

The Fourth Profession



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The doorbell rang around noon on Wednesday.

I sat up in bed and-it was the oddest of hangovers. My head didn't spin. My sense of balance was quiveringly alert. At the same time my mind was clogged with the things I knew: facts that wouldn't relate, churning in my head.

It was like walking the high wire while simultaneously trying to solve an Agatha Christie mystery. Yet I was doing neither. I was just sitting up in bed, blinking.

I remembered the Monk, and the pills.
How many pills?

The bell rang again.

Walking to the door was an eerie sensation. Most people pay no attention to their somesthetic senses. Mine were clamoring for attention, begging to be tested-by a backflip, for instance. I resisted. I don't have the muscles for doing backflips.

I couldn't remember taking any acrobatics pills.

The man outside my door was big and blond and blocky. He was holding an unfamiliar badge up to the lens of my

spy-eye, in a wide hand with short, thick fingers. He had candid blue eyes, a square, honest face-a face I recognized. He'd been in the Long Spoon last night, at a single table in a corner.

Last night he had looked morose, introspective, like a man whose girl had left him for Mr. Wrong. A face guaranteed to get him left alone. I'd noticed him only because he wasn't drinking enough to match the face.

Today he looked patient, endlessly patient, with the patience of a dead man.

And he had a badge. I let him in.

"William Morris," he said, identifying

himself. "Secret Service. Are you Edward Harley Frazer, owner of the Long Spoor Bar?"

"Part-owner."

"Yes, that's right. Sorry to bother you, Mr. Frazer. I see you keep bartender's hours." He was looking at the wrinkled pair of underpants I had on.

"Sit down," I said, waving at the chair. I badly needed to sit down myself. Standing, I couldn't think about anything but standing. My balance was all-conscious. My heels would not rest solidly on the floor. They barely touched. My weight was all on my toes; my body insisted on standing that way.

So I dropped onto the edge of the bed, but it felt like I was giving a trampoline performance. The poise, the grace, the polished ease! Hell. "What do you want from me, Mr. Morris? Doesn't the Secret Service guard the President?"

His answer sounded like rote-memory. "Among other concerns, such as counterfeiting, we do guard the President and his immediate family and the President-elect, and the Vice President if he asks us to." He paused. "We used to guard foreign dignitaries too."

That connected. "You're here about the Monk."

"Right." Morris looked down at his

hands. He should have had an air of professional self-assurance to go with the badge. It wasn't there. "This is an odd case, Frazer. We took it because it used to be our job to protect foreign visitors, and because nobody else would touch it."

"So last night you were in the Long Spoon guarding a visitor from outer space."

"Just so."

"Where were you night before last?"

"Was that when he first appeared?"

"Yah," I said, remembering. "Monday

night..."

He came in an hour after opening time. He seemed to glide, with the hem of his robe just brushing the floor. By his gait he might have been, moving on wheels. His shape was wrong, in a way that made your eyes want to twist around to straighten it out.

There is something queer about the garment that gives a Monk his name. The hood is open in front, as if eyes might hide within its shadow, and the front of the robe is open too. But the loose cloth hides more than it ought to. There is too much shadow.

Once I thought the robe parted as he

walked toward me. But there seemed to be nothing inside.

In the Long Spoon was utter silence. Every eye was on the Monk as he took a stool at one end of the bar, and ordered.

He looked alien, and was. But he seemed supernatural.

He used the oddest of drinking systems. I keep my house brands on three long shelves, more or less in order of type. The Monk moved down the top row of bottles, right to left, ordering a shot from each bottle. He took his liquor straight, at room temperature. He drank quietly, steadily, and with what seemed to be total concentration.

He spoke only to order.

He showed nothing of himself but one hand. That hand looked like a chicken's foot, but bigger, with lumpy-looking, very flexible joints, and with five toes instead of four.

At closing time the Monk was four bottles from the end of the row. He paid me in one dollar bills, and left, moving steadily, the hem of his robe just brushing the floor. I testify as an expert: he was sober. The alcohol had not affected him at all.

"Monday night," I said. "He shocked the hell out of us. Morris, what was a Monk doing in a bar in Hollywood? I thought

all the Monks were in New York."

"So did we."

"Oh?"

'We didn't know he was on the West Coast until it hit the newspapers yesterday morning. That's why you didn't see more reporters yesterday. We kept them off your back. I came in last night to question you, Frazer. I changed my mind when I saw that the Monk was already here."

"Question me. Why? All I did was serve him drinks."

"Okay, let's start there. Weren't you

afraid the alcohol might kill a Monk?"

'It occurred to me."

"Well?"

"I served him what he asked for. It's the Monks' own doing that nobody knows anything about Monks. We don't even know what shape they are, let alone how they're put together. If liquor does things to a Monk, it's his own lookout. Let him check the chemistry."

"Sounds reasonable."

"Thanks."

"It's also the reason I'm here," said

Morris. "We know too little about the Monks. We didn't even know they existed until something over two years ago."

"Oh?" I'd only started reading about them a month ago.

"It wouldn't be that long, except that all the astronomers were looking in that direction already, studying a recent nova in Sagittarius. So they caught the Monk starship a little sooner, but it was already inside Pluto's orbit.

"They've been communicating with us for over a year. Two weeks ago they took up orbit around the Moon. There's only one Monk starship, and only one

ground-to-orbit craft, as far as we know. The ground-to-orbit craft has been sitting in the ocean off Manhattan Island, convenient to the United Nations Building, for those same two weeks. Its crew are supposed to be all the Monks there are in the world.

"Mr. Frazer, we don't even know how your Monk got out here to the West Coast! Almost anything you could tell us would help. Did you notice anything odd about him, these last two nights?"

"Odd?" I grinned. "About a Monk?"

It took him a moment to get it, and then his answering smile was wan. "Odd for a Monk."

"Yah," I said, and tried to concentrate. It was the wrong move. Bits of fact buzzed about my skull, trying to fit themselves together.

Morris was saying, "Just talk, if you will. The Monk came back Tuesday night. About what time?"

"About four-thirty. He had a case- of- pills-RNA..."

It was no use. I knew too many, things, all at once, all unrelated. I knew the name of the Garment to Wear Among Strangers, its principle and its purpose. I knew about Monks and alcohol. I knew the names of the five primary colors,, so that for a moment I was blind with the

memory of the colors themselves, colors no man would ever see.

Morris was standing over me, looking worried. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"Ask me anything." My voice was high and strange and breathless with giddy laughter. "Monks have four limbs, all hands, each with a callus heel behind the fingers. I know their names, Morris. Each hand, each finger. I know how many eyes a Monk has. One. And the whole skull is an ear. There's no word for ear, but medical terms for each of the-resonating cavities-between the lobes of the brain-"

"You look dizzy. You don't sample your

own wares, do you,' Frazer?"

"I'm the opposite of dizzy. There's a compass in my head. I've got absolute direction. Morris, it must have been the pills."

"Pills?" Morris had small, squarish ears that couldn't possibly have come to point. But I got that impression.

"He had a sample case full of-education pills-"

"Easy now." He put a steady hand on my shoulder. "Take it easy. Just start at the beginning, and talk. I'll make some coffee."

"Good." Coffee sounded wonderful, suddenly. "Pot's ready. Just plug it in. I fix it before I go to sleep."

Morris disappeared around the partition that marks off the kitchen alcove from the bedroom/living room in my small apartment. His voice floated back, "Start at the beginning: He came back Tuesday night."

"He came back Tuesday night," I repeated.

"Hey, your coffee's already perked. You must have plugged it in in your sleep. Keep talking." '

"He started his drinking where he'd left

off, four bottles from the end of the top row. I'd have sworn he was cold sober. His voice didn't give him away..."

His voice didn't give him away because it was only a whisper, too low to make out. His translator spoke like a computer, putting single words together from a man's recorded voice. It spoke slowly and with care. Why not? It was speaking an alien tongue.

The Monk had had five tonight. That put him through the ryes and the bourbons and the Irish whiskeys, and several of the liqueurs. Now he was tasting the vodkas.

At that point I worked up the courage to

ask him what he was doing.

He explained at length. The Monk starship was a commercial venture, a trading mission following a daisy chain of stars. He was a sampler for the group. He was mightily pleased with some of the wares he had sampled here. Probably he would order great quantities of them, to be freeze-dried for easy storage. Add alcohol and water to reconstitute.

"Then you won't be wanting to test all the vodkas," I told him. "Vodka isn't much more than water and alcohol."

He thanked me.

"The same goes for most gins, except for flavorings." I lined up four gins in front of him. One was Tanqueray. One was a Dutch gin you have to keep chilled like some liqueurs. The others were fairly ordinary products. I left him with these while I served customers.

I had expected a mob tonight. Word should have spread. Have a drink in the Long Spoon, you'll see a Thing from Outer Space. But the place was half empty. Louise was handling them nicely.

I was proud of Louise. As with last night, tonight she behaved as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening. The mood was contagious. I could almost hear the customers thinking: We like our

privacy when we drink. A Thing from Outer Space is entitled to the same consideration.

It was strange to compare her present insouciance with the way her eyes had bugged at her first sight of a Monk.

The Monk finished tasting the gins. "I am concerned for the volatile fractions," he said. "Some of your liquors will lose taste from condensation."

I told him he was probably right. And I asked, "How do you pay for your cargos?"

"With knowledge."

"That's fair. What kind of knowledge?"

The Monk reached under his robe and produced a flat sample case. He opened it. It was full of pills. There was a large glass bottle full of a couple of hundred identical pills; and these were small and pink and triangular. But most of the sample case was given over to big, round pills of all colors, individually wrapped and individually labeled in the wandering Monk script.

No two labels were alike. Some of the notations looked hellishly complex.

"These are knowledge," said the Monk.

"Ah," I said, and wondered if I was

being put on. An alien can have a sense of humor, can't he? And there's no way to tell if he's lying.

