# The Haute Bourgeoisie

Robert F. Young

“It seems to me, Starfinder,” Ciely Bleu declares one evening, her blue-flower eyes fixed on the timescreen in the whaleship’s lounge, “that a disproportionate amount of Earth’s history consists of people crossing things. Moses crossing the Red Sea, Alexander the Great crossing the Hellespont, Hannibal crossing the Alps, Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon, Columbus crossing the Atlantic, Balboa crossing the Isthmus of Panama, and now Samuel Johnson crossing Inner Temple Lane.”

“You’re a fine one to be complaining,” Starfinder says. “What other twelve-year-old girl from Renascence—or from any of the other terrestrialized planets, for that matter—has ever before been treated to a spacewhale’s eyeview of history?”

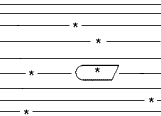
“I wasn’t complaining. I was merely giving verbal vent to a perspicacious observation.” Then, “Look!—Dr. Johnson almost fell!”

“He’ll be all right,” Starfinder reassures her. “He’s only got a few more steps to go to reach his doorway.”

“He’s counting them, I’ll bet.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it.”

Judging from the stick figure that takes shape in both their minds, the whale, which communicates tele-hieroglyphically, is somewhat contemptuous of Dr. Johnson’s alcoholic propensities:



“I don’t think that was a very nice thing to say, Charles,” Ciely says. “Charles” is her name for the whale. “After all, Dr. Johnsondid compile the first English lexicon, and without so much as a smidgen of help from that snooty Lord Chesterfield either! He earned the right to at least a little leeway in his social activities, I think!”

“Well, anyway, he made it home,” says Starfinder, as the door of No. 1 Inner Temple Lane closes behind the subject of their conversation. “In a few more minutes he’ll be safe in bed. And speaking of bed—”

Sadness shadows Ciely’s thin face, darkening her blue-flower eyes. “Couldn’t we tune in one more place-time first, Starfinder? Thisis my final night on board the whale, you know.”

“You promised Inner Temple Lane would be the last.”

“I know. But people are prone to promise almost anything when they’re on the verge of desperation. Anyway, what difference does it make what time I get up tomorrow morning? You said yourself you’re going to have Charles resurface off Renascence just three weeks after I stole—just three weeks after I disappeared. So no matter how long he remains in the Sea of Time, future time won’t pass for us.”

“Maybe so, but in future time you’ve been missing for three whole weeks, and your parents must be worried sick.”

“But they won’t be worried any sicker no matter how long we stay in the past. Assuming theyare worried sick.”

Starfinder sighs. “One more then. What would you like to see?”

“Not what. Whom. I want to see Elizabeth Barrett when she was still living at No. 50 Wimpole St. Before she married Robert. When she was composing herSonnets .”

“And when was that?”

“A.D. 1845,” Ciely answers. “In the spring, I should think.”

Starfinder sighs again. “It’ll be a tough one to tune in, but I’ll try.”

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Starfinder is a strange man. Who else but a strange man would choose, in the very prime of life, to live out the rest of his years in the belly of a converted spacewhale? A spacewhale that, despite its ability to plumb the depths of the Sea of Time, to see and hear for millions of miles while simultaneously seeing and hearing inside itself, to exceed by far the velocities of ordinary whaleships (i.e., dead ones); despite its compartmented, superbly appointed, phosphorescence-illuminated interior, its self replenishing life-support system, its hot and cold running water, its well-stocked larder, its luxurious lounge, its commercially-viable holds; despite its high intelligence, its fine sensibilities, its sense of humor—that, despite all these abilities, these assets, these qualities, is still, basically, nothing more than a sentient, self-propelled asteroid?

He leaves the lounge, walks down the fore-to-aft middeck corridor to the forward companionway and ascends it to the bridge. When he tapped the audio-visual “petal” of the whale’s huge, rose-like ganglion and linked it electromagnetically to the lounge-viewscreen, he also attuned the on-board computer (installed as a matter of course by the Altair IV orbital shipyard converters) to the ganglion’s “stem,” or thought-center. The whale can resurface to any spatio-temporal coign of vantage it chooses, provided the coordinates don’t coincide with its dive-point, but were Starfinder to “say,”No. 50 Wimpole St. London, England, Earth; spring, A.D. 1845 , it might not know what he is talking about, even though, during the brief span of their relationship, it has assimilated a large percentage of his lore. So, instead, he feeds the information into the computer, which translates it into coordinates more readily comprehensible to the whale, whereupon the whale re-enters the Sea of Time, resurfaces and reorients itself. The transition is almost instantaneous, and Earth, after briefly blanking out, reappears in the center of the bridge viewscreen. Only the different positions of the constellations, the moon, and Venus (the other solar planets are beyond the periphery of the screen) indicate that the whale now occupies a new coign of vantage and that over half a century has gone by.

Starfinder returns to the lounge, where Ciely Bleu is leaning forward in her viewchair, gazing at the new London that has replaced the old. Inner Temple Lane still fills the screen. It has changed, but not very much. The problem is to get from it to Wimpole St.—a problem that the whale, which, of necessity, knows no more about nineteenth-century London than Starfinder does, dumped on his lap.

