

STARTLING STORIES



Lord OF THE STORM

*A Novel of
the Future*

By KEITH
HAMMOND

THE CIRCLE OF ZERO

*A Hall of
Fame Classic*
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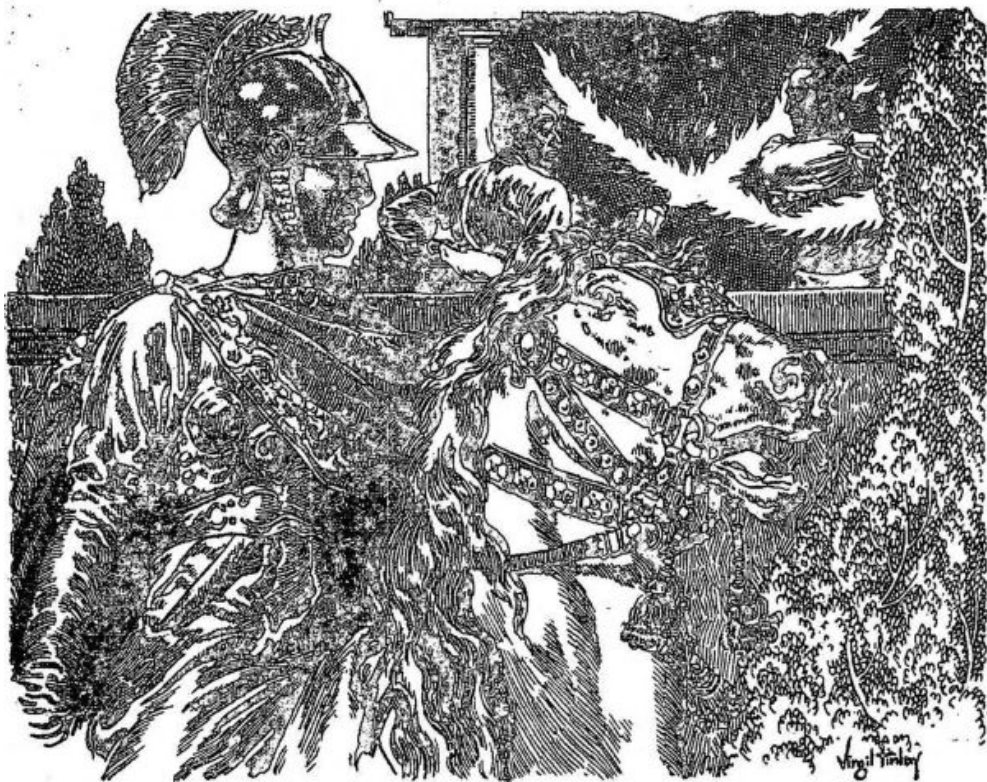
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Havers rode arrogantly erect in the saddle. (CHAP. V)

LORD OF THE STORM

By

Henry Kuttner

Writing under the pseudonym Keith Hammond.

Illustrations by Virgil Finlay.

First published *Startling Stories*, September 1947.

Thunder and lightning, storm and flood—these are the weapons of Mart Havers as he champions humanity in its epochal struggle against evil tyranny and destruction!

CHAPTER I

A New Leader Is Born

Haversham stared toward the enormous white moonlit tower of the hospital. Fine beads of sweat showed on his pale face. There was a distant clatter of hoofs, and he sank back against the padded cushions of the autocar until the guardsman had cantered past, crimson cloak flaring, golden helmet bright under its tossing plume.

The steel-worker twisted a fold of his own russet cloak between bony fingers.

"I'd kill him first," he said, under his breath. "If I thought my son would grow up to be one of those strutting devils—"

"Easy, John," said the man beside him. "Easy! Our plans are made."

Haversham looked again at the hospital. He was younger than his companion, but he looked older. His gaunt face was harsh and fanatical.

"Plans!" he said. "It's action we need!"

"Not yet."

"When? Years, Kennard? Centuries?"

"Maybe," said the quiet voice, and Kennard La Boucherie, bulky and awkward-seeming as a mastodon in his many-tiered cape, drummed thick fingers on the autocar's guidestick.

All of the man's adroitness lay in his hands, fat white shapeless gloves whose appearance lied. La Boucherie could handle a scalpel or a microscope with equal ease, as he could use a smash-gun or tighten those deceptively pulpy fingers around an enemy's throat.

A Cromwellian's, for preference.

"I know," he said. "This is the hardest part, waiting. You're sure about Margot?"

"She won't talk."

"Even under the anesthetic?"

"She doesn't know anything," Haversham snapped, giving his cloak another savage twist. "Not about me—us—the Freemen."

La Boucherie put a heavy hand on the man's knee in warning. The steel-worker caught his breath.

"They're not gods," he protested. "Are you beginning to believe your own fables?"

"Fables?" Above the great bulk of La Boucherie's body his face looked like a smiling skull when that thin smirk drew up his lips. "Who says they're fables? I have a precedent for speaking in parables. You can't tell the plain truth to men like mine, John. It is true that the Cromwellians have scientific powers that are almost godlike. And how did they get them in the first place?"

"I know." Haversham gestured toward the hospital, above its terrace of gardens. "We'd have a finger in powers like that, if they didn't skim, off the cream of the generations, straight from the cradle. If they ever left us any leaders!"

"They never will. Trust them." La Boucherie pulled off his feathered hat and rubbed the crease its band had left across his forehead. His voice was tired. "We have no leaders left. All we have are the little men who can't understand, sometimes, unless you speak in parables. Fables. They're not so far from the truth at that, John. And we've got to be careful, if we expect to get away with this."

“We’ll get away with it. My son’s one baby who won’t grow up into a Cromwellian Leader.”

He half-drew the deadly bulk of a smash-gun from under his arm. La Boucherie snarled a command.

“Put that back! You fool!”

The rhythm of hoofbeats sounded again. Haversham let his hand fall from the weapon.

La Boucherie’s little eyes gleamed with reluctant appreciation of the approaching horseman’s uniform, even as suspicion tightened all the muscles in his gross bulk. But the Guardsman in crimson and gold braid cantered on with scarcely a glance at the common men in the common autocar. His helmet canted at a rakish’ angle above one eye, his cloak billowing over the horse’s black, gleaming rump, he rode past—and La Boucherie, a dandy even in this era of dandies, envied him that crimson and gold, that gorgeous mount waxed to a sheen like water.

Haversham had no such feelings. His thoughts were all with his new-born son in the great hospital above them. He stared at La Boucherie, and jerked his head toward the retreating guardsman. “Sometimes I think you envy those peacocks,” he said.

“I might have been one of them myself,” the big man said slowly. “I might have been a—Leader.” The skull showed plainly behind the gross mask of fat, and a vicious, deadly malignance glittered in La Boucherie’s eyes. “But I’m not. And I never will be, now.”

Haversham scarcely heard. “My son—they won’t get him. He’s not going into a Leader Creche and work for justice all his life. Justice! A hundred years ago, maybe, but not now.”



A second Deluge, a new Ice Age was in the making (CHAP. XVI)

"They may not want your son," La Boucherie said.

"They will. The preliminary mental tests showed he was above par—'way above. They'll take him, if they can."

"We'll see," La Boucherie said soberly. "It must be almost time, John. Mustn't keep *them* waiting. You're only a parent, you know."

“And a commoner,” Haversham growled.

He touched the door button and stepped out of the car, to stand silent for a moment looking up at the cool loveliness of the hospital tower, rising like a ziggurat amid moonlit garden terraces, rococo with balustrades and elaborate balconies. Above the central tower loomed the immense marble figure of the blind goddess, scales in hand—the Justice that was the symbol of this world of 1970, where there was no justice.

Haversham stared up at the great cold figure. He shivered, and turned to La Boucherie.

“If this doesn’t work—” he said.

“I’ll do what I can. I’ll get your son, if I can. And I’ll train him the right way.”

Some chill, subsensory premonition of the future touched Haversham then. He looked at La Boucherie, secret leader of the Freeman, with suddenly clear eyes, and the flesh seemed to drop away from that gross face, leaving the bare skull. And something more than that. A burning flame that blazed with relentless fury, the enigmatic motive that had made La Boucherie what he was, one man against the world.

“Luck,” La Boucherie said.

Haversham nodded silently and turned away toward the arched portal of the hospital. Under his purple tunic he could feel the bulk of the two smash-guns, safely hidden in webbed sheaths that magnet-detector rays could not penetrate. It was treason to carry such weapons, of course. In the world the Leaders ruled nothing deadlier than the farcical toys called light-swords might be carried as sidearms.

Haversham shrugged. He would use his guns, in all probability.

The hospital lobby had been white and bare as a Grecian theatre a few years ago, but modern fashions were catching up and smothering such plainness. The walls were hung with strips of patterned plastivelt, and the wooden waiting benches had been replaced by cushioned relaxers in rich, deep colors. Any hospital that catered to Leaders could afford expensive decor.

Haversham glowered at a tri-dimensional mural glowing against the wall. He wished that Margot had not wanted her son to be born here. The alternative would have been one of the crowded, uncomfortable commoner hospitals, of course, but it would have been better than asking favors of Alex Llewelyn. A favor Llewelyn could easily grant, for he was a Leader.

Perhaps, in the past two years, Margot had often wished she had married Llewelyn, instead of the dour, grim-faced man she had chosen.

And why not? Llewelyn was all that Haversham was not—a handsome, good-natured, successful man who had never had a serious thought in his life. He had lived the life of a medieval nobleman, while Haversham’s life had been that of a serf. Margot had never complained, not once, but nevertheless she must have been conscious of the wide gulf.

Haversham scowled and pushed his way, hat in hand, through the scattering of fashionable ladies and swaggering gallants in the lobby. In his russet and dark purple he made a sombre figure among the bright satins of the crowd. The men flaunted their colored cloaks; the women in clinging Grecian garments minced on tottering heels and flashed glances through the transparent dark lace which modestly veiled their faces. Most of them were trailed by elderly duennas, lynx-eyed guardians of the new moral code which was beginning to set so strict a seal upon feminine virtue.

“Your wishes, sir?”

Haversham paused before one of the reception screens. A man’s face showed on the panel.

"I'm John Haversham. Dr. Thornley expects me. Key Seventeen bio-forty."

"Elevator Twenty-four."

A guide light glimmered above the opening door, and Haversham stepped into the compartment, his heart beginning to thud with thick, heavy beats.

Medico Thornley met him in the corridor above, his ruddy face alight.

"Health, Haversham. There's good news."

"Good news?"

"Yes, I. . . But you'll want to see your wife. I haven't told her yet either. But you can guess what it is. A great honor, Haversham!"

Haversham's dark face set more grimly. He followed Thornley down the hall, thinking of Margot, and of Alex Llewelyn, and of what he himself must do tonight. He was thinking of his new-born son, and of the Freeman of Earth, all the little, voiceless people who looked to La Boucherie for guidance and championship.

Margot's glossy dark hair lay in ringlets on the pillow. She smiled up at him—very fragile, very hopeless, very young, and an unaccustomed gentleness stirred in Haversham's heart. Then his lips tightened again.

"Hello, darling," she said. "You just missed Alex. Do you know what he wants to do? Take little Martin into mnemonic psychology under him. He says the potentialities seem to check."

"Oh, he told you, then," Thornley said disappointedly. He fumbled with the chart buttons at the foot of the bed. "'Martin Haversham'," he read. "'A potential Leader. He's been chosen—'"

"A Leader?" Haversham's voice was harsh. "What branch? Does he test for Mnemonics?"

"We can't be sure yet, of course. At birth, all we can do is check the potentialities of the brain. But the heredity patterns indicate a trend toward the psychological sciences. He'll certainly develop into a high-grade mentality. Psychology, sociology—he'll find his place. And he'll get the best training possible at the Creche." Thornley looked more sharply at Haversham. "By the way," he went on quickly, "this doesn't mean that you'll lose your status as parents—either, of you. A lot of people have that idea. It's wrong. Martin will be trained and educated in the Creche, naturally, but you can see him whenever you like, provided you don't upset his mental and emotional balance."

"I see."

"And eventually he'll go to Research and follow his natural bent. The Leaders live the life of Reilly, you know. Your boy's very lucky."

"Yes," Haversham said. "May I see him?"

"John—" Margot said.

Quickly the steel-worker bent and kissed her. She looked after him, the faint shadow of trouble in her eyes, as he went out with the physician.

Thornley led the way to a dimly lit room walled with glass on one side. Behind the barrier Haversham could see a plain cubicle. A nurse appeared, holding a baby, blanket-wrapped, in her arms. She drew back a fold to reveal the scarlet, wrinkled face.

"I suppose it's against the rules for me to hold him?" Haversham said.

"Sorry. Unless you want to go through the Cleansing Rooms. We can't take any risks with germ infection."

Haversham hesitated. If he stripped, his weapons would be revealed.

His hand slipped into his blouse. He shook a smash-gun from its sheath. With almost the same motion, he aimed and fired. The glass crashed, a ten-foot circle blasted into tinkling shards. Thornley's jaw dropped. He made an impotent gesture as Haversham sprang through the gap and snatched the child from the astonished nurse's arms.

The warm, living bundle fitted neatly into the crook of Haversham's elbow. It was the first time, and the last, that he was ever to hold his son, and he felt an unexpected warmth of emotion at the contact.

A Leader, eh! An accursed Cromwellian! Not if he could help it!

CHAPTER II

Rescue—and Death!

Medico Thornley had whirled and was racing toward the door. Haversham went back through the gap in the glass, his sharp command halting the medico in his tracks.

“Wait!”

“Great heavens, man! Are you crazy? You can’t do this!”

“Shut up,” Haversham said.

He saw that the nurse had fainted, which was convenient for his purposes. He pushed the muzzle of the smash-gun into Thornley’s ribs.

“You know what this will do to you,” he said. “You’ve seen smash-gun wounds, haven’t you?”

The medic shuddered.

“Then take it easy. We’re leaving the hospital together. You won’t be hurt unless you ask for it.”

Thornley’s ruddy face was splotched with pallor.

“You can’t do it,” he said in a strained whisper, without daring to turn his head. “There are Guards. . . . Do you want your son killed?”

“If necessary. Then he’ll never be a Leader.”

“Treason?” The medic’s voice held disbelief. For treason was akin to blasphemy, though less easily forgiven.

“Open the door,” Haversham said. “Hurry up!”

Thornley obeyed. They went along an empty corridor. No one seemed to have heard the smashing of the glass. The room was probably sound-proofed. At the elevator, Haversham forced Thornley aside and stepped close so that his own face showed on the viewplate.

“Lift, please.”

“Coming up.”

The door slid open. Haversham nodded, his gun hidden but ready, and Thornley preceded him into the car.

No alarm, yet.

They went down, and again the door opened. Facing them were three Guards in red uniforms, vivid as blood against the pale gray walls. Their guns were lifted.

Haversham went weak with sick desperation. Fighting an organization like this meant only death!

Thornley came to life and tried to snatch the baby from Haversham’s clasp. The steel-worker almost automatically pressed the smash-gun’s trigger. Thornley’s face vanished in red ruin. A Guard, in the path of the beam, screamed and was driven back, his chest caved in by the invisible impact of beam energy.

“All right!” Haversham snarled.

He sprang aside, shielded by the door, and aimed again. The operator was crouching in a corner, his face green. He wouldn’t interfere. And the guards were still hesitating, not daring to kill an infant who had been chosen to be a Leader. The life of any Leader was sacrosanct.

Haversham’s gun jolted the deadly energy bolts. The Guards died, flung back to the wall and crushed against it.

The door of the elevator began to close. Haversham sprang through the narrowing gap, saw that his road lay momentarily open, and raced toward the portal, out into the cool night air, where stars blazed in a purple sky, and where La Boucherie waited in the driveway.

But the alarm had been given. Footsteps sounded. The grounds suddenly were bathed in a flow of brilliant white light.

Something sighed, a soft whisper of death, and a pinprick stabbed Haversham's back. Cold instantly numbed him. His heart jolted, lost its normal rhythm, and he knew that he was dying.

He had almost reached the car. Its door was open, and La Boucherie was leaning out. Haversham reeled forward and threw the blanket-clad child as he collapsed. La Boucherie made a deft catch.

The rubberoid pavement swung up at Haversham in a tilting leap. He felt the impact dimly. Faintly he heard the soft whine of La Boucherie's car as it shot into motion.

The child was safe—his son would never be a Leader. That, at least, had been accomplished.

His body rolled. He could see the tower of the hospital. Somewhere in that colossal structure was Margot. Margot!

Above the tower loomed the giant figure of the blind goddess. She was leaning, he thought, about to fall and crush him. But as she toppled, somehow she dissolved into an infinity of twinkling star-points, and they faded into utter blackness.

La Boucherie—that was his last thought. . . .

The hag crouched against the wall, drawing her filthy rags closer about her, and watched La Boucherie lumbering back and forth across the tiny room. Once or twice she peered from the window, but no Guardsmen ever entered this underworld district where vice and crime hung like a miasmic cloud above the rotting tenements.

La Boucherie whirled toward the pallet where the baby lay. He crouched like some immense vulture, gross and terrible, his cloak billowing. He thrust his head forward, glaring down.

"Martin Haversham!" he whispered. "Mart Havers, it'll be. We'll train you—by the Eternal we'll train you as no human has ever been trained before! You'll win the game for us! But I won't forget what John wanted, either." The man's small eyes flamed. "You'll kill Alex Llewelyn, one of these days. And your mother, too. They'll die, all of them, all those swine that robbed me! The time will come!"

The pulpy, strong hands were a vulture's claws.

"And if you fail me, if you dare to fail me—"

But Martin Haversham could not understand. . . .

Twenty-five years later, he still found it hard to understand. La Boucherie was fifty-five now, but the same flaming purpose that had fired him from the beginning was with him still.

The world had grown older, too. It had not changed much. Science, art, and religion had sedately advanced under the great law of Justice. Inflexible Justice, blind and cold as the goddess, administered impartially by the Leaders in the country that was the whole planet.

The Leaders. It was possible to trace the record back now, and see where the trend had begun, after the first kindling of atomic fire and the decade of political and moral chaos that followed. The two abortive wars that broke out and burned with atomic violence and were ended within weeks had left their scars deep in the social fabric of mankind. And then MacKennow Greeley had come along, and provided the answer.

There were many who thought the answer worse than the problem it had solved. But within ten years the Greeley party ruled the nation, and in another ten, the world.

Politico-idealists, they called themselves, sometimes Puritans, most often Cromwellians. Inflexible justice was their keystone—mechanical, unyielding justice, based on Greeley's theory as set forth in his "Culture of Man." Natural selection was his chief basic. He wrote:

In the past there have been leaders born in every era—the mystics Buddha, Appollonius, Confucius; the scientists Newton, Edison, Darwin; the statesmen Machiavelli, Disraeli, Caesar; the politico-conquerors Genghis Khan, Cromwell, Napoleon. They were certainly not supermen, but they possessed capabilities and potentialities beyond those of the average men. Such powers should be trained by, and should work for humanity and the social unit. These men are the minds of the race. They must be recognized, cultivated, trained to utilize their full powers.

Technologically it was a new era. Electronics had begun to reach maturity. Turbo-jet engines revolutionized flying. New antibiotics brightened the medical outlook. And one day long before, in November, 1946, a man in a light plane had dropped six pounds of dry ice pellets into a cloud and created the first artificial snowstorm.

Out of that beginning a great science grew. Since the days of creation man had been slave of the weather, until now. The Deluge, the Ice Ages, hurricanes, droughts, the Dust Bowl—all that was coming under control; imperfectly, true, but it was a beginning. In a way, a futile beginning, for before long thinking men realized there could be no real advance beyond the present.

The Cromwellians dared not allow advances, for advance meant change, and stasis was the foundation upon which their world was built.

In that world Mart Havers grew up, and La Boucherie grew older.

La Boucherie had weathered the quarter-century well enough, as fat men often do. His hair was white now; his eyes were chilly. The fat had turned to granite, but this was not apparent to the casual glance of the social world which knew him so well.

He sat back, on a winter night, in his deeply cushioned relaxer, smiling down the dimmed length of a club-size autocar. His smile was more-than ever the lipless smile of a skull, but few people sensed that.

Tonight he was taking a party slumming, out of shining, luxurious Reno into the notorious Slag between the city and the spaceports. Most of the crowd were youngsters, to whom La Boucherie was as unchanging a figure in society as the colored plastic figure of Greeley in Washington, or the goddess on Bedloe's Island.

Under the cold blue stars, through streets of peacock-plastics lighted with shifting colors, the club-car glided smoothly. Some of the crowd were dancing in the broad aisle to the sentimental strains of a waltz. A few leaned at the little bar at the car's far end, sipping cocktails and watching the dancers. In deep relaxers around the ribbed walls duennas and a fierce mother or two sat watchfully. Conventions had stiffened into, iron rigidity in twenty-five years. Conventions that were anachronisms.

The girls, whirling in the waltz, swayed their bright colored skirts that belled out over ruffled petticoats. Their small, heelless slippers whispered on the plastic floor. The young men thrust their short capes out with a jaunty elbow cocked, hands resting ostentatiously near the

hilt of their light-swords, those weapons without which no brawling dandy was fully equipped. Most of the young faces bore the scars of those dueling swords, and La Boucherie's pale wisps of brows lifted ironically.

Light-swords. Toys for quarrelsome children. Translucent hilts of glowing plastic swung in a scabbard at each gallant's hip, ready to leap to the owner's hand and spit out its long blade of burning force for the duel. And because those blades could inflict superficial burns, painful for a day, these brawlers thought themselves romantically one with the great swashbucklers of legend. The harmless fencing with force-blade spattering sparks from force-blade was no farce to them, but a serious matter of face lost or gained. La Boucherie's lipless mouth widened.

Mart, now, he thought. Young Mart Havers, waiting tonight in a thieves' den in the Slag, waiting for him. Whatever his faults, Mart was no posturing fool like these. But as for Mart's faults—that was another matter.

La Boucherie looked out past the ornate windows of the car, past the colored walls of Reno where light crawled in ceaselessly changing hues. He did not see the swirl of thin snow blowing past the glass. He was remembering what young Mart had cost him in despair, in heartbreak, in bloody ruin of all his hopes and plans. If Mart had grown into a superman in the years since that terrible time when he had been forcibly taken from the hospital, he could scarcely have compensated La Boucherie for all he had unwittingly caused.

But Mart was no superman.

His kidnapping, twenty-five years ago—the abduction of a potential Leader—had been the first step in La Boucherie's great plan to supply his Freeman with the leadership they must have. Or at least a figurehead. He himself was quite as capable



as any leader, he thought, but he did not have the name, and that was all-important. Mart *had* been chosen to be a Leader, and therefore should have shown the qualities for leadership which he did not.

The rocket ship could not be guided, but La Boucherie was throwing full power into those jets. (CHAP. XIX)

CHAPTER III

To Be Free!

From the beginning La Boucherie's plan had gone wrong. Because of Mart Havers, the Freeman had faced disaster immediately.

The child's abduction had touched off a spark igniting massacre all over the world. It was a second slaughter of the Huguenots. No one liked to look back on that bloody time when three thousand Freemen died at the hands of the Leaders' Guardsmen. They were hunted down like wolves. Informers were paid bounties.

But La Boucherie had escaped. No breath of suspicion had touched him, miraculously enough.

He smiled, broad chest expanding as he breathed deep.

The dancing had stopped within the club autocar, and soft-voiced girls and men were gathering at the windows to stare out at the fabulous Slag. La Boucherie watched a girl in coral-pink flirt her curls sideward and coquettishly tap the man next to her with a fan. Her laughter tinkled artificially through the car. La Boucherie, while admiring the girl's exquisitely unreal prettiness, let his own dark hatred of her and all she represented come welling up almost luxuriously in the depths of his mind.

How much the world had changed, he thought, since he was as young as this coquette! He could remember when functional lines in building and designing had been beautiful, when clothes had been unadorned, and women as straightforward as men. But he could remember it only dimly, for even in his youth the change had been beginning.

Among the disciplined masses, he had watched today's flamboyance grow, and had grown with it. He wore clothing as gorgeous as any; he liked wearing it. But he loathed the implication behind these bright swashbuckling styles. He was conditioned now to admire the rococo buildings of modern tradition, the colors splashed on colors, the decorations upon decorations. The clean, functional lines of yesterday looked unfinished to him now, threadbare and outdated. But still he hated all that lay between functionalism and today's rococo.

Much lay between them. The Leaders had known that mankind cannot be repressed too far without emotional release. And so this had been the release provided—this personal gorgeousness of cloak and plume and light-sword. This intricate social tradition involving "face," the jockeying to gain it, and to degrade a rival by its loss. The constant dueling with blades of shining force. The tradition among the men of gallant brawling.

