

In The Face Of My Enemy

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I am not a coward by nature, though surely there is a little cowardice in all of us. Mine surfaced as soon as I could made out the features of the man disembarking from the shuttle. It was Ivan Carmody himself, my boss.

There are men. Also, there are MEN. The difference is one of kind, not degree; and the mind perceives it instantly, unerringly, and inexplicably.

One approached whom I feared, but to whom duty demanded I explain the other. And I wondered if I could.

My months on Campbell had been filled with many strange experiences—some of which, I felt, were better left out of my report. But Carmody would demand to hear them all. And I knew I would tell.

I was too minor to have met him face to face before. As Secretary of Extraterrestrial Affairs he was the U.N.'s most powerful figure, and its most colorful. As he approached I understood why, for he was imposing. He was tall, with the look of an eagle about him, from the straight white hair he wore combed back to the huge curved beak of his nose. Thick glasses perched on its bridge magnified piercing green eyes that did not blink.

"Kimberly Ryan," the voice boomed. "Are you in charge of this mess?"

I glanced around at the muddy street, the burned-out buildings and crushed equipment. Most of the men who had watched the shuttle's approach had skulked away. "Yes, sir. I have assumed command under Emergency Regulation Number 309," I said, hoping I had cited the right one. I felt his stare on my body, at the rough leather clothing that Casey had made for me. "This is all I have left, Mr. Secretary. Everything burned."

"I'll want to hear your report immediately, Miss Ryan, preferably not out here in the street."

"Yes, sir. We can go to Solar Minerals H.Q., to Mr. Meyers's office. What's left of it, that is. I'll show you the way."

I turned and started off down the street, trying to stick to the dryer spots. He followed along a pace or two behind.

"Where is Meyers?"

"Dead," I told him. He shot himself just before the settlement, uh, fell, when he thought the aliens were going to fire the building. I can send for Mr. Bigelow, though. He's in charge of Solar's operations now, I guess."

"No, I want your report first. We may be filing charges against the management, including Mr. Bigelow."

I reached the stairs and started up, wondering if the flight would hold both of us in its damaged condition. It had taken a glancing hit from a catapult which had partially destroyed the landing, but Carmody did not hesitate. He trailed me up the twenty or so steps closely enough for me to hear him panting.

We entered Meyers's office and Carmody took it upon himself to sit at Meyers's desk, despite the fact that the chair back was still spattered with dried blood and brains. He propped his chin on his hands, leaning over the desk, and looking right at me. "Find a chair, Miss Ryan. I don't like looking up at people."

I pulled one of the rough-hewn chairs closer to the desk and sat down carefully, mindful that it contained splinters, and when I was as comfortable as I could be in the presence of such awesome power, I asked him where he wanted me to start.

"At the beginning, Miss Ryan: from the time you first set foot on Campbell. And you will omit nothing. Is that clear?"

"Very. But actually, it started before I ever got here. I found that out later. Mr. Bigelow told me."

Carmody slapped the fingers of one hand against his chin. "Whatever," he said.

"Well, evidently he—that is, Captain Corsetti—he was the master of the *Wilmington*—had orders to buy a little time for Meyers before I got here. He called Meyers on the radio as soon as we were in orbit and warned them I was coming. That's an indication to me that Solar management back on Earth knew about the cairn, and meant to conceal it from ..."

"Forget that part. I'll take care of them. I want to hear about this Indian; what's his name?"

"Kah-Sih-Omah. But we called him Casey. How did you hear about him?"

"Never mind. Get on with it."

"Yes, sir. Well, here again, some of this is secondhand from Bigelow and it was much later when I found out about it, but to begin with I certainly didn't hit it off with Mr. Meyers. He knew why I was here, or thought he did, and he saw his job about to be snatched out from under him. He'd be through if I learned of the cairn."

"Without comments, please, Miss Ryan. Stick to what's relevant."

"I'm only trying to show his attitude, Mr. Carmody."

Carmody seemed to give up at this point. He didn't respond, and I felt safe in going ahead, repeating as much as I could remember, verbatim.

It had started out innocently enough; I'd merely thanked Meyers for meeting me at the dock. His reply had been harsh.

"I didn't come down here for that, lady. I came to check cargo. As far as I'm concerned, you can go back on the next barge. What do you want here, anyway?"

"You know why I'm here, Mr. Meyers. I'm here to make the ecological survey. That's the law. No planet can be opened to colonization or exploitation until the U.N. Ecological Committee has approved it and imposed the necessary restrictions. That's my job, okay? I'm not looking for a fight."

"Nor am I. But I've got enough work to do now without looking after you and wasting time leading you around."

"I don't need looking after. I don't need leading. I can find my own way around. You won't even know I'm here."

I started to leave, and that was when he grabbed me by the arm. It hurt, and I suspected this was his intention. I couldn't shake loose. "Get your hands off me," I demanded. "I'm an officer of the United Nations. You could go to jail for this."

He let go.

"Have it your own way, lady, but keep this in mind: there are 450 healthy construction men on this planet, and no women. Some of them have been here two years without a woman. Maybe I won't know you're here, but every one of them will before you're off this dock." He'd have

been all right if he'd stopped there, but he didn't. "Course, maybe that's the way you like it. A girl like you could get rich in the four months you'll be here."

I knew it was a mistake when I did. it. I lunged and threw a punch.

He stopped me easily with one ham-like hand. "There'll be none of that, lady. On Campbell I'm the law; judge, jury and all the rest of it. Assaulting me ought to be worth ninety days in the brig, at least. Bigelow," he called.

A big, sleepy-eyed man came over. Meyers thereafter called him Scotty. I didn't know it then, but he wasn't quite as harmless as he looked. Bigelow was the project architect. He was responsible for erecting the landing web, but later it turned out he had a sideline too. He was a part-time assassin.

I went with him to the administration building, where Meyers had told him to take me immediately. Meyers hadn't been subtle about that, although he did try to mask his real purpose. I heard him tell Bigelow to find somebody big, ugly and stupid to be my bodyguard.

Bigelow had seemed nice enough at the time, though he too gave me to understand I was in the way, that they had deadlines to meet, that any delay, however slight, cost the company and the consortium to which it belonged great sums of money, all of which had to be made up by investors who would bid on the minerals when the web was finished. He, personally, feared for his bonuses, which field management would not get if they didn't make the deadlines. And he told me all about the expensive family he was supporting on Earth.

I stood there, locked in a back room feeling sorry for him, and even for Meyers, although I still didn't like Meyers. I was a problem to them, and maybe in their place I'd have felt the same way, guarding against 450 potential rapists.

It seemed like hours before he returned. I amused myself by staring out the one window the room contained. It overlooked a muddy street remarkable for its complete lack of traffic. Then Bigelow came into view followed by a hulking, shambling figure dressed in bib overalls and a hard hat. He wore no shirt, and from beneath his hat fell long black braids, which lay on coppery-skinned shoulders. He was as massive as he was brawny. Bigelow had followed orders in one respect: the man was big. At the time I hoped he was not too dumb, though he gawked around like a tourist. He was not ugly; he was simply ordinary.

Bigelow introduced him as K.C. Oma.

"Hello, Mr. Oma," I said.

"I am called Casey," he replied somewhat shyly. "I am pleased to meet you. Are you ready?"

I thanked Bigelow and followed Casey down the stairs and into the street, walking slightly behind him, watching him. He moved like a shadow, without effort or urgency, and I found myself admiring him for the graceful way he managed that massive form. I had known Indians before. He was tall and light-skinned enough to have been a Northern Sioux, but they were rarely this heavy.

We did not speak until we were inside the suite: a foyer, a kitchen and two bedrooms, all of rough-sawn native timber and sparsely furnished with articles of the same material. "Not the Ritz," I said, "but adequate." Then I realized how dumb that sounded.

I looked around. There was my luggage in the larger bedroom. I peeked into the other one. In it was a beat-up military-style duffle bag.

Before I could ask the question, Casey answered it. "Mine," he said. "I am to guard you every moment." He sounded as if he really meant it.

I felt the words of protest rise in my throat. But there they stopped, unuttered, and I thought, *It does seem reasonable*. Who could menace me with him nearby? And he did seem nice enough, so I said instead, "Fine, I'll try to be no trouble."

With great innocence he remarked, "You do not trouble me at all, Miss Ryan. Tell me, what is it you will do here?"

"I'm a busybody, Casey. Haven't they told you?" He shook his head gravely.

I realized I was behaving defensively, making this simple man the object of revenge for the hostile reception at the dock. "Forgive me," I said, "I meant to say I'm here on an ecological survey of the planet, to see if the presence of men will harm it: hurt the local life forms, or create hazards for future colonists, that sort of thing. Understand?"

"Yes, Miss Ryan."

"I'll need to go out in the field, perhaps for days at a time, and I assume that means you'll go too."

"Yes, Miss Ryan. I shall go."

"Have you been out there before?"

"Only near the station, never far in."

At first his answer disturbed me, and I was angered that Meyers had not furnished me with an experienced guide. But after thinking it over, I liked this better. This way I could choose where to go, and this simple man seemed so sincere in his assurances that I believed he could and would protect me, even from Meyers.

"Fine. We'll get started in the morning. We'll need a skimmer. I assume you can arrange that, and that you can drive one."

"Yes, Miss Ryan, I can."

My next question was redundant, in light of what I later learned, but at the time it seemed appropriate, and Casey took no offense. "We'll be camping out for several days, Casey. You'll need to collect equipment and food. I assume you know something about camping and cooking."

"I can manage, Miss Ryan. I will obtain what we need and be ready by morning." He got me settled in, then left me behind locked doors to make preparations.

I did not know at the time what a foment I had caused, or what drastic preparations Meyers and Bigelow were making to insure that I did not leave Campbell with word of the cairn. Though it lay far away in dense woods, and the odds I would find it were astronomically high, they were unwilling to risk even that, fearing that if its existence became known their operation would be halted until we determined what it represented. Perhaps they thought we could consider it a mark of some other race's claim to Campbell and order the planet abandoned.

They had already tried to destroy it, with no success whatever. The effect of modern explosives upon it was nil. Man could not have built it, and he could not demolish it either. Later I learned that Meyers had considered burying it under a mound of dirt, but my unexpected arrival left him no time for that. So they decided instead to destroy Casey, the big, dumb, expendable Indian, and me.

We did not know that then, the morning we left the station aboard a skimmer loaded with death.

At first the day was pleasant, though we were cool to start with, both in shorts, but this area of Campbell was tropical and soon it grew hot, even with the blast of the skimmer's fans to cool us. We headed inland, across the coastal plain where the proto-grasses flourished, but these gave way to a cycad-like growth which was evidently a survivor of the planet's earlier plant evolution. Farther in in the uplands they were rare, supplanted by larger organisms closely resembling terrestrial trees.

There was much of interest to see, and we flew low, just high enough to avoid obstacles, while I drank it in. We spoke little beyond what was necessary to call each other's attention to some new curiosity. I was too excited to risk missing something, and he too taciturn.

Our course was leisurely, and we followed the streams that flowed down from the highlands to the sea. Here life teemed, and we stopped many times to observe and photograph it, hanging on the skimmer's fans and hovering over small herds of little animals which gathered at the streams to drink.

