The Gone Dogs

A green turbo-copter moved over the New Mexico sand flats, its rotor blades going whik-whik. Evening sunlight cast deep shadows ahead of it where the ground shelved away to a river canyon. The 'copter settled to a rock outcropping, a hatch popped open and a steel cage containing one female coyote was thrown out. The cage door fell away. In one jump, the animal was out of its prison and running. It whisked over the outcropping, leaped down to a ledge along the canyon wall and was out of sight around a bend—in its blood a mutated virus which had started with hog cholera.

The lab had a sharp chemical odor in which could be detected iodoform and ether. Under it was that musky, wet-fur smell found in the presence of caged animals. A despondent fox terrier sulked in a cage at one end; the remains of a poodle were stretched on a dissecting board atop a central bench, a tag on its leg labelled X-8, PULL-MAN VETERINARY RESEARCH CENTER, LAB-ORATORY E. Indirect lighting touched everything with a shadowless indifference.

Biologist Varley Trent, a lanky, dark-haired man with angular features, put his scalpel in a tray beside the poodle,

stepped back, looked across at Dr. Walter Han-Meers, professor of veterinary medicine. The professor was a plump, sandy-haired Chinese-Dutchman with the smooth-skinned look of an Oriental idol. He stood beside the dissecting bench, staring at the poodle.

"Another failure," said Trent. "Each one of these I autopsy, I say to myself we're that much closer to the last dog on Earth."

The professor nodded. "Came down to give you the latest. Don't see how it helps us, but for what it's worth, this virus started in coyote."

"Coyote?"

Professor Han-Meers found a lab stool, pulled it up, sat down. "Yes. Ranch hand in New Mexico broke it. Talked to the authorities. His boss, a fellow named Porter Durkin, • is a V.M.D., has a veterinary hospital on a ranch down there. Used a radioactive carbon egg to mutate hog cholera. Hoped to make a name for himself, killing off all the coyotes. Made a name for himself all right. Government had to move in troops to keep him from being lynched."

Trent ran a hand through his hair. "Didn't the fool realize his disease would spread to other canines?"

"Apparently didn't even think of it. He has a license from one of those little hogwallow colleges, but I don't see how anyone that stupid could make the grade."

"How about the covote?"

"Oh, that was a great success. Sheep ranchers say they haven't lost an animal to coyotes in over a month. Only things worrying them now are bears, cougars and the lack of dogs to..."

"Speaking of dogs," said Trent, "we're going to need more test animals here by tomorrow. Serum nine isn't doing a thing for that fox terrier. He'll die tonight sometime."

"We'll have lots of test animals by tomorrow," said Han-Meers. "The last two dog isolation preserves in Canada reported primary infestations this morning."

Trent drummed his fingers on the bench top. "What's the government doing about the offer from the Vegan biophysicists?"

Han-Meers shrugged. "We are still turning them down. The Vegans are holding out for full control of the project.

You know their reputation for bio-physical alterations. They might be able to save our dogs for us, but what we'd get back wouldn't be a dog any longer. It'd be some elongated, multi-legged, scaly-tailed monstrosity. I wish I knew why they went in for those fish-tail types."

"Linked gene," said Trent. "Intelligence factor coupled. They use their *mikeses* generators to open up the gene

pairs and...'

"That's right," said Han-Meers. "You studied with them. What's the name of that Vegan you're always talking about?"

"Ger (whistle) Anso-Anso."

"That's the one. Isn't he on Earth with the Vegan delegation?"

Trent nodded. "I met him at the Quebec conference ten years ago—the year before we made the bio-physical survey to Vega. He's really a nice fellow once you get to know him."

"Not for me." Han-Meers shook his head. "They're too tall and disdainful. Make me feel inferior. Always harping about their damned *mikeses* generators and what they can do in bio-physics." "They can do it, too."

"That's what makes them so damned irritating!" Trent laughed. "If it'll make you feel any better, the Vegans may be all puffed up with pride about their biophysics, but they're jealous as all git-out over our tool facility."

"Hmmmph!" said Han-Meers.

"I still think we should send them dogs for experimental purposes," said Trent. "The Lord knows we're not going to have any dogs left pretty soon at the rate we're going." "We won't send them a sick spaniel as long as Gilberto Nathal is in the Federated Senate," said Han-Meers. "Every time the subject comes up, -he jumps to his feet and hollers about the pride of Earth and the out-worlder threat." "But..."

