

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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Novelet of
Tomorrow



LOVERS SUBVERSIVE

by D. A. Jourdan

illustration by EMSH

In a society where only first-class citizens were allowed to breed, love was forbidden for everyone else. For even Van, the prosecutor chosen by the World State to discipline a man who had flouted the law, agreed that a childless marriage was meaningless. Then he met Rhea ...

VAN WATCHED his secretary give the yellow poppies on his reception table a careful half-turn. She surveyed the entire office slowly and critically, came over and changed the

position of his visitor's chair minutely, and re-stacked the morning mail so that the communications were in exact alignment.

Closer, he could see that his prim, middle-aged secretary



Security Police had seized the woman in the case, for an example had to be made of all who dared flout the breeding laws.

had actually been using artificial aid in reddening her lips. He tried not to let his amusement show. "Something tells me we're being honored by a visit from one of the powers of the earth..."

The narrow pink lips tightened. "We, Van, are the powers of the earth! The future of the earth lies in its breeders. Never forget that," she admonished her superior severely. Her face relaxed, and she said, "But I do wish you had worn your blue suit..."

Van stood obediently and let her stuff him into the gray jacket. He was well aware that his secretary had never made use of her right to breed, but he also knew that her position as a member of the privileged class was the most important thing in her life. "Just who is about to descend on us?"

Dola beamed. "We're not supposed to know—I got it through channels. It's a surprise visit by Kori." Her tone conveyed equal parts of awe and satisfaction. "Of course everyone has known for months who was behind those anonymous summonses that

have been taking you on so many big jobs lately. But a personal call! He's coming out into the open!" She glanced at her wrist, repeated regretfully, "It's a pity about the suit—the blue makes you look young and happy—Stop frowning!"

VAN, WRYLY watching her hurry across the office, could think of several dozen reasons why, as one of Europe's top planners he had a legitimate right to display some signs of tension or fatigue.

She swivelled at the door, reminded him, "Don't take off your coat. And look as if you're thinking. But happy!" she ordered, contradictorily.

Van could understand her excitement and satisfaction. He had felt the same way when he had first been summoned to work for Kori.

Moments later Dola returned escorting, unaccompanied, one of the twelve members of the World Council.

Kori was a small man, smaller even than most non-breeders, and dark. His size, in that year of 2260, was a shock; but even breeders occasionally came up with something less

than a perfect physical specimen; and once born, only a citizen's tests could affect his fate.

He carried himself with exactly the correct air of amiable condescension considered becoming in citizens of the first class. It was almost as if he enjoyed the contrast between his own meager proportions and those of most planners.

White teeth gleamed momentarily in the dark face in a moderate smile. "You seem to be expecting someone," Kori commented. "Me?"

Van began honestly, "Why, as a matter of fact. . ."

Dola interrupted hastily, "As a matter of fact, Councilman, I sometimes think Van is psychic. They used to believe that intuition was the property of women, way back in the time of haphazard breeding, but it may be that now even the men. . ." She broke off, blushing. "But I'm babbling. I beg your pardon, I must be so overwhelmed by the honor. . ." She recovered her poise, bowed crisply and left the room.

THERE WAS a brief silence, which Kori broke thought-

fully. "If I had wanted this to be really a surprise visit, Van," he gestured with his head toward the door through which Dola had just left, "it would have been."

Van started to grin, then frowned slightly. It was almost as though Kori, in his amiable fashion was warning him of something. "We're honored by the visit," he temporized. He knew Kori slightly and liked him, but it was not easy to understand him for all his mild benignity. Van wondered if this was a quality that resulted from his high position—or caused it.

"I have another job for you." Kori looked at him blandly. "It's the sort of thing my assistant—or successor—would have to handle from time to time."

Van, now feeling the physical sensations of excitement, reminded himself that he was as impressionable as Dola. Kori had just given him a broad hint that he was considering him for Aide, but he tried to speak coolly. "I've enjoyed the other jobs you've assigned me in the past. . ."

The dark man nodded a

couple of times. "A pleasure reservation, a revised curriculum for general education..." Kori looked grave. "Yes. But you will not enjoy this..."

THE SELECTION of a Councilman had to depend on merit—and chance. Despite his recognized ability, Van knew there must be dozens of other planners as capable as he was. Chance had already contributed as much as he could hope for in bringing him to Kori's attention. He felt a certain reluctance because of the Councilman's manner, but he knew that this opportunity wouldn't occur again. "Still, if it has to be done..."

"Good!" Kori smiled subtly. "A distasteful responsibility... I felt it was only fair to warn you." He shrugged. "I wanted you to know that a Councilman, too, pays for his privileges..."

"And the job?" The uncertain feeling in the pit of his stomach told Van that his viscera already knew he had made a mistake. He tried to thrust aside the imagination he had spent thirty years developing.

Kori glanced down at his own hands, then across the room thoughtfully. "You may remember the matter of Dargo, first class citizen of a French coastal town. About six months ago. He bred."

Van shook his head. "A first class citizen. What's wrong with that?"

Kori glanced quickly at Van. "Illegally. Of course."

Van flushed. "Of course." His own stupidity, he knew, was because he now knew what was going to be asked of him. He wondered what had seemed so attractive to him about promotion. Why did a man always want to rise? What neurotic discontentment bred ambition?

Kori went on, "He had so much to lose, so little to gain. We like to investigate these matters thoroughly—one never knows where one will find a weakness in the social structure. And it's just such incidents as this that can sometimes focus light on the darker places..."

VAN HAD a momentary vision of what the words "The darker places" meant to him personally. It was the way

a genetics text had referred to the volcanic islands that sheltered the surviving naturals, descendants of the people who had ignored scientific breeding.

VAN FORCED his mind back to the case Kori was referring to. The woman had jumped from a building, had splattered her flesh—and the flesh of the innocent prisoner of her body—on the smooth, hard causeway of the city. He wondered at a citizen of the masses having the courage to do such a thing; there was so much time for thinking before one could ascend to the top of a tall building, step through a window. His voice was not happy. “What must I do?”

Kori’s eyebrow rose fractionally. “It will be your privilege to represent the World Council against Dargo, planner, of Marseilles. Charge: breeding out of class.” His voice became less official. “You’ll have absolute authority and will prosecute the charge and judge the evidence as a Councilman would do.”

Kori looked at Van neutrally. “What’s the matter? Have

you had no experience enforcing our laws?”

“Against the masses, certainly. But not against a member of my own class!”

“Your loyalty does you credit,” Kori said coolly. “However, first class citizens do occasionally disobey the law, and when they do they must be punished.” He watched Van. “Very well.”

Kori continued briskly, “You’ll proceed to Vienna for the trial. The prisoner is on his way there, accompanied by certain specialists who are to assist you in obtaining evidence and information. The change in venire is because there has already been too much public interest in the crime and I didn’t want the trial held in the home city of either Dargo, you, or even myself.” He smiled grimly. “We’ll all keep clear.”

