

FRANK NEWELL was still excited when he heard the beeping of the radio signal at his belt. He put aside the seeds on which he had been working and threw the switch that brought him Bulkley's voice. The man sounded anxious, amusingly so. You might have thought there was real danger. "Newell! You all right?"

Newell tried to keep the excitement out of his own voice. No use betraying his discovery too soon. No sense in giving Bulkley time to start his crafty mind going, to make plans for a double-cross. He said, "I'm fine. How are you? How are all the relatives?"

"Don't try to be funny, Newell." That crack about the relatives must have hurt, to judge from the savage anger in the man's tones. It emphasized his isolation, his desperate loneliness. "A minute ago I was feeling sorry for you. Don't make me want to break your neck myself."

"No, that would be dangerous, wouldn't it?"

"That last fall of trees didn't come close to you?"

"I wasn't among the trees. I was in a cleared area."

"You've got more sense than I thought." He could detect the relief in the man's voice. "For a while I thought you might have been caught. I thought I might be—"

"Can't lose me, Bulkley. It's sweet of you to worry, though. How'd you spare the time from watching that dancer on television?"

"Being funny again, Newell? You know that I don't watch television during the day."

"Thought you just sat there and stared at the screen, mooning about her."

"Newell, if you weren't so important to me—"

"Sure, I know how much you think of me. Anyway, my dear friend, I'm alive. Alive and kicking. I'll be back in two hours."

And with something to tell you, he added to himself. Something that'll give you the kind of hope you haven't had in a long time. We're no pals, we hate each other's guts, but all the same we're in this for another three months, at least—if we live that long.

It's a big if, he thought, as he turned back to the seeds. This beautiful planet, so quiet and peaceful now, is a death trap. It's a planet where danger lies in wait. That's why Bulkley and I have been exiled here.

He thought back. How long have we been there together? Why, it's no more than six months in all. Imagine that, only six months! It feels like a lifetime. But six months with Bulkley would be a lifetime anywhere.

The man never fooled me, he reflected with gloomy pride. I hated him from the beginning, although not the way I've come to hate him now. That's because I've come to realize what he's done to me. That night when the truth struck me—that's the time I needed self-control. That was the time when the desire to avenge myself, to kill, surged over me, almost overpowered me. But it would have left me alone here, alone on this damned and beautiful planet.

So I kept my feelings under control and, after a time, they changed. My hatred for Bulkley is deeper now. But it's become a cold, calculating hatred. Some day I'm going to have my revenge. But not yet. Now we have to work together, protect each other as if there were the greatest bond of affection between us. We need each other too much for either of us to let the other die.

BROTHERLY love, he thought. Brotherly love, just like Cain and Abel in the prehistoric story.

Newell began to sort his seeds again. He was a big man in shorts, a thin film of moisture covering his deeply bronzed skin. The pinkish sun was hot overhead, and there was no wind at all. Only the creeping plants in the forest crackled from time to time in response to some inner change in their metabolism.

When he had finished with his seeds, his hands almost dropping some of them in his excitement, it was late, more than time to return to the plastex hut. He put everything in order for the next day's experiments, and set out for home.

The forest was still quiet, but once a slight wind arose, and he had a sensation of danger, and an urge to run. Don't be a fool, he told himself. There's no danger, nothing to run from. He fought down the sense of panic, and forced himself to walk slowly.

Outside the plastex hut he forced himself to stop. No use letting Bulkley see how fundamentally excited he was. For a long time they had been without hope of escape, and now that one unexpected door away from death had been opened, Bulkley would be in a fever of anticipation. No use letting the man see the eagerness, the hope which filled Newell himself at the thought of what he had discovered.

As he had expected, Bulkley was sitting at the television set, his eyes glued to the screen. A lithe girl, clothed mostly in veils of gauze, twisted and writhed against an exotic purple and gold background. The same girl. This was the kind of educational program Bulkley liked, he told himself with a grim smile. It was a program that specialized in graphic illustration of the anthropology of alien planets, with occasional excursions into the anthropology of the dead past. It combined sex with instruction. A fine program, a fascinating program, a program well calculated to drive a lonely man completely crazy.

Almost incidentally, Newell noted the dancer's face. It was half hidden by the swirling gauze, but he could see that it was wistful and appealing. Bulkley had probably not even noticed it, nor had he noted the name of the program chastely displayed on a glowing placard at the right: EXTINCT DANCES OF EARTH. Bulkley was too busy watching those lithe movements, anticipating the throwing off of the next veil.

With a feeling of unexpected pleasure, Newell allowed himself to show a small part of the hatred he felt. As the dancing girl whirled with flaring veils, he reached over and turned off the set. The girl faded out.

Silence descended on the hut. The rows of transparent metal utensils hanging on the wall, the clothes, transparent and opaque, neatly arrayed in the closets, the store of precious raw plastex powder in the stock room, the tiny atomic power plant at the side—all were silent. Silent and tense, as if waiting for a thunderbolt to strike from the equally silent sky.

The thunder clouds were forming. A blank look spread over Bulkley's face. Then, as he realized to the full the deliberateness of the act, he leaped to his feet, his hand dropping to his holster. "I'll get you for that, you lousy space-warped fool!"

THE MAN'S rage was destined to be frustrated, and that made it amusing. Newell smiled, and dropped into a seat. "Calm down," he said. "I've got something important to say to you. And you'd be in no condition to appreciate it after watching that program."

"I'll watch what I damn please, you mind-twisted—"

"Easy, Bulkley, or you'll run out of adjectives. And I get tired of hearing you repeat yourself. You know that you don't watch what you please. You watch what the censors let you. And they'd never permit the girl to strip off the last veil."

Bulkley was still cursing, more to himself now than at the other man. Newell stared at him, his own excitement more easily controlled now that he saw what a fool his companion looked like when he was unreasonably excited. And yet, Bulkley was no fool. He was a shrewd, dangerous enemy, and a false and treacherous friend. Physically, he was enormously impressive. Tall, wide-shouldered, with powerful muscles that had been hardened in his work as engineer on numerous planets, he seemed to dwarf even Newell. He was older than Newell, and—yes, Newell had to admit it—shrewder. Bulkley had been around, he knew how things were done. Newell was a good biochem man, with a special affinity for plants. He could almost sense how a plant felt as it grew—and that seemed absurd, because a plant has no feelings. But Bulkley could sense how people felt.

He had control, too, a control and a will as strong, when he wanted to use them, as Newell's own. His hot rage was disappearing now, and as it disappeared, a cold and ugly look formed in his eyes. A cold look in the eyes, a cold smile on the hard face. He said evenly, "One of these days, Newell, I'm going to kill you for pulling a little trick like that."

"Kill me? You should thank me, Bulkley. All you're building up for yourself by watching programs of that sort is frustration. You haven't a chance in the world—any world—of seeing a girl like her in the flesh

for a long time. Why tantalize yourself? It only makes your blood pressure worse. And there are no doctors on this planet to treat it."

"You're so kind and thoughtful of my health, Newell, I don't know how to thank you. But I'm going to kill you anyway. I'm warning you now."

"You won't kill me yet, though. We're the only two people on this planet. You need me too much."

"One of these days you might make me forget that I need you."

NEWELL stood up slowly. "I won't tell you my opinion of you, Bulkley," he said. "I'll leave it to you to guess. But I don't want you to think I'm afraid of you. If there were such a thing as a space-devil, I wouldn't be afraid of that either, not if I hated it as much as I hate you. And another thing I don't want you to imagine is that you've fooled me. Because you haven't, not worth a damn. I know why I'm on this planet. It's because you framed me and had me put here."

"You're having hallucinations, Newell."

"I don't think so. I've been having thoughts. We've been here for about six months now—and I've had time to figure out why I was convicted."

"The why is simple enough. You were caught." There was a contemptuous sneer on the bigger man's face. "They had the evidence against you, just as they had against me. Only the big shot who arranged everything got away."

"The big shot? There was no big shot. It was you who ran everything, you who manufactured the evidence. It's no use trying to laugh that off, Bulkley, because I know the truth. Millions of credits were disappearing, and you were the one responsible for making them disappear. When they got wise to you, you tried to shift the blame to me. That didn't work—not quite, anyway. You couldn't get out of the net of evidence yourself, although you were able to involve me."

"And you were innocent. Too bad."

"I was a simple-minded scientist. Before this happened, I had been entirely absorbed in my work. When the accusations against me were first made, I was too bewildered to know what was happening. It probably wouldn't have made any difference if I had known. The evidence I needed had disappeared. The entire Research Bureau where I worked had been cleaned out. The only way I might have been cleared was by the testimony of the people who were your own pals—the secretary of the Bureau, his assistant, and the others."

"Imagination, Newell. These people were no pals of mine. Especially after they disappeared, and couldn't be located again."

"Could the reason for that be, my friend, that you dipped your hands in a little murder?"

Bulkley's face flushed suddenly at the question as a wave of blood swept up from the neckline. But he didn't lose his temper again. He was icy now, icy and more dangerous.

"It could be—" he said slowly, "—if that's the kind of imagination you have."

"It is." Newell laughed harshly. "You have no idea. Bulkley, how close you were to death the night you confessed."

"I confessed?"

"You were talking and cursing in your sleep. I guess that the loneliness here was getting you, I heard you through, the walls. I opened the door of your room and listened."

"And you didn't say anything in the morning?"

"I didn't trust myself to speak to you. That was the morning I got up early and hurried to work before you awoke."

Bulkley said slowly, "I remember that you did act strange for a time. I thought that the loneliness was getting you."

"Not loneliness. The urge to murder. Yes, Bulkley, it's catching. I think the chief reason I didn't kill you—"

"The same reason I let you live. We need each other too much."

NEWELL nodded. "To keep our sanity, if for no other reason. They put us together on this planet,

out of the way of the great galactic routes, with no hope of returning to civilization. I don't know whether they figured we hated each other or not. At any rate, it was a clever method of punishment to leave us here together."

He stared through the clear plastex window. "As pretty a little planet as you'd want to see. Food for the taking, and clear sweet water in every brook. Not an animal in the place, so they didn't leave us weapons. But they were kind to us, so far as kindness can be consistent with the cruelty of punishment. They left us books, a television receiver, a supply of raw material for plastex, and a stock of drugs in case of dangerous virus or bacterial disease. They wanted us to stay alive as long as possible—until one of those little accidents happened."

He was silent for a moment, as both he and Bulkley thought of the accident they had recently so narrowly escaped. Long streamers from the pink sun, a violent windstorm, the giant trees snapping and striking out in all directions—death had been very close that night. It would be close again the next time the winds rose, and it would never cease threatening from the earthquakes, the damnable earthquakes that had eventually destroyed every colony that had been started here. Sooner or later, the earthquakes would engulf them.

Not yet, however. And possibly, not at all, if his new hopes were justified.

Bulkley said, "Is this what you wanted to tell me?"

"No. This is merely something I want to get off my chest, so that we can have things straight, and understand each other. The fact is that I've stumbled on something that may be important enough to get us off this planet."

He could see the spark of light that sprang into Bulkley's eyes. There was new hope there—new hope, and new danger.

"What is it, Newell?"

"Before I tell you, I want to know how far you've gone with that equipment you've been working on, from the old buried wreck we found in the forest."

The man's eyes became hooded, evasive. "Not very far. The space ship was an obsolete type, and the equipment wasn't of much use."

"Then there's no use in my telling you what I found."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Bulkley.

"We can't get off here unless we can communicate with the nearest space outpost. And if you haven't been able to construct a long-range radio transmitter—"

THE EYES shifted, prepared to look candid and truthful. "I haven't been working on it very hard. I might get the thing done if there was a good reason for it."

You're lying, thought Newell. Most probably you've got the radio transmitter already made, and you're trying to keep its existence to yourself. Now that you see a chance of getting out of here, you feel that your need for me is less. I know you're a killer, I know that I'm dangerous to you, too dangerous to be allowed to live. Well, I'm not going to tell you much now, old friend. I'm not going to tell you so much that you'll feel you can afford to kill me, and go it alone.

He said, "There's a good reason. But I'm keeping it to myself until I see that transmitter."

Bulkley stared at him, hatred radiating from the big body. "So after coming in here and turning that show off, and building up my hopes, you've got nothing to tell me."

"Nothing, until I see that transmitter. I don't trust you, Bulkley. It's never good policy to trust murderers."

The hatred in the room seemed ready to crystallize, to take tangible form. But Bulkley merely said with contempt, "You'll see the transmitter tomorrow. And what you have to say had better be good."

"It will be good enough." Newell switched on the television set. An ancient man's withered face sprang into being on the screen, and a droning voice began to fill the air with details of linguistic differences between races of different galaxies. This was educational, and no mistake about it. "Here's your program, Bulkley. Only, this old bird isn't removing any veils."

Bulkley reached a heavy hand toward the set, and once more the picture on the screen faded. The

hatred in the room continued to hang there, thick and heavy.

They ate in silence, and when the meal was over, Newell went into his own room, closed the door, and quietly arranged the booby trap he had prepared. He knew that Bulkley would not try to kill him yet, not until he had learned what the discovery was. But there was nothing to prevent Bulkley from knocking him out, tying him up, and then torturing him in an effort to get the secret. Nothing but his own ingenuity.

He slept well, too well. In the middle of the night he was awakened by the hoarse scream of a man in terror.

THE BOOBY trap had worked. He flashed on the light. On the floor was a gun and a length of rope. Standing in the doorway was Bulkley, writhing desperately in the grip of long brown arms that hugged his neck with deadly affection, tightened around his body, twisted around his legs. The arms were attached to no body of their own. They hung loose in the air, like the snakes which on this planet did not exist.

It was not good to see a man so terrified, even a man like Bulkley, whose intentions were so obviously murderous. Newell felt a little sick at the sight.

The arms around the neck twisted tighter, and the screams became hoarser and more strangled. Newell realized that in another minute the man would lose consciousness.

He pressed the button of one of his research flashlights. A strong invisible pencil of infrared lanced out at the brown arms. They froze into immobility.

