

Moonchild

by Tom Purdom

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Ten minutes after his brother left the apartment, Harvey Oliver picked up his big wooden recorder and started warming it between his hands. He had been playing the tenor recorder for nearly three years now and he was getting pretty good at it. His big hands could handle the long stretch between the finger holes, and the structured, measured music of the Baroque period had always appealed to him. The music had been written in a century when there had still been country roads on Earth and no one had dreamed there would ever be cities on the Moon, but something in his personality had always responded to it.

The recorder is a wind instrument, however. The pitch is controlled by the performer's control of his breath pressure. A harsh, raspy note leaped out of the instrument before he was halfway through the minuet and he pulled it away from his mouth and turned away from his music stand.

It had now been fourteen minutes since Ted had slipped through the door. It would take Ted twenty minutes to walk down to King Garden and another five or ten to look it over and make sure they could plant the containers without dodging too many mid-afternoon strollers.

His father raised his head and smiled thinly. "I'm afraid I'm not feeling particularly calm myself," Dr. Oliver said.

"It's just tension," Harvey said. "I felt the same way the night before the election."

"Why don't we get the stuff out of the closet and get it set up?"

Harvey pulled the recorder apart and reached for the long swab he used to wipe out the moisture after he finished playing it. His father stood up and Harvey watched his thin, stooped back as he opened the closet and bent over.

"It's a good thing we aren't trying to do this with bombs," his father said. "I'd probably be sitting here thinking they were going to go off accidentally every time somebody walked past the door."

Harvey chuckled politely. His father turned away from the closet and laid a belt and three plastic containers on a stone coffee table.

"All in order," Dr. Oliver said. "All primed and ready to go."

Harvey stood up and untied the sash around his waist. His father was wearing shorts and a belted judo jacket, but students all over Earth and the Moon had been wearing long, brilliantly colored robes for the last two years. His father was going to plant the containers in the park, but he and his brother were going to tote them there.

His father stuffed the containers into the pouches on the belt and he stepped up to the table and picked it up. He had helped his father make the chemicals in the containers but he didn't feel any sense of accomplishment when he looked at them.

"It's the only way we can do it," Dr. Oliver murmured. "We aren't going to get anywhere sitting around waiting for the next so-called election."

Harvey pushed back his robe and buckled the belt around the turtleneck body shirt he wore underneath it. His father had said that a dozen times already, but Harvey knew he was really trying to convince himself. He was only fourteen but he had been studying modern psychology since he had been in kindergarten and he understood most of the dynamics of normal human behavior. His father was just as troubled by this as he was. Every time Dr. Oliver made one of his little speeches, he was really telling his sons he wasn't sure he was doing the right thing.

I thought about this for a long time, Harvey. I've never done a violent thing in my life. This is the only alternative we've got to breaking out the guns and knives. We tried to beat them at the polls, and they proved we aren't going to win them over that way. No ruling class has ever given up its privileges until it is forced to. They'll know somebody sabotaged their life support system as soon as they get a look at the results. They'll know we can do it again anytime we want to. There's no place on the Moon for people who are willing to wallow in luxury while the rest of the people in their community are doing without a necessity. People are too dependent on each other on the Moon. It's too easy for somebody to deprive you of something vital. They've forgotten they're vulnerable but they aren't fools. They'll come to their senses as soon as they get a little reminder. This will probably be the one and only time we'll have to do something like this.

"We'll be all right," Harvey said.

"It'll probably be the easiest thing we ever did."

"We'll probably be back here before we know it."

The phone buzzed. Dr. Oliver's shoulders jerked. Harvey settled his robe over his belt and turned on the phone screen.

Ted's face filled the screen. "I've just been taking a little stroll around the park, Harve. Why don't you two music addies get out of that prison cell and stretch your legs?"

"We'll be right there," Harvey said. "Where do you want us to meet you?"

"I'll probably be hanging around the fountain. There's some nice looking hits sitting around the edge."

"Have fun."

The screen blanked. Harvey turned away from the phone and fiddled with the knot on his sash.

"It looks like we got ready just in time," Dr. Oliver said.