And among the women? La Boucherie was quite sure that the Leaders had cold-bloodedly forced the women back into subservience for a purpose. If men under the rigid laws of the Leaders felt the pinch sometimes, why not give them a lesser race upon whom they in turn could impose rigid laws? So women had gone back, by subtle degrees, imperceptibly but swiftly, into the old social and legal shackles from which they once had been emancipated.

So deftly had the Leaders managed it that the women themselves would have been the first now to protest against a change. For what they lost in freedom, did they not more than make up in leisure, in pampered home life while the men worked, in comfortable days of gossip and idleness, and nights of gaiety among the colorful cities of earth?

And who could say, thought La Boucherie, a little bitterly, that this coquette in pink, tapping her gallant with a folded fan, was not happier tonight than her grandmother who spent

her life at an office desk, man's equal, who had never seen in any face the indulgent tenderness beaming back upon this pink coquette in the club autocar.

Within the hour, La Boucherie reminded himself, he must manage to guide the party to the Jolly Roger. Unobtrusively he flexed his fingers, still the strong talons of a bird of prey, and more ruthless now. At the Jolly Roger Georgina would be waiting, and the elaborate little comedy they had worked out together would get under way.

Georgina was a fine actress. In another culture she might have made a great name for herself as a mimic, for she could portray with the utmost conviction any rôle she once had a chance to study. And Georgina for three years had worked as ladies' maid in the great mansions of the wealthy. She could play a spoiled young coquette now with more authority than many a girl born to the rôle. She would have her chance tonight.

He glanced down the car at the thin, pinched, leathery face of the Leader called Avish, and sank his own fat chin upon his chest to smother his smile.

Petty comedy! La Boucherie ground his teeth in sudden, silent rage at the part he himself had to play. These surges of impotent resentment came over him sometimes, and he had to fight them down with all the vast store of self-discipline he had built up over the past twenty-five years of growing disappointment, continuous failure.

"Mart Havers," he thought. "Mart Havers." And the thick fingers curled on his knee.

If he could have looked forward this far on the night Haversham had died, he would have closed those fingers about the neck of the newborn child and spared himself and the world much misery. No, he must not think of Mart Havers tonight. There was something more important than Mart on his mind now, something with a chance of success behind it. Not Mart Havers, who was flat failure. . . .

The Slag celebrated Saturday night, as usual, with intoxicated revelry. A decade before, a sudden boom had built this suburb on empty grazing land, but it had deteriorated. The unexpected advance in space-flight to and from the Moon was mostly responsible. It wasn't pleasant to live within sight and sound of the roaring blasts of rocket-craft on their way to the strictly private Government mines on the satellite. Nerves jolted under the erratic impact of booming, tearing thunder that ripped out day and night. The scarlet flashes made sleep difficult; the fumes were atrocious.

So the suburb, with its plasticoid buildings and spreading parks slipped down the social scale till it took a place with Limehouse, the Bowery, and the Kasbah. It was the Slag—the home of the poor, the petty criminal, the social misfit, and the occasional haunt of such slumming parties as this.

Mart Havers was lounging along Stink Street—once Pinewood Lane—with a cigarette pasted to his lip and scented smoke trickling from his nostrils. He was a big man, with rough, rather heavy blunt features, and his dark eyes looked out somberly at a world in which he had no place.

Snow fell slowly in dying gusts as the clouds were swept away by an icy wind. To the east was a reddening flare that pulsed and faded as a spaceship jockeyed for its landing. Heavy thunder muttered.

Havers coughed and inhaled soothing smoke to offset the foul odor of rocket exhausts. His big body, clothed in form-fitting, warm garments of dull blue, moved more swiftly along the street.

Living a masquerade was not easy, and never had been. But it was, of course, the only way since the Cromwellian Leaders had clamped down. Political organizations were taboo, with a capital penalty. Other crimes had punishments, but not as severe. The State recognized treason as the only sin requiring surgical treatment.

So Mart Havers was not, apparently, a Freeman. There weren't any Freemen any more—the Leaders thought. Havers was a gambler, thief, and con man, and, as such, he had occasional brushes with the law, but he was not hunted down ruthlessly. He survived.

His sullen mouth twisted. He walked on, heavy shoulders swinging, past a block of deserted apartment buildings, grimy and desolate, but still in good repair of glass and plasticoid. The builders a decade ago had been efficient. It was more expensive to raze a house than to let it stand, and the Slag was full of such structures, the homes of a few drunken bums and human strays. Guardsmen seldom troubled to search the ruins. Rehabilitation was free to all who wanted it, and the others—well, they were allowed to lie in the beds they had made.

From the east that deep mutter grew louder. The ground shook under Havers' feet as a freighter took off in a blast of searing fire. He increased his pace, for the wind was toward him and it would, be wise to reach the Jolly Roger before the fumes blew down into the Slag.

The Earth-Moon run was a long-established route now, but only, as a Government project. Too dangerous out of Leader hands, of course. There were priceless sources of ore on the Moon, and a regular circuit of shipping to and from the mines kept the space-field roaring just outside the Slag.

But it was all very hush-hush. Mart suspected that experiments had probably been made in the direction of the nearer planets, but if they had succeeded, the rank and file on Earth knew nothing of it. Not yet—not ever, probably. The status quo was too comfortable here. The Cromwellians wouldn't want any land rushes that might depopulate cities and upset the economic structure. The machine must be kept running. Still—

To be out there, free on a new world!

Havers grinned crookedly. Not much chance of that. A virulent whiff of rocket-gas caught him and he blinked and coughed, eyes smarting. That was about all the taste of space that he would ever get.

Light from a doorway in his path made him pause. The Goodwill Mission, Government subsidized. Havers disliked Salvationers, the weak-willed who gave up and signed the pledge. Still, he pushed through the glass door, opened a second, hermetic one, and entered the Mission. There was no choking gas in here, at any rate. Warmth and ruddy light greeted him. An immense stone fireplace filled one wall of the room, and there were relaxers here and there, occupied by ragged figures. A big audio screen stood against one wall.

Havers sat down, bulking large among the others, to wait till the fumes had cleared from the street outside. Automatic panels and spigots in a corner provided food and drink, but Havers ignored these.

He had never been in one of these Missions before, and now he examined it curiously. The people of the Slag spoke of these places with contempt and certain vague fear. That Teleaudio screen had, in the past, worked apparent miracles. Gunnar Arnheim, an unsavory racketeer, uncrowned king of the Slag, had himself fallen victim to the Mission's spell. It had touched some inherent strain of sentiment in his character, and he had signed the pledge—and vanished.

As others had vanished.

Havers leaned back. On the screen, a face was swimming into visibility.

It was the gentle, friendly face of an elderly woman. Her calm eyes studied the grimy, unshaven faces beneath the view-panel, and her voice sounded, low and soothing:

“We’re not going to ask you to do anything. The door to the street isn’t locked. You can go out whenever you want, remember. The stories you hear about the Mission aren’t true. We don’t hypnotize anyone. All we do is point out what we can do for you and that’s magic, but scientific magic. Giving a man will-power, strengthening his body and his mind, curing him of various weaknesses, so he can accomplish anything he wants—well, that’s been done in the past, and it’ll be done again.”

“Not with me, lady,” a red-bearded gnome said, half-tipsy on *sakar*-smoke.

Somebody near him said, “Shut up,” and he subsided, mumbling incoherently. Havers chuckled.

“You’ve been hearing stories about the Purge,” the woman went on. “I know they sound pretty bad. I’d like to explain, if you’ll listen. You see, it was developed originally to replace capital punishment. But it does much more than that now. The Leaders have worked out a system of mental therapy that washes a man’s mind clean. He loses all his memories. He’s given a new chance, the second start in life that lots of men need.

“After that, he’s cured of any physical ailment he may have, conditioned until he’s a healthy specimen, and then he’s allowed to learn anything he wants, whatever he shows special aptitude for. But he’s the same man. We don’t steal his soul. We gave Gunnar Arnheim the Purge, cured him of *sakar* poisoning, and now he’s a spaceship research engineer.”

“In three months?” the red-bearded man yelled. “That’s what *you* say!”

It was a two-way circuit. The woman smiled and nodded.

“In three months, mister. The adult brain can learn much faster than the child’s, and Arnheim was given high-pressure mental education, both awake and asleep. He’s just finished his trial period on the job. He can talk to you now if you want to see him. How about it?”

“Yeah!”

“All right.”

The screen dimmed and brightened, showing a burly hump-shouldered man in a white gown, working at a draughtsman’s blue-glass table.

“We’re tuned in to the Mission at the Slag, Arnheim,” the woman’s voice said from off the screen. “Somebody’s skeptical. Mind telling the boys they’re crazy?”

The man turned, grinning. He waved an arm.

“All right, boys. You’re crazy. Now what?”

“Hey, Arnie—can you hear me?” said red-beard. “What’d they do to you?”

“Fixed me up,” Arnheim said, “just like Janie says. I feel swell, too. Better play along with her.”

The screen blanked out, and “Janie’s” voice interrupted.

“It’s hard to convince you, so I’ll show you some test cases. Ask me questions if you want.”

New pictures grew, some taken in the Slag, showing men and women in lives of hopeless degradation, victims of drugs, sickness, poverty, psychoses—anything and everything that would stab the lesson home to the men in the Mission.

“You’re thinking the Purge might work on Arnheim, but not on you,” Janie said. “Well, are you worse specimens than these? See where they are now.”

They were, according to the screen, reclaimed and happy, working in good positions and contented with their lot. Many spoke to the watchers at the Slag. Finally the screen showed a huge arrow pointing down to a door at its left.

“Anybody who wants to go out there,” Janie said, “will find twenty erg-credits and a can of thermo-tablets—with no strings attached. You can buy liquor with the credits, and the thermos will keep you warm. The Slag gets pretty cold in winter. Weather report says snow, by the way. Wait a minute, now. Here’s the other door.” A new arrow showed. “Anybody who wants to try the Purge, go in there. Give your names to the desk-screen, and you’re all set. Now let’s have a comedy reel, for a change.”

A cartoon lit up the wall, and fully a dozen men rose and went through the door at the right of the screen. Red-beard started to follow, cursed thickly, and swung to the other door. He was the only one. The rest of the Salvationers remained in their relaxers.

CHAPTER IV

The Jolly Roger

Havers got up, his glance instinctively going to the door that marked the Purge. Under different circumstances he might have considered that solution himself. But he had a definite aim in life, and propaganda could not stir him so easily.

Yet it was excellent propaganda, he realized, well fitted to the psychology patterns of the derelicts. “Waste not, want not,” said the Government. They could always use good men. And the Purge, taking the place of other punishments, had swayed popular feeling still further toward the Cromwellians.

Justice, even to the outcasts of Earth—justice, Havers thought, but not liberty or equality. The social pattern was frozen, and humanity had to follow that pattern, or else be outcast. They were not even allowed to remain outcasts! This blasted Mission!

The rocket fumes were gone when Havers stepped out into the street, though a low muttering still came from the east. He walked briskly toward his destination, feeling warm and languorous after his brief rest, but a chill wind sharpened his senses.

Again he passed a Guard, and his dark features grew sullen. The Guards were not the power of the Cromwellians. The Leaders, the technicians, were that. But the Guards typified the mailed fist. They would strike mercilessly to preserve the Government that ruled the Earth, and they had standing orders to investigate ruthlessly any slightest hint of treasonable activity.

But they paid little heed to Havers, who was—supposedly—merely a swindler, thief, and con man.

A man sat against a grimy doorpost, head bent, an empty *sakar* tube beside him. Havers stepped over his legs. Ten paces beyond, he turned into an uninviting doorway and mounted ramshackle steps that led up into the gloom of a building. Spider webs clung to the walls. Havers grinned. This was pure atmosphere, all faked, all created by the owner of the Jolly Roger, who knew what slumming parties wanted.

At the top of the flight, he pushed open a creaking door and entered a huge, dimly lit room. It occupied the entire second floor of the building. The partitions had been knocked out, but a few remained standing for the sake of Bohemianism.

The big room looked like a shambles. There was disorder everywhere. Tables and chairs were scattered about at random; cushions were piled up against the walls; on a couch near the door a nearly naked woman was sleeping what was presumably a drugged slumber. She was paid by the hour, Havers knew, and tourists were properly shocked and edified.

Sporadic dancing and music came from one corner, and the air was stuffy with perfumed smoke that neutralized the omnipresent rocket-jet fumes. This was the Jolly Roger, one of many clip joints that battened in the Slag.

Havers pushed through the crowd toward the bar across one end of the big disorderly room. He had no plans, beyond the immediate intention of getting drunk. He ought to be up in the Aleutian secret base now, studying under the guidance of the dusty little man who had been his tutor during the sporadic doses of education to which La Boucherie had subjected him since childhood.

None of them had been any good. None of them ever would, while the present set-up continued, though La Boucherie didn't know that and Havers was only dimly aware of it,

being too close to his own problem for perspective.

They were trying to interest him in nuclear physics now. It wasn't difficult, but it was so deadly, hopelessly dull to him. He had failed La Boucherie in this as in everything, and he was a renegade just now from the tutor and the lab and the Aleutians.

Havers knew La Boucherie was in Reno. He knew they might meet. Perhaps that was why he had come here, not realizing himself how ready he was for an explosion. Let them meet, his sub-threshold mind seemed to urge, and get the explosion over once and for all.

He leaned on the bar and ordered a second drink before he began on his first.

He was half-way through his third, and beginning to feel mildly mellow and more at peace with the world, when a waiter jogged his elbow and nodded across the room. In one of the half-screened booths along the wall a girl was beckoning to him.

Havers didn't know her, but he picked up his glass and threaded his way through the tables. The girl wore a black lace veil drawn across her face like a rather ineffectual mask. Her ruffled skirts filled up half the booth and her smooth bare shoulders and lace-mitted arms leaned forward from the folds of a deeply furled cloak thrown back across her chair. Her hair was like black watered silk under the black veil, and an expensive fragrance rose from the booth as Havers shouldered his way into it through the crowd. Then he paused, looking down.

"Oh—Georgina," he said, not without disappointment.

"Mart, you idiot," she began, then gave a smooth-shouldered shrug and said, "Oh well, never mind. Let it go. I suppose you know La Boucherie's on his way here?"

"Blast La Boucherie."

"Yes, I know! But. . . Oh, why does everything happen to me?" She spoke to the man in the booth with her. "Pusher—Mart Havers. Mart, this is Pusher Dingle. A man with an idea. Come on, sit down. He wants to talk."

Havers hooked a chair forward with his foot and sat down with his back to the screen and his face toward the distant door. From the corner of his eye he considered "Pusher" Dingle, who was revolving a small blue glass of rye and watching him with equal obliqueness.

Pusher was fat, but with a bouncing, sparrowlike fatness that had no resemblance to La Boucherie's bulk. When he smiled, white-gold artificial teeth gleamed beneath his yellow-gray mustache. He had sleek yellow hair, streaked with gray, combed back from a sloping forehead. His right hand was a mechanical gadget of plastic and steel.

"You want to talk?" Havers inquired ungraciously.

Pusher Dingle tapped the table with his plastic substitute for a hand.

"I've heard you're smart," he said.

"I am." Havers' voice was mild.

"I need help. Can't use a gun." He indicated the plastic gadget. "Nice little job, that. Delicate as forceps. But no good for shooting. You know how to handle a gyro-flier?"

"Sure."

"I've got a job, and maybe you're the man to help me pull it off. I had one, but he got Salvation last week. Been asking questions around, and you sound like the right man to me. I —"

"*Ssst!*" Georgina leaned forward sharply, nodding toward the door.

The two men turned to look. There was a subtle, siphonlike motion in the crowd as La Boucherie herded his gorgeously dressed group of shimmers into the Jolly Roger. Everyone there went automatically into his act, and Havers could almost feel the instant determination

to get what he could that drew every man a little way toward the sightseers before he could stop himself.

Georgina pushed the black lace veil a little upward, leaving her mouth and chin visible, and an air of indescribable demureness mingled with daring seemed to change the very set of her bones and muscles as she, too, went into her prearranged act. Now she was no longer the rather commonplace little go-between whom La Boucherie had employed for years, but a pampered and rebellious darling of the upper classes, bored with luxury, tantalizing, dangerous, demure. Georgina could act.

They watched La Boucherie's apple-green cloak swinging out from his great shoulders as he led the way toward the bar, the youngsters pressing behind him. Most of the mothers had stayed in the car, scented handkerchiefs pressed unnecessarily to their nostrils in the air-conditioned interior. But several grim duennas paced among the girls, whose fans were at their faces as they shot bright, excited glances around the room. The gallants kept their hands ridiculously on the hilts of their toy swords, and looked fiercely at the synthetic dangers about them.

La Boucherie was shooting glances around the room under his tufted brows, looking for Georgina. He saw her just as the bartender was handing him a glass, and La Boucherie all but let it slip through his thick fingers when he recognized the heavy-shouldered figure beside her.

Havers met the fat man's glare with a sardonic nod, and La Boucherie swore to himself as he felt the tide of angry crimson surge upward into his face. Blood beat heavily at his temples and he cursed Havers all over again for the sudden throb of headache that increased blood pressure meant to a man as heavy as La Boucherie. It was another tiny debt in the long list of big debts and small chalked up against Mart Havers.

The Leader, Avish, who stood at La Boucherie's elbow, leaned forward.

"Anything wrong?"

La Boucherie started to choke a denial, then suddenly changed his mind. He had been an opportunist all his fifty-five years and here was a chance too fortuitous to miss.

"That girl," he said, and the thickness of his voice was convincing, though it sprang from another cause. "Over there in the booth. The one with the veil. I know her. She's got no business here. She. . . Excuse me."

He contrived as he swung his bulk away from the bar to give Avish an almost inadvertent push in the same direction. It was all that was needed. Even from here Avish could see that Georgina was a pretty thing.

So the thin-faced Leader was beside him when La Boucherie stood above Georgina's table and scowled down at her with a rage whose origin she knew, though not a flicker of her eyes toward Havers betrayed it. Havers himself, after that one ironic nod, had taken no notice whatever of La Boucherie's existence. He sat with his big shoulders hunched and his head sunk between them, staring indifferently into his drink while the two newcomers stood above him, looking at Georgina.

"Miss Curtis"—La Boucherie's voice was properly stern—"I'll take you home immediately."

He bent forward to lift her cloak over her shoulders, but Avish was before him, performing the service with a gallantry that was slightly too familiar, since they had not yet been introduced. It was exactly the reaction La Boucherie had hoped for, and in spite of himself his anger subsided a bit.

“Not yet, please!”

Georgina’s voice was petulant. She shot Avish a veiled glance that gave him the courage to brush her bare shoulder lingeringly as he drew up the cloak. Georgina was playing a spoiled and rather daring debutante, ready to invite familiarities and equally ready to resent them to the point of inciting duels. She smiled and then gave Avish a haughty glance.

“Who is this man?” she demanded of La Boucherie.

“I won’t introduce you to a respectable man in a place like this,” La Boucherie told her sternly. “You’re lucky I haven’t sent for your father. Now get up and come with me.”

Submissively she rose.

“Oh, come now, La Boucherie,” Avish said, trying to make his harsh voice cajoling. “There’s no harm done, is there? If you’ll introduce me to Miss Curtis I’d be very grateful. Perhaps she’d even let me escort her home. It would spare you to your other guests, and I’ve seen the Slag before.”

Mart Havers, eyes stubbornly lowered through all this, watched the colored reflections of the people around him moving in his glass. He knew what would happen. He had seen Georgina in action before. He had even played a part like this himself on occasion, for though he had no such talent for impersonation as Georgina’s, La Boucherie had seen to it that his training included the social graces and he could pass as one of the upper classes himself when he cared to.

Above him there were polite flourishes and protests. Then Georgina swirled her ruffled skirts and moved away in a cloud of perfume on Avish’s arm. The moment they were out of earshot La Boucherie let his breath out in a soft, explosive snort and gave his temper its freedom. He kept his voice down, for he knew eyes were upon him from the crowded bar, but his words were violent.

CHAPTER V

Rebellion

With his shoulders hunched a little, Havers let the storm beat unheeded upon him. Pusher Dingle's eyes widened as he listened. Clearly he expected Havers to spring at the other man's throat. But Mart only sat there, his face expressionless, his heavy brows meeting in a sullen scowl, while La Boucherie's soft-voiced, hotly worded fury spent itself in a torrent of blistering phrases.

Years of danger had instilled instinctive caution in both men, though, so the nearest La Boucherie came to saying anything revealing was his curt order for Havers to get back where he belonged.

"Not for a while yet," Mart said, speaking for the first time since La Boucherie had begun his tirade. He knew the right weapon to use against the older man—casualness that he didn't feel in the least.

La Boucherie opened his mouth and closed it again. He swept his cloak around him with an angry motion of his arm and a swirl of bright colors.

"Now," he said. "I mean—*now*."

Havers signaled the waiter and got a refilled glass. La Boucherie's brows met. He had noticed Mart's nearly empty wallet.

And Havers had seen La Boucherie's glance. Driven by a vital desire to assert his independence, he grinned across the table.

"I know," he said. "I'm nearly broke. But I've got a job coming up that ought to pay off. Eh, Pusher?"

Pusher Dingle's eyes flickered warningly. La Boucherie studied the little man.

"Oh, no," he said. "I can guess what sort of a job that would be. That's out."

Mart Havers had never been classified as expendable. He was the only Freeman, outside of La Boucherie himself, with Leader potentiality and all that it denoted.

The two men's glances clashed. It was a struggle no less violent because it was necessarily concealed. Then, deliberately, Havers' turned his shoulder to La Boucherie.

"I'll see you later," he said. "I've got to discuss this job."

Again Pusher's eyes flickered.

A muscle twitched at the corner of La Boucherie's tight mouth. He was no fool. He knew that at last he was facing what he had dreaded for years—open rebellion. And he knew that he had been maneuvered into a spot where he could not use the pressure he usually did. Mart was in a mood to ignore him completely, to risk his neck deliberately, simply to spite his mentor.

Again the blood pounded in La Boucherie's temples. With a tremendous effort he forced his anger down. He turned to Pusher Dingle, studying the man. At last he nodded, apparently satisfied.

Under the shield of his cloak his thick hands made quick motions. A bundle of banknotes, torn in half, changed hands. The transaction was invisible except to the three men concerned. Pusher concealed the money deftly.

"A thousand," La Boucherie said softly. "No good until you get the other halves of the bills." He patted his pocket. "That's an earnest. I can pay you more than you could make

otherwise, and there'll be no risk. Meet me in an hour at Twilight House. Code word 'Golconda.' That means both of you."

He didn't wait for an answer. He knew Pusher Dingle's type well enough to be sure of him. And he thought he knew Havers thoroughly, too. Without a word he turned, cape flaring, and went back to his party. . . .

Twilight House had been an apartment building ten years ago. Its ornate plastic rooms and corridors were unchanged physically, but the life that went on inside them bore little likeness to the respectable family life for which the building had been designed. There were private rooms here for every purpose for which men might require privacy. The proprietors of Twilight House asked no questions. A man paid for his space, was assigned a code word and thereafter might give the code to as many as the room would accommodate, if he chose.

"Golconda" admitted Havers and Pusher to a dim cubicle on the third floor. Red rocket-flare pulsed rhythmically through its one window from some experimental work going on down at the field. High walls and barbed wire shut out the curious, but that intermittent glow could not be concealed, speaking silently as it did of the forbidden spaceways and the worlds just outside mankind's reach.

La Boucherie sat waiting impatiently in the red glow.

"Sit down, sit down," he said. "I haven't any time to waste. You, Dingle—you've got a Sherlock. Don't argue. I've been making inquiries. How good are you with it?"

Pusher Dingle glanced at Havers, who shrugged.

"I'm good," Pusher said, after a moment's hesitation. "You've got to be good to operate a Sherlock. There aren't any half-way men with *that* gadget."

He was right, of course. The tiny specialized robots were hard to procure and even harder to handle, since the control apparatus was extremely complicated.

"All right, you're good." La Boucherie nodded. "I know what you've been using your Sherlock for. Penny ante stuff. I can put you onto something that'll make it worth your while to drop everything else." He flapped his handful of torn bills. "This could be just a start, if you'll work for me. How about it?"

"Doing what?"

"A frame, to start with. Perfectly safe."

"I'll give it a try."

