

Making History  
by Paul McAuley

"The drama's done. Why then here does any one step forth?" Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* For the Friday Shut-ins One I believe that I first saw Demi Lacombe at the gala reopening of the theater. She had arrived in Paris, Dione a week before, but I am sure that, had I passed her in one of the gardens or arcades of the diplomatic quarter, or glimpsed her at one of the receptions or soirees or cocktail parties or conversations, I would have remembered her, for in an age where beauty could be cheaply bought, hers was a rare and natural wonder, and not easily forgotten.

So I am certain that we first met that night, at the touring company production of *Don Giovanni*. The theater of Paris, Dione, was one of the first buildings in the city's main dome to have been restored after the end of the siege. Although the gala performance which marked its reopening was an overt symbol of the occupation force's power, it was the first time many of the force's executives and officials had ventured outside the diplomatic quarter. It was preceded by speeches made more to the media (represented by a single journalist and a dozen remotes) than to the audience, for it was the kind of event which politicians fondly believe will enhance their status, but which usually wins not so much as a footnote in the pages of history.

The theater was a roofless bowl modelled in miniature on Rome's ruined Colosseum. Tiers of seats and private boxes rose steeply all around the circular stage to the rim, where armored troopers and angular killing machines patrolled, tiny shadows against the artificial night. The colonists, who had fought to the death for freedom from Earth's rule, had kept to the twenty-four hour diurnal cycle of their home planet; the panes of the dome, high above, were polarized against the wan light of Dione's midday, and the suspensor lamps were turned down to mere stars.

On the stage's glowing dish, the cast flitted and swarmed through a web of wires and stays like a flock of gaudy birds, freezing in emblematic tableaux during the great arias. The lackluster production had been foolishly gussied up in modern dress, with the Commendatore a robot, *Don Giovanni* a dispossessed captain of a Kuiper Belt habitat driven mad by a bioweapon symbiont, his servant Leporello an ambitious neuter who borrowed something of Iago's malevolent glee at the ordinary human weaknesses of its extraordinary master. From the vantage of my fifth tier box, I paid as much attention to the audience as I did to the familiar allegory of the priapic Don's damnation, and two people in a box on the same level as mine quickly caught my eye. One was someone I had come to know well, Cris DeHon, head of the team that was reconstructing the city's information network; DeHon's companion was as breathtaking as she was incongruous. After the statue of the Commendatore had sprung to life and consigned the Don to his doom amidst flares of flame and writhing, red-skinned demons, after the ritual of applause and encore, DeHon found me at the post performance party which, in truth, was more important to most of the audience than the opera's choreographed histrionics.

"Dr. Lacombe has an interest in history," DeHon told me, after it had made the introductions. Like Leporello, the Don's servant, Cris DeHon was a neuter, one of the few people in the room who could not be affected, except in a purely aesthetic sense, by Dr. Lacombe's beauty. And like Leporello, it was consumed by a feverish delight in fomenting intrigue. Perhaps intrigue was to it as sex to most men and women. It was a brilliant and vicious gossip, and a generous source of unreliable information.

"Indeed," I said, helplessly, foolishly smiling at DeHon's companion. I confess that, like most men in the chamber, and not a few women, I could not take my eyes from her. She was so unspeakably lovely, swaying gracefully in the low gravity about the anchor point of her sticky shoes like a Nereid on some sea's floor. When I dared to lift her gloved right hand by the tips of her fingers, and bent over her knuckles, the gorgeous creature actually blushed.

She was young, and seemed to have not yet grown into her beauty, for she wore it as carelessly as a child costumed in some fabulously antique robe, and was simultaneously embarrassed and amused by the reactions she provoked. Perhaps even then she had a presentiment that it would be the cause of her death. She said, so softly I had to lean close to hear her, "I am no more than an amateur of history. But of course I have heard of your work, Professor-Doctor Graves."

Her Portuguese had a soft, husky lilt. A subtle perfume, with a deep note of musk, rose from the cleft between her breasts, which were displayed to their advantage by the blood-red folds of her spidersilk blouson. A wide belt of red leather measured the narrowness of her waist; red silk trousers, cuffed at the ankles, gathered in complex pleats around her long, slim legs. Her hair was silver and frost; her eyes beaten copper flecked with green.

"Demi is too modest," DeHon said. "Her monograph on the conceptual failures in design of early orbital habitats is something of a classic."

I noted that the ghost of a double chin appeared when Demi Lacombe dipped her head in quiet acknowledgment of DeHon's compliment, and that her bare arms were plump and rosy. I thought then that if she ever had children the natural way, she would have to take care not to grow fat, and it was a relief to realize that her beauty was only mortal.

She said, "Cris is probably the only one, apart from myself and my thesis supervisor, who had read all of it."

"I like to keep up with our cultural guests," DeHon said.

"I'm really more of an engineer," Demi Lacombe told me. "What they did here, with the city parklands, that was true artistry."

I learned that she was an environmental engineer, brought to Dione by the Three Powers Occupation Force to survey Paris's damaged ecosystem and to suggest how it could be reconstructed.

When I expressed interest, she deflected it automatically. "I am not here to do anything radical. Simply figure out the best way to make the city habitable again. But for a historian to find himself right at the center of history in the making must be tremendously exciting."

"The war is over. This gala performance was deliberately staged to make the point. I'm merely picking over its ruins."

"Is it true that you go out into the city without any guards?"

"I have a guide. I need to talk to people when they are at their ease. Bringing them to the diplomatic quarter has unfortunate implications."

"Arrest," DeHon said, with a delicate, refined shudder. "Interrogation."

I said, "I do carry a weapon, but it's as unnecessary as the guards who patrol the perimeter of the theater. The survivors of the siege are by now quite inured to their fate. It's true that many areas of the city are still dangerous, but only because of unrepaired damage and a few undiscovered booby traps."

"Do you believe," Demi Lacombe asked, boldness making her eyes shine, "that he still lives?"

I knew at once whom she meant, of course, as would anyone in Paris. I said, "Of course not."

"Yet I'm told that many of the survivors think that he does."

"It is a frail and foolish hope, but hope is all they have. No, he willed his death from the beginning, when he assassinated the rest of the emergency committee and despoiled the diplomatic quarter, and he sealed his fate when he killed his hostages and the diplomats sent to bargain for peace. He was not the kind of man to run away from the consequences of his actions and so, like most of those he briefly commanded, he would have been killed in the siege. His body has not yet been identified, but the same can be said for more than half of those killed."

"You are very certain."

"I have studied human nature all my life."

"And would you classify him as one of your great men?"

"I'm flattered that you know of my work."

Demi Lacombe said, "I wouldn't lie for the sake of politeness, Professor-Doctor Graves."

"Please, Mademoiselle, I think we might be friends. And my friends call me Fredo."

"And so shall I, because I don't really get on with this false formality. I know it's the fashion in the Pacific Community, but I'm a hick from Europe. So, Fredo, is he a great man?"

The delicate suffusion of her soft cheeks: alabaster in the first light of morning.

I bowed and said, "The corporados think so, or they would not have sponsored my research. However, I have not yet made up my mind."

As we talked, I was aware of the people, mostly men, who were watching Demi Lacombe from near and far. The architects of the cities of the moons of the outer planets, imaginations stimulated by the engineering possibilities of microgravity, made their public spaces as large as possible, to relieve the claustrophobia of their tents and domes and burrows. The theater's auditorium, a great crescent wedged beneath the steep slope of the seats, could easily have held two thousand people, and although almost everyone in the diplomatic quarter had come to the gala opening, we numbered no more than three hundred, scattered sparsely across the vast, black floor, which our shoes gripped tightly in lieu of proper gravity. Diplomats, executives and officials of the ad hoc government; novo abastado industrialists, sleek as well-fed sharks, trailed by entourages of aides and bodyguards as they lazily cruised the room, hoping to snap up trifles and tidbits of gossip; officers of the Three Powers Occupation Force, in the full dress uniforms of half a dozen different armies; collaborationists in their best formal wear, albeit slightly shabby and out of fashion, mostly enfamille and mostly gorging themselves at the buffet, for rationing was still in force amongst Paris's defeated population.

There was a stir as, in full costume and make-up, Don Giovanni and Leporello escorted Donna Anna and Donna Elvira into the huge room. The actors half-swam, half-walked through the web of tethers with consummate ease, acknowledging the scattering of applause. At the center of the auditorium's crescent, one man, sleek, dark-haired, in an immaculate pearly uniform, had not turned to watch the actors but was still staring openly at Demi Lacombe. It was Dev Veeder, the dashing colonel in charge of the security force. When Demi Lacombe looked up and saw him watching her I thought I heard the snap of electricity between them.

DeHon nudged me and said loudly, for the benefit of everyone nearby, "Our brave colonel is smitten, don't you think?"

I should not have allowed myself to become involved, of course. But like Cris DeHon (although I was neutered by age and temperament rather than by elective treatment), I had a bystander's fascination with human sexual behavior. And, frankly, my assignment, although lucratively paid, was becoming tiresome.

I had been in Paris, Dione for two months, commissioned by a consortium of half a dozen Greater Brazilian corporados to write an official history of the siege of the city, and in particular to contribute to a psychological model of Marisa Bassi, the leader of the barricades, the amateur soldier who had kept off the forces of the Three Powers Alliance for twenty days after the general surrender which had brought an end of the uiet War elsewhere in the solar system.

I knew that I had been chosen because of my position as emeritus professor of history at Rio de Janeiro rather than for my ability or even my reputation, tattered as it was by the sniping of jealous younger colleagues. Historians cannot reach an agreement about anything, and most especially they cannot agree on the way history is made. Herodotus and Thucydides believed that the proper subjects of history were war and constitutional history and political personality, times of crisis and change; Plutarch suggested that history was driven by the actions and desires of exemplary characters, of great men. The Christians introduced God into history, a kind of alpha great man presiding over a forced marriage of divine and human realms, and when the notion of an

epicurean God was shouldered aside in the Renaissance, the idea that history was shaped by forces beyond the control of ordinary men remained, although these forces were no longer centered on extraordinary individuals but were often considered to be no more than blind chance, the fall of a coin, the want of a nail. Like a maggot in an apple, chance lay at the heart of Gibbon's elegant synthesis of the philosophical studies of Voltaire and the systematic organization of facts by rationalists like Hume and Montesquieu; it was the malignant flaw in Leopold von Ranke's (a distant ancestor of mine) codification of history as a neutral, nonpartisan, scholarly pursuit; and it was made explicit in the twentieth century fragmentation of the history of ideas into a myriad specialties and the leveling of all facts to a common field, so that the frequency of dental caries in soldiers in the trenches of the First World War was considered as important an influence of events as the abilities of generals. Great men or small, all were tossed alike by society's tides. It was not until the restoration of history as a species of literature, by deployment of virtual theater and probabilistic clades, that the idea of the worth of the individual was restored. Who can say if this view of history caused the collapse of democratic republicanism, or if republicanism's collapse changed our philosophy of history? But it is certain that the rise of nationalism and the restoration of half-torgotten monarchies, aided by supranational corporados which found it convenient to divide their commercial territories into quarreling kingdoms and principalities, paralleled the return of the theory of the great man in history, a theory of which I, in my time, was an important champion.

In my time.

I had hoped that by coming to Paris, Dione, in the midst of reconstruction of a war scarcely ended, I would be able to secure my reputation with a final masterwork and confound my jealous rivals. But I soon discovered that the last days of the free collective of Paris, and of its leader, Marisa Bassi, were a tissue of echoes and conflicting stories supported by too few solid facts. Those few surviving collectivists who believed that Marisa Bassi was dead could not agree how or where he had died; the majority, who foolishly believed that he had escaped during the hours of madness when special forces of the Three Powers Alliance had finally infiltrated the city, could not agree on how he had escaped, nor where he had escaped to. No ship had left Dione in those last desperate days except the cargo scow which, its navigation system driven mad by viral infection, had ploughed into Saturn's thick atmosphere and had either burned up or now floated, squashed to a two-dimensional profile by crushing atmospheric pressure, near the planet's metallic hydrogen core. If history is a story told by winners, then the winners have the unconscionable burden of sifting mountains of dross for rare nuggets of pure fact, while the losers are free to fantasize on what could or should have been.

My commission should have been simple, but I found the demands of my employers, who did not trouble to supply me with assistants, were stretching my methodology to its breaking point. The corporados wanted to capture the psyche of great rebel leader in a heuristic model, a laboratory specimen of a troublesome personality they could study and measure and define, as doctors begin to fight a disease by first unraveling the genetic code of the virus, bacterium or faulty gene which is its cause. By knowing what Marisa Bassi had been, they thought that they could prevent another of his kind gaining power in the half-ruined colonies.

