

Assumption Unjustified

Thrykar saw the glow that limned the broad pine trunk with radiance and sent an indefinite shadow toward the spot where he lay, and knew that extreme caution must direct his actions from then on. He had, of course, encountered living creatures as he had felt his way through the darkness down the forested mountain side; but they had been small, harmless animals that had fled precipitately as the sounds denoting his size or the odors that warned of his alienness had reached their senses. Artificial light, however, which he and Tes had seen from the mountain top and which was now just below him, meant intelligence; and intelligence meant—anything.

He felt the ridiculousness of his position. The idea of having not only to conceal his intentions, but even his existence, from intelligent beings could seem only silly to a member of a culture that embraced literally thousands of physically differing races, and Thrykar did have a rising desire to stand on his feet and walk openly down the main thoroughfare of the little settlement in the valley. He resisted the temptation principally because it was not an unexpected one; the handbook had warned that such a reaction was probable—and warned in the strongest terms against yielding to it.

Instead of yielding, therefore, he resumed his crawling, working his way headforemost downhill until he had reached the tree. Hugging the rough trunk closely, he reached his eight feet of snaky body to full height behind it, tapped out the prearranged signal to Tes on the small communicator he carried, and began carefully examining the town and the ground between him and the outlying houses.

It was not a large town. About three thousand human beings lived in it, though Thrykar was not familiar enough with men to be able to judge that fact from the number of buildings. He did realize that some of the structures were probably not dwelling places; the purposes of the railway station became fairly clear as a lighted train chugged slowly into motion and snaked its way out of town to the north. Most of the lights were concentrated within a few blocks of the station, and it was only in that neighborhood that Thrykar could see the moving figures of human beings. A few lighted windows, and the rather thinly scattered street lamps, were all that betrayed the true size of the place.

There was another center of activity, however. As the sound of the train died out in the distance, a rhythmic thudding manifested itself to Thrykar's auditory organs. It seemed to come from his right, from that portion of the town nearest to the foot of the mountain. Leaning out from behind his tree, he could see nothing in that direction; but a fact which he had only subconsciously noted before was brought to prominence in his mind.

Only a few yards below him, the mountainside fell away abruptly in a sheer cliff which seemed, in the darkness, to extend for some distance to either side of Thrykar's position. The undergrowth which covered the slope continued to the very edge of this cliff; so the alien dropped once more to the prone position and wormed his way downhill until he could look over. He hadn't improved matters much, as the darkness was impenetrable to his eyes, but the sounds were a little clearer. They were quite definitely coming from the right and below and after a moment's hesitation, Thrykar began crawling along the cliff edge in that direction. The bushes, which grew thicker here, hampered him somewhat; for the flexibility of his body, which was no thicker than a man's, was offset by the great, triangular, finlike appendages which extended more than two feet outward on each side. These, too, were fairly flexible, however, ribbed as they were with cartilage; and he managed to accommodate himself to the somewhat uncomfortable mode of travel.

He had gone less than a hundred yards when he found the cliff edge to be curving outward and down, as though it were the lip of a somewhat irregular vertical shaft cut into the mountain. This impression was strengthened when the curve led back to the left, away from the source of sound that Thrykar wished to investigate; but he continued to follow the edge, and eventually reached its lowest point, which must have been almost directly beneath the place at which he had first looked over. At this point things became interesting.

On Thrykar's left—that is, within the shaft—the drip-ping of water became audible; and at the same

time the bushes and irregular rocks disappeared, and he found himself on what could be nothing but a badly kept road. He did not realize its condition at first; but within a few feet he found a rivulet flowing across it, in a fairly deep gully which it had cut in the hard earth. Investigating this flow of water, he found that its source was the shaftlike excavation, which was apparently full of water almost to the level of the road. With growing enthusiasm, Thrykar found that the hole was fully a hundred and fifty yards in the dimension running parallel to the face of the moun-tain; and he had learned during his descent that it had fully half that measure in the other direction. If it were only deep enough—he was on the point of entering the water to investigate, when he remembered the communicator, which might suffer damage if wet, and from which he had promised Tes not to separate himself. Instead of investigating the pit, therefore, he turned back, following the road toward the sounds which had first roused his curiosity.

His progress, on the legs which were so ridiculously short for his height, was not rapid. In fifteen minutes he had passed two more of the water-filled pits and was approaching a third. This he was able to examine in more detail than the others, though he could not approach it closely; for the road at this point, and the water near it, were illuminated by the first of the town's outlying street lamps. A few yards farther, on the side of the road away from the pits, house lights began to be visible; and, seeing them, Thrykar paused to consider.

The sound was evidently coming from farther inside the town. If he went any further in his investigations, he not only sacrificed the shelter of darkness, but could also expect a heavier concentration of human beings. On the other hand, his skin was dark in color, the lights were by to means numerous, he was very curious about the sounds which had continued without interruption since he had first heard them, and it would be necessary to confront a human being eventually, in any case—though, if all went well, the human being would never know it. Thrykar finally elected to proceed, with increased cau-tion.

He chose the side of the road away from the pits, as it was somewhat darker at first, and offered some conceal-ment in the form of hedges and fences in front of the houses, which now began to be more numerous. He walked, with his mincing gait, close beside these, standing at his full height and letting the great, independent eyes set on either side of his neckless, rigidly set head rove constantly around the full circle of his vision. One more pit was passed in this fashion; but a hundred yards further down the road, on the right side, a wall began which effectually cut off the sight of any more, if they existed. It was a fence of boards, solidly built, and its top was fully two feet above Thrykar's head. The sounds appeared to be coming from a point behind this barrier, but somewhat further down the road.

Having come so far, the alien was human enough to dislike the idea of having wasted his efforts. He crossed the road at a point midway between two street lamps. Between the pits, the brush-covered slope of the hill came down almost to the thoroughfare; so he dropped flat once more to take advantage of this cover as he approached the near end of the wall. He had hoped to find access to the hinder side of the barrier, but he found that, instead of beginning where it was first visible, the portion along the road was merely a continuation of a similar structure that came down the hillside; and Thrykar considered it a waste of time to circumambulate the enclosure on the chance of finding an opening.

Instead, he rose once more to his full height, and looked carefully about him. The neighborhood still seemed deserted. Pressing close against the boards, he reached up and let the tips of his four wiry tentacles curl over the top of the fence. The appendages, even at the roots, were not much thicker than a human thumb, for they were, anatomically, detached portions of the great side fins rather than legs and feet modified for prehensile use; unless they could be wound completely around an object, they could not approach the gripping or pulling strength of the human hand and arm. Thrykar, however, let his supple body sag in an S-curve, and straightened suddenly, leaping upward; and at the same instant exerted all the strength of which the slender limbs were capable. The effort proved sufficient to get the upper portion of his body across the top of the fence, and during the few seconds he was able to maintain the position he saw enough to satisfy him.

There were two more of the pits inside the fence, dimly lighted by electric bulbs. They contained practically no water, and were enormously deep—the nearer, whose bottom was visible to Thrykar, was over two hundred feet from the edge to the loose blocks of stone that lay about in the depths. The pits were quarries, quite evidently. The stone blocks and tools, as well as the innumerable nearly flat faces on

the granite walls, showed that fact clearly. The noises that had aroused the alien's curiosity came from machines located at the bottom of the nearer pit; and the existence of certain large pipes running up from them, as well as the almost complete absence of water, assured him that they were pumps.

There was a further deduction to be drawn from the absence of water. These human beings were strictly air-breathers—the handbook had told Thrykar and Tes that much; and it followed that the pits farther along the mountain side, which had been allowed to fill with water, must no longer be in use. If they were as deep as these, there was an ideal hiding place for the ship.

At that thought, Thrykar let himself slip down once more outside the fence. He flexed his body once or twice to ease the ache where the edges of the boards had cut into his flesh, and started to stretch his tentacles for the same purpose; but suddenly he froze to rigidity. Behind him, on the road down which he had come, appeared a glow of yellow that brightened swiftly—so swiftly that before he could move, its source had swept into sight around the last shallow curve in the route and he was pinned against the fence by the beams from the twin headlights of an automobile.

As the vehicle reached the straight portion of the street the direct beams left him; but he knew he must have been glaringly visible during the second or so in which they had dazzled his eyes. He held his breath as the car approached; and the instant it passed he plunged up the hillside for twenty or thirty yards, wriggled his way under some dense bushes, and lay as motionless as was physi-cally possible for him. He listened intently as the sound of the engine faded and died evenly away in the distance, and finally gave a deep exhalation of relief. Evidently, hard as it was to believe, the occupant or occupants of the vehicle had not seen him.

It did not occur to Thrykar that, even if the driver had noticed the weird form looming in his headlight beams, stopping to investigate might be the farthest thing in the universe from his resultant pattern of action. Thrykar himself, and every one of his acquaintances—which were by no means confined to members of his own race—would have looked into the matter without a second thought about the safety or general advisability of the procedure.

He was a little shaken by the narrow shave. He should have foreseen it, of course—it was little short of stupid to have climbed the wall so close to the road; but what would be self-evident to a professional soldier, detective, or housebreaker did not come within the sphere of everyday life to a research chemist on a honeymoon. If Thrykar had known anything about Earth before starting his journey, he wouldn't have come near the planet. He had simply noted that there was a refresher station near the direct route to the world which he and Tes had planned to visit on a vacation; and not until he had cut his drive near the beacon on Mercury had he bothered to read up on its details. They had been somewhat dismayed at what they found, but the most practicable detour would have consumed almost the entire vacation period in flight; and, as Tes had said, what others had evidently done he could do. Thrykar suspected that his wife might possibly have an exaggerated idea of his abilities, but he had no objection to that. They had stayed.

