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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SENSITIVE MAN ***

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Conspiracy seems to be as much a part of our times as it was in the times of Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot. Hence it finds frequent reflection in all branches of fiction, including science fiction. Yet, as in life, something new has been added, the most gigantic conspiracy of all, the human conspiracy against conspirators. Which makes for a fine stirring story in this short novel of the future by Mr. Anderson, one of our best young authors.

the sensitive man

by ... Poul Anderson

One man stood between a power-hungry cabal
and world mastery—but a man of unusual talents.

The Mermaid Tavern had been elaborately decorated. Great blocks of hewn coral for pillars and booths, tarpon and barracuda on the walls, murals of Neptune and his court—including an outsize animated picture of a mermaid ballet, quite an eye-catcher. But the broad quartz windows showed merely a shifting greenish-blue of seawater, and the only live fish visible were in an aquarium across from the bar. Pacific Colony lacked the grotesque loveliness of the Florida and Cuba settlements. Here they were somehow a working city, even in their recreations.

The sensitive man paused for a moment in the foyer, sweeping the big circular room with a hurried glance. Less than half the tables were filled. This was an hour of interregnum, while the twelve to eighteen hundred shift was still at work and the others had long finished their more

expensive amusements. There would always be a few around, of course—Dalgetty typed them as he watched.

A party of engineers, probably arguing about the compression strength of the latest submarine tank to judge from the bored expressions of the three or four rec girls who had joined them. A biochemist, who seemed to have forgotten his plankton and seaweed for the time being and to have focussed his mind on the pretty young clerk with him. A couple of hard-handed caissoniers, settling down to some serious drinking.

A maintenance man, a computerman, a tank pilot, a diver, a sea rancher, a bevy of stenographers, a bunch of very obvious tourists, more chemists and metallurgists—the sensitive man dismissed them all. There were others he couldn't classify with any decent probability but after a second's hesitation he decided to ignore them too. That left only the group with Thomas Bancroft.

They were sitting in one of the coral grottos, a cave of darkness to ordinary vision. Dalgetty had to squint to see in and the muted light of the tavern was a harsh glare when his pupils were so distended. But, yes—it was Bancroft all right and there was an empty booth adjoining his.

Dalgetty relaxed his eyes to normal perception. Even in the short moment of dilation the fluoros had given him a headache. He blocked it off from consciousness and started across the floor.

A hostess stopped him with a touch on the arm as he was about to enter the vacant cavern. She was young, an iridescent mantrap in her brief uniform. With all the money flowing into Pacific Colony they could afford decorative help here.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said. "Those are kept for parties. Would you like a table?"

"I'm a party," he answered, "or can soon become one." He moved aside a trifle so that none of the Bancroft group should happen to look out and see him. "If you could arrange some company for me...." He fumbled out a C-note, wondering just how such things could be done gracefully.

"Why, of course, sir." She took it with a smoothness he envied and handed him a stunning smile in return. "Just make yourself comfortable."

Dalgetty stepped into the grotto with a fast movement. This wasn't going to be simple. The rough red walls closed in on top of him, forming a space big enough for twenty people or so. A few strategically placed fluoros gave an eerie undersea light, just enough to see by—but no one could look in. A heavy curtain could be drawn if one wanted to be absolutely secluded. Privacy—*uh-huh!*

He sat down at the driftwood table and leaned back against the coral. Closing his eyes he made an effort of will. His nerves were already keyed up to such a tautness that it seemed they must break and it took only seconds to twist his mind along the paths required.

The noise of the tavern rose from a tiny mumble to a clattering surf, to a huge and saw-edged wave. Voices dinned in his head, shrill and deep, hard and soft, a senseless stream of talking, jumbled together into words, words, words. Somebody dropped a glass and it was like a bomb going off.

Dalgetty winced, straining his ear against the grotto side. Surely enough of their speech would come to him, even through all that rock! The noise level was high but the human mind, if trained in concentration, is an efficient filter. The outside racket receded from Dalgetty's awareness and slowly he gathered in the trickle of sound.

First man: "—no matter. What can they do?"

Second man: "Complain to the government. Do you want the FBI on our trail? I don't."

First man: "Take it easy. They haven't yet done so and it's been a good week now since—"

Second man: "How do you know they haven't?"

Third man—heavy, authoritative voice. Yes, Dalgetty remembered it now from TV speeches—it was Bancroft himself: "I know. I've got enough connections to be sure of that."

Second man: "Okay, so they haven't reported it. But why not?"

Bancroft: "You know why. They don't want the government mixing into this any more than we do."

Woman: "Well, then, are they just going to sit and take it? No, they'll find some way to—"

"HELLO, THERE, MISTER!!!"

Dalgetty jumped and whirled around. His heart began to race, until he felt his ribs tremble and he cursed his own tension.

"WHY, WHAT'S THE MATTER, MISTER? YOU LOOK—"

Effort again, forcing the volume down, grasping the thunderous heart in fingers of command and dragging it toward rest. He focussed his eyes on the girl who had entered. It was the rec girl, the one he had asked for because he had to sit in this booth.

Her voice was speaking on an endurable level now. Another pretty little bit of fluff. He smiled shakily. "Sit down, sweet. I'm sorry. My nerves are shot. What'll you have?"

"A daiquiri, please." She smiled and placed herself beside him. He dialed on the dispenser—the cocktail for her, a scotch and soda for himself.

"You're new here," she said. "Have you just been hired or are you a visitor?" Again the smile. "My name's Glenna."

"Call me Joe," said Dalgetty. His first name was actually Simon. "No, I'll only be here a short while."

"Where you from?" she asked. "I'm clear from New Jersey myself."

"Proving that nobody is ever born in California." He grinned. The control was asserting itself, his racing emotions were checked and he could think clearly again. "I'm—uh—just a floater. Don't have any real address right now."

The dispenser ejected the drinks on a tray and flashed the charge—\$20. Not bad, considering everything. He gave the machine a fifty and it made change, a five-buck coin and a bill.

"Well," said Glenna, "here's to you."

"And you." He touched glasses, wondering how to say what he had to say. Damn it, he couldn't sit here just talking or necking, he'd come to listen but... A sardonic montage of all the detective shows he had ever seen winked through his mind. The amateur who rushes in and solves the case, *heigh-ho*. He had never appreciated all the detail involved till now.

There was hesitation in him. He decided that a straightforward approach was his best bet. Deliberately then he created a cool confidence. Subconsciously he feared this girl, alien as she was to his class. All right, force the reaction to the surface, recognize it, suppress it. Under the table his hands moved in the intricate symbolic pattern which aided such emotion-harnessing.

"Glenna," he said, "I'm afraid I'll be rather dull company. The fact is I'm doing some research in psychology, learning how to concentrate under different conditions. I wanted to try it in a place like this, you understand." He slipped out a 2-C bill and laid it before her. "If you'd just sit here quietly it won't be for more than an hour I guess."

"Huh?" Her brows lifted. Then, with a shrug and a wry smile, "Okay, you're paying for it." She took a cigarette from the flat case at her sash, lit it and relaxed. Dalgetty leaned against the wall and closed his eyes again.

The girl watched him curiously. He was of medium height, stockily built, inconspicuously dressed in a blue short-sleeved tunic, gray slacks and sandals. His square snub-nosed face was lightly freckled, with hazel eyes and a rather pleasant shy smile. The rusty hair was close-cropped. A young man, she guessed, about twenty-five, quite ordinary and uninteresting except for the wrestler's muscles and, of course, his behavior.

Oh, well, it took all kinds.

Dalgetty had a moment of worry. Not because the yarn he had handed her was thin but because it brushed too close to the truth. He thrust the unsureness out of him. Chances were she hadn't understood any of it, wouldn't even mention it. At least not to the people he was hunting.

Or who were hunting him?

Concentration, and the voices slowly came again: "—maybe. But I think they'll be more stubborn than that."

Bancroft: "Yes. The issues are too large for a few lives to matter. Still, Michael Tighe is only human. He'll talk."

The woman: "He can be made to talk, you mean?" She had one of the coldest voices Dalgetty had ever heard.

Bancroft: "Yes. Though I hate to use extreme measures."

Man: "What other possibilities have we got? He won't say anything unless he's forced to. And meanwhile his people will be scouring the planet to find him. They're a shrewd bunch."

Bancroft, sardonically: "What can they do, please? It takes more than an amateur to locate a missing man. It calls for all the resources of a large police organization. And the last thing they want, as I've said before, is to bring the government in on this."

The woman: "I'm not so sure of that, Tom. After all, the Institute is a legal group. It's government sponsored and its influence is something tremendous. Its graduates—"

Bancroft: "It educates a dozen different kinds of psychotechnicians, yes. It does research. It gives advice. It publishes findings and theories. But believe me the Psychotechnic Institute is like an iceberg. Its real nature and purpose are hidden way under water. No, it isn't doing anything

illegal that I know of. Its aims are so large that they transcend law altogether."

Man: "What aims?"

Bancroft: "I wish I knew. We've only got hints and guesses, you know. One of the reasons we've snatched Tighe is to find out more. I suspect that their real work requires secrecy."

The woman, thoughtfully: "Y-y-yes, I can see how that might be. If the world at large were aware of being—manipulated—then manipulation might become impossible. But just where does Tighe's group want to lead us?"

Bancroft: "I don't know, I tell you. I'm not even sure that they do want to—take over. Something even bigger than that." A sigh. "Let's face it, Tighe is a crusader too. In his own way he's a very sincere idealist. He just happens to have the wrong ideals. That's one reason why I'd hate to see him harmed."

Man: "But if it turns out that we've got to—"

Bancroft: "Why, then we've got to, that's all. But I won't enjoy it."

Man: "Okay, you're the leader, you say when. But I warn you not to wait too long. I tell you the Institute is more than a collection of unworldly scientists. They've got *someone* out searching for Tighe and if they should locate him there could be real trouble."

Bancroft, mildly: "Well, these are troubled times, or will be shortly. We might as well get used to that."

The conversation drifted away into idle chatter. Dalgetty groaned to himself. Not once had they spoken of the place where their prisoner was kept.

All right, little man, what next? Thomas Bancroft was big game. His law firm was famous. He had been in Congress and the Cabinet. Even with the Labor Party in power he was a respected elder statesman. He had friends in government, business, unions, guilds and clubs and leagues from Maine to Hawaii. He had only to say the word and Dalgetty's teeth would be kicked in some dark night. Or, if he proved squeamish, Dalgetty might find himself arrested on a charge like conspiracy and tied up in court for the next six months.

By listening in he had confirmed the suspicion of Ulrich at the Institute that Thomas Bancroft was Tighe's kidnapper—but that was no help. If he went to the police with that story they would (a) laugh, long and loud—(b) lock him up for psychiatric investigation—(c) worst of all, pass the story on to Bancroft, who would thereby know what the Institute's children could do and would take appropriate counter-measures.

II

Of course, this was just the beginning. The trail was long. But time was hideously short before they began turning Tighe's brain inside out. And there were wolves along the trail.

For a shivering instant, Simon Dalgetty realized what he had let himself in for.

It seemed like forever before the Bancroft crowd left. Dalgetty's eyes followed them out of the bar—four men and the woman. They were all quiet, mannerly, distinguished-looking, in rich dark slack suits. Even the hulking bodyguard was probably a college graduate, Third Class. You wouldn't take them for murderers and kidnappers and the servants of those who would bring back political gangsterism. But then, reflected Dalgetty, they probably didn't think of themselves in that light either.

The enemy—the old and protean enemy, who had been fought down as Fascist, Nazi, Shintoist, Communist, Atomist, Americanist and God knew what else for a bloody century—had grown craftier with time. Now he could fool even himself.

Dalgetty's senses went back to normal. It was a sudden immense relief to be merely sitting in a dimly-lit booth with a pretty girl, to be no more than human for a while. But his sense of mission was still dark within him.

"Sorry I was so long," he said. "Have another drink."

"I just had one." She smiled.

He noticed the \$10-figure glowing on the dispenser and fed it two coins. Then, his nerves still vibrating, he dialed another whiskey for himself.

"You know those people in the next grotto?" asked Glenna. "I saw you watching them leave."

"Well, I know Mr. Bancroft by reputation," he said. "He lives here, doesn't he?"

"He's got a place over on Gull Station," she said, "but he's not here very much, mostly on the mainland, I guess."

