

The second day

This time I am alone when I open my eyes. No Dr. Servant watching over my bed. Diffuse daylight has replaced the artificial lighting. I feel faint, somewhat better, it is true, than at the last awakening, less weak and tired, but still empty. The emptiness is located in my centre, radiating to my arms and legs, and head. I remain lying quietly for a while and try to think. Again I picture an empty room, in which my thoughts flutter about, scattered, dishevelled like lost birds. What a strange image, and how removed from my thought processes. I am a rational person, I think in words, not in pictures.

Thinking, forbidden to me by Dr. Servant – instead he recommended sleep and pleasant dreams. I hazily recall one of my dreams. There were images from my early childhood, a fairytale, not unpleasant, but nonetheless a pointless diversion.

I notice with satisfaction that my mind is clearing, words take the place of the confused images, critical thinking steadily resumes its rightful place, and I take stock of my situation. So far I have not been disturbed. If my bodily functions are being monitored, someone will soon notice that I am no longer asleep, and pay me another visit.

I ask myself: Who am I? And I answer myself – Jason Brandt, Doctor of Law, Patent Attorney, founder of the chambers Brandt, Vincent and Nagy, well known to the whole West Coast, a successful coordinator since my sixtieth year, I recall. Thinking works. And there is more: Member of MENSA, member of various New Technology companies, the name of a corporation pops up, GEN-IM, and suddenly the memory frays, neural connections dissolve before my searching mind, disintegrate...

What brought me into this situation? I try once more to grasp my thoughts, to resolve the gaps in my memory, without success. It must have been an accident. Partial amnesia due to accident. For the moment my brain is satisfied by this explanation, a logical explanation. I am pragmatic, a cool calculating person, and my success to date has proven me right. I turn my attention, therefore, to other things, analysing my physical condition and my immediate surroundings.

My resting place is a modern, multifunctional hospital bed with storage trays at the sides. Carefully, I turn my body, and I notice the bed's surface accommodates me, light as a feather, as if the weight of a human body were nothing - perfect for coma patients. Hands – my hands touch bare skin, pass over areas sealed with wound spray, come into contact with bandages, under which I can feel tiny raised points – this is no part of me – resistance but no pain. My right hand grasps the left, the thumb feels around the wrist, comes to a halt. The index finger follows the thumb, sliding around the edge of a cuff that smoothly surrounds the wrist, seemingly without beginning or end. Cautiously I draw my hand from beneath the bedsheet and hold it up to my eyes. It is indeed a sort of wristband, a shiny, whitish plastic ring, so light and smooth that I did not feel it at first upon awakening. Is it a device for monitoring my bodily functions? I turn my hand over, examine the cuff from every side, then hold the back of my hand to my right ear, nestled against my cheek and chin, and I know that it is more than a simple diagnostic device: A gentle, barely perceptible energy is being

emitted, wafts calmingly over my face, flows through my pores, through veins and capillaries, loses itself in nerve cells, companions of RNA. It is all so simple, so pleasant, and things? They are what they are. Basta! I lay my hand back down on the bed covers. I am content. Everything will be resolved, with my help or without it.

I must have closed my eyes for a while and freed myself from my thoughts. As I surface once more from the emptiness and gaze at the wall facing me, I see a smooth, cream-colored expanse, bare except for pale yellow platforms at knee height: Plastic. Next to it, only slightly higher, a shelf, also of yellow plastic. It leads into a narrow corner closet, and this connects on my right to a further row of closed cabinets. Somewhere along these wall units must be the door through which Dr. Servant departed a few hours ago.

My gaze returns to the opposite wall. A barely noticeable wave movement, oscillating and circling in places, reveals the cream-colored space to be a giant screen, perhaps even a group of several discrete visual displays. There is no sign, however, of controls or connecting cables.

My interest has been awakened, and my helpless condition distresses me; although I feel weak and literally bed-bound, definitely a case for the intensive care unit, I do not observe any of the cables I would expect to find connecting me to the life-support machines. Neither is there any sign of this equipment itself, nor any similar systems. Just one inconspicuous connection from the bed to the wall, a thin tube, disappears into the shelf below the screen. Maybe the technology is located at the head of my bed?

With an effort, I turn my head and see a mountain landscape in expressive, lively brushstrokes, *alla prima* style, with green, blue and purple paint unmixed and brightly superimposed: One of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's alpine scenes. I am fond of the early expressionists, and some years earlier, I had leased two Kirchners to the National Gallery. Upon looking closely, colors and contours appear to blend together. This, too, an illusion!