"He didn't waste any time."

Half a dozen children were playing tag in the long corridor that ran past their door. Two of Harvey's friends were playing chess in an alcove. A fat man was pulling a shopping wagon loaded with groceries and three or four other people were strolling along the corridor on various errands. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, according to the twenty-four-hour cycle people used on the Moon, and most of the people in this part of Freedom City were safely tucked away in their offices and labs.

Two girls raced past them with a five-year-old boy yelling at their heels. His father stopped and watched them trample down the corridor and Harvey stopped a couple of steps in front of him and waited. He knew what his father was thinking without being told. The Duvalis process.

This process had been developed on Earth only six years before and it had become a global issue overnight. For the first time in the history of mankind, every human child could grow up with an IQ in the 200s. The proper combination of drugs and carefully planned environments could put every child on Earth and the Moon in the genius class. The drugs and the environments had to be tailored for every child, however. Parents and teachers had to receive special training. If every child were to receive the benefits of the process, every nation on Earth would have to increase its educational expenditures by a factor of six.

Two major nations had already decided the investment would give them a population that would dominate the world economy, and would therefore be worth every sacrifice they had to make. The rest of the governments on Earth were dragging their feet, as usual. A complete Duvalization program would require massive increases in taxes-- and the people who would have to put up the money would naturally be the wealthiest and most powerful people in each society. Most of the countries of the world were already using the Duvalis process on some of their children, but it was obviously going to be a long time before they started giving it to everybody. Somebody always lost when the world changed-- and the people on top always resisted when they thought there was a good chance they might be the losers.

The political conflict in Freedom City was a microcosm of the struggle taking place on Earth. The independent colony had been founded by one of the leading genetic researchers on the Moon and the independent research stations still dominated it economically and politically. Their research on genetic engineering and artificial ecologies brought in most of the wealth the city attracted from the outside; the sterile, isolated deserts of the Moon were the best place to experiment with new microorganisms and

with modifications in the ecology of Earth, and many of the best researchers in the world had left the bases owned by their nation states and joined the independent colony. Earth needed the research facilities located in Freedom City and it was willing to pay for the services of the men who controlled them. The rest of the people in the colony, however, were primarily farmers and small businessmen; they had left the planned societies of Earth because they wanted more personal freedom, and they knew they would have led impoverished lives on the Moon if they hadn't been associated with the men at the research stations. And the people in the research stations naturally felt they should get the lion's share of the colony's resources.

"You can't have every advantage you had on Earth," the Chairman of City Council, Dr. Nathan Gibson, had told a delegation of parents. "This is the Moon. We don't have the resources they have on Earth. Pioneers can't live like the people who stayed behind in civilization. This is a land of opportunity and it's a place where you can call your mind and soul your own-- but it isn't Earth. It will be a long time before you can have all the comforts of Earth."

As far as Harvey's father was concerned, however, the parents had been asking for a necessity, not a luxury, and they weren't getting it because Dr. Gibson and his colleagues were being selfish and greedy. "We could do it if some of us would give up some of our fancy incomes," Dr. Oliver had said. "We could double the number of children we could give the treatment to, even if we couldn't give it to everybody. But they won't do it. They'll let children grow up with their intellectual potential stunted before they'll give up some of the money they spend on toys for their own children."

Dr. Oliver turned away from the children in the corridor. He straightened up as if he were stepping onto a speaker's platform, and Harvey lowered his eyes.

"Let's go," Dr. Oliver said.

The light in the hallway varied from section to section as they walked along. The walls were decorated with long, brightly colored murals and windows in the ceiling let in filtered sunlight which focused on big potted plants. The sun was hammering on an airless desert outside, but Freedom City was a sealed oasis of life, color, and warmth. The crowded underground cities of Earth tended to be sterile and colorless, but the citizens of Freedom City had tried to create an environment in which there would be room to stretch your arms, and food for all your senses. They hadn't crossed 240,000 miles of empty space merely because they wanted to re-create the sterile, dull environments they had left on Earth.

