

194 John Varley

"When did you change your mind?" she asked.

I thought back. "At first I thought it was while you were caring for me when I was so helpless. Now I can recall when it was. It was shortly after I walked out of the tent for that last night on the ground."

She couldn't find anything to say about that. She just beamed at me. I began to wonder what sort of papers I'd be signing when we got to Venusburg: adoption, or marriage contract.

I didn't worry about it. It's uncertainties like that that make life interesting. We got up together, leaving the pile of jewels on the floor. Walking softly, we hurried out to catch the blimp.

Golto /ing. Gotta Dance

Sailing in toward a rendezvous with Janus, Barnum and Bailey encountered a giant, pulsing quarter note. The stem was a good five kilometers tall. The note itself was a kilometer in diameter, and glowed a faint turquoise. It turned ponderously on its axis as they approached it.

"This must be the place," Barnum said to Bailey.

"Janus approach control to Barnum and Bailey," came a voice from the void, "You will encounter the dragline on the next revolution. You should be seeing the visual indicator in a few minutes."

Barnum looked down at the slowly turning irregular ball of rock and ice that was Janus, innermost satellite of Saturn. Something was coming up behind the curve of the horizon. It didn't take long for enough of it to become visible so they could see what it was. Barnum had a good laugh.

"Is that yours, or theirs?" he asked Bailey.

Bailey sniffed. "Theirs. Just how silly do you think I am?"

The object rising behind the curve of the satellite was a butterfly net, ten kilometers tall. It had a long, fluttering net trailing from a gigantic hoop. Bailey sniffed again, but applied the necessary vectors to position them for being swooped up in the preposterous thing.

"Come on, Bailey," Barnum chided. "You're just jealous because you didn't think of it first."

"Maybe so," the symb conceded. "Anyway, hold onto your hat, this is likely to be quite a jerk."

The illusion was carried as far as was practical, but

196 John Varley

Barnum noticed that the first tug of deceleration started sooner than one would expect if the transparent net was more than an illusion. The force built up gradually as the electromagnetic field clutched at the metal belt he had strapped around his waist. It lasted for about a minute. When it had trailed off, Janus no longer appeared to rotate beneath them. It was coming closer.

"Listen to this," Bailey said. Barnum's head was filled with music. It was bouncy, featuring the reedy, flatulent, yet engaging tones of a bass saxophone in a honky-tonk tune that neither of them could identify. They shifted position and could just make out the location of Pearly Gates, the only human settlement on Janus. It was easy to find because of the weaving, floating musical staffs that extruded themselves from

the spot like parallel strands of spider web.

The people who ran Pearly Gates were a barrel of laughs. All the actual structures that made up the above-ground parts of the settlement were disguised behind whimsical holographic projections. The whole place looked like a cross between a child's candy-land nightmare and an early Walt Disney cartoon.

Dominating the town was a giant calliope with pipes a thousand meters tall. There were fifteen of them, and they were all bouncing and swaying in time to the saxophone music. They would squat down as if taking a deep breath, then stand up again, emitting a colored smoke ring. The buildings, which Barnum knew were actually functional, uninteresting hemispheres, appeared to be square houses with flower boxes in the windows and cartoon eyes peering out the doors. They trembled and jiggled as if they were made of jello.

"Don't you think it's a trifle overdone?" Bailey asked.

"Depends on what you like. It's kind of cute, in its own gaudy way."

They drifted in through the spaghetti maze of lines, bars, sixteenth notes, rests, smoke rings, and blaring music. They plowed through an insubstantial eighth-note run, and Bailey killed their remaining velocity with the jets. They lighted softly in the barely perceptible gravity and made their way to one of the grinning buildings.

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 197

Coming up to the entrance of the building had been quite an experience. Barnum had reached for a button marked LOCK CYCLE and it had dodged out of his way, then turned into a tiny face, leering at him. Practical joke. The lock had opened anyway, actuated by his presence. Inside, Pearly Gates was not so flamboyant. The corridors looked decently like corridors, and the floors were solid and gray.

"I'd watch out, all the same," Bailey advised, darkly. "These people are real self-panickers. Their idea of a good laugh might be to dig a hole in the floor and cover it with a holo. Watch your step."

"Aw, don't be such a sore loser. You could spot something like that, couldn't you?"

Bailey didn't answer, and Barnum didn't pursue it. He knew the source of the symb's uneasiness and dislike of the station on Janus. Bailey wanted to get their business over as soon as possible and get back to the Ring, where he felt needed. Here, in a corridor filled with oxygen, Bailey was physically useless.

Bailey's function in the symbiotic team of Barnum and Bailey was to provide an environment of food, oxygen, and water for the human, Barnum. Conversely, Barnum provided food, carbon dioxide, and water for Bailey. Barnum was a human, physically unremarkable except for a surgical alteration of his knees that made them bend outward rather than forward, and the oversized hands, called peds, that grew out of his ankles where his feet used to be. Bailey, on the other hand, was nothing like a human.

Strictly speaking, Bailey was not even a he. Bailey was a plant, and Barnum thought of him as a male only because the voice in Barnum's head—Bailey's only means of communication—sounded masculine. Bailey had no shape of his own. He existed by containing Barnum and taking on part of his shape. He extended into Barnum's alimentary canal, in the mouth and all the way through to emerge at the anus, threading him like a needle. Together, the team looked like a human in a featureless spacesuit, with a bulbous head, a tight waist, and swollen hips. A ridiculously exaggerated female, if you wish.

198 John Varley

"You might as well start breathing again," Bailey said.

"What for? I will when I need to talk to someone who's not paired with a symb. In the meantime, why bother?"

"I just thought you'd like to get used to it."

"Oh, very well. If you think it's necessary."

So Bailey gradually withdrew the parts of him that filled Barnum's lungs and throat, freeing his speech apparatus to do what it hadn't done for over ten years. Barnum coughed as the air flowed into his throat. It was cold! Well, it felt like it, though it was actually at the standard seventy-two degrees. He was unused to it. His diaphragm gave one shudder then took over the chore of breathing as if his medulla had never been disconnected.

"There," he said aloud, surprised at how his voice sounded. "Satisfied?"

"It never hurts to do a little testing."

"Let's get this out in the open, shall we? I didn't want to come here any more than you did, but you know we had to. Are you going to give me trouble about it until we leave? We're supposed to be a team, remember?"

There was a sigh from his partner.

"I'm sorry, but that's just it. We *are* supposed to be a team, and out in the Ring we are. Neither of us is anything without the other. Here I'm just something you have to carry around. I can't walk, I can't talk; I'm revealed as the vegetable that I am."

Barnum was accustomed to the symb's periodic attacks of insecurity. In the Ring they never amounted to much. But when they entered a gravitational field Bailey was reminded of how ineffectual a being he was.