"Good." La Boucherie nodded briskly. He did not seem to be aware that Havers was in the room. "I'll give you the whole story. You've got a good reputation around town. I've been checking. The man I'm after is a Leader. Avish. . . No—wait! I told you it's perfectly safe. We're covered, as long as we're careful. Now, here's the story."

He did not glance at Havers, but Mart knew the story was directed at him, not Pusher. He listened with reluctant interest, hidden behind his usual sullen mask.

"Avish got drunk and talked too much in the wrong places. Avish is an engineer, not top circle, but good in his field. He invented a stabilizer recently, something they've been needing. Too many spaceships have cracked up for lack of a good one. Well, Avish found out last week that the administration was planning to offer a big reward for a stabilizer, so he decided to wait.

"That's an anti-social act, enough to get him demoted, and he's been suspected of shady deals before. If the government learns he is holding back his invention to cash in on the reward, it will be pretty bad for Avish. I could make this a straight shakedown, but I'd like a

little more information first. I'll tell you what to look for. Incidentally, it won't mean anything to you, so don't try any tricks. And Avish himself hasn't enough money to make a doublecross worth your while, either. I've got more than he has. This is a private matter. Now, how about it?"

"All right with me. Who's going to plant the Sherlock?"

"I am." Mart Havers' voice startled them, he had been so long silent. Now he crossed his legs, the chair creaking as he moved. "I'll plant it. I'm in on this too, remember."

La Boucherie looked at him, the veins in his thick neck congesting. His temples gave a sudden throb with the ache he was coming to associate with Mart Havers and anger.

"All right, Mart," he said with hatred in his voice, but softly. "All right! Go. And I hope you fail. I hope they kill you."

The sleek muscles of the great black horse moved rhythmically against Havers' thighs. He rode arrogantly erect in the inlaid saddle, feet firm in silver stirrups, a scarlet cloak tossing behind him, caught by the blast of cold wind that blew down Reno's wide avenues. The hoofs rang like bells on the pavement as the horse cantered on, black mane flying.

Far to the east was the Slag. Not even the distant glow of red could be seen from Reno. For almost two weeks Havers and Georgina had been here, and the plan was working well. Tonight might spell the finish.

Havers' heavy-featured face with its thick black bars of eyebrows looked sullen, almost brutal, as he rode along wrapped in his secret thoughts. On the slowly sliding paveways, each speed-level rimmed with luminous rails, men and women moved, types strange to Havers, though he had seen such people all his life. Their motives were alien to him. But their emotions. . . A wry smile twisted his lips. Emotions were a common denominator.

His masquerade had gone unchallenged so far, his forged credentials showing him to be a visiting Guardsman on leave, giving him entrée into the social circles he sought. Why, indeed, should there be any suspicion of his *bona fides*? The administration did not know that any disaffection existed. Or if they did, they were careful not to reveal that knowledge. The *status quo* was their god now. At any cost it must be preserved and defended. No intimation must ever be made that change was conceivable, or that any man alive desired it.

All through the mounting levels of the Government that necessity alone held sway. From the plodding workmen and serving classes up through the circles of wealth and aristocracy and into the high level of the Leaders themselves Cromwellian perfectionism held all minds hypnotized in its grip, like a culture preserved in amber for all time to come, frozen, motionless, fearing change as they feared death itself.

And above the Leaders. . . Havers let his sullen glance lift to the high white tower overtopping all Reno, where the Government chambers housed their secrets, where the Leaders lived and worked and ruled.

Who gave the orders to the Leaders? No one knew. There must somewhere be a head man. The Cromwellians functioned too perfectly not to operate by a well-coordinated plan handed down by a man or a group as well-coordinated. Was it a man, or a council who really ruled the world?

Havers doubted if even all the Leaders knew the answer to that. Orders came and they obeyed them. It was enough, in this obedient culture. No one risked blinding himself in

attempts to peer at the sun. Accept benefices and ask nothing. Whoever the top man might be, he never made mistakes. He was infallible. No wonder the lesser men asked no questions.

It was this attitude that La Boucherie and the Freeman had so hated twenty-five years ago that they had risked everything to combat it—and lost. It was this attitude they were laboriously building up the power to fight again. Except, it seemed to Havers that La Boucherie had changed. Even in recent years the change was clear, and it must have been going on imperceptibly from those first days when the Freeman saw their hopes dashed in a single terrible day, and disbanded and went into hiding.

Bitterness was La Boucherie's keynote now. Bitterness and hatred. There were unexplained mysteries to his background that Havers sometimes wondered about. Once he had been a Leader, or in training for Leadership. Whatever it was that had happened, and when it happened, no one knew now. But La Boucherie had been cast out of the sacrosanct ranks to become the bitterest enemy Cromwellianism had today.

A billow of blue cloak caught Havers' eye. He let the unpleasant thoughts slide for a moment out of his mind as he watched the horseman ahead swing down from his saddle and stride into a neon-circled doorway from which laughter and clinking glasses sounded.

A Weather Patrolman—a Storm Smasher in the popular cant. Whatever remained to the world of real excitement and romance centered in the Storm Smashers now. They herded the great air masses down from the Pole and fought the typhoons and the cloudbursts high in the stratosphere, jockeying their jet-planes among streaming vapors up where the sky was black at mid-day, to insure controlled weather for the Cromwellian world. It was difficult and dangerous work, and Havers looked after the swaggering blue figure with frank admiration.

It made him feel futile and resentful when he thought of such work as that. He had so consistent a pattern of failure behind him. His mind was keen enough, but purpose was not in it. And the dark miasma of La Boucherie's hatred stifled whatever interest he might have been able to rouse to artificial life. He felt the cloud of his own defeatism close about him again as he shook the reins and cantered on.

In a way he was grateful for the immediate necessity of action, even such trivial action as helping Georgina swindle the cheating Avish. Without a fixed purpose he would have felt doubly out of place here in Reno. The social culture of these people could not touch him.

Superficially he responded to the flashing glamour of the life, the stylized and romanticized etiquette that ruled most activities, the patterned conversation, the massive lines of the city itself. But he was not himself a part of this world. As always, he remained a masquerader, in exile from life and the world.

He did it well enough. His training had fitted him for deception and given him ability to create protective camouflage. And as he rode the powerful black horse down the street, Mart Havers was the target of many a slanted glance from the gaily dressed women who moved along the promenades, past shop windows decorated by highly paid artists and glittering with expensive luxuries.

Havers, with his barrel chest and darkly sullen face, was not the usual type of guardsman.

CHAPTER VI

The Sherlock

Overhead the sky was losing its blue brilliance as the sun neared the western peaks. Havers rode on, fingers wound in the glittering reins. He passed a plaza where two silk-shirted young gallants were dueling hurtlessly with light-swords, sparks cascading as the force-blades clashed and spun. Havers repressed an ironic grin. Children playing with toys.

They were not children—that was the unpleasant part of it. But they were content to play with toys, while the sterile social machine spun on in its never-ending circle.

There was no advance. In spite of spaceships—that stopped short at the Moon—in spite of medical discovers and engineering development. Science was not enough. The Cromwellians had intermingled religion and social culture with science, and the result was a mutual strangulation in which the three, like the Laocoon group, struggled helplessly in the toils of immobility. In this gigantic prison, greater than Babel or the Great Pyramid, foolish men and women bowed and danced and scribbled meaningless patterns on the walls.

And at the summit the Leaders built on endlessly, uselessly, under orders from—what? A council, or a single man, or whatever mysterious sovereign really ruled this planet.

Mart Havers could see no meaning in the life. Perhaps life itself had no meaning. Certainly his own had none. He was conscious suddenly of a profound disinterest in living at all, and he put the dark thought out of his mind wearily and jingled the reins. Worst of all was the futility of striving against the Cromwellian Juggernaut, but La Boucherie gave the rules, and Havers had no choice but to follow.

He rode on. Georgina's message had been explicit. Avish was nibbling at the bait, and tonight might prove the time.

He was near enough now, he thought, glancing up at the rococco walls above the street. He could not ride to Pusher Dingle's place. There was risk enough afoot. He reined in the horse, swung himself down, tethered the beast to a curb hitching-post. No one accosted the big guardsman as he made his way across the promenades, threading an intricate path that presently brought him to a narrow street near the river.

The lobby of Dingle's apartment building was outmoded in its classic severity of line. He buzzed a signal in a row of glass-brick mail-boxes, then took the elevator. Dingle opened his door cautiously, his pulpy lower lip thrust out. At sight of the guardsman's uniform he took a deep, unsteady breath.

"Come in," he said, stepping back.

This was not easy to do. The single room was a chaos of equipment without plan or reason. Wires were strung everywhere, and cryptic gadgets were piled on benches and tables and shelves. The entire contents of half a dozen assorted laboratories seemed to have been dumped into this room.

"I want the Sherlock," Havers said briskly. "You work it from here?"

"Right here." Dingle swept an arm around at the cluttered room. "The control's mixed up with everything else. A needle in a haystack of junk. No one would guess I've got anything workable here—which is lucky. I had visitors today. Guardsman. They're getting suspicious, Havers."

"Did they find anything?"

“No. Next time, maybe. We’ll have to hurry. There’s one serious danger. After you’ve introduced the Sherlock into Avish’s place I’ve got to operate it by remote control. And the right instruments can detect and locate my control here. Well”—he shrugged—“here’s the Sherlock.”

It was a flat plastic hemisphere six inches in diameter. Havers examined it with interest. It had been made under microscopes, he knew, and was something more than a mechanical bloodhound. Built into that compact body were devices for seeing, both by visible light and by infra-red, and an X-ray lens as well as a device for chemical analysis. Little could remain hidden from a Sherlock with a trained operator at the controls.

Havers folded under it the rubbery tentacles, each with a tiny suction cup at the tip, and thrust it out of sight under his cloak.

“Good luck,” Dingle said, holding the door for him.

“We’ll need it,” Havers grunted, and swung out, brows drawn together.

It was a moonless night by the time he reached the Palladium. Pillars of veined plastic lit from within with coiling tints, shone vividly through the dark. Havers tossed his reins to a liveried groom and walked up the great ramp into the foyer. The vast domed hall was a kaleidoscope of shifting color beneath him. A cotillion was in progress. Uniforms blazed everywhere, and the bellling skirts of the women swayed like flowers in the dance.

Havers’ eye found Georgina and Avish at a balcony table above the floor. He threaded his way toward them among the dancers.

“Hello, Mart.” Georgina’s greeting was gay. “It’s a good thing you’ve got here at last. My reputation’s in shreds already. What kept you?”

“You shouldn’t have come at all without a chaperon,” Mart said, playing out the little farce to its close.

“My dear brother, you’re chaperon enough for six girls,” Georgina assured him. “The Leader and I were getting worried about you.” She nodded at Avish, whose thin, lined face was rather sour. “I’ve been invited up to Leader Avish’s apartment, and of course I can’t go alone. He has some space films I wanted to see.”

“Government shots of the Moon works,” Avish amplified with as good grace as possible. Obviously, though, he had not intended this. He had planned on a rendezvous with Georgina. Havers was spoiling things. But liquor and Georgina’s charm combined to placate him and he finished his drink and called for the check.

Havers met Georgina’s eyes, and a secret smile passed between them. . . .

An hour later Mart Havers stood alone in Avish’s library. From the adjoining room he could hear the low voices of the Leader and Georgina, and the occasional clink of glasses. That was fine. The girl would keep Avish occupied until a suitable hiding place could be found for the Sherlock.

That wouldn’t be hard. The library held shelves of old-style books as well as the racks of small cylinders that were standard equipment—talking books, visual books, and combinations. Havers found a place for the Sherlock behind a set of Dumas. There was room enough between the volumes and the shelf above so that the robot-controlled device could slip out easily, and then it would be up to Pusher Dingle.

Havers touched a tiny stud on the disc, and, after a second, touched it again. Now it was activated. In his makeshift control room elsewhere in Reno Pusher would know that the plan had succeeded, up to this point. He would be watching and waiting.

A light flickered into existence on the Sherlock and went out. Pusher would be watching now, through the gadget's electric eyes. Havers slowly replaced it behind the books, knowing that the controller was noting and remembering each detail. After this, Pusher would be on his own.

It was dangerous to leave the beam current on too long, since the Leaders' technicians had plenty of detectors rigged throughout the city. There was always the chance that somewhere in Reno a gauge-needle would jump suddenly, a man would lean toward it, frowning—and the competent machinery of the police would move into action. Triangulation could locate both Pusher's laboratory and the location of the Sherlock itself, once an unaccountable electronic-beam was noticed by watchful eyes.

That was one of the reasons why planned crime was so dangerous. The safest felonies were sudden, swift, and personal assaults, and an equally swift escape.

But this test was necessary. It didn't take long. The Sherlock slipped out from behind the books, made a circuit of the room, and returned. It vanished behind the Dumas. The faint light went out. And it would remain out, Havers knew, until Pusher decided the apartment was empty.

Havers smiled. Like most well-armored antagonists, the Leaders had a vulnerable point. Plate armor fails at the joints, where it has to be flexible—under the arm, for example, where the heart is easily reached with a long blade. Chain mail is another matter, but the whole civilization of the Cromwellians was too rigid to be compared to steel mesh. There were too many rules, too much rigidity. So there were the inevitable joints where their power failed them.

The whole Cromwellian civilization could be destroyed, Havers thought suddenly, if you could find the right joint in their armor where a sword could strike a mortal blow. A sword? Armor could deflect spears and arrows, but when gunpowder was utilized practically, perhaps a vulnerable spot could be found.

Well, leave that to La Boucherie. That was the old fanatic's main purpose.

Havers grunted and began examining the curious old bindings of the books. There was a sense of solidity, of luxury about this room that disturbed him. Not luxury, really, so much as the sense of *belonging*.

A gust of anger against Avish shook him. There was nothing like this in the Slag! All men were certainly not created equal, not in the world of the Cromwellians. In a primeval world, where courage and strength were important, it would be Mart Havers who owned this library, this sleek apartment in the gigantic serpentine building where a thousand families dwelt—not Avish!

The voices from the next room had stopped. Havers went to the threshold, vaguely hoping there would be some good opportunity for a fight. He knew that reaction was the wrong one and that La Boucherie would not approve. But the devil with La Boucherie! It was all right for the old man to be devoted to an ideal, but Mart Havers was young. He had the opportunities that had long since passed by La Boucherie.

No fight seemed required. Georgina was leaning back against cushions, smiling, while Avish poured fresh drinks. The Leader glanced up as Havers entered.

"Another?"

"No."

Havers' tone was so brusque that Georgina shot him a quick warning glance. Rebelliously he ignored it. He walked over to a relaxo-chair, sat down, and crossed his arms, staring at Avish.

The Leader was ill at ease. Over his glass rim he blinked at Havers.

"What do you think of my library?" he asked.

"I don't read much."

"I do," Avish said. "You'd be surprised how often pure romance leads into practical ideas. Romance has to be based on natural forces."

"Romance?" Georgina asked.

"In the purist sense. I'm not speaking of affairs of the heart." Avish smiled. "I mean, like Hugo's 'Toilers of the Sea.' You can get that down to engineering basics. The fight with the devilfish—pure siphon principle. Jet propulsion. But it's my unconscious mind that absorbs the technical part. Consciously I just enjoy the cloak and sword treatment."

"That can be broken down to psychological basics too, can't it?" Havers asked.

"In historical romances," Avish said thoughtfully. "Not today. There's a lot of swashbuckling now, but it doesn't spring from the same causes. It's a safety valve. We buckle swashes now not because we really want to, but life would be infernally dull for most people if they didn't. That's the real reason. It's negativistic. It doesn't get us anything we *want*. D'Artagnan's swaggering was positive. It got him what he wanted. Fighting today isn't glamorous."

"There isn't much fighting, though," Georgina said.

Instinctively Havers touched the hilt of his sword. Avish following the movement with his eyes, chuckled.

"Ornamental," he said. "You wouldn't use it in a fight, any more than you'd use your fists. Pistols are more effective. And most effective of all is a jet-propelled robot-guided projectile with an atomic warhead. Nothing like that had been used for years. But when it was, there was little glamour involved! The chivalric tradition went out with the technology, or it took other lines."

"It's stifled, perhaps," Georgina said.

"Perhaps. If we were allowed interplanetary experiments, there'd be plenty of excitement and glamour on Mars or Venus or the Moon. Only it's too dangerous. Colonies can rebel. And if a rebellion started in a lunar colony, the insurgents could bombard Earth with atomic bombs. A war base like that—" He shook his head.

"It does seem a waste, though," Georgina said. "We've gone about as far as we can with jet-propulsion and atomic engines, haven't we? And all we do is circle the Earth."

"There's still much to discover about our own planet. Underground, we haven't dug very far down. Still, in one way you're right. It's a mistake to solve one problem completely before you start another, or at least think about it. When this world is finally Utopia we should already have started reaching out to the stars. In my own field, I feel the restrictions sometimes. Though they're necessary," he added hastily. "Excuse me. The door."

CHAPTER VII

The Death-Wish

A buzzer was singing. Avish touched a stud, a panel opened in the wall, and Havers saw Georgina stiffen. He turned his head slowly. On the threshold were five guardsmen, resplendent in their finery, one of them wearing the gilded feathers of an eagle on his shako.

Havers forced himself to sit motionless. Guardsmen might conceivably come here for a routine reason. A colonel might come socially or on business, but the combination struck a false note.

Almost too late Havers realized that his reaction, too, struck an equally false note. He was on his feet instantly, stiffening to attention.

The colonel's eyes, which had fastened coldly upon him, drifted away. He saluted Avish.

"Priority, Leader," he said. "We've a report that beam radiation came from your apartment."

Avish looked puzzled. "Perhaps. I've some equipment."

The colonel held out a slip of paper. "It was on this wave-length. Have you been using this tonight?"

"Why, no. Are you sure?" Avish looked from Georgina to Havers. "You didn't use the visor, did you?"

"I did," Havers said quickly. "I wanted the newscast."

The Leader nodded. "That was it, then. It's quite all right."

"Not quite, sir," the colonel objected. "We traced the other end of the beam, too—the sending station. We haven't localized it yet, but it's nowhere near any televising station. And there was a directional scrambler being used."

"Some experimental work?" Avish suggested, but the officer's mouth tightened.

"That might be, sir. But we can take no chances. Have you any objection to a search?"

"No. Naturally not."

The colonel gestured. One of his men stepped forward and held up his hand. In the palm was a flat, glittering object. He showed it briefly in turn to Avish, Georgina, and Havers. It was a telecamera, and that might mean trouble, though Havers hoped for the best. As far as he knew, his photograph was not on file in the great Government bureaus, and neither was Georgina's.

As for the Sherlock—Havers half-smiled when he saw a detector being rolled in. The Sherlock was dead, at the moment. No betraying radiation would come from it, unless Pusher activated the mechanism!

He was still at attention. The colonel gave him an at ease, and the search began. Though it was thorough, the guards were careful not to damage anything belonging to a Leader. Once the detector buzzed before a blank panel, and the colonel looked inquiringly at Avish.

"My home laboratory," the Leader said. "You'll need authorization to get into it. Besides, my own key won't work until I televise my Field Chief and have him send the lock-releasing signal."

"Pass it," the colonel said. "We may ask you to open it later, sir, but I hope it won't be necessary."

It wasn't. Not that the searchers found the Sherlock, but calamity struck from an entirely different direction. The first warning Havers had was the way the colonel tilted his head a little to one side in the betraying attitude of a man listening. Faintly in the room they could hear the buzz of the earphone in his helmet. The man's eyes went unfocused for a moment as he concentrated on the incoming message. Then quick attention came into his gaze and he stared at Georgina, a hard, suspicious stare.

"Your name again?" he demanded sharply, not at all in the tone a colonel of the guard would normally use toward a debutante.

Havers heard the faint squeak of panic flatten her voice a little as she answered. And something drastic happened in depths of his mind which he had never explored before.

He had known Georgina for two years. There had once been a time when they had thought they loved each other. The idea had been dropped and lost by tacit consent, though in cases like that one of the two involved is always first to let the affair die. Mart Havers had been the instigator in this one. Georgina was too facile, too unstable for his taste. To his mind she seemed not quite real, so easily did she assume the personality of whatever rôle she played.

It had been nearly a year since they had last exchanged kisses. It had been longer than that since he had fancied himself in love. But when he heard the sound of panic in her voice, suddenly impulses in him unguessed until now took control. The top level of awareness. That level said:

"You aren't expendable, Georgina is. Keep still for the sake of the Freeman!"

That level vanished like smoke. Beneath it lay a stronger and more primitive impulse. He crossed his arms and fell back a step in a way that looked casual. But it brought both hands to the guns beneath his cloak, and his feet were braced for action.

The colonel was listening again, his eyes narrowed. He gestured now, and two of his men fell back to guard the door. Avish was looking from face to face in something like panic as he began to catch the undercurrents in what went on.

"Georgina Curtis," the colonel said slowly. "Name your family line! What code number does your father carry? Where's your family center meeting? Quick, girl, answer me!"

She was, after all, only a Slag girl. Her airs and graces had been copies of the real thing, amazingly accurate copies, but without foundation. La Boucherie had never expected the farce to go this far. He had not briefed her on the ritual questions any girl of good family could answer without even thinking. Her disguise had been meant to deceive Avish, who wanted to be deceived. It would not stand up to any closer scrutiny.

"I—I can't."

It was amazing how the likeness to the debutante dropped from her. The demure arrogance, the delicate graces vanished, and she was a Slag girl dressed up in borrowed finery, staring with scared muteness around the room.

"I thought so." The colonel laughed harshly. "Leader, this woman's an impostor. One of our men recognized her photograph at Headquarters. She was questioned once in the Slag about a holdup. I'll just take her along."

He reached for her arm—and the sough of Haver's smash-gun flame roared between them. An inch to the right and the colonel's hand would have vanished from his wrist.

Mart Havers laughed in sudden reckless excitement. He swung his two guns authoritatively.

“All right—back up!” he said, his voice strange in his own ears because of that joyful recklessness that seemed to close his throat.

He didn’t have time to wonder about it. He had never known quite this stimulation in his other conflicts, this intoxicating happiness that was like feeling an intolerable burden rolled from his shoulders. He was almost disappointed at the ease with which he carried the venture off. For every other man in the room was backing carefully in obedience to the swinging guns. They all knew what a smash-ray can do. They respected those blunt, flattened muzzles.

“Georgina, get behind me,” Havers said. “You by the door—inside here. Quick!”

Stepping carefully, he edged his way around the wall, backing toward the door, hearing Georgina’s rustling skirts and the patter of her feet as she moved behind the shelter of his broad cloaked shoulders. He heard the door creak as she opened it.

He didn’t dare look around, but for one instant of inexplicable disappointment he thought, “I’m going to make it! They aren’t even going to fight!”

Then something crashed against the back of his head that was like lightning made tangible, and time slowed up to a series of infinite seconds, a chain of them, one dropping leisurely from the next.

He had time to be aware of everything that happened. He saw the open mouths of the guards, their stares, the look of satisfaction on the colonel’s face. Havers felt his own muscles go limp, the heavy guns dropping from his hands and taking an immeasurable time to strike the floor. He felt his knees buckle and saw the floor tilt up in his face, but slowly, slowly.

Inside his head, thoughts moved in lightning contrast to the slowed and dimming world. “Georgina’s getting away,” he thought, because he could hear her scurrying feet and no scream to announce her capture. Then he thought, “She’ll never make it—La Boucherie’s going to hate this.” And just before the lights went out entirely, he knew a great deal more about himself, in one flash, than he had known when the blow struck his skull.

This was what he had wanted, unconsciously, all along. The explicit death-wish that had haunted him for years now and had come so near the surface on his way here. “La Boucherie will hate this!” That was the most important thing in the world, revenge on the man who had made his life what it was. An intolerable life, pointless, a failure from start to finish, hatred grinding him from task to fruitless task and hating him the more for his inevitable failures, because under hatred he was incapable of success. The death-wish had a double source—revenge and escape. Personal escape into oblivion, if need be.

That was the reason for his exultant joy in this one fight of all the fights in his life, and the reason for his disappointment when he thought he had succeeded. It was the reason, he knew suddenly, why he had come to Georgina’s defense even though he had no more emotional ties there. Until this last vanishing moment he had not even thought that if she were exposed, then he as her brother would be exposed too. It had been sheer reaction against La Boucherie that had brought the guns to his hands.

He could not have known that twenty-five years ago his father had performed the same pattern of behavior, pulling smash-guns from beneath the web-shielded cloak and going down before the onslaught of the Leaders and their men.

