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I CAN DO ANYTHING

*When a man makes that claim, don't make
the mistake of asking him to prove it.*

BY J. T. McINTOSH

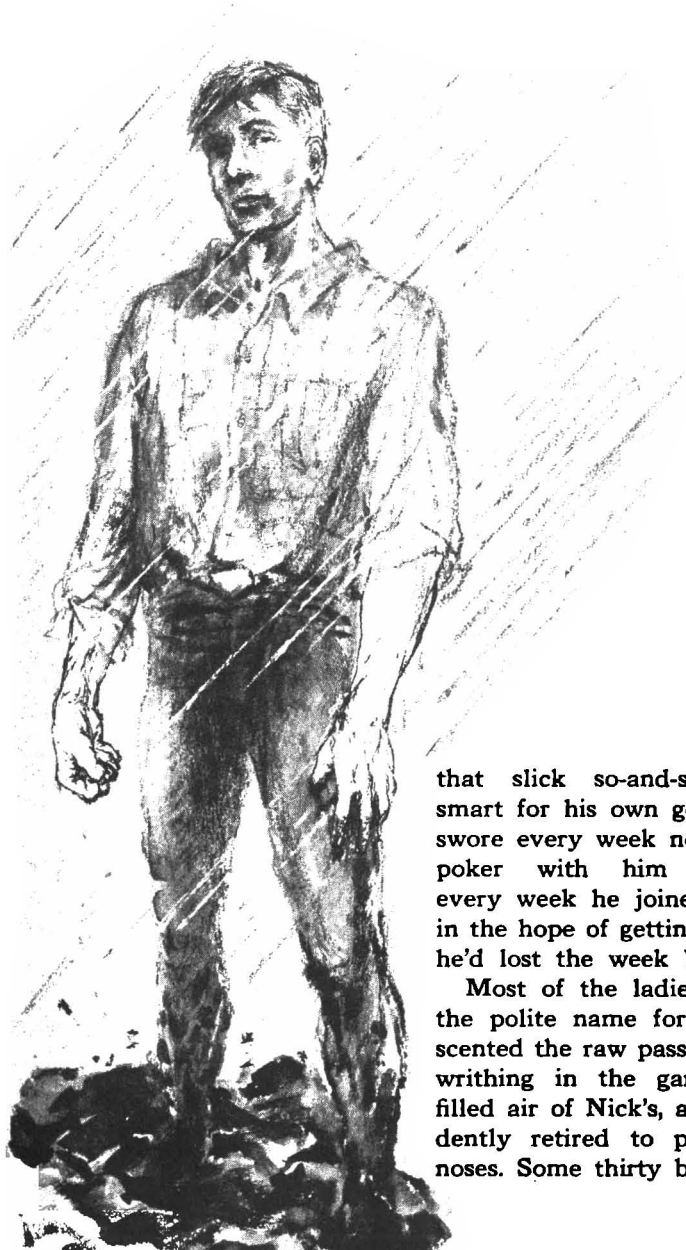
Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

TROUBLE was brewing at Nick's. There was nothing surprising in that—it was payday at the mines, and miners are the same all over the Galaxy. In some places, however, they're more the same than others, and Cronfeld was easily the toughest of the so-called civilized worlds.

Ricky Chiotza, the big Blue Star foreman, was in the early stages of the slow burn which in due course would inevitably

reach the point of spontaneous combustion. Trouble was, somebody had stolen Ricky's girl. He didn't know who, any more than he knew precisely who his girl was, but if there was one thing sure it was that Ricky Chiotza was going to get the guy.

Occasionally Chiotza shot black looks at Sammy Talbot, who had taken a hundred dollars from him in a poker game the night before. Except when he was drunk, as he was now,



that slick so-and-so was too smart for his own good. Chiotza swore every week never to play poker with him again—and every week he joined the game in the hope of getting back what he'd lost the week before.

Most of the ladies—that was the polite name for them—had scented the raw passion that was writhing in the garish, smoke-filled air of Nick's, and had prudently retired to powder their noses. Some thirty big, sweating,

unsteady, check-shirted, womanless miners were left, drinking neat whisky like beer, talking in loud, belligerent tones and listening to nobody else.

Sammy Talbot, the smallest man in the room, was rapidly reaching the state of furious drunkenness when he would tell the world at the top of his voice that he could do anything. When that happened, the effects were predictable. Sammy's luck with cards didn't make him popular with the men who had been losing regularly to him for years. Nobody believed that he had any superhuman abilities, and it was quite true that with cards he hadn't—he just happened to be a good poker player.

Drunk, as he was now, Sammy wasn't so smart. Sammy was quite likely to pick a fight with Ricky Chiotza, who was three inches taller and thirty pounds heavier than Sammy. Afterward, someone would rustle up Cliff Burns from whatever high society function he happened to be honoring with his presence, and Cliff, after cursing for a minute or two, would come and scrape up what was left of Sammy.

OUTSIDE Nick's it rained as it could rain only in Cronfeld. There was no wind—there seldom was. Cronfeld had virtually no weather except blasting

heat, rain, fog and, occasionally, snow. The rain poured patiently out of the dark sky, keeping the paved road perpetually four inches deep in water despite the efficiency of the drainage — drainage on Cronfeld had to be efficient or there was no use messing with it—and elsewhere trying to prove, despite millions of years of experimental evidence to the contrary that silicon dust *would* eventually dissolve in water.

Across the street from Nick's was the Garden, the West End of the mining town. You couldn't be on the right or wrong side of the tracks on Cronfeld, there being no railroad. But you could be a miner or something else. If you were a miner, you lived in the shacks or the hostels, fought, drank, sweated, ate like a pig and died like a wolf, torn to pieces by the rest of the pack. If you weren't a miner, you lived in Garden City, wore expensive clothes or impractical clothes to prove you weren't a miner, and spent your whole life insisting vehemently that there really was cultured, educated society on Cronfeld.

There is no upper set quite so frenetically gay, quite so extravagant, quite so artificial, as a privileged class which exists side by side with an exceedingly underprivileged group. The vast

contrasts of the French Revolution, the Tsarist régime and the Great Depressions weren't curious, inexplicable accidents.

No more than two hundred yards from Nick's, Cliff Burns adjusted his already perfect white tie, smoothed his impeccable tails, and surveyed the scene in the Benjamin ballroom with carefully assumed boredom. There had been a mix-up and half the guests had thought it was a fancy dress ball and the other half hadn't. It didn't matter—everybody agreed that this only made it a better party than ever.

The floor and the walls were of glass, the drapes dull crimson. An enormous crystal staircase curved voluptuously into the ballroom itself, and in the center of the glass floor a fountain cascaded, lit by concealed colored lights. The guests were pale and antiseptically clean, for on a dirty, muddy world where it was easy to acquire a deep brown tan it was naturally a mark of quality to be spotlessly clean and pale as a white orchid. Everybody was having a wonderful time, and the gayest of all were the people who secretly wished they were in bed and asleep.

The orchestra was playing a Strauss waltz. Strauss himself had been buried four centuries

ago on a world 773 light-years away, but nobody thought there was anything odd in playing his music on Cronfeld. You could be cultured and still listen to Strauss, and he was a lot easier to listen to than Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart or any of that crowd.

A blonde in black tights flicked her whip at Cliff's white tie, laughing shrilly, but he hardly looked at her. He was looking for Shirley Benjamin.

He needn't have bothered. The daughter of the house could hardly be expected to make an ordinary, unheralded entrance. Abruptly the orchestra stopped playing *Voices of Spring*, went into *Lovely to Look At*, and Shirley slowly descended the crystal staircase, regally alone, to polite applause.

FROWNING, Cliff moved forward to meet her at the foot of the stairs. Before he could say anything, she giggled and said: "I know, Cliff. You're angry because I'm not wearing your ring. Don't be mean, Cliff. That would spoil it. Don't you see the idea? No earrings, necklace, ring, bangles—"

"I see the idea all right," Cliff growled.

She laughed again. "Oh, I get it. You don't want anybody to see me like this but you, is that

it? Go ahead, Cliff, be jealous. That's all right."

He choked back his annoyance with an effort. He simply couldn't afford to quarrel with Shirley. She represented his one chance of escape from Cronfeld.

"Well, if you aren't going to ask me to dance," she said, piqued, "I can easily find somebody else . . ."

The orchestra was playing a slow drag. He took her in his arms and they moved out on the floor. If he had dared he would have sent her back upstairs to put on more clothes. But there was too much at stake—and you didn't tell Shirley Benjamin what she could and couldn't do.

Mamma and Papa Benjamin were looking on dotingly. No hope of support there. In their eyes Shirley could do no wrong. Unwillingly Cliff admitted to himself that it was just as well that they felt like that, for if Shirley hadn't been allowed to do exactly as she chose there wouldn't have been much chance of Cliff Burns ever succeeding in becoming engaged to her.

Gradually Cliff's annoyance subsided. Every man in the room envied him, he knew, and probably most of them knew that Shirley wasn't going to close her bedroom door on him after the ball. Long ago, when he was

planning his campaign to marry Shirley and escape from Cronfeld, he had decided that Shirley was the kind of girl who would be easier to marry afterward if he'd seduced her first, who would be easier to hold if she thought she had to work to hold him.

Naturally he had never allowed her to suspect that he'd have married the sleaziest girl from Nick's if that would have gotten him off Cronfeld.

He was just beginning to enjoy himself when he felt a tug at his sleeve. "Excuse me," the butler murmured. "Phone call."

Cliff stepped away from Shirley with a muffled curse. Why couldn't Sammy keep out of trouble for just one night? He forced his lips to smile. "Excuse me, darling."

It was Bill Monkton, phoning from Nick's. Uptown and Downtown had only one thing in common—the telephone system. But even that wasn't as egalitarian as it might be. Every instrument in Garden City had a red light on it which lit up warningly whenever the call was from the Jungle. And if you didn't want to be soiled by even telephonic contact, you didn't need to take the call.

The red light was on now.

"Sammy's going to get hurt," Monkton whined. "Chiotza is spoiling for a fight, and any mo-

ment Sammy is going to oblige him. Chiotza will kill Sammy."

Monkton wasn't very bright, Cliff thought, if it had never occurred to him that nothing would suit Cliff better. But despite the trouble Sammy was always getting into and the number of fights he lost, Sammy never did get killed, and Cliff was getting impatient.

"What's the good of telling me that?" Cliff demanded. "I can't come over there and drag Sammy out of it, can I? Call again if anything happens."

HE hurried back to the ballroom. Shirley was on the bandstand, her supple torso writhing rhythmically in an exhibition that was five per cent dance and ninety-five per cent sex. Cliff pulled her down from the stand, not very gently. He was angry again. It offended his dignity that the girl he was going to marry should act like a tramp.

"That low-life pal of yours again, Cliff?" Shirley said. "What's he got on you?"

"We knew each other on Earth," Cliff said easily. It was a lie—he had met Sammy for the first time on Cronfeld.

They had barely started dancing again when Cliff was called to the phone once more. This time he didn't muffle his

curses. Shirley giggled and blew him a kiss.

"He ain't hurt bad," Monkton said over the phone. "You've seen him a lot worse."

"Where is he?"

"In the gutter outside Nick's."

Cliff cut the connection and called a taxi. It came right to the door, close against the canopy, so that he could step into it without getting wet. "Nick's," he snapped.

The cab splashed diagonally across the road and stopped beside a limp form face down in the gutter. "Lift him in," said Cliff.

"I can't do it alone," the cabbie complained. "I need help."

He got it, but not from Cliff. A slight figure dashed from the side door at Nick's, a figure in a shapeless raincoat. At first annoyed, for no particular reason, Cliff suddenly smiled. This girl, whoever she was, could see Sammy home, and he could go right back to the party.

Between them the taxi-driver and the girl hoisted Sammy into the back of the car and propped him in a corner. Cliff kept well into the opposite corner, hoping his immaculate clothes weren't going to be soiled.

"Get in," Cliff told the girl curtly.

She blinked, but obeyed.

Suddenly Sammy turned his head and saw Cliff. He tried to get up. "I'm not staying in the same room with that guy," he said indistinctly but vehemently.

"You're not in a room, you're in a taxi," the girl said soothingly.

"Susie . . . What are you doing here with this heel, Susie? Let me get at him and I'll—"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Sammy. Every time you get into trouble, Mr. Burns always comes and gets you out of it."

Cliff was startled. Although he'd never seen this girl Susie before, apparently she knew all about him.

"He gets paid for it," Sammy muttered.

"Sammy!" Cliff exclaimed. "Watch what you're saying!"

"You're my keeper. You get paid to keep an eye on me. You wish I was dead, but any time I get in trouble you've got to haul me out in case I die and you're held responsible. But you're really only looking for a chance to finish off the job some time when you're absolutely certain the first guy is going to get blamed for the whole thing—"

Forgetting his concern over his clothes, Cliff brushed Susie aside and slapped Sammy hard on both cheeks. Instantly he found himself struggling with

the girl. And she was winning.

"Look," he gasped. "I've had enough of this. You — what's your name?—Susie, will you see that Sammy gets home?"

She stopped struggling, puzzled. She couldn't make out whether Cliff was Sammy's friend or not.

"Sure," she said. "Sure."

The taxi crossed the street again and Cliff got out. He paid the driver and stood back under the canopy of the Benjamin house. The car sloshed away, sending out bow waves like a speedboat.

SAMMY'S room at the miners' hostel was untidy but not dirty. There were signs that he wasn't just an ordinary miner—books, a water color or two, a chess game he was working through.

Such evidences of a not un-cultured background weren't unknown among the miners. The only good reason to become a miner on Cronfeld was to escape the law, and usually men who chose this way of escape were quite unaware that the law was perfectly satisfied to know that they were there. Occasionally men escaped from jails and often men were released from jails. But nobody ever came back from the minefields of Cronfeld.

