



Heinlein Robert The Star Beast

The Star Beast. Robert A. Heinlein. FOR DIANE AND CLARK

Robert A. Heinlein

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CONTENTS

CONTENTS

I.L-Day.4

II.The Department of Spatial Affairs.16

III."-An Improper Question"21

IV.The Prisoner at the Bars.33

V.A Matter of Viewpoint49

VI."Space Is Deep, Excellency"61

VII."Mother Knows Best"71

VIII.The Sensible Thing To Do.81

IX. Customs and an Ugly Duckling.87

X. The Cygnus Decision.96

XI. "It's Too Late, Johnnie"104

XII. Concerning Pidgie-Widgie.110

XIII. "No, Mr. Secretary"121

XIV. "Destiny? Fiddlesticks!"128

XV. Undiplomatic Relations.137

XVI. "Sorry We Messed Things Up"146

XVII. Ninety-Seven Pickle Dishes.153

I.L-Day

Lummox was bored and hungry. The latter was a normal state; creatures of Lummox's breed were always ready for a little snack, even after a full meal. Being bored was less usual and derived directly from the fact that Lummox's chum and closest associate, John Thomas Stuart, had not been around all day, having chosen to go off somewhere with his friend Betty.

One afternoon was a mere nothing; Lummox could hold his breath that long. But he knew the signs and understood the situation; John Thomas had reached the size and age when he would spend more and more time with Betty, or others like her, and less and less time with Lummox. Then there would come a fairly long period during which John Thomas would spend practically no time with Lummox but at the end of which there would arrive a new John Thomas which would presently grow large enough to make an interesting playmate.

From experience Lummox recognized this cycle as necessary and inevitable; nevertheless the immediate prospect was excruciatingly boring. He lumbered listlessly around the back yard of the Stuart home, looking for anything—a grasshopper, a robin, anything at all that might be worth looking at. He watched a hill of ants for a while. They seemed to be moving house; an endless chain was dragging little white grubs in one direction while a countermarching line returned for more grubs. This killed a half hour.

Growing tired of ants, he moved away toward his own house. His number-seven foot came down on the ant hill and crushed it, but the fact did not come to his attention. His own house was just big enough for him to back into it and was the end building of a row of decreasing size; the one at the far end would have made a suitable doghouse for a chihuahua.

Piled outside his shed were six bales of hay. Lummox pulled a small amount off one bale and chewed it lazily. He did not take a second bite because he had taken as much as he thought he could steal and not have it noticed. There was nothing to stop him from eating the entire pile—except the knowledge that John Thomas would bawl him out bitterly and might even refuse for a week or more to scratch him with the garden rake. The household rules required Lummox not to touch food other than natural forage until it was placed in his manger; Lummox usually obeyed as he hated dissension and was humiliated by disapproval.

Besides, he did not want hay. He had had hay for supper last night, he would have it again tonight, and again tomorrow night. Lummox wanted something with more body and a more interesting flavor. He ambled over to the low fence which separated the several acres of back yard from Mrs. Stuart's formal garden, stuck his head over and looked longingly at Mrs. Stuart's roses. The fence was merely a symbol marking the line he must not cross. Lummox had crossed it once, a few years earlier, and had sampled the rose bushes... just a sample, a mere appetizer, but Mrs. Stuart had made such a fuss that he hated to think about it even now. Shuddering at the recollection, he backed hastily away from the fence.

But he recalled some rose bushes that did not belong to Mrs. Stuart, and therefore in Lummox's opinion, did not belong to anybody. They were in the garden of the Donahues, next door west. There was a possible way, which Lummox had been thinking about lately, to reach these "ownerless" rose bushes.

The Stuart place was surrounded by a ten-foot concrete wall. Lummox had never tried to climb over it, although he had nibbled the top of it in places. In the rear there was one break in it, where the gully draining the land crossed the property line. The gap in the wall was filled by a massive grating of eight-by-eight timbers, bolted together with extremely heavy bolts. The vertical timbers were set in the stream bed and the contractor who had erected it had assured Mrs. Stuart that it would stop Lummox, or a herd of elephants, or anything else too big-hipped to crawl between the timbers.

Lummox knew that the contractor was mistaken, but his opinion had not been asked and he had not offered it. John Thomas had not expressed an opinion either, but he had seemed to suspect the truth; he had emphatically ordered Lummox not to tear the grating down.

Lummox had obeyed. He had sampled it for flavor, but the wooden timbers had been soaked in something which gave them a really unbearable taste; he let them be.

But Lummox felt no responsibility for natural forces. He had noticed, about three months back, that spring rains had eroded the gully so that two of the vertical timbers were no longer imbedded but were merely resting on the dry stream bed. Lummox had been thinking about this for several weeks and had found that a gentle nudge tended to spread the timbers at the bottom. A slightly heavier nudge might open up a space wide enough without actually tearing down the grating...

Lummox lumbered down to check up. Still more of the stream bed had washed away in the last rain; one of the vertical timbers hung a few inches free of the sand. The one next to it was barely resting on the ground. Lummox smiled like a simple-minded golliwog and carefully, delicately insinuated his head between the two big posts. He pushed gently.

Above his head came a sound of rending wood and the pressure suddenly relieved. Startled, Lummox pulled his head out and looked up. The upper end of one eight-by-eight had torn free of its bolts; it pivoted now on a lower horizontal girder. Lummox clucked to himself. Too bad... but it couldn't be helped. Lummox was not one to weep over past events; what has been, must be. No doubt John Thomas would be vexed but in the meantime here was an opening through the grating. He lowered his head like a football linesman, set himself in low gear, and pushed on through. There followed several sounds of protesting and rending wood and sharper ones of broken bolts, but Lummox ignored it all; he was on the far side now, a free agent.

He paused and raised up like a caterpillar, lifting legs one and three, two and four, off the ground, and looked around. It was certainly nice to be outside; he wondered why he had not done it sooner. It had been a long time since John Thomas had taken him out, even for a short walk.

He was still looking around, sniffing free air, when an unfriendly character charged at him, yapping and barking furiously. Lummox recognized him, an oversized and heavily muscled mastiff that ran ownerless and free in the neighborhood; they had often exchanged insults through the grating. Lummox had nothing against dogs; in the course of his long career with the Stuart family he had known several socially and had found them pretty fair company in the absence of John Thomas. But this mastiff was another matter. He fancied himself boss of the neighborhood, bullied other dogs, terrorized cats, and repeatedly challenged Lummox to come out and fight like a dog.

Nevertheless Lummox smiled at him, opened his mouth wide and, in a lisping, baby-girl voice from somewhere far back inside him, called the mastiff a very bad name. The dog gasped. It is likely that he did not comprehend what Lummox had said, but he did know that he had been insulted. He recovered himself and renewed the attack, barking louder than ever and raising an unholy ruckus while dashing around Lummox and making swift sorties at his flanks to nip at Lummox's legs.

Lummox remained reared up, watching the dog but making no move. He did add to his earlier remark a truthful statement about the dog's ancestry and an untruthful one about his habits; they helped to keep the mastiff berserk. But on the dog's seventh round trip he cut fairly close to where Lummox's first pair of legs would have been had Lummox had all eight feet on the ground; Lummox ducked his head the way a frog strikes at a fly. His mouth opened like a wardrobe trunk and gobbled the mastiff.

Not bad, Lummox decided as he chewed and swallowed. Not bad at all... and the collar made a crunchy tidbit. He considered whether or not to go back through the grating, now that he had had a little snack, and pretend that he had never been outside at all. However, there were still those ownerless rose bushes and no doubt John Thomas would make it inconvenient for him to get out again soon. He ambled away parallel to the Stuart's rear wall, then swung around the end onto the Donahue land.

John Thomas Stuart XI got home shortly before dinner time, having already dropped Betty Sorensen at her home. He noticed, as he landed, that Lummox was not in sight, but he assumed that his pet was in his shed. His mind was not on Lummox, but on the age-old fact that females do not operate by logic, at least as logic is understood by males.

He was planning to enter Western Tech; Betty wanted them both to attend the state university. He had pointed out that he could not get the courses he wanted at State U.; Betty had insisted that he could and had looked up references to prove her point. He had rebutted by saying that it was not the name of a course that mattered, but who taught it. The discussion had fallen to pieces when

she had refused to concede that he was an authority.

He had absent-mindedly unstrapped his harness copter, while dwelling on the illogic of the feminine mind, and was racking it in the hallway, when his mother burst into his presence. "John Thomas! *Where* have you been?"

He tried to think what he could have slipped on now. It was a bad sign when she called him "John Thomas"... "John" or "Johnnie" was okay, or even "Johnnie Boy." But "John Thomas" usually meant that he had been accused, tried, and convicted in absentia.

"Huh? Why, I told you at lunch, Mum. Out hopping with Betty. We flew over to..."

"Never mind that! Do you know what *that* beast has done?"

Now he had it. LummoX. He hoped it wasn't Mum's garden. Maybe Lum had just knocked over his own house again. If so, Mum would level off presently. Maybe he had better build a new one, bigger. "What's the trouble?" he asked cautiously.

"What's the trouble? What isn't the trouble? John Thomas, this time you simply will have to get rid of it. This is the last straw."

"Take it easy, Mum," he said hastily. "We can't get rid of Lum. You promised Dad."

She made no direct answer. "With the police calling every ten minutes and that great dangerous beast rampaging around and..."

"*Huh?* Wait a minute, Mum, Lum isn't dangerous; he's gentle as a kitten. What happened?"

"Everything!"

He gradually drew out of her some of the details. LummoX had gone for a stroll; that much was clear. John Thomas hoped without conviction that LummoX had not got any iron or steel while he was out; iron had such an explosive effect on his metabolism. There was the time LummoX had eaten that second-hand Buick...

His thoughts were interrupted by his mother's words. and Mrs. Donahue is simply furious! And well she might be... her prize roses."

Oh oh, that was bad. He tried to recall the exact amount in his savings account. He would have to apologize, too, and think of ways to butter up the old biddy. In the meantime he would beat LummoX's ears with an ax; LummoX knew about roses, there was no excuse.