After two months, I had a scant handful of facts about Marisa Bassi's life before the uiet War, and a horrible knot of evasions and half-truths and lies about his role in the siege, a knot which became more complex each day, with no way of cutting through to the truth. I confess, then, that in the days after my first meeting with Demi Lacombe, I was more interested in the rumors and gossip about her and Dev Veeder than in my own work.

It was, you must understand, an interest born of concern for her safety; an almost paternal concern. There was our age difference-almost fifty years-and

my devotion to the memory of my dear dead wife. No matter what others may say, I had only pure motives in taking an interest in Dev Veeder's assault on the heart of the young and beautiful environmental engineer.

At first, much of my information came from Cris DeHon, who told me how our head of security personally escorted Demi Lacombe as she surveyed and cataloged the ruined wildernesses and parklands and farms of the city, assiduously transporting her to wherever she desired, arranging Picnics in a sealed house or in a bubble habitat laboriously swept clear of booby traps and biowar beasties by squads of troopers. And like everyone else in the claustrophobic sharkP<sup>ool</sup> of Paris's diplomatic quarter, I saw how closely Dev Veeder attended Demi Lacombe at every social gathering, even though she spent most of her time with the science crews while he stood by impotently, unable to participate in their unpenetrable, jargon-ridden conversations.

"It's a purely one-sided affair," DeHon told me, when it caught me watching her at a party held by one or another of the corporados, I forget which, on the huge lawn at the center of the diplomatic quarter, part of the parkland that both penetrated and surrounded the built-up area inside the quarter's pyramidal tent. As always, most of us were there, scattered across an oval of brilliant green grass webbed with tethers, the dozens of faint shadows overlapping at our feet cast by brilliant lamps hung from the high ridge of the quarter's roof, Saturn's foggy crescent tilted beyond like a fantastic brooch pinned to a sky as black as jeweler's velvet. In the shade of the efflorescent greenery of a sweet chestnut tree, that sprawled like a banyan in the low gravity, Demi Lacombe was talking earnestly with a couple of techheads; Dev Veeder stood close by in his dress uniform, watching her over the rim of the wine bulb from which, every now and then, he pretended to sip. Cris DeHon said, "She's such an innocent: she really doesn't see how badly she is humiliating Dev. You've heard how he's increased the number of security sweeps in the general population? I do believe that it is a reliable index of his growing frustration. I think that soon there will be more public executions, unknowing sacrifices on the altar of our gallant police chief's unrequited love."

I said, perhaps a trifle sharply, "What do you know of love?"

"Love or lust," the neuter said, "it's all the same. Love is merely the way by which men fool themselves that they have nobler motives than merely spending their urges, a game sprung from the constant tension between the male's blind need to copulate and the female's desire to win a father who will help provide for her children.

Our security chief is parading like a peacock because he knows he is competing against every potential suitor of the delicious Mademoiselle Lacombe. And how many suitors there are!" DeHon bent closer and whispered, "I hear she takes long night walks in the parkland."

Its breath smelt of milk and cinnamon: a baby's breath.

"That's hardly surprising," I said. "She is an environmental engineer. The gardens must fascinate her."

"I've heard she has a particular interest in the gardeners."

I laughed. "That would be obscene if it were not so ridiculous."

Cris DeHon's smile showed small pearl-white teeth. "Perhaps. But perhaps poor beautiful Demi seeks simple relief from the strain of being the focus of a killer's desire."

I suppose the epithet was not an exaggeration, although it shocked me then, as no doubt DeHon hoped it would. Dev Veeder had had a good war, and had risen quickly through the ranks of the Greater Brazilian Army. He was a war hero, although like many heroes of the quiet War-at least, on the winning side-he had never engaged in combat. His specialty was debriefing; I suppose a more liberal age might say that he was a torturer, although his methods were as much psychological as physical. He once confided to me that showing a prisoner the instruments he proposed to use often had as much effect as application of the instruments themselves -especially if the prisoner had been forced to listen to the screams of others suffering hot questioning. Early in the war,

Dev Veeder had interrogated an entire mining community on Europa, some fifty men, women and children; the intelligence he had wrung from them had helped bring a swift and relatively bloodless end to the siege of Minos. This and other exploits had won him his present position of head of security of Paris, which he prosecuted with diligence and vigor.

Dev Veeder was young, the youngest son of a good family with connections in both industry and government. He was fiercely ambitious and highly intelligent.

He had a sharp black impatient gaze. His hair was combed back in waves from his high forehead and aquiline nose; his make-up was discretely but skillfully applied. A dandy from the pages of a seventeenth century novel, but no fool. I knew him well from the conversations we had had about history. He was very interested in my theories, and believed, like many middle-ranking military men, that he himself had something of the attributes of a great man. This vanity was his single serious weakness, although it was true that, like all tyrants, he believed himself both benevolent and pragmatic.

"If only I had had the chance to really prove myself," he said to me more than once, showing that he really misunderstood my theory. For great men of history do prove themselves; the will to succeed, not luck or circumstance, is what makes them great. They rise to the occasion; they seize the day; they mold themselves to be all things to all men. Dev Veeder was too proud to realize this, and perhaps too cruel. He could only be what he was, and perhaps that is why I feared for Demi, and why I crossed him.

Each day, I left the safety of the diplomatic quarter for the ruins of the city to interview the survivors of the siege, to try and learn what they knew or claimed to know about Marisa Bassi. In spite of my reputation and the letters of commission I carried, Dev Veeder did not think that I was important enough to warrant a proper escort—an impertinence for which I was grateful, for one cannot properly conduct interviews amongst a defeated population in the presence of troopers of the force which now occupies their territory. And so, each day, armed only with the blazer which I kept bolstered at my ankle, I set out to pursue my research in the refugee warrens.

It was my custom to wait for my guide in a small cafe at the edge of the small plaza just outside the diplomatic quarter. The place had once been the checkpoint for the quarter, with cylinder gates to control access and human guards on duty in case there was a problem the computer was not authorized to handle.

On the night of the revolution, a mob had stormed the guardhouse and killed the guards, fried the computer and associated security hardware with an industrial microwave beam, and blown the gates. The diplomatic quarter had already been evacuated, but a small detachment of soldiers and minor executives had been left behind as caretakers; no one had expected the revolutionary committee to violate the diplomatic quarter's sovereign status. The soldiers killed half a hundred of the mob before they were themselves killed, the surviving executives were taken hostage, and the buildings looted. After the war, the quarter was the first place to be restored, of course, and a memorial had been erected to the murdered soldiers and martyred hostages, virtually the only casualties on our side. But the ruins of the gates still stood to one side of the plaza on which half a dozen pedways and escalators converged, tall hollow columns gutted of their armatures, their bronze facings scorched and ghosted with half-erased slogans.

The guardhouse's airy teepee was slashed and half-collapsed, but an old married couple had set up a tiny kitchen inside it and put a scattering of mismatched chairs and tables outside. Perhaps they hoped to get the custom of those collaborators who had clearance to get past the security things, half dog, half bear, knitted together with cybernetic enhancements and armor, which now guarded the diplomatic quarter. However, I seemed to be their only customer, and I suspected that they were relatives of my assiduous guide; for that reason I never left a tip. That day, two days after the party, I was sitting as usual in a wire frame chair, sipping from a bulb of dark strong

coffee and nibbling a meltingly sweet pain au chocolat, looking out across the vista of Paris's main dome while I waited for my guide.

Before the uiet War, Paris, Dione, was one of the loveliest cities in the solar system, and the largest of all the cities on Saturn's moons. Its glassy froth of domes and tunnels and tents straddled a ridge of upthrust brecciated basalt between Romulus and Remus craters. Since the twin craters are close to the equator of the icy moon's sub-Saturnian hemisphere, Saturn stood almost directly overhead, cycling through his phases roughly every three days. The city had been renowned for its microgravity architecture, its wide, tree-lined boulevards and parks-much of its population was involved in the biotech industries-its cafe culture and opera and theaters, and the interlinked parkland blisters which stepped down the terraces of Remus crater along the waterfall-filled course of what had been renamed the Proudhon River during the revolution and now, after the end of uiet War and the fall of the barricades, was the Little Amazon-or would be, once the pumps were fixed and the watercourse had been cleared of debris.

The main dome, like many others, had been blown during the bloody end of the siege. It was two kilometers across, bisected by a dry riverbed from east to west and by the Avenue des fitoiles, so-called because of the thousands of lanterns which had hung from the branches of its trees, from north to south, and further divided into segments by boulevards and tramways. Clusters of white buildings stood amongst the sere ruins of parks, while warehouses and offices were packed around its circumference. Although the civic buildings at its center were superficially intact, their windows were shattered and their white walls were pockmarked to the third story by the bullet-holes of the bitter hand-to-hand fighting of the bloody day in which eighty thousand citizens died defending their city from invading troops of the Three Powers Alliance. Every scrap of vegetation in the parks had been killed by exposure to vacuum after the blowout, of course, and now, with the restoration of atmospheric pressure, it was all rotting down to mulch. The air of the plaza where I sat, high above it all, held a touch of that cabbagey stink.

I was woken from my reverie by a light touch on my shoulder, the musk of roses. Demi Lacombe fell, light as a bird, into the wire chair on the other side of the little cafe table and favored me with her devastating smile. She wore loose white coveralls; I could not help but notice that her breasts were unbound.

I scarcely saw Dev Veeder scowling a dozen meters away, or his squad of burly armored troopers.

Demi Lacombe's left wrist was bound by a pressure bandage; when I expressed my concern, she explained that she had fractured it in a silly accident. "I overestimated my ability to jump in this lovely light gravity, and took a bit of a tumble. The clinic injected smart bacteria which will fix up the bone in a couple of days. I've seen this place so many times," she added, "but I didn't know that you were its patron, Professor-Doctor."

"Please, my name is Fredo. Won't you join me in a coffee? And you too, perhaps, Colonel Veeder?"

"There's no time for that," Veeder said brusquely. "You're a fool to patronize these people, Graves."

Inside the guardhouse's half-collapsed shroud, the old couple who ran the makeshift cafe shrank from his black glare.

I said boldly, "The psychologists tell me that enterprises like this are a healthy sign, Colonel. Even though it is, admittedly, on a microeconomic scale."

"You're being scammed," Veeder said. "I think I ought to re-examine the credentials of your so-called guide."

"History shows us, Colonel, that those defeated benefit from subsequent cultural and economic fertilization. Besides, my sponsors would be unhappy if you disturbed my work."

Demi Lacombe said, "I think it's a nice thing, Dev. A little sign of reconciliation."

"Whatever. Come on. It's a long way to the tramhead."

"The trams are working again?"

"One or two," Dev Veeder said.

"Dev restored the tram lines which pass through some of the parklands," Demi said. "It really does help my surveys." For a moment, she took my hand in both of hers. "You're a kinder man than you seem, Fredo," she said, and floated up out of her chair and took Dev Veeder's arm.

I watched them cross the plaza to the escalators. Demi had only been in Paris a couple of weeks, but she had already mastered the long loping stride which worked best in Dione's low gravity. Only when they had descended out of sight did I look at the scrap of paper she had thrust into my palm.

I must talk with you.

My guide arrived hardly a miaute later; I suspected that he had been watching the whole thing from a safe vantage. I suppose I should tell you something about Lavet Corso. The most important thing was that I never entirely trusted him, an instinctive reaction to which I should have paid more attention. But who does like collaborationists? They are despised by their own people for being traitors, and for the same reason are distrusted by those they are so eager to please.

Lavet Corso had once been something in the lower echelons in the city's government, and was studiously neutral about Marisa Bassi. Although he had arranged many interviews, I had never tried to interview him. He had been widowed in the war and had to support a young daughter in difficult circumstances. While interviewing survivors of the siege, I had to endure the squalor of the warrens in which they lived. On my first visit, Corso had had the temerity to complain about the noise, lack of privacy, dirt and foul air, and I had told him sharply, "You and your daughter are lucky. Fate saved you from a horrible death. If not for a chance which separated you from your wife, you could have been aboard that scow too. You could have fallen inside a tin can into Saturn's poisonous atmosphere, choking and boiling and flattened in the calorific depths. But you, Mr. Corso, were spared, as was your daughter. Life goes on."

I don't think he took my little homily to heart, but he didn't dare complain again.

Corso was a tremendously tall man, with a pockmarked face, dark eyes and black hair slicked back from his pale face with heavy grease. He was efficient and smarter than he mostly allowed himself to appear; perhaps too smart, for his flattery never seemed sincere, and he was too ready to suggest alternatives to my plans. That day, for instance, after I had told him where I wanted to go, he immediately proposed visiting another sector that was both easier to reach and in a far safer condition.

"It is my life if you are hurt, boss."

"I hardly think so, given the waivers I had to sign in order to do my fieldwork."

"And you have been there already, boss. Several times. Very badly damaged it is, not safe at all. And there are still many booby traps."