He said quietly, "They won't get any tighter, Bulkley. Not unless you start them up again by trying to escape."

The other man was deadly still. Not a muscle seemed to move, although he could not keep an artery in his neck from twitching, and his sweat glands were overstimulated by fear. His face glistened in the dim light like the surface of a sheet of water.

Newell said with contempt, "I thought you'd try to do that. You probably caught the others asleep too. It's too bad for you that my own ropes were a little more alert than yours."

Terror found a voice. Bulkley said hoarsely, "Let me out of these damned things."

"No, my friend. I don't trust you out of them. They're one of the native plants I've been working with for the past few months. Ordinarily they're harmless, but I've learned how to control them, and to defend myself with them. And I'm defending myself now."

Bulkley stammered, "Let me out. I can't breathe."

"That's hardly something for me to worry about. However, I will loosen them a bit. But I don't intend to remove them, Bulkley. From now on, they stay on you, day and night, until you're no longer in a position to harm me. You may be glad to know that they respond to sudden motions, and if you try any more of your tricks, they'll strangle you for good."

"I won't try anything. Just let me out!"

Newell altered the wave-length emitted in the light pencil, and gave the brown arms a carefully regulated dose of the differently colored infrared. The arms seemed to relax slightly and he heard the long gasping intake of breath from the other man.

"That should let you move around more freely. Now, I think, we'd better get some more sleep."

The man staggered out toward his own room. Newell lay down on his bed again, and this time he slept till morning.

THE PLANET had an approximately twenty-five-hour day, and the nights during the present season were long. When he finally arose, Newell felt rested and pleased with himself. He could hardly say as much for his fellow exile, who was still wearing his animate chains.

Newell ate a hearty meal but, naturally enough, Bulkley had no appetite. His throat was sore from the experience of the night, and his voice was hoarse as he pleaded, "Take these things off Me, Newell, and I swear I won't try to kill you, again."

Newell laughed without amusement. "Let's not talk nonsense," he said contemptuously. "They're my guarantee against murder." He added, with an air of assurance that Bulkley could not know was false, "Kill me, and you'll never get out. You'll rot with those things around your neck. Now, I'd like to see that

radio transmitter."

As he had expected, it was in the ruins of the old space ship. Even handicapped as Bulkley was by the brown plant arms around his neck, it took the man only a few minutes to fit the parts together.

Newell stared at the array of tubes and transistors, at the elute-powered electric generator. "Power plant too weak for twenty-four-hour operation, but strong enough to get through to the nearest space station in bursts. Very good. You're not a bad engineer, Bulkley. A little untrustworthy, with homicidal tendencies, but highly skilled."

The man said nothing. But he thought, and the nature of his thoughts was obvious.

Newell hesitated. It seemed foolish to go ahead with keeping a promise to a man who had tried to kill him, but Newell had always kept his word before, and he did not intend to break it now. "All right, Bulkley," he said at last. "Now I'm going to keep my part of the bargain. Come with me."

Newell led the way to the prairie-like field where he had been working. From the corner of his eye he kept a watch on the other man, as if he didn't quite count on the deadly plants to keep Bulkley up to the proper behavior. He knew, as he didn't want Bulkley to know, that the plants had only a short life, and then in the normal course of events it would be only a day or two more before the man was free of them.

The field was bare and looked recently plowed. The normal plant life had been killed off, and the half-acre of brownish-black soil had a stark and naked appearance.

Newell stretched out a hand filled with curious objects. "Take a look at these. What do you think they are?"

Bulkley caught his breath in surprise. "Teeth! Big, pointed brown and white teeth! There are animals on this planet after all!"

He stared around him in an obvious access of terror. The planet had been bad enough before, with its great falls of trees and its earthquakes. Now it seemed to be acquiring new and equally horrible dangers.

But Newell said reassuringly, "There are no animals. Now, get back and watch."

Newell had a plastic bag full of the brown tooth-like objects, and he slung the bag over his shoulder before he walked through the plowed area. As he strode between the furrows, scattering the seed sparsely to right and left, and reaching into the plastic bag from time to time for another handful, he looked like one of the ancient pre-historic farmers back on the mother planet.

FEAR GAVE Way to confusion in Bulkley's baffled face. "What do you expect to grow?"

Newell didn't answer. He glanced once at the rapidly rising sun, pink and hot, and then moved on rapidly. He was completing the sowing of the last furrow before he turned to look back.

On the other side of the field, tiny shoots of purple and green were already showing. They pushed up slowly, imperceptibly at times, and then again in sudden spurts, like the minute hands of an ancient timepiece whose mechanism worked jerkily. When the first shoots had reached a height of six inches, the last shoots on the other side of the field were just beginning to break through.

"They're growing fast," said Bulkley, his personal woes momentarily forgotten at the amazing sight.

Newell had rejoined him. "I've learned how to accelerate growth."

"Where'd you get the chemicals you needed?"

"From the other plants. I made extracts. A chemist would have a field day with the variety of different compounds these plants contain. Alkaloids of entirely new types, indole-aliphatic acids, everything. I've been able to extract fairly pure mixtures that will stimulate the kind of growth I want, help twist the plant in the direction I want it to take."

"Then those brown and white things were not teeth, but seeds."

"Yes. Their natural color is white. The treatment I gave them turned them partly brown. But watch."

Some of the plants were almost two feet in height. So far they had grown straight up, apparently without putting forth shoots or branches of any kind. Now there began to grow what seemed like the beginnings of branches. On the top, a small brown swelling began to form.

Slowly the branches developed, one on each side, slowly the brown swellings grew. As the men

watched, the shoots divided at the bottom. The growing plants began to look like caricatures of human beings, fantastic scarecrows that arose from the incredibly nourishing soil.

When they had reached four feet in height, the plants were more human than ever, uncannily so. The purple had, disappeared, and now they looked like brown men, their faces and bodies streaked with white. Bulkley was silent, his eyes filled with wonder and a new fear. There was something else, too. Newell thought he could detect the beginnings of crafty calculations.

Still the plants continued to grow, both in height and in width. And as they grew, they became more human. Newell gazed with awe at the thing that he himself had wrought. Science it was, the mere application of simple and easily understood principles—the use of plant hormones, light, heat, and other simple agents which he had not troubled to explain to Bulkley—and yet the results struck him as a miracle.

The crop he had sown filled the expanse of field before him. Brown and white manlike things writhed and grimaced as the stimulating rays of the hot sun reached them. Rows and rows of them, at least two thousand in number, an aura of power, of energy barely held in leash, surrounded them. They began to twist from side to side, as if in anger at the roots that still held them to the ground, as if trying to escape and wreak vengeance on some enemy yet unknown.

Newell was reminded of the ancient legend of Cadmus, who had planted dragon's teeth and seen the teeth grow into an army of soldiers, whom a trivial incident had provoked into deadly combat. But nothing would set these soldiers off, he thought. His control of them was too good.

The pencil of Newell's flash beam widened into a conical ray, swept over the field. Where it struck, one brown manlike thing after another froze into a posture of tortured strength, of motion held temporarily in check by a force that could not last. The field seemed to overflow with a great uneasy quiet.

And then the quiet was shattered, the sun in the sky blazed like a nova and blotted out the strange sight. Newell dropped to the ground, while behind him there came from Bulkley a harsh laugh of triumph.

WHEN HE awoke, it was dark. He was lying on his own bed, unbound. He had no idea of how much time had passed, of how long he had lain unconscious. But his head throbbed painfully, and through it there passed a series of harsh noises, of shrieks and cries that grated on his nerves. As he lifted himself to a sitting position, the noises began to make sense. He realized that they were the sounds from a television program to which Bulkley was listening.

They were weird, shrill, piercing. Exotic music, he told himself. Music to accompany a dance such as that he had turned off—how long before? The program was repeated every two days. That meant that he had lain unconscious for at least a day and a half.

He wondered what Bulkley had learned in that time. More, he knew, than was safe. Enough, he feared, to do tremendous harm.

Newell forced himself to his feet and staggered to the door. As he pulled it open, a pair of brown and white hands gripped him, one from each side. Bulkley, at the television set, grunted, "Time you woke up."

Through still dazed eyes, Newell stared at the creatures holding him, the creatures which he himself had changed from plants into the semblances of men.

Bulkley said quietly, "You made a bad mistake, Newell. Those ropes you had on me were slackening just enough to let me get at them. First I slashed the ones around my neck with a knife, and then I was able to get at the others—and at you."

"And now you control these creatures." It was not a question, but a flat statement of fact—of sickening fact.

"Thanks to a couple of notebooks of yours. You gave me credit before for being a good engineer, Newell. I give you credit now for being a good biologist. You worked out the details so well that it was a cinch to follow them. And when I found your note books in your room, I knew that I'd be able to do with these creatures as I pleased."

As he talked, his eyes remained fastened to the screen. The same dancer whom Newell had turned off on the previous occasion was now performing again, this time almost fully clothed. Now he could catch quick glimpses of her face as she whirled rapidly around, see what genuine charm she possessed. Now he could wonder if Bulkley was quite so irrational in wanting her, in dreaming about her.

Bulkley said, "These things were easy to condition. At first I used lights of different wave-lengths, then spoken commands along with the lights. I just followed your notes all along. The things learned faster than dogs or monkeys. It was no trouble at all to get them to respond to spoken commands alone. All I had to do was talk loud, so that they would be sure to catch the sound in their vibration-detecting organs. It's almost as if they had brains."

Newell said dully, "They have, in a way. They have central motor control in the upper part of the chest—or in what would be the upper part of the chest in a man."

"That explains it. But certain kinds of things they don't learn. I've tried them with heat rays, mechanical shock, chemical poisoning. They react, but they don't learn fear. That means they don't feel. And that's perfect for the things I intend to do with them."

THE CREATURES beside Newell made no sound. They were as motionless as the species of plants from which they had descended. But they gave an impression of alertness, of waiting, that was more human than plantlike.

"Let me show you some of the things I can get them to do," said Bulkley. He put his fingers to his mouth and whistled shrilly.

Two more of the creatures came through the door of the hut. "Take fire," said Bulkley.

One of them picked up a fuel lighter with one stubby hand and set the flame to the end of his other arm. The material charred, flickered, and then caught fire. The expression on what passed for a face did not change.

"Put out," ordered Bulkley.

The flaming arm thrust against the side of the hut and put out the fire. Again the expression on what so horribly resembled a human face remained unaltered.

"That'll give you an idea. They'll do anything they're conditioned to do—and I know how to condition them. I haven't given them very complicated commands as yet, but they're learning fast. And there are two thousand of them."

"They're dangerous, Bulkley." Newell's head was clearing, and he was beginning to realize what the other man intended. "They may burn their arms as ordered, but you're really the one who's playing with fire."

"I'll take my chances of their turning on me. I've got them under control. And I've got you there too."

The dance came to an end, and he switched off the set. "I've got a little business to attend to, Newell. A million or so miles off this planet." He noticed Newell's surprise, and grinned evilly. "I can't get as far, yet, as the next planet. But that wrecked ship had better parts than I let you know. It even had several lifeboats, almost intact. I've taken parts of those boats and built myself a low-powered one-man jet job that'll help me get more supplies. If a few hours from now you shift that screen from the entertainment channels to some of the automatic space scanners, you'll be able to see what I do. I think that what happens will keep you entertained. But don't try to get away."

The door closed behind Bulkley and two of the creatures. The other two, their handlike appendages on Newell's own arms, relaxed their grip, but remained at his side.

Newell took a deep breath, and tried to think. He knew better than to believe he was free. A dog could be trained in a few weeks, was trained in the old days, to be an effective canine soldier, to watch with a fierce vigilance every move you made, to tear you apart if you tried to pull a gun or other object recognizable as a weapon. These plant-creatures learned faster than dogs, were more dangerous. He himself, during his first experiments, had been thrilled to see how rapidly they could be conditioned, with what incredible speed they could go through the motions of learning.

Of their physical strength he had only a rough idea. Flexible plant fibers could be as tough as animal muscles, but that was not where the chief danger lay. What set them apart, what made them horrible



beyond the ancient breeds of great cats and feral dogs, and the six-legged harpies of such planets as Venus IV, or any of the other fierce beasts at which primitive humans had once shuddered, was the fact of their insensitivity to feeling. Neither happiness nor pain affected them. They were plant robots who, if once started on their course, let nothing stand in their way. You had to destroy them completely in order to stop them.

No, Bulkley was not being careless as he himself had been. It made Newell sick to recall exactly how careless he had been. He had forgotten that the plants which held the man captive weakened and relaxed their grip under the direct rays of the sun. In his excitement at seeing the army of growing creatures, he had behaved like a fool.

HE SWITCHED on the set, the two plant-creatures watching without any motion of their own. The light receptors which were scattered over the entire upper halves of their bodies were so small as to be invisible to the naked eye. But not the slightest move, he knew, would escape them.

A dim picture appeared on the scene, a voice came soothingly from the speaker. "Do you have difficulty falling asleep? Do you suffer unnecessarily from insomnia? Do your troubles keep you awake? Then tune in our special program with Dr. Hypno! Dr. Hypno's soothing personality will put you to sleep without difficulty over millions of miles of space. Dr. Hypno's healing balm for the soul will act as the salve for your wounded psyche.

"Dr. Hypno is brought to you as a good-will service by Psychiatric Associates, Inc., makers of psychic articles of all kinds. In just a moment, Psychiatric Associates, Inc., will bring you the details of a wonderful offer by which you can obtain absolutely free some of the most remarkable inventions—"

He leaned forward to turn the thing off, when suddenly, responding to something in his behavior that must have set off an alarm mechanism, the two creatures seized him and held him firm. He was helpless, unable to move forward or back.

The eyes of Dr. Hypno widened, became enormous, began to glow. A camera trick, he thought dully. But he could not turn his own eyes away. Nor could he close his ears when a soothing voice began, "You are falling asleep, you are falling—asleep." He slept.

Strangely enough, he felt refreshed when he awoke. A post-hypnotic suggestion by Dr. Hypno, he thought. He had his freedom to move once more. Carefully, for fear of alarming the too-alert creatures, he leaned forward and switched off the set.