"Look, Mum, I'm awfully sorry. I'll go right out and pound some sense into his thick head. When I get through with him, he won't dare sneeze without permission." John Thomas started edging around her.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"Huh? Out to talk with Lum, of course. When I get through with him..."

"Don't be sffly. He isn't here."

"Huh? Where is he?" John Thomas swiftly rearranged his prayers to hope that LummoX hadn't found very much iron. The Buick hadn't really been LummoX's fault and anyhow it had belonged to John Thomas, but...

"No telling where he is now. Chief Dreiser said..."

"The police are after LummoX?"

"You can just bet they are, young man! The entire safety patrol is after him. Mr. Dreiser wanted me to come downtown and take him home, but I told him we would have to get you to handle that beast."

"But Mother, LummoX would have obeyed you. He always does. Why did Mr. Dreiser take him downtown? He knows Lum belongs here. Being taken downtown would frighten Lum. The poor baby is timid; he wouldn't like..."

"Poor baby indeed! He wasn't taken downtown."

"But you said he was."

"I said no such thing. If you'll be quiet, I'll tell you what happened."

It appeared that Mrs. Donahue had surprised LummoX when he had eaten only four or five of her rose bushes. With much courage and little sense she had run at him with a broom, to scream and belabor him about the head. She had not followed the mastiff, though he could have managed her with one gulp; LummoX had a sense of property as nice as that of any house cat. People were not food; in fact, people were almost invariably friendly.

So his feelings were hurt. He had lumbered away from there, pouting.

The next action report on LummoX was for a point two miles away and about thirty minutes later. The Stuarts lived in a suburban area of Westville; open country separated it from the main part of town. Mr. Ito had a small farm in this interval, where he handraised vegetables for the tables of gourmets. Mr. Ito apparently had not known what it was that he had found pulling up his cabbages and gulping them down. LummoX's long residence in the vicinity was certainly no secret, but Mr. Ito had no interest in other people's business and had never seen LummoX before.

But he showed no more hesitation than had Mrs. Donahue. He dashed into his house and came out with a gun that had been handed down to him from his grandfather—a relic of the Fourth World War of the sort known affectionately as a "tank killer."

Mr. Ito steadied the gun on a potting bench and let LummoX have it where he would have sat down had LummoX been constructed for such. The noise scared Mr. Ito (he had never heard the weapon fired) and the flash momentarily blinded him. When he blinked his eyes and recovered, the thing had gone.

But it was easy to tell the direction in which it had gone. This encounter had not humiliated LummoX as had the brush with Mrs. Donahue; this frightened him almost out of his wits. While busy with his fresh green salad he had been faced toward a triplet of Mr. Ito's greenhouses. When the explosion ticked him and the blast assailed his hearing, LummoX shifted into high gear and got underway in the direction he was heading. Ordinarily he used a leg firing order of 1,4,5,8,2,3,6,7 and repeat, good for speeds from a slow crawl to fast as a trotting horse; he now broke from a standing start into a double-ended gallop, moving legs 1, 2, 5, 6 together, alternated with 3, 4, 7, 8.

LummoX was through the three greenhouses before he had time to notice them, leaving a tunnel suitable for a medium truck. Straight ahead, three miles away, lay downtown Westville. It might have been better if he had been headed in the opposite direction toward the mountains.

John Thomas Stuart listened to his mother's confused account with growing apprehension. When he heard about Mr. Ito's greenhouses, he stopped thinking about his savings account and started wondering what assets he could convert into cash. His jump harness was almost new... but shucks! it wouldn't pay the damage. He wondered if there was any kind of a dicker he could work with the bank? One sure thing: Mum wouldn't help him out, not the state she was in.

Later reports were spotty. LummoX seemed to have gone across country until he hit the highway leading into town. A transcontinental trucker had complained to a traffic officer, over a cup of coffee, that he had just seen a robot pedatruck with no license plates and that the durned thing had been paying no attention to traffic lanes. But the trucker had used it as an excuse to launch a diatribe about the danger of robot drivers and how there was no substitute for a human driver, sitting in the cab and keeping his eyes open for emergencies. The traffic patrolman had not seen LummoX, being already at his coffee when LummoX passed, and had not been impressed since the trucker was obviously prejudiced. Nevertheless he had phoned in.

Traffic control center in Westville paid no attention to the report; control was fully occupied with a reign of terror.

John Thomas interrupted his mother. "Has anybody been hurt?"

"Hurt? I don't know. Probably. John Thomas, you've got to get rid of that beast at once."

He ignored that statement; it seemed the wrong time to argue it. "What else happened?"

Mrs. Stuart did not know in detail. Near the middle of town LummoX came down a local chute from the overhead freeway. He was moving slowly now and with hesitation; traffic and large numbers of people confused him. He stepped off the street onto a sidewalk. The walk ground to a stop, not being designed for six tons of concentrated load; fuses had blown, circuit breakers had opened, and pedestrian traffic at the busiest time of day was thrown into confusion for twenty blocks of the shopping district.

Women had screamed, children and dogs had added to the excitement, safety officers had tried to restore order, and poor LummoX, who had not meant any harm and had not intended to visit the shopping district anyway, made a perfectly natural mistake... the big display windows of the Bon Marche looked like a refuge where he could get away from it all. The duraglass of the windows was supposed to be unbreakable, but the architect had not counted on LummoX mistaking it for empty air. LummoX went in and tried to hide in a model bedroom display. He was not very successful.

John Thomas's next question was cut short by a thump on the roof; someone had landed. He looked up. "You expecting anyone, Mum?"

"It's probably the police. They said they would..."

"The police? Oh, my!"

"Don't go away... you've got to see them."

"I wasn't going anywhere," he answered miserably and punched a button to unlock the roof entrance.

Moments later the lazy lift from the roof creaked to a stop and the door opened; a safety sergeant and a patrolman stepped out. "Mrs. Stuart?" the sergeant began formally. " 'In your service, ma'am.' We..." He caught sight of John Thomas, who was trying not to be noticed. "Are you John T. Stuart?"

John gulped. "Yessir."

"Then come along, right away. 'Scuse us, ma'am. Or do you want to come too?"

"Me? Oh, no, I'd just be in the way."

The sergeant nodded relieved agreement. "Yes, ma'am. Come along, youngster. Minutes count." He took John by the arm.

John tried to shrug away. "Hey, what is this? You got a warrant or something?"

The police officer stopped, seemed to count ten, then said slowly, "Son, I do not have a warrant. But if you are the John T. Stuart I'm looking for... and I know you are... then unless you want something drastic and final to happen to that deep-space what-isit you've been harboring, you'd better snap to and come with us."

"Oh, I'll come," John said hastily.

"Okay. Don't give me any more trouble."

John Thomas Stuart kept quiet and went with him.

In the three minutes it took the patrol car to fly downtown John Thomas tried to find out the worst. "Uh, Mister Patrol Officer? There hasn't been anybody hurt? Has there?"

"Sergeant Mendoza," the sergeant answered. "I hope not. I don't know."

John considered this bleak answer. "Well... LummoX is still in the Bon Marche?"

"Is that what you call it?-LummoX? It doesn't seem strong enough. No, we got it out of there. It's under the West Arroyo viaduct... I hope."

The answer sounded ominous. "What do you mean: 'you hope'?"

"Well, first we blocked off Main and Hamilton, then we chivvied it out of the store with fire extinguishers. Nothing else seemed to bother it; solid slugs just bounced off. Say, what's that beast's hide made of? Ten-point steel?"

"Uh, not exactly." Sergeant Mendoza's satire was closer to fact than John Thomas cared to discuss; he still was wondering if LummoX had eaten any iron. After the mishap of the digested Buick LummoX's growth had taken an enormous spurt; in two weeks he had jumped from the size of a misshapen hippopotamus to his present unlikely dimensions, more growth than he had shown in the preceding generation. It had made him extremely gaunt, like a canvas tarpaulin draped over a scaffolding, his quite unearthly skeleton pushing through his skin; it had taken three years of a high-caloric diet to make him chubby again. Since that time John Thomas had tried to keep metal away from LummoX, most especially iron, even though his father and his grandfather had always fed him tidbits of scrap metal.

"Um. Anyhow the fire extinguishers dug him out-only he sneezed and knocked two men down. After that we used more fire extinguishers to turn him down Hamilton, meaning to herd him into open country where he couldn't do so much damage... seeing as how we couldn't find you. We were making out pretty well, with only an occasional lamp post knocked down, or ground car stepped on, or such, when we came to where we meant to turn him off on Hillcrest and head him back to your place. But he got away from us and headed out onto the viaduct, ran into the guard rail and went off, and... well, you'll see, right now. Here we are."

Half a dozen police cars were hovering over the end of the viaduct Surrounding the area were many private air cars and an air bus or two; the patrol cars were keeping them back from the scene. There were several hundred harness flyers as well, darting like bats in and out among the vehicles and making the police problem more difficult On the ground a few regular police, supplemented by emergency safety officers wearing arm bands, were trying to hold the crowd back and were diverting traffic away from the viaduct and from the freight road that ran under it down the arroyo. Sergeant Mendoza's driver threaded his way through the cars

in the air, while speaking into a hushophone on his chest. Chief Dreiser's bright red command car detached itself from the knot over the end of the viaduct and approached them.

Both cars stopped, a few yards apart and a hundred feet above the viaduct. John Thomas could see the big gap in the railing where LummoX had gone over, but could not see LummoX himself; the viaduct blocked his view. The door of the command car opened and Chief Dreiser leaned out; he looked harassed and his bald head was covered with sweat. "Tell the Stuart boy to stick his head out."

John Thomas ran a window down and did so. "Here, sir."

"Lad, can you control that monster?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I hope you're right. Mendoza! Land him. Let him try it."

"Yes, Chief." Mendoza spoke to the driver, who moved the car past the viaduct and started letting down beyond it. LummoX could be seen then; he had taken refuge under the end of the bridge, making himself small... for him. John Thomas leaned out and called to him,

"Lum! Lummie boy! Come to papa."

