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REBELS OF THE RED PLANET

CHARLES L. FONTENAY



First Book Publication

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CHARLES L. FONTENAY writes: "I was born in Brazil of a father who was by birth English and by parentage German and French, and of a mother who was by birth American and by parentage American and Scottish. This mess of internationalism caused me some trouble in the army during World War II as the government couldn't decide whether I was American, British, or Brazilian; and both as an enlisted man and an officer I dealt in secret work which required citizenship by birth. On three occasions I had to dig into the lawbooks. Finally they gave up and admitted I was an American citizen . . .

"I was raised on a West Tennessee farm and distinguished myself in school principally by being the youngest, smallest (and consequently the fastest-running) child in my classes . . . Newspaper work has been my career since 1936. I have worked for three newspapers, including *The Nashville Tennessean* for which I am now rewrite man, and before the war for the Associated Press."

Mr. Fontenay is married, lives in Madison, Tenn., and has had one other novel published by Ace Books.

REBELS OF THE RED PLANET

by

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ACE BOOKS, INC.

23 West 47th Street, New York 36, N.Y.

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Charles L. Fontenay has also written:

TWICE UPON A TIME (D-266)

200 YEARS TO CHRISTMAS

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Printed in U.S.A.

IT is a sea, though they call it sand.

They call it sand because it is still and red and dense with grains. They call it sand because the thin wind whips it, and whirls its dusty skim away to the tight horizons of Mars.

But only a sea could so brood with the memory of aeons. Only a sea, lying so silent beneath the high skies, could hint the mystery of life still behind its barren veil.

To practical, rational man, it is the Xanthe Desert. Whatever else he might unwittingly be, S. Nuwell Eli considered himself a practical, rational man, and it was across the bumpy sands of the Xanthe Desert that he guided his groundcar westward with that somewhat cautious proficiency that mistrusts its own mastery of the machine. Maya Cara Nome, his colleague in this mission to which he had addressed himself, was a silent companion.

Nuwell's liquid brown eyes, insistent upon their visual clarity, saw the red sand as the blowing surface of unliving solidity. Only clarity was admitted to Nuwell, and the only living clarity was man and beast and vegetation, spotted in the dome cities and dome farms of the lowlands. He and Maya scurried, transiting sparks of the only life, insecure and hastening in the absence of the net of roads which eventually would bind the Martian surface to human reality from the footholds of the dome cities.

In that opposite world which was the other side of the groundcar's seat, Maya Cara Nome's opaque black eyes struggled against the surface. They struggled not from any rational motivation but from long stubbornness, from habit, as a fly kicks six-legged and constant against the surface tension of a trapping pool.

Formally, Maya was allied to Newell's clarity and solidity, and she could express this alliance with complete logic if called on. But behind the casually blowing sand she sensed a depth. The shimmering atmosphere, hostile to man, which sealed the red desert was a lens that distorted and con-

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cealed by its intervention. The groundcar was a mechanical bug, an alienness with which timorous man had allied himself; allied with it against reality, she and Nuwell were hastened by it through reality, unseeing, toward the goal of a more comfortable unreality.

The groundcar bumped and slithered, and an orange dust-cloud boiled up from its broad tires and wafted away across the sculpted sand. The desert stretched away, silent and empty, to the distant horizon; the groundcar the only humming disturbance of its silence and emptiness. The steel-blue sky shimmered above, a lens capping the red surface.

The groundcar rolled westward, slashing toward its goal from the distant lowland of Solis Lacus. Far away, two men, machineless, plodded this same Xanthe Desert toward the same goal; but they plodded southward, approaching on a different radius.

They were naked. In a thin atmosphere without sufficient oxygen to support animal life or even the higher forms of terrestrial plant life, they wore no marsuits, no helmets, no oxygen tanks.

The man who walked in front was tall, erect, powerfully muscled. His features and short-clipped hair were coarse, but self-assured intelligence shone in his smoky eyes. He moved across the loose sand, barefoot, with easy grace.

The—man?—that shambled behind him was as tall, but appeared shorter and even more muscular because his shoulders and head were hunched forward. His even coarser face was characterized by vacuously slack mouth and blue eyes empty of any expression except an occasional brief frown of puzzlement.

Toward a focal point: from the east, two people; from the north, two people. If in the efficient self-assurance of Adam Hennessey could be paralleled a variant harmony with the insistent surfaceness of S. Nuwell Eli, does any coincidental parallelism exist between Brute Hennessey and Maya Cara Nome?

Puzzlement was the climate of Brute's mind. This surface film of things through which he ploughed his way, the

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swarming currents below the surface—all were chaos. He grasped vaguely at comprehension without achieving, the effective coalescence of electric ideas always falling short before reaching consciousness.

The two men plodded, naked, through the loose sand. Above them in the Mars-blue dome of day, the weak sun turned downward, warning of its eventual departure.

A two-passengered groundcar and two men, widely apart, and yet bound for the same destination. . . .

The destination was a lone, sprawling building in the desert. It could have been a huge warehouse, or a fortress, of black, almost windowless Martian stone. The only outstanding feature of its virtually featureless hulk was a tower which struck upward from its northern side.

As the summer afternoon progressed, Dr. G. O. T. Hennessey paced the windy summit of the tower, peered frequently into the desert north beneath a sunshading hand, and wagged his goat beard in annoyance under his transparent marshelmet.

Had the helmet speaker been on or the air less thin, one might have determined that Goat Hennessey was utilizing some choice profanity, directed at those two absent personages whose names were, respectively, Adam and Brute.

The airlock to the tower elevator opened and a small creature—a child?—emerged onto the roof. Distorted, hump-backed and barrel-chested, it scuttled on reed-thin legs to Goat's side. It wore no marsuit.

"Father!" screeched this apparition, its thin voice curiously muffled by the tenuous air. "Petway fell in the laundry vat!"

"For the love of space!" muttered Goat in exasperation. "Is there water in it?"

When the newcomer gave no sign of hearing, Goat realized his helmet speaker was off. He switched it on.

"Is there water in the vat?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir. It's full of suds and clothes."

"Well, go fish him out before he soaks up all the water. The soap will make him sick."

The messenger turned, almost tripping over its own broad

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feet, and went back through the airlock. Goat returned to his northward vigil.

Miles away, Nuwell slowed the groundcar as it approached the lip of that precipitous slope bordering the short canal which connects Juventae Fons with the Arorae Sinus Lowland. He consulted a rough chart, and turned the groundcar southward. A drive of about a kilometer brought them to a wide descending ledge down which they were able to drive into the canal.

Here, on the flat lowland surface, the canal sage grew thick, a gray-green expanse stretching unbroken to the distant cliff that was the other side of the canal. Occasionally above its smoothness thrust the giant barrel of a canal cactus.

Nuwell headed the groundcar straight across the canal, for the chart showed that the nearest upward ledge on the other side was conveniently almost opposite. The big wheels bent and crushed the canal sage, leaving a double trail.

The canal sage brought with it the comforting feeling of surface life once more. This feeling, for no reason that he could have determined consciously, released Nuwell's tongue.

"Maya," he said, in a voice that betrayed determination behind its mildness, "I don't see any real reason for waiting. When we've cleared up this matter at Ultra Vires and get back to Mars City, I think we should get married."

She glanced at his handsome profile and smiled affectionately.

"I'm complimented by your impatience, Nuwell," she said. "But there is a good reason for waiting, for me. When we're married, I want to be your wife, completely. I want to keep your home and mother your children. Don't you understand that?"

"That's what I want, too," he said. "That's my idea of what marriage is. But, Maya, if you insist on finishing this government assignment, that could be a long time off."

"I know, and I don't like it any better than you do, darling," said Maya. "But it's cost the Earth government a great deal of trouble and money to send me here, and you know how long it would take for them to get a replacement to Mars for

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me. I don't feel that I can let them down, and I don't think it would be much of a beginning to our marriage for me to be running around ferreting out rebels during the first months of it."

"That's another thing I don't like, Maya," said Nuwell. "It's dangerous, and I don't want anything to happen to you."

"It's your work, too, and it's not absolutely safe for you, either. I'll be sharing it with you when we're married, and for you it will go on for a long time. I have a specific mission here, to locate the rebel headquarters, and as soon as I've done that I'll be more than happy to become just a contented housewife and leave the rest of it to you."

Nuwell shrugged, a little disconsolately, and turned his attention to the task of negotiating the groundcar up the ascending slope.

She was a strange creature, this little Maya of his. She had been born on Mars and, orphaned by some unknown disaster, had been cared for during her first years by the mysterious, grotesque native Martians. When they took her at last to one of the dome cities, she was sent to Earth for rearing. And now she was back on Mars as an undercover agent of the Earth government, seeking to ferret out the rebels known to be engaging in widespread forbidden activities.

Often he did not understand her, but he wanted her, nevertheless.

Nuwell steered the groundcar slowly up the slope, over rubble and ruts, avoiding the largest rocks. At last they reached the top, and the groundcar arrowed out over the desert again, picking up speed.

Far to the left and ahead of them there was another dust-cloud drifting up, one that was not of the thin wind, but nearly stationary. Nuwell found the binoculars in the storage compartment and handed them to Maya.

"What's that over there?" he wondered. "Another groundcar? Take a look, Maya."

Maya trained the glasses in the direction indicated, through the groundcar's transparent dome. It was difficult to get

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them focused, for the groundcar swayed and jolted, but at last she was able to make brief identification.

