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SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE

Robert A. HEINLEIN  
THE STAR BEAST

John Thomas had a most unusual pet...  
and an incredible problem with intergalactic  
implications!



# THE STAR BEAST

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FOR DIANE AND CLARK

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LUMMOX was bored and hungry. The latter was a normal state; creatures of LummoX's breed were always ready for a little snack, even after a full meal. Being bored was less usual and derived directly from the fact that LummoX's chum and closest associate, John Thomas Stuart, had not been around all day, having chosen to go off somewhere with his friend Betty.

One afternoon was a mere nothing; LummoX could hold his breath that long. But he knew the signs and understood the situation; John Thomas had reached the size and age when he would spend more and more time with Betty, or others like her, and less and less time with LummoX. Then there would come a fairly long period during which John Thomas would spend practically no time with LummoX but at the end of which there would arrive a new John Thomas which would presently grow large enough to make an interesting playmate.

From experience LummoX recognized this cycle as necessary and inevitable; nevertheless the immediate prospect was excruciatingly boring. He lumbered listlessly around the back yard of the Stuart home, looking for anything—a grasshopper, a robin, anything at all that might be worth looking at. He watched a hill of ants for a while. They seemed to be moving house; an endless chain was dragging little white grubs in one direction while a countermarching line returned for more grubs. This killed a half hour.

Growing tired of ants, he moved away toward his own house. His number-seven foot came down on the ant hill and crushed it, but the fact did not come to his attention. His own house was just big enough for him to back into it and was the end building of a row of decreasing size; the one at the far end would have made a suitable doghouse for a chihuahua.

Piled outside his shed were six bales of hay. LummoX pulled a small amount off one bale and chewed it lazily. He did not take a second bite because he had taken as much as he thought he could steal and not have it noticed. There was nothing to stop him from eating the entire pile—except the knowledge that John Thomas would bawl him out bitterly and might even refuse for a week or more to scratch him with the garden rake. The household rules required LummoX not to touch food other than natural forage until it was placed in his manger; LummoX usually obeyed as he hated dissension and was humiliated by disapproval.

Besides, he did not want hay. He had had hay for supper last night, he would have it again tonight, and again tomorrow night. LummoX wanted something with more body and a more interesting flavor. He ambled over to the low fence which separated the several acres of back yard from Mrs. Stuart's formal garden, stuck his head over and looked longingly at Mrs. Stuart's roses. The

fence was merely a 'symbol marking the line he must not cross. LummoX had crossed it once, a few years earlier, and had sampled the rose bushes

- . . . just a sample, a mere appetizer, but Mrs. Stuart had made such a fuss that he hated to think about it even now. Shuddering at the recollection, he backed hastily away from the fence:

But he recalled some rose bushes that did not belong to Mrs. Stuart, and therefore in LummoX's opinion,

did not belong to anybody. They were in the garden of the Donahues, next door west. There was a possible way, which LummoX had been thinking about lately, to reach these "ownerless" rose bushes.

The Stuart place was surrounded by a ten-foot concrete wall. LummoX had never tried to climb over it, although he had nibbled the top of it in places. In the rear there was one break in it, where the gully draining the land crossed the property line. The gap in the wall was filled by a massive grating of eight-by-eight timbers, bolted together with extremely heavy bolts. The vertical timbers were set in the stream bed and the contractor who had erected it had assured Mrs. Stuart that it would stop LummoX, or a herd of elephants, or anything else too big-hipped to crawl between the timbers.

LummoX knew that the contractor was mistaken, but his opinion had not been asked and he had not offered it. John Thomas had not expressed an opinion either, but he had seemed to suspect the truth; he had emphatically ordered LummoX not to tear the grating down.

LummoX had obeyed. He had sampled it for flavor, but the wooden timbers had been soaked in something which gave them a really unbearable taste; he let them be.

But LummoX felt no responsibility for natural forces. He had noticed, about three months back, that spring rains had eroded the gully so that two of the vertical timbers were no longer imbedded but were merely resting on the dry stream bed. LummoX had been thinking about this for several weeks and had found that a gentle nudge tended to spread the timbers at the bottom. A slightly heavier nudge might open up a space wide enough without actually tearing down the grating...

***LummoX lumbered down to check up. Still more of***

the stream bed had washed away in the last rain; one of the vertical timbers hung a few inches free of the sand. The one next to it was barely resting on the ground. LummoX smiled like a simple-minded golliwog and carefully, delicately insinuated his head between the two big posts. He pushed gently.

Above his head came a sound of rending wood and the pressure suddenly relieved. Startled, LummoX pulled his head out and looked up. The upper end of one eight-by-eight had torn free of its bolts; it pivoted now on a lower horizontal girder. LummoX clucked to himself. Too bad. . . but it couldn't be helped. LummoX was not one to weep over past events; what has been, must be. No doubt John Thomas would be vexed

but in the meantime here was an opening through the grating. He lowered his head like a football linesman, set himself in low gear, and pushed' on through. There followed several sounds of protesting and rending wood and sharper ones of broken bolts, but LummoX ignored

it all; he was on the far side now, a free agent.

He paused and raised up like a caterpillar, lifting legs one and three, two and four, off the ground, and

- looked around. It was certainly nice to be outside; he wondered why he had not done it sooner. It had been a long time since John Thomas had taken him out, even for a short walk.

He was still looking around, sniffing free air, when an unfriendly character charged at him, yapping and barking furiously. LummoX recognized him, an oversized and heavily muscled mastiff that ran ownerless and free in the neighborhood; they had often exchanged insults through the grating. LummoX had nothing against dogs; in the course of his long career with the Stuart family he had known several socially and had found them pretty fair company in the absence of John Thomas. But this mastiff was another matter. He fancied himself boss of the neighborhood, bullied other

dogs, terrorized cats, and repeatedly challenged LummoX to come out and fight like a dog.

Nevertheless LummoX smiled at him, opened his mouth wide and, in a lisping, baby-girl voice from somewhere far back inside him, called the mastiff a very bad name. The dog gasped. it is likely that he did not comprehend what LummoX had said, but he did know that he had been insulted. He recovered himself and renewed the attack, barking louder than ever and raising an unholy ruckus while dashing around LummoX and making swift sorties at his flanks to nip at LummoX's legs.

LummoX remained reared up, watching the dog but making no move. He did add to his earlier remark a truthful statement about the dog's ancestry and an untruthful one about his habits; they helped to keep the mastiff berserk. But on the dog's seventh round trip he cut fairly close to where LummoX's first pair of legs would have been had LummoX had all eight feet on the ground; LummoX

ducked his head the way a frog strikes at a fly. His mouth opened like a wardrobe trunk and gobbled the mastiff.

Not bad, LummoX decided as he chewed and swallowed. Not bad at all. . . and the collar made a crunchy tidbit. He considered whether or not to go back through the grating, now that he had had a little snack, and pretend that he had never been outside at all. However, there were still those ownerless rose bushes .

and no doubt John Thomas would make it inconvenient for him to get out again soon. He ambled away parallel to the Stuart’s rear wall, then swung around the end onto .the Donahue land. -

John Thomas Stuart xi got home shortly before dinner time, having already dropped Betty Sorensen at her home. He noticed, as he landed, that LummoX was not in sight, but he assumed that his pet was in his

shed. His mind was not on LummoX, but on the age-old fact that females do not operate by logic, at least as logic is understood by males.

He was planning to enter Western Tech; Betty wanted them both to attend the state university. He had pointed out that he could not get the courses he wanted at State U.; Betty had insisted that he could and had looked up references to prove her point. He had rebutted by saying that it was not the name of a course that mattered, but who taught it. The discussion had fallen to pieces when she had refused to concede that he was an authority.

He had absent-mindedly unstrapped his harness copter, while dwelling on the illogic of the feminine mind, and was racking it in the hallway, when his mother burst into his presence. “John Thomas! Where have you been?”

He tried to think what he could have slipped on now. It was a bad sign when she called him “John

***Thomas” . . . “John” or “Johnnie” was okay, or even***

“Johnnie Boy.” But “John Thomas” usually meant that he had been accused, tried, and convicted in absentia.

“Huh? Why, I told you at lunch, Mum. Out hopping with Betty. We flew over to...”

“Never mind that! Do you know what that beast has done?”

Now he had it. LummoX. He hoped it wasn’t Mum’s garden. Maybe Lum had just knocked over his own house again. If so, Mum would level off presently. Maybe he had better build a new one, bigger. “What’s the trouble he asked cautiously.

‘What’s the trouble?’ What isn’t the trouble? John Thomas, this time you simply will have to get rid of it. This is the last straw.”



“I said no such thing. If you’ll be quiet, I’ll tell you what happened.”

It appeared that Mrs. Donahue had surprised LummoX when he had eaten only four or five of her rose bushes. With much courage and little sense she had run at him with a broom, to scream and belabor him about the head. She had not followed the mastiff, though he could have managed her with one gulp; LummoX had a sense of property as nice as that of any house cat. People were not food; in fact, people were almost invariably friendly.

***So his feelings were hurt. He had lumbered away from there, pouting. -***

The next action report on LummoX was for a point two miles away and about thirty minutes later. The Stuarts lived in a suburban area of Westville; open country separated it from the main part of town. Mr. Ito had a small farm in this interval, where he handraised vegetables for the tables of gourmets. Mr. Ito apparently had not known what it was that he had found pulling up his cabbages and gulping them down. LummoX’s long residence in the vicinity was certainly no secret, but Mr. Ito had no interest in other people’s business and had never seen LummoX before.

But he showed no more hesitation than had Mrs. Donahue. He dashed into his house and came out with a gun that had been handed down to him from his grandfather—a relic of the Fourth World War of the sort known affectionately as a “tank killer.”

Mr. Ito steadied the gun on a potting bench and let LummoX have it where he would have sat down had LummoX been constructed for such. The noise scared Mr. Ito (he had never heard the weapon fired) and the flash momentarily blinded him. When he blinked his eyes and recovered, the thing had gone.

But it was easy to tell the direction in which it had gone. This encounter had not humiliated LummoX as had the brush with Mrs. Donahue; this frightened him almost out of his wits. While busy with his fresh green salad he had been faced toward a triplet of Mr. Ito’s greenhouses. When the explosion ticked him and the blast assailed his hearing, LummoX shifted into high gear and got underway in the direction he was heading. Ordinarily he used a leg firing -order of 1,4,5,8,2,3,6,7 and repeat, good for speeds from a slow crawl to fast as a trotting horse; he now broke from a standing start into a double-ended gallop, moving legs 1 & 2 & 5 & 6 together, alternated with 3 & 4 & 7 & 8.

LummoX was through the three greenhouses before he had time to notice them, leaving a tunnel suitable for a medium truck. Straight ahead, three miles away, lay downtown Westville. It might have been better if he had been headed in the opposite direction toward the mountains.

John Thomas Stuart listened to his mother's confused account with growing apprehension. When he heard about Mr. Ito's greenhouses, he stopped thinking about his savings account and started wondering what assets he could convert into cash. His jump harness was almost new . . . but shucks! it wouldn't pay the damage. He wondered if there was any kind of a dicker he could work with the bank? One sure thing: Mum wouldn't help him out, not the state she was in.

***Later reports were spotty. LummoX seemed to have***

gone across country until he hit the highway leading into town. A transcontinental trucker had complained to a traffic officer, over a cup of coffee, that -he had just seen a robot pedatruck with no license plates and that the durned thing had been paying no attention to traffic lanes. But the trucker had used it as an excuse to launch a diatribe about the danger of robot drivers and how there was no substitute for a human driver, sitting in the cab and keeping his eyes open for emergencies. The traffic patrolman had not seen LummoX, being already at his coffee when LummoX passed, and had not - been impressed since the trucker was obviously prejudiced. Nevertheless he had phoned in.

Traffic control center in Westville paid no attention to the report; control was fully occupied with a reign of terror.

***John Thomas interrupted his mother. "Has anybody***

been hurt?' -

"Hurt? I don't know. Probably. John Thomas, you've got to get rid of that beast at once."

He ignored that statement; it seemed the wrong time to argue it. "What else happened?"

Mrs. Stuart did not know in detail. Near the middle of town LummoX came down a local chute from the overhead freeway. He was moving slowly now and with hesitation; traffic and large numbers of people confused him. He stepped off the street onto a slidewalk. The walk ground to a stop, not being designed for six tons of concentrated load; fuses had blown, circuit breakers had opened, and pedestrian traffic at the busiest time of day was thrown into confusion for twenty blocks of the shopping district.

***Women had screamed, children and dogs had - added***

to the excitement, safety officers had tried to restore order, and poor LummoX, who had not meant any harm and had not intended to visit the shopping district anyway, made a perfectly natural mistake. . . the big dis

play windows of the Bon Marché looked like a refuge



“Is that what you call it?-Lummox? It doesn’t seem strong enough. No, we got it out of there. It’s under the West Arroyo viaduct. . . I hope.”

The answer sounded ominous. “What do you mean: ‘you hope’?”

“Well, first we blocked off Main and Hamilton, then we chivvied it out of the store with fire extinguishers. Nothing else seemed to bother it; solid slugs just bounced off. Say, what’s that beast’s hide made of?

Ten-point steel?”

“Uh, not exactly.” Sergeant Mendoza’s satire was closer to fact than John Thomas cared to discuss; he still was wondering if Lummox had eaten any iron. After the mishap of the digested Buick Lummox’s growth had taken an enormous spurt; in two weeks he had jumped from the size of a misshapen hippopotamus to his present unlikely dimensions, more growth than he had shown in the preceding generation. It had made him extremely gaunt, like a canvas tarpaulin draped over a scaffolding, his quite unearthly skeleton pushing through his skin; it had taken three years

of a high-caloric diet to make him chubby again. Since that time John Thomas had tried to keep metal away from Lummox, most especially iron, even though his father and his grandfather had always fed him tidbits of scrap metal.

***“Urn. Anyhow the fire extinguishers dug him out-***

only he sneezed and knocked two men down. After that we used more fire extinguishers to turn him down Hamilton, meaning to herd him into open country where he couldn’t do so much damage . . . seeing as how we couldn’t find you. We were making out pretty well, with only an occasional lamp post knocked down, or ground car stepped on, or such, when we came to where we meant to turn him off on Hillcrest and head him back to your place. But he got away from us and headed out onto the viaduct, ran into the guard rail and went off, and . . . well, you’ll see, right now. Here we are.”

Half a dozen police cars were hovering over the end of the viaduct Surrounding the area were many private air ears and an air bus or two; the patrol cars were keeping them back from the scene. There were several hundred harness flyers as well, darting like bats in and out among the vehicles and making the police problem more difficult On the ground a few regular

- police, supplemented by emergency safety officers wearing arm bands, were trying to hold the crowd back and were diverting traffic away from the viaduct and from the freight road that ran under it down the arroyo. Sergeant Mendoza’s driver threaded his way through the cars in the air, while speaking



John Thomas jumped off and turned to face him. Well, the fall apparently had not hurt Lum any; that was a relief. He would get hhp home first and then go over him inch by inch.

In the meantime LummoX was nuzzling his legs and making a sound remarkably like a purr. John looked stern. "Bad Lummie! Bad, bad Lununie . . . you're a mess, aren't you?"

LummoX looked embarrassed. He lowered his head to the ground, looked up at his friend, and opened his mouth wide. "I didn't mean to," he protested in his baby-girl voice.

'You didn't mean to. You didn't mean to! Oh, no, you never do. I'm going to take your front feet and stuff them down your throat. You know that, don't you? I'm going to beat you to a pulp and then use you - for a rug. No supper for you. You didn't mean to, indeed!"

The bright red car came close and hovered. "Okay?" demanded Chief Dreiser.

"Sure."

"All right. Here's the plan. I'm going to move that barrier up ahead. You get him-back up on Hillcrest, going out the upper end of the draw. There will be an escort waiting; you fall in behind and stay with it all the way home. Get me?"

"Okay." John Thomas saw that in both directions the arroyo road had been blocked with riot shields, tractors with heavy armor mounted on their fronts, so that a temporary barrier could be thrown across a street or square. Such equipment was standard for any city safety force since the Riots of '91, but he could not recall that Westville had ever used them; he began to realize that the day that LummoX went to town would not soon be forgotten.

But he was happy that LummoX had been too timid to munch on those steel shields. He was beginning to hope that his pet had been too busy all afternoon to

eat any ferrous metal. He turned back to him. "All right, get your ugly carcass out of that hole. We're going home."

LummoX complied eagerly; the viaduct again trembled as he brushed against it. "Make me a saddle."

LummoX's midsection slumped down a couple of feet. He thought about it very hard and his upper surface shaped itself into contours resembling a chair. "Hold still," John Thomas ordered. "I don't want any mashed fingers." LummoX did so, -quivering a little, and the young man scrambled up, grabbing at slip folds in LummoX's durable hide. He sat himself like a rajah ready for a tiger hunt. - -







John Thomas did not answer. He had not realized it; now he saw that it was inevitable. Dreiser went on in a kindly voice, "Try not to worry about it. You seem like a good boy and everybody thought well of your father. Now I've got to go in and have a word with your mother. You had better stay here until my man arrives . . . and then maybe sort of introduce him to, uh, this thing." He passed a doubtful eye over LummoX.

John Thomas stayed while the police chief went back to the house. Now was the time to give LummoX whatfor, but he did not have the heart for it. Not just then.

## II

### ***The Department of Spatial Affairs***

- TO John Thomas Stuart xi the troubles of himself and LummoX seemed unique and unbearable, yet he was not alone, even around Westville. Little Mr. Ito was suffering from an always fatal disease-old age. It would kill him soon. Behind uncounted closed doors in Westyule other persons suffered silently the countless forms
- of quiet desperation which can close in on a man, or woman, for reasons of money, family, health, or face.

Farther away, in the state capital, -the Governor stared hopelessly at a stack of papers-evidence that would certainly send to prison his oldest and most trusted friend. Much farther away, on Mars, a prospector abandoned his wrecked sandmobile and got ready to attempt the long trek back to Outpost. He would never make it.

Incredibly farther away, twenty-seven light years, the Starship Bolivar was entering - an interspatial transition. A flaw in a- tiny relay.. would cause that relay to operate a tenth of a second later than it should. The S,S. Bolivar would wander between the stars for many years.. . but she would never find her way home.

Inconceiveably farther from Earth, half way across the local star cloud, a race of arboreal crustaceans was slowly losing to a younger, more aggressive race of amphibians. It would be several thousands Earth years before the crustaceans - were extinct, but the issue was not in doubt. This was regrettable (by human standards) for the crustacean race had mental and spiritual abilities which complemented human traits in a fashion which could have permitted a wealth of

civilized cooperation with them. But when the first Earth-humans landed there, some eleven thousand years in the future, the crustaceans would be long dead.

Back on Earth at Federation Capital His Excellency the Right Honorable Henry - Gladstone Kiku, M. A. (Oxon,) Lift. D. honoris causa (Capetown), O.B.E., Permanent Under Secretary for Spatial Affairs, was not worried about the doomed crustaceans because he would never know of them. He was not yet worried about S.S. Bolivar but he would be. Aside from the ship, the loss of one passenger in that ship would cause a chain reaction of headaches for Mr. Kiku and all his associates for years to come.

Anything and everything outside Earth's ionosphere was Mr. Kiku's responsibility and worry. Anything which concerned the relationships between Earth and any part of the explored universe was also his responsibility. Even affairs which were superficially strictly Earthside were also his concern, if they affected or were in any way affected by anything which was extra-terrestrial, interplanetary, or interstellar in nature-a very wide range indeed.

His problems included such things as the importation of Martian sand grass, suitably mutated, for the

Tibetan plateau. Mr. Kiku's office had not approved that until after a careful mathematical examination of the possible effect on the Australian sheep industry-and a dozen other factors. Such things were done cautiously, with the gruesome example of Madagascar and the Mar.

tian berryroot always before them. Economic decisions did not upset Mr. Kiku, no matter how many toes

he stepped on; other sorts kept him awake nights-such as his decision not to give police escorts to Goddard exchange students from Procyon VII despite the very real danger to them from provincial Earthmen with

prejudices against beings having unearthly arrangements of limbs or eyes or such-the cephalopods of that planet were a touchy people and something very like a police escort was their own usual punishment for criminals. -

Mr. Kiku had an extremely large staff to help him, of course, and, also of course, the help of the Secretary himself. The Secretary made speeches, greeted Very Important Visitors, gave out interviews, and in many other ways eased for Mr. Kiku an otherwise unbearable load-Mr. Kiku would be first to admit this. As long as the current Secretary behaved himself, minded his business, took care of public appearances, and let the Under Secretary get on with the department's - work, he had Mr. Kiku's approval. Of course, if he failed to pull his load or threw his weight around, Mr. Kiku was capable of finding ways to get rid of him. But it had















“Uh . . .” He turned to his mother. “Why not fix breakfast for them, Mum? I’ve still got to wake LummoX and feed him.” -

By the time LummoX had been wakened and fed and had had matters explained to him, by the time five patrolmen had each enjoyed a second cup of coffee after a hot meal, the feeling was more that of a social event than an arrest. It was long past -seven before the procession was on the road.

