

Volume 5

Number 6

SCIENCE FICTION

35¢ STORIES

May, 1955

NOVEL

LAST STAND Algis Budrys 4

NOVELETS

LIVE IN AMITY D. A. Jourdan 36

PROTECTIVE CAMOUFLAGE Charles V. De Vet 106

SHORT STORIES

IN WORKING ORDER Ward Moore 55

DESIGN IN STATISTICS Irving Cox, Jr. 63

TELESTASSIS M. C. Pease 78

UGLY DUCKLING Barbara Constant 93

Editor: ROBERT W. LOWNDES

Art Director: MILTON LUROS

COVER BY EMSH

MARIE A. PARK, Asso. Ed.

DOROTHY B. SEADOR, Asso. Ed.

Illustrations by Emsch, Pease, Luton, and Orban

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, May, 1955, published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 841 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke, Mass., under the act of March 2, 1879. Entire contents copyright 1955 by Columbia Publications, Inc., 35¢ per copy; yearly subscriptions \$3.18. Printed in the U. S. A.

The Brotherhood was sure that Theodore Srock had been planted amongst them—but what was the purpose?

PROTECTIVE CAMOUFLAGE

NOVELET

by Charles V. De Vet

illustrated by ED EMSH

He came up out of the anaesthetic with his mind blank. His lips moved and he said, "My name is Theodore Srock," like a man reciting a learned lesson. The words were an "open sesame," that sprung loose a flood of memory. A man in a white coat moved at his side and he looked up and saw the man and thought, *That man is my enemy.*

TED SROCK had his first drink of the evening as Havilland's second sun went below the horizon.

He glanced idly at the girl who shouldered her way into the open space next to him at the bar, and noted with surprise that she was fighting to hold back panic. She stood for a moment gripping the

polished edge of the bar so hard that her fingers showed white.

She was slender, Srock observed, and vital, with a ripely curved body and delightfully ample bosom. The olive-hued flesh of her face must normally have been soft and feminine, but now the tenseness of the muscles had drawn the skin tight across her cheekbones.

quiring gaze. She surveyed him hastily, taking in his muscular frame and darkly handsome features, and the roll-collar emblem of his Brotherhood in one brief appraisal. Resolutely she banished the signs of fear from her face and smiled.

"Smile back at me," she whispered urgently, "and laugh—as



Suddenly she gave a faint gasp and Srock followed her glance into the mirror behind the bar. She was looking, he saw, at two guardsmen coming in through the door. For an instant fear rode high on her features.

She turned and met Srock's in-

though I'd just told you something amusing."

With one part of his mind wondering at his ready acquiescence Srock found himself doing as she asked.

She leaned toward him and rested her forehead against his shoul-

der. She appeared to be laughing, but her voice came up to him laden with anxiety. "Take me outside, and keep talking while we walk; pretend we're a little drunk."

Srock took her arm and led her toward the door. As they passed the guardsmen he bent close to her ear and whispered, "Steady."

She looked up at him and laughed gaily. Only the strained whiteness at the corners of her mouth showed the effort it cost her.

Once outside the girl held tight to his coat sleeve. "Stay with me awhile longer," she begged; "please."

Srock nodded. "Don't appear in too great a hurry," he cautioned as they walked.

Fifty feet from the bar entrance the girl turned and threw a glance over her shoulder. Srock felt her stiffen. "We didn't fool them," she breathed; "they're about ten paces behind. What can we do?"

"Turn left at the next corner," Srock answered. His course of action was formed as he spoke. He knew he was planning a dangerous thing: Assaulting Cartec's guardsmen was a crime punishable by death. But, as a member of the Brotherhood, faithful to its vows, Srock saw no alternative. Furthermore, he found himself oddly anxious to help this unusually-met girl.

As they turned the corner Srock pushed her ahead and flattened

himself against the building's near wall. He waited, with the personal satisfaction of knowing that he was at least as well conditioned as his pursuers for violent physical action. One of the axioms of the Brotherhood was that its members must be fit—and ready for any possible contingency.

The first unsuspecting guardsman rounded the corner and the heel of Srock's right hand landed heavily just below his left ear.

Srock caught the short, heavy body as it went limp and spun it against the second guardsman, knocking his hand from his half drawn gun. Before he could recover Srock drove forward. His shoulder caught the guardsman in the diaphragm, lifting him off his feet and battering him against the building at his back. The starch went out of the guardsman and he sagged slowly down along the wall.

In the back of his mind Srock had expected the girl to be gone when it was over, but now he found her still waiting. Neither of them said a word as they walked rapidly away. It was the girl who hailed a licensed carrier a block farther on.

ONCE IN the cab she gave the driver an address, then relaxed and looked at Srock. "You're quite a man," she said.

Srock shrugged his shoulders noncommittally.

"I see by your collar that you're a Brother," she observed. "Isn't this sort of thing a bit out of your line?"

"Not too much," Srock answered. "We try to help—in whatever way seems necessary."

"Aren't you afraid of trouble with the guardsmen?"

"As afraid as the next man, I suppose."

"I've got to have a cigaret," the girl said. She drew a partly filled package from a pocket on her sleeve. Taking out a slim, white oval she placed it between her red lips, lit it, breathed in deeply, and blew smoke at the cab ceiling. She reached toward Srock with the package. "Have one?" she asked.

Srock shook his head. "No, thanks. I prefer these." He pulled a five-sided cigar from his breast pocket and bit off the tip with square white teeth. The girl held her lighter to the cigar end until it glowed redly.

"Now," Srock said, leaning back. "What's this all about?"

