

*The way to lead the Public  
is to get out in front and convince them they're  
chasing you the way you want to go . . .*

**ROBERT CHILSON**

*Illustrated by Leo Summers*

Ginger danced lightly from one foot to the other, chanting in a whisper, seeming to float. Her red head scarcely seemed to move, while her feet flew. Sugar and Pepper were as excited, still locking horns in front of the mirror and occasionally giggling breathlessly. Even the view of the mountains above Lake Titicaca was forgotten, though this was their first visit to Earth. Mr. Koepfels would be not merely their first reporter, but their first Man. The robot monitor brought them *His* heavy voice as *He* showed Mr. Koepfels in.

"Hurry up, girls," said Ginger, increasing amazingly the speed of her dance. "They're already *here*."

"This is my first visit to Earth since my research entered its last Phase, nearly three years ago," came *His* voice. Its perpetual undertone of warm amusement was very apparent. "You can see where all my credit has gone. Though I did use a lot of it in my research."

"It certainly is impressive," said the reporter respectfully. Yuri Koepfels was as impressed as he sounded, though he didn't expect much of a story from this Dr. Birrel, who'd been in retirement on the Moon for seven years or so. Still, the man must've been some scientist, to be able to afford an astromobile home. He said as much.

Dr. Birrel laughed in the quiet, heavy way he had. He was black-haired and black-eyed, fat but not offensively so, light on his feet, and apparently very good-humored. He had obviously not taken geriatrics treatments. He shrugged. "I am more a good engineer, or even inventor, than a scientist. My work has been mostly applying what my betters in pure science have discovered. I get the credit and they get the fame and prestige."

"Still," suggested Yuri shrewdly and hopefully, "all the important men in the biologic sciences will be watching their telefaxes for your reports in the journals. They could hardly have forgotten the man who developed substitution catalysis in DNA electrosynthesizers. It would take several pages just to list all the applications of that: geriatrics, mensation, and orthosomatics all use it And, of course, biomorphics, which is your field, isn't it?"

"In a way, yes. I have done quite a bit of work in the edges of that field, but I am merely a biochemist specializing in DNA, RNA, and proteins—not quite the same thing, though DNA synthesis is the heart of biomorphics."

"Then you haven't actually done much work in controlled mutation?" asked Yuri, controlling his disappointment. That was a big field these days.

"I can't say that I have, not directly," rumbled Dr. Birrel. "The field has never lived up to its early promise. It never will, as a matter of fact."

"I know," said Yuri, who had read up on the subject in preparation for this assignment. "We still lack an elegant solution for the genetic code, a method of predicting mathematically the shape of an organism from its genes. It's still hit or miss, just a cheaper and faster method of mutating than the old radiation

experiments in the late Twentieth Century. Not *controlled* mutation. But again," he said with sudden hope, "that's your field, in a way. I mean, you have to study DNA before you can synthesize it. Do you have an elegant solution or at least an approach?"

"I must confess I haven't able to come up with an *elegant* solution," he said. "Though I do an approach of sorts." Yuri's face lit up. He reached into his shirt pocket and squeezed his audio recorder on. Dr. Birrel forestalled his eager questions with a little hand. "First let's sit down and have something cool to drink," he said, looking gratefully around the luxurious room. Yuri followed him impatiently.

"They're in the *lounge*," whispered Sugar. "Hurry up!"

"Wait a minute!" said Pepper in panic. "Sugar, please—that clasp just behind my ear I can't get right."

"There," said Sugar. "Ready to go? Ginger, your shoes!"

"Right here," said Ginger, patting her pouchbelt. "I'm to dance, remember? I want to be all ready."

"Let's go!" Pepper dropped Sugar's hand and dashed ahead. The others followed, hand in hand, saying in frantic whispers, "Wait, Pepper! Don't go in yet!"

They caught up with her in the conservatory just next to the lounge. All three were with excitement and stage fright as they huddled into a rose arbor in a big-eyed cluster, arms around each other, cheeks pink.

"As you know," said Dr. Birrel, pursing his lips over a tall, insulated tumbler, "the primary problem in attempting to produce that elegant solution is the fact that there are many different gene patterns that will build highly similar somatic structures; for instance, the eyes of men and octopi. In their attempts to solve the problem, the biosynthesists have analyzed thousands of human and animal gene patterns and related them to the somatic structures they define—feathers, fur, tongues, beaks, hearts, and so on. But they have still not discovered the mathematical relationship between gene and structure.

"The biomorphists' empirical approach, which makes use of the known genes, is becoming ineffective, too. Double-hearted animals are commonplace, but real improvements in plants and animals come slower, because they are more subtle—disease resistance, nitrogen-fixation for plants, better fruits and vegetables, and so on."

Yuri got that. "But you say you have a practical approach that promises success?"

"That is right. But perhaps it would be simpler to show you the results of the approach, then explain it to you."

"Fine!" said Yuri heartily, coming to his feet. He hoped—it began to seem—that this would be something really good, a real breakthrough. That would be very good for his career, too—Pan Solar was the only news service that had sent a reporter to interview Dr. Birrel on his latest research. But he made no move.

Pepper, springing lithely to her feet, almost fell. Hearts pounding, taking short steps and frequently bumping each other, the sisters crowded up to the door, thumbed it open, and spilled into the lounge. Pepper was still in the lead.

They stopped in a tight cluster, Sugar and Ginger looking over her shoulders. After a reassuring

glance at *Him*, they focused their attention on Yuri Koeppels. They saw a tall, rather broadshouldered, though slender young man with wavy brown hair. His face was smooth and rather stubby, as if he were still in his teens, but he was good-looking enough for all that.

Yuri's interest had perked at first sight of the girls. His second glance had caused him to redden slightly with surprise, as the girls were bare from the waist up; he had hardly expected that in the lounge of a man conservative enough to ignore geriatrics treatments. Resolutely not staring, he looked at their faces, which were highly similar. The girls were small, slender, about five-five, apparently in the middle or late teens; each wore tight, furry pants the color of her curly hair: black, red-gold, platinum blond.

Then the girls focused their attention on him. Their pointed ears swept forward an inch or so, starkly outlined against their hair. His smile froze and his jaw dropped. The ears drew his attention to the horns sprouting from above and a little behind them; short, curving toward each other over the top of the head. There was room between and under them to pat a hand or comb, but they were quite small and close. He had thought they were merely fancy hats. Each girl's horns were nearly the color of her hair: a kind of translucent ebony, pearl gray, translucent redwood.

Wide-eyed, Yuri's gaze traveled down their figures to their feet, which turned out to be hooves, tiny things, split, the color of the horns. The ankles were deliciously slender; it seemed impossible for them to balance themselves. Then he looked again at the pants and was only mildly surprised to discover that they were actually fur, not pants at all. The girls were bare but for pouchbelts.

*Of course*, he thought numbly. *No pockets!*

Dr. Birrel was chuckling heavily, voice like warm oil. "Well, Mr. Koeppels, you seem entranced by my daughters. I am sure they appreciate that unconscious compliment, and I believe they reciprocate, judging by their expressions."

The sisters pinkened, spread out more. Yuri managed to stammer something, pulling his jaw up. The three had the same face, barring slight differences in complexion and freckles—the redhead had a delightful crop of freckles across nose. The brunette paced forward on her tiny hooves, like a girl very high spring heels; only she moved with a lithe grace, as if springs were built into her legs. She looked up into his wide-open face, grin widening. "I'm Pepper, and you're all right."