It was nine o’clock before they got LummoX backed into the temporary cage outside the courthouse. LummoX had been delighted by the smell of steel and had wanted to stop and nibble it; John Thomas was forced to be firm. He went inside with LummoX and petted him and talked to him while the door was welded shut, He had been worried when he saw the massive steel cage, for he had never got around to telling Chief Dreiser that steel was less than useless against LummoX.

Now it seemed too late, especially as the Chief was proud of the pen. There had been no time to pour a foundation, so the Chief had ordered an open-work box of steel girders, top, bottom, and sides, with one end left open until LummoX could be shut in.

Well, thought John Thomas, they all knew so much and they didn’t bother to ask me. He decided simply to warn LummoX not to eat a bite of the cage, under dire threats of pLxnishment. . . and hope for the best.

LummoX was inclined to argue; from his point of view it was as silly as attempting to pen a hungry boy by stacking pies around him. One of the workmen

paused, lowered his welding torch and said, “You know, it sounded just like that critter was- talking.”

“He was,” John Thomas answered briefly.

“Oh.” The man looked at LummoX, then went back to work. Human speech on the part of extra-terrestrials was no novelty, especially on stereo programs; the man

seemed satisfied. But shortly he paused again. “I don’t hold with animals talking,” he announced. John Thomas did not answer; it did -not seem to be a remark to which an answer could be made.

Now that he had time John Thomas was anxious to examine something on LummoX which had been worrying him. - He had first noticed the symptoms on the morning following LummoX’s disastrous stroll~ two swellings located where LummoX’s shoulders would have been had he been so equipped. Yesterday they had seemed larger, which disturbed him, for he had hoped that they were just bruises . . . not that LummoX bruised easily.





“Why?” asked Lummox.

“Never mind ‘why.’ You wait for me here.”

“All right.” -

There was a crowd on the courthouse lawn, people gawking at Lummox in his new notoriety. Chief Dreiser had ordered rope barriers erected and a couple of his men were present to see that they were respected. The two young people ducked under the ropes and pushed through the crowd to the courthouse steps. The county clerk’s office was on the second floor; there they found his chief deputy, an elderly maiden lady.

Miss Schreiber took the same view of registering Lummox as free from judgment that John Thomas did. But Betty pointed out that it was not up to the county clerk to decide what was an eligible chattel under the law, and cited an entirely fictitious case about a man who homesteaded a multiple echo. Miss Schreiber reluctantly filled out forms, accepted the modest fee, and gave them a certified copy.

It was almost ten o’clock. John Thomas hurried out and started downstairs. He stopped when he saw that Betty had paused at a penny weighing machine.

“Come

• on, Betty,” he demanded. “This is no time for that.”

“I’m not weighing myself,” she answered while staring into the mirror attached to it. “I’m checking my makeup. I’ve got to look my best.”

“You look all right.”

“Why, Johnnie, a compliment!”

“It wasn’t a compliment. Hurry up. I’ve got to tell Lummox something.”

“Throttle back and hold at ten thousand. I’ll bring you in.” She wiped off her eyebrows, painted them back in the smart Madame Satan pattern, and decided that it made her look older. She considered adding a rolling-dice design on her right cheek, but skipped it as Johnnie was about to boil over. They hurried down and outdoors. -

More moments were wasted convincing a policeman that they belonged inside the barrier. Johnnie saw that two men were standing by Lummox’s ~cage. He broke into a run. “Hey! You two! Get away from there!”

Judge O’Farrell turned around and blinked. “What is your interest, young man?” The other man turned but said nothing.

“Me? Why, I’m his owner. He’s not used to strangers. So go back of the rope, will you?” He turned to Lummox. “It’s all right, baby. Johnnie’s here.”

**“Howdy, Judge.” -**

“Oh. Hello, Betty.” The~ judge looked at her as if trying to decide why she was present, then turned to John Thomas. ‘You must be the Stuart boy. I’m Judge O’Farrell”

“Oh. Excuse me, Judge,” John Thomas answered, his ears turning pink. “I thought you were a sightseer.”

“A natural error. Mr. Greenberg, this is the Stuart boy . . . John Thomas Stuart. Young man, this is the Honorable Sergei Greenberg, Special Commissioner for the Department of Spatial Affairs.” He looked around. “Oh yes - . - this is Miss Betty Sorenson, Mr. Commissioner. Betty, why have you done those silly things to your face?”

She ignored him with dignity. ‘Honored to meet you, Mr. Commissioner.”

“Just ‘Mr. Greenberg,’ please, Miss Sorenson.” Greenberg turned to Johnnie. “Any relation to the John Thomas Stuart?”

“I’m John Thomas Stuart the Eleventh,” Johnnie answered simply. “I suppose you mean my great-greatgreat grandfather.”

“I guess that would be it. I was born on Mars, almost within sight of his statue. I had no idea your family was mixed up in this. Perhaps we can have a gab about Martian history later.”

“I’ve never been to Mars,” Johnnie admitted.

“No? That’s surprising. But you’re young yet.”

***Betty listened, ears almost twitching, and decided***

that this judge, if that was what he was, would be an even softer mark than Judge O’Farrell. It was hard to remember that Johnnie’s name meant anything special,,especially since it didn’t. Not around Westville.

Greenberg went on, “You’ve made me lose two bets, Mr. Stuart.”

“Sir?”

“I thought this creature would prove not to be from ‘Out There.’ I was wrong; that big fellow is certainly not native to Earth. But I was equally sure that, if he was e.-t., I could attribute him, I’m not an exotic zoologist, but in my business one has to keep skimming such things . . . look at the pictures at least. But I’m stumped. What is he and where did he come from?”

“Uh, why, he’s just LummoX. That’s what we call him. My great grandfather brought him back in the Trail Blazer.. . her second trip.”





cause of him.” Greenberg gestured at LummoX. “There was a chance that your pet might be of a race having treaty rights with us. Once or twice, strange as it may

- seem, a foreigner visiting this planet has been mistaken for a wild animal, with - . - shall we say ‘unfortunate’ results?” Greenberg frowned, recalling the terrible hushed-up occasion when a member of the official family of the Ambassador from Llador had been found, dead and stuffed - in a curiosity shop in the Virgin Islands. “But no such hazard exists here.”

“Oh. I guess not, sir. LummoX is . . . well, he’s just a member of our family.” -

“Precisely.” The Commissioner spoke to Judge O’Farrell. “May I consult you a moment, Judge? Privately?”

“Certainly, sir.” --

The men moved, away; Betty joined John Thomas. “It’s a cinch,” she whispered, “if you can keep from making more breaks.” -

“What did I do?” he protested. “And what makes you think it’s going to be easy?”

“It’s obvious. He likes you, he likes LummoX.”

“I don’t see how that pays for the ground floor of the Bon Marché. Or all those lamp posts.”

“Just keep your blood pressure down and follow my lead. Before we are through, they’ll be paying us. You’ll see.”

A short distance away - Mr. Greenberg was saying to Judge O’Farrell, “Judge, from what I have learned it seems to me that the Department of Spatial Affairs should withdraw from this case.”

“Eh? I don’t follow you, sir.”

“Let me explain. What I would like to do is to postpone the hearing twenty-four hours while I - have my conclusions checked by the department. Then I can withdraw and let the local authorities handle it. Meaning you, of course.”

Judge O’Farrell pursed his lips. “I don’t like last-minute postponements, Mr. Commissioner. It has always seemed unfair to me to order busy people to gather together, to their expense and personal inconvenience, then tell them to come back another day. It doesn’t have the flavor of justice.”

Greenberg frowned. “True. Let me see if we can arrive at it another way. From what young Stuart tells me I am certain that this ease is not one calling for intervention under the Federation’s xenic policies, even though the center of interest is extra-terrestrial and therefore a legal cause for intervention if needed. Although the department has the power, that power is exercised only when

necessary to avoid trouble with governments of other planets. Earth has hundreds of thousands of e.-t. animals; it has better than thirty thousand non-human xenians, either residents or - visitors, having legal status under treaties as 'human' even though they are obviously non-human. Xenophobia being what it is, particularly in our cultural backwaters . . . no, I wasn't referring to Westville! Human nature - being what it is, each of those foreigners is a potential source of trouble in our foreign relations.

"Forgiv~ me for saying what you already know; it is a necessary foundation. The department can't go around wiping the noses of all our xenic visitors -

even those that have noses. We haven't the personnel and certainly not the inclination. If one of them gets into trouble, it is usually sufficient to advise the local magistrate of our treaty obligations to the xenian's home planet. In rare cases the department intervenes. This, in my opinion, is not such a case. In the first place it seems that our friend LummoX here is an 'animal under the law and..."

"Was there doubt?" the judge asked in astonishment. "There might have been. That's why I am here. But, despite his limited ability to talk, his other limitations would keep such a breed from rising to a level where

we could accept it as civilized; therefore he is an animal. Therefore he has only the usual rights of animals under our humane laws. Therefore the department need not concern itself." - -

"I see. Well, no one is going to be cruel to him, not in my court."

"Certainly. But for another quite sufficient reason the department is not interested. Let us suppose that this creature is 'human' in the sense that law and custom and treaty have attached to that word since we first made contact with the Great Race of Mars. He is not, but suppose it."

"Stipulated." agreed Judge O'Farrell.

"We stipulate it. Nevertheless he cannot be a concern of the department because. . . Judge, do you know the history of the Trail Blazer?"

- "Vaguely, from grammar school days. I'm not a student of spatial exploration. Our own Earth is confusing enough."

"Isn't it, though? Well, the Trail Blazer made three

- of the first interspatial transition flights, when such flights were as reckless as the voyage Columbus attempted. They did not know where they were going and they had only hazy notions about how to get back in fact the Trail Blazer never came back from her third trip." - -

"Yes, yes. I remember."

“The point is, young Stuart-I can’t call him by his full name; it doesn’t seem right- Stuart tells me that this loutish creature with the silly smile is a souvenir of the Trail Blazer’s second cruise. That’s .all I need to know. W~ have no treaties with any of the planets she visited, no trade, no intercourse of any sort. Legally they don’t exist. Therefore the only laws that apply to LummoX are our own domestic laws; therefore the department should not intervene-and even- if -it did, a special master such as myself would be obliged to rule entirely by domestic law. Which you are better qualified to do than I.”

Judge O’Farrell nodded. “Well, I have no objection to resuming jurisdiction. Shall we go in?”

“Just a moment. I suggested a delay because this case has curious features. I wanted to refer back to the department to make sure that- my theory is correct and that I have not missed some important precedent or law. But I am willing to withdraw at once if you can assure me of one thing. This creature . . . I understand that, despite its mild appearance, it turned out to be destructive, even dangerous?” -

***O’Farrell nodded. ‘So I understand . . . unofficially***

- of course.”

“Well, has there been any demand that it be destroyed?”,

“Well,” the judge answered slowly, “again unofficially, -

I know that such a demand will be made. It has come to my attention privately that our chief of police in-

- tends to ask the court to order the animal’s destruction as a public safety measure. I anticipate prayers from private sources as well.”

Mr. Greenberg looked worried. “As bad as that? Well, Judge, what is your attitude? If you try the case, are you going to let the animal be destroyed?”

- Judge O’Farrell retorted, “Sir, that is an improper question.”

Greenberg turned red. “I beg your pardon. But I must get at it in some fashion.

You realize that this specimen is unique? Regardless of what it has done, or how dangerous it may be (though I’m switched if I’m con- vinced of that), nevertheless its interest to science is such that it should be preserved. Can’t you assure me that you will not order it destroyed?”

“Young man, you are urging me to prejudge a case, or a portion of a case. Your attitude is most improper!”

Chief Dreiser chose this bad time to come Jiurrying

up. “Judge, rye been looking all over for you. Is this hearing going to take place? I’ve got seven men who...”

O'Farrell interrupted him. 'Chief, this is Mr. Commissioner Greenberg. Mr. Commissioner, our Chief of Safety.'

"Honored, Chief."

"Howdy, Mr. Commissioner. Gentlemen, about this hearing. I'd like to know..."

"Chief," the judge interrupted brusquely, "just tell my bailiff to hold things in readiness. Now leave us in private, if you please."

"But.. ." The chief shut up and backed away, while muttering something excusable in a harassed policeman. O'Farrell turned back to Greenberg.

The Commissioner had had time during the interruption to recall that he was supposed to be without personal emotions. He said smoothly, "I withdraw the question, Judge. I had no intention of committing an impropriety." He grinned. "Under other circumstances I might have found myself slapped for contempt, eh?"

O'Farrell grudgingly smiled. "It is possible."

"Do you have a nice jail? I have over seven months leave saved up and no chance to~take it."

"You shouldn't overwork, young man. I always find time to fish, no matter how full the docket. 'Allah does not subtract from man's allotted time those hours spent in fishing.'"

"That's a - good sentiment. But I still have a problem. You know that I could insist on postponement while I consult the department?"

"Certainly. Perhaps you should. Your decision should not be affected by my opinions."—

"No. But I agree with you; last-minute postponements are vexations." He was thinking that to refer to the department, in this odd case, meant to consult Mr. Kiku

- . and he could hear the Under Secretary making disgusted remarks about "initiative" and 'responsibility'
- and "for heaven's sake, couldn't anyone else around this madhouse make a simple decision?" Greenberg made up his mind. "I think it is best for the depart
- ment to continue intervention. I'll take it, at least through a preliminary hearing."

O'Farrell smiled broadly. "I had hoped that you would. I'm looking forward to hearing you. I understand that you gentlemen from the Department of Spatial Affairs sometimes hand out an unusual brand of law."

"Really? I hope not. I mean to be a credit to Harvard Law."







“Question, your honor.”

“Yes?”

“May it please the court: my client and I have no objection if all that we are engaged in is a preliminary inquiry. But will we return to accepted procedures if we go on to terminer?” -

“This court, being convened by the Federation and acting in accordance with the body of law called ‘Customs of Civilizations’ in brief and consisting of agree-

- ments, treaties, precedents, et cetera,, between two or more planets of the Federation, or with other civilizations with which member planets of the Federation have diplomatic relations, is not bound by local procedures. It is the purpose of this court to arrive at the truth and, from there, to reach equity . . . equity under the Law. The court will not trample on local law and custom except -where they are hopelessly opposed to superior law. But where local custom is merely ritualistic, this court will ignore formality and get on with its business. Understand me?”

“Er, I believe so, sir. I may take exception later.” The small, middle-aged man who spoke seemed embarrassed.

“Any one may object at any time for any reason atid be heard. Also you may appeal from my decisions. However-. . .” Greenberg grinned warmly. “. . . I doubt if it will do you much good. -So far I have been pretty lucky in having my decisions upheld.”

“I did not intend to imply,” the man answered stiffly, “that the court ~i’as not properly..

“Sure; - sure! Let’s get on with it.” Greenberg picked up a stack of papers. “Here is a civil action. ‘Bon Marché Merchandising Corporation versus ‘LummoX,’ John Thomas Stuart XI ...”(“That name still bothers me,” he said in an aside to Judge O’Farrell.) “. . . Marie Brandley Stuart. et al., and another one like it for the Western Mutual Assurance Company, insurers of Bon Marché. Here is another, same defendants, brought by

K. Ito and his insurance company, urn, New World Casualty, Ltd., and one from the City of Westville, same defendants again . . - and still another brought by Mrs. Isabelle Donahue. Also some criminal matters

one is for harboring a dangerous animal, one for felonious harboring of same, another for negligence and another for maintaining a public nuisance.” -

John Thomas had been steadily turning white. Greenberg glanced at him and said, “They haven’t skipped much, have they, son? Cheer up . . - the condemned man always eats a hearty breakfast.” John Thomas managed a sickly grin. - Betty found his knee under the table and patted it.













“Eh? Why, yes. I hardly ever use them.”

“I like them.” He turned to the others. “Truth meters will be hooked up. No one is required to use one, but anyone choosing not to will be sworn. This court, as is its privilege, will take judicial notice of and will comment on the fact if anyone refuses the use of a truth meter.” -

John Thomas whispered to Betty, “Watch your step, Slugger.”

She whispered back, “I will, smarty! You watch yours.” Judge O’Farrell said -to Greenberg, “It will take some time to rig them. Hadn’t we better break for lunch?”

“Oh yes, lunch. Attention, everyone - . this court does not recess for lunch. I’ll ask the bailiff to take orders for coffee and sandwiches, or whatever you like while the clerk is rigging the meters. We will eat here at the table. In the meantime . . .” Greenberg fumbled for cigarettes, fumbled again. “~ , . has anybody got a match?”

Out on the lawn, LummoX, having considered the difficult question of Betty’s right to give orders, had come to the conclusion that she possibly had a special status. Each of the John Thomases had introduced into his life a person equivalent to Betty; each had insisted that the person in question must be humored in every whim. This John Thomas had already begun the process with Betty; therefore, it was best to go along with what she wanted as long as it was not too much

trouble. He lay down and went to sleep, leaving his watchman eye on guard.

He slept restlessly, disturbed by the tantalizing odor of steel. After a time he woke up and stretched, causing the cage to bulge. It seemed to him that John Thomas had been gone an unnecessarily long time. On second thought, he had not liked the way that man had taken John Thomas away . . . no, he hadn’t liked it a bit. He wondered what he should do, if anything? What would John Thomas say, if he were here?

The problem was too complex. He lay down and tasted the bars of his cage. He refrained from eating them; he merely tried them for flavor. A bit grucky, he decided, but good.

Inside, Chief Dreiser had completed his testimony and had been followed by Karnes and Mendoza. No argument had developed and the truth meters had stayed steady; Mr. deGrasse had insisted on amplifying parts of the testimony. Mr. Ito’s lawyer stipulated that Mr. Ito had fired at LummoX; Mr. Ito’s son was allowed to describe and show photographs of the consequences. Only Mrs. Donahue’s testimony was needed to complete the story of L-day.









“We’ll get to that. On another issue: I cannot grant that your analogy is valid. We are dealing here, not with a little boy, but with an animal. If this court should order the destruction of this animal, it would not

be in spirit of vengeance nor of punishment, for an animal is presumed not to understand such values. The purpose would be preventive, in order that a potential danger might not be allowed to develop into damage to life or limb or property. Your little boy can be restrained by the arms of his nurse. . . but we are dealing with a creature weighing several tons, capable of crushing a man with a careless step. There is no parallel in your cookie-stealing small boy.”

“There isn’t, huh? That little boy can grow up and wipe out a whole city by pushing one teeny little but.~

ton. So off with his headi-before he grows up. Don’t ask him why he took the cookie, don’t ask him anything! He’s a bad boy-chop his head off and save trouble.”

Greenberg found himself again biting his lip. He said, -“It is your wish that we examine LummoX?”

“I said so, didn’t I?”

“I’m not sure what you said. The court will consider it.”

Mr. Lombard said quickly, “Objection, your honor. If this extraordinary...”  
“Hold your objection, please. Court will recess for ten minutes. All will remain.”  
Greenberg got up and walked away. He took -out a cigarette, found again that he had no light, stuck the pack back in his pocket.

Blast the girl! He had had it figured how to dispose of this case smoothly, with credit to the department and everybody satisfied.. . except the Stuart boy, but

- that could not be helped . . . the boy and this precocious preposterous young mammal who had him under her wing. And under her thumb, too, he added. He could not allow this unique specimen to be destroyed. But he had meant to do it suavely . . . deny the petition of that old battle-axe, since it was obviously from malice, and tell th~ police chief privately

- to forget the other one. The Save-the-World-fuj-the Neanderthals petition didn’t matter. But- this cocky girl; by talking when she should have listened, was going to make it appear that a departmental court could be pushed into risking public welfare over a lot of sentimental, anthropomorphic bosh!

Confound her pretty blue eyes!

They would accuse him of being influenced by those pretty blue eyes, too. Too bad the child wasn’t homely.



He turned to the others. “The court announced earlier that there would be due notice if we were to continue to terminer. The court sees no reason not to. Objection?” -

***The attorneys shifted uncomfortably and looked at***

• each other. Greenberg turned to Betty. “How about you?”

***“Me? I thought I wasn’t allowed to vote.” -***

“Shall we conclude these issues today?”

She glanced at John Thomas, then said dully, “No objection,” then leaned to him and whispered, “Oh, Johnnie, I tried!”

He patted her hand under the table. “I know you did, Slugger.”

Greenberg pretended not to hear. He went on in a cold, official voice. “This court has before it a petition

asking for the destruction of the extra-terrestrial LummoX on the grounds that it is dangerous and uncontrollable. The facts have not sustained that view; the petition is denied.’ -

Betty gasped and squealed. John Thomas looked startled, then grinned for the first time. “Order, please,” Greenberg said mildly. “We have here another petition to the same end, but for different reasons.” He held up the one submitted by the Keep Earth Human League. “This court finds itself unable to follow the alleged reasoning. Petition denied. -

“We have four criminal charges, I am dismissing all four. The law requires...”