Campbell was made for skimmers. Its sun was bright and poured its energy into the cells that covered our hull, from which it flowed into the plastic batteries built into it and thence to the motors which drove the fans. Riding in one made me feel detached, as though it was the magic carpet of the old Arabian nights.

Nightfall found us in the highlands, where the air was cooler. Casey set up a tent for me, there among the trees, and we ate from supplies brought from the settlement. Whether out of shyness or due to some unspoken preference, Casey refused to occupy the tent and instead rolled up in a blanket outside.

By then he had demonstrated he was no stranger to the woods. He laid out the camp in an expert manner, with the tent rigidly erect on taut ropes and perched for drainage on a little hummock. His fire blazed brightly and cleanly, fed with dry, dead wood and banked carefully to last the night. Whatever doubts, whatever reservations I had had about the man disappeared that night. I slept as soundly in my tent as I ever had on Earth.

The morning brought the smell of fresh coffee into the tent, borne on a gentle breeze. I rose to find Casey bent over the fire, cooking breakfast. Around us there was a heavy fog which swathed the tops of the trees and blotted out the half-risen sun.

I took the steaming mug from him and tasted it, while he divided the contents of the skillet onto stainless steel plates. It too smelled wonderful, and I found myself drawing deep breaths of Campbell's morning air into my lungs. And I said to him, "Casey, this is why I'm here. Smell that air. Nothing like it exists on Earth— anywhere. All that man spoiled long ago. But I mean to see that no one spoils this."

He handed me a plate, which I took gratefully, but he said nothing. Instead he met my gaze, pausing a brief moment before resuming his task. Had that been a tear in his eye? From the smoke, perhaps. Surely not

because of what I'd said. But then, of course, I did not know that Casey had seen it all before.

We ate, struck camp, wiped the condensate from the skimmer's cells, and started off again. More and bigger trees appeared, growing in clumps, not yet numerous enough to become a continuous forest. They yielded a kind of nut, on which fed little beasts about the size of cats. We saw the first sizeable group of them that morning. They were quadrupedal, with good manipulative ability with their front paws, and scurried about gathering and crunching nuts despite our approach.

I did not know a great deal about Campbell's life forms. What I did know came from survey reports made by the first scout teams to visit here, and like all survey reports they covered only the obvious.

They had, to their own satisfaction, ruled out the existence of intelligent life. It was a fairly safe bet, since Campbell appeared to be geologically younger than Earth, and its life consequently less highly organized. There were evolutionary confluences, of course, but on this land mass, at least, these did not extend to large grazing forms or to large predators.

Campbellian protein was organized slightly differently from the terrestrial norm, and utilized different amino acid groups in its structure. Most of it was simply useless as food for human beings, who couldn't metabolize it—but some of it was poisonous as well.

We observed and photographed animals for a while, then began to follow a stream which wound its way through the foothills of the still-distant mountains. Here again we saw teeming life, this time in a pool. The creatures which threw their shadows on its sandy bottom were not fish, but occupied the same ecological position as fish and had the same problems: they were hunted.

The predator beast had fangs in his jaws and claws on his feet. He was no larger than the nut grazers, though he managed to look ferocious, even leonine, as he growled at us. We left him to his fishing and continued.

That night we camped in the foothills. Once again Casey pitched the tent. This time I was not content to bury myself in notebooks as I had the night before and retire early from the weariness of the journey. I had become acclimated to the outdoor life and caught up in the spirit of the adventure. I was resolved to leave the recording of trivia to another day, and instead enjoy those things that made this journey personally memorable.

And so I took over the task of cooking while Casey went to the stream for water. I sat by the fire and drank in the aroma of the food and the still,

calm pleasure of Campbell's star-studded night.

Casey returned, looking troubled. At first he refused to tell me why. But I pestered him without mercy, and then he explained.

"It may mean nothing," he said, "but I have found the remains of a fire."

He took me to it, and we examined it by torchlight, along the banks of the stream: charred lumps of wood, so tiny I could hardly see them, scattered around and half buried in the sand. They meant something to him. I would never have noticed them, much less equated them with the presence of men, and did not understand his concern.

"So," I said, "other men have been here, made a fire. Why should this disturb you?"

"Because now I must search for their bones." He reached down and took an object from the sand, where it had been shallowly buried. He brushed away the debris. It was the skull of one of the fish creatures, and it looked charred.

"The creatures of this world are different from those of the Earth. Some can be safely eaten, though they provide little nourishment and taste foul. Most are not safe. These are poisonous, though it appears that they have been roasted and the flesh eaten."

"By whom? Surely if you know this others do as well."

"Yes, it is common knowledge—now. So this must have been done by an early exploration party, dead before I came here. I know of no one missing from the station since then, and the signs are old. I will search again in the morning."

He did, but found nothing except more fishbones. That day I saw the grim side of Casey, for he was morose and troubled, as though he took this as a sign. And in truth it was, for us, as the first of the disasters struck us.

Suddenly our dead reckoner became a dead dead reckoner. It refused to show our position on the console display, but meandered from one side of the screen to the other. We could get nothing but a feeble, anemic-looking blip that rolled around the bottom of the screen.

"Can you repair it, Casey?"

His glance answered even before his words. "It is beyond my skill, even if I had the parts and tools. We will have to work: use the satellite beacon and calculate our position from its next pass. I suggest that we do not move until we have done that." He switched on the radio and punched the red button for the navigation channel.

We waited. The time came and went, but the beacon did not register as it overflowed. Casey removed the cowling from the receiver, no easy task without proper tools. He looked into the works and sighed. "Fused. The tuner will not move. There has been a surge of some kind: an arc across the plates. They have been welded together. If I force them, the tuner will break. If I do not, we cannot match the satellite's frequency."

"What else do we have?" I felt peculiarly helpless, since my education did not extend to such technical things, and I lacked the knowledge even to fully appreciate our predicament.

"Nothing. Not even a compass. Modern science replaced such things long ago with gadgetry. I'm afraid we'll have to resort to even more primitive methods."

"Can you find our way back to the station?"

"Certainly. To the east is the sea. We could hardly miss that, and once there we can follow the shoreline to the station. We are not in any danger of becoming lost, but I suggest we do not risk further problems by continuing inland. We should return at once."

Reluctantly I agreed. I was disappointed, but there was still plenty of time. We could get another skimmer and go out again, and this time we'd check it out carefully before we left.

Casey changed course, headed east, and carefully watched the skimmer's shadow on the ground below. He took what he hoped was the proper heading to get us near the station, holding a slight angle to the right and trying to compensate mentally for the passage of time. It was tedious work.

I left him alone, partly because I realized he was very busy and partly in reflection of my own disgust with this unhappy turn of events. I sat there, feeling the rush of wind through my hair and listening to the steady hum of the fans.

I began hearing a click, at first barely audible, which grew louder as time went on.

Casey noticed it too, and cocked an ear to listen. There was a look of concern on his face, as though he anticipated more mechanical problems. Then the sound vanished, and Casey's look went with it.

After that we flew on at a steady speed of about forty-five knots for nearly two hours without a hint of what the mysterious noise had been. With their simple construction and controls, there was little that could go wrong with a skimmer, and neither of us then suspected the click

represented anything more than a twig lodged in one of the fan grills.

Then the escarpment appeared. It threatened to run for miles perpendicular to our path. To go around meant risking the loss of our orientation, human senses being as fallible as they are. Casey therefore decided to increase our altitude and climb it, and then to camp on the high plains for the night, which was rapidly approaching.

But as he increased power to gain the necessary lift, the click abruptly returned. It grew into a loud knock, and then a squeal joined it. Together they lapsed into a pounding vibration. I clung to the seat, fearful of being thrown out, for the skimmer had begun to list and pitch. Casey fought to control it, but could not stabilize us. In desperation, he cut the power and we dropped like a stone, our lifting surfaces inadequate to support us without the help of the fans.

Trees, in the path of our steep and rapid glide, rushed toward us. I could see Casey straining with the stick, trying to guide us toward a small clearing near the bend of a stream, but I knew we'd never make it. I was still watching in horror when the ground came up and we struck it with a glancing blow that jolted every bone in my body. We were sliding along the ground, striking bushes and rocks, a cloud of dust and debris rising around us. Then I felt myself being flung forward and knew I would hit the windscreen. Desperately, I tried to duck.

Then I saw stars and briefly tasted blood. After that came darkness.

I do not know how long my personal night lasted. I awoke to the real night, staring upward into Campbell's star-strewn sky and feeling wet and cold. There was pain in my face and in my arms and legs. I could still taste blood, and a couple of my front teeth felt loose. But testing, I found my arms and legs seemed to work.

I strained to raise my head, felt a wave of pain, and dropped back into the coarse sand beneath me. I would have to try that a little more slowly. I looked around again, into the darkness, turning my head from side to side. There was little to be seen in the darkness except a glow on my right, toward a distant hilltop. As I watched, I could see it was creeping up the slope, and the realization came, aided by the acrid smell of smoke in the air, that it was a fire. And then it dawned on me I didn't know where Casey was.

Ignoring the pain this time, I struggled to my feet, took an experimental step or two, and stumbled over something. I strained to see in the darkness of Campbell's moonless night. Below was a shapeless mass. Our tent? No, the satchel of supplies: part of it, anyway. It smelled funny, and I

realized it had been burnt.

I groped at it, trying to find the opening and get a flashlight. That was when I heard Casey moan. He was underneath the bag, holding it with both arms. It was *he*, not the bag, who had been burnt.

I struggled with the bag, pulling it downward toward his feet, until at last it slipped off him. I opened it and searched frantically through its contents, until at last I found a shape that was right.

Pushing the switch brought forth a stabbing beam of light. In it I could see the burned stumps of trees, and the ground covered with blackened ash. Grasses, still holding their living form but now consisting only of fragile ash, disintegrated into little puffs as eddies of wind hit them.

I turned the light on Casey and gasped in horror. His fingers were charred stumps. Above them his arms were blistered horribly, and while the bag apparently had protected his upper chest and face, his hair hung loosely around his head, the braids singed off. There was a deep gash in his forehead. The blood had run down his neck and puddled darkly beneath his head.

The moan had told me Casey lived, and the sight told me how badly off he really was. There are few things more painful than burns, and fewer still more difficult to treat. In time, when the protective shock wore off, he would be suffering horribly, and I must then be ready to give him what help I could.

There was precious little in our bag of medical supplies. I searched through it and found nothing even remotely adequate. There was a tube of antiseptic jelly with which I coated the worst parts of his burnt arms and hands. But there were no large dressings, no unguents, and only three ampules of morphine sulfate to relieve his pain. They would not help for long. I decided to wait until his need was greatest before using them. I covered him with a blanket and sat down beside him to consider my own situation.

I was not badly hurt. I had only small bumps, cuts and abrasions. From the looks of the front of my blouse, I had bled profusely from the nose, and while this was sore, it did not seem to be broken.

Alone, with the shock wearing off, I tried to piece things together. I knew what must have happened: the crash of the skimmer, into a rock or large tree, must have ruptured cells in its hull, shorting them out and setting fire to the underbrush. This would have melted other portions of the hull and started more fires. I did not see the remains of the skimmer nearby.

