The Dead Lady of Clown Town

By Cordwainer Smith

She was born and bred to heal
any ill—in an age which had
forgot the habit of sickness!

I

You already know the end—the immense drama of the Lord Jestocost, seventh of his line, and how the cat-girl C'mell initiated the vast conspiracy. But you do not know the beginning, how the first Lord Jestocost got his name, because of the terror and inspiration which his mother, the Lady Goroke, obtained from the famous real-life drama of the dog-girl D'joan. It is even less likely that you know the other story—the one behind D'joan. This story is sometimes mentioned as the matter of the "nameless witch," which is absurd, because she really had a name. The name was "Elaine," an ancient and forbidden one.

Elaine was a mistake. Her birth, her life, her career were all mistakes. The ruby was wrong. How could that have happened?

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Go back to An-fang, the Peace Square at An-fang, the Beginning Place at An-fang, where all things start. Bright it was. Red square, dead square, clear square, under a yellow sun.

This was Earth Original, Manhome itself, where Earthport thrusts its way up through hurricane clouds that are higher than the mountains.

An-fang was near a city, the only living city with a pre-atomic name. The lovely meaningless name was Meeya Meefla, where the lines of ancient roadways, untouched by a wheel for thousands of years, forever paralleled the warm, bright, clear beaches of the Old South East.

The headquarters of the People Programmer was at An-fang, and there the mistake happened:

A ruby trembled. Two tourmaline nets failed to rectify the laser beam. A diamond noted the error. Both the error and the correction went into the general computer.

The error assigned, on the general account of births for Fomalhaut III, the profession of "lay therapist, female, intuitive capacity for correction of human physiology with local resources." On some of the early ships they used to call these people witch-women, because they worked unaccountable cures. For pioneer parties, these lay therapists were invaluable; in settled post-Riesmannian societies, they became an awful nuisance. Sickness disappeared with good conditions, accidents dwindled down to nothing, medical work became institutional.

Who wants a witch, even a good witch, when a thousand-bed hospital is waiting with its staff eager for clinical experience ... and only seven out of its thousand beds filled with real people? (The remaining beds were filled with lifelike robots on which the staff could practice, lest they lose their morale. They

could, of course, have worked on under-people—animals in the shape of human beings, who did the heavy and the weary work which remained as the caput mortuum of a really perfected economy—but it was against the law for animals, even when they were underpeople, to go to a human hospital. When underpeople got sick, the Instrumentality took care of them—in slaughter-houses. It was easier to breed new underpeople for the job than it was to repair sick ones. Furthermore, the tender, loving care of a hospital might give them ideas. Such as the idea that they were people. This would have been bad, from the prevailing point of view. Therefore the human hospitals remained almost empty while an underperson who sneezed four times or who vomited once was taken away, never to be ill again. The empty beds kept on with the robot patients, who went through endless repetitions of the human patterns of injury or disease.) This left no work for witches, bred and trained.

Yet the ruby had trembled; the program had indeed made a mistake; the birth-number for a "lay therapist, general, female, immediate use" had been ordered for Fomalhaut III.

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Much later, when the story was all done down to its last historic detail, there was an investigation into the origins of Elaine. When the laser had trembled, both the original order and the correction were fed simultaneously into the machine. The machine recognized the contradiction and promptly referred both papers to the human supervisor, an actual man who had been working on the job for seven years.

He was studying music, and he was bored. He was so close to the end of his term that he was already counting the days to his own release. Meanwhile he was rearranging two popular songs. One was The Big Bamboo, a primitive piece which tried to evoke the original magic of man. The other was about a girl, Elaine, Elaine whom the song asked to refrain from giving pain to her loving swain. Neither of the songs was important; but between them they influenced history, first a little bit and then very much.

The musician had plenty of time to practice. He had not had to meet a real emergency in all his seven years. From time to time the machine made reports to him, but the musician just told the machine to correct its own errors, and it infallibly did so.

On the day that the accident of Elaine happened, he was trying to perfect his finger work on the guitar, a very old instrument believed to date from the pre-space period. He was playing The Big Bamboo for the hundredth time.

The machine announced its mistake with an initial musical chime. The supervisor had long since forgotten all the instructions which he had so worrisomely memorized seven long years ago. The alert did not really and truly matter, because the machine invariably corrected its own mistakes whether the supervisor was on duty or not.

The machine, not having its chime answered, moved into a second-stage alarm. From a loudspeaker set in the wall of the room, it shrieked in a high, clear human voice, the voice of some employee who had died thousands of years earlier:

"Alert, alert! Emergency. Correction needed. Correction needed!"

The answer was one which the machine had never heard before, old though it was. The musician's fingers ran madly, gladly over the guitar strings and he sang clearly, wildly back to the machine a message strange beyond any machine's belief:

Beat, heat the Big Bamboo!
Beat, beat, beat the Big Bamboo for me...!

Hastily the machine set its memory banks and computers to work, looking for the code reference to "bamboo," trying to make that word fit the present context. There was no reference at all. The machine pestered the man some more.

"Instructions unclear. Instructions unclear. Please correct."

"Shut up," said the man.

"Cannot comply," stated the machine. "Please state and repeat, please state and repeat, please state and repeat."

"Do shut up," said the man, but he knew the machine would not obey this. Without thinking, he turned to his other tune and sang the first two lines twice over:

Elaine. Elaine,
go cure the pain!
Elaine, Elaine,
go cure the pain!

Repetition had been inserted as a safeguard into the machine, on the assumption that no real man would repeat an error. The name "Elaine" was not correct number code, but the fourfold emphasis seemed to confirm the need for a "lay therapist, female." The machine itself noted that a genuine man had corrected the situation card presented as a matter of emergency.

"Accepted," said the machine.

This word, too late, jolted the supervisor away from his music.

"Accepted what?" he asked.

There was no answering voice. There was no sound at all except for the whisper of slightly-moistened warm air through the ventilators.

The supervisor looked out the window. He could see a little of the blood-black red color of the Peace Square of An-fang; beyond lay the ocean, endlessly beautiful and endlessly tedious.

The supervisor sighed hopefully. He was young. "Guess it doesn't matter," he thought, picking up his guitar.

(Thirty-seven years later, he found out that it did matter. The Lady Goroke herself, one of the chiefs of the Instrumentality, sent a subchief of the Instrumentality to find out who had caused D'joan. When the man found that the witch Elaine was the source of the trouble she sent him on to find out how Elaine had gotten into a well-ordered universe. The supervisor was found. He was still a musician. He remembered nothing of the story. He was hypnotized. He still remembered nothing. The sub-chief invoked an emergency and Police Drug Four ("clear memory") was administered to the musician. He immediately remembered the whole silly scene, but insisted that it did not matter. The case was referred

to Lady Goroke, who instructed the authorities that the musician be told the whole horrible, beautiful story of D'joan at Fomalhaut—the very story which you are now being told—and he wept. He was not punished otherwise, but the Lady Goroke commanded that those memories be left in his mind for so long as he might live.)

The man picked up his guitar, but the machine went on about its work.

It selected a fertilized human embryo, tagged it with the freakish name "Elaine," irradiated the genetic code with strong aptitudes for witchcraft and then marked the person's card for training in medicine, transportation by sailship to Fomalhaut III and release for service on the planet.

Elaine was born without being needed, without being wanted, without having a skill which could help or hurt any existing human being. She went into life doomed and useless.

It is not remarkable that she was misbegotten. Errors do happen. Remarkable was the fact that she managed to survive without being altered, corrected or killed by the safety devices which mankind has installed in society for its own protection.

Unwanted, unused, she wandered through the tedious months and useless years of her own existence. She was well fed, richly clothed, variously housed. She had machines and robots to serve her, underpeople to obey her, people to protect her against one another or against herself, should the need arise. But she could never find work; without work, she had no time for love; without work or love, she had no hope at all.

If she had only stumbled into the right experts or the right authorities, they would have altered or re-trained her. This would have made her into an acceptable woman; but she did not find the police, nor did they find her. She was helpless to correct her own programming, utterly helpless. It had been imposed on her at An-fang, way back at An-fang, where all things begin.

The ruby had trembled, the tourmaline failed, the diamond passed unsupported. Thus, a woman was born doomed.

II

Much later, when people made songs about the strange case of the dog-girl D'joan, the minstrels and singers had tried to imagine what Elaine felt like, and they had made up The Song of Elaine for her. It is not authentic, but it shows how Elaine looked at her own life before the strange case of D'joan began to flow from Elaine's own actions:

Other women hate me.
Men never touch me.
I am too much me.
  I'll be a witch!
Mama never towelled me.
Daddy never growled me
Little kiddies grate me
  I'll be a bitch!
People never named me

Dogs never shamed me
Oh, I am a such me!
    I'll be a witch.
I'll make them shun me.
They'll never run me.
Could they even stun me?
    I'll be a witch.
Let them all attack me.
They can only rack me.
Me—I can hack me.
    I'll be a witch.
Other women hate me.
Men never touch me.
I am too much me.
    I'll be a witch.

The song overstates the case. Women did not hate Elaine; they did not look at her. Men did not shun Elaine; they did not notice her either. There were no places on Fomalhaut III where she could have met human children, for the nurseries were far underground because of chancy radiation and fierce weather. The song pretends that Elaine began with the thought that she was not human, but underpeople, and had herself been born a dog. This did not happen at the beginning of the case, but only at the very end, when the story of D'joan was already being carried between the stars and developing with all the new twists of folklore and legend. She never went mad.

("Madness" is a rare condition, consisting of a human mind which does not engage its environment correctly. Elaine approached it before she met D'joan. Elaine was not the only case, but she was a rare and genuine one. Her life, thrust back from all attempts at growth, had turned back on itself and her mind had spiraled inward to the only safety she could really know, psychosis. Madness is always better than X, and X to each patient is individual, personal, secret and overwhelmingly important. Elaine had gone normally mad; her imprinted and destined career was the wrong one. "Lay therapists, female" were coded to work decisively, autonomously, on their own authority and with great rapidity. These working conditions were needed on new planets. They were not coded to consult other people; most places, there would be no one to consult. Elaine did what was set for her at An-fang, all the way down to the individual chemical conditions of her spinal fluid. She was herself the wrong and she never knew it. Madness was much kinder than the realization that she was not herself, should not have lived, and amounted at the most to a mistake committed between a trembling ruby and a young, careless man with a guitar.)

She found D'joan and the worlds reeled.

Their meeting occurred at a place nicknamed "the edge of the world," where the undercity met daylight. This was itself unusual; but Fomalhaut III was an unusual and uncomfortable planet, where wild weather and men's caprice drove architects to furious design and grotesque execution.

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Elaine walked through the city, secretly mad, looking for sick people whom she could help. She had been stamped, imprinted, designed, born, bred and trained for this task. There was no task.

She was an intelligent woman. Bright brains serve madness as well as they serve sanity—namely, very well indeed. It never occurred to her to give up her mission.

The people of Fomalhaut III, like the people of Manhome Earth itself, are almost uniformly handsome; it is only in the far-out, half-unreachable worlds that the human stock, strained by the sheer effort to survive, becomes ugly, weary or varied. She did not look much different from the other intelligent, handsome people who flocked the streets. Her hair was black, and she was tall. Her arms and legs were long, the trunk of her body short. She wore her hair brushed straight back from a high, narrow, square forehead. Her eyes were an odd deep blue. Her mouth might have been pretty, but it never smiled, so that no one could really tell whether it was beautiful or not. She stood erect and proud: but so did everyone else. Her mouth was strange in its very lack of communicativeness and her eyes swept back and forth, back and forth like ancient radar, looking for the sick, the needy, and stricken, whom she had a passion to serve.

How could she be unhappy? She had never had time to be happy. It was easy for her to think that happiness was something which disappeared at the end of childhood. Now and then, here and there, perhaps when a fountain murmured in sunlight or when leaves exploded in the startling Fomalhautian spring, she wondered that other people—people as responsible as herself by the doom of age, grade, sex, training and career number—should be happy when she alone seemed to have no time for happiness. But she always dismissed the thought and walked the ramps and streets until her arches ached, looking for work which did not yet exist.

Human flesh, older than history, more dogged than culture, has its own wisdom. The bodies of people are marked with the archaic ruses of survival, so that on Fomalhaut III, Elaine herself preserved the skills of ancestors she never even thought about—those ancestors, who in the incredible and remote past, had mastered terrible Earth itself. Elaine was mad. But there was a part of her which suspected that she was mad.

Perhaps this wisdom seized her as she walked from Waterrocky Road toward the bright esplanades of the Shopping Bar. She saw a forgotten door. The robots could clean near it but, because of the old, odd, architectural shape, they could not sweep and polish right at the bottom line of the door. A thin hard line of old dust and caked polish lay like a sealant at the base of the doorline. It was obvious that no one had gone through for a long, long time.

The civilized rule was that prohibited areas were marked both telepathically and with symbols. The most dangerous of all had robot or underpeople guards. But everything which was not prohibited, was permitted. Thus Elaine had no right to open the door, but she had no obligation not to do so. She opened it—

By sheer caprice.

Or so she thought.

This was a far cry from the "I'll be a witch" motif attributed to her in the later ballad. She was not yet frantic, not yet desperate, she was not yet even noble.

That opening of a door changed her own world and changed life on thousands of planets for generations to come, but the opening was not itself strange. It was the tired caprice of a thoroughly frustrated and mildly unhappy woman. Nothing more. All the other descriptions of it have been

improvements, embellishments, falsifications.

She did get a shock when she opened the door, but not for the reasons attributed backwards to her by balladists and historians.

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She was shocked because the door opened on steps and the steps led down to landscape and sunlight—truly an unexpected sight on any world. She was looking from the New City to the Old City. The New City rose on its shell out over the old city, and when she looked "indoors" she saw the sunset in the city below. She gasped at the beauty and the unexpectedness of it.

There, the open door—with another world beyond it. Here, the old familiar street, clean, handsome, quiet, useless, where her own useless self had walked a thousand times.

There—something. Here, the world she knew. She did not know the words "fairyland" or "magic place," but if she had known them, she would have used them.

She glanced to the right, to the left.

The passerby noticed neither her nor the door. The sunset was just beginning to show in the upper city. In the lower city it was already blood-red with streamers of gold like enormous frozen flame. Elaine did not know that she sniffed the air; she did not know that she trembled on the edge of tears; she did not know that a tender smile, the first smile in years, relaxed her mouth and turned her tired tense face into a passing loveliness. She was too intent on looking around.

People walked about their business. Down the road, an underpeople type—female, possibly cat—detoured far around a true human who was walking at a slower pace. Far away, a police ornithopter flapped slowly around one of the towers; unless the robots used a telescope on her or unless they had one of the rare hawk-undermen who were sometimes used as police, they could not see her.

She stepped through the doorway and pulled the door itself back into the closed position.

She did not know it, but therewith unborn futures reeled out of existence, rebellion flamed into coming centuries, people and underpeople died in strange causes, mothers changed the names of unborn Lords and starships whispered back from places which men had not even imagined before. Space3 which had always been there, waiting for men's notice, would come the sooner—because of her, because of the door, because of her next few steps, what she would say, and the child she would meet. (The ballad-writers told the whole story later on, but they told it backwards, from their own knowledge of D'joan and what Elaine had done to set the worlds afire. The simple truth is the fact that a lonely woman went through a mysterious door. That is all. Everything else happened later.)

At the top of the steps she stood, door closed behind her, the sunset gold of the unknown city streaming out in front of her. She could see where the great shell of the New City of Kalma arched out toward the sky; she could see that the buildings here were older, less harmonious than the ones she had left. She did not know the concept "picturesque," or she would have called it that. She knew no concept to describe the scene which lay peacefully at her feet.

There was not a person in sight.

Far in the distance, a fire-detector throbbed back and forth on top of an old tower. Outside of that there was nothing but the yellow-gold city beneath her, and a bird—was it a bird, or a large storm-swept leaf?—in the middle distance.

Filled with fear, hope, expectation and the surmisal of strange appetites, she walked downward. With quiet, unknown purpose.

III

At the foot of the stairs, nine flights of them there had been, a child waited—a girl, about five. The child had a bright blue smock, wavy red-brown hair, and the daintiest hands which Elaine had ever seen.

Elaine's heart went out to her. The child looked up at her and shrank away. Elaine knew the meaning of those handsome brown eyes, of that muscular supplication of trust, that recoil from people. It was not a child at all—just some animal in the shape of a person, a dog perhaps, which would later be taught to speak, to work to perform useful services.

The little girl rose, standing as though she were about to run. Elaine had the feeling that the little dog-girl had not decided whether to run toward her or from her. She did not wish to get involved with an underperson—what woman would?—but neither did she wish to frighten the little thing. After all, it was small, very young.

The two confronted each other for a moment, the little thing uncertain, Elaine relaxed. Then the little animal-girl spoke.

