

THE WITNESS

Eric Frank Russell

No court in history had drawn so much world attention. Six television cameras swivelled slowly as they followed red and black-robed legal lights parading solemnly to their seats. Ten microphones sent the creaking of shoes and rustling of papers over national networks in both hemispheres. Two hundred reporters and special correspondents filled a gallery reserved for them alone. Forty representatives of cultural organizations stared across the court at twice their number of governmental and diplomatic officials sitting blank-faced and impassive.

Tradition had gone by the board; procedure resembled nothing familiar to the average lawyer, for this was a special occasion devised to suit a special case. Technique had been adapted to cope with a new and extraordinary culprit, while the dignity of justice was upheld by means of stagy trim-mings.

There were five judges and no jury, but a billion citizens were in their homes watching and listening, determined to ensure fair play. Ideas of what constituted fair play were as varied as the unseen audience, and most of them unreasoning, purely emotional. A minority of spectators hoped for life, many lusted for death, while the waverers compromised in favor of arbitrary expulsion, each according to how he had been influenced by the vast flood of colorful and bigoted propaganda preceding this event.

The judges took their places with the casual unconcern of those too old and deeply sunk in wisdom to notice the lime-light. A hush fell, broken only by the ticking of the large clock over their rostrum. It was the hour of ten in the morning of May 17, 1977. The microphones sent the ticking around the world. The cameras showed the judges, the clock, and finally settled on the center of all this attention: the creature in the defendant's box.

Six months ago this latter object had been the sensation of the century, the focal point of a few wild hopes and many wilder fears. Since then it had appeared so often on video screens, magazine and newspaper pages, that the public sense of amazement had departed, while the hopes and fears remained. It had slowly degenerated to a cartoon character contemptuously dubbed "Spike," depicted as halfway between a hopelessly malformed imbecile and the crafty emissary of a craftier other-world enemy. Familiarity had bred contempt, but not enough of it to kill the fears.

It's name was Maeth and it came from some planet in the region of Procyon. Three feet high, bright green, with feet that were mere pads, and stubby limbs fitted with suckers and cilia, it was covered in spiky protrusions and looked somewhat like an educated cactus. Except for its eyes, great golden eyes that looked upon men in naive expectation of mercy, because it had never done anyone any harm. A toad, a wistful toad, with jewels in its head.

Pompously, a black gowned official announced, "This special court, held by international agreement, and convened within the area of jurisdiction of the Federal Government of the United States of America, is now in session! Silence!"

The middle judge glanced at his fellows, adjusted his spectacles, peered gravely at the toad, or cactus, or whatever it might be. "Maeth of Procyon, we are given to

understand that you can neither hear nor speak, but can comprehend us telepathically and respond visually."

Cameras focussed as Maeth turned to the blackboard immediately behind him and chalked one word. "Yes."

"You are accused," the judge went on, "generally of illegal entry into this world known as Earth and specifically into the United States of America. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"How else can one enter?" inquired Maeth, in bold white letters.

The judge frowned. "Kindly answer my question."

"Not guilty."

"You have been provided with defending counsel—have you any objection to him?"

"Blessed be the peacemaker."

Few relished that crack. It smacked of the Devil quoting Scripture.

Making a sign, the judge leaned back, polished his glasses.

Adjusting the robes on his shoulders, the prosecuting attorney came to his feet. He was tall, hatchet-faced, sharp-eyed. "First witness!"

A thin, reedy man came out of the well of the court, took his chair, sat uncomfortably, with fidgeting hands.

"Name?"

"Samuel Nall."

"You farm outside Dansville?"

"Yes, sir. I—"

"Do not call me `sir.' Just reply to my questions. It was upon your farm that this creature made its landing?"

"Your Honors, I object!" Mr. Defender stood up, a fat, florid man, but deceptively nimble-witted. "My client is a person, not a creature. It should therefore be referred to as the defendant."

"Objection overruled," snapped the middle judge. "Pro-ceed, Mr. Prosecutor."

"It was upon your farm that this *creature* landed?"

"Yes," said Samuel Nall, staring pridefully at the cameras. "It come down all of a sudden and—"

"Confine yourself to the question. The arrival was accom-panied by much destruction?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Two barns and a dollop of crops. I'm down three thousand dollars."

"Did this *creature* show any remorse?"

"None." Nall scowled across the court. "Acted like it couldn't care less."

Mr. Prosecutor seated himself, throwing a mock smile at the fat man. "Your witness."

Standing up, the latter eyed Nall benevolently and in-quired, "Were these barns of yours octagonal towers with walls having movable louvres and with barometrically controlled roofs?"