Resignedly, he kneels before the timescreen and begins fiddling with the banks of dials that flank it and for whose complexity he alone—as an amateur electronics engineer—is responsible. Inner Temple Lane gives way to White Chapel—the territory-to-be of Jack the Ripper. He continues to fiddle. Buckingham Palace, Baker St. (BakerSt.?), Bunhill Row . . . Only through sheer chance does he finally find the street he is looking for, after which it is a cinch to tune in No. 50.

Ciely leans forward in her viewchair. It is late afternoon, and there are a number of carriages passing on the street. Starfinder continues to work the dials. Presently a kitchen appears (walls are no barrier to the whale’s vision). In it, a dowdy servant woman is standing over a grotesque cast-iron stove, on which the contents of a large cast-iron pot are bubbling (the whale’s olfactory range is severely limited, which, in the present instance, is probably just as well). Starfinder next tunes in a study, in which an austere old man is sitting at a desk, poring over a pile of papers; then a large living room, in which two young men are lolling. And then, suddenly, a bed-sitting room appears, in which an attractive woman in her late thirties is reclining in her armchair, her legs covered with a lap robe.

“It’s her, Starfinder!” Ciely cries. “It’s ‘Ba.’ You’ve found her!”

Starfinder returns to his viewchair and sits back down. Ciely is still leaning forward in hers. Presently, “But she’s not writing anything, Starfinder. She’s just sitting there, doing nothing. Why isn’t she composing theSonnets from the Portuguese ?”

Starfinder is tempted to point out that, were they to look in on any woman of moderate or above-moderate means, in any given age, they would probably find her sitting, doing nothing; but he refrains. For one thing, Elizabeth Barrett is an invalid; for another, it will serve no practical purpose to taint his starry-eyed ward with his own cynicism.

Elizabeth Barrett’s eyes, it soon becomes apparent, are closed. Moreover, her breast is rising and falling with telltale evenness. Lying facedown at her feet, in a puddle of afternoon sunshine, is a book that has apparently slipped from her lap.

“Do you know what?” Starfinder says. “I think she’s sleeping.”

“She isnot! Do you think for one minute she’d fall asleep over a volume of Robert’s poems?”

“But we don’t know that itis a volume of his poems.”

“Whatelse would she be reading with their marriage only a year away?”

The whale is of the same mind as Starfinder.

hb2.gif

it observes.

“Oh,you! ” Ciely says.

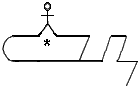
“Well whether she’s asleep or not,” says Starfinder, “I know someone who should be.”

Slowly Ciely gets to her feet. She gives him a long, reproachful look and makes as though to turn her back on him and march out of the lounge. Then, abruptly, she darts over and kisses him, whispers “Good night” into his ear, and runs aft to her cabin, which is next to his, and which she refers to as her “room.”

\* \* \*

Long after she leaves, he can feel the moist coolness of her kiss upon his cheek, but he is totally unaffected by it. He cannot afford to be affected by moist kisses bestowed by innocent young maidens overflowing with love and affection, because the problem that confronts him requires a cold objectivity of thought that cannot be attained if he is to allow himself to be sidetracked by silly sentimentality.

In a way, the roots of the problem go back to when he was a converter in the Orbital Shipyards of Altair IV; to when the whale “said,”

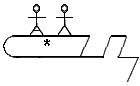


indicating that if he would repair its unique auxiliary ganglion, which the Jonah who destroyed the primary one hadn’t known existed, it would obey his every command for the rest of its life and take him where/whenever he wished to go inhb4.gif (space) andhb5.gif (time).

But the roots can be traced back farther yet. They can be traced back to the days when he himself was a Jonah and killed spacewhales, ostensibly for a living but actually out of revenge for his having been temporarily blinded by one, and scarred for life. Killed them, till one day he saw his face in one and could kill them no longer.

The complexity of problems is no new thing under the suns, but the complexity of this one is nevertheless unique. Ciely Bleu, at odds with the proletariat society she grew up in on Renascence (aAndromedae IX) and whose members she scornfully calls the “haute bourgeoisie” because of their middle-class values and because they put on “parvenu airs,” stole a star eel that was undergoing experimental conversion out of the Renascence Orbital Shipyards (where her father is employed as a converter) to keep it from being enslaved. Three weeks later (Renascence time), the eel, which she had named “Pasha” and which she loved, affixed itself to Starfinder’s whale and began absorbing its 2-omicron-vii lifeblood. Starfinder boarded the eel, conned Ciely into returning with him to the whale, where he talked her into calling the eel off. The whale, acting out of instinct, promptly rammed the eel, destroying it. Starfinder should have anticipated this, but he didn’t.

The eel, despite its gargantuan size, was Ciely’s pet, and its death overwhelmed her. The whale, contrite, substituted itself.



it “said,” indicating that she and Starfinder and itself would henceforth be three comrades in the Sea ofhb4.gif andhb5.gif . The antidote worked, and she has come to love “Charles” as much as she loved “Pasha.” It is now up to Starfinder to return her to her “haute bourgeoisie” parents.

Well, this doesn’t seem like much of a problem. There will be tears involved, of course, and sad farewells; but eventually Ciely will forget Starfinder and the whale and come to love her “haute bourgeoisie” parents, however much she may think she despises them. But wait: There are financial and legal complications to contend with. The star eel she stole was the property of Renascence’s Orbital Shipyards (OrbShipCo), and, at a conservative estimate, was worth in the neighborhood of $10,000,000,000. It is doubtful that Renascence law will allow a twelve-year-old girl to be prosecuted for grand larceny; nevertheless, someone is going to have to pay the $10,000,000,000 back.