The girl reflected for a moment before answering. "My name is Jessica," she said. "Jessica Manthe. Other than that all I can tell you is that I've done nothing illegal. The guardsmen want me for questioning. If they take me they'll make me talk. And if I talk, my . . ." her pause was barely perceptible, ". . . brother will die."

Srock made no attempt to ques-

tion her further. He had helped from a sense of duty. It didn't give him the privilege of prying. For the second time he regarded her closely. Dark, almost black hair that caught the light and reflected it as she moved her head. Brown eyes, and fine nostrils. Excitement had brought a high color to her cheeks that Srock found fascinating.

"It seems that you Brothers are becoming more numerous every day," she said, almost as though talking to herself. "I understand there are Brothers in every occupation and class of society. You're all followers of a code of conduct like the golden rule, aren't you?"

"Something like that," Srock answered. "Originally we were a small group that fought against class restrictions and segregation. From that beginning we evolved into a society with a definite philosophy: '*No man has the right to inflict pain on another for selfish purposes.*' That may sound rather general, but it was worded thus deliberately. In time we hope to expand to other Worlds—to wherever mankind has settled."

The carrier came to a sputtering stop that precluded further questions. Srock climbed out. Flicking his cigar in a glowing end over end arc into the street, he held open the cab door.

Jessica paused and crushed out her cigaret in the cab's ashtray before alighting. Srock watched with

approval the graceful way she moved her hands, and found that he approved also of her unconscious pride of carriage as she stepped from the cab and stood beside him on the curb.

"We have a couple more blocks to go," she said, after he had paid the driver. "I thought it better not to give him the exact address—in case the guardsmen question him."

They walked the two blocks in silence. At the entrance to a copper front house-of-flats she stopped and rested her hand on his arm. "I should be safe now," she said. "Thank..." The wail of a guard-car siren came from near at hand. Her fingers dug deep into his arm.

"Quick! Inside," she urged, tugging at his sleeve.

Srock allowed himself to be pulled through the building's entrance into a short hallway. He was conscious that she was pressed tight against him as the sound of the siren grew louder, passed without pausing, and faded in the distance. She did not draw away after it was gone. Srock put his arms around her and felt a quivering from deep within as she fought to control her nerves.

Soon he grew aware of the warmth of her that came through her clothing into his hands and against his body. He was a man, and healthy, and he felt the faint stirrings of a kind of hunger, but he held it behind a close reserve.

Abruptly she seemed to feel this

new thing in him, and looked up and was afraid: But the fear was a small thing against the terror she felt of the guardsmen.

"I can't take being alone—for awhile anyway," she said. "Please come up with me."

SROCK CAME awake with all his senses alert. He concentrated, in an effort to determine what it was that had aroused him. He did not find it at first. But the feeling persisted that something was wrong. A heart beat later he had the answer. There was no sound of breathing beside him. He touched the bed where Jessica had lain—and the place was still warm. She must have risen only a moment before.

A small region of pain smarted in the upper bicep of his right arm. That, he recognized, was what had awakened him. The pain spread quickly and brought a strange, abnormal tension to every muscle in his body.

Desperately he tried to throw himself from the bed. His face strained with effort, but his body refused to move. He was helpless.

A flood of brightness burst before his eyes; for a moment he knew nothing, and the next the darkness of the room was gone and he was staring, unthinking, at a white ceiling.

The first shock of his discovery passed. Without moving, so much

as to shift the position of his staring eyes, he sent his thoughts into urgent exploration. He knew he was in danger, and that he had to understand the situation, and to decide swiftly how to react to it.

His own body first. He breathed deeply. There were no muscular protests. A good omen. He moved the tip of one little finger. Its ready response indicated that the paralysis had left him. However, in the act of tightening the muscles that controlled the finger he felt a firm snugness along his forearm. He decided quickly that he was bound to the bed on which he lay. Unobtrusively he tested the play of his nervous and muscular co-ordination on the bonds, and was tempted to apply the technique of leverage he had learned under the Brothers' training.

The risk, he decided instantly, would be too great, at least until he learned more about his immediate surroundings. One other factor disturbed him: Small islands of numbness about his temples told him that pressure had recently been applied to his forehead.

He caught a slight movement from the corner of his eye and dismissed further immediate thought of himself.

A voice said, "It looks like we did a good job."

"Do you think the mind block will hold?" a second, deeper voice asked.

"They invariably do. And I'm

not concerned too much about the superimposed memory. But if the suggestions we put in conflict too strongly with his natural inclinations he'll be able to resist them."

"Well, that's the chance he took when he came here. Shall we go ahead with the final step?"

Srock set his muscles, threw himself forward, and...

II

SUNLIGHT coming in through a crack between the window shade and the sill, fell across Srock's face and wakened him. He allowed himself the luxury of a yawn and a long stretch before bringing his attention to his surroundings. For a moment he was puzzled as to where he was. Then he remembered. Jessica! Where was she? The bed beside him was empty, and there were no woman signs anywhere in the room. Why had she left like that?

The ringing of the house caller on the wall interrupted his thoughts. Reluctantly he rose and walked to the instrument. He pressed its response button.

"Good afternoon," a robot voice said. "Your forty hours have expired. If you wish to continue occupancy please deposit another three-piece."

Forty hours? He couldn't have been here that long. They had rented the room only last night. And

it should be morning now. He shook the sleep from his mind and drew back the window shade. Semi-twilight. That meant that one sun had already set. It was evening.

"What is the correct date?" he asked into the caller mouthpiece.

"The date is the twelfth day of the third moon-month," the mechanical replied. "You have one hour in which to either deposit an additional fee or vacate."