Samuel Nall waggled his eyebrows and uttered a faint, "Huh?"

"Never mind. Dismiss that query and answer me this one: were your crops

composed of fozzles and bicolored mer-kins?"

In desperation, Nall said, "It was ripe barley."

"Dear me! Barley—how strange! Don't you know what fozzles and merkins are? Wouldn't you recognize them if you saw them?"

"I reckon not," admitted Farmer Nall, with much reluctance.

"Permit me to observe that you seem singularly lacking in perceptive faculties," remarked Mr. Defender, tartly. "indeed, I am really sorry for you. Can you detect sorrow in my face?"

"I dunno," said Nall, feeling that his throne before the cameras was becoming somehow like a bed of nails.

"In other words, you cannot recognize remorse when you see it?"

"Objection!" roared Mr. Prosecutor, coming up crimson. "The witness cannot reasonably be expected—." He stopped as his opponent sat down. Recovering swiftly, he growled, "Next witness!"

Number two was big, beefy, clad in blue, and had all the assurance of one long familiar with courts and the tedious processes of the law.

"Name?"

"Joseph Higginson."

"You are an officer of the Dansville police?"

"Correct."

"You were summoned by the first witness?"

"I was."

Mr. Prosecutor wore the smile of one in complete command of circumstances as he went on, "Discovering what had occurred, you tried to apprehend the cause of it, did you not?"

"I sure did." Officer Higginson turned his head, threw a scowl at the golden eyes pleading in the box.

"And what happened?"

"It paralyzed me with a look."

The judge on the left interjected, "You appear to have recovered. How extensive was this paralysis, and how long did it last?"

"It was complete, Your Honor, but it wore off after a couple of hours."

"By which time," said Mr. Prosecutor, taking over again, "this outlandish object had made good its escape?" Lugubriously, "Yes."

"It therefore obstructed a police officer in the execution of his duty, assaulted a police *officer*, and resisted arrest?" "It did," agreed Higginson, with emphasis.

"Your witness." Mr. Prosecutor seated himself, well satisfied.

Mr. Defender arose, hooked thumbs in vest-holes, and inquired with disarming amiability, "You can recognize another police official when you see him?"

"Naturally."

"Very well. There is one at present seated in the public section. Kindly point him out for the benefit of this court."

Higginson looked carefully over the small audience which represented in person the vaster audience beyond. Cameras swung in imitation of his search. Judges, reporters, officials, all looked the same way.

"He must be in plain clothes," declared Higginson, giving up.

The middle judge interposed mildly, "This court can hardly accept witness's inability to recognize a plain clothes officer as evidence."

"No, Your Honor," agreed Mr. Defender. His plump features registered frustration and disappointment which gladdened the heart of his watching opponent. Then, satisfied that the other had reached the heights, he plunged him to the depths by brightening and adding, "But the said official is in full uniform."

Mr. Prosecutor changed faces like swapping masks. Higginson got a crick in the neck as he took in the audience again.

"Olive-drab with red trimmings," Mr. Defender went on. "He is a Provost Marshal of the Corps of Military Police."

"You didn't tell me that," Higginson pointed out. He was openly aggrieved.

"Did you tell the defendant that you were a police officer?" The witness reddened, opened his mouth, closed it, gazed appealingly at the prosecuting attorney.

"Answer the question!" insisted a judge.

"No, I did not tell it."

"Why not?"

Mopping his forehead, Higginson said in hoarse tones, "Didn't think it was necessary. It was obvious, wasn't it?"

"It is for me to put the questions; for you to provide the answers. Do you agree that the Provost Marshal is obvious?"

"Objection!" Mr. Prosecutor waved for attention. "Opinions are not evidence."

"Sustained!" responded the middle judge. He eyed defending attorney over his glasses. "This court takes cognizance of the fact that there was no need for witness to offer vocally any information available to defendant telepathically. Proceed with your examination."

Mr. Defender returned his attention to Higginson and asked "Precisely what were you doing at the moment you were paralysed?"

"Aiming my gun."

"And about to fire?"

"Yes."

"At the defendant?"

"Yes."

"Is it your habit to fire first and ask questions afterward?"

"The witness's habits are not relevant," put in the middle judge. He looked at Higginson. "You may ignore that question."

Officer Higginson grinned his satisfaction and duly ignored it.

"From what range were you about to fire?" pursued defending attorney.

"Fifty or sixty yards."

"So far? You are an excellent marksman?"

Higginson nodded, without pride, and warily. The plump man, he had decided, was a distinct pain in the neck. "About what time do you hope to get home for supper?" Caught on one foot by this sudden shift of attack, the witness gaped and said, "Maybe midnight."

