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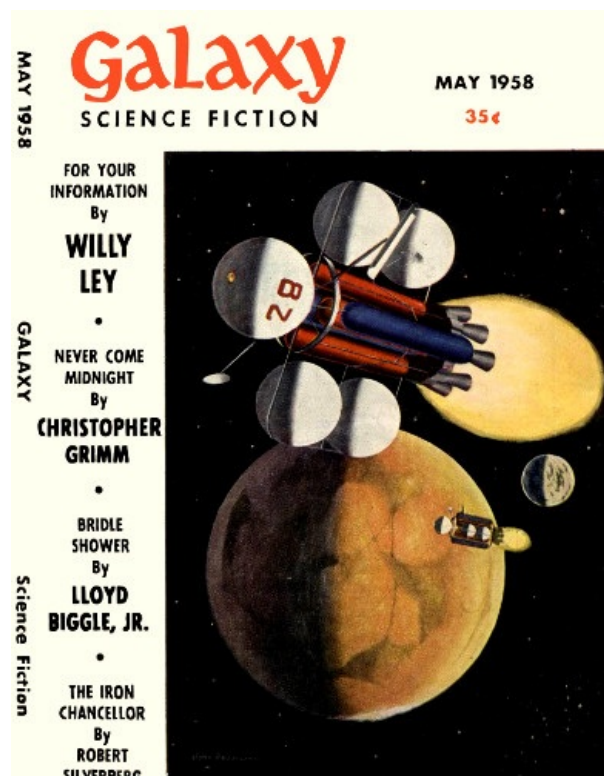
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NEVER COME MIDNIGHT ***



NEVER COME MIDNIGHT

by **CHRISTOPHER GRIMM**

Illustrated by **DILLON**

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***Across the void came a man who could not ever
have been born—from a world that could never
have been conceived—to demand his birthright
of an Earth that would have to die to pay it!***

I

Jan Shortmire smiled. "You didn't know I had a son, did you, Peter? Well, neither did I—until quite recently."

"I see." However, Peter Hubbard knew that Jan Shortmire had never married in all of his hundred and fifty-five years. In that day and age, unmarried people did not have children; science, the law, and public sophistication had combined to make the historical "accident" almost impossible. Yet, if some woman of one of the more innocent planets had deliberately conceived in order to trap Shortmire, surely he would have learned of his son's existence long before.

"I'm glad it turns out that I have an heir," Shortmire went on. "Otherwise, the government might get its fists on what little I have—and it's taken enough from me."

Although the old man's estate was a considerable one, it did seem meager in terms of the money he must have made. What *had* become of the golden tide that had poured in upon the golden youth, Hubbard wondered. Could anyone have squandered such prodigious sums upon the usual mundane dissipations? For, by the time the esoteric pleasures of the other planets had reached Earth—the byproduct of Shortmire's own achievement—he must have already been too old to enjoy them.

At Hubbard's continued silence, Shortmire said defensively, "If they'd let me sell my patents to private industry, as Dyall was able to do, I'd be leaving a *real* fortune!" His voice grew thick with anger. "When I think how much money Dyall made from those factory machines of his...."

But when you added the priceless extra fifty years of life to the money Shortmire had made, it seemed to Hubbard that Shortmire had been amply rewarded. Although, of course, he had heard that Nicholas Dyall had been given the same reward. No point telling Shortmire, if he did not know already. Hubbard could never understand why Shortmire hated Dyall so; it could not be merely the money—and as for reputation, he had a shade the advantage.

"That *toymaker!*" Shortmire spat.

Hubbard tactfully changed the subject. "What's your boy like, Jan?" But of course Jan Shortmire's son could hardly be a boy; in fact, he was probably almost as old as Hubbard was.

Such old age as Shortmire's was almost incredible. Sitting there in the antique splendor of Hubbard's office, he looked like a splendid antique himself. Who could imagine that passion had ever convulsed that thin white face, that those frail white fingers had ever curved in love and in hate? Age beyond the reach of most men had blanched this once-passionate man to a chill, ivory shadow.

For once, Hubbard felt glad—almost—that he himself was ineligible for the longevity treatment. The allotted five score and ten was enough for any except the very selfish—or selfless—man.

But Shortmire was answering his question. "I have no idea what the boy is like; I've never seen him." Then he added, "I suppose you've been wondering why I finally decided to make a will?"

"A lawyer never wonders when people *do* make wills, Jan," Hubbard said mildly. "He wonders when they *don't*."

"I'm going on a trip to Morethis. Only one of the colonized planets I've never visited." Shortmire's smile did not reach his amber-hard eyes. "Civilized planets, I should have said. It isn't official government policy to colonize planets that have intelligent native live-forms."

Not even the most besotted idealist could ever have described Jan Shortmire as altruistic. And for him to be concerned about Morethis, of all planets—Morethis, where the indigenous life-forms were such as to justify a ruthless colonization policy ... it was outrageous! True, the terrestrial government had been more generous toward the Morethans than toward any of the seven other intelligent life-forms they had found. But this tolerance was based wholly on fear—fear of these remnants of an old, old civilization, eking out their existence around a dying star, yet with terrible glories to remember in their twilight—and traces of these glories to protect them.

How was it that Shortmire, who had been everywhere, seen everything, had never been to Morethis? Hubbard looked keenly at his client. "What *is* all this, Jan?"

The old man shrugged. "Merely that the Foreign Office has suggested it would be wise for travelers to make a will before going there. Being a dutiful citizen of Earth, I comply." He smiled

balefully.

"The Foreign Office has suggested that it would be wiser not to go at all," Hubbard said. "There are people who say Morethis ought to be fumigated completely."

"Ah, but it has rare and precious metals on which our industries depend. There are herbs which have multiplied the miracles of modern medicine, jewels and furs unmatched anywhere. We need the native miners and farmers and trappers to get these things for us."

"We could get them for ourselves. We do on the other planets."

Shortmire grinned. "On Morethis, somehow, our people can't seem to find these things themselves. Or, if they do, we can't find our people afterward. Which is why there is peace and friendship between Morethis and Earth."

"*Friendship!* Everyone knows the Morethans hate terrestrials. They tolerate us only because we're stronger!"

"Stronger physically." Shortmire's smile was fading. "Even technology is a kind of physical strength."

New apprehension took shape in Hubbard. "You're not going metaphysical in your old age, are you, Jan? And even if you are," he said quickly, while he was still innocent of knowledge, hence could not be consciously offending the other man's beliefs, "what a cult to choose! Blood, terror and torture!"

Shortmire grinned again. "You've been watching vidcasts, Peter. They've laid it on so thick, I'll probably find Morethis deadly dull rather than just ... deadly."

Certainly, all Hubbard knew of Morethis was based on hearsay evidence, but this was not a court of law. "Jan you're a fool! A third of the terrestrials who go to Morethis never come back, and mostly they're young men, strong men."

"Then they're the fools." Shortmire's voice was low and tired. "Because they're risking a whole lifetime, whereas all I'll be risking is a few years of a very boring existence."

Hubbard said no more. Even though the law still did not condone it, a man had the right to dispose of his own life as he saw fit.

Shortmire stood up. Barely stooped by age, he looked, with his great height and extreme emaciation, almost like a fasting saint—a ludicrous simile. "My wine palate is gone, Peter," he said, clapping the younger old man's shoulder, "women and I seem to have lost our mutual attraction, and I never did have much of a singing voice. At least this is one experience I'm not too old to savor."

"Death, do you mean?" Hubbard asked bluntly. "Or Morethis?"

Shortmire smiled. "Perhaps both."

So Peter Hubbard was not surprised when, a few months later, he got word that Jan Shortmire had died on Morethis. The surprising thing was the extraordinarily prosaic manner of his death: he had simply fallen into a river and drowned. No traveler on Morethis had been known to die by undisputed accident before; as a result, the vidcasts devoted more attention to the event than they might have otherwise. But the news died down, as other news took its place. In so large a universe, something was always happening; the dog days were forever gone from journalism.

Going through the old man's papers in his capacity as executor, Hubbard came across an old passport. He was startled to discover that this trip had not been Shortmire's first to Morethis. Why had he lied about it? But that was a question that no one alive could answer—or so Hubbard thought.

Almost two years went by before the will was finally probated on all the planets where Shortmire had owned property. Then the search for Emrys Shortmire began. Messages were dispatched to all the civilized planets, and Peter Hubbard settled back for a long wait.

Five years after Jan Shortmire's death, the intercom on Peter Hubbard's desk buzzed and his secretary's voice—his was one of the few legal offices wealthy enough to afford human help—said, "Mr. Emrys Shortmire to see you, sir."

How could a man come from so many light-years' distance without radioing on ahead, or at least tele-calling from his hotel? Dignity demanded that Hubbard tell his secretary to inform Shortmire that he never saw anyone without an appointment. Curiosity won. "Ask him to come in," he said.

The door slid open. Hubbard started to rise, with the old-fashioned courtesy of a family lawyer. But he never made it. He sat, frozen with shock, staring at the man in the doorway. Because Emrys Shortmire wasn't a man; he was a boy. He might have been a stripling of thirty, except for his eyes. Copper-bright and copper-hard they were, too hard for a boy's. Give him forty, even forty-five, that would still have made Jan Shortmire a father when he was nearly a hundred and twenty. The longevity treatment produced remarkable results, but none that fantastic. Though health and strength could be restored, fertility, like youth, once vanished was gone forever.

Yet the boy looked too sophisticated to have made a stupid mistake like that, if he were an imposter. More important, he *looked* like Jan Shortmire—not the Shortmire whom Hubbard had known, but the broad-shouldered youth of the early pictures, golden of hair and skin and eyes, almost classical in feature and build. Plastic surgery could have converted a fleeting resemblance to a precise one, yet, somehow, Hubbard *felt* that this was flesh and blood of the old man's.

"You're very like your father," he said, inaccurately: Emrys was less like his father than he should have been, given that startling identity of physique.

