

ASSAULT ON A CITY

Jack Vance

Jack Vance, winner of two Hugo Awards and a Nebula Award, is one of the most admired writers of modern science fiction; his stories fairly dance with a colorful inventiveness unmatched in this most imaginative of all types of fiction. Here is a long and delightful story of adventures in Earth's distant future, in which Vance brings to life a wonder-filled city and its hard-pressed inhabitants— and includes a few observations on urbanity, subjectivity and gunk.

1

A CERTAIN Angus Barr, officer's steward aboard the spaceship *Danaan Warrior*, had taken his pay and gone forth into that district of the city Hant known as Jillyville in search of entertainment. There, according to information received by the police, he fell into the company of one Bodred Histledine, a well-known bravo of the North River district. The two had entertained themselves briefly at the Epidrome, where Angus Barr won two hundred dollars at a gambling machine. They then sauntered along the Parade to the Black Opal Cafe, where they drank lime beer and tried to pick up a pair of women tourists without success. Continuing north along the Parade, they crossed the River Louthe by the Boncastle Bridge and rode the clanking old escalator up Semaphore Hill to Kongo's Blue Lamp Tavern, and Angus Barr was seen no more.

The disappearance of Angus Barr was reported to the police by the chief steward of the *Danaan Warrior*. Acting on a tip, Detectives Clachey and Delmar located Bo Histledine, whom they knew well, and took him to Central Authority for examination.

Mind-search produced no clear evidence. According to Bo's memory, he had spent an innocent evening in front of his term.* Unluckily for Bo, his memory also included fragmentary recollections of the Epidrome, the

Parade and the Black Opal Cafe. The female tourists not only described the missing Angus Barr, but also positively identified Bo.

* From the acronym TERM: Total Experience Reproduction Mechanism.

Delmar nodded with grim satisfaction and turned to Bo. "What do you say to that?"

Bo hunched down in the chair, his face a mask of belligerent obstinacy. "I told you already. I know nothing about this case. Those backwads** got me mixed with somebody else. Do you think I'd work on a pair like that? Look at her!" Bo jerked his head toward the closer of the angry women. "Face like a plateful of boiled pig's feet. She's not wearing a sweater; that's the hair on her arms. And her cross-eyed mother—"

** Backwad: Slang of the period: an ill-favored or otherwise repulsive woman. Etymology uncertain.

"I'm not her mother! We're not related!"

"—she's no better; she walks with her legs bent, as if she's sneaking up on somebody."

Delmar chuckled; Clachey nodded gravely. "I see. And how do you know the way she walks? They were sitting down when we brought you in. Your bad mouth has brought you trouble."

Delmar said, "That's all, ladies. Thank you for your help."

"It's been a pleasure. I hope he gets sent out to Windy River." She referred to a penal colony on the far planet Resurge.

"It might well be," said Delmar.

The tourists departed. Clachey said to Bo, "Well, then, what about it? What did you do to Barr?"

"Never heard of him."

"You had your memory blanked," said Delmar. "It won't do you any good. Windy River, get ready."

"You haven't got a thing on me," said Bo. "Maybe I was drunk and don't

remember too well, but that doesn't mean I scragged Barr."

Clachey and Delmar, who recognized the limitations of their case as well as Bo, vainly sought more direct evidence. In the end Bo was arraigned on the charge of memory-blanking without a permit: not a trivial offense when committed by a person with an active criminal record. The magistrate fined Bo a thousand dollars and placed him upon stringent probation. Bo resented both provisions to the depths of his passionate soul, and he detested the probation officer, Inspector Guy Dalby, on sight.

For his part, Inspector Dalby, an ex-spacefarer, liked nothing about Bo: neither his dense blond-bronze curls, his sullenly handsome features—marred perhaps by a chin a trifle too heavy and a mouth a trifle too rich and full—nor his exquisitely modish garments, nor the devious style of Bo's life. Dalby suspected that for every offense upon Bo's record, a dozen existed which had never come to official attention. As a spaceman he took an objective attitude toward wrongdoing, and held Bo to the letter of his probationary requirements. He subjected Bo's weekly budget to the most skeptical scrutiny. "What is this figure—one hundred dollars—repayment of an old debt?"

"Exactly that," said Bo, sitting rigid on the edge of the chair.

"Who paid you this money?"

"A man named Henry Smith: a gambling debt."

"Bring him in here. I'll want to check this."

Bo ran a hand through his cap of golden curls. "I don't know where he is. I happened to meet him on the street. He paid me my money and went his way."

"That's your total income of the week?"

"That's it."

Guy Dalby smiled grimly and flicked a sheet of paper with his fingertips. "This is a statement from a certain Polinasia Glianthe, occupation: prostitute. 'Last week I paid Big Bo Histledine one hundred and seventy-five dollars, otherwise he said he would cut my ears.'"

Bo made a contemptuous sound. "Who are you going to believe? Me or some swayback old she-dog who never made a hundred and seventy-five the best week of her life?"

Dalby forbore a direct response. "Get yourself a job. You are required to support yourself in an acceptable manner. If you can't find work, I'll find it for you. There's plenty out on Jugurtha." He referred to that world

abhorred by social delinquents for its rehabilitation farms.

Bo was impressed by Dalby's chilly succinctness. His last probation officer had been an urbanite whose instinctive tactic was empathy. Bo found it a simple matter to explain his lapses. The probation officer in turn was cheered by Bo's ability to distinguish between right and wrong, at least verbally. Inspector Dalby, however, obviously cared not a twitch for the pain or travail which afflicted Bo's psyche. Cursing and seething, Bo took himself to the City Employment Office and was dispatched to the Orion Spaceyards as an apprentice metalworker, at a wage he considered a bad joke. One way or another he'd outwit Dalby! In the meantime he found himself under the authority of a foreman equally unsympathetic: another ex-spaceman named Edmund Sarkane. Sarkane explained to Bo that to gain an hour's pay he must expend an hour's exertion, which Bo found a novel concept. Sarkane could not be serious! He attempted to circumvent Sarkane's precept by a variety of methods, but Sarkane had dealt with a thousand apprentices and Bo had known only a single Sarkane. Whenever Bo thought to relax in the shadows, or ignore a troublesome detail, Sarkane's voice rasped upon his ears, and Bo began to wonder if after all he must accept the unacceptable. The work, after all, was not in itself irksome; and Sarkane's contempt was almost a challenge to Bo to prove himself superior in every aspect, even the craft of metal-working, to Sarkane himself. At times to his own surprise and displeasure he found himself working diligently.

The spaceyards themselves he found remarkable. His eye, like that of most urbanites, was sensitive; he noted the somber concord of color: black structures, ochre soil, gray concrete, reds, blues and olive-greens of signs and symbols, all animated by electric glitters, fires and steams, the constant motion of stern-faced workmen. The hulls loomed upon the sky, for these Bo felt a curious emotion: half awe, half antipathy; they symbolized the far worlds which Bo, as an urbanite, had not the slightest intention of visiting, not even as a tourist. Why probe these far regions? He knew the look, odor and feel of these worlds through the agency of his term; he had seen nothing which wasn't done better here in Hant.

If one had money. Money! A word resonant with magic. From where he worked with his buffing machine he could see south to Cloudhaven, floating serene and golden in the light of afternoon. Here was where he would live, so he promised himself, and muttered slow oaths of longing as he looked. Money was what he needed.

The rasp of Sarkane's voice intruded upon his daydreams. "Put a Number Five head on your machine and bring it over to the aerie bays.

Look sharp; there's a hurry-up job we've got to get out today." He made what Bo considered an unnecessarily brusque gesture.

Bo slung the machine over his shoulder and followed Sarkane, walking perforce with the bent loose-kneed stride of a workman carrying a load. He knew the look of his gait; introversion and constant self-evaluation are integral adjuncts to the urbanites' mental machinery; he felt humiliation and fury: he, Bo Histledine, Big Bo the Boodlesnatch, hunching along like a common workman! He longed to shout at Sarkane, something like: "Hey! Slow down, you old gutreek; do you think I'm a camel? Here, carry the damn machine yourself, or put it in your ear!" Bo only muttered the remarks, and loped to catch up with Sarkane: through the clangor of the cold-belling shop, across the pulsion-pod storage yard with the great hulls massive overhead; over the gantry ways to a cluster of three platforms at the southern edge of the yard. On one of the platforms rested a glass-domed construction which Bo recognized for an aerie: the honorary residence of a commander in the Order of the Terrestrial Empire, and reserved for the use of such folk alone.

Sarkane motioned to Bo, and indicated the underside of the peripheral flange. "Polish that metal clean, get all that scurf and oxide off, so the crystallizer can lay on a clean coat. They'll be arriving at any time and we want it right for them."

"Who is 'them'?"

"A party from Rampold: an O.T.E. and his family. Get cracking now, we don't have much time."

Sarkane moved away. Bo considered the aerie. Rampold? Bo thought he had heard the place mentioned: a far half-savage world where men strove against an elemental environment and hostile indigenes to create new zones of habitability. Why didn't they stay out there if they liked it so much? But they always came swanking back to Earth with their titles and prerogatives, and here he was, Bo Histledine, polishing metal for them.

Bo jumped up to the deck and went to peer into the interior. He saw a pleasant but hardly lavish living room with white walls, a scarlet and blue rug, an open fireplace. In the center of the room a number of cases had been stacked. Bo read the name stenciled on the sides: Commander M. R. Tynnott, S.E.S.—the S.E.S. for Space Exploration Service.

Sarkane's voice vibrated against his back. "Hey! Histledine! Get down from there! What do you think you're up to?"

"Just looking," said Bo. "Keep your shirt on." He jumped to the ground. "Nothing much to see, anyway. They don't even have a TV, let alone a

term. Still, I'd take one if they gave it to me."

"There's no obstacle in your way." Sarkane's tone was edged with caustic humor. "Just go work out back of beyond for twenty or thirty years; they'll give you an aerie."

"Bo Histledine isn't about to start out there."

"I expect not. Buff down that flange now, and make a clean job of it."

While Bo applied his machine, Sarkane wandered here and there, inspecting the repairs which had been made on the aerie's under-body, waiting for the crystallizer crew, and keeping an eye on Bo.

The work was tiresome; Bo was forced to stand in a cramped position, holding the machine above him. His zeal, never too keen, began to flag. Whenever Sarkane was out of sight, Bo straightened up and relaxed. Commander Tynnott and his family could wait another hour or two, or two or three days, so far as Bo was concerned. Star-landers were much too haughty and self-satisfied for Bo's taste. They acted as if the simple process of flying space made them somehow superior to the folk who chose to stay home in the cities.

During one of his rest periods he watched a cab glide down to a halt nearby. A girl alighted and walked toward the aerie. Bo stared in fascination. This was a girl of a sort he had never seen before: a girl considerably younger than himself, perfectly formed, slender, but lithe and supple, a creature precious beyond value. She approached with an easy jaunty stride, as if already in her short life she had walked far and wide, across hill and dale, forest trails and mountain ridges: wherever she chose to go. Her polished copper hair hung loose, just past her jaw line; she was either ignorant or heedless of the intricate coiffures currently fashionable in Hant. Her clothes were equally simple: a blue-gray frock, white sandals, no ornaments whatever. She halted beside the aerie, and Bo was able to study her face. Her eyes were dark-blue and deep as lakes; her cheeks were flat; her mouth was wide and through some charming mannerism seemed a trifle wry and crooked. Her skin was a clear pale tan; her features could not have been more exquisitely formed. She spoke to Bo without actually looking at him. "I wonder where I get aboard."