They had entered the night of the tenth. It wasn't possible that he had slept for forty hours. Unless he had been drugged. Still puzzled, he replaced the receiver and walked to the room's small closet. His clothes hung as he remembered placing them. He took out his coin sack and found the money still intact. Next his fingers explored his belt. A crinkly stiffness within the fabric assured him that the large bill he carried there, in a concealed pocket, had not been disturbed.

Still puzzled, Srock dressed and left the room. He walked down the stairs to the ground floor and out of the building. At a street corner he bought a packet of cigars. He pressed the quarter-piece firmly into the palm of the vender as he paid for his purchase.

"General summons," the vender said in an undertone. "The nearest Cradle is three blocks straight ahead."

Srock gave no sign that he heard.

* * *

"It's coming through in scrambler code," the Brother next to Srock said. "It'll take a minute for the decoder to interpret it."

"Attention, Brothers," the decoding machine intoned. "This is your message: Three weeks ago Director Cartee published a letter in the news sheets which I will now read. Quote. *To the people of the planet Havilland: I, Cartee, your thirteenth Director, will be your last. During the next six months I will initiate steps toward setting up a democratic government, similar to that of our home World, Earth. At the end of that time your new government will be ready to function, and I will then step down and become Cartee, private citizen. May God guide and aid you.* Unquote.

"May God help us if we believe him," the voice went on, the vehemence of the words contrasting with the unemotional tone of the interpreting instrument. "Almost two hundred years ago the seventh Director issued a much similar statement; three months later all the leaders of a rapidly-growing opposition were dead.

"Cartee is the direct lineal descendant of twelve Director ancestors. All were strong men—as is Cartee; all were brilliant and shrewd—as is Cartee. All were oppressive. There is no slightest reason to expect that Cartee will be different. If we trust him now we will be assigning many of our Brothers to death, in addition to

choking off our ripening efforts to overthrow him.

"This noon we received a communication from our most reliable contact within the Palace grounds. A Brother was seen during the past ten hours leaving Cartee's personal quarters! The contact was unable to identify him. We are forced to the conclusion that there is a traitor among us. For the next twenty hours you will devote your entire effort to uncovering him. If he is not found by then you will proceed with Project Cartee."

"Project Cartee!" The Brother next to Srock let his breath out in a long sigh. "Assassination of the Director!"

SROCK WAS one of the approximately ten percent of the Brothers who devoted their full time to the work of the Society. The remaining majority worked at normal occupations, and kept their identity secret—even from most of their own Brothers. Cohesion was maintained by means of an interlocking linear organization.

For the twenty hours following the general summons Srock worked on leads furnished by the Brotherhood in their effort to run down the spy. At the end the word came through that the search had been fruitless—and that Project Cartee began immediately.

The success of Project Cartee depended largely on the undercover Brothers stationed within the

administration area. For the present there was nothing for Srock to do and he waited an impatient fourteen hours before the report came that the project had failed; Cartee had disappeared.

A heavy rain was falling as Srock left the Cradle and walked through bleak and empty streets to his quarters in the Bremner building. The rain failed to penetrate his moisture-proofed clothing, but it brought a damp and cold gloom to his spirit. For the past several hours he had been thinking of the girl, Jessica Manthe. Who was she? And what had happened during his forty hour memory lapse?

For a time he debated whether or not the girl had been an enemy agent, or whether his blanked-out period somehow tied in with some deep-seated scheme of the Director and his men. After a time he dismissed the suspicion. He, himself, while an integral part of the Society, was, after all, only a minor cog. If Cartee had decided to strike at them through one of the Brothers the chances were his attempt would have centered on a more influential member. He shrugged irritably.

Srock opened the door of his suite, stepped inside—and felt a sudden rush of alarm! He was not alone! The room was in semi-darkness, but his intuition—strong by nature, but made acute by training—sensed the presence of another person in the room.

For an instant he knew fear. The other held the advantage, and that advantage might mean his own death. The room was faintly lighted by the rays of a street lamp coming in through a pair of side windows. His visitor had very probably adjusted his vision to the gloom by this time, and knew his exact location, while Srock's eyes registered nothing. He crouched, straining for sound, and thought swiftly. One small factor was in his favor. The other would not yet know that Srock was aware of his presence. Perhaps with immediate action he could turn that small asset into victory. He moved one hand slowly toward a side pocket.

"You won't need that," a voice said, and something in its tone awakened suppressed memories in Srock's mind: Memories of beauty, pliant feminine eagerness—and danger. They added up to one person—Jessica.

"You may turn off the lights," she said, as Srock stood with his mixed emotions.

He reached out and snapped on the light button, keeping his gaze on the spot from which her voice had come. She sat in a lounge chair, with her hands folded placidly in her lap. But all about her was the sense of leashed aliveness, and the disturbing attraction he had felt at their first meeting. She was wearing, he saw, a snow white dress, cut short, and leaving her knees bare and cool.

He walked across the room and stood in front of her. "Stand up," he said.

With a small smile on the edges of her lips she obeyed.

Unhurriedly, expertly, he went over her body for a concealed weapon.

"All right," he said, when he'd finished. "Now we can visit."

She sat down again. "Satisfied?" she asked. "I assure you that I am not here to harm you. In fact, I mean to save your life—if you'll let me."

SROCK RAISED his eyebrows questioningly. Then he smiled back at her and sat down in a chair at her right. "Say what you have to say," he told her.

"Time may already be running out on us," she said. "Do you trust me enough to leave with me—immediately? With no questions asked?"

Srock's smile widened.

