

# OPERATION HIGH TIME

by Jacqueline Lichtenberg

## I

Clad blissfully in my old shorts and sandals instead of the cover-every-inch costume the Gens required at their medical school, I headed outdoors to soak up some Indian summer heat. I was glad nobody was home when I got there. The privacy would let the resonant peace of the ranch heal my nerves before I launched my attack on the Retainer Laws.

I paused in the kitchen, massaging my wrists and forearms, extending and flexing all the tentacles and trying to relieve the bruised soreness and tingling that still lingered twelve hours after shedding my retainers at the Sime Territory border. At last, I'd received my M.D. and was home, the place that had haunted my dreams for the last two years at New Harvard.

The ranch had always been our weekend retreat. We allowed no life-powered services, preferring to use mechanical door locks, a petro-chemical stove and heater, electrochemical lights, and a really ancient ice box--no power just ice. We got along well without hot running water and vigorously enforced our ban on all powered communications instruments, public and private.

It was a bubble of rustic isolation perfect for Noadron, that vitally necessary Sime discipline that relieves the tension of constant transfer denial demanded by life among the non-donor Gens, and that's what I was here for.

I went out the kitchen door onto the patio, letting the screen door clatter lopsidedly shut behind me. The single-floored, rambling structure was surrounded on two sides by the patio and its roof-high, whitewashed wall. The third side was the garage; the whole back of the house was a glassed-in sun porch with a view of an ancient pine forest.

I stood on the patio, luxuriating in the dry heat. Extending my grasping tentacles to the fullest, I jumped and caught the beam connecting the patio wall to the roof. I was shocked when I had to support my weight on my hands, the tentacles were so weakened by constant use of retainers.

Walking out into the yard, I looked back at the house with the perspective of years. It seemed to crouch in the middle of our ten acres of rocky, virgin hills like some sort of invader, not really a part of the country.

With renewed purpose, I strode toward the back, bearing left away from the pines, stepping carefully, mindful of my bare toes. Five minutes later, lying among the summer-parched grasses of my favorite hillside, I studied wisps of cloud roiling in stratospheric breezes and relaxed into the vaulted infinity with no field gradient other than my own to distract me.

Would it really be a good thing to walk among the Gen life-potential fields unprotected by retainers? As a QN-1 class channel, I wouldn't be bothered as much as a simple Q-class Sime, but still, I did rely on retainers for comfort in the steep field potentials of non-Donors.

The Gens, the Generators, the normal humans, invented retainers about four hundred years ago so that the Sime mutants they captured during the Sime Wars could not attack and kill them by stripping them of life-energy. As contact developed into integration, any Sime not wearing retainers was shot on sight. Then the channels appeared. They were like the ordinary Sime in every respect except that they could take life-energy from a Gen without killing, and later transfer it to the ordinary Sime, satisfying his desire for a kill.

Now many Gens donate life in return for the life-powered services only Simes can provide, and the penalty for not wearing retainers in Gen Territory is deportation to Sime Territory.

The time for change had arrived again.

I held up my right arm and extended the moist pink-gray laterals. Used only in life-transfer, but they loved

freedom and sunshine, not the confining and heavy retainers. I extended the two dorsal and two ventral gripping tentacles, touching the tips of my fingers. By contrast, these were sinewy ropes with a smooth, dry, ordinary skin. Their strength and dexterity were the joy of Sime musicians and artists everywhere except in Gen Territory, where, needlessly immobilized in retainers, they became weak and clumsy. I was determined to present my arguments and inventions to Grandpa Digen tonight. If I could convince him that the time was right to force the issue...

After dinner, Grandpa Digen and I sat alone on the sun porch watching darkness engulf the pine forest. Aunt Clare was puttering in the kitchen as women do, and nobody else was about. Cousin Dorien and his family wouldn't come until later.

Grandpa Digen is really my great grandfather. A hundred and twenty is old even for a Sime, so I wanted to broach the subject gently and keep the talk quiet.

"Did you hear about the Sime, Ray Bilton I think his name was, who tripped on a crowded walkway a few days ago and knocked a Gen into the path of a truck?"

"No, I didn't. What happened?"

"The Gen was hospitalized. The Gen police didn't hold Bilton responsible, but the Sime investigation turned up that he'd been wearing retainers more than twelve hours. They blamed his carelessness on the cumulative effect of the pain and discomfort and let it go at that."

"There ought to be a law against wearing retainers more than twelve hours."

"I disagree. There ought not to be a law requiring retainers when they are not needed."

"I should live to see the day!"

"Well, you've lived to see the invention of revolutionary, comfortable retainers, so why not?"

"I have?" Grandpa was really interested now.