"Ask her," she said, and it was a command.

Elaine was surprised. Since when did animals command?

"Ask her!" repeated the little thing. She pointed at a window which had the words TRAVELERS' AID above it. Then the girl ran. A flash of blue from her dress, a twinkle of white from her running sandals, and she was gone.

Elaine stood quiet and puzzled In the forlorn and empty city.

The window spoke to her, "You might as well come on over. You will, you know."

It was the wise mature voice of an experienced woman—a voice with a bubble of laughter underneath its phonic edge, with a hint of sympathy and enthusiasm in its tone. The command was not merely a command. It was, even at its beginning, a happy private joke between two wise women.

Elaine was not surprised when a machine spoke to her. Recordings had been telling her things all her life. She was not sure of this situation, however.

"Is there somebody there?" she said.

"Yes and no," said the voice. "I'm 'Travelers' Aid' and I help everybody who comes through this way.

You're lost or you wouldn't be here. Put your hand in my window."

"What I mean is," said Elaine, "are you a person or are you a machine?"

"Depends," said the voice. "I'm a machine, but I used to be a person, long, long ago. A lady, in fact, and one of the Instrumentality. But my time came and they said to me, 'Would you mind if we made a machine print of your whole personality? It would be very helpful for the information booths.' So of course I said yes, and they made this copy, and I died, and they shot my body into space with all the usual honors, but here I was. It felt pretty odd inside this contraption, me looking at things and talking to people and giving good advice and staying busy, until they built the new city. So what do you say? Am I me or aren't I?"

"I don't know, ma'am." Elaine stood back.

The warm voice lost its humor and became commanding. "Give me your hand, then, so I can identify you and tell you what to do."

"I think," said Elaine, "that I'll just go back upstairs and go through the door into the upper city."

"And cheat me," said the voice in the window, "out of my first conversation with a real person in four years?" There was demand in the voice, but there was still the warmth and the humor; there was loneliness too. The loneliness decided Elaine. She stepped up to the window and put her hand flat on the ledge.

"You're Elaine," cried the window. "You're Elaine! The worlds wait for you. You're from An-fang, where all things begin, the Peace Square at An-fang, on old Earth itself!"

"Yes," said Elaine.

The voice bubbled over with enthusiasm. "He is waiting for you. Oh, he has waited for you a long, long time. And the little girl you met. That was D'joan herself. The story has begun. 'The world's great age begins a new.' And I can die when it is over. So sorry, my dear. I don't mean to confuse you. I am the lady Panc Ashash. You're Elaine. Your number originally ended 783 and you shouldn't even be on this planet. All the important people here end with the numbers 5 and 6. You're a lay therapist and you're in the wrong place, but your lover is already on his way, and you've never been in love yet, and it's all too exciting."

Elaine looked quickly around her. The old lower town was turning more red and less gold as the sunset progressed. The steps behind her seemed terribly high as she looked back, the door at the top very small. Perhaps it had locked on her when she closed it. Maybe she wouldn't ever be able to leave the old lower city.

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The window must have been watching her in some way, because the voice of the lady Panc Ashash became tender.

"Sit down, my dear," said the voice from the window. "When I was me, I used to be much more polite. I haven't been me for a long, long time. I'm a machine, and still I feel like myself. Do sit down, and do

forgive me."

Elaine looked around. There was the roadside marble bench behind her. She sat on it obediently. The happiness which had been in her at the top of the steps bubbled forth anew. If this wise old machine knew so much about her, perhaps it could tell her what to do. What did the voice mean by "wrong planet"? By "lover"? By "he is coming for you now," or was that what the voice had actually said?

"Take a breath, my dear," said the voice of the lady Panc Ashash. She might have been dead for hundreds or thousands of years, but she still spoke with the authority and kindness of a great lady.

Elaine breathed deep. She saw a huge red cloud, like a pregnant whale, getting ready to butt the rim of the upper city, far above her and far out over the sea. She wondered if clouds could possibly have feelings.

The voice was speaking again. What had it said?

Apparently the question was repeated. "Did you know you were coming?" said the voice from the window.

"Of course not." Elaine shrugged. "There was just this door, and I didn't have anything special to do, so I opened it. And here was a whole new world inside a house. It looked strange and rather pretty, so I came down. Wouldn't you have done the same thing?"

"I don't know," said the voice candidly. "I'm really a machine. I haven't been me for a long, long time. Perhaps I would have, when I was alive. I don't know that, but I know about things. Maybe I can see the future, or perhaps the machine part of me computes such good probabilities that it just seems like it. I know who you are and what is going to happen to you. You had better brush your hair."

"Whatever for?" said Elaine.

"He is coming," said the happy old voice of the lady Panc Ashash.

"Who is coming?" said Elaine, almost irritably.

"Do you have a mirror? I wish you would look at your hair. It could be prettier, not that it isn't pretty right now. You want to look your best. Your lover; that's who is coming, of course."

"I haven't got a lover," said Elaine. "I haven't been authorized one, not till I've done some of my lifework, and I haven't even found my lifework yet. I'm not the kind of girl who would go ask a Subchief for the dreamies, not when I'm not entitled to the real thing. I may not be much of a person, but I have some self-respect." Elaine got so mad that she shifted her position on the bench and sat with her face turned away from the all-watching window.

The next words gave her gooseflesh down her arms, they were uttered with such real earnestness, such driving sincerity. "Elaine, Elaine, do you really have no idea of who you are?"

Elaine pivoted back on the bench so that she looked toward the window. Her face was caught redly but the rays of the setting sun. She could only gasp.

"I don't know what you mean..."

The inexorable voice went on. "Think, Elaine, think. Does the name 'D'joan' mean nothing to you?"

"I suppose it's an underperson, a dog. That's what the D is for, isn't it?"

"That was the little girl you met," said the lady Panc Ashash, as though the statement were something tremendous.

"Yes," said Elaine dutifully. She was a courteous woman, and never quarreled with strangers.

"Wait a minute," said the lady Panc Ashash, "I'm going to get my body out. God knows when I wore it last, but it'll make you feel more at easy terms with me. Forgive the clothes. They're old stuff, but I think the body will work all right. This is the beginning of the story of D'joan, and I want that hair of yours brushed even if I have to brush it myself. Just wait right there, girl, wait right there. I'll just take a minute."

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The clouds were turning from dark red to liver-black. What could Elaine do? She stayed on the bench. She kicked her shoe against the walk. She jumped a little when the old-fashioned street lights of the lower city went on with sharp geometrical suddenness; they did not have the subtle shading of the newer lights in the other city upstairs, where day phased into the bright clear night with no sudden shift in color.

The door beside the little window creaked open. Ancient plastic crumbled to the walk.

Elaine was astonished.

Elaine knew she must have been unconsciously expecting a monster, but this was a charming women of about her own height, wearing weird, old-fashioned clothes. The strange woman had glossy black hair, no evidence of recent or current illness, no signs of severe lesions in the past, no impairment evident of sight, gait, reach or eyesight. (There was no way she could check on smell or taste right off, but this was the medical check-up she had had built into her from birth on—the checklist which she had run through with every adult person she had ever met. She had been designed as a "lay therapist, female" and she was a good one, even when there was no one at all to treat.)

Truly, the body was a rich one. It must have cost the landing charges of forty or fifty planetfalls. The human shape was perfectly rendered. The mouth moved over genuine teeth; the words were formed by throat, palate, tongue, teeth and lips, and not just by a microphone mounted in the head. The body was really a museum piece. It was probably a copy of the lady Panc Ashash herself in time of life. When the face smiled, the effect was indescribably winning. The lady wore the costume of a byegone age—a stately frontal dress of heavy blue material, embroidered with a square pattern of gold at hem, waist and bodice. She had a matching cloak of dark, faded gold, embroidered in blue with the same pattern of squares. Her hair was upswept and set with jeweled combs. It seemed perfectly natural, but there was dust on one side of it.

The robot smiled, "I'm out of date. It's been a long time since I was me. But I thought, my dear, that you would find this old body easier to talk to than the window over there..."

Elaine nodded mutely.

"You know this is not me?" said the body, sharply.

Elaine shook her head. She didn't know; she felt that she didn't know anything at all.

The lady Panc Ashash looked at her earnestly. "This is not me. It's a robot body. You looked at it as though it were a real person. And I'm not me, either. It hurts sometimes. Did you know a machine could hurt? I can. But—I'm not me."

"Who are you?" said Elaine to the pretty old woman.

"Before I died, I was the lady Panc Ashash. Just as I told you. Now I am a machine, and a part of your destiny. We will help each other to change the destiny of worlds, perhaps even to bring mankind back to humanity."

Elaine stared at her in bewilderment. This was no common robot. It seemed like a real person and spoke with such warm authority. And this thing, whatever it was, this thing seemed to know so much about her. Nobody else had ever cared. The nurse-mothers at the Child-house on earth had said, "Another witch-child, and pretty too, they're not much trouble," and had let her life go by.

At last Elaine could face the face which was not really a face. The charm, the humor, the expressiveness were still there.

"What—what," stammered Elaine, "do I do now?"

"Nothing," said the long-dead lady Panc Ashash, "except to meet your destiny."

"You mean my lover?"

"So impatient!" laughed the dead woman's record in a very human way. "Such a hurry. Lover first and destiny later. I was like that myself when I was a girl."

"But what do I do?" persisted Elaine.

The night was now complete above them. The street lights glared on the empty and unswept streets. A few doorways, not one of them less than a full street-crossing away, were illuminated with rectangles of light or shadow—light if they were far from the street lights, so that their own interior lights shone brightly, shadow if they were so close under the big lights that they cut off the glare from overhead.

"Go through this door," said the old nice woman.

But she pointed at the undistinguished white of an uninterrupted wall. There was no door at all in that place.

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"But there's no door there," said Elaine.

"If there were a door," said the lady Panc Ashash, "you wouldn't need me to tell you to go through it. And you do need me."

"Why?" said Elaine.

"Because I've waited for you hundreds of years, that's why."

"That's no answer!" snapped Elaine.

"It is so an answer," smiled the woman, and her lack of hostility was not robot-like at all. It was the kindliness and composure of a mature human being. She looked up into Elaine's eyes and spoke emphatically and softly. "I know because I do know. Not because I'm a dead person—that doesn't matter any more—but because I am now a very old machine. You will go into the Brown and Yellow Corridor and you will think of your lover, and you will do your work, and men will hunt you. But you will come out happily in the end. Do you understand this?"

"No," said Elaine, "no, I don't." But she reached out her hand to the sweet old woman. The lady took her hand. The touch was warm and very human.

"You don't have to understand it. Just do it. And I know you will. So since you are going, go."

Elaine tried to smile at her, but she was troubled, more consciously worried than ever before in her life. Something real was happening to her, to her own individual self, at a very long last. "How will I get through the door?"

"I'll open it," smiled the lady, releasing Elaine's hand, "and you'll know your lover when he sings you the poem."

"Which poem?" said Elaine, stalling for time and frightened by a door which did not even exist.

"It starts, 'I knew you and loved you, and won you, in Kalma...' You'll know it. Go on in. It'll be bothersome at first, but when you meet the Hunter, it will all seem different."

"Have you ever been in there, yourself?"

"Of course not," said the dear old lady. "I'm a machine. That whole place is thoughtproof. Nobody can see, hear, think or talk in or out of it. It's a shelter left over from the ancient wars, when the slightest sign of a thought would have brought destruction on the whole place. That's why the lord Englok built it, long before my time. But you can go in. And you will. Here's the door."

The old robot lady waited no longer. She gave Elaine a strange friendly crooked smile, half proud and half apologetic. She took Elaine with firm fingertips holding Elaine's left elbow. They walked a few steps down toward the wall.

"Here, now," said the lady Panc Ashash, and pushed.

Elaine flinched as she was thrust toward the wall. Before she knew it, she was through. Smells hit her like a roar of battle. The air was hot. The light was dim. It looked like a picture of the Pain Planet, hidden somewhere in space. Poets later tried to describe Elaine at the door with a verse which begin,

There were brown ones and blue ones
And white ones and whiter,
    In the hidden and forbidden
    Downtown of Clown Town.
There were horrid ones and horrider
In the brown and yellow corridor.

The truth was much simpler.

Trained witch, born witch that she was, she perceived the truth immediately. All these people, all she could see, at least, were sick. They needed help. They needed herself.

But the joke was on her, for she could not help a single one of them. Not one of them was a real person. They were just animals, things in the shape of man. Underpeople. Dirt.

And she was conditioned to the bone never to help them.

She did not know why the muscles of her legs made her walk forward, but they did.

There are many pictures of that scene.

The lady Panc Ashash, only a few moments in her past, seemed very remote. And the city of Kalma itself, the new city, ten stories above her, almost seemed as though it had never existed at all. This, this was real.

She stared at the underpeople.

And this time, for the first time in her life, they stared right back at her. She had never seen anything like this before.

They did not frighten her; they surprised her. The fright, Elaine felt, was to come later. Soon, perhaps, but not here, not now.

IV

Something which looked like a middle-aged woman walked right up to her and snapped at her.

"Are you death?"

Elaine stared. "Death? What do you mean? I'm Elaine."

"Be damned to that!" said the woman-thing. "Are you death?"

Elaine did not know the word "damned" but she was pretty sure that "death," even to these things, meant simply "termination of life."

"Of course not," said Elaine. "I'm just a person. A witch woman, ordinary people would call me. We don't have anything to do with you underpeople. Nothing at all." Elaine could see that the woman-thing

had an enormous coiffure of soft brown sloppy hair, a sweat-reddened face and crooked teeth which showed when she grinned.

"They all say that. They never know that they're death. How do you think we die, if you people don't send contaminated robots in with diseases? We all die off when you do that, and then some more underpeople find this place again later on and make a shelter of it and live in it for a few generations until the death machines, things like you, come sweeping through the city and kill us off again. This is Clown Town, the underpeople place. Haven't you heard of it?"

Elaine tried to walk past the woman-thing, but she found her arm grabbed. This couldn't have happened before, not in the history of the world—an underperson seizing a real person!

"Let go!" she yelled.

The woman-thing let her arm go and faced toward the others. Her voice had changed. It was no longer shrill and excited, but low and puzzled instead. "I can't tell. Maybe it is a real person. Isn't that a joke? Lost, in here with us. Or maybe she is death. I can't tell. What do you think, Charley-is-my-darling?"

The man she spoke to stepped forward. Elaine thought, in another time, in some other place, that underperson might pass for an attractive human being. His face was illuminated by intelligence and alertness. He looked directly at Elaine as though he had never seen her before, which indeed he had not, but he continued looking with so sharp, so strange a stare that she became uneasy. His voice, when he spoke, was brisk, high, clear, friendly; set in this tragic place, it was the caricature of a voice, as though the animal had been programmed for speech from the habits of a human, persuader by profession, whom one saw in the story-boxes telling people messages which were neither good nor important, but merely clever. The handsomeness was itself deformity. Elaine wondered if he had come from goat stock.

"Welcome, young lady," said Charley-is-my-darling. "Now that you are here, how are you going to get out? If we turned her head around, Mabel," said he to the underwoman who had first greeted Elaine, "turned it around eight or ten times, it would come off. Then we could live a few weeks or months longer before our lords and creators found us and put us all to death. What do you say, young lady? Should we kill you?"

"Kill? You mean, terminate life? You cannot. It is against the law. Even the Instrumentality does not have the right to do that without trial. You can't. You're just underpeople."

"But we will die," said Charley-is-my-darling, flashing his quick intelligent smile, "if you go back out of that door. The police will read about the Brown and Yellow Corridor in your mind and they will flush us out with poison or they will spray disease in here so that we and our children will die."

Elaine stared at him.

The passionate anger did not disturb his smile or his persuasive tones, but the muscles of his eye-sockets and forehead showed the terrible strain. The result was an expression which Elaine had never seen before, a sort of self-control reaching out beyond the limits of insanity.

He stared back at her.

She was not really afraid of him. Underpeople could not twist the heads of real persons; it was contrary to all regulations.

A thought struck her. Perhaps regulations did not apply in a place like this, where illegal animals waited perpetually for sudden death. The being which faced her was strong enough to turn her head around ten times clockwise or counter-clockwise. From her anatomy lessons, she was pretty sure that the head would come off somewhere during that process. She looked at him with interest. Animal-type fear had been conditioned out of her, but she had, she found, an extreme distaste for the termination of life under random circumstances. Perhaps her "witch" training would help. She tried to pretend that he was in fact a man. The diagnosis "hypertension: chronic aggression, now frustrated, leading to overstimulation and neurosis: poor nutritional record: hormone disorder probable" leapt into her mind.

She tried to speak in a new voice.

"I am smaller than you," she said, "and you can 'kill' me just as well later as now. We might as well get acquainted. I'm Elaine, assigned here from Manhome Earth."