Therefore I had been removed from the site, dunked in the stream, then placed here on the sand. Casey would have been all right then. And the fact that I had not been burned, or even singed, meant I had not come through the fire. That meant Casey had returned to the wreck to get the bag, and by that time the fire must have been fierce. He'd gotten his injuries retrieving the bag. Why did he risk it?

Then I remembered: the native foods would not sustain human life. We needed terrestrial food. Without the skimmer return to the settlement would take weeks: long enough so that we'd have risked starvation on the way. Casey knew that we needed the bag to get back; that we were isolated and lost, with no expectation of rescue. That's why he'd gone back.

I felt brief anger at him then, for sacrificing both of us. His male mind had told him that he must save me by getting the food, but not that without him I had no hope whatsoever of making it. *I* knew it—and strangely it didn't bother me to know; not like it bothered me to have the responsibility for comforting Casey in what I realized would be his last hours.

As I sat there, all alone in the darkness, I realized I had absolutely no way of coping with the situation. I could only huddle here, wrapped in a blanket, and watch Casey's life pass away along with Campbell's night.

The shock wore off, and fatigue marched in and took me away. For a time I slept. Then the rising sun woke me. Opening my eyes, I could see it was already at least an hour past dawn. I must be up, to see to Casey. I strained to rise, and found that slumber had brought me stiffness to go with my pain. Every joint ached, every movement was agony; nevertheless I did gain my feet.

Around me, the blackened landscape loomed starkly. A hundred yards away the skimmer hung, its bow canted against the bole of a still smouldering tree. Its skin had melted off in the fire, exposing the steel skeleton, now buckled and bent in the middle so that the stern rested flat on the ground.

Casey had not moved; he still lay, arms crooked, beneath the blanket. I could not tell if he was alive, and hesitated long moments before raising the blanket to look.

It would have shocked me less to find him dead. His eyes were open. Incredibly, they moved. He was conscious, and remarkably composed, and he seemed to have been waiting for me.

I gasped at the sight, and it was a moment before I found my voice, "Casey, I have the morphine. I'll give you some."

"No." His voice was strong. It was not consistent with the terrible pain I knew he must be experiencing. "Save it," he said. "I am in control." Then he closed his eyes.

He's delirious, I remember telling myself. I broke. I was not in control.

"Casey, your hands," I shouted. "There's nothing left of them. What are we going to do?"

The eyes opened, again calmly, to reassure me. Again he spoke in strange words. "We will wait."

"Casey, we're lost, hundreds of miles from the station. Nobody knows we're here. I can't get us back. I can't get myself back, much less move you."

"We will wait." His voice fairly boomed at me. "Set up the tent around me, then let me sleep. And wash that blood off your face. You look awful."

Again he closed his eyes, and again I was terrified. Was this merely the product of delirium, or was Casey some kind of superman, immune to pain? He looked so bad: yet he sounded so strong, so positive. For long moments I knelt there, bent over him, watching his chest rise and fall with deep, even breaths. Then I covered him again and went to do as he asked.

I washed away the blood, soaking a bandanna in the cool water of the stream, so that I could go back and do the same for him.

I could not tell whether or not the strain was playing tricks with my imagination or whether I really saw what I thought, but at the time he seemed a little more gaunt, a little thinner, than he had the day before. When I went to clean the dried blood from his face, the gash that had gaped at me so malignantly the night before now seemed tiny and insignificant.

I had to get hold of myself, curb my imagination. Nothing helps do that quite so well as work. So I pitched the tent: not as well as Casey would have, but adequately, then gathered wood and built a fire. I cooked and ate a light meal, then took the dishes to the stream to wash them—terrifying, in the process, the fish creatures which swam there, trapped in an oxbow pond.

Casey slumbered on inside the tent, oblivious of the awesome destruction his body had endured. He did not waken again, though I feared he would at any moment: that he would find his control gone and fearsome pain present, and I would need the morphine.

I pondered now his recovery, where short hours ago I had pondered his death. If he survived he would be helpless for weeks. I looked at the bag of

supplies, which was by no means full, and wondered how we could stretch them out. We'd planned six days in the skimmer. On foot it would be more like six weeks, if we could make it at all.

Time passed. I waited silently in the shade just inside the tent flap, and adjusted it from time to time to keep the sun off Casey. Campbell rotated in slightly more than nineteen standard hours. With next to no axial tilt there were roughly ten hours of daylight. As light began to ebb, I resolved the night would not be dark, and that this time the fire would be friendly.

Because of the destruction of vegetation in the area I had to go farther than usual to find wood, but I returned just as the light was about to fail, intending to check once more on Casey before it did. I dumped the wood on the ground and brushed off pieces of bark, then entered the tent and raised the blanket.

He did not stir, but appeared to be sleeping peacefully. Sometime during the day his arms had descended, and now rested across his chest beneath the blanket. Is it the light, I asked myself, or does he look yet thinner than he did before?

Over the bones of his face the skin stretched tight, and his cheeks seemed hollow. Then I glanced at his forehead. The gash had dwindled: shrunk, the way a healing cut does, to a fraction of its former size, as if days had passed instead of hours. This, I knew, was real. It was not a product of my mind. And I knew that what was real was in no way natural either, but I found my attitude about Casey's situation changing. It was not a question of if he recovered, but *when*.

Troubled by this perplexing fact and many others, I went outside and looked up into the night. Ahead and low on the horizon was the escarpment, which was probably the best reason I had to be pessimistic. We would have to climb it to reach the sea, and though Casey's miraculous slumber might eventually mend what was left of him, he might survive it merely to join me in starvation. The escarpment was our greatest obstacle, and we had met it at the worst time.

It seemed to stretch out endlessly in both directions. It was both steep and high. And what was nothing to a skimmer was insurmountable to us now. No doubt along its course there existed breaches in its face, where a healthy person could climb up, and I could imagine myself struggling up some steep ravine, slipping on fallen rock and tearing at creepers for handholds. But Casey? No. His battered stumps of hands would be useless, and I simply lacked the strength to get him to the top.

I caught myself thinking, *if only there was help: somebody else*

nearby. A useless plea that flashed across my mind about the time I saw, or thought I saw, the fire at the top of the escarpment. Fire? Did I see it or did my mind create the image? It was but a flicker, a pinpoint that flashed across my retinas, then was gone.

I grew cold, and wrapped myself in a blanket. And creeping inside the tent, I lay at Casey's feet, staring at the flickering embers of our own fire. It had not occurred to me, as I fell asleep, that it, too, might be seen from far away.

Morning came. I rose with the sun, feeling somewhat less achey than I had the day before, and now resigned to what was to be. Casey slumbered on, looking even more skeletal, eyes now sunken in their sockets beneath dark lids. But the gash! The gash was gone! Not just diminished, but *gone*, without scab, without scar: not even a discoloration was left. I felt my blood run cold.

With shaking hands I grasped the blanket and drew it down, past his now-bony neck and across his chest. Through the unbuttoned shirt it, too, looked shallow, and where thick muscles had laced across it ribs now pushed prominently through his skin.

And then I looked at his arms, which rested across his abdomen, expecting to see devastation, perhaps gangrene. Burnt skin had sloughed off and lay in flakes beneath them. Blisters had drained. In place of blackened ruin now appeared smooth pink skin, devoid of any scarring.

Reason told me this could not be: that it was in my mind the fantasy lay. But even as I gazed in disbelief my eyes dropped to his hands, no longer charred and cracking, oozing fluid and dripping life away, bare stumps of useless, tortured flesh. A scream rose in my throat, which at the last minute I stifled, while blood thumped a fierce tattoo and went pounding across my temples.

The hands were whole, smooth and pink, lacking only nails—and at the fingertips these, too, were budding. I dropped the blanket and knelt there, over this strange new Casey, reflecting on what I'd seen, convinced it was not real. Then I wondered: did fantasy deceive touch, as it did the eyes? And some insane curiosity impelled me to reach out. I felt—not charred and hardened ruin— but firm warm flesh, and a pulse, faint, but regular. This time the scream came, shrill and piercing, and echoed down the valley.

Casey stirred. He opened his eyes and smiled weakly, totally obliterating the demonic picture of him that had been forming in my mind, becoming once more only a man. I lost my fear and again I knelt beside him, holding

his hand, waiting for him to gain the strength to speak. Whatever sort of miracle was taking place, I was now grateful.

Presently his lips began to move. At first no sound came out, but I bent near and strained to hear, and at last he became audible.

"I have control," he said. "I have rebuilt; replaced the damaged tissue. But my body's reserves are gone; used up. They must now be replaced. Help me."

He referred, of course, to his emaciated condition.

Somehow he had moved tissue into the wounded parts, perhaps at great peril to his system as a whole, and it was this he wanted to protect now. But what was it he wanted me to do?

"How, Casey? Tell me how."

"I need protein: lots of it. I must eat meat."

I started to rise. "I'll get it for you, Casey."

But he held tightly to my hand. "No," he said. "Not from the supplies. Those are for you. You need them."

"Where, then?"

"From the stream. There is food in the stream."

"The fish? But you said they were poisonous." I knelt again, still holding his hand.

"To you: not to me. I can metabolize them; make the poisons harmless. You cannot. Listen to me: you have seen that I am different. Now do as I ask."

Weak though his voice was, its tone was commanding, and I went down to the stream, to trap the fish creatures imprisoned in the pond. Some spare clothing and a length of springy root became a net, with which I hurled the helpless creatures up on the shore until I had all of them the pool contained. Then, with my hands, I dug a passage through the soft mud and sand, so more could enter from the stream.

They smelled terrible, cooking on the spit. I did not know how to clean them. Casey seemed not to mind, but ate every bit I fed him. Throughout the day he ate all I could catch, interrupting his disgusting repast with catnaps in between.

By nightfall he had gained strength to the point where he could sit up. "Tomorrow," he said, "I shall hunt."

I had not troubled him with questions during the long day. In truth, I

lacked sufficient insight to ask anything meaningful. I knew only that he was a most extraordinary man, if that was in fact his nature; that the experience I was having was unique to human memory. When the sun set I fell asleep, still wondering whether this was real or a dream.

I rose late, with the sun high outside the tent and Casey gone. I found him outside, transformed. Still thin, still gaunt, but looking fit and now whole, he stood there, moccasins of deerskin on his feet, a deerskin loincloth spanning lithe hips. His hair, now too short to braid, was bound with a strip of cloth. These had come, no doubt, from the depths of the battered dufflebag, along with the curious necklace that now hung across his chest.

He saw me look at that.

"Serpent's teeth," he said, "for luck. One of my talismans. We can use some good luck for a change."

"I hope so," I said. "So far, it's all been bad."

Casey was fashioning a javelin of sorts, using a stick and a sharpened tent peg. "Luck," he said, "had nothing to do with our misfortunes. It was sabotage."

I stared at him for long moments, finally finding voice. "But how, and who?"

"As to the instruments, I cannot say for sure. The fire left little trace of them. But I found the fan-bearing housings full of emery, and that is why they failed."

"But who? Who would want us dead?"

"Not us: you. I am nothing to them, whoever they are. You menace someone at the station. Compelled to guess, I would say they fear your mission here will uncover something which will deny them this world."