Martin Luther King Garden was a good example of the lunar colonist's fondness for bright colors and lush vegetation. It was the life support system for a big section of Freedom City but it had been laid out so it would be a pleasant place to visit, too. Fountains danced among the big-leafed plants that produced most of the oxygen. Narrow, winding paths twisted through the shrubbery. Tropical birds chattered and twittered in the branches of small trees. Oversize dragonflies darted through the dome and preyed on other insects.

The bio-engineers who had developed the organic life support systems had been 240,000 miles away from the nearest large supply of free air and water. They had wanted a system they could trust and they had known that the living organisms in the system would still be subject to the laws of nature. The microorganisms in the system would still be mutating and evolving as they adapted to their environment and competed with each other. Humans would still be arriving from Earth with their bodies full of germs. If the lunar colonists populated their domes with one or two species of plants and food animals, a single new disease might spread through the whole system and wipe out most of their supply of food or oxygen before they could cope with it. An organic life support system had to be a complete, self-sustaining artificial eco-system and it had to be as varied as the natural eco-systems of Earth. If a new disease attacked a plant, there had to be other species of plants that could form a barrier between the disease and its next victim-- or that could take the victim's place and fill in the gap if the disease wiped out a whole species. And you couldn't add new species of plants without adding new species of insects and microorganisms, and all the other creatures they needed to support them and keep them in balance.

Nothing lived alone. Every living organism was supported by a web of life. You could build a new web under a lunar dome but it still had to be a web.

Ted was lounging against a jumble of rocks beside the main fountain. He was talking to a freckle-faced

girl in a long black and yellow robe. Another girl was sitting on top of the rocks with her arms around her knees.

The spray from the fountain touched Harvey's face. He raised his hand in greeting and Ted grinned and waved back.

"It's about time you bolts got here," Ted said. "I knew you'd get here just when I found some decent company."

Dr. Oliver's face darkened for a moment. He smiled at the girls and the freckle-faced girl smiled back. The other girl nodded her head and turned back to her contemplation of the fountain.

"We've got a little family business we have to talk about," Ted said. "I'll probably be back in about twenty minutes."

"I'll still be here," the freckle-faced girl said.

"I hope so."

Ted pushed himself away from the rocks and fell in beside his father. The three of them turned a corner and moved down a narrow, winding walk.

A yellow bug landed on Harvey's arm and he pushed it off without hurting it. The soft, low sound of a pair of recorders reached him from somewhere in the shrubbery. Two girls in their early twenties were strolling about ten meters ahead of them.

Dr. Oliver's face looked tense and sober. He was holding his long, thin arms close to his sides and walking as if his joints were surrounded by a rigid, invisible space suit.

"That girl Natasha really lights me up," Ted said.

Dr. Oliver swallowed. "The girl in the black and yellow robe?"

"Right."

"Have you known her very long?"

"I just met her last week. Her father owns a farm in a little dome about twenty kilometers out. She only gets into town when she can hitch a ride with somebody."

They turned a corner and entered a little clearing in which a small fountain was dancing between two stone benches. The two girls had disappeared around a bend twenty meters ahead.

Dr. Oliver stopped at the edge of the clearing. He touched his chin with his hand, and Ted and Harvey glanced at each other.

Dr. Oliver stepped into the center of the clearing. He looked up and down the path and studied the bushes on both sides.

"All right, Harvey."

Harvey stepped down the walk and looked around. He pulled a container out of his robe and his father grabbed it and held it against his side with his hand covering most of it.

"Watch the other end of the walk," Dr. Oliver said. "Stay there, Ted."

Harvey stepped across the clearing and positioned himself beside a bush. He glanced over his shoulder and saw his father dropping to his hands and knees and crawling into the bushes.

The container in his father's hand had a small black tab on one side. When Dr. Oliver pulled on the tab, a powder and a liquid would combine inside the container and an odor would spread through the surrounding area as the compound evaporated. No human nose could detect the odor, but it would have a serious effect on a small black and red beetle. Like most insects, the beetles located their mates with their sense of smell; their chemical senses could detect the correct odor if only a few molecules were present in every cubic foot of air-- and the chemical in the containers would increase the number of molecules per cubic foot by nearly six hundred percent. The beetles would become confused and their birth rate would be significantly affected.