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The effect was spectacular.

Charley-is-my-darling stepped back. Mabel's mouth dropped open. The others gaped at her. One or two, more quick-witted than the rest, began whispering to their neighbors.

At last Charley-is-my-darling spoke to her. "Welcome, my lady. Can I call you my lady? I guess not. Welcome, Elaine. We are your people. We will do whatever you say. Of course you got in. The lady Panc Ashash sent you. She has been telling us for a hundred years that somebody would come from Earth, a real person with an animal name, not a number, and that we should have a child named D'joan ready to take up the threads of destiny. Please, please sit down. Will you have a drink of water? We have no clean vessel here. We are all underpeople here and we have used everything in the place, so that it is contaminated for a real person." A thought struck him. "Baby-baby, do you have a new cup in the kiln?" Apparently he saw someone nod, because he went right on talking. "Get it out then, for our guest, with tongs. New tongs. Do not touch it. Fill it with water from the top of the little waterfall. That way our guest can have an uncontaminated drink. A clean drink." He beamed with a hospitality which was as ridiculous as it was genuine.

Elaine did not have the heart to say she did not want a drink of water.

She waited. They waited. By now, her eyes had become accustomed to the darkness. She could see that the main corridor was painted a yellow, faded and stained, and a contrasting light brown. She wondered what possible human mind could have selected so ugly a combination. Cross-corridors seemed to open into it; at any rate, she saw illuminated archways further down and people walking out of them briskly. No one can walk briskly and naturally out of a shallow alcove, so she was pretty sure that the archways led to something.

The underpeople, too, she could see. They looked very much like people. Here and there, individuals reverted to the animal type—a horse-man whose muzzle had regrown to its ancestral size, a rat-woman with normal human features except for nylon-like white whiskers, twelve or fourteen on each side of her face, reaching twenty centimeters to either side. One looked very much like a person indeed—a

beautiful young woman seated on a bench some eight or ten meters down the corridor, and paying no attention to the crowd, to Mabel, to Charley-is-my-darling or to herself.

"Who is that?" said Elaine, pointing with a nod at the beautiful young woman.

Mabel, relieved from the tension which had seized her when she had asked if Elaine were "death," babbled with a sociability which was outre in this environment. "That's Crawlie."

"What does she do?" asked Elaine.

"She has her pride," said Mabel, her grotesque red face now jolly and eager, her slack mouth spraying spittle as she spoke.

"But doesn't she do anything?" said Elaine.

Charley-is-my-darling intervened. "Nobody has to do anything here, lady Elaine—"

"It's illegal to call me 'lady,'" said Elaine.

"I'm sorry, human being Elaine. Nobody has to do anything at all here. The whole bunch of us are completely illegal. This corridor is a thought-shelter, so that no thoughts can escape or enter it. Wait a bit! Watch the ceiling ... Now!"

A red glow moved across the ceiling and was gone.

"The ceiling glows," said Charley-is-my-darling, "whenever anything thinks against it. The whole tunnel registers 'sewage tank: organic waste' to the outside, so that dim perceptions of life which may escape here are not considered too unaccountable. People built it for their own use, a million years ago."

"They weren't here on Fomalhaut III a million years ago," snapped Elaine. Why, she wondered, did she snap at him? He wasn't a person, just a talking animal who had missed being dropped down the nearest incinerator.

"I'm sorry, Elaine," said Charley-is-my-darling. "I should have said, a long time ago. We underpeople don't get much chance to study real history. But we use this corridor. Somebody with a morbid sense of humor named this place Clown Town. We live along for ten or twenty or a hundred years, and then people or robots find us and kill us all. That's why Mabel was upset. She thought you were death for this time. But you're not. You're Elaine. That's wonderful, wonderful." His sly, too-clever face beamed with transparent sincerity. It must have been quite a shock to him to be honest.

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"You were going to tell me what the undergirl is for," said Elaine.

"That's Crawlie," said he. "She doesn't do anything. None of us really have to. We're all doomed anyhow. She's a little more honest than the rest of us. She has her pride. She scorns the rest of us. She puts us in our place. She makes everybody feel inferior. We think she is a valuable member of the group. We all have our pride, which is hopeless anyway, but Crawlie has her pride all by herself,

without doing anything whatever about it. She sort of reminds us. If we leave her alone, she leaves us alone."

Elaine thought, You're funny things, so much like people, but so inexpert about it, as though you all had to "die" before you really learned what it is to be alive. Aloud, she could only say, "I never met anybody like that."

Crawlie must have sensed that they were talking about her, because she looked at Elaine with a short quick stare of blazing hatred. Crawlie's pretty face locked itself into a glare of concentrated hostility and scorn; then her eyes wandered and Elaine felt that she, Elaine, no longer existed in the thing's mind, except as a rebuke which had been administered and forgotten. She had never seen privacy as impenetrable as Crawlie's. And yet the being, whatever she might have been made from, was very lovely in human terms.

A fierce old hag, covered with mouse-gray fur, rushed up to Elaine. The mouse-woman was the Baby-baby who had been sent on the errand. She held a ceramic cup in a pair of long tongs. Water was in it.

Elaine took the cup.

Sixty to seventy underpeople, including the little girl in the blue dress whom she had seen outside, watched her as she sipped. The water was good. She drank it all. There was a universal exhalation, as though everyone in the corridor had waited for this moment. Elaine started to put the cup down but the old mouse-woman was too quick for her. She took the cup from Elaine, stopping her in mid-gesture and using the tongs, so that the cup would not be contaminated by the touch of an underperson.

"That's right, Baby-baby," said Charley-is-my-darling, "we can talk. It is our custom not to talk with a newcomer until we have offered our hospitality. Let me be frank. We may have to kill you, if this whole business turns out to be a mistake, but let me assure you that if I do kill you, I will do it nicely and without the least bit of malice. Right?"

Elaine did not know what was so right about it, and said so. She visualized her head being twisted off. Apart from the pain and the degradation, it seemed so terribly messy—to terminate life in a sewer with things which did not even have a right to exist.

He gave her no chance to argue, but went on explaining, "Suppose things turn out just right. Suppose that you are the Esther-Elaine-or-Eleanor that we have all been waiting for—the person who will do something to D'joan and bring us all help and deliverance—give us life, in short, real life—then what do we do?"

"I don't know where you get all these ideas about me. Why am I Esther-Elaine-or-Eleanor? What do I do to D'joan? Why me?"

****

Charley-is-my-darling stared at her as though he could not believe her question. Mabel frowned as though she could not think of the right words to put forth her opinions. Baby-baby, who had glided back to the group with swift mouselike suddenness, looked around as though she expected someone from the rear to speak. She was right. Crawlie turned her face toward Elaine and said, with infinite condescension:

"I did not know that real people were ill-informed or stupid. You seem to be both. We have all our information from the lady Panc Ashash. Since she is dead, she has no prejudices against us underpeople. Since she has not had much of anything to do, she has run through billions and billions of probabilities for us. All of us know what most probabilities come to—sudden death by disease or gas, or maybe being hauled off to the slaughterhouses in big police ornithopters. But the lady Panc Ashash found that perhaps a person with a name like yours would come, a human being with an oldname and not a number name, that that person would meet the Hunter, that she and the Hunter would teach the underchild D'joan a message and that the message would change the worlds. We have kept one child after another named D'joan, waiting for a hundred years. Now you show up. Maybe you are the one. You don't look very competent to me. What are you good for?"

"I'm a witch," said Elaine.

Crawlie could not keep the surprise from showing on her face. "A witch? Really?"

"Yes," said Elaine, rather humbly.

"I wouldn't be one," said Crawlie. "I have my pride." She turned her face away and locked her features in their expression of perennial hurt and disdain.

Charley-is-my-darling whispered to the group nearby, not caring whether Elaine heard his words or not, "That's wonderful, wonderful. She is a witch. A human witch. Perhaps the great day is here! Elaine," said he humbly, "will you please look at us."

Elaine looked. When she stopped to think about where she was, it was incredible that the empty old lower city of Kalma should be just outside, just beyond the wall, and the busy new city a mere thirty-five meters higher. This corridor was a world to itself. It felt like a world, with the ugly yellows and browns, the dim old lights, the stenches of man and animal mixed under intolerably bad ventilation. Baby-baby, Crawlie, Mabel and Charley-is-my-darling were part of this world. They were real; but they were outside, outside, so far as Elaine herself was concerned.

"Let me go," she said. "I'll come back some day."

Charley-is-my-darling, who was so plainly the leader, spoke as if in a trance: "You don't understand, Elaine. The only 'going' you are going to go is death. There is no other direction. We can't let the old you go out of this door, not when the lady Panc Ashash has thrust you in to us. Either you go forward to your destiny, to our destiny too, either you do that, and all works out all right, so that you love us, and we love you," he added dreamily, "or else I kill you with my own hands. Right here. Right now. I could give you another clean drink of water first. But that is all. There isn't much choice for you, human being Elaine. What do you think would happen if you went outside?"

"Nothing, I hope," said Elaine.

"Nothing!" snorted Mabel, her face regaining its original indignation. "The police would come flapping by in their ornithopter—"

"And they'd pick your brains," said Baby-baby.

"And they'd know about us," said a tall pale man who had not spoken before.

"And we," said Crawlie from her chair, "would all of us die within an hour or two at the longest. Would that matter to you, ma'am and Elaine?"

"And," added Charley-is-my-darling, "they would disconnect the lady Panc Ashash, so that even the recording of that dear dead lady would be gone at last, and there would be no mercy at all left upon this world."

"What is 'mercy'?" asked Elaine.

"It's obvious you never heard of it," said Crawlie.

The old mouse-hag Baby-baby came close to Elaine. She looked up at her and whispered through yellow teeth. "Don't let them frighten you, girl. Death doesn't matter all that much, not even to you true humans with your four hundred years or to us animals with the slaughterhouse around the corner. Death is a when, not a what. It's the same for all of us. Don't be scared. Go straight ahead and you may find mercy and love. They're much richer than death, if you can only find them. Once you do find them, death won't be very important."

"I still don't know mercy," said Elaine, "but I thought I knew what love was, and I don't expect to find my lover in a dirty old corridor full of underpeople."

"I don't mean that kind of love," laughed Baby-baby, brushing aside Mabel's attempted interruption with a wave of her hand-paw. The old mouse face was on fire with sheer expressiveness. Elaine could suddenly imagine what Baby-baby had looked like to a mouse-underman when she was young and sleek and gray. Enthusiasm flushed the old features with youth as Baby-baby went on, "I don't mean love for a lover, girl. I mean love for yourself. Love for life. Love for all things living. Love even for me. Your love for me. Can you imagine that?"

****

Elaine swam through fatigue but she tried to answer the question. She looked in the dim light at the wrinkled old mouse-hag with her filthy clothes and her little red eyes. The fleeting image of the beautiful young mouse-woman had faded away; there was only this cheap, useless old thing, with her inhuman demands and her senseless pleading. People never loved underpeople. They used them, like chairs or doorhandles. Since when did a doorhandle demand the Charter of Ancient Rights?

"No," said Elaine calmly and evenly, "I can't imagine ever loving you."

"I knew it," said Crawlie from her chair. There was triumph in the voice.

Charley-is-my-darling shook his head as if to clear his sight. "Don't you even know who controls Fomalhaut III?"

"The Instrumentality," said Elaine. "But do we have to go on talking? Let me go or kill me or something. This doesn't make sense. I was tired when I got here, and I'm a million years tireder now."

Mabel said, "Take her along."

"All right," said Charley-is-my-darling. "Is the Hunter there?"

The child D'joan spoke. She had stood at the back of the group. "He came in the other way when she came in the front."

Elaine said to Charley-is-my-darling, "You lied to me. You said there was only one way."

"I did not lie," said he. "There is only one way for you or me or for the friends of the lady Panc Ashash. The way you came. The other way is death."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," he said, "that it leads straight into the slaughterhouses of the men you do not know. The Lords of the Instrumentality who are here on Fomalhaut III. There is the Lord Femtiosex, who is just and without pity. There is the Lord Limaono, who thinks that underpeople are a potential danger and should not have been started in the first place. There is the Lady Goroke, who does not know how to pray, but who tries to ponder the mystery of life and who has shown kindnesses to underpeople, as long as the kindnesses were lawful ones. And there is the Lady Arabella Underwood, whose justice no man can understand. Nor underpeople either," he added with a chuckle.

"Who is she? I mean, where did she get the funny name? It doesn't have a number in it. It's as bad as your names. Or my own," said Elaine.

"She's from Old North Australia, the stroon world, on loan to the Instrumentality, and she follows the laws she was born to. The Hunter can go through the rooms and the slaughterhouses of the Instrumentality, but could you? Could I?"

"No," said Elaine.

"Then forward," said Charley-is-my-darling, "to your death or to great wonders. May I lead the way, Elaine?"

Elaine nodded wordlessly.

The mouse-hag Baby-baby patted Elaine's sleeve, her eyes alive with strange hope. As Elaine passed Crawlie's chair, the proud, beautiful girl looked straight at her, expressionless, deadly and severe. The dog-girl D'joan followed the little procession as if she had been invited.

They walked down and down and down. Actually, it could not have been a full half-kilometer. But with the endless browns and yellows, the strange shapes of the lawless and untended underpeople, the stenches and the thick heavy air, Elaine felt as if she were leaving all known worlds behind.

In fact, she was doing precisely that, but it did not occur to her that her own suspicion might be true.

V

At the end of the corridor there was a round gate with a door of gold or brass.

Charley-is-my-darling stopped.

"I can't go further," he said. "You and D'joan will have to go on. This is the forgotten antechamber between the tunnel and the upper palace. The Hunter is there. Go on. You're a person. It is safe. Underpeople usually die in there. Go on." He nudged her elbow and pulled the sliding door apart.

"But the little girl," said Elaine.

"She's not a girl," Charley-is-my-darling. "She's just a dog—as I'm not a man, just a goat brightened and cut and trimmed to look like a man. If you come back, Elaine, I will love you like God or I will kill you. It depends."

"Depends on what?" asked Elaine. "And what is 'God'?"

Charley-is-my-darling smiled the quick tricky smile which was wholly insincere and completely friendly, both at the same time. It was probably the trademark of his personality in ordinary times. "You'll find out about God somewhere else, if you do. Not from us. And the depending is something you'll know for yourself. You won't have to wait for me to tell you. Go along now. The whole thing will be over in the next few minutes."

"But D'joan?" persisted Elaine.

"If it doesn't work," said Charley-is-my-darling, "we can always raise another D'joan and wait for another you. The lady Panc Ashash has promised us that. Go on in!"

He pushed her roughly, so that she stumbled through. Bright light dazzled her and the clean air tasted as good as fresh water on her first day out of the spaceship pod.

The little dog-girl had trotted in beside her.

The door, gold or brass, clanged to behind them.

Elaine and D'joan stood still, side by side, looking forward and upward.

There are many famous paintings of that scene. Most of the paintings show Elaine in rags with the distorted, suffering face of a witch. This is strictly unhistorical. She was wearing her everyday culottes, blouse and twin over-the-shoulder purses when she went in the other end of Clown Town. That was the usual dress on Fomalhaut III at that time. She had done nothing at all to spoil her clothes, so she must have looked the same when she came out. And D'joan—well, everyone knows what D'joan looked like.

The Hunter met them.

****

The Hunter met them, and new worlds began.

He was a shortish man, with black curly hair, black eyes that danced with laughter, broad shoulders and long legs. He walked with a quick sure step. He kept his hands quiet at his side, but the hands did not look tough and calloused, as though they had been terminating lives, even the lives of animals.

"Come up and sit down," he greeted them. "I've been waiting for you both."

Elaine stumbled upward and forward. "Waiting?" she gasped.

"Nothing mysterious," he said. "I had the viewscreen on. The one into the tunnel. Its connections are shielded, so the police could not have peeped it."

Elaine stopped dead still. The little dog-girl, one step behind her, stopped too. She tried to draw herself up to her full height. She was about the same tallness that he was. It was difficult, since he stood four or five steps above them. She managed to keep her voice even when she said:

"You know, then?"

"What?"

"All those things they said."

"Sure I know them," he smiled. "Why not?"

"But," stammered Elaine, "about you and me being lovers? That too?"

"That too," he smiled again. "I've been hearing it half my life. Come on up, sit down and have something to eat. We have a lot of things to do tonight, if history is to be fulfilled through us. What do you eat, little girl?" said he kindly to D'joan. "Raw meat or people food?"

"I'm a finished girl," said D'joan, "so I prefer chocolate cake with vanilla ice cream."

"That you shall have," said the Hunter. "Come, both of you, and sit down."

They had topped the steps. A luxurious table, already set, was waiting for them. There were three couches around it. Elaine looked for the third person who would join them. Only as she sat down did she realize that he meant to invite the dog-child.

