper. It was, slightly so.

The girl was under the tower now, and colloquing with some guards inside the wire. Craig watched intently. The guards seemed too puzzled at first to take orders, but they began at last to move. It was some time before it dawned on Craig that the firing from the tower had stopped. . . .

A party of guards disappeared into a hatchway and reappeared a moment later outside the wire, next to the

lift-tube of the tower. This they entered, the Lady following. A few seconds passed, and then a black-clad body was slowly extruded from the embrasure of the tower, and fell, end over end, a hundred meters to the ground.

The spherical figure of Khoory rose majestically from behind the crest of the hill, still holding the helmet aloft on a long twig. Craig rose to go meet him, staggered, fell, and stood up again. The Doctor looked at the tower and then at Craig and walked over to Craig.

He peered silently at Craig's shoulder. "Come," he said. "Lean on me."

22

They found the laager in confusion. The Lady had taken personal command; more than this no one seemed to know.

A guard, an incurious Procyonese, said: "She was here a minute ago. Try headquarters." Craig and the Doctor set out for headquarters.

The loudspeakers on the corners of buildings intoned the names of missing free-men: "Billy Montero, report if alive. Paul Ostroff, report if alive. . . ."

An overseer stood doing nothing. "Have I *seen* her! Where d'you think I got this? With my own cat, that was. She stands right the hell in front of my groundcar, I stop, she asks for it *please*, I say no trip-slip no car, she asks for my cat *please*, I hand it over, she gives me one in the face with it, pulls me off the seat, and goes off with my cat *and* my car. . . . Where. How should I know?"

Crews along the muddy streets were listing dead slaves and sealing them in long green sacks. "MS33621. MS29388, MS31115. What am I supposed to do they got no left arm? Put down 'no number,' then. MS41992. MS50191. Did I see *who*? Well, a *car* went by, it went *by* all right, splashed mud all over the stiffs. Oh, that was *her*! It's all right, then—I mean it's *her* mud and *her* stiffs, isn't it? . . . MS44022."

"Let us stop in here," said the Doctor. Inside the guard-barracks, two crews were at work. Ont was identifying the corpses of overseers and guards. "That's the *third* Alois Schmeisser you've positively identified, you moron!" They were preparing them for shipment in neatly tagged black sacks. Then they reopened the sacks to argue, bellowing, "Shut up! Have some respect!"

The other crew was trying to care for injured free-men. Dr. Khoory moved professionally along the row of beds, looking and palpating, snapping orders in his castrato voice. The team had an aid-kit. Dr. Khoory cleaned and disinfected Craig's burnt shoulder and sprayed a temporary skin on it. An overseer with a broken arm said: "I saw her. Outside, in a groundcar: Which way? Let me see—to the pit-head, I think."

At the pit-head, a team of engineers tried to jury-rig an emergency pumping system. "You can't *pull* water, fathead, you got to *push* it! What do you figure to do, stand at the end of a sixty-meter hose and say, '*Here, wutta-wutta-wutta*'? Excuse me? Yes, the little lady's right here. Well, she was. . . . Now, what you do is drill . . ."

The lift, ridden by two men in diving suits, ascended with four drowned slaves, and descended again. The operator, a wizened old Sirian, cackled and said: "Just left. She wanted to go down the hole, but the diving suit wouldn't fit. Some places it was too *large*, and some places it was too *small*." He cackled. "'Bye! Come again!"

The loudspeakers in the street: "Guard-Lieutenant Wesley Monk, report if alive. Billy Montero, report if alive. Paul Ostroff, report if alive. . . ."

Craig said: "There's the groundcar, down there. Way down by G."

The street level of Barracks G was full of injured and half-drowned slaves, attended by one old slave who sobbed incessantly.

At the far end of the dim, long room, a huddled red shape unfolded over a pallet and stood disconsolately to face them. Her ladyship had put an officer's dress-scarlet tunic, much too large for her, on over her ragged suit, and belted it tightly with an officer's wide black true-leather belt mounting a huge, glossy holster. Her face was still smudged, her hair damp.

As they came up to her, she said, "This one is a *little* boy. I think he's still alive. I was trying to make him breathe." She bent over the young slave and pressed her open mouth to his face.

"It is coming out of his nose," said Dr. Khoory critically. "Let me see him, please." The Lady stood aside. "No cyanosis," he said. "He must have been breathing when they brought him out. Quite recently. Perhaps when they dumped him here. . . . I think we can start him up again." He busied himself.

"Oh, Khoory, what am I to do with this?" the girl said. She wheeled on the old slave. "You! Stop sniveling, damn you! Where are the others? Who's in charge?"

A fresh spate of sobs and hiccoughs was the answer.

Craig said: "My lady, let *me* try. He might tell me—slave-to-slave, you know."

She watched him with hard, bright eyes as he walked over to the old slave and put an arm over the trembling shoulders. "You were in the mine when it happened?" The old slave nodded, and a drop of fluid fell from the tip of his nose. "So was I," said Craig. "It was awful. They brought you here." The slave nodded. "You were out,

unconscious." Nod. "Where were you lying when you woke up?" The slave pointed to an empty pallet. "Were there any guards here?" Shake of the head. "Overseers?" Another negative. "Medics?" Shake of the head. "So you got up and tried to take care of things." Nod. "You used to be a M.T.?" Shake of the head. "M.D.?" Negative. "Teacher?" Nod. "I'll bet you were a good teacher." Nod. A racking sob. "You don't have to answer this, now. I won't tell anybody if you do, though. Did anybody die while you were in charge?" The old slave turned and buried his face in Craig's burned shoulder. Craig closed his eyes and stiffened with the pain, but put his arms gently around the old man. "Who was it?" The old man looked up searchingly into Craig's face, then pointed to a pallet nearby. "Oh, he probably was dead already when they brought him here. I'm sure he was. Doctor," Craig called over to Dr. Khoory, who had finished with his young patient, "would you examine that patient, please, and tell us: did he die here, or *was he dead when he came?*"

The Doctor bent over the indicated figure, stood up, and looked steadily at Craig. Why, *he is not dead*," he said. "He is just *unconscious*." He joined Craig. "But you, young fellow," he said to the aged slave, "you will be pretty sick if you do not at once lie down and stay quiet. I am in charge here now. So you just take it easy." He helped Craig guide the old man, sniffing, to his pallet.

Craig knelt beside the pallet and stared into the old slave's face. "You're going to go to sleep now. You're terribly tired, after taking care of all those patients. You'll wake up in the morning feeling much better." Nod. The vague, reddened eyes closed.

Craig and the Doctor looked at each other. Both looked at the Lady. She walked slowly over. Craig and the Doctor went to the pallet containing the dead man and, while the Lady leaned over the sleeping slave to block his view if he should open his eyes, silently man-

handled it to the side of the room; they picked up a pallet with a groaning slave in it, and put it in the place of the other.

Craig whispered to the Lady: "I'll take it to your ladyship's groundcar, and you can leave it with the bag-stuffers on the street." She nodded, still with that intent look. Craig slung the corpse over his right shoulder, carried it to the car, and returned.

Re-entering quietly, he heard the Lady say, "Don't be taken in by that insolent tenderness. He's just like me." Warned by Dr. Khoory's glance, she went on, "I'm going to headquarters. You and the slave can see to things here for a while. I'll send somebody down; then you can report to headquarters—and bring the slave, and I'll decide what to do with him."

When the Lady had gone, Dr. Khoory said: "Lie down for one minute." Craig lay down on the pallet from which he had removed the corpse a few moments before. The Doctor examined him. "Superficially," he said, "you are a terrible mess. Your right foot is contused. Both feet are deeply scratched, and there is much dirt in the lacerations. Fortunately, most of the bacteria of Kossar have not yet acquired a taste for human tissue. Your left shoulder is burned, and the temporary skin I have put on is of poor quality. You are filthy. You are suffering from fatigue. You are, however, in the best of health. You are not only in the best of health, but still alive."

Craig: "I take your meaning."

Dr. Khoory: "Frankly, I am not sure how long this state of affairs will continue. Her ladyship told me just now that the Commandant was already dying when she and the guards reached him. You grasp the significance? You must have wounded him fatally with one of your *eight* shots. . . . Thus you pose a dilemma. You save her ladyship's life. Yet you, a slave, killed one of her officers. You will perhaps argue that the first fact should outweigh the second."

Craig: "I think I could undertake to defend that position. Paradoxical as it might seem at first."

Dr. Khoory: "No, I am serious. You see, there is something else. Something in your manner . . ."

Craig: "Ah, perhaps I was meant for something better than slavery."

Dr. Khoory: "Who meant you? Well, that is as it may be. This something. Her ladyship called it 'insolence.'"

Craig: "'Insolent tenderness.' Don't forget the tenderness."

Dr. Khoory smiled sadly. "You heard. So. Let me explain: once a slave starts killing free-men for a *good* reason, he may, so to speak, generalize—he may then kill for a reason that is only *nearly* as good, and then for a questionable reason, and eventually he may kill on some quite farfetched analogy. He may start by killing a Commandant John Fentriss, but he may end by killing a Lady Morgan Sidney. He may lose sight of the difference. And this something of yours . . . But if—" and here the high voice faltered—"if her ladyship decides to use one of the punishment-drugs on you, I will say to her I have none left. That will only delay things, of course. However, if you then wish me to . . ."

Craig: "Thank you. I'll let you know."

Dr. Khoory: "Her ladyship explicitly ordered me *not* to have you cleaned up. She said you stank like a ferret. Now, for certain reasons I think that that is a good sign, though I have never smelt a ferret."

Craig: "Don't feel bad, Doctor. Your old-fashioned ferret-smeller belongs to a vanishing breed. But I really do thank you. And you are right about killing. Somebody or other once wrote, 'Nothing is so pregnant as cruelty.' . . . Shall we look at our patients?"

Two hangdog technicians appeared a few minutes later, and Dr. Khoory braced them with a rattle of instructions.

23

Out in the street, the loudspeakers chanted: "Alois Schmiesser, report if alive. Wu Tsu-shih, report if alive."

Craig followed Dr. Khoory into headquarters. The Doctor's great white orb seemed soiled and shriveled. Craig's own body felt altogether depleted. The orderly-room babble washed over him.

One clerk was saying to another: "No, that's the earlier list. *This* is the later."

The other clerk: "Are you sure?"

First clerk: "Let me see."

A technician shouted: "Where's the key to Locker Twenty-Eight? The sound-detection gear's in there."

An overseer: "You *told* me to report if alive. Well, I been *trying* to report. A whole *hour* now I been trying. So put me down as *dead*, all right?"

Technician: "There's supposed to be noises in the Nine-S workings. Who knows where the key is?"

Dr. Khoory: "Where's her ladyship?"

First clerk: "In there, sir." He pointed to a door stenciled, "The Commandant."

Dr. Khoory said to Craig, "Wait here," and went in.

Two supercilious young guard officers near Craig were conversing in undertones. They ignored the bedraggled slave. The first said: "Is Fred in there?"

The second nodded.

The first: "Who's with him?"

Second: "Just the Whore."

The first: "I thought I just saw the Eunuch go in."

Second: "I didn't see him. But if he's in there, so much the better."

First: "What if Fred peaches?"

Second: "He wouldn't."

First: "She a beautiful Whore. And Fred thinks *he's* beautiful."

Second: "Fred's in deeper than we are."

First: "That's just it. That's why he might sell us."

Second: "She wouldn't buy. Or at least, she wouldn't keep her end of the bargain. The Whore doesn't like squeed. And Fred should know that."

First: "I'd be happier if one of us were in there."

Second: "We weren't invited. Wait till Ulrich and his merry overseers get here. Then we'll *all* go in."

Craig, his fatigue overridden, slouched in a wide circuit through the crowded orderly-room, passed an empty desk, picked up an imposing black-bound print-out, shuffled to the door marked "The Commandant," thrust it open, and stepped inside.

The Lady was leaning over the Commandant's desk with a strapping young guard-lieutenant, studying a plan of the mines. Dr. Khoory sat in a soft armchair, apparently half-asleep. Craig shuffled up to the lieutenant, "'Scuse me, sir, are you Doctor Khoory?" The Lady's eyes narrowed. Dr. Khoory's opened.

"No, idiot!" barked the lieutenant. "Over there!" He shoved Craig roughly toward the Doctor, and then wiped off his hands on the skirts of his beautifully pressed tunic. Craig let the push carry him off balance and fell in a whimpering heap at the Doctor's feet. The Doctor tisked pettishly and bent over Craig; his eyes inquired frantically. Craig whispered between groans: "Two pals of this clown waiting outside by the outer door—lieutenants. Some overseers on the way here. All set to get the Lady and you."

"What fool sent *you* with this?" shrilled the Doctor,

picking up the print-out. "Don't answer. Shut up!" The Lady's eyes were on him, puzzled. The Doctor studied the print-out but ran his right index finger thoughtfully across his throat.

"Thank you so much, Lieutenant Mesquier," she said loudly. "I must say, it's a pleasure to see an officer properly dressed around here. I do hope I'll see you tomorrow."

The lieutenant smiled with conscious charm and began to take his leave.

"Oh, one more thing, Lieutenant. But excuse me. Doctor Khoory, can you take care of whatever it is you have there while I talk a little more with the lieutenant? Leave the slave here."

"Yes, your ladyship. I will be only a minute," said the Doctor, and went out the door.

The Lieutenant looked at Craig, disgusted at his continued presence.

The Lady: "What is your given name, Lieutenant?"

The Lieutenant: "My friends call me Fred, your ladyship."

Dr. Khoory reappeared in the doorway, accompanied by the two young officers. The Doctor glanced at Craig, who nodded slightly. "I thought," said Dr. Khoory, "these gentlemen might help us with our problem."

Mesquier and his fellow officers now looked uneasy.

"Lieutenant Mesquier," said the Lady, "a little while ago, as I was coming down the hill, Commandant Fentriss was in one of the towers, trying to ray a slave out on the hillside."

The Lieutenant: "The slave was thought to be escaping, your ladyship."

The Lady: "Escaping by running *toward* the laager, Lieutenant? Well, well, let it pass. You, at the time, were on the ground, inside the fence."

The Lieutenant: "Yes, your ladyship. I—"

The Lady: "And you shouted up to the tower, 'Jack, on the other side, quick!' Or words to that effect."

There was an almost imperceptible pause.

The Lieutenant: "I don't remember what I shouted, your Ladyship."

The Lady: "I myself heard and saw you. *I* was coming on the other side."

The Lieutenant did not answer. Craig moved silently behind one of the other officers. Dr. Khoory was already behind the third.

The Lady: "Poor Fred, you didn't shout loudly enough." She opened her holster as a girl of an earlier century might have opened her reticule for a handkerchief, drew out a blast-pistol, thumbed the aperture-wheel, and meticulously obliterated the Lieutenant's head. "Oh, how *smelly!*" she cried mock-womanishly to the other officers. She looked at Craig. "Testify."

"My lady," he said, "if you would cover those two buffoons with your ladyship's blaster while the Doctor and I get out of the line of fire . . . very good. Thank you, my lady. One of the intrinsic drawbacks of slavery, my lady, is that it denies a fact of life, the humanity of the slave. In the minds of the vulgar, this habitual denial leads to the most impractical aberrations, and those two would-be gentlemen, seeing a slave standing within earshot large as life, thought nothing of discussing how they and their confederates, some overseers led by a free-man they called Ulrich, were going to come in here and deal with two people they referred to . . ."

The Lady: "Go on."

Craig: "Did I hear your ladyship order me to go on?"

The Lady: "Are you afraid?"

Craig: "Two people whom they referred to as the Whore and the Eunuch."

The Lady: "Go on."

Craig: "The late Fred, whose beauty your ladyship has

just vandalized, was 'in deeper' than these two, that is, deeper into the squeed trade in this laager. Ulrich will be here shortly, I infer, accompanied by what these garrulous free-men refer to as 'his merry overseers.' "

The Lady: "Well done, slave, Dr. Khoory?"

Dr. Khoory: "Yes, my Lady?"

The Lady: "How many full doses of those very scientific punishment-drugs do you have?"

The Doctor turned with undisguised grief to Craig. Craig smiled and blinked reassuringly.

"I—I have six doses, your Ladyship."

The Lady sighed. "We'll have to make do, that's all. You sir," she addressed the first officer, "what is your name?"

"Are you going to take a slave's word against mine?"

The Lady stared. "Why not? Now answer the question, you bad boy, or I shall pull down your pants and burn off your wee-wee with little Bowser here." She wagged the blast-pistol.

"My name is Rawlson."

The Lady: "Given name?"

Rawlson: "Thomas."

The Lady rummaged in the side pocket of her tunic and produced a slip of paper. "There's one thing about this laager—you can't *procrastinate* here. I was hoping to do this tomorrow. Let's see. This tunic belonged to the late John Fentriss, and I found this paper in the pocket. It appears to be a record of money transactions of some sort. 'F. M.'—that's our late friend here. 'F. M.' again. 'V. L.' 'F. M.' 'J. R. J.' 'A. R. S.' 'U. Z.' Could that be Ulrich? 'T. R.' That's you. You occur one, two, three times in all."

Rawlson: "I've never drunk squeed in my life."

The Lady: "You, sir, What's *your* name?"

"Vassily Liebling."

The Lady: "'V. L.' You look like small potatoes in this list. A bargain in treason. V. L., would you care to

tell me who Ulrich Z. is, who his merry overseers are, and precisely when they are expected here?"

Liebling: "No."

The Lady: "Doctor, pick up that mineral on the desk and anaesthetize these two patients."

Dr. Khoory picked up a large, polished slab of carnelian, hefted it, walked behind the two officers, and expertly knocked them unconscious.

The Lady: "Will they fit in that safe? Good. Take their side arms. The combination is on the underside of the desk chair. Let's be on our way. Out the back."

They ran, the Lady holstering her blast-pistol, the Doctor carrying two others; they tumbled into the groundcar, Craig in back; the Lady drove it out into the street in a howling swerve.

The Lady said: "The trick is to attack first, I'm told. Which way to the overseers' quarters?"

Craig: "Left."

The Lady: "Doctor, give him one of those guns."

Dr. Khoory hesitated, eyes closed as if in pain. "Yes, your Ladyship." He complied.

Craig: "The two buildings on the right."

The Lady: "We're in time, I think." She slowed the groundcar.

A knot of men, some carrying laser-carbines, others with blast-pistols stuck in their belts, others with stun-guns, came out of the building and started uphill.

Craig, crouching on the floor of the vehicle, called loudly, "Ulrich, old man!"

A burly man in the front of the group looked up inquiringly. Her ladyship put the groundcar in screaming acceleration and drove into the midst of the group, lurching over one man's body and sending two others flying brokenly to the side; she pulled the car around in a tight circle and drove at them again. As she looked over her shoulder to check the street behind her, Craig saw that she was smiling—like a child in a swing.

Craig fired the blast-pistol and brought down Ulrich. The Doctor accounted for another. The men were scattering. One ran straight ahead of the car, a featherless biped in terror; the Lady followed and ran him down, steering with her left hand as she drew her weapon with her right. She burnt off the feet of three men in one prolonged sweep of fire, and then finished them as they threshed on the ground.

The remnant of the group took cover in their quarters, some in each of the two buildings. Return fire began.

Craig said sharply: "Drive, my lady!"

She sent the groundcar screeching forward, skidded into a turn, and took them around the side of the overseers' quarters, up behind the building, around the next one, and back into the street. Craig thought he hit one man aiming from a window. The Doctor, his huge figure shielding the girl, was firing coolly and with effect. "I have not been to an amusement park since my medical-school days," he said.

A squad of guards was running down the hill toward them. The girl swung the groundcar toward them, slowing.

Craig: "Be careful, my lady! They may belong to the other side."

The Lady: "We'll know soon enough." She brought the vehicle to a halt, alighted, and walked toward them, a straight, fragile figure in the waning sun. A shot from down the hill went wide. She ignored it. The guards watched her approach. "Who's in command?" she asked.

A corporal stepped forward and saluted. She returned the salute by touching the snout of her blast-pistol to her fair hair.

The Lady: "There are some mutinous overseers in those two buildings. I should say about six are still alive. Take your squad and surround the buildings. Overseers are never issued radiation-weapons, I take it? I thought

not. Execute any man in those buildings who has a weapon. No prisoners, please. Follow me."

The corporal saluted. "Squad, skirmish-order! At the double."

"The fight was brief.

The corporal's squad—two fewer in number—stacked the bodies in the street and, at the Lady's command, fell in. She stood before them, the embers of the fight still alive in her eyes, and began: "Men, you have my—"

The low-slanting rays of the sun threw a shadow that was somehow wrong in the corner of Craig's field of vision, and it moved slightly. He bellowed, "Over there! Get him!" plunged at the Lady, and knocked her down with his body, covering her. From behind and to the left of him, where the man with a weapon lurked, came the first rattle of ionization. . . .

24

Under his back was a softness like—like the preposterous past. He opened an eye. Above him loomed and wavered the face of Dr. Khoory.

"Dizzy?" the Doctor asked.

"Very."

"Then close that bloodshot eye." Craig obeyed. "That cretin out there only had a stunner," the Doctor's high voice went on, "but it could have shorted out her ladyship's brain—or yours. I do not think you got a very heavy dose, though."

"Her ladyship?"

"Quite unharmed. You are not terribly heavy."

Craig tried with one eye again and then opened the other. The dizziness subsided.

Dr. Khoory: "She is across the street at headquarters, settling a few matters, but she will be here shortly. You are to wait."

Craig: "Where is 'here'?"

Dr. Khoory: "These are the Commandant's quarters, and this is the late John Fentriss' own room."

Craig: "Is this bed a particularly soft one?"

The Doctor smiled. "Only by contrast."

The door opened and her ladyship strode in, alone. She still wore the holster-belt over the scarlet tunic; her face, still smudged, was now in repose; she jammed her hands into the side pockets of the tunic and swung around the room.

"So this was the fellow's boudoir," she said softly. "Not a nice man."

Dr. Khoory: "A squeed room."

The Lady: "No wonder he wouldn't show it to us when we came yesterday. Distinctly a squeed room."

There was an unhealthy brilliance to the colors, and something else . . .

Dr. Khoory: "Before the sorting-out. The erection of Narcissus."

The Lady went to the night table and twitched open the drawer. "Yes." She took out a small carved bottle capped with a tiny golden chalice. "Here." She held the bottle out to the Doctor. Her eyes were hard. "Is that a toilet in there? Get rid of this. Every molecule. Can you use my blast-pistol on the bottle without setting the place on fire?"

Dr. Khoory: "I think so." He took the bottle and the weapon and disappeared.

Craig started struggling to his feet.

The Lady said sharply: "Stay there."

Craig: "May I know what your ladyship intends to do with me?"

She ignored the question. The Doctor returned and held out the weapon to her. She dropped it into the holster.

Dr. Khoory: "With your permission, I shall go over to headquarters and see whether my influence extends to some kitchen somewhere. Will your ladyship join me?"

The Lady: "As you know, I like the salt of hunger."

Dr. Khoory: "Until whenever, then." He bowed and rolled out. Her ladyship locked the door.

Craig: "May I not know what your ladyship intends to do with me?"

She looked down at him with eyes the color of smoke; slid the harness off her tunic and the tunic off her arms, letting the gear fall to the floor; and stood, scratched, muddy, and glowing through the rents in her thin black suit. Then she suddenly clapped her hands and laughed happily. "I just realized," she said, "I forgot all about those lieutenants in the safe. And there can't be much air left in there. Well, never mind them. It'll save trouble." She was poised above him. Her face took on a fiercer amusement. The pale gold hair cascaded over it. Her whisper fell on his skin. "As to your insolent question, slave, the answer is, 'Four things.' "

25

"I could make you the Commandant of this place if I wanted to," she said languidly, and stretched. "But I'm

not finished with you yet. . . . You know, you're wrong about slavery. It doesn't deny the humanity of the slave. If you weren't human, you wouldn't be a slave, and I wouldn't be a slaveowner. If I weren't so tired, I'd send you over to the orderly-room to fetch me my cat."

Her body in repose retained a heartbreaking grace.

"What was your name?" she asked.

"John Smith."

"What was your real name?"

A long pause. "John Smith."

She laughed. "I shall let you have your little mystery. And because you're now going to be, as we say, 'attached to my person'—because it really wouldn't do, you know, to have you running about the mines and talking around after you've killed free-men and taken liberties with your mistress—I shall give you the name, um, Smitty. . . . Are my feet beautiful, Smitty?"

"Very beautiful. Very talented."

"Do you respect my feet, Smitty?"

"I respect them, my lady."

"Do you respect every part of me, Smitty?"

"I do, my lady."

"You'd better. . . . I think I'll get up and look for Doctor Khoory. I don't suppose we could find any of *your* food at this hour, so you can have some of ours. And I can't let you go to the slave-barracks, for reasons noted above. I shall sleep in my other room tonight, and you can sleep across the foot of my bed. In case I need anything."

Craig, locked for the morning in the Commandant's bedroom, lay on the bed, alternately sleeping and composing a sonnet. For reasons he did not understand at first, his imagination had been drawn back to the instant in the dusty warehouse when, on his knees before Bastigliano, he saw the incision he had made.

*This bright arterial blood was on its way
To drive an act of violence. This blue vein
Was the cloaca—since what could remain
Of any act but molecules? This gray
Integument was bared to feel the play
Of terror-quicken breath. This chain
Of neurons, firing to the distant brain,
Has something very different now to say.
This thumb survived the forests, where an ape
Could grasp a stick or stone of such a shape
As to trepan a foe or feed a wife.
This ego, twisting at the thought of rape,
Whispered its order. And this little knife
Was large enough to take a roaring life.*

"And what makes the Lady different?" Craig asked the ceiling, suddenly understanding himself. "Beauty?" The thought came to him: the fat Doctor, who must know a great deal about slaves, had said, "He may lose sight of the difference." And he, Craig, had answered in Lavater's words, " 'Nothing is so pregnant as cruelty.' "

Around midday, the door was unlocked and Dr.

Khoory rolled in, immaculate and firmly spherical in a fresh white suit. "The skimmer has been ordered for an hour from now," he said happily. "Do you have any possessions?"

"One or two. In Barracks L."

"I shall come with you to fetch them."

The central street was drying and there was less visible disorder: neat stacks of green bags lay quietly on corners; the loudspeakers were silent. The Doctor followed Craig into the barracks. "Someone," he said critically from behind Craig's shoulder, "has bitten through the nice new skin I put on that last night."

Craig grunted; his eyes were questing in the dim chamber; he saw a slave lying inert on a pallet at the far end and said in a low voice, "Doctor, is that man dead?"

The Doctor glanced across the room and looked at Craig. "I will go see," he said with the trace of a smile.

With Dr. Khoory several meters away, Craig bent swiftly and, picking up with his left hand the little gray wash bag containing the skin-cloth, the cake of vermin-killing soap, and the can of face-depilatory he had been issued, with his right felt under the edge of his pallet for the knife, its blade forced into a crack in the pallet frame. He found it, closed it, and was slipping it into the pocket of his trousers when Dr. Khoory's podgy hand closed over his. Craig stood up.

The Doctor silently held out his hand. Craig placed the knife in it, suddenly hoping the fat man would keep it. The Doctor opened the knife, thumbed the blade, and inspected it, remarking, "The slave you were concerned about is alive, suffering from exhaustion; that is all. I have told his fellows that they must make him go to meals." He handed the knife back to Craig and said: "You will be tempted. But I think you are very strong." He ignored Craig's questioning look.

27

The skimmer—Craig recognized it as an old PC14 and supposed that if he scratched the paint he would find the insignia of one of the Terran armed forces—took them high over the great blackish-green fen of Blind-marsh, dappled at the end of the rainy season with shiny patches and tufts of mist, white in the milky sunlight. Across the fen, the nearly straight line of the ore railroad ran toward the sea. The sea itself was a silver edge on the world, far to the left. Behind them and to their right rose the hills, between the crests of which Craig glimpsed the swollen river—the Mulbrach, Dr. Khoory called it.

Craig was sitting alone at the rear of the cabin; they were almost over the Castle before he saw it, a sheaf of towers, looking from the descending skimmer like a pipe organ in reduced circumstances, on a high, foam-bordered promontory nosing into a dark green bay.

28

With the end of the rainy season, the winds shifted, and the curious smell of Kossar's sea—something like human sweat, something like fermentation—troubled Craig less often. The prevailing winds were now from inland, smelling of corn and fodder-grasses not very far

mutated from their Earth parent-varieties; and Craig was lulled at moments into the illusion that he was on his home planet.

The Castle had two walled gardens, one of Earth flowers, the other of plants native to Kossar. The Earth garden was small and perfunctorily tended; evidently it was an unvalued inheritance from some nostalgic ancestor of Lady Morgan Sidney's whose tastes ran to the English Victorian Age. Craig decided that he approved of that ancestor's tastes. The Kossar garden, much larger and better maintained, was crowded with great, fleshy growths bearing leaves more black than green and drooping blossoms—Craig supposed them to be that—of a pearly gray; and there were others with leaves concentrically orange and purple; and still others, behind plastiglass, that were like faintly phosphorescent toadstools. Craig detested that garden. Dr. Khoory seemed to feel no such discomfort; he was often there, busy: either he was dabbling in horticulture, or the garden was providing him with samples for his drugs—very likely the punishment-drugs, Craig thought.

Craig was set to helping the gardeners and, being recently from Terra, was allowed to devote himself to the Earth garden; of flowers he knew little, but one of the two free-men who served as the chief gardeners, an elderly Kossarian named MacInnis, was garrulous and rather kindly, and Craig learned diligently.