Instantly gallant, Bo stepped forward. "Here; let me give you a leg up." To touch her, to caress (even for an instant) one of those supple young legs would be a fine pleasure indeed. The girl seemed not to hear him; she jumped easily up to the rail and swung herself over.

Sarkane came forward. He made a brusque gesture toward Bo, then turned to the girl. "I expect you're one of the owners. Tynnott, I think, is

the name?"

"My father is Commander Tynnott. I thought he'd already be here with my mother. I suppose they'll be along soon." The girl's voice was as easy and light-hearted as her appearance, and she addressed gray old Ed Sarkane as if they had been friends for years. "You're no urbanite; where did you get your cast?" She referred to the indefinable aspect by which starlanders and spacemen were able to identify their own kind.

"Here, there and everywhere," said Sarkane. "Most of my time I worked for Slade out in the Zumberwalts."

The girl looked at him with admiration. "Then you must have known Vode Skerry and Ribolt Troil, and all the others."

"Yes, miss, well indeed."

"And now you're living in Hant!" The girl spoke in a marveling voice. Bo's lips twitched. What, he wondered, was so wrong about living in Hant?

"Not for long," said Sarkane. "Next year I'm going out to Tinctala. My son farms a station out there."

The girl nodded in comprehension. She turned to inspect the aerie. "This is all so exciting; I've never lived in such splendor before."

Sarkane smiled indulgently. "It's not all that splendid, miss, or I should say, not compared to the way the rich folk live up there." He gestured toward Cloudhaven. "Still, they'd trade for aeries anytime, or so I'm told."

"There's not all that many aeries, then?"

"Two thousand is all there'll ever be; that's the law. Otherwise they'd be hanging in the sky thick as jellyfish. Every cheap-jack and politician and plutocrat around the world would want his aerie. No, miss, they're reserved for the O.T.E. and that's how it should be. Are you to be here long?"

"Not too long; my father has business with the Agency, and I'll undertake a bit of research while I'm here."

"Ah, you'll be a student at the Academy? It's an interesting place, the last word on everything, or so they say."

"I'm sure it is. I plan to visit the Hall of History tomorrow, as a matter of fact." She pointed toward a descending cab. "Here they are at last."

Bo, who had worked to within casual earshot, wielded his machine until Sarkane went off to confer with the Tynnotts. He buffed along the flange to where the girl stood leaning on the rail; raising his eyes he glimpsed a pair of smooth slender brown legs, a glint of thigh. She was only peripherally

aware of his existence. Bo straightened up and put on that expression of mesmeric masculinity which had served him so well in the past. But the girl, rather than heeding him, went down the deck a few steps. "I'm already here," she called, "but I don't know how to get in."

Bo quivered with wrath. So the girl wouldn't look at him! So she thought him a stupid laborer! Couldn't she tell he was Bo Histledine, the notorious Big Boo, known up and down the North Shore, from Dipshaw Heights to Swarling Park?

He moved along the rail. Halting beside the girl he contrived to drop his adjustment wrench on her foot. She yelped in pain and surprise. "Sorry," said Bo. He could not restrain a grin. "Did it hurt?"

"Not very much." She looked down at the black smear of grease on her white sandal, then she turned and joined her parents, who were entering the aerie. She said in a puzzled voice, "Do you know, I believe that workman purposely dropped his tool on my foot."

Tynnott said after a moment, "He probably wanted to attract your attention."

"I wish he'd thought of some other way ... It still hurts."

Two hours later, with the sun low in the west, Tynnott took the aerie aloft. The spaceyards dwindled below; the black buildings, the skeletal spaceships, the ramps, docks and gantries, became miniatures. The Louthe lay across the panorama in lank mustard-silver sweeps, with a hundred bridges straddling. Dipshaw Heights rose to the west with white structures stepping up and down the slope; beyond and away to the north spread residential suburbs among a scatter of parks and greenways. In the east stood the decaying towers of the Old City; in the south, golden among a tumble of cumulus clouds, Cloudhaven floated like a wonderful fairy castle.

The aerie drifted full in the light of sunset. The Tynnotts, Merwyn, Jade and Alice, leaned on the railing looking down upon the city.

"Now you've seen old Hant," said Merwyn Tynnott, "or at least the scope of it. What do you think?"

"It's a wild confusion," said Alice. "At least it seems that way. So many incongruous elements: Cloudhaven, the Old City, the working-class slums . . ."

"Not to mention Jillyville, which is just below us," said Jade, "and

College Station, and the Alien Quarter."

"And Dipshaw Heights, and Goshen, and River Meadow, and Elmhurst, and Juba Valley."

"Exactly," said Alice. "I wouldn't even try to generalize."

"Wise girl!" said Merwyn Tynnott. "In any event, generalization is a job for the subconscious, which has a very capable integrating apparatus."

Alice found the idea interesting. "How do you distinguish between generalization and emotion?"

"I never bother."

Alice laughed at her father's whimsy. "I use my subconscious whenever I can, but I don't trust it. For instance, my subconscious insists that a workman carefully dropped his wrench on my foot. My common sense doesn't believe it."

"Your common sense isn't common enough," said Merwyn Tynnott. "It's perfectly simple. He fell in love and wanted to let you know."

Alice, half amused, half embarrassed, shook her head. "Ridiculous! I'd only just jumped aboard the boat!"

"Some people make up their minds in a hurry. As a matter of fact, you were unusually cordial with Waldo Walberg last night."

"Not really," said Alice airily. "Waldo of course is a pleasant person, but certainly neither of us has the slightest romantic inclination. In the first place, I couldn't spare the time, and secondly, I doubt if we have anything in common."

"You're right, of course," said Jade. "We're only teasing you because you're so pretty and turn so many heads and then pretend not to notice."

"I suppose I could make myself horrid," mused Alice. "There's always the trick Shikabay taught me."

"Which trick? He's taught you so many."

"His new trick is rather disgusting, but he insists that it works every time."

"I wonder how he knows," said Jade with a sniff. "Wretched old charlatan! And lewd to boot."

"In this connection," said Merwyn Tynnott, "I want to warn you: be careful around this old city. The people here are urbanites. The city festers with subjectivity."

"I'll be careful, although I'm sure I can take care of myself. If I couldn't, Shikabay would feel very humiliated ... I'll get it." She went in to answer the telephone. Waldo's face looked forth from the screen: a handsome face, the eyes stern, the nose straight, the droop of the mouth indicating sensitivity, or charm, or self-indulgence, or impatience, or all, or none, depending upon who made the appraisal and under what circumstances. In accordance with the current mode, Waldo's hair had been shorn to a stubble, then enameled glossy black, and carefully carved into a set of rakish curves, cusps and angles. His teeth were enameled black; he wore silver lip-enamel and his ears were small flat tabs, with a golden bauble dangling from his right ear. To a person schooled in urban subtleties, Waldo's costume indicated upper-class lineage and his mannerisms were those of Clouthaven alone. "Hello, Waldo," said Alice. "I'll call Father."

"No, no, wait! It's you I want."

"Oh? For what?"

Waldo licked his lips and peered into the screen. "I was right."

"How so?"

"You're the most exciting, entrancing, exhilarating person in, on, above or below the city Hant."

"How ridiculous," said Alice. "I'm just me."

"You're fresh as a flower, an orange marigold dancing in the wind."

"Please be serious, Waldo. I assume you called about that book *Cities of the Past*."

"No. I'm calling about cities of the present, namely Hant. Since you'll be here so short a time, why don't we look the old place over?"

"That's just what we're doing," said Alice. "We can see all the way south to Elmhurst, north to Birdville, east to the Old City, west to the sunset."

Waldo peered into the screen. Flippancy? Ponderous humor? Sheer stupidity? Utter naivete? Waldo could not decide. He said politely, "I meant that we should look in on one of the current presentations, something that you might not see out on Rampold. For instance, a concert? an exhibition? a percept? . . . What's that you're doing?"

"I'm noting down an idea before I forget it."

Waldo raised his expressive eyebrows. "Then afterwards we could take a bite of supper somewhere and get acquainted. I know an especially picturesque place, the Old Lair, which I think you might enjoy."

"Waldo, I really don't want to leave the aerie; it's so peaceful up here,

and we're having such a nice talk."

"You and your parents?" Waldo was amazed.

"There's no one else here."

"But you'll be in Hant such a very short time!"

"I know . . . Well, perhaps I should make the most of my time. I can enjoy myself later."

Waldo's voice became thick. "But I want you to enjoy yourself tonight!"

"Oh, very well. But let's not stay out late. I'm visiting the Academy tomorrow morning."

"We'll let circumstances decide. I'll be across in about an hour. Will that give you time to do your primping?"

"Come sooner, if you like. I'll be ready in ten minutes."

2

Waldo arrived half an hour later to find Alice waiting for him. She wore a simple gown of dull dark-green stuff; a fillet of flat jade pebbles bound with gold wire confined her hair. She inspected Waldo with curiosity, and for a fact Waldo's habiliments were remarkable both for elegance and intricacy. His trousers, of a light material patterned in black, brown and maroon, bagged artfully at the hips, gripped the calves, and hung carelessly awry over the slippers of black- and red-enameled metal. Waldo's blouse was a confection of orange, gray and black; above this he wore a tight-waisted black jacket, pinched at the elbow, flaring at the sleeve, and a splendid cravat of silk, which shimmered with the colors of an oil-film on water. "What an interesting costume!" Alice exclaimed. "I suppose each detail has its own symbolical value."

"If so, I'm not aware of it," said Waldo. "Good evening, Commander."

"Good evening, Waldo. And where are you bound tonight?"

"It depends upon Alice. There's a concert at the Contemporanea: the music of Vaakstras, highly interesting."

"Vaakstras?" Alice reflected. "I've never heard of him. Of course that means nothing."

Waldo laughed indulgently. "A cult of dissident musicians emigrated to the coast of Greenland. They raised their children without music of any sort, without so much as knowledge of the word 'music.' At adolescence

they gave the children a set of instruments and required that they express themselves, and in effect create a musical fabric based upon their innate emotive patterns. The music which resulted is indeed challenging. Listen." From his pocket he brought a small black case. A window glowed to reveal an index; Waldo set dials. "Here's a sample of Vaakstras; it's not obvious music."

Alice listened to the sounds from the music-player. "I've heard better cat fights."

Waldo laughed. "It's demanding music, and certainly requires empathy from the participant. He must search his own file of patterns, rummaging and discarding until he finds the set at the very bottom of the pile, and these should synthesize within his mind the wild emotions of the Vaakstras children."

"Let's not bother tonight," said Alice. "I'd never be sure that I'd uncovered the proper patterns and I might feel all the wrong emotions, and anyway I'm not all that interested in feeling someone else's emotions; I've got enough of my own."

"We'll find something you'll like, no fear of that." Waldo bowed politely to Merwyn and Jade, and conducted Alice into the cab. They slanted down toward the city.