"Here you can breathe on your own," Bailey went on. "You could see on your own if I uncovered your eyes. By the way, do you—"

"Don't be silly. Why should I use my own eyes when you can give me a better picture than I could on my own?"

"In the Ring, that's true. But here all my extra senses are just excess mass. What good is an adjusted velocity display to you here, where the farthest thing I can sense is twenty meters off, and stationary?"

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 199

"Listen, you. Do you want to turn around and march back out that lock? We can. I'll do it if this is going to be such a trauma for you."

There was a long silence, and Barnum was flooded with a warm, apologetic sensation that left him weak at his splayed-out knees.

"There's no need to apologize," he went on in a more sympathetic tone. "I understand you. This is just something we have to do together, like everything else, the good along with the bad."

"I love you, Barnum."

"And you, silly."

The sign on the door read:

TYMPANI & RAGTIME TINPANALLEYCATS

Barnum and Bailey hesitated outside the door.

"What are you supposed to do, knock?" Barnum asked out loud. "It's been so long I've forgotten how."

"Just fold your fingers into a fist and—"

"Not that." He laughed, dispelling his momentary nervousness. "I've forgotten the politenesses of human society. Well, they do it in all the tapes I ever saw." He knocked on the door and it opened by itself on the second rap.

There was a man sitting behind a desk with his bare feet propped up on it. Barnum had been prepared for the shock of seeing another human, one who was *not* enclosed in a symb, for he had encountered several of them on the way to the offices of Tympani and Ragtime. But he was still reeling from the unfamiliarity of it. The man seemed to realize it and silently gestured him to a chair. He sat down in it, thinking that in the low gravity it really wasn't necessary. But somehow he was grateful. The man didn't say anything for a long while, giving Barnum time to settle down and arrange his thoughts. Barnum spent the time looking the man over carefully.

Several things were apparent about him; most blatantly, he was not a fashionable man. Shoes had been virtually

200 John Varley

extinct for over a century for the simple reason that there was nothing to walk on but padded floors. However, current fashion decreed that Shoes Are Worn.

The man was young-looking, having halted his growth at around twenty years. He was dressed in a holo suit, a generated illusion of flowing color that refused to stay in one spot or take on a definite form. Under the suit he might well have been nude, but Barnum couldn't tell.

"You're Barnum and Bailey, right?" the man said.

"Yes. And you're Tympani?"

"Ragtime. Tympani will be here later. I'm pleased to meet you. Have any trouble on the way down? This is your first visit, I think you said."

"Yes, it is. No trouble. And thank you, incidentally, for the ferry fee."

He waved it away. "Don't concern yourself. It's all in the overhead. We're taking a chance that you'll be good enough to repay that many times over. We're right enough times that we don't lose money on it. Most of your people out there can't afford being landed on Janus, and then where would we be? We'd have to go out to you. Cheaper this way."

"I suppose it is." He was silent again. He noticed that his throat was beginning to get sore with the unaccustomed effort of talking. No sooner had the thought been formed than he felt Bailey go into action. The internal tendril that had been withdrawn flicked up out of his stomach and lubricated his larynx. The pain died away as the nerve endings were suppressed. It's all in your head, anyway, he told himself.

"Who recommended us to you?" Ragtime said.

"Who . . . oh, it was . . . who was it, Bailey?" He realized too late that he had spoken it aloud. He hadn't wanted to, he had a vague feeling that it might be impolite to speak to his symb that way. Ragtime wouldn't hear the answer, of course.

"It was Antigone," Bailey supplied.

"Thanks," Barnum said, silently this time. "A man named Antigone," he told Ragtime.

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 201

The man made a note of that, and looked up again, smiling.

"Well now. What is it you wanted to show us?"

Barnum was about to describe their work to Ragtime when the door burst open and a woman sailed in. She sailed in the literal sense, banking off the door jamb, grabbing at the door with her left ped and slamming it shut in one smooth motion, then spinning in the air to kiss the floor with the tips of her fingers, using them to slow her speed until she was stopped in front of the desk, leaning over it and talking excitedly to Ragtime. Barnum was surprised that she had peds instead of feet; he had thought that no one used them in Pearly Gates. They made walking awkward. But she didn't seem interested in walking.

"Wait till you hear what Myers has done now!" she said, almost levitating in her enthusiasm. Her ped-fingers worked in the carpet as she talked. "He realigned the sensors in the right anterior ganglia, and you won't believe what it does to the—"

"We have a client, Tympani."

She turned and saw the symb-human pair sitting behind her. She put her hand to her mouth as if to hush herself, but she was smiling behind it. She moved over to them (it couldn't be called walking in the low gravity; she seemed to accomplish it by perching on two fingers of each of her peds and walking on them, which made it look like she was floating). She reached them and extended her hand.

She was wearing a holo suit like Ragtime's but instead of wearing the projector around her waist, as he did, she had it mounted on a ring. When she extended her hand, the holo generator had to compensate by weaving larger and thinner webs of light around her body. It looked like an explosion of pastels, and left her body barely covered. What Barnum saw could have been a girl of sixteen: lanky, thin hips and breasts, and two blonde braids that reached to her waist. But her movements belied that. There was no adolescent awkwardness there.

"I'm Tympani," she said, taking his hand. Bailey was

202 John Varley

taken by surprise and didn't know whether to bare his hand or not. So what she grasped was Barnum's hand covered by the three-centimeter padding of Bailey. She didn't seem to mind.

"You must be Barnum and Bailey. Do you know who the original Barnum and Bailey were?"

"Yes, they're the people who built your big calliope outside."

She laughed. "The place *is* a kind of a circus, until you get used to it. Rag tells me you have something to sell us."

"I hope so."

"You've come to the right place. Rag's the business side of the company; I'm the talent. So I'm the one you'll be selling to. I don't suppose you have anything written down?"

He made a wry face, then remembered she couldn't see anything but a blank stretch of green with a hole for his mouth. It took some time to get used to dealing with people again.

"I don't even know how to read music."

She sighed, but didn't seem unhappy. "I figured as much. So few of you Ringers do. Honestly, if I could ever figure out what it is that turns you people into artists I could get rich."

"The only way to do that is to go out in the Ring and see for yourself."

"Right," she said, a little embarrassed. She looked away from the misshapen thing sitting in the chair. The only way to discover the magic of a life in the Ring was to go out there, and the only way to do that was to adopt a symb. Forever give up your individuality and become a part of a team. Not many people could do that.

"We might 'as well get started," she said, standing and patting her thighs to cover her nervousness. "The practice room is through that door."