Once a miner, you were stuck

on Cronfeld for life. There was nothing to stop people from the Garden traveling on the space freighters which carried the more valuable ores back to the inner worlds. It was easier, however, to get through the eye of a needle than to make the short journey from the Jungle to the Garden. Money didn't help. The miners were reasonably well paid, and it was no secret that Sammy, the poker king, must have thousands stashed away somewhere. But money alone couldn't get him into the Garden. No social door had ever been more tightly bolted and barred than the door of the Garden against the Jungle.

The authorities on many worlds were well aware of this. Criminals and undesirables were often helped on their way, without having the faintest suspicion of the fact, by the police of the country or world they were leaving.

Susie found a rag and soaked it at the cracked sink.

"I c'n do anything," Sammy uttered.

"Sure you can," said Susie, working on his injuries, which weren't serious this time.

Susie wasn't as pretty as Shirley Benjamin. In fact, she wasn't pretty at all, although she had a passable figure. A girl didn't have to be pretty on a

world like Cronfeld. Merely to be young was enough, and Susie was about eighteen. She had nevertheless been one of Nick's girls for six years, which meant that in some kinds of experience she was as old as time.

"I c'n do anything," Sammy insisted, turning his head petulantly away from her. "If I liked, I could . . . Susie, I've told you before. They sent me here because . . . Look, Susie, I'm not a killer or a thief or a brute like the rest of them. I never did anything really bad—no more than you'd expect when a fellow can do anything he likes."

"Sure, honey," said Susie tenderly.

She had no other name but Susie. Having been sold to the proprietors of Nick's at the age of three months, and then boarded out with one of Nick's girls for twelve or thirteen years until she should become a commercial asset, Susie had naturally known very little tenderness in her life. Not that she had any complaints—people who have things tough right from birth rarely do have complaints. When she met Sammy, however, it had been like a door of a prison opening into a lovely, sunny valley.

Sammy wasn't much. He was always pitying himself, and getting drunk whenever he had a

chance, and playing the same old bombastic I-can-do-anything record whenever he got drunk. But Sammy was nice to her in a way no one had ever been before.

Sometimes she cried when she thought of it. Imagine anybody realizing she had feelings! And not merely realizing she had feelings, but respecting them.

Once he had tried to give her money, a lot of money. She hadn't counted it, but it seemed to Susie's astonished eyes to be more money than she had believed, to that moment, existed in all of Cronfeld.

"Go on, take it," he had said. "It's no good to me. I can't use it to get off Cronfeld. You might, if you went the right way about it."

But when he had seen that she was refusing the money because of finer feelings than he had credited her with, he apologized sincerely, treating her with such respect and courtesy that she felt ashamed. At the same time, womanlike, she loved him more for it.

IT WAS a pity that he got drunk. Susie had grown up with hard liquor, trained to make the men with her drink as much as possible, and Sammy was the only man she ever tried to stop drinking. Drunk, he was

like any man. Sober, there was something fine about Sammy.

"That Cliff Burns . . ." Sammy whispered, with loathing.

"Honey, I don't get it about you and him. Does he really get paid, like you said? Like Norma was paid to look after me?"

"I'm not supposed to talk about it."

"Sure, honey, but you keep talking about it all the same. You keep saying that you can do anything, but you're not supposed to, and you're not even supposed to talk about it, and Cliff Burns gets paid for looking after you, but you're not supposed to talk about that either."

Although when other people said such things Sammy flew into a blind rage, Susie's tone was so warm and sympathetic that he couldn't be angry.

"Maybe I should try to explain it to you, Susie. A guy's got to talk to somebody, sometime . . . I spent four years on a dead planet once. This planet hasn't even a name, but the race that used to live there called it Xyt. It was four years before I was picked up—"

"I know, honey," said Susie patiently. "You told me."

"I'm not supposed to tell anybody. More than that, I'm not supposed to *do* anything. That's why Cliff Burns is here. If I *do* anything, he's free to scramble

me. Then he can leave here. But if he scrambles me and can't prove I *did* anything, he'll be sent back—as a miner this time. I'm safe from Cliff so long as I don't—”

“Honey, you just don't make no sense.”

His head ached. The raw whisky was still working on him. He knew, however, that even sober he'd be unable to make Susie believe what he said, and understand it. Susie was loyal and generous. She had a certain shrewdness which had once made him hope that there was something to work on in her dark head. He had discovered however, that she was completely lacking in imagination, and that her shrewdness was merely the cunning any determined animal develops in jungle conditions.

She couldn't understand anything outside her own experience, and in her experience people like Sammy and people like Cliff could never have anything in common. Just as miners never crossed the figurative tracks to the Garden, people from the Garden never sank to the miners' level. If the charity of their friends didn't keep them from disaster, they'd lie and cheat and steal to stay in the Garden—and if that failed, there was always suicide.

“If only you'd believe me, Susie,” Sammy whispered, “it wouldn't be so bad. I can do anything, Susie—except control the encephalograph Cliff's got hidden somewhere. It would give me away. And if I make him show me where he keeps the scrambler and the encephalograph, it only lands me in deeper trouble. And it's no good killing Cliff. He makes two phone calls every morning at ten o'clock, and if he doesn't make them I'll be scrambled anyway—”

“Don't talk about killing, Sammy. Killing never did no one no good.”

“I never wanted to kill anybody but Cliff. That's all. I hate his guts.”

“That never did no one no good neither.”

“Don't you hate anybody, Susie?”

She stared at him. “Me? Who would I hate?”

He said nothing. A few minutes later she saw he was asleep. Sighing, she took off her garish dance frock and lay down beside him. He was trembling as he always did when he slept. She knew about that. It was the Dream.

Poor Sammy. She loved him, pitied him, and admired him, all at once. But most of all she loved him.

SHIRLEY'S bedroom was like something out of the France of Louis Quinze. The bed was an enormous four-poster with silk curtains which could be drawn for privacy within privacy. The dressing table was almost as massive as the bed, with three huge mirrors in which she could see herself in triplicate—you couldn't have too much of a good thing—or examine the back of her head if she wanted to. There were big cut-glass jars of cosmetics and silver-backed hairbrushes. And there was Shirley, standing in front of the three mirrors and looking at herself with satisfaction.

She still wore her ball dress. For the moment she had forgotten Cliff, standing behind her, in her pleasure in her own beautiful body.

"Shirley," said Cliff, "I want to talk to you."

She pouted. It was hardly a compliment when a man admitted to her bedroom after the party was over wanted to talk.

Cliff realized his mistake at once. In a moment he was behind her, pulling her against him and gently stroking her. She began to writhe in anticipatory pleasure.

"There's nothing to talk about, Cliff," she whispered. "The passages are booked. We leave on the next ship, in two weeks'

time. Isn't that what you wanted?"

"So soon?" Cliff breathed.

"You've been trying to get me to fix it for so long . . . Daddy finally agreed this morning. I knew it would be a wonderful surprise for you, Cliff."

It was a wonderful surprise, but it was also a shock. Although he automatically went on caressing Shirley, Cliff had almost forgotten her existence. His thoughts were racing, and they weren't thoughts of Shirley Benjamin.