"What? Certainly I've yet found nothing which would require that, unless ..." The thought occurred to me. "Casey, how long have you been on Campbell?"

"About three years; since the first crews came."

"And you've traveled about?"

"Some, though never this far from the sea."

"Have you seen, or heard rumors of, any advanced life forms here?"

"No, I never have. Why do you ask?"

"Because," I said, still not sure I had not dreamed it, "the other night I

thought I saw a fire, out on the escarpment."

"Perhaps you did. Maybe it was a search party, out looking for us."

"But they don't know we're lost. We're not overdue yet. And why, if they were men, have they not yet come to us? Perhaps they are not men. This is a big world. And unlikely though it seems, considering the low order of life the planet seems to support, it is not impossible that intelligence arose here. Making, even using, fire requires intelligence of a relatively high order. Certainly well beyond anything we've yet encountered. And," I added, "the existence of native intelligent life is an eminently good reason to kill me. The planet would belong to them. Solar Minerals would be out on its neck."

"Show me where you saw the fire, Kim."

I pointed with reasonable certainty toward the escarpment. *Had he used my first name?* "It's there," I said, "where the dark streak is."

"Then we shall go that way. Now eat, while I prepare packs. I am afraid we must abandon the tent and the less useful equipment, to travel light."

All day we trekked across the scrublands which lay between the foothills and the escarpment. Our goal was the escarpment's base, and it was deceptively distant. The going was difficult; our passage was hindered by heavy brush and gulleys strewn with rocks. When at last we stopped, to camp by a small stream, Casey would not allow a fire. We ate cold food. After that Casey went to work, fashioning snares of tent cordage and setting them by the water.

When the sun set we lay in darkness, huddled together under blankets. Though exhausted, I could not sleep, but lay there wondering if, even with his marvelous skill at woodmanship, we'd ever make it back to the sea. More than that, I believed that now I could summon the nerve to ask the question which had nagged me since the crash: a question I had been afraid to ask, because I did not know if I could live with the answer if I got one.

So, following my impulse, and without further reflection I blurted it out. "What are you, Casey?" *There, I'd done it.*

He did not answer at once, but sighed. "I am Kah-Sih-Omah. He-Who-Waits, in the tongue of my fathers."

I rose on my left elbow and faced him. "No," I said. "Not who; *what* are you, Casey? You know what I mean. You owe me a truthful answer."

Again he paused, as if deliberating whether or not to say anything at all. Again came the sigh. "This is true, Kim. I do indeed owe you that. But I

fear that what you ask is unanswerable. I have myself asked the same question too often to remember."

I was becoming angry now, finding courage in my impatience. "Don't try riddles with me, Casey. You aren't, and never were, the dumb Indian you pretend to be, though you play the part to perfection. Admit it: you are more than human. Now tell me truthfully: what are you?"

He protested my anger. His answer rang with sadness all the same, and there was a curious cracking in his voice. "In truth, I do not know what I am, or even exactly how I came to be. I can only tell you this: if I am no longer man, I once was, long ago. I have lived a very long time already. I may never be able to die, however much I may wish to."

A horrible thought struck me. "The fish, Casey! Did you eat them to poison yourself, so you could die?" I pictured myself alone, beside his rotting corpse.

"No, Kim. I ate them for strength, knowing they could not harm me. I desperately wanted to live because you needed me."

I felt ashamed at this and spoke no more, but Casey, having started, seemed constrained to continue; as though it meant something special to him to explain, to have someone share.

"I have done this before," he said. "Some believed me and some did not. I have shared this tale of grief with other friends, only to watch them age and wither away: to leave me in death, all alone, separated from all others by the cruelest of all barriers: time. I am trapped in an eternal present."

His voice took on plaintive tones. There was a great sorrow in it, and a touch of frustration he tried very hard to subdue. "I have tried many lives, and been many things in the time I have already lived. In the beginning I was most assuredly a man, with all a man's infirmities. I grew old as a man—then suddenly I was young again, and have remained so ever since, though I can take the appearance of age or any other feature of man whenever it suits me.

"I was a shaman of the People: a medicine man. This I remember, as I remember all that happened before, and all that happened since the vision which changed me. I had gone to the mountaintop to fast, in hopes that the spirits would speak to me. For many days and nights I waited, and they were silent. Then I took the cup: the spirit of the sacred mushroom steeped in water. It is hallucinogenic, which compounds the mystery of my transformation, since I could not tell what was fact and what was fantasy. I have a memory of an awesome flame and terrible burning pain, then of a satisfying inner peace such as no other I have ever known. I believed at the

time that I had been with God.

"When the vision began, I was an old man, perhaps sixty. The People had no accurate way of reckoning time, but in my calling age was much revered. When I awoke I was much as you see me now, and the People did not know me, though I told them I was Kah-Sih-Omah. My wife denied me. To them I was a stranger who had come upon cherished family secrets through magic and overcome Kah-Sih-Omah. I had his medicine bundle; therefore I was more powerful than he, potent though he was. And in superstitious fear they drove me away.

"I did not know then of my immortality. I still feared death.

"I wandered the land as an outcast, perhaps for millennia, certainly for many centuries. I found that within certain relatively broad limits I could control both my form and my features, though radical changes were onerous and required enormous concentration to hold. Minor changes required next to no effort; therefore I could adapt to any tribe and live among them, learn their tongue and customs, and be as they were, until they noticed I did not grow old. I rarely remained that long in any one place, and so, in time, I had no identity. And as time changes men, so also does it change cultures. Even the People lost their identity in the time I had lived.

"When I was young, mammoths roamed the Americas. By the time they passed, I was already intimate with both continents, South and North, and with those who lived upon them. I conversed with each in his own tongue and believed at the time this was all there was to the world.

"Then I learned of great, fierce strangers who visited the far north. Great hulking Vikings with pale skin and hair on their faces, who used weapons and implements of iron brought from lands beyond the eastern sea. I went north, becoming as they were, and lived among them. But they found the land too harsh and the distance from home too great. When they sailed away, I went with them.

"It was in Europe where I began to really understand my plight, for the Europeans possessed a true conception of the passage of time. Here too, I made my first acquaintance with the messianic redemptionist religions of the Middle East. It was an era of foment. Islam and Christendom fought each other on the battlefields, each claiming true insight into the destiny of man.

"I had to know my reason to be. For a time I believed the answer lay in the East, and I went there, seeking to find the purpose my existence served, to end the boredom of useless existence. Still, none could, or

would, tell me. I began to regard what answers they gave me as purely parochial. They were seers, such as I had been, whose movements had acquired the trappings of cults and mired themselves in mindless dogma. I knew well the ways of the wizards. I understood their motives, and how wily, indolent men sometimes corrupt a noble concept, using knowledge to acquire wealth and power.

"I wanted none of these, so I abandoned them and traveled on, to India. There, despite more mountains of superstitious nonsense, I remained a century or two and sifted through it, finding much that was good. I found not an answer, but an aid: a truly realistic concept of the vastness of time that contemplated both a beginning and an end.

"And then I knew I was not truly immortal, that I would someday end—if not with the death of Earth, then with the death of the universe. I knew also that, while life was finite after all, it would seem infinite to me, and yet in that infinity—somewhere, out of sight and understanding, to be revealed to me someday—I had a purpose.

"While man remained pinned to Earth, I searched that world over, hoping to find clues. By then I had little doubt that the beings who changed me were no more than an unimaginably advanced race, though it still seemed meet to think of them as spirits. It was not a question of what *they* were but of *who else* they might also have changed.

"In that respect, too, I was different from other men, who only hoped humanity would someday reach the stars. I *knew*—knew that other races had, and that man would; and that when he did I would search the cosmos also, for my creators.

"That story you know well enough—of the great, mysterious Kazim, and of his son, Omar; of their vast wealth, and their use of it to find and seize the key, the alien computer buried deep in the Andes. I was both these men. It was my wealth that brought us here, Kim." He sighed, and paused.

"Yes," I replied, and gave a silent sigh myself. And to myself I silently added, *And it is your character.*

But Casey did not notice. He was lost in his past. "I envisioned space as ennobling, then," he continued. "I believed it marked a new era for man, when he would regard himself merely as man and leave his old vices behind him, buried in the Earth from which they both sprang.

"I was wrong. I shipped aboard the first of man's star-traveling vessels—the *Gandhi*, bound for that world which we now call Herschel, though at the time we could not be certain a livable world lay out there. In the boredom, passions grew. Intrigues ran rampant— prejudices surfaced

and became weapons.

"Kazim had conceived the *Gandhi* as a racial effort. Her components were built by many different peoples, each ignorant of what the other was doing. They were assembled under his control, and she lifted under U.N. auspices.

"But the nations of men died hard. Each nation packed its quota with spies, eager to claim for that nation the full secrets of her construction. They would have wrecked her to get them.

"Inevitably, mutiny flared. I was killed, or so they thought. But the body that went out the airlock was the captain's, not mine; and I took his place, to reign like a potentate over the bedlam the ship had become.

"It was then that I resolved never again, aside from grave emergency, to allow my differences to show. I became the epitome of the common man.

"So I wait, as I have for centuries, for my sign, preparing myself as best I can for what must come. Now I know my destiny approaches. But it is a lonely wait."

Then Casey spoke no more. I huddled near him, to comfort him. Though I was but an infinitesimal fraction of what he was, he took it, and for a while that loneliness we both felt ebbed, and was for a time forgotten.

With daylight we could risk a fire. I was kindling one when Casey returned from checking snares. He carried one of the nut creatures, and the head of his javelin was stained with blood.

He plunged the javelin into the ground, where it would be handy, and set about skinning the animal with one of the mess kit's knives. Though he had talked a great deal the night before, he was strangely silent now. He finished the flaying, spitted the carcass over the fire, and took its entrails down to the stream to wash them. At the time I thought perhaps he regretted baring his soul to me.

He returned, bearing a glazed mass, which he stuffed into a plastic jar and liberally salted. Then he took the spit from me, turning it slowly until the meat turned uniformly brown and began to crackle, dripping melted fat into the fire.

I watched him tear off a small fragment and chew it carefully. Then he swallowed it and said, "You may safely eat this. Your body will make use of little of it, but it will not harm you, and it is filling. We must now use all the land will give us, if we are ever to reach the station."

Strange words, I thought. His voice carried foreboding, but I did not pry. I now knew that Casey revealed himself in his own good time and at his own pace. I ate what he gave me, and it was good.

Then, while I broke camp, Casey scraped and salted the animal's hide. He rolled it up and tied it with a thong. "Come," he said, picking up his pack and javelin. Then he walked off in the direction of the wrecked skimmer.

"Casey, that's the wrong direction." I was mystified.

"I know, but come with me. I must show you something."

I followed him, sensing his disturbance, all the way to the stream, where we came to an area of packed sand.

He stopped and pointed down. "Look," he said, pointing to tracks in the sand. "Something stalks us."

Fear washed over me. "What—who?"

"I do not know. It is not human, but it is not a beast, either. I had four snares. All caught game, but three were raided. Only that closest to our fire was undisturbed."

"Maybe another animal ..."

"No. Animals bite or break the cord. They do not untie the knots. They kill with teeth or claws, not clubs. The thief had a stone axe. He put it on the ground while he took our game. He stepped on it, leaving its impression in the sand. There are the thongs binding head to haft. Observe this footprint. This foot was not bare; it was covered. When the creature knelt on one knee, it did not mark the ground with toes."