Dalgetty nodded. He had come to Pacific Colony two days before, had been hanging around in the hope of getting close enough to Bancroft to pick up a clue. Now he had done so and his findings were worth little. He had merely confirmed what the Institute already considered highly probable

without getting any new information.

He needed to think over his next move. He drained his drink. "I'd better jet off," he said.

"We can have dinner in here if you want," said Glenna.

"Thanks, I'm not hungry." That was true enough. The nervous tension incidental to the use of his powers raised the devil with appetite. Nor could he be too lavish with his funds. "Maybe later."

"Okay, Joe, I might be seeing you." She smiled. "You're a funny one. But kind of nice." Her lips brushed his and then she got up and left. Dalgetty went out the door and punched for a top-side elevator.

It took him past many levels. The tavern was under the station's caissons near the main anchor cable, looking out into deep water. Above it were store-houses, machine rooms, kitchens, all the paraphernalia of modern existence. He stepped out of a kiosk onto an upper deck, thirty feet above the surface. Nobody else was there and he walked over to the railing and leaned on it, looking across the water and savoring loneliness.

Below him the tiers dropped away to the main deck, flowing lines and curves, broad sheets of clear plastic, animated signs, the grass and flowerbeds of a small park, people walking swiftly or idly. The huge gyro-stabilized bulk did not move noticeably to the long Pacific swell. Pelican Station was the colony's "downtown," its shops and theaters and restaurants, service and entertainment.

Around it the water was indigo blue in the evening light, streaked with arabesques of foam, and he could hear waves rumble against the sheer walls. Overhead the sky was tall with a few clouds in the west turning aureate. The hovering gulls seemed cast in gold. A haziness in the darkened east betokened the southern California coastline. He breathed deeply, letting nerves and muscles and viscera relax, shutting off his mind and turning for a while into an organism that merely lived and was glad to live.

Dalgetty's view in all directions was cut off by the other stations, the rising streamlined hulks which were Pacific Colony. A few airy flex-strung bridges had been completed to link them, but there was still an extensive boat traffic. To the south he could see a blackness on the water that was a sea ranch. His trained memory told him, in answer to a fleeting question, that according to the latest figures eighteen-point-three percent of the world's food supply was now being derived from modified strains of seaweed. The percentage would increase rapidly, he knew.

Elsewhere were mineral-extracting plants, fishery bases, experimental and pure-research stations. Below the floating city, digging into the continental shelf, was the underwater settlement—oil wells to supplement the industrial synthesizing process, mining, exploration in tanks to find new resources, a slow growth outward as men learned how to go deeper into cold and darkness and pressure. It was expensive but an over-crowded world had little choice.

Venus was already visible, low and pure on the dusking horizon. Dalgetty breathed the wet pungent sea-air into his lungs and thought with some pity of the men out there—and on the Moon, on Mars, between worlds. They were doing a huge and heart-breaking job—but he wondered if it were bigger and more meaningful than this work here in Earth's oceans.

Or a few pages of scribbled equations, tossed into a desk drawer at the Institute. Enough. Dalgetty brought his mind to heel like a harshly trained dog. He was also here to work.

The forces he must encounter seemed monstrous. He was one man, alone against he knew not what kind of organization. He had to rescue one other man before—well, before history was changed and spun off on the wrong course, the long downward path. He had his knowledge and abilities but they wouldn't stop a bullet. Nor did they include education for this kind of warfare. War that was not war, politics that were not politics but a handful of scrawled equations and a bookful of slowly gathered data and a brainful of dreams.

Bancroft had Tighe—somewhere. The Institute could not ask the government for help, even if to a large degree the Institute was the government. It could, perhaps, send Dalgetty a few men but it had no goon squads. And time was like a hound on his heels.

The sensitive man turned, suddenly aware of someone else. This was a middle-aged fellow, gaunt and gray-haired, with an intellectual cast of feature. He leaned on the rail and said quietly, "Nice evening, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Dalgetty. "Very nice."

"It gives me a feeling of real accomplishment, this place," said the stranger.

"How so?" asked Dalgetty, not unwilling to make conversation.

The man looked out over the sea and spoke softly as if to himself. "I'm fifty years old. I was born during World War Three and grew up with the famines and the mass insanities that followed. I saw fighting myself in Asia. I worried about a senselessly expanding population pressing on senselessly diminished resources. I saw an America that seemed equally divided between

decadence and madness.

"And yet I can stand now and watch a world where we've got a functioning United Nations, where population increase is leveling off and democratic government spreading to country after country, where we're conquering the seas and even going out to other planets. Things have changed since I was a boy but on the whole it's been for the better."

"Ah," said Dalgetty, "a kindred spirit. Though I'm afraid it's not quite that simple."

The man arched his brows. "So you vote conservative?"

"The Labor Party *is* conservative," said Dalgetty. "As proof of which it's in coalition with the Republicans and the Neofederalists as well as some splinter groups. No, I don't care if it stays in, or if the Conservatives prosper or the Liberals take over. The question is—who shall control the group in power?"

"Its membership, I suppose," said the man.

"But just who is its membership? You know as well as I do that the great failing of the American people has always been their lack of interest in politics."

"What? Why, they vote, don't they? What was the last percentage?"

"Eight-eight-point-three-seven. Sure they vote—once the ticket has been presented to them. But how many of them have anything to do with nominating the candidates or writing the platforms? How many will actually take time out to *work* at it—or even to write their Congressmen? 'Ward heeler' is still a term of contempt.

"All too often in our history the vote has been simply a matter of choosing between two well-oiled machines. A sufficiently clever and determined group can take over a party, keep the name and the slogans and in a few years do a complete behind-the-scenes *volte-face*." Dalgetty's words came fast, this was one facet of a task to which he had given his life.

"Two machines," said the stranger, "or four or five as we've got now, are at least better than one."

"Not if the same crowd controls all of them," Dalgetty said grimly.

"But—"

"If you can't lick 'em, join 'em.' Better yet, join all sides. Then you *can't* lose."

"I don't think that's happened yet," said the man.

"No it hasn't," said Dalgetty, "not in the United States, though in some other countries—never mind. It's still in process of happening, that's all. The lines today are drawn not by nations or parties, but by—philosophies, if you wish. Two views of man's destiny, cutting across all national, political, racial and religious lines."

"And what are those two views?" asked the stranger quietly.

"You might call them libertarian and totalitarian, though the latter don't necessarily think of themselves as such. The peak of rampant individualism was reached in the nineteenth century, legally speaking. Though in point of fact social pressure and custom were more strait-jacketing than most people today realize.

"In the twentieth century that social rigidity—in manners, morals, habits of thought—broke down. The emancipation of women, for instance, or the easy divorce or the laws about privacy. But at the same time legal control began tightening up again. Government took over more and more functions, taxes got steeper, the individual's life got more and more bound by regulations saying 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not.'

"Well, it looks as if war is going out as an institution. That takes off a lot of pressure. Such hampering restrictions as conscription to fight or work, or rationing, have been removed. What we're slowly attaining is a society where the individual has maximum freedom, both from law *and* custom. It's perhaps farthest advanced in America, Canada, and Brazil, but it's growing the world over.

"But there are elements which don't like the consequences of genuine libertarianism. And the new science of human behavior, mass and individual, is achieving rigorous formulation. It's becoming the most powerful tool man has ever had—for whoever controls the human mind will also control all that man can do. That science can be used by anyone, mind you. If you'll read between the lines you'll see what a hidden struggle is shaping up for control of it as soon as it reaches maturity and empirical useability."

"Ah, yes," said the man. "The Psychotechnic Institute."

Dalgetty nodded, wondering why he had jumped into such a lecture. Well, the more people who had some idea of the truth the better—though it wouldn't do for them to know the whole truth either. Not yet.

"The Institute trains so many for governmental posts and does so much advisory work," said the man, "that sometimes it looks almost as if it were quietly taking over the whole show."

Dalgetty shivered a little in the sunset breeze and wished he'd brought his cloak. He thought wearily, *Here it is again. Here is the story they are spreading, not in blatant accusations, not all at once, but slowly and subtly, a whisper here, a hint there, a slanted news story, a supposedly dispassionate article.... Oh, yes, they know their applied semantics.*

"Too many people fear such an outcome," he declared. "It just isn't true. The Institute is a private research organization with a Federal grant. Its records are open to anyone."

"All the records?" The man's face was vague in the gathering twilight.

Dalgetty thought he could make out a skeptically lifted brow. He didn't reply directly but said, "There's a foggy notion in the public mind that a group equipped with a complete science of man—which the Institute hasn't got by a long shot—could 'take over' at once and, by manipulations of some unspecified but frightfully subtle sort, rule the world. The theory is that if you know just what buttons to push and so on, men will do precisely as you wish without knowing that they're being guided. The theory happens to be pure jetwash."

"Oh, I don't know," said the man. "In general terms it sounds pretty plausible."

Dalgetty shook his head. "Suppose I were an engineer," he said, "and suppose I saw an avalanche coming down on me. I might know exactly what to do to stop it—where to plant my dynamite, where to build my concrete wall and so on. Only the knowledge wouldn't help me. I'd have neither the time nor the strength to use it."

"The situation is similar with regard to human dynamics, both mass and individual. It takes months or years to change a man's convictions and when you have hundreds of millions of men...." He shrugged. "Social currents are too large for all but the slightest, most gradual control. In fact perhaps the most valuable results obtained to date are not those which show what can be done but what cannot."

"You speak with the voice of authority," said the man.

"I'm a psychologist," said Dalgetty truthfully enough. He didn't add that he was also a subject, observer and guinea pig in one. "And I'm afraid I talk too much. Go from bad to voice."

"Ouch," said the man. He leaned his back against the rail and his shadowy hand extended a pack. "Smoke?"

"No, thanks, I don't."

"You're a rarity." The brief lighter-flare etched the stranger's face against the dusk.

"I've found other ways of relaxing."

"Good for you. By the way I'm a professor myself. English Litt at Colorado."

"Afraid I'm rather a roughneck in that respect," said Dalgetty. For a moment he had a sense of loss. His thought processes had become too far removed from the ordinary human for him to find much in fiction or poetry. But music, sculpture, painting—there was something else. He looked over the broad glimmering water, at the stations dark against the first stars, and savored the many symmetries and harmonies with a real pleasure. You needed senses like his before you could know what a lovely world this was.

"I'm on vacation now," said the man. Dalgetty did not reply in kind. After a moment—"You are too, I suppose?"

Dalgetty felt a slight shock. A personal question from a stranger—well, you didn't expect otherwise from someone like the girl Glenna but a professor should be better conditioned to privacy customs.

"Yes," he said shortly. "Just visiting."

"By the way, my name is Tyler, Harmon Tyler."

"Joe Thomson." Dalgetty shook hands with him.

"We might continue our conversation if you're going to be around for awhile," said Tyler. "You raised some interesting points."

Dalgetty considered. It would be worthwhile staying as long as Bancroft did, in the hope of learning some more. "I may be here a couple of days yet," he said.

"Good," said Tyler. He looked up at the sky. It was beginning to fill with stars. The deck was still empty. It ran around the dim upthrusting bulk of a weather-observation tower which was turned over to its automatics for the night and there was no one else to be seen. A few fluoros cast wan puddles of luminance on the plastic flooring.

Glancing at his watch, Tyler said casually, "It's about nineteen-thirty hours now. If you don't mind waiting till twenty hundred I can show you something interesting."

"What's that?"

"Ah, you'll be surprised." Tyler chuckled. "Not many people know about it. Now, getting back to that point you raised earlier...."

The half hour passed swiftly. Dalgetty did most of the talking.

"—and mass action. Look, to a rather crude first approximation a state of semantic equilibrium on a world-wide scale, which of course has never existed, would be represented by an equation of the form—"

"Excuse me." Tyler consulted the shining dial again. "If you don't mind stopping for a few minutes I'll show you that odd sight I was talking about."

"Eh? Oh-oh, sure."

Tyler threw away his cigarette. It was a tiny meteor in the gloom. He took Dalgetty's arm. They walked slowly around the weather tower.

The men came from the opposite side and met them halfway. Dalgetty had hardly seen them before he felt the sting in his chest.

A needle gun!

The world roared about him. He took a step forward, trying to scream, but his throat locked. The deck lifted up and hit him and his mind whirled toward darkness.