The beetles were the specific control for a bug that ate the roots of certain plants and kept their population under control. The bugs would begin to increase and there would be a gradual decrease in the number of plants in three different species. Within six Earth months, if Dr. Oliver's calculations were correct, the plant population in the artificial eco-system would be much less varied than it had been.

The change wouldn't be detectable for most of those six months. Three Earth months from now, Dr. Oliver would return to the life support system and spread a virus he had already developed in his home

lab. The virus would spread through a species of plants that had exceeded its normal population density and huge areas of oxygen-producing vegetation would be blighted and put out of action. At the very minimum, oxygen production would be reduced by twenty-five percent. If any unexpected side effects took place and the thing got out of hand, it might be reduced by fifty to seventy-five percent.

Nobody in the area served by the system would be killed. Oxygen could be pumped into the area from other systems. The damage would probably be repairable. Dr. Gibson and his chums would merely be getting a warning message in the only language they seemed to understand. They had rigged the electoral system in their favor and there was nothing anybody could do about it; you couldn't vote the rascals out when they had set up the political system and had made sure it included a lot of nice little items like the rule that all employees of research stations had to cast their votes at their places of employment. But that didn't mean they could ignore the anger of the people they lived with.

Dr. Oliver backed out of the bushes on his hands and knees. He glanced at both ends of the path as he stood up and Ted nodded reassuringly.

"Five more to go," Dr. Oliver murmured.

The six containers had to be scattered around the park. The exact locations weren't important but they had to be sure the odor would cover most of the area.

A girl laughed behind Harvey's back. He turned around as if he had been jabbed with a pin and saw a girl and a young man five steps behind him. He had turned his head when his father had crawled out of the bushes and they had apparently rounded the bend and walked up on him before he had seen them.

Dr. Oliver turned toward a rose bush behind a bench. Ted stepped off the walk and raised his head as if he was examining the top branches of a tree. The couple walked across the little clearing with their arms around each other's waists and Dr. Oliver turned away from the rose bush and stalked toward Harvey.

"Keep your eyes on the damned path, Harvey," Dr. Oliver whispered. "Don't worry about me."

"You were already standing up when they came up behind me. They didn't see a thing."

"Keep your eyes on the path. We aren't playing games."

Harvey's face reddened. Ted came up behind his father and shrugged.

"Where to next?" Ted said.

Dr. Oliver shook his head. He put his hand on Harvey's shoulder and Harvey smiled wryly and punched him on the biceps.

"I can think of a lot of other things I'd rather be doing right now," Harvey said.

"You're doing fine," Dr. Oliver said. "Let's go."

A middle-aged couple were sitting in the next open area. Dr. Oliver, Harvey, and Ted trudged across it without saying anything and Dr. Oliver turned left when they came to a branch in the path.

"There's another little clearing about thirty meters ahead," Dr. Oliver said.

A woman was sitting in the clearing with a baby in her arms. A boy and girl were playing hide-and-go-seek in the bushes.

"I was afraid it would turn out like this," Dr. Oliver murmured.

"It went off fine the first time," Harvey said.

"It looks like we had beginner's luck."

They stepped out of the clearing and rounded another bend in the path. Dr. Oliver gestured with his hand and his sons stopped in their tracks.

Dr. Oliver looked around him. His whole body stiffened. He gestured at Harvey and Harvey reached inside his robe and handed him another container.

Dr. Oliver lowered his head and ducked into the dark, hedge-like bushes beside the path. Ted and Harvey faced each other and watched the path by looking over each other's shoulders.

Ted stiffened. Harvey turned his head and saw a square, muscular man in a red beret coming down the path.

"I should have known we'd run into one of them at a time like this," Ted said.

People could prowl around in the bushes near the fountains and the clearings, but the areas beside the paths were off limits. Martin Luther King Garden was a life support system, not just a park-- and you

didn't let people tramp around inside a life support system just because they thought it might be fun. Dr. Oliver would be in trouble even if the man from the Peace Watch never suspected he was trying to sabotage the system.