Lastly, the window. It takes up the whole side of the room on my left, but I cannot make out anything except a milky white light. The material of the pane blocks any view. Regardless, I know perfectly well where I am. Dr. Servant's presence is the key.

I glance to my right and am taken aback, in fact, for a moment I am stunned and cannot take it in: Floating in space, close to the wall with the automatic meal dispenser, an oval-shaped object is rotating. Smooth, honey-colored, glowing from within, it encloses a structure of filigree composition. A long, darkly striped abdomen, transparent, microscopically fine-veined wings, two pairs of defensively-spined legs, giant, glistening compound eyes, as if they wanted to reflect their prey dozens of times over, the powerful pincer maxilla, ready to tear into its victim and devour it in mid-flight: A dragonfly from the Tertiary period, 50 million years old, perhaps more, an imago in its perfected form and beauty, and its golden coffin a piece of amber of a size and clarity I have never before seen. "A faultless piece, don't you think? And pretty much unbeatable as a hologram, even if you might miss the aura of the original. For that you'd have to travel to Europe, though, to a little exclave on the Baltic sea, an interesting little spot with a chequered past: politically it belongs to the Russian republic, economically to the Eurozone for a few years now, a fiercely disputed experiment, and now actually a success story. The original can be seen in the museum at Kant University.

Dr. Servant is grinning down at me complacently from the opposite wall, behind him the monotonous flickering of an empty, silent screen – no, to the observant eye, not quite empty. Colored dots and lines flit across certain fields, rows of numbers alternate with graphics, interspersed with feeds from other rooms like mine, with their assigned monitors. Dr. Servant notices my look and stops smiling. He shrugs his shoulders apologetically, opening his arms slightly.

“I know you can see me, as I can see you. It was not my intention to burst in on you unannounced. But your data suddenly went crazy: Respiration, blood pressure, puls and heart rate. We rather expected your nerves to hold up better, faced with our little surprise.” He has regained his cheerful self-assurance and winks boyishly at me.

“I see that your mind is already busy taking in your surroundings.” How does he see that?

“A wonderful opportunity for me to acquaint you with our technical equipment. Just watch!” An invisible camera pans away from his seat and over a seemingly endless array of monitors, most of them dark. “Don’t go thinking that the technology ever sleeps. All the vital signs of every person connected to the system are recorded and can be retrieved on demand – mine, too. Look!” His figure reappears in the display. He indicates a small area at eye level, and I can make out the typical waves of brain activity and heartbeat, beneath which diagrams and rows of numbers are arranged. For a few seconds he is engrossed in the images. “Optimal values, the system has calmed itself again, excellently, after the shock you gave me just now!”

He actually has the gall to give me a reproachful look.

“When there is any risk, when –for whatever reason – the bodily functions diverge from the normal range, we are alerted, and the monitors light up. We, of course, determine what the normal range is, on a case by case basis. Your settings are particularly unique.” He leans forward, enormous, larger than life, and looks deep into my eyes. On which screen or wall am I appearing to him, and how large?

“Believe me, Jason, you are of great importance to me.” I believe him. Everything bears out his words – my accommodation, the technical provisions, and that which I do not yet know.

I will find out – and with effort, still without a voice, I speak, whisper my first word: “Why?”

“Jason!” He calls me by my first name again. Since when are we so intimate?

“Do not be impatient. “These things take time, and you only awoke from the coma a few hours ago. I promise you, you will find out what you need to know, but all in good time.”

The extra-large image of Dr. Servant shrinks to regular size, the animated images behind the contours of his figure disappear, and the whole width of the wall is taken up with the apparatus of intensive care: now I see the tubes and cables which sustained me throughout the past days, or maybe weeks – less than I had imagined. A monitor shows the head end of my bed. The Kirchner painting, the hologram, dissolved, vanished, as if it had never existed. In its place, further exhibits of our technical age. Dr. Servant’s image is silent for a few seconds, looking expectantly at me. Evidently he is waiting until I have become accustomed to the changes in my room before he speaks again.