The space scanners, he knew, were scattered along the main passenger and freighter routes. They were like the ancient buoys on the oceans of water-rich planets, informing sea-faring vessels of their positions. But unlike the buoys, these scanners had automatic television cameras attached. In case a vessel met with some disaster and its own sending set were destroyed, some scanner or other was sure to pick up its position and guide a protest ship to the rescue.

On the screen, a tiny silvery figure swam into view. Slowly it grew larger, became a giant shape which blotted out more and more of the background of stars. It was a freighter, speeding in a trajectory which at its closest point would bring the ship to within two million miles of his own planet.

From out of the blackness, a tiny gnat appeared and raced after the freighter. From a gleaming point, the gnat grew, took on definite form. It was a low-powered atomic jet ship, of the most primitive design, resembling the one-man jets of the pre-spaceflight era. Speed was high, but the jet was so small that the oxygen store, despite the regenerators, could hardly suffice for more than a few million miles. He could see vaguely the figure of the man inside. That was Bulkley, so intent on pursuit. That was the murderer, going about new murders.

A flash of light appeared at the muzzle of one of the weapons of the jet and, almost simultaneously, the side of the freighter burst open like a great eggshell. In the heatless vacuum of interstellar space there was no sound. But the great flash of radiation was as terrifying as any roar would have been. The entire screen shone with fierce radiance and then blanked out. The sending scanner had been put out of commission.

HE TURNED off the set altogether, his heart sick, his body tense with excitement. A few hours from

now, what remained of the freighter would crash on the surface of the planet. Until then he had time to think. He had time to find a way out of the horrible mess into which his own blundering had brought him.

He stared once more at the two plant-creatures that were guarding him. Strange, he thought, that they don't look absolutely alike. The arrangement of white streaks on the brown surface is different in each case. They have different individualities. The one on my right looks tough, hard-boiled, but the other one seems to have a kinder expression. They deserve names. Think I'll christen them Tough-Egg and Kind-Mugg.

Then he laughed at himself. I'm trying to read their expressions as if those were human faces, he told himself, I'm ascribing human emotions to them. They're not human, they're plants. They have no feelings, one way or the other.

No feelings at all. They can be used for any purpose Bulkley wants to use them. Committing more murders, for instance.

I'll have to stop him, somehow, figure out a way. They're conditioned to taking orders from him, but I'll have to recondition them. Let me see, now, they're affected primarily by chemical changes, and by light. Sounds as such mean little to them. They get the mechanical vibrations, but conditioning to words comes *after* strong conditioning to different lights. If I had my flashlights—

Trouble is, there aren't any flashlights. There are no sources of adjustable light or heat within the room. Bulkley has been thoughtful enough to remove them. Still, Bulkley can't think of everything. Maybe he made a mistake, as I did. Maybe—ah, the television set.

He moved cautiously, slowly, so that the creatures would not be stimulated by any sudden motion to pounce upon him. He switched on the set again, then turned it around, opened the back, and stared inside. No glowing tubes here. But I can feel a slight warmth when I put my hand close. And those plant-things are thermotropic, they respond to heat radiations.

He turned the set so that the faint heat was directed at Tough-Egg. The plant-creature moved forward hesitated—then moved forward again. Responds to stimulus, thought Newell, but it's a weak stimulus, and a weak response. Can't recondition him—it—that way. But it's a start. And maybe Kind-Mugg will respond more strongly.

Kind-Mugg didn't respond at all. Newell muttered to himself in disappointment. Have to try something else, he realized. Have to keep on trying. Maybe, by the time Bulkley gets back, I'll have hit on something good.

The hours passed in almost futile experiments. By the time he heard the rockets off the torn freighter, decelerating what was left of the ship for a landing, he had learned little. But the two creatures left to guard him had become almost like old friends. No doubt about it, they had distinct individualities. No feelings, though. No more feelings than two pieces of furniture.

THE DOOR opened. Bulkley stepped in and grinned at him. "Still here, I see, Newell."

"I saw what you did to that freighter."

"Neat job, wasn't it? I needed supplies I couldn't get off that wrecked ship on this planet. And when I tuned in on shipping news, I heard that this freighter would be coming along with some of the objects I needed."

"You won't get away with it for long, Bulkley. You caught them by surprise because they never expected pirates in this part of space. But the patrol guards have the news by now. They'll be sending a well-armed patrol ship along in a day or so. And you'll be helpless against them."

"Not helpless, Newell. I know exactly how I'm going to handle any patrol ship that shows up. In fact, I'm looking forward to it. The more ships they send, the more supplies I'll have."

The hatred in the man twisted his face into a horrible smile. Newell felt, hatred of his own well up inside him at the thought of what the man intended to do.

Bulkley could see how he felt. "Don't like the idea, do you, Newell? Don't like the idea of all those patrol guards being cut down like the worthless space-lice they are? Too bad. Because you're going to help me. That's why I'm letting you stay alive, Newell. You're going to be very useful to me. And you're going to start off by getting me some more of those dragon-tooth seeds."

Newell's teeth clamped together. He shook his head.

Bulkley smiled grimly. "You'll change your mind, Newell. This is too important for me to let you be stubborn about it. Do you realize what I can do with these creatures?"

"I realize. That's why I won't help you."

Bulkley seemed not to have heard him. "The perfect robots," he said, as if to himself. "Trained to do anything I want them to, anything at all. No feelings, no fears. And they're cheaper than any other kind of robot. No expensive machinery to make, no sponge-colloid brain that can go out of order. The kind for which people like me have been looking for a long time.

"They're not only perfect servants, Newell. They're soldiers. What was the old word for them—cannon fodder? That's what they are. They don't know what it is to live, so they don't mind dying. No indoctrination needed, no nonsense about how terrible the enemy is. Just train them to obey, and they kill for you and get themselves killed."

THE MAN had delusions of grandeur, thought Newell. He wasn't crazy—far from it. In some ways he was only too sane. But hatred consumed him, and on this lonely planet his hatred had been too greatly bottled up. Now it had its chance to come out. And when it came, it would bring death and destruction in its wake.

"So you see, my friend, why I want more of those dragon teeth."

"They're not easy to prepare," said Newell slowly. He was beginning to get the glimmering of an idea that might keep him safe for a while. Bulkley needed him. Why not pretend to go along with what Bulkley wanted, pretend he wouldn't dare disobey—and at the same time put a spoke in the man's plans? "They grow fast once you put them in the ground," he went on, "but before that, they need a good deal of treatment. That takes time."

"Then get started. These two creatures will watch you and serve as your assistants. Maybe, if the process isn't too complicated, they'll learn how to prepare the seeds themselves. That would be nice, wouldn't it, Newell? The cannon fodder themselves preparing more cannon fodder." He laughed, and suddenly, without warning, changed the subject. "By the way, Newell, we have guests on our beautiful planet. Not the kind of guests I'd have chosen, but they'll do to relieve the loneliness."

The crew, thought Newell. Some of the crew were still alive.

Bulkley flashed a light signal through the window. The door opened, and a man and a woman, guarded by two of the plant-creatures, stumbled over the threshold.

"Mr. Hilton," said Bulkley. The man peered at them from behind thin transparent metal lenses, the high retractive index making his eyes seem enormous. His face was old, lined, worried. He was a hundred and twenty if a day, thought *Newell*. "And this is Miss Indra Hilton, his daughter."

The girl stared at him dully through her own glasses, the shock of what had happened during the past few hours still visible on her face. An atomic blast that tore out the side of the freighter was not an easy thing to take, thought Newell. Still, those glasses, and those clothes— She'd have been pretty, he told himself, in the right clothes. But perhaps it was just as well, for her sake, that she wasn't pretty. She wore an octagonal hat, as well as octagonal glasses—as weird a combination as a girl could be expected to think up. She looked schoolteacherish in the worst sense of the word. Her clothes were awkward, loose-fitting, the kind some women seemed to choose almost automatically in an effort to conceal any good points they might have. But she wasn't old. No clothes could make so young a girl seem old. She wasn't past her early twenties.

"This, my honored guests," said Bulkley, "is my very talented colleague, Mr. Newell. Mr. Newell invented those plant creatures who are now guarding you. But he doesn't like what I'm doing with them, so that he is a prisoner just as much as you are."

Newell found his voice. "What happened to the crew?"

"The members of the crew were unfortunately killed in the—the accident, shall we call it?—that incapacitated the freighter. Mr. Hilton brought the ship down to earth with the mechanical landing equipment, setting the controls according to instructions I radioed to him. Mr. Hilton is very good at following instructions."

"I am an educator," said Hilton sonorously. "Yes, Gentlemen, I instruct the young in the best knowledge of the past. It is a noble profession, and it trains the mind in proper habits of thought." His voice didn't sound old. It was strong and resonant, and Newell thought it seemed faintly familiar. He wondered whether at any time in the past the man had taught at a school that he had attended. Greater Procyon IV University, for instance, where he had taken special courses in chemobotany, had thousands of teachers, and most of them he knew only by sight, if at all.

"Miss Hilton also teaches school," said Bulkley. He grinned again. "It seems to me that she could stand learning a few things herself. I'll be glad to teach them to her."

THERE WAS a tense silence in the room. In Newell the feeling of hatred suddenly welled up almost to the point of bursting. He felt a choking sensation in his throat, and in his muscles an almost intolerable urge to leap forward and smash Bulkley's evilly grinning face. Perhaps, though, that was exactly what the man wanted. Perhaps that was what he counted on, knowing that if any move were made against him, his planet robots would immediately spring to his defense.

Only the old man seemed undisturbed by the threat. He took off his metal lenses and began to polish them. "It is always good to add to one's knowledge," he announced sonorously. The old boy is senile thought Newell. He doesn't understand a thing. But the look of dignity on the old face gave him pause. "Maybe he's just a little slow on the uptake," thought Newell. "Or maybe he's putting on an act."

The old man held up the lenses, stared through them. "Now his face, as well as his voice, seems familiar," thought Newell. "Where in space have I seen him?"

Bulkley waited, as if disappointed that no outburst had occurred. He grunted, "I think that Miss Hilton is disappointed in me. I've really neglected her. Perhaps she doesn't realize the effect that traveling in almost gravity-less space has on a man. It leaves one unable to think for a time of the more pleasant things in life. But you needn't worry about me, Miss Hilton. I'm very glad you're here, even if you don't exactly resemble some of the performers on interspatial television."

Something clicked in Newell's mind. He knew now where he had seen the old man before.

Bulkley said, "I'm going to see what I can do with some of those supplies on the freighter. Meanwhile, Newell, make our guests at home. And don't try to escape, any of you. These plant creatures are too alert. And they can't be bought, bribed, or won over in any manner whatever."

He went out, leaving them together. Newell said politely, "I've seen you before, Mr. Hilton. On television. You're no school teacher. You're Dr. Hypno."

"Yes, my dear sir, I am Dr. Hypno."

"I had trouble recognizing you. Even now your face doesn't look quite the same—but the special cameras will account for that."

The man nodded. "I am, however actually an educator, a school teacher, as you so crudely put it. I had dabbled for many years in hypnosis as a cultural activity, and when this firm, Psychiatric Associates, Inc., needed some one of ability, I was recommended to them."

"Can you hypnotize Bulkley?"

"Not, I fear, under present conditions, against his will. Not without special equipment."

"Perhaps that can be obtained." He turned to face the girl. "Any special talents of your own, Miss Hilton, that we could use against Bulkley?"

For some unaccountable reason, the girl flushed. "I am a school teacher too," she said. "My father and I had decided to splurge on a vacation together. Freighter rates are lower than regular passenger rates, of course, because freighters lack certain conveniences. That is why we were so unfortunate as to fall into your partner's hands."

"Don't call Bulkley my partner."

The girl's eyebrows went up in a manner that was strangely out of place for a school teacher. "He told us he was."

"He's a liar."

"He said that the two of you were in on a job together before you were caught."

NEWELL said grimly, "Bulkley is developing a sense of humor. What actually happened is that he framed me in order to shift the blame from himself. His plan worked only partially, and we were both convicted."

"Then this planet is a penal colony?"

"A substitute for one. In the old days, when crime was supposed to be common, I understand that the government maintained numerous penal colonies for convicted criminals, with psychiatrists to recondition the more promising colonies. But the last regular colony had been abandoned fifty years ago, and they didn't know what to do with us until some one hit on the idea of exiling us here. *We* were given all the supplies *we* could need, except those that would help us escape from the planet. And we began to have hope even before that when we discovered a space ship that had been wrecked a long time before, and still had useful equipment."

The old man was staring around the plastex room. "Primitive, but apparently comfortable," he commented. His eyes fell on the brown and white creatures who were guarding them. "Those, sir, I take it, are to be our permanent custodians. They appear to have distinct personalities."

"They look different," agreed Newell. "I'm hoping that I'll be able to work on them." His eyes came back to the girl. There was something about her that baffled him. Why had she turned red when he asked her whether she had special talents? And why was he so irritated by those unbecoming octagonal glasses, that silly hat, those stupidly ugly clothes?

He reached over, and with an abrupt motion lifted the glasses from her face. The transformation was striking. In the fraction of a second, she had become beautiful.

With no lenses to distort or conceal their expression, her eyes blazed.

She sprang at him, and her hand stung his face. The two plant-guards, their light receptors responding to the sudden motion, wavered between him and the girl, their bodies quivering like trees in a storm of emotion. They had been conditioned to react to certain kinds of danger. But in a situation of this sort they did not know what to do.

NEWELL'S hand went to his face. "You have a powerful swing," he said ruefully. "Isn't that unusual in a dancer?"

"So you know who I am!"

"Yes. Those glasses and those clothes were an effective disguise, but after a time your face did begin to seem annoyingly familiar. You did those exotic dances of Earth. Perhaps I'd have realized sooner if I had stopped to think that they were on film, just as your father's hypnotic tricks were. Somehow, however, I took it for granted that you were dancing in the studio."