"A certain complex organic molecule has much to do with memory," said the Monk. "Ribonucleic acid. It is present and active in the nervous systems of most organic beings. Wish you to learn my language?"

I nodded.

He pulled a pill loose and stripped, it of its wrapping, which fluttered to the bar like a shred of cellophane. The Monk put the pill in my hand and said, "You must swallow it now, before the air ruins it, now that it is out of its wrapping."

The pill was marked like a target in red and green circles. It was big and bulky going down.

"You must be crazy," Bill Morris said wonderingly.

"It looks that way to me, too, now. But think about it; This was a Monk, an alien, an ambassador to the whole human race. He wouldn't have fed me anything dangerous, not without carefully considering all the possible consequences."

"He wouldn't, would he?"

"That's the way it seemed." I remembered about Monks and alcohol. It

was a pill memory, surfacing as if I had known it all my life. It came too late...

"A language says things about the person who speaks it, about the way he thinks and the way he lives. Morris, the Monk language says a lot about Monks."

"Call me Bill," he said irritably.

"Okay. Take Monks and alcohol. Alcohol works on a Monk the way it works on a man, by starving his brain cells a little. But in a Monk it gets absorbed more slowly. A Monk can stay high for a week on a night's dedicated drinking.

"I knew he was sober when he left

Monday night By Tuesday night he must have been pretty high."

I sipped my coffee. Today it tasted different, and better, as if memories of some Monk staple foods had worked their way as overtones into my taste buds.

Morris said, "And you didn't know it."

"Know it? I was counting on his sense of responsibility!" Morris shook his head in pity, except that he seemed to be grinning inside.

"We talked some more after that . . . and I took some more pills."

"Why?"

"I was high on the first one."

"It made you drunk?"

"Not drunk, but I couldn't think straight. My head was full of Monk words all trying to fit themselves to meanings. I was dizzy with nonhuman images and words I couldn't pronounce."

"Just how many pills did you take?"

"I don't remember."

"Swell."

An image surfaced. "I do remember

saying, 'But how about something unusual? Really unusual.'"

Morris was no longer amused. "You're lucky you can still talk. The chances you took, you should be a drooling idiot this morning!"

"It seemed reasonable at the time."

"You don't remember how many pills you took?"

I shook my head. Maybe the motion jarred something loose. "That bottle of little triangular pills. I know what they were. Memory erasers."

"Good God! You didn't-"

"No, no, Morris. They don't erase your whole memory. They erase pill memories. The RNA in a Monk memory pill is tagged somehow, so that the eraser pill can pick it out and break it down."

Morris gaped. Presently he said, "That's incredible. The education pills are wild enough, but that-You see what they must do, don't you? They hang a radical on each and every RNA molecule in each and every education pill. The active principle in the eraser pill is an enzyme for just that radical."

He saw my expression and said, "Never mind, just take my word for it. They must have had the education pills for a

hundred years before they worked out the eraser principle."

"Probably. The pills must be very old."

He pounced. "How do you know that?"

"The name for the pill has only one syllable, like fork. There are dozens of words for kinds of pill reflexes, for swallowing the wrong pill, for side effects depending on what species is taking the pill. There's a special word for an animal, training pill, and another one for a slave training pill. Morris, I think my memory is beginning to settle down."

"Good!"

"Anyway, the Monks must have been peddling pills to aliens for thousands of years. I'd guess tens of thousands."

"Just how many kinds of pill were in that case?"

I tried to remember. My head felt congested.

"I don't know if there was more than one of each kind of pill. There were four stiff flaps like the leaves of a book, and each flap had rows of little pouches with a pill in each one. The flaps were maybe sixteen pouches long by eight across. Maybe. Morris, we ought to call Louise. She probably remembers better than I do, even if she noticed less at the time."

"You mean Louise Schu the barmaid? She might at that. Or she might jar something loose in your memory."

"Right."

"Call her. Tell her we'll meet her. Where's she live, Santa Monica?"

He'd done his homework, all right.

Her phone was still ringing when Morris said, "Wait a minute. Tell her we'll meet her at the Long Spoon. And tell her we'll pay her amply for her trouble."

Then Louise answered and told me I'd jarred her out of a sound sleep, and I told her she'd be paid amply for her

trouble, and she said what the hell kind of a crack was that?

After I hung up I asked, "Why the Long Spoon?"

"I've thought of something. I was one of the last customers out last night. I don't think you cleaned up."

"I was feeling peculiar. We cleaned up a little, I think."

"Did you empty the wastebaskets?"

'We don't usually. There's a guy who comes in in the morning and mops the floors and empties the wastebaskets and so forth. The trouble is, he's been home

with flu the last couple of days. Louise and I have been going early."

"Good. Get dressed, Frazer. We'll go down to the Long Spoon and Count the pieces of Monk cellophane in the waste' baskets. They shouldn't be too hard to identify. They'll tell us how many pills you took."

I noticed it while I was dressing. Morris's attitude had, changed subtly. He had become proprietary. He tended to stand closer to me, as if someone might try to steal me, or as if I might try to steal away.

Imagination, maybe. But I began to wish I didn't know so much about Monks.

I stopped to empty the percolator before leaving. Habit. Every afternoon I put the percolator in the dishwasher before I leave. When I come home at three A.M. it's ready to load.

I poured out the dead coffee, took the machine apart, and stared.

The grounds in the top were fresh coffee, barely damp from steam. They hadn't been used yet.

There was another Secret Service man outside my door, a, tall Midwesterner with a toothy grin. His name was George Littleton. He spoke not a word after Bill Morris introduced us, probably because I looked like I'd bite him.

I would have. My balance nagged me like a sore tooth. I couldn't forget it for an instant.

Going down in the elevator, I could feel the universe shifting around me. There seemed to be a four-dimensional map in my head, with me in the center and the rest of the universe traveling around me at various changing velocities.

The car we used was a Lincoln continental. George drove. My map became three times as active, recording every touch of brake and accelerator.

"We're putting you on salary," said Morris, "if that's agreeable. You know more about Monks than any living man.

We'll class you as a consultant and pay you a thousand dollars a day to put down all you remember about Monks."

"I'd want the right to quit whenever I think I'm mined out."

"That seems all right," said Morris. He was lying. They would keep me just as long as they felt like it. But there wasn't a thing I could do about it at the moment.

I didn't even know what made me so sure.

So I asked, "What about Louise?"

"She spent most of her time waiting on tables, as I remember. She won't know

much. We'll pay her a thousand a day for a couple of days. Anyway, for today, whether she knows anything or not."

"Okay," I said, and tried to settle back.

"You're the valuable one, Frazer. You've been fantastically lucky. That Monk language pill is going to give us a terrific advantage whenever we deal with Monks. They'll have to learn about us. We'll know about them already. Frazer, what does a Monk look like under the cowl and robe?"

"Not human," I said. "They only stand upright to make us feel at ease. And there's a swelling along one side that looks like equipment under the robe, but

it isn't. It's part of the digestive system. And the head is as big as a basketball, but it's half hollow."

"They're natural quadrupeds?"

"Yah. Four-footed, but climbers. The animal they evolved from lives in forests of plants that look like giant dandelions. They can throw rocks with any foot. They're still around on Center; that's the home planet. You're not writing this down."

"There's a tape recorder going."

"Really?" I'd been kidding.

"You'd better believe it. We can use

anything you happen to remember. We still don't even know how your Monk got out here to California."

My Monk, forsooth.

"They briefed me pretty quickly yesterday. Did I tell you? I was visiting my parents in Cannel when my supervisor called me yesterday morning. Ten hours later I knew just about everything anyone knows about Monks. Except you, Frazer.

"Up until yesterday we thought that every Monk on Earth was either in the United Nations Building or aboard the Monk ground-to-orbit ship.

'We've been in that ship, Frazer. Several men have been through it, all trained astronauts wearing lunar exploration suits. Six Monks landed on Earth-unless more were hiding somewhere aboard the ground-to-orbit ship. Can you think of any reason why they should do that?"

"No."

"Neither can anyone else. And there are six Monks accounted for this morning. All in New York. Your Monk went home last night."

That jarred me. "How?"

'We don't know. We're checking plane flights, silly as that sounds. Wouldn't you

think a stewardess would notice a Monk on her flight? Wouldn't you think she'd go to the newspapers?"

"Sure."

"We're also checking flying saucer sightings."

I laughed. But by now that sounded logical.

"If that doesn't pan out, we'll be seriously considering teleportation. Would you-"

"That's it," I said without surprise. It had come the way a memory comes, from the back of my mind, as if it had always

been there. "He gave me a teleportation pill. That's why I've got absolute direction. To teleport I've got to know where in the universe I am."

Morris got bug-eyed. "You can teleport?"

"Not from a speeding car," I said with reflexive fear. "That's death. I'd keep the velocity."

"Oh." He was edging away as if I had sprouted horns.

More memory floated up, and I said, "Humans can't teleport anyway. That pill was for another market."

Morris relaxed. "You might have said that right away."

"I only just remembered."

"Why did you take it, if it's for aliens?"

"Probably for the location talent. I don't remember. I used to get lost pretty easily. I never will again. Morris, I'd be safer on a high wire than you'd be crossing a street with the Walk sign."

"Could that have been your 'something unusual'?"

"Maybe," I said. At the same time I was somehow sure that it wasn't.

Louise was in the dirt parking lot next to the Long Spoon. She was getting out of her Mustang when we pulled up. She waved an arm like a semaphore and walked briskly toward us, already talking. "Alien creatures in the Long Spoon, forsooth!" I'd taught her that word. "Ed, I keep telling you the customers aren't human. Hello, are you Mr. Morris? I remember you. You were in last night. You had four drinks. All night."

Morris smiled. "Yes, but I tipped big. Call me Bill, okay?"

Louise Schu was a cheerful blonde, by choice, not birth. She'd been working in the Long Spoon for five years now. A

few of my regulars knew my name; but they all knew hers.