Van set his jaw. “If this responsibility is mine, why do I need experts? The suicide is certainly a confession. All I have to do is pronounce judgment on the man.”

KORI LOWERED his eyes. “There’s a little more to it

than there seems. Hundreds of years ago, when the world state was first fighting for its life, we used a certain legal technique to discipline the masses. Our citizens are more orderly, it's true, but even now from time to time occasionally it's necessary to quiet them..."

Van muttered, "The public trial." They were not held too frequently, but no planner was ever proud of them.

Kori said sharply, "If you were an ordinary citizen, a member of the masses—yet felt you were as good a man as any other—you'd want to be very sure that the breeders who ruled you submitted to an even sterner discipline than your own. The first class citizens, being human, do err, commit crimes. But our punishment must be more severe." Kori said flatly, "Since the greatest privilege is to breed, Dargo has committed the greatest crime."

Van nodded, feeling hollow. He couldn't disagree, even mentally.

Kori hammered, "The woman escaped us, but that's not important. She was a non-breeder. But the masses have the right to know that their

leaders are entitled to their job, are in every way superior, and worthy of their privilege."

He rose. "Put on a good show, Van. The might and resources of the entire world are yours to command when you fight for the masses..."

II

VAN WENT to Vienna alone. Dola would have been helpful, but with her sex there was always the danger of sentiment. Either she would have despised Dargo for so far demeaning himself as to mate out of class, or she might possibly have been excited by the grandeur of a passion so irresistible it crossed the class line. He was willing to put up with the inconvenience of unfamiliar help to stay free of any further prejudices than those he already bore.

The old city was as lovely as always. It spread farther as the centuries passed, but through the wisdom of planners long dead—who were certainly his spiritual ancestors if not his actual progenitors—the newer areas merged gracefully with the ancient. The architects

had managed to avoid the aggressively modern, without clinging to the cloyingly quaint.

There was little time for either sightseeing or reflection, for his escort took Van directly to the Hall of Justice, and to a luxurious suite of offices high up in the building.

A beautiful girl in blue flicked wonderful brown eyes at Van's escort in merry dismissal, then directed them at him in friendly greeting. Her voice was respectful but without awe. "If the Councilman Surrogate will follow me?"

It was not far from her desk to the handsome, spacious office. She opened the door, permitted Van to precede her. "Councilman Surrogate Van, Bardi, Administrator."

The man behind the desk rose and crossed to Van, his dark waves bobbing relaxedly as he moved. He smiled. "I won't be a liar and say we're glad to have you..." the smile grew warmer. "But you don't look too bad, actually."

VAN GRINNED back. "I won't be a liar and say I'm glad to be here." He rolled his

eyes to the left, where he could still feel the girl's warm and scented presence beside him. "But I can't deny that the unpleasantness of my mission begins to have compensation..."

Bardi blushed, turned to the girl. "Er, thanks Rhea. That'll be all..."

Van refused the seat behind the desk offered him, made himself comfortable in another chair. "Of course it's an imposition to use Vienna..."

Bardi made a wry face, said dutifully, "One world, Councilman Surrogate. One people."

"Van," Van suggested. "The title is only for the duration of the job." He wondered if even the pay Kori had dangled before him was sufficient reward, reminded himself that he had asked for this job himself.

He tried to think of something pleasanter. "That is a beautiful secretary you have, Bardi. None of our northern breeders have yet inspired me with a desire to mate, but your lovely women here..."

Bardi was blushing again. "Rhea's not a breeder," he interrupted quickly. "She's the best secretary a man could

want," he said defensively, "but she's not a breeder."

Van looked astonished. "She looks like a breeder," he said stupidly.

Bardi showed embarrassment but stubbornness. "I know it's a bit unusual. But this particular girl is extremely competent, and I work with her better than with any of our breeders. So..." He dropped his hand gracefully.

Van frowned. The temptations of life on a citizen of either class were numerous and pressing. It didn't make sense to go out of one's way to subject oneself to more. He refrained from referring to the cause of his visit, Dargo, whose crime probably had its inception in just such an innocent beginning. "How did you happen to contact a second-class citizen," he asked sternly. "To discover her—competence?"

BARDI BLUSHED deeply. "Years ago—some of the more reckless undergraduates used to call it 'social research' to strike up acquaintance with the masses. Boyish high spirits," he said deprecatingly.

"Yet, years later, you still maintain this connection..."

Bardi's face could grow no redder, his eyes were now hot, too. "There has never been anything between us." He let his anger show. "We're friends."

Van showed his scorn. "Friends with a non-breeder. Friends with a member of the masses, an inferior mind."

Bardi leaned forward, anger lancing toward his guest and superior. "It is a known fact that some of the ordinary citizens have as good intellects as any breeder. Or would have, had they had training."

Van regarded him silently for a long moment. He said chilly, "If you will show me to an office where I shall not disturb anyone, I should like to start work."

Bardi stood. "This is your office," he said with icy courtesy. He walked over to a row of filing cabinets. "These are records pertinent to the matter you are here to handle. Buttons on your desk connect directly with the west wing of the confinement area, which has been isolated for the ex-

clusive use of your prisoner and his entourage.”

Bardi hesitated. “I had assigned Rhea to your service and had her brief herself in this matter. We have a certain tradition toward guests here, and she is actually my most valued assistant. It shouldn’t take too long for any of our breeders to receive the material from Rhea, however, so if you will just...”

“That won’t be necessary.” Van interrupted. “Since Rhea is informed, then let it stand at that.”

“But...” Bardi stopped. He closed his mouth. “Nothing. I am, of course, at your orders...”

HE LEFT while Van opened his small flat briefcase and put its contents out on the handsomely carved old desk. As the door closed behind him, Van opened the connection to Rhea. The easy, musical voice on the other end invited, “Order me.” Van said, “I want to speak with Dargo. Here. Alone.” He had caught that bit about the prisoner’s entourage, he was not naive about the methods of authority.

But if he wanted every assistance Kori’s corps of experts could give him, he also knew that he was morally responsible for this trial and he wanted to be sure he was actually making whatever decisions were to be made. He was realistic enough to know that his political future might rest more securely on their more practiced skill, but there was also the need to live with his own opinion of himself.

Even Van was astonished to see six men accompanying the one wan prisoner into his office. It was all formally correct. Two were in the gray uniform of the Security Police. They marched in back. The two in the white garments of medicos stood on either side of a thin, pale man who appeared drugged.

Van looked at the two healthy, assured officials who lead the party. He kept his temper; he was to be as much on display in this business as Dargo. “I wanted to question the prisoner. Alone.” The medicos were depositing the man carefully in a chair. “Is he capable of intelligent speech?”

The plumper of the two officials looked at him blandly. "Oh, yes. He's under sedation, it's true. But that was necessary, Councilman Surrogate. For his own protection. . ."

The man in the chair made a weak noise. Van glanced at him, but his face was expressionless.

THE SECOND official could restrain himself no longer. "And for my protection," he said indignantly. "After all, he's my responsibility. And he nearly escaped."

Van looked at him deliberately. "From the World Council?"