***The city attorney looked startled. “But, your honor-“***

“If you have a point, will you save it? No criminal intent can be found here, which therefore would make it appear that there could be no crime. However, constructive intent may appear where the law requires a man to exercise due prudence to protect others and it is on this ground that these issues must be judged. Prudence is based on experience, personal or vicarious, not on impossible prescience. In- the judgment of this court, the precautions taken were prudent in the light of experience . . . experience up to last Monday afternoon, that is to say.” He turned and addressed John Thomas. “What I mean, young man, is this: your precautions were ‘prudent’ so far as you knew. Now you know better. If that beast gets loose again, it will go hard with you.” -  
Johnnie swallowed. “Yessir.”

“We have remaining the civil matters of damage, Here the criteria are different. The guardian of a minor, or the owner of an animal, is responsible for damage

committed by that child or that animal, the law holding that it is better that the owner or guardian suffer than the innocent third party. Except for one point, which I will reserve for the moment, these civil ac

tions fall under that rule. First, let me note that one or more of these issues ask for real, punitive, and exemplary damages. Punitive and exemplary damages are denied; there are no grounds. I believe that we have arrived at real damages in each case and counsels have so stipulated. As to costs, the Department of Spatial Affairs has intervened in the public interest; costs will be borne by the department.”

Betty whispered, “A good thing we homesteaded him.

Look at those insurance vultures grin.” . Greenberg went on, “I reserved one point. The - question has been raised indirectly that this LummoX may not be an animal . . . and therefore not a chattel

but may be a sentient being within the meaning of ‘the Customs of Civilizations’ . . . and therefore his own master.” Greenberg hesitated. He was about to add his bit to the “Customs of Civilizations”; he was anxious not to be overruled. “We have long disavowed slavery; no sentient being may be owned. But if LummoX is

- sentient, what have we? May LummoX be held personally responsible? It would not appear that he has sufficient knowledge of our customs, nor does - it appear that he is among us by his own choice. Are the putative owners in fact his guardians and in that way responsible? All these questions turn on this: is LummoX a chattel, or a free being?

“This court expressed its opinion when it ruled that LummoX might not testify . . . at this time. But this court is not equipped to render a final decision, no matter how strongly it may believe that LummoX is an animal.

“The court will therefore start proceedings on its own motion to determine the status of LummoX. In the meantime the local authorities will take charge of LummoX and will be held responsible both for his safety and for public safety with respect to him.” Greenberg shut up and sat back.

A fly would have had his choice of open mouths. First to recover was the attorney for Western Mutual, Mr. Schneider. “Your honor? Where does that leave us?~~

“I don’t know.”

“But . . . see here, your honor, let’s face the facts. Mrs. Stuart hasn’t any property or funds that can be attached; she’s the beneficiary of a trust. Same for the boy. We expected -to levy against the beast itself; he will bring a good price in the proper market. Now you have, if you will permit me, upset the apple cart.









into our possession. We can't have our people going hungry because some moron in St Louis dropped his socks in a yeast vat."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Kiku turned back to work. He realized unhappily that he had been too brusque with Wong. His present frame of mind, he knew, was not Wong's fault, but that of Dr. Ftaeml - -

No, not Ftaeml's fault . . . his own! He knew that he should not harbor race prejudice, not in this job. He was aware intellectually that he himself was relatively safe from persecution that could arise from differences of skin and hair and facial contour for the one reason that weird creatures such as Dr. Ftaeml had made the differences between breeds of men seem less important.

Still, there it was . . . he hated Ftaeml's very shadow. He could not help it.

***If the so-and-so would wear a turban, it would help***

- . . instead of walking around with those dirty snakes on his head wiggling like a can of worms. But oh no! the Rargyllians were proud of them. There was a suggestion in their manner that anyone without them was not quite human. Come now! . . . Ftaeml was a decent chap. He made a note to invite Ftaeml to dinner, not put it off any longer. After all, he would make certain of deep~hyp. . . notic preparation; the dinner need not be difficult. But his ulcer gave a fresh twinge at the thought.

Kiku did not hold it against the Rargyllian that he had dropped an impossible problem in the department's tired lap; impossible problems were routine. It was just

well, why didn't the monster get a haircut?

The vision of the Chesterfieldian Dr. Ftaeml with a shingle cut, his scalp all lumps and bumps, enabled Mr. Kiku to smile; he resumed work feeling better. The next item was a brief of a field report . . . oh yes! Sergei Greenberg. Good boy, Sergei. He was reaching for his pen to approve the recommendation even before he had finished reading it. -

Instead of signing, he stared for almost half a second, then punched a button. "Files! Send up the full report

of Mr. Greenberg's field job, the one he got back from a few days ago."

"Do you have the reference number, sir?"

"That intervention matter . . . you find it. Wait it's, uh, Rt0411, dated Saturday. I want it right now."



“See? You don’t use your eyes and ears. Sergei, once that beast talked, you should have postponed the hearing until we knew all about him.”

“Mmmm. . . I-suppose so.”

“You suppose so! Son, your subconscious alarms should have been clanging like a bed alarm on Monday morning. As it is, you let the implications be sprung on you when you thought the trial was over. And by a girl, a mere child. I’m glad I don’t read the papers; I’ll bet they had fun.”

Greenberg blushed. He did read the papers.

“Then when she had you tangled up like a rangtangtoo trying to~ find its own feet, instead of facing her challenge and meeting it . . . Meeting it bow? By adjourning, of course, and ordering the investigation you should have ordered’ to start with, you...”

“But I did order it.”

“Don’t interrupt me; I want you browned on both sides. Then yo~ proceeded to hand down a decision

~he like of which has not been - seen since Solomon ordered the baby sawed in half. What mail-order law school did you attend?”

**“*Harvard,*” Greenberg answered sullenly. -**

“Hmm . . . Well, I shouldn’t be too harsh on you; you’re handicapped. But by the seventy-seven sevensided gods of the Saryanchil, what did you do next? First you - deny a petition from the local government itself to destroy this brute in the interest of public- safety

- . . then you reverse yourself, grant the prayer and tell them to kill him . . . subject only to routine approval of this department. All in ten minutes. Exeunt omnes, laughing. Son, I don’t mind - you making a fool of yourself, but must you include the department?”
- “Boss,” Greenberg said humbly, - “I made a mistake. When I saw the mistake, I did the only thing I could do; I reversed myself. The beast really is dangerous and there are no proper facilities for confining it in Westville. If it had not been beyond my power, I
- would have ordered it destroyed at once, without referring back for the department’s approval.. . for your approval.”

“Hummph!”

“You weren’t sitting where I was, sir. You didn’t see that solid wall bulge in. You didn’t see the destruction.”

- “I’m not impressed. Did you ever see a city that

had been flattened by a fusion bomb? What does one courthouse wall matter? . . . probably some thieving contractor didn't beef it up."

"But, boss, you should have seen the cage he broke out of first. Steel I-beams, welded. He tore them like straw."

"I recall that you inspected him in that cage. Why didn't you see to it that he was confined so that he couldn't get out?"

"Huh? Why, it's no business of the department to provide jails." -- -

"Son, a factor concerning in any way anything from 'Out There' is the very personal business of this department. You know that. OnGe you know it awake and asleep, clear down to your toes, you'll begin to trot through a perfunctory routine, like an honorary chairman sampling soup in a charity hospital. You were supposed to be there with your nose twitching and your ears quivering, on the lookout for 'special situations.' You flubbed. Now tell me about this beast. I read the report, I saw his picture. But I don't feel him."

"Well, it's a non-balancing multipedal type, eight legs and about seven feet high at the dorsal, ridge. It's..."

Kiku sat up straight. "Eight legs? Hands?"

"Hands? No."

"Manipulative organs of any sort? A modified foot?"

"None, chief . . . if there had been, I would have ordered a full-scale investigation at once. The feet are about the size of nail kegs, and as dainty. Why?"

- "Never mind. Another matter. Go on."

"The impression is something like a rhinoceros, something like a triceratops, though the articulation is unlike anything native to this planet. 'Lummox' his young master calls him and the name fits. It's a- rather engaging beast, but stupid. That's the danger; it's so big and powerful that it is likely to hurt people through clumsiness and stupidity. It does talk, but about as well as a four-year-old child . . . in fact it sounds as if it had swallowed a baby girl."

"Why stupid? I note that its master with the historybook name claims that it is bright."

Greenberg smiled. "He is prejudiced. I talked with it, boss. It's ~stupid." -

"I can't see that you have established that. Assuming that an e.-t. is stupid because he can't speak our language well is like assuming that an Italian is illiterate because he speaks broken English. A non-sequitur."



explosives were useless . . . you saw the transcript .  
at least - of power safe enough to use inside a town. So  
he tried poison. Knowing nothing about the creature,  
he used half a dozen sorts in quantities sufficient for a  
regiment and concealed in several kinds of food.” “Well?”

“Lummox gobbled them all. They didn’t even make him sleepy; in fact it seemed  
to stimulate his appetite, for the next thing he did was to eat the intake valve and  
the reservoir started to fill up again. They had to shut it off from the pumping  
station.”

Kiku snickered. “I’m beginning to like this Lummox. Did you say he ate the  
valve? What was it made of?”

“I don’t know. The usual alloy, I suppose.”

“Hmm.. . seems to like a bit of roughage in its diet. Perhaps it has a craw like  
a bird.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“What did the Chief do next?”

“Nothing as yet. I asked O’Farrell to impress on Drelser that he was likely to end  
up in a penal colony thirty light-years from Westville if he persisted in bucking  
the department. So he is waiting and trying to figure out his problem. His latest  
notion is to cast- Lummox in concrete and let him die at his own convenience.  
But O’Farrell put the nix on that one-inhumane.” -

“So Lummox is still in the reservoir, waiting for us to act, eh?” -

“I believe so, sir. He was yesterday.”

“Well, he can wait there, I suppose, until other action can be taken.” Mr. Kiku  
picked up Greenberg’s shortforth report and recommendation.

Greenberg said, “I take it that you are overruling me, sir?”

“No. What gave you that idea?” He signed the order permitting the destruction of  
Lummox and let it be swallowed by the outgoing basket. “I don’t reverse a man’s  
decision without firing him . . . and I have another job for you.”

“Oh.” Greenberg felt a twinge of compassion; he had been expecting, with relief,  
that the chief would reprove Lummox’s death sentence. Well.. . too bad

but the beast was dangerous.

Mr. Kiku went on, “Are you afraid of snakes?”

“No. I rather like them.”

“Excellent! Though it’s a feeling I can’t imagine. I’ve always been deathly afraid  
of them. Once when I was

a boy in Africa. . . never mind. Have you ever worked closely with Rargyllians? I  
don’t recall.”

Greenberg suddenly understood. "I used a Rargyllian interpreter in the Vega-VI affair. I get along all right with Rargyllians."

"I wish I did. Sergei, I have some business -which involves a Rargyllian interpreter, a Dr. FtaemL You may have heard of him."

"Yes, of course, sir."

"I'll admit that, as Rargyllians go . . ." He made the noun sound like a swear word. ". . . Ftaeml is all right. But this involvement has the odor of trouble . . . and I find my own nose for trouble blanked out by this phobia of mine. So I'm putting you on as my assistant to sniff for me." -

"I thought you didn't trust my nose, boss?"

"We'll let the blind lead the blind, if you'll forgive a switch in metaphor. Perhaps between us we'll sniff it out."

"Yes, sir. May I ask the nature.of the assignment?"

"Well . . ." Before Mr. Kiku could answer, his secretary's light flashed and her voice stated, "Your hypnotherapist is here, sir."

The Under Secretary glanced at his clock and said, "Where does the time go?" . . . then to the communicator: "Put him in my dressing room. I'll be in." He continued to Greenberg, "Ftaeml will be here in thirty minutes. I can't stop to talk, I've got to get braced for

it. You'll find what there is . . . little enough! . . . in my 'pending-urgent' file." Mr. Kiku glanced at his incoming basket, which had filled to overflowing while they talked. "It won't take five minutes. Spend -the rest

- of the time clearing up that stack of waste paper. Sign my name and hold anything that you think I must see but it had better be no more than half a dozen items, or I'll send you back to Harvard!"
- He got up hurriedly, while making a mental note to tell his secretary, from his dressing room, to note everything that went through in the next half hour and let him see it later . . . he wanted to see how the lad worked. Mr. Kiku was aware that he would die someday and he intended to see to it that Greenberg replaced him. In the meantime life should be as tough for the boy as possible.

The Under Secretary headed for his dressing room, the door ducked aside, contracted behind him; Greenberg was left alone. He was reaching for the pendingurgent file when a paper dropped into the incoming basket just as the light on it blinked red and a buzzer sounded. -

He picked up the paper, ran his eye down the middle and had just realized that it really was urgent when a similar light-and-buzzer combination showed at the interoffice communicator and its screen came to life;

Greenberg recognized the chief of the bureau of system liaison. "Boss?" the image said excitedly.

Greenberg touched the two-way switch. "Greenberg here," he answered. "I'm keeping the chief's chair warm for him. Your memo just came in, Stan. I'm reading it?"

Ibaflez looked annoyed. "Never mind that. Get me the boss."

Greenberg hesitated. Ibaflez's problem was simple, but sticky. Ships from Venus were regularly granted pratique without delay, each ship's doctor being a public health deputy. But the Ariel, already due at Port Libya, had suddenly been placed under quarantine by her doctor and was now waiting in a parking orbit. The Venerian foreign minister was aboard . . . most unfor-

- tunately, as Venus was expected to support Terra's position against Mars in the impending triangular conference.

Greenberg could stall the touchy problem until the boss was free; he could break in on the boss; he could

go over the boss's head to the Secretary himself (which meant picking an answer and presenting it so as to get that answer approved); or.. . he could act, using Mr.

Kiku's authority.

Mr. Kiku could not have predicted the emergency

- , but the boss had -a pesky habit of pushing people off the deep end.

Greenberg's summing up had been quick. He answered, "Sorry, Stan, you can't talk to the boss. I am acting for him."

"Eh? Since when?"

"Just temporarily, but I am."

Ibañez frowned. "Look, chum, you had better find the boss. Maybe you are signing his name on routine matters . . . but this is not routine. We've got to bring that ship down in a hurry. Your neck would be out a yard if you took it upon yourself to authorize me to overlook a basic rule like quarantine. Use your head."

Break quarantine? Greenberg recalled the Great Plague of '51, back in the days when the biologist serenely believed that each planetary life group was immune to the ills of other planets. "We won't break quarantine."

Ibaflez looked pained. "Sergei, we can jeopardize this conference . . . 'jeopardize?' What am I saying? We can't toss away ten years' work because some crewman has a slight fever. The quarantine must be broken. But I don't expect you to do it."

Greenberg hesitated. "He's under hypnosis, for a tough job coming up. It may be a couple of hours before you can see him." - -

Ibañez looked blank. "I'll have to tackle the Secretary. I don't dare wait two hours. That sacred cow from Venus is- like as not to order his skipper to head home

we can't risk that." -

"And we can't risk bringing in an epidemic, either. Here's what you do. Call him and tell him you are coming to get him in person. Use a fast scout. Get him aboard and leave the Ariel in quarantine orbit. Once you get him aboard the scout . . . and not before .

tell him that both you and he will attend the conference in isolation suits." The isolation suit was a sealed pressure suit; its primary use was to visit planets whose disease hazards had not yet been learned. "The scout ship and crew will have to go into quarantine, too, of course."

"Isolation suit! Oh, he'll love that. Sergei, it would be less damaging to call off the conference. An indig

- nity like that would put him against -us for certain. The jerk is poisonously proud." -

"Sure he'll love it," Greenberg explained, "once you suggest -how to play it. 'Great personal self-sacrifice'

'unwilling to risk the welfare of our beloved sister planet' . . . 'the call of duty takes precedence over any et cetera.' If you don't feel sure of it, take one of the public relations boys along. And look, ~,ll through the conference he must be attended by a physician . . . in a white suit. . . and a couple of nurses. The conference must stop every now and then while he rests

put a cot and hospital screens in the Hall of Heroes near the conference table. The idea is that he's come down with it himself but is carrying on as his dying act. Get it? Tell him before you land the scout ship . . . indirectly, of course."

Ibaflez looked perturbed. "Do you think that will work?"

“It’s up to you to make it work. I’m sending down your memo, ordering quarantine to continue but telling you to use your initiative to insure his presence at the conference.” - -

“Well. . . all right.” Ibafeiez suddenly grinned. “Never mind the memo. rm on my way.” He-switched off.

Greenberg turned back to the desk, feeling exhilarated by the sensation - of playing Cod. He wondered

- what the boss would have done?. . . but did not care. There might be many correct solutions, but this was one; it felt right. He reached again for the pendingurgent file.

He stopped. Something was gnawing at the back of his mind. The boss had not wanted to approve that death sentence; he had felt it. Shucks, the boss had told him that he was wrong; the proper action was a full

investigation. But the boss, as a matter of loyalty to his subordinates, had not reversed him.

- But he himself was sitting in the boss’s chair at the moment. Well? Was that why the boss had placed him there? To let him correct his own mistake? No, the boss was sub-tie but not omniscient; he could not have predicted that Greenberg would consider reopening the matter.

Still ... He called the boss’s private secretary. EMildred?”

“Yes, Mr. Greenberg?”

“That brief-and-rec on that intervention I carried out Rt0411, it was. It went put fifteen minutes ago.

I want it back.” . -

“It may have been dispatched,” she said doubtfully.

“The communications desk has been running only about seven minutes behind demand today.”

“There is such a thing as too much efficiency. If the order has left the building, send a cancellation and a more-to-follow, will you? And get the original document back to me.”

Finally he got to the pending-urgent file. As Mr. Kiku had said, the jacket marked “Ftaeml” was not large. He found it subtitled: “Beauty & the Beast” - and wondered why. The boss had a sense of humor . . . but it veered so much that other people had a hard time following it.

Presently his eyebrows lifted. Those tireless interpreters, brokers, go-betweens, and expounders, the Rargylhans, were always popping up in negotiations between diverse races; the presence of Dr. Ftaeml on Earth had tipped Greenberg that something was up with a nonhumanoid people . . . non-human in mentality, creatures so different psychologically that communication was

difficult. But he had not expected the learned doctor was representing a race that he had never heard of. . . something termed “the Hroshli.”

It was possible that Greenberg had simply forgotten these people with a name like a sneeze; they might be some unimportant breed, at a low cultural level, or economically inconsequential, or not possessing space travel. Or they might have been brought into the Community of Civilizations while Greenberg had been up to his ears in Solar System affairs. Once the human race had made contact with other races having interstellar -travel the additions to the family of legal “humans” had come so fast that a man could hardly keep

up; the more mankind widened its horizons the harder those horizons were to see. -

Or perhaps he knew of the Hroshii under another name? Greenberg turned to Mr. Kiku’s - universal dictionary and keyed in the name.

***The machine considered it, then the reading plate***

flashed: NO INFORMATION.

Greenberg tried dropping the aspirate on the assumption that the word might have degenerated in the

mouths of non-Hroshii. . . still the same negative.

He dropped the matter. The universal dictionary in the British Museum was not more knowledgeable than the one in the Under Secretary’s office; its working parts occupied an entire building in another part of Capital, and a staff- of cyberneticists, semanticians and encyclopedists endlessly fed its hunger for facts. He could be sure that, whatever the “Hroshii” were, the Federation had never heard of them before.

Which was astounding. -

- Having let astonishment persist a full second Greenberg went on reading. He learned that the Hroshii

were already here, not landed on Earth but within waving distance. . . in a parking orbit fifty thousand miles out. He let himself be astonished for two whole seconds before going on to discover that the reason he had not heard of their advent was that Dr. Ftaeml had

urgently advised Mr. Kiku to keep patrol ships and

- such from challenging and attempting to board the stranger.

He was interrupted by the return of his report of the LummoX matter,- bearing on it Mr. Kiku's confirmation of the sentence. He thought for a moment, then added to the endorsement so that it read: "Recommendation

approved . . . but this action is not to be carried out until after a complete scientific analysis of this creature has been made. Local authorities will surrender custody when required to the Bureau of Xenie Sd

ence, which will arrange transportation and select the agency to pursue the evaluation." -

Greenberg signed Kiku's name to the change and put it back into the system. He admitted sheepishly that the order was now weasel-worded . . . for it was a sure thing that once the xenobiologists got their hands on LummoX they would never let him go. Nevertheless his heart felt suddenly lighter. The other action was wrong; this one was right.

He turned his attention back to the Hroshii . . . and again his eyebrows went up. The Hroshii were not here to establish relations with Earth; they were here to rescue one of their own. According to Dr. Ftaeml, they were convinced that Terra was holding this Hroshia and were demanding that she be surrendered.

Greenberg felt as if he had blundered - into a bad melodrama. These people with the asthmatic name had

picked the wrong planet for cops-and-robbers nonsense. A non-human on Earth without a passport, without a dossier in the hands of the department, without an approved reason for visiting Earth, would be as helpless as a bride without a ration book. She would be picked up in no time . . . idiot's delight! she could not even get through quarantine.

Why didn't the boss simply tell them to take their wagon and go home?

Besides, how did they figure she had reached the surface of Earth? Walked? Or taken a swan dive? Star ships did not land; they were served by shuttles. He could just see her tackling the purser of one of those shuttles: "Excuse me, sir, but I am fleeing from my husband in a distant part of the Galaxy. Do you mind if I hide under this seat and sneak down to your planet?" -

"No tickie, no washee" . . . that's what the purser would say. Those shuttle companies hated deadheads; Greenberg could feel it every time he presented his own diplomatic pass.

