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# Strange Relations

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Philip José Farmer

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## ...Son

The luxury liner blew up, and with it went Jones.

He had been leaning on the railing, his eyes on the moon's image dancing on the waves and his thoughts on his wife. He had left her in Hawaii; he would, he hoped, never see her again. He had also been thinking of his mother in California and wondering how it would be to live again with her. He wasn't unhappy or happy about either prospect. He had just been meditating.

Then the enemy, in one of the first moves of the undeclared war, had torpedoed the ship from beneath. And Jones, utterly unwarned, was thrown high into the air as if he had bounced off a tremendous springy diving board.

He plunged deep. The blackness crushed him. He became panicky, and lost that delicate sense of poise that he was able to maintain when he was swimming in the sunlit open waters. He wanted to scream and then to ascend on the scream, like a circus acrobat on a rope, to the uncloseted air and the bright moon.

Before the cry for help came, before the waters poured their heavy blackness down his lungs, his head broke the surface, and he gulped in light and breath. Then he looked around and saw that the ship was gone and that he was alone. There was nothing for him to do but seize a floating piece of debris and hang on with the hope that the day would bring airplanes or another ship.

An hour later, the sea suddenly heaved and split, and a long dark back emerged. It looked like a whale, for it had the rounded head and the sloping-away body. Yet it did not move the tail up and down to propel itself forward, nor roll to one side nor do anything but lie there. Jones knew that it must be a new type of submarine, but he was not sure because it looked so alive. There was about it that indefinable air that distinguishes the animate from the inanimate.

His doubts were settled a moment later when the smooth, curved back was suddenly broken by a long rod pushing up from the centre. The shaft grew until it was twenty feet high, halted, and then flowered at its end into grids of various sizes and shapes. Retractable radar antennae.

So this was the enemy. It had come up from the depths where it had been hiding after its deadly blow. It wished to survey the destruction and, perhaps, pick up any survivors for questioning. Or to make sure that none lived.

Even with that thought he did not try to swim away. What could he do? Better to take a chance that they would treat him decently. He did not want to sink into the abyss below, into the darkness and the pressure.

He trod water while the sub turned its blind snout towards him. No men appeared from the hatches suddenly popping open upon the sleek deck. There was no sign of life except that men must be presumed to be below and turning the faceless, eyeless grids of the radar towards him.

Not until it was almost upon him did he see how it planned to take him prisoner. A large, round port in the whale-shaped head swung in. The sea rushed into it and carried Jones with it. He struggled, for he could not endure the idea of being scooped up in this monstrous parody of a cow catcher, gulped like a sardine chased by a mobile can. Moreover, the very thought of a door swinging open and showing him nothing but blackness beyond was enough to make him want to scream.

In the next moment, the port slid shut behind him, and he found himself hemmed in by water and walls and darkness. He struggled frantically against an enemy that he could not hold in his hands. He cried out from the bottom of his being for a breath of air and a spark of light and a door that would lead him out of this chamber of panic and death. Where was the door, the door, the door? Where . . . ?

There were moments when he almost awoke, when he was suspended in that twilight world between dark sleep and bright wakefulness. It was then that he heard a voice that was new to him. It sounded like a woman's, soft, caressing and sympathetic. Sometimes it was urgent with the hint that he'd better not try to hold anything back.

Hold back? Hold back what? What?

Once he felt rather than heard a series of tremendous impacts – thunder from somewhere, and a sense of being squeezed in a giant fist. That, too, passed.

The voice returned for a while. Then it faded off and sleep came.

He did not awaken swiftly. He had to struggle up through

blanket after blanket of semiconsciousness, throwing each one off with desperation tempered with a frantic hope that the next would be the last. And just as he was about to give up, to sink again beneath the choking and heavy layers, to quit breathing and fighting, he awoke.

He was crying out loud and trying to wave his arms and he thought, just for a moment, that the closet door had opened and light and his mother had entered.