Louise's deadliest enemy was the extra twenty pounds she carried as padding. She had been dieting for some decades. Two years back she had gotten serious about it and stopped cheating. She was mean for the next several months. But, clawing and scratching and half-starved every second, she had worked her way down to one hundred and twenty-five pounds. She threw a terrific celebration that night and-to hear her tell it afterward.-ate her way back to one-forty-five in a single night.

Padding or not, she'd have made

someone a wonderful wife. I'd thought of marrying her myself. But my marriage had been too little fun, and was too recent, and the divorce had hurt too much. And the alimony. The alimony was why I was living in a cracker box, and also the reason I couldn't afford to get married again.

While Louise was opening up, Morris 'bought a paper from the coin rack.

The Long Spoon was a mess. Louise and I had cleaned off the tables and collected the dirty glasses and emptied the ash trays into waste bins. But the collected glasses were still dirty and the waste bins were still full.

Morris began spreading newspaper over an area of floor.

And I stopped with my hand in my pocket.

Littleton came out from behind the bar, hefting both of the waste bins. He spilled one out onto the newspaper, then the other. He and Morris began spreading the trash apart.

My fingertips were brushing a scrap of Monk cellophane.

I'd worn these pants last night, under the apron.

Some impulse kept me from yelling out. I

brought my band out of my pocket, empty. Louise had gone to help the others sift the trash with their fingers. I joined them.

Presently Morris said, "Four. I hope that's all. We'll search the bar too."

And I thought: Five.

And I thought: I learned five new professions last night. What are the odds that I'll want to hide at least one of them?

If my judgment was bad enough to make me take a teleport pill intended for something with too many eyes, what else might I have swallowed last night?

I might be an advertising man, or a superbly trained thief, or a Palace Executioner skilled in the ways of torture. Or I might have asked for something really unpleasant, like the profession followed by Hitler or Alexander the Great.

"Nothing here," Morris said from behind the bar. Louise shrugged agreement. Morris handed the four scraps to Littleton and said, "Run these out to Douglass. Call us from there."

"We'll put them through chemical analysis," he said to Louise and me. "One of them may be real cellophane off a piece of candy. Or we might have missed one or two. For the moment, let's

assume there were four."

"All right," I said.

"Does it sound right, Frazer? Should it be three, or five?"

"I don't know." As far as memory went, I really didn't. "Four, then. We've identified two. One was a course in teleportation for aliens. The other was a language course. Right?"

"It looks that way."

"What else did he give you?"

I could feel the memories floating back there, but all scrambled together. I shook

my head.

Morris looked frustrated.

"Excuse me," said Louise. "Do you drink on duty?"

"Yes," Morris said without hesitation.

And Louise and I weren't on duty. Louise mixed us three gin-and-tonics and brought them to us at one of the padded booths Morris had opened a flattish briefcase that turned out to be part tape recorder. He said, "We won't lose anything now. Louise, let's talk about last night."

"I hope I can help."

"Just what happened in here after Ed took his first pill?"

"Mmm." Louise looked at me askance. "I don't know when he took that first pill. About one I noticed that he was acting strange. He was slow on orders. He got drinks wrong.

"I remembered that he had done that for awhile last fall, when he got his divorce-"

I felt my face go stiff. That was unexpected pain, that memory. I am far from being my own best customer; but there had been a long lost weekend about a year ago. Louise had talked me out of trying to drink and bartend too. So

I had gone drinking. When it was out of my system I had gone back to tending bar.

She was saying, "Last night I thought it might be the same problem. I covered for him, said the orders twice when I had to, watched him make the drinks so he'd get them right.

"He was spending most of his time talking to the Monk. But Ed was talking English, and the Monk was making whispery noises in his throat. Remember last week, when they put the Monk speech on television? It sounded like that.

"I saw Ed take a pill from the Monk and

swallow it with a glass of water."

She turned to me, touched my arm. "I thought you were crazy. I tried to stop you."

"I don't remember."

"The place was practically empty by then. Well, you laughed at me and said that the pill would teach you not to get lost! I didn't believe it. But the Monk turned on his translator gadget and said the same thing."

"I wish you'd stopped me," I said.

She looked disturbed. "I wish you hadn't said that. I took a pill myself."

I started choking. She'd caught me with a mouthful of gin and tonic.

Louise pounded my back and saved my life, maybe. She said, "You don't remember that?"

"I don't remember much of anything coherent after I took the first pill."

"Really? You didn't seem loaded. Not after I'd watched you awhile."

Morris cut in. "Louise, the pill you took. What did the Monk say it would do?"

"He never did. We were talking about me." She stopped to think. Then, baffled and amused at herself, she said, "I don't

know how it happened. All of a sudden I was telling the story of my young life. To a Monk. I had the idea he was sympathetic."

"The Monk?"

"Yes, the Monk. And at some point he picked out a pill and gave it to me. He said it would help me. I believed him. I don't know why, but I believed him, and I took it."

"Any symptoms? Have you learned anything new this morning?"

She shook her head, baffled and a little truculent now. Taking that pill must have seemed sheer insanity in the cold grey

light of afternoon.

"All right," said Morris. "Frazer, you took three pills. We know what two of them were. Louise, you took one, and we have no idea what it taught you." He closed his eyes a moment, then looked at me. "Frazer, if you can't remember what you took, can you remember rejecting anything? Did the Monk offer you anything-" He saw my face and cut it off.

Because that had jarred something.

The Monk had been speaking his own language, in that alien whisper that doesn't need to be more than a whisper because the basic sounds of the Monk language are so unambiguous, so easily

distinguished, even to a human ear. This teaches proper swimming technique. A _____ can reach speeds of sixteen to twenty-four ____ per ____ using these strokes. The course also teaches proper exercises...

I said, "I turned down a swimming course for intelligent fish."

Louise giggled. Morris said, "You're kidding."

"I'm not. And there was something else." That swamped-in-data effect wasn't as bad as it had been at noon. Bits of data must be reaching cubbyholes in my head, linking up, finding their places.

"I was asking about the shapes of aliens. Not about Monks, because that's bad manners,, especially from a race that hasn't yet proven its sentiency. I wanted to know about other aliens. So the Monk offered me three courses in unarmed combat techniques. Each one involved extensive knowledge of basic anatomy."

"You didn't take them?"

"No. What for? Like, one was a pill to tell me how to kill an armed intelligent worm, but only if I was an unarmed intelligent worm. I wasn't that confused."

"Frazer, there are men who would give an arm and a leg for any of those pills you turned down."

"Sure. A couple of hours ago you were telling me I was crazy to swallow an alien's education pill."

"Sorry," said Morris.

"You were the one who said they should have driven me out of my mind. Maybe they did," I said, because my hypersensitive sense of balance was still bothering the hell out of me.

But Morris's reaction bothered me worse. Frazer could start gibbering any minute. Better pump him for all he's worth while I've got the chance.

No, his face showed none of that. Was I going paranoid?

"Tell me more about the pills," Morris said. "It sounds like there's a lot of delayed reaction involved. How long do we have to wait before we know we've got it all?"

"He did say something . . ." I groped for it, and presently it came.

It works like a memory, the Monk had said. He'd turned off his translator and was speaking his own language, now that I could understand him. The sound of his translator had been bothering him. That was why he'd given me the pill.

But the whisper of his voice was low, and the language was new, and I'd had to listen carefully to get it all. I

remembered it clearly.

The information in the pills will become part of your memory. You will not know all that you have learned until you need it. Then it will surface. Memory works by association, he'd said.

And: There are things that cannot be taught by teachers. Always there is the difference between knowledge from school and knowledge from doing the work itself.

"Theory and practice," I told Morris. "I know just what he meant. There's not a bartending course in the country that will teach you to leave the sugar out of an Old Fashioned during rush hour."

"What did you say?"

"It depends on the bar, of course. No posh bar would let itself get that crowded. But in an ordinary bar, anyone who orders a complicated drink during rush hour deserves what he gets. He's slowing the bartender down when it's crucial, when every second is money. So you leave the sugar out of an Old Fashioned. It's too much money."

"The guy won't come back."

"So what? He's not one of your regulars. He'd have better sense if he were."

I had to grin. Morris was shocked and horrified. I'd shown him a brand new

sin. I said, "It's something every bartender ought to know about. Mind you, a bartending school is a trade school. They're teaching you to survive as a bartender. But the recipe calls for sugar, so at school you put in the sugar or you get ticked off."

Morris shook his head, tight lipped. He said, "Then the Monk was warning you that you were getting theory, not practice."

"Just the opposite. Look at it this way, Morris-

"Bill."

"Listen, Bill. The teleport pill can't make

a human nervous system capable of teleportation. Even my incredible balance, and it is incredible, won't give me the muscles to do ten quick backflips. But I do know what it feels like to teleport. That's what the Monk was warning me about. The pills give field training. What you have to watch out for are the reflexes. Because the pills don't change you physically."

"I hope you haven't become a trained assassin."

One must be wary of newly learned reflexes, the Monk had said.

Morris said, "Louise, we still don't know what kind of an education you got

last night. Any ideas?"

"Maybe I repair time machines." She sipped her drink, eyed Morris demurely over the rim of the glass.

Morris smiled back. "I wouldn't be surprised."

The idiot. He meant it.

"If you really want to know what was in the pill," said Louise, "why not ask the Monk?" She gave Morris time to look startled, but no time to interrupt. "All we have to do is open up and wait. He didn't even get through the second shelf last night, did he, Ed?"

"No, by Cod, he didn't."

Louise swept an arm about her. "The place is a mess, of course. We'd never get it clean in time. Not without help. How about it, Bill? You're a government man. Could you get a team to work here in time to get this place cleaned up by five o'clock?"

"You know not what you ask. It's three fifteen now!"

Truly, the Long Spoon was a disaster area. Bars are not meant to be seen by daylight anyway. Just because our worlds had been turned upside down, and just because the Long Spoon was clearly unfit for human habitation, we

had been thinking in terms of staying closed tonight. Now it was too late...