The car did have one good effect on Thrykar; he became much more cautious. Having satisfied his curios-ity about the sounds, he began to retrace his way to the ship and Tes; but this time he stayed well off the road, traveling parallel to it, until the abandoned quarries prevented further progress on that line. Even then he left the woods and went downhill only far enough to permit him to enter the water without splashing. He swam rapidly across, holding the communicator out of the water with one tentacle, and emerged to continue his trip on the other side. He had wasted as little time as possible, as the pit he had just crossed was the one so comparatively well illuminated by the street lamp.

At the next one, however, he spent more time. Instead of carrying the communicator with him, he cached it under a bush near the road and disappeared entirely under water. It was utterly black below the surface, and he had to trust entirely to his sense of touch; and remembering what he had seen of the walls of the empty quarries, he dared not swim too rapidly for fear of braining himself against an outcrop of granite. In conse-quence, it took him over half an hour to get a good idea of the pit's qualifications as a hiding place. The verdict was not too good, but possible. Thrykar finally emerged, collected his communicator, and proceeded to the next quarry.

He spent several hours in examining the great shafts. There were seven altogether; two were in use, and enclosed by the fence he had found, one was rendered unusable by the embarrassing presence of the street lamp; so the remaining four claimed all his attention. The one he had found first was the last, and farthest from the town; but it was the adjacent one which finally proved the most suitable. Not only was it the only one at all set back from the road—a drive about twenty yards in length led down, to the water—but it was deeply undercut about thirty-five feet below the surface, on the side toward the mountain. The hollow thus made was not large enough to hide the hull of the ship altogether, but it would be a great help. Thrykar felt quite satisfied as he emerged from the water after his second examination of this recess. Recovering the small case of the communicator from its last hiding place, he tapped out the signal he had agreed on with Tes to announce his return. Then he held it up toward the mountain, moving it slowly from side to side and up and down until a small hexagonal plate set in the case suddenly glowed a faint red. Satisfied that he could find his ship when close enough, the alien began his climb.

Just before entering the dense woods above the quarries, he looked back at the town. Practically all the house lights were extinguished now; but the station was still illuminated and the street lamps glowed. The quarry pumps were still throbbing, as well; and, satisfied that he had created no serious disturbance by his presence, Thrykar resumed his climb.

It took his short legs a surprisingly long time to propel him from the foot of the valley to the hollow near the mountain top where the ship still lay. He had hoped and expected to complete the job of concealing the craft before the night was over; but long before he reached it he had given up the plan. After all, it was invisible until the searcher actually reached the edge of the hollow; and he was practically certain that no human beings would visit the spot—though the handbook had mentioned that they still hunted wild animals both for food and sport. He and Tes could alternate watches in any case, and if a hunter or hiker did approach—steps could be taken.

Twice during the climb he made use of the communicator, each time wondering why it was taking so long to get back. The third time, however, the plate glowed much more brightly, and he began to follow the indicated direction more carefully instead of merely climbing. It took him another half hour to find the vessel; but at last he reached the edge of the small declivity and saw the dim radiance escaping from behind the partly closed outer door of the air lock. He slipped and stumbled down the slope, scrambled up the cleated metal ramp that had been let down from the lock, and pushed his way into the chamber.

Tes met him at the inner door, anxiety gradually disappearing from her expression.

"What have you been doing?" she asked. "I got your return signal, and began broadcasting for your finder; but that was hours ago, and I was getting worried. You had no weapon, and we don't know that all Earth animals would fear to attack us."

"Every creature I met, fled," replied her husband. "Of course, I don't know whether any of them would have attacked an Earth being of my size. They may all have been herbivorous, or something; but in any case, you know we could get into awful trouble by carrying arms on a low-culture planet.

"However, I've found an excellent place for the ship, very close to the town. If I weren't so tired, we could take it down there now; but I guess we can wait until tomorrow night. The whole business is going to take us several of this planet's days, anyway."

"Did you see any of the intelligent race?" asked Tes.

"Not exactly," replied Thrykar. He told her of the encounter with the automobile, while she prepared food for him; and between mouthfuls he described the underwater hollow where he planned to conceal the ship and from which they could easily make the necessary sorties.

Tes was enthusiastic, though she was still not entirely clear as to the method Thrykar planned to employ in obtaining what he wanted from a human being without the latter's becoming aware of the alien presence. Her husband smiled at her difficulty.

"As you said, it's been done before," he told her. "I'm going to sleep now; I haven't been so tired for years. I'll tell you all about it tomorrow." He rose, tossed the eating utensils into the washer, and went back to the sleeping room. The tanks were already full; he slid into his without a splash, and was asleep almost before the water closed over him. Tes followed his example.

He had not exaggerated his fatigue; he slept long after his wife had risen and eaten. She was in the library when he finally appeared, reading once again the few chapters the handbook devoted to Earth and its inhabitants. One of her eyes rolled upward toward him as Thrykar entered.

"It seems that these men are primitive enough to have a marked tendency toward superstition—ascribing things they don't understand to supernatural intervention. Are you going to try to pass off our present activities in that way?"

"I'm not making any effort in that specific direction," he replied, "though the reaction you mention may well occur. They will realize that something out of the ordinary is happening; I don't see how that can be avoided, unless we are extremely lucky and happen on an individual whose way of life is such that he won't be missed by his fellows for a day or so. I'm sure, however, that a judicious use of anaesthetics will prevent their acquiring enough data to reach undesirable conclusions. If you will let me have that book for a while, I'll try to find out what is likely to affect their systems."

"But I didn't think we had much in the way of drugs, to say nothing of anaesthetics, aboard," exclaimed Tes.

"We haven't; but we have a fair supply of the commoner chemicals and reagents. Remember your husband's occupation, my dear!" He took the book, smiling, and settled into a sling. He read silently for about ten minutes, leafing rapidly back and forth in a way that suggested he knew what he was looking for, but which made it very difficult for his wife to read over his shoulder. She kept on trying.

Eventually Thrykar spent several consecutive minutes on one page; then he looked up and said, "It looks as though this stuff would do it. I'll have to see whether we have the wherewithal to make it. Do you want to watch a chemist at work, my beloved musician?"

She followed him, of course, and watched with an absorption that almost equaled his own as he inventoried their small stock of chemicals, measured, mixed, heated and froze, distilled and collected; she had only the most general knowledge of any of the physical sciences, but in watching she could appreciate that her husband, in his own occupation, was as much of an artist as she herself. It was this understanding, shared by very few, of this side of his character that had led her to marry an individual who was considered by most of his acquaintances to be a rather stodgy and narrow-minded, if brilliant, scientist.

Thrykar connected the exhaust tube of his last distillation to a small rotary pump, confining the resultant gas in a cylinder light enough to carry easily. Even Tes could appreciate the meaning of that.

"If it's a gas, how do you plan to administer it?" she asked. "Judging from their pictures, these human beings are much more powerful than we. You can't very well hold a mask over their faces, and even I know it's not practical to shoot a jet of gas any distance. Why don't you use a liquid or soluble solid that can be carried by a small dart, for example?"

"The less solid equipment we carry and risk losing, the better for all concerned," replied Thrykar. "If the air is fairly still and there is no rain, I can make them absorb a lungful of this stuff quite easily. It has been done before, and on this planet—you should pay more attention to what you read." He rolled an eye back at his wife. "Did you ever blow a bubble?"

Tes stood motionless for a moment, thinking. Then she brightened. "Of course. I remember what you mean now. Passing to another phase of the problem, how and where do you find a human being alone?"

"We attack that matter after moving the ship. We'll have to watch them for a day or two, to learn something about their habits in this neighborhood—the book is not very helpful. If a lone hunter or traveler gets near enough, the problem will solve itself; but we can't count on that. I've done all I can here, my dear. We'll have to wait till dark, now, to move the ship."

"All right," replied Tes. "I'm going outside for a while; our only daylight view of this planet was from high altitude. Even if we can't get close to any small animals, there may be plants or rocks or just plain scenery that will be worth looking at. Won't you come along?"

Thrykar acquiesced, with the proviso that neither of them should wander far from the hollow in which the ship was located. He was perfectly aware of his limitations in an uncivilized environment, and knew that it wouldn't take a very skillful stalker to approach them without their knowing it. In the open, that could be dangerous; with the ship and its equipment at hand, countermeasures could always be taken.

They went out together, leaving the outer air lock door open—it could have been locked and reopened electrical-ly; but Thrykar had once read of an individual in a position similar to theirs who had returned to his ship to find the power cut off by a burned-out relay, leaving him in a very embarrassing position. The weather was overcast, as it had been ever since their arrival, but there were signs that the sun might soon break through. The woods were dripping wet, which made them if anything more unpleasant for the aliens. The temperature was, from their point of view, cool but not uncomfortable.

There was plenty of animal life. Although none of the small creatures permitted them to approach at all closely, the two were able to examine them in considerable detail; retinal cells rather smaller than those in the human eye and eyeballs more than three times as large permitted them to distinguish clearly objects for which a human being would have needed a fair-sized opera glass. The bird life was of particular interest to Tes; no such creatures had ever evolved on their watery home planet, and she made quite a collection of cast-off feathers.

The largest animal they saw was a deer. It saw them at the same moment, standing at the edge of the hollow at a point where very few trees grew; it stared at them for fully half a minute trying to digest a new factor in its existence. Then, as Tes made a slight motion toward the creature, it turned and bounded off, disappearing at once below the edge of the cup. They hastened toward the spot where it had stood, hoping to catch a final glimpse, but they were far too slow, and nothing was visible among the trees when they got there. Tes turned to her partner.

"Why isn't it possible to use an animal like that? It's easily large enough to take no harm, and must be at least as similar to us as these human beings." Thrykar rippled a fin negatively.