"I reached into my pocket and brought forth my ring. It glittered red-gold in the dying sunlight. "It's crude because I didn't have tools to make real jewelry." I pointed out the half-inch rounded crown where the stone would be. "The mechanism is here. I call it an attenuator because it attenuates field gradients by several dynopters with absolutely no cumulative discomfort. Here, try it."

He took it and put it on his ring finger a bit gingerly.

"Ho! How about that! It really does." He took it off to look it over carefully.

"It's my own invention. I want to market it, but I don't know where to begin. I have something else, too." I took out my other prize. Grandpa looked at it.

"Looks like half a sleeve. The bottom half."

"I call it a damper and I believe it will replace the retainer. You slip it on like this, fasten this strap below the elbow and hook this loop around your middle finger to keep it from twisting. Now this material strip hugs the lateral and completely cuts off field sensation from that lateral only." I showed him closely in the fading light. "There is none of the discomfort and disorientation of the regulation model, and it leaves all handling tentacles free. You only wear it on one lateral at a time so there's no problem of over sensitization, and it's quite comfortable."

While Grandpa gave it the same careful inspection, I continued, "It will provide as much protection for the Gens as the retainers; and used with an attenuator, it can make any Sime reasonably comfortable in any field gradient, even direct skin contact. No time limit. No agony. No torture. The problem is to convince them of that."

No family patriarch was ever more respected than Grandpa Digen. What he said went. I waited anxiously while he pondered. With family help, the first step of my crusade would be easy. To market my inventions for private use of Simes -- for instance exchange students living with all-Gen families, or for medical therapy -- and then get accepted by the Gens. The second step -- to put the use of them completely at the discretion of the individual Sime -- would take much longer and be more difficult.

At last Grandpa spoke. "That will require convincing the Gen public that transfer cannot possibly take place without all four laterals in skin contact. We'd have to get their congress to legalize the things. We'd have to get our congress to define criteria for need of them. It would mean a tremendous public relations campaign to drum up Gen sympathy for their suffering Sime friends ..."

He trailed off, and I sat perfectly still holding my breath as it became completely dark. The old man still

had a quick intelligence, a lightning grasp of the heights and depths of a problem.

When he spoke again, it was with a fired enthusiasm. "What a fight that would make! What a crusade! I'm going to do it. My last crusade, my last project."

I leaned back with an explosive sigh. Now to business.

While I spent the next ten days in Noadron, relaxing, quietly motionless for hours at a time, Grandpa Digen made plans and contacted people. Each evening we'd sit and watch the sunset and he'd tell me how it was going.

The first night he reported that he had spoken to several Sime manufacturing firms and a patent attorney. My inventions would be on the market in all Sime territories within the month.

A few days later, he had arranged for a publisher to put out a book about transfer mechanics and field-gradient sensing written in an easy, popular style. Also, he had someone working to change the image of the Sime in Gen fiction from the aloofly non-participant -- which was the least explosive he'd been able to manage when he was running his integration crusade -- to sensitive, long-suffering, understanding, human type people. In a few weeks we'd start pushing stories about retainer incidents.

He organized the whole thing so well that I began to feel it wasn't my project. But on the tenth day, we were sitting on the porch again, after dinner.

"Well, son, have you had enough Noadron to last you a while?"

"Yes, quite enough."

"That's good. Feel up to a little trip to Washington?"

"Washington? The Gen capitol?"

"Hmmm." He nodded affirmatively.

"I suppose so. Why?"

"Operation High Time is your baby. It's time you took over. I'm too old to travel and too weak to buttonhole, browbeat, cajole, argue and plead. That's your job and you're scheduled to start with some lobbying in Washington."

## II

The next morning I was still saying to myself, over and over, "Me? Lobby? In Washington?" I felt unsure as I boarded the special helicopter Grandpa had arranged for me.

It just didn't fit my self-image. What does a young doctor who should be interning in something-or-other Memorial Hospital know about politics? Still, I'd asked for it when I started this whole thing.

As I climbed into the chopper -- life-powered, not petrochemical -- the pilot, a Q-class Sime, began to modulate the three dynopter fields that twirled our blades, and we were off.

Cross country from the Pacific Ocean to Washington-on-Potomac in a two-seat whirly would be impossible if we couldn't hop from one Sime island territory to the next for re-fueling, that is taking on new life-packed batteries.

We arrived at the Sime Reserve just south of the Potomac border of Washington about dark, and I decided to stay at the Harvington Ward for the night before plunging into the Gen area. The Sime Reserve is not really a Sime Territory. It's a legal fiction, like a foreign embassy. Its borders are sacrosanct and it's internally under Sime law, but it's only the size of a small city, not the usual few hundred miles across.