He followed her into a dimly lit room that seemed to be half-buried in paper. He hadn't realized that any business could require so much paper. Their policy seemed to be to stack it up and when the stack got too high and tumbled into a landslide, to kick it back into a corner. Sheets of

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 203

music crunched under his peds as he followed her to the corner of the room where the synthesizer keyboard stood beneath a lamp. The rest of the room was in shadows, but the keys gleamed brightly in their ancient array of black and white.

Tympani took off her ring and sat at the keyboard. "The damn holo gets in my way," she explained. "I can't see the keys." Barnum noticed for the first time that there was another keyboard on the floor, down in the shadows, and her peds were poised over it. He wondered if that was the only reason she wore them. Having seen her walk, he doubted it.

She sat still for a moment, then looked over to him expectantly.

"Tell me about it," she said in a whisper.

He didn't know what to say.

"Tell you about it? Just tell you?"

She laughed and relaxed again, hands in her lap.

"I was kidding. But we have to get the music out of your head and onto that tape some way. How would you prefer? I heard that a Beethoven symphony was once written out in English, each chord and run described in detail. I can't imagine why anyone would *want* to, but someone did. It made quite a thick book. We can do it that way. Or surely you can think of another." He was silent. Until she sat at the keyboard, he hadn't really thought about that part of it. He knew his music, knew it to the last hemi-semi-demi-quaver. How to get it out?

"What's the first note?" she prompted.

He was ashamed again. "I don't even know the names of the notes," he confessed.

She was not surprised. "Sing it."

"I ... I've never tried to sing it."

"Try now." She sat up straight, looking at him with a friendly smile, not coaxing, but encouraging.

"I can hear it," he said, desperately. "Every note, every dissonance—is that the right word?"

She grinned. "It's *a* right word, but I don't know if you know what it means. It's the quality of sound produced when the vibrations don't mesh harmoniously: rf/V-chord, it

204 John Varley

doesn't produce a sonically pleasing chord. Like this," and she pressed two keys close together, tried several others, then played with the knobs mounted over the keyboard until the two notes were only a few vibrations apart and wavered sinuously. "They don't automatically please the ear, but in the right context they can make you sit up and take notice. Is your music discordant?"

"Some places. Is that bad?"

"Not at all. Used right, it's . . . well, not pleasing exactly . . ." She spread her arms helplessly. "Talking about music is a pretty frustrating business, at best. Singing's much friendlier. Are you going to sing for me, love, or must I try to wade through your descriptions?"

Hesitantly, he sang the first three notes of his piece, knowing that they sounded nothing like the orchestra that crashed through his head, but desperate to try something. She took it up, playing the three unmodulated tones on the synthesizer: three pure sounds that were pretty, but lifeless and light-years away from what he wanted.

"No, no, it has to be richer."

"All right, I'll play what I think of as richer, and we'll see if we speak the same language." She turned some knobs and played the three notes again, this time giving them the modulations of a string bass.

"That's closer. But it's still not there."

"Don't despair," she said, waving her hand at the bank of dials before her. "Each of these will produce a different effect, singly or in combination. I'm reliably informed that the permutations are infinite. So somewhere in there we'll find your tune. Now. Which way should we go; this way, or this?"

Twisting the knob she touched in one direction made the sound become tinnier; the other, brassier, with a hint of trumpets.

He sat up. That was getting closer still, but it lacked the richness of the sounds in his brain. He had her turn the knob back and forth, finally settled on the place that most nearly approached his phantom tune. She tried another knob, and the result was an even closer approach. But it lacked something.

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 205

Getting more and more involved, Barnum found himself standing over her shoulder as she tried another knob. That was closer still, but.. .

Feverishly, he sat beside her on the bench and reached out for the knob. He tuned it carefully, then

realized what he had done.

"Do you mind?" he asked. "It's so much easier sitting here and turning them myself."

She slapped him on the shoulder. "You dope," she laughed, "I've been trying to get you over here for the last fifteen minutes. Do you think I could really do this by myself? That Beethoven story was a lie."

"What will we do, then?"

"What *you'll* do is fiddle with this machine, with me here to help you and tell you how to get what you want. When you get it right, I'll play it for you. Believe me, I've done this too many times to think you could sit over there and describe it to me. Now *sing!*"

He sang. Eight hours later Ragtime came quietly into the room and put a plate of sandwiches and a pot of coffee on the table beside them. Barnum was still singing, and the synthesizer was singing along with him.

Barnum came swimming out of his creative fog, aware that something was hovering in his field of vision, interfering with his view of the keyboard. Something white and steaming, at the end of a long . . .

It was a coffee cup, held in Tympani's hand. He looked at her face and she tactfully said nothing.

While working at the synthesizer, Barnum and Bailey had virtually fused into a single being. That was appropriate, since the music Barnum was trying to sell was the product of their joint mind. It belonged to both of them. Now he wrenched himself away from his partner, far enough away that talking to him became a little more than talking to himself.

"How about it, Bailey? Should we have some?"

"I don't see why not. I've had to expend quite a bit of water vapor to keep you cool in this place. It could stand replenishing."

206 John Varley

"Listen, why don't you roll back from my hands? It would make it easier to handle those controls; give me finer manipulation, see? Besides, I'm not sure if it's polite to shake hands with her without actually touching flesh."

Bailey said nothing, but his fluid body drew back quickly from Barnum's hands. Barnum reached out and took the offered cup, starting at the unfamiliar sensation of heat in his own nerve endings. Tympani was unaware of the discussion; it had taken only a second.

The sensation was explosive when it went down his throat. He gasped, and Tympani looked worried.

"Take it easy there, friend. You've got to get your nerves back in shape for something as hot as that." She took a careful sip and turned back to the keyboard. Barnum set his cup down and joined her. But it seemed like time for a recess and he couldn't get back into the music. She recognized this and relaxed, taking a sandwich and eating it as if she were starving.

"She *is* starving, you dope," Bailey said. "Or at least very hungry. She hasn't had anything to eat for eight hours, and she doesn't have a symb recycling her wastes into food and dripping it into her veins. So she gets hungry. Remember?"

"I remember. I'd forgotten." He looked at the pile of sandwiches. "I wonder what it would feel like to eat one of those?"

"Like this." Barnum's mouth was flooded with the taste of a tuna salad sandwich on whole wheat. Bailey produced this trick, like all his others, by direct stimulation of the sensorium. With no trouble at all he could produce completely new sensations simply by shorting one sector of Barnum's brain into another. If Barnum wanted to know what the taste of a tuna sandwich sounded like, Bailey could let him hear.

"All right. And I won't protest that I didn't feel the bite of it against my teeth, because I know you can produce that, too. And all the sensations of chewing and swallowing it, and much more besides. Still," and his thoughts took on a tone that Bailey wasn't sure he liked, "I wonder if it would be the polite thing to eat one of them?"