Often he slept at nights in the household-slaves' quarters, a warren of small ill-ventilated rooms low on the land side of the Castle; but almost as often he was summoned to her ladyship's apartments.

"You're wanted to tend her ladyship's little garden," MacInnis would say. "I hope your trowel isn't rusty, boy." It was his unvarying formula.

Or Duplain, the other senior gardener, a deserter from some colonial army and nominally MacInnis' superior, would grunt simply, "You! They want you."

The Lady's apartments overlooked the Bay of Treglast

from high in the tower nearest the sea. To Craig, after the mines, they seemed filled with an astonishing radiance; he would wake in the morning, lying across the foot of the bed, and no matter what his *devoirs* had been, the sheer lucidity of the daylight in the white curtains and on the white rug and along the white satin of the coverlet put him at peace until the Lady awoke.

The bedchamber was white; other rooms were in other colors; but all of them conveyed an intense impression of chastity.

29

The Lady: "Do you consider me cruel, Smitty?"

Craig: "Oh, no, your ladyship!"

The Lady: "You don't?"

30

*Medusa loves me, hardening my flesh.
She salts my dying childhood with her fury.
Her white teeth open for a last bonne bouche,
My cowardice. Her smoky eyes are merry.
I think she loves me; when she eats my pain,
She lies back dreaming, on the dampened pillow,
The tendons easy in the golden skin,
The golden snakes quiescent like a halo.*

*I love Medusa laughing in her bath
Tinted with blood, my blood. I love the keen
Blade of her furor in its silky sheath:
Not feral, but the alien thought of man,
Far from the natural temper, far from Earth.
What pain can teach, the crafty mind can learn.*

31

"The Lady: "So you don't think I'm cruel."

Craig: "Actually, I do, your ladyship. You remind me of a girl in my class in school, named Hildegarde Skenk. Only she had darker hair. She was very cruel, even in ninth grade. She was probably the cruelest girl in West Orange, New Jersey."

The Lady: "You're in remarkably good spirits today, little Smitty. I hope they last."

Craig: "I was really very fond of that Hildegarde—in an immature way, of course."

The Lady: "It's not much fun humbling you, Smitty. You weep and plead and-fawn deliciously, but you—you're not sincere."

32

Craig made no friends among the other slaves. He was tainted. At first they simply fell silent if he came near

while they were dosing themselves with whispered fantasies of revenge and escape; then they were ostentatious about falling silent; then they took to blurting out selected hints and threats; and when they discovered that he did not report them to her ladyship, they talked for his benefit in more and more violent terms, working out obscene scenarios for the Lady's future. Craig made a policy of ignoring this and of course acquired a reputation for being haughty.

There was one slave lad named Curt, a lanky boy of about twelve, with light eyes and skin the color of old amber—Craig noticed that a surprisingly large number of young slaves were dark-skinned and thought he would ask Dr. Khoory about it some day—who was much disturbed by the talk. "Don't mind them, Johnny. They're only envious," he said comfortingly to Craig, and was so patently envious himself that for an instant Craig was tempted to pull up his shirt and show the boy the lattice-work of weals on his back; but he looked into the guileless young face and decided that the boy's pubescent folly was more decent than what the truth might leave in its place.

Another time, Curt asked Craig, "Can't you make them stop?" Craig explained that trying to make them stop would only egg them on. This seemed too complicated to the boy, and he was disappointed in Craig.

One morning, a slave who waited on table in the great hall was muttering about poison and watching Craig, and had begun to describe just how he would violate the Lady in her death throes, when the brown boy struck him in the mouth, crying out to Craig, "If you won't stop him, I will!" The waiter, a big though somewhat flabby man, lunged toward Curt, who dodged away but tripped. The boy went down. The big slave aimed a kick at him. As he drew his foot back, Craig hooked his own left foot under it and threw his right arm around the man's throat.

"Let him alone," Craig said. The man wrenched free

and turned on Craig. "Want to fight?" asked Craig pleasantly, gesturing peremptorily to the boy to move away. Curt obeyed.

"You bet I do," breathed the man.

"Outside, then," said Craig. They went to a dingy courtyard area half hidden between two storage sheds, accompanied by a dozen hopeful slaves, including the boy.

The man had the reach on Craig, and very decidedly the weight, and Craig had to dance backward to keep out of his grasp. The laughter of the watching slaves was broken by Curt's wail, "What's the matter, Johnny? Why don't you kill him?"

The big man rushed. Craig ducked beneath the grappling arms and landed a solid blow in the man's stomach, following it with a sharp punch that took the man in the underside of the jaw. Craig's antagonist gasped for breath, but caught Craig from above around the neck and chest, lifted him up, and slammed him on the ground. The big man tried to fall on Craig, but Craig rolled aside and scrambled to his feet. His nose was bleeding.

The man came on more warily, and Craig decided to change tactics. He danced for a moment longer and then suddenly charged, low, with a bellow. The surprise threw the big man off his timing, and Craig landed four vicious cuts on his antagonist's face and thought he heard a tooth go. As the big man twisted back, raising his guard, Craig became aware that the chattering and hostile grumbling of the watching slaves had stopped abruptly. In the silence, Curt's solitary cry of "Good! Good! Kill him, Johnny!" sang out clearly.

Craig disengaged and danced around. The boy was standing apart from the other watchers, and directly behind him was the Lady.

She was not, at the moment Craig saw her, looking at Craig but down at the oblivious Curt, who still waved his clenched fists in delight and called, "Now you kill him!"

She glanced up at Craig, and the look on her face was one of furious envy. Craig's heart sank for the lad.

The big man had also seen the Lady; he stood still, with his guard still up. Only the boy did not see. "Go in and kill him, Johnny," he called to Craig. "Teach him to talk about her . . ." He trailed off, seeing everyone's eyes fixed above him, and turned. A look of hopelessness came over his face. His dark skin flushed.

The Lady asked quietly, "Teach him to talk about whom?"

The boy answered in a breaking whisper, "No one, your Ladyship."

The Lady looked at Craig and back at the boy. "If it was about *me*," she said, bending to look the boy in the eyes, "let—them—talk." She pinched the end of his nose gently and sauntered away, giving, Craig could have sworn, a slight extra swing to her elegant posteriors.

33

The Lady: "I've decided that insincerity isn't your problem. *Tenderness* is your problem. You have this insolent tenderness. I hate you."

Craig: "Has your ladyship no tenderness of your own? I remember that day after the mines flooded—with the half-drowned boy in Barracks G."

The Lady: "Oh, that was play. It was—it was a sensation. Like everything else. Damn you! *I'll* show you tenderness!"

"Mister MacInnes?"

"Yes, boy?"

"What happened to her Ladyship's father?"

"We don't talk about it around her."

"That's what I noticed," said Craig. "That's what's so interesting. Who killed him?"

MacInnis looked around. They were in the Earth garden and could not possibly have been under observation. "A slave named Weeden killed him. Black Weeden, that was what they called him. He was a black man from the Antares colony. He shot Lord Henry right through the heart."

Craig: "Shot? With a blaster?"

MacInnis: "Shot. With a bullet-gun."

Craig: "Even a bullet-gun. Where did he get it?"

MacInnis looked around again. "They say he had a cache of them. Him and his friends."

Craig: "There were others in it?"

MacInnis: "That's what they thought. They never found out who, though. Couldn't get a thing out of Weeden. Even with the drugs. He was something of a man, was Black Weeden."

Craig: "How did they know about the others, if they never caught them?"

MacInnis: "They did catch 'em, in a manner of speaking. Or at least, they killed 'em. It was a very big thing, you see, and the High Council met. Came *here* and met, and they executed every slave who had had anything at all to do with Black Weeden. Well, not *anything* at all,

because he worked in the PPC in the Clinic and he did several females a day, but anything else."

Craig: "Didn't they, uh, use drugs on any of the others?"

MacInnis: "Several. They didn't get anything useful out of 'em. Weeden had kept things to himself pretty much. He never told anybody where he had the guns hidden. He said they would all know when the time came. And the same was, when someone joined up with him, no one else knew."

Craig: "So all they could get a man to tell was whether he himself had been in the plot."

MacInnis: "And, of course, after pouring in more and more drugs trying to get more facts, the slaves weren't any use to themselves or anybody else, whether they'd been in on it or not, so the obvious thing was not to waste the drugs, just execute 'em all. That's how the High Council saw it. Something of a man, Weeden was. The strongest swimmer I ever saw. And vigorous? Sometimes ten females a day, and most of 'em took. Of course, that kind of thing can make a man go crazy, you know," he said, looking severely at Craig. "Maybe that's what made him go in for"—he looked around, and dropped his voice—"rebellion. Of course, they've had one or two rebellions since. But not here. Weeden was the only one here. Right through the heart. I'm not criticizing him, either. Well, now, we've said *quite* enough, boy. In another minute, one of us might say too much. Get to work."

35

"When I was on Earth, my lady, I loved to swim."

She laughed. "As my soldiers would say, swim in this."

After an interval, Craig tried again. "Does your ladyship swim?"

The Lady: "What *is* this about swimming?"

Craig: "I've always heard, your ladyship, one can do things floating in the water that are impossible otherwise."

The Lady thought for a moment. "Uncomfortable otherwise, perhaps, but why impossible?"

Craig: "Impossible. Your ladyship will see."

36

Her ladyship dozed on a large, smooth, convex rock that rested in the foam under the cliff of the headland. She lay on her back, naked to the sun and spray, her arms and legs flung wide.

*"Sing of the princess, Muse, of Andromeda
naked and golden,*

*Spreadeagled, waiting for dragons, not for the
popinjay Perseus . . ."*

murmured Craig; she did not react; he slid carefully back into the water.

He was a fair swimmer, certainly not a good one like Black Weeden, the strongest swimmer MacInnis had ever seen; and now, moreover, he was tired even before he began his search. But he would have only a few minutes in any case, this first time.

He backed to the edge of the submerged rock-shelf, filled his lungs, stopped off, and pulled himself below the surface.

37

The head gardener Duplain said he was ill and stayed in his quarters. MacInnis, shrugging apologetically, told Craig to help in the Kossar garden. Craig winced and obeyed.

There was nothing definably disgusting about the Kossar flora, no rancid or fetid smells; but evidently Craig's phylogeny was strong in him, and his instincts rebelled. Many of the Kossarians, he noticed, betrayed discomfort—disguised with exclamations—in the Kossar garden: their Terran phylogeny was at work. Others, and even some immigrants like Duplain, did not seem to mind.

Craig was working on some low border foliage near one of the locked plastiglass cases in which the repulsive toadstools—or whatever they were—were kept. His pruning shears clinked against something that lay hidden in the shrubbery. He put out a gloved hand, felt it, and pulled the leaves aside. It was a neat, almost new little phosphor torch.

He let the leaves spring back to cover it and continued his pruning. . . . The torch was lying hardly more than a meter away from the lock of one of the toadstool cases. Someone, then, had been doing something with that specimen—something forbidden, or why creep in at night? The someone, therefore, would be back for the torch but could not make an outcry when he did not find it.

Craig looked around. No one was near. He picked up a trowel with his right hand and retrieved the torch with his left, wedged the torch into the drawstring waist of his trousers—it was clammy against his skin—and casually walked toward the garden gate. He nodded to MacInnis, who was examining a blighted plant and did not question him, and went through the gate into the Earth garden.

No one was there. Craig buried the torch under a rose bush and returned to his work, touching as he did so the bulge in the waistband of his trousers where he had sewn the little knife.

38

Later that day, Dr. Khoory came into the Kossar garden with a black satchel. "I would like you to work somewhere else—over there will do—for a few minutes," he said to Craig. He opened the satchel and took out a light face-mask, a pair of heavy gloves, and a small magnetic key; put on the mask and gloves; unlocked one of the big plastiglass specimen cases and, somewhat gingerly, slid the door open; squatted and peered at the gray fungus; took a plastiglass box, a scalpel, and a forceps out of the satchel; delicately sliced some fleshy protuberances from the plant and dropped them into the box; closed and

locked the specimen case; dropped the key in the satchel; shut and sealed the box; put the scalpel, forceps, mask and gloves into a bag; sealed the bag; put everything in the satchel; stood up and started for the gate.

Craig: "Doctor?"

The fat man hesitated and then turned affably to Craig.

Craig: "Did you notice that someone had been tampering with that lock?"

Dr. Khoory turned without a word and hurried back to the specimen case. When he faced Craig again, his expression was grim. "I think you are right. How did you come to notice?"

Craig: "Someone had been trampling the borders there." He pointed to the spot where he had found the torch. "Doctor, may I ask you, what is that plant?"

Dr. Khoory: "You may ask, but I shall not tell you. . . . Or perhaps I shall. Curiosity is the hunger of Reason, you know. That plant is of a species that belongs to no known genus; it is literally *sui generis*. It is usually called 'Leper's Tongue.' It is—or used to be—found only on Kossar, but no other plant on Kossar or anywhere else is like it; its genetic structure is very strange, almost nonchromosomal. It is a poison, a vesicant, an intoxicant, a euphoriant, a hallucinogen.

"It is the source of squeed. It is the source also of one of the new punishment-drugs. It is the source of three aphrodisiac substances. It is grown as a kind of crop by two of the Proprietors. Fortunately, it is difficult and dangerous to grow. Her Ladyship has asked the High Council to ban it but has always been refused. I have been, so far as my poor powers allow, doing some research with it. Hence these specimens. Her Ladyship would like me to find a blight or a destructive specific of some kind. I have had no success. The lecture is over for today." He started toward the gate.

Craig: "So you believe, Doctor, that this is an alien species transplanted to Kossar?"

Dr. Khoory: "You take my meaning. But from where? It has been transplanted *to* a few other worlds *from* Kos-sar. But every plant of this species in the universe has been traced, generation by generation, back to this cape, here, where you and I are standing. Her Ladyship's late father sold spores to other Proprietors. As to the lock—the culprit will announce himself sooner or later. He will identify himself as God."

39

The Lady: "You look so ridiculous, gasping and spluttering like that."

Craig: "If your ladyship succeeds in drowning me, I won't be much further use."

The Lady: "That's true. Women *are* at a disadvantage when it comes to necrophilia. But I was getting tired of you anyway. You cloy. You do have talent, though. What I might do is put out your eyes and let you replace Blind Will in the PPC; he's getting old. We'd see how long your tenderness lasts."

Craig thought of the tan-skinned young slaves he had seen and Black Weeden in the PPC "doing" ten women a day. "PPC?"

The Lady: "Planned Parenthood Center. It's in the Clinic over by the wall."

Craig: "I think I understand. Except, why put out Will's eyes, your ladyship?"

The Lady: "Oh, we didn't put out *his* eyes. He blew them out repairing a machine or something. We had—lost the slave who was there before, and this seemed like a job

a blind man could do. But it would help to be blind, I should think: most of the slave women are homely. . . . You close your eyes when you're kissing anything, anyway; you're so romantic. Meanwhile, get up there on the rock."

Craig obeyed.

The Lady: "Lie back. Close your eyes."

Craig obeyed. He heard the quick sough as her body left the water to join him. His bright lids were shadowed. He waited for her descent. She seemed to pause above him. He opened one eye. Her face was just above his. She was frowning down at him like a child trying to read a grownup's book.

"Close your eyes!" she snapped.

He closed his eye. A few drops of cool water were falling from her mane onto his face. But one drop was warm. It fell on his upper lip. Unbelievably, he stretched up the tip of his tongue and tasted it. It was salt, the salt of Earth, not the bitumen of the Kossar sea. He felt a swift, feathery kiss on each eyelid.

Then: "Damn your eyes!" and she was her usual self.

40

Something in the fat man's manner as he bobbed slowly across the Earth garden warned Craig that the news was bad.

Craig: "You may as well start with the worst, Doctor."

Dr. Khoory: "I am not sure how bad it really is. Her Ladyship has an idea."

Craig waited stonily.

The Doctor: "There is a slave-woman at the PPC—at the Clinic—who has put up a fight and broken Blind Will's arm. Blind Will is—"

Craig interrupted quietly, "I know who Blind Will is. And what happens to me?"

Dr. Khoory's whole mass seemed to wobble apologetically. "You are to take over Blind Will's duties—only with this one female, I believe, but even of that I am not sure. . . . It is a most peculiar notion the Lady has generated. She is in an alien mood, a frightened mood. I do not understand it. Or more precisely, I try not to understand it. . . . Her ladyship is to watch. She would like to inspect your work, she says. I was to tell you that."

Craig: "Was there anything about—about my eyes?"

Dr. Khoory: "How did you know? If you fail in your assignment—and the slave is a *most* determined young female we bought recently from a neighbor—you are to be . . . blinded. Please understand, this—this is not to my liking."

Craig: "Nor to mine. And if I succeed?"

Dr. Khoory: "If you succeed, her ladyship will 'think about it.' Incidentally, if you fail, the slave-woman will be executed. It is true, we cannot have—"

Craig: "You can skip that, Doctor. And if I succeed?"

Dr. Khoory: "Oh, then she will be pregnant. She will be safe, of course. We are not reptiles. . . . That works in your favor, of course. You might explain that to the slave-woman, if she lets you."

Craig: "It does work in my favor, Doctor, but that was not the point of it. The point of it was to prevent me from sacrificing myself nobly for this woman, thus spoiling the fun. I'm flattered in a way. Tell me, Doctor, suppose I succeed in the immediate sense *but* this woman doesn't get pregnant."

Dr. Khoory: "Very improbable, unless your sperm

count is unusually poor. The slave will ovulate at the right time. I see to that."

Craig: "You couldn't add a little aphrodisiac to whatever it is you give her?"

Dr. Khoory: "She has already had the regular injection, you see. If I had known . . ."

Craig: "*Si la vieillesse savait, si la jeunesse pouvait.* And when is this festival to take place?"

Dr. Khoory: "Now."

Craig: "Now. . . . No time for me to dress up pretty, to buy a posy, to put a dab of some sense-stirring perfume behind each ear? Very well. My self will suffice. 'Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him Eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves.' Let us proceed to the treadmill."

Dr. Khoory: "I could give *you* a small dose of a mild aphrodisiac. Fear, you know, sometimes—"

Craig: "My dear Doctor, her ladyship, a considerable scientist in her own right, has discovered that fear seems to have quite the opposite effect on me. This bravado you see in me extends—all the way down."

The Clinic reeked of brute-force antisepsis; it was shabby and grim and (doubtless as a consequence, Craig thought) almost without patients. The "Planned Parenthood Center" consisted of three squalid little rooms on the second floor: a waiting room, in which an uncomfortable overseer sat guarding three wretched-looking female slaves ("I'll try, Doctor, but you're asking a lot," said Craig in a stage whisper, pointing to the overseer); an examination room, which was empty; and what must be *the* room.

The Doctor held the door of the third room open for Craig, who stepped briskly inside, rubbing his hands.

The Lady sat on a folding chair beside the door, dressed in the gray military tunic and jodhpurs in which Craig had first seen her at the spaceport, and fingering a

small, neat stun-gun. Opposite her, in what little was left of a slave-garment, stood a diminutive, taut, black-haired girl with raging hazel eyes. Under the grimy window was a grimy cot and on the wall next to the door was a small mirror. Otherwise, nothing: the room was featureless.

The Lady looked up at Craig. Her jaw was set.

Craig returned her gaze.

The Lady: "Smitty . . ." Whatever else she had planned to say, she discarded; that decision was visible in a single, soundless working of the throat.

Craig, for one second of wild calculation, thought of seizing on that flash of misery or shame and appealing to her for mercy, crying, "No, no, I do not love you, I only serve you. Please let us off!" But he did not trust his guess. He dared not drop his bravado. He said cheerfully, "Good afternoon, your ladyship. I hope there's room for us all in the bridal suite. You wouldn't care to move that chair outside and just sit with your ladyship's ear pressed tightly against the door? No? I was afraid not. Doctor, will you do the honors?" Craig beamed at the slave-girl.

Dr. Khoory stared at Craig and then slowly produced a folded document from his pocket. "O-P-three-one-three-three-six, Marina Kress, nineteen, Kossar-born of slave mother; meet John Smith."

Craig: "M-S-four-three-nine-eight-five, thirty-one, Terran."

Dr. Khoory: "John Smith, meet Marina."

Craig held out his hand to the slave-girl. She spit out a curse like an animal's cry and raked his forearm with her nails. The Lady uttered a sound between a gasp and a laugh. Craig held his hand out steadily and watched the blood well up in the scratches.

Dr. Khoory: "I have duties elsewhere, your ladyship. Forgive me." He disappeared.

Craig lowered his hand and stood with his arms relaxed at his sides. "Marina," he said softly. "Oh, you poor child!"

She had started for his face, her hands like claws. His last words seemed to reach her and stop her just before her nails reached his undefended eyes. He had managed to keep his eyes open. She drew back, puzzled. Her full black brows trembled; her eyes searched his face.

He looked at the young face distorted with fear and hopeless anger; the rictus like a hurt animal's; and three freckles, like a small child's, on the bridge of the little nose. Pity for this trapped, shamed youngster, stripped so casually of her dignity and fighting with such futile bravery to clutch it back to her, overwhelmed him. He blinked, and tears started down his face.

She looked at him wonderingly. "Are you the man that's going to do me?" she asked. "Because if you're not, I'm sorry I hurt you." Her voice was hoarse, exhausted.

Craig fought back a terrifying impulse to reassure her. "I don't know what's going to happen to us," he said slowly. "I promise you I won't do anything to you that you don't want me to do."

She studied him. "Are you a slave?"

"Of course." He looked down at his stained clothing.

"You don't talk like a slave."

"That's because I haven't started to think like a slave yet," he explained. "I was captured only—not so long ago."

"That's why you sound like my mother. She was a lady from Earth. But she was captured." The slave-girl thought for a moment. "I was very angry before."

"You certainly were. You were wonderful."

"I felt good, then. But now . . . I don't know."

"What don't you know?"

She reflected. "This is going to be very confusing."

"I'll try to understand."

"I—I'm not a cherry, you know. I've been done before."

"I knew that."

"You did?"

"Oh, yes. Because your dress is torn, and I could see those funny little white lines on your belly. Like cracks in a dish, only white. You get those in childbirth."

"You're right!" she said admiringly. "That's when I got them." Then she frowned. "But if you knew I'd already had a baby, why didn't you just grab me, you know? Why did you cry?"

"For the same reason you didn't just lie down on that cot."

"But you don't *know* my reason. I didn't tell you yet."

"I think I do know it, Marina," said Craig and went on slowly, thinking his way. "It was because he was blind. He couldn't even *see* you. He couldn't see *you*. . . . So it didn't matter *who* you were. That meant that *you* didn't matter. . . . You weren't *you* any more. . . ."

"That's right!" The hoarse little voice dropped in awe. "You're wonderful. That's what I was thinking."

"It was a matter of principle," said Craig.

"That's right! It was a matter of principle. I was afraid for a minute you were going to say it was the other reason."

Craig was surprised. "What other reason?"

"Oh, many times when the women have been done, they try to kill the baby, you know? Inside. Because they say they don't want to bring a baby into the world if it's going to be a slave. But *I* say that's silly."

"It is," said Craig.

"A slave could escape—or something," the girl said, looking apprehensively at the Lady. "But if he wasn't even born, he couldn't *ever* escape. That's even less of a chance, if you see what I mean. I always need to tell them, *I'm* a slave and I'd rather be that than not even be there at all."

"I see just what you mean," said Craig.

"I was afraid you thought I was going to give that other reason, and I wanted you to know I'm really too sensible for that, even though I do get excited at times."

"I think you're very intelligent."

"Sometimes I am. Listen," said the girl, "what did you mean before when you talked about what would happen to *us*? What will happen to *you* if you don't do me?"

"They said they would put out my eyes."

Her own great hazel eyes grew round. "Oh, how awful! Is that what happened to the other fellow, some woman wouldn't let him, and they did that? The poor old man!"

"No, no. With him it was something else. An accident. No," said Craig, "this is a *new* idea somebody had."

"Well, then, you'd better do me right away." She came close and whispered, "Does she *have* to be in the room?"

"She says she does," said Craig in a low voice, "and she owns the two of us."

"All right, then," the girl grumbled. She beckoned. "Excuse me." She stood on tiptoe, put her mouth next to Craig's ear, and whispered, "Some people have no manners." Then she held Craig by both ears and put her mouth against his.

His arms went very gently about her.

After a while, the girl said, "Let's sit down, huh?" They went to the cot, and Craig removed her shreds of clothing. Then they kissed again, and the girl turned and put her feet up on the cot and said, "Oh you're so—tender!"

The Lady said icily, "You needn't continue."

Craig looked around at her; she was white-faced and her hand on the stunner was quivering.

Marina sat up and gathered her clothes in front of her as if the Lady had just come in to the room and surprised them. "Excuse *me*," the slave-girl said, her temper reviving, "and maybe I shouldn't say this, but I don't think it's right to make him come in here to do me and then stop us at the—the last minute. Besides, do you want him to get his eyes put out?" Glancing sideways at the object of her solicitude, she saw Craig unconsciously passing his hand over his eyes, and with extraordinary quickness added to

the Lady, "Or was it *your* idea to put his eyes out? Maybe you'll have his eyes put out now if he *does* do me." She slipped her arm protectively around Craig's shoulders. "Well, your lady, which do you want?"

The Lady stood up, and looked for a long time at the couple on the cot. She said almost inaudibly, "I'll wait outside."

"Excuse me," said the slave-girl.

The Lady stopped at the door.

"Is that a promise you won't put out his eyes or anything? I don't want to get him in trouble."

The Lady said, "I promise." The door closed behind her.

Marina said, "You know, I don't think she knows her own mind. Well, it doesn't matter," she went on comfortably. "We know *ours*."

41

Marina: "I guess I'd better be going now. There are those other three waiting." She sat up, took his right hand in both of hers, and pressed it to her face, looking at him with her head on one side.

"You're very nice. Tender." She leaned over him conspiratorially and whispered, "If they let me name it, what name do you want me to give it?"

Craig whispered: "Marina."

Marina: "If it's a boy? *She* called you 'Smitty.' "

Craig: "Call it 'Craig'—after a man I used to know."

Marina frowned. "It's a funny name. . . . Unless it's yours." She got up, arranged her tatters as best she could, looked at herself in the mirror, grimaced, came over and

pecked Craig on the nose, paused at the door to say, "If they decide to breed me again next year, I'll see you. 'Bye, now," and tried to march out, almost colliding with the Lady, who was coming in.

The Lady said to her in a flat voice, "There's no overseer out there now. I sent them all away. Report to Doctor Khoory downstairs. He'll give you instructions."

Marina turned to Craig: "Bye, now, again." She ran out.

The Lady slammed the door shut and locked it. Craig began to get up. The Lady turned on him venomously: "*Get back on that bed!*" Craig fell back. The Lady wrenched at the neck-fastening of her tunic and tore the garment from her body, kicked her boots across the room, ripped the breeches off her legs, plucked off her underclothing, and flung herself on him.

He rolled aside, stumbled to his feet, absorbed a vicious backhand across the jaw, picked the tunic off the floor with a swipe of the hand, and wedged it into place covering the mirror; then he walked back to the cot and lay down submissively. "Or does your ladyship *want* to put on a peep-show for the overseers?"

She raised herself on hands and knees to look down at him. Her eyes flicked over her shoulder to the mirror and back to his. "Oh, Smitty, you dirty dog," she crowed, laughter exploding in her eyes and mouth. "You knew what it was all the while!" She pounded his chest with her fists. Her loosened hair spilled into his face.

"Oh, Smitty, you dirty, dirty dog! You're nothing after all but a—a gross, tumescent coward with a line." The Lady stretched like a tawny animal. "There you were, being *so* tender, *so* considerate, while you crawled into her poor little body." She laughed and yawned. "You almost had me fooled. You know what your tenderness is? It's a defense. Because you're frightened. You caress what scares you. So I think I'll keep scaring you, now I know you aren't real."

Craig looked at her sadly. "You poor girl—" he began.

"Oh, no! Not the tenderness again!" she wailed incredulously.

Craig: "You poor girl. Of *course* tenderness is a defense against the world. What did you *think* it was, some kind of perversion? And what a childhood you must have had, you poor darling, to think that the best defense against the world is a good attack!"

"How dare you!" She sat up and glared at him. "Call me 'my lady'! You be respectful, slave. I'm your owner." She struck him very softly across the mouth. "Oh, you just wait," she said.

It was a reprieve, but an uncertain one—in its way a shocking and exquisite interval.

The water-play was now less frequent, and even when Craig did get to the Bay, it was more difficult for him to make extended explorations under the foam around the promontory; the Lady was distinctly experimental, like a child whose mother is away.

In the Earth garden, however, MacInnis was becoming more discursive than ever.

Craig: "Have you ever been off Kossar, Mister MacInnis?"

MacInnis: "Off-world? Once. Only once. Down to Terra." (It was, Craig had found, a sign of conservative temperament everywhere among the stars to use the phrase "*down to Terra*" or "*down on Earth*.") "It was interesting, I don't say it wasn't, but I have what I want up here. And whenever they went from one space to another, I got sick to my stomach; had the runs for days, too."

Craig: "Does Kossar have more than one spaceport?"

MacInnis: "Just one. One's enough. People looked happy on Terra, at least what I saw, which wasn't much, I admit. Everybody here says that Terra is a miserable place. Greedy, nobody caring about anybody, all that. *I* didn't see it." He dropped his voice. "We have all these sayings, 'Masterless man, lost soul,' 'As many is to few, the cruelty of the many is to the cruelty of the few,' and so forth. I used to know a lot of 'em. *I* didn't see it. *I* didn't see it. . . . We're lucky to have a good owner here,

but that's just luck, you know. I've seen things in some other places. . . . She's a bit headstrong; *you* know that."