"Your wife will be happy to know that. Were it not for the radio and video, you could not have told her vocally, could you?"

"I can't bawl from here to Dansville," assured Higginson, slightly sarcastic.

"Of course not. Such a distance is completely beyond range of the unaided human voice." Mr. Defender rubbed his chin, mused awhile, suddenly demanded, "Can you bawl *tele-pathically* for fifty to sixty yards?"

No reply.

"Or is your mental limit in keeping with what the defendant assures me to be the normal limit of twenty-five to thirty yards?"

Higginson screwed up his eyes and said nothing.

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"A pity!" commented Mr. Defender, shaking his head sadly and taking a seat.

The third witness was a swarthy, olive-skinned character who stared sullenly at his boots while the prosecuting attorney got to work.

"Name?"

"Dominic Lolordo." He gave it in an undertone, as if reluctant to have it coupled with his image on the video. "You operate a sea-food restaurant?"

"Yes."

"Do you recognize the creature in that box?"

His eyes slid sidewise. "Yes."

"In what circumstances did you last see it?"

"In my joint, after hours."

"It had forced an entrance, had it not, shortly before dawn, and it awakened you while plundering the place?" "That's correct."

"You did not try to catch it?"

Lolordo made a face. "Catch that? *Look* at it!"

"Appearance alone would not deter you if you were being robbed," Mr. Prosecutor suggested meaningfully. "Surely there was something else?"

"It had walked in through the window," said Lolordo, his voice rising considerably. "Right through the window, leaving a hole its own shape. It went out the same way, making another hole. No broken glass around, no splinters, nothing. What can you do with a green nightmare that walks through glass as if it wasn't there?"

"Seeing this demonstration of supernormal powers, you ran for assistance?"

"You bet!"

"But it came too late? This unscrupulous plunderer had gone?"

"Yes."

The questioner handed over with a gesture, and the defending attorney began.

"You assert that you were plundered? Of what?"

"Stuff."

"That is not an answer."

"Ain't it?" Lolordo yawned with exaggerated disinterest. The middle judge bent forward, frowning heavily. "Does the witness desire to be committed for contempt?"

"Lobsters and oysters," said Lolordo, hurriedly and with bad grace.

"In other words, a square meal?" inquired Mr. Defender. "If that's what you want to call it."

"Was it being consumed as if the defendant were raven-ously hungry?"

"I didn't stick around to see. I took one look and went on my way—fast."

"So that if the defendant picked up enough of your thoughts to realise that a felonious act had been committed, there was no opportunity to apologise or make restitution?"

No reply.

"And, in any case, your departing thoughts were violently hostile?"

"I wasn't hot-footing for a bouquet," assured Lolordo.

Mr. Defender said to the judges, "This witness is impertinent. I have no further use for him."

The judges conferred, and the middle one decided coldly, "The witness will be detained within the precincts of this court until the case has been decided."

Lolordo stamped away from his seat, glowering right and left.

"Fourth witness!"

The chair was taken by a middle-aged, dapper man who resembled the movie notion of a bank president or an eminent surgeon. He could have been cast equally well for either part.

"Name."

"Winthrop Allain."

"You are a resident professor of zoology, are you not?" inquired the prosecuting attorney.

"That is correct."

"You recognize the creature in the box?"

"I ought to. I have been in close communication with it for many weeks."

Mr. Prosecutor made an impatient gesture. "In what circumstances did you first encounter it?"

An answer to that one seemed unnecessary. The whole world knew the circumstances, had been told them time and time again with many fanciful frills.

Nevertheless, Allain responded, "It appeared in the zoo some two hours after closing time. How it got there I don't know."

"It was snooping around, seeing all there was to see, making mental notes of everything?"

Hesitantly, "Well—"

"Was it or was it not looking over the place?"

"It certainly saw a good bit of the zoo before the keepers discovered it, but—"

"Please do not embellish your answers, Professor Allain," said Mr. Prosecutor, firmly. "Let us continue: owing to the great furore created by this strange object's arrival and subsequent exploits, your keepers had no difficulty in recognising it?"

"None at all. They reported to me at once."

"What did you do then?"

"I attended to the matter myself. I found it a warm and comfortable apartment in the unused section of the Reptile House."

The entire court along with the cameras peered respectfully at the expert who could treat such an occasion with such nonchalance.

"How did you achieve this without suffering paralysis, dis-integration or some other unnatural fate?" Mr. Prosecutor's voice had a touch of acid. "Did you graciously extend a cordial invitation?"

The witness, dryly, "Precisely!"