"I do remember, Mr. Corso, and I also remember that on each occasion you tried to dissuade me. But I will go again, because it is important to me. If we do get into trouble, the machines of the security force claim to be only five minutes away from any spot in the city."

"It's certainly what we're told," Corso said. "Perhaps it's even true."

"Then lead on, Mr. Corso. I want to see this place today."

A few minutes later, the whole of the main dome was spread beneath us. I sat behind Corso as he labored at the pedals of the airframe, beneath the central joint of its wide, vivid yellow bat wings. I found this mode of travel quite exhilarating, for Corso was an expert pilot, and in Dione's meager gravity we could fall a hundred meters and escape with only bruises and perhaps a broken bone or two.

We swooped out above the cankerous, rotting tangles of parks, above streets dotted with half-cleared barricades, above white buildings and the blackened



shells of buildings set afire in the last hours of the siege. One reason for the blowout had been to save Paris from its crazed citizens (riding behind Corso, with cold cabbagey air blowing around me, I could imagine the dome's blister filling with swirling fumes, a smoky pearl that suddenly cleared when its integrity was breached; its huge diamond panes were still smudged with the residue of the suddenly snuffed fires). And then the little flying machine stooped and we bounced once, twice, and were down, taxiing across a wide flat roof above an avenue lined with dead chestnut trees.

I had come here on my second day in Paris. I had insisted, and Dev Veeder had, with ill-grace, provided an escort. I had returned several times since, for here were the ruins of the office building, like a broken tooth in the terraced arcades of this commercial sector, from which Marisa Bassi had run his revolutionary committee. Since I had first visited the place, I had learned much more about those desperate, last days. From one of these terraces, bareheaded and in shirt-sleeves, Bassi had made his crucial speech to the crowds who had packed the stilled pedways and empty tram tracks. It was at an intersection nearby that he had organized the first of the barricades, and inaugurated the block captain system by which the building and defense of each barricade was assigned to platoons of a dozen or so citizens. How proud the survivors still were of their token efforts, singing out the names of the barricades on which they had served like captains recalling the names of their ships.

Place de la Concorde.

The Killing Field.

The Liberty Line.

For a long time, I stood at the remains of that first barricade and tried to imagine how it had been, that day when Bassi had made his speech. To insert myself, by imaginative reconstruction built on plain fact, into the life of another, is the most delicate part of my work. As I stood there, I imagined the plane trees in leaf, the heat and brilliant light of hundreds of suspensor lamps beneath the roof of the dome, like floating stars against the blackness of Dione's night, the restless crowd on the wide avenue, faces turned like flowers towards Marisa Bassi.

An immigrant, he was half the height of most of the population of Paris, but was broad-shouldered and muscular, with a mane of gray hair and a bushy beard woven through with luminescent beads. What had he felt? He was tired, for he had certainly not slept that night. I was certain that he had had a direct hand in the deaths of his former government colleagues, and perhaps he was haunted by the bloody scenes. Murder is a primal event. Did the screams of his murdered colleagues fill him with foreboding, did his hands tremble as he grasped the rail and squared his shoulders and prepared to address the restless crowd? He had showered, and his hair was still wet as he let go of the rail and raised his hands (I had a photograph of his hands which I looked at often: they were square-palmed, the fingers short and stout, with broken nails—a laborer's rather than a murderer's hands) to still the crowd's noise, and began to speak. And in that moment changed history, and condemned most of his audience to a vainglorious death. Had he planned his speech, or did it come unprompted?

Several of those I had interviewed had said that he had seemed nervous; several others that he had spoken with flawless confidence; all said that he had spoken without notes, and that he had been cheered to the echo.

I walked about for an hour, every now and then dictating a few words to my notebook, impressions, half-realized ideas. Bassi did not yet stand before me fully-fleshed, but I felt that he was growing closer.

One of the killing machines which patrolled the repressurized parts of the city stalked swiftly across a distant intersection, glittering and angular, like a praying mantis made of steel, there one moment, gone the next. I wondered if it or one of its fellows had caught the man who had painted the silly slogan, He Lives!, across the sooty stone of the building's first setback; I would have to ask Dev Veeder.

I told Corso, "I'm pleased to see that our angels of mercy are afoot."  
"They might reassure you, boss, but they scare the shit out of me. I've seen what those things can do to a man."

"But not to you, my dear Corso. Not while you are under my protection."

"Not while I have the stink of occupation upon me."

"That's putting it crudely," I said.

All of the occupation force and certain of its favored collaborators had been tweaked so that their sweat emitted specific long-chain lipids which placated the primitive brains of the security things and killing machines.

"I'm sorry, boss. This place weirds me out."

"Bad memories, perhaps?"

I was wondering if Corso had been there, that day, but as usual, he did not rise to the bait. He said, "I was on corpse detail, right after they repressurized this part of the city. The bodies had lain in vacuum at minus two hundred degrees Centigrade for more than two months. They were shriveled and very dry.

Skin and flesh crisp, like pie crust. It was hard to pick them up without a finger or a hand or a foot breaking off. We all wore masks and gloves, but flakes of dead people got in your skin, and pretty soon all you could smell was death."

"Don't be so gloomy, Corso. When the reconstruction is finished, your city will have regained its former glory."

"Yeah, but it won't be my city any more. So, where do you want to go next?"

"To the sector where he lived, of course."

"Revisiting all your old favorites today, boss?"

"I feel that I'm getting closer to him, Mr. Corso."

We climbed back up to the roof, took off with a sudden stoop, and then, with Corso pedaling furiously, rose high above roofs and avenues and dead parkland.

"I don't understand why you aren't grateful for the reconstruction, Mr. Corso. We could quite easily have demolished your city and started over. Or pulled out entirely, and brought you all back to Earth."

"I was born here. This is where I was designed to live. Earth would kill me."

"And you will live here, thanks to the generosity of the Three Powers Occupation Force, but you will live here as part of human mainstream. The high flown nonsense about colonizing the outer limits of the solar system, the comets and the Kuiper Belt, all of that was sheer madness. I have a colleague who has demonstrated that it is economically impossible. There will be a few scientific outposts, perhaps, but the outer system is too cold and dark and energy poor. It's no place to live. Here though, will be the jewel of Earth's reconciliation with her children, Mr. Corso. I believe that the uiet War will mark the beginning of the first mature epoch of human history, a war to end wars, and an end to childish expansionism. In its place will be as fine a flowering in the sciences and the arts as humanity has ever known. We are lucky to be alive at this time."

"The Chinese might disagree. About an end to war."

"Such disagreements as there are between the Democratic Union of China and the Three Powers Alliance will be settled by diplomacy and the intermingling of trade and culture. Men live for so long now that their lives are too valuable to be wasted in war."

Pedaling hard, Corso said over his shoulder, "Old men have always used that as an excuse to send young men to war."

"You are a cynic, Mr. Corso."

"Maybe. Still, it's funny how the war started because we wouldn't repay our debts, and now you're pouring money into reconstruction."

How do wars start? I suppose you could graph the rise in Government debt against public resentment at the colonies funded by Earth's taxes until a trigger point was reached, a crisis which had finally forced the governments of the Three Powers Alliance to act. That crisis was generally agreed to be the refusal by certain colonies to pay increased rates of interest on the corporate and government loans which had funded their expansion, an act of

defiance which coincided with the death of the president of Greater Brazil close to an election, and the need by his inexperienced and unpopular vice president to be seen to act decisively. By that view, the uiet War was no more than an act of debt recovery. Or perhaps one might suggest that the uiet War was an historical inevitability, the usual reaction of colonies which had chafed under the yoke of an over-stretched and underfunded empire until they could not help but demand independence: there were dozens of precedents for this in Earth's history.

And yet the colonists had lost. The Three Powers Alliance had the technological and economic advantage, and superior access to information; the colonies, fragile bubbles of air and light and heat scattered in the vastness of the outer solar system, were horribly vulnerable. Apart from a few assassinations and acts of sabotage, almost no one had died on Earth during the uiet War, but hundreds of thousands had died in the colonies on the moons of Jupiter and Saturn, in orbital habitats and in spacecraft.

Sartre wrote that because of technology we can no longer make history; instead, history is something that happens to us. It is an irony, I suppose, that Marisa Bassi's spark of defiance was extinguished because the very technology which sustained his city made it so very vulnerable.

And yet certain important corporados were sufficiently worried about the futile resistance led by that one man, in one city on one of Saturn's small icy moons, to have sent me to profile him, as a police psychologist might profile a mass murderer.

Was Marisa Bassi a great man who had risen from obscurity to fame but had failed? Or was he a fool, or worse than a fool—a psychopath who had hypnotized an emotionally vulnerable population and made them martyrs not for the cause of liberty, but for gratification of his inadequate ego?

I still had too little material to make that judgment, and I confess that on that day, as I returned to places I had already trawled over, my mind was as much on the implications of Demi Lacombe's note as my work, and to Lavet Corso's undisguised relief I brought an early end to my labors.

Four It was not easy to arrange a private meeting with Demi Lacombe, for the diplomatic quarter was small, and Dev Veeder's already keen eye was sharpened further by jealousy. I took to walking in the parkland after dark, even though I gave little credence to Cris DeHon's gossip, but I met only tame animals and, once, one of the gardeners, who for a moment gazed at me with gentle, mild curiosity before shambling away into the shadows beneath the huge, shaggy puffballs of a stand of cypress trees.

I spent the next few days within the diplomatic quarter, interviewing wretches caught up in Dev Veeder's latest security sweep. They were either sullen and mostly silent, or effusively defiant, and in the latter case their answers to my questions were so full of lies or boasts or blusters that it was almost impossible to find any grain of truth. One wild-eyed man, his face badly bruised, claimed to have seen Bassi shot in the head in the last moments of the resistance, after the invading troops had blown the main dome and stormed the barricades. Several said that he was sleeping deep beneath one of the moon's icefields, and would waken again in Paris's hour of need—something I had heard many times already, unconsciously echoing the Arthurian legend just as the Bassi's revolution had so very consciously echoed the Parisian communes of the 19th century (in our age, all revolutionaries worth their salt must pay fastidious attention to precedent).

All worthless, yet I felt that I was growing near to understanding him. Sometimes he was in my dreams. But suddenly my work no longer mattered, for I contrived my rendezvous with Demi Lacombe.

It was at another of the receptions with which the small community within the diplomatic quarter bolstered its sense of its own worth. It was easily done. By an arrangement I was later to regret, Cris DeHon diverted Dev Veeder into a long and earnest conversation with a visiting journalist about the anti-reconstruction propaganda that was circulating in the general population (in truth no more than a few scruffy leaflets and some motile slogans planted

more to irritate the occupying troops than rally the vestigial resistance, but how Dev preened before the journalist's floating camera). I exchanged a glance with Demi Lacombe, and she set her bulb of wheat frappe" on a floating tray and set off past the striped tents erected in the airy glade into the woods beyond. I followed a minute later, my heart beating as quickly and lightly as it had when I had set off on romantic assignations half a century ago.

Ferns grew head-high beneath the frothy confections of the trees, but I glimpsed Demi's pale figure flitting through the green shadows and hurried on into the depths of the ravine which split the quarter's parkland. We soon left the safety of the trees behind but still she went on and I had to follow, although my eagerness was becoming tempered with a concern that we would be spotted by one of the security things.

Yet how wonderful it was, to be chasing that gorgeous creature! We flew down a craggy rock face like creatures in a dream, over vertical fields of brilliantly colored tweaked orchids, along great falls of ferns and vines and air-kelp. Birds lazily swam in the air; beyond the brilliant stars of suspensor lamps, beyond the diamond panes of the quarter's tent, Saturn blessed us with his pale, benign gaze.

The chase ended in a triangular meadow of emerald- green moss, starred with the spikes of tiny red flowers and backed by the tall, ferny cliff of black, heat-shocked basalt down which we had swum. There was a steep drop to the dark lake at the bottom of the ravine at one edge, and a dense little wood of roses grown as tall as trees at the other. The wild heady scent of the roses did nothing to quieten my heart; nor did the way Demi pressed her hands over mine. The bandage on her left wrist was gone; those smart bacteria had worked their magic.

"Thank you, Fredo," she said. "Thank you for this. If I couldn't get away from him now and then I swear I would go crazy."

How can I describe what she looked like in that moment? Her silvery hair unbound about her heart-shaped face, which was mere centimeters from my own. Her pale, gauzy trousers and blouson floating about her body. Her scent so much like the scent of the wild roses. The virides- cent light of that little meadow, filtered through ferns and roses, gave her pale skin an underwater cast; she might have been a Nereid indeed, clasping a swooning sailor to her bosom,

"Dev Veeder," I said stupidly.

"He's declared his love for me."

"You must be careful how you respond. You may think him foolish, but it will be dangerous to insult his honor."