Craig nodded.

MacInnis continued in a low voice: "But that's youth. She deserves it, *I* say."

Craig: "Oh?"

MacInnis: "Never saw such a scaredy little child, when her father was alive. He used to make her go round with him. She used to hide. There was a whole year she didn't talk, after she had to watch him disciplining. . . . She was seven years old. I never heard he laid a finger on *her*, though. I give him that. Now you take Sir Osman over there—" jerking his head in a direction Craig judged to be away from the Bay. "He's another story. You never saw him. He comes around sometimes to sell us slaves. He sells us his troublemakers, if you ask me. Trouble-makers. I'm not criticizing 'em, though. . . . That's why the High Council won't have more than one spaceport. They're wise, as things stand." He looked around and resumed his normal voice. "We ought to be working."

Craig: "Is the spaceport far from here, Mister MacInnis?"

MacInnis looked at him closely. "Don't be getting silly ideas, boy. It's been tried."

"What's been tried?" asked Craig innocently.

MacInnis looked around: "Why, escaping. Isn't that what you had in mind? They've tried it through Blind-marsh Fen. On foot. They've worked up the shore to the ore-port, and hid in the wagons—got all the way to the mines, and then tried to cross the hills into the Plantations, or tried to get down the Mulbrach into the Quern. They've worked over to the Quern down here and tried to hide on the donkey barges. Never heard of one getting away. Never. And most of 'em saved the executioner the trouble. The High Council wants to see the body, as you can understand. It's not enough to know the poor fool has died trying. The Council has skimmers with claws on the

front to pick up the body. What I said was, I never *heard* of one getting away, even as far as the spaceport. But if any *did* get away . . . the likes of me wouldn't have heard of it, would they?"

Craig: "I wasn't talking about escaping, Mister MacInnis."

MacInnis: "Neither was I, boy."

44

*The man who has no legs is studying
The flight of birds. They ride the rising air,
Bank, and redress, deciding with a wing
Lazily canted, when to light and where.
Embossed on the bright emptiness, they stand—
(The loping hare is far beneath the claw)—
And, pinions high, stoop to the sunny land. . . .
The cripple said, "The body makes the Law."*

*The captive said, "The Law replaces time."
The sun retires from this day in vain;
It is a captive; when it starts to climb
The kindling skies, this day begins again.
Tomorrow dies; last year is nearly dead.
"The mind is its own place," the blind man said.*

"Funny," said Craig to himself, "I can only think in Earth images. . . . Earth. Earth."

He was sleeping across the foot of the Lady's bed when the buzzer erupted on the small audio-communicator in the headboard. It must be early dawn; a paleness was creeping into the window curtains; Craig could see, as a kind of latent glory, the girl's skin when she stretched up to press the switch.

"Lady Morgan here."

"This is Doctor Khoory." The Doctor's flutings were noticeably tremulous. "I thought your Ladyship should know. We have a squeed case, a bad fugue, and he's loose in the Castle. I suggest you lock your doors."

The Lady: "They're locked, of course. Who is it?"

Dr. Khoory: "The gardener, what's his name?"—Craig held his breath—"Duplain."

The Lady: "I'll be right down. Give me thirty seconds to dress. Where are you?"

Dr. Khoory: "Please don't, your ladyship."

The Lady: "*Where are you?*"

Dr. Khoory: "In the guard-captain's office. Your ladyship, it will only hamper the guards if we have to worry about your—"

The Lady: "Oh, stop clucking, Khoory-Khoory! I'll bring my bodyguard here, if he can get his poor old carcass in motion." She laughed and switched the communicator off, switched the room light on, windmilled her legs from under the covers, slid down and kicked Craig accurately in the stomach with her bare foot, and said, "Ouch! Get up." Then she leaped up in a whirl of gleaming skin and, in thirty seconds, was dressed in black cov-

cralls, belt, and boots, and armed with a hand stun-gun. Craig, with only his slave-trousers and work boots to put on, was ready no sooner.

The Lady: "Smitty, you're getting old and slow. I think I'll retire you to stud. Come on!"

Craig followed her through the apartments.

"You take the lift-car," she said, "and I'll take the stairs." But as he ran toward the waiting lift-car, the tube door slid shut and the car hissed downward.

Craig: "Somebody's down there somewhere. A guard, or Duplain."

The Lady: "Then we'll get below *him*, whoever he is."

They pelted down the stairs. The Lady said, "If it's—a guard—I'll fire the—dumb—bastard—for coming up—like that when—for all he knew—he could get—his stupid face—rayed off—as he came out—of the lift."

Craig: "It's not a guard. Look."

They had reached ground level. The lift-car was there, standing open and empty.

The Lady: "Somebody called it on this level, and then ran away when he heard us coming. . . . *That* door shouldn't be open!" She pointed to a door leading out into the open air. They arrived at it together and went out together, sideways, back to back. But there was no ambush by the door.

The Lady: "Neatly done."

Craig: "Over there." He had seen a shadowy movement some meters away by the corner of a shed.

The Lady: "Right you are."

They raced toward the shed. A torch beam wavered around them and then fixed on them. There was a multiple bellowing of "Halt!" They stood stock-still.

It was a squad of guards, strung out as a cordon. Several aimed their laser-carbines at Craig.

The Lady roared across the open space like a sergeant: "Ground arms! I said, ground arms! Lower those weapons, you morons, or I'll have you flayed." Sleet succeeded

to thunder: "Ah, that's better. What were you going to do, you heroes? Burn up an expensive slave—who was standing a few centimeters away from *me*?"

Craig murmured, "Two hundred and ten credits."

The Lady glanced at him with a laugh on her flushed face and replied softly and swiftly: "You know, Smitty? I think I'm getting my money's worth." She resumed her discourse to the guards: "Now—when you baboons happened along, we had just spotted our friend there, ducking behind that shed. Do you think some of you could practice your heroism in that direction? And try not to burn one another up while you're looking."

She led Craig to the guard-room and into the captain's office. Dr. Khoory stood with the Officer of the Watch, staring at a large plan of the Castle grounds that covered one wall. The Lady explained curtly what had happened and, preempting the captain's desk chair, sat down to wait for developments; she motioned to Craig to lie down on the bench along the wall; he complied, and she apologized solemnly to the officer: "He put in a long, long evening, the poor thing." She turned to Dr. Khoory. "You said it was a bad fugue?"

Dr. Khoory: "I judge it to be so, my lady. The first reports were the usual ones with squeed: man talking wildly, boasting of mysterious powers, trying to walk through walls. But it still could have been several other things. About an hour ago, we got the indicia: the omnipotence, but also the loss of boundary—he began to talk as if other people were parts of him, or excretions or emanations of his. He was roaming the slave-quarters at the time, chanting things, and creating a very satisfying uproar—it stimulated the oceanic imaginings, you know. A textbook case, and a bad one. He attempted to kill several female slaves—minor wounds, actually, and some he just tried to *deny* to death—but what does worry me,

your ladyship, is that they were all fair-haired slave-women."

The Lady: "Would you say he had another four or five hours of it in him?"

Dr. Khoory: "Easily that, my lady. And meanwhile, the animal foreconscious will protect him—they get more cunning as it goes on, harder to catch."

The dawn advanced without any developments except a welter of contradictory reports—simultaneous sightings in scattered places, voices and rustlings heard that were obviously the mere sexual prowlings of the Castle's inmates.

The sun over the Bay of Treglast had turned from rose to yellow, and from yellow to white, when a young guard dashed in with the news that he and several others had seen a distant figure step queerly off the promontory cliff into—it had to be—the Bay.

The keenness returned to her ladyship's face. "Show us exactly where!" she said.

The Officer of the Watch remained at his post; the Lady, the Doctor, and Craig followed the guard to the brim of the headland. A knot of guards, overseers, and miscellaneous Castle personnel stood at the edge, pointing and chattering and passing a pair of field glasses back and forth.

The Lady: "I tell you, Doctor, running Treglast is like herding geese. . . . Stand aside! Move! Jump! That's better. . . . Now, young man, show me where all this happened." She listened with narrowed eyes. "And while you came to tell me," she said as he finished, "all my *guards* and *overseers* here could think of to do was stand up here and *talk*."

Craig: "My Lady, I think a morning swim would refresh me."

The Lady: "Your request is granted. I'm told you are

very good at diving, swimming underwater, and the like. Proceed. The rest of us will watch from here—it seems.”

Craig set off at a jog trot for the long, ladderlike flight of stairs down the cliff-face that the Lady had had built for their convenience. . . .

The slanting rays of Kossar's sun were almost all reflected off the surface, so that the green depths of the Bay were dimmer and seemed deeper than they had ever seemed before. As Craig's eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, he began to make out the floor of the Bay near the rock-shelf. He swam underwater, bobbed up with eyes closed to relieve and reinflate his lungs, and forced himself under again. . . .

His limbs were beginning to feel half detached from him. He knew he was dangerously close to cramping. He was now well beyond where he had been able to go in his surreptitious searchings.

An unnatural shape caught his eye, an excrescence on the steep slope where the rock-shelf dropped off into the deepest part of the Bay. He rose to the surface, prepared himself, and kicked himself downward toward the shape.

It was the body of the saturnine gardener. From the look of him, Duplain had struck the face of the cliff or a rock on the shelf before the water had retarded his fall. And having plummeted in, the body or its clothing had caught on a projecting corner of fractured rock.

Something else plucked at the sleeve of Craig's brain; he looked carefully around—and consciously saw what his eye had learned the habit of seeking: a black patch among the greenish shadows: what might be the mouth of a tunnel or cave. He went to the surface and descended, this time toward the black hole in the rock. It was—an entrance to something. But there was no light or time to enter it.

Nor did he dare to leave the corpse for others to bring up; what he had seen, others might see. He chanced one

more trip to the surface and swam back to the shattered body—it would not come free, the poor devil would not come free—wrenched it loose, and living off his last oxygen towed it to the surface. As he broke out into the air, he grasped the corpse's clothing, ripped away a pocket and wedged the piece of cloth into a crack in the rock face. . . .

The Lady said in a low voice: "I'm going back to bed, Smitty. I feel—mortal. And Smitty?"

Craig: "Yes, your ladyship."

The Lady: "I think you could use a rest. In, not across."

Craig: "I could, your ladyship. Thank you, your ladyship. I, too, think of Duplain, suspecting that he was not God, as he fell. . . . Would your ladyship permit me to show her the opposite of death?"

46

*Sleeping across the foot of Circe's bed
Hadn't prepared Odysseus for Calypso.
The moly sprig had kept him—till he fled—
From turning to a swine; then, facto ipso,
His very humanness had got him caught
In that unusual grotto on Ogygia.
He thought of home and wept, but then he thought
Of the fair goddess—and her callipygia.*

*A various-minded man, to tell the truth,—
Old Homer oversimplified—and Beauty
Always renewed the randy dreams of youth. . . .*

He also heard the bugle-voice of Duty.

He left the lower, chose the higher good.

I sit and wonder how the rascal could.

47

Several nights passed before Craig slept in the slave-quarters again; and on his first night back in the dingy cubicle, it rained. "Good," said Craig aloud to the window, against which the drops ticked gently. The rain was light but would suffice to keep the less conscientious guards inside. Even on the worst nights, of course, there was a good deal of wandering about by free-men making stealthy use of the slave-women, but they were anxious to avoid one another and therefore should be easy enough to avoid. Craig carefully pulled out the stitches that held the little knife in the waistband of his trousers and worked the knife around to where he could free it quickly.

Craig's room was on the lowest tier. The window was a small one up near the low, cracked ceiling of the chamber; it looked out at ankle-height on a drab courtyard used for the delivery of supplies and for the infrequent drilling of the guards. Craig stood on his toes and surveyed the terrain. No one was in sight. The rain slicked the pavement; mist put a soft nimbus around the few outdoor lights. Barefoot, Craig slipped out into the night.

Hurrying along close to the face of the tower, Craig was almost out of the courtyard when he sensed, and then saw, a furtive figure crossing it from the direction of the guard-room; if it was a guard, he was not where he should have been, for he carefully avoided looking in

Craig's direction and went on his way, head down, toward the door Craig had just come out by.

Craig made his way between sheds and bases of towers, and reached the gate of the Earth garden without further encounters. The gate was supposed to be locked, but during work he had wedged a pebble into the ancient lock and now had no difficulty opening it. He closed the gate soundlessly behind him, stood motionless listening for any stir in the enclosure, and, hearing none, ran to the rose bush where he had buried the torch. He dug with his hands.

It was still there. He wiped it on his clothing and snapped it on for a second to test it. It seemed to be at full charge, throwing a clean, steady beam. He snapped it off quickly.

From the Earth garden to the stairs on the cliff-face was the most unfrequented part of his route, but the darkest: there were few outdoor lights, and none at all near the cliff; he could not use the torch directly under her ladyship's windows; and, with the rain clouds blotting out the stars, Kossar's moonless sky was absolutely black. He stepped along cautiously, listening.

He was nearer the edge of the cliff than he had thought: the pounding of fear shook him for an instant as he realized that he might, with another step or two, have plunged to a death like Duplain's. He made his way, stopping between steps to feel ahead of him with his toes, like a blind man robbed of his radar-cane, to the stair-head.

In the blackness, the stairs seemed somehow to sway horribly. He felt that he was climbing a rope ladder being shaken from above; but he reached the foot of the cliff safely and sat trembling for a moment in the cold, unseen spume.

Here, beneath the overhang of the cliff, he could use his torch, and he shone it around methodically for a moment, orienting himself to repeat in darkness the swim he

had once taken in the dawn. Then he thrust the torch into his trousers, untied the drawstring and retied it through the loop of the torch handle, and pushed out into the black water.

When he estimated that he had swum the distance, he twisted the torch up through his trouser-fly and shone it around, laughing aloud at the image. He was, however, only a little more than halfway. He turned off the light, closed his fly over the torch, and swam on.

The next check with the torch struck him with dismay, until he realized that he had overshot; and swimming slowly back, he came after a few seconds to where the tatter of Duplain's clothing dangled from the cracked rock.

He trod water for a while, recouping his strength and reconstructing in his mind the angle from the marker to the underwater opening. Then he opened his fly, filled his lungs, and swam downward. Fishing out the torch and switching it on, he kicked his way to the hole and pointed the beam into it. There was a tunnel, more or less round, nearly two meters in diameter; he could see that it slanted upward into the great mass of the headland.

The strain in his chest was building rapidly. He knew that if he went up the tunnel and found no air-filled cave, he would not be able to return. A sudden image of straw-colored skin and golden hair shook him; he had no desire to escape now, none; and he knew he was going to die escaping. He kicked and entered the tunnel.

Aiming the torch with one hand and using the other as well as his feet to propel him along the rough rock, he made his way quickly up the slope of the passage. His lungs were burning with strain. The pulse drummed in his head. He saw that the passage was narrowing around him; ahead of him it seemed to close down to a hole too small for a man; and still his torch showed no surface ahead.

He had come too far now: he could not get back to the surface outside. His vision began to fail; the swirling

green beam of the torch seemed to wane; it pulsed, brighter and dimmer, with the throb in his temples. He was in the narrow part of the passage now, and still moving forward. He felt his control of his throat weakening; in an instant, he would expel the exhausted air from his lungs and breathe in the water. The bubbles gushed from his nose and mouth; he struggled not to inhale. And as he lost the struggle, the torch slipped from his fingers, the beam swung down, and he broke surface into air—vile-smelling, filled with choking spray, but air.

He held on to the sides of the tunnel and simply breathed. The dangling torch illuminated only his crotch, but he lacked the strength to grasp and aim it.

When he recovered control over his body, he hoisted himself far enough out of the water to get the torch above the surface, and he swept the beam ahead of him. About two meters above, the passage seemed to open out, and a distance beyond that, Craig could see faintly what looked like the roof of a cavern.

48

Sitting on the cavern floor, Craig turned out the torch to conserve its charge and rested with his arms around his knees and his forehead on the knees. He dared not lie back; he might, in his exhaustion, fall asleep and not wake until he had been missed at the Castle.

He roused himself, switched the torch on, and stood up to examine the cave. Its floor was almost level; its roof was about three meters high; it was roughly circular in shape, about fifteen meters wide, with vertical walls. It was no natural formation. It was a man-made chamber.

He swung the beam slowly around. Either there was another length of tunnel, or a door of some sort in the cavern wall, or else somewhere in this chamber was what he had come to find—Black Weeden's arsenal.

It was in this chamber, over against the wall: a neat stack of gray, strangely shaped packages. He went over. Each package contained a weapon; he was sure of that; the bag around it was made of a variety of plastic—or was it animal membrane?—that he had never seen before; there were no markings, no seams, no opening; the membrane was remarkably tough and flexible. Craig took one off the stack—it weighed perhaps two kilograms—and sat down to open it, raising his knees and propping the torch against his hams. He slid the knife out of the trouser waistband and tried to cut into the membrane. At first, he could not even dig the point in, but he discovered that there was one direction in which the blade sliced in easily. He peeled off the slit membrane and examined the gleaming metal device.

It was a gun, a projectile weapon, such as MacInnis had said Black Weeden used. It was too long for a handgun, rather too short for butt-to-shoulder marksmanship. The stock, in fact, was shaped very poorly for the human shoulder. Craig could not figure out the sighting system at all; there were devices attached to the barrel, but not things one could look along or through. It was different in design from any present or past weapon Craig knew about.

One thing was obvious: Black Weeden had not procured these guns; he had found them. They had been left here—it could have been a century before—by the men who had drilled the tunnel and excavated the cave.

Why had they done so? The Castle would have been as safe. They could not have been enemies of the Castle; it would have been impossible to scoop out so much of the insides of the promontory without the Castle's knowing

about it. The cavern—Craig's mind raced—must have been here *before* the Castle.

(Time to go back.)

But what sort of men were these, who had cut their way into the heart of the cape, stocked it with weapons, and disappeared? For one thing, they would have had to be very oddly shaped men. . . . An idea forced itself into Craig's consciousness.

He looked for calibrations and markings on the gun. There were some words, etched into the stock in an alphabet unfamiliar to him: ugly, jagged characters. On the mysterious sighting mechanism, there were calibration marks and, next to them, numbers—but not the numerals Craig knew. And that was not canny at all. Craig was sure that nowhere in the known universe was there a civilized community that did not use Earth's systems of numeration, Arabic decimal and Standard binary.

He looked again at the stock, and certainty came. These were not human weapons. Somewhere in the galaxy there was—or there had been—a nonhuman, nonhumanoid, technologically advanced civilization. And everyone knew there was no such thing.

He had to go back.

He rose, put the naked weapon on the top of the stack, looked about for ammunition, and found a pile of smaller, regularly shaped gray packages that he was sure must be the bullets for the guns. He made a rapid circuit of the walls and found no door or passage except the one through which he had come in. He quickly examined the surface of the rock; his knowledge of mining was more or less confined to the archaic methods used under the hills above Blindmarsh, but he could think of no Terran techniques that might leave a surface quite like this; for some reason, the word "mandible" came into his head.

He put the knife securely back in his waistband; picked up the slit bag he had taken off the gun, filled it with air,

and twisted the neck tight to make an auxiliary air supply of about two breaths; filled his lungs, turned off the torch, tucked it into his fly, and lowered himself into the tunnel.

49

Exhausted as he was, he could not sleep. He lay naked on his cot in the slave-quarters, staring at the ceiling. A wan light—but to Craig it now seemed bright and warm, like a hearth—filtered in through the little window, and the rain ticked away on the plastiglass.

For a few hours—or perhaps they were minutes—he considered throwing himself on Dr. Khoory's mercy, telling him of his discovery, and pleading with him to let the Earth authorities know. It was certainly important enough news—that Man had a rival in the galaxy. And not only important, but bad. For the only discovered artifacts of this Other civilization were weapons; military weapons; military, because sportsmen and explorers did not stack large numbers of identical weapons in secret places. And because Kossar had no native fauna. A man like Khoory would recognize how trivial the keeping of one miserable Terran slave was, compared with that.

Moreover, though Craig, for all his training and prominence as a galactic diplomat—he was none other than John Craig, diplomat, miner, murderer, gardener, male concubine, village bull, masochist, a versatile fellow—had never heard of Kossar before arriving there, there was doubtless some pedantic little bureaucrat on Earth, in some great mumbling agency, who knew all about Kossar, all about slavery, all about squeed, all about weinsteinite—a man who did not even think of himself as a man but

as a desk, "the Kossar desk." But nothing had happened to Kossar. Nothing would happen. There was nothing for Khoory, or the High Council, to worry about. They could tell Earth.

Having perfected his reasoning, Craig knew his conclusion to be false. The aliens were a theory. Slavery was an institution, a peculiar interest, a precarious actuality. To the Kossarians, moreover, the notion of humanity as a bond, a claim, was severely limited. For that matter, had any ruling class ever risked its rule for the sake of "mankind"? A ruling class that would do so would not be fit to rule in the first place. The High Council of Kossar could not know that Earth, under the Liberals, had abandoned the high-spirited Palmerstonian policy of the first years in deep space.

And Craig recognized, guiltily, the source of his impulse to turn to Khoory: for all his little defiance, his lies, his Traditionalist poems, his private triumphs—and his murders—he had failed to keep John Craig alive. He was Smitty. He knew why. Soon after he had come to the Castle, he had started some sapphics, using the Earth imagery that was necessary to him—

*"Who is this that, whimpering, dies within me,
While July is chattering in the hollow
And the artemisia on the furrow
Springs like an army?"*

He had been very proud of remembering the old botanical name for wormwood—"artemisia," with its reference to the hunting goddess. But, with an impulse he had somehow not looked at at the time, he had broken off without consciously answering that question, and relieved his tensions with self-parody:

*"Who is this that rides like a young Erinys,
Musky princess, breaker of foaming horses,*

*Posting wildly, swallowing air, and keening,
Breaking my glasses?"*

This was an old, inapposite joke, from an old bawdy song—John Craig had never, of course, worn glasses—but taking glasses as a good Trad symbol of what John Craig had been, he now saw that his unconscious had tried to be frank with him. . . . That second question he *had* answered:

*"Oh! the lovely harlot, the queenly harlot,
Queen-and-harlot, whoring in high dominion!
How can time-bound man that is born of woman
Break from her magic?"*

"What?" he said aloud, "know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, is one flesh." He did not want to escape.

Yet, however slight was his chance of getting back to Earth, it was the *only* chance that this evidence of an alien presence in the galaxy would ever arrive at central human headquarters.

50

The Lady: "You look tired, Smitty. I should think you'd have had more rest than usual last night."

Craig: "I missed you, my lady." And suddenly his flippancy deserted him. He had told the truth but used the wrong tense, that was all. He felt that his precarious resolve was about to desert him, too.

She must have detected some change in his counte-

nance, and he caught a glimpse of fright in hers. But she smiled and said: "Oh, poor lad!" Then inconsequently: "Do you love music, Smitty?"

Craig: "I like it very much, your ladyship."

The Lady: "But do you love it?"

Craig: "I love it."

The Lady: "Good boy."

They went to her tower. The sitting room was charged with a daylight the color of pearls. She slipped a cartridge into the player, and they sat.

He had half expected Wagner or Hasmodeen or Werlin, something full of assertion and libidinous bawling. Instead, the gallant style of the eighteenth century swept into the chamber, like a courteous throng; not, however, the mincing puppets of some little Court; the melodies were women and men of flesh and bone. Craig did not know the piece. Mozart, he supposed. . . .

A brisk resolving cadence, and the equipment fell silent; but the Lady continued to listen for several seconds, with rapt eyes. "What a beautiful game!" she breathed at last. "It's—like playing hide-and-seek with passion." She cocked her head and studied him.

"Terran male, about thirty, highly educated, what are you thinking?" she asked severely.

Craig did not answer.

The Lady: "Did Hildegarde Skenk get good grades in school?"

Craig was startled. "She had a B-minus average, your ladyship."

The Lady laughed. "I graduated at the top of my class, Smitty. What did you take me for, a barbarian princess?"

Her ladyship had business in Port Constantine—the High Council was due to hold its regular five-day session—and for a few hours she flirted with the notion of taking Craig with her. Craig concealed his eagerness by strenuous effort: the “port” that gave the city its class-name was the spaceport.

The Lady: “Smitty, I don’t think I should take you. You’d be tempted.”

Craig: “Are there other ladies on the High Council, your ladyship?”

The Lady laughed. “No. There are some versatile gentlemen, though. But what I had in mind was the spaceport. By the way, your expression is extraordinarily ordinary, Smitty.” She sighed. “I shall have to do without your expert services for five days and five nights. I’m leaving tomorrow morning. *Kneel*, Smitty. . . . And if you’re a good boy, I’ll bring you a present.”

Craig spent most of the next day stealing. He accumulated a small supply of biscuits, a jar of jam, a crock of pâté de foie gras that a kitchen girl had stolen and hidden

in her room, the food-supplement pills MacInnis kept on his work table, the torch from under the rose bush, and a newly sharpened pruning shears. All these he put under his cot in the slave-quarters. That night, he tied them—except for the torch—into the tough gray membrane bag he had brought from the arms cache, and he made a successful trip to the cavern, bringing back three more emptied gray bags.

The following day, he asked MacInnis: "Aren't *any* of the native Kossar plants edible?"

The old gardener looked at him sadly and said nothing for several seconds. "Some are edible. None are what you might call delicacies. Some are poisonous. I would advise anyone who ate Kossar plants to take food-supplement pills, for the Terran vitamins. . . . Come into the other garden, boy, and I'll show you a few that a fellow might eat if he was damn fool enough. . . ."

After work that day, Craig approached a buxom laundry girl whose cubicle was directly above his in the slave-quarters, and who entertained one or another member of the guard detachment with rousing success almost every night. "Molly," he said shyly, "I want to ask you something."

Molly looked astonished. "Me? Oh, Johnny, you've come down in the world. Anyway, I *have* someone dropping over tonight."

Craig: "Sh-h. That's what I want to talk to you about, Molly. The ceiling of my room is the floor of yours, you know, and it isn't very thick. I can hear everything."

Molly's face hardened. "Oh, *that's* what you want. You're complaining! Well, Johnny my boy, just because you have yours in a private tower . . . I don't care *what* you hear, see?"

Craig: "I'm glad you feel that way, Molly. I knew you were a good sport. Because what I want to do is hide under your bed tonight."

Molly regarded him in awe. "You want to . . . But *why*? Is *that* what you do in the tower? You *watch*? You mean to say, there are *other* people in there with you?"

Craig looked mysterious. "If you help me out tonight, Molly, I'll tell you a few things tomorrow—well, no, I have to see somebody tomorrow and the night after—but the next night after that, I'll tell you all you want to know."

Molly: "Well, I'm not going to let you hide under my bed without you tell me *why*."

Craig: "Because these guards always bring torches, and I want a torch."

Molly: "If you think I'm going to ask a *guard* to give me his *torch* . . ."

Craig: "No, no, Molly. Why would I have to hide under the bed for that? I'll take the torch, while you're making him happy. Then when he gets up and says, 'Where's my torch?' all you have to say is, 'Why, honey, you didn't bring one tonight.' Simple? Then when he goes, I go."

Molly: "That's the silliest thing I ever heard. He'll *see* you take it."

Craig: "You're too modest, Molly. I'll bet they don't see or hear anything else."

Molly giggled. "Well—it depends on whether I'm in a good mood or not. . . . I don't like it, Johnny. I've never let anybody *listen*. It's like giving a *show*."

Craig: "But that's what I've been telling you. I hear everything anyway. What's the difference? And then in three days, I'll come up and lie on the bed and answer any questions you ask me."

It proved easier than Molly had feared; during an intermission, her friend went pattering down the hall to relieve himself, and she simply slipped the torch to Craig under the bed. Craig would have chanced leaving then, but she said, "I'm enjoying it this way. It's something

new. Do you think I'm pretty? Am I as pretty as she is? Oops, here comes Old Grumblebelly." And since she had been in a good mood, her friend accepted without argument the statement that he had not brought the torch at all. He trudged out.

Molly: "Johnny? I don't suppose you'd care to lie here a while and tell me some of those things now? Well, you're right, it *is* kind of late."

Compared with that, obtaining a ham next day was simple, a mere exercise in wheedling. Craig made another trip to the cavern at night, taking the ham and the extra torch in one bag and the other two filled with clean drinking water.

The following night, taking a large loaf of fresh-baked bread, wrapped in a gray bag, Craig went to the cavern and did not return.

53

He planned to live there long enough to allow the local pursuit to exhaust itself and the High Council's body-search to move elsewhere.

Most of the time he passes lying in total darkness, to save the torches. Now and again he descended the tunnel and slipped up to the air outside, but this he could only do at night. He discovered that by lowering himself a little way into the tunnel he could observe the light—and the diurnal cycle—on the outside.

He ate sparsely. He rationed his water, adding to it by swallowing Bay water when he went out. It was only faintly brackish. He relieved himself during the day in a

corner of the cave, and found that he became accustomed to his own effluvia much more quickly than he had learned to tolerate the smell of others' on the slave ship.

He used the pruning shears to cut some of the gray bags—amazingly tough, they were—into strips to make a harness with. He had planned to work in the darkness on some poems, but only one subject came to mind, and he could no longer cope with it: the fear seized him that he would turn back.