From my room in the Ward, I could see the Gen capitol afire with colored lights designed to make the buildings look impressive, which was unnecessary. They were. What was impressive to me was that of all that electricity, probably sixty percent was life-powered.

The next morning I claimed the car Grandpa had reserved for me and drove into the Gen Capitol. It was one of those magnificently alive fall days that can follow the misery of a Washington summer.

I had a ten o'clock appointment with Jon Izak whom Grandpa had only identified as a professional lobbyist. Izak's plush suite was across the street from the Senate offices. His private office cowered behind three rooms full of secretaries and stenographers. In his office, I waited for him while gloomily contemplating how I'd stopped every machine in the place simply by walking in the door. Evidently, they weren't expecting a Sime.

"So you're Mairus Farris!"

The voice that came from behind me would have boomed fifty years ago. Now it croaked huskily. I was startled enough to jump to my feet. I hadn't felt the field gradient increase because I was wearing retainers, of course.

"Well, turn around, let me have a look at you."

I turned obediently while examining the speaker. He was a Gen. Maybe eighty or eighty-five. A little shorter than my five-foot eleven, portly but not obese. He looked like an elder statesman, complete with silver-knobbed cane.

He snapped a formidable-looking lock on the door and hobbled to his polished desk, gesturing at me.

"Take them things off and make yourself at home. You're the spittin' image of your grandfather, you know that?"

"No, sir, I didn't," I said, so surprised I actually started removing my retainers. Then, I realized what I was doing and stopped, horrified.

"Go on! Go on!" the old man prompted. "Your grandfather and I worked together many years ago. I'll never forget it. Crusades he called 'em! Hah! I'll never forget the time... . No, not now. Digen got me out of retirement to give you a hand, not a lecture. You comfortable?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"Well, I'm going to give you a hand. In fact my whole organization is going to give you multiple hands, but we won't do your work for you. You've got about three weeks of good hard leg work to do. Think you're up to it?"

"Yes, sir," I said, not at all sure I was.

"Good! Now, my son generally runs this place these days, but he's off helping his wife have a baby, so we'll just have to get along without him." He started hunting through drawers.

"I don't know anything about this sort of work, sir. I'm just an intern."

"Well, you can talk, can't you?"

"Yes," I said, bewildered.

"Retainers drive you crazy, don't they?"

I nodded again. He seemed to know all about me.

"All right. All you have to do is be yourself. Project your sincerity for your cause. Tell 'em like they never heard it before. You'll do all right."

"Ah. Here they are!" he produced a stack of papers.

"Briefly, the situation is this. There's a bill up before the Senate." He handed me a paper. "Says that public establishments, restaurants, theatres, even buses, have the right to designate areas where Simes may enjoy the services without having to wear retainers. It's been up in one form or another several years now, but always dies in committee. You're going to see every member of that committee, and you're going to talk that bill onto the floor. Here are your appointments." He handed me another paper.

"Next year, when the public has been softened up a bit, we'll get a bill legalizing your inventions.

Meantime, you've got to convince these men that retainers are painful, therefore dangerous, and public rest areas should be provided for those who want 'em. Here's a bunch of statistics. Memorize 'em and use 'em. Good luck."

I found myself on the street, my head whirling like the blades of the copter that had brought me here. It didn't stop whirling for three weeks. I talked. I saw every one on the list several times. I learned to recognize influential Senators and catch them in restaurants, corridors, even the men's room. Soon everybody knew me; in fact, they and their secretaries knew me better than I knew them. Which sometimes wasn't so good.

Then it was the big morning, the day the committee would either report the bill out or table it for the year. I figured it had a good chance. I'd convinced a majority of the committee. But Senator Fieldman, the chairman, was still the Opposition.

Oh, he'd made a lot of public noise about how he was all for "human treatment of our fellow humans, the so-called Simes." And the public swallowed it. I'd looked up his voting record and I knew what to expect. So it was with some apprehension that I entered the pseudo-Grecian building that served the Senate. The inside was as modern as tomorrow while the outside was kept archaic. "As a link with our revered

ancestors," it said over the door. I marched self-consciously down the long, carpeted, and hush-ceilinged corridors, avoiding the occasional Gen and hunting conference room A-35.

I had become quite adept at finding my way around government buildings, so I walked right to it and swung my weight against the door as if I knew where I was going.

I bumped my nose on the newspaper clipping tacked to the locked door.

It read in part, "Senator Fieldman and his fifteen-year-old son, Ronald, were kidnapped last night from their Washington apartment. Mrs. Fieldman says that no ransom note has reached her. The Washington police... ."