Waldo looked sidewise at Alice. He declared, "Tonight you're an enchanted princess from a fairy tale. How do you do it?"

"I don't know," said Alice. "I didn't try anything special. Where are we going?"

"Well, there's an exhibition of Latushenko's spirit crystals, which he grows in new graves; or we could go to the Arnaud Intrinsicalia, where there's a very clever performance, which I've already seen three times; I know you'd enjoy it. Operators are prosthetically coupled to puppets, who perform the most adventurous and outrageous acts. There's a performance of *Salammbô* on tonight, with *The Secret Powder-puff*, which is rather naughty, if you like such things."

Alice smiled and shook her head. "I happened upon the mammoth atrachids of Didion Swamp in a state of oestrus, and since then I've lost all interest in voyeurism."

Waldo was taken aback. He blinked and adjusted his cravat. "Well—there's always the Perceptory—but you're not wired and you'd miss a great deal. There's an exhibit at the Hypersense: John Shibe's Posturings. Or we might luck into a couple seats at the Conservatory;

tonight they're doing Oxtot's *Generation of Fundamental Pain*, with five music machines."

"I'm not really all that interested in music," said Alice. "I just don't care to sit still that long, wondering why someone saw fit to perform this or that particular set of notes."

"My word," said Waldo in astonishment. "Isn't there any music on Rampold?"

"There's music enough, I suppose. People sing or whistle when the mood strikes them. Out on the stations there's always someone with a banjo."

"That's not quite what I mean," said Waldo. "Music, and in fact, art in general, is the process of consciously communicating an emotional judgment or point of view in terms of abstract symbology. I don't believe whistling a jig fits this definition."

"I'm sure you're right," said Alice. "I know it's never occurred to me when I'm whistling. When I was very little we had a school-teacher from Earth—an elderly lady who was dreadfully afraid of everything. She tried to teach us subjectivity; she played us plaque after plaque of music without effect; all of us enjoyed our own emotions more than someone else's."

"What a little barbarian you are, for a fact!"

Alice only laughed. "Poor old Miss Burch! She was so upset with us! The only name I remember is Bargle, or Bangle, or something like that, who always ended his pieces with a great deal of pounding and fanfares."

"'Bargle'? 'Bangle'? Was it possibly Baraungelo?"

"Why, yes, I'm sure that's the name! How clever of you!"

Waldo laughed ruefully. "One of the greatest composers of the last century. Well—you don't want to go to concerts or exhibitions, or to the Perceptory," said Waldo plaintively. "What are you doing? Making more notes?"

"I have a bad memory," said Alice. "When an idea arrives, I've got to record it."

"Oh," said Waldo flatly. "Well—what do you suggest we do?"

Alice tried to soothe Waldo's feelings. "I'm a very impatient person. I just don't care for subjectivizing, or vicarious experience . . . Oh, my, I've done it again, and made it even worse. I'm sorry."

Waldo was dazed by the whirl of ideas. "Sorry for what?"

"Perhaps you didn't notice, which is just as well."

"Oh, come now. It couldn't have been all that bad. Tell me!"

"It's not important," said Alice. "Where do spacemen go for amusement?"

Waldo responded in a measured voice. "They drink in saloons, or escort fancy ladies to the High Style Restaurant, or prowl Jillyville, or gamble in the Epidrome."

"What is Jillyville?"

"It's the old market plaza, and I suppose it's sometimes amusing. The Alien Quarter is just down Light-year Road; the jeeks and wam-poons and tinkos all have shops along the Parade. There are little bistros and drunken spacemen, mystics, charlatans and inverters, gunkers and gunk peddlers and all sorts of furtive desperate people. It's more than a trifle vulgar."

"Jillyville might be interesting," said Alice. "At least it's alive. Let's go there."

What an odd girl! thought Waldo. Beautiful to melt a man's mind, a daughter of Commander Merwyn Tynnott, O.T.E., a member of the galactic nobility with a status far superior to his own; yet how provincial, how incredibly self-assured for her age, which could hardly be more than seventeen or eighteen! She seemed at times almost patronizing, as if he were the culturally impoverished star-lander and she the clever sophisticate! Well, then, thought Waldo, let's divert matters into a more amusing channel. He leaned close, put his hand to her cheek and sought to kiss her, which would reestablish his initiative. Alice ducked back and Waldo was thwarted. She asked in astonishment, "Why did you do that?"

"The usual reasons," said Waldo in a muffled voice. "They're quite well known. Haven't you ever been kissed before?"

"I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, Waldo. But let's just be casual friends."

Waldo said largely, "Why should we limit ourselves in any way? There's scope for whatever relationship we want! Let's start over. Pretend now that we've just met, but already we've become interested in one another!"

"The last person I want to deceive is myself," said Alice. She hesitated. "I hardly know how to advise you."

Waldo looked at Alice with a slack jaw. "As to what?"

"Subjectivity."

"I'm afraid I don't understand you."

Alice nodded. "It's like talking to a fish about being wet. . . Let's speak of something else. The lights of the city are really magnificent. Old Earth is certainly picturesque! Is that the Epidrome down there?"

Looking askance at the charming features, Waldo responded in a somewhat metallic voice. "That's Meridian Circle, at the end of the Parade, where the cults and debating societies meet. See that bar of white luciflux? That marks the Parade. The luminous green circle is the Epidrome. See those colored lights across the Parade? That's the Alien Quarter. The jeeks like blue lights, the tinkos insist on yellow, the wampoons won't have any lights at all, which accounts for that rather strange effect."

The cab landed; Waldo gallantly assisted Alice from the craft. "We're at the head of the Parade; that's all Jillyville ahead of us . . . What's that you're carrying?"

"My camera. I want to record some of those beautiful costumes, and yours too."

"Costume?" Waldo looked down at his garments. "Barbarians wear costumes. These are just clothes."

"Well, they're very interesting in any event. . . What a remarkable assortment of people!"

"Yes," said Waldo glumly. "You'll see everybody and everything along the Parade. Don't walk too closely behind the jeeks. They have a rather noxious defensive mechanism right above their tail horn. If you see a man with a red hat, he's a bonze of the External Magma. Don't look at him or he'll want an 'enlightenment fee' for divining his thoughts. Those three men yonder are spacemen—drunk, of course. Down at the end of the Parade is Spaceman's Rest: a jail reserved for overexuberant spacemen. Out yonder is the Baund, the most garish section of Jillyville: saloons, bordellos, shampoo parlors, cult studios, curio shops, mind-readers, evangelists and prophets, gunk-peddlers—all in the Baund."

"What a picturesque place!"

"Yes, indeed. Here's the Black Opal Cafe, and there's a table; let's sit and watch for a bit."

For a period they sat and sipped drinks: Waldo, a clear cold Hyperion Elixir, Alice, a goblet of the popular Tanglefoot Punch. They watched the passers-by: tourists from the backlands, spacemen, the young folk of Hant. Ladies of the night sauntered past with an eye for the spacemen, their wrist-chains jingling with socket adapters. They dressed in the most

modish extremes, hair piled high and sprinkled with sparkling lights. Some varnished their skins, others wore cheek-plates plumed with jaunty feathers. Their ears were uniformly clipped into elf-horns; their shoulder finials rose in grotesque spikes. Waldo suggested that Alice take their picture, and she did so. "But I'm really more interested in representative pictures of representative folk, such as yourself and that fine young couple yonder. Aren't they picturesque? My word, what are those creatures?"

"Those are jeeks," said Waldo. "From Caph Three. There's quite a colony here. Notice the organ above the dorsal horn? It ejects body-tar, which smells like nothing on Earth . . . Look yonder, those tall whitish creatures. They're wampoons from Argo Navis. About five hundred live in an old brick warehouse. They don't walk out too often. I don't see any tinkos, and the spangs won't appear until just before dawn."

A tall man stumbled against the railing and thrust a hairy face over their table. "Can you spare a dollar or two, your lordships? We're poor backlanders looking for work, and hungry so that we can hardly walk."

"Why not try gunk," suggested Waldo, "and take your mind off your troubles."

"Gunk is not free either, but if you'll oblige with some coins, I'll make myself merry and gay."

"Try that white building across the Parade. They'll fix you up."

The gunker roared an obscenity. He looked at Alice. "Somewhere, my lovely darling, we've met. Out there somewhere, in some lovely land of glory; I'll never forget your face. For old times' sake, a dollar or two!"

Alice found a five-dollar bill. The gunker, chuckling in mad glee, seized it and shambled away.

"Money wasted," said Waldo. "He'll buy gunk, some cheap new episode."

"I suppose so ... Why isn't wiring illegal?"

Waldo shook his head. "The perceptories would go out of business. And never discount the power of love."

"Love?"

"Lovers wire themselves with special sockets, so that they can plug into one another. You don't do this on Rampold?"

"Oh, no indeed."

"Aha. You're shocked."

"Not really. I'm not even surprised. Just think, you could even make love by telephone or television, or even by a recording; all you need is the right kind of wiring."

"It's been done. In fact, the gunk producers have gone far beyond: brain-wiring plus a percept equals gunk."

"Oh. That's what gunk is. I thought it was a hallucinatory drug."

"It's controlled hallucination. The more you turn up the voltage, the more vivid it becomes. To the gunker life is gray; the colors come back when he dials up the gunk. Real life is a dismal interlude between the sumptuous experiences of gunk . . . Oh, it's seductive!"

"Have you tried it?"

Waldo shrugged. "It's illegal—but most everybody tries it. Are you interested?"

Alice shook her head. "In the first place, I'm not wired. In the second place—but no matter." She became busy with her notes.

Waldo asked, "What are you writing about now? Gunk?"

"Just an idea or two."

"Such as?"

"You probably wouldn't be interested."

"Oh, but I would! I'd be interested in all your notes."

"You might not understand them."

"Try me."

Alice shrugged and read, "Urbanites as explorers of inner space: i.e.—subjectivity. The captains: psychologists. The pioneers: abstractionists. The creed: perceptiveness, control of ideas. The fuglemen: critics. The paragons: the "well-read man," the "educated listener," the "perceptive spectator."

"Precursive to gunk: theater-attendance, percepts, music, books: all urbanite cult-objects.

"Abstraction: the work of urbanity. Vicarious experience: the life-flow of urbanity. Subjectivity: the urban mind-flow."

She looked at Waldo. "These are only a few rough notes. Do you want to hear any more?"

Waldo sat with a grim expression. "Do you really believe all that?"

"Belief is not quite the right word." Alice reflected a moment. "I've

simply arranged a set of facts into a pattern. For an urbanite the implications go very far—in fact, very far indeed. But let's talk of something else. Have you ever visited Nicobar?"

"No," said Waldo, looking off across the Baund.

"I've heard that the Sunken Temple is very interesting. I'd like to try to decipher the glyphs."

"Indeed?" Waldo lifted his eyebrows. "Are you acquainted with Ancient Gondwanese?"

"Of course not! But glyphs usually have a symbolic derivation. Don't stare at those lights, Waldo; they'll put you to sleep."

"What?" Waldo sat up in his chair. "Nothing of the sort. They're just the lights of a carousel."