He was ready, if he should sense that he was depleting the oxygen in the cave, to move on earlier and risk the pursuit; but, except for his effluvia, the air seemed to become no fouler. At moments, lying still in the blackness, he thought he could feel a stir, a current. He investigated with a torch. On the ceiling, inconspicuous among the curious gouges that had suggested the image of small, incredibly powerful mandibles or claws, was a slot; and putting his palm against it, he was sure he felt a slight suction. There *must* be another opening, then, from which air was entering the cave. He dared not use up a torch looking. The cavern was vented, perhaps to opposite sides of the promontory so as to use the force of the winds.

He speculated on the beings who had carved it out: sea-dwellers or, more likely, amphibians; slender enough to get through the narrowest part of the tunnel easily; shoulderless, or jointed strangely; warlike, or at least coercive. And not native to Kossar, which had no fauna. Intruders.

He studied the weapon and found out how to load it. He discovered that one sighted by looking directly down into the rear device: its inventors must have held the butt against their chests. Shoulderless. He wondered how Black Weeden had managed.

After fourteen days—or fifteen, he was not sure—he packed one torch and the remaining biscuits, jam, and food-supplement into a bag; took down an unopened gun and two unopened bags of ammunition; harnessed the

impedimenta snugly about his back and waist; attached the other torch as before, and set out.

In his harness, he had a bad moment getting through the narrow neck of the tunnel, but arrived still in good array in the open air. It was, of course, the middle of the night.

54

Seventeen days later, gaunt, hard, and bearded, he arrived at the ore-port on the seacoast of Blindmarsh Fen.

It was an automated port, by far the best technology he had seen on Kossar. He had picked up enough from Mac-Innis and from Castle conversation to know that the workerless machinery had been brought to Kossar and was maintained there by an off-world consortium. The consortium obviously needed something better than the technology of a slave-burdened world, and the rulers of Kossar obviously would not trust their slaves near an off-world shipping complex or an off-world engineering staff. Craig stood neck-deep in the sea among the pilings of a disused wharf and watched the great scoop swing back and forth, dropping the pink weinsteinite into the red-and-gray high-prowed drone barges; the small wagons hissing into place one after the other, feeding the scoops, and rattling away empty; the filled barges slowly moving from the wharves in high bursts of green-white spray, and ponderously turning north. He had also picked up the notion somewhere that there were smelters or processing plants of some sort in Kossar's north polar region that used some natural energy-form; but he had never heard anything precise. There was, he supposed, some sort of

spaceport for freighters there as well. They would be programmed freighters, with no place aboard them where a human could survive. . . . Only one man was in sight, sitting on a spavined chair near the hoists, patiently exploring one nostril with his pinky. He might or might not be an off-worlder, but he must be acceptable to the High Council of Kossar.

Overhead, a lone skimmer, evidently searching, circled over the port. Craig waited until it was swinging away from him, and cautiously drew off.

He moved back down the coast a few kilometers and then cut inland, as he had done at intervals for many days and nights, to forage for edible plants and to rest. Not far inland, in the midst of a patch of shallow, stagnant water, he found a huge old korphain tree. He climbed one of the gnarled, arching roots that converged, about three meters above the surface of the puddle, to form a short trunk; made his way up the trunk to the crotch between the radiating branches, and slept.

He woke as the sun was setting and began to work northward, paralleling the coast, to intercept the rail line. Once in sight of this, he ate, drank from a loathsome puddle, and slept again.

At dawn, he rose and followed the tracks inland until they came to a rise in the ground. Here he waited and watched a few sets of empty ore wagons go by: the older, more battered ones slowed satisfactorily as they climbed the grade. He stood beside the track about halfway up the slope and, when a set of cars came rattling along and started to lose speed, ran along beside them.

His impedimenta were mostly gone—only the gun, the ammunition, and one torch remained to weight him down—and he managed to match the wagons' speed for a moment. He grasped the edge of a wagon, hoisted himself up with a heaving effort, teetered, and dropped heavily but uninjured into the empty bin.

He had no idea how long the trip to the mines took: in

any case, he had no intention of completing it. He busied himself with his little knife, unwrapping the gun, loading it from one packet of ammunition, and reharnessing it under his loose shirt. To his left, the full wagons came down the other track in regular clusters.

Around him, the vast, swampy green-black forests of Blindmarsh fell behind unvaryingly. This was not the terrain he needed.

Nor did a single skimmer appear overhead.

As the sun climbed toward noon, however, the land-forms and vegetation changed. The ground was a little higher and more open. There were fair-sized clearings and occasional sandy flats. He judged that he would soon be approaching the foothills below the mine-infested hills. He waited until the wagon was slowing to breast a rise: then he vaulted over the edge, hit the ground running but not running fast enough, did a forward roll, skinning his back with the gun, and lay half-dazed on the ground.

Back down the slope, there was a large, dry open space. The problem was how to attract the attention of a searcher.

He walked toward the scrub beyond the clearing and found a sturdy-looking small tree. When, however, he took hold of it to twist off a branch, an explosive pain spread through his hands. He let it go and sat down, blinded with tears and not daring to rub his eyes, until the smarting stopped. It flashed across his mind that this was a strange vegetable to find on a planet that had no animals. . . . No blisters seemed to be forming, but his fingers were curiously stiff, as if they had had an electric shock. He found another stout shrub, which he thought he recognized as one that MacInnis had said was harmless, and by notching a branch with his knife, succeeded in breaking loose a heavy piece of it. He took this and laid it across the rails.

A pair of cars came rattling along, struck the branch, sent it spinning away, rocked, slipped back into place on

the rails, and rattled on. Full cars went past on the other track.

Craig recovered the branch, laid it carefully across one rail only of the empty-wagon track, and waited. A trio of cars approached. The foremost struck the branch and toppled off the track, the others following it.

A few moments later, another set of wagons came along. There evidently was, as Craig had expected, an automatic sensing and braking mechanism in the little cars. They slowed and stopped. The next set stopped a few meters behind them. Craig watched a long, neatly spaced line of empty wagons forming. The full cars went by on the other track unimpeded.

Craig went to the wagons just behind the derailed cars, took out his little knife and put it on the ground, removed his ragged clothing, tossed it onto a full wagon as it passed, unlimbered the gun, and lay down on his back, between the rails and between two cars. He wondered whether the cars had an alarm mechanism that might radio a warning of trouble, or whether he would have to wait until someone at the mines grew alarmed at the interruption in arrivals. As time passed, he concluded that he would have to wait until the loaders at the mines grew suspicious.

At length he saw a skimmer coming from the direction of the mines, flying along the line of the track. "Poor devil," said Craig. "But someone had to be first." It banked, circled lower, flew away toward the mines—Craig shut his eyes in childish panic—turned, and approached again. It alighted gently in the clearing.

It was a black single-seater with a body-snatching clamp on the nose, of the type that had hunted down the fugitive at the spaceport. The pilot, black-uniformed, stepped out and started walking toward the overturned cars, saw Craig's motionless body, changed direction and came toward him.

Craig sat up suddenly, faced the guard-pilot, nestled

the butt of the strange gun in the center of his chest, sighted, and fired. The gun barked and kicked, knocking the wind out of Craig; but when he was able to get up and examine the pilot's fallen body, there was a hole drilled neatly into the man's forehead.

"Oh passerby, tell the Lacedaemonians," said Craig aloud, "that I lie here obeying their orders."

He hastily stripped off the man's clothing, put it on the seat in the cabin of the skimmer, along with the gun, the ammunition, and the little knife; dragged the naked corpse to the derailed cars, rolled it into one of them; went back, and took the controls of the skimmer.

It was a Terran-made craft, of a model that Craig had never flown before, but similar to a light military trainer Craig had encountered in his year of required service. He pointed it a few degrees westward of the rail line, took it to its maximum altitude and velocity, set the controls on "Automatic," dressed in the pilot's uniform—a barely tolerable fit—and looked for the chart case. There was none.

He must now find his way to the spaceport, without maps, without even having seen a map of Kossar, meanwhile eluding interception by suspicious guardcraft. He switched the communicator to "Receive."

"Tony, what have you got? Tony, what have you got? Report, Tony. Report. I don't hear you. Report. *Report*, Tony, you crazy bastard!"

Craig switched to "Send," held his nose, and honked disjointedly: ". . . under attack . . . derailed. What a mess! . . . Eight of 'em . . . got a groundcar, a half-track . . . pellet-rifle. *There's another!*" He switched off.

55

Port Constantine lay below, like a raveling tapestry of streets and parti-colored roofs. Craig knew it was Port Constantine because ahead stretched the straw-yellow, pocked expanse of the spaceport.

There was no ship on it; for the time being it was deserted.

The two compounds, the one for the travel of free-men, the other for the slave trade, passed directly below. Next to them, on a tarmac patch, were several craft like the one Craig was flying.

"Not with this beard," said Craig, and veered off.

56

Some twenty kilometers back, southeast of Port Constantine, Craig saw what he took to be a rich estate: a broad, rolling lawn in classical Terran style; a complicated masonry house with terraces, dormers, even chimneys; Earth trees that must have dated from the first human colonization; and at one edge of the grounds a small tarmac occupied by two parked skimmers and several varieties of surface transport.

Taking the skimmer down, Craig switched the communicator to "Receive." ". . . an attack on the ore

railroad one hundred and eighty-three kilometers from Mannion Point. The pilot reported at least one half-tracked ground vehicle in the action. It left no trail and is not on the surface within a twenty-kilometer radius. The pilot was killed by a solid projectile of totally unfamiliar shape. Repeat: his skimmer, number 75-114, 75-114, is missing . . . 75-114, black, with retrieval clamp on nose. . . ."

Craig switched it off. There were still field reports. A private estate would not be likely to have heard them, but a general alarm would follow in minutes.

He set skimmer number 75-114 down on the tarmac, picked up the alien gun, and waited.

An elderly attendant in clean coveralls came over. Craig opened the cabin and sat silent. The attendant, peevishness showing through his obsequious smirk, leaned in and began, "Welcome to the Institute. Is something wrong, sir? Can I—" He caught sight of Craig's beard and costume, and fear took over his face. Craig knocked him unconscious with the butt of the gun.

Craig slid the gun and the ammunition into his harness and stepped to the ground over the slumped form of the attendant, whom he dragged clear. He leaned back into the cabin, set the controls for "Take Off," stooped, and pulled off the attendant's left shoe, which he held poised. Then he rammed the throttle bar down, wedged it with the shoe, and stepped back quickly. The machine shuddered, sneezed, and began its lift, sending a pancake of dusty air down in its place. Craig tried to shut the cabin but missed his hold; the skimmer rose rapidly, its side panel flapping. It was pointed south. Craig waved after it. "Goodbye, Brünnhilde!" It dwindled southward.

Craig looked around him: still no one was in sight; the great house, the lawn, and the ancient trees seemed to doze in the sunlight. The place had a remarkable serenity.

A narrow crushed-stone driveway wound in a gracious curve up the slope to the house. Craig walked briskly over

to a modest red groundcar and peered in: the controls were unlocked. Craig opened the luggage compartment, carried the attendant over and stowed him in it, making sure there were air vents, closed it, and slid into the driver's seat. He drove at a leisurely speed toward the house. The driveway branched, and he took the branch that seemed to lead around to the back. He still had seen no one except the attendant. He stopped the groundcar close to the rear entrance of the house and hurried into "the Institute."

By choosing the back door instead of the front, he had denied himself a chance to see any plaque there might be that told what this was an Institute of. But the incongruity of his bushy beard in that uniform made it impossible to explain or identify himself; the first order of business was to find some depilatory; and a better-fitting costume would be highly desirable.

Inside the door was a large, dimly lit area evidently used for receiving and storing supplies. A slave looked up from sweeping; he was a heavy-set, black-haired youth with a bad complexion and an expression of vacuous contentment; but a crafty look came into his eyes as he took in Craig's outfit. He seemed not to know how to start the conversation, however. Craig unfastened his left sleeve, watching the youth, who said at last, "I thought you was a doctor, with the whiskers." Then he added, by way of precaution, "Sir."

Craig slid up his sleeve and turned his arm to exhibit his slave-number to the youth. The youth's eyes widened as he looked from the scars to the slung gun. Craig said, "I don't want anybody to see me."

The youth snorted. "No fooling." He thought some more—he seemed to like dramatizing his efforts at cerebration—and said, "In here." He jerked his head toward a green door. "Toilet. Ours." Craig followed him into the

reeking little room. The youth said, "You got a nerve. I'll say that. I don't know's I want to be around you."

Craig: "Would you like to escape?"

The youth's face kindled for an instant, then resumed its sly stupidity. "You think you're funny. Escape to where?"

Craig: "Off Kossar."

The youth: "Off-world? I was born here."

Craig: "There are hundreds of worlds you could go to."

The youth: "I was born here." He added, "Besides, I'm throwing it to the cook every couple of days and she feeds me good." He did more mental labor. "If you want to go, I won't stop you. I won't say I seen you. If they don't drug me. Spaceport's that way." He pointed, thought, and pointed in a different direction. He was right the second time. "Better get going."

Craig: "In a minute. What kind of Institute is this?"

The youth: "It's a head place."

Craig: "Crazy people?"

The youth: "People feel bad. Maybe they did things. They come here three-four days. The doctors talk to them. Give them stuff. They feel better." He shrugged. "Why? You feel bad?"

Craig said gently: "I feel terrible, friend. I've murdered three men."

The youth was not impressed. He shrugged. "Maybe the doctors could help you."

Craig: "Whose groundcar is that red one I have out there?"

The youth went out to look and came back. "Mister Rork. Old geezer down at the lot." He marveled. "How come *he* lent it to you?"

Craig: "Because I hit him on the head."

The youth snorted. "You got a nerve. I'll say that. He dead?"

Craig: "No. Out. I need some deppo and a shears."

The youth: "I won't give you my deppo. Take some from the sickies. Third floor. Wait a minute." He disappeared and returned with a greasy poultry shears. "Here. Got it from the cook."

Craig shoved it into the belt of his harness. "Give me a hand with Rork. He's in the luggage compartment. Quick. Before he wakes up."

The youth: "I don't want to."

Craig dashed out through the receiving area, ran down the steps, pressed his ear to the luggage compartment. There was a groan inside. He flung open the lid, immediately covered the attendant's eyes with one hand, slapped him with the other across the temple, wincing, hoisted the again unconscious man over his shoulder, and carried him into the building. "Where do you want him?" he asked the slave, who had resumed his sweeping.

The youth: "So's he don't get in my way, that's all. He dead?"

Craig: "No." He arranged the body behind some packing cases. "Better get the cook and say you just found it."

The youth: "She's his wife. She'll get excited." He snorted and went slowly out, jerking his head toward a narrow, steep staircase.

Craig bolted up it. From the second-floor landing, he peeked out into the corridor: it was sumptuously carpeted; its walls were lined with varnished wooden doors, between which hung heavily framed paintings, mostly, so far as Craig could see, Terran landscapes. As Craig watched, one of the doors started to open; he ducked back into the stairwell, listening, ready to run either up or down.

A voice said in warm, soothing tones: "My dear Lord Ewbold, we shall discuss these feelings of yours tomorrow. Just now you're tired. You've been through a *great* deal. Tomorrow we'll put things in perspective."

The other voice, doltish but tense, said, "I shouldn't have killed the fellow, though."

The first voice: "Tomorrow we'll examine that proposition a little more closely. I'll walk with you to your room: and then I strongly recommend a nap before dinner. If you want, you can have . . ."

Craig peeked out again. They were strolling up the big, open front stairs, a stocky young man wearing a peacock-blue dressing gown over a riding suit, and a bearded older man in a physician's white smock.

Craig crept up the back staircase and waited on the third-floor landing until he heard the warm voice say, "Have a good rest now, my lord. *We'll* have you ready for your holiday, never fear," the younger voice grunt, and a door latch click. Then, allowing time for the physician to return to the front staircase, he stepped out into the corridor—carpeted and ornate, like the one below—and chose a door at random. He walked over, swept it open, went in, and closed it.

A man lay on the great old-fashioned bed, asleep. Craig leaned over him: a puffy, sallow, middle-aged creature, prosperously clothed in the Terran style; he breathed heavily. Craig judged him to be under sedation.

In the bathroom, Craig found a true-leather grooming kit containing a silver jar of depilatory. In the wardrobe, he found several suits of clothes and a woman's elaborate evening gown. A pair of shoes on the wardrobe floor were too small. Craig took one of the plainer suits into the bathroom. With the poultry shears and the depilatory, he removed his beard; he trimmed his hair into a foppish bang in front; he showered, scrubbing furiously, and dried himself; he put the stolen suit on over his naked skin, buttoning the tunic tight at the neck; he shifted the little knife to a pocket of the suit and gathered up the gun, the ammunition, the shears, the harness, and the pilot's boots; he draped the pilot's uniform over them to hide the weapon; he stepped out into the bedroom; he gently re-

moved the sleeping man's carpet-slippers and put them on; he listened at the door and went out into the hall. He entered the next room, saw the young Lord Ewbald still awake, drawled, "Excuse me. Wrong room," and retreated. He walked three doors down; this room was empty—untenanted, in fact, as Craig could see from the empty wardrobe. He arranged the gun, ammunition, and boots in the pilot's uniform, tied them into a bundle with the harness, brought a chair over to the wardrobe, stood on it, stabbed the shears into the inside front wall of the wardrobe above the door as high as he could reach, hung the bundle in the shadows, closed the wardrobe, and replaced the chair.

He returned to the corridor and noted that the door he had just come out of had a neat "12" stenciled on it. He tried the next room. It was also untenanted. Craig lay on the bed and composed himself for sleep. He wished he had had the young slave wheedle some food for him from the cook. . . .

A voice said, "Who are you?"

Craig opened one eye. A red-bearded man in physician's garb was standing over him. Craig opened the other eye.

"Who *are* you?" asked the physician, more sharply.

Craig stared at him blankly. "I—I don't know," he whispered incredulously. "I don't know."

The physician glared at him suspiciously through thick lenses. "Whose patient are you?"

Craig: "P-patient?"

The physician: "Who is your doctor here?"

Craig: "D-doctor?"

The physician showed admirable tenacity. "Who admitted you to the Institute?"

Craig meditated stammering, "I-institute?" but decided to take the initiative. "What is this place? What have you done to me? Who are you?" Then he began to blubber,

hands over face. "I don't know my name! I don't know my own name! What have you done to me? What is this place?"

The physician said shortly, "Wait there," and left.

Craig pulled off his tunic and trousers and, using the point of his little knife, ripped the labels from them. He could find no other identifying marks. He put the clothes on again, slid the labels into the pillow slip and the little knife, blade open, under the pillow, and lay back. The red-bearded physician returned with a white-bearded one, a singularly benign-looking old fellow, who bent over Craig solicitously. "My poor young man," he said, "you certainly do present us with a mystery. Doctor Kalamai here says you claim to have forgotten your own name, that you can give no account of yourself whatever, that you cannot explain how you came to be in the Institute. It must be very hard on you to find yourself in this condition. As Director of the Institute, I cannot, of course, allow you to stay unless we establish some *bona fides* for you. Take off your clothing, please."

Craig complied, managing to lean on his left arm as he did so, so that the slave-number was pressed to the bedspread. The physicians took the clothing and peered at every inch of it.

Dr. Kalamai: "Why have you no underclothes?"

Craig counterattacked. "My dear Doctor—if that's what you are—surely that is for *you* to tell *me*. Here I am, in some sort of clinic or medical institution—if that's what it is—deprived of my memory, my underclothes, *and*, I may add, my billfold." He overrode their attempts to interrupt. "You say it is a mystery. But if you are, as you claim, physicians, and if this is, as you claim, a sanitarium, equipped with—ah—the usual narcotics and drugs, then it is no mystery at all. It becomes mysterious only if you *claim* to have no part in this. Then it becomes not only mysterious but impossible. Now I am very angry.

I suggest that you administer the—ah—antidote to whatever it is you gave me—and restore my billfold. Moreover, these are not my slippers, and I would never wear such a shabby suit. Give me back my clothes at once. Or I shall tell my uncle—” He broke off and allowed a spasm of panic to show in his face. “Uncle?” he muttered. Then he pulled himself together and glared.

The two physicians exchanged glances. The Director said smoothly: “I assure you, my dear fellow, that we are as mystified as you. Unfortunately for your theory, there is no known drug that causes functional amnesia—amnesia without massive destruction of cells. You do not seem neurologically impaired. And there is no known drug that *cures* amnesia. However . . .” He queried his colleague in a half-whisper: “MSR? Twenty milligrams?”

Dr. Kalamai looked apprehensive. “Suppose he really has an uncle?”

The Director shrugged. “As you wish. Antaphase, then, half a c.c.”

Dr. Kalamai: “Perhaps you should get it. Let me stay here. He is a muscular specimen.”

Craig: “What kind of quackery are you proposing? I warn you—”

The Director: “No, no. Antaphase is a very mild medication. It relaxes the patient, renders him—well, garrulous. It helps to overcome blocks and inhibitions of verbal activity. You agree, Doctor Kalamai, that it helps in cases where trauma, or shame, have censored the memory? Yes, you see, he agrees.” The benign old man trotted out. The red-bearded one stood watchful.

Dr. Kalamai: “I should, perhaps, tell you that I am armed.”

Craig: “You may tell me anything you like. I seem to have fallen among a very unsavory lot here. You may think, Doctor Calamity, that you have me helpless because I can’t at the moment recall who I am, but your

own indecision shows *either* that you don't know who I am any more than I do, which rather cancels my disadvantage, doesn't it?—or *else* that you do know and that I am, as I can tell, someone important."

Dr. Kalamai: "Save your talk."

The Director returned with a handful of equipment and measured out the drug in the hypodermic barrel. Craig lay on his back, his arms folded over his belly, the slave-number pressed against his left side; he tensed to reach for the little knife and make a fight of it. But it was for his right arm that the Director reached. The old man jabbed the needle into the flesh and pressed the plunger; he removed the syringe and looked at his watch. "In a few minutes, you will begin to feel relaxed," he said amiably. "Chatty. I need hardly say that there is no use your fighting it—not that you have any wish to, of course."

Craig: "You mean, Doctor, I'll blurt out everything that's on my mind? If I secretly think Doctor Calumny here is the nastiest piece of goods I've seen in a long time, I'll forget my manners and say it?"

The Director: "I'm afraid so." He consulted his watch.

Craig: "Will I remember afterward what I say under the influence of this drug?"

The Director: "What you say in the earlier or shallower stages, yes. What you say when the antaphase is at full effect, probably not."

Craig: "Then how do I know you won't lie about what I said? After all, Doctor, you look almost too good to be true, with that saintly beard and that coprophagous smile of yours. You could be a blackmailer. Or you could be one of my uncle's enemies—" He broke off and from the corner of his eye saw the pair exchange glances. "Here comes that uncle again. How very disconcerting. I wonder who he is. . . ." He waited, the picture of pious resignation. "I don't feel particularly strange, considering that I'm lying here stark naked being eyed by two aging degenerates. Are you sure you have the right stuff?"

Dr. Kalamai smiled bleakly. "Oh yes, it's the right stuff."

Craig could in fact feel a curious relaxation setting in. He decided that his best chance of defeating the antaphase was to invent a fantasy and involve himself in it before the drug took full effect. "Well, Doctor Clammy, you know best, of course. It reminds me . . ." He trailed off.

The Director: "You were saying, this reminds you . . ."

Craig: "Was I? I shouldn't have been, you know. But it does remind me of one time when I went with—I can't remember whom I went with—I went down to Treglast with my uncle—I shouldn't have said that, you arch old pervert, you—to sell Lady What's-her-face some slaves. Lady What's-her-face, now there's a morsel. Have you ever noticed the way her waist tapers out to those tight buttocks? No, you haven't, of course; you prefer boys; I forgot that. Morgan Something. My memory is getting better. You really ought to go into medicine, old boy; you have a talent; you're wasted running this joy-house. You remind me of a fellow named Pursuivant." (Danger.) "Remind me to tell you about old Pursuivant at the Señora's seventieth birthday party." (Safe again.) "What was I saying?"

The Director: "You went with your uncle to sell Lady Morgan Sidney some slaves."

Craig: "Sidney. That was the name. Thank you. Though how you expect me to tell this story when you keep interrupting me, I'll never know. Lady Morgan Sidney." (Danger.) "There was a fellow named Sir Oswyn Parade, or something, there. Between us, not normal. I daresay he's one of your best customers. To me, pederasty seems utterly lacking in aesthetic appeal. My uncle, poor old sado-masochist soul . . ." He went on, spinning a melodrama about a bet between his uncle and this Sir Oswyn or Osman Pederast as to which could flog a healthy slave to death first with a riding quirt. "Her lady-

ship—" (Danger.) "Her ladyship was quite a little artist with the quirt herself—" (Danger!) "But she didn't exactly approve of wasting two perfectly good slaves. However . . ." He managed to stay with his fantasy, but he was now finding it more and more difficult to keep away from the real memories that thronged into his mind. "Why am I telling you this story? What has it to do with . . . my being here? *This* isn't the story I was going to tell you." (Danger.) "What I was going to tell you—oh, yes—lying on a bed . . ." (Danger!) "Lying on a bed, naked." (Danger!) "Naked to the gaze of two raddled old sodomists." (Safe.) "It reminds me of these two little slave-girls that belonged to her Ladyship. Molly and Marina, their names were." (Danger.) "And they had a bet about *me*. . . ." He created pornography for a long while. "Why, I do believe Doctor Colonic is having trouble with his little doodle! Izzums doodle all stiff and hurty? And as for you, you whited old sepulchre. The Institute's saintly Director Of Foreskins is quite a collector. He fries 'em in batter, And so it don't matter As to whether they're scalar or vector." He was getting silly now, and this must be a bad sign. It dawned on him that he was going to lose. "I say, old fellow," he pleaded with the Director, "how long does this gopp of yours last? I must have been talking for hours."

The Director checked his watch and said mildly, "Oh, no, my dear chap, it's only been a little over twelve minutes. Antaphase acts for two or three hours."

But Craig had seen the Director's watch when he gave the injection, and he had glimpsed it now. More than two hours had elapsed. The Director was lying. That meant that Craig was winning. Should he tell the Director this? *no!* "Well, if you say so," he said slowly, perspiring. "My uncle always used to say I talked too much, even as a little boy." (Danger.) "He used to come back from meetings of the High Council and say that I made as much sense as any of them. He himself was what one might de-

scribe as a strong, silent man. His vice was gambling. I remember once when he took me to Lady Morgan Sidney's little pipe-organ castle. We were going to sell some slaves—actually, they had been troublemakers, these particular slaves, but as you can well imagine, we said nothing about *that*—and it happened that Sir Osman Prat was there." He yawned. "And the two old dears . . ." He began in meticulous detail to repeat the story he had already told. He was very sleepy. His own voice was like a lullaby; he knew he must stay awake, but he could not. Danger. But the danger was far away. It could wait.

The Director: "By the way, what is your uncle's name?"

Craig looked at him coldly. He was wide awake again. "Haven't you been *listening*? I—I told you all about it, and you weren't even listening, and now—now I'll never know!" He began to snifle.

The two physicians looked at each other. The Director held up his watch and reached for Craig's left hand to take his pulse.

"Don't you touch me, you filthy old man!" screeched Craig. "If you try anything fresh, I'll call for help."

The Director shrugged. "You can put your clothes on," he said wearily. "I want you out of the Institute the first thing tomorrow morning." The two left.

Craig waited a few minutes, and then, overwhelmed with the need to sleep, stumbled down the corridor and returned the slippers. The suit he would have to steal. He stopped off in Room 12 and retrieved his bundle and his shears.

He slept the sleep of the just.

He woke at dawn, famished. He pulled the chair from where he had wedged it under the ornate brass doorknob, stood on it to get his bundle down from the shadows at the top of the wardrobe; took the boots out of the bundle, remade the bundle, and returned it to its hiding-place; and put the boots on, smoothing his trouser legs over them. They looked odd, but not conspicuously so.

He went down the back stairs. The smells and sounds of breakfast in preparation made him salivate. Before long, his friend the repulsive youth came along on his way to the slaves' toilet. "Good morning," said Craig cheerfully.

The youth stared. "You found what you wanted?" he said at last.

Craig: "I did. But I'm very hungry. Could you get me some food? And something else. I need a bag, a plastic or cloth bag about so big." He held out his hands.

The youth: "I could get you food. Don't know about the bag. You can eat in the toilet."

The food was plentiful and hot, and Craig did not let the smell of the room bother him. He gorged himself. When he stepped out into the receiving area, a stained cloth sack was lying in front of the toilet door. The youth was nowhere in sight.

As Craig silently climbed the back stairs, he heard, or rather felt, something that made him stop dead: a low thrill in the air, in the stairs, in the wall: the distant rum-

bling of a great spaceship sitting down on its retros. He turned and went down the stairs, two at a time.

The youth was still not to be seen, but Craig walked toward the door he had seen him come out of at his first appearance that morning, and the youth was just inside it; he came out, looking impatient, and said, "What do you want now?"

Craig: "Have you changed your mind about getting off Kossar?"

The youth: "No." He thought carefully and said, "Good luck."

Craig: "Thank you for everything." But the youth was already walking back to the pantry.

Craig returned to his room and put his bundle inside the sack, which he trimmed with the poultry shears—ingeniously, he thought—to resemble a schoolboy's book-bag or a lady's tote-bag. He slung it over his shoulder, checked the little knife in his pocket, and ambled out into the corridor toward the front stairs.

Except for an aged man in a kind of livery, sitting behind a high wooden desk like a pulpit, the foyer was empty. There was, however, a pile of very dapper luggage near the main front door. Craig strolled over to the old servitor. "Director about?" he asked cheerfully.