The other girls crowded up with the same high, mincing steps and introduced themselves, the ice broken. Yuri found one almost too much; three definitely so. While he tried to say hello to each one and introduce himself to them all once, Pepper stepped forward and poked at his stomach with a stiffened forefinger. He tightened his diaphragm by reflex and she nodded in pleased approval. Ginger spread her hands to measure his shoulders, head on one side, eyes sparkling. They were green, he noted; Pepper's black; Sugar's, pale blue. Sugar brushed back a lock of his hair over his ear.

Feeling a little weak in the knees, Yuri tumbled back into the lounge he did not remember having left. Dr. Birrel's chuckle had become genuine laughter; his great bulk heaving, he said, "Enough, girls. Let him get his breath."

The girls were a little pinker, but still bright-eyed. Pepper, overcome with sudden bashfulness, trotted over to *His* lounge and straddled the arm. Ginger went a little way out in front of Yuri's lounge and sat cross-legged on the floor. He noticed dazedly that they had short tails covered with that soft fur, that worked back-and-forth with each step. These were short enough not to get in their way when they sat down, yet long enough for them to switch delightfully when in the mood, as Pepper was.

Sugar, though a little abashed by her own boldness, did not retreat. She climbed up on Yuri's lounge arm, hooves almost under her, knees almost in his lap. He stared at the soft, almost white fur that

covered them. It was silk-fine, with a tittle curl at the end; if it had been longer it would have been wavy. Her hair was even more curly; like all the girls', it was a cloud of ringlets all over her head and spilling down on her neck.

"Surely this can't be biomorphics, sir," he gasped at last. "Not in one jump! Plastic surgery?"

"That is your first coherent sentence, young man; perhaps it will be recorded in history. You're quite right," *He* said, sobering but still with a current of amusement in *His* voice. "They are synthetics. Androids."

There was a little silence while Yuri stared again. "Really?" he whispered, looking at the sisters in turn. "But how'd you ever do it? Why, Von Brauchitch claims that advanced animal life won't be synthesized in this century. Some researchers say that intelligent life is so complex we'll never be able to duplicate it."

"We know," Ginger told him. "We read all such reports and interviews. They're a storm." Yuri had to grin; under the circumstances, they must be.

Dr. Birrel smiled fondly at her. "The process is adapted from biomorphics, but the result is equal to anything biosynthesis promises. General-human DNA of the sort used in orthosomatics is the starting point. As you know, such DNA chains contain the entire gene print for a human being except for the personal characteristics: hair color, complexion, shaape of face, et cetera. The Rodman effect, which makes possible the duplication of molecules without knowing their structures, is not perfect; on such complex molecules, the fine details are lost. The process itself is something like biomorphics, since it involves the synthesis of transformation DNA and the mutation of the genetic pattern with it; but the transformation is done outside the cell, and the desired transformations are carried out, one at a time, on the same DNA chain. That is, after every half-dozen or so transformations; and since there is only one work-piece, there is no need to crossbreed to fix genes until the final form is reached."

"I think I see," said Yuri, eyes lighting with excitement. "Your transformation DNA is, say, a copy of the gene that builds horns in certain kinds of goats; it is brought against the work-piece, where it attaches itself to the genes that define the head. Next you reshape the feet into hooves, displacing the old genes; and so on until you have the complete pattern for your android. After that you synthesize a cell around the new nucleus."

"For us, the term is capriform android," Ginger told him.

"It may not be genuine biosynthesis, but it beats what they call controlled mutation," said Sugar. "Imagine trying to produce *us* by any such inefficient methods!"

"Or anything, human or animal, half so attractive," grinned Ginger.

"He notices that," Pepper told her, cocking her ears and an eyebrow at Yuri.

Yuri reddened, then still more as Sugar patted him on the head, saying, "Don't, Ginger, Pepper; he was nice to you." He had such a bewildered and hunted look that Sugar felt a surge of warm sympathy; she wanted to cuddle him to her and soothe him. It was what *He* called mother-love, and it hit you all-of-a-sudden, and it always felt wonderful, but it was always disconcerting.

"I can have them put on blouses if you wish," *He* chuckled.

Yuri reddened again. "Oh no, this is all right. Uh, you called them capriform androids," not looking at Ginger. "That means goat-shaped, doesn't it? Why this particular shape, Dr. Birrel? In fact, why androids at all? You know a lot of people are going to scream about that. They have religious, or philosophical, or

moral scruples against synthetic life in general and androids in particular. You know the kind I mean. It might have been better to start with animals."

The girls were obviously amused at the thought of that kind of people. "Religion, philosophy, or morals; whatever they call it, the true name is fear," Dr. Birrel declared. "They're afraid they'll be replaced by some strange life form, some monster. It's a foolish fear; anything made by men is going to be acceptable to Man. But no real significant improvements can be made in plants and animals except by accident until we have that elegant solution. Human beings, on the other hand, are adaptable enough so that a slight improvement becomes highly significant. The girls' purpose is to break down the public's resistance to the idea of such improved human races. I look forward to a species-pluralistic society, containing mermen, say, mermen capable of adapting to extremes in atmospheric pressure; desert dwellers; cold-climate dwellers with fur; high-gravity men, and so on. Such a society would be much more interesting than one; so we'll need a multiplicity of subspecies when we reach the stars. In fact, we'll breed them normally, so we don't synthesize them."

"Well, why this particular shape? Not that I'm objecting," glancing quickly at Sugar, who smiled sweetly. "But why not a normal human shape to break the ice?"

"Because we're specially designed for entertaining," said Ginger, rolling to her feet in one smooth motion. She clicked across the floor to a round, six-foot stage, raised a hand's-width above the floor. It was wood, damped to kill resonance. The sound of her hooves on the floor made Yuri peer closely at her feet, then glance at Sugar's and Pepper's, both of whom moved as silently as ghosts.

Sugar laid one ankle on the other knee, extending her tiny hoof toward him. Each half of it was covered with a crescent of soft rubber, held on with stasite, the stuff used on nail masks. "We're genuine hoofers," said Sugar, clicking her toes together and smiling at Ginger, who erupted rather like an ancient machine gun.

In a human being it might have been called a tap dance, but the more he saw of it, the more Yuri doubted that any human could have done it. The girls were almost fantastically lithe. You might almost expect them to walk around in a perpetual crouch, though they stood as straight as so many elm trees.

"Now you know why we're called capriforms; we not only look like goats, we jump like goats," laughed Pepper, landing beside Yuri's lounge. She bounded straight into the air, did a complete flip, landing in her tracks, and instantly lifted off, almost floating, in a back flip. Keeping perfect time, Sugar noticed approvingly, with Ginger's twinkling hooves, purely out of habit. *He* had trained them well.

"At least we don't smell like goats," she smiled at Yuri. "Now what do you think all those lovely people who oppose biosynthesis will think of us?"

"Can you do more conventional dances?" Yuri asked her.

