



**PHILIP K. DICK**

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**THE CRACK IN SPACE**

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MARINER BOOKS  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT

*Boston New York*

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THE YOUNG COUPLE, black-baked, dark-skinned, probably Mexican or Puerto Rican, stood nervously at Herb Lackmore's counter and the boy, the husband, said in a low voice, 'Sir, we want to be put to sleep. We want to become *bibs*.'

Rising from his desk, Lackmore walked to the counter and although he did not like Cols—there seemed to be more of them every month, coming into his Oakland branch office of the U.S. Department on Special Public Welfare—he said in a pleasant tone of voice designed to reassure the two of them, 'Have you thought it over carefully, folks? It's a big step. You might be out for, say, a few hundred years. Have you shopped for any *professional* advice about this?'

The boy, glancing at his wife, swallowed and murmured. 'No, sir. We just decided between us. Neither of us can get a job and we're about to be evicted from our dorm. We don't even own a wheel, and what can you do without a wheel? You can't go anywhere. You can't even look for work.' He was not a bad-looking boy, Lackmore noticed. Possibly eighteen, he still wore the coat and trousers which were army-separation issue. The girl had long hair; she was quite small, with black, bright eyes and a delicately-formed almost doll-like face. She never ceased watching her husband.

'I'm going to have a baby,' the girl blurted.

'Aw, the heck with both of you,' Lackmore said in disgust, drawing his breath in sharply. 'You both get right out of here.'

Ducking their heads guiltily the boy and his wife turned and started from Lackmore's office, back outside onto the busy downtown early-morning Oakland, California street.

'Go see an abort-consultant!' Lackmore called after them irritably. He resented having to help them, but obviously someone had to; look at the spot they had gotten themselves into. Because no doubt they were living on a government military pension, and if the girl was pregnant the pension would automatically be withdrawn.

Plucking hesitantly at the sleeve of his wrinkled coat the Col boy said, 'Sir, how do we find an abort-consultant?'

The ignorance of the dark-skinned strata, despite the government's ceaseless educational campaigns. No wonder their women were often preg. 'Look in the phone book,' Lackmore said. 'Under *abortionists, therapeutic*. Then the subsection *advisors*. Got it?'

'Yes, sir. Thank you.' The boy nodded rapidly.

'Can you read?'

'Yes. I stayed in school until I was thirteen.' On the boy's face fierce pride showed; his black eyes gleamed.

Lackmore returned to reading his homeopape; he did not have any more time to offer gratis. No wonder they wanted to become *bibs*. Preserved, unchanged, in a government warehouse, year after year, until—would the labor market ever improve? Lackmore personally doubted it and he had been around a long time; he was ninety-five years old, a *jerry*. In his time he had put to sleep thousands of people, almost all of them, like this couple, young. And—dark.

The door of the office shut. The young couple had gone again as quietly as they had come.

Sighing, Lackmore began to read once more the pape's article on the divorce trial of Lurton D. Sands, Jr, the most sensational event now taking place; as always, he read every word of it avidly.

This day began for Darius Pethel with vidphone calls from irate customers wanting to know why their Jiffi-scuttlers hadn't been fixed. Any time now, he told them soothingly, and hoped that Erickson wa

already at work in the service department of Pethel Jiffi-scuttler Sales & Service.

~~As soon as he was off the vidphone Pethel searched among the litter on his desk for the day's copy of £7.5. *Business Report*; he of course kept abreast of all the economic developments on the planet. This alone set him above his employees; this, his wealth, and his advanced age.~~

'What's it say?' his salesman, Stu Hadley, asked, standing in the office doorway, robant magnetic broom in hand, pausing in his activity.

Silently, Pethel read the major headline.

EFFECTS ON THE NATION'S BUSINESS

COMMUNITY OF A NEGRO PRESIDENT

And there, in 3-D, animated, was a pic of James Briskin; the pic came to life, Candidate Briskin smiled in miniature, as Pethel pressed the tab beneath it. The Negro's mustache-obscured lips moved and above his head a balloon appeared, filled with the words he was saying.

*My first task will be to find an equitable disposition of the tens of millions of sleeping.*

'And dump every last bib back on the labor market,' Pethel murmured, releasing the word tab. 'this guy gets in, the nation's ruined.' But it was inevitable. Sooner or later, there would be a Negro president; after all, since the Event of 1993 there had been more Cols than Caucs.

Gloomily, he turned to page two for the latest on the Lurton Sands scandal; maybe that would cheer him up, the political news being so bad. The famous org-trans surgeon had become involved in sensational contested divorce suit with his equally famous wife Myra, the abort-consultant. All sorts of juicy details were beginning to filter out, charges on both sides. Dr Sands, according to the homeopapes, had a mistress; that was why Myra had stomped out, and rightly so. Not like the old days, Pethel thought, recalling his youth in the late decades of the twentieth century. Now it was 2080 and public—and private—morality had worsened.

Why would Dr Sands want a mistress anyhow, Pethel wondered, when there's that Golden Door Moments of Bliss satellite passing overhead every day? They say there're five thousand girls to choose from.

He, himself, had never visited Thisbe Olt's satellite; he did not approve of it, nor did very many *jerries*—it was too radical a solution to the overpopulation problem, and seniors, by letter and telegram, had fought its passage in Congress back in '72. But the bill had gone through anyhow . . . probably, he reflected, because most Congressmen had the idea of taking a jet'ab up there themselves. And no doubt regularly did, now.

'If we whites stick together—' Hadley began.

'Listen,' Pethel said, *that time has passed*. If Briskin can dispose of the bibs, more power to him; personally, it keeps me awake at night, thinking of all those people, most of them just kids, lying in those gov warehouses year after year. Look at the talent going to waste. It's—bureaucratic! Only a swollen socialist government would have dreamed up a solution like that.' He eyed his salesman harshly. 'If you hadn't gotten this job with me, even you might—'

Hadley interrupted quietly, 'But I'm white.'

Reading on further, Pethel saw that Thisbe Olt's satellite had grossed a billion U.S. dollars in 2079. Wow, he said to himself. That's big business. Before him was a pic of Thisbe; with cadmium-white hair and little high conical breasts she was a superb sight, an aesthetic as well as a sexual treat. The pic showed her serving male guests of her satellite a tequila sour—an added fillip because tequil being derived from the mescal plant, had long been illegal on Earth proper.

Pethel touched the word tab of Thisbe's pic and at once Thisbe's eyes sparkled, her head turned, her stable, dense breasts vibrated subtly, and in the balloon above her head the proper words formed.

*Embarrassing personal urgency, Mr American businessman? Do as many doctors recommend: visit my Golden Door!*

It was an ad, Pethel discovered. Not an informative article.

'Excuse me.' A customer had entered the store and Hadley moved in his direction.

Oh lord, Darius Pethel thought as he recognized the customer. Don't we have his 'scuttler fixed yet? He rose to his feet, knowing that he would be personally needed to appease the man; this was Dr Lurton Sands, and because of his recent domestic troubles he had become, of late, demanding and hot tempered.

'Yes, Doctor,' Pethel said, walking toward him. 'What can I do for you today?' As if he didn't know. Trying to fight off Myra as well as keep his mistress, Cally Vale, Dr Sands had enough problems; he really needed the use of his Jiffi-scuttler. Unlike other customers it was not going to be possible to put this man off.

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Plucking by reflex at his great handlebar mustache, presidential candidate Jim Briskin said tentatively 'We're in a rut, Sal. I ought to fire you. You're trying to make me out the epitome of the Cols and you know I've spent twenty years playing up to the white power structure. Frankly, I think we'd have better luck trying to get the white vote, not the dark. I'm used to them; I can appeal to them.'