The indignant one was not intimidated. "World or no world, we can only use men to restrain men."

The plump man said soothingly, "The prisoner had a certain regrettable influence in the area where he was known." His small, shrewd eyes were on Van knowingly. "But the Councilman Surrogate is doubtless aware of the causes for the change in venire. . ."

It was not the first experience Van had had in administering justice, but it was the

first time Van had felt shame over his part. There was something degrading, with the whole world arrayed against this one man, to need any assistance beyond the man's own crime.

Nor did he appreciate being humiliated before the man he was to destroy. The essence of punishment was that the prisoner must be made to know he was wrong; otherwise, the government was practising nothing but tyranny.

Van frowned. He would have preferred having the trial in Marseilles, and damn the public feeling. Right was right and didn't need to sneak around using legal technicalities. He went over to Dargo, looked at him carefully. He was breathing shallowly but he was able to sit in the chair unaided, and his eye reflexes were only a little slow.

"All right," Van said. "I'll talk to the prisoner now." He gestured 'out' with his head. The others left, but the plump man remained. Van controlled himself. "Alone." He kept his voice unemphatic.

"Guilemont," the plump man introduced himself.

"Councilman Surrogate, consider me only a spectator, here for your protection." He drew a gun from his pocket ostentatiously, stood holding it.

VAN LOOKED at Dargo, wondered if the heat he could feel in his face was visible. Definitely there was a jeer on the prisoner's wan face, veiled and yet somehow manifest. Guilemont would not be so bold unless he had his orders from Kori.

He resented Kori's suggestion of supervision—or if not supervision, at least chaperonage. He resented the lack of faith in him personally. After all, somewhere along the line a man had to be capable of honor and had to be trusted, even if in this World Council it was only at the Councilman level.

Perhaps that was why he was ambitious. A man wanted somehow to prove that he obeyed the law because he believed in it—not because someone was watching him and he would be punished if he didn't obey.

Van's voice was tightly

governed. "The prisoner is not armed?"

Guilemont ignored the sarcasm. "Pardon me. The Councilman Surrogate is brilliant but young. There are other dangers..."

Van's tone duplicated Guilemont's cold respect. "I shall have to risk them."

Guilemont gave in with Gallic grace, deposited his gun on Van's desk. "At least permit me to leave this with you," he said, and left the room.

Alone, Van studied Dargo. The glint in his eye, if it had ever been there, was gone. Dargo was interested in nothing, not in his surroundings, his prosecutor-judge, not even in himself.

VAN Poured himself a drink from the carafe on the desk. Dola was an intelligent woman but she never could remember to see that there was fresh water for him. Van could almost understand Bardi's wanting a girl as lovely as Rhea around, but it was shortsighted of him to imagine that people would believe that it was because of her intellectual qualities.

Lightning did occasionally hit. Sometimes, despite the constant tests all citizens received at each formative age level, members of the masses did in later life manifest proof of superiority. When this did occur, they could receive further examination; and if they were successful, they could be admitted into the ranks of the first class citizens, the breeders.

If the lovely Rhea were as intelligent as Bardi suggested, it would have been a simple matter to have her status changed, for obviously, physically she was perfect. The water was fresh, which was more than it would have been in Stockholm, but that proved nothing.

He forced himself back to the matter at hand. Judging a citizen was like conducting a post mortem on a living being, except that one could hardly call the accused "living." By the time they came to Van, mentally and spiritually they were deader than ground meat. He had always supposed it was the conviction of their own guilt that turned them into the fear-paralyzed zombies he saw.

He reminded himself that Dargo's crime was not a simple matter of unbridled human desires requiring sentence. Kori was right: Dargo's crime had dangerous social overtones.

Van let his loathing show. "How could a breeder deliberately unite himself to an inferior mate?" He had attacked Dargo's aggravating disinterest with all the disgust he was capable of, and he was not prepared for just what the prisoner did.

III

DARGO GLANCED at him briefly, then swung his gaze toward the door Guilemont and the others had just left through. He tried to rise from his chair, his expression of hopelessness intensified.

Van saw the tendons on his thin hands and arms stand out with his effort to lift himself, but he had only barely raised himself when Van strode over and shoved him back in the chair. "And where did you think you were going?"

"Out. We're wasting time." His voice held a bitterness as

well as hopelessness. "I thought— When I heard I was to go before the eminent Van..." He shook his head. "I should have known better..."

"Known better than what?"

Dargo's eyes held despair, but the glint was there, too. "Than to hope you would be any less of a fool than the others."

"You're the fool, Dargo." Van felt himself losing interest; the man was either delirious or insane. "There are some things no one can dispute. Neither you, nor I, nor the masses. For they could destroy us all in a moment if we were wrong."

"And that's why you're destroying me?" Dargo asked jeeringly. "Because if you didn't, they'd destroy you?"

Van flushed only a trifle. "Partly," he admitted truthfully. He offered Dargo's hopeless, jeering eyes his own. His conviction must show. "Three hundred years ago two great cultures divided the earth," he reminded him. "It's no accident this is a united world today. Equal to our own, perhaps even stronger, was our

enemy. But they followed a religious precept which called for a weakening of the strong and a strengthening of the weak—they did this deliberately, in its political phase naming it democracy..."

VAN WAS aware of the contrast between his growing intensity and Dargo's boredom. Dargo knew everything he knew, but Dargo had forgotten—it was easy to forget. He went on, enjoying his own ferocity. "They weren't stupid, those religious ones. They bred their animals with all the science they possessed. Imagine cows producing thirty kilograms of milk a day!"

In his urgency, Van grasped Dargo's shoulder, demanding his attention. The sharpness of the man's bones disconcerted him and he felt a momentary pity for him. That made it the more important to convince him. "They spent unbelievable amounts for the purpose of breeding horses that could run a fraction of a second faster than other horses! For entertainment!"

Van looked at Dargo sternly. "But they failed to breed

themselves." His frown was puzzled. "They had all the information. Over a hundred years before they fell to us they knew everything we knew. Gaxton, Terman had proved that only by mating superior males and females could you produce superior offspring..."

"Their own statistics showed them their tendency was to mate unevenly." Van's laugh was short and patronizing. "They felt that biological drive justified mongrelized mating, jeered at the ancient German concept of superman— They deliberately and knowingly bred down their national intellect and handed us the world." Van eyed Dargo grimly. "And you, apparently, would like to see us follow their lead."

DARGO SAID sarcastically, "You haven't re-hashed the matter in its disgusting entirety. When I was in school they said that defective females were considered the most desirable of mates, and married younger and produced more offspring than any others."

Van was running out of juice, was wearying of Dargo's untouchability. Sometimes a

man went bad, but the masses had a right to expect their leaders to set an example. "Then you're prepared to admit publicly that your act was a crime against the world and that you regret it?"

Dargo, without any change in expression, shook his head.

Van felt some anger at the man's stubbornness. At his stupidity. He said wearily, "Which? You don't think you made an error, or you refuse to admit it?" He turned away, picked up a small ivory carving of Pisa's ancient tower.

