

The life of the woman Casperdan is documented in the finest detail, from birth to death, from head to toe, from likes to dislikes to indifferences.

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WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE . . .

Humans are like that.

The stallion Pericles we know only by his work.

Horses are like that.

We know it all began the year 1360 Imperial, 1822 After the Breakthrough, 2305 after the human Micah Schell found the hormone that broke the lock on rudimentary animal intelligence and enabled the higher mammals to attain at least the mental abilities of a human ten-year-old.

The quadrant was the Stone Crescent, the system Burr, the planet Calder, and the city Lalokindar.

Lalokindar was a wealthy city on a wealthy world. It ran away from the ocean in little bumps and curlicues. Behind it was virgin forest; in front, the Beach of Snow. The homes were magnificent and sat on spacious grounds, and that of the industrialist Dandavid was one of the most spacious and magnificent of all.

His daughter Casperdan was quite short, very brilliant, and by the standards of any age an extraordinary beauty. She had the looks and temperament of a Titania and the mind of a Baron Sachet. Tomorrow she came of legal age, which on Calder at that time was seventeen.

Under Calderian law she could then, as the oldest (and only) child, assume control of the family business or elect not to. Were one inclined to wager on the former course he would have found plenty of takers. It was only a formality. Girls of seventeen did not normally assume responsibility and control for multimil-lion-credit industrial complexes.

Besides, following her birthday Casperdan was to be wed to Comore du Sable, who was handsome and intelligent (though not so rich as she).

Casperdan was dressed in a blue nothing and sat on the balustrade of the wide balcony overlooking Snow Beach and a bay of the Greengreen Sea. The aged German shepherd trotted over to her, his claws clicking softly on the purple porphyry.

The dog was old and grayed and had been with the

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family for many years. He panted briefly, then spoke.

"Mistress, a strange mal is at the entrance."

Casperdan looked idly down at the dog.

"Who's its master?"

"He comes alone," the dog replied wonderingly.

"Well, tell him my father and mother are not at home and to come back tomorrow."

"Mistress"—the dog flattened his ears and lowered his head apologetically—"he says he comes to see you."

The girl laughed, and silver flute notes skittered off the polished stone floor.

"To see me? Stranger and stranger. And really alone?" She swung perfect legs off the balustrade. "What kind of mal is this?"

"A horse, mistress."

The flawless brow wrinkled. "Horse? Well, let's see this strange mal that travels alone."

They walked toward the foyer, past cages of force filled with rainbow-colored tropical birds.

"Tell me, Patch . . . what is a 'horse'?"

"A large four-legged vegetarian." The dog's brow twisted with the pain of remembering. Patch was extremely bright for a dog. . "There are none on Calder. I do not think there are any in the entire system."

"Off-planet, too?" Her curiosity was definitely piqued, now. "Why come to see me?"

"I do not know, mistress."

"And without even a human over h—"

Voice and feet stopped together.

The mal standing in the foyer was not as large as some. La Moure's elephants were much bigger. But it was extraordinary in other ways. Particularly the head. Why . . . it was exquisite! Truly breathtaking. Not an anthropomorphic beauty, but something uniquely its own.

Patch slipped away quietly.

The horse was black as the Pit, with tiny exceptions. The right front forelock was silver, as was the diamond on its forehead. And there was a single streak

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of silver partway through the long mane, and another in the black tail. Most mal wore only a lifepouch, and this one's was strapped to its neck. But it also wore an incongruous, utterly absurd hat of green felt, with a long feather, protruding out and back.

With a start she realized she'd been staring . . . very undignified. She started toward it again. Now the head swung to watch her. She slowed and stopped involuntarily, somehow constrained from moving too close.

"This is ridiculous! she thought. It's only a mere mal, and not even very big. Why, it's even herbivorous!

Then whence this strange fluttering deep in her tummy?

"You are Casperdan," said the horse suddenly. The voice was exceptional, too: a mellow tenor that tended to rise on concluding syllables, only to break and drop like a whitecap on the sea before the next word.

She started to stammer a reply, angrily composed herself.

"I am. I regret that I'm not familiar with your species, but I'll accept whatever the standard horse-man greeting is."

"I give no subservient greeting to any man," replied the horse. It shifted a hoof on the floor, which here was deep foam.

A stranger and insolent to boot, thought Casperdan furiously. She would call Patch and the household guards and . . . Her anger dissolved in confusion and uncertainty.