When he'd been sent to Cronfeld to keep an eye on Sammy Talbot, he had thanked his chief with heartfelt sincerity. It had been that or a jail sentence for his negligence in killing a girl prisoner. Banishment on full salary to a world with civilized society seemed, at the time, infinitely preferable to jail.

He had even admired, at the time, the chief's solution to the whole problem. The chief had made no secret of the fact that he wanted Sammy scrambled, but the court had shown unexpected clemency, as courts sometimes did. Neither Cliff nor the chief really believed the stories about Sammy Talbot, but that wasn't the point. Scrambled, Sammy could be released, could be forgotten. Unscrambled, Sammy had to be watched. There



was no doubt that Sammy could do *something*.

After three years, Cliff had changed his mind. The court's merciful ruling—that Sammy was not to be scrambled unless or until he used his trick again—meant that Cliff was tied up on Cronfeld, that he had to employ a couple of assistants there, that every ship from Cronfeld had to be carefully checked . . . in short, the court's ruling meant that instead of the Sammy Talbot case being firmly closed when he was caught, as it should have been, it stayed open until Sammy obligingly got himself killed or gave Cliff reasonable grounds for scrambling him.

In three years, Sammy had done neither.

Cliff wasn't worried about anything Sammy might do. Sammy was such a whining, boasting, irritable, ineffectual character that it was impossible to be worried about anything he might do. Nevertheless, to be on the safe side, Cliff had always acted as if Sammy really was dangerous.

He had two auxiliaries, Monkton, who worked beside Sammy, ate with him and drank with him, and Keig, who lived in the Garden and had never seen Sammy. Each of them had a detector and a preset scrambler unit, and their job was to use

the latter if the former ever showed anything.

Sammy might nullify Monkton, but he could hardly cancel out Keig, of whose existence he knew nothing. Sammy was hog-tied and he knew it.

Cliff trusted Monkton and Keig for the excellent reason that they didn't dare cross him and they knew it.

Lieutenant Gibson of the Cronfeld police also knew something about Sammy and about Cliff's responsibility for him—not much, but something.

In fact, scores of people were involved in the safety measures taken against the whining, ineffectual Sammy—and all because a court on Earth had said, "No, don't scramble him yet."

Naturally Cliff had thought often enough about scrambling Sammy and going back home with a convincing explanation. Unfortunately, he knew that he wasn't going to be convincing enough. Once Sammy Talbot was no longer a problem, Cliff could go back to Earth—that had been the agreement. But Cliff had been assured that unless he returned with ironclad proof that he'd had to scramble Sammy, he would be on the next ship back to Cronfeld—and this time he wouldn't be residing in the Garden.

"I thought you'd be pleased,"

Shirley said. "Daddy didn't want to let me go. If you'd rather stay here, I can soon—"

"Of course I'm pleased," said Cliff. "I'm speechless."

"Well, you don't have to talk," said Shirley. "There are other ways of expressing your appreciation."

Idly Cliff wondered how a girl in Shirley's position could be so insecure that she needed so much reassurance. There were rumors that she had been an unattractive child, strange as that seemed now—did that explain everything?

In any case, there was no doubt about what he had to do now.

It was surprising how being compelled to do a thing turned what should have been a great pleasure into rather a bore.

THE DREAM was always the same. First, Sammy lived through the crash again. Everybody but himself had been killed instantly.

It had been one of those hyperspace disasters which no spaceman ever thought about, just as an airplane pilot with no parachute didn't think about crack-up in mid-air. There was no percentage in it. If you were spewed out of hyperspace, your chance of rescue was no chance—not one in a million, not one

in any number of millions—not any.

Nobody was going to come out of a hyperspace vector voluntarily, that was for sure. The hyperspace routes were so carefully established that you didn't work them out any more; you fed the right card into the ship's computer. There was no card for the world on which Sammy's ship crashed. The chance of any other Terran ship arriving there was like the chance of a collision between the only car on the American continent and the only car in Australia.

Sammy, who had been an ordinary spaceman then, survived the crash because he was thrown against a padded bulkhead which broke loose and careened on through the ship, to be stopped gradually by an aluminum water tank which acted as a giant hydraulic brake. Not unexpectedly, nobody else was as fortunate.

He found himself on a cold desert world which had obviously once been hot, a world with the right kind of air but not quite enough of it, and once he fully comprehended his situation he honestly wished there had been no survivors.

The ship was less than a wreck; it wasn't even a shelter. And there was no life, no water, in the desert in which it lay.

Since his death from lack of air, food and water was only a matter of time, Sammy's decision to make for the mountains he could see to the north was not unreasonable.

He reached the mountains fairly easily and found that they enclosed a vast valley at the bottom of which there was enough trapped air for his needs. So he wasn't going to die of lack of air, after all.

There was also a stream whose waters he found he could drink without ill effects. He wasn't going to die of thirst, either.

Although there was an abundance of small animals little larger than rats but much less active, it seemed for some time that this fact wasn't going to help him much. Every time he killed and ate one of them, he was violently sick. He eventually discovered, however, that it was the mixture of Terran and native food that his stomach couldn't stand. It could and did adapt to the animal life of Xyt. So neither was he going to die of hunger.

He still didn't look on his future on Xyt with any enthusiasm—not even when he found the ruins.

For two years the ruins in the valley and the things he found in them meant no more to Sam-

my than something to keep him sane. It transpired that the Xytians had used a kind of paper which was less destructible than their stone and metal buildings, and which the small animals couldn't eat. Consequently Xytian literature survived complete when even their strongest buildings and machines had collapsed in rust and ruin.

At the end of two years Sammy was reading Xytian literature voraciously. Even children's primers had survived, and consequently learning the language presented no great problem to a man with unlimited time on his hands. He would never be able to speak it, of course; but since there would never be anyone, Xytian or human, to speak it to, this hardly seemed to matter.

The Xytians must have been very nearly human mentally, although physically there had been few resemblances. Xytian anecdotes made sense to Sammy, even if they never managed to make him laugh. He didn't do much laughing on Xyt.

At the end of three years Sammy was beginning to understand *Power*. *Power* was the nearest equivalent to the Xytian word. *Power* had been outlawed among the Xytians, and yet it had killed them off in the end. Presumably, like most outlawed

things, it was used by outlaws.

Power was a means of doing anything—or, rather, of making anybody else do anything. It was partly telepathic, but mainly a technique for control of another person through the unconscious. In other words, it wasn't very far removed from hypnotism.

A human being given a post-hypnotic command to do something, no matter how unreasonable, will dream up a reason for doing it which he is convinced is the real reason. Xytian *Power* went several stages further. In the first place, since it was telepathic, words weren't needed. In the second place, since the so-called unconscious was always conscious, even in sleep, it was always accessible. Third, the unconscious had no natural defenses—you could invade another person's unconscious without having to get past it. Fourth, once you'd done what you wanted to do in the victim's unconscious, his own conscious was on your side, working for you.