"It's so fucked up," the gorgeous creature declared. She let go of my hands and strode the width of the meadow in four graceful strides, came back to me in four more. "I can't work, the way he follows me around everywhere."

"His devotion is exceptional. I take it that you do not reciprocate his infatuation."

"If you mean do I love him, do I want to marry him, no. No. I thought I liked him, but I knew better than to sleep with him because I know what a big thing it is with you Greater Brazilians."

I thought then that it might have been better if she had slept with him as soon as possible, since it would have instantly devalued her in Dev Veeder's eyes. She would have become his mistress, but never his wife.

Demi said, "I think he's been out here too long. I've heard dreadful stories about him."

"Well, we have been at war."

"That he tortures his prisoners," she said. "That he enjoys it."

"He is a soldier. Sometimes it is necessary to do things in war which would be unforgivable in peacetime."

I did not particularly want to defend Dev Veeder, but I did not yet know what she wanted of me, and I was feeling an old man's caution.

"He enjoys it," she said again.

"Perhaps he enjoys carrying out his duty."

"A Jesuitical distinction if ever I heard one."

"I was educated by them, as a matter of fact."

"So was I! Just outside Dublin. A horrible gray pile of a Place that smelled of damp and floor polish and cheap disinfectant. Brr," she said, and shuddered and smiled. "I bet you had to endure that lecture on damnation and eternity. The sparrow flying from one end of the Universe to the other..."

"On each circuit carrying away in its beak a grain of rice from a mountain as tall as the Moon's orbit."

"In our lecture the mountain was made of sand. And I guess your priests were men, not women. I still remember the punchline. Even when the sparrow had finished its task not one moment of eternity had passed. They knew how to leave a mark on your soul, the Jesuits. I learned to hate them because they scared me into being good."

"I am sure that you needed little tuition in that direction, Dr. Lacombe."

"Demi, Fredo. Call me Demi. uit being so formal."

"Demi, then."

"They gave me a strong sense of duty too, the Jesuits. I came here to do a job. An important job."

I began to understand what she wanted. I said, "Dev Veeder's attentions are interfering with your work."

"He's an impossible man. He says that he wants to help me, but he won't listen when I try to tell him that he could best help by letting me get on with my work on my own."

"He is from a good family. Very old-fashioned."

"Right. He insists on going everywhere with me, and insists that I stay locked up in the quarter when he can't spare the time to escort me. So I'm way behind in my survey. I mean, I knew it would be a big job, but Dev is making it impossible. And it's so important that it gets done. This was such a wonderful place, before the war." She made a sweeping gesture that took in the roses, the falls of ferns, the viridescent moss. "It was all like this, then."

"The restoration is an important symbol of political faith."

"Well, there's that. But this city was a biotech showpiece before the war. It had more gene wizards than any other colony, and they exported their expertise to almost everywhere else in the outer system. There's so much we can learn from what's left, and so much more we can learn during the reconstruction."

"And of course you want to play a part in that. It would set the cap on your career."

"It was like a work of art," Demi Lacombe said. "It would be a terrible sin not to try and restore it. There's a man I need to see. Away from Dev."

"One of the survivors."

"Yani Hakaiopulos. He was a gene wizard, once upon a time. As great a talent as Sri Hong-Owen or Avernus. He retired a long time ago, but he helped entrain the basic ecological cycles which underpinned everything else. I can learn so much from him, if I'm given the chance."

"But he won't talk if Dev Veeder is with you."

"The Parisians think that Dev is a war criminal."

"If they had won the war, perhaps that's what he would have become. But they did not."

"Will you help me, Fredo? You go out into the city alone. You interview the people there."

"And you want me to interview this man about the city's ecosystems? I would not know where to begin."

"No," Demi Lacombe said, her gaze bright and bold. "I want you to take me with you."

"Without Dev Veeder's knowledge."

"Under his nose."

"He is the chief of police, Demi. No one can come and go without his knowledge."

"I think I've found a way," Demi Lacombe said. She stepped back and put two fingers between her blood-red lips and whistled, a single shrill note so loud

it startled me, and disturbed a flock of small brown birds which had been perching in the ferns overhead. As they tumbled through the air, a man stepped out of the roses on the other side of the little meadow.

My heart gave a little leap, tugged by guilt, and I was suddenly aware of how much like illicit lovers Demi Lacombe and I must have looked. But the man was no man at all, merely one of the gardeners, the tutelary spirits of the parkland.

Before the revolution, before the quiet War, the government of Paris, Dione was an attempt to revive the quaint notion of technodemocracy, an experiment in citizen participation that on Earth had been dismissed long ago as just another Utopian idea that was simply too unwieldy in practice. But it had briefly flourished in the little goldfish bowl of the colony city; every citizen could put a motion to change any aspect of governance providing he could enlist a quorum of supporters, and the motion would be enforced by the appropriate moderating committee if a sufficient majority voted it through. It was a horrible example of how lazy and misguided rulers, who should have been elevated above the mob by virtue of breeding or ability, devolve their natural obligations to ignorance, prejudice and the leveling force of popular taste. Imagine the time wasted in uniformed debate over trivial issues, the constant babble of prejudices masquerading as opinion or even fact! It had been a society shaped not by taste or intelligence but by a kind of directionless, mindless flailing reminiscent of Darwinian evolution. We have mastered evolution, and we must be masters of the evolution of our civilization, too. Yet Paris's nascent technodemocracy had thrown up one or two interesting ideas, and one of these was its method of capital punishment. Like all democracies, it mistakenly believed in the essential perfectibility of all men, and so practiced rehabilitation of its criminals rather than punishment.

But even it had to admit that there were some criminals who, by genetic inheritance, parental conditioning or choice, were irredeemable. As thrifty as the rest of the energy- and resource-poor colonies of the outer solar system, Paris did not waste material and labor in constructing prisons for these wretches; nor did it waste their potential for labor by executing them. Instead, they were lobotomized and fitted with transducer and control chips, transforming psychopaths into useful servants, meat extensions of the control system which maintained the parklands and wilderness and farms of the city. The gardener Demi had summoned from his hiding place had obviously been an untweaked immigrant, for he was no taller than me. Like the gardener I had encountered when wandering the parkland like a lorn, lovesick fool, hoping to encounter Demi Lacombe, he was sturdy, barechested and barefoot, his white trousers ragged, his shaven head scarred by the operation which had transformed him, encircled by a coppery headband into which was woven a high-gain broad band antenna.

Through this he was linked to both his fellows and the computers which controlled the climate of the parkland, its streams, its hidden machines, and even its animals, which all were fitted with control chips too. Several of the small brown birds which had fallen from the ferns fluttered about his head, calling in high excited voices, unnervingly like those of small children, before flying away over the edge of the meadow. With a rustling and snapping of canes, a pygmy mammoth emerged from the roses, its long russet hair combed straight and gleaming with oils, its trunk flexed at its broad forehead as the sensitive pink tip snuffled the air. Tools and boxes hung on its flanks, attached to a rope harness.

The gardener scarcely glanced at me; his attention was on Demi Lacombe. I thought I saw a look pass between them, crackling with a shared emotion. Desire, I thought, and in that moment unknowingly sealed her fate, for I was suddenly, violently, unreasonably jealous of the poor child of nature she had summoned, believing that Cris DeHon's malicious insinuations may have been right all along.

"He knows me," Demi Lacombe said softly. "I can speak with him."

"Anyone can speak to them," I said. "I understand they are programmed to understand a few simple commands. But mostly they keep away from the people they serve. It's better that way."

Demi Lacombe smiled and touched her left temple with her forefinger. "I mean that I can truly talk with him. I have an implant similar to his, so that I can access the higher functions of the machines which control the habitat. Through them, I can talk with him. Watch, Fredo! I can send him away as easily as I summoned him."

She made no signal, but the gardener turned and parted the canes of the roses and vanished into them. The mammoth turned too and trotted after him. It was unnervingly like magic, and I briefly wondered how else she might have commanded the brute, before crushing the vile image as a man might crush a loathsome worm beneath the heel of his boot.

Demi said, "He showed me a way out of here that Dev and his troopers don't know about."

I laughed, a trifle excessively I fear. I was not quite myself. Roses in a wild garden, a woman trapped by her own beauty, a compliant monster. I said, "Really, Demi. A secret passage?"

"A stream was diverted when the layout of the parkland was redesigned twenty years ago. Its sink pipe wasn't sealed up because it lies at the bottom of the lake, down there." She stepped gracefully to the edge of the meadow. A light wind blew up the face of the cliff, stirring her long, silvery hair— as she pointed downward; she looked like a warrior from some pre-technological myth. I shuffled carefully to her side, and looked down at the long, narrow sleeve of black water that was wedged at the bottom of the ravine, between the base of the cliff on which we stood and the wall of bare sheetrock which rose in huge bolted slabs toward the foot of one of the tent's diamond panes, high above us.

Demi said, "The pipe is flooded, but the gardeners can give me one of the air masks they wear when they clean out the bulk storage tanks. There's a pressure gate which must be opened—it fell closed when the main dome was blown. Then I'll be outside."

"It sounds dangerous. More dangerous than Dev Veeder."

"I've tested the pressure gate. I know it works. But I need help getting across the main part of the city." She had turned to me, her face shining with excitement. How young she was, how lovely! Her scent was very strong at that moment; I could have drowned in it quite happily. She said, "I need your help, Fredo. Will you help me?"

For a moment, I quite forget my loathsome spasm of jealousy. "Of course," I said. "Of course I will, my dear Demi. How could I refuse the plea of a maiden in distress?" We made our plans as we walked back through the shaggy, exuberances of the cypresses toward the lights and noise of the party. We took care to return to it separately, from different directions, but still my heart gave a little leap when I saw Dev Veeder moving purposefully through knots of chattering people, hauling himself hand over hand along one of the waist-high tethers which webbed the lawn. He was making straight for Demi, and when he reached her she put her hand on his shoulder and her lovely, delicate face close to his and talked quietly into his ear. He nodded and smiled, and she smiled too, my cunning minx.

"Now you can tell me all about it."

I swung around so quickly that I would have floated above the heads of the chattering party-goers if Cris DeHon had not caught my wrist. The neuter's fingers were long and delicate, and fever-hot. It wore a white blouson slashed here and there to show flashes of scarlet lining, as if it were imitating the victim of some primitive and bloody rite. Its hair was dyed a crisp white, and stiffened in little spikes.

"Tell me all about it," DeHon said. "What plot's afoot? Is it love?"

I smiled into the neuter's sharp pale face. "Don't be ridiculous."

"A marriage of summer and winter is not unknown. And if you're half the distinguished scholar you claim to be, you'd be quite a catch for a struggling

academic from the most backward and impoverished country of the Alliance."

"She was showing me some of the wonders of our gardens," I said, shaking free of DeHon's hot grasp. "This city is famous for its gene wizards."

DeHon smiled craftily, looking sidelong through the crowd at Demi Lacombe and Dev Veeder. "I don't believe it for a minute, but I won't spoil the fun. The curtain has risen; the play has commenced. For your sake, I hope Dev Veeder will be in a good temper when he discovers your little plot."

The night passed in a daze of half-sleeping, half-waking. I had never slept well in Dione's light gravity, and what sleep I had that night was full of murky dreams colored by fear and desire.

The next morning, I drank an unaccustomed second cup of coffee at the makeshift cafe' and, when Lavet Corso finally arrived, I instructed him to fly us to the coordinates which Demi Lacombe had given me.

He stared at me insolently, the seams in his face tightening around his mouth. "That's nothing but a park, boss."

"Nevertheless, that is where we will go."

And so we did, after a brief argument which I quite enjoyed, and which did more to wake me than the coffee did. I was beginning to suspect that Corso's protests were ritual, like the bargaining one must do in a souk when making a purchase. Now that the game was afoot, I was in a careless mood of anticipation, and did not complain at the pitch and yaw of the airframe as Corso slipped it through updraughts, spiraling down to the brown and black wreckage of the park. We swooped in low over the tops of skeletal trees which raised their white arms high above a wasteland of deliquescing vegetation. The stink was horrible. An eye of water gleamed in the shadow of a low cliff of raw basalt, and a small figure stepped from a cleft at the foot of the cliff and semaphored its arms. A flood of relief and renewed desire turned my poor foolish heart quite over. I tapped Corso's shoulder, but he had already seen her. The wings of the airframe boomed as they shed air, and we skidded across a black carpet of mulch.

Demi Lacombe floated down from the cleft, from which a little water still trickled into what had once been a lake, and ran to us with huge loping strides, sleek in silvery skinthins which hugged every contour of her slim body. An airmask and a small tank dangled from one hand. Her wet hair was snarled around her beautiful face, made yet more beautiful by the brilliant smile she turned on me.