"How did you get past Row and Cuff?" Surely this harmless-looking, handless quadruped could not have overpowered the two lions. The horse smiled, showing white incisors.

"Cats, fortunately, are more subject to reason than many mal. And now I think I'll answer the rest of your questions.

"My name is Pericles. I come from Quaestor." Quaestor! Magic, distant, Imperial capital! Her

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anger at this maFs insolence was subsumed in excitement.

"You mean you've actually traveled all the way from the capital... to meet me?"

"There is no need to repeat," the horse murmured, "only to confirm. It took a great deal of time and searching to find someone like you. I need someone young . . . you are that. Only a young human would be responsive to what I have to offer. I needed someone bored, and you are wealthy as well as young."

"I'm not bored," Casperdan began defiantly, but he ignored her.

"I needed someone very rich, but without a multitude of ravenous relatives

hanging about. Your father is a self-made tycoon, your mother an orphan. You have no other relatives. And I needed someone with the intelligence and sensitivity to take orders from a mere mal."

This last was uttered with a disdain alien to Casperdan. Servants were not sarcastic.

"In sum," he concluded, "I need you."

"Indeed?" she mused, too overwhelmed by the outrageousness of this animal's words to compose a suitable rejoinder.

"Indeed," the horse echoed drily.

"And what, pray tell, do you need me for?"

The horse dropped its head and seemed to consider how best to continue. It looked oddly at her.

"Laugh now if you will. I have a dream that needs fulfilling."

"Do you, now? Really, this is becoming quite amusing." What a story she'd have to tell at the preparty tomorrow!

"Yes, I do. Hopefully it will not take too many years."

She couldn't help blurting, "Years!"

"I cannot tell for certain. You see, I am a genius and a poet. For me it's the dream part that's solid. The reality is what lacks certitude. That's one reason why I need human help. Need you."

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This time she just stared at him.

"Tomorrow," continued the horse easily, "you will not marry the man du Sable. Instead, you will sign the formal Control Contract and assume directorship of the Dan family business. You have the ability and brains to handle it. With my assistance the firm will prosper beyond the wildest dreams of your sire or any of the investors.

"In return, I will deed you a part of my dream, some of my poetry, and something few humans have had for millennia. I would not know of this last thing myself had I not chanced across it in the Imperial archives."

She was silent for a brief moment, then spoke brightly,

"I have a few questions."

"Of course."

"First, I'd like to know if horses as a species are insane, or if you are merely an isolated case."

He sighed, tossing his mane. "I didn't expect words to convince you." The long black hair made sailor's knots with sunbeams. "Do you know the Meadows of Blood?"

"Only by name." She was fascinated by the mention of the forbidden place.

"They're in the Ravaged Mountains. It's rumored to be rather a pretty place. But no one goes there. The winds above the canyon make it fatal to arrears."

"I have a car outside," the horse whispered. "The driver is mal and knows of a winding route by which, from time to time, it is possible to reach the Meadows. The winds war only above them. They are named, by the way, for the color of the flora there and not for a bit of human history . . . unusual.

"When the sun rises up hi the mouth of a certain canyon and engulfs the crimson grasses and flowers in light... well, it's more than 'rather pretty.'"

"You've already been there," she said.

"Yes, I've already been." He took several steps and

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that powerful, strange face was close to hers. One eye, she noticed offhandedly, was red, the other blue.

"Come with me now to the Meadows of Blood and I'll give you that piece of dream, that something few have had for thousands of years. I'll bring you back tonight and you can give me your answer on the way."

"If it's 'no,' then I'll depart quietly and you'll never see me again."  
Now, in addition to being both beautiful and intelligent, Casperdan also had her sire's recklessness.

"All right... I'll come."

When her parents returned home that night from the party and found their daughter gone, they were not distressed. After all, she was quite independent and, heavens, to be married tomorrow! When they learned from Patch that she'd gone off, not with a man, but with a strange mal, they were only mildly concerned. Casperdan was quite capable of taking care of herself. Had they known where she'd gone, things would have been different.

So nothing happened till the morrow.

"Good morning, Cas," said her father.

"Good morning, dear," her mother added. They were eating breakfast on the balcony. "Did you sleep well last night, and where did you go?"

The voice that answered was distant with other thoughts.

"I didn't sleep at all, and I went into the Ravaged Mountains. And there's no need to get excited, Father" —the old man sat back in his chair—"because as you see, I'm back safely and in one piece."

"But not unaffected," her mother stated, noticing the strangeness in her daughter's eyes.