Angrily she lifted the cover from a small cedar box on one edge of the end table at her side and took out a cigaret. "I didn't think you would," she said, lighting up. "You have to be real smart and demand a detailed blueprint before you'll believe me. In the meantime the noose will draw tighter around us."

Something of the urgency in her voice communicated itself to him. He sat a bit straighter. "I don't need a blueprint," he said. "Just

give me enough of an explanation to know what it's all about—and that I can trust you."

"I will." She drew on the cigaret and let the cloud of thick smoke billow around in her mouth before breathing it deep into her lungs. "I'll be as brief as possible. To begin with, you think you are Ted Srock. But you aren't."

"I'm not?"

"No," she answered. "Three days ago I tricked Srock into coming to my room with me. There I drugged him, and a couple of Cartee's men took him away to the Palace. Earlier, Cartee's doctors had remolded the features of another man into the likeness of Srock. They blocked out this man's mind and planted Srock's identity-pattern and memories in its place. You are that other man."

Quickly he considered what she had told him. The thought that he was not actually Srock he dismissed without consideration. In his own mind he was too certain of his own identity to doubt it. She was merely trying to manipulate him for some purpose of her own. His best plan would be to get all the information he could from her, before showing suspicion.

"You work for Cartee, then?" he asked.

"Not directly; I'm not that high up. I work for others, who work for him."

"If I'm not Srock, what was the

purpose behind this assumed substitution?"

"Oh, don't be stupid." The girl's impatience changed to anger. "It could have been done for any one of a dozen reasons. You can think of them yourself if you try. But the important thing right now is that you've got to get away."

"Why?"

"Why. Why." She seemed at the last frayed ends of her patience. She took a deep breath and forced herself to be calm. "Because you were seen leaving the Palace. By now the Brothers must have checked the time against the activities and whereabouts of all their members, and have narrowed the search to you."

"That sounds a bit too pat," Srock said. "Can you give me any proof that I'm not actually Srock?"

"I think I can," she answered. "But will you have the good sense to accept them? Briefly, here are a few. You should know already that a man's memory can be blocked out, and a faked memory implanted. And that it can be done cleverly enough that the man himself is unaware of the deception. But the implanting of a complete set of memories is a gigantic job that would require months of time, plus knowledge that only the original man would possess. Therefore, an imposed memory is necessarily incomplete—especially in recall of minor, relatively trivial events and experiences.

"I'll name a few that would ordinarily be missed. Do you remember the names and faces of the children you played with when you were young? Do you remember your first date; if you ever had a pet; what sports you took part in; any spankings your parents gave you; the names of your first teachers; where you..."

"That's enough!" Srock found himself stunned at the blank places she had touched. He could recall none of the past she had named. And he had tried, even as she spoke. "I don't remember," he said wearily. Does that mean... His voice faded into silence.

"Of course it does," Jessica insisted. "They wouldn't have put in those memories I mentioned. You wouldn't even have noticed that they weren't there, unless someone pointed them out to you."

Srock recovered quickly from the momentary shock and made his decision. There was no doubt but that his mind had been tampered with, but the chance that she was telling the truth about the rest was too negligible to be considered seriously.

He'd have to take her in where she could be questioned, by men trained for that sort of thing. He hesitated, however. He knew what she would have to go through—before they finished questioning her. The few short hours of life remaining to her would not be pleasant. But he hardened himself

against the pity—and was it something else—that he felt. He had no choice. It was his duty.

He rose. "I think we'd better..." he began.

Jessica had been watching him closely. As he spoke she brushed her dark hair lightly and Srock found himself staring at a small gray pencil-gun—pointed directly at him. He cursed himself for not having examined her hair. At the same time he felt an odd relief at knowing that she would get away. And an admiration at the contrast between her woman's soft depths and her fire and spirit.

"Well, I tried," the girl said. Her shoulders seemed weary beneath the burden of her frustration. "Your only chance now rests with my staying free. Don't move for three minutes."

She walked to the door, opened it, and was gone.

III

"YOU ASKED to see someone as high up in the echelon of the Brotherhood as possible, Mr. Srock?" The man behind the desk was tall, pale of face, and with small, down-slanting lines of harshness at the corners of his mouth. He spoke with a low, steel-like courtesy, his voice revealing quick currents beneath its mildness. Srock had never seen the man before.

"Yes," Srock said, as he regarded his interviewer levelly. He was seated in a chair that had been placed directly in front of the desk. "May I know to whom I speak?"

"You may call me Mr. Taneh," the tall man answered. "And I can assure you that I hold sufficient authority to deal with any matter you may wish to discuss."

Srock was satisfied. "I'll start at the beginning," he said. He spent the next several minutes going over everything—as he remembered it—that had happened to him since he met Jessica Manthe in the bar.

"And you conclude now," Taneh said, resting his elbows on the desk and joining the tips of his fingers in front of his face, "that your mind has been tampered with. Correct?"

Srock nodded.

Taneh considered that a moment. "What do you expect us to do?" he asked.

"I didn't think it through that far," Srock answered. "My first thought was to get to someone in authority—and let him decide what was to be done."

"Quite commendable," Taneh said, clearing his throat drily. "Do you feel... That there's any possibility that the girl may have been telling the truth—about your not being Srock?"

"I don't believe so," Srock answered. "I'm too certain in my own mind that I have always been

Ted Srock. No pseudo-identity could be planted that firmly."

"Hmm. What is your theory as to Cartee's purpose in tampering with your mind?"

Srock was thoughtful for a minute. "I believe he may have gotten some information from me through hypnosis, or the use of drugs," he said, "and the tampering was done to block out my remembering having given it. Or... He may have some means of maintaining a remote control. If you asked, I would advise that you lock me up, or at least see that I have no outside contact."