I tried my best to see what he saw, but even with his explanation this was not easy. But then, he had been here before and had had time to think about an explanation, and if he thought the thief had not been human I wanted to know why.

"There are other tracks, farther along. They are in soft mud and bear impressions well. And the shape and size of the foot is wrong. So is its articulation. There is no arch, and the foot that made the tracks did not bend in the manner of the human foot. The creature's strides are impossibly long, suggesting a giant, yet it is also impossibly light. There are other signs, less visible but equally informative. We are fortunate that there was only one of them."

"So Campbell has sapients. And Solar Minerals knew it. You were right about them wanting me dead."

"It would seem so. But now we face new danger: more enemies. That is why I must now make weapons and why I may again have to kill, loathe as I am to do so. But come, we must travel. We can learn nothing more here."

Throughout the day we walked steadily. I found myself taking frequent nervous glances behind, searching the undergrowth for signs of the tall creature. Once or twice I thought I saw something, but Casey assured me there was no cause for alarm.

From time to time he stopped and picked rocks from the ground, slipping them into his pack. Once, while I rested, he went off into the bush to cut a stave. Later, as we walked, he whittled on it. The stave took form and symmetry, becoming a bow before my eyes.

We camped that night at the base of the escarpment, taking shelter in a shallow cave, from whose entrance Casey labored long to erase our spoor. Again we ate cold food, afraid to risk a fire. "Tomorrow," Casey said, "we shall be armed, and make preparation for the climb."

I lolled around the next day watching Casey's wizardry with the rocks he had collected. Pressing shards against a bit of bone, he fractured and shaped them with consummate skill into dozens of exquisitely formed arrowheads. Then, with enough of these, he ventured out to cut quills. Peeled, split, notched, and winged with bits of plastic, these became the shafts of his arrows. Their heads he bound on with twisted strips of wet gut taken from the animal in the snare. Other strips, tightly twisted, became the bowstring, and sewed the seams of the quiver he made from the salted hide. As the thong dried, it bound tightly whatever it encircled; such was Casey's skill in the wild.

That night I fell asleep in his arms, confident, as the light died, that I was safe with a protector far better armed than any enemy who stalked us.

Later on we met the enemy, there in the dark hollowness of the cavern. I was thrown suddenly aside, awakened by a scream never uttered by a human throat. I crawled away from thrashing feet and grabbed a torch from my pack, then flashed its light around the cave.

Casey struggled with a gangling giant who reached nearly to the top of the cavern. In one of the creature's hands was a stone axe: in the other, Casey's throat.

Casey held the axe arm back with one hand. With the other he lashed out. His enemy was mighty and determined, and was pushing Casey back toward the wall, though Casey's muscles strained and knotted in

resistance. His feet left furrows in the cave's sandy floor as he was forced to give way.

I jumped to my feet, side-stepping them, and they struggled past me. I flashed the light around the cave, fearing other enemies might be about to enter and trying to think of something I could do to help. Casey was no weakling, but he had not yet recovered his full strength. There in the corner of the cave stood the bow and quiver, which I lacked the skill to use. But there also, stuck in the sand, was the javelin. I ran to it and pulled it free just as a strange sound struck my ears. I flashed the light at the wall. Casey's opponent had kicked his feet out from under him and the sound had come from his head hitting the wall.

The light momentarily distracted the creature. It turned to look at me. For an instant I froze in my tracks as that face inspired pure terror in me, but when it turned its attention back on Casey I knew what I had to do. I brought up the javelin and thrust its head deep into the creature's back.

There was another blood-curdling scream, but it lasted only an instant. Before my eyes and in the torchlight the being literally wilted. A torrent of orange-pink fluid poured from its wound onto the cave floor. It seemed to collapse in sections, like a beach toy deflating. The axe clattered to the ground.

Casey scrambled to his feet. He seized the torch from me and held it on the alien, now curiously flattened and growing even flatter with each passing moment. My nerve broke. I sank to my knees and broke into tears. Casey moved to console me. I struggled for a time to speak, and found words difficult to come by. When they did come they were in broken gasps. "Casey—uh—what is that thing?"

"It is the being who raided our snares, I would guess. It had been tracking us, presumably with this." He pointed to its long snout. "Such noses are found on all earthly creatures with acute sense of smell. I wish you had not killed it."

I was suddenly hurt; defensive. "But you were losing, Casey. I had to do something."

"Its anatomy was strange to me. I needed time to find its vulnerabilities, so I retreated to the wall to explore it. Despite its size it is far weaker than a man. You will perceive it has no bones."

"No bones," I screamed in disbelief.

"It lacks a rigid skeleton on which to anchor muscles, therefore it has great resilience but little strength. That is the reason it died so swiftly

once punctured with a deep wound. The fluids expelled were under considerable pressure to hold it rigid, but once released, its form collapsed. Probably it suffocated. I will know in the morning when light permits dissection. That should be fascinating."

I was horrified. "Dissection! I can't stand to look at it now. How can you be so morbid?"

He placed his hand on my shoulder and helped me to my feet. "I have been many things in my long past, Kim, including on many occasions a physician. I was at Waterloo, for instance, and at Gettysburg and Iwo Jima. I was there because while I could not confer my own invulnerability, I could ease pain. I learned from those experiences as I will from this. Perhaps I may even learn to avoid killing any more of these creatures, should we be attacked again."

"I don't want to meet any more of them." I shuddered at the thought.

Casey's answer was firm and resolute. "Nor do I," he said. "But if we do, I do not intend to take another life. My own may be safe, but that of others is so transitory it is much more sacred to me."

I slept no more that night, but huddled in my blanket waiting for dawn. When it came, I avoided Casey. This was illogical, and I knew it. What he said had been true and his grisly work was necessary, but I waited outside the cave while he did it.

When he finally joined me he was grim and seemed puzzled, though not disposed to say why. I packed, while he buried the creature's body in the woods beneath a pile of stones and marked the spot with the stone axe.

We started out, walking silently along the base of the escarpment, searching for a path to the top. Presently we came upon a promising ravine, through which trickled the waters of a small stream. We climbed its slippery rocks as far as the cataract which fell from its summit. There we rested, and drank. I bathed my aching feet in the cool waters of the cataract's pool while Casey kept his bow ready and his eyes on the rim.

Finally I could endure silence no longer. "What disturbs you, Casey? What did you find?"

"I found many things, Kim. All of them strange, most unfathomable. The alien's limbs bore marks on what would be its wrists and ankles were it human. I have seen such marks before, on the bodies of slaves. Manacles and leg irons make them. These were fresh."

I pondered this remark. Casey seemed so sure. "Slavery," I said, "is not new to human culture. It existed on Earth into the last century. I am

shocked to find such evidence here on Campbell, where higher life is not supposed to exist at all, but what bothers me more is the possibility that Solar Minerals ..."

"No." Casey had never interrupted me before. "Solar Minerals has no slaves. They may know of these creatures' existence and suppressed that knowledge, but nothing more. That I know for sure.

"The alien you killed was not a native form. It did not evolve here. There are no anatomical parallels with Campbell's other life. It is grossly unrelated to them. It is, like us, an alien."

He paused a moment to let that sink in, then continued. "There is more. That creature, at least, has been here very briefly. I examined its dentation. In the past it has had caries, repaired with skill few human dentists could match. I found a stainless steel bridge, which implies a very high order of technology, yet the creature was armed with a stone axe *Homo erectus* would have been ashamed to carry. Why?"

I did not know, but the implication sent shivers through me. Suddenly I felt cold and pulled my feet from the water. But the chill was not in the water: it was in my mind. It felt uncomfortable here. "Can we go, Casey?"

He was willing, and we started out. At the top of the escarpment we found flat land, thickly forested. The proto-grasses grew profusely between the clumps of trees, but the bushes were sparse, which made easy travel. The grass was high enough to almost conceal herds of the little grazers, and from time to time we would flush them by stumbling into their hiding places. Toward the end of the day Casey shot two of them: more than we really needed for food, but as he pointed out, I was rapidly tearing my clothing to tatters, struggling through the bush. And while not deerskin, and though it promised to be malodorous for want of adequate curing, it was all we had.

I was reassured, watching this demonstration of his skill with the bow: sure, swift shots that never missed. Less reassuring was the fact that now he kept it always at the ready, while I fell heir to the less complicated javelin, and held it ever tighter.

We stopped well before sundown that night, so that we could have a fire and cook the meat before darkness fell.

Casey picked a thorny thicket and plugged its entrances with branches. "If we have visitors tonight," he said, "they will have to pass slowly through this. I only hope the wood is too green for them to burn us out. The spoor I have seen nearby is old, but it is best to use care."

Spoor, I thought. So, there was more alien activity in the area. He knew it but hadn't told me. Again I spent an uncomfortable night, awakening to a dawn that promised even more danger.

Again we set out in the direction of the rising sun. Long shadows shrank like the dew as the sun cleared the treetops and brought yet another enigma.

Casey noticed it first, of course. His first impulse was to give it wide berth and hope I missed it. I didn't. "What is it, Casey?"

Caught at deception, he owned up. "A building, I think. I am reasonably certain men did not put it there. That leaves the aliens, whose signs abound. Then, as if to forestall alarm in me, he added, "Old signs, though. None have passed this way in recent days."

It lay across our course, and we approached it carefully, stopping about 500 yards away. At this distance its surface was clearly visible. It gleamed in off-white brilliance, standing about three times man-height, with a base of about the same diameter. Concentric stone discs about a foot thick made up its layers, the largest at the bottom. A man would have been hard-pressed to stand on the tiny disc at the apex. We could not tell if these were molded or stacked, the seams were undetectable.

We went nearer and circled it. Casey studied the ground, found nothing recent enough to bother him, then motioned me to come closer.

"It's just a stack of stone steps, Casey. Out here in the middle of nowhere. Why?"

"I cannot even make a conjecture. I can tell you more aliens exist: perhaps more than one kind. I can detect impressions of three distinct shapes and sizes of feet. One fits our dead alien, one is hooflike, and the third is human. All are old and faint."

"Human! Then Solar does know there is a connection." '

"They know of the structure." He bent down and walked around it, surveying its base, then picked something up. "Paper fragments, charred and faded. Very old." He stopped again.

This time the retrieved object was larger. He held it to his nose and sniffed.

"What have you found, Casey?"

"Men have been here. One of them smoked cigars. This is tobacco leaf. The paper fragments come from the wrapping of half-pound blocks of nitrostarch, such as we use for blasting. They have tested the strength of

this edifice, or perhaps tried to obtain a sample of it. The blast discolored it, nothing more, but the grass and the ground yielded though the stone did not." He pointed.

"Newer growth, though still weeks old, perhaps a couple of months old. They knew long before you came. I think this merits further exploration."

He turned and started off, eyes on the ground, stepping carefully. I walked behind him and waited for him to tell me what I saw. None of it meant anything to me, but I knew he was following tracks of some sort. They led out of one grove and into another. Casey's pace quickened.

Once within it he again bent down; began picking up bones, dried and bleached, which looked to me to be the same as those from the animals we ate. Farther in there was a firepit, edged with stones and littered with more bones.