"There is a time and place for humor, Professor," reproved Mr. Prosecutor, with some severity. "However, the court understands that you classified this nightmarish entity as a reptile and managed to put it in its proper place."

"Nonsense! The Reptile House was immediately available, convenient and acceptable. The defendant is unclassifiable."

Dismissing that with a contemptuous gesture, the prosecuting attorney went on, "You are not prepared to tell this court by what means you overcame this creature's menacing powers and succeeded in trapping it?"

"I did not trap it. I knew it was sentient and treated it as such."

"If we can rely upon the evidence of other witnesses," said Mr. Prosecutor, tartly, "you were fortunate to have any choice about the matter. Why did this caricature permit you to make the contact it denied to others?"

"Because it recognized my mind as of a type accustomed to dealing with non-human forms. With considerable logic it assumed that contact with me would be far easier than with any others."

"With considerable logic," echoed prosecuting attorney, turning toward the judges. "I ask Your Honors to make especial note of that remark, bearing in mind that witness has a distinguished status." He returned his attention to Allain. "By that, you mean it is intelligent?"

"Indubitably!"

"You have had many weeks in which to study the mind of this unwanted invader. Just how intelligent would you say it is?"

"As much so as we are, though in a different way."

"Do you consider this sample to be fairly representative of its race?"

"I have no reason to suppose otherwise."

"Which race, therefore, equals us in brain-power?"

"Very probably." Professor Allain rubbed his chin and mused a moment. "Yes, insofar as one can relate things which are not the same, I'd say they are our intellectual equals."

"Perhaps our superiors, not only in brains, but also in numbers?"

"I don't know. I doubt it."

"The possibility cannot be ruled out?" persisted Mr. Prosecutor.

"Such data as is available is far from sufficient and therefore I—"

"Do not evade my question. There is a possibility, no matter how remote, that the life-form represented by this monster now standing before us is the direst menace humanity has ever been called upon to face?"

"Anything can be construed as a menace if you insist, but—"

"A menace, yes or no?"

The middle judge interjected profoundly, "Witness cannot be required to provide a positive answer to a hypothetical question."

Not fazed in the least, Mr. Prosecutor bowed. "Very well, Your Honor, I will put it differently." He resumed with Allain. "In your expert estimation, is the intelligence quotient of this life-form high enough to enable it to conquer, subdue and enslave humanity if it so desired?"

"I do not know."

"That is your only answer?"

"I'm afraid so."

"It is quite satisfactory," commented Mr. Prosecutor, throwing a significant look through the cameras at the un-seen but billion-strong jury. "inasmuch as it admits the possibility of peril, extreme peril."

"I did not say that," protested Allain.

"Neither have you said the contrary," retorted the other. He seated himself, confident and pleased. "Your witness."

Mr. Defender began heavily, "Professor Allain, have your various hand-outs concerning the defendant been reported factually?"

"Without exception, they have been grossly distorted," said

Allain, grimly. He cast a cold look at the big group of reporters who grinned back arrogantly.

"Defendant has repeatedly been described as a spy who must receive drastic treatment lest worse befall. Does your data support that theory?"

"No."

"What status do you assign to the defendant?"

"A refugee," said Allain.

"It is impossible for the defendant's motives to be hostile?"

"Nothing is impossible," said Professor Allain, honest though the heavens fall. "The smartest of us can be fooled. But I don't think I am fooled. That is my opinion, for what it is worth."

Mr. Defender sighed, "As I have been reminded, opinions are not evidence." He sat down murmuring, "Most unfortunate! Most unfortunate!"

"Fifth witness!"

"Tenth witness!"

"Sixteenth witness!"

That one, number sixteen, ended the prosecution's roster. Four or five times as many witnesses could have been produced, but these were the pick of the bunch. They had something cogent to offer, something calculated to help the public to decide once and for all—at least with its prejudices if not with its brains—whether gallivanting life-forms were to be tolerated, or given the bum's rush, or worse. The question at issue was the ephemeral one of public safety, and it was for the public to say whether or not they were going to take any risks. With this in mind, the evidence of the sixteen made a formidable indictment against the queer, golden-eyed thing on trial for its liberty or even its life.

Conscious that he was leading on points, Mr. Prosecutor came erect, gazed authoritatively at the defendant.

"Just why did you come to this world?"

"To escape my own."

"Do you expect us to believe that?"

"I expect nothing," chucked Maeth laboriously. "I merely hope."

"You hope for what?"

"For kindness."

It disconcerted the questioner. Left with no room for a telling retort, he was silent a moment while he sought another angle.

"Then your own world did not please you? What was wrong with it?"

"Everything," responded Maeth.

"Meaning you were a misfit?"