In that first combat, Mart Havers had entered into his exile in La Boucherie’s skilled but blundering hands. In this second combat, following the pattern to its end, Mart Havers stepped out of exile and into his heritage again, though he could not have guessed it as the twenty-

five-year cycle closed and the lights went out and the floor came up to receive his collapsing body. . . .

This was oblivion. It was what he must have longed for over a period of many increasing years, this vast, relaxing grayness. This pleasant, endless, empty dream.

But then the lights began—no, sounds, words, questions that echoed and reechoed until his resting brain stirred into reluctant answer. But only a part of it. The censor slept on in his mind, but the paths where knowledge had imprinted itself in his brain lay open and answering to the skillful questions that came out of the dark.

“Who is Georgina Curtis?”

He told them. Why not? Nothing was important now. He was not even thinking.

“When did you first meet her?”

He told them that, too. Questions and answer went on and on, while the clouds of his slumber began to stir and seethe with a slow turmoil.

“Who? La Boucherie? Kennard La Boucherie?”

“Yes. Yes.”

“When did you first meet Kennard La Boucherie?”

And some miles away across town La Boucherie was packing in angry haste, shooting questions at the frightened Georgina as he worked. It was his own fault, this catastrophe. He was fair enough to know it. He had let anger override his judgment and sent Havers off on a job as dangerous to La Boucherie and the Freeman organization as it was to Havers himself, because in his brain Havers carried, willy nilly, the safety of them all.

Twenty-five years before as John Haversham had died on the hospital steps he had ignited a time-fuse with the blast of his smash-guns which set off this explosion a quarter of a century later. La Boucherie knew it. Too late, he recognized in his own mind the slow growth of the hatred which had culminated in his sending Havers to his own doom and the doom of them all.

“He did it for me!” Georgina was sobbing. “I didn’t realize—I never knew he cared so much. It was all my fault. I know it was!”

“Shut up,” La Boucherie said. “Hand me that box. Quick, girl!”

“What do you think they’re doing to him now?”

Georgina blindly offered him the wrong item, and La Boucherie slapped it out of her hand with a growl. His nerves were cushioned under protective layers of fat, but this emergency had penetrated deep and made them vibrate to every petty annoyance.

“He’ll be right in the middle of the Purge, spilling everything he knows,” La Boucherie told her savagely. “Names and dates and places. Yours, mine. Everything. Guards may be on their way here now. If you can’t help, get out of my way.”

He lumbered across the room to ring for a porter.

“I think I’ve got about half an hour,” he said. “Stop that crying and pull yourself together. Even a porter might be suspicious today, if he saw you. Hurry, now. We’ve got to get out of here fast.”

They made it with fifteen minutes to spare.

CHAPTER VIII

The Purge

The Purge was always efficient, but the psychologists who administered it to Mart Havers took time to marvel to one another at its super-efficiency in this one case. Fascinating things always emerged under narcosynthesis, from every criminal mind that was treated, but usually the things followed an accepted pattern. With Mart Havers there were startling developments.

It was hard to believe. Kennard La Boucherie had never been suspected of subversiveness, and the Freeman were thought a dead issue long ago. But the trail led straight from the comparatively innocent matter of Georgina, questioned as a witness to a Slag robbery, to La Boucherie and the Freeman and the vast underground organization that was moving so carefully toward success after the crippling pogrom of twenty-five years past.

They had to believe Havers. No one lies under narcosynthesis. There would be checks, of course, careful investigations. Meanwhile the information poured out, under the skilled questioning of the psychologists. They learned of La Boucherie's long-term plans, and the paths they were so deviously following toward a point still years away when the Freeman could strike in safe hope of victory. They learned of the Aleutian hideout and of many others.

But they learned only what Mart Havers knew. La Boucherie had not by any means told him everything.

When everything that questions could elicit had emerged at last, it was time to examine the source from which they had come—Mart Havers himself, the individual organism. And what they found surprised them almost as much as the earlier material about the Freeman.

For clearly this was a potential Leader. Mart Havers had known, vaguely the story of his kidnaping and his background. But the investigators needed no such reminder to tell them what potential dynamite they had here in this remarkable brain. Leader material was not so plentiful they could afford to waste it.

With interest and enthusiasm they went to work on Mart Havers. . . .

The next four months were a blank in Mart Havers' memory.

The Cromwellian technicians were skillful. Even though certain lines of research were forbidden, other fields were left wide open, and parapsychology was a science immensely valuable to this civilization. The Leaders ruled only as long as they could rule. And psychology is far more powerful even than an atomic bomb, because it can stop the bomb from going off or being made in the first place.

They didn't change his name. There was no need to erase his mind completely and imprint new memories upon it. Selectivity was necessary. What they did was to dissect Mart Havers' ego, laying his mind open with drugs and hypnosis, and spreading out the material like a complicated aerial map.

He didn't know it. He couldn't have resisted neo-pentothal and Gestalt probing and all the other weapons they used. He was a guinea pig, and they took his mind apart, kept what they wanted, and removed the rest.

They removed it by burying it. It went from the conscious mind into the unconscious, that deep, turgid well that opens in the mind of every man. Complete erasure was impossible, unless they worked with the electronic patterns of pure thought, and they could not do that—

yet. But on the writing in Havers' brain they used ink eradicator, in effect, so that it was no longer visible, even to Mart Havers. Many of his memories faded into invisibility.

Then they wrote new sentences in his mind.

From an electrician's viewpoint, they rewired Mart Havers so that from now on he would operate on AC instead of DC. The psychic drive was different. His basic motivations had been altered. He was the same man, but now he would run on another type of current.

It took time. The process had to be geared to Havers' strength. Years ago, when the process had first been used, too hasty treatment had often resulted in insanity or death. When a man faces an insoluble problem he may go mad, and two types of minds—radically opposed—in the same skull means ethical anode and cathode. So the siphoning was done most carefully these days. As one reservoir was gradually emptied, the other was as gradually filled.

And, in the end, Mart Havers was a Cromwellian. . . .

He didn't have amnesia at all. True, he had forgotten some things, key events that had shaped his character. And other, non-existent events had been substituted, to fit his new character logically. But he was Mart Havers.

A Cromwellian.

While they were at it, they checked his capabilities. At birth he had had Leader potentialities, though no one could tell whether a new-born infant would be an electronics expert or a geopolitician. Environment shaped that. Havers' environment had subtly shaped him, and the tests showed the job at which he would be most competent. So they put memories of technical training in his mind, too, and he came out of the Purge a fully qualified Weather Patrolman—qualified except for practical experience.

After that, he was assigned to Weather Patrol, and liked it.

The mind, like Nature, has a check and balance system. The psychologists had taken away Havers' memories of Georgina and La Boucherie, and had given him nothing in place of the emotions he had felt toward those two. It wasn't as simple as love or hatred; emotions are blended composites. But there was a lack now in Mart Havers' psyche, and his super-ego did something about that.

It was inevitable that the gap had to be filled. It was accident that he met Daniele Vaughan and Andre Kelvin.

He met Daniele first. Another man would probably have overlooked the potentialities of her beauty, for she was one of the rare Female Leaders, and was bound by the traditional rule of "uglification." The Cromwellians ruled by giving their slaves a lesser race to rule in turn—the female of the species, degraded to a pretty, helpless, useless group without any purpose in life except to preen themselves for the males. So the Leaders were mostly men.

Sometimes, however, female babies exhibited Leader potentialities. It was not safe to let them grow up as ordinary women. They would be rebellious, lacking a natural outlet for their capabilities. These were trained as Leaders, but with a difference. You couldn't be a Leader—and a woman!

Daniele wore gray, skilfully tailored so that she looked awkward and mannish in it. Her hair was done up in an unbecoming huddle, and her lips and cheeks had never known rouge or lipstick. Daniele Vaughan was a Leader technician on the lab staff of Weather Control, and it was her job to teach Havers the practical application of certain knowledge already implanted in his brain. She taught him capably, but not as a woman.

Hypnosis had given him a great stock pile of references. He knew what was meant by the lapse rate—the vertical temperature gradient—and the difference between dry adiabatic and saturated adiabatic. He knew how to use the cup anemometer and theodolite-equipped balloons. He knew that Beaufort Number 5 was little more than a moderate wind, and above Beaufort Number 10 the real danger began. He understood isobars and anticyclones and, in theory, he was a Weather Patrolman.

But he needed the practical experience, and he got part of it in the laboratory, working with Daniele Vaughan.

For the first time he enjoyed working at a profession. The harsh, relentless pressure of La Boucherie's watchfulness was gone, and instead there was a real new psychic drive, which left no room for rebellion.

Why should the new Mart Havers rebel? He had a chance for advancement; he was serving the period of apprenticeship that every unfledged Leader must serve before he became a Leader—and that was enough. True, there had been considerable discussion before the authorities decided to admit Havers to the closely guarded Leader ranks, but there was no arguing with the results of the psychological tests. Mental ability made a Leader, and Mart Havers had that.

False memories had been implanted. Havers didn't know he had taken the Purge. He seldom bothered to wonder about his previous life. There was a reason—a mental bloc the psychologists had placed in his mind, so he wouldn't wonder too much. That was insurance against conflict between his new conscious mind and the secrets, now forgotten, buried in his unconscious.

He worked with Daniele. He didn't regard her as a woman. But she regarded him as a man, because she had never known another man like him. Havers' harsh early life had left ineradicable traces.

They were charting a polar front. Daniele sat back in her chair and nodded at Havers.

"All right," she said. "Suppose you tell me. See how much you've learned in six weeks."

Havers studied the map. It told him something, but not enough. A cold wave was advancing, there would be variations in pressure. Perhaps a storm near the border. That didn't matter. But—

He found another, larger, map and plotted the weather with swift accuracy. Daniele watched him, her gray eyes unreadable.

Havers laughed.

"Don't break it," he said. "Not at this time of year. There may be a mild storm in Dakota, but that doesn't matter."

"Why?"

"The coastal fruit crop," he told her. "Hot days, cold nights. Too cold for this time of year. The growers need a cloud blanket to save their crops."

"How?"

This was rote. "Nocturnal clouds will reflect the outgoing radiation from the ground at night, after a hot day. The heat will just bounce back and forth between the ground and the clouds all night long, instead of being dissipated into space, which would let the crops freeze. That's why we don't want to break up the storm before it gets far enough south. Satisfied?"

She nodded briefly. "That's enough for today," she said, rising and yawning. "I'm tired. From now on it's routine, anyway, and only a few more days of it. You're going out on Patrol

Wednesday, aren't you?"

"That's right Patrol Fifty-one."

"Oh?" she said, an odd note in her voice. "Well, you'll have a good captain over you. Clean up the lab before you turn in. Good night."

She went out, her shoulders sagging tiredly. Havers looked after her for a moment and then whistling, went to work. He worked slowly. His mind was full of the new project—the field experience to be gained on actual Patrol duty.

It was an exciting job, a glamorous one, and a vital one. Ever since mankind had first made his epochal step toward controlling the weather in 1946, when Vincent Shaefer dropped six pounds of dry ice through a cloud, supercooling and precipitating it, Earth had begun to be a little more under control of its dominant race. Weather could be controlled!

To those who had survived smashing hurricanes, torrential floods, frigid cold snaps, baking arid spells, and the thousand other vagaries that any planet must have, unless it is a perfectly smooth surface of either land or water, revolving on an upright instead of a tilted ecliptic, weather control had been a miracle.

Even in 1946 and 1947 it had been possible to predict the future. Not the immediate future, perhaps, but soon—soon.

A farmer could raise delicate crops and be sure that a snowstorm wouldn't ruin it, because the storm could be precipitated before it reached him, in some area where snowfall would be harmless, or even beneficial, if the snows could be used to replenish a watershed. It meant the virtual end of droughts. It meant that great cities and transportation systems would never again be snowbound and immobilized.

Even in 1947 that could be foreseen, and today Earth was more nearly Eden, climatically speaking, than it had been since the prehistoric days when weather could be predicted for two thousand years ahead, because there were no land surfaces to cause variations. The particular ecology had been balanced. Man controlled the weather.

Not easily, and not completely. There were still catastrophes at times, and always an unceasing vigilance had to be maintained against the ancient, inhuman foe that sent out attack after attack from the birthplace of the storms. It was a never-ending war against an enemy with infinite resources.

An enemy whose voice was thunder. Whose sword was the lightning. That implacable foe whose bludgeon was the hurricane itself. No wonder the Weather Patrol was glamorous, pitted against the most powerful force that had ever existed in the world.

As the planet rolled ceaselessly around its tremendous spiral, it gave birth every hour to a god greater than Zeus, greater than his allies, the Cyclopes who ruled the thunder and lightning, and the Hecatonchires, the hundred-handed monsters who shook the Earth.

Down from the Pole rolled the storms, and up to meet the ancient gods of wind and darkness flashed the jet-planes of the Weather Patrol—the Storm Smashers.

CHAPTER IX

Daniele Vaughan, Leader

It was at times like this, in the rare moments when he was alone, that Mart Havers had trouble with his memories. Mostly his work was planned to give him small opportunity for introspection. But he was beginning to realize, in a dim, half-remembering way, that his own past was too vague.

He had memories of boyhood in an institute for orphans—the mnemonic experts had tried to parallel the real facts as closely as possible—and of adolescence and adulthood training for this job. But there was a curious quality of—thinness? Emptiness? He could not quite identify it. He only knew a bloc in his mind kept him from looking back closely, or from wanting to look back. He knew this was not normal, and it bothered him.

The job they had done on his mind was not perfect. For one reason, his mind itself was of a more complicated fabric than the experts had ever before worked on. No one of Leader calibre had needed such alteration until Havers came along. Basically they had succeeded. He now believed wholeheartedly in the Cromwellian cause, in their credo and their sets of rules. He believed because of a long chain of interlocking pseudo-experiences carefully implanted in his memory.

But there were empty places they had not filled. There were depths they had not been able to reach. And in these hollows a vacuum existed that strove to fill itself and sent little whirlpools of nameless discontent upward to the surface of his mind.

Georgina had left such a hollow.

He found Daniele Vaughan's identification disc while he was straightening the laboratory that night. Trailing a length of fine broken chain, it lay beneath the chair where she had sat. He picked it up and studied the flat, cryptic symbols that told so little about Daniele Vaughan. Well, she would need the medallion in the morning. He had better return it.

It might be another thousand years before man begun to understand fully the complicated colloid of the human brain. As Havers stood before the door of Daniele's suite a curious current stirred in his mind. He could not have traced it to its source, and the solemn psychologists who had laid out the artificial patterns of his brain were helpless, too, when they left those vacuum spots—but Havers was unconsciously ready tonight for what lay before him.

A cool night wind moved gently through the half-open door. He could hear soft footsteps inside.

He rang, and Daniele's pleasant, impersonal voice called:

"Is it you, Mega? Come in. I've been expecting you."

He obeyed before he realized that she was not talking to Mart Havers.

The room was broad and high, carpeted in deep blue, and dim except for the reading light in the far corner, falling from a fashionably ornate spiral fluorescent made like a flowering vine. There were record books on the low table beside the chair, and a familiar pair of reading-glasses lay upon them. Not for Daniele was the vanity of contact lenses.

For a moment he did not see her. Then her voice came again and he turned toward the tall windows through which moonlight came strongly, and the brilliant glow that was Chicago outside, a jewel-case towering up into the starry heavens and mingling its stars with theirs.

Chicago? He was puzzled for a second. It should have been another city. Reno? No, it couldn't be Reno. He had never seen Reno, surely. He searched his shallow memory and found no clue.

"Mega?" the gentle voice from the balcony inquired. "Who is it?"

Then Daniele came into the open glass doors and stood there staring, and for an instant Mart Havers was speechless.

If it had not been for that pleasant soft voice he would never have known her. The blue and the pastels in this room might have given him a hint that it had been decorated for a blonde, and in their private quarters even women Leaders had a free hand.

But to say "blonde" was not to describe Daniele Vaughan with any justice. It was so delicate and elusive a fairness that no flamboyance in her struck the eye. Her hair which was braided tight all day under the severe laboratory cap flowed now in a smooth stream like white molten metal over one shoulder and nearly to her waist. She was lifting it with both hands against her ears, holding the heavy stream away from her head, when she first saw Havers. And for a moment she was speechless, too.

Then she laughed and said, "I thought you were my hairdresser. I'm sorry. You see my secret. Even a female Leader can be too vain to cut her hair."

He was not even aware then he had not answered her. He was staring with new vision at the delicate, serene face framed in the ash-blond hair. It was the same face he had seen daily for a long while, but. . . No, not the same at all. Subtle differences too elusive to name had wrought an indefinable change in her. That ritual "uglification" meant among other things a face tinted to a monotone with careful emphasis on the wrong features.

But now the make-up was gone and Daniele's wild-rose coloring against the background of her skillfully colored room all but took Havers' breath away. And under the carefully shapeless uniform which was her daily dress had been hidden a body as lovely as her face. The tightly girdled robe she wore now made no secret of it.

One of the whirlpools which had been troubling the surface of Mart Havers' mind slowed imperceptibly, began to still. Deep down under it an emptiness from which it had risen was filling itself as he stood gazing at Daniele Vaughan.

"You—I never knew it, but you're beautiful." He was surprised to hear his own words.

She smiled. "No. Passably pretty, that's all. It's just the contrast from the way I have to look all day. Really, Havers, you shouldn't be here. What do you want?"

He stepped inside, closed the door, put his broad back against it. Under the heavy black brows he grinned at her deliberately.

"I just want to look at you. That's all."

"Don't be impertinent, Havers." The wild-rose coloring deepened a little.

"Don't be selfish, Vaughan!" He was surprised at his own sudden daring. He did not question it. He let the words come as they would. "You've been cheating me all these weeks. Now let me look."

She swept the stream of pale molten hair off her shoulder, tossing it down her back with a quick motion of her bare uplifted arm. Then she came forward resolutely and reached for the door.

"Outside, Havers. I don't want to report you, but—"

He seized the wrist that reached past him, pulling her a little off balance, so that he had an excuse to put out his other arm and catch her. For the first time he was aware of how

delicately small she was in contrast to his height and bulk.

She put both hands on his arm to steady herself. Calmly she looked up into his face.

“Don’t make a fool of yourself, Havers,” she said quietly. “You’re forgetting something.”

“I’m just discovering something,” he contradicted her, grinning.

“This is exactly the reason I have to dress the way I do,” she told him, making her voice dispassionate. “You see? The moment you find I’m a woman you treat me like any little fluffy fool you’ve known outside the lab. All women needn’t be morons—it’s only a fashion. Don’t think you’re flattering me when you act this way, Havers. I don’t like it. Let me go.”

For an instant the muscles of his arm trembled and he thought he was going to tighten that embrace in which he half held her. She thought so too. She looked up at him in silence, and the color deepened in her face, and her lips parted in a protest she did not voice. They were quiet for what seemed like a long moment, and in the air between them a sudden unspoken emotion vibrated, too formless to name, perhaps too dangerous to name. But as real as the air they breathed.

He could have kissed her. He meant to. He could see she expected that he would. But the justice of what she had just said came to him more fully in every second he delayed, and whatever jaunty intoxication had come over him in recognition of her beauty, and reaction to it, chilled in his mind.

Slowly he let her go.

She stepped back, her eyes still upon his in an almost searching look. For Daniele had never known anyone like this man, and there were undercurrents between them now that frightened and fascinated them both.

“I’m sorry,” Havers said to her, surprised to find his voice a little unsteady and his breath coming faster than usual. “You’re right. I expect I’m a fool. Forget it, if you—if you’re willing.”

She lifted her brows at him.

“No!” he said rapidly, in answer to that query. “Don’t forget it. That was a kiss, whether I took it or not. Remember that.” There was no coquetry about her.

“I know it was. I will remember. But—”

The ring of the doorbell interrupted whatever she was about to say. She frowned and glanced at the door.

“Mega,” she said softly.

“I’ll go. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. But you’ll have to go, of course.”

“May I come back later?”

She put her hand to her cheek and lifted the heavy hair away, pulling her head back with it. Without looking at him she shook her head, making the pale stream swing upon her shoulders.

“Why not?”

“You’re due for Patrol duty next week,” she said obliquely, not meeting his eyes. “Right? Do you know your assignment?”

“Patrol Fifty-one. Captain Kelvin.”

“Andre Kelvin,” she said gently. “Andre’s a wonderful person. We’re going to be married next year.”

Havers opened his mouth and then closed it again. In the silence the bell rang again, and this time he did not interfere when she reached to open the door. But just before the handle

turned in her fingers he said:

“No. I warned you that was a kiss. I expect there’ll be others, more tangible. I won’t take Andre Kelvin for an answer.”

She smiled. She pulled the door open.

“Come in, Mega,” she said. “You’re late. Havers—good night.”

The door closed quietly behind him.

CHAPTER X

Weather Patrol

Captain Andre Kelvin said, "We've got two jobs. We don't need a jet-plane for the first one, but we do for the second. Stratosphere work."

The crew of five men were in an office attached to the hangers. Mart Havers, in the blue-and-gold uniform of Weather Patrol, stood with the others, at ease, watching the blackboard over which Kelvin's pointer hovered. He switched his gaze to the Captain.

Andre Kelvin was a tall, long-boned, rangy man, with blond hair and a deceptively young face.

"The first job is to bust a cloud over the Canadian Rockies," he said now. "That's a cinch. The second one needs more explaining, though you've been briefed already. But I'll run over the main points. The sun's corona has been acting up. It takes a coronagraph with a birefringent filter to make the predictions we need, but that's been done. Electrons are going to blast into the upper atmosphere at a high rate—solar-generated electrons. That's nothing new. But we've orders to make analytical recordings of the effects of that electronic bombardment on artificial meteors. Got that?"

His eyes rested on Havers, the new man. Havers nodded.

"Know what artificial meteors are?"

"Slugs loaded into rockets that explode only at high altitudes."

"Yeah. They go fast—seven miles a second. They'll be watched from Earth and photographed with telescopic equipment for study, but we want to get close photographs, without any intervening troposphere. These slugs aren't iron. Some of them are fissionable isotopes. They're testing all sorts of effects this time."

"What's, this got to do with Weather Patrol?" one man asked.

"Weather Control depends on communication, like most tech-systems," Kelvin explained. "Solar storms can mess up tele-radio plenty. And solar radiation has a lot to do with the weather directly, too. The more the astrophysicists find out about the sun, the farther ahead weather predictions can be made, allowing for the variables that mess us up sometimes. Now—we'll wear thermosuits, just in case. I don't think one of the rockets will hit us. They're aimed carefully, and our route's laid out in advance. But you never know. Remember—don't take chances topside." Again he looked at Havers. "That's all. Let's jet."

He led the way out to the field.

Following him, Havers turned the last words in his mind. Was that coincidence, or was the man warning him obliquely to stay away from Daniele? He thought it was coincidence. He had seen Daniele only briefly since that night and never alone. She was as remote and impersonal with him as ever, but now and again their eyes would meet and for an instant hold a remembering stare. She was not pretending the episode had never taken place. She was simply dismissing it.

Deliberately Havers put the memory of her out of his mind. If Andre Kelvin knew what had happened—well, that didn't matter either. Warning or no warning, Havers knew what he meant to do, when the time came. Meanwhile, there was work to be done.

He followed Kelvin toward the plane. . . .

It's easy to retrain a man after the Purge. There are psychic blocs in his mind; he misses certain of his memories, and he doesn't like to think about those gaps. He concentrates completely upon the work on hand, giving it his fullest attention—which is why Mart Havers, who had already assimilated the technical training, was able to pick up the field experiences with surprising ease.

Jet-planes move fast. They had to use a precision bomb-sight in order to hit the clouds over the Canadian Rockies before they were jetting above the Pacific, and it was impossible to tell with the naked eye whether they had succeeded. But the relayed television shots told them. The pounds of dry ice smashed into the cloud belt, exploding vaporous blasts toward the upper tropopause, and the dry ice broke the deadlock of super-cooling that wouldn't let the droplets of vapor freeze. From the created ice seeds grew snowflakes instantly, and as precipitation occurred, snow poured on the Canadian Rockies.

The fall would replenish the watershed there, and would save southern agricultural areas, in the path of the storm, from blighted crops.

That was the first job. It was routine. Jet-planes weren't necessary for a simple snow-making task, but Weather Control was killing two birds at once.

Mart Havers, by the captain's order, sat beside Kelvin at the control board, which supervised the activities of the entire crew. Kelvin spoke to the pilot through the microphone, and slanted a glance at Havers.

"Know why we're climbing?" he asked.

"Well, this is a stratosphere job."

"Sorry. I meant, do you know why we haven't begun to accelerate yet?"

Havers considered that. There was acceleration, plenty of it, but nothing at all compared to the possibilities this plane held.