"Sure," said Pepper, landing on her feet and instantly trotting forward, spinning on one hoof, dancing lightly aside, spinning again, trotting forward springily—a perfect Enzer, switching her tail deliciously with every step. "But it's too slow," she said. "If the dance is not at least as fast as the Osage Drum Dance, it's no fun." She peeled off her shoes—a quick squeeze on the piezoelectric crystal to reverse the stasis field; they came off more easily than nail masks—and tucked them into her belt, then joined Ginger on the stage.

They went into the two-hand section of the Drum Dance, legs a black-and-red blur, whirling around dizzily. "It's the double-heart system that gives us the stamina," Sugar told him.

It ended abruptly and Ginger did two flips that placed her just in front of his lounge. Her hooves almost went out from under her on the slippery floor and she had to clutch his knees to keep her balance. Pepper followed more slowly.

"How about it?" asked Ginger.

"Think you can get in an audition of some kind?" asked Sugar.

They watched him breathlessly as he tamed to *Him*, who had remained fondly silent.

"Do you intend to let them dance? I mean, to get a job as entertainers?"

"Of course," *He* said. "They cannot spend the rest of their lives in laboratories. They have been trained as dancers and can sing. The whole point of creating such charming and appealing androids is to break down the public's resistance to the idea; to do so, they must go where they will be seen. And you needn't worry about them having to entertain in low cabarets; they'll soon be audio-visual stars. Not that they can act convincingly; they're too young."

A look of sudden enlightenment broke over Yuri's face, making every girl giggle. "Just how old *are* you all?" he asked, looking at them with new eyes.

"Six months," they chorused, laughing.

"They were synthesized three years ago," *He* said. "But they only came out of the incubators six months ago, already physically adolescent. Of course, mentally they were as blank as any baby; they had to go through the crawling and toddling stages, but having fully-developed brains and bodies, they went through them very rapidly."

"It took me three days to learn how to sit down in a chair," said Sugar reminiscently. "I would just climb up into it on my knees and then turn around."

Yuri thought for a moment. Pan Solar News, of course, also made documentary audio-visuals for sale to the magazines, and occasionally sold them direct to the public TV. Granted sufficient publicity in the newspapers, plenty of people would pay to see these entrancing girls in an hour-long show. Androids alone were one of the great news events of the century. After even one such show, the A/V record companies would get in touch with them. Every telefax and TV in the System should soon be carrying the girls.

"All that's necessary," Yuri said, nodding, "is to have them dance on a documentary. They'll be calling you then."

"My idea exactly," beamed Dr. Birrel as the delighted girls dug into their pouches.

"Show these to your boss if you have trouble convincing him," Pepper said, producing a fistful of records.

Pan Solar kept the news of the androids as close as it could until it had tucked the amused Dr. Birrel astromobile home in an exclusive park in Idaho's Bitterroot Mountains, convenient to its summer studios on the Snake; interviewed them to exhaustion; and recorded the first documentary. Yuri was unofficially appointed PSN's liaison man to them since he was known to them and was the corporation's expert on the androids. He suspected that part of his job was to persuade the girls to hold still for the storm. That was unnecessary; they took everything with the delight of kittens.

For the interview and dance part of the documentaries they called in PSN's own personality, Jeff Jackson. Jackson drafted Yuri to help with the shows, though he did not appear in the records. The girls refused to memorize any kind of script, and all they could do was find out, in general, what their answers to a given question was likely to be. Yuri was very helpful here; he had interviewed the girls several times himself, and had sat through dozens of others during which the sob sisters pitied the poor dears for never having had a mother. They had no objection to blouses, except that they were hot while dancing, but Yuri told Jackson not to bother trying to get them to wear bras. That obviously bothered him, as it was supposed to be a family show and the girls' dancing was on the vigorous side. Fortunately they had the dancer's classic figure, slender and small-breasted.

"But are you really human beings?" Jackson asked them.

Pepper said, "Depends on what you mean by human. *He*, calls us Homo Capriformus, meaning we're the same genus but a different species, like lions and tigers."

"That's right," said. Sugar. "I guess we have human rights. That's kind of too bad, isn't it? We'd make such wonderful pets."

"That's what people have babies for, Sugar," Ginger told her. "You needn't feel sorry for them."

"Uh," said Jackson, recovering, "I gather that you're not able to have babies yourselves. Do you ever wish you could?"

"Why?" asked Pepper pleasantly. "Then we'd have to wait until *He* or someone synthesized capriform husbands for us. Now we can marry anybody we like, since we can't have children anyway."

"Or we could have 'em synthesized; that way we could have children without having to put up with babies," said Ginger.

"Besides, fertile women have blue periods and have to take pills, and so on. What baby is worth all that trouble?" Pepper asked, wide-eyed.

"Unless it was a *boy* baby," Sugar suggested, propping chin on fist, elbow on knee, and glancing at him sideways.

"Are you married?" Ginger asked interestedly.

Jackson took it very well, passing it off with a laugh. "I understand that Dr. Birrel did not want to create another race of human beings, at least not without the permission of the rest of us, so he left you sterile. It is possible, isn't it, to make capriform androids that are fertile? Why not have two races? My daughters would be delighted to meet your brothers, if you had any."

"It's because we're not good for anything," Pepper told him. He couldn't help blinking, to Yuri's secret satisfaction, remembering his own first interview with them. "We're just good for dancing and looking at. Now if we were mermaids, or if we could live in space without vac armor, *He'd* have no objection."

"Or if we could live on Jupiter, or Venus," added Sugar.

"Actually, we capriforms are just here to sell the public on androids. Not many of us are needed for that," said Ginger. "But *He* miscalculated, for once," shaking her head. "It won't work." She gave the icon a sultry look. "It loses too much in transmission."

After that, their dance came as a relief to Jackson.

By the time the first documentary was broadcast, the news of the androids was all over the System. The public's reaction was mixed; in general they were hostile to the idea of androids, but those who saw and heard the girls were captivated. They were not in favor of peopling the System with monsters, but could not resist the girls' appeal.

Yuri passed along to Pan Solar Dr. Birrel's famous remark that new races of men would have to be acceptable to Man, and a number of articles were written around it. The girls, they pointed out, had perfectly normal human brains. But the public buys new ideas very cautiously. Give 'em a couple of years to get used to the girls, thought Yuri. The glamour of their stardom would rub off on future androids. Dr. Birrel had described for reporters his ideas for a race of mermen, which seemed to interest the public. But the girls were still their best selling point.

The girls, whom he saw daily, were in seventh heaven. Having spent all their short lives secluded on the Moon, he'd have thought they'd be too shy to speak, assaulted by a crowd of reporters and agents. He should have known their reaction, remembering how they had greeted him. Pan Solar's precautions had paid off; most of the curious were stopped by Cheviot Preserve's ever-vigilant directors. Only those in the upper social levels were passed. It did not seem to occur to the girls to protect themselves. He never heard of them refusing to be interviewed.

The second TV interview went like the first, half of a documentary; once it was recorded, Jackson was finished, as the third would be done by Maxine Bibot.

The girls were in the conservatory, their favorite room, when Yuri came in one morning, their third week on Earth. Pepper saw him first and was flying toward him before Ginger could look around. She saw him grin that little-boy grin they never got enough of and brace himself to receive her, but, of course, she knew better than to jump at anybody, even as tall and strong as Yuri, at top speed. She braked, leaning back and digging her rubber-shod hooves in, then bounded lightly forward, landing right beside him, motionless. Instantly she leaped straight up, tucking her legs under her and throwing her arms around his neck, or, rather, shoulders. He slipped one arm under her and took the weight easily.