The old man studied him.

Craig grinned and looked down at his own garb. "You must get the Director to tell you about his little mistake some time," he said. "Where can I find him?"

The old man: "At breakfast . . . sir."

Craig: "Thanks. I'll wait in here. When you're ready, but not before, go tell him that." He strolled into the sitting room, picked up a year-old Antarean magazine, and stretched out in an easy chair with it. Under his brows, he could see the old man watching him sourly. "Don't hurry," he called out with a smile. The old man stumped off.

A curious figure came down the stairs and strode into

the foyer. It was dressed in a military uniform and snapped a swagger-stick against its shank as it huffed impatiently, but there was something about its puny physique and vast array of campaign ribbons that smacked of three-dee farce. "Ha!" it said, "*there* they are! Official idiots didn't wait to ask." It went over to the luggage. "One—two—three—four—five—*six!* All there, as it happens. . . . Ha!" This last was a comment on the arrival of the Director, followed by the aged servitor.

The Director: "Ah, my dear General! You're leaving us early."

The General grew amiable. "Early for you, Doctor. For an old campaigner, the day is half over."

The Doctor: "Here's someone I want you to meet, General. My dear young man, you know General Falkendire, your uncle's colleague on the High Council?"

Craig rose and came over politely. "I haven't had the honor of meeting the General before, but of course I've heard my uncle talk about him. My uncle has said more than once that General Falkendire talks more plain good sense in one second than most members of the Council do in an hour."

The General: "Ha! Fine fellow, your uncle."

Craig: "He is that, he is that. A good judge of men, sir."

The General had acquired a haunted look, like that of a man who has missed the point of a joke but, having laughed, cannot admit it. Nor was all this *agapē* going over well with the Director, apparently; he broke in and said to Craig, "What did you wish to see me about?"

Craig: "My dear Director, I must leave your hospitable roof at once, as I think you agreed last night, but since you have not (I take it?) been able to find my billfold, a difficulty arises."

The Director: "Why don't you call your uncle for transportation?"

Craig: "Under the circumstances, that would be indiscreet."

The Director's saintly disposition was slipping. "I'll have Rork, the attendant at the lot, drive you where you want to go."

Craig: "And report to you afterward? That would be positively tactless. I will not ask for the entire contents of the billfold, but perhaps a partial restitution? That would solve the problem—for both of us."

The General had been watching this exchange with growing puzzlement, but said decisively, "I can drop you off on the way to the spaceport, my boy. My car will be here in a minute. Where d'you want to go?"

Craig: "Perhaps the simplest thing, sir, would be for me to go with you to the spaceport. My uncle could pick me up there. That way there would be no question of any—ah—scrape."

The General: "Ha! I see what you're driving at, my boy. Uncle a bit stricter with you than with himself, eh, my boy?"

The Director: "Have a good vacation at Betelgeuse, General. We'll see you again next year." He did not acknowledge Craig's presence further.

Craig followed the General to the chauffeured ground-car. Going down the majestic steps, he turned and looked at the entrance. The bronze plaque read: "Institute of Innocence."

58

The mere fact of arriving with a member of the High Council got Craig into the free compound of the spaceport without difficulty. He took leave of his uncle's admired friend with a display of bravura sycophancy and set off, as he put it, to call home. The problem was now to get aboard the spaceship.

The facts of the situation, he decided, supported only one conclusion: if he was to get aboard, the officers or crew of the spaceship must get him aboard. On further analysis, it had to be an officer; given the gross fact of slavery on Kossar, crewmen must long ago have been warned off the doing of good, or else Kossar would have made trouble.

Craig's search for officers off the spaceship went unrewarded for hours. He began to see signs of impending departure. He considered changing back into his guard's uniform; this might, if worst came to worst, enable him to make a dash out to the ship. He went into a rest-room to change. There, washing his hands and primping, was an indisputable spaceman, an officer.

Craig: "Off the ship?"

Spaceman: "What else?"

Craig: "Terran?"

Spaceman: "What else?"

Craig: "N.A.?"

Spaceman: "Keep going."

Craig: "I'm from West Orange, New Jersey, myself. Where's your captain?"

Spaceman: "What do you want with him?"

Craig: "Sixty seconds."

The spaceman looked into Craig's face. "Right."

59

A week. Transshipment. Weeks more.

Craig watched the planet Earth grow in the view-screen: the clouds, the continents, the lovely schoolbook outlines.

"Heureux qui comme Ulysse a fait un beau voyage," he whispered, and burst into tears.

part four

1

The dry old voice of Lord Wynther cut in: "Will someone fetch Lady Morgan's aide-de-camp? She appears to be overcome."

The Lady's aide-de-camp, an enormously obese man in a white suit, trotted in a moment later, agitated and perspiring, like a pig charging at peacocks. He said in a high voice, "Please stand back, my lords and so forth," and bent stertorously to examine Lady Morgan, who lay on the floor between her seat and the council table. She raised her head, shook it with a frown, and said under her breath, "Smitty." She looked into the fat man's eyes and said in a low voice, "Khoory-Khoory, I'm a sick woman. Help me get up." She stood up slowly, threw back her shoulders, smiled apologetically at the Earth Ambassador, and, as if suffering another seizure, stood stock-still; her left hand returned to the fat man's shoulder and started to close like a talon. The fat man turned to follow her stare. His great, damp, subtle face opened in a smile of uncomplicated pleasure, and he piped, "It is!"

The Earth Ambassador said gravely, "Good afternoon, Doctor. I'm happy to see you undiminished." He walked toward them.

Sir Osman Parad began, "It appears that Doctor Khoory, whom I believe we all know, has already met His Excellency—"

The Count of Lyme said maliciously, "And so, apparently, has her ladyship, a fact that—"

Wynter: "Morgan, my dear, why didn't—"

The Council Chamber fell silent: the Earth Ambassador had bowed formally to Lady Morgan and stood waiting. She stared at him with violent eyes.

"Smitty, you unclean animal!" she said at last through clenched teeth. "And to think that I wept for you!" Then she turned to the Council. "I had known Ambassador Craig years ago, under another name. There is an embarrassment between us." She smiled. "I am sorry, my lords, but it will be necessary for the High Council to meet in executive session to replace me as chief negotiator."

Ambassador Craig: "Perhaps, my lady, my lords, if Secretary Macwith could be allowed to finish the introductions he had begun, and if her Ladyship's indisposition has passed, you would permit me to address you in Council for a very few minutes. I may be able to make the work of your executive session somewhat easier and"—he smiled shyly—"less speculative."

Parad: "I concur, Your Excellency. I am sure we all concur. Lady Morgan?" She nodded. "Mister Secretary, will you proceed?"

Dr. Khoory rested one pale, fat little hand on the Earth Ambassador's left arm as he passed silently, and withdrew into the buzzing crowd outside the bronze doors. The Confidential Secretary went through the roster of personages and titles and withdrew.

Parad: "Your Excellency, will this seat be suitable?"

Ambassador Craig: "Thank you. What I have to tell you, my lady, my lords, falls under four headings: Who I

am. What I have come to do. What my experience of Kossar has been. What I believe are the real choices available to you, you as embodying the whole sovereignty of this world.

"My name is John Craig. I am, as you see, a commonplace Terran. Terran male, thirty-eight. The imposing titles your Secretary recited before my name are, unlike yours, merely temporary. In diplomacy, one can become an Excellency without excelling. I do bear one permanent distinction of which very few men other than residents of Kossar can boast: under my sleeve here is a small, neat brand. Mine reads, 'MS43985'. I shall return to that subject.

"You have, I hope, been enquiring about me on Earth. It was your duty to do so. You will have learnt, I trust, that the plan for the Man-Inhabited Planets Treaty and its effectuating Organization began with a document I wrote. I wrote it six years ago, immediately on my return to Earth from Kossar. If you have put aside the question of General Clause Eighteen and recollected the *fundamental* purpose of that Treaty—to defend human communities against the Plith—the timing of that paper must have struck you as curious.

"I have come to Kossar now to obtain, if I can, your full"—he paused after the word—"acceptance of the Treaty.

"My previous visit to Kossar was involuntary. The *Star Queen* was intercepted in infraspaces by raiders eight years ago; I was put with others in Captain VanDam's hold, brought here, and sold for two hundred and ten credits to her ladyship. I remained her property for nearly two years.

"I would have been content to remain her property"—he looked earnestly at Lady Morgan, who returned his gaze without expression—"except for a discovery I made—by chance. I was not looking for what I found, but I ought to have been. And so ought you.

"Kossar has no native fauna. You accept this fact. Yet it is rare to find a planet on which vegetation alone has evolved. Plants and animals usually evolve together or not at all. Moreover, the flora of Kossar is hard to explain in the absence of animal life. I worked in her Ladyship's gardens. There were native flowers, some of them showy. Wherever one finds flowers, one finds them serving evolutionary purposes. They permit efficient recombination of genes by attracting flying animals—insects or birds—that transport pollen or similar genetic material over considerable distances. It is hard to explain how the thousands of successive mutations that are needed to evolve one variety of blossom should have won out, sport by sport, in the right sequence—and not once, but hundreds of times for the various blossoms—if they served no such use.

"Once, straying through Blindmarsh Fen, I laid hold of a shrub. It gave me a paralyzing dose of some electrochemical emission. Why should plants evolve such defences? Not against other plants.

"It is hard not to conclude that Kossar once had a considerable fauna. What became of it?

"One other piece of botanical lore. Among Kossar's indigenous flora is the Leper's Tongue. It is genetically and cytologically different from every other plant in the known universe. It is so radically different that no common ancestry is possible. The chances of its having evolved on Kossar without a single trace of a related or predecessor species are something like one in ten raised to the twenty-third power. How did it arrive on Kossar? We shall, perhaps, discuss some other aspects of the Leper's Tongue in a later session.

"One explanation suggests itself; it recommends itself; it explains much by assuming little. It is that Kossar had the usual inter-evolving flora and fauna until it was invaded by an alien species that for some reason systematically wiped out all animal life; and this alien species brought the Leper's Tongue and planted it here.

"If that is so, the alien species, like the Leper's Tongue, must have come from some world still not known to man. And since Kossar is a very Earthlike world, on which Terran plants and animals, including men, can live, it follows that the aliens prefer the same general conditions as humans. There is no reason to suppose that they would hesitate to exterminate the fauna of other man-inhabitable planets, including men. All that is what I *ought* to have been thinking.

"My accidental discovery, near her ladyship's Castle, was of a weapon, a projectile-gun. It was advanced in technology, but was clearly designed for use by a species very different from humans in shape, and it was marked in a written language not known on any man-inhabited planet.

"This was, I understand, the second weapon of its type to be discovered near her ladyship's Castle. The first was found some years ago by a slave named Weeden, who used it to assassinate her ladyship's father. I do not know what became of that gun. Evidently it was studied by this Council. But this Council drew no inferences from it.

"As I held the gun in my hands, I realized that I must get it to Earth. A dangerous alien species had been in the universe—recently enough to have left a gun that was still in working order. A gun to be used against what? For, by some quite different, more efficient means, they had killed all the animals on Kossar.

"I debated with myself. Should I entrust the strange gun to her Ladyship and Doctor Khoory, or should I take it to Earth myself? I had, and I still have, the highest respect for the intelligence of my owner and her aide-de-camp. I have no colleagues in the Terran federal government who are as capable as they.

"But there is something very time-consuming, very attention-demanding, about your domestic institutions. One of the many impractical aspects of chattel-slavery is that it always tends to subordinate all other relations and all

other considerations to one consideration, the maintenance of slavery itself. I decided to go to Earth. I abandoned my responsibilities as MS43985 and did so.

"You know most of what followed, at least in its public forms. The aliens, the Plith, have since shown themselves—but in casual if sanguinary raids, depredations in space, rival battles, and the like. There is only one world in all the galaxy in which the Plith have shown a longer-term interest: Kossar.

"For this reason, it seems very much in *your* interest to make common cause with the rest of mankind in resisting the singularly ruthless Plith empire. The choice before you is: Abolition or Extinction.

"In your discussions before I came, some among you may have argued this way: 'It is, after all, not very likely that the Plith would single out our little Kossar for their attentions; whereas it is not only likely but certain that conforming to General Clause Eighteen will destroy us as rulers.' I hope my fragment of autobiography has thrown some new light on that argument.

"Others among you may have said: 'We can get the protection of the Treaty Organization without conforming to General Clause Eighteen. Even if we refuse to join their Organization, they cannot stand by while we are slaughtered and the Plith get a base here.' I must tell you that the Organization's General Staff will let the Plith settle in on any non-Organization planet they attack, and will then sterilize that planet. It is a brutal policy, but it will discourage the Plith. We would not be killing our fellowmen. The Plith would have done that.

"Still others may have said: 'We need not actually abolish slavery; we will enjoy the Organization's protection while we negotiate endlessly over General Clause Eighteen; or we can join the Organization by announcing fictitious plans for the abolition of slavery.' I must warn you, your slaves will put a stop, a bloody stop, to any

such charade. Revolutions are fueled by hope. The real slogan of every great revolution is: 'Why wait?'

"One more small topic, and I have done. You have doubtless heard that I am the author of General Clause Eighteen. I am. You must not think that it was my personal reaction to my experiences on Kossar. I would hate to have you ask," (he smiled whimsically) "the minute I left the room, 'Now, Lady Morgan, what did you *do* to this poor fellow to make him so bitter?' Clause Eighteen comes from a reasoned conviction.

"Let me relapse into autobiography. Eight years ago, as I was being marched into the slave-trade compound a short distance from here, I wanted to know whether it was going to be possible to escape from slavery on Kossar. So I called out to the gatekeeper, 'Good to see you again!' He came roaring over; he said that since I had been here before, I must have escaped the last time; the rule was that I had to go back to my old owner. This rule told me that escape was not unknown here. It gave me hope. . . .

"As I was leaving on this mission, I told my superiors about this rule and said facetiously that if I did not obtain your signatures on the Treaty, including Eighteen, I would probably have to remain on Kossar as MS43985. . . . Facetiously. And yet"—he fixed his gaze on Lady Morgan's smoky eyes—"there is much that I love on Kossar."

2

The High Council was again in closed session. Outside, and standing apart by a window of the great ante-chamber, the Earth Ambassador and Lady Morgan Sidney's aide-de-camp talked in undertones, watched curiously from a distance by the hangers-on and petty officials.

Dr. Khoory glanced over his shoulder. "I have not had this much attention for many years."

Craig: "We are omens."

Dr. Khoory: "It is natural. Curiosity is the hunger of Reason. Their lives will change now. . . . It was your own wish to come on this mission?"

Craig: "I insisted on it."

Dr. Khoory: "You are a very—conservative man, I think."

Craig: "There were three people I wanted to see."

Dr. Khoory: "I was one?"

Craig: "Of course."

Dr. Khoory: "I thank you. Sincerely I thank you. And the third?"

Craig: "My son or daughter."

Dr. Khoory: "Son. A small-built but highly energetic boy. The mother asked to give him the name of 'Craig.' An odd name. We were surprised."

Craig: "We?"

Dr. Khoory: "Her ladyship and I. I should not tell you this, perhaps. . . ." He hesitated.

Craig: "You should tell me everything. Please."

Dr. Khoory: "I myself delivered the baby. Do you know, I kept my obstetrics textbook from medical school on a little table in the room? . . . I showed her ladyship that it was a baby boy. She laughed and said, 'Make a note of the date, Doctor. On his fifteenth birthday, I shall have this boy. I shall be thirty-eight—and still beautiful.' So. It was a—a pleasantry, of course."

Craig: "Of course. But she meant to do it."

Dr. Khoory: "I think she meant to do it."

Craig: "*Quel sentiment!* Actually, it was a very kind thought. . . . Where is the boy now?"

Dr. Khoory: "He lives in the Castle grounds, with his mother and two half-brothers and one half-sister." The Doctor smiled. "His duties are light. He is six years old. Sometimes I teach him. He reads well. Her ladyship ordered many books from Earth for him. You will be proud of him. . . . Recently, when we heard that the Earth negotiator who was to come here was named 'Craig,' I was puzzled. But her ladyship said that it had to be a very common Terran name."

They were silent a while. Outside the window, beyond a narrow strip of Terran lawn, the street was congested with groundcars, impeded by darting pedestrians, many—the most reckless—of whom were slaves.

Craig: "Kossar is making progress."

Dr. Khoory: "In the worst sense of the word. Things are not well with Kossar. . . . The sickest patients, you understand, are the ones who say, 'Doctor, I do not feel well. I just feel bad.' Such a man may die. It is much easier to save a man who has been critically injured, or who has gross symptoms, even the worst. I have more hope for a man with bloody stool than for a man who tells me, 'I feel—I do not know—not right in the mornings.' You follow my thought?"

Craig: "I do."

Dr. Khoory: "There have been, of course, *some* symptoms. Revolts of slaves; untidy little affairs, badly led."

Craig: "They had nothing *in particular* that they wanted."

Dr. Khoory: "Quite so. So they were put down easily enough. . . . But Ewbold, Baron Ewbold in there, the mighty hunter; when his slaves rose two years ago, he was visiting at Treglast; and as he was leaving to go deal with them, he said to her ladyship, 'I don't know why I bother.' "

Craig: "And he was right?"

Dr. Khoory: "He was right. He would have been better off without slaves—if he could have skipped the next ten years, do you see? . . . I am telling you all this for a purpose. I did not have it when I began, but now I have a purpose."

Craig: "Which is?"

Dr. Khoory: "In there"—he gestured—"are the rulers of Kossar. They are fools, except for her ladyship and the ancient Wynther. But they are the only rulers Kossar has. We do not have a ruling class. Once we did, but unfortunately the ruling class turned into a leisure class. Now we have—them. I am afraid they will botch everything. And that will be the end of Kossar, if you let it be so. Now, you have small reason to love Kossar—"

Craig: "You are wrong, Doctor."

Dr. Khoory: "My son, at *best*"—he hissed the word—"you could fit your reason into one bed. . . . Well, well, you would have another bed for the little boy. In the next stateroom."

Craig: "Doctor, I don't feel that way about Kossar. No, honestly—"

Dr. Khoory smiled sadly. "I concede. But it would not take long to feel that way. How ugly we always are in our troubles! This accounts, perhaps, for the ancient theory of

demoniac possession. . . . In any case, give our bedeviled world an extra chance, will you not?"

Craig: "Two extra. If your rulers let me. They must learn to engage in the class struggle. It is their only chance to—to become. Speaking of rulers: her ladyship reacted—strongly to my reappearance. Is she physically well?"

Dr. Khoory: "Physically, she is positively robust—" A noise arose on the other side of the room. "Ah, we are to learn something."

The sardonic Macwith stalked through the gaggle. "Your Excellency? If you could meet with the Council for a moment?"

Craig stepped into the Chamber.

Sir Osman Parad said smoothly, "Thank you for joining us, Your Excellency. We are all sorry to have taken so long. Your remarks had made a very deep impression on the Council. But we have this to report: we have decided that instead of conducting its preliminary negotiations through one member, the Council will negotiate as a plenum."

Craig bowed his head. "Your Excellencies' collective wisdom," he said in a troubled voice, "will, I am sure, make the negotiations, ah, swift. For reasons I need not repeat, there should be the least possible delay. I am ready to begin now."

Parad: "My dear Ambassador, we could not think of imposing on you after the fatigues of your journey. Tomorrow will be soon enough. Tomorrow afternoon."

Craig looked around the Chamber. Orme looked exasperated. Wynther could not be read. The General contrived to look decisive and apprehensive at the same time. Ewbold was pleased. Lyme had an air of challenge. Parad still wore the oleaginous smile of a spokesman. The Lady met his eyes blandly, but Craig thought he saw behind her composure a look of stony despair.

Craig: "Thank you, Sir Osman. At least, may we begin tomorrow with General Clause Eighteen?"

Parad: "I regret, Your Excellency, that the Council is not ready with its presentation on General Clause Eighteen. But be assured, we shall prepare ourselves as expeditiously as we can." He smiled more than ever.

Craig bowed. "Your assurance relieves my mind. I have explained to Secretary Macwith that I have brought no one with me for the preliminary phases. A cruiser assigned to the Treaty Organization will arrive later with my staff under my deputy, Colonel-General Murashchenko, along with observers from several of the member planets. My lady, my lords." He bowed again, bleakly.

3

Lady Morgan twisted in her seat. A sudden intense emotion, a wave of something between boredom and rage, left her breathless. Lyme was speaking, slowly. He refined his logical categories. He questioned the obvious. He found ambiguities. He wondered at length whether he was adequate to the historic responsibility he bore. It was clearly to be Lyme's day. Parad was not even present; resting for his turn tomorrow, no doubt. Falkendire was in the chair, faithful but unhappy.

Though she herself had outlined the Kossar strategy of stretching out negotiations as long as possible and then pretending to accept Clause Eighteen "in principle"—both of these theatrical performances giving Kossar adequate protection but requiring nothing practical in return—she had voted against it at the last minute. The Earth

Ambassador, damn him! had pointed out the danger they had overlooked; if they flirted with Emancipation, they would be raped by it. Even after the danger had been pointed out to them, the majority of the High Council continued to overlook it: they relied on the "security" of their meetings; they relied on *force majeure* (how Lyme loved that phrase!); they were sure that the Earth Ambassador had raised that specter only to frighten them because theirs was a strategy he could not meet. She knew better: she knew her Smitty. She knew her Smitty.

She studied the Earth Ambassador. He was taking it well, with that obstinate, sad tenderness that had so often infuriated her: he was treating the High Council, damn him! damn him! as he had once treated the little slave-girl—what was her name? Marina. . . .

She rose to her feet so suddenly that Lord Wynther woke up with a frightened grunt. She turned to the chair and, breaking rudely into one of Lyme's numbered lists of points, said loudly: "General, I pray to be excused." She swept out and through the deserted antechamber.

In her apartments, she roused a dozing servant—one of Macwith's staff of aged retainers, an equivocal lot—and sent him looking for Khoory. She paced. The servant returned to say that Dr. Khoory was not to be found.

Probably out in Port Constantine nosing about the dilapidated university. . . . She went into her bedroom and flung herself across the foot of the bed.

A timid knock at the door. She sat up and called, "What is it?"

The door opened a few centimeters and the old servant's voice said, "A vidiphone call for her ladyship."

She asked peevishly, "Who is it?"

"A child, your ladyship."

A child! She was about to scold the servant for his senile lapse, but decided not to waste time on the matter. Poor Khoory's voice . . .

She went to the 'phone in the sitting room. It was not Khoory. Nothing showed in the screen but the very top of a small, tousled head. "Who is this?" she asked, startled.

"Craig," said the child's pure treble. "Your ladyship, we're in terrible trouble here. People are killing people, and the guards are all in your tower but they can't get out, and they said to go to the 'phone that's working in their guard-quarters because I'm a little boy and nobody pays any attention to me, and nobody *did*, the other slaves, I mean, and—" The treble was mounting to a break.

"Good work, Craig. You're a brave, good boy. Now listen to me carefully. You go to your mother and stay with her. Don't tell her you spoke to me. Don't tell *anybody*. Just stay with your mother and—and family, and keep them away from any trouble. That's all. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, your ladyship! What shall I tell the poor guards?"

"Don't go near them. They'll be all right. I'll see to it. Just take care of your family, d—" She caught herself halfway through the word "darling" and then completed it. "'Bye now."

She ran into her bedroom, stripping naked as she went. In the wardrobe she found her old gray uniform, complete with holstered blast-pistol and freshly shined boots. Dressed and armed, she ran past the gaping servant and down to Macwith's office.

The Confidential Secretary let surprise show in his face as she burst in.

"Order me a skimmer, a single-seater, and give me some paper," she snapped.

Calmly, the Secretary spoke into a desk-communicator, ordering the skimmer, while he extended a single sheet of the Council's official stationery to her. "Five minutes," he reported.

"Macwith, you dubious character," she said as she

scribbled, "your security arrangements didn't work. Did you think they would?"

"No," said the Secretary. "I'm not in charge of the Council's mouths."

She held out her left hand as she wrote; he put an envelope into it. She inserted the note she had completed and sealed the envelope. "This, Mister Secretary, is for Doctor Khoory as soon as he gets back. Any slip or delay, and I shall tear out your cullions and serve them to you for breakfast, poached. I see the threat is lost on you. You probably never notice what you eat for breakfast."

She ran out to the skimmer.

4

She set the skimmer down in the most seaward of the courtyards, nearest her own tower. A moment before she landed, it was empty; a moment later, a rabble of slaves converged on her.

They were armed with crowbars, with simple sticks, with pikes improvised from broom handles and kitchen knives; but also with blast-pistols, stunners, and a laser-carbine or two—taken, no doubt, from ambushed guards. The mob seemed to quiet and slow down as it got closer, until it formed a circle of several meters' radius around the skimmer and waited silently.

Two figures made their way through the press, perturbed the circle with a flurry of talk, and advanced into the open space. One was a bulbous slave she recognized as Maurice, who served table; he kept his eyes on her with a kind of glazed fury of desire. The other was a young mulatto slave whose name she thought was Curt;

once, she remembered with a grim smile, he had cheered on Smitty in a fight for her good name.

She flung open the cabin flap, vaulted out, and stood arms akimbo, watching them approach. She turned and swept the mob with a surprised look. "What are you standing there for?" she called to them, laughing. "Don't you trust your spokesmen with me?"

From high in the tower behind her, a laser shot crackled across the paving in the circle, missing the two slowly advancing slaves by several meters.

Her first thought, as a deep-throated roar arose among the mob, was that her fools of guards had done for her and for themselves; her second was to enjoy her last few instants. She wrenched the blast-pistol from its holster, tightened the aperture with her thumb, took careful aim at Maurice, and burned his heart out. Then the mob was upon her, and her unconsciousness dissolved in a welter of sparkling blows and kicks. . . .

She came to her senses, confused by pain and movement and, she realized a few moments later, in a peculiar position: her head and arms were hanging down; so were her legs; the front of her pelvis was supported by something bony and jouncing that she at last identified as a man's right shoulder; and it was a man's hand that gripped her hard by the right buttock and pressed a thumb unnecessarily into her groove. She resolutely kept her eyes closed and remained limp. There were a few blows, and an occasional squall of women's voices. The man who was carrying her protected her succinctly: "She's mine. Get away. . . . Later. Later. Get away." The long thumb wriggled deeper.

Dimness closed over them: They were entering a building. There was the noise of a slamming door, and she was dumped on a yielding surface: a bed. She opened her eyes and looked up at Curt.

His light eyes wavered and dropped before hers. He

covered his weakness by stooping over her and beginning to rip at her uniform. She lay passive. "Come on, don't make a big fuss about this," she said quietly.

As he stripped her, she said in the same quiet tone, "You once wanted to kill Maurice for just talking about this."

"I was a boy then. Now I'm a man."

When she was naked and he bent his cruel, anxious young face toward hers, she ran her hands softly over his shoulders and up his throat, murmuring, "I'll try to make this good."

Then convulsively she tightened her grip and dug her thumbs into his carotids.

She had the advantage of surprise; he flailed but could not find a grip on her. She drove all her strength into her hands and strangled him until he went limp across her breasts; then she slid from under him and, making no effort to salvage any of her clothing from the floor, ran out of the room into a narrow corridor. Three women and a man were creeping down the hall stealthily, evidently to listen at the door. She ran straight at them. They gave way, too startled to seize her. She dashed between them, saying, "Naughty-naughty!" and came to the door of a stairwell, pivoted and plunged in and up.

For more than two flights, she heard no pursuit behind her; but then she heard steps and voices entering the stairwell: some of the would-be-eavesdroppers had recovered from their shamed surprise, and perhaps the tough young Curt had come to.

She instantly dropped into a soundless walk on her bare feet and, at the next landing, crept out of the stairwell into a corridor like the one she had left. She was in the slave-quarters, at the base of a landward tower. This was a women's tier. But she could not risk going into a room to take some clothes—no telling whether the occupant might be dozing away the afternoon, or lying drunk on wine.

She broke into a tiptoe-run toward a small door at the end of the corridor.

It was unlocked. On the other side a tiny metal spiral staircase ran up and down: it was, as she had remembered, the fire-stairs. She darted silently down.

The stairs ended in a dank masonry chamber, at the side of which was a small door; beyond was an unlighted passage that should lead under a courtyard to the next tower. She moved briskly through the darkness, burned one hip slightly on one of the pipes that lined the walls, overestimated the distance, crashed painfully into the door at the far end, shook her head clear, pushed open the door a crack, listened, heard nothing, and slipped through. She could, she was sure, make her way through the service tunnels to the tower next to her own. Hers was not connected by any tunnel. She would have to go the last part of the way over open ground. Would her guards organize themselves to give her covering fire? . . .

She eased open the little door that led out into the broad roughly-paved courtyard across which rose her tower, pressed one cheek against the jamb, and with one eye surveyed the tower face. About two-thirds of the way up, a face showed at one of the windows. Careless bastard, she thought; if she had been one of the slaves, she could have picked him off easily. Still, he was there and alive. That meant the slaves were not attacking the tower very actively just now. She waited a moment until his lazily wandering gaze seemed to approach her general direction; then she stepped out into the sunlight, and waved cheerfully up at him.

From above and behind her, she could hear a window flung open. A slave had also spotted her. She broke into a run, veering leftward and, for the benefit of the incredulously staring guard, pointing furiously to the left of the tower.

Sprinting across the courtyard, she laughed aloud at the thought that nothing in this wicked world had the dra-

matic intensity of a naked woman: the surprising sight of her bare body in the open air was saving her from an easy ray-shot from in back of her—for the instant.

