

Quite a few of Robert Young's stories have concerned themselves with giantism. Here's a superior addition, a gripping tale of a primitive race who creates a monster in the form of a beautiful giantess, and of a professional hunter brought in to kill her. That's where it begins...

## The Giantess

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

### *Strophe*

Hill halted at the base of the hogback to re-sling his '02 Weslich. It was a heavy piece, and he did not wish it to encumber him while he was climbing the ridge. This time he slung it diagonally, leaving both arms free. It did not interfere with his overnight pack, nor with the wide belt that supported his canteen, his two-way radio and an extra cartridge clip. In leaving his fly-buggy, he had taken no other weapon: if he couldn't bag Cheida with an '02 Weslich, he couldn't bag her, period.

The question arises why, with so formidable an obstacle as the hogback still separating him from her demesne, he should have chosen to go the rest of the way on foot. The answer lay partly in the impossibility of his getting off a good shot from a moving aircraft and partly in his desire to catch her unawares. Were she to see the fly-buggy come down, she would be alerted, and bagging her then would be a ticklish operation. It was true her valley was a vast one and she might at the moment be on its far side, remote enough from the hogback not to be able to see the little fly-buggy land. But in Hill's profession you took nothing for granted: you played the hand you were dealt and never asked for an unknown card.

He started up the side of the hogback, digging the pointed toes of his black Beowulf boots into the bank. Small trees afforded him occasional handholds, and in places shale ledges provided erratic stairs. He had been off booze for a month and was in superb condition. When he neared the end of the climb, he slowed his pace and inched his way the final few feet to the top. He saw a grassy promenade dotted with bushes on which big red berries grew. He moved on all fours across it and surveyed Cheida's demesne from the concealment of the tall grass.

Midsummer haze dimmed the details of the valley, reduced the farther slope to a bluish blur. A river wandered down from mountains on the north, wound its way across the prairie-like terrain to green hills on the south. Trees grew thickly along its banks, forming an anfractuous forest. There were a number of widely scattered rock formations, and far to the northeast, well beyond the river, a little lake shone dully in the afternoon rays of Alpha Aurigae. Semicircling it was a stand of sequoia-like trees.

Hill saw no sign of his quarry. Nevertheless, he knew she was somewhere in the valley. The Hujiri had told him she was childlike in more ways than one and kept irregular hours. More than likely she was taking a nap in some secluded bower.

He had begun his survey with the opposite slope, moving his gaze gradually back to the ridge. The slope immediately before him was so acute as to be perpendicular, and presently he found himself gazing straight down to the valley floor, over a thousand feet below. He also found himself gazing straight down upon the naked body of a sleeping girl.

In Hill's mind the height of the hogback shrank drastically in order to accommodate the pattern he had instinctively imposed upon the object of his gaze. Consequently, it was some time before he realized that the young and lovely girl sleeping at the foot of the cliff far exceeded her seeming size.

Other factors delayed his re-acceptance of reality. She was lying there the way any girl, tired from the day's exertions, might lie — one arm shielding her eyes from the sun; one hand lying on her stomach; one leg drawn up, half hiding her pubes. Then there was her wild black hair, her full rose-nippled breasts, her long, slender legs — one simply did not associate such qualities with a giantess.

When the realization finally did take root, he was astonished. The Hujiri, in telling him about Cheida, had failed to mention that she was beautiful. Perhaps to them — in the light of her cruelties — she was not. But it did not matter really — what mattered was that he had found her without having to track her down, had caught her unawares and in a vulnerable position. It was true he could not get off a good shot at her from where he lay, but it would be a simple matter for him to descend the hogback and circle out onto the prairie. Once there, he could bring her to her feet with one blast of the Weslich and blow her brains out with a second.