"It hasn't been too long since the Denebian campaign," said Han-Meers.

Trent wet his lips with his tongue. "Mmmmm, hmmmm.

How are the other research centers coming?"

"Same as we are. The morning report shows a lot of words which sum up to a big round zero." Han-Meers reached into his pocket, extracted a yellow sheet of paper. "Here, you may as well see this. It'll be out pretty soon, anyway." He thrust the paper into Trent's hand.

Trent glanced at the heading:

BUREAU-GRAM —DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SANITATION —PRIMARY SECRET:

He looked up at Han-Meers.

"Read it," said the professor.

Trent looked back to the *bureau-gram*. "Department doctors today confirmed that Virus D-D which is attacking the world's canines is one-hundred percent fatal. In spite of all quarantine precautions it is spreading. The virus shows kinship to hog cholera, but will thrive in a solution of protomycetin strong enough to kill any other virus on the list. It shows ability to become dormant and anerobic. Unless a suitable weapon with which to combat this disease is found within two more months, Earth is in danger of losing its entire population of wolves, dogs, foxes, coyote ..."

Trent looked back to Han-Meers. "We've all suspected it was this bad, but..." He tapped the *bureau-gram*.

Han-Meers slipped the paper from Trent's grasp. "Varley, you held out on the census takers when they came around counting dogs, didn't you?"

Trent pursed his lips. "What makes you say a thing-like that?"

"Varley, I wouldn't turn you over to the police. I/am suggesting you contact your Vegan and give him your dogs."

Trent took a deep breath. "I gave him five puppies last week."

A Capital correspondent for a news service had broken the story six weeks previously, following up a leak in the Health and Sanitation Committee of the Federated Senate. A new virus was attacking the world's canine population and no means of fighting it was known. People already realized their pets were dying off in droves. The news story was enough to cause a panic. Interstellar passenger space disappeared. Powerful men exerted influence for themselves and friends. People ran every which way with their pets, hopelessly tangling inter-world quarantine restrictions. And the inevitable rackets appeared.

SPECIAL CHARTER SHIP TO PLANETS OF AL-DEBARAN. STRICTEST QUARANTINE REQUIRE-MENTS. TRAINED ATTENDANTS TO GUARD YOUR PETS IN TRANSIT. PRICE: FIFTY THOU-

SAND CREDITS A KILO.

The owners, of course, could not accompany their pets,

shipping space being limited.

This racket was stopped when a Federation patrol ship ran into a strange meteor swarm beyond Pluto, stopped to map its course, discovered the swarm was composed of the frozen bodies of dogs.

Eleven days after the virus story appeared, the Arcturian planets banned Terran dogs. The Arcturians knew dogsmuggling would begin and their people could profit.

Trent kept six part-beagle hounds in a servo-mech kennel at an Olympic Mountain hunting camp. They were at the camp when the government instituted its emergency census of dogs. Trent deliberately overlooked mentioning them.

Leaving Pullman at three o'clock the morning after he talked to Han-Meers, he put his jet-'copter on auto-pilot, slept until he reached Aberdeen.

The Aberdeen commander of the Federated Police was a graying, burn-scarred veteran of the Denebian campaign. His office was a square room overlooking the harbor. The walls were hung with out-world weapons, group photographs of officers and men. The commander stood up as Trent entered, waved him to a chair. "Makaroff's the name. What can I do for you?"

Trent introduced himself, sat down, explained that he was a member of the Pullman research staff, that he had nine hounds—six adults and three puppies—at a mountain kennel.

The commander seated himself, grasped the arms of

his chair, leaned back. "Why aren't they in one of the government preserves?"

Trent looked the man in the eyes. "Because I was convinced they'd be safer where they are and I was right. The preserves are infested. Yet my hounds are in perfect health. What's more, Commander, I've discovered that humans are carrying the disease. We ..."

"You mean if I pet a dog that could kill it?"

"That's right."

The commander fell silent. Presently, he said, "So you disobeyed the quarantine act,*eh?"

"Yes."

"I've done the same kind of thing myself on occasion," said the commander. "You see some stupid order given, you know it won't work; so you go against it. If you're wrong they throw the book at you; if you're right they pin a medal on you. I remember one time in the Denebian campaign when

"Could you put an air patrol over my camp?" asked

Trent

The commander pulled at his chin. "Hounds, eh? Nothing better than a good hunting hound. Damned shame to see them die with all the rest." He paused. "Air patrol, eh? No humans?"