"I'm a chemist, not a biologist, and I don't know the whole story. It has something to do with the degree of development of the donor's nervous system. It may seem odd that that should affect its blood, but it seems to—remember, every cell of a creature's body has the chromosomes and genes and whatever else the biologists know about in that line, which make it theoretically possible to grow a new animal of the same sort from any of the cells. I don't believe it's been done yet," he added with a touch of humor, "but who am I to say it can't be?"

Tes interrupted him with a gesture.

"Tell me, Thrykar, is that throbbing noise I hear now the one produced by those pumps? I'm surprised that it should be audible at this distance. Listen." He did so, wondering for a moment, then gave once more a sign of negation.

"It's a machine of some kind, but I can't say just what. It doesn't seem to be down there in the town—we'd be hearing it more definitely from that direction. It might be almost anywhere among these mountains—not too far away, of course—with echoes confusing us as to its point of origin. It can't be an aircraft, because it's too loud and—look out! Don't move, Tes!" He froze as he spoke, and his wife followed his example. As the last words left his mouth, the pulsing drone increased to a howling roar which, at last, had a definite direction. The eyes of the aliens rolled upward to follow the silvery, winged shape that fled across their field of vision scarcely five hundred feet above them.

The pilot of the A-26 saw neither the aliens nor their ship. He passed directly above the latter, so that it was out of his direct vision; and although Thrykar and Tes felt horribly conspicuous in the almost clear area where they were standing, the speed of the machine and the pilot's preoccupation with the task of navigating com-bined to prevent untimely revelations.

As the roar faded once more to a drone, Thrykar galvanized into action. He plunged into the hollow toward his ship; and Tes, after a moment's startled immobility, followed.

"What's the matter?" she called after him. "I don't think he saw us, and anyway it's too late to do anything about it."

"That's not the trouble," replied Thrykar as he flung himself up the ramp into the ship. "You should have spotted that yourself. You mentioned something this morning about the tendency of man toward superstition. If he's in that stage of social development, he shouldn't have more than the rudiments of any of the physical sciences. The book said as much, as I recall; and I want to check up on that, right now!" He snatched up the volume, which fell open at the already well-thumbed section dealing with Earth, and began to read. Tes, with an effort, forbore to interrupt; but she was not kept waiting long. Her husband

looked up presently, and spoke.

"It's as I thought. According to this thing, mankind has as one of its most advanced mechanisms the steam-powered locomotive. I saw one last night, you may recall. I assumed without really giving the matter much thought that the quarry pumps were also steam-driven. It says here that animals are even used for hauling or carrying loads over short distances. That all ties in with a culture still influenced by superstition. The book does not mention aircraft—and that machine wasn't steam-powered. Those were internal-combustion engines. I think now that the pumps in the quarries had similar power plants; and if men can make them at once light and powerful enough to drive aircraft, they know more of molecular physics and chemistry than they should."

"But why should that be a manmade ship?" asked Tes. "After all, we are here; why shouldn't another spaceship have come in at the same time? After all, Earth is a refresher station."

"For a variety of reasons," replied Thrykar. "First, anyone coming here for refreshing would keep out of sight, as we are doing; and that ship flew in plain sight of the town below here, and made racket enough to be heard for miles. Second, that wasn't a spaceship—you must have seen that it was driven by rotating airfoils and supported by fixed ones. Why should anyone from off the planet go to the trouble of bringing and assembling such a craft here, when they must have infinitely better transportation in the form of their spaceship? No, Tes, that thing was manmade, and there's something very wrong with the handbook. It's the latest revision on this sector, too—the Earth material is only sixty or seventy years old. I hope it isn't so badly off on the biology and physiology end; we certainly don't want to cause injury to any man."

"But what can you do, if the book can't be trusted?"

"Feel my way carefully, and go on the evidence already at hand. We can't very well leave now—you're safe, as you aren't of age yet, but I might be in rather bad shape by the time we reached another refresher station. We'll carry on as planned for the present, and move the ship down to the quarry tonight. I just hope the human race isn't so far advanced in electronics as they seem to be elsewhere; if they are, we are wide open to detection. I wonder how in blazes the individual who reported on this planet could have come to do such a slipshod job. Failure to measure their chemical or biological advancement is forgivable, those wouldn't be so obvious; but missing aircraft, and electric lights, and internal-combustion engines in general is a little too much. However," he left the vexing question, "that is insoluble for the present. The other point that arises, Tes, is the one you mentioned. I'm afraid they won't bear a superstitious attitude toward our activities, if they become aware of them; and we'll have to be correspondingly more careful. If you can think of anything that will help between now and nightfall, it will be appreciated."

Neither of them did.

Bringing the little craft down the mountain side in the dark was rather more difficult than Thrykar had anticipated. He was afraid to use micro-wave viewers because of the newborn fear of the scientific ability of the human race; it was necessary to drift downhill at treetop level, straining his eyes through the forward ports, until the slope flattened out. The lights of the town had been visible during the descent, and he had kept well to their left; now he backed fifty feet up the hill, turned on the reflection altimeter—whose tight, vertical beam he hoped would not scatter enough to cause a reaction in any nearby receivers—and crawled along the contour in the general direction of the lights.

He had allowed more leeway than was strictly necessary, and was some distance to the north of the quarries; but at last the dial of the altimeter gave a sudden jump, and the two aliens looked carefully out of the ports as Thrykar let the ship descend, a foot at a time. At last the hull touched something—and sank in; they were at the first quarry. The ship lifted again, a little higher this time for safety as its course slanted in once inure toward the mountain. Again a flicker of the needle; again the cautious descent; but this time it was permitted to sink on down after the hull made contact.

The ship stopped sinking when it was about three-fourths submerged, and Thrykar guided it carefully to the side of the great pit where he had located the undercut. While the nose continued to bump gently against the granite, he let water into compartment after compartment until the hull was completely under

water—he could have used the drive, but preferred to have the ship stable in its hiding place. He did use power to ease into the hollow, which he located by use of an echo-sounder; its impulses would not be detectable out of the body of water in which they were used.

Leaving Tes to hold the ship in position temporarily, Thrykar plunged out through the air lock and made fast, using metal cables clipped to rings in the hull and extending to bars set into cracks already in the rock. He could have drilled holes specifically for the purpose, but not silently; and the existing facilities were adequate. The work completed, he tapped on the hull to signal Tes. She cut off all power, let the ship settle into stability, and joined Thrykar in the water. It was the first swim she had had since they had started the trip, and they spent the next hour enjoying it.

A little more time was spent exploring the ground around the quarry and out to the road; then, on the chance that the next day might be more hectic than those preceding, they sought the sleeping tanks. Thrykar, before sliding into the cold water, set an alarm to awaken him shortly before sunrise.

Before the sun was very high, therefore, he and Tes were at work. They explored once more, this time by daylight, the environs of the pit; and among the bushes, heaps of crushed rock, and broken blocks of granite they found a number of good hiding places.

None was ideal; they wanted two, more or less visible from each other, commanding views along at least a short stretch of the road passing the quarry. One was very satisfactory in this respect, but unfortunately it was situated on the side away from the town and covered that segment of road which they planned to watch more to insure safety than in expectation of results. On the other side, a space under several blocks was found from which it was possible to view the other hiding place and the quarry itself, but to see the road it was necessary to crawl some twenty yards. As the crawl could be made entirely under fair cover, Thrykar finally selected this space, and stored the gas cylinders and auxiliary equipment therein.

From the point where he could see the road, Tes' hiding place was invisible; and after a moment's indecision he called to her. He was sure no human beings were as yet in the neighborhood, but he made his words brief. Then he crawled back to the edge of the quarry. As his station was some distance up the hillside, he was fully sixty feet above the water; but he launched himself over the lip of granite without hesitation, and clove the surface with no more sound than a small stone would have made from the same height.

He entered the submerged ship, enclosed two of the small communicators such as he had used on the first night in water-tight cases, and brought them to the surface. Climbing painfully to where Tes was watching, he gave her one; then he returned to his own place, crossing above the quarry.

He settled down to his vigil, reasonably sure that the tiny sets were not powerful enough to be picked up outside the immediate vicinity, and relieved of the worry that Tes might see something without being able to warn him.

They did not have long to wait. Tes was first to signal that something was visible; before Thrykar could move to ask for details, he himself heard the engine of the car. It sped on down the road and into town—an ancient, rickety jalopy, though the aliens had no standard with which to compare it. Two more passed, going in the same direction, during the next fifteen minutes. Each held a single human being—hired men from the farms up the valley, going to town on various errands for their employers, though the watchers had no means of knowing this. After they had passed, nothing happened for nearly an hour.

At about eight o'clock, however, Tes signaled again; and this time she tapped out the code they had agreed upon to indicate a solitary pedestrian. Thrykar acknowledged the message, but made no move. Again the traveler proved not to be alone; within the next five minutes more than a dozen others passed, both singly and in small groups. They were the first human beings either of the aliens had seen at all clearly, and they were at a considerable distance, though the eyesight of the watchers did much to overcome this handicap. Practically all of them were carrying small parcels and books. They varied in height from about half that of Thrykar to nearly three quarters as tall, though, as individuals of a given size tended to form groups to the exclusion of others, this was not at once obvious to the watching pair.

And that was all. After those few chattering human beings had passed out of sight and hearing into the town, the road remained deserted. Once only, shortly before noon, one of the automobiles clattered back along it; Thrykar suspected it to be one of those he had seen earlier, but had no proof, as he was not familiar enough with either vehicles or drivers to discern individual differences. As before, there was only one occupant, who was not clearly visible from outside and up. For some seven hours he was the only native of Earth to disrupt the solitude.