He grinned. It was going to be easy — a lead-pipe cinch. And for this one he would receive not only his usual fee from Galactic Guidance but an additional one from the Hujiri. They had promised him five hundred head of cattle if he succeeded in destroying the monster they had unwittingly brought to life, and five hundred head of cattle would bring him a small fortune on the galactic exchange. The thought of all the elegant boots he could buy made his senses swim; anticipation set his hands to trembling. He experienced only a modicum of self-loathing. The real loathing would come afterward.

He moved back from the edge of the cliff and stood up. Some distance to his left the cliff gave way to more typical terrain. He walked along the ridge top and began circling down to the valley floor. The slope was covered with huge berry bushes, taller than he was. Some of them were broken, their berries scattered on the ground. Once, the hogback seemed to tremble slightly, and he nearly lost his footing. He did not unslung the Weslich till he was almost to the base of the ridge; then he brought it round and held it at ready.

A huge rock formation that he had not noted from above rose up a considerable distance from the cliff. It would provide ideal cover from which to earn his double fee. He backed toward it, eyes fixed on the base of the cliff where he had seen Cheida lying. He found it odd that he could not see her now...Odd? Preposterous! Awareness of the cunning trap into which he had walked as naively as a purblind ant swept over him, and for a while he could not move. When at last paralysis left him and he spun around, the "rock formation" had already come to life and extended a granitelike "ridge" in his direction. Slablike fingers closed round him; the Weslich, knocked from his hands, went flying butt over muzzle toward the base of the cliff. Awesome pressure drove the breath from his lungs, and the sky, so benignly blue a moment ago, went black.

### *Antistrophe*

If we are going to sing of the monsters primitive races create and if we are going to sing of the professional hunters who hunt them down and kill them, we must realize from the start that essentially we are singing the same song.

The Hujiri of the planet Primeval invented Cheida ostensibly to frighten their children but actually to frighten themselves. They told ever taller tales of her over their cook fires at night, and as the legend of her grew, she grew too. For maximum effect they located her in an uninhabited valley less than two days' journey from the one in which they raised their crops and grazed their sheep and cattle and made wool. They confined her diet to nuts and berries and wild apples, disqualifying her from ogrehood; but the games they invented for her to play were scarcely less horrifying than anthropophagy would have been. They pretended the world was her playpen and adopted the role of toys for her to play with.

Inevitably they came to believe their own lies. Among primitive people there are no skeptics; when a primitive society believes something, *every single member* believes it; and if there are no outsiders to temper that belief, a paradox is born. On the one hand, we have a whole race of people believing *en masse* that something exists; and on the other hand, we have the bald fact of its nonexistence. Such a paradox cannot be tolerated: reality is forced to relent, and fiction becomes fact.

Cheida appeared on the Hujiri horizon one fine day, strode into their valley and sat down beside one of their villages. She began playing with the houses and the people hiding in them. She turned the houses upside down; she picked the people up by their heels and held them high above the village street and let them drop. She pushed Hujiri wagons back and forth till their axles broke and their wheels fell off and the beasts of burden harnessed to them dropped dead. She pulled up trees by their roots and replanted them

in the village square. She dug a channel down the sacred Avenue of Departed Chiefs and rerouted the brook that for centuries had purred along the village outskirts. She knocked down the roundhouse that was the then chiefs pride and joy and squashed the shed where the communal farming equipment was stored. Growing bored, she yawned, then lay down full-length and fell asleep, her legs demolishing the few buildings that still remained standing, her head resting on the sacred mound where ten generations of village chiefs lay buried. She slept all afternoon, then got up and found another village and wrecked it, pouting because there were no people in it for her to play with. Finally, after kicking over a silo, she returned to her own valley.

That was her first visit. Others followed. The Hujiri, dismayed, demoralized, disorganized, no longer dared live in their own houses. They fled to the woods, to caves in the hills. Cheida tracked them down, resumed her terrible games.

At length word of the Hujiri's plight and its authoress reached the local Galactic Guidance center, whence it was relayed to GG Headquarters. Advanced space exploration had brought to light many superbeings like Cheida and had resulted not only in the creation of an authority to cope with them but in an exhaustive inquiry into Earth's past that had revealed that among primitive Terran peoples fiction had frequently become fact also and that many of the superhuman figures hitherto relegated to mythology fell into the superbeing category and had enjoyed actual — if ephemeral — existence. It was after the slayer of one of them that Galactic Guidance had named its hunters.