'You're wrong,' his campaign manager, Salisbury Heim, said. 'Your appeal—listen and understand this, Jim—is to the dark kid and his wife scared to death their only prospect is winding up bibs in some gov warehouse. "Bottled in bond," as they say. In you these people see . . .'

'But I feel guilty.'

'Why?' Sal Heim demanded.

'Because I'm a fake. I can't close the Dept of SPW warehouses; you know that. You got me to promise, and ever since I've been sweating my life away trying to conceive how it could be done. And there isn't any way.' He examined his wristwatch; one quarter-hour remained before he had to give his speech. 'Have you read the speech Phil Danville wrote for me?' He reached into his disorganized, lumpy coat-pouch.

'Danville!' Heim's face convulsed. 'I thought you got rid of him; give me that.' He grabbed the folded sheets and began going over them. 'Danville is a nut. Look.' He waved the first sheet in Jim Briskin's face. 'According to him, you're going to ban traffic from the U.S. to Thisbe's satellite. That's insane! If the Golden Door is closed, the birth rate will jump back up again where it was—what then? How does Danville manage to counter that?'

After a pause Briskin said, 'The Golden Door is immoral.'

Spluttering, Heim said, 'Sure. And animals should wear pants.'

'There's just got to be a better solution than that satellite.'

Heim lapsed into silence as he read further into the speech. 'And he has you advocate this outmoded, thoroughly discredited planet-wetting technique of Bruno Mini.' He tossed the papers into Jim Briskin's lap. 'So what do you wind up with? You back a planetary colonization scheme tried twenty years ago and abandoned; you advocate closing the Golden Door satellite—you'll be popular, Jim, after tonight. But popular with whom, though? Just answer me; who is this aimed at?' He waited.

There was silence.

'You know what I think?' Heim said presently. 'I think this is your elaborate way of giving up. Of saying to hell with the whole thing. It's how you shed responsibility; I saw you start to do the same thing at the convention in that crazy doomsday speech you gave, that morbid curiosity which still has everyone baffled. But fortunately you'd already been nominated. It was too late for the convention to

repudiate you.'

~~Briskin said, 'I expressed my real convictions in that speech.'~~

'What, that civilization is now doomed because of this overpopulation biz? Some convictions for the first Col President to have.' Heim got to his feet and walked to the window; he stood looking out downtown Philadelphia, at the jet-copters landing, the runnels of autocars and ramps of footers coming and going, into and out of every high-rise building in sight. 'I once in a while think,' Heim said in a low voice, 'that you feel it's doomed because it's nominated a Negro and may elect him; it's a way of putting yourself down.'

'No,' Briskin said, with calm; his long face remained unruffled.

'I'll tell you what to say in your speech for tonight,' Heim said, his back to Briskin. 'First, you once more describe your relationship with Frank Woodbine, because people go for space explorers; Woodbine is a hero, much more so than you or what's-his-name. You know; the man you're running against. The SRCD incumbent.'

'William Schwarz.'

Heim nodded exaggeratedly. 'Yes, you're right. Then after you gas about Woodbine—and we show a few shots of you and him standing together on various planets—then you make a joke about I Sands.'

'No,' Briskin said.

'Why not? Is Sands a sacred cow? You can't touch him?'

Jim Briskin said slowly, painstakingly, 'Because Sands is a great doctor and shouldn't be ridiculed in the media the way he is right now.'

'He saved your brother's life. By finding him a wet new liver just in the nick of time. Or he saved your mother just when . . .'

'Sands has preserved hundreds, thousands, of people. Including plenty of Cols. Whether they were able to pay or not.' Briskin was silent a moment and then he added, 'Also I met his wife Myra and I didn't like her. Years ago I went to her; I had made a girl preg and we wanted abort advice.'

'Good!' Heim said violently. 'We can use that. You made a girl pregnant—that, when Nonovuli is free for the asking; that shows you're a provident type, Jim.' He tapped his forehead. 'You think ahead.'

'I now have five minutes,' Briskin said woodenly. He gathered up the pages of Phil Danville's speech and returned them to his inside coat pouch; he still wore a formal dark suit even in hot weather. That, and a flaming red wig, had been his trademark back in the days when he had telecast as a TV newsclohn.

'Give that speech,' Heim said, 'and you're politically dead. And if you're . . .'

 He broke off. The door to the room had opened and his wife Patricia stood there.

'Sorry to bother you,' Pat said. 'But everyone out here can hear you yelling.' Heim caught a glimpse, then, of the big outside room full of teen-age Briskinettes, uniformed young volunteers who had come from all over the country to help elect the Republican Liberal candidate.

'Sorry,' Heim murmured.

Pat entered the room and shut the door after her. 'I think Jim's right, Sal.' Small, gracefully-built—she had once been a dancer—Pat lithely seated herself and lit a cigar. 'The more naive Jim appears the better.' She blew gray smoke from between her luminous, pale lips. 'He still has a lingering reputation for being cynical. Whereas he should be another Wendell Wilkie.'

'Wilkie lost,' Heim pointed out.

'And Jim may lose,' Pat said; she tossed her head, brushing back her long hair from her eyes. 'But if he does, he can run again and win next time. The important thing is for him to appear sensitive and innocent, a sweet person who takes the world's suffering on his own shoulders because he's mad'

that way. He can't help it; he has to suffer. You see?'

'Amateurs,' Heim said, and groaned.

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The TV cameras stood inert, as the seconds passed, but they were ready to begin; the time for the speech lay just ahead as Jim Briskin sat at the small desk which he employed when addressing the people. Before him, near at hand, rested Phil Danville's speech. And he sat meditating as the TV technicians prepared for the recording.

The speech would be beamed to the Republican-Liberal Party's satellite relay station and from it telecast repeatedly until saturation point had been achieved. States Rights Conservative Democrat attempts to jam it would probably fail, because of the enormous signal-strength of the R-L satellite. The message would get through despite Tompkin's Act, which permitted jamming of political material. And, simultaneously, Schwarz's speech would be jammed in return; it was scheduled for release at the same time.

Across from him sat Patricia Heim, lost in a cloud of nervous introspection. And, in the control room, he caught a glimpse of Sal, busy with the TV engineers, making certain that the image recorded would be flattering.

And, off in a corner by himself, sat Phil Danville. No one talked to Danville; the party bigwigs, passing in and out of the studio, astutely ignored his existence.

A technician nodded to Jim. Time to begin his speech.

'It's very popular these days,' Jim Briskin said to the TV camera, 'to make fun of the old dreams and schemes for planetary colonization. How could people have been so nutty? Trying to live in completely inhuman environments . . . on worlds never designed for Homo sapiens. And it's amusing that they tried for decades to alter these hostile environments to meet human needs—and naturally failed.' He spoke slowly, almost drawlingly; he took his time. He had the attention of the nation, and he meant to make thorough use of it. 'So now we're looking for a planet ready-made, another "Venus," or more accurately what Venus specifically never was. What we had *hoped* it would be: lush, moist and verdant and productive, a Garden of Eden just waiting for us to show up.'

Reflectively, Patricia Heim smoked her El Producto alta cigar, never taking her eyes from him.

'Well,' Jim Briskin said, 'we'll never find it. And if we do, it'll be too late. Too small, too late, too far away. If we want another Venus, a planet we can colonize, *we'll have to manufacture it ourselves*. We can laugh ourselves sick at Bruno Mini, but the fact is, he was right.'

In the control room Sal Heim stared at him in gross anguish. He had done it. Sanctioned Mini's abandoned scheme of recasting the ecology of another world. Madness revisited.

The camera clicked off.

Turning his head, Jim Briskin saw the expression on Sal Heim's face. He had been cut off there in the control room; Sal had given the order.

'You're not going to let me finish?' Jim said.

