

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Someone to Watch Over Me, by Floyd C. Gale and H. L. Gold

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Someone to Watch Over Me

Author: Floyd C. Gale

Author: H. L. Gold

Illustrator: Dick Francis

Release date: April 23, 2016 [EBook #51844]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Greg Weeks, Mary Meehan and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME ***



Someone To Watch Over Me

By CHRISTOPHER GRIMM

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

**[Transcriber's Note: This etext was produced from
Galaxy Science Fiction October 1959.
Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that
the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]**

In the awfulness of hyperspace, everything was the nightmare opposite of itself ... and here was where Len Mattern found his goal!

I

Len Mattern paused before the door of the Golden Apple Bar. The elation that had carried him up to this point suddenly wasn't there any more. Lyddy couldn't have changed too much, he'd kept telling himself. After all, it hadn't been so very long since he'd seen her. Now he found himself counting the years ... and they added up to a long time.

But it was too late to go back now. A familiar thought. The commitment was moral only, and to himself, no one else—the same way it had been that other time, the time that had changed the direction of his whole life, and, possibly, of all other lives in his universe as well. There was only one human being with whom he kept faith—himself. Therefore, the commitment was a binding one.

He pushed open the door and went in.

He saw Lyddy at the end of the bar, surrounded by a group of men. Lyddy had always been surrounded by a group of men, he remembered, unless she was up in her room entertaining just one. She half-turned and he saw her face. The sun-pink lips were parted, her eyes still comparable to the heavens of Earth. She stood erect and lithe and slender.

She had not changed at all!

The tension that had built up inside him snapped with the weight of sudden relief. He lurched against a small hokur-motal table. It rocked crazily. The zhapiq who owned the Golden Apple came out from behind the carved screen where he'd been sitting segregated from the customers. Many of the zhapiq, who had been native to Erytheia before the Federation took over, owned businesses catering to humans. It might be degrading, but it paid well.



"Maybe you've had enough to drink, Captain?" he suggested. "Maybe you'd like to come back another time?"

"I haven't had anything at all to drink," Mattern said curtly. "What's more, I haven't come for a drink."

He strode across the room, firmly now, and brushed aside the men who clustered around Lyddy. "I've come for you," he told her.

She didn't say anything, just looked him up and down. The beautiful blue eyes skillfully appraised his worth as a man and as a customer. Then she smiled and patted the gilded hair that streamed past her bare shoulders to her narrow waist.

"You're not a Far Planets man," she said. "How come you know about me?"

Funny he should feel disappointed. Sure, he'd been thinking of her all those years, but he'd never expected her to have been thinking of him. Yet he found himself blurting out, "Don't you remember me, Lyddy?" Then he cursed himself; first because he didn't want her to remember him as he had been; second, because he knew every man who'd ever slept with her—or a woman like her—would ask the same question. And, of course, she'd have the standard answer, something like "Why, of course I remember you, honey. I'm just not good at names."

But she just looked at him levelly. "No, dear, I'm afraid I don't remember you," she said. Then a tiny frown gathered on her smooth forehead. "Seems to me I would've, though. When did I meet you?"

"Oh, years ago! I was just a kid!"

She flushed, and he realized he'd been a little tactless. If he was no kid any more, neither would she be. Still, she looked as young as she ever had, and he, he knew, looked younger.

He didn't want her to probe further, so he hastily made an appointment with her for an evening later that week. As he left, he could hear her saying, in a bewildered voice, "I could've sworn there was somebody with him when he came in."

And he quickened his steps.

She had the same room—a warm luxurious chamber, high up in the Golden Apple Hotel. Lyddy herself was the same, too, just as he remembered her.

Afterward, as they lay together in the blackness, she asked, "Can you see in the dark, Captain?"

He was surprised, and then, thinking about it, not so surprised. "Of course not, no more than you can! Whatever made you ask that?"

"I—feel like somebody's looking at me."

He rolled over on his side, so his body was as far away from hers as possible. He didn't want her to feel the sudden rise of tension in him. *Something's got to be done about this*, he thought. *I can't put up with it now.*

"Why don't you say anything, honey?" her anxious voice came out of the darkness.

"Will you marry me, Lyddy?" he said.

He could hear the intake of her breath. "Ask me again in the morning," she told him wearily. He knew what she must be thinking: Men who hadn't had a woman for a long time sometimes did strange things. In the morning, she would wake up and he would be gone.

Only, when morning came, he was still there. Two weeks later, they were married.

II

Lyddy was curious about her husband-to-be and kept trying to find out all about him. Fortunately, in the code of the Far Planets, a man's past was his own business, so he was able to be evasive without actually lying to her. Not that he had any scruples, about lying; it was simply easier to tell as few stories as possible, rather than worry about keeping them straight.

But it was all right to ask about a man's present. "Do you have anybody, Len? Relations, anything like that?"

He frowned a little, remembering the boy on Fairhurst. "No," he said, "I have no relatives. I have nobody."

Her face fell. "It would've been kind of nice to have a ready-made family."

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "There are times when it's better to have no family."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. They might not approve of me."

"We'll be everything to each other," he assured her.

There was a ghost of a sound then—a laugh or a sigh. He hoped she didn't hear it.

The zhapik insisted on giving Lyddy's wedding, even though he himself could, of course, be present only behind the screen. Most people said the old E-T bastard knew a good piece of publicity when he saw it, but Mattern thought it might be out of genuine sentiment. He was closer to aliens than most men in this sector, any sector. Although he had originally hailed from the Far Planets, he had traveled widely and lost his prejudices. His best friend wasn't human.

Every human in Erytheia City was invited to the wedding. Mattern's four crewmen came. Three were middle-aged and had sailed with Mattern for years, but his most recent acquisition was a

young man, almost a boy. Something Raines, his name was. He kept staring at Lyddy as if he had never seen a beautiful woman before, though, coming from Earth, he must have seen many. Mattern was gratified at this tribute to his choice.

"Only four crewmen!" Lyddy said, looking disappointed. "You must have a small ship."

Mattern smiled. "Not too small." He could see she didn't believe him.

Lyddy didn't seem to be enjoying her wedding. She kept glancing over her shoulder all through the ceremony and during the reception. Finally Mattern had to ask her what was wrong, although he would rather not have known.

"Y'know, hon," she whispered, "I keep having the funniest feeling there's somebody *extra* here, somebody who doesn't belong. I haven't quite seen him; he always seems to slip by so fast, but I don't even think he's a man."

"Don't be silly, Lyddy," he said, almost sharply. "You know no extraterrestrial would dare to crash a human party!"

"I guess not." But she still kept looking over her shoulder.

The zhapike invited them to remain at the Golden Apple Hotel as his guests for as long as they liked. They stayed two months. Then Mattern told his wife it was time they started planning their future, decided where they were going to live. "You'll want a home of your own," he said. "Otherwise you'll get bored."

"I'm never bored," said Lyddy. "But where will we go? I mean what system?"

"Well, Erytheia is a pleasure planet, so I thought we might as well stay here. There are some attractive residential neighborhoods on this continent—or, if you'd prefer, the other one."

Her face fell. "You mean we're going to stay *here*?"

He didn't know why he was so anxious to remain on Erytheia. Mainly it was because for no good reason he found himself disliking the idea of making the Jump with her. "If you'd rather, I could build you a city of your own, Lyddy," he tempted her.

It was obvious that even if she had taken this seriously, it still wouldn't be what she wanted. "I'd like to go away from here," she told him. "Far away."

"Just because you want a change—is that it?"

She hesitated. "That's partly it. But there's more. Somehow, ever since we've been married, I keep feeling all the time like—like I'm being watched."

His smile was strained. "Well, naturally, in 'Rytheia City, people will tend to—watch. Let's go far away from where people are. There's an island on this planet, way off in the western seas. I'll buy you that island, Lyddy. I'll build you a villa there—a chateau, a castle, whatever you want."

But she shook her golden head. "No, nothing like that. I want to go to another system. It's not that I don't want to be where people are. I like crowds. I just want to be where there are *different* people."

He forced another smile. "What's gotten into you, Lyddy? In the old days, you used to be so calm."

She wriggled her shoulders uncomfortably. "I keep seeing things, shadows that shouldn't be there, reflections of nothing. Only, when I turn, they don't get out of the way fast enough to be nothing."

"They?" he repeated.

"I only see one at a time, but I don't know if it's always the same one." She shivered again.

"It must be your nerves." He went on resolutely, "Maybe you do need a change of scene." Actually it was absurd to feel so apprehensive about the Jump. She'd be safer in hyperspace in his ship than anywhere else in the universe. And a large metropolis might provide distractions to take her mind off—shadows. "How would you like to go to Burdon?"

"That would be real nice!" But she was not as enthusiastic about it as he had expected.

She laid a hesitant hand on his arm. "Honey," she began tentatively, "you—you seem to spend so much time all by yourself. Do I bore you?"

"Of course not, dear," he said awkwardly. "It just seems that way to you. Pressure of business...."

"But why do you play chess with yourself all the time?"

"I've spent so much time in space that I got into the habit of playing alone. Many spacemen do that."

She bit her painted lip. "Sometimes—sometimes when you're alone in your room, I hear your voice. Why do you talk to yourself?"

It was an effort for him to meet the beautiful, blank blue eyes. "When you're alone a lot of the time, sweetheart, you have to hear the sound of a voice even if it's your own, or you start hearing voices."

"But you have me," she said. "You're *not* alone. But you still do it."

"Old habits are hard to break, dear."

She looked up at him, trying to force her way past the wall in his eyes. God help her, he thought, if she ever succeeds. "Would you like me to learn to play chess?"

"Would you like to?"

"I—don't know," she murmured doubtfully. "I've never been much good at mind things. But I want to be *everything* to you."

"You are, sweetheart." He stooped and kissed her. "Don't force yourself to do anything you don't want to for my sake. I'm used to playing alone."

"But I want you to do things with *me*!"

"I'll do everything else with you," he promised.

He went to his room and shut the door behind him. But she had heard him talking there, so sounds must carry through. When they got a place of their own, he would have the walls and doors sound-proofed. Meanwhile, it would be safer to go to the ship.

As he came out of the hotel door, he collided with a man who looked familiar. It took him a moment to identify the sullen, startled face as belonging to that newest member of his crew, young Something Raines.

"Hello there," he said. "Were you coming to see me?"

"N-no, sir. I was just coming in for a—a pack of Earth smokesticks. I can't stand those *stinking* native brands!" The boy spoke with a viciousness so unsuited to the subject that it was almost funny. He flushed, perhaps realizing this, perhaps remembering that Mattern was reputed to hail from this sector. "It's a question of what you're used to, see?" he mumbled.

"Of course," Mattern agreed pleasantly. "This is your first time on Erytheia, is it?"

"Yes, my first time here."

"Are you enjoying it?"

"Well, I dunno exactly." There was doubt in the boy's blue eyes. Something in them seemed familiar, more familiar than just recognizing one of his own crewmen. He had a look of—who? Of Lyddy? But that was absurd.

The doubt in Raines' face had changed to fear, and Mattern realized that he himself must have been just standing there, staring at him. He laughed. "You're supposed to *enjoy* Erytheia; it's a pleasure planet."

"Well," the boy said, choosing his words with care, "it's a pretty enough place, but it's set up more for people with money. I mean there's nothing here for fellows like me; the pleasure's for the rich people only. Even the smokesticks cost almost twice as much as anywhere else."

"We'll probably be leaving soon, so you'll only have to stick it a little while longer." Mattern's hand went to his pocket, then fell to his side as he saw the look on the boy's face. If Raines was proud, Mattern would not offend him by offering him money. "Maybe you'll find Burdon more to your liking."

"Oh, *yes*, sir!" The young spaceman's face was virtually radiant. *He must have a girl on Burdon*, Mattern thought, amused.

As he walked over to the landing field where his ship was moored, he was troubled by the memory of the boy's voice. Not that it was familiar—but there was the faintest hint of a Far Planets accent. Provincials as a rule didn't go to the terrestrial space schools, but it was, of course, possible. Raines must have had an Earth education, because Mattern followed the rule of the Marine service and never hired a man who didn't have a degree from one of the space schools. He must look at the boy's records as soon as he got a chance.

The Hesperian Queen was not a small vessel. She was one of the newest, fastest, most fully automated models. Moreover, she was large and she glittered like a dwarf star. Lyddy would get a surprise when she came to see the ship.