The creature stirred and the end of the viaduct stirred with him. About twelve feet of his front end emerged from under the structure and he looked around wildly.

"Here, Lum! Up here!"

LummoX caught sight of his friend and split his head in an idiot grin. Sergeant Mendoza snapped, "Put her down, Slats. Let's get this over."

The driver lowered a bit, then said anxiously, "That's enough, Sergeant. I saw that critter rear up earlier."

"All right, all right." Mendoza opened the door and kicked out a rope ladder used in rescue work. "Can you go down that, son?"

"Sure." With Mendoza to give him a hand John Thomas shinnied out of the door and got a grip on the ladder. He felt his way down and came to the point where there was no more ladder; he was still six feet above LummoX's head. He looked down. "Heads up, baby. Take me down."

LummoX lifted another pair of legs from the ground and carefully placed his broad skull under John Thomas, who stepped onto it, staggering a little and grabbing for a hand hold. LummoX lowered him gently to the ground.

John Thomas jumped off and turned to face him. Well, the fall apparently had not hurt Lum any; that was a relief. He would get him home first and then go over him inch by inch.

In the meantime LummoX was nuzzling his legs and making a sound remarkably like a purr. John looked stern. "BadLummie! Bad, bad Lummie... you're a mess, aren't you?"

LummoX looked embarrassed. He lowered his head to the ground, looked up at his friend, and opened his mouth wide. "I didn't mean to," he protested in his baby-girl voice.

"You didn't mean to. You didn't mean to! Oh, no, you never do. I'm going to take your front feet and stuff them down your throat. You know that, don't you? I'm going to beat you to a pulp and then use you for a rug. No supper for you. You didn't mean to, indeed!"

The bright red car came close and hovered. "Okay?" demanded Chief Dreiser.

"Sure."

"All right. Here's the plan. I'm going to move that barrier up ahead. You get him back up on Hillcrest, going out the upper end of the draw. There will be an escort waiting; you fall in behind and stay with it all the way home. Get me?"

"Okay." John Thomas saw that in both directions the arroyo road had been blocked with riot shields, tractors with heavy armor mounted on their fronts, so that a temporary barrier could be thrown across a street or square. Such equipment was standard for any city safety force since the Riots of '91, but he could not recall that Westville had ever used them; he began to realize that the day that LummoX went to town would not soon be forgotten.

But he was happy that LummoX had been too timid to munch on those steel shields. He was beginning to hope that his pet had been too busy all afternoon to eat any ferrous metal. He turned back to him. "All right, get your ugly carcass out of that hole. We're going home."

LummoX complied eagerly; the viaduct again trembled as he brushed against it. "Make me a saddle."

LummoX's midsection slumped down a couple of feet. He thought about it very hard and his upper surface shaped itself into contours resembling a chair. "Hold still," John Thomas ordered. "I don't want any mashed fingers." LummoX did so, quivering a little, and the young man scrambled up, grabbing at slip folds in LummoX's durable hide. He sat himself like a rajah ready for a tiger hunt.

"All right. Slow march now, up the road. No, no! Gee around, you numskull. Uphill, not down."

Docilely, LummoX turned and ambled away.

Two patrol ground cars led the way, two others brought up the rear. Chief Dreiser's tomato-red runabout hung over them at a safe distance. John Thomas lounged back and spent the time composing first, what he was going to say to LummoX, and second, what he was going to say to his mother. The first speech was much easier; he kept going back and embellishing it with fresh adjectives whenever he found himself running into snags on the second.

They were halfway home when a single flier, hopping free in a copter harness, approached the little parade. The flier ignored the red warning light stabbing out from the police chiefs car and slanted straight down at the huge star beast. John Thomas thought that he recognized Betty's slapdash style even before he could make out features; he was not mistaken. He caught her as she cut power.

Chief Dreiser slammed a window open and stuck his head out. He was in full flow when Betty interrupted him. "Why, Chief Dreiser! What a terrible way to talk!"

He stopped and took another look. "Is that Betty Sorenson?"

"Of course it is. And I must say, Chief, that after all the years you've taught Sunday School I never thought I would live to hear you use such language. If that is setting a good example, I think I'll..."

"Young lady, hold your tongue."

"Me? But you were the one who was using..."

"Quiet! I've had all I can take today. You get that suit to buzzing and hop out of here. This is official business. Now get out."

She glanced at John Thomas and winked, then set her face in cherubic innocence. "But, Chief, I can't."

"Huh? Why not?"

"I'm out of juice. This was an emergency landing."

"Betty, you quit fibbing to me."

"Me? Fibbing? Why, Deacon Dreiser!"

"I'll deacon you. If your tanks are dry, get down off that beast and walk home. He's dangerous."

"Lummie dangerous? Lummie wouldn't hurt a fly. And besides, do you want me to walk home alone? On a country road? When it's almost dark? I'm surprised at you."

Dreiser sputtered and closed the window. Betty wiggled out of her harness and settled back in the wider seat that LummoX had provided without being told. John Thomas looked at her. "Hi, Slugger."

"Hi, Knothead."

"I didn't know you knew the Chief."

"I know everybody. Now shut up. I've gotten here, with all speed and much inconvenience, as soon as I heard the newscast. You and LummoX between you could not manage to think your way out of this, even with LummoX doing most of the work-so I rallied around. Now give me the grisly details. Don't hold anything back from mama."

"Smart Alec."

"Don't waste time on compliments. This will probably be our only chance for a private word before they start worrying you, so you had better talk fast."

"Huh? What do you think you are? A lawyer?"

"I'm better than a lawyer, my mind is not cluttered with stale precedents. I can be creative about it."

"Well..." Actually he felt better now that Betty was present. It was no longer just LummoX and himself against an unfriendly world. He poured out the story while she listened soberly.

"Anybody hurt?" she asked at last.

"I don't think so. At least they didn't mention it."

"They would have." She sat up straight. "Then we've got nothing to worry about."

"What? With hundreds, maybe thousands, in damage? I'd like to know what you call trouble?"

"People getting hurt," she answered. "Anything else can be managed. Maybe we'll have LummoX go through bankruptcy."

"Huh? That's silly!"

"If you think that is silly, you've never been in a law court."

"Have you?"

"Don't change the subject. After all, LummoX was attacked with a deadly weapon."

"It didn't hurt him; it just singed him a little."

"Beside the point. It undoubtedly caused him great mental anguish. I'm not sure he was responsible for anything that happened afterwards. Be quiet and let me think."

"Do you mind if I think, too?"

"Not as long as I don't hear the gears grind. Pipe down."

The parade continued to the Stuart home in silence. Betty gave him one piece of advice as they stopped. "Admit nothing. Nothing. And don't sign anything. Holler if you need me."

Mrs. Stuart did not come out to meet them. Chief Dreiser inspected the gap in the grating with John Thomas, with LummoX hanging over their shoulders. The Chief watched in silence as John Thomas took a string and tied it across the opening.

"There! Now he can't get out again."

Dreiser pulled at his lip. "Son, are you all right in the head?"

"You don't understand, sir. The grating wouldn't stop him even if we did repair it... not if he wanted to get out. I don't know anything that would. But that string will. LummoX!"

"Yes, Johnnie?"

"See that string?"

"Yes, Johnnie."

"You bust that string and I'll bust your silly head. Understand me?"

"Yes, Johnnie."

"You won't go out of the yard again, not ever, unless I take you."

"All right, Johnnie."

"Promise? Cross your heart?"

"Cross my heart."

"He hasn't really got a heart," Johnnie went on. "He has an uncentralized circulatory system. It's like..."

"I don't care if he has rotary pumps, as long as he stays home."

"He will. He's never broken 'Cross my heart,' even if he hasn't got one."

Dreiser chewed his thumb. "All right. I'll leave a man out here with a portophone tonight. And tomorrow we'll put some steel I-beams in there in place of that wood."

John started to say, "Oh, not steel," but he thought better of it. Dreiser said, "What's the matter?"

"Uh, nothing."

"You keep an eye on him, too."

"He won't get out"

"He had better not. You realize that you are both under arrest, don't you? But I've got no way to lock that monstrosity up."

John Thomas did not answer. He had not realized it; now he saw that it was inevitable. Dreiser went on in a kindly voice, "Try not to worry about it. You seem like a good boy and everybody thought well of your father. Now I've got to go in and have a word with your mother. You had better stay here until my man arrives... and then maybe sort of introduce him to, uh, this thing." He passed a doubtful eye over LummoX.

John Thomas stayed while the police chief went back to the house. Now was the time to give LummoX what for, but he did not have the heart for it. Not just then.

II. The Department of Spatial Affairs

II. The Department of Spatial Affairs

To John Thomas Stuart XI the troubles of himself and LummoX seemed unique and unbearable, yet he was not alone, even around Westville. Little Mr. Ito was suffering from an always fatal disease—old age. It would kill him soon. Behind uncounted closed doors in Westville other persons suffered silently the countless forms of quiet desperation which can close in on a man, or woman, for reasons of money, family, health, or face.

Farther away, in the state capital, the Governor stared hopelessly at a stack of papers—evidence that would certainly send to prison his oldest and most trusted friend. Much farther away, on Mars, a prospector abandoned his wrecked sandmobile and got ready to attempt the long trek back to Outpost. He would never make it.

Incredibly farther away, twenty-seven light years, the Starship *Bolivar* was entering—an interspatial transition. A flaw in a tiny relay would cause that relay to operate a tenth of a second later than it should. The S.S. *Bolivar* would wander between the stars for many years... but she would never find her way home.

Inconceivably farther from Earth, half way across the local star cloud, a race of arboreal crustaceans was slowly losing to a younger, more aggressive race of amphibians. It would be several thousands Earth years before the crustaceans were extinct, but the issue was not in doubt. This was regrettable (by human standards) for the crustacean race had mental and spiritual abilities which complemented human traits in a fashion which could have permitted a wealth of civilized cooperation with them. But when the first Earth-humans landed there, some eleven thousand years in the future, the crustaceans would be long dead.