Sal's voice, amplified, boomed, 'No, goddam it. No!'

Standing up, Pat called back, 'You have to. He's the candidate. If he wants to hang himself, let him.'

Also on his feet, Danville said hoarsely, 'If you cut him off again I'll spill it publicly. I'll leak the entire thing how you're working him like a puppet!' He started at once toward the door of the studio; he was leaving. Evidently he meant what he had said.

Jim Briskin said, 'You better turn it back on, Sal. They're right; you have to let me talk.' He did not feel angry, only impatient. His desire was to continue, nothing else. 'Come on, Sal,' he said quietly. 'I'm waiting.'

The party brass and Sal Heim, in the control room, conferred.

'He'll give in,' Pat said to Jim Briskin. 'I know Sal.' Her face was expressionless; she did not

enjoy this, but she intended to endure it.

—‘Right,’ Jim agreed, nodding.

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‘But will you watch a playback of the speech, Jim?’ She said, ‘For Sal’s sake. Just to be sure you intend what you say.’

‘Sure,’ he said. He had meant to anyhow.

Sal Heim’s voice boomed from the wall speaker. ‘Damn your black Col hide, Jim!’

Grinning, Jim Briskin waited, seated at his desk, his arms folded.

The read light of the central camera clicked back on.

AFTER THE SPEECH Jim Briskin's press secretary, Dorothy Gill, collared him in the corridor. 'Mr Briskin, you asked me yesterday to find out if Bruno Mini is still alive. He is, after a fashion.' Miss Gill examined her notes. 'He's a buyer for a dried fruit company in Sacramento, California, now. Evidently Mini's entirely given up his planet-wetting career, but your speech just now will probably bring him back to his old grazing ground.'

'Possibly not,' Briskin said. 'Mini may not like the idea of a Col taking up his ideas and propagandizing them. Thanks, Dorothy.'

Coming up beside him, Sal Heim shook his head and said, 'Jim, you just don't have political instinct.'

Shrugging, Jim Briskin said, 'Possibly you're right.' He was in that sort of mood, now he felt passive and depressed. In any case the damage had been done; the speech was on tape and already being relayed to the R-L satellite. His review of it had been cursory at best.

'I heard what Dotty said,' Sal said. 'That Mini character will be showing up here now; we'll have him to contend with, along with all our other problems. Anyhow, how about a drink?'

'Okay,' Jim Briskin agreed. 'Wherever you say. Lead the way.'

'May I join you?' Patricia said, appearing beside her husband.

'Sure,' Sal said. He put his arm around her and hugged her. 'A good big tall one, full of curiously-refreshing tiny little bubbles that last all through the drink. Just what women like.'

As they stepped out onto the sidewalk, Jim Briskin saw a picket—two of them, in fact—carrying signs.

KEEP THE  
WHITE HOUSE WHITE  
LET'S KEEP AMERICA CLEAN!

The two pickets, both young Caucs, stared at him and he and Sal and Patricia stared at them. No one spoke. Several homeopape camera men snapped pics; their flashbulbs lit the static scene starkly for an instant, and then Sal and Patricia, with Jim Briskin following, started on. The two pickets continued to pace back and forth along their little routes.

'The bastards,' Pat said as the three of them seated themselves at a booth in the cocktail lounge across the street from the TV studio.

Jim Briskin said, 'It's their job. God evidently meant them to do that.' It did not particularly bother him; in one form or another it had been a part of his life as long as he could remember.

'But Schwarz agreed to keep race and religion out of the election,' Pat said,

'Bill Schwarz did,' Jim Briskin said, 'but Verne Engel didn't. And it's Engel who runs CLEAN, not the SRCD Party.'

'I know darn well the SRCD pays the money to keep CLEAN solvent,' Sal murmured. 'Without their support it'd fold in a day.'

'I don't agree with you,' Briskin said. 'I think there'll always be a hate organization like CLEAN and there'll always be people to support it.' After all, CLEAN had a point; they did not want to see a Negro President, and wasn't it their right to feel like that? Some people did, some people didn't; that was perfectly natural. And, he thought, why should we pretend that race is not the issue? It is, really.

am a Negro. Verne Engel is factually correct. The real question was: how large a percentage of the electorate supported CLEAN's views? Certainly, CLEAN did not hurt his feelings; he could not be wounded: he had experienced too much already in his years as a newsclown. In my years, he thought to himself acidly, as an American Negro.

A small boy, white, appeared at the booth with a pen and tablet of paper. 'Mr Briskin, can I get your autograph?'

Jim signed and the boy darted off to join his parents at the door of the tavern. The couple, well-dressed, young, and obviously upper stratum, waved at him cheerily. 'We're with you!' the man called.

'Thanks,' Jim said, nodding to them and trying—but not successfully—to sound cheery in return.

'You're in a mood,' Pat commented.

He nodded. Mutely.

'Think of all those people with lily-white skins,' Sal said, 'who're going to vote for a Col. My, my. It's encouraging. Proves not all of us Whites are bad down underneath.'

'Did I ever say you were?' Jim asked.

'No, but you really think that. You don't really trust any of us.'

'Where'd you drag that up from?' Jim demanded, angry now.

'What're you going to do?' Sal said. 'Slash me with your electro-graphic magnetic razor?'

Pat said sharply, 'What are you doing, Sal? Why are you talking to Jim like that?' She peered about nervously. 'Suppose someone overheard.'

'I'm trying to jerk him out of his depression,' Sal said. 'I don't like to see him give in to them. Those CLEAN pickets upset him, but he doesn't recognize it or feel it consciously.' He eyed Jim. 'I've heard you say it many times. "I can't be hurt." Hell, you sure can. You were hurt just now. You want everyone to love you, White and Col both. I don't know how you ever got into politics in the first place. You should have stayed a newsclown, delighting young and old. Especially the *very* young.'

Jim said, 'I want to help the human race.'

'By changing the ecology of the planets? Are you serious?'

'If I'm voted into office I actually intend to appoint Bruno Mini, without even having met him, director of the space program; I'm going to give him the chance they never let him have, even when they—'

'If you get elected,' Pat said, 'you can pardon Dr Sands.'

'Pardon him?' He glanced at her, disconcerted. 'He's not being tried; he's being divorced.'

'You haven't heard the rumes?' Pat said. 'His wife is going to dig up something criminal he's done so she can dispatch him and obtain their total property. No one knows what it is yet but she's hinted—'

'I don't want to hear,' Jim Briskin said.

'You may be right,' Pat said thoughtfully. 'The Sands divorce is turning nasty; it might backfire if you mentioned it, as Sal wants you to. The mistress, Cally Vale, has disappeared, possibly murdered. Maybe you do have an instinct, Jim. Maybe you don't need us after all.'

'I need you,' Jim said, 'but not to embroil me in Dr Sands' marital problems.' He sipped his drink.

Rick Erickson, repairman for Pethel Jiffi-scuttler Sales & Service, lit a cigarette, tipped his stool back by pushing with his bony knees against his work bench. Before him rested the master turret of a defective jiffi-scuttler. The one, in fact, which belonged to Dr Lurton Sands.

There had always been bugs in the 'scuttlers. The first one put in use had broken down; years ago that had been, but the 'scuttlers remained basically the same now as then.

Historically, the original defective 'scuttler had belonged to an employee of Terran Development named Henry Ellis. After the fashion of humans Ellis had not reported the defect to his employers . . . or so Rick recalled. It had been before his time but myth persisted, an incredible legend, still current among 'scuttler repairmen, that through the defect in his 'scuttler Ellis had—it was hard to believe—composed the Holy Bible.