"We have two months to find an answer to this virus or there won't be another dog on earth," said Trent. "You see how important those dogs could be?"

"Bad as that, eh?" He pulled a vidi-phone to him. "Get me Perlan." He turned to Trent. "Where is your camp?"

Trent gave him the vectors. The commander scribbled them on a scratch pad.

A face came on lie screen. "Yes, sir."

The commander turned back to the vidi-phone. "Perlan, I want a robotics air patrol—twenty-four-hour duty—over a hunting camp at," he glanced at the scratch pad, "vectors 8181-A and 0662-Y, Olympic West Slope. There's a kennel at the camp with nine hounds in it. No humans at all must contact those dogs." He wet his lips with his tongue. "A doctor has just told me that humans are carrying this Virus D-D thing."

When Trent landed at Pullman that afternoon he found

Han-Meers waiting in Lab E. The professor sat on the same stool as though he had not moved in two days. His slant eyes contemplated the cage which had held the fox terrier. Now there was an airdale in the enclosure. As Trent entered, Han-Meers turned.

"Varley, what is this the Aberdeen policeman tells the news services?"

Trent closed the lab door. So the commandant had talked.

"Flores Clinic was on the line twice today," said Han-Meers. "Want to know what we discovered that they overlooked. The policeman has perhaps made up a story?"

Trent shook his head. "No. I told him a hunch of mine was an actual fact. I had to get an air patrol over my hunting camp. Those hounds are in perfect health."

Han-Meers nodded. "They have been without such a convenience all summer. Now they have to have it."

"I've been afraid they were dead. After all, I raised those hounds from pups. We've hunted and..."

"I see. And tomorrow we tell everybody it was a big mistake. I had thought you possessed more scientific integrity than that."

Trent hid his anger behind a passive face, slipped off his coat, donned a lab smock. "My dogs were isolated from humans all summer. We ..."

"The Flores people have been thorough in their investigation," said Han-Meers. "They suspect we are trying to..."

"Not thorough enough." Trent opened a cupboard door, took out a bottle of green liquid. "Are you going to stay here and help or are you going to let me tackle this one alone?"

Han-Meers took off his coat, found an extra lab smock. "You are out on a thin limb, Varley." He turned, smiled. "But what a wonderful opportunity to give those M.D.'s a really big come-uppance."

At nine-sixteen the next morning, Trent dropped a glass beaker. It shattered on the tile floor and Trent's calm shattered with it. He cursed for two minutes.

"We are tired," said Han-Meers. "We will rest, come

back to it later. I will put off the Flores people and the others today. There is still "

"No." Trent shook his head. "We're going to take another skin wash on me with Clarendon's Astringent."

"But we've already tried that twice and "

"Once more," said Trent. 'This time we'll add the synthetic dog blood *before* fractionating."

At ten-twenty-two, Han-Meers set the final test tube in a plastic diffraction rack, pressed a switch at its base. A small silver cobweb shimmered near the top of the tube.

"Ahhhhh!" said the professor.

They traced back. By noon they had the pattern: Dormant virus was carried in the human glands of perspiration, coming out through the pores—mostly in the palms of the hands—only under stress of emotion. Once out of the pores, the virus dried, became anerobic.

"If I hadn't dropped that beaker and become angry,"

said Trent.

"We would still be looking," added Han-Meers. "Devil of a one, this. Dormant and in minute quantity. That is why they missed it. Who tests an excited subject? They wait for him to become calm."

"Each man kills the thing he loves," quoted Trent.

"Should pay more attention to philosophers like Oscar Wilde," said Han-Meers. "Now I will call the doctors, tell them of their error. They are not going to like a mere biologist showing them up."

"It was an accident," said Trent.

"An accident based on observation of your dogs," said Han-Meers. "It is, of course, not the first time such accidents have occurred to mere biologists. There was Pasteur. They had him stoned in the village streets for..."

"Pasteur was a chemist," said Trent curtly. He turned, put test tube and stand on a side bench. "We'll have to tell the authorities to set up robotics service for the remaining dogs. That may give us time to see this thing through."

"I will use your lab phone to call the doctors," said Han-Meers. "I cannot wait to hear that Flores' voice

when..."