Back on Earth at Federation Capital His Excellency the Right Honorable Henry Gladstone Kiku, M.A. (Oxon.) Litt.D. *honoris causa* (Capetown), O.B.E., Permanent Under Secretary for Spatial Affairs, was not worried about the doomed crustaceans because he would never know of them. He was not yet worried about S.S. *Bolivar* but he would be. Aside from the ship, the loss of one passenger in that ship would cause a chain reaction of headaches for Mr. Kiku and all his associates for years to come.

Anything and everything outside Earth's ionosphere was Mr. Kiku's responsibility and worry. Anything which concerned the relationships between Earth and any part of the explored universe was also his responsibility. Even affairs which were superficially strictly Earthside were also his concern, if they affected or were in any way affected by anything which was extra-terrestrial, interplanetary, or interstellar in nature—a very wide range indeed.

His problems included such things as the importation of Martian sand grass, suitably mutated, for the Tibetan plateau. Mr. Kiku's office had not approved that until after a careful mathematical examination of the possible effect on the Australian sheep industry—and a dozen other factors. Such things were done cautiously, with the gruesome example of Madagascar and the Martian berryroot always before them. Economic decisions did not upset Mr. Kiku, no matter how many toes he stepped on; other sorts kept him awake nights—such as his decision not to give police escorts to Goddard exchange students from Procyon VII despite the very real danger to them from provincial Earthmen with prejudices against beings having unearthly arrangements of limbs or eyes or such—the cephalopods of that planet were a touchy people and something very like a police escort was their own usual punishment for criminals.

Mr. Kiku had an extremely large staff to help him, of course, and, also of course, the help of the Secretary himself. The Secretary made speeches, greeted Very Important Visitors, gave out interviews, and in many other ways eased for Mr. Kiku an otherwise unbearable load-Mr. Kiku would be first to admit this. As long as the current Secretary behaved himself, minded his business, took care of public appearances, and let the Under Secretary get on with the department's work, he had Mr. Kiku's approval. Of course, if he failed to pull his load or threw his weight around, Mr. Kiku was capable of finding ways to get rid of him. But it had been fifteen years since he had found it necessary to be so drastic; even the rawest political appointee could usually be broken to harness.

Mr. Kiku had not made up his mind about the current Secretary, but was not now thinking about him. Instead he was looking over the top-sheet synopsis for Project Cerberus, a power proposal for the research station on Pluto. A reminder light on his desk flashed and he looked up to see the door between his office and that of the Secretary dilate. The Secretary walked in, whistling *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*; Mr. Kiku did not recognize the tune.

He broke off. "Greetings, Henry. No, don't get up."

Mr. Kiku had not started to get up. "How do you do, Mr. Secretary? What can I do for your"

"Nothing much, nothing much." He paused by Mr. Kiku's desk and picked up the project folder. "What are you swotting now? Cerberus, eh? Henry, that's an engineering matter. Why should we worry about it?"

"There are aspects," Mr. Kiku answered carefully, "that concern us."

"I suppose so. Budget and so forth." His eye sought the bold-faced line reading: ESTIMATED COST: 3.5 megabucks and 7.4 lives. "What's this? I can't go before the Council and ask them to approve this. It's fantastic."

"The first estimate," Mr. Kiku said evenly, "was over eight megabucks and more than a hundred lives."

"I don't mind the money, but this other... You are in effect asking the Council to sign death warrants for seven and four-tenths men: You can't do that, it isn't human. Say, what the deuce is four-tenths of a man anyway? How can you kill a fraction of a man?"

"Mr. Secretary," his subordinate answered patiently, "any project bigger than a schoolyard swing involves probable loss of life. But that hazard factor is low; it means that working on Project Cerberus will be safer, on the average, than staying Earthside. That's my rule of thumb."

"Eh?" The Secretary looked again at the synopsis. "Then why not say so? Put the thing in the best light and so forth?"

"This report is for my eyes... for our eyes, only. The report to the Council will emphasize safety precautions and will not include an estimate of deaths-which, after all, is a guess."

"Mmm, 'a guess.' Yes, of course." The Secretary put the report down, seemed to lose interest.

"Anything else, sir?"

"Oh, yes! Henry, old man, you know that Rargyllian dignitary I am supposed to receive today? Dr. What's-his-name?"

"Dr. Ftaeml." Mr. Kiku glanced at his desk control panel. "Your appointment is, uh, an hour and seven minutes from now."

"That's just it. I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to substitute. Apologies to him and so forth. Tell him I'm tied up with affairs of state."

"Sir? I wouldn't advise that. He will expect to be received by an official of your rank... and the Rargyllians are extremely meticulous about protocol."

"Oh, come now, this native won't know the difference."

"But he will, sir."

"Well, let him think that you're me... I don't care. But I won't be here and that's that The Secretary General has invited me to go to the ball game with him-and an invitation from the S. C. is a 'must,' y'know."

Mr. Kiku knew that it was nothing of the sort, had the commitment been explained. But he shut up. "Very well, sir."

"Thanks, old chap." The Secretary left, again whistling.

When the door closed, Mr. Kiku with an angry gesture slapped a row of switches on the desk panel. He was locked in now and could not be reached by phone, video, tube, autowriter, or any other means, save by an alarm button which his own secretary had used only once in twelve years. He leaned elbows on his desk, covered his head with his hands and rubbed his fingers through his woolly pate.

This trouble, that trouble, the other trouble... and always some moron to jiggle his elbow! Why had he ever left Africa? Where came this itch for public service? An itch that had long, since turned into mere habit...

He sat up and opened his middle drawer. It was bulging with real estate prospectuses from Kenya; he took out a handful and soon was comparing relative merits of farms. Now here was a little honey, if a man had the price-better than eight hundred acres, half of it in cultivation, and seven proved wells on the property. He looked at map and photographs and presently felt better. After a while he put them away and closed the drawer.

He was forced to admit that, while what he had told the chief was true, his own nervous reaction came mostly from his life-long fear of snakes. If Dr. Ftaeml were anything but a Rargyllian... or if the Rargyllians had not been medusa humanoids, he wouldn't have minded. Of course, he knew that those tentacles growing out of a Rargyllian's head were not snakes-but his stomach didn't know it. He would have to find time for a hypnotic treatment before-no, there wasn't time; he'd have to take a pill instead.

Sighing, he flipped the switches back on. His incoming basket started to fill up at once and all the communication instruments showed lights. But the lights were amber rather than blinking red; he ignored them and glanced through the stuff falling into his basket. Most of the items were for his information only: under doctrine his subordinates or their subordinates had taken action. Occasionally he would check a name and a suggested action and drop the sheet in the gaping mouth of the outgoing basket.

A radiotype came in that was not routine, in that it concerned a creature alleged to be extra-terrestrial but unclassified as to type and origin. The incident involved seemed unimportant-some nonsense in one of the native villages in the western part of the continent. But the factor of an extra-terrestrial creature automatically required the local police to report it to Spatial Affairs, and the lack of classification of the e.-t. prevented action under doctrine and resulted in the report being kicked upstairs.

Mr. Kiku had never seen Lummox and would have had no special interest if he had. But Mr. Kiku knew that each contact with "Out There" was unique. The universe was limitless in its variety. To assume without knowledge, to reason by analogy, to take the unknown for granted, all meant to invite disaster.

Mr. Kiku looked over his list to see whom he could send. Any of his career officers could act as a court of original and superior jurisdiction in any case involving extra-terrestrials, but who was on Earth and free? Hmm...

Sergei Greenberg, that was the man. System Trade Intelligence could get along without a chief for a day or two. He flipped a switch. "Sergei?"

"Yes, boss?"

"Busy?"

"Well, yes and no. I'm paring my nails and trying to figure a reason why the taxpayers should pay me more money."

"Should they, now? I'm sending a bluesheet down." Mr. Kiku checked Greenberg's name on the radiotype, dropped it in his outgoing basket, waited a few seconds until he saw Greenberg pick it out of his own incoming basket. "Read it."

Greenberg did so, then looked up. "Well, boss?"

"Phone the local justice that we are assuming tentative jurisdiction, then buzz out and look into it."

"Thy wish is my command, O King. Even money the critter is terrestrial after all, two to one I can identify if it isn't."

"No wager, not at those odds. You're probably right. But it might be a 'special situation'; we can't take chances."

"I'll keep the local yokels in line, boss. Where is this hamlet? Westville? Or whatever it is?"

"How would I know? You have the sheet in front of you."

Greenberg glanced at it. "Hey! What do you know? It's in the mountains... this may take two or three weeks, boss. Hot enough for you?"

"Take more than three days and I'll charge it off your annual leave." Mr. Kiku switched off and turned to other matters. He disposed of a dozen calls, found the bottom of his incoming basket and lost it again, then noticed that it was time for the Rargyllian. Goose flesh crawled over him and he dug hastily into his desk for one of the special pills his doctor had warned him not to take too frequently. He had just gulped it when his secretary's light started blinking.

"Sir? Dr. Ftaeml is here."

"Show him in." Mr. Kiku muttered in a language his ancestors had used in making magic-against snakes, for example. As the door dilated he hung on his face the expression suitable for receiving visitors.

III."-An Improper Question"

III."-An Improper Question"

The intervention by the Department of Spatial Affairs in the case of LummoX did not postpone the hearing; it speeded it up. Mr. Greenberg phoned the district judge, asked for the use of his courtroom, and asked him to have all parties and witnesses in court at ten o'clock the next morning-including, of course, the extra-terrestrial that was the center of the fuss. Judge O'Farrell questioned the last point.

"This creature... you need him, too?"

Greenberg said that he most decidedly wanted the e.-t. present, since his connection with the case was the reason for intervention. "Judge, we people in DepSpace don't like to butt into your local affairs. After I've had a look at the creature and have asked half a dozen questions, I can probably bow out... which will suit us both. This alleged e.-t. is my only reason for coming out. So have the beastie present, will you?"

"Eh, he's rather too large to bring into the courtroom. I haven't seen him for several years and I understand he has grown a bit... but he would have been too large to bring indoors even then. Couldn't you look at him where he is?"

"Possibly, though I admit to a prejudice for having everything pertinent to a hearing in one spot. Where is he?"