"May I speak?" Van flushed at the man's emphasis, waited, but didn't turn. Dargo spoke to his back. "You call it mongrelized mating. I say that sometimes something passes between a man and a woman that is more important than the machine's blessing. More important, sometimes, than life or death..."

Van turned sharply. "We recognize temptation. There is all kinds of assistance for such situations. Right up to sterilization."

Dargo smiled grimly. "We tried sterilizing the masses to keep from over-populating the

earth, but they didn't want to live incapable of procreation. So we settled for an efficient, well-policed system of birth control. With an occasional permission to breed for some citizen of the masses whose outstanding contribution demanded spectacular reward." His thin mouth contracted still further. "A neat compromise."

VAN, PACING the floor, hesitated at the door. "You can hardly object to an effective compromise." With both impatience and discomfort he watched Dargo laboriously draw himself up out of his chair. He wondered just how much "preparation" Guilemont had given his prisoner. He himself had not given much thought to a plan of action because it never occurred to him that any sane man would resist both the world and his own conscience. "It's also foolish for you to object to co-operating in the trial. You're one of us—you know exactly how expert we are at such persuasion..."

Dargo, moving slowly across the room, stopped and supported himself against a chair to

turn and look at Van. "I do know."

Van said angrily, to cover his own discomfort, "You conclude too quickly. You might have been given permission to have this child you thought so important..."

Dargo's laugh was very soft.

Van meant to sting. "For all you know, your non-breeder might have been a breeder. You know Genetics are carrying on long-range experiments all the time—that many are raised unaware of their true class..." Dargo's face didn't soften him, he was deliberately cruel. "Your mate may have sacrificed herself needlessly. And you may be again worsening your position by too hasty..." Then he understood why Dargo was dragging himself across the room. Van had forgotten the gun Guilemont had left on the desk.

Dargo, so weak he could barely stand without support, had not forgotten. Above the gun now, his face was slowly relaxing from the lines of pain. He looked like a man, who after hard work and long service, is about to receive a longed-for reward. "It doesn't matter

now." His voice was almost the only living thing about him. That and his eyes. They looked almost happy.

VAN CURSED himself for his stupidity. Dargo had strength enough to pull the trigger, and he knew he could not stop him. The length of the room lay between them.

He tried to blame Kori, for assigning him to a task any man would hate. Or Guilemont for his deadly "protection." But he had been depressed by the whole painful, shameful proceeding, too anxious to be done with it, and he had been careless.

Aloud he said stupidly, "You can't escape."

Dargo's smile was remote, hardly bitter. "Yes I can."

"Not alive."

"Alive." The gun moved slightly with Dargo's disdain. Van watched it, knew that he wanted life intensely. With anger and hunger he remembered the texture of Rhea's olive skin. He was only thirty, and he had spent his whole life up to that moment driving relentlessly toward the position he was now approaching.

He realized suddenly all the things he had missed, had deliberately deferred until he should have accomplished his aim.

Dargo, studying him, might have been reading his mind. "Van, the Comer," he said sardonically. "You actually might have made Councilman. One of the powers of the earth..."

"I may still," Van said stubbornly.

Dargo's laugh was stronger. "I'm free," he said wonderingly. "With this in my hand, I'm as free as though I were already dead. I can't be stopped, swayed. You've failed at your filthy job," he frowned at Van. "But you just might escape. A good politician might even get clear," he gestured slightly with the gun, "of something like this. So I think I'll take you with me..." His face contorted into a grimace intended for a smile. "Unless you care to persuade me not to kill you. You're quite good at persuasion. You're all of you good at that sort of thing." His voice was softer now. "Go ahead, Councilman Surrogate. Persuade me not to kill you..."

VAN DESPISED himself for his sluggishness before the need for action. But he was supposed to be a planner. "Brilliant" was an adjective they frequently applied to him, and he could think of nothing. Weak as Dargo was, slowed as his reflexes were, there was still plenty of time to kill and turn the gun back to himself.

Van wondered if there was a great deal of pain to having a bullet tear through your vitals, but knew that even if there was he couldn't help himself. He flung himself across the room toward Dargo.

Dargo aimed coolly at him, shot once and then turned the gun on himself for the second shot. Van saw the flashes and heard the shots and marvelled at how excitement—fear—anaesthetized a man. The shot could not have missed him but he felt nothing. He reached Dargo and tore the gun away from him.

Not until then did either of the men notice that there was no blood. No blood at all. Van, holding Dargo's weak frame, felt the hysterical laughter arising from within him. Dar-

go's face told Van that the prisoner, too, understood.

Barely able to restrain his laughter Van dropped the gun on the desk, hustled Dargo into a chair and poured him a drink from the decanter.

THERE WAS a sedate knock on the door and Guilemont's voice came through, slightly-raised, but calm. "Are you all right, Councilman Surrogate?"

Van smoothed his jacket. "Come in!"

Guilemont entered, smugly poised, irritatingly incurious. Van studied him with new respect and even more dislike. He gestured toward Dargo. "Perhaps you'd better get one of those doctors in here. He looks very pale to me."

Guilemont shrugged. "He won't eat. We force-feed him, but it isn't the same they tell me."

Van switched, complimented, "That was quite a trick. That business with the unloaded gun. Quite revelatory. But if I hadn't been so stupid, the trick might not have gone off just the way it did..." He

hoped his face showed only admiration.

Guilemont shrugged characteristically. "No one could possibly be hurt. With an unloaded gun."

Van finished off his thought then sharply. "If Kori had been the recipient of your little surprise he might not have liked it even as much as I did..."

Guilemont was sparked into truth. "My job is to assist you with the trial. Your personal vulnerability is not my responsibility."

Van accepted his statement. Guilemont was right. He was dangerous because he envied "the brilliant young Councilman Surrogate," but that was to be expected. His own job was to use Guilemont's talents and avoid being trapped by the older man's jealousy. "What have you done so far to convince Dargo we must have his co-operation?"

Guilemont said suavely, "You are in charge. We have done little except await your orders."

VAN FROWNED at Dargo, who sagged in the chair, staring unseeingly at the im-

portant gun on the desk. Van handed it to Guilemont. "He doesn't look well," he suggested again, sparring.

Guilemont's ruddy face reddened more with emotion. "That's nobody's fault but his own. He's made several attempts at suicide—even now, he won't eat. You didn't give my colleague much chance to explain. But it wasn't Dargo's escape he feared but his death. It's not easy to prevent a determined man from dying."

Dargo's voice was grating. "Particularly when he has friends."

Only Guilemont's eyes showed his feeling. "Exactly," he said, and waited.

Van hesitated no longer. "My job is evaluation—projection of group trends. I've no experience with the various techniques of persuasion." Deliberately Van permitted himself the luxury of letting Guilemont know what he thought of him. "I'm sure, Guilemont, you must be very good at this sort of thing..."

Guilemont ignored the insult, looked worried. "He's not well," he said. "And he's very stubborn..."