"They're Martians, Nuwell," she said. "Can we drive over that way?"

"You've seen Martians before," he said.

"But I'd like to speak with them," she said. "I talk their language, you know."

"Yes, I do know, darling, but that's utterly foolish. They're only animals, after all, and we have to get to Ultra Vires before night, if we can."

He kept the groundcar on its course.

Maya lapsed into disgruntled silence. Nuwell stole a side-long glance at her, his breath catching slightly at the curve of the petite, perfectly feminine form beneath the loose Martian tunic and baggy trousers. He reached over and patted her hand.

But Maya was offended. She kept her black head turned away from him, looking out of the groundcar dome across the desert.

At their destination, Goat Hennessey peered eagerly into the distance, searching.

This time, his watery blue eyes picked up two tiny figures on the horizon. He watched them as they approached, finally detailing themselves into two naked, pink creatures of manshape and only slightly more than mansize.

"They made it," he muttered. "Both of them. Good!"

He turned and entered the airlock. As soon as its air reached terrestrial density and composition, he removed his marshelmet.

Goat rode the elevator to the ground level, left it and hurried down a corridor, reaching the outside airlock in time to admit the two figures.

Adam entered first, easily confident, carrying his head like a king. Brute shambled behind him.

"Everything go all right?" asked Goat, his voice quavering in his anxiety.

"Fine, father," said Adam, smiling to reveal savage, even teeth.

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"Nothing unusual happen?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"You forget, Adam?" mouthed Brute eagerly. "You forget you fall?"

Adam spun on him ferociously, raising a heavy hand in threat. Brute did not cringe.

"I forget nothing!" snarled Adam. "You crazy Brute, I say it is nothing!"

"But, Adam—"

"I say it is nothing!" howled Adam and sprang for him.

"Stop it!" snapped Goat, like the crack of a whip, and they froze in the moment of their grappling. Sheepishly, they parted and stood side by side before him.

"I'll listen to details after supper," said Goat. "The children are hungry, and so am I."

2

ADAM and Brute followed Goat Hennessey down the corridor, towering over him like Saint Bernards on the heels of a terrier. They turned into the dining room, a big square room centered with a rude table and chairs, one wall pierced by a fireplace in which a big cauldron steamed over smouldering coals.

The dining room swarmed with a dozen small creatures, human in their pink flesh, more or less human in their twisted bodies. As soon as Goat entered with Adam and Brute in tow, the assemblage set up a high-pitched howling and twittering of anticipation and began beating utensils on the dishes, table and walls.

"Quiet!" squawked Goat over the tremendous clatter, and the noise subsided. They stood where they were, bright eyes fixed on him.

These were "the children." Some of them were hump-backed, like Evan, the one who had carried the message to the tower. Some, like Evan, were grotesquely barrel-chested, with or without the hump. Some were as thin as skeletons,

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with huge heads; some were hulking miniatures of Brute. One steatopygean girl was so bulky in legs and hindquarters that she could waddle only a few inches with each step, yet her head and upper torso were skinny and fragile.

Goat sat down at the head of the table, and immediately there was a tumbling rush for places. Most of the children sat, chattering, while two of the larger girls moved around the table, taking bowls to the cauldron, filling them with a brownish stew and returning them.

They ate in silence. When supper was ended, the children scattered, some to play, others to chores. Goat beckoned to Adam and Brute to follow him. He led them down the corridor and into his study.

Goat turned on the light, revealing a book-lined, paper-stacked room focused on a huge desk. He removed his mar-suit to stand in baggy trousers and loose tunic. Adam and Brute stood near the door, shifting uncomfortably, for the study was normally forbidden ground.

Goat stood by a thick double window, looking out over the desert to the west. The small sun disappeared beneath the horizon even as he looked, leaving the fast-darkening sky a dull, faint red. Almost as though released by the sunset, pale Phobos popped above the horizon and began to climb its eastward way. The desert already was dark, but a stirring above it bespoke a distant sandstorm.

Goat turned from the window and faced the pair.

"Well," he snapped harshly, "what happened?"

Adam smiled confidently.

"We did as you said, father," he answered. "We walked to the edge of the canal, and we walked back. We had no water and we had no air. We did not feel tired. We did not feel sick."

"Fine! Fine!" murmured Goat.

"Father . . ." said Brute.

Goat turned his eyes to Brute, and savage irritation swept over him. With that word, at that moment, Brute gave him a feeling of guilty foreboding.

"Don't call me 'father!'" snapped Goat angrily.

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"But you say call you father," protested Brute, the puzzled frown wrinkling his brow. "What I call you if I not call you father?"

"Don't call me anything. Say 'sir.' What did you want to say?"

"Father, sir," began Brute again, "Adam forget. Adam fall."

With a muted roar, Adam swept his powerful arm in a backhanded arc that caught Brute full on the side of his head. The blow would have felled an ox, but Brute was not shaken. Apparently unhurt, he stood patiently, his blue eyes on Goat with something of pleading in them.

"Adam, let him alone!" commanded Goat sharply. "Brute, what do you mean, Adam fell?"

"We come back. We not far from canal. Adam fall. Adam sick. Adam turn blue."

"It is lies, father!" exclaimed Adam, glaring at Brute. "It is not true."

"Let him finish," instructed Goat. "I'll decide whether it's true. What did you do, Brute?"

"I find cactus, father," answered Brute. "I make hole in cactus. I put Adam inside. I put hole back. Adam stay in cactus. Then Adam break cactus and come out again. We come back."

Goat cogitated. If Adam had shown symptoms of oxygen starvation . . . The big canal cacti were hollow, and in their interiors they maintained reserves of oxygen for their own use. More than once, such a cactus had saved a Martian traveler's life when his oxygen supply ran short.

He turned to Adam.

"Well, Adam?" he asked.

"I tell you, father, it is lies! I do not fall. Brute does not put me in the cactus."

"And why should he lie?" asked Goat blandly.

This stumped Adam for a minute. Then he brightened.

"Brute wants to be bigger and stronger than Adam," he said. "Brute knows Adam is bigger and stronger than Brute. Brute does not like this. He tells you lies so you will think Brute is bigger and stronger than Adam."

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"I know you are bigger brother, Adam," objected Brute, almost plaintively. "I not try to be bigger. Why you say you do not fall?"

"I do not fall!" howled Adam. "I do not fall, you stupid Brute!"

Goat held up a stern hand, enforcing silence.

"I can't certainly settle this disagreement, but I'd be inclined to accept what Brute says," said Goat thoughtfully. "You're smart enough to lie, Adam. Brute isn't. The only thing I can do is to run the experiment over. You shall go out again tomorrow, and this time I'll go with you."

"You'll see, father," said Adam confidently. "Adam will not fall."

"Perhaps not. But I must be sure. As much as I prefer your more human characteristics, Adam, it's entirely possible that Brute has some survival qualities that you lack."

"Is true, father," said Brute eagerly. "Some things kill Adam, they not kill Brute."

"You lie!" cried Adam again, turning on him. "Why do you lie, Brute?"

"No lie," insisted Brute. "You know, is true."

"Lie! Lie!" shouted Adam. "Adam is bigger and stronger! What do you say can kill Adam that does not kill Brute?"

"This," replied Brute calmly.

With an unhurried lunge, he picked up a heavy knife from Goat's desk. In a single easy movement, he turned and slashed Adam's throat neatly.

Choking and gurgling, Adam sank to his knees, bright blood spouting from his neck, while Goat stood frozen in horror. Adam fell prone, he kicked and threshed convulsively like a beheaded chicken, then twitched and lay still in a spreading pool of blood.

Brute calmly wiped the knife on his naked thigh and laid it back on the desk.

"Adam dead," he said without emotion. "Brute not lie."

Dismayed fury erupted through Goat's veins and a red haze swept over his eyes.

"You idiot!" he squawked. "So that won't kill you?"

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Goaded beyond endurance, Goat seized the knife and swung it as hard as he could against Brute's neck. It thunked like an ax biting into a tree trunk, biting halfway through the flesh. Brute recoiled at the impact, tearing the handle from Goat's feeble hands and leaving the knife blade stuck in his throat.

Brute staggered momentarily. Then he reached up and jerked the knife away. Blood spurted through his severed throat. Brute clapped a hand to the wound, tightly.

For a moment, blood oozed through his fingers. Then, pale but steady, Brute dropped his hand.

The wound had closed! Its edges already were sealed, leaving a raw, red scar that no longer bled.

"Brute not lie," said Brute, the words forced out with some difficulty. "It not kill Brute."

Stunned by astonishment and disbelief, Goat stared at him, his mouth moving soundlessly.

"Go away," he whispered hoarsely at last. "Go out of here, monster!"

Obediently, Brute shambled out of the study. As he passed through the door, Goat regained his voice and called after him:

"Tell the children to come and take away Adam's body."

Kilometers away, Maya Cara Nome and S. Nuwell Eli rode a groundcar that moved swiftly across the interminable waves of the red sand. It swayed through hollows and jounced over multiple ridges, Nuwell steering it with some difficulty. In the steely sky, the small sun moved downward, its brightness unimpaired by the occasional thin clouds which moved before it.

The sun touched the western horizon, seemed to hesitate, dropped with breathtaking suddenness, and the stars immediately began to appear in the deepening twilight sky.

