

RORY

Steven Gould

Dr. Anton Grebenchekov banged his head on a doorway for the fourth time that day and swore, "*Chyort vosmoi!*" His clumsiness infuriated him for many reasons, not the least being the several gymnastic medals he'd earned in college.

"Mind your head, Anton," said Dr. Ruth McMillian, the section head in biochemistry.

Anton winced again. She'd found nothing to approve of in him since his arrival six hours earlier. Starting with a piece of research he'd published four years before and finishing with his spoken opinions of minutes before, she'd attacked every concept he'd ever voiced. And, more than anything in the solar system, Anton wanted Dr. McMillian to approve of him.

"Excuse me, Dr. McMillian, what were you saying?" He floated into the lab, still rubbing his head.

"Granulopoietin, Anton. You have heard of granulopoietin?" She turned to face him. Close-cropped, salt-and-peppered hair framed her unlined face. She wore an off-white coverall with a stiff, almost Roman collar. She was pretty in a stern way. Anton found her beautiful.

Anton blushed. "My degree is in bio-chemistry!" he said, almost angrily.

"I wasn't sure. That last piece you did in the *JBC* was so vague."

Anton's blush turned into a slow burn. Damn her eyes! "If you disprove of my work and qualifications, why did you approve of my appointment here?"

"I didn't. That decision was made on Earth, by the head of the Institute."

"Dr. Herzig," supplied Anton.

"Hmmp. She probably sent you out here to learn some discipline—some precision in your thinking."

"And perhaps she sent me out here to put some originality in yours!" Anton cringed inwardly, wishing he hadn't spoken. He'd used all the resources available to him to get this position with Dr. McMillian. "I'm sorry, I didn't—"

She cut him off. "Perhaps you're right." Her face hadn't changed expression, but her voice was cooler. "I'll let you get settled in your cabin before dinner. Can you find your way?"

"Yes."

"Dinner at 1800." She turned and pulled a notepad from its clip on one of the lab benches and began studying it.

Anton hesitated for a moment, then left. On the way out, he hit his head on the doorway.

Rory flipped a switch on the dictionary clipped to his belt and said, "Define monarch."

The small black box hesitated an instant, then replied in a pleasant tenor, "*Monarch*. One: a person who rules over a kingdom or empire as (a) a sovereign ruler, (b) a constitutional king or queen. Two: someone or something holding a preeminent position or power. Three: a large migratory American but—" the device shut off in mid-sentence as Rory hit the interrupt key.

"Thank you," said Rory automatically.

"You're welcome," the dictionary said.

Rory kicked the wall nearest him and went flying down the passage. Halfway down, a large figure came floating backwards out of a side passage. Rory had time to yell, "Look out!" before he collided with Anton's stomach.

He and Rory pinwheeled down the passage.

Rory detached himself in mid-flight and pushed gently away from Anton. They came to a stop against the frame of the next doorway. "You should look both ways before you go into a passageway. Some people go lots faster than me."

Anton stared at Rory while trying to draw a breath. Rory went on, "You're new here. I haven't seen you. Did you just get here? Where did you come from?"

"Sorry," Anton finally managed. "I should've looked, but I was lost and

trying to figure out where I was."

"Lost?" Rory scratched his head. "In the *station*?"

"Well, yes," Anton said, staring. He saw an oddly shaped male adult with slanting eyes, broad short head, and stubby, short fingers. Age was hard to guess, but Anton decided that he must be around twenty. "I'm Anton Grebenchekov."

"I'm Rory. Are you the one who's going to work with Dr. Ruth?"

"Dr. Ruth? No . . . oh, Ruth McMillian. Right. That's what I hope to do. What do you do, Rory?"

Rory grinned, and slapped his chest. "I'm the supercargo. That's because I'm special." He flipped the switch on the dictionary again. "Define mongolism."

The box beeped and said, "*Mongolism*. A congenital condition characterized by slanting eyes, by a broad short skull, by broad hands with short fingers, by trisomy of the chromosome numbered twenty-one in man, and by moderate to severe mental defi—" Rory hit the interrupt again.

"Thank you," said Rory.

"You're welcome," the box said.