"Yes."

"Nevertheless you view *this* world as a suitable dumping-ground for misfits?"

No reply.

"I suggest that your plea is nonsense, your whole story a sheer fabrication. I suggest that your motives in coming here are deeper and darker than you dare admit. I will go further and put it to you that you do not come even from the region of Procyon, but from somewhere a good deal nearer, such as Mars."

Still no reply.

"Are you aware that astronomical engineers have subjected your damaged ship to long and careful examination and made a report on it?"

Maeth stood there, pathetically patient, eyes looking into the distance as if in search of peace, and said nothing.

"Are you aware that they have reported that while your vessel is far in advance of anything yet developed by us, and while it is undoubtedly capable of travelling far outside this solar system, it is not able to reach Alpha Centauri, much less Procyon?"

"That is true," wrote Maeth on the board.

"Yet you maintain that you came from the region of Pro-cyon?"

"Yes."

The prosecuting attorney spread despairing hands. "You have heard defendant, Your Honors. His ship cannot reach here from Procyon. All the same, it came from Procyon. This creature cannot manage to be consistent, either because it is dimwitted or, more probably, an ineffectual liar. I therefore see little purpose in continuing my—"

"I rode on a rock," scrawled Maeth.

"There!" Mr. Prosecutor pointed sardonically at the black-board. "Defendant rode on a rock. That is the escape from a self-created impasse—a rock, no less!" He frowned at the box. "You must have ridden a long, long way."

"I did."

"So you sat your ship on this rock and saved fuel by letting it carry you many millions of miles? Have you any idea of the mathematical odds against finding a wandering aster-oid in any section of space?"

"They are very large," admitted Maeth.

"Yet you discovered the very asteroid to bring you all the way here? Most astonishing spacemanship, is it not?"

"It did not bring me all the way. It brought me most of the way."

"All right," agreed Mr. Prosecutor, with airy contempt. "Ninety-nine millions instead of one hundred millions or whatever the distance is supposed to be. It is still amazing."

"Moreover," continued Maeth, writing steadily, "I did not select one to bring me here, as you imply. I thankfully used the only visible rock to take me anywhere. I had no specific destination. I fled into the void at random, putting my trust in the fates."

"So some other rock might have borne you some place else, might it not?"

"Or no place at all," Maeth put morbidly. "The fates were kind."

"Don't be too sure of that." Mr. Prosecutor hooked thumbs in vest pockets and studied the other with sinister expression. "If your real purposes, your real motives are in fact those which have been attributed to you by our ever-alert news-services, it is to be expected that you would have a cover-up story replete with plausibility. You have given this court such a story but have offered no concrete evidence in proof. We are left with nothing but your unsupported word—and the word of an ill-formed alien, an unknown quantity, at that!" He paused, ended, "Can you not submit to this court something more material than a series of bald assertions?"

"I have no way of combating disbelief," wrote Maeth, slowly and tiredly, "except with trust."

Mr. Prosecutor countered that one by striking hard and ruthlessly. "How many others of your kind are now upon this world, following their dastardly designs while you distract attention by posing in the full glare of publicity?"

The court, the hidden audience, had not thought of that. Half a dozen reporters quietly kicked themselves for not having conceived its first and played it up for all it was worth. It had been assumed from the beginning that the alien in their hands was the only one on the planet. Yet there might well be more, a dozen, a hundred, hiding in the less frequented places, skulking in the shadows, biding their time. People stared at each other and fidgeted uneasily.

"I came alone," Maeth put on the board.

"I accept that statement. It may be the only truthful one you have made. Experts report that your vessel is a single-seater scout, so obviously you came in it alone. But how many other vessels came about the same time?"

"None."

"It would be a comfort to think so," remarked Mr. Prosecutor, thereby discomfiting his listeners. "Doubtless, your world has many other ships, much larger and more powerful than yours?"

"Many," admitted Maeth. "But they can go no farther or faster. They can only have greater loads."

"How did you come by your own ship?"

"I stole it."

"Indeed?" The prosecuting attorney raised his eyebrows. gave a little laugh. "A self-confessed thief!" He assumed an air of broadminded understanding. "It is expected, of course, that one would suffer less by confessing to theft rather than espionage." He let that sink in before attempting another hard blow. "Would you care to tell us how many other bold and adventurous males are ready or making ready to follow your path to conquest?"

Defending attorney stood up and said, "I advise my client not to answer."

His opponent waved him down, turned to the judges. "Your Honors, I am ready to state my case."

They consulted the clock, talked in undertones between themselves, then said, "Proceed."