Something was niggling at him . . . - then he remembered the boss's inquiry; did LummoX have hands? He realized that the boss must have been wondering whether LummoX could be the missing Hroshia, since Hroshii,

according to Ftaeml, had eight legs. Greenberg chuckled. LummoX was not the boy to build and operate star ships, not he nor any of his cousins. Of course the boss had not seen LummoX and did not know how preposterous it was.

And besides that, LummoX had been here more than a hundred years. That would make him very late for supper.

The real question was what to do with the Hroshii now that we were in contact with them. Anything from "Out There" was interesting, educational, and profitable to mankind, once it was analyzed . . . and a race that had its own interstellar drive was sure to be all of that, squared and cubed. No doubt the boss was kidding them along while developing permanent relations.

Very well, it was up to Greenberg to foster that angle and help the boss get past his emotional handicap in dealing through a Rargyllian. -

He skimmed the rest of the report. What he had learned so far he had gotten frCSM the synopsis; the rest was a transcript of Ftaeml's flowery circumlocutions. Then he handed the jacket back to the file and tackled the boss's work.

Mr. Kilcu announced himself by looking over his shoulder and saying, "That basket is as full as ever."

"Oh. Howdy, boss. Yes, but think of the shape it would have been in if I hadn't torn up every second item without reading it." Greenberg moved from the chair.

Mr. Kiku nodded. "I know. Sometimes I just check 'disapproved' on all the odd-numbered ones."

"Feeling better?"

"Ready to spit in his face. What's a snake got that I haven't got more -of?"

"That's the spirit."

"Dr. Morgan is very adept. Try him sometime if your nerves ever act up."

Greenberg grinned. "Boss, the only thing that bothers me is insomnia during working hours. I can't sleep at my desk the way I used to."

"That's the earliest symptom. The mind mechanics will get you yet." Mr. Kiku glanced at the clock. "No word from our friend with the animated hair?"

"Not yet." Greenberg told about the quarantine for the Arid and what he had done. Mr. Kiku nodded, which was equivalent to a citation in front of the regiment in some circles; Greenberg felt a warm glow and went on to tell about the revision in the order for LummoX. He sidled up to it self-consciously.

"Boss, sitting in 'that chair puts a different slant on things."

"So I discovered, years ago."

- "Urn, yes. While I was there I got to thinking about that intervention matter."  
"Why? We settled it."

“So I thought. Nevertheless. . . well, anyhow. . .” He blurted out his change in the order and waited. -

Mr. Kiku nodded again. He considered telling Greenberg that it had saved him thinking up a face-saving way of accomplishing the same end, but decided not to. Instead he leaned to his desk, “Mildred? Heard anything from Dr. Ftaeml?”

“Just arrived, sir.”

“Good. East conference room, please.” He switched off and turned to Greenberg. “Well, son, now for some snake charming. Got your flute with you?”

- VI  
“Space Is Deep, Excellency”

“DR. TrAEML, this is my associate, Mr. Greenberg.”

The Rargyllian bowed low, his double knees and unhuman articulation making it an impressive rite. “I know the distinguished Mr. Greenberg by reputation, through a compatriot who was privileged to work with him. I am honored, sir.”

Greenberg answered with the same sort of polite amphigory the cosmic linguist had selected. “I have long wished for the boon of experiencing in person the scholarly aura of Dr. Ftaeml, but I had never dared let the wish blossom into hope. Your servant and pupil, sir.”

“Hrrumpl” Mr. Kiku interrupted. “Doctor, this delicate affair you are negotiating is of such importance

that I, with my constant housekeeping chores, have not been able to give it the close attention it demands. Mr. Greenberg is ambassador extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of the Federation, commanded for this purpose.”

Greenberg’s eyes flicked toward his boss, but showed no surprise. He had noticed that the boss had earlier

said “associate” rather than “assistant” and had spotted it as the elementary maneuver of enhancing the prestige of one’s own negotiators for advantage in protocol-but he had not expected this sudden brevet. He was reasonably sure that Mr. Kiku had not bothered to have the rank approved by the Council; nevertheless the boss could make it stick and his credentials would probably show up on his desk. He wondered if his pay check

would show it?

He decided that the boss must have a hunch that this silly business had importance not evident Or was he simply getting the medusoid off his back?

Dr. Ftaeml bowed again. “Most gratifying to work with his excellenc~’.”  
Greenberg suspected that the Rargyllian was not fooled; nevertheless it

probably was really gratifying to him, since it implied that the medusoid was himself of ambassadorial rank.

A female aide brought in refreshments; they stopped for ritual. Ftaeml selected a French wine, while Greenberg and Kiku chose, by Hobson's choice, the only Rargyllian item available-some stuff called "wine" through failure of language but which looked like bread mushed into milk and tasted as if sulphuric acid had been added. Greenberg went through the motions of enjoying it while not letting it pass his lips.

***He noticed with respect that the boss actually consumed the stuff. -***

The rite common to seven out of ten civilizations gave Greenberg time to size up Ftaeml. The medusoid was dressed in an expensive parody of terrestrial formal clothes . . . cutaway jacket, lacy jabot, and striped shorts. It helped to hide the fact that, while he was a bifurcate humanoid with two legs, two arms, and head at the top of an elongated trunk, he was not remotely human in any but the legal sense.

But Greenberg had grown up in the presence of the Great Martians and had dealt with many other peoples since; he did not expect "men" to look like men and had no prejudice in favor of human form. Ftaeml was, to his eye, handsome and certainly graceful. His dry chitinous skin, purple with green highlights, was as neat as a leopard's pelt and as decorative. The absence of a nose was no matter and was made up for by the mobile, sensitive mouth.

Greenberg decided that Ftaeml must have his tail

wrapped around him under his clothes in order to carry out the pretense that he looked like a terrestrial

as well as being dressed like one-Rargyllians would go to any trouble to conform to the ancient, urbane rule that when in Rome, one should shoot Roman candles. The other Rargyllian Greenberg had worked with had worn no clothes at all (since the people of Vega-VI wore none) and had carried his tail aloft, like a proud cat. Thinking of Vega-VI made Greenberg shiver, he had found it necessary to bundle up to his ears. -

- He glanced at the medusoid's tendrils. Pshaw! they weren't snakelike. The boss - must have a neurosis as big as a house. Sure, they were about a foot long and as thick as his thumb, but they didn't have eyes, they didn't have mouths or teeth-they were just tendrils. Most races had tendrils of some sort. What were fingers but short tendrils?

Mr. Kiku put down his cup when Dr. Ftaeml set down his glass. "Doctor, you have consulted with your principals?" -

“Sir, I have had that honor. And may I take this opportunity to thank you for the scout ship you so

graciously placed at my disposal for the unavoidable trips back and forth from the surface of your lovely planet to the vessel of the people I have the privilege of assisting? It is, I may say without casting any reflections on the great people I now serve, more suited to the purpose and more comfortable to one of my build than are the auxiliary craft of their vessel.”

“Not at all, Glad to do a favor to a friend.” “You are gracious, Mr. Under Secretary.”

“Well, what did they say?” -

Dr. Ftaeml shrugged his whole body. “It pains me to inform you that they are unmoved. They insist that their she child be returned to them without delay.”

Mr. Kiku frowned. “No doubt you explained that we don’t have their missing child, have never heard of it, have no reason to think that she has ever been on this

planet and strong reason to believe that she never could have been?”

“I did. You will pardon my inurbanity if I translate their answer in -terms crude but unmistakable.” He shrugged apologetically. “They say you are lying.”

Mr. Kiku took no offense, being aware that a Rargyl- -han when acting as go-between was as impersonal as a telephone. “It would be better if I were lying. Then I could hand over their brat and the matter would be finished.”

“I believe you,” Dr. Ftaeml said suddenly.

“Thank you. Why?”

“You used the subjunctive.”

“Oh. Did you tell them that there were over seven thousand varieties of non-terrestrial creatures on Earth, represented by some hundreds of thousands - of individuals? That of these individuals some thirty thousand are sentient beings? But of these sentient beings only a very few have anything like the physical characteristics of your Hroshii? And that all those few we can account for as to race and planet of origin?”

“I am Rargyllian, sir. I told them all that and more, in their own language, putting it .more clearly than you could explain it to another Earthmen. I made it live.”

“I believe you.” Mr. Kiku tapped the table top. “Do you have a suggestion?”

“Just a moment,” put in Greenberg. “Don’t you have a picture of a typical Hroshii? It might help.”

“ ‘Hroshiu,’ “ corrected Ftaeml. “Or, in this case, ‘Hroshia? I am sorry. They do not use symbology of the picture type. Unfortunately I am not equipped to take one of your pictures.”

“An eyeless race?” --

“No, Excellency. Their sight is quite good, quite subtle. But their eyes and nervous systems abstract somewhat differently from yours. Their analog of ‘picture’ would be meaningless to you. Even I find it dif-

ficult and my race is admitted to be the most subtle of all in the interpretation of symbolic abstraction. If a Rargyllian.. .” He stopped and preened himself.

**“Well. . describe one to us. Use your justly famed semantic talents.” -**

“A pleasure. The Hroshii manning this vessel are all about of a size, being of the military class.. .”

Mr. Kiku interrupted. “Military class? Doctor, is this a war vessel? You did not tell me this.”

Dr. Ftaeml looked pained. “I considered the fact both obvious and distasteful.”

“I suppose so.” Mr. - Kiku wondered if he should alert the Federation General Staff. Not now, he decided. Mr. Kiku was strongly prejudiced against the introduction of military might into negotiations, since he believed that a show of force not only was an admission of failure on the part of diplomats but also poisoned the chances of accomplishing anything more by negotiation. He could rationalize this opinion but he held it as

an emotion. “Go on, please.” -

“The military class are of three sexes, the differences in the types being not readily apparent and need not concern us. My shipmates and hosts are perhaps six inches higher than this table and half again your height in length. Each has four pairs of legs and two arms. Their hands are small and supple and extremely dexterous. In my opinion the Hroshii are unusually beautiful, form serving function with rare grace. They are remarkably adroit with machines, instruments, and delicate manipulations of every sort.”

Greenberg relaxed a little as Ftaeml - talked. Despite everything, the vagrant notion had still been bothering him that this creature “Lummox” might be of the Hroshii. . . but he saw now that the thought came from

nothing more than accidental similarity in leg number . . . as if an ostrich were a man because of two legs! His mind wanted to file Lummox into a category and no doubt would keep on trying, but this category did not fit.

Dr. Ftaeml was continuing: ‘~. . . -but the outstanding characteristic of the Hroshii, not covered by these mere facts of size, shape, body structure, and mechanical function, is an overwhelming impression of great mental power. So overwhelming, in fact . . .’ The medusoid chuckled in embarrassment. ‘. . . that I was almost persuaded to waive my professional fee and serve them as a privilege.’

Greenberg was impressed. These Hroshti really must have something; the Rargyllians, honest brokers though they were, would let a man die of thirst rather than tell him the local word for water, unless cash was in band. Their mercenary attitude had the quality of devoutness.

- “The only thing,” Ftaeml added, “that saved me from this excess was the knowledge that in one thing I excelled them. They are not linguists. Rich and powerful as their own speech is, it is the only language they ever learn well. They are even less talented linguistically than is your own race.” Ftaeml spread his grotesque hands in a gesture that was—purely Gallic (or a perfect, studied imitation) and added, “So I repaired my self-esteem and charged twice my usual fee.”

He ceased talking. Mr. Kiku stared glumly at the table and Greenberg merely waited. Finally Kiku said, “What do you suggest?”

“My esteemed friend, there is only one course that is of any use. The Hroshia they seek must be delivered up.”

“But we do not have this Hroshia.”

Ftaeml simulated a human sigh. “That is regrettable.” Greenberg looked at him sharply; the sigh did not carry conviction. He felt that Ftaeml regarded the impasse as somehow tremendously exciting . . . which was ridiculous; a Rargyllian, having accepted the role of go-between, was invariably anxious that the negotia

tion be successful; anything less than success caused them to lose face in their own eyes.

So he spoke up. “Dr. Ftaeml, when you undertook this commission for the Hroshii, did you expect that we would be able to produce this, uh, Hroshia?”

- The creature’s tendrils suddenly slumped; Greenberg cocked an eyebrow and said drily, “No, I see that you did not. May I ask why, then, you accepted this commission?”

Ftaeml answered slowly and without his usual confidence: “Sir, one does not refuse a commission of the Hroshii. Believe me, one does not.”

“11mm . . . these Hroshii. Doctor, will you pardon me if I say that you have not yet conveyed to me a full understanding of these people? You tell us that they

are mentally very powerful, so much so that a leading mind of a highly-advanced race . . . yourself is almost 'overwhelmed' by them. You imply that they are powerful in other ways . . . that you, a member of a proud, free race, must obey their wishes. Now here they are in a single ship, facing an entire planet, a planet so powerful that it has been able to create hegemony more extensive than any before in this portion of space . . . yet you say that it would be 'regrettable' if we were not to satisfy their impossible demand."

"All that is true," Ftaeml answered carefully.

"When a Rargyllian speaks professionally I cannot disbelieve him. Yet this I have trouble believing. These superbeings. . . why have we never heard of them?"

"Space is deep, Excellency."

"Yes, yes. No doubt there are thousands of great races that we of Earth have never - met, will never meet. Am I to infer that this is also the first contact of your race with the Hroshff?"

"No. We have long known of them . . . longer than~ we have known of you,"

"Eh?" Greenberg glanced sharply at Mr, Kiku. He went on, "What are the relations of Rargyll with the Hroshii? And why has not this been reported to the Federation?"

"Excellency, is that last question a rebuke? If so, I must answer that I am not acting for my government."

"No," Greenberg assured him, "it was a simple inquiry. The Federation always seeks to extend -its diplo.. matic linkage as far as possible. I was surprised to learn that your race, which claims friendship with ours, could know of a mighty civilization and not make that fact known to the Federation."

"May I say, Excellency, that I am surprised at your surprise? Space is deep...and my race have long been great travelers. Perhaps the Federation has not asked the right questions? As for the other, my people have no diplomatic relations, rio relations of any sort, with the mighty Hroshii. They are a people who, as you say, mind their own business, and we are very happy to (as you would phrase it)...to stay out of their yard. It has been years, more than five of your centuries, since the last time a Hroshij ship appeared- in our skies and demanded service from us. it is better so."

Greenberg said, "I seem to be getting more confused the more I know. They stopped at Rargyll to pick -up an interpreter instead of coming straight here?"

"Not precisely. They appeared in our skies and asked if we had ever heard of you people. We answered that we knew you...for when the Hroshii ask, they are answered! We identified your star and I had the unsought honor to be chosen to

represent them.” He shrugged. “Here I am. Let me add that it was not until we were deep in space that I learned the object of their search.”

Greenberg had made note earlier of a loose end. “Just a moment. They retained you, they started for

Earth, then told you that they were searching for a

missing Hroshia. It must have been then that you decided that this mission would fail. Why?” -

“Is it not evident? We Rargyllians, in your lovely and precise idiom, are the greatest gossips in space. Perhaps you would say ‘historians’ but I mean something more lively than that. Gossips. We go everywhere, we know everyone, we speak all languages. I did not need to ‘check the files’ to know that men of Earth had never been to the capital planet of the Hroshii. Had you made such contact you would have forced your attentions on them and started a war. It would have been a

- ‘scandal to the jaybirds’. . . a lovely phrase, that; I must see a jaybird while I am here. It would have been discussed with many a fine anecdote wherever two Rargyllians - got together. So I knew that they must be mistaken; they would not find what they sought.”

“In other words,” Greenberg answered, “you people identified the wrong planet. . . and wished this problem on us.”

“Please,” protested Dr. Ftaeml. “Our identification was perfect, I assure you-not of your planet, for -the Hroshii did not know where you came from-but of you yourself. The creatures - they wished to locate were men of Earth, in every possible detail-down to your fingernails, your internal organs.”

“Yet you knew they were mistaken. Doctor, I am not the semantician you are. I seem to see a contradiction . . . or a paradox.”

“Permit me to explain. - We who deal professionally in words know how cheap words are. A paradox can exist only in words, never in the facts behind the words. Since the Hroshii described exactly the men of Earth and since I knew that the men of Earth knew not the Hroshii, I concluded what I must conclude-that there is another race in this galaxy as like to your race as twin Sornia in their shell-as two peas in the pod. Peas? You like beans better?”

“‘Peas’ is the correct idiom,” Mr. Kiku answered soberly.

“Thank you. Your language is rich; I must refresh myself of it while I am here. Would you believe it?

the man from whom I first learned it intentionally taught me idioms unacceptable in your polite society. For example ‘as cold as...’”

“Yes, yes,” Mr. Kiku said hastily. “I can believe it. Some of our compatriots have an odd sense of humor. You concluded that there is somewhere in this star cloud a race so like ours as to be our twin brothers? I find that notion statistically unlikely to the point of impossibility.”

“The entire universe, Mr. Under Secretary, is wildly unlikely to the point of ridiculousness. Therefore, we of Rargyll know that God is a humorist.” The medusoid made a gesture peculiar to his breed, then politely repeated it in idiom by making one of the most common Earthly gestures of reverence.

“You explained this conclusion to your clients?”

“I did . . . and I repeated it most carefully in my lastest -consultation. ‘I’he result was foreseeable.”

“Yes?”

“Each race has its talent, each its weakness. The Hroshii, once having with mighty intellect arrived at an opinion, are not easily swayed. ‘Pig-headed’ is your precise term.” - -

“Pig-headedness breeds pig-headedness, Dr. Ftaeml.”

“Please, my dear sir! I hope that you will not be so tempted. Let me report, if I must, that you have been unable to find their treasured one, but that you are instituting new and more thorough searches. I am your friend . . . do not admit that this negotiation has failed.”

“I never broke off a negotiation in my life,” Mr. Kiku

answered sourly. “If you can’t outargue the other fellow, sometimes you can outlive him. But I do not see what more we have to offer them. Except for that one possibility we spoke of last time . . . did you bring the coordinates of their planet? Or did they refuse?”

“I have them. I told you that they would not refuse; the Hroshii are not in the least afraid of having other races know where to find them \* . . . they are merely indifferent” Dr. Ftaeml opened a brief case which was either an imitation of a terrestrial one, or might have been purchased on Earth. “Nevertheless it was not easy. The where-and-when had to be translated from their concepts to those using Rargyll as the true center of the universe, for which purpose it required that I first convince them of the necessity, then explain to them spacetime units as used on Rargyll. Now, since I must shame myself by admitting that I am not skilled in your methods of reckoning the shape of the universe, it is necessary that I have help in translating our figures into yours.”

“No need to feel shamefaced,” Mr. Kiku answered, “for I don’t know anything about our astrogation methods myself. We use specialists for that sort of thing. Just a moment.” He touched an ornamental knob on the conference table. “Get me BuAstro.”

“They’ve all gone home for the day,” a disembodied female voice answered, “except the astrogation duty officer.

“Then that’s who I want. Hurry it up.”

Very shortly a male voice said, “Dr. Warner, night duty officer.”

“Kiku here. Doctor, you solve space-time correlations?”

Of course, sir.”

“Can you do it from Rargylliari data?”

“Rargyuian?” The duty officer whistled softly. “That’s a tough one, sir. Dr. Singh is the man for that”

“Get him up here, right away.”

“Uh, why, he’s gone home, sir. He’ll be here in the morning.”

***“I didn’t ask where he was; I said, ‘Get him up here***

***\* \* \* right away.’ ~se police a1a~rm and general call, if necessary. I want him now.”***

“Er . . . yes, sir.”

Mr. Kiku turned back to Dr. Ftaeml. “I expect to be able to show that no terrestrial starship ever visited the Hroshii. Fortunately we do have astrogation records for every interstellar trip. My thought is this: it is time that the principals met face to face in this negotiation. With your skillful interpretation we can show them that we have nothing to hide, that the facilities of our civilization are at their disposal, and that we would like to help them find their missing sibling

• . . but that she is not here. Then, if they have any thing to suggest, we will . .

.” Mr. Kiku broke off as a door at the end of the room opened. He said

tonelessly, “How do you do, Mr. Secretary?”

The Most Honorable Mr. Roy MacClure, Secretary for Spatial Affairs for the Federated Community of Civilizations, was entering. His eye seemed to light only on Mr. Kiku. “There you are, Henry! Been looking all over. That stupid girl didn’t know where you had gone, but I found that you had not left the building. You must...”

Mr. Kiku took him firmly by the elbow and said loudly, “Mr. Secretary, allow me to present Dr. Ftaeml, Ambassador de facto of the mighty Hroshii.”

Mr. MacClure met the occasion. “How do you do, Doctor? Or should I say ‘Excellency’?” He had the grace not to stare.

‘Doctor’ will do nicely, Mr. Secretary. I am well, thank you. May I enquire as to your health?”

“Oh, good enough, good enough . . . if everything didn’t pop at once. Which reminds me . . . can you

spare me my chief assistant? I'm awfully sorry but something urgent has come up.