Mattern greeted the crew member on watch and went up to his luxuriously appointed cabin—suite, really. Inside, a chessboard was set up, as its counterpart was set up in his hotel room, one side in the light from a porthole, the other in a corner full of shadows.

The pieces were not only in position, but a game had been started. Mattern sat down on the bright side and moved a piece.

"Lyddy's aware of you," he told the shadows. "She has no idea of what you are, of course. But she

knows you're around, kqyres. She's half seen you and it's beginning to bother her. It's beginning to bother me, too."

Part of the shifting grayness flowed over the board. When it receded, a knight had changed its place. "Truly, I have tried to be careful," a quiet, rather tired voice said out of a darkness at the heart of the shadows, an area that was tenuously substant. "Is it certain that you yourself have not in some way given her cause for suspicion?"

"Quite certain. I've watched myself night and day." Mattern smiled ruefully. "Which is damned hard when you're on your honeymoon."

"Is there anyone else who might have spoken of these things to her?" the kqyres asked.

"No one." Then Mattern remembered the young spaceman he had met coming into the hotel, who seemed to have a look of Lyddy. But that was nonsensical. Looking *like* her didn't mean talking *to* her. In any case, what would Raines know that he could tell her? Silly to be so suspicious. The Golden Apple *was* one of the few places in Erytheia City where one could get Earth smokesticks. "No one," Mattern repeated. "No one at all."

The patterns shifted and darkened. "Then I must be getting careless. I am growing old."

"Anyone can make a slip," Mattern said reassuringly. "Just try to be a little more careful, that's all." He moved a rook.

The grayness crept out over the board, touched a bishop, hesitated, and moved to a pawn. *He is getting old*, Mattern thought pityingly, as he took the pawn. *Once I could never beat him. Now I win two games out of three.*

"But you are content with the woman?" his partner asked anxiously. "You are not disappointed with her in any way? She pleases you as much today as she did when first you set eyes on her?"

"Of course she does! You'd think it was you who'd been dreaming of her all these years, not me."

"I suppose we shared those dreams...."

"And you'd never seen her." Mattern stared intently at the shadow. "Are you disappointed, then?"

"Of course not. You know that to me a human woman is merely an object of art. And she *is* very beautiful. But I thought she might not have come up to your expectations. Reality often falls short of dreams." The shadow's voice tautened. "Has she changed much?"

"Very little," Mattern said, absorbed once more in the game. "You'd think only a year or two had passed. Surprising how women do it."

The shadow sighed. "Surprising," it agreed, its voice relaxing. "But then the female sex is mysterious."

They played on a while in silence. The kqyres finally spoke. "You will need a lot of money to provide an establishment fitting for so lovely a lady."

"I have a lot of money," Mattern said. "More than enough."

The kqyres flickered so violently that Mattern's eyes hurt. "Not enough for the things she deserves to have. Jewels, palaces, planets...."

"One thing I know would make it a lot more comfortable for her," Mattern suggested. "If only you didn't have to be close to me all the time, kqyres. If only you could stay on the ship even when I'm not there. Not that I don't enjoy your company," he added quickly, "but she seems to be highly strung."

"Do you think I like the situation any better than you? But this is the way the mbretersha has ordered it."

"I suppose she knows what she's doing," Mattern sighed. In any case, the mbretersha's orders were absolute and could not be contravened—otherwise, at least one universe might be destroyed. There were still so many things he didn't understand and was not likely to learn.

"Strange," he went on pensively, "that Lyddy should have seen you, when I hardly can, and I *know* you're here." He knew, too, that the kqyres was deliberately vibrating out of phase, so that the horror of his appearance in this continuum would be spared not only those he chanced to meet, but also himself. There was always the danger of passing a mirror. Knowing how the kqyres looked in his own universe, knowing how he himself looked in the kqyres' universe, Mattern didn't doubt that any revelation would be a frightful one. However, he couldn't help being curious.

"I still think someone must have told her where to stare," the shadow said, "and what for."

"Don't be absurd!" Mattern snapped, outraged at the idea that his carefully kept secret might not be a secret at all. "Just try to be careful when she's around. Vibrate harder, or something."

"I shall do my poor best." The shadowy one hesitated. "Do you not think that if perhaps you were to tell her the truth—"

"Lord, no!" Mattern exclaimed. "She'd take a fit!"

"Once you would not have spoken of her that way," the kqyres said reproachfully.

"I didn't mean it the way it sounded," Mattern tried to explain. "It's just that—well, by now I hardly remember what the truth is myself."

III

Did that truth go back fifteen years, to the time he had met the kqyres, twenty years to the time he had first seen Lyddy? Or even further back than that? Did it go back, say, twenty-four years, to the time when he was sixteen and had killed his stepfather? He could still see Karl Brodek lying there with his head crushed, could still feel the terror rising in him at what he had done....

Then he had turned and fled the small community on Fairhurst—one of the Clytemnestra planets—and made for the capital, where he shipped out on one of the small tramp freighters that voyaged among the planets of that system. None of the four other planets was human-inhabitable, but two had mining stations, and one had a native civilization advanced enough to make trading practicable, though not very profitable.

For the next four years, he drifted from one tenth-rate ship to another, one ill-paid job to another. In all this time, he never left the Clytemnestra System. As soon as he was satisfied that his former neighbors were not going to set the law on his trail, he had no desire to go away. It wasn't place-liking that kept him; it was dread of the Jump.

Most spacemen never do quite get over their dread of the hyperspace Jump, but with Len the dread amounted almost to a mania. He was ashamed of the feeling, especially since he suspected he'd picked up that extra dollop of terror from the creatures on the native planet.

Self-respecting colonials didn't associate with non-humans, but during those first years of fear that his fellow men were hunting him, he'd felt safe only with the fluska. He learned a little of their language, and he spent such spare time as he had on Liman, their planet. He couldn't breathe the atmosphere, but there were the trading domes; nobody minded if he used them when there was no trade going on.

The fluska were a religious people, with gods and demons similar to those of the terrestrial cosmogonies. Only, while their gods lived conventionally in the sky, their demons lived in hyperspace. Len was too unsophisticated himself to wonder how so primitive a people could have evolved such a concept as hyperspace in their theology. He merely grew to share their terror of it.

The year Len was twenty, the *Perseus*, one of the star freighters that made the long haul from Castor to Capella, found itself in Fairhurst Station short one deckhand. The man they'd shipped out with was in jail, waiting to see whether a manslaughter or assault charge was going to be lodged against him. The ship could not afford to wait. The station was scoured for a replacement and Len Mattern was the best man they could find.

Normally the starships did not take on untrained hands. Even the lowliest crewman was supposed to have spent a minimum number of years at the space schools, because in theory, all promotions came from the ranks, even in the merchant service. But in spite of his lack of training, they offered him the job. The bigline ships never liked to sail shorthanded; in case of trouble, that could be a basis for legal action.

Len knew the opportunity offered him was a dazzling one—not only far more money than he'd ever seen before, but the chance of breaking out of the system. He was afraid though, terribly afraid. "I've never made the Jump," he told the second officer in a quavering voice.

"You'll never be a real spaceman until you do." The second officer was patient, because he knew Mattern was his only chance of making the crew up to its full complement.

"I've heard tell that—things change their shapes in Hyperspace."

"Maybe they do; maybe it's their real shapes you see out there. Who's to tell what the truth is?"

Len licked dry lips and tried again. "They say there're people—beings, anyway—*living* in hyperspace." That tale he had heard from spacemen who had made the Jump. Even if he'd believed in the fluska's demons, he would have had the good sense not to admit such a thing to a starship officer—a man of sophistication from the Near Planets, perhaps even Earth herself. Still, spacemen were notorious myth-spinners. Perhaps he had made a fool of himself, anyway.

But the second officer wasn't laughing. "Federation law says we should have nothing to do with the creatures of hyperspace. If we leave them alone, they don't bother us."

It would have been better if the officer had laughed at him and said there was nothing in hyperspace but space. "Will we see them?"

"Does a ship going through ordinary space see any of us?" the officer returned. "The creatures of hyperspace live on their own planets, and we give those planets a wide berth. Simple as that." He added, "What are you so afraid of, boy? Not a ship's been lost in hyperspace for over two centuries, and there haven't been any blowups for years."

"Blowups?" Len repeated.

"Accidents. A technical term. You've taken worse risks shipping out in those tincan tramps."

Finally, Len gave in—to his own common sense more than to the officer's—and signed up for the voyage. He filled out the necessary forms—hundreds of them, it seemed like. When it came to each line for next of kin, he left a blank on every one.

"Haven't you any relatives at all?" the second officer asked, surprised.

"Not a one." Len didn't bother to mention that half-brother back on Fairhurst; a five-year-old kid isn't much kin to speak of. Besides, the boy probably didn't even know he had a brother—he'd been less than a year old when Len left. One of the barren women must have adopted him and brought him up as her own.

So Len Mattern filled out all the papers and was inscribed on the ship's rolls. And he made the terrible jump through hyperspace for the first time.

People who traveled on spaceships only as passengers never could understand why the Jump was invariably referred to as "terrible." That was because before the ship made the Jump they'd be given drugs, in their cocktails, in their food at dinner, or in their drinking water—and the next day they'd wake up and find they had slept right through the whole thing, so it couldn't be so awful. Of course those who traveled around the universe a lot were bound to catch on. Someday they'd miss a meal or not drink anything and they'd find themselves awake while the ship was Jumping. But the shipping lines didn't take any chances and the aberrant passengers would also find themselves locked in their cabins with smooth metal shutters where the mirrors used to be.

But one thing that couldn't be helped: They couldn't be stopped from looking down at themselves and seeing extra arms and legs; or finding no arms and legs at all, but tentacles instead; or that their skin had turned into shining scales or that there was an extra eye in the back of their head. And when the time came for another Jump, they would *ask* to be drugged.

However, crewmen couldn't be drugged. They had to be awake to tend the ship. The credo of the Space Service was that you couldn't trust a machine to itself any more than you could trust an extraterrestrial, a non-human. If a man wasn't in charge, ultimately everything would go to pot. That was part of the space tradition, like the primitive axes that hung on the bulkheads, so a man could smash his way to the modern fire-fighting equipment. Except, of course, that if fire really broke out, it would be quicker to press the button that sent the automatic fire-fighting machines into immediate action. But still the axes hung there, because they had always hung there—and, like all the metal on the ship, they had to be kept polished.

Each time a ship made the Jump, the crewmen stayed awake. They saw space and time change before their eyes. They saw their own fellows turn into monsters. It was an awful thing to see, even though they knew it wasn't actually a change, but a shift to another aspect of themselves. Worse than the seeing was the *feeling*. It was like being turned inside out, organ by organ—your heart and your liver and your guts and all the rest, each carefully turned inside out, the way a woman takes off her gloves, smoothing each one with great precision. The hellish part was that it didn't hurt. A man felt as if he were being twisted and wrenched apart, and it didn't hurt, and it was the wrongness of that more than anything else that—well, that was why the pay was so high on the starships. So many of them went mad.

All this Len Mattern had heard of and had expected—though no amount of expectation could have braced him for that kind of reality. But there was more to it than he had heard, and it was the extra part that the second officer seemed curiously anxious to deny. "You saw nobody—nothing at the portholes," he told Mattern after that first Jump. "You just imagined it."

Mattern had been a spaceman long enough to be able to distinguish imagination from reality. Perhaps the creatures of hyperspace did live on planets, but it seemed they did not breathe the atmosphere of those planets as human beings breathe air, and so they were not confined to them. They could move around freely in the starless dusk of their universe. And, if there was a pact, then they must be intelligent creatures—though he would have known that anyway, for they spoke to him. He could hear them through the tight walls of the ship—less in his ears than his mind—cajoling, entreating, *promising*. And he shut his ears and his mind, because he was afraid.

At the end of the voyage, he was offered a permanent berth on the *Perseus*. "We don't usually take crewmen from the Far Planets," the second officer said thoughtfully. "They don't have the training needed. But you're a good deckhand."

Len waited tensely, not knowing whether he did want the job or not.

"The universe is opening up and sooner or later we're going to have to start diversifying our crews, take untrained men, maybe even—" the officer hesitated—"extraterrestrials. Sometimes

training can restrict a man to the point where he can't think for himself. Main trouble with untrained men, though, is that often they've got too much imagination. They think things that aren't true, see things that aren't there."