"Tip Top Cleaners," I remembered. "They send out a four man team with its own mops. Fifteen bucks an hour. But we'd never get them here in time."

Morris stood up abruptly. "Are they in the phone book?"

"Sure."

Morris moved.

I waited until he was in the phone booth before I asked, "Any new thoughts on what you ate last night?"

Louise looked at me closely. "You mean the pill? Why so solemn?"

"We've got to find out before Morris does."

"Why?"

"If Morris has his way," I said, "they'll classify my head Top Secret. I know too much. I'm likely to be a political prisoner the rest of my life; and so are you, if you learned the wrong things last night."

What Louise did then, I found both flattering and comforting. She turned upon the phone booth where Morris was making his call, a look of such

poisonous hatred that it should have withered the man where he stood.

She believed me. She needed no kind of proof, and she was utterly on my side.

Why was I so sure? I had spent too much of today guessing at other people's thoughts. Maybe it had something to do with my third and fourth professions...

I said, "We've got to find out what kind of pill you took. Otherwise Morris and the Secret Service will spend the rest of their lives following you around, just on the off chance that you know something useful. Like me. Only they know I know something useful. They'll be picking my brain until Hell freezes over."

Morris yelled from the phone booth. "They're coming! Forty bucks an hour, paid in advance when they get here!"

"Great!" I yelled.

"I want to call in. New York." He closed the folding door. Louise leaned across the table. "Ed, what are we going to do?"

It was the way she said it. We were in it together, and there was a way out, and she was sure I'd find it-and she said it all in the sound of her voice, the way she leaned toward me, the pressure of her hand around my wrist. We. I felt the power and confidence rising in me; and at the same time I thought: She couldn't

do that yesterday.

I said, 'We clean this place up so we can open for business. Meanwhile you try to remember what you learned last night. Maybe it was something harmless, like how to catch trilchies with a magnetic web.'

"Tril-?"

"Space butterflies, kind of."

"Oh. But suppose he taught me how to build a faster-than-light motor?"

"We'd bloody have to keep Morris from finding out. But you didn't. The English words for going faster than light-

hyperdrive, space warp-they don't have Monk translations except in math. You can't even say 'faster than light' In Monk."

"Oh."

Morris came back grinning like an idiot. "You'll never guess what the Monks want from us now."

He looked from me to Louise to me, grinning, letting the suspense grow intolerable. He said, "A giant laser cannon."

Louise gasped "What?" and I asked, "You mean a launching laser?"

"Yes, a launching laser! They want us to build it on the Moon. They'd feed our engineers pills to give them the specs and to teach them how to build it. They'd pay off in more pills."

I needed to remember something about launching lasers. And how had I known what to call it?

"They put the proposition to the United Nations," Morris was saying. "In fact, they'll be doing all of their business through the UN, to avoid charges of favoritism, they say, and to spread the knowledge as far as possible."

"But there are countries that don't belong to the UN," Louise objected.

"The Monks know that. They asked if any of 'those nations had space travel. None of them do, of course. And the Monks lost interest in them."

"Of course," I said, remembering. "A species that can't develop spaceflight is no better than animals."

"Huh?"

"According to a Monk."

Louise said, "But what for? Why would the Monks want a laser cannon? And on our Moon!"

"That's a little complicated," said Morris. "Do you both remember when

the Monk ship first appeared, two years ago?"

"No," we answered more or less together.

Morris was shaken., "You didn't notice? It was in all the papers. Noted Astronomer Says Alien Spacecraft Approaching Earth. No?"

"No."

"For Christ's sake! I was jumping up and down. It was like when the radio astronomers discovered pulsars, remember? I was just getting out of high school."

"Pulsars?"

"Excuse me," Morris said over politely.
"My mistake. I tend to think that everybody I meet is a science fiction fan. Pulsars are stars that give off rhythmic pulses of radio energy. The radio astronomers thought at first that they were getting signals from outer space."

Louise said, "You're a science fiction fan?"

"Absolutely. My first gun was a Gyrojet rocket pistol. I bought it because I read Buck Rogers."

I said, "Buck who?" But then I couldn't keep a straight face. Morris raised his

eyes to Heaven. No doubt it was there that he found the strength to go on.

"The noted astronomer was Jerome Finney. Of course he, hadn't said anything about Earth. Newspapers always get that kind of thing garbled. He'd said that an object of artificial, extraterrestrial origin had entered the solar system.

"What had happened was that several months earlier, Jodrell Bank had found a new star in Sagittarius. That's the direction of the galactic core. Yes, Frazer?"

We were back to last names because I wasn't a science fiction fan. I said,

"That's right. The Monks came from the galactic hub." I remembered the blazing night sky of Center. My Monk customer couldn't possibly have seen it in his lifetime. He must have been shown the vision through an education pill, for patriotic reasons, like kids are taught what the Star Spangled Banner looks like.

"All right. The astronomers were studying a nearby nova, so they caught the intruder a little sooner. It showed a strange spectrum, radically different from a nova and much more constant. It got even stranger. The light was growing brighter at the same time the spectral lines were shifting toward the red.

"It was months before anyone identified the spectrum.

"Then one Jerome Finney finally caught wise. He showed that the spectrum was the light of our own sun, drastically blue-shifted. Some kind of mirror was coming at us, moving at a hell of a clip, but slowing as it came."

"Oh!" I got it then. "That would mean a light-sail!"

"Why the big deal, Frazer? I thought you already knew."

"No. This is the first I've heard of it. I don't read the Sunday supplements."

Morris was exasperated. "But you knew enough to call the laser cannon a launching laser!"

"I just now realized why it's called that."

Morris stared at me for several seconds. Then he said, "I forgot. You got it out of the Monk language course."

"I guess so."

He got back to business. "The newspapers gave poor Finney a terrible time. You didn't see the political cartoons either? Too bad. But when the Monk ship got closer it started sending signals. It was an interstellar sailing ship, riding the sunlight on a reflecting

sail, and it was coming here."

"Signals. With dots and dashes? You could do that just by tacking the sail."

"You must have read about it."

"Why? It's so obvious."

Morris looked unaccountably ruffled. Whatever his reasons, he let it pass. "The sail is a few molecules thick and nearly five hundred miles across when it's extended. On light pressure alone they can build up to interstellar velocities, but it takes them a long time. The acceleration isn't high.

"It took them two years to slow down to

solar system velocities. They must have done a lot of braking before our telescopes found them, but even so they were going far too fast when they passed Earth's orbit. They had to go inside Mercury's orbit and come up the other side of the sun's gravity well, backing all the way, before they could get near Earth."

I said, "Sure. Interstellar speeds have to be above half the speed of light, or you can't trade competitively."

"What?"

"There are ways to get the extra edge. You don't have to depend on sunlight, not if you're launching from a civilized

system. Every civilized system has a moon-based launching laser. By the time the sun is too far away to give the ship a decent push, the beam from the laser cannon is spreading just enough to give the sail a hefty acceleration without vaporizing anything."

"Naturally," said Morris, but he seemed confused.

"So that if you're heading for a strange system, you'd naturally spend most of the trip decelerating. You can't count on a strange system having a launching laser. If you know your destination is civilized, that's a different matter."

Morris nodded.

"The lovely thing about the laser cannon is that if anything goes wrong with it, there's a civilized world right there to fix it. You go sailing out to the stars with trade goods, but you leave your launching motor safely at home. Why is everybody looking at me funny?"

"Don't take it wrong," said Morris. "But how does a paunchy bartender come to know so much about flying an interstellar trading ship?"

"What?" I didn't understand him.

"Why did the Monk ship have to dive so deep into the solar system?"

"Oh, that. That's the solar wind. You get

the same problem around any yellow sun. With a light-sail you can get push from the solar wind as well as from light pressure. The trouble is, the solar wind is just stripped hydrogen atoms. Light bounces from a light-sail, but the solar wind just hits the sail and sticks."

Morris nodded thoughtfully. Louise was blinking as if she had double vision.

"You can't tack against it. Tilting the sail does from nothing. To use the solar wind for braking you have to bore straight in, straight toward the sun," I explained.

Morris nodded. I saw that his eyes were as glassy as Louise's eyes.

"Oh," I said. "Damn, I must be stupid today. Morris, that was the third pill."

"Right," said Morris, still nodding, still glassy-eyed. "That must have been the unusual, really unusual profession you wanted. Crewman on an interstellar liner. Jesus."

And he should have sounded disgusted, but he sounded envious.

His elbows were on the table, his chin rested on his fists. It is a position that distorts the mouth, making one's expression unreadable. But I didn't like what I could read in Morris's eyes.

There was nothing left of the square and

honest man I had let into my apartment at noon. Morris was a patriot now, and an altruist, and a fanatic, He must have the stars for his nation and for all mankind. Nothing must stand in his way. Least of all, me.

Reading minds again, Fraser? Maybe being captain of an interstellar liner involves having to read the minds of the crew, to be able to put down a mutiny before some idiot can take a heat point to the mpH glip habbabub, or however a Monk would say it, it has something to do with straining the breathing-air.

My urge to acrobatics had probably come out of the same pill. Free fall training. There was a lot in that pill.

This was the profession I should have hidden. Not the Palace Torturer, who was useless to a government grown too subtle to need such techniques; but the captain of an interstellar liner, a prize too valuable to men who have not yet reached beyond the Moon.

And I had been the last to know it. Too late, Frazer-

"Captain," I said. "Not crew."

"Pity. A crewman would know more about how to put a ship together. Frazer, how big a crew are you equipped to rule?"

"Eight and five."

"Thirteen?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you say eight and five?"

The question caught me off balance. Hadn't I...? Oh. "That's the Monk numbering system. Base eight., Actually, base two, but they group the digits in threes to get base eight."

"Base two. Computer numbers."

"Are they?"

"Yes. Frazer, they must have been using

computers for a long time. Aeons."

"All right." I noticed for the first time that Louise had collected our glasses and gone to make fresh drinks. Good, I could use one. She'd left her own, which was half full. Knowing she wouldn't mind, I took a swallow.