"Panned up where he lives, with his owner. They have a suburban place a few miles out"

Greenberg thought about it. Although a modest man, one who cared not where he ate or slept, when it came to DepSpace business he operated on the rule of making the other fellow do the running around; otherwise the department's tremendous load of business would never get done. "I would like to avoid that trip out into the country, as I intend to hold my ship and get back to Capital tomorrow afternoon, if possible. It's rather urgent... a matter of the Martian treaty." This last was Greenberg's standard fib when he wanted to hurry someone not in the department.

Judge O'Farrell said that he would arrange it. "We'll rig a temporary pen on the lawn outside the court house."

"Swell! See you tomorrow, Judge. Thanks for everything.

Judge O'Farrell had been on a fishing trip two days earlier when LummoX had gone for his walk. The damage had been cleaned up by his return and, as a fixed principle, he avoided hearing or reading news reports or chitchat concerning cases he might have to try. When he phoned Chief-of-Safety Dreiser he expected no difficulty about moving LummoX.

Chief Dreiser went through the roof. "Judge, are you out of your head?"

"Eh? What's ailing you, Deacon?"

Dreiser tried to explain; the judge shrugged off his objections. Whereupon they both phoned the mayor. But the mayor had been on the same fishing trip; he threw his weight on O'Farrell's side. His words were: "Chief, I'm surprised at you. We can't have an important Federation official thinking that our little city is so backwoods that we can't handle a small thing like that." Dreiser groaned and called the Mountain States Steel & Welding Works.

Chief Dreiser decided to move LummoX before daylight, as he wished to get him panned up before the streets were crowded. But nobody had thought to notify John Thomas; he was awakened at four in the morning with a sickening shock; the wakening had interrupted a nightmare, he believed at first that something dreadful had happened to LummoX.

Once the situation was clear he was non-cooperative; he was a "slow starter," one of those individuals with a low morning blood-sugar count who is worth nothing until after a hearty breakfast-which he now insisted on.

Chief Dreiser looked angry. Mrs. Stuart looked mother-knows-best and said, "Now, dear, don't you think you had better..."

"I'm going to have my breakfast. And LummoX, too."

Dreiser said, "Young man, you don't have the right attitude. First thing you know you'll be in even worse trouble; Come along. You can get breakfast downtown."

John Thomas looked stubborn. His mother said sharply, "John Thomas! I won't have it, do you hear? You're being difficult, just like your father was."

The reference to his father rubbed him even more the wrong way. He said bitterly, "Why don't you stand up for me, Mum? They taught me in school that a citizen can't be snatched out of his home any time a policeman gets a notion. But you seem anxious to help *him* instead of *me*. Whose side are you on?"

She stared at him, astounded, as he had a long record of docile obedience. "John Thomas! You can't speak to your mother that way!"

"Yes," agreed Dreiser. "Be polite to your mother, or I'll give you the back of my hand-unofficially, of course. If there is one thing I can't abide it's a boy who is rude to his elders." He unbuttoned his tunic, pulled out a folded paper. "Sergeant Mendoza told me about the quibble you pulled the other day... so I came prepared. There's my warrant. Now, will you come? Or will I drag you?"

He stood there, slapping the paper against his palm, but did not offer it to John Thomas. But when John Thomas reached for it, he let him have it and waited while he read it. At last Dreiser said, "Well? Are you satisfied?"

"This is a court order," John Thomas said, "telling me to appear and requiring me to bring LummoX."

"It certainly is."

"But it says ten o'clock. It doesn't say I can't eat breakfast first..., as long as I'm there by ten."

The Chief took a deep breath, expanding visibly. His face, already pink, got red, but he did not answer.

John Thomas said, "Mum? I'm going to fix my breakfast. Shall I fix some for you, too?"

She glanced at Dreiser, then back at her son and bit her lip. "Never mind," she said grudgingly. "I'll get breakfast. Mr. Dreiser, will you have coffee with us?"

"Eh? That's kind of you, ma'am. I don't mind if I do. I've been up all night."

John Thomas looked at them. "I'll run out and take a quick look at LummoX." He hesitated, then added, "I'm sorry I was rude, Mum."

"We'll say no more about it, then," she answered coldly.

He had been intending to say several things, in self-justification, but he thought better of it and left. LummoX was snoring gently, stretched half in and half out of his house. His sentry eye was raised above his neck, as it always was when he was asleep; it swiveled around at John Thomas's approach and looked him over, but that portion of LummoX that stood guard for the rest recognized the youth; the star creature did not wake. Satisfied, John Thomas went back inside.

The atmosphere mellowed during breakfast; by the time John Thomas had two dishes of oatmeal, scrambled eggs and toast, and a pint of cocoa inside him, he was ready to concede that Chief Dreiser had been doing his duty and probably didn't kick dogs for pleasure. In turn, the Chief, under the influence of food, had decided that there was nothing wrong with the boy that a firm hand and an occasional thrashing would not cure... too bad his mother had to raise him alone; she seemed like a fine woman. He pursued a bit of egg with toast, captured it, and said, "I feel better, Mrs. Stuart, I really do. It's a treat to a widower to taste homecooking... but I won't dare tell my men."

Mrs. Stuart put a hand to her mouth. "Oh, I forgot about them!" She added, "I can have more coffee in a moment. How many are there?"

"Five. But don't bother, ma'am; they'll get breakfast when they go off duty." He turned to John Thomas. "Ready to go, young fellow?"

"Uh..." He turned to his mother. "Why not fix breakfast for them, Mum? I've still got to wake LummoX and feed him."

By the time LummoX had been wakened and fed and had had matters explained to him, by the time five patrolmen had each enjoyed a second cup of coffee after a hot meal, the feeling was more that of a social event than an arrest. It was long past seven before the procession was on the road.

It was nine o'clock before they got LummoX backed into the temporary cage outside the courthouse. LummoX had been delighted by the smell of steel and had wanted to stop and nibble it; John Thomas was forced to be firm. He went inside with LummoX and petted him and talked to him while the door was welded shut. He had been worried when he saw the massive steel cage, for he had never got around to telling Chief Dreiser that steel was less than useless against LummoX.

Now it seemed too late, especially as the Chief was proud of the pen. There had been no time to pour a foundation, so the Chief had ordered an open-work box of steel girders, top, bottom, and sides, with one end left open until LummoX could be shut in.

Well, thought John Thomas, they all knew so much and they didn't bother to ask me. He decided simply to warn LummoX not to eat a bite of the cage, under dire threats of punishment... and hope for the best.

LummoX was inclined to argue; from his point of view it was as silly as attempting to pen a hungry boy by stacking pies around him. One of the workmen paused, lowered his welding torch and said, "You know, it sounded just like that critter was talking."

"He was," John Thomas answered briefly.

"Oh." The man looked at LummoX, then went back to work. Human speech on the part of extra-terrestrials was no novelty, especially on stereo programs; the man seemed satisfied. But shortly he paused again. "I don't hold with animals talking," he announced. John Thomas did not answer; it did not seem to be a remark to which an answer could be made.

Now that he had time John Thomas was anxious to examine something on LummoX which had been worrying him. He had first noticed the symptoms on the morning following LummoX's disastrous stroll—two swellings located where LummoX's shoulders would have been had he been so equipped. Yesterday they had seemed larger, which disturbed him, for he had hoped that they were just bruises... not that LummoX bruised easily.

But they fretted him. It seemed possible that LummoX had hurt himself during the accidental gymkhana he had taken part in. The shot that Mr. Ito had taken at him had not damaged him; there had been a slight powder burn where the explosive charge had struck him but that was all; a charge that would destroy a tank was to LummoX about like a hearty kick to a mule—startling, but not harmful.

LummoX might have bruised himself in plunging through the greenhouses, but that seemed unlikely. More probably he had been hurt in falling off the viaduct. John Thomas knew that such a fall would kill any Earth animal big enough to have an unfavorable cube-square ratio, such as an elephant. Of course LummoX, with his unearthly body chemistry, was not nearly as fragile as an elephant... still, he might have bruised himself badly.

Dog take it! the swellings were bigger than ever, real tumors now, and the hide over them seemed softer and thinner, not quite the armor that encased LummoX elsewhere. John Thomas wondered if a person like LummoX could get cancer, say from a bruise? He did not know and he did not know anyone who would. LummoX had never been ill as far back as John Thomas could remember, nor had his father ever mentioned LummoX having anything wrong with him. LummoX was the same today, yesterday, and always—except that he kept getting bigger.

He would have to look over his grandfather's diary tonight and his great grandfather's notes. Maybe he had missed something...

He pressed one of the swellings, trying to dig his fingers in; LummoX stirred restlessly. John Thomas stopped and said anxiously, "Does that hurt?"

"No," the childish voice answered, "it *tickles*."

The answer did not reassure him. He knew that LummoX was ticklish, but it usually took something like a pickaxe to accomplish it. The swellings must be very sensitive. He was about to investigate farther when he was hailed from behind.

"John! Johnnie!"

He turned. Betty Sorenson was outside the cage. "Hi, Slugger," he called to her. "You got my message?"

"Yes, but not until after eight o'clock. You know the dorm rules. Hi, LummoX. How's my baby?"

"Fine," said LummoX.

"That's why I recorded," John Thomas answered. The idiots roused me out of bed before daylight. Silly."

"Do you good to see a sunrise. But what is all this rush? I thought the hearing was next week?"

"It was supposed to be. But some heavyweight from the Department of Space is coming out from Capital. He's going to try it,"

"*What?*"

"What's the matter?"

"The matter? Why, everything! I don't know this man from Capital. I thought I was going to deal with Judge O'Farrell... I know what makes him tick. This new judge... well, I don't know. In the second place, I've got ideas I haven't had time to work out yet."

She frowned. "We'll have to get a postponement."

"What for?" asked John Thomas. "Why don't we just go into court and tell the truth?"

"Johnnie, you're hopeless. If that was all there was to it, there wouldn't be any courts."

"Maybe that would be an improvement."

