

**THE
MARTIAN GENERAL'S
DAUGHTER**

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THEODORE JUDSON



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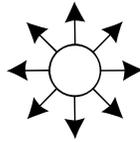
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For Tim and Jean



The day will come when holy Troy shall fall
And Priam, lord of spears, and Priam's folk.

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I.

AD 2293. Late March

W

hen the word of Pretext's fall came to Peter Black's camp the general was seated beneath a conveyer belt on the Twelfth Level, watching a sales presentation made by the scrap men of Antioch Station. Many hundreds of workmen in small electric carts were parading past General Black and his staff officers while they displayed samples of the supposedly uninfected metal they were hoping to sell to the army. The traders had brought acrobats dressed in light armor made of silvery scales, and those agile young men jumped from cart to racing cart to impress the hopefully gullible soldiers. They looked like silver birds hopping across the backs of the ever-moving vehicles. "Bloch, Bloch, Pater Bloch!" the riders shouted each time they passed the general's retinue, for that is how these men of largely Middle Eastern descent mispronounced his famous surname. The

red dust the machines were raising was becoming very thick around the conveyer belt; some of the officers—including Brigadier Harriman, the second-in-command—were choking on the rolling clouds and were frantically waving their hands in front of their faces to make patches of breathable air. One of these officers, a young Spaniard named Arango, remarked to me how well the general endured the dust; the others were making a great show of their suffering while the old veteran remained seated, his eyes held straight ahead and his body rigid. “He is an example to us all,” said the young man. Not until the messengers came with the letter from Garden City did he realize that the general had gone to sleep.

“Thank you, my darling. I will treasure it always,” said my father when Brigadier Harriman touched him on the shoulder and awakened him.

Father blinked at the startled man when he understood he was not addressing his wife. He motioned me to come to him and kneel at his side.

“Your mother is at home, isn’t she?” he asked in my ear.

“Your wife is indeed in Garden City, sir, if that is the one you speak of,” I said.

I did not think it a fit time to explain to him once again what he should know better than any man: he was my father, but the woman on Earth was not my mother.

“Of course,” he said, and tapped himself on the leg. “What are we doing here?”

“Looking to buy scrap metal,” I whispered in his ear.

“Do we need scrap?” he asked.

“Yes, but not this,” I said. “These are mostly infected parts the traders could not sell elsewhere. They are keeping them moving so we can’t examine the damage they’ve covered with red enamel. The entire lot is of suspect quality.”

“Arabs,” huffed Father. “We have beaten them.”

“Many times, sir,” I said. “Presently, however, they are our friends.”

“Clever fellows, though,” he said. “I like how they jump about. If you can’t fight worth a damn, you should be able to do tricks. Could we lie down now? It’s very unpleasant here.”

Brigadier Harriman pointed out the messengers to him.

“Governor General, they have a letter from Mr. Golden,” said the second-in-command, and handed my father a stack of sealed papers.

“Mr. Golden?” said Father, and he had to ponder the name for several moments ere he remembered Mr. Golden was the father of his sons’ wives. “A slippery chap,” said General Black, as he recalled. “Very rich. I wouldn’t buy scrap from him, either. He talks too much. Bit of a windbag.”

The general fell silent again. I could tell he was further considering Mr. Golden. The soldiers standing around him were awaiting his orders and beginning to glance at each other from the corners of their eyes.

“Sir,” said Harriman, after he had awaited a word from his commander for a respectful minute, “the tradesmen from Antioch Station . . .”

“Send them away,” said Father, emerging from his reverie. “They are too noisy for my liking. Send old Golden away, too. Tell him to call on me later. I don’t care if we are related by marriage. I need to lie down.”

“General,” said Harriman, and cleared his throat, “the gentleman is not present. His messengers have brought you the letter you are holding.”

“Yes, yes indeed,” said Father, and was surprised to see he was holding a bundle of papers in his lap. “Well done,” he added to Harriman and the other officers. “Exemplary service. You are dismissed. Not from the army—from my presence, I mean. Go about your duties. Go about your regular duties. I don’t need your help,” he said to me as he leaned forward to stand.

He got almost into a crouching position before he decided he was not going to get completely upright. He grunted mightily when he reached the acme of his progress, as if the sound in his throat would give him the momentum he needed to get to his feet. The sound did not help. Brigadier Harriman and I had to step forward and lift him up, which we were accustomed to doing nearly every time he stood.

“There we go. No need for help. Here we go. Once the old mule takes the first step, he can go all the way home, no matter how long the trip. Here we go,” said Father.

I took his arm and led him from the conveyer belt toward the wide dome housing the military station. The officers saluted Father's retreating backside, and the general waved to them over his shoulder. He could not have used less ceremony if he were taking leave of a group of children. I noted that the messengers from Garden City were carrying other missives that they distributed to the divisional commanders and to several of the common soldiers as soon as we were a hundred paces from them.