It was soda water.

With a lime in it. It had looked just like our gin and tonics. She must be back on the diet. Except that when Louise resumed a diet, she generally announced it to all and sundry

Morris was still on the subject. "You use a crew of thirteen. Are they Monk or

human or something else?"

"Monk," I said without having to think.

"Too bad. Are there humans in space?"

"No. A lot of two-feet, but none of them are like any of the others, and none of them are quite like us."

Louise came back with our drinks, gave them to us, and sat down without a word.

"You said earlier that a species that can't develop space flight is no better than animals."

"According to the Monks," I reminded him.

"Right. It seems a little extreme even to me, but let it pass. What about a race that develops spaceflight and then loses it?"

"It happens. There are lots of ways a space-going species can revert to animal. Atomic war. Or they just can't live with the complexity. Or they breed themselves out of food, and the world famine wrecks everything. Or waste products from the new machinery ruins the ecology."

""Revert to animal.' All right. What about nations? Suppose you have two nations next door, same species, but one has space flight-"

"Right. Good point, too. Morris, there

are just two countries on Earth that can deal with the Monks without dealing through the United Nations. Us, and Russia. If Rhodesia or Brazil or France tried it, they'd be publicly humiliated."

"That could cause an international incident." Morris's jaw tightened heroically. "We've got ways of passing the warning along so that it won't happen."

Louise said, "There are some countries I wouldn't mind seeing it happen to."

Morris got a thoughtful look ... and I wondered if everybody would get the warning.

The cleaning team arrived then. We'd used Tip Top Cleaners before, but these four dark women were not our usual team. We had to explain in detail just what we wanted done. Not their fault. They usually clean private homes, not bars.

Morris spent some time calling New York. He must have been using a credit card; he couldn't have that much change.

"That may have stopped a minor war," he said when he got back. And we returned to the padded booth. But Louise stayed to direct the cleaning team.

The four dark women moved about us with pails and spray bottles and dry

rags, chattering in Spanish, leaving shiny surfaces wherever they went. And Morris resumed his inquisition.

"What powers the ground-to-orbit ship?"

"A slow H-bomb going off in a magnetic bottle."

"Fusion?"

"Yah. The attitude jets on the main starship use fusion power too. They all link to one magnetic bottle. I don't know just how it works. You get fuel from water or ice."

"Fusion. But don't you have to separate out the deuterium 'and tritium?"

"What for? You melt the ice, run a current through the water, and you've got hydrogen."

"Wow," Morris said softly. "Wow."

"The launching laser works the same way," I remembered. What else did I need to remember about launching lasers? Something dreadfully important.

'Wow. Fraser, if we could build the Monks their launching laser, we could use the same techniques to build other fusion plants. Couldn't we?"

"Sure." I was in dread. My mouth was dry, my heart was pounding. I almost knew why. "'What do you mean, if?"

"And they'd pay us to do it! It's a damn shame. We just don't have the hardware."

"What do you mean? We've got to build the launching laser!"

Morris gaped. "Frazer, what's wrong with you?"

The terror had a name now. "My God! What have you told the Monks? Morris, listen to me. You've got to see to it that the Security Council promises to build the Monks' launching laser."

"Who do you think I am, the Secretary-General? We can't build it anyway, not with just Saturn launching

configurations." Morris thought I'd gone mad at last. He wanted to back away through the wall of the booth.

"They'll do it when you tell them what's at stake. And we can build a launching laser, if the whole world goes in on it. Morris, look at the good it can do! Free power from seawater! And light-sails work fine within a system."

"Sure, it's a lovely picture. 'We could sail out to the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. We could smelt the asteroids for their metal ores, using laser power. . .'" His eyes had momentarily taken on a vague, dreamy look. Now they snapped back to what Morris thought of as reality. "It's the kind of thing I

daydreamed about when I was a kid. Someday we'll do it. Today-we just aren't ready."

"There are two sides to a coin," I said. "Now, I know how this is going to sound. Just remember there are reasons. Good reasons."

"Reasons? Reasons for what?"

"When a trading ship travels," I said, "It travels only from one civilized system to another. There are ways to tell whether a system has a civilization that can build a launching laser. Radio is one. The Earth puts out as much radio flux as a small star.

"When the 'Monks find that much radio energy coming from a nearby star, they send a trade ship. By the time the ship gets there, the planet that's putting out all the energy is generally civilized. But not so civilized that it can't use the knowledge a Monk trades for.

"Do you see that they need the launching laser? That ship out there came from a Monk colony. This far from the axis of the galaxy, the stars are too far apart. Ships launch by starlight and laser, but they brake by starlight alone, because they can't count on the target star having a launching laser. If they had to launch by starlight too, they probably wouldn't make it. A plant-and-animal cycle as

small as the life support system on a Monk starship can last only so long."

"You said yourself that the Monks can't always count on the target star staying civilized."

"No, of course not. Sometimes a civilization hits the level at which it can build a, launching laser, stays there just long enough to send out a mass of radio waves, then reverts to animal. That's the point. If we tell them we can't build the laser, we'll be animals to the Monks."

"Suppose we just refuse? Not can't but won't."

"That would be stupid. There are too

many advantages. Controlled fusion-

"Frazer, think about the cost." Morris looked grim. He wanted the laser. He didn't think he could get it. "Think about politicians thinking about the cost," he said. "Think, about politicians thinking about explaining the cost to the taxpayers."

"Stupid," I repeated, "and inhospitable. Hospitality counts high with the Monks. You see, we're cooked either way. Either we're dumb animals, or we're guilty of a criminal breach of hospitality. And the Monk ship still needs more light 'for its light-sail than the sun can put out."

"So?"

"So the captain uses a gadget that makes the sun explode."

"The," said Morris, and "Sun," and "Explode?" He didn't know what to do. Then suddenly he burst out in great loud cheery guffas, so that the women cleaning the Long Spoon turned with answering smiles. He'd decided not to believe me.

I reached across and gently pushed his drink into his lap.

It was two-thirds empty, but it cut his laughter off in an instant. Before he could start swearing, I said, "I am not

playing games. The Monks will make our sun explode if we don't build them a launching laser. Now go call your boss and tell him so."

The women were staring at us in horror. Louise started toward us, then stopped, uncertain.

Morris sounded almost calm. "Why the drink in, my lap?"

"Shock treatment. And I wanted your full attention. Are you going to call New York?"

"Not yet." Morris swallowed. He looked down once at the spreading stain on his pants, then somehow put it out of his

mind. "Remember, I'd have to convince him. I don't believe it myself. Nobody and nothing would blow up a sun for a breach of hospitality!"

"No, no, Morris, They have to blow up the sun to get to the next system. It's a serious thing, refusing to build the launching laser! It could wreck the ship!"

"Screw the ship! What about a whole planet?"

"You're just not looking at it right-"

"Hold it. Your ship is a trading ship, isn't it? What kind of idiots would the Monks be, to exterminate one market just

to get on to the next?"

"If we can't build a launching laser, we aren't a market."

"But we might be a market on the next circuit!"

"What next circuit? You don't seem to grasp the size of the Monks' marketplace. The communications gap between Center and the nearest Monk colony is about-" I stopped to transpose. "-sixty-four thousand years! By the time a ship finishes one circuit, most of the worlds she's visited have already forgotten her. And then what? The colony world that built her may have failed, or refitted the spaceport to

service a different style of ship, or reverted to animal; even Monks do that. She'd have to go on to the next system for refitting.

"When you trade among the stars, there is no repeat business."

"Oh," said Morris.

Louise had gotten the women back to work. With a corner of my mind I heard their giggling discussion as to whether Morris would fight, whether he could whip me, etc.

Morris asked, "How does it work? How do you make a sun go nova?"

"There's a gadget the size of a locomotive fixed to the main supporting strut, I guess you'd call it. It points straight astern, and it can swing sixteen degrees or so in any direction. You turn it on when you make departure orbit. The math man works out the intensity. You beam the sun for the first year or so, and when it blows, you're just far enough away to use the push without getting burned."

"But how does it work?"

"You just turn it on. The power comes from the fusion tube that feeds the attitude jet system. -Oh, you want to know why does it make a sun explode. I don't know that. Why should I?"

"Big as a locomotive. And it makes suns explode." Morris sounded slightly hysterical. Poor bastard, he was beginning to believe me. The shock had hardly touched me, because truly I had known it since last night.

He said, "When we first saw the Monk light-sail, it was just to one side of a recent nova in Sagittarius. By any wild chance, was that star a market that didn't work out?"

"I haven't the vaguest idea."

That convinced him. If I'd been making it up, I'd have said yes. Morris stood up and walked away without a word. He

stopped to pick up a bar towel on his way to the phone booth.

I went behind the bar to make a fresh drink. Cutty over ice, splash of soda; I wanted to taste the burning power of it.

Through the glass door I saw Louise getting out of her car with her arms full of packages. I poured soda over ice; squeezed a lime in it, and had it ready when she walked in.

She dumped the load on the bar top. "Irish coffee makings," she said. I held the glass out, to her and she said, "No thanks, Ed. One's enough."

"Taste it."

She gave me a funny look, but she tasted what I handed her. "Soda water. Well, you caught me."

"Back on the diet?"

"Yes."

"You never said yes to that question in your life. Don't you want to tell me all the details?"

She sipped at her drink. "Details of someone else's diet are boring. I should have known that a long time ago. To work! You'll notice we've only got twenty minutes,"

I opened one of her paper bags' and fed

the refrigerator with cartons of whipping cream. Another bag held fresh ground coffee. The flat, square package had to be a pizza.

'Pizza. Some diet," I said.

She was setting out the glass coffee-makers. "That's for you and Bill."

I tore open the paper and bit into a pie-shaped slice. It was a deluxe, covered with everything from anchovies to salami. It was crisp and hot, and I was starving.

I snatched bites as I worked.