"I know, but passing behind those pillars they fluctuate at about ten cycles a second, or so I'd estimate."

"And what of that?"

"The lights send impulses to your brain which create electrical waves. At that particular frequency, if the waves are strong enough or continue long enough, you'll very likely become dazed. Most people do."

Waldo gave a skeptical grunt. "Where did you learn that?"

"It's common knowledge—at least among neurologists."

"I'm no neurologist. Are you?"

"No. But our odd-jobs man on Rampold is, or at least claims to be. He's also a magician, bear wrestler, cryptologist, boat-builder, herbalist, and half a dozen other wonderful things. Mother considers him bizarre, but I admire him tremendously, because he is competent. He's taught me all kinds of useful skills." Alice picked a pink flower from a potted plant beside the table. She placed it on the table, and put her hands down flat, covering the flower. "Which hand is it under?"

Waldo somewhat condescendingly pointed to her left hand. Alice lifted her right hand to reveal a red flower.

"Aha," said Waldo. "You picked two flowers! Lift your other hand."

Alice lifted her left hand. On the table glittered the gold ornament which had hung at Waldo's ear. Waldo blinked, felt his ear, then stared at Alice. "How did you get hold of that?"

"I took it while you were watching the lights. But where is the pink flower?" She looked up, grinning like an imp. "Do you see it?"

"No."

"Touch your nose."

Waldo blinked once more and touched his nose. "There's no flower there."

Alice laughed in great merriment. "Of course not. What did you expect?" She sipped from her goblet of punch, and Waldo, somewhat annoyed, leaned back with his own glass of punch, to find within the pink flower. "Very clever." He rose stiffly to his feet. "Shall we continue?"

"As soon as I photograph the picturesque couple at the table yonder. They seem to know you. At least they've been watching us."

"I've never seen them before in my life," said Waldo. "Are you ready? Let's go on."

They continued along the Parade.

"There's a really big jeek," said Alice. "What's that it's carrying?"

"Probably garbage for its soup. Don't stand too close behind it . . . Well, we're behind it anyway. Just don't jostle it, or—"

An arm reached in from the side and dealt the jeek's tail horn a vigorous blow. Alice ducked aside; the spurt of body tar missed her and struck Waldo on the neck and chest.

3

After his day's work Bo Histledine rode a slideway to the transit tube, and was whisked northwest to Fulchock, where he inhabited a small apartment in an ancient concrete warren. Waiting for him was Hernanda Degasto Confurias, whom he had only recently wooed and won. Bo stood in the doorway looking at her. She was perfectly turned out, he thought; no one was more sensitive to the latest subtleties of fashion; no one surpassed her at adapting them to herself, so that she and the style were indistinguishable; with every change of clothes she assumed a corresponding temperament. A toque or cylinder of transparent film clasped the top of her head and contained a froth of black curls, artfully mingled with bubbles of pale-green glass. Her ears were concave shells three inches high, rounded on top, with emerald plugs. Her skin was marmoreal; her lips were enameled black; her eyes and eyebrows, both black, could not be improved upon and remained in their natural condition. Hernanda was a tall girl. Her breasts had been artificially

reduced to little rounded hummocks; her torso was a rather gaunt cylinder over which she had drawn a tube of coarse white cloth, which compressed her haunches. On her shoulders stood small bronze ornaments, like urns or finials, into each of which she had placed a dram of her personal scent. On her hands she wore greaves of black metal clustered with green jewels. Under her right armpit was a socket and the bottom terminal was decorated with a pink heart on which were inscribed the initials *B.H.*

Hernanda stood proud and silent before Bo's inspection, knowing herself perfect. Bo gave her no word of greeting; she said nothing to him. He strode into his inner room, bathed, and changed into a black and white diapered blouse, loose lime-green pantaloons, the legs long over his heels and tucked into sandals to expose his long white toes. He tied a purple and blue kerchief at a rakish angle to his head, and hung a string of black pearls from his right ear. When he returned to the living room Hernanda apparently had not moved. Silent as an obelisk she waited beside the far wall. Bo stood brooding. Hernanda was just right in every aspect. He was a lucky man to own the private plug to her socket. And yet... And yet what? Bo angrily thrust aside the thought.

"I want to go to the Old Lair," said Hernanda.

"Do you have money?"

"Not enough."

"I'm short as well. We'll go down to Fotzy's."

They left the apartment and carefully adjusted the alarms; only last week gunkers had broken in and stolen Bo's expensive term.

At Fotzy's they pressed buttons to order the dishes of their choice: hot gobbets of paste in spice-sauce, a salad of nutrient crisps on a bed of natural lettuce from the hydroponic gardens of Old City. After a moment or two Bo said: "The spaceyards are no good. I'm going to get out."

"Oh? Why?"

"A man stands watching me. Unless I work like a kaffir he harangues me. It's simply not comfortable."

"Poor old Bo."

"But for that flashing probation I'd tie him in a knot and kite off. I was built for beauty, not toil."

"You know Suanna? Her brother has gone off into space."

"It's like jumping into nothing. He can have all he wants."

"If I got money I'd like to take an excursion. Give me a thousand dollars, Bo."

"You give me a thousand dollars. I'll go on the excursion."

"But you said you wouldn't go!"

"I don't know what I want to do."

Hernanda accepted the rejoinder in silence. They left the restaurant and walked out upon Shermond Boulevard. South beyond Old City, Cloudhaven rode among the sunset clouds; in the halcyon light it seemed as if it might have been, or should have been, the culminating glory of human endeavor; but everyone knew differently.

"I'd rather have an aerie," muttered Bo.

One of Hernanda's few faults was a tendency to enunciate the obvious with the air of one transmitting a startling new truth. "You're not licensed for an aerie. They only give them to O.T.E.'s."

"That's all tripe. They should go to whoever can pay for them."

"You still wouldn't have one."

"I'd get the money, never fear."

"Remember your probation."

"They'll never fix on me again."

Hernanda thought her private thoughts. She wanted Bo to take a cottage in Galberg, and work in the artificial flavor factory. Tonight the prospect seemed as flimsy as smoke. "Where are we going?"

"I thought we'd look into Kongo's for the news."

"I don't like Kongo's all that much."

Bo said nothing. If Hernanda did not like Kongo's she could go somewhere else. And only as recently as yesterday she had seemed such a prize!

They rode the slideway to the Prospect Escalator and up to Dip-shaw Knob. Kongo's Blue Lamp Tavern commanded a fine view of the River Louthe, the spaceyards and most of West Hant, and was old beyond record or calculation. The woodwork was stained black, the brick floors were worn with the uneven passage of footsteps; the ceiling was lost in the dark blur of time. Tall windows looked across the far vistas of Hant, and on a rainy day Kongo's was a tranquil haven from which to contemplate the city.

Kongo's reputation was not altogether savory; curious events had occurred on the premises or shortly after patrons had departed. The Blue Lamp was known as a place where one must keep his wits about him, but the reputation incurred no loss of patronage; indeed the suffusion of vice and danger attracted folk from all Hant, as well as backland tourists and spacemen.

Bo led Hernanda to his usual booth, and found there a pair of his cronies: Raulf Dido and Paul Amhurst. Bo and Hernanda seated themselves without words of greeting, according to the tenets of current custom.

Bo presently said, "The spaceyard keeps me off punction, but this aside, it's just too bad."

"You're earning an honest wage," said Raulf Dido.

"Hah! Bah! Bo Histledine, a sixteen-dollar-a-day apprentice? You give me fits!"

"Talk to Paul. He's on to something good."

"It's a beautiful new line of gunk," said Paul Amhurst. "It's produced in Aquitaine and it's as good as the best."

He displayed a selection of stills; the views were vivid and provocative.

"Ow-wow," said Bo. "That's good stuff. I'll take some of that myself."

Hernanda made a restless movement and pouted; it was bad manners to talk of gunk in front of one's lady friend, inasmuch as gunk inevitably included erotic and hypererotic episodes.

"Somebody will get the Hant distributorship," said Paul, "and I'm hoping it's me. If so, I'll need help: you and Raulf, maybe a few more if we have to bust into Julio's territory."

"Hmm," said Bo. "What about the Old Man?"

"I put through an application a week ago. He hasn't bounced it back. I saw Jantry yesterday and he gave me an up-sign. So it looks good."

"Genine won't fix it with Julio."

"No. We'd have to gut it through by ourselves. It might get warm."

"And wet," said Paul, referring to the bodies sometimes found floating in the Louthe.

"That flashing probation," spat Bo. "I've got to worry about that. In fact, look over there! My personal vermin, Clachey and Delmar. Hide that gunk! They're coming by."

The two detectives halted beside the table; they looked down with mercury-colored eyes, back and forth between Bo, Raulf and Paul. "A fine lot of thugs," said Clachey. "What deviltry are you working up now?"

"We're planning a birthday party for our mothers," said Raulf. "Would you care to come?"

Delmar scrutinized Bo. "Your probation, as I recall, depends on avoiding bad company. Yet here you sit with a pair of gunk merchants."

Bo returned a stony gaze. "They've never mentioned such things to me. In fact we're all planning to enter the Police Academy."

Clachey reached to the seat between Bo and Paul and came up with the stills. "Now, what have we here? Could it be gunk?"

"It looks like some photographs," said Raulf. "They were on the seat when we arrived."

"Indeed," said Clachey. "So you think you're going to import Aquitanian gunk? Do you have any tablets on you?"

"Of course not," said Raulf. "What do you take us for? Criminals?"

"Empty your pockets," said Delmar. "If there's gunk in the group, somebody's probation is in bad trouble."

Paul, Raulf and Bo wordlessly arranged the contents of their pockets on the table. One at a time they stood up while Delmar deftly patted them up and down. "Oh, what's this?" From Paul's waistband he extracted one of those devices known as stingers, capable of hurling needles of lethal or anesthetic drugs across a room or a street and into a man's neck. Bo and Raulf were clean.

"Pay your respects to all," Clachey told Paul. "I believe that this is up and out, Amhurst."

"It might well be," Paul agreed dolefully.

A drunk lurched away from the bar and careened into the two detectives. "Can't a man drink in peace without you noses breathing down his neck?"

A waiter tugged at his arm and muttered a few words.

"So they're after gunkers!" stormed the drunk. "What of that? Up in Cloudhaven there's fancy gunk-parlors; why don't the noses go raid up there? It's always the poor scroffs who get the knocks."

The waiter managed to lead him away.

Bo said, "For a fact, how come you don't raid Cloudhaven?"

"We got our hands full with the scroffs, like the man said," replied Delmar, without heat.

Clachey amplified the remark. "They pay; they have the money. The scroffs don't have the money. They loot to get it. They're the problem, them and you merchants."

Delmar said to Bo, "This is a final notification, which will be inserted into your record. I warn you that you have been observed in the company of known criminals. If this occurs again, it's up and out."

"Thank you for your concern," said Bo in a heavy voice. He rose to his feet and jerked his hand at Hernanda. "Come along. We can't even take a drink in a respectable tavern without persecution."

Delmar and Clachey led away the despondent Paul Amhurst.

"Just as well," said Raulf. "He's too erratic."

Bo grunted. "I'm going to have to lay low. Until I think of something."