At this point in his researches Sammy was still merely reading for something to do. There wasn't much direct instruction about *Power* in Xytian literature, naturally enough, since it was an illegal technique. But there was plenty about telepathy, which was perfectly legal.

And one day when his studies

of Xytian mental science were sufficiently advanced, Sammy read a paper explaining how telepathy worked through hyperspace.

The Xytians knew nothing of space travel. They knew nothing of hyperspace as an extension of a point-to-point flight, a way of getting from A to B without having to traverse all the distance between A and B.

Being a telepathic race, they knew hyperspace only as a medium for telepathic communication. They had been in telepathic communication with at least a score of intelligent races in the universe. Not Earthmen—at that time the ancestors of Earthmen had been swimming about in the sea.

It was then that Sammy had his first wild hope of rescue. Could he learn telepathy? Could he learn *Power*?

Could he make Terrans in Terran ships come to Xyt for him?

SAMMY groaned and turned over. But the noise which had disturbed him went on.

He sat up, blinding pain in his temples. Susie was asleep beside him, so deeply asleep that the noise of the telephone out in the hall didn't bother her.

Still drunk, Sammy climbed out of bed and staggered into

the hall. Vaguely wondering why the ringing had disturbed nobody else, he remembered that Smith and Proctor, who had the two nearest rooms, had both been with girls at Nick's and probably wouldn't be back until morning.

"Huzza?" he said into the phone.

Cliff, too, had left a woman sleeping. Shirley, like Susie, was a very deep sleeper, and that was what had given Cliff his idea. The evidence of a mistress wasn't always enough for the police, but on Cronfeld the testimony of a Benjamin—if it should happen to be asked—was the strongest, safest, most absolute evidence there was.

Some girls would object to giving testimony like that. But not Shirley. Shirley was quite open about her relations with Cliff. She boasted about them, as if she'd been the ugliest girl on Cronfeld instead of one of the prettiest.

She would say he had been with her all night—if necessary.

"Sammy, this is Cliff. No, don't hang up — this is vital. Sammy, you and I both want to get away from Cronfeld. Well, has it ever occurred to you that if we work together, we can do it— both of us?"

Sammy was drunker than he had been when he had fallen

asleep. Yet Cliff's words made sense. Sure, he hated Cliff Burns, his keeper—his warden. Nevertheless, he had thought long ago, apparently long before the idea had occurred to Cliff, that if the two of them worked together there ought to be a way in which they could both get what they wanted.

"Listen, Sammy, is Susie still with you?"

Sammy looked around owlishly. There was no sign of Susie. "No," he said. "She isn't here."

"Okay. Sammy, I've got to see you right away. Up by Ricky Chiotza's place. At the back, where—"

"I'm not going near that guy," said Sammy emphatically. "Had a fight with him. Bastard hit me with a bottle."

Cliff had guessed as much. "It's just a place to meet, Sammy," he said. "We're not going to see Chiotza. We're just going to talk in that old shed behind his house—to be out of the rain."

Sammy thought tortuously. The shed behind Chiotza's house. "Okay," he said, and hung up.

He looked down. He was stark naked. Well, that was all right—no sense in getting his clothes wet.

Why, he wondered vaguely, was he going to the shed behind Chiotza's? To meet Cliff. Cliff

had an idea to get them both off Cronfeld. Might as well hear it. Could always say no. Would say no, unless Susie could come too.

He staggered downstairs and out at the back door. The rain still poured steadily. Sammy didn't mind—it felt good on his skin.

Chiotza's house was only a few hundred yards away. Sammy skirted it, went around behind it, pushed open the rickety door of the old shed.

Where was that Cliff Burns?

It had taken Sammy perhaps five minutes to reach the shed from the telephone in the hostel. Nevertheless, it seemed like a rank discourtesy that Cliff shouldn't be waiting for him.

He sat down on the stone floor, finding a piece of sacking to insulate his bare bottom from the concrete. *Mus' watch this Cliff*, he thought. *Capable of anything, that man. Mus' be on my guard.*

On his guard, waiting for Cliff, Sammy fell asleep.

ON the face of it, Sammy's undertaking had been a pretty wild one. The Xytians had been a telepathic race. The very nature of their literature showed this clearly. What was written down, for the most part, was what minds were liable to forget, what one mind couldn't

easily pass to another mind, what was needed to supplement mental communication.

Humans weren't a telepathic race. It had been shown that they weren't telepathically blind, deaf and dumb, that was all.

But Sammy didn't care how fantastic his plan was. It was far more realistic, certainly, than waiting hopefully for someone to come and rescue him. And he still dreamed of rescue.

Soon he began to realize that his efforts weren't so fantastic after all. What was personality, what was personal magnetism, but *Power*? Wasn't it possible that even if a human conscious mind couldn't reach out and touch another human conscious mind, it might be able to reach a human unconscious? Wasn't there plenty of evidence in human relations that it could?

And the Xytians had not merely used telepathy, but also studied it, developed it, catalogued it. There were exercises for Xytian children. Exercises in extending the consciousness. Exercises in remembering-seeing-projection. Exercises in thought-direction.

One day Sammy found he could control the little animals which had been his staple diet for three years. After that he hated eating them. It seemed inhuman to bring them to him to

be killed and make them stand while he killed them. Yet when he could do that, did it make sense to go out and try to stun them with stones, as he'd been doing for years?

Power was a way of stabbing direct at the unconscious. All animals had an unconscious, and therefore all animals could be controlled by someone who had the Xytian *Power*.

It was doubtful whether Sammy, or anyone else, could have developed the faculty without such a stimulus. For Sammy, learning to operate *Power*, or not learning, was a matter of life or death.

He learned. Or he thought he learned. How could he tell? The fact that he could control the Xytian creatures proved nothing beyond the fact that he had a stronger intellect than they, which was pretty obvious anyway. *They* could be the telepaths.

Anyway, he began broadcasting his commands. They should, if everything went according to plan, be going out by hyperspace. They should reach Earth, or more particularly, any Terran ship in space. They should slide direct into the unconscious minds of Terran spacemen, who should then seek them to their source, not knowing why they really did so, but inventing for

their own satisfaction perfectly good reasons why they should ...

The ship arrived four years and ten days after Sammy's ship was wrecked. It was a survey ship, and the members of the crew were all convinced that they had been ordered to survey this section of space.

For a long time after that Sammy didn't attempt to use *Power* again. It could have been a coincidence that the survey ship came to Xyt. In due course he would know for sure. In any case, although the survey team examined and photographed the Xytian remains, Sammy cautiously refrained from showing them any Xytian literature. It naturally didn't occur to them that any could have survived.

BACK on Earth, Sammy continued to be cautious for a while. But why should he work if people could be made to want to help him, support him, love him?

Any doubt that he possessed *Power* was soon at an end. He could do anything he wanted—or make others do anything he wanted.

With certain exceptions. About one person in a hundred was somehow blocked to him. *Power* just didn't work with these rare individuals.

It didn't seem to matter. Sam-

my never found it vitally necessary to have any truck with these stubborn, intractable people—invariably men and women who were resistant to hypnosis, too.