"Your theory may be the correct one," Taneh said. "On the other hand it would be diabolically clever of Cartee to plant you merely as a distraction. He would expect us to divert quite a bit of our energy to solving the enigma of what he did to you. We might even postpone our prearranged moves against him."

"That sounds like something he might try," Srock agreed. "Whatever else we may say about Cartee, we can't say he's stupid."

Taneh made no comment. Unhurriedly he pressed a button on the corner of his desk. "Getting back to one of my earlier questions," he said, not mentioning his action, "despite the feeling of certainty you have that you are actually Ted Srock—it's possible that the girl told you the truth. Do you grant that?"

"I suppose so," Srock answered. He glanced up uneasily as the door behind Taneh opened and three Brothers walked into the room. One of them carried an oblong metal box. He set it on the desk in front of Taneh. Srock understood at once what was about to happen. His first thought was to resist. Then he forced himself to relax. This was something he would have to bear, for the greater good.

"As you mentioned," Taneh said evenly, "Cartee is clever, and we can't take any unnecessary chances. Our first duty must be to make certain that you are what you—knowingly or unknowingly—pretend to be. Will you pull your chair a bit closer to the desk, please?"

Srock opened his mouth to speak but let only a soft sigh escape. Any argument he offered now would sound like pleading. He'd take whatever they gave him. He was glad that he had proven to his own satisfaction that he was no coward. They might torture him, but they would never break him.

ONE OF the Brothers opened the box and Srock placed his right forearm in the groove in the lower section. He had seen these instruments of persuasion before. The Brother closed the top over Srock's arm and secured the clamps on its sides.

Taneh squeezed a bulb, con-

nected to the box by a thin wire, and Srock felt the metal close tight against his flesh. A second later concealed springs bent the box in the middle, putting pressure on both ends of the arm bone while holding the center in place.

Srock set his mind to meet the anguish which he knew would soon begin shooting through his arm. His best defense, he realized, would be an attempt at dissociation.

Taneh manipulated the control until the pain in the arm grew from sharp torment to a hot, searing agony. Without changing an expression on his face, Srock sat regarding the punished arm, his mind refusing to accept the pain as subjective. Moisture collected on his forehead, and rolled down his cheeks in great oily drops. He fastened hard to the thought that his body was a separate entity from his mind: indirectly connected with himself.

Finally he looked up. Taneh's face showed a pale and damp pleasure; there was a streak of sadism in the man, Srock decided. "One more ounce of pressure and the bone will snap," he said quietly.

Taneh brought his attention up from the arm with an obvious effort. He released his grip on the bulb and the pressure eased from Srock's arm, leaving it limp and numb. "I see that pain will never force you to speak," Taneh said.

"However, it proves little. Can you suggest any other means of achieving our mutually desired clearing up of this matter?"

"We could try a lie-detector," Srock said. "That would prove that I am telling the truth—at least as I know it."

"That's right," Taneh agreed. "You know, I find myself developing a deep admiration for you, Mr. Srock. You evidently thought of the lie-detector earlier—yet you permitted yourself to be tortured, rather than suggest it. You are a brave man. You and I have much in common. I hope you can prove that you are telling the truth, so that we may become better friends." He turned to the Brother who had brought the box. "Release his arm, Miller."

Ten minutes later Srock had vindicated himself. Taneh rose and offered his hand. "I'm sorry for the trouble I've had to cause you," he said. "But we may have gained something by all this. As you know, our big problem right now is to find Cartee. Perhaps the girl will be the lead to him. I want you to contact her again, if possible, and see what you can learn. For now, good-bye and good luck."

Flexing the hand of his still weak and sore right arm Srock turned and left the room. As he walked down the outer corridor he drew a long breath of relief. It had been easier than he had expected. He stopped with the

breath half expelled. It had been too easy!

AFTER Srock had gone, Taneh spoke to the men at his side. "Miller, stay here with me; you other two get out."

In deep abstraction Taneh rose from the desk and paced the length of the room three times before he spoke again. "I want to get a few things straight in my own mind," he said. "You listen, Miller, and if you see an angle I'm missing let me know. To begin with, that man is convinced that he is Ted Srock; I'm not. Electro-micro-surgery makes the remolding of a man's features a simple matter. And he'd be unable to judge—with a mind that had definitely been tampered with—just how effective that tampering was."

"Personally, I thought his suggestion that we lock him up was a good one," Miller said, when Taneh paused.

Taneh waved the suggestion aside disinterestedly. "I don't know what Cartee's game is," he said. "But the last thing we can afford to do is follow any suggestion coming from Srock; there's too much danger that it would be something put there by Cartee. We can forget that. Now. The girl seems to be the contact between Cartee and Srock. Our best bet is to let Srock go free, on the chance that he can find the girl, or that she comes to him. With Cartee so well hidden, we'll

probably have to get our hands on her before we can find him."

"Don't you have any other leads as to where he might be?"

"None. Despite our best efforts we haven't a clue. But right now, I'm more concerned with Cartee's purpose in setting this thing in motion. The man's clever—damnablely clever—and I suspect there's more behind Srock's memory tampering, or transfer, than we've been able to guess."

"Using him for a diversion, as you suggested to Srock, sounds pretty clever to me," Miller said.

"I thought so at first too," Taneh answered. "But Cartee knows he's not dealing with children. We'd never let that really stop us."

"Do you think it possible that he might have learned anything else about what we have in mind?" Miller asked.

"You mean about our taking over the government?" Taneh asked. "He may have. Though there are only eight others—none of whom would talk—besides yourself and I, who know about it. The rest of the Brothers still believe they're fighting only to overthrow a hated dictatorship."