The shot came, but missed. Another followed, but too late: she was in the lee of the tower now, and near the door that faced the Bay.

Inside, they were certainly taking their time about opening the door. Perhaps the stupid sentry had misunderstood her pointing gesture. Any second, pursuers might come dashing around the tower.

She hammered at the door with both hands. A bolt was drawn back. The door opened, and she darted, laughing, inside.

She looked round at the cluster of gaping men. "Don't entertain any foolish notions, gentlemen," she said; "I have a loathsome disease. Now: who's your commanding officer?"

5

Covertly, Craig looked over at Lady Morgan. She was twisting in her seat. The sight disturbed him. He looked away.

The Count of Lyme was speculating as to what future historians would say about the momentous decision that lay before the High Council. Such decisions, he need not remind his hearers, could be made only once, and it would therefore, of course, be impossible for the future historian to know with certainty what might have happened if the decision actually taken had not been taken; nevertheless, from the perspective . . .

Craig wrote at intervals on a piece of paper, looking up

amiably at Lyme betweentimes. In this fashion, he completed a sonnet.

*Seeing once more the sweet breasts hammering
Softly against the silk, the brave eyes glancing
At me like momentary teeth, the swing
Of thigh past thigh, and all your garment dancing;
Seeing again the suave posteriors
In easy motion, and the back-flung shoulders,
The smile beneath which lonely anger stirs,
The icy smile behind which longing smoulders;
Seeing you now, oh Lady! oh Possessor!
I waver like a swimmer on the shore
Looking at shark-torn waters, a transgressor
Against my reason, and I feel once more
The old delight, the challenge, and the pains,
The old unwanted uproar in my veins.*

He was wondering whether to start another poem when the Lady rose abruptly in her place, excused herself, and went out. Unendurably bored, Craig supposed. . . .

Lyme had finished at last, and the General was speaking: ". . . for his profound remarks. Perhaps His Excellency Ambassador Craig would care to add his own comments?"

Craig said gently, "My lords, only this: Future historians will have little sympathy for you. History is written by the survivors."

The General thanked him for his valuable comment and adjourned the session.

Craig went restlessly in search of Dr. Khoory, but found out from Macwith that the Doctor had not yet come back from a visit to the university.

Craig, about to wander off to his suite, turned and faced Macwith. "Mister Secretary, will you answer a simple question simply—for the sake of Kossar?"

The Secretary: "Yes."

Craig: "How much is known of these negotiations outside that Chamber? Or rather, how much is known out in the domains?"

The Secretary: "Everything, I believe, Mister Ambassador." He seemed to consider adding something, and then remained silent.

Craig: "Thank you, Mister Secretary. How much time before the deluge, do you think?"

The Secretary: "No time."

Craig: "Thank you, Mister Secretary."

He went to his suite and tinkered listlessly with the sestet of the sonnet; he wondered what might happen if he were to copy the poem out and send it to Lady Morgan. . . .

An hour later, Dr. Khoory hurtled into Craig's suite with a sheet of paper in his hand. His face was mottled. "Here, read this!" he said, straining for breath.

"Kh.-Kh.-Slaves in armed revolt at Castle. Craig jr. got to vphone, called me. Says 'people killing people.' Guards holding out in my tower. Am borrowing Macw's skimmer, will take charge. Tell Craig sr. he was right, the bastard, and ask if stinking idealistic Terrans will help us or the slaves. Will call you and report. Stand by. Love, M.S."

As if a council of his organs were coming to a decision even before his mind had been informed, Craig felt his body preparing for battle: his lungs worked, his heart drove, the muscles in his limbs hummed with blood; he glared at Khoory without seeing him. "They'll kill her," he whispered. "This won't be rebellion. They'll kill her in the filthiest way they can think of. A rite of passage. And the guards—they'll save themselves. Doctor, do the guards know about the negotiations?"

Dr. Khoory: "We assume the slaves have risen because they know. If the slaves know, the guards know."

Craig: "Then the guards won't fight. I'm going after her. Will Macwith get me a skimmer? I want one with

room for six or seven. With amphibian landing gear if possible. I want a laser-carbine, a stun-gun, *and* a blast-pistol. I want some maps. Will you arrange all that while I get ready?"

Dr. Khoory: "But I'm coming with you."

Craig: "You'll have to stay here a day or so. No, don't argue, listen. I'm going to write out a transmission-text. You get Macwith to put it out *exactly* as I write it, on the *biggest* space-sender you have; send on—I'll write that down here at the top—on seven-three-seven-point-eight-five-five townes. See it through yourself. Keep sending it until it's acknowledged. I have a cruiser, the *Cochrane*, out there with a nest of scoutcraft and a battalion of Ukrainian idealists under a tough named Ihor Murashchenko. This is to bring them in. They'll find you here. You can show them around Kossar."

Dr. Khoory: "Which will these idealists help, the Council or the slaves?"

Craig: "Both. The line between idealism and insanity is vague, isn't it, Doctor? Always. We won't take a chance of crossing it. We *won't* massacre the slaves, and the Council *can't*. But we can't let the slaves massacre the free-men, or we'll have chaos, then the Plith."

Dr. Khoory: "If the Lady is killed, there will be war to the knife, I think."

Craig: "*Après nous le déluge*. Baptism of outrage. Every man his own Vesuvius. If the Lady is killed, the slaves and the slaveowners will abolish each other. It wasn't what I had in mind. I won't live to see it. . . ."

6

Craig brought the skimmer in low around the headland, barely clearing the fingers of spray. The stairs down the cliff-face were still there. He pushed the "Inflate" toggle on the instrument panel, gave the pontoons time to fill, and set the chunky craft down a good kilometer out in the Bay. He pressed the button over the "Sounding" dial, saw that the Bay was too deep, taxied toward the promontory until the needle registered in the white zone, and pressed the anchor release. He slid the little raft from under his seat, raised the cabin flap to its highest position, took the pilot's glasses from their holder, and studied the jutting cape.

The sun was low over the Castle. It shone full in his face and gave anyone ashore a good view of him—and a good shot at him. He had positioned the skimmer so that the Lady's tower cut off as much as possible of the rest of the Castle. Inside that tower were—or had been—the loyal guards. Lady Morgan might be in there, too. Or she might not: she might have won back control of the Castle; she might be in the hands of the rebels; she might be dead. He could see—but the glasses were not visible-light glasses and discriminated poorly through ordinary windows—the faintest traces of a reciprocal studying from the tower. But the tower was like a great sleeping beehive in the afternoon shadows. Of Lady Morgan there was no sign. Surely, sitting flamboyantly lighted as he was, she would have recognized him and signaled.

He inflated the raft and set it in the water; it rocked annoyingly as he lowered himself into it; he slammed and

locked the skimmer's cabin flap, started the raft's hissing, gurgling propulsion unit, and steered a course for the low side of the cape where the isthmus began to broaden to the mainland.

There was no hail, no challenge, no shot.

The shore was deserted. He sensed, rather than heard, a gathering somewhere else; a focus; an excitement. He encountered no one until he had made his way into the paved portion of the Castle grounds. Then a slave wandered into view, gaped at Craig's clothing—which was that of an ordinary Terran bourgeois—and ran away. Craig followed at a walk.

Two men appeared in front of him; one had a blast-pistol, the other a pole with a knife lashed to the end of it.

"Halt!" barked the man with the pistol.

Craig halted, maintaining an expression of mild inquiry. The slave with the pistol seemed uncertain what to do next.

"What are you doing here?" asked the man with the homemade lance.

"Looking for the fun and games," said Craig.

This reply visibly pleased the man with the lance. Even the man with the pistol seemed mollified. Craig felt himself shudder.

He peered through the shadows at the man with the pistol. "Binks," he said, "don't you remember me? Johnny? Johnny Smith. The gardens."

Binks said wonderingly, "But you drowned. You escaped and drowned. They looked for you."

Craig: "I escaped. I didn't drown."

The man with the lance asked suddenly, "What'd you come back for?"

Craig: "I heard there was fighting, and I came back to tell you where Black Weeden's guns are."

The man with the lance said to Binks, "We'll take him to Curt."

As Craig walked docilely between them, Binks said, "How did you get away, Johnny?"

Craig: "I followed the coast up to the ore port and took an empty cart to the mines. I'd been in the mines before, you know, a long time; and there was a back way to the river. . . ." They were entering the Kossar garden. With a chill, Craig realized that he had been hearing the low, cruel, muttering laughter of a mob watching death.

The throng in the garden was so dense and so enthralled that Craig's escort took several minutes to maneuver him to the front.

In a little space, surrounded by peering, craning slaves, stood Curt. His tawny skin seemed to glow in the waning light; his pale eyes glistened. Two slaves, their drawstring trousers soaked with fresh blood, stood flanking him. On the ground lay five bodies, all of women. None was the Lady's. All had been mutilated. The body at Curt's feet was headless. The head lay nearby in a blood-dabbled border; it was the slave-girl Molly.

Craig stood motionless, choking back the vomit in his throat. Curt recognized him at once, and with glee.

"Johnny!" he cried, "you did escape! And you've come back!" There was something almost pathetic in the young man's eagerness to show off his triumph: "We're winning, Johnny! And—and I'm their leader now."

Craig: "You've certainly got them with you, Curt."

Curt: "We've been dealing with the traitors—the ones who sold themselves to the guards. I'm going to make a speech. I'm good at speeches; you'll see." He stepped toward a heavy crate lying behind him on the ground.

Craig: "Curt." The young man paused. "Curt," said Craig in an urgent undertone, "let me make a speech first. I'll work them up a little for you."

Curt hesitated and gave way. Craig mounted the crate and looked out over the faces wasting with feverish brutality.

"Fellow slaves—*that-were!*" he shouted. The throng

mumbled approval. "I don't exactly know why I'm up here speaking to you—except that I'm one of you who escaped." Surprise and scattered confirmation. "I escaped from here six years ago . . . but today"—he dropped his voice—"today I came back to be amongst you. To take my place amongst you . . ." (Approval. Someone in the deepening shadows called, "Good old Johnny!") ". . . only to find"—his voice suddenly rang out—"only to find that the girl who risked her life to help me escape is lying *there*." He pointed with a stabbing hand to Molly's corpse, and lowered his voice. "There. You murdered her. *You!*" he screamed at the crowd. "That's her blood on your feet, you in the front here, you who crowded up front to *see* better. But it's on all of you. You murdered her because *he* told you to." He gestured toward the astonished Curt with open hand. "You're *his* slaves now, it seems."

Curt rallied bravely. "Don't listen to these lies," he shouted. "Wait till you've heard me!"

Craig cut him off with thunderous sarcasm. "Oh, yes! Yes, Curt, you want a chance to talk. You gave Molly a great chance to talk. Molly, tell them your story!" he cried out with streaming eyes. "Molly, Molly, tell them how you hid me in your room when the guard came, tell them how you protected me, tell them what the fat guard did with his torch. . . ." He quavered, hardly above a whisper: "Molly, why don't you *explain*?"

Curt said shrilly: "What do you want, Johnny? What's it all about? Why don't you be the leader, if that's what you want?"

A husky voice, ignoring the irony, called, "Yes, you lead us, Johnny."

"Why, of course," Craig bellowed corrosively, "you murder my girl, so I become your leader!" He let his voice rattle in his throat. "I wouldn't *have* followers like you-u-u. . . . Follow the Butcher Boy here!"

He plunged off the platform and into the crowd, which

gave way for him, shuffling and confused. No one spoke to him as he worked his way back, but he could feel the shallow mood of guilt dissolving, and hostility already beginning to congeal behind him. He turned at the edge of the crowd and shouted: "When I was *drugged* in Port Constantine I protected the people who had helped me! And a lot of good it did 'em, right?" Then he walked slowly away out of the gate, and into the nearest shadows.

He hurried from shadow to shadow toward the Lady's tower. It was now dusk. Most of the outdoor lights were on, but some were evidently broken or in some way disconnected. The lights in the courtyard around the Lady's tower were mostly out; they looked as if they had been the objects of bored target practice by slaves or guards.

Craig was about to dash across the courtyard and around the tower to the door facing the Bay when a furtive movement near the tower base caught his eye; he drew back and watched from heavy shadow; it was a man in guard's uniform, stealthily coming from the seaward side. Defecting perhaps.

But perhaps not. Craig waited until the guard, weaving silently between the patches of light, had come across the courtyard; then, when the guard slipped into the shadows around some sheds—the same sheds, Craig remembered, where the Lady and he had once pursued the squeed man—he crept after him.

Passing a shed, he heard a low voice: "Harry, are you in there?"

A whisper answered: "Yes. Which of you is that?"

The first voice: "Bragdon."

The second: "Where's Pelliser?"

The first voice: "Couldn't get away. She's getting suspicious. If we're going to do business, we've got to do it now."

The second: "I'm ready. What are you asking?"

The first voice: "Food. Food now. And then, in the morning, as much food as we can carry. No interference;

a free path to the mainland. *With* our weapons. Four groundcars *in* good working order, fueled up, *at* the mainland gate."

The second: "And we get?"

The first voice: "What else do you want? You get *her*. *In* good working order."

The second: "*I* get her first."

The first voice: "If you can handle it, Harry. If you can handle it."

The second: "I want in before you clear out. I want an hour upstairs. We have a couple of ideas for her later, but they'll kind of spoil her. So I get the hour upstairs first. *Then* you get the food."

The first voice: "That's not so easy. Some of the men might not go that far, to stand guard while—"

The second: "That's your problem, not mine."

A silence, then the first voice surrendered: "All right. Give me fifteen minutes to talk to the men. Then come to the Bay door, knock twice, pause, twice again—like this: rat-tat, rat-tat, got it? I'll let you in. Then"—he sniggered—"it's up to you."

Craig waited for the unseen Bragdon to leave. Then, when he judged him out of earshot, he leaned into the shed where Harry was waiting and whispered: "Psst. I forgot to give you this." There was a faint stir. Craig crawled into the shed and whispered: "Here it is. Hurry. Where are you?"

Harry's whisper was right beside him. "Here."

Craig found Harry's throat on the first try, choked off a yell, hacked at the larynx with the side of his hand, twisted the head around and hammered the base of the skull. Then he stripped the slave shirt and drawstring trousers from the unconscious man and placed them at the door of the shed, removed his own garments and put them with Harry's. The man stirred and uttered a sound. It began as a moan and then broke up into a snigger. Craig knelt frozen in the darkness. The man's terrible vitality left no

choice. Feeling in his tunic pocket and extracting a small metal-handled knife, Craig crawled back, unfolded the blade, and—from behind, so as to avoid the spurting—slit Harry's throat. Then he sat down and waited what he judged to be ten minutes. He wondered if Harry had had free will. He put on Harry's clothes, put the little knife into the waistband of the trousers, scientifically bundled his own garments, and, with the bundle under his arm, set off barefoot across the courtyard and around the tower.

He put the bundle on the ground beside the door, rolled up his sleeves so that the slave-number would show, and knocked: rat-tat, rat-tat. The bolt clicked back and the door opened. Craig stepped into a dimly lit entrance-way and faced a pale, slit-mouthed lieutenant.

The lieutenant's eyes narrowed. "You're not Harry!"

Craig sneered at him. "Sh! Curt killed Harry. So now I'm Harry. If you want your food and the rest of it, I'm Harry." He sneered again. "You look like you lost a little weight already."

The lieutenant glanced at Craig's arm and saw the slave-number. He shrugged. "All right. Up here."

They started up the stairs and, to Craig's consternation, several guards joined them at the first landing and formed a kind of bridal procession in back of him. One said, "We put her in her own little bedroom for you, nice and comfy." Another said, "Ah, you don't know what you're *getting*," and raised a laugh. None of them recognized him.

The lieutenant unlocked the familiar bedroom door, held it open, and said, "All right, *Harry*. One hour by the clock." Craig stepped inside; the door slammed behind him and the lock clicked shut. There was a burst of prurient laughter from the other side of the door, and Craig heard the word "disease."

The Lady sat on the far edge of the bed, her back to the door. She was naked. Her hair tumbled down her back from her bowed head. She did not look around, but

said dully, "Don't talk, don't talk. They explained it all to me. Drop your pants and collect your bill."

Craig silently took off Harry's shirt and trousers, walked around the bed, and kissed the crown of her head softly. The head whipped up; the Lady's eyes widened; and Craig planted a fingertip on her lips.

"I'm known as Harry," he whispered. "My dear! My dear!" He kissed her mouth. "Listen," he whispered into her ear, "you don't have to—do this really. Just make a convincing noise. They're out there listening."

Her nails slid up and down his back. Her laugh was as golden as her hair. "Oh, Smitty, Smitty!" she whispered, "don't be *stupid*, boy!"

7

A pounding at the door.

The lieutenant's voice: "Hour's up." It was an angry voice.

Craig snickered loudly and whispered: "Know the drill?"

The Lady nodded. Her eyes were bright. She took her place just inside the door; anyone entering must suddenly confront her nakedness at close quarters.

Craig hefted an old-fashioned lamp base he had chosen, positioned himself by the hinged edge of the door, and called: "All right, all *right*, come in. I got to talk to you anyways about something." The lock rattled; the door opened; the lieutenant took a step inside and had his attention preempted; Craig shut the door, threw the bolt as silently as he could, and brought the lamp base down diagonally across the base of the lieutenant's skull; the

Lady caught the crumpling form, lowered it quietly to the floor, removed the officer's blast-pistol, checked its charge, and smiled at Craig.

Craig raised his voice clamorously: "All right, all *right*, let me get my clothes." He mumbled for a moment in a low tone, then answered loudly, "That ain't what I said, Lieutenant."

Craig-Lieutenant: mumble-grumble.

Craig-Harry: "What do you mean, you don't trust me? The food—"

Craig-Lieutenant interrupted with more mumbling.

Craig-Harry: "I told you we got it ready. Curt has nothing to do with it."

Craig-Lieutenant mumbled at length, while the Lady stripped the actual lieutenant naked and handed the clothing to Craig, who put it on. It was a fair fit. She gathered together an outfit of her own and made a bundle of that. She put on Harry's shirt and trousers and tied her hair up in a babushka made of a dark brown blouse.

Craig-Harry: "Now, look here, Lieutenant, that wasn't the deal and you know it! You want your food? Then don't threaten *me*. You don't get no food without I go out there *safe and sound*, right?" As he spoke, he pulled some of the circuitry out of the lamp, twisted wires together, stooped to an electrical outlet in the wall and rammed home his device. There was an explosive flash; all the lights in the room went out; and a hubbub outside the door announced that the circuit breakers had tripped nicely—for that level of the tower, at least. Craig-Harry roared: "What happened to the lights? Lieutenant, make them put those lights on. What kind of trick is this? You don't get no food if this is how you play!"

The Lady handed Craig the blaster. "Got the clothes?" he whispered. She whispered, "Yes. Ready?" He answered, "Yes." They unbolted the door and flung it open; outside, the suite was in total darkness.

The Lady-Harry and Craig-Lieutenant pushed past

the knot of guards outside the bedroom door and strode rapidly in the darkness through the familiar rooms toward the outer door of the suite. The stair landing was satisfactorily dark; the one below was dark. Craig looked down: everything was dark except the lowest level, just inside the door facing the Bay. Here, for some reason, the light was on a different circuit breaker.

They hurried as fast as they dared down the stairs, with several guards clomping suspiciously after them. As they approached the lighted area, they broke into a run. "Hi! Stop!" yelled a guard.

They skittered across the entrance-way, wrenched the door open, and scrambled into the night. Craig slithered to a stop, whirled, and faced the door. The first of their pursuers appeared, weapon in hand, silhouetted against the lit doorway: Craig removed his head with the blaster. The other pursuers checked and drew back. Craig darted toward the door; picked up his bundle of clothing; fired at random into the entrance-way, producing a shriek; yelled, "You insulted my wife!" and dashed after the Lady, who had found the stairs down the cliff face and was descending.

"Too bad I can't swim far in these boots," said Craig, as they reached the surf. "Might as well leave the whole uniform." He stripped; in the darkness he tied his clothing-bundle to the top of his head with the trouser legs knotted under his chin; he threw the blaster into the water and stepped in. Somewhere ahead of him in the water was the Lady. "Straight out from shore," he called in to her in a low voice. "Here, better follow me." There was a soft splashing, and two sharp-nailed fingers administered an agonizing pinch to his left buttock.

On the brow of the cliff, behind and above them, the guards opened fire into the darkness with lasers and blasters.

"They're firing much too high," whispered the Lady.

"Yes," whispered Craig, "and they might hit the skimmer by accident."

"They have no torches, you notice," she whispered. "They ran into the tower during the daytime. No brains, no torches."

They swam on in the blackness, as silently as they could. Ahead of them there was a flash of flame and a kind of brief snarl, then a dying glow of metal. Craig's fear had been justified. "At least it gives us a bearing," he said. They swam on.

The skimmer was hit twice more before they arrived at it; each time, Craig had a nightmarish vision of a punctured pontoon and a foundered craft. But the skimmer seemed to be placidly afloat when they blundered into its substructure. "Now to work the bloody combination in the dark," said Craig. He worked at the tiny lock with wet fingers.

A blaster-shot glanced off the skimmer near the tail. "Woof!" said the Lady. Then, just as Craig said, "Ah!" a laser-flash seared at something on the Lady's head. Craig cried out. "Just my clothing," said the Lady. She untied it and threw it away.

"Here," said Craig, his heart still pounding. "Get in." She hauled herself up. He threw his bundle aboard and, with the Lady pulling at his armpits, clambered in.

"Now," he said, "we'll see if they hit anything vital."

The skimmer blubbered a little, shivered, and began to lift.

"That's more like it," said the Lady.

They flew straight for a few minutes, due north.

"If Harry had vermin," said the Lady, yawning, "they've all been drowned."

Craig: "Among the ancient primitives, de-lousing one another was considered a choice intimacy. I shall demonstrate. . . . No, I won't either. I can't get this onto Automatic. They did hit something. . . . I can't get the pontoons to deflate. The course of true love never did run smooth. . . . Ah, well! as long as I can steer and land."

The Lady: "How do you know you can land?"

Craig: "That we'll find out eventually. Get the maps out and that torch. Can you find this part of the coast for me?"

The Lady: "Which part?"

Craig: "Blindmarsh, I should think."

"Here it is." She showed him.

Craig: "I think I'll head west-by-northwest. The laagers will be lighted. That will give me a reference point." The skimmer banked. The stars in strange constellations wheeled past the cabin windows. "The army of unalterable law," quoted Craig.

A moment later he added calmly, "I can't get this thing out of the turn." He fought the controls.

The Lady: "Don't get angry. Be tender with it."

Craig: "A-ah-h! You were right. It worked."

The Lady: "If it works with me, it'll work with a mere machine."

Craig: "All the same, if we can find some place to put down until daylight . . ."

The Lady: "Want me to take the controls for a while?"

Craig: "No, you watch for lights. The laagers should be somewhere off to the right."

Some time later, the Lady reported lights in the extreme distance on the right.

Craig: "We'd better go and look at them. Make sure they're the laagers."

The Lady: "Maybe it'll behave better on a right turn."

Craig coaxed and forced the controls. "Not *much* better." He was perspiring.

The Lady: "Now you know how *I* feel—felt. . . . Why are you such a threat to me, Smitty? You excite me because you threaten me." She trailed her fingertips like feathers over his bare belly.

Craig kept his eyes on the approaching lights. "Because I love you. You can't stand that."

The Lady laughed. "It hasn't ruined my health so far."

Craig: "They *are* the laagers. Do we put down here? I don't know how it would be with pontoons on dry land, and I don't think we can trust the Mulbrach."

The Lady: "I don't think we can trust the slaves *or* the guards."

Craig: "You're right. We head for Port Constantine. Let me see the map. I'll go a whole three hundred and fifty degrees to the right, instead of ten to the left. . . . She's pretty willful, poor thing. She's been hurt. . . . Ah! . . . No: cancel that 'ah': I can't get her straight. The lateral controls seem to have locked. She's going to keep veering just a little to the left." He swept his hand over the map. "Who's over that way?"

The Lady: "Sir Osman. But we'll be past him, I think, unless your radius-of-turn is fairly short. Over here would be Lyme."

Craig: "I wonder if Lyme's slaves have risen. Maybe he bores 'em into submission."

The Lady: "He's one of the squeed-traders, you know. If his slaves don't kill him, I might."

Craig: "Fine. Khoory put the weapons in that rack. . . . You know, I didn't say 'lust'; I said 'love.' I also *love* you."

The Lady: "And that's a threat?"

Craig: "To you, my lady, yes. It's like a seasoning, isn't it? It intensifies the guilty flavor of your life. Isn't that what happens?"

The Lady: "I'll think about it—some time."

Craig said morosely: "Think about what it means to me, too."

The Lady: "Oh, Smitty, I can feel what it means to you. You *are* a shameless animal."

9

Craig: "Wake up. What's that over there? On the left."

The Lady sat up. "That, my boy, is a damn big fire. Can you take us nearer?"

Craig: "I don't know. I'll try diving. Maybe with the controls skewed like this . . ." He put the skimmer into a hurtling dive and pulled out sharply.

The Lady: "I liked that. Do it again."

Craig: "I'll get some more altitude first. It did turn her a little. . . . All right, down again. . . . That should bring us closer."

"It's Lyme's place," said the Lady. "High Lyme. It's burning. All of it. Look at that!"

High Lyme was a cluster of blazing rectangles, white-hearted, touched with a silvery shimmer from the intensity of the heat, sending up great columns of palely incandescent gas into the black sky.

Craig: "No one left alive in that fire-storm. . . . I hope the up-currents don't suck us into it. I can't steer this thing at all—and we're going to come awful close." They were now headed almost directly toward the column of hot gases. Craig pulled and pushed the controls for maximum climb and maximum forward thrust. The clumsy, half-crippled skimmer wobbled helplessly as it moved into the turbulence around the updraft; it canted, slipped sideways, took a fierce buffet from the updraft, bucked, and staggered clear.

Craig clung desperately to the controls; he felt like a rat being shaken by a terrier. The Lady's body crashed against his, then tumbled away and thudded against the side of the cabin. She uttered no sound. The air in the cabin was charringly hot. Craig flipped the controls over to the landing mode; the craft did not respond; he would have to bring it down manually.

It would have been a good enough landing, but the pontoons were still inflated, and the skimmer bounded, lurched, and skidded sideways to a halt. Craig flung himself toward the Lady. She was breathing, and her pulse was regular and strong; Craig rapidly felt her head and limbs, and could find no wetness of blood and no palpable fractures.

The glare of the fire, about a kilometer away, lit the cabin somewhat. Craig began looking through the strewn equipment for the torch.

A form, black and distorted against the glare, loomed up outside the skimmer, lifted open the cabin flap, inserted the snout of a raygun, and said politely: "Welcome to my hearth and home. You have come, I take it, to enjoy my fire." He gestured toward the conflagration. "I laid and lit it myself. Not at all bad for an evening's work, don't you think? I did not even have time to warn the inhabitants." It was the Count of Lyme.

"I think," said the Earth Ambassador, "I'll tell Murashchenko to work with *you*—with Khoory, not the Council. Let me write my text, and you get what you can. When I've left, you can tell the others."

Khoory looked at the man he had known only as an impertinent and seductive slave. Craig had taken out a tiny, red pocket notebook and was encoding or enciphering a message. It was still difficult for the Doctor to realize that one man—and a man so casual, so sensual, so concretely *there*—could wield such power over an entire world; more difficult to realize that Kossar, the slavers' oligarchy, like a child grown senile before it has grown up, was dying; most difficult of all to realize that he, Ly-sander Khoory, was to have a role in History. He hurried off to Macwith's office to get this curious ally his skimmer, his weapons, his maps. . . .

When Craig had left for Treglast, Khoory went back to Macwith. "I have two more urgent requests, Mister Secretary," he said.

The Secretary: "Only two?"

Khoory: "The first—you will forgive my peremptory manner, but I have no practice in making History, Mister Secretary, and novices are always self-important—is that you authorize me to put a message out on Kossar's *biggest* space-sender. The second is that you personally inform all the members of the Council who are here that a revolt of slaves has broken out in Treglast and *may* have broken out in their own domains."

The Secretary's long, ambiguous face did not change.

"As to the first, Doctor, our only sender is at our only spaceport. I will give you a note to the technician in charge, and I will assign you a groundcar to take you there. As to the second, Baron Ewbold has received a vidiphone call and has left; he told Lord Wynther, who has left; the Count of Lyme may or may not have received a message, but he has left; as you know, her ladyship left hours ago; and I shall be—happy to inform General Falkendire, Sir Osman, and the Master of Orme." He added in the same even tone: "I will now break my rule and volunteer an opinion: the Count of Lyme has gone mad. You may wish to consider that in your planning."

Khoory put Macwith's note in his pocket with Craig's and drove with intense care to the spaceport. He found the space-sender and roused the technician in charge. "Here is my authorization from the High Council," he said. "This message must go out on seven-three-seven-point-eight-five-five townes."

The technician looked at the message. "This don't make sense," he said sulkily.

"Where is it written," said Khoory, "that nightmares must make sense? Or History? I have my orders, and now you have yours."

Khoory had seen the arrival of spaceships many times, but had never before seen a naval cruiser land. After the rumbling descent, when slavers and passenger ships simply spilled their human contents into the field, easily, as a dog vomits, this ship began a cycle of formalities; musters and deployments, formations and inspections; the scoutcraft—snub, compact, glistening—formed an array as perfect as a crystal lattice; the Ukrainian Idealists (it must be they) stood formation with huge and complicated packs on their backs, bristling with armament.