They stopped and had a compact meal, heated in the groundcar's short-wave cooker. Then Nuwell switched on the headlights and they went on again.

Soon afterward, a faint spot of light appeared in the

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desert far ahead of them. As they approached it, it became a yellow-lighted window in a huge black mass rearing up against the night sky. They had reached Ultra Vires.

Nuwell announced their arrival over the groundcar radio and swung the groundcar up beside the building's main entrance. He sealed the groundcar's door to the building airlock so they would not have to don marsuits.

After a few moments, the airlock opened. They passed through it and were greeted by a skinny, shriveled little man with watery blue eyes and a goatee.

"I was expecting you, but not tonight," said this person, rather sourly. "Well, come on in and I'll have the children fix you something to eat if you haven't eaten."

"I'm S. Nuwell Eli," said Nuwell, holding out a hand which the other ignored. "This is the terrestrial agent, Miss Maya Cara Nome. You are Dr. Hennessey, I assume."

"That's right," said Goat. "Do you want supper?"

"No, thank you, we ate on the way," said Nuwell. "I'd like to get started with the inspection as soon as possible."

"Inspection or investigation?" suggested Goat, sniffing. "Well, no matter. I have nothing to hide."

He led them down a dim, dusty corridor, stretching deep into the dark bowels of the building, and turned aside into a paper-stacked room which evidently was his study. He went straight to a big desk, sat down, swivelled his chair around and waved them to seats. Nuwell shuffled a little uncomfortably, then sank into a chair, but Maya remained standing by the door, her small traveling bag in her hand, indignation rising in her.

"Before you settle down to charts and questions, Dr. Hennessey, do you mind showing us to our rooms so we may wash away some of the travel dust?" she asked icily, black eyes snapping.

At this, Goat jumped to his feet, sincere contrition in his face wiping out all traces of his irritated gruffness.

"I'm very sorry!" he exclaimed. "I hope you will forgive my manners, but I've lived and worked here alone in the desert so long that I had forgotten the niceties of civilization."

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This apology cleared the air. Goat showed them their overnight quarters, adjoining rooms which were not luxurious but were reasonably comfortable, and after a time the three of them congregated once more in Goat's study, all of them in better humor.

"Let us have some wine first," suggested Goat. "This is very good red wine, imported from Earth."

He went to the door and shouted into the corridor.

"Petway!"

Goat returned to his chair. A few moments later, a twittering noise sounded in the corridor, then a horrible little apparition appeared in the door. It was a child-sized creature, naked, grotesquely barrel-chested and teetering on thin, twisted legs. Its hairless head was skull-like, with gaping mouth and huge, round eyes.

Maya gasped, profoundly shocked. The little creature looked more like a miniature Martian native than a human, but the Martians themselves were not so distorted. She saw her own shock reflected in Nuwell's face.

"Petway, get us three glasses of wine," commanded Goat calmly.

Petway vanished and Goat turned briskly back to his guests.

"Now," he said, "I shall outline the progress of my experiments to you and answer any questions you may have."

3

MAYA'S education was extensive, but it did not include the genetic sciences. She was able to follow Goat's explanations and his references to the charts he hung, one after another, on the wall of his study, but she was able to follow them only in a general sense. The technical details escaped her.

Nuwell seemed to have a better grasp of the subject. He nodded his dark, curly head frequently, and occasionally asked a question or two.

"Surgery is performed with a concentrated electron stream on the cells of the early embryo," said Goat. "I call it surgery,

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but actually it is an alteration of the structure of certain specific genes which govern the characteristics I am attempting to change. Such changes would, of course, then be transmitted on down to any progeny.

"The earlier the embryo is caught, the easier and surer the surgery, because when it has divided into too many cells the very task of dealing with each one separately makes the time requirement prohibitive, besides multiplying the chance for error. The Martians have a method of altering the physical structure and genetic composition of a full-grown adult, but this is far beyond the stage I've reached."

"The Martians?" repeated Nuwell in astonishment. "You mean the Martian natives? They're nothing but degenerated animals!"

"You're wrong," replied Goat. "I know that's the general opinion, but I had considerable contact with them a good many years ago. Perhaps most of them are little more than strange animals. No one really knows. They live simple, animal-like lives, holed up in desert caves, and they're rarely communicative in any way. But I know from my own experience that some of them, at least, are still familiar with that ancient science that they must have possessed when Earth was in an earlier stage of life than the human."

"This . . . child . . . that brought us the wine is one of the products of your experiments?" asked Nuwell.

"Yes. Petway's pretty representative of the children, I'm afraid. I've been trying to determine what went wrong. It could be an inaccuracy in dealing with the genetic structure itself, or a failure to follow exactly the same pattern of change in moving from one cell to another in the embryo. If I could only catch one at the single cell stage!

"None of the children has turned out as well as my first two experiments, Brute and Adam. Both of them were born about twenty-five years ago—terrestrial years, that is—and developed into normal, even superior physical specimens. Unfortunately, their mental development was retarded. Adam was the brighter of the two, and Brute killed him tonight, shortly before your arrival."

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Maya shivered.

"Somehow, it seems horrible to me, experimenting with human lives this way," she said.

"It's being done for a good cause, Maya," said Nuwell. "Dr. Hennessey's objective is to help man live better on Mars. After all, there is nothing nobler than the individual's sacrifice of himself for his fellows, whether it's voluntary or involuntary."

"But what about the mothers of these children?" asked Maya.

"The big problem is to reach them as soon as possible after conception," said Goat, misinterpreting her question. "We do this by magnetic detectors, which report instantly the conjunction of the positive and negative. The surgery is performed, as quickly as possible, utilizing the suspended animation technique which is being developed toward interstellar travel."

"I wasn't asking about the technical aspects," said Maya. "What I want to know is, what sort of mothers will permit you to experiment this way on their unborn children, especially seeing the results you've already obtained?"

Goat started to answer, but Nuwell forestalled him.

"There are some things that are none of your business, darling," he said. "The terrestrial government sent you here on a specific assignment, and I don't think you should inquire into matters which are classified as secret by the local government, which don't have anything to do with that assignment. Now, Dr. Hennessey, just what sort of survival qualities have you been able to develop in these experiments?"

"There's no witchcraft involved," retorted Goat, with a sardonic grimace.

"I haven't accused you," said Nuwell quickly.

"No, but I keep up with events, even out here, well enough to know that you're the Mars City government's chief nemesis where there's any suspicion of extrasensory perception. I doubt that you chose to make this trip yourself without reason, Mr. Eli."

"It's merely a routine inspection," murmured Nuwell.

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Goat indicated one of his charts, showing a diagram of genes and chromosomes in different colors.

"This is my original chart," he said. "I copied it from one belonging to the Martians many years ago, and my genetic alteration of Brute and Adam were based on it. But I must have miscopied it, or else the Martians didn't have the objective I thought they did in it, because I could find no alteration of genes affecting lung capacity or oxygen utilization. My own subsequent charts, on which later experiments were based, are alterations of this."

"But just what is your objective, and how well have you succeeded?" persisted Nuwell.

"Ability to survive under Martian conditions."

"I know. This is stated in all previous inspection reports. I want something more specific."

"Why, ability to survive in an almost oxygen-free atmosphere, of course. As well as can be determined, the Martians do this by deriving oxygen from surface solids and storing it in their humps under compression, very much like an oxygen tank.

"I've succeeded to some degree with my children. All of them can go an hour or two without breathing. What I don't understand is that no capacities like that were included in the genetic changes on Adam and Brute, and yet they've gradually developed an ability to do much better. Both of them were out on the desert the entire day today without oxygen."

Nuwell was silent for a moment, tapping the tips of his fingers together, apparently in deep thought. Then he said:

"Maya, I think we've reached the point where you had better retire to your room and let us to talk privately. You can question Dr. Hennessey in the morning about any attempts the rebels may have made to contact him."

Maya obeyed silently, rather glad to get away and think things over alone. When she had come to Mars as an agent of the Earth government, it had not occurred to her that there would be areas of information from which the local government would bar her. She recognized that such a pro-

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hibition was perfectly valid, but she was a little offended, nevertheless.

Her room was a spacious one on the ground level, and boasted one of Ultra Vires' few large windows. Maya unpacked her bag, and gratefully stripped off her boots and socks, her tunic and baggy trousers. In underpants, she went into the small bathroom, washed cosmetics from her face and brushed down her thick, short hair.

Donning her light sleeping garment, she sat down on the edge of her bed. She was very tired from the long drive and, almost without thinking, she did not get up to turn out the light. She thought at it.

The switch clicked and the light went out.

She felt foolish and a little frightened. She had never told Nuwell of this sort of thing. Can a woman ask her witch-hunting lover: "Do you think I'm a witch?"

With almost total recall, as though she heard it spoken, she remembered the summation speech Nuwell had made the first time she had seen him in action. He was prosecuting a man charged with conducting experiments similar to the historic and outlawed Rhine experiments of Earth.

"Gentlemen, we sit here in a public building and conduct certain necessary human affairs in a dignified and orderly manner. We follow a way of life we brought with us from distant Earth. Apparently, we are as safe here as we would be on Earth.

"I say 'apparently.' Sometimes we forget the thin barriers here that protect us against disaster, against extermination. A rent in this city's dome, a failure in our oxygen machinery, a clogging of our pumping system by the ever-present sand, and most of us would die before help could reach us from our nearest neighbors.