Starfinder is as poor as a church-mouse. He doesn’t even own his own whaleship—at least not legally.

No doubt Ciely’s parents are moderately well-to-do and have money in the bank in the city of Kirth, which is the New Bedford of the star-eel industry and the headquarters of OrbShipCo. But how are they going to raise $10,000,000,000? How, for that matter, if their daughter can be prosecuted, are they going to raise enough to cover the fee of a lawyer crafty enough to keep her out of jail?

Problem? This is no problem. This is a brick wall. A four-dimensional brick wall that slams against you just as hard when you try to climb over it or to go around it or to burrow under it as it does when you try to barge right through it.

But fortunately Starfinder has in his possession a four-dimensional sledge hammer in the form of a whale.

He turns off the timescreen, retires to his cabin and has the wardrobizer outfit him in nondescript apparel that will pass uncommented upon where and when he is going. From a secret drawer of his desk he removes a pair of telekinetic dice and slips them into one of the pockets of his nondescript coat. Into another pocket he slips an ostentatious bauble that can easily be converted into legal tender. Then he leaves the cabin, makes his way forward and ascends the companionway to the bridge. There, via the computer, he programs the whale to surface five hundred miles off the shores of Kirth (well beyond the orbiting dead star-eels and the conversion docks and the space stations that constitute the orbital shipyards) at a temporal level when Kirth was a small town and the star-eel industry was still in its embryonic stage, and he post-programs the whale to dive the moment he departs in the lifeboat and to resurface one Renascence month later at a corresponding point in space. Then he girds himself and descends to the boat-bay. He has a busy “night” before him.

\* \* \*

“You look bushed, Starfinder,” Ciely says over her cereal. “Didn’t you sleep well last night?”

Starfinder fortifies himself with a second cup of coffee and dials an order of toast and scrambled synthi-eggs. In the galley viewscreen,a Andromedae hangs like a dazzling Christmas-tree ornament from the black branches of the fir of space. In the foreground, hogging most of the screen, Renascence turns imperceptibly on its axis, its dayside green-gold, and tinged with blue. The orbital shipyards, visible only on the nightside, bring to mind a moving semicircle of twinkling trinkets.

Where did those little crow’s feet at the corners of your eyes come from?” Ciely asks, when Starfinder makes no reply. “They weren’t there last night.”

“I didn’t know there were any crow’s feet at the corners of my eyes.”

“Well there are.”

Starfinder doesn’t argue. Instead, he tackles his order of toast and scrambled synthi-eggs. He is wearing his captain’s uniform. It is white, with gold piping. The left side of the coat front is hung with seven rows of multi-colored ribbons, to each of which is attached a gleaming, meaningless medal. The epaulets match, in both color and design, the décor on the fore-piece of the white hat, which rests on the table near his elbow, and bear a strong resemblance to the scrambled synthi-eggs he is eating. The white trousers have triple creases and are tucked neatly into black, synthi-leather boots that are so highly polished you can see your face in them. The uniform came with the whale.

Ciely is staring at the viewscreen. Her abbreviated khaki dress, faded from many washings, gives evidence from its tightness of the weight she has gained during her sojourn in the belly of the whale. “Are you going to come and see me after they put me in jail, Starfinder?”

“No one’s going to put you in jail, Ciely. Everything’s been taken care of.”

She doesn’t seem to hear him. “I’ll get life at least. And my mother and father will gloat. ‘Steal a ten-billion-dollar star-eel, will you?’ my father will say. ‘Well, you’re getting your just desserts.’ ”

“But, Ciely, you’re not going to jail.”

“Thehaute bourgeoisie are like that, you know. They don’t care about their children. All they care about is time-and-a-half on Saturdays and double-time on Sundays.”

“Ciely, listen—”

“My father is so hungry he works every Sunday they let him. He’s a brown-noser too. Every Christmas he gives the shift leader a case of Scotch.”

“Ciely, I don’t have any choice. Ihave to take you home.”

“I know. My debt to society must be paid.”

“It has nothing to do with your debt to society. Anyway, there’s no longer any such debt. But I still have to take you home. You belong with your parents, with young people your own age. You can’t grow up in a spacewhale with no one to keep you company but an old man of thirty-three.”

She begins to cry. The handle of her spoon protrudes forlornly from her forgotten bowl of cereal. Her glass of synthi-milk stands untouched by the synthi-sugar bowl.

Starfinder is a great hand with children in distress. He sits there woodenly in his dazzling captain’s uniform, like a bemedaled bump on a log. Oh, he is a great hand with them, all right.

It is up to the whale to save the day. With its usualsavoir-faire , it does so:

hb7.gif

it says, signifying, by the juxtaposition of itself (\*), Ciely (hb8.gif ), andhb9.gif (space-time), that they will always be comrades no matter how far they may drift apart.

“I know, Charles,” Ciely whispers. I know we will.” She dries her eyes with her napkin and stands up. “I’m ready, Starfinder.” And then,I love you, Charles. Goodbye.

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The lifeboat lands in a big back yard beside an in-ground swimming pool. It is night, and there is the scent of new-mown grass.