"Certainly, Mr. Secretary. Your pleasure is my greatest

Mr. MacClure looked sharply at the medusoid but found himself unable to read his expression . . . if the thing had expressions, he amended. "Uh, I trust you are being well taken care of, Doctor?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Good. I really am sorry, but. . . Henry, if you please?"

- Mr. Kiku bowed to the Rargyllian, then left the table while wearing an expression so masklike that Greenberg shivered. Kiku spoke in a whisper to MacClure as soon as they were away from the table.

MacClure glanced back at the other two, then answered in a whisper that Greenberg could catch. "Yes, yes! But this is crucially important, I tell you. Henry, what in the world possessed you to ground those ships without consulting me first?"

Mr. Kiku's reply was inaudible. MacClure went on, "Nonsense! Well, you will just have to come out and face them. You can't..."

Mr. Kiku turned back abruptly. "Dr. Ftaeml, was it your intention to return to the Hroshii ship tonight?"

"There is no hurry. I am at your service, sir."

"You are most gracious. May I leave you in Mr. Greenberg's care? We speak as one."

The Rargyllian bowed. "I shall count it an honor."

"I look forward to the pleasure of your company tomorrow."

Dr. Ftaeml bowed again. "Until tomorrow. Mr. Secretary, Mr. Under Secretary. \* . your servant."

The two left. Greenberg could not know whether to laugh or cry; he felt embarrassed for his whole race. The medusoid was watching him silently.

Greenberg grinned with half his mouth and said,

"Doctor, does the Rargyllian tongue include swear words?"

"Sir, I can use profanity in more than a thousand tongues . . . some having curses that will addle an egg at a thousand paces. May I teach you some of them?"

Greenberg sat back and laughed heartily. "Doctor, I like you. I really like you . . . quite aside from our mutual professional duty to be civil."

Ftaeml shaped his lips in a good imitation of a human smile. "Thank you, sir. The feeling is mutual \* \* \* and gratifying. May I say without offense that the

reception given my sort on your great planet is sometimes something that one must be philosophical about?"

"I know. I'm sorry. My own people, most of them, are honestly convinced that the prejudices of their native village were ordained by the Almighty. I wish it were different."

"You need not be ashamed. Believe me, sir, that is the one conviction which is shared by all races everywhere. . . \* the only thing we all have in common. I do not except my own race. If you knew languages

All languages carry in them a portrait of their users and the idioms of every language say over and over again, 'He is a stranger and therefore a barbarian.'"

Greenberg grinned wryly. "Discouraging, isn't it?"

"Discouraging? Why, sir? It is sidesplitting. It is the only joke that God ever repeats, because its humor never grows stale." The medusoid added, "What is your wish, sir? Are we to continue to explore this matter? Or is your purpose merely to stretch the palaver until the return of your. . . \* associate?"

Greenberg knew that the Rargyllian was saying as politely as possible that Greenberg could not act without Kiku. Greenberg decided that there was no sense in pretending otherwise \* . . and besides, he was hungry. "Haven't we worked enough today, Doctor? Would you do me the honor of having dinner with me?"

"I would be delighted! But \* . . you know our peculiarities of diet?"

"Certainly. Remember, I spent some weeks with one of your compatriots. We ~can go to the Hotel Universal."

"Yes, of course." Dr. Ftaeml seemed unenthusiastic.

"Unless there is something you would like better?"

"I have heard of your restaurants with entertainment

- would it be possible? Or is it...?"

- "A night club?" Greenberg thought. "Yes! The Club Cosmic. Their kitchen can do anything the Universal can.

They were about to leave when a door dilated and a slender, swarthy man stuck his head in. "Oh. Excuse me. I thought Mr. Kiku was here."

Greenberg remembered suddenly that the boss had summoned a relativity mathematician. "Just a moment You must be Dr. Singh."

"Yes."

"Sony. Mr. Kiku had to leave, I am here for him."

He introduced the two and explained the problem. Dr. Singh looked over the Rargyllian's scroll and nodded. "This will take a while."

“May I help you, Doctor?” asked Ftaeml.

“It won’t be necessary. Your notes are quite complete.” Thus assured, Greenberg and Ftaeml went out on the town.

The floor show at the Club Cosmic included a juggler, which delighted Ftaeml, and girls, which delighted Greenberg. It was late by the time Greenberg left Ftaeml in one of the special suites reserved for non-human guests of DepSpace at Hotel Universal. Greenberg was yawning as he came down the lift, but decided that the evening had been worth while in the interest of good foreign relations.

Tired though he was, he stopped by the department. Dr. Ftaeml had spilled one item during the evening that he thought the boss should know. . . tonight if he could reach him, or leave it on his desk if not. The Rargyllian, in an excess of pleasure over the juggler, had expressed regret that si~ch things must so soon cease to be.

“What do you mean?” Greenberg had asked.

“When mighty Earth is volatilized. \* .” the medusoid had begun, then stopped.

Greenberg had pressed him about it. But the Rargylhan insisted that he had been joking.

Greenberg doubted if it meant anything. But Rargylhan humor was usually much more subtle; he decided to tell the boss about it as quickly as possible. Maybe that strange ship needed a shot of paralysis frequencies, a “nutcracker” bomb, and a dose of vacuum.

The night guard at the door stopped him. “Mr. Greenberg . . . the Under Secretary has been looking for you for the past half hour.”

He thanked the guard and hurried upstairs. Mr. ICiku he found bent over his desk; the incoming basket was clogged as always but the Under Secretary was paying no attention. He glanced up and said quietly, “Good evening, Sergei. Look at this.” He passed over a report.

It was Dr. Singh’s rework of Dr. Ftaeml’s notes. Greenberg picked out at the bottom the geocentric coordinates and did a quick sum. “Over nine hundred light-years!” he commented. “And out in that direction, too. No wonder we’ve never encountered them. Not exactly next door neighbors, eh?”

“Never mind that,” Mr. Kiku admonished. “Not the date. This computation is the Hroshii’s claim as to when and where they were visited by one of our ships.”

Greenberg looked and felt his eyebrows crawl up toward his scalp. He turned to the answer machine and started to code an inquiry. “Don’t bother,” Kiku told him. “Your recollection is correct. The Trail Blazer. Second trip.” •

“The Trail Blazer,” Greenberg repeated foolishly.

“Yes. We never knew where she went, so we couldn’t have guessed. But we know exactly when she went. It matches. Much simpler hypothesis than Dr. Ftaeml’s twin races.”

“Of course.” He looked at his boss. “Then it is-Lummox.”

“Yes, it’s Lummox.”

“But it can’t be Lummox. No hands. Stupid as a rabbit.”

“No, it can’t be. But it is.”

## VII

### ***“Mother Knows Best”***

LUMMOX was not in the reservoir. He had got tired and had gone home. It had been necessary to tear a notch in the reservoir to get out comfortably, but he had damaged it no more than was needful. He did not care to have any arguments with John Thomas over such silly matters-not any more arguments, that is.

Several people made a fuss over his leaving, but he ignored them. He was careful not to step on anybody and their actions he treated with dignified reserve. Even when they turned loose hated spray things on him he did not let them herd him thereby, the way they had herded him out of that big building the day he had gone for a walk; he simply closed his eyes and his rows of nostrils, put his head down and slogged for home. •

John Thomas met him on the way, having been fetched by the somewhat hysterical chief of safety.

Lummox stopped and made a saddle for John Thomas, after mutual greetings and reassurances, then resumed his steady march homeward.

Chief Dreiserwas almost incoherent. “Turn that brute around and head him back!” he screamed.

“You do it,” Johnnie advised grimly.

“I’ll have your hide for this! I’ll-I’ll-“

“What have I done?”

“You- It’s what you haven’t done. That beast broke out and-“

“I wasn’t even there,” John Thomas pointed out while Lummox continued plodding.

“Yes, but . . . That’s got nothing to do with it! He’s out now; it’s up to you to assist the law and get him penned up again. John Stuart, you’re getting in serious trouble.”

“I don’t see how you figure. You took him away from me. You got him condemned and you say he doesn’t belong to me anymore. You tried to kill him

- . . . you know you did, without waiting to see if the government would okay it. If he belongs to me, I ought to sue you. If he doesn’t belong to me, it’s no skin off my nose if LummoX climbs out of that silly tank.” John Thomas leaned over and looked down. “Why don’t you climb into your car, Chief, instead of running along beside us and getting yourself winded?”

Chief Dreiser ungraciously accepted the advice and let his driver pick him up. By the time this was done he had somewhat recovered his balance. He leaned out and said, “John Stuart, I won’t bandy words with you. What I have or have not done hasn’t anything to do with the case. Citizens are required to assist peace officers when necessary. I am demanding officially-and I’ve got this car’s recorder going while I ask it-that you assist me in returning that beast to the reservoir.”

John Thomas looked innocent. “Then can I go home?”

“Huh? Of course.”

“Thanks, Chief. Uh, how long do you figure he will stay in the reservoir after I put him in it and go home? Or were you planning on hiring me in as a permanent member of your police force?”

Chief Dreiser gave up; LummoX went home.

Nevertheless Dreiser regarded it as only a temporary setback; the stubbornness that made him a good police officer did not desert him. He admitted to himself that the public was probably safer with the beast penned up at home while he figured out a surefire way to kill him. The order from the Under Secretary for Spatial Affairs, permitting him to destroy LummoX arrived and that made Dreiser feel better. . . old Judge O’Farrell had been pretty sarcastic about his jumping the gun.

The cancellation of that order and the amended order postponing LummoX’s death indefinitely never reached him. A new clerk in the communications office of DepSpace made a slight error, simply a transposition of two symbols; the cancellation went to Pluto . . . and the amended order, being keyed to the cancellation, followed it.

So Dreiser sat in his office with the death order clutched in his hand and thought about ways to kill the beast Electrocutation? Maybe . . . but he could not even guess at how much of a jolt it would take to do it. Cut his throat like butchering a

hog? The Chief had serious doubts about what sort of knife to use and what the brute would be doing in the meantime.

Firearms and explosives were no good. Wait a minute! Get the monster to open its mouth, wide, then shoot straight down its throat, using an explosive charge that would blow his innards to bits. Kill him instantly- yes, sir! Lots of animals had armor-turtles, rhinos, armadillos, and things-but always outside, not inside. This brute was no exception; Chief Dreiser had had several looks down inside that big mouth the time he had tried poison. The beast might be armor plate outside; inside he was pink and moist and soft like everybody else.

Not let's see; he'd have the Stuart boy tell the brute to hold its mouth open and . . . no, that wouldn't do. The boy would see what was up and like as not would order the beast to charge \* . . . and then some cops' widows would draw pensions. That boy was going bad, no doubt of it. . . funny how a good boy could take a wrong turn and wind up in prison.

No, the thing to do was to get the kid downtown on some excuse and carry out the order while he wasn't around. They could entice the brute into saying "ah!" by offering him food . . . "tossing it to him," Dreiser amended.

He glanced at his clock. Today? No, he wanted to choose the weapon and then rehearse everybody so that it would go like clockwork. Tomorrow early . \*

better have the boy picked up right after breakfast.

LummoX seemed contented to be home, ready to let bygones be bygones. He never said a word about Chief Dreiser and, if he realized that anyone had tried to harm him, he did not mention it. His naturally sunny disposition displayed itself by wanting to put his head in Johnnie's lap for cuddling. It had been a long time since his head was small enough for this; he merely placed the end of his muzzle on the boy's thigh, carrying the weight himself, while Johnnie stroked his nose with a brickbat.

Johnnie was happy only on one side. With the return of LummoX he felt much better, but he knew that nothing had been settled; presently Chief Dreiser would again try to kill LummoX. What to do about it was an endless ache in his middle.

His mother had added to his unhappiness by raising a loud squawk when she saw "that beast!" returned to the Stuart home. John Thomas had ignored her demands, threats, and orders and had gone ahead stabling his friend and feeding and watering him; after a while she had stormed back into the house, saying that she was going to phone Chief Dreiser. Johnnie had expected that and was fairly sure that nothing would come of it . \* . and nothing did; his mother remained in the house. But Johnnie brooded about it; he had a life-long habit of getting along with his mother, deferring to her, obeying her. Bucking her was

even more distressing to him than it was to her. Every time his father had left (including the time his ship had not come back) he had told Johnnie, "Take care of your mother, son. Don't cause her any trouble."

Well, he had tried . \* . he really had! But it was sure that Dad had never expected Mum to try to get rid of LummoX. Mum ought to know better; she had married Dad. knowing that LummoX was part of the package. Well, hadn't she? Betty would never switch sides like that. Or would she?

'Women were very strange creatures. Maybe he and Lum ought to bach it together and not take chances. He continued to brood until evening, spending his time with the star beast and petting him. Lummie's tumors were another worry. One of them seemed very tender and about to burst; John Thomas wondered if it ought to be lanced? But no one knew any more about it than he did and he did not know.

On top of everything else, here Lummie was ill . it was just too much!

He did not go in to dinner. Presently his mother came out with a tray. "I thought you might like to picnic out here with LummoX," she said blandly.

Johnnie looked at her sharply. "Why, thanks, Mum uh, thanks."

"How is Lummie?"

"Uh, he's all right, I guess."

"That's good."

He stared after her as she went in. Mum angry was bad enough, but Mum with 'that secret, catlike look, all sweetness and light, he was even more wary of. Nevertheless he polished off the excellent dinner, not having eaten since breakfast. She came out again a half hour later and said, "Finished, dear?"

"Uh, yes. . . thanks, it was good."

"Thank you, dear. Will you bring the tray in? And come in yourself; there is a Mr. Perkins coming to see you at eight."

"Mr. Perkins? Who's he?" But the door was closing behind her.

He found his mother downstairs, resting and knitting socks. She smiled and said, "Well? How are we now?"

"All right. Say, Mum, who is this Perkins? Why does he want to see meP'

"He phoned this afternoon for an appointment. I told him to come at eight."

"But didn't he say what he wanted?"

"Well . . . perhaps he did, but mother thinks it is better for Mr. Perkins to explain his errand himself."

“Is it about LummoX?”

“Don’t cross-examine Mum. You’ll know quickly enough.”

“But, look here, I...”

“We’ll say no more about it, do you mind? Take off your shoe, dear. I want to measure for the foot.”

Baffled, he started to remove his shoe. Suddenly he stopped. “Mum, I wish you wouldn’t knit socks for me.

“What, dear? But mother enjoys doing it for you.”

“Yes, but... Look, I don’t like hand-knit socks. They make creases on the soles of my feet... \* I’ve showed you often enough!”

***“Don’t be silly! How could soft wool do your feet***

any harm? And think what you would have to pay for real wool, real handwork, if you bought it. Most boys would be grateful.”

“But I don’t like it, I tell you!”

She sighed. “Sometimes, dear, I don’t know what to do with you, I really don’t.” She rolled up her knitting and put it aside. “Go wash your hands \* \* . yes, and your face, too... and comb your hair. Mr. Perkins will be here any moment.”

“Say, about this Mr. Perkins...”

“Hurry, dear. Don’t make things difficult for mother.” Mr. Perkins turned out to be pleasant; John Thomas liked him despite his suspicions. After a few polite inanities, with coffee served for ritual hospitality, he came to the point.

He represented the Exotic Life Laboratory of the Museum -of Natural History. As a result of the news picture of LummoX in connection with the story of the trial the beast had come to the attention of the Museum... which now wanted to buy him.

“To my surprise,” he added, “in searching the files I discovered that on another occasion the Museum attempted to buy this specimen... from your grandfather, I believe. The name was the same as yours and the date fitted. Are you any relation to... .

“My great great great grandfather... sure,” John Thomas interrupted. “And it was probably my grandfather they tried to buy LummoX from. But he was not for sale then-and he’s not for sale now!”

His mother looked up from knitting and said, “Be reasonable, dear. You are in no position to take that attitude.”

John Thomas looked stubborn. Mr. Perkins went on with a warm smile, “I sympathize with your feelings, Mr. Stuart. But our legal department looked into

the matter before I came out here and I am familiar with your present problems. Believe me, I'm not here to make them worse; we have a solution that will protect your pet and clear up your troubles."

***"I'm not going to sell LummoX," John Thomas persisted.*** \*

"Why not? If it turns out to be the only solution?"

"Well . . . because I can't. Even if I wanted to. He wasn't left to me to sell, he was left to me to keep and take care of. He was in this family before I was . . . before my mother was, for that matter." He looked sternly at his mother. "Mum, I don't know what's gotten into you."

She answered quietly, "That will be enough of that, dear. Mother does what is best for you."

Mr. Perkins changed the subject smoothly as John Thomas began to cloud up. "In any case, now that I've come all this way, may I see the creature? I'm terribly interested."

"Uh, I suppose so." Johnnie got up slowly and led the stranger outside.

Mr. Perkins looked up at LummoX, took a deep breath and let it out. "Marvelous!" He walked around him, admiring. "Absolutely marvelous! Unique . . . and the biggest e.-t. specimen I've - ever seen. How in the world was he shipped?"

"Why, he's grown some," John Thomas admitted. "I understand he parrots human speech a bit. Can you coax him to do it?"

"Huh? He doesn't 'parrot'. . . he talks."

"Really?"

"Of course. Hey, Lummie, how are you, boy?" "I'm all right," LummoX piped. "What does he want?" "Oh, nothing, nothing. He just wanted to see you." Mr. Perkins stared. "He talks! Mr. Stuart, the laboratory must have this specimen."

"That's out, I told you."

"I'm prepared to go much higher, now that I've seen him.. . and heard him."

John Thomas started to say something rude, checked himself and said instead, "Look, Mr. Perkins, are you married?"

"Why, yes. Why?"

"Any kids?"

"One, a little girl. She's just five." His face softened. "I'll make you a deal. We'll swap even. No questions asked and each of us does as he likes with his 'specimen.'"

Perkins started to flare up, then suddenly grinned. "Touché! I'll shut up. But," he went on, "you were taking a chance. One or two of my colleagues would have taken you up. You can't understand what a temptation a specimen like this is to a man of science. Really." He looked longingly at LummoX and added, "Shall we go in?"

Mrs. Stuart looked up as they came in; Mr. Perkins shook his head briefly. They sat down and Mr. Perkins fitted his finger tips together. "Mr. Stuart, you have forbidden me to discuss a possible sale, but if I tell the director of the Lab that I didn't even put the proposition, I will look foolish. Would you let me state what the museum has in mind. . . just for the record?"

"Well . . ." John Thomas frowned. "I guess there's no harm in that."

"Thanks. I must do something to justify my travel expenses. Let me analyze the situation. That creature

your friend LummoX . . . or let's say 'our friend LummoX' for I liked him as soon as I saw him. Our friend LummoX is under sentence of death, isn't he? A court order." -

"Yes," John Thomas admitted. "But it hasn't been confirmed by the Space Department yet."

"I know. But the police have already made attempts to kill him, without waiting for final approval. Right?"

John started to use bad language, then glanced at his mother and refrained. "The stupid idiots! Anyhow, they can't kill LummoX; they're too dumb."

"I agree with your sentiments . . . privately. That buffoon chief of police ought to have his commission taken away. Why, he might have destroyed an absolutely unique specimen. Imagine!"

Mrs. Stuart said crisply, "Chief Dreiser is a fine gentleman."

Mr. Perkins turned to her and said, "Mrs. Stuart, I did not mean to cast slurs on a friend of yours. But I stick by my guns; the Chief had no right to take things into his own hands. Such behavior is worse on the part of a public official than it is when done by a lay citizen."

"He had public safety to think about," she insisted.

"True. Perhaps that is an extenuating circumstance. I take back my remarks. They are off the subject and I did not intend to start an argument."

"I'm glad to hear you did not, Mr. Perkins. Shall we get back to the subject?"

John Thomas felt himself warming a little to the scientist-Mum had slapped Perkins down just the way she did him-and, besides, he liked LummoX. Mr. Perkins continued, "Any time now, tomorrow, or even today, the Department of Spatial Affairs will approve the destruction of LummoX and..."

“Maybe they’ll turn it down.”

“Can you risk LummoX’s life on that unjustified hope? The Chief of Police will show up again-and this time he’ll kill LummoX.”

“No, he won’t! He doesn’t know how. We’ll laugh at him!”

Mr. Perkins shook his head slowly. “That’s not your head talking, that’s your heart. The Chief will make sure this time. He’s been made to look silly; he won’t let it happen again. If he can’t figure out a sure way himself, he’ll get expert advice. Mr. Stuart, any biolo

gist could run a rough analysis on LummoX and tell almost offhand two or three certain ways to kill him

- ... kill him quickly and safely. I’ve already thought of one, just from seeing him.”

John Thomas looked at him in alarm. “You won’t tell Chief Dreiser?”

“Of course not! I’d be strung up by the thumbs first But there are thousands of others who can advise him. Or he may hit on a method himself. Be sure of this: if you wait until that death sentence is approved, it will be too late. They’ll kill LummoX. And that would be a great pity.”

John Thomas did not answer. Mr. Perkins added quietly, “You can’t oppose the forces of society singlehanded. If you are stubborn you yourself will make certain that LummoX will be killed.”