The principle underlying the operation of the 'scuttlers was a limited form of time travel. Along the tube of his 'scuttler—it was said—Ellis had found a weak point, a shimmer, at which another continuum completely had been visible. He had stooped down and witnessed a gathering of tiny persons who yammered in speeded-up voices and scampered about in their world just beyond the wall of the tube.

Who were these people? Initially, Ellis had not known, but even so he had engaged in commerce with them; he had accepted sheets—astonishingly thin and tiny—of questions, taken the questions to language-decoding equipment at TD, then, once the foreign script of the tiny people had been translated, taking the questions to one of the corporation's big computers to get them answered. Then back to the Linguistics Department and at last at the end of the day, back up the tube of the Jiffi-scuttler to hand to the tiny people the answers—in their own language—to their questions.

Evidently, if you believed this, Ellis had been a charitable man.

However, Ellis had supposed that this was a non-Terran race dwelling on a miniature planet in some other system entirely. He was wrong. According to the legend, the tiny people were from Earth's own past; the script, of course, had been ancient Hebrew. Whether this had really happened Rick did not pretend to know, but, in any case, for *some* breach of company rules Ellis had been fired by TD and had long since disappeared. Perhaps he had emigrated; who knew? Who cared? TD's job was to patch the thin spot in the tube and see that the defect did not reoccur in subsequent 'scuttlers.

All at once the intercom at the end of Rick's workbench blared. 'Hey, Erickson.' It was Pethel's voice. 'Dr Sands is up here asking about his 'scuttler. When'll it be ready?'

With the handle of a screwdriver Rick Erickson savagely tapped the master turret of Dr Sands' 'scuttler. I better go upstairs and talk to Sands, he reflected. I mean, this is driving me crazy. It *can't* malfunction the way he claims.

Two steps at a time, Rick Erickson ascended to the main floor. There, at the front door, a man was just leaving; it was Sands—Erickson recognized him from the homeopape pics. He hurried, reached him outside on the sidewalk.

'Listen, doc—how come you say your 'scuttler dumps you off in Portland, Oregon and places like that? It just can't; it isn't built that way!'

They stood facing each other. Dr Sands, well-dressed, lean and slightly balding, with deeply tanned skin and a thin, tapered nose, regarded him complexly, cautious about answering. He looked smart, very smart.

So this is the man they're all writing about, Erickson said to himself. Carries himself better than the rest of us and has a suit made from Martian mole cricket hide. But—he felt irritation. Dr Sands in general had a helpless manner; good-looking, in his mid-forties, he had an easy-going, bewildered geniality about him, as if unable to deal with or comprehend the forces which had overtaken him. Erickson could see that; Dr Sands had a crushed quality, still stunned.

And yet Sands remained a gentleman. In a quiet, reasonable tone he said, 'But that's what it seems to do. I wish I could tell you more, but I'm not mechanically inclined.' He smiled, a thorough disarming smile that made Erickson ashamed of his own gruffness.

'Aw, hell,' Erickson said, backtracking. 'It's the fault of TD—they could have ironed the bugs out of the 'scuttlers years ago. Too bad you got a lemon.' You look like a not too bad guy, he reflected.

“A lemon,” Dr Sands echoed. ‘Yes, that sums it up.’ His face twisted; he seemed amused. ‘Well, that’s my luck. Everything has been running like this for me, lately.’

‘Maybe I could get TD to take it back,’ Erickson said. ‘And swap you another one for it.’

‘No.’ Dr Sands shook his head vigorously. ‘I want that particular one.’ His tone had become firm; he meant what he said.

‘Why?’ Who would want to keep an admitted lemon? It didn’t make sense. In fact, the entire business had a wrong ring to it, and Erickson’s keen faculties detected this—he had seen many, many customers in his time.

‘Because it’s mine,’ Sands said. ‘I picked it out originally.’ He started on, then, down the sidewalk.

‘Don’t give me that,’ Erickson said, half to himself.

Pausing, Sands said, ‘What?’ He moved a step back, his face dark, now. The geniality had departed.

‘Sorry. No offense.’ Erickson eyed Dr Sands acutely. And did not like what he saw. Beneath the doctor’s suavity there lay a coldness, something fixed and hard. This was no ordinary person, and Erickson felt uneasy.

Dr Sands said in a crisp voice, ‘Get it fixed and soon.’ He turned and strode on down the sidewalk, leaving Erickson standing there.

Jeez, Erickson said to himself, and whistled. My busted back. I wouldn’t want to tangle with him, he thought as he walked into the store.

Going downstairs a step at a time, hands thrust deep in his pockets, he thought: Maybe I’ll stick all back together and take a trip through it. He was again thinking of old Henry Ellis, the first man to receive a defective ’scuttler; he was recalling that Ellis had not wanted to give up his particular one, either. And for good reason.

Back in the service department basement once more, Rick seated himself at the work bench, picked up Dr Sands’ ’scuttler-turret and began to reassemble it. Presently, he had expertly restored it to its place and had hooked it back into the circuit.

Now, he said to himself as he switched on the power field. Let’s see where it gets us. He entered the big gleaming circular hoop which was the entrance of the ’scuttler, found himself—as usual—within a gray, formless tube which stretched in both directions. Framed in the opening behind him lay his work bench. And in front of him—

New York City. An unstable view of an industriously-active street corner which bordered Dr Sands’ office. And a wedge, beyond it, of the vast building itself, the high rise skyscraper of plastic—rexeroid compounds from Jupiter—with its infinitude of floors, endless windows . . . and, past that, monojets rising and descending from the ramps, along which the footers scurried in swarms so dense as to seem self-destructive. The largest city in the world, four-fifths of which lay subsurface; what he saw was only a meager fraction, a trace of its visible projections. No one in his lifetime, even a *jerry*, could view it all; the city was simply too extensive.

See? Erickson grumbled to himself. Your ’scuttler’s working okay; this isn’t Portland, Oregon—it’s exactly what it’s supposed to be.

Crouching down, Erickson ran an expert hand over the surface of the tube. Seeking—what? He didn’t know. But something which would justify the doctor’s insistence on retaining this particular ’scuttler.

He took his time. He was not in a hurry. And he intended to find what he was searching for.

THE PLANET-WETTING SPEECH which Jim Briskin delivered that night—taped earlier during the day and then beamed from the R-L satellite—was too painful for Salisbury Heim to endure. Therefore, he took an hour off and sought relief as many men did: he boarded a jet 'ab and shortly was on his way to the Golden Door Moments of Bliss satellite. Let Jim blab away about Bruno Mini's crackpot engineering program, he said to himself as he rested in the rear seat of the rising 'ab, grateful for this interval of relaxation. Let him cut his own throat. But at least I don't have to be dragged down to defeat along with him; I'm tempted, sometime before election day, to cut myself loose and go over to the SRCDD party.

Beyond doubt, Bill Schwarz would take him on. By an intricate route Heim had already sounded the opposition out. Schwarz had, through this careful, indirect linkage, expressed pleasure at the idea of Heim joining forces with him. However, Heim was not really ready to make his move; he had not pursued the topic further.

At least, not until today. This new, painful bombshell. And at a time when the party had troubles enough already.

The fact of the matter was—and he knew this from the latest polls—that Jim Briskin was trailing Schwarz. Despite the fact that he had all the Col vote, and that included non-Negro dark races such as Puerto Ricans on the East Coast and the Mexicans on the West. It was not a shoo-in by any means. And why was Briskin trailing? Because all the Whites would be going to the polls, whereas only about sixty per cent of the Cols would show up on election day. Incredibly, they were apathetic toward Jim. Perhaps they believed—and he had heard this said—that Jim had sold out to the White power structure. That he was not authentically a leader of the Col people as such. And in a sense this was true.

Because Jim Briskin represented Whites and Cols alike.