The speech for the prosecution was able, devastating and long. It reviewed the evidence, drew dark conclusions, implied many things from which the hidden

audience could draw other and still darker conclusions. This is not to say that Mr. Prosecutor had any real hatred of or fear of the stranger at the gate; it was merely that he was doing his specialised job with ability that was considerable.

"This case, with its own new and peculiar routine," he reminded, "will go down in legal annals. As from today it will constitute a precedent by which we shall determine our attitude toward future visitors from space. And the final arbiters of that attitude will be you, the members of the general public, who will reap the reward of outside alliances or"—he paused, hardened his voice—"suffer the sorrows of other-world enmities. Allow me to emphasise that the rewards can be small, pitifully small—while the sorrows can be immense!"

Clearing his throat, he had a sip of water, started to get into his stride. "In trying to decide what should be done for the best we have no basis for forming conclusions other than that provided by the fantastic example who will be the subject of your verdict."

Turning, he stared at Maeth while he went on. "This creature has not been put on oath because we know of no oath binding upon it. Its ethics—if any—are its own, having little in common with ours. All we do know is that its farfetched and highly imaginative story places such a strain upon human credulity that any one of us might be forgiven for deeming it a shameless liar."

Maeth's large eyes closed in pain, but Mr. Prosecutor went determinedly on. "While the question of its truthfulness or lack of same may remain a matter for speculation, we do have some evidences based upon fact. We know, for instance, that it has no respect for property or the law, which forms of respect are the very foundation-stones of the civilization we have builded through the centuries and intend to preserve against all corners."

He overdid it there. Maeth was too small, too wide-eyed and alone to fit the part of a ruthless destroyer of civilizations. Nevertheless, the picture would serve to sway opinions. Some thousands, probably millions, would argue that when in doubt it is best to play safe.

"A thief. More than that: a self-admitted thief who steals not only from us but also from his own," declared the prosecuting attorney, quite unconscious of switching his pronoun from neuter to male. "A destroyer, and an intelligent one, possibly the forerunner of a host of destroyers. I say that advisedly, for where one can go an army can follow." Dismissing the question of whence said army was going to get its flock of trans-cosmic asteroids, he added, "A dozen armies!"

His voice rising and falling, hardening and softening, he played expertly upon the emotions of his listeners as a master would play on a giant organ, appealing to world patriotism, pandering to parochialism, justifying prejudices, enlarging fears—fear of self, fear of others, fear of the strange in shape, fear of tomorrow, fear of the unknown. Solemnity, ridicule, sonorousness, sarcasm, all were weapons in his vocal armory.

"He," Mr. Prosecutor said, pointing at Maeth and still using the male pronoun, "he pleads for admission as a citizen of this world. Do we take him with all his faults and follies, with all his supernormal powers and eccentric aptitudes, with all his hidden motives that may become clear only when it is too late? Or, if indeed he be as pure and innocent as he would have us believe, would it not be better to inflict upon

him a grave injustice rather than court infinitely greater injustices to a great number."

Challengingly he stared around. "If we take him, as a refugee, who will have him? Who will accept the society of a creature with which the average human has no joint understanding?" He gave a short, sharp laugh. "Oh, yes, there have been requests for the pleasure of his company. Incredible as it may seem, there are people who want him."

Holding up a letter for all to see, he continued, "This person offers him a home. Why? Well, the writer claims that he himself was a spiky thing in Procyon during his eighth incarnation." He tossed the letter on his desk. "The crackpots are always with us. Fortunately, the course of human history will be decided by calmly reasoning citizens and not by incurable nuts."

For a further half hour he carried on, a constant flow of words which concluded with, "In human affairs there is a swift end for the human spy, quick riddance for the suspected spy. I conceive of no reason why any alien form deserves treatment more merciful than that which we accord to fellow humans. Here, we have before us one who at very least is an undesirable character, at most the first espionage agent of a formidable enemy. It is the prosecution's case that you have to consider *only* whether it is in the best interest of public safety that he be rewarded with death or with summary expulsion into the space from which he came. The weight of evidence rules out all other alternatives. You will not have failed to note that the witnesses who have appeared are overwhelmingly for the prosecution. Is it not remarkable that there is not one witness for the defense?" He waited to give it time to sink home, then drove it further by repeating, "Not one!"

Another sip of water, after which he seated himself, carefully smoothed the legs of his pants.

One thing seemed fairly clear: Maeth was a stinker.

Mr. Defender created a mild stir right at the start by rising and saying, "Your Honors, the defense does not intend to state its case."

The judges peered at him as if he were a sight ten times more strange than his own client. They pawed papers, talked together in whispers.

In due time, the middle one inquired, "By that, do you mean that you surrender to verdict by public poll?"