He saw her surprise, but did not comment on it directly.

Instead, he spoke to D'joan.

"You know me, girl, don't you?"

The child smiled and relaxed for the first time since Elaine had seen her. The dog-girl was really strikingly beautiful when the tension went out of her. The wariness, the quietness, the potential disquiet —these were dog qualities. Now the child seemed wholly human and mature far beyond her years. Her white face had dark, dark brown eyes.

"I've seen you lots of times, Hunter. And you've told me what would happen if I turned out to be the D'joan. How I would spread the word and meet great trials. How I might die and might not, but people and underpeople would remember my name for thousands of years. You've told me almost everything I know— Except the things that I can't talk to you about. You know them too, but you won't talk, will you?" said the little girl imploringly.

"I know you've been to Earth," said the Hunter.

"Don't say it! Please don't say it!" pleaded the girl.

"Earth! Manhome itself?" cried Elaine. "How, by the stars, did you get there?"

The Hunter intervened. "Don't press her, Elaine. It's a big secret, and she wants to keep it. You'll find out more tonight than mortal woman was ever told before."

"What does 'mortal' mean?" asked Elaine, who disliked antique words.

"It just means having a termination of life."

"That's foolish," said Elaine. "Everything terminates. Look at those poor messy people who went on beyond the legal four hundred years." She looked around. Rich black-and-red curtains hung from ceiling to floor. On one side of the room there was a piece of furniture she had never seen before. It was like a table, but it had little broad flat doors on the front, reaching from side to side; it was richly ornamented with unfamiliar woods and metals. Nevertheless, she had more important things to talk about than furniture.

****

She looked directly at the Hunter (no organic disease; wounded in left arm at an earlier period; somewhat excessive exposure to sunlight; might need correction for near vision) and demanded of him:

"Am I captured by you, too?"

"Captured?"

"You're a Hunter. You hunt things. To kill them, I suppose. That underman back there, the goat who calls himself Charley-is-my-darling—"

"He never does!" cried the dog-girl, D'joan, interrupting.

"Never does what," said Elaine, cross at being interrupted.

"He never calls himself that. Other people, underpeople I mean, call him that. His name is Balthasar, but nobody uses it."

"What does it matter, little girl?" said Elaine. "I'm talking about my life. Your friend said he would take my life from me if something did not happen."

Neither D'joan nor the Hunter said anything.

Elaine heard a frantic edge go into her voice, "You heard it!" She turned to the Hunter, "You saw it on the view screen."

The Hunter's voice was serenity and assurance: "We three have things to do before this night is out. We won't get them done if you are frightened or worried. I know the underpeople, but I know the Lords of the Instrumentality as well—all four of them, right here. The Lords Limaono and Femtiosex and the Lady Goroke. And the Norstilian, too. They will protect you. Charley-is-my-darling might want to take

your life from you because he is worried, afraid that the tunnel of Englok, where you just were, will be discovered. I have ways of protecting him and yourself as well. Have confidence in me for a while. That's not so hard, is it?"

"But," protested Elaine, "the man—or the goat—or whatever he was, Charley-is-my-darling, he said it would all happen right away, as soon as I came up here with you."

"How can anything happen," said little D'joan, "if you keep talking all the time?"

The Hunter smiled.

"That's right," he said. "We've talked enough. Now we must become lovers."

Elaine jumped to her feet, "Not with me, you don't. Not with her here. Not when I haven't found my work to do. I'm a witch. I'm supposed to do something, but I've never really found out what it was."

"Look at this," said the Hunter calmly, walking over to the wall, and pointing with his finger at an intricate circular design.

Elaine and D'joan both looked at it.

The Hunter spoke again, his voice urgent. "Do you see it, D'joan? Do you really see it? The ages turn, waiting for this moment, little child. Do you see it? Do you see yourself in it?"

Elaine looked at the little dog-girl. D'joan had almost stopped breathing. She stared at the curious symmetrical pattern as though it were a window into enchanting worlds.

The Hunter roared, at the top of his voice, "D'joan! Joan! Joanie!"

The child made no response.

The Hunter stepped over to the child, slapped her gently on the cheek, shouted again. D'joan continued to stare at the intricate design.

"Now," said the Hunter, "you and I make love. The child is absent in a world of happy dreams. That design is a mandala, something left over from the unimaginable past. It locks the human consciousness in place. D'joan will not see us or hear us. We cannot help her go toward her destiny unless you and I make love first."

Elaine, her hand to her mouth, tried to inventory symptoms as a means of keeping her familiar thoughts in balance. It did not work. A relaxation spread over her, a happiness and quiet that she had not once felt since her childhood.

"Did you think," said the Hunter, "that I hunted with my body and killed with my hands? Didn't anyone ever tell you that the game comes to me rejoicing, that the animals die while they scream with pleasure? I'm a telepath, and I work under license. And I have my license now from the dead lady Panc Ashash."

Elaine knew that they had come to the end of the talking. Trembling, happy, frightened, she fell into his

arms and let him lead her over to the couch at the side of the black-and-gold room.

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A thousand years later, she was kissing his ear and murmuring loving words at him, words that she did not even realize she knew. She must, she thought, have picked up more from the story-boxes than she ever realized.

"You're my love," she said, "my only one, my darling. Never, never leave me; never throw me away. Oh, Hunter, I love you so!"

"We part," he said, "before tomorrow is gone, but shall meet again. Do you realize that all this has only been a little more than an hour?"

Elaine blushed. "And I," she stammered, "I—I'm hungry."

"Natural enough," said the Hunter. "Pretty soon we can waken the little girl and eat together. And then history will happen, unless somebody walks in and stops us."

"But, darling," said Elaine, "can't we go on—at least for a while? A year? A month? A day? Put the little girl back in the tunnel for a while."

"Not really," said the Hunter, "but I'll sing you the song that came into my mind about you and me. I've been thinking bits of it for a long time, but now it has really happened. Listen."

He held her two hands in his two hands, looked easily and frankly into her eyes. There was no hint in him of telepathic power.

He sang to her the song which we know as I Love You and Lost You.

I knew you, and loved you, and won you, in Kalma.
I loved you, and won you, and lost you, my darling!
The dark skies of Waterrock swept down against us.
Lightning-lit only by our own love, my lovely!
Our time was a short time, a sharp hour of glory—
We tasted delight and we suffer denial.
The tale of us two is a bittersweet story,
Short as a shot but as long as death.
We met and we loved, and vainly we plotted
To rescue beauty from a smothering war.
Time had no time for us, the minutes, no mercy.
We have loved and lost, and the world goes on.
We have lost and have kissed, and have parted, my darling!
All that we have, we must save in our hearts, love.
The memory of beauty and the beauty of memory...
I've loved you and won you and lost you, in Kalma.

His fingers, moving in the air, produced a soft organ-like music in the room. She had noticed music-beams before, but she had never had one played for herself.

By the time he was through singing, she was sobbing. It was all so true, so wonderful, so heartbreaking.

He had kept her right hand in his left hand. Now he released her suddenly. He stood up.

"Let's work first. Eat later. Someone is near us."

He walked briskly over to the little dog-girl, who was still seated on the chair looking at the mandala with open, sleeping eyes. He took her head firmly and gently between his two hands and turned her eyes away from the design. She struggled momentarily against his hands and then seemed to wake up fully.

She smiled. "That was nice. I rested. How long was it—five minutes?"

"More than that," said the Hunter gently. "I want you to take Elaine's hand."

A few hours ago, and Elaine would have protested at the grotesquerie of holding hands with an underperson. This time, she said nothing, but obeyed: she looked with much love toward the Hunter.

"You two don't have to know much," said the Hunter. "You, D'joan, are going to get everything that is in our minds and in our memories. You will become us, both of us. Forevermore. You will meet your glorious fate."

The little girl shivered, "Is this really the day?"

"It is," said the Hunter. "Future ages will remember this night."

"And you, Elaine," said he to her, "have nothing to do but to love me and to stand very still. Do you understand? You will see tremendous things, some of them frightening. But they won't be real. Just stand still."

Elaine nodded wordlessly.

"In the name," said the Hunter, "of the First Forgotten One, in the name of the Second Forgotten One, in the name of the Third Forgotten One. For the love of people, that will give them life. For the love that will give them a clean death and true..." His words were clear but Elaine could not understand them.

The day of days was here.

She knew it.

She did not know how she knew it, but she did.

The lady Panc Ashash crawled up through the solid floor, wearing her friendly robot body. She came near to Elaine and murmured:

"Have no fear, no fear."

Fear? thought Elaine. This is no time for fear. It is much too interesting.

****

As if to answer Elaine, a clear, strong, masculine voice spoke out of nowhere:

This is the time for the daring sharing.

When these words were spoken, it was as if a bubble had been pricked. Elaine felt her personality and D'joan mingling. With ordinary telepathy, it would have been frightening. But this was not communication. It was being.

She had become Joan. She felt the clean little body in its tidy clothes. She became aware of the girl-shape again. It was oddly pleasant and familiar, in terribly faraway kinds of feeling, to remember that she had had that shape once—the smooth, innocent flat chest; the uncomplicated groin; the fingers which still felt as though they were separate and alive in extending from the palm of the hand. But the mind—that child's mind! It was like an enormous museum illuminated by rich stained-glass windows, cluttered with variegated heaps of beauty and treasure, scented by strange incense which moved slowly in unpropelled air. D'joan had a mind which reached all the way back to the color and glory of man's antiquity. D'joan had been a Lord of the Instrumentality, a monkey-man riding the ships of space, a friend of the dear dead lady Panc Ashash, and Panc Ashash herself.

No wonder the child was rich and strange: she had been made the heir of all the ages.

This is the time for the glaring top of the truth at the wearing sharing, said the nameless, clear, loud voice in her mind. This is the time for you and him.

Elaine realized that she was responding to hypnotic suggestions which the Lady Panc Ashash had put into the mind of the little dog-girl—suggestions which were triggered into full potency the moment that the three of them came into telepathic contact.

For a fraction of a second, she perceived nothing but astonishment within herself. She saw nothing but herself—every detail, every secrecy, every thought and feeling and contour of flesh. She was curiously aware of how her breasts hung from her chest, the tension of her belly-muscles holding her female backbone straight and erect—

Female backbone?

Why had she thought that she had a female backbone?

And then she knew.

She was following the Hunter's mind as his awareness rushed through her body, drank it up, enjoyed it, loved it all over again, this time from the inside out.

She knew somehow that the little dog-girl watched everything quietly, wordlessly, drinking in from them both the full nuance of being truly human.

Even with the delirium, she sensed embarrassment. It might be a dream, but it was still too much. She began to close her mind and the thought had come to her that she should take her hands away from the hands of Hunter and the dog-child.

But then fire came...

VI

Fire came up from the floor, burning about them intangibly. Elaine felt nothing ... but she could sense the touch of the little girl's hand.

Flames around the dames, games, said an idiot voice from nowhere.

Fire around the pyre, sire, said another.

Hot is what we got, tot, said a third.

Suddenly Elaine remembered Earth, but it was not the Earth she knew. She was herself D'joan, and not D'joan. She was a tall, strong monkey-man, indistinguishable from a true human being. She/he had tremendous alertness in her/his heart as he/she walked across the Peace Square at An-fang, the Old Square at An-fang, where all things begin. She/he noticed a discrepancy. Some of the buildings were not there.

The real Elaine thought to herself, "So that's what they did with the child—printed her with the memories of other underpeople. Other ones, who dared things and went places."

The fire stopped.

Elaine saw the black-and-gold room clean and untroubled for a moment before the green white-topped ocean rushed in. The water poured over the three of them without getting them wet in the least. The greenness washed around them without pressure, without suffocation.

Elaine was the Hunter. Enormous dragons floated in the sky above Fomalhaut III. She felt herself wandering across a hill, singing with love and yearning. She had the Hunter's own mind, his own memory. The dragon sensed him, and flew down. The enormous reptilian wings were more beautiful than a sunset, more delicate than orchids. Their beat in the air was as gentle as the breath of a baby. She was not only Hunter but dragon too; she felt the minds meeting and the dragon dying in bliss, in joy.

Somehow the water was gone. So too were D'joan and the Hunter. She was not in the room. She was taut, tired, worried Elaine, looking down a nameless street for hopeless destinations. She had to do things which could never be done. The wrong me, the wrong time, the wrong place—and I'm alone, I'm alone, I'm alone, her mind screamed. The room was back again; so too were the hands of the Hunter and the little girl.

Mist began rising—

Another dream? thought Elaine. Aren't we done?

But there was another voice somewhere, a voice which grated like the rasp of a saw cutting through bone, like the grind of a broken machine still working at ruinous top speed. It was an evil voice, a terror-filling voice.

Perhaps this really was the "death" which the tunnel underpeople had mistaken her for.

The Hunter's hand released hers. She let go of D'joan.

There was a strange woman in the room. She wore the baldric of authority and the leotards of a traveler.

Elaine stared at her.

****

"You'll be punished," said the terrible voice, which now was coming out of the woman.

"Wh—wh—what?" stammered Elaine.

"You're conditioning an underperson without authority. I don't know who you are, but the Hunter should know better. The animal will have to die, of course," said the woman, looking at little D'joan.

Hunter muttered, half in greeting to the stranger, half in explanation to Elaine, as though he did not know what else to say:

"Lady Arabella Underwood."

Elaine could not bow to her, though she wanted to.

The surprise came from the little dog girl.

I am your sister Joan, she said, and no animal to you.

The lady Arabella seemed to have trouble hearing. (Elaine herself could not tell whether she was hearing spoken words or taking the message with her mind.)

I am Joan and I love you.

The lady Arabella shook herself as though water had splashed on her. "Of course you're Joan. You love me. And I love you."

People and underpeople meet on the terms of love.

"Love. Love, of course. You're a good little girl. And so right." You will forget me, said Joan, until we meet and love again.

"Yes, darling. Good-by for now."

At last D'joan did use words. She spoke to the Hunter and Elaine, saying, "It is finished. I know who I am and what I must do. Elaine had better come with me. We will see you soon, Hunter—if we live."

Elaine looked at the Lady Arabella who stood stock still, staring like a blind women. The Hunter nodded at Elaine with his wise, kind, rueful smile.

The little girl led Elaine down, down, down to the door which led back to the tunnel of Englok. Just as they went through the brass door, Elaine heard the voice of the Lady Arabella say to the Hunter:

"What are you doing here all by yourself? The room smells funny. Have you had animals here? Have you killed something?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the Hunter as D'joan and Elaine stepped through the door.

"What?" cried the Lady Arabella.

Hunter must have raised his voice to a point of penetrating emphasis because he wanted the other two to hear him, too:

"I have killed, ma'am," he said, "as always—with love. This time it was a system."

They slipped through the door while the Lady Arabella's protesting voice, heavy with authority and inquiry, was still sweeping against the Hunter.

Joan led. Her body was the body of a pretty child, but her personality was the full awakening of all the underpeople who had been imprinted on her. Elaine could not understand it, because Joan was still the little dog-girl, but Joan was now also Elaine, also Hunter. There was no doubt about their movement; the child, no longer an undergirl, led the way and Elaine, human or not, followed.

The door closed behind them. They were back in the brown-and-yellow corridor. Most of the underpeople were awaiting them. Dozens stared at them. The heavy animal-human smells of the old tunnel rolled against them like thick, slow waves. Elaine felt the beginning of a headache at her temples, but she was much too alert to care.

For a moment, D'joan and Elaine confronted the underpeople.

****

Most of you have seen paintings or theatricals based upon this scene. The most famous of all is, beyond doubt, the fantastic "one-line drawing" of San Shigonanda—the board of the background almost uniformly gray, with a hint of brown and yellow on the left, a hint of black and red on the right, and in the center the strange white line, almost a smear of paint, which somehow suggests the bewildered girl Elaine and the doom-blessed child Joan.

Charley-is-my-darling was, of course, the first to find his voice. (Elaine did not notice him as a goat-man any more. He seemed an earnest, friendly man of middle age, fighting poor health and an uncertain life with great courage. She now found his smile persuasive and charming. Why, thought Elaine, didn't I see him that way before? Have I changed?)

Charley-is-my-darling had spoken before Elaine found her wits. "He did it. Are you D'joan?"

"Am I D'joan?" said the child, asking the crowd of deformed, weird people in the tunnel. "Do you think I am D'joan?"

"No! No! You are the lady who was promised—you are the bridge-to-man," cried a tall yellow-haired

old woman, whom Elaine could not remember seeing before. The woman flung herself to her knees in front of the child, and tried to get D'joan's hand. The child held her hands away, quietly, but firmly, so the woman buried her face in the child's skirt and wept.