"You're convinced that Cartee actually intends to set up a democratic government, if he gets the chance, aren't you?"

"Certainly," Taneh exclaimed impatiently. "The information we've obtained leaves little room

for doubt. And if we let things slide, where will we be? We'd be fortunate if we landed minor jobs in the government under a setup like that. On the other hand, if we can kill Cartee now, the resulting period of unsettlement and disorganization will be an ideal time for us to take over. And once we're in control they'll never get us out."

"I wonder why Cartee hasn't tried to kill you," Miller said. "You're the heart of the resistance, the one man with a firm grasp of essential details, and the tie that binds the rest of us together. Cartee should know that by now, and that we'd be helpless without you."

"You don't suppose that he wouldn't try if he could reach me, do you?" Taneh asked. "I haven't been out of this building for over three months. And I've taken every precaution to keep the place heavily guarded. The situation right now boils down to this: Will Cartee be able to kill me before we find and kill him? Who will be the first to succeed? That's the crux of the whole situation."

"Perhaps Srock's mission is to kill you?"

"I thought of that. But my best defense is that neither Srock nor Cartee know that I am the actual head of the Brotherhood; therefore neither of them knows whom he must kill. In fact, only the eight I mentioned, and you, know that."

Miller scowled and snapped his fingers. "We've forgotten something," he said. "We should have had Srock followed."

Taneh smiled, mirthlessly. "I made arrangements in advance for a couple men to follow him when he left the building," he said.

ON THE WAY down the stairs of the Brotherhood building Srock made his own plans. Taneh had told him to find Jessica; he would.

He did not return to his room. Cartee's men might have the place watched, or its wires tapped. Neither, he decided, could he be certain that any of the places he usually visited would be safe. He stopped at a side street recreation-place that he had never been in before and made his way to a private communication booth in the rear.

Dropping a half-piece into the pay slot he adjusted the speaking tube to his height and made himself comfortable against the padded seat. This might take some time.

"Information Central," he spoke into the tube.

"Do you have a record of a Jessica Manthe?" he asked the mechanical that answered.

There was a subdued whir and a short pause. "None listed," the metallic voice responded.

He had expected as much. Now for a chore that might be hopeless, but he could think of no

better means of securing the information he needed. "I wish to learn the identity of a girl living in the city," he said. "I will describe her."

"Proceed."

"Dark brown hair and eyes," Srock began. "Olive complexion, and..." What else did she have?

"There are 753,646 females in that descriptive category," the voice said, after a slightly longer pause.

"Age somewhere between twenty and twenty-five," Srock supplied, reaching hopefully.

"That narrows the number to 200,563."

"Height between five-two and five-five."

"86,441."

"Weight one hundred fifteen—give or take ten pounds."

"21,401."

Srock slumped dejectedly. How else could he describe her? "Very beautiful," he said.

"Beauty is too subjective a term to be useful."

He was stumped. Then—a hunch. "First name, Jessica, he said.

"There are thirty-seven females named Jessica within your descriptive range."

Thirty-seven. If he were lucky he would find her now. "Please put their images on the screen."

Twelve pictures later Jessica's image smiled back at him. He had found her!

"Give me her background," Srock said.

"Name Jessica Daenis. Daughter of Commerce Minister, Lork Daenis. Unwed. Born..."

Enough. He had what he wanted. Switching off the call instrument he left the booth.

IV

SROCK changed from his Brotherhood brown to the raiment of a civilian, and spent the afternoon in the Heights, a neighborhood bordering the government grounds. He visited the drinking places and talked with barmen and loungers. By evening he had the information he wanted.

Havilland's smaller sun had followed its companion below the horizon when he drifted into a patch of deep shadow which he had carefully noted earlier. Now he drew tight a leather girdle which he wore about his middle. The action might be rough during the next quarter-hour and he needed the protection the girdle would give his vital organs. He pulled on a pair of metal-knuckled gloves, and was ready for action.

The timing had to be perfect, he reflected, as he stood quietly observing the various guardsmen patrolling the area.

At exactly eighteen-two he slipped across the street and into a clump of shrubbery near the Commerce Minister's house. A

minute later a slow-pacing guardsman approached and Srock's muscles tightened in preparation. The guardsman walked to the bushes, turned, and started back. Srock leaped, swinging his right arm in the same motion. The guardsman spun on his heel and fell stiffly backward.

Srock removed the insignia and official cap from the fallen man and put them on. He dragged the limp body into the bushes and took the guardsman's place on patrol. So far so good. With luck he'd pass in the darkness.

Ten minutes later a long official car, spitting blue smoke, drew up to the front of the Commerce Minister's residence. A girl came out and walked toward the waiting vehicle.

The driver went around the car to open the door on the far side and Srock knew the time had come to make his move. From here in caution must be an abandoned thing.

Sprinting to the car he crouched low against its rear fender.

The driver rounded the back, saw Srock, and halted. "What are you doing..."

Srock's fist stopped the words. He stepped aside to avoid the falling, sprawled body, and sprang into the car, guiding it with one hand as he stepped on the accelerator.

The girl on the seat turned wildly toward him. Srock threw a flash-

ing glance her way and had a glimpse of eyes so wide that white showed clear around the iris. "Who..." she began.

With his free hand Srock shoved his short gun against her ribs. Shoved hard enough to hurt. "Shut up," he said.

The girl subsided immediately, shrinking back into the corner of her seat. Srock drove a few blocks farther before he heard a subdued sob. For the first time he had misgivings. Until that moment he had had no doubt but that right was on his side, and he would move heaven and earth to do what he must. But for a moment now that certainty was gone. With surprise he realized that his emotions were swaying his logic. Anger acted as a defense mechanism. "What did you expect?" he growled. "When you run with a pack of yellow dogs you're bound to find yourself treated like one."