Ginger was swinging from his other arm before she had time to speak to him. She was carried across to Ginger's lounge, switching her tail demurely, and deposited on the arm. Ginger promptly perched on his lap. He was pleased, she could tell, but a little red-faced.

"Yuri, this is Mr. Frolich of Galactic Records. He wants us to make a record—a ninety-minute fiction piece!" she said breathlessly.

He grinned, looking over at the agent. "Did you figure on signing them to do a record, or to something like an exclusive ten-year contract?"

Mr. Frolich grinned back. He looked a little like a freckled frog, but he was nice; very friendly. "I asked around, the last couple of days, and found that everybody that waved exclusive contracts at them was told 'don't call us.' They never even got to dicker; the first offer was all the girls would listen to."

Yuri looked at her, then Ginger. "Mary had a little wolf, she fleeced him white as snow," he grinned. "Where's Sugar?"

"Taking a shower," said Ginger, turning and leaning against the other arm of the lounge. "She did a demonstration for Mr. Frolich."

"I'm tempted," mused Frolich, "to quit my job and join the girls as manager. They'll need someone, quite a few someones, in fact, since they'll have little time left after recording, studying, and practice to



consider investments, read contracts, and the rest. I don't suppose you'll be willing, let alone able, to handle business for them," he said to *Him*.

*He* shook his head smilingly, looking at his glass. "It would be a strange sort of retirement—from biochemical research to business. No, they're launched, as far as I'm concerned—I'm just the designer."

"It's sort of odd that they'd know so much about contracts and so on, but hardly have heard of Cal Varril."

"They've been studying for records since they learned to talk," *He* said. "But six months—almost seven, now—is not a very long time. They've viewed a selection of record classics back to Shakespeare, but study time had to be used for the basics, including law and business. They were born knowing English—structured RNA—and that saved a lot of trouble. Most of the time was spent in dancing, of course."

Pepper winked at him, remembering. Learning to speak—she was still learning, of course—had been breathtaking. You'd hear a new word, and suddenly you knew it, like it was an old one. But you could never think of it until you heard it or read it.

"Here's Sugar now," said Ginger, looking past Yuri. She was toweling herself vigorously, hair and fur damp. Wriggling quickly into her blouse, which she had left on a pink dogwood, she put on her belt and came around Yuri's lounge, peering at him.

"Hi, Yuri, You sleep late or something? You should've been here an hour ago—I was dancing."

Pepper felt Sugar's hands on her shoulders, but before she realized her intentions, she had been flipped backward off the lounge's arm. She twisted her feet aside in time to keep from kicking either Ginger or Yuri in the face. Then she caught herself on her hands, pushed, and was on her feet. Sugar had had time, though, to ensconce herself on the lounge, her arm around Yuri's neck and her small nose against his cheek.

"You're going to have to learn to get up earlier," she murmured, looking at Pepper out of the corner of her eye.

Pepper couldn't help laughing. She climbed up on the arm beside Sugar, seized her by one horn, and yanked her away from Yuri. "Arrant wench!" Sugar scooted over, laughing, and they put their arms around each other in a sudden mutual flood of sisterly love.

News of their contract with Galactic made the front page of newspapers all over the System; Maxine Bibot questioned them about it over her TV interview. However, if record viewers were delighted, record makers in general were not. This week, as they answered questions and danced for the public on two TV variety shows, and studied and practiced almost constantly, the murmuring in the entertainment industry grew. Galactic sent them no word, being busy, according to the papers, with internal troubles. A number of other companies had made them attractive offers only they realized that exclusive contracts were *non grata* in Cheviot Preserve. They had not accepted any of them yet, and toward the end of the week, with public opinion against them mounting, some were withdrawn; and few new offers were being made.

It seemed that as nine-day wonders they were acceptable; as flesh-and-blood robots, the stuff of millions of daydreams, and as symbols of the utility of biosynthesis, but not as human girls—not where they competed with ordinary men and women for jobs. They personally threatened only the people in the entertainment industry, but the public realized that they were just the point of the knife. General Oceanics,

polling the public on the subject of mermen, found it ranging from negative to hostile.

On Friday their troubles came to a head; the Actors' Guild filed suit against Galactic Records, obtaining an injunction. They said that androids were "created beings, hence akin to robots"; robotic puppets were restricted in their contracts with the industry. The legalisms were immaterial; their primary weapon was the public's fear of being replaced. The suit gave all suppressed fears full expression.

Galactic would not dare press the battle in the face of public hostility. Since Weldon West's invention of the gravitronic motor and the development of all the other applications of gravitronics, society had liquefied. The sheer impossibility of collecting taxes, when the disaffected can slap together a makeshift astromobile and go off to the asteroids, spelled the doom of bureaucracy. It was up to the judges, then, to maintain some degree of justice and judges who permitted outmoded laws to obstruct justice had frequently been lynched. Since the general abandonment of the cities, the selection of judges had been brought closer to the voters. An unfortunate result was that the judges tended to play to the crowd. The people got what they wanted—not justice.

The girls' lessons in history had been comprehensive; they saw all the ramifications clearly enough, and sank into gloom. They were pacing around in the lounge, heaving sighs at regular intervals, when the monitor chimed and announced Mr. Frolich, formerly of Galactic Records. They had instructed it to turn everyone away without disturbing them, but Mr. Frolich was on the short list.

Entering the lounge a little later that day, Yuri opened the door on pandemonium. Sugar was staggering across the knee-high, transpex-topped table; Pepper doing a handstand beyond it; and Ginger leaping for it at full speed. As Ginger landed on the table top, she doubled her legs under her, then uncoiled like a released spring, gleaming red horns reaching for Sugar's slender waist. Sugar had had time to recover her balance. She avoided the horns lithely, laughing, and caught her sister by the shoulder, trying to push her to one side and off in mid-leap. But Ginger grabbed her arm and yanked as she staggered sideways. For a moment they teetered on the edge, each trying to throw the other off. Then Pepper landed in the middle of the table top, legs doubled under her. She uncoiled in the girls' devastating fashion and stiff-armed the others off. One of them managed to catch her arm and drag her with them. Pepper teetered precariously on the edge herself, as the others landed in a breathlessly laughing heap, then her hooves slipped off and she sat down heavy on the edge of the table. She had scrambled, laughing, partway back on, before the others got to their feet. They grabbed her arm and leg and jerked her off.

"Yuri!" she cried, as she landed on the floor. The other two saw him then, and he was inundated by them, all talking at once. Before he could do more than say hello, they had told him that Mr. Frolich had become their manager, that he had a plan, and that he wanted to see him. They dragged him into the conservatory, where Frolich had been talking quietly to Dr. Birrel, sat him down in a lounge, brought him drinks, and swarmed into his lap. It was like having a lapful of kittens.

"You wanted to see me—I believe?" he said, looking at the girls doubtfully.

"That's right," said Frolich, laughing; "The girls tell me you've been down to Silver City. You understand what the girls' chances of happiness are, then."

Yuri nodded. "Ten years or more from now, some new android will try again and open the doors, but this is the girls' only chance," he said somberly. "They'll have been forgotten by then except for historical background in the articles."