John Thomas pushed his fist hard against his mouth. Then he said almost inaudibly, “What can I doE”

“Much, if you let me help you. First, ret me make this clear. If you entrust your pet to us, he will never be harmed in any way. You hear talk about vivisection and such. . . well, forget it. Our object is to put specimens into environments as much like their home planets as possible, then study them. We want them to be healthy and happy, and we go to a lot of trouble to accomplish those ends. Eventually LummoX will die a natural death. . then we’ll mount the hide and skeleton, as a permanent exhibit.”

“How would you like to be stuffed and exhibited?” Johnnie asked bitterly.

“Eh?” Perkins looked surprised, then laughed. “It wouldn’t bother me at all; I’m leaving my carcass to the medical school of my alma mater. And it won’t bother LummoX. The point is to get him out of the clutches of the police . . . so that he can live to a ripe old age.”

“Wait a minute. If you buy him, that doesn’t get him~ off. They’ll still kill him. Won’t they?”

“Yes and no. Mostly no. Selling him to the Museum doesn’t cancel the order to destroy him, but, believe me, it will never be carried out. I’ve been coached by our legal department as to what to do. First, we agree on terms and you give me a bill of sale; that gives the Museum legal standing. At once, tonight, I get hold of your local judge and get a temporary order postponing ~he execution for a few days; it is definitely within his discretion to postpone it while this new factor of a change in ownership is considered. That’s all we need. We can get straight to the Secretary for Spatial Affairs if we need to . . . and I promise you that, once the Museum holds title, LummoX will never be destroyed.”

***“You’re surer***

“Sure enough to risk the Museum’s money. If I’m wrong, I might be out of a job.” Perkins grinned. “But I’m not wrong. Once I have the temporary order and have phoned the Museum to get busy on a permanent order my next step is to settle all the damage. I’ll carry cash, enough to do it. . \* cash has a convincing effect. That done, we’ll have only the Chief of Safety against us,. \* . and, while he may seem an obstacle to you, he will never be able to stand up against the weight that the Museum can bring to bear, when needed. And everybody lives happily ever after!” Perkins smiled. “Anything wrong with it?”

John Thomas traced out a pattern on the rug with his toe, then looked up. “Look, Mr. Perkins, I know I have to do something to save LummoX. But up to now I haven’t seen any way . . . and I guess I haven’t had the courage to look the facts in the face.”

“Then you’ll do it?”

“Just a minute, please! This isn’t any good either. Lummie would be miserable with loneliness. He’d

never get used to it. It would just be swapping death for life imprisonment. I’m not sure but what he’d rather be~ dead. . . than to be all alone, with ‘a lot of strangers and them poking him and bothering him and making tests of him. But I can’t even ask him what he wants because I’m not sure Lummie understands about death. But he does understand about strangers.”

Mr. Perkins chewed his lip and reflected that it was very hard to do this young man a favor. “Mr. Stuart? If you were to go with LummoX, would it make a difference?”

“Huh? How?”

“I think I can promise you a job as an animal handler . . . In fact I have a vacancy in my own department; I could hire you tonight and we could sort the red tape later. After all, there is a real advantage in having an exotic animal cared for by someone who knows his ways.”

Before Johnnie could answer his mother said, "No!"

"Eh? What, Mrs. Stuart?"

"Out of the question. Mr. Perkins, I had hoped that you would provide a rational way out of this silly unpleasantness. But I cannot agree to that last suggestion. My son is to go to college. I will not have him waste his life sweeping out that beast's cage. \* . like a roustabout! No indeed!"

"Now look here, Mother. . ."

"John Thomas! If you please! The subject is closed."

Mr. Perkins looked from the boy's smoldering face to his mother's set expression. "After all," he said, "that is no business of the Museum. Let me put it this way, Mrs. Stuart. I'll keep that job open for, oh, say six months.. . no, please, Mrs. Stuart! Whether or not your son takes it is your problem . . . and I .am sure you don t need my advice. I just want to assure your son that the Museum won't keep him away from his pet. Is that fair?"

Her needles were clicking like machinery. "I suppose so," she admitted.

"Mr. Stuart?"

"Wait a minule. Mother, you don't think I'd.."

"Please, Mr. Stuart! The Museum of Natural History has no place in a family discussion. You know our offer. Will you accept?"

Mrs. Stuart interrupted. "I don't believe you mentioned the price, Mr. Perkins."

"Why, so I didn't! Shall we say twenty thousand?"

"Net?"

"Net? Oh, no . . . subject to the claims we'll have to settle, of course."

"Net,' Mr. Perkins," she said firmly.

He shrugged. "Net."

"We accept."

"Good."

"Hey, wait a minute!" protested John Thomas. "We don't either. Not if this other thing isn't settled. I'm not going to turn LummoX over to..."

"Quiet! Dear, I've been patient but we'll have no more of this nonsense. Mr. Perkins, he accepts. Do you have the papers with you?"

"We don't either accept!"

"Just a moment," Mr. Perkins appealed. "Ma'am, am I correct in thinking that I must have your son's signature for a valid bill of sale?"

"You'll get it."

"Hmm. Mr. Stuart?"

"I'm not going to sign unless it's settled that LummoX and I stay together."

"Mrs. Stuart?"

“This is ridiculous.”

“I think so, too. But there is nothing I can do.” Perkins stood up. “Good night, Mr. Stuart. Thanks for letting me speak my piece—and for letting me see LummoX. No, don’t get up; I can find the door.”

He started to leave, while the Stuarts were busy not looking at each other. He paused at the door. “Mr.

- Stuart?”

“Huh? Yes, Mr. Perkins?”

“Would you do me a favor? Get as many pictures of LummoX as possible? Color-stereo-motion-sound if you can: I would have a professional crew flown here .

but there may not be time. You know. It would be a shame indeed if there were not some scientific record left of him. So do what you can.” He turned away again.

John Thomas gulped and was up out of his chair. “Mr. Perkins! Hey! Come back.”

A few minutes later he found himself, signing a bill of sale. His signature was shaky but legible. “Now Mrs. Stuart,” Mr. Perkins said smoothly, “if you will sign Underneath, where it say~ ‘Guardian’ . . . thanks! Oh yes! I must scratch out that part about ‘subject to settlement of claim.’ I don’t have the cash with me; I got here after the banks had closed, so I’ll pass over a nominal sum to bind it and we’ll settle the rest before we move the specimen.”

“No,” said John Thomas.

“Eh?”

“I forgot to tell you. The Museum can settle the claims, since I can’t and after all LummoX did it. But I’m not going to take any money. I’d feel like Judas.”

His mother said sharply, “John Thomas! I won’t let you...”

“Better not say it, Mum,” he said dangerously. “You know what Dad would have thought.”

“Hrrumph!” Mr. Perkins cleared his t-hroat loudly. “I’m going to fill in the usual legal fiction of a nominal sum. I won t stay longer; Judge O’Farrell told me that he goes to bed at ten. Mrs. Stuart, I consider the Museum bound by my offer. Mr. Stuart, I’ll leave you to settle with your mother in your own way. Good night all!” He shoved the bill of sale in his pocket and left quickly.

An hour later they were still facing each other wearily and angrily aci’oss the living room. John Thomas had let himself be bullied into conceding that his mother could take the money, as long as he was not required to touch it. He had

given this in exchange, he thought, for permission to accept the job with LummoX.

But she shook her head. "Quite out of the question. After all, you are about to go to college. You couldn't take that beast along. So you had no reason to expect to keep him with you anyhow."

"Huh? But I thought you had meant to take care of him... the way you promised Dad. . .and I would have seen him on week ends."

"Keep your father out of this! I might as well tell you right now that I made up my mind long ago that the day you went away to school this household would cease to be a zoo. This present mix-up has simply moved up the date a few days."

He stared at her, unable to answer.

Presently she came over and put a hand on his shoulder. "Johnnie? Johnnie dear;.."

"Huh?"

"Look at me, darling. We've had some bitter words and I'm sorry they were ever spoken . . . I'm sure you did not mean them. But Mum has only been thinking of your welfare, you know that? Don't you?"

"Uh, I suppose so."

"That's all Mum ever thinks about.~ . what's best for her big boy. You're young, and when a person is young, things seem important that aren't. But as you grow older, you will find that Mum knew best. Don't you see that?"

"Well ... Mum, about that job. If I could only...."

"Please, dear. Mother has a splitting headache. We'll say no more about it now. Get a good night's sleep and tomorrow you'll see things differently." She patted his cheek, bent down and kissed him. "Good night, dear."

"G'night."

He sat there long after she had gone up, trying to figure things out. He knew that he should feel good

- . he'd saved Lummie; hadn't he?

But he did not feel good; he felt like an animal that has chewed a leg off to escape a trap . . . shock and misery, not relief.

At last he got up and went outside to see LummoX.

## VIII

- The Sensible Thing To Do

JOHN THOMAS stayed with Lummox a short time only, as he could not bear to tell him the truth and there was nothing else to talk about. Lummox sensed his distress and asked questions; at last John Thomas pulled himself together and said, "There's nothing wrong I tell you! Shut up and go to sleep. And be darn sure you stay in the yard, or I'll beat you bow-legged."

"Yes, Johnnie. I don't like it outside anyway. People did funny things."

"Just remember that and don't do it again."

"I won't Johnnie. Cross my heart."

John Thomas went in and up to bed. But he did not go to sleep. After a while he got up, dressed in part, and went up to the attic. The house was very old and had a real garret, reached by a ladder and scuttle hole in an upper hallway closet. Once there had been a proper staircase but it had been squeezed out when the landing flat was built on the roof, as the space had been needed for the lazy lift.

But the attic was still there and it was John Thomas's only private place. His room his mother "tidied" sometimes, even though it was his duty (and wish) to do it himself. Anything might happen when Mum tidied. Papers might be lost, destroyed, or even read, for Mum believed that there should be no secrets between parents and children.

So anything he wanted to keep to himself he kept in the attic; Mum never went there-ladders made her dizzy. He had a small, almost airless and very dirty room there which he was supposed to use only for "storage." Its actual uses were varied: he had raised snakes there some years before; there he kept the small collection of books which every boy comes by but does not discuss with parents; he even had a telephone there, an audio extension run from the usual sound & sight instrument in his bedroom. This last was a practical result of his high-school course in physics and it had been real work to wire it, as it not only had to be rigged when Mum was out of the house and in such a way that she would not notice it but also it had to be done so as not to advertise its presence to the phone company's technicians.

But it worked, jury-rigged though it was, and he had added a "servant" circuit which flashed a warning light if anyone was listening from any other instrument in the house.

Tonight he had no wish to call anyone and it was past the hour when direct messages were permitted at the dormitory where Betty lived. He simply wanted to be alone . \* . and to look over some papers he had not looked at in a long time. He fumbled under his work table, flipped a toggle; a panel opened in what appeared to be blank wall. In the cupboard thus exposed were books and papers. He took them out.

One item was a thin-paper notebook, his great grandfather's diary of the Trail Blazer's second voyage of

exploration. It was more than a hundred years old and showed the wear of many hands. John Thomas had read it a dozen times; he supposed that his father and his grandfather had done the same. All the pages were fragile, many had been repaired.

He thumbed through it, turned the pages carefully, but browsing rather than reading. His eye lit on one remembered item:

"Some of the lads are panicky, especially the married men. But they should of thought of it before they signed up. Everybody knows the score now; we burst through and came out somewhere not close to home. Who cares? We meant to travel, didn't we?"

John Thomas turned a few more pages. He had always known the story of the Trail Blazer; it produced in him neither awe nor wonder. One of the first interstellar ships, her crew had plied the profession of discovery with the same acceptance of the unknown that had marked the golden days of -the fifteenth century, when men had braved uncharted seas in wooden vessels. The Trail Blazer and her sisters had gone out the same way, burst through. the Einstein barrier, taken their chances on getting back. John Thomas Stuart viii had been aboard her that second voyage, had come home in one piece, married, begat a male child, and settled down. . . it was he who had built the landing flat on the roof.

Then one night he had heard the call of the wild goose, signed up again. He had not come back.

John Thomas located the first mention of LummoX:

"This planet is a fair imitation of good old Terra, which is a relief after the last three, since we can hit dirt without suiting up. But evolution must

have been playing double-or-nothing here, instead of the four-limbed arrangement considered stylish at home practically everything here has at least eight legs . ~. \* 'mice' that look like centipedes, rabb'itlike creatures with aix short legs and one pair of tremendous jumping legs, all sorts up to things as big as giraffes. I caught one little fel.. low (if you can call it that . . . fact is, he came up and crawled into my lap) and I Was so taken with him that I am going to try to keep him as a mascot. He puts me in mind of a dachshund puppy, only better engineered. Cristy had the airlock watch, so I was able to get him aboard without turning him over to Biology."

The next day's entry did not mention LummoX, being concerned with a more serious matter:

“We hit the jackpot this time . . . \* Civilization. The officers are, so excited they are almost off their heads. I’ve seen one of the dominant race at a distance. The same multi-legged pattern, but otherwise making you wonder what would have happened to Earth if the dinosaurs had made good.”

Still further on...

“I’ve been wondering what to feed Cuddle pup. I needn’t have worried. He likes everything I’ve sneaked out of the mess for him . . . \* \* but he will eat anything that is not riveted down. Today he ate my Everlasting stylus and it has me worried. I don’t suppose the ink cartridge will poison him but how about the metal and plastic? He’s just like a baby; everything he can reach goes in his mouth.

***“Cuddlepuppy gets cuter every day. The little***

*tyke* seems to be trying to talk; he whines at me and I whine back at him. Then he crawls into my lap and tells me that he loves me, plain as anything. I’ll be switched if I’ll let Biology have him, even if they catch me. Those birds would likely as not cut him up just to see what makes him tick. He trusts me and I’m not going to let him down.”

John Thomas, Junior, had not gone to sea. Instead he had killed himself flying a boxkite affair termed an “aeroplane.” That had been before the first of the World Wars; for several years thereafter the house had received “paying guests.”

J. T. Stuart had died to greater purpose; the submarine of which he was gunnery officer had penetrated Tsushima Straits to the Sea of Japan, but had failed to return

John Thomas Stuart IV was killed on the first trip to the Moon.

John Thomas V had emigrated to Mars; his son, the famous name in the family, Johnnie skipped over quickly; he had long since grown tired of being reminded that he bore the same name as General Stuart, first governor of the Martian Commonwealth after the revolution. Johnnie wondered what would have happened to his great great great grandfather if the revolution had failed? Would they have hanged him? . . . instead of putting up statues of him?

Much of the book was devoted to - an attempt by Johnnie’s grandfather to clear the name of his own grandfather-for the son of General Stuart was no public hero; instead he had sweated out his last fifteen years of life in the Triton penal colony. His wife had returned to her family on Earth and taken back her maiden name, for herself and her son. -

But her son had gone proudly into court the day he was of age and had had his name changed from “Carl-

ton Gimxnidge” to “John Thomas Stuart viii.” It was he who had fetched LummoX back and he had used his bonus money from the second trip of the Trail Blazer to buy back the old homestead. He had apparently impressed on his own son that his son’s grandfather had gotten a dirty deal; the son had made a great point of it in this record.

Johnnie’s grandfather could himself have used an ad-, vocate to defend his name. The record stated simply that John Thomas Stuart ix had resigned from the service and had never gone into space again, but Johnnie knew that it had been a choice of that or a court martial; his own father had told him . \* . but he had told him also that his grandfather could have got off scotfree had he been willing to testify. His father had added, “Johnme, I’d rather see you loyal to your friends than with your chest decked out in medals.”

The old man had still been living at the time Johnnie’s father told him this. On a later occasion, while Johnnie’s father was out on patrol, Johmüe had tried to let him know that he knew. -

Granddad had been furious. “Poppycock!” he had shouted. “They had me dead to rights.”

“But Dad said your skipper was actually the one who...”

“Your Dad wasn’t there. Captain Dominic was the finest skipper that ever trod steel . . . may his soul rest in peace.. Set up the checkers, son. I’m going to beat you.” -

Johnnie had tried to get the straight of it after his grandfather died, but his father’s answer was not direct. “Your grandfather was a romantic sentimentalist, Johnme. It’s the flaw in our make-up. Hardly sense enough in the whole line to balance a check book.” He had puffed his pipe and added, “But we do have fun.”

Johnnie put the books and papers away, feeling dully that it had not done him much good to read about his

forebears; LummoX was still on his mind. He guessed he ought to go down and try to get some sleep.

He was turning away as the phone flashed; he grabbed it before the light could change to sound signal; he did not want his mother to wake. “Yes?”

“That you, Johnnie?”

“Yeah. I can’t see you, Betty; I’m up in the attic.”

“That isn’t the only reason you can’t. I haven’t got my face on, so I’ve got the video switched off. Besides it’s pitch dark in this hallway, since I’m not allowed to phone this time o’ night. Uh, the Duchess isn’t listening, is she?”

Johnnie glanced at his warning signal. “No.”



Or take . . . Oh, shucks, take any of 'em! There hadn't been a "good" boy in the bunch. Would granddad have sold LummoX? Why, granddad would have torn down the courthouse with his bare hands. If granddad was here, he'd be standing guard over Lum

inox with a gun and daring the world to touch one spine.

He certainly wasn't going to take any of Perkins' dirty money; he knew that. -

But what could he do?

He could go to Mars. Under the Lafayette Law he was a citizen and could claim land. But how could he get there? Worse, how could he get LummoX there?

The trouble with that, he told himself savagely, is that it almost makes sense. And sense is no use to me.

At last he hit on a plan. It had the one virtue of having no sense to it at all; it was compounded of equal parts of folly and of risk. He felt that granddad would have liked it.

Ix

## Customs and an Ugly Duckling

nn went down to the upper hallway and listened at his mother's door. He did not expect to hear anything as her bedroom was sound-proofed; the action was instinctive. Then he returned to his own room and made rapid preparations, starting by dressing in camping clothes and mountain boots. His sleeping bag he kept in a drawer of his desk; he got it out, tucked it in a side pocket of his coat and shoved its power pack in a breast pocket. Other items of hiking and camping gear he distributed among other pockets and he was almost ready to go.

He counted his cash and swore softly; his other assets were in a savings account and now he would have no chance to draw from it. Well, it couldn't be helped

he started downstairs, then remembered an important matter. He went back to his desk,

"Dear Mum," he wrote. "Please tell Mr. Perkins that the deal is off. You can use my college money to pay back the insurance people. Lu~n and 1 are going away and it won't do any good to try to find us. I'm sorry but we have to." He looked at the note, decided that there was no more to be said, added "love," and signed

it.

He started a note to Betty, tore it up, tried again, and finally told himself that he would send her a letter when he had more to say. He went downstairs, left the note on the dining table, then went to the pantry and picked out supplies. A few minutes later, carrying a large sack crammed with tins and packages, he went out to LummoX's hou'se.

His friend was asleep. The watchman eye accepted him; LummoX did not stir. John Thomas hauled back and kicked him as hard as possible. "Hey, Lum! Wake up.

The beast opened his other eyes, yawned daintily, and piped, "Hello, Johnnie."

"Pull yourself together. We're going for a hike."

LummoX extended his legs and stood up, letting a ripple run from head to stern. "All right."

"Make me a seat-and leave room for this." Johnnie held up the bag of groceries. LummoX complied without comment; John Thomas chucked the sack up on the beast, then scrambled up himself. Soon they were' on the road in front of the Stuart home.

Almost irrational as he was, John Thomas nevertheless knew that running away and hiding LummoX was a project almost impossible; LummoX anywhere would be about as conspicuous as a bass drum in a bathtub. However there was a modicum of method in his madness; concealing LummoX near Westville was not quite the impossibility it would have been some places.

***Westville lay in an open mountain valley; immediate-***

ly west the backbone of the continent shoved its gaunt ridges into the sky. A few miles beyond the city commenced one of the great primitive areas, thousands of square miles of up-and-down country almost the same as it had been when the Indians greeted Columbus. During a short season each year it swarmed with redcoated sportsmen, blazing away at deer and elk and each other; most of the year it was ciesertea.

If he could get LummoX there without being seen, it was barely possible that they could avoid being caught-until his food supplies ran out. When that time came-well, he might live off the country just as LummoX would . . . eat venison, maybe. Or maybe go back to town without LummoX and argue it out again from the strong position of being able to refuse to tell where LummoX was until they listened to reason. Th@ possibilities were not thought out; he simply intended to get LummoX under cover and then think about it. . \* get him somewhere where that old scoundrel Dreiser

- couldn't try out ways to hurt him!

John Thomas could have turned LummoX to the west and set off across country toward the mountains, LummoX being no more dependent on pavement than is a tank. . . but LummoX left a track in soft earth as conspicuous as that of a tank. It was necessary to stay on paved road. -

Johnnie had a solution in mind. In an earlier century a transcontinental highway had crossed the mountains here, passing south of Westville and winding ever higher toward the Great Divide. It had long since been replaced by a modern powered road which tunneled through the wall of rock instead of climbing it. But the old road remained, abandoned, overgrown in many places, its concrete slabs heaved and tilted from frost and summer heat. . . but still a paved road that would show little sign of LummoX's ponderous progress,

He led LummoX by back ways, avoiding houses and

working toward a spot three miles west where the expressway entered the first of its tunnels and the old highway started to climb. He did not go quite to the fork, but stopped a hundred yards short, parked LummoX in front of a vacant lot, warned him not to move, and scouted the lay of the land. He did not dare take LummoX onto the expressway to reach the old road; not only might they be seen but also it would be dan-

- gerous to LummoX.