"We live here under certain restrictions that many of us do not like. Certainly, no one likes to be unable to step out under the open sky without wearing a bulky marsuit and an oxygen tank. Certainly, no one likes to be rationed on water and meat throughout the foreseeable future.

"But what we have to remember is that absolute discipline

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has always been a requirement for those courageous souls in the vanguard of human progress.

"Witchcraft—the practice of extrasensory perception, if you prefer the term—is forbidden on Mars because to practice it one must differ from his fellow men when the inexorable dangers of our frontier demand that we work together. To practice it, one must devote time and mental effort to untried things when our thin margin of safety makes concentrated and combined effort necessary for survival. That is why witchcraft is forbidden on Mars.

"Let those who yet cling to the wistful liberalism of Earth label us conformists if they will. I say to you that until Mars is won for humanity, we cannot afford the luxury of non-conformity.

"Gentlemen, I give you the prosecution's case."

Maya stared out the window. This whole side of Ultra Vires was dark, except for a rectangle of light cast from a window a little distance away—the window of Goat Hennessey's study. In this rectangle, the red sand of the desert lay clear and stark.

Near the end of the rectangle lay an indistinct, crumpled, oblong figure. Puzzled, Maya studied it. It looked like a body to her.

In the study, Nuwell gazed at the skinny doctor with angry brown eyes.

"The bulletins sent to you, as well as other researchers, gave specific instructions that research was to be directed toward human utilization of certain foods now being developed," accused Nuwell.

"I thought this was more important," replied Goat.

"You thought! You're not on Earth, where scientists can get government grants and go jaunting off on wild research projects of their own."

"I still think this is more important," said Goat stubbornly. "I know that all of us are expected to co-operate and stick to tried and accepted lines so we won't be wasting time and material. Perhaps I was wrong in not doing that initially.

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But now I've proved that this line of research can be followed profitably, so its continuance now can't be looked on as a waste of time."

"Scientists should leave political direction to more experienced men," said Nuwell in an exasperated tone. "This is not merely a matter of time waste, or nonconformity. The Mars Corporation operates our sole supply line to Earth, Dr. Hennessey, and that supply line brings to man on Mars all the many things he needs to live here. The Earth-Mars run is an expensive operation, and it's important that it remain economically feasible for Marscorp to operate it.

"No matter how altruistic you may be about it, you get man to the point that he doesn't depend on atmospheric oxygen here, and domes, pressurized houses and groundcars, oxygen equipment—a great many things are going to be unnecessary. But there'll still be a lot of other things we'll have to have from Earth. Don't you realize what a disaster it would be if Marscorp decided to drop the only spaceship line to Earth because its cargo fell off to the point that it was economically unsound?"

Goat looked at him with shrewd blue eyes.

"I think I can jump to a conclusion," he remarked mildly. "Marscorp has some sort of control over the 'foods' you're trying to make practical for human consumption in the approved experiments, doesn't it?"

"Well, yes. Marscorp wants to make man gradually self-sufficient on Mars, and I think it's legitimate that Marscorp derive some economic benefits from its efforts in that direction."

"I've wondered for some time just how close Marscorp and the government were tied together," said Goat dryly. "Obviously, if I don't do as you say, my supplies here will be cut off. So I have no choice but to discontinue this work and turn my attention to the approved line."

"That isn't quite adequate now," said Nuwell. "You're going to have to leave here and come to Mars City where you can do your research under supervision. Your experimental humans here will be destroyed, of course."

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"Destroyed?" There was an agonized note to Goat's voice. "All of them? How about the two mothers I have who haven't given birth yet?"

"You'd destroy them anyhow, as you have the others, not long after the births. And that brings up another thing. When you get to Mars City, watch your tongue. You almost revealed to Miss Cara Nome that the government has been kidnapping an expectant mother now and then for your experiments."

"Years of work, gone to waste," mourned Goat somberly. "When must I do this?"

"As soon as possible. You'll be expected in Mars City within two weeks. Now, I'd like to see these experimental humans."

A few moments later, they made their way together through a large dormitory in which all of Goat's charges were sleeping. Nuwell shuddered at the sight of the small, deformed bodies.

"I don't worry that you could ever take any of these to Mars City undetected. But" he said, pointing to Brute, "that one looks too near normal. I want to see him destroyed before I leave."

"Brute? But he's the most successful one I have left!"

"Exactly. That's why I want to see him destroyed, tonight."

Goat awoke Brute, and the monster man sleepily followed them back to the study.

Goat picked up the huge knife, still stained with Adam's blood, and looked Brute squarely in the face. Brute returned the gaze, no comprehension in his dull blue eyes.

"You think I can't kill you, Brute?" said Goat coldly. "I'll show you!"

With a surgeon's precision, Goat plunged the sharp point between Brute's ribs and into the heart.

Shock swept over Brute's mind.

Father kills me!

Reject! Reject!

Father, all kindness, all hope, all wisdom and love, wants me no more. Father rejects me! Father kills me!

Despair!

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Reject! Reject!

Blackness swept fading through Brute's despairing brain.

One agonized note of pleading in the pale-blue eyes, and they closed in acceptance. Brute swayed and fell forward, crashing to the floor, driving the knife into his chest to the hilt.

Brute shuddered and rolled over on his back. He lay sprawled, arms flung out limply, the knife hilt protruding upward. He sighed, and his breathing stopped.

Goat stared down at him. He picked up Brute's wrist and held it. There was no pulse.

Shortly after dawn, Maya awoke. Remembering what she had seen dimly the night before, she went curiously to the window.

There were two of them now. They were bodies, human bodies, naked and unquestionably dead. In the night, the dry, vampirish Martian air had dessicated them. They were skeletons, parchment skin stretched tightly over the lifeless bones.

Even as she stood and looked, a group of figures appeared on the horizon and came slowly nearer. They were Martians—monstrous creatures, huge-chested, humpbacked, with tremendously long, thin legs and arms, their big-eyed, big-eared heads mere excrescences in front of their humps.

Trailing slowly through the desert toward Aurorae Sinus, they passed near the skeleton bodies. One of the Martians saw them. He boomed excitedly at the others, loudly enough for Maya to hear through the double window.

The Martians stopped and gathered around the bodies.

What, she wondered, could interest them in two corpses? There was no guessing. Martian motives and thought processes were alien and incomprehensible, even to one who had lived among them and communicated with them as a child.

One of the Martians picked up one of the corpses, and the whole group moved away toward the lowland, the Martian carrying the body easily with one long-fingered hand. Wisps

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of sandy dust trailed them as they dwindled and slowly vanished.

The second body lay where they had left it. A gaping wound in its throat seemed to mock her.

4

FANCHER LADDIGAN made his way down a long dim corridor in the rear portion of the Childress Barber College, in Mars City's eastern quarter. He stopped and hesitated, with some trepidation, before an unmarked door near the end of the corridor.

Completely bald, bespectacled and well up in years, Fancher looked like a clerk and he had the instincts of a clerk. Yet he utilized that appearance and those instincts in a perilous cause.

Fancher knocked timidly on the door. On receiving an indistinct invitation from inside, he pushed it open and entered.

Fancher had a tendency to shiver every time he had occasion to see the Chief, whose real name was unknown to Fancher and to most others here at the barber college.

Small as a child in body, wagging a thin-haired head larger than lifesize, the Chief surveyed Fancher with icy green eyes. The eyes were large and round as a child's, but there was nothing childlike about their expression. As though to deny his physical smallness, he smoked one of the fragrant, foot-long cigars produced only in the Hadriacum Lowlands.

"Sit down," commanded the Chief in a high, piping voice.

Fancher swallowed and sat, facing his superior across the big desk. The Chief opened a drawer, took out another of the long cigars, and handed it to Fancher. Fancher did not like cigars, but he had never dared say so to the Chief. He lit it gingerly, coughed at his first inhalation, and smoked at it dutifully and unhappily.

"You recognized this man certainly as Dark Kensington?" asked the Chief.

"Well . . ." Fancher began, and started coughing again.

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The Chief fixed him with an unwinking green stare. When the coughing spell ended, Fancher sat silent, his eyes stinging with tears, fumbling at what he wanted to say.

"You knew Dark Kensington before his disappearance twenty-five years ago," said the Chief, with a trace of impatience in his tone. "I am told that you saw this man and talked to him. You are qualified to recognize Dark Kensington. Is this man Dark Kensington, or not?"

"Well," said Fancher again, "the man was walking alone across the desert, and when someone picked him up he asked how he could find the Childress Barber College, and of course our men heard of it and went out to—"

"I have received a full report on the man's appearance and our initial contact with him. I asked you a question."

"Well, Chief, it's a peculiar thing. If this man, as he is now, had reappeared twenty-five years ago, I'd *know* it was Dark Kensington. But he looks exactly as Dark did when he disappeared, not one day older. And he doesn't remember a thing beyond his disappearance except events of the past two weeks, he says.

"Yet his memories of Dark's activities before his disappearance are unquestionably accurate and clear. It's as though Dark had been put on ice at the time of his disappearance and just now thawed out, without any aging or memory during the interim."

"Perhaps he was," said the Chief dryly. "But is it possible that this man, looking so much like Dark Kensington, could have studied Kensington's personality and activities carefully and be posing as Kensington?"

