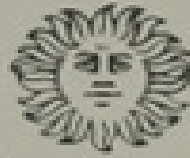


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CLANS OF THE ALPHANE MOON

PHILIP K. DICK

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CLANS OF THE ALPHANE MOON

Philip K. Dick was born in Chicago in 1928 and lived most of his life in California. He briefly attended the University of California, but dropped out before completing any classes. In 1952, he began writing professionally and proceeded to write numerous novels and short-story collections. He won the Hugo Award for the best novel in 1962 for *The Man in the High Castle* and the John W. Campbell Memorial Award for best novel of the year in 1974 for *Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said*. Philip K. Dick died on March 2, 1982, in Santa Ana, California, of heart failure following a stroke.

NOVELS BY PHILIP K. DICK

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Counter-Clock World
The Crack in Space
Deus Irae (with Roger Zelazny)
The Divine Invasion
Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?
Dr. Bloodmoney
Dr. Futurity
Eye in the Sky
Flow My Tears, the Policeman Said
Galactic Pot-Healer
The Game-Players of Titan
The Man in the High Castle
The Man Who Japed
Martian Time-Slip
A Maze of Death
Now Wait for Last Year
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A Scanner Darkly
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The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch
Time Out of Joint
The Transmigration of Timothy Archer
Ubik
The Unteleported Man
VALIS
Vulcan's Hammer
We Can Build You
The World Jones Made
The Zap Gun

CLANS OF THE

ALPHANE

MOON

PHILIP K. DICK



VINTAGE BOOKS

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ONE

Before entering the supreme council room, Gabriel Baines sent his Mans-made simulacrum clacking ahead to see if by chance it might be attacked. The simulacrum—artfully constructed to resemble Baines in every detail—did many things, since it had been made by the inventive clan of Manses, but Baines only cared to employ it in its maneuvering for defense; defending himself was his sole orientation in life, his claim to membership in the Pare enclave of Adolville at the north end of the moon.

Baines had of course been outside Adolville many times, but he felt safe—or rather relatively safe—only here, within the stout walls of this, the Pare city. Which proved that his claim to membership in the Pare clan was not contrived, a mere simulated technique by which he could gain entry into the most solidly-built, sturdy and enduring urban area anywhere. Baines beyond doubt was sincere... as if there could be any doubt of *him*.

For example, there was his visit to the incredibly degrading hovels of the Heebs. Recently he had been in search of escaped members of a work brigade; being Heebs they had perhaps straggled back to Gandhitown. The difficulty, however, was that all Heebs, to him at least, looked alike: dirty, stooped creatures in soiled clothing who giggled and could not concentrate on any complicated procedure. They were useful for mere manual labor, nothing more. But with the constant need for tinkering improvement of Adolville's fortifications against the predations of the Manses, manual labor was currently at a premium. And no Pare would dirty his hands. Anyhow, among the dilapidated shacks of the Heebs he had felt pure terror, a sense of almost infinitely vast exposure among the most flimsy of human construction; it was an inhabited garbage dump of cardboard dwellings. The Heebs however did not object. They dwelt among their own refuse in tranquil equilibrium.

Here today, at the twice yearly council meeting representing all the clans, the Heebs would of course have a spokesman; speaking for the Pares he would find himself seated in the same room with an odious—literally so—Heeb. And this scarcely dignified his task. Probably it would be straggle-haired, fat Sarah Apostoles again this year.

But more ominous would be the Mans representative. Because, like every Pare, Baines was terrified of each and every Mans. Their reckless violence shocked him; he could not comprehend it, so purposeless was it. For years he had put Manses down as simply hostile. But that did not explain them. They *enjoyed* violence; it was a perverse delight in breaking things and intimidating others, especially Pares such as himself.

But knowing this did not fully help him; he still quailed at the anticipated confrontation with Howard Straw, the Mans delegate.

Wheezing asthmatically his simulacrum returned, a fixed smile on its Baines-like artificial countenance. "All in order, sir. No deadly gas, no electrical discharge of a dangerous degree, no poison in the water pitcher, no peepholes for laser rifles, no concealed infernal machines. I would offer the suggestion that you can safely enter." It clacked to a halt, became silent.

“No one approached you?” Baines asked cautiously.

The simulacrum said, “No one is there yet. Except, of course, for the Heeb sweeping the floor.”

Baines, out of a lifetime of protective cunning, opened the door a crack for that which was essential: a momentary glimpse of the Heeb.

The Heeb, a male, swept in his slow, monotonous way, the usual silly Heeb expression on his face, as if his work amused him. He could probably keep it up for months without becoming bored; Heeb could not tire of a task because they could not comprehend even the concept of diversity. Of course, Baines reflected, there was some virtue in simplicity. He had for instance been impressed by the famous Heeb saint, Ignatz Ledebur, who radiated spirituality as he wandered from town to town, spreading the warmth of his harmless Heeb personality. This one certainly looked devoid of dangerousness...

And the Heeb, at least, even their saints, did not try to convert people, as did the Skinny mystics. All the Heeb asked was to be let alone; they simply did not want to be bothered by life, and each year they shed more and more of the complexities of living. Returned, Baines reflected, to the mere vegetable, which, to a Heeb, was ideal.

Checking his laser pistol—it was in order—Baines decided that he could enter. So step by step he walked into the council room, took a chair, then abruptly changed to another; the one had been too close to the window: he presented too good a target to anyone outdoors.

To amuse himself while he waited for the others to arrive, he decided to bait the Heeb. “What’s your name?” he demanded.

“J-jacob Simion,” the Heeb said, sweeping with his standard silly grin unchanged; a Heeb never knew when he was being baited. Or if he did he did not care. Apathy toward everything: that was the Heeb way.

“You like your work, Jacob?” Baines asked, lighting a cigarette.

“Sure,” the Heeb said, and then giggled.

“You’ve always spent your time sweeping floors?”

“Huh?” The Heeb did not appear able to comprehend the question.

The door opened and plump, pretty Annette Golding, the Poly delegate, appeared, purring under her arm, her round face flushed, her green eyes shining as she panted for breath. “I thought I was late.”

“No,” Baines said, rising to offer her a chair. He glanced professionally over her; no sign that she had brought her weapon. But she could be carrying feral spores in capsules secreted in a gum-pocket within her mouth; he made it a point, when he reseated himself, to select a chair at the far end of the big table. Distance... a highly valuable factor.

“It’s warm in here,” Annette said, still perspiring. “I ran all the way up the stairs.” She smiled at him in the artless way that some Polys had. She did seem attractive to him... if only she could lose a little weight. Nonetheless he liked Annette and he took this opportunity to engage in light banter with her, tinged with overtones of the erotic.

“Annette,” he said, “you’re such a pleasant, comfortable person. A shame you don’t marry me. If you married me—”

“Yes, Gabe,” Annette said, smiling. “I’d be protected. Litmus paper in every corner of the room, atmosphere analyzers throbbing away, grounding equipment in case influential machines radiating—”

“Be serious,” Baines said, crossly. He wondered how old she was; certainly no more than twenty. And, like all Polys, she was childlike. The Polys hadn’t grown up; they remained unfixed, and what was Polyism if not the lingering of plastic childhood? After all, the children, from every clan on the moon, were born Polys, went to their common, central school as Polys, did not become differentiated until perhaps their tenth or eleventh year. And some, like Annette, never became differentiated.

Opening her purse Annette got out a package of candy; she began to eat rapidly. “I feel nervous,” she explained. “So I have to eat.” She offered the bag to Baines, but he declined—after all, one never knew. Baines had preserved his life for thirty-five years now, and he did not intend to lose it due to a trivial impulse; everything had to be calculated, thought out in advance if he expected to live another thirty-five.

Annette said, “I suppose Louis Manfredi will represent the Skitz clan again this year. I always enjoy him; he has such interesting things to tell, the visions he sees of primordial things. Beasts from the earth and the sky, monsters that battle under the ground...” She sucked on a piece of hard candy thoughtfully. “Do you think the visions that Skitzes see are real, Gabe?”

“No,” Baines said, truthfully.

“Why do they ponder and talk about them all the time, then? They’re real to them anyhow.”

“Mysticism,” Baines said scornfully. He sniffed, now; some unnatural odor had come to him, something sweet. It was, he realized, the scent of Annette’s hair and he relaxed. Or was it supposed to make him think that? he thought suddenly, again alert. “Nice perfume you have on,” he said disingenuously. “What’s it called?”

“*Night of Wildness*,” Annette said. “I bought it from a peddler here from Alpha II; it cost me ninety skins but it does smell wonderful, don’t you think? A whole month’s salary.” Her dark eyes looked sad.

“Marry me,” Baines began again, and then broke off.

The Dep representative had appeared; he stood in the doorway and his fear-haunted concave face with its staring eyes seemed to pierce Baines to the heart. Good lord, he groaned, not knowing whether to feel compassion for the poor Dep or just outright contempt. After all, the man could buck up; all the Deps could buck up, if they had any courage. But courage was totally lacking in the Dep settlement to the south. This one palpably showed that lack; he hesitated at the door, afraid to come in, and yet so resigned to his fate that in that moment he would do so anyhow, would do the very thing he feared... whereas an Ob-Com of course would simply count to twenty by twos, turn his back and flee.

“Please enter,” Annette coaxed pleasantly, indicating a chair.

“What’s the use of this conversation?” the Dep said, and entered slowly, sagging with despair. “We’ll just tear each other apart; I see no point in convening for these fracasas. However, resignedly, he seated himself, sat with bowed head, hands clenched futilely.

together.

“I’m Annette Golding,” Annette said, “and this is Gabriel Baines, the Pare. I’m the Pol. You’re Dep, aren’t you? I can tell by the way you stare at the floor.” She laughed, but with sympathy.

The Dep said nothing; he did not even give his name. Talking for a Dep, Baines knew, was difficult; it was hard for them to summon the energy. This Dep had probably come early out of a fear of being late; over-compensation, typical of them. Baines did not like them. They were useless to themselves and the other clans; why didn’t they die? And, unlike the Heeb, they could not even function as laborers; they lay down on the ground and stared sightlessly up at the sky, devoid of hope.

Leaning toward Baines, Annette said softly, “Cheer him up.”

“The hell I will,” Baines said. “What do I care? It’s his own fault he’s the way he is; he could change if he wanted. He could believe good things if he made the effort. His lot’s not worse than the rest of ours, maybe even better; after all, they work at a snail’s pace... I wish I could get away with doing as little work in a year as the average Dep.”

Now, through the open door, walked a tall, middle-aged woman in a long gray coat. This was Ingrid Hibbler, the Ob-Com; counting silently to herself she passed around and around the table, tapping each chair in turn. Baines and Annette waited; the Heeb sweeping the floor glanced up and giggled. The Dep continued to stare sightlessly down. At last Miss Hibbler found a chair whose numerology satisfied her; she drew it back, seated herself rigidly, her hands pressed tightly together, fingers working at great speed, as if knitting an invisible garment of protectiveness.

“I ran into Straw on the parking lot,” she said, and counted silently to herself. “Our Man Ugh, he’s an awful person; he almost ran over me with his wheel. I had to—”

She broke off. “Never mind. But it’s hard to rid yourself of his aura, once it infects you.” She shivered.

Annette said, to no one in particular, “This year if Manfredi is the Skitz again he’ll probably come in through the window instead of by the door.” She laughed merrily. The Heeb sweeping, joined her. “And of course we’re waiting for the Heeb,” Annette said.