There aren't many bars that will keep the

makings for Irish coffee handy. It's too much trouble. You need massive quantities of whipping cream and ground coffee, a refrigerator, a blender, a supply of those glass figure-eight-shaped coffee-makers, a line of hot plates, and-most expensive of all-room behind the bar for all of that. You learn to keep a line of glasses ready, which means putting the sugar in them at spare moments to save time later. Those spare moments are your smoking time, so you give that up. You learn not to wave your arms around because there are hot things that can burn you. You learn to half-whip the cream, a mere spin of the blender, because you have to do it over and over again, and if you overdo it the cream

turns to butter.

There aren't many bars that will go to all that trouble. That's why it pays off., Your average Irish coffee addict will drive an extra twenty minutes to reach the Long Spoon. He'll also down the drink in about five minutes, because otherwise it gets cold. He'd have spent half an hour over a 'Scotch and soda.

While we were getting the coffee ready, I found time to ask, "Have you remembered anything?"

"Yes," she said.

"Tell me."

"I don't mean I know what was in the pill. Just ... I can do things I couldn't do before. I think my way of thinking has changed. Ed, I'm worried-"

"Worried?"

She got the words out in a rush. "It feels like I've been falling in love with you for a very long time. But I haven't. Why should I feel that way so suddenly?"

The bottom dropped out of my stomach. I'd had thoughts like this ... and put them out of my mind, and when they came back I did it again. I couldn't afford to fall in love. It would cost too much. It would hurt too much.

"It's been like this all day. It scares me, Ed. Suppose I feel like this about every man? What if the Monk thought I'd make a good call girl?"

I laughed much harder than I should have. Louise was getting really angry before I was able to stop.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Are you in love with Bill Morris too?"

"No, of course not!"

"Then forget the call girl bit. He's got more money than I do. A call girl would love him more, if she loved anyone, which she wouldn't, because call girls are generally frigid."

"How do you know?" she demanded.

"I read it in a magazine."

Louise began to relax. I began to see how tense she really had been. "All right," she said, "but that means I really am in love with you."

I pushed the crisis away from us. "Why didn't you ever get married?"

"Oh . . ." She was going to pass it off, but she changed her mind. "Every man I dated wanted to sleep with me. I thought that was wrong, so-"

She looked puzzled. "Why did I think that was wrong?"

"Way you were brought up."

"Yes, but.. ." She trailed off.

"How do you feel about it flow?"

"Well, I wouldn't sleep with anyone, but if a man was worth dating he might be worth marrying, and if he was worth marrying he'd certainly be worth sleeping with, wouldn't he? And I'd be crazy to marry someone I hadn't slept with, wouldn't I?"

"I did."

"And look how that turned out! Oh, Ed, I'm sorry. But you did bring it up."

"Yah," I said, breathing shallow.

"But I used to feel that way too. Something's changed?"

We hadn't been talking fast. There had been pauses, gaps, and we had worked through them. I had had time to eat three slices of pizza. Louise had had time to wrestle with her conscience, lose, and eat one.

Only she hadn't done it. There was the pizza, staring at her, and she hadn't given it a look or a smell. For Louise, that was unusual.

Half-joking, I said, "Try this as a theory. Years ago you must have sublimated

your sex urge into an urge for food. Either that or the rest of us sublimated our appetites into a sex urge, and you didn't."

"Then the pill un-sublimated me, hmm?" She looked thoughtfully at the pizza. Clearly its lure was gone. "That's what I mean. I didn't used to be able to outstare a pizza."

"Those olive eyes."

"Hypnotic, they were."

"A good call girl should be able to keep herself in shape." Immediately I regretted saying it. It wasn't funny. "Sorry," I said.

"It's all right." She picked up a tray of candles in red glass vases and moved away, depositing the candles on the small square tables. She moved with grace and beauty through the twilight of the Long Spoon, her hips swaying just enough to avoid the sharp corners of tables.

I'd hurt her. But she'd known me long enough; she must know I had foot-in-mouth disease...

I had seen Louise before and known that she was beautiful. But it seemed to me that she had never been beautiful with so little excuse.

She moved back by the same route,

lighting the candles as she went. Finally she put the tray down, leaned across the bar and said, "I'm sorry. I can't joke about it when I don't know."

"Stop worrying, will you? Whatever the Monk fed you, he was trying to help you."

"I love you."

"What?"

"I love you."

"Okay. I love you too." I use those words so seldom that they clog in my throat, as if I'm lying, even when it's the truth. "Listen, I want to marry you. Don't

shake your head. I want to marry you."

Our voices had dropped to whispers. 'In a tormented whisper, then, she said, "Not until I find out what I do, what was in the pill. Ed, I can't trust myself until then!"

"Me too," I said with great reluctance. "But we can't wait. We don't, have time."

"What?"

"That's right, you weren't in earshot. Sometime between three and ten years from now, the Monks may blow up our sun."

Louise said nothing. Her forehead wrinkled.

"It depends on how much time they spend trading. If we can't build them the launching laser, we can still con them, into waiting for awhile. Monk expeditions have waited as long as-"

"Good Lord. You mean it. Is that what you and Bill were fighting over?"

"Yah."

Louise shuddered. Even in the dimness I saw how pale she had become. And she said a strange thing.

She said, "All right, I'll marry you."

"Good," I said. But I was suddenly shaking. Married. Again. Me. Louise stepped up and put her hands on my shoulders, and I kissed her.

I'd been wanting to do that for ... five years? She fitted wonderfully into my arms. Her hands closed hard on the muscles of my shoulders, massaging. The tension went out of me, drained away somewhere. Married. Us. At least we could have three to ten years.

"Morris," I said.

She drew back a little. "He can't hold you. You haven't done anything. Oh, I wish I knew what was in that pill I took! Suppose I'm the trained assassin?"

"Suppose I am? We'll have to be careful of each other."

"Oh, we know all about you. You're a starship commander, an alien teleport and a translator for Monks."

"And one thing more. There was a fourth profession. I took four pills last night, not three."

"Oh? Why didn't you tell Bill?"

"Are you kidding? Dizzy as I was last night, I probably took a course in how to lead a successful revolution, God help me if Morris found that out."

She smiled. "Do you really think that

was what it was?"

"No, of course not."

"Why did we do it? Why did we swallow those pills? We should have known better."

"Maybe the Monk took a pill himself. Maybe there's a pill that teaches a Monk how to look trustworthy to a generalized alien."

"I did trust him," said Louise. "I remember. He seemed so sympathetic. Would he really blow up our sun?"

"He really would."

"That fourth pill. Maybe it taught you a way to stop him."

"Let's see. We know I took a linguistics course, a course in teleportation for martians, and a course in how to fly a lightsail ship. On that basis ... I probably changed my mind and took a karate course for worms."

"It wouldn't hurt you, at least. Relax.... Ed, if you remember taking the pills, why don't you remember what was in them?"

"But I don't. I don't remember anything."

"How do you know you took four, then?"

"Here." I reached in my pocket and pulled out the scrap of Monk cellophane. And knew immediately that there was something in it. Something hard and round.

We were staring at it when Morris came back.

"I must have cleverly put it in my pocket," I told them. "Sometime last night, when I was feeling sneaky enough to steal from a Monk."

Morris turned the pill like a precious jewel in his fingers. Pale blue it was, marked on one side with a burnt orange triangle. "I don't know whether to get it analyzed or take it myself, now. We

need a miracle. Maybe this will tell us-"

"Forget it. I wasn't clever enough to remember how fast a Monk pill deteriorates. The wrapping's torn. That pill has been bad for at least twelve hours."

Morris said a dirty thing.

"Analyze it," I said. "You'll find RNA, and you may even be able to tell what the Monks use as a matrix. Most of the memories are probably intact. But don't swallow the damn thing. It'll scramble your brains. All it takes is a few random changes in a tiny percentage of the RNA."

"We don't have time to send it to Douglass tonight. Can we put it in the freezer?"

"Good. Give it here."

I dumped the pill in a sandwich-size plastic Baggy, sucked the air out the top, tied the end, and dropped it in the freezer. Vacuum and cold would help preserve the thing. It was something I should have done last night.

"So much for miracles," Morris said bitterly. "Let's get down to business. We'll have several men outside the place tonight, and a few more in here. You won't know who they are, but go ahead and guess if you like. A lot of your

customers will be turned away tonight. They'll be told to watch the newspapers if they want to know why. I hope it won't cost you too much business."

"It may make our fortune. We'll be famous. Were you maybe doing the same thing last night?"

"Yes. We didn't want the place too crowded. The Monks might not like autograph hounds."

"So that's why the place was half empty."

Morris looked at his watch. "Opening time. Are we ready?"

"Take a seat at the bar. And look nonchalant, dammit."

Louise went to turn on the lights.

Morris took a seat to one side of the middle. One big square hand was closed very tightly on the bar edge. "Another gin and tonic. Weak. After that one, leave out the gin."

"Right."

"Nonchalant. Why should I be nonchalant? Frazer, I had to tell the President of the United States of America that the end of the world is coming unless he does something. I had to talk to him myself!"

"Did he buy it?"

"I hope so. He was so goddam calm and reassuring, I wanted to scream at him. God, Frazer, what if we can't build the laser? What if we try and fail?"

I gave him a very old and classic answer. "Stupidity is always a capital crime."

He screamed in my face. "Damn you and your supercilious attitude and your murdering monsters too!" The next second he was ice-water calm. "Never mind, Frazer. You're thinking like a starship captain."

"I'm what?"

"A starship captain has to be able to make a sun go nova to save the ship. You can't help it. It was in the pill."

Damn, he was right. I could feel that he was right. The pill had warped my way of thinking. Blowing up the sun that warms another race had to be immoral. Didn't it?

I couldn't trust my own sense of right and wrong! Four men came in and took one of the bigger tables. Morris's men? No. Real estate men, here to do business.

"Something's been bothering me," said Morris. He grimaced. "Among all the things that have been ruining my composure, such as the impending end of

the world, there was one thing that kept nagging at me."