"That's the idea. The Guild is swinging the public against us. It's like they're herding sheep; they mean

us no harm, they're just protecting their own interests, but . . ."

Yuri nodded again. "You said something about a plan."

"Yes. As I see it, the thing to do is to lead the sheep in a circle, back over the shepherds."

"It *sounds* great," said Yuri dubiously. "How do you do it?"

"Well, what direction are they going? At this rate, they'll soon have made it a matter of legal precedent that an android, or other 'created being', is legally property like a robot. The precedent will hold until some judge decides to upset it, but that won't happen until a clear majority of the public change their minds. So we take a step further in the same direction. We sell one of the girls."

The girls all grinned at him, un-dismayed by the prospect. He pulled his jaw up, and managed to croak, "There must be more to it. Out with it."

"Your reaction is, as the posters say, negative, yes?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Most people will agree with you, I think. Men might secretly like to be able to buy girls, but they would care to have women able to buy exotic men. Women, in particular, will find android ownership decidedly indecent. Especially the Discussion Clubs." He grinned, frog-like. "Lucky they had that clause limiting use of robotic puppets; the temptation to use it against the girls was too great."

"You make it sound too simple," said Yuri, dismayed at the thought of one of the girls sold to some drooling vacbrain. "Forbidding ownership of androids is one thing, but granting them freedom to compete with men is another." He shook his head, looked over at Dr. Birrel, who also looked unhappy. "What do you think of it?" he asked.

The other frowned. "I don't like it any better than you do. But I admit that I'm out of my element here. Mr. Frolich does seem to understand the public."

Yuri felt abandoned, yet he couldn't voice his objections—not with the delighted girls reading his every thought from six inches away.

"So, which one would you prefer?"

"*What?*"

The girls exploded into laughter at his expression, Sugar leaning out to protest something to Frolich. Pepper gave him a delighted hug, and Ginger said, "Was that reaction negative or positive?"

"But—I couldn't—I couldn't begin to . . ." he began dazedly.

"Remember, this is merely for the benefit of the news services."

"But—"

"You're not hinting that there's something wrong with *us*, are you?" asked Pepper, peering into his eyes.

"Let me think," he said feebly. To Frolich, "The idea is to arouse the indignation of the public?"

"That's right. Also, the mere idea that anyone, even an ordinary young reporter, can afford to buy an

android, will give everyone the horrors. Think what it would do to society. Free androids, and the problem of fitting them into society, is a mild problem beside that."

"But our main purpose is to arouse indignation. I'll be the monster in the scene, the girls the innocents. I see your plan," he nodded. "Yes, I can buy it. But I still don't like it," trying to avoid the girls' eyes. *Better me than some men I know*, he thought.

Sugar had climbed down and brought a spinner and card from some child's game. "High score wins," she said, and before Yuri could grasp her meaning, they had all spun it.

Sugar won. Yuri looked down on a radiant face between two of the saddest ones he'd ever seen. Ginger and Pepper were blinking back tears, lips quivering; they looked for all the world like two puppies left outside at night for the first time. He reached down and gave them both a bear hug, and Sugar hugged them from the other side. They were nothing if not game; in a few minutes all were smiling.

"Next time *I'll* get the spinner," said Pepper huskily. Then they both hugged Sugar. Ginger said, "We'll help you pack. Come on, let's hurry!" Sugar had time only to squeeze Yuri's hands, then they were gone.

An hour later Yuri, still dazed, was airborne with a chattering platinum-blond android all his very own—it says here. Specifically, it—the bill of sale—said that he had, "for considerations received and forthcoming" purchased forty-seven kilograms of assorted organic compounds "formed into a living experimental animal, description below"—Sugar's name not being mentioned anywhere on the document.

"The Actors' Guild has compared them to robots, which are nothing but zerohmic crystals," said Frolich. "By that reasoning, an android is 'nothing but' a mass of organic compounds; an experimental animal, at best."

Frolich called the panting reporters together, and in comment on the Actors' Guild suit, announced that they had "accepted the decision of the public"; they had sold Sugar and options on her sisters. The new owner proposed to exhibit them on the live circuit; Dr. Birrel would receive twenty percent of the net for the next ten years. He had retired, and had no plans for producing more androids.

By the time Yuri and Sugar got to Cleveland, a flight of over an hour and a half, two-thirds of the population of the Inner Planets must have known about the sale. Frolich had not disclosed the name of the purchaser, but Yuri could not long remain anonymous even if he wished. His apartment was in the Spire of Cleveland.

Cleveland had not gone the Free City route during the dissolution of society. The city's Negroes had long been restricted to Hough House, the world's largest building; when the upper and middle classes bought air- and automobile homes and flew away, the Whites were unable to cooperate with the Negroes on the city's administration. Things were violent in the Jungle, the abandoned residential districts, for a time, but when things began to stabilize to the point where secession might have been possible, it was no longer needed; the new world was born and growing lustily.

As in most cities, the white-elephant office buildings, such as the hundred-story Spire, had been converted to apartments. They were occupied by people late of the Jungle and Hough House, mostly young, on the way up. It was just this group which could be expected to be most hostile to androids; the group with which they'd competed for jobs.

The hangar on the eighty-ninth level opened for them automatically and Yuri swept into the landing cradle of his parking tower. Sugar, quivering with excitement all the way from Idaho, bounced out and took in the drab hangar with delight. The usual complement of loafers went slack-jawed. At least she was

dressed. Yuri struggled out with her two suitcases—the larger one, he had learned, contained mostly toys and games.

Her smile widened impishly at one oldster's remark, "I never knew they were real—I thought they just had 'em on TV," but she said nothing. Luckily the locals were too awed to approach; they were able to get through without having to answer half a million questions. Yuri would have slunk hastily through if he could, but Sugar took her time.

A stunning Negro girl with the air of a queen entered the hangar just as he was leading Sugar out, relieved. Sugar took her in with one wide-eyed, awed look and bounded forward, arms extended, saying, "I'm Sugar and you're beautiful!"

The girl—Yuri finally recognized her as one of the youngsters who just yesterday had been sitting on the parking towers, wistfully watching their older sisters come and go with their dates—bent over her with a sunrise smile. "I've seen you on TV," she said, voice as rich as that of a trained actress. "*You're* the one who's beautiful."

"And this is Yuri," added Sugar. "Aren't I lucky?"

She smiled politely at Yuri, who was tongue-tied by her sudden magnificence and his own inability to remember her name.

"He just bought me," Sugar explained eagerly.

The smile vanished. "*Bought* you?" she asked wonderingly, looking at Yuri. He managed a sheepish grin, made the mistake of looking at Sugar, wished the suitcases were in orbit.

Sugar explained about the Actors' Guild suit and Dr. Birrel's "decision." She leaned her head against Yuri's chest, face radiant. "*I* was the lucky one. And Yuri was lucky, too, of course. Isn't he nice?"

The girl gave him an icy look that loosened his jaw. "Yes, nice. And very, very lucky." The smile flashed back on as she bent over Sugar, squeezing her hand. "I hope you'll be very happy," she said, as if to a child.

"Oh, I am!"

The girl nodded sadly once, flashed Yuri another look, and brushed past.

"Did I do that right?" asked Sugar innocently as they went up the hall.

Yuri caught his breath, said, "Perfectly."