“I’m the d-delegate from Gandhitown,” the Heeb, Jacob Simion, said, pushing his broom in his monotonous way. “I j-just thought I’d do this while I w-waited.” He smiled guilelessly around at all of them.

Baines sighed. The Heeb representative, a janitor. But of course; they *all* were, potential if not actually. Then that left only the Skitz and the Mans, Howard Straw, who would be in soon as he finished darting about the parking lot, scaring the other delegates as they arrived. Baines thought, He better not try to intimidate me. Because the laser pistol at Baines’ waist was not simulated. And there was always his sim, waiting outside in the hall, to call on.

“What’s this meeting about?” Miss Hibbler the Ob-Com asked, and counted rapidly, her eyes shut, fingers dangling. “One, two. One, two.”

Annette said, “There’s a rumor. A strange ship has been sighted and it’s not traders from Alpha II; we’re reasonably sure of that.” She went on eating candy; Baines saw, with gri-

amusement, that she had devoured almost the entire bagful by now. Annette, as he well knew, had a diencephalic disturbance, an overvalent idea in the gluttony-syndrome area. And whenever she became tense or worried it became worse.

“A ship,” the Dep said, stirring into life. “Maybe it can get us out of our mess.”

“What mess?” Miss Hibbler asked.

Stirring, the Dep said, “You know.” That was all he could summon up; he became inarticulate once more, lapsed into his coma of gloom. To a Dep things were always a mess. And yet, of course, the Deps feared change, too. Baines’ contempt grew as he pondered this. But—a ship. His contempt for the Dep turned to alarm. Was this true?

Straw, the Manses, would know. At Da Vinci Heights the Manses had elaborate technical devices for sighting incoming traffic; probably the original word had come from Da Vinci Heights... unless of course a Skitz mystic had foreseen it in a vision.

“It’s probably a trick,” Baines said aloud.

Everyone in the room, including the gloomy Dep, gazed at him; the Heeb momentarily even ceased sweeping.

“Those Manses,” Baines explained, “they’ll try anything. This is their way of getting an advantage over the rest of us, paying us back.”

“For what?” Miss Hibbler said.

“You know the Manses hate all of us,” Baines said. “Because they’re crude, barbaric roughnecks, unwashed storm troopers who reach for their gun when they hear the word ‘culture.’ It’s in their metabolism; it’s the old Gothic.” And yet that did not really state it; to be perfectly honest he did not know why the Manses were so intent on hurting everyone else unless, as his theory went, it was out of sheer delight in inflicting pain. No, he thought, *there must be more than that*. Malice and envy; they must envy us, know we’re culturally superior. As diverse as Da Vinci Heights is, there’s no order, no esthetic unity to it; it’s a hodgepodge of incomplete so-called “creative” projects, started out but never finished.

Annette said slowly, “Straw is a little unpolished, I admit. Even typically the reckless sort. But why would he report a foreign ship if one hadn’t been sighted? You haven’t given an clear reason.”

“But I know,” Baines said stubbornly, “that the Manses and especially Howard Straw are against us; we should act to protect ourselves from—” He ceased, because the door had opened and Straw strode brusquely into the room.

Red-haired, big and brawny, he was grinning. The appearance of an alien ship on the minute moon did not bother *him*.

It remained now only for the Skitz to arrive and, as usual, he might be an hour late; he would be wandering in a trance somewhere, lost in his clouded visions of an archetypal reality, of cosmic proto-forces underlying the temporal universe, his perpetual view of the so-called *Urwelt*.

We might as well make ourselves comfortable, Baines decided. As much so as possible given Straw’s presence among us. And Miss Hibbler’s; he did not much care for her either. In fact, he did not care for any of them with perhaps the exception of Annette: she of the

inordinate, conspicuous bosom. And he was getting nowhere with her. As usual.

But that was not his fault; all the Polys were like that—no one ever knew which way they'd jump. They were contrary on purpose, opposed to the dictates of logic. And yet they were not moths, as were the Skitzes, nor debrained machines like the Heebs. They were abundantly *alive*; that was what he enjoyed so about Annette—her quality of animation, freshness.

In fact she made him feel rigid and metallic, encased in thick steel like some archaic weapon of a useless, ancient war. She was twenty, he was thirty-five, perhaps that explained it. But he did not believe so. And then he thought, I'll bet she wants me to feel this way; she's deliberately trying to make me feel bad.

And, in response, all at once he felt icy, carefully-reasoned Pare hatred for her.

Annette, simulating obliviousness, continued to devour the remnants of her bag of candy.

The Skitz delegate to the biannual get-together at Adolfville, Omar Diamond, gazed over the landscape of the world and saw, beneath it and upon it, the twin dragons, red and white, of death and life; the dragons, locked in battle, made the plain tremble, and, overhead, the sky split and a wizened decaying gray sun cast little if any comfort in a world fast losing its meager store of the vital.

"Halt," Omar said, raising his hand and addressing the dragons.

A man and wavy-haired girl, walking along the sidewalk of Adolfville's downtown district toward him, halted. The girl said, "What's the matter with him? He's doing something." Repugnance.

"Just a Skitz," the man said, amused. "Lost in visions."

Omar said, "The eternal war has broken out afresh. The powers of life are on the wane. Can no man make the fatal decision, renounce his own life in an act of sacrifice to restore them?"

The man, with a wink at his wife, said, "You know, sometimes you can ask these fellows a question and get an interesting answer. Go ahead, ask him something—make it big and general, like, 'What is the meaning of existence?' Not, 'Where's the scissors I lost yesterday?' He urged her forward.

With caution the woman addressed Omar. "Excuse me, but I've always wondered—is there life after death?"

Omar said, "There is no death." He was amazed at the question; it was based on enormous ignorance. "What you see that you call 'death' is only the stage of germination in which the new life form lies dormant, awaiting the call to assume its next incarnation." He lifted his arms, pointing. "See? The dragon of life cannot be slain; even as his blood runs red in the meadow, new versions of him spring up at all sides. The seed buried in the earth rises again." He passed on, then, leaving the man and woman behind.

