# Forgotten Tongue

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“Hands up, scum,” grated a voice. “You’re going for a jump.”

Pepper raised his hands and coughed drily. “Forget it,” he said. “You can’t get away with this.” He felt a knee jolt the small of his back in answer.

“Walk,” said the voice.

The street was narrow, and the buildings flanking it had no lights. This was the Industrial, one of the three great divisions of New York Sector. Plants were resting their machinery for two hours out of the twenty-four, Pepper realized. As he walked along, as slowly as he dared, the clopping of metal soles against the pavement sounding behind him, he cursed himself for an imbecile, coming alone and unarmed through this bleak part of town.

“How long,” he asked tentatively, “have you been gunning for me?” He wanted to find out how many of them there were.

“Keep moving,” said the voice. “You don’t get news out of us, scum.”

He kept moving. They were headed in the direction of the Industrial Airport. That meant, probably, that he’d be crated like a gross of drills and accidentally dropped from a mile or so in the air. There would be protests; threats, recriminations. Then the customary jeering retort from the Optimus Press: “If a Lower wishes to disguise himself for purposes of his own and is damaged in the process, we fail to see how this is any reflection on the present able administration. Honi soit—”

Not daring to give way to panic, knowing that it would mean an immediate and ugly death, Pepper walked on and tried to keep his knees from buckling.

“Look,” he began again. “We can make a deal—”

“Shut up!” snarled someone. “And stay shut. I’d like to—”

“Let him talk, Captain,” said another voice. Pepper stiffened as he heard it, for the dialect was unmistakably the throaty whine affected by the Optimus as the “pure” speech.

“Never mind,” Pepper said. The sound of that voice was his death-warrant, he knew. Loyalists had been known to take bribes and deliver, their masters never. “How do you like this part of town, Cedric?” he demanded. “How does it strike you?”

“Why Cedric?” the voice of the Optimus asked one of the Loyalists, ignoring Pepper.

“Supposed to be funny, Mr. Fersen,” said the Loyalist. Then Pepper heard a blow and cry. “I’m sorry, Mr.—sir—please—”

“Let that be a lesson,” said Pepper. “Never tell the name. But don’t worry, Mr. Fersen—I never heard of you.”

“I’m just in,” said the voice of the Optimus with a note of strain and disgust. “I’m just in from Scandinavia.”

“In that case,” said Pepper, “you’d do well to get back there. Because here comes a gang of Lowers that mean you ill.”

Approaching them were people he knew. There was Marty who worked in a glass plant, Pedro who managed an autokafe; hard faces gleaming under the wide-spread street lights.

Bats and clubs appeared in their hands. “Hello!” yelled Marty. The distance was about twice the width of the street.

“Dash it!” whined the voice of the Optimus. “Dash the luck! You’ll have to fire into the thick of them.”

The next thing Pepper knew was that he was dashing for the knot of Lowers down the street, zig-zagging wildly as projectiles buzzed about his ears. Even then he did not forget the rules he had been taught in Training School; he ran with a calculated, staggering gait that would—at least in theory—unsettle any marksman.

His friends met him halfway; he was taken into their midst, lost in the little group of a dozen or so.

“They won’t attack,” he gasped. “It’s too near the shift. They’d be mobbed—torn to pieces.”

“Easy,” soothed Marty. “Take it easy. They’re breaking—going back. Jupiter—if I only had a camera to get those faces! Who are they?”

Pepper grinned feebly. “I never got a look at one of them,” he said. “There was an Optimus with them by the name of Fersen. Do you know him?”

“Yes,” said Marty. “I know him. He’s a scientist. He’s so thoroughly damned brilliant that even the Lowers’ technical journals reprint his articles. He’s a psychologist—experimental.”

“Let it go,” said Pepper. He shook his head. “What happened? How come you came to meet me—armed?”

“Something new of mine,” said Marty. “We were trying it out. You can call it a psychological eavesdropper. We call it a modified Geiger-Müller counter reset for cerebrum-surface potential composition. It’s thoroughly impractical, but we were waiting for you and I turned it on you for a demonstration. Before it blew out the thing showed that something had upset you terribly.

“Pedro thought it must have been a babe walking down the street. That’s the Latin mind. When you didn’t come we put two and two together and found a slight case of Optimus.”

“Yes,” said Pepper absently. “It’s usually that.”