"See? Special. According to Dr. Ruth, there isn't anybody else like me in space. She says I'm an 'investigator,' " Rory continued. "I investigate things."

Anton smiled slowly. "I see. Could you investigate something for me?"

"Sure. I'm good at that."

"How do I get to cabin Ten-C?"

"Ten-C? Oh, you're in the same pod as me. Follow me." Rory grabbed one of the lines running down the wall of the passage and pulled himself hand over hand back in the direction he had come with the rapidity of a monkey. Anton followed as best he could.

At every junction Rory paused, waiting for Anton to catch up. Then, looking both ways, he kicked off the edges of that containment bulkhead and zoomed down the next passge, often not touching a wall until the next intersection.

Anton gradually got the hang of it. Before long, he was jumping as far as Rory. And a few times he actually stayed clear of the walls. But he was slowed by sightseeing. They passed open doors with people working over equipment strange to him, or closed doors with intriguing labels like

Astrophysics, Agronomy, Plant Physiology, Astronomy, Electronics, Metallurgy, Project SETI, Waste Reclamation, and Radiation Safety.

At regular intervals the windows looked out at other parts of the station (a bewildering construct of struts, tubular passages, and spherical chambers) and the small asteroid known as Lucy to which the station was tethered. Anton also knew that if he looked in the correct direction, he could see the faint disk of Ceres, fifteen thousand kilometers away; and sometimes a bright flash of light as the sun caught the Ceres colony's surface installations just right, thirty-two hours away by shuttle.

"Here we are," announced Rory as they came to yet another junction with passages going right, up, left, down, and straight ahead. Each of the passages was marked with a letter. "G" was the one to Anton's right. Rory ducked into that passage. Anton followed. The passage ended with another doorway, pressure door pinned back on sprung hinges, ready to snap shut from any drop of pressure outside the pod. Another identical door was in the passage, ready for any pressure drop inside the pod.

Anton hoped he'd be on the correct side, if that ever happened.

The passage opened onto a spherical lounge perhaps seven meters in diameter. Twelve hexagonal doors, equally spaced, were set into the carpeted surface of the room. They were labeled one through twelve in white numerals, contrasting with the blue curving walls and green doors.

Anton had seen it briefly when he'd left his bags earlier, but the maze of station passageways had left him lost moments after leaving.

"Thank you, Rory," he said.

Rory grinned. "You're welcome." He bounced over to number seven and nulled the door open. "Wanna see Geary? He's my best friend."

Anton pushed off and came to a successful stop at the edge of Rory's doorway. Like all the cabins, Rory's had a half-meter-square window looking out on space. A ventilator outlet opened on one side of the room and an intake grille was on the other. A storage unit was mounted on one of the six side walls, and belongings were attached to other walls with Velcro fasteners.

"See, he's also special."

Anton pulled himself into the room. As he got closer, he saw a sphere made of wire mesh mounted rigidly before the ventilator intake. Bits of vegetable debris clung to the side of the sphere closest to the inlet. Then he saw the rodent floating in the sphere and looking back at him with black, beady eyes.

"This is Geary. He's sort of a Mongoloid, too."

"What do you mean, Rory?"

"He's a Mongolian gerbil."

Anton nodded. He'd seen the animals used in laboratories on Earth. They were extremely adaptable to temperature extremes, even if they tended to look more like rats than gerbils.

"Dr. Stan says his name really should be Al—Algernon, I think. I don't know what that means, do you?" Rory looked around at Anton.

Anton shook his head. "I don't know."

Rory continued. "Sometimes, I don't think Dr. Stan likes me."

In his cage Geary straightened out his tail, using it to push against one side of the sphere. This propelled him to the other side of the cage, where he hooked small claws in the mesh and squeaked.

"He wants food," said Rory. "Watch this." He traced his hand around the outside of the mesh sphere slowly. Clinging to the mesh within, the gerbil followed the hand around. Rory's hand moved faster and the gerbil began running around the inside of the sphere, centripetal acceleration keeping the creature against the mesh.

"See? Isn't he special?" Rory pulled his hand away. Geary continued to circle the sphere for a few more circuits then stopped, watching Rory expectantly.

"Yes, Rory. He's very special."

