



Poul Anderson Time Patrolman

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While Solomon was in all his glory and the Temple was a-building, Manse Everard came to Tyre of the purple. Almost at once, he was in peril of his life.

That mattered little in itself. An agent of the Time Patrol was expendable, the more so if he or she enjoyed the godlike status of Unattached. Those whom Everard sought could destroy an entire reality. He had come to help rescue it.

One afternoon, 950 B.C., the ship that bore him approached his destination. The weather was warm, nearly windless. Sail furled, the vessel moved under manpower, creak and splash of sweeps, drumbeat of a coxswain posted near the sailors who had the twin steering oars. Around the broad seventy-foot hull, wavelets glittered blue, chuckled, swirled. Farther out, dazzlement off the water blurred sight of other craft upon it. They were numerous, ranging from lean warships to tublike rowboats. Most were Phoenician, though many hailed from different city-states of that society. Some were quite foreign, Philistine, Assyrian, Achaean, or stranger yet; trade through the known world flowed in and out of Tyre.

"Well, Eborix," said Captain Mago genially, "there you have her, queen of the sea like I told you she is, eh? What d'you think of my town?"

He stood in the bows with his passenger, just behind a fishtail ornament that curled upward and aft toward its mate at the stern. Lashed to that figurehead and to the latticework rails which ran down either side was a clay jar as big as himself. The oil was still within it; there had been no need to calm any billows, as easily as the voyage from Sicily had gone.

Everard glanced down at the skipper. Mago was a typical Phoenician, slender, swarthy, hooknosed, eyes large and a bit slant, cheekbones high; neatly bearded, he wore a red-and-yellow kaftan, conical hat, sandals. The Patrolman towered over him. Since he would be conspicuous whatever guise he assumed, Everard took the part of a Celt from central Europe, complete with breeches, tunic, bronze sword, and sweeping mustache.

"A grand sight, indeed, indeed," he replied in a diplomatic, heavily accented voice. The electro-cram he had taken, uptime in his native America, could have given him flawless Punic, but that wouldn't have fitted his character; he settled for fluency. "Daunting,

almost, to a simple backwoodsman."

His gaze went forward again. Truly, in its way Tyre was as impressive as New York-perhaps more, when you recalled how much King Hiram had accomplished in how short a span, with only the resources of an Iron Age that was not yet very old.

Starboard the mainland rose toward the Lebanon Mountains. It was summer-tawny, save where orchards and woodlots spotted it with green or villages nestled. The appearance was richer, more inviting than when Everard had seen it on his future travels, before he joined the Patrol.

Usu, the original city, lay along the shore. Except for its size, it was representative of the milieu, adobe buildings blocky and flat-roofed, streets narrow and twisty, a few vivid fa9ades indicating temple or palace. Battlemented walls and towers ringed three sides of it. Along the docks, gates between warehouses let those double as defenses. An aqueduct ran in from heights beyond Everard's view.

The new city, Tyre itself-Sor to its dwellers, meaning "Rocks" -was on an island half a mile offshore. Rather, it covered what had been two skerries until men filled in between and around them. Later they dug a canal straight through, from north to south, and flung out jetties and breakwaters to make this whole region an incomparable haven. With a burgeoning population and a bustling commerce thus crowded together, houses climbed upward, story upon story until they loomed over the guardian walls like small skyscrapers. They seemed to be less often of brick than of stone and cedarwood. Where earth and plaster had been used, frescos or inlaid shells ornamented them. On the eastward side, Everard glimpsed a huge and noble structure which theking had had built not for himself but for civic uses. Mago's ship was bound for the outer or southern port, the Egyptian Harbor as he called it. Its piers bustled, men loading, unloading, fetching, bearing off, repairing, outfitting, dickering, arguing, chaffering, a tumble and chaos that somehow got its jobs done. Dock wallopers, donkey drivers, and other laborers, like the seamen on this cargo-cluttered deck, wore merely loincloths, or kaftans faded and patched. But plenty of brighter garments were in sight, some flaunting the costly colors that were produced here. Occasional women passed among the men, and Everard's preliminary education told him that they weren't all hookers. Sound rolled out to meet him, talk, laughter, shouts, braying, neighing, footfalls, hoof-beats, hammerbeats, groan of wheels and cranes, twanging music. The vitality was well-nigh overwhelming.

Not that this was any prettified scene in an Arabian Nights movie. Already he made out beggars crippled, blind, starveling; he saw a lash touch up a slave who toiled too slowly; beasts of burden fared worse. The smells of the ancient East roiled forth, smoke, dung, offal, sweat, as well as tar, spices, and savory roastings. Added to them was a stench of dyeworks and murex-shell middens on the mainland; but sailing along the coast and camping ashore every night, he had gotten used to that by now.

He didn't take the drawbacks to heart. His farings through history had cured him of fastidiousness and case-hardened him to the cruelties of man and nature – somewhat. For their era, these Canaanites were an enlightened and happy people. In fact, they were more so than most of humanity almost everywhere and every when.

His task was to keep them that way.

Mago hauled his attention back. "Aye, there are those who'd shamelessly swindle an innocent newcomer. I don't want that to happen to you, Eborix, my friend. I've grown to like you as we traveled, and I want you to think well of my town. Let me show you to an inn that a brother-in-law of mine has -brother of my junior wife, he is. He'll give you a clean doss and safe storage for your valuables at a fair exchange."

"It's thankful to you I am," Everard replied, "but my thought was I'd seek out that landsman I've bespoken. Remember, 'twas his presence emboldened me to fare hither." He smiled. "Sure, and if he's died or moved away or whatever, glad I'll be to take your offer." That was mere politeness. The impression he had gathered along the way was that Mago was as cheerfully rapacious as any other merchant adventurer, and hoped to get him plucked.

The captain regarded him for a moment. Everard counted as big in his own era, which made him gigantic here. A dented nose in the heavy features added to the impression of toughness, while blue eyes and dark-brown hair bespoke the wild North. One had better not push Eborix too hard.

At the same time, the Celtic persona was no great wonder in this cosmopolitan place. Not only did amber come from the Baltic littoral; tin from Iberia, condiments from Arabia, hardwoods from Africa, occasional wares from farther still: men did.

Engaging passage, Eborix had told of leaving his mountainous homeland because of losing out in a feud, to seek his fortune in the South. Wandering, he had hunted or worked for his keep, when he didn't receive hospitality in return for his tales. He fetched up among the Umbrians of Italy, who were akin to him. (The Celts would not begin overrunning Europe, clear to the Atlantic, for another three centuries or so, when they had become familiar with iron; but already some had won territory far from the Danube Valley that was the cradle of their race.) One of them, who had served as a mercenary, described opportunities in Canaan and taught Eborix the Punic tongue. This induced the latter to seek a bay in Sicily where Phoenician traders regularly called and buy passage with goods he had acquired. A man from his area of birth was said to be living in Tyre, after an adventurous career of his own, and probably willing to steer a compatriot in a profitable direction.

This line of bull, carefully devised by Patrol specialists, did more than slake local curiosity. It made Everard's trip safe. Had they supposed the foreigner to be a waif with no connections, Mago and the crew might have been tempted to set upon him while he slept, bind him, and sell him for a slave. As was, the journey had been interesting, yes, rather fun. Everard had come to like these rascals.

That doubled his wish to save them from ruin.

The Tyrian sighed. "As you wish," he said. "If you do need me, my home is on the Street of Anat's Temple, near the Sidonian Harbor." He brightened. "In any case, do come look me up, you and your host. He's in the amber trade, you mentioned? Maybe we can work out a little deal of some kind... Now, stand aside. I've got to bring us in." He shouted profane commands.

Deftly, the sailors laid their vessel along a quay, got it secured, put out a gangplank. Folk swarmed close, yelling for news, crying for stevedore work, chanting the praises of their wares or of their masters' business establishments. None boarded, however. That prerogative belonged initially to the customs officer. A guard, helmeted, scale-mailed, armed with spear and shortsword, went before him, pushing a way through the crowd, leaving a wake of fairly good-natured curses. At the officer's back trotted a secretary, who bore a stylus and waxed tablet.

Everard went below decks and fetched his baggage, which he had stowed among the blocks of Italian marble that were the ship's principal cargo. The officer required him to open the two leather sacks. Nothing surprising was in them. The whole purpose of traveling all the way from Sicily, instead of time-hopping directly here, was to pass the Patrolman off as what he claimed to be. It was well-nigh certain that the enemy was keeping watch on events, as they neared the moment of catastrophe.

"You can provide for yourself a while, at least." The Phoenician official nodded his grizzled head when Everard displayed some small ingots of bronze. Coinage would not be invented for several centuries, but the metal could be swapped for whatever he wanted. "You must understand that we cannot let in one who might feel he has to turn robber. In fact - " He looked dubiously at the barbarian sword. "What is your purpose in coming?"

"To find honest work, sir, as it might be a caravan guard. I'll be seeking out Conor the amber factor." The existence of that resident Celt had been a major reason for Everard's adoption of his specific disguise. The chief of the local Patrol base had suggested it.

The Tyrian reached a decision. "Very well, you may go ashore, your weapon too. Remember that we crucify thieves, bandits, and murderers. If you fail to get other work, seek out Ithobaal's hiring house, near the Hall of the Suffetes. He can always find something in the way of day labor for a husky fellow like you. Good luck."

He returned to dealing with Mago. Everard lingered, awaiting a chance to bid the captain farewell. Discussion went quickly, almost informally, and the tax to be paid in kind would be modest. This race of businessmen had no use for the ponderous bureaucracy of Egypt or Mesopotamia.

Having said what he wanted to, Everard picked up his bags by the cords around them and went ashore. The crowd surged about him, staring, chattering. At first he was amazed; after a couple of tentative approaches, nobody begged alms or beset him to buy trinkets. Could this be the Near East?

He recalled the absence of money. A newcomer wouldn't likely have anything corresponding to small change. Usually you made a bargain with an innkeeper, food and lodging for so-and-so much of the metal, or whatever else of value, you carried. For lesser purchases, you sawed a piece off an ingot, unless some different trade was arranged. (Everard's fund included amber and nacre beads.) Sometimes you called in a broker, who made your transaction part of a complicated one involving several other individuals.

If you felt charitable, you'd carry around a little grain or dried fruit and drop it in the bowls of the indigent.

Everard soon left most of the people behind. They were mainly interested in the crew. A few idle curiosity-seekers, and many stares, trailed him. He strode over the quay toward an open gate.

A hand plucked his sleeve. Startled enough to miss a step, he looked down.

A brown-skinned boy grinned back. He was sixteen or so, to judge from the fuzz on his cheeks, though small and scrawny even by local standards. Nonetheless, he moved lithely, barefoot, clad only in a ragged and begrimed kilt at which hung a pouch. Curly black hair fell in a queue behind a sharp-nosed, sharp-chinned face. His smile and his eyes – big, long-lashed Levantine eyes – were brilliant.

"Hail, sir, hail to you!" he greeted. "Life, health, and strength be yours! Welcome to Tyre! Where would you go, sir, and what can I do for you?"

He didn't burble, but spoke very clearly, in hopes the stranger would understand. When he got a response in his own language, he jumped for joy. "What do you want, lad?"