"No, sir," said Fancher promptly. "Dark and I were very close friends at one time. He remembers that, although he had difficulty recognizing me since I'm so much older. We went through some experiences together that I never told to anyone, and I'm sure he didn't. He remembers them in every detail. Like the way we trapped a sage-rabbit once when we'd run out of supplies out in Hadriacum."

Fancher chuckled.

"Then we couldn't eat the thing," he reminisced.

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"Very well, if you're sure of his identity, that's all I wish to know," said the Chief. "I don't want to be trapped by a Marscorp trick with plastic surgery. But if this man is Dark Kensington, it's the best fortune the Phoenix has met with in a long time."

He fell silent, and busied himself with papers on his desk, paying no more attention to Fancher. Fancher waited, then concluded reasonably that the interview was at an end. And, since the long cigar agonized him, he rose and moved quietly toward the door.

"I have not given you permission to leave," said the Chief, without raising either his eyes or his voice. "Kensington is due to arrive in a few moments, and I want you here when I talk to him. If any of his words or actions appear inconsistent in any way to you, I want you to let me know."

Fancher sighed silently, returned to his chair and puffed disconsolately on the cigar.

Some five minutes passed. Then there was a firm rap on the door.

"Come in!" called the Chief in his reedy voice.

The door opened, and in walked a man whose entire presence radiated strength confidence and the potentiality of instant violence. Dark Kensington was tall and broad-shouldered, clad in dark-blue tunic and baggy trousers. His face was darkly tanned, strong, handsome. His hair was black as midnight. His eyes were startlingly pale in the dark face; eyes of pale blue, remote and filled with light.

"I'm Dark Kensington," he said, striding up to the Chief's desk. "You're the man known as the Chief?"

"Yes," answered the Chief, and waited.

Dark nodded to Fancher. Fancher, feeling rather green about the gills, returned the greeting.

Dark turned his attention back to the Chief, and he, also, waited. There was a long silence. The Chief broke it first.

"What do you know about Dr. G. O. T. Hennessey—Goat Hennessey?" asked the Chief calmly.

Fancher blinked at this unexpected line of questioning. A cloud passed over Dark's face, as though the name had trig-

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gered something in him that he could not quite remember.

"He was a very good friend of mine," answered Dark, "although it seems that something happened between us that I can't quite recollect. He was one of the most brilliant geneticists of Earth, and came to Mars with an experimental group that was to try to develop a human type that could live more comfortably under Martian conditions. The project was backed by the government."

He stopped. It was the Chief who added:

"Then Marscorp stepped in."

The expression on Dark's face was blank.

"You don't know what Marscorp is, do you?" asked the Chief curiously.

"The name's familiar," replied Dark. "It's a spaceline, isn't it?"

"If your amnesia is genuine, you might very well react in such a fashion," said the Chief reflectively. "Marscorp is the Mars Corporation, and it's the only spaceline that serves Mars now. It's a giant combine on Earth which has a virtual monopoly on the spacelines and exports and imports between Earth and all the colonized planets.

"Marscorp is against any development of human beings who can live under natural extraterrestrial conditions, because that would end the colonies' dependence on Marscorp for supplies. As it is, the colonies literally can't live without Marscorp. Marscorp controls enough senators and delegates in the World Congress to block other important projects if the Earth government refuses to co-operate with it, so the government—that is to say, Marscorp—put a ban on the experiments by Hennessey and other scientists here."

"I remember the government ban on the projects, but I wasn't aware that Marscorp had anything to do with it," said Dark. "Goat Hennessey was one of a group of us who retired to the desert to continue work despite the government ban."

"Goat sold out," said the Chief. "Perhaps your memory doesn't include that important point, but Fancher remembers it well. It was a little before my time. Goat sold out, and be-

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trayed the others to the government in return for assistance in carrying out more limited experiments. Some of the group escaped and formed the nucleus of the rebel movement which now is centered here at the Childress Barber College. We call ourselves the Order of the Phoenix."

The Chief allowed himself the luxury of a very faint smile. "Marscorp and the government call us the Desert Rats," he said. "Very appropriate. They consider us in the same category as rats."

Dark had been standing, casually at ease, before the Chief's desk, with the air of a man who does not tire from standing. Now he did something Fancher would not have dared: without the Chief's invitation, Dark sat down in a comfortable chair, leaned back and stretched out his legs in relaxation.

"It's a little hard for me to realize there's a twenty-five-year gap in my memory," he said. "It seems to me that it has been less than a month ago that Goat and I were together, with other refugees from the government edict, in the Icaria Desert. Why did you ask me about Goat?"

"Because the government brought him back to Mars City not three months ago," answered the Chief. "None of us had any idea where he was, but it turns out that the government has had him working under surveillance some place in the Xanthe Desert north of Solis Lacus. Since it was not far from Solis Lacus that you were picked up, I wondered if you had had any contact with him."

"Not that I remember," said Dark. "Do you have another of those cigars?"

"Why, yes," answered the Chief, startled. He produced another Hadriacum cigar and handed it to Dark. Dark lit it and puffed the fragrant smoke with evident enjoyment.

"As I say, the last time I remember seeing Goat was in the Icaria Desert, in a dome we had set up there," said Dark. "The next thing I remember is waking up in the midst of some sort of cave in a different part of Icaria, surrounded by Martians.

"I could communicate with them in a fashion—something I was never able to do before—and they were able to write

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the name of the Childress Barber College so I could read it. But they evidently don't differentiate our dome cities by name. I had no idea the college was here in Mars City until your men contacted me; I just assumed it was at Solis Lacus."

"You'd have waged a merry search for it, clear on the other side of Mars," remarked the Chief. "What was your purpose in finding it?"

"I don't know that I had any specific purpose," replied Dark easily. "I gathered from the Martians that here I could find someone who concurred with my philosophy of resisting the government edict against seeking self-sufficiency on Mars, and this was more or less confirmed by your two men who contacted me at Solis Lacus."

"I'll see to it that in the future they're not quite so frank until they're sure of their man," said the Chief darkly. He looked quizzically at Fancher, and Fancher nodded slightly. "But it's true. As a matter of fact, the Phoenix follows the path toward self-sufficiency that you recommended, rather than the one sought by Goat Hennessey."

"That's the wrong way to approach it," said Dark promptly. "Goat and the other scientists were following a line offering valid possibilities in their genetic research. The only reason the rest of us chose to attempt the extrasensory powers—particularly teleportation—was that we were not qualified in genetic research and this seemed a field in which we stood a chance to contribute along alternate lines. The effort should be followed along both lines."

"The government managed to capture all the scientists at the time of your disappearance, and it was assumed that you had been captured, too," said the Chief. "We don't have any scientists in the Phoenix who are capable of doing Goat Hennessey's type of research."

"You say he's in Mars City? I wonder if it would do any good for me to contact him."

"I told you that he was the one who betrayed the whole thing to the government, and he's been working under government supervision these last twenty-five years. I wouldn't trust him."

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The Chief surveyed Dark's strong face with speculative green eyes, then added:

"As a matter of fact, we've made a certain amount of progress following your line of research. Since there are probably a good many things you discovered in this work that we haven't stumbled on yet, we could use your help in developing it, if you're interested."

"Very definitely," answered Dark. "I'm interested in seeing what you've done, and I'll be glad to help in any way I can."

"There's one thing," said the Chief, measuring his words. "I've held this organization together despite some pretty severe reverses for more than fifteen years now. The reason I've been able to do it is that I expect and must insist on absolute obedience to my orders."

Dark smiled. "I said that I would be willing to help you," he replied gently. "I follow no man's orders."

The green eyes fixed themselves unwinkingly on the pale-blue ones for a long moment. The blue ones did not waver.

At last, to Fancher's utter amazement, the Chief nodded agreement.

5

MAYA CARA NOME looked from her furnished room through cracked shutters at the building across the street.

A barber college. The building at 49 Sage Avenue, Mars City, was a barber college.

That surprised her. She didn't know exactly what she had expected: a hospital, perhaps, or even a kindergarten. But a barber college!

But the source of the information she had received that 49 Sage Avenue was the address she sought was unimpeachable. She had ferreted it out, after a long time and through devious ways, and she was sure she could trust it.

"The Childress Barber College" read the neatly lettered sign above the door. Maya's landlady, moon-faced Mrs. Chan, had pointed out Oxvane Childress to her as he left the build-

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ing one day: a big man, comfortably stomached, with a heavy brown beard which, even at that distance, she could see was shot with gray.

As innocent as you please. Childress came out and went in, the students went in and came out. Still, it was the address she had been given.

Maya had to gain entrance to the building. She could learn nothing watching it from outside. She was established here as a tourist from Earth; besides, the position and activities of women were prescribed rigidly by Martian colonial convention, and women did not study to become barbers on Mars.

She would have to have help. She thought at once of Nuwell, and as immediately rejected him.

"Maya, I don't see why you insist on working alone," he had complained. "I can set the whole machinery of government in motion to help you, whenever you need it."

"Primarily because you're well known and your activities are observed," she had answered. "Your whole government machinery hasn't been effective in tracking down the rebel headquarters yet, and it's reasonable to assume that the rebels have a fairly effective intelligence network. My job is to find that headquarters, and if I were seen very often with you or tried to utilize your government machinery, they'd have me pinpointed pretty soon."

She left the window, filled a tiny basin with precious water, shrugged out of her negligee and sponged her small, perfect body. She donned form-fitting tunic, briefs and short skirt, pulled on knee-length socks and laced up Martian walking shoes. She spent some time preparing her hair and face.