“Where are we, Starfinder? Whose house is that?”

“Mine,” Starfinder answers.

She stares at it. It is three-storied, cupolaed, multiwindowed. Behind it is a big double garage. A driveway winds around the house and down a grassy slope and joins hands with a highway. There are no other houses for miles around—only fields and trees. In the distance, the lights of a large city can be seen.

Starfinder opens the garage door, pushes the lifeboat inside, next to a big, black limousine. Ciely helps him. “I suppose you’re going to tell me that’s your car, too.”

“One of them. I loaned the other one to my lawyer.”

“You’re putting me on, Starfinder. How can you possibly own a house in the country and two limousines when you just this minute set foot on Renascence for the first time?”

“What makes you so sure it’s the first time?”

Ciely gasps. “You pastbacked!”

Starfinder nods. “And not just once, either. I tried to tell you at breakfast, but you wouldn’t listen. Come on, let’s go inside.”

The downstairs lights wink on as they approach the house. A tall, spare man, clad in pajamas, bathrobe, and slippers, meets them at the back door, and they step into a large, brightly illumined kitchen. “This is Arthur, my carkeeper,” Starfinder says. “Arthur, this is my niece, Ciely Bleu.”

Arthur nods. He yawns. “I heard the grodge door open and figured it was prob’ly you.” He yawns again. “I’m goin’ back t’bed.”

“Since when have I been your niece?” Ciely asks, after Arthur leaves the room.

“Since two weeks ago, when I adopted your family.”

“Starfinder, you take the cake.”

“Speaking of cake, I had Arthur order one for the occasion.” He glances at the digital kitchen clock, which registers 4:57A.M. “But I forgot we’d be arriving so early.”

“What does our arriving here early have to do with it?”

Starfinder doesn’t argue. He finds the cake in one of the inbuilt cupboards and sets it on the kitchen table. He takes a container of milk out of the refrigerator and gets together a plate, a glass, and a knife and fork. He and Ciely sit down across from each at the table. The cake is a chocolate one with white icing. Ciely cuts a big piece and puts it on her plate. “Aren’t you going to have any, Starfinder?”

“No.”

He gazes thoughtfully through the big picture window that the table adjoins. Dawn has daubed the eastern horizon with pastel pink. Against the pinkness the city of Kirth shows as a serrated silhouette. He stares at it for some time, then he returns his gaze to Ciely, who is starting in on her second piece of cake.

“First of all, Ciely, from here on in you must call me ‘Uncle John.’ As you probably know, on Renascence a man of sufficient means and with no family of his own can adopt a family, if it has no objections, and assume an avuncular status. Two weeks ago, via my lawyer, I adopted yours. Subsequently, my lawyer informed your mother and father that I owned the eel you’d stolen and that in pursuing you in my whaleship I accidentally rammed the eel and destroyed it, imperiling your life in the process. I had to put in the last part, because my imperiling your life makes my adoption of your family seem like an act of contrition, and therefore believable. By the same token, it’s understandable why I’m not bringing charges against you for the theft, even though the OrbShipCo insurance underwriters probably won’t pay off.

“My lawyer also informed your mother and father that you’re safe and sound and that I’m bringing you home. Ostensibly, I made all these arrangements via radio while still in space, traveling at minus-Cvelocities; actually, of course, I made them during my most recent pastback.”

Ciely is staring at him. “Youowned Pasha?”

Starfinder nods. “But I didn’t know it, of course, before last night.”

“But how could you possibly have managed to buy a star eel worth billions of dollars?”

“I started out with a pair of telekinetic dice, way back when. I invested my winnings in OrbShipCo stock and arranged for the dividends to be paid into a trust fund for my ‘son.’ I was able to do this because there’s no ‘in-being’ law in the commonwealth of Kirth. I then returned twenty-some years lateras my ‘son,’ invested the dividend earnings in more OrbShipCo stock and in various other corporations related to the star-eel industry, and set up a second trust fund for a second ‘son,’ and so on. Originally, to explain my periodic absences—disappearances, in the eyes of my ‘contemporaries’—I passed myself off as a space sailor. Lately, I’ve assumed the role of a whaleship captain. My name, incidentally, is no longer just ‘John Starfinder.’ It’s ‘John Starfinder VI.’ This house has been in the ‘Starfinder family’ for ‘generations.’ Arthur is the most recent of a long line of caretakers. I hired him when I hired Ralph.”

“Ralph?”

“He’s my chauffeur. It would look funny, don’t you think, to own two limousines and not have a chauffeur?”

“Yes, I guess it would,” Ciely says weakly. She takes a deep breath. “Starfinder—”

“ ‘Uncle John,’ ” he corrects her.

“Uncle John, you did all those things, you went to such fantastic lengths, just to keep me from going tojail ?”

“I don’t think you’d have gone to jail, Ciely.”

“But, just the same, you did them because you thought I might.”

“Among other things.”

“But if you could do all that, Starfinder—”

“ ‘Uncle John.’ ”

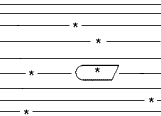
“But if you could do all that, Uncle John, why couldn’t you have fixed things so that Ididn’t steal Pasha? So that he’d still be alive?”