"I understand, sir," Mattern said. "I'll keep my imagination stowed away until it's wanted."

From then on, he had seen no more at the ports than any of his properly conditioned mates.

IV

Len Mattern stayed with the *Perseus* over three years. Gradually, from things he observed himself, from things his shipmates told him, he learned what little there was to be known about hyperspace. Everything was different there from normspace; even the mechanical properties of things changed. However, Jumping was safe enough, as long as the spaceships didn't stop. As long as they were only passing through that other universe, they were, in a sense, not actually there, so that the elements of which they were composed would not change, although, to the senses, they seemed to.

Unless, of course, the ship collided with something. Then everything became very real. That was what the pact was for—to make sure they didn't collide. Every spaceship had, locked in the captain's cabin, charts of that other universe—charts which gave, in normspace terms, the coordinates of the hyperspace worlds. That way, when a ship made the Jump, there would be no danger of her materializing inside one of the alien planets and destroying both. Even touching one of the hyper-worlds could have a disastrous effect. Only the captains were ever permitted to see these charts; they would be far too dangerous in irresponsible hands.

Len might have grown old in the *Perseus'* service, if the Hesperia System hadn't been one of her stops, and if he hadn't seen Lyddy there.

Hesperia was a small, rose-pink sun surrounded by four planets and the debris of what once was a fifth. Most solar systems in the Galaxy had asteroid belts like that; some time later, Len found out why. Three of Hesperia's four planets were barren rocks. The fourth, Erytheia, was mostly water, calm water, sometimes blue, sometimes—when the sun was high—violet-tinged. There was land, a small continent in the north, where it was always spring, a slightly larger continent in the south, where it was always summer, and that large island in the west which was said to have a climate better than spring and summer combined.

The atmosphere of Erytheia was what they call Earth type—that is, Man could breathe on it. A very inadequate description, though, because men could breathe the atmosphere of Ziegler's Planet, too, only sometimes it almost seemed worthwhile to stop living in order to stop having to breathe Ziegler's air. Erytheia's atmosphere was gentler and purer than the air of Earth. The native fruits were edible and the local life-forms were small and amiable. But there wasn't enough land for the establishment of a self-supporting colony; it would have bred itself into poverty within a few generations.

What else could be done with a small paradise in a remote sector of space but turn it into a high-class brothel and gambling casino? Only the very rich could afford to travel so far to look at scenery, and by the time they reached their destination, scenery wasn't enough. They wanted some excitement.

Naturally, the *Perseus* would stop at Hesperia. Naturally, Mattern would see Lyddy, who was one of the seven wonders of that system. She wasn't too many years out from Earth then, and he had never dreamed any woman could be that beautiful.

She was long-necked and slender, unlike the women of the Far Planets, who were mostly squat-built and bred for labor. It seemed to him he had seen her before—in a vision, a dream, who knew where? Certainly never in reality. But he could understand why men would travel light-years for her.

The prices she charged were also astronomical. Still, if he put away his money carefully, in a couple of years he ought to be able to save up enough for a night with her. It was a goal, and he'd never had a goal before, even such a small one; everything had been just aimless drifting. He got a tridi of her and put it up inside the door of his locker and was happy dreaming of her, even if it meant being kidded about her by his shipmates.

When he made the next Jump, he knew for certain that the creatures of hyperspace not only spoke to him through his mind, but could enter it and read it if they chose. He felt very naked and vulnerable. Why couldn't the others on his ship also see the creatures, so that he would not be the sole focus of their attentions?

"Do what we ask," the hyperspacers—the xhindi, they called themselves—said softly, "and you will have enough from just a single voyage to have her for a week, a month, a year. Do what we ask and you can have her for all eternity."

"But all I want is just one night!" he protested.

And they had laughed, and one with a honey-sweet mind had said, "Is that *all* you want, *really*

all?" Then they began naming the things a man could want—and they certainly seemed to have a full knowledge of humanity and its most secret desires.

Afterward, Len had started to think. It *would* be nice to have Lyddy all to himself—for a while, anyway. It would be nice to be able to buy her pretty dresses and jewelry. There were other things that would also be nice. Maybe he could have his teeth fixed and his leg straightened. His stepfather had broken it the night his mother died and it had never set properly. With money, he could do a lot of things. He hadn't realized there was so much in the universe to be wanted.

Now his wages began to look as picayune as once they had seemed large. He could make more elsewhere, he told himself; he might not be educated, but he had a good mind, plus rapidly dwindling principles. He didn't need the hyperspacers, though. There were plenty of illegal ways of making money within the framework of normspace activities. So he left the secure monotony of the starship to seek an enterprise which would bring in quick and copious profits.

His first step was to go see a rather disreputable acquaintance of his, Captain Ludolf Schiemann. Schiemann was an ancient spaceman from Earth, who owned and commanded a ramshackle craft of prehistoric design, held together with spit and spells.

Schiemann operated out of Capella IV with cargoes of whatever he could get. He was able to make a living with the *Valkyrie* only because he would take on jobs that no sane skipper would touch. Some were dangerous; most were illegal into the bargain. The risks were out of all proportion to the profit, which was why the only helper he'd been able to get was Balas—a big, powerful man, not old but mad. He'd been a deckhand on one of the big starships and had broken too early to be entitled to a pension.

Mattern had met old Schiemann at a bar in Burdon, the capital of Capella IV, and had had a few drinks with him whenever the *Perseus* and the *Valkyrie* had happened to hit port at the same time. Schiemann had a favorite joke he kept repeating over and over: "If you ever get sick of the *Perseus*, Lennie—sick of good food and hot water and decent quarters—you can always come to the *Valkyrie*. I'll take care of you."

Now Mattern went to him and said he'd like to take Schiemann up on that offer.

The old man's pale green eyes protruded even further from his head. "You want to leave the *Perseus* for a berth on my ship! You're madder than Balas!"

"Not a berth, Pop," Mattern told him. "A share of her—a half share."

Schiemann grinned. "Now you must think *I'm* crazy, to hand over half my ship just like that. Maybe you'd like me to sign her over to you entirely." And he puffed savagely upon his Venuswood pipe.

"Look," Len said, "let's not kid ourselves. You're a crook, Pop, but such a lousy crook that you make it look as if crime really doesn't pay. And I'll tell you what's wrong with the way you operate. You have no organization, no system, no imagination. I have 'em all. You contribute the ship; I'll contribute my know-how. Together, we'll make a fortune."

"Modest, aren't you?" the old man jeered. "What kind of know-how do you get working as a deckhand on a starboat? All right, maybe you're the universe's best metal polisher, but—"

"Look, Pop," Len interrupted, "I'll make a deal with you. We work together for a year. If you don't pull in at least three times the amount you got before, as just your share, my half of the ship reverts to you. What could be fairer than that?"

Schiemann still wasn't convinced that he was not being played for a sucker. Being what he was, he could never expose himself to a court battle, no matter how much justice might be on his side in a particular instance. But he didn't think Len could be so rotten as to figure on something like that. Besides, the old captain couldn't help liking the boy. So he agreed, saying as he did so, "I should have my head examined." But before the fourth voyage was out, he realized that he had never done a wiser thing in his life. Under Len's direction, the *Valkyrie* as a business enterprise was cleaning up.

Only in relative terms, of course. It took six months, over a dozen voyages, before Len managed to save enough for that night with Lyddy. And every time he made the Jump in the *Valkyrie*, the hyperspacers told him, "One night won't be enough," and the honey-minded one had insisted, "You must want more than that. You *must*. Who could be satisfied with so little?"

Finally, the night came. It was wonderful, it was ecstasy, it was everything he had dreamed of—but it was too short. "Good-by, honey," Lyddy said as he left, "come back and see me again."

"When you have some more money," she meant. And it was all over.

For her, not for him. He found he couldn't get her out of his mind. One night was not enough. The *xhindi* had been right. Now he wanted her for his own, for the rest of his life if not for all eternity.

He had no romantic fancies that she would be willing to go off with him for the sake of true love and himself alone. He had seen himself too often in the mirror panel on the door of his tiny cabin, and he looked there now, with a chill objectivity. Undersized, crippled, pallid with the unhealthy

color that comes from spending too little time in any kind of sunlight, Len Mattern was twenty-four and looked forty. Not even an ordinary woman of the planets could love him, let alone a love goddess.

But a love goddess who loved money could be bought. However, in order to win her, he'd need to have really big money. No matter how efficiently he organized the *Valkyrie's* operations, the ship was just a battered old hulk and, in her sphere, could never be more than small-time. There was only one answer—hyperspace.

He found Schiemann puffing contentedly at his pipe in the *Valkyrie's* control room. "Look, Pop," he said, "we've been wasting our time on stardust. We have to aim for something big."

Schiemann looked trustfully at the young man. He had no relatives, so he had come to think of Len as his son, and, in fact, had made him his heir. "Whatever you say, Lennie. Figure on breaking out of this sector and moving in closer to Earth, do you?"

"Not exactly. We're going into hyperspace."

"Sure," Schiemann said, blowing a smoke ring. "Can't leave the sector without passing through hyperspace; that stands to reason. But where are we jumping to?"

Len tried to keep the tautening of his body from becoming apparent. "We're not jumping anywhere. We're *stopping* in hyperspace."

The pipe dropped from the old man's mouth. He caught it in his hand and gave a muffled exclamation as the heat burned his palm. Then he looked at his partner. "Of course you're joking, Lennie." And he arranged his face for laughter.

Len shook his head. "No joke, Pop; I'm dead serious. We're going to take a cargo into hyperspace. To the mem—the mem—oh, hell, I can't pronounce it—the queen, I guess, of Ferr. That's one of their planets. She wants Earth stuff, she says, and she promises to do right by us if we bring it to her. Sounds like a good deal."

The silence thickened as the two men face each other. At last Schiemann got up. "Look, Lennie, I don't make out I'm a saint. I've smuggled and cheated and stolen. But this I will not do. For the laws of the Federation, I don't give a damn—men made 'em and men can break 'em—but to go against the laws of nature, that is a different thing." He turned on his heel and went out of the control room.

Len went to his cabin and began to pack his gear. As he had expected, Schiemann interrupted him when he was halfway through. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Leaving," Len said. "I'm sick of small-time operations."

"Leaving me? Just like that? Does our friendship mean nothing at all to you?"

"Sure it does," Len told him. "When I get a chance, I'll write."

The old man's face crumpled. "Look, Lennie, if we did move into one of the more important sectors, maybe—"

"You know we wouldn't have a chance there," Len said harshly, to conceal his true emotions. "The sectors closer in to Earth have bigger, faster ships, and bigger, tougher men to run 'em. And they wouldn't like us trying to jet in!"

"I'd rather take a chance on that than—"

"We wouldn't *have* a chance; it'd just be a massacre, with us on the receiving end. The only way we can break into the big time ourselves is through hyperspace. We've got to do what's never been done before."

That wasn't quite true, from what the xhindi had told him, but near enough. It had been done before, but not very often, and not very recently. However, it had been done, so it was possible to do. Otherwise he wouldn't think of chancing it ... or would he?

"Why do you want money so much, Lennie?" Schiemann asked. "What do we need the big-time stuff for? It's nice and quiet and practically secure the way you've got things running for us, almost like we were honest businessmen. So why go looking for trouble?"

"If I'd wanted a quiet life," Len said, "I'd have stuck with the *Perseus*. So don't sing me security."

The hand that held the pipe was trembling. "Look, Lennie, at least give me time to think."

"Okay," Len said. He was, in his way, fond of the old man, but there were bigger things at stake. He had to have Lyddy; he had to have money; he had to have ... something he couldn't put a name to, but desperately important nonetheless. "I'll give you six months."

At the end of half a year, Schiemann said no, he positively wouldn't do it. Len said "Good-by." Schiemann said, "All right, but you'll be sorry; we'll all be sorry," and gave in.

So they took the *Valkyrie*, the two of them—and Balas, of course, but naturally nobody would consult a madman—and headed for hyperspace. Len knew exactly where to go, even though he

had no charts. The breakthrough he wanted was in their own sector and it had been carefully marked for him in his mind.