"No, Mother, not unaffected. There will be no wedding." Before that lovely woman could reply, Casperdan turned to her father. "Dad, I want the contract of Control. I intend to begin as director of the firm eight o'clock tomorrow morning. No, better make it noon ... I'll need some sleep." She was smiling.

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ing faintly. "And I don't think I'm going to get any right now."

On that she was right. Dandavid, that usually even-tempered but mercurial gentleman, got very, very excited. Between his bellows and her sobs, her mother leveled questions and then accusations at her.

When they found out about the incipient changeover, the investors immediately threatened to challenge it in court—law or no law, they weren't going to be guided by the decisions of an inexperienced snippet. In fact, of all those affected, the intended bridegroom took it best. After all, he was handsome and intelligent (if not as rich), and could damn well find himself another spouse. He wished Casperdan well and consoled himself with his cello.

Her father (for her own good, of course) joined with the investors to challenge his daughter in the courts. He protested most strongly. The investors ranted and pounded their checkbooks.

But the judge was honest, the law machines incorruptible, and the precedents clear. Casperdan got her Contract and a year in which to prove herself.

Her first official action was to rename the firm Dream Enterprises. A strange name, many thought, for an industrial concern. But it was more distinctive than the old one. The investors grumbled, while the advertising men were delighted.

Then began a program of industrial expansion and acquisition unseen on somnolent Calder since the days of settlement. Dream Enterprises was suddenly everywhere and into everything. Mining, manufacturing, raw materials. These new divisions sprouted tentacles of their own and sucked in additional businesses.

Paper and plastics, electronics, nucleonics, hydro-logics and parafoih'ng, insurance and banking, tridee stations and liquid tanking, entertainments and hydroponics and velosheeting.

Dream Enterprises became the wealthiest firm on Calder, then in the entire Stone Crescent.

The investors and Dandavid clipped their coupons

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and kept their mouths shut, even to ignoring Cas-perdan's odd relationship with an outsystem mal.

Eventually there came a morning when Pericles looked up from his huge lounge in the executive suite and stared across the room at Casperdan in a manner different from before.

The stallion had another line of silver in his mane. The girl had blossomed figuratively and figurewise. Otherwise the years had left them unchanged.

"I've booked passage for us. Put Rollins in charge. He's a good man."

"Where are we going?" asked Casperdan. Not why nor for how long, but where. She'd learned a great deal about the horse in the past few years.

"Quaestor."

Sudden sparkle in beautiful green eyes. "And then will you give me back what I once had?"

The horse smiled and nodded. "If everything goes smoothly."

In the Crescent, Dream Enterprises was powerful and respected and kowtowed to. In the Imperial sector it was different. There were companies on the capital planet that would classify it as a modest little family business. Bureaucratic trip-wires here ran not for kilometers, but for light-years.

However, Pericles had threaded this maze many times before, and knew both men and mal who worked within the bowels of Imperial Government.

So it was that they eventually found themselves in the offices of Sim-sem Around, subminister for Unincorporated Imperial Territories.

Physically, Around wasn't quite that. But he did have a comfortable bureaucratic belly, a rectangular face framed by long bushy sideburns and curly red hair tinged with white. He wore the current fashion, a monocle. For all that, and his dry occupation, he proved charming and affable.

A small stream ran through his office, filled with trout and tadpoles and cattails. Casperdan reclined on

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a long couch made to resemble solid granite. Pericles preferred to stand.

"You want to buy some land, then?" queried Around after drinks and pleasantries had been exchanged.

"My associate will give you the details," Casperdan informed him. Around shifted his attention from human to horse without a pause. Naturally he'd assumed . . .

"Yes sir?"

"We wish to purchase a planet," said Pericles. "A small planet... not very important."

Around waited. Visitors interested in small transactions didn't get in to see the subminister himself.

"Just one?"

"One will be quite sufficient."

Around depressed a switch on his desk. A red light flashed on, indicated that all details of the conversation to follow were now being taken down for the Imperial records.

"Purpose of purchase?"

"Development."

"Name of world?"

"Earth."

"All right . . . fine," said the subminister. Abruptly, he looked confused.

Then he smiled. "Many planers are called Earth by their inhabitants or discoverers. Which particular Earth is this?"

"The Earth. Birthplace of mankind and malkind. Old Earth. Also known variously as Terra and Sol III."

The subminister shook his head. "Never heard of it."

"It is available, though?"