At the time of Cheida's rampage, GG had at least a dozen such "Beowulfs" on its payroll. But most of them were in the field, and of those who weren't only one could be located: Norman Hill.

Enter Norman Hill. Slayer of Gogmagogs, Grendels and Fafnirs. Frequenter of stargirl stations, seeker after pain—

Hung-up Norman Hill.

### *Strophe*

There were a number of semilucid intervals during which Hill fancied himself lying in a warm sling from which his head and feet protruded and which was attached to the end of a huge pendulum that was swinging slowly back and forth in an impossibly long arc. Accompanying the swing and inexplicably connected with it were evenly spaced rumbles as of thunder.

He did not open his eyes. To have done so would have dispelled the illusion that was enabling him to retain his sanity.

When complete consciousness finally returned, he became aware first of all of pain. It enveloped his entire thorax but seemed to be most acute in the lower left region. Motion had ceased, and the "sling" had been supplanted by a hard surface of some kind. A wind was blowing at rhythmic intervals, but he could not feel it upon his body.

He lay without moving, letting the memory of what had happened seep slowly into his mind. He kept his eyes tightly closed. Gradually it became clear to him that he had not played his hand quite carefully enough: that Cheida must have spotted the approaching fly-buggy while berrying on the hogback and watched it land from the concealment of the ridge. Then, divining the reason for his presence, she had pretended to be asleep long enough to lure him into the valley. It also became clear to him that he had taken the Hujiri too literally when they had described her as an inarticulate child, that she could think, and think well. Moreover, her intuition must be highly developed indeed for her to have perceived that, when he saw her at close range for the first time, his mind would automatically reject her and substitute a more believable phenomenon.

Only after he had safely absorbed the memory did Hill open his eyes.

Night had fallen. He was in a large box. A box with vertical bars on all four sides. Its miasmal stench informed him that he was far from being its first occupant.

Between the bars he saw starlit foliage. Painfully he got to his feet. The bars were branches broken from trees, spaced three inches apart. The floor and the upper section consisted of branches lashed together with vines. The truth struck him: he was in a cage, and the cage was hanging in a tree.

Far below and perhaps a thousand yards distant the waters of a little lake shone in the starlight. He remembered seeing the lake from the hogback. Cheida, evidently, had carried him all the way across the valley.

But where was she now? Paying the Hujiri another visit?

Hearing the rhythmic wind, he lowered his gaze. Beneath the cage and extending partway into the forest was a smooth granite outcropping. He traced its contours out onto the prairie, saw that it joined a far larger outcropping from which two granite tors jutted. From the tors, the outcropping extended northward toward the lake, dividing into two ridges; to the south it terminated in a great granite boulder, heavily wooded on its southern side...

He heard the wind again and saw the magnificent tors rise and fall. No, Cheida wasn't visiting the Hujiri. This was her night to stay home.

Hill taped his ribs as best he could with adhesive strips from the first-aid compartment of his overnight pack. Cheida had not removed it, nor had she removed his carryall belt. His two-way radio, however, was hopelessly smashed. He broke open a carton of concentrated rations and ate silently in the darkness, washing the food down with a few swallows of water from his canteen. Finishing, he put the pack back on and began a systematic survey of his prison.

It netted him nothing. The vines Cheida had used to bind the branches together were unbreakable, and he had no knife to cut through them. The bars were firmly secured to both floor and roof, and try as he would, he could not bend them. He did discover a door — not that it did him any good. It consisted of six vertical branches and two horizontal ones and was held tightly in place by means of more vines, those on the right functioning as hinges.

He was wasting his time and he knew it. Even if he could break out of the cage and even if he could make the climb to the branch from which it was suspended, he still wouldn't be able to climb down the sequoia-like trunk to the ground.