Schiemann left all the details to him, even the selection of cargo. Len chose coal. He knew that what the xhindi wanted was normspace materials, but not precisely what materials. Their normspace value did not matter, because normspace matter changed to another form of itself when it got to hyperspace, and that was where the possibility of enormous profit came in. Something cheap in normspace could become something quite rare and expensive in hyperspace, and vice versa. The distribution of elements was different between the two universes; each one essentially complemented the other.

There was one hitch: a stable form in normspace could become an unstable one in hyperspace. Without empiric knowledge, it was impossible for anyone going from one universe into the other to tell whether any substance he was carrying or wearing or *was* would remain stable. If unstable, it could turn into liquid or gas; it could turn into energy and blow up; it could cease to be a solid in any one of a number of ways.

As if that weren't bad enough, it could also happen that even a stuff previously proven to be stable in both universes could become unstable, if there was even the trace of a potentially unstable element, or if something that, stable in itself, combined with it in unstable fashion. Such an admixture could be accidental, which was what made the whole business especially tricky, and what made the reason for the inter-universe ban necessary.

The reason why that first load of the *Valkyrie's* had been coal was a simple one. Somewhere, Len had read that coal and diamonds were different forms of the same normspace element, and he'd thought that might carry over into the other continuum. However, even an education wouldn't have helped him know what a right first cargo to take would have been. The xhindi had told him what they did know, but their terminology was not clear. They spoke his language with outward correctness but with imperfect conceptualization; he spoke theirs not at all. Much of what they did know, they appeared to have forgotten, or only half-learned.

They managed to make him understand that certain stuffs would be definitely unsafe; they could not make it clear which stuffs would be safe, or which they would find most desirable as trade goods. He gathered that they would be satisfied with anything that came through. So he chose coal, hoping to make a splendid initial impression.

The *Valkyrie* reached hyperspace. It slowed down. The throbbing of its creaky engines ebbed to a hum. And it stopped and hung there in the quiet darkness of utterly alien time and place. Schiemann and Balas, expectedly, changed their appearance, but he had seen them in their monster guises before. The coal changed to something pale and glittering, but not diamonds. Everything remained quiet. The ship's instruments recorded no temperature change, but it seemed to grow colder and colder inside her.

Suddenly, Mattern knew the truth. A trap had been laid for him, and he had tumbled neatly into it. And the most shameful part was that his own desires and yearnings—deliberately fostered by the xhindi—had been the bait.

He wanted to turn to the horrible thing that Schiemann had become to scream, "Let's go back!" But he couldn't. Something held tight grip of his mind. And, looking out the portholes, he saw that the xhindi had begun to swarm.

The flickering terror of their appearance became more awesome to him than it had been at the beginning, when he'd been only a transitory shadow in hyperspace. Now, although he had no doubt that they were friendly—indeed, almost ardent in their welcoming—horror chilled him all over again. He could almost feel the molecules inside his body slow down as his viscera quivered faintly and then froze into stillness.

He looked at Schiemann and Balas. Neither of them could, he knew, see the hyperspacers. Their conditioning back on Earth's space schools had ensured this. That was the real reason for the schools; any actual training was incidental. But Schiemann knew the creatures were there, and so he could sense them. And Balas, too, certainly seemed to sense something as he stood there, tense and wary and almost *understanding*. It must be even worse, Len thought, to *know* the hyperspacers were out there and not be able to see them.

"We—we can still go back," Schiemann said in a cracked voice; apparently the minds outside had not touched his. "Please, Lennie...."

"No, it's too late!" Mattern cried. Once he went back, he would never dare return, and all hope of —Lyddy would fade into fog. The thought of not being able to have her was unbearable. "We can't go back now!"

The hideous mask that was Schiemann's hyperspace visage contorted, and drops of liquid flowed where his withered cheeks would have been in normspace. "Please, Lennie...."

"I can't," Len said. "Even if I wanted to, I couldn't. It's too late, now that we've stopped."

He forced out the words, against objections that seemed to come from outside him—not objections to Schiemann's knowing the truth, but to his own admission of it.

"They're in control," he said.

"We bid you welcome to our universe, Mattern," the xhindi said in his mind. "Come, follow us. We will lead you to the port on Ferr that we have made ready for you."

"Will the ship be safe there?" Mattern asked, remembering the further danger of touching alien substance.

"As safe as she could be anywhere in this space." And then the mellifluous one added, "Remember, whatever risks there are, now we share them with you."

A point of livid light that danced so Mattern knew it must be alive led them to the gleaming purple-dark ovoid that was Ferr, then to the place that had been set aside for the *Valkyrie*. The xhindi had been right about the port so far as the ship herself was concerned. Probably they'd had a fair idea of what materials she and her contents were composed of from the ships that had passed fleetingly through their space, never pausing to become real. What they could not allow for were the random factors.

The ship set down on the "safe" port at Ferr. It made contact with the glossy alien ground. And, as it did so, Captain Schiemann very quietly disintegrated. No explosion, no sound. He simply crumbled into a white powder which slowly drifted away, and then was gone.

"Coal into diamonds," Mattern found himself saying as he stared at Schiemann's pipe rolling on the empty corridor floor, "dust unto dust." When the pipe quivered to a stop, he began to laugh hysterically.

"So you think it's funny, do you?" a gentle voice said behind him.

Mattern turned. Balas stood there.

"I'm afraid that I don't agree," Balas went on with that frightening softness. "He was good to me, and to you too, Lennie. He was damned good to the both of us. And this is the way you repay him. It wasn't a nice thing to do, Lennie."

Mattern opened his mouth to deny intent, but all that came out was the bubbling laughter.

"I know you didn't mean for him to disappear like that," Balas said, almost kindly. "It's just that I guess you don't care what happens to anybody but yourself. No, you don't care for yourself even, just the things you want. You're awful greedy, Lennie—awful greedy."

His voice was very reasonable. "If I don't do something to stop you, you'll do the same thing to our whole universe that you did to the captain. It would be wrong for me to let that happen. So, you see, I *have* to kill you. I'm sorry, Lennie, because I like you, but I know you'll understand."

And he lunged for Mattern, reaching out the four monstrous arms that were his in hyperspace, the eye in his forehead brilliant with that hideous sanity.

Mattern backed away, still laughing. *If Balas has gone sane, he thought, then perhaps I have gone mad. Only I am still conscious of everything that's going on: the danger I am in, the way I am behaving. In fact, I have control over all of myself except my laughter. I know where we are—Balas and I are locked inside the ship alone together, and only one of us is coming out alive.*

Undoubtedly the xhindi could have passed through the hull or opened the airlocks in some way, if they had wanted to. But they made no move to try, merely remained outside, watching. The two humans, in that space and time, were alone in a small private war of their own. Mattern could not tell whether the xhindi outside were enjoying themselves, as a group of humans would have under like circumstances, but he seemed to sense anxiety for the outcome—not only of that battle but of another, inner one. *Why, I'm beginning to read their thoughts, too,* he realized, in the middle of his fear and hysteria. *I am growing closer to them by the minute.*

And Balas was getting closer to him. Mattern had a blaster, of course, but he was afraid to use it. A bolt of alien energy might produce a reaction that could rip both universes. Yet, bare-handed, he was no match for the bigger, stronger man. Fortunately, he had never pretended to be a hero, not even to himself in the saneness of normspace, so he was able to turn and run. Balas pursued him through the desolate corridors of the *Valkyrie*, Mattern's laughter echoing crazily in the emptiness.

His only hope was to find a hand weapon—or something that could be used as a hand weapon. And, as he rounded a bend, Mattern saw the primitive fire axe hanging against a bulkhead, the traditional relic that all spaceships, large and small, carried and kept burnished and ready for a use that would never come. But there was another use it could be put to.

Instinct made Mattern seize the axe from its hooks on the wall. Instinct surged up from the handle to fill him with the power and joy and knowledge to use it. He turned to face Balas' onrush, and his laughter no longer sounded insane in his ears; it had the triumphant energy of a primeval war cry.

The madman's charge was lightning fast, but Mattern was the younger man by at least a decade. He told himself that he meant only to stun Balas, but he was conscious all the time that, if Balas were merely stunned, the problem would be merely postponed. He lifted the axe and brought it

down. And then Mattern was alone, the only human being in an alien space and an alien time, locked in this ship with the drifting white dust that had been his friend, and the bleeding corpse that had been—no, not his enemy, but his friend also, and who had, only minutes after death, already begun to haunt him. It was then that Mattern remembered the other man he had killed in the same way.

Karl Brodek had never haunted him, but that was because Len knew the killing was justified—it was retribution, not murder. For Len had seen Brodek kill his mother, not all at once, but little by little. It was her face that stayed with him always, her blue eyes and her sweet voice. She'd been the only one he ever had, really—the brother had been nothing but a wailing blob of protoplasm—and then Schiemann, a little. Now he was more alone than he'd been in all of his solitary life.

He knew that the eerie creatures outside meant him no harm, but would have liked to comfort him if they could. That made it worse rather than better. If only there were some tangible enemy to attack, to beat his fists against ... but the only enemy he could find was the monstrous form reflected in the mirror of his own cabin.

He was no longer laughing, he noticed; the fit was over. And so, he sensed, was the anxiety outside. In some way, he had passed a test.

It was then that the xhindi began to speak to him through the hull of the ship, urging him to come out. "You have come so far," they said, "and time is a precious and a dangerous commodity. We cannot afford to waste it, either of us."

He did not—could not—respond.

They could have forced him out, but they were kind—or perhaps only wise. They simply coaxed and waited. After a while, moving stiffly, as if he had cogs instead of a heart, he opened the airlock and went outside. He set foot on the dark polished surface of Ferr. But there was no thrill of strangeness or of triumph or anticipation. There was ... nothing. His physical senses were all operating. He knew there was neither gravity nor lack of it. He knew there was no atmosphere—and he accepted that, not because he accepted the xhindi's word that he would not need to breathe in this continuum, but because he didn't care whether or not he breathed; he didn't care about anything.

"Come," the xhindi said, in audible words now, and their spoken voices were as sweet as their mind voices.

He found himself moving as through a nightmare, as he proceeded according to their directions, and the xhindi themselves, with their monstrous grace and musical voices, were a logical part of the black ballet in which he found himself participating.

The dignitaries of Ferr, a fantasy procession in the moonlit colors of hell—smoke and flame and shadow—came to greet him and to lead him to the mbretersha. She glittered splendidly upon her throne of alien substance—a monster, of course, in human terms, and yet also a great lady, as a queen should be in any terms. Through the fog of his own immediate perception, she reached out and touched him with her dignity and compassion.



"I am very sorry," she said, "that such a thing should have happened. I know you are full of grief for your comrades, and I wish that I could have postponed our interview. However, I must press you, for the longer you stay on this world, the greater the risk is for my people."

Somewhere before, it seemed to him, he had heard her voice—sensed her mind pattern, anyway. If he had not known that she was the mbretersha, he would have fancied that hers had been one of the minds that had spoken to him, the most persuasive of the cajoling creatures that had sung him their siren songs as he flashed transitorily through their universe. But, he thought dully, that was impossible. She was the mbretersha, the queen.

She read his thoughts, and the pattern of her appearance altered subtly. It was a warm and kind expression of herself; it was a smile. "You must learn, Mattern, that the concept of a ruler in this universe differs from the concept in yours. Here a ruler is the servant of her people, not their master. It is her obligation to take care of them, protect them, watch over them—in whatever way seems most fitting to her. She can have no pride in herself, only in them. They are more than her children."

It was funny, Mattern thought, that she should so easily plan to break the rules of her universe. A space rat like him—that was one thing; it was to be expected. But a queen? Now that he was coming back to life a little, he began to wonder about this again.

Deftly, she picked the wonder out of his mind and answered it. "Our Federation, like yours, is an artificial creation. Its laws are no more than arbitrary regulations, devised by the various peoples of each universe with regard to the greatest good of the majority, and thrust upon majority and minority alike."

Mattern began to understand, or thought he did. "A queen isn't likely to hold with democracy," he said—though perhaps not aloud.

She was a little impatient. "It's not a question of absolute power or divine right—simply that my people come first, even before myself; my own world is part of me, and I am part of it by nature and instinct. Its needs are my needs. When my people are hungry, I feel the pangs."

Most rulers justify themselves like that, he thought, keeping his lips pressed firmly together. *But they all do the same things.*

But he couldn't keep her out of his mind. "No," she said, "you're wrong. I was not speaking metaphorically. My nervous system is attuned to my people's; it is a hereditary trait bred into my family. So being the ruler is not a pleasant station to occupy."