But it was not so. He was not back in the locked closet. He was not six years old, and it was not his mother who had rescued him. Certainly that was not her voice, nor was it the voice of his father, the man who had locked him in the closet.

It came from a speaker set into the wall. It did not talk in the tongue of the enemy, as he had expected, but in English. It droned on and on, oddly half-metallic, half-maternal, and it told him what had been taking place in the last twelve hours.

He was shocked to know he had been unconscious that long. While he assimilated that knowledge, he ran his eyes over his cell, taking stock. It was seven feet long, four wide, and six high. It was bare except for the cot on which he lay and certain indispensable plumbing. A bulb burned directly above him, hot and naked.

The discovery that he was hemmed within such a place, narrow as a tomb and with no exit that he could see, made him leap from the cot. Or try to, for he found that his arms and legs were bound inside broad plastic bands.

The voice filled the cell.

'Do not be alarmed, Jones. And do not try to make those hysterical and hopeless struggles that you made before I was forced to give you a sedative. If you suffer from severe claustrophobia, you must endure it.'

Jones did not struggle. He was too numbed by the disclosure that he was the only human being upon the submarine. It was a robot speaking to him – perhaps the sub itself, directed electronically from a mother ship.

He took some time, turning the matter over in his mind . . . but he could bring himself to feel no lessening of the terror. It would have been bad enough to be imprisoned with the living enemy, but an enemy that was steel skin and plastic bones and electronic veins and radar eyes and germanium brains was an

enemy that filled him with an overpowering dread. How could you fight against anybody – anything – like that?

He checked his fear with the thought that, after all, he was in no way worse off. How would this machine differ from the enemy itself, the creature from the creator? It was the enemy who had built this automatic fish, and he would model it exactly after his own thought processes, his own ideology. Whichever way the living enemy would have acted, just so would this monster.

Now that he was conscious, he remembered what the robot had said to him and what he had answered. He had awakened from his near-drowning and seen a long, plastic arm withdrawing into a hole in the wall. The hole had been covered with a small port, but not before he had caught a glimpse of the needles at the end of the arm. Later, he was to understand that the arm needles had shot adrenalin into him to stimulate his heart, and another chemical – unknown to the American – to cause his internal muscles to reject the water he had swallowed.

The sub wanted him alive. The question was, for what?

It was not long until he knew. The machine or mechanical 'brain' or whatever you wanted to call it had also injected a drug that would put him in a light hypnotic state. And it had given him a key word which, uttered after the effect of the drug died off, would enable him to remember what had happened. Now that the voice had uttered that magical key to his unconscious – it was from the enemy's language so he did not understand it – everything came back in a rush.

He understood everything that the sub had thought fit to tell him. In the first place, she was one of the new experimental craft the enemy had built shortly before the war began. She was wholly automatic, not because the enemy had no men to spare, for God knew they had millions to throw away on the battlefield, but because a submarine that did not have to carry a great amount of supplies and air-making equipment for a crew and that did not have to consider living space, could be much smaller and efficient and stay at sea longer. The machinery required to run her occupied much less space than sailors.

The entire craft was designed for sleekness and speed and deadliness. She carried forty torpedoes, and when these were expended she would return to her mother ship somewhere in the

Pacific. If need be, she did not have to rise to the surface at any time during her entire cruise. But her makers had put in orders to the effect that she should, if it was safe, take some prisoners and pry loose from them valuable information.

'Then,' said the voice with its hint of metal, 'I would have shot you back into the sea from which I picked you. But when, during the questioning, I found that you were an electronics specialist I decided to keep you and take you back to the base. I am required to bring back any valuable prisoners. It is lucky for you that you turned out to be a man we can use. Otherwise . . .'

The cold echoes hung in the room. Jones shivered. He could see in his mind's eye, the port swinging inward, the sea rushing in, his own struggles, and then the irresistible plastic arms shoving him out into the black and silent depths.

He wondered briefly how much *Keet VI* had found out about him. No sooner thought than answered. Memory flooded in, and he knew all the rest that had happened.

