

BUTCH

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Like everybody else, I read about the Nova Scotia Meteor with some interest, though I'll admit my first thought was what a pity that it had plunged unrecoverably into the Atlantic. Anything big enough to produce that much fire and noise would have been of real scientific value. It was Valerie who pointed out to me the farms and towns and people on which it had not fallen. Then we forgot about it.

A few days later, the papers were full of stories about the Bangor Monster. You remember the terror for a week in eastern Maine: two men and a boy found dead in lonely places, and any number of dogs and cows, apparently slashed by knife-like claws; unidentifiable pad marks around the bodies, which could only have been made by something walking on two feet; stories of the thing glimpsed, stories of the thing chasing people, ten thousand conflicting stories and descriptions over the whole east coast; state police everywhere, reporters everywhere, the Thing (capitalized by now) everywhere simultaneously. As usual, whatever facts there might be were soon buried under the hysteria and the publicity-seeking lies. Then the sudden blackout of news, the story buried in back pages, psychologists talking pompous nonsense about mass hallucination, and oblivion. Pretty soon we forgot about that too.

It was a couple of months later when I came home, one of those raw, sleety evenings you get in the Chicago winter, and found that we had a visitor. I opened the door of our apartment, thinking mostly about supper, a hot Scotch and lemon, pipe and slippers and our newly acquired Beethoven *Ninth*.

Valerie met me, and I greeted her in detail. Even after two years of marriage, you don't get tired of a vivacious, imaginative little blonde whose figure is best described by making sine waves with the hands. She can also cook.

"Bob—" she said. "Bob, my new hairdo—hey, there!—oh, well . . . mmmm . . ." Pulling free: "Take it easy, caveman. We've got company."

"Oh?" I went past her into the living room. Doc Urquhart was sitting under the *View of Toledo*, a short, round, shock-headed figure I hadn't seen for four years now. "Well, I'll be damned!"

"Quite probably," said Valerie.

Doc got up and pumped my hand. We'd become acquainted during the war, when he was the medical man finding out just what a human pilot can stand and I was the engineer explaining to him why the pilot would have to stand a little bit more than that, and had kept up the friendship since. "Nice to see you," I said, and meant it. "But why the deuce didn't you let us know you were coming? We'd 've arranged—"

I realized suddenly how grave his face was, and broke off. For a moment there was silence.

"It's business, Bob," he said at last. "I want to offer you a job."

"Thanks, but I've got one," I answered.

"Can you get leave from it?"

"Why—well—what do you want me for?"

Doc shook his tangled gray head. "Can't tell you that. Not here. But you've never worked on anything more important."

"I assure you, Dr. Urquhart, there are no Russians under the sofa taking notes," said Valerie.

"Sorry, Mrs. Muir. This, well, I just can't talk about it. In fact, I'll have to ask you not to mention that I've been here or that Bob has been co-opted."

"If I've been," I said, annoyed.

"Look, Bob," said Doc, "you know me better than that. Here's the deal. We need a man like you. And I recommended you personally. Luckily, you're working with classified data at the moment, so your FBI clearance is already good. But your wife hasn't been cleared. We want you as a—a consultant. Top pay, and the work is, well, it's the sort of thing you'd pay to get in on. Shouldn't take too long, about six weeks maybe. I came out to interview you personally and see

if you qualify. Talking with your wife has convinced me that you do."

"I'll have to think about it," I said lamely.

Doe switched the conversation, and we had a pleasant evening, the sort of bull session that had lasted till dawn in my bachelor days. In the end, of course, I agreed to his offer. Two days later, we were in a taxi bound for the airport and a special plane.

"Now can you tell me what the job is?" I asked.

"Not till we're in the air," he replied. "But I'll tell you why you qualify for it."

"Go ahead."

"I noticed that you still read science-fiction."

As it turned out, the plane was an Air Force speedster with a taciturn young crew. That didn't make me feel important, somehow; instead, I had the sudden idea I was a very small fly caught in a very large machine. "Where are we bound?" I asked humbly.

"The Danton Institute. It's a mental hospital in up-state New York." Doc got his pipe going and blew moody blue clouds.

"And what are we going to do there?"

"We're part of a sanity commission."

"Huh?"

"We have to decide on the sanity of a being from outer space."

The Danton Institute had been picked largely because of its isolation. It lay in the rolling hills above the Hudson valley, with a couple of hundred acres of lawn and park around it; once it had been a millionaire's estate. The nearest town was a village ten miles off, otherwise there were only scattered farms. A high stone wall surrounded the main house, which had been the mansion and about which smaller out-buildings had mushroomed. On the whole, it must have been pleasant enough, with an exclusive and expensive clientele. These had all been moved elsewhere, and now the Institute looked more like an armed camp. Sentries stood at the approaches, sentries patrolled the walls, jeeps and half-tracks and a few light tanks squatted with bored-looking drivers always waiting nearby, helicopters were parked in the rear, soldiers had turned the dormitories into barracks, soldiers and

important-looking civilians moved in and out of the big house—"Judas priest!" I said. "All for one alien?"

"If you remember your science-fiction," said Doc, "this alien may at any instant start pulling men apart by telekinesis. Or he may decide he doesn't like us and take it on the lam for Russia—with all his knowledge. Or he may call up the Kremlin by telepathy and get a paratroop brigade sent to haul him out of here."

"I wonder if he's the crazy one," I muttered. The fourth consecutive MP was checking our passes.

Doc shrugged. "I suppose you'd welcome him with a brass band and the keys to the city—after he murdered three unarmed citizens up in Maine, including one ten-year-old child, and tore the throat out of a psychiatrist here who was only trying to get an encephalogram."

"Mmmm—yeah," I said. "There is that."