But John Thomas found what he thought he - remembered: a construction road looping around the junction. It was not paved but was hard-packed granite gravel and he judged that even LummoX's heavy steps would not leave prints. He went back and found LummoX placidly eating a "For Sale" sign. He scolded him and took it away, then decided that he might as well get rid of the evidence and gave it back. They continued while LummoX munched the sign.

Once on the old highway John Thomas relaxed. For the first few miles it was in good repair, for it served homes farther up the canyon. But there was no through traffic, it being a dead end, and no local traffic at this hour. Once or twice an air car passed overhead, party or theater goers returning home, but if the passengers noticed the great beast plodding on the road below they gave no sign.

The road meandered up the canyon and came out on a tableland; here was a barrier across the pavement:

### **ROAD CLOSED . . . VEHICULAR PASSAGE FORBIDDEN BEYOND**

THIS POINT. Johnnie got down and looked it over. It was a single heavy timber supported at the chest height. "Lunimie, can you walk over that without~ touching it?"

















































Eight figures poured out of the door of the ship. They looked not human, being covered head to foot with

heavy metal mesh. Each wore a helmet resembling a fencer's mask and carried as a back pack a field antigrav. They trotted confidently in open double file toward the passage through the trees; as they struck the field they slowed slightly, sparks flew, and a violet nimbus formed around each. But on they came.

The second four were carrying a large metal-net cylinder, high as a man and of equal width. They balanced it easily up in the air. The man in the lead called out, "Swing wide of the beast. We'll get the kids out first, then dispose of him." He sounded quite cheerful.

The squad came up to the odd group of three, cutting around without passing close to Lummo. "Easy! Catch them both," the leader called out. The barrel-like cage was lowered over Betty and John Thomas, setting slowly until the man giving orders reached inside and flipped a switch-whereupon it struck sparks and dropped to the ground.

He gave them a red-faced grin. "Feels good to get the molasses off you, doesn't it?"

Johnnie glared at him with his chin quivering, and replied insultingly while he tried to rub cramps out of his leg muscles. "Now, nos~!" the officer answered mildly. "No good to feel that way. You made us do it." He glanced up at Lummo. "Good grief! He is a big beast, isn't he? I'd hate to meet him in a dark alley, without weapons."

Johnnie found that tears were streaming down his face and that he could not stop them. "Go ahead!" he cried, his voice misbehaving. "Get it over with!"

"He never meant any' harm! So kill him quickly . . . don't play cat-and-mouse with him." He broke down and sobbed, covering his face with his hands. Betty put her hands on his shoulders and sobbed with him.

The officer looked distressed. "What are you talking about, son? We aren't here to hurt him. We have orders

to bring him in without a scratch on him-even if we lost men in the process. Craziest orders I ever had to carry out.



























"Well.. . go on. Tell me the rest."

## XIII

### **"No, Mr. Secretary"**

~n. icucu's wife let him sleep late the next morning. She did this occasionally, reasoning that no crisis was important enough to wake him when he needed rest. When he got to his office he found Wesley Rolibins, Special Assistant Secretary for public relations, asleep in his chair. Robbins was not a diplomat, did not want to be one, and made a point of showing it.

"Good morning, Wes," Mr. Kiku said mildly.

"What's good about it?" Robbins chucked a copy of the CAPITAL TIMES at the Under Secretary. "Seen this?"

"No." Mr. Kiku unfolded it.

"Twenty-three years in the newspaper business . . . to be scooped on my own beat."

Mr. Kiku read:

### **ALIEN INVADERS**

#### **THREATEN WAR! I I**

#### **Demand Hostages**

Capital Enclave, Sep. 12 (GP) . . . Space Secretary MacClure revealed today that the xenic visitors dubbed "Hroshii" now landed at Capital port have demanded, under threats of war, that the Federation...

Kiku scanned down, saw that a distortion of his answer to the Hroshii had been credited to Secretary MacClure, with no mention of the possibility of peaceful settlement. A trailer story reported the Chief of the General Staff as assuring Earth and all the federated planets that there was nothing to fear from the insolent aliens. A South Asian senator demanded to know what steps were being taken. . . Kiku glanced at it all but discarded the meaningless 90%, including a blast from the Keep Earth Human League and a "We Stand at the Crossroads" editorial. There was an interview with Mrs. Murgatroyci but he did not take time to find out which side Pidgie-Widgie was on.





even to the peoples of Earth, but to all sovereignties & the Federation, both on Terra and eJse~. where?"

"What's that got to do with it? We're the leading power."

"Whom do you mean by 'we'? Not my little country certainly. No, I was thinking that this will now be settled by vote of the Council and I was wondering whether the Council might possibly vote to surrender one unimportant citizen of North America rather than risk an interstellar war? I wonder how Mars will vote?"

The Secretary got up and strode up and down his office. It was a large room, much larger than Mr. Kiku's. He stopped at the far end and stared 'out at the Tow-

en of Three Planets and the Hall of Civilizations, while Kiku sat quietly. Wes Robbins slumped in a chair, his bony legs stretched in front of him. He was trimming his nails with a pocket knife; they were long and black and needed the attention.

MacClure turned suddenly to Kiku. "See here, Henry, you confounded word splitter, I won't be bullied."

"Bullied, Mr. Secretary?"

"Yes, bullied. Oh, you dressed it up in your usual double-talk, but I wasn't born yesterday. You know perfectly well that if we give the press these unnecessary details . . . that nonsense this Dr. Fatima or whatever his name is, this Rargyllian monster, filled you with. . . yes, and you threatening to tell the press that I got cold feet about an attack . . . that's a threat if I ever heard one! . . . you give 'em all that junk and we'd have a row in the Council that would be heard from here to Pluto! With the home governments sending special instructions to their delegates and may.. be the Terran bloc getting outvoted. Bight on top of this ticklish Triangular Conference it could be disastrous. Yes, that's the word . . . disastrous." MacClure stopped and struggled for breath. "Well, you won't get away with it. You're fired! . . . understand me? Fired! I'll take care of having you removed for cause, or transferring you to the retired list, or whatever the red tape calls for, but you are done, right now. I'm relieving you. You can go home."

"Very well, Mr. Secretary," Mr. Kiku said evenly and started for the door to his office.

In the silence Wes Robbins' knife clicked shut loudly. He stood up. "Hold it, Henry! Mac. .."

Mr. MacClure looked around. "Huh? What's the matter with you? And don't call me 'Mac'; this is official business. I'm still Secretary around here, as I just told Kiku."

"Yes, you are still Secretary-for about two hours, maybe."













































“If it is true that they have no need for other peoples, please ask him why they have come to us and why they have offered us presents?”

“But you insisted on it, my friend,” Ftaeml answered in surprise.

“Thank you, Doctor, but I do not want your comment. Require him to answer. Please do not coach him.”

“I will try.” Ftaeml exchanged several sentences of the high’ whining with the Hroshij commander, then turned back to Kiku. “Forgive me. He says that he acceded to your childishness as the simplest means of accomplishing his purpose. He wishes to discuss now the surrender of John Thomas Stuart.”

“Please tell him that the matter is not open to discussion. The agenda requires that we first settle the question of diplomatic relations.”

“Pardon me, sir. ‘Diplomatic relations’ is a concept difficult to translate. I have been working on it for days.”

“Tell him that what he sees now is an example of diplomatic relations. Free peoples, negotiating as equals, with peaceful intentions, to their mutual benefit.”

The Ragyllian simulated a sigh. “Each of those concepts is almost equally difficult. I will try.”

Presently he answered, “The hereditary marshal says that if what we are doing constitutes diplomatic relations you have them now. Where is the Stuart boy?”

“Not so fast. The agenda must be taken up point by point. They must accept an embassy and a mixed mission for cultural, scientific, and ‘trade purposes. They must leave with us a similar embassy and mission. Regular travel between our two sovereignties must be planned.

Not until these are disposed of can there be any mention of the Stuart boy.”

“I will try again.” Ftaeml spoke to the ‘Boss’ Hroshiu at length; the reply was short. “He tells me to tell you that all those points are rejected as not worthy of consideration. Where is the Stuart boy?”

“In that case,” Mr. Kiku answered quietly, “tell them that we do not bargain with barbarians. Tell them to pick up the trash-be sure of forceful translation!-with which they have littered our home, and get quickly back to their ship. They are required to take off at once. They must bundle their precious Hroshia aboard, by force if need be, if they ever expect to see her again- they will never again be allowed to land.”

Ftaeml looked as if he were about to burst into tears he was incapable of shedding. “Please! I beg you not to antagonize them. I tell tales out of school . . . I go beyond my professional duties . . . but they could now destroy this city without recourse to their ship.”

“Deliver the message. The conference is ended.” Mr. Kiku stood up, picked up the others with his eyes, and headed for the retiring room.

The double went ahead. MacClure caught Kiku by the arm and fell into step. “Henry . . . you’re running this, granted. But shouldn’t you talk it over? They’re savage beasts. It could. . .”

“Mr. MacClure,” Kiku said softly, “as a distinguished predecessor once said, in dealing with certain types you must step on their toes until they apologize.” He urged the Secretary toward the door.

“But suppose they won’t?”

“That is the hazard. Please . . . let us not argue in their presence.” They went into the retiring room; the door closed behind them.

Greenberg turned to Kiku. ‘Nice try, boss . . . but what do we do now?’

“We wait.”

“Okay.” Greenberg went nervously to a wall relay, picked up the scene inside the auditorium. The Hroshii had not left. He could just make out Ftaeml, surrounded by creatures much larger than the medusoid,

The double said to Kiku, ‘Through with me, sir?’

‘Yes, Arthur. A good job.’

“Thanks. I’ve got time to get this make-up off and catch the second game of the doubleheader.”

“Good. Perhaps you had better change your appearance here.”

‘Shucks, the photographers know. They play along.’ He left, whistling.

MacClure sat down, lit a cigar, took a puff, put it down. “Henry, you ought to notify the Chief of Staff.”

“He knows. We wait.”

They waited. Greenberg said suddenly, “Here comes Ftaeml.” He hurried to the door and let the Rargyllian in.

***Dr. Ftaeml seemed very tense. “My dear Mr. Kiku***

- the Hroshij commander states that they will agree to your strange wishes for sake of prompt settlement. He insists that you now deliver the Stuart boy.”
- “Please tell him that he misunderstands entirely the nature of friendly relations between civilized people. We do not barter the freedom of one of our citizens against their worthless favors, even as they would not barter the freedom of their Hroshia Lummox. Then tell him that I order them to leave at once.”

Ftaeml said earnestly, “I reluctantly deliver your message.”

He was back quickly. "They agree to your terms."

"Good. Come, Sergei. Mr. MacClure, there is no need for you to appear unless it suits you." He went out into the hall, followed by Greenberg and FtaemL

The Hroshij "boss," it seemed to Kiku was more baleful than ever. But the details went promptly forward

- an equal number of Hroshii and of humans to constitute the missions, passage to be provided in the Hroshij ship, one of the Hroshii there present to be ambassador to the Federation. Ftaeml assured them that this Hroshiu was of practical rank second only to the expedition commander.

And now, said the Hroshij commander, it is time to turn over to us John Thomas Stuart. Ftaeml added anxiously, "I trust you have made arrangements, my friend? I dislike the tenor of this. It has been too easy."

With a feeling of satisfaction soothing his troubled stomach Mr. Kiku answered, "I see no difficulty. The Stuart boy is willing to go, now that we are assured of civilized relations. Please make sure that they understand that he goes as a free being, not a slave, not a pet. The Hroshii must guarantee his status and his return passage, in one of their own ships, whenever he so wishes."

Ftaeml translated. Presently he answered. "All of that is satisfactory except for something which I will translate as a 'minor detail' The Stuart boy will be a member of the household of the Hroshia LummoX. Naturally-I translate here most carefully-naturally the question of the boy returning, if ever, is a personal prerogative of the Hroshia LummoX. Should she grow tired of him and wish to return him, a ship would be made available."

"No."

"No what, sir?"

"A simple negative. The subject of the Stuart boy is finished."

Ftaeml turned back to his clients.

***"They say," he answered presently, "that there is no treaty.~"***

"I know that. Treaties are not signed with . . they have a word meaning 'servant'?"

"They have servants of several sorts, some higher, some lower."

"Use the word for the lowest sort. Tell them that there is no treaty because servants have no power to treat. Tell them to go and be quick about it."

Ftaeml looked, at- Kiku saicily. "I admire you, my friend, but I do not envy you." He turned to the expedition commander and whined for several moments.

The Hroshiu opened his mouth wide, looked at Kiku, and squealed like a kicked puppy. Ftaeml gave a start and moved away. “Very bad profanity, untranslatable . . .”The monster continued to make noises; Ftaeml tried frantically to translate: “Contempt . . . lower animal . . . eat you with relish. . . follow back your ancestors and eat them as well . . . your despicable race must be taught manners . . . kidnapers . . . child stealers. . .” He stopped in great agitation.

The Hroshiu lumbered toward the platform, ~reared up until he was eye to eye with Mr. Kiku. Greenberg slid a hand under his desk and located a control that would throw a tanglefoot field over the lower’ floor .

a permanent installation; the hail had seen other disturbances.

But Mr. Kiku sat like stone. They eyed each other, the massive thing from “Out There” and the little elderly human. Nothing moved in the great hall, nothing was said.

Then from the back of the hall broke out a whining as if a whole basket of puppies had been disturbed at once. The Hroshij commander whirled around, making the floor shake, and shrilled to his retainers. He was answered and he whined back sharp command. All twelve Hroshii swarmed out the door moving with speed incredible for beings so ungainly.

Kiku stood up and watched them. Greenberg grabbed his arm. “Boss! The Chief of Staff is trying to reach you.

Kiku shook him off. “Tell him not to be hasty. It is most important that he not be hasty. Is our car waiting?”

xv’

“Sorry We Messed Things Up”

JOHN THOMAS STUART xx had wanted to attend the conference; it required a flat refusal to keep him away. He was in the Hotel Universal in the suite provided for him and his mother, playing checkers with his bodyguard, when Betty Sorenson showed up with Miss Holtz. Myra Holtz was an operative for BuSec of DepSpace, and concealed her policewoman profession under a pleasant façade. Mr. Kiku’s instructions to her concerning Betty had been: “Keep a sharp eye on her. She has a taste for excitement.”

The two guards greeted each other; Betty said, “Hi, Johnnie. Why aren’t you over at the heap big smoke?”

“They wouldn’t let me.”

“Me, too.” She glanced around. “Where’s the Duchess?”

“Cone shopping. I’m still getting the silent treatment. Seventeen hats she’s bought. What have you done to your face?”

Betty turned to a mirror. ‘Like it? It’s called ‘Cosmic Contouring’ and it’s the latest thing.”

“Makes you look like a zebra with the pip.”

“Why, you country oaf. Ed, you like it. Don’t you?”

Ed Cowen looked up from the checker board and said hastily, “I wouldn’t know. My wife says I have no taste.”

‘Most men haven’t. Jøbnnie, Myra and I liave come to invite you two to go out on the town~ How about it?’

Cowen answered, “I don’t favor that, Myra.”

“It was her idea,” Miss Holz answered.

John Thomas said to Cowen, “Why not? I’m sick of checkers.”

“Well . . . r~ supposed to keep in touch with the office. They might want you any time now.”

‘Pooh!’ put in Betty. “You carry a bodyphone. Anyhow Myra does.”

Cowen shook his head. “Let’s play it safe.”

“Am I under arrest?” Betty persisted. “Is Johnnie?”

‘Mmm. . . no. It’s more protective custody.”

‘Then you can protectively cuss him wherever be is. Or stay here and play checkers with yourself. Come on, Johnnie.”

Cowen ~looked at Miss Holtz; she answered slowly, “I suppose it’s all right, Ed. We’ll be with them.”

Cowen shrugged and stood up. Johnnie said to Betty, “I’m not going out in public with you looking like that. Wash your face.”

“But Johnnie! It took two hours to put it on.”

“The taxpayers paid for it, didn’t they?”

“Well, yes, but. . .”

‘Wash your face. Or we go nowhere. Don’t you agree, Miss Holtz?’

Special Operative Holtz had only a flower pattern adorning her left cheek, aside from the usual tinting. She said thoughtfully, “Betty doesn’t need it. Not at her age.

“Oh, you’re a couple of Puritans!” Betty said bitterly, stuck her tongue at Johnnie and slouched into the bath. She came out with her face glowing pink from scrubbing. “Now I’m stark naked. Let’s go.”

There was another tussle at the lift, which Ed Cowen won. They went to the roof to take an air taxi for sightseeing, instead of going down to the streets. “Both you kids have had your faces spread around the papers the past few days. And

this town has more crackpots than a second-hand shop. I don't want any incidents."

"If you hadn't let them bully me, my face wouldn't be recognizable."

"But his would."

"We could paint him, too. Any male face would be improved with make-up." But she entered the lift and they took an air taxi.

"Where to, Chief?"

"Oh," said Cowen, "cruise around and show us sights. Put it on the hourly rate."

"You're the doctor. I can't fly across the Boulevard of Suns. Some parade, or something."

"I know."

"Look," put in Johrmie, "take us to the space port."

"No," Cowen corrected. "Not out there."

"Why not, Ed? I haven't seen Lummox yet. I want to look at him. He may not be well"

"That's one thing you can't do," Cowen told him. "The Hroshii ship is out of bounds."

"Well, I can see him from the air, can't I?"

"No!"

"But..."

"Never mind him," Betty advised. "We'll get another taxi. I've got money, Johnnie. So long, Ed."

"Look," complained the driver. "I'll take you to Timbuctu. But I can't hang around over a landing flat. The cops get rude about it."

"Head for the space port," Cowen said resignedly. There was a barricade around the many acres assigned to the Hroshii except where it had been broken to let their delegation enter the Boulevard of Suns, and even then the barricade joined others carrying on down the avenue toward the administrative group. Inside the enclosure the landing craft of the Hroshii sat squat and ugly, almost as large as a terrestrial star ship. Johnnie looked at it and wondered what it was going to be like to be on Hroshijud. He was uncomfortable at the thought, not because he was fearful but be-

cause he had not yet told Betty that he was going. He had started a couple of times but it had not worked out right.

Since she had not raised the subject he assumed that she did not know.

There were other sightseers in the air, and a crowd, not very thick, outside the barricade. No single wonder lasted long in Capital; its residents prided

themselves on being blasé and in fact, the Hroshii were not fantastic compared with a dozen other friendly races, some of them members of the Federation.

The Hroshii swarmed around the base of their ship, doing unexplained things with artifacts they had erected. Jo'hnnie tried to estimate their number, found it like guessing beans in a bottle. Dozens, surely. . . how many more?

The taxi cruised just outside the point patrol of police air cars. Johnnie suddenly called out, "Hey! There's Lummie!"

Betty craned her neck. "Where, Johnnie?"

"Coming into sight on the far side of their ship. There!" He turned to the driver. "Say, mister, could you put us around on the far side as close in as they'll let you?"

The driver glanced at Cowen, who nodded. They swung around, the police sentries and came in toward the Hroshij craft from the far side. The driver picked a point between two police cars and back a little. LummoX could be seen clearly now, closely attended by a group of Hroshii and towering over them.

***"I wish I had bh~ox," Johnnie complained. "I can't really see." '***

"Pair in the glove compartment," offered the driver. Johnnie got them out. They were a simple optical type, without electronic magnification, but they brought LummoX up much closer. He stared into his friend's face. ~

"How does Lummie look, Johnnie?"

"Okay. Kind of skinny, though. I wonder if they are feeding him right?"

"Mr. Greenberg tells me they aren't feeding Lummie at all. I thought you knew?"

"What? They can't do that to Lummie!"

"I don't see what we can do about it."

"Well . . ." John Thomas lowered the window and tried to get a better look. "Say, can't you take it in closer? And lower maybe? I want to give him a good checking over."

Cowen shook his head. The driver grumbled, "I don't want no words with the cops." But he did move in a little closer until he was lined up with' the police cars.

Almost at once the speaker in the car's overhead blared, "Hey, you! Number four eighty-four! Where do you think you're going with that can? Drag it out of there!"

The driver muttered and started to obey. John Thomas, still with the glasses to his eyes, said, 'Aw!' . . . then added, "I wonder if he can hear me? Lummie!" he shouted into the wind. "Oh LummoX!"

The Hroshia raised her head and looked wildly around.

Cowen grabbed John Thomas and reached for the window closure; But Johnnie shook free. "Oh, you go fry eggs!" he said angrily. "I've been pushed around long enough. LummoX! It's Johnnie, boy! Over here! Come over this way..."

Cowen dragged him inside and slammed the window shut. "I knew we shouldn't have come out. Driver, let's get out of here."

"Only too happy!"