I must go to the six-story stone building, Omar said to himself. They wait there, the council. Howard Straw the barbarian. Miss Hibbler the crabbed one, beset by numbers. Annette Golding, the embodiment of life itself, plunging into everything that lets her *become*

Gabriel Baines, the one who is compelled to think up ways of defending himself against the one which does not attack. The simple one with the broom who is nearer to God than any of us. And the sad one who never looks up, the man even without a name. What shall I call him? Perhaps Otto. No, I think I'll make it Dino. Dino Watters. He awaits death, not knowing that he lives in anticipation of an empty phantom; even death cannot protect him from his own self.

Standing at the base of the great six-story building, the largest in the Pare settlement of Adolfsville, he levitated; he bobbed against the proper window, scratched at the glass with his fingernail until at last a person within came to open it for him.

"Mr. Manfreti isn't coming?" Annette asked.

"He cannot be reached this year," Omar explained. "He has passed into another realm and simply sits; he must be force-fed through the nose."

"Ugh," Annette said, and shuddered. "Catatonia."

"Kill him," Straw said harshly, "and be done with it. Those cat-Skitzes are worse than useless; they're a drain on Joan d'Arc's resources. No wonder your settlement's so poor."

"Poor materially," Omar agreed, "but rich in eternal values."

He kept far away from Straw; he did not care for him at all. Straw, despite his name, was a breaker. He enjoyed smashing and grinding; he was cruel for the love of it, not the need of it. Evil was gratuitous with Straw.

On the other hand, there sat Gabe Baines. Baines, like all Pares, could be cruel, too, but he was compelled to, in his own defense; he was so committed to protecting himself from harm that he naturally did wrong. One could not castigate him, as one could Straw.

Taking his seat Omar said, "Bless this assembly. And let's hear news of life-giving properties, rather than of the activities of the dragon of harm." He turned to Straw. "What is the information, Howard?"

"An armed ship," Straw said, with a wide, leering grim smile; he was enjoying the collective anxiety. "Not a trader from Alpha II but from another system entirely; we used a teep to pick up their thoughts. Not on any sort of trading mission but here to—" He broke off, deliberately not finishing his sentence. He wanted to see them squirm.

"We'll have to defend ourselves," Baines said. Miss Hibbler nodded and so, with reluctance, did Annette. Even the Heeb had ceased to giggle and now looked uneasy. "We at Adolfsville," Baines said, "will of course organize the defense. We'll look to your people, Straw, for the technological devices; we expect a lot from you. This is one time we expect you to throw your lot for the common good."

"The 'common good,'" Straw mimicked. "You mean for *our* good."

"My god," Annette said, "do you always have to be so irresponsible, Straw? Can't you take note of the consequences for once? At least think of our children. We *must* protect them, not ourselves."

To himself, Omar Diamond prayed. "Let the forces of life rise up and triumph on the plain of battle. Let the white dragon escape the red stain of seeming death; let the womb of protection descend on this small land and guard it from those who stand in the camp of the

unholy.” And, all at once, he remembered a sight he had seen on his trip here, by foot, harbinger of the arrival of the enemy. A stream of water had turned to blood as he stepped over it. Now he knew what the sign meant. War and death, and perhaps the destruction of the Seven Clans and their seven cities—six, if you did not count the garbage dump which was the living space of the Heeb.

Dino Watters, the Dep, muttered hoarsely, “We’re doomed.”

Everyone glared at him, even Jacob Simion the Heeb. How like a Dep.

“Forgive him,” Omar whispered. And somewhere, in the invisible empery, the spirit of li heard, responded, forgave the half-dying creature who was Dino Watters of the Dep settlement, Cotton Mather Estates.

TWO

With scarcely a glance around the old conapt with its cracked sheet-rock walls, recessed lighting that probably no longer worked, archaic picture window and shabby, out-of-date pre-Korean War tile floors, Chuck Rittersdorf said, "It'll do." He got out his checkbook, wincing at the sight of the central wrought-iron fireplace; he had not seen one of these since 1970 since his childhood.

The owner of this deteriorating building, however, frowned in suspicion as she received Chuck's identification papers. "According to this you're married, Mr. Rittersdorf, and you have children. You're not going to bring in a wife and children to this conapt; this was listed in the homeopape ad as 'for bachelor, employed, nondrinker,' and—"

Wearily Chuck said, "That's the point." The fat, middle-aged landlady in her Venusian whistle-cricket hide dress and wubfur slippers repelled him; already this had become a grim experience. "I've separated from my wife. She's keeping the children. That's why I need the conapt."

"But they'll be visiting." Her purple tinted eyebrows rose.

Chuck said, "You don't know my wife."

"Oh they will; I know these new Federal divorce laws. Not like the old days of state divorces. Been to court, yet? Got your first papers?"

"No," he admitted. It was just beginning for him. Late last night he had gone to a hotel and the night before that—it had been his final night of struggling to achieve the impossible, to keep on living with Mary.

He gave the landlady the check; she returned his ID form and departed; at once he shut the door, walked to the window of the conapt and gazed out at the street below, the wheels, jeeps, hoppers, ramps and runnels of footers. Soon he would have to call his attorney, Nat Wilde. Very soon.

The irony of their marital breakup was too much. For his wife's profession—and she was good at it—was marriage counseling. In fact she had a reputation here in Marin County, California, where she maintained her office, as being the best. God knew how many fracturing human relationships she had healed. And yet, by a masterstroke of injustice, the very talent and skill on her part had helped drive him to this dismal conapt. Because, being so successful in her own career, Mary could not resist feeling contempt, which had grown over the years, for him.

The fact was—and he had to face it—that in his career he had not been nearly as successful as Mary.