We were shepherded by a tense-looking young lieutenant of Intelligence, through high, oak-paneled hallways to the room which was the main office of Project Wizard. That name, together with other misleading hints, had been chosen with malice aforethought: in case there was some leak, it was hoped "they" would assume we'd taken over the institute merely to study something in the ESP line which might have military value. I overheard snatches of conversation between men. It had nothing to do with the stars or a science a thousand years ahead of our own or the fate of our race; it was mostly plain human bellyaching at being penned in here indefinitely without so much as a female face around. Nobody but the top brass was going to leave the Institute till something had been accomplished with Butch.

Brigadier General Harmon J. Leslie was about forty years old, a bulky, harassed-looking man with stiff gray-shot hair and horn-rimmed glasses. He was actually just an administrator; the real boss of Project Wizard was Dr. Hamilton Moran. Both of them greeted us as we entered, said they were pleased to meet me, and asked us to sit down.

"I haven't been told many details," I said. "I'm not even sure just what I can do to help."

"The whole business is unprecedented," said Moran. "We've had to make up our own rules as we went along. Dr. Urquhart said you had the kind of mind which could come up with new approaches, fresh slants—that's enough for us. If

nothing else, you may be able to guess just how far advanced the technology of Butch's people is."

He was a slim, dark, sharp-featured man, whose gentle voice didn't quite fit with the almost Puritanical features. Doc said he'd been picked to run the project because of his prominence as a research psychiatrist. He'd had a lot to do with developing shock techniques and lobotomy, as well as fundamental work in encephalography and neurology. Actually, there were not too many men working on the problem itself. A large number would only have gotten in each other's way. Moran and his assistants were handling the psychiatric end, while Doc Urquhart's staff was still considering Butch's anatomy and biochemistry. I was a kind of last resort; maybe Butch was his people's equivalent of an engineer, and I would think enough like him to understand what was going on in that unhuman skull.

"Suppose you begin from the beginning," I suggested. "I gather that the Nova Scotia Meteor was really a spaceship which crashed in the sea. It hasn't been recovered, has it?"

"With some thousands of square miles in which it might have struck, and some hundreds or thousands of feet of water on top of it—hardly." The general's voice was dry. "We're still trying, but it's hopeless. Apparently it went out of control, and Butch was the only survivor. He bailed out—"

"How?"

"How should I know? He was found in Maine, three or four hundred miles away, practically naked. Maybe he's, what's the word, telekinetic."

"Then he wouldn't stay here," said Moran crisply. "He wouldn't have been captured at all. No, I imagine he had a—oh, call it an antigravity parachute—which carried him about to Bangor. Then it probably ran out of fuel, and he buried it and set off on foot. He wandered around for a week or so, presumably hiding by day and traveling by night."

"Sounds like he was scared of us," I suggested.

"Well," said Doc, "wouldn't you be if you landed on an alien planet? He'd have no idea what we were like. Maybe, on the basis of other planets he's seen, the chances were that we'd be hostile. He buried his parachute so as not to give us any information we don't have, and began skulking about trying to learn what sort of world he was marooned on."

"That's a nice hypothesis," snapped Moran, "but it just

doesn't fit the facts. Which are that he killed people and animals without provocation."

"The cows he must have killed for food," said Doc. "They had been partially eaten. The dogs probably barked at him, and he didn't dare have that noise."

"But the people? He *must* have known they were the dominant species here and that his killing them could only antagonize us."

"I can't explain that," admitted Doc in a small voice.

"Nor has he been the least bit co-operative since we caught him," said Moran. His soft tones had suddenly turned cold. "He should have been able to see where his only advantage lies. But he's done nothing that makes sense. Most of the time he's quite passive, refusing to communicate in any way. Occasionally, for no reason at all, he flies into murderous rages. We've had one man killed and several badly injured."

"So what's your theory?" I asked, though I knew the answer.

"He's insane, of course. Probably he sustained some injury in the crash and it's driven him out of his mind."

Leslie smiled with a certain bleakness. "You see the problem," he said. "Butch represents a civilization so far beyond ours that we probably can't imagine half of what they've got. Atomic energy, gravity control, probably faster-than-light travel—just write your own list. We've got to have his knowledge, both for the sake of this nation and for the whole damn human race. His civilization could probably squash us like beetles if they wanted to. But will they want to? We've got to *know!*"

He spread his hands. "Only Butch is insane. First we've got to cure him. How do you cure a nonhuman member of a civilization that never was on Earth?"

Doc Urquhart cocked a sardonic brow at Moran. "I think there's a more fundamental question," he replied. "How do you know when he *is* cured? What, for Butch, constitutes sanity?"

The padded cell was upstairs, at the end of a corridor whose doors opened on labs crammed with more testing equipment than I could put a name to. A pair of sentries stood at the landing, and another pair, flanking the outer door of the cell, snapped to attention as we four approached.

The room beyond was a large one. It had been cut in half by a hastily erected but husky wall. The farther end was the cell. Moran gestured at a peephole, and I put my eye to it. There was a wide-angle lens which covered nearly the whole space, but I looked only at Butch.

He was standing in the middle of the room, arms hanging, the long cat-like tail drooping, but his posture was defiant. My first impression was that he was gigantic. Then I recognized the illusion common to six-footers, that anyone their own height is taller. According to the measurements, Butch was six one and a half and weighed some two hundred pounds. His torso looked almost human, broad-shouldered and smoothly muscled; his legs were not quite so manlike, he was digitigrade and walked with a crouched gait on three clawed toes. There were horny spurs on his heels, and when the four stubby fingers of his hand closed together, retractible claws came out between them. Sleek bluish-gray fur covered the whole form; otherwise he wore only a kind of sporran of some soft, metallic-looking, seemingly indestructible fabric. The pouch had been empty when he was captured.

His head was the most unearthly thing about him. It was of good size, round, with a high bulging forehead and large pointed ears. The eyes were oblique and yellow, with narrow horizontal pupils. The mouth was wide, full-lipped, with two small tusks projecting over the chin. Instead of a nose, he had two fleshy organs that looked rather like branched coral growths, though they were soft and movable.