Kelvin made a few deft gestures at his control board. "We've got trapezoidic wings," he remarked, apparently at random.

"Oh," Havers said. "The trans-sonic wall."

"Give. Details."

"Speed of sound is seven hundred and sixty-one m. p. h. Supersonic's a thousand m. p. h. and up. Between those speeds you get the trans-sonic wall, where air conditions are fouled up. Props, wings, airfoils don't react normally. The shock waves can tear a ship to pieces in seconds when you hit the wall."

"And?"

"Trapezoidic wings stabilize the center of pressure during the shift-over. That helps. But it helps to climb above the cirrus level, too, into the base of the stratosphere, where density's less and shock waves aren't so intense. When you get high enough, you can crack the wall safely. We'll need supersonic speeds, I guess, to be able to keep track of those artificial meteors."

"What's the worst point of the wall?"

"Six hundred and fifty to nine hundred m. p. h. That's when the standing sound wave can step in."

Neither man needed to explain the dangers of compressibility. As long as air flows smoothly over the polished hide of a jet-propelled plane, there is no danger. But when you begin to hit 650 m. p. h., the demon of the air uses a microscope to find flaws. Bullets and gas

blasts can interrupt the smooth air flow, and even a squash bug on the edge of a wing can wreck a plane, once the sound waves start hammering.

So they found a new alloy that had all the qualities they needed, and planes were redesigned. Even then it was safer to hit the stratosphere before climbing into sonic speeds. Above the wall it was easy riding, comparatively speaking. But first you had to get over the wall.

That meant smart piloting. A smooth, straight course, because the least wavering might be catastrophic. Robot controls were safer than human pilots, and Havers saw that the robot pilot had taken over now. They were nearing the wall.

Every man abroad let out his breath the moment the green light flashed from the ceiling. This time they were safe.

It was Mart Havers' real introduction to the Weather Patrol. No implanted memories, no lab-tech training could hope to indicate the scope of Weather Control. No wonder this was the most glamorous job on Earth or above it, Mart thought, as he watched the blazing glory of an alien world unfold upon the vision screens. The only real adventure left in mankind.

The sky was black, dead black, beyond the clustered brilliance of the stars and planets. The sun's corona made a jagged ring of white fire against that ultimate night. And from the distant Earth came rocket after rocket, exploding into showers of blood-red and silver-white meteors, while the jet-plane swung in tremendous circles, shaken with its own thunder, the blast of its jets streaming like the blade of a sword of fire behind it.

So, amid the chaos of man-made creation, Mart Havers had his initiation. . . .

The weeks and months slipped past. Gradually, imperceptibly, Mart's psych became adjusted and reoriented. There were periods spent in the tech-labs, but he preferred flight duty. He learned to apply the knowledge implanted in his brain. Over the Alps he battled the Föhn, and on the other side of the planet he met the same dry air mass where it was called the Chinook.

He flew Weather Patrol from the Horse Latitudes through the Southeast Trades, and beyond, and back again. He learned to play the clouds like a complicated instrument, to bring the results ordered by his superiors. He jetted beyond the stratosphere and drove through the burning Borealis, in the ionosphere itself, and he helped battle a Beaufort 10 wind, which is not quite a typhoon.

The Cromwellian psychologists had been wise to provide Purged men with an engrossing objective. His work kept Mart Havers reasonably happy, except for the occasional moments of queer restlessness and emptiness that came apparently without cause. He found himself thinking more and more of Daniele Vaughan.

If he had wanted to forget her it would not have been possible, for she was still his official mentor and checked twice a week with him, either by televisior or in person, if he were not out on patrol duty. Since she could have asked to have him transferred to another mentor, he concluded that she too found their meetings too interesting to drop. Impersonal as she remained, he knew she remembered. She allowed him to be sure of that.

And their acquaintance grew. They found similar tastes, they compared dislikes and reactions, they built up the usual code of private jokes and references that grow between two people working regularly on a congenial job together.

Though nothing ever happened that Andre Kelvin could have found fault with, though every word and gesture between them had complete impersonality, yet there was a growing

undercurrent of intimacy which flowed stronger, and stronger with every meeting. Each was willing to wait—but a climax built slowly up as time went on, toward some explosion still in the future, which neither could yet be sure about.

Under other circumstances, Havers would probably have liked Andre Kelvin without reservation. They worked together pleasantly enough. Kelvin was a casual man who could tighten into an efficient machine when need arose, as it did arise one day, bringing still another set of subterranean conflicts in Mart Havers' mind to a sudden crisis.

CHAPTER XI

A Serious Problem

Kelvin had called the crew into his office for briefing.

"New orders," he told them when they had settled down. "No definite time yet, but zero may come any time from now on. It depends on whether that cold over Maine breaks up, and the Shetland-Faroes High, and a lot of other things. We've got to strike at exactly the right moment."

"Stratosphere job?" someone asked.

"I don't think so. The tech-lab has several plans worked out, but nobody's sure which one we'll use. By the look of the sky, though, I'd say Plan Two."

Kelvin nodded toward the wall, where four huge charts had been set up. They looked complicated, with the intricate details of isobars, isotherms, an occluded depression moving southward, and the curving shadows of the rain belts, but Mart read the maps' meanings as easily now as Kelvin himself did. He looked again at Plan Two, and his mouth tightened slightly.

The captain was still talking. Havers brought back his thoughts from the formless places where they were straying and tried to listen. He could not concentrate. The best he could do was keep silent and pretend to be attentive until Kelvin had finished and asked:

"Any questions?"

There were none.

"Okay. You're alerted. Don't leave the field."

The crew went out, but Havers didn't follow. Kelvin had turned back to the work on his desk, but he looked up and caught Mart's eye.

It came out unexpectedly, before Havers knew what he was saying.

"Count me out."

Kelvin looked across the desk for a puzzled second. Then he got up and went across the room to a window. He stood looking out, his back to Havers.

"I don't get it," he said.

Oddly enough, neither did Mart. He was trying to search into those darkened corners of his brain, those blocked-off passages, trying to understand why he felt this inexplicable, importunate pressure.

"I—I don't want this job," he said, his voice a little unsteady. "That's all. You've got other crewmen."

Kelvin turned. "Look," he said, "Everybody gets cold feet, even old hands, in Weather Patrol. The worst thing you can do is give in to it. The stratosphere jet jobs are a lot more dangerous than this. It's routine. I'll shift you to another post in the ship."

"I said count me out."

The captain rubbed his jaw. He studied Havers.

"I can't do that," he said. "Believe me, I've had the same feelings myself. It's nothing to get excited about. Only there's discipline."

Havers was still trying to open the locked doors in his mind. They would not stir, no matter how desperately he tried. He drew a long shuddering breath.

"The devil with discipline," he said, and turned around and went out. . . .

Daniele Vaughan called him on the visor in his quarters. Mart didn't get up from the edge of the bed where he was sitting, smoking a cigarette that had no taste. He flipped on the switch and said "yeah."

"What's wrong?" she asked him.

Mart scowled into the visor screen. "So Captain Andre Kelvin told you all about it, eh?"

"Certainly he did," Daniele said calmly. "He doesn't want to get you in a mess. If he'd reported you through channels, you might be in real trouble."

"You weren't due to call me till tomorrow."

"I know. I'll call you tomorrow. Then I can make out my routine report on your progress. But I'm calling you now so we can thrash this out and have a good report tomorrow."

Havers grimaced. Daniele looked at him in the visor screen with a faintly worried air.

"I don't understand this, Mart," she said. "Don't you like Patrol work? Is that it?"

"No. I like the work."

"Then why refuse to go out on patrol?"

Havers crushed his cigarette between finger and thumb and threw it across the room.

"I don't know!" he snapped. "I don't know why! Let it go at that."

"For some reason I don't understand," Daniele said, "the top men are interested in following your progress. They don't tell me their secrets, but I can guess it would be a lot better for you to steer a straight course than go off beam at this point. As a matter of fact, I ought to report your conduct immediately. I should have done it before I vised you. But Mart—go on back to Andre and—"

"Apologize?"

"You should know him better than that. He doesn't want an apology. I'll vise him myself. Shall I? It's a routine flight, Mart, after all."

Havers put his hand to his forehead, as though to still the sudden ache that had begun to pound there. Locked doors, locked doors . . . And somewhere, somehow, a pressure he could not understand and could not resist.

"I can't do it," he said hoarsely. "I—can't make that flight. I *can't do it!*"

His orders came through two hours later. Havers didn't see Kelvin before he left. He simply gave his uniform a few careless touches and went out to the field where a jet-plane waited—for him. He was no longer trying to open locked doors or even to think. Temporarily, he had given up. The problem was too difficult, especially since he couldn't even understand its nature.

It was as though a trans-sonic wall had risen in his brain, and he could not pass it without cracking up. But it was more tangible than the airy hammer of that wall of speed. It was a solid barrier that had risen within his mind.

He could not pass that barrier. He knew that he could not make the flight Kelvin planned. But whenever he asked himself why, there was only darkness and turmoil and an unanswerable question.

So he gave up. Let the higher-ups do what they wanted to him. It was better than trying to resolve his own problems.

Automatically he checked the cloud masses and found himself trying to predict tomorrow's weather as the plane roared southwest.

Reno was the destination. This wasn't too surprising, since the Nevada city had become one of the key spots for the leading Cromwellians. As the plane decelerated Havers noticed

the sprawling squalor of the Slag, a spilled ink-blot beside the jeweled brightness of Reno.

Sight of the Slag stirred nothing at all in his memory.

The trip through Mnemonic Center did arouse a slight feeling of familiarity, though. He couldn't localize it, but once or twice he thought that something like this had happened before. When he asked questions, one of the psychologists brushed him off with a reference to the *déjà vu* phenomenon, and he learned nothing.

Nor did he understand the purpose of the tests he underwent. They would not tell him, and after a time he didn't bother to ask. He went with sullen submissiveness from one gadget to another, apparently a responsive patient, but not quite as obedient as he seemed. A small seed of rebellion began to grow within him.

Before it had time to sprout, the doors of Mnemonic Center closed behind him. He was conducted to a great building towering in the center of Reno, and taken up in an elevator to the roof.

The apartment there was slightly palatial. So was the great room Havers entered, alone, at one end of his journey. The farther wall was a huge transparent curve of glass, through which could be seen the lights of Reno, beginning to appear as the sun dropped behind Tahoe.

The man standing looking out turned as Havers came in, and at his gesture luminous incandescents glowed into being high up on the walls. He was tall, thin, and dark—hair, eyes, and swarthy complexion. Only the smoothness of his movement saved him from seeming awkward. What Havers noticed first was that he seemed very, very tired.

His voice was tired too.

"Hello, Havers," he said. "Please sit down. My name's Llewelyn."

Alexis Llewelyn, the mnemonics expert, the Leader. Mart had heard of him, since he was one of the highest of the top Cromwellians. He sat down warily, keeping his eyes steady on Llewelyn.

"Relax," the Leader said. "Smoke? Drink? I won't say this is off the record, because it isn't, but I wanted to have a talk with you for a number of reasons. Those machines at the Center are competent, of course, but there are intangibles a machine can never catch." He paused, frowning at some obscure thought, and then came back to Havers with a start. "You can stop worrying. I know more about your case than you do. Perhaps more than anybody else. And don't ask me to explain that. I may, some time, but not now. The main thing is—why did you refuse to take on that routine Weather Patrol flight?"

Mart lay back in his chair, feeling as tired as Llewelyn looked.

"I don't know," he said. "That's all. I don't know."

The Leader nodded. "Fine, if it's true. Or perhaps not. A good deal depends . . . Unfortunately we can't tell you all the circumstances, for rather important reasons, but I will tell you this. You'll be watched and checked for the next few days. I want you to react normally. That's your best out. Nothing unpleasant will happen to you under any circumstances; but we've got to know your normal reactions, so go ahead and do what you feel like doing. It'll be all right."

The tired voice sounded reassuring.

"I wish I could be sure it'd be all right," Havers said. "I—I don't know."

"Don't worry about it. I think I know something of what's going on in your mind. Well, it isn't important. You can trust Cromwellianism to take care of you. Feel free to shift any responsibility. I suspect you have a serious problem, but you don't know what it is. Is that right?"

Mart nodded, surprised. “Something like that. I wasn’t afraid of that assignment. It was only—”

“Plan Two was the one that bothered you, I gather,” Llewelyn said. “I’m not familiar with the mechanics of Weather Control myself, but I’m told that plan would have affected the weather in the Aleutians, suddenly and violently. Right?”

“The Aleutians? Why—yes. That’s right. The cold front—”

Mart went into detail, feeling a curious sense of relief as he talked, explaining just how Plan Two would adjust the pressure areas and bring a phenomenal warm spell, as a by-product, to the Aleutian group.

Llewelyn didn’t seem to be watching him, but every time Mart hesitated, the Leader put in a casual word that kept the monologue going.

CHAPTER XII

The Maze of no Memory

Realizing how long he had been talking, Havers paused after a while. The stiffness of embarrassment chilled him. Llewelyn got up and wandered to the immense window.

"Sir," Mart said suddenly, "may I ask you a question?"

"Why not? What is it?"

"Is there something wrong with me? My—mind, I mean?"

"Do you think there is?" Llewelyn said, without turning.

Havers tried to marshal the few facts he had.

"I don't know. But there's—something—I don't know. Why was I brought to Mnemonic Center, and given all those tests after I'd refused that assignment?"

"Weather Patrolmen don't refuse assignments, as a rule. That might be one reason, eh?"

"There's more to it than that, I think," Havers said. "I don't even know why I refused to take this particular order. Any other job, but not that one. And I don't know why. I should know. Only—"

Llewelyn came back from the window. "Only what?"

"I think the trouble's with me. Things seem strange sometimes, no—not solid. As though they were shadows of the real things, whatever they might be. And—"Havers' laugh was strained—"I don't feel any too real myself."

"Down at the Center they'd call it dereistic thinking," the Leader said. "Feelings of unreality often occur. The environment doesn't appear natural nor as it appeared formerly." Llewelyn paused briefly, his glance flicking Havers' face, then sliding away again. "And in depersonalization there's a sense of change in yourself. Your body feels altered, unreal. But emotional stresses can cause those feelings."

"I'm not under emotional stress."

"How do you know? It may be submerged. That's why I'm saying, give your impulses free rein for the next few days. Your buried stresses may come out in the open, and then they won't be so hard to remedy. As for feelings of unreality, I have 'em sometimes myself. I'm older than you—old enough to have seen a world change overnight. I can say things aren't the way they used to be, and I'd be right. Things have changed."

"But they're not changing now," Havers said, and the other man nodded.

"Is that the trouble, then?" Llewelyn asked.

"I don't know. I hadn't seen it in just that light before. But I wonder. The whole world did change overnight, didn't it? But now it's stopped."

"Stopped?"

"There are a few government-controlled Moon rockets on the regular run. But why not the planets?"

"The Moon's a mining base. It's near enough to be controlled. The planets aren't. There might be trouble. We'll have to be sure of the Earth before we try for Mars or Venus."

"That's an explanation," Havers said, "but I'm wondering something. Who gives the orders?"

Llewelyn blinked.

"I've never questioned this before, either," Mart went on, "though it's pretty obvious. You're at the top, sir. Do you give the orders?"

"Some of them," the Leader said. "Mnemonic Center is under my jurisdiction:"

"That isn't quite what I mean. Who gives you your orders, or does anybody?"

"Well, there's the Leader Council," Llewelyn said, and Havers suddenly got the impression that the man did not want to talk about this matter at all. "They follow the tenets of Cromwellianism, and they're the high administrative group. They inherited certain methods and principles of science and logic from the pre-Cromwell world."

His voice died away. He looked more tired than before, and something like doubt showed in his thin face.

A signal hummed. Llewelyn spoke into a nearby teleaudio, and looked up at Havers as he finished.

"Sorry. I'll see you again soon. Meanwhile remember what I said. About submerged conflicts. Do what you want to. You'll be my guest for a few days. I'll have someone show you to your suite."

He smiled at Havers and the two men stood up as a servant entered the room.

"He'll show you the way," Llewelyn said. "Then you're on your own."

Half-way to the door Mart paused as a woman appeared on the threshold. She was not young, but she seemed to give an appearance of youth, perhaps because of the atmosphere of restful calm that surrounded her.

"Margot," Llewelyn said, hurrying toward her. He took her hand. "This is Weather Patrolman Havers," he introduced Mart. "Havers—my wife."

Thus Mart Havers saw his mother again, for the first time in many years.

He did not know her.

And she did not recognize him. . . .

Until now, Havers thought, sitting on the edge of his new bed and staring blankly at the windowed wall before him—until now the one purpose which had seemed to guide his life had been busyness. Every moment, almost, until today, had been planned to fill his time to overflowing. And the effect—the planned effect, perhaps—had been that he'd had no time to think or to worry because he could not think.

But now he had too much time.

This was the second day as Llewelyn's guest. He had seen only the servants who brought his meals. He had not gone out or wished to. For long hours he had lain on his bed, arm across his eyes, striving in all the ways he could devise to push through that closed curtain which shut his own past away.

He had tried direct chains of memory, tracing back from this moment to his last clear recollection of the past. He had tried random attacks, forcing his mind to emptiness until something strong enough to outwit the barrier swam up to the surface, and linking backward from that. He had ransacked his memory for the flotsam of early life and groped in vain, among childhood recollections. He had recollections of childhood, yes but they were not satisfying, somehow not quite real.

And in some ways what he did remember was irrational. He knew he had grown up in an orphan institution, training all along for this weather work. And yet, dimly, he seemed to recall a fat man in bright clothes and a dark aura of hatred whenever he remembered the man.

Some officer at the institution, perhaps? No. He knew that was wrong, but he did not know how or why. And surely no institution child would have been allowed the wild forays among dark byways which he could so dimly recall in fragmentary form out of his past.

Those were dreams, he told himself wearily. They must have been dreams, of the kind a romantic boy weaves for himself to compensate for a dull life. But why did the memory of them seem so much more real than those realities he knew he must have lived in the institute?

Llewelyn was testing him deliberately, of course, testing to see how strong the artificial barriers were in Havers' mind. Because so strong a bloc against bringing necessary disaster upon the Aleutians had somehow managed to come through the wall, there was only one way to tell him how much more might come through. Better to invite trouble now, while it could be watched and measured.

The servants reported meticulously to Llewelyn all that Mart did. He made careful notes and waited.

On the third day Daniele televised Mart.

"May I come up?" she said directly, giving him a level gray stare from under her lashes.

She wore, as always, the severe uniform of her class, the clever makeup that hid her beauty. But Havers never saw her now without superimposing upon that plain background the one brief recollection of the real Daniele which shone so much more vividly in his mind than the reality he looked on.

"Of course." He rubbed his eyes. "Shall I meet you somewhere?"

"No. Anything wrong?"

"Oh no. I'm a little drowsy is all. I've been trying to remember."

"Remember what?"

"That's the trouble. I—I don't know."

Her voice and her manner had lost the gradually increasing intimacy which had grown up between them in the past months. Tonight she seemed as remote as when they first met.

"I'm on my way," she said crisply, and blanked out.

Something was wrong. He knew her well enough to recognize that, and he waited impatiently for her to ring at the door. It should have been exciting, this prospect of being alone with her for the first time since the moment when their relationship had taken its curious turn toward intimacy. But Havers felt uneasy when the ring came at last and he opened the door to her.

"Alone?" she asked, glancing around the room as she came in.

"Yes. What's wrong?"

She wheeled sharply, looked up at him, opened her lips to speak, and then instead shook her head and turned away. Havers had never known her to show such indecision before. On an impulse he took her shoulders in his hands, turning her to face him.

"Daniele," he said softly. "Daniele, what is it?"

And when she still would not speak, he released one shoulder to reach out and pull the spectacles from her nose. The blue eyes looked up at him, long-lashed, cloudy now with trouble. Gently he pushed the gray cap from her forehead until tendrils of pale gold hair showed, and the coronet of tight braids above them.

"That's more like it," he said. "That's the Daniele I really know. Do you still remember, Daniele?"

She would not pretend to misunderstand.

“Yes. I’ve been remembering all this time—longer than I should. All that was a mistake, Mart.”

“But—”

He narrowed his eyes at her, trying to understand, thinking of these months past when their growing friendship had based itself on the unspoken acceptance of the kiss they had never shared—yet.

“It might have been a mistake, once,” he said. “But not now. Not when we know each other so well. We’ve been working toward this meeting a long time, Daniele. I’ve been going along on the idea that there was a chance for you and me. A good chance. A chance that was getting better.”

“No!” Her voice was sharp, but he would not let her finish.

“You’ve been talking to Kelvin, then. He’s persuaded you—”

“No. He doesn’t know anything about all this.”

“What’s wrong, then? Up to a few days ago I was sure things were going well between us, Daniele. From that first evening, I thought you felt as I did. I know you did. You aren’t like most women. You wouldn’t make a game of this. If you hadn’t responded to me you wouldn’t have gone on with our check-ups. You’d have handed me over to someone else. Is it because I cracked up a little over that patrol business? Did you think I was afraid, Daniele? No, you’re not such a fool.”

“It was that, Mart. Or partly that. Let me talk.”

She pulled free and walked away from him toward the wall, where a mutacolor picture in a heavily carved frame coiled slow tint through slow tint in a drowsy pattern.

“Listen and let me tell you what I can,” she said, and fingered the stud that controlled the picture, speeding up the action until light followed upon light in a rhythm almost martial.

“I *did* respond, as you put it, after that evening. There’s something about you different from anything I’ve ever known before. It’s exciting and—dangerous, perhaps. Andre is all I ever thought I could want, until you came along that night. But Mart, what’s wrong with you? Do you know?” She gave him an anxious, searching look.

“I wish I did know. Do you?”

She did not answer him. After a moment, still playing with the stud, she went on.

“I’ll tell you frankly, Mart, you’re not the man for me. I thought you were. I know now you’re not. Isn’t that enough?”

He drew a quick breath to protest. And then something about the way she was watching him made him pause, and an idea leaped into his mind that was cunning and distasteful. She knew! Whatever was wrong with him, she had found it out. Llewelyn knew too. He realized that suddenly, looking back over their talk and piecing his idea together. There was some secret about himself that he could almost guess, he had come so close to recognizing it in his long, deep hours of solitude.

What was it? He thought he could find out. And he must know, even if it meant tricking this girl he believed he loved.

“Let’s not pretend any longer,” he said suddenly. “You didn’t have to come up here to tell me all this. You came for a reason. To see me, look at me, find out how much I know. I’ve spent the last three days lying on my back thinking, Daniele. I’ve got my answer now. You’re right—I’m not the man for you. I’m only part of a man. I’m hollow, unstable, incomplete. I know it. Is that what you want to say?”

Her finger on the picture stud gave a sudden twist that sent color like hot flames leaping inside the frame.

“You know that much, then. Yes, Mart. I never have lied to you. That’s true. I grew up a Leader, not a woman. I haven’t any illusions about romance. I could love you very much, too much for safety. And you—you aren’t there to love. You realize that as well as I do. Andre means safety. You . . . No, I’m afraid. It can’t be you, Mart, ever.”

Watching her closely, he went a step further, testing every inch of the way, saying only things he had thought out in these silent hours.

“My memory’s incomplete,” he said. “I can’t remember far back, but there’s a spot in my past where full memory seems to take up again. The ground seems solid from there on, but behind it is nothing stable. I think I know what it means, Daniele. I know what’s wrong. It could only be one thing. You know it too. How long have you known?”

He didn’t know what he was angling for, what “one thing” he meant. But he could see that she knew. And in her next words he realized he had won.

“Only since this morning, Mart,” she said.

“How did you learn?”

He swallowed hard to keep the triumph out of his voice. His heart had begun to pound and his stomach knotted up with excitement. It had worked! In a moment she might give herself away.

“Llewelyn told me. I went to him. I had to find out. The thing is, Mart—”

She gave a final twist to the stud and turned away from the picture that flared into burning crimsons and golds behind her, making a halo for the gray cap she wore still askew on the shining pale braids.

“The thing is, Mart, what were you? You may know now what’s happened, but you don’t have your memories back. You can’t guess what sort of a man you used to be. Llewelyn wouldn’t tell me that. He wouldn’t!”

CHAPTER XIII

The Man Who Knew

Gripped by a monstrous suspicion which was dawning in his mind, for a moment Havers ceased to hear Daniele. A name for all the vague ideas which had swum so long in his unconscious was taking shape. For three days the name of his malady had been nearly at tongue-tip, waiting to be spoken. But until now he had not quite dared apply it to himself.