Starfinder shakes his head sadly. “I couldn’t, Ciely. You can add to the past, but you can’t subtract from it. The death of anything or anyone can never be deleted.”

He looks through the window at the nascent day. The pinkness along the eastern horizon has paled and spread high into the sky. A band of saffron-yellow light has come into being just beneath it. The serrated silhouette of Kirth is more distinct now, and somehow sinister.

He contacts the whale, which is in synchronous orbit.Is all well, whale?

The answer comes back at once:



Yes, all is well.

“Come on, Ciely, I’ll show you the rest of the house. Then, as soon as you’ve had a chance to digest your ‘breakfast,’ we’ll take a morning dip in the pool. Afterward, you can put on one of the new outfits I bought you and pack the rest. When Ralph shows up, I’ll have him bring the Car around to the front, and we’ll get an early start.”

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The big, black limousine noses through suburban traffic, makes a right turn, then a left. Then another right. To a large extent, Renascence’s society is an atavism—a reversion to twentieth-century North America’s. Such atavisms are fairly common among terrestrialized societies and are generally the result of a similarity of ages and beginnings. It is true that on Renascence there were no Indians to contend with, but there were indigenes of like nature that had to be—and of course were—subdued.

Ralph makes another right turn. “Are you sure you gave him the right address, Ciely?” Starfinder asks. “We seem to be traveling in a circle.”

Ciely is wearing an azure dress, a little white tam with a blue pom-pom, and white platform sandals. On her lap rests a small, white handbag. “I’m positive, Uncle John.” Then, peering over Ralph’s shoulder, “There it is—just up ahead. That sort of squarish house.”

The adjective is of next to no help, for all the houses on the block are sort of squarish. But Ralph has no trouble finding the right driveway and pulls into it and parks behind a cinnamon-colored runabout with a red roof. If any question exists in Starfinder’s mind that it is the right driveway, a cast aluminum sign placed conspicuously on the adjacent front lawn, readingTHE BLEUS , dispels it.

A little concrete walk leads up from the sidewalk, past a large flowerbed, to the front porch. Standing on the porch are a man and a woman. Both are about Starfinder’s age. The man is short and heavy-set and has a faint stubble of beard. He is wearing work clothes. The woman is svelte, and, at first glance, has eyes that are twins of Ciely’s. She is wearing an abbreviated housedress with little pots and pans printed all over it.

Ciely, who up until a moment ago had not spoken since they left Starfinder’s house in the country, gives a little gasp, jumps out of the car and runs across the lawn. The man and woman come running to meet her, and the three of them embrace.

Starfinder experiences a twinge of envy, but it is only a very faint one. After an appropriate interval, he gets out of the limousine and, carrying Ciely’s suitcase, skirts the flowerbed, which has a little white wire fence around it, and walks over to where the trio are standing and introduces himself. His first close-up impression of Mr. and Mrs. Bleu is that they have remarkably protuberant eyes. Then he remembers that he is wearing his captain’s uniform and that they have never seen such an ensemble before.

All up and down the street, people are standing on their front porches, gawking. On two or three front lawns, small children are playing; the older ones, apparently, are in school.

Mrs. Bleu kisses him on the cheek. Mr. Bleu shakes hands with him. “We sure appreciate you adopting us and bringing our dotter back safe and sound,” Mr. Bleu says solemnly.

“From the bottoms of our hearts,” says Mrs. Bleu.

“I just got off work” Mr. Bleu announces. “I’m on the night shift this week. After I get off work, I always have a couple of beers. Last night, that suckhole Skeechy Klodzow squawked about me getting so much overtime, and the shift leader told me to take tonight off, so I’m going to have more than just a couple. How about joining me, Uncle John?”

“Sure, I’ll have a beer with you,” Starfinder says.

“Mildred, open two tall, cold ones.”

“I’ll do better than that,” Mrs. Bleu laughs, heading for the house. “I’ll open three.”

Starfinder and Mr. Bleu follow, and Ciely, left alone on the lawn, hurries after them. As Starfinder is about to ascend the porch steps, someone taps him on the shoulder. Turning, he beholds Ralph, the chauffeur.

“Yes, Ralph?”

“You forgot to invite me, sir.”

“Inviteyou ? Invite you where?”

“Along.”

“What he means is,” Mr. Bleu explains, “is that according to the rules and regulations of the Personnel Carriers’ Union, whenever a carrier is going to be kept waiting more than five minutes he’s supposed to be treated as a social equal by his employer.”

“ButI can’t invite him intoyour house,” Starfinder objects.

“What d’you mean, you can’t? Where you been living all these years, Uncle John?”

Starfinder realizes he has stubbed his toe. During his pastbacks, he was so busy playing the stock market that he neglected to bone up on unions and union regulations, and on social customs in general. Now, it is too late.

Ciely comes to his rescue. “Star—Uncle John spends most of his time in space. Heis a whaleship captain, you know. He can hardly be expected to keep up to date on employee privileges and other such things.”

“No, I suppose not,” Mr. Bleu concedes.

“Will you join us for a beer, Ralph?” Starfinder asks.

“Don’t mind if I do.”

“Mildred” Mr. Bleu bellows. “Open up another tall, cold one for our friend Ralph.”