He sensed us and turned around. For a moment he hissed, and the claws came out. Then he went back to his aloofness.

I looked up from the peephole, shivering. It must have taken real guts for the state police to track down that monster and then catch him in nets instead of filling him with lead. After that, of course, the FBI and the Secret Service had taken over. Those outfits work fast when they want to.

"He takes a little getting used to," said Doc quietly. "But he's really beautiful, in his own way. We must look just as weird to him."

"Or it," muttered Leslie.

"It?" I asked, bristling a trifle. "Look, just because he's from outside—"

"Oh, I didn't mean to sound—prejudiced," said the gen-

eral. "Fact is, Butch is 'he' only by courtesy. He's really, a, uh, hermaphrodite."

"No kidding!" I took another look.

Doc nodded. "We're not too well up on his anatomy yet," he said. "But he's submitted to a number of examinations. He's a warm-blooded, hairy animal with both male and female reproductive organs—though neither looks much like ours. He could reproduce by himself or in partnership. But he's oviparous, I'm convinced, and there are no organs of lactation." He smiled wryly. "Neither mammal, reptile, nor good red herring. You name it."

"How about those—antennae?"

"Spongy growths, used for both breathing and smelling as far as we can gather," said Moran. Doc frowned a bit; after all, those results were due to *his* team. "Tests with minute traces of perfumes and so on indicate that his sense of smell is far superior to ours. While we can't be certain, we've reason to think that his other senses are about as good as the human, maybe his hearing is not quite equal to our norm. He probably smells us at the peephole."

I looked in again. There were washing and sanitary facilities in the cell, also padded and rubber-covered. Doc told me that Butch used them without having needed instruction.

"How about food?" I asked.

"Now there's a real problem," said Doc. "His metabolism is obviously pretty similar to ours. Blood and cell samples, analysis of body wastes, and so on, indicate that, though there are some interesting anomalies. No adrenalin, for instance—another phenol derivative instead; and the chromosome pattern— Well, anyway, we've just given him a wide variety of stuff and let him choose what he wants. Which turns out to be mostly meat, though he won't touch it if it's bloody. Some fruits and vegetables, too. So far his health has remained tolerably good, as far as I can judge. Only—what vitamins and trace elements that he needs are lacking in that diet? It'd be strange if he could eat nothing but ordinary Earth food for a long time without developing some kind of deficiency. We've added a supplement containing almost everything we could think of, in minute doses, so if he needs tantalum or calcium pentothenate he's getting it. But—" Doc shrugged. "No telling."

"He can't be from this solar system," I said, very quietly.

"There are no planets here he could have come from."

"Yeah," said Leslie. "Interstellar spaceships. I know. And if the galactic overlords don't like the way we've treated Butch—"

"They may never find us again," I said. "Space is too huge. This may be only one of a million explorers, of whom a certain percentage never come back and are just written off."

"There are ten thousand possibilities," said Moran impatiently, "and we'll never know which is right until Butch tells us. But he won't communicate."

The institute was pretty crowded, but Doc and I had a fair sized room to ourselves. That evening we broke open a case of beer and settled down to some serious talking.

"You're an idea man," said Doc. There was a new harshness on his round ruddy face. "We've tried just about every standard, professional approach there is. At my insistence, we've now co-opted you for the amateur approach. Deliver, boy."

"Well," I said, tilting my chair back against the wall, "just what have you tried? Let's see. Let's make a list." I ticked the points off on my fingers. "From the physiological angle, you've studied samples of blood, skin, hair, and so on. You've taken Butch's temperature, which turns out to be around one hundred two—"

"Not necessarily his racial norm," said Doc. "A lot of humans have chronic hyper- or hypothermia. Moran thinks the temperature is a sign of hysteria."

"Well, you've tried to test his senses by seeing how he reacts," I went on. "Not too successfully, because most of the time he just refuses to react. You've let him decide his own diet, but don't know if you're slowly poisoning him or not. You've taken cardiograms, X-rays, encephalograms—"

"Ah, yes, those encephalograms," said Doc. "They're not human patterns, you know. But Moran thinks they indicate mental abnormality. He says one of those frequencies is found in humans with a bruised cortex, and Butch is nearly enough human—"

"How can you find out? That wave may be perfectly all right for his race."

"How do you think Moran means to find out? Open the skull and see."

"But—good Lord! Butch's brain probably doesn't even look like ours!"

"I know. Such hints as the X-rays give us suggest that. Still—what else is there to do? Moran may be right. Me, I'm wondering what anesthetic to use."

"Well, let's go on to the technological angle," I said. "Pretty nil, you told me. When you showed him stellar maps, he didn't do a thing. When you took him outside and showed him the stars and asked him in sign language to point out where he came from—he didn't."

"Moran says he's nuts, and that's part of the evidence," nodded Doc.

"I think Butch is just being cagy," I said. "How does he know we don't have spaceships and designs on his home star if we can find it?"

"Well, such suspicions do look pretty paranoid, don't they?" asked Doc. "I've always thought the whole idea of galactic conquest was ridiculous. Logistics and economics both speak against it."

"Could be," I said reluctantly.

"At any rate," said Doc, "we tried to draw diagrams for him, simple things like a Coolidge tube or the fission of a U-235 atom. Dammit, Bob, he couldn't have been crewman on a spaceship without knowing a lot of applied science! We wanted him to draw similar pictures. It needn't have been anything he wanted to hide, it could only have been—oh, a picture of thorium fission. A schematic radio circuit. *Anything*, just to give us some common basis of symbols. But he kind of stared at the pictures, and then handed the pencil back."

"So that's proof he suffers from amnesia?" I asked.

"Well, it's indicative," said Doc mildly.