I set his gin-and-tonic in front of him. He tasted it and said, "Fine. And I finally realized what it was, waiting there in the phone booth for a chain of human snails to put the President on. Frazer, are you a college man?"

"No. Webster High."

"See, you don't really talk like a bartender. You use big words."

"I do?"

"Sometimes. And you talked about 'suns exploding,' but you knew what I meant

when I said 'nova.' You talked about 'H-bomb power,' but' you knew what fusion was."

"Sure."

"I got the possibly silly impression that you were learning the words the instant I said them. Parlez-vous français?"

"No. I don't speak any foreign languages."

"None at all?"

"Nope. What do you think they teach at Webster High?"

"Je parle la langue un peu, Frazer. Et

tu?"

"Merde de cochon! Morris, je vous dit-oops."

He didn't give me a chance to think it over. He said, "What's fanac?"

My head had that clogged feeling again. I said, "Might be anything. Putting out a sine, writing to the lettercol, helping put on a Con-Morris, what is this?"

"That language course was more extensive than we thought."

"Sure as hell, it was. I just remembered. Those women on the cleaning team were speaking Spanish, but I understood

them."

"Spanish, French, Monkish, technical languages, even Fannish. What you got was a generalized course in how to understand languages the instant you hear them. I don't see how it could work without telepathy."

"Reading minds? Maybe." Several times today, it had felt like I was guessing with too much certainty at somebody's private thoughts.

"Can you read my mind?"

"That's not quite it. I get the feel of how you think, not what you're thinking. Morris, I don't like the idea of being a

political prisoner."

'Well, we can talk that over later." When my bargaining position is better, Morris meant. When I don't need the bartender's good will to con the Monk. "What's important is that you might be able to read a Monk's mind. That could be crucial."

"And maybe he can read mine. And yours."

I let Morris sweat over that one while I set drinks on Louise's tray. Already there were customers at four tables. The Long Spoon was filling rapidly and only two of them were Secret Service.

Morris said, "Any ideas on what Louise Schu ate last night? We've got your professions pretty well pegged down. Finally."

"I've got an idea. It's kind of vague." I looked around. Louise was taking more orders. "Sheer guesswork, in fact. Will you keep it to yourself for awhile?"

"Don't tell Louise? Sure-for awhile."

I made four drinks, and Louise took them away. I told Morris, "I have a profession in mind. It doesn't have a simple one or two word name, like teleport or starship captain or translator. There's no reason why it should, is there? We're dealing with aliens."

Morris sipped at his drink. Waiting.

"Being a woman," I said, "can be a profession, in a way that being a man can never be. The word is housewife, but it doesn't cover all of it. Not nearly."

"Housewife. You're putting me on."

"No. You wouldn't notice the change. You never saw her before last night."

"Just what kind of change have you got in mind? Aside from the fact that she's beautiful, which I did notice."

"Yes, she is, Morris. But last night she was twenty pounds overweight. Do you think she lost it all this morning?"

"She was too heavy. Pretty, but also pretty well padded." Morris turned to look over his shoulder, casually turned back. "Damn. She's still well padded. Why didn't I notice before?"

"There's another thing.-By the way. Have some pizza."

"Thanks." He bit into a slice. "Good, it's still hot. Well?"

"She's been staring at that pizza for half an hour. She bought it. But she hasn't tasted it. She couldn't possibly have done that yesterday."

"She may have had a big breakfast."

"Yah." I knew she hadn't. She'd eaten diet food. For years she'd kept a growing collection of diet food, but she'd never actively tried to survive on it before. But how could I make such a claim to Morris? I'd never even been in Louise's apartment.

"Anything else?"

"She's gotten good at nonverbal communication. It's a very womanly skill. She can say things just by the tone of her voice or the way she leans on an elbow or-"

"But if mind reading is one of your new skills..."

"Damn. Well. . . it used to make Louise nervous if someone touched her. And she never touched anyone else." I felt myself flushing. I don't talk easily of personal things.

Morris radiated skepticism. "It all sounds very subjective. In fact, it sounds like you're making yourself believe it. Frazer, why would Louise Schu want such a capsule course? Because you haven't described a housewife at all. You've described a woman looking to persuade a man to marry her."

He saw my face change. "What's wrong?"

"Ten minutes ago we decided to get

married."

"Congratulations," Morris said, and waited.

"All right, you win. Until ten minutes ago we'd never even kissed. I'd never made a pass, or vice versa. No, damn it, I don't believe it! I know she loves me; I ought to!"

"I don't deny it," Morris said quietly. "That would be why she took the pill. it must have been strong stuff; too, Frazer. We looked up some of your history. You're marriage-shy."

It was true enough. I said, "If she loved me before, I never knew it. I wonder

how a Monk could know."

"How would he know about such a skill at all? Why would he have the pill on him? Come on, Frazer, you're the Monk expert!"

"He'd have to learn from human beings. Maybe by interviews, maybe by-well, the Monks can map an alien memory into a computer space, then interview that. They may have done that with some of your diplomats."

"Oh, great."

Louise appeared with an order. I made the drinks and set them on her tray. She winked and walked away, swaying

deliciously, followed by many eyes.

"Morris. Most of your diplomats, the ones who, deal with the Monks; they're men, aren't they?"

"Most of them. Why?"

"Just a thought." It was a difficult thought, hard to grasp. It was only that the changes in Louise had been all to the good from a man's point of view. The Monks must have interviewed many men. Well, why not? It would make her more valuable to the man she caught-or to the lucky man who caught her- "Got it."

Morris looked up quickly. "Well?"

"Falling in love with me was part of her pill learning. A set. They made a guinea pig of her."

"I wondered what she saw in you." Morris's grin faded. "You're serious. Frazer, that still doesn't answer-"

"It's a slave indoctrination course. It makes a woman love the first man she sees, permanently, and it trains her to be valuable to him. The Monks were going to make them in quantity and sell them to men."

Morris thought it over. Presently he said, "That's awful. What'll we do?"

"Well, we can't tell her she's been made

into a domestic slave! Morris, I'll try to get a memory eraser pill. If I can't I'll marry her, I guess. Don't look at me that way," I said, low and fierce. "I didn't do it. And I can't desert her now!"

"I know. It's just-oh, put gin in the next one."

"Don't look now," I said.

In the glass' of the door there was darkness and motion. A hooded shape, shadow-on-shadow, supernatural, a human silhouette twisted out of true...

He came gliding in with the hem of his robe just brushing the floor. Nothing was to be seen of him but his flowing gray

robe, the darkness in the hood and the shadow where his robe parted. The real estate men broke off their talk of land and stared, popeyed, and one of them reached for his heart attack pills.

The Monk drifted toward me like a vengeful ghost. He took the stool we had saved him at one end of the bar.

It wasn't the same Monk.

In all respects he matched the Monk who had been here these last two nights. Louise and Morris. must have been fooled completely. But it wasn't the same Monk.

"Good evening," I said.

He gave an equivalent greeting in the whispered Monk language. His translator was half on, translating my words into a Monk whisper, but letting his own speech alone. He said,, "I believe we should begin with the Rock and Rye."

I turned to pour. The small of my back itched with danger.

When I turned back with the shot glass in my hand, he was holding a fist-sized tool that must have come out of his robe. It looked like a flattened softball, grooved deeply for five Monk claws, with two parallel tubes poking out in my direction. Lenses glinted in the ends of the tubes.

"Do you know this tool? It is a "____", and he named it. I knew the name. It was a beaming tool, a multi-frequency laser. One tube locked on the target; thereafter the aim was maintained by tiny flywheels in the body of the device.

Morris had seen it. He didn't recognize it, and he didn't know what to do about it, and I had no way to signal him.

"I know that tool," I confirmed.

"You must take two of these pills." The Monk had them ready in another hand. They were small and pink and triangular. He said, "I must be convinced that you have taken them. Otherwise you

must take more than two. An overdose may affect your natural memory. Come closer."

I came closer. Every man and woman in the Long Spoon was staring at us, and each was afraid to move. Any kind of signal would have trained four guns on the Monk. And I'd be fried dead by a narrow beam of X-rays.

The Monk reached out with a third hand/foot/claw. He dosed the fingers/toes around my throat, not hand enough to strangle me, but hard enough.

Morris was cursing silently, helplessly. I could feel the agony in his soul.

The Monk whispered, "You know of the trigger mechanism. If my hand should relax now, the device will fire. Its target is yourself. If you can prevent four government agents from attacking me, you should do so."

I made a palm-up gesture toward Morris. Don't do anything. He caught it and nodded very slightly without looking at me.

"You can read minds," I said.

"Yes," said the Monk-and I knew instantly what he was hiding. He could read everybody's mind, except mine.

So much for Morris's little games of

deceit. But the Monk could not read my mind, and I could see into his own soul.

And, reading his alien soul, I saw that I would die if I did not swallow the pills.

I placed the pink pills on my tongue, one at a time, and swallowed them dry. They went down hard. Morris watched it happen and could do nothing. The Monk felt them going down my throat, little lumps moving past his finger.

And when the pills had passed across the Monk's finger, I worked a miracle.

"Your pill-induced memories and skills will be gone within two hours," said the Monk. He picked up the shot glass of

Rock' and Rye and moved it into his hood. When it reappeared it was half empty.

I asked. "Why have you robbed inc of my knowledge?"

"You never paid for it."

"But it was freely given."

"It was given by one who had no right," said the Monk. He was thinking about leaving. I had to do something. I knew now, because I had reasoned it out with great care, that the Monk was involved in an evil enterprise. But he must stay to hear me or I could not convince him.

Even then, it wouldn't be easy. He was a Monk crewman. His ethical attitudes had entered his brain through an RNA pill, along with his professional skills.

"You have spoken of rights," I said. In Monk. "Let us discuss rights." The whispery words buzzed oddly in my throat; they tickled; but my ears told me they were coming out right.