There was a handwritten note attached saying that the committee meeting was postponed. I must have stood staring at the clipping for several minutes reading it over and over. All it said was that they knew nothing. Dazed, I wandered back to the lobby and sat in my favorite chair in a tiny alcove almost hidden behind a huge potted frond. I stared at the oiled leaves and thought furiously.

From my viewpoint, the motive was easy--to stop my bill. I'd convinced a lot of people of the need for the bill, but they wouldn't necessarily stay convinced. Perhaps the Opposition believed Senator Fieldman's public stand. Or perhaps they wanted time to do some counter-lobbying.

It didn't matter; they had stopped the bill by stopping the vote by removing the key figure. If they kept him isolated for a few days, the committee would elect a new chairman and proceed. By then, the situation would be less favorable to me.

So the kidnappers would have instructions to hold the Senator, probably without hurting him, in as unlikely a place as they could manage, but not too far from Washington, so he'd be available.

Perhaps taking the son was an accident, or perhaps they planned to release the Senator while holding his son to insure cooperation.

I asked myself over and over, "Where wouldn't the police look?" It was two o'clock and I was still asking myself when hunger drove me to the nearest restaurant. I didn't like eating in Gen restaurants because retainers were required, but after six years of school cafeterias, I'd learned to handle utensils without pinching my laterals too often. Pain like that spoils digestion.

Naturally, I was shown to a corner table. Nobody wants to eat with a Sime at the next table. After I'd ordered, the waiter silently presented the Sime beverage list, and I chose Porstan, the vaguely sweet Sime beer. To a Gen, it tastes like iodine.

I sat back and observed the restfully dim, wood-paneled, carpeted room. Each table had an elegant white tablecloth that seemed to glow in the shadows, reflecting more than its fair share of the light from the ancient crystal chandelier. Most of the tables were empty now, but some were surrounded by neatly dressed Washingtonites conducting the real business of government.

I watched the waiter. He hadn't spoken a word to me. He'd known immediately that I was Sime. There was no outward difference between us, but he'd known--or assumed--simply on the basis of my retainers, that I was Sime. I ate slowly, mulling that thought over, turning it every which way. Somehow, it was important, but I couldn't quite see how. That's the way it always was. Why did it attract my attention now?

With the last swallow of Porstan, it suddenly hit me.

Suppose, wild as it might sound, just suppose a Gen walked in wearing retainers! Every Gen in the place would know he was Sime. Only another Sime would know different, provided he was close enough to sense the field gradient and he wasn't wearing retainers. In one huge inductive feat. I knew where they had taken Senator Fieldman!

I made for my car and was on the road for the Sime Reserve before I'd had time to question the validity of induction.

The Sime Reserve border was not guarded by both Simes and Gens like Sime Territories. It had a Gen military guard only. Any Sime could pass inward without challenge, and Gen could pass outward without challenge. Vice-versa you needed papers and counter-signatures. Any Gen audacious enough to snap retainers on his wrists like medieval gauntlets could pass the Gen guards with a breezy wave, just as I was doing. A Sime who happened to look like Senator Fieldman would not be noticed or reported.

Now, where would they put up? In the city itself, where no Sime wore retainers and no Gen non-Donor

was allowed, they'd be discovered immediately. As soon as I'd asked the question, the answer loomed obvious. I turned onto the main reserve boulevard, setting myself in the through lane in step with the traffic lights heading due south.

There were a couple of hours of daylight yet, and I knew where I was going. If they were there indeed, it would be the interracial incident of the century. Gens would demand rights of search of Sime Territory instead of granting us greater freedom. I decided to look over the situation and see if I couldn't break it up quietly.

My destination was an abandoned copter port built before the development of ground-effect landing made it reasonable to set a chopper down in town. My pilot had pointed it out on our way down. The Sime Reserve extended five miles south of the town to include the copter port and, on its far side, a wild life preserve and picnic area. I shot past the field, scarcely daring to look for signs of life. At the first turnoff under the trees, I parked next to a blue sedan. There were no other cars about, and nobody was in sight. My heart leaped into my throat. It could be their car! I wiped my palms on my trousers and removed my retainers. As far as I could tell, I was alone.

The October foliage was a furious riot of color, and the early evening breeze was brisk with the promise of winter. I took a deep breath, buttoned my coat, and crept into the forest in the direction of the copter field.

A kind of foreboding dread settled over me as I crept through that forest. I hadn't been so scared since I went into the QN-1 placement test when I was thirteen. The placement was designed to strain resources, to determine limits. I'd had nightmares for six months after. I had that same nightmarish feeling now. Finally, I reached a tremendous oak and peeped around its gnarled trunk at the whitewashed, decrepit passenger terminal, square and lonely on the cracked concrete apron. The starkness of the scene was relieved only by the huge poles that had held lights and Reeves projectors.