"Yeah. Unless—could it be that his science and its symbols are *really* different from ours? Maybe they don't use radios, they might have something we've never dreamed of. Maybe they don't think of the atom as a particle made up of other particles. It could be regarded just as a singularity in a universal potential field, if Butch's race is good enough at mathematics . . . In other words, our whole symbology may be so alien to his that he saw it was hopeless to try drawing us any pictures."

"It's possible," said Doc. "I'd like to believe it, Bob. But

his whole behavior pattern is so irrational that— Well, look. He has almost the same vocal equipment as we do. Vocal cords, hard and soft palate, tongue—all of it. He'd speak English with a funny whistling accent, but he could talk. His race *must* communicate by speech, they wouldn't have such organs so well-developed if they didn't."

"And he won't talk," I said.

"Not a damn word," said Doc. "We've tried by the hour, pointing out objects, naming them, acting out verbs, drawing pictures, every goddam thing you can imagine. We've had educational psychologists from here to California working on the problem. Butch watches us. But he never says a word. When he gets mad, he may hiss, but never a word."

"Look," I said, "there's no such thing as human nature. It's a matter of cultural patterns. There's no biological difference between us and the late lamented Nazis, but you could cross the universe, I'm sure, without finding thought and behavior patterns more incompatible. So—what kind of society does Butch come from?"

"We've had anthropologists here," said Doc. "All they could do was make profound and meaningless remarks. Hell, Butch doesn't give us anything to go on! If he is a normal member of his culture, then that culture must be something horrible. Look at his record—" The old voice shook just a little. "Murder, complete unco-operativeness, passivity breaking into violence for no reason at all—"

"Maybe we break one of his taboos every now and then, without knowing it," I suggested.

"If Butch could cross space, he'd have sense enough not to expect us to behave just the way he thinks proper," said Doc. "Unless Moran's right."

"My wife has a degree in anthropology," I said, "and she's a smart girl too. Can't you get her here?"

"I'll try if you insist," said Doc, "but there isn't much chance of it. Anyway, by the time she got her clearance, this business would be over—one way or the other."

I sat forward so my chair's legs crashed on the floor. "How's that?"

Doc smiled grimly. "You don't think this deadlock can go on forever, do you? Butch has knowledge we've got to have. Moran already has an okay to—cure him. Sooner or later, and probably sooner, he'll start trying."

"And if Moran fails?"

"Then," said Doc, "we forget that this ever happened. We bury it deeper than that spaceship is buried. We lock Project Wizard up and throw away the key. Until the possible day when Butch's friends come looking for him."

I wanted to watch some of the studies, and that was granted me the next morning. After breakfast, Doc was going to make some allergy and reaction tests. "Dr. Moran's orders," he explained. "You have to know a good deal about biochemistry before you can try shock treatment."

"Why shock?" I asked through a mouthful of ham and eggs. They fed us well, at least. The dining room was full of uniforms and the good clean smell of coffee. "If concussion is responsible—"

"We'll have a look at his brain first," said Moran, "but I wonder if shock may not be our only hope. If it fails, there's always lobotomy."

"What the hell do you think you're treating him for?" I snapped. I'm always irritable in the morning.

"I wish I knew," said Moran frankly. "It isn't a human behavior pattern—not even an abnormal one. The passivity alternating with sudden rages suggests manic-depression; but then again, it could be paranoia, ordinarily showing as aloofness but becoming murderous at some fancied threat or insult. But there's the amnesia too, those scientific data that he simply didn't recognize." His gaunt keen face took on a stubborn look. "All in all, though, it looks as if the insanity is due more to psychic factors than to gross lesions. Possibly the terror of the crash landing. . . . If that's correct, then shock treatment is indicated."

I bit back my reply, but it was harsh inside me: *Yeah, that's right. Charge on into something you don't know, destroy brain cells right and left, and probably you'll end up destroying the whole life of that being from the stars. After which you can forget he ever came to us.*

Communication with Butch was so much more than just the data he could give. That alone might be enough to jump man a thousand years ahead, to enforce peace and nourish the world and wipe out the disease and poverty and misery which have haunted us through all our days. Butch was more, even, than the knowledge we *had* to have about his own civi-

lization: where were they, who were they, what were they, what did they intend for us? Before all else, to me, Butch was the stars.

My sons could ride across the universe.

But Butch was crazy.

Or was he?

As we went up the stairs—Doc, Moran, myself, and a couple of Army medical technicians—I tried again to make another pattern out of the facts. Items: murder, intransigence, bursts of rage, blank silence, apparent failure to recognize scientific diagrams, an irrational suspiciousness so great that he wouldn't even point to the direction in the sky he'd come from. To Moran, it all added up to insanity. Doc Urquhart was more than half convinced, and only dubious about the prospects of a cure. Or even of knowing if the cure had worked.

But if all this was a normal pattern for Butch's race and culture—God in heaven, if we started tampering with his brain we were throwing away the universe! If we could figure out the—the soul of Butch, if we could make sense out of what he had been doing, then we might figure out how to talk to him.

Of course, a race whose norm included tearing open the bellies of children would not make very pleasant company; but if there were such creatures, then we had to know about them.

"Dr. Moran," I asked, "wouldn't it be wiser, if we can't establish communication, just to keep Butch the way he is? Maybe something will turn up later."

"And maybe Butch will die," said Moran. "Or break loose, which is worse. No, Mr. Muir, the first surgery will be performed in a week." He gave me a frosty smile. "Unless you have thought of an alternative—before then."

I wished again that Valerie were here. That girl had a mind like a whip. But more than that, she had a humaneness— Yes, I thought, *that's what's lacking here. We're all thinking of Butch as an enemy, a problem, a chance for fame and power and wealth. We're none of us trying to put ourselves in his place. We don't really believe, down inside of us, that Butch can have his own hopes and fears and dreams and loves. I wonder how lonely he is?*

We came to the cell and went past the guards. One of the

medical techs got out a pair of handcuffs welded to a long light chain. "What's that for?" asked the other. I gathered that he was new to the job, like me.