She smiled as at some secret, glanced wonderingly up at him, and said, "But you didn't say anything. Aren't you supposed to be acting, too?"

"Don't worry, Twink, I did my part," he said grimly. Sugar started giggling and couldn't stop. "You little imp!" he exclaimed. "I should've bought a whip first thing."

Yuri had a four-room apartment, seeming very small after Dr. Birrel's palatial astromobile, but Sugar did not seem to notice the contrast. She followed him around, taking in everything. He had thought of putting her in his bed, but concluded that she could stand the couch better than he could. The smaller suitcase contained mostly blouses; no need to unpack them. Sugar took out the currycombs, hairbrushes, and the meager cosmetics kit, and carefully arranged them on Yuri's dresser. Yuri was somehow not

surprised to find that the symbol on them was that of a female satan with a fantastic figure. The other suitcase they didn't bother to open.

Yuri had recovered somewhat by the time he'd finished dinner. Though he did not exactly look forward with joy to meeting his neighbors—the tale was undoubtedly over the building by now—he'd have to face them. Sugar changed blouses twice and spent ten minutes brushing and rearranging her curls, moving at a dance, while Yuri's jitters grew. She didn't look any different to him, but when they stepped into the rec-room, she was stunning. A concerted sigh, or maybe gasp, arose, and Yuri swelled a little with pride. The rec-rooms, one on each level, were set up for the younger children. The older folks on the eighty-ninth floor had gotten into the habit of gathering in it every night. Tonight there was an unusual number of young people and children.

Sugar began by hugging a wide eyed girl-child who came to a fearless stop right in front of her and stared, then hugged the girl's embarrassed mother. With Yuri following in her wake, she proceeded to make the circuit of the room, speaking to everyone, examining each as boldly as a puppy. In ten minutes flat, she was the most popular person in the entire building. Sugar was soon separated from Yuri, surrounded by a crowd of women, young and old.

"It must be something to be able to remember how it feels to be born," mused an old woman, looking at her curiously. "Is it like they say, like waking up?"

Sugar tilted back on her hooves, studying her. She had not seen many old people. To think that she herself would someday have had so many experiences gave her a strange feeling. "Not really," she answered musingly. "When you wake up, you're sometimes confused at first, but you know where you are, and what you are, you know all about beds and rooms and doors and waking up in the morning. You know that you have a body and you can tell where it is and you know the difference between it and the rest of the world."

"You mean, a baby can't even tell the difference between itself and the things around it?" asked a young woman incredulously.

"Not really," said Sugar. "Not at first. But they learn all those things before they start really thinking. Then they forget all about what it was like when they learn to talk."

"You girls were born able to speak and read, weren't you?" asked another. "That must be very convenient."

Sugar smiled. "In a way, yes. But if you've ever taken structured memory-RNA, you'll know it's not that simple. We were born understanding English and phonetic script, but that's not the same thing as being able to speak and read. We're still learning that."

"Can you remember what it was like before you were born?" asked the old woman.

"I can still remember a little of what it was like," Sugar told her. "A sort of floating, dark nothing; very peaceful. Being dead must be like that. For a long time I was afraid of the world, and kept wanting to go back to sleep. Then I got to be afraid of sleeping, for fear I wouldn't wake up again. It was only yesterday, but it seems so long ago."

"Only seven months," breathed one of the younger women; she was dressed in a beautiful gown that made Sugar envious. Yuri had said that probably a lot of them would stay home tonight on the chance of seeing her. In fact, there seemed to be people here from a number of floors; the room was crowded.

"How long did it take you to learn to walk?" asked the old woman, struck by the thought.

"Only about a week. The incubator had an exerciser complex, you know, and that opened the nerve channels. It was also important to the muscles, of course, but the nerves are the main thing. We were starting dancing and singing at the end of the second week."

Faces lit up at the mention of dancing. "Give us a demonstration!" she was urged. Nothing loath, Sugar grinned, looked around for room, tugged at her blouse. The mere thought of dancing made it feel like a winding sheet.

"Not unless you're a lot richer than I am," Yuri was disappointing his listeners. "They only let me have her on credit. I can make enough renting her as a dancer on the live circuit to pay for her and to live on, a lot more than I'm getting now. Naturally Dr. Birrel didn't want to go into the business. He's retired, you know."

"But when they go to making 'em by the thousand, that'll put you out of business, won't it?" asked one young man in formal evening dress.

"Well, not out of business," Yuri said, watching Sugar's twinkling hooves. "I'll have considerable mass by then. I could buy up a lot and promote them—they will be a lot cheaper. But you're right; I'll have to get the credit while I can; androids will be common soon. In fact, I think it's only a matter of time before every record company in the entertainment industry is producing its own special androids, and all kinds of other animals, too."

"Don't bet on it," said one old man in the background. The crowd of eager young men turned to look at him. He was sucking a reeking black pipe, had several days' growth of beard, and should have been sitting on a bench in front of a general store a century and a half ago. His voice was dry, sour, pessimistic with a lifetime's knowledge of human beings. "They'll change the law fast enough," he said dryly. "I don't mean they won't make more. But they won't be bought and sold."

"Why not? You don't call 'em *human*, do you?" asked one loudly-dressed youth incredulously. Yuri had a brief daydream in which legions of loudly-dressed youths died in agony.

"Got nothin' to do with it," grunted the oldster. "If you were married, which you ain't by your words, you'd know one argument without being told. Bringing a thing like that home, regardless of what it's called, is grounds for divorce. And how!" He pointed at Sugar with his pipestem. Sugar, flushed and joyous, caught Yuri's eye, her laughing glance sweeping the group.

"My wife'd beat my skull in if brought her a, uh, housemaid like that," agreed a middle-aged man with a round, red face.

"How about if you're just free-married?" challenged one of the optimists.

"Just makes it easier for the little lady to throw you outta the house."

"Wouldn't need a wife anyway," grunted one of the youngsters. He looked Sugar over carefully, added, "And how!" Yuri had another brief daydream.

"All it takes is six months' practice," Sugar said jerkily, her feet pattering softly on the gem-hard floor. "Anybody can do it. As you can tell by me. You just need hooves. And a tail," switching it outrageously, turning in the air on each bound. "The horns just come natural. Lots of people have 'em. But the thing you need the most is an audience. Like this one." She leaped straight up beside a shy, plain woman holding a big-eyed baby, put her hands on the woman's shoulder, kissed the baby on the fly, and was gone.

Pausing for breath, she grinned around at them, picked out a strong young girl in pants and said, "Give me a hand. Catch me and toss me straight up." The other was dubious, but game. Standing just in front of her, she leaped into the air, folding her legs; the other caught her by the knees and heaved. Another girl might have gone over her head, but Sugar put both hands on the head and pushed away lightly. Landing on her hooves, she bounded forward onto her hands just in front of the startled girl again, pushed off hard, turned half-over in mid air and caught the girl's shoulders just as she was backing away. The girl was nervous but beginning to realize Sugar's precision; she halted and Sugar dressed her turn, landing lightly and easily in front of her, laughing into her eyes.

She was dancing hopscotch with a group of pre-teen girls when Yuri finally decided they'd done enough. An intense, hostile silence closed around him as he threaded into the group of women; they all pulled away from him. His bright smile became a toothy travesty. Calling on all the aplomb learned as a cub reporter in Free Los Angeles, he said heartily, "Time to go, Sugar. Bedtime for you." That was an unfortunate remark. If looks could have killed, there'd have been nothing left of Yuri Koeppels but a spot.