Tes, younger and less patient than her husband, was the first to grow weary in the vigil. Some time after the passage of the lone car, she began tapping out on the communicator, in the general code which he had insisted on her learning in the conformity of the law, a rather irritated question about the expected duration of the watch. Thrykar had been expecting such an outbreak for hours, and was pleasantly surprised at the patience his wife had displayed, so he replied, "One of us should remain on guard until dark, at least; but there is no reason why you shouldn't go down to the ship for food and rest, if you wish. You might bring me something to eat, also, when you've finished."

He crawled back to the point from which he could see Tes' hiding place, and watched her move to the edge of the quarry, poise, and dive; then he returned to his sentry duty.

His wife had eaten, rested, brought up food for him, and been back at her place for some time before anything else happened. Then it was Thrykar who saw the new-comer; and in the instant of perception he not only informed Tes, but formed a hypothesis which would account for the observed motions of the human beings and implied the possibility of productive action in a very short time.

The present passer turned out not to be alone; there were two individuals, once more carrying books. Thrykar watched them pass, mulling over his idea; and when they were out of sight he signaled Tes to come over to his hiding place. She came, working her way carefully among the bushes above the quarry, and asked what he wanted.

"I think I know what is going on now," he said. "These people we have seen pass apparently live some-where up the road, and are required for some reason to spend much of the day in town. It is therefore reasonable to assume that they will all be returning the way they went, sometime before dark. I am quite sure that the two who just passed were among those who went the other way this morning.

"Therefore, I want you to watch here, while I work my way down to the place where the little road from this quarry joins the other. You will signal me when more of these people approach; and I, concealed at the roadside, will be able to get a first specimen if and when a solitary human being passes. If others approach while I am at work, you can warn me; but it should take only a few seconds, and the creature need not be unconscious much longer than that. Even if others are following closely, I can arrange matters to seem as though it had a fall or some similar accident. I am assuming that no one will come from the other direction; it's a chance we have to take, but the amount of traffic so far today seems to justify it."

"All right," replied Tes. "I'll stay here and watch. I hope it doesn't take long; I'm getting mortally weary of waiting for something interesting or useful to happen."

Thrykar made a gesture of agreement, and gathered his equipment for the move.

Jackie Wade would have sympathized with Tes, had he dreamt of her existence. He, too, was thoroughly bored. Yesterday hadn't been so bad—the first day of school at least has the element of interest inherent in new classes, possible new teachers, and—stretching a point—even new books; but the second day was just school. Five years of education had not taught Jackie to like it; at the beginning of the sixth, it was simply one of life's less pleasant necessities.

He looked, for the hundredth time, at the lock placed by intent at the back of the room. It lacked two minutes of dismissal time; and he began stealthily to gather the few books he planned to take home for appearance's sake. He had just succeeded in buckling the leather strap about them when the bell rang. He knew better than to make a dash for the door; he waited until the teacher herself had risen, looked over the class, and given verbal permission to depart. Fifteen seconds later he was in front of the school building.

His brother James, senior to him by two years and taller by nearly a head, joined him a moment later.

They started walking slowly toward the country road, and within a minute or two the other dozen or so boys from valley farms had caught up with them. When the last of these had arrived, Jackie started to increase his pace; but his brother held him back. He looked up in surprise.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "You getting rheuma-tism?" Jimmy gestured toward small figures, some dis-tance in front.

"Fatty and Mice. Let 'em get good and far ahead. We're going swimming, and Fatty's a tattler if there ever was one."

Jack nodded understandingly, and the group dawdled on. The shortest way to the quarries would have taken them past the still active pits and—more to the point—past the houses lying farthest out on the road. The adult inhabitants of one or two of these dwellings had made themselves unpopular with the boys by interfering with the swimming parties; so before the country road was reached, the group turned north on a street which ran parallel to the desired route. This they followed until it degenerated into a rutted country lane; then they turned left again and proceeded to cross the fields and through a small wood—the straggling edge of the growth that covered the mountain—until the road was reached. It was approached with caution, the boys making an Indian stalk of the business.

There was no sign of anyone, according to the "scouts"; the two girls had presumably passed already. The party hastily crossed the road, and ran down the drive that led to the most secluded of the quarries. Thrykar was not the first to appreciate this quality. Thirteen boys, from seven years of age to about twice that, dived into convenient bushes, shed garments with more haste than neatness, and a moment later were splashing about in the appallingly deep water.

They, were all good swimmers; the parents of town and valley had long since given up hope of keeping their offspring out of the quarries all the time, and most of them had taken pains to do the next best thing. Jackie and Jimmie Wade were among the best.

Thrykar, whose journey down to the road had been interrupted by the boisterous arrival of the gang, didn't think too much of their swimming abilities; but he was fair-minded enough to realize their deficiencies in that respect were probably for anatomical reasons. His first emotion at the sight of them had been a fear that they would discover the hiding place where the gas cylinders and Tes were concealed, and he had returned thereto in a manner as expeditious as was consistent with careful concealment. The fear remained as he and Tes carefully watched from the edge of the pit; but there was nothing they could do to prevent such a discovery. On dry land they could not move nearly so fast as they had seen the boys run; and there were too many eyes about to risk a drop over the edge into the water.

Two or three of the boys did climb the sides of the quarry some distance, to dive back down; but Thrykar, after seeing the splashes they made on entry, decided they were not likely to come much higher. He wondered how long they were likely to stay; it was obvious that they had no motive but pleasure. He also wondered if they would all leave together; and as that thought struck him, he glanced at the gas cylinders behind him.

The boys might have remained longer, but the local geography influenced them to some extent. The quarry was on the east side of the mountain, it was mid-afternoon, and most of the water had been in shadow at the time of their arrival. As the sun sank lower, depriving them of the direct heat that was necessary to make their swimming costume comfortable in mid-September, their enthusiasm began to decline. The youngest one present remembered that he lived farther up the valley than any of them, and presently withdrew, to return fully clothed and exhorting one or two of his nearest neighbors to accompany him.

Jackie Wade looked at the boy in surprise as he heard his request.

"Why go so soon? Afraid of something?" he jeered.

"No," denied the seven-year-old stoutly, "but it's get-ting late. Look at the sun."

"Go on home if you want, little boy," laughed Jack, plunging back into the water. He lived only a short distance out on the road, and was no less self-centered than any other child of ten. Two or three of the others, however, appreciated the force of the argument the youngster had implied, rather than the one he had voiced; and several more disappeared into the bushes where the clothes had been left. One of these

was James, who had foresight enough to realize that the distance home was not sufficient to permit his hair to dry. After all, they weren't supposed to swim in the quarry, and there was no point in asking for trouble.

This action on the part of one of the oldest of the group produced results; when Jackie clambered out of the water again, none of the others was visible. He called his brother.

"Come on and dress, fathead!" was the answer of that youth. Jackie made a face. "Why so soon?" he called back. "It can't even be four o'clock yet. I'm going to swim a while longer." He suited action to the word, climbing up the heaped blocks of granite at the side of the quarry and diving from a point higher than had any of the others that day.

"You're yellow, Jim!" he called, as his head once more broke the surface. "Bet you won't go off from there!" His brother reappeared at the water's edge, dressed except for the undershirt he had used as a towel—which would be redonned, dry or otherwise, before he reached home.

"You bet I won't," he replied as Jackie clambered out beside him, "and you won't either, not today. I'm going home, and you know what Dad will do if you go swimming alone and he hears about it. Come on and get dressed. Here's your clothes." He tossed them onto a block of stone near the water.

A voice from some distance up the road called, "Jim! Jackie! Come on!" and Jim answered with a wordless yell.

"I'm going," he said to his brother. "Hurry up and follow us." He turned his back, and disappeared toward the road. Jackie made a face at his departing back.

In a mood of rebellion against the authority conferred by age, he climbed back up to the rock from which he had just dived, forcing Thrykar, who was making his best speed down the hill with a load of equipment in his tentacles, to drop behind the nearest cover. Jackie thought better of his intended action, however; the dangers of swimming alone had been well drilled into him at an early age, and there was a stratum of common sense underlying his youthful impetuosity. He clambered back down the rocks, sat down on the still warm surface of the block where his clothes lay, and began to dry himself. Thrykar resumed his silent progress downhill.

As he went, he considered the situation. The human being was sitting on the stone block and facing the water; at the moment, Thrykar was directly to his left, and still somewhat above him. Tes was more nearly in front, and still further above. If there was any wind at all, it was insufficient to ripple the water; and Thrykar had recourse to a method that was the equivalent of the moistened finger. He found that there was a very faint breeze blowing approximately from the east—from the rear of the seated figure. Thrykar felt thankful for that, though the circumstance was natural enough. With his skin still wet, Jackie felt the current of air quite sharply, and had turned his back to it without thought.

It was necessary for Thrykar to get behind him. This entailed some rather roundabout travel through the bushes and among the blocks of stone; and by the time the alien had reached a position that satisfied him, the boy had succeeded in turning his shorts right side out and donning them, and was working on the lace of one of his shoes—he had kicked them off without bothering to untie them.

Thrykar, watching him sedulously with one eye, set the tiny cylinders on the ground, carefully checked the single nozzle for dirt, and began to adjust the tiny valves. Satisfied at last, he held the jet well away from his body and toward Jackie, and pressed a triggerlike release on the nozzle itself. Watching carefully, he was able to see faintly the almost invisible bubble that appeared and grew at the jet orifice.

It was composed of an oily compound with high surface tension and very low vapor pressure; it could, under the proper conditions, remain intact for a long time. It was being filled with a mixture composed partly of the anaesthetic that Thrykar had compounded, and partly of hydrogen gas—the mixture had been carefully computed beforehand by Thrykar to be just enough lighter than air to maintain a bubble a yard in diameter in equilibrium.

He watched its growth carefully, releasing the trigger when it seemed to have attained the proper size. Two other tiny controls extruded an extra jet of the bubble fluid, and released another chemical that coagulated it sufficiently in the region near the nozzle to permit its being detached without rupture; and the almost invisible thing was floating across the open space toward Jackie's seat.