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 207

"What's all this politeness all of a sudden?" Bailey exploded. "Eat it if you like, but I'll never know why. Be a carnivorous animal and see if I care."

"Temper, temper," Barnum chided, with tenderness in his voice. "Settle down, chum. I'm not going anywhere without you. But we have to get along with these people. I'm just trying to be diplomatic."

"Eat it, then," Bailey sighed. "You'll ruin my ecology schedules for months—what'll I do with all that extra protein?—but why should you care about that?"

Barnum laughed silently. He knew that Bailey could do anything he liked with it: ingest it, refine it, burn it, or simply contain it and expel it at the first opportunity. He reached for a sandwich and felt the thick substance of Bailey's skin draw back from his face as he raised it to his mouth.

He had expected a brighter light, but he shouldn't have. He was using his own retinas to see with for the first time in years, but it was no different from the cortex-induced pictures Bailey had shown him all that time.

"You have a nice face," Tympani said, around a mouthful of sandwich. "I thought you would have. You painted a very nice picture of yourself."

"I did?" Barnum asked, intrigued. "What do you mean?"

"Your music. It reflects you. Oh, I don't see everything in your eyes that I saw in the music, but I never do. The rest of it is Bailey, your friend. And I can't read his expression."

"No, I guess you couldn't. But can you tell anything about him?"

She thought about it, then turned to the keyboard. She picked out a theme they had worried out a few hours before, played it a little faster and with subtle alterations in the tonality. It was a happy fragment, with a hint of something just out of reach.

"That's Bailey. He's worried about something. If experience is any guide, it's being here at Pearly Gates. Symbs don't like to come here, or anywhere there's gravity. It makes them feel not needed."

"Hear that?" he asked his silent partner.

208 John Varley

"Umm."

"And that's so silly," she went on. "I don't know about it firsthand, obviously, but I've met and talked to a lot of pairs. As far as I can see, the bond between a human and a symb is ... well, it makes a mother cat

dying to defend her kittens seem like a case of casual affection. I guess you know that better than I could ever say, though."

"You stated it well," he said.

Bailey made a grudging sign of approval, a mental sheepish grin. "She's outpointed me, meat-eater. I'll shut up and let you two talk without me intruding my baseless insecurities."

"You relaxed him," Barnum told her, happily. "You've even got him making jokes about himself. That's no small accomplishment, because he takes himself pretty seriously."

"That's not fair, I can't defend myself."

"I thought you were going to be quiet?"

The work proceeded smoothly, though it was running longer than Bailey would have liked. After three days of transcribing, the music was beginning to take shape. A time came when Tympani could press a button and have the machine play it back: it was much more than the skeletal outline they had evolved on the first day but still needed finishing touches.

"How about 'Contrapunctual Cantata'?" Tympani asked.

"What?"

"For a title. It has to have a title. I've been thinking about it, and coined that word. It fits, because the piece is very metrical in construction: tight, on time, on the beat. Yet it has a strong counterpoint in the woodwinds."

"That's the reedy sections, right?"

"Yes. What do you think?"

"Bailey wants to know what a cantata is."

Tympani shrugged her shoulders, but looked guilty. "To tell you the truth, I stuck that in for alliteration. Maybe as a selling point. Actually, a cantata is sung, and you don't have anything like voices in this. You sure you couldn't work some in?"

Barnum considered it. "No."

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 209

"It's your decision, of course." She seemed about to say something else but decided against it.

"Look, I don't care too much about the title," Barnum said. "Will it help you to sell it, naming it that?"

"Might."

"Then do as you please."

"Thanks. I've got Rag working on some preliminary publicity. We both think this has possibilities. He liked the title, and he's pretty good at knowing what will sell. He likes the piece, too."

"How much longer before we'll have it ready?"

"Not too long. Two more days. Are you getting tired of it?"

"A little. I'd like to get back to the Ring. So would Bailey."

She frowned at him, pouting her lower lip. "That means I won't be seeing you for ten years. This sure can be a slow business. It takes forever to develop new talent."

"Why are you in it?"

She thought about it. "I guess because music is what I like, and Janus is where the most innovative music in the system is born and bred. No one else can compete with you Ringers."

He was about to ask her why she didn't pair up and see what it was like, firsthand. But something held him back, some unspoken taboo she had set up; or perhaps it was him. Truthfully, he could no longer understand why *everyone* didn't pair with a symb. It seemed the only sane way to live. But he knew that many found the idea unattractive, even repugnant.

After the fourth recording session Tympani relaxed by playing the synthesizer for the pair. They had known she was good, and their opinion was confirmed by the artistry she displayed at the keyboard.

Tympani had made a study of musical history. She could play Bach or Beethoven as easily as the works of the modern composers like Barnum. She performed Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, first movement. With her two hands and two pedals she had no trouble at all in making an

210 John Varley

exact reproduction of a full symphony orchestra. But she didn't limit herself to that. The music would segue imperceptibly from the traditional strings into the concrete sounds that only an electronic instrument could produce. She followed it with something by Ravel that Barnum had never heard, then an early composition by Riker. After that, she amused him with some Joplin rags and a march by John Philip Sousa. She allowed herself no license on these, playing them with the exact instrumentation indicated by the composer.

Then she moved into another march. This one was incredibly lively, full of chromatic runs that soared and swooped. She played it with a precision in the bass parts that the old musicians could never have achieved. Barnum was reminded of old films seen as a child, films full of snarling lions in cages and elephants bedecked with feathers.

"What was that?" he asked when she was through.

"Funny you should ask, Mr. Barnum. That was an old circus march called 'Thunder and Blazes.' Or some call it 'Entry of the Gladiators.' There's some confusion among the scholars. Some say it had a third title, 'Barnum and Bailey's Favorite,' but the majority think that was another one. If it was, it's lost, and too bad. But everyone is sure that Barnum and Bailey liked this one, too. What do you think of it?"

"I like it. Would you play it again?"

She did, and later a third time, because Bailey wanted to be sure it was safe in Barnum's memory where they could replay it later.

Tympani turned the machine off and rested her elbows on the keyboard.

"When you go back out," she said, "why don't you give some thought to working in a synapticon part for your next work?"

"What's a synapticon?"

She stared at him, not believing what she had heard. Then her expression changed to one of delight.

"You really don't know? Then you have something to learn." And she bounced over to her desk, grabbed some-

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 211

thing with her peds, and hopped back to the synthesizer. It was a small black box with a strap and a wire with an input jack at one end. She turned her back to him and parted her hair at the base of her skull.

"Will you plug me in?" she asked.

Barnum saw the tiny gold socket buried in her hair, the kind that enabled one to interface directly with a computer. He inserted the plug into it and she strapped the box around her neck. It was severely functional, and had an improvised, bread-boarded look about it, scarred with tool marks and chipped paint. It gave the impression of having been tinkered with almost daily.