“Most of our clients do not appreciate this environment. They want the advantages of technology, but fear or despise the sight of it. That is why we provide, if desired, the illusion of their preferred surroundings. In your case, too, we naturally took your interests into account. Also: your functions are stable now, the sensors on your skin provide reliable data, so we can terminate the artificial feeding. In the coming days you will require assistance with eating and hygiene. We have also put together an exercise programme for you, and if you would like any entertainment or information, simply express your wishes. The programme, well, what am I saying, the entire system responds to your voice. Try it!”

This time I am not surprised. Voice recognition is old hat, after all; my house, cars and flycar, everything that surrounds me in everyday life, use it too. “Later. First, show me where I am. Also, I want to look out of the window.”

A smile. The intensive care unit disappears, cream-colored emptiness, then another swirl of color settles itself into a composition of delicately tinted lines and surfaces: Wassily Kandinsky. And not far away, Dr. Servant’s smiling image:

“I can see that you like the pictures. We have respected the conditions of your lease contract. You can change the wall exhibits at any time according to your personal tastes. But didn’t you have a question just now? If you would like to become more familiar with your location, look up now.”

I look up to the ceiling, and am looking down. Far beneath me is the sea, with a group of islands, towards which I am plummeting at speed. The racing plunge slows, I am hovering over a plateau with expansive scrub and grassland, young trees, I even see a small forest; all bordered by a rocky, jagged coastline, tiny bays with white sandy beaches in between, isolated rocks standing offshore. The air smells of the sea and the wind, pine trees, spring blossoms and fresh grass; I taste salt, hear the cry of a seagull and above everything, the constant, unchanging rhythm of the surf: the sea. Except for a complex of buildings with a tennis court and a small runway at the edge of the forest, there are no signs of habitation on the island. My intuition has not misled me.

It is the island! The campsite was abandoned years ago, I know. How much must they have paid the authorities and the conservationists for that? And for the permit to build the clinic and the research center? Improved conservation, better protection of the native species, small groups of conservationists, who, under the leadership of experts, of course, are allowed to hike along specified paths and observe the seal colonies. Oh yes, I know their arguments, I helped to formulate them myself.

I would like to take a closer look at the building, but the image disappears abruptly. “Enough for today! The four-senses presentation is strenuous, and you are a convalescent. If you feel like further views, just look out the window. You can regulate the opacity yourself at any time.”

Dr. Servant indicates the opaque light-screen on my left, and I follow his pointing finger: The diffuse light clears and collects at some points, darkens at others. Contours emerge, the railing of a balcony, the upper third transparent, and from the height of the second or third floor the view extends over the trees of the little forest, over waves of grassland, over the steep rocky hillside to the sea: Smooth and seemingly unmoving it is spread out beneath me to the horizon, another illusion. Rocks sprayed with surf further out reveal the truth, that like

everywhere along the coast, deep down the sea is gathering strength for its neverending onslaught on the land.

The sky. Twinned with the rising fog, behind clouds a red-gold glow reaches to the horizon, light-filled spaces, rays bursting through, edged with white-gold, and from left to right into the heart of the sun, a dart of large migrating birds flies with even wingbeats.

I falter. What are these thoughts of mine? The baroque imagery, the sentimental commentary. It is my way to analyze nature, not to wax lyrical about it.

The friendly voice interrupts my musing. "You're not saying anything? I must say, we have given you one of our very best rooms. A perfect view to the southwest, relatively little wind and fog. When your condition improves you can take your breakfast on the balcony and listen to a morning concert or the world news or take care of business relationships." Pause. "Well, the latter should perhaps wait a while. You will understand that we must deny your business partners electronic access for the time being. Your firm will run just fine without you - after all, you have already perfectly streamlined all your processes." That is who I am, then, homo oeconomicus, who has made himself redundant...

In confidence, I would greatly appreciate some tips on better organization of my own workplace." An expansive gesture takes in the projection walls and the very clear desk. Apparently, he jests.

"You can certainly take a look at the get-well greetings some time - and the condolences received by your firm, too. They didn't know where else to send them..."

My ears do not deceive me - he sniggers at these words.

"The fact is, it was thought at first that you were dead." Seriously, again: "Without us, you would be, of course. But you are alive and must answer to no-one except us."

Dr. Servant smiles again, but it sounds like a veiled threat. He rubs his hands together, interlaces the fingers:

"To help you regain your strength, your first meal will be served in a moment. My assistant can give you any further information. Allow me to take my..."

"No!", I say, and hold out my left arm with the strange wristband to him: "What is this?"