"Precaution, Jones," said the first. "We've been shackling him for every test, ever since he killed that one man. He usually submits without giving any trouble." He slapped the forty-five at his hip. "He'd better."

"I—see—" The second doctor, Jones, licked his lips. "Christ! He's a big brute, isn't he?"

Doc unlocked the cell door and we stepped inside. The padded floor felt springy under my feet. I wasn't afraid of Butch myself, not when we were five armed men with more on call. For a moment I looked into his yellow eyes and tried to think at him. Maybe he was telepathic—*Hello, Butch. Hi, stranger. I'd like to be your friend, if you'll let me.*

I had only a minute, then, to see the sudden glazing in those eyes. The huge form trembled, muscles knotting as it warred with itself, and something like a groan came anguished from the opening lips. There was barely time for me to wonder, with a sharp dismay, if he had been taken ill.

Then something knocked me aside. I hit the floor, gasping, and Butch's spurred heel raked my cheek as he leaped over me. Moran yelled, and one powerful arm batted him aside, into Doc. Jones screamed when those claws tore at his face.

The guards outside burst in. Butch hissed and sprang between them. One raised his rifle. Butch hooked claws into his wrist and caught the gun as he let it go. Whirling, the alien clubbed the gun butt into the other soldier's jaw.

Jones was down under Butch's tearing feet. The unhuman face was a frightful thing to watch. The other tech had his automatic out, but it's a clumsy weapon. He fired and missed. Butch stuck the rifle almost into his belly and squeezed the trigger.

Two soldiers and two techs down now! Butch paused only to shoot poor Jones in the head. Then he turned and leaped from the cell, out into the hallway.

I scrambled after him, in time to see him mixing it up with the guards on the landing. He threw one down the stairs. A rifle bullet ripped along his left shoulder, but he didn't seem to notice. He knocked the other man to the floor and plunged beyond him—out through the second-story window.

I didn't see what followed. They told me later that Butch

landed on his feet and made a break for the gate. He didn't reach it, of course. He took three slugs in his body before falling to the ground. Then they lashed him tight and carried him back into the house. He was conscious, but had suddenly become quiet. Now and then he mewed a little with pain.

"Eight men injured, one with a bullet through his stomach," said Moran bleakly. "And one more man dead. Do you still think Butch is sane?"

"I don't know," I said. My own torn cheek hurt like the devil. "What is sanity?"

"Comprehension of and appropriate adjustment to reality," snapped Moran, "and I'm not in a mood to argue philosophy, Mr. Muir."

"If Butch's kind of sanity includes shooting Sergeant Jones in cold blood," said Leslie heavily, "then he's probably better off without it."

We sat in the waiting room of the institute's surgery. It was a quiet, coldly lighted place, with the sharp hospital smell that I've always hated. It doesn't make sense that idoform should annoy me that way, I realize it's there for my own good, but I can't help my feeling.

Butch was beyond the door, having three bullets cut out of him. Doc Urquhart was acting as assistant to a man sent down by the Surgeon General of the United States. The wounded humans were getting routine treatment in a jerry-rigged hospital tent.

"Look," I said, "for some reason, Butch has to kill, or try to kill a certain kind of people. He can't help himself. In this case, the victim was Jones. In the course of the hassel, Butch saw a chance to escape, and took it. I wouldn't call that insane. How did he know what revenge we might take?"

"If he thinks he can escape, alone and on foot, on an alien planet, then he is mad," said Moran. He shot me a glance of dislike.

"Maybe he prefers death," I said. "It can't be very pleasant for him, locked up here."

"Then he can talk to us and explain himself," answered Moran. "We've surely taught him some basic English by now. He was watching our instructors all the time. He must have learned something, if he's capable of it."

"Yeah," I said. "Quite possibly he's gathered what your

own cute little plan is. Would you want your brain carved up by somebody who didn't even know its anatomy?"

"Let him ask me to refrain, then," said Moran testily. "And let him stop trying to kill people who've done him no harm."

"How do you know they haven't?" I asked. "Jones had red hair. Maybe red hair is physically painful to him."

"None of the other dead people did," said Leslie.

"Well, what did they have in common, then?"

Leslie gave me a puzzled look. "I'm damned if I know," he said. "They were all just—people. I'd thought of that angle too, and checked up, but there's nothing I can see."

"I'm trying to put myself in Butch's skin," I said. "It's the only way we'll ever understand him. Look, he's a stranger in a strange land, shipwrecked, surrounded by he knows not what. For some reason, he has a run-in with various of the natives and kills them. Naturally, when he's captured he'll expect retaliation. So he won't be especially co-operative."

"How dumb does he think we are?" clipped Moran.

"Let me finish," I said impatiently. The psychiatrist bridled, and I wondered if I was going to get myself fired. "For some reason, Butch must occasionally commit murder and cannot talk to us. Let's assume that he's rational but that those compulsions exist for him. All right. In that case, he'll be able pretty well to guess what we think of him. He knows we think he's nuts. Possibly he knows we intend to try a cure that will only wreck his mind. So why should he stick around? Why shouldn't he take any chance to escape—even to escape into death?"

"If he is under compulsions such as you postulate," said Moran with strained politeness, "then he is not rational. Most schizophrenics think perfectly logically; it's their basic postulates that are wrong, and they have to build up more and more elaborate fictions to rationalize the facts. Which is what you're doing, by the way, Mr. Muir."

"So you're really going through with your shock treatment," I said.

"Since no workable alternative has been offered me—yes."

I thought that the most practical course of all was open to us—simply waiting and thinking some more on the problem. But it wouldn't do any good to repeat that to Moran. I know when a man has his mind locked tight.

The door opened and Doc Urquhart came out. He looked

like another being in his gown and mask, something more and less than human. We got up and stood waiting, not saying anything.

Doc nodded tiredly. "Butch will live," he said. "The injuries aren't too bad. There was an internal hemorrhage, but we've stopped that now."