Harvey's face reddened again. The peaceman's eyes slid across his face and Harvey turned back to his brother and tried to look innocent. Every nerve in his back was tingling.

Should Ted ignore the peaceman and pretend he was talking? Should he say hello and give him a wave? Did his father know the peaceman was there?

Ted looked tense, too. He turned his head toward the bushes and Harvey's fists clenched.

Branches brushed against the peaceman's clothes. "How's it going, men?"

"Fine," Harvey blurted.

"Seen any good-looking hits around today?"

Ted turned his head. The peaceman was rocking on the balls of his feet and smiling pleasantly.

My father's hiding in the bushes. He's planting a chemical that can wreck a life support system.

"There's a big bunch of them by the main fountain," Ted said.

Leaves rustled in the bushes. Ted jerked his head around.

A moth and two small birds leaped into the air. A big praying mantis hopped across a bush. The birds landed on a branch on the other side of the path and the moth rose into the air with the dream-like, lazy strokes of a creature flying in low lunar gravity.

He's probably got the container in his hands right now. You'll catch him red-handed.

The peaceman's eyes narrowed. He glanced at the two faces in front of him and Harvey's mind blanked. They had talked about all the things they could do in different situations and now he couldn't remember one thing they had said.

Ted smiled. "It sounds like there must be a bear running around in there."

"We've been having a real problem with bears around here lately."

"It's our father," Ted said. "He wanted to look at something in there."

"He's a bio-engineer," Harvey blurted. "He saw something interesting and dropped into the bushes before we knew he was gone."

Leaves rustled near the hem of Harvey's robe. He stepped back and his father crawled out of the bushes with all the care of a man who valued every leaf in the system. Dr. Oliver looked up at the peaceman and then he stood up and brushed himself off.

The peaceman shook his head. Most peacemen were students who were working their way through school, but he looked like he was the kind of man who would have been a policeman on Earth, too.

Dr. Oliver held up a pocket microscope. "I was just looking at some of the soil in there. I made some improvements in the soil system here four years ago and I couldn't help taking a look at it on the spur of the moment."

The peaceman's face clouded. "They're getting pretty strict about people going into the off-limits zones. A lot of people are getting so self-confident nowadays they're beginning to forget we've got reasons for those rules."

"I don't do it very often," Dr. Oliver said. "I could get a permit but I just yielded to impulse."

"May I see your ID please?"

Dr. Oliver colored. Harvey started to step back and then caught himself and stayed where he was.

Dr. Oliver reached inside his jacket and took out his wallet. He flipped it open and the peaceman leaned over and studied it.

"Dr. Oliver! I thought I knew you from somewhere. I'm sorry! I was standing guard outside the council room when you made that statement three months ago."

"The statement I made at the meeting about the Duvalis process? It wasn't a very effective statement, I'm afraid."

"It was a pleasure just to hear somebody from the blasted labs was standing up for us ordinary bolts. My oldest daughter's getting the Duvalis treatment right now but I'll be damned if I can see why she should get it and my son shouldn't."

"That's exactly the point I was trying to make," Dr. Oliver said. "They're going to be living on the same

world for the next sixty or seventy years. How can we have some of them grow up with 200 plus IQs and the rest of them only be normal?"

"It's too bad a few more of the voters couldn't have seen it that way. I would have given up three months rations if it would have helped some of Petri's people get on the Council."

"We'll just have to try again next time. Sooner or later people have to see it's the only way."

"I hope so."

Harvey shuffled restlessly. Dr. Oliver held out his hand and clapped the peaceman on the shoulder.

"They will," Dr. Oliver said. "It's going to take longer than I'd hoped it would, but I'm certain they will."

They backed away with Dr. Oliver in the lead and disappeared around another bend. Ted sagged against a tree trunk and rolled his eyes at the top of the dome as if he were going to faint.

"Buck up," Dr. Oliver said.

"He knows who you are," Harvey murmured. "He'll remember you were here."