Corso gave a low whistle, and I said sharply, "Enough of that. Remember your poor dead wife." "You're late," Demi said breathlessly. "My guide has a bad sense of time." "It doesn't matter. Well, I'm ready. Let's go!" "You have not brought... more suitable attire?" Demi laughed, and cocked her hip. The silvery material was molded tightly to every centimeter of her body. "What's wrong? You don't like this?"

I liked it very much indeed, of course, and it was obvious at Corso did too. He was cranking up the prop, to give enough kinetic energy to assist takeoff. When I told him aaM futures sharply to hurry up, he mumbled something about overloading.

"Nonsense. You hardly expect my passenger to walk. Look lively! Every moment we stay here risks discovery."

"I didn't sign up for adventure," Corso said. He straightened, with one hand to the small of his back. "Maybe you better tell me what this is all about, boss."

"You just get us to the warrens," I said.

"No," Demi said, "he's right." She stepped up to Corso and touched his arm and said, "You're Lavet Corso, aren't you? Professor-Doctor Graves has told me so much about the help you've given him."

"And who are you?"

"Dr. Demi Lacombe. I'm here to help reconstruct your wonderful ecosystem, and I want to talk to Yard Hakaiopulos."

"Really," Corso said, but I could see that he was weakening. "Why not have your boyfriend haul him in?"



"My boyfriend?"

"Colonel Veeder. You are the woman he's been escorting everywhere."

"Well, that's true, but he isn't my boyfriend, and that's why I need your help."

Corso locked the prop's winding mechanism and said, "You can try and talk to Yani if you like, but you'll find he's immune to your charms. Climb on board now, both of you. Let's see if I can get this higher than the trees."

Demi looked at the flimsy airframe and said, "I thought it would be safer to walk."

"Not at all," I said. "It would take several hours, and we would be bound to encounter more than one of the killing machines, and they would report straight back to the security forces. But no one bothers to watch where we go."

"You had better be right, boss."

The airframe jinked across the rotten black carpet and bounded into the air. Demi, seated behind me, screamed loudly and happily. She had put her arms around my waist; the pressure of her body against my back, and her musky scent, almost as strong as the cabbage-stink of the rotten vegetation, awakened a part of me that had been sleeping for quite some time.

Although Corso was pedaling hard, the airframe clambered through the middle air of the dome with the grace of a pregnant dragonfly. I leaned back and pointed out to Demi the remains of barricades across the avenues, the ruined hulk of the Bourse, like a shattered wedding cake, where the last of those citizens who had been in or near to pressure suits when the dome had been blown open had made their final stand. Once, I saw the silver twinkle of a killing machine stalking down the middle of the Avenue des fitoilles; Corso must have seen it too, for he veered the airframe away, scudding in toward one of the flat rooftops clustered around the edge of the dome.

The place was an automated distribution warehouse of some kind, and although it would have been cleared of any bodies, the red-lit echoing emptiness of its storage areas and ramps was eerie. Demi kept close to me as Corso led us down a narrow street. I told her about Marisa Bassi's early days in Paris, Dione, when as an immigrant he had worked in one of these warehouses, rising quickly to become its supervisor, then moving on to become a partner in an import-export business of dubious legality, where he had made enough money to buy his citizenship.

"And two years after that he became a councillor, and then the war came. The rest will be history, once I have written it."

"Your history, maybe," Corso said.

"All history belongs to the winners," I said, "so it will be your history too. If you know anything about Bassi, now's the time to tell me."

"Nothing you need to know, boss," Corso said, with his maddening disingenuousness.

Marisa Bassi had been living in this semi-industrial sector when the war began. Imagine his small, sparsely furnished room that evening, the sounds of the street drifting up through a window open to catch any stray breeze: a tram rattling through a nearby intersection; the conversation of people strolling about as the suspensor lights dimmed overhead; the smell of food from the cafes and restaurants. Bassi was sitting in a chair, flicking through page after page on his slate—he hated the paperwork which went with his job, and was especially impatient with it now that the first move toward independence had been made—when he heard a distant thump, like a huge door closing. At the same moment the suspensor lights flickered, came back on. Bassi looked out of the window and saw people running, all in one direction, running with huge loping strides like gazelles fleeing a lion's rush. His heart felt hollow for a moment, then filled with a rush of adrenaline. He called out to someone he recognized, and the man stopped and shouted up that it was the parliament building, someone had blown it up.

"It's war!" the man added, holding up a little scrap of TV film. Let's say that he was a Sicilian too, Bep Martino or some such rough hewn name, a

construction worker. He and Bassi played chess and drank rough red wine under the chestnut trees in the little park at the end of the street.

"Wait there!" Bassi said. "I'm coming with you!"

It seemed that most of the population of Paris had converged on the ruins of the parliament building. It had neatly collapsed on itself, its flat roof draped broken-backed across the pancaked remains of its three stories. People had organized themselves into teams and were carefully picking through the wreckage, chains of men and women passing chunks of fractured concrete from top to bottom, stopping every now and again while someone listened for the calls of those who had been buried. Living casualties were carried off to hospital; the dead lay in a neat row under orange blankets on the trampled lawns.

Followed by his friend, Marisa Bassi restlessly stalked all the way around the perimeter of the building. Five killed, eighteen injured, a doctor told him, and probably more still to be found in the rubble.

Bep Martino appraised the ruins with a critical eye and said that it was a professional job. "Charges placed just so, the walls went out and the floors fell straight down. Boom!" Every so often, he flattened out the TV on his palm and gave a report on what it was saying. Earth's three major powers had made good their threat, and were sending out what they called an expeditionary force to quell revolutionary elements in their outer colonies.

"Note the possessive," Bassi said.

"Well, we voted to suspend payments," Martino said, "so I guess we're all revolutionaries now."

"This is our moment," Bassi said.

He stopped to talk with another councillor, a third generation tweak, very tall, and thin as a rail. Stooping, he told Bassi that the air conditioning had failed because of a virus, and software faults had shut down the fusion reactors; the city was running on battery power.

"We expected all this," Bassi said impatiently. "It is only a warning. We will get the systems back on line, we will clear this up. We will bury our dead and swear on their graves that they will not have died in vain."

He said this last loudly, for the benefit of the people who were gathering around the two councillors, felt a gleeful kick of adrenaline, and added, because he liked the phrase, "This is our moment."

"We did not expect them to send soldiers," the tall councillor said gloomily.

"We'll fight if we have to," Bassi said, his face burning with a sudden self-righteous anger. "We built this city; no soldiers can take it from us." People were clapping and shouting all around him now. The councillor took his elbow and said quietly, "Be careful of the mob, Bassi. It'll eat you up, if you let it."

Surely someone would have told him something like that, but with the taste of concrete dust in his throat and his blood up, Marisa Bassi would have shrugged off any advice. It was not a time for moderation or conciliation. That was what he told the city's prime committee a day later, as they debated their response to the threats made by the Three Powers Alliance, and on that day at least, the council was with him, for it agreed to declare a state of war. The stage was set. Soon, Marisa Bassi would dominate it.

The sector where he had lived was dead now; his entire city was dead. Corso, Demi Lacombe and I crept like mice in a deserted house along a walkway which plunged through the dome's rocky skirt (its diamond panes arching high above us as if we were microbes trapped in a fly's eye). It was one of the many ways into the warrens where the survivors of the city's siege had hidden, walkways and passages and shafts linking insulated dormitories or hydroponic tunnels. One of the walkways actually ran a little way across the naked face of the ridge, and gave views to the northwest of the dark, rumpled floor of the Romulus crater. The moon was so small that the far side of crater was well below the horizon, and we seemed to be standing on a high, curved cliff looking out across a sea frozen in the midst of a violent tempest. Saturn's banded disc of salmon and saffron was tipped high in the black sky, the narrow

arc of his rings shining like polished steel.

There was the landing platform, two shuttles standing on top of it like toys on a cakestand. There were the orange slashes and dashes and squiggles, like ribbons of cuneiform code, of the vacuum organism fields. As I pointed these out to Demi, a huge trembling and translucent jellyfish rose up from the sharply drawn line of the close horizon, its skirts glittering in the harsh sunlight even as it began to lose shape and fall back toward the plain. It was where many of the surviving population of Paris had been put to work, excavating fragments of the iron-rich bolide whose impact had formed the twin craters.

I had not finished explaining this when another jellyfish rose, writhing, into the sunlight, and a moment later the tremor of the first explosion passed through the walkway.

I told Demi, "It is an open-cast mine. They must be making it wider or deeper. The ice is so cold it is hard as rock, and that's why they must use explosives."

"Means two or three more people will die out there today," Corso said. "Or get badly hurt."

"Don't be impertinent," I told him. "It's important work, necessary work. The metals will aid in the reconstruction of your city."

"I only mean that Yam might suddenly be too busy to have time to talk to the young lady, boss," Corso said.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, Mr. Corso, or you might find yourself working in the mines. Or back on corpse detail."

"It would most likely be the mines," Corso said, "seeing as they've mostly cleared away the dead."

We passed through an antiquated airlock, a sequence of diamond slabs which had to be cranked open and shut by hand, into the noise and squalor and stink of refugee town. It had once been part of the city's farm system, first growing raw organics in the form of unicellular algae, and then, after vacuum organisms had been developed, cultivating fruits and vegetables for the luxury market.

Now, the wide, low-roofed tunnels, mercilessly lit by piped sunlight, divided by panels of extruded plant waste or pressed rock-dust, by blankets or sheets hung from wires and plastic string, were the rude dormitory quarters of the thousand or so surviving Parisians. Although many were off working two- or three-day shifts at the mines or helping to restore the vacuum farms (the city's vacuum organisms had been killed by prions which had catalyzed a debilitating change in their photosynthetic pigments, and were slowly being stripped out and replaced), the wretched place seemed noisy and crowded. Everything was damp, and the hot, heavy air was ripe with the smell of sewage and body odor. A dubious brown liquid trickled under the raised slats of the walkway down which Corso led Demi and me. He walked several paces ahead of us, with a self-consciousness I'd not seen before, as he led us to the hospital where Yani Hakaiopulos worked.

People were sitting at the openings of their crudely partitioned spaces. A few looked up and, with dull eyes, watched us go by. Old men and women mostly; one crone dandled a fretting baby whose face was encrusted with bloody mucus.

"Poor thing," Demi whispered to me.

War is cruel, I almost said, but her look of compassion was genuine and my sentiment was not. I had been here many times before to interview the unfortunate survivors about Marisa Bassi, and I confess that my heart had been hardened to the squalor to which their reckless actions had consigned them. The hospital was another converted agricultural tunnel, beyond yet another set of tiresome mechanically operated doors. The reception area, where a dozen patients waited on stretchers or a medley of plastic chairs, was walled off by scratched and battered transparent plastic scarred with the lumpy seams of hasty welds. Corso talked with a weary woman in a traditional white smock, and was allowed through into the main part of the hospital, where beds stood in neat rows in merciful dimness—in there, the piped sunlight was filtered

through beta cloth tacked over the openings in the low ceiling. Most of the medical orderlies were missionary Redeemers, gray-skinned, tall and skinny, wrapped in bandages like so many of their patients, or Egyptian mummies come to life. They all had the same face. There were many badly burned patients, immobilized inside molded plastic casings while damaged skin and muscles were reconstructed. A few people shuffled about, often on crutches; many were missing limbs. Corso passed between the beds into the obscure dimness at the far end of the hospital, and within a minute returned, leading a stooped old man in a white smock spattered with blood stains.

As they came into the reception area, I understood what Corso had meant when, he had said that Demi's charms might not work, for Yard Hakaiopulos was blind. The old gene wizard was congenitally sightless, in fact, having been born with an undeveloped optic chiasma, but he could see, after a fashion. Corso commandeered the hospital's single office, and stuck three tiny cameras to its walls; Yani Hakaiopulos had an implant which transmitted the camera pictures as the sensation of needles on his skin, and so gave him a crude analog of vision. All this Yani Hakaiopulos explained while Corso set up the cameras. "It hurts to see," he said, smiling at us one by one when the system had been switched on, "which is why I do not use it most of the time. Also, I see little more than shapes and movement, and so for my work it is more convenient to use my other senses."

"A blind doctor!" I exclaimed. "Now I have seen everything."

"I am not a qualified doctor, sir," Yani Hakaiopulos said, "but in these terrible times even I may be of some help." He turned his face in Demi's direction.

"I understand that you have come to talk with me, my dear. I'm flattered, of course."

"I'm honored that you would interrupt your work to talk with me," Demi said.

"There's not much to be done now, except try and keep those well enough to recover from dying of an opportune infection, and to nurse those who are too ill to recover through their last days. And the Redeemers are far better at that than I am. You," he said, turning his face approximately in my direction, "I believe that you are the historian. The one who goes around asking people about Marisa Bassi."

"Did you know him?"