The phone rang. Han-Meers put it to his ear. "Yes. I am me ... I mean, I am here. Yes, I will take the call." He

waited. "Oh, hello, Dr. Flares. I was just about to..." Han-Meers fell *silent*, listened. "Oh, you did?" His voice was flat. "Yes, that agrees with our findings. Yes, through the pores of the hands mostly. We were waiting to confirm it, to be certain ... Yes, by our Dr. Trent. He's a biologist on the staff here. I believe some of your people were his students. Brilliant fellow. Deserves full credit for the discovery." There was a long silence. "I insist on scientific integrity, Dr. Flares, and I have your report in my hands. It absolves humans as carriers of the virus. I agree that this development will be bad for your clinic, but that cannot, be helped. Good-bye, Dr. Flores. Thank you for calling." He hung up the phone, turned. Trent was nowhere in sight.

That afternoon the last remaining pureblood Saint Bernard died at Anguac, Manitoba. By the following morning, Georgian officials had confirmed that their isolation kennels near Igurtsk were infested. The, search for uninfected dogs continued, conducted now by robots. In all the world there were nine dogs known to be free of Virus D-D—six adult hounds and three puppies. They sniffed around their mountain kennel, despondent at the lack of human companionship.

When Trent arrived at his bachelor apartment that night he found a visitor, a tall (almost seven feet) Class C humanoid, head topped by twin, feather-haired crests, eyes shaded by slitted membranes like Venetian blinds. His slender body was covered by a blue robe, belted at the waist.

"Ger!" said Trent. He shut the door.

"Friend Varley," said the Vegan in his odd, whistling tones.

They herd out their hands, pressed palms together in the Vegan fashion. Ger's seven-fingered hands felt overwarm.

"You've a fever," said Trent. "You've been too long on Earth."

"It is the accursed oxidized iron in your environment," said Ger. "I will take an increased dosage of medicine

tonight." He relaxed his crests, a gesture denoting pleasure. "But it is good to see you again, Varley."

"And you," said Trent. "How are the . . ." He put a hand down, made the motion of petting a dog.

"That is why I came," said Ger. "We need more."

"More? Are the others dead?"

"Their cells are alive in new descendants," said Ger.
"We used an acceleration chamber to get several generations quickly, but we are not satisfied with the results.
Those were very strange animals, Varley. Is it not peculiar that they were identical in appearance?"

"It sometimes happens," said Trent

"And the number of chromosomes," said Ger. "Aren't there.."

"Some special breeds differ," said Trent hurriedly.

"Oh." Ger nodded his head. "Do you have more of this breed we may take?"

"It'll be tricky to do," said Trent, "but maybe if we are very careful, we can get away with it"

Commander Makaroff was *delighted* to renew his acquaintance with the famous Dr. Trent. He was *delighted* to meet the visitor from far Vega, although a little less delighted. It was clear the commander was generally suspicious of out-worlders. He ushered the two into his office, seated them, took his place behind his desk.

"I'd like a pass permitting Dr. Anso-Anso to visit my kennel," said Trent. "Not being an Earth-human, he does not carry the virus and it will be quite safe to . . ."

"Whv?"

"You have, perhaps, heard of the Vegan skill in biophysics," said Trent. "Dr. Anso-Anso is assisting me in a line of research. He needs to take several blood and culture samples from ..."

"Couldn't a robot do it?"

"The observations depend on highly specialized knowledge and there are no robots with this training."

"Hmmm." Commander Makaroff considered this. "I see. Well, if you vouch for him, Dr. Trent, I'm sure he's all right" His tone suggested that Dr. Trent *could be* mistaken. He took a pad from a drawer, scrawled a pass,

handed it to Trent. "I'll have a police 'copter take you

"We have a specially sterilized 'copter with our lab equipment," said Trent. "Robotics International is servicing it right now."

Commander Makaroff nodded. "I see. Then I'll have an escort ready for you whenever you say."

The summons came the next day on a pink sheet of paper:

"Dr. Varley Trent is ordered to appear tomorrow before the special sub-committee of the Federated Senate Committee on Health and Sanitation at a hearing to be conducted at 4 p.m. in the office building of the Federated Senate." It was signed, "Oscar Olaffson, special assistant to Sen. Gilberto Nathal."

Trent accepted the summons in his lab, read it, took it up to Hans-Meers' office.

The professor read the order, handed it back to Trent "Nothing is said about charges, Varley. Where were you yesterday?"

Trent sat down. "I got my Vegan friend into the preserve so he could snatch the three puppies. He's half way home with them by this time."