"It's still in the development process," she said. "Myers—he's the guy who invented it—has been playing with it, adding things. When we get it right we'll market it as a necklace. The circuitry can be compacted quite a bit. The first one had a wire that connected it to the speaker, which hampered my style considerably. But this one has a transmitter. You'll see what I mean. Come on, there isn't room in here."

She led the way back to the outer office and turned on a big speaker against the wall.

"What it does," she said, standing in the middle of the room with her hands at her sides, "is translate body motion into music. It measures the tensions in the body nerve network, amplifies them, and ... well, I'll show you what I mean. This position is null; no sound is produced." She was standing straight, but relaxed, peds together, hands at her sides, head slightly lowered.

She brought her arm up in front of her, reaching with her hand, and the speaker behind her made a swooping sound up the scale, breaking into a chord as her fingers closed on the invisible tone in the air. She bent her knee forward and a soft bass note crept in, strengthening as she tensed the muscles in her thighs. She added more harmonics with her other hand, then abruptly cocked her body to one side, exploding the sound into a cascade of chords. Barnum sat up straight, the hairs on his arms and spine sitting up with him.

Tympani couldn't see him. She was lost in a world that

212 John Varley

existed slightly out of phase with the real one, a world where dance was music and her body was the instrument. Her eyeblinks became staccato punctuating phrases and her breathing provided a solid rhythmic base for the nets of sound her arms and legs and fingers were weaving.

To Barnum and Bailey the beauty of it lay in the perfect fitting together of movement and sound. The pair had thought it would be just a novelty, that she would be sweating to twist her body into shapes that were awkward and unnatural to reach the notes she was after. But it wasn't like that. Each element shaped the other. Both the music and the dance were improvised as she went along and were subordinate to no rules but her own internal ones.

When she finally came to rest, balancing on the tips of her peds and letting the sound die away to nothingness, Barnum was almost numb. And he was surprised to hear the sound of hands clapping. He realized it was his own hands, but he wasn't clapping them. It was Bailey. Bailey had *never* taken over motor control.

They had to have all the details. Bailey was overwhelmed by the new art form and grew so impatient with relaying questions through Barnum that he almost asked to take over Barnum's vocal cords for a while.

Tympani was surprised at the degree of enthusiasm. She was a strong proponent of the synapticon but had not met much success in her efforts to popularize it. It had its limitations, and was viewed as an interesting but passing fad.

"What limitations?" Bailey asked, and Barnum vocalized.

"Basically, it needs free-fall performance to be fully effective. There are residual tones that can't be eliminated when you're standing up in gravity, even on Janus. And I can't stay in the air long enough here. You evidently didn't notice it, but I was unable to introduce many variations under these conditions."

Barnum saw something at once. "Then I should have one installed. That way I can play it as I move through the Ring."

Tympani brushed a strand of hair out of her eyes. She was covered in sweat from her fifteen-minute performance, and her face was flushed. Barnum almost didn't hear her

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 213

reply, he was so intent on the harmony of motion in that simple movement. And the synapticon was turned off.

"Maybe you should. But I'd wait if I were you." Barnum was about to ask why but she went on quickly. "It isn't an exact instrument yet, but we're working on it, refining it every day. Part of the problem, you see, is that it takes special training to operate it so it produces more than white noise. I wasn't strictly truthful with you when I told you how it works."

"How so?"

"Well, I said it measures tensions in nerves and translates it. Where are most of the nerves in the body?"

Barnum saw it then. "In the brain."

"Right. So mood is even more important in this than in most music. Have you ever worked with an alpha-wave device? By listening to a tone you can control certain functions of your brain. It takes practice. The brain provides the reservoir of tone for the synapticon, modulates the whole composition. If you aren't in control of it, it comes out as noise."

"How long have you been working with it?"

"About three years."

While Barnum and Bailey were working with her, Tympani had to adjust her day and night cycles to fit with his biological processes. The pair spent the periods of sunlight stretched out in Janus's municipal kitchen.

The kitchen was a free service provided by the community, one that was well worth the cost, since without it paired humans would find it impossible to remain on Janus for more than a few days. It was a bulldozed plain, three kilometers square, marked off in a grid with sections one hundred meters on an edge. Barnum and Bailey didn't care for it—none of the pairs liked it much—but it was the best they could do in a gravity field.

No closed ecology is truly closed. The same heat cannot be reused endlessly, as raw materials can. Heat must be added, energy must be pumped in somewhere along the line to enable the plant component of the pair to synthesize the carbohydrates needed by the animal component. Bailey

214 John Varley

could use some of the low-level heat generated when Barnum's body broke down these molecules, but that process would soon lead to ecological bankruptcy.

The symb's solution was photosynthesis, like any other plant's, though the chemicals Bailey employed for it bore only a vague resemblance to chlorophyll. Photosynthesis requires large amounts of plant surface, much more than is available on an area the size of a human. And the intensity of sunlight at Saturn's orbit was only one hundredth what it was at Earth's.

Barnum walked carefully along one of the white lines of the grid. To his left and right, humans were reclining in the centers of the large squares. They were enclosed in only the thinnest coating of symb; the rest of the symb's mass was spread in a sheet of living film, almost invisible except as a sheen on the flat ground. In space, this sunflower was formed by spinning slowly and letting centrifugal force form the large parabolic organ. Here it lay inert on the ground, pulled out by mechanical devices at the corners of the square. Symb's did not have the musculature to do it themselves.

No part of their stay on Janus made them yearn for the Rings as much as the kitchen. Barnum reclined in the middle of an empty square and let the mechanical claws fit themselves to Bailey's outer tegument. They began to pull, slowly, and Bailey was stretched.

In the Ring they were never more than ten kilometers from the Upper Half. They could drift up there and deploy the sunflower, dream away a few hours, then use the light pressure to push them back into the shaded parts of the Ring. It was nice; it was not exactly sleep, not exactly anything in human experience. It was plant consciousness, a dreamless, simple awareness of the universe, unencumbered with thought processes.

Barnum grumbled now as the sunflower was spread on the ground around them. Though the energy-intake phase of their existence was *not* sleep, several days of trying to accomplish it in gravity left Barnum with symptoms very like lack of sleep. They were both getting irritable. They were eager to return to weightlessness.

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 215

He felt the pleasant lethargy creep over him. Beneath him, Bailey was extending powerful rootlets into the naked rock, using acid compounds to eat into it and obtain the small amounts of replacement mass the pair needed.

"So when are we going?" Bailey asked, quietly.

"Any day, now. Any day." Barnum was drowsy. He could feel the sun starting to heat the fluid in Bailey's sunflower. He was like a daisy nodding lazily in a green pasture.