Will live—I turned away. What did it matter if he lived or not? He was done. We were all done for. We had never really tried to understand, and now it was too late; now Butch's suspicion of us must have hardened into something that only death could break.

One last try: Two days later, I went to see him. The intervening time had been pretty rough for all of us. It wasn't that we'd been working hard. In Project Wizard, you wanted to work your guts out. The thing which made it a small hell was that there was really nothing we could do. We just sat around, argued endlessly and ferociously, broke into petty little fits of temper. General Leslie had to crack down with a stiff order to all personnel, which didn't make him any more popular. "The military mind," I grunted. "It is a mind, isn't it?"

"He's doing his best," said Doc gently.

"Such as it is," I snorted.

I couldn't even write home about my troubles. Mail was censored, and all of it was sent off from New York City. I could only drop Valerie a meaningless little note.

To keep from going crazy, or from being fired, I busied myself studying the reports. There were a lot of them, but they added up to a blank. I considered the FBI investigations of the people whom Butch had attacked. Those were thorough indeed, in the search for some common factor, but there was nothing. The two men in Maine—both ordinary farmers who'd happened to be out late; the boy was only a farm kid coming home at night from a neighbor's. The men whom our alien had assaulted here had nothing special about them that I could discover, just plain Americans. And in his furtive night wanderings before being captured, Butch could only have seen a few humans in brief glimpses, not enough to give him any real basis for conclusions about us.

I remembered how he had stood trembling in the cell. Fighting against his own uncontrollable *berserker*gang? Prob-

ably. But lots of homicidal maniacs do that. When they're hauled in, they cry and ask why somebody didn't stop them. Damnation! It looked more and more as if Moran was right. Only his notion didn't feel right.

So I went up to the hospital room where Butch was recovering. Time was terribly short. The doctors said he could take trephining in a week or so without serious injury. At least, he could if he were human.

My badge got me past the guards at the entrance to the surgery wing. Butch had a room to himself, with a sentry outside the door and a medical orderly always present. I walked into the room and the orderly looked up from his magazine. He was a big, placid non-com, bored by now like most of the men, but he got up with an air of relief at having some company. "May I see your permit, sir?" he asked.

I handed him the one which Doc had scribbled for me and he nodded. "Okay, sir. But damn if I know what you expect to find out, just watching him."

"Look," I said, "I want to be alone with Butch for a few minutes."

"Sorry, sir. I've got orders—"

"So have I. Just go out in the corridor."

It was pure bluff, but when he tried to protest again I shouted him down. "Dammit, this is direct from the general. Want to call up and bother him about it? Okay, soldier, go ahead, and I hope he puts you to cleaning bedpans for the rest of your hitch."

"Well, all right, sir. Five minutes." He went outside with an uncertain glance at me.

I walked up to the bed. The alien lay in it with a metal collar and chain to keep him there. He'd tried to attack one orderly, but it had been a feeble attempt in his weakened condition, and he'd done nothing against the other men. The room was clean and bleak, full of sunlight but otherwise barren.

"Hello, Butch," I said. The yellow eyes looked back up at me, a glance of suffering, but nothing came from the broad tusked mouth.

"I brought you a magazine," I went on, and put a copy of *Life* on the table. "The pictures might interest you." I sat down on the chair beside him. "Nobody else thought you might get bored lying here, did they?"

He turned his head to watch me, the ears cocked forward and the nose-antennae curled over in my direction. One gray-furred hand lay on the sheet, strong and big and strangely helpless.

"I don't know what the devil I expect to gain by seeing you," I told him softly. "I don't even know if you understand me, though I suspect you get the drift of it. Maybe it's just for myself. Here you are, the most wonderful thing that's happened in all our history, and they've chained you up like this. I'd like to be friends, Butch."

The hand doubled up into a fist, and the claws leaped out, but he didn't slash at me. It was only a gesture.

"That's right," I said. "You can't trust us any more. Let's look at it from your angle for a while. You've had rotten luck, haven't you? First the crash of your ship, the being stranded here God knows how many light-years from home. Then something which made you attack us, willy-nilly, and something else which made it impossible for you to talk to us. So naturally, you think, we believe you're mad. We'll never trust you. And therefore you'll never trust us. You've no way of knowing whether I really mean this or whether it's just an attempt to gain your confidence; so you'll never have faith in any of our species."

I shook my head. "Damn it, Butch, can't you make even one friendly move? Can't you do *something* to show us you're rational, that you want to be accepted as an ambassador instead of an enemy? If you'd only behave yourself better, and draw us a few pictures or—anything— Well, hell, all you have to do is make your sanity look a little more probable. Then they'll at least delay the things they're going to do to you. It'll buy you time in which to work out a real understanding with us."

Those eyes never blinked, watching me, but the only sound from him was the slow deep breathing. I sighed. "Is it that you don't trust us?" I asked. "Is it that you fear us—or, perhaps, fear our fear of you? You'd rather die than enter into communication with a species you've wronged and that may want revenge? You imagine us thinking that since we can't get along with your kind, we'd better wipe you all out? Hell, Butch, we aren't that dumb. Believe me, we aren't."

He turned his face away from me.

"If that's how you want it—" I got up, feeling wholly

beaten. "If you just won't talk to mankind, I can't make you. Man isn't such a bad sort, and you've hit one of the most decent groups of our race. But you don't leave us much choice. Our best bet would be just to save you, but that's apparently not going to be allowed. Some men are so impatient to get at your knowledge that they'll destroy it in their hurry."

Was that an answering sigh, low in his throat? But he wasn't even looking at me any more. There was something utterly defeated about the way he lay there. I thought of him locked inside his own skull, wanting home and security and love as all life wants them, but he couldn't get free of himself. He probably hated himself just then. Maybe he would be glad to escape his body, through death or the ruining of his mind.

"Well," I said, feeling the same darkness in my own heart, "well, if you won't talk to man, then man can't talk to you. Goodbye, Butch."