"No, those dances *were* all recorded. I did them when I was working for my degree in Galactic Anthropology."

"What in space ever gave you the idea of wearing such clothes?"

"It was annoying to have people recognize me and turn to stare at me everywhere I went. It interfered with my getting new material."

"Maybe you don't know it, but Bulkley is a special fan of yours. He's been wanting to meet you for a long time."

"When I meet people like Bulkley, I always wear my glasses." She took them out of his hands and returned them to her face. He was amazed to see how completely they transformed her features back again. Now she was once more the dowdy woman of a few moments ago.

"At any rate," he said, "now I know what those special talents of yours are."

This time her expression was smooth, inscrutable. "You don't know the half of it," she said softly. "I have a surprise in store for your friend Bulkley."

Footsteps sounded outside. The door swung open, and Bulkley grinned at them. "Talking about me, I imagine," he growled.

"Nothing good, of course," said Newell.

"I'll take care of you later, Newell. Meanwhile, we'd better get to work. I expect a visit from a patrol ship, and I want to be ready for it. You'll start at once to prepare those dragon-tooth seeds. I want them

in a hurry. As for our guests, they'd better start building themselves a plastex hut. Unless, that is, Miss Hilton wants to move in with me."

"No, thank you." she said contemptuously.

"You don't realize how you're being honored. But if you won't accept, you don't have to—now."

The old man was staring at him. Bulkley turned to him in some annoyance. "What in the galaxy are you looking at?"

"You, sir. I am attempting to estimate your intellectual and emotional strength."

He was trying to decide, realized Newell, whether Bulkley would be easy or difficult to hypnotize. It was a crucial question. For a time there was silence, as if all knew that they were weighing their future in the balance.

BULKLEY uttered an uneasy laugh. "You'll find that my strength is enough to keep you here. Just don't try any funny business."

"Of course not. As prisoner to captor, may I offer a suggestion, sir?"

"I don't want you to offer anything."

The old man nodded, as if pleased at the answer. "As I expected."

"What are you so happy about?"

"To find you so suggestible. If you will forgive an old pedagogue the weakness of indulging in his favorite vice of lecturing, I must impart this fact to you. There are two sorts of men who are extremely open to suggestion. The first kind adopts everything that is proposed to him."

"You'll find out that I'm not like that," said Bulkley.

"I have already done so, sir. You go to the opposite extreme. You *reject* everything—because you realize your own weakness. You put up artificial barriers to keep from doing as other people propose. You don't trust your own power of judgment to decide on what is good or bad. That means that once the barrier is crossed or broken, you will be at the mercy of the person who has broken it."

Newell found himself wondering. The old man was pompous in manner, vain of his ability, but he had the shrewdness of the centenarian. And now, he might be right about Bulkley. Beneath the man's harsh brutality there might be a great lack of self-confidence. On the other hand, the whole thing might be simply a lot of psychological double-talk, intended to break down Bulkley's powers of resistance.

Whatever it was, Bulkley didn't like it. He snarled, "I don't know what you're talking about. But I do know that you're of no use around here, and it wouldn't take me much to get rid of you altogether. Now get out, and start working on a plastex hut for yourself." He gestured to the side. "You'll find a foam gun in that closet."

Newell left the room, the two walking plants keeping close beside him. There were possibilities, he thought, in the old man. He was testing Bulkley, probing for weak spots in the man's psychological make-up, without Bulkley's being aware of it. Unaided, he might not be able to hypnotize the murderer against his will, but with the proper apparatus, there were distinct possibilities of success. And now that Bulkley had to rely on them to prepare for the visit of the patrol ship, they might be able to make something that would be effective.

But Bulkley, they soon found, was not so stupid as to let any of his three captives lay hands on dangerous equipment. Newell tried to stall in various ways—he found a sudden need for chemicals or ultra flashlights at moments when Bulkley was busy with his own preparations. At such times, despite his desire for speed in the work, Bulkley made him wait. The proper chemicals or lights were used, and then removed to a spot where neither Newell nor his fellow captives could lay hands on them.

BY THE END of the third day, after he had killed as much time as he dared, Newell had three thousand of the dragon-tooth seeds ready. That same night, the trouble that had been brewing finally erupted.

The pink sun was setting behind the trees, and the sky was quickly turning dark as Newell returned to the hut that he and Bulkley still shared, his guards dogging his footsteps as usual. Bulkley himself was not in sight. On the other side of the clearing stood the plastex hut, somewhat clumsily put together, that

the old man had built for himself and his daughter.

Newell had seen little of the girl these past three days, although he had thought of her a great deal. There was irony in the thought that of all the women in the entire planetary system, she was the one that Bulkley had been the most eager to meet, although now that he had her practically in his grasp, he failed to recognize her.

Now, as Newell watched, the girl slipped out of her own hut and came toward his. Despite her deliberately unattractive clothes, she moved with the lithe grace of the trained dancer. If Bulkley had happened to see her at that moment, her walk alone might have given her away.

But apparently he was nowhere near, and she was able to gain the hut without interference. She came in, her plant-guards following her as they followed all of Bulkley's captives.

She began abruptly, "I wanted to talk to you. Alone."

He nodded. "Here's your chance."

"I don't know whether or not you were telling the truth about being framed. For all the evidence I have, you're as much a criminal as Bulkley."

"What do I have to do to convince you that I'm not?"

"Nothing. You can't convince me. But it won't matter—at least, for a time. The main thing, is that we've got to work together against him."

"Of course. Do you have a plan?"

"Father has. He says that Bulkley's so suggestible that if he had even the crudest hypnotic equipment, he'd be able to control the man."

"I've looked for equipment we could use. I've found nothing."

"Father suggested this television set. He might be able to use some of the transistors. Two would be enough."

"That's an idea. But suppose Bulkley comes in and decides to turn on the set?"

"That's a risk we'll have to take.

Let's hope that we can hypnotize him before he discovers that something's wrong."

Newell walked over to the set, and opened it up. Quickly removing two of the tiny tubes, he put them in her hands. "Here they are. Tell your father to make use of them as soon as he can."

"Thank you."

"Tell him not to go to the trouble of hypnotizing me, though. Tell him that his daughter's eyes have already had that effect."

"You're rather suggestible yourself. How long is it since you've seen a woman on this plant?"

"A little over six months. But I haven't seen one like you in a lifetime."

"It's my clothes that attract you to me," she said sardonically.

HE DIDN'T answer in words. He saw a smile playing on her lips, and suddenly, moved by impulse, he pulled her to him, as if anxious to obliterate it with his own lips.

For a second or two she let him kiss her, then pushed him away. "Your friend is coming," she said simply.

Bulkley's footsteps were audible outside. He came in, saw them, and frowned. "When the cat's away, the mice will play," he said.

"I suppose so," she admitted coolly. "The old proverb seems fitting, although I've never seen a cat, and haven't the slightest idea what a mice is."

"*Mice* is plural. Singular *mouse*," explained Newell. "Once infested Earth, but could never adapt to other planets, and were eventually exterminated."

"Good idea, extermination," said Bulkley heavily. "I'd keep you, of course, sweetheart," he told her. "But I'm beginning to think I won't need Newell or your father any more."

"You have a tendency to turn to murder to solve your problems, Bulkley," said Newell. "But this time I'm afraid you'd only complicate them. If you want more of those dragon's-teeth seeds, you'll have to keep me around."

"I wonder. You talk a little too much about murder, Newell. Almost as if you wanted to dare me.

And our little school teacher friend here seems to be daring me in another way. I'd hate to disappoint her."

He put a rough hand on the girl's arm. Newell started toward him, only to find himself seized in the firm grip of two plant-creatures.

Bulkley said, "Take it easy, Newell. There's nothing you can do."

The girl said sharply, "Take your filthy paw off me."

That was the only encouragement a man like Bulkley needed: He laughed, and pulled her toward him.

What happened then amazed and startled Newell almost as much as it did the other man, although not so painfully. The great body of the man seemed to leap into the air and fly into the wall. He landed with a thud, and sank to the floor, dazed and half unconscious.

Newell tried to leap forward toward the flashlight that had slipped from Bulkley's belt. But as he did so, the two plant creatures pulled him back. Rough twigs with bark-like surfaces tightened about his arms and held him helpless.

Despite his frustration, he had a feeling of elation, as if he had watched a miracle happen. How in the name of space had the girl done that to Bulkley?

Her expression was unruffled, and her lips were smiling again. "I told you I had other talents," she said.

"What diabolical trick was that?" asked Newell.

"One of the bits of knowledge I picked up while studying the ancient customs of Earth. It was known in its day as—let me see—jiu jitsu. The principles are simple enough, but the results are startling to a modern race which has long forgotten most of what it knew about physical combat."

Bulkley was picking himself up from the floor. Suddenly, as if he had convinced himself that what had happened to him the first time was only a bad dream, he rushed at her again.

THIS TIME he landed against the furniture and bounced off to the wall so violently that Newell hoped the man's skull was cracked.

"The greater the effort he makes, the harder he lands," explained the girl. "That's one of the beauties of jiu jitsu."

Bulkley's skull was a little too strong for plastex. He picked himself up, hesitated for a moment as if to attack again, and then thought better of it. "Get back to your own hut," he told her hoarsely. "I'll attend to you later."

The girl left, her manner prim and dignified, the manner of a school teacher who has just given an unusually stupid pupil a lesson.

Bulkley glowered after her, and then turned to face Newell. "Wipe that smile off your face," he ordered, in a rage.

"I wasn't smiling at you, my friend. I was just pitying you. You really were a pathetic sight."

"Keep your mouth shut, damn you!" roared the man.

"You'd better be careful from now on, Bulkley. That girl is dangerous. Too bad we don't have an X-ray machine here. You *may* have a serious concussion."

"I'm all right, and mind your own business." He turned to the television set, and Newell realized that he intended to get his favorite program, hoping perhaps that Indra herself would appear. But the set did not light up.

"You probably smashed the insides when you landed against it," said Newell hastily. He stared into the set. "Whew! Everything's in a mess in here."

This time Bulkley cursed bitterly, emitting a long string of oaths that to Newell had novelty and interest, if not charm. Finally he turned away, and sank into his chair.

A little while later he went into his room, and dropped off to sleep.

But Newell stayed up. He thought for a while of the girl, and then of Bulkley, and what he could possibly do to free himself from the man's grip. If only the plant-creatures were less alert! He was glad to see that they hadn't responded to the girl's motions when she had thrown Bulkley head over, heels. That



was because she had moved suddenly, and her motions had been on a small scale —the shift of weight from one foot to another, the use of one arm for leverage, the other for a gentle push. If he moved like that, perhaps he would be able to put something over on them. He brooded for a long time, trying to find a way.

When finally he too went to sleep, he had made up his mind to wait for the right conditions, and then attempt a sudden dash for safety.

It was the roar of an approaching space ship that awoke them shortly before dawn. Newell and Bulkley rushed out of the hut, to stare up and see the faint white exhaust from the rocket tubes far off near the horizon against the fading blackness of the night.

The patrol ship, of course. The patrol ship that would try to cook Bulkley's goose. He would have to stay for a while.

The ship was coming down at a gentle slope, using the resistance of the atmosphere, as well as its own braking jets, to brake its fall. Its hull gleamed a low red from the heat of friction, then faded into pale gray, the shimmer of heat waves dancing around as it slowed down and made a gradual landing. It settled to the ground in a clearing half a mile from their own plastex hut.

Bulkley's eyes were glistening with anticipation. "That ship's all I need," he gloated. "I capture that and I get off the planet."

"You'll never get away with it," said Newell.

"No? You watch."

And because he had nothing better to do, Newell watched, with a gathering dread whose intensity grew from moment to, moment.

DAWN WAS breaking. A door opened in the side of the ship, and in the distance two men got out. The two tiny figures carried a heavy gun of some sort unknown to Newell. This they mounted at the side of the ship, ready for any emergency except that which actually threatened.

Newell opened his mouth to yell a warning, and as he did so, Bulkley signaled an order with his flashlight. A wooden arm closed around Newell's throat and choked off his cry.

More men were getting off the ship. They moved cautiously, in pairs, and without suspicion of the real danger. They knew that two men had been left on the planet, and that one of them had attacked the freighter. But the planet itself was supposed to contain no wild beasts, no plants whose existence meant peril.

They could see about them now as the pink sun continued rising slowly over the horizon. What they saw seemed harmless—odd perhaps, but not threatening. Brown and white tree stumps stood rooted in the ground near the ship, branches lopped off in a most unusual fashion, so that stump after stump bore a great resemblance to a human scarecrow. They had never seen anything like these stumps before, but this was a new planet to them, and far stranger things were to be seen on other new planets.

With his flashlight, Bulkley shot an ultraviolet signal toward the ship. The captain was expecting no signals, and paid no attention to the response of one of the instruments on his panel. But the brown and white scarecrows sprang into activity.

A pair of them leaped for the nearest gun, tore it from the grip of the startled patrol men who had held it, and turned it on the ship itself. With the sound of firing, a shrill cry of alarm rang out. Terror awoke, and grew at the sudden attack.

The terrain around the ship became a field of battle. Men fell into the clutches of the plant-creatures and did not rise again. Those that survived the first onslaught raced back toward the ship.

Some of the plant-men were hit too. Newell, the grip on his throat loosened now, could see them running around, their arms, legs, bodies in flames, their faces totally oblivious of such feelings and motions as pain and fear. The sight added the final touch of terror to the surprised patrol crew. Those already in the ship yelled to the others to close the door.

But it was already too late. The plant-creatures were inside the ship now, disregarding weapons fired at them point-blank, hunting down the survivors. Though their wooden bodies were torn and shattered, they were still capable of killing.

Bulkley was gloating, his eyes ablaze with the fervor of the despised man who sees his desperate plans working like a charm. "The ship's mine," he shouted. "Do you realize that, Newell? A complete space ship. All mine. I can pack five hundred of my army into it and take them with me to the nearest planetary outpost; nothing will be able to stand before me."