"But... Look, Knothead, don't stand there making silly noises. If we have to appear in less than an hour..." She glanced up at the clock tower on the ancient courthouse. 'A good deal less. We've got to move fast. At the very least, we've got to get that homestead claim recorded."

"That's silly. They won't take it, I tell you. We can't homestead LummoX. He's not a piece of land."

"A man can homestead a cow, two horses, a dozen pigs. A carpenter can homestead his tools. An actress can homestead her wardrobe."

"But that's not 'homesteading.' I took the same course in commercial law that you did. They'll laugh at you."

"Don't quibble. It's section II-of the same law. If you were exhibiting Lummie in a carnival, he'd be the 'tools of your trade,' wouldn't he? It's up to them to prove he isn't. The thing is to register LummoX as exempt from lien before somebody gets a judgment against you."

"If they can't collect from me, they'll collect from my mother."

"No, they won't. I checked that. Since your father put the money in a trust, legally she hasn't got a dime."

"Is that the law?" he asked doubtfully.

"Oh, hurry up! The law is whatever you can convince a court it is."

"Betty, you've got a twisted mind." He slid out between the bars, turned and said, "Lummie, I'll only be gone a minute. You stay right here."

"Why?" asked LummoX.

"Never mind 'why.' You wait for me here."

"All right."

There was a crowd on the courthouse lawn, people gawking at LummoX in his new notoriety. Chief Dreiser had ordered rope barriers erected and a couple of his men were present to see that they were respected, The two young people ducked under the ropes and pushed through the crowd to the courthouse steps. The county clerk's office was on the second floor; there they found his chief deputy, an elderly maiden lady.

Miss Schreiber took the same view of registering LummoX as free from judgment that John Thomas did. But Betty pointed out that it was not up to the county clerk to decide what was an eligible chattel under the law, and cited an entirely fictitious case about a man who homesteaded a multiple echo. Miss Schreiber reluctantly filled out forms, accepted the modest fee, and gave them a certified copy.

It was almost ten o'clock. John Thomas hurried out and started downstairs. He stopped when he saw that Betty had paused at a penny weighing machine. "Come on, Betty," he demanded. "This is no time for that."

"I'm not weighing myself," she answered while staring into the mirror attached to it. "I'm checking my makeup. I've got to look my best."

"You look all right."

"Why, Johnnie, a compliment!"

"It wasn't a compliment. Hurry up. I've got to tell LummoX something."

"Throttle back and hold at ten thousand. I'll bring you in." She wiped off her eyebrows, painted them back in the smart Madame Satan pattern, and decided that it made her look older. She considered adding a rolling-dice design on her right cheek, but skipped it as Johnnie was about to boil over. They hurried down and outdoors.

More moments were wasted convincing a policeman that they belonged inside the barrier. Johnnie saw that two men were standing by LummoX's cage. He broke into a run. "Hey! You two! Get away from there!"

Judge O'Farrell turned around and blinked. "What is your interest, young man?" The other man turned but said nothing. "Me? Why, I'm his owner. He's not used to strangers. So go back of the rope, will you?" He turned to LummoX. "It's all right, baby. Johnnie's here."

"Howdy, Judge."

"Oh. Hello, Betty." The judge looked at her as if trying to decide why she was present, then turned to John Thomas. "You must be the Stuart boy. I'm Judge O'Farrell."

"Oh. Excuse me, Judge," John Thomas answered, his ears turning pink. "I thought you were a sightseer."

"A natural error. Mr. Greenberg, this is the Stuart boy... John Thomas Stuart. Young man, this is the Honorable Sergei Greenberg, Special Commissioner for the Department of Spatial Affairs." He looked around. "Oh yes... this is Miss Betty Sorenson, Mr. Commissioner. Betty, why have you done those silly things to your face?"

She ignored him with dignity. "Honored to meet you, Mr. Commissioner."

"Just 'Mr. Greenberg,' please, Miss Sorenson." Greenberg turned to Johnnie. "Any relation to *the* John Thomas Stuart?"

"I'm John Thomas Stuart the Eleventh," Johnnie answered simply. "I suppose you mean my great-great-great grandfather."

"I guess that would be it. I was born on Mars, almost within sight of his statue. I had no idea your family was mixed up in this. Perhaps we can have a gab about Martian history later."

"I've never been to Mars," Johnnie admitted.

"No? That's surprising. But you're young yet."

Betty listened, ears almost twitching, and decided that this judge, if that was what he was, would be an even softer mark than Judge O'Farrell. It was hard to remember that Johnnie's name meant anything special... especially since it didn't. Not around Westville.

Greenberg went on, "You've made me lose two bets, Mr. Stuart."

"Sir?"

"I thought this creature would prove not to be from 'Out There.' I was wrong; that big fellow is certainly not native to Earth. But I was equally sure that, if he was e.-t., I could attribute him, I'm not an exotic zoologist, but in my business one has to keep skimming such things... look at the pictures at least. But I'm stumped. What is he and where did he come from?"

"Uh, why, he's just LummoX. That's what we call him. My great grandfather brought him back in the *Trail Blazer*... her second trip."

"That, long ago, eh? Well, that clears up some of the mystery; that was before DepSpace kept records... in fact before there was such a department. But I still don't see how this fellow could have missed making a splash in the history books. I've read about the *Trail Blazer* and I remember she brought back many exotica. But I don't remember this fellow... and, after all, extra-terrestrials were news in those days."

"Oh, that... Well, sir, the captain didn't know LummoX was aboard. Great-granddad brought him aboard in his jump bag and sneaked him off the ship the same way."

"In his lump bag?" Greenberg stared at LummoX's out-sized figure.

"Yes, sir. Of course Lummie was smaller then."

"So I am forced to believe."

"I've got pictures of him. He was about the size of a collie pup. More legs of course."

"Mmmm, yes. More legs. And he puts me, more in mind of a triceratops than a collie. Isn't he expensive to feed?"

"Oh, no, Lummie eats anything. Well, almost anything," John Thomas amended hastily, glancing self-consciously at the steel bars. "Or he can go without eating for a long time. Can't you, Lummie?"

LummoX had been lying with his legs retracted, exhibiting the timeless patience which he could muster when necessary. He was listening to his chum and Mr. Greenberg while keeping an eye on Betty and the judge. He now opened his enormous mouth. "Yes, but I don't like it."

Mr. Greenberg raised his eyebrows and said, "I hadn't realized that he was a speech-center type."

"A what? Oh, sure. Lummie's been talking since my father was a boy; he just sort of picked it up. I meant to introduce you. Here, Lummie...I want you to meet Mr. Commissioner Greenberg."

LummoX looked at Greenberg without interest and said, "How do you do, Mr. Commissioner Greenberg," saying the formula phrase clearly but not doing so well on the name and title.

"Uh, how do you do, LummoX." He was staring at LummoX when the courthouse clock sounded the hour. Judge O'Farrell turned and spoke to him.

"Ten o'clock, Mr. Commissioner. I suppose we had better get started."

"No hurry," Greenberg answered absent-mindedly, "since the party can't start until we get there. I'm interested in this line of investigation. Mr. Stuart, what is LummoX's R.I.Q. on the human scale?"

"Huh? Oh, his relative intelligence quotient. I don't know, sir."

"Good gracious, hasn't anyone ever tried to find out?"

"Well, no, sir... I mean 'yes, sir.' Somebody did run some tests on him back in my grandfather's time, but granddad got so sore over the way they were treating Lummie that he chucked them out. Since then we've kept strangers away from Lummie, mostly. But he's real bright. Try him."

Judge O'Farrell whispered to Greenberg, "The brute isn't as bright as a good bird dog, even if he can parrot human speech a little. I know."

John Thomas said indignantly, "I heard that, Judge. You're just prejudiced!"

The judge started to answer but Betty cut across him. "Johnnie! You know what I told you... I'll do the talking."

Greenberg ignored the interruption. "Has any attempt been made to learn his language?"

"Sir?"

"Mmm, apparently not. And he may have been brought here before he was old enough to talk... his own language I mean. But he must have had one; it's a truism among xenists that speech centers are found only in nervous systems that use them. That is to say, he could not have learned human speech as speech even poorly, unless his own breed used oral communication. Can he write?"

"How could he, sir? He doesn't have hands."

"Mmm, yes. Well, taking a running jump with the aid of theory, I'll bet on a relative score of less than 40, then. Xenologists have found that high types, equivalent to humans, always have three characteristics: speech centers, manipulation, and from these two, record keeping. So we can assume that LummoX's breed was left at the post. Studied any xenology?"

"Not much, sir," John Thomas admitted shyly, "except books I could find in the library. But I mean to major in xenology and exotic biology in college."

"Good for you. It's a wide open field. You'd be surprised how difficult it is to hire enough xenists just for DepSpace. But my reason for asking was this: as you know, the department has intervened in this case. Because of him." Greenberg gestured at LummoX. "There was a chance that your pet might be of a race having treaty rights with us. Once or twice, strange as it may seem, a foreigner visiting this planet has been mistaken for a wild animal, with... shall we say 'unfortunate' results?" Greenberg frowned, recalling the terrible hushed-up occasion when a member of the official family of the Ambassador from Llador had been found, dead and stuffed-in a curiosity shop in the Virgin Islands. "But no such hazard exists here."

"Oh. I guess not, sir. LummoX is... well, he's just a member of our family."

"Precisely." The Commissioner spoke to Judge O'Farrell. "May I consult you a moment, Judge? Privately?"

"Certainly, sir."

The men moved, away; Betty joined John Thomas. "It's a cinch," she whispered, "if you can keep from making more breaks."

"What did I do?" he protested. "And what makes you think it's going to be easy?"

"It's obvious. He likes you, he likes LummoX."

"I don't see how that pays for the ground floor of the Bon Marche. Or all those lamp posts."

"Just keep your blood pressure down and follow my lead. Before we are through, they'll be paying us. You'll see."

A short distance away Mr. Greenberg was saying to Judge O'Farrell, "Judge, from what I have learned it seems to me that the Department of Spatial Affairs should withdraw from this case."

"Eh? I don't follow you, sir."