Then she left the room and the house and walked up-town. The walk was about a kilometer, along sidewalks bordered by cubical, functional houses and trim lawns of terrestrial grass and small trees. Above the city, its dome was opalescent in the morning sun.

The small houses gave way to larger business buildings, also cubical, and the lawns dwindled and vanished. Farther down, the buildings were even larger and the streets were

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wider and busier; but she was not going into the heart of Mars City.

She turned into an office building, and studied the directory in the lobby. The offices were those of doctors and lawyers. On the directory she found "Charlworth Scion, Attorney-at-Law, Room 207."

There was no elevator. Maya walked up the stairs and down a corridor, finding a door that had nothing on it but the number. She turned the knob and went in.

The small outer office was uninhabited. It was carpeted and desked, with two straight chairs against a wall, for clients. Through a door, she could see part of the inner office, cluttered and stacked with papers and books.

She stood there, hesitating. The outer door clicked shut behind her. At the sound, a gray-haired, preoccupied man with spectacles and stooped shoulders peered from the inner office.

"Oh!" he said. "I'm sorry, my secretary went to lunch a bit early today. Can I help you, Miss?"

"I'm looking for Mr. Scion," she said.

"I'm Charlworth Scion."

"Terra outshines the Sun," said Maya.

Scion's eyes were suddenly wary behind the spectacles.

"Well, well," he murmured. "Come in, please."

She went into the cluttered inner office, and Scion closed and locked the door.

"And you are . . .?" said Scion behind his desk, his pale hands fumbling aimlessly with papers.

"Maya Cara Nome," she said.

Scion found a paper and scanned it. He apparently found her name there.

"I'm surprised to see you here," he admitted. "Our information was that you would be working entirely alone."

"I am," said Maya. "Or I was. I was told not to contact you unless I had to, Mr. Scion, but it seems I'm going to need some help."

Scion inclined his head, but said nothing.

"As you may or may not know, my specific assignment is

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to locate the nerve center of rebellious activity," said Maya. "It seems that the rebels have an intelligence network about as effective as the government's, and it was felt that a woman tourist from Earth might be successful where any unusual probing by local agents might arouse suspicion."

"That's true," conceded Scion. "I doubt that they're really sure of the identity of more than a few of our agents, but sometimes I think they have a card file on every person on Mars. We have to be very careful that movements of our agents are consistent with their pretended occupations."

"I have a reliable tip that their nerve center is the Childress Barber College here," she said. "I can't find out anything, though, unless I get into the building over a period of time. As a woman, I can't very well apply to study barbering."

"No," said Scion. "I see your problem."

He turned to a filing cabinet, unlocked it and searched through it, whistling tunelessly. He found a folder, pulled it out and studied it.

"If it is, they've certainly kept it well covered," he said. "There's not a mark of suspicion entered against the Childress Barber College. But here's a possibility for getting you in. The barber college employs one secretary, female. Now, if you could take her place . . ."

Maya smiled.

"I might as well apply as a barber student," she said. "You propose to remove a trusted member of their own group from their midst and replace her with a complete unknown?"

"We don't know that she's a rebel," answered Scion. "If she isn't, she can be lured away to another job at a much better salary. If she is, and can't be lured . . . well, there are other methods. The Mars City Employment Agency is operated by one of our agents, and you'll be the only secretary available when the barber college asks for a woman to fill her place.

"Believe me, Miss Cara Nome, as easy as it is for a woman to get married on Mars, it is difficult to find women to do any

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sort of business work. It won't seem at all strange that you're the only one available."

"The only trouble is that I'm known in the neighborhood as a tourist from Earth," objected Maya.

"Well," said Scion, "things have been more expensive than you planned for on Mars. You've run short of money. You have to work for a while to pay living expenses here until the next ship leaves for Earth."

"My account at the bank?"

"It will vanish quietly from the records," said Scion with a smile. "The bank is a government institution."

"Very well," said Maya, taking her purse from his desk. "Let me know when I'm to apply."

"You won't hear from me again," said Scion, shaking his head. "The employment agency will notify you to appear at the barber college for an interview."

Maya knew of Scion only as her emergency contact on Mars. She did not know what position he held in that underground network of terrestrial agents which was largely unknown even to Nuwell Eli, the government prosecutor. But, whatever his position, he got things done in a hurry.

Within two weeks, Maya was typing up applications, examination reports and supply orders in the Childress Barber College, joking and flirting with barber students between classes, and naively declaiming to her ostensible employer, phlegmatic Oxvane Childress, how lucky it was for her that she was able to get a job right across the street from her rooming house.

"The work's easy," rumbled Childress, explaining her tasks to her. "Any time you want to take a coffee break with any of the young men, or go uptown shopping, go ahead, as long as the work gets done. Just one thing: you have to stay up here in the front of the building, and don't ever go back in the classrooms. The instructors are mighty strict about that, and that's one rule I won't stand to be violated."

This significant restriction convinced Maya she was on the right track. But she needed to move cautiously, if she was not

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to arouse immediate suspicion. So she adhered strictly to her role for nearly a month, keeping her eyes open.

If it was a rebel operation, it was almost perfectly disguised. Childress performed the duties of the administrative head of a barber college, and nothing more. The students, about fifty of them, went in and out at regular school hours, and she became casually acquainted with a good many of them. The half-dozen instructors, whom she also came to know, were less regular in their movements, but she could detect nothing suspicious about them.

"We cut the hair of Mars," was the college's motto, and she learned that it was the larger of only two barber colleges on the planet. Apparently, it actually did supply graduate barbers to all the dome cities. It took in customers for the students to practice on, and, although many of them were strangers, some of them were prominent Mars City citizens whom she knew by sight.

There was no question about it: partially, at least, it was a legitimate barber college, whatever other activities it might mask. The only thing noticeably unusual on the surface was that it was extremely selective in its approval of students who applied for courses in barbering. She discerned that through her processing of the applications.

If she was going to find out anything definite, she would have to get into the forbidden rear portion of the building. But obviously there were legitimate classrooms there, in addition to the activities she suspected, and if she were caught nosing around the classrooms she would be discharged at once for violation of the rules, without finding out what she sought. She would have to hit it right the first time.

Biding her time and watching, she was able to learn, almost intuitively, from the movements of students, customers and instructors, that the classrooms in which barbering was actually taught were all concentrated on the western side of the building. If there were any more sinister activities, they occurred on the opposite side. Having determined this, she planned her course of action.

Near the end of her first month at work, she chose her

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time one day when Childress was downtown, leaving her alone in the business office. The afternoon classes were in full swing.

Taking along a filled-out order form as an excuse, Maya walked quickly down the corridor that stretched across the front of the building. Carefully and quietly, she pushed open the door at the extreme end of the corridor—a little surprised, as a matter of fact, to find it unlocked.

She was in another corridor, that struck straight back to the rear of the building.

She hesitated. There were doors spaced all along both sides of this corridor. Did she dare attempt to open one, on the chance that the room behind it was unoccupied?

Then she saw that one door, a little way down, stood half open. Quietly she walked down the hall, not quite to the door, but near enough to it to be able to see a large area of the room behind it.

There were people in there. In the part she was able to see, there were half a dozen students seated, and one of the instructors standing among them. Fortunately, their backs were to her.

Whatever they were studying, it was not barbering. There was an occasional murmur of voices, but she could not make out the words.

Then she saw! On the table at the front of the room, which the students faced, there was a big barber's basin.

As she watched, the basin slowly raised off the table and moved upward a few inches. No one was near it, but it floated there, quivering and tilting a little, in the air. And then, from it, slowly, the water itself came up in a weird fountain, moved completely free of the basin and hung above it in the air, gradually assuming the form of a globe.

Telekinesis! This was a class in telekinesis! The students were concentrating on the basin and water, and lifting them into the air by the power of their minds.

This was indeed the heart of the rebel movement. She had found what she sought.

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"Aren't you where you shouldn't be, young lady?" asked a calm masculine voice behind her.

Shocked, terrified, she whirled. A tall, handsome, dark-haired man she had never seen before was standing there, observing her quizzically. His pale eyes seemed to look through her and beyond her.

She forced herself to casual composure.

"I don't believe I've met you," she said. "Are you one of the instructors?"

"I'm Dark Kensington, one of the supervisors," he replied. "And you're Miss Cara Nome, the secretary, who shouldn't be back here."

Had he noticed that she saw the telekinetic action? She glanced back at the classroom. The basin was now comfortably esconced back on the table, full of water.

"I had this order, which I thought was of an emergency nature," she said, offering it to him. "Mr. Childress wasn't in, and I thought I'd better find one of the instructors so it could be approved and go out right away."

Dark took it and glanced at it.

"I doubt that its emergency nature is as grave as you may have thought," he said soberly. "However, Mr. Childress would be better qualified to judge that. You understand that I shall have to report this infraction of the rules to him."

Suddenly, Maya was overwhelmed by an utterly terrifying sensation. It seemed that these pale-blue eyes were looking into her mind, searching, seeking to determine her thoughts and her true intention.

Instinctively, not knowing how she did it, she veiled her thoughts with a psychic barrier. And, instinctively, she recognized that he detected the barrier and could not penetrate it.

Telepathy? Why not, if they were experimenting successfully with telekinesis?

"I'm sorry," she murmured hurriedly, and brushed past him. He did not try to detain her.