"We'll know in a second." Around studied the screen in his desk.

Actually it took several minutes before the gargantuan complex of metal and plastic and liquid buried deep in the soil beneath them could come up with a reply.

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"Here it is, finally," said Alround. "Yes, it's available ... by default, it seems. The price will be . . ." He named a figure which seemed astronomical to Casperdan and insanely low to the horse.

"Excellent!" husked Pericles. "Let us conclude the formalities now."

"Per," Casperdan began, looking at him uncertainly. "I don't know if we have enough ..."

"Some liquidation\* will surely be necessary, Casperdan, but we will manage." The subminister interrupted: "Excuse me ... there's something you should know before we go any further. I can sell you Old Earth, but there is an attendant difficulty."

"Problems can be solved, difficulties overcome, obstructions removed," said the horse irritably. "Please get on with it."

Alround sighed. "As you wish." He drummed the required buttons. "But you'll need more than your determination to get around this one."

"You see, it seems no one knows how to get to Old Earth anymore ... or even where it is."

Later, strolling among the teeming mobs of Imperial City, Casperdan ventured a hesitant opinion.

"I take it this means it's not time for me to receive my part of the dream again?"

"Sadly, no, my friend."

Her tone turned sharp. "Well, what do you intend to do now? We've just paid quite an enormous number of credits for a world located in obscurity, around the corner from no place."

"We shall return to Calder," said the horse with finality, "and continue to expand and develop the company." He pulled back thick lips in an equine smile.

"In all the research I did, in all my careful planning and preparation, never once did I consider that the location of the home world might have been lost."

"So now we must go back and hire researchers to research, historians to historize, and ships to search

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and scour the skies in sanguine directions. And wait."

A year passed, and another, and then they came in small multiples. Dream Enterprises burgeoned and grew, grew and thrived. It moved out of the Stone Crescent and extended its influence into other quadrants. It went into power generation and multiple metallurgy, into core mining and high fashion.

And finally, of necessity, into interstellar shipping.

There came the day when the captain with the stripped-down scoutship was presented to Casperdan and the horse Pericles in their executive office on the two hundred and twentieth floor of the Dream building.

Despite a long, long, lonely journey the captain was alert and smiling.

Smiling because the endless trips of dull searching were over. Smiling because he knew the company reward for whoever found a certain aged planet.

Yes, he'd found Old Earth. Yes, it was a long way off, and in a direction only recently suspected. Not in toward the galactic center, but out on the Arm. And yes, he could take them there right away.

The shuttleboat settled down into the atmosphere of the planet. In the distance, a small yellow sun burned smooth and even.

Pericles stood at the observation port of the shuttle as it drifted planetward. He wore a special protective suit, as did Casperdan. She spared a glance at the disconsolate mal. Then she did something she did very rarely. She patted his neck.

"You mustn't be too disappointed if it's not what you expected, Per." She was trying to be comforting. "History and reality have a way of not coinciding." It was quiet for a long time. Then the magnificent head, lowered now, turned to face her, Pericles snorted bleakly.

"My dear, dear Casperdan, I can speak eighteen languages fluently and get by

in several more, and

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there are no words in any of them for what I feel. 'Disappointment'? Consider a nova and call it warm. Regard Quaestor and label it well-off. Then look at me and call me disappointed."

"Perhaps," she continued, not knowing what else to say, "it will be better on the surface."

It was worse.

They came down in the midst of what the captain called a mild local storm. To Casperdan it was a neat slice of the mythical hell.

Stale yellow-brown air whipped and sliced its way over high dunes of dark sand. The uncaring mounds marched in endless waves to the shoreline. A dirty, dead beach melted into brackish water and a noisome green scum covered it as far as the eye could see. A few low scrubs and hearty weeds eked out a perilous existence among the marching dunes, needing only a chance change in the wind to be entombed alive.

In the distance, stark, bare mountains gave promise only of a higher desolation.

Pericles watched the stagnant sea for a long time. Over the intercom his voice was shrunken, the husk of a whisper, those compelling tones beaten down by the moaning wind.

"Is it like this everywhere, Captain?'"

The spacer replied unemotionally. "Mostly. I've seen far worse worlds, sir ... but this one is sure no prize. If I may be permitted an opinion, I'm damned if J can figure out why you want it."

"Can't you feel it, Captain?"

"Sir?" The spacer's expression under his faceglass was puzzled.