"The remains of feasts, Kim. Some old, some relatively recent. Some of the parties were large. The last consisted of ten or twelve individuals."

"Men or aliens?" I asked.

"Aliens. I can find no useful tracks among these leaves, but men would leave distinctive signs. And men have metal implements. What ate here had not even flint knives, but only axes, crudely made of stone. Observe the fragments in the fire: seasoned wood was broken and only green wood was cut, because stone blades can handle that. Bones were smashed at the joints, then twisted loose, a somewhat messy, inefficient process compared to cutting.

"And I have noticed something else about this place. I did not climb the structure, therefore I missed it before. Look at this."

He led me to a large, flat, oblong stone set in the ground, obscured by grass. Behind it, in a line leading to the structure, were others. "A marked path, visible from the top of the structure but barely noticeable from the ground. Note the stones are not dressed but natural, though carefully selected. The builders of the structure did not lay them; the diners did. Neither work has been here very long."

"How do you know?"

"The bushes tell me. Outside of a fifty-or-so-foot circle many large ones grow, but few grow inside and they are small. And the grasses within are thinner. They grow in soil recently disturbed to a considerable depth, and therefore poor in nutrients. But come, let us continue."

I followed him around, while he searched for obscure things I would not have dreamed bore information. The signs led him to another stone. Again

it was flat and very large, sunk deep into the ground and partially covered with leaves; On its face, crudely scratched in the soft limestone, were several lines of symbols, each rubbed with some kind of clay to give it contrast with the rest of the rock.

"Writing," Casey said. "Several different languages, too, I'd say. And far from primitive."

"You can read it?" I asked incredulously.

"Of course not. Even so, there is much it tells me. I am familiar with most human script. Writing begins with pictograms. Stylized symbols follow, then true alphabets. Alphabets are refined. Their use demands extreme abstraction of thought. Being so fundamental, their symbols are repetitious: economical. Alphabets do not occur in non-technical civilizations. Certainly, no human writing system predates the use of metals."

"Which means?" I wondered if he himself really knew.

"The primitive tools are an expedient to the people who carved this stone, used because better ones demand technology they don't have. They cannot even shape flint decently."

"Perhaps they did not come here purposely, Casey, but were shipwrecked. Perhaps the structure is for signalling."

He did not agree. "I think not, but I have no better explanation. However, the writing clearly conveys a message. The intention of the writers is also clear: it is to be seen by someone on top of the structure. The writer intends that the reader first ascend. What intrigues me is why."

"Perhaps the structure is a monument."

"If so, it is poorly placed, hidden in the grove."

For the rest of the morning we explored the area around the structure. Casey found much more to indicate heavy past traffic through the woods, but nothing that would tell him why. But from the signs he saw he concluded the beings came and went from some location to the east. There was a fairly well worn path in that direction.

We, too, set off to the east, but kept to a nearby ridge which ran parallel, not wishing chance encounters. The difficult ground and the need for stealth made the traveling slower, so we had gotten only about a quarter of a mile when Casey suddenly stopped.

His reason was not apparent to me. "What is it?" I asked.

"A strange sensation. I feel peculiar." He looked down at his arm. His sparse hairs were twitching. Then I saw the hair on his head beneath the band move and stand out. I felt my own hair rise like a wreath around my head.

"Some kind of electrostatic field," Casey said. "Let's get off this ridge."

I looked up at the sky. It was cloudless, so it was not an electrical storm that was producing the effect. Nevertheless I followed Casey to lower ground. A noise began: a hiss, then a crackle. It came from behind us, in the direction of the structure. We could see only the top of this. It was glowing.

Soon it was brighter than the sun. The air around it shimmered and the noise rose in both amplitude and pitch. An object, dark by comparison, appeared atop the structure, at first indistinct but rapidly gathering form. It became a great cross: then, as we watched, the image changed, and became a figure with outstretched arms. Abruptly the hissing died down, and the figure dropped its arms to its sides. Then it ran down the tiers and disappeared from sight.

Again, the hiss grew: the structure glowed. In the same manner as before a being appeared, then fled the pinnacle. Six times more the episode was repeated. Then the glow died.

I broke our long silence. "Well," I said, "Now we know how they got here. It's some kind of matter transmitter. The next question is why. How can we reconcile this with stone axes?"

"We can't, Kim," he answered gravely. "Not without revising our previous speculation. I have the beginning of an hypothesis, but I want to see what happens next before explaining. Let's get up on the ridge where we can watch the trail. Be very quiet."

I followed him to the crest, where we could see in both directions for nearly five hundred yards.

He took note of the direction of the wind and notched an arrow to his bow. "We are downwind," he said, "and thus may not be noticed."

About ten minutes later forms appeared, heading west. There were four of them, all carrying axes. The two in front were the tall, boneless kind. Those behind, and having difficulty keeping up, were short, thick, heavily muscled creatures with hooved feet. They passed without noticing us.

Twenty minutes or so later six of each passed in the opposite direction, but the newcomers had no weapons. Casey waited until they were well ahead of us, then motioned me to follow him along the ridge. "I think I

know now where we are," he said.

"Another riddle, Casey? Where are we?"

"This is Devil's Island. It's a penal colony, like the one the French used to have in South America. I believe this is where the aliens send criminals, and I think that is what those creatures are. Whoever sends them doesn't know humans have come here. Probably they never visit. There would be no reason for it."

I didn't understand, and said so. Casey explained his theory.

"It fits the facts we have. Consider: these beings possess nothing not obtainable here: not even clothing, if they wear it. This is not compatible with a colonizing or commercial venture, nor with an invasion force, given the means they have of transporting material things of great size.

"Also, note the condition of arrival. The subjects are restrained on crosses. Released, they run and disappear. This may, of course, be necessary to transmission, but I find another possibility more likely: they are restrained because they would otherwise resist. They are freed only when safely trapped here. And they are not slaves as I once supposed, since slaves are useful only when they can be worked.

"But the best support of the convict theory was found on the dead one. He got adequate but cheap dental care: stainless steel instead of gold, porcelain, or silver alloy. It smacks of institutional dentistry: the sort, perhaps, that he'd get from another inmate who had lots of time on his hands, and who employed great skill and patience in the job, but who couldn't get his hands on really first-class materials. The convict dentist's talent shows in the humbler medium, just as the skills of early American goldsmiths showed in the pewter they sometimes substituted when gold was too scarce or too dear.

"Then there are the old signs of turmoil I found at the structure. The first arrivals probably battled one another, then gradually saw that this was foolish and began cooperating. Later they probably organized into some loose form of government and made the guide marker and stone plaque. I think the feasts took place at an earlier time, when they stayed near the structure. Then, as their numbers increased, they hunted the area bare and had to leave. They probably made the plaque then."

"It sounds reasonable, Casey," I said. 'But then, so does everything else you say. I am amazed you learn so much from a few simple signs that I don't even notice. Tell me, what have you thought it means for us?"

Casey looked at me and smiled. He was obviously proud of his powers of

observation and deduction. "Some look," he said. "Others see. If asked to speculate—and I have been—I would conclude, as I have said, that the makers do not suspect the presence of men here. Perhaps long ago they sent a ship here to build this station, and possibly others elsewhere on this planet, though I think this unlikely. Perhaps they send only a few convicts here, and it may therefore have been a long time since they built the structure.

"In the interim humans came, and the convicts have not molested them, though I believe they know of us. Perhaps promiscuous attack is discouraged by our relatively great numbers and their knowledge that we possess better arms and explosives.

"In any event, I have heard no rumors among the men concerning the aliens. It may therefore be that management knows of the structure, but they think it is sessile."

The impact of that settled on me. It meant that we would now be hunted by both groups.

But Casey reassured me. "I think the alien you killed was a scout, who did not get back to report. Perhaps he saw the forest fire and surmised a skimmer crash. The fire would have been visible for great distances, particularly from atop the escarpment, and the wreck would have represented a valuable source of metal for making tools and weapons.

"He arrived, perhaps, the day we left the site, but dared not attack us then. Instead he followed us to the cave, assuming we would be taken more easily while asleep. He was, therefore, alone at the time, though others may have followed. That too is unlikely, since we had much of value to him and he took nothing. If he were a part of a group he would have selected choice objects for himself. Since he did not, he counted on retrieving them later. Therefore, he was alone."

"That," I said, "is bad enough, even with only half the planetary population against me. I have a real talent for finding trouble, don't I? What am I going to do?"

"The situation would seem to call for skillful diplomacy, Kim. I was about to ask you that question."

"Well, this is obviously going to change Campbell's whole history. I'll have to report the situation as soon as I can, whether Solar Minerals likes it or not, and let the U.N. handle it."

"That is plainly the proper course. The method, however, is critical. This is not a situation of indigenous life having a primary claim; it is a

question of who has a better discovery claim. Solar will adopt that position if discovered. I know something of the law, having been a lawyer at various times during my existence.

"However, I have been a human being even longer— and, I hope, a sensible one. It does not seem sensible to me for you to mention any of this to Solar's local management. Remember, we are 114 light years from Earth. The *Wilmington* is our only contact, and it is under their charter. You have a four-month wait until the ship returns, and fifty-two days in space."

"I don't think I can keep the secret that long, Casey."

"You must. Meyers condoned, if he did not order, one attempt to kill you. When they discover their failure there will be another try, unless in the meantime you prove yourself innocuous."

"Why can't we just hide out in the woods until the ship comes?"

"You would starve. I can exist on native foods: you can't. You need Earthly nourishment, and what we brought will not last you."

"So I have to cook up a story, leaving the part about the beasties out of it?"

"It is the only way. You may not succeed in convincing Meyers you are not a danger to him, but it is less likely he will try to harm you at the station with so many others around. And he will have no way of knowing for sure that you have knowledge of the aliens."

I deliberated.

Casey went on. "You have certainly seen enough to make a judgment and complete your survey: you will not have to go out again."

That was true enough, I thought. But I said, "What about you, Casey? You're in it, too. And you can't run like I will."

"Do not worry," he told me. "I'm just a dumb Indian, with more luck than brains. They know I'm too slow-witted to be trouble. Besides, you have seen what my body can do. I cannot count the times I have been killed in the past. As long as a single cell lives, so does He-Who-Waits: though it may take as long as a century to regenerate, my body will rebuild."

That, I told myself, is something else I have to figure out how to handle.

In twenty-seven days we reached the sea. I had gained muscle but lost

weight, and was feeling very fit despite the lack of certain nutrients in my diet. But for my red hair and light eyes, I might have been Casey's tribesman, tanned as I was and sporting a set of leather clothing he'd made from the skins of our food animals. They smelled a little ripe, but wore better than what I'd started out in.

There we rested for a day, playing in the surf and sand of the nearly tideless seashore. I felt a certain sorrow fill me. To leave this life and make the transition back to civilized being would not be easy. True, life in the wilderness was not easy, but it was strangely fulfilling. It satisfied my psychological need to find out what was really in me. I was satisfied with what I found. I had the stuff of pioneers. In bygone days I might have been one, seeking fate and fortune in the wild American West or in the harsh beauty of Herschel. In part, that had been my reason for joining the Ecological Service: to see how much of that I could take, without risking all. Now the work seemed tame. The U.N. was a stodgy bureaucracy, an extension of the old U.S.A., which now dominated planetary government on Earth.