"Why, sir, to be your guide, your advisor, your helper, and, yes, your guardian. Alas, our otherwise fair city is afflicted with scoundrels who like nothing better than to prey on innocent newcomers. If they do not outright steal everything you have, the first time you blink, they'll at least wish the most worthless trash on you, at a cost which'll leave you paupered almost as fast – "

The boy broke off. He had spied a seedy-looking young man approach. At once he sped to intercept, windmilling his fists, yelling too quickly and shrilly for Everard to catch more than a few words. " – louse-bitten jackal!... I saw him first... Begone to the latrine that spawned you – "

The young man stiffened. He reached for a knife hung at his shoulder. Hardly had he moved before the stripling snatched a sling from his pouch and a rock to load it. He crouched, leered, swung the leather strap to and fro. The man spat, said something nasty, turned on his heel, and stalked off. Laughter barked from such passersby as had paid attention.

The boy laughed too, gleefully, loping back to Everard. "Now that, sir, was a prime example of what I meant," he crowed. "I know you villain well. He's a runner for his father-maybe his father -who keeps the inn at the Sign of the Blue Squid. There you'd be lucky to get a rotten piece of goat's tail for your dinner, the single wench is a shambling farm of diseases, the pallets hang together only because the bedbugs hold hands, and as for the wine, why, I think the wench must have infected somebody's horse. You'd soon be too sick to notice that grandsire of a thousand hyenas when he plundered your baggage, and if you sought to complain, he'd swear by every god in the universe that you gambled it away. Little does he fear hell after this world is rid of him; he knows they'd never demean themselves there by letting him in. That is what I've saved you from, great lord."

Everard felt a grin tug at his lips. "Well, son, you might be stretching things just a trifle," he said.

The boy smote his thin breast. "No more than needful to give your magnificence the proper impression. Surely you are a man of the widest experience, a judge of the best as well as a generous rewarder of faithful service. Come, let me bring you to lodgings, or whatever else you may desire, and then see for yourself whether or not Pummairam has led you aright."

Everard nodded. The map of Tyre was engraved in his memory; he had no need of a guide. However, it would be natural for a yokel to engage one. Also, this kid would keep others from pestering him, and might give him a few useful tips.

"Very well, lead me whither I would go. Your name is Pummairam?"

"Yes, sir." Since the youth didn't mention his father, as was customary, he probably didn't know who that had been. "May I ask how my noble master should be addressed by his humble servant?"

"No title. I am Eborix, son of Mannocho, from a country beyond the Achaeans." With none of Mago's folk listening, the Patrolman could add: "He whom I seek is Zakarbaal of Sidon, who deals for his kin in this city." That meant Zakarbaal represented his family firm among the Tyrians, and handled its affairs here in between visits by its ships. "I've heard tell his house is on, uh, the Street of the Chandlers. Can you be showing me the way?"

"Indeed, indeed." Pummairam took Everard's bags. "Only deign to accompany me."

Actually, it wasn't hard to get around. As planned city, rather than one which had grown organically through centuries, Tyre was laid out more or less on a gridiron pattern. The thoroughfares were paved, guttered, and reasonably wide, considering how

short of acreage the island was. They lacked sidewalks, but that didn't matter, because except for a few trunk routes, beasts of burden were not allowed on them outside the wharf areas; nor did people dump stuff on them. They also lacked signs, of course, but that didn't matter either, since almost anybody would have been glad to give directions for the sake of some words with an outlander and perhaps a deal to propose.

Walls rose sheer to right and left, mostly win-dowless, enclosing the inward-looking houses that would prevail in Mediterranean countries for millennia to come. They shut off breezes and radiated back the heat of the sun. Noise echoed off them, odors rolled thick between. Yet Everard found himself enjoying the place. Still more than at the waterfront, crowds moved, jostled, gestured, laughed, talked at machine-gun speed, chanted, clamored. Porters beneath their yokes, litter-bearers conveying the occasional wealthy burgher, forced a way among sailors, artisans, vendors, laborers, housewives, entertainers, mainland farmers and shepherds, foreigners from end to end of the Midworld Sea, every variety and condition of life. If most clothes were of dull hue, many were gaudy, and none seemed to cover a body that was not overflowing with energy.

Booths lined the walls. Everard couldn't resist lingering now and then, to look at what they offered. That did not include the famous purple dye; it was too expensive, sought after by garment-makers everywhere, destined to become the traditional color of royalty. But there was no dearth of bright fabrics, draperies, rugs. Glassware abounded, anything from beads to beakers; it was another specialty of the Phoenicians, their own invention. Jewelry and figurines, often carved in ivory or cast in precious metals, were excellent; this culture originated little or nothing artistic, but copied freely and skillfully. Amulets, charms, gewgaws, food, drink, utensils, weapons, instruments, games, toys, endlessness –

Everard remembered how the Bible gloated (would gloat) over the wealth of Solomon, and whence he got it. *"For the king had at sea a navy of Tharshish with the navy of Hiram: once in three years came the navy of Tharshish, bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. – "*

Pummairam was quick to switch off conversations with shopkeepers and start Everard onward. "Let me show my master where the really good stuff is." Doubtless that meant a commission for Pummairam, but what the hell, the youngster had to live somehow, and didn't seem ever to have lived terribly well.

For a while they followed the canal. To a bawdy chant, sailors towed a laden ship along. Its officers stood on deck, wrapped in the dignity that behooved businessmen. The Phoenician bourgeoisie tended to be a sober lot... except in- their religion, some of whose rites were orgiastic enough to compensate.

The Street of the Chandlers led off from this waterway. It was fairly long, being hemmed in by massive buildings that were warehouses as well as offices and homes. It was quiet, too, despite its far end giving on a thronged avenue; no shops crouched against the high, hot walls, and few people were in sight. Captains and shipowners came here for supplies, merchants came to negotiate, and, yes, two monoliths flanked the entrance of a small temple dedicated to Tanith, Our Lady of the Waves. Several little children who must belong to resident families – boys and girls together, naked or nearly so – darted about at play while a gaunt, excited mongrel dog barked.

A beggar sat, knees drawn up, by the shady entrance to an alley. His bowl rested at his bare feet. A kaftan muffled his body and a cowl obscured his face. Everard did see the rag tied over the eyes. Poor, blind devil; ophthalmia was among the countless damnations that made the ancient world not so glamorous after all... Pummairam darted past the fellow, to overtake a man in a priestly robe who was leaving the temple. "Hoy, sir, your reverence, if you please," he called, "which is the door of Zakarbaal the Sidonian? My master condescends to visit him –" Everard, who already knew the answer, lengthened his stride to follow.

The beggar rose. His left hand plucked away his bandage, to reveal a lean, thick-bearded visage and a pair of eyes that had surely been watching through the cloth. From that flowing sleeve, his right hand drew something that gleamed.

A pistol!

Reflex flung Everard aside. Pain whipped through his own left shoulder. Sonic gun, he realized, from futureward of his home era, soundless, recoilless. If that invisible beam got him in the head or heart, he'd be dead, and never a mark upon him.

No place to go but forward. "Haaa!" he roared, and plunged zigzag to the attack. His sword hissed forth.

The other grinned, drifted back, took careful aim.

Asmack! resounded. The assassin lurched, yelled, dropped his weapon, grabbed at his ribs. Pummairam's spent slingstone clattered over the cobbles.

Children scattered, screaming. The priest returned prudently through his temple door. The stranger whirled and ran. He vanished down the lane. Everard was too slow. His injury wasn't serious, but for the moment it hurt abominably. Half dazed, he stopped at the alley mouth, stared down the emptiness before him, panted, and rasped in English, "He's escaped. Oh, God damn it, anyway."

Pummairam darted to him. Anxious hands played over the Patrolman's form. "Are you wounded, my master? Can your servant help? Ah, woe, woe, I'd no time for a proper windup, nor to aim right, else I'd have spattered the evildoer's brains for yon dog to lick up."

"You... did mighty well... just the same." Everard drew shuddering breaths. Strength and steadiness began to return, agony to recede. He was still alive. That was miracle enough for one day.

He had work to do, though, and urgent it was. Having obtained the gun, he laid a hand on Pummairam's shoulder and made their gazes meet. "What did you see, lad? What d'you think happened this while?"

"Why, I - I -" Ferret-fast, the youth collected his wits. "It seemed to me that the beggar, though such he scarcely was, threatened my lord's life with some talisman whose magic did inflict harm. May the gods pour abominations on the head of him who would have extinguished the light of the universe! Yet, naturally, his wickedness could not prevail against the valor of my master -" the voice dropped to a confidential whisper: "- whose secrets are assuredly locked away safe in the bosom of his worshipful servant."

"Good," Everard grunted. "Sure, and these be matters about which common folk should never dare talk, lest they be stricken with palsy, deafness, and emerods. You've done well, Pum." *Saved my life, probably*, he thought, and stooped to untie the cord on a fallen bag. "Here, small reward it is, but this ingot ought to buy you something you'd like. And now, before the brannigan started, you did learn which is the house I want, did you not?"

Underneath the business of the minute, fading pain and shock from the assault, exhilaration of survival, grimness rose. After all his elaborate precautions, within an hour of arrival, his cover was blown. The enemy had not only had Patrol headquarters staked out, somehow their agent had instantly seen that it was no ordinary wanderer come into this street, and had not hesitated a second before trying to kill him.

This was a hairy mission for sure. And more was at stake than Everard liked to think about – first the existence of Tyre, later the destiny of the world.

Zakarbaal closed the door to his inner chambers and latched it. Turning around, he held out his hand in the manner of Western civilization. "Welcome," he said in Temporal, the Patrol language. "My name, you may remember, is Chaim Zorach. May I present my wife Yael?"

They were both of Levantine appearance and in Canaanite garb, but here, shut away from office staff and household servants, their entire bearing changed, posture, gait, facial expressions, tone of voice. Everard would have recognized them as being of the twentieth century even if he had not been told. The atmosphere was as refreshing to him as a wind off the sea.

He introduced himself. "I am the Unattached agent you sent for," he added.

Yael Zorach's eyes widened. "Oh! An honor. You... you are the first such I have met. The others who've been investigating, they are just technicians."

Everard grimaced. "Don't be too awe-struck. I'm afraid I haven't made much of a showing so far."

He described his journey and the contretemps at its end. She offered him some painkiller, but he said he was pretty well over hurting, and her husband thereupon produced what was better anyway, a bottle of Scotch. Presently they were seated at their ease.

The chairs were comfortable, not unlike those of home—a luxury in this milieu, but then, Zakarbaal was supposed to be a wealthy man, with access to every kind of imported goods. Otherwise the apartment was austere by future standards, though frescos, draperies, lamps, furnishings were tasteful.

It was cool and dim; a window opening on a small cloister garden had been curtained against the heat of the day.

"Why don't we relax a while and get acquainted before we buckle down to duty?" Everard suggested.

Zorach scowled. "You can do that right after you almost got killed?"

His wife smiled. "I think he might need to all the more, dear," she murmured. "We too. The menace can wait a little longer. It's been waiting, hasn't it?"

From the pouch at his belt, Everard drew anachronisms he had permitted himself, hitherto used only in solitude: pipe, tobacco, lighter. Zorach's tension eased a trifle, he chuckled and fetched cigarettes out of a locked coffer which held various such comforts. His language changed to Brooklyn-accented English: "You're American, aren't you, Agent Everard?"