To begin with, the sub was as human as it was possible for a machine to be. It 'thought' of itself as *Keet VI* - which meant *Whale VI* - and spoke in terms that might have fooled a non-expert into thinking it was conscious of itself. Jones knew better. No mechanical 'brain' had been built yet that was self-conscious. But it was set up so that it gave that impression. And Jones, after a while, adopted the natural fallacy of thinking of it as a living being. Or as a woman. For *Keet's* makers had fallen into their own trap and, believing that ships are female, had unconsciously built and endowed *Keet* with a feminine psychology.

Otherwise, how could you explain that *Keet* seemed almost tenderly solicitous of him? Knowing that he was a valuable male, that the men back upon the mother ship wanted a man like Jones who had information and talents they could use, *Keet* was prepared to do all she could to keep his body alive. That was why she had fed him intravenously and why she had stopped questioning him when she had stumbled upon a particularly tender and painful area of his brain.

What was that sensitive part? Why, nothing other than that night long ago in time, but so near in effect, when his father had locked him in that dark closet because he, Jones, would not confess that he had stolen a quarter from his mother's purse. And he had refused to confess, for he knew he was innocent,



until the darkness had become thick and heavy and hot, like a strangler's blanket thrown around him, and he, unable to endure any longer the terror, the blackness, and the walls that seemed to be moving in on him to crush him, had screamed and screamed until his mother, thrusting his father aside, had opened the door and given him light and space and a broad, deep bosom upon which to weep and sob.

And since then . . .

*Keet's* voice, somehow not so cold now, said, 'I could not get much from you other than that you were an electronics specialist, that you had been on the luxury liner *Calvin Coolidge*, that you were leaving your wife for a trial separation and going to live with your mother who resides upon a university campus. There you were going to take up the old, safe, academic life, teaching, and there you were going to spend the rest of your days with your mother until she died. But when I struck that thought, you suddenly reverted to the closet incident, and I could do nothing more with you. Unfortunately, I am equipped with only the lightest of drugs and cannot put you under deep hypnosis. If I could, I could penetrate past that episode or set it to one side. But every time I begin the questioning, I touch that particular territory of the past.'

Was it his imagination or did he detect a slightly querulous or plaintive note? It was possible. If the enemy had built in a modulator so it could imitate sympathy and kindness, he could also install circuits to mock other emotions. Or was it possible that the machine, which was, after all, a highly intelligent 'brain', could manipulate voice mechanism to reproduce desired effects?

He would probably never know. Yet there was no doubt that the voice contained at least a hint of emotion.

He was glad that he was intrigued by the potentialities of *Keet*. Otherwise, he would have been struggling like a thing out of its mind to loose himself from these bonds strapping him down to the cot. The walls were too close, too close. And while he could endure them now, as long as the light was on, he knew he would go mad if that light were to go out.

*Keet* must have known that by now, too, yet she had made no threat, no attempt to utilize the knowledge. Why? Why hadn't she tried to scare his knowledge from him? Such would have been the methods of the men who had made her, and she was,

after all, only a reflection of them. Why hadn't she tried to terrify him?

The answer was not long in coming.

'You must understand that I am in trouble. At the same time, that means that you, Jones, are also in trouble. If I sink, you do, too.'

Jones tensed. Now would come the crux of it. He was surprised to hear the almost pleading tone in her voice. Then he remembered that her builders would have put the whole range of emotions in her voice for her to use whenever occasion required.

'While you were unconscious I was attacked by planes. They must have been carrying some device unknown to me, for I was a hundred fathoms deep, yet they spotted me,' *Keet* said.

Jones was sure now. There *was* emotion in her voice, and it was half-way between sullenness and hurt feelings. When *Keet* had been sent to sea, the stage, thought Jones, had lost a great actress.

Despite his situation, he could not help chuckling. *Keet* overheard, for she said, 'What is that noise, Jones?'

'Laughter.'

'Laughter?'

There was a pause. Jones could imagine *Keet* waiting while she searched through the channels of her electronic memory-banks for the definition of the thing called laughter.