"Am I?" The boy smiled. "I never knew him. Of course, I know I look like the pictures, but pictures never tell much, do they?"

He had many papers to give Peter Hubbard. Too many; no honest man had his life so well in order. But then Emrys' honesty was not the issue, only his identity. The birth certificate said he had been born on Clergal fifty-five years before, so he was ten years older than Hubbard's wildest estimate. A young man, but not a boy—a man of full maturity, but still too young to be, normally, Jan Shortmire's son. Then Hubbard opened Emrys Shortmire's passport and received another shock.

He tried to sound calm. "I see you were on Morethis the same time your father was!"

Emrys' smile widened. "Curious coincidence, wasn't it?"

A surge of almost physical dislike filled the lawyer. "Is that all it was—a coincidence?"

"Are you suggesting that I pushed my father into the Ekkan?" Emrys asked pleasantly.

"Certainly not!" Hubbard was indignant at the thought that he, as a lawyer, would have voiced such a suspicion, even if it had occurred to him. "I thought you two might have arranged to meet on Morethis."

"I told you I'd never seen my father," Emrys reminded him. "As for what I was doing on Morethis—that's my business."

"All I'm concerned with is whether or not you *are* Emrys Shortmire." Distaste was almost tangible on Hubbard's tongue. "It does seem surprising that, since you *were* on Morethis at the time your father died, you should not have come to claim your inheritance sooner."

"I had affairs of my own to wind up," Emrys said flatly.

Hubbard tapped the papers. "You understand that these must be checked before you receive your father's estate?"

"I understand perfectly." Emrys' voice was soft as a Si-yllan cat-man's, and even more insulting. "They will be gone over thoroughly for any possible error, any tiny imperfection, anything that could invalidate my claim. But you will find them entirely in order."

"I'm sure of that." And Hubbard knew, if the papers were forgeries, they would be works of art.

"You'll probably want me to undergo an equally thorough physical examination for signs of—ah—surgical tampering. Yes, I see I'm right."

Ungenerous hope leaped inside Hubbard. "You would object?"

"On the contrary, I'd be delighted. Haven't had a thorough medical checkup for years." On this cooperative note, Emrys Shortmire bowed and left.

Hubbard sighed back against the velvet cushions of his chair—real silk, for he was a very rich old man. Unfortunately, he could not doubt that this was Jan Shortmire's progeny. But—and Hubbard sat upright—no matter how much Emrys resembled his father, that was only one parent. Who had the young man's mother been?

Quickly, Hubbard searched through the papers for the birth certificate. The name was Iloa Tasqi. The nationality: *Morethan*.

No wonder the affair had been kept so secret. No wonder Emrys seemed so strange and that Jan had lied about his previous visit to the dark planet. Small wonder, too, that he'd had a son he was not aware of. Who would have believed that human and Morethan could breed together? For the Morethans, although humanoid, were not at all human.

So Emrys Shortmire was only half human. The other half was—well, the vidcasts called it *monster*, and, now that he had met the young man, Peter Hubbard was inclined to agree.

II

Outside the office building, Emrys Shortmire paused and inhaled deeply. Say what you would about the atmospheres of some of the other planets' being fresher and purer, the air of Earth, being the air in which Man had evolved, was the air that felt best in his nostrils and filled his lungs to greatest satisfaction. And, after the fetid atmosphere of Morethis, this was pure heaven. Gray sky and violet dying sun against blue sky and radiant golden sun. No wonder the Morethans were what they were, and Earthmen were what they were.

Well, the golden sun of Earth would set somewhat sooner than the physicists—or the sociologists—had prognosticated. But all that would be long after he himself had died. It was no concern of his, anyway. He was Emrys Shortmire, born out of Jan Shortmire and no mortal woman; and nothing else on Earth, or in the Universe, mattered.

Disdaining the importunate heli-cabs that besieged him with plaintive mechanical offers of transportation, he walked down the street, enjoying the pull of the planet upon the youth and strength of his body, delighting in the clarity of his vision and the keenness of his nostrils. He was so absorbed in his thoughts and so unaccustomed still to Earth's traffic that he did not look where he was going. The groundcar was upon him before he knew it. Of course something like this would happen, he thought bitterly, as darkness descended upon him and he waited for the crushing impact. It was always like that in the old stories, always some drawback to spoil the magic gift.

But then it was light again. The car had passed over him and he was unharmed, to the amazement—and disappointment—of the avid crowd that had gathered.

"Pedestrians should look where they're going," the voice of the car observed petulantly. "Repairs cost money."

Being part human, Emrys was shaken by the experience. His eye caught the brilliant sign of a bar. Here, he thought, would be syrup to soothe his nerves. And he went inside, eager to try the taste of ancient vintages of Earth—unobtainable on the other planets, since fine wines and liquors could not endure the journey through space.

He sipped a whisky and soda, trying not to feel disappointed at the savor. As he drank, he felt eyes upon him—the bartender's. Yet the long Qesharakan reflecting glass above the bar showed him nothing unusual about his appearance. Did the bartender know who he was? How could he?

Then Emrys noticed that the man glanced from him to someone else—a girl sitting at the other end of the bar. As she met Emrys' eye, she smiled at him. Absently, with remote appreciation of her good looks, he smiled back, then returned to the contemplation of his drink. The bartender's expression deepened to amused contempt.

Emrys realized what was wrong and he could hardly keep from laughing. So intent had he been on the pursuit of his goal that he had almost lost sight of the goal itself. Deliberately, he turned his head and smiled at the girl. She promptly smiled back.

He sat down at her side. Now that he was close, her aquamarine hair showed dark at the roots, and, through the thick golden maquillage, the pores stood out on her nose. Also, she was not so very young. He laughed then, and, when she asked why, bought her a drink. After he had bought her several more, they went to her apartment—a luxurious one in a good section of town. She was not going to be cheap, but, he thought with rising anticipation, he could afford her.

However, the night was curiously unsatisfactory. For him—apparently not for the girl, because the next morning she indignantly refused his money. Evidently the experience had been something out of the ordinary for her. He could not feel it was her fault that it had been nothing for him; the lack was in *him*, he thought, some almost-felt emotion he could not recapture.

Promising to call her, he left, went back to his hotel room and flung himself upon the resilient burim-moss couch.

His body wasn't tired, but his head ached wearily. The liquor, naturally, on an empty stomach ... after all those years of Morethan qumesht. And then the trip. Even with the Shortmire engines—standard equipment now, of course—it had taken a long, tiring time, for Morethis was the most distant of all the civilized planets. Anyone would be exhausted after such a trip. Added to all this, the accident. There were no bruises on his body yet, but later, he knew, they would be visible.

At last he slept, or seemed to, and dreamed he was on Morethis again—or Morethis was there with him. The air thickened about him into the tangible atmosphere of the dark planet—the swirling aniline fog that never cleared. And in the midst stood Uvrei, the high priest, robed in amethyst and sable. The term *high priest* was vulgar as applied to him, but the nearest terrestrial equivalent to what he was.

The lips in the shockingly beautiful face parted. "How goes it, son of my spirit?" the familiar greeting rolled out, in the familiar voice, deep yet sweet, like dulcet thunder.

"My head hurts, father of my soul." Emrys knew his voice was a petulant child's, yet he could not stop himself. "I was promised—"

"You have not taken care," the ancient one said.

How ancient he was, Emrys did not know. The priests of Morethis were, they said, immortal. And they did live for a long, long time, far longer than the common people, whom they resembled only vaguely. Terrestrial scholars said the ruling class was a variant of the Morethan race, inbred to preserve its identity, probably closer to the original world-shaking Morethans than their debased followers. The members of this group seemed young, as coin faces seem young, also old, like coins themselves.

"I warned you it takes time for the final adjustments to be made. Wait, my son; haste means nothing to you."

"But I've waited so long," Emrys complained.

"Wait a little longer, then. You have all the time in the world."

The fog swirled shut about him, and Emrys sank into his personal miasma of sleep. When he woke up, late that afternoon, he knew from the dank odor clinging to the bedclothes that it had not been a dream, that the priests, the "gods," the "immortals" of Morethis could, as they professed—and even he had not believed them in this—project their minds far through space ... though, fortunately, not their bodies, or they would not have needed him. He remembered then the vial of tiny golden pellets Uvrei had given him before he left Morethis, and took one. Perhaps that was what the ancient one had meant. At any rate, Emrys thought he felt better afterward.

He examined his body in the mirror to see if bruises had come, but the tawny, muscle-rippled flesh was unmarked. At length he put on his clothes and, leaving the hotel, went to a jeweler, where he bought a costly bracelet to be sent to the girl of the night before. Such a grandiose gesture relieved him—he had always felt—of all further obligation.

He did not wish to repeat his experience with the liquor, so he did not go to a bar. He had no friends on Earth—nor could he have acknowledged them if he had. He did not wish to repeat his disappointment of the previous night, so he did not seek female companionship—although it was obvious from the eyes of the women he passed that he would have no difficulty whenever he changed his mind. But what should he do? What did young men do with their leisure, he tried to remember, when they had nothing but leisure?

He dined alone, finally, on a variety of rare terrestrial foods that did not taste quite as he expected, and went to the theater. The play was one he had seen a hundred times before under a hundred different names on many different planets. He went then to a nightclub, but it was crowded and noisy, and the girls did not excite him. Going back to the hotel, he found that sleep, at least, came easily.

But I did not, he thought, do what I did merely for the sake of a good night's rest.

The third day, he wandered into a museum. He found himself less bored than he had expected. Perhaps culture would be most therapeutic for him until he reached his ultimate adjustments. Accordingly, he went from the museum to a revival of a nineteenth-century opera. He didn't like it; in fact, it disturbed him so much that he left before the final curtain and walked through the streets for hours, until he ran into a girl who was also walking the streets, and went home with her.

The experience with the drab, as with the courtesan, was mechanically satisfactory, emotionally inadequate. He paid her—knowing she, too, would have given herself for nothing, had she known how—and went to his hotel limp with the same not-physical weakness he had felt before. The effects of the trip or the accident were lingering. He half expected Uvrei to appear that night, but the old one did not come. Why should he? This talk of spirit-son and soul-father was sophistry; there had been a bargain and each had kept his part.