For a moment he seems displeased and remains silent. Then: "Very well, I shall explain it now, you will find out sooner or later anyway. This device not only transmits the data on your bodily functions, it regulates them and - we are particularly proud of this - it has a balancing effect on your mood, that is, on the brain metabolism, without any medication or drugs and their troublesome side-effects. We stimulate pleasant memories and positive emotions, and eliminate bad dreams and psychological distress. In recent hours I believe we have accessed some happy childhood memories for you. Am I right?"

Ah, how right you are, Henry. The thing works just as you say. It calls up pleasant dream images. But it has also led me to a precipice, and just prevented me from looking down. I shudder, that is, I think I ought to shudder, if, yes, if Henry should not have my best interests

at heart. But how could I mistrust him even for an instant? He is so convincing and so interesting.

“The Psychoformer works on the principles of bio-feedback, a method from the last century, optimized by us: Every nightmare, every undesired, unpleasant idea registers physiological reactions, and instruments highlight these. Changes in pulse rate, skin resistance, perspiration are just the most obvious. But while with the historic form of bio-feedback the patient had to learn, at great length, how to influence the physiological processes, the Psychoformer controls these independently, changes negative emotions into positive, painful sensitivities into, let us say, interesting states, if not quite delightful ones. It controls every conceivable condition, and should its measures prove inadequate, it will send you into a deep sleep, from which normally you will wake up in good humour and improved mental strength. Believe me: You may confidently leave your troubles in our hands.”

He waves. The image disappears.

For a while I stare at the bare wall. Am I still being watched? He asks me to have faith in him, but if memory and conviction do not deceive me, I am not a man of faith, I do not belong to any religious group, certainly not to the Traditionalists. I view life as a simple mathematical problem, have always trusted only my own analysis. Miracles, even the everyday types, like happiness, is not something I've ever believed in.

The arrival in this moment of a sporty, slim figure on the screen is also no wonder, but Dr. Servant's assistant, a technically perfect imitation of reality. A figure-hugging slim pant suit, shoulder-length jet-black hair, facial features so regular that only art, not nature, could be responsible for them. In short: Her appearance betrays something of Henry Servant's empathy with my tastes, and suddenly she reminds me of Glenn.

“Good morning, Dr. Brandt, I am at your service, to answer your questions and to support you in almost every way.”

I note the ‘almost’ with amusement: Differentiated programming!

“My name is Vera, but you may, of course, call me something else.”

Vera. I like the name, and the whole artificial person. I expect her to become familiar with me, to ask to call me Jason, but nothing of the sort happens. Henry Servant knows my aversion to any kind of premature intimacy. He discovered it himself early in our acquaintance, when he addressed me by my first name, as is usual in this country. What is usual was irrelevant to me.

Vera is looking at me expectantly, and I understand. She is waiting for my answer – do I wish to change her name? “Thank you, we shall keep Vera, it's a promising-sounding name. What's in store for me next?”

“Your meal is ready. Doctor's orders are that we cannot offer you a choice today, however. Please answer ‘yes’ if we may serve it.” Her voice reminds me of my childhood: Pleasant, well-spoken English, as I speak it myself, as it's spoken in my hometown, Boston. They really think of everything, and my regard for Dr. Servant grows. Unexpectedly I feel a surge of mockery. Was he afraid, perhaps, that a Texan drawl would have spoiled my appetite?

Vera has accepted my rusty 'yes', for a little later, the door opens, and a young woman brings in soup for the convalescent, greeting me: "How are we today then?", She lays the tray on the pivoting side table, with the push of a button raises me and the bed into the desired position, and with a friendly, energetic "Now, let's eat up this good, strong vegetable soup!" she begins to feed me. For all the technology, all the comforts of modern nursing, some things never change...

While she feeds me, carefully and silently spooning the broth into my obediently open mouth, I catch myself wondering what her bosom looks like under the pale green dress; I would like to nestle my head against her and abandon myself, eyes closed, to her soft support.

An unusual longing for somebody who avoids gatherings of people, shies away from physical contact, other than opportunities for sexual release. I shake my head, and soup misses my mouth and splatters over my left cheek.

"Now we don't want to make a mess, do we, or are we done already?" She wipes my face with a dampened paper towel. My helplessness is embarrassing... or is it just funny? The pragmatic in me resolves to accept that which I cannot change, for now...