"It can't be helped, Harvey. We'll just have to go ahead and hope for the best."

"They'll know we were doing something in the bushes if one more peaceman catches us like that."

"I couldn't let him catch me in the bushes with the container. He would have been suspicious right away if Ted hadn't told him I was there."

"I wish you'd come out sooner," Ted said. "I didn't know what to do there for a minute."

"You aren't the only one. I would have stood up two minutes earlier if I hadn't been scared stiff."

"They'll just have to spot us like that one more time," Harvey said. "That's all it'll take."

Dr. Oliver stared at his son's face. The path was empty in both directions but they were all talking in whispers.

"Do you want us to go on without you, Harvey? Do you think it's too dangerous?"

"He knows your name, Dad. He knows you're one of the people who've been fighting the Council. He'll remember you were here as soon as they find the container and start asking questions."

"It'll be six months before they start looking. They can't prove we put it there even if he goes against his natural inclinations and happens to remember he saw us."

"It'll just take one more incident. They'll know it wasn't just a coincidence if one more peaceman happens to see us."

Dr. Oliver's gentle, scholarly face hardened. "You'd better give Ted your last container, Harvey. We'll go ahead without you."

A man and a woman came into view at one end of the path. Ted pushed himself away from the tree trunk and studied his brother's face.

"It doesn't matter whether I go with you or not!" Harvey said. "You're the one they'll persecute."

"We don't have time to argue, Harvey. Give Ted your container."

The couple were about twenty meters away. Harvey sucked in a deep breath and stepped toward his brother.

"Don't let him do it, Ted. He can't do it if you won't help him."

His voice cracked with emotion. He had been scared before but he was on the edge of panic now. His father trusted him. They had gotten along well for fourteen years. They had worked side by side on election day and they had come out of the experience with a real respect for each other. He had showed his father he could hold his own in a rough situation and his father had given him a vivid picture of a mature man's anger at selfishness and injustice and his concern about the people who were the victims of other people's callousness.

Ted's eyes shifted from his brother to his father. He glanced at the couple coming down the walk and frowned.

"You can get the containers as soon as they go by," Dr. Oliver murmured.

The couple came down the walk with their hands gesturing and their attention obviously concentrated on their conversation. Harvey and his father both stepped closer to Ted to give them room to pass. They went on by without a glance and another couple came around the bend on the other side and walked by.

"Don't let him do it," Harvey whispered. "They'll kill him if they find out he did it."

Fingers dug into his shoulders. Rough hands spun him around. His father's red, contorted face glared down at him.

"Give him the container! Give him the container and shut up!"

The fingers squeezed his shoulders like a set of clamps. His father's eyes were glaring at him like the eyes of a madman.

The angry mask glanced up and down the path. Dr. Oliver reached inside the robe and jerked the container out of Harvey's belt. He swung on Ted and Ted grabbed the container away from him and shoved it under his belt.

Harvey stepped away from his father and rubbed his aching shoulders. Dr. Oliver stalked down the path and Ted shook his head and followed him. Ted looked back once and then turned away with his eyes on the ground.

Harvey slumped against the tree trunk. Three voices chattered on the other side of the bend and he stood up and tried to look composed.

Three young girls ran around the bend. They ran past him without a glance in his direction and he slumped against the tree again.

More voices rose on the other side of the bend. He pushed himself away from the tree and trudged around the bend as if he were walking through a fog.

Two boys his own age had dropped onto a bench and started arguing about an international chess game they had seen on television. They looked up when he came around the bend and turned back to their argument.

A big moth fluttered past his ear. He waved it away without touching it and a flash of red caught his eye.

His right hand slid along the top of the bushes as if he were resting it on a banister. People flowed past him as if in a dream. A man and a woman looked at him strangely.

The peaceman was standing by a fountain with a pair of girls. He looked relaxed but his eyes were watching every side of the clearing as he talked. He jerked his hand at Harvey and gave him a wink as soon as Harvey entered the clearing.

"How's it going?" the peaceman said.

Harvey stopped ten steps from the peaceman. One of the girls turned her head and eyed him curiously.