"But what could I have done?"

He didn't know if he said it aloud or not. He heard the words echoing around inside his skull like thunder, and he thought he had not spoken.

"I'm a Leader. What terrible thing could a Leader have done to deserve—to deserve—"

He spoke the name of the thing aloud at last. After all it was he, not Daniele, who gave it its name in open speech.

"The Purge," he said, quite softly. "The Purge."

"Yes," Daniele told him. He didn't hear her. He didn't see her. He had almost no recollection of leaving the room.

Havers used the televisor to locate Alexis Llewelyn. They told him that the Leader was busy. Mart apparently didn't hear them. His tight lips opened only far enough to snap demands. He didn't talk much. He didn't dare to loosen the rigid control he had managed to enforce upon himself.

Finally he got through to Llewelyn at Mnemonic Center.

"I want to see you," he told the Leader.

"Very well. In a few hours I'll be at your disposal."

"Now."

Llewelyn seemed to notice Havers' expression.

"What's wrong?"

"I want to talk to you. Not over a visor."

Llewelyn hesitated. He came to a quick decision.

"Listen. I can't leave the Center now. There's a rather important experiment going on and I have to be on hand. I'll be free by midnight."

"Now!"

"Well—come over. I'll send down word for you to be admitted."

Havers broke the connection instantly. He wheeled, tiny beads of sweat on his cheeks, and made for the elevator. His footsteps made loud, rhythmic sounds. He listened to them thudding on the carpets. He chafed, forcing himself to stand motionless as the elevator dropped, and then he listened again to the sounds his heels made on the pavement.

He crossed the roadway, staring straight ahead, and a red-cloaked Guardsman had to rein in his cantering horse to avoid crashing into this grim, silent figure in the uniform of Weather Patrol.

Other footsteps paced him. He noticed that unconsciously. But not for a few minutes did they move abreast of him.

"Havers," a low voice said. "Mart Havers."

Mart gave a quick, angry glance aside. He saw a small fat man with a sleek cap of black hair, a man dressed unobtrusively in gray, even to gray gloves. He looked away again. He kept

on walking.

“Havers,” the man said, without moving his lips. “Don’t you know me?”

Mart took three more steps before realization came to him. He had never seen this man before in his life. But how little he knew of what had happened before this new, artificial life had been given to him! Had he known this man before his Purge?

The coincidence was too obvious. Was it some trick of Llewelyn’s?

He had paused.

“Dangerous,” the fat little man said urgently. “Go in there—that restaurant. I’ll join you. Quick.”

Mart nodded briefly.

Across the table they took he looked at the little man and tried to remember. He shook his head.

“No,” he said. “I don’t know you.”

“You’ve been Purged.”

“I’ve just learned that. I can’t remember what happened before.”

The other man held his right hand under the table, where only Havers could see, and stripped the glove from a gleaming contraption of plastic and steel.

“Remember this?”

“No.”

The glove was replaced.

“I dyed my hair black since you saw me last time. And I shaved my mustache. You wouldn’t remember—Pusher Dingle?”

“No.”

Mart still suspected Llewelyn’s intervention. He ignored his drink and watched Pusher intently. Dingle’s plump face twisted in a grimace.

“You’ve got to get me out of Reno,” he said. “La Boucherie—he needs you.”

“Who is La Boucherie?”

“That blasted mnemonic treatment,” Dingle said. “You don’t remember a thing? How you and Georgina planted that Sherlock in Avish’s apartment? Something went badly wrong. I got away by the skin of my teeth. I’ve been hiding out for months.”

“Yes?” Havers said noncommittally.

This man, he thought, was a potential enemy, as every man might be now. He, Mart Havers, was blindfolded.

Dingle sighed.

“You don’t trust me.”

“Why should I?”

“Well, how efficient is the Purge? You can’t remember anything of your past life? No, I guess not. I’ve run into other people who’ve been through the Purge—usually they knew it, though.” Pusher examined Mart’s uniform. “Weather Patrol. I thought they only took Leaders in that.”

“Right.”

Dingle whistled. “Anyway,” he said, “you’ve got to help me.”

“Why?”

“If you had your real memories back, you’d know why.”

"I'm going to get them back," Havers said suddenly, his intent crystalizing. "Somehow. I've got to."

Dingle looked skeptical.

"I'll find a way," Mart repeated. "I'm going to see Llewelyn now. I'm going to ask him questions."

"Which he may not answer," Pusher said. "You can't see a big shot like that and push him around. You probably won't even get past the office boy."

"He's expecting me."

"Where?"

"Mnemonic Center."

Dingle put his gloved artificial hand on the table and studied it. A new light had come into his eyes.

"There could be a way," he said, "but you'd need my help. Don't you realize what you're up against? Suppose you ask Llewelyn to give you your memories back and he says no? Suppose he says yes? The treatment takes months. You can't hold a smash-gun on him while you're under pentothal." He paused, then added significantly, "But I can."

Mart stared.

"Right," Pusher said. "You help me, I'll help you. I need you, Havers—especially in that uniform. You can get me out of the spot I'm in. I'm under guard right now."

"What?"

Dingle's plump face creased in a sly smile.

"I was hiding out in the Aleutians. I got word there was a dig there the Cromwellians had already searched once. Some of us figured they wouldn't bother to search again. Only they did—a few hours ago. I was brought down here with the others by jet. And they let me escape, after making sure I'd seen you walking along the street."

"We're watched now?"

"Sure. I don't know all the angles, but I've been in the rackets for years, and I know some of 'em. They let me see you, and then they made sure I was given a chance to escape. Don't ask me why. If you've had the Purge, you're not supposed to remember me."

"I don't. That's funny. The Weather Patrol job I turned down was . . . Yes, it involved the Aleutians. And that's where you say you were?"

"It was a hideout of La Boucherie's. That doesn't mean anything either? Well, there've been two guards trailing me ever since I—escaped. They've probably got orders to see what happens between us. But don't ask me why!"

Havers scowled. "I'm certainly not going to trust you at this point," he said. "You may be one of Llewelyn's spies yourself."

"You wouldn't think so of you had your real memory back."

"I'll get it back."

"Not without my help you can't," Pusher said, and glanced at his artificial hand again. "I've got an idea. You've an appointment at the Center with Llewelyn?"

Mart nodded.

"Okay. My guess is that those guards are just supposed to watch us and report. And to stop us if we try to leave Reno. But suppose we went to Mnemonic Center and saw Llewelyn? Suppose we put the heat on him, and made him restore your memories?"

"You said it takes months."

"I've heard talk of a new machine that does it faster. Instantly. It won't work for Purging, but it does something—short-circuits the mind—if the guy's already been purged. Llewelyn's in charge of Mnemonics. He'd know how to work it. And it's the only chance you'll ever have of getting your memories back. Did you really think you could talk Llewelyn into it."

Mart thought of Daniele. A slow, deep anger was burning within him. And there was a hollowness, too, a feeling that he was merely a shadow, that his real substance had been taken from him.

"You help me, I'll help you," Dingle said. "But you've got to promise to get me out of Reno."

"How can I?"

"Your uniform's a passport."

"What about those guards you say are watching us?"

Pusher looked at his gloved hand again.

"Leave that to me," he said. . . .

The first warning Llewelyn had of trouble was when Havers and Dingle opened the door of his office and stepped inside, each man carrying a smash-gun. Llewelyn didn't move. His tired face tightened a bit, that was all.

"Don't move," Dingle said. He circled the desk, looking for concealed signal buttons. "All right Stand up. Against the wall. Hold out your arms."

Defly he frisked the Leader, while Llewelyn's eyes held steady on Mart Havers.

"Put down your hands," Dingle said. "But stay where you are. If anybody comes in, you'll be killed. Remember that."

"You've been followed," Llewelyn said.

"Not any more, though," Pusher said, smiling. "Remember what I said. If there's trouble, you'll be the first to get it."

The Leader was still looking at Havers.

"There'll be no interruptions," he said. "I gave orders that I wasn't to be disturbed. I wanted to see you alone, Mart."

"Did you know why I was coming?" Havers asked quickly.

"I guessed. You've found out you were Purged. Is that it?"

Mart nodded.

"The human factor always fails us," Llewelyn said. "With you—and with this other plan. I tried to stop that, but apparently didn't succeed."

"What plan?"

"Letting Pusher Dingle escape and get to you."

"We're wasting time," Pusher said, and Havers nodded.

"You know what I want, Llewelyn," Havers said. "Either I get it now, or I'll kill you."

"Your old memories?" the Leader asked. "It's a long treatment. It takes months."

"That new machine you've got," Dingle put in. "That, doesn't take months, does it?"

Llewelyn didn't answer. Mart pushed his gun muzzle forward.

"There's such a machine?"

"There is. But it's still experimental. It's much too dangerous to use on a human subject yet."

Havers ignored that.

“Where is it?” Anger rose in him. “I’m not playing. I’m quite ready to kill you. Then we can look for another technician who can work the machine. You can’t stop me now. Understand that?”

Llewelyn nodded toward a door. “It’s in my private lab. Let’s go inside. We’ll be safer from interruptions.”

CHAPTER XIV

The Mind's High Voltage

Pusher's eyes narrowed suspiciously. But the Leader, ignoring the guns aimed at him, turned his back and went slowly across the room. Dingle was at his heels. The door opened.

"Okay," Pusher said. "I hope."

They went in. The door shut behind them. The lab was big, but not cluttered. Wiring, mechanisms, calibrated dials and revolving drums—all were vaguely familiar to Mart.

Llewelyn went to a metallic, partly insulated chair and ran his hand across one of its arms.

"Is that it?" Mart asked.

The Leader nodded. "That's it, Mart. But you can't use it. It's too dangerous."

"You know how to work it, though," Pusher said. "If anything goes wrong—" He gestured with his weapon.

Llewelyn turned to face them. "You're not psychologists or neurologists. The brain's a delicate mechanism. We've been trying to build an artificial synapse between the conscious and the unconscious mind. That's where your former memories are, Mart—buried in your unconscious. Considered electrically, there's a high potential built up there. But the insulation between conscious and unconscious is pretty good. That's a safety measure. If you make an artificial synapse, it's like running a dangerously high voltage through a copper wire that isn't made to take it. And there's only one safety fuse in the mind." He paused.

"I'll take the chance," Mart said.

"Let me tell you what the fuse is. It's insanity. It's the final retreat for a mind that's too overloaded with high voltage. So far we haven't found a governor to control this device. It bridges the two minds, yes, but it does it too fast to be safe. We don't know enough about the mind, Mart. Especially one like yours. No potential Leader has ever taken the Purge before."

"Who was I?" Havers asked slowly. "What could a Leader do that would make a Purge necessary?"

Instead of answering, Llewelyn went off apparently in a new direction.

"It was experimental," he said. "You were valuable material, and we wanted to save you, if we could. But all—almost all—of your previous memories had to be erased. We had to make sure of that. We had to make absolutely certain you'd turn into a *bona fide* Cromwellian. That's why we kept checking on you, through Daniele Vaughan and others. After a while we were convinced you were safe, that your unconscious had turned the lock on those dangerous early memories of yours."

"What were they? That's what I want to know."

Llewelyn didn't answer that either.

"You refused a certain order. Superficially that was unimportant, except it was a bad breach of discipline. But our psychologists checked. So did I. I had a reason for being interested in your case. I suspected that it was your unconscious mind that had prompted your refusal to take on that particular Weather Patrol job. I knew that if the job went through, there'd be an abnormally hot spell in the Aleutians. Some glaciers would break up. One in particular. A certain hideout would be exposed and discovered."

Dingle caught his breath.

"You didn't know it had been already discovered. You talked about it when you were given the Purge. Our Guards went up there, but it was empty. So we forgot about it temporarily, until you refused that order. After that, we sent up guards on another routine check, and found out that some law-breakers had moved in in the meantime." He glanced at Pusher.

"I've known this man, Dingle, before?" Mart said. "Before I was Purged?"

Llewelyn nodded. "We've never worked on a Leader's mind before. We weren't quite sure how effective the Purge would be, whether the unconscious would keep its secrets. So we had to make sure. I had you brought here so I could study your psychological motivations. I didn't believe you knew consciously that the Weather job would be dangerous to you—your former friends, but it was your unconscious mind that interested me. I had to make sure you wouldn't begin regaining your old memories. That's why I gave orders to let Dingle escape after he'd seen you. I wanted to find out your reaction."

Havers eyed the chair. "Don't bother with long explanations," he said curtly. "They won't be necessary, after—" He gestured toward the mechanism.

The Leader didn't answer. Mart handed his gun to Pusher and sat down in the chair.

"I'll give you ten seconds," he said. "After that, you'll be killed and we'll find another technician to do what we want."

"Very well," Llewelyn said. "My death wouldn't stop you. This may be the best answer, after all. A Leader's mind is so complicated that the Purge may stultify it fatally. Perhaps it was a mistake to remove your early memories. From what I know of your mind, Mart, I suspect you have remarkable potentialities. But you need all your brain to develop them. I'll tell you this. Before your Purge, you were an enemy of Cromwellianism. And now you're a Cromwellian. Well, I'll bargain with you. I'll agree to restore your former memories, if you let me do it my way. The safe way. It will take three months."

Havers shook his head.

"I don't trust you," he said. "Even if I did, I know you're not at the top. You take orders too—from the Council."

"This is dangerous. You run the risk of insanity."

Suddenly Mart found that he didn't care any more. He found himself vaguely hoping that the treatment would kill him, and the hope was strangely familiar in his mind, as if it slopped into a groove already worn to receive it. In another crisis of his life, somewhere, sometime, lost with the lost life, he had felt as he felt now. "Let it kill me! Let it be finished!"

Pusher Dingle gestured with his gun at Llewelyn.

"Ten seconds," he said. "Get going."

Llewelyn looked at Mart. He looked at the switch on the wall above the chair. For an instant he hesitated. Then he shook his head.

"I won't do it," he said.

Mart Havers gave him a grim, narrow-eyed glance. Then deliberately he twisted in the chair and laid his hand on the switch.

"Is this it?"

Llewelyn's shoulders slumped. He said nothing, but he nodded. Mart's hand closed on the lever. He pulled it down.

Mart Havers felt the firmness of the chair beneath him, the firmness of the lever in his hand. He felt a quiver of something, some intangible force, move blindly through him. And

then a bomb went off in the center of his brain.

Until that instant no man could have imagined what the mind of a god might see. In Mart Havers' mind every pathway worn by every random thought that had ever crossed it for one freakish second stood clear and open. He could look down every pathway to its source. And every path was double.

For his mind was double, too. And the halves were at war.

In that first godlike illumination he did not realize it. He was only stunned by the vast complexity of the memories that poured in upon him. But after the first second, the memories crashed and clashed.

For when Mnemonics altered Havers' brain, they had implanted ideas diametrically opposed to the ideas already there. They had to. For every erased belief they set up a counter-belief, a contradiction, stemming from false but plausible sources.

So on the one hand, in a series of flashing pictures, Havers seemed simultaneously to see—for one instance—a handsome Guardsman gallant in plumes and scarlet cloak, bravely going down under the treacherous onslaught of squat, sneering men in Freeman emblems, and his emotion choked him with grief and loyalty; and in the same bewildering instant he saw the Freeman as sturdy, courageous martyrs fighting against hopeless odds, and their Guardsman victim a plumed fop who personified all that was evil and decadent.

That conflict multiplied endlessly in the vast spaces upon which any human mind can open. Wave upon wave of passionate conviction surged up and crashed upon an equal, opposing wave, until the tumult over-reached the bounds of reason and Mart Havers felt the foundation of his sanity reel beneath that intolerable burden.

He remembered. He remembered not only what surface memories the artificial treatment had erased, but the sources lying far beneath them, from which they had sprung in his childhood. He remembered all that the doctors had said and done above him while he lay at Mnemonics Center unconscious beneath their ministrations. He remembered clearly the false things planted upon the roots of the true things.

But he could not sort out true from false. He believed with perfect conviction in every double truth before him. He *knew* the Cromwellians were infallible, noble, good—and he *knew* they were false, evil, decadent. His mind spun with ideas by which they might be saved and overthrown.

If it had been a physical conflict Mart Havers might have torn his own body in half to comply with the double convictions that pulled him two ways so ruthlessly, so strong was each side of the combat. But since it was mental, there was no out at all. No out except the thing Llewelyn had threatened, and Mart's was a strong mind, potentially so powerful that even under this terrible schism its tough fabric resisted to the very last.

The bomb went off in the center of his brain. He remembered that. He remembered, and then shut off his blinded thoughts, the instant when all memories lay frightfully open at one glance. He remembered a moment of such pure torment that the mind dazzled and refused to accept anything more. . . .

Long afterward, Pusher Dingle told him what had happened. But Havers had no recollection of leaving the Center, or of their flight. Pusher said he had seemed quite normal. But then Pusher did not know Mart Havers very well. Certainly he must have walked and run, fired his gun when he had to, hidden and lain flat and got up again to crawl in the shadows—all this as efficiently as a man with his wits about him.

But for all his thinking purposes, Mart Havers was mad for a long while. Mentally he was in a catatonic state of pure death, out of which nothing could shake him. It was his only hope for eventual cure, and he must have known it, in the murky depths of his mind walled off by scar-tissue while healing slowly, slowly took place.

Many days went by before Mart knew where he was, or who he was. And many more before the first painful stirrings of thought began again.

CHAPTER XV

Freemen's Hideout

La Boucherie drew the ragged fabric of his once-gala red cloak across his huge shoulders. The corners of his mouth were drawn down. He sat back in his chair, thrusting it against the crude aluminum brace that helped support the cave wall, and eyed Mart Havers.

"Got something?" he asked abruptly.

Mart found another chair.

"Maybe," he said. "My mind's still messed up. But I think there may be a way. I've been kicking it around with Georgina and Pusher, and it could work. But I wanted to talk to you first, and alone."

Havers had been here a month, in this top secret hideout near the Pole. It had taken that long for his half-wrecked brain to mend. With a new purposefulness he had forced himself to refrain from thinking ahead, waiting until he felt that he was ready. He was not quite ready yet, but the inaction had grown unendurable. He wanted a showdown.

One reason, perhaps, was the change in La Boucherie. It wasn't only the man's altered attitude toward him, though that was significant. There was a new, grudging respect in it, and a little more of animosity than Mart had ever realized. But he told himself that La Boucherie was under a tremendous strain. Alone, the man had saved the wreck of the Freemen, during the Cromwellian crackdown after Mart's capture, managing to bring nearly two hundred of them to this new, safer hideout.

La Boucherie had discovered the cavern long ago, Mart learned, but had kept the knowledge to himself. Back in 1948, it had been an experimental station for polar technological experiments, and, insulated beneath the tundra, it had stood safe even after its desertion. It had been completely forgotten, an unfinished construction. But La Boucherie had remembered, and secretly he managed to keep it stocked with food. It had been the haven he needed when the peril came at last.

"Well?" La Boucherie was waiting.

Havers ticked off points on his fingers. "One, the Freemen are smashed, except for this single cell and maybe some scattered members who can't help us. We can't hope to overthrow the Cromwellians. We haven't enough manpower. We can't count on the workers to join us, even though they're in the majority. They're used to Cromwellian rule. Right so far?"

La Boucherie nodded.

"Two, then. Everything depends on us—what we can do, alone. What are we aiming for?"

"You know that. Overthrow of the Cromwell rule."

"And then? Setting up another, arbitrary rule won't be easy. That's how tyrannies get started. Man should choose his own government. The government he deserves is what he always gets, anyhow. Remember, I've been a Cromwellian. I can see both sides of the coin. The trouble with Cromwellianism is that there's no strong opposition party."

"You think that you would cure the evil?"

"I think so. But it's too late to create such a party while the Cromwellians hold power. The time for that passed long ago. They've been ruling for so long now that they're perfectly sure they're right and that everybody else is wrong. They never question their own rules."

"So?"

"There are two steps. Make the Cromwellians vulnerable. Then smash them."

La Boucherie sneered heavily.

"Easy to say," he remarked, "but they've got the weapons and the technology."

Havers shrugged. "Government depends on a comparatively few key men," he said. "There are perhaps a hundred Cromwell Leaders in the world today who aren't expendable. There's the Council—"

"Thirty-six men in that."

"You know who they are?"

"I brought my secret papers with me," La Boucherie said. "I know who the key men are. You're right on that point. If we could get rid of perhaps a hundred Leaders, there'd be chaos—until we were smashed and new Leaders stepped into the top posts."

"Suppose the Cromwellians had other fish to fry?"

La Boucherie shook his head.

"It's impossible. We haven't the ships or men or weapons. The Leaders are generally guarded. How far would the whole two hundred of us get in Reno, say?"

"It's still possible."

"We'd be gunned down in the streets!"

"By whom?"

"The Guardsmen, you fool! The Guardsmen!"

"Not if they were busy somewhere else," Mart said. "Not if the whole world happened to be busy somewhere else. Misdirection's the answer. The red herring. And a double play. You said we didn't have a weapon. There's a weapon right at our hands—the strongest one in the world. All we have to do is use it."

La Boucherie stilled.

"Atomics?" he said, and his voice was not quite steady.

"No," Havers said, "we wouldn't dare. And it wouldn't solve our problem anyway. If we tried to fly a load of atom bombs over the key spots, our planes would be shot down long before we got there. Key spots are guarded."

"We have three planes—"

"We'll hijack more. But atomics isn't the answer. We'll want to strike at certain key spots that are constantly changing. The Cromwellians can't guard them efficiently, because they're so variable. And they won't be expecting that sort of attack anyhow."

"What sort? What weapon are you talking about?"

"Weather," Mart said. "Just—weather . . ."

There would be no chance for a second trial if they failed in the first attempt. Mart Havers knew that. And, in essence, the success or failure of the whole scheme depended on him, because he was the only man among them who knew Weather Control. He thanked his gods for the knowledge hypnotically implanted in his brain, and for the lab and field training he had had in the Weather Patrol.

For he knew weather. And he had to know it, backward and forward. What he planned was such a sudden, tremendous catastrophe that, once started, it could not be stopped. Not easily, at least, and while the Weather Patrol was trying to stop it, the Freeman planes would be starting more trouble.

The radio helped. A man was assigned to pick up and collate the weather reports, which ended on Mart's cluttered desk and were transformed into cryptic charts that he pored over

endlessly. Highs. Cold Fronts. Warm fronts. The sunspot cycles. Barometer readings. Movements of pressure areas. They all built into a single pattern, while Havers planned and plotted and waited for exactly the right moment.

The moment would come, he knew; the time when a push in the right direction would cause the most trouble for the Cromwellians. One push wouldn't be enough, but a series of rhythmic taps can move a planet. And Mart was thoroughly familiar with Weather Control. What he would need, presently, was equipment.

That could be stolen.

La Boucherie was the unquestioned leader in that field. He found what Havers wanted and arranged his commandos accordingly. Everything was worked out on paper first—everything but the weather, which was unpredictable after a certain point. But given the initial equation, the rest of the pattern would fall into place.

One point seemed an insurmountable problem for a while—simple lack of man power. But it was Pusher Dingle who solved that. He remembered the Sherlock, the useful little radio-controlled robot mechanism and suggested its possibilities to Mart.

"Can you make 'em?" Havers asked.

"No. I stole that one. But I know where a lot more can be stolen."

"What about controlling them?"

"There are portable controls. I wouldn't have had to use that big lab, with so much equipment, if I could have got my hands on one of the control set-ups. But one man can't steal too much at one time."

He explained further. Havers called in La Boucherie.

It was La Boucherie who decided that question.

"The Wisconsin factory. That's the place. We'll raid it, at the right time, and each man will get a Sherlock and its controller. Then we'll spread out and keep moving. That way, nobody can get a direction on us and drop a bomb. We'll decentralize and stay mobile. We can control the weather planes from other planes, which we'll hijack first from various skyports."

So the work went on, under the frozen tundra at the Pole, while an air mass built up slowly above Newfoundland and the Azores High shifted westward. The oldest weapon in the world was being unsheathed, the hammer of Thor, the sword of Zeus, poised above the unsuspecting Earth.

Hammer of the thunder. Sword of the lightning.

Out of the south cometh the whirlwind.

* * * * *

Zero hour.

The three planes had been transformed into mobile transmitting units. That had been necessary. No directional antenna must be focused on the polar hideout, the nerve center of the offensive. Three planes cruised in erratic courses far from the Pole, receiving Mart's commands and relaying them to the Freeman's receivers.

In Wisconsin. In Ontario. In California. In dozens of areas.

They had filtered down two days before. The three planes had ferried them, and returned ready for their task. Almost all of the two hundred had gone, leaving a skeleton crew at the hideout.