Rory took a small paper packet from a drawer and opened a door in the cage. Sticking both hands in, he carefully tore the bag open. Almost immediately the seeds and dried fruit within drifted to the side of the sphere closest to the intake. The gerbil, already waiting there, started eating.

Anton checked his watch. It was 1740, twenty minutes before supper, and he hadn't the faintest idea how to get to the dining hall. "Rory, I need another thing investigated. ..."

Life at the station soon became routine for Anton. He moved into the lab vacated by Dr. Nielson, the biochemist he had replaced, and started relearning every laboratory technique applicable to biochemistry. At least centrifuges were still the same. But techniques like column chromatography differed radically, requiring either separate centrifuges

or vacuum to pull solutions through the appropriate medium. Any technique that *required* gravity to function properly had to be adapted.

Then again, some techniques worked better without gravity. Thin layer chromatography, using capillary action to transfer fluids, worked better in zero-g, and everybody knew about electrophoresis.

Still, the most minor tasks of handling fluids, powders, and mixing were complicated by no gravity.

As if this weren't a large enough headache, Dr. McMillian would pop into the lab to observe Anton's progress. Despite a growing skill in handling zero-g, every time she showed up Anton started fumbling objects or bumping into things. It also didn't help that she lived in C-pod, right next to Rory in cabin number eight. He couldn't seem to avoid her.

He took to spending more of his off time with Rory. When he did that, Ruth left him alone.

Rory constantly amazed Anton with bizarre combinations of insight and misunderstanding.

"I heard Dr. Stan talking about millions of queens and kings flying down the coast back on Earth," Rory said one day. "How do they fly? Is it magic? And how come there are so many of them? I thought only one person in thousands got to be king."

"Just what exactly did Dr. Peterson say?" Dr. Stan Peterson was a physiologist who lived in C-Twelve. Anton had talked to him only a few times.

Rory frowned, his eyes shut. "He said that it was really incredible to see the millions of mon, uh . . . monarchs flying along the coast."

Anton smiled. "A monarch isn't always a queen or a king, Rory. Among other things, it's a type of butterfly."

Rory considered that. "Ohhh. A butterfly is a flying bug, isn't it?"

"Close enough, Rory. Close enough."

Once Anton asked Rory how he came to be at the station.

"I was born here."

"Oh? How old are you?"

After a moment, Rory said with great precision, "Twenty-three. I have a birthday next month. I'll be . . . twenty-four! Dr. Stan once said I had the mind of a five-year-old, though. What did he mean by that?"

"I don't know, Rory." Anton was beginning to dislike Dr. Stan Peterson,

and he'd only talked to the man twice. "Perhaps he meant that you have a fresh view on things." He changed the subject. "Where are your parents now?"

"My mother's on Earth. She sends me presents and messages. My father's dead. He died when I was real little—I didn't know him." He tilted his head to one side and looked at Anton. "Dr. Ruth is my guardian."

Anton stared at Rory, surprised. "She is, is she? That's very interesting." He stared off into space.

Rory waited a minute, then said, "You really like her, don't you?"

Anton nodded solemnly.

Rory scowled. "Darn. It would be nice if she liked you. You're my best friend after Geary." He batted at the carpeted wall of the lounge. "Sometimes I don't understand her at all. She was acting like she liked you. Smiling right after you'd leave the room and looking at nothing. You know, the sort of look you get on your face when you bang your head real hard on the doorway? I was sure she liked you!"

"You certainly couldn't prove it by me."

"Well, I thought she did. Then she said something rotten 'bout you."

"What did she say, Rory?" Anton wasn't sure he should ask, but couldn't help himself. What was another small pain?

"She was talking to Kim, what they call 'girl talk,' so they chased me out of Dr. Ruth's room, but they didn't close the door so I stuck myself to the floor and listened." Kim Cowlander was an electronics technician who roomed in Three-C. She was friendly, but brisk, except with Rory. With him she was patient and kind.

"Well, what did you hear?" Anton's stomach didn't feel very good.

"Dr. Ruth said you didn't do anything. No, that's not it. She said you were a lump. Or was it a large piece? No, no. She said you were a hunk! I didn't think that was very nice. You do lots of things! Why are you laughing?"