"Good chaps, good chaps," my father said to the scores of troopers who stopped to salute him as we passed them. (I expect that as soon as we were beyond earshot many of the men commented on how the governor of Mars's mining stations needed a woman to help him walk.)

Movement always did Father good. As we walked farther, his legs became steadier and his mind clearer. On the last half of the walk home, he was able to let go of me and progress under his own power.

"Old age happens all at once, Justa," he told me. "One day I was as strong as a bull, and the next I needed an hour to wake up and longer than that to go to sleep."

The servants at our quarters scurried about like so many geese when they beheld us approaching. Mica, the Siberian butler my father had collected on a campaign in the Far East, came running to us, bowing as he went, and smiling so broadly the corners of his mouth nearly touched his ears.

"The governor general has purchased many tons of fine steel, yes?" he said. "The Arab traders have wonderful scrap. I told you so."

"We bought scrap, no," I told him. "Your friends tried to sell us defective metal that has the nano-infestation on it."

"Not my friends!" protested Mica. "Arabs are liars and thieves! They are the enemies of mankind! Never have I been a friend to Arabs! God bless the noble soldiers of the Pan-Polarian Empire for defending civilization from those evil people!"

He was indignant I should remember he was the one who had approached the general on behalf of the traders. As a member of the religious sect known as the Pristine Ones, a group that was not supposed to consort with criminals, Mica resented anyone who disparaged his moral

character. He put a smile over his anger and pulled the door open to let us enter. My father instantly cast off his armored jacket and his long plastic topcoat, and laid himself upon his field cot. While Mica undid the old man's laced boots, Father gave forth a deep, appreciative sigh.

"Read me the letter, Justa," he ordered me. "What could Golden want to plague us with now? It's something to do with money, I'll wager."

Those who have spoken ill of my father—or were more afraid of his enemies than they were true to him—have said the governor general of Mars Station was an uneducated man, and that was why he had others read aloud to him. In truth he was born to a wealthy military father who saw to it that Father was proficient in both English and Syntalk while he was still a boy living at home. Father's problem when he grew to be an old man was not lack of education; it was his failing eyesight. The same blazing tunnel lights and eastern sky that had burned Father's face and neck as dark as his name had baked his eyes until everything beyond the end of his nose was a little blurry to him. In the declining years of his life he could no more have read handwritten script than he could have won a footrace. Unless he heard my voice, he was unable to identify his daughter when I was standing at a distance.

I tore open the seal on Mr. Golden's letter and began to read:

"My warmest salutations to my lord Peter Justice Black—"

"'Lord'?! What is this 'Lord' business?" asked my father. "The rascal definitely wants more than I can give him!"

I read: "'—the hero the Pan-Polarian people have chosen to be—I cannot stop myself from writing it—emperor!'"

"What is the fool saying?" asked Father.

Mr. Golden's declaration caused Father to prop himself onto the edge of the cot.

I continued: "'Do not, for humility's sake, forbid me to call you by that title, and order not the scholar reading this to you to tear apart these lines written by the most insignificant of your supporters. I beg your indulgence: I well know no one would dare to demand it of you. Please trust me when I aver it is my love for your noble person and my faith in

the salvation you shall bring to the Empire which makes me, compels me, yea, threatens me with tortures worse than death lest I call you by that title. "The Emperor Peter Justice Black," I say aloud to myself again and again, so intoxicated am I by that sweet phrase that my family and friends and those I meet upon the streets think I am mad. The Emperor Peter Justice Black. It surpasses all other pleasures to write it and then to contemplate the words that are enthroned upon the paper.

"I have been told by certain friends that you know what happened in the Field of Diversions upon John Chrysalis's failure to pay the Guardsmen of Garden City the gold he had promised them."

"I know nothing of this!" exclaimed Father. "Herman Pretext is emperor! Who is this John Chrysalis?"

"Lord Chrysalis, sir," I explained. "He was a senator. Apparently, he is now emperor. Lord Pretext seems to be gone."

"They just killed an emperor!" said my father. "How long has it been since we were in Garden City when they killed Luke Anthony?"

"We were there only three months ago, sir," I said.