'We're there, sir,' the 'ab driver, a Col, informed him. The 'ab slowed, came to rest on the breast-shaped vehicle port of the satellite, a dozen yards from the pink nipple which served as a location-signal device. 'You're Jim Briskin's campaign manager?' the driver said, turning to face him. 'Yeah, I recognize you. Listen, Mr Heim; he's not a sell-out, is he? I heard a lot of folk argue that, but he wouldn't do it; I know that.'

'Jim Briskin,' Heim said as he dug for his wallet, 'has sold out nobody. And never will. You can tell your buddies that because it's the truth.' He paid his fare, feeling grumpy. Grumpy as hell.

'But is it true that—'

'He's working with Whites, yes. He's working with me and I'm White. So what? Are the Whites supposed to disappear when Briskin is elected? Is that what you want? Because if it is, you're not going to get it.'

'I see what you mean, I guess,' the driver said, nodding slowly. 'You infer he's for all the people, right? He's got the interest of the White minority at heart just like he has the Col majority. He's going to protect everybody, even including you Whites.'

'That's right,' Salisbury Heim said, as he opened the 'ab door. 'As you put it, "even including you Whites"'. He stepped out on the pavement. Yes, even us, he said to himself. Because we merit it.

'Hello there, Mr Heim.' A woman's melodious voice. Heim turned—

'Thisbe,' he said, pleased. 'How are you?'

'I'm glad to see that you haven't stayed below just because your candidate disapproves of us,' Thisbe Olt said. Archly, she raised her green-painted, shining eyebrows. Her narrow, harliquin-like

face glinted with countless dots of pure light embedded within her skin; it gave her eerie, nimbus-like countenance the appearance of constantly-renewed beauty. And she had renewed herself, over a number of decades. Willowy, almost frail, she fiddled with a tassel of stone-impregnated fabric draped about her bare arms; she had put on gay clothes in order to come out and greet him and he was gratified. He liked her very much—had for some time now.

Guardedly, Sal Heim said, ‘What makes you think Jim Briskin has any bones to pick with the Golden Door, Thisbe? Has he ever actually said anything to that effect?’ As far as he knew, Jim’s opinions on that topic had not been made public; at least he had *tried* to keep them under wraps.

‘We know these things, Sal,’ Thisbe said, ‘I think you’d better go inside and talk with George Walt about it; they’re down on level C, in their office. They have a few things to say to you, Sal. I know because they’ve been discussing it.’

Annoyed, Sal said, ‘I didn’t come here—’ But what was the use? If the owners of the Golden Door satellite wanted to see him, it was undoubtedly advisable for him to come around. ‘Okay,’ he said, and followed Thisbe in the direction of the elevator.

It always distressed him—despite his efforts to the contrary—to find himself engaged in conversation with George Walt. They were a mutation of a special sort; he had never seen anything quite like them. Nonetheless, although handicapped, George Walt had risen to great economic power in this society. The Golden Door Moments of Bliss satellite, it was rumored, was only one of their holdings; they were spread extensively over the financial map of the modern world. They were a form of mutated twinning, joined at the base of the skull so that a single cephalic structure served both separate bodies. Evidently the personality *George* inhabited one hemisphere of the brain, made use of one eye: the right, as he recalled. And the personality *Walt* existed on the other side, distinct with its own idiosyncrasies, views and drives—and its own eye from which to view the outside universe.

A uniformed attendant, a sort of cop, stopped Sal, as the elevator doors opened on level C.

‘Mr George Walt wanted to see me,’ Sal said. ‘Or so Miss Olt tells me, at least.’

‘This way, Mr Heim,’ the uniformed attendant said, touching his cap respectfully and leading Sal down the carpeted, silent hall.

He was let into a large chamber—and there, on a couch, sat George Walt. Both bodies at once rose to their feet, supporting between them the common head. The head, containing the unmingled entities of the brothers, nodded in greeting and the mouth smiled. One eye—the left—regarded him steadily, while the other wandered vaguely off, as if preoccupied.

The two necks joined the head in such a way that the head and face were tilted slightly back. George Walt tended to look slightly over whomever they were talking to, and this added to the unique impression; it made them seem formidable, as if their attention could not really be engaged. The head was normal size, however, as were both bodies. The body to the left—Sal did not recall which of them it was—wore informal clothing, a cotton shirt and slacks, with sandals on the feet. The right hand body, however, was formally dressed in a single-breasted suit, tie and buttoned gray cape. And the hands of the right body were jammed deep into the trouser pockets, a stance which gave to it an aura of authority if not age; it seemed distinctly older than its twin.

‘This is George,’ the head said, pleasantly. ‘How are you, Sal Heim? Good to see you.’ The left body extended its hand. Sal walked toward the two of them and gingerly shook hands. The right hand body, Walt, did not want to shake with him; its hands remained in its pockets.

‘This is Walt,’ the head said, less pleasantly, then. ‘We wanted to discuss your candidate with you, Heim. Sit down and have a drink. Here, what can we fix for you?’ Together, the two bodies managed to walk to the sideboard, where an elaborate bar could be seen. Walt’s hands opened a bottle of Bourbon while George’s expertly fixed an old fashioned, mixed sugar and water and bitters together in the bottom of a glass. Together, George Walt made the drink and carried it back to Sal.

‘Thanks,’ Sal Heim said, accepting the drink.

‘~~This is Walt,~~’ the common head said to him. ‘~~We know that if Jim Briskin is elected he’ll~~ instruct his Attorney General to find ways to shut the satellite down. Isn’t that a fact?’ The two eyes, together now, fixed themselves on him in an intense, astute gaze.

‘I don’t know where you heard *that*,’ Sal said, evasively.

‘This is Walt,’ the head said. ‘There’s a leak in your organization; that’s where we heard it. You realize what this means. We’ll have to throw our support behind Schwarz. And you know how many transmissions we make to Earth in a single day,’

Sal sighed. The Golden Door kept a perpetual stream of junk, honky-tonk stag-type shows, pouring down over a variety of channels, available to and widely watched by almost everyone in the country. The shows—especially the climactic orgy in which Thisbe herself, with her famous display of expanding and contracting muscles working in twenty directions simultaneously and in four colors appeared—were a come-on for the activity of the satellite. But it would be duck soup to work in an anti-Briskin bias; the satellite’s announcers were slick prose.

Downing his drink he rose and started toward the door. ‘Go ahead and stick your stag shows on Jim; we’ll win the election anyhow and then you can be *sure* he’ll shut you. In fact, I personally guarantee it right now.’

The head looked uneasy. ‘Dirty p-pool,’ it stammered.

Sal shrugged. ‘I’m just protecting the interests of my client; you’ve been making threats toward him. You started it, both of you.’

‘This is George,’ the head said rapidly. ‘Here’s what I think we ought to have. Listen to this, Walt. We want Jim Briskin to come up here to the Golden Door and be photographed publicly.’ It added, in applause for itself, ‘Good idea. Get it, Sal? Briskin arrives here, covered by all the media, and visits one of the girls; it’ll be good for his image because it’ll show he’s a normal guy—and not some creep. So you benefit from this. And, while he’s here, Briskin compliments us.’ It added, ‘A good final touch but optional. For instance, he says the national interest has—’

‘He’ll never do it,’ Sal said. ‘He’ll lose the election first.’

The head said, plaintively, ‘We’ll give him any girl he wants; my lord, we have five thousand to choose from!’

‘No luck,’ Sal Heim said. ‘Now if you were to make that offer to me I’d take you up on it in a second. But not Jim. He’s—old-fashioned.’ That was as good a way to put it as any. ‘He’s a Puritan. You can call him a remnant of the twentieth century, if you want.’

‘Or nineteenth,’ the head said, venomously.