Raulf made a sign of comprehension; Bo and Hernanda departed Kongo's. "Where now?" asked Hernanda.

"I don't know ... I don't feel like much. There's nowhere to go." As if involuntarily he glanced up to the stars which burned through the night-glare. Rampold? Where was Rampold?

Hernanda took Bo's arm and led him down the escalator to the Shermond slideway. "I haven't been over to Jillyville for a while. It's just across the bridge."

Bo grumbled automatically, but could think of nothing better.

They crossed River Louthe by the Vertes Avenue Bridge, and sauntered through the flower market which for centuries had created a zone of clotted color in the shadow of the Epidrome.

Hernanda wanted to wander through the Epidrome and perhaps risk a dollar or two at one of the games of chance. "So long as you use your own money," said Bo gracelessly. "I don't intend to throw gold down a rathole. Not at sixteen dollars a day on that buffing machine."

Hernanda became sulky and refused to enter the Epidrome, which suited Bo well enough. The two moodily walked up to the Parade.

As they passed the Black Opal Cafe, Bo noticed Alice's copper-glinting hair. He stopped short, then led Hernanda to a table. "Let's have a drink."

"Here? It's the most expensive place along the Parade!"

"Money means nothing to Big Bo the Histle."

Hernanda shrugged, but made no objection.

Bo selected a table twenty feet from where Waldo sat with Alice. He punched buttons, deposited coins; a moment later a waitress brought out their refreshment: lime beer for Bo and frozen rum for Hernanda.

Alice saw them and raised her camera; in irritation Bo put his head down on his hand. Hernanda stared at Alice and the camera. Tourists everywhere, taking photographs.

"We should be flattered."

Bo gave Waldo a baleful examination. "Toffs out slumming—him, anyway. She's off-world. A starlander."

Hernanda scrutinized each detail of Alice's gown, hair, face and her fillet of jade pebbles. "She's just a child and a bit tatty. She looks as if she'd never seen a stylist in her life."

"Probably hasn't."

Hernanda looked at him suspiciously, sidelong. "Are you interested?"

"Not all so much. She looks happy. I wonder why. It's probably her first time to Hant; soon she'll be heading back into nowhere. What has she got to live for?"

"She's probably rolling in money. I could have it too if I were willing to put up with her kind of life."

Bo chuckled. "It's remarkable, for a fact. Well, she's harmless, or so I suppose."

"Certainly nothing much to look at. All young eagerness and dancing around the maypole. Hair like a straw pile . . .Bo!"

"What?"

"You're not listening to me."

"My mind is roving the star lanes."

Waldo and Alice rose from their table and left the cafe. Bo's lewd conjectures caused him to suck in his breath. "Come along."

Hernanda sulkily swung her head away, and remained in her seat. Bo paid her no heed. Speechless with indignation, she watched him go.

Waldo and Alice halted to avoid a jeek. Bo reached from the side and gave the jeek's tail horn a hard slap. The jeek voided upon Waldo. Alice glanced at Bo in consternation, then turned to Waldo. "It's that man there who did it!"

"Where? Which man?" croaked Waldo.

Suddenly alive to the danger of apprehension and police charges, Bo slid away through the crowd. Reeking and smarting, Waldo pursued him. Bo ran across the Parade, off into one of the rancid little alleys of the Alien Quarter. Wild with rage, Waldo followed.

Bo ran across the plaza where a dozen or more jeeks stood at a chest-high bench ingesting salt-froth. Waldo halted, looking here and there; Bo darted forth and thrust him into the group of jeeks; Waldo's impetus overturned the bench. Bo ran fleetly away, while the jeeks trampled Waldo, struck him with their secondary stubs, squirted him with tar.

Alice appeared with a pair of patrolmen, who flashed red lights at the jeeks and froze them into rigidity.

Waldo crept across the plaza on his hands and knees, and vomited the contents of his stomach.

"Poor Waldo," said Alice.

"Leave him to us, miss," said the corporal. "Just a question or two, then I'll call down a cab. Who is this gentleman?"

Alice recited Waldo's name and address.

"And how did he get in this mess?"

Alice explained as best she could.

"Was this man in the green pants known to either of you?"

"I'm sure not. The whole affair seems so strange."

"Thank you, miss. Come along, I'll call the cab."

"What of poor Waldo?"

"He'll be all right. We'll take him to the dispensary to be cleaned up. Tomorrow he'll be as good as new."

Alice hesitated. "I don't like to leave him, but I'd better be getting home; I've a great deal to do tomorrow."

4

Bo gave no thought to Hernanda; he strode along the Parade in a strange savage mood, comprehensible to himself least of all. Why had he acted so? Not that he was sorry; on the contrary, he had hoped to soil the

girl as well.

He returned to his Fulchock apartment, where he thought of Hernanda for the first time. She was nowhere in evidence, nor had he expected her, nor did he want her. What he craved was something unattainable, something indescribable.

He wanted the red-haired girl, and for the first time in his life he thought not in terms of sheer submission, but admiration and affection and a manner of living he could only sluggishly imagine.

He flung himself upon his couch and fell into a torpor.

Gray-blue light awoke Bo. He groaned, rolled over on his couch and sat up.

He went to look at himself in the mirror. The sullen heavy-jawed face under the tangle of blond ringlets provided him neither distress nor joy; Bo Histledine merely looked at Bo Histledine.

He showered, dressed, drank a mug of bitter mayhaw tea, and ruminated.

Why not? Bo rasped at himself. He was as good as anyone, and better than most. If not one way, then another—but own her, possess her he would. The aspirations of the night before were flimsy shadows; Bo was a practical man.

The spaceyards? The buffing machine? As remote as the winds of last summer.

Bo dressed with care in gray and white pantaloons, a loose dark-blue shirt with a dark-red cravat, a soft gray cap pulled low over his forehead. Examining himself in the mirror, Bo found himself oddly pleased with his appearance. He looked, so he thought, less bulky and even somewhat younger: perhaps because he felt excited.

He removed the cravat and opened the collar of his shirt. The effect pleased him: he looked—so he thought—casual and easy, less heavy in the chin and jaw. What of the tight blond curls which clustered over his ears and gave his face—so he thought—a sullen, domineering look? Bo yanked the cap down over his forehead and left his apartment.

At a nearby studio, a hairdresser trimmed away clustering curls and rubbed brown toner into the hair remaining. Different, thought Bo. Better? Hard to say. But different.

He rode the tube south to Lake Werle in Elmhurst, then went by slideway to the Academy.

Bo now moved tentatively; never before had he visited the Academy. He passed under the Gate of the Universe and stood looking across the campus. Giant elms stood dreaming in the wan morning sunlight; beyond rose the halls of the various academic disciplines. Students streamed past him: young men and women from the backlands and the far worlds, a few from Cloudhaven and the patrician suburbs, others from the working-class areas to the north.

The business of the day was only just beginning. Bo asked a few questions and was directed to the central cab landing; here he leaned against a wall and composed himself for a possibly long wait.

An hour passed. Bo frowned through a discarded student journal, wondering why anyone considered such trivia worth the printing.

A cab dropped from the sky; Alice stepped to the ground. Bo dropped the journal and watched her, keen as a hawk. She wore a black jacket, a gray skirt, black stockings reaching up almost to her knees; at her waist hung her note-taking apparatus. For a moment she stood looking about her, alert and attentive, mouth curved in a half-smile.

Bo leaned forward, encompassing her with the hot force of his will. He scrutinized her inch by inch, memorizing each of her attributes. Body: supple, slender; delightful slim legs. Hair flowing and glowing like brushed copper. Face: calm, suffused with—what? gaiety? merriment? optimism? The air around her quivered with the immediacy of her presence.

Bo resented her assurance. This was the whole point! She was smug! Arrogant! She thought herself better than ordinary folk because her father was a commander of the O.T.E. ... Bo had to admit that this was not true. He would have preferred that it were. Her self-sufficiency was inherent. Bo envied her: a bubble of self-knowledge opened into his brain. He wanted to be like her: easy, calm, magnificent. The inner strength of the starlander was such that she never thought to measure herself against someone else. True! Alice was neither smug nor arrogant; on the contrary, she knew no vanity, nor even pride. She was herself; she knew herself to be intelligent, beautiful and good; nothing more was necessary.

Bo compressed his lips. She must concede him equality. She must know his strength, recognize his fierce virility.

Tragedy might be latent in the situation. If so, let it come! He was Bo Histledine, Big Boo the Blond Brute, who did as he pleased, who drove through life, reckless, feckless, giving way to no one.

Alice walked toward the halls of learning. Bo followed, twenty feet behind, admiring the jaunty motion of her body.

5

That morning, immediately after breakfast, Alice had telephoned Waldo at Clouthaven. The Waldo who appeared on the screen was far different from that handsome, serene and gallant Waldo who had arrived by cab the previous evening to show her the city. This Waldo was pale, gaunt and grim, and met Alice's sympathetic inspection with a shifting, darting gaze. "No bones broken," he said in a muffled voice. "I'm lucky there. Once the jeeks start on a man they'll kill him, and they can't be punished because they're aliens."

"And this stuff they squirted on you: is it poisonous?"

Waldo made a guttural sound and directed one of his burning suspicious glances into the screen. "They scoured me and scrubbed me, and shaved all my hair. Still I smell it. The stuff apparently reacts with skin protein, and stays until a layer of skin wears off."

"Certainly a remarkable affair," mused Alice. "I wonder who would do a thing like that? And why?"

"I know who, at least. It was the fellow in green pantaloons at the table opposite. I've been meaning to ask you: didn't you photograph that couple?"

"Yes, indeed I did! They seemed such a typical pair! I don't think you can identify the man; his head is turned away. But the woman is clear enough."

Waldo thrust his head forward with something of his old animation. "Good! Will you bring over the photograph? I'll show it to the police; they'll work up an identification fast enough. Somebody's going to suffer."

"I'll certainly send over the photograph," said Alice. "But I'm afraid that I don't have time to drop by. The Academy is on my schedule for today."

Waldo drew back, eyes glittering. "You won't learn much in one day. It usually takes a week just for orientation."

"I think I can find the information I want in just an hour or two; anyway, that's all the time I can spare."

"And may I ask the nature of this information?" Waldo's voice now had a definite edge. "Or is it a secret?"

"Of course not!" Alice laughed at the thought. "I'm mildly curious as to the formal methods of transmitting the urbanite ideology. Academicians are naturally a diverse lot, but in general they are confirmed urbanites: in fact, I suppose this is the basis upon which they attain their positions. After all, rabbits don't hire lions to teach their children."

"I don't follow you," said Waldo haughtily.

"It's perfectly simple. The Academy indoctrinates young rabbits in rabbitry, to pursue the metaphor, and I'm mildly curious as to the techniques."

"You'll be wasting your time," said Waldo. "I attend the Academy and I'm not aware of any 'rabbitry,' as you put it."

"You would be more apt to notice its absence," said Alice. "Goodbye, Waldo. It was kind of you to show me Jillyville; I'm sorry the evening ended unpleasantly."

Waldo stared at the fresh young face, so careless and gay. "'Goodbye?'"

"I may not be seeing you again. We won't be in Hant all that long. But perhaps someday you'll come out to the starlands."

"Not bloody likely," Waldo muttered.