Anton had been speaking English since he was in grade school and had done his post doctoral work at Johns Hopkins in Baltimore. He had a more than adequate grasp of American slang. "It's all right, Rory. Sometimes it is a good thing to be a hunk. What else did they say?"

"Well, Kim said you certainly weren't her type." He looked sideways at Anton. "Dr. Stan says that Kim likes girls and she really likes Dr. Ruth but Dr. Ruth doesn't like girls that way."

Anton shook his head in amazement.

"Then I left. I was too mad to listen anymore."

"That's okay, Rory. Can we keep what you just told me a secret?"

"Secrets are for friends to keep," agreed Rory.

Just then, Dr. McMillian came into the lounge. She was wearing shorts and a tee-shirt, and was flushed from working out in the two-g centrifuge. "Hello, Rory," she said warmly, adding, "Anton," somewhat cooler.

Anton nodded. "Dr. McMillan." She looked at him suspiciously. "What are you smiling at?"

"Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all."

The accident occurred right before dinner. Anton was watching the docking of the weekly shuttle from Ceres from his cabin window, so he saw most of it.

The shuttle, a spherical pressurized cabin with rocket motors and fuel tanks on struts, had completed most of its braking and was drifting toward the station's docking pod. The station's own two smaller shuttles were docked at two of the six available locks. A station hand floated in his suit, waiting to jump across with a line and warp the shuttle in. The shuttle fired braking thrusters one more time.

And then blew up.

Anton blinked.

Saw a glowing sphere of burning gasses expand from the far side of the shuttle.

Blinked.

Saw the shuttle break apart like an egg shattering or a water balloon exploding.

Blinked.

Saw major segments of the shuttle smash into the docking pod.

Blinked.

Saw the docking pod crumple in two places.

Blinked.

Saw an even larger explosion erupt from the docking pod.

Blinked.

Saw pieces of the pod smash into the station's shuttles.

Blinked.

Saw one of the shuttles fly off into space, with a caved-in, fractured look, and saw the other shuttle heading straight for C-pod.

Winced.

He drew a gasp of air to shout, but before he finished, the small shuttle passed out of view to his left, toward the station proper, and a shock jarred the entire room. There was a sudden draft and his ears popped as pressure suddenly dropped. The lights went out. Then there was a "whump" as the pressure door at the entrance to C-pod slammed shut on its rubber gasket.

"Rory!" Ruth McMillian shouted distantly. He scrambled for the door in the dark, found it, and shoved it open.

A lone emergency light mounted by the pod exit dimly lit the lounge. Anton saw Dr. McMillian tug at the door to Rory's room. It flipped open and Rory came sailing out. She grabbed him and ran fingers down his sides. "Are you all right?"

"Sure," he smiled. His nose was bleeding. "Just couldn't find the door latch. Blowout?"

There was a muffled screaming from Dr. Peterson's door. "Let me out! Let me out!"

Anton kicked his way over there and flipped the latch. Stan Peterson erupted into the lounge, clawing wildly with his hands at the edge of the door. Large areas of white showed in his eyes and he was visibly sweating. "Ohmigod, ohmigod." He clutched his head in his hands and moaned.

"Claustrophobe," said a voice behind them. Kim Cowlander was pulling herself out of her room when Anton turned to look. She was still zipping up a sleeveless coverall as she floated out into the lounge. "What the shit happened?"

Dr. McMillian shrugged. Anton said, "The shuttle from Ceres blew up. It took the docking pod with it. The last I saw before we got hit was the number two shuttle zipping past my window. I think it hit the passageway."

"No shit, Sherlock," said Kim. "Let's see if we can see the extent of the damage." She shoved past the still moaning Peterson, ignoring him, and made her way to the passage door. Anton and Ruth McMillian followed.

"Holy shit," Kim said when she'd looked through the small port in the center of the door.

"You have a preoccupation with fecal matter, Kim?" said Anton, as he pressed forward to look past her shoulder. His eyes widened when he saw. "I take it back."

The shuttle had done more than damage the passageway—it had sheared it cleanly away. When Anton looked out the port he saw the station framed by a jagged and torn passageway—a lot of the station, and more every second. It was receding from them at a visible rate, and nothing connected them to it.