"Really?" she asked. "I don't feel sleepy; just a little tired."

"Mustn't get too tired," he said, straining his smile wider. "After all," he said to the frozen-faced women, "you're only seven months old and must get a lot of sleep, ha-ha!"

"If you say so," said Sugar reluctantly. "It still seems early to me." Yuri writhed at that, but she came away. Taking his hand, she innocently wrapped his arm around her, smiled and waved at her friends saying good-bye as she went. There was an agonizing wait while she kissed every pre-teenager in the room, then they were at the door. Sugar flashed one last bright smile back, and they were out, Yuri's back feeling as if he were being stabbed with a thousand icicles.

"Are you trying to get me lynched?" he croaked, imagining the sudden explosion of the women into scandalized speech behind him.

Sugar giggled. "Doing O.K., aren't I?"

"So good you're the most popular person in the building and I'm the most unpopular."

She skipped happily. "Good. That's like you outlined it. You're very sharp, you know?" looking up at him worshipfully.

"Yeah," he grunted. "So sharp I scare myself."

In his apartment, Yuri headed for the refrigerator. His electrosynthesizer, working on air, produced sugar, starch, flour (cellulose for bulk), fats and oils, including cream—and ethanol. Just the basics. Right now ethanol was the basic. Pouring out a glass of mix—carbonated ethanol and water—he drank it straight, like medicine.

Sugar watched curiously. "Got some for me?" she asked.

He looked down at her in surprise. "Uh, that's not good for little girls," he said after a moment, then turned red, thinking of the women.

"I'm a capriform, remember? It won't hurt me," she told him.

"Don't you get drunk?"



"Heavenly orbits, no. Bad for the reflexes." She looked around at the clock, frowning. "It is bedtime, though. Energy drinks keep me awake."

"You drink alcohol for energy?"

"Sure. Ethanol, that is. We have liver-type tissues surrounding our intestines—you know the kind. They oxydize the alcohol before it gets into the blood."

She went off to take a shower, whipping off her blouse and looking around in puzzlement for the cleanser. Yuri winced at the thought of taking her clothes down to the laundromat. He set the electrosynthesizer to *ethanol* and sat down, brooding. He just hoped it would work. If it broke the public's resistance to androids, he couldn't really complain. The personal contact should do it, from what they'd already seen. But he dreaded taking her around the live circuit. He could afford to hold out for the fashionable nightclubs—with a large percentage of women in audience.

Sugar came out glowing, toweling herself. For a moment it almost seemed worth it; her fresh, appealing innocence brought a lump to his throat. Then she glanced distastefully at the couch, resentfully at him, and wistfully at his bed. He froze inside, ignoring her glance. She brought out her brushes and combs, came and stood in front of him, and prattled cheerfully about all the wonderful people she had met, currying herself entrancingly. Yuri found he couldn't ignore her.

Finished, she came and sat down on the chair arm. "I think this is a lot better than being an A/V star; don't you?" she asked musingly, leaning against him.

He became conscious of her warm bare body, the faint sweet scent of her damp fur. "It has its points," he agreed, sweating. "About time for you to go to bed, isn't it?"

There was a brief silence. "I'm not sleepy," she said shortly.

She got down after a moment, walked around in front of him, heaved a deep sigh, glanced at him appealingly, silently gathered up her brushes and combs and slowly carried them back to his bedroom. He heard her arrange them on the dresser. She paced slowly around the room for several minutes, and he heard her sigh again. Then she appeared in the doorway. "Aren't you going to bed?" she asked wistfully.

He managed to make his voice sound almost normal. "I've got to do an article for Llewellyn tonight," he said.

"Oh." She came slowly into the room. "I'll wait for you." She paced silently around the room for a minute or two, then began to dance slowly and somehow sadly.

Yuri couldn't think of a single thing to write.

After a long time, five or ten minutes, Sugar slowed down, blinking sleepily. She finally came back to his chair, stood by him silently for a time, then climbed onto his lap. "Tell me when you get it done," she said drowsily. Yuri held his breath for five minutes or so, and then she was asleep.

He picked her up gently, carried her over to the couch, and laid her out comfortably. For a moment he stood looking down on her slight, girlish body and peaceful, childish face. *A sweet wink*, he thought. *Poor little innocent. Just seven months old!* He smoothed her silky fur, drew a sheet up over her, and started for his own bed, heaving a sigh of relief.

"Damn you, Yuri!" She sat up, blinking at him in sleepy anger.

"You shouldn't say such . . ." he began weakly.

"I'd've said worse if I'd known it," she growled. She curled up, muttering about, "Prudes and their Teaching Machines."

The next morning Yuri was up early, and checked through the unicom's records. There was a whole series of requests for interviews from reporters who knew or had learned his Unident number, and a few from friends, cautiously curious. There were also calls from Pepper and Ginger for Sugar.

On the telefax section of the unicom, there were several business offers, ranging from bids for Sugar to queries on rentals, both from private individuals and from booking agents. One prospective purchaser was an aging, wealthy socialite who affected a gold-plated astromobile. There was also a cautious message from Llewellyn, requesting a public statement, if not an interview. Pan Solar would have liked an article on the future of androids if possible. That must be handled very delicately; it was for the family newspapers.

"He's telling me?" muttered Yuri. Sugar awoke about then, cheerful again. She gave Yuri a good-morning kiss, and he put her to work on breakfast; she had mastered the apartment's simple cooking equipment quickly. She returned her sisters' calls. Yuri brooded over the publicity problem, finally decided to avoid all reporters for a day or two, to make a public statement, and to write an article tying in with it and Frolich's "theory" that androids were "nothing but" better than robots. The public statement was simple; it had been outlined by Frolich the day before. Basically, he had bought Sugar on spec and bad options on her sisters; he would promote them as dancers, exactly as a man with a troupe of robo-puppets would. Frolich would back him from the other end, saying that Yuri was the natural choice for manager, as the girls knew and liked him.

The article had to cheerfully assume that androids would never be free, without coming out and saying so; and Yuri was careful to work in the opinion that had been growing on him, that all record companies would soon be producing their own androids. That hit the Actors' Guild from both sides; their actions condemned the girls to slavery without actually protecting their own jobs. Finished, it looked like something that might be found in a girlie magazine. He telefaxed it and the statement off to PSN quickly, before he lost his nerve.

During breakfast, he and Sugar read the papers and watched the news. In general, the sale of the beautiful android had unleashed pandemonium. Expressions of outrage were made by a large number of influential people, but Frolich had discounted their protests against the Actors' Guild suit; people pay no attention to moralisms when their jobs are threatened. Other expressions of outrage, however, were more important. Reporters had descended on the Spire apparently just after he and Sugar had retired. They had tramped the public rooms until midnight, questioning everybody, and many newspapers carried one news service poll of the Spire's occupants on the ethics of the ownership of androids—reaction overwhelmingly negative.

"It's working even faster than I thought," sighed Yuri in relief.

Sugar said, "They came around and questioned Pepper and Ginger again last night. Can you get the interview on TV?"