"This is silly," I said to myself. "You're being melodramatic. Now, take yourself back to the car and go talk to the police if you think there's anything in it."

By the time I yielded to good sense, it had turned full dark. When I noticed that, I noticed the Gen standing behind me.

I must have been lost in a reverie akin to Noadron. I had not felt him approach, but he was definitely a non-Donor. I started to turn around.

"Hold it!" the man said. "I have a gun primed right in your back. Now march! Right up to the front door." I had no choice. I marched.

### III

They had pitched a tent in the waiting room and had camp lanterns, a stove and a small heater going. There was the smell of boiled coffee and a staleness of onion and garlic. Each of these alone was enough to turn my stomach; together they almost made me vomit.

My captor jabbed the gun barrel in my back and marched me to the dispatcher's office, a small shack in the rear corner. He threw a makeshift bolt they had nailed to the door and shoved me in with the stock of his rifle. I sprawled on the floor weakly, fighting nausea and the backwash of fear. Only when my head stopped swimming did I realize I was imprisoned with Senator Fieldman and his son.

There was enough moonlight through the small duroplast window to see the boy lying on a blanket in one corner and the Senator standing by the window staring at me. His prematurely bald pate reflected the moonlight, creating a halo for his distinguished features.

"Mr. Farris?!" I'm sure he did not know what to think.

"Yes, sir." I got up and brushed myself off.

"What ... ?"

He was entitled to an explanation so I told him everything. All the time I was talking I was nagged by a queer discomfort, but didn't pay much attention. But when I'd finished, that prick came into sharp focus. I went over to the boy, "What's the matter with your son?"

"Ronald suddenly took sick this morning. I think he's sleeping off a fever. These ..." He searched for a sufficiently strong term as I searched for words to tell him the news. "These criminals won't pay any

attention."

I bent down and felt Ronald's forearms, extending a lateral behind his ear and checking his temperature and the field gradient. I knew already -- it's an instinct to recognize it -- but I went through the motions anyway.

"Senator, sit down, sir."

It was beginning to dawn on him. He sat on the floor. There was no furniture.

"Ronald is ..." I took a breath and started again. "Ronald is going through changeover." As a QN-1 I'd delivered that news hundreds of times, but it had never been so hard.

He just sat there and stared. I imagine he felt as if the elevator had gone down and left his stomach on the fifth floor. He sat perfectly still, perfectly silent for about five or ten minutes: then he took a deep breath and began to sob.

I gave him a handkerchief, but I didn't touch him. He might have misunderstood. He was a non-Donor. What could I say? In a Sime family, changeover is a celebration.

At last he blew his nose and said, "Never before in my family, never!"

"Senator," I said more to be talking than to say anything, "thirty percent of the children of two Simes are Gens and thirty percent of the children of two Gens are Simes. It's no respecter of family. Your son is not lost to you. He's growing up. But he'll always be your son. Possibly, if you're willing to make some adjustments, he may come back to live with you."

He heaved a great sigh; he knew I meant he'd have to become a Donor. It would be a complete change of philosophy. Many parents in this situation still react with violent hatred. A generation ago, it was common for a Gen parent to murder his child during the first helpless stage of changeover. Now, from our educational campaigns, they generally accept the situation. But some who have strong anti-Sime feelings, disown the child. I was relieved when Fieldman spoke with dazed neutrality.

"What can we do for him here?"

I turned to my patient, trying to sense the exact state of his condition. "Would you move back, please, sir? I want to check him over more carefully."

He moved to the far corner of the room, and the gradient eased off so I could separate out Ronald's. I checked the forearms again. The tentacles were tiny ropes beneath the skin, so small you had to know what to look for. His temperature was rising; it was almost Sime normal, so his hormone balance was almost achieved. I checked the back of his neck, and the Remott gland was swollen nearly to changeover maximum; no wonder he was unconscious. He was well into Sequence four and so far so good, but I could see trouble.

The life-energy supply he was born with would run out before his laterals would be developed enough to receive more. It was a common problem with the children of Gens. Fear eats life at a stupendous rate. Before the QN channels these children died. Today, a channel backed by a Sime hospital could usually save them. Practically nobody died in changeover these days.

I was not backed by a Sime hospital, but I was supposed to be an extraordinary skilled channel, a QN-1. Bunk! Without certain drugs, there was nothing I could do.

I got up, stuck my hands in my pockets and stared at the only door in our prison.

"There are six men out there with guns," Fieldman said, "and they're the type who'd use them."

"But they don't want your son to die."

"Die!"

"Relax. He won't if I can help it." I pounded on the door trying to sound imperious and humble.

Presently, a gruff voice, full of gravel ... or maybe buckshot... said, "What'cha want?"