Now I am lying flat again and I ask myself if perhaps the emptiness in my head didn't stem largely from the emptiness in my belly before? I draw in air and seem to still detect something of her scent, young and feminine, mixed with fine soap and a trace of disinfectant. An enjoyable experience, overall, especially since I had not counted on having a real nurse.

I examine the meal dispenser with the mechanical feeding assistant next to my bed. Evidently the automatic food supply isn't used for all patients: more evidence that I am valued here, or should I say, rather, for the value I perhaps represent? My feeding assistant of flesh and blood has left me without another word, without any time for questions, so I ask myself: Is she following orders from the clinic director? And: How pleasant could the sight of me have been for her, anyway?

"A mirror!" I need to check my appearance. The projection wall shows the room, the bed, beneath the sheets the outline of a figure, topped by shoulders, neck and a head. At first I don't recognise myself: A smooth bald scalp, beneath the wound spray a red line, the nearly-healed head wound. The nose is different, too, wider and slightly crooked, like after a fresh break; gaunt features, a two-day beard. But it is I, and even in this condition I do not look my age, you haven't aged at all, she had said, looking at those photos that showed me shortly after founding the law firm. She? Who...?

I am rapidly coming to appreciate my appearance. When I think about it, Mother Nature was kind to me, with the benign appearance she bestowed upon me - I never needed to go under the knife of a cosmetic surgeon, my skin is still tanned from our vacation together. I consider this. Together? How did I get here? Weren't we in a city, airy, uncrowded, with many galleries? Then in a strange car? My temple throbs. Something like pain is trying to get through, immediately overlaid by a soft veil... Don't think... Dr. Servant bends over me, his index finger a friendly threat. First the index finger, then his face behind it, everything blurs together, his smile last of all. It, too, dissolves, and cheering images float up from an old children's book: Alice in Wonderland – the Cheshire Cat's grin – Dr. Servant – the Cheshire

Cat – smiling – grinning. It's too strange: No brooding - well-being. And I doze, am vaguely aware of the sun sinking below the horizon, the evening gathering...

A gong sounds and in the reverberating echo I hear Vera's perfect voice.

Dr. Brandt, a lady would like to speak to you on the videophone. Her name is Glenn and she won't be put off. May I connect you?"

"Yes!" Of course I want to see her, speak to her. Something in my memory was jogged when I first saw Vera, no coincidence, Dr. Servant must have planned the similarity. The real Glenn will help me to work things out.

And there she sits in one of the comfortable body-formed armchairs, sportingly elegant and simultaneously languid as a cat, she really is wearing a pant suit, in mauve, almost like her technically more perfect impersonator. The left hand on the arm of the chair, the right holding the stem of a half-full wine glass, slender, well-kept hand on pale damask, silver-painted nails, on the ring finger the emerald I bought her in Rio.

Back then she had accompanied me to a negotiation. The gem was a commensurate reward for her presence and services, naturally in addition to her monthly allowance and the rent on her apartment. I can make out silverware, a carelessly folded linen napkin, as if someone had unfolded it for the first course and then, interrupted by something or other, put it back – next to it a second glass with wine.

At this moment we both look at the second glass, an unmistakeable sign that she is not alone. She reaches for it instinctively and pushes it away, as if to remove it from my field of vision. Glenn, Glenn, as smart and clever as you are, you should know that the image capture will follow the motion of your hand, and the glass, towards the strong, stumpy-fingered man's hand, which immediately receives and grasps the flute, pulling it out of my line of sight. Glenn beams at me with her practised smile:

"Oh Jason, I am so pleased to see you on the road to recover. I only heard by coincidence about your terrible accident, since I hadn't heard anything at all from you in the last six months. For more than six months!"

She looks reproachfully at me, and I am inclined to see her point, if she has turned her attentions elsewhere. Our relationship worked out, so far, only because it was conducted like any good business arrangement: Contractually secured usage with full financial compensation. She leads the life of luxury that her intelligence and beauty merit, and foregoes, if I desire it, a part of her freedom. I have at my disposal, when required, an attractive companion for social events and travel, who conforms with erotic tastes and fulfils my sexual needs.

Cybersex, the electronic form of self-gratification, is not for me. Erotic flights of fancy with virtual playmates may provide diversion for the plebs, but they have long been no alternative for me, not even after the death of my wife. It need not be called prostitution. Practically every partnership, every marriage is implicitly based on the same exchange, and if it fails, it's most likely because of hypocrisy. Glenn seems to read my thoughts: "By the way, I still live in the same apartment, on the same terms." I understand, she wants to let me know that she is still drawing down my monthly payments, without coming out and saying it in front of her hidden dining companion. A veiled offer to continue our arrangement.