"I shall write a learned paper," said Khoory to himself, "entitled, 'Evolved Atavism: The Ceremony of Empire.' How beautiful it all is!" The sun's rays had the slant of late afternoon.

He went back to his groundcar and found a way to drive it out into the field. He drove with the speed of exhilaration toward Craig's armed forces. Only meters away from what he was sure were the Ukrainians—snub, compact men they turned out to be, but by no means glistening—he alighted. He hastened toward the officer in charge of them, a squat figure in a kind of armored space-helmet. "Could you direct me," said Khoory, "to Colonel-General Ihor Murashchenko? He is to meet me. I come from Ambassador Craig."

The officer scanned his figure with a neutral expression. "Will come soon," he replied in a harsh basso. "Please wait where you stand. Soon come."

Khoory waited where he stood, and soon there appeared among the group on the uppermost ramp a man who, even at a distance, could be seen to bear authority. He spoke with the others in the group, descended the ramp with unhurried briskness, and marched toward the Ukrainians, who sprang to attention. The officer in charge saluted vehemently; General Murashchenko (if this was he) returned the salute with matter-of-fact correctness; the officer said something unintelligible to the General; Murashchenko raised his black eyebrows and, with a sudden abandonment of his military bearing, walked over to Khoory.

He pulled off his red-and-brown garrison hat, put it under his left arm, and extended his hand. "You are Doctor Khoory. I am Ihor Murashchenko, Mister Craig's deputy." General Murashchenko was a slim man, shorter than Khoory, with black hair, round blue eyes so deep-set that he had a frowning look, and a straight nose that jutted a shade too sharply out of his face. Khoory's first thought was that the man was very young to be a Colonel-General; the second was that the man was about Craig's age.

"Lysander Khoory. I am honored, sir." Khoory grasped the General's hand.

General Murashchenko: "Where is Mister Craig now?"

Khoory: "He has gone to Treglast to investigate the rising there. He—he has gone alone."

General Murashchenko scowled. "You let him?" Then his face broke into a youthful smile. "I also would have had to let him."

Khoory: "I must tell you, General, that I am worried. Truly so. . . . Will you be making your headquarters at the High Council Building in Port Constantine?"

General Murashchenko: "It is best, I think. Major Hrushevsky will take over passenger terminal here and billet his soldiers in it. There will be no outgoing space traffic for some time, you agree? A sealed world for time? The Major will require permanent vidiphone circuit with our headquarters, but this, I think, he can make clear to appropriate personnel. Not linguist, but communicates effectively. You have met Major?"

Khoory: "Not by name."

The General beckoned to the squat officer, who marched over and saluted forcefully again. Khoory bowed.

General Murashchenko: "Major Nestor Kiril'ch Hrushevsky. Medical Doctor Lysander Khoory. Major, this Doctor and I will proceed at this time to Port Constantine—you have transportation, Doctor Khoory?—excellent! we will use it—and establish headquarters, Type Four mission, at so-called High Council Building. Major, you will carry out here your usual procedures. I want your men ready for combat deployment in" (he consulted his watch) "three hours. If not used this evening, they are to sleep on low-alert. Important *policy*: you and your men are to do nothing until ordered that will change status of slaves, but you yourselves are not to recognize in any way difference between slave and free. No difference. Have you questions, Major?"

Major Hrushevsky: "None at present time, General."

General Murashchenko: "Tell your men to stand at

ease. Major, carry on." They exchanged salutes. "Doctor, yours is ground-contact or atmosphere vehicle?"

Khoory: "Groundcar. This way. You have no personal luggage, General?"

General Murashchenko: "My orderly will follow in atmosphere scouter. Perhaps you will give me relevant background as we travel. I have been briefed by Mister Craig, but is difficult for me to comprehend world that is anomalous without being imaginative. Forgive me: comment is perhaps not founded. Now is your opportunity to explain why labor-intensive economy cannot buy labor power in free market, accelerate capital accumulation."

11

The troops moved out before dawn and arrived over the Castle of Treglast just as the first rays of the sun streaked the Bay. The personnel-carriers hovered, almost motionless, faintly brushed with the blood-red light, over the headland. In a small scout, General Murashchenko and Khoory swooped low around the towers and across the courtyards.

"There is a regulation, general officer is not to pilot his own vehicle. Wise regulation," said General Murashchenko, with his sudden smile, as he played the controls.

The windows of the Lady's tower were utterly dark except where they reflected the rising edge of the sun. In the contiguous compound, only a few of the lights were on.

Khoory: "Are those bodies?" In the dark areas of the courtyard there were long darker patches.

General Murashchenko: "Living bodies. Two of them looked up. Forgive me: I now use my native language."

He switched on the communicator, gave an order, and switched to Receive. Khoory heard the order passed on in a guttural basso. The General explained: "I am having that whole yard sprayed with stun-guns, as precaution." Behind them, one of the hovering craft darted over the courtyard and hung there, pouring radiation down.

Khoory: "Please, General, do not cook their brains. My lady and Mister Craig may be among them."

General Murashchenko snapped another order into the communicator. The stun-guns fell silent.

Khoory: "Those men are in black and therefore must be guards. If they were making a sally—do you call it?—from the Lady's tower, your Ambassador and my lady would not stay behind."

General Murashchenko: "We use very side, safe beam. But you are right. If that was sortie, they are now harmless but insurgents not. Not fair play. You have this concept? We must also put insurgents to sleep." He gave another order in his native tongue, and several craft swept in and hung poised over the Castle grounds. "Now, Doctor, perhaps you address insurgents through my amplifier, persuade them to come out and stand in courtyards? I go round, round, slowly; you repeat, repeat. Do not listen to your echoes, will confuse you. Also, you are not under oath. You have this concept?" He grinned and gave Khoory a microphone.

Khoory: "This is Doctor Khoory speaking to you. This is Doctor Khoory. I am with the Terrans. The Terrans are here, above you. Their guns cover every millimeter of this place. Their guns are pointing at you now. They do not want to kill you. They have come to Kossar to free the slaves. You have set yourselves free. But you are not safe. The fighting must stop. Step out into the courtyards. Do not stay inside. It is not safe inside. This is Doctor Khoory. I am with the Terrans. We are in the air above you. The Terrans have guns pointed . . ."

Slowly, like sauce pouring from a bottle, men and

women began to issue from the buildings. More and more of them dotted the courtyards. Some were armed, almost defiant. Most stood in bewildered, aimless groups in the strengthening dawn.

General Murashchenko: "You think most are now out? Excellent!" He pulled the scouter steeply upward and spoke into the communicator. The stun-guns in the waiting craft opened up.

12

Most of them, slaves and guards, were awake, and all these had been questioned. All weapons had been confiscated. The guards had been put for safekeeping in their barracks, and a squad of Ukrainians stood impassively outside. The slaves who had been interrogated were in their quarters watched by another squad of Ukrainians; the rest of the slaves, conscious and unconscious, were in the great dining hall, under the cold eye of one Corporal Makhno. The free-men who were not guards—most of them had fled when the rising began; or were dead—had given their parole and been sent to their quarters. But there was no sign of Craig or the Lady.

In the Lady's bedroom, the naked corpse of a man lay on the floor, and there were acrid traces of a small electrical fire. Khoory finished examining the body and stood up wearily to face General Murashchenko. "His skull was crushed, I presume with that lamp base," he reported. "He was a guard-officer named Bragdon. I would hazard a guess that Mister Craig or my lady was compelled to kill him, in self-defense naturally; he would have had a blast-pistol, and so would the other guards." He followed the

General's stare to the churned-up bedclothes. "That? It could have been rape. It could have been this man's struggle for life. It could have been"—he looked blandly at the General—"a negotiation between your Ambassador and my lady."

General Murashchenko: "You say this officer had blast-pistol?"

Khoory: "He would have had, yes."

General Murashchenko: "Where is blast-pistol? Where is uniform of guard? Other guards perhaps take blast-pistol, but why take uniform?" He smiled. "Your lady, I think, has escaped." He reflected. "I reason: Guards do not admit lady escaped. Why not admit this? Insurgents say lady came to this tower. Guards say no lady came to tower. Signs of—activity in lady's boudoir. Corpse of guard. Missing uniform. . . . I continue my thought: Insurgents say former John Smith came to their meeting, made speech to meeting, and left meeting. Insurgents held meeting in repulsive garden. We dig up fresh corpses in repulsive garden. None of corpses is John Smith, who is Mister Craig now, or your lady. Guards deny seeing Mister Craig, but guards do not tell truth today. . . . I conclude: Mister Craig came to Castle, spoke at meeting of insurgents, left meeting, perhaps because of corpses, and came to this tower looking for your pretty lady. Trouble with guards in tower. Mister Craig and pretty lady kill guard in boudoir, take blast-pistol and uniform, and escape, killing two guards downstairs who try to stop them. Because of trouble, remaining guards tell lies."

Khoory: "Admirable reasoning, General, admirable. So. Now we must find out where they went."

General Murashchenko: "Who is highest-ranking guard we have found?"

Khoory: "Lieutenant Pelliser. An unusually tough person."

General Murashchenko: "If Colonel-General cannot make Lieutenant talk, lieutenants have greatly improved

since I was lieutenant." He spoke into a hand communicator and turned back to Khoory. "Come, Doctor. This Lieutenant Pelliser will be waiting for us in Major's new office."

Pelliser was waiting for them between two Ukrainians. He was a large man with a dour face behind which, Khoory thought, there were twinges of fear; but he held himself erect.

General Murashchenko: "Ah, Lieutenant Pelliser, so charmed to renew acquaintance. You forgot to tell us something, not so?"

Pelliser: "I've told you everything I know."

General Murashchenko paced up and down in front of the Lieutenant. "You saw corpses dug up from garden? No? Oh, you are lucky, Lieutenant Pelliser. A disgusting sight. Must have suffered. Dreadful, dreadful. Now, Lieutenant, if you do not tell us truth about lady and Mister Craig or Smith, I will bring here insurgents who have done these things, and I will give them one hour with you, and I will tell them if they break you I will reward them."

Pelliser: "I've told you everything I know."

General Murashchenko: "Excellent. You are, as Medical Doctor Khoory informed me, unusually tough. . . . Doctor, who is young man identified by other insurgents as being in charge of those dreadful proceedings in garden? Curt. Very good. Major, where do you keep this Curt? Upstairs there are cells. Very good. Major, please have brought Curt. . . . Tough, dear Lieutenant Pelliser, is much-needed quality in these difficult times. You are ranking guard-officer. Medical Doctor Khoory and I must go to other domains, as you call them, on our work of mercy. Who is to be left in charge here? I wonder. Perhaps a small few men of my command. But must also be someone who is familiar with this place. Natural person: ranking guard-officer. But what to do if ranking guard-officer refuses to cooperate? Another natural person: leader of insurgents. Immediate difficulty: Leader of in-

surgents will resume hostilities against guards, and guards are now disarmed. Poor guards. Perhaps some more dreadful proceedings. . . . Ah, here is Curt. He is looking very tough, like yourself, dear Lieutenant. Curt, I will need you in short time. Please be patient. . . . At this time, Lieutenant Pelliser, I am interested in two people. One is man a little taller than myself, with brown hair, and with scars on left forearm saying M-S-forty-thousand-and-something. Other is beautiful lady like story-book, known to all persons here. I am *not* interested in little fight in lady's tower. I am *not* interested in remarkably wrinkled bed. Since everything will turn out to be fault of dead Bragdon, I will agree in advance you are not to blame whatever. Now you may tell, and save lives of many guards. Your men. Your responsibility." He stopped pacing and faced the Lieutenant. Pelliser looked down and began in a low voice, "She did come to the tower. She was naked. . . . But she said she was diseased. I suppose she lay on her back for that animal there." He glared at Curt.

Curt exploded shrilly, "She did not! I did want to, yes, I did, but—"

Khoory: "Of course not, of course not. Curt, you are supposed to be a tough *man*." The young man subsided.

Pelliser: "We thought that was how she got away from them and how she got the luboes, or whatever it was. . . . And we were hungry. There was no food in the tower. We forgot that when we holed up there. So Bragdon got in touch with a slave called 'Harry.' They made a deal. We would give Harry the lady, and Harry would get us food and we would be allowed out through the grounds into the mainland. Well, she'd been worked over by *them* anyway, hadn't she? Harry wanted an hour with the lady first. Then he would bring us the food and take her to the other animals. We didn't like it, right there, with *us* waiting. But Bragdon said we had to. . . . But Curt killed Harry for some reason—"

Curt: "I did not!"

Khoory: "Of course not, of course not. Only women."

Pelliser: "Anyway, some other slave came instead. He had brown hair and a slave-number, but I didn't see what it was. He spent an hour with her in the bedroom. . . ." He shook his head slowly and the hint of a smile broke through his grim look. "Bragdon went in at the end of the hour. We could hear them arguing—the slave and Bragdon. Then the light went out, and we thought it was Bragdon and the slave. They killed Bragdon; we found him later. . . . There was some shooting. They had Bragdon's blaster. They got down into the Bay and swam out to a skimmer there. . . . I forgot to tell you, a man came earlier in this skimmer and went ashore on a power raft. I don't know who he was. . . . Then they flew; I couldn't see where."

General Murashchenko: "Excellent! Major, I need pair of handcuffs. Not local variety. Terran. While you are having brought them, Major, tell me: What noncommissioned officer will you leave in charge of here?"

Major Hrushevsky: "Corporal Makhno. Speaks good. . . . Shoots first, *then* speaks good."

General Murashchenko: "Little Kolya Makhno. Tougher than Lieutenant Pelliser, tougher than Curt. Excellent. He will pick squad of five men, and remain. Here come handcuffs. Lieutenant Pelliser, hold out right hand. Mister Curt, hold out left hand." He shackled the two men together. "Now, gentlemen, you are two of you in charge here as civilian administration together until Medical Doctor Khoory will return. Corporal Makhno will *not* have key. *I* will have key. Corporal Makhno will at all times have men watch you closely even on toilet. They will keep informed at all times Medical Doctor Khoory and myself. Now, Doctor, a map. I think nearest domains are of Parad and of Lyme. . . . Major, you have not re-

ceived answer with vidiphone to these domains? That is worse than suspicious. . . . Who is this unauthorized small boy looking at me?"

Khoory whispered: "General, this is Mister Craig's son. . . . Where is your mommy, Craig?" he asked aloud.

"She's in good health, thank you, Uncle Lysander. We did not sleep very long. She said I could come, because I was a good boy. She's home."

General Murashchenko: "She was right. You are excellent boy. It is honor to make acquaintance." He shook hands gravely with the boy. "I am Ihor Murashchenko."

The boy: "Is the lady in good health, Uncle Lysander?"

Khoory: "I am sure she is, Craig. I am going to see her now."

General Murashchenko: "Major, tell Corporal Makhno to choose sixth man, who will remain at all times protecting Craig and Mommy." He bent over the map. "Is it Parád, then?"

13

It was midday before they saw Jellak, Sir Osman's citadel, edging over the horizon. It seemed to bake under a sky of brass: low, pale, windowless buildings with interior courtyards like bins; clustered around a larger and more ornate structure swirling with blue arabesques and prickled with curious little towers; and all surrounded by a high wall the color of sand.

General Murashchenko spoke in his native tongue into

the communicator and then looked sidewise at Khoory. "We wish to take considerable chance to see ourselves this place, yes, Doctor?"

Khoory: "Yes, General."

General Murashchenko took the scouter up and toward Jellak while the other craft dropped behind. "Old anthropological doctrine: Forms tend to outlive contents. But this is not even outliving. It is reviving; it is fiction. Outside of wall is not désert; green fields; wall is painted color of sand. Kossar is fiction."

Khoory: "I think, General, you will find some even more curious violations of anthropological doctrine—in Sir Osman's hareem, for example."

General Murashchenko: "I will guess: boys. Or: boys *and* girls."

Khoory: "Neither."

General Murashchenko raised his heavy brows. "You do not tell me chimpanzees? . . . I knew man once in Kurdistan who loved goats—"

Khoory: "You will see how on Kossar the new serves the old."

General Murashchenko: "Tighten straps. We dip now."

The scouter tilted and plummeted toward the great central building of Jellak. The center of the roof was a low dome embellished with tiles the colors of sard and lapis lazuli—actually plastiglass, as Khoory knew—but around the dome were level areas. These were dotted with turbaned guards. As the little scouter dropped toward them, several of the guards rolled over and fired with rayguns and laser-carbines. The metal of one of the scouter's fins glowed and ripped slightly.

General Murashchenko: "I will not kill them yet." He played the controls; the scouter side-slipped, nosed up, heeled over, and left the guards behind, some still firing. The General took his vehicle around in a wide, rising arc. "They were not put there to shoot at *us*, Doctor. Whom?"

Khoory: "Slaves, I would imagine. But why shoot at us, then?"

General Murashchenko: "They are insane, perhaps. I think you have on Kossar epidemic form of suicidal mania, Doctor. We will humor them." He smiled brightly at Khoory. "You have this concept? Humor. Let commit suicide."

In the streets and on the roofs of the meaner buildings, there were other armed men. Those nearest the serai were crouching or lying in cover.

General Murashchenko: "Remarkably well armed for former slaves. Appearances of training."

Khoory: "Sir Osman was accused last year of using mamelukes." Answering an interrogative silence, he explained, "Armed slaves employed as soldiers."

General Murashchenko: "Soldiers? Against what enemy? You also have feudal wars, Doctor?"

Khoory: "I am not altogether sure, General. We have not had a feudal war in my lifetime. But I suspect that Sir Osman trained some mamelukes as a check against his own guards. Janissary rebellions are no doubt in this tradition. And it is in his personality to play off guards and mamelukes."

The damaged fin suddenly glowed again, and a large, ragged piece curled and was wrenched off in the slipstream.

General Murashchenko said calmly: "More crazy men. Three elements: Guards. Former slaves with mameluke leadership and armament. Sir Osman. Guards fight against former slaves. Both shoot at us. Where is Sir Osman? With his mamelukes as leader? With his mamelukes as prisoner? With his guards as leader? With his guards as prisoner? What is Doctor's opinion?" He pulled the scouter back toward the main force to the southeast.

Khoory: "Sir Osman Parad is a very complicated man, General. He may have come back, found a guard mutiny going on, and joined the slaves, claiming to favor aboli-

tion. He may have come back to fight against the slaves, but may have been accused by his guards of having brought about the slave revolt and may be dead or held prisoner. Or he may have found himself in a situation like her ladyship's."

General Murashchenko: "Not worth raping, this one."

Khoory: "Jellak is—strange."

General Murashchenko: "I will now order general assault. Forgive me: I am to consult you. You know of another way, Doctor?"

Khoory: "None."

The General spoke a single phrase into the communicator.

Khoory: "That was rather brief, General."

General Murashchenko: "I say, 'Major, take everything.' " He grinned. "Major likes when I give that order."

The flotilla spread out over Jellak, guided by a happy rumbling of orders from Major Hrushevsky at which General Murashchenko nodded approvingly. There was an intense barrage of radiation from the gunships—stunwaves, Khoory supposed—and then the personnel-carriers began in unison to disgorge men: they wore equipment on their backs that emitted furious jets of white vapor; they rode these jets swiftly down to the surface, controlling the direction of their descent by twisting their bodies; and as the first wave descended, they fired stunners at every man and every window behind which a man might be waiting below.

Their fire was returned. Evidently, some of the mamelukes and guards had protective suits and helmets. Khoory saw one of the descending troopers writhe, smoke, and curl to a charred mass; then another; and a third. The return fire was with lasers and blasters.

Murashchenko's grin turned to a cold glare. He cracked a word into the communicator and faced Khoory with a mirthless smile. "We always sacrifice few of our comrades to the Liberals. It is policy."

There was a fugue of orders. The troopers changed weapons, and a second wave, pouring from the carriers, opened fire with blasters and lasers into their scattering opponents below.

14

General Murashchenko landed his scouter in the largest of the flat areas on the roof of the serai. "Doctor," he asked, "you use weapons?"

Khoory: "Competently, General."

General Murashchenko: "Blast-pistol. Very ordinary. You are familiar?"

Khoory: "Very familiar." He accepted the weapon and followed the General into a door in one of the slender towers, like minarets, which rose at the corners of the roof.

As they spiraled down the stairs, Khoory could hear the rasp of ionization and now and again the screams of a burned man, though whether of guard or trooper he could not tell; the General, with his head cocked intently to one side and with his laser-carbine poised diagonally in front of his trim body, moved out of the stairwell into a maze of rooms; Khoory followed. The General called out loudly in Ukrainian, received a kind of choral answer, and led Khoory toward the squad making its sweep through the uppermost level of the palace.

Khoory had seen the decor of Sir Osman's many times, but it now presented itself to him as more sinister than he had remembered it: the splendid, if imitation, draped tapestries might conceal doors—or corpses—or guards with blasters; ten men might crouch in ambush behind the di-

vans in a single room; each intaglioed wall could be a sieve of spy-holes—or loopholes. "General," said the Doctor softly.

General Murashchenko glanced at him inquiringly; Khoory nodded toward a hanging; the General aimed his laser at it; Khoory said, even more softly, "Wait." He hurried over to it, seized it, and pulled; it fell, covering a shape that uttered a faint, quavering sigh. Khoory said: "Tell them not to shoot, General," and removed the swaths of fabric.

It was a plump human of eighteen or so, neither male nor female, and yet with pronounced elements of both. It was dressed in a gauzy shirt and trousers, the shirt plum-colored, the trousers pale green, and both revealing every detail of the soft, anomalous body underneath. It was weeping; the tears ran down its vague, sweet face.

Khoory: "Here, General, is a specimen from Sir Osman's hareem, a truly distinguished achievement of hormone chemistry. What is your name, lovely one?"

The creature whimpered, "Shekerleb," and began to sob; its sobbing was an obscene display—infantile, and yet with an appetitive intensity, a *reaching* quality that was more than dependence; the creature's assortment of fatty deposits and organs quivered; it leaned with parted lips toward the General, who had come over to examine it, and the eyes that continued to spill tears opened lustrously.

Khoory: "If I am not mistaken, General, 'Shekerleb' means 'Sugar-lips.' "

The creature lisped, "Yes," and wriggled.

Khoory: "It was a boy once, General. What was your name when you were younger, Shekerleb?"

The creature: "Tommy."

Khoory: "It is not, you will understand, a matter of injecting a boy crudely with female hormones. That will produce a sexual vegetable, very passive. This is—active. The patient retains the primary male characteristics, de-

velops the secondary female characteristics in profusion, and has a strong libido. This requires a fine tuning of the molecules, and a perfect balance. Sir Osman has a Terran physician who comes here from time to time. Where are the others, Sugar-lips?"

The creature started to tremble. "They have them locked up. They will kill them. All the others. And the master, too."

General Muraschenko: "Locked up? Where? Show to us."

The creature shivered deliciously for him. "Wh, no-o-o." It raised its hands in supplication, and the General stepped back hastily, raising the butt of his laser-carbine slightly.

Khoory: "Shekerleb, you *will* show us, or I shall be very unkind to you. Not cruel; unkind."

The creature sighed. "In the pit," it said faintly.

Khoory: "Take us there."

Two of the Ukrainians had lingered to watch; the rest had gone on with their sweep—fled, Khoory imagined. The General looked at the two, who stood several meters away, their weapons dangling, their eyes wide.

General Murashchenko: "Very secure in psyche, those two. Or paralyzed by fear." He addressed them sharply in Ukrainian. They snapped to attention.

The creature led Khoory, the General, and the two soldiers to one of the minaret staircases and down an interminable helix into what Khoory was sure were the deepest foundations of the serai. Where the stairs ended, a heavy metal plate was set into the stone floor, like the lid of a conventional service trough. The creature stared at them with sweet helplessness, wringing its hands pleadingly, while the tears flowed.

General Murashchenko: "Has kidneys too close to eyes." He nodded curtly toward the trapdoor, and the two soldiers slung their weapons and lifted it. Below, a long metal ladder ran down into a dimly lit chamber or corridor of gray concrete. The creature lowered itself delicate-

ly; the Doctor, remarking, "Allow me, as a sexual dielectric, to precede you, General," followed; the General and the soldiers completed the vertical procession; halfway down, the General said something to the rearmost soldier, who climbed back up the ladder and sat at the top of it, dangling his legs in the opening and looking down rather sourly.

Khoory stared around him. The corridor was lined with doors, most of which stood open; they were, Khoory noted with a shiver, heavily soundproofed; he looked into one cell, and it was lined with sound-absorbent material held in place by alloy netting.

General Murashchenko: "This door still closed." He waved the others aside and applied his laser-carbine to the lock area of the door. Choking fumes began to fill the corridor; the metal glowed red, then orange, then greenish-white. He kicked the center of the door; it swung open.

Sir Osman Parad, his swarthy, bluish body naked, but his faded green turban in place, was stapled, spreadeagled, to the floor; nestling around him, on him, naked, like huge white grubs, were five more androgynes like Shekerleb; they were moaning in fear, voluptuously burrowing their faces into the hollows of their master's body; three were in a state of gross arousal; Sir Osman lay as if catatonic, gleaming with sweat, his own and that of his creatures.

Shekerleb made as if to run toward the group. The General casually knocked him senseless with the butt of his carbine, then walked over to Parad. He kicked a plump, squirming body off the man's face and said, "Sir Osman Parad? Colonel-General Murashchenko at your service." He saluted and continued, "Important question: You have seen this Lady Morgan since you left Port Constantine?"

Sir Osman gave no response other than a glare. The General kicked him dispassionately in the ribs and said,

"Answer question, or I persuade this little pet to bite off your left testicle."

Sir Osman said huskily: "I have not seen her. I have been down here since I—"

General Murashchenko: "Very good. Thank you. I give you objective test. Which of the following fits most closely actual facts: A. You come from Port Constantine to Jellak. Guards mutiny. They hold you prisoner. Then slaves and mammillaries think you abolished slavery. They try to rescue you. . . . B. You come etcetera. Slaves and mammillaries already rebelling to free themselves. Guards fight to put down slaves. Guards accuse you of treachery. They make you prisoner. . . . C. You come etcetera. Slaves and Mammillaries rebelling. Guards fighting. Guards losing. They take you prisoner to give you to slaves in return for good terms. . . . A or B or C?"

Khoory: "Mamelukes."

General Murashchenko: "Mamelukes. Thank you. . . . A or B or C?"

Sir Osman: "A."

General Murashchenko: "Very good. Thank you. Pretty ones, continue with your emotional life. We shall close door, ensure privacy. If you try to escape, soldiers will burn off your hands and feet; but if you are good, staying here, we will be kind to you." He led the others out into the corridor and closed the door. "Doctor, let us go and arrange truce, new administration of guards and mamelukes (right this time?), trial and execution of this man who modifies people. These beings; you can cure them?"

Khoory: "I can try, General, but I am not an authority and I am not hopeful. Please to remember: Sir Osman had the services of a university professor from Terra."

General Murashchenko: "I think perhaps I apply General Clause Eighteen at that university. A new idea." He smiled. "Come. We finish here quickly, then we go to see this Lyme."

part five

Lyme: "Not at all bad for an evening's work, don't you think? I did not even have time to warn the inhabitants. No matter. You will be company enough. You will amuse me. Who are you?" He peered at Craig. "A naked man. Show me your left arm. A naked slave. And over there, a slave-boy; unconscious or dead. One or two slaves for company. And my brain, of course. It is enough. . . . Slave, I will tell you a secret. There are only two kinds of men: those who know they are slaves, and those who do not know. Even I only recently became free. . . . Slave, you were searching for something. Find it. I will let you find it. No, not the torch; you did not want that; I have no use for it. Nor the blast-pistol; I do not need it. That is a stunner; that is what you wanted; give it me. . . . Now you will pick up your dead slave-boy; very gently; you must not injure him. Bring him out here and walk ahead of me. Carry him in your arms. . . . I will tell you where to walk."

Craig obeyed. As he walked, he pretended to limp vio-

lently, kicking at the ground with his bare right foot; if he could leave a trail from the skimmer to wherever the madman was taking them, it was just possible that someone might rescue them.

Lyme: "You are silent, slave. That is good. You will know when I wish you to speak."

The walk went on. They were going generally away from the burning citadel. Craig's foot was by now agonizingly scraped; his limp was real now; he scuffed the ground with his left foot; his arms were exhausted from the weight of the Lady. The Count of Lyme walked amiably behind Craig, the stunner in the belt of his cassock, the raygun in his hands.

Lyme: "Turn slightly to my right, slave. Now I will choose: the stun-gun or the raygun? How beautiful it is to have the power of choice! I am sorry for all those who do not have it. You may put the slave-boy down now. Your task is done. I am here."

Craig raised the Lady in his failing arms, kissed her throat, lowered her to the ground, began to rise, saw the Count's shadow change as the weapon went up, and, as he had once done long ago, threw himself across her body.

2

He regained consciousness, became aware of himself, and yet at first could not be sure he was recovering his senses: his eyes reported only a stinging blankness, white light without source or shadow; his ears a suffusing white rhythm; his nose no smell, even of metal or stone, only an noise, in which his mind groped vainly for pitch or

undefined lack, a deadness, in the air; his mouth only his own thirst and hunger; and his skin nothing so distinct as a rope or manacle; yet he could not move. He tried to close his eyes, and could not; but now at least he received the first definite report from his integument: his eyelids were taped open. With this one distinct sensation to work from he succeeded in organizing his sanity. His fear ebbed.