I said, "We've got a very sick boy in here. He'll die without medical aid. I'm a doctor, I can save him, but I need a few things."

"Yeah? Like what?"

"Extra blankets. He's got a high fever. And some medicines. In my car, in the glove compartment, there's a flat metal case. It has everything I need except water."

"And you want us to let you go get your case and whatever Sime weapons is in it? You think we're nuts?"

"The car is unlocked. Get the case yourself. Don't try to open it, though. I'll open it for you. It's life-locked

and you'd only destroy the contents."

"Huh. Well, I'll think about it.

He left, and I laid my jacket and coat over the boy. Fieldman shook his head and started to take off his coat.

"No, no, sir," I said. "Don't. It isn't necessary. I can keep warm other ways."

He understood I meant by using my stored life-energy. As a channel, I always carried far more than I needed just to stay alive. I was entrusted with public property, to be dispensed to Simes in need, and to be used in the public interest.

It must have been almost two hours later that I heard the bolt of the door slide.

"O.K., Sime, come on out of there. Make it slow."

Gravel voice was back. There was a slight glow from the tent, but I'm sure it wasn't visible from outside. Three men were silhouetted against that glow, their faces pale in the moonlight from the observation windows. They were all Gen non-Donors, wearing mismatched hiking clothes and knee-high boots and pointing rifles at me.

"Into the tent." Gravel voice gestured, and they closed in behind me.

A fourth man hulked over a small table illuminated by a suspended lantern. He was at least a head taller than the others and maybe fifty pounds heavier. The tent held six cots and a couple of stools. The emergency kit from the car lay on the table.

"There's your miracle box, 'Doctor.' Open it!" said the big one.

His voice was about two octaves higher than expected from a man that size. He shoved it at me and moved back, obviously taking no chances.

I thumbed it open. As I had expected, it was almost the standard kit containing the thirty-six chemicals used to aid changeover--pills, liquids and aromatics.

"As you can see, it contains nothing but medicines," I said as steadily as I could.

"Sime medicines! How's that and a Sime doctor going to help him?"

"I'm a Sime doctor, but I've had some training in Gen medicine." I wasn't going to admit that Ronald was one of us. "In addition to this, I'll need extra blankets, and, in the morning some boiling water."

The big one seemed to be the boss. He sat there and squinted at me for an eternity before flicking a finger at gravel voice, who picked up a bundle from the nearest cot while the others prodded me out the door.

The moonlight had shifted, and this time I spotted the rest room sign. "Hey." I said to gravel voice, "Does that work or do we go find a tree?" "It works ... you get a turn in the morning." The rest of the way back I wondered what would happen if I insisted on taking a turn right now.

I found Fieldman pacing anxiously across the far end of the room from his son. Retrieving my coat, I covered the boy with the extra blanket and started him on an aromatic sedative. He gave a few tosses of the head and then relaxed completely.

"He's sleeping now, Sir, the way he needs to sleep. In the morning you'll tell him that you accept him, that you still love him and you'll give him courage." I held my breath waiting for his commitment.

"Yes, yes. I can do that. At least that. I ..."

Relieved, I said, "In the meantime, we ought to try to help ourselves out of this situation.

"There's no way out," Fieldman gave a hopeless little shrug. "I've tried everything. The window does not break, but there must be some way ..."

"If we wait long enough, we'll get found ..."

"We can't wait. By tomorrow afternoon Ronald's condition will be obvious, even to them. If they believe that this will bind you to the Sime viewpoint, they may kill us and run."

"What do you propose to do?"

"I don't know. I must admit I'm embarrassed. A Sime trapped in a Sime building in Sime territory by Gens. Most embarrassing."

Through our tiny window, I studied the landing apron and its border of undisciplined forest which one day would obliterate this relic of modern civilization as it had countless pre-Sime structures. My mind whirled like the vanes of an idling copter, throwing up five or six plans to arouse my eagerness to be away from here. Free to take my patient to the facilities he really needed.



And, like a Judo expert, I used that figurative centrifugal force to rid myself of those plans because each one involved newly discovered QN-1 abilities. I could not betray our secrets to the Gens merely to save a few lives. Any premature hint of these superior or odd talents of Simes would only be fuel for the anti-Simes who would burn us at the stake.

Presently, the senator said very quietly, "A man whose touch can kill doesn't need a gun ..."

"Senator!" I whirled on him truly shocked. That hadn't occurred to me. "Every Sime is pledged to die by attrition or suicide rather than kill in transfer. That's what I've been telling you for weeks. This is no longer the Dark Ages. Gens can trust Simes. What use is life without stable society?"

After a long pause he said very faintly, "It was only a thought."