For nearly a year Earth paid him back for the loneliness he had suffered on Xyt. Earth reimbursed him willingly, gladly. People loved Sammy Talbot and didn't know why they loved him. It didn't matter—they could, and did, invent plenty of reasons.

On the whole, Sammy wasn't too ambitious or too cruel. That was what saved him later. He merely took what he wanted, making others want to give. When he tired of anything or anyone, he always neatly rounded off the incident in a way which gave pain to no one.

He did some good, too. Sammy could touch the unconscious direct. And when people were miserable, or when people were insane, it was because of something wrong in the unconscious, something which Sammy could set right.

But he did take a lot . . .

The police must have done a good job. Of course, they had the evidence of those rare individuals whom Sammy couldn't touch. They even used a couple of them as assistants. All the same, it must have been quite a

job, tracing everything back to Sammy and believing the incredible. It would have been impossible if Sammy had actually been able to read minds. But he couldn't. He could merely control other people's unconscious minds.

Another thing that helped the cops was the fact, unknown to Sammy, that when he used *Power*, encephalographs for miles around went mad. Indeed, before they took him in they had developed a small, simple detector which was nothing like as complicated as an encephalograph but which detected *Power* activity at a range of several miles.

After that, Sammy was hooked.

WHILE he was drugged, a police surgeon inserted a tiny instrument in a cavity in his skull. From then on Sammy could be scrambled at any time, at any distance up to a hundred miles.

And so Sammy, with his magnificent *Power*, was as helpless as Gulliver. There were people, admittedly rare people, whom he couldn't affect. There was a *Power* detector. And he could be scrambled without even being caught.

For a while Sammy became a secret-secret-secret agent work-

ing for the government. But the *Power* which only Sammy Talbot had was so awful, so dangerous, that it was decided he couldn't be allowed to keep it. After the way he carried out his assignments, who would feel safe with him unscrambled?

But there justice stepped in, good old kindly, fatuous, bumbling human justice. Sammy couldn't be sentenced without a trial. So he had a trial—a secret trial, but not a rigged one.

The court ruled that Sammy had not done anything bad enough to be scrambled for it.

So Sammy was sent to Cronfeld, almost a free man, with Cliff Burns to watch over him. Cliff was not, unfortunately, one of the rare individuals immune to Sammy. None of those, as it happened, could be compelled to go to Cronfeld. Cliff could.

That Sammy should be exiled to Cronfeld wasn't quite what justice had intended. It certainly wasn't what the kindly, humane court which wouldn't give permission for scrambling had intended.

It was a police decision and it wasn't stupid. It wasn't nearly as stupid as it looked.

Neither Sammy nor Cliff knew the points which had been considered by Cliff's chief when the situation was set up. They were:

1. Sammy would probably use *Power* and be scrambled. If that didn't happen,

2. Cliff would probably scramble Sammy anyway, claiming he had used *Power*. Or

3. Cliff would murder Sammy in the hope of gaining his freedom. That would be a pity, of course; but it would certainly be the end of an awkward moral, legal and sociological problem.

4. In any case, every human being who left Cronfeld would be screened at short, medium and long range to make sure he couldn't possibly be Sammy Talbot.

ALTHOUGH Cliff didn't entirely believe in Sammy's alleged superhuman abilities, he reviewed what he had heard of them as he approached the hut, just in case.

It was known that Sammy wasn't a telepath. That was pretty obvious anyway—you couldn't very well drug a telepath and take him prisoner.

So all Cliff had to do was make sure that he got Sammy before Sammy could do anything. Cliff couldn't use a gun, unfortunately; the miners had

no guns. It would have to be a knife—a knife like any miner's knife. Not in the heart, for men lived and used their brains after being stabbed in the heart. It would have to be in the brain. If Sammy's heart went on beating, it wouldn't matter. He couldn't do any superhuman tricks with his heart.

Chiotza and Sammy had fought only a few hours ago. And Susie hadn't stayed with Sammy at the hostel—there was no reason why Sammy should lie about that. When Sammy was found dead behind Chiotza's house, what would everybody think?

Well, what did it matter what they thought? Nobody cared much about the death of a miner after a drinking session. Cliff Burns, if anybody cared to check, would have an alibi. Besides, Cliff was Sammy's friend; everybody knew that. Most of all, would anybody from the Garden be crazy enough to venture into the Jungle at night?

Cliff exulted. Once Sammy was dead, he was safe, and he knew it. The Cronfeld police, who never meddled much with killings in the Jungle, would probably never even consider him as a suspect. He would marry Shirley and go and live on a decent world. And Cliff wouldn't have anything to fear

from his chief, who would have the Cronfeld police's report on Sammy's death.

Cliff exulted in his cleverness, but he wasn't quite clever enough to realize that what he was doing now had been planned long ago, on Earth.

He moved forward silently and pushed open the door of the hut. In the gloom he could make out Sammy, sitting down against the wall, asleep, naked.

The poor drunken sot. He *wanted* to be killed.

Cliff swung his knife in a short arc terminating at Sammy's right eye.

Warned by a sense which had nothing to do with *Power*, Sammy opened both eyes. He hadn't time to move, hadn't even time to think.

Cliff pulled his hand back and savagely hacked his own throat, almost severing his head from his shoulders. He pitched on the floor a fraction of a second after a stream of his own gushing blood.

Sammy got up unsteadily. He was suddenly completely sober. He knew instantly what this meant. He had always known what it would mean when he used *Power* again.

In that moment Sammy became a different person, very different from the weak, drunken, hopeless braggart he had been



as a Cronfeld miner. Suddenly he was more like the desperate but patient man who had deciphered the Xytian manuscripts.

You couldn't have a gift like that, keep it bottled up inside you and live a normal, useful life. Having *Power* and not using it was like sitting down for the last time, refusing to use your perfectly good legs ever again. You became a weeping, moaning, whining, self-pitying wreck of a man when you didn't do what you could do.

But now they would get him and he'd be scrambled. There was no doubt about that. Already, somewhere, a tiny *Power* detector, a tiny Sammy Talbot detector, had jumped and made a permanent record. The suspended sentence on Sammy Talbot was now automatically confirmed, three years later.

SAMMY left Cliff's body where it lay and padded through the incessant rain like a pale ghost. It was about two o'clock in the morning. He probably had eight hours, until ten. Perhaps less, certainly no longer.

At the hostel he went first to the strongbox in the cellar. He didn't count the money he took from it. He didn't have to. Poker was a lucrative profession among miners who played boldly, ag-

gressively, but not skillfully. There was nearly twenty thousand dollars in his hands.

Cautiously, making sure he wasn't seen, he went back to his room. Susie was still asleep, which was just as well.

First he did the superficial things. Susie could be pretty, and since nothing Sammy did would make any difference now, Susie might as well be pretty.

The human brain can control far more than it believes it can control. Sammy couldn't make Susie look much different now, but he could make her look quite a bit different in a few weeks' time.