"They discovered it on the morning count, of course," said Han-Meers. "Ordinarily, they'd have just hauled you off to jail, but there's an election coming up. Nathal must be cozy with your Commander Makaroff.'

Trent -looked at the floor.

"The Senator will crucify you in spite of your virus discovery," said Han-Meers. "I'm afraid you've made powerful enemies. Dr. Flores is the brother-in-law of Senator Grapopulus of the Appropriations Committee. They'll bring in Flores Clinic people to claim that the virus carrier could have been discovered without you."

"But they're my dogs! I can . , ."

"Not since the emergency census and quarantine act," said Han-Meers. "You're guilty of sequestering government property." He pointed a finger at Trent. "And these enemies you've made will ..."

I've made! You were the one had to pull the grandstand act with Flores."

"Now, Varley. Let's not quarrel among ourselves." Trent looked at the floor. "Okay. What's done is done."

"I have a little idea," said Han-Meers. "The college survey ship, the Elmendorff, is out at Hartley Field. It has been fueled and fitted for a trip to Sagittarius."

"What does that mean?"

"The ship is well guarded, of course, but a known member of the staff with a forged note from me could get aboard. Could you handle the Elmendorff alone?'

"Certainly. That's the ship we took to Vega on the bio-

physical survey."

"Then run for it. Get that ship into hyper-drive and they'll never catch you."

Trent shook his head. "That would be admitting my

guilt."

"Man, you are guilty! Senator Nathal is going to discover that tomorrow. It'll be big news. But if you run away, that will be bigger news and the senator's screaming will be just so much more background noise.'

"I don't know.'

"People are tired of his noises, Varley."

"I still don't like it."

"Varley, the senator is desperate for vote-getting news. Give him a little more time, a little more desperation, he'll go too far."

"I'm not worried about the senator. I'm worried

"The dogs," said Han-Meers. "And if you escaped to Vega you could give them the benefit of your knowledge of terrestrial biology. You'd have to do it by remote control, of course, but . . . " He left the idea dangling there.

Trent pursed his lips.

"Every minute you waste makes your chances of escape that much slimmer." Han-Meers pushed a pad toward Trent. "Here's my letterhead. Forge your note."

Twenty minutes after Trent's 'copter took off for Hartley Field, a government 'copter settled to the campus parking area. Two men emerged, hurried to Han-Meers' office, presented police credentials. "We're looking for a Dr.

Varley Trent. He's charged with violating the dog-restriction act. He's to be held in custody."

Han-Meers looked properly horrified. "I think he went home. He said something about not feeling well."

Senator Nathal raged. His plump body quivered. His normally red face became redder. He shouted, he screamed. His fuming countenance could be seen nightly on video. Just when he was reaching a fine climax, warning people against unbridled science, he was pushed aside by more important news.

The last dog in an isolation preserve—a brindle chowdied from virus infection. Before the senator could build up steam for a new attack, the government announced the discovery of an Arctic wolf pack of twenty-six animals untouched by virus. A day later, robot searchers turned up a live twelve-year-old mongrel on Easter Island and five cocker spaniels on Tierra del Fuego. Separate preserves for dogs and wolves were prepared on the west slope of the Olympic Mountains, all of the animals transported there.

Wolves, cockers, mongrel and hounds—they were the world's pets. Excursions in sealed 'copters were operated from Aberdeen to a point five kilometers from the dogwolf preserve. There, powerful glasses sometimes gave a glimpse of motion which imagination could pad into a dog or wolf.

About the time Senator Nathal was getting ready to launch a new blast, pointing out that Trent's hounds were not necessarily important, that there had been other canine survivors, the twelve-year-old mongrel died of old age.

Dog lovers of the world mourned. The press took over and all the glory of mongrel Dom was rehashed. Senator Nathal again was background noise.

Trent headed for Vega, hit hyper-drive as soon as he had cleared the sun's area of warp. He knew that the Vegans would have to quarantine him to protect the dogs, but he could follow the experiments on video, help with his knowledge of terrestrial biology.

Professor Han-Meers, protesting ill health, turned his college duties over to an assistant, went on a vacation tour of the world. First, he stopped at the capital, met Senator Nathal, apologized for Dr. Trent's defection and praised the politician's stand.