"Yes. Recruited in 1954." How many years of his lifespan had passed "since" he answered an ad, took certain tests, and learned of an organization that guarded a traffic through the epochs? He hadn't added them up lately. It didn't matter much, when he and his fellows were the beneficiaries of a treatment that kept them unaging. "Uh, I thought you two were Israelis."

"We are," Zorach explained. "In fact, Yael's *asabra*. Me, though, I didn't immigrate till I'd been doing archaeology there for a spell and had met her. That was in 1971. We got recruited into the Patrol four years later."

"How'd that happen, if I may ask?"

"We were approached, sounded out, finally told the truth. Naturally, we jumped at the chance. The work's often hard and lonesome – twice as lonesome, in a way, when we're home on furlough and can't tell our old friends and colleagues what we've been up to – but it's totally fascinating," Zorach winced. His words became a near mumble. "Also, well, *this* post is special for us. We don't just maintain a base and its cover business, we manage to help local people now and then. Or we try to, as much as we can without causing anybody to suspect there's anything peculiar about us. That makes up, somehow, a little bit, for... for what our countrymen will do hereabouts, far uptime."

Everard nodded. The pattern was familiar to him. Most field agents were specialists like these, passing their careers in a single milieu. They had to be, if they were to learn it thoroughly enough to serve the Patrol's purposes. What a help it would be to have native-born personnel! But such were very rare before the eighteenth century A.D., or still later in most parts of the world. How could a person who hadn't grown up in a scientific-industrial society even grasp the idea of automatic machinery, let alone vehicles that jumped in a blink from place to place and year to year? An occasional genius, of course; however, most identifiable geniuses carved niches for themselves in history, and you didn't dare tell them the facts for fear of making changes...

"Yeah," Everard said. "In a way, a free operative like me has it easier. Husband-and-wife teams, or women generally – Not to pry, but what do you do about children?"

"Oh, we have two at home in Tel Aviv," Yael Zorach answered. "We time our returns so we've never been gone from them for more than a few days of their lives." She sighed. "It is strange, of course, when to us months have passed." Brightening: "Well, when they're of age, they're going to join the outfit too. Our regional recruiter has examined them already and decided they'll be fine material."

If not, Everard thought, could you stand it, watching them grow old, suffer the horrors that will come, finally die, while you are still young of body? Such a prospect had made him shy away from marriage, more than once.

"I think Agent Everard means children here in Tyre," Chaim Zorach said. "Before traveling from Sidon – we took ship, like you, because we were going to become moderately conspicuous – we quietly bought a couple of infants from a slave dealer, took them along, and have been passing them off as ours. They'll have lives as good as we can arrange." Unspoken was the likelihood that servants had the actual raising of those two; their foster parents would not dare invest much love in them. "That keeps us from appearing somehow unnatural. If my wife's womb has since closed, why, it's a common misfortune. I do get twitted about not taking a second wife or at least a concubine, but on the whole, Phoenicians mind their own business pretty well."

"You like them, then?" Everard inquired.

"Oh, yes, by and large, we do. We have excellent friends among them. We'd better – as important a nexus as this is."

Everard frowned and puffed hard on his pipe. The bowl had grown consolingly warm in his clasp, aglow like a tiny hearthfire. "You think that's correct?"

The Zorachs were surprised. "Of course!" Yael said. "We know it is. Didn't they explain to you?"

Everard chose his words with care. "Yes and no. After I'd been asked to look into this matter, and agreed, I got myself crammed full of information about the milieu. In a way, too full; it became hard to see the forest for the trees. However, my experience has been that I do best to avoid grand generalizations in advance of a mission. It could get hard to see the trees for the forest, so to speak. My idea was, once I'd been dropped off in Sicily and taken ship for Tyre, I'd have leisure to digest the information and form my own ideas. But that didn't quite work out, because the captain and crew were infernally curious about me; my mental energy went into answering their questions, which were often sharp, without letting any cat out of the bag." He paused. "To be sure, the role of Phoenicia in general, and Tyre in particular, in Jewish history – that's obvious."

On the kingdom that David had cobbled together out of Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem, this city soon became the main civilizing influence, its principal trading partner and window on the outside world. Now Solomon continued his father's friendship with Hiram. The Tyrians were supplying most of the materials and nearly all the skilled hands for the building of the Temple, as well as structures less famous. They would embark on joint exploratory and commercial ventures with the Hebrews. They would advance an immensity of goods to Solomon, a debt which he could only pay off by ceding them a score of his villages... with whatever subtle long-range consequences that had.

The subtleties went deeper, though. Phoenician customs, thoughts, beliefs permeated the neighboring realm, for good or ill; Solomon himself made sacrifices to gods of theirs. Yahweh would not really be the sole Lord of the Jews until the Babylonian Captivity forced them to it, as a means of preserving an identity that ten of their tribes had already lost. Before then, King Ahab of Israel would have taken the Tyrian princess Jezebel as his queen. Their evil memory was undeserved; the policy of foreign alliance and domestic religious tolerance which they strove to carry out might well have saved the country from its eventual destruction. Unfortunately, they collided with fanatical Elijah – "the mad mullah from the mountains of Gilead," Trevor-Roper would call him. And yet, had not Phoenician paganism spurred them to fury, would the prophets have wrought that faith which was to endure for thousands of years and remake the world?

"Oh, yes," Chaim said. "The Holy Land's aswarm with visitors. Jerusalem Base is chronically swamped, trying to regulate the traffic. We get a lot fewer here, mostly scientists from different eras, traders in artwork and the like, the occasional rich tourist. Nevertheless, sir, I maintain that this place, Tyre, is the real nexus of the era." Harshly: "And our opponents seem to have reached the same conclusion, right?"

The starkness took hold of Everard. Precisely because the fame of Jerusalem, in future eyes, overshadowed that of Tyre, this station was still worse undermanned than most; therefore it wasterribly vulnerable; and if indeed it was a root of the morrow, and that root was cut away –

The facts passed before him as vividly as if he had never known them before.

When humans built their first time machine, long after Everard's home century, the Danellian supermen had arrived from farther yet, to organize the police force of the temporal lanes. It would gather knowledge, furnish guidance, aid the distressed, curb the wrongdoer; but these benevolences were incidental to its real function, which was to preserve the Danellians. A man has not lost free will merely because he has gone into the past. He can affect the course of events as much as ever. True, they have their momentum, and it is enormous. Minor fluctuations soon even out. For instance, whether a certain ordinary individual has lived long or died young, flourished or not, will make no noticeable difference several generations later. Unless that individual was, say, Shalmaneser or Genghis Khan or Oliver Cromwell or V. I. Lenin; Gautama Buddha or Kung Fu-Tze or Paul of Tarsus or Muhammad ibn Abdallah; Aristotle or Galileo or Newton or Einstein-Change anything like that, traveler from tomorrow, and you will still be where you are, but the people who brought you forth do not exist, they never did, it is an entirely other Earth up ahead, and you and your memories bespeak the uncausality, the ultimate chaos, which lairs beneath the cosmos.

Before now, along his own world line, Everard had had to stop the reckless and the ignorant before they worked that kind of havoc. They weren't too common; after all, the societies which possessed time travel screened their emissaries prettycarefully as a rule. However, in the course of a million years or more, mistakes were bound to happen.

So were crimes.

Everard spoke slowly: "Before going into detail about that gang and its operation -"

"What pitiful few details we have," Chaim Zorach muttered.

"- I'd like some idea of what their reasoning was. Why did they pick Tyre for the victim? Aside from its relationship to the Jews, that is."

"Well," Zorach began, "for openers, consider political events futureward of today. Hiram's become the most powerful king in Canaan, and that strength will outlive him. Tyre will stand off the Assyrians when they come, with everything that that implies. It'll push seaborne trade as far as Britain. It'll found colonies, the main one being Carthage." (Everard's mouth tightened. He had cause to know, far too well, how much Carthage mattered in history.) "It'll submit to the Persians, but fairly willingly, and among other things provide most of their fleet when they attack Greece. That effort will fail, of course, but imagine how the world might have gone if the Greeks had not faced that particular challenge. Eventually Tyre will fall to Alexander the Great, but only after a siege of months – a delay in his progress that also has incalculable consequences.

"Meanwhile, more basically, as the leading Phoenician state, it will be in the forefront of spreading Phoenician ideas abroad. Yes, to the Greeks themselves. There are religious concepts – Aphrodite, Adonis, Herakles, and other figures originate as Phoenician divinities. There's the alphabet, a Phoenician invention. There's the knowledge of Europe, Africa, Asia that Phoenician navigators will bring back. There's the progress in shipbuilding and seamanship."

Enthusiasm kindled in his tone: "Above everything else, I'd say, there's the origin of democracy, of the worth and rights of the individual. Not that the Phoenicians have any such theories; philosophy, like art, never will be a strong point of theirs. Just the same, the merchant adventurer – explorer or entrepreneur – he's their ideal, a man out on his own, deciding for himself. Here at home, Hiram's no traditional Egyptian or Oriental god-king. He inherited his job, true, but essentially he presides over the suffetes – the magnates, who must approve every important thing he does. Tyre is actually quite a bit like the medieval Venetian republic in its heyday.

"We don't have the scientific personnel to trace the process out step by step, no. But I'm convinced that the Greeks developed their democratic institutions under strong Phoenician influence, mainly Tyrian – and where will your country or mine get those ideas from, if not the Greeks?"

Zorach's fist smote the arm of his chair. His other hand brought the whisky to his lips for a long and fiery gulp. "That's what those devils have learned!" he exclaimed. "They're holding Tyre up for ransom because that's how to put the future of the whole human race at gunpoint!"

Having broken out a holocube, he showed Everard what would happen, a year hence.

He had taken pictures with a sort of minicamera, actually a molecular recorder from the twenty-second century, disguised as a gem on a ring. ("Had" was the ludicrous single way to express in English how he doubled back and forth in time. The Temporal grammar included appropriate tenses.) Granted, he was not a priest or acolyte, but as a layman who made generous donations so that the goddess would favor his ventures, he had access.

The explosion took place (would take place) along this very street, in the little temple of Tanith. Occurring at night, it didn't hurt anybody, but it wrecked the inner sanctum. Rotating the view, Everard studied cracked and blackened walls, shattered altar and idol, strewn relics and treasures, twisted scraps of metal. Horror-numbered hierophants sought to placate the divine wrath with prayers and offerings, on the site and everywhere else in town that was sacred.

The Patrolman selected a volume of space within the scene and magnified. The bomb had fragmented its carrier, but there was no mistaking the pieces. A standard two-seat hopper, such as plied the time lanes in untold thousands, had materialized, and instantly erupted.

"I collected some dust and char when nobody was looking, and sent it uptime for analysis," Zorach said. "The lab reported the explosive had been chemical – fulgurite-B, the name is."

Everard nodded. "I know that stuff. In common use for a rather long period, starting a while after the origin span of us three. Therefore easy to obtain in quantity, untraceably – a hell of a lot easier than nuke isotopes. Wouldn't need a large amount to do this much damage, either...I suppose you've had no luck intercepting the machine?"

Zorach shook his head. "No. Or rather, the Patrol officers haven't. They went downtime of the event, planted instruments of every kind that could be concealed, but – Everything happens too fast."

Everard rubbed his chin. The stubble felt almost silky; a bronze razor and a lack of soap didn't make for a close shave. He thought vaguely that he would have welcomed some scratchiness, 'or anything else familiar.