Thrykar would not have been surprised had the first one missed; but luck and care combined to a happier result. The boy undoubtedly felt the touch of the bubble film, for he twisted one arm behind his back as though to brush away a cobweb; but he never completed the gesture. At the first touch on his skin, the delicate film burst, releasing its contents; and Jackie absorbed a lungful of the potent mixture with his next breath. For once, the book appeared to be right.

Thrykar had been able, with difficulty, to keep the bubble under observation; and as it vanished he emerged from behind the concealing stone and dashed toward his subject. Jackie, seated as he was with feet clear of the ground, collapsed backwards across the block of granite; and by some miracle Thrykar managed to reach him and cushion the fall before his head struck the stone. The alien had not foreseen this danger until after the release of the bubble.

He eased the small body down on its back, and carefully examined the exposed chest and throat. A pulse was visible on the latter, and he gave a mutter, of ap-proval. Once more the handbook had proved correct.

Thrykar opened the small, waterproof case that had been with the equipment, and extracted a small bottle of liquid and a very Earth-appearing hypodermic syringe. Bending over the limp form on the rock, he opened the bottle and sniffed as the odor of alcohol permeated the air. With a swab that was attached to the stopper, he lightly applied some of the fluid to an area covering the visible pulse; then, with extreme care, he inserted the fine needle at the same point until he felt it penetrate the tough wall of the blood vessel, and very slowly retracted the plunger. The transparent barrel of the instrument filled slowly with a column of crimson.

The hypodermic filled, Thrykar carefully withdrew it, applied a tiny dab of a collodionlike substance to the puncture, sealed the needle with more of the same material, and replaced the apparatus in the case. The whole procedure, from the time of the boy's collapse, had taken less than two minutes.

Thrykar examined the body once more, made sure that the chest was still rising and falling with even breaths and the pulse throbbing as before. The creature seemed unharmed—it seemed unlikely that the loss of less than ten cubic centimeters of blood could injure a being of that size in any case; and knowing that the effects of the anaesthetic would disappear in a very few minutes, Thrykar made haste to gather up his equipment and return to the place where Tes was waiting.

"That puts the first waterfall behind us," he said as he rejoined her. "I'll have to take this stuff down to the ship to work on it—and the sooner it's done, the better. Coming?"

"I think I'll watch until it recovers," she said. "It shouldn't take long, and—I'd like to be sure we haven't done anything irreparable. Thrykar, why do we have to come here, and go to all this deceitful mummery to steal blood from a race that doesn't know what it's all about, when there are any number of intelligent creatures who would donate willingly? That creature down there looks so helpless that I rather pity it in spite of its ugliness."

"I understand how you feel," said Thrykar mildly, following the direction of her gaze and deducing that of her thoughts. "Strictly speaking, a world such as this is an emergency station. You know I tried to get a later vacation period, so that I'd come up for refreshment before we left; but I couldn't manage it. If we'd waited at home until I was finished, we might as well have stayed there—there wouldn't have been time enough left to see anything of Blahn after we got there. There was nothing to do but stop en route, and this was the only place for that. If we'd taken a mainliner, instead of our own machine, we could have reached Blahn in time for treatment, or even received it on board; but I didn't want that any more than you did. I know this business isn't too pleasant for a civilized being, but I assure you that they are not harmed by it. Look!"

He pointed downwards. Jackie was sitting up again, wearing a puzzled expression which, of course, was lost on the witnesses. He was a healthy and extremely active youngster, so it was not the first time in his life he had fallen asleep during the daytime; but he had never before done so with a block of stone under him. He didn't puzzle over it long; he was feeling cold, and the other boys must be some distance ahead of him by now—he dressed hastily, looked for and finally found the books which Jimmy had

neglected to bring with his clothes, and ran off up the road.

Tes watched him go with a feeling of relief for which she was unable to account. As soon as he was out of sight, Thrykar picked up the gas cylinders and equipment case, made sure the latter was sealed watertight, and began once more to struggle down the hill with the load. He refused Tes' assistance, so she, unburdened, saved herself the climb by slipping over the edge of the pit. She was in the tiny galley preparing food by the time Thrykar came aboard; she brought him some within a few minutes and remained in the laboratory to watch what he was doing.

He had transferred the sample of blood to a small, narrow-necked flask, which was surrounded by a heating pad set for what the book claimed to be the human blood temperature. The liquid showed no sign of clotting; evidently some inhibiting chemical had been in the hypodermic when the specimen was obtained. Tes watched with interest as Thrykar bent over the flask and permitted a thin stream of his own blood, flowing from a valve in the great vein of his tongue, to mingle with that of the human being. The valve, and the tiny muscles controlling it, were a product of surgery; the biologists of Thrykar's race had not yet succeeded in tampering with their genes sufficiently to produce such a mechanism in the course of normal development. The delicate operation was performed at the same time the individual received his first "refreshment," and was the most unpleasant part of the entire process. Tes, not yet of age, was not looking forward to the change with pleasure.

The flask filled, Thrykar straightened up. His wife looked at the container with interest. "Their blood doesn't look any different from ours," she remarked. "Why this mixing outside?"

"There are differences sufficient to detect either chemically or by microscope. It is necessary, of course, that there be some difference; otherwise there would be no reaction on the part of my own blood. However, when the blood is from two different species, it is best to let the initial reaction take place outside the body. That would be superfluous if my donor was a member of our own race, with merely a differing blood type. If you weren't the same as I, it would have saved us a lot of trouble."

"Why is it that two people who have been treated, like you, are not particularly helpful to each other if they wish to use each other's blood?"

"In an untreated blood stream, there are leucocytes—little, colorless, amoeboid cells which act as scavengers and defenders against invading organisms. The treatment destroys those, or rather, so modifies them that they cease to be independent entities—I speak loosely; of course they are never really independent—and form a single, giant cell whose ramifications extend throughout the body of the owner, and which is in some obscure fashion tied in with, or at least sensitive to, his nervous system. As you know, a treated individual can stop voluntarily the bleeding from a wound, overcome disease and the chemical changes incident to advancing age—in fact, have a control over the bodily functions usually called 'involuntary' to a degree which renders him immune to all the more common causes of organic death." One of his tentacles reached out in a caress. "In a year or two you will be old enough for the treatment, and we need no longer fear—separation.

"But to return to your question. The giant leucocyte, after a few months, tends to break up into the original, uncontrollable type; and about half the time, if that process is permitted to reach completion, the new cells no longer act even as inefficient defenders; they attack, instead, and the victim dies of leukemia. The addition to the blood stream of white cells from another type of blood usually halts the breakdown—it's as though the great cell were intelligent, and realized it had to remain united to keep its place from being usurped; and in the few cases where this fails, at least the leukemia is always prevented."

"I knew most of that," replied Tes, "but not the leukemia danger. I suppose that slight risk is acceptable, in view of the added longevity. How long does that blood mixture of yours have to stand, before you can use it?"

"About four hours is best, I understand, though the precise time is not too important. I'll take this shot before we go to bed, let it react in me overnight, and tomorrow we'll catch another human being, get a full donation, and—then we can start enjoying our vacation."

Jackie Wade ran up the road, still hoping to catch up with his brother. He knew he had fallen asleep, but was sure it had been for only a moment; Jim couldn't be more than five minutes ahead of him. He had

not the slightest suspicion of what had happened during that brief doze; he had lost as much blood before, in the minor accidents that form a normal part of an active boy's existence. His throat did itch slightly, but he was hardened to the activities of the mosquito family and its relatives, and his only reaction to the sensation was mild annoyance.

As he had hoped, he caught the others before they reached his home, though the margin was narrow enough. Jim looked back as he heard his brother's running footsteps, and stopped to wait for him; the other boys waved farewell and went on. Jackie reached his brother's side and dropped to a walk, panting.

"What took you so long?" asked Jim. "I bet you went swimming again!" He glared down at the younger boy.

"Honest, I didn't," gasped Jackie. "I was just comin' on slowly—thinking."

"When did you start thinking, squirt?" An exploratory hand brushed over his hair. "I guess you didn't at that; it's almost as dry as mine. We'd both better stay outside a while longer. Here, drop my books on the porch and find out what time it is."

Jackie nodded, took the books as they turned in at the gate, and ran around to the small rear porch, where he dropped them. Looking in through the kitchen window, he ascertained that it was a few minutes after four; then he jumped down the steps and tore after his brother. Together, they managed to fill the hour and a half before supper with some of the work which they were supposed to have done earlier in the day; and by the time their mother rang the cow bell from the kitchen door, hair and undershirts were dry. The boys washed at the pump, and clattered indoors to eat. No embarrassing questions were asked at the meal, and the Wade offspring decided they were safe this time.

Undressing in their small room that night, Jackie said as much. "How often do you think we can get away with it, Jim? It's so close to the road, I'm always thinking someone will hear us as they go by. Why don't they like us to swim there, anyway? We can swim as well as anyone."

"I suppose they figure if we did get drowned they'd have an awful time getting us out; they say it's over a hundred feet deep," responded the older boy, somewhat absently.

Jackie looked up sharply at his tone. Jim was carefully removing a sock and exposing a rather ugly scrape which obviously had been fresh when the sock was donned. Jackie came over to examine it. "How did you do that?" he asked.

"Hit my foot against the rock the first time I dived. It's a little bit sore," replied Jim.

"Hadn't we better have Mother put iodine on it?"

"Then how do I explain where I got it, sap? Go get the iodine yourself and I'll put it on; but don't let them see you get it."

Jackie nodded, and ran barefooted downstairs to the kitchen. He found the brown bottle without difficulty, brought it upstairs, watched Jim's rather sketchy application of the antiseptic, and returned the bottle to its place. When he returned from the second trip Jim was in bed; so he blew out the lamp without speaking and crawled under his own blankets.

The next morning was bright and almost clear; but a few thin cirrus clouds implied the possibility of another change in the weather. The boys, strolling down the road toward school, recognized the signs; they prompted a remark from Jackie as they passed the second quarry.

"I bet the middle of a rainstorm would be a good time to go swimming there. No one would be around, and you'd have a good excuse for being wet."

"You'd probably break your neck on the rocks," replied his brother. "They're bad enough when it's dry." Jim's foot was bothering him a little, and his attitude toward the quarry was a rather negative one. He had managed to conceal his trouble from their mother, but now he was limping slightly. They had already fallen behind the other boys, who had met them at the Wade gate, and there began to be a serious prospect of their being late for school. Jim realized this as they entered the town and with an effort increased his pace; they managed to get to their rooms with two or three minutes to spare, to Jim's relief. He had been foreseeing the need for a written excuse, which might have been difficult to provide.

When they met at lunch time, Jim refused to discuss his foot, and even Jackie began to worry about the situation. He knew his elder brother would not lie about his means of acquiring the injury, and it

seemed very likely that the question was going to arise. After school, there was no doubt of it. Jimmy insisted that his brother not wait for him, but go home and stay out of the way until he had faced the authorities; Jackie was willing to avoid the house, but wanted to keep with Jim until they got there. The older boy's personality triumphed, and Jackie went on with the main crowd, while James limped on behind.

They did not swim, that day. The older boys had determined to play higher up the mountain side, and the younger ones trailed along. They spent a riotous afternoon, with little thought to passage of time; and Jackie heard the supper bell ring when he was a hundred yards from the house. He took to his heels, paused briefly at the pump, burst into the kitchen, recovered his poise, and proceeded more sedately to the dining room. His mother looked up as he entered, and asked quietly, "Where's Jimmy?"

That morning, as on the previous day, Thrykar had made careful count of the number of human beings passing the quarry. Although only one automobile had passed the second day, the number of pedestrians had tallied three times—fifteen people had walked to town both mornings; two had walked back in the afternoon, and thirteen had paused to swim. He concluded that those fifteen could be counted on as regular customers, when he laid his plans for the second afternoon.

This time, he took up his station very near the road, concealed as best he could behind bushes. Tes was at his station of the day before, ready to give him warning of people approaching. He was not counting on a lone swimmer remaining behind at the quarry; he hoped to snatch one of the passersby from the road itself.

In consequence, he was more than pleased to see that the human beings did not stop to swim; the first group to pass consisted of twelve, whom he rightly assumed to be most of the previous day's swimmers, and the second was the pair of girls, which Thrykar, of course, was unable to recognize as such. There was one to go; and, though it seemed too good to be true, there was every chance that that one would pass alone.

He did. Tes signaled his approach, and Thrykar, not waiting for anything more, started blowing a bubble. The wind was against him today; he had to make a much larger one, of heavier material, and "anchor" it to the middle of the road. It was more visible, in consequence, than the other had been; but he placed it in the shadow of a tree. Jimmy might not have seen it even had he been less preoccupied. As it was, he almost missed it; Thrykar had time to lay but one trap, which he placed at the center of the road; and Jimmy, from long-established habit, walked on the left. In consequence, he was down-wind from the thing; and when it ruptured at his grazing touch, the alien had no reason to be dissatisfied with the result.

The boy hit the ground before Thrykar could catch him, but there were no visible marks to suggest injury to his head when the trapper examined him. Thrykar picked up the unconscious form with an effort, collected the books which had fallen from its hand, and staggered back to the place where he had concealed the rest of his equipment.

This was not the place from which he had been watching; there was more equipment this time, the operation would take longer, and it would have been foolhardy to work so close to the road. He had found another space between large, discarded granite blocks about midway between road and quarry; and this he made his operating room.

Before going to work, he applied an extra dose of the anaesthetic directly to the boy's nostrils; and he laid the cylinder containing the substance close at hand. He uncased a much larger needle, connected by transparent, flexible tubing to a small jar graduated for volumetric measure; and, not trusting his memory, he laid the book beside it, open to the page which gave the quantity of blood that might safely be removed from a human being—a quantity determined long before by experiment.

As he had done the day before, he swabbed the unprotected throat with alcohol, and inserted the needle; a tiny rubberlike bulb, equipped with a one-way valve, attached to the jar, provided the gentle suction needed, and the container slowly filled to the indicated graduation. Thrykar promptly stopped pumping, extracted the needle, and sealed the puncture as before. Then, before the blood had time to cool appreciably, he removed a small stopper from the jar, inserted his slender tongue, and spent the next

two minutes absorbing the liquid into his own circulatory system.

That accomplished, he quickly replaced the apparatus in its case. Then he exerted himself to pick up Jimmy's body and carry it back to the road, at the point where the boy had fallen. There he laid him, face down, as nearly as he could recall in the attitude in which he had collapsed; the books were replaced near his left hand, and after a few minutes' search the alien found a fair-sized fragment of granite, which he placed near the boy's foot to serve as a reason for falling. He considered placing another under the head to account for the loss of consciousness, but couldn't bring himself to provide the necessary additional bruise.

Looking around carefully to make sure none of the human being's property was unreasonably far from the body, Thrykar returned to his watching place and set himself to await the boy's return to consciousness. He had no fears himself for the subject's health, but he remembered Tes' reaction the day before, and wanted to be able to reassure her.

He lay motionless, watching. He was beginning to feel restless, and could tell that he was running a mild fever—the normal result of the refresher reaction. He would be a trifle below par for the rest of the day. That was not worrying him seriously; he could rest until blackness fell, and as soon as that desirable event had occurred, they could be out and away.

He did feel a little impatient with his subject, who was taking a long time to regain consciousness. Of course, the creature had received a far heavier dose of anaesthetic than had the other, and had lost more blood; it might be a little longer in recuperating, on that score; but he had occupied fully ten minutes with the operation and stage-setting, which was about twice as long as the total period of unconsciousness of yesterday's subject.

His patience wore thinner in the additional ten minutes that elapsed before Jimmy Wade began to stir. His first motion attracted the alien's wandering attention, and Thrykar gathered himself together preparatory to leaving. Jimmy moaned a little, stirred again, and suddenly rolled over on his back. After a moment his eyes opened, to stare blankly at the overshadowing tree; then he rolled over again, this time obviously under conscious control, and started to get to his feet. Thrykar, behind his concealing bush, did likewise. He was the only one to complete the movement. The boy got as far as his hands and knees, and was starting to get one foot under him, when Thrykar saw the small body go limp as though it had received a second shot of gas, and slump back into a huddled heap on the road.

Thrykar stood frozen for a moment, as though he expected to be similarly stricken; and even when he relaxed, he kept both eyes fixed on the inert form for fully half a minute. Then, heedless of the risk of being seen should the creature regain its senses, he rushed out on the road and bent over the body, simultaneously tapping out an urgent call to Tes. Once more he picked Jimmy up, feeling as though his tentacles were about to come out at the roots, and bore him carefully back to the scene of the operation.

His emotions were almost indescribable. To say that he felt criminally guilty in causing serious injury to a sensitive being would not be strictly true; although he had an intellectual realization that human beings were social creatures in a plane comparable to that of his own race, he could not sympathize with them in the etymologically correct sense of the word. At the same time, he was profoundly shocked at what he had done; and he experienced an even deeper feeling of pity than had Tes the day before.

With careful tentacles he opened the loose shirt, and felt for the heart he had located the day before. It was still beating, but fully twice as rapidly as it should have been; and so weakly that for a moment Thrykar could not find it. The chest was rising and falling slightly, in slow, shallow breaths. A man would have detected at once the pallor underlying the tan on the boy's face, but it was unnoticeable to the alien.

Tes arrived and bent over the pair, as her husband performed the examination. Thrykar told her what had happened in a few words, without looking up. She gave a single word of understanding, and let a tentacle slide gently across Jimmy's forehead.

"What can you do?" she asked at last.

"Nothing, here. We'll have to get it down to the ship somehow. I'm afraid to take it under water—none of them went more than a few feet below the surface yesterday, and none stayed down for more than a few seconds. I hate to do it, but we'll have to bring the ship up in broad daylight. I'll stay

there; you go down, cast off, and bring the ship over to this side of the pit. Raise it just far enough to bring the upper hatch out of the water. I'll keep this communicator, and when you are ready to come up call me to make sure it's safe."

Tes whirled and made for the quarry without question or argument; a few seconds later Thrykar heard the faint splash as she hurled herself into the water. She must have worked rapidly; a bare five minutes later Thrykar's communicator began to click, and when he responded, the curved upper hull of the spaceship appeared immediately at the near edge of the quarry. Thrykar picked up the boy once more, carried him to the water's edge, eased him in and followed, holding the head well above the surface. He swam the few feet necessary, found the climbing niches in the hull with his own appendages, crawled up the shallow curve of metal, and handed the limp form in to Tes, who was standing below the hatch. She almost fell as the weight came upon her, but Thrykar had not entirely released his hold, and no damage resulted. A few moments later Jimmy was stretched on a metal table in a room adjacent to the control chamber, and the ship was lying at the bottom of the quarry.

Tes had to go out once more for the equipment Thrykar had left above, which included the all-important book. She took only a few minutes, and reported that there was no sign of any other human being.

Thrykar seized the book, although he had already practically memorized the section dealing with Earth and its natives. He had already set the room thermostat at human blood temperature for safety's sake, and had the air not been already saturated with moisture Jimmy's clothes would have dried very quickly. As it was, he was at least free from chill. The chemist checked as quickly as possible the proper values for respiration rate and frequency of heartbeat, and sought for information on symptoms of excessive exsanguination; but he was unable to find the last. His original opinion about heartbeat and breathing was confirmed, however; the subject's pulse was much too rapid and his breathing slow and shallow.