He was wound up like a chrysalis in a cocoon of some inelastic cording that covered all but his face. He was on his back on an unyielding surface, looking up at a smooth transilluminated ceiling. The rushing whirr came from some mechanical system nearby.

He strained to turn his head sideways, but could see nothing except featureless white walls; at length, by forcing his head back, he was able to catch a glimpse of the Lady, or at least of the foot end of a cocoon similar to his.

"Are you awake?" he whispered.

"Awake?" returned her puzzled whisper.

Relief that she was alive brought welling tears. The tape on his lids had kept him from nictitating, and his eyes had begun to burn with dryness; now the tears eased the burning but confused his vision again. "You're all right," he whispered. "You're all right. Good girl."

Whisper: "Good girl?"

A loud clang, the slamming of a metal door, warned him that the Count of Lyme had come in. The madman in his priestly cassock stood for a while looking down at Craig with an expression of brooding severity. "You thought," he half muttered, half intoned, as if he were trying to remember a psalm, "that I was no more than a being such as yourself. I shall teach you better." Lyme's face almost seemed lit from within by some secret zeal, and the cassock seemed now something more than an affectation.

Craig, through his drying tears, steadily returned Lyme's stare but did not risk speaking; even if the inter-

minable reasoner of the High Council had not so far recognized the Earth Ambassador, Craig's voice might set off some train of malignant recollection. Had the maniac also failed to recognize Lady Morgan? That this could happen for more than a minute or two had not occurred to Craig before; he reproached himself for having used the phrase "good girl"; Lyme might well have heard it and might now look more closely at the "slave-boy."

Lyme stepped past Craig and stood looking down at Lady Morgan. He muttered something that sounded like, "Shall I have willed it?" Then he stooped over the prostrate form.

Craig forced his head back again, farther, to watch. The tape on his left eyelid came off, evidently soaked loose by his tears; behind Lyme's bent back, he worked his right eyelid free, but had not time to rest his eyes. The Count slid the top of the Lady's cocoon down to her throat and twitched the brown cloth from her head; her hair spilled out like syrup on the floor of the bunker. Even over the whirring machinery, Craig could hear the long exhalation of the Count's breath and thought her identity had penetrated the cracked mind; but Lyme, giving no more positive sign of recognizing his fellow Councillor, began to unwind her from her cocoon, and at the end of the process fumbled at the fly of her drawstring trousers, peered in, and said only: "I willed that they were to be male and female. That is accomplished. It is good." His speech had a peculiar evenness of pitch, not so much a chanting tone as the monotony of a small child's commentary on his lonely play. He began patiently to rewind the cord, handling the supple form as if it were a parcel.

"Good?" came the Lady's confused whisper.

Craig's fears for her returned; his stomach knotted. The disorientation that, even in the sensory confusions of this setting, had lasted for him only a minute or two was not clearing up at all for her. Had Lyme cooked her brain

with the stunner? Had he, Craig, damaged it in the lurching skimmer?

The Count of Lyme seemed to pay no attention to the Lady's whispers. He finished tying her up, rose, and again stood over Craig, this time so that his face was upside down for Craig; after a few seconds, however, his eyes appeared to have turned and to be looking at Craig right side up in an inverted face. It was a perfectly commonplace illusion, but now it accentuated Lyme's aura of madness.

Craig considered addressing him as "Thou," but decided to test the man's delusions a little more. "Who are you?" he whispered.

Lyme answered tonelessly, with only the slightest assertiveness to show that any trace of sane doubt remained: "Before the world was, I am." He stalked away, and the metal door clanged.

Craig: "My lady?"

There was no reply.

Craig: "Lady Morgan?"

No reply.

Craig: "My dearest?"

Lady Morgan whispered: "Who are you?"

Craig: "Smitty."

There was no reply.

Craig: "Where are we?"

Lady Morgan: "Were you bad, too?"

Craig understood: he was talking to a child. He closed his eyes in pain. "Is that where we are? Where they put the bad children?"

Lady Morgan: "I suppose so. What did you do bad?"

Craig: "I don't remember."

Lady Morgan: "I don't either. But it was awful."

Craig: "What?"

Lady Morgan: "What I did. I can't help doing bad things, you know. They're in me to do."

Craig ventured in a shaking voice, "Maybe you didn't do any bad things."

Her whisper gave way to a peal of seven-year-old laughter: "Silly! Why do you suppose I have to be punished, if I'm not bad?"

The door clanged; the Count returned and said, like a child admonishing a toy: "You must pay attention, or I shall grow tired of you."

Craig whispered: "We cannot see, my lord."

Lyme stooped and set something down on the floor, grasped Craig, dragged him to the wall, and propped him, half sitting, against it; he did the same with the Lady, whom he put next to Craig, less than a meter away. He retrieved what he had set down and stood before his two captives with it, raising it ceremoniously: it was a small crystal flask, capped by an inverted golden chalice: a squeed bottle. Lyme twisted off the cap, held it upright, and poured a few drops of clear, oily liquid into it from the flask. He elevated the little chalice. "Can you drink of the cup that I drink of?" he droned, without looking at them.

Lady Morgan asked blankly: "Must I?"

Lyme's eyes widened as if he had been interrupted; he put the cup to his mouth, drained off the squeed, and carefully licked the inside of the tiny vessel with a dark red tongue. Then he poured out a few more drops from the flask and advanced on Lady Morgan. "You must if I will it so."

Desperately, Craig whispered: "My lord, my lord, didst Thou not command us, saying, 'Ye may not eat of it, nor touch it, lest your eyes be opened and ye be as gods, knowing good and evil?'"

The madman stopped dead. Doubt had taken him by surprise. His features flickered. It took him several seconds to mend his divinity. Then his voice boomed angrily in the resonant bunker: "I have commanded you! You

shall *not* eat it." His voice flattened again. "Is there anyone who can hide himself in secret places where I cannot see him? Do I not fill all space and time?" He swallowed the dose himself.

The Lady watched him uncomprehendingly.

Lyme stood listening. Craig heard only the whirr.

Lyme: "Fools, wandering in the darkness outside. I chastised them, but they didn't learn. With fire, but they learned nothing. Now they're hiding in the darkness. They think I can't see them. I know what they're thinking in the darkness; I know as if it were day. They want my weapons. They want to reach out their hands and take the weapons I laid on the ground. They won't find them." He went out abruptly. The door crashed shut.

Craig wriggled sideways until his cocoon touched Lady Morgan's, then twisted forward and sideways and kissed her mouth. Her kiss in response was that of a drowsy child. With his lips, Craig gently pulled the tape from her eyelids.

Craig: "It's all right. He's gone for now. . . . Is that why *you* punish people?"

Lady Morgan: "Why, of course!"

Craig: "Because they do bad things?"

Lady Morgan: "Of course they do, silly."

Craig: "They *do* them, or they do them in their *heads*?"

Lady Morgan: "Silly, if you don't do it in your head, *you're* not doing it."

Craig: "So other people are really no better inside than you."

She was an indignant seven-year-old: "Of course they're not. Would I punish them if they were?"

Craig said, without changing his tone: "Can you move your hands inside all that string?"

Lady Morgan: "No. . . . Yes, a little."

Craig: "Can you get one of them in front of you?"

A flush rose from her throat. "Wh-which hand?"

Craig: "Your right hand."

Lady Morgan: "Why?"

Craig: "When I was wearing those trousers, I hid something in the belt."

She shuddered. "I don't want to touch it."

Craig forced himself to say, "It's a knife. It's a little knife; I slid it into the belt band where the string goes in. Just try to get it out and push it out through the cords. I need it. To save us."

Lady Morgan: "I don't want to touch it."

There was an interval, which Craig could not measure.

The Count of Lyme reentered.

Craig, like an exhausted swordsman, knew that he himself had strength left for only a few psychological parries, no more; and the Lady's survival or death and his own depended on events—chancy, bursting events—inside that imposing skull of the Count's. A glance told Craig that Lyme's mind was much more dialyzed now: the scurrying-animal-Lyme was frightened; he almost backed in through the door; after he slammed it, he leaned against it for an instant; the weapons hung awkwardly over his shoulders, as if he had slung them while running; and when he turned, his eyes darted from side to side as if looking for new enemies; yet the words that streamed from the godhead-Lyme were detached, without melody, addressed to no exterior person, calm:

"Didn't *need* them. It was for their own sake I saw them. I didn't need them.

"They weren't worth thinking about. Took up too much time in the mind. Anyway. Not worthy. Too much going and coming in the dark. They disobeyed the mind. They thought they were free. Disobeyed in the dark. Thought they could think their own thoughts. All that whispering in the mind . . .

"Won't see them any more. Won't let them back into

the mind. *Won't*. It was better to make sure with the raygun. Won't hear them. Didn't need all that whispering in the mind. Better.

"Who let the sight of them into the mind? Sound of them? Who let them be *there*? Then they tried to be there without the mind. Outside.

"Could have stopped listening and looking without the raygun. Enough. Take back the sight and sound of them. Take back. Take back. Where would they be? Not there. Enough. Hard to stop thinking about a thing, though. The mind is bigger. Free. Can think without meaning to. Things are there suddenly. . . .

"The ones in here are very silent. Won't listen for a while. Rest inside myself. All this giving and taking . . .

"Don't need light now. Not under here while I'm inside myself. If there's light, I might think. Have to listen to them then. Unless I use the raygun."

He went out. The lights went off. The whirr stopped. The bunker was black; dead, except for the Lady's regular breathing, the hesitant steps of the returning animal-Lyme, and godhead-Lyme's trailing hypnogogic drone: "Left the light on outside. Not outside. *Not* outside. No need to move. I'll think, 'No light in the sky.' No light in the sky. No light in the sky. No dawn . . ."

3

It was unbelievable to Craig that he could have slept; yet obviously he had done so. As he woke up in the absolute darkness, troubled dreams scuttled away, leaving the night's equally strange and turbulent realities clear in his consciousness. How long had he slept? His bladder

was very full, as if he had had an ordinary night's sleep, and even in his immobilizing cocoon he could feel the cold, twinging stiffness of his joints.

Both the other occupants of the bunker slept restlessly. Lyme's voice tossed in the blackness, croaking short, subjectless phrases, interspersed with dry breathing. The Lady whispered at intervals; Craig, remembering Lyme's fury at the imagined whisperings in his head, was terrified that the madman might leap up and butcher her.

Lyme: "*Am* free. Alone. Is free alone? Alone. *Am* alone. Alone. Don't *need* them. Don't *need*. . . . Need. Do too need. Do *too*. Need what? Warm. Not sounds. Warm. Is warm alone? . . . Alone is *not* warm now. Not warm? Cold. Cold now. Cold is not free. What is free? . . . Why sounds? Don't *need* sounds. Whispers. Why? No sights. Not now. No sights. Not now. No sights. Whispers. . . . Don't *need* whispers. *Not* whispers, no. No. No. No. . . ."

Lady Morgan: "Why do they put you in the dark if you're bad? Well, they're bad, too. Yes they are. . . . Here I am, Smitty. Oh, Smitty, they left me here in the dark!" The childlike call rose in a reedy treble; but Craig allowed himself one second of hope that he had heard a returning trace of adult modulation in the voice.

He said loudly, "I'm here. Smitty is right here. Don't be frightened." Feeling intensely foolish, he added, "You're a good girl." The boom of his own voice in the bunker startled him.

There was a faint, booming resonance, like a continuation or an answer. It was repeated, and repeated again. *Boom*. It was coming from where he remembered the metal door as being: Not a pounding on the door itself; too faint for that; but a slow, massive battering against something beyond the door. *Boom*. Neither Lyme nor Lady Morgan seemed to have heard. The one struggled in the cradle; the other wept gently in some child's hell. *Boom*.

Khoory? Murashchenko? No, they would not bother to pound away in that fashion; they would simply burn their way in. *Boom.*

The survivors of High Lyme, then? That was more likely; that surely was it; they had turned on their incendiary Count at last. *Boom.* Craig rolled over and began to wriggle along the floor toward where he thought the door was. *Boom.*

Lyme woke. His verbigeration ceased abruptly. *Boom.* The Count squealed once, scrambled for a moment, and clattered across the floor.

Craig felt a crash of pain; Lyme had tripped over him. The madman fell, thrashing wildly; he said nothing, but his breathing was stridulous, like fingernails drawn across slate; then he must have regained his feet; he landed a vicious kick on Craig's hip. Craig choked back a moan; he heard Lyme waver away, step by tentative step, and resumed his own progress.

He heard Lyme fling open the metal door: the pounding became much louder. The madman cried out, "No!" and then seemed to instruct himself in an undertone: "Kill them all."

Boom. The onslaught was furious. *Boom.*

Lyme screeched: "Kill them all." *Boom.* Then in a mutter: "He will kill them. . . . I—I will kill them." Loudly: "I will kill them." *Boom. Boom.* Shouting again: "You, you, I will kill you all." *Boom.* The pounding seemed to have no effect on the hatch or door. *Boom. Boom.*

"Better yet," muttered Lyme, and shouted: "I have two in here. Go away. Two of you. I will kill them. Go away now." The hammering stopped.

The silence was broken only by Lyme's scratchy breathing. Craig stopped his own furtive movements.

Then the pounding began again, inexorably. *Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.* Frantically arching and flattening his body like an inchworm, Craig wriggled farther; he felt

his feet collide with what must be the edge of the metal door, hooked them around it, and swiveled on his behind, slamming the door. He completed the spin of his body and succeeded in bracing himself against the door.

The door shoved violently against his back. Craig leaned against the thrust, and it subsided. Another shove forced Craig forward, but the pressure was brief, and as soon as it relaxed, he was able to throw himself backward into his original position. The spasmodic thrust was repeated; again Craig reestablished himself. He could now feel the dull concussion of the assault on the outer barrier. *Boom. Boom.*

Fear had evidently put Lyme back in partial touch with reality, for he stopped his futile shoves against the door and began a steady pressure.

Craig could not withstand this. He propped his body so as to get the best traction he could with his heels, and let his spine take the thrust. Perspiration poured from his skin and soaked into the cording that bound him. But he was forced forward, millimeter by millimeter.

He resisted until he thought the door was ajar almost enough for Lyme to get through and then rolled aside, let his enemy stagger in, and swung his legs back to trip the madman up. Lyme punished Craig's shin cruelly as he fell, but the fall was heavy; and Lyme lay for a minute, gasping. *Boom. Boom. Boom.* Was there a change in timbre? Craig's sweat-moistened bonds had now stretched enough to allow a kind of two-footed kick at the Count. It landed, eliciting a satisfactory sob; then Craig rolled over and away. Lyme flung himself with an animal growl at the place where Craig had been, and Craig, from a meter's distance, brought his heels down hard on the madman's neck.

Lyme slithered out of reach. Craig set himself for a beating, but heard his enemy retreat toward the door. To parley with the besiegers? No point in that. The lights: he had gone to turn on the lights. Craig kept his eyes closed

as he began hastily to work his way back toward the center of the room.

The lights came on. The abrupt illumination hurt Craig's eyes even through his lids. Painfully, he opened them to a slit and twisted his head this way and that until he saw the raygun and stunner on the floor. He wriggled toward them.

Just as he heard Lyme's footsteps clatter toward him from behind, he succeeded in rolling on top of the raygun. The Count laughed, a jagged sound.

Lyme: "Go to sleep, little slave. You will never wake up." He picked up the stunner, put the snout directly to Craig's head and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened. The gun was dead. Lyme had used it up hunting his slaves outside. The madman hurled it on the floor and jeered in a grating yell: "You fight back: Slave, slave, are you fighting back? It doesn't want to sleep. It fights back!"

He kicked Craig in the shoulder. Craig tried to pull his consciousness in from the surface of his body, taking refuge in a kind of safe burrow in his mind; but the blaze of pain pursued him. Another kick, this time to the bottom of the rib cage. Craig lost his breath in a gagging exhalation, and struggled to refill his lungs. Lyme threw himself on Craig's back and pummeled him about the head. The repeated shocks to the medulla began to tell on Craig's perceptions. The light seemed to brighten and dull with the blows. Pain and sound became confused; the boom of the assault on the bunker mingled with Lyme's blows. (Was the timbre changing? Craig could not tell now.)

Lyme gave over flailing at Craig and began to pull violently at his body. Craig twisted against the tugs, but felt himself being irresistibly rolled off the weapon. *Boom. Boom. Boom. Boom.* Craig shrank as if from blows. Lyme heaved, reached under Craig and slid the raygun from under him.

Boom. Then a noise less hollow: A scraping, rending noise. The outer barrier was breaking.

Lyme held the ray gun in one hand and ran his other caressingly along the long, bluish wave-guide. He lifted the stock to his shoulder. His head, with its high white brow and melodramatic veins, glistened with sweat; his lips pulled back mirthlessly from his teeth; his eyes fastened eagerly on Craig's. He aimed and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened; this gun was also dead, used up.

Crash. The outer hatch was giving way. *Crash. Crash.*

Lyme's face seemed to break apart. His eyebrows went up, his eyes grew round, his lower jaw went down. He jabbed furiously at Craig's face with the nose of the ray-gun, the sight gouging the cheek; then the madman lifted the raygun high in both hands preparing to stave in Craig's skull with the butt.

A hand slipped around Lyme's left side from behind and played nimbly over the thorax, the fingertips dancing on the ribs, finding the place. Another hand crept round from the right and thrust something into Lyme's heart. The Count toppled with a sigh that had started to be a scream.

Lady Morgan did not look at her victim, but she shuddered. "Smitty," she whispered. She knelt and kissed Craig's mouth gently. "Oh, my darling! Smitty, Smitty, Smitty, thank you for forgiving me. I was dreaming, but I didn't dream *that*, did I?"

Craig: "You didn't dream *that*."

She pulled the little knife out of Lyme's corpse, wiped it on the cassock, and turned back to cut Craig's bonds.

A final, screeching crash and a rush of feet: the populace had arrived.

The Lady lifted her countenance to stare at them, dazed; her cheek was smeared with the blood from Craig's.

The newcomers blinked in the eerie shadowless light. One of them said: "We're too late. He's dead."

Another: "They saved us the trouble."

The first: "They saved *him* some trouble."

A third: "Let's do it to *them*, then."

The second: "They're slaves, like us. He had them prisoner in here."

The first: "That's what he *said*."

The third man said to the Lady: "Show us your arm."

Craig hastily lifted himself on his right elbow and extended his left arm, displaying the slave-number, but the man's eyes were on the Lady. She held out her left arm, impassively, and pulled up the sleeve. The three men in the front of the mob looked coldly at the unscarred skin.

The third man's face creased briefly with satisfaction. He said, "There. And dressed up as a slave. What are we waiting for?"

A jumble of voices echoed him: "What are we waiting for? Let's get started. What's all the talk? I'll hold her down. No, let's start with him. Let her watch awhile. That's right, let her watch a while."

Lady Morgan: "He *is* a slave."

The first man: "A pet slave. What were they doing in the squeed still?"

The third: "What are we waiting for?"

A loud contralto cut through the murmur. "For me, as it turns out. Please to place your hands firmly on the tops of your heads. I shall remove now any head that does not have two hands on it." And, pushing through the rabble like a great snub-nosed barge docking, came the vast white form of Dr. Khoory. In his broad wake, with their laser-carbines prominently held at the ready, came Colonel-General Murashchenko and four compact troopers.

Craig said, "Lysander. Ihor. How nice of you to come!" Then he fainted.

part six

1

The High Council of Kossar was ranged on one side of the great Chamber, the Delegation of the Organization of Signatories to the Treaty of the Man-Inhabited Planets on the other. In between was a narrow table draped with green baize. On it Macwith placed two copies of the document. He straightened and turned a look of inquiry on Lord Wynther, who was to be chairman of the session.

The Lord Wynther was visibly failing; now and again an ember of malicious life flared up behind the ancient face, but the man wore his Victorian frock coat like a carapace that was too heavy for him. With long effort, he rose.

"The session will be in order," he said and looked slowly around for several seconds before going on. "I must explain to the Honorable Delegates, and to those three members of the High Council who have joined us within the last—can it be only eleven?—days, that it is this Council's tedious custom, before we enact any law, to have the text of it read aloud to us"—and the lipless

mouth widened momentarily—"in case there should be any Councillors who do not know how to read. I myself have known a few such, though not in the past century. Times change and—ah—change again. Customs persist marvelously, and the benighted past prepares for the enlightened future. Mister Secretary Macwith, will you favor us with a rendition?" He lowered himself into his chair and became motionless.

Macwith retrieved one of the copies and began: "The parties to this Treaty,

"Recognizing the sovereign quality of all the parties;

"Reiterating their desire to live in peace with all worlds, all human aggregations, all governments and hegemonies, and all culture-bearing species soever;

"Intending to declare publicly and formally their sense of unity, so that any potential aggressor will apprehend that the parties stand together in this galaxy; and

"Desiring further to coordinate their efforts for collective defense,

"Therefore agree as follows:

"Article One. Clause One. The parties undertake to settle by peaceful means any disputes in which they may be involved, and to refrain . . ."

The Master of Orme listened with jaw out-thrust—the spherical jaw of eleven days before was now somewhat crumpled, as if events had rendered it—and lips in-turned. He now wore a loose bush jacket, stained at both elbows and at the right shoulder.

General Falkendire scowled. At intervals his face slipped into repose and left an expression of dull wonder, almost of hurt, showing around the slightly prominent eyes; and then he would gather his face into an intelligent scowl again. He had taken the medals off his uniform.

Malcolm, Eleventh Baron Ewbold, fidgeted at his mouth. There was nothing of the Tenth Baron, the costumed huntsman, about this eighteen-year-old nephew, the pale surface of whose face stirred incessantly with

some neurotic contrivings inside; it was said that on seeing his uncle's murdered body the boy had remarked, as if busy with something else, "Quite so. History is a good hunter, too." He wore the sober, almost shabby, clothes of a commercial or bureaucratic underling.

The member for High Lyme was a freedman, a squat, knobby, yellow-brown man with a shaven pate and black brows, who now costumed himself in a somewhat too-intensely-blue soft suit and glared importantly at his fellow Councillors. He was the most colorful thing in the Chamber, tirelessly projecting; and yet there was also an indisputable earthy cunning about that face.

The member for Jellak was an old woman, hollow-fleshed and heavy-boned—once a prominent Terran, it was said—still in slave clothing. Her eyes were small and shrewd; they turned this way and that, inquiring into the details of the Chamber and its occupants; repeatedly they rested on the Earth Ambassador, who once looked up and exchanged a grin with her; but as Macwith came to the end of Clause Seventeen, she fixed her gaze on the Secretary expectantly.

Macwith: "Clause Eighteen. No slavery shall exist, nor shall any member of a culture-bearing species be held in involuntary servitude except as punishment for crime whereof he shall have been convicted by due process of law, in any place subject to the jurisdiction of any of the parties. Article Two . . ." And the neutral voice went on.

Lady Morgan Sidney closed her eyes and drew breath; the long inflation of her lungs raised her bowed head; then she exhaled, and the golden head sank forward.

Next to her, the old woman from Jellak peered 'round, alarmed, and whispered: "Is something wrong, my dear? Feeling sick? Or frightened?"

Lady Morgan looked up at her with ironic eyes in which unshed tears had collected. "Thank you, Miss Doe," she whispered back. "It's just that . . . it's very unnerving to recover one's virginity." She smiled. "I was so

bloody tired of guilt, and now I find I don't like innocence either."

The peeling old face of the slave-woman creased in an answering smile. "Cheer up, my dear. Just think what it would be like not to be capable of either."

Lady Morgan: "Is like, you mean, don't you?"

Councillor Doe: "Was like, my dear."

The Secretary's voice halted at last. Wynther labored to his feet, and said: "The final reading is over. I do not hear any Councillor asking to be recognized. That is appropriate. *Dulce et decorum est pro patria tacere*. (I have made the Earth Ambassador smile, have I not?) Perhaps one of the Honorable Delegates from the Human Race will wish to embellish the occasion? No? The human race remains silent. Evidently this is not a social club we are joining. Now as to the procedure for signing . . ."

He was the first to sign for the planet Kossar. He bent painfully over the green table and scrawled on each copy.

Craig, very pale, and with his half-healed face-wounds standing out angrily against his pallor, followed.

Then Falkendire. Then Murashchenko, impeccably turned out, with his deep-set eyes twinkling grimly. "Now we begin work," he said as he handed the pen to Orme.

Then the new Baron Ewbold, who turned the pages of each document and scanned them before signing. Then the Delegate-Observer from the Vulpi Cluster, the Honorable F. Daniel Mayfee, gluttonous, sly, and fluent. Then His Excellency Henry Choolek, the Councillor from High Lyme.

The fat little Delegate-Minister from Horner's World, the Honorable Andreas Goudsmit. Then the member for Jellak, supporting her big ramshackle frame with one hand while she wrote "Jane," hesitated, and added "Doe." Then the Procyonese Delegate-Observer, Citizen Iskander, like a starved hawk.

Then the Lady Morgan Sidney. She walked slowly from her seat to the green table, a chaste, tentative figure in

white, and said to the Secretary in a low voice: "Mac, old friend, get me a chair." She looked over at the Earth Ambassador. "Get two chairs. Quickly, Mac." Macwith's calm dropped away; he darted across the Chamber and dragged two chairs back. The Lady sat down in one, bent over the documents with a frown like a schoolgirl's, signed them, and pushed them toward the Secretary; she kept hold of the pen and stared at its tremblings with a small reflective smile.

Wynther was standing. He said: "Mister Secretary, you will, I trust, find a safe place for our copy of this document. It was very expensive. But I anticipate vast benefits from it. As I understand it, it establishes us as being 'men' and our strange ball of rock and clay as being a 'planet.' Many of us had suspected as much, but it is nice to have official confirmation of these things.

"I do not know how much longer I will grace the High Council of Kossar with my wit and learning. I feel death making steady progress in me. I recognize the symptoms. Some amongst you will be glad to learn that I am not, after all, interminable. . . . Since, from my point of view, death is the ultimate in boredom, I feel morally entitled to bore you with one of the riper lessons of my experience. It is this—

"We appear, but only appear, to have joined a league of planets. The preamble to the instrument we have just signed begins by proclaiming 'the sovereign equality of all the parties.' This is one of those pious lies that enable us to do good things in spite of our cowardice. Long ago, it was just such a lie that enabled me to marry. . . . We are not equal, and soon we shall not be sovereign. I recognize the symptoms. We have joined not a league, but an empire.

"I am fond of empires. A nation is to an empire as a word is to a sentence. You may use that in your own oratory. I shall not need it again.

"We shall do well as a Terran colony. Several of the

conditions that ordinarily disturb the working relations between a mother-country and a colony are absent. To take one instance: empires like to place the most annoying restrictions on the brutality of colonists toward indigenous populations. If we had autochthones on Kossar, we should, of course, be very brutal toward them; but we have not got any, and our imported substitutes have prudently been taken away from us in advance. We are of use to Earth, moreover, not for economic, but for military reasons; and history shows that such colonies are generally the best treated. . . . It is in vain that the Earth Ambassador has been pursing his lips deprecatingly and the Honorable Delegates arranging their features in grimaces of surprise. Such *is* the tendency of our situation.

"I conclude. An empire is a good thing, when 'wisely used. But how to acquire wisdom I have not the time to tell you. We must go on to the second and final item on the agenda of this joint session."

The old man nodded, tortoiselike, to Macwith; the Secretary went to the great door and opened it; Dr. Khoory rolled in, leading a small boy by the hand. Meanwhile, the Earth Ambassador left his place and sat down at the green table next to Lady Morgan.

Macwith produced a somewhat yellowed piece of paper, apparently an obsolete printed form, and laid it in front of Craig. Craig and the Lady did not look at each other. Colonel-General Murashchenko came over and stood behind Craig. Dr. Khoory posted Little Craig by the door, came over, and stood behind the Lady.

Contract of Matrimony *Form B—Monogamous Relation*

Part 1. To be filled out by male:—I, _____, whose signature/thumbprint/retinal pattern is affixed hereunder, do hereby contract and agree to have this Woman, _____, to my wedded wife, to live together in the so-

cially sanctioned state of Matrimony, assuming all legal rights and obligations thereunto pertaining under the laws on whatsoever world/hegemony/tribe wherein we may be domiciled. I will [cross out inapplicable words] love/comfort/honor/keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, excepting as hereinafter provided, keep myself only unto her [cross out inapplicable words] as long as we both shall live/for a term of _____ years/until such date as may be agreed on by both contracting parties/until the sum of _____ in legal tender shall be paid by me unto her in the presence of competent witnesses. Provisions limiting exclusivity:

Signature/thumbprint/retinal pattern of Male_____

Signature/thumbprint/retinal pattern of Witness_____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Craig filled in "John Craig"; filled in "Lady Morgan Sidney"; left the words "love/comfort/honor/keep" intact; crossed out everything from "for term of . . ." to "the presence of competent witnesses" inclusive; entered "None" in large letters; signed; and handed the pen to Murashchenko, who signed as Witness and handed the form and pen to Lady Morgan.

She laughed and began to write: "Morgan Sidney . . ."

2

*All that in April happens in the earth
Happens in me when your hand touches me;
That fires the long cat's reflexes beneath
The moonlit fur; that lifts the sleeping fur;
Happens in me when your breath warms my skin;
When you—*

**Rip-roaring
space romp . . .**

"A joyous dream."

—Fantasy and Science Fiction



ON A DISTANT PLANET IN THE DISTANT FUTURE

When all the galaxies are colonized, John Craig, a young space diplomat, is captured by interplanetary pirates and sold into slavery.

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