'You mean like this?' *Keet* said.

The speaker burst out with a blood-chilling cackle.

Jones smiled tightly. Evidently the creators of *Keet* had included the definition of laughter and ability to reproduce such in her make-up. But the laughter they had given her was just what you would expect from them. It was designed to frighten their victims. There was nothing of amusement or gaiety in this. He told her so. Another pause. Then the speaker chuckled. But this expressed contempt and scorn.

'That is not what I mean,' he answered.

*Keet's* voice trembled. Jones wondered about that. Surely the enemy engineers had not meant for her to express her own emotions. Machines, he knew, could be frustrated, but they did not 'feel' such disappointments as human beings did. But it was possible that in their desire to make her emulate a human as

much as possible, they had included this device. It would be carrying construction to a fantastic limit, but it could be so.

It was then that he received another slight shock. *Keet* had started telling him why she needed help, but she had suddenly switched to this discussion and this vain attempt to reproduce his laughter.

*Keet* could be sidetracked.

He filed away that information. Perhaps he could use it against her later on if he ever got in a position where he could use it. At present, with the bands locking him down, there did not seem to be much hope.

'What were you saying?' he asked.

'I said that I was in trouble, and that, therefore, we both are. If you want to survive, you must aid me.'

She paused as if searching her metal-celled brain for the psychologically right combination of words. He tensed, for he knew that this was his only chance, and listened carefully.

'While you were sleeping,' she said, 'these planes – which I suppose were bourgeois Yankee aircraft – somehow located me and dropped depth charges. They exploded quite close, but I am built rather strongly and compactly, and they did little external harm. But they did shake me up quite a bit.

'I dived at a slant and got away from them. But when I had come to the bottom, I stopped. My nose is in the abysmal ooze, and I cannot back away.'

Good Lord, thought Jones, how deep are we? Thousands of feet?

The thought brought back his claustrophobia. Now the walls did indeed seem to crowd in on him. They bent beneath the mountain-heavy weight of the fathoms above him.

Black and crushing.

*Keet* had paused, as if to allow him time to dwell upon the terror that hovered beyond her thin skin. Now, as if she had gauged his reactions correctly, she continued.

'My walls are strong and they are flexible enough so they will not, even at this depth, collapse. But I have sprung a leak!

'It is a very small one, but it is filling a compartment between my outer wall and my inner. And, I must confess, a panel from my inner wall has been dislodged by the impact of the explosions. They were quite close.'

She spoke as if she were a woman telling her doctor that she had a diseased kidney.

'My pumps are working well enough so that I can keep this water from eventually filling up my interior,' she said. 'Unfortunately, the wetness has affected part of the circuits that direct my steering gear. I can direct myself in but one direction because my diving rudders are now locked.'

She paused dramatically and then said, 'That direction is downwards.'

Her words brought terror. There would be no opening of this door. It would only bring in the blackness and the crushing, not light and air and his . . .

He clenched his fists and summoned the strength to hurl back the panic. She would know what effect her words were having; she'd be counting on them. The chances were very strong that the bonds around his arms contained instruments to measure his blood pressure and heart beats. She could tell when he was lying to her and also when he was in a state of fear.

'I have means with which to repair myself,' she continued, 'but this leak has, unfortunately, also put out of commission those circuits that direct the repairing arms. Most unfortunate.'

His voice was tight as his clenched fists. 'So?'

'So I wish to release you from your cell and allow you to stop the leak and to repair the circuits. The material for stopping the leak and the box containing the blueprints are in my engine room. You can read the circuits from these.'

'And if I do this?'

'I will take you back unharmed to the mother ship.'

'And if I don't?'

'I will shut off your air. But first, I will turn off your light.'

She might as well have struck him on the head and slammed the coffin lid shut in his face. He knew he couldn't stand against what she threatened. He didn't want to admit himself a coward; he wanted desperately to believe that he was strong. But he knew that there was something buried in him that would betray him.