"Well, thank God the cutoffs worked," said Kim, "or we'd be trying to breathe thinner stuff than this. You can see where the power line tore, and there's the sewage and air lines. I don't see the water pipe—it must have torn closer to the hull." She was pointing through the little window.

"We'll just have to wait for one of the shuttles to come get us," said Ruth.

"Uh, I don't think that's going to happen," said Anton. "The last I saw of the number one shuttle it was traveling in-system looking like a cracked teapot, and it was shuttle number two that went through the passageway. I'd be willing to wager it didn't hang around afterward. And even if it did, I'll bet it isn't serviceable."

"Not to worry," said Kim to Ruth. "In a suit I could jump the distance with a line. They'll send someone after us with an EVA pack and a fishing line." Anton thought about that and felt better, but his breathing was still faster than he thought it should be. Must be the thin air left over from the separation, he thought.

"Dr. Ruth! Anton!" It was Rory's voice, rising in a distressed wail.

Anton kicked out hard against the port and shot across the lounge. Halfway there he tucked and flipped, then killed his momentum by collapsing his legs when he landed. Ruth was right behind, but not as graceful. She banged into the carpeted surface and would have bounced back off if Anton hadn't grabbed the sill of Rory's doorway and her leg. "What is it, Rory?" asked Anton.

"It's Geary! Something's wrong with Geary!"

Anton looked at the cage. The gerbil was floating in the middle of the cage, twitching. Most of the seed shells, fruit rinds, and gerbil feces that normally plastered the side of the cage nearest the intake was floating freely about the mesh sphere.

Ruth pushed past Anton and moved forward until her face was right up against the cage. She took a deep breath and blew gently into the mesh. Almost immediately, Geary stopped twitching. After thirty seconds, the gerbil had recovered enough to start rubbing its nose vigorously.

"He was suffocating in his own carbon dioxide. The ventilators shut off when we lost power. What's more, it's happening to us, too." She unfastened the cage from the wall and handed it to Rory. "Keep moving around, Rory, and Geary will be fine." She looked at Anton. "The same thing applies to all of us."

Anton smiled. "Didn't know you cared."

She scowled back at him, but he was already leaving the room.

Peterson had stopped moaning when Rory, Anton, and Ruth had emerged from the cabin. Rory was carefully moving Geary's cage back and forth through the air.

Kim joined them. "Keep moving," Ruth told her. "Or you'll drown in your own CO₂."

Kim laughed harshly. "Go teach your grandmother. I haven't stopped moving since the accident." She poked a finger at Peterson. "Hey, Mr. Hotshot Physiologist! How long before we use up all this air?"

Peterson stared at her vaguely. He was breathing rapidly. Anton gave him a gentle shove to move him into fresher air. "What's the volume of this area? More importantly, what's the partial pressure of oxygen?"

"How should I know that? You're the scientist."

"What's the air pressure, then?"

"No, idea, Doc. Can't be much lower than 2 kg/cm². Even I know we wouldn't be conscious that low, what with the oxy/nitrogen mix the station runs."

"Could be anything from two hours to twenty. I don't know."

Anton felt his breathing speed up again and moved sideways. His head was beginning to ache. Rory had moved off with Geary in tow, and Ruth had moved back to the passageway door.

Kim was starting in on Peterson again when Ruth called. "I think they're sending someone after us!" There was a rush for the door; Rory stayed behind and Anton moved more slowly than the rest. He pulled open the door to the adjoining cabin instead of crowding in with the others and used the larger window inside.

He was appalled at how far away the station looked. It had to be a good kilometer distant. Still, he could see some activity at the airlock on one of the construction pods. As he watched, he saw a flash of brightness lighting up a section of the station in shadow. Then a dot started growing slowly closer. It took two minutes before the dot was a recognizable man. In that time, the station had grown appreciably more distant. After another minute, they could see the line trailing behind the space-suited figure. It glistened against the black sky like a silver thread.

"Come on, baby."

"You can do it!"

Kim and Ruth were cheering the figure on. Anton moved again to help his breathing, but kept his eyes glued to the moving man. He was ten meters away—so close they could make out facial features through the visor—when the line jerked him to a halt and sent him rebounding back toward the station.