The afternoon of the fourth day, a vidicast reporter called to ask whether Emrys Shortmire was any relation to the Jan Shortmire who had invented the space-warp engines. Emrys could not deny his identity without jeopardizing his inheritance; however, he refused to be interviewed personally or let his picture be used. He did not, he said, want to be dwarfed by his father's reputation. Nonetheless, his arrival was mentioned on the newscasts and panic rose up in him when he heard his name spoken publicly.

The next day a letter came for him. People rarely wrote letters any more, except to the distant planets, yet this one had an Earth postmark. Cold with panic again, he tore it open and read:

My dear Mr. Shortmire:

This evening's vidicast informed me that you were on Earth. You will not, I am sure, know my name. However, I was a friend of your father's, when we were both young men, and it would give me great pleasure to make your acquaintance.

NICHOLAS DYALL

Emrys crumpled up the letter and hurled it across the room. He knew Dyll for an old—associate of Jan Shortmire's, but he had not thought him to be alive. What had Dyll done to warrant the longevity treatment? He was nothing but a glorified machinist, a technician. And now he might wreck all of Emrys' plans. But if the young man made no reply, perhaps the old one would take the hint. And so it turned out; there was no further word from Nicholas Dyll.

Finally, two weeks after Emrys had first come to Earth, he got a telecall from Peter Hubbard. His documents were all in order and he could receive his inheritance as soon as he passed the physical examination.

Emrys went to the doctor's offices feeling a cold touch of apprehension again. But all Dr. Jameson

said when the examination was finished was, "You have the physique of a man fifteen years your junior, Mr. Shortmire."

Emrys fastened his tunic with fingers that shook from relief. "Guess I'm lucky," he muttered.

The doctor cleared his throat. "Peter Hubbard was telling me about your mother, that she was...."

Hubbard, that old fool! And Emrys had been so sure of his discretion. "My mother was Morethan, yes." Then he realized it was possible that Hubbard, too, had felt there might be something not-quite-human manifest in his body and had tried to prepare the doctor. Emrys made his tone more conciliatory. "On both Morethis and Earth, the child takes citizenship from the father, so—"

"I wasn't worrying about any legal problems; I was merely thinking that medical science would be interested."

"I do not wish the fact of my—of my birth publicized in any way—until after my death," Emrys added placatorily. "Surely you can understand what hell life would become if people knew I was half Morethan?"

The doctor sighed. "Yes, I know. I can't blame you."

"Tell me, Doctor," Emrys asked tensely, "is there anything about me that doesn't seem ... quite human?"

The doctor shook his head. "Only that you're so young for your age. Mr. Shortmire, was your mother one of the caste they call the 'immortals'?" Then he flushed. "Forgive me. I didn't mean to violate—"

Emrys laughed sourly. "Don't worry; I don't hold to the Morethan beliefs. She was one of the so-called gods, yes. They do live somewhat longer than either the common people or terrestrials; I guess that's why the legend arose, probably why I look so young, too. I should be glad I didn't inherit a—less pleasant trait."

"You should, indeed," the doctor said somberly.

III

"I love you, Emrys," the woman said, and died agonizedly in his arms. He looked down at the contorted, leaden face, ravaged by sickness, and thought: *Even when she was beautiful, I could not love her.* He could not even feel sorry for her, except in a remote, intellectual way. He could not even feel sorry for himself and his own inability to feel.



Since none of the servants was left in the house—those who were still alive had fled to the country, where there was less chance of contagion—he took her body to the crematorium himself. Other people were there, consigning their grisly burdens to the automatic fires—thin, sickly

creatures they were, who would soon be carrion for the firebirds themselves. Whereas he—if he had an emotion left, it would be shame—shame for the radiant youth and health that he saw mirrored in their dully wondering eyes.

Outside, the street was clamorous with the taped importunities of the empty vehicles—so many machines, because there were so few people left. But he chose to walk.

The air was sweet and clean, because the Dyll machines came and took away the bodies of those who fell in the street, and then cleaned those streets as carefully and tenderly as they had done when the walks and gutters had abounded with the vibrant slovenliness of the living. Emrys could, of course, have thrown the woman's body out into the gutter, and the machines would have carried her in their steel maws to the crematorium. But some remembered emotion had kept him from doing such a thing, and had made him give her to the flames with what small ceremony he could muster.

She had been the last mistress remaining to him, and probably, he thought, to any man in the city. Perhaps, out in the country, there might be women with life and lust in them still, but such women as were left here could no longer be considered women. This last one had not been even human for the past week; yet he had tended her—why, he could not say, except that he had nothing better to do. For one thing, she had been quieter when he was near her, and he could not bear her cries.

He was glad when she did die, because playing the good Samaritan had grown tedious as, in their turn, all other roles had palled. Even though he knew there would be no more women for him, he was glad. During the first few weeks of the plague, when everyone who had been alive had known that soon they would be dead, all the people on Earth had rushed to squander the life which suddenly seemed to fill them to bursting. Then a man could have had all the women he wanted, all of anything he wanted, for the asking, except the one thing he really wanted—the assurance of life.

Not everyone had plunged into an orgy of joyless pleasure. There were some who took refuge in prayer—addressed either to the traditional Deity or to the recent importations from the other planets. But, in the end, it was the same for all, prayerful and profligate alike. The only exceptions were the lucky few who seemed to be immune, like Emrys Shortmire, and those who escaped from the cities—to the country or, if they were rich, the other planets. So, even if Emrys had craved women before, he would have had enough of them by now.

As he passed through the streets, he heard a man who walked alone and talked to himself curse the name of Jan Shortmire. *They would tear me to pieces if they knew I was his flesh and blood*, Emrys thought, and smiled to think how once he had feared to be engulfed by Jan Shortmire's reputation, and now he feared to be destroyed by it.

For it had been a starship equipped, like all starships, with the Shortmire engines that had brought back the plague—a starship probing the distant corners of the Galaxy which were all that Man's insatiable curiosity had left undiscovered.

Far out, even beyond Morethis—outermost of the discovered planets—in the middle of the dead and dying stars that were all there was in this chill, cold sector of space, the ship had come upon three dead planets, dark and lifeless. But when it returned to Earth to report the end of Man's ambitions for further conquest, it turned out that one planet had not been quite as lifeless as they had fancied. And the ship had brought back its life—a virus against which terrestrial medicine was powerless.

Emrys could have fled the city; he could have fled the planet. But somehow, after three years on Earth, he had not wanted to. He had spent those years fulfilling the dreams that all young men dream in the murky part of their souls but seldom have the chance to gratify.

As soon as the inheritance was his, he had bought the most lavish mansion that was available at the instant of his desire, furnished it extravagantly, and prepared to enjoy himself. His pleasures were many and, some of them, strange. At first his mistresses were human, then non-human. Females of all the intelligent species, save the Morethan, were to be found on Earth, and although consorting with extraterrestrials was illegal, still a wealthy man had never been too much troubled by laws.

But women—females—represented only a fraction of his pleasures, as did the terrestrial vices. He indulged heavily in rrilla, zbokth, mburrje, and all the other outworld pursuits that had been imported from the planets where the native life had been intelligent enough for decadence.

However, though he pushed his body a thousand times beyond what should have been the limits of his endurance, the distress he had suffered during the first hours of his landing on Earth did not recur. He remained as clear of eye and trim of form as ever; each physical excess seemed only to improve his splendid health.

Oddly, he did not seem to enjoy these pleasures as much as he had anticipated. Something seemed lacking. It was always like this when you dreamed too long about something, he told himself; no result ever equaled its expectation. And he took another one of the sparkling pills

from Morethis. They provided the only satisfaction he seemed able to get.

Emrys had been wrong about Uvrei's indifference. He apparently did consider Emrys his responsibility, over and above the material details of the bargain. The Morethans regarded all those of alien species as enemies, and all those outside the clan as unfriends. Therefore, Emrys began to realize the ceremonies of adoption he had gone through were more than merely honorific or ritual—they had been genuine. It was an uncomfortable conclusion.

"Well, son of my spirit," Uvrei would keep asking, "is this what you wanted?"

"This is what I wanted, father of my soul," Emrys would agree. And it was what he had asked, what he had *thought* he wanted.

The ancient one would smile and say, "Then I am content," and recombine into fog. And Emrys would wonder whether the Morethans had not *known* before they granted him his heart's desire that it would turn to dust and ashes when he had it. Then he would dismiss the thought, telling himself maybe he'd been too impatient for pleasure. After all, how could he, sprung full-blown into a quasi-alien society, hope to become an integral part of it all at once?

So he had waited ... one year, two years, three years. At the end of the fourth, the plague had struck. And he had stayed on Earth, because going to another planet somehow did not seem worthwhile. He was able to take care of his house alone, since the servants had been primarily for show, and the great Dyall machine—which was all the house, essentially, was—could run itself. Whenever a part of it broke down, he repaired it himself, glad of the opportunity to have something to do with his hands.

Finally he realized that he must be immune; hence a lifetime waited ahead of him. So he turned to learning, for the vast libraries of tapes and books remained changeless amid the disaster. He read and he learned a great deal, and if he could not derive pleasure from this, at least there was a deep intellectual appreciation that almost took its place.

The doctors on Ndrikull, the most advanced of the other planets, at last managed to find a serum that would kill the plague—that is, they maintained it was their serum that had killed it. Some suggested that the virus had died because Earth's environment had eventually proved hostile to it. But Earth did not die, even though most of its people had, because the great machines that took care of it—the Dyall machines—had kept functioning.

Gradually, most of the people who had fled to the other planets came back, and those who had survived in the country returned to the cities. Earth was restored to its former splendor as the social and political capital of the Galaxy, though Ndrikull now was the financial center and rivaled Earth for artistic honors. But still Emrys stuck to his books. Once in a while, he would sink himself for a week or a month in what would be, for other men, physical pleasure, just to see if his reactions had changed, but they had grown even more impersonal.

When Emrys Shortmire had been ten years on Earth, he eventually ran into Nicholas Dyall, at the opening of a scientific exposition. As soon as he saw Dyall in the crowd, he turned to go, but Dyall had seen him at the same time, and hurriedly limped across the room.

"You must be Emrys Shortmire," he declared, in a voice of surprising resonance for so old a man. "You look so much like Jan, I couldn't be mistaken." Grasping his stick with one hand for support, he extended the other to Emrys, who could not refuse it. "But you are so young...."

"I'm older than I look," Emrys said uncomfortably; then remembered to add, "You were a friend of my father's, sir?"

"A hundred years ago, yes. My name is Nicholas Dyall."

"I've heard of you; you're the man who—who invented all those machines," Emrys said, trying not to sound too ingenuous. "I've heard people say you revolutionized our technology as much as—"

"As much as your father revolutionized our civilization? Yes, both of us are responsible for a great deal. Luckily, your father is dead."

"Luckily?" Emrys echoed.

"Luckily for him, I mean." The old man sighed. "But you are too young to understand." Then his dark face relaxed into a smile. "I won't ask if you received the letter I sent when you first arrived on Earth. I can understand that a young man would wish the society of other—young people."

Emrys avoided Dyall's eye, and, so doing, met the gaze of the girl standing next to the old man, and stopped, transfixed. She was very young, less than forty, he judged, perhaps even less than thirty.

It was long since he had seen a woman like her. Her hair was a soft yellow, the only natural color among all the women in the room. Her face was painted pink and white, not the blues fashionable that year. Instead of being twisted and bedizened with cloth into fantastic shapes and protuberances, her pretty body was clad in a simple translucent slip. Yet, in spite of her almost deliberate dowdiness, she was beautiful—not the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, but the most ... no, striking was not it, either. What *was* the word he wanted? He could not dredge it out of the pool in which so many of his memories had been submerged for want of room.

"This is my great-great-granddaughter Megan," Dyall introduced her. The girl nodded and smiled.

After a moment, Emrys forced himself to do the same.

"I won't press you to come visit us, Mr. Shortmire," Dyall said to Emrys as he and his descendant finally turned to leave, "but I hope that you will."

"We should be so glad to see you," the girl said, with a shy smile.

"Perhaps—perhaps I will come," he found himself saying. "One day." The two men shook hands, and Nicholas Dyall and his great-great-granddaughter moved away. Emrys stared after them for a minute; then, without paying any attention to the exhibits, he went back to his house and spent the rest of the evening staring at the falling flakes in his snowplace.

For years, he had thought he'd lost any capacity to feel. Now he knew that was not true ... because he had been moved by Megan Dyall. How, he could not say—not even whether it was love or hate he felt toward her—but he *felt*. That was the important thing, and, because of that, he had to take the risk and call on them.

He waited a week, then went to the Dyall house—a mansion, less ostentatious than his, but probably more expensive. Dyall greeted him warmly. "I'm glad you decided to come. Your father and I were not close friends, but he was the only one left of my generation whom I knew. It was a shock to hear of his passing, even though I hadn't seen him for a century or so."

"You've lived for such a long time, Grandpa," Megan said in her high, sweet voice, "it's hard to imagine. But why doesn't everybody get the longevity treatment, so we can all live a long time?"

"Because it's difficult and expensive," her ancestor said, smiling over her golden head at Emrys. "Because the old must make way for the young. It is only given to those whose lives, the government feels, should be prolonged, either because of the contributions they can still make, or whose contributions have already been so great that this is the only fitting reward."

The girl stared at him with large blue eyes. "Does that mean you will live forever, Grandpa?"

"No," the old man told her. "All our science can give is an extra half century. I don't know how long my life span would have been, but I'm past the average and the extra half century, and so I'm living on borrowed time."

The blue eyes filled with tears. "I don't want you to die, Grandpa. I don't want to grow old and die, either."

Dyall looked down at her, and there was, Emrys thought, an odd perplexity in his gaze. Didn't he find it natural for a young girl not to like the idea of old age, of death?

"But I shall want to die when my time comes, Megan," Dyall said. "We all will." Gently, he touched her cheek. "Perhaps, by the time you make your contribution to society, scientists will know how to give youth as well as extra years. More years are not really much of a gift to the old."

"But I can't do anything, Grandpa," she sobbed. "I have nothing to contribute."

It was an outrage, Emrys thought, that this woman, by being the essence of femininity, should be denied the ultimate reward society had to offer. Motherhood alone should entitle her.... He was, of course, already envisioning himself as the father of her children. *But could he be a father?*

Old Dyall was saying, "Perhaps, Megan, by the time you are old enough, our government will be wise enough to realize that beauty, of itself, deserves the greatest reward Man can give." He turned to Emrys. "Forgive me for getting so sentimental, but Megan looks as uncannily like her great-great-grandmother—my wife—as ... you look like your father. I can't bear to think she must die, too. It's a pity there is no way she can stay young and beautiful for all time."

Emrys found his fists clenching. The fingers were cold.

"Alissa's portrait was painted just before I married her," the old man said. "She was just about Megan's age then. Come, I'd like you to see it."

No! something inside Emrys cried out, but he could not courteously—or any other way—refuse to follow the old man.

They went into another room. Hanging over the mantelpiece was the painting of a girl in old-fashioned clothes. Anyone, not knowing, would have taken her to be Megan. But Emrys knew she was not, and suddenly he let himself remember what it was that Megan meant to him ... and why he hated Nicholas Dyall with such coruscating fury.

IV

"You should have sent for me to come to you, Mr. Hubbard," Nicholas Dyall said, with a gentle pity that infuriated the old lawyer, who knew that he himself was young enough to be Dyall's grandson. Hubbard was jealous—he would not conceal it from himself—bitterly jealous. It had not been hard for him to rationalize Jan Shortmire's gift of years as a worthless one; that old man's bitterness and disillusionment had not inspired envy. But this hale and rosy old man seemed to be enjoying his years.

I may not have made any signal contribution to human welfare, Hubbard thought resentfully, but I have done my best. Why must I die at an age fifty years short of the age which this man is allowed to reach?

"I am perfectly able to get about, Mr. Dyall," he said in icy tones, "since I am in excellent health." Which he was, the doctor had told him, adding, however, "for your age."

"What is more," Hubbard continued, "since I was on Ndrikull, it might have seemed rather presumptuous for me to send for you; whereas I had always been planning to return to Earth one day. I left at the time of the plague."

"You were wise. I merely retired to the country. I escaped the virus, but the rest of my family was less fortunate. I have but one remaining—my great-great-granddaughter."

"Yes," Hubbard said, "I know. It's because of her I've come to see you."

He had not really planned ever to return to Earth. Ndrikull had been comfortable and a man of his age did not risk a trip through space unless the need was urgent. The memory of Emrys Shortmire had disturbed him from time to time, but, he thought, probably the young man had died of the plague. Even if he had not, what good would it do for Peter Hubbard to be present on Earth? He could not counteract the presence of an evil force without knowing the quality of that evil.

Then, picking up the kind of journal he did not usually read, he had seen mentioned the fact that Jan Shortmire's son was "courting" Nicholas Dyall's great-great-granddaughter. And he had known the need was now urgent. He must go back to Earth and warn someone; it was his duty. A letter could not convey the hatred and fear with which the young man had inspired him. Obviously, old Dyall had been the person to warn. Yet he did not seem right.

I do not like this man, Hubbard thought. And then: This is the second man I have taken such an instant dislike to. Can it be senility rather than perceptiveness, and have I been foolish to come all this way?

"You've come because of Megan?" Dyall raised eyebrows that were still thick and black. "Have you met her? Do you know her?" His voice sharpened. "She has never spoken of you."

"I have never met her," Hubbard said, and saw Dyall relax. Hubbard waited, but the other man said nothing, so he went on, "I wanted to talk to you about the man she's been seeing, this Emrys Shortmire." Leaning forward, Hubbard spoke slowly, as if, by giving weight to each word, he could make them sound less fantastic. "He's a monster. Literally, I mean. His mother was a Morethan. Or *is*. For all I know, she may still be alive."

Hubbard had not thought of this before, and it shook him. Yet, if Iloa Tasqi was alive, then Emrys Shortmire must be considered to be, to all intents and purposes, Morethan entirely, working only for the interests of that planet. After all, his mother had been the only parent the boy had known. Even on Clergal, he must have been brought up under a strong Morethan influence. Now, if the female was still alive, then the influence would be alive, too. Since Morethans were not permitted on Earth, there would be an obvious advantage for them in having someone here.

Dyall was holding back a smile, not too well. "I didn't know a human and a Morethan could—ah—breed together."

And, obviously, he didn't believe it. There was no way Hubbard could prove it, unless he asked Emrys to produce his birth certificate again. "It isn't generally known that the two species can reproduce together," he finally said, "nor should it be."

Then he looked directly in Dyall's black eyes—impossible that eyes so keen should be so deliberately blind, that any aware human being should not have sensed *something* of that dark aura. "Haven't you felt something strange about young Shortmire?" he asked.

"Can't say I have," Dyall chuckled. "He seems an agreeable enough young fellow."

"He's sixty-five years old."

"Really? I should have taken him to be younger. But youth lasts longer these days. And there's—" Dyall gave a little laugh—"no crime in being old, or you and I would be in prison, wouldn't we?"

Hubbard would not let himself be distracted. "He looked less than forty when he came to Earth, and he hasn't, I understand, changed in the past ten years."

"Ten years is not so long." Dyall's swarthy hands began playing with the ornaments on his desk. Clearly, he was impatient to be rid of his tedious caller, and Hubbard struggled with the instinctive good breeding that told him to get up and leave. This was not a social call, so it did not matter that he was boring his host, however.