‘Say anything you want,’ Sal said, nodding. ‘Jim won’t care. He knows what he believes in; he thinks the satellite is undignified. The way it’s all handled up here, boom, boom, boom—mechanically, with no personal touch, no meeting of humans on a human basis. You run an autofac; I don’t object and most people don’t object, because it saves time. But Jim does, because he’s sentimental.’

Two right arms gestured at Sal menacingly as the head said loudly, ‘The hell with that! We’re a sentimental up here as you can get! We play background music in every room—the girls always learn the customer’s first name and they’re *required* to call him by that and nothing else! How sentimental can you get, for chrissakes? What do you *want*?’ In a higher-pitched voice it roared on, ‘A marriage ceremony before and then a divorce procedure afterward, so it constitutes a legal marriage, is that it? Or do you want us to teach the girls to sew mother hubbards and bloomers, and you pay to see their ankles, and that’s it? Listen, Sal.’ Its voice dropped a tone, became ominous and deadly. ‘Listen, Sal Heim,’ it repeated. ‘We know our business; don’t tell us our business and we won’t tell you yours. Starting tonight our TV announcers are going to insert a plug for Schwarz in every telecast to Earth,

right in the middle of the glorious chef-d'oeuvre you-know-what where the girls . . . well, you know. Yes, I mean *that* part. And we're going to make a campaign out of this, really put it over. We're going to insure Bill Schwarz' reelection.' It added, 'And insure that Col fink's thorough, total defeat.'

Sal said nothing. The great carpeted office was silent.

'No response from you, Sal? You're going to sit idly by?'

'I came up here to visit a girl I like,' Sal said. 'Sparky Rivers, her name is. I'd like to see her now.' He felt weary. 'She's different from all the others . . . at least, all I've tried.' Rubbing his forehead he murmured, 'No, I'm too tired, now. I've changed my mind. I'll just leave.'

'If she's as good as you say,' the head said, 'it won't require any energy from you.' It laughed in appreciation of its wit. 'Send a fray named Sparky Rivers down here,' it instructed, pressing a button on its desk.

Sal Heim nodded dully. There was something to that. And after all, this *was* what he had come here for, this ancient, appreciated remedy.

'You're working too hard,' the head said acutely. 'What's the matter, Sal? *Are you losing?* Obviously, you need our help. Very badly, in fact.'

'Help, schmelp,' Sal said. 'What I need is a six-week rest, and not up here. I ought to take an 'ab to Africa and hunt spiders or whatever the craze is right now.' With all his problems, he had lost touch.

'Those big trench-digging spiders are out, now,' the head informed him. 'Now it's nocturnal moths, again.' Walt's right arm pointed at the wall and Sal saw, behind glass, three enormous iridescent cadavers, displayed under an ultraviolet lamp which brought out all their many colors. 'Caught them myself,' the head said, and then chided itself. 'No, you didn't; I did. You saw them but popped them into the killing jar.'

Sal Heim sat silently waiting for Sparky Rivers, as the two inhabitants of the head argued with each other as to which of them had brought back the African moths.

The top-notch and expensive—and dark-skinned—private investigator, Tito Cravelli, operating out of N'York, handed the woman seated across from him the findings which his Altac 3-60 computer had derived from the data provided it. It was a good machine.

'Forty hospitals,' Tito said. 'Forty transplant operations within last year. Statistically, it's *unlikely* that the UN Vital Organ Fund Reserve would have had that many organs available in so limited a time, but it is possible. In other words, we've got nothing.'

Mrs Myra Sands smoothed her skirt thoughtfully, then lit a cigarette. 'We'll select at random from among the forty; I want you to follow at least five or six up. How long will it take for you to do that?'

Tito calculated silently. 'Say two days. If I have to go there and see people. Of course, if I can do some of it on the phone—' He liked to work through the Vidphone Corporation of America's product; it meant he could stick near the Altac 3-60. And, when anything came up, he could feed the data on the spot, get an opinion without delay. He respected the 3-60; it had set him back a great deal, a year ago when he had purchased it. And he did not intend to permit it to lie idle, not if he could help it. But sometimes—

This was a difficult situation. Myra Sands was not the sort who could endure uncertainty; for her things had to be either this or that, either A or not-A—Myra made use of Aristotle's Law of the Excluded Middle like no one else he knew. He admired her. Myra was a handsome, extremely well-educated woman, light-haired, in her middle forties; across from him she sat erect and trim in her yellow Lunar squeak-frog suit, her legs long and without defect. Her sharp chin alone let on—to Tito at least—the grimness, the no-nonsense aspect, of her personality. Myra was a businesswoman first,

before anything else; as one of the nation's foremost authorities in the field of therapeutic abortions, she was highly paid and highly honored . . . and she was well aware of this. After all, she had been at for years. And Tito respected anyone who lived as an independent business person; after all, he, too, was his own boss, beholden to no one, to no subsidizing organization or economic entity. He and Myra had something in common. Although, of course, Myra would have denied it, Myra Sands was a terrible goddam snob; to her, Tito Cravelli was an *employee* whom she had hired to find out—or rather to establish as fact—certain information about her husband.

He could not imagine why Lurton Sands had married her. Surely it had been conflict—psychological, social, sexual, professional—from the start.

However, there was no explaining the chemistry which joined men and women, locked them in embraces of hate and mutual suffering sometimes for ninety years on end. In his line, Tito had seen plenty of it, enough to last him even a *jerry* lifetime.

'Call Lattimore Hospital in San Francisco,' Myra instructed in her crisp, vigilantly authoritative voice. 'In August, Lurton transplanted a spleen for an army major, there; I think his name was Walleck or some such quiddity as that. I recall, at the time . . . Lurton had had, what shall I say? A little too much to drink. It was evening and we were having dinner. Lurton blurted out some darn thing or other. About "paying heavily" for the spleen. You *know*, Tito, that VOFR prices are rigidly set by the UN and they're not high; in fact they're too low . . . that's the cardinal reason the fund runs out of certain vital organs so often. Not from a lack of supply so much as the existence of too darn many takers.'

'Hmm,' Tito said, jotting notes.

'Lurton always said that if the VOFR only were to raise its rates . . .'

'You're positive it was a spleen?' Tito broke in.

'Yes.' Myra nodded curtly, exhaling streamers of gray smoke that swirled toward the lamp behind her, a cloud that drifted in the artificial light of the office. It was dark outside, now; the time was seven-thirty.

'A spleen,' Tito recapitulated. 'In August of this year. At Lattimore General Hospital in San Francisco. An army major named—'

'Now I'm beginning to think it was Wozzeck,' Myra put in. 'Or is that an opera composer?'

'It's an opera,' Tito said. 'By Berg. Seldom performed, now.' He lifted the receiver of the vidphone. 'I'll get hold of the business office at Lattimore; it's only four-thirty out there on the Coast.'

Myra rose to her feet and roamed restlessly about the office, rubbing her gloved hands together in a motion that irritated Tito and made it difficult for him to concentrate on his call.

'Have you had dinner?' he asked her, as he waited on the line.

'No. But I never eat until eight-thirty or nine; it's barbaric to eat any earlier.'

Tito said, 'Can I take you to dinner, Mrs Sands? I know an awfully good little Armenian place in the Village. The food's actually prepared by humans.'

'Humans? As compared to what?'

'Automatic food-processing systems,' Tito murmured. 'Or don't you ever eat in autoprep restaurants?' After all, the Sands were wealthy; possibly they normally enjoyed human-prepared food. 'Personally, I can't stand autopreps. The food's always so predictable. Never burned, never . . .' He broke off; on the vidscreen the miniature features of an employee at Lattimore had formed. 'Miss, this is Life-factors Research Consultants of N'York calling. I'd like to inquire about an operation performed on a Major Wozzeck or Walleck last August, a spleen transplant.'