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The three men sit down in the Bleus’ living room, Mr. Bleu in a commodious armchair, Starfinder on a settee and Ralph on a ten-foot-long sofa. The room is a pleasant one, with lace curtains frilling the windows and a staircase showing in the background. In addition to the aforementioned articles of furniture, there are a long, low coffee table, two end tables, a knick-knack cabinet, two floor lamps, two table lamps and a hassock. A huge holosole occupies almost an entire wall. Above the mantle of an electric fireplace hangs a romanticized painting of Armstrong taking his first small step on the moon. For some reason, Starfinder is reminded of an antique painting he once saw entitledWashington Crossing the Delaware.

Mrs. Bleu enters from stage right, bearing four bottles of beer. She hands one to Ralph, one to Starfinder, and one to Mr. Bleu; then, retaining the fourth, she sits down on the sofa next to Ralph. All this while, Ciely has been standing off to one side. She looks first at her father, then at her mother, but neither seems to be aware of her. At length, she picks up her suitcase, which Starfinder has set down beside the settee, and disappears upstairs.

Starfinder is about to ask Mrs. Bleu for a glass when he sees that she, her husband, and Ralph are drinking directly from their bottles. Remembering hisfaux pasof a few minutes ago, he hastily follows suit. Ever since he sat down, he has been waiting for someone to remark on the 2-omicron-vii scar on his cheek. Finally Mr. Bleu does so.

MR. BLEU: That’s a nasty looking scar you’ve got there, Uncle John. Knife wound?

STARFINDER: I was burned and blinded years ago when I was a cabin boy on a whaleship that hadn’t been deganglioned properly. I guess you could call the scar a sort of souvenir.

MR. BLEU: You can’t trust those damned whaleships, I always say. You don’t see many of them around these parts. All they’re good for is freighters, anyway. You take an eelship now. They make good passenger ships and good practical freighters too, and they’re safe. I know. I work in the yards. Been there seventeen years—ever since I got my working papers and joined the union.

RALPH (to Starfinder): How come you’re captain of a whaleship instead of an eelship? Seems to me a good, loyal Renascence citizen ought to stick to products made on his own planet, not somebody else’s.

STARFINDER: Originally I’m from whaleship country. From Terraltair—Altair IV.

RALPH: But Altair IV’s halfway across the galaxy. It’d take more years than you are old for you to get here.

STARFINDER: My whaleship’s a special one. It exceeds standard ftl velocity.

RALPH: Is that so?

STARFINDER: Yes.

Ralph makes arat-a-tat-tatwith his empty bottle on the coffee table, and Mrs. Bleu jumps up, dashes into the kitchen and returns with four full ones. Ciely has come back downstairs and now begins collecting the empties.

THE WHALE:hb11.gif

STARFINDER:Never mind, whale.

MR. BLEU (after, a mild eructation): I know it’s prob’ly none of my business, Uncle John, but that eelship of yours that you accidentally rammed with your whale when you went after that feather-brained dotter of mine must have set you back quite a bundle. Just how big a bundle, if I may be so bold as to ask?

STARFINDER: Ten billion dollars, or thereabouts.

MR. BLEU (in an awed voice): Ten billion dollars!

RALPH (in an equally awed voice): Ten billion dollars!

MRS. BLEU: Was it insured?

STARFINDER: Naturally.

MRS. BLEU: Are they going to pay off?

STARFINDER: I doubt it. It’ll probably be classified as an “Act of God.”

MR. BLEU: Ten billion dollars. Down the drain!

STARFINDER (blandly): What’s ten billion dollars?

RALPH: Dirty capitalist pig! (To Mrs. Bleu): Get me another beer, Mildred. (Mrs. Bleu heads for the kitchen again.)

STARFINDER (calling after her): Skip me this time, ma’am.

RALPH: Too good to drink with us common ordinary working-class people, huh, Starfinder?

CIELY (again collecting the empties): He’s certainly too good to drink with a freeloading klutz like you. You aren’t fit to shine his shoes!

MR. BLEU: Ciely!

MRS. BLEU (returning with three full ones): Apologize to our guest this minute, you bitchy little brat!

CIELY: He’s your guest, not mine. (Runs outside.)

MRS. BLEU (sitting back down on the sofa): I don’t know what we’re going to do with her. I just don’t.

RALPH (putting his booted feet on the coffee table and leaning back to a more comfortable position): I know whatI’d do with her!

MR. BLEU: And she’d have it coming too.

MRS. BLEU: We’ve tried everything. Cutting off her allowance. Locking her in her room. Washing her mouth out with soap. But she goes right on being just as snotty as ever, and keeps right on reading those buks.

STARFINDER: Buks?

MRS. BLEU: You know—those make-up things with words.

STARFINDER: But isn’t she taught out of books at school?

MRS. BLEU: You’re talking about textbuks. I’m talking about buks. Like you get from the underground liberry.

MR. BLEU: Mildred, Ithink Ralph’s bottle is empty. While you’re at it, bring me another one. And bring Uncle John another one too.

STARFINDER: Skip me again, ma’am.

RALPH: Dirty capitalist pig!

STARFINDER: I think I’ll get some air.

\* \* \*

Outside in the bright morning sunlight, he wipes his forehead with the regulation handkerchief that came with the uniform and puts his captain’s hat back on. He takes a deep breath. In another minute he’d have—

Best to forget about it.

He looks up and down the block. Ciely is nowhere in sight.