I returned to staring out the window. Moonlight glinted off the top of the light standards. For the first time, I noticed the Reeves projector casings humped at the tops of the poles like frightened monkeys.

I said, "Isn't it strange that the toilets were left operative?"

Fieldman looked at me a moment then shrugged accepting the odd comment. "Perhaps they turned them on?"

"Perhaps," I said searching the room with renewed interest. "And then again perhaps not."

How had the dispatcher's furniture been placed? The chart at that end where Ronald now lay, Atlas case, radiophone, and the dispatcher's desk in this corner opposite the door. I ran my hand down the join in the walls. The Reeves control box was mounted to be reached from the desk, life-locked, about as big as my hand.

Not daring to hope, not daring to think, I opened the box and threw the switch. A surge of power!

Somewhere charged life-batteries still fed the projectors.

"They work!"

"What work?"

"The Reeves projectors."

"Fine. What are Reeves projectors?"

"Standard markers used to supplement lights by creating an interference pattern any Sime can sense. They take hours to warm up, but with any luck, they may be noticed by noon tomorrow. When a field is in use, they're kept warm on standby, but these were turned completely off. Odd that they weren't removed, but very lucky for us."

"Now all we have to do is to survive until tomorrow afternoon."

"And to do that we'd better get some rest."

"I couldn't sleep."

Even without examining the deepening circles about his eyes I could sense the fatigue in him. "Sir, tomorrow is going to be a very hard day. You'll need all your faculties. You really must sleep, at least a few hours." I hesitated a few breaths and then decided, "If you wish, I could help you sleep ..."

Instantly, I regretted it. He gasped and stiffened in panic. Simes are ultra-sensitive to a Gen's fear and react with instinctive aggressiveness. I suppressed my animal response with gritted teeth and clenched fists, and tried to calm him. "Senator, I won't touch you without your permission ... ever."

Then suddenly it was over. He said, "Yes, there's no time like now. If only for Ronald's sake ... what do I do?"

Arranging a couple of blankets in the farthest corner from Ronald, I said, "Lie down here, push your sleeves up and try to relax."

I sat on a blanket on his left side and began to talk softly, "Now, this will work only if you co-operate. Listen to my voice, relax, think very hard about sunrise. You don't want to know anything until sunrise when the light will awaken you. I'm going to touch you, lightly just with my hand."

I brushed the palms of his hands. "Now, I've got an accurate reading, I'm going to even the field gradient. Relax, don't pull away, just lie still. You won't feel a thing; next thing you know it will be dawn and you will wake refreshed."

I leaned forward and made wrist contact with my laterals. Then I brushed his lips with mine ever so gently for the time sense adjustment so he would sleep.

It was his first, so I only took the first level of his life-store. He was a General Class Donor now.

I bedded down next to my patient, linked to be roused instantly by any minor change in his condition.

#### IV

I woke to pre-dawn grayness and checked Ronald over. Now he needed exercise. When I waved a second aromatic under his nose, he stirred restlessly. Then I sat him up, supporting him against my chest as I chose a small vial of liquid.

"Ronny, Ronny, I'm your friend, Ronny, I'm going to help you feel better." He looked at me, bleary-eyed, with changeover's instinctive hostility, the withdrawal, the need for total privacy during the vulnerable phase warring openly with the docile suggestivity induced by my drugs. "Here, drink this down. It will clear your head. I know you don't want to swallow, but this won't upset your stomach."

The drugs prevailed, and he drank. While we huddled together, waiting for it to take effect, his father woke. Ronald had buried his face in my shoulder and was breathing heavily to the waves of sensation from the drugs and from his condition. I motioned his father to be still and waited.

Finally, Ronald drew a shuddering sigh and looked up to my face, down at my arms, and then shrank away in trained reflex.

Our eyes met. I said, "You too, you know?"

Hesitantly, he nodded.

"Ronald." I took his hands. "Don't fight it anymore. Your life depends on that. I can help you only if you relax and accept it. You do what I say and you'll live. I promise."

I motioned his father over. "Talk to him a while." And I went to the window to give them privacy.

The Reeves projectors were drawing power, but I knew they were still imperceptible. The building was insulated, so I wouldn't know when they established a pattern but I could guess.

Suddenly, my stomach remembered it hadn't had any dinner and only a light lunch yesterday. I pounded on the door and kicked it until gravel voice husked sleepily, "What'cha want?"

"Breakfast, and that pot of hot water. Or are we to be starved to death?"

It was a crude jibe. Simes always fed their prisoners well. But it was effective. Half an hour later we received boiled eggs, bread, cheese, mild coffee, and a pot of hot water.

I sent the Senator to eat while I poured some of the hot water in a cup, added a powder from the emergency kit and took it to Ronald. I turned him to the corner and sat in front of him, taking out my other handkerchief.