"Then make him amenable," Van ordered calmly. "After all, this is only one individual. And you have the resources of the whole world behind you." He remembered Kori saying almost the same thing to him, when he passed the problem of Dargo on to him. He wondered if Guilemont would also delegate the actual application of force. Watching the careful way Guilemont half-supported, half-forced Dargo to his feet and out of the office, Van suspected that this was a duty Guilemont would enjoy handling personally.

IV

A WEEK LATER, after a series of reports from Guilemont, growing in intensity from exasperation to fury, Van knew that he had been right. Guilemont took Dargo's resistance as a personal challenge, and Dargo was not the sort of man to be moved by duress.

Van realized now why Kori had given Dargo to him, but unfortunately his own talent for strategy was equally unprovocative of anything that

might persuade Dargo. He wondered guiltily if it might be because of his own emotional pre-occupation, reminded himself that no man was completely the master of his biological drives.

But he had not been merely admiring the sunshine himself. The files on the prisoner were orderedly and full; and although this other tension was growing within him, he had dutifully assimilated an enormous amount of material about Dargo. All of which had added up to no single idea on how to affect the man.

There were, of course, always drugs and hypnosis to force a man to act his part correctly for the public spectacle. But the masses were not insensible to the difference between a quick and living being of free will and a quiescent mound of protoplasm. There was neither drama nor morality in punishing a corpse.

Kori, and the ancient religious ones who preceded him by so many centuries, had been very wise when they presented citizens with a clear and vivid scene of the penitent sinner submitting to, even yearning

for his punishment. Thousands of years of so-called civilization had proven it was the most effective morality lesson the people could receive.

Van let his finger hover for a moment over the button that would bring Rhea into his room, then reminded himself wearily that there was also the problem of Dargo. The new problem was so demanding he had to force himself to keep his mind on the reason he was in Vienna.

VAN BUZZED for Rhea, and when she entered pointed at three fat folders on his desk. "You may return those to the file." He did not look at her, tried not to think about her. "And didn't you say those were the last?"

Rhea nodded, glancing at the list of names on his desk. She held a pencil poised over the bottom name. "And that completes your list of associates," she added, checking it off.

"Dargo's political science instructor. When he was in secondary school." Van gave up trying to ignore her fragrant presence. He now whole-

heartedly agreed with Bardi's statement about her intelligence. He would have feared the threat her beauty and charm represented to an impressionable breeder, if he had not had an unconscious conviction that she was as much a breeder as he was himself. Reason told him that might be wishful thinking, but he was long past the point where reason could dictate.

He said, "Dargo had strongly democratic sympathies as a boy." He smiled tiredly. "The class system worried him—he felt that—the world had merely exchanged one tyranny for another." His tone was tolerant. "We all go through that."

Rhea didn't smile. "Well, didn't we? Merely exchange one tyranny for another?"

Van showed his disappointment. She was much too intelligent not to understand. "There must be some order if we're not all to starve. Otherwise everyone would paint sunsets and no one would raise pigs."

Her wonderful dark eyes were very intent. "But the decision. The responsibility of deciding who shall paint the sun-

sets and who shall raise the pigs. Who shall rule and who shall be ruled."

SHE WAS holding the three files as though someone might snatch them from her and she looked unlike her usual gay self. Van rose, took the files from her, letting his arms linger for one pleasant second around her hyacinth-scented body. "You know ours is the best system man has yet discovered," he said reproachfully. "We breed only the most perfect humans, and we take only the top percent of offspring for planners and future breeders. And if you or any citizen can improve on that you have only to notify the Council."

"But how can the testing machines know which women should breed—dare to tell them?"

Van looked at her wonderingly. "Who should know better?"

"The woman herself!" Rhea blushed at her own emphasis, tried to cover with a flood of words. "It's not fair to the women of the masses to deny

them the right to breed! Oh, yes, you keep them hoping. You say those who have performed special services may be accorded the privilege of children. But it's too slender a chance, one out of millions..."

"Rhea, you must have seen pictures of how they live on the islands." Van knew he must convince himself as well as her. He used all the arguments he had been taught. "Dirty, cowardly, vicious—that's what man becomes if he chooses to mongrelize his species—breed haphazard, from whim or lack of self-control. Is that what you want for the world?"

She looked at him, silent but resistant.

Van said, "Only a few hundred years ago men went right up to the verge of self-destruction because they were unable to live with self-control—to breed deliberately and with intelligence." His mouth showed his distaste, his eyes his incredulity. "They had the facts, they had done all sorts of studies on genetics and eugenics. Yet they continued degenerating their species—it was like setting fire to their own house while they were in it!"

VAN SAID sternly, "They used just the arguments you would: some mystic attraction between people told them which would produce the finest offspring." His laugh was short and bitter, for he wanted to use that very thinking in his own mind.

The lovely, angry face was discouraged now. "I know you're right. But I feel..." She broke it off. "Never mind."

Van took her cool hand, resisted an impulse to kiss it. "When this is over I'll use whatever power I have—and I have some—to obtain a breeding permit for you, Rhea." He held his breath lest class loyalty make her refuse his offer. Many did, even when offered the opportunity. "Of course the permit would only be for you," he warned. "You'd have to mate with a breeder." It seemed like a subtle way to find out if she had anyone in mind.

The gayety was back in her face and with it, mischief. She said demurely, "The man is a planner..."

There was someone. Van's face fell. He said gloomily,

"I'm very happy for both you and Bardi..."

Rhea picked up the files she had started to put away, took them briskly to the cabinets. "Oh, not Bardi."

From her voice Van knew she was smiling. He suspected it was at him, walked over to the files and forced her to face him. "Then who?"

She was laughing. "Who would you like it to be?"

Her lips were not only warm and soft, he knew that of the two billion females on earth, they were the only lips that were salt-sweet in a combination exactly to his taste. He wondered if even the newest machine could have told him this, suspected it could not.

IT WAS several minutes before he realized that if his hunch about Rhea being actually a breeder was incorrect, he was about to do exactly what the man he was assigned to destroy had done. It was not merely ironic, it should have been frightening. The most frightening part of all was that he felt no fear.

He put Rhea's inviting body away from him firmly. "I shall

not touch you until I have a breeding permit."

Her eyes, behind an ardency as fervent as his own might have been a little mocking. "We don't necessarily have to breed. Or don't you trust..."

"Not in a case where the man feels as strongly as I do." He had been taught that such thinking was superstition, yet he couldn't help his conviction. "We'll wait." He didn't tell her of his hope that she might be a planner citizen herself, that the wait might not be too long. "First I must dispose of the job I was sent here for." He felt the reaction from his hope. "And I'm at a dead end."

Her eyes were so very bright Van realized why her lips had tasted salt. "Do it quickly, Van! Get it over quickly! He's me, he's every citizen who's punished for doing what he wants, and his pain is mine..."

A sudden thought struck him. "And if I can't—would you be willing to go with me to the islands? If I could get us there?"

Her face was serious, frightened. "They're violent, they say. How do we know we could

survive?" She looked at him. "I'd go!"