"I guess I don't need to point it out, but the transcription is complete. There's no need for us to stay."

"I know."

That night Tympani danced again. She made it slow, with none of the flying leaps and swelling crescendos of the first time. And slowly, almost imperceptibly, a theme crept in. It was changed, rearranged; it was a run here and a phrase there. It never quite became melodic, as it was on the tape,

but that was only right. It had been scored for strings, brass, and many other instruments but they hadn't written in a tympani part. She had to transpose for her instrument. It was still contrapunctual.

When she was done she told them of her most successful concert, the one that had almost captured the public fancy. It had been a duet, she and her partner playing the same synapticon while they made love.

The first and second movements had been well received.

"Then we reached the finale," she remembered, wryly, "and we suddenly lost sight of the harmonies and it sounded like, well, one reviewer mentioned 'the death agonies of a hyena.' I'm afraid we didn't hear it."

"Who was it? Ragtime?"

She laughed. "Him? No, he doesn't know anything about music. He makes love all right, but he couldn't do it in three-quarter time. It was Myers, the guy who invented the synapticon. But he's more of an engineer than a musician. I haven't really found a good partner for that, and anyway, I wouldn't do it in public again. Those reviews hurt."

"But I get the idea you feel the ideal conditions for mak-

216 John Varley

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 217

ing music with it would be a duet, in free fall, while making love."

She snorted. "Did I say that?" She was quiet for a long time.

"Maybe it is," she finally conceded. She sighed. "The nature of the instrument is such that the most powerful music is made when the body is most in tune with its surroundings, and I can't think of a better time than when I'm approaching an orgasm."

"Why didn't it work, then?"

"Maybe I shouldn't say this, but Myers blew it. He got excited, which is the whole point, of course, but he couldn't control it. There I was, tuned like a Stradivarius, feeling heavenly harps playing inside me, and he starts blasting out a jungle rhythm on a kazoo. I'm not going through that again. I'll stick to the traditional ballet like I did tonight."

"Tympani," Barnum blurted, "I could make love in three-quarter time."

She got up and paced around the room, looking at him from time to time. He couldn't see through her eyes, but felt uncomfortably aware that she saw a grotesque green blob with a human face set high up in a mass of putty. He felt a twinge of resentment for Bailey's exterior. Why couldn't she see *him*? He was in there, buried alive. For the first time he felt almost imprisoned. Bailey cringed away from the feeling.

"Is that an invitation?" she asked.

"Yes."

"But you don't have a synapticon."

"Me and Bailey talked it over. He thinks he can function as one. After all, he does much the same thing every second of our lives. He's very adept at rearranging nerve impulses, both in my brain and my body. He more or less lives in my nervous system."

She was momentarily speechless.

"You say you can make music . . . and hear it, without an instrument at all? Bailey does this for you?"

"Sure. We just hadn't thought of routing body movements through the auditory part of the brain. That's what you're doing."

She opened her mouth to say something, then closed it again. She seemed undecided about what to do.

"Tympani, why don't you pair up and go out into the Ring? Wait a minute; hear us out. You told me that my music was great and you think it might even sell. How did I do that? Do you ever think about it?"

"I think about it a lot," she muttered, looking away from him.

"When I came here I didn't even know the names of the notes that were in my head. I was ignorant. I still don't know much. But I write music. And you, you know more about music than anyone I've ever met; you love it, you play it with beauty and skill. But what do you create?"

"I've written things," she said, defensively. "Oh, all right. They weren't any good. I don't seem to have the talent in that direction."

"But I'm proof that you don't need it. I didn't write that music; neither did Bailey. We watched it and listened to it happening all around us. You can't imagine what it's like out there. It's all the music you ever heard."

At first consideration it seemed logical to many that the best art in the system should issue from the Rings of Saturn. Not until humanity reaches Beta Lyrae or farther will a more beautiful place to live be found. Surely an artist could draw endless inspiration from the sights to be seen in the Ring. But artists are rare. How could the Ring produce art in every human who lived there?

The artistic life of the solar system had been dominated by Ringers for over a century. If it was the heroic scale of the Rings and their superb beauty that had caused this, one might expect the art produced to be mainly heroic in nature and beautiful in tone and execution. Such had never been the case. The paintings, poetry, writing, and music of the Ringers covered the entire range of human experience and then went a step beyond.

A man or a woman would arrive at Janus for any of a

L

218 John Varley

variety of reasons, determined to abandon his or her former life and pair with a symb. About a dozen people departed like that each day, not to be heard of for up to a decade. They were a reasonable cross section of the race, ranging from the capable to the helpless, some of them kind and others cruel. There were geniuses among them, and idiots. They were precisely as young, old, sympathetic, callous, talented, useless, vulnerable, and fallible as any random sample of humanity must be. Few of them had any training or inclination in the fields of painting or music or writing.

Some of them died. The Rings, after all, were hazardous. These people had no way of learning how to survive out there except by trying and succeeding. But most came back. And they came back with pictures and songs and stories.

Agency was the only industry on Janus. It took a special kind of agent, because few Ringers could walk into an office and present a finished work of any kind. A literary agent had the easiest job. But a tinpanalleycat had to be ready to teach some rudiments of music to the composer who knew nothing about notation.

The rewards were high. Ringer art was statistically about ten times more likely to sell than art from anywhere else in the system. Better yet, the agent took nearly all the profits instead of a commission, and the artists were never pressuring for more. Ringers had little use for money. Often, an agent could retire on the proceeds of one successful sale.

But the fundamental question of why Ringers produced art was unanswered.

Barnum didn't know. He had some ideas, partially confirmed by Bailey. It was tied up in the blending of the human and symb mind. A Ringer was more than a human, and yet still human. When combined with a symb, something else was created. It was not under their control. The best way Barnum had been able to express it to himself was by saying that this meeting of two different kinds of mind set up a tension at the junction. It was like the addition of amplitudes when two waves meet head on.

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 219

That tension was mental, and fleshed itself with the symbols that were lying around for the taking in the mind of the human. It had to use human symbols because the intellectual life of a symb starts at the moment it comes in contact with a human brain. The symb has no brain of its own and has to make do with using the human brain on a timesharing basis.

Barnum and Bailey did not worry about the source of their inspiration. Tympani worried about it a lot. She resented the fact that the muse which had always eluded her paid such indiscriminate visits to human-symb pairs. She admitted to them that she thought it unfair, but refused to give them an answer when asked why she would not take the step pairing herself.

But Barnum and Bailey were offering her an alternative, a way to sample what it was like to be paired without actually taking that final step.

In the end, her curiosity defeated her caution. She agreed to make love with them, with Bailey functioning as a living synapticon.