"This is going to be painful, but it's necessary. I fear you've used too much life-energy. So you'll require more before your laterals are fully developed. If I weren't here, that would be deadly. But I am here. And I'm a QN-1. I can force a transfer to you with a minimum development of your tentacles, but I need at least that minimum.

"This is old-fashioned and very crude, but effective." I dipped the handkerchief in the steaming water and applied it to his forearms. He bore that torture with staid courage until, finally, I wiped the tears of pain from his eyes.

Then I tested the brew I had prepared and made him drink it all. It was pure nourishment in a form his disturbed metabolism could accept.

I spent the rest of the morning alternately walking Ronald around the room and instructing him in the channel's transfer technique. Gen-Sime transfer is instinctive, but Sime-Sime transfer has to be learned.

With lunch, I demanded more hot water and got it without comment. Surprisingly, our captors did not look in on us more often. I suppose they depended on the outside guards. I knew that at this time of year only the rangers and the border police used this road, so I didn't care to calculate the probability of the right man noticing the Reeves field and reacting the right way.

About mid-afternoon, I began routine sedation for Ronald's first transfer, an effective tranquilizer that would nevertheless sharpen his new senses. It was getting dark when I could put it off no longer.

I engaged the life-lock on the door to insure our privacy, "Sir, I'm going to ask you to stay back in the corner again. The less interference the better."

"He's going to be all right?"

"Definitely. But this is the critical point."

That was more confidence than I felt. I'd never done it outside a hospital before. Nothing is quite like your first field test. Reminding myself that I was far overqualified for this simple job, and that any QN-3 could have done it, I worked through the routine very slowly, talking the half-conscious boy into confidence, reminding him of what I'd taught him that morning, and slowly building up a tremendous field gradient between us. I watched for his first instinctive reaching toward the apex of that gradient, the sign that I really had my minimal development.

I got it after two heartstopping minutes, made contact, gave him enough to see him through to full development, and withdrew.

Just in time, too. I sensed somebody at the door. Hastily I disengaged the life-lock and tried to pull myself together. After that operation, I needed about five minutes to return to normal.

It was our dinner, the same uninspiring fare. And another pot of hot water ... . unasked.

"How's the kid?" gravel voice inquired.

"Sleeping. I think he'll be fine."

Gravel voice looked me up and down once, very slowly, "Yeah... he better be." I was afraid he'd look for himself, but he left with only a glance at the heap of blankets in the corner. Perhaps he thought it was contagious.

I sat down, poured myself a cup of hot water, added a little something from the emergency kit, and drank it all. It helped. I stopped shaking.

Then, I noticed Fieldman. I poured another cup of water and added a mild Gen sedative from the beginning of the sequence. I'd been treating Ronald from the middle of the array and I'd taken mine from the end. "Doctor Farris prescribes." I offered him the cup.

He hesitated. I smiled. "Come on, sir, this is good for you."

With a sigh, he sat beside me and took the cup. "Rescue's late."

"Not too. I think we're safe until morning. I don't know about you, but I've had a day. I'm going to sleep."

"How can you sleep?"

"I don't know but I'll manage."

I woke to the sound of rifle fire. The Senator stood by the window, moonlight splashing the floor around his shadow. Ronald was soundly unconscious.

"Rescue?" I asked.

"I think so. I think so. I think they're trying to get away."

I joined him to watch for the sporadic flashes among the trees. Presently, it tapered off and ceased.

Fifteen minutes later the bolt slid, and the door opened.

Grandpa Digen stood there leaning on his cane and chuckling.

Four days later, Grandpa and I sat on our porch watching the sunset.

"So they finally rounded up all the people responsible as well as the kidnappers themselves. Credited solely to the Simepolice. And you have got yourself a Senator for a friend. What more do you want?"

"What did you mean about Izak? Did he have me followed? I don't want someone snooping on me."

"Hah! No, he didn't have you followed. He has more savvy than you'll ever know. When you didn't check back, he got worried and started worrying others. If you'd thought to turn on the Reeves sooner, we'd have got there sooner."

"Well ..." You can't argue with Grandpa, so I changed the subject. "We got the bill out of committee, recommended for passing. So where do we go from here?"

This set him to wheezing and chuckling and mumbling. "Got myself a real trooper for a grandson!"

UZF

FROM JACQUELINE LICHTENBERG:

The above is the first story I ever sold (bought by Fred Pohl for *IF MAGAZINE*, who also bought *STAR TREK LIVES!*). Proofing the story now, I find a lot I would now handle differently, but we won't go into that. I refuse to be embarrassed by older work which does not come up to my current standard.

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