The Earth, though poor now in resources and horribly overpopulated, was still manhome. And Earth assumed that the space around her was hers to control, particularly as man had met no challengers as yet. Mudron didn't count. It was a fluke, an old system which experts felt was not really a part of local stellar evolution: its inhabitants were backward, and would never present any threat to human supremacy.

The beings who'd built that matter transmitter did. That scared me. They were far and away our technological superiors. They might greet our discovery with resentment, perhaps extermination: who knew?

Casey said they could do something worse: ignore us, as the Europeans had his people; pen us up on reservations, leaving us to starve and stagnate. And Casey knew what that was all about.

I felt myself feeling a little fear of him, too. Not of the man, but the idea behind the man. As we traveled it had seemed natural for me to be with him, but what of the end of the journey? What would happen then?

To Casey, all other men were as children. He, who had already lived throughout ages eternal, would still be alive and vital when I was dust. He treated me as an equal, knowing that I wasn't, any more than all the others. He trusted me with his secret, speaking freely of his past, concealing nothing. Perhaps this was the greatest wisdom of all. I understood, yet the secret was still safe. Who would I tell? Who would believe a story so fantastic? He could deny everything without saying a

word. Silence would suffice, and the rest of the world would assume I was deranged.

I hoped he would never do that to me: that somehow I would find a way to join him in his destiny, here among the stars, if only for a little while. A dream taunted me. In it, we were together. I knew that he had done such things before with other partners, now long gone, and come away each time a lonely man, without a purpose or the solace of a kindred soul to share his misery. Of all the creatures in the universe, only he was unique, lacking both siblings and descendants.

"My creator gave me wondrous powers," he told me once, "and many gifts are mine. But that which made me truly a man, he took from me."

It didn't matter. I decided, on that last night on the beach, that the rest of the dream was worth it.

We started south in the morning, this time following a trail of a different sort: the *Wilmington's*. It was as clear as any path could be, even to me. Until the cradle of the landing web was finished she came down on her spacedrive: a process enormously destructive to the off-shore island which served as a landing site. The drive-fields were tame in space, where matter was scarce, but in an atmosphere their inertial force churned the sky and raised cubic miles of seawater into the air. Each takeoff or landing resembled a small hurricane. And as the vessel settled, these forces went to work on soil and crustal rock, fracturing it into powder, which fell to the ground in concentric rings according to its density.

We followed these, taking into account the island lay beyond the great promontory, which itself extended fifty miles to sea. Near its seaward end, on a bay, lay the settlement.

When the net was finished, an array of twenty banks of continuously firing lasers dumping power into the system would lower ships slowly into the cradle Solar's crews were building.

One more night we spent out under the stars, there on the sandy lowland. I tried to get back to reality, sifting mental notes of what I had seen so that I could complete a report. I had no written notes or photographs, of course, but I was satisfied I knew what was here: that except for the aliens, I could have passed this world for colonization. I intended to do so.

"I still do." Suddenly I found myself bursting from reminiscence into reality, and shouting at the boss.

Carmody looked at me critically. He had listened politely while I rambled on. He had not interrupted. He did now, though somehow his manner was softened. "I am here to make that choice, Miss Ryan, though I'll take your recommendation into consideration. Actually it's become more political than technical now, in view of your discovery of the aliens. Would it surprise you to hear that we'll probably follow it?"

I was surprised, and showed it.

Carmody smiled. "This may be just the break the human race needs: a chance to get a free lunch, to learn from willing teachers. The government'll probably give you a medal, and Casey too, if they can find him."

"Casey's not likely to be very impressed," I answered. "Now if they made that a necklace of prime serpent's teeth ..."

"I want to hear the rest of it, Miss Ryan, including all you can tell me about him. Maybe it'll help us find him."

"Okay. Let's see, where was I? Well, needless to say, there was quite a ruckus at camp when we turned up. We walked out of the bush looking like Tarzan and Jane: scared the pants off two guys who were goofing off behind a piling at the construction site. We went back to the settlement in their truck, riding in the back because we smelled bad. Meyers himself met us when we got in ...

"We thought you were dead," he told us, probably wondering where he'd failed. "I sent search parties out when you didn't return. We found a burned skimmer and we just naturally assumed you'd been in it."

I did the talking. Casey went back to being the dumb Indian. "Well, as you can see, we're all right. All I need is a bath and some real food. We've been eating what Casey shot with his bow."

Meyers had been watching Casey with a new respect. "Oh, so that's what it's for." He examined one of the arrows. "Certainly looks deadly." He turned to Casey. "I guess you'd better get back to your regular work."

No, you don't. I wasn't about to let myself out of Casey's sight and protection. "Uh—if you don't mind, Mr. Meyers, I'd like to keep him for a while, if you can spare him. I need him to help me with my report."

"Him? What can he do?"

"I want to pick his brains. I lost all my samples and photographs, and I couldn't take notes on the trail, so my report will have to be composed from memory—his and mine. And as you can see, he's a woodsman. He must have noticed thousands of things I didn't."

There was no credible way Meyers could refuse, though I doubt he bought my explanation, so Casey stayed, and we went back to our old quarters together.

"You shouldn't have done that, Kim."

"Why not? I do need the benefit of your observations. And I need your protection. Did you see the way he looked at your bow?"

"I noticed. But a man like Meyers wouldn't be afraid of a savage, and it's difficult to play Dumb Indian when you make me party to scientific studies. I'd have been more effective in the field, where I could keep an eye on things."

"Quit worrying, Casey. Human nature will take care of that problem. We can trust Meyers's prurient mind if nothing else. He'll figure I want to hang onto my stud."

Casey didn't say another word about it. In spite of his vast experience, I guess he still didn't understand women. He settled in with me, and we went to work on a report.

We still needed some information we didn't have, mostly about marine life on Campbell. This provided an excuse for short local field trips, and gave us a chance to reminisce. We spent many days on Campbell's broad beaches or out in a motorboat.

I loved Campbell's mild climate and its friendly sun. "I think," I told Casey, "that I could live here forever. I really like this."

"Have you forgotten the night in the cave," he replied, "or what we saw in the interior?"

"No, Casey, but I can dream, can't I? It will end soon enough, when my report hits. Then the government will tell us we can't have Campbell."

He was compassionate, and he let me keep the dream a little longer—but there came a day when it died. He came back from a sojourn: they had flooded him with innuendos about "his squaw," but he had learned useful things.

"It has begun, Kim. Great care must be taken now." Casey always had a penchant to talk in riddles. It irritated me more than anything else he did. I guess it showed.

"What has started?" I demanded.

"Men have begun to vanish. They disappear into the bush around the cradle site."

I was appalled. "If the aliens now exist in sufficient numbers, this might

be the beginning of an attack."

"None have been seen," Casey said glumly. "Management has an official explanation. They say that with the web near completion, the missing men have simply taken off, to get the jump on the colonists who will come later. But Meyers knows the real reason."

"How do you know that?"

"The machine shop is making weapons. Lathes turn gun barrels. The smith is making pike heads and short swords. There are armed skimmers patrolling the periphery."

"War, with the aliens?" I saw myself trapped here, perhaps imprisoned or killed, to keep word from getting back to Earth.

"Perhaps. Perhaps not." Casey pondered each phrase. "Meyers may believe he can quietly exterminate the aliens or drive them deep into the bush where they will not be rediscovered. He may bring mercenaries here to hunt them. Certainly he will station marksmen at the transmitter to pick off new arrivals."

"What are we going to do, Casey?"

"For the meantime, nothing. Everything depends on getting you out when the *Wilmington* returns. I now believe the government must be told, even if we lose Campbell. This is better than interstellar war, which man would surely lose."

We waited, and hoped.

I learned later that Meyers and Bigelow *had* tried extermination: had placed a garrison at the alien transmitter. They succeeded for a while in preventing the formation of large concentrations of aliens, but this did not last. Men still disappeared; amusingly enough, some ran off voluntarily, believing Meyers's explanation for the disappearance of others and determined to get in on a good thing.

Not so amusing were the discussions they'd had about Casey and me, which Bigelow admitted to later. To his credit, he balked at murder, but Meyers thought they could blame it on the aliens if they ever got caught.

I was getting packed to leave while this was going on and didn't suspect a thing, not even when landing day arrived. How Meyers talked Corsetti into doing what he did, I'll never know. Casey and I discussed it later and agreed that even a moron should have known it wouldn't work. But some things are just destined to happen, and I guess it was one of them.

We were on the back porch looking at the sky, watching for the great

hulk of the ship to descend. On the first down-orbit pass she was just a gleaming point of light which moved rapidly over the station. The second pass would bring her down, and we waited for her to reappear in the western sky. She did not.

"Something's wrong, Kim," Casey told me. He pointed westward.

The air shimmered, and an enormous dust cloud had risen from the ground to race to the top of the atmosphere and flatten out. Then the earth itself started to shake, and there came a series of sonic shocks followed by a great wind. In the dust cloud appeared blazing halos.

Both of us had seen these things before. It was the awful tumult which accompanies a ship's descent on Aschenbrenner drive—but it belonged on the island, not in the bush to the west.

Casey's eyes blazed. He grabbed my arm and shoved me to the door. "Get inside quickly," he warned. "Those fools have turned *Wilmington's* drive on the alien transmitter."

I found myself on the rough floor with Casey on top of me, and started to protest his rough treatment. I stopped when I saw the flash, brilliant like a thousand suns. The fireball singed the settlement as it rose, despite the vast distance; then it dimmed. Through the top of the window I could see it rise toward space.

More shock waves followed; more howling wind. The building shook and rattled but it held together.

One, maybe both of them, went: either the ship's engines went critical or the transmitter did. There might be nothing left of either. Casey let me up.

"What now, Casey? What do we do now?"

This time he didn't have an answer.

Outside, men could be seen shouting, screaming; vehicles roared wildly through the streets, racing engines and squealing tires. We knew that there must have been casualties.

A few minutes later Meyers came and brought two men, both armed. "Your time has come, Miss Busybody," he said to me.

They herded us off to the brig. The cell looked adequate even to hold Casey.

I sat there on the edge of my bunk, crying. Casey paced.

"I have experience with prisons, too," he said. "There is a way out of all of them."

I was pessimistic. Our cell was essentially a steel box, with walls perforated for ventilation. Its seams were welded, and it was barred and locked from outside, with no openings large enough even to pass a hand. It was also guarded by one of Meyers's gunmen, who sat in a chair outside the door.

After a while Casey came over and sat beside me. "Kim," he said. "I want you to stop that and get control of yourself. That is what I am going to do: understand?"

I hiccupped and nodded my head. I didn't, really.

"Good," he whispered. "I will need three or four hours, and the result may be quite frightening. Do not allow it to upset you."

"Okay," I whispered.

"In the meantime keep me covered, but try not to distract me. If anyone comes you must warn me. Is that clear?"

"Clear."

"I am just going to rearrange a few things."

Then he left me and climbed into the other bunk, covering himself with a blanket.

A new guard relieved the first one. He came to the door to talk to me, but I told him to let Casey sleep. Soon he settled into the chair by the door.