It certainly wouldn't be, he thought, if she was telling the truth—to suffer every pang that was suffered on the planet, and, if the attuning were psychic also, every sorrow. He expected her to pick the disbelief out of his mind, but she smiled and went on to tell him about her planet.

Ferr was not a large world. Moreover, it was essentially a barren one. It had been rich only because it had previously engaged in sub-rosa commerce with Mattern's universe. "And the last traffic was long, long ago," she told Mattern. "In a day much before mine, when my mother ruled."

"What happened? What stopped the traffic?"

"Our captain died of old age, and we have had trouble finding a successor to him."

"Why is it so hard to get somebody else?" Mattern asked bluntly.

She paused. When she spoke again, it was so obliquely that he did not realize immediately that it was an answer. "Time was when we had more contact with your people. There were many who knew of the xhindi, although few had actually encountered us. It was not difficult for us to get humans to work with us then. But the barbarians took over your world and your people lost the knowledge of how to get through to us. And when they regained it, we were not why they wished to get through. Much of the problem is in making people believe that we exist."

He nodded. "The fluska call you demons."

"There are still some on Earth who call us demons, Mattern. Your rulers and administrators do not call us demons—no, they are too learned for that—but your Space Service, by means of divers spells and conditionings, prevents most of those who pass through hyperspace from seeing and hearing us. And, of those who do, most are too frightened for negotiation."

She asked with sorrowful archness, "Are we so terrible in your eyes, Mattern?"

"I don't know," he said slowly, bewilderedly. "Sometimes you are, and I know you will be again. But right now, to me you look—almost beautiful."

There was silence, and, for a moment, he thought that he had offended her.

Then, "Thank you," she said softly. "It is a great compliment."

He was anxious to know why they had chosen him as their human representative. "Weren't there

any men who did try to get through?" he asked.

"A few—a very few—reached this space." She added reluctantly, "Some of them proved to lack stability of substance—"

He was angry, at her, and at himself, for not realizing that he had not been chosen. It had merely been a question of survival. "Then you *knew* what could happen to Schiemann!"

"It could have happened to anyone, Mattern. You knew there were risks to be taken. We did not conceal that from you."

And that was true. It had not occurred to him that the risks would not be equally shared by all three members of the ship's company.

The mbretersha continued: "And others of those who come through go mad. We feared that might happen to you, Mattern."

"Others go sane also," he said.

"This is the first time that has happened in my experience. But truly, Mattern, a madman would not seek to reach us."

"I wonder," Mattern said. "I wonder if anybody but a madman would."

This time he had displeased her. There was chill silence, and then: "Time is short. It is best that we return to discussing our business together. Now we will pay you for the merchandise you have brought us with a substance which is stable on Earth—at least it was in times gone by—and which used to become a stuff of considerable value. On your next trip—"

"What makes you think there's going to be a next trip? What makes you think I'm going to come back here again?" He would really have to be a madman to go through that all over again.

The mbretersha smiled. "You will come, Mattern," she said. "You will come when you see how rewarding it is to deal with us. And you will come because—"

"Because of what?" he demanded, more sharply than one should address a queen.

"Because your kqyres will make sure that you do." The tall, splendidly illuminated being who stood close to her throne bowed as she introduced him: "This is Lord Njeri, who served as kqyres with the previous captain. He will serve with you."

"Kqyres? What's that?" Apprehension quickened inside Mattern. "And what right have you to—"

"Your partner is dead," the mbretersha told him. "Lord Njeri is your new partner."

Mattern stood staring at her. No point protesting further, he knew; he was on her world, in her power. For the time being, he would have to obey her.

"Come, Captain Mattern," said the kqyres. "It is fitting that we superintend the loading of the ship."

So they went back to the port and Mattern watched the xhindi fill the *Valkyrie's* hold with some queer, spongy-looking substance that couldn't possibly be of value anywhere. And beside him stood the kqyres, as he was to be beside him for the next fifteen years.

"If you are disturbed about my effect upon your people when they catch sight of me," the kqyres assured the young man, "you may ease your mind. I shall make myself so that I am barely visible in your universe. Only those who look for me can see me. You need have no fear," he added with a sigh. "I have been through all this before."

"Yeah, that's what she told me," said Mattern grimly.

"It is disloyal of me, I know," the xhind murmured, "but I had hoped the mbretersha would not find a human representative before I died. I am aware of my obligation to my world—but it is not a pleasant prospect to spend one's last years in exile, however honorable."

"Don't worry, as soon as we get to normspace, I'll send you back. I'm not going on with this."

The kqyres seemed to shrug sadly. "You cannot send me back, for I am permanently attached to you. Wherever you go, I go—until the mbretersha chooses to free us, one from the other."

Mattern couldn't believe that. Once he got out of this alien universe, none of its laws could apply to him.

"Secondly," the kqyres informed him, "you will *want* to come back here. When you look at the cargo and see what it is, you will want to come back." He sighed again. "I know your species so well. And I do not fancy they have changed."

VI

When the *Valkyrie* reached normspace, her cargo proved to be the traditional reward—gold. Not the most precious metal in the universe any more, certainly, but still valuable. What there was in her hold would come to perhaps as much money as Mattern might, if his luck had held, have

amassed in several decades of operating with Schiemann in normspace.

"Well," said the kqyres as Mattern stood goggling at the glowing bullion, "is the payment just?"

"Yeah," Mattern grunted, "fair enough." His mind was working busily: *Captain Schiemann is dead, and so is Balas, so I can't do anything about that. A man's got to have some kind of business. Why shouldn't I go on trading with the xhindi, since I seem to be one of the few people lucky enough to be able to do it? Besides, from what the mbretersha said, I couldn't get out of it even if I wanted to. So why fight? Ethics aside, it's a good deal. I'd make more money that way than any other way. I could see a lot of Lyddy.*

He caught a flicker in the shifting planes of a grayness that the kqyres had become, according to promise.

"I'm thinking the way you want me to think—right, Lord Njeri?" Mattern asked self-mockingly.

"You are thinking the way any reasonable being would think."

Left to his own devices, Mattern would have disposed of the gold as quickly as he could, and then gone back to Erytheia to spend it all on a year or so with Lyddy. She came that expensive.

"And then what would you do?" the kqyres queried.

"Well, then I'd go out to hyperspace and make more, I guess. I know it's a little tough on you," Mattern added apologetically, "but you know how it is; I'm crazy about that woman."

The kqyres evidently did not know, but he made an effort to understand. "And, meanwhile, she will go back to—doing what she has been doing, with other men?"

Mattern frowned. "Yeah, I guess so."

"This procedure is acceptable in terms of your culture?"

"Well," Mattern said, "for women like Lyddy, sure. I mean—oh, hell—it's hard to explain."

"But it doesn't disturb you?"

"All right," Mattern said sullenly, "so it disturbs me. So what can I do about it?"

"Would it not be wiser," the kqyres suggested, "for you to wait until you can get enough money so you can have her for yourself alone? After all, how long would it take for you to get together a sufficient sum at that rate?" And the kqyres indicated the gold.

"You got a point there." Mattern could see that the xhindi was right. It would be a lot more sensible to make a few more trips and get himself a sizable bankroll before going after Lyddy, so he'd never have to share her again. Otherwise it would be back and forth, back and forth, until it sent him off his mental course.

So, as soon as he disposed of the gold, he went back with another cargo, and then another. Waiting for Lyddy wasn't as bad as he thought it would be, because he could talk to the kqyres about her. He'd never had somebody he could really talk to; even Captain Schiemann hadn't really been a companion. The kqyres always seemed interested in what Mattern had to say. He never talked much about himself, but he listened patiently to Mattern's description of Lyddy's talents, and charms, including some which, as a non-human, he could understand only intellectually, if at all.

And he didn't only listen, with it going in one ear and out the other—or whatever the xhindi had instead of ears. He made helpful suggestions, such as maybe Mattern ought to fix himself up a little before going back for Lyddy.

"I know she is to be—bought," he said, as if he still didn't quite understand what that meant, "but would you not derive greater pleasure from your purchase if you knew you were a man whom a woman could like for his own self?"

Len was silent. He knew the kqyres couldn't understand human concepts of beauty; he had taken Len's own word that the young man wasn't much of a specimen, that his body and his teeth were crooked and his skin bad, his vision defective and his hair drab. Lyddy deserved something better than that; Len knew it himself. Even if she would go with him for the sake of the money, it wasn't the same thing.

"I could get my teeth fixed up in this sector," he said at last, "but I'd need to go to the Near Planets, maybe even Earth, to have my leg fixed. It'd take a long time and passage costs a hell of a lot. People don't go that far just for a junket, you know. For most of 'em, it's a once-in-a-lifetime deal."

"Of course," Njeri said. "Your wealth is dearly won; you wouldn't want to squander it. However, wouldn't a considerable economy be effected if you went in your own ship?"

"The *Valkyrie*!" Len was shocked into laughter. "She'd never make it to Earth! She'd crumple up like an old paper bag!"

"She will not last much longer, in any case," said Njeri.

Len had been thinking that himself for some time—wondering how soon he would have no ship left at all, and what he would do then.

"It would be wise," the kqyres suggested, "for you first to get enough money to pay for a new ship. Only a few more trips should be necessary. Then go to whatever planet you deem most suitable for the necessary improvements, and finally return to Lyddy—a man worthy not only of her but of any woman."

"It'll take so long," Mattern said, tempted, and yet driven wild by the idea of Lyddy, so close to attainment.

"At your age, what are a few more trips?"

Len gave in.

Actually, it took five trips into hyperspace merely to pay for the new vessel, a much larger and more elaborate model than Len had planned on buying. "In the long run," his partner told him, "the best is most economical. A sound, spaceworthy vessel such as this one will last out your lifetime. And you can call her the *Hesperian Queen*, after Lyddy."

"Why?" Len asked. "Is that what Lyddy is short for?"

"It is the same as naming it after her," the kqyres said shortly. "Only it's a little more subtle."

"Oh." Somehow the kqyres made Len feel stupid, *uncouth* almost, even though he was the human being and the other nothing but hyperextraterrestrial.

The treatments were even costlier than anticipated, and it took many more trips to pay for them. Expenses were increased by the fact that he had to commute back and forth from his sector of space to the planet where he was being treated, since he couldn't afford to neglect his business now that his costs were mounting.

He had his leg straightened on Earth. That world was as colorful, as complex, as intoxicating as it was claimed to be. One series of marvels after another presented themselves before his inexperienced eyes like scenes in a vision show—except that he was actually there, breathing, tasting, feeling a part of this vast sophistication. Earth had many beautiful women, and he enjoyed the favors of those in Lyddy's profession, but only to prove to himself that she was much more wonderful.

He decided there was no point bothering with the other planets; he might as well have his teeth and everything else taken care of on Earth, too. "Very wise of you," the kqyres approved. "The best is always the soundest, and, hence, most worth waiting for. Like Lyddy."

"Yes," Mattern agreed, "she is the best. And the most beautiful."

"Of course," the kqyres said. "Tell me more about her."

And Mattern talked, far into the night. What he couldn't remember of her by now, he imagined, so that the picture should be complete, not only for the xhindi but for himself.

When his leg and his teeth had been fixed, "Why stop at that?" the kqyres asked. "If it had not been for the way that stepfather of yours treated you as a child—" for Len had found himself telling his companion not only about Lyddy but about everything—"you would be a fine-looking man today. It would be no difficult task to have you restored to what you should rightfully be."

Mattern would not, of course, do such a thing out of vanity. But the more presentable he made himself, the more he would be offering Lyddy. So it would be worth the extra time, especially since he could spend so much of it on Earth. Lyddy had come from Earth; it would be a bond between them later.

Doctors and cosmetologists got to work on him. Each treatment seemed to be lengthier than the preceding one, and more expensive. He could, however, easily afford it—all he had to do was make more trips. The kqyres not only told him what cargoes to take but advised him on the investments to make with his profits.

They did very well together. As far as Mattern was concerned, they did fabulously well, because he had to make enough on his side to counterbalance the entire expenses of a planet on the other. The thought impressed him. *I am, in a sense, equal to the mbretersha*, he thought, *and she is a monarch*. As a result, he walked a little more erect than even the operations had rendered him.