He forced himself to lie down, to relax. He slept fitfully through the night, sank into a deep slumber just before dawn. A series of tremendous splashings and loud gurglings awakened him, and opening his eyes and sitting up, he saw that Cheida was in the lake, bathing. He gasped at the sight of her vast water-rivuleted breasts as she stood there waist-deep in the water; he marveled at the black abundance of her hair. Her complexion was fair, like the Hujiri's; the pigmentation of her skin, like theirs, impervious to the sun.

She was combing her hair with a large hayrake taken from one of the villages. The wrought-iron teeth exceeded a foot in length but were spaced too far apart for her to do a good job. Presently she finished and tossed the rake to shore; then she squatted down neck-deep in the water. Her hair spread out like a black kelp bed, losing the modicum of order combing had imposed upon it. She must have felt Hill's gaze upon her, for she looked up at him — and smiled.

She emerged from the lake, drops of water dancing down her arms and shoulders, tumbling down the escarpments of her thighs. Still smiling, she approached the cage. He shrank back against the rear bars. Her face loomed ever larger upon the blue-green-gold canvas of the morning. Seen from the top of the hogback, it had been the face of a beautiful girl; seen from the cage when she had been bathing, it had been the face of a beautiful giantess. But he could no longer see it *in toto*. The eyebrows were like cornices upon which dark thickets grew; the nose appeared as a near-vertical granite ridge. A beauty mark on her cheek had degenerated into a black ulcerous mass; her lips were pink rimrocks beyond which showed the vertical slabs of slightly yellowed teeth.

He saw her right arm rise, the blur of her hand approach. Dumbly he watched her fingers fumble with the vines that held the door —

Abruptly the door swung open. She reached in and got him and set him gently on the ground.

He looked up at her, up past the pale precipices of her legs, up past the dark coppice of her mons veneris; up past the white expanse of her belly, up between the awesome overhangs of her breasts at her still-smiling face.

Subtly, the smile became a grin.

Goose flesh erupted over his entire body. A thrill of anticipation intermingled with his fear.

She nudged him with her big toe. He began to run.

He ran out of the forest and onto the prairie. The grass sang around his legs. Within him sang the pain of his bruised and broken ribs and another song. He ran in the direction of the distant hogback — not because he expected to reach it, but because logically there was no other direction for him to take. The '02 Weslich lay somewhere in the grass at the hogback's base (unless Cheida had found it, and he did not think she had), and the Weslich represented his one and only hope of living a long life.

The ground jarred beneath his feet, and sudden shade engulfed him. He began running erratically to avoid being scooped up in her enormous palm. But such did not prove to be the nature of the game. Instead, she stepped over him and brought her right foot down squarely in his path. He collided with her heel and fell back bleeding to the ground.

There was a sound as of a thousand power saws biting into a thousand bars of high-alloy steel. It was her laughter.

He groveled in abject ecstasy at her feet. She turned him over with her toes and he got up dutifully and began to run again. He understood the rules of the game now. It was a variant of the game he had played many times before in the stargirl stations. The fact that he had real rather than artificial gravity and real rather than feigned sadism to contend with only made the game more thrilling.

He wondered why it hadn't occurred to him in the beginning that he was psychologically unfit for the Primeval assignment.

He wondered why it hadn't occurred to Galactic Guidance.

### *Antistrophe*

It *had* occurred to Galactic Guidance.

Hill's dossier contained not only the information he had volunteered but the data GG's investigative division had dug up behind his back. The latter far outweighed the former, and it said as plain as day that a mission involving a sadistic giantess would be suicidal for Norman Hill.

Why, then, had Galactic Guidance dispatched him posthaste to Primeval?

Did they do so because they abhorred his sexual aberration, or did they do so because they saw reflected in it latent aberrations of their own?

Whatever their true motive, their official reason was irreproachable: the Hujiri had been in desperate need of help, and there had been no one to send but Hill—

Hung-up Norman Hill.