In Geneva, Han-Meers met a pianist whose pet Dalmatians had been among the first to die in the epidemic. At Cairo, he met a government official who had bred wolf hounds, also among the first deceased. In Paris, he met the wife of a furrier whose pet airdale, *Coco*, had died in the third wave of the epidemic. In Moscow, in Bombay, in Calcutta, in Singapore, in Peking, in San Francisco, in Des Moines, in Chicago, he met others in like circumstances. To all he gave notes of introduction to Senator Nathal, explaining that the senator would see they received special treatment if they wanted to visit the Olympic preserve. Han-Meers expected at least one of these people to become a scandalous nuisance sufficient to insure the senator's political embarrassment.

The wife of the Paris furrier, Mme. Stagier Couloc, paid off, but in a manner Han-Meers had not anticipated.

Mme. Couloc was a slim woman of perhaps forty-five, chic in the timeless French fashion, childless, with a narrow, haughty face and a manner to match it But her grandmother had been a farm wife and underneath the surface of pampered rich woman, Mme. Couloc was tough. She came to Aberdeen complete with two maids, a small Alp of luggage and a note from Senator Nathal. She had convinced herself that all of this *nonsense* about humans carrying the disease couldn't possibly apply to her. A few simple sanitary precautions and she could have a dog of her own.

Mme. Couloc meant to have a part-beagle dog, no matter the cost. The fact that there were no dogs to be had, made her need all the more urgent Cautious inquiries at Aberdeen convinced her this would have to be a lone-handed job. Amidst the tangled psychological desperation which filled her mind, she worked out a plan which had all of the evasive cunning characteristic of the mentally ill.

From the air, on one of the daily excursions, Mme. Couloc surveyed the terrain. It was rugged enough to discourage a less determined person. The area had been maintained in its natural state for seven hundred years. Thick undergrowth of salal, devil club and huckleberry crowded the natural avenues of access to the interior. Rivers were full of the spring snow melt. Ridgetops were tangles of windfalls, wild blackberries in the burns, granite outcroppings. After the rough terrain there was a double fence—each unit sixteen meters high, a kilometer between. Mme. Couloc returned to Aberdeen, left her maids at the hotel, flew to Seattle where she bought tough camping clothes, a rope and grappling hook, a light pack, concentrated food and a compass. A map of the preserve was easy to obtain. They were sold as souvenirs.

Then she went fishing in the Straits of Juan de Fuca, staying at Neah Bay. To the south towered the Olympics, remote snow caps.

For three days it rained; five days Mme. Couloc fished with a guide. On the ninth day she went fishing alone. The next morning, the Federated Coast Guard picked up her overturned boat off Tatoosh Light. By that time she was nineteen kilometers south of Sequim, two kilometers inside the prohibited area which surrounded the fences. She slept all day in a spruce thicket. Moonlight helped her that night, but it took the entire night for her to come within sight of the fence. That day she crouched in a tangle of Oregon grape bushes, saw two tripod-legged robot patrols pass on the other side of the fence. At nightfall she moved forward, waited for a patrol to pass and go out of sight. The grapple and rope took her over the top. The kilometer between fences was cleared of trees and underbrush. She crossed it swiftly, scaled the final barrier.

The robotics patrols had counted too heavily on the forbidding terrain and they had not figured a psychotic woman into their plans.

Two kilometers inside the preserve, Mme. Couloc found a cedar copse in which to hide. Her heart racing, she crouched in the copse, waiting for the dawn in which to find her dog. There were scratches on her face, hands and legs; her clothes were torn. But she was inside!

Several times that night she had to dry her perspiring palms against her khaki hiking trousers. Toward morning, she fell asleep on the cold ground. Bess and Eagle found her there just after dawn.

Mme. Couloc awoke to the scraping of a warm, damp tongue against her cheek. For a moment, she thought it was her dead *Coco*. Then she realized where she was.

And the beautiful dogs!

She threw her arms around Bess, who was as starved for human affection as was Mme. Couloc.

Oh, you beautifuls!

The robotics patrol found them there shortly before noon. The robots were counting dogs with the aid of the tiny transmitters they had imbedded in the flesh of each animal. Mme. Couloc had been waiting for nightfall in which to escape with a dog.

Bess and Eagle ran from the robots. Mme. Couloc screamed and raged as the impersonal mechanicals took her away.

That afternoon, Eagle touched noses with a wolf female through the fence separating their enclosures.

Although the robots put each dog in isolation, they were too late. And nobody thought *to* bother with the wolves in their separate preserve.