The dangers of his trade grew less and less frightening as he came to know his way between the universes, even though, at the same time, he began to realize how great those dangers were. He had not conceived of their immensity before. The reason there were asteroid belts in so many of the solar systems, he learned now, was that the xhindi had traded with other intelligent races in earlier eras, and there had been accidents. Those races were now extinct.

The xhindi themselves ceased to be monstrous in his eyes. He grew to accept their appearance as perfectly natural in their universe. Toward the kqyres, he came to feel something of what he had felt toward Schiemann, except that where Schiemann had looked up to him and relied on him, he found himself increasingly dependent on Njeri. He told him all his hopes and ambitions, and the kqyres listened attentively. Mattern tried to explain to him how he himself felt about Lyddy, and

the kqyres tried to understand.

The kqyres taught Mattern how to play chess. "But that's our game!" Mattern said. "I mean we play it in our universe!"

"In ours also," the xhind smiled. "Who knows whether it came from our universe to yours, or yours to ours? Nor does it matter. It is an old game and a good one."

Mattern became increasingly skillful at it. He was pleased that there was an intellectual activity in which he could engage as an equal with the kqyres, and the kqyres seemed pleased, too.

When the treatments were over, Mattern looked in a mirror. He was straight; he was handsome. His skin was clear, his eyes bright. He looked less than his age. Now he could go back to Lyddy, assured that most women would find his physical appearance more than acceptable.

But he found himself hesitating. Only his physical appearance would be truly acceptable. There was something still lacking in him. His body was right, but the way he stood, the way he moved, the way he spoke, all these were wrong.

"I'm not finished yet," he said stumbingly to the kqyres, "not quite straightened out. I ought to be more—well, more smooth."

"You do lack polish," the kqyres admitted, "although you are far less awkward, shall we say, than when we first met."

"That's because of you, Njeri!" Mattern declared, with genuine gratitude. "You've taught me a lot!" And he looked at his outlandish friend with a great affection.

The kqyres seemed quite moved; he flickered like a pin-wheel. "You have been an exceedingly apt pupil, Mattern. When first I saw you, I did not think it possible that I should ever consider you a companion. However, I have found myself taking an increasing pleasure in your company. Sometimes I even forget you are a human."

Mattern could not speak; he was so overwhelmed by the tribute.

"The passage of time disclosed to me that there were sensitivities and perceptions beneath that—forgive me, but we know how misleading first impressions can be—boorish exterior. The very fact that you are conscious of your own deficiencies *proves* that you are more than the mere clod you still, on occasion, seem to be—"

"Can't I improve myself that way, too?" Mattern asked plaintively. "Can't I make myself worthy of Lyddy in every way?"

"Of course you can," the kqyres beamed. "Were you to apply yourself specifically to the acquisition of culture, I am sure you could become as polished as any human being can hope to be. But it will take time."

"Well," Mattern said, "Lyddy's waited so long, she can wait a little longer. Things worth having are worth waiting for."

Under Njeri's tutelage, Mattern cultivated the arts and the amenities. As he used his ship for a permanent residence, it was there that he housed his growing collection of costly rare objects of art, and his library, notable for its first editions—not only of tapes, but of books. His uniforms were cut by the best terrestrial tailors and he took kinescope courses in the liberal arts and social forms from the outstanding universities of Earth. The provincial twang vanished from his speech; he developed a taste for wine and conversation. Nobody, seeing him, could ever have fancied him once a poor wizened space rat.

As the years went by, he grew to become as much of a ruler in his way as the mbretersha in hers. She ruled one planet, he told himself, but he had a business empire farflung over many planets—all of which, to some extent, he did rule through his investments. He would have worlds to lay at Lyddy's feet now, he thought complacently. No man could offer any woman more.

The first *Hesperian Queen* didn't have a chance to last out his lifetime; he kept trading her in for another and yet another model, as better, faster, more luxurious starships were developed. Finally, he outbid the Federation Government itself for plans of the latest-model spacecraft. When the government protested, he graciously gave them copies free of all charge. "I merely wanted to be sure that I had the best ship available," he explained. "I have no objection to your having it also. But I knew that you could not afford to be as generous as I can."

He never had more than one ship, because it was too dangerous to run more than one cargo at a time. His crew was always as small in number as possible. He would have preferred none at all; actually, all spaceships could run themselves, for the controls were completely automatic. But regulations said there had to be a crew, both for the sake of "face"—many extraterrestrials couldn't seem to recognize the authority of machines—and because a power failure was not inconceivable.

So the *Hesperian Queen* carried four men. And, whenever she made the Jump through hyperspace, even the crew—though conditioned on Earth—was drugged. Mattern carried on

alone. And if, when the crewmen awakened, they found that a day had passed when only an hour should have gone by, they knew better than to ask questions.

So the years went by—busy, pleasant, profitable years. The image of Lyddy was always before him, inspiring him to further efforts. *Someday soon I will go back to her*, he would tell himself. On his latest birthday, he looked in the mirror closely. At twenty-four, he had appeared forty; at forty, he could have passed for thirty. Sixteen years had gone by since that night with Lyddy. Now he was worthy of her or anyone.

"I think it's time I went back for her," he told the kqyres.

"For whom?" the kqyres asked; then added hastily, "Oh, yes, of course, Lyddy. We'll do that right after we come back from the Vega System. There's a little Earth-type planet out there—"

"*Before* we go to Vega," Mattern interrupted. "Now."

"But why the hurry? You've waited so long already—"

"I've waited too long. I'm not young any more."

"Neither is she," observed the kqyres. "Perhaps she is too old now, Mattern."

"She can't be too old," Mattern said. The tridi in his locker was Lyddy, and the picture was young; therefore, Lyddy must still be young.

"She may have married someone else. She may have numerous children clustering about her knee."

"Then I will take her away from her husband and children," Mattern declared. "Can you imagine that a little thing like that would stop me?"

"She may have lost her beauty," the kqyres said. "She may have left Hesperia. She may have suffered a disfiguring accident."

Mattern realized then that Njeri was deliberately trying to keep him from going back to Lyddy. Either he felt that she would interfere with the smooth operation of their business, or he was jealous of a third intruding into their company.

"I have done everything I did for the sake of winning Lyddy," Mattern said, biting off the words. "If all hope of her is gone, then my whole reason for working with you is gone. I will never go back to hyperspace."

"There are other women—"

"Not for me!"

"The business itself means nothing to you?" There was an aggrieved note in the kqyres' voice.

"It's just a living," Mattern said, "just a way of getting Lyddy. You know that was why I went into it. I thought you'd been listening to me all these years."

"I thought perhaps with the deepening of your interests—"

"They have only made me love her the more profoundly."

The kqyres took the equivalent of a deep breath. "You do not have a house or any regular place of residence. You cannot expect a lady to live permanently on a spaceship."

"I will build her a house."

"Will it not show her how carefully you have prepared for her if, first, you build her a palace worthy—"

"I have no time to build palaces."

"There is a tiny planet that circles the dim sun you call Van Maanen's star," the alien persisted. "It is always twilight there. The beings who live on that planet build crystal towers miles high and as fragile as spun glass, in dusk colors the rainbow never dreamed of."

"If she wants a crystal tower, I will have one built for her. But first I will ask her."

"Very well," the kqyres sighed, "since nothing else will satisfy you, let us return and fetch her."

And when they got to Erytheia City, Lyddy was still there, not only unmarried, but—in spite of all the years—unchanged.

VII

And now Mattern had been her husband for several months. He had begun to know her, and he realized that she could never be let known the truth about his life and his work. She would be frightened, and, if there was any emotion left over in her, angry.

He told the kqyres: "I've been thinking of taking Lyddy to Burdon. She might find distractions there that will take her mind off—things it shouldn't be on. What do you think of the idea?"

"I cannot tell," the kqyres replied doubtfully. "I have a curious feeling...."

"That *what?*" Mattern prompted him anxiously. It was the first time he had seen the kqyres definitely at a loss, although it had seemed to him of recent months that the xhind's assurance was beginning to ebb.

"... that I am getting too old for my work," the kqyres finished.

"Nonsense!" Mattern cried. The kqyres was his tower of strength; he *would* not conceive of any weakness in him. It would mean that he would be forced to rely upon himself. *And yet*, he thought, *I am certainly old and experienced enough by now to begin relying upon myself. In fact, I'm getting a little old and tired, too.*

"You know," he said to his partner, "maybe we both ought to retire."

"What do you mean?"

"You've been at this long enough and I've got all the money I want. We can see each other sometimes; no reason why I couldn't go into hyperspace just to visit."

The kqyres paled to pearl. "Now that you have Lyddy, you don't want anything else at all?"

"Now that I have Lyddy, what else is there to want?"

The kqyres flickered anxiously. "But the mbretersha has commanded—"

Mattern smiled. "Her commands don't hold good in this universe. You know that. When I was a kid, she could fool me into believing she had a hold over me. But the hold is a psychological one; that's the only thing that could carry over from universe to universe. And I'm strong enough to break it now."

Although he was not quite serious, it might be, he thought, that the hyperspace trade and the trips to Ferr had spoiled him for everyday life, made him too restless for the mundanities of any world. And it was time for him to settle down now.

He let the kqyres win the game, and then he stood up. "I'd better start getting things ready for the trip to Burdon."

"You've definitely decided to go?"

"Yes," Mattern said, pleased with himself, "definitely."

He went to the control room and got out the forms that would need to be filled out before the ship could leave port. Suddenly he remembered his puzzlement about the young spaceman—what was his name?—Raines? He pressed a button on the file, and the boy's records flashed up at him. At first they seemed to be in order: *Alard Raines, aged twenty-five, educated on Earth*, well and good. But *born on Earth ...* Mattern was almost positive that could never have been, not from the way the young man spoke. And one false statement meant that the whole record was false.

However, he could not challenge the discrepancy before they left for Capella. If he spoke to Raines, he'd probably have to dismiss him then and there. It would be difficult to find a suitable replacement in Erytheia City. He might have to send for someone from Earth, which would take months, perhaps a year. First he'd take the *Queen* to Burdon, he decided, and then he would fire Raines.

Nearly three weeks went by before they could leave. Mattern found himself looking forward with some impatience to Burdon. When Lyddy had a house of her own that she could take an interest in, he told himself, things would be different; she would be different. This way she was bored much of the time, and boredom is contagious.

"I've 'vised ahead to Capella, dear," he told her as they boarded ship, "and rented a furnished multiplex, so we'll have some place to stay."

"Yes, honey," she said, with a strange lack of interest. She didn't even seem surprised at the size of the ship. Underneath her elaborate makeup, she was pale; her body was trembling. She saw that an explanation was necessary. "It's been so long since I made the Jump. Silly of me to be so nervous, but you do hear things about hyperspace...."

"You're safer in my ship than anywhere else."

"Yes, I know." Was she merely expressing trust in him, or was there more to her words than that?

At first he was just vaguely suspicious. Then, the second day out, he noticed that Lyddy and Raines seemed to be together a good deal more of the time than chance would account for, and his suspicions secured a focus. The two had some kind of unspoken understanding, he thought, watching them as much out of curiosity as anger. *I have become chilled with the years of alien company*, he thought. *I am incapable of true passion; perhaps that is what she seeks in another.*

But, though he might find excuses for her, he would not condone her. A bargain was a bargain. At the end of the first week, he said to her one evening, as he sat on the edge of the bed, watching her brush her long, thick gilded hair, "Darling, I'm a little worried about one of my crewmen."

Lyddy didn't turn from the jeweled dressing table he'd had especially installed for her. "Which one?" she asked.

"Young Raines. Do you know which he is?"

"Yes." She paused. "There's only one young one. Why are you worried about him? Do you think

he's sick or something?" But that was the question she should have asked *before* asking the man's identity.

Mattern let a moment elapse, then said, "His papers appear to be forged."

He glanced at the reflection of her face, but it held neither relief nor fear, merely its usual sweet emptiness. "Maybe he needed a job real bad," she said.

"Maybe," her husband agreed, "but why use forged papers?"

"He might of gotten into some kind of trouble—you know how boys are."

"I'd hardly care to employ the kind of spaceman who gets into trouble serious enough for him to lose his papers. You have to do something pretty drastic to get them taken away, you know."

She said nothing.

He went on, "What I'm beginning to suspect is that he isn't really a trained spaceman at all, that he didn't go to any of the Earth space schools."

"Do you have to go to an Earth space school to be a spaceman? Can't you study somewhere else?"