### *Strophe*

Hill lay upon his back on the floor of the cage. His body was bruised in a hundred places; at least three of his ribs were broken; blood oozed from his broken nose.

It was midday. He had wanted to keep on playing the game, but Cheida had grown bored and put him back in the cage. Then she had departed. Probably she was visiting the Hujiri, shopping for a new toy to replace him when he wore out.

The thought made him writhe.

Miraculously his pack still clung to his back, his carryall belt still encircled his waist. When his strength began to return he sat up, leaned against the tree-branch bars and ate and drank. Sparingly.

Why sparingly? After today he would have no further need of food and water. By tomorrow he would be dead.

Dead.

That was what he wanted, wasn't it? To be dead?

Wasn't that what he had always wanted whenever he visited a stargirl station? Hadn't he, every time

a heavy whore ground a spiked heel into his naked chest, wanted that heel to pierce his heart? Hadn't he, every time the stargirls walked on his naked body in the elegant spiked boots he bought them, wanted death and orgasm to be one?

Yes, that was what he wanted —*at the time*. But not afterward. Afterward, despite the pain, despite the shame, despite the guilt, despite the self-loathing, he knew peace.

He knew peace now. And he did not want to die. Not quite.

A warm wind came up and breathed sporadically down the distant hogback and across the valley floor, and the cage swung gently back and forth, back and forth. For some time he had been staring absently at the little lake. Presently he realized that his gaze had shifted to something lying on the shore. At first he did not consciously identify it. Only gradually did he become cognizant that it was Cheida's "comb".

Even then, he did not for a long while realize why he was staring at it. He kept thinking of the game he and Cheida had played all morning long, kept remembering her uncanny timing whenever it was her "move." Part of it was owing to his unvarying rate of speed and to his adherence, after he'd learned the rules, to straight rather than erratic courses. In effect, he had established a pattern, and she had become conditioned to it.

If he were to re-establish it when they next played the game and then suddenly vary it, would not the "move" she had already started to make be completed through sheer momentum?

He knew then why he was staring at the hayrake.

It wasn't much of a card, but it was the only one he had been dealt. When Cheida returned he would play it. Play it for all it was worth.

But he did not play it that day. Cheida did not return till late, and either she was too tired for games or did not care to risk losing him in the gathering darkness. She peered at him through the bars of the cage, the whites of her eyes like pale moons in the night sky of her face. He smelled wild berries on her awesome breath...To his horror he found himself wishing to be set upon the ground, to be prodded by her toe, to begin the game again —not so he could employ his stratagem and flee, but so he could reexperience the bliss of being utterly subject to her will.

He sat perspiring in the darkness after she lay down to sleep. His nose began to bleed again; his broken ribs were jagged peaks in the ragged graph line of his pain. Around him the leaves rustled in the wind of her rhythmic exhalations. He felt suddenly, horribly alone. Alone in the night, alone in eternity; forever, evermore alone —

### *Antistrophe*

He is *not* alone. In the surreal shadows behind him the pages of *Psychopathia Sexualis* flutter in the winds of time, and a Krafft-Ebing company steps upon the stage. Footlights blaze, a *dance macabre* begins. A harlot makes a pirouette, a sadist does a rigadon, a masochist a minuet. A fetishist waltzes with a shoe, a sodomist with a sheep. Queers dance with queers. And from the wings, Rousseau and Baudelaire look on.

### *Strophe*

Morning found Cheida again bathing in the little lake. From his cage Hill carefully noted where she tossed the hayrake after she finished combing her hair.

He had eaten the rest of his rations and drunk the rest of his water before she arose. While she bathed, he retaped his ribs. He did not bother to put his pack back on. It was useless to him now. He detached his empty thermos from his belt. He had already thrown the useless two-way radio away.

It had been useless to begin with. The Primeval GG Center consisted of one man, one modular hut

and one fly-buggy, and Hill had borrowed the fly-buggy for his mission.