On the other hand, he was not getting anywhere. Perhaps he could *blast* the other out of his smugness. "Look, Dyall, I know this is an outrageous thing for a man of my profession to say. I haven't a shred of proof, not a suspicion—but I'm morally sure he killed his father."

Instead of showing shock or anger or even thought, Dyall merely gave him a tolerant smile. "You're an old man, Mr. Hubbard. We're both old men," he amended graciously, "so we're apt to—jump at shadows."

I'm an old man, Hubbard thought angrily, *and you're an old fool!*

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with the young man," Dyall continued, "or not-so-young man, if you prefer. He appears to be very fond of Megan, and if he should choose to marry her, it would ease my mind considerably. I've exceeded my life span myself, you know."

Since Peter Hubbard had done the same, and his span was considerably shorter, he had no sympathy. "You'd—let the strain continue?"

"Perhaps it's a good strain. I understand the Morethans are said to be immortal. If so, the genes might be a desirable addition to our own."

He was laughing openly now. Hubbard almost wept with helplessness. There must be *something* he could do. But what? He could not take the trip to Morethis; he would certainly die on the way. And what could he do there? There was no guarantee that, if there was anything to be found, he would find it, or even if he reached the planet alive, that he would go back alive.

"Won't you stay and dine with us tonight, Mr. Hubbard?" Dyall asked.

"No—no, thank you," Hubbard said, feeling no necessity for making an excuse. The offer had represented only the barest kind of courtesy.

Dyall got up. "Perhaps another night then?"

"Perhaps." Hubbard rose to his feet also, trying to appear brisk and alert and *young*. At least he could walk without aid, he thought, staring pointedly at the stick leaning against the wall. "I would rather you didn't tell Shortmire I had come to see you about him."

"Of course not, if you wish."

But Hubbard knew Dyall would not keep the stranger's visit from his friend. Odd that Dyall and young Shortmire should be friends. Not so odd either, though; young Shortmire had no reason to love his father. Besides, although Jan Shortmire had hated Nicholas Dyall, that did not mean Nicholas Dyall had hated Jan Shortmire, or even knew of the other man's animosity.

As he was riding back to his hotel, Hubbard let his tired old body indulge the aches and pains that were its rightful heritage. As his body relaxed, his mind relaxed, and he began to think more clearly. Perhaps Dyall would not listen to him—perhaps Dyall had some reason for not listening—but the government might.

What young Shortmire might have done as a human, they would consider a matter for local law—but the fact that human and Morethan had begotten offspring would interest them. The fact that the Morethans might have managed at last to get a spy on Earth would interest them. If Emrys would not surrender his birth certificate, they could get another from Clergal. Only, would the government's representative believe Hubbard enough to get that birth certificate? Or would they, like Dyall, dismiss him as a doddering old fool?

The private humiliation had been hard enough; he hated to risk a public one. But it was his duty to tell officialdom of his suspicions, he knew miserably. Never again could he think with pride of himself as a worthy citizen if he didn't at least make the attempt. Never again could he let himself feel a justifiable jealousy of those with endowments superior to his, if he did not prove himself worthy of what he had.

Well, there was no hurry; he would sleep on it. He was mistaken. In the morning, before he had even started to decide upon any course of action, the front desk called to announce that a Mr. Shortmire wished to see him.

"Very well," the old lawyer said wearily into the machine, *to the machine*, for it was the Dyall itself speaking. "Send him up."

A short while later, there was a rap on the door. "Come in," Hubbard called.

The door slid open. A man entered, a tawny golden youth with eyes like burnished metal. "Do you know who I am, Peter?"

"Of course," Hubbard said, faintly disgusted, since he considered melodrama vulgar. "You're Emrys Shortmire."

"You're wrong," the man said. "I'm Jan Shortmire."

V

Emrys Shortmire had gone home the night Dyall had shown him the portrait of his long-dead wife, and Emrys had dreamed, not of Megan Dyall, but of Alissa Embel, Megan's great-great-grandmother, whom he had wanted a hundred years before, and who had married Nicholas Dyall. Consciously, he had forgotten her, but at the back of his mind, she had, for over a century, walked hand in hand with his hatred.

That night he understood what he had not realized then. He had completed the engines with which he had been tinkering for years with a real vengeance. He had taken the first starship out

into space himself—when no one had faith in his engines, least of all himself—merely "to show her" what a great man he was, even if he died in the showing. In his spite, he had opened up the stars for mankind.

And when he returned, years later, he found that Dyall, too, had stopped tinkering and had changed the pattern of his gadgets to one more acceptable to the public taste. Before, they had operated quite satisfyingly, but they had not been salable in the shape he had given them, and no manufacturer had been interested in leasing the patents. Now that he had yielded, manufacturers were falling all over themselves to get the right to produce his machines.

Dyall's was not as soul-stirring a success as Shortmire's—he did not inspire cheering crowds and parades—but a more enduringly popular one. The Shortmire engines carried humanity to the stars, but it was the Dyall machines that cooked humanity's dinners and kept its houses clean. So humanity respected Jan Shortmire and took Nicholas Dyall to its collective heart.

Emrys awakened, remembering all this and rigid with loathing for Nicholas Dyall, and for the world which had allowed Nicholas Dyall to take from him something he had wanted. Something which had, as soon as he'd known for sure he'd lost it forever, become what he wanted most. And also he hated the world which had given Alissa Embel to Dyall and had then proceeded to heap on him in addition every honor Jan Shortmire himself had won in an effort to make up for what he'd lost. Jan Shortmire had risked his life in space; Nicholas Dyall had sat comfortably in his chair—and both were equally honored.

Then Emrys—as Emrys—caught hold of himself. It was true that originally there had been injustice. But it had been righted and so there was no more reason to hate Dyall. *I have a second chance, but he will have none. I will live out another full lifetime, and I will have Megan, too, and he'll die in a few years. And as for the world, I have already revenged myself on it in advance.*

He got up and pulled a spun-metal robe about him, amethyst and sable—a gift from Morethis. There was always a costly gift on his birthday, either out of kindness or cruelty, together with a vial of the golden capsules.

What a pity, he thought, as he went downstairs, that Dyall and the world both would never know the truth: that Jan Shortmire had no son, that Emrys and Jan Shortmire were one.

The Morethans first came to Jan Shortmire when, approaching his natural old age, he had traveled as a visitor to their planet—largely because old men did not go to Morethis—and they had made him their offer. He had laughed in their dark and exquisite faces.

"My own government will give me fifty years more of life," he said, for he had heard, during the voyage out, that he would be on the next honors list. "What need do I have of you?"

"We can give you far more than fifty years," they'd told him. "And youth, besides."

At that, he had stopped laughing, but still he had not accepted their offer, for many reasons ... doubt and fear, perhaps some shreds of honor, and certainly, since he was a man of science, skepticism.

Then, when Shortmire was nearing the end of those fifty extra years which had, indeed, been granted him by a grateful Earth government—together with a plaque, suitably inscribed—he had received a gift. It was one of those great crystalline prisms from Morethis that were so fashionable on Earth as lighting fixtures, not because they saved fuel—for one such prism would cost ten lifetimes of fuel—but because they gave a light no Earthborn device could give, making the old look young, the stupid wise, and, most important of all, the ugly beautiful.

Shortmire looked into the lambent depths, wondering who had sent him so costly and so useless a gift. Suddenly the flame vitrified into a face that flashed up at him from the crystal—a face that was beautiful in its horror, and horrible in its beauty. He closed his eyes, but when he opened them, the iridescent eyes were still there, mocking him for his cowardice.

"I am Uvrei," a deep voice of tingling sweetness said, "god among gods and man among men. I bring you greetings from Morethis, Jan Shortmire."



Shortmire knew well enough what Uvrei must want, for the Morethans' long-ago offer had risen of late to the top of his thoughts. They could not do what they claimed, he had tried to reassure himself, whenever the memory returned; it was a trick which he had been clever enough not to fall for. But part of his mind did not believe this, and that part was glad to see Uvrei.

"What do you want of me?" he demanded.

The Morethan smiled, and each glittering tooth was a fiery brilliant. "The same as before, on the same terms," he said, offering no enticements. The man who would accept such an offer would provide his own.

If they were capable of doing this ... thing with the crystal, then they might also have other powers. So Shortmire could no longer pretend that what they offered him was impossible. On the other hand, what they required of him in return was truly terrible. Could they really do what they said?

After all, my world has not done overmuch for me. Others, like Nicholas Dyall, have wealth and power and.... He would not let himself think of Alissa Dyall, since she must long be dead, of old age, if nothing else. The last he had heard of her was when she and Dyall had announced their wedding date. Then he had taken the ship fitted out with the engines everyone said would not work, and he had fled into space. When he had come back, no one had spoken of her, and gradually, in his new-found importance, he had to some degree forgotten her, though he never forgot Dyall.

Pity to think of Alissa as having grown old. Even more of a pity to think of himself as having grown old, for he could see that in every mirror he passed.

"You're sure you can give me youth as well as life?" he asked.

"Not only youth, but perpetual youth," Uvrei assured him. "Youth such as you did not know even when you were young."

But Shortmire was still suspicious. Even if the Morethans could do what they said, how did he know they would? An alien concept of honor might have no reference to the terrestrial one. "How do I know I can trust your word?"

Uvrei's face grew black, literally black, and the crystal shivered until, Emrys thought, it would split. And he shivered, too, knowing in the fine nerves and little muscles of his body what would happen to him at the final shivering. A fear filled him then that he had never known before, not even when he faced space for the first time, and in the midst of that fear came the thought that, if he truly hated Earth, this was the most artistically nasty revenge he could take.

The crystal trembled to stillness as Uvrei's face paled to composure. "If you were not an Earthman, Jan Shortmire," he said, "we would not have needed you, nor you us. And an Earthman

could not be expected to know that the words you have just spoken are the insult that, on Morethis, is deadlier than death; for the word of an immortal—no matter to whom or what he gives it—is as sacred and enduring as he himself."

"I apologize," Shortmire said quickly, "for my ignorance."