When the darkness came and the air grew hot and stuffy, he would be as a child again, a child shut up inside a closet that seemed to him to be sinking down towards the earth's centre, never to rise again. And above him would be the weight of the

earth itself, its seas and mountains and the people walking far, far overhead.

'Well?' Her voice was impatient.

He sighed. 'I'll do it.'

After all, as long as he lived, he had hopes of escaping. Perhaps of seizing this monstrosity . . .

He shook his head wryly. Why try to fool himself? He was a coward and no good. If he hadn't been, he'd never have been running away from fear all his life, running home to his mother. He'd not have given up that prominent teaching job at a big midwestern university and come out to the coast to teach because he could be close to his mother there.

She had refused to leave her home, so he had come to her.

And afterwards, when he met Jane and allowed her to talk him into working at that big electronics laboratory in Hawaii, he had thought several times that he'd like to have his mother come and visit them. And when, after many bitter quarrels, Jane had refused to allow it because she said his mother was smothering the manhood out of him, he had walked out on her.

And now, here he was back in in the closet sinking ever deeper into the crushing abyss, back in the closet because he had run away again. If he had had the guts to stay with Jane, he wouldn't be in this predicament.

The terrible part about it was that he recognized that Jane was right. He'd known his mother had her hold over him because of this curious twist in his brain. Yet he'd not been able to do anything about it except struggle feebly, just as he had been swept into the open maw of this monster and was now obeying her every word. And all because of a fear that he could not face.

Her sharp voice drove into his reverie.

'There is only one thing holding me back from releasing you.'

'What is that?'

'Can I trust you?'

'What can I do? I don't want to die, and only by staying with you can I live. Even if it is as a prisoner.'

'Oh, we treat our co-operative technicians very well.'

He did not miss the stress on co-operative. He shivered and wondered what was ahead for him and if, perhaps, it would not

be as well to refuse her. He would at least go down with honour.

Honour was such a meaningless word, here so many solid fathoms under the seas, where nobody would ever know the sacrifice that he had made. He'd just be one of the missing, forgotten by all except his mother and Jane. And she – she was young and pretty and intelligent. She'd find somebody else, soon enough. The thought sent a wave of anger through him.

*Keet* said, 'Your blood pressure went up. What were you thinking?'

He wanted to tell her it was none of her business, but he knew that she might suspect he was devising some ways of tricking her. He confessed.

Indifferently, she said, 'You bourgeois Yankees should learn to control your emotions. Or, better yet, get rid of them. You will lose the war because of your stupidity and your sheep-like emotions.'

Under other circumstances, Jones would have laughed at the idea of a machine spouting off such patriotisms, but now he was only slightly interested to know that *Keet's* builders had not neglected even the ideological side of the well-brought-up, mechanical brain.

Besides – and this was a thought that made him wince – she might be right.

'Before I let you loose, Jones,' she said, her voice taking on more of an edge, 'I must warn you that I am taking precautions against any sabotage on your part. I will be very frank with you and confess that, while you are in the engine room, I cannot keep as close a check on you as I can while you are here. But I have all sorts of means for following your movements. If you should touch any unauthorized parts – or even get near them – I will be warned.'

'Now, I will admit that I have only one aggressive weapon against you. If you do not behave, I will at once release an anaesthetic gas. I will leave the cell door open so the gas will eventually flood the rest of me. As the corridors are very narrow – being designed solely for maintenance men who work on me when I am in port – these quarters will quickly fill up. You will be overcome.'

'And after that?' asked Jones.

'I will keep up the flow until you die. Then we both perish.'

But I will have the satisfaction of knowing that no capitalist boot-licker conquered me. And I am not afraid of death, as you are.'

Jones doubted that last statement. It was true she would not be afraid in the sense he was. But her makers must have built into her a striving for survival that would be as strong as his. Otherwise, she would not be the fighting machine the enemy wanted, and they might as well construct the more conventional type of sub manned with beings who would fight for their lives.

The main difference was that, being a machine, she was not neurotic. He was a man, much more highly organized. Therefore, he was much more capable of having something go wrong with him. The higher the creature, the greater the downfall.