"Earth's the only place where they give the conditioning." He told the truth, figuring she wouldn't understand.

She turned to look at him. "That's so the men shouldn't—see the things outside when they go through hyperspace, isn't it?"

Mattern was somewhat taken aback. "How did you know? It's not public information."

She shrugged and turned back to the dressing table. "I've known a lot of spacemen, hon."

Her face was pale, but why just now? He wondered just what Raines had told her—how much the boy actually knew. Naturally there could be only one possible reason he had chosen Lyddy as his confidante.

"There's something between you and Raines, isn't there?" he asked.

There was a slight delay. Then her laughter shrilled through the cabin. "Don't be silly, hon; I hardly know the man! All I've done was speak to him a couple of times!" She got up and put her soft arms around her husband. "You're jealous, Len," she said, and there was complacency mixed with the fright in her eyes.

He felt a pang of disgust, but tried not to let it show. Gently, he put her away from him.

"But that's so silly," she murmured. "How could I prefer a dumb pimply kid to you?"

In theory, that was quite true, but Len knew women had strange tastes. And possibly "a dumb pimply kid" *had* more to offer her emotionally and, in reverse, intellectually, than he had. It was not impossible that she was telling the truth, but Mattern could not, of course, believe her. And there was no point in making a further issue of it now. When they reached Burdon, he would fire Raines simply on the basis of the forged papers. No need to bring Lyddy into it at all. So that problem would be easily solved, but what of the others?

He went to play chess with the kqyres. "I trust you have got over your whimsical notion to retire," the xhind said hopefully.

"No," Len told him maliciously, "I've practically made up my mind to quit. There doesn't seem to be any point to it any more."

"The woman *has* changed! That's the whole trouble, isn't it? Even though it's not apparent, in some way she has changed?"

"No," Len said again, "she hasn't changed at all. In fact, I think that's what the trouble is. She hasn't changed, but *I* have."

"I never thought of that," the kqyres confessed.

The night of the Jump, Mattern turned in at the kqyres' suggestion. "For once, your men can take care of the ship," the xhind said, "since there will be no trading stop." Lyddy would be drugged, but Mattern would not need drugs, for hyperspace held no more horrors for him. Or so he thought.

But that night he was awakened by the sound of a screaming so hideous that, if he hadn't known voices don't change during the hyperjump, he would be tempted to think it was one result of the law of mutability—so monstrous were these shrill, worse-than-animal cries.

He rushed out of his cabin.

In the corridor stood Lyddy, still screaming, her face contorted with terror that only the sight of Alard Raines standing there in his normal shape let Mattern know that they had already passed

the Jump.

The shrieking separated into words. "I saw it! It was horrible!" And she made an ugly noise in her throat. "You were right, Alard. It's true! There's a monster on board and it did something *awful* to me...." Her voice ebbed to a bubble as she looked down at her body beneath the thin veil of fabric and found the same voluptuous curves she had started out with.

Mattern sighed. "Better come into my cabin, Lyddy." And then he jerked his head at Raines. "You come, too." He paused in the doorway when he saw there was no need for privacy. "Where are the other crewmen?"

"Asleep," Raines said. "Drugged. As usual. Who do you think you're fooling, anyway?"

Mattern was too disturbed at the news to take notice of the boy's manner. "But they weren't supposed to be drugged this trip! And who's in charge then? *You?*"

Raines flushed and struggled to pronounce the word he wanted to use in return. "Your kek—kqyres, I'd say, is in charge. Like he always has been," he concluded triumphantly.

Mattern shut the cabin door behind the three of them. Lyddy went over and sat down on the edge of the bunk, quieter now that she found her personal transformation had been ephemeral. Seeing a monster is not, after all, anywhere near as bad as being a monster. Her fright dimmed and was outshone by a strong sense of personal injury.

"I thought all Alard's talk of kek-kek-monsters was just superstition," she babbled, "but it's *true*. I saw that thing with my own eyes and it's *hideous*! Len, *why* do you have it on board, especially when *I'm* here?"

"I have to," Len said. "He's my partner."

Her blue eyes widened in shock. "Then you've been doing more than just *trading* with the hyperspacers. You've been *associating* with them, and they're even worse than extraterrestrials because they're so much more—extraterrestrial!"

She went on talking in this vein, but Mattern ignored her and turned his attention to the boy. "I suppose you told her not to eat or drink anything so she'd see the hyperspacer?"

Raines nodded, his face essaying contempt but imperfectly concealing terror.

"And I suppose you yourself did the same thing, not knowing the men weren't going to be drugged this trip?" Len sat down behind his writing table and looked thoughtfully at the young man. "You must have done the same thing before, on other trips, to know as much as you seem to. You must have heard and seen a great deal, eh?"

"Plenty," Raines said, through brave, stiff lips. "Plenty."

Obviously the boy hates me, Mattern thought. But why? Is Lyddy enough reason?

"Why did you bring her into this?" he asked, almost mildly.

Lyddy didn't give Alard a chance to answer. "Because he wanted me to see you as you really are!" she shrieked.

The boy shuffled his feet. "I had to tell somebody."

"Why my wife, though? She owes you nothing; she owes me everything. The first woman of the streets you picked up would have made a safer confidante."

"Maybe I trusted her."

"Maybe you had no right to trust her!" Mattern cried, almost with sincerity. "It would have been wrong of her not to tell me."

"Maybe it was because I—I love her," Alard said, looking down at the thick rugs that covered the cabin floor. "If you fall in love with somebody, you tell them things."

Mattern couldn't help smiling. "I never do," he said.

"Maybe you've never been in love. Maybe you don't have any human feelings at all."

There was an uncomfortable feeling in Mattern's shoulders, as if his tailor had made a mistake for once. Had he, during sixteen years of alien trade, changed into something not quite human? Was there then a solid basis for the anti-extraterrestrial prejudice? He picked up a slender, sharp thike and ran his thumb absent-mindedly along the blade. Alard stiffened in his effort not to flush.

Mattern smiled and laid the thike down on the table. It was only a paperknife and had never been used for anything more. If he ever had need for such a thing to be done, the time was long past when he would have needed to do it himself. He looked at the crewman.

"One would almost think you told my wife because you wanted her to tell me," he suggested.

"That's ridiculous!" Alard flashed. "I may be a fool, but not that much of a fool!"

"Why are you on my ship with forged papers then?" Mattern demanded.

"I wanted—I wanted to bring you to justice."

"By committing a crime yourself? Surely a roundabout way. And why have you taken it upon yourself to help rid humanity of me?"

"Why shouldn't I?" Alard asked. "I'm a human being; isn't that enough? But, as a matter of fact, that wasn't the reason I came to your ship. I only found out later what you were doing."

Mattern waited patiently.

"You killed my father!" the boy burst out. And then tension seemed to ebb from him, as if the worst had happened. "So now you know who I am!"

Mattern picked his words delicately. "If you have proof that I murdered your father, why don't you prosecute? There's no statute of limitation on murder on any of the planets. Or don't you have proof?"

Alard's voice broke slightly. "Everybody on Fairhurst knows you killed him, but they won't do anything about it. They say he deserved what he got."

Mattern sighed, knowing now who the young man was. His brother. Another responsibility, another vain tie. "How do you know, he didn't deserve what he got?" Mattern asked.

Suddenly Alard grew shy. He lowered his eyes to the rug again. "Because *I* didn't deserve what *I* got."

And there, Mattern thought, Alard had him. Whatever the boy was now, he certainly had not deserved what he'd got then. *But I was only sixteen*, Mattern argued with himself; *how could I have been held responsible?* And then he told himself, *You haven't been sixteen for twenty-four years.*

"I thought one of the women in the village would have adopted you," he said.

"One of 'em did. They took me away from her after she beat me so hard she practically killed me. Every little thing I did wrong, she said it was the bad blood coming out in me, and beat me so hard the blood did come. I went from one family to another, but nobody really wanted me." His voice cracked wide across. "You don't know what it's like to grow up with nobody caring for you!"

"It so happens I do," Mattern said, "but I can't expect you to believe me."

Alard wasn't interested in Mattern's life story; he wanted to wallow in his own in front of a captive audience. "The only hope I had was that you would come back for me some day. They told me you were probably dead, but I wouldn't believe it, see? It was all I had to hang onto."

"I thought you were part of a family," Mattern tried to defend himself. "I thought you belonged to somebody." He almost convinced himself that this was true, but, at the back of his mind, something whispered, *You ditched him.*

"When I was sixteen, like you'd been, I ran away to look for you. I found out where you'd gone and I followed. I even stayed a while with the fluska. I liked them better than my own people. They said I should try looking for you in hyperspace."

"They are a very wise people," Mattern said.

Alard hadn't had his brother's luck. None of the great starships offered him a berth. But there were unchartered vessels—smugglers and pirates and worse—that would hire anybody who didn't value his life very highly and knew how to keep his mouth shut. He got jobs on them. And as the bandit ships he sailed on took Jumps closer and closer in to the more sophisticated sectors, Alard began to hear of a Len Mattern. It took him a long time before he could bring himself to believe that this king of finance was the brother whom he had imagined finding derelict and penniless. Instead, he was rich and oblivious, not needing anything the younger man could give him.

It was then that Alard determined revenge. It took him years to save up enough money to buy the false papers he needed—more years to buy his way into Mattern's crew. And, finally, he had achieved his end; he was there.

"But you've been with me almost a year now," Mattern pointed out, "and done nothing except talk to Lyddy against me. What were you planning to do?"

"I don't know," the boy said hopelessly. "Lots of times I thought of killing you, but then I'd be killing the only relative I had."

"You could have told me who you were. I'd have done something for you."

Alard's eyes blazed. "Yes, you *would* have. When it's easy, when it wouldn't mean a damn thing to you, you'd do something for me!"

Len pulled out a smokestick and offered it to the boy. Alard shook his head impatiently. Len lit one for himself. Neither of them said anything.

Lyddy was sobbing softly. "You never really loved me," she whimpered. "It was just a way of getting back at Len."

Alard looked away from her, met his brother's eye, and dropped his gaze to the rug, without denying the impeachment.

Mattern exhaled smoke. "All right, you had a grudge against me, but what did you have against her? If you *were* using her to get back at me, then I think you have no cause to reproach me for anything I did. Maybe your foster-mother was right; there *is* bad blood in the family."



The young spaceman was still silent.

Lyddy lifted her head. There was resolution on her tear-smudged face. "I'm going to leave you, Len! I can't go on living with a man who does the awful, evil, *unnatural* things you do...." Her voice petered out as her vocabulary proved unequal to her emotions. *Poor Lyddy*, he thought. And then, *Poor Len, with emotions unequal to his vocabulary.*

"Everything I did, I did for your sake, Lyddy," he told her softly, but no longer with any hope of her comprehension. "It was because I was poor and couldn't afford your love that I went into hyperspace." He couldn't help adding, "Doesn't it mean anything to you that I risked a whole universe for your sake, and that now I have worlds to offer you?"

"Don't put the blame on *me*, Len Mattern!" Angry tears stood in her eyes. "I never wanted anybody to do *that* much for me. All I wanted were nice things and somebody to take care of me and maybe love me. I never wanted to have the whole universe risked for me." Her voice broke on the truth. "Nobody's worth all that!"

She was right, he thought—being given too much can be worse than being given too little. The words spilled out of her; he'd been so disenchanted by her stupidity that he gave her credit for less understanding than she did have.

"You wouldn't've been able to wait fifteen-sixteen years for me if you really loved me. But you were *happy* the way you were—you and that extraterrestrial of yours. All you wanted was to dream about me. You were a fool ever to have come back for me; you shoulda stuck with your dreams."

And again, he knew, she was right. He felt very tired and empty, the way he'd felt after Schiemann and Balas had died, as if nothing mattered any more. He didn't argue with her.

"What would you do if you left me, Lyddy?" he asked gently.

"I can always—" she swallowed—"go back to my old job, I guess."

Alard gave an exclamation of horror, and Mattern agreed in his mind that that solution would never do. Beyond a doubt, she was his responsibility. And so was Alard. Why had he ever longed for a family?

And then an outside mind joined in with his and he knew what to do.

"Alard," he said, "before, I offered to do something for you. Now I'm not going to do anything for you, not a damn thing."

Alard drew himself erect. "I wouldn't expect you to, see? Even if you wanted to, I wouldn't take—"

"I want you to do something for me," Mattern cut in.

Alard paled, then flushed with anger. "If this is some half-baked way of thinking you can make up for things without me feeling—"

"Hear me out before you leap to conclusions. You said that you loved my wife...."

Lyddy gave a moan. "You know he was only stringing me along to get back at you."

"He wouldn't have done that," said Mattern. "Not a fine, upstanding boy like Alard, no matter how much he hated me. You really love Lyddy, don't you, Alard—as you said before?"

The boy looked frightened. "Only in a manner of speaking," he said quickly. "I was trying to make

you jealous. I think of her as a sister—a sister-in-law."

"She's very beautiful," Mattern reminded him. And the *xhindi had* done their work well. She hadn't changed; they had preserved her for him just as she had been sixteen years before. If only they had let her change, then things might have worked out. They could have kept the body from growing old without holding back the mind—or had they not held back the mind? Was this the fullest maturity it was capable of?

"A man who has her as his wife should be very happy," Mattern pointed out. "You wouldn't want her to go back to what she'd been doing, and she won't stay with me."

"Yes, sure." There was a desperate note in the boy's voice. "But she's not young. I mean for me—although, of course, she *looks* young," he added, with a wild glance in her direction. "And she's not very—she isn't—"

Mattern got up and put his hand on his brother's shoulder. "Then if you feel that way about her and do as I ask, it will really be a favor to me."

"Why should I do you a favor?" Alard demanded. His eyes darted back and forth like an animal that is beginning to realize it is caught in a trap.

"To prove you're the better man," Mattern told him. "To heap coals of fire on my head. To prove that if there's bad blood in the family, it exists only in me."

Alard didn't ask what Mattern wanted him to do. He knew already.

Mattern put it into words: "I want you to take her with you."

"Take her," Alard repeated numbly. "Where?"

"Anywhere she wants to go—to Earth or back to Erytheia, or any one of the planets she chooses."

"Will she go with me?" Alard challenged. "You have to ask her; she has the right—"

"Oh, I'll go with you, Alard," Lyddy interrupted joyfully. "I'd go with anybody right now, but especially you."

"Even if you know I love you only as a sister?"

"That's better than nothing," Lyddy said. "Besides, you could change your mind. I think you and me have a lot more in common than him and me."

"I want to make sure there will always be someone to take care of her, to watch over her," Mattern told his brother. "Funny, I wouldn't have done what I did except for the sake of winning her, and now that I've won her, I can't hold her because of what I did to get her. But she was my dream and I want her to be cherished."

"That's noble of you, Len," Lyddy said. "I'll think of you often, and I won't be mad at you." She got up and linked her arm in Alard's. "You'll take good care of me, won't you, hon?"

But it was to his brother that Alard spoke. "I'll take good care of her," he promised, his voice thick with an emotion that was one part sentiment, one part resignation.

"Splendid," Mattern said. "I wouldn't want her to be cast adrift. She knows so little of any of the worlds outside her own restricted sphere."

"Sure," Alard replied miserably, "I understand. I'll do my best."

Mattern got up and put out his hand and, after a little hesitation, Alard took it.

"I hope in time you'll come to forgive me," Mattern said, "and that your hatred will dwindle into dislike, perhaps even tolerance."

"Oh, I don't hate you any more," Alard assured him. "I guess, in your way, you've had as much to put up with as I did." He frowned in perplexity. "But why did it have to be me?"

"You'll change your mind about that, too," Mattern said comfortably. "Lyddy is a very accomplished woman."

VIII

He felt quite cheerful as he left the two together in his cabin. At long last, he was free of responsibility, of illusion, of dreams. He didn't need a woman; it would be wrong for him to expect a woman to live with the *kqyres*, even unwittingly. Love was for the very young; he had his work. And now that he was free of all these vexing human entanglements, he'd be able to take hold of the business the way he should have been doing all along. The *kqyres* was getting old; it was time to assume the details of management himself. There were quite a few areas of operation which could become even more productive if the business was thoroughly reorganized.

Mattern went up to the control room. The *kqyres* was there, which was not his usual place. Perhaps Alard had been right when he said it was Njeri who had drugged the other crewmen and taken control of the ship. Presently, Mattern would ask him why, but there were other matters to be discussed first.

"Well," Mattern said, flinging himself into a chair, "Lyddy seems to be disposed of satisfactorily." He gave a rueful laugh. "I take it you had a hand in the arrangements. That was only fair—she's your creation." He waved his smokestick at the xhind. "However, I'm warning you, I won't let myself be manipulated any more. You're through pushing me around."

The kqyres seemed almost offended. Then there came a soft chuckle. "Manipulated, nonsense! We merely deluded you a little, in the same manner you were wont to delude yourself, but more purposefully. In truth, what else could we do? We needed you, and in order to induce you to accept our terms, we had to establish some goal, some ideal for you to aim at."

Something about the kqyres' voice disturbed Mattern; he only half listened as the hyperspacer continued: "And the resources of your mind were so pitifully meager at that time that this woman was the best we could dredge up. Later, when your horizons had broadened and your perceptions deepened, we attempted to alter your goal to a more worthy one, but the woman had already become an obsession...."

"You're not the kqyres," Mattern interrupted. "You have a different voice."

"Not the *same* kqyres," the voice corrected. "Truly, it was unfair to make Lord Njeri go through a thing like this twice in one lifetime. Moreover, as he grew old, he grew careless."

So that was why the men had been drugged. There had been an unscheduled stop in hyperspace.

Mattern got up and looked intently at the shadowy form. The xhind flickered a little, as if in embarrassment, and embarked almost nervously upon an explanation. "You were never intended to attain Lyddy, merely to keep her image before you like the star a mariner follows but can never reach." And then the kqyres laughed. "Except, of course, that today he can reach his star."

"A carrot and a donkey might be a more suitable simile," Mattern said. "Pity you couldn't have provided a better carrot."

The new kqyres ignored this comment. "Lord Njeri was transferred. He has asked me to say that he looks forward to the pleasure of renewing your friendship when you come again to Ferr. Meanwhile, I have taken his place." After some hesitation, the new kqyres added, "I hope we shall be good friends, also."

There was no use pretending any longer. "I know who you are," Mattern said. "I recognize your voice. You're the mbretersha herself, aren't you?"

She seemed pleased rather than dismayed. "Yes, I am the mbretersha. I came to realize that the post of kqyres was more difficult than that of queen. Therefore, I was the only one who should rightfully undertake it. As I told you, in our universe a ruler cannot afford pride. She lives only for the good of her people."

"She's got to," Mattern said bluntly, "if, as you said, her nervous system is attuned to theirs. What actually did happen is that Njeri told you I was quitting the business and he couldn't control me any more. So you took his place to see if you could change my mind."

"Oh, that was a mere pleasantry!" she said. "I knew you would not give up the hyperspace trade. What else would you have left?"

What else *would* he have left? His money, his collections, his unpleasant memories. All his emotional ties now were with that other universe.

"Who's ruling Ferr?" he asked, evading her question.

"Lord Njeri, your former kqyres, serves as my regent. He is my father, so he is fitted by birth; his system is also attuned to the planet's, although not as sensitively as mine, since he is a male. Perhaps that would make him a better ruler; he will suffer less. And I see no reason otherwise why a male should be deemed incapable of ruling, providing he is under careful supervision."

"No reason at all," Mattern agreed.

"Moreover," she continued, "I have organized the whole government of my planet so that it runs itself. And, of course, from time to time, when we make our trips, I shall be able to check into what's going on."

"But we're not going to make any more trips," he said. Although he had not been serious about retiring—he knew that now—he wasn't going to let the hyperspacers push him around. *Make her sweat a little*, he thought irreverently.

"Will you not give me a chance, Captain?" she asked. "Is the prospect of my company so displeasing to you that it will make you give up the business immediately?"

"You know it's not that. I told the kqyres before you came—"

"But my people won't know it's not that. I shall lose face."

"If only you *had* a face!" he cried. "I'm sick of sailing with shadows!"

"My form in your universe is truly horrible, Mattern," she said softly, "truly monstrous. The xhindi who have seen themselves in mirrors in your universe have often gone mad."

"Anything is better than emptiness," he told her.

"If I appear in my true form, then will you accept me as your kqyres?"

"Well," he said, enjoying himself, "I'll make a few more trips with you, but that's all I'll promise."

"I accept your promises," she said.

He felt a tiny shiver rise up in him. Suppose her normspace form was even more hideous than her hyperspace form, which of course, was no longer hideous to him. Would his nerves be strong enough to bear it?

He held his breath as the vibrations began to slow down, the grays shimmering into substance, taking on all the colors of the rainbow and then flowing into one basic roseate hue. Bit by bit, the planes and shapes began to coalesce into the shape of...

A woman. The most beautiful woman he had ever seen. A woman next to whom even the dream of Lyddy paled into thin air.

And, momentarily, he became the Len Mattern of fifteen years back, standing there with his mouth agape. "But you said you'd be a monster...."

"To my people, Mattern," she smiled, "this form is as monstrous as ours is to your people. You change into our doubles in hyperspace; we change into yours in normspace. Had you kept the continuity of tradition that we have, you would know what we have always known—that xhindi and human are different aspects of the same race. That is why you fear us, and we do not fear you."

Of course, he thought. How else could they understand us so well? How else could they find logic in our illogic and be able to condition us according to our human natures? And he smiled to think that all objection to the xhindi from the social angle was invalid. Monsters they might be, but not non-humans.

"Once I thought this appearance was monstrous, Mattern," the mbretersha went on, in the sweet voice which suited her now, "because I thought you and your kind were, though forms of our race, monstrous forms—not only without beauty, but without dignity or intelligence or compassion."

"Maybe you were right," he said.

"But since I have learned to know you and to—like you, I have come to realize that outward semblances are meaningless. I may appear one way in your universe, another way in mine, but I am the same I. If there is beauty—" and she gave what, in a lesser personage, would have been almost a giggle—"it is an inner beauty."

Mattern could not agree with this premise. Although he had admired the mbretersha on Ferr, he felt quite differently toward her now, and because of no suddenly discovered inner beauty.

"You'll stay this way in this universe then?" he asked. "It makes it so much more comfortable for me—than just a collection of shadows," he added hastily.

"I will stay this way permanently while I am in your universe, Mattern," she told him, "if, in your turn, you will accept me as—as—"

"As my shipmate," Mattern finished, "my kqyres. I have already done so."

"Not merely as your *shipmate*."

"As my—wife?" he blurted, wondering whether he was reading her mind or whether she was projecting so forcibly into his that he merely spoke her thoughts for her.

She nodded.

To be chained again, after this brief moment of freedom! He wanted her, right enough, and he was delighted to have her for his partner, his companion, but he saw no need for formal commitments between them.

"You're the mbretersha," he protested, "the queen. It wouldn't be right for you to marry a commoner!"

"And you," she retorted, "are one of nature's own noblemen, and, hence, a fitting consort for me. There is no one in either universe whom I could marry without lowering myself," she explained, "so I might as well wed where there is a basis of respect, of admiration, and, to be sure, expediency."

"But—but *our* ceremony wouldn't be valid in *your* universe, would it?" he spluttered wildly. "And *your* ceremony—"

"We will have two ceremonies, Mattern, one in each universe."

This, he could see in alarm, was going to be a truly lasting marriage.

Mattern was happy with the mbretersha, for she knew how to satisfy a man's every dream as well as his desires, and of course, being the kqyres, she was the only woman who would not be disturbed by the presence of one on board. Moreover, she was a woman for whom a universe could be risked, a woman to whom worlds could be offered—in short, just as he was the only man

worthy of her, so she was the only woman worthy of him.

But sometimes he fancied that the mbretersha's blue eyes had the same haunting familiarity that he had seen in Lyddy's and Alard's, and he wondered. Alard's had been explicable enough; he and Mattern had had the same mother. But why should Lyddy also have his mother's eyes—and, stranger still, why should the mbretersha?

Len could not help wondering whether, to create the ideal fantasy, the ultimate carrot, the xhindi had reached far back in his mind to get the earliest—and thus the most fundamental—illusion of beauty for him. Could both Lyddy and the mbretersha have been deliberately modeled on his mother, and was the mbretersha's form in normspace merely whatever she chose it to be—or appear to be?

Oh, well, he thought, perhaps an artful illusion is the truest form of reality.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the

works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.