It usually was. The Fusionists were nominally in power throughout the whole hemisphere, but the hand of the Optimus tended to grow clumsier and clumsier, showing through the thin veil of the Continental Congress. The Fusionists had been elected generally on the most immense wave of enthusiasm ever to sweep a new party into office. Their appeal had been almost irresistible—to combine the best features of both classes and work for harmony.

The Old Malarky, it soon developed. The Fusion officials—“Fightin’ Bob” Howard, Oscar Stoop, “Iron Man” Morris—had been bought and paid for. Things were growing bad, worse than they had ever been before. The Lowers were arming. Every issue of their newspapers contained inflammatory statements, direct slurs against the government and the Optimus Party.

Money was being spent like water by the Optimus; whole factories had been turned “Loyalist” by promises of tripled wages and security. The Loyal Lowers League was growing slowly, very slowly. There was a basically prejudiced attitude among the factory workers against turncoats of that stamp. This, of course, only widened the gulf between authentic Lowers and those who had joined the League. Things were in a very bad way indeed. Everybody on the continent was waiting for the next election. There was much wild talk about revolution and gutters running with blood.

Pepper was examining the psychological eavesdropper that had saved him some unpleasantness a while ago, tinkering with it and attempting to set it right.

“Well?” grunted Marty.

“Can’t be done,” said Pepper. “Let’s turn to more constructive lines of thought. What did you say Fersen did?”

“Psychology, like us. He experiments. Last thing he did was a study of engramatic impulses.”

“Do tell. What are they?”

“It’s really the old ‘group unconscious’ idea in false face. Engrams are memories of previous lives stamped into the chromosomes. They carry compulsive force sometimes. If you hear a low-pitched, growling musical note, your tendency is to shudder and draw away. If you’re drunk you’ll try to run like hell, because that note, if rightly delivered, means feline carnivores in misty Tertiary jungle.”

“I see,” mumbled Pepper. “When did Fersen publish this, and from where?”

“Oslo, eight years ago,” said Marty.

“And what I’ve done then and up to now would sorely tax your limited understanding,” said a full-throated whine.

Pepper slowly swiveled his chair around. The face that he saw was thin and keen, the hair an ashy blonde. But more to the point than hair and face was the blued steel tube that was in the speaker’s hands.

“If I read your gaze aright,” said the aristocrat, “you’re wondering about this thing. Wonder no more, for it is a new development on the old-style chiller. It will congeal the blood of a turtle. What’s more it is absolutely noiseless. I could kill you two where you sit and walk out and away to my very comfortable flat in Residential. My name is Fersen and I got here by bribing your janitor. Does that answer all your questions?”

“Doesn’t even begin to,” grunted Pepper sourly. “What now?”

“Now you are coming with me.” He herded them from the room at the point of his weapon. As they came out into the open he hid it under his cloak.

“Stroll casually,” said Fersen. “Be gay and lightsome. You’re going to Residential to watch the beautiful women walk down the beautiful streets. Sorry I bungled that attempt last night, Pepper. It must have been irritating to both of us. You weren’t going to be killed at all.”

Nervously, Fersen went on talking. “You’ll be interested to know that I was summoned to this continent by a grand conclave of Optimus. They propose to settle the unhappy question of the coming election once and for all time.”

“By committing mass suicide?” suggested Marty.

Fersen was pleased to laugh briefly, like the snapping of a lock in a death-cell’s door. “By no means,” he chuckled. “By that gentlest of all arts, psychology. Whereat, enter Fersen. Get in, please.” He gestured at the open door of a car that had pulled up beside them, silent and grim.

“C’est bon, children,” smiled Fersen. “Romp if you wish.” The two Lowers were staring in awe at the incredible battery of instruments racked on the walls, piled on the floors, hanging from the ceiling—everywhere.

“For a lab, not bad,” finally admitted Pepper. “All psychological?” He stared hard at some electronic equipment—ikonoscopes, tubes and coils—that was sparking quietly away in a corner.

“All,” said Fersen proudly. “Now be seated, please.”

The two were shoved into chairs by bruisers, then buckled in securely with plastic straps. The bruisers saluted Fersen and left.

“Now,” said the psychologist, carefully locking the door, “you poor scum think you know things about the human brain?” He paced to their chairs and stared contemptuously into their faces.