He changed the pattern of Susie's physical supply lines. The changes he made were small, apparently insignificant, hardly worth bothering about. Yet, as a result of them, Susie's slightly bulbous nose would gradually slim away until it was small and straight. Her slightly heavy chin would become lean and smooth. Her skin would become clearer, all over her body, and she would lose a little fat around her hips.

More important than these things was the change he made in Susie's physical balance. People are recognized by their friends more by the set of their heads, the way they walk, the way they sit in a chair, the way

they hold themselves, than by their facial features. A good figure depends less on shape than on bearing.

Susie had started with good teeth and a passable figure. Sammy made her a pretty girl with a figure a showgirl could be proud of. At least, that was what she would be in perhaps three weeks. Even now her walk, her bearing would be so different that nobody who didn't look closely at her face would recognize Susie. And in three weeks she wouldn't even resemble Susie.

Strangely enough, what Sammy did next was easier for him. He stimulated areas in Susie's brain which had previously been dormant. He sent carefully calculated charges of mental impulses along the channels she normally did use. He stimulated tag-ends of talent and potential which had never before been touched.

He couldn't make Susie a genius even if he wanted to, and he didn't. Geniuses with too much emotion never made much out of life. And Susie had a lot of emotion in her, good, generous emotion. Sammy didn't want to destroy the best of Susie.

She opened her eyes when he was done, and even Sammy was startled at the immediate change. For now they were fine,

intelligent eyes. She was changed.

Rapidly he told her about Cliff, explained everything. She understood all he said at once, believed it all at once. When you actually experience a miracle, you don't have to waste time marveling at it.

"But you, Sammy," she said urgently. "What's going to happen to you?"

"I'll be scrambled," he said simply.

EVEN in her horror there was some relief. "They won't burn you for killing Cliff?"

Sammy smiled. "I didn't kill Cliff."

"But you just said—"

"The police have a machine which traces and establishes nerve patterns, Susie. When Cliff is found, the knife will still be in his hand. The cops will check his arm and find he cut his own throat."

"But you made him . . . I see. Your gift, this *Power* isn't in the book, is that it? They won't be able to charge you with a crime that doesn't exist?"

He nodded. "Anyway, I don't think they will. They'll scramble me and let it go at that. Probably at ten o'clock tomorrow. A daily check is made on the detector then."

"Sammy, isn't there any way you can escape? Couldn't you—"

"For days or weeks, perhaps. But there are men and women here, as well as on Earth, who are immune to me, Susie. I'd lose out in the end—inevitably. And I might have more to face than scrambling."

"Sammy, I love you. You know that. And you've made me into a girl you could love. Together, we—"

"We haven't time to talk about that, Susie. What's your favorite name? You can't be Susie any more."

"What do you mean?"

"Susie, I haven't time to argue. What's your favorite girl's name?"

"I once read a book. The heroine was called Amanda Randolph. I thought that was a lovely name."

"Fine, Miss Randolph — or may I call you Amanda? Now put your clothes on. We're going somewhere."

She didn't ask any more questions. The new Susie was as patient as the old. In character she hadn't changed—only in capacity.

She didn't seem to notice the difference in herself as they dressed, but Sammy noticed. She stood straighter now, with her chin up and her shoulders back. As a result her bust tilted higher, her waist was slimmer and her stomach flatter. Sammy was sat-

isfied with the preliminary signs of the transformation he had wrought. This wasn't Susie. This was Amanda.

She would even speak better. Of course, he hadn't been able to extend her very limited vocabulary, but she'd do that herself, very rapidly. And she couldn't help expressing herself better, even with the words she knew now.

Amanda. In the recesses of his mind, he called her Galatea.

THEY left the hostel, walked back to Nick's—closed and silent now, although the upstairs lights were on—and crossed the street to Garden City.

Susie hung back. "You're not going to—"

"I'm not going to do anything very bad, Susie. And I'm going to do one good thing. I'm going to make Cliff's girl happier without Cliff than she ever was with him."

He rang the bell of the Benjamin house. When at last the butler came, he ushered Sammy and Susie in as if he'd been expecting them.

Down the wide, silent staircase came three people, belting dressing gowns about them. First was Mrs. Benjamin, small and plump. Then Mr. Benjamin, tall, gray-haired, blinking. Finally Shirley, tousled, sleepy.

"Cliff is dead," Sammy told them without preliminaries. "But you don't mind that, do you?" The question was addressed to Shirley, who hadn't changed expression on being told of Cliff's death.

"No," said Shirley mechanically. "I didn't love him."

"Why did you think you did?"

"He wanted me."

"You have to love anybody who wants you?"

"Yes. Nobody ever wanted me."

"Is that true, Mrs. Benjamin?"

The three Benjamins were like sleepwalkers. Sammy was holding them in a kind of trance in which they had no choice but to tell the truth, the real truth, the underlying truth. It was similar to questioning under sodium pentothal but deeper, much deeper.

"Yes, it's true," said Mrs. Benjamin in a dull tone similar to Shirley's. "The doctors told me I'd die if the child was born."

"Why was Shirley born, then?"

"A specialist was to come and operate. He didn't come. The other doctors wouldn't perform the operation. Shirley was born. I nearly died, but after a year I recovered."

"And you still didn't want Shirley?"

"She had caused me so much pain . . ."

"Did your feelings change, Mrs. Benjamin?"

The woman sighed. "Of course. Could I go on hating my own daughter?"

Sammy turned back to Shirley. "You had to love anybody who wanted you, because your parents didn't want you. But later they loved you."

"Later they loved me," said Shirley blankly.

"They love you now. There's no need to love a man just because he says he wants you."

"No need any more," Shirley repeated.

Sammy lifted the trance slowly, gradually. "No need any more!" said Shirley joyfully, and turned to hug her mother.

AS Sammy knew from experience, this method worked. It was time to turn to his next aim.

"This is your friend Amanda, Shirley," he said.

"No, Sammy, no!" Susie exclaimed.

"My friend Amanda," said Shirley happily.

"She's staying with you. She's—"

"Sammy," said Susie urgently, pulling at his arm. "This isn't right. It's like stealing. I can see what you're trying to do, and I know you're doing it for me, but—"

"You're going to help Shirley,"

Sammy said quietly. "She's got to rebuild her life. She can do it if a girl like you is around to help her, Amanda."

"But I'm from the Jungle, and—"

"Stay in this house for three weeks and I promise you that when you go out, nobody will know you. You're Amanda Randolph. I'm going to leave you here and go over to Nick's to kill off Susie. She died yesterday and was buried the same day."

"Sammy, I can't stay here. It won't work. You can make these people believe I'm Shirley's friend and that I've never been in the Jungle in my life, but I can't live on them for the rest of my life. I can't—"

"Of course you can't." He gave her an envelope. "That won't keep you forever, but it's enough to silence questions, that and the fact that you're Shirley's friend. You came from somewhere in the south. You like the Garden and you're going to stay. Twenty thousand dollars is a pretty good introduction to society."

"I can't take it."

"Don't let's go into that again. What good is it to me?"

"Sammy, you can't get away with all this."