From somewhere will rose within him, trained reflexes worked, he summoned all that was left of his draining strength and fought the anesthetic. His wrestling with it was a groping in fog. Again and again he spiraled into unconsciousness and rose strangling. Dimly, through nightmare, he was aware of being carried. Once someone stopped the group in a corridor and asked what was wrong. The answer seemed to come from immensely far away. "I dunno. He passed out—just like that. We're taking him to a doctor."

There was a century spent going down some elevator. The boat-house walls trembled liquidly around him. He was carried aboard a large vessel, it was not visible through the gray mist. Some dulled portion of himself thought that this was obviously a private boat-house, since no one was trying to stop—trying to stop—trying to stop....

Then the night came.

III

He woke slowly, with a dry retch, and blinked his eyes open. Noise of air, he was flying, it must have been a triphibian they took him onto. He tried to force recovery but his mind was still too paralyzed.

"Here. Drink this."

Dalgetty took the glass and gulped thirstily. It was coolness and steadiness spreading through him. The vibrato within him faded, and the headache dulled enough to be endurable. Slowly he looked around, and felt the first crawl of panic.

No! He suppressed the emotion with an almost physical thrust. Now was the time for calm and quick wit and—

A big man near him nodded and stuck his head out the door. "He's okay now, I guess," he called. "Want to talk to him?"

Dalgetty's eyes roved the compartment. It was a rear cabin in a large airboat, luxuriously furnished with reclining seats and an inlaid table. A broad window looked out on the stairs.

Caught! It was pure bitterness, an impotent rage at himself. *Walked right into their arms!*

Tyler came into the room, followed by a pair of burly stone-faced men. He smiled. "Sorry," he murmured, "but you're playing out of your league, you know."

"Yeah." Dalgetty shook his head. Wryness twisted his mouth. "I don't league it much either."

Tyler grinned. It was a sympathetic expression. "You punsters are incurable," he said. "I'm glad you're taking it so well. We don't intend any harm to you."

Skepticism was dark in Dalgetty but he managed to relax. "How'd you get onto me?" he asked.

"Oh, various ways. You were pretty clumsy, I'm afraid." Tyler sat down across the table. The guards remained standing. "We were sure the Institute would attempt a counterblow and we've studied it and its personnel thoroughly. You were recognized, Dalgetty—and you're known to be very close to Tighe. So you walked after us without even a face-mask...."

"At any rate, you were noticed hanging around the colony. We checked back on your movements. One of the rec girls had some interesting things to tell of you. We decided you'd better be questioned. I sounded you out as much as a casual acquaintance could and then took you to the rendezvous." Tyler spread his hands. "That's all."

Dalgetty sighed and his shoulders slumped under a sudden enormous burden of discouragement.

Yes, they were right. He was out of his orbit. "Well," he said, "what now?"

"Now we have you *and* Tighe," said the other. He took out a cigarette. "I hope you're somewhat more willing to talk than he is."

"Suppose I'm not?"

"Understand this." Tyler frowned. "There are reasons for going slow with Tighe. He has hostage value, for one thing. But you're nobody. And while we aren't monsters I for one have little sympathy to spare for your kind of fanatic."

"Now there," said Dalgetty with a lift of sardonicism, "is an interesting example of semantic evolution. This being, on the whole, an easy-going tolerant period, the word 'fanatic' has come to be simply an epithet—a fellow on the other side."

"That will do," snapped Tyler. "You won't be allowed to stall. There are questions we want answered." He ticked the points off on his fingers. "What are the Institute's ultimate aims? How is it going about attaining them? How far has it gotten? Precisely what has it learned, in a scientific way, that it hasn't published? How much does it know about us?" He smiled thinly. "You've always been close to Tighe. He raised you, didn't he? You should know just as much as he."

Yes, thought Dalgetty, Tighe raised me. He was all the father I ever had, really. I was an orphan and he took me in and he was good.

Sharp in his mind rose the image of the old house. It had lain on broad wooded grounds in the fair hills of Maine, with a little river running down to a bay winged with sailboats. There had been neighbors—quiet-spoken folk with something more real about them than most of today's rootless world knew. And there had been many visitors—men and women with minds like flickering sword-blades.

He had grown up among intellects aimed at the future. He and Tighe had traveled a lot. They had often been in the huge pylon of the main Institute building. They had gone over to Tighe's native England once a year at least. But always the old house had been dear to them.

It stood on a ridge, long and low and weathered gray like a part of the earth. By day it had rested in a green sun-dazzle of trees or a glistening purity of snow. By night you heard the boards creaking and the lonesome sound of wind talking down the chimney. Yes, it had been good.

And there had been the wonder of it. He loved his training. The horizonless world within himself was a glorious thing to explore. And that had oriented him outward to the real world—he had felt wind and rain and sunlight, the pride of high buildings and the surge of a galloping horse, thresh of waves and laughter of women and smooth mysterious purr of great machines, with a fullness that made him pity those deaf and dumb and blind around him.

Oh yes, he loved those things. He was in love with the whole turning planet and the big skies overhead. It was a world of light and strength and swift winds and it would be bitter to leave it. But Tighe was locked in darkness.

He said slowly, "All we ever were was a research and educational center, a sort of informal university specializing in the scientific study of man. We're not any kind of political organization. You'd be surprised how much we differ in our individual opinions."

"What of it?" shrugged Tyler. "This is something larger than politics. Your work, if fully developed, would change our whole society, perhaps the whole nature of man. We *know* you've learned more things than you've made public. Therefore you're reserving that information for uses of your own."

"And you want it for your purposes?"

"Yes," said Tyler. After a moment, "I despise melodrama but if you don't cooperate you're going to get the works. And we've got Tighe too, never forget that. One of you ought to break down if he watches the other being questioned."

We're going to the same place! We're going to Tighe!

The effort to hold face and voice steady was monstrous. "Just where are we bound?"

"An island. We should be there soon. I'll be going back again myself but Mr. Bancroft is coming shortly. That should convince you just how important this is to us."

Dalgetty nodded. "Can I think it over for awhile? It isn't an easy decision for me."

"Sure. I hope you decide right."

Tyler got up and left with his guards. The big man who had handed him the drink earlier sat where he had been all the time. Slowly the psychologist began to tighten himself. The faint drone of turbines and whistle of jets and sundered air began to enlarge.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"CAN'T TELL YOU THAT. SHUDDUP, WILL YOU?"

"But surely...."

The guard didn't answer. But he was thinking. *Ree-villa-ghee-gay-doe—never would p'rnounce that damn Spig name ... cripes, what a God-forsaken hole!... Mebbe I can work a trip over to Mexico.... That little gal in Guada....*

Dalgetty concentrated. Revilla—he had it now. Islas de Revillagigedo a small group some 350 or 400 miles off the Mexican coast, little visited with very few inhabitants. His eidetic memory went to work, conjuring an image of a large-scale map he had once studied. Closing his eyes he laid off the exact distance, latitude and longitude, individual islands.

Wait, there was one a little further west, a speck on the map, not properly belonging to the group. And—he riffled through all the facts he had ever learned pertaining to Bancroft. Wait now, Bertrand Meade, who seemed to be the kingpin of the whole movement—yes, Meade owned that tiny island.

So that's where we're going! He sank back, letting weariness overrun him. It would be awhile yet before they arrived.

Dalgetty sighed and looked out at the stars. Why had men arranged such clumsy constellations when the total pattern of the sky was a big and lovely harmony? He knew his personal danger would be enormous once he was on the ground. Torture, mutilation, even death.

Dalgetty closed his eyes again. Almost at once he was asleep.

IV

They landed on a small field while it was still dark. Hustled out into a glare of lights Dalgetty did not have much chance to study his surroundings. There were men standing on guard with magnum rifles, tough-looking professional goons in loose gray uniforms. Dalgetty followed obediently across the concrete, along a walk and through a garden to the looming curved bulk of a house.

He paused just a second as the door opened for them and stood looking out into darkness. The sea rolled and hissed there on a wide beach. He caught the clean salt smell of it and filled his lungs. It might be the last time he ever breathed such air.

"Get along with you." An arm jerked him into motion again.

Down a bare coldly-lit hallway, down an escalator, into the guts of the island. Another door, a room beyond it, an ungentle shove. The door clashed to behind him.

Dalgetty looked around. The cell was small, bleakly furnished with bunk, toilet and washstand, had a ventilator grille in one wall. Nothing else. He tried listening with maximum sensitivity but there were only remote confused murmurs.

Dad! he thought. *You're here somewhere too.*

He flopped on the bunk and spent a moment analyzing the aesthetics of the layout. It had a certain pleasing severity, the unconscious balance of complete functionalism. Soon Dalgetty went back to sleep.

A guard with a breakfast tray woke him. Dalgetty tried to read the man's thoughts but there weren't any to speak of. He ate ravenously under a gun muzzle, gave the tray back and returned to sleep. It was the same at lunch time.

His time-sense told him that it was 1435 hours when he was roused again. There were three men this time, husky specimens. "Come on," said one of them. "Never saw such a guy for pounding his ear."

Dalgetty stood up, running a hand through his hair. The red bristles were scratchy on his palm. It was a cover-up, a substitute symbol to bring his nervous system back under full control. The process felt as if he were being tumbled through a huge gulf.

"Just how many of your fellows are there here?" he asked.

"Enough. Now get going!"

He caught the whisper of thought—*fifty of us guards, is it? Yeah, fifty, I guess.*

Fifty! Dalgetty felt taut as he walked out between two of them. Fifty goons. And they were trained, he knew that. The Institute had learned that Bertrand Meade's private army was well-drilled. Nothing obtrusive about it—officially they were only servants and bodyguards—but they knew how to shoot.

And he was alone in mid-ocean with them. He was alone and no one knew where he was and anything could be done to him. He felt cold, walking down the corridor.

There was a room beyond with benches and a desk. One of the guards gestured to a chair at one end. "Sit," he grunted.

Dalgetty submitted. The straps went around his wrists and ankles, holding him to the arms and

legs of the heavy chair. Another buckled about his waist. He looked down and saw that the chair was bolted to the floor. One of the guards crossed to the desk and started up a tape recorder.

A door opened in the far end of the room. Thomas Bancroft came in. He was a big man, fleshy but in well-scrubbed health, his clothes designed with quiet good taste. The head was white-maned, leonine, with handsome florid features and sharp blue eyes. He smiled ever so faintly and sat down behind the desk.

The woman was with him—Dalgetty looked harder at her. She was new to him. She was medium tall, a little on the compact side, her blond hair cut too short, no makeup on her broad Slavic features. Young, in hard condition, moving with a firm masculine stride. With those tilted gray eyes, that delicately curved nose and wide sullen mouth, she could have been a beauty had she wanted to be.

One of the modern type, thought Dalgetty. A flesh-and-blood machine, trying to outmale men, frustrated and unhappy without knowing it and all the more bitter for that.

Briefly there was sorrow in him, an enormous pity for the millions of mankind. They did not know themselves, they fought themselves like wild beasts, tied up in knots, locked in nightmare. Man could be so much if he had the chance.

He glanced at Bancroft. "I know you," he said, "but I'm afraid the lady has the advantage of me."

"My secretary and general assistant, Miss Casimir." The politician's voice was sonorous, a beautifully controlled instrument. He leaned across the desk. The recorder by his elbow whirred in the flat soundproofed stillness.

"Mr. Dalgetty," he said, "I want you to understand that we aren't fiends. There are things too important for ordinary rules though. Wars have been fought over them in the past and may well be fought again. It will be easier for all concerned if you cooperate with us now. No one need ever know that you have done so."

"Suppose I answer your questions," said Dalgetty. "How do you know I'll be telling the truth?"

"Neoscopolamine, of course. I don't think you've been immunized. It confuses the mind too much for us to interrogate you about these complex matters under its influence but we will surely find out if you have been answering our present questions correctly."

"And what then? Do you just let me go?"

Bancroft shrugged. "Why shouldn't we? We may have to keep you here for awhile but soon you will have ceased to matter and can safely be released."

Dalgetty considered. Not even he could do much against truth drugs. And there were still more radical procedures, prefrontal lobotomy for instance. He shivered. The leatherite straps felt damp against his thin clothing.

He looked at Bancroft. "What do you really want?" he asked. "Why are you working for Bertrand Meade?"

Bancroft's heavy mouth lifted in a smile. "I thought you were supposed to answer the questions," he said.

"Whether I do or not depends on whose questions they are," said Dalgetty. *Stall for time! Put it off, the moment of terror, put it off!* "Frankly, what I know of Meade doesn't make me friendly. But I could be wrong."