Some distance down the street there is an eruption of verdure that indicates a park. Perhaps she is there.

He finds her sitting on a green bench that girds a spreading shade tree. She has a small branch in her hand and is tracing evanescent patterns on the grass. In her azure dress, she looks like a piece of the sky that has broken free and drifted down to the ground.

He crunches along a pebbled path and seats himself beside her. He sits there dumbly, not knowing what to say. For a long while, Ciely doesn’t say anything either. Then, not looking at him, she asks, “What did you think of my devoted parents, Starfinder?”

“Cynicism doesn’t become you, Ciely.”

“I know it doesn’t. And evasiveness doesn’t become you.”

He takes refuge behind a scholarly approach. “The major components of any given culture have a tendency to think alike and to behave alike and to glorify their own ignorance. Nevertheless, such people form the foundation of all stable societies. Without them, there wouldn’t be civilizations.”

“But you don’t understand, Starfinder. You made all that money while everybody else was trudging along the highway toward economic security, and you still don’t understand.” She is looking at him now. Earnestly, “If thehaute bourgeoisie were just the foundation, it would be all right. But they are the walls and the floor and the roof, too. Their unions are so powerful that whatever they say, goes. It’s like serfs taking over a fiefdom and remaining serfs; like muzhiks taking over a landowner’s estate and remaining muzhiks; like sailors taking over a ship and remaining sailors.”

“If they didn’t remain sailors, the ship might sink.”

“It would be better if it did.”

Starfinder sighs. “I don’t think we’re getting anywhere, Ciely.”

She nods. Sadly. “I know. Anyway, we’re talking about tomatoes when the subject is really potatoes.”

“I’ve deeded my house in the country to your parents, with the proviso that they bequeath it to you. I’ve also established a trust fund for you, with no strings attached, so that when you come of age you can do anything you want, ‘haute bourgeoisie’ or no ‘haute bourgeoisie.’ You can even write poetry if that happens to be your bent. My lawyer has instructions to sell both my limousines and to deposit the money, less his commission of course, in a bank account in your name.”

She has resumed tracing evanescent patterns in the grass. He waits for her to say something, but the silence is broken only by the shrill voice of a mother sitting on a nearby bench, reprimanding one of her children.

There is a gnawing ache at the base of his sternum that has all the earmarks of a duodenal ulcer, but which is nothing of the sort. Once again, he assumes a scholarly air. “Given a democracy, Ciely, sooner or later there’s bound to be an establishment, and inevitably its values are going to flavor the societal soup. Renascence’s establishment is comprised of workingmen; but, believe me, if it were comprised of businessmen, it wouldn’t be any better; and if it were comprised of intellectuals, it would probably be worse.” His words sound empty, even to him.

“You’re still talking about tomatoes, Uncle John.” She throws away her branch and gets to her feet. “I think it will be best if we go back now. My mother and father are probably worried about where I am. As you probably noticed, I’m uppermost in their minds, morning, noon, and night.”

They leave the park and walk up the street of squarish houses, side by side but parsecs apart. They come to a halt by the little walk that leads up to the Bleus’ front porch. Ina Andromedae’s morning light, the flowerbed in the front yard is a multicolored glory to behold. There is one exactly like it next door. In fact, there is one exactly like it in every front yard on the block.

“Are you coming in, Uncle John?”

Starfinder shakes his head. “It would serve no useful purpose. Say goodbye to your folks for me, and tell Ralph I’m ready to leave.”

“Very well.”

She stands staunchly before him, looking at last into his eyes. She is not nearly as thin now as she was when he first saw her in the boatbay of the eel, nor nearly as frail. And yet she seems to sway slightly in the morning breeze. “Goodbye, Uncle John. Tell Charles I’ll say goodbye to him later.”

“All right.”

And then, without warning, she is in his arms, sobbing. “Oh, Starfinder, I’ve been so mean, and I didn’t want to be—honest! I know you had to bring me home, I know you can’t afford to saddle yourself with a twelve-year-old misfit like me, and I don’t blame you in the least. I know all you did for me and I know I can never repay you in a thousand years, I know, I know, I know, and, oh, Starfinder, I love you, you and Charles, and please, when I’m grown up, come back for me!”

She turns, runs quickly up the walk, climbs the porch steps and disappears into the house. Starfinder’s “duodenal ulcer” takes a turn for the worse. In fact, it nearly doubles him over. Along the periphery of his vision he sees fields and trees and little hills clad with green and growing grass, and then, subtly, the fields fade away, and the hills and the trees, and the grass pales and vanishes, and all that is left is bleak and barren earth.

\* \* \*

Ralph comes out of the house, descends the porch steps, staggers a little as he crosses the lawn, and starts to climb behind the wheel of the limousine. Starfinder taps him on the shoulder. “You’re too drunk to drive, Ralph,” he says.

Ralph turns around, regards him blearily. “Nobody gets drunk on beer. Beer ish the moderage of beveration.”

“I don’t like drunks,” Starfinder says. “I especially don’t like beer drunks. They’re hypocrites, slobs, and loud-mouths.”

“Dirty capitalist pig!” Ralph shouts and makes a wild swing in Starfinder’s general direction.

Starfinder turns him around, propels him across the lawn, boots him in the buttocks and sends him sprawling facedown in the Bleus’ flowerbed. Then Starfinder returns to the limousine, gets behind the wheel, backs out of the driveway and heads for his house in the country, where he will spend the rest of the day winding up his affairs.