“Sometimes I get cabin fever though, and I have to keep up my social contacts. Tonight, for example, I’m out for a bite to eat and a little entertainment.” She waves expansively to one side and behind her, but of course I have long since recognized the place - the vintage chairs, the silver flatware, damask tablecloths and napkins, the green island in the middle of the room, not to mention the artificial waterfall by the window with a view over the Pacific. It could only be a sinfully expensive club like the Old Style.

“Glenn, what happened? Why didn’t you hear anything from me? Tell me everything!” My first complete sentences since... yes, since I don’t remember when, a hoarse, imploring request she must comply with. I look her directly in the eye, holding her gaze fast. The eyes are lovelier, livelier than Vera’s, the perfect impersonator’s. But now something closes behind her pupils, her gaze becomes fixed and resistant.

“I’m sorry, I can’t tell you anything, maybe later...”

Later! That’s what Dr. Servant promised, too. And all at once I get it. It’s all a set-up: Glenn had been persuaded to call me, but why? Just to reignite an old superficial relationship? I understand less and less.

“Goodbye, Glenn,” I say lamely; “I’m happy that you called.” Glenn looks happy, too, before she breaks the connection. The conversation has exhausted me, and for a while I lie still. I try not to think about it anymore - in vain. Again and again her image appears out of the darkness, she pushes the glass over to a strong man’s hand, her expression shuts down.

Music will distract me from unpleasant thoughts and relax me. I choose at random from the current classical program and close my eyes. Contrapoint: Sacred choral music from the Baroque, normally calming even for agnostics. However, these sounds are not calming. My interest is piqued, and I call up the score, the original text and the English translation. It is a Bach cantata, as I correctly guessed, and as an urgent bass aria begins, I read To hang one’s heart on earthly treasures is a deception of the foolish world, and Ah, how fleeting, ah how insignificant is the life of mankind!

That is not the message I want to hear right now! I end the broadcast and lie once more in the dark, staring through the window at the night sky, watching a cloud: It pushes itself in front of the moon, hiding it for a while then freeing it again. There must be quite a wind blowing outside. Slowly the moon wanders past my window, the lovers’ companion. Distantly I recall – the moon floated in her eyes, back then, as we lay together and the night seemed never-ending – but immediately I pull myself together. What is wrong with me and my mind? I would never have spoken about the moon like this before; I despise wretched female thinking like this. The moon is a cold, lifeless rock, how often I had to tell my wife just this...

‘Beth, come in, you’ll get a chill!’

‘Not yet, the night is so beautiful; just look how brightly the moon is shining tonight. The full moon is a wonder for me, every time.’ She is standing in her sleeveless nightgown on the terrace, her arms spread wide and raised to the heavens. It is, in fact, a full moon. A silver gleam lies on her unbound hair, flows around the soft curves of her body. The curves are too soft for my taste, and her upper arms could be thinner too. But I have to put up with her as she is. - ‘Money makes beauty’ – that was all Denis said, when I showed him her photo.

Denis and I. We are identical in our aesthetic judgement, too. Of course beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and others might even think her pretty, with her gentle, round face, her soft shape...

She turns around, gives me her sad cow eyes.

'My name is Elizabeth, E-liz-a-beth; when will you get that into your head!' 'Long names are a waste of time – and discussing them is even worse!' I cut off her objection. There is no point explaining to her that the moon has no light of its own, that it is a lump of rock, incompatible with life, that its surface is heated by the sun to over 250 degrees Fahrenheit. That's when it is shining at all, and not hanging blackly in freezing space. Our astronauts are relieved each time they are allowed, after many months, to leave the station there. On some level she knows this, but her nature, her damned sentimental nature...

'You have a hopelessly romantic temperament!' I tell her. She goes to answer, then gives a resigned shrug of her shoulders and follows me into the house. For the next several hours I sit at my desk and work on the contract between the authorities and GEN-IM. A young, promising company, the GEN-IM Corporation. I compare the data, perform a calculation and lean back, content. My stake should pay off pretty soon and make me independent. I look at the ceiling, hearing for while the back and forth of her footsteps, then it is quiet. Time for me, too, to sleep.