'Wait,' Myra said suddenly. 'Now I remember; it wasn't a spleen—it was an islands of Langerhans; you know, that part of the pancreas which controls sugar production in the body. I

remember because Lurton got to talking about it because he saw me putting two teaspoonsful of sugar in my coffee.’

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‘I’ll look that up,’ the girl at Lattimore said, overhearing Myra. She turned to her files.

‘What I want to find out,’ Tito said to her, ‘is the exact date at which the organ was obtained from the UN’s VOFR. If you can give me that datum, please.’ He waited, accustomed to having to be patient. His line of work absolutely required that virtue, above all others, including intelligence.

The girl presently said, ‘A Colonel Weiswasser received an organ transplant on August twelve of this year. Islands of Langerhans, obtained from the VOFR the day before, August eleven. Dr Lurton Sands performed the operation and of course certified the organ.’

‘Thanks, miss,’ Tito said, and broke the connection. ‘The VOFR office is closed,’ Myra said, as he began once more to dial. ‘You’ll have to wait until tomorrow.’

‘I know somebody there,’ Tito said and continued dialing.

At last he had Gus Anderton, his contact at the UN’s vital organ bank. ‘Gus, this is Tito. Check August eleven this year for me. Islands of Langerhans; okay? See if the org-trans surgeon we previously had reference to picked up one there on that date.’

His contact was back almost at once with the information. ‘Correct, Tito; it all checks out. August eleven, Islands of Langerhans. Transferred by jet-hopper to Lattimore in San Francisco. Routine in every way.’

Tito Cravelli cut the circuit, exasperated.

After a pause Myra Sands, still pacing restlessly about his office, exclaimed, ‘But I *know* he’s been obtaining organs illegally. He never turned anybody down, and you know there never have been that many organs in the bank reserve—he had to get them somewhere else. He still is; I know it.’

‘Knowing this and proving this are two . . .’

Turning to him, Myra snapped, ‘And outside of the UN bank there’s only one other place he would or could go.’

‘Agreed,’ Tito said, nodding. ‘But as your attorney said, you better have proof before you make the charge; otherwise he’ll sue you for slander, libel, defamation of character, the entire biz. He’d have to. You’d give him no choice.’

‘You don’t like this,’ Myra said.

Tito shrugged. ‘I don’t have to like it. That doesn’t matter.’

‘But you think I’m treading on dangerous ground.’

‘I know you are. Even if it’s true that Lurton Sands . . .’

‘Don’t say “even if.” He’s a fanatic and you know it; he identifies so fully with his public image as a savior of lives that he’s simply had to make a psychological break with reality. Probably he started in a small way, with what he told himself was a unique situation, an exception; he had to have a particular organ and he took it. And the next time . . .’ She shrugged. ‘It was easier. And so on.’

‘I see,’ Tito said.

‘I think I see what we’re going to have to do,’ Myra said. ‘What *you’re* going to have to do. Get started on this. Find out from your contact at the UN exactly what organ the bank lacks at this time. Then deliberately set up another emergency situation; have someone in a hospital somewhere apply to Lurton for that particular transplant. I realize that it’ll cost one hell of a lot of money, but I’m willing to underwrite the expense. Do you see?’

‘I see,’ Tito said. In other words, trap Lurton Sands. Play on the man’s determination to save the life of a dying person . . . make his humanitarianism the instrument of his destruction. What a way to earn a living, Tito thought to himself. Another day, another dollar . . . it’s hardly that. Not when you get involved in something like this.

‘I know you can arrange it,’ Myra said to him fervently. ‘You’re good; you’re experienced.’

Aren't you?'

~~'Yes, Mrs Sands,' Tito said. 'I'm experienced. Yes, possibly I can trap the guy. Lead him by the nose. It shouldn't be too hard.'~~

'Make sure your "patient" offers him plenty,' Myra said in a bitter, taut voice. 'Lurton will bite he senses a good financial return; that's what interests him—in spite of what you and the darn public may or may not imagine. I ought to know; I've lived with him a good many years, shared his most intimate thoughts.' She smiled, briefly. 'It seems a shame I have to tell you how to go about your business, but obviously I have to.' Her smile returned, cold and exceedingly hard.

'I appreciate your assistance,' Tito said woodenly.

'No you don't. You think I'm trying to do something wicked. Something out of mere spite.'

Tito said, 'I don't think anything; I'm just hungry. Maybe you don't eat until eight-thirty or nine but I have pyloric spasms and I have to eat by seven. Will you excuse me?' He rose to his feet, pushing his desk chair back. 'I want to close up shop.' He did not renew his offer to take her out to dinner.

Gathering up her coat and purse, Myra Sands said, 'Have you located Cally Vale and if so where?'

'No luck,' Tito said, and felt uncomfortable.

Staring at him, Myra said, 'But why can't you locate her? She must be *somewhere!*' She looked as if she could not believe her ears.

'The court process servers can't find her either,' Tito pointed out. 'But I'm sure she'll turn up by trial time.' He, too, had been wondering why his staff had been unable to locate Lurton Sands' mistress; after all, there were only a limited number of places a person could hide, and detection and tracing devices, especially during the last two decades, had improved to an almost supernatural accuracy.

Myra said, 'I'm beginning to think you're just not any good. I wonder if I shouldn't put my business in somebody else's hands.'

'That's your privilege,' Tito said. His stomach ached, a series of spasms of his pyloric valve. He wondered if he was ever going to get an opportunity to eat tonight.

'You must find Miss Vale,' Myra said. 'She knows all the details of his activity; that's why he's got her hidden—in fact she's pumping blood with a heart he procured for her.'

'Okay, Mrs Sands,' Tito agreed, and inwardly winced at the growing pain . . .

THE BLACK-HAIRED, EXTREMELY dark youth said shyly, 'We came to you, Mrs Sands, because we read about you in the homeopape. It said you were very good and also you take people without too much money.' He added, 'We don't have any money at all right now, but maybe we can pay you later.'

Brusquely, Myra Sands said, 'Don't worry about that now.' She surveyed the boy and girl. 'Let's see. Your names are Art and Rachael Chaffy. Sit down, both of you, and let's talk, all right?' She smiled at them, her professional smile of greeting and warmth; it was reserved for her clients, given to no one else, not even to her husband—or, as she thought of Lurton now, her former husband.

In a soft voice the girl, Rachael, said 'We tried to get them to let us become bibs but they said we should consult an advisor first.' She explained, 'I'm—well, you see, somehow I got to be preg. I'm sorry.' She ducked her head fearfully, with shame, her cheeks flushing deep scarlet. 'It's too bad they don't just let you kill yourself, like they did a few years ago,' she murmured. 'Because that would solve it.'

'That law,' Myra said firmly, 'was a bad idea. However imperfect deep-sleep is, it's certainly preferable to the old form of self-destruction undertaken on an individual basis. How far advanced is your pregnancy, dear?'

'About a month and a half,' Rachael Chaffy said, lifting her head a trifle. She managed to meet Myra's gaze; for a moment, at least.

'Then abort-processing presents no difficulty,' Myra said. 'It's routine. We can arrange for it by noon today and have it done by six tonight. At any one of several free government abort clinics here in the area. Just a moment.' Her secretary had opened the door to the office and was trying to catch her attention. 'What is it, Tina?'

'An urgent phone call for you, Mrs Sands.'

Myra clicked on her desk vidphone. On the screen Tito Cravelli's features formed in replica, puffy with agitation.

'Mrs Sands.' Tito said, 'sorry to bother you at your office so early this morning. But a number of tracking devices we've been employing here have wound up their term of service and have come home. I thought you'd want to know. Cally Vale is nowhere on Earth. That's absolutely been determined; that's definite.' He was silent, then, waiting for her to say something.