"I am Joan," said the child, "and I am dog no more. You are people now, people, and if you die with me, you will die men. Isn't that better than it has ever been before? And you, Ruthia," said she to the woman at her feet, "stand up and stop crying. Be glad. These are the days that I shall be with you. I know your children were all taken away and killed, Ruthie, and I am sorry. I cannot bring them back. But I give you womanhood. I have even made a person out of Elaine."

"Who are you?" said Charley-is-my-darling. "Who are you?"

"I'm the little girl you put out to live or die an hour ago. But now I am Joan, not D'joan, and I bring you a weapon. You are women. You are men. You are people. You can use the weapon."

"What weapon?" The voice was Crawlie's, from about the third row of spectators.

"Life and life-with," said the child Joan.

"Don't be a fool," said Crawlie. "What's the weapon? Don't give us words. We've had words and death ever since the world of underpeople began. That's what people give us—good words, fine principles and cold murder, year after year, generation after generation. Don't tell me I'm a person—I'm not. I'm a bison and I know it. An animal fixed up to look like a person. Give me a something to kill with. Let me die fighting."

Little Joan looked incongruous in her young body and short stature, still wearing the little blue smock in which Elaine had first seen her. She commanded the room. She lifted her hand and the buzz of low voices, which had started while Crawlie was yelling, dropped off to silence again.

"Crawlie," she said, in a voice that carried all the way down the hall, "peace be with you in the everlasting now."

Crawlie scowled. She did have the grace to look puzzled at Joan's message to her, but she did not speak.

"Don't talk to me, dear people," said little Joan. "Get used to me first. I bring you life-with. It's more than love. Love's a hard, sad, dirty word, a cold word, an old word. It says too much and it promises too little. I bring you something much bigger than love. If you're alive, you're alive. If you're alive-with, then you know the other life is there too—both of you, any of you, all of you. Don't do anything. Don't grab, don't clench, don't possess. Just be. That's the weapon. There's not a flame or a gun or a poison that can stop it."

"I want to believe you," said Mabel, "but I don't know how to."

"Don't believe me," said little Joan. "Just wait and let things happen. Let me through, good people. I have to sleep for a while. Elaine will watch me while I sleep and when I get up, I will tell you why you are underpeople no longer."

Joan started to move forward—

A wild ululating screech split the corridor.

****

Everyone looked around to see where it came from.

It was almost like the shriek of a fighting bird, but the sound came from among them.

Elaine saw it first.

Crawlie had a knife and just as the cry ended, she flung herself on Joan.

Child and woman fell on the floor, their dresses a tangle. The large hand rose up twice with the knife, and the second time it came up red.

From the hot shocking burn in her side, Elaine knew that she must herself have taken one of the stabs. She could not tell whether Joan was still living.

The undermen pulled Crawlie off the child.

Crawlie was white with rage, "Words, words, words. She'll kill us all with her words."

A large, fat man with the muzzle of a bear on the front of an otherwise human-looking head and body, stepped around the man who held Crawlie. He gave her one tremendous slap. She dropped to the floor unconscious. The knife, stained with blood, fell on the old worn carpet. (Elaine thought automatically: restorative for her later; check neck vertebrae; no problem of bleeding.)

For the first time in her life, Elaine functioned as a wholly efficient witch. She helped the people pull the clothing from little Joan. The tiny body, with the heavy purple-dark blood pumping out from just below the rib-cage, looked hurt and fragile. Elaine reached in her left handbag. She had a surgical radar pen. She held it to her eye and looked through the flesh, up and down the wound. The peritoneum was punctured, the liver cut, the upper folds of the large intestine were perforated in two places. When she saw this, she knew what to do. She brushed the bystanders aside and got to work.

First she glued up the cuts from the inside out, starting with the damage to the liver. Each touch of the organic adhesive was preceded by a tiny spray of re-coding powder, designed to reinforce the capacity of the injured organ to restore itself. The probing, pressing, squeezing, took eleven minutes. Before it was finished, Joan had awakened, and was murmuring:

"Am I dying?"

"Not at all," said Elaine, "unless these human medicines poison your dog blood."

"Who did it?"

"Crawlie."

"Why?" said the child. "Why? Is she hurt too? Where is she?"

"Not as hurt as she is going to be," said the goat-man, Charley-is-my-darling. "If she lives, we'll fix her up and try her and put her to death."

"No, you won't," said Joan. "You're going to love her. You must."

The goat-man looked bewildered.

He turned in his perplexity to Elaine. "Better have a look at Crawlie," said he. "Maybe Orson killed her with that slap. He's a bear, you know."

"So I saw," said Elaine, drily. What did the man think that thing looked like, a hummingbird?

She walked over to the body of Crawlie. As soon as she touched the shoulders, she knew that she was in for trouble. The outer appearances were human, but the musculature beneath was not. She suspected that the laboratories had left Crawlie terribly strong, keeping the buffalo strength and obstinacy for some remote industrial reason of their own. She took out a brainlink, a close-range telepathic hookup which worked only briefly and slightly, to see if the mind still functioned. As she reached for Crawlie's head to attach it, the unconscious girl sprang suddenly to life, jumped to her feet and said:

"No, you don't! you don't peep me, you dirty human!"

"Crawlie, stand still."

"Don't boss me, you monster!"

"Crawlie, that's a bad thing to say." It was eerie to hear such a commanding voice coming from the throat and mouth of a small child. Small she might have been, but Joan commanded the scene.

"I don't care what I say. You all hate me."

"That's not true, Crawlie."

"You're a dog and now you're a person. You're born a traitor. Dogs have always sided with people. You hated me even before you went into that room and changed into something else. Now you are going to kill us all."

"We may die, Crawlie, but I won't do it."

"Well, you hate me, anyhow. You've always hated me."

"You may not believe it," said Joan, "but I've always loved you. You were the prettiest woman in our whole corridor."

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Crawlie laughed. The sound gave Elaine gooseflesh. "Suppose I believed it. How could I live if I thought that people loved me? If I believed you, I would have to tear myself to pieces, to break my brains on the wall, to do—" The laughter changed to sobs, but Crawlie managed to resume talking: "You things are so stupid that you don't even know that you're monsters. You're not people. You never

will be people. I'm one of you myself. I'm honest enough to admit what I am. We're dirt, we're nothing, we're things that are less than machines. We hide in the earth like dirt and when people kill us they do not weep. At least we were hiding. Now you come along, you and your tame human woman—" Crawlie glared briefly at Elaine—"and you try to change even that. I'll kill you again if I can, you dirt, you slut, you dog! What are you doing with that child's body? We don't even know who you are now. Can you tell us?"

The bear-man had moved up close to Crawlie, unnoticed by her, and was ready to slap her down again if she moved against little Joan.

Joan looked straight at him and with a mere movement of her eyes she commanded him not to strike.

"I'm tired," she said, "I'm tired, Crawlie. I'm a thousand years old when I am not even five. And I am Elaine now, and I am Hunter too, and I am the Lady Panc Ashash, and I know a great many more things that I thought I would ever know. I have work to do, Crawlie, because I love you, and I think I will die soon. But please, good people, first let me rest."

The bear-man was on Crawlie's right. On her left, there had moved up a snake-woman. The face was pretty and human, except for the thin forked tongue which ran in and out of the mouth like a dying flame. She had good shoulders and hips but no breasts at all. She wore empty golden brassiere cups which swung against her chest. Her hands looked as though they might be stronger than steel. Crawlie started to move toward Joan, and the snake-woman hissed.

It was the snake hiss of Old Earth.

For a second, every animal-person in the corridor stopped breathing. They all stared at the snake-woman. She hissed again, looking straight at Crawlie. The sound was an abomination in that narrow space. Elaine saw that Joan tightened up like a little dog, Charley-is-my-darling looked as though he was ready to leap twenty meters in one jump, and Elaine herself felt an impulse to strike, to kill, to destroy. The hiss was a challenge to them all.

The snake-woman looked around calmly, fully aware of the attention she had obtained.

"Don't worry, dear people. See, I'm using Joan's name for all of us. I'm not going to hurt Crawlie, not unless she hurts Joan. But if she hurts Joan, if anybody hurts Joan, they will have me to deal with. You have a good idea who I am. We S-people have great strength, high intelligence and no fear at all. You know we cannot breed. People have to make us one by one, out of ordinary snakes. Do not cross me, dear people. I want to learn about this new love which Joan is bringing, and nobody is going to hurt Joan while I am here. Do you hear me, people? Nobody. Try it, and you die. I think I could kill almost all of you before I died, even if you all attacked me at once. Do you hear me, people? Leave Joan alone. That goes for you, too, you soft human woman. I am not afraid of you either. You there," said she to the bear-man, "pick little Joan up and carry her to a quiet bed. She must rest. She must be quiet for a while. You be quiet too, all you people, or you will meet me. Me." Her black eyes roved across their faces. The snake-woman moved forward and they parted in front of her, as though she were the only solid being in a throng of ghosts.

Her eyes rested a moment on Elaine. Elaine met the gaze, but it was an uncomfortable thing to do. The black eyes with neither eyebrow nor lashes seemed full of intelligence and devoid of emotion. Orson, the bear-man, followed obediently behind. He carried little Joan.

As the child passed Elaine she tried to stay awake. She murmured, "Make me bigger. Please make me bigger. Right away."

"I don't know how..." said Elaine.

The child struggled to full awakening. "I'll have work to do. Work ... and maybe my death to die. It will all be wasted if I am this little. Make me bigger."

"But—" protested Elaine again.

"If you don't know, ask the lady."

"What lady?"

The S-woman had paused, listening to the conversation. She cut in.

"The Lady Panc Ashash, of course. The dead one. Do you think that a living Lady of the Instrumentality would do anything but kill us all?"

****

As the snake-woman and Orson carried Joan away, Charley-is-my-darling came up to Elaine and said, "Do you want to go?"

"Where?"

"To the Lady Panc Ashash, of course."

"Me?" said Elaine. "Now?" said Elaine, even more emphatically. "Of course not," said Elaine, pronouncing each word as though it were a law. "What do you think I am? A few hours ago I did not even know that you existed. I wasn't sure about the word 'death.' I just assumed that everything terminated at four hundred years, the way it should. It's been hours of danger, and everybody has been threatening everybody else for all that time. I'm tired and I'm sleepy and I'm dirty, and I've got to take care of myself, and besides—"

She stopped suddenly and bit her lip. She had started to say, and besides, my body is all worn out with that dream-like love-making which the Hunter and I had together. That was not the business of Charley-is-my-darling: he was goat enough as he was. His mind was goatish and would not see the dignity of it all.

The goat-man said, very gently, "You are making history, Elaine, and when you make history you cannot always take care of all the little things too. Are you happier and more important than you ever were before? Yes? Aren't you a different you from the person who met Balthasar just a few hours ago?"

Elaine was taken aback by the seriousness. She nodded.

"Stay hungry and tired. Stay dirty. Just a little longer. Time must not be wasted. You can talk to the Lady Panc Ashash. Find out what we must do about little Joan. When you come back with further instructions, I will take care of you myself. This tunnel is not as bad a town as it looks. We will have

everything you could need, in the Room of Englok. Englok himself built it, long ago. Work just a little longer, and then you can eat and rest. We have everything here. 'I am the citizen of no mean city.' But first you must help Joan. You love Joan, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I do," she said.

"Then help us just a little bit more."

With death? she thought. With murder? With violation of law? But—but it was all for Joan.

It was thus that Elaine went to the camouflaged door, went out under the open sky again, saw the great Saucer of Upper Kalma reaching out over the Old Lower City. She talked to the voice of the Lady Panc Ashash, and obtained certain instructions, together with other messages. Later, she was able to repeat them, but she was too tired to make out their real sense.

She staggered back to the place in the wall where she thought the door to be, leaned against it, and nothing happened.

"Further down, Elaine, further down. Hurry! When I used to be me, I too got tired," came the strong whisper of the Lady Panc Ashash, "but do hurry!"

Elaine stepped away from the wall, looking at it.

A beam of light struck her.

The Instrumentality had found her.

****

She rushed wildly at the wall. The door gaped briefly. The strong welcome hand of Charley-is my-darling helped her in.

"The light! The light!" cried Elaine. "I've killed us all. They saw me."

"Not yet," smiled the goat-man, with his quick crooked intelligent smile. "I may not be educated, but I am pretty smart."

He reached toward the inner gate, glanced back at Elaine appraisingly, and then shoved a man-sized robot through the door.

"There it goes, a sweeper about your size. No memory bank. A worn-out brain. Just simple motivations. If they come down to see what they thought they saw, they will see this instead. We keep a bunch of these at the door. We don't go out much, but when we do, it's handy to have these to cover up with."

He took her by the arm. "While you eat, you can tell me. Can we make her bigger...?"

"Who?"

"Joan, of course. Our Joan. That's what you went to find out for us."

Elaine had to inventory her own mind to see what the Lady Panc Ashash had said on that subject. In a moment she remembered.

"You need a pod. And a jelly bath. And narcotics, because it will hurt. Four hours."

"Wonderful," said Charley-is-my-darling, leading her deeper and deeper into the tunnel.

"But what's the use of it," said Elaine, "if I've ruined us all? The Instrumentality saw me coming in. They will follow. They will kill all of you, even Joan. Where is the Hunter? Shouldn't I sleep first?" She felt her lips go thick with fatigue; she had not rested or eaten since she took that chance on the strange little door between Waterrocky Road and the Shopping Bar.

"You're safe, Elaine, you're safe," said Charley-is-my-darling, his sly smile very warm and his smooth voice carrying the ring of sincere conviction. For himself, he did not believe a word of it. He thought they were all in danger, but there was no point in terrifying Elaine. Elaine was the only real person on their side, except for the Hunter, who was a strange one, almost like an animal himself, and for the Lady Panc Ashash, who was very benign, but who was, after all, a dead person. He was frightened himself, but he was afraid of fear. Perhaps they were all doomed.

In a way, he was right.

VII

The Lady Arabella Underwood had called the Lady Goroke.

"Something has tampered with my mind."

The Lady Goroke felt very shocked. She threw back the inquiry. Put a probe on it.

"I did. Nothing."

Nothing?

More shock for the Lady Goroke. Sound the alert, then.

"Oh, no. Oh, no, no. It was a friendly, nice tampering." The Lady Arabella Underwood, being an Old North Australian, was rather formal: she always thought full words at her friends, even in telepathic contact. She never sent mere raw ideas.

But that's utterly unlawful. You're part of the Instrumentality. It's a crime! thought the Lady Goroke.

She got a giggle for reply.

You laugh...? she inquired.

"I just thought a new Lord might be here. From the Instrumentality. Having a look at me."

The Lady Goroke was very proper and easily shocked. We wouldn't do that!

The Lady Arabella thought to herself but did not transmit, "Not to you, my dear. You're a blooming prude." To the other she transmitted, "Forget it then."

Puzzled and worried, the Lady Goroke thought: Well, all right. Break?

"Right-ho. Break."

The Lady Goroke frowned to herself. She slapped her wall. Planet Central, she thought at it.

A mere man sat at a desk.

"I am the lady Goroke," she said.

"Of course, my lady," he replied.

"Police fever, one degree. One degree only. Till rescinded. Clear?"

"Clear, my lady. The entire planet?"

"Yes," she said.

"Do you wish to give a reason?" his voice was respectful and routine.

"Must I?"

"Of course not, my lady."

"None given, then. Close."

He saluted and his image faded from the wall.

She raised her mind to the level of a light clear call. Instrumentality Only—Instrumentality Only. I have raised the Police fever level 1° by command. Reason, personal disquiet. You know my voice. You know me. Goroke. Far across the city—a police ornithopter flapped slowly down the street.

The police robot was photographing a sweeper, the most elaborately malfunctioning sweeper he had ever seen.

The sweeper raced down the road at unlawful speeds, approaching three hundred kilometers an hour, stopped with a sizzle of plastic on stone, and began picking dust-motes off the pavement.

When the ornithopter reached it, the sweeper took off again, rounded two or three corners at tremendous speed and then settled down to its idiot job.

The third time this happened, the robot in the ornithopter put a disabling slug through it, flew down and picked it up with the claws of his machine.

He saw it in close view.

"Birdbrain. Old model. Birdbrain. Good they don't use those any more. The thing could have hurt A Man. Now, I'm printed from a mouse, a real mouse with lots and lots of brains."

He flew toward the central junkyard with the worn-out sweeper. The sweeper, crippled but still conscious, was trying to pick dust off the iron claws which held it.

Below them, the Old City twisted out of sight with its odd geometrical lights. The new city, bathed in its soft perpetual glow, shone out against the night of Fomalhaut III. Beyond them, the everlasting ocean boiled in its private storms.