His job, and he personally enjoyed it very much, was the programming of simulacra for the Cheyenne government's intelligence agency for its unending propaganda programs, in agitation against the ring of Communist states which surrounded the USA. He personally

believed deeply in his work, but by no rationalization could it be called either a high-paying calling or a noble one; the programming which he concocted—to say the least—was infantile, spurious and biased. The main appeal was to school children both in the USA and in the neighboring Communist states, and to the great masses of adults of low educational background. He was, in fact, a hack. And Mary had pointed this out many, many times.

Hack or not, he continued in this job, although others had been offered him during the six-year course of his marriage. Perhaps it was because he enjoyed hearing his words uttered by the human-like simulacra; perhaps it was because he felt the overall cause was vital: the CIA was on the defensive, politically and economically, and had to protect itself. It needed persons to work for the government at admittedly low salaries, and at jobs lacking heroic or splendid qualities. *Someone* had to program the propaganda simulacra, who were deposited all over the world to do their job as reps of the Counter Intelligence Authority, to agitate, convince, influence. But—

Three years ago the crisis had come. One of Mary's clients—who had been involved with incredibly complex marital difficulties including three mistresses at once—was a TV producer. Gerald Feld had produced the famous, the one and only Bunny Hentman TV show, and owned a major piece of the popular TV comic. In a little side-dealing Mary had passed onto Feld several of the programming scripts which Chuck had written for the CIA's local branch in San Francisco. Feld had read them with interest because these—and this explained Mary's selection—contained a good deal of humor. That was Chuck's talent; he programmed something other than the usual pompous, solemn stuff... it was said to be alive with wit; it sparkled. And—Feld agreed. And had asked Mary to arrange a meeting between him and Chuck.

Now, standing at the window of the small, drab, old conapt, into which he had not moved so much as one article of clothing, gazing down at the street below, Chuck recalled the conversation with Mary which had erupted. It had been an especially vicious one, certainly classic; it had epitomized the breach between the two of them.

To Mary the issue had been clear: here was a job possibility; it had to be poked thoroughly into. Feld would pay well and the job would carry enormous prestige; each week, at the end of the Bunny Hentman show, Chuck's name, as one of the script writers, would appear on the screen for all the nonCom world to see. Mary would—and here was the key phrase—take *pride* in his work; it was conspicuously creative. And to Mary creativity was the open sesame to life; working for the CIA, programming propaganda simulacra who gabbled a message for uneducated Africans and Latin Americans and Asians, was not creative; the messages tended always to be the same and anyhow the CIA was in bad repute in the liberal, money-loving sophisticated circles which Mary inhabited.

“You're like a—leaf-raker in a satellite park,” Mary had said, infuriated, “on some kind of civil service deal. It's easy security; it's the way out of having to struggle. Here you are thirty-three years old and already you've given up trying. Given up wanting to make something of yourself.”

“Listen,” he said futilely. “Are you my mother or just my wife? I mean, is it your job to keep goading me on? Do I have to keep rising? Is it becoming TERPLAN President, is that what you want?” Outside of the prestige and money *there was something more involve*

Evidently Mary wanted him to be another person. She, the one who knew him best in all the world, was ashamed of him. If he took the job writing for Bunny Hentman he would become different—or so her logic went.

He could not deny the logic. And yet he persisted; he did not quit his job, did not change. Something in him was just too inertial. For better or worse. There was a hysteresis to one's essence; he did not put by that essence easily.

Outside, on the street, a white Chevrolet deluxe wheel, a shiny new six-door model had dropped to the curb and landed. He watched idly and then he realized with a start and incredulity that—impossible but true—it was his ex-own; here was Mary. She had already found him.

His wife, Dr. Mary Rittersdorf, was about to pay him a visit.

He felt fright, and a sense of increased failure; he had not even been able to pull off this—find a conapt in which to live where Mary couldn't locate him. In a few more days, Norman Wilder could arrange legal protection, but now, at this point, he was helpless; he had to admit her.

It was easy to see how she had traced him; moderate detection devices were available and cheap. Mary had probably gone to a pry-vye, a robot detection agency, obtained use of a *sniffer*, presented it his cephalic pattern; it had gone to work, followed him to every place he had been since leaving her. Nowadays, finding someone was an exact science.

So a woman determined to locate you, he reflected, can. There probably was a law governing it; perhaps he could call it Rittersdorf's Law. In proportion to one's desire to escape, to hide, detection devices—

A rap sounded on the hollow-core door of the conapt.

As he walked stiff-legged, unwillingly, to the door he thought, She will make a speech which will embody every known reasonable appeal. I, of course, will have no argument, just my feeling that we can't go on, that her contempt for me indicates a failure between us too profound to admit any future intimacy.

He opened the door. There she stood, dark-haired, wispy, in her expensive (her best) natural-wool coat, without makeup; a calm, competent, educated woman who was her superior in a flock of ways. "Listen, Chuck," she said, "I won't stand for this. I've arranged for a moving company to pick up all your things and put them in storage. What I'm here for is a check; I want all the money in your checking account. I need it for bills."

So he had been wrong; there was no speech of sweet reasonability. On the contrary; his wife was making this final. He was absolutely stunned and all he could do was gape at her.

"I've talked to Bob Alfson, my attorney," Mary said. "I've had him file for a quit-claim deed on the house."

"What?" he said. "Why?"

"So you can sign over your share of the house to me."

"Why?"

“So I can put it on the market. I’ve decided I don’t need such a large house and I can use the money. I’m putting Debby in that boarding school back East we were discussing. Deborah was their oldest, but still only six, years too young to be sent away from home. Good grief.

“Let me talk to Nat Wilder first,” he said feebly.

“I want the check now.” Mary made no move to come in; she simply stood there. And he felt desperate, despairing panic, the panic of defeat and suffering; he had lost already: she could make him do anything.