She made no answer. But a few miles later she said, "Ted? I'd like to talk. Will you give me just five minutes?"

Srock was glad of the opportunity to do her the small service. For the past couple minutes he had been seeing a picture of himself, and the picture was not a pleasant one. Swinging into a side street he switched off the mobile's motor. "Five minutes. No more," he said.

"You're an intelligent man," Jessica began urgently. "Tell me, why do you persist in blinding

yourself to the fact that your mind has been changed, merely because you don't feel that it has? Can't you see that's only proof that the job was well done?"

"For the sake of argument, let's say that you're telling the truth," Srock conceded her point. "That doesn't change the position of the opposing factions here. On the one side is a rotten dictatorship, fighting to hold on to its power. On the other is a large group of men determined to overthrow oppression. If my mind has been altered, in such a way that I want to help those men—those morally right men—then I'm thankful for the enlightenment."

"You're so certain that the Brothers are on the side of God," Jessica exclaimed. "I swear that they're not. What certainty have you that the rank and file Brothers are not being used as dupes—by their own leaders?"

THE QUESTION stopped Srock's next argument. "Do you have proof that they are?"

"Yes. I have been very close to Cartee, and I know that he is sincere in his announced intention to set up a democratic government. The fact is, the Brothers were asked to work with him, to that end, and they refused. What do you think of that?"

"I don't believe it."

"No, you wouldn't. But what do you know of the workings of your

leaders? You don't even know who they are. I tell you this, and you have my word it's the truth. Your top leaders don't want democratic government. They wish to kill Car-tee, but only so they can seize the reins of power themselves."

"There's still a small thing missing in your arguments," Srock said. "You haven't given me one good reason why I should trust you."

"Here's one," she said. "You love me."

Strangely Srock could not deny it. For days now that love had tangled his reason with thoughts of her body, of the softness of her breath against his cheek, and the sweetness of her lips: It went with him wherever he went, until he wanted to shout, "To hell with reason," and take her in his arms and love her. And now he felt himself surrendering, felt his hard purpose fade into remoteness. "And you?" he asked, "do you love me?"

She moved nearer to him and sat so close that he could see his reflection in her eyes. "I've loved you for years," she said quietly.

"For years? But..." Then he realigned his identity—presumed or real—in his mind. "You mean you loved me before I knew myself as Srock?"

For answer she kissed him—long and sweetly. Oddly, Srock's arms remained rigid at his sides. This action, meant to be her proof, gave

him a new weapon with which to fight to retain a cold logic.

"You kissed me like that before—and slept with me," he said, and watched his words strike like blows. "Remember?"

She straightened and drew away from him. "You're stupid," she said, her voice coming at him hard and brittle. "Your memory of that was deliberately planted to tie you to me. Because I was to be your contact with our side. It never really happened."

Though he suspected that it was because he wanted it, Srock found himself believing her. He reached across to take her to him.

She pushed his hands down. "Don't touch me," she said. "Unless you believe me. If you don't, take me to your torturers and let them kill me."

Srock sat for a long minute, lost in his doubts. "I've never been a compromising man," he said slowly, "but now, God help me, I don't know what's right. I can't fight the Brothers—and yet I can't let them hurt you." Another long minute passed before he set himself again behind the steering wheel. "I'm going to drive out of the city," he said. "As far as our fuel will take us. When it's gone we'll walk. You and I will be out of all this. We won't even be spectators."

Simultaneously with his last words the doors on both sides of the mobile were jerked open. Srock

swung around, and found himself facing three Brothers. All were armed.

TWO BROTHERS walked ahead, two at their sides, and four behind. They were taking no chances, Srock noted. He took Jessica's hand in his. "I'm sorry," he said. "If I had it to do over again, I'd trust you."

Her small hand was cold. She did not answer.

Their guards remained with them as they walked up two flights to the top floor of the building. Srock knew they were being taken to Taneh's office. Evidently Taneh ranked as one of the highest in the Brotherhood, or they wouldn't be taking them to him.

Once inside they found Taneh seated at his desk. "Welcome back," he said, with the same cold courtesy of manner. He placed his hands together in their familiar gesture. "Should our first step be to torture you, Mr. Srock, in the hope that she will talk? Or should I begin with her?"

Srock said nothing, but his mind worked swiftly. Either he acted now, he knew, or he faced the certainty of death for them both. The odds against him were great, but one factor was in his favor. They were dealing with a thoroughly desperate man, and desperation itself is often a powerful ally.

"I believe the latter would be

preferable," Taneh went on, disdaining to wait for Srock's answer. "Her flesh and spirit are much the softer; if she does not speak, I suspect that you will want to save her from the torture."

All the way up the stairs and into the office Srock had worked to form the hard fabric of his desperation into a plan of action. And now was the moment. "I'll talk," he said, and took a step forward.

As he had hoped, the unexpected response caught the Brothers off guard for the split second he needed. Abruptly he wheeled, caught the arm of the guard nearest him and bent it behind his back. With his free hand he drew the guard's gun and pointed it at Taneh.

All the movements were accomplished in one swift action and for that brief instant Srock dominated the situation. He spoke fast to hold that advantage. "If any of you move—even the slightest—I will shoot Taneh," he said.

Taneh was the first to recover his poise. "I would advise you to surrender." He spoke almost conversationally. "You realize, of course, that you have no slightest chance of getting out of this building alive."