He expected Cheida to begin where they had left off yesterday. She did not. Instead, after removing him from his cage she waded back into the water and dropped him in the middle of the lake.

He landed on his left side and nearly blacked out from pain. He sank deep, kicked free from his boots and clawed his way back to the surface. He began swimming toward the opposite shore. He knew she would be waiting for him when he got there. She was. Her delighted cachinnation crashed upon his eardrums as she picked him up and waded back into the lake and dropped him into the water once again. This time he surfaced in a dead-man's float, hoping to make her understand that he was not built for this kind of play and that if it were to continue she would have an inanimate toy on her hands.

Either she got the message or had already become bored; at any rate, she picked him up out of the water and deposited him on the grassy shore. He lay there on his right side, breathing heavily. From where he lay he could see her "comb." It was partially hidden by the tall grass. He had seen similar rakes in the ruins of the Hujiri villages he had visited during his reconnaissance. They had long wooden tongues with which to attach them to yoked oxen. This one had no tongue. Probably Cheida had broken it off.

She did not let him rest for long, and presently she nudged him with her big toe. He groveled in the grass at her feet, fighting an impulse to kiss them. She laughed delightedly and nudged him again. This time he got up and began to run. He headed toward the trees, knowing he would never reach them. He did not. Her right foot descended in his path and he crashed into her heel, toppled backward to the ground. He fought back an impulse to grovel again, screaming to himself that he must kill this outsize whore or be killed himself; then he got up and ran out onto the prairie.

As he ran, he counted his steps. Her right foot descended in his path again. Again he collided with her heel, but managed to cushion the shock by turning sideways. He got up and set off again, once more counting his steps. Her right foot descended on the same count as before.

He was well out on the prairie. Still counting, he began circling back toward the lake. He was divided into two parts: one part wanted to go on playing the game; the other wanted desperately to reach the hayrake and bring the game to an end.

But merely reaching the rake would not be enough. He must reach it at exactly the right moment.

Cheida was laughing almost continuously now, and forest birds, flushed from the trees by the terrifying sound, hung high in the benign blue sky. He could see them clearly as he lay on his back for the sixth consecutive time. He had estimated the last three "moves" carefully, and the next one should bring him to the rake.

He lay there, breathing heavily. Cheida squatted above him, looking down into his face. Her knees were a pair of granite knolls, her dugs wreaths of wild red roses. Her hair hung down around her face like the black streamers of a summer storm.

He got up again and began running toward the rake, pacing himself carefully. The soles of his socks had worn through, and his feet were bleeding. He did not even feel them. When he was halfway to the rake, the ground trembled from the impact of her first step. He continued to run at the same even pace; then, ten feet from his goal, he doubled his speed. Reaching the rake, he raised it on edge, so that its teeth pointed toward the sky. Cheida's enormous foot was already descending, the whole of her massive weight behind it. He held onto the rake till the last second, then let go and jumped to one side.

THUDDDD!

Her scream sent the forest birds winging far out over the prairie. The waters of the little lake quivered in the morning sunlight. She sat down with an earth-shaking crash and, crooking her right leg over her left knee, seized the imbedded rake and pulled it from the sole of her foot. She screamed again. Hill expected her to throw it at him and stood where he was, prepared to dodge. But she did not. Instead, she laid it to one side and looked at him in terrible contemplation. He waited no longer. He was off over the prairie, running.

### *Antistrophe*

Run, Hill, run.

Run run run.  
Run from your twisted yesterdays; run from your tortured tomorrows.  
Run from the mother that begot you; run from the mother that forgot you.  
Run, Hill, run.  
Run run run!

### *Strophe*

Hill came at length to the anfractuous forest that bordered both sides of the river, and entered the coolness of the trees. When he reached the river, he halted on the bank. His legs were a pair of wooden stilts, his feet two concrete blocks. He sank down on the grassy bank to get his breath—

Only to leap instantly erect when he felt the bank shudder beneath him.