"No, no. I guess you cannot. But I do, Captain. Even though this is not the Earth I believed in, I still feel it. I fell in love with a dream. The dream seems to have departed long ago, but the memory of it is still here, still here . . ." Another long pause, then, "You said 'mostly'?"

"Well, yes." The spacer turned and gestured at the distant range. "Being the discovering vessel, we ran a

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pretty thorough survey, according to the general directives. There are places—near the poles, in the higher elevations, out in the middle of the three great oceans—where a certain amount of native life still survives. The cycle of life here has been shattered, but a few of the pieces are still around.

"But mostly, it's like this." He kicked at the sterile sand. "Hot or cold desert—take your pick. The soil's barren and infertile, the air unfit for man or mal.

"We did find some ruins . . . God, they were old! You saw the artifacts we brought back. But except for its historical value, this world strikes me as particularly worthless."

He threw another kick at the sand, sending flying shards of mica and feldspar and quartz onto the highways of the wind.

Pericles had been thinking. "We won't spend much more time here, Captain." The proud head lifted for a last look at the dead ocean. "There's not much to see."

They'd been back in the offices on Calder only a half-month when Pericles announced his decision.

Dream-partner or no dream-partner, Casperdan exploded.

"You quadrupedal cretin! Warm-blooded sack of fatuous platitudes! Terraforming is only a theory, a hypothesis in the minds of sick romantics. It's impossible!"

"No one has ever attempted it," countered the horse, unruffled by her outburst.

"But ... my God!" Casperdan ran delicate fingers through her flowing blond hair. "There are no facilities for doing such a thing ... no company, no special firms to consult. Why, half the industries that would be needed for such a task don't even exist."

"They will," Pericles declared.

"Oh, yes? And just where will they spring from?"

"You and I are going to create them."

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She pleaded with him. "Have you gone absolutely mad? We're not in the miracle business, you know."

The horse walked to the window and stared down at the Greengreen Sea. His reply was distant. "No . . . we're in the dream business . . . remember?"

A cloud of remembrance came over Casperdan's exquisite face. For a moment, she did—but it wasn't enough to stem the tide of objection. Though she stopped shouting.

"Please, Per . . . take a long, logical look at this before you commit yourself to something that can only hurt you worse in the end."

He turned and stared evenly at her. "Casperdan, for many, many years now I've done nothing but observe things with a reasoned eye, done nothing without thinking it through beginning, middle, and end and all possible ramifications, done nothing I wasn't absolutely sure of completing.

"Now I'm going to take a chance. Not because I want to do it this way, but because I've run out of options. I'm not mad, no ... but I am obsessed." He looked away from her.

"But I can't do it without you, damn it, and you know why ... no mal can bead a private concern that employs humans."

She threw up her hands and stalked back to her desk. It was silent in the office for many minutes. Then she spoke softly.

"Pericles, I don't share your obsession . . . I've matured, you know . . . now I think I can survive with just the memory of my dream-share. But you rescued me from my own narcissism. And you've given me ... other things. If you can't shake this psychotic notion of yours, I'll stay around till you can."

Horses and geniuses don't cry ... ah, but poets ...!

And that is how the irony came about—that the first world where terraforming was attempted was not some sterile alien globe, but Old Earth itself. Or as the horse

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Pericles is reputed to have said, "Remade in its own image."

The oceans were cleared ... the laborious, incredibly costly first step. That done, and with a little help from two thousand chemists and bioengineers, the atmosphere began to cleanse itself. That first new air was neither sweet nor fresh—but neither was it toxic.

Grasses are the shock troops of nature. Moved in first, the special tough strains took hold in the raped soil. Bacteria and nutrients were added, fast-multiplying strains that spread rapidly. From the beachheads near the Arctic and in the high mountains flora and fauna were reintroduced.

Then came the major reseeded of the superfast trees: spruce and white pine, juniper and birch, cypress and mori and teak, fir and ash. And from a tiny, museum on Duntroon, long preserved Sequoia and citrus.

Eventually there was a day when the first flowers were replanted. The hand-planting of the first bush—a green rose—was watched by the heads of the agricultural staffs, a black horse, and a ravishing woman in the postbloom of her first rejuvenation.

That's when Pericles registered the Articles. They aroused only minor interest within the sleepy, vast Empire. The subject was good for a few days' conversation before the multitudes returned to more important news.

But among the mal, there was something in the Articles and accompanying pictures that tugged at nerves long since sealed off in men and mankind by



time and by choice. Something that pulled each rough soul toward an unspectacular planet circling an unremarkable star in a distant corner of space.