"Eventually, of course, Your Honor, but not just yet. I wish to produce evidence for my side and will be content to let my case rest on that."

"Proceed," ordered the judge, frowning doubtfully.

Addressing Maeth, the defending attorney said, "On your home world all are like you, namely, telepathic and non-vocal?"

"Yes, everyone."

"They share a common neural band, or, to put it more simply, they think with a communal mind?"

"Yes."

"That is the essential feature in which your home world differs from this one of ours: that its people share a racial mind, thinking common thoughts?"

"Yes," chalked Maeth.

"Tell this court about your parents."

Maeth's eyes closed a moment, as if the mind behind them had gone far, far away.

"My parents were freaks of nature. They drifted from the common band until they had almost lost contact with the race-mind."

"That was something the race-mind could not tolerate?" asked Mr. Defender gently.

"No."

"So they were killed—for *having minds of their own*?"

A long pause and a slow, "Yes." The scrawl on the board was thin, shaky, barely decipherable.

"As you would have been had you not fled in sheer desperation?"

"Yes."

Mr. Defender eyed the judges. "I would like to put further questions to the fourth witness."

They signed agreement, and Professor Allain found his way back to the chair.

"Professor, as an expert who has made a long, personal study of my client, will you tell this court whether defendant is old or young."

"Young," said Allain promptly.

"Very young?"

"Fairly young," Allain responded. "Not quite an adult." "Thank you." Mr. Defender let his mild, guileless gaze roam over the court. There was nothing in his plump features to warn them of the coming wallop. In quieter tones, he asked, "Male or female?"

"Female," said Allain.

A reporter dropped a book. That was the only sound for most of a minute. Then came a deep indrawn hiss of breath, a rapid ticking as cameras traversed to focus on Maeth, a run-ning murmur of surprise from one end of the court to the other.

Back of the gallery, the most pungent cartoonist of the day tore up his latest effort, a sketch of defendant strapped to a rocket hell-bent for the Moon. It was captioned, "Spike's Hike." What could one call *it—him—her*, now? Spikina? He raked his hair, sought a new tack, knowing that there was none. You just can't crucify a small and lonely female.

Mr. Prosecutor sat with firmed lips and the fatalistic air of one who has had eighty percent of the ground snatched from under his feet. He knew his public. He could estimate their reaction to within ten thousand votes, plus or minus.

All stared at the golden eyes. They were still large, but somehow had become soft and luminous in a way not noticed before. You could see that now. Having been told, you could really *see* that they were feminine. And in some peculiar, inexplicable manner the outlines around them had become sub-dued, less outlandish, even vaguely and remotely human!

With effective technique, the defending attorney gave them plenty of time to stew their thoughts before carefully he struck again.

"Your Honors, there is one witness for my side."

Mr. Prosecutor rocked back, stared searchingly around the court. The judges polished their glasses, looked around also. One of them motioned to a court official who promptly bawled in stentorian tones.

"Defense witness!"

It shuttled around the great room in echoing murmurs. "Defense witness! There is

a witness for the defense!"

A bald-headed little man came self-consciously from the public section, bearing a large envelope. Reaching the chair, he did not take it himself, but instead placed upon it a photograph blown up to four feet by three.

Court and cameras gave the picture no more than the brief-est glance, for it was instantly recognisable. A lady holding a lamp.

Rising with a disapproving frown, the prosecuting attorney complained, "Your Honors, if my learned opponent is permitted to treat the Statue of Liberty as a witness he will thereby bring into ridicule the proceedings of this—."

A judge waved him down with the acid comment, "The bench is fully capable of asserting the dignity of this court." He shifted his attention to Mr. Defender, eyeing him over the tops of his glasses. "A witness may be defined as one able to assist the jury in arriving at a just conclusion."

"I am aware of that, Your Honor," assured Mr. Defender, not in the least disturbed.

"Very well." The judge leaned back, slightly baffled. "Let the court hear witness's statement."

Mr. Defender signed to the little man who immediately produced another large photograph and placed it over the first.

This was of the enormous plinth, with Liberty's bronze skirt-drapes barely visible at its top. There were words on the plinth, written bold and large. Some in the court gave the picture only another swift look, since they knew the words by heart, but others read them right through, once, twice, even three times.

Many had never seen the words before, including some who had passed near by them twice daily, for years. Cameras picked up the words, transmitted them pictorially to millions to whom they were new. An announcer recited them over the radio.

*Send me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me—
I lift my Lamp beside the Golden Door*

In the deep, heart-searching silence that followed nobody noticed that Mr. Defender had bowed deeply to the judges and resumed his seat. The defense rested, having nothing more to add.