As he went to get his checkbook, Mary walked a few steps into the conapt. Her aversion for it was beyond words; she said nothing. He shrank from it, could not face it; he busied himself scratching out the check.

“By the way,” Mary said in a conversational tone of voice, “now that you’ve left for good I’m free to accept that government offer.”

“What government offer?”

“They want consulting psychologists for an interplan project; I told you about it.” She did not intend to burden herself with enlightening him.

“Oh yes.” He had a dim memory. “Charity work.” An outgrowth of the Terran-Alphane clash of ten years ago. An isolated moon in the Alphane system settled by Terrans which had been cut off two generations ago because of the war; a rookery of such meager enclaves existed in the Alph’ system, which had dozens of moons as well as twenty-two planets.

She accepted the check, put it folded into her coat pocket.

“Would you get paid?” he asked.

“No,” Mary said, remotely.

Then she would live—support the children as well—on his salary alone. It came to him: she expected a court settlement which would force him to do the very thing his refusal of which had pulled down their six-year marriage. She would, through her vast influence in Marin County courts, obtain such a judgment that he would have to give up his job with the San Francisco branch of the CIA and seek other work entirely.

“How—long will you be gone?” he asked. It was obvious that she intended to make good use of this interval of reorganization of their lives; she would do all the things denied her—allegedly, anyhow—by his presence.

“About six months. It depends. Don’t expect me to keep in touch. I’ll be represented in court by Alfson; I won’t appear.” She added, “I’ve started the suit for separate maintenance so you won’t have to do that.”

The initiative, even there, was gone from his hands. He had as always been too slow.

“You can have everything,” he told Mary, all at once.

Her look said, But what you can give isn’t enough. “Everything” was merely nothing, as far as his achievements were concerned.

“I can’t give you what I don’t have,” he said quietly.

“Yes you can,” Mary said, without a smile. “Because the judge is going to recognize what

I've always recognized about you. If you have to, if someone makes you, you can meet the customary standards applied to grown men with the responsibility of a wife and children."

He said, "But—I have to retain some kind of life of my own."

"Your first obligation is to us," Mary said.

For that he had no answer; he could only nod.

Later, after Mary had left with the check, he looked for and found a stack of old homeopapes in the closet of the apt; he sat on the ancient, Danish-style sofa in the living room, rooting through them for the articles on the interplan project which Mary intended to become involved in. Her new life, he said to himself, to replace that of being married.

In a 'pape one week old he found a more or less complete article; he lit a cigarette and read carefully.

Psychologists were needed, it was anticipated by the US Interplan Health & Welfare Service, because the moon had originally been a hospital area, a psychiatric care-center for Terran immigrants to the Alphane system who had cracked under the abnormal, excessive pressures of inter-system colonization. The Alphanes had left it alone, except for their traders.

What was known of the moon's current status came from these Alphane traders. According to them a civilization of sorts had arisen during the decades in which the hospital had been severed from Terra's authority. However, they could not evaluate it because their knowledge of Terran mores was inadequate. In any case local commodities were produced, trade in domestic industry existed, too, and he wondered why the Terran government felt the necessity of meddling. He could imagine Mary there so well; she was precisely the sort which TERPLAN, the international agency, would select. People of Mary's type would always succeed.

Going to the ancient picture window he stood for a time once more, gazing down. And then, stealthily, he felt rise up within him the familiar urge. The sense that it was pointless to go on; suicide, whatever the law and the church said, was for him the only real answer at that instant.

He found a smaller side window that opened; raising it, he listened to the buzz of a jet hopper as it landed on a rooftop on the far side of the street. Its sound died. He waited, and then he climbed part way over the edge of the window, dangling above the traffic which moved below....

From inside him a voice, but not his own, said, "Please tell me your name. Regardless of whether you intend or do not intend to jump."

Turning, Chuck saw a yellow Ganymedean slime mold that had silently flowed under the door of the conapt and was gathering itself into the heap of small globes which comprised its physical being.

"I rent the conapt across the hall," the slime mold declared.

Chuck said, "Among Terrans it's customary to knock."

"I possess nothing to knock with. In any case I wished to enter before you—departed."

“It’s my personal business whether I jump or not.”

“No Terran is an island,” the slime mold more or less quoted. “Welcome to the building which we who rent apts here have humorously dubbed ‘Discarded Arms Conapts.’ There are others here whom you should meet. Several Terrans—like yourself—plus a number of non-Ts of assorted physiognomy, some which will repel you, some which no doubt will attract. I had planned to borrow a cup of yogurt culture from you, but in view of your preoccupation it seems an insulting request.”

“I haven’t moved in anything. As yet.” He swung his leg back over the sill, stepped back into the room, away from the window. He was not surprised to see the Ganymedeian slime mold; a ghetto situation existed with non-Ts: no matter how influential and highly-placed in their own societies on Terra they were forced to inhabit substandard housing such as this.

“Could I carry a business card,” the slime mold said, “I would now present it to you. I am an importer of uncut gems, a dealer in secondhand gold, and, under the right circumstances, a fanatic buyer of philatelic collections. As a matter of fact I have in my apt at the moment a choice collection of early US, with special emphasis on *mint blocks of four* of the Columbus set; would you—” It broke off. “I see you would not. In any case the desire to destroy yourself has at least temporarily abated from your mind. That is good. In addition to my announced commercial—”

“Aren’t you required by law to curb your telepathic ability while on Terra?” Chuck said.

“Yes, but your situation seemed to be exceptional. Mr. Rittersdorf, I cannot personally employ you, since I require no propagandistic services. But I have a number of contacts among the nine moons; given time—”

“No thanks,” Chuck said roughly. “I just want to be left alone.” He had already endured enough assistance in job acquisition to last him a lifetime.