It was then that the idea came to me. It didn't come all at once, nor did it leave me gasping at my own brilliance. I stood there for a long while, not moving, and the thing grew within me. Crazy, sure. Crazy as a loon. But—

What did we have to lose?

I snatched back the magazine and went out of that room shivering. When I got downstairs, I began to run.

"Sorry, sir," the orderly in the outer office told me. "The general's in conference."

I had half a mind to brush him aside and burst in. It would have been the dramatic thing to do. But I found a chair instead and sat down and tried to read. I'd gone through nearly a pack of cigarettes before I realized that I'd been reading the same page over and over.

The inner door opened and Moran came out. I didn't wait any longer, but charged past him and the orderly. Leslie glanced up from his desk, annoyed.

"General—" My throat felt sandy. "General, I may have the answer."

"Eh?" He looked at me without much hope. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Muir. What do you mean?"

"I may have a way to get Butch to talk," I said. The words stumbled over each other in my hurry.

Moran turned around and came back in. "What's this?" he asked.

"I've got an idea, I tell you!" I shouted.

"Well?" Leslie ripped it out in a parade-ground voice. "Well, what is it?"

"Look," I chatted, "Butch is sane, but—but—" That blasted stutter which always hits me when I get excited broke me off.

Moran raised his brows. "This is somewhat of an obsession with Mr. Muir, General," he said. "He'll go to any length to defend his notion, in the face of all the facts."

"I've got a way to test it!" I yelled. Which was a lie, because I had no idea whether it was practical or not.

"Go ahead, then," said Leslie. "Tell me."

"I'll have to get my wife here, and some other—"

"That's impossible. She hasn't been cleared."

"Dammit, clear her, then!"

"That takes weeks," said Moran. "By that time, we should have Butch back to normal anyway."

"By that time Butch will really be insane!" I answered. "You're the one with the obsession. Anything to get at his brain—but do you give a hoot in hell about getting at his mind?"

"Calm down!" Leslie stood up and barked his words. "Both of you! This is no time for personalities."

Moran shrugged. "I tell you, the first surgical investigation is set for next Wednesday," he declared. "Nobody could be cleared by that time."

"You couldn't postpone the work, could you?" I spoke to Leslie, almost begging.

He shook his head. "I'm afraid not. Washington is in a hurry too, you know. The orders are definite. It's too risky keeping Butch forever the way he is, and the rewards for success are too big and urgently needed."

I sat down, feeling suddenly drained. "Never mind, then," I mumbled. "Never mind."

"Let's have your idea," said Leslie.

Moran smiled sarcastically and sat down too.

I told them.

"You're nuts!" said Moran inelegantly. "It's the most childish thing I ever—"

"What harm would it do to try?" I asked with bitterness.

"Or are you afraid it might succeed? Then you wouldn't get your chance to—"

"That will do, Mr. Muir!" rapped Leslie. He drummed on his teeth with a nervous forefinger. "It's an—interesting—no-tion. Wild, but then this whole business is so crazy. . . . However, there's still that matter of security clearance."

"Bring them here anyway," I said. "You can keep them here if it doesn't work, till they've been checked."

"That's not so simple." Moran's tone grew condescending. "General Leslie has orders too, you know. Regulations—"

The soldier stood for a minute longer. The *military mind!* I thought again.

Suddenly he slammed his fist down on the desk. "By God, I'll do it!"

"They'll court-martial you!" yelled Moran.

"Yeah," said Leslie. "And if it pans out, I'll get by with a reprimand or something. If it doesn't—to hell with it."

Moran turned his back on us.

I held out my hand. "Sir," I said, "may I apologize?"

Two days later, the big show went on the road. I hadn't slept much, and it was with a certain grogginess that I watched the long train of cars draw into the yard. I needed a drink, badly.

The soldiers had been well rehearsed. You could see what they really wanted to do, but they snapped to attention with spine-breaking violence. A military band came out of one barrack and broke into a loud, brassy march. Civilians got down on their knees. I glanced up at the window of Butch's room. We'd put him on a longer chain, so he could walk over to it, but I didn't know if he was looking out or not. I prayed that he was.

Valerie stepped from the first car. She wore a skirt and blouse in the brightest colors and snuggest fit she'd been able to find. Her hair curled down to her shoulders, soft gold in the wintry sunlight. *That's my wife*, I thought, and kowtowed to her. The slush was cold.

She stamped by me, cracking the whip she held in one hand. It tickled along my back, mischievously. I groveled lower. The band played louder. The soldiers saluted.

A girl was coming out of each of the other cars. Leslie's agents had done a fine job, picking the most curvaceous, deco-

rative, utterly female human beings they could find. I hoped they'd been able to match the other essential qualifications: courage, serenity, gentleness.

They swept past us in a blaze of hues. Most had put on jewelry for the occasion, it flashed in the light, there under the tall blue sky of Earth. Into the building they went, not deigning to notice us. Into the house and up the stairs and along the hall to Butch's room.

Doc Urquhart's tests yesterday had shown that my guess about the cause of Butch's furies was probably right; and on the basis of those results, we had not told the girls they had anything to fear, we had indeed stressed his complete harmlessness. But we could still be wrong. There could be more than one possible cause. We had men planted with guns, of course, ready to come in at the first shriek for help. But Butch could disembowel at least one with a sweep of his claws before they knew he meant to do it. *Valerie, I thought, Valerie will go first. I know she will. Please, God, watch over her. Watch over all of us today.*

We waited. And there was silence. There was a thousand years of silence.

General Leslie appeared at the front door. His elegant pants were wrinkled from kneeling before the women. His face had a strangeness about it. "Come along, Muir," he said quietly. "They want you there too."

I followed him into the house. The whole place had a wire-tight waiting over it. We didn't see anyone as we went upstairs, until Moran stepped from one of the labs. His mouth was twisted.