A curious affair, Alice reflected, as she rode the cab down to the Academy. The man in the green pantaloons probably mistook Waldo for someone else. Or he might have acted out of sheer perversity; such folk were probably not uncommon in the psychological stew of the great city Hant.

The cab discharged her on a plat at the center of the campus. She stood a moment admiring the prospect: the walks and slideways leading here and there across landscaped vistas, the white halls under great elms, the great Enoie Memorial Clock Tower, formed from a single quartz crystal four hundred and sixty feet high. Students passed in their picturesque garments, each a small lonely cosmos exquisitely sensitive to the psychic compulsions of his environment. Alice gave her head a wistful shake and went to an information placard where the component structures of the Academy were identified: the Halls of Physical Science, Biologies, Mathematics, Human History, Anthropology and Comparative Culture, Xenology, Cosmology, Human Ideas and Arts, a dozen others. She read an informational notice addressed to visitors:

Each hall consists of a number of conduits, or thematic passages, equipped with efficient pedagogical devices. The conduits are interconnected, to provide a flexible passage through any particular discipline, in accordance with the needs of the individual. The student determines his special field of interest, and is issued a chart designating his route through the hall. He moves at a rate dictated by his assimilative ability; his comprehension is continuously verified; when the end is reached he has mastered his subject.

Alice proceeded to the Hall of History. Entering, she gazed in awe around the splendid lobby, which enforced upon the visitor an almost stupefying awareness of the human adventure. Under a six-inch floor of clear crystal spread a luminous map of the terrestrial surface, projected by some curious shifting means which minimized distortion. The dark-blue dome of the ceiling scintillated with constellations. Around the walls, somewhat above eye-level, ran a percept-continuum where marched a slow procession of men, women and children: straggling peasants; barbarians in costumes of feathers and leather; clansmen marching to a music of clarions and drums; heroes striding alone; prelates and sacerdots; hetairae, flower-maidens and dancing girls; blank-faced folk in drab garments, from any of a dozen ages; Etruscans, Celts, Scythians, Zumbelites, Dagonites, Mennonites; posturing priests of Babylon, warriors of the Caucasus. At one side of the hall they appeared from a blur of fog; as they marched they turned an occasional glance out toward those who had come to visit the Hall of History; to the far side of the great room they faded into the blur and were gone.

Alice went to the information desk, where she bought a catalog. Listed first were the basic routes through the conduits, then more complicated routes to encompass the aspects of special studies. Alice settled upon the basic survey course: *Human History: from the origin of man to the present*. She paid the three-dollar fee for noncredit transit, received a chart indicating her route through the conduits. A young man in a dark shirt immediately behind her, so she chanced to notice, elected the same course: evidently a subject popular with the students.

Her route proved to be simple enough: a direct transit of Conduit 1, with whatever detours, turn-offs, loops rnto other conduits, which happened to arouse her interest.

The young man in the dark shirt went on ahead. When she entered the conduit she discovered him studying the display of human precursors. He glanced at Alice and politely moved aside so that she might inspect the diorama as well. "Rough-looking thugs!" he commented in a jocular voice. "All hairy and dirty."

"Yes, quite so." Alice moved along the diorama.

The young man kept pace with her. "Excuse me, but aren't you a starlander? From Engsten, or more likely Rampold?"

"Why, yes! I'm from Rampold. How did you know?"

"Just a lucky guess. How do you like Hant?"

"It's interesting, certainly." Alice, rather primly erect, moved on along the display.

"Ugh," said Bo. "What's that they're eating?"

"Presumably some sort of natural food," said Alice.

"I guess you're right," said Bo. "They weren't too fussy in those days. Are you a student here?"

"No,"

"Oh, I see. Just sightseeing."

"Not exactly that either. I'm curious as to the local version of history."

"I thought history was history," said Bo.

Alice turned him a quick side-glance. "It's hard for the historian to maintain objectivity, especially for the urban historian."

"I didn't know there was all that much to it," said Bo. "I thought they just showed a lot of percepts and charts. Don't they do it the same way on Rampold?"

"We have nothing quite so elaborate."

"It all amounts to the same thing," said Bo generously. "What's done is dead and gone, but here they call it history and study it."

Alice gave a polite shrug and moved on. Bo understood that he had struck the wrong tone, which annoyed him. Oh, why must he pussyfoot? Why must he appease? He said, "Of course I don't know all that much about the subject. That's why I'm here; I want to learn!"

The statement was uttered in a mincing over-delicate voice which Alice found amusing, and hence worth some small exploration. "All very well, if you learn anything useful. In your case, I doubt if . . ." Alice let her voice

trail off; why discourage the poor fellow? She asked, "I take it you're not a student either?"

"Well, no. Not exactly."

"What do you do?"

"I—well, I work in the spaceyards."

"That's useful work," Alice said brightly. "And it's work you can be proud of. I hope you profit from your studies." She gave him a gracious nod and passed on down the conduit, to a percept detailing the daily activities of a Mesolithic family.

Bo looked after her with a frown. He had pictured the encounter going somewhat differently, with Alice standing wide-eyed and coy, enthralled by the magnetism of his personality. He had worried only that she might recognize him, for she had seen him on two previous occasions. His fears were groundless. Evidently she had paid no attention to him. Well, she'd make up for that. And her attitude now was far too casual; she treated him as if he were a small boy. He'd fix that, as well.

Bo followed her slowly along the conduit. He considered the percept, then sidled a step closer. In a bluff voice he said, "Sometimes we don't realize how lucky we are, and that's a fact."

"'Lucky'?" Alice spoke in an abstracted voice. "Who? The people of Hant? Or the Cro-Magnons?"

"Us, of course."

"Oh."

"You don't think so?" Bo spoke indulgently.

"Not altogether."

"Look at them! Living in caves. Dancing around a campfire. Eating a piece of dead bear. That doesn't look so good."

"Yes, their lives lacked delicacy." Alice continued along the conduit, moving briskly, and frowning just a trifle. She glanced into percepts depicting aspects of the proto-civilizations; she halted at a percept presenting in a time-compression sequence the development of Hialkh, the first city known to archaeologists. The annunciator commented, "At this particular instant in the human epic, civilization has begun. Behind: the long gray dawn ages. Ahead: the glories which culminate in Hant! But beware! look yonder across the Pontus! The cruel barbarians of the steppes, those expert wielders of sword and axe who time and time again have ravaged the cities!"

Bo's now familiar voice spoke, "The only ravagers nowadays are the tourists."

Alice made no comment, and continued along the conduit. She looked into the faces of Xerxes, Subotai, Napoleon, Shgulvarsko, Jensen, El Jarm. She saw battles, sieges, slaughters and routs. Cities developed from villages, grew great, collapsed into ruins, disappeared into flames. Bo enunciated his impressions and opinions, to which Alice made perfunctory acknowledgments. He was something of a nuisance, but she was too kind to snub him directly and hurt his feelings. Altogether she found him somewhat repulsive, a curious mixture of innocence and cynicism; of ponderous affability and sudden sinister silences. She wondered if he might not be a trifle deranged; odd for a person of his attributes to be studying the history of man! The percepts and displays, for all their splendor, began to bore her; there was simply too much to be encompassed at a casual inspection, and long ago she had learned what she wanted to know. She said to Bo, "I think I'll be leaving. I hope you profit by your studies; in fact I know you will if you apply yourself diligently. Goodbye."

"Wait," said Bo. "I've seen enough for today." He fell into step beside her. "What are you going to do now?"

Alice looked at him sidewise. "I'm going to find some lunch. I'm hungry. Why do you ask?"

"I'm hungry too. We're not all that different, you and I."

"Just because we're both hungry? That's not logical. Crows, vultures, rats, sharks, dogs: they all get hungry. I don't identify myself with any of these."

Bo frowned, examining the implications of the remark. They left the Hall of History and came out into the daylight. Bo asked gruffly, "You mean that you think I'm like a bird or a rat or a dog?"

"No, of course not!" Alice laughed at the quaint conceit. "I mean that we're people of different societies. I'm a starlander; you're an urbanite. Yours is a very old way of life, which is perhaps a bit-well, let's say, passive, or introverted."

Bo grunted. "If you say so. I never thought about it that way. Anyway just yonder is a branch of the Synthetique. Do you care to eat there? It's on me."

"No, I think not," said Alice. "I've seen those colored pastes and nutritious shreds of bark and they don't look very good. I think I'll go up

home for lunch. So once again: goodbye. Have a good lunch."

"Wait!" cried Bo. "I've got a better idea! I know another place, an old tavern where spacemen and all kinds of people go. It's very old and famous: Hongo's Blue Lamp. It would be a shame if you didn't see it." He modulated his voice into that husky cajoling tone which had always dissolved female will power like warm water on sugar. "Come along, I'll buy you a nice lunch and we'll get to know each other better."

Alice smiled politely and shook her head. "I think I'll be getting on. Thank you anyway."

Bo stood back, mouth compressed. He turned glumly away, raising a hand to his face. The gesture closed a circuit in Alice's memory-bank. Why, this was the man who had victimized Waldo! How very odd! What a strange coincidence that she should meet him at the Academy! Coincidence? The chances seemed remote. She asked, "What is your name?"

Bo spoke in a grumbling resentful voice. "Bo, short for Bodred. The last name is Histledine."

"Bodred Histledine. And you work at the spaceyards?"

Bo nodded. "What's your name?"

Alice seemed not to hear. "Perhaps I'll have lunch at this tavern after all—if you care to show me the way."

"It's not exactly a big expedition, with me running ahead like a guide," growled Bo. "I'll take you there as my guest."

"No, I wouldn't care for that," said Alice. "But I'll visit this tavern: yes. I think I'd like to talk with you."

6

Waldo pushed the photograph across the desk to Inspector Vole, who examined it with care. "The man isn't identifiable, as you can see for yourself," said Vole. "The woman—I don't recognize her, but I'll put her through identification procedure and maybe something will show up." He departed the room. Waldo sat drumming his fingers. From time to time a faint waft of jeek body-tar odor reached his nostrils, causing him to wince and twist his head.

Inspector Vole returned with the photograph and a print-out bearing the likenesses of a dozen women. He pushed the sheet across the desk.

"This is what the machine gave me. Do you recognize any of them?"

Waldo nodded. "This is the one." He touched a face on the sheet.

"I thought so too," said Vole. "Do you intend to place criminal charges?"

"Maybe. But not just yet. Who is she?"

"Her name is Hernanda Degasto Confurias. Her address is 214-19-64, Bagram. If you plan to confront this woman and her friend, I advise you to go in company with a police officer."

"Thank you; I'll keep your advice in mind," said Waldo. He left the office.

Vole reflected a moment, then punched a set of buttons. He watched the display screen, which flashed a gratifying run of green lights: the name Hernanda Confurias was not unknown to the criminal files. Instead of a data read-out, the screen flickered to show the face of Vole's colleague Detective Delmar.

"What have you got on Hernanda Confurias?" asked Delmar.

"Nothing of import," said Vole. "Last night on the Parade—" Vole described the occurrence. "A senseless matter, or so it seems offhand."

"Put through the photograph," said Delmar. Vole facsimilated across a copy of the photograph.