He feels a little better, but not much.

\* \* \*

De-orbit, whale, Starfinder commands, standing on the bridge.Dive back into the past.

The whale does not respond.

Clearly, it is dozing and has failed “hear” his command.

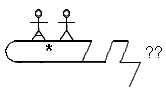
De-orbit, whale, he “says” again, doubling the mental voltage of the telepathic command.Dive back into the past!

The whale does not budge.

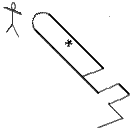
Starfinder is about to repeat the command again when a hieroglyph appears in his mind:

hb12.gif

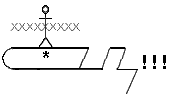
You know perfectly well where she is, whale. She’s on Renascence. Now de-orbit and stop playing games!



That’s all behind us now, whale. Now, it’s just you and me. Two comrades instead of three. De-orbit!



You can’t leave me in the lurch, whale! Remember our pact!



Damn it, whale! Do you want me to kidnap her?

Silence.

Even if I dared, she needs more than just a father. She needs a mother, too.

hb16.gif

Starfinder throws his captain’s hat on the deck. Not only is he furious, his “duodenal ulcer” is killing him.All right, whale, this is the end! It so happens that I have a house in the country down below and that I happen to own stock in half the major corporations on Renascence and. . . . And then he remembers that he deeded his house in the country to the Bleus and that he liquidated all his stock to buy the star eel and to establish a trust fund for Ciely and that he is as poor as he was before he went pastbacking—to wit, as a church mouse.

Moreover, without the whale’s cooperation, he can’t amass another fortune.

Would he if he could?

Would he, if he could, buy another house in the country and settle down for the rest of his life among the “haute bourgeoisie”?

He would sooner settle down among the Great Apes of Tau Ceti III.

Ciely has no option. At least not until she comes of age.

By then, it may well be too late. By then, she may very well be a Great Ape herself.

It is true that her parents aren’t really Great Apes. But they might just as well be.

Why did he blind himself to the glaring truth? Why did he refuse to face the inexorable fact that they do not give a damn about her, never have and never will?

Because the alternative was kidnapping her?

Hardly. He already has two crimes lying on his doorstep. There is sufficient room for one more.

Because there isn’t enough room for two people in the whale?

Hardly. There is enough room in the whale for a whole girl’s school.

Because living in the whale, in space, in time, would deprive Ciely of a proper education?

Hardly. Not with the entire past, with its wealth of music, paintings, sculptures, literature, drama, philosophy, and science at her very fingertips.

Because she would be deprived of the company of young people?

Hardly. He could set up housekeeping in a place-time of her choice, and she could attend school and become part of a peer group and remain a part for as long as she chose. All he would need would be money, and with the whale’s cooperation he could amass another fortune anytime, anywhen.

A panorama of what he and the whale can do for her appears before his eyes, dazzling him. It has been there all along, but up till now he has refused to look at it.

Why?

Why did he pretend it wasn’t there? Why did he pretend that in stranding Ciely among the “haute bourgeoisie” he was acting in her own best interests?

The answer, when it comes, punctures his ego like a pin piercing a balloon.

He acted as he did because he knew that the freedom he stole when he stole the whale was in jeopardy. Because, whenever he balanced that freedom against the love of a little girl, he always put his thumb on the scales. Free, unfettered, he was afraid to cross his Red Sea, his Hellespont, his Alps, his Rubicon, his Atlantic, and his Isthmus.

Well, he is afraid no more.

\* \* \*

He lands the lifeboat in the Bleus’ front yard, knocking down the pretentious cast-aluminum sign and demolishing the rest of the flowerbed. He pounds on the front door so hard he nearly knocks the house down, and when a startled Mrs. Bleu opens it, he rushes through the living room without difficulty. She is fast asleep on her narrow bed. Her pillow is wet with tears. He picks her up, grabs an armful of dresses out of a nearby closet and carries her in her night clothes back down the stairs and through the living room and out onto the porch and down the steps and across the ruined flowerbed to the lifeboat.

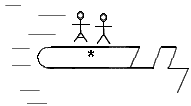
Behind him, a half-awake Mr. Bleu bellows, “Bring back my dotter, you space-bum, you!”

“Kidnapper!” screams Mrs. Bleu.

Somehow, they sound like actors in a play.

Starfinder lofts the lifeboat. Miraculously, his “duodenal ulcer” has healed. Ciely doesn’t come fully awake till they are halfway to heaven. “Starfinder, you came back!” Presently the whale shows above them, a gigantic silhouette against the stars. Starfinder docks the boat and they make their way together to the bridge. Nowwill you de-orbit, whale? Nowwill you dive?

There is a great crepitation as 2-omicron-vii energy fills the drive tissue. A faint creaking of bulkheads as the whale girds itself for the de-orbital thrust. And a rebus thrown in for good measure:



The whale breaks free. A moment later, it dives.

“I think,” says Starfinder,pere et mere , leading the way to the lounge, “that we might have a glass of orange pop before we turn in. And maybe look in on ‘Ba’ and see how she’s doing with herSonnets these fine days.”

hb18.gif

“observes” the whale.

“Oh,you !” says Ciely Bleu.