There was only one logical cause, book or no book, symptoms or no symptoms. The only source of organic disturbance of which Thrykar had any knowledge was his own removal of the creature's blood. It was too late to do anything about that. The extra dose of gas might be a contributing factor, but the worried chemist doubted it, having seen the negligible effects of the stuff on the human organism the day before.

"Why does that blasted handbook have to be right often enough to make me believe it, and then, when I trust it on something delicate, turn so horribly wrong?" he asked aloud. "I would almost believe I was on the wrong planet, from what it says of the cultural level of this race; then it describes their physical make-up, and I know it's right; then I trust it for the right amount of blood to take, and—this. What's wrong?"

"What does it say about their physical structure?" asked Tes softly. "I know it is fantastically unlikely, but we might have the wrong reference."

"If that's the case, we're hopelessly lost," replied her husband. "I know of no other race sufficiently like this in physical structure to be mistaken for it for a single moment. Look—there are close-ups of some of the most positive features. Take the auditory organ—could that be duplicated by chance in another face? And here—a table giving all the stuff I've been using: standard blood temperature, coloration, shape, height, representative weights . . . Tes!"

"What is wrong?"

"Look at those sizes and weights! I couldn't have moved a body that bulky a single inch, let alone carry one twenty yards! You had the right idea; it is the wrong race . . . or ... or else—"

"Or else," said Tes softly but positively. "It is the right planet, the right race, and the right reference. Those values refer to adult members of that race; we took as a donor an immature member—a child."

Thrykar slowly gestured agreement, inwardly grateful for her use of the plural pronoun. "I'm afraid you must be right. I took blood up to the limit of tolerance of an adult, with a reasonable safety margin; this specimen can't be half grown. Yesterday's must have been still younger. How could I possibly have been so unobservant? No wonder it collapsed in this fashion. I hope and pray the collapse may not be

permanent—by the way, Tes, could you make some sort of blindfold that will cover its eyes without injuring them? They seem deeply enough set to make that a fairly simple job. If it does recover consciousness, there are still laws which should not be broken."

"You could not be blamed for the mistake, anyway," added Tes, comfortingly. "This creature is as large as any we have seen in the open; and who would have thought that children would have been permitted to run freely so far from adult supervision?" She turned away in search of some opaque fabric as she spoke.

"The question is not of blame, but of repairing my error," replied Thrykar. "I can only do my best; but that I certainly will do." He turned back to book, boy, and laboratory.

One thing was extremely clear: the lost blood must be made up in some fashion. Direct transfusion was impos-sible; the creature's body must do the work. Given time and material, it was probably capable of doing so; but Thrykar was horribly afraid that time would be lacking, and he had no means of learning what materials were usable and acceptable to those digestive organs. One thing he was sure would do no chemical harm—water; and he had almost started to pour some down the creature's throat when he recalled that he had heard these beings speak with their mouths, and that there must consequently be a cross-connection of some sort between the alimentary and pulmonary passages. If it was com-pletely automatic, well and good; but it might not be, and there was in consequence a definite risk of strangling the child. He considered direct intravenous injection of sterile water, but chemical knowledge saved him from that blunder.

Tes designed and applied a simple blindfold; after that at Thrykar's direction, she made periodic tests of the subject's blood temperature, pulse, and respiration. That left her husband free to think and read in the forlorn hope of finding something that would enable him to take positive action of some sort. Simply sitting and watching the helpless little creature die before his eyes was as impossible for him as for any human being with a heart softer than flint.

Unquestionably it could have used some form of sugar; perhaps dextrose, such as Thrykar himself could di-gest—perhaps levulose or fructose or even starch. That was something that Thrykar could have learned for himself, even though the book contained no information on the matter; for he was a chemist, and a good one.

But he didn't dare take another blood sample from those veins, even for a test. And he didn't dare resort to trial and error; there would probably be only a single error.

A saliva test would have given him the answer, had he dreamt that an important digestive juice could be found so high in any creature's alimentary canal. He didn't; and the afternoon passed at a funereal tempo, with the faint breathing of the victim of his carelessness sounding in his too-keen ears.

It must have been about sunset when Tes spoke to him.

"Thrykar, it's changing a little. The heart seems stronger, though it's still very fast; and the blood temper-ature has gone up several degrees. Maybe it will recover without help."

The chemist whirled toward the table. "Gone up?" he exclaimed. "It was about where it should be before. If that thing is running a fever—" He did not finish the sentence, but checked Tes' findings himself. They were correct; and looking again at the figures in the book, he lost all doubt that the creature was suffering from a fever which would have been dangerous to a member of Thrykar's own race and was probably no less so to his. He stood motionless beside the metal table, and thought still more furiously.

What had caused the fever? Certainly not loss of blood—not directly, at least. Had the creature been suffering from some disease already? Quite possible, but no way to make sure. An organic tendency peculiar to the race, resulting from lowered blood pressure, prolonged unconsciousness, or similar unlikely causes? Again, no way to prove it. A previously acquired injury? That, at least, gave hope of providing evidence. He had noted no signs of physical disrepair during the few moments he had seen the creature conscious, but it was more or less covered with artificial fabric which might well have concealed them. The exposed portion of the skin showed nothing—or did it? Thrykar looked more closely at the well-tanned legs, left bare from ankle to just below the knee by the corduroy knickers.

One—the right—was perceptibly larger than its fellow; and touching the brown skin, Thrykar found

that it was noticeably hotter. With clumsy haste he unlaced and removed the sneakers, and peeled off the socks; and knew he had the source of the trouble. On the right foot, at the joint of the great toe, was an area from which the skin appeared to have been scraped. All around this the flesh was an angry crimson; and the whole foot was swollen to an extent that made Thrykar wonder how he had managed to get the shoe off. The swelling extended up the leg, in lesser degree, almost to the knee; the positions of the veins in foot and ankle were marked by red streaks.

Ignorant as he was of human physiology, Thrykar could see that he had a bad case of infection on his hands; taken in connection with the fever, it was probably blood poisoning. And, even more than before, there was nothing he could do about it.

He was right, of course, on all counts. Jimmy, in replacing his sock over the scrape the day before, had assured himself of trouble; the iodine had come far too late. By the next morning a battle royal was raging in the neighborhood of the injury. His healthy blood had been marshaling its forces all night and day, and struggling to beat back the organisms that had won a bridgehead in his body; it might possibly have won unaided had nothing further occurred; but the abrupt destruction of his powers of resistance by the removal of nearly half a liter of blood had given the balance a heavy thrust in the wrong direction. James Wade was an extremely ill young man.

Tes, looking on as her husband uncovered the injured foot, realized as clearly as he the seriousness of the situation. The fear that she had been holding at bay for hours an emotion composed partly of the purely selfish terror that they might do something for which the law could punish them, but more of an honest pity for the helpless little being which had unwittingly aided her husband—welled up and sought expression; Thrykar's next words set off the explosion.

"Thank goodness for this!" was what he said, beyond any possibility of doubt; and his wife whirled on him.

"What can you mean? You find yet another injury you've caused this poor thing, and you sound glad of it!"

Thrykar gave a negative flip of his great fins. "I'm sorry; of course my words would give that impression. But that was not what I meant. I am powerless to help the creature, and have been from the first, though I stubbornly refused to admit the fact to myself. This discovery has at least opened my eyes.

"I wanted to treat it myself before, because of the law against making our presence known; and I wasted my time trying to figure out means of doing so. I was attacking the wrong problem. It is not to cure this being ourselves, so that our presence will remain unsuspected; it is to get it to the care of its own kind, without at the same time betraying the secret. I suppose I assumed, without thinking, that the latter problem was insoluble."

"But how can you know that the human race has a medical science competent to deal with this problem?" asked Tes. "According to the handbook, their science is practically nonexistent; they're still in the age of superstition. Now that I think of it, I once read a story that was supposed to take place on Earth, and the men treated some member of our own race on the assumption that he was an evil, supernatural being. Whoever wrote the story must have had access to information about the planet." Thrykar smiled for the first time in hours as he answered.

"Probably the same information used by whoever compiled the Earth digest in this handbook. Tes, my dear, can't you see that whoever investigated this world couldn't have stirred a mile from the spot he landed—and must have landed in a very primitive spot. He made no mention of electrical apparatus, metallurgical development, aircraft—all the things we've seen since we got here. Mankind must be in the age of scientific development. That investigator was criminally lax. If it weren't for the letter of the law, I'd reveal myself to a human being right now.

"All sciences tend to progress in relation to each other; and I don't believe that a race capable of creating the flying machine we saw two days ago would be lacking in the medical skill to treat the case we have here. We will figure out a means to get this being into the hands of its own people again, and that will solve the problem. We should be able to get away sometime tonight."

Tes felt a great weight roll from her mind. There seemed little doubt that the program her husband had outlined was practical.

"Just how do you plan to approach a man, or group of them, carrying an injured member of their own race—a child, at that—and get away not only unharmed, but unobserved?" she asked, from curiosity rather than de-structive criticism.

"It should not be difficult. There are several dwelling places not far down the road. I can take the creature, place it in plain sight in front of one of them, then withdraw to a safe distance, and attract attention by throwing stones or starting a fire or something of that sort. It must be dark enough by now; we'll go up right away, and if it isn't we can wait a little while."

It was. It was also raining, though not heavily; the boy's prediction of the morning had been fulfilled. Tes maneuvered the little ship as close as possible to the quarry's edge, while Thrykar once again transferred his burden across the short but unavoidable stretch of water. He pulled it out on dry, or comparatively dry, land, and signaled Tes to close the hatch and submerge. She was to wait for him just below the surface, ready to depart the moment he returned.

That detail attended to, he turned, straightened up, and coiled and uncoiled his tentacles two or three times after the manner of a man flexing his muscles for a severe task. He realized that, in the transportation of a one-hundred--fifteen pound body some three-quarters of a mile, he had taken on a job to which his strength might barely be equal; but the alternative of bringing the ship closer to the town was unthinkable as yet. He bent over, picked Jimmy up, and started toward the road, keeping to the right side of the drive that led to the quarry.

It was even harder than he had expected. His muscles were strained and sore from the unaccustomed exertion earlier in the day; and by the time he was halfway to the road he knew that some other means of transportation would have to be found. He let his supple body curve under its load, and gently eased his burden to the ground.

Whether he had grown careless, or the rain had muffled the scuffling sound of approaching human feet, he was never sure; but he was unaware of the fact that he was not alone until the instant a beam of light lanced out of the darkness straight into his eyes, paralyzing him with astonishment and dismay.

Jackie Wade had heard nothing, either; but that may be attributed to Thrykar's unshod feet, the rain, and Jackie's own preoccupation with the question of his brother's whereabouts. He was not yet actually worried, though his parents were beginning to be. Once or twice before, one or the other of the boys had remained at a comrade's home for supper. They were, however, supposed to telephone in such an event, and the rather stringent penalties imposed for failure to do so had made them both rather punctilious in that matter.

Jackie had not told about his brother's sore foot; he had simply offered, after supper, to go looking for him on the chance that he might be at the home of a friend who did not possess a telephone. He had no expectation that Jimmy would be at the quarry; he could think of no reason why he should be; but in passing the drive, he thought it would do no harm to look. Jimmy might have been there, and left some indication of the fact.

He knew the way well enough to dispense with all but occasional blinks of the flashlight he was carrying; so he was almost on top of the dark mass in the drive before he saw it. When he did he stopped, and, without dreaming for a moment that it was more than a pile of brush or something of that sort, left, perhaps, by one of the other boys, turned the beam of his light on it.

He didn't even try to choke back the yell of astonishment and terror that rose to his lips. His gaze flickered over, accepted, and dismissed in one split second the body of his brother stretched on the wet ground; he stared for a long moment at the object bent over it.

He saw a black, glittering wet body, wide and thick as his own at the upper end, and tapering downwards; a dome-shaped head set on top of the torso without any intermediary neck; great, flat appendages, suggestive in the poor light of wings, spreading from the sides of the body; and a pair of great, staring, wide-set eyes that reflected the light of his flash as redly as do human optics.

That was all he had time to see before Thrykar moved, and he saw none of that very clearly. The alien straight-ened his flexible body abruptly, at the same time rocking backward on his short legs away from Jimmy's body; and the muscles in his sinewy, streamlined torso and abdomen did not share any part

of the feebleness inherent in his slender tentacles. When he straightened, it was with a snap; he did not merely come erect, but leaped upward and backward out of the cone of light, with his great fins spread wide for all the assistance they could give. He completely cleared the enormous block of stone lying beside the drive, and the sound of his descent on the other side was drowned in Jackie's second and still more heartfelt yell.

For a moment Thrykar lay where he had fallen; then he recognized his surroundings, dark as it was. He was in the space he had used that afternoon for an operating theater; and with that realization he remembered the path among the rocks and bushes which he had used in carrying the boy to the ship. As silently as he could, he crept along it toward the water; but as yet he did not dare signal Tes.

Behind him he heard the voice of the creature who had seen him. It seemed to be calling—"Jimmy! Jimmy! Wake up! What's the matter!"—but Thrykar could not understand the words. What he did understand was the pound of running feet, diminishing along the drive and turning down the road toward the town. Instantly he rapped out an urgent signal to Tes, and abandoning caution made his way as rapidly as possible to the quarry's edge. A faint glow a few feet away marked the hatch in the top of the hull, and he plunged into the water toward it. Thirty seconds later he was inside and at the control board, with the hatch sealed behind him; and without further preamble or delay, he sent the little ship swooping silently upward, into and through the dripping overcast, and out into the void away from Earth.

Jackie, questioned by his father while the doctor was at work, told the full truth to the best of his ability; and was in consequence sincerely grieved at the obvious doubt that greeted his tale. He honestly believed that the thing he had seen crouched over his brother's body had been winged, and had departed by air. The doctor had already noted and commented on the wound in Jim's throat, and the head of the Wade family had been moved to find out what he could about vampire bats. In consequence, he was doing his best to shake his younger son's insistence on the fact that he had seen something at least as large as a man. He was not having much luck, and was beginning to lose his temper.

Dr. Envers, entering silently at this stage and listening without comment for several seconds, gleaned the last fact, and was moved to interrupt.

"What's wrong with the lad's story?" he asked. "I haven't heard it myself, but he seems to be sure of what he's saying. Also," looking at the taut, almost tearful face of the boy sitting before him, "he's a bit excited, Jim. I think you'd better let him get to bed, and thrash your question out tomorrow."

"I don't believe his story, because it's impossible," replied Wade. "If you had heard it all, you'd agree with me. And I don't like—"

"It may, as you say, be impossible; but why pick on only one feature to criticize?" He glanced at the open encyclopedia indicated by Wade. "If you're trying to blame Jimmy's throat wound on a vampire bat, forget it. Any animal bite would be as badly infected as that toe, and that one looks as though it had received medical treatment. It's practically healed; it was a clean puncture by something either surgically sterile, or so nearly so that it was unable to offer a serious threat to the boy's health even in his present weak condition. I don't know what made it, and I don't care very much; it's the least of his troubles."

"I told you so!" insisted Jackie. "It wasn't one of your crazy little bats I saw. It was bigger than I am; it looked at me for a minute, and then flew away."

Envers put his hand on the youngster's shoulder, and looked into his eyes for a moment. The face was flushed and the small body trembled with excitement and indignation.

"All right, son," said the doctor gently. "Remember, neither your father nor I have ever heard of such a thing as you describe, and it's only human for him to try to make believe it was something he does know about. You forget it for now, and get some sleep; in the morning we'll have a look to find out just what it might have been."

He watched Jackie's face carefully as he spoke, and noted suddenly that a tiny lump, with a minute red dot at the center, was visible on his throat at almost the same point as Jimmy's wound. He stopped talking for a moment to examine it more closely, and Wade stiffened in his chair as he saw the action. Envers, however, made no comment, and sent the boy up to bed without giving the father a chance to resume the argument. Then he sat in thought for several minutes, a half smile on his face. Wade finally

interrupted the silence.

"What was that on Jackie's neck?" he asked. "I same sort of thing that—"

"It was not like the puncture in Jimmy's throat, replied the doctor wearily. "If you want a medical opinion, I'd say it was a mosquito bite. If you're trying to connect it with whatever happened to the other boy, forget it; if Jackie knew anything unusual about it, he'd have told you. Remember, he's been trying to put stuffing in a rather unusual story. I'd stop worrying about the whole thing, if I were you; Jimmy will be all right when we get these strep bugs out of his system, and there hasn't been anything wrong with his brother from the first. I know it's perfectly possible to read something dramatic into a couple of insect bites—I read 'Dracula' in my youth, too—but if you start reading it back to me I'm quitting. You're an educated man, Jim, and I only forgive this mental wandering because I know you've had a perfectly justifiable worry about Jimmy."

"But what did Jackie see?"

"Again I can offer only a medical opinion; and that is—nothing. It was dark, and he has a normal imagination, which can be pretty colorful in a child."

"But he was so insistent—"

The doctor smiled: "You were getting pretty positive yourself when I walked in, Jim. There's something in human nature that thrives on opposition. I think you'd better follow the prescription I gave for Jackie, and get to bed. You needn't worry about either of them, now." Envers rose to go, and held out his hand. Wade looked doubtful for a moment, then laughed suddenly, got to his feet, shook hands, and went for the doctor's coat.

Like Wade, Tes had a few nagging worries. As Thrykr turned away from the controls, satisfied that the ship was following the radial beam emanating from the broadcaster circling Sol, she voiced them.

"What can you possibly do about that human being who saw you?" she asked. "We lived for three Earth days keyed up to a most unpleasant pitch of excitement, simply because of a law which forbade our making ourselves known to the natives of that planet. Now, when you've done exactly that, you don't seem bothered at all. Are you expecting the creature to pass us off as supernatural visitants, as they are supposed to have accounted for the original surveyors?"

"No, my dear. As I pointed out to you before, that idea is the purest nonsense. Humanity is obviously in a well-advanced stage of scientific advancement, and it is unthinkable that they should permit such a theory to satisfy them. No—they know about u, now, and must have been pretty sure since the surveyors' first visit."

"But perhaps they simply disbelieved the individuals who encountered the surveyors, and will similarly dis-credit the one who saw you."

"How could they do that? Unless you assume that all those who saw us were not only congenital liars but were known to be such by their fellows, and were nevertheless allowed at large. To discredit them any other way would require a line of reasoning too strained to be entertained by a scientifically trained mind. Rationalization of that nature, Tes, is as much a characteristic of primitive peoples as is superstition. I repeat, they know what we are; and they should have been permitted galactic intercourse from the time of the first survey—they cannot have changed much in sixty or seventy, years, at least in the state of material progress.

"And that, my dear, is the reason I am not worried about having been seen. I shall report the whole affair to the authorities as soon as we reach Blalhn, and I have no doubt that they will follow my recommendation—which will be to send an immediate official party to contact the human race." He smiled momentarily, then grew serious again. "I should like to apologize to that child whose life was risked by my carelessness, and to its parents, who must have been caused serious anxiety; and I imagine I will be able to do so." He turned to his wife.

"Tes, would you like to spend my next vacation on Earth?"