There was no need to keep unnecessary men here. If this cave were discovered, the fight was over. Everything depended on speed, indirection, one sudden, tremendous blow—and

then a pattern amid general confusion.

Havers' section of the cavern had been walled off with screens in an attempt at privacy. Concentration was necessary. Makeshift tables and panels had been rigged, covered with charts and calculations. A sending set, non-visual, was beside him, with Georgina as its operator. A movable screen shut off La Boucherie, seated at an equally cluttered table, with another sending set near him.

Zero hour had passed.

La Boucherie lifted the screen.

"Should be getting reports," he said. That was true.

One immediate problem had been to procure enough weapons, but there La Boucherie had provided a ready-made answer. For years past he had been building up caches of arms in various places around the country, preparing for revolution against Cromwellianism, though he had never expected this sort of battle.

By now the two hundred should have provided themselves with weapons and scattered to their destinations—the airfields where they could hijack the necessary planes, the Weather Patrol airstrips where the specially equipped jettors could be obtained, the Wisconsin Sherlock factory.

Timing would do it. Timing, and a sudden, concerted blow.

The scrambler sent a stream of erratic noises through the cavern. Hastily La Boucherie switched on the unscrambler. It was one of the three relay ships reporting.

"Sherlocks procured. Plan Sub-Four proceeding. T-thirty-one M two-fourteen."

Havers met La Boucherie's eyes and nodded. He could spare no more than a second for that. Instantly he was back at his maps, recalculating, integrating the latest weather reports Georgina was noting. The Azores High had shifted somewhat. That meant a dozen other alternations in the pattern of weather that spun its tremendously complicated web across the globe. Certain key spots had moved in the last half hour.

"Got any changes?" La Boucherie said. "Almost ready now."

Mart figured rapidly.

"These changes," he said. "Newfoundland Key—from twenty-five feet to fifteen thousand. Kodiak Basin—"

La Boucherie relayed the new orders to the three receiving planes, and they in turn relayed it, via code, to the Freeman. The code was hot uncrackable, but it would take a while for even the Cromwell experts to break it. That while might be long enough.

Eighty planes, more or less, each with its Freeman pilot and a Freeman handling the controller of the Sherlock—super remote control. For the Sherlocks were in Weather Patrol planes, the specially equipped jobs which had almost reached their various destinations.

"Two of our planes have been shot down," La Boucherie said.

"Almost ready," Mart told him. He examined his watch. "One more point to make sure of, that's all. Georgina, anything on the Mojave adiabatic?"

"Nothing new."

"Good enough. We'll take a chance. Ready, La Boucherie?"

"Planes Twenty-five, Sixty-one, Four and Nineteen aren't at their key spots yet."

"Which planes were shot down?"

"Twenty and Thirty-three. Wait a minute. Fifty-nine too, now."

"What's the nearest to Twenty's key area?"

“Seven. Next nearest, Thirty.”

“Seven we need. Jerk Thirty to Twenty’s key spot. Ready?”

“Forty-six is down.”

Mart glanced at his charts. “We can’t wait any longer,” he said. “The pattern’s as tight as we can hope to get it.”

He drew a long breath. La Boucherie watched him, his blunt fingers poised over the signal key.

“Zero,” Havers said.

CHAPTER XVI

Thunder and Lightning—Storm and Flood

Seventy-four planes, scattered across the planet, sent but the radio impulses that activated seventy-four Sherlock robots, at the controls of seventy-four Weather Patrol ships. Simultaneously special equipment began to operate.

Down toward cloud masses plummeted pounds of dry ice.

Crashing trigger voltages of artificial lightning split the atmosphere at crucial points.

Monstrous parcels of air hesitated, shifted, and moved ponderously in new directions. Snow began to pour down from certain cloud areas. Depressions, tropical air masses, cold fronts—all were altered abruptly from their original pattern.

Altered into a new pattern of catastrophe.

Beaufort Number 12 winds had been limited to tropical revolving storms until this day. But now gales topping the 75 m. p. h. velocity began to march across the face of the Earth.

Out of the south cometh the whirlwind.

Weather takes time to develop, usually. That was why Havers had waited until all the elements were ready, poised in dangerous equilibrium, waiting only for the catalyst he had provided. Even so, the great air masses can move at only a certain speed. They are ponderous. But they are also nearly irresistible.

Cromwell civilization had its key spots, too. The communication and transportation centers, for example. Mart had waited until he could immobilize those, until the unstable, shifting weather giant had poised his iron-shod foot about the nerve centers of Cromwellianism.

Far beneath the frozen tundra they heard nothing. But they knew what was happening. At first the radio gave reports. Then that failed in screaming static. A handicap, perhaps, but more of a handicap for the Cromwellians, who did not have a prearranged plan.

La Boucherie's plan was already in operation. Each Freeman knew what his task was to be. Some were to remain in control of the Weather planes. These men Mart had given the rudiments of Weather training, so he hoped they would know what to do. The weather crisis must not be allowed to pass. It must be kept at full intensity, even though the Cromwell Weather Patrol would be doing its best to bring the storms under control.

Thirty-six hours later Havers turned to La Boucherie and said:

"We've shot our bolt. Short of wiping out civilization, we've done all we dare now. I think we've got them on the run. It'll take time to be sure, but . . . I wish the radio were working."

La Boucherie turned from the map wall, under whose high, concave side he had spent most of the lapsed hours, keeping the records in colored chalks as reports poured in.

"You look half dead," he said. "Better lie down a while. I'll wake you if you're needed."

For the first time Havers realized how near collapse he really was. The cavern wavered before him as his taut nerves began at last to relax. He looked up at La Boucherie, standing under the hollow patterned world as it arched above him. There were scarlet rings around ten principal cities—Reno and Chicago among them—where the nerve centers of the Cromwellian culture had their being.

Every city must by now be helpless, communications cut off, air impassable to flight traffic. Intricate symbols sweeping across the map traced the course of pressure areas moving ponderously under the goads of the Freeman planes.

"I think we've done it," Havers said.

"Think?" La Boucherie demanded. "Don't you know?"

"This is ticklish business. Too much pushing could bring on wholesale disaster. I've explained all that before. As much as I dare do I've already done. Now we can only wait."

La Boucherie was silent. Then he went with his incongruously light step to the chart table and leafed over the big scribbled sheets. He had learned more than a little from Mart in the past weeks, and he could read the charts with a fair degree of accuracy now. Clearly he knew what he wanted. In a moment he turned up an X'd-out chart and spread it across the table with a crackling sweep. He knocked his fat knuckles against it.

"This one, Mart. Remember?"

Havers glanced up as he pulled off his boot. The cot creaked under him.

"Forget it," he said in a weary voice. "That's the one we worked out not to use. It's okay now. We won't need it."

He had charted out the more perilous possibilities that could result from this herding of the storms, simply to have a map that would warn him away from danger. Whenever a curve plotted from the incoming reports swung its arc too near that danger pattern Mart could check with this master plan and reroute the ships.

"We're fighting the Cromwellians, not the whole world," he said. "Some lives have got to be lost, but no more than we can help. Tear that out now, will you? And wake me if anything comes up."

La Boucherie came forward with his soft tread and pulled a screen around the cot where they had taken turns in catnapping.

"Go to sleep," he said. "I'll call you."

Mart was dimly aware of lights being turned low beyond the screen, so that only the soft blue flame of the trioxane heat-tabs glowed upon the walls. He could hear the inarticulate radio stuttering out static, and La Boucherie's heavy breathing as he rustled papers at the desk.

Then sleep was like a thick, soft blanket shutting out everything. Above, thunder and lightning, snow and storm and flood raged across the world. But here Mart Havers slept sound.

He dreamed that Daniele's wild-rose face bent above him, her fair hair brushing his cheek. He dreamed that she was calling him, and he woke with a jolt, the voice out of his dream still echoing softly around the cavern.

Nothing had changed. The blue flame glowed on. He might have slept minutes or hours. There was still the occasional rustle of papers, the steady crackle of static, the almost inaudible buzz of voices in La Boucherie's earphones and his soft rumble of instructions in reply. It was curiously peaceful down here under the frozen tundra at the top of the world.

Then in the stutter of the radio a voice for a moment spoke with freakish clearness. It said only a few words, but the words brought Mart up on his cot with galvanizing force.

"—tidal wave that wiped out Galveston now leveling off inland around—"

The squeal of static broke in and silenced the rest of the sentence, while Mart stared at the blue-lit screen and wondered if he were still dreaming. He waited, frozen with incredulity, and in a while the static broke again and another voice said in quick, quiet phrases:

“—hurricane-flattened eastern coast reports thousands of deaths in—”

The screen went over with a crash as Mart sprang to his feet. La Boucherie, crouching over the desk, whirled and stared at him in surprise. And then a terrifying look of triumph and cunning moved his thin lips and narrowed his eyes. It was not quite a sane look, and Mart felt his heart jump and pause for a second before it began to thump faster with dismay and dawning rage.

“How long have I slept?” he demanded.

But he did not wait for an answer, for his eyes met the recorder dial on the desk and he saw, with a sinking distress, the answer. Twenty-six hours. Time enough for the storms he had launched to begin leveling off, time enough for the Freeman to begin their negotiations with the Cromwellians isolated in their beleaguered cities—if all had gone according to plan.

But it had not. He knew he had not dreamed those radio reports. La Boucherie’s face would have told him that if all else failed to tell him.

And it was Havers himself who had furnished the plans for disaster. He should have known. He should have set some guard while he slept. He should have—

No matter now. Too late for all that. In his stocking feet he thudded across the cavern and looked up at the map-lined hollow above. A glance was enough. Where only ten ringed cities had spoken of siege before he slept, every capital in the nation was shadowed now with the marks that told of ruin already accomplished or already on the way. Irrevocably on the way.

Not even the Storm Smashers could smash these expertly launched disasters in the time that remained to them. For the climatic gyroscope of the whole hemisphere had been thrown off balance at La Boucherie’s orders by now.

Mart read the tale of tidal wave, hurricane, overwhelming floods whenever he looked. A second Deluge, a new Ice Age in the making—and lives must already be lost beyond any counting by those left alive in the ruined areas.

As he stared, stunned, La Boucherie’s soft laughter penetrated at last through his daze. He turned. La Boucherie’s face was crimson, his great bulk heaved with the deep waves of his merriment. And it was not the merriment of a sane man.

“I’ve done it!” La Boucherie said between the gusts of his mirth. “I’ve done it at last! They smashed me twice and they thought *I* was finished, but this time *I*’ve smashed them! The last laugh’s La Boucherie’s, after all.”

“But why—why?” Havers could not shape his words, but the fat man seemed to understand. He slapped both big hands on the desk.

“It wasn’t sure, your way,” he said. “I’ve had enough waiting! I’ve waited thirty years! I’ve tried the slow way and now I’m through with all that. Now they know who’s master! If anyone’s left alive when I’ve finished with ’em, they can bow down to La Boucherie and thank me for saving their lives! I’ll show ’em who runs this planet before I’m through!” He choked on his own laughter and his face turned a deeper crimson as he swayed in the creaking chair.

Behind him the radio sputtered again and then said:

“Reno Leaders calling martial law until Council sends down emergency orders. Weather Patrol over Reno reports storm under control there. Council promises relief within hours.”

La Boucherie’s thick-voiced laughter halted abruptly. He swung to the radio just as static blanked out the voice again.

“Mart!” he said sharply. “The Council—what is it?”

"You know as much as I do," Havers heard himself saying.

"You were there, in Reno. You talked with the Leaders. You must know who really heads the Government. What is this Council?"

"I only know they never make mistakes," Mart said. A faint flicker of enjoyment was beginning to sound in his voice. Wryly he added, "You and I are only fallible humans. We've wrecked the country. Now the Council's taking over. I wouldn't give a nickel for your life or mine from now on, La Boucherie."

Suddenly, for the first time in many years, he remembered what the name La Boucherie really meant. The butchery—the slaughter-house. This man had made the whole continent a slaughter-house under the blows of the elements, but a reckoning was on its way. He found he was laughing.

Ponderously La Boucherie heaved himself out of the chair.

"Mart!" he said.

Mart Havers did not hear. His laughter was half-hysterical and he knew it, but he could not stop. Not until a searing pain hissed past his face and something crashed against the wall behind him. Then he caught his breath and stared. Half-swallowed in La Boucherie's huge hand, the little gun looked innocent enough. But it glared with white fire as Mart saw it and a second pain seared his other cheek.

"All right!" La Boucherie went on. "We're going out. You first, Mart."

"But where? Why?"

"We're going to Reno. You know your way around there. You're taking me to the Council!"

It was a Weather Patrol rocket-job which Havers flew, with La Boucherie beside him, the little gun digging into his ribs all the way. One of the stolen ships. One of the ships in which his friends among the Freeman and his friends among the Patrol were at this moment battling one another with thunderbolts and cloud masses above the stricken Earth.

A rocket flies fast. High and fast. They could not see much of the curved Earth from this stratosphere level, but through a rift in the clouds now and then, too far below to have meaning or relevance, the planet's ruined face looked up at them.

Sunlight glinted on vast moving sheets of water where cities had been only yesterday. White snow fields blotted out the green of whole states. Mountain ranges reeled past below, sheathed in dazzling ice.

And La Boucherie chuckled, chuckled as the ship jetted on.

CHAPTER XVII

Madman's Last Effort

Up here they were comparatively safe from the elements they themselves had loosed upon the shaken world. But presently the jagged peaks below them took on familiar shapes, and Mart knew that Reno lay below the cloud blanket.

Rain lashed with the fierce velocity of hail against the ship's sides as they broke through the ceiling and the white tower which housed the Council pointed its tall, pale finger at them. Thunder rolled as they slanted down, and a violet lance of lightning shook threateningly across the gray sky.

Mart never saw the ship that shot them down.

He knew, of course, that guard ships constantly patrolled the area, but the waning storm was still fierce enough to blind him and his first intimation of attack was almost his last—the smashing impact that knocked him out of his seat and cracked his head against the curved wall.

Rain in his face roused him. Someone was shaking his shoulder and crying, “Mart! Mart!” over and over in a faraway voice.

“Daniele?” he said, then opened his eyes and was looking into La Boucherie's face, streaming with rain.

He sat up, testing his limbs. Miraculously, he seemed to be unhurt.

“Mart, wake up!” La Boucherie's voice was urgent. Fat hands helped him to his feet. “The plane's smashed, but the rocket braked us. I'm all right. Are you? Hurry, Mart! They're looking for us. We've got to get away.”

The white tower lifted high above them, rising only a little way off among debris that had been houses when Mart had last seen Reno. Hurricane and fire had come and gone here, and flood had put out the fire and was now beginning to recede a little.

Urged by La Boucherie, still half dazed from the fall, Mart scrambled over the ruins toward the tower.

Through the sluicing rain they floundered toward the back of the tower. Mart still had his key to one of the private entrances underground. He led La Boucherie down the stairs and into the little foyer, knee-deep now with rainwater, and fitted his key in the lock.

He was not quite sure yet what his own plans were. La Boucherie—something certainly had given away in the big man's mind, tried to the breaking point by thirty years of heartbreaking defeats.

And yet victory might be salvaged out of the terrible disasters still raging across the continent. No less than La Boucherie, Mart now wanted to confront the Council and demand an answer from whatever mysterious group he found at the height of the tower.

They could go only so high, Mart knew, without entering the public corridors. Private elevators went up five stories to the private quarters of the Leaders. Beyond that, it was anybody's guess how far they would get.

They got to the eighth floor. To work their way even so far was like fighting through a roar of heavy surf, for the whole great building was a vortex through which poured a pandemonium of activity. The halls seethed with hurrying men and women, their faces tight with sleeplessness and responsibility. The catastrophe which Mart had so lately unleashed

upon the world was even now only beginning to slacken, and upon these men and women rested a heavy measure of the duty of combating its results.

The bright blue uniforms of the Weather Patrol made a pattern in the shifting crowds. The red cloaks of Guardsmen billowed out in the faces of passersby. Laboratory technicians in white smocks pushed through the jostling confusion with sheafs of reports in their hands. And now and then a tall Leader of Council grade hurried down a lane respectfully opened before him.

Many of the crowd wore torn and dripping uniforms, many had blood on their faces and clothing. La Boucherie's disheveled look and wild, furious eyes were not the arresting sight they would have been in any circumstances. It looked as if all Reno was pouring in and out of this enormous building, and among the rest two illegal entrants seemed unlikely to draw anyone's notice.

La Boucherie held Mart's arm in the grip of a big hand like a padded glove, through which the iron tension of muscles and bone clamped painfully. It was always surprising to be reminded of what power lay in those puffy, ineffectual-looking fingers. Mart's cloak, hanging in heavy folds between them, hid the little smash-gun engulfed in La Boucherie's fat palm and pressing between them into Mart's ribs.

"Where are you taking me?" La Boucherie demanded in the almost inaudible corner-of-the-mouth whisper that has been standard among fugitive minorities since men first began imprisoning one another. "Where is this Council?"

"Up somewhere at the top of the building," Mart told him in the same Slag-generated murmur. "I've never been there, but I know it's near the top."

"Don't try anything. You won't live long enough to regret it."

Mart shrugged. He was not sure enough of his own mind to have any clear idea what he really did want. Through his own error, the attack on Cromwellianism had gone so far that there was no hope of redeeming the mistake.

Perhaps La Boucherie was right. Perhaps the only hope now was to smash all Leader authority from its very source and let fresh leadership arise out of the welter to which the continent had been reduced. He shook his head hopelessly. There had been too much strain on his battered mind in the past months. He couldn't think except in circles and parables.

"Let the storm blow itself out," he thought. "I sowed the wind. I'll have to reap the whirlwind. Let it blow. It's out of my hands now."

They reached the eighth floor without difficulty. But this was the top, so far as the public crowds were concerned. And as they waited by the broad elevator doors while a swarm of cloaked and white-coated men poured out, the thing both had been expecting happened at last.

A red cloak swirled beside them and a Guardsman in a shining steel helmet, still miraculously bright in spite of the mud and rain on his shoulders, put out his gloved hand to bar their way.

"Excuse me, sir," he said to Mart. "Your pass, please."

La Boucherie's gun dug hard in Mart's ribs. For a moment it seemed to Mart that the three of them stood in a little cone of absolute silence. All sound stopped around him while he waited for some idea to spring to lift in his mind. When it came he was not really aware of it.

"I haven't got a pass," he heard himself say, without any idea of what would come next. But it came smoothly enough. "I've lost my papers," he went on in a calm voice.

It seemed plausible enough. Many men must have lost their papers in the increasing chaos that had engulfed Reno.

“But you must have got a pass at the door,” the Guard insisted, still politely, but with dawning suspicion in his eyes. “Whom do you want to see?”

“We came in a private way,” Mart said truthfully. He held out the distinctive key which only resident Leaders carried. “We’re on private business. Let us by, please. The elevator’s just going.”

He tried to push past the Guard. The man hesitated. That key had been a powerful bit of evidence, but he was still uncertain.

Mart saw the half-conviction on his face, and clinched it. He leaned forward and murmured in the Guard’s ear, a code sentence by which as Weather Patrolman and Leader he had got entry into proscribed areas before.

There was a tense instant when La Boucherie’s gun ground its warning snout into his ribs on one side in mistrust of this secrecy, and the Guard’s mistrust on the other hand still held him rigid. Trapped between them, Mart waited.

Then the Guard relaxed, nodding his brightly helmed head.

“All right, sir. Go ahead.” He stepped back.

Together Mart and La Boucherie crowded into the elevator, linked by the stiff bond of hand-grip and gun. The door slid shut, the Guard’s watching face vanished, the shaft sighed beneath them as the car rose.

When the door slid open again six Guardsmen were waiting for them.

There was a flurry of excitement as the packed elevator emptied itself into the hall and the red-cloaked men shouldered forward to close in upon Mart and La Boucherie.

“You did it!” La Boucherie snarled at Mart’s shoulder, and the gun muzzle wavered against his side a little as a fat finger tightened upon its trigger.

Something in Mart’s face must have warned the Guards, for in the instant that Mart pivoted on his right foot and smacked his hand down over La Boucherie’s gun wrist, swinging away from the muzzle as it scraped across his ribs, the foremost Guardsman lunged forward and flung his arms around La Boucherie’s enormous shoulders, pinioning his arms from the back.

There was a period of heaving, stamping struggle. Someone had a stranglehold around Mart’s neck, and the air swam red before him with his own suffocation and the streaming cloaks of the Guards. There was a great deal of shouting and confusion as the crowd swirled around the fight in its center.

But no souging of a smash-gun sounded, and Mart knew after a moment or two of waiting for it that La Boucherie did not have a chance. Not without his gun. As for Mart himself—he was not fighting hard. He had been waiting equally for success or capture, uncertain which he hoped for, ready to accept either. Now he had his answer.

Few people paid any attention to the little group of Guards and the two prisoners as they marched down the length of the enormous room toward the desk at the far end. It must be an Operations Center for this whole area, Mart thought, glancing up at the three tiers of balconies rising above the thronging floor. Everywhere were desks, report boards, television screens, hurrying men.

It occurred to Mart suddenly that this room was probably the first relay station that received orders handed down by the High Council and distributed them abroad over the whole

continent. He was conscious of an overwhelming desire to see the Council itself, or the man who represented the Council. Whatever or whoever it was on the topmost floor of this building, guiding the destinies of the Cromwellian world in this most perilous hour.

A man whom Mart had never seen before sat at the desk to which they were led at last. Curiously, it was La Boucherie who identified him. The fight in the hall seemed temporarily to have calmed La Boucherie a little, and now he murmured out of the corner of his mouth as companionably as if he had not been trying to kill Mart a few minutes before.

"Williams," he said softly. "Chief of the Continental Police. Belongs at Washington. They must have moved the whole organization right here. That means the High Council's here too, Mart. We've got to escape!"

The Guard who had first stopped them was talking to Williams now.

"And when he gave me the Leader code phrase," the man said, "I remembered the alarm we had about a renegade Leader, and—"

"Yes, yes, thank you." Williams cut him off impatiently. He looked down at Mart, his brows meeting in a scowl that might be anger or only deep thought. "You're Havers, aren't you? Renegade Weather Patrolman. What are you doing here?"

Mart shrugged and was silent. What could he say?

"I think you may have a lot to tell us about what's been happening," the police chief went on after a pause. "If you don't feel like talking now, I believe I'll—"

He broke off and flipped the switch of his visor-screen.

"Leader Vaughan," he said. "Leader Vaughan!"

The screen darkened and then Daniele's blue eyes and pale, tired face looked out at them.

"I have a man here who worked with you for a while," Williams said. "There's been a report out on him. Will you step down here for a moment?"

Daniele's gaze shifted from Williams to the group before the desk. Only Mart would have known that she was startled. That little flutter of her lower lip caught for a moment between her teeth was all the sign she gave, but her eyes dwelt upon his for what seemed like a long second before she said:

"Of course, Leader Williams. Right away."

She did not speak to Mart when she stood at Williams' elbow, looking down, but he thought she had not taken her eyes from him since she first came into sight, threading her way among the desks. She listened in silence to all Williams had to tell her.

"I'd like to suggest something," she said, when he finished. "Mart Havers was under treatment at Mnemonics when he had his—relapse. I'd very much like to have Leader Llewelyn see him. And this other man, too, since they were taken together."

She stared hard at Mart as she spoke. He felt sure she was trying to say something with that silent stare, but what, he could not guess. Perhaps even she did not yet quite know. Bewilderment was in her eyes, and something like surprise.

"If I may," she finished, glancing for the first time at Williams, "I'll go along too. I—I think I have something to say to Leader Llewelyn about this man."

They could hear the storm roaring outside when they came out of the elevator and crossed Llewelyn's private foyer. Rain pounded at the tall windows and slid down the glass in sheets so heavy the windows were opaque.

La Boucherie was up to something. Mart knew it by the changed tempo in the big man's breathing, in the way he walked between his guards. That violence in him which had built up

for thirty years and broken at last with almost the force of the storm itself was not to be held in leash for long. But he timed himself with great cunning and control.

Daniele was speaking into the door-visor, announcing their arrival, when La Boucherie's enormous bulk lurched suddenly sideward as if he were falling. It looked so much like a fall that the Guard at his elbow put out his both hands to help. That was an error. La Boucherie's tremendous weight came down like an avalanche of solid flesh upon the Guard. La Boucherie's deceptive-looking hand flashed out, slipped the man's smash-gun deftly from its holster and folded lovingly around it.