He wanted to kiss her again, but it was too much and not enough. There was work to do, work he was failing at. He sent for Guilemont.

GUILEMONT, in front of the carved desk, shook his head angrily. "You're to be the star of this show—I know that, Councilman Surrogate." He was too angry to sneer as he pronounced Van's title. "But I have my pride, too. If I can't reach him—no one can!"

Van was alarmed. "You've not—killed him."

Guilemont was insulted. "I'm not a butcher!" His tone changed. "But he's sick and stubborn, and it's not easy to press such a man and still keep him alive..."

Van warned, "Alive is how we need him." He had already received his answer about Rhea's citizenship; his hunch was wrong. The case of the World versus Dargo no longer interested him, but if they were ever to consummate their love, Dargo's continued existence was of utmost importance. "I

want to see him. Now, with you."

Guilemont looked at him, shrugged.

The Confinement area combined the more distasteful qualities of prison cell and hospital. The guard lounging outside the door stood and flipped the viewer mechanism for their benefit.

Guilemont waved Van to it. "Ten to one he's just sitting there. Melancholia. Deep dependency." He said with some emotion, "How can you reach a man who wants nothing?"

Van felt a stab of fear. If Dargo wanted nothing, Guilemont was right: there was no way to reach him. But he knew that there was something any man with a spark of life in him wanted, even if it was a negative desire. "But you did make vigorous effort to obtain his co-operation? You used force?"

Guilemont was annoyed. "Do you think I'm a slacker? I've done everything I dared..."

Van couldn't afford to be wrong. "But—you tortured him? You? Yourself, personally?"

Guilemont sounded self-righteous. "In the service of the masses I am not squeamish. As I suspect some people are," he hinted.

VAN HOPED that his gleam of triumph didn't show. There had been something of the willing bully in the way Guilemont had handled Dargo in his office. He had counted on that, had hoped that Guilemont was not personally squeamish. For himself, even before he found himself loving Rhea, he had been reluctant to punish Dargo. Guilemont was right.

Van gestured at the door. "We'll go in," he said to the guard.

Dargo was sitting flaccidly on his padded bench, his gaunt face empty. There was a small flicker of something as he saw Guilemont; Van's face was just another of the many that had come and gone since his crime. He didn't even recognize him. It was exactly what Van wanted: that he, personally, should mean nothing to Dargo—or at least less than Guilemont meant.

Van said quietly, "Remember me, Dargo? Van?" He smiled wryly. "The 'eminent' planner who was to punish you?"

Dargo looked at him without interest, nodded.

"I have a suggestion. Something that might change your mind about co-operating with us."

Guilemont looked sullen. "Rome wasn't built in a day," he said. "Given time, I'm sure I can persuade Dargo to assist his government in his trial."

His eyes were on Dargo as he spoke and Dargo was unable to restrain a slight shudder.

Van felt nausea—and elation. If he had prepared a script for Guilemont to read, it couldn't go better. He said smoothly, "However time is just the problem. Right now the world is interested in why a man like Dargo would transgress against his own laws. But the masses lose interest quickly."

Dargo looked exhausted, bored.

Van said, "How would you like, Dargo, to tour the naturals' islands? See for yourself

the results of acts such as yours?"

GUILEMONT was outraged, horrified. "No!" he exploded. "It would be too dangerous! If he ever escaped there we'd never find him!"

Dargo had ignored Van's suggestion when he first made it, but he glanced curiously at Guilemont's intensity.

Van said tightly, "I must prove to him he's wrong!" Days ago he would have said those words in complete sincerity. Now, he could only hope he was a convincing actor. Liar.

Guilemont jutted out his chin, glared at Van. "The terrain is ideal for one man to hide in—it's so rough we've not had a census taken for hundreds of years. Short of absolute destruction we couldn't even control the islands. And the Council would never risk destruction of our only reserve of pre-scientifically bred humans."

Van said patiently, "I'm not asking you to turn him loose there. I only want to show him the place. He's not going to escape."

"I refuse," Guilemont said hotly. "I won't be a party to this."

"I'll take the responsibility," Van said easily.

"Impossible!"

Dargo had been watching them with slight but then growing interest. "Maybe I'd like to see the islands. Maybe they're not the hell-holes we've been told..." His eyes were on Guilemont as he spoke.

Van's heart leaped. He had not been betting on Dargo's desire to see the islands, for dead men are not interested in proving themselves right, and Dargo was dead, had probably died with the woman. He had bet on the first and last emotion a human being has: hate. He had bet on Dargo's hatred for Guilemont and he had won.

For Guilemont's benefit, Van said carefully, "And if you discover your error, you'll publicly admit it?"

Dargo grimaced. "A fair price."

Guilemont said excitedly, "This is insane. I absolutely refuse."

Van looked at him. "However, I believe I'm in charge here..."

V

HE DIDN'T even know where the islands were, but by moving through the correct channels, Van was able to get permission and transportation arranged immediately. He suspected Kori's hand in the speed with which it was accomplished, but the important thing was that he and Dargo, accompanied by a limited entourage, were actually to be permitted to visit the highly secret area.

Van didn't even tell Rhea his full plan until they were there. Then he couldn't keep still. "Here they live literally as the people of the past did culturally," he said, smiling. He felt gay and young and reckless. "On a live volcano."

The climate was tropical, temperature-wise little different from the regulated temperatures of the large cities of the world. But because this was natural, there was a subtle difference in the feeling of the moisture content of the air on the skin.

The habit of responsibility made him ask again. "You're sure you'd be willing to spend

the rest of your life there? Perhaps eating your food raw—if there is any food to eat?”

Rhea's smile was not happy but loving. “The naturals live, somehow.”

“And kill.” Van's mouth was suddenly straight. “But I'm sure I can take care of you, Rhea.”

SHE KISSED him, trustingly. She smiled. “If we're going to be completely insane—perhaps its best not to think about it.”

“I think I've considered all the angles,” Van said. “Dargo may or may not make his public confession—we'll never know. Because we're going to be hidden away somewhere on the islands, here. Remain here forever...”

“That insane?” Rhea shivered slightly.

He said quickly, “We'll build our own paradise. Our own Garden of Eden...”

“They'll kill us. Savages always hate strangers.” Her voice held submission to the inevitable, a hidden hopelessness.

Van forced a larger buoyancy into his tone. “They'll

probably make me their chief—their god. To make sure, I'm taking this.” He patted a holstered weapon he wore under his jacket.

“And when we fall asleep?” Rhea asked sadly.

He smiled at her. “By *that* time we'll be friends.” He said urgently, “Rhea—Kori, World Councilman, was actually considering me for successor. If I was able to survive in our world, I can survive in this.”

Rhea studied him helplessly. “But why give up all you had achieved? Why not use your position to help us. Perhaps you could...”

“Even if I could...” Van frowned. “It would be cheating the very laws I'm supposed to be administering. Before—I believed in what I was doing. What the world was doing. Now—it would be like taking gifts from someone you hate!”