"If we don't," Srock replied starkly, "you will never live to know it. Jessica," he called without turning his head, "remove their guns. And you Brothers keep in

mind that Taneh's life depends on your remaining motionless."

Quickly Jessica went among the Brothers, removing their weapons. "Shall I take his?" she asked, indicating Taneh with a motion of her head.

"No. We don't want to arouse suspicion when we get outside."

Srock raised his voice and addressed the others. "We're taking your weapons with us. If I hear any of you leave this room I'll shoot Taneh without a second thought."

Taneh licked his dry lips. "What if I refuse to go with you?" he asked. He studied Srock. His expression made a slight change as he read his answer. He shrugged. His will to resistance was gone. "You men do as he told you," he said, and came out from behind the desk. Not a guardsman moved as they went across the room and out the door.

Srock deposited the extra guns in a waste chute in the hall.

One flight down Taneh spoke again. "You're clever enough to keep your weapon out of sight," he said. "But you weren't clever not to take mine. What if I reach for it? I may be faster than you?"

Srock knew that Taneh was trying to distract him from the job at hand, in the hope that his men would somehow be able to intercept them. He gave it back in kind. "If you think this is a good day to

die, old man, you might try it," he suggested.

Taneh's lips thinned into the semblance of a smile. "Touche," he said.

THEY WENT down until they reached the garage in the basement. Once there Taneh realized that his hope of outside help was gone. It was then he played his last card, and Srock was to remember him after as a brave man.

Taneh stopped and leaned against a pillar. "If I let you take me to Cartee, then we are whipped," he said, with the undercurrent of fatalism that was so much a part of his nature. "So it's better that I make my stand here. I refuse to go any farther."

Srock was in no mood to quibble. His nerves were operating on a thin edge. He drew his gun and started toward the stubborn man. "You'll come if I have to knock you down and drag you," he said.

"Wait!" Taneh barked the word as he held up his hand. "Whether you're the original Srock, or an imposter," he said, "I'm certain that you are imbued with the convictions and philosophy of the Brotherhood, and that you cannot willfully harm another Brother. I am going to gamble that I am right—and that you will not stand against me. I intend to draw my gun now, and put a bullet through your shoulder. You see, I want you

alive; I command you to make no resistance."

He reached—abruptly—toward his shoulder holster and the bullet from Srock's gun painted a livid red mark on the bridge of his nose.

Taneh swayed for a moment, his face showing the shocked realization that his life had been smashed from his body. Then he fell without a sound. There was no blood.

"Get into the car behind you," Srock commanded Jessica. "Sit in the middle. I'll place his body beside you; you'll have to hold it upright."

"I can't do it," Jessica whimpered, her face white and bloodless with the shock of the past few minutes' violence. "I can't do it!"

Srock took her by the shoulders and shook her roughly. "You'll have to do it," he said. "They won't stop us if he's along. I'm going to prop him up in the seat and open his eyes; we'll drive fast and we should get by."

Jessica shuddered but did as she was told.

They were nearing the administration grounds before Jessica overcame some of her horror at having to hold the dead man erect. A faint color returned to her cheeks. She turned to Srock. "I know it was rough on you," she said. "But you did what was right. You won't be sorry."

"Damn you!" Srock cursed her and stopped the car. He had had time for reflection while they drove and at last he realized fully what he had done. He had not only betrayed the Brotherhood, but his killing of Taneh might be the direct cause of their defeat.

He made no further attempt to voice his bitter thoughts but walked around the mobile and lifted out the body of Taneh. Tenderly he laid it on the floor of the rear compartment. He resumed his seat behind the wheel.

"There's one thing I can do to make partial restitution," he said with savage determination. "That's to kill Cartee. And you're going to take me to him."

Jessica studied his face, started to speak, then thought better of it.

"Keep in mind that I have nothing to lose," Srock warned. "Your life, or even my own, is but small weight on the scales in this game. You'll take me to him—now. Refuse, or make one attempt to deceive me, and I'll kill you without a qualm."

Jessica kept her head bowed and Srock was unable to interpret the emotions that played over her face as he spoke. "I'll take you to him," she said; "you have my word."

THE GUARDSMAN standing watch at the entrance to the administration grounds recognized Jessica and waved them on. They were not stopped as they alighted at the Palace, and they went in the entranceway. Down a long corridor they walked, with Jessica keeping her gaze directly ahead.

They walked up a flight of stairs, down a short hallway, and stopped in front of an embossed copper door. "This is it," Jessica said.

Once again Srock had the feeling that this had been too easy. She should have tried to dissuade or deceive him. "If you're lying to me you'll never get another chance," he said. He drew his gun and shoved it against her spine. "Open the door."

Unhesitatingly she pressed the button and the door swung wide.

Srock pushed her ahead of him and followed, warily. Silence. The room, as far as he could see, was empty. He took two more steps, turned to ask her a question and—froze.

Fully conscious, he fought to move, but he knew it was useless. He had walked into a trap. They had been waiting for him, and had used a paralyzer to render him helpless. He could not even die fighting. In that moment the thought of the futility of everything he had tried to do sickened him.

Two men in the white frocks of doctors walked into the room from a rear entrance and stood on either side of him. "This will take only a minute," one of them said to Jessica.

They picked Srock up bodily and carried him to a long table. Still conscious, he watched them fix the antennae of a small instrument to his temples. One of the doctors made an adjustment, squeezed a control, and a wave of nausea swept over Srock.

The paralysis passed, he rose—and he had the solution. It was all there. The Srock identity was gone and he... He was Cartee!

"Probably the best hiding place a man ever had," the first doctor said.

"Perfect protective camouflage," the other agreed.