"I wouldn't swear to it," said Delmar, "but that looks to me like Big Bo Histledine."

Waldo found the apartment numbered 214-19-64, then went to a nearby park where he approached a pair of adolescent girls. "I need your help," said Waldo. "A certain lady friend is angry with me, and I don't think she'll answer the door if she sees my face in the robber's portrait, so I want one, or both, of you to press the door button for me." Waldo produced a five-dollar note. "I'll pay you, of course, for your trouble."

The girls looked at each other and giggled. "Why not? Where does she live?"

"Just yonder," said Waldo. "Come along." He gave the girls instructions and led them to the door, while he waited beyond the range of the sensor eye, which produced the "robber portrait" on the screen within.

The girls pressed the button, and waited while the person within scrutinized their images.

"Who do you want?"

"Hernanda Degasto Confurias. We're from the charm school."

"Charm school?" The door opened; Hernanda looked forth. "Which charm school?"

Waldo stepped forward. "You girls come some other time. Hernanda, I want to speak with you."

She tried to close the door, but Waldo pushed through the opening. Hernanda ran across the room to the alarm button. "Get out of here! Or I'll press for the police!"

"I am the police," said Waldo.

"No, you're not! I know who you are."

"Who am I?"

"Never mind. Leave here at once!"

Waldo tossed the photograph to the table. "Look at that."

Hernanda gingerly examined the picture. "Well—what of it?"

"Who's the man?"

"What's it to you?"

"You say you know who I am."

Hernanda gave her head a half-fearful, half-defiant jerk of assent. "He shouldn't have done it—but I'm not saying anything."

"You'll either tell me or the police."

"No! He'd cut my ears; he'd sell me to the gunkers."

"He won't get the chance. You can either tell me now in secret, or the police will take you in as his accomplice."

"In secret?"

"Yes. He won't know where I got his name."

"You swear this?"

"I do."

Hernanda came a timid step forward. She picked up the photograph, glanced at it, threw it contemptuously back down on the table. "Bodred Histledine. He lives in Fulchock: 663-20-99. He works in the spaceyards."

"Bodred Histledine." Waldo noted the name and address. "Why did he do what he did?"

Hernanda gave her head a meditative strike. "He's a strange man. Sometimes he's like a little boy, sad and sweet; then sometimes he's a beast of the jungle. Have you noticed his eyes? They're like the eyes of a tiger."

"That may be. But why did he victimize me?"

Hernanda's own eyes flashed. "Because of the girl you were with! He's a crazy man!"

Waldo gave a grunt of bitter amusement. He inspected Hernanda thoughtfully; in her turn she looked at him. A patrician for certain: one of those Clouthaven types.

"He's always up at the Blue Lamp Tavern," said Hernanda. "That's his headquarters. He's on probation, you know. Just yesterday the detectives warned him." Hernanda, relaxing, had become limpid and charming; she came forward to the table.

Waldo looked her over without expression. "What did they warn him for?"

"Consorting with gunkers."

"I see. Anything else you care to tell me?"

"No." Hernanda now was almost arch. She came around the table. "You won't tell him that you saw me?"

"No, definitely not." Waldo once again caught a breath of that hateful odor. Rolling his eyes up and around, he turned and left the apartment.

7

Entering the Blue Lamp Tavern, Alice halted and peered through the gloom. For possibly the first time in her brash young life she felt the living presence of time. Upon that long black mahogany bar men of ten centuries had rested their elbows. The old wood exhaled vapors of the beer and spirits they had quaffed; their ghosts were almost palpable and their conversations hung in the gloom under the age-blackened ceiling. Alice surveyed the room, then crossed to a table under one of the tall windows which overlooked the many-textured expanse of Hant. Bo came at a rather foolish trot behind her, to pluck at her arm and urge her toward his usual booth. Alice paid him no heed, and seated herself placidly at the table she had chosen. Bo, drooping an eyelid and mouth, settled into the seat across from her. For a long moment he stared at her. Her features were fine and

clean, but hardly extraordinary; how did she produce so much disturbance? Because she was insufferably confident, he told himself; because she enforced her own evaluation of herself upon those who admired her ... He'd do more than admire her; she'd remember him to the last day of her life. Because he was Bo Histledine! Bo the Histle! Big Boo the Whangeroo! who accepted nothing but the best. So now: to work, to attract her interest, to dominate her with his own pride. He said, "You haven't told me your name."

Alice turned from the window and looked at Bo as if she had forgotten his presence. "My name? Miss Tynnott. My father is Commander Tynnott."

"What is your first name?" Bo asked patiently.

Alice ignored the question. Signaling the waiter, she ordered a sandwich and a mug of Tanglefoot. She looked around at the other patrons. "Who are these people? Workmen like yourself?"

"Some are workmen," said Bo in a measured voice. "Those two"— he nodded his head—"are off a sea-ship from the river docks. That tall thin man is from the backlands. But I'm more interested in you. What's your life like out on Rampold?"

"It's always different. My father's work takes him everywhere. We go out into the wilderness to plan canals and aquifers; sometimes we camp out for weeks. It's a very exciting life. We're about finished on Rampold; it's becoming quite settled, and we may move on to a new wild planet; in fact that's why we're here on Earth."

"Hmmf," said Bo. "Seems as if you'd want to stay in Hant and enjoy yourself awhile; take in the percepts, meet people, buy new clothes, get your hair fixed in the latest style, things like that."

Alice grinned. "I don't need clothes. I like my hair as it is. As for percepts, I don't have either time or inclination for vicarious living. Most urbanites, of course, don't have much choice; it's either vicarious experience or none."

Bo looked at her blankly. "I don't altogether understand you. Are you sure you know what you're talking about?"

"Of course. Passive, fearful, comfort-loving people tend to live in cities. They have no taste for real existence; they make do with secondhand second-best experience. When they realize this, as most do consciously or subconsciously, sometimes they become hectic and frantic."

"Bah," growled Bo. "I live in Hant; I'd live nowhere else. Second-best

isn't good enough for me. I go after the best; I always get the best."

"The best what?"

Bo looked sharply at the girl. Was she mocking him? But no, above the sandwich her eyes were guileless.

"The best of whatever I want," said Bo.

"What you think you want is a shadow of what you really do want. Urbanites are dissatisfied people; they're all lonesome for the lost paradise, but they don't know where to find it. They search all the phases of subjectivity: they try drugs, music, percepts—"

"And gunk. Don't forget gunk!"

"Urban life is the ultimate human tragedy," said Alice. "People can't escape except through catastrophe. Wealth can't buy objectivity; the folk in Cloudhaven are the most subjective of any in Hant. You're lucky to work in the spaceyards; you have contact with something real."

Bo shook his head in wonder. "How old are you?"

"It's really not relevant."

"You certainly didn't figure all that stuff out by yourself. You're too young."

"I've learned from my father and mother. Still, the truth is obvious, if you dare to look at it."

Bo felt baffled and savage. "I'd say that maybe you're not all that experienced yourself. Have you ever had a lover?"

"Last night," said Alice, "someone put the question rather more delicately. He asked me if I'd ever been in love, and of course I didn't care to discuss the matter."

Bo drank deep from a tankard of lime beer. "And what do you think of me?"

Alice gave him a casual appraisal. "I'd say that you are an individual of considerable energy. If you directed and disciplined yourself, you might someday become an important person: a foreman or even a superintendent."

Bo looked away. He picked up his tankard, drank and set it down with a carefully measured effort. He looked back at Alice. "What are you writing about?"

"Oh—I'm just jotting down ideas as they occur to me."

"In regard to what?"

"Oh—the folk of the city and their customs."

Bo sat glowering at her. "I suppose you've been studying me all morning. Am I one of the picturesque natives?"

Alice laughed. "I must be starting home."

"One moment," said Bo. "I see a man I want to talk to." He crossed to a booth from which Raulf Dido quietly observed comings and goings.

Bo spoke in a harsh clipped voice. "You notice who I'm sitting with?"

Raulf nodded impassively. "Very tasty, in an odd sort of way. What is she?"

"She's a starlander, and to talk to her you'd think she owns all Hant. I've never seen such conceit."

"She looks like she's dressed for a masquerade."

"That's the style out back of beyond. She's absolutely innocent, pure as the morning dew. I'll deliver. How much?"

"Nothing whatever. The heat's on. It's just too much of a hassle."

"Not if it's handled right."

"I'd have to ship her off to Nicobar or Mauritan. It wouldn't be worth the risk."

"Come, now. Why not work up a quick sequence over in the studio like we did with that set of twins?"

Raulf gave his head a dubious shake. "There's no scenery; we don't have a script; we'd need a buck—"

"I'll be the buck. All we need is the studio. No story, no sets: just the situation. She's so arrogant, so haughty! She'll throw a first-class display! Outrage. Apprehension. Fury. The works! I'm itching to lay hands on her beautiful body."

"She'll turn you in. If she's around to do so."

"She'll be around. I want her to remember a long time. I'll have to wear a clown-mask; I can't risk having Clachey or Delmar look at the gunk and say 'Hey! there's Bo!' Here's how we can arrange it so we're both clear—"

Raulf inclined his head toward Alice. "You're too late. She's leaving."

"The wicked little wench, I told her to wait!"

"I guess she just remembered," said Raulf mildly. "Because suddenly

now she's waiting."

Alice had seen enough of the Blue Lamp Tavern, more than enough of Hant; she wanted to be back up on the aerie, high in the clear blue air. But a man had entered the room, to take an unobtrusive seat to the side, and Alice peered in wonder. Surely it wasn't Waldo? But it was! though he wore a loose golden-brown slouch hat, bronze cheek-plates, a voluminous parasol cape of beetle-back green, all of which had the effect of disguising his appearance. Now, why had Waldo come to the Blue Lamp Tavern? Alice curbed a mischievous impulse to cross the room and put the question directly. Bo and his friend had their heads together; they were obviously plotting an escapade of some sort, probably to the discredit of both. Alice glanced back to Waldo to find him staring at her with furtive astonishment. Alice found his emotion highly amusing, and she decided to wait another few minutes to learn what eventuated.

Two other men approached Waldo and joined him at his table. One of the two directed Waldo's attention to Bo with an almost imperceptible inclination of the head. Waldo darted a puzzled look across the room, then returned to his informant. He seemed to be saying, "But he's not blond! The photograph showed blond hair!" And his friend perhaps remarked, "Hair dye is cheap." To which Waldo gave a dubious nod.

Alice began to quiver with merriment. Waldo had been surprised to find her at the Blue Lamp Tavern, but in a moment Bo would come swaggering back across the room, and indeed Bo now rose to his feet. For a moment he stood looking off into nothing, with what Alice thought a rather unpleasant smirk on his face. His bulk, his meaty jaw, the round stare of his eyes, the flaring nostrils, suggested the portrayal of a Minoan man-bull she had noticed earlier in the day; the resemblance was fascinating.

Bo crossed the room to the table where Alice sat. Waldo leaned forward, jaw sagging in shock.

Bo seated himself. Alice was more than ever conscious of his new mood. The rather obsequious manner he had cultivated at the Academy was gone; now he seemed to exude a reek of bravado and power. Alice said, "I'm just about ready to go. Thank you for showing me the tavern here; it's really a quaint old place, and I'm glad to have seen it."