"Let me explain. What I would like to do is to postpone the hearing twenty-four hours while I have my conclusions checked by the department. Then I can withdraw and let the local authorities handle it. Meaning you, of course."

Judge O'Farrell pursed his lips. "I don't like last-minute postponements, Mr. Commissioner. It has always seemed unfair to me to order busy people to gather together, to their expense and personal inconvenience, then tell them to come back another day. It doesn't have the flavor of justice."

Greenberg frowned. "True. Let me see if we can arrive at it another way. From what young Stuart tells me I am certain that this case is not one calling for intervention under the Federation's xenic policies, even though the center of interest is extra-terrestrial and therefore a legal cause for intervention if needed. Although the department has the power, that power is exercised only when necessary to avoid trouble with governments of other planets. Earth has hundreds of thousands of e.-t. animals; it has better than thirty thousand non-human xenians, either residents or-visitors, having legal status under treaties as 'human' even though they are obviously non-human. Xenophobia being what it is, particularly in our cultural backwaters... no, I wasn't referring to Westville! Human nature-being what it is, each of those foreigners is a potential source of trouble in our foreign relations.

"Forgive me for saying what you already know; it is a necessary foundation. The department can't go around wiping the noses of all our xenic visitors – even those that have noses. We haven't the personnel and certainly not the inclination. If one of them gets into trouble, it is usually sufficient to advise the local magistrate of our treaty obligations to the xenian's home planet. In rare cases the department intervenes. This, in my opinion, is not such a case. In the first place it seems that our friend Lummo here is an 'animal under the law and...'"

"Was there doubt?" the judge asked in astonishment. "'There might have been. That's why I am here. But, despite his limited ability to talk, his other limitations would keep such a breed from rising to a level where we could accept it as civilized; therefore he is an animal. Therefore he has only the usual rights of animals under our humane laws. Therefore the department need not concern itself."

"I see. Well, no one is going to be cruel to him, not in my court."

"Certainly. But for another quite sufficient reason the department is not interested. Let us suppose that this creature is 'human' in the sense that law and custom and treaty have attached to that word since we first made contact with the Great Race of Mars. He is not, but suppose it."

"Stipulated." agreed Judge O'Farrell.

"We stipulate it. Nevertheless he cannot be a concern of the department because... Judge, do you know the history of the Trail Blazer?"

"Vaguely, from grammar school days. I'm not a student of spatial exploration. Our own Earth is confusing enough."

"Isn't it, though? Well, the Trail Blazer made three of the first interspatial transition flights, when such flights were as reckless as the voyage Columbus attempted. They did not know where they were going and they had only hazy notions about how to get back in fact the Trail Blazer never came back from her third trip."

"Yes, yes. I remember."

"The point is, young Stuart-I can't call him by his full name; it doesn't seem right-Stuart tells me that this loutish creature with the silly smile is a souvenir of the Trail Blazer's second cruise. That's all I need to know. We have no treaties with any of the planets she visited, no trade, no intercourse of any sort. Legally they don't exist. Therefore the only laws that apply to Lummo are our own domestic laws; therefore the department should not intervene-and even if it did, a special master such as myself would be obliged to rule entirely by domestic law. Which you are better qualified to do than I."

Judge O'Farrell nodded. "Well, I have no objection to resuming jurisdiction. Shall we go in?"

"Just a moment. I suggested a delay because this case has curious features. I wanted to refer back to the department to make sure that my theory is correct and that I have not missed some important precedent or law. But I am willing to withdraw at once if you can assure me of one thing. This creature... I understand that, despite its mild appearance, it turned out to be destructive, even dangerous?"

O'Farrell nodded. "So I understand... unofficially of course."

"Well, has there been any demand that it be destroyed?"

"Well," the judge answered slowly, "again unofficially, I know that such a demand will be made. It has come to my attention privately that our chief of police intends to ask the court to order the animal's destruction as a public safety measure. I anticipate prayers from private sources as well."

Mr. Greenberg looked worried. "As bad as that? Well, Judge, what is your attitude? If you try the case, are you going to let the animal be destroyed?"

Judge O'Farrell retorted, "Sir, that is an improper question."

Greenberg turned red. "I beg your pardon. But I must get at it in some fashion. You realize that this specimen is unique? Regardless of what it has done, or how dangerous it may be (though I'm switched if I'm convinced of *that*), nevertheless its interest to science is such that it should be preserved. Can't you assure me that you will not order it destroyed?"

"Young man, you are urging me to prejudge a case, or a portion of a case. Your attitude is most improper!"

Chief Dreiser chose this bad time to come hurrying up. "Judge, rye been looking all over for you. Is this hearing going to take place? I've got seven men who..."

O'Farrell interrupted him. "Chief, this is Mr. Commissioner Greenberg. Mr. Commissioner, our Chief of Safety."

"Honored, Chief."

"Howdy, Mr. Commissioner. Gentlemen, about this hearing. I'd like to know..."

"Chief," the judge interrupted brusquely, "just tell my bailiff to hold things in readiness. Now leave us in private, if you please."

"But..." The chief shut up and backed away, while muttering something excusable in a harassed policeman. O'Farrell turned back to Greenberg.

The Commissioner had had time during the interruption to recall that he was supposed to be without personal emotions. He said smoothly, "I withdraw the question, Judge. I had no intention of committing an impropriety." He grinned. "Under other circumstances I might have found myself slapped for contempt, eh?"

O'Farrell grudging a smile. "It is possible."

"Do you have a nice jail? I have over seven months leave saved up and no chance to take it."

"You shouldn't overwork, young man. I always find time to fish, no matter how full the docket. 'Allah does not subtract from man's allotted time those hours spent in fishing.'"

"That's a good sentiment. But I still have a problem. You know that I could insist on postponement while I consult the department?"

"Certainly. Perhaps you should. Your decision should not be affected by my opinions."

"No. But I agree with you; last-minute postponements are vexations." He was thinking that to refer to the department, in this odd case, meant to consult Mr. Kiku and he could hear the Under Secretary making disgusted remarks about "initiative" and 'responsibility" and "for heaven's sake, couldn't anyone else around this madhouse make a simple decision?" Greenberg made up his mind. "I think it is best for the department to continue intervention. I'll take it, at least through a preliminary hearing."

O'Farrell smiled broadly. "I had hoped that you would. I'm looking forward to hearing you. I understand that you gentlemen from the Department of Spatial Affairs sometimes hand out an unusual brand of law."

"Really? I hope not. I mean to be a credit to Harvard Law."

"Harvard? Why, so am I! Do they still shout for Reinhardt?"

"They did when I was there."

"Well, well, it's a small world! I hate to wish this case on a schoolmate; I'm afraid it is going to be a hot potato."

"Aren't they all? Well, let's start the fireworks. Why don't we siten *banc*? You'll probably have to finish."

They started back to the courthouse. Chief Dreiser, who had been fuming some distance away, saw that Judge O'Farrell had forgotten him. He started to follow, then noted that the Stuart boy and Betty Sorenson were still on the other side of Lummo's cage. They had their heads together and did not notice that the two magistrates were leaving. Dreiser strode over to them.

"Hey! Inside with you, Johnnie Stuart! You were supposed to be in court twenty minutes ago."

John Thomas looked startled. "But I thought... he began, then noticed that the judge and Mr. Greenberg had gone. "Oh! Just a minute, Mr. Dreiser... I've got something to say to Lummo."

"You've got nothing to say to that beast now. Come along."

"But, Chief..."

Mr. Dreiser grabbed his arm and started to move away. Since he outweighed John Thomas by nearly one hundred pounds Johnnie moved with him. Betty interrupted with, "Deacon Dreiser! What a nasty way to behave!"

"That'll be enough out of you, young lady," Dreiser answered. He continued toward the courthouse with John Thomas in tow. Betty shut up and followed. She considered tripping the police chief, but decided not to.

John Thomas gave in to the inevitable. He had intended to impress on Lummo, at the very last minute, the necessity of remaining quiet, staying put, and not eating the steel bars. But Mr. Dreiser would not listen. It seemed to John that most of the older people in the world spent much of their time not listening.

Lummo had not missed their exit. He stood up, filling the enclosed space, and stared after John Thomas, while wondering what to do. The bars creaked as he brushed against them. Betty looked back and said, "Lummo! You wait there! We'll be back."

Lummo remained standing, staring after them and thinking about it. An order from Betty wasn't really an order. Or was it? There were precedents in the past to think over.

Presently he lay down again.

IV. The Prisoner at the Bars

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As O'Farrell and Greenberg entered the room the bailiff shouted, "Order in the court!" The babble died down and spectators tried to find seats. A young man wearing a hat and hung about with paraphernalia stepped into the path of the two officials. "Hold it!" he said and photographed them. "One more... and give us a smile, Judge, like the Commissioner had just said something funny."

"One is enough. And take off that hat." O'Farrell brushed past him. The man shrugged but did not take off his hat.

The clerk of the court looked up as they approached. His face was red and sweaty, and he had his tools spread out on the justice's bench. "Sorry, Judge," he said. "Half a moment." He bent over a microphone and intoned, "Testing... one, two, three, four... Cincinnati... sixty-six." He looked up. "I've had more grief with this recording system today."

"You should have checked it earlier."

"So help me, Judge, if you can find anybody... Never mind. I did check it, it was running sweet. Then when I switched it on at ten minutes to ten, a transistor quit and it's been an endless job to locate the trouble."

"All right," O'Farrell answered testily, annoyed that it should happen in the presence of a distinguished visitor. "Get my bench clear of your implements, will you?"

Greenberg said hastily, "If it's all the same to you, I won't use the bench. We'll gather around a big table, court-martial style. I find it speeds things up."

O'Farrell looked unhappy. "I have always maintained the ancient formalities in this court. I find it worthwhile."

"Very likely. I suppose that those of us who have to try cases anywhere and everywhere get into sloppy habits. But we can't help it. Take Minatare for example; suppose you attempted, out of politeness, to conform to their customs in trying a case. They don't think a judge is worth a hoot unless he undergoes a cleansing fast before he mounts the judge's sphere... then he has to stay up there without food or drink until he reaches a decision. Frankly, I couldn't take it. Could you?"