What had happened was plain enough. The vehicle had been unmanned, autopiloted, sent from some unknown point of space-time. Startoff had activated the detonator, so that the bomb arrived exploding. Though Patrol agents could pinpoint the instant, they could do nothing to head off the occurrence.

Could a technology advanced beyond theirs do so – Danellian, even? Everard imagined a device planted in advance of the moment, generating a forcefield which contained the violence when it smote. Well, this had not happened, therefore it might be a physical impossibility. Likelier, though, the Danellians stayed their hand because the harm *had* been done – the saboteurs could try again – all by itself, such a cat-and-mouse game might warp the continuum beyond healing – He shivered and asked roughly: "What explanation will the Tyrians themselves come up with?"

"Nothing dogmatic," Yael Zorach replied. "They don't have our kind of *Weltanschauung*, remember. To them, the world isn't entirely governed by laws of nature, it's capricious, changeable, magical."

And they're fundamentally right, aren't they? The chill struck deeper into Everard.

"When nothing else of the kind occurs, excitement will die down," she went on. "The chronicles that record the incident will be lost; besides, Phoenicians aren't especially given to writing chronicles. They'll think that somebody did something wrong that provoked a thunderbolt from heaven. Not necessarily any human; it could have been a quarrel among the gods. Therefore nobody will become a scapegoat. After a generation or two, the incident will be forgotten, except perhaps as a bit of folklore."

Chaim Zorach fairly snarled: "That's if the extortionists don't do more and worse."

"Yeah, let's see their ransom note," Everard requested.

"I have a copy only. The original went uptime for study."

"Oh, sure, I know. I've read the lab report. Sepia ink on a papyrus scroll, no clue there. Found at your door, probably dropped from another unmanned hopper that just flitted through."

"Certainly dropped in that way," Zorach reminded him. "The agents who came in set up instruments for that night, and detected the machine. It was present for about a millisecond. They might have tried to capture it, but what would have been the use? It was bound to be devoid of clues. And in any case, the effort would have entailed making a racket that could have brought the neighbors out to see what was going on."

He fetched the document for Everard to examine. The Patrolman had pored over a transcript aspart of his briefing, but hoped that sight of the actual hand would suggest something, anything to him.

The words had been formed with a contemporary reed pen, rather skillfully used. (This implied that the writer was well versed in the milieu, but that was obvious already.) They were printed, not cursive, though certain flamboyant flourishes appeared. The language was Temporal.

"To the Time Patrol from the Committee for Aggrandizement, greeting." At least there was none of the cant about being a people's army of national liberation, such as nauseated Everard in the later part of his home century. These fellows were frank bandits. Unless, of course, they pretended to be, in order to cover their tracks the more thoroughly...

"Having witnessed the consequences when one small bomb was delivered to a carefully chosen location in Tyre, you are invited to contemplate the results of a barrage throughout the city."

Once more, heavily, Everard nodded. His opponents were shrewd. A threat to kill or kidnap individuals – say, King Hiram himself – would have been nugatory, if not empty. The Patrol would mount guard on any such person. If somehow an attack succeeded, the Patrol would go back in time and arrange for the victim to be elsewhere at the moment of the assault; it would make the event "unhappen." Granted, that involved risks which the outfit hated to take, and at best would require a lot of work to make sure that the future did not get altered by the rescue operation itself. Nevertheless, the Patrol could and would act.

But how did you move a whole islandful of buildings to safety? You could, perhaps, evacuate the population. The town would remain. It wasn't physically large, after all, no matter how large it loomed in history – about 25,000 people crowded into about 140 acres. A few tons of high explosive would leave it in ruins. The devastation needn't even be total. After such a terrifying manifestation of supernatural fury, no one would come back here. Tyre would crumble away, a ghost town, while all the centuries and millennia, all the human beings and their lives and civilizations, which it had helped bring into existence... those would be less than ghosts.

Everard shivered anew. *Don't tell me there is no such thing as absolute evil*, he thought. *These creatures* - He forced himself to read on:

" – The price of our forbearance is quite reasonable, merely a little information. We desire the data necessary for the construction of a Trazon matter transmuter – "

When that device was being developed, during the Third Technological Renaissance, the Patrol had covertly manifested itself to the creators, though they lived downtime of its own founding. Forever afterward, its use – the very knowledge of its existence, let alone the manner of its making – had been severely restricted. True, the ability to convert any material object, be it just a heap of dirt, into any other, be it a jewel or a machine or a living body, could have spelled unlimited wealth for the entire species. The trouble was, you could as easily produce unlimited amounts of weapons, or poisons, or radioactive atoms...

"- You will broadcast the data in digital form from Palo Alto, California, United States of America, throughout the 24 hours of Friday 13 June 1980. The waveband to employ... the digital code... Your receipt will be the continued reality of your time line. -"

That was smart, too. The message wasn't one that would be picked up accidentally by some native, yet electronic activity in the Silicon Valley area was so great as to rule out any possibility of tracking down a receiver.

"- We will not use the device upon the planet Earth. Therefore the Time Patrol need not fear that it is compromising its Prime Directive by this helpfulness to us. On the contrary, you have no other way to preserve yourselves, do you?"

"Our compliments, and our expectations."

No signature.

"The broadcast won't be made, will it?" Yael asked low. In the shadows of the room, her eyes glimmered enormous. *She has children uptime*, Everard remembered. *They would vanish with their world*.

"No," he said.

"And yet our reality remains!" burst from Chaim. "You came here, out of it, starting uptime of 1980. So we must have caught the criminals."

Everard's sigh seemed to leave a track of pain through his breast. "You know better than that," he said tonelessly. "The quantum nature of the continuum – If Tyre explodes, why, here we'll be, but our ancestors, your kids, everything we knew, they won't. It'll be a whole different history. Whether whatever is left of the Patrol can restore it – somehow head off the disaster – that's problematical. I'd call it unlikely."

"But what would the criminals have gained, then?" The question was raw, almost a screech.

Everard shrugged. "A certain wild satisfaction, I guess. The temptation to play God slinks around in the best of us, doesn't it? And the temptation to play Satan isn't unrelated. Besides, they'd be careful to lurk downtime of the destruction; they'd stay existent. They'd have a good chance of making themselves overlords of a future where nothing but bits and pieces of the Patrol were left to oppose them. Or at a minimum, they'd have a lot of fun trying."

Sometimes I myself have chafed at the restrictions on me. "Ah, Love! could thou and I with Fate conspire To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire-"

"Besides," he added, "conceivably the Danellians will countermand the decision and order us to release the secret. I could return home to find that feature of my world wasn't the same any longer. A trivial variation as far as the twentieth century is concerned, affecting nothing noticeable."

"But later centuries?" the woman gasped.

"Yeah. We've only the gang's word that it'll confine its attentions to planets in the far future and beyond the Solar System. I'll bet whatever you like that that word is worthless. Given the capabilities of the transmuter, why shouldn't they play fast and loose with Earth? It'll always be *the* human globe, and I don't see how the Patrol can stop them."

"Who are they?" Chaim whispered. "Have you any idea?"

Everard drank whisky and smoke, as if warmth could seep through his tongue into his spirit. "Too early to say, on my personal world line... or yours, hm? Plain to see, they're from far uptime, though short of the Era of Oneness that precedes the Danellians. In the course of many millennia, information about the transmuter was bound to leak out – enough to give somebody a clear notion of the thing and of what he might do with it. Certainly he and his buddies are rootless desperados; they don't give a damn that their action threatens to eliminate the society that begot them, and everybody living in it whom they ever knew. But I don't think they are, say, Neldorians. This operation is too sophisticated. The enemy's got to have spent a lot of lifespan, a lot of effort, getting to know the Phoenician milieu well and establishing that it is in fact a nexus.

"The organizing brain must be of genius level. But with a touch of childishness – did you notice that Friday the thirteenth date? Likewise, performing the sabotage practically next door to you. The M.O. – and my being recognized as a Patrolman–those do suggest – Merau Varagan?"

"Who?"

Everard didn't reply. He went on mumbling, mostly to himself: "Could be, could be. Not that that's much help. The gang did its homework, downtime of today, surely – yes, they'd want an informational baseline covering quite a few years. And this post is undermanned. The whole goddamn Patrol is." *Regardless of agents' longevity. Sooner or later, something or other will get each and every one of us. And we don't go back to cancel the deaths of our comrades, nor to see them again while they lived, because that could start an eddy in time, which might grow into a maelstrom; or if not, it would at least rack us too cruelly.* "We can detect time vehicles arriving and departing, if we know where and when to aim our instruments. That may be how the gang discovered this is Patrol HQ, if they didn't learn it routinely in the guise of honest visitors. Or they could have entered this era elsewhere and come by ordinary transportation, looking like any of countless legitimate contemporary people, the same way I tried to.

"We can't ransack every bit of local space-time. We haven't the manpower, nor dare we risk the disruption that so much activity of ours could cause. No, Chaim, Yael, we've got to find ourselves some clues, to narrow down our search. But how? Where do I start?"

His disguise being penetrated, Everard accepted the Zorachs' offer of a guestroom. He'd be more comfortable here than in an inn, and handier to whatever gadgets he might need. However, he'd also be cut off from the real life of the city.

"I'll arrange an interview with the king for you," his host promised. "No difficulty; he's a brilliant man, bound to be interested in an exotic like you." He chuckled. "Therefore it will be very natural for Zakarbaal the Sidonian, who needs to cultivate the friendship of the Tyrians, to inform him of a chance meeting with you."

"That's fine," Everard replied, "and I'll enjoy paying the call. Maybe he can even be some help to us. Meanwhile, uh, we've got several hours of daylight left. I think I'll stroll around town, start getting the feel of it, pick up a scent if I'm lucky."

Zorach scowled. "You might be what's picked up. The killer is skulking yet, I'm sure."

Everard shrugged. "A chance I take; and could be him that comes to grief. Lend me a gun, please. Sonic."

He set the weapon to stun, not slay. A live prisoner was at the top of his birthday list. Since the enemy would be aware of that, he didn't really expect another attempt on him – today, at any rate.

"Take a blaster, too," Zorach urged. "I wouldn't put it past them to come after you from the air. Bring a hopper to an instant where you are, hover on antigravity, and potshoot, hm? They don't have our motivation to stay inconspicuous."

Everard holstered the energy gun opposite the other. Any Phoenician who noticed would take them for charms or something of the kind, and besides, he'd let a cloak fall over them. "I scarcely think I'd be worth that much effort and risk," he said.

"You were worth trying for earlier, weren't you? How did that guy know you for an agent, anyway?"

"He may have had a description. Merau Varagan would realize that just a few Unattached operatives, me among them, were likely choices for this assignment. Which inclines me more and more to think he is behind the plot. If I'm right, we've got a mean

and slippery opponent."

"Stay in public view," Yael Zorach pleaded. "Be sure to get back before dark. Violent crime is rare here, but there are no lights, the streets grow nearly deserted, you'd become easy prey."

Everard imagined himself hunting his hunter through the night, but decided not to attempt provoking such a situation unless he became desperate. "Okay, I'll return for dinner. I'm interested in what Tyrian food is like -ashore, not ship rations."

She mustered a smile. "Not awfully good, I'm afraid. The natives aren't sensualists. However, I've taught our cook several uptime recipes. Do you like gefilte fish for an appetizer?"