"Of course not," he said wryly. "I told you, remember?"

"But, Sammy, if you . . ." She stopped. There was nothing she

could suggest to him, nothing he could do.

Sammy turned back to the Benjamins. "Amanda Randolph has been Shirley's friend for a long time. She isn't seeing anybody just now because she's had an operation on her face, and she'll change during the next few weeks. Her parents are dead and she doesn't know anybody in town but Shirley. In a month or so you'll help her to get a job in the Garden, won't you?"

"Of course."

Sammy took a last look at them. When people *knew* a thing, loose ends didn't bother them. Shirley was radiant because she knew, knew beyond argument, that she wasn't unloved after all. Although it would take her many weeks to rethink her life, reassess everything that had ever happened to her, she'd be able to do it in the end, with the help of a generous, sympathetic friend like—like Amanda. Amanda was doubtful, bewildered, but soon she would respond to these people and flower in the easier life of the Garden.

Holding them for a moment, he ducked out into the street, out of their lives.

THE rain had stopped. It was easy to find and rouse a few of the miners, convincing them

absolutely that Susie had died suddenly the day before and had been buried. It wasn't so easy when he went to the police. Here he had to do a much more careful, subtle job, for later these men would know about Cliff Burns' suicide and that Sammy Talbot had been scrambled for using a strange, secret *Power* over men. No doubt there would be an attempt later to find out just what Sammy had actually done.

After he had finished his calls—which hadn't been made at all, for no one would remember them—there was nothing for him to do but return to the hostel.

As he made his way there, he thought without regret of the events of the last few hours. Human beings shouldn't have this *Power*, obviously, and he bore nobody any malice for what was going to happen to him. His life and personality weren't so remarkable that he had any real excuse for wanting to preserve them. Being a man, he did want to preserve them. But he was content—as content as any man could be knowing he was going to be scrambled in the next few hours.

He didn't reach the hostel. Suddenly he felt an intense pain in his head and knew at once what it meant.

Pitching forward in the mud, he lay still.

“IT'S all I could collect,” said Sergeant Teiger, dropping two typewritten sheets on Lieutenant Gibson's desk. “Doesn't amount to much, but I'd sure appreciate it if you can make it do for your report to Earth. Snooping around in the Jungle asking questions isn't the healthiest occupation I know.”

Gibson lit his pipe before picking up the sheets. “Party at Benjamins' broke up around twelve, Cliff Burns left about one,” he mused. “Found next morning in shed behind Ricky Chiotza's place, throat cut, undoubtedly suicide. Chiotza had fight with Sammy Talbot earlier in evening, taxi-driver says Burns picked up Talbot and girl, drove Burns back to Benjamins', Talbot and girl to hostel in Jungle. Girl untraced . . . Talbot's girl, Susie, died earlier same day . . .”

He looked up. “Bill, this isn't a report. It's a dog's breakfast.”

“I know, Lieutenant. I can't help it.”

“Hell, all this was three weeks ago. Surely by this time—”

“Look, if that guy Keig hadn't pressed the button the moment he woke up and saw Talbot had been up to something, we might have made some sense out of this. Sure, those were his instruc-

tions, and now we've got to pat Keig and Monkton on the back and let them go on the next ship, though we know Monkton at least is a crook—"

"Relax, Bill," said Gibson. "If Talbot was a mutant or something, naturally the affair got tangled at the end. I must say the whole thing leaves a bad taste—poor devil gets sent out to the mines here with Burns, Keig and Monkton waiting for him to make a false move so that they could slap him down. Okay, Bill, I'll do what I can with this. It isn't our business, anyway. If the Earth authorities want to know what really happened, they can come here and try to find out."

Teiger went out. Gibson started to write his report.

Teiger came back. "Dame wants to see you about Talbot."

"What kind of dame?"

"Your type. My type. Anybody's type."

"Okay, show her in."

"I thought you'd say that."

The girl who came into Gibson's office was no Helen of Troy, but nobody who found her on his line would throw her back. Her face was lean and attractive, and she held herself like a queen.

Gibson let his appreciation show. He came forward to meet her. "I'm Lieutenant Gibson," he

said warmly, taking her hand.

She smiled. "Amanda Randolph."

"You knew Sammy Talbot, Miss Randolph?"

"How would I know a miner?" How would she, indeed? That was what had interested Gibson. Her expensive gray silk dress showed that she wouldn't know anything about the Jungle or its inhabitants.

"Then what is your interest in him?"

"I'm interested in psychology, Lieutenant Gibson, and I have a lot of time on my hands. Can anything be done for anyone like Talbot?"

"Oh, sure. In about ten years he'll be more or less normal."

"Where is he now?"

"At the hospital. When a scrambling sentence is carried out, the prisoner becomes a state charge."

"Could I go and see him? I've read about scrambling and I'd like to see the results."

"Frankly, Miss Randolph, I don't want to have any hand in turning a poor guy like that into a sort of sideshow."

"I don't mean it like that, lieutenant. I said I had a lot of time on my hands. Perhaps I could help with Talbot. I don't suppose he gets much attention at the hospital."

"I guess you're right at that,"

Gibson sighed. "Okay, if you go over to the hospital I'll call them right now and tell them it's all right."

"Thank you, Lieutenant." Amanda Randolph stood up. "Tell me, is he a prisoner?"

"Prisoner? Hell, no. His sentence was carried out. He's being kept at the hospital because he couldn't live a normal life, that's all."

"Thank you, Lieutenant," Amanda said again.

HALF an hour later, a white-coated doctor said: "Sure, go in. He's not dangerous."

"Is he getting any treatment?"

"Well, Miss Randolph, you know how it is. Cases like that don't need treatment; they need re-education. It would make sense to send him to school with the five-year-olds, in about two years or so when he's learned to talk."

"Suppose I came every day?"

"That would be fine of you, Miss Randolph. But you'd better see him first and see if you still want to."

"Doctor, let me put a hypothetical case. Suppose someone married him and took him out of here—suppose his wife was with him all the time, except when she had to work—couldn't he be, well, normal in a fairly short time?"

The doctor smiled ruefully. "You said hypothetical, Miss Randolph. If there was some woman who had loved the guy before—it would have to be before, for there's nothing left now for any woman to love—she might make him into something resembling a human being in a few months. But it'll be years before he can talk like an adult, and read, and count, and build up the background of general knowledge we all have . . . Look, you'd better see him before you consider any more hypothetical questions, Miss Randolph."

Amanda thanked him and pushed open the door.

Sammy lay in bed staring at the ceiling. He looked around as Amanda came in and sat down beside the bed.

"Hello, Sammy," said Amanda quietly.

His face was as clear and empty as a child's. The mind behind it was even emptier.

Amanda sighed. She had endless patience and it was clearly going to be needed.

"Ssssss," she said.

"Ith?" Sammy inquired.

"Ssssss."

"Iss."

She let pleasure show in her face, and Sammy responded to it with a cackle. "Iss!" he crowed. "Iss! Iss! Iss!"

— J. T. McINTOSH