"Aaaaahhhhhhhh, shit! They ran out of line!" Kim screamed.

"Son of a bitch," said Peterson.

"It's okay," said Kim. "They'll link together more line and try again."

Anton frowned again. His head was killing him. "In the time they take to find every extra meter of rope, I'll bet we drift three meters. If we don't do something to push us back in the other direction or at least stop our movement, they won't be able to reach us."

Kim stared at him. "I hate know-it-alls." She began looking around the room. "So we need to fling some mass that way." She pointed in the direction opposite the station.

"What do we have in the way of pro-pellant?" Anton asked. "The fire extinguisher!"

"Christ, yes." Kim jumped to the passageway and opened a panel marked with the traditional orange and red flames. A red cylinder with nozzle and valve emerged. "That's fifteen kilos at 140 kg/cm². That'll give us a healthy shove, but not enough."

"There are three more in this pod, though," added Ruth. "How will you vent it out?"

"I'll adapt it to one of the sink faucets, then open the faucet valve and squeeze the trigger. When it's discharged, I'll close the faucet valve and hook another extinguisher up. It'll blast out of the torn pipe!"

Ruth frowned. "But in what direction?"

Kim paused. "Whatever direction that torn end is pointed. It could have ripped on the bathroom side. That's the direction we want."

"And if it didn't, we'll end up blasting ourselves farther away!" said Dr. Peterson. "We can't take that risk."

"We can't afford not to, Stan," said Anton. "We'll hook it up, then try it with lookouts posted. We should see the crystals."

"And if it isn't the right direction?" asked Peterson.

"We'll have tried." They started working. Meanwhile, Rory was worried. Geary seemed to be doing okay, but you never knew. He paid more attention to Geary's movements than to the conversations around him. After a while, he found that he could keep Geary's cage moving best by giving it a slow toss across the room, then bouncing over and catching it before it hit the far wall. He kept doing this over and over again until Dr. Peterson said, "Rory, sit still. You're using up more oxygen by jumping around like that, you stupid little shit!"

Anton turned from where he was steadying one of the fire extinguishers while Kim taped its nozzle to the faucet with turn after turn of electrical tape. "Dr. Peterson, the next unkind thing you say to Rory you will regret. I mean it."

"Right," said Ruth from across the room. "So do I."

Dr. Peterson subsided, mumbling to himself.

Rory frowned. At least Dr. Ruth and Dr. Anton were getting along better. He moved away from Dr. Peterson and gave another toss to the cage.

Halfway across the room, Geary started running around the inside of the mesh sphere like he did when Rory was about to feed him. Rory sat back and watched the rotating sphere and running gerbil. He was sure that Dr. Stan didn't like him. Well, he decided, I don't like Dr. Stan, either.

"Ready, all?" yelled Kim from the bathroom. In one hand she held the faucet handle, in the other the squeeze handle to the fire extinguisher. From the door port Anton said, "Ready." Ruth and Dr. Peterson replied from two different cabins.

"Here goes the first burst." She turned the faucet and felt the tape stiffen as the inside of her connection was opened on vacuum. Quickly, she gave a squeeze of the handle and a burst of chemical foam surged into the pipe system. Just as quickly, she shut it off.

"No good," called Anton. "It came out on my side, pointing at Lucy."

Peterson started moaning again.

"Well, damn it," screamed Kim. "Turn the fucking pod around!"

"How? Get out and push?" Anton snapped.

"If I had one of the centrifuges from my lab, you could wire it to the battery and get some spin out of it. That would turn us."

Ruth said, "Maybe one of the other pipes is pointing tangential to the pod. If we fired one of the extinguishers out one like that, it would turn us."

Kim started crying. Ruth stared at her, shocked.

"No, damn it," Kim said. "This is the only outlet I can get to. The sewage cutoff I can't adapt to and the hot water pipe just runs to the heater there—then out the same pipe. It's so damn unfair!"

Peterson started moaning louder and twitching.

Rory came up to Kim and awkwardly stroked her hair. "Don't cry, Kim. I don't like for you to cry."

Kim tried to smile at him. "I'm sorry, baby. I don't mean to. I just wish this stupid old pod would roll over so we could go back to the station." She grabbed hold of him and buried her face in his chest.