“Integrity...” There was a ghost of her mischievous smile. “Expensive...”

His own doubt made him the more passionate. “I really think we could make it, Rhea. If you want to try...”

“Defy the world? Escape it?”

Van said stubbornly, "I've thought of everything. They could flood these islands with troops. And we could still play hide and seek with them and win. They'd need to bomb the islands to get me. Wipe out every one of their precious naturals. I don't think they would..." He smiled grimly. "But even if they were willing to pay that price—there's the volcano. You don't put a bomb down a volcano. Not without another world to sit on while you wait to see what happens."

THEY travelled through jungle, and though they carried enough to reproduce in a few generations much of the civilization they were leaving, they moved swiftly.

Van had thought of the reasons for leaving behind the microfilmed books, the technical knowledge—and had then decided to bring along all he could carry. At his leisure he could decide more wisely whether the Garden could co-exist with books. Right now things were moving too fast. He wasn't sure.

There was not much time for talk. Once he told her he felt

as though they were being followed.

Hours later she panted, "Are they still after us?"

It was nothing so specific as that, he had not really seen or heard anything. It was only a feeling, perhaps an instinctive reaction to the size of his crime.

HE WAS beginning to realize that he alone, plus the material he carried in the books, plus time, might conceivably jeopardize the security of the world as it now existed. It was a powerful and frightening thought, and it was hard to understand how the world could have survived three hundred years of comparative stability if one man's momentary unbalance could endanger it.

There in the beauty and sticky heat of the tropical jungle Van reminded himself that 'unbalance' was the correct word, for his behavior was reckless to the point of insanity.

As a student—and later as a planner and administrator—he had learned all there was to know about biological and psy-

chological drives. Together they constituted a potent threat to man's sanity and the world, through its administrators, offered all sorts of safeguards against the danger. However he had ignored any possible help, had refused even to admit that he needed help.

It was largely Rhea, but there were other things that came into it, too. He had been working very hard, and he had dreaded his assignment to punish Dargo. Ambition had compelled him to go on, but some crimes were so human, so understandable, once you used the mind of the criminal as your frame of reference, that they became almost tragedies, with the criminal the victim. No decent man wanted to go around punishing men for having bad luck.

Just before the darkness came they saw paths. Van pointed them out silently, and they both moved even more quietly. Keeping off the paths they worked their way very close to a sort of village of eleven simple huts built around a cluttered central enclosure.

Rhea, visible in the reflect-

ed light of the naturals' campfires, wrinkled her nose. "Phew! Is that an animal? Or some sort of plant?"

"Neither," Van said quietly. "Remember, naturals lack our sanitary disposal facilities."

THE NATURALS did their cooking at the fires in the clearing. There were fourteen females of varying sizes and ages, and Van and Rhea could see them clearly. The young ones romped and wrestled with each other as the older ones cooked. They used as cooking vessels what appeared to be charred coconut shells and crude, baked-mud containers.

Van saw that Rhea was looking on in horror. There was little trace of order here. Van thought of the books in his pack, and his heart sank. It was no use to tell himself that he had not yet seen the men, for a civilization was an integrated thing. Both ideals and morals were highly contagious. If the women had no sense of order and comfort, the men would not be what he had hoped to find.

In a little while, as the two watched, the men came trick-

ling into the clearing, alone or in twos, bringing food. Van saw the women perform rough cleansing operations, dressing the game somewhat before putting the fresh meat into the pots, but Rhea couldn't watch.

Rhea shuddered, glancing from time to time. She tried to comfort Van. "We'll keep to ourselves. We don't need them. We don't need anybody!"

Van's voice was flat. "Yes we do. We're human, we need humans." He gestured with his head in the flickering darkness. "And it would take generations to make people like that civilized. Maybe you never could, starting with that kind of stock..."

Rhea let her panic show. "But we can't go back! Not now!"

Van hesitated, tried to think. There was nothing. "We can't go on, not to that..." He gestured helplessly. "I knew they would be simple, fierce. But I expected to find..."

"How can we go back?"

The sadness in her voice reminded Van of how utterly she had trusted him. He knew he must salvage at least her

security from the appalling mess he had made. There was a way for at least that.

VI

THEY HAD barely turned back, begun to retrace their steps when they met their pursuers. He had felt that they were being followed, even at the same time he had believed that it was impossible to follow someone in that jungle—impossible unless you began right with the quarry, almost as a member of their party. That they had been pursued was not unexpected, but he had not realized that they were being pursued from so near a distance. It was almost as though they were being escorted.

Van told himself it didn't matter. He had been insane, so it was understandable that all his ideas, calculations, were wrong.

What was even stranger was that he thought he saw Kori among the World party that overtook them and wordlessly herded them back to the Control Station. Certainly, even with the speed of communica-

tion and transportation, there had not been time for Guilemont to have apprised Kori, and for Kori to have come to the islands, and for them to be at their heels.

Van told himself it didn't matter. Probably Kori had suspected his weakness. Since he was returning to take his medicine anyhow, it didn't matter whether he returned to the Control Station alone with Rhea or under guard. He was even glad Kori was there, for Kori would see the value of what he intended to offer. Guilemont might have rejected his proposal automatically, simply to frustrate him.

Back at the small, antiseptic Control Station it was hard to believe how much had happened, how radically his life had been changed. Only the bars on the windows and the guard to summon him to Kori.

Kori's room was not a lot larger than the detention cell and he excused the guard with a wave of his hand. His dark face was unreadable as he pointed Van to a chair. He waited silently.

Van struggled helplessly against the unreasoning anger

Kori's silent poise sparked in him. "I can't explain it to you because I don't understand it myself."

KORI SLOUCHED comfortably into the only upholstered chair in the room until he looked like a child. But the sharp, opaque eyes were very old. "Then let me explain it to you." He said flatly, "You broke down." He raised an eyebrow at Van. "Perhaps I gave you a job that was too difficult?"

"I hated the business of Dargo," Van admitted. "But I don't think that was it."

"Perhaps you came too far too fast? Because we both know I was actually considering you for Aide. And you're very young for that..."

"I was tired—not physically—something beyond that..."

"Perhaps you didn't believe in the way we govern the World. I and you and all the rest who do the work—make the judgments."

Van looked at him uncertainly. Kori's voice was grim but almost acquiescent. Almost as if in rueful agreement. Or perhaps it was only his own

desire to believe so that made it sound so.

The dark face gave no information. "Perhaps you believed in the delightful sentiment of a people now gone: democracy. As if the undisciplined masses would ever choose what was good for them over what pleased them." Kori laughed without pleasure. "As if a child, tempted by candy, would push it aside and demand proper nourishment..." The words were jeering but the tone was different.

Van shook his head tiredly. He couldn't understand what Kori was saying by the tone beneath the words. "I have no excuse. I was mad."

KORI'S MOOD crystalized, turned chill and didactic. "Those dear, sentimental ancients concentrated on raising the lowly and crushing the strong. They were so afraid of wounding the feelings of the average man, they deliberately bred to that level—eliminated what should have been any society's most precious possession: its superior citizens."