The peaceman frowned. The other girl turned her head and raised her eyebrows.

"I've got something I have to tell you," Harvey said. "Can I talk to you alone?"

The peaceman ran his hands across a girl's shoulder and stepped toward him. "Sure. What's the matter?"

"We'll still be here when you're finished," one of the girls said.

The peaceman stopped in front of him. Harvey looked around the clearing and the peaceman pointed down a path. "Let's go that way."

The peaceman strolled down the path and Harvey found himself moving with him. They stopped beside a big, flower-covered bush and the peaceman studied Harvey's face.

"What's the matter, son? What can I do for you?"

Harvey's fists clenched. He was standing on one side of a huge canyon and his father and Ted were standing on the other side. His father had grown up on Earth and lived there most of his life. Ted had been five years old when their family had moved to the Moon.

"I need some help with my father," Harvey said. "He's getting himself in a lot of trouble. Somebody has to help me stop him before he gets into trouble."

"He's doing something illegal again?"

"He's trying to make the council change its policies. He thinks he can scare them into giving more kids the Duvalis treatment."

The peaceman frowned. "He thinks he can scare them?"

"He's trying to damage the garden. He can't do it if you're watching him."

The peaceman's eyes narrowed. He stepped back and looked Harvey over.

"You're trying to tell me a man like your father would damage a life support system?"

"He thinks it's the only way we can get any justice. He's so angry he doesn't care what he does."

"That's a pretty big accusation, young man. You're certain you aren't trying to have a little fun with a poor stupid cop?"

"He's doing it right now. He'll be all done in another fifteen or twenty minutes if you don't help me stop him."

"One man can't destroy a life support system all by himself. What's he going to do? Set it on fire?"

"He's hiding a container that contains a chemical he developed himself. It's like a poison. He knows exactly what to use. He's already planted two but he has to plant four more. He'll have to stop if he sees you watching him."

The peaceman unhooked the radio on his belt. He pressed a button on its control panel and raised it to his mouth.

"This is Johnson," the peaceman said. "I've got a situation here we'd better look into. Look out for Dr. William Oliver and his oldest son-- a thin man in his mid-forties, about 188 centimeters tall, type twelve face, bald, white tunic, black turtleneck shirt, accompanied by a teenager, about eighteen, type six face, in a blue robe with yellow embroidery. They may be planting containers with some kind of poison in them. Don't let them dump anything they're carrying. Hold them right where they are if you catch one of them climbing out of the shrubbery."

Harvey stepped back. The peaceman lowered the walkie-talkie and looked down at him.

"He's breaking the law, son. I can't help him break the law."

"He can't do it if you're watching him."

"That's not my job. He's breaking the law and you and I both know it."

"He doesn't know what he's doing. He's only doing it because he's worried about your children."

"We can't have any kind of law here if I decide I'm going to enforce the law some of the time. You knew I might send out the alarm when you told me about this. You did everything you could to protect him. You know we can't let people do things like this. He couldn't do anything worse than this."

The walkie-talkie buzzed. The peaceman raised it to his ear and nodded. "I'll be right there," he said.

He lowered the intercom. "They caught him coming out of the bushes. They're waiting for me now."

His father and Ted were standing by a bench with three peacemen standing around them. A dozen curiosity seekers were standing near them. More people were coming down the path.

Harvey stopped twenty steps away and rested his hand on a bush. Johnson barked an order as he moved in and a young peaceman started searching Ted's robe.

The peaceman pulled out the belt with the containers. He handed it to Johnson and Johnson looked over the two prisoners.

Dr. Oliver's face was scarlet. He had drawn himself up to his full height and he was looking down on the peacemen as if he were standing on top of a mountain. He turned toward Harvey and their eyes met across the heads of the peacemen.

Harvey's eyes blurred. He turned his head away from his father and two middle-aged women stepped between them.

A huge moth landed on his bare hand. The touch of its feelers sent a shiver up his arm. He brushed it off without hurting it and it flew across the bushes and landed on a flower.

A life support system was a sacred object. Nobody should damage a life support system. Not for any reason.

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