"No, not really. I had been long retired and out of the public eye when the war began, and I could hardly help in the defense of the city. I did meet him once, after his escape from the invaders, in the last hours of our poor city. He came to the hospital-not this one, but the one which lies in ruins in the main dome-to be treated for the gunshot wound he had received, but he was only there for a handful of minutes. A good voice he had. Warm and quiet, but it could fill a room if he let it."

"He was wounded in the side," I said.

"Yes," the old man, Yani Hakaiopulos said, and touched the left side of his stained white smock, just under his ribs. The dark, mottled skin of his face was tight on the skull beneath, his teeth large and square and yellow, his white hair combed sideways across a bald pate. He had an abstracted yet serene air, as if he was happy with the world just as he found it.

I said, "Some claim that he later died of his wound."

"I would not know, Professor-Doctor Graves, for I did not treat him." He turned his smile to Demi and added, "But I believe you have come here to talk of the future, not the past. I am afraid that I do not give much thought to the future -there's very little of it left for me."

"I am here to learn," Demi said, and suddenly knelt down in front of him like a supplicant, and took his hands in hers. She said, in a small, quiet voice, "I do want to learn. That is, if you will allow it."

The old man allowed her to bring his fingers to her face.

He traced her lips, the bridge of her nose, the downy curve of her cheek. He smiled and said, "I haven't had a pupil for many years, and besides, I am long out of practice. My small contribution to the greening of the city was made

long ago."

"Knowledge of the past can help remake the future," Demi said, with fierce ardor.

"Many of my people would say that the city should be destroyed," Yani Hakaiopulos said.

"They certainly did their best," I said.

"Yes, indeed. At the end, many were possessed by the idea that they should destroy their city rather than let it fall into the hands of their enemies. They knew that the war was lost, and that if the city survived it would no longer be their city."

"But it will be," Demi insisted, "once it has been rebuilt."

"No, my dear. It will be like a doppelganger of a dear dead friend, living in that dead friend's house, wearing their clothes."

Demi sat back, and I was aware once more of the way her slim, full-breasted body moved inside the tight fabric of her silvery skinthins. She said, "Do you believe that?"

"I do not believe that the great, delicate systems we engineered, the animals and plants we made, can be brought back as they once were. Perhaps something equally wonderful might rise in its place, but I wouldn't know. I'm an old man, the last of gene wizards. All of my colleagues are dead, from old age, from the war..."

"I have studied the parkland in the diplomatic quarter," Demi said. "I have talked with its gardeners, walked its paths ... I think I understand a small part of what this city once possessed."

Yani Hakaiopulos breathed deeply, then reached out and briefly caressed the side of her face. He said, "You truly want to do this thing?"

"I want to learn," Demi said.

"Well, if you can endure an old man's ramblings, I will do my best to tell something of how it was done."

They talked a long time. An hour, two. I sat outside the office while they talked, and drank weak, lukewarm green tea, with Corso fretting beside me. He was worried that Dev Veeder would learn about our little escapade.

"Go and see your daughter," I suggested at last, tired of his complaints.

"She's in school, and her teacher is this fierce old woman who does not like her classes disturbed. It's okay for you, boss. Veeder can't touch you. But if he finds that I brought his girlfriend here--"

"She isn't his girlfriend."

"He thinks she is."

"Well, that is true. She is cursed by her beauty, I think."

"She's dangerous. You be careful, boss."

"What nonsense, Mr. Corso. I'm nearly as old as your friend Yani Hakaiopulos."

"He's a great man, boss. And she got him telling her his secrets almost straight away. It's spooky."

"Unlike most of you, I think he wants the city rebuilt."

"Spooky," Corso said again. "And she said she was talking with the gardeners."

"Oh, that. She has had transducers or the like implanted in her brain." I touched my temples. The knife-blade of a headache had inserted itself in the socket of my left eye. The air in the warrens was bad, heavy with carbon dioxide and no doubt laced with a vile mixture of pollutants, and the brightly lit reception area was very noisy. I said, "She told me that she can interface with the computers which control the climate of the parklands and so on. And through them, she can, in a fashion, communicate with the gardeners. There is no magic about it, nothing sinister."

"If you say so, boss," Corso said. He fell into a kind of sulk, and barely spoke as he led us back through the warrens to the main part of the city, and the rooftop where he had left the airframe.

Uev Veeder found me the next morning at the cafe, where I was waiting for Lavet Corso to make an appearance. The colonel came alone, sat opposite me and waved off the old man who came out of the half-collapsed guardhouse to ask what he wanted. He seemed amiable enough, and asked me several innocuous

questions about the progress of my work.

"I find this Bassi intriguing," he said. "A shame he's dead."

"I hope I might bring his memories to life."

"Hardly the same thing, Professor-Doctor Graves, if you don't mind my saying so."

"Not at all. I am quite aware of the limitations of my technique, but alas, there is no better way."

"It's interesting. He was a fool, an amateur soldier who chose to stand and fight in a hopeless situation, yet he was able to rally the entire population of the city to his cause. But perhaps he was not really their leader at all. Perhaps he was merely a figurehead raised up by the mob."

"He was certainly no figurehead," I said. "The assassination of his fellow members of the government shows that he was capable of swift and ruthless action."

He was tireless in rallying the morale of those who manned the barricades—indeed, when the invasion of Paris began, he was captured at an outlying barricade."

"The sole survivor amongst a rabble of women and old men. They were fighting against fully armored troopers with hand weapons, industrial lasers and crude bombs."

"And he escaped, and went back to fight."

Dev Veeder thought about that, and admitted, "I suppose I do like him for that."

"You do?"

Dev Veeder was staring at me thoughtfully. His dark, almost black eyes were hooded and intense. I had the uncomfortable feeling that he was seeing through my skin. He said, "Marisa Bassi didn't have to escape. He didn't have to fight on."

"He would have been executed."

"Not at all, Professor-Doctor. Once captured, he could have sued for peace. If he truly was the leader of the mob, they would have obeyed him. He would have saved many lives; some might have even been grateful. The Three Powers Alliance wouldn't have been able to install him as head of a puppet government, of course, but they could have pensioned him off, returned him to wherever it was on Earth he was born."

"Sicily."

"There you are. He could have opened a pizza parlor, become mayor of some small town, made a woman fat and happy with a pack of bambinos."

"The last is unlikely, Colonel."

"But he stuck to the cause he had adopted. He went back. He finished the job. He may have been an amateur and a fool, Professor-Doctor Graves, but he had a soldier's backbone."

"And caused, as you said, many unnecessary deaths, and much unnecessary destruction."

I gestured at the devastation spread beyond the foot of the plaza's escalators: the rotting parks; the streets still choked with rubble; the shattered buildings.

Dev Veeder did not look at it, but continued to stare at me with a dark, unfathomable intensity.

I made a show of peering at the empty air above the rooftops of the city and said, "My wretched guide is late."

"He'll come. He has no choice. This talk interests me, Professor-Doctor. We haven't talked like this for a while."

"Well, you've been busy."

"I have?"

"With your new prisoners. And of course, escorting Demi."

"Dr. Lacombe?"

I felt heat rise in my face. "Yes, of course. Dr. Lacombe."

"Tell me, Professor-Doctor Graves, do you think that Marisa Bassi was one of your great men?"

"His people-those who survive-think that he was."

"His people. Yes. Do you know, many of them cry out his name in the heat of questioning?"

"I don't see-"

"Usually, those subjected to hot questioning scream for their mothers at the end. When they're emptied, when they've given up everything. Huge bloodied babies shitting and pissing themselves, unable to move because we've broken every major bone, bawling for the only unfailing comfort in all the world. But these people, they cry out for Bassi." Dev Veeder's right hand made a fist and softly struck the cradle of his left. He wore black gloves of fine, soft leather. One rumor was that they were vat-grown human skin. Another that they were not vat-grown. He said, "Can you imagine it, Professor-Doctor? You've been broken so badly you know you're going to die. You're flayed open. You've given up everything you've ever loved. Except for this one thing. Your love of the man who led you in your finest hour. You don't give him up. No, in your last wretched moment, you call out to him. You think he'll come and help you."

"That's ... remarkable."

"Oh yes. Remarkable. Astonishing. Amazing. What do you think you would call out, if you were put to the question, Professor-Doctor Graves?"

"I'm sure I don't-"

"Nobody knows," Dev Veeder said, "until the moment. But I'm sure you'd call for your mother, eh?" His smile was a thing of muscles and teeth, with only cold calculation behind it, "Was Marisa Bassi a great man? His people think so, and perhaps that's enough."

I said, eager to grasp this thread, "He lost his war. Great men are usually remembered because they won."

"It goes deeper than winning or losing," Dev Veeder said. "The important thing is that Bassi took responsibility for his actions. He was captured; he escaped and returned at once to the fight. Technology makes most men remote from the war they create. At the end of the Second World War, which was, as you know, the first truly modern war, neither the crew of the American aircraft Enola Gay nor most of the technicians and scientists who built the atomic bomb, nor even the politicians who ordered its use, none of them felt any guilt over what they did. Why not? The answer is simple: the destruction was remote from them. In the quiet War, most people were killed by technicians millions of kilometers away.

Technicians who fought the war in eight-hour shifts and then went home to their spouses and children. Remoteness and division of labor induces both a diminished sense of responsibility and moral tunnel vision, so that men see the task of killing only in terms of efficiency and meeting operation parameters. In my line of work it is different, of course. That is why I am despised by so many, but I believe that I am a more moral man than they for at least I know exactly what I do. I see the fear in my victims' eyes; I smell their sweat and their voided bladders and guts; I get blood on my hands. And I am often the last person they see, so I do not stint my sympathy for their plight."

I said, "It must make breaking their bones difficult." "Not at all. I do it with a clear conscience because they are the enemy, because it is necessary. But at no time do I reduce them to ciphers or quotients or statistics. They are not targets or casualties or collateral damage. They are men and women in the glory of their final agony. People hate me, yes. But while they think they hate me because of what I do, in fact they hate me because they see in me what they know is lacking in them. Nietzsche had it right: the weak mass always despises the strong individual."

I was sure that Nietzsche had said no such thing, and told Dev Veeder, "Nietzsche tried to erase moral responsibility and went mad doing it. On the morning when they finally had to haul him off to the asylum, he rushed out of his lodgings, still wearing his landlord's nightcap, and tearfully embraced a carthorse.

The amoral philosophy which the Nazis would adopt as their own in the Second

World War, the creed which would shatter Europe, had already shattered his mind."

"Do you fear me, Professor-Doctor?"

"Fear? What a question!"

"Because, you know, you should. This place, where you play-act the role of conqueror of the world, it will have to go. It endangers security. I will see to it," Dev Veeder said, and stood up and bowed and loped away.

I knew that Cris DeHon had betrayed me, but when I returned from my research in the ruins of the city and confronted him, the neuter denied it with an uncomfortable laugh.

"Why should I spoil all the fun?"

"Fun?"

"The plot. The play. The unfolding mysteries of the human heart."

"You have no right to talk of such things, DeHon. You opted out of all that."

DeHon clutched its breast dramatically, "A cruel cut, Graves. I might be desexed, but I'm still human, and part of life's great comedy. If nothing else, I can still watch. And I do like to watch."

"Nevertheless, you told him."

"I won't deny that our gallant love-struck colonel asked me if I knew where his sweetheart had been while I was talking with him at that party. You still owe me for that, by the way."

"Not if you told him."

"Perhaps I did let a little something slip. Please, don't look at me that way! I didn't mean to, but our colonel is very persistent. It is his job, after all."

The small, bright-eyed smile with which this admission was delivered let me know that DeHon had deliberately revealed something about the assignation to Dev Veeder. I said, "It was innocent. uite innocent."

"I do not believe," DeHon said, "that Demi Lacombe is as innocent as she likes people to think she is."

This was at a reception held by the Pacific Community's trade association. Several of its companies had just won the contract to rebuild Dione's organic refineries. Most of us were there.. Dev Veeder was standing to one side of a group of biochemists who were talking to Demi Lacombe. He saw me looking at him, and raised his bulb of wine in an ironic salute.

When I had returned to the plaza that afternoon, I had found that Dev Veeder had been true to his word. The cafe was gone, its mismatched chairs and tables and the shell of the half-ruined guardshouse cleared away. Later, I discovered that the old man and woman who had run it had been sent to work in the vacuum organism fields, a virtual death sentence for people their age, but I did not need to know that to understand that Dev Veeder had made his point, and I managed to have a brief word with Demi at the buffet of sushi, seaweed, and twenty varieties of bananas stewed and fried and stuffed-exotic food shipped from Earth at God knows what expense for our delectation.

As I transferred morsels I would not eat from the prongs of their serving plates to the prongs of my bowl, I told Demi, "He knows."

"He doesn't know. If he did, he would have done something."

"He has done something," I said, and told her about the cafe . Had I known then about the fate of its proprietors I would not have dared to even speak with her.