So the mal went back to Old Earth. Not all, but many. They left the trappings of Imperial civilization and confusing intelligence and went to the first mal planet.

More simply, they went home.

There they labored not for man, but for themselves.

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And when a few interested humans applied for permission to emigrate there, they were turned back by the private patrol. For the Articles composed by the horse Pericles forbade the introduction of man to Old Earth. Those Articles were written in endurasteel, framed in paragraphs of molten duralloy. Neither human curiosity nor money could make a chip in them.

It was clear to judges and law machines that while the Articles (especially the phrase about "the meek finally inheriting the Earth") might not have been good manners or good taste, they were very good law.

It was finished.

It was secured.

It was given unto the mal till the end of time.

Casperdan and Pericles left the maze that was now Dream Enterprises and went to Old Earth. They came to stand on the same place where they'd stood decades before.

Now clean low surf grumbled and subsided on a beach of polished sand that was home to shellfish and worms and brittle stars..They stood on a field of low, waving green grass. In the distance a family of giraffe moved like sentient signal towers toward the horizon. The male saw them, swung its long neck in greeting. Pericles responded with a long, high whinny.

To their left, in the distance, the first mountains began. Not bare and empty now, but covered with a mat of thick evergreen crowned with new snow.

They breathed in the heady scent of fresh clover and distant honeysuckle.

"It's done," he said.

Casperdan nodded and began to remove her clothes. Someday she would bring a husband down here. She was the sole exception in the Articles. Her golden hair fell in waves to her waist. Someday, yes ... But for now...

"You know, Pericles, it really wasn't necessary. All this, I mean."

The stallion pawed at the thick loam underfoot.

"What percentage of dreams are necessary, Cas-

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perdan? You know, for many mal intelligence was not a gift but a curse. It was always that way for man, too, but he had more time to grow into it. For the mal it came like lightning, as a shock. The mal are still tied to their past—to this world. As I am still tied. Have you ever seen mal as happy as they are here?

"Certainly sentience came too quickly for the horse. According to the ancient texts we once had a special relationship with man that rivaled the dog's. That vanished millennia ago. The dog kept it, though, and so did the cat, and certain others. Other mal never missed it because they never had it. But the horse did, and couldn't cope with the knowledge of that loss that intelligence brought. There weren't many of us left, Casperdan.

"But we'll do well here. This is home. Man would feel it too, if he came here now. Feel it ... and ruin this world all over again. That's why I wrote the Articles."

She was clad only in shorts now and to her great surprise found she was trembling slightly. She hadn't done that since she was fifteen. How long ago was that? Good God, had she ever been fifteen? But her face and figure were those of a girl of twenty. Rejuvenation.

"Pericles, I want back what you promised. I want back what I had in the

Meadows of Blood in the Ravaged Mountains."

"Of course," he replied, as though it had happened yesterday. A mal's sense of time is different from man's, and Pericles' was different from that of most mal.

"You know, I have a confession to make."

She was startled to see that the relentless dreamer was embarrassed!

"It was done only to bribe you, you know. But in truth . . . in truth, I think I enjoyed it as much as you. And I'm ashamed, because I still don't understand why."

He kicked at the dirt.

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She smiled understandingly. "It's the old bonds you talk about, Per. I think they must work both ways."

She walked up to him and entwined her left hand in his mane, threw the other over his back. A pull and she was up. Her movement was done smoothly . . . she'd practiced it ten thousand times in her mind.

Both hands dug tightly into the silver-black mane. Leaning forward, she pressed her cheek against the cool neck and felt ropes of muscle taut beneath the skin. The anticipation was so painful it hurt to speak,

"I'm ready," she whispered breathlessly.

"So am I," he replied.

Then the horse Pericles gave her what few humans had had for millennia, what had been outlawed in the Declaration of Animal's Rights, what they'd shared in the Meadows of Blood a billion years ago.

Gave her back the small part of the dream that was hers.

Tail flying, hooves digging dirt, magnificent body moving effortlessly over the rolling hills and grass, the horse became brother to the wind as he and his rider thundered off toward the waiting mountains. . . .

And that's why there's confusion in the old records. Because they knew all about Casperdan in the finest detail, but all they knew about the horse Pericles was that he was a genius and a poet. Now, there's ample evidence as to his genius. But the inquisitive are puzzled when they search and find no record of his poetry.

Even if they knew, they wouldn't understand.

The poetry, you see, was when he moved.

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