Van wanted to defend himself, but there was nothing.

Kori said, "How they must have loved the masses, those people! It was like specifying that the links of a chain should all be constructed of the tensile strength of the weakest. We care for our masses, too. But that doesn't stop us from reproducing our best..."

Helplessly, Van repeated, "I've always believed in our way, before. I must have been sick. But I'll atone..."

"Atone?" Kori's eyebrow was skeptical, his face disapproving.

"The girl I brought," Van explained quickly. "I'm responsible for this—it would be unjust to punish her..." Kori's face told him nothing. "You wanted a spectacle," he reminded him. He was obscurely frightened of Kori's disinterest. "You wanted something to move the people. I'll give it to you." The urgency in his voice gave away his fear. "And believe it! You said—we know—the truth is visible. The people can tell what a man believes. I am ashamed. I was weak. I do regret..." He grimaced. "If I failed with Dargo, at least I

can offer myself as substitute..."

Kori's voice was cold. "It's unfortunate that the masses—and some breeders, as well—need this occasional drama of retribution to buttress their morality. However..." his dark face was saturnine, "I must inform you that your offer would provide us with an embarrassment of public recanters. Your idea was successful; Dargo has seen the naturals and is willing to renounce his error. Your sacrifice is not needed." Kori's expression was grimly amused. "As Shakespeare said some six hundred years ago, too much protestation spoils the effect of sincerity... Or too many repentant fallen breeders..."

VAN'S HEART sank. Kori was right: two trials would be inartistic. They didn't need him now; now he had nothing to trade for Rhea's pardon. He pleaded, "But you won't hold her responsible? She's only a second class citizen."

Kori shook his head. "Wrong again. She's a breeder. Like yourself."

"She's not!" Van felt his

heart thud as he realized how far back Kori must have known exactly what was going on in his mind.

"Your first instinct was correct. Genetics was doing some long-range studies on environmental effects. She doesn't know herself that she's a breeder. I intervened to have you misinformed, to see how you would react."

All of his helplessness burned into hate, focused on the Councilman. Van said savagely, "You found out. Do we need to continue this interview any longer?" He felt as Dargo must have, that even death was infinitely to be preferred to this measured exposition of his stupidity.

Kori ignored his anger, except for a slight deepening of the ironic smile. "Your ostensible reason for throwing away thirty years of successful work was your desire to procreate. You wanted the right to breed and you thought Rhea a non-breeder. What if I permit you two to procreate?"

DESPITE distrust, Van's heart leaped. To live and to love Rhea! To found a seed

that, if it survived the constant tests it must undergo, might continue through the ages toward—later, if eternity was too poetical a conception. "It's any man's highest desire." In his position it was insane to hope. "In return for what?"

Kori ignored his question, threw out the whole subject. "Breeding with Rhea was your ostensible reason for throwing away your career." He emphasized the word. "What was your real reason?"

Van could barely see him for the blur of pain. It was hard to believe a man could be so cruel to his fellow as to dangle heaven before him as he shoved him down the pit. But Kori was doing it to him as ruthlessly as only a few days ago he had used every device he knew to goad Dargo.

His rage and disgust were as much for himself as for Kori. "Because I didn't believe in what I was doing any more. With Dargo." With pain Van remembered the despair and loathing in Dargo's face. "You seem to have the stomach for it Councilman. I just didn't."

Kori's expression showed merely courteous interest. "But

you didn't seem to want to remain among the naturals and found your own system, either..."

Van was helpless with frustration, and the rage, now, was a permanent part of his brain. "I was on a leash. And I held in my hand other men, also on leashes..."

Kori suggested helpfully, "Who, in turn, held other men, also on leashes..."

Kori's look of weary tolerance quenched Van's anger as no other retort could have, silenced him.

KORI SAID, "And you were suddenly overwhelmed by the unfairness... Some citizens, through a mere fortunate accident of breeding, were able to do great work, and received privilege and power over their less fortunate fellows..."

Van heard his own voice as from a distance. "I went through all the training that all breeders receive. I accepted that there must be levels of power and of privilege. At least I thought I accepted. Apparently it didn't quite take. The flaw took thirty years to show up... Pity. The commonest

and cheapest of weaknesses..."

"Pity," Kori repeated, in a different tone. The darkness of his eyes reflected light. "You can't always train it out of a man..." The tiredness was still in his face but he looked oddly contented. "Van, once you were very eager to be my Aide."

Van remembered. It was a long time ago.

Kori might have been talking to himself. "It's true you're on a leash. You always will be." For once there was no slightest ghost of smile on the dark face. "Don't accept because you think a Councilman wears no leash—it's shorter then and tighter." He shrugged. "But you've seen how free your naturals are. The only freedom, really, is to choose the holder of the leash. Among the naturals you decided that our system of breeding to improve mankind is right. And if it's right it must be obeyed by all, especially by the ones who administer it. Our only security lies in the integrity of those men..."

Van was able to speak. "You'd trust me? Now?"

Kori shrugged again. "You voluntarily decided against the other way. You were willing to pay with your life to reverse your error..." His twisted smile was back. "Even if the best we have to offer is merely the lesser of two evils..."

VAN SOUGHT for certainty, and frowned. "There in the jungle, I did choose our system. And I will administer it with integrity, because it is the lesser of two evils..." He hesitated, then added uncertainly, "But I'll never feel quite right..."

"Quite right," Kori cut him off. "Neither do I. You have the makings of a Councilman." He gestured toward the door in weary dismissal. "Why not tell your lovely Rhea? She, at least, will be very happy."

No, Van thought as he turned away, I'll never feel quite right. But why—could it be that one of the "two evils" wasn't really evil at all?

He had seen a crude, primitive society and the crudeness had been a shock to him—an unbearable shock to Rhea, who had pictured a natural paradise in the jungle. But he had kept

on looking, after she turned away, and the meaning of what he saw was all too clear. For if the planned breeding of the world state were the moral and scientific way, then the naturals wouldn't have been merely primitives—they'd have been vicious animals. Evil in such a society would be visible on the surface, not concealed and overlaid with culture.

Among the naturals, children were loved and wanted—he'd seen them running forward happily to greet the men as they returned from the hunt. Women were loved and respected—the way the men greeted them was proof of that. The aged and infirm were cared for—he'd seen that food was given to the old women and the sick first, although there was only one of the latter visible—probably the victim of an accident.

So they had rules—whether they had been codified into laws, or not. In either event, these rules were respected and obeyed, and not through fear alone. Or defied through despair—the naturals displayed none of the outstanding characteristics of the masses in the society Van had chosen as the "lesser evil".

Yet...wasn't the comfort and progress of his society worth a little sacrifice? He knew he would have to concentrate on that thought and try to avoid thinking about how much that "little" really was.

Van put aside the doubt as he headed for Rhea, and a glow of pleasure began to creep over him. She would, indeed, be very happy. She hadn't observed...

And, for the moment at least, Van felt very happy, too.

