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Persuasion

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Persuasion

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AH YES, you are Mr. Brookfield, are you not? Do come in please. I am so glad that you were able to come.

Let me take your wraps.

There. Yes, it is beastly cold out tonight, isn't it. Personally, I never step out in such weather.

Now, won't you come with me? Ha! I see by your eyes that my home surprises you. Well, it should. It is quite an antique, a veritable relic, I might add. But the style of the twentieth century always did appeal to me. And it is quite comfortable for my needs.

This is my study — really the best room in the house. I keep a few of my more interesting souvenirs here. As you may know, young man, I am chairman of the Resource Development Council for the Federation of Planets. I've managed to pick up these several oddities from different cultures I've encountered.

For example, note that ball of swirling fluid. Beautiful, isn't it. Almost like a liquid opal. But it has no container. It remains a perfectly shaped sphere through properties of its own. The natives on Arcturus' tenth planet eat it as an *hors d'oeuvre*.

Oh, and this piece of sculpture represents the work of some obscure Vegan craftsman. Observe its intricacy. We on Terra could never hope to duplicate those colors, which, as you may notice, are continuously changing.

There's a particularly interesting little item. Pick it up. Yes, it's all right. I really don't know what one would call it — perhaps a relaxer. At least that's what it is used for on its home planet. I imagine it's highly polished wood of some sort. It fits so well in the hand, doesn't it, as though it were expressly designed for you. There, you've got the idea now. Just rub your thumb up and down that smooth indentation.

It's marvelously satisfying, isn't it? The natives claim it can even put you into a trance.

Ah, you laugh? Well, come sit over here and continue stroking it if you wish while I explain why I asked you to come. You shall no doubt prove me wrong about the piece of wood — I myself have never seen it work.

Your eyes are quizzical, Mr. Brookfield. By the way, may I call you John? Yes? Well, as I was saying, you are puzzled about this and wondering for what possible reason I would want to see you. You might say, John, that I am, uh, recruiting. But first let me tell you a little story:

Several years ago — three to be precise — a colonization ship chanced on an obscure planet whose star is only a number on our charts. The conditions on the planet were found to be extraordinarily similar to Terra's, and instruments showed it to contain extremely high quantities of milasium, which you know to be an important metal to us. Communication was established with the inhabitants, and then we — the Council — were sent in to bargain for the ore.

Ah, you are still rubbing the wood. It *is* a delightful experience.

But let me continue. We found the planet's social structure not particularly different from others we'd encountered. It is a true matriarchy — reminded me somewhat of an over-scaled bee hive. The women are 'queens.' Their purpose is to procreate and they do nothing else. Hence, from lack of activity and continuous eating, they grow into great mounds of flesh and fat. Except for short distances, they can't even walk. Really quite gross by our standards, wouldn't you say?

Yet the women are intelligent and they are a peaceable group. Their men are somewhat like the drones in a hive. Of course, they do mate with the women — continuance of the race to be sure — but they're actually slaves. They are the farmers, child-raisers, attendants — theirs tends to be a difficult and exhausting life.

Young man, you have been staring into space for several moments now. I do hope I'm not boring you. But my story is almost completed.

The planet has a problem. For an unknown reason, the

male population has been steadily dying off within the last decade or so. Our own scientists have studied the situation, and their only answer is exhaustion of the male species. There may be more to it than that — I don't know — but the women have appealed to us for help. And you see, this is the amazing thing: they are physically so similar to us Terrans that we are able to impregnate them with healthy children. So we have made a bargain — milasium ore for new 'blood.'

Have you understood all this, Mr. Brookfield? Mr. Brookfield? Ah, but I see you are perhaps more interested in rubbing the piece of wood.

James? . . . James, he's ready.

Poem from *The Childstime*

by *Andrea Carlisle*
English and Speech, Jr.

I have left a thousand times
the things I never knew well:
a leaf-choked stream with secrets not
all to be learned in only my first
six years.

And one Tuesday by a dusty gold
Seventh Day Adventist Tent
I met a cross-eyed cat, with scabs
and matted fur, wounded by the stones
of laughing children.

Her, I knew well but she went away,
padded down some graveled street
with tired paws. I saw her again.
cut in half by a tire that traveled
that same road.

And there was somebody who wept over
the same things as I and who said
I would make it as a swan someday
but he left too. The best ones always go
or I leave them.

Neighbors always came to say
goodbye when the Allied-Orange van showed,