Judge O'Farrell felt annoyed that this glib young man should imply that there could be a parallel between the seemly rituals of his court and such heathen practices. He recalled uneasily the three stacks of wheat cakes, adorned with sausage and eggs, with which he had started the day. "Well... 'other times, other customs,'" he said grudgingly."

"Exactly. And thanks for indulging me." Greenberg motioned to the bailiff; the two started shoving attorneys' tables together to make one big one before O'Farrell could make clear that he had quoted the old saw for the purpose of rebutting it. Shortly, about fifteen people were seated around the composite table and Greenberg had sent the bailiff out to find ash trays. He turned to the clerk, who was now at his control desk, wearing earphones and crouching over his instruments in the awkward pose of all electronics technicians. "Is your equipment working now?"

The clerk pressed a thumb and forefinger together. "Rolling."

"Very well. Court's in session."

The clerk spoke into his mike, announcing time, date, place, nature and jurisdiction of the court, and the name and title of the special master presiding, reading the last and mispronouncing Sergei Greenberg's first name; Greenberg did not correct him. The bailiff came in, his hands full of ash trays, and said hastily, "Oyez! Oyez! Let all who have business before this court gather nigh and..."

"Never mind," Greenberg interrupted. "Thanks anyhow. This court will now hold a preliminary hearing on any and all issues relating to the actions last Monday of an extra-terrestrial creature locally resident and known as 'Lummox? I refer to that big brute in a cage outside this building. Bailiff, go get a picture of him, please, and insert it in the record."

"Right away, your honor."

"The court wishes to announce that this hearing may be converted to a final determination on any or all issues at any time, if the court so announces and subject to objection and ruling at the time. In other words, don't hold your fire; this may be your only day in court. Oh yes... the court will receive petitions relating to this extra-terrestrial as well as hear issues."

"Question, your honor."

"Yes?"

"May it please the court: my client and I have no objection if all that we are engaged in is a preliminary inquiry. But will we return to accepted procedures if we go on to terminer?"

"This court, being convened by the Federation and acting in accordance with the body of law called 'Customs of Civilizations' in brief and consisting of agreements, treaties, precedents, et cetera, between two or more planets of the Federation, or with other civilizations with which member planets of the Federation have diplomatic relations, is not bound by local procedures. It is the purpose of this court to arrive at the truth and, from there, to reach equity... equity under the Law. The court will not trample on local law and custom except where they are hopelessly opposed to superior law. But where local custom is merely ritualistic, this court will ignore formality and get on with its business. Understand me?"

"Er, I believe so, sir. I may take exception later." The small, middle-aged man who spoke seemed embarrassed.

"Any one may object at any time for any reason atid be heard. Also you may appeal from my decisions. However..." Greenberg grinned warmly. "... I doubt if it will do you much good. So far I have been pretty lucky in having my decisions upheld."

"I did not intend to imply," the man answered stiffly, "that the court was not properly..."

"Sure, sure! Let's get on with it." Greenberg picked up a stack of papers. "Here is a civil action. 'Bon Marche Merchandising Corporation versus 'Lummox,' John Thomas Stuart XI..." (*"That name still bothers me,"* he said in an aside to Judge O'Farrell.) "... Marie Brandley Stuart. et al., and another one like it for the Western Mutual Assurance Company, insurers of Bon Marche. Here is another, same defendants, brought by K. Ito and his insurance company, um, New World Casualty, Ltd., and one from the City of Westville, same defendants again... and still another brought by Mrs. Isabelle Donahue. Also some criminal matters one is for harboring a dangerous animal, one for felonious harboring of same, another for negligence and another for maintaining a public nuisance."

John Thomas had been steadily turning white. Greenberg glanced at him and said, "They haven't skipped much, have they, son? Cheer up... the condemned man always eats a hearty breakfast." John Thomas managed a sickly grin. Betty found his knee under

the table and patted it.

There was another paper in the stack; Greenberg shuffled it in with the others without reading it into the record. It was a petition signed by the Chief-of-Safety on behalf of the City of Westville praying the court to order the destruction of a dangerous animal known as "Lummox" and further identified as, etc. Instead Greenberg looked up and said, "Now who's who? You, sir?"

The man addressed was the lawyer who had questioned the court's methods; he identified himself as Alfred Schneider and stated that he was acting both for Western Mutual and for the Bon Marche. "This gentleman beside me is Mr. deGrasse, manager of the store."

"Good. Now the next man, please." Greenberg established that all principals were present, with their attorneys; the roster included, besides himself, Judge O'Farrell, John Thomas, Betty, and Chief Dreiser, the following: Mrs. Donahue and her lawyer Mr. Beanfield, Messrs. Schneider and deGrasse for Bon Marche, Mr. Lombard, city attorney of Westville, the attorney for Mr. Ito's insurance company and Mr. Ito's son (acting for his father), Officers Karnes and Mendoza (witnesses), and John Thomas's mother with the Stuart family lawyer, Mr. Postle.

Greenberg said to Postle, "I take it you are also acting for Mr. Stuart."

Betty interrupted with, "Heavens, no! I'm representing Johnnie."

Greenberg raised his eyebrows. "I was about to ask what you were doing here. Uh, you are an attorney?"

"Well... I'm his counsel."

O'Farrell leaned over and whispered, "This is preposterous, Mr. Commissioner. Of course she is not a lawyer. I know the child. I'm rather fond of her... but frankly, I don't think she is quite bright." He added severely, "Betty, you have no business here. Get out and quit making a fool of yourself."

"Now, see here, Judge..."

"One moment, young lady," Greenberg put in. "Do you have any qualifications to act as counsel for Mr. Stuart?"

"I certainly do. I'm the counsel he wants."

"Mmm, a very strong point. Though perhaps not sufficient." He spoke to John Thomas. "Is that correct?"

"Uh, yes. sir."

Judge O'Farrell whispered, "Don't do it, son! You'll be reversed."

Greenberg whispered back, "That's what I "am afraid of." He frowned, then spoke to Mr. Postle. "Are you prepared to act for both mother and son?"

"Yes."

"No!" Betty contradicted.

"Eh? Wouldn't Mr. Stuart's interests be better protected in the hands of an attorney than in yours? No, don't answer; I want Mr. Stuart to answer."

John Thomas turned pink and managed to mutter, "I don't want him."

"Why?"

John Thomas looked stubborn. Betty said scornfully, "Because his mother doesn't like Lummox, that's why. And..."

"That's not true!" Mrs. Stuart cut in sharply.

"It is true... and that old fossil Postle is stringing along with her. They want to get rid of Lummie, both of them!"

O'Farrell coughed in his handkerchief. Postle turned red. Greenberg said gravely, "Young lady, you will stand and apologize to Mr. Postle."

Betty looked at the Commissioner, dropped her eyes and stood up. She said humbly, "Mr. Postle, I'm sorry you're a fossil. I mean I'm sorry I said you were a fossil."

"Sit down," Greenberg said soberly. "Mind your manners hereafter. Mr. Stuart, no one is required to accept counsel not of his choice. But you place me in a dilemma. Legally you are a minor child; you have chosen as counsel another minor child. It won't look well in the record." He pulled at his chin. "Could it be that you... or your counsel... or both of you... are trying to cause a mistrial?"

"Uh, no, sir." Betty looked smugly virtuous; it was a possibility she had counted on but had not mentioned to Johnnie.

"Hmm..."

"Your honor..."

"Yes, Mr. Lombard?"

"This strikes me as ridiculous. This girl has no standing. She is not a member of the bar; obviously she can't function as an attorney. I dislike finding myself in the position of instructing the court but the obvious thing to do is to put her outside the bar and appoint counsel. May I suggest that the Public Defender is present and prepared?"

"You may so suggest. Is that all, Mr. City Attorney?"

"Uh, yes, your honor."

"May I say that the court also finds it distasteful for you to instruct the court; you will not do so again."

"Er... yes, your honor."

"This court will, make its own mistakes in its own way. Under the customs by which this court is convened it is not necessary that a counsel be qualified formally... in your idiom, be a 'member of the bar,' a licensed lawyer. If you find that rule unusual, let me assure you that the hereditary lawyer-priests of Deflai find it much more astonishing. But it is the only rule which can be applied everywhere. Nevertheless I thank you for your suggestion. Will the Public Defender stand up?"

"Here, your honor. Cyrus Andrews."

"Thank you. Are you prepared to act?"

"Yes. I'll need a recess to consult with my principal." "Naturally. Well, Mr. Stuart? Shall the court appoint Mr. Andrews as your counsel? Or associate counsel?"

"No!" Again Betty answered.

"I was addressing Mr. Stuart, Miss Sorenson. Well?" John Thomas glanced at Betty. "No, your honor."

"Why not?"

"I'll answer that," Betty put in. "I talk faster than he does; that's why I'm counsel. We won't take Mr. Andrews because the City Attorney is against us on one of these silly things they've got about Lummo... and the City Attorney and Mr. Andrews are law partners when they are not fighting sham battles in court!"

Greenberg turned to Andrews. "Is that correct, sir?"

"Why, yes, we're law partners, your honor. You will understand that, in a town this size..."

"I quite understand. I also understand Miss Sorenson's objection. Thank you, Mr. Andrews. Stand down."

"Mr. Greenberg?"

"What is it now, young lady?"

"I can get you part way off the spot. You see, I had a dirty hunch that some busybody would try to keep me out of it. So we fixed it up ahead of time. I'm half owner."

"Half owner?"

"Of Lummo. See?" She took a paper from her bag and offered it. "A bill of sale, all legal and proper. At least it ought to be, I coped it out of the book."

Greenberg studied it. "The form appears correct. The date is yesterday... which would make you voluntarily liable to the extent of your interest, from a civil standpoint. It would not affect criminal matters of earlier date."

"Oh, pooh! There aren't any criminal matters."

"That remains to be determined. And don't say 'pooh'; it is not a legal term. The question here is whether or not the signer can vend this interest. Who owns Lummo?"

"Why, Johnnie does! It was in his father's will."

"So? Is that stipulated, Mr. Postle?"

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