****

On the actual stage the actors cannot do much with the scene of the interlude, where Joan was cooked in a single night from the size of a child five years old to the tallness of a miss fifteen or sixteen. The biological machine did work well, though at the risk of her life. It made her into a vital, robust young person, without changing her mind at all. This is hard for any actress to portray. The storyboxes have the advantage. They can show the machine with all sorts of improvements—flashing lights, bits of lightnight, mysterious rays. Actually, it looked like a bathtub full of boiling brown jelly, completely covering Joan.

Elaine, meanwhile, ate hungrily in the palatial room of Englok himself. The food was very, very old, and she had doubts, as a witch, about its nutritional value, but it stilled her hunger. The denizens of Clown Town had declared this room "off limits" to themselves, for reasons which Charley-is-my-darling could not make plain. He stood in the doorway and told her what to do to find food, to activate the bed out of the floor, to open the bathroom. Everything was very old-fashioned and nothing responded to a simple thought or to a mere slap.

A curious thing happened.

Elaine had washed her hands, had eaten and was preparing for her bath. She had taken most of her clothes off, thinking only that Charley-is-my-darling was an animal, not a man, so that it did not matter.

Suddenly she knew it did matter.

He might be an underperson but he was a man to her. Blushing deeply all the way down to her neck, she ran into the bathroom and called back to him:

"Go away. I will bathe and then sleep. Wake me when you have to, not before."

"Yes, Elaine."

"And—and—"

"Yes?"

"Thank you," she said. "Thank you very much. Do you know, I never said 'thank you' to an underperson before."

"That's all right," said Charley-is-my-darling with a smile. "Most real people don't. Sleep well, my dear

Elaine. When you awaken, be ready for great things. We shall take a star out of the skies and shall sets thousands of worlds on fire..."

"What's that?" she said, putting her head around the corner of the bathroom.

"Just a figure of speech," he smiled. "Just meaning that you won't have much time. Rest well. Don't forget to put your clothes in the ladysmaid machine. The ones in Clown Town are all worn out. But since we haven't used this room, yours ought to work."

"Which is it?" she said.

"The red lid with the gold handle. Just lift it." On that domestic note he left her to rest, while he went off and plotted the destiny of a hundred billion lives.

****

They told her it was mid-morning when she came out of the room of Englok. How could she have known it? The brown-and-yellow corridor, with its gloomy old yellow lights, was just as dim and stench-ridden as ever.

The people all seemed to have changed.

Baby-baby was no longer a mouse-hag, but a woman of considerable force and much tenderness. Crawlie was as dangerous as a human enemy, staring at Elaine, her beautiful face gone bland with hidden hate. Charley-is-my-darling was gay, friendly and persuasive. She thought she could read expressions on the faces of Orson and the S'woman, odd though their features were.

After she had gotten through some singularly polite greetings, she demanded, "What's happening now?"

A new voice spoke up—a voice she knew and did not know.

Elaine glanced over at a niche in the wall.

The Lady Panc Ashash! And who was that with her?

Even as she asked herself the question, Elaine knew the answer. It was Joan, grown, only half a head less tall than the Lady Panc Ashash or herself. It was a new Joan, powerful, happy, and quiet; but it was all the dear little old D'joan too.

"Welcome," said the lady Panc Ashash, "to our revolution."

"What's a revolution?" asked Elaine. "And I thought you couldn't come in here with all the thought shielding?"

The Lady Panc Ashash lifted a wire which trailed back from her robot body, "I rigged this up so that I could use the body. Precautions are no use any more. It's the other side which will need the precautions now. A revolution is a way of changing systems and people. This is one. You go first, Elaine. This way."

"To die? Is that what you mean?"

The lady Panc Ashash laughed warmly. "You know me by now. You know my friends here. You know what your own life has been down to now, a useless witch in a world which did not want you. We may die, but it's what we do before we die that counts. This is Joan going to meet her destiny. You lead as far as the Upper City. Then Joan will lead. And then we shall see."

"You mean, all these people are going too?" Joan looked at the ranks of the underpeople, who were beginning to form into two queues down the corridor. The queues bulged wherever mothers led their children by the hand or carried small ones in their arms. Here and there the line was punctuated by a giant underperson.

They have been nothing, thought Elaine, and I was nothing too. Now we are all going to do something, even though we may be terminated for it. "May be" thought she: "shall be" is the word. But it is worth it if Joan can change the worlds, even a little bit, even for other people.

Joan spoke up. Her voice had grown with her body, but it was the same dear voice which the little dog-girl had had sixteen hours (they seem sixteen years, thought Elaine) ago, when Elaine first met her at the door to the tunnel of Englok.

Joan said, "Love is not something special, reserved for men alone.

"Love is not proud. Love has no real name. Love is for life itself, and we have life.

"We cannot win by fighting. People outnumber us, outgun us, outrun us, outfight us. But people did not create us. Whatever made people, made us too. You all know that, but will we say the name?"

There was a murmur of no and never from the crowd.

"You have waited for me. I have waited too. It is time to die, perhaps, but we will die the way people did in the beginning, before things became easy and cruel for them. They live in a stupor and they die in a dream. It is not a good dream and if they awaken, they will know that we are people too. Are you with me?" They murmured yes. "Do you love me?" Again they murmured agreement. "Shall we go out and meet the day?" They shouted their acclaim.

Joan turned to the Lady Panc Ashash. "Is everything as you wished and ordered?"

"Yes," said the dear dead woman in the robot body. "Joan first, to lead you. Elaine preceding her, to drive away robots or ordinary underpeople. When you meet real people, you will love them. That is all. You will love them. If they kill you, you will love them. Joan will show you how. Pay no further attention to me. Ready?"

Joan lifted her right hand and said words to herself. The people bowed their heads before her, faces and muzzles and snouts of all sizes and colors. A baby of some kind mewed in a tiny falsetto to the rear.

Just before she turned to lead the procession, Joan turned back to the people and said, "Crawlie, where are you?"

"Here, in the middle," said a clear, calm voice far back.

"Do you love me now, Crawlie?"

"No, D'joan. I like you less than when you were a little dog. But these are my people too, as well as yours. I am brave. I can walk. I won't make trouble."

"Crawlie," said Joan, "will you love people if we meet them?"

****

All faces turned toward the beautiful bison-girl. Elaine could just see her, way down the murky corridor. Elaine could see that the girl's face had turned utter, dead white with emotion. Whether rage or fear, she could not tell.

At last Crawlie spoke, "No, I won't love people. And I won't love you. I have my pride."

Softly, softly, like death itself at a quiet bedside, Joan spoke. "You can stay behind, Crawlie. You can stay here. It isn't much of a chance, but it's a chance."

Crawlie looked at her, "Bad luck to you, dog-woman, and bad luck to the rotten human being up there beside you."

Elaine stood on tiptoe to see what would happen. Crawlie's face suddenly disappeared, dropping downward.

The snake woman elbowed her way to the front, stood close to Joan where the others could see her, and sang out in a voice as clear as metal itself:

"Sing 'poor, poor, Crawlie,' dear people. Sing 'I love Crawlie,' dear people. She is dead. I just killed her so that we would all be full of love. I love you too," said the S'woman, on whose reptilian features no sign of love or hate could be seen.

Joan spoke up, apparently prompted by the lady Panc Ashash. "We do love Crawlie, dear people. Think of her and then let us move forward."

Charley-is-my-darling gave Elaine a little shove. "Here, you lead."

In a dream, in a bewilderment, Elaine led.

She felt warm, happy, brave when she passed close to the strange Joan, so tall and yet so familiar. Joan gave her a full smile and whispered, "Tell me I'm doing well, human woman. I'm a dog and dogs have lived a million years for the praise of man."

"You're right, Joan, you're completely right! I'm with you. Shall I go now?" responded Elaine.

Joan nodded, her eyes brimming with tears.

Elaine led.

Joan and the Lady Panc Ashash followed, dog and dead woman championing the procession.

The rest of the underpeople followed them in turn, in a double line.

When they made the secret door open, daylight flooded the corridor. Elaine could almost feel the stale odor-ridden air pouring out with them. When she glanced back into the tunnel for the last time, she saw the body of Crawlie lying all alone on the floor.

Elaine herself turned to the steps and began going up them.

No one had yet noticed the procession.

Elaine could hear the wire of the Lady Panc Ashash dragging on the stone and metal of the steps as they climbed.

When she reached the top door, Elaine had a moment of indecision and panic. "This is my life, my life," she thought. "I have no other. What have I done? Oh, Hunter, Hunter, where are you? Have you betrayed me?"

Said Joan softly behind her, "Go on! Go on. This is a war of love. Keep going."

Elaine opened the door to the upper street. The roadway was full of people. Three police ornithopters flapped slowly overhead. This was an unusual number. Elaine stopped again.

"Keep walking," said Joan, "and warn the robots off."

Elaine advanced and the revolution began.

VIII

The revolution lasted six minutes and covered one hundred and twelve meters.

The police flew over as soon as the underpeople began pouring out of the doorway.

The first one glided in like a big bird, his voice asking, "Identify! Who are you?"

Elaine said, "Go away. That is a command."

"Identify yourself," said the bird-like machine, banking steeply with the lens-eyed robot peering at Elaine out of its middle.

"Go away," said Elaine. "I am a true human and I command."

The first police ornithopter apparently called to the others by radio. Together they flapped their way down the corridor between the big buildings.

A lot of people had stopped. Most of their faces were blank, a few showing animation or amusement or horror at the sight of so many underpeople all crowded in one place.

Joan's voice sang out, in the clearest possible enunciation of the Old Common Tongue:

"Dear people, we are people. We love you. We love you."

The underpeople began to chant love, love, love in a weird plainsong full of sharps and half-tones. The true humans shrank back. Joan herself set the example by embracing a young woman of about her own height. Charley-is-my-darling took a human man by the shoulders and shouted at him:

"I love you, my dear fellow! Believe me, I do love you. It's wonderful meeting you." The human man was startled by the contact and even more startled by the glowing warmth of the goat-man's voice. He stood mouth slack and body relaxed with sheer, utter and accepted surprise.

Somewhere to the rear a person screamed.

A police ornithopter came flapping back. Elaine could not tell if it was one of the three she had sent away, or a new one altogether. She waited for it to get close enough to hail, so that she could tell it to go away. For the first time, she wondered about the actual physical character of danger. Could the police machine put a slug through her? Or shoot flame at her? Or lift her screaming, carrying her away with its iron claws to some place where she would be pretty and clean and never herself again? "Oh, Hunter, Hunter, where are you now? Have you forgotten me? Have you betrayed me?"

The underpeople were still surging forward and mingling with the real people, clutching them by their hands or their garments and repeating in the queer medley of voices:

"I love you. Oh, please, I love you! We are people. We are your sisters and brothers..."

The snake-woman wasn't making much progress. She had seized a human man with her more-than-iron hand. Elaine hadn't seen her saying anything, but the man had fainted dead away. The snake woman had him draped over her arm like an empty overcoat and was looking for somebody else to love.

Behind Elaine a low voice said, "He's coming soon."

"Who?" said Elaine to the Lady Panc Ashash, knowing perfectly well whom she meant, but not wanting to admit it, and busy with watching the circling ornithopter at the same time.

"The Hunter, of course," said the robot with the dear dead lady's voice. "He'll come for you. You'll be all right. I'm at the end of my wire. Look away, my dear. They are about to kill me again and I am afraid that the sight would distress you."

Fourteen robots, foot models, marched with military decision into the crowd. The true humans took heart from this and some of them began to slip away into doorways. Most of the real people were still so surprised that they stood around with the underpeople pawing at them, babbling the accents of love over and over again, the animal origin of their voices showing plainly.

The robot sergeant took no note of this. He approached the Lady Panc Ashash only to find Elaine standing in his way.

"I command you," she said, with all the passion of a working witch, "I command you to leave this place."

His eye-lenses were like dark-blue marbles floating in milk. They seemed swimmy and poorly-focused

as he looked her over. He did not reply but stepped around her, faster than her own body could intercept him. He made for the dear, dead Lady Panc Ashash.

Elaine, bewildered, realized that the Lady's robot body seemed more human than ever. The robot-sergeant confronted her.

This is the scene which we all remember, the first authentic picture tape of the entire incident:

The gold and black sergeant, his milky eyes staring at the Lady Panc Ashash.

The Lady herself, in the pleasant old robot body, lifting a commanding hand.

Elaine, distraught, half-turning as though she would grab the robot by his right arm. Her head is moving so rapidly that her black hair swings as she turns.

Charley-is-my-darling shouting, "I love, love, love!" at a small handsome man with mouse-colored hair. The man is gulping and saying nothing.

All this we know.

Then comes the unbelievable, which we now believe, the event for which the stars and skylanes were unprepared.

Mutiny.

Robot mutiny.

Disobedience in open daylight.

****

The words are hard to hear on the tape, but we can still make them out. The recording device on the police ornithopter had gotten a square fix on the face of the Lady Panc Ashash. Lip-readers can see the words plainly; non-lip-readers can hear the words the third or fourth time the tape is run through the eyebox.

Said the Lady, "Overridden."

Said the sergeant, "No, you're a robot."

"See for yourself. Read my brain. I am a robot. I am also a woman. You cannot disobey people. I am people. I love you. Furthermore, you are people. You think. We love each other. Try. Try to attack."

"I—I cannot," said the robot sergeant, his milky eyes seeming to spin with excitement. "You love me? You mean I'm alive? I exist?"

"With love, you do," said the Lady Panc Ashash. "Look at her," said the Lady, pointing to Joan, "because she has brought you love."

The robot looked and disobeyed the law. His squad looked with him.

He turned back to the Lady and bowed to her: "Then you know what we must do, if we cannot obey you and cannot disobey the others."

"Do it," she said sadly, "but know what you are doing. You are not really escaping two human commands. You are making a choice. You. That makes you men."

The sergeant turned to his squad of man-sized robots: "You hear that? She says we are men. I believe her. Do you believe her?"

"We do," they cried almost unanimously.

This is where the picture-tape ends, but we can imagine how the scene was concluded. Elaine had stopped short, just behind the sergeant-robot. The other robots had come up behind her. Charley-is-my-darling had stopped talking. Joan was in the act of lifting her hands in blessing, her warm brown dog eyes gone wide with pity and understanding.

People wrote down the things that we cannot see.

Apparently the robot-sergeant said, "Our love, dear people, and good-by. We disobey and die." He waved his hand to Joan. It is not certain whether he did or did not say, "Good-by, our lady and our liberator." Maybe some poet made up the second saying; the first one, we are sure about. And we are sure about the next word, the one which historians and poets all agree on. He turned to his men and said,

"Destruct."

Fourteen robots, the black-and-gold sergeant and his thirteen silver-blue foot soldiers, suddenly spurted white fire in the street of Kalma. They detonated their suicide buttons, thermite caps in their own heads. They had done something with no human command at all, on an order from another robot, the body of the Lady Panc Ashash, and she in turn had no human authority, but merely the word of the little dog-girl Joan, who had been made an adult in a single night.

Fourteen white flames made people and underpeople turn their eyes aside. Into the light there dropped a special police ornithopter. Out of it came the two Ladies, Arabella Underwood and Goroke. They lifted their forearms to shield their eyes from the blazing dying robots. They did not see the Hunter, who had moved mysteriously into an open window above the street and who watched the scene by putting his hands over his eyes and peeking through the slits between his fingers. While the people still stood blinded, they felt the fierce telepathic shock of the mind of the Lady Goroke taking command of the situation. That was her right, as a Chief of the Instrumentality. Some of the people, but not all of them, felt the outre countershock of Joan's mind reaching out to meet the Lady Goroke.

"I command," thought the Lady Goroke, her mind kept open to all beings.

"Indeed you do, but I love, I love you," thought Joan.

The first-order forces met.

They engaged.

The revolution was over. Nothing had really happened, but Joan had forced people to meet her. This was nothing like the poem about people and underpeople getting all mixed up. The mixup came much later, even after the time of C'mell. The poem is pretty, but is it dead wrong, as you can see for yourself:

You should ask me,
    Me, me, me,
Because I know—
I used to live
    On the Eastern Shore.
Men aren't men,
And women aren't women,
And people aren't people any more.

There is no Eastern Shore on Fomalhaut III anyhow; the people/underpeople crisis came much later than this. The revolution had failed, but history had reached its new turning-point, the quarrel of the two Ladies. They left their minds open out of sheer surprise. Suicidal robots and world-loving dogs were unheard-of. It was bad enough to have illegal underpeople on the prowl, but these new things—ah!

****

Destroy them all, said the Lady Goroke.

"Why?" thought the Lady Arabella Underwood.

Malfunction, replied Goroke.

"But they're not machines!"

Then they're animals—underpeople. Destroy! Destroy!

Then came the answer which has created our own time. It came from the Lady Arabella Underwood, and all Kalma heard it:

Perhaps they are people. They must have a trial.

The dog-girl Joan dropped to her knees. "I have succeeded, I have succeeded, I have succeeded! You can kill me, dear people, but I love, love, love you!"