"Mr. Meade is a distinguished executive."

"Uh-huh. He's also the power behind a hell of a lot of political figures, including you. He's the real boss of the Actionist movement."

"What do you know of that?" asked the woman sharply.

"It's a complicated story," said Dalgetty, "but essentially Actionism is a—a *Weltanschauung*. We're still recovering from the World Wars and their aftermath. People everywhere are swinging away from great vague capitalized causes toward a cooler and clearer view of life.

"It's analogous to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which also followed a period of turmoil between conflicting fanaticisms. A belief in reason is growing up even in the popular mind, a spirit of moderation and tolerance. There's a wait-and-see attitude toward everything, including the sciences and particularly the new half-finished science of psychodynamics. The world wants to rest for awhile.

"Well, such a state of mind has its own drawbacks. It produces wonderful structures of thought but there's something cold about them. There is so little real passion, so much caution—the arts, for instance, are becoming ever more stylized. Old symbols like religion and the sovereign state and a particular form of government, for which men once died, are openly jeered at. We can formulate the semantic condition at the Institute in a very neat equation.

"And you don't like it. Your kind of man needs something big. And mere concrete bigness isn't enough. You could give your lives to the sciences or to inter-planetary colonization or to social correction, as many people are cheerfully doing—but those aren't for you. Down underneath you

miss the universal father-image.

"You want an almighty Church or an almighty State or an almighty *anything*, a huge misty symbol which demands everything you've got and gives in return only a feeling of belonging." Dalgetty's voice was harsh. "In short, you can't stand on your own psychic feet. You can't face the truth that man is a lonely creature and that his purpose must come from within himself."

Bancroft scowled. "I didn't come here to be lectured," he said.

"Have it your way," answered Dalgetty. "I thought you wanted to know what I knew of Actionism. That's it in unprecise verbal language. Essentially you want to be a Leader in a Cause. Your men, such as aren't merely hired, want to be Followers. Only there isn't a Cause around, these days, except the common-sense one of improving human life."

The woman, Casimir, leaned over the desk. There was a curious intensity in her eyes. "You just pointed out the drawbacks yourself," she said. "This *is* a decadent period."

"No," said Dalgetty. "Unless you insist on loaded connotations. It's a necessary period of rest. Recoil time for a whole society—well, it all works out neatly in Tighe's formulation. The present state of affairs should continue for about seventy-five years, we feel at the Institute. In that time, reason can—we hope—be so firmly implanted in the basic structure of society that when the next great wave of passion comes it won't turn men against each other.

"The present is, well, analytic. While we catch our breath we can begin to understand ourselves. When the next synthetic—or creative or crusading period, if you wish—comes, it will be saner than all which have gone before. And man can't afford to go insane again. Not in the same world with the lithium bomb."

Bancroft nodded. "And you in the Institute are trying to control this process," he said. "You're trying to stretch out the period of—damn it, of decadence! Oh, I've studied the modern school system too, Dalgetty. I know how subtly the rising generation is being indoctrinated—through policies formulated by *your* men in the government."

"Indoctrinated? Trained, I would say. Trained in self-restraint and critical thinking." Dalgetty grinned with one side of his mouth. "Well, we aren't here to argue generalities. Specifically Meade feels he has a mission. He is the natural leader of America—ultimately, through the U.N., in which we are still powerful, the world. He wants to restore what he calls 'ancestral virtues'—you see, I've listened to his speeches and yours, Bancroft.

"These virtues consist of obedience, physical *and* mental, to 'constituted authority'—of 'dynamism,' which operationally speaking means people ought to jump when he gives an order—of Oh, why go on? It's the old story. Power hunger, the recreation of the Absolute State, this time on a planetary scale.

"With psychological appeals to some and with promises of reward to others he's built up quite a following. But he's shrewd enough to know that he can't just stage a revolution. He has to make people want him. He has to reverse the social current until it swings back to authoritarianism—with him riding the crest.

"And that of course is where the Institute comes in. Yes, we have developed theories which make at least a beginning at explaining the facts of history. It was a matter not so much of gathering data as of inventing a rigorous self-correcting symbology and our paramathematics seems to be just that. We haven't published all of our findings because of the uses to which they could be put. If you know exactly how to go about it you can shape world society into almost any image you want—in fifty years or less! You want that knowledge of ours for your purposes!"

Dalgetty fell silent. There was a long quietness. His own breathing seemed unnaturally loud.

"All right." Bancroft nodded again, slowly. "You haven't told us anything we don't know."

"I'm well aware of that," said Dalgetty.

"Your phrasing was rather unfriendly," said Bancroft. "What you don't appreciate is the revolting stagnation and cynicism of this age."

"Now you're using the loaded words," said Dalgetty. "Facts just *are*. There's no use passing moral judgments on reality, the only thing you can do is try to change it."

"Yes," said Bancroft. "All right then, we're trying. Do you want to help us?"

"You could beat the hell out of me," said Dalgetty, "but it wouldn't teach you a science that it takes years to learn."

"No, but we'd know just what you have and where to find it. We have some good brains on our side. Given your data and equations they can figure it out." The pale eyes grew wholly chill. "You don't seem to appreciate your situation. You're a prisoner, understand?"

Dalgetty braced his muscles. He didn't reply.

Bancroft sighed. "Bring him in," he said.

One of the guards went out. Dalgetty's heart stumbled. *Dad*, he thought. It was anguish in him. Casimir walked over to stand in front of him. Her eyes searched his.

"Don't be a fool," she said. "It hurts worse than you know. Tell us."

He looked up at her. *I'm afraid*, he thought. *God knows I'm afraid*. His own sweat was acrid in his nostrils. "No," he said.

"I tell you they'll do everything!" She had a nice voice, low and soft, but it roughened now. Her face was colorless with strain. "Go on man, don't condemn yourself to—mindlessness!"

There was something strange here. Dalgetty's senses began to reach out. She was leaning close and he knew the signs of horror even if she tried to hide them. *She's not so hard as she makes out—but then why is she with them?*

He threw a bluff. "I know who you are," he said. "Shall I tell your friends?"

"No, you don't!" She stepped back, rigid, and his whetted senses caught the fear-smell. In a moment there was control and she said, "All right then, have it your way."

And underneath, the thought, slowed by the gluiness of panic, *Does he know I'm FBI?*

FBI! He jerked against the straps. Ye gods!

Calmness returned to him as she walked to her chief but his mind whirred. Yes, why not? Institute men had little connection with the Federal detectives, who, since the abolition of a discredited Security, had resumed a broad function. They might easily have become dubious about Bertrand Meade on their own, have planted operatives with him. They had women among them too and a woman was always less conspicuous than a man.

He felt a chill. The last thing he wanted was a Federal agent here.

The door opened again. A quartet of guards brought in Michael Tighe. The Briton halted, staring before him. "*Simon!*" It was a harsh sound, full of pain.

"Have they hurt you, Dad?" asked Dalgetty very gently.

"No, no—not till now." The gray head shook. "But you...."

"Take it easy, Dad," said Dalgetty.

The guards hustled Tighe over to a front-row bench and sat him down. Old man and young locked eyes across the bare space.

Tighe spoke to him in the hidden way. *What are you going to do? I can't sit and let them—*

Dalgetty could not reply unheard but he shook his head. "I'll be okay," he answered aloud.

Do you think you can make a break? I'll try to help you.

"No," said Dalgetty. "Whatever happens you lie low. That's an order."

He blocked off sensitivity as Bancroft snapped, "Enough. One of you is going to yield. If Dr. Tighe won't, then we'll work on him and see if Mr. Dalgetty can hold out."

He waved his hand as he took out a cigar. Two of the goons stepped up to the chair. They had rubberite hoses in their hands.

The first blow thudded against Dalgetty's ribs. He didn't feel it—he had thrown up a nerve bloc—but it rattled his teeth together. And while he was insensitive he'd be unable to listen in on....

Another thud, and another. Dalgetty clenched his fists. What to do, what to do? He looked over to the desk. Bancroft was smoking and watching as dispassionately as if it were some mildly interesting experiment. Casimir had turned her back.

"Something funny here, chief." One of the goons straightened. "I don't think he's feeling nothing."

"Doped?" Bancroft frowned. "No, that's hardly possible." He rubbed his chin, regarding Dalgetty with wondering eyes. Casimir wheeled around to stare. Sweat filmed Michael Tighe's face, glistening in the chill white light.

"He can still be hurt," said the guard.

Bancroft winced. "I don't like outright mutilation," he said. "But still—I've warned you, Dalgetty."

"*Get out, Simon,*" whispered Tighe. "*Get out of here.*"

Dalgetty's red head lifted. Decision crystalized within him. He would be no use to anyone with a broken leg, a crushed foot, an eye knocked out, seared lungs—and Casimir was FBI, she might be able to do something at this end in spite of all.

He tested the straps. A quarter inch of leatherite—he could snap them but would he break his bones doing it?

Only one way to find out, he thought bleakly.

"I'll get a blowtorch," said one of the guards in the rear of the room. His face was wholly impassive. Most of these goons must be moronic, thought Dalgetty. Most of the guards in the twentieth-century extermination camps had been. No inconvenient empathy with the human flesh

they broke and flayed and burned.

He gathered himself. This time it was rage, a cloud of fury rising in his mind, a ragged red haze across his vision. That they would *dare!*

He snarled as the strength surged up in him. He didn't even feel the straps as they popped across. The same movement hurtled him across the room toward the door.

Someone yelled. A guard leaped in his path, a giant of a man. Dalgetty's fist sprang before him, there was a cracking sound and the goon's head snapped back against his own spine. Dalgetty was already past him. The door was shut in his face. Wood crashed as he went through it.

A bullet wailed after him. He dodged down the corridor, up the nearest steps, the walls blurred with his own speed. Another slug smacked into the paneling beside him. He rounded a corner, saw a window and covered his eyes with an arm as he leaped.

The plastic was tough but a hundred and seventy pounds hit it at fifteen feet per second. Dalgetty went through!

Sunlight flamed in his eyes as he hit the ground. Rolling over and bouncing to his feet he set out across lawn and garden. As he ran his vision swept the landscape. In that state of fear and wrath he could not command much thought but his memory stored the data for re-examination.

V

The house was a rambling two-story affair, all curves and planes between palm trees, the island sloping swiftly from its front to a beach and dock. On one side was the airfield, on another the guard barracks. To the rear, in the direction of Dalgetty's movement, the ground became rough and wild, stones and sand and saw-grass and clumps of palmettos, climbing upward for a good two miles. On every side, he could see the infinite blue sparkle of ocean. Where could he hide?

He didn't notice the slashing blades through which he raced and the dry gulping of his lungs was something dreadfully remote. But when a bullet went past one ear, he heard that and drew more speed from some unknown depth. A glance behind revealed his pursuers boiling out of the house, men in gray with the hot sunlight blinking off their guns.

He ducked around a thicket, flopped and belly-crawled over a rise of land. On the farther side he straightened again and ran up the long slope. Another slug and another. They were almost a mile behind now but their guns had a long reach. He bent low, zigzagging as he ran. The bullets kicked up spurts of sand around him.

A six-foot bluff loomed in his path, black volcanic rock shining like wet glass. He hit it at full speed. He almost *walked* up its face and in the instant when his momentum was gone caught a root and yanked himself to the top. Again he was out of their sight. He sprang around another hulk of stone and skidded to a halt. At his feet, a sheer cliff dropped nearly a hundred feet to a white smother of surf.

Dalgetty gulped air, working his lungs like a bellows. A long jump down, he thought dizzily. If he didn't crack his skull open on a reef he might well be clawed under by the sea. But there was no other place for him to go.

He made a swift estimate. He had run the upward two miles in a little over nine minutes, surely a record for such terrain. It would take the pursuit another ten or fifteen to reach him. But he couldn't double back without being seen and this time they'd be close enough to fill him with lead.

Okay, son, he told himself. *You're going to duck now, in more than one sense.*

His light waterproof clothes, tattered by the island growth, would be no hindrance down there, but he took off his sandals and stuck them in his belt pouch. Praise all gods, the physical side of his training had included water sports. He moved along the cliff edge, looking for a place to dive. The wind whined at his feet.

There—down there. No visible rocks though the surf boiled and smoked. He willed full energy back into himself, bent his knees, jack-knifed into the air.