About sundown Casey stirred. I watched an arm snake out from under the blanket and rise to grasp its edge. The arm was pink and covered with a light brown fuzz. It rolled the blanket down, revealing a face I knew and hated. A hand rose to its lips, and Fritz Meyers stood up.

"Rankin." Even the voice was the same. "Get over here."

"Mr. Meyers? How? ..."

"Never mind: get this door open."

"Yes, sir, only ... what are you doing in there?"

"None of your business, Rankin: the lady and I made a deal. Get the door open."

The lock clicked and the bar slid back. Casey hit the door like a battering ram, driving it into Rankin's face, smashing flesh and bone alike. He crumpled to the floor.

"Come on out, Kim."

I left the cell, still not completely convinced I was looking at Casey.

He shoved Rankin inside, flipping him onto my bunk, and covered him up. Then he reached over into his own and withdrew a clump of black substance.

"My own hair," he said. "I can't reconstitute dead tissue. I had to get rid of it and start over. We'll hide this somewhere outside."

"Where are we going?"

"Back to our quarters first, to get our equipment and some food for you. Then into the bush. We'll hide there until contact with Earth is re-established. Meyers has to try to kill us now if we stay, and in your case, death's permanent."

We started out into the compound. It was strangely empty. Then I heard a faint popping, and in the south there was a glow in the sky. It looked like a fire, and I thought I smelled smoke, too. For an instant I was afraid it was our quarters that were burning, but the fire seemed to be farther away. We hurried off in that direction.

Others appeared in the street, scurrying about, some moving equipment in the direction of the fire. Casey called to one of them. The man stopped running and came over.

"What's happening out there, Barker?"

"Mr. Meyers. How—I just talked to you on the phone. How did you get way over here?"

"Never mind. Fill me in."

"Well, okay—you mean the fire? Them things set it, we think. I ain't seen none myself, but they're supposed to be all over. There's gonna be a fight, I think."

"What are we doing about it?"

Barker looked at him as if to say *don't you know?*, but he said only, "We got the guys with guns on rooftops, and some in a skimmer. The rest of the men got axes and machetes. We ain't gonna beat fire, though. If they decide to burn us out, we can't stop them."

"You're doing the right thing, Barker. Get back to work."

Barker took off.

"General foreman," Casey explained. "One of the dumber ones. We'd better hurry before the battle really gets started. Barker's right: they can't stop a fire, though I doubt the aliens want to burn up what they hope to get from this raid. Most likely the fire is just a diversion."

We reached our rooms, got what we needed, and left again. I noticed the Meyers form was fading, and commented.

"It takes too much concentration to hold a new pattern until I get really used to it. On occasion I've held them for years—the Compte de Rochambeau, for instance. Now there was a role where I had everybody guessing."

I had not seen the mischievous side of Casey before, but this proved he had one.

We made our way out of the settlement, heading west in the direction of the cradle site. Once or twice we stopped and Casey listened for sounds of others moving in the bush, but we encountered neither man nor alien. Casey led us across the lowlands and into higher country, and by morning we were high on the spine of the promontory about twenty miles west of the station. He selected a campsite where there was both water and cover, and we rested. That is, I rested. Casey climbed a tree and examined the surrounding countryside with field glasses.

I awoke and ate, while Casey explained our situation. "I see little groups of aliens converging on the station. All are poorly armed. As of now there are probably not enough of them to overcome the men, but more arrive hourly. Soon they can start a siege, if they can find the food to maintain one. Still, if the men narrow their perimeter and defend it, they may yet prevail. I think last night's raid was simply a test of human strength."

"Maybe they don't know how many men there are."

"A good point. But neither do the men know the aliens strength. If the transmitter has ceased to function, their numbers will not grow, but I regard that as a particularly disastrous possibility."

"Why? I should think that would be better for us."

"In the short run, perhaps. But for the race, devastating. If the aliens can detect its malfunction, they may return and find us. Discovery, I think, is something best postponed as long as possible. In the interim perhaps we will be rescued and obliterate our traces from Campbell."

"Do you think we will have to go that far?"

"I cannot see the future, Kim."

"We could have a long wait, Casey. It'll be almost two months before the *Wilmington* is overdue. More time will be wasted deciding what to do, and still more will pass before another ship can get here. What happens in the meantime?"

"Nothing, I hope. We will survive it and do what we can to find solutions. There was a time when I thought we might simply get you back to Earth and let the government handle things. Now that won't work. We're out of time. But I wish we had a better insight into this."

I had thought he did, but something apparently still bothered him. I asked him what it was.

"The aliens are inept. That's not typical criminal behavior, at least not for the human criminals I've known. They're not nearly aggressive enough. Even allowing for cultural differences they ought to show more resourcefulness, particularly in weaponry. We ought to be seeing some spears along with the clubs, and some concerted effort to get hold of human material for weapons. The one thing they do seem to rely on is fire: otherwise, they behave like amateurs."

We moved again, farther into the interior, to find a place which, as Casey said, "You and I can defend by ourselves for long enough to bring this business to an end."

He didn't tell me what he meant by that, but he found our redoubt: a cavern halfway up a cliff face overlooking a broad stream. We had brought much food, and the shrubs from the narrow pathway would provide fuel. Inside the cavern was a pool containing more water than we could drink in years. But farther down the valley was a ford, where aliens sometimes crossed, headed for the settlement.

Casey got me settled in, then told me to rest. "Tonight," he said, "you will not close your eyes at all, but you will be safe here until I return. Even you alone could hold this place against an army, with nothing more than a few rocks and a knife."

When darkness fell he sallied forth armed only with a staff. I waited in darkness all alone for his return, and all alone fought off the savage creatures my imagination conjured up. Once or twice I felt the bow and wondered, if the need arose, whether I could summon the strength to draw it or the skill to find the mark.

With the first light of dawn I heard a noise on the trail below me, and felt a fright. Casey would move more silently than that. And Casey did. But the lanky prisoner he led, tightly bound and stumbling, had no wish to cooperate.

I stood, watching from the cave's mouth, as Casey dragged it in. It seemed to me to be in life even uglier and more menacing than the dead one at the other cave, though it was much smaller.

"I chose it for its size," Casey said. "In time you will understand why. Now I must get to work and learn yet another tongue, so I may speak with it."

And in the days that followed he struggled to master the grunts, hisses and squeals that made up the alien's speech. I despaired of matching his resolve and left the two alone, preferring to speculate on what was happening to the settlement.

Later, when it was over, I learned that these had been desperate times for Meyers, and had finally driven him to self-destruction. By that time most of the outer buildings had been leveled to provide a clear field of fire for what was left, huddled behind barriers of barbed wire. In two months he had lost four hundred men—not killed, but *taken*, dragged away by the aliens.

The cairn had not been destroyed, and the *Wilmington* was sacrificed in vain. Aliens still came through to be cut down by human sharpshooters mounted in skimmers. Then the aliens ended that; they fire-bombed the motor pool. Immobilized, Meyers sat within his reduced perimeter, along with fifty men who remained, and waited for the end. Casey had been ready.

Again the secretary broke into my narrative.

"That's the part I understand the least," Carmody said. By this time he seemed far more mellow; almost human. His haughtiness was gone. "Perhaps if we could find Kah-Sih-Omah . . ."

"Casey doesn't want to be found, Mr. Carmody. And if he doesn't, he won't be. Until he does turn up this is only a story, a myth, both to us and the aliens." *But he was more than that to me*, I thought. And the thought was painful.

"I want to hear the rest of it, Miss Ryan. Especially the ending."

"I suppose that's the part that really matters most of all," I replied. "I wasn't in on much of it. All I really know was pieced together later, from people I talked to. A lot of my information comes from Bigelow, and has to be considered less than reliable. And I'm sure the aliens don't suspect a thing. "It all started one morning when I woke to find the message scratched in the sand at the cave mouth. Casey and the alien were gone. By that time, of course, Casey was fluent in the alien speech and ..."

"What was the message?" Carmody interrupted

"It didn't make sense. Mr. Carmody. It was only three words. I couldn't really make it out," I lied. "Anyway, Casey was gone, and after that things started happening at the settlement.

"Meyers had succeeded in holding on as long as the aliens simply besieged him, and he was able to fight off their night raids with superior tactics and weapons. The aliens couldn't mount a direct assault.

"Then, suddenly, the aliens brought up trebuchet and used them to reduce the buildings. Meyers shot himself and Bigelow took over. He had guts; I'll give him that, going out to parley with the aliens. You pretty well know the rest."

Carmody did, though he wasn't quite sure how to handle it from there. I wasn't either, and said so.

"I'm leaving you in charge, Miss Ryan, while I go back to report all this. Somehow I can't see the government abandoning Campbell over this; not with all this knowledge available for exploitation. I think we'll get the landing web finished in record time now. There'll be all kinds of people coming in. In the meantime you'll have to keep things stable here. I hope you get along all right with the alien leader."

"Yes," I said. "We understand one another. His English seems to be pretty good."

"Fine, then I won't worry about a thing." He rose from the chair and motioned for me to follow him down to the dock. "This'll mean a promotion for you, you know. Maybe even to an advance scout team. Would you like that?" He had my written report in his hand, and patted it lovingly.

"Yes, if I could get the right partner; yes, I think I would."

He climbed into the launch and I watched it leave, until at last the image became too small, and disappeared over the horizon.

He hadn't had time to read the report, that I knew. When he did, he would find no reference in it to the extraordinary powers Casey had displayed. So far as that part of the story was concerned, it would remain a myth.

The alien entered the room and sat down in the chair beside me, its legs bent awkwardly, arms resting in its lap. I looked no more than necessary at its face, which appealed to me not at all, though I knew what lay behind it. Instead, I looked away and said, "When, Casey? How much longer?"

"Shh. Not so loud." He raised an arm, but I retreated. I would not allow it to touch me.

"There are," he said, "grave disadvantages to my present form, but until the job is done it is necessary. I grow used to it and it becomes easier to hold. Tell me, Kim, how did your interview go?"

"Better than expected, I think. Carmody appears to be a very prudent man. He will have my report and read it as he travels back to Earth. He believes the aliens can be exploited."

"So do I, and I believe that they will permit this willingly, in the hope that we can someday aid their fellows."

"For all we know they may really be criminals."

"No. Not in the sense you mean. And we do know, in general, where they originate from, farther in on the spiral arm. Their home systems are in foment. They are what they claim to be; political refugees. They are politicians, philosophers, scientists, writers, artists and the like; anything but criminals, and certainly not soldiers. That is why I had to lead them and teach them to make war. They could not even bring themselves to kill, but simply captured humans and dragged them off, often with heavy casualties to their own.

"And they don't want Campbell; at least, not in the sense we do. Their government simply dumped them here with nothing, to fend for themselves on what was thought to be a vacant world. These people embarrassed them.

"To us, they can be partners. We can trade them sustenance for knowledge. The matter transmitter alone is worth that. Spaceships will always be needed for exploration, but commerce needs something better to be really worthwhile. It will make colonization really practical too, and you know what that means."

"We will need many more new worlds." This time I did not avoid his touch. I knew also what the message meant, that still I pictured scratched in the sand. He-Who-Waits had found a companion, "For A Time."