She said, "I'm going again tomorrow. If you are too scared to help me, Professor-Doctor Graves, I will find my own way across the city."

With a pang of jealousy, I thought of the way that Yani Hakaiopulos's fingers had caressed her face. The two of them sharing secrets while I waited outside like a court eunuch. I said, "Colonel Veeder will be watching you."

"He has to make a presentation about security to company representatives, and I've told him that I will be working in diplomatic quarter's parkland." She touched her temple. "If his men do try to follow me hi there, and so far they have not, I'll see them long before they see me. And I know you won't tell him, Fredo. But we shouldn't talk any more, at least, not here. I think Dev is



getting suspicious."

"He is more than suspicious," I said. My cheeks were burning like those of a foolish adolescent. "And that is why, I am afraid, I can no longer help you." I did not go into the city the next day, for if I did I knew that I would have to go back to that ruined park and wait for Demi to emerge from the cliff, like Athena stepping newborn from the brow of Zeus. If nothing else, I still had my pride. She will need my help, I thought, and I was wounded when, of course, she did not seek me out.

The day passed, and the next, and still she did not come. I discounted the third day because she was taken out into the city by Dev Veeder; but on the morning of fourth, hollow, anxious, defeated, I summoned Lavet Corso and ordered him to fly me straight to the ruined park.

He knew what I was about, of course; I made no pretense about it. We landed on the black slime of the lawn, and I saw a rill of water falling from the cleft in the black basalt cliff and felt my heart harden.

"Take me back," I told Corso.

"Sure, boss, but I'll have to wind the prop first."

While he worked, I said, "You knew all along, didn't you?"

"A woman like that coming down to the warrens, well, she's hard to miss, boss."

"I suppose that she is talking with that gene wizard. With Yani Hakaiopulos.

"I don't like it either, boss."

"You were right about her, Mr. Corso. She uses men. Even old fools like me and your Mr. Hakaiopulos. There was a school of thought in the late twentieth century that men—even great men—were ruled by their genitals. They couldn't help themselves, and as a result they either treated all women like prostitutes, or the women who were involved in their lives had an undue influence on them. It's long been discredited, but I wonder if there isn't some truth to it.

We can never really know what is in the hearts of men, for after all, most refuse to admit it to themselves. At least your own great man, Marisa Bassi, was not troubled by women. The sector where he went looking for sex ..."

"The Battery?"

"Yes, you took me there. One must admire, I suppose, the meticulousness of city planners who would design a neighborhood where men can go to find other men, free of class, driven only by desire."

"It wasn't really designed, boss. It sort of grew up. And it wasn't just gay men who went there."

"Do you think he went there while he was organizing the resistance to the siege?"

"I wouldn't know, boss."

"No, of course not. You did not know him, as you keep reminding me, and you are a family man. But I expect that he did. Leaders of men are almost always highly sexed. We can't condemn such impulses."

Corso locked the crank of the prop and stood back, dusting his hands. "You're not just talking about Marisa Bassi now, are you?"

"No. No, I suppose not. It's all part of the human comedy ... or tragedy."

"We can go now, boss. It's all wound up and waiting."

"Of course. Then take me back to the quarter, Mr. Corso. I think I must tell Colonel Veeder about this security problem."

Corso paused, halfway through swinging into the pilot's sling. One hand was raised, grasping a support strut of the airframe's wide canary yellow wings, and half his face was in shadow. He gave me a level, appraising look and said, "Are you sure you want to do that?"

"The security of the diplomatic quarter is at risk. It's not only Demi Lacombe who could be using that way in and out of the parklands." When Corso did not reply, I bent and touched the bulge of the blazer, bolstered at my calf. "Get me back, Mr. Corso. I insist."

"You will get more people than her into trouble, boss."

"I will tell Colonel Veeder that your part in this was blameless. That you

were under my orders."

"I'm not just thinking of myself."

"Yani Hakaiopulos will have to take his chance. I shudder to think what Demi must have done, to gain his secrets."

"I think it's more a question of what she did to him," Corso said.

"I have had enough of your impertinence, Mr. Corso. Look sharp, now. I want to get this whole unfortunate business over with."

"I don't think so, boss."

"What?"

He let go of the strut and stepped back and said flatly, "It won't take you long to walk back, even if you have to use the stairs to climb up to the quarter."

And as you always like to remind me, you have your blazer to protect you."

"Corso! Damn you Corso, come back here!"

But he did not look back as he walked away across the blackened ruins of the lawn, even when I drew the blazer and blew a dead tree to splinters. I hoped that the shot might attract one of the killing machines which patrolled the city, but although I waited a full ten minutes, nothing stirred. At last, I climbed out of the airframe and began the long walk home.

Seven Uev Veeder took my revelation more calmly than I had thought he would, even though I had taken the precaution of having arranged to meet with him in the presence of Colm Wardsmead, the nominal director of the diplomatic quarter and, therefore, of the entire city. Wardsmead was a shifty, self-satisfied man; although he liked to think of himself as a Medici prince, the effectiveness of his native cunning was limited by his laziness and contempt for others.

I knew that Dev Veeder despised Wardsmead, but also knew that he would not dare lose control of his temper in the director's presence.

"This is all very awkward," Wardsmead said, when I was done. "Perhaps you would care to make a recommendation, Colonel Veeder. I am sure that you would want this matter handled discreetly."

During my exposition, Dev Veeder had stood with his back to the eggshaped room, looking out of the huge window toward the shaggy treetops of the parkland.

Without turning around, he said, "She's supposed to be doing research out there. It would be the best place for an arrest."

"Away from the excitable gaze of the diplomatic community," Wardsmead said. "I quite understand, Colonel."

He was unable to hide his satisfaction at Dev Veeder's discomfort. Veeder was a war hero and so difficult to discipline, but now Wardsmead believed that he had a stick with which to beat him.

Perhaps Veeder heard something he did not like in Wardsmead's tone. He turned and gave the man a hard stare and said, "I always do what is best, Mr.

Wardsmead, not what is convenient. My men are tracking her as she makes her way back across the main dome. They will allow her to enter the back door to the quarter's parkland, and I will arrest her when she arrives."

Wardsmead swung to and fro in the cradle of his chair, hands folded across his ample stomach, and said, "I suppose the question is, once you have arrested her, has she done anything wrong?"

"Consorting with the enemy without permission is a crime," Dev Veeder said promptly. "Failing to reveal a weakness in the security of the diplomatic quarter is also a crime. Both are betrayals of trust."

"Well, there we have it," Wardsmead said.

"There will have to be a trial," Dev Veeder told him.

"Oh, now, that would be an unnecessary embarrassment, don't you think? One of the shuttles is due to leave in a couple of days. We can ship her off--"

"There will be a trial," Dev Veeder said. "It is a security matter, and the crime was committed outside the diplomatic quarter, so it falls under martial law. She will be tried, and so will the old man."

I said, "You have arrested Yani Hakaiopulos?"

For the first time, Dev Veeder looked directly at me. I confess that I flinched. He said, "The old man was not at the hospital, but there are only so many places he can hide. Your guide, the man Corso, has also vanished. I must assume that he is also part of the plot."

I said, "Yani Hakaiopulos was simply helping Demi understand how the parklands and wilderness had been put together. Surely that's not a crime?"

Using her first name was a mistake. Dev Veeder said coldly, "You have admitted, Professor-Doctor Graves, that you did not know what they talked about. I have not arrested you only because stupidity is not a crime under either civil or martial law."

Wardsmead said, "I don't much care what happens to the two tweaks, but even if I allow you your trial, Colonel Veeder, I want an assurance that Dr. Lacombe will be deported at the end of it."

Despite his amiable tone, his forehead was greasy with sweat. He scented a scandal, and did not want its taint to sully his career.

Dev Veeder said, "That depends on what I discover during my interrogation. And I can assure you, gentlemen, that it will be a very thorough interrogation. You will come with me, Professor-Doctor Graves."

"I have already told you-"

"You will come with me," Dev Veeder said again.

He wanted his revenge to be complete.

Eight Lamelot, Mimas fell; Baghdad, Enceladus fell; Athens and Spartica on Tethys surrendered within days of each other, blasted into submission by singleship attacks; the vacuum organism farms of Iapetus's carbonaceous plains were destroyed by viral infection; Phoebe, settled by the Redeemers, and the habitats which had remained in orbit around Titan, had all declared neutrality at the beginning of the war, and were under martial law.

Within two months of the arrival of the expeditionary force from Earth, the war was almost over. Only Paris, Dione remained defiant to the end.

Singleships had taken out most of the city's peripheral installations. Its vacuum organism farms were dying. And now new stars flared in its sky as troop ships took up their eccentric orbits. The emergency committee of Paris voted to surrender, and the same night were assassinated by Marisa Bassi's followers. Bassi rallied the citizens, organized the barricades and the block captains, killed a party of negotiators in a fit of fury and used his hostages too.

It was an unforgivable act, a terrible war crime, yet for Marisa Bassi and the citizens of Paris it was deeply necessary. It was an affirmation of their isolation and their outlaw status. It united them against the rest of humanity.

I believe that Bassi was tired of waiting, tired of the slow attrition of the blockade. He was bringing the war to the heart right into his city and, like the people he led, was eager to embrace it.

Imagine that last day, as lights streaked across the sky as the troop ships launched their drop capsules. A battery of industrial X-ray lasers tried and failed to target them; a troop ship came over the horizon, pinpointed the battery, and destroyed it with a single low-yield fission missile, stamping a new crater a kilometer wide on Remus crater's floor.

Marisa Bassi felt the shock wave of that strike as a low rumbling that seemed to pass far beneath the ground, like a subway train. He was in the street, organizing the people who manned one of the barricades. It was mid-morning. He had been awake for more than forty-eight hours. His throat was sore and his lips were cracked. His eyes ached in their dry sockets and there was a low burning in his belly; he had drunk far too much coffee.

The scow had gone, and those citizens too old or too young to fight had been moved into the tunnels of the original colony. There was nothing left to do now but fight. The people knew this and seemed to be in good heart. They still believed that the Three Powers Alliance would not dare to destroy their beautiful city, the jewel of the outer system, and perhaps Marisa Bassi believed it too. He felt that he carried the whole city in his heart, its

chestnut trees and caf&, trams and parklands, the theater and the Bourse and the lovely glass cathedral, and he had never loved his adopted home as fiercely as he loved it now, in its last hours.

The barricade was in one of the service sectors near the perimeter of the dome, with diamond panes arching just above the rooftops of the offices and warehouses. It commanded a good view of a wide traffic circle, and on Bassi's orders men and women were cutting down stands of slim aspens to improve the fire lanes. Bassi was working with them, getting up a good sweat, when the tremor passed underneath. One of his young aides came running up, waving a TV strip like a handkerchief.

"They got the lasers," she said breathlessly. She was fifteen or sixteen, almost twice Bassi's height, and trembled like a racehorse at the off. Like everyone else, she was wearing a pressure suit. The bowl of its helmet was hooked to her utility belt.

"We expected that," Bassi said, staring up at her. He had shaved off his beard, cut his hair to within a millimeter of his scalp. His hands, grasping the shaft of his diamond-edged axe, tingled. He said, "What else?"

"They're down," the girl said, "and coming along both ends of the ridge."

"Any message from their command ship?"

"No sir."

"And we won't send one. Get back to headquarters. Tell them I'll be back in twenty minutes."

"Sir, shouldn't you-"

Bassi lifted the axe. "I've a job to finish here. Go!"

They were mostly old men and women on that barricade, and knew that they would be among the first to engage the invaders. Why did Bassi stay with them? Perhaps he was exhausted. He had brought the whole city to this point by sheer rorce of will, and perhaps he saw nothing beyond the moment when the fighting started. Perhaps he knew then that defeat was inevitable, and wanted to make a last heroic gesture rather than face the ignominy of surrender.

In any case, he stayed. Once the aspens had been cleared, he went back with the others to the barricade. It was no more than a ridge of roadway which had been turned up by a bulldozer and topped with tangles of razor wire. They closed up the wire and started checking their weapons-machine pistols and blazers stamped out by a rejigged factory, an ungainly machine which used compressed air to fire concrete-filled cans.

Someone had a flask of brandy and they all took a sip, even Bassi's remaining aide. The flask was going around the second time when there was a brisk series of bangs in the distance, and a wind got up, swirling foliage broken from the aspens high into the air.

The invaders broke into the main dome of the city at nine points, breaching the basalt skirt with shaped charges, driving their transports straight through, and then spraying sealant to close the holes. At that point, they thought they could take the city without inflicting much damage.