He was right, thought Newell. The ship was his; the peaceful colonies on unprotected planets lay open to attack. Many a lone-wolf outlaw had dreamed of revenge on society for the wrongs he imagined he had suffered, for the punishments that the innocent had inflicted on him for his crimes. Yes, Bulkley was going to make these outlaw dreams come true.

The field of battle was empty of enemies now—the few human beings still on it were dead. Bulkley took a step forward.

And the planet shook.

THE GROUND rocked and trembled under foot like a vast heap of jelly. They could feel the vibrations from some distant slide of rock strata. In the forest ahead of them, a row of trees suddenly tipped over, as if toppled by a giant hand.

Bulkley fell, his flashlight flying away from him. Newell, dropping to all fours for his own safety, made a lunge for the flashlight, his fingers closing about it. Bulkley did not notice him.

The plant-creatures had reacted in an unexpected way. Their foot-like appendages became rooted in the ground, held them firm. The wind was rising now, and as sudden gusts came blustering down upon them, they bent before it, springing up again when the pressure was released.

It was useless to try to use the lights upon them now. Newell did not know the combinations of wave lengths to which they responded, and the stimuli from the wind were now so strong as to control their movements. He saw Bulkley rise and turn to him, to shout a few words which the wind carried away, and then take a step toward him.

The ground between the two men opened up. A gulf suddenly yawned between them, a dozen feet wide and a hundred deep. Newell knew from previous experience that the earthquakes were violent, but that the series of shocks was of short duration. In a few moments, Bulkley would recover his wits, and regain control of the plant-creatures. If there was a chance to escape, Newell would have to take it now.

He tried to run, but the wind, now of hurricane force, knocked him down, and he crawled as fast as he could over the heaving ground. He could hear nothing but the howling of the wind, and up above streamers shot out of the sun, while the great disk of the flaming star itself grew dark and gloomy as the vast clouds of dust rose into the air and obscured the light.

He reached the rows of fallen trees, and began to crawl over the tops of them.

Suddenly, as suddenly as it had begun; the earthquake ended. The ground grew firm beneath the fallen trees, the heaving, as of a ship in a violent storm, came to an end. The wind still blew, but not quite with its former force. From second to second he could feel how its strength subsided. Only the clouds of dust still obscured the sun, which he knew from past experience would not regain its brightness for at least a day.

He sank down among the trees. Bulkley would soon be looking for him, desperate because of his need for more dragon-tooth seeds, more soldiers. The seeds which Newell had already prepared would not sprout, as Newell well realized, and the other man's rage would be something fearful to behold.

In the distance Newell could see the two plastex huts, their sides cracked and twisted. Well, that damage amounted to little. Plastex Powder could be poured into the cracks for repairs, and a twisted hut, although novel in design, was just as good a shelter as one with straight sides.

But the ship—and then he realized why he could see so far ahead of him. The ship had sunk into the ground, which had opened beneath the great hull and then closed again with the power of a gigantic nut cracker. The metal hull was shattered now shattered beyond hope of repair. It was the same thing that had happened to the other space ship long before Newell and Bulkley had arrived on the planet.

He could hear the sound of Bulkley's cursing. The man could not get off the planet now. He would have to wait for another patrol ship to come searching for the first one. His plans would have to be delayed. And for Newell, delay meant hope.

Bulkley would, he knew, send his plant-creatures to search for him from the moment the man recovered from the immediate effects of the disaster. Newell had to get further away. Only distance meant safety.

HE BEGAN to make his way through the trees, when unexpectedly the sound of human speech came to his ears.

He swung around. Indra was helping her father over a fallen tree trunk. They too had escaped. Bulkley was without human companionship now, alone with his army of plant-soldiers. And he was more desperate and more dangerous than ever.

The old man saw him and a smile broke over the old withered face. Now there was somebody else besides the old gentleman's daughter to talk to. "Ah, my dear sir," began Hilton. "I am pleased to see that you too have escaped. It is an ill wind that blows no good."

"This wind didn't do half the damage the earthquake did."

"And those creatures." The girl shuddered. "The slaughter was sickening. I had to turn my eyes away."

"The slaughter will be repeated with the next patrol ship," said Newell soberly. "Unless we find a way to stop it."

The old pedagogue shrugged. "It was very difficult even under the previous conditions, as you well realize, Mr. Newell, to get at Bulkley. It will be doubly difficult now that we have escaped. He will undoubtedly post guards to watch for us."

"We'll have to think of ways of getting past them: How is that hypnotic device of yours coming along?"

"Ah I had almost forgotten. Thank you, sir, for reminding me. The fact is, that it is coming along, to use your phrase. Indeed; it is completed. It has not, however, undergone actual test, so I cannot vouch for its effectiveness." From his pocket he pulled out what seemed like a short blunt plastex tube.

"Observe."

Newell stared at the end of the tube. He could see it begin to glow dully, turn cherry red, orange, white, and then orange and red again. The next time it raced through the spectral gamut of colors from red to violet, faded out, and seemed to retrace its steps. And all the time its intensity ebbed and flowed, ebbed and flowed, as pulses of energy raced one after the other through the short tube.

He was tired, Newell realized, tired of the horrifying excitement of the battle. He would like to get away from everything, forget the planet, forget Bulkley, forget the plant-creatures. He would like to rest, to sleep

His head snapped back, and he was suddenly alert. "Take that thing away!" he shouted.

The old man chuckled with satisfaction. "Indeed, sir, this is more effective than I had thought. The combination of color change and intensity fluctuation makes it difficult for most people to resist. The exact rhythm is, of course, of great importance. It is the result of a great many experiments, a great deal of work and thought for which I, sir, cannot claim a particle of credit! The principle was first discovered by a professor of a distant system—"

"Never mind that. Mr. Hilton. The main thing is that it works."

"Yes, it is, as I say, rather effective, even when used without the adjust of suggestion. If, in addition, sleep-suggestive words or, on occasion, syllables, are employed, successful hypnosis is almost guaranteed. If you are one of those unfortunate sufferers from insomnia, troubled sleep, inability to relax—"

For the first time that morning Newell found something to laugh at. "You don't have to go into your Dr. Hypno spiel," he said. "I'll take your word for it that it works."

THE OLD man fondled the hypnotic device, like a child with his toy. "I am rather anxious now," he said. "to get a chance to use this on Bulkley."

"Later, Father, later," his daughter told him, and the old man smiled, and seemed to become absent-mindedly lost in his own thoughts, as he wandered away from them into the forest.

Newell turned to the girl, noticing now that in her haste to escape she hadn't managed to make herself as unattractive as usual. Her clothes fitted the lithe body more snugly and disturbingly. Looking at her now, you could believe that she was the dancer who had appeared on television and aroused the enthusiasm of the inhabitants of an entire planetary system.

But her own mind did not seem to be on her appearance. She was in a serious mood as she said, "We can't stay out here in the woods for long."

"You mean because of your father."

"Yes. He's only a hundred and twenty, but he's not in good health. And if the weather should turn bad—"

"You needn't worry about the weather here. It's mild all year round, and there's little rain. It's the wind that's dangerous. Even when there are no earthquakes, it sometimes rises to hurricane force, and the falling trees would be deadly."

"We'll have to find a cleared space."

"And we'll have to watch out for those plant-creatures. Bulkley may send them out looking for us."

He thought she looked troubled, but he could not read the expression in her eyes behind the lenses. Once more he reached toward her and lifted the octagonal glasses from her face. This time she did not slap him.

"You don't really need those," he said.

"They've just become a habit," she admitted.

"Meant to keep people at a distance. But you don't need them with me. You have your jiu jitsu."

"Yes, I can always fall back on that."

"I suppose I risk being thrown, head over heels if I so much as try to kiss you."

"I'm sure that you realize that it's happened to others before you."

"It's a risk that's worth taking."

He was not thrown head over heels. But when he let go of her, his brain was in such a whirl that he felt almost as if he had been.

Bulkley sent his plant-slaves after them that very day, a few hours before the sun was due to set. It was hard at first to see the creatures coming, for their brown and white surfaces blended all too perfectly with the natural browns and whites and greens of their parent forest. But when they moved forward, they became visible. And soon Newell could see them, from twenty-five to fifty of them, scattered in a long thin row and marching straight ahead, slowly, giving a terrifying impression of implacable power.

"What do we do?" whispered the girl. "We can't fight them."

"I know one thing we can do to beat them off. But it'll take time: Meanwhile, we run. They can't move fast enough to catch us."

"But my father is too old!"

"He won't have to race along. We have a head start, and if we keep going steadily, a fast walk will do. The important thing is to keep the distance between us and them, and to add to it."

They turned and began to crash through the forest. The old man grumbled, at first. Running away was beneath his dignity. He would face these creatures and stand on his rights, explain to them that what they were doing was illegal and would be punished.

NEWELL did not wait to hear what else the old man wanted to say. He simply dragged the unwilling pedagogue along and, soon, lack of breath forced his companion to stop talking.

They had been moving for an hour, more at a fast walk than at a run, when a slight wind arose. It was cool and pleasant, and blew in their faces so refreshingly that at first Newell did not think of what it might mean to his plans; When he realized how it could help, he came to a stop.

There were dead and dried trees scattered all through the forest, and inside them he found the tinder he needed. The flashlight he had taken from Bulkley had tiny permanent batteries that were capable of giving a strong spark. It was the work of but a moment to set fire to the tinder, and to nurse the tiny flame until it grew fierce and ravenous.

Using a flaming branch, he spread the fire through the forest. The wind, blowing steadily, spread the

blaze into a continuous sheet, and urged it forward. The sound of crackling branches became a steady roar, a roar that rose louder and louder as it seized upon new fuel. The sheet of flame swept on, driven by the wind, and accompanied by the fierce crescendo music that its own fury aroused.

Into the flames walked the plant-creatures. Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die. They died. Newell could see some of them, animate torches stalking through a sea of flame. They moved forward as long as they could, and when the flames had seized them too completely, they toppled over and finished burning to the ground.

There was something to be said after all, he thought, for human beings, with all their fears and imperfections. The very fact that they had reason to live made them worse soldiers under conditions where sacrifices were needed. But sometimes sacrifices were stupid and in vain. Sometimes the best thing a soldier could do for his own cause was to be afraid, and keep himself alive. And that kind of wisdom the plant-creatures did not have.

Indra looked troubled. "They seem so—so human," she said. "I know they're not, but all the same, I felt as if I were watching human beings walk to their deaths."

He nodded somberly. "I feel the same way. But Bulkley doesn't. To him their lives are meaningless as the lives of so many blades of grass. That's where he has the advantage over us."

"And he has almost two thousand more in reserve?"

"Almost. A few were killed in the attack on the ship, and more have just been burnt, but he still has the greater part of his slave army." Sudden rage seized him at the thought. "The army that I provided for him."

"No use worrying about it now. Father seems tired, and can't run any further. Let's think of shelter for the night."

He shook his head impatiently. "There's something else to do, and I'm the only one who can do it. You find a place for yourself and your father to sleep if you want to. I'm setting to work."

"What do we do for food?"

"I'll show you which plants are edible." He pointed out a small bush. "You can collect these berries. They're tasty and nourishing. If you want to, you can collect a meal for me, after you yourself have eaten. In the meantime, the only thing you can give me is inspiration."

She eluded his arms. "No, I don't want you to forget your work."

He *would* have forgotten it, he told himself. Now that he knew her better, he realized that she could make him forget anything but herself.

He put the thought aside, and began to collect the seeds he needed.

Equipment he could improvise. And most of the necessary chemicals he'd be able to extract from the same kinds of plants he had used before.

SOON HE was so lost in his work that it came as a shock of surprise when she appeared before him with berries to eat. He ate mechanically, hardly aware of the taste of the food.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Fighting fire with fire—another kind of fire. Trying to create a slave army of my own."

"How long before they're ready?"

"Two days to prepare the seeds, another day for them to grow, and for the plant creatures to undergo preliminary training."

"Suppose Bulkley finds us before then?"

"Then we're out of luck. The fact is, even if he doesn't find us, I'll have to go looking for danger. I don't have all the chemicals I need. One complex compound is in a vial, in what's left of our plastex hut. I'll have to go back for it."

"That's insane! You'll never be able to get away with it!"

"I'll have to try."

She had turned pale, and Newell thought with surprise, "She's worried about me. Is it because she's counting on me to protect her against Bulkley—or is it something deeper?"

She said, "I'll go with you. Two will stand a better chance than one."

"No. You'd only distract me. I'd be thinking of your safety instead of my own."

"I want to help you. In any way you say. I can help you prepare your chemicals."

He shook his head doubtfully. "That requires careful work."

"I can do careful work. I've done experiments in science. Have you forgotten that I'm a school teacher?"

He looked at her. The effort to escape through the forest from the pursuing plant-creatures had torn her once ill-fitting clothes in many places, and lent them a casual charm they had not originally possessed. There were rips through which he could see her body, and it was not the kind of body he thought of as belonging to a school teacher. Doubtless, he was doing school teachers an injustice.

"Good thing you reminded me," he grunted. And he turned back to his labors.

Thanks to her help, it was evening of the following day, sooner than he had expected, when he retraced his path toward the plastex hut that he had shared for six months with the man who now wanted to kill him.

He had a weapon—the hypnotizer that Indra's father had fashioned. It was much less reliable than a gun, but it was the best he could get, and it would have to do. If he was lucky, he would avoid Bulkley altogether, and not have the chance to use it. But if Bulkley discovered him trying to steal that vial of chemical—

He shrugged. There would be trouble, and all the advantages would be on the other man's side. He must avoid discovery as long as he could.

He made his way cautiously through the forest in the darkness, not daring to use his flashlight. He knew, even before his feet crunched the charred wood, when he had reached the burned-out portion of the forest. The odor of burnt wood was overpowering. And here and there, after more than twenty-five hours, sparks still glowed in the night, like tiny signal fires lighting his way.

After the burnt forest was behind him, he became even more cautious. Bulkley, he knew, now that the man was alone, would be sleeping with the lightness and insecurity of a feral beast, ready to start up at any noise. The plant-creatures were not very sensitive to slight sounds, not unless they had been conditioned to sound more thoroughly than Newell imagined was possible. But with light-receptors scattered all over their surfaces, they had an extraordinary sensitiveness to light. The merest alteration of dim light to faint shadow, or vice versa, might arouse them.