The sea was a hammer blow against his body. He came up threshing and tumbling, gasped a mouthful of air that was half salt spray, was pulled under again. A rock scraped his ribs. He took long strokes, always upward to the blind white shimmer of light. He got to the crest of one wave and rode it in, surfing over a razorback reef.

Shallow water. Blinded by the steady rain of salt mist, deafened by the roar and crash of the sea, he groped toward shore. A narrow pebbly beach ran along the foot of the cliff. He moved along it, hunting a place to hide.

There—a sea-worn cave, some ten feet inward, with a yard or so of fairly quiet water covering its bottom. He splashed inside and lay down, exhaustion clamping a hand on him.

It was noisy. The hollow resonance of sound filled the cave like the inside of a drum but he didn't notice. He lay on the rocks and sand, his mind spiraling toward unconsciousness, and let his body make its own recovery.

Presently he regained awareness and looked about him. The cave was dim, with only a filtered greenish light to pick out black walls and slowly swirling water. Nobody could see much below the surface—good. He studied himself. Lacerated clothes, bruised flesh and a long bleeding gash in one side. That was not good. A stain of blood on the water would give him away like a shout.

Grimacing, he pressed the edges of the wound together and willed that the bleeding stop. By the time a good enough clot was formed for him to relax his concentration the guards were scrambling down to find him. He didn't have many minutes left. Now he had to do the opposite of energizing. He had to slow metabolism down, ease his heartbeat, lower his body temperature, dull his racing brain.

He began to move his hands, swaying back and forth, muttering the autohypnotic formulas. His incantations, Tighe had called them. But they were only stylized gestures leading to conditioned reflexes deep in the medulla. *Now I lay me down to sleep...*

Heavy, heavy—his eyelids were drooping; the wet walls receding into a great darkness, a hand cradling his head. The noise of surf dimmed, became a rustle, the skirts of the mother he had never known, come in to bid him goodnight. Coolness stole over him like veils dropping one by one inside his head. There was winter outside and his bed was snug.

When Dalgetty heard the nearing rattle of boots—just barely through the ocean and his own drowsiness—he almost forgot what he had to do. No, yes, now he knew. Take several long, deep breaths, oxygenate the bloodstream, then fill the lungs once and slide down under the surface.

He lay there in darkness hardly conscious of the voices, dimly perceived.

"A cave here—a place for him to hide."

"Nah, I don't see nothing."

Scrunch of feet on stone. "Ouch! Stubbed my damn toe. Nah, it's a closed cave. He ain't in here."

"Hm? Look at this, then. Bloodstains on this rock, right? He's *been* here, at least."

"Under water?" Rifle butts probed but could not sound the inlet.

The woman's voice. "If he is hiding down below he'll have to come up for air."

"When? We gotta search this whole damn beach. Here, I'll just give the water a burst."

Casimir, sharply—"Don't be a fool. You won't even know if you hit him. Nobody can hold his breath more than three minutes."

"Yeah, that's right, Joe. How long we been in here?"

"One minute, I guess. Give him a couple more. Cripes! D'ja see how he ran? He ain't human!"

"He's killable, though. Me, I think he's just rolling around in the surf out there. This could be fish blood. A 'cuda chased another fish in here and bit it."

Casimir: "Or if his body drifted in, it's safely under. Got a cigarette?"

"Here y'are, Miss. But say, I never thought to ask. How come you come with us?"

Casimir: "I'm as good a shot as you are, buster, and I want to be sure this job's done right."

Pause.

Casimir: "Almost five minutes. If he can come up now he's a seal. Especially with his body oxygen-starved after all that running."

In the slowness of Dalgetty's brain there was a chill wonder about the woman. He had read her thought, she was FBI, but she seemed strangely eager to hunt him down.

"Okay, le's get outta here."

Casimir: "You go on. I'll wait here just in case and come up to the house pretty soon. I'm tired of following you around."

"Okay. Le's go, Joe."

It was another four minutes or so before the pain and tension in his lungs became unendurable. Dalgetty knew he would be helpless as he rose, still in his semi-hibernating state, but his body was shrieking for air. Slowly he broke the surface.

The woman gasped. Then the automatic jumped into her hand and leveled between his eyes. "All right, friend. Come on out." Her voice was very low and shook a trifle but there was grimness in it.

Dalgetty climbed onto the ledge beside her and sat with his legs dangling, hunched in the misery of returning strength. When full wakefulness was achieved he looked at her and found she had moved to the farther end of the cave.

"Don't try to jump," she said. Her eyes caught the vague light in a wide glimmer, half frightened. "I don't know what to make of you."

Dalgetty drew a long breath and sat upright, bracing himself on the cold slippery stone. "I know who you are," he said.

"Who, then?" she challenged.

"You're an FBI agent planted on Bancroft."

Her gaze narrowed, her lips compressed. "What makes you think so?"

"Never mind—you are. That gives me a certain hold on you, whatever your purposes."

The blond head nodded. "I wondered about that. That remark you made to me down in the cell suggested—well, I couldn't take chances. Especially when you showed you were something extraordinary by snapping those straps and bursting the door open. I came along with the search party in hope of finding you."

He had to admire the quick mind behind the wide smooth brow. "You damn near did—for them," he accused her.

"I couldn't do anything suspicious," she answered. "But I figured you hadn't leaped off the cliff in sheer desperation. You must have had some hiding place in mind and under water seemed the most probable. In view of what you'd already done I was pretty sure you could hold your breath abnormally long." Her smile was a little shaky. "Though I didn't think it would be *inhumanly* long."

"You've got brains," he said, "but how much heart?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, are you going to throw Dr. Tighe and me to the wolves now? Or will you help us?"

"That depends," she answered slowly. "What are you here for?"

His mouth twisted ruefully. "I'm not here on purpose at all," Dalgetty confessed. "I was just trying to get a clue to Dr. Tighe's whereabouts. They outsmarted me and brought me here. Now I *have* to rescue him." His eyes held hers. "Kidnapping is a Federal offense. It's your duty to help me."

"I may have higher duties," she countered. Leaning forward, tautly, "But how do you expect to do this?"

"I'm damned if I know." Dalgetty locked moodily out at the beach and the waves and the smoking spindrift. "But that gun of yours would be a big help."

She stood for a moment, scowling with thought. "If I don't come back soon they'll be out hunting for me."

"We've got to find another hiding place," he agreed. "Then they will assume I survived after all and grabbed you. They'll be scouring the whole island for us. If we haven't been located before dark they'll be spread thin enough to give us a chance."

"It makes more sense for me to go back now," she said. "Then I can be on the inside to help you."

He shook his head. "Uh-uh. Quit making like a stereoshow detective. If you leave me your gun, claiming you lost it, that's sure to bring suspicion on you the way they're excited right now. If you don't I'll still be on the outside and unarmed—and what could you do, one woman alone in that nest? Now we're two with a shooting iron between us. I think that's a better bet."

After a while, she nodded. "Okay, you win. Assuming"—the half-lowered gun was raised again with a jerking motion—"that I will aid you. Who are you? *What* are you, Dalgetty?"

He shrugged. "Let's say I'm Dr. Tighe's assistant and have some unusual powers. You know the Institute well enough to realize this isn't just a feud between two gangster groups."

"I wonder...." Suddenly she clanked the automatic back into its holster. "All right. For the time being only though!"

Relief was a wave rushing through him. "Thank you," he whispered. Then, "Where can we go?"

"I've been swimming around here in the quieter spots," she said. "I know a place. Wait here."

She stepped across the cave and peered out its mouth. Someone must have hailed her, for she waved back. She stood leaning against the rock and Dalgetty saw how the sea-spray gleamed in her hair. After a long five minutes she turned to him again.

"All right," she said. "The last one just went up the path. Let's go." They walked along the beach. It trembled underfoot with the rage of the sea. There was a grinding under the snort and roar of surf as if the world's teeth ate rock.

The beach curved inward, forming a small bay sheltered by outlying skerries. A narrow path ran upward from it but it was toward the sea that the woman gestured. "Out there," she said. "Follow me." She took off her shoes as he had done and checked her holster: the gun was waterproof, but it wouldn't do to have it fall out. She waded into the sea and struck out with a powerful crawl.

They climbed up on one of the hogback rocks some ten yards from shore. This one rose a good dozen feet above the surface. It was cleft in the middle, forming a little hollow hidden from land and water alike. They crawled into this and sat down, breathing hard. The sea was loud at their backs and the air felt cold on their wet skins.

Dalgetty leaned back against the smooth stone, looking at the woman, who was unemotionally counting how many clips she had in her pouch. The thin drenched tunic and slacks showed a very nice figure. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Casimir," she answered, without looking up.

"First name, I mean. Mine is Simon."

"Elena, if you must know. Four packs, a hundred rounds plus ten in the chamber now. If we have to shoot them all, we'd better be good. These aren't magnums, so you have to hit a man just right to put him out of action."

"Well," shrugged Dalgetty, "we'll just have to lumber along as best we can. I oak we don't make ashes of ourselves."

"Oh, *no!*" He couldn't tell whether it was appreciation or dismay. "At a time like this too."

"It doesn't make me very popular," he agreed. "Everybody says to elm with me. But, as they say in France, ve are alo-o-one now, mon cherry, and tree's a crowd."

"Don't get ideas," she snapped.

"Oh, I'll get plenty of ideas, though I admit this isn't the place to carry them out." Dalgetty folded his arms behind his head and blinked up at the sky. "Man, could I use a nice tall mint julep right now."

Elena frowned. "If you're trying to convince me you're just a simple American boy you might as well quit," she said thinly. "That sort of—of emotional control, in a situation like this, only makes you less human."

Dalgetty swore at himself. She was too damn quick, that was all. And her intelligence might be enough for her to learn....

Will I have to kill her?

He drove the thought from him. He could overcome his own conditioning about anything, including murder, if he wanted to, but he'd never want to. No, that was out. "How did you get here?" he asked. "How much does the FBI know?"

"Why should I tell you?"

"Well, it'd be nice to know if we can expect reinforcements."

"We can't." Her voice was bleak. "I might as well let you know. The Institute could find out anyway through its government connections—the damned octopus!" he looked into the sky. Dalgetty's gaze followed the curve of her high cheekbones. Unusual face—you didn't often see such an oddly pleasing arrangement. The slight departure from symmetry....

"We've wondered about Bertrand Meade for some time, as every thinking person has," she began tonelessly. "It's too bad there are so few thinking people in the country."

"Something the Institute is trying to correct," Dalgetty put in.

Elena ignored him. "It was finally decided to work agents into his various organizations. I've been with Thomas Bancroft for about two years now. My background was carefully faked and I'm a useful assistant. But even so it was only a short while back that I got sufficiently into his confidence to be given some inkling of what's going on. As far as I know no other FBI operative has learned as much."

"And what have you found out?"

"Essentially the same things you were describing in the cell, plus more details on the actual work they're doing. Apparently the Institute was onto Meade's plans long before we were. It doesn't speak well for your purposes, whatever they are, that you haven't asked us for help before this.

"The decision to kidnap Dr. Tighe was taken only a couple of weeks ago. I haven't had a chance to communicate with my associates in the force. There's always someone around, watching. The set-up's well arranged, so that even those not under suspicion don't have much chance to work unobserved, once they've gotten high enough to know anything important. Everybody spies on everybody else and submits periodic reports."

She gave him a harsh look. "So here I am. No official person knows my whereabouts and if I should disappear it would be called a deplorable accident. Nothing could be proved and I doubt if the FBI would ever get another chance to do any effective spying."

"But you have proof enough for a raid," he ventured.

"No, we haven't. Up till the time I was told Dr. Tighe was going to be snatched I didn't know for certain that anything illegal was going on. There's nothing in the law against like-minded people

knowing each other and having a sort of club. Even if they hire tough characters and arm them the law can't protest. The Act of Nineteen Ninety-nine effectively forbids private armies but it would be hard to prove Meade has one."

"He doesn't really," said Dalgetty. "Those goons aren't much more than what they claim to be—bodyguards. This whole fight is primarily on a—mental level."

"So I gather. And can a free country forbid debate or propaganda? Not to mention that Meade's people include some powerful men in the government itself. If I could get away from here alive we'd be able to hang a kidnapping charge on Thomas Bancroft, with assorted charges of threat, mayhem and conspiracy, but it wouldn't touch the main group." Her fists clenched. "It's like fighting shadows."

"You war against the sunset-glow. The judgment follows fast my lord!" quoted Dalgetty. *Heriots' Ford* was one of the few poems he liked. "Getting Bancroft out of the way would be something," he added. "The way to fight Meade is not to attack him physically but to change the conditions under which he must work."

"Change them to what?" Her eyes challenged his. He noticed that there were small gold flecks in the gray. "What does the Institute want?"

"A sane world," he replied.

"I've wondered," she said. "Maybe Bancroft is more nearly right than you. Maybe I should be on his side after all."

"I take it you favor libertarian government," he said. "In the past it's always broken down sooner or later and the main reason has been that there aren't enough people with the intelligence, alertness and toughness to resist the inevitable encroachments of power on liberty."

"The Institute is trying to do two things—create such a citizenry and simultaneously to build up a society which itself produces men of that kind and reinforces those traits in them. It can be done, given time. Under ideal conditions we estimate it would take about three hundred years for the whole world. Actually it'll take longer."

"But just what kind of person is needed?" Elena asked coldly. "Who decides it? *You* do. You're just the same as all other reformers, including Meade—hell bent to change the whole human race over to your particular ideal, whether they like it or not."

"Oh, they'll like it," he smiled. "That's part of the process."

"It's a worse tyranny than whips and barbed wire," she snapped.

"You've never experienced those then."

"You *have* got that knowledge," she accused. "You have the data and the equations to be—sociological engineers."

"In theory," he said. "In practice it isn't that easy. The social forces are so great that—well, we could be overwhelmed before accomplishing anything. And there are plenty of things we still don't know. It will take decades, perhaps centuries, to work out a complete dynamics of man. We're one step beyond the politician's rule of thumb but not up to the point where we can use slide rules. We have to feel our way."

"Nevertheless," she said, "you've got the beginnings of a knowledge which reveals the true structure of society and the processes that make it. Given that knowledge man could in time build his own world-order the way he desired it, a stable culture that wouldn't know the horrors of oppression or collapse. But you've hidden away the very fact that such information exists. You're using it in secret."

"Because we have to," Dalgetty said. "If it were generally known that we're putting pressure on here and there and giving advice slanted just the way *we* desire, the whole thing would blow up in our faces. People don't like being shoved around."

"And still you're doing it!" One hand dropped to her gun. "You, a clique of maybe a hundred men...."

"More than that. You'd be surprised how many are with us."

"You've decided *you* are the almighty arbiters. Your superior wisdom is going to lead poor blind mankind up the road to heaven. I say it's down the road to hell! The last century saw the dictatorship of the elite and the dictatorship of the proletariat. This one seems to be birthing the dictatorship of the intellectuals. I don't like any of them!"

"Look, Elena." Dalgetty leaned on one elbow and faced her. "It isn't that simple. All right, we've got some special knowledge. When we first realized we were getting somewhere in our research we had to decide whether to make our results public or merely give out selected less important findings. Don't you see, no matter what we did it would have been us, the few men, who decided? Even destroying all our information would have been a decision."

His voice grew more urgent. "So we made what I think was the right choice. History shows as conclusively as our own equations that freedom is not a 'natural' condition of man. It's a metastable state at best, all too likely to collapse into tyranny. The tyranny can be imposed from outside by the better-organized armies of a conqueror, or it can come from within—through the will of the people themselves, surrendering their rights to the father-image, the almighty leader, the absolute state.

"What use does Bertrand Meade want to make of our findings if he can get them? To bring about the end of freedom by working on the people till they themselves desire it. And the damnable part of it is that Meade's goal is much more easily attained than ours.

"So suppose we made our knowledge public. Suppose we educated anyone who desired it in our techniques. Can't you see what would happen? Can't you see the struggle that would be waged for control of the human mind? It could start as innocuously as a businessman planning a more effective advertising campaign. It would end in a welter of propaganda, counter-propaganda, social and economic manipulations, corruption, competition for the key offices—and so, ultimately, there would be violence.

"All the psychodynamic tensors ever written down won't stop a machine-gun. Violence riding over a society thrown into chaos, enforced peace—and the peace-makers, perhaps with the best will in the world, using the Institute techniques to restore order. Then one step leads to another, power gets more and more centralized and it isn't long before you have the total state back again. Only this total state could *never* be overthrown!"

Elena Casimir bit her lip. A stray breeze slid down the rock wall and ruffled her bright hair. After a long while she said, "Maybe you're right. But America today has, on the whole, a good government. You could let them know."

"Too risky. Sooner or later someone, probably with very idealistic motives, would force the whole thing into the open. So we're keeping hidden the very fact that our most important equations exist—which is why we didn't ask for help when Meade's detectives finally learned that they know."

"How do you know your precious Institute won't become just such an oligarchy as you describe?"

"I don't," Simon said, "but it's improbable. You see, the recruits who are eventually taught everything we know are pretty thoroughly indoctrinated with our own present-day beliefs. And we've learned enough individual psych to do some real indoctrinating! They'll pass it on to the next generation and so on.

"Meanwhile we hope the social structure and the mental climate is being modified in such a way that eventually it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for anyone to impose absolute control by any means. For as I said before, even an ultimately developed psychodynamics can't do everything. Ordinary propaganda, for instance, is quite ineffective on people trained in critical thinking.

"When enough people the world over are sane we can make the knowledge general. Meanwhile we've got to keep it under wraps and quietly prevent anyone else from learning the same things independently. Most such prevention, by the way, consists merely of recruiting promising researchers into our own ranks."

"The world's too big," she said very softly. "You can't foresee all that'll happen. Too many things could go wrong."

"Maybe. It's a chance we've got to take." His own gaze was somber.

They sat for awhile in stillness. Then she said, "It all sounds very pretty. But—what are you, Dalgetty?"

"Simon," he corrected.

"What are you?" she repeated. "You've done things I wouldn't have believed were possible. *Are you human?*"

"I'm told so." He smiled.

"Yes? I wonder! How is it possible that you—"

He wagged a finger. "Ah-ah! Right of privacy." And with swift seriousness, "You know too much already. I have to assume you can keep it secret all your life."

"That remains to be seen," Elena said, not looking at him.

VII

Sundown burned across the waters and the island rose like a mountain of night against the darkening sky. Dalgetty stretched cramped muscles and peered over the bay.

In the hours of waiting there had not been much said between him and the woman. He had dropped a few questions, with the careful casualness of the skilled analyst, and gotten the expected reactions. He knew a little more about her—a child of the strangling dying cities and

shadowy family life of the 1980's, forced to armor herself in harshness, finding in the long training for her work and now in the job itself an ideal to substitute for the tenderness she had never known.

He felt pity for her but there was little he could do to help just now. To her own queries he gave guarded replies. It occurred to him briefly that he was, in his way, as lonesome as she. *But of course I don't mind—or do I?*

Mostly they tried to plan their next move. For the time, at least, they were of one purpose. She described the layout of house and grounds and indicated the cell where Michael Tighe was ordinarily kept. But there was not much they could do to think out tactics. "If Bancroft gets alarmed enough," she said, "he'll have Dr. Tighe flown elsewhere."

He agreed. "That's why we'd better hit tonight, before he can get that worried." The thought was pain within him. *Dad, what are they doing to you now?*

"There's also the matter of food and drink." Her voice was husky with thirst and dull with the discouragement of hunger. "We can't stay out here like this much longer." She gave him a strange glance. "Don't you feel weak?"

"Not now," he said. He had blocked off the sensations.

"They—*Simon!*" She grabbed his arm. "A boat—hear?"

The murmur of jets drifted to him through the beating waves. "Yeah. Quick—underneath!"

They scrambled over the hogback and slid down its farther side. The sea clawed at Dalgetty's feet and foam exploded over his head. He hunched low, throwing one arm about her as she slipped. The airboat murmured overhead, hot gold in the sunset light. Dalgetty crouched, letting the breakers run coldly around him. The ledge where they clung was worn smooth, offered little to hold onto.

The boat circled, its jets thunderous at low speed. *They're worried about her now. They must be sure I'm still alive.*

White water roared above his head. He breathed a hasty gasp of air before the next comber hit him. Their bodies were wholly submerged, their faces shouldn't show in that haze of foam—but the jet was soaring down and there would be machine-guns on it.

Dalgetty's belly muscles stiffened, waiting for the tracers to burn through him.

Elena's body slipped from his grasp and went under. He hung there, not daring to follow. A stolen glance upward—yes, the jet was out of sight again, moving back toward the field. He dove off the ledge and struck into the waves. The girl's head rose over them as he neared. She twisted from him and made her own way back to the rock. But when they were in the hollow again her teeth rattled with chill and she pressed against him for warmth.

"Okay," he said shakily. "Okay, we're all right now. You are hereby entitled to join our Pacific wet-erans' club."

Her laugh was small under the boom of breakers and hiss of scud. "You're trying hard, aren't you?"

"I—*oh, oh!* Get *down!*"

Peering over the edge Dalgetty saw the men descending the path. There were half a dozen, armed and wary. One had a WT radio unit on his back. In the shadow of the cliff they were almost invisible as they began prowling the beach.

"Still hunting us!" Her voice was a groan.

"You didn't expect otherwise, did you? I'm just hoping they don't come out here. Does anybody else know of this spot?" He held his lips close to her ear.

"No, I don't believe so," she breathed. "I was the only one who cared to go swimming at this end of the island. But...."

Dalgetty waited, grimly. The sun was down at last, the twilight thickening. A few stars twinkled to life in the east. The goons finished their search and settled in a line along the beach.

"Oh-oh," muttered Dalgetty. "I get the idea. Bancroft's had the land beaten for me so thoroughly he's sure I must be somewhere out to sea. If I were he I'd guess I'd swum far out to be picked up by a waterboat. So—he's guarding every possible approach against a landing party."

"What can we do?" whispered Elena. "Even if we can swim around their radius of sight we can't land just anywhere. Most of the island is vertical cliff. Or can you...?"

"No," he said. "Regardless of what you may think I don't have vacuum cups on my feet. But how far does that gun of yours carry?"

She stole a glance over the edge. Night was sweeping in. The island was a wall of blackness and the men at its foot were hidden. "You can't see!" she protested.

He squeezed her shoulder. "Oh yes I can, honey. But whether I'm a good enough shot to.... We'll

have to try it, that's all."

Her face was a white blur and fear of the unknown put metal in her voice. "Part seal, part cat, part deer, part what else? I don't think you're human, Simon Dalgetty."

He didn't answer. The abnormal voluntary dilation of pupils hurt his eyes.

"What else has Dr. Tighe done?" Her tone was chill in the dark. "You can't study the human mind without studying the body too. What's he done? Are you the mutant they're always speculating about? Did Dr. Tighe create or find homo superior?"

"If I don't plug that radio com-set before they can use it," he said, "I'll be homo-genized."

"You can't laugh it off," she said through taut lips. "If you aren't of our species I have to assume you're our enemy—till you prove otherwise!" Her fingers closed hard on his arm. "Is that what your little gang at the Institute is doing? Have they decided that mere humanity isn't good enough to be civilized? Are they preparing the way for your kind to take over?"

"Listen," he said wearily. "Right now we're two people, very mortal indeed, being hunted. So shut up!"

He took the pistol from her holster and slipped a full clip into its magazine. His vision was at high sensitivity now, her face showed white against the wet rock with gray highlights along its strong cheekbones beneath the wide frightened eyes. Beyond the reefs the sea was gunmetal under the stars, streaked with foam and shadow.

Ahead of him, as he rose to his feet, the line of guards stood out as paler darkneses against the vertiginous island face. They had mounted a heavy machine-gun to point seaward and a self-powered spotlight, not turned on, rested nearby. Those two things could be dangerous but first he had to find the radio set that could call the whole garrison down on them.

There! It was a small hump on the back of one man, near the middle of the beach. He was pacing restlessly up and down with a tommy-gun in his hands. Dalgetty raised the pistol with slow hard-held concentration, wishing it were a rifle. *Remember your target practice now, arm loose, fingers extended, don't pull the trigger but squeeze—because you've got to be right the first time!*

He shot. The weapon was a military model, semi-noiseless and with no betraying streak of light. The first bullet spun the goon on his heels and sent him lurching across sand and rock. Dalgetty worked the trigger, spraying around his victim, a storm of lead that *must* ruin the sender.

Chaos on the beach! If that spotlight went on with his eyes at their present sensitivity, he'd be blind for hours. He fired carefully, smashing lens and bulb. The machine-gun opened up, stuttering, wildly into the dark. If someone elsewhere on the island heard that noise—Dalgetty shot again, dropping the gunner over his weapon.