While some of the people at the barricade latched up their helmets and checked their weapons, others were still looking at TV strips. Bassi ripped the TVs from then- hands, told them roughly to watch the street. The motor of the compressor gun started up with a tremendous roar and at the same moment sleek shining man-sized machines appeared on the far side of the traffic circle. The killing things moved very quickly. It is doubtful that anyone got off a shot before the machines had crossed the traffic circle and leaped the razor wire. Bassi's aide ran, and a killing thing was on him in two strides, slicing and jabbing, throwing the corpse aside. The others were dispatched with the same quick ruthlessness, and then only Bassi was left, drenched in the blood of the men and women who had died around him, his arms and legs pinned by one of the killing things.

Once the barricade had been cleared, a squad of human troopers in sealed pressure suits came forward. Their sergeant photographed Bassi, cuffed him, and ordered one of his men to take him back for what he called a debriefing. Bassi knew then that he had been selected by chance, not because he had been

recognized; shaving off his trademark beard had saved him. He smiled and spat on the sergeant's visor. The squad and the killing things moved on; the trooper marched Bassi at gunpoint across the traffic circle toward the command post at the breached perimeter.

No one knows how Bassi got free, only that he was captured at a barricade in the first minutes of fighting and then escaped. Certainly, he never reached the command post. Perhaps the trooper was killed by one of the snipers which infested the city, or perhaps Bassi got free on his own; after all, he was a very resourceful man. In any case, it is known that he reached the Bourse two hours after the barricade fell, because he made a brief, defiant television transmission there.

I have watched this speech many times. It is the last sighting of him. He was wounded when he escaped, and the wound had been patched but the bullet was still inside him; he must have felt it, and felt the blood heavy and loose inside his belly as he spoke, but he showed no sign that he was in pain. He spoke for five minutes. He spoke clearly and defiantly, but it was a poor, rambling speech, full of allusions to freedom and idealism and martyrdom, and his steady gaze had a crazed, glittering quality.

By then, most of the outlying tents and domes of the city had been captured by the invaders; even Bassi's headquarters had been taken. The citizens of Paris had fallen back to the central part of the main dome. Most of the barricades had been overrun by killing things. Thousands of citizens lay dead at their posts, while the invaders had incurred only half a dozen casualties, mostly from snipers. The battle for Paris was clearly over, but still its citizens fought on.

"I warn the commander of the invaders," Marisa Bassi said, "that we will fight to the end. We will not let you take what we have built with our sweat and our blood. Paris will die, but Paris lives on. The war is not over."

A few minutes later, the main buildings of the city were set on fire, filling the dome with smoke. A few minutes after that, the commander of the invasion force gave the order to breach the integrity of the main dome.

By then, no doubt, Bassi was already at one of the last barricades, armed with the carbine he had taken from the dead trooper, his pressure suit sealed.

A great wind sucked fire and smoke from the burning, broken wedding cake of the Bourse; smoke rushed along the ground in great billows which thinned and vanished, leaving the eerie clarity and silence of vacuum. And then a shout over the radio, doubling and redoubling. Killing things were running swiftly across the wide lawns toward the last barricades, puffs of earth jumping around them as people started to fire.

Bassi drew himself up to face his enemy, no longer the leader of the free government of Paris, his fate no more significant now than any of the last of its citizens. He thought that he was only moments from death. He was wrong. Ljemi Lacombe had stapled a nylon rope to a basalt outcrop at the edge of the mossy, emerald-green meadow; its blue thread fell away to the trough of black water a hundred meters below. Dev Veeder squatted on his heels and ran a gloved finger around the knot doubled around the eye of the staple, then looked up at me and said, "I could loosen this so that she would fall as she climbed back up. Do you think the fall would kill her?"

"I think not. Not in this low gravity."

He stood. "No. I don't think so either. Well, she'll be here soon. We'd better keep out of sight."

I dabbed sweat from my brow with the cuff of my shirt. I had been marched quickly through the parkland by Veeder's squad of troopers, as if I had been under arrest, with no chance until now of talking with him, of trying to change his mind. I said, "Are you enjoying yourself, Colonel?"

"You want revenge too. Don't deny it. She used us both, Graves."

"This seems so ... melodramatic."

"History is made with bold gestures. I want her arrested in the act of returning through a passageway which presents a clear and present danger to the security of the diplomatic community. I want you to be a witness."

"No bold gesture can be based on so petty a motive as revenge."

Dev Veeder moved closer to me, so close that when he spoke a spray of saliva fell on my cheek. "We're in this together, Graves. Don't pretend that you're just an observer like that thing, DeHon. Be a man. Face up to the consequences of your actions."

"She was only trying to do her work, Colonel. Your crazy jealousy got in the way-"

"We are both jealous men, Graves. But at least I did not betray her."

Veeder shoved me away from him then, and I went sprawling on the soft, wet moss. By the time I had regained my feet, he was on the other side of the little meadow, showing the four troopers where to take cover. As they concealed themselves amongst the exuberant rose briars, the sergeant of the squad took me by the arm and pulled me into the shade of the ferns which cascaded down the basalt cliff.

It was hot and close inside the curtain of fern fronds. Sweat dripped from my nose, my chin, ran down my flanks inside my shirt. Tiny black flies danced about my face with dumb persistence. In the meadow, huge, sulfur-yellow butterflies circled each other above the bright green moss, their hand-sized wings flapping once a minute. The sergeant, a muscular, dark-eyed woman, hummed softly to herself, watching the screen she had spread on her knee. It showed a view of the lake below the meadow, transmitted from one of the tiny cameras the troopers had spiked here and there. Time passed. At last, the sergeant nudged me and pointed.

Centered in the screen, Demi Lacombe's silvery figure suddenly stood up, waist-deep, in black water. She stripped off her airmask and hooked it to her belt, waded to the gravelly shore and grasped the rope and swarmed up it, moving so quickly, hand over hand, that it seemed she was swimming through the air.

I looked up from the screen as she pulled herself over the edge of the meadow and rolled onto the vivid green moss. As she got to her feet, Dev Veeder stepped out of his hiding place, followed by his troopers; the sergeant shoved me roughly and I tumbled forward, landing on my hands and knees.

Demi looked at Dev Veeder, at me. For a moment I thought she might jump into the chasm, but then Dev Veeder crossed the meadow in two bounds and caught her by the left wrist, the one she had broken soon after arriving in Paris. She turned pale, and would have dropped to her knees if Dev Veeder had not held her up.

"All right," he growled. "All right."

The brilliant light of the suspensor lamps hung high above dimmed. I felt a few fat raindrops on my face and hands, congealing rather than falling from the humid air. The pathetic fallacy made real by Demi Lacombe's implants, I thought, and Dev Veeder must have had the same idea, because he said, "Stop that, you bitch," and delivered a back-handed slap to her face while still holding on to her wrist.

Demi's cry of pain was cut off by a roll of thunder; I think I must have shouted out then, too, for the sergeant grasped my arm and shook me and told me to shut the fuck up. Those were her words. A sheet of sickly light rippled overhead and the air darkened further as a wind got up, blowing clouds of raindrops as big as marbles. They hissed against the curtain of ferns above, and drenched me to the skin in an instant.

Someone was standing at the edge of the rose thicket.

It was one of the gardeners. I was sure that it was the one that Demi had summoned before-their shaven heads and blank expression effaced individuality, but he had the same stocky immigrant build and wary manner. At his side was a pair of tawny panthers; a huge bird perched on his upraised arms, its gripping claws digging rivulets of bright blood from his flesh.

With a sudden snap, like playing cards dealt by a conjurer, the four troopers formed a half circle in front of Dev Veeder and Demi Lacombe. Their carbines were raised. The rain was very thick now, blown up and down and sideways by the gusting wind; water sheeted down the closed visors of the troopers'

helmets, the slick resin of their chestplates.

The gardener made no move, but the panthers and huge bird suddenly launched themselves across the meadow. Two wild shots turned every drop of rain blood red; the scream of air broken by their energy echoed off the ferny cliff. Dev Veeder was struggling with Demi Lacombe, a horrible, desperate waltz right at the edge of the cliff. One trooper was down, beating at the bird whose wings beat about his head; one of the panthers had bowled over two more troopers and the second took down a trooper as he fled. The trooper struggling with the bird took a step backward, and fell from the edge of the meadow; a moment later, the bird rose up alone, wings spread wide as it rode the gust of wind that for a moment blew the rain clear of the meadow.

The sergeant raised her carbine. I saw that she had the presence of mind to aim at the gardener, and threw myself at her legs. The shot went wild. She kicked me hard and in the Paul J. McRuley light gravity her legs flew from beneath her and she sat down. I fell flat on sodden moss, and was trying to unholster my blazer, although I do not know who I would have shot at, when the sergeant hauled me half-around by one of my arms-fracturing a small bone in my wrist, I later discovered -and struck my head with the stock of her carbine. Then the bird fell upon her.

I was dazed and bloodied and far from the meadow when Lavet Corso found me. I did not remember how I had gotten away from the troopers-perhaps the gardener had led me to my former guide-nor did I remember seeing Dev Veeder and Demi Lacombe fall, but their drowned bodies were found a day later, lying together on a spit of gravel at the far end of the dark little lake, like lovers at the end of a tale of doomed romance. Although, of course, they were never lovers. Of that, at least, I am certain.

Corso told me that Demi Lacombe had been in the habit of using a pheromone-rich perfume to befuddle men from whom she wanted some favor or other. "A kind of hypnotic, Yani Hakaiopulos said. It does exactly what other perfumes only claim to do. He recognized it at once, and confirmed his suspicion using the hospital's equipment. He was amused at her presumption, and rather admired her ambition."

We were crouched under the billowing skirts of a cypress, while the gale blew itself out around us. The gardener sat on his haunches a little way off, staring out into the rainy dark.

"Hakaiopulos only wanted his gardens rebuilt," I said dully. My head and wrist ached abominably, and I felt very cold.

Corso said, "He'll get his chance, but not here. You know, you're a lucky man. Lucky that Veeder didn't kill you when he had the chance; lucky that I don't kill you now."

"You should get away, Mr. Corso. Go on: leave me. If Colonel Veeder finds you here -"

I did not know then that he was dead.

"I'm leaving Paris," Corso said. "I'm going to join my wife."

For a moment, I thought he meant that he was going to kill himself. Perhaps he saw it in my face, because he added, "She's not dead. None of the people who left on the scow are dead."

"It fell into Saturn."

"The scow did, yes. But before it took its dive, it traveled most of the way around the planet within the ring system, long enough to drop off its passengers and cargo in escape pods. There are millions of ice and rock bolides in the rings. Sure, most of them have been ground down to gravel and dust, but there's a sizable percentage of bodies more than a couple of kilometers across-something like half a million."

"This is fantasy, Mr. Corso."

"My wife and the other people who escaped have made their home on one of them; that's where I'm taking my daughter and a couple of other people. I would have gone sooner, but I had work to do here, and I couldn't justify the risk of stealing a shuttle until now."

"You're saving Yani Hakaiopulos."

"Him too. We can always use a gene wizard. But there's someone else, someone more important to us than anyone else."

I said, "It was you who painted those slogans, wasn't it? You could move freely about the city because you smell right to the killing machines. He lives."

Another silly fantasy, Mr. Corso. He died with the fools he was leading." Corso shook his head. "After he escaped, he made his way back to the main dome and rallied the last of the barricades. We still thought then that if enough soldiers died while attempting to take Paris, we might carry the day. We were giving our lives for the city, after all, but the soldiers were dying for no more than the redemption of a loan. But you sent in killing machines, and then you blew the dome. Like most of the people at the barricades, Marisa Bassi was wearing a pressure suit, and he continued to fight until he ran out of air. In his last moments of consciousness he hid amongst the dead who lay all around him. The suit saved his life by chilling him down, but lack of oxygen had already caused brain damage. After one of the corpse details found him, he was carefully resuscitated, but his frontal lobes were badly damaged. The implants keep him functioning, and one day we'll be able to reconstruct him."

You have to understand that although this was the most fantastic part of Corso's story, it is the part I believe without question, for I insisted on examining the gardener myself. His hands were strong and square, with blunt fingers, yes. but so are the hands of most laborers. But I also saw the wound in his side, just under his ribs, the wound he suffered when he escaped, a wound into which I could insert my smallest finger.

Corso took me as far as the edge of the parkland, and I do not know what became of him-or of his daughter, or Yani Hakaiopulos, or the gardener, Marisa Bassi. A shuttle was stolen during the confusion after Colonel Veeder's death, and was later found, abandoned and gutted, in an eccentric orbit that intersected the ring system.

As for myself, I have decided not to return to Earth. There are several colonies which managed to remain neutral during the uiet War, and I hope to find a place in one of them. The advance of my fee should be sufficient to buy citizenship. I once planned to endow a chair of history in my name, as a snub to my rivals, but using the credit to win a new life, if only for a few years, now seems a better use for it.

I hope that they will be peaceful years. But before he left me to my grief and to my dead, Lavet Corso told me that his was not the only clandestine colony hidden within the ring system's myriad shifting orbits, and his last words still make me shiver.

"The war's not over."