The Lady Panc Ashash said quietly to Elaine, "I thought I would be dead by now. Really dead, at last. But I am not. I have seen the worlds turn, Elaine, and you have seen them turn with me."

The underpeople had fallen quiet as they heard the high-volume telepathic exchange between the two great Ladies.

The real soldiers dropped out of the sky, their ornithopters whistling as they hawked down to the ground. They ran up to the underpeople and began binding them with cord.

One soldier took a single look at the robot body of the Lady Panc Ashash. He touched it with his staff, and the staff turned cherry-red with heat. The robot-body, its head suddenly drained, fell to the ground in a heap of icy crystals.

Elaine walked between the frigid rubbish and the red-hot staff. She had seen Hunter.

She missed seeing the soldier who came up to Joan started to bind her and then fell back weeping, babbling, "She loves me! She loves me!"

The Lord Femtiosex, who commanded the inflying soldiers, bound Joan with cord despite her talking.

Grimly he answered her: "Of course you love me. You're a good dog. You'll die soon, doggy, but till then, you'll obey."

"I'm obeying," said Joan, "but I'm a dog and a person. Open your mind, man, and you'll feel it."

Apparently he did open his mind and felt the ocean of love riptiding into him. It shocked him. His arm swung up and back, the edge of the hand striking at Joan's neck for the ancient kill.

"No, you don't," thought the Lady Arabella Underwood. "That child is going to get a proper trial."

He looked at her and glared, Chief doesn't strike Chief, my Lady. Let go my arm.

Thought the Lady Arabella at him, openly and in public: "A trial, then."

In his anger he nodded at her. He would not think or speak to her in the presence of all the other people.

A soldier brought Elaine and Hunter before him.

"Sir and master, these are people, not underpeople. But they have dog-thoughts, cat-thoughts, goat-thoughts and robot-ideas in their heads. Do you wish to look?"

"Why look?" said the Lord Femtiosex, who was as blonde as the ancient pictures of Baldur, and oftentimes that arrogant as well. "The Lord Limaono is arriving. That's all of us. We can have the trial here and now."

Elaine felt cords bite into her wrists; she heard the Hunter murmur comforting words to her, words which she did not quite understand.

"They will not kill us," he murmured, "though we will wish they had, before this day is out. Everything is happening as she said it would, and—"

"Who is that she?" interrupted Elaine.

"She? The lady, of course. The dear dead Lady Panc Ashash, who has worked wonders after her own death, merely with the print of her personality on the machine. Who do you think told me what to do? Why did we wait for you to condition Joan to greatness? Why did the people way down in Clown Town keep on raising one D'joan after another, hoping that hope and a great wonder would occur?"

"You knew?" said Elaine. "You knew ... before it happened?"

"Of course," said the Hunter, "not exactly, but more or less. She had had hundreds of years after death inside that computer. She had time for billions of thoughts. She saw how it would be if it had to be, and I—"

"Shut up, you people!" roared the Lord Femtiosex. "You are making the animals restless with your babble. Shut up, or I will stun you!"

Elaine fell silent.

The Lord Femtiosex glanced around at her, ashamed at having made his anger naked before another person. He added quietly:

"The trial is about to begin. The one that the tall Lady ordered."

IX

You all know about the trial, so there is no need to linger over it. There is another picture of San Shigonanda, the one from his conventional period, which shows it very plainly.

The street had filled full of real people, crowding together to see something which would ease the boredom of perfection and time. They all had numbers or number-codes instead of names. They were handsome, well, dully happy. They even looked a great deal alike, similar in their handsomeness, their health and their underlying boredom. All of them had a total of four hundred years to live. None of them knew real war, even though the extreme readiness of the soldiers showed vain practice of hundreds of years. The people were beautiful, but they felt themselves useless, and they were quietly desperate without knowing it themselves. This is all clear from the painting, and from the wonderful way that San Shigonanda has of forming them in informal ranks and letting the calm blue light of day shine down on their handsome, hopeless features.

With the underpeople, the artist performs real wonders.

Joan herself is bathed in light. Her light brown hair and her doggy brown eyes express softness and tenderness. He even conveys the idea that her new body is terribly new and strong, that she is virginal and ready to die, that she is a mere girl and yet completely fearless. The posture of love shows in her legs: she stands lightly. Love shows in her hands: they are turned outward toward the judges. Love shows in her smile: it is confident.

And the judges!

The artist has them, too. The Lord Femtiosex, calm again, his narrow sharp lips expressing perpetual rage against a universe which has grown too small for him. The Lord Limaono, wise, twice-reborn, sluggardly, but alert as a snake behind the sleepy eyes and the slow smile. The Lady Arabella Underwood, the tallest true-human present, with her Norstrilian pride and the arrogance of great wealth, along with the capricious tenderness of great wealth, showing in the way that she sat, judging her fellow-judges instead of the prisoners. The Lady Goroke, bewildered at last, frowning at a play of fortune which she does not understand. The artist has it all.

And you have the real view-tapes, too, if you want to go to a museum. The reality is not as dramatic as the famous painting, but it has value of its own. The voice of Joan, dead these many centuries, is still strangely moving. It is the voice of a dog-carved-into-man, but it is also the voice of a great lady. The image of the Lady Panc Ashash must have taught her that, along with what she had learned from Elaine and Hunter in the antechamber above the Brown and Yellow Corridor of Englok.

The words of the trial, they too have survived. Many of them have became famous, all across the worlds.

Joan said, during inquiry, "But it is the duty of life to find more than life, and to exchange itself for that higher goodness."

Joan commented, upon sentence. "My body is your property, but my love is not. My love is my own, and I shall love you fiercely while you kill me."

When the soldiers had killed Charley-is-my-darling and were trying to hack off the head of the S'woman until one of them thought to freeze her into crystals, Joan said:

"Should we be strange to you, we animals of earth that you have brought to the stars? We shared the same sun, the same oceans, the same sky. We are all from Manhome. How do you know that we would not have caught up with you if we had all stayed at home together? My people were dogs. They loved you before you made a woman-shaped thing out of my mother. Should I not love you still? The miracle is not that you have made people out of us. The miracle is that it took us so long to understand it. We are people now, and so are you. You will be sorry for what you are going to do to me, but remember that I shall love your sorrow, too, because great and good things will come out of it."

The Lord Limaono slyly asked, "What is a 'miracle'?"

And her words were, "There is knowledge from Earth which you have not yet found again. There is the name of the Nameless one. There are secrets hidden in time from you. Only the dead and the unborn can know them right now: I am both."

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The scene is familiar, and yet we will never understand it.

We know what the lords Femtiosex and Limaono thought they were doing. They were maintaining established order and they were putting it on tape. The minds of men can live together only if the basic ideas are communicated. Nobody has, even now, found out a way to recording telepathy directly into an instrument. We get pieces and snatches and wild jumbles, but we never get a satisfactory record of what one of the great ones was trasmitting to another. The two male chiefs were trying to put on record all those things about the episode which would teach careless people not to play with the lives of the underpeople. They were even trying to make underpeople understand the rules and designs by virtue of which they had been transformed from animals into the highest servants of man. This would have been hard to do, given the bewildering events of the last few hours, even from one Chief of the Instrumentality to another; for the general public, it was almost impossible. The outpouring from the Brown and Yellow Corridor was wholly unexpected, even though the Lady Goroke had surprised D'joan; the mutiny of the robot police posed problems which would have to be discussed halfway across the galaxy. Furthermore, the dog-girl was making points which had some verbal validity. If they

were left in the form of mere words without proper context, they might affect heedless or impressionable minds. A bad idea can spread like a mutated germ. If it is at all interesting, it can leap from one mind to another halfway across the universe before it has a stop put to it. Look at the ruinous fads and foolish fashions which have nuisanced mankind even in the ages of the highest orderliness. We today know that variety, flexibility, danger and the seasoning of a little hate can make love and life bloom as they never bloomed before; we know it is better to live with the complications of thirteen thousand old languages resurrected from the dead ancient past than it is to live with the cold blind-alley perfection of the Old Common Tongue. We know a lot of things which the Lords Femtiosex and Limaono did not, and before we consider them stupid or cruel, we must remember that centuries passed before mankind finally came to grips with the problem of the underpeople and decided what "life" was within the limits of the human community.

Finally, we have the testimony of the two Lords themselves. They both lived to very advanced ages, and toward the end of their lives they were worried and annoyed to find that the episode of D'joan overshadowed all the bad things which had not happened during their long careers—bad things which had labored to forestall for the protection of the planet Fomalhaut III—and they were distressed to see themselves portrayed as casual, cruel men when in fact they were nothing of the sort. If they had seen that the story of Joan on Fomalhaut III would get to be what it is today—one of the great romances of mankind, along with the story of C'mell or the romance of the lady who sailed The Soul—they would not only have been disappointed, but they would have been justifiably angry at the fickleness of mankind as well. Their roles are clear, because they made them clear. The Lord Femtiosex accepts the responsibility for the notion of fire; the Lord Limaono agrees that he concurred in the decision. Both of them, many years later, reviewed the tapes of the scene and agreed that something which the Lady Arabella Underwood had said or thought—

Something had made them do it.

But even with the tapes to refresh and clarify their memories, they could not say what.

We have even put computers on the job of cataloguing every word and every inflection of the whole trial, but they have not pinpointed the critical point either.

And the Lady Arabella—nobody ever questioned her. They didn't dare. She went back to her own planet of Old North Australia, surrounded by the immense treasure of the santaclara drug, and no planet is going to pay at the rate of two thousand million credits a day for the privilege of sending an investigator to talk to a lot of obstinate, simple, wealthy Norstrilian peasants who will not talk to off-worlders anyhow. The Norstrilians charge that sum for the admission of any guest not selected by their own initiative so we will their own invitation; so we will never know what the lady Arabella Underwood said or did after she went home. The Norstrilians said they did not wish to discuss the matter, and if we do not wish to go back to living a mere seventy years we had better not anger the only planet which produces stroon.

And the Lady Goroke—she, poor thing, went mad.

People did not know it till later, but there was no word to be gotten out of her. She performed the odd actions which we now know to be a part of the dynasty of Lords Jestocost, who forced themselves by diligence and merit upon the Instrumentality for two hundred and more years. But on the case of Joan she had nothing to say.

The trial is therefore a scene about which we know everything—and nothing.

We think that we know the physical facts of the life of D'joan who became Joan. We know about the Lady Panc Ashash who whispered endlessly to the underpeople about a justice yet to come. We know the whole life of the unfortunate Elaine and of her involvement with the case. We know that there were in those centuries, when underpeople first developed, many warrens in which illegal underpeople used their near-human wits, their animal cunning and their gift of speech to survive even when mankind had declared them surplus. The Brown and Yellow Corridor was not by any means the only one of its kind. We even know what happened to the Hunter.

For the other underpeople—Charley-is-my-darling, Baby-baby, Mabel, the S'woman, Orson and all the others—we have the tapes of the trial itself. They were not tried by anybody. They were put to death by the soldiers on the spot, as soon as it was plain that their testimony would not be needed. As witnesses, they could live a few minutes or an hour; as animals, they were already outside the regulations.

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Ah, we know all about that now, and yet know nothing. Dying is simple, though we tend to hide it away. The how of dying is a minor scientific matter; the when of dying is a problem to each of us, whether he lives on the old-fashioned 400-year-life planets or on the radical new ones where the freedoms of disease and accident have been reintroduced; the why of it is still as shocking to us as it was to pre-atomic man, who used to cover farmland with the boxed bodies of his dead. These underpeople died as no animals had ever died before. Joyfully.

One mother held her children up for the soldier to kill them all.

She must have been of rat origin, because she had septuplets in closely matching form.

The tape shows us the picture of the soldier getting ready.

The rat-woman greets him with a smile and holds up her seven babies. Little blondes they are, wearing pink or blue bonnets, all of them with glowing cheeks and bright little blue eyes.

"Put them on the ground," said the soldier. "I'm going to kill you and them too." On the tape, we can hear the nervous peremptory edge of his voice. He added one word, as though he had already begun to think that he had to justify himself to these underpeople. "Orders," he added.

"It doesn't matter if I hold them, soldier. I'm their mother. They'll feel better if they die easily with their mother near. I love you, soldier. I love all people. You are my brother, even though my blood is rat blood and yours is human. Go ahead and kill them soldier. I can't even hurt you. Can't you understand it? I love you, soldier. We share a common speech, common hopes, common fears, and a common death. That is what Joan has taught us all. Death is not bad, soldier. It just comes badly, sometimes, but you will remember me after you have killed me and my babies. You will remember that I love you now —"

The soldier, we see on the tape, can stand it no longer. He clubs his weapon, knocks the woman down; the babies scatter on the ground. We see his booted heel rise up and crush down against their heads. We hear the wet popping sound of the little heads breaking, the sharp cut-off of the baby wails as they die. We get one last view of the rat-woman herself. She had stood up again by the time the seventh baby is

killed. She offers her hand to the soldier to shake. Her face is dirty and bruised, a trickle of blood running down her left cheek. Even now, we know she is a rat, an underperson, a modified animal, a nothing. And yet we, even we across the centuries, feel that she had somehow become more of a person than we are—that she dies human and fulfilled. We know that she has triumphed over death: we have not.

We see the soldier looking straight at her with eerie horror, as though her simple love, were some unfathomable device from an alien source.

We hear her next words on the tape:

"Soldier, I love all of you—"

His weapon could have killed her in a fraction of a second, if he had used it properly. But he didn't. He clubbed it and hit her, as though his heat-remover had been a wooden club and himself a wild man instead of part of the elite guard of Kalma.

We know what happens then.

She falls under his blows. She points. Points straight at Joan, wrapped in fire and smoke.

The rat-woman screams one last time, screams into the lens of the robot camera as though she were talking not to the soldier but to all mankind:

"You can't kill her. You can't kill love. I love you, soldier, love you. You can't kill that. Remember—"

His last blow catches her in the face.

She falls back on the pavement. He thrusts his foot, as we can see by the tape, directly on her throat. He leaps forward in an odd little jig, bringing his full weight down on her fragile neck. He swings while stamping downward, and we then see his face, full on in the camera.

It is the face of a weeping child, bewildered by hurt and shocked by the prospect of more hurt to come.

He had started to do his duty, and duty had gone wrong, all wrong.

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Poor man. He must have been one of the first men in the new worlds who tried to use weapons against love. Love is a sour and powerful ingredient to meet in the excitement of battle.

All the underpeople died that way. Most of them died smiling, saying the word "love" or the name "Joan."

The bear-man Orson had been kept to the very end.

He died very oddly. He died laughing.

The soldier lifted his pellet-thrower and aimed it straight at Orson's forehead. The pellets were 22

millimeters in diameter and had a muzzle velocity of only 125 meters per second. In that manner, they could stop recalcitrant robots or evil underpeople, without any risk of penetrating buildings and hurting the true people who might be inside, out of sight.

Orson looks, on the tape the robots made, as though he knows perfectly well what the weapon is. (He probably did. Underpeople used to live with the danger of a violent death hanging over them from birth until removal.) He shows no fear of it in the pictures we have; he begins to laugh. His laughter is warm, generous, relaxed—like the friendly laughter of a happy foster-father who has found a guilty and embarrassed child, knowing full well that the child expects punishment but will not get it.

"Shoot, man. You can't kill me, man. I'm in your mind. I love you. Joan taught us. Listen man. There is no death. Not for love. Ho, ho, ho, poor fellow, don't be afraid of me. Shoot! You're the unlucky one. You're going to live. And remember. And remember. And remember. I've made you human, fellow."

The soldier croaks, "What did you say?"

"I'm saving you, man. I'm turning you into a real human being. With the power of Joan. The power of love. Poor guy! go ahead and shoot me if it makes you uncomfortable to wait. You'll do it anyhow."

This time we do not see the soldier's face, but the tightness of his back and neck betray his own internal stress.

We see the big broad bear face blossom forth in an immense splash of red as the soft heavy pellet plow into it.

Then the camera turns to something else.

A little boy, probably a fox, but very finished in his human shape.

He was bigger than a baby, but not big enough, like the larger underchildren, to have understood the deathless importance of Joan's teaching.

He was the only one of the group who behaved like an ordinary underperson. He broke and ran.

He was clever: He ran among the spectators, so that the soldier could not use pellets or heat-reducers on him without hurting an actual human being. He ran and jumped and dodged, fighting passively but desperately for his life.

At last one of the spectators—a tall man with a silver hat—tripped him up. The fox-boy fell to the pavement, skinning his palms and knees. Just as he looked up to see who might be coming at him, a bullet caught him neatly in the head. He fell a little way forward, dead.