Shadows had lengthened and air cooled somewhat when Everard stepped forth. Traffic bustled along the street crossing Chandlers, though no more than earlier. Situated on the water, Tyre and Usu were generally free of the extreme midday heat that dictated a siesta in many countries, and no true Phoenician would waste hours asleep in which he might turn a profit.

"Master!" warbled a joyful voice.

Why, it's my little wharf rat. "Hail, uh, Pum-mairam," Everard said. The boy bounced up from his squat. "What are you waiting for?"

The slight brown form bowed low, albeit eyes and lips held as much merriment as reverence. "What but the fervently prayed-for hope that I might again be of service to his luminosity?"

Everard stopped and scratched his head. The kid had been almighty quick, had possibly saved his bacon, but – "Well, I'm sorry, but I've no further need of help."

"Oh, sir, you jest. See how I laugh, delighted by your wit! A guide, an introducer, a warder off of rogues and... certain worse persons – surely a lord of your magnanimity will not deny a poor sprig the glory of his presence, the benefit of his wisdom, the never-to-be-forgotten memory in after years of having trotted at his august heels."

While the words were sycophantic, that was conventional in this society, and the tone was anything but. Pum-mairam was having fun, Everard saw. Doubtless he was curious, too, as well as eager to earn more. He fairly quivered where he stood looking straight up at the huge man.

Everard made his decision. "You win, you rogue," he said, and grinned when Pum-mairam whooped and danced. It wasn't a bad idea to have such an attendant, anyway. Wasn't his purpose to get to know the city, rather than merely its sights? "Now tell me what it is you are thinking you can do for me."

The boy poised, cocked his head, laid finger to chin. "That depends upon what my master's desire may be. If business, what kind and with whom? If pleasure, likewise. My lord has but to speak."

"Hm-m..." *Well, why not level with him, to the extent that is allowable? If he proves unsatisfactory, I can always fire him, though I expect he'd cling like a tick.* "Then hear me, Pum. I do have weighty matters to handle in Tyre. Yes, they may well concern the suffetes and the king's self. You saw how a magician tried to stop me. Aye, you aided me against him. That may happen anew, and I not so lucky next time. It's barred I am from saying more about that. Yet I think you'll understand my need to learn a great deal, to meet people of many kinds. What would you suggest? A tavern, maybe, and I buying drinks for the house?"

Pum's quicksilver mood froze to seriousness. He frowned and stared into space for a few heartbeats, before he snapped his fingers and cackled. "Ah, indeed! Well, excellent master, I can recommend no better beginning than a visit to the High Temple of Asherat."

"Hey?" Startled, Everard flipped through the information planted in his brain. Asherat, whom the Bible would call Astarte, was the consort of Melqart, the patron god of Tyre – Baal-Melek-Qart-Sor... She was a mighty figure in her own right, goddess of fruitfulness in man, beast, and land, a female warrior who had once dared hell itself to recall her lover from the dead, a sea queen of whom Tanith might be simply an avatar... yes, she was Ishtar in Babylon, and she would enter the Grecian world as Aphrodite...

"Why, the vast learning of my lord surely includes the fact that it would be foolish for a visitor, most especially a visitor as important as he, *not* to pay homage to her, that she may smile upon his enterprise. Truly, if the priests heard of such an omission, they would set themselves against you. That has, indeed, caused difficulties with some of the emissaries from Jerusalem. Also, is it not a good deed to release a lady from bondage and yearning?" Pum leered, winked, and nudged Everard. "Besides being a pleasurable romp."

The Patrolman remembered. For a moment, he was taken aback. Like most other Semites of this era, the Phoenicians required that every freeborn woman sacrifice her virginity in the fane of the goddess, as a sacred prostitute. Not until a man had paid for her favor might she marry. The custom was not lewd in origin, it traced back to Stone Age fertility rites and fears. To be sure, it also attracted profitable pilgrims and foreign visitors.

"I trust my lord's folk do not forbid such an act?" the boy inquired anxiously.

"Well... They do not."

"Good!" Pum took Everard by the elbow and steered him off. "If my lord will allow his servant to accompany him, quite likely I shall recognize someone whom he would find it useful thus to get acquainted with. In all abasement, let me say that I do get around and I do keep eyes and ears open. They are utterly at the service of my master."

Everard grinned, on one side of his mouth, and strode along. Why shouldn't he? To be honest with himself, after his sea voyage he felt damnably horny; and it was true, patronizing the holy whorehouse was, in this milieu, not an exploitation but a kindness; and he might even get some lead in his mission...

First I'd better try to find out how reliable my guide is. "Tell me something about yourself, Pum. We may be together for, well, several days if not more."

They came out on the avenue and threaded their way through jostling, shouting, odorous throngs. "There is little to tell, great lord. The annals of the poor are short and simple." That coincidence startled Everard too. Then, as Pum talked, he realized that the phrase was false in this case.

Father unknown, presumably one of the sailors and laborers who frequented a certain low-life hostel while Tyre was under construction and had the wherewithal to enjoy its serving wench, Pum was a pup in a litter, raised catch-as-catch-can, a scavenger from the time he could walk and, Everard suspected, a thief, and whatever else might get him the local equivalent of a buck. Nonetheless, early on he had become an acolyte at a dockside temple of the comparatively unimportant god Baal Hammon. (Everard harked back to tumbledown churches in the slums of twentieth-century America.) Its priest had been a learned man once, now gentle and drunken; Pum had garnered considerable vocabulary and other knowledge from him, like a squirrel garnering acorns in a wood, until he died. His more respectable successor kicked the raffish postulant out. Despite that, Pum went on to make a wide circle of acquaintances, which reached into the palace itself. Royal servants came down to the waterfront in search of cheap fun... Still too young to assume any kind of leadership, he was wangling a living however he could. His survival to date was no mean accomplishment.

Yes, Everard thought, /may have lucked out, just a little.

The temples of Melqart and Asherat confronted each other across a busy square near the middle of town. The former was the larger, but the latter was amply impressive. A porch of many columns, with elaborate capitals and gaudy paint, gave on a flagged courtyard wherein stood a great brass basin of water for ritual cleansing. The house rose along the farther side of the enclosure, its squareness relieved by stone facing, marble, granite, jasper. Two pillars flanked the doorway, overtopping the roof and shining. (In Solomon's Temple, which copied Tyrian design, these would be named Jachin and Boaz.) Within, Everard knew, was a main chamber for worshippers, and beyond it the sanctuary.

Some of the forum crowd had spilled into the court and stood about in little groups. The men among them, he guessed, simply wanted a quiet place to discuss business or whatever. Women outnumbered them—housewives for the most part, often balancing loads on their scarved heads, taking a break from marketing to make a brief devotion and indulge in a bit of gossip. While the attendants of the goddess were male, here females were always welcome.

Stares followed Everard as Pum urged him toward the temple. He began to feel self-conscious, even abashed. A priest sat at a table, in the shade behind the open door. Except for a rainbow-colored robe and a phallic silver pendant, he looked no different from a layman, his hair and beard well-trimmed, his features aquiline and lively.

Pum halted before him and said importantly, "Greeting, holy one. My master and I wish to honor Our Lady of Nuptials."

The priest signed a blessing. "Praises be. A foreigner confers double fortune." Interest gleamed in his eyes. "Whence come you, worthy stranger?"

"From north across the waters," Everard replied.

"Yes, yes, that's clear, but it's a vast and unknown territory. Might you be from a land of the Sea Peoples themselves?" The priest waved at a stool like that which he occupied. "Pray be seated, noble sir, take your ease for a while, let me pour you a cup of wine."

Pum jittered about for several minutes in an agony of frustration, before he hunkered down under a column and sulked. Everard and the priest conversed for almost an hour. Others drifted up to listen and join in.

It could easily have lasted all day. Everard was finding out a lot. Probably none of it was germane to his mission, but you never knew, and anyway, he enjoyed the gab session. What brought him back to earth was mention of the sun. It had dropped below the porch roof. He remembered Yael Zorach's warning, and cleared his throat.

"Och, how I regret it, my friends, but time passes and I must soon begone. If we are first to pay our respects -"

Pum brightened. The priest laughed. "Aye," he said, "after so long a faring, the fire of Asherat must burn hotly. Well, now, the free-will donation is half a shekel of silver or its value in goods. Of course, men of wealth and rank are wont to give more."

Everard paid over a generous chunk of metal. The priest repeated his blessing and gave him and Pum each a small ivory disc, rather explicitly engraved. "Go in, my sons, seek whom you will do good, cast these in their laps. Ah... you understand, do you not, great Eborix, that you are to take your chosen one off the sacred premises? Tomorrow she will return the token and receive the benison. If you have no place of your own nigh to here, then my kinsman Hanno rents clean rooms at a modest rate, in his inn just down the Street of the Date Sellers..."

Pum fairly zoomed inside. Everard followed with what he hoped was more dignity. His talkmates called raunchy good wishes. That was part of the ceremony, the magic.

The chamber was large, its gloom not much relieved by oil lamps. They picked out intricate murals, gold leaf, inset semiprecious stones. At the far end shimmered a gilt image of the goddess, arms held out in a compassion which somehow came through the rather primitive sculpturing. Everard sensed fragrances, myrrh and sandal-wood, and an irregular undertone of rustles and whispers.

As his pupils widened, he discerned the women. Perhaps a hundred altogether, they sat on stools, crowded along the walls to right and left. Their garb ranged from fine linen to ragged wool. Some slumped, some stared blankly, some made gestures of invitation as bold as the rules permitted, most looked timidly and wistfully at the men who strolled by them. Those visitors were few, at this hour of an ordinary day. Everard thought he identified three or four mariners on shore leave, a fat merchant, a couple of young bucks. Their deportment was reasonably polite; it was a church here.

His pulses pounded. *Damnation*, he thought, irritated, *why am I making such a production in my head? I've been with enough women before.*

Sadness touched him. *Only two virgins, though.*

He walked along, watching, wondering, avoiding glances. Pum sought him and tugged his sleeve. "Radiant master," the youth hissed, "your servant may have found that which you require."

"Huh?" Everard let his attendant drag him out to the center of the room, where they could murmur unheard.

"My lord understands that this child of poverty could never hitherto enter these precincts," spilled from Pum. "Yet, as I said earlier, I do have acquaintanceship reaching into the royal palace itself. I know of a lady who has come each time her duties and the moon allow, to wait and wait, these past three years. She is Sarai, daughter of shepherd folk in the hills. Through an uncle in the guard, she got a post in the king's household, at first only as a scullery maid, but now working closely with the chief steward. And she is here today. Since my master wishes to make contacts of that sort -"

Bemused, Everard followed his guide. When they halted, he gulped. The woman who, low-voiced, responded to Pum's greeting, was squat, big-nosed – he decided to think of her as homely – and verging on spinsterhood. But the gaze she lifted to the Patrolman was bright and unafraid. "Would you like to release me?" she asked quietly. "I would pray for you for the rest of my life."

Before he could change his mind, he pitched his token onto her skirt.

Pum had found himself a beauty, arrived this same day and engaged to the scion of a prominent family. She was dismayed when such a ragamuffin picked her. Well, that was her problem. And perhaps his too, though Everard doubted it.

The rooms in Hanno's inn were tiny, equipped with straw mattresses and little else. Slit windows, giving on the inner court, admitted a trickle of evening light, also smoke, street and kitchen smells, chatter, plaintiveness of a bone flute. Everard drew the reed curtain that served as a door and turned to his companion.