"And I forgive you," Uvrei declared, as grandly as if he *were* a god, "because of that ignorance. Moreover, since you cannot help your racial deficiencies, I will make this bargain with you. Come to Morethis. There we will give you the life and youth we promised. Then, when you are satisfied that we have given you what you desire, you will give us what we desire."

Not having been too honorable a man in his own hundred and fifty-five years, Jan Shortmire still could not believe that the Morethans would act in all honor. However, even the remote possibility that they would play fair was strong temptation for an ardent man pushing death. So he had agreed. He had wound up his affairs and made his will in favor of "his son." Then he had left Earth to go to Morethis, to die as Jan Shortmire and he resurrected as Emrys Shortmire.

The Morethans had kept their word, though there were times when he wished they had not. For no phoenix casting itself into the fire to burn alive in agony, so that it might rise again, young and strong and purified, from the ashes of its own dead self, could have suffered the excruciating torment of both mind and body that he suffered as, little by little, he was made young again.

Uvrei had warned him that this would happen. "To become one of us, you must be capable of all-endurance." So, for three years, he had lived on the miasmatic planet, suffering unending, unbearable pain—not only his, but of the others whose lives went to make his new life. Slowly, agonizingly, these were stirred into the shrieking cauldrons of his body, until they blended and melted and coalesced to become his new shape.

Then Uvrei had led him ceremoniously to a reflecting glass and shown him Emrys Shortmire—a boy far more handsome than the boy Jan Shortmire had been, though, at the same time, his twin. The only thing not quite human about Emrys Shortmire was his eyes, and how could they be human after what they had seen? But he would forget all that once he was back on Earth, forget the payment that had been exacted—and prepare to live his new life to the full.

All this Emrys Shortmire told Peter Hubbard in the quiet of the expensive hotel room. It was pleasant to be able to unburden himself at last. For the past eleven years, there had been a secret side of him that must always walk apart, even from Megan. Now there was someone who could know the whole of him, and he was grateful to Hubbard for having come back to Earth.

But Hubbard sat there staring with so fixed a gaze that, for a moment, Emrys thought he was dead. Then he realized that it was only shock; all this had been too much for so old a man. Selfishly, he had heaped his burden upon another, without asking whether that other was willing, or able, to share it.

"Peter," he began, "I'm sorry..." not quite sure for what he was apologizing. He could not have trusted the old man at the beginning, just as he *had* to trust him now. But of course he was apologizing to Peter Hubbard, as the representative of humanity, for what he himself had done to Earth.

He began to give unasked-for explanations. "I deliberately made you suspect I killed my father, because if you suspected one of us had done away with the other, why, then, you'd automatically have assumed there were two." He looked down at the floor. "And I wanted you to hate me. We couldn't be friends; otherwise, knowing me better than anyone else alive, you might have guessed..."

"I doubt it," Hubbard said wearily. "Almost anything else would have seemed more likely." Presently he asked, "Weren't you afraid I might investigate?"

Emrys smiled. "What could you find out? After all, I *hadn't* killed Jan Shortmire."

The smile became a little fixed. "I wouldn't have cared even if you had told someone your suspicions then," Emrys went on doggedly, "because I knew no one would believe you. But now—" he colored—"well, I don't want you to tell Megan Dyall anything ... bad about me. You see, I ... love her."

"I gathered that impression," Hubbard said.

But why does he sound so unhappy about it? Emrys thought angrily. *What's wrong with me?* Because he was in love, he could not appreciate the irony of that thought.

VI

Peter Hubbard looked at his old friend with the young face and the young body and the eyes that were unhuman—but less so than before. This was a frightful thing that had been done, and by and by he would feel the full horror of it. Right now he was too numb to care. He felt, as Emrys Shortmire must have felt on coming back to Earth, detached and without interest. *But I've felt this way before*, he thought; *it's because I'm old.*

"Were you really satisfied with your bargain, Jan?" he asked, almost casually.

"Not at first," the boy admitted, sinking down on the couch and clasping his hands around his knees. So young, so graceful, and so ... unnatural. "It seemed to me then that the Morethans had given me youth and taken away humanity. Because, once I found I was physically capable, I found I didn't really want the things I had craved so much before."

"So they did trick you?" When all was said and done, Hubbard thought, you could never trust an alien life-form, a foreigner.

"No, *no!* You still don't understand. The way I see it is that ... certain elements in us may not mean anything to them. They don't know they're there, so they wouldn't realize that anything got lost in ... the process."

"Do you think, Jan," Hubbard asked slowly, "that the way you felt—or didn't feel—might not have anything to do with the Morethans at all? That, for all your young body, you are an old man and feel like an old man?"

"Nonsense! I know what it is to feel like an old man, and I know what it is to feel like a young man, and I—I felt like neither."

"When a man has lived a certain number of years," Hubbard said, knowing that envy gave the truth relish, "he is an old man. Age is in the mind and heart, not only in the body."

"That's a lie!" Then Emrys said, more calmly, "If that's so, why did everything change when I met Megan? Because I found then that my emotions had not been lost! I had a feeling for her that I'd never had for another woman—not even for Alissa, I think. I hadn't imagined there could be a woman like Megan in the world, so sweet and amiable and completely feminine." He looked angrily at Hubbard. "You think I'm sentimental, don't you?"

Hubbard tried to smile. "There's nothing wrong with sentiment." But sentimentality was characteristic of an old man's love.

Emrys laughed and hugged his knees. He was overdoing the ingenuousness. Of course he deliberately played the part of a boy young enough to be his own great-great-grandson, because he was wooing a woman young enough to be his own great-great-granddaughter. And Hubbard remembered how he himself had attempted to move briskly before Nicholas Dyall. Emrys Shortmire would not have the physical aches that he'd had as a result, but could there be psychical aches? Could an old man ever actually be young?

Emrys' face grew sober. "I've never touched her, Peter—really touched her, I mean. She's not like other women, you know."

"I know," Hubbard said, remembering back to the time when he, too, had been in love. Only the memory was not tender in him, because he had married the girl and lived with her for nearly seventy years.

"Peter, you aren't listening!"

"I'm sorry," the old man said, waking from his reverie. "What were you saying?"

"I said, do you think Megan would be willing to marry me, if she knew I was older than her great-great-grandfather?"

But there was a more important question that Hubbard could no longer refuse to face. "Jan, what did you give the Morethans in return for what they gave you?"

"You haven't answered my question."

"I can't answer it, because I don't know the girl. But you can answer mine, because you know what you gave the Morethans."

Emrys was silent for a moment; then he laughed. "I gave them my soul," he said lightly. "Like that fellow in the opera."

"I know that. What I'm afraid of is that it wasn't enough. In what form did you give it to them, Jan?"

"You have no right to catechize me like that."

The old man's voice was soft. "I think I have."

Emrys was a long time in answering. When he finally spoke, his voice was flat and dead. "All right, I gave them the blueprints for the space-warp engines. What else did I have to give them in exchange?"

Hubbard expelled a long breath. He had answered this question for himself many minutes before. Still, the shock of confirmation was too great. All hope was gone now. "Perhaps you had a right to sell your own soul, Jan, but you had no right to sell humanity's." His good breeding held up all the way. This man had betrayed the whole of mankind, and so he, Peter Hubbard, reproached him gently for it. Though, come to think of it, what good would savage recrimination—or anything—do?

"But *you* don't have to worry about it, Peter!" Emrys cried. "Listen, the Morethan technology is so alien, so different from ours, because it's based on mental rather than physical forces, that it'll

take centuries before they can acquire the techniques they'll need to build the engines. And they'll have trouble getting the materials. We'll both have been long in our graves by the time they'll reach Earth."

"And that makes it all right? It doesn't matter to you what happens to your own home planet once you are dead?"

The young-looking face was flushed. "Why should it? Does Earth care what happens to me? During the plague, they cursed my name because I invented the star-engines. That's the only time Earth remembered me."

"During the plague, men were insane, Jan," Hubbard said, knowing his own sweet reasonableness was ludicrous under the circumstances, "not responsible for what they said. They don't curse your name any more."

"No, they've forgotten it." Emrys looked at Hubbard with blazing, unhuman eyes. "Why should you expect me to put their welfare before my own?"

"You must, if the race is to survive."

Hubbard expected Emrys to say, "Why should it survive?" but apparently there was a grain of emotion left here. "It will survive. The Morethans are not—" the word seemed to stick in Emrys' throat—"monsters."

"Jan," Hubbard said in a monotone, "eleven years ago, after you came to Earth for your inheritance, I became interested in Morethis—naturally enough, I suppose. I started scanning everything I could lay my hands on, and I learned a great deal about it—as much, I believe, as anyone off Morethis knows. Except, of course, you."

Emrys rose and began to pace the floor. "Nobody really knows anything about Morethis. Most of what has been written is a—a pack of lies. One liar copied from another, and so they perpetuate the lie. Scandal has always sold better than truth!"

Hubbard said, "There is a legend that the Morethans once had limited space travel, though no way of warping space to bring the distant stars closer, since they did not use engines. But there were many stars close to them, and they traveled from system to system, sucking each one dry. Then there were no living planets left in their sector of space, and their engineless ships could not bridge the gap to the next cluster, so they found themselves trapped on a dying planet that revolved around a dying star, and they, as a race, began to die themselves."

Emrys tried to laugh. "Looks like a fine case of poetic justice, but—"

"Wait. I haven't finished. The race did not die completely; it decayed. Certain among the people stayed alive through sucking the lives of the others; certain among them still kept some vestiges of the old traditions and knowledge; certain among them waited."

"Is that the end of your story?"

Hubbard nodded. Emrys' face was ashen. "Well, it's an old wives' tale," he sputtered. "All the Morethans want is to be able to compete on an equal basis with Earth. They don't want to be exploited, nor do they intend to...." As his eyes caught Hubbard's, his voice trailed off. "Anyhow, I'll be dead," he said. "I don't give a damn what happens after I'm dead."

Hubbard didn't believe it. He couldn't. There is no man who has not some love for his own kind, be it ever so little, merely because they look like him.