In seven weeks the dog-wolf preserves were emptied by Virus D-D. Mme. Couloc was sent to a mental hospital in spite of the pleas of an expensive lawyer. The news services made much of Senator Nathal's note which had been found in her pocket.

Earth officials sent a contrite message to Vega. It was understood, said the message, that one Dr. Varley Trent had given Earth dogs to a Vegan bio-physicist. Were there, by any chance, some dogs still alive?

Back came the Vegan reply: We have no dogs. We do not know the present whereabouts of Dr. Trent.

Trent's ship came out of hyper-drive with Vega large in the screens. The sun's flaming prominences were clearly visible. At eight hundred thousand kilometers, he increased magnification, began scanning for the planet. Instead, he picked up a Vegan guard ship arrowing toward him. The Vegan was only six thousand kilometers off when it launched a torpedo. The proximity explosion cut off Trent's quick leap for the transmitter to give his identity. The ship buckled and rocked. Emergency doors slammed, air hissed, warning lights came on, bells clanged. Trent scrambled to the only lifeboat remaining in his section. The tiny escape craft was still serviceable, although its transmitter was cracked open.

He kept the lifeboat in the shadow of his ship's wreckage as long as he could, then dove for the Vegan planet which loomed at two o'clock on his screen. As soon as his driver tubes came alight, the Vegan sped after him. Trent pushed the little boat to its limit, but the pursuer still gained. They were too close *to* the planet now for

the Vegan to use another torpedo.

The lifeboat screamed into the thin edge of the atmosphere. *Too fast!* The air-cooling unit howled with the overload. A rear surface control flared red, melted, fused. Trent had time to fire the emergency nose rockets, cut in automatic pilot before he blacked out. The ship dived, partly out of control, nose rockets still firing. Relays clicked—*full alarm!*—circuits designed to guard human life in an emergency came alive. Some worked, some had been destroyed.

Somewhere, he could hear running water. It was dark where he was, or perhaps lighted by a faint redness. His eyelids were stuck tightly. He could feel folds of cloth around him. A parachute! The robot controls of the lifeboat had ejected him in the chute-seat as a last resort

Trent tried to move. His muscles refused to obey. He could sense numbness in his hips, a tingling loss of specific perception in his arms.

Then he heard it—the baying of a hound—far and clear. It was a sound he had never again expected to hear. The bugling note was repeated. It reminded him of frosty nights on Earth, following Bess and Eagle and . . .

The baying of a hound!

Panic swept through him. The hound mustn't find him! He was Earth-human, loaded with deadly virus!

Straining at his cheek muscle, Trent managed to open one eye, saw that it was not dark, but a kind of yellow twilight under the folds of the parachute. His eyelids had been clotted with blood.

Now he could hear running feet, a hound's eager sniffing.

Please keep him away from me! he begged.

An edge of the chute stirred. Now there was an eager whining. Something crept toward him under the cloth.

"Go away!" he croaked.

Through the blurred vision of his one eye, Trent saw a brown and white head—very like Eagle's. It bent toward something. With a sick feeling, Trent realized that the *something* was one of his own outstretched, virus-filled hands. He saw a pink tongue come out, lick the hand, but could not feel it. He tried to move and unconsciousness overwhelmed him. One last thought flitted through his mind before the darkness came— "Each man kills the thing he ..."

There was a bed beneath him—soft, sleep-lulling. In one part of his mind he knew a long time had passed. There had been hands, needles, wheeled carts taking him places, liquids in his mouth, tubes in his veins. He opened his eyes. Green walls, glaring white sunshine partially diffused by louvre shutters, a glimpse of blue-green hills outside.

"You are feeling better?" The voice had the peculiar whistling aspiration of the Vegan vocals.

Trent shifted his gaze to the right. Ger! The Vegan stood beside the bed, deceptively Earth-human in appearance. His shutter-nice eye membranes were opened wide, the double crest of feathery hair retracted. He wore a yellow robe belted at the waist.

"How long ..."

The Vegan put a seven-fingered hand on Trent's wrist, felt the pulse. "Yes, you are feeling much better. You have been very ill for almost four of your months."

"Then the dogs are all dead," said Trent, his voice flat "Dead?" Ger's eye membranes flicked closed, opened.

"I killed them," said Trent "My body's loaded with dormant virus."

"No," said the Vegan. "We gave the dogs an extra white blood cell—more predatory. Your puny virus could not survive it."