ONCE A TWIG snapped under his feet, and he came to a halt. But in the army of resting plant-creatures, all was quiet, and after a tense thirty seconds he went on again, more carefully this time, testing the ground with each foot before he let his weight fall upon it. A hundred yards to one side he was aware of a darker shadow, of a great mass that was even blacker than the surrounding black. It was the smashed hull of the space ship, won by ruthless slaughter, and wrecked in a moment of giant and more ruthless playfulness by the planet itself. Now only the top protruded above the level of the surrounding soil.

As he approached the hut, he dropped to the ground and crawled. The less possibility of casting a shadow, he told himself, the better. Walking was more convenient, but also more dangerous. He crawled, slowly and painfully.

He was at the door of the hut. Quiet reigned, a dead absence of sound held sway. No, there *was* a sound—something low and menacing, something—I'm a damn fool, he thought. It's my own breathing.

He held his breath, and heard through the walls of the hut the faintest of sighs. Now it was Bulkley's breathing he heard, the breathing of a Bulkley who slept untroubled, with no murderous dreams to disturb his rest, no fear of danger to himself.

There must be plant-creatures on guard, he told himself, some of them must be present in the hut itself. But the hut is dark. Lucky for me that they're not very sensitive to heat radiations as I established with those television set parts. Don't want my body heat to set them off. But they *are* sensitive to the near-visible infrared, and visible light, and ultraviolet. For plants, they're unusually sensitive. But they need a stimulus in order to respond. No stimulus, no response. If they don't see me, if not so much as a single photon sets off their light-receptors, I'm safe.

Inside the hut now. Stop again, listen again—Bulkley's breathing is louder now, I can hear it almost like an intermittent roar when I hold my own breath, but there's no other change. If only I don't touch a plant-creature in the dark. I know where the chemical I want is, I can feel my way around without switching on a light, as I did for so many months when I lived here. Bulkley may have made changes in the past few days, but he hasn't changed the location of the closet. Ah, here it is. I reach inside. Here are the bottles, large and small. I don't need to read the labels to know what's inside them. Acids, indole derivatives—ah, here's the vial I want. I know its size, its shape. All I need now is a single crystal, but common sense dictates that I take it all. I may need more later, and besides, there's no sense leaving anything for Bulkley to use.

Theft mission accomplished safely —or almost, anyway. Now to get away from here.

Unexpectedly—a noise. A noise not from the hut itself, but from overhead. A faint drone like that of some insect zooming through the air, preparing for a dive at the end of which it will dip its tiny jaws into human skin for a meal of blood. The drone becomes a roar—the roar of a space ship. Another patrol vessel, of course, here to see what happened to its predecessor. More cautious than the first one, scanning the planet for danger before landing, with no desire to come down in the dark. Very smart, laudably smart. But helpless for all its smartness and all its caution, because its captain and its crew don't realize the real danger, don't realize that death comes from the harmless plants with which the surface of the planet is covered.

STILL, caution keeps the ship safe for the moment. The roar dies away to a faint drone again, to silence again, as the visitors scout the planet.

Hope they don't find us too soon. Hope it for their sake.

Not a sound now. Not even the sound of Bulkley's breathing. And that's odd. Very odd. A man asleep breathes deeply, heavily—

But Bulkley isn't asleep. Bulkley is standing in the doorway of his room, a flashlight in one hand, a weapon in the other. Bulkley is grinning evilly at him, ready to shoot, ready to kill.

Wish to amend previous report. Theft mission *not* accomplished safely.

The man moved forward. "Don't move, Newell," he cautioned. "Not unless you want to die in a hurry."

Newell froze. That damned space ship, he told himself bitterly. Cautious as all space itself. So cautious that it woke him up.

The flashlight went off as the room lights went on. Bulkley said comfortably, "Sit down. Be comfortable. Make yourself at home. Make believe you live here."

Humor from Bulkley, of all people. Or was it just humor? The place was home, the house was still as comfortable as ever, but that wasn't the reason Bulkley wanted him to sit. A sitting man couldn't leap at you with the suddenness that a standing man could. A sitting man was like a sitting duck, easy to keep under the muzzle of your own weapon, and his weapon of surprise taken away from him.

"Thought you'd be back, Newell. Thought you wouldn't want to leave your old pal without saying good-bye. And you're not getting away again. I don't expect another earthquake soon, but if there is one, I'll shoot you dead at the first sign of it."

HELL SHOOT me anyway when he has no more use for me. What do I do now? Those plant-creatures are watching me. Three of them here with us in the room. Strange to think that they were here all the time, like dummies, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, doing nothing. Tough-Egg and Kind-Mugg—I recognize them. Or are these their twins? Could be. The third one looks even more human. A brown scar with white trimmings down a brown and white face. Scar-face. Human and sinister.

Never mind how they look. It's how they act that counts. They act like robots, perfect robots under Bulkley's control. Well, not perfect, perhaps. They have their weaknesses. But none that I can count on. The question is: What do I do now?

Nothing with them directly. Can't think of a thing to do. Bulkley is very likely the real weak link in the

chain that's got me trapped. Settle his hash, and the robots are left without orders, they're harmless. Yes, put Bulkley out of commission for a few seconds, and you get a start. And given that start, you can outrun them, especially in the dark.

Let's start off. My hand can slip casually along the arm of the plastex chair in which I'm sitting. Bulkley notices nothing wrong. Good. The thing now is to talk, talk heatedly passionately—talk in any way that will arouse Bulkley's interest, get him excited, not let him see what that hand is going to do. The hand is going to be quicker than the distracted eye. The hand is going to slip into a pocket and pull out the hypnotizer. The pulsing light will glow and change color, and then Bulkley's eyes will be drawn to it, and then, before he realizes what it is and what it's doing to him..."

"All right, Bulkley, you've got me. What do you want of me?"

"First thing, I want you to help me get that girl back."

"That school teacher? Thought you didn't like her."

"School-teacher in a space-devil's eye. She's that danced I had her in my hands and didn't realize it. Just last night I was watching that program—yes, I fixed the television set, my friend, and found that some of the parts were-missing. But anyway, I was watching the program, and it struck me that I had seen her face before."

"Quick on the trigger. That's you, Bulkley."

"I'm the one who's in a position to be funny, Newell, not you."

"Sure, sure you're a born humorist." He's beginning to burn. Fine. He isn't watching my hand at all.

"I'm warning you for the last time, Newell. Don't, try to be funny. I want that girl back."

Laugh at him. Laugh when you want to smash his face. "You're crazy, Bulkley. Or is it your turn to try to be funny?"

"I'm not crazy and I'm not funny. I want her back."

"You heard me. The answer is, 'No'."

The man's eyes are glittering. Hope I don't carry this too far. Don't want him to shoot.

His lips seem to be dry. He licks them before speaking. "You're a fool, Newell." Softly, dangerously. "A complete fool. What's the girl to you? You've know her for only a couple of days. She means nothing to you. She can't possibly mean anything. And whether you live or die, sooner or later I'll get her anyway. I'm offering you your life if you help me get her now."

"You're wasting your time." Wrong tactics, here. I should stall, ask him what he wants me to do. But I can't. Not on a subject like this. To hell with even thinking of stalling on a subject like this. "If this is the subject you want to talk about, shoot me and get it over with. I won't discuss it."

THAT'S stopping him. His face is red with anger and frustration. He *may* shoot at that. He says evenly, "Whatever I decide to do to you, Newell, it won't be the way you want it to be. I won't shoot you and just get it over with. That would be pleasant for you. But I don't like to cut my own pleasures short that way. For a time, at least, I'm going to keep you alive."

"You can't keep me alive against my will. Try to torture me, and I'll kill myself. And I'll take you with me."

"You tempt me, Newell." The words are slow; weighed carefully. "I hesitate to tell you how much you tempt me. I've hated your guts ever since I've known you—"

"Ever since you framed me. We always hate those we hurt. Sense of guilt, I suppose."

"You're wrong. I don't feel guilty about what I've done to you. I'm only sorry it wasn't worse. And I'm going to do all I can to make it worse."

"Aren't you overlooking something, Bulkley? We're not going to be alone on this planet much longer. That was a space ship that awoke you."

"I know that. I heard it."

"Isn't that going to interfere with your plans? Some place out there—" his left arm gestured vaguely toward vaguely toward the window—"that ship will be landing soon. The captain and the crew know that something is wrong with this planet. That's why they came in such a hurry to search for the first ship. They'll be careful, this time. You won't catch them by surprise again."



"You're a fool." Contempt is in his voice. "They can't be careful enough, because they don't realize what they have to be careful about. What ship ever worries about being attacked by trees?"

He's right, he's saying what I myself think. But I can't let him know that I agree with him. "They'll be suspicious of everything."

"No, they won't be suspicious of the one thing they should suspect."

Like you, my friend. You're watching to make sure that I don't try to leap at you from this chair. But you're not suspicious of the vague gesture I make with my left arm. You don't realize that your eyes follow it without your meaning them to, and that while your attention is distracted toward the window, my right hand has slipped into a pocket and drawn out the hypnotizer.

Now to start it going—low power, at first, so that you don't even realize the light's on. Low power, and in the near-visible infrared, so that your eyes begin to be affected without your actually seeing anything. You're susceptible to suggestion, the old man proved that when he first spoke to you in my presence. Before you know it, your eyes will be glazed, you won't be able to tear them away. You'll do as I tell you, and all your desperate plans will end in failure.

Mustn't look at the light myself, though. I know what it can do. I'll resist it if my eyes do happen to glance at it, but still it's best not to take chances. Fine joke it would be if I were hypnotized myself. Turn the power up a bit, slowly, gradually, so he doesn't even realize the light is visible—

Bulkley is talking abruptly. Words mean little now, but I have to pretend to listen. "However, that space thing isn't the thing I want to talk about. I'll handle it when the time comes. And then there won't be another earthquake to crush it, and I'll have a ship I can use to get off this damned planet."

"So you think."

"That's the way it'll be. But how about you, Newell? Do you want to live or die? Or maybe that isn't the question. Because after I start working on you, I know that you'll want to die, even if I decided to let you live. The real question is whether you'll do it the easy way, or insist on suffering a little first."

"Let's be reasonable, Bulkley." Just a moment of reason, before the thing has him under control. "I don't like to be tortured any more than the next man. But what you're asking—"

"Cut it out, Newell."

THERE'S something unexpected in the man's voice. Something I don't understand and don't like. There's a sneer of brutal triumph, an overwhelming tone of contempt. Have I made a fool of myself?

"What do you mean, cut it out?"

"Stop stalling for time: Because that thing you have in your hand isn't working. And it isn't going to work, no matter how long you keep it going. I'm not susceptible to hypnotizers."

Impossible. He's lying, trying to upset me. The dirty rat is wide open to suggestion. The hypnotizer will work in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred even on the average man, and there's no reason why it shouldn't affect him.

Bulkley's laughing. "There are a few things about me that you didn't know, Newell. I never thought of telling them to you. When I was under investigation, they also figured, as I knew they would, that I'd be susceptible to suggestion, and they tried to hypnotize me. But I was way ahead of them. I pretended to let myself go, but told them nothing, absolutely nothing."

"But how—"

"Because I can't be hypnotized." Triumph in the brutal voice again. "I'm immune to it, at least when tried by any ordinary man or with any ordinary device. You immunize yourself against bacterial infection, viral infection—well, I immunized myself against hypnotism long ago. I went to a specialist who got me under control, and then gave me this posthypnotic suggestion: *Never let yourself be hypnotized again.* Clever trick for a murderer, isn't it, Newell? And the suggestion's still working."

HE'S OUTWITTED me. Let him gloat, he has a right to do it. Crude, murderous, brutal—he's also got a kind of shrewdness I hadn't counted on. He's made a complete fool of me. And the cost—the cost is not only my own life, which doesn't count any more, but Indra's, her father's.

THE SIGHT of his desperate face must have been funny. Bulkley chose that moment to laugh again—and within the fraction of a second, the very, strength of desperation had sent Newell leaping out of his chair, his hands reaching straight for the man's throat.

Bulkley's arm went up instinctively in a gesture of self-protection, and a hoarse cry came from his lips. "Help!"

The plant-creatures didn't move. Newell's hands missed the throat, balled into fists, and smashed at the other man's jaw. Bulkley staggered backward, fell. And still his once faithful slaves did not come to his help. Tough-Egg, Kind-Mugg, Scar-Face, all three stood as if paralyzed—no, as if hypnotized. The hypnotizer which had failed on Bulkley had succeeded with them!

Bulkley cursed, and his hand went to the weapon at his side. Newell threw a chair at him. The chair landed, but did not knock the weapon from his hand. Newell raced for the door, and plunged through just as a blast tore a hole through the wall behind him.

He was running in the darkness now, his hypnotizer still glowing. It made him a target for Bulkley, but he had to risk it, now that he knew what it could do to the plant-creatures. He should have suspected what would happen. They reacted in different ways to different light stimuli. When the lights followed one another in rapid succession, as they did in the hypnotizer, they were stimulated to do different, contradictory things. The result was that they did nothing, standing motionless like the plants from which they had descended.

Bulkley was pursuing him in the darkness. A blast came, ripping a hole of flame in the night before the darkness overwhelmed it again. And then Newell ducked behind a genuine tree, and Bulkley could no longer see the glow of light, could no longer follow. Newell heard his curses die away in the distance.

He paused for a moment to catch his breath before going ahead.

Later, when he told Indra of his narrow escape, he could see how strongly she was affected. Her face paled, her voice shook.

"He'll be murderous now," she shuddered. "He'll come after you, do anything to revenge himself on you."

"He may send the plant-creatures after us. But now we can defend ourselves from them with the hypnotizer, and Bulkley knows that. He'd have to come himself if he really wanted to get us."

"He knows that in the long run we can't escape. Father can't run far. And I wouldn't leave him to Bulkley's mercy."