“But, on my part, quite unlike your wife, I have no ulterior motive.” The slime mold ebbed closer. “Like most Terran males your sense of self-respect is bound up in your wage-earning capabilities, an area in which you have grave doubts as well as extreme guilts. I can do something for you... but it will take time. Presently I leave Terra and start back to my own moon. Suppose I pay you five hundred skins—US, of course—to come with me. Consider it a loan, if you want.”

“What would I do on Ganymede?” Irritably, Chuck said, “Don’t you believe me either? I have a job; one I consider adequate—I don’t want to leave it.”

“Subconsciously—”

“Don’t read my subconscious back to me. And get out of here and leave me alone.” He turned his back on the slime mold.

“I am afraid your suicidal drive will return—perhaps even before tonight.”

“Let it.”

The slime mold said, “There is only one thing that can help you, and my miserable job offer is not it.”

“What is it, then?”

“A woman to replace your wife.”

“Now you’re acting as a—”

“Not at all. This is neither physically base nor ethereal; it is simply practical. You must find a woman who can accept you, love you, as you are; otherwise you’ll perish. Let me ponder this. And in the meantime, control yourself. Give me five hours. And remain here.” The slime mold flowed slowly under the door, through the crack and outside into the hall. Its thoughts dimmed. “As an importer, buyer and dealer I have many contacts with Terrans of all walks of life...” Then it was gone.

Shakily, Chuck lit a cigarette. And walked away—a long distance away—from the window to seat himself on the ancient Danish-style sofa. And wait.

It was hard to know how to react to the slime mold’s charitable offer; he was both angered and touched—and, in addition, puzzled. Could the slime mold actually help him? It seemed impossible.

He waited one hour.

A knock sounded on the door of the conapt. It could not be the Ganymedean returning because a slime mold did not—could not—knock. Rising, Chuck went to the door and opened it.

A Terran girl stood there.

THREE

Although she had a thousand matters to attend to, all pertaining to her new non-paying job with the US Interplan Health & Welfare Department, Dr. Mary Rittersdorf took time off for a personal item. Once more she rode by jet cab to New York and the Fifth Avenue office of Jerry Feld, the producer of the Bunny Hentman show. A week ago she had given him a batch of the very latest—and best—CIA scripts which Chuck had written; it was now time to find out if her husband, or ex-husband, had a chance at the job.

If Chuck wouldn't seek better employment on his own she would. It was her duty, if for no other reason than that she and the children, for the next year at least, would be totally dependent on Chuck's earnings.

Let off on the roof field Mary descended by in-ramp to floor ninety, came to the glass door, hesitated, then allowed it to open and entered the outer office in which Mr. Feld's receptionist—very pretty, with much make-up and a rather tight spider-silk sweater—sat. Mary felt annoyed at the girl; just because bras had become passé, did a girl with so pronounced a bosom have to cater to fashion? In this case practicality dictated a bra, and Mary stood at the desk feeling herself flushing with disapproval. And artificial nipple-dilatation it was just too much.

"Yes?" the receptionist said, glancing up through an ornate, stylish monocle. As she met Mary's coldness her nipples deburged slightly, as if scared into submission, frightened away.

"I'd like to see Mr. Feld. I'm Dr. Mary Rittersdorf and I don't have much time; I have to leave for the TERPLAN lunar base at three P.M. New York time." She made her voice efficient—and demanding—as she knew how.

After a series of bureaucratic actions on the receptionist's part Mary was sent on in.

At his imitation oak desk—no genuine oak had existed for a decade—Jerry Feld sat with a video tape projector, deep in his business tasks. "Just a moment, Dr. Rittersdorf." He pointed to a chair; she seated herself, crossed her legs and lit a cigarette.

On the miniature TV screen Bunny Hentman was doing an act in which he played a German industrialist; wearing a blue, double-breasted suit, he was explaining to his board of directors how the new autonomic plows which their cartel was producing could be used for war. For the plows would guide themselves, at news of hostilities, into a single unit; the unit was not a larger plow but a missile-launcher. In his heavy accent Bunny explained this, putting it as if it were a great achievement, and Feld chuckled.

"I don't have much time, Mr. Feld," Mary said crisply.

Reluctantly, Feld stopped the video tape and turned toward her. "I showed Bunny the scripts. He's interested. Your husband's wit is dry, moribund, but it's authentic. It's what one was—"

"I know all this," Mary said. "I've had to hear his programming scripts for years; he always tried them out on me." She smoked rapidly, feeling tense. "Well, do you think Bunny could use them?"

"We're nowhere," Feld said, "until your husband sees Bunny; there's no use your—"

The office door opened and Bunny Hentman entered.

This was the first time Mary had seen the famous TV comic in person and she felt curious: how did he differ from his public image? He was, she decided, a little shorter, quite a bit older, than on TV; he had a large bald area and he looked tired. In fact, in real life Bunny looked like a worried Central European junk dealer, in a rumpled suit, not quite well-shaved, thinning hair disarrayed, and—to cap the impression—smoking the shortened remains of a cigar. But his eyes. He had an alert and yet warm quality; she rose and stood facing him. Over TV the strength of his gaze did not register. This was not mere intelligence on Bunny's part; this was more, a perception of—she did not know what. And—

All about Bunny an aura hung, an aura of suffering. His face, his body, seemed sopped with it. Yes, she thought, that's what shows in his eyes. Memory of pain. Pain that took place long ago, but which he has never forgotten—nor will he. He was made, put on this planet, to suffer; no wonder he's a great comic. For Bunny comedy was a struggle, a fighting back against the reality of literal physical pain; it was a reaction formation of gigantic—and effective—stature.

"Bun," Jerry Feld said, "This is Dr. Mary Rittersdorf; her husband wrote those CIA robot programs I showed you last Thursday."

The comic held out his hand; Mary shook hands with him and said, "Mr. Hentman—"

"Please," the comic said. "That's just my professional name. My real name, the one I was born with, is Lionsblood Regal. Naturally I had to change it; who goes into show biz calling himself Lionsblood Regal? You call me Lionsblood or just Blood; Jer here calls me Li-Regal; it's a mark of intimacy." He added, still holding onto her hand, "And if there is anything I like about a woman it's intimacy."