She knelt before him as if huddling into her garments. "I do not know your name or your country, sir," she said, low and not quite steadily. "Do you care to tell your handmaiden?"

"Why, sure." He gave her his alias. "And you are Sarai from Rasil Ayin?"

"Did the beggar boy send my lord to me?" She bowed her head. "No, forgive me, I meant no insolence, I was thoughtless."

He ventured to push back her scarf and stroke her hair. Though coarse, it was abundant, her best physical feature. "No offense taken. See here, shall we get to know each other a bit? What would you say to a cup or two of wine before – Well, what would you say?"

She gasped, astounded. He went out, found the landlord, made the provision.

Presently, as they sat side by side on the floor with his arm around her shoulders, she was talking freely. Phoenicians had scant concept of personal privacy. Also, while their women got more respect and independence than those of most societies, still, a little consideration on a man's part went a long ways.

"- no, no betrothal yet for me, Eborix. I came to the city because my father is poor, with many other children to provide for, and it did not seem anybody in our tribe would ever ask my hand for his son. You wouldn't possibly know of someone?" He himself, who would take her maidenhead, was debarred. In fact, her question bent the law that forbade prearrangement, as for example with a friend. "I have won standing in the palace, in truth if not in name. I wield some small power among servants, purveyors, entertainers. I have scraped together a dowry for myself, not large, but... but it may be the goddess will smile on me at last, after I have made this oblation -"

"I'm sorry," he answered in compassion. "I'm a stranger here."

He understood, or supposed he did. She wanted desperately to get married: less to have a husband and put an end to the barely veiled scorn and suspicion in which the unwedded were held, than to have children. Among these people, few fates were more terrible than to die childless, to go doubly into the grave... Her defenses broke apart and she wept against his breast.

The light was failing. Everard decided to forget Yael's fears (and – a chuckle – Pum's exasperation) and take his time, treat Sarai like a human being simply because that was what she in fact was, wait for darkness and then use his imagination. Afterward he'd see her back to her quarters.

The Zorachs were mainly upset because of the anxiety their guest caused them, not returning until well past sunset. He didn't tell them what he had been doing, nor did they press him about it. After all, they were agents in place, able persons who coped with a difficult job often full of surprises, but they were not detectives.

Everard did feel obliged to apologize for spoiling their supper. That was to have been an unusual treat. Normally the main meal of the day occurred about midafternoon, and folk had little more than a snack in the evening. A reason for this was the dimness of lamplight, which made it troublesome to prepare anything elaborate.

Nonetheless, the technical accomplishments of the Phoenicians deserved admiration. Over breakfast, which was also a sparse meal, lentils cooked with leeks and accompanied by hardtack, Chaim mentioned the waterworks. Rain-catching cisterns were helpful but insufficient. Hiram didn't want Tyre dependent on boats from Usu, nor linked to the mainland by an extended aqueduct that could serve an enemy as a bridge. Like the Sidonians before him, he had a project in train that would draw fresh water from springs beneath the sea.

And then, of course, there was the skill, the accumulated knowledge and ingenuity, behind dyeworks and glassworks, not to mention ships less frail than they looked, since in the future they would ply as far as Britain...

"The Purple Empire, somebody in our century called Phoenicia," Everard mused. "Almost makes me wonder if Merau Varagan has a thing for that color. Didn't W. H. Hudson call Uruguay the Purple Land?" His laugh clanked. "No, I'm being foolish. The murex dyes generally have more red than blue in them. Besides, Varagan was doing his dirty work a lot farther north than Uruguay when we collided 'earlier.' And so far I've no proof he's involved in this case; only a hunch."

"What happened?" asked Yael. Her glance sought him across the table, through sunlight that slanted in a doorway open to the garden court.

"No matter now."

"Are you certain?" Chaim persisted. "Conceivably your experience will call something to our minds that will be a clue. Anyway, we do get starved for outside news in a post like this."

"Especially adventures as wonderful as yours," Yael added.

Everard smiled wryly. "To quote still another writer, adventure is somebody else having a hell of a tough time a thousand miles away," he said. "And when the stakes are high, like here, that really makes a situation feel bad." He paused. "Well, no reason not to spin you the yarn, though in very sketchy form, because the background's complicated. Uh, if a servant isn't going to come in soon, I'd like to light my pipe. And is any of that lovely clandestine coffee left in the pot?"

—He settled himself, rolled smoke across his tongue, let the rising warmth of the day bake his bones after the night's nippiness. "My mission was to South America, the Colombia region, late in the year 1826. Under Simon Bolivar's leadership, the patriots had cast off Spanish rule, but they still had plenty troubles of their own. That included worries about the Liberator himself. He'd put through a constitution for Bolivia that gave him extraordinary powers as lifetime president; was he going to turn into a Napoleon and bring all the new republics under his heel? The military commander in Venezuela, which was then a part of Colombia, or New Granada as it called itself—he revolted. Not that this Jose Paez was such an altruist; a harsh bastard, in fact.

"Oh, never mind details. I don't remember them well myself any more. Essentially, Bolivar, who was a Venezuelan by birth, made a march from Lima to Bogota. Only took him a couple of months, which was fast in those days over that terrain. Arriving, he assumed martial-law presidential powers, and moved on into Venezuela against Paez. Bloodshed was becoming heavy there.

"Meanwhile Patrol agents, monitoring the history, turned up indications that all was not kosher. (Um-m, pardon me.) Bolivar wasn't behaving quite like the selfless humanitarian that his biographers, by and large, described. He'd acquired a friend from... somewhere... whom he trusted. This man's advice had, on occasion, been brilliant. Yet it seemed as if he might be turning into Bolivar's evil genius. And the biographies never mentioned him...

"I was among the Unattached operatives dispatched to investigate. This was because I, before ever hearing of the Patrol, had kicked around some in those boonies. That gave me a slight special sense for what to do. I could never pass myself off as a Latin American, but I could be a Yankee soldier of fortune, in part starry-eyed over the liberation, in part hoping somehow to cash in on it — and, mainly, though *macho* enough, free of the kind of arrogance that would have put those proud people off.

"It's a long and generally tedious story. Believe me, my friends, 99 percent of an operation in the field amounts to patient collection of dull and usually irrelevant facts, in between interminable periods of hurry-up-and-wait. Let's say that, aided by a good deal of luck, I managed to infiltrate, make my connections, pass out my bribes, gather my informers and my evidence. At last there was no reasonable doubt. This obscurely originating Blasco Lopez had to be from the future.

"I called in our troops and we raided the house where he was staying in Bogota. Most of those we collared were harmless local people, hired as servants, though what they had to tell proved useful. Lopez's mistress, accompanying him, turned out to be his associate. She told us a lot more, in exchange for comfortable accommodations when she'd go to the exile planet. But the ringleader himself had broken free and escaped.

"One man on horseback, headed for the Cordillera Oriental that rises beyond the town — one man like ten thousand genuine Creoles — we couldn't go after him on time hoppers. The search could too damn easily get too damn noticeable. Who knew what effect that might have? The conspirators had already made the timestream unstable...

"I grabbed a horse, a couple of remounts, some jerky and vitamin pills for myself, and set off in pursuit."

Wind boomed hollowly down the mountainside. Grass and low, scattered shrubs trembled beneath its chill. Up ahead, they gave way to naked rock. Right, left, behind, peaks reared into a blue bleakness. A condor wheeled huge, on watch for any death. Snowfields on the heights above glowed beneath a declining sun.

A musket cracked. At its distance, the noise it made was tiny, though echoes flew. Everard heard the bullet buzz. Close! He hunched down in the saddle and spurred his steed onward.

Varagan can't really expect to drop me at this range, passed through him. What, then? Does he hope I'll slow down? If so, if he gains a little on me, what use is that to him? What goal has he got?

His enemy still led him by half a mile, but Everard could see how yonder animal lurched along, exhausted. To get on Varagan's trail had taken some while, going from this peon to that shepherd and asking if a man of the given description had ridden by. However, Varagan had only the single horse, which he must spare if it was not to collapse under him. After Everard found the traces, a wilderness-trained eye had readily been able to follow them, and the pace of the hunt picked up.

It was also known that Varagan had fled bearing no more than a muzzle-loader. He'd been spending powder and balls pretty freely ever since the Patrolman hove in view. Since he was a fast recharger and an excellent shot, it did have its delaying effect. But what refuge was in these wastes? Varagan appeared to be making for a particular crag. It was conspicuous, not only high but its shape suggestive of a castle tower. It was no fortress, though. If Varagan took shelter behind it, Everard could use the blaster he carried to bring the rock molten down upon his head.

Maybe Varagan wasn't aware the agent had such a weapon. Impossible. Varagan was a monster, yes, but not a fool.

Everard pulled down his hatbrim and drew his poncho tight against the wind. He didn't reach for the blaster, no point in that yet, but as if by instinct, his left hand dropped to the flintlock pistol and saber at his hip. They were mainly part of his costume, intended to make him an authority figure to the inhabitants, but there was an odd comfort in their massiveness.

Having reined in to shoot, Varagan continued straight on uphill, this time without lingering to reload. Everard brought his own horse from trot to canter and closed the gap further. He kept alert – not tensed, but alert against contingencies, ready to swing aside or even jump down behind the beast. Nothing happened, just that lonesome trek on through the cold. Could Varagan have fired his last ammunition? *Have a care, Manse, old son.* The sparse alpine grass ended, save for tufts between boulders, and rock rang beneath hoofs.

Varagan halted near the crag and sat waiting. The musket was sheathed and his hands rested empty on the saddlebow. His horse quivered and swayed, neck a-droop, utterly blown, lather swept freezingly off its hide and out of its mane.

Everard took forth his energy gun and clattered nigh. Behind him, a remount whickered. Still Varagan waited.

Everard stopped three yards off. "Merau Varagan, you are under arrest by the Time Patrol," he called in Temporal.

The other smiled. "You have the advantage of me," he replied in a soft tone that, somehow, carried. "May I request the honor of learning your name and provenance?"

"Uh... Manson Everard, Unattached, born in the United States of America about a hundred years uptime. No matter. You're coming back with me. Hold on while I call a hopper. I warn you, at the least suspicion you're about to try something, I'll shoot. You're too dangerous for me to be squeamish."

Varagan made a gentle gesture. "Really? How much do you know about me, Agent Everard, or think you know, to justify this violent an attitude?"

"Well, when a man takes potshots at me, I reckon he's not a very nice person."

"Might I perhaps have believed you were a bandit, of the sort who haunt these uplands? What crime am I alleged to have committed?"

Everard's free hand paused on its way to get out the little communicator in his pocket. For a moment, eerily fascinated, he stared through the wind at his prisoner.

Merau Varagan seemed taller than he actually was, as straight as he held his athletic frame. Black hair tossed around a skin whose whiteness the sun and the weather had not tinged at all. There was no sign of beard. The face might have been a young Caesar's, were it not too finely chiseled. The eyes were large and green, the smiling lips cherry-red. His clothes, down to the boots, were silver-trimmed black, like the cape that flapped about his shoulders. Seen against the turreted crag, he made Everard remember Dracula.