"But Bulkley doesn't have the time to spare for us. Don't you see, Indra, he has to be ready for that space ship. He doesn't know where it will land, and he can't take chances with it. It may blast a cleared space among the trees and come down among them. And then the sight of his plant-creatures, no matter how much they imitate other trees, will arouse suspicion. Bulkley has to arrange his soldier-slaves beforehand, give them signals as to what to do."

"So you think we're safe for a while?"

"Until the space ship comes down and is attacked."

"But we can't let those crew men be slaughtered the same way the others were. We have to do something!" "What?"

"Warn them, signal them—"

"Not so long as they're up in the air. We don't have the proper equipment for that. Besides, they'll be suspicious of whoever contacts them. If *we* did try to signal them too soon, they'd beware of us, not of Bulkley. No, the best thing we can do is plan to reach the ship after it comes down, and spoil Bulkley's surprise."

"You mean to use the hypnotizer?"

"It should be helpful."

"But suppose Bulkley realizes that," she pointed out. "He'll try to recondition his creatures. You say that he himself foresaw that attempts would be made to hypnotize him, and took steps against it. Suppose he finds a way to protect those plant-creatures against hypnosis?"

Newell nodded slowly. "You're right, Indra, there's that danger. I can't laugh it off. I've been underestimating Bulkley all along, but I mustn't underestimate him now. That might be fatal—"

"If *we* had such a thing as a flame-thrower—"

"We haven't. But talking about flame-throwers reminds me, Indra. As I said before, we have to fight fire with fire. And slaves with slaves. I'm almost ready to do so now."

He pulled from his pocket the vial which he had gone to so much trouble to obtain. "We'll have to go ahead with our experiments, as fast as we can. I'll work through the night to get the dragon-tooth seeds ready for planting."

"How about the field to plant them in?"

"That has to be prepared too. It won't take long to make the proper chemical solutions for that, though. And you can help me."

"Aren't you glad now that I'm a school teacher and have such good ideas?"

HE HELD her in the darkness and laughed. "I didn't fall in love with you for your ideas."

"You're like any other man. You fall in love for the worst reasons. Because to you I was a pretty face on a television screen!"

"Not only a face."

"Don't make me blush."

"Blush? You're still a school teacher after all! Put on your glasses and get to work!"

The planet had no moon, but during the night the sky cleared, and the starlight poured down upon them, bright, clear, and cool. Newell switched off the flashlight, which he had been using from time to time as he mixed his chemicals, and went ahead with his work in the semi-darkness. Indra worked near him, and the thought of her, so close that he was aware of her every movement, sent a warm thrill through him. No wonder Bulkley envied him, went mad with rage when he thought of Newell's good fortune.

He was within a few minutes of completing his work, when the new day dawned. Indra's father had been sleeping a short distance away, on a heap of leaves which his daughter had carefully collected and made up into a soft bed. Now he arose, somewhat stiffly, and shook both the drowsiness and the leaves from him.

"These are indeed primitively simple surroundings for a man of a hundred and twenty-one," he commented.. "And I do not believe that sleeping on the ground is favorable to the condition of my joints. No, indeed, I regard that as a most injudicious proceeding, although, in the circumstances, inevitable. Nevertheless, sir I imagine that the over-all effect is rather invigorating. There is nothing like direct contact with nature to restore the energy of the human psyche."

Newell, too busy with his work to have time for small talk, grunted.

"It is gratifying to know, sir, that you are in agreement with me. It is living in this manner that gives promise for the future of humanity. I sometimes am inclined to believe, Mr. Newell, that our present mode of existence is too complicated, too confusing. It baffles the soul, deprives it of contact with true cosmic greatness. Yes, I fear that we have lost contact with the true Truth, we have been deprived of the simplicity that once was ours. We dwell in great cities, on amazing planets that are parts of great systems. We go, in the happy and carefree days of youth, to great nurseries, and then to great schools, great universities. We enter upon great and difficult duties. It was different, in the old days."

Old men weren't any different, though, thought Newell. Wonder if they could talk quite as well as that. When you listened to that rich resonant voice and didn't pay too much attention to the meaning, you might actually think he was saying something different. So times have changed—imagine thinking that was a great discovery!

But that voice—no wonder the old boy's a good hypnotist. The very way he thinks is calculated to put you to sleep. Fuzzy mind, furry voice—wonder if they had any quite as good as him then, always looking back with regret to *their* old days.

"My father, sir, lived to a hundred and sixty-three, and even then it was only accident that ended his life. I was born when he was one hundred and eleven. I come from a long-lived line, sir, a line that retains its manly powers for many years."

Boasting, huh? Okay, Pop, go ahead.

Indra must have heard him. "Father," she called.

"Yes, dear?"

"I know that Mr. Newell is too polite and too considerate to ask you, but we are doing something in a hurry—"

"An enterprise of great moment, eh, dear?"

"Yes, it's important. It would be very nice if you could help."

"Anything within the limits of my abilities, Indra, dear, anything within the rather wide limits of my abilities. Tell me your difficulties, and I shall do my best to counsel you properly."

"You don't understand, Father. *We* don't need advice. We'll tell you what to do."

The old throat cleared. "Unfortunately, Indra, as you know, I lack the abounding physical energies that once were mine. Mentally I am as alert as ever, but physically—"

"It won't be difficult, Father." "One moment. Indra, I must tell Mr. Newell something. Would you believe it, sir, when I was twenty-three, and a student at the Intermediate—no, at the Lesser Galactic Graduate School—Section 4A—or was it 5C?— let me see, now—"

"Here, Father," said Indra coaxingly. "It's really very simple. It's a matter of digging furrows, as we sometimes see in the pictures that have come down to us from primitive times."

"Such menial labor as that, eh, daughter?" But he went over to her, and Indra, to Newell's surprise, soon had him doing useful work.

Newell shook his head to get all those words out of his ears, and then went on with his own work. Unexpected difficulties had cropped up.

The sun was two hours above the horizon when he finally began to plant the dragon-tooth seeds.

IT WENT slower here than when he had first planted them. This was no cleared field where he could stride without watching his footsteps. This was a partial clearing at best, the path broken by trees, stumps, and bushes of all kinds. But there had been no time to seek for better ground. This would have to do to raise a crop of the dragon-tooth creatures.

The girl and the old man watched in awe as the shoots began to push their way up. Now, as the growing plants became gradually more human in appearance, there was no effect as of an army of men springing into existence. Each plant-creature was surrounded by other plants, so that as the young shoots grew they appeared to be merely coming out of a hiding place which they had assumed long before.

"Remarkable," said the old man. "A most remarkable phenomenon. Still, it is not absolutely unprecedented. I recall the descriptions of some of the plant-beasts of the lesser known stars—"

"Of course, Father." Indra turned to Newell. "How do you handle them now?"

"With lights. It isn't going to be easy. I have my flashlight, and I have the glow of the hypnotizer. I'll have to condition them to signals of different intensity and different rhythms. They exhibit a natural tropism—a tendency to move—toward red light and away from violet. It's doubtless connected with the pinkness of the sun. At any rate, that helps me to control their movements, and at the same time, gives me a chance to combine the light signals with loud vocal commands, condition them to respond to words."

"Doesn't that take a great deal of time?"

"I should be able to get good results in a few hours."

Up above, there was the same roar he had heard the preceding night. The sun glinted on a tiny silvery shape before distance shrank the ship to an undetectable point.

"That's the space ship that came last night!" she exclaimed.

"They're still cruising around, trying to find Bulkley and me. I hope they don't succeed in spotting the plastex huts too soon."

"But surely, now that they know something has happened to the first ship, they won't be so easy to take by surprise!"

He shook his head. "I'm not counting on them. They know about the earthquakes that occur here, and if they come across the ruins of the first ship, caught in the ground, they may think at first that the ship was the victim of an accident. Bulkley might even take steps to make them think that. He might, for instance, put up a signal of distress."

"Then we don't have too much time!"

"Right. The sooner I can get my soldiers trained, the better off we'll be."

The minutes, as he was painfully aware, were ticking away all too rapidly. Where on the previous occasion the plant-creatures had seemed to grow with miraculous speed, now they hardly appeared to grow at all. What was that old motto again—a watched pot never boils? Motto proverb, whatever it was—and whatever a pot was—it expressed what was happening now. Watched plants never grew.

Somehow, however, they were full size, and then they began to free themselves from the soil. Newell switched on his flashlight, began to coordinate his light signals with spoken commands.

It was amazing to see how quickly they learned to obey—or rather, were conditioned to obey, for of learning in any conscious sense there could be none. Quickly he reached the point where he could march them back and forth across the field by the spoken word alone.

Up above him, the space ship flashed again. Fortunately, it did not land nearby. Time, he was reminded, was growing short. It was almost with a sense of desperation that he went on with his military drill.

He had taught them to march and maneuver. Now he had to teach them to kill.

IT WAS NOT human beings that would be their enemies, not even Bulkley. Bulkley he would take care of himself. It was the other plant-creatures, their own kind. That's what soldiers are good for, he thought, to kill each other. They mustn't be too ambitious about killing their superiors. In the days when wars were common, there was a saying that generals died in bed.

But General Bulkley wouldn't die peacefully in bed, not if he could help it. For compared with Newell's army, Bulkley's would be at a disadvantage. Bulkley's soldiers had been taught to slaughter human beings, to locate their weak points and attack with a vicious fury that terrified the victims. Put them up against creatures of their own kind, and they'd strike for the heart or throat—and in plants such weak points simply didn't exist. Plants couldn't be terrified, either.

True, there were vital points—but Bulkley wasn't enough of a botanist to know exactly where they were on these creatures. But I do know, Newell said to himself, I'll teach my army. I'll teach them to paralyze the centers of motion in the branches that look and act like arms and legs, to cut off the vital metabolic impulses. When I'm through with them, they'll be perfect killers of their own kind.

They learned rapidly. It was hardly more than an hour after he had begun this phase of their teaching when Indra suggested, "How will they know which ones to attack? In the actual battle, they might mistake each other for the enemy."

"Good idea. We'll have to give them, if not uniforms, at least distinguishing insignia. They can get green creepers from some of the forest trees, tie them around their arms."

Indra's father was watching the last-minute preparations, the final checkup before Newell set his amazing army into motion. "There is something vastly impressive about a display of military might," he said. "Would that human beings had as much discipline as these thoughtless vegetable creatures! I have often pondered, sir, that the chief weakness of the younger generation lies in its lack of discipline. Young people are unruly, disrespectful of their elders intolerant of the accumulated wisdom and experience of those who have lived before them. They believe that wisdom begins with them. These plant-soldiers, on the other hand, respect authority and wisdom. They obey, immediately and implicitly."

Newell was not listening. His army was ready, to do or die. He, as the general, was now suffering the uncertainty of all leaders of armed men who have great decisions to make. He would have liked to give them further training, but time was growing short. Already he might have delayed too long.

He flashed the green signal that meant, "Forward, march."

And his army began to march.

It was as if a forest had picked itself up, tree by tree, root and branch, and set itself into motion. A phrase from a play in one of the extinct Earth languages sprang into his mind: "Till Birnam Wood do come to Dunsinane." He remembered that to those old Earthmen the phrase had been a mere bit of trickery, a juggling with words. Now the words had acquired a literal and terrifying meaning.

The plant-soldiers moved forward slowly and inexorably. How long, Newell asked himself, till they reached the hut, the hut where Bulkley is lying in wait to slaughter the crew of the new ship? An hour and

a half at the earliest. If Bulkley suspects anything, if he's been foresighted enough to spy on what I've been doing, he'll try to stop them, burn them as I did his own soldiers. I'll have to watch out for traps, although I may not recognize them until too late, until after they're already sprung. And I'll have to hope that the ship doesn't suddenly decide to land.

ONE, TWO, three, four, *one*, two, three, four. It's a grim burlesque of a human army, four thousand wooden feet marching to a single rhythm. *One*, two three, four, *one*, two, three, four—they keep going remorselessly, tirelessly. No sound of talk to break the rhythm of marching, no irregularities of step to betray the inhuman weakness.

It's hard to breathe. I can feel the breath drying my open mouth, I can sense the rapid beating of my heart. A sudden pain—those are knots tying themselves in my stomach, and writhing in the effort to get untied. Guess this is how it felt to go into battle in the old days, when the human race was still young and foolish. This was what it meant to march, under orders, into the jaws of death.

Bulkley is armed, Bulkley has weapons that can tear apart both human and plant bodies. Me, I have nothing but my own bare hands to fight with. The hypnotizer is useless now. It has no effect beyond a narrow radius, and there's a danger that it would hypnotize my own soldiers instead of Bulkley's. Can't take the chance of using it, can't risk it.

*One*, two, three, four, *one*, two, three, four. Human soldiers don't need hypnotizers, the rhythm itself is hypnotic. Getting used to it. I'm breathing more normally now, my stomach hurts less, my heart is beating more regularly. How long have we been marching? A quarter of an hour at most. But now the fear and uncertainty are gone, now I'm ready to face anything. I'm not ready yet to laugh at danger. But it's easier now to pretend that it doesn't exist.

What's that noise in back of me? Two people—funny, I was forgetting about people. All I was thinking of was my nonhuman army. Indra and her father, walking a short distance behind me, the old man giving his comments on the younger generation as usual, the girl white-faced and determined. She sees me turn, she's waving to me.

Maybe I'd better order her back, command her to stay out of danger. She wouldn't obey, though. And besides, perhaps it's better this way. If my army is victorious there'll be no danger. Bulkley doesn't want to shoot her, and my plant-soldiers will protect her from other enemies. That is, they'll protect her if all goes well, if they succeed in doing as I taught them. If they fail, if the battle goes against us, she'll probably die on the field. The thought of it scares me, but it's better, a lot better, than having her fall into Bulkley's hands.

*One*, two, three, four, *one*, two, three, four. Another quarter of an hour gone, a third the distance covered. No sign of the ship. Time is still in my favor.