His plastic bonds snapped back. He rose, rubbing his tingling arms and legs. At the same time, the cell door slid back into a hollow in the wall. He walked towards it and then peered down the passageway. He drew back.

'Go ahead!' said *Keet*, impatiently

'It's so dark,' he said. 'And so low and narrow. I'll have to crawl.'

'I can't give you any light,' she snapped. 'There are flashlights for the maintenance men, but those are located in a locker in the engine-room. You'll have to go get them.'

He could not. It was impossible to urge his legs into that solid blackness.

*Keet* swore an enemy oath. At least, he supposed it was an oath. It certainly sounded like one.

'Jones, you bourgeois coward! Get out of this room!'

He whimpered, 'I can't.'

'Ha! If all Yankee civilians are like you, you will surely lose the war.'

He could not explain to her that everybody was not like him. His weakness was special; it excused him. There was just no fighting against it.

'Jones, if you do not get out of here, I will flood this cell with the gas.'

'If you do, you will be lost, too,' he reminded her. 'You will stay here forever with your nose in the mud.'

'I know that. But I have a stronger directive than survival. If I have to take a choice between being captured or perishing, I

accept the latter. Without the qualms that distinguish you bourgeois.'

She paused and then, with a contempt so strong he could almost see the curl of the speaker's lip, she said. 'Now get!'

He had no doubt she meant what she said. Moreover, so burning had been the derision in her voice, he felt as if a flame had lashed out and burnt the back of his legs. He crouched down and plunged into the darkness and the narrowness.

Even then, he knew that she was not capable of any real contempt. It was just the makers had put into her electronic brain the directives that she treat the captured enemy in such and such a fashion. She was aware of his psychological states, and she automatically turned on contempt or whatever emotion was needed when the time came. Nevertheless, there had been a sting in her voice, and it had struck deep.

Bent over, knuckles almost touching the plastic floor, he walked like an ape in a strange forest. His eyes burned through the darkness as if they would furnish their own light. But he could see nothing. Several times he glanced nervously over his shoulder and was always comforted by the square of light that the cell globe threw out. As long as he had that in sight, he wouldn't be too lost.

The corridor took a little curve. When he looked behind him, there was only the faintest glow to show that all was not black, that he was not, after all, shut up in a closet. His heart beat fast, and something welled up from the lowest and deepest part of his being. It brought with it an oily, heavy, black scum of fear and reasonless panic. It filled his heart and crept up into his throat. It tried to choke him.

He stopped and put both hands out against the walls on either side. They were solid and cold to the touch and they were not shifting in towards him to crush him. He knew that. Yet, for just the flicker of a feeling, he had felt them *move*. And he had felt the air thicken, as if it were a snake about to coil around his neck.

'My name is Chris Jones,' he said aloud. His voice rang along the corridors. 'I am thirty years old. I am not a child of six. I am a specialist in electronics and capable of making my own living. I have a wife, whom I realize now, for the first time, dear God, I love more than anything else in the world. I am an



American, and I am now at war with the enemy, and it is my duty and right and privilege, and should be my joy, if I were of the heroic mould, to do everything in my power to cripple or destroy that enemy. I have my two good hands and my knowledge. Yet God knows I am not doing what I should. I am creeping along a tunnel like a small child, shivering in my boots, ready to run crying for mother, back to the light and the safety. And I am aiding and abetting the enemy so that I may have that light and safety and my mother's voice once again.'

His voice shook, but he firmed it. Its hardening was an indication of what was taking place within him. Now or never, he breathed to himself. Now or never. If he turned back, if his legs and heart failed him, it was all up with him. It would not matter at all that he might eventually reach safety as a prisoner of the enemy. Or even that he might be rescued and go home to his own people, free. If he did not break that fault in him, throw it down and march over it, he would always be a prisoner of the enemy. He had always been a captive of the enemy, he realized, and the enemy was himself. Now, deep under the sea, caught in this confined and lightless corridor, he must wrestle with that enemy whose face he couldn't see but knew well, and he must overthrow it. Or be thrown.