Bullets spanged around him, probing the darkness. One down, two down, three down. A fourth was running along the upward path. Dalgetty fired and missed, fired and missed, fired and missed. He was getting out of range, carrying the alarm—*there!* He fell slowly, like a jointed doll, rolling down the trail. The two others were dashing for the shelter of a cave, offering no chance to nail them.

Dalgetty scrambled over the rock, splashed into the bay and struck out for the shore. Shots raked the water. He wondered if they could hear his approach through the sea-noise. Soon he'd be close enough for normal night vision. He gave himself wholly to swimming.

His feet touched sand and he waded ashore, the water dragging at him. Crouching, he answered the shots coming from the cave. The shriek and yowl were everywhere around him now. It seemed impossible that they should not hear up above. He tensed his jaws and crawled toward the machine-gun. A cold part of him noticed that the fire was in a random pattern. They couldn't see him then.

The man lying by the gun was still alive but unconscious. That was enough. Dalgetty crouched over the trigger. He had never handled a weapon like this but it must be ready for action—only minutes ago it had tried to kill him. He sighted on the cave mouth and cut loose.

Recoil made the gun dance till he caught onto the trick of using it. He couldn't see anyone in the cave but he could bounce lead off its walls. He shot for a full minute before stopping. Then he crawled away at an angle till he reached the cliff. Sliding along this he approached the entrance and waited. No sound came from inside.

He risked a quick glance. Yes, it had done the job. He felt a little sick.

Elena was climbing out of the water when he returned. There was a strangeness in the look she gave him. "All taken care of?" she asked tonelessly.

He nodded, remembered she could hardly see the movement, said aloud, "Yes, I think so. Grab some of this hardware and let's get moving."

With his nerves already keyed for night vision it was not difficult to heighten other perceptions and catch her thinking ... *not human. Why should he mind if he kills human beings when he isn't one himself?*

"But I do mind," he said gently. "I've never killed a man before and I don't like it."

She jerked away from him. It had been a mistake, he realized. "Come on," he said. "Here's your pistol. Better take a tommy-gun too if you can handle it."

"Yes," she said. He had lowered his reception again, her voice fell quiet and hard. "Yes, I can use one."

On whom? he wondered. He picked up an automatic rifle from one of the sprawled figures. "Let's go," he said. Turning, he led the way up the path. His spine prickled with the thought of her at his back, keyed to a pitch of near-hysteria.

"We're out to rescue Michael Tighe, remember," he whispered over his shoulder. "I've had no military experience and I doubt that you've ever done anything like this either, so we'll probably make every mistake in the books. But we've got to get Dr. Tighe."

She didn't answer.

At the top of the path Dalgetty went down on his stomach again and slithered up over the crest. Slowly he raised his head to peer in front of him. Nothing moved, nothing stirred. He stooped low as he walked forward.

The thickets fenced off vision a few yards ahead. Beyond them, at the end of the slope, he could glimpse lights. Bancroft's place must be one glare of radiance. How to get in there without being seen? He drew Elena close to him. For a moment she stiffened at his touch, then she yielded. "Any ideas?" he asked.

"No," she replied.

"I could play dead," he began tentatively. "You could claim to have been caught by me, to have gotten your gun back and killed me. They might lose suspicion then and carry me inside."

"You think you could fake *that*?" She pulled away from him again.

"Sure. Make a small cut and force it to bleed enough to look like a bullet wound—which doesn't usually bleed much, anyway. Slow down heartbeat and respiration till their ordinary senses couldn't detect them. Near-total muscular relaxation, including even those unromantic aspects of death which are so rarely mentioned. Oh yes."

"Now I know you aren't human," she said. There was a shudder in her voice. "Are you a synthetic thing? Did they make you in the laboratory, Dalgetty?"

"I just want your opinion of the idea," he muttered with a flicker of anger.

It must have taken an effort for Elena to wrench clear of her fear of him. But then she shook her head. "Too risky. If I were one of those fellows, with all you've already done to make me wonder about you, the first thing I'd do on finding your supposed corpse would be to put a bullet through its brain—and maybe a stake through its heart. Or can you survive that too?"

"No," he admitted. "All right, it was just a thought. Let's work a bit closer to the house."

They went through brush and grass. It seemed to him that an army would make less noise. Once his straining ears caught a sound of boots and he yanked Elena into the gloom under a palmetto. Two guards tramped by, circling the land on patrol. Their forms loomed huge and black against the stars.

Near the edge of the grounds Dalgetty and Elena crouched in the long stiff grass and looked at the place they must enter. The man had had to lower his visual sensitivity as they approached the light. There were floodlights harsh on dock, airfield, barracks and lawn, with parties of guards moving around each section. Light showed in only one window of the house, on the second story. Bancroft must be there, pacing and peering out into the night where his enemy stirred. Had he called by radio for reinforcements?

At least no airboat had arrived or left. Dalgetty knew he would have seen one in the sky. Dr. Tighe was here yet—if he lived.

Decision grew in the man. There was a wild chance. "Are you much of an actress, Elena?" he whispered.

"After two years as a spy I'd better be." Her face bore a hint of puzzlement under the tension as she looked at him. He could guess her thought—*For a superman, he asks some simple-minded questions. But then what is he? Or is he only dissembling?*

He explained his idea. She scowled. "I know it's crazy," he told her, "but have you anything better to offer?"

"No. If you can handle your part...."

"And you yours." He gave her a bleak look, but there was an appeal in it. Suddenly his half-glimpsed face looked strangely young and helpless. "I'll be putting my life in your hands. If you don't trust me you can shoot. But you'll be killing a lot more than me."

"Tell me what you are," she said. "How can I know what the ends of the Institute are when

they're using such means as you? Mutant or android or"—she caught her breath—"or actually a creature from outer space, the stars. Simon Dalgetty, what are you?"

"If I answered that," he said with desolation in his voice, "I'd probably be lying anyway. You've got to trust me this far."

She sighed. "All right." He didn't know if she was lying too.

He laid the rifle down and folded his hands on top of his head. She walked behind him, down the slope toward the light, her submachine-gun at his back.

As he walked he was building up a strength and speed no human ought to possess.

One of the sentries pacing through the garden came to a halt. His rifle swung up, and the voice was a hysterical yammer: "Who goes?"

"It's me, Buck," cried Elena. "Don't get trigger-happy. I'm bringing in the prisoner."

"Huh?"

Dalgetty shuffled into the light and stood slumped, letting his jaw hang slack as if he were near falling with weariness.

"You *got* him!" The goon sprang forward.

"Don't holler," said Elena. "I got this one, all right, but there are others. You keep on your beat. I got his weapons from him. He's harmless now. Is Mr. Bancroft in the house?"

"Yeah, yeah—sure." The heavy face peered at Dalgetty with more than a tinge of fear. "But lemme go along. Yuh know what he done last time."

"Stay on your post!" she snapped. "You've got your orders. I can handle him."

VIII

It might not have worked on most men but these goons were not very bright. The guard nodded, gulped and resumed his pacing. Dalgetty walked on up the path toward the house.

A man at the door lifted his rifle. "Halt, there! I'll have to call Mr. Bancroft first." The sentry went inside and thumbed an intercom switch.

Dalgetty, poised in a nervous tautness that could explode into physical strength, felt a clutch of fear. The whole thing was so fiendishly uncertain—anything could happen.

Bancroft's voice drifted out. "That you, Elena? Good work, girl! How'd you do it?" The warmth in his tone, under the excitement, made Dalgetty wonder briefly just what the relationship between those two had been.

"I'll tell you upstairs, Tom," she answered. "This is too big for anyone else to hear. But keep the patrols going. There are more like this creature around the island."

Dalgetty could imagine the primitive shudder in Thomas Bancroft, instinct from ages when the night was prowling terror about a tiny circle of fire. "All right. If you're sure he won't—"

"I've got him well covered."

"I'll send over half a dozen guards just the same. Hold it."

The men came running from barracks, where they must have been waiting for a call to arms, and closed in. It was a ring of tight faces and wary eyes and pointing guns. They feared him and the fear made them deadly. Elena's countenance was wholly blank.

"Let's go," she said.

A man walked some feet ahead of the prisoner, casting glances behind him all the time. There was one on either side, the rest were at the rear. Elena walked among them, her weapon never wavering from his back. They went down the long handsome corridor and stood on the purring escalator. Dalgetty's eyes roved with a yearning in them—how much longer, he wondered, would he be able to see anything at all?

The door to Bancroft's study was ajar and Tighe's voice drifted out. It was a quiet drawl, unshaken despite the blow it must have been to hear of Dalgetty's recapture. Apparently he was continuing a conversation begun earlier:

"... science goes back a long way, actually. Francis Bacon speculated about a genuine science of man. Poole did some work along those lines as well as inventing the symbolic logic which was to be such a major tool in solving the problem.

"In the last century a number of lines of attack were developed. There was already the psychology of Freud and his successors, of course, which gave the first real notion of human semantics. There were the biological, chemical and physical approaches to man as a mechanism. Comparative historians like Spengler, Pareto and Toynbee realized that history did not merely happen but had some kind of pattern.

"Cybernetics developed such concepts as homeostasis and feedback, concepts which were applicable to individual man and to society as a whole. Games theory, the principle of least effort and Haeml's generalized epistemology pointed toward basic laws and the analytical approach.

"The new symbologies in logic and mathematics suggested formulations—for the problem was no longer one of gathering data so much as of finding a rigorous symbolism to handle them and indicate new data. A great deal of the Institute's work has lain simply in collecting and synthesizing all these earlier findings."

Dalgetty felt a rush of admiration. Trapped and helpless among enemies made ruthless by ambition and fear, Michael Tighe could still play with them. He must have been stalling for hours, staving off drugs and torture by revealing first one thing and then another—but subtly, so that his captors probably didn't realize he was only telling them what they could find in any library.

The party entered a large room, furnished with wealth and taste, lined with bookshelves. Dalgetty noticed an intricate Chinese chess set on the desk. So Bancroft or Meade played chess—that was something they had in common, at least, on this night of murder.

Tighe looked up from the armchair. A couple of guards stood behind him, their arms folded, but he ignored them. "Hello, son," he murmured. There was pain in his eyes. "Are you all right?"

Dalgetty nodded mutely. There was no way to signal the Englishman, no way to let him hope.

Bancroft stepped over to the door and locked it. He gestured at the guards, who spread themselves around the walls, their guns aimed inward. He was shaking ever so faintly and his eyes glittered as with fever. "Sit down," he said. "*There!*"

Dalgetty took the indicated armchair. It was deep and soft. It would be hard to spring out of quickly. Elena took a seat opposite him, poised on its edge, the tommy-gun in her lap. It was suddenly very still in the room.

Bancroft went over to the desk and fumbled with a humidor. He didn't look up. "So you caught him," he said.

"Yes," replied Elena. "After he caught me first."

"How did you—turn the tables?" Bancroft took out a cigar and bit the end off savagely. "What happened?"

"I was in a cave, resting," she said tonelessly. "He rose out of the water and grabbed me. He'd been hiding underneath longer than anybody would have thought possible. He forced me out to a rock in the bay there—you know it? We hid till sundown, when he opened up on your men on that beach. He killed them all.

"I'd been tied but I'd managed to rub the strips loose. It was just a piece off his shirt he tied me with. While he was shooting I grabbed a stone and clipped him behind the ear. I dragged him to shore while he was still out, took one of the guns lying there and marched him here."

"Good work." Bancroft inhaled raggedly. "I'll see that you get a proper bonus for this, Elena. But what else? You said...."

"Yes." Her gaze was steady on him. "We talked, out there in the bay. He wanted to convince me I should help him. Tom—he isn't human."

"Eh?" Bancroft's heavy form jerked. With an effort he steadied himself. "What do you mean?"

"That muscular strength and speed, and telepathy. He can see in the dark and hold his breath longer than any man. No, he isn't human."

Bancroft looked at Dalgetty's motionless form. The prisoner's eyes clashed with his and it was he who looked away again. "A telepath, did you say?"

"Yes," she answered. "Do you want to prove it, Dalgetty?"

There was stillness in the room. After a moment Dalgetty spoke. "You were thinking, Bancroft, 'All right, damn you, can you read my mind? Go ahead and try it and you'll know what I'm thinking about you.' The rest was obscenities."