*One*, two, three, four, *one*, two, three—something's happened to the rhythm. A brown and white object is rising from the ground and throwing itself at my startled body.

A wooden arm clutching for my throat, the feel of bark bruising my skin. Smart guy, Bulkley. Hit at the general, leave his army leaderless. Kill the general—

Both hands on the wooden arm, try to wrench it away. My strength against the strength of an unfeeling plant-creature's, my muscles of flesh and blood straining for a moment plant-creature's, my muscles of flesh raining—no, that's perspiration that's starting up on my forehead. This is something to sweat about.

Deadlock. Neither of us can move. Both straining, motionless

Deadlock broken. My own soldiers have remembered their lessons, are applying the training I gave them. They're rallying to my support. The wooden arms of the enemy fall limply away from him, the brown and white form is collapsing. Good soldiers.

SLIGHT disorganization, though. Quick light signals to bring my men to a halt. Signal to reform ranks quickly, to march on again.

So Bulkley has scouts out to watch for me. I haven't given him too much credit. Bulkley is no fool. But the question still remains: has he taught his own soldiers a defense against the attack of their own

kind?

Up above, there's something doing. A silvery light, flashing once more. And this time it isn't going away. The great shape is cruising back and forth, slowly, as if on guard. And as it cruises it grows larger.

Have to tell Indra. "The ship's coming in for a landing! We'll be too late after all!"

"Not unless they lose all their sense of caution. They're not being reckless. Even after they land, they may not leave the ship until after they've done as much investigation as possible by instrument. If we could only get our own soldiers to move faster—"

"I don't see how, unless—wait a minute, I've got an idea. If I intensify the stimulus, I may get a stronger response. I'll turn the green signal on as strong as possible, and keep it on."

Sweep the green light across the field, back and forth, back and forth. No response. That's what it seems like at first, anyway. But after a time—yes, the army is gradually picking up speed. The rhythm is quickening, quickening. Now it's one-and-two-and-three-and-four, now they're moving ahead at almost twice their former speed.

But the ship's coming lower and lower. In another ten minutes it will land.

The old man's protesting. I can hear him back there, he's complaining because the quickened pace of the advance is leaving him behind. Another twisted figure is springing at me, but this time I'm not taken by surprise. This time I react quickly, I dodge the dangerous wooden arms and leave it to my soldiers to dispose of the intruder. Whatever else happens, I mustn't delay the main body of troops.

The ship is easing down close to the ground. Some one aboard it must have seen the other patrol ship, some one must be curious to know what's happened, for the place of landing is little more than a hundred yards away from the previous wreck.

Ten minutes now, ten desperate minutes. Let them stay inside for those ten minutes, and they'll be safe. If only I can warn them in some way

Have to run ahead, thread my way through my own soldiers. The rapid pace is telling on me now. Mouth and throat are both dry, and it's hard to breathe.

But that won't stop me. I'm in front of the men now, as a brave leader should be. A quarter of a mile away I can see an outer door of the space ship tremble. They're going to come out.

"Stay in!" Didn't know I could yell that loud. "Don't come out! Danger!"

HAD THEY heard him? Had they picked up his warning on one of their instruments? Or had they been too careless to listen.

The door stayed shut.

Two figures sprang at him. He tried to twist aside, but other figures cut off his path, and still others blocked his retreat. For a moment they surrounded him, grim and impassive as death. Then his own soldiers reached him. The battle was joined.

The field was filled with forms which writhed as if under the blows of a hurricane. What seemed to Newell the most striking feature of the battle was that it was so quiet. Desperate duels were going on in a hundred different places, destruction lay in wait in a hundred different forms—and every one of them silent. These were soldiers that could neither utter shouts to terrify their opponents, nor cry out in pain. At most there was the occasional creak as of branches swaying in the wind, a sharp crack as of a tree trunk splitting in two. The whole scene, so quiet and so terrifying, had the quality of a painted nightmare.

A giant sword stroke seemed to slash through the battlefield, cutting across friend and foe alike. One of Bulkley's creatures had fired a real weapon. In the path of the deadly beam, a series of flames broke out. In a matter of moments, the battle field was a blaze of fire.

Palls of smoke drifted over the weird struggling forms, making the nightmare even more horrible. A third of the soldiers originally on the field had already fallen, and it seemed to Newell that, among the slaughtered, most were Bulkley's. The training against human beings that the man had given his creatures had been fatally deficient against other creatures like themselves.

The doors of the ship had not opened. Now, Newell saw the guns swivel around, prepare to go into action. Apparently the patrol ship captain, unable to tell friend from foe, cared little which of the seemingly hostile creatures he slaughtered.

The purple signal of retreat flashed over the battlefield. Newell's soldiers drew back, leaving the open ground to the enemy.

A burst of heavy rays came from the ship, swept the field. Within five seconds, only a few scattered soldiers of Bulkley's army were left standing, and these were burning like torches. The battle was over.

The ship door slid open. Two men with a gun edged out cautiously, their nostrils wrinkling as they caught a whiff of the acrid smoke-filled air. Behind them came two others, similarly armed.

Newell came forward stiffly. He felt exhausted, as if by a day of hard work, although the sun seemed hardly to have moved in the sky. He realized with amazement that the entire slaughter had taken less than half an hour.

"Lift your hands," said one of the men sharply. "And come forward to be searched for weapons."

Newell would have smiled, if his facial muscles had not been so frozen. "I have no weapons. I'm the man who warned you."

"Where's the leader of these creatures?"

"Probably running for his life. He hoped to catch you by surprise, as he caught the other ship."

"What happened to them?"

NEWELL explained, as briefly as he could. Then he was brought into the ship, to explain all over again to the captain.

The latter frowned. "He's probably saved a few slaves."

"And he may be able to create more. The method isn't too difficult. And he may have found another vial of the chemical which I took from him. He's still dangerous."

"He'll have to be caught. You know his habits. And you know this section of the planet. Do you think you can lead us to him?"

"I'll try. We'll have to be wary, though. In forests like these, it's easy to walk into an ambush."

"Yes. It's even possible to be led into one. I wonder, Newell, just how trustworthy you really are."

"Still remembering that I'm supposed to be a criminal, are you? Mr. Hilton and his daughter should be able to testify to my character. They're the ones who were kidnapped from the freighter."

"And they're still alive? Good. Where are they?"

Where were they? They had been close behind him the last time he had looked—but that had been at least a half hour ago, at the beginning of the battle. Newell felt the blood drain out of his face at the thought that they might have fallen into the desperate Bulkley's hands.

"I thought they were near me, Captain. They must have become lost during the battle."

"You don't think they might have been taken prisoner by Bulkley, do you?" demanded the Captain sharply. "I'm afraid so, sir."

"That's another reason for finding him in a hurry. Newell, you may have a couple of my men, with a heavy gun. I can't spare any more."

"I won't need any more, sir. I have my own plant-soldiers. They're trained to attack others of their kind, but not human beings. They'll take care of the creatures that Bulkley still has left, and make it possible for us to get at him."

The fatigue of a moment ago was gone. Now fear for Indra and her father seemed to race through his blood, arousing him to new and greater efforts.

Where could Bulkley have taken them? Not across the field, not under the guns of the ship. He must have drawn back from the plastex hut, first stripping it of the things he thought he would need most. Chemicals to create new dragon-tooth seeds, tubes to create light, a generator unit. He would not let go of these if he could help it.

The two men the Captain had assigned to him were waiting. "Stay with me," he ordered. To his plant-soldiers he flashed a light-signal. "Deploy across the field, then advance."

They spread out, moved forward. Smoke drifted across the sky from the still smoldering battlefield, but here, where no fighting had taken place, the ground itself was redolent of leaves and grasses, of small creepers and flowering shrubs.

Now we'll see, thought Newell, which general will die in bed and which with his boots on. This time



it's the showdown—either Bulkley or me. But he has a powerful threat in what he can do to Indra and her father.

Everything looks peaceful now, no sign of danger anywhere. Wonder how many slaves Bulkley has left. Less than a score out of the two thousand he started with, the two thousand I gave him. They won't help him now. And neither will his weapons. I'll tear him apart with my bare hands if I have to.

THE WOODEN army came to a sudden confused halt. Before them stood a man—Hilton himself, holding up his hand in warning. Newell exclaimed, "Mr. Hilton? You're safe! But where's Indra?"

"That, sir, is what I am about to explain to you. Do not advance, Mr. Newell. And tell your men, if I may be permitted to employ the expression to refer to such obviously nonhuman creatures, to remain in position. I am here, sir, under duress. I am, despite what you conceive to be my freedom to speak to you, a captive."

"Then Bulkley's in back of you, holding a gun on you!"

"You surmise the situation correctly, Mr. Newell, and state it concisely. In order to complete the picture, however, I must add that my daughter—" his resonant voice faltered for a moment, then picked up again—"my daughter is also being threatened with death."

"It won't help him. Do you hear that, Bulkley, wherever you are? Your goose is cooked now. Your only chance is to surrender and plead for mercy."

There was a moment's silence. Then the old man said, "He will not answer directly, for fear of revealing his position. He is within earshot, but I myself cannot state precisely where."

"That won't help him either."

"I devoutly hope not, Mr. Newell, but I must none the less repeat the message he gave me. Either you surrender, or my own life and my daughter's will be forfeit. I am not intimidated, sir, although if not for this unfortunate occurrence, I should still have many years of useful existence before me. I am in my vigorous one hundred and twenties, and my father, as you may not know, lived more than forty years beyond that age, until an unhappy accident—"

Newell lost track of the old man's wandering words. He remembered only that he had to save Indra. Somewhere near them, Bulkley was hiding, the girl probably gagged to keep her from crying out. And she was probably being held by one of Bulkley's few remaining slaves, so that she couldn't run away. But where was the group concealed?

He caught the thread of the old man's words. "And those, sir, are his terms."

"Say that again!"

"I thought I had made the conditions clear. Nevertheless, sir, I shall repeat. Mr. Bulkley asks you to throw down your weapons and come forward unarmed—after giving orders to your men to retreat."

"He wants me to put myself in his power, is that it?"

"That is the situation, Mr. Newell. Otherwise he will murder my daughter and me."

Newell shouted, "I have no weapons with me, Bulkley, so I can't throw them down. But that won't stop me from coming at you."

"Wait, Mr. Newell. First you must order your men to retreat."

"I'll signal them, all right."

He put his hand in his pocket and drew out the hypnotizer. The light began to glow, to go through its pulsing sequence of colors.

His own plant-creatures stood as if paralyzed. And Bulkley's? They must see it too. Whichever ones were holding Indra could no longer exert their strength. If she sensed their lack of power, and wrenched herself free

There was a sudden creaking as of branches swaying from twenty-five yards ahead of them, an abrupt curse of anger and desperation. A small black object suddenly shot into the air—Bulkley's gun. Newell raced toward the scene of struggle, covering the ground in a dozen strides.

At one side stood Indra, wrenching at the gag on her mouth, her face scratched, her hair dishevelled. Near her was Bulkley, struggling in the grip of a pair of his own creatures. The brown and white caricatures of faces were familiar. In the fraction of a second which it took Newell to grasp the scene, he

recognized the features of the pair he had called Tough-Egg and Scar-Face.

ONE LAST choking cry came from Bulkley, and then there was a snap. His head fell forward, his body dropped to the ground.

The creatures which had killed turned to run. Newell flashed a quick signal to his own followers, and seconds later the killers were surrounded and their wooden bodies taken apart.

Indra was in his arms. He held her tight, disregarding the two men the Captain had sent along with him. Finally he turned to them. "Thanks for your offer to be of help, gentlemen, but I have no further need of you."

One of them grinned. "I can see that."

"You can report to the Captain. Both of you."

They started on their way back. Indra shuddered in his arms. "Toward the end Bulkley was out of his mind, completely beyond control. He blamed you for upsetting all his plans. He wanted nothing but to kill you."

"He did his best."

"I tried to think of a way to stop him, but I was helpless. Then, when you started the hypnotizer going, I remembered what you had told me of its previous effect on these creatures, and was able to wrench myself free. Bulkley tried to turn the gun on me, but he was too close, and I was able to disarm him, using another jiu jitsu method. He rushed me when he realized I was getting away, and then I threw him over my head, and he landed on the creatures nearby. That's what set them off, and made them turn on him."

"All those creatures he taught to kill human beings are dangerous. They'll have to be destroyed."

"Yes, I know. But they seem so human. It will be like murder."

"It won't be. They feel nothing." He went on slowly, "That may change, of course. As they learn more and more, they may develop some kind of genuine consciousness of the world around them. They may develop feelings. And then they'll offer a real problem."

"The ones you trained aren't harmful to us. And they could be useful."

"That's why I first invented them. To be useful. I thought I could show them to the authorities, prove I was capable of doing good work, and win back my rights as a citizen. This planet is dangerous to human beings. But plants can live here, and so could creatures descended from plants. They could build it up, make the planet part of an intergalactic system."

She nodded, "You're right."

"I think that when I explain all that, and the authorities realize what I've done here, and how Bulkley has tried to turn my work to vicious purposes, I'll have no trouble in getting them to reopen the original case, and convince them of my innocence of crime."

"And my father and I can continue with the vacation that Bulkley interrupted."

"Your father is getting too old to travel. You need another companion. And it won't be a vacation. It'll be more like a honeymoon. In fact, it will be one."

It was at that moment that a sonorous voice came to them. "I have been cogitating, Mr. Newell, and my meditations concern the ethical and sociological aspects of the problems involved in the existence of these plant-creatures. Recalling the many experiences with strange and unexpected forms of life on many galaxies—"

Newell bit back an expression of extreme annoyance. Indra said sweetly "Father!" "Look at this, Father!"

She held up the hypnotizer that the old man himself had constructed. The light began to glow and pulse.

A glazed look came into the eyes of the man whom millions of listeners and viewers knew as Dr. Hypno. The facial muscles relaxed, the eyes stared blankly.

"He hasn't the slightest idea of what's going on in front of his nose," said Indra demurely.

Which was a good thing, thought Newell, as he stretched out his hungry arms.

THE END