He waited for the tremor of her next footstep. Almost a minute passed before it came, and it was almost imperceptible. Good. She was limping badly. There was an excellent chance he could reach the hogback before she overtook him, a fair chance he could find the Weslich in time to save his life.

He waded into the river, began swimming when the water reached his chest. The pain of his damaged ribs was so acute that he could barely move his arms, but at last he crawled up onto the opposite bank. He lay face downward, taking in great lungfuls of the morning air, expelling them in huge sobs. A tremor brought him to his bleeding feet, and he reentered the forest at a stumbling trot.

Through the forest and out onto the prairie again. He could see the hogback distinctly now. The cliff he had so confidently looked down from less than two days ago stood out starkly from the greenness of the rest of the ridge. He pointed himself toward it, ran on. From behind him came the crash of falling trees. Cheida had reached the forest.

She screamed at him, but he did not look back. Little animals erupted from the ground and ran with him toward the hogback. He was so weak that he nearly fell when the next major tremor came. The minor followed a long time afterward.

Suddenly the sunlight gave way to shadow, and before him he made out the ragged outline of her head; on either side, the shape of her huge shoulders. However, the sun was still low in the sky, and her shadow was long; she was still a considerable distance behind him. The cliff loomed tantalizingly close; he pushed himself toward it. Behind him, Cheida screamed again. Her shadow had not yet reached the hogback, and the grass along the base was still bathed in morning sunshine. He scanned the grass as he ran, and presently his eyes caught a faint gleam of metal near the foot of the cliff. It *had* to be the Weslich. He came upon it still running, did not pause but snatched it up and veered sharply to the right and started up the slope where the berry bushes grew. To bag her at such close range he needed all the height he could get.

He had not climbed far before he felt the warm wind of her breath upon his back. He turned, then, and fitted the butt of the Weslich to his shoulder and braced his feet against a shale ledge. She loomed awesomely above him, obscuring the morning sky. Her hair was like a black thundercloud, her arms were raised, her fingers curved into massive claws. Her face was in shadow, but he could see her cold pitiless eyes. Suddenly he remembered how a long time ago he had watched a little girl vent her rage upon a doll she had taken a dislike to. First she had pulled out its hair; then she had torn off its arms; then she had gripped it by its feet and slammed it repeatedly on the floor till finally the head had fallen off and rolled into a corner.

He had already pointed the muzzle of the Weslich at Cheida's forehead. He had merely to squeeze the trigger. To his horror, he found that he could not. He gazed helplessly up at the vast magnificence of her body; he remembered the thrilling game they had played. What stargirl in what orbital brothel could ever match her terrible tyranny? What boots could ever symbolize the primitive imperiousness of her naked feet?

Screaming with rage, she reached down to pluck him from the bank. He lowered the muzzle of the Weslich till it pointed at her neck, closed his eyes and squeezed the trigger.



She fell forward onto the slope of the hogback. Slowly; there was plenty of time for him to get out of the way. Her hair spread out around her head and shoulders, covering bushes and little trees. He found wild flowers growing farther up the bank and picked them, blue ones, yellow ones, orange, and placed them in her hair. The ground was turning red from the blood pouring from the huge hole the Weslich had blown in her throat. His feet were red as he climbed the slope a second time and picked more wild flowers for her hair, red with her blood and his own. He sat beside her all afternoon. Toward nightfall he climbed the hogback for the last time and descended the opposite slope. The fly-buggy was unharmed; either Cheida had forgotten it or had disdained to play with it. He got behind the controls and lifted it into the night sky. The stars came out; peace lay upon the land. *I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense...*

The starlit land drifted by beneath him, the fields and the streams, the hills and the little outlying places pale with flowers... After selling his five hundred head of Hujiri cattle he would return to Earth and collect his fee from Galactic Guidance. He knew how he would spend the money. He knew how he would spend the rest of his life. He would frequent the stargirl stations as he had never frequented them before; like a man condemned, he would search forever for her ghost among the whores.

### *Antistrophe*

Her ghost among the whores.