Bo sat looking at her, with rather more intimacy than she liked. He said in a husky voice, "My friend yonder is a police agent. He wants to show me a gunk studio they've just raided; perhaps you'd like to come along."

"What's a gunk studio?"

"A place where fanciful percepts are made. Sometimes they're erotic; sometimes they're wonderful experiences, and the person who wires into them becomes the person who takes part in the adventures. It's illegal, naturally; a gunk addict can't do much else but stay wired into gunk once he's had a taste of it."

Alice considered. "It sounds interesting, if one is in the mood for depravity. But I think I've had enough for today."

"Enough what?" asked Bo jocularly. "Depravity? You haven't seen anything yet."

"Still, I'll be leaving for home." Alice rose to her feet. "It was pleasant meeting you, and I hope you do well at the spaceyards."

Bo joined her. "I'll show you the cab pad. This way, out the back. It's just around the corner."

Alice somewhat dubiously went with Bo along a dim corridor, down concrete steps to an iron door, which opened into an alley. Alice paused, glanced sidewise at Bo, who was standing rather closer than she liked. He lifted his hand and stroked her hair. Alice moved back with raised eyebrows. "And where is the cab pad?"

Bo grinned. "Just around the corner."

Keeping a wary eye on Bo, Alice marched off down the alley, with Bo a pace or two behind. She noticed a small van parked to the side. As she passed, footsteps pounded behind her; she swung around to see two men bearing Bo to the ground. Another man threw a blanket over her head, looped a strap around her knees; she was picked up and tossed into the van. The door closed and a moment later the van moved off.

Alice rolled over and made herself as comfortable as possible. She found no difficulty breathing and her first emotion was outrage. How dared anyone treat her with such disrespect! She began to speculate as to the purpose of the deed, and her probable prospects; she was not at all cheered.

Kicking and elbowing, she worked the blanket loose, and freed herself, but her situation was hardly improved. The interior of the van was dark and the doors were locked.

The van halted; the back door opened to reveal the interior of a concrete-walled room. Two men looked in at her; Alice was somewhat reassured by the hoods which concealed their faces, which would seem to indicate that they planned to spare her life, if nothing else.

She jumped out of the van and looked about her. "What's the reason for

all this?"

"Come along; this way. You're going to be famous."

"Oh? In what way?"

"You're to be the star of an exciting new percept."

"I see. Is this what is called 'gunk'?"

"I've heard it called 'gunk.' I like to think of it as 'art.'"

"I'm afraid you'll find me an uncooperative performer. The production will be a failure."

"Nothing in life is a sure thing. Still, it's worth trying. Come along this way."

Alice went as she was directed, along a hall and into a large win-dowless room illuminated by panels in the ceiling and around the walls. From four angles and from above recording apparatus surveyed the room. A man in a white beret, a domino and cheek-plates stood waiting. He came to inspect Alice. "You don't seem concerned."

"I'm not, particularly."

Raulf Dido, the man in the white beret, was momentarily disconcerted. "Maybe you like the idea?"

"I wouldn't quite go that far."

"Are you wired?"

Alice smiled, as if at the naive question of a child. "No."

"We'll want you to wear this induction device. It's not as accurate as the direct connection but better than nothing."

"Just what do you propose to do?" asked Alice.

"We plan to produce an erotic percept with emotional accompaniment. As you see, we have no exotic props, but we feel that your special personality will make the production interesting. Before you indulge in any tantrums or hysterics, we'll want to attach this induction device to your neck."

Alice looked at the adjuncts of the room: a couch, a chair, a case containing several objects which caused Alice to compress her lips in wry disgust. "You don't understand my 'special personality,' as you put it. The percept will be very uninteresting. I wonder if you have a magazine or a newspaper I might read while you're trying to make your percept?"

"You won't be bored, never fear." This was the comment of another man

who had entered the room: a man tall and strong, bulky about the shoulders, with a head shaved bald. A mask of gold foil clung to his face; he wore loose black pantaloons, a blouse checked red, white and black; he looked almost monumental in his strength. Alice instantly recognized Bo, and burst out laughing.

"What's so funny?" he growled.

"The whole affair is ridiculous. I really don't care to be a party to such a farce. After all, I have my pride."

The man in the gold mask stood looking at her sullenly. "You'll find whether it's ridiculous or not." He spoke to the man in the domino. "Check my signals." He pushed a clip into the socket under his right arm.

"Signals fine. You're in good shape."

"Put on her induction; we'll get on with the business."

The man in the domino advanced; Alice gestured, took the induction-cell, waved her hands and the cell was gone. Bo and Raulf Dido stared in annoyance. "What did you do with it?" asked Bo in a hard voice.

"It's gone," said Alice. "Forever. Or maybe it's somewhere up here." She jumped up to the recorder platform and pushed over equipment. Cameras, recorders crashed to the floor, evoking cries of rage from Raulf and Bo. They ran to catch her, then stopped short at the sound of contention: calls and curses, the thud of blows. Into the room burst four men. Waldo stood to the side while his companions advanced upon Raulf and Bo and commenced to beat them with leather truncheons. Raulf and Bo bellowed in rage and sought to defend themselves, with only small success, as the blows fell upon them from all sides.

Alice said, "Hello, Waldo. What are you doing here?"

"I might ask you the same thing."

"Bodred brought me here in a van," said Alice. "He seemed to want my help in making percepts; I was about to go when you arrived."

"You were about to go?" Waldo laughed scornfully. He put his arm around Alice's waist and drew her toward him.

She put her hands on his chest and held him away. "Now, Waldo, control yourself. I don't need reassurance."

"Do you know what they were going to do?" asked Waldo in a thick voice.

"I wasn't particularly interested. Please, Waldo, don't be amorous. I'm sure women of your own race are adequate to your needs."

Waldo made a guttural sound. He called to his hirelings. "Hold off. Don't kill them. Bring that man over here."

The men pushed Bo across the room. Waldo held a small gun which he waved carelessly. "You were about to produce some gunk, evidently."

"What if we were?" Bo panted. "Is it any of your affair? Why did you come busting in on us?"

"Think back to last night."

"Oh. You were the geezer behind the jeek."

"Correct. Go on with your gunk." Waldo jerked his head toward Alice. "Take her. Use her. I don't want her."

Bo glanced uncertainly toward Raulf, still on the floor. He looked back to Waldo, glaring sidelong at Waldo's gun. "What then?"

"I'm not done with you, if that's what you're worried about. You've got a lot coming, and you're going to get it."

Alice spoke in a puzzled voice. "Waldo, are you suggesting that these nasty creatures continue with what they were doing?"

Waldo grinned. "Why not? A little humility might do you good."

"I see. Well, Waldo, I don't care to participate in anything so sordid. I'm surprised at you."

Waldo leaned forward. "I'll tell you exactly why I'm doing this. It's because your arrogance and your vanity absolutely rub me raw."

"Hear, hear!" croaked Bo. "You talk the way I feel."

Alice spoke in a soft voice. "Both you boys are mistaken. I'm not vain and arrogant. I'm merely superior." She could not control her mirth at the expressions on the faces of Waldo and Bo. "Perhaps I'm unkind. It's really not your fault; you're both rather pitiful victims of the city."

"A 'victim'? Hah!" cried Waldo. "I live in Cloudhaven!"

And almost in the same instant, "Me, Big Bo, a victim? Nobody fools with me!"

"Both of you, of course, understand this—subconsciously. The result is guilt and malice."

Waldo listened with a sardonic smile, Bo with a lowering sneer.

"Are you finished?" Waldo asked. "If so—"

"Wait! One moment," said Alice. "What of the cameras and the induction-cell?"

Raulf, limping and groaning, went to one of the cameras which Alice had not thrown to the floor. "This one will work. The cell is gone; I guess we'll have to dub in her track."

Bo looked around the room. "I don't know as I like all this company. Everybody's got to go. I can't concentrate."

"I'm not going," said Waldo. "You three wait in the hall. There'll be more work for you after a bit."

"Well, don't beat *me* any more," whined Raulf. "I didn't do anything."

"Quit sniveling!" Bo snarled. "Fire up that camera. This isn't quite like I planned, but if it's not good, we'll do a retake."

"Wait!" said Alice. "One thing more. Watch my hands. Are you watching?" She stood erect, and performed a set of apparently purposeless motions. She halted, held her palms toward Bo and Waldo, and each held a small mechanism. From the object in her right hand burst a gush of dazzling light, pulsating ten times per second; the mechanism in the left hand vented an almost solid tooth-chattering mass of sound: a throbbing scream in phase with the light: *erreek erreek erreek!* Waldo and Bo flinched and sagged back, their brain circuits overloaded and rendered numb. The gun dropped from Waldo's hand. Prepared for the event, Alice was less affected. She placed the beacon on the table, picked up the gun. Waldo, Bo and Raulf staggered and lurched, their brain-waves now surging at dis-orientation frequency.

Alice, her face taut with concentration, left the room. In the hall she sidled past Waldo's three hireling thugs, who stood indecisively, and so gained the street. From a nearby public telephone, she called the police, who dropped down from the sky two minutes later. Alice explained the circumstances; the police in short order brought forth a set of sullen captives.

Alice watched as they were loaded into the conveyance. "Goodbye, Waldo. Goodbye, Bo. At least you evaded your beating. I don't know what's going to happen to you, but I can't extend too much sympathy, because you've both been rascals."

Waldo asked sourly, "Do you make as much trouble as this wherever you go?"

Alice decided that the question had been asked for rhetorical effect and required no exact or accurate reply; she merely waved and watched as Waldo, Bo, Raulf Dido and the three thugs were wafted aloft and away.

Alice arrived back at the aerie halfway through the afternoon, to find that her father had completed his business. "I was hoping you'd get back early," said Merwyn Tynnott, "so that we could leave tonight. Did you have a good day?"

"It's been interesting," said Alice. "The teaching processes are spectacular and effective, but I wonder if by presenting events so categorically they might not stifle the students' imaginations?"

"Possible. Hard to say."

"Their point of view is urbanite, naturally. Still, the events speak for themselves, and I suspect that the student of history falls into urbanite doctrine through social pressure."

"Very likely so. Social pressure is stronger than logic."

"I had lunch at the Blue Lamp Tavern, a spooky old place."

"Yes. I know it well. It's a back-eddy of ancient times, and also something of an underworld hangout. Dozens of spacemen have disappeared from the Blue Lamp."

"I had an adventure there myself; in fact, Waldo Walberg misbehaved rather badly and I believe he's now been taken away for penal processing."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Merwyn Tynnott. "He'll miss Cloud-haven, especially if he's sent out to the starlands."

"It's a pity about poor Waldo, and Bodred as well. Bodred is the workman who flung his wrench upon my foot. You were quite right about his motives. I'm a trifle disillusioned, although I know I shouldn't be."

Merwyn Tynnott hugged his daughter and kissed the top of her head. "Don't worry another instant. We're off and away from Hant, and you never need come back."

"It's a strange wicked place," said Alice, "though I rather enjoyed Jillyville."

"Jillyville is always amusing."

They went into the dome; Commander Tynnott touched the controls, and the aerie drifted away to the southeast.