Rory alternated between scowling and distress. "Don't cry, Kim. I'll turn the pod for you, if you won't cry."

"Oh, Rory. You can't, baby." She cried even louder.

Rory pushed her to arms length. "Oh, yes I can. You just watch!" He detached himself from her and went to the doorway of the bathroom. Anton watched, as Rory crouched and got both feet planted on the edge of the sill, then pushed off—not across the lounge, but along its surface. Before he ploughed into the rising carpet, he put a hand out and hit the carpet enough to bring his body tangential to the floor again. He began kicking out with his feet also, maintaining the momentum and improving it. Soon he was traveling around the room on all fours on a path just missing the open bathroom door at one end of the pod and the passageway at the other. With a spasmodic jerk, he stumbled erect and began running around the room. This increased his speed dramatically.

Kim looked at him, amazed, then jumped across the lounge to the passageway door. She looked across at the station. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the station was dropping with respect to the window.

"I'll be goddammed. He's doing it. *He's doing it!*"

Anton started moving, too. As an athlete raised in a gravity well, he was able to get upright much faster than Rory. He kept on the side of the pod opposite Rory and followed the same path. Kim started laughing. "Come on, you rats. Turn this bloody squirrel cage!" She jumped back to the bathroom and gripped the handles again. Her eyes locked on the one small window and stayed there.

Rory started gasping, followed quickly by Anton. It wasn't that they were building up CO₂ again. In fact, their motion was acting as a crude circulating fan for the entire lounge. The problem was that the cabin pressure was equivalent to the Andean highlands, and there just wasn't enough oxygen in that air to support heavy athletic activity. They stumbled to a stop, but not before the pod was spinning at a respectable one-point-two rpm.

Kim looked back at them. "You can't quit. You have to start running in the other direction so the nozzle will stop pointed in the right direction!"

Anton gasped, "Don't be silly. Just fire the damn thing every time it's in position."

"Oh." She shut up. The station swam into view from her position. She twisted the valve and squeezed the extinguisher handle for the ten seconds it took to pass out of view. After another minute and six seconds she repeated the process. It took her five minutes to empty the extinguisher and another two to attach the next one. Twenty minutes later she'd emptied all four extinguishers and the water heater's ninety liters of water.

Every revolution, the station looked slightly larger.

An hour later, a smiling space-suited figure impacted with the crumpled passageway frame and attached a nylon line to the pod. Two hours later, a jury-rigged pressure collar let the five of them into the station proper.

Two weeks after the incident, the station held a farewell party for Dr. Peterson in the cafeteria. Conspicuous in their absence were Anton, Ruth, Kim, and Rory. Kim was in her room with a female lab technician from Electron Microscopy, Rory was wandering around the station, and Anton was in his lab reading.

Ruth popped her head in the door. "What's this? I thought you communists went in for parties?"

Anton frowned. "*Vecherinka*, the Russian word for evening party or celebration, has absolutely no relation to *partiya* or *kompaniya*, the Communist Party."

"Spoilsport."

"Imperialist lackey."

"Commie pig"

"Capitalist dog."

She smiled and threw something at him. He snared it lazily out of the air.

It was a bound notebook, several hundred pages thick, with her name emblazoned on the cover. He looked back up at her quickly.

She had stopped smiling. "That's my baby—the write-ups on the work we've been doing out here for the last four years. I would like you to read it over and tell me what you think." She was looking off to the side, avoiding his eyes.

He licked his lips and looked back down at the book before carefully saying, "Certainly. It would be an honor."

When he lifted his head, Ruth was staring at him, the barest hint of a smile on her face. She nodded once. "Good."

Anton cocked his head to one side. "You perhaps should have Rory read it, too. That one's going to require watching."

She did smile then. "The son of a Nobel Laureate usually does."

Anton stared. "Rory *Herzig*?"

Ruth nodded. "When she was recalled to Earth, she thought he'd be happier here."

Anton nodded slowly, then smiled. "He *will* bear watching."

Over in J-pod, the extra-special investigator of the universe pushed a small button on a small box. Geary the gerbil listened as Rory said, "Define . . . *motion*."