'Then she emigrated,' Myra said, trying to picture the dainty and rather nauseatingly fragile Miss Vale in the rugged environment of Mars or Ganymede.

'No,' Tito Cravelli said emphatically, shaking his head. 'We've checked on that, of course. *Cally Vale did not emigrate*. It doesn't make sense, but there it is. No wonder we're making no headway; we're faced with an impossible situation.' He did not appear very happy about it. His features sagged glumly.

Myra said, 'She's not on Earth and she didn't emigrate. Then she must . . .' It was obvious to her why hadn't they thought of it right away, when Cally originally vanished from sight? 'She's entered a government warehouse. Cally's a bib.' It was the only possibility left.

'We're looking into that,' Tito said, but without enthusiasm. 'I admit it's possible but frankly I just don't buy it. Personally, I think they've thought up something new, something original; I'd stake my job on it, everything I have.' Tito's tone was insistent, now. No longer hesitant. 'But we'll check all the Dept. of SPW warehouses, all ninety-four of them. That'll take a couple of days at least. Meanwhile—' He caught sight of the young couple, the Chaffys, waiting silently. 'Perhaps I'd better discuss it with you later; there's no urgency.'

Maybe what the homeopapes are hinting at actually did take place, Myra thought to herself. Perhaps Lurton has actually killed her. So she can't be subpoenaed by Frank Fenner at the trial.

'Do you believe Cally Vale is dead?' Myra said to Tito bluntly. She ignored the young couple seated opposite her; they did not at the moment matter: this was far too important.

'I'm in no position . . .' Tito began. Myra cut him off; she broke the connection, and the screen faded. I'm in no position to say, she finished for him. But who is? Lurton? Maybe even he doesn't know where Cally is. She might have run out on him. Gone to the Golden Door Moments of Bliss satellite and joined the army of girls there, under an assumed name. With relish, Myra pondered that, picturing her former husband's mistress as one of Thisbe's creatures, sexless and mechanical and automatic. Which will it be, Cally? One, two, three or four? Only, the choice isn't yours. It's theirs. Every time. Myra laughed. It's where you ought to be, Cally, she thought. For the rest of your life, for the next two hundred years.

'Please forgive the interruption,' Myra said to the young couple seated opposite her. 'And do go on.'

'Well,' the girl Rachael said awkwardly, 'Art and I felt that—we thought over the abortion and we just don't want to do it. I don't know why, Mrs Sands. I know we should. But we can't.'

There was silence, then.

'I don't see what you came to me for,' Myra said. 'If you've made up your minds against it already. Obviously, from a practical standpoint you should go through with it; you're probably frightened . . . after all, you are very young. But I'm not trying to talk you into it. A decision of this sort has to be your own.'

In a low voice Art said, 'We're not scared, Mrs Sands. That's not it. We—well, we'd like to have the baby. That's all.'

Myra Sands did not know what to say. She had never, in her practice, run into anything quite like this; it baffled her.

She could see already that this was going to be a bad day. Between this and Tito's phonecall—it was too much. And so early. It was not yet even nine A.M.

In the basement of Pethel Jiff-scuttler Sales & Service, the repairman Rick Erickson prepared, for the second day in a row, to enter the defective 'scuttler of Dr Lurton Sands, Jr. He still had not found what he was searching for.

However, he did not intend to give up. He felt, on an intuitive level, that he was very close. It would not be long now.

From behind him a voice said, 'What are you doing, Rick?'

Startled, Erickson jumped, glanced around. At the door of the repair department stood his employer, Darius Pethel, heavy-set in the wrinkled dark-brown old-fashioned *jerry*-type wool suit which he customarily wore.

'Listen,' Erickson said. This is Dr Sands' 'scuttler. You can laugh, but I think he's got his mistress in here, somewhere.'

'What?' Pethel laughed.

'I mean it. I don't think she's dead, even though I talked to Sands long enough to know he could do it if he felt it was necessary—he's that kind of guy. Anyhow nobody's found her, even Mrs Sands. Naturally they can't find her, because Lurton's got his 'scuttler in here with us, out of sight. He knows it's here, *but they don't*. And he doesn't want it back, no matter what he says; he wants it stuck down here, right in this basement.'

Staring at him Pethel said, 'Great fud. Is this what you've been doing on my time? Working out detective theories?'

Erickson said, 'This is important! Even if it doesn't mean any money for you. Hell, maybe it does; if I'm lucky and find her, maybe you can sell her back to Mrs Sands.'

After a pause Darius Pethel shrugged in a philosophical way. 'Okay. So look. If you do find her —'

Beside Pethel the salesman of the firm, Stuart Hadley, appeared. He said breezily, 'What's up, Dar?' As always cheerful and interested.

'Rick's searching for Dr Sands' mistress,' Pethel said. He jerked his thumb at the 'scuttler.

'Is she pretty?' Hadley asked. 'Well started?' He looked hungry.

'You've seen her pics in the homeopapes,' Pethel said. 'She's cute. Otherwise why do you suppose the doctor risked his marriage, if she wasn't something exceptional? Come on, Hadley; I need you upstairs on the floor. We can't all three be down here—someone'll walk away with the register.' He started up the stairs.

'And she's in there?' Hadley said, looking puzzled as he bent to peer into the 'scuttler. 'I don't see her, Dar.'

Darius Pethel gaffawed. 'Neither do I. Neither does Rick, but he's still searching—and on my time, goddam it! Listen, Rick; if you find her she's *my* mistress, because you're on my time, working for me.'

All three of them laughed at that.

'Okay,' Rick agreed, on his hands and knees, scraping the surface of the 'scuttler tube with the blade of a screwdriver. 'You can laugh and I admit it's funny. But I'm not stopping. Obviously, the rent isn't visible; if it was, Doc Sands wouldn't have dared leave it here. He may think I'm dumb, but not that dumb—he's got it concealed and real well.'

'“Rent,”' Pethel echoed. He frowned, starting back a few steps down the stairs and into the basement once more. 'You mean like Henry Ellis found, years ago? That rupture in the tube-wall that led to ancient Israel?'

'Israel is right,' Rick said briefly, as he scraped. His keen, thoroughly-trained eye saw all at once in the surface near at hand a slight irregularity, a distortion. Leaning forward, he reached out his hand . . .

His groping fingers passed through the wall of the tube and disappeared.

'Jesus,' Rick said. He raised his invisible fingers, felt nothing at first, and then touched the upper edge of the rent. 'I found it,' he said. He looked around, but Pethel had gone. 'Darius!' he yelled, but there was no answer. 'Damn him!' he said in fury to Hadley.

'You found what?' Hadley asked, starting cautiously into the tube. 'You mean you found the Vale woman? Cally Vale?'

Headfirst, Rick Erickson crept into the rent.

He sprawled, snatching for support; falling, he struck hard ground and cursed. Opening his eyes, he saw, above, a pale blue sky with a few meager clouds. And, around him, a meadow. Bees, or what looked something more or less like bees, buzzed in tall-stemmed white flowers as large as saucers. The air smelled of sweetness, as if the flowers had impregnated the atmosphere itself.

I'm there, he said to himself. I got through; this is where Doc Sands hid his mistress to keep her from testifying for Mrs Sands at the trial or hearing or whatever it's called. He stood up, cautiously. Behind him he made out a hazy shimmer: the nexus with the tube of the Jiffi-scuttler back in the store's basement in Kansas City. I want to keep my bearings, he said to himself warily. If I get lost, I may not be able to get back again and that might be bad.

*Where is this?* he asked himself. Must work that out—now.

Gravity like Earth's. Must be Earth, then, he decided. Long time ago? Long time in the future? Think what this is worth; the hell with the man's mistress, the hell with him and his personal problem

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