"Should; I always leave it set to record news." Yuri checked through the TV's record index, found *androids* mentioned under News Briefs. He tuned to it and the wall opened on the lounge of Dr. Birrel's astromobile. Sugar caught her breath at sight of the familiar room. Pepper stood in the center of the visiplat, pouting; Ginger was curled sullenly in a lounge farther back. Sugar started to giggle at their expressions.

"What do you think," came the voice of the reporter from behind his icon, "of having your sister sold like that?"

"I think it was awful, and if she shows her head here again, we'll dehorn her," flashed Pepper hotly.

"What?"

"You heard me," she said clearly. "It was a sneaky trick. Not fair!"

"But *he* bought *her*!" protested the flabbergasted reporter.

"Ha!" exclaimed Pepper.

"That's right," Ginger agreed angrily. "She's the one talked *Him* into selling just one of us at first, because Yuri couldn't afford the down payment for us all. We never knew anything about it until it was all over with."

"You really mean you see nothing wrong with being sold?"

They looked at him as if he were a cretin.

Ginger said, "If *He* wants to make some credit off us, well, *He* earned it. We're here, aren't we?"

"Well, but what about future androids, androids made by other people. Unscrupulous people who'd sell 'em to anyone with the credit?"

Pepper looked at him, shrugged, turned and marched back to the lounge, stamping her hooves and switching her tail angrily with every step. "Ask the Actors' Guild," she growled, curling up beside Ginger.

"People will do whatever they want with them no matter what we say. We've got our own problems," Ginger agreed.

"If you see Sugar, tell her to swim the Atlantic," said Pepper. "Yuri, too!"

Yuri joined Sugar in laughter, but said worriedly, "They're not being innocent enough and they're not making me out to be enough of a monster."

Sugar gripped his arm. "They had to play it that way," she said. "After the image we've projected, they couldn't act shocked; it would seem phony." She grinned impishly. "They're putting on a good act, too, aren't they?"

Yuri found one other significant reaction to yesterday's news of the sale of Sugar. The Actors' Guild had requested a continuance to rephrase their plea. The judge had denied it, but he had recessed until noon to "study the issues." Frolich's plan was definitely working, at whatever cost to Yuri; His Honor was undoubtedly considering the next election. Yuri was quite cheerful as he began to call up booking agents.

Sugar, at loose ends, took their clothes down to the laundromat and made the rounds of the eighty-ninth level's public rooms. Yuri watched her on TV later; she made it a point to avoid reporters' questions. The public appearance was eminently successful; feeling against Yuri did not decline much, despite her evident happiness.

Newspaper reporters got to Ginger and Pepper and finally made them admit that selling androids was bad—for the androids. The afternoon editions were filled with gloomy pictures of future android slavery in both gray and purple prose. Yuri's article was the only one that seemed cheerful at the prospect; it

replenished the monster image with a vengeance, and the left-handed crack in it at the Actors' Guild drew blood.

All the Inner Planets tuned into the courtroom that afternoon. The trend of public opinion was obvious, and judges who have political ambitions must seem to lead the pack, not follow. The Actors' Guild's suit was dismissed on the grounds that the androids were "intelligent, reasoning beings, a subspecies of Man; that human rights, under the law, must be extended to all intelligent beings, whatever their form or origin."

Yuri gave Sugar a hug. "We're home free, Twink! It's going a lot faster than I ever thought it would. I'd say androids are about accepted. I expected it to take at least a week, and maybe as much as a month."

"I wish it would take a month," said Sugar. Looking disgustedly at him, she added, "Not that it would make any difference."

An hour later Yuri received two telefaxed messages: ALLEE ALLEE OUTS IN FREE—FROLICH. The other read, YURI SUGAR COME HOME ALL IS FORGIVEN—PEPPER GINGER.

The morning newspapers, the next day, showed a picture of a cheerful Yuri arriving, late at night, at Cheviot Preserve; they had been detained by a farewell party at the Spire. The captions were variations of Still Cheerful After Demotion—*from Android Owner to Android Press Agent*. Other pictures of Sugar were captioned Slavery Apparently No Great Ordeal. Yuri read them at breakfast, between sessions of watching the girls.

He had come in late that morning and ordered Sugar to get breakfast. They looked as fresh as flowers, though he suspected they had sat up until midnight while Sugar told them everything. Ginger promptly kicked him in the shin, her sharp hoof sending a wave agony up to his knee.

"Don't speak to *us*, Yuri Koeppels! We know all about *you*," she said indignantly.

"We don't associate with robo-puppets," Pepper told him with dignity.

"I thought all was forgiven?" he said, wincing.

"We're mad all over again," Pepper told him. "You insulted our sister!"

Frolich came in late—he had had to leave his airmobile outside the Preserve—and called a business conference. Ginger and Sugar showed up, dancing and trying to trip each other. Yuri went after Pepper. He found her in the lounge and at first assumed she was asleep. She was lying on a relaxer, waving her feet in the air and weeping quietly.

His heart turned over and went into a power dive. "Pepper, honey," he said, feeling miserably inadequate. "What's wrong? Don't cry, Twink. Tell me about it."

She lifted a wet, surprised face. "What's the matter?" she asked.

Taken aback, Yuri asked, "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," she said, more surprised every moment "I was just crying."

"Well, but what were you crying about? Is something wrong?"

"Of course not! Everything's wonderful. Don't you ever cry?"

"Not if I can help it. Certainly not without reason."

"Well, I had a reason. I just felt like crying, that's all."

"What makes you feel that way?" asked Yuri, curious.

She shrugged and smiled, piquantly. "I don't know. I'm happy, and sad, and I think how I wasn't even alive seven months ago, and what a wonderful world it is, and I just naturally cry. Anybody would."

"I guess they would, at that," said Yuri slowly. "Maybe I better leave you alone, then."

"It's O.K. now; I'm out of the mood. What was it you wanted?"

"We're holding a business conference in the conservatory. Care to join?"

"If you'll carry me." She reached for him. "I'm out of the crying mood and into the being-carried mood." She had that listless, comfortable feeling you get after you've had a good cry. He grinned and picked her up. She wiped her face on his shoulder and was contentedly silent as he carried her into the conservatory.

"Shame, Pepper!" cried Ginger. "We're mad at him!"

"I forgot," said Pepper unrepentantly.

"Incorrigible," sighed Ginger.

Sugar shrugged wryly. "Both of them. But she's our sister and he is Yuri." Resignedly, they started to join Pepper and Yuri in the lounge.

"Hold it!" said Yuri, catching Ginger by the horn. "You may have forgiven me, but now I'm the one who's mad. You kicked me in the shin!"

Ginger halted, shamefaced. "It was just a joke," she protested meekly. She sank penitently to her knees and rubbed the offended shin, only half in jest.

Yuri looked down tenderly into Pepper's peaceful face, "I never fully realized how tragic it would be for androids to be bought and sold until I saw you crying," he told her, rubbing Ginger's head.

Ginger piled into the lounge beside him. "Don't mention it," she said. "I'm glad *that's* over with."

Frolich looked up in surprise. "Over with? What gave you that idea?"

"Isn't it?" asked Yuri tensely.

"For these girls, I think yes; they're accepted. But the battle will no doubt have to be fought all over again with each new form. Can't you just see General Oceanics getting its mermen to sign lifetime contracts the minute they come out of the incubator? I hope you don't think we've changed the shape of the human race."