"A guess," said Bancroft. There was sweat on his cheeks. "Just a good guess. Try again."

Another pause, then, "'Ten, nine, seven, A, B, M, Z, Z ...' Shall I keep on?" Dalgetty asked quietly.

"No," muttered Bancroft. "No, that's enough. What are you?"

"He told me," put in Elena. "You're going to have trouble believing it. I'm not sure if I believe it myself. But he's from another star."

Bancroft opened his lips and shut them again. The massive head shook in denial.

"He is—from Tau Ceti," said Elena. "They're way beyond us. It's the thing people have been speculating about for the last hundred years."

"Longer, my girl," said Tighe. There was no emotion in his face or voice save a dry humor, but Dalgetty knew what a flame must suddenly be leaping up inside him. "Read Voltaire's *Micromegas*."

"I've read such fiction," said Bancroft harshly. "Who hasn't? All right, why are they here, what do they want?"

"You could say," spoke Dalgetty, "that we favor the Institute."

"But you've been raised from childhood...."

"Oh yes. My people have been on Earth a long time. Many of them are born here. Our first spaceship arrived in Nineteen Sixty-five." He leaned forward in the chair. "I expected Casimir to be reasonable and help me rescue Dr. Tighe. Since she hasn't done so I must appeal to your own common sense. We have crews on Earth. We know where all our people are at any given time. If necessary I can die to preserve the secret of our presence but in that case you will die too, Bancroft. The island will be bombed."

"I...." The chief looked out the window into the enormity of night. "You can't expect me to—to accept this as if...."

"I've some things to tell you which may change your mind," said Dalgetty. "They will certainly prove my story. Send your men out though. This is only for your ears."

"And have you jump me!" snapped Bancroft.

"Casimir can stay," said Dalgetty, "and anyone else you are absolutely certain can keep a secret and control his own greed."

Bancroft paced once around the room. His eyes flickered back and forth over the watching men. Frightened faces, bewildered faces, ambitious faces—it was a hard decision and Dalgetty knew grimly that his life rested on his and Elena's estimate of Thomas Bancroft's character.

"All right! Humphrey, Zimmermann, O'Brien, stay in here. If that bird moves shoot him. The rest of you wait just outside." They filed out. The door closed behind them. The three guards left posted themselves with smooth efficiency, one at the window and one at either adjoining wall. There was a long quiet.

Elena had to improvise the scheme and think it at Dalgetty. He nodded. Bancroft planted himself before the chair, legs spread wide as if braced for a blow, fists on hips.

"All right," he said. "What do you want to tell me?"

"You've caught me," said Dalgetty, "so I'm prepared to bargain for my life and Dr. Tighe's freedom. Let me show you—" He made a move as if to rise.

"Stay where you are!" snapped Bancroft, and three guns swiveled around to point at the prisoner. Elena backed away until she stood beside the one near the desk.

"As you will." Dalgetty leaned back again, casually shoving his chair a couple of feet. He was now facing the window and, as far as he could tell, sitting exactly on a line between the man there and the man at the farther wall. "The Union of Tau Ceti is interested in seeing that the right kind of civilizations develop on other planets. You could be of value to us, Thomas Bancroft, if you can be persuaded to our side, and the rewards are considerable." His glance went for a moment to the girl and she nodded imperceptibly. "For example...."

The power rushed up in him. Elena clubbed her gun butt and struck the man next to her behind the ear. In the fractional second before the others could understand and react Dalgetty was moving.

The impetus which launched him from the chair sent that heavy padded piece of furniture sliding across the floor to hit the man behind him with a muffled thud. His left fist took Bancroft on the jaw as he went by. The guard at the window had no time to swing his gun back from Elena and squeeze trigger before Dalgetty's hand was on his throat. His neck snapped.

Elena stood over her victim even as he toppled and aimed at the man across the room. The armchair had knocked his rifle aside. "Drop that or I shoot," she said.

Dalgetty snatched up a gun for himself, leveling it at the door. He more than half expected those outside to come rushing in, expected hell would explode. But the thick oak panels must have choked off sound.

Slowly, the man behind the chair let his rifle fall to the floor. His mouth was stretched wide with supernatural fear.

"My God!" Dr. Tighe's long form was erect, shaking, his calm broken into horror. "Simon, the risk...."

"We didn't have anything to lose, did we?" Dalgetty's voice was thick but the abnormal energy was receding from him. He felt a surge of weariness and knew that soon the payment must be made for the way he had abused his body. He looked down at the corpse before him. "I didn't mean to do that," he whispered.

Tighe collected himself with an effort of disciplined will and stepped over to Bancroft. "He's alive, at least," he said. "Oh my God, Simon! You could have been killed so easily."

"I may yet. We aren't out of the woods by any means. Find something to tie these two others up with, will you, Dad?"

The Englishman nodded. Elena's slugged guard was stirring and groaning. Tighe bound and gagged him with strips torn from his tunic. Under the submachine-gun the other submitted meekly enough. Dalgetty rolled them behind a sofa with the one he had slain.

Bancroft was wakening too. Dalgetty located a flask of bourbon and gave it to him. Clearing eyes looked up with the same terror. "Now what?" mumbled Bancroft. "You can't get away—"

"We can damn well try. If it had come to fighting with the rest of your gang we'd have used you as a hostage but now there's a neater way. On your feet! Here, straighten your tunic, comb your hair. Okay, you'll do just as you're told, because if anything goes wrong we'll have nothing at all to lose by shooting you." Dalgetty rapped out his orders.

Bancroft looked at Elena and there was more than physical hurt in his eyes. "Why did you do it?"

"FBI," she said.

He shook his head, still stunned, and shuffled over to the desk visiphone and called the hangar. "I've got to get to the mainland in a hurry. Have the speedster ready in ten minutes. No, just the regular pilot, nobody else. I'll have Dalgetty with me but it's okay. He's on our side now."

They went out the door. Elena cradled her tommy-gun under one arm. "You can go back to the barracks, boys," said Bancroft wearily to the men outside. "It's all been settled."

A quarter hour later Bancroft's private jet was in the air. Five minutes after that he and the pilot were bound and locked in a rear compartment. Michael Tighe took the controls. "This boat has legs," he said. "Nothing can catch us between here and California."

"All right." Dalgetty's tones were flat with exhaustion. "I'm going back to rest, Dad." Briefly his hand rested on the older man's shoulder. "It's good to have you back," he said.

"Thank you, son," said Michael Tighe. "I can't tell you how wonderful it is to be free again."

IX

Dalgetty found a reclining seat and eased himself into it. One by one he began releasing the controls over himself—sensitivities, nerve blocs, glandular stimulation. Fatigue and pain mounted within him. He looked out at the stars and listened to the dark whistle of air with merely human senses.

Elena Casimir came to sit beside him and he realized that his job wasn't done. He studied the strong lines of her face. She could be a hard foe but just as stubborn a friend.

"What do you have in mind for Bancroft?" he asked.

"Kidnapping charges for him and that whole gang," she said. "He won't wriggle out of it, I can guarantee you." Her eyes rested on him, unsure, a little frightened. "Federal prison psychiatrists have Institute training," she murmured. "You'll see that his personality is reshaped *your* way, won't you?"

"As far as possible," Simon said. "Though it doesn't matter much. Bancroft is finished as a factor to be reckoned with. There's still Bertrand Meade himself, of course. Even if Bancroft made a full confession I doubt that we could touch him. But the Institute has now learned to take precautions against extra-legal methods—and within the framework of the law we can give him cards and spades and still defeat him."

"With some help from my department," Elena said. There was a touch of steel in her voice. "But the whole story of this rescue will have to be played down. It wouldn't do to have too many ideas floating around in the public mind, would it?"

"That's right," he admitted. His head felt heavy, he wanted to rest it on her shoulder and sleep for a century. "It's up to you really. If you submit the right kind of report to your superiors it can all be worked out. Everything else will just be detail. But otherwise you'll ruin everything."

"I don't know." She looked at him for a long while. "I don't know if I should or not. You may be correct about the Institute and the justice of its aims and methods. But how can I be sure, when I don't know what's behind it? How do I know there wasn't more truth than fiction in that Tau Ceti story, that you aren't really the agent of some non-human power quietly taking over all our race?"

At another time Dalgetty might have argued, tried to veil it from her, tried to trick her once again. But now he was too weary. There was a great surrender in him. "I'll tell you if you wish," he said, "and after that it's in your hands. You can make us or break us."

"Go on then." Her tone withdrew into wariness.

"I'm human," he said. "I'm as human as you are. Only I've had rather special training, that's all. It's another discovery of the Institute for which we don't feel the world is ready. It'd be too big a temptation for too many people, to create followers like me." He looked away, into the windy dark. "The scientist is also a member of society and has a responsibility toward it. This—restraint—of ours is one way in which we meet that obligation."

She didn't speak, but suddenly one hand reached over and rested on his. The impulsive gesture brought warmth flooding through him.

"Dad's work was mostly in mass-action psych," he said, making his tone try to cover what he felt, "but he has plenty of associates trying to understand the individual human being as a functioning mechanism. A lot's been learned since Freud, both from the psychiatric and the neurological angle. Ultimately, those two are interchangeable.

"Some thirty years ago one of the teams which founded the Institute learned enough about the relationship between the conscious, subconscious and involuntary minds to begin practical tests. Along with a few others I was a guinea pig. And their theories worked.

"I needn't go into the details of my training. It involved physical exercises, mental practice, some hypnotism, diet and so on. It went considerably beyond the important Synthesis education which is the most advanced thing known to the general public. But its aim—only partially realized as yet—its aim was simply to produce the completely integrated human being."

Dalgetty paused. The wind flowed and muttered beyond the wall.

"There is no sharp division between conscious and subconscious or even between those and the centers controlling involuntary functions," he said. "The brain is a continuous structure. Suppose, for instance, that you become aware of a runaway car bearing down on you.

"Your heartbeat speeds up, your adrenalin output increases, your sight sharpens, your sensitivity to pain drops—it's all preparation for fight or flight. Even without obvious physical necessity the same thing can happen on a lesser scale—for example when you read an exciting story. And psychotics, especially hysterics, can produce some of the damndest physiological symptoms you ever saw."

"I begin to understand," she whispered.

"Rage or fear brings abnormal strength and fast reaction. But the psychotic can do more than that. He can show physical symptoms like burns, stigmata or—if female—false pregnancy. Sometimes he becomes wholly insensitive in some part of his body via a nerve bloc. Bleeding can start or stop without apparent cause. He can go into a coma or he can stay awake for days without getting sleepy. He can—"

"Read minds?" It was a defiance.

"Not that I know of." Simon chuckled. "But human sense organs are amazingly good. It only takes three or four quanta to stimulate the visual purple—a little more actually because of absorption by the eyeball itself. There have been hysterics who could hear a watch ticking twenty feet away that the normal person could not hear at one foot. And so on.

"There are excellent reasons why the threshold of perception is relatively high in ordinary people—the stimuli of usual conditions would be blinding and deafening, unendurable, if there weren't a defense." He grimaced. "I *know!*"

"But the telepathy?" Elena persisted.

"It's been done before," he said. "Some apparent cases of mindreading in the last century were shown to be due to extremely acute hearing. Most people sub-vocalize their surface thoughts. With a little practice a person who can hear those vibrations can learn to interpret them. That's all." He smiled with one side of his mouth. "If you want to hide your thoughts from me just break that habit, Elena."

She looked at him with an emotion he could not quite recognize. "I see," she breathed. "And your memory must be perfect too, if you can pull any datum out of the subconscious. And you can—do everything, can't you?"

"No," he said. "I'm only a test case. They've learned a great deal by observing me but the only thing that makes me unusual is that I have conscious control of certain normally subconscious and involuntary functions. Not all of them by a long shot. And I don't use that control any more than necessary.

"There are sound biological reasons why man's mind is so divided and plenty of penalties attached to a case like mine. It'll take me a couple of months to get back in shape after this bout. I'm due for a good old-fashioned nervous breakdown and while it won't last long it won't be much fun while it does last."

The appeal rose in his eyes as he watched Elena. "All right," he said. "Now you have the story. What are you going to do about it?"

For the first time she gave him a real smile. "Don't worry," she said, "Don't worry, Simon."

"Will you come hold my hand while I'm recuperating?" he asked anxiously.

"I'm holding it now, you fool," Elena answered.

Dalgetty chuckled happily. Then he went to sleep.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SENSITIVE MAN ***

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