People die. We know how they die. We have seen them die shy and quiet in the Dying Houses. We have seen others go into the 400-year-rooms, which have no door-knobs and no cameras on the inside. We have seen pictures of many dying in natural disasters, where the robot crews took picture-tapes for the record and the investigation later on. Death is not uncommon, and it is very unpleasant.

But this time, death itself was different. All the fear of death—except for the one little fox-boy, too young to understand and too old to wait for death in his mother's arms—had gone out of the

underpeople. They met death willingly, with love and calmness in their bodies, their voices, their demeanor. It did not matter whether they lived long enough to know what happened to Joan herself: they had perfect confidence in her, anyway.

This indeed was the new weapon, love and the good death.

Crawlie, with her pride, had missed it all.

The investigators later found the body of Crawlie in the corridor. It was possible to reconstruct who she had been and what had happened to her. The computer in which the bodiless image of the Lady Panc Ashash survived for a few days after the trial was, of course, found and disassembled. Nobody thought at the time to get her opinions and last words. A lot of historians have gnashed their teeth over that.

The details are therefore clear. The archives even preserve the long interrogation and responses concerning Elaine, when she was processed and made clear after the trial. But we do not know how the idea of "fire" came in.

Somewhere, beyond sight of the tape-scanner, the word must have been passed between the four Chiefs of the Instrumentality who were conducting the trial. There is the protest of the Head of Birds (Robot), or police chief of Kalma, a Subchief named Fisi.

The records show his appearance. He comes in at the right side of the scene, bows respectfully to the four Chiefs and lifts his right hand in the traditional sign for "beg to interrupt," an odd twist of the elevated hand which the actors have found it very difficult to copy when they tried to put the whole story of Joan and Elaine into a single drama. (In fact, he had no more idea that future ages would be studying his casual appearance than did the others. The whole episode was characterized by haste and precipitateness, in the light of what we now know.) The Lord Limaono says:

"Interruption refused. We are making a decision."

The Chief of Birds spoke up anyhow.

"My words are for your decision, my Lords and my Ladies."

"Say it, then," commanded the Lady Goroke, "but be brief."

"Shut down the viewers. Destroy that animal. Brainwash the spectators. Get amnesia yourselves, for this one hour. This whole scene is dangerous. I am nothing but a supervisor of ornithopters, keeping perfect order, but I—"

"We have heard enough," said the Lord Femtiosex. "You manage your birds and we'll run the worlds. How do you dare to think 'like a Chief'? We have responsibilities which you can't even guess at. Stand back."

Fisi, in the pictures, stands back, his face sullen. In that particular frame of scenes, one can see some of the spectators going away. It was time for lunch and they had become hungry; they had no idea that they were going to miss the greatest atrocity in history, about which a thousand and more grand operas would be written.

Femtiosex then moved to the climax. "More knowledge, not less, is the answer to this problem. I have heard about something which is not as bad as the Planet Shayol, but which can do just as well for an exhibit on a civilised world. You there," said he to Fisi, the Chief of Birds, "bring oil and a spray. Immediately."

Joan looked at him with compassion and longing, but she said nothing. She suspected what he was going to do. As a girl, as a dog, she hated it; as a revolutionary, she welcomed it as the consummation of her mission.

The Lord Femtiosex lifted his right hand. He curled the ring finger and the little finger, putting his thumb over them. That left the first two fingers extended straight out. At that time, the sign from one Chief to another, meaning, "private channels, telepathic, immediate." It has since been adopted by underpeople as their emblem for political unity.

The four Chiefs went into a trancelike state and shared the judgment.

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Joan began to sing in a soft, protesting, dog-like wail, using the off-key plainsong which the underpeople had sung just before their hour of decision when they left the Brown and Yellow Corridor. Her words were nothing special, repetitions of the "people, dear people, I love you" which she had been communicating ever since she came to the surface of Kalma. But the way she did it has defied imitation across the centuries. There are thousands of lyrics and melodies which call themselves, one way and another, The Song of Joan, but none of them come near to the heart-wrenching pathos of the original tapes. The singing, like her own personality, was unique.

The appeal was deep. Even the real people tried to listen, shifting their eyes from the four immobile Chiefs of the Instrumentality to the brown-eyed singing girl. Some of them just could not stand it. In true human fashion, they forgot why they were there and went absent-mindly home to lunch.

Suddenly Joan stopped.

Her voice ringing clearly across the crowd, she cried out:

"The end is near, dear people. The end is near."

Eyes all shifted to the two Lords and the two Ladies of the Instrumentality. The Lady Arabella Underwood looked grim after the telepathic conference. The Lady Goroke was haggard with wordless grief. The two Lords looked severe and resolved.

It was the Lord Femtiosex who spoke.

"We have tried you, animal. Your offense is great. You have lived illegally. For that the penalty is death. You have interfered with robots in some manner which we do not understand. For that brand-new crime, the penalty should be more than death; and I have recommended a punishment which was applied on a planet of the Violet Star. You have also said many unlawful and improper things, detracting from the happiness and security of mankind. For that the penalty is reeducation, but since you have two death sentences already, this does not matter. Do you have anything to say before I pronounce sentence?"

"If you light a fire today, my lord, it will never be put out in the hearts of men. You can destroy me. You can reject my love. You cannot destroy the goodness in yourselves, no matter how much goodness may anger you—"

"Shut up!" he roared. "I asked for a plea, not a speech. You will die by fire, here and now. What do you say to that?"

"I love you, dear people."

Femtiosex nodded to the men of the Chief of Birds, who had dragged a barrel and a spray info the street in front of Joan.

"Tie her to that post," he commanded. "Spray her. Light her. Are the tape-makers in focus? We want this to be recorded and known. If the underpeople try this again, they will see that mankind controls the worlds." He looked at Joan and his eyes seemed to go out of focus. In an unaccustomed voice he said, "I am not a bad man, little dog-girl, but you are a bad animal and we must make an example of you. Do you understand that?"

"Femtiosex," she cried, leaving out his title, "I am very sorry for you. I love you too."

With these words of hers, his face became clouded and angry again. He brought his right hand down in a chopping gesture.

Fisi copied the gesture and the men operating the barrel and spray began to squirt a hissing stream of oil on Joan. Two guards had already chained her to the lamp post, using an improvised chain of handcuffs to make sure that she stood upright and remained in plain sight of the crowd.

"Fire," said Femtiosex.

Elaine felt the Hunter's body, beside her, cramp sharply. He seemed to strain intensely. For herself, she felt the way she had felt when she was defrozen and taken out of the adiabatic pod in which she had made the trip from earth—sick to her stomach, confused in her mind, emotions rocking back and forth inside her.

Hunter whispered to her, "I tried to reach her mind so that she would die easy. Somebody else got there first. I ... don't know who it is."

Elaine stared.

The fire was being brought. Suddenly it touched the oil and Joan flamed up like a human torch.

X

The burning of D'joan at Fomalhaut took very little time, but the ages will not forget it.

Femtiosex had taken the cruelest step of all.

By telepathic invasion he had suppressed her human mind, so that only the primitive canine remained.

Joan did not stand still like a martyred queen.

She struggled against the flames which licked her and climbed her. She howled and shrieked like a dog in pain, like an animal whose brain—good though it is—cannot comprehend the senselessness of human cruelty.

The result was directly contrary to what the Lord Femtiosex had planned.

The crowd of people stirred forward, not with curiosity but because of compassion. They had avoided the broad areas of the street on which the dead underpeople lay as they had been killed, some pooled in their own blood, same broken by the hands of robots, some reduced to piles of frozen crystal. They walked over the dead to watch the dying, but their watching was not the witless boredom of people who never see a spectacle; it was the movement of living things, instinctive and deep, toward the sight of another living thing in a position of danger and ruin.

Even the guard who had held Elaine and Hunter by gripping Hunter's arm—even he moved forward a few unthinking steps. Elaine found herself in the first row of the spectators, the acrid, unfamiliar smell of burning oil making her nose twitch, the howls of the dying dog-girl tearing through her eardrums into her brain. Joan was turning and twisting in the fire now, trying to avoid the flames which wrapped her tighter than clothing. The odor of something sickening and strange reached the crowd. Few of them had ever smelled the stink of burning meat before.

Joan gasped.

In the ensuing seconds of silence, Elaine heard something she had never expected to hear before—the weeping of grown human beings. Men and women stood there sobbing and not knowing why they sobbed.

Femtiosex loomed over the crowd, obsessed by the failure of his demonstration. He did not know that the Hunter, with a thousand kills behind him, was committing the legal outrage of peeping the mind of a Chief of the Instrumentality.

The Hunter whispered to Elaine, "In a minute I'll try it. She deserves something better than that..."

Elaine did not ask what. She too was weeping.

The whole crowd became aware that a soldier was calling. It took them several seconds to look away from the burning, dying Joan.

The soldier was an ordinary one. Perhaps he was the one who had been unable to tie Joan with bonds a few minutes ago, when the Lords decreed that she be taken into custody.

He was shouting now, shouting frantically and wildly, shaking his fist at the Lord Femtiosex.

"You're a liar, you're a coward, you're a fool, and I challenge you—"

The Lord Femtiosex became aware of the man and of what he was yelling. He came out of his deep

concentration and said, mildly for so wild a time:

"What do you mean?"

"This is a crazy show. There is no girl here. No fire. Nothing, You are hallucinating the whole lot of us for some horrible reason of your own, and I'm challenging you for it, you animal, you fool, you coward."

****

In normal times even a Lord had to accept a challenge or adjust the matter with clear talk.

This was no normal time.

The Lord Femtiosex said, "All this is real. I deceive no one."

"If it's real, Joan, I'm with you!" shrieked the young soldier. He jumped in front of the jet of oil before the other soldiers could turn it off and then he leapt into the fire beside Joan.

Her hair had burned away but her features were still clear. She had stopped the doglike whining shriek. Femtiosex had been interrupted. She gave the soldier who had begun to burn as he stood voluntarily beside her, the smiles. Then she frowned, the gentlest and most feminine of smiles. Then she frowned, as though there were something which she should remember to do, despite the pain and terra which surrounded her.

"Now!" whispered the Hunter. He began to hunt the Lord Femtiosex as sharply as he had ever sought the alien, native minds of Fomalhaut III.

The crowd could not tell what had happened to the Lord Femtiosex. Had he turned coward? Had he gone mad? (Actually, the Hunter, by using every gram of the power of his mind, had momentarily taken Femtiosex courting in the skies; he and Femtiosex were both male bird-like beasts, singing wildly for the beautiful female who lay hidden in the landscape far, far below.)

Joan was free, and she knew she was free.

She sent out her message. It knocked both Hunter and Femtiosex out of thinking; it flooded Elaine; it made even Fisi, the Chief of Birds, breathe quietly. She called so loudly that within the hour messages were pouring in from the other cities to Kalma, asking what had happened. She thought a single message, not words. But in words it came to this:

"Loved ones, you kill me. This is my fate. I bring love, and love must die to live on. Love asks nothing, does nothing. Love thinks nothing. Love is knowing yourself and knowing all other people and things. Know—and rejoice. I die for all of you now, dear ones—"

She opened her eyes for a last time, opened her mouth, sucked in the raw flame and slumped forward. The soldier, who had kept his nerve while his clothing and body burned, ran out of the fire, afire himself, toward his squad. A shot stopped him and he pitched flat forward.

The weeping of the people was audible throughout the streets. Underpeople, tame and licensed ones,

stood shamelessly among them and wept too.

The Lord Femtiosex turned wearily back to his colleagues.

The face of Lady Goroke was a sculptured, frozen caricature of sorrow.

He turned to the Lady Arabella Underwood. "I seem to have done something wrong, my lady. Take over, please."

The Lady Arabella stood up. She called to Fisi, "Put out that fire."

She looked out over the crowd. Her hard, honest Norstrilian features were unreadable. Elaine, watching her, shivered at the thought of a whole planet full of people as tough, obstinate and clever as these.

"It's over," said the Lady Arabella. "People, go away. Robots, clean up. Underpeople, to your jobs."

She looked at Elaine and the Hunter. "I know who you are and I suspect what you have been doing. Soldiers, take them away."

The body of Joan was fire-blackened. The face did not look particularly human any more; the last burst of fire had caught her in the nose and eyes. Her young, girlish breasts showed with heart-wrenching immodesty that she had been young and female once. Now she was dead, just dead.

The soldiers would have shoveled her into a box if she had been an underperson. Instead, they paid her the honors of war that they would have given to one of their own comrades or to an important civilian in time of disaster. They unslung a litter, put the little blackened body on it and covered the body with their own flag. No one had told them to do so.

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As their own soldier led them up the road toward the Waterrock, where the houses and offices of the military were located, Elaine saw that he too had been crying.

She started to ask him what he thought of it, but Hunter stopped her with a shake of the head. He later told her that the soldier might be punished for talking with them.

When they got to the office, they found the lady Goroke already there.

The Lady Goroke already there ... It became a nightmare in the weeks that followed. She had gotten over her grief and was conducting an inquiry into the case of Elaine and D'joan.

The Lady Goroke already there ... She was waiting when they slept. Her image, or perhaps herself, sat in on all the endless interrogations. She was particularly interested in the chance meeting of the dead lady Panc Ashash, the misplaced witch Elaine, and the non-adjusted man, the Hunter.

The Lady Goroke already there ... She asked them everything, but she told them nothing.

Except for once.

Once she burst out, violently personal after endless hours of formal, official work, "Your minds will be cleansed when we get through, so it wouldn't matter how much else you know. Do you know that this has hurt me—me!—all the way to the depths of everything I believe in?"

They shook their heads.

"I'm going to have a child, and I'm going back to Manhome to have it. And I'm going to do the genetic coding myself. I'm going to call him Jestocost. That's one of the Ancient Tongues, the Paroskii one, for 'cruelty,' to remind him where he comes from, and why. And he, or his son, or his son will bring justice back into the world and solve the puzzle of the underpeople. What do you think of that? On second thought, don't think. It's none of your business, and I am going to do it anyway."

They stared at her sympathetically, but they were too wound up in the problems of their own survival to extend her much sympathy or advice. The body of Joan had been pulverized and blown into the air, because the Lady Goroke was afraid that the underpeople would make a good-place out of it; she felt that way herself, and she knew that if she herself were tempted, the underpeople would be even more tempted.

Elaine never knew what happened to the bodies of all the other people who had turned themselves, under Joan's leadership, from animals into mankind, and who had followed the wild, foolish march out of the Tunnel of Englok into the Upper City of Kalma. Was it really wild? Was it really foolish? If they had stayed where they were, they might have had a few days or months or years of life, but sooner or later the robots would have found them and they would have been exterminated like the vermin which they were. Perhaps the death they had chosen was better. Joan did say, "It's the mission of life always to look for something better than itself, and then to try to trade life itself for meaning."

At last, the Lady Goroke called them in and said, "Good-by, you two. It's foolish, saying good-by, when an hour from now you will remember neither me nor Joan. You've finished your work here. I've set up a lovely job for you. You won't have to live in a city. You will be weather-watchers, roaming the hills and watching for all the little changes which the machines can't interpret fast enough. You will have whole lifetimes of marching and picknicking and camping together. I've told the technicians to be very careful, because you two are very much in love with each other. When they re-route your synapses, I want that love to be there with you."

They each knelt and kissed her hand. They never wittingly saw her again. In later years they sometimes saw a fashionable ornithopter soaring gently over their camp, with an elegant woman peering out of the side of it; they had no memories to know that it was the Lady Goroke, recovered from madness, watching over them.

****

Their new life was their final life.

Of Joan and the Brown and Yellow Corridor, nothing remained.

They were both very sympathetic toward animals, but they might have been this way even if they had never shared in the wild political gamble of the dear dead Lady Panc Ashash.

One time a strange thing happened. An underman from an elephant was working in a small valley,

creating an exquisite rock garden for some important official of the Instrumentality who might later glimpse the garden once or twice a year. Elaine was busy watching the weather, and the Hunter had forgotten that he had ever hunted, so that neither of them tried to peep the underman's mind. He was a huge fellow, right at the maximum permissable size—five times the gross stature of a man. He had smiled at them friendily in the past.

One evening he brought them fruit. Such fruit! Rare off-world items which a year of requests would not have obtained for ordinary people like them. He smiled his big, shy, elephant smile, put the fruit down and prepared to lumber off.

"Wait a minute," cried Elaine, "why are you giving us this? Why us?"

"For the sake of Joan," said the elephant man.

"Who's Joan?" said the Hunter.

The elephant man looked sympathetically at them. "That's all right. You don't remember her, but I do."

"But what did Joan do?" said Elaine.

"She loved you. She loved us all," said the elephant man. He turned quickly, so as to say no more. With incredible deftness for so heavy a person, he climbed speedily into the fierce lovely rocks above them and was gone.

"I wish we had known her," said Elaine. "She sounds very nice."

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In that year there was born the man who was to be the first Lord Jestocost.