"Li-Reg," Feld said, "is your cable address; you've got it mixed up again."

"That's so." Hentman released Mary's hand. "Well, Frau Doktor Rattenfänger—"

"Rittersdorf," Mary corrected.

"Rattenfänger," Feld said, "is German for rat-catcher. Look, Bun, don't make a mistake like that again."

"Sorry," the comic said. "Listen, Frau Doktor Rittelsdorf. Please call me something nice; I can use it. I crave affection from pretty women; it's the small boy in me." He smiled, and yet his face—and especially his eyes—still contained the world-weary pain, the weight of an ancient burden. "I'll hire your husband if I get to see you now and then. If he understands the *real* reason for the deal, what diplomats call the 'secret protocols.'" To Jerry Feld he said, "And you know how my protocols have been bothering me, lately."

"Chuck is in a run-down conapt on the West Coast," Mary said. "I'll write the address down." Quickly she took pen and paper and jotted. "Tell him you need him; tell him—"

"But I don't need him," Bunny Hentman said quietly.

Mary said, with caution, "Couldn't you see him, Mr. Hentman? Chuck has a unique talent. I'm afraid if no one pushes him—"

Plucking at his lower lip Hentman said, "You're afraid he won't make use of it, that it'll go begging."

"Yes." She nodded.

"But it's *his* talent. It's for him to decide."

"My husband," Mary said, "needs help." And I ought to know, she thought. It's my job to understand people. Chuck is a dependent infantile type; he must be pushed and led if he's to move at all. Otherwise, he'll rot in that awful little old conapt he's rented. Or—throw himself out the window. This, she decided, is the only thing that will save him. Although he would be the last to admit it.

Eyeing her intently Hentman said, "Can I make a side-deal with you, Mrs. Rittersdorf?"

"W-what kind of side-deal?" She glanced at Feld; his face was impassive as if he had withdrawn, turtlelike, from the situation.

"Just to see you now and then," Hentman said. "Not on business."

"I won't be here. I'm going to work for TERPLAN; I'll be in the Alph' system for months, not years." She felt panic.

"Then no job for your hubby," Hentman said.

Feld spoke up. "When are you leaving, Dr. Rittersdorf?"

"Right away," Mary said. "In four days. I have to pack my things, arrange for the children to—"

"Four days," Hentman said meditatively. He continued to eye her, up and down. "You and your husband are separated? Jerry said—"

"Yes," Mary said. "Chuck's already moved out."

"Have dinner with me tonight," Hentman said. "And meanwhile I'll either drop by your husband's conapt, or send someone from my staff. We'll give him a six weeks' try... get him started doing scripts. Is it a deal?"

"I don't mind having dinner with you," Mary said. "But—"

"That's all," Hentman said, "just dinner. Any restaurant you want, anywhere in the United States. But, if more develops..." He smiled.

After flying back to the West Coast by jet cab, she traveled on the urban monorail into downtown San Francisco and TERPLAN's branch office, the agency with whom she had dealt regarding her highly desirable new job.

Shortly she found herself ascending by elevator; beside her stood a trim-cut young man, well-dressed, a P.R. official of TERPLAN whose name, as she had gotten it, was Lawrence McRae.

McRae said, "There's a gang of homeopape reporters waiting, and here's what they'll throw at you. They'll imply, and try to get you to confirm, that this therapeutic project is a coverup."

for Terra's acquisition of the moon Alpha III M2. That fundamentally we're there to reestablish a colony, claim it, develop it, then send settlers to it."

"But it was ours before the war," Mary said. "Otherwise how could it have been used as a hospital base?"

"True," McRae said. They left the elevator, walked down a hall. "But no Terran ship has visited it for twenty-five years and legally speaking that terminates our land-claim. The moon reverted five years ago to political and legal autonomy. However, if we land and reestablish a hospital base, with technicians, doctors, therapists, whatever else is needed, we can assert a fresh claim—if the Alphanes haven't, and evidently they haven't. They're still recovering from the war, of course; that may be it. Or they may have scouted the moon and decided it's not what they want, that the ecology is too foreign to their biology. Here." He held a door open and she entered, finding herself facing seated homeopape reporters, fifteen or sixteen of them, some with pic-cameras.

Taking a deep breath she walked to the lectern which McRae pointed out; it was equipped with a microphone.

McRae, speaking into the mike, said, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is Dr. Mary Rittersdorf, the renowned marriage counselor from Marin County who as you know has volunteered her services for this project."

A reporter at once said, lazily, "Dr. Rittersdorf, what is this project called? Project Psychotic?" The other reporters laughed.

It was McRae who answered. "*Operation Fifty-minutes* is the working name we've applied to it."

"Where do the sickies on the moon go when you catch them?" another reporter asked. "Should maybe you sweep them under the rug, is that it?"

Mary, speaking into the mike, said, "At first we will be involved in research, in order to fathom the situation. We know already that the original patients—at least some of them—and their progeny are alive. How viable the society they've formed is we don't pretend to know. I would guess it's not viable at all, except in the bare, literal sense that they do live. We will attempt corrective therapy with those we can. It's the children, of course, that we're most concerned with."

"When do you expect to be on Alpha III M2, Doctor?" a reporter asked. The pic-camera whirred on the ground away, whirring like distant flights of birds.

"I'd say within two weeks," Mary said.

"You're not being paid for this, are you, Doctor?" a reporter asked.

"No."

"You're convinced, then, that this is in the public good? It's a Cause?"

"Well," Mary said, hesitantly. "It—"

"Terra, then, will benefit by our meddling with this culture of ex-mental hospital patients?" The reporter's voice was sleek.

Turning to McRae, Mary said, "What should I say?"

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