She hurried back to the office. She hurried, but as she hurried down first the one corridor and then the other, she discovered that her steps were slowing involuntarily. A

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powerful force seemed to be detaining her, attempting to draw her back.

Frightened but curious, she attempted to analyze this force even as she struggled against it. She could not be sure—it was disturbing, either way, but she could not be sure whether it was a telepathic thing or merely the magnetic force of this man's powerful masculine personality that pulled at her.

In a state of mental turmoil, she reached the office. Childress was not yet back.

Should she wait for him?

Then, as suddenly as she had sensed Dark Kensington's telepathic probing, she sensed something else. Somewhere in the back of the building, he was talking to another man she had not seen before, and within ten minutes Dark Kensington would be in this office. And the prospect she faced was far more serious than mere discharge for infringement of company rules.

She had to get in touch with Nuwell at once. She recognized that if she could get out of this building and across the street to her rooming house, she would be safe for a little while. She could telephone Nuwell from there.

Grabbing her purse, she hastened out of the office.

6

THE THREE men who stood by a table in the back lobby of the Childress Barber College and checked off the departure of the men at regularly spaced intervals were as different in appearance as they were in their positions in the Order of the Phoenix.

Oxvane Childress, big and bearded, was the "front," and directed the very necessary task of administering the Childress Barber College as a genuine barber college. Childress was a prominent member of two of Mars City's civic and social clubs, and careful examination of his activities over a period of years would have thrown no suspicion on him.

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The Chief, whose real name perhaps Childress knew but never spoke, was a huge-headed midget who directed the far-flung activities of the Order of the Phoenix as an underground rebel organization. He never left the building, but reports were brought in to him from all over Mars. He knew a great deal at any time about what the government and Marscorp were doing, and he gave the orders for those moves aimed at maintaining the secrecy of the Phoenix.

Dark Kensington, tall and pale-eyed, had moved at once into the natural position of guiding the experimental work of the organization in extrasensory perception and telekinesis. He was able to add his knowledge of earlier work to the progress that had been made since his disappearance, and coordinated the studies in the various dome cities.

A little behind the three stood Fancher Laddigan, doing the actual checking with a pencil on a list in his hand.

"I think it's all unnecessary," rumbled Childress unhappily. "I watched the girl carefully while she was here, and the usual checks were made into her background. It's true she had some social contacts with Nuwell Eli when she first came to Mars, but there's nothing sinister about that association and it seems the last thing a Marscorp agent would do openly. As far as I could determine, she just realized she'd violated a rule and would be discharged for it, so she left before she could be discharged."

"She hasn't returned to her rooming house," remarked the Chief in his high, thin voice.

"Looking for another job, or maybe just on a trip," said Childress. "After all, she's a terrestrial tourist. If this is all a false alarm, how am I going to explain suspending operation of the college for a period?"

"Remodeling," replied the Chief. "Work out the details and put a sign up as soon as evacuation has progressed far enough."

"It may be unnecessary, Oxvane," said Dark, "but it's best not to take chances. This telepathy is a very uncertain thing, and sometimes it's hard to differentiate true telepathic communication from one's own hopes or fears. But it seemed to

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me that I had the very definite sense that Miss Cara Nome was seeking something with hostile intent, and it's entirely possible that she saw part of one of the experiments through that open door."

Two students appeared, gave their names to Fancher in an undertone, and sauntered out the back door of the building. "What's the status now?" asked the Chief.

"They were nineteen and twenty," answered Fancher precisely. "They're part of Group C, which is going to Hesperidum. Group A goes to Regina, Group B to Charax, Group D to Nuba and Group E to Ismenius."

"None to Solis?" asked Childress in surprise.

"No, sir, nor to Phoenicis, either," answered Fancher. "They're both so far, and Solis is a resort, where they might be easier to detect. We're using both public transport and private groundcars. All of them so far have reported safely through the flower shop, except these last two, so the government evidently hasn't thrown a ring around the building yet."

"And I don't think they will, either," growled Childress. "I tell you, it's all unnecessary."

"Are things going smoothly here?" asked the Chief.

"Yes, sir," replied Fancher. "The last five men scheduled to leave are taking care of any customers who come in, and the rest of them are packing supplies into the trucks. As soon as I get word from the flower shop that the last pair has cleared, I give another pair the word to leave."

"It seems to be moving along well," said the Chief, and he turned his green eyes upon Childress. "Is the business office manned?"

"Why—why, there's no one there right now," said Childress, taken aback.

"I think it would look extremely peculiar to any investigator if you weren't there, frantically trying to locate a new secretary," said the Chief quietly.

Childress left, in confusion. The Chief turned to Dark.

"I think Fancher's handling this very well without my help," he said. "You know where your groundcar is, if we all have to make a run for it?"

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"Yes," answered Dark. "We won't be going together?"

"No," replied the Chief, and his lips twisted in a faint smile. "I have my own method of exit, which should give them other things to think about."

He left, moving with quick, short steps. Dark stayed for a few moments more, then he too went back into the building to help with packing.

The Lowland Flower Shop, on the other side of Mars City, near the west airlock, was the clearance point for the evacuees. The flower shop was operated by a Phoenix agent, and each pair that left the barber college passed through there before leaving the city to let those behind know that they had not been stopped by government men. Other Phoenix agents watched the heliport and bus station for any evidence that the government was trying to block these routes out of Mars City.

The evacuation moved steadily, and it began to appear that Childress was right. Singly, the first two of the five trucks moved out, and all of the ESP instructors and thirty-two of the students had reported back safe clearance from the flower shop, when. . . .

Dark was moving a stack of charts from one of the classrooms to the basement when bells all over the building set up a tremendous clangor. Immediately the quiet evacuation dissolved into an uproar, with men running and shouting and the bell ringing incessantly.

Dark knew what had happened. Childress, in the front office, had seen government agents approaching, or perhaps they had actually entered the building. He had pressed the alarm bell, then sought to delay them with the righteous indignation suitable to the administrative head of a barber college which is invaded by government officials.

The bells stopped suddenly, and the scattered shouting sounded strange and thin in the comparative silence. Then the piping voice of the Chief came over the loudspeakers spread throughout the building.

"Attention!" said the Chief. "We are temporarily safe. The

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alarm automatically sealed all doors to the building behind the front corridor.

"Kensington, please come to my office. The rest of you, tie up the customers still here and leave them unharmed, and then leave the building by the emergency exits. Scatter, and make your way by whatever private transportation methods you can to the rendezvous assigned to your respective group. Do not use public transportation, because Marscorp will undoubtedly be checking public transport now."

Dark set the charts down on the stairs and made his way back to the Chief's office. The Chief was sitting, tiny behind his big desk, his face as serene as ever. He was puffing casually on one of the long Hadriacum cigars.

Dark laughed.

"You don't have another of those cigars, do you?" he asked.

For the first time since he had been here, Dark saw the Chief's mouth break into a full, broad smile.

"I think so," said the Chief, an undertone of delight bubbling in his voice. He reached into the desk and pulled one out. Dark accepted it gravely, and lit it.

"The last two evacuees haven't reported to the flower shop, and they're overdue," said the Chief, his face getting serious. "Childress hasn't reported back here by telephone, either, so the Marscorp gang probably had already entered the building before he detected them and sounded the alarm."

"What about Childress?" asked Dark. "What will happen to him?"

"He'll take the rap," answered the Chief. "His defense will be that if there were any Phoenix activities going on here he didn't know about it. He was just running a barber college in good faith. I don't think they can prove otherwise."

"Do we have any idea what our situation is?" asked Dark.

"A very accurate idea. We have observers posted in the two houses at the ends of our emergency exits, and they've been reporting to Fancher, in the next room, by telephone. There's a force of about a hundred Mars City policemen and plain-clothes agents in the streets all around the building.

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They saw a squad go into the front, but evidently they didn't have enough warning to let Childress know in time."

"Will the doors hold?"

The Chief's mouth quirked.

"They'll need demolition equipment to break them down," he said. "All these have are heatguns and tear gas. One of the observers farther downtown said he saw a tank heading this way, but if they don't already know there are innocent customers in here, Childress will tell them."

"Then everybody gets away but Childress?"

"We hope. They're not going to ignore these surrounding houses, especially with men drifting out of them and moving away. That's why I want to stress the importance of one thing to you, Kensington: you're too important for us to lose at this juncture, with your knowledge of the original work done. That house at the end of your exit will have a dozen or so of our men in it, waiting to drift away one by one, but you can't afford to worry about them. I want you to get in that groundcar, alone, and take off like Phobos rising."

"You're going out the other emergency exit?"

"That's none of your business. But, as a matter of fact, no. If you want to see something that will throw consternation into this Marscorp outfit, watch the roof of this building. Now, get moving, Kensington, and good luck. Fancher and I will be leaving as soon as he gets all the records packed."

The Chief held out his tiny hand, and Dark shook hands with him. Then Dark left, went down into the basement and entered an underground door in its eastern wall. He had to crawl through the tunnel driven through the sand under the street.

He emerged in the basement of a house across the street, which ostensibly was owned by Manfall Kingron, a retired space engineer. He went upstairs.

About half the personnel of the barber college who had not been caught by the alarm were roaming the rooms of the small house, drifting singly out the back door at ten-minute intervals.

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Dark went to the front window and looked across the street at the barber college.