Barnum and Bailey reached Tympani's apartment and she held the door for them. Inside, she dialed all the furniture into the floor, leaving a large, bare room with white walls.

"What do I do?" she asked in a small voice. Barnum reached out and took her hand, which melted into the substance of Bailey.

"Give me your other hand." She did so, and watched stoically as the green stuff crept up her hands and arms. "Don't look at it," Barnum advised, and she obeyed.

He felt air next to his skin as Bailey began manufacturing an atmosphere inside himself and inflating like a balloon. The green sphere got larger, hiding Barnum completely and gradually absorbing Tympani. In five minutes the featureless green ball filled the room.

"I'd never seen that," she said, as they stood holding hands.

"Usually we do it only in space."

"What comes next?"

"Just hold still." She saw him glance over her shoulder, and started to turn. She thought better of it and tensed, knowing what was coming.

A slim tendril had grown out of the inner surface of the symb and groped its way toward the computer terminal at the back of her head. She cringed as it touched her, then relaxed as it wormed its way in.

"How's the contact?" Barnum asked Bailey.

"Just a minute. I'm still feeling it out." The symb had oozed through the microscopic entry points at the rear of the terminal and was following the network of filaments that extended through her cerebrum. Reaching the end of one, Bailey would probe further, searching for the loci he knew so well in Barnum.

"They're slightly different," he told Barnum. "I'll have to do a little testing to be sure I'm at the right spots."

Tympani jumped, then looked down in horror as her arms and legs did a dance without her volition.

"Tell him to stop that!" she shrieked, then gasped as Bailey ran through a rapid series of memory-sensory loci; in almost instantaneous succession she experienced the smell of an orange blossom, the void of the womb, an embarrassing incident as a child, her first free fall. She tasted a meal eaten fifteen years ago. It was like spinning a radio dial through the frequencies, getting fragments of a thousand unrelated songs, and yet being able to hear each of them in its entirety. It lasted less than a second and left her weak. But the weakness was illusory, too, and she recovered and found herself in Barnum's arms.

"Make him stop it," she demanded, struggling away from him.

"It's over," he said.

"Well, almost," Bailey said. The rest of the process was conducted beneath her conscious level. "I'm in," he told Barnum. "I can't guarantee how well this will work. I wasn't built for this sort of thing, you know. I need a larger entry point than that terminal, more like the one I sank into the top of-your head."

"Is there any danger to her?"

"Nope, but there's a chance I'll get overloaded and have

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 221

to halt the whole thing. There's going to be a lot of traffic over that little tendril and I can't be sure it'll handle the load."

"We'll just have to do our best."

They faced each other. Tympani was tense and stony-eyed.

"What's next?" she asked again, planting her feet on the thin but springy and warm surface of Bailey.

"I was hoping you'd do the opening bars. Give me a lead to follow. You've done this once, even if it didn't work."

"All right. Take my hands . . ."

Barnum had no idea how the composition would start. She chose a very subdued tempo. It was not a dirge; in fact, in the beginning it had no tempo at all. It was a free-form tone poem. She moved with a

glacial slowness that had none of the loose sexuality he had expected. Barnum watched, and heard a deep undertone develop and knew it as the awakening awareness in his own mind. It was his first response.

Gradually, as she began to move in his direction, he essayed some movement. His music added itself to hers but it remained separate and did not harmonize. They were sitting in different rooms, hearing each other through the walls.

She reached down and touched his leg with her fingertips. She drew her hand slowly along him and the sound was like fingernails rasping on a blackboard. It clashed, it grated, it tore at his nerves. It left him shaken, but he continued with the dance.

Again she touched him, and the theme repeated itself. A third time, with the same results. He relaxed into it, understood it as a part of their music, harsh as it was. It was her tension.

He knelt in front of her and put his hands to her waist. She turned, slowly, making a sound like a rusty metal plate rolling along a concrete floor. She kept spinning and the tone began to modulate and acquire a rhythm. It throbbed, syncopated, as a function of their heartbeats.

222 John Varley

Gradually the tones began to soften and blend. Tympani's skin was glistening with sweat as she turned faster. Then, at a signal he never consciously received, Barnum lifted her in the air and the sounds cascaded around them as they embraced. She kicked her legs joyously and it combined with the thunderous bass protest of his straining leg muscles to produce an airborne series of chromatics. It reached a crescendo that was impossible to sustain, then tapered off as her feet touched the floor and they collapsed into each other. The sounds muttered to themselves, unresolved, as they cradled each other and caught their breath.

"Now we're in tune, at least," Tympani whispered, and the symb-synapticon picked up the nerve impulses in her mouth and ears and tongue as she said it and heard it, and mixed it with the impulses from Barnum's ears. The result was a vanishing series of arpeggios constructed around each word that echoed around them for minutes. She laughed to hear it, and that was music even without the dressings.

The music had never stopped. It still inhabited the space around them, gathering itself into dark pools around their feet and pulsing in a diminishing allegretto with their hissing breath.

"It's gotten dark," she whispered, afraid to brave the intensity of sound if she were to speak aloud. Her words wove around Barnum's head as he lifted his eyes to look around them. "There are things moving around out there," she said. The tempo increased slightly as her heart caught on the dark-on-dark outlines she sensed.

"The sounds are taking shape," Barnum said. "Don't be afraid of them. It's in your mind."

"I'm not sure I want to see that deeply into my mind."

As the second movement started, stars began to appear over their heads. Tympani lay supine on a surface that was beginning to yield beneath her, like sand or some thick liquid. She accepted it. She let it conform to her shoulder blades as Barnum coaxed music from her body with his

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 223

hands. He found handfuls of pure, bell-like tones, unencumbered with timbre or resonance, existing by themselves. Putting his lips to her, he sucked out a mouthful of chords which he blew out one by one,

where they clustered like bees around his nonsense words, ringing change after change on the harmonies in his voice.

She stretched her arms over her head and bared her teeth, grabbing at the sand that was now as real to her touch as her own body was. Here was the sexuality Barnum had sought. Brash and libidinous as a goddess in the Hindu pantheon, her body shouted like a Dixieland clarinet and the sounds caught on the waving tree limbs overhead and thrashed about like tattered sheets. Laughing, she held her hands before her face and watched as sparks of blue and white fire arced across her fingertips. The sparks leaped out to Barnum and he glowed where they touched him.

The universe they were visiting was an extraordinarily cooperative one. When the sparks jumped from Tympani's hand into the dark, cloud-streaked sky, bolts of lightning came skittering back at her. They were awesome, but not fearsome. Tympani knew them to be productions of Bailey's mind. But she liked them. When the tornadoes formed above her and writhed in a dance around her head, she liked that, too.