The Monk was startled. "I was told that you had been taught our speech, but not that you could speak it."

"Were you told what pill I was given?"

"A language pill. I had not known that he carried one in his case."

"He did not finish his tasting of the alcohols of Earth. Will you have another drink?"

I felt him guess at my motives, and guess wrong. He thought I was taking advantage of his curiosity to sell him my wares for cash. And what had he to fear from me? Whatever mental powers I had learned from Monk pills, they would be gone in two hours.

I set a shot glass before him. I asked him, "How do you feel about launching lasers?"

The discussion became highly technical. "Let us take a special case," I remember saying. "Suppose a culture has been

capable of starlight for some sixty-fours of years-or even for eights of times that long. Then an asteroid slams into a major ocean, precipitates an ice age ..." It had happened once, and well he knew it. "A natural disaster can't spell the difference between sentience and nonsentience, can it? Not unless it affects brain tissue directly."

At first it was his curiosity that held him. Later it was me. He couldn't tear himself loose. He never thought of it. He was a sailship crewman, and he was cold sober, and he argued with the frenzy of an evangelist.

"Then take the general case," I remember saying. "A world that cannot build a

launching laser is a world of animals, yes? And Monks themselves can revert to animals."

Yes, he knew that.

"Then build your own launching laser. If you cannot, then your ship is captained and crewed by animals."

At the end I was doing all the talking. All in the whispery Monk tongue, whose sounds are so easily distinguished that even I, warping a human throat to my will, need only whisper. It was a good thing. I seemed to have been eating used razor blades.

Morris guessed right. He did not

interfere. I could tell him nothing, not if I had had the power, not by word or gesture or mental contact. The Monk would read Morris's mind. But Morris sat quietly drinking his tonic-and-tonics, waiting for something to happen. While I argued in whispers with the Monk.

"But the ship!" he whispered. "What of the ship?" His agony was mine; for the ship must be protected.

At one fifteen the Monk was halfway across the bottom row of bottles. He slid from the stool, paid for his drinks in one dollar bills, and drifted to the door and out.

All he needed was a scythe and hour

glass, I thought, watching him go. And what I needed was a long morning's sleep. And I wasn't going to get it.

"Be sure nobody stops him," I told Morris.

"Nobody will. But he'll be followed."

"No point. The Garment to Wear Among Strangers is a lot of things. It's bracing; it helps the Monk hold human shape. It's a shield and an air filter. And it's a cloak of invisibility."

"Oh?"

"I'll tell you about it if I have time. That's how he got out here, probably.

One of the crewmen divided, and then one stayed and one walked. He had two weeks."

Morris stood up and tore off his sport jacket. His shirt was wet through. He said, "What about a stomach pump for you?" "No good. Most of the RNA-enzyme must be in my blood by now. You'll be better off if you spend your time getting down everything I can remember about Monks, while I can remember anything at all. It'll be nine or ten hours before everything goes." Which was a flat-out lie, of course.

"Okay. Let me get the dictaphone going again?"

"It'll cost you money."

Morris suddenly had a hard look. "Oh? How much?" I'd thought about that most carefully. "One hundred thousand dollars. And if you're thinking of arguing me down, remember whose time we're wasting."

"I wasn't." He was, but he'd changed his mind.

"Good. We'll transfer the money now, while I can still read your mind."

"All right."

He offered to make room for me in the booth, but I declined. The glass wouldn't

stop me from reading Morris's soul.

He came out silent; for there was something he was afraid to know. Then: "What about the Monks? What about our sun?"

"I talked that one around. That's why I don't want him molested. He'll convince others."

"Talked him around? How?"

"It wasn't easy." And suddenly I would have given my soul to sleep. "The profession pill put it in his genes; he must protect the ship. It's in me too. I know how strong it is."

"Then-"

"Don't be an ass, Morris. The ship's perfectly safe where it is, in orbit around the Moon. A sailship's only in danger when it's between stars, far from help."

"Oh."

"Not that that convinced him. It only let him consider the ethics of the situation rationally."

"Suppose someone else unconvinces him?"

"It could happen. That's why we'd better build the launching laser."

Morris nodded unhappily.

The next twelve hours were rough.

In the first four hours I gave them everything I could remember about the Monk teleport system, Monk technology, Monk family life, Monk ethics, relations between Monks and aliens, details on aliens, directions of various inhabited and uninhabited worlds . . . everything. Morris and the Secret Service men who had been posing as customers sat around me like boys around a campfire, listening to stories. But Louise made us fresh coffee, then went to sleep in one of the booths.

Then I let myself slack off.

By nine in the morning I was flat on my back, staring at the ceiling, dictating a random useless bit of information every thirty seconds or so. By eleven there was a great black pool of lukewarm coffee inside me, my eyes ached marginally more than the rest of me, and I was producing nothing.

I was convincing, and I knew it.

But Morris wouldn't let it go at that. He believed me. I felt him believing me. But he was going through the routine anyway, because it couldn't hurt. If I was useless to him, if I knew nothing, there was no point in playing soft. What could he lose?

He accused me of making everything up. He accused me of faking the pills. He made me sit up, and damn near caught me that way. He used obscure words and phrases from mathematics and Latin and Fan vocabulary. He got nowhere. There wasn't any way to trick me.

At two in the afternoon he had someone drive me home.

Every muscle in me ached; but I had to fight to maintain my exhausted slump. Else my hindbrain would have lifted me onto my toes and poised me against a possible shift in artificial gravity. The strain was double, and it hurt. It had hurt for hours, sitting with my shoulders hunched and my head hanging. But now,

if Morris saw me walking like a trampoline performer...

Morris's man got me to my room and left me.

I woke in darkness and sensed someone in my room. Someone who meant me no harm. In fact, Louise. I went back to sleep. .

I woke again at dawn. Louise was in my easy chair, her feet propped on a corner of the bed. Her eyes were open. She said, "Breakfast?"

I said, "Yah. There isn't much in the fridge."

"I brought things."

"All right?" I closed my eyes.

Five minutes later I decided I was all slept out. I got up and went to see how she was doing.

There was bacon frying, there was bread already buttered for toasting in the Toast-R-Oven, there was a pan hot for eggs, and the eggs scrambled in a bowl. Louise was filling the percolator.

"Give that here a minute," I said. It only had bad water in it. I held the pot in my hands, closed my eyes and tried to remember.

Ah.

I knew I'd done it right even before the heat touched my bands. The pot held hot, fragrant coffee.

"We were wrong about the first pill," I told Louise. She was looking at me very curiously. "What happened that second night was this. The Monk had a translator gadget, but he wasn't too happy with it. It kept screaming in his ear. Screaming English.

"He could turn off the part that was shouting English at me, and it would still whisper a Monk translation of what I was saying. But first be bad to teach me the Monk language. He didn't have a pill

to do that. He didn't have a generalized language learning course either, if there is one, which I doubt.

"He was pretty drunk, but he found something that would serve. The profession it taught me was something like yours. I mean, it's an old one, and it doesn't have a one-or-two-word name. But if it did, the word would be prophet."

"Prophet," said Louise. "Prophet?" She was doing a remarkable thing. She was listening with all her concentration, and scrambling eggs at the same time.

"Or disciple. Maybe apostle comes closer. Anyway, it included the Gift of

Tongues, which was what the Monk was after. But it included other talents too."

"Like turning cold water into hot coffee?"

"Miracles, right. I used the same talent to make the little pink amnesia pills disappear before they hit my stomach. But an apostle's major talent is persuasion.

"Last night I convinced a Monk crewman that blowing up suns is an evil thing.

"Morris is afraid that someone might convert him back. I don't think that's possible. The mind reading talent that goes with the prophet pill goes deeper

than just reading minds; I read souls. The Monk is my apostle. Maybe he'll convince the whole crew that I'm right.

"Or he may just curse the hachiroph ship, the little old nova maker. Which is what I intend to do."

"Curse it?"

"Do you think I'm kidding or something?"

"Oh, no!" She poured our coffee. "Will that stop it working?"

"Yes."

"Good," said Louise. And I felt the

power of her own faith, her faith in me. It gave her the serenity of an idealized nun.

When she turned back to serve the eggs, I dropped a pink triangular pill in her coffee.

She finished setting breakfast and we sat down. Louise said, "Then that's it. It's all over."

"All over." I swallowed some orange juice. Wonderful, what fourteen hours' sleep will do for a man's appetite. "All over. I can go back to my fourth profession, the only one that counts."

She looked up quickly.

"Bartender. First, last, and foremost, I'm a bartender. You're going to marry a bartender."

"Good," she said, relaxing.

In two hours or so the slave sets would be gone from her mind. She would be herself again: free, independent, unable to diet, and somewhat shy.

But the pink pill would not destroy real memories. Two hours from now, Louise would still know that I loved her, and perhaps she would marry me after all.

I said, "We'll have to hire an assistant. And raise our prices. They'll be fighting their way in when the story gets out."

Louise had pursued her own thoughts. "Bill Morris looked awful when I left. You ought to tell him he can stop worrying."

"Oh, no. I want him scared. Morris has got to talk the rest of the world into building a launching laser, instead of just throwing bombs at the Monk ship. And we need the launching laser."

"Mmm! That's good coffee. Why do we need a launching laser?"

"To get to the stars."

"That's Morris's bag. You're a bartender, remember? The fourth profession."

I shook my head. "You and Morris. You don't see how big the Monk marketplace is, or how thin the Monks are scattered. How many novas have you seen in your lifetime?"

"Damn few," I said. "There are damn few trading ships in a godawful lot of sky. There are things out there besides Monks. Things the Monks are afraid of, and probably others they don't know about.

"Things so dangerous that the only protection is to be somewhere else, circling some other star, when it happens here! The Monk drive is our lifeline and our immortality. It would be cheap at any price-"

"Your eyes are glowing," she breathed. She looked half hypnotized, and utterly convinced. And I knew that for the rest of my life, I would have to keep a tight rein on my tendency to preach.