The street was full of men carrying heat pistols, moving restlessly, facing the barber college. Some of them were in police uniform. Squads of them moved about on the college grounds, and a few were in the yards of houses on this side of the street.

Dark watched the roof.

As he did so, from its center a helicopter rose into the air, hovering over the building, moving upward slowly.

So that was the Chief's escape method. He had smuggled a helicopter into the domed city itself! But how was he to get out of the city in it?

The appearance of the copter threw the men outside into confused excitement. They ran about, aiming their short-range heat beams futilely up at the rising copter.

A military tank, undoubtedly the one the Chief had been told about, spun around the corner. It stopped, and its guns swung upward toward the copter. But they remained silent. Heavy heat beams or artillery could puncture the city's protecting dome.

The copter went straight up, gathering speed. Up, and up, and it did not stop!

It hit the plastic dome near its zenith. It tilted and staggered. It ripped through the dome and vanished.

Immediately, sirens began to wail throughout the city. Doors clanged shut automatically everywhere. Lights and warning signs flashed at every street corner, advising citizens to run for the nearest airtight shelter.

The dome was punctured!

Emergency crews would be up within minutes to repair the break, and very little of the city's air would hiss away. But, in the meantime, every activity in Mars City was snarled by the necessity to seek shelter. The Chief had, indeed, created a situation of consternation in which it would be easier for the Phoenix men to elude their enemies.

The armed men of the government forces were already

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running for the houses in this area. Some of them were headed for the house from which Dark watched.

The Phoenix men were donning marsuits. They would admit the refugees, after requiring them to lay down their arms, and then leave the house in their marsuits.

Dark grinned happily, and walked quickly through the house to the attached garage. He climbed into the groundcar, started the engine, and opened the garage door by the remote control mechanism on the dashboard.

Accelerating at full power, Dark drove the groundcar out of the garage and spun into the street. The men afoot, seeking entrance to the houses, paid no attention. The tank began to turn ponderously in his direction, but by the time it was in a position to bring its guns to bear, Dark's groundcar had reached the corner and raced around it into the broad thoroughfare leading to Mars City's east airlock.

The airlock was only a dozen blocks away. The Chief's theory had been that the government, depending on surprise in its move to surround the Childress Barber College, would not attempt the complicated task of checking all traffic passing through the airlock until it was realized that some of the Phoenix men had escaped from the trap at the college.

Dark reached the airlock in minutes. The Chief's theory proved correct. There were no police at the airlock, and the maintenance employee stationed there did not even look up as Dark's approach activated the inner door.

He drove the groundcar into the airlock. The inner door closed behind him. The outer door opened, and Dark drove out onto the highway that struck straight across the Syrtis Major Lowland toward the Aeria Desert and Edom. It was as simple as that.

About ten miles out was the circular bypass highway that surrounded Mars City, and Dark proposed to turn right on that, for his destination was Hesperidum. The highway he was on would take him eastward, and Hesperidum was about 8,000 kilometers southwest of Mars City—a little better than two-days' drive at groundcar speed on the straight, flat highways.

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Dark reached over and set the groundcar's radio dial on the frequency which had been agreed on for emergency Phoenix broadcasts during this operation. If government monitors caught the broadcasts and jammed them, there were alternate channels chosen. With only about two dozen radio stations on all Mars, plus the official aircraft and groundcar band, there was plenty of free room in the air.

There was nothing on the Phoenix frequency now but a little disconsolate static.

The country through which he drove here was uninhabited lowland. The human life on Mars, agricultural, industrial and commercial, was concentrated under the domes of the cities. Except for a few tiny individual domes at the edge of Mars City, there were no human structures close to it except the airport and the spaceport, and these were west and north of the city, respectively.

The highway struck straight and lonely through a faintly rippling sea of gray-green canal sage, spotted occasionally with the tall trunk of a canal cactus, rising above it. Later he would see infrequent dome farms, but he could expect no more than two or three score of these in the entire long drive to Hesperidum.

Dark slowed and entered the cloverleaf that took him onto the bypass expressway. Even as he did so, the radio crackled and the thin voice of the Chief sounded over the groundcar loudspeaker.

"Attention, Phoenix," said the Chief intensely. "Attention, Phoenix. Emergency instructions. We have monitored reports that the government is checking airlocks at all cities. Repeat: the government is checking airlocks at all cities.

"Some Phoenix have been captured attempting to leave Mars City. Instructions: those in Mars City do not attempt to leave but find shelter with Phoenix friends. Those beyond dome without credentials, go to assigned emergency rendezvous spots *outside* dome cities. Repeat instructions: those. . ."

Swearing under his breath, Dark pulled the groundcar to a stop beside the highway. It was so simple! They should have foreseen that the government would take such a step

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as soon as it was realized that the Phoenix men were leaving Mars City. He himself evidently had gotten through the airlock just in time.

But he had been assigned no outside rendezvous! Whether it was an oversight or not, he did not know, but the only place he had been instructed to go was Hesperidum. The only Phoenix contact he knew was the South Ausonia Art Shop in Hesperidum; and now he could not enter the city without being captured.

He had only one alternative: the Martians, in the Icaria Desert, halfway around Mars. They would remember him and shelter him, and he was sure he could find the spot.

He looked at his fuel gauge. The tank was full. It would not take him quite there, but he could chance refueling at Solis Lacus, some 20,000 kilometers from Mars City. He could take the highway, turning out into the desert to go around Edom, Aram and Ophir.

He put the groundcar in drive again, and made a U-turn in the highway. He entered the cloverleaf and was halfway through it when he saw the copter.

It was a red-and-white government copter, and it was descending at a shallow angle toward him from the direction of Mars City. Dark switched his radio to the official channel.

“. . . await check. Repeat: groundcar in cloverleaf, stop at once and await check.”

Dark braked the groundcar to a stop. As soon as the copter grounded, he could accelerate and escape.

But the copter did not ground. It hovered, directly over him. Then Dark realized it was awaiting a patrol car from Mars City to check and take him in custody if necessary.

Immediately, he put the groundcar in drive and whipped out of the cloverleaf under full acceleration. If he could only achieve top speed, 350 kilometers-an-hour, the copter couldn't match it.

But the copter was on his tail at once as he swerved out of the tight curve. Its guns spat fire.

There was a terrific impact, and the groundcar dome shattered above him. Unprotected, he felt the air explode from

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the groundcar, from his lungs. Oxygenless death poured in through the broken dome.

It all happened in an instant. Even as the dome shattered under the copter's shell and Dark recognized the imminence of death, the groundcar twisted out of control and careened from the highway. He felt it spinning over and over, and then blackness closed in around him.

7

MAYA had never seen Nuwell in such a state of sustained rage.

He strode back and forth in the private dining room of the Syrtis Major Club, near the western edge of Mars City, slapping his fist into his hand. His face usually was engaging and boyish, the wave of his dark hair setting it off handsomely, but now it was flushed like that of a petulant child and the lock of hair hung down over his forehead. Maya, the only other person in the room, sat quietly and watched him pace.

"They had plenty of time and all the information they needed," stormed Nuwell, "and yet they didn't get a single one of the key men! Most of the rebels slipped out easily, right under their noses!"

Maya watched him detachedly. This was the man she had promised to marry, and, as she had once or twice before, she was undergoing pangs of doubt. After all, she had known Nuwell Eli only during the few months she had been on Mars.

She had fallen in love with him for his charm, his intelligence, his good-humored gentleness, but she did not like this display of temper. It was not a controlled anger, but had something of the irrational in it.

"Childress was captured," she reminded him.

"Childress! A figurehead! He says he didn't know about the rebel activities going on in the college, and he's so stupid I may not be able to make a case against him."

Maya recognized that this element, the success of his prosecution, was a very important factor to Nuwell.

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"Are the twelve I identified the only ones captured?" asked Maya.

"Yes. Twelve captured, seven killed, and every one of them small fry. The leaders undoubtedly got away in that copter. We blockaded the airlocks fast, so most of the others are probably still in the city, but we don't have any idea where to look for them."

"I may be able to help in that, when I get back from my swing around the other cities," said Maya.

"I don't want you to go on that jaunt, Maya!" exclaimed Nuwell, swinging around to face her with fierce emphasis. "You said when you had found the headquarters, you'd resign the service and marry me. Now you want to go all over Mars looking for rebels!"

"Nuwell, I can identify almost all of those who were at the barber college," Maya remonstrated. "They've picked up some men at the airlocks and others on the roads at several cities, and even Martian law won't permit you to uproot those people and send them to Mars City just on suspicion. They can't be sent here for me to identify: I'll have to go there."

"We can work out some charges to get them extradited to Mars City," snapped Nuwell angrily. "I don't want you to go, Maya. I want you to stay here and marry me, immediately."

"Aren't you being a little dictatorial, Nuwell?" she suggested coolly.

The warning implied in her remoteness seemed to trigger a polarized reaction in Nuwell. The furious dark eyes melted suddenly, the stubborn anger of the face altered on the instant to a sentimental, wistful smile of appeal.

"Don't be angry, Maya," he pleaded, half-ruefully, half-humorously. "It's just that I love you so much. It's just that I'm impatient for you to be my wife."

Changeability is attributed to the feminine, but Maya was not able to shift her mood as facily as her fiance.

"If I'm worth marrying, I'm worth waiting for a little longer," she said, with an edge to her voice. She was angry at Nuwell for acting so like a spoiled child. "I'm going to see