The question was, how?

The answer was, go ahead. Do not stop.

He moved slowly, feeling the wall with his right hand. *Keet* had given him directions; if he followed them he could locate the locker in the engine room. And he did. After what seemed hours of groping and fighting off the choking sensation around neck and breast, he felt an object whose dimensions answered *Keet's* description. The key was hanging by a chain from a staple; he inserted it and unlocked the door. Another minute, and he had turned on the flashlight.

He played it like a hose about him. Beside him was the huge cube of the atomic reactor. Its exterior consisted of newly invented alloy that blocked radiation, yet did not weigh nearly as much as the now obsolete lead shielding. Nevertheless, knowing that there was some radiation leaking through and that the maintenance men would wear anti-radiation suits, he felt uncomfortable. If, however, he did not linger long, he would be safe.

He located, easily enough, the dislodged panel. It was in itself evidence that *Keet*, though she may have been well-planned, had been hastily built.

He changed that conclusion. Perhaps one of the men who had helped build her had been a member of the underground, a saboteur. This weak part of *Keet* was his handiwork.

He turned his flashlight into the opening. It showed a fine spray of water spurting at intervals of several seconds through an invisible hole. This might be further evidence that there were hands among the enemy working for the so-called bourgeois swine. The sub was formed of parts welded together for greater strength, instead of being riveted. *Keet's* body should not leak unless a projectile had shattered a hole in the metal. That did not seem likely. So it was possible that this section had been deliberately flawed.

It did not matter, Jones thought. Whether on purpose or by accident, the deed had been done. It was up to him to take advantage of it.

He examined the compartment. The circuits inside were under water, but it was not because of their immersion that they were not working. Incased in plastic, they could operate inside a water-filled chamber. But due to a series of safety devices, this section of circuits had an automatic shut-off in case of emergencies such as the present. *Keet* could not turn them on until the leak was stopped up.

Jones returned to the locker and took out a spray gun. He squirted a semi-fluid over the spray which came through the wall rhythmically. The stuff congealed and dried. The spray was at once shut off.

Jones rose and turned to walk, stooped over, back to the locker. There he would look for a dipper with which to remove the water faster, inasmuch as the pumps were not working swiftly enough. But he stopped, one foot ahead of the other, as if he had been frozen in mid-stride.

What a fool he was! Why hadn't he noticed this before? He must have been in a hell of a blue funk not to have thought at once of this!

*Keet* had said that her nose was buried in the mud and that she could not withdraw until the circuits governing the steering mechanism were turned on again.

Yet there was no evidence at all that the craft was tilted. He

could walk without having to lean one way or the other to compensate for the supposed incline.

*Keet*, then, was lying for reasons of her own.

He forgot about the fear that was still pressing around him, kept back only by an effort of strong will. This problem demanded all of his attention, and he gave every bit of it.

He had taken her word for the true state of their situation because it had not occurred to him that a robot could lie. But now that he thought about it, it was only natural that the machine should be cast in the mould of the makers. They boasted that lying was a good thing if it got them what they desired. And they would, of course, have built a lie-fabricator into *Keet*. If the occasion demanded it, she would make up something contrary to reality.

The big, million-dollar question was – why should she feel it necessary to do so?

Answer: She must feel weak, exposed.

Question: Where did she feel weak?

Answer: He, Jones, was her tender spot.

Why?

Because he was a man. He could walk around, and he could think. He might get nerve enough to take action against her. If he did, he might overcome her.

*Keet* was not nearly as bold and strong as she pretended. She had had to play upon his own weakness, his fear of the dark and the narrow, of the awful weight of water supposedly hanging over him. She had relied on that to make him meekly repair the damage and then, like the sheep he was, return to the pen. And, he thought, probably to the slaughter. He doubted now that she would take him back to the mother ship.