"You won't tell anybody who I really am?" Emrys asked childishly. "You're still my friend, aren't you?"

Hubbard sighed. Was he still this creature's friend? He didn't know. "Who would believe me?" he finally asked. "And even if they did, what's the use? Nothing can be done. The only thing that's ever protected us from the Morethans is distance. When they reach Earth, they will have already conquered us. Mental powers are always stronger than physical powers at close range."

"That's right." Emrys seemed to be relieved at the idea that the question was out of his hands. "Too late now to do anything about it."

Hubbard nodded. There was no way out that he could see.

"But you *do* promise not to tell old Dyll that I'm my father instead of me?" Emrys asked anxiously.

"Even if he believed me, he wouldn't care. All he wants is a good match for that great-great-granddaughter of his."

But was that all? As far as money went, Nicholas Dyll was reputed to be the richest man alive. And if he was truly fond of the girl, would he not at least have investigated the young man?

"You're *hard*!" Emrys complained, but without rancor.

"I have a suspicious nature," Hubbard said thoughtfully. "Perhaps it's the legal mind. At any rate, I don't care for Nicholas Dyll."

"Well, I don't either, but I don't really give a hang what kind of a great-great-grandfather-in-law I'm getting. All I care about is Megan. Do you think it's wrong for me to ask her to marry me?"

"Can't you understand that, at this stage, the girl doesn't matter?"

"No," Emrys said simply. "I cannot imagine her not mattering."

After he had gone, Hubbard still found himself thinking about Nicholas Dyall. In his whole lifetime, the old lawyer had personally known only two men whom society had deemed worthy of its highest honor, the longevity treatment. And these were more than most men had met, for the longevity treatment was given to very few. Both of the two, Dyall and Shortmire, had some defect in their personalities that warped them—all but completely, in Shortmire's case—away from the human virtues.

Was that defect a part of the creative talent that had earned the individual his right to the treatment? Or did it arise as an effect of the treatment itself? Because, if that was the case, then Earth's longevity treatment might be nothing more than a primitive form of the Morethan "process."

Since only straws remained to be grasped at, no one thing Hubbard did would be more futile than any other. And since he had nothing better to do, he might just as well investigate this new avenue. Jan Shortmire had hated Nicholas Dyall. Had Nicholas Dyall hated Jan Shortmire with equal venom? And, if so, had he done anything about it?

VII

A Gong sounded and a mechanical voice announced, "Mr. Peter Hubbard to see Mr. Dyall and Mr. Shortmire."

"Do you mean to say he has the *gall* to come see us, after the accusations he made against you, Emrys?" Dyall demanded incredulously. "I still can't understand why you sent him an invitation to the wedding, but that he should make a casual social call...!"

"We've come to terms." Emrys smiled. "After all, at his age, he can't be held accountable for everything he says."

"I'm at least fifty years older than he is!" the old engineer almost spat. "And you—do you mean that I am not responsible for what I say?"

Knowing that he was the other man's senior by some twenty years himself, Emrys was malevolently pleased. "Some people retain their faculties longer than others," he observed. "And Hubbard was my father's friend, as well as his lawyer, so he's the closest thing to a relative that I have on Earth. Except you, of course; you were my father's friend, too."

Dyall's lips tightened. "How does Hubbard know you're in this house right now? Do you think he's having you followed?"

It was possible, but Emrys didn't care. For almost a year now, his life had been blameless, and, strangely, it suited him to live that way. "I'm here in this house most of the time. It wouldn't be hard for him to figure out where he could find me."

The gong sounded again. Dyall looked undecided.

"If *I* can forgive him, sir," Emrys said gently, "surely *you* can."

"Show him in," Dyall rasped to the machine.

Megan rose to go, but Emrys kept hold of her small, cold hand. "I'd like you to meet Peter Hubbard, dear. He's really a nice old fellow when you get to know him. Just a bit too much of a do-gooder, that's all."

Dyall snorted.

"I shall be glad to know any friend of yours, Emrys," Megan said, sitting down again obediently.

After a moment, Peter Hubbard came into the room. "Peter, this is my fiancée, Megan Dyall." Smilingly, Emrys waited for the usual inane felicitations. He couldn't expect a man of Hubbard's age to be bowled over by this loveliness, but still surely no man, no matter how ancient, could be completely insensible to the girl's charm.

Hubbard stood still and stared at her. "Amazing...." he murmured. "Amazing...." Then he turned to Dyall. "You are to be congratulated, sir."

Emrys was annoyed. He knew Hubbard was too well-bred to make a remark like that unintentionally. However, he pretended to be amused and said, "You're supposed to congratulate *me*, Peter."

But Hubbard continued his inexplicable rudeness by paying no attention to Emrys and, instead, staring at Nicholas Dyall. And finally Dyall said, with a strangled laugh, "I think perhaps in this instance Mr. Hubbard is right."

He threw himself into an easy chair with an attempt at nonchalance, but it was embarrassingly apparent that his stick was not enough to support him any more. His old body was trembling. And Emrys found that he himself was trembling, too.

There was a painful silence. Everyone seemed to be waiting. Even Megan glanced from one to the other with her usual expression of bright-eyed interest.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Hubbard," Dyall said at last, "you've reached your conclusions too late to do anything except perhaps hasten an end that is, you'll concede, by now inevitable."

"Yes," Hubbard agreed, "you've won *your* game." He came a little further into the room, so that he was standing over the other old man. "I do believe that, of the two, you are the worse. He did what he did out of spite. You created that spite and kept it alive."

Dyall's dark face flushed and his hands tightened on his cane. "But I had a right to do what I did. And I hurt only one person. Two, if you include me. Give me credit, at least, for the smallness of my scope."

Hubbard glanced at Megan. And Dyall broke into the shrill cackle of an old man. "But you know, you *know*, and still you think of her! How sentimental can you get? Don't you realize—"

"How much does she?" Hubbard said. "How much do you?"

Emrys had become nearly frantic with frustration and bewilderment. He was the one who had secrets; nobody else. Nothing was to be kept hidden from *him*! "What are you two blabbering about?" he almost screamed. "It doesn't make sense—any of it!"

Hubbard turned toward him, his head and neck moving with the deliberate precision of a piece of clockwork. "It makes very good sense, Jan. I realized that I could find out nothing more from the stars, so I turned my researches back to Earth. I've been investigating Mr. Dyall."

"What did you find?" Emrys asked tensely. Why did Peter call him by his former name in front of his former enemy? Had the old fool forgotten his promise, or had he broken it on purpose? "*What did you find out?*" he repeated.

Hubbard's voice was filled with pity. "Just this: Nicholas Dyall never did marry Alissa Embel."

Emrys' fear exploded into a scarlet rage. "Then Megan is—" He advanced on Dyall, his fists clenched. "If you took Alissa and then didn't—"

Hubbard caught his arm in a frail grip. "Don't be so hasty, Emrys. Dyall did no wrong to Alissa Embel, whatever wrong he may have done to you."

"Thank you," Dyall murmured, "for granting me that I gave her all I had, but it wasn't what she wanted. She wanted—" his old eyes were filled with hate as he looked at Emrys—"you."

"Alissa Embel killed herself on the day before the wedding," Hubbard told Emrys. "She, as we attorneys say, died without issue."

Emrys was glad that, since he could not have had Alissa, Dyall had not, either. At the same time, he felt an overwhelmingly poignant sense of sorrow, that he should have had three full lifetimes, and the woman he had loved—insofar as Jan Shortmire had been capable of love—not even one.

He raised dull eyes to the two old men. "Then who is Megan?"

Hubbard hesitated. But what worse could there be to tell? And then the lawyer asked a ridiculous question, "Jan, do you know why Dyall's machines didn't meet popular favor until he changed them?"

Emrys plunged back once again into the well of his memories. "Nobody wanted to buy machines that looked too much like people; it made them ... uncomfortable. So Dyall stopped designing robots and made machines adapted to their separate functions and—" His voice became a cry of anguish. "*Megan!*"

She turned her bland, smiling doll face toward him. "I'm sorry, Emrys," the sweet voice said.

Dyall's eyes were squeezed shut and something glistened on the edge of them—something that Emrys would not admit were tears, because he himself could never cry.

"When Alissa died," Dyall said, "I knew I couldn't love another woman. So I made a mechanical doll in her image. I made her the woman every man dreams of—lovely and sympathetic and undemanding. And I told myself she would be better than the original Alissa because she would be perfect, and Alissa wasn't; she would stay young forever, while the real Alissa would have grown old ... if she had lived. But it wasn't the same for me."

Why was she the same for me, then? Emrys wondered bitterly. Was it because I didn't know? Is that all love is—self-deception?

"Perhaps," Dyall went on, "Man cannot appreciate true perfection; perhaps he's not good enough himself. Still, she was company of a sort and so I kept her by me. And then, when I read of Emrys Shortmire's arrival on Earth, I sent him a note, but he didn't answer; however, I contrived to get a look at him anyway. Then I knew for sure that he was Jan Shortmire himself; and then I knew what Megan's destiny was...."

"How *could* you know he—I was Jan Shortmire?" Emrys demanded angrily. It was insupportable that old Dyall should have known all along; it spoiled the joke. "Where would you have—have gotten the concept?"

The old man smiled, opening his eyes. "Because the Morethans made me the same offer they did you! Did you think you were the only one?" And, throwing back his head, he derisively began to laugh aloud.

More than ever, Emrys hated the Morethans, not for what they would do to Earth's pride, but for what they had done to his. Because now there was nothing that he had been offered that Dyall had not been offered also. And Dyall had not accepted the Morethans' offer, thereby proving himself the better man. And Dyall had tricked him, thereby proving himself the cleverer man. And Dyall had hated him even more than he had hated Dyall, thereby proving himself the more constant man. So there Emrys Shortmire, Jan Shortmire, was left ... with nothing but a youthfulness of which, he had to admit to himself, he had grown rather tired.

"I'm sorry, Emrys," Megan said. "I'm terribly sorry."