Yet his voice remained mild: "Evidently your colleagues have extracted information from mine. I daresay you have been in touch with them as you fared. Thus you know our names and somewhat of our origin – "

Thirty-first millennium. Outlaws after the failure of the Exaltationists to cast off the weight of a civilization grown older than the Old Stone Age was to me. During their moment of power, they possessed themselves of time machines. Their genetic heritage- Nietzsche might have understood them. I never will.

"- But what do you truly know of our purpose here?"

"You were going to change events," Everard retorted. "We barely forestalled you. At that, our corps has a lot of tricky restoration work ahead. Why did you do it? How could you be so... so selfish?"

"I think 'egoistic' might be a better word," Varagan gibed. "The ascendancy of the ego, the unconfined will – But think. Would it have been altogether bad if Simon Bolivar had founded a true empire in Hispanic America, rather than a gaggle of quarrelsome successor states? It would have been enlightened, progressive. Imagine how much suffering and death would have been averted."

"Come off that!" Everard felt anger rise and rise within himself. "You must know better. It's impossible. Bolivar hasn't the cadre, the communications, the support. If he's a hero to many, he's at least got many others furious with him: like the Peruvians, after he detached Bolivia. He'll cry on his deathbed that he 'plowed the sea' in all his efforts to build a stable society.

"If you meant it about unifying even part of the continent, you'd have tried earlier and elsewhere."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. The only chance. I've studied the situation. In 1821 San Martin was negotiating with the Spanish in Peru, and playing with the idea of setting up a monarchy under somebody like Don Carlos, King Ferdinand's brother. It could have included the territories of Bolivia and Ecuador, maybe later Chile and Argentina, because it would have had the advantages Bolivar's inner sphere lacks. But why am I telling you this, you bastard, except to prove I know you're lying? You must have done your own homework."

"What then do you suppose my real objective was?"

"Obvious. To make Bolivar overreach himself. He's an idealist, a dreamer, as well as a warrior. If he pushes too hard, everything hereabouts will break up in a chaos that could well spread to the rest of South America. And there would be your chance for seizing power!"

Varagan shrugged, as a were-cat might have shrugged. "Concede me this much," he said, "that such an empire would have had a certain dark magnificence."

The hopper flashed into being and hovered twenty feet aloft. Its rider grinned and aimed the firearm he carried. From the saddle of his horse, Merau Varagan waved at his time-traveling self.

Everard never quite knew what happened next. Somehow he made it out of the stirrups and onto the ground. His horse screamed as an energy bolt struck. Smoke and a stench of seared flesh spurted forth. Even while the slain animal crumpled, Everard shot back from behind it.

The enemy hopper must veer. Everard skipped clear of the falling mass and maintained fire, upward and sideways. Varagan leaped from his own horse, behind the rock. Lightnings blazed and crackled. Everard's free hand yanked forth his communicator and thumbed the Mayday spot.

The vehicle dropped, rearward of the crag. Displaced air made a popping noise. Wind blew away the stinging ozone.

A Patrol machine appeared. It was too late. Merau Varagan had already borne his earlier self away to an unknowable point of space-time.

Everard nodded heavily. "Yeah," he finished, "that was his scheme, and it worked, God damn it. Reach an obvious landmark and note the time on his watch. That meant he'd know, later along his world line, where-when to go, in mounting his rescue operation."

The Zorachs were appalled. "But, but a casual loop of that sort," Chaim stammered, "didn't he have any idea of the dangers?"

"Doubtless he did, including the possibility that he would make himself never have existed," Everard replied. "But then, he'd been quite prepared to wipe out an entire future, in favor of a history where he could have ridden high. He's totally fearless, the ultimate desperado. That was built into the genes of the Exaltationist princes."

He sighed. "They lack loyalty, also. Varagan, and whatever associates he had left, made no attempt to save those we'd captured. They just vanished. We've been wary of their reappearance ever 'since then,' and this new caper does bear similarities to that one. But of course – time loop hazard again – I can't go read whatever report I'll have filed at the conclusion of the present affair. If it

has a conclusion, and if I don't."

Yael patted his hand. "I'm sure you'll prevail, Manse," she said. "What happened next in South America?"

"Oh, once the bad counsel, which he hadn't recognized was bad – once that stopped, Bolivar went back to his natural ways," Everard told them. "He made a peaceful settlement with Paez and issued a general amnesty. More troubles broke out later, but he handled them capably and humanely, too, while fostering both the interests and the culture of his people. When he died, most of the great wealth he'd inherited was gone, because he'd never taken a centavo of public money for himself. A good ruler, one of the few that humankind will ever know.

"So's Hiram, I gather – and now his rule is threatened likewise, by whatever devil is loose in the world."

When Everard emerged, sure enough, there was Pum waiting. The boy skipped to meet him.

"Where would my glorious master go today?" he caroled. "Let his servant conduct him whithersoever he wills. Perhaps to visit Conor the amber factor?"

"Huh?" In slight shock, the Patrolman goggled at the native. "What makes you think I've aught to do with... any such person?"

Pum returned a look whose deference failed to mask its shrewdness. "Did not my lord declare this was his intention, while aboard Mago's ship?"

"How do you know that?" Everard barked.

"Why, I sought out men of the crew, engaged them in talk, lured forth their memories. Not that your humble servant would pry into that which he should not hear. If I have transgressed, I abase myself and beg forgiveness. My aim was merely to learn more of my master's plans in order that I might think how best to assist them." Pum beamed in undiminished cockiness.

"Oh. I see." Everard tugged his mustache and peered around. Nobody else was in earshot. "Well, then, know that that was a pretense. My true business is different." *As you must have guessed already, from the fact of my going straight to Zakarbaal and lodging with him*, he added silently. This was far from the first time that experience reminded him that people in any given era could be intrinsically as sharp as anybody futureward of them.

"Ah, indeed! Business of the greatest moment, assuredly. The lips of my master's servant are sealed."

"Understand that my aims are in no way hostile. Sidon is friendly to Tyre. Let's say I'm involved in an effort to organize a large joint venture."

"To increase trade with my master's people? Ah, but then you do want to visit your countryman Conor, no?"

"I do not!" Everard realized he had shouted. He curbed his temper. "Conor is not my countryman, not in the way that Mago is yours. My folk have no single country. Aye, most likely Conor and I would not be understanding each other's languages."

That was more than likely. Everard had too much intellectual baggage to carry as was, information about Phoenicia, to pile on a heap about the Celts. The electronic educator had simply taught him enough to pass for one among outsiders who didn't know them intimately – he hoped.

"What I've in mind," he said, "is just to stroll about the city today, whilst Zakarbaal seeks to get me an audience with the king." He smiled. "Sure, and for this I could well put myself in your hands, lad."

Pum's laughter pealed. He clapped his palms together. "Ah, my lord is wise! Come evening, let him deem whether or not he was led to pleasure and, yes, knowledge such as he seeks, and perhaps he... will in his magnanimity see fit to bestow largesse on his guide."

Everard grinned. "Give me the grand tour, then."

Pum assumed shyness. "May we first seek the Street of the Tailors? Yesterday I took it upon myself to order new garb that should be ready now. The cost will bear hard on a poor youth, despite the munificence his master has already shown, for I must pay for speed as well as fine material. Yet it is not fitting that a great lord's attendant should go in rags like these."

Everard groaned, though he didn't really mind. "I catch your drift. Och, how I do! 'Tis unsuited to my dignity that you buy your own garments. Well, let's go, and 'tis I will be standing you your coat of many colors."

Hiram did not quite resemble his average subject. He was taller, lighter-complexioned, hair and beard reddish, eyes gray, nose straight. His appearance recalled the Sea Peoples – that buccaneer horde of displaced Cretans and European barbarians, some of

them from the far North, who raided Egypt a couple of centuries before, and eventually became the principal ancestors of the Philistines. A lesser number, ending up in Lebanon and Syria, interbred with certain Bedouin types who were themselves getting interested in nautical things. From that cross arose the Phoenicians. The invader blood still showed in their aristocrats.

Solomon's palace, of which the Bible was to boast, would when finished be a cut-rate imitation of the house in which Hiram already dwelt. The king himself, though, usually went simply clad, in a white linen kaftan with purple trim, slippers of fine leather, a gold headband and a massive ruby ring to signify royalty. His manner, likewise, was direct and unaffected. Middle-aged, he looked younger, and his vigor remained unabated.

He and Everard sat in a room broad, gracious, and airy, that opened on a cloister garden and fish pond. The carpet was of straw, but dyed in fine patterns. Frescos on the plaster walls had been done by an artist imported from Babylonia, depicting arbors, flowers, and winged chimeras. A low table between the men was of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl. It held unwatered wine in glass cups, and dishes of fruit, bread, cheese, sweets. A pretty girl in a diaphanous gown knelt nearby and strummed a lyre. Two manservants awaited orders in the background.

"You are being right mysterious, Eborix," murmured Hiram.

"Sure, and 'tis not my wish to withhold aught from your highness," Everard replied carefully. A word of command could bring in guardsmen to kill him. No, that was unlikely; a guest was sacred. But if he offended the king, his whole mission was compromised. "Aye, vague I am about certain things, but only because my knowledge of them is slight. Nor would I risk laying baseless charges against anyone, should my information prove in error."

Hiram bridged his fingers and frowned. "Still, you claim to bear word of danger-word which contradicts what you have said elsewhere. You are scarcely the bluff warrior you pass yourself off as."

Everard constructed a smile. "My lord in his wisdom knows well that an unlettered tribesman is not necessarily a fool. To him I admit having, ah, earlier shaded the truth a wee bit. 'Twas because I had to, even as any Tyrian tradesman does in the normal course of business. Is that not so?"

Hiram laughed and relaxed. "Say on. If you are a rogue, you are at least an interesting one."

Patrol psychologists had invested considerable thought in Everard's yarn. There was no way for it to be immediately convincing, nor was that desirable; the king should not be stampeded into actions that might change known history. Yet the tale must be sufficiently plausible that he would cooperate in the investigation which was Everard's real purpose.

"Know, then, O lord, that my father was a chieftain in a mountain land far over the waves -" the Hallstatt region" of Austria.

Eborix went on to relate how various Celts who had been among the Sea Peoples fled back there after the shattering defeat which Rameses III inflicted on those quasi-vikings in 1149 B.C. Their descendants had maintained tenuous connection, mostly along the amber route, with the descendants of kinsmen who settled in Canaan by leave of victorious Pharaoh. Old ambitions were forgotten; Celts have always had a long racial memory. Talk went on about reviving the great Mediterranean push. That dream strengthened as wave after wave of barbarians came down into Greece, over the wreckage of Mycenaean civilization, and chaos spread through the Adriatic and far into Anatolia.

Eborix knew of spies who had also served as emissaries to the kings of the Philistine city-states. Tyre's amicability toward the Jews did not exactly endear it to the Philistines; and of course the riches of Phoenicia provided ever more temptation. Schemes developed fitfully, slowly, over a period of generations. Eborix himself was not sure how far along arrangements might be, to bring south an army of Celtic adventurers.

To Hiram he admitted frankly that he would have considered joining such a troop, his hand-fast men at his back. However, a feud between clans had ended in the overthrow and slaying of his father. Eborix had barely escaped alive. Wanting revenge as much as he wanted to mend his fortunes, he made the trek hither. A Tyre grateful for his warning might, if nothing else, give him the means to hire soldiers of his own and bring them home to reinstate him.

"You offer me no proof," said the king slowly, "naught but your naked word."