La Boucherie struck the floor on one padded shoulder, rolled completely over and was on his feet with incredible lightness. For an instant the muzzle of the gun menaced them from the curtained doorway, La Boucherie's skull-like smile as menacing as the gun above it. The Guard, scrambling to his feet, for a moment gave him the shield he needed, and by the time the way was clear La Boucherie had vanished soundlessly.

It was hopeless, of course. He could not possibly get far in a strange building swarming with Guards and communication devices. Mart saw the leader of the Guards speaking into his glove-visor and knew the alarm was out already. Then the two men who gripped his elbows pushed him forward and he went into Llewelyn's private apartment again, Daniele walking before him.

CHAPTER XVIII

Top Secret

No single detail of the story Mart told to Llewelyn was left out.

“And that,” he finished, “is all that happened. All of it. It was my own fault and I’m ready to take the consequences, because I’ve got to. The thing was out of hand thirty years ago, I suppose, when La Boucherie had his first major setback and started on the path that led to—this. Certainly it was out of hand the moment I let myself fall asleep in the cave. I’m not excusing myself, Leader. I’m glad I did what I did. It’s the sin of omission that worries me, and even that’s too late to worry about now.”

Llewelyn looked at him, the weariness in his lined dark face more nearly exhaustion than Mart had ever seen it. But there was no anger there. They were alone—Mart, Llewelyn, Daniele. Mart was locked into a restraining chair, comfortable but inflexible. The Guards waited outside. This was a conversation in complete privacy. Llewelyn proved that in the next instant by saying something that astounded Mart.

“You may be right,” he said. “I think a lot of us have a feeling very like relief now that something’s finally blasted the Cromwellian culture out of its stasis.”

“You mean—” Mart stared at him. “You mean you’re on our side?”

“Of course not. What do you offer, except anarchy? I mean I’m going to do everything I can from now on to reestablish the old regime, but with differences. More flexibility. More scope. And you’re going to help me, Mart.”

Mart shook his head. Daniele’s eyes were still unswerving on him, and he thought the look in them brightened a little now.

“I can’t help you,” he told Llewelyn. “Even if I wanted to, I’d never be accepted again. And I don’t want to. You’re wrong. The old abuses would be right back inside six months. Cromwellianism can’t be flexible. It’s got to stay rigid or break up entirely. That’s the way it’s organized.”

“You left us while you were still under treatment,” Llewelyn reminded him, ignoring his other arguments. “No one’s going to blame you for doing wild things when your mind was in the state it was. I want you to undergo treatment again, Mart. Since you forced that reversal treatment on yourself and got your memories back I’ve been studying the method carefully. It had never been used before on a mind like yours. The records were taken automatically in the machine, of course. Having that data took me forward an important step toward solving your problem. I’ve been working on it here in my spare time.”

He pushed open a sliding door at his elbow and they all looked into the shining laboratory beyond. A familiar chair stood there, like and yet unlike the one in which Mart had set off the bomb of conflicting memories inside his own skull. Llewelyn came forward leisurely and laid his hand on the arm of Mart’s restraining chair. It rolled to his touch.

“Come with me into the lab,” he said. “You too, Daniele.”

It was a high, bright room glowing with fluorescents. Here, too, the storm raged against tall windows so heavily that nothing but streaming water could be seen, though now and then lightning shot violent flashes through the waterfall, and thunder rocked the whole great building.

“Mart, I want you to let me finish the work on your mind,” Llewelyn said persuasively. “You aren’t in any condition now to refuse me. You aren’t really responsible. Once I’ve brought you back to normal you’ll see how right I’ve—”

It was a little thing that interrupted him. For an instant all three of them were aware of it without quite realizing what had happened. But the sound of thunder was much louder in the room, and a chilled blast of rain-wet air blew by them. Then knowledge seemed to strike all three at once, and they turned their heads almost automatically toward the windows.

La Boucherie stood there, grinning his mirthless skull-grin, rain streaming heavily down his gross body and the smash-gun steady in his hand. They could see the balcony behind him, and the storm which he himself had brought into being. Still grinning, he stepped carefully to the floor, closing the window.

“No, Mart,” he said. “Don’t be a fool. He can’t force you to accept treatment if your mind rebels. You know what he wants to do, don’t you? Put you under hypnosis again, so you’ll be an automaton Leader. Don’t trust him.”

“That’s not true,” Llewelyn said dispassionately. It was curious how academically the two men seemed to be debating, arguing a point of free will as lucidly as if one did not hold the other at gun-point, and with all the instability of madness hovering on the face behind the gun. “It isn’t true at all. I won’t try to influence your decisions again, Havers. But you know your mind isn’t working well yet. In your own mind you know you need treatment.”

“Mart, don’t!” La Boucherie’s voice sharpened. “I need you! Wait!” He gestured with his gun and stepped forward toward the big metal chair upon which Llewelyn was leaning. “If you’re telling the truth, Llewelyn,” he said, “suppose you just sit down in that chair yourself. I don’t suppose the treatment would affect you at all, if you think your own mind’s all right now. You heard me, Llewelyn! Sit down, if you’re not lying.”

Llewelyn looked at him for a long moment, eyes locked with the small, furious eyes of La Boucherie. His hand stole behind him, toward a stud in the wall.

“I think you need treatment worse than either of us,” he said, his finger reaching the bell at last.

He touched it, but for an instant did not ring. La Boucherie could not see what he was doing. Mart could, and to save his life he could not have spoken. For much more was happening here than the mere conflict of the two men. The bell was no answer. He had to see the outcome. And one more thing was in process that he knew he must not halt.

Daniele was watching the bell, too. And she was leaning forward slowly.

“Sit down, Llewelyn,” La Boucherie said.

He put out a fat hand and pushed the Leader backward toward the chair. In the other hand the gun trembled a little with violent emotion violently controlled. Mart knew what storms of bitter feeling must be moving in La Boucherie’s brain now, memories of his own frustrated career of Leadership, hatred of this man who had all La Boucherie had been denied.

“Sit down!” he said, and pushed hard.

Llewelyn’s finger twitched and stiffened upon the bell. And Daniele moved with startling swiftness, her hand shooting out, striking the pressing finger aside. She spread her palm above the bell and shook her head slowly at Llewelyn’s amazed stare, her lips colorless and pressed firmly together.

“I’m sorry, Leader,” she said. “I’ve made up my mind. I think they’re right. Cromwellianism’s had its day. From now on I’m with Mart Havers.”

La Boucherie gave a howl of triumph and his blow knocked Llewelyn back so hard into the chair that for a moment the Leader was breathless. Daniele came swiftly to Mart, her eyes warm as they met his gaze. She touched three locks and the restraining arms of the chair sprang apart. He got up stiffly.

La Boucherie, working one-handed, with an uncanny deftness, already had the metal hood on Llewelyn's head. The strap locked beneath his chin with a final click. La Boucherie laughed senselessly and snapped the master switch above the chair. Mart would have stopped him. But it happened too fast. And now the sight of what was happening held him fascinated.

Llewelyn's eyes were blank. He stared straight before him, seeing nothing. La Boucherie laughed again and reached for the dial above the metal hood. He moved its pointer two notches up—and Llewelyn spoke.

His words were gibberish.

"La Boucherie!" Mart came forward fast, his arm out. "Stop it! You don't know what you're doing."

"I do know." La Boucherie swung his gun around and leveled it at Mart. "I know exactly what I'm doing. I've worked machinery like this before. It may kill the man, but before it does I'll find out what I want to know. Stand back!"

He turned the dial up two notches more. Llewelyn's gibberish went high and shrill, but a word was recognizable in it now and then. La Boucherie swung the pointer back eight notches. Blank-faced, unseeing, Llewelyn responded to it with unintelligible sounds. It was like listening to the tuning of a radio, swinging to and fro among the crackling static until finally the words came out in clear form on the narrow band of true focus. As Llewelyn's came, at last.

"I can hear you now," he said in a voice quite unlike his own. "You have the right calibration. Stop."

"Llewelyn!" La Boucherie's voice was thick with triumph. "Have I got the level of your mind I want? The sub-censor area? Tell me the code word that identifies you with the Council. Quick—what is it?"

Without hesitation Llewelyn told him. It was the top secret code entrusted to every Leader, different for each, to be guarded more closely than the Leader's life itself. Llewelyn babbled it out like a child. La Boucherie laughed with delight that was almost childlike, too.

"Tell me—where is the Council chamber?" he demanded, his voice shaking with eagerness. "How can I get to it without danger?"

"Take the elevator behind that door in the corner," Llewelyn told him promptly. "The Chamber is on the top floor. No one will stop you."

"What is the Council?"

"I don't know." Llewelyn's voice did not falter on this either.

La Boucherie bent forward, his face flushing dark.

"You've got to tell me. I'm talking to your mind below the censor area. You must answer with the truth. What is the Council?"

"There are many members. I have sat on the Council myself. But I can't tell you what it is. You must see that for yourself. No one could tell who had not seen it."

La Boucherie straightened. Sweat mingled with the rain on his broad forehead. He turned to Mart and Daniele, his gun steady. He backed toward the door Llewelyn had indicated.

"I'm going up," he said. "Mart, you're coming with me. I don't trust you down here. You—woman—whatever your name is, sit down in that chair. Yes, I know you say you're with us.

I won't hurt you. But I've got a job to do. Sit down—that's right. Now kick that lever. There!"

The automatic locks snapped and Daniele lay back quietly enough in the confining bands.

"I'll be all right," she told Mart. "I think you will too. Go on. See whatever it is you have to see. I believe you'll come back safe to let me go."

The last Mart saw of her was her warm, calm smile. . . .

The small lift sighed to a stop, the door slid back. La Boucherie pushed Mart out ahead of him. They stood in an empty hall. Far down it were tall double doors with a symbol glowing upon them that meant "TOP SECRET—NO ADMITTANCE." And that was all they saw.

This area which should have been a hive of busy activity was utterly silent except for the faintest possible humming noise, almost subsonic, a sound that made Mart shiver a little without quite realizing it.

"I don't understand this," La Boucherie said behind him, almost in a whisper, and Mart knew that he, too, felt that tiny unreasoning shiver. "He couldn't have lied to me. He said it was nothing but a meeting of Leaders. I don't like it!"

Neither did Mart. But he went down the hall in answer to La Boucherie's nudge, both of them walking softly. Secretaries should be scurrying to and fro, reporting Leaders coming and going. There was nothing. No one. Only the empty hall filled with that distant humming, and the big doors which warned all comers away.

They came to the doors. They pushed them open, cautiously. And so, in silence and without opposition, they found the Council at last.

There was a long, low table with a score of chairs around it, but only six had men in them. Six men, sitting motionless. They were Leaders, all of them, and each wore a round, dull cap of some pitted metal. Other caps lay on the table top, one before each chair. The men did not stir or turn as La Boucherie followed Mart into the room.

It was a perfectly plain room, windowless, with one door in the far wall. And that soft humming filled the air like a bodiless solid.

The six Leaders looked straight ahead, blank-faced, every gaze fixed on nothing. They seemed to be listening.

Mart touched the shoulder of the nearest man. He shook it. No response. He tried the next. Still nothing. La Boucherie spoke softly.

"Catalepsy?" he asked. And then, with sudden viciousness, "We'll see!"

The slam of a high-charge electronic beam made Mart jump. He whirled and saw the last man at the table slowly collapsing forward, his chest disintegrated by La Boucherie's blast. But even then no expression showed on his face.

Mart set his teeth grimly and said nothing. He knew he would have to find some way to disarm the man, and soon. Now he went forward without comment, skirting the fallen body, and followed La Boucherie toward the door in the wall.

"La Boucherie," he thought. "No man was ever named more accurately!"

The fat hand holding the gun still pointed at Mart, but with the other hand La Boucherie opened the door. Then the gunhand fell slowly. It was Mart's chance, but he did not even know it. Gripped in the same stunned amazement as the other man, he stood and stared across La Boucherie's shoulder.

A bright red light beat out in heavy waves, like heartbeats, from the room beyond. It was a small room. No—not a room at all. More accurately, it was a machine.

Walls, floor, ceiling were metal like the dull, pitted caps the Leaders wore. Infinitely complicated wiring filled the space between like a steely web. Smoothly, on oiled surfaces, metallic things slid with a measured motion to and fro among the webbing. Like shuttles, a little. Shuttles weaving their own strong webs. Or a Lachesis of some race more imperishable than flesh, weaving a more imperishable web of destiny.

Mart swung back to the table, knowing the answer to his question before he asked it aloud, but not daring to accept his own answer.

“What is that thing?” he demanded, shaking a capped man by the shoulder. “Answer me! That thing in the next room. Is it a machine? Is it alive? Is it intelligent? What is it?”

“I am a machine,” the Leader’s lips said. But it was not a man’s voice that spoke. “I am not alive. I am not intelligent.”

CHAPTER XIX

Thinking Machine

Except for that deep, continuing purr from the place beyond, La Boucherie's heavy breathing was the only sound in the room. After a long time La Boucherie put his own question, very softly:

"Who are you? To whom are we talking?"

"You are talking to a machine. An electronic calculating machine."

The Leader's lips framed the words but neither man had any illusion about who spoke. And Mart realized, without any further questions, how truly he had accused this culture of inflexibility. He knew now why it had operated along such rigid, unyielding patterns, so obediently to the will that guided it, so like a machine in itself.

"These men here," La Boucherie said. "What's happened to them?"

"They are getting answers from the electronic calculator. Those are mental-hookup helmets, to eliminate semantic difficulties."

"This has got to be stopped!" Mart was thinking desperately. "Somehow—but how? Where can I find an Atropos to cut the thread it's weaving?"

La Boucherie was speaking again, excitement in his voice.

"Will you answer our questions?"

"Yes."

"How do the Leaders use you?"

"The electronic calculating machine was built in nineteen-forty eight," the unhuman voice said. "It was improved from time to time. It was the first truly successful calculating machine. Electron tubes and electrical circuits were substituted for clumsy cogs and gears. Originally three thousand and seven tubes were used in the electronic calculating machine. Today there are twelve thousand, six hundred and eleven.

"The electronic calculating machine was invented to solve complex mechanical problems faster than human colloid brains could solve them. Gradually other problems were introduced. It was necessary to improve the electronic calculating machine so that it could break down problems into pure mathematics, solve them, and rephrase them into their original applications.

"All knowledge can be found mathematically. When the Cromwellians first established their rule, they found certain problems insoluble, except by the empirical method, which might have taken hundreds of years. They decided to use the electronic calculating machine to answer those problems: This was kept secret. All important decisions were submitted to the Council of Leaders, who apparently made the final judgment, but actually submitted those decisions to the electronic calculating machine, for judgment. Thus the legend of the infallibility of the Council was built up. This is a brief reply to your questions."

"A machine!" La Boucherie whispered. "The world has been ruled by a machine!"

"Then the Cromwell Leaders aren't any smarter than anybody else," Mart said. "At least, they're not supermen. Anybody can use this machine and get the right answers."

"Anybody can, but only the Leaders have access to it," La Boucherie said. He swung toward the silent Leader. "I was a Leader myself once. But I was disqualified when I was

nineteen. They told me my case was referred to the Council for decision. That means—” His mouth drew down at the corners. “It was this accursed machine that disqualified me!”

“That doesn’t matter now,” Mart said. “The main thing is what we’d better do. As long as the Leaders hold the secret of this gadget, they can get the right answers, and continue to rule. If we could spread the word—”

La Boucherie was walking toward the open door of the adjoining room. The lurid red light beat out upon his face. Suddenly he jerked out his smash-gun and fired through the doorway.

There was a hissing crackle. Havers saw La Boucherie step back a pace, frowning, mouth twisted. He fired again.

“La Boucherie!” Mart said.

He started forward, but the man had turned and was moving back toward the long table. There was no longer red light playing upon his face, but his eyes were red.

He paused opposite the Leader who had answered their questions. “How can you be destroyed?” he said softly.

“High-voltage currents will short-circuit the electronic calculating machine,” the unhuman voice answered instantly.

“How can I do that?”

“By introducing a current from outside this building. The electronic calculating machine is automatically protected against such attacks within these walls.”

Mart touched La Boucherie’s arm. The fat man turned to face him, still scowling, the red light burning in his deep-set eyes.

“I was a Leader,” La Boucherie whispered. “This thing threw me out!”

“Kennard—”

La Boucherie shook his head. He looked oddly surprised.

“I hated you, Mart,” he said. “For years I’ve hated you. And so many other things I’ve hated—the Leaders, and the Guardsmen with their arrogance and their confidence, and so many things. But I was wrong. I don’t hate you any more. Or anything else, except the machine. I never knew what to hate before. But now I know.”

And, without warning, La Boucherie laughed, spun on his heel, and charged out of the room.

Outside the building the Patrol planes were still circling on their never-ending round, under a dark, lowering ceiling of cloud. The rain beat down viciously. Mart got outside in time to see La Boucherie’s shadowy form plunge without a pause into the torrential downpour.

“Wait!” he shouted, and thunder rolled deeply, drowning his voice.

From above a spotlight flamed into being, finding La Boucherie and then losing him. The white disc swung in widening circles, seeking its quarry again. A fountain of geysering earth told of a dropped bomb.

“He’s insane!” Havers thought. “Insane, to run out of this haven, where the Patrol dared not drop its bombs, into the open where he is a clear target.”

Once more the searchlight found La Boucherie. The running man swerved, but the beam followed him. Other beams focused on the fugitive, and two more bombs dropped. La Boucherie staggered, caught himself, and ran on.

Mart found himself running after La Boucherie. He did not quite know why. Perhaps he hated La Boucherie as much as the old Freeman had hated him. And certainly it was useless

folly for Havers to throw his life away—a life that, by some miracle, might be useful to the Freeman later—but in that storm-blasted arena of wind and darkness and whirling lights there was no time for conscious reasoning. Mart Havers raced after the man he had hated for years, trying to save him from inevitable death.

The gale picked up La Boucherie and threw him thirty yards away. That was the only thing that saved his life momentarily. A bomb fountained where he had been, but now the searchlights were confused and darted about anxiously. So far none of them had touched Havers. Not that it mattered, for this was hopeless.

Yet he ran on.

Lightning made a pallid flame across the cloudroof. Both La Boucherie and Mart were clear targets in its flare. Havers saw the bulky form ahead of him, saw it staggering on, one arm flapping uselessly, and saw the wreck of the Weather Patrol rocket plane just beyond.

As the ships dived from above and the bombs crashed down, La Boucherie flung himself into the cabin of the jet-plane.

“La Boucherie!” Havers screamed against the wind and the thunder. “Don’t try it!”

He was flung back by the concussion of a bomb. He lay dazed, half-conscious, until the beating of rain on his face brought him back to alertness. That, and something else—the deep, hoarse bellowing of jets.

Mart propped himself up on one elbow. What he saw froze him motionless. The rocket-plane was rising.

When an ordinary plane cracks up it cannot fly, since wings, motor, prop are all useless. But a rocket-ship cannot be immobilized as long as the rockets can be fired. La Boucherie sent the plane up.

Its jets could be fired, yes. But the controls were gone. It could not be guided. And La Boucherie was throwing full power into those roaring jets.

The Patrol ships dived, weapons blasting. But La Boucherie left them behind and below him in a matter of moments. The ordinary planes were too slow, and the Patrol jet jobs not maneuverable enough to hit him.

The rocketing plane, with its small wings, fled up toward the skies. Burning rockets made the blade of a flaming sword that stood for an instant above the storm-racked Earth.

Then lightning crackled from clouds to plane, and from plane to the ground.

Mart found himself on his feet, shouting, staring up, heedless of the blinding rain. He knew, now, what La Boucherie intended. Not insanity—not quite, though it meant suicide. La Boucherie had remembered the lessons in Weather Control Havers had given him. He had remembered the special equipment in this particular ship, the device for drawing lightning from static-heavy clouds. And Mart remembered, now, what the thinking machine had said—that it could be destroyed by high-voltage currents. A current from outside the protected building in which it stood.

Sword of flame stood still in the dark, thunder-ridden skies for an instant.

Sword of lightning crashed down, driving inexorably, instantly, through the massed Patrol ships.

Even above the storm the death scream of the thinking machine rose shrill and intense—an unbearable, knife-edged whine that rose higher and higher—

And stopped.

But Mart Havers was looking up, to the fiery sword that was La Boucherie’s ship, out of control since before its take-off. It was turning now in the sky. The wavering blade of flame

tipped, was level with the horizon, swung further.

Inverted, the sword dropped toward the Earth.

Mart did not watch the end. Breathing in deep, racking gasps, he ran back toward the building. Once a Patrol ship dived toward him, but then he was almost at the threshold.

And across it.

His smash-gun was unholstered. He did not know what to expect now. But he intended to make sure that La Boucherie's death had served its purpose.

He came into the room with the long table. The six Leaders were still seated in their chairs, the metal helmets still on their heads. The man La Boucherie had killed was slumped down, but the others sat upright, staring straight ahead.

Mart came closer, his gun ready. He reached out to touch one of the men.

The Leader toppled from his chair. His body struck the floor heavily.

He was dead.

So were the others, Mart saw. But they did not matter particularly, now. What mattered was the machine. That was the heart, the brain, of the Cromwellian rule, the heart of any future government that could use it, and inevitably be forced into the rigid, mechanical pattern that meant destruction for mankind.

The machine gave the right answers. That was true. Yet they were not entirely the right answers—not for human beings. Men and women, Mart thought, could never be broken down into mathematical formulae and their problems solved by such a method.

Man must fight his own battles. He has always done so, and he always will, or he will perish. Thus he grows stronger. The men of the Weather Patrol, battling the ancient foe, were not the helpless weaklings Cromwell machine-rule had made of the rest of the race. Man must fight his own wars—against the storms, and the blizzards and tidal waves of his dark, unknown destiny. But that fight he must fight with his own resources, or lose his ultimate destiny.

Mart crossed the room. He paused at a doorway and stared at what was left of the electronic brain.

The man-made lightning had done its work efficiently. Even Havers, who was not a technician, saw that the machine would never operate again. It was wrecked.

He lifted the smash-gun, sure now that the barrier that had stopped a charge before would not stop it now. That distant humming had ceased. The machine was vulnerable—but it was dead.

He hesitated, and then slowly lowered the weapon.

"The world must see this," he thought. "Otherwise they won't believe. But I can show it to them, if I live. I can tell them they've been ruled by a machine, not by an infallible Cromwell Council of Leaders. Once they know the truth they will seek their own destiny!"

The rookie pilot and the old hand stood near their jet-plane, waiting for their take-off signal. A turmoil of thick clouds hung dully overhead. Once the low roaring of a supersonic job drifted down the wind.

"Almost time," the old hand said. "Cigarette?"

The rookie didn't answer. He was staring across the airstrip toward Administration.

The other man grinned.

“First time you’ve met Havers?” he asked. “Well, it won’t be the last. You never know when he’ll pop up at some outpost and make a check. He’s been doing that for over twenty years now, and I’ve never seen him let down yet.”

“Even outposts like this!” the rookie said half-wonderingly.

“Today’s outpost is tomorrow’s city. We keep pushing the frontiers forward. You were just a kid when the Cromwells were smashed, weren’t you? There weren’t any frontiers then. Exploration was forbidden. But now it’s different.”

The old hand shaded his eyes from a gleam of sunlight. Overhead, the clouds were breaking up as Weather Patrol planes worked their scientific magic, step by step changing the climate to suit civilization’s requirements.

“He’s taking off,” the rookie said disappointedly.

Across the field Mart Havers moved toward a ship. The old hand cocked his head, blinked, then returned Havers’ buoyant wave. It was the old signal of Weather Patrol—“All clear”.

“Sure he’s taking off, kid. He’s got a date in Reno with his wife.”

“Oh, that’s right. He’s married, isn’t he?”

There was a pause.

“Yes. Married to a girl who used to be a Leader in the old days—never mind that. . . . There he goes! Quite a man, Mart Havers. I think I knew that twenty years ago, when he walked into my office.”

“Did you know him then?”

“Mart Havers got his field training under me,” Andre Kelvin said. “Probably that’s why I can pull the jobs I want. Colonels aren’t generally assigned to frontier work like this, but I asked for the assignment. Mart and I both like frontiers. . . . There’s our call. Let’s go, kid. We’ve got some weather to smash before a city can be built in this neck of the woods.”

The two men in their bright blue uniforms turned toward the ship. The clouds were almost gone now, but toward the west a new bank was forming. Another job for the Storm Smashers, the shock troops of civilization.

The jets flamed, and the plane shot forward, rising from alien soil into the turbulent winds of Venus.

[The end of *Lord of the Storm* by Henry Kuttner (as Keith Hammond)]