She might be out to sea for a year or more until she found enough targets at which to shoot all of her forty torpedoes. In the meantime, she would have to be feeding him and giving him air. She was not built large enough for that; she did not have much cargo space.

The cell in which he had lain must have been for the temporary keeping of prisoners who could be questioned. Also, it was probably meant for the cabins of spies and saboteurs, who would be let out, some dark night, on America's coast. *Keet* had been lying to him from the beginning.

The irony of it was that, in forcing him to repair her damage,

she had had to use his particular fault of character to get him to do so. Yet, in so doing, she had forced him to overcome his weakness; she had made him strong.

For the first time since he had left his wife, he smiled with sincerity.

At the same instant, his flashlight picked out the spray gun where he had laid it. His eyes narrowed. *Keet* had been correct in her fears. In essence, she was a machine with a machine's limitations, and he was a man. He was mobile, and he had an imagination. Therein lay the enemy's defeat.

He could hear her voice echoing down the corridors, asking where he was and threatening to release the gas if he did not report at once to her.

'I'm coming, *Keet*,' he called. His one hand held a screw-driver which he had taken from the locker, and the other held the spray gun.

Two days later, a navy patrol boat dived towards the sub, which lay helpless upon the surface. The alert observer spotted the man standing upon the sleek back and waving a white shirt. The plane did not release its bombs, but, after a judicious scouting, landed and picked up the man, who turned out to be an American with the good old American name of Jones.

He told his story over the radio on his way back to Hawaii. A destroyer close by immediately set out to take over *Keet*. When Jones landed, he had to make an official report and repeat in greater detail what had happened. In reply to a question a naval officer put to him, he answered, 'Yes, I did take a chance, but I had to. I was sure that she - pardon me, the robot - was lying to me. If we'd had our nose stuck in the mud, I should have detected at once that the cell and the corridor were on a slant. Moreover, the water was not coming out steadily, as it would have if it had great pressure behind it. It sputtered through the fissure, true, but only at intervals. It didn't take much deduction to see that we were on the surface, and that every time a wave hit that side, it forced some of its water through.'

'*Keet* was depending on me not to notice this, to be so overwhelmed by our supposed situation that I would fix up the trouble and then creep back into the cell.'

And I would have, too, he thought grimly, if it had not been for that unutterable scorn in her voice and the fact that then

was the moment in which I had to prove myself forever a man or a coward.

I'm still afraid of the dark and the narrow, but it is a fear that I can conquer. *Keet* did not think I could. But to make sure, she told me that I was at the bottom of the sea. She did not want me to know that her steering gear was set so that she could only go up, instead of down, as she told me, and that she was on the surface, an easy prey to the first American ship that came by. She calculated that if I knew that, I might get nerve enough to revolt. Unfortunately for her, she did not give me any credit for brains. Or else she banked on my fear neutralizing my intelligence. And she was *so* near to being correct.

'Now, just what did you do with the spray gun?' asked the Lieutenant-Commander.

'First, I held my breath and ran into the cell where I had been prisoner. I located the vent from which the gas was coming and sprayed the stop-leak cement on it. That blocked it. Then I retreated to the locker, read the blueprints there, and located *Keet's* "brain".

'It took me only a minute to disconnect her from her "body".'

He grinned. 'That did not stop her voice, which gave me an unladylike cussing. But, inasmuch as it was in the enemy's tongue, I didn't understand a word of it. Funny, isn't it, that she, like a human being, should revert to her native tongue in a moment of fury and frustration?'

'Yes, and then?'

'I stimulated the circuits that opened the deck hatch and let in air from the outside.'

'And you weren't sure whether or not air or water would come flooding in?'

He nodded. 'That is right.' He did not add that he had stood there, cold and shaking, while he waited.

'Very well,' said the Lieutenant-Commander with an admiring glance that warmed Jones and for the first time made him realize that he had, after all, done something in the heroic mould. 'You may go. We'll call you if we want to hear any more. Is there anything you wish before you go?'

'Yes,' he said looking around. 'Where's the telephone? I'd like to call my wife.'