“You think,” he spat, “that the incredible, contorted caverns of the mind can be unraveled by base-born apes of your caliber? Forget it. I’m going to show you things about behavior you won’t believe even after you see them. I’m going to make you say that you love the Optimus Party and that you’ll fight to the death anybody who doesn’t.

“I’m going to leave you in such a state of cringing, gibbering bestality that you’re going to betray your friends and cut your children’s throats and know that you’re doing a noble thing.”

“Hypnotism won’t work that far,” said Pepper matter-of-factly.

“I don’t use hypnotism,” grunted Fersen. “I’m turning to the classics. What good would an isolated case or so be? We’ve got to have a mass movement, a movement that will spread like wildfire. Look at that!” He held up a book.

“Odes of Anacreon,” read Pepper from the title-page. “So what?”

Fersen grinned slowly. “I know,” he said irrelevantly, “an arrangement of lines that would make you beat your brains out in despair. I know a sound that will make you so angry that you’ll tear your own flesh if there’s nobody else around. I know a certain juxtaposition of colored masses that would turn you into a satyr—drive you mad with insatiable lust.”

“I see,” said Marty slowly. “I see that you weren’t quite finished with the engram in Oslo.”

“I had barely begun. I am now able—once I’ve sized up the psyche of the subject—to deliver complex commands in a compulsion-language that cannot possibly be disobeyed.”

“Go on,” snapped Pepper, catching Fersen’s eye. He had seen something at the edge of his vision that made his heart pound. He relaxed deliberately. “Go on!”

“This book,” said Fersen, smiling again, “will be released to the general public very shortly—as soon as I’ve completed copy for a definitive edition. Picture this scene:

“A bookseller receives a shipment of the Odes. ‘How now!’ says bookseller. He is amazed. He is distressed. He did not order the Odes. He does not want to pay for them; they look like a slow-moving item. He picks up a copy from the crate so as to get a better idea of what they are. ‘What’s this?’ demands bookseller excitedly. For it seems to be a foreign tongue which he does not understand. Printed plainly on every page in large type is a brief message. Always the same, always legible.

“Bookseller than scans one page, very briefly. Some strange compulsion holds him; he reads further and the mysterious language is as plain as day. The message says: ‘You are loyal to the Optimus Party. You will always be loyal to the Optimus Party. You will show the Odes to everybody you see. Everybody must read the Odes. You will always be loyal to the Optimus Party.’

“‘How now!’ says bookseller again. ‘Uncanny!’ And he sees a woman on the street. He seizes her. She screams. He twists her arm and shoves her into his shop. She sits quietly while the Odes are shoved under her nose. She reads, lest this madman damage her. They then join forces and distribute copies of the book far and wide. It’s like a prairie fire—people read and make others read.

“Pepper, there are twelve thousand booksellers in New York Sector. As soon as I’ve probed somewhat into your minds to determine whether a vowel or a diphthong would serve better to break down the resistance of a determined spirit opposed to the Optimus, I shall give orders to the printers, who’ve been immunized by a temporary hypnosis.

“Pepper, two hours after I have sent in copy the crates of books will arrive simultaneously in every one of the twelve thousand shops. Now relax. You’re going to be investigated.”

He turned to select instruments from a cluttered board. With a faint intake of breath Marty slid from the chair in which he had been strapped, from which he had been working himself free with desperate speed while Pepper held the psychologist’s gaze.

Marty launched himself at Fersen’s back, snapping an arm about his throat. The psychologist snatched a scalpel from the board before the two reeled away into the center of the cluttered room. With his other hand Marty grabbed frantically at the wrist that held the blade, closed with crushing force about it. The knife dropped, tinkling, to the floor. The two of them fell; Marty, shoving a knee into the small of Fersen’s back, wrenched at his arm.

The psychologist collapsed shuddering in a heap. Marty warily broke away from him and picked up a casting, then clubbed Fersen carefully on the side of the head.

As he unbuckled Pepper he snapped: “Thank God that door’s locked. Thank God he didn’t make enough noise to get the guard. Thank God for so damned many things, Pepper. This is the chance of a lifetime!”

“I don’t understand,” said Pepper.

“You will,” smiled Marty airily. “You probably will. Now where in the bloody dithering hell does he keep his notes—?”

Jay Morningside, bookseller, wearily said: “I’m sorry, ma’am; I’m in trade. I can’t afford to have any political opinions.”

“Please,” said the girl appealingly. “This election petition will help turn out the Fusionist gang and put in Lowers who know how people like us feel and think—”