Dyall sprang from his chair. "I'm sick of that piping doll's voice of yours! I've stood it for a century, and that's long enough!" Raising his stick high in the air, he crashed it down upon the golden head, the pretty pink and white face. And, frozen in horror, Emrys could not move until it was too late. He had not conceived old Dyall capable of committing outright murder so wantonly. Probably he wasn't; to him, Megan was and had been always a doll.

And now she was a heap of broken wheels and gears on the thick rug. Still, out of the heap of twisted machinery, a tiny, tinny voice kept repeating "I'm sorry, Emrys. I'm terribly sorry."



Exhausted by his effort, Dyall sank back into his chair. And he laughed as Emrys, wanting desperately to weep, unable to, bent over the pieces, trying to fit them together again.

"You'll never do it, Jan," he croaked maliciously. "Even a good engineer would never be able to repair it now. If I know how to create, I also know how to destroy!" And he went into another paroxysm of gleefully triumphant laughter.

Emrys saw that Megan was indeed far beyond his powers, and probably old Dyall's, to repair. Filled with fury—the one emotion, he saw now, that he had not given up—he turned to smash Nicholas Dyall as Dyall had smashed his doll. But the old, old man sat perfectly still in his chair. There was a broad grin on his face.

He made a very cheerful corpse.

VIII

Emrys Shortmire found that he did not want life any more. He went back to his mansion and he tried to hang himself. But the rope would not cut off his breath. He pointed a ray gun at his head, and although the heat became intolerable, it did not burn him. He swallowed poison and waited. Nothing happened. He threw himself off the roof and landed unhurt upon the pavement below. He went back inside and slashed his wrist and saw the cuts close before his eyes. And as he stared at the unmarked skin, thick fog filled the room, and he heard Uvrei's voice—and it was the greatest ignominy of all that the Morethan's voice should *dare* to hold compassion.

"Don't you know, Emrys, that an immortal cannot die?"

When Emrys forced himself to look at the ancient one, he saw that the beautiful eyes were filled with an unhallowed pity. "You are an immortal god, son of my spirit. You can destroy anything except one of us—and you are one of us now."

"I'm not one of you. I'm not a god, nor are you. I'm not...." Emrys looked down at his wrists, then back at Uvrei. "But I may be immortal," he acknowledged. "It wasn't just a figure of speech?"

"You will never die, Emrys. You will exist forever, like us, a handful of changelessness in a

changing universe."

"Then I *won't* be dead when you come to Earth?" He had fancied himself out of it, but what exquisite punishment that not until he had tired of life had he found out he was cursed with unwanted life forever. He had not been a good man, but was any man evil enough to deserve this?

"When we come to Earth, you will be waiting for us. But you will look forward to our coming." And Uvrei said once again, "You are one of us, Emrys."

"I'm not! I'm *not!*"

"Of course you are. Like us, you do not breathe air—"

"I do...." And then Emrys remembered that the rope had not cut off his breath, and it might well have been because he had not been breathing.

"Like us, you do not eat food."

"But I do!" And here Emrys was genuinely perplexed.

"We left you your digestive system, because part of the pleasure you craved comes through that. But you could completely deny yourself the food that you thought sustained you and feel no ill effects—at least no physical ones. It's the pills that feed you, Emrys."

"Well," Emrys said slowly, "they're food, then."

"Of a sort. But not the kind you mean. You cannot exist without us and our skills, Emrys. Each vial of pills consists of the mitogenetic force of ten tons of life."

"What kind of life?" Emrys asked.

"Does it really matter?"

"You said I cannot exist without you," Emrys pointed out shrewdly, "that I need the pills. So I could stop taking them, couldn't I, and starve myself to death?"

Uvrei smiled. "Yes, you could do that. Only it would take, say, about fifteen hundred terrestrial years—perhaps, since we have given you a strong, young body, as much as two thousand. Do you think you are strong enough to starve yourself to death over a period of two thousand years?"

Emrys knew he was not. In that first anguish, all he could think of to do was to humble himself before the Morethan. "I have served your purpose. Why not be merciful to me now?" he pleaded. "At least let me die."

"I could not, even if I would. So little of our old powers remain. We have kept the secret of perpetual life, but we have lost the secret of perpetual death."

"But that's the greater secret!"

"Of course it is!" For the first time, Emrys saw the Morethan high priest lose control. "Do you think I don't know what it is to crave death?"

After a silence, the voice, once more chillingly warm, said, "Come, my son, being one of us, you have nothing to fear from our arrival. You no longer have anything in common with these animals. You cannot even—what is your word?—love them. When you tried, you fixed upon a machine with the face of a memory."

"Would a human being have known she was a machine?"

"A human being would have known."

"Then ... I am a machine, too? A machine created by mental, rather than physical processes, but a machine nonetheless?"

"In a sense," the alien said thoughtfully, "you could be called that—though to compare you, as an artistic creation, with that trumpery piece of gimcrack...."

"Don't call her that!" Emrys shouted. "She's dead!"

Uvrei began to laugh quietly. After a little, Emrys began to laugh, too. "I'm being foolish," he said.

"Extremely foolish," Uvrei agreed. "Resign yourself, my son, and accept your fate. That is what we immortals have all had to do, one by one."

Of course he could do that, Emrys thought. After all, he wouldn't be as badly off as the other Earth people when the Morethans came; whatever else happened, he, at least, could not be turned into a component part of a little golden pill. Immortality was a dull future, but perhaps, after the Morethans arrived, it would become more interesting.

"Good-by, son of my spirit," Uvrei said. "We shall meet again corporeally in a few centuries." The fog thickened about him and disappeared, leaving its characteristic odor behind.

And still Emrys could not resign himself. *Dyall could have had this, too, if he had wanted it. This was what he was offered and what he was strong enough to refuse. If I accept my fate, then I will always know that I have come off second best to him.* And this prospect, more than immortality, more than the knowledge of what would happen to Earth and its people, was the one that Emrys

found intolerable.

IX

Why doesn't he leave me alone? Peter Hubbard thought, as, wearily, he told the Dyall machine to let Emrys Shortmire up. *I am a very old man and I will die soon. Can't he leave me alone in the little time left?*

But he could not forget the obligations of courtesy. He was polite to Emrys Shortmire when the other man came in. Even if he hadn't been, he saw, Emrys wouldn't have noticed; he was too full of his own thoughts.

"Peter," he cried, almost before he was fully in the room, "did you know that, in dying, Nicholas Dyall won a final victory over me?"

The old man muffled a yawn. "You mean you can't die? Well, I was afraid of that. I am sorry for you, Jan, but you brought this upon yourself."

"I know," Emrys said, looking a little disappointed that the knowledge did not startle the lawyer. "I will be alive when they come," he went on, more subdued. "I will be waiting, or so they think."

"I imagine that's what they counted on," Hubbard said indifferently. "You not only giving them the secret of the engines but acting as a—an outpost. They didn't sell their wares cheap, did they?"

Emrys' eyes flashed copper fire. "But I will *not* be waiting to help them. I will be waiting to *fight* them."

"Brave words."

"You think I can't fight them?"

"Of course you can't. They have powers far beyond yours. And why should you want to fight them? I know you hadn't planned to be alive when they came, but it won't be bad for you. You're one of them now."

Emrys sat down on the couch. "Physically I am. That's why I *can* fight them. Look, Peter, I have centuries ahead of me. By giving me immortality, they have also given me time."

"Splendid. Time to do what?"

"I don't know," Emrys confessed. "But time is such a valuable commodity in itself. With it, I could learn how to turn their own powers against them."

"Easier said than done," Hubbard observed.

"Maybe I could—oh—invent a machine that will amplify my mind powers until it can overcome all of theirs...."

Hubbard said nothing.

"Well, then, the engines I gave them can't take them out of this galaxy any more than those same engines can take humanity out of it. But, given time, I can invent *new* engines, Peter—engines that can jump the gap from galaxy to galaxy. If I cannot give Man the weapons with which to fight, at least I can give him the means by which to flee! And, since I was the man who invented the one, I can be the man to invent the other!"

That was true, Hubbard thought, hope rising in him, despite all his efforts to hold it back. That was possible. But would Emrys do this? Right now, in the first flush of repentance, he might try to. But if the work grew tedious, might he not say to himself: *Why bother? I'm bound to live forever, anyway. Why should I care what happens to the others of my kind?*

"Who knows, Peter," Emrys cried, "I may be able to invent engines that can move the whole world—all our worlds—to another galaxy, where the Morethans will never be able to follow!"

"What's in it for you, Emrys?" Hubbard asked bluntly.

"I want to save humanity ... and, of course," Emrys added, his eyes lighting exultantly, "by doing that, I will do more than Dyall ever did. My name will go down in history, and his—"

"Do you hate him so much, Emrys, even though he's dead?" Hubbard asked wonderingly, unable to conceive of such a thing.

"*Especially* because he's dead," Emrys snarled. "Because now I'll never have the pleasure of mocking him." He looked anxiously at Hubbard. "Don't you think I'm doing the right thing, Peter?"

The right thing, but for the wrong reason. Only for the wrong reason, though, was Emrys sure to finish what he had set out to do. It was the one motive that would keep him working long after he grew bored with the work. It was humanity's only chance, and so it did not matter *why* Emrys was doing this.

"It's a splendid thing you're planning to do, Emrys," Hubbard said warmly. "A splendid thing!"

What if Emrys *did* go down in history? It would be thanks to him that history had continued at all.

Yes, he was a vicious man. And Dyall had been equally vicious. And Peter Hubbard was a good man—and it was he who had *not* been granted that fifty extra years of life. What was goodness? Was it inherently opposed to greatness? Did things get done only out of malevolent motives—anger and ruthlessness and spite? If, as it seemed, goodness was a passive force, and evil an active one, perhaps the world needed both. And if, as it seemed, evil could beget good, then evil could not be all bad.

So, Peter Hubbard thought, *there is hope for the Morethans as well as for humanity.*

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