"But hold it just back of the police lines. I want to check on this."

'Make up your mind.'

It needed no binoculars to see what was happening. LummoX headed straight for the barrier, on a bee line

with the taxi, scattering other Hroshii right and left. On reaching the barrier no attempt was made to flow over it; LummoX went through it.

"Jumping jeepers!" Cowen said softly. "But the tanglefoot will stop her."

It did not. LummoX slowed down, but one mighty foot followed another, as if the charged air had been deep mud. With the persistence of a glacier the Hro'shia was seeking the point most closely under the taxi.

And more Hroshii were pouring out the gap. They made still heavier weather of the immobilizing field, but still they came. As Cowen watched, LummoX broke free of the ' zone and came on at a gallop, with people scattering' ahead of her.

Cowen snapped, "Myra, get through on another circuit to the military! I'll call the office."

Betty grabbed his sleeve. "No!"

'Huh? YOu again! Shut up or you'll get the back of my hand.'

"Mr. Cowen, will you listen." She went on hastily, "Its no good calling for help. There isn't anybody who can make LummoX listen but Johnnie-and they won't listen to anybody but LummoX. You know that. So put him down where he can talk to Lummie-or you're going to have a lot of people hurt and it will be all your fault."

Security Operative First Class Edwin Cowen stared at her and reviewed in his mind his past career and future hopes. Then he made a brave decision almost instantly. "Take her down," he snapped. "Land her and

let the kid and me out." -

The driver groaned. "I'm charging extra for this." But he landed the car so fast that it jarred them. Cowen snatched the door open and he and John Thomas burst out; Myra Holtz tried to grab Betty, was unsuccessful. She herself jumped out as the driver was already raising.

“Johnnie!” squealed Lummox and held Out mighty arms in a universal gesture of welcome.

John Thomas ran to the star beast. “Lummie! Are you all right?”

“Sure,” agreed Lummox. “Why not? Hi, Betty.”

“Hi, Lummie.”

“Hungry, though,” Lummox added thoughtfully.

“We’ll change that.”

“It’s all right. I’m not supposed to eat now.”

John Thomas started to answer this amazing statement when he noticed Miss Holtz ducking away from one of the Hroshii. Others were milling around as if uncertain how to treat this development. When Johnnie saw Ed Cowen draw his gun and place himself between the Hroshiu and Myra he said suddenly, “Lummox! These are my friends. Tell your friends to leave them alone-and get back inside. Quickly!”

“Whatever you’ say, Johnnie.” The Hroshia spoke in the whining speech to her kin; at once she was obeyed.

“And make us a saddle. We’ll go with you and have a long talk.”

“Sure, Johnnie.”

They got aboard, Johnnie giving Betty a hand up, and started in through the break in the barrier. When Lummox struck the tanglefoot field again they stopped and Lummox spoke sharply to one of the others.

That Hroshiu called out to’ one inside; the tanglefoot’ field disappeared. They moved on in without difficulty.

When Mr. Kiku, Sergei Greenberg, and Dr Ftaeml arrived they found an armed truce, tense on both sides. All the Hroshii were back inside the broken barrier; military craft in quantity had replaced the police patrol and far overhead, out of sight, bombers were ready in final extremity to turn the area into a radioactive desert.

***The Secretary General and the Chief of Staff met***

them at the barricade. The Secretary General looked grave. “Ah, Henry. It seems we have failed. Not your fault.”

Mr. Kiku looked out at the massed Hroshii. “Perhaps.” The Chief of Staff added, “We are evacuating the blast radius as rapidly as possible. But if we have to do it, I don’t know what we can do for those two youngsters in there.”

“Then let’s not do anything, shall we? Not yet.”

"I don't think you understand the seriousness of the situation, Mr. Under Secretary. For example, we placed an immobilizing locus entirely around this area. It's gone. They cancelled it out. Not just here. Everywhere."

'So. Perhaps you do not understand the seriousness of the situation, General. In any case, a few words can do no harm. Come, Sergei. Coming, Doctor?' Mr. Kiku left the group around the Secretary General and headed for the break in the barricade. Wind sweeping across the miles-wide field forced him to clutch his hat. 'I do not like wind,' he complained to Dr. FtaemL "It is disorderly."

"There is a stronger wind ahead," the Rargyllian answered soberly. "My friend, is this wise? They will not hurt me; I am their employee. But you..."

'What else can I do?'

"I do not know. But there are situations in which courage is useless."

"Possibly. I've never found one yet."

'One finds such a situation but once.'

They were approaching the solid mass of Hroshti around LummoX. They could make out the two humans on the back of the Hroshtia a good hundred yards beyond. Kiku stopped. "Tell them to get out of my way. I wish to approach the Hroshtia LummoX."

Ftaeml translated. Nothing happened, though the Hroshtii stirred uneasily.

Greenberg said, "Boss, how

about asking LummoX and the kids to come out here?' That crowd doesn't smell friendly."

"No. I dislike shouting into this wind. Please call out to the Stuart lad and tell him to have them make way."

***"Okay, boss. It will be fun to tell my grandchildren***

- if I have grandchildren." He cupped his mouth and shouted, "Johnnie! John Stuart! Tell LummoX to have them clear a path."

"Sure!"

A path wide enough for a column of troops opened as if swept with a broom. The little procession moved down the ranks of Hroshtii. Greenberg felt goose flesh crawl up and down his back.

Mr. Kiku's only worry seemed to be keeping his hat on in the wind. He swore primly while clutching at his head. They stopped in front of LummoX. "Howdy, Mr. Kiku," John Thomas called out. "Shall we come down?"

"Perhaps it would be best."

Johnnie slid off, then caught Betty. "Sorry we messed things up."

"So am I. If you did. Will you introduce me to your friend, please?"

“Oh, sure. LummoX, this is Mr. Kiku. He’s a nice fellow, a friend of mine.”

“How do you do, Mr. Kiku.”

“How do you do, LummoX.” Mr. Kiku looked, thoughtful “Doctor, is not that the commander, there by the Hroshia? The one with the ugly glint in his eye?”

The Rargyllian looked. “Yes, it is he.”

“Urn. Ask him if he has reported the conference to his mistress.”

“Very well.” The medusoid spoke to the Hroshij commander, was answered. “He says not.”

“Urn. John Thomas, we concluded a treaty with the Hroshii to permit, all that I discussed with you. Suddenly they repudiated the agreement when they discovered that we would not surrender your person with-

out guarantees. Will you help me find out if such were the wishes of your friend?”

“You mean LummoX? Sure.”

“Very well. Wait a moment. Dr. Ftaeml, will you report the essentials of our agreement to the Hroshia LummoX-in the presence of the commander? Or are the concepts beyond her?”

“Eh? Why should they be? She was perhaps two hundred of your years old when she was brought here.”

“So much? Well, speak ahead.”

The Rargyllian commenced the curious whines of the Hroshij tongue, addressing LummoX. Once or twice LummoX interrupted, then allowed him to continue. When Dr. Ftaeml had finished she spoke to the expedition commander. Ftaeml said to the humans, “She asks, SCan ..his be tue?”

The commander made as wide a circle as space permitted, crept up in front of her, with the little group representing the Federation giving way. His legs were retracted so that he crawled like a caterpillar. Without lifting his head from the ground he whined his answer.

“He is admitting the truth but pleading necessity.”

“I wish he would hurry with it,” Kiku fretted. “I’m getting chilly.” His thin knees trembled.

“She is not accepting the explanation. I will spare you the exact tenor of her language-but her rhetoric is superb.”

Suddenly LummoX spat out one squeal, then reared up with four legs clear of the ground. With arms retracted the great beast swung down her head and struck the unfortunate commander a smashing sideways blow,

It lifted him off the ground, bowled him into the crowd. Slowly he regained his feet, slunk back to the spot in front of LummoX.

***LummoX began to speak. "She is saying. . . I wish***

you could hear this in her language!.. . that so long as the Galaxy shall last the friends of Johnnie are her friends. She adds that those who are not friends of her friends are nothing, less than nothing, never to be suffered in her sight. She commands this in the names of

it is a recitation of her ancestry with all its complicated branches and is somewhat tedious. Shall I attempt to translate?"

"Don't bother," Mr. Kiku told him. "'Yes' is 'yes' in any language."

"But she tells it with great beauty," Ftaeml said. "She is recalling to them things dreadful and wonderful, reaching far into the past."

"I am interested only in how it affects the future .

and in getting out of this pesky wind." Mr. Kiku sneezed.

"Oh dear!"

Dr. Ftaeml took his cape off and hung it around Mr. Kiku's narrow shoulders.

"My friend.. . my brother. I am sorry."

No, no, you will be cold.

"Not I."

"Let us share it, then."

"I am honored," the medusoid answered softly, his tendrils twitching with emotion. He spread it around them and they huddled together while LummoX finished her peroration. Betty turned to Johnnie.

"That's more than you ever did for me."

"Now, Slugger, you know you're never cold."

"Well, put your arm around me at least."

"Huh? In front of everybody? Go snuggle up to LummoX."

While speaking LummoX had stayed reared up. As the oration progressed the assembled Hroshii sank down, retracting their legs until they were all in the humble position of the commander. At last it was over and LummoX added one sharp remark. The Hroshii stirred

and began to move. 'She says,' translated Ftaeml, "that she now wishes to be alone with her friends."

'Ask her,' directed Kiku, "please to assure her friend John Thomas that all she has said is true and binding."

"Very well." As the other Hroshii hurried away Ftaeml spoke briefly to LummoX.

LummoX listened, then turned to John Thomas. Out of the great mouth came the piping, little-girl voice. "That's right, Johnnie. Cross my heart."

John Thomas nodded solemn agreement. "Don't worry, Mr. Kiku. You can depend on it."

## XVII

### *Ninely-Seven Pickle Dishes*

"sxivn her in."

Mr. Kiku composed himself nervously, giving the tea tray one last glance, making sure that the intimate little conference room was all that he wished of it. While he was thus fussing a door dilated and Betty Sorenson walked in, said sweetly, 'Hello, Mr. Kiku,' and seated herself with composure.

He said, "How do you do, Miss Sorenson?"

"Call me Betty. My friends all do."

"Thank you. I would wish to be one." He looked her over and shuddered. Betty had been experimenting with a new design of bars; it made her face somewhat like a checker board. Besides that she had evidently been shopping and was dressed in styles far too old for her. Mr. Kilcu was forced to remind himself that customs varied. "Urn. . . my dear young lady, the purpose of this consultation is somewhat difficult to explain."

"Make it easy on yourself. I'm in no hurry."

"Will you have tea?"

"Let me pour for us. It's chummier." He allowed her to, then sat back with his cup in a relaxed attitude he did not feel

'I trust you have been enjoying your stay?"

"Oh my, yesi I've never been able to shop before without counting pennies. Everybody should have an expense account."

"Enjoy it I assure you it will never show in the annual budget . . . literally. Our discretionary fund. Uh, you are an orphan, are you not?"

'A legal orphan. I'm a Free Child. My guardian is the Westville Home for Free Children. Why?"

"Then you are not of age?"

"Depends on how you look at it. I think I am, the court says I'm not. But it won't be long now, thank goodness."

"Urn, yes. Perhaps I should say that I knew all this,"

"I figured you did. What's it all about?"

"Urn. Perhaps I should tell a little story. Did you ever raise rabbits? Or cats?"

"I've had cats."

"We have run into a difficulty with the Hroshia we know as LummoX. Nothing disastrous; our treaty with them is not affected, since she has given her word. But, uh, shall we say that if we could oblige LummoX in a certain matter, it would make for better feelings, better future relations?"

"I suppose we shall say so, if you say so. What is it, Mr. Kiku?"

"Urn. We are both aware that this Hroshia LummoX has long been a pet of John Thomas Stuart."

"Why, certainly. It worked out funny, didn't it?"

"Urn, yes. And that LummoX was the pet of John Thomas's father before him, and so on for four generations."

"Yes, of course. Nobody could ~want a sweeter pet."

"Now, that is just the point, Miss Sorenson. . . Betty. That is the point of view of John Thomas and his forebears. But there are always at least two points of view. From the viewpoint of LummoX she . . . he . . . was not a pet. Quite the contrary. John Thomas was hi.s pet. LummoX was engaged in raising John Thomases."

Betty's eyes widened, then she started to laugh and choked. "Mr. Kiku! Oh nor

"I am quite serious. It is a matter of viewpoint and made more reasonable by considering relative lifetimes. LummoX had raised several generations of John Thomases. It was LummoX's only hobby and principal interest. Childish, but LummoX was, and still is, a child."

Betty got herself under control to the point where she could talk through giggles. "Raising John Thomases.' Does Johnnie know about this?"

"Well, yes, but I explained it to him somewhat differently."

"Does Mrs. Stuart know about this?"

"Ah. . . I haven't found it necessary to tell her."

"May I tell her? I want to see her face. 'John Thomases'. . . oh my!"

"I think that would be cruel," Mr. Kiku answered stiffly.

"I suppose so. All right, I won't do it. But I can dream about it, can't I?"

“We all can dream. But to continue: LummoX appears to have been perfectly happy with this innocent hobby. It was the Hroshia’s intention to continue it indefinitely. That was the reason that we found ourselves faced with this curious..dilemma of being unable to get the Hroshii to leave after their sibling had been restored. LummoX wished to continue, uh, raising John Thomases.” He hesitated.

Finally Betty said, “Well, Mr. Kiku? Go on.”

“Uh, what are your own plans, Betty . . . Miss Sorenson?”

“Mine? I haven’t discussed them with anyone.”

“Urn. Pardon me if I was unduly personal. You see, there are requirements in any endeavor and LummoX, it appears, is aware of one of the requirements uh, let’s put it this way. If we have here a rabbit . or a cat.. .” He stopped dead, unable to go on.

She searched his unhappy face. “Mr. Kiku, are you trying to say that it takes two rabbits to have more rabbits?”

“Well, yes. That was part of it.”

“Now, really! Why make such a fuss about it? Everybody knows it. I suppose the rest is that LummoX knows that the same rule applies to John Thomases?”

He could only nod dumbly.

“You poor dear, you should have written me a note about it. It would have been less of a strain on you. I suppose I’ll have to help you with the rest, too. You thought I might figure in this plan?”

“I had no wish to intrude , . but I did want to sound out your intentions.”

“Am I going to marry John Thomas? I’ve never had any other intention. Of course.”

Mr. Kiku sighed. “Thank you.”

“Oh, I won’t be doing it to please you.”

“Oh no! I was thanking you for assisting me.”

“Thank Lummie. Good old Lummiel You can’t fool LummoX.”

“I take it that this is all settled?”

“Huh? I haven’t proposed to him yet. But I will

- . . I was waiting until it was a little nearer time for the ship to leave. You know how men are-nervous and skittery. I didn’t want to leave him time to worry. Did your wife propose to you right off? Or did she wait until you were ripe for the kill?”

“Uh, well, the customs of my people are somewhat different. Her father arranged it with my father.”

Betty looked shocked. “Slavery,” she stated baldly.

"No doubt. However I have not been unhappy under it." He stood up. "I'm glad that we have concluded our talk so amiably."

"Just a moment, Mr. Kiku. There are one or two other matter. Just what are you doing for John Thomas?"

**"What's the contract?"**

"Oh. Financially we mean to be liberal. He will devote most of his time to his education, but I had thought of giving him a nominal title in the embassy-special attaché, or assistant secretary, or some such."

Betty remained silent. "Of course, since you are going along, it might be well to give you a semi-official status, too. Say special aide, with the same salary? It would give you two a nice nest egg if you return when you return."

She shook her head. "Johnnie isn't ambitious. I am."

"Yes?"

"Johnnie is to be ambassador to the Hroshii."

Mr. Kiku had grave trouble talking. At last he managed to say, "My dear young lady! Quite impossible."

"That's what you think. Look, Mr. MacClure got cold feet and welched on you, didn't he? Don't beat around the bush; by now I have my connections inside your department. He did. Therefore the job is open. It's for Johnnie."

"But, my dear," he said weakly, "it is not a job for an untrained boy.. . much as I think of Mr. Stuart."

"MacClure was going to be dead wood, wasn't he? Everybody knows that. Johnnie would not be dead wood. Who knows the most about Hroshii? Johnnie."

"My dear, I admit his special knowledge; I grant that we will make use of it. But ambassador? No."

"Yes."

"Chargé d'Affaires? That's an awfully high rank, b~t I'm willing to stretch a point But Mr. Greenberg must be the ambassador. We require a diplomat."

"What's so hard about being a diplomat? Or to put it another way, what could Mr. MacClure do that my Johnnie can't do better?"

He sighed deeply. "You have me there. All I can say is that there are situations which I am forced to accept, knowing them to be wrong, and others that I need not accept. If you were my own daughter I would paddle you. No."

She grinned at him. "I'll bet I outweigh you. But that's not the point. I don't think you understand the situation."

"No?"

"No. Johnnie and I are important to you in this dicker, aren't we? Especially Johnnie."

"Yes. Especially Johnnie. You are not essential . . . even in the, uh, raising of John Thomases."

"Want to put it to a test? Do you think you can get John Thomas Stuart one half inch off this planet if I set myself against it?"

'Hmm.. . I wonder."

'So do I. But I've got nerve enough to put it to a trial. If I win, where are you? Out on a windy field, trying to talk your way out of a mess again. . . . without Johnnie to help you."

Mr. Kiku went over to a window and looked out. Presently he turned. "More tea?" Betty asked politely.

"Thank you, no. Miss, do you have any idea what an ambassador extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary is?"

"I've heard the term."

"It is the same rank and pay as an ambassador, except that it is a special case. This is a special case. Mr. Greenberg will be the ambassador and carry the authority; the special, and purely nominal, rank will be created for John Thomas."

***"Rank and pay," she answered. "I'm acquiring a taste for shopping~"***

"And pay," he agreed. "Young lady, you have the morals of a snapping turtle and the crust of a bakery pie. Very well, it's a deal. . . . if you can get your young man to agree to it."

She giggled. "I won't have any trouble."

"I didn't mean that. I'm betting on his horse sense and natural modesty against your avarice. I think he'll settle for assistant embassy secretary. We'll see."

'Oh, Yes, we'll see. By the way, where is he?"

"Eh?"

"He's not at the hotel. You have him here, don't you?"

"He is here, as a matter of fact."

"Good." She walked up and patted him on the cheek. "I like you, Mr. Kiku. Now trot Johnnie in here and leave us alone. It will take me about twenty minutes. You don't have a thing to worry about."

“Miss Sorenson,” Mr. Kiku asked wonderingly, “how does it happen that you do not ask to be ambassador yourself?”

Lummo was the only non-human to attend the wedding. Mr. Kiku stood up for the bride. He noticed that she was wearing no make-up, which made him wonder if possibly the embassy’s junior secretary might not be master in his own home after all.

They received the usual ninety-seven pickle dishes, mostly from strangers, and other assorted costly junk that they would not take with them, including an all-expense trip to Hawaii for which they had no possible use. Mrs. Stuart wept and had her picture taken and greatly enjoyed herself; all in all it was a very successful wedding. Mr. Kiku leaked a few tears during the responses, but Mr. Kiku was a very sentimental man.

He was sitting at his desk the next morning, ignoring lights, with his Kenya-farm brochures spread out before him, but he was not looking at them. Dr. Ftaemi and he had gone out together and done the town after they got the kids safely married—and Mr. Kiku was feeling it somewhat, in a pleasant, relaxed manner. Even though his head buzzed and his coordination was poor, his stomach was not troubling him. He felt fine.

He was trying fuzzily to sum up the affair in his mind. All this fuss, all this grief, because some fool spaceman more than a century ago didn’t have sense enough not to tamper with native life until protocol had been worked out. Oh my people, my people!

On second thought, he told himself not to point the finger of scorn; he might be looking in a mirror.

There was something that good old Ftaemi had said last night... something. . . now what was it he had said? Something which, at the time, convinced Kiku that the Hroshli never had had any weapons capable of seriously damaging Earth. Of course a Rargyllian would not lie, not professionally . . . but would one skate around the truth in order to conclude successfully a negotiation which seemed about to fail?

Well, since it had all been settled without violence he could only wonder. Just as well, perhaps.

Besides, the next heathens to show up might not be bluffing. That would not be good.

Mildred’s voice came to him. “Mr. Kiku, the Randavian delegation is waiting.”

“Tell them I’m molting!”

“Sir?”

“Never mind. Tell them I’ll be right in. East conference room.”

He sighed, decided to treat himself to just one pill, then got up and headed for the door, ready to stick his finger in another hole in the dike. Chinese obligation, be thought; once you take it on you can't drop it.

But he still felt cheerful and sang a snatch of the only song he knew all the way through: “. . . this story has no moral, this story has no end. This StOry only goes to show that there ain't iw good in men.”

- In the meantime, out at the space port, the new Secretary for Spatial Affairs was seeing off the noble Hroshii. Her Imperial Highness, the Infanta of that race, 213<sup>th</sup> of her line, heiress to the matriarchy of the Seven Suns, future ruler over nine billion of her own kind, and lately nicknamed “The LummoX” contentedly took her pair of pets aboard the imperial yacht.