Midnight. A large stone cell with a metal grille, a bed, a table, two chairs and a radio in one corner. Maeth and the plump man sat there conversing, examining correspondence, watching the clock.

"The opposition picked a sloppy one with that crackpot's letter," remarked Mr. Defender. He could not refrain from expressing himself vocally though he knew full well that the other was hearing only the thoughts within his mind. He tapped a heavy forefinger on the bunch of missives at which they had been looking. "I could easily have countered him with this bunch written from a week ago to way back. But what

was the use? They prove nothing except that all people don't think alike."

He sighed, stretched his arms wide and yawned, had his twentieth or thirtieth look at the clock, picked up another letter. "Listen to this one." He read it aloud.

"My son, aged thirteen, keeps pestering us to offer your client a home for at least a little while. I really don't know whether we are being wise in giving way to him, but we shall certainly suffer if we don't. We have a spare room here, and if your client is clean about the house and don't mind a bit of steam around on wash-days—"

His voice petered out as he had to yawn again. "They say it will be six in the morning before this public poll is complete. Bet you it's at least eight o'clock and maybe ten. They're always late with these things." He jerked around in vain effort to make himself more comfortable in his hard chair. "However, I'm staying with you until we've seen this through, one way or the other. And don't kid yourself I'm the only friend you've got." He pointed to the letters. "You've plenty there, and none of them certifiable."

Maeth ceased perusal of a note in uneven spidery writing, reached for pencil and paper and scribbled, "Allain did not teach me enough words. What is a 'veteran'?" Having had it explained, she said, "I like this writer best. He has been hurt. If I am freed I will accept his invitation."

"Let me see." Taking the note, Mr. Defender read it, mur-muring, "Urn . . . um . . ." as he went along. He handed it back. "The choice is yours. You'll have something in common, anyway, since you'll both be coping with a cock-eyed world." Throwing a glance at the wall, he added, "That clock has gone into a crawl. It's going to take us a week to get to morning."

Somebody opened the grille with a jangle of keys, and Mr. Prosecutor came in. Grinning at his rival, he said, "Al, you sure make it tough for yourself in clink—you don't even use the comforts provided."

"Meaning what?"

"The radio."

Mr. Defender gave a disdainful sniff. "Darn the radio. Noise, noise, noise. We've been busy reading—in peace and quiet." Sudden suspicion flooded his ample features. "What have we missed on the radio, if anything?"

"The midnight news." Mr. Prosecutor leaned on the edge of the table, still grinning. "They have thrown up the poll."

"They can't do that!" The defending attorney stood up, flushed with anger. "It was by international agreement that this case was—"

"They can do it in certain circumstances," interrupted the other. "Which are that a torrent of votes overwhelmingly in favor of your client has already made further counting a waste of time." He turned to Maeth, finished, "Just between you and me, Funny-face, I was never more happy to lose a fight."

The man in the back room was nearing middle age, prematurely gray, and had long slender fingers that were sensitive tools. He was listening to the radio when the doorbell rang. There was no video in the room, only the radio softly playing a Polynesian melody. The bell jarred through the music, causing him to switch off and come upright. Very deliberately he moved around the room, through the door and into the passage.

Strange for anyone to call in the early evening. Not often that people came then. The mailman occasionally turned up in the morning and one or two tradesmen toward midday. Rarely did somebody appear later, all too rarely. He was not expecting a visitor, either.

He trod gently along the passage toward the front door, his feet silent on the thick carpet, his right hand brushing the wall.

There was something mighty queer about this summons be-cause as he neared the door he conceived the weird notion that he knew in advance who was waiting outside. The picture crept into his mind, shadowy but discernable, as if insinuated by some means he could not define, as if hopefully projected by one of those beyond the door. It was a picture of a big, plump, confident man accompanied by something small, all green and golden.

Despite past trials and stern testings which had made him what he was today, his nerves were passably good and he was not subject to delusions, or had not yet developed a tendency to delusions. So he was puzzled, even a little upset by preconceptions without any basis. He had never known a big, heavy man such as his brain was picturing, not even in other more normal days. As for the second one .

Here and there of course, are people with greatly sharp-ened senses, with odd aptitudes developed to an extreme.

That was to be expected, for the fates were kind and provided compensation. Without them, it would be hard to get around. But he knew his own and they included none like this.

His fingers, usually so precise, fumbled badly as they sought the door-latch, almost as if they had temporarily forgotten where it was placed. Then, finding it, they began to turn the lock, and at that point a thin piping voice came into his mind as clearly as a tinkling bell.

"Open please—*I am your eyes!*"