Trent tried to sit up, but Ger restrained him. "Please, Varley. You are not yet recovered."

"But if the dogs are immune to the virus . . ." He shook his head. "Give me a shipload of dogs and you can name your own price."

"Varley, I did not say dogs are immune. They . . . are . . . not like dogs exactly. We cannot give you a shipload of your animals because we do not have them. They were sacrificed in our work."

Trent stared at him.

"I have unfortunate news, my friend. We have made our planet restricted to humans. You may live out your life here, but you may not communicate with your fellows."

"Is that why your ship fired on me?"

"We thought it was an Earth vessel coming to investigate."

"But ..."

"It is regrettable that yourself must be kept here, Varley, but the pride of our peoples is at stake."

"Pride?"

The Vegan looked at the floor. "We, who have never failed a bio-physical alteration . . ." He shook his head.

"What happened?"

The Vegan's face went blue with embarrassment.

Trent recalled his first awakening on this planet. "When I recovered consciousness I saw a dog. At least I saw its head."

Ger pulled a wicker chair close to the bed, sat down. "Varley, we tried to combine the best elements of our own *progoas* and the Earth dogs."

"Well, wasn't that what you were supposed to do?"

"Yes, but in the process we lost all of the dogs you sent us and the resultant animals ..." He shrugged.

"What are they?"

"They do not have a scaly tail or horned snout. For centuries we have been telling the Universe that sentient pets of the highest quality must show these characteristics of our own *progoas*."

"Aren't the new animals intelligent and loyal? Do they

have as good hearing, sense of smell?"

"If anything, these characteristics have been heightened."

He paused. "You realize, though, that this animal is not truly a dog."

"Not truly a ..."

"It's fully serviceable ..."

Trent swallowed. "Then you can name your own price."
"When we made our first cross, the *mikeses* fertilization process united an open *progoa* cell with a dog cell, but a series of peculiar linkages occurred. They were not what we had come to expect from our readings and from what

you had told us.

Trent took a deep breath, exhaled slowly.

"It was as though the gene pattern of dog characteristics were predatory, tying down tightly even with *progoa* dominants," said Ger. "Each time we repeated the process; the same thing occurred. From our knowledge of terrestrial biology, this should not have been. The blood chemistry of our animals is based on the element you call copper. We have not much iron on our planet, but what few of your type of animals we had proved to us that the copper-basic was dominant in a *mikeses* cross. Of course, without & *mikeses* generator, cells cannot be opened to permit such a cross, but still..."

Trent closed his eyes, opened them. "No one else will ever hear what I am about to tell you . . ." He hesitated.

Vertical lines of thoughtfulness appeared in the Vegan's cheeks. "Yes?"

"When I was here on the survey trip, I copied the diagram of a *mikeses* generator. I was able to build a working model on Earth. With it, I developed a line of hounds." He wet his lips with his tongue. "We have life on Earth

with blood of copper-base chemistry. The common squid of our oceans is one of *them*.?' Ger lowered his chin, continued to stare at Trent. "With the generator, I linked the canine dominants of my dogs with a recessive of squid."

"But they could not breed naturally. They . . ." "Of course not. The hounds I sent you were from a line which had no fathers for six generations. I fertilized them with the generator. They had only the female side, open to the first linkage which presented itself." "Why?"

"Because, from my observations of *progoas*, I knew dogs were superior, but could profit by such a cross. I hoped to make that cross myself."

The Vegan looked at the floor. "Varley, it pains me, but I am faced with the evidence that your claim is true. However, the pride of my world would never permit this to be known. Perhaps the Elders should reconsider."

to be known. Perhaps the Elders should reconsider."
"You know me," said Trent. "You have my word on it."

Ger nodded. "It is as you say, Varley. I know you." He preened a feather crest with three fingers. "And through knowing you, perhaps I have tempered the pride which rules my world." He nodded to himself. "I, too, will remain silent." A subtle Vegan smile flitted across his face, disappeared.

Trent recalled the beagle head he had seen under the parachute when he'd recovered consciousness. "I'd like to see one of these animals."

"That can be . . ." Ger was interrupted by the near baying of a pack of hounds. He stood up, flung open the window louvres, returned to support Trent's head. "Look out there, friend Varley."

On the blue-green Vegan plain, Trent could see a pack of hounds coursing in pursuit of a herd of runaway *ichikas*. The hounds had the familiar beagle head, brown and white fur. All had six legs.