Everard nodded. "My lord sees clearly as Ra, the Falcon of Egypt. Did I not agree beforehand that I could be mistaken, that there may in truth be no real menace, just the scutterings and chat-terings of vainglorious apes? Nonetheless I do urge that my lord have

the matter looked into as closely as may be, for safety's sake. In that effort, 'tis I his servant that could be of help. Not only do I know my folk and their ways, but in wandering across their continent I met many different tribes, aye, and civilized nations too. I might therefore be a better hound than most, upon this particular scent."

Hiram tugged his beard. "Perhaps. Such a conspiracy must needs involve more than a few wild mountaineers and Philistine magnates. Men of several origins – But foreigners come and go like vagrant breezes. Who shall track the wind?"

Everard's heart slugged. Here was the moment toward which he had striven. "Your highness, I've thought much upon this, and the gods have sent me some ideas. I'm thinking we should first search not for common merchants, skippers, and seamen, but for strangers from lands which Tyrians have seldom or never visited, strangers who ask questions that often do not pertain to trade, or even to ordinary inquisitiveness. They would be inserting themselves into high places as well as low, seeking to learn everything. Does my lord recall any such?"

Hiram shook his head. "No, none unaccountable like that. And I would have heard about them and wanted to see them. My followers are aware of how I always hunger for new knowledge, fresh news." He chuckled. "As witness the fact I was willing to receive you."

Everard swallowed his disappointment. It tasted sour. *But I shouldn't have imagined the enemy would be openly active now, this close to the time when he's going to strike. He'd know the Patrol would be busy. No, he'd do his preliminary research, acquire his detailed information about Phoenicia and its vulnerabilities, earlier. Maybe quite a bit earlier.*

"My lord," he said, "if there is indeed a menace, it must have been a long while in the egg. Dare I ask your highness to think back? The king in his omniscience might recollect something from years ago."

Hiram lowered his gaze and concentrated. Sweat prickled Everard's skin. He forced himself to sit still. Finally, softly, he heard:

"Well, late in the reign of my illustrious father King Abibaa... yes... he had certain guests for a spell, about whom rumors flew. They were not of any land familiar to us... Seekers of wisdom from the Far East, they said... What was the name of their country? Shee-an? No, belike not." Hiram sighed. "Memory fades. Especially memory of mere words."

"My lord did not meet them himself, then?" "No, I was gone, spending some years in travel through our hinterlands and abroad, so as to prepare myself for the throne. And now Abibaa sleeps with his fathers. As, I fear, do well-nigh all who may have encountered those men."

Everard suppressed a sigh of his own and struggled to ease off. The lead was fog-tenuous, if it was a lead. But what could he expect? The enemy wouldn't have left engraved announcements.

Nobody here kept journals or saved letters, nor did anybody number years in the manner of later civilizations. Everard would not be able to learn precisely when Abibaa entertained his curious visitors. The Patrolman would be lucky to find one or two individuals who remembered them well. Hiram had reigned for two decades now, and life expectancy was not great.

I've got to try, though. It's the single lonely clue I've turned up. Or else it's a false scent, of course. Those could have been legitimate contemporaries – explorers from Chou Dynasty China, maybe.

He cleared his throat. "Does my lord grant permission for his servant to ask questions, in the royal household as well as in the city? I'm thinking that humble folk might speak a little more free and open before a plain fellow like me, than they would in the awe of his highness' presence."

Hiram smiled. "For a plain fellow, Eborix, you've a smooth tongue. But – yes, you may try. Abide for a while as my guest, with your young footman whom I noticed outside. We'll talk further. If nothing else, you are a fanciful talker."

A page conducted Everard and Pum through corridors to their quarters, as evening closed in. "The noble visitor will dine with the guards officers and men of like rank, unless he is bidden to the royal board," he explained obsequiously. "His attendant is welcome at the freeborn servants' mess. If aught be desired, let him only inform a butler or steward; his highness' generosity knows no bounds."

Everard resolved not to try that generosity too far. The household seemed more status-conscious than Tyrians generally were – no doubt the presence of many out-and-out slaves reinforced that – but Hiram was probably not above thrift.

Yet when the Patrolman reached his room, he found that the king was a thoughtful host. Hiram must have issued orders after their discussion, while the newcomers were shown the sights of the palace and given a light supper.

The chamber was large, well-furnished, lit by several lamps. A window, which could be shuttered, overlooked a court where flowers and pomegranates grew. Doors were solid wood on bronze hinges. The interior one stood open on an adjacent cubicle, sufficient for a straw tick and a pot, where Pum would sleep.

Everard halted. Lamplight fell soft over carpet, draperies, chairs, a table, a cedar chest, a double, bed. Shadows stirred as a young woman rose and genuflected.

"Does my lord wish more?" asked the page. "If not, let this lowly person bid him a good night." He bowed and departed.

Breath hissed between Pum's teeth. "Master, she's beautiful!"

Everard's cheeks smoldered. "Uh-huh. Goodnight to you, too, lad."

"Noble sir—"

"Goodnight, I said."

Pum rolled eyes toward the ceiling, shrugged elaborately, and trudged to his kennel. The door slammed behind him.

"Stand straight, my dear," Everard mumbled. "Don't be afraid. I'd never hurt you."

The woman obeyed, arms crossed over bosom and head meekly lowered. She was tall for this milieu, slender, stacked. The wispy gown decked a fair skin. The hair knotted loosely at her nape was ruddy-brown. Feeling almost diffident, he laid a finger beneath her chin. She lifted a face that was blue-eyed, pert-nosed, full-lipped, piquantly freckled.

"Who are you?" he wondered. His throat felt tight.

"Your handmaiden sent to attend you, lord." Her words bore a lilting foreign accent. "What is your pleasure?"

"I... I asked who you are. Your name, your people."

"They call me Pleshti, master."

"Because they can't pronounce your real name. I'll be bound, or won't bother to. What is it?"

She swallowed. Tears glistened. "I was Bron-wen once," she whispered.

Everard nodded to himself. Glancing around, he saw a jug of wine as well as water on the table, plus a beaker and a bowl of fruit. He took her hand. It lay small and tender in his. "Come," he said, "let's sit down, take refreshment, get acquainted. We'll share yon glass."

She shuddered and half shrank away. Sadness touched him afresh, though he achieved a smile. "Don't be afraid, Bronwen. I'm not leading up to anything that could hurt you. I simply wish us to be friends. You see, macushla, I think you're of my folk."

She fought off the weeping, squared her shoulders, and gulped, "My lord is, is g-godlike in his kindness. How shall I ever thank him?"

Everard led her to the table, got her seated, and poured. Before long her story came forth.

It was all too ordinary. Though her concepts of geography were vague, he deduced that she belonged to a Celtic tribe which had migrated south from the Danubian *Urheimat*. Hers was a village at the head of the Adriatic Sea, and she had been the daughter of a well-to-do yeoman, as Bronze Age primitives reckoned prosperity.

She hadn't counted birthdays before nor years after, but he figured she was about thirteen when the Tyrians came, about a decade ago. They were in a single ship, boldly questing north in search of new trade possibilities. They camped on the shore and dickered in sign language. Evidently they decided there was nothing worth coming back for, because when they left, they kidnapped several children who had wandered near to look at the marvelous foreigners. Bronwen was among them.

The Tyrians hadn't raped their female captives, nor mistreated any of either sex more than they found necessary. A virgin in sound condition was worth too much on the slave market. Everard admitted that he couldn't even call the sailors evil. They had just done what came naturally in the ancient world, and most subsequent history for that matter.

Bronwen lucked out, everything considered. She was acquired for the palace: not the royal harem, though the king had had her unofficially a few times, but for him to lend to such house guests as he would favor. Men were seldom deliberately cruel to her. The pain that never ended lay in being captive among aliens.

That, and her children. She had borne four over the years, of whom two died in infancy – a good record, especially when they hadn't cost her much in the way of teeth or health. The surviving pair were still small. The girl would probably become a concubine too when she reached puberty, unless she was passed on to a brothel. (Slave women did not get deflowered as a religious rite. Who cared about their fortunes in later life?) The boy would probably be castrated at that age, since his upbringing at court would have made him a potential harem attendant.

As for Bronwen, when she lost her looks she'd be assigned to labor. Not having been trained in skills such as weaving, she'd likeliest end in the scullery or at a quern.

Everard had to coax all this out of her, piece by harsh little piece. She didn't lament nor beg. Her fate was what it was. He remembered a line Thucydides would pen centuries hence, about the disastrous Athenian military expedition whose last members ended their days in the mines of Sicily. "Having done what men could, they suffered what men must."

And women. Especially women. He wondered if, way down inside, he had Bronwen's courage. He doubted it.

About himself he was short-spoken. After avoiding one Celt and then getting another thrust upon him, so to speak, he felt he'd better play very close to his vest.

Nonetheless, at last she looked at him, flushed, aglow, and said in a slightly wine-slurred voice, "Oh, Eborix -" He couldn't follow the rest.

"I fear my tongue is too unlike yours, my dear," he said.

She returned to Punic: "Eborix, how generous of Asherat that she brought me to you for, for whatever time she grants. How wonderful. Now come, sweet lord, let your handmaiden give you back some of the joy -" She rose, came around the table, cast her warmth and suppleness into his lap.

He had already consulted his conscience. If he didn't do what everybody expected, word was bound to reach the king. Hiram might well take umbrage, or wonder what was wrong with his guest. Bronwen herself would be hurt, bewildered; she might get in trouble. Besides, she was lovely, and he'd been much deprived. Poor Sarai scarcely counted.

He gathered Bronwen to him.

Intelligent, observant, sensitive, she had well learned how to please a man. He hadn't figured on more than once, but she changed his mind about that, more than once. Her own ardor didn't seem faked, either. Well, he was probably the first man who had ever tried to please *her*. After the second round, she whispered brokenly into his ear: "I've... borne no further... these past three years. How I am praying the goddess will open my womb for you, Eborix, Eborix -"

He didn't remind her that any such child would be a slave also.

Yet before they slept she murmured something else, which he thought she might well not have let slip if she were fully awake: "We have been one flesh tonight, my lord, and may we be so often again. But know that I know we are not of one people."

"What?" An iciness stabbed him. He sat bolt upright.

She snuggled close. "Lie down, my heart. Never, never will I betray you. But... I remember enough things from home, small things, and I do not believe Geyils in the mountains can be that different from Geyils by the sea... Hush, hush, your secret is safe. Why should Bronwen Brannoch's daughter betray the only person here who ever cared about her? Sleep, my nameless darling, sleep well in my arms."

At dawn a servant roused Everard – apologizing, flattering all the while – and took him away to a hot bath. Soap was for the future, but a sponge and a pumice stone scrubbed his skin, and afterward the servant gave him a rubdown with fragrant oil and a deft shave. He met the guards officers, then, for a meager breakfast and lively conversation.

"I'm going off duty today," proposed a man among them. "What say we ferry over to Usu, friend Eborix? I'll show you around. Later, if daylight remains, we can go for a ride outside the walls." Everard wasn't sure whether that would be on donkeyback or, more swiftly if less comfortably, in a war chariot. To date, horses were almost always draught animals, too valuable for any purposes but combat and pomp.

"Many thanks," the Patrolman answered. "First, though, I've need to see a woman called Sarai. She works in the steward's department."

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