"This is preposterous!" he said. "The beast's just using the chance to disarm our suspicions. I won't have it!"

"I'm the boss here," said Leslie.

"You won't be for long, when Washington hears—"

"Can we trust this bird not to upset the applecart?" I asked maliciously.

"Um, well—protective custody—" Leslie grinned and turned to the MP who was following us. "Conduct Dr. Moran to his quarters," he ordered. "And see that he stays there."

Off they went. I had an idiotic desire to thumb my nose.

We continued down the hall to the hospital room. At its door, the sentry stood more rigid than he'd ever done for an inspection—but he caught my eye and winked at me. Leslie

and I knelt again. We waited till Valerie noticed us and said coldly: "All right, come on in. I want you to take this chain off. Now!"

The room was a swirl of color and shapeliness and bright light voices chattering. Valerie sat on the edge of the bed. She was stroking Butch's big fanged head. Another girl was bending over him, patting his shoulder, and a third was holding his left hand.

His right hand was clutching a pencil, and he was drawing a diagram of a planetary system.

Leslie, Doc, and I had to sneak into Valerie's room. It wouldn't do for Butch to see the slaves killing a fifth of Scotch with the boss. But we just had to celebrate.

"Hullo, property," said my wife.

I grabbed her close and shut off her wisecracks in the best possible manner.

After a while, she said rather breathlessly: "I still don't get it. I still don't see how you managed it. That briefing they gave us was *really* brief."

I poured Scotch over ice cubes and said smugly: "Depends on a number of things, darling. My main assumption was that Butch is sane, only his sanity doesn't quite correspond to ours. Could you expect identical behavior patterns in a creature from the stars? No, hardly.

"But if he was sane, then he wouldn't willingly have attacked those poor people. He must feel like hell about it. Which, incidentally, gives us a moral ascendancy that ought to make him very glad to co-operate with us—now that the dam's been broken. But why, then, did he run amok?"

I took a long sip and went on: "I remembered that Sergeant Jones had been scared of Butch. It occurred to me that probably all those who were attacked had also been frightened. Those people in Maine—well, shucks, if you saw a thing like Butch on a dark night, wouldn't you jump out of your pretty pink unmentionables? And a man here who knew his bad reputation might also get frightened at the thought of working with a monster that could kill him.

"Remembering that Butch has a sense of smell as good as a dog's, and that a dog can smell when you're afraid and will often bite you on that account—well, it added up."

"It's a matter of high adrenalin output," nodded Doc. "Fear

or rage give you a different odor, even if your own nose can't detect it. You should have seen how Butch reacted to a tiny whiff yesterday." He frowned. "But why should the scent of adrenalin drive him into a homicidal fury, eh?"

"I don't know," I said. "But here's a guess. On his home world, his species has—or had once—a natural enemy which smelled strongly of adrenalin. You told me yourself, Doc, that his own glands don't seem to produce that particular chemical. Anyway, his lifeform acquired a built-in instinct to attack when it caught that scent." Now, I know that I was essentially right about this point.

"Could be," said Doc. "We've got a lot of evolutionary hangovers ourselves that only cause us trouble now. The appendix, for instance."

"Well," I continued, "Butch knew he'd got himself in bad with our race. He wasn't going to tell us anything, lest we try to strike back at his people in revenge or out of fear."

"He says he'll talk in seventeen days," Valerie told us.

"Huh?" asked Leslie. "How—?"

"Sign language. Pictures. He got the idea across. He's learned a fair amount of English, but for some reason he can't speak till that period is up."

We found out why, later. Butch's religion, which he takes pretty seriously, requires silence for a given time in mourning for dead comrades. You can't call him insane for sticking by those principles, any more than you can call a Jew or a Moslem crazy for refusing to eat pork or a Catholic mad for going to considerable trouble to attend Mass. It's important to him, that's all. We've a lot of compulsions, like marital fidelity, which don't make much sense to his mind.

We also found that my guess about the variance of his symbology from ours had been right; it had taken him a long time to understand what we were trying to do with our diagrams, and how he should respond. By then he had decided it was hopeless to communicate.

"Well," I said on this particular evening, "somehow he couldn't talk to us, and he'd concluded we were his enemies in any event. So why should he try to co-operate with us in any way? It looked like an impasse, till I remembered that in all probability Butch had never seen a woman. Women aren't likely to wander on lonely roads after dark, and once he'd been captured, he'd been in an exclusively masculine environ-

ment. He may have overheard conversation about women, and has doubtless seen some pictures, but that wouldn't convey much to him.

"And he's hermaphroditic, which makes it likely that all the higher life-forms on his planet are. Of course, he might have seen bisexual animals on other worlds, but then again he might not. The fact that the spaceship did go out of control suggests it's an early model, that this may even be the first interstellar expedition of his race.

"So—why shouldn't he assume that a woman, if he saw one, belonged to a different species from the men? It would be a natural idea. And if this other species were the real rulers of Earth, with us merely their slaves and peasants, *they* wouldn't care much that a few males had been knocked off. They'd be furious that the inferior race had dared to lock up a visitor from space and maltreat him without telling them. As soon as they learned he was here, they'd come running to make amends.

"Since we didn't tell the girls that Butch was dangerous, they didn't fear him. I hope he takes the lack of adrenalin smell for a characteristic of the master race and therefore concludes he won't always be getting into trouble with them. If that works out"—it did—"he's going to fall all over himself trying to co-operate with you girls."

Valerie ruffled my hair. "Sometimes," she murmured, "I almost think there's a brain underneath that mop."

Leslie shifted awkwardly. "How long does this farce have to go on?" he asked.

"Oh, not too long, I suppose," I answered. "Till the girls have won his trust, and talked to him, and gradually broken the news. Then he can start telling us how to build space-ships."

"Yeah," said Leslie. "And meanwhile he's going to think men aren't human!"

Valerie grinned at us. "Well," she replied, "are they?"