The gathering storm increased as the tempo of their music increased, in perfect step. Gradually, Tympani lost track of what was happening. The fire in her body was transformed into madness: a piano rolling down a hillside or a harp being used as a trampoline. There was the drunken looseness of a slide trombone played at the bottom of a well. She ran her tongue over his cheek and it was the sound of beads of oil falling on a snare drum. Barnum sought entrance to the concert hall, sounding like a head-on collision of harpsichords.

Then someone pulled the plug on the turntable motor and the tape was left to thread its way through the heads at a slowly diminishing speed as they rested. The music gabbled insistently at them, reminding them that this could only be a brief intermission, that they were in the com-

1

224 John Varley

mand of forces beyond themselves. They accepted it, Tympani sitting lightly in Barnum's lap, facing him, and allowing herself to be cradled in his arms.

"Why the pause?" Tympani asked, and was delighted to see her words escape her mouth not in sound, but in print. She touched the small letters as they fluttered to the ground.

"Bailey requested it," Barnum said, also in print. "His circuits are overloading." His words orbited twice around his head, then vanished.

"And why the skywriting?"

"So as not to foul the music with more words."

She nodded, and rested her head on his shoulder again.

Barnum was happy. He gently stroked her back, producing a warm, fuzzy rumble. He shaped the contours of the sound with his fingertips. Living in the Ring, he was used to the feeling of triumphing over something infinitely vast. With the aid of Bailey he could scale down the mighty Ring until it was within the scope of a human mind. But nothing he had ever experienced rivaled the sense of power he felt in touching Tympani and getting music.

A breeze was starting to eddy around them. It rippled the leaves of the tree that arched over them. The lovers had stayed planted on the ground during the height of the storm; now the breeze lifted them into the air and wafted them into the gray clouds.

Tympani had not noticed it. When she opened her eyes, all she knew was that they were back in limbo again, alone with the music. And the music was beginning to build.

The last movement was both more harmonious and less varied. They were finally in tune, acknowledging the baton of the same conductor. The piece they were extemporizing was jubilant. It was noisy and broad, and gave signs of becoming Wagnerian. But somewhere the gods were laughing.

Tympani flowed with it, letting it become her. Barnum was sketching out the melody line while she was content to supply the occasional appoggiatura, the haunting nuance that prevented it from becoming ponderous.

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 225

The clouds began to withdraw, slowly revealing the new illusion that Bailey had moved them to. It was hazy. But it was vast. Tympani opened her eyes and saw

—the view from the Upper Half, only a few kilometers above the plane of the Rings. Below her was an infinite golden surface and above her were stars. Her eyes were drawn to the plane, down there. ... It was thin. Insubstantial. One could see right through it. Shielding her eyes from the glare of the sun (and introducing a forlorn minor theme into the music) she peered into the whirling marvel they had taken her out here to see, and her ears were filled with the shrieks of her unspoken fear as Bailey picked it up. There were stars down there, all around her and moving toward her, and she was moving through them, and they were beginning to revolve, and

—the inner surface of Bailey. Above her unseeing eyes, a slim green tendril, severed, was writhing back into the wall. It disappeared.

"Burnt out."

"Are you all right?" Barnum asked him.

"I'm all right. Burnt out. You felt it. I warned you the connection might not handle the traffic."

Barnum consoled him. "We never expected that intensity." He shook his head, trying to clear the memory of that awful moment. He had his fears, but evidently no phobias. Nothing had ever gripped him the way the Rings had gripped Tympani. He gratefully felt Bailey slip in and ease the pain back into a corner of his mind where he needn't look at it. Plenty of time for that later, on the long, silent orbits they would soon be following. . . .

Tympani was sitting up, puzzled, but beginning to smile. Barnum wished Bailey could give him a report on her mental condition, but the connection was broken. Shock? He'd forgotten the symptoms.

"I'll have to find out for myself," he told Bailey.

"She looks all right to me," Bailey said. "I was calming her as the contact was breaking. She might not remember much."

She didn't. Mercifully, she remembered the happiness

226 John Varley

but had only a vague impression of the fear at the end. She didn't want to look at it, which was just as well. There was no need for her to be tantalized or taunted by something she could never have.

They made love there inside Bailey. It was quiet and deep, and lasted a long time. What lingering hurts there were found healing in that gentle silence, punctuated only by the music of their breathing.

Then Bailey slowly retracted around Barnum, contracting their universe down to man-size and forever excluding Tympani.

It was an awkward time for them. Barnum and Bailey were due at the catapult in an hour. All three knew that Tympani could never follow them, but they didn't speak of it. They promised to remain friends, and knew it was empty.

Tympani had a financial statement which she handed to Barnum.

"Two thousand, minus nineteen ninety-five for the pills." She dropped the dozen small pellets into his other hand. They contained the trace elements the pair could not obtain in the Rings, and constituted the only reason they ever needed to visit Janus.

"Is that enough?" Tympani asked, anxiously.

Barnum looked at the sheet of paper. He had to think hard to recall how important money was to single humans. He had little use for it. His bank balance would keep him in supplement pills for thousands of years if he could live that long, even if he never came back to sell another song. And he understood now why there was so little repeat business on Janus. Pairs and humans could not mix. The only common ground was art, and even there the single humans were driven by monetary pressures alien to pairs.

"Sure, that's fine," he said, and tossed the paper aside. "It's more than I need."

Tympani was relieved.

"I *know* that of course," she said, feeling guilty. "But I always feel like an exploiter. It's not very much. Rag says

Gotta Sing, Gotta Dance 227

this one could really take off and we could get rich. And that's all you'll ever get out of it."

Barnum knew that, and didn't care. "It's really all we need," he repeated. "I've already been paid in the only coin I value, which is the privilege of knowing you."

They left it at that.

The countdown wasn't a long one. The operators of the cannon tended to herd the pairs through the machine like cattle through a gate. But it was plenty of time for Barnum and Bailey, on stretched-time, to embed Tympani in amber.

"Why?" Barnum asked at one point. "Why her? Where does the fear come from?"

"I saw some things," Bailey said, thoughtfully. "I was going to probe, but then I hated myself for it. I decided to leave her private traumas alone."

The count was ticking slowly down to the firing signal, and a bass, mushy music began to play in Barnum's ears.

"Do you still love her?" Barnum asked.

"More than ever."

"So do I. It feels good, and it hurts. I suppose we'll get over it. But from now on, we'd better keep our world down to a size we can handle. What is that music, anyway?"

"A send-off," Bailey said. He accelerated them until they could hear it. "It's coming over the radio. A circus march."

Barnum had no sooner recognized it than he felt the gentle but increasing push of the cannon accelerating him up the tube. He laughed, and the two of them shot out of the bulging brass pipe of the Pearly Gates calliope. They made a bull's-eye through a giant orange smoke ring, accompanied by the strains of "Thunder and Blazes."