I read farther in Mr. Golden's letter: "As you know, the people gathered there, inside the Field of Diversions, and they were furious with John Chrysalis, whom they rightfully considered unworthy of the title Emperor. I was present and can truthfully say that for the first hours of that daylong gathering the air thundered with insults aimed at the impudent slug who would rule the world. Here, a group shouted lewd jokes concerning Chrysalis's unmanly passions—the which I shall not repeat here for fear I offend a man whose self-restraint in sensual matters is so widely known. There, Chrysalis's dupes came forth bearing meager sacks of gold coins and tried to buy the public's goodwill. They were driven from the stadium with stones clattering at their heels. Here again, good citizens railed against Chrysalis's brazen assumption of the throne so soon after Lord Pretext's death, and they argued that the usurper had a hand in that kindly ruler's murder. Then, from somewhere in the crowd arose a rhythmic chant we at first thought was the sound of soldiers' boots on the street outside. We fell silent and listened. We heard clearly then it was

some good men chanting: “Black, Black, Peter Black!” Others followed their brave example. Then more and more shouted your name, the glorious chant rising and yet rising farther in power like the wind rising from the southern deserts, until “Peter Black” was upon the lips of every man in Garden City, save upon the girlish lips set in the midst of John Chrysalis’s flaccid, yellow face. Next someone—if I recall correctly, it was myself—went to the speaker’s platform and gave, in the best words he could summon, a speech invoking Peter Black as the guardian of the Empire and the true heir to the sacred office of emperor. The speaker asked, most respectfully, that General Black not forget his people in these desperate times. This speech, as poor as it was, was greeted with tumultuous applause and shouts of approval. Other far more elegant men of senatorial rank came forward to make similar, but more eloquent, orations in your favor, and each speech was followed by a round of riotous cheering.

“I have been told by friends that certain conspirators who love not you, me, or the Empire have whispered to you that those faceless men who began the chant for Peter Black were bribed by this your loyal servant to act as they did. Consider, my friend, that these same liars have before claimed that I have secretly pledged my support to Abdul Selin!”

“Another name,” said Father. “At least I know that one. Selin is governor in North America.”

“It seems some want him to be emperor now,” I said.

“Everyone, it seems, will be emperor sooner or later,” said Father.

I read on: “The scoundrels should get their lies to agree. If I were supporting Selin in his ill-conceived assault on the sacred throne the gods—if they exist and have a number that can be counted—have set above the reach of all ordinary men, would I be bribing riffraff to boom your cause in the Field of Diversions?”

“I don’t get that,” said Father. “The man cannot write a straight sentence. Crooked words, crooked thoughts I always say. What do you suppose he means by that business about the throne?”

“He means the emperor’s throne,” I said.

“Since when is that sacred?” asked Father. “Some dead emperors are

sacred, or so their sects and the Senate have declared them, but the place where they sit? We're worshipping chairs now?"

"He is being poetic, sir."

"Poets," sniffed Father. "A bunch of lisping little fairies. They can't write a straight sentence, not a one of them. You ask me, they're ninety percent of what's wrong with the world; them and all their songs. Well, them and this thing that infects the metal—together they're ninety percent of the problem. At any rate, they are a bad bunch for anybody to use as a model."

"Were I the African Selin's lackey," I read, "'which no true Pan-Polarian could be, would I be the first to expose myself upon the speaker's platform, despite the threats these many conspirators have sent my way? Would I have married my daughters to your sons, knowing the danger to their lives should our designs fail, if I were the Turk's confidant?'"

"Turk?" said Father. "Who is the Turk? Selin?"

"Yes," I said, "Mr. Golden is referring to Selin. Selin is of Turkish ancestry and African birth. His hometown is Tunis. To Mr. Golden, Turks and Africans seem to be all the same."

"Turks, Libyans, Syrians, Iranians, Arabs—they're all wogs," said Father, and lay back down so Mica could rub his weary legs. "The sun burnt me black. Old Selin was born as brown as a loaf of bread."

"As was I, sir," I said.

He did not mean to be as cruel as he sometimes was. He actually forgot that my mother was a Syrian. At times he succeeded in forgetting I was also a bastard.

I forged ahead in the turgid letter. "'Would I have solicited money for your cause from the capital's best families—which monies I shall be sending to you when the time is more opportune—if I were not devoted entirely to you? Would I risk this correspondence with the great General Black if I were not completely his? No, says this honest man. Put me to the test: give me whatever dangerous mission your elite troopers shun; let me die for my friend, my lord, my emperor, my special deity! I am a slave in perpetuity to you; not a common slave who may one day buy his

freedom, but one who will remain your property until your death—may God forestall that evil day when you are taken from us! Tell me to cut off my right hand as a sign of my obedience and the messenger who brings you my next letter will bring my severed hand with him. Order me to kill my dear brother, and the same messenger will bring his head to you, for that is the sort of upright man I am.”

“The man is an ass,” commented Father. “Skip ahead to the pertinent parts, if there are any.”

“Let’s see,” I said. “There are another five paragraphs of self-abuse. He says he would kill his mother for you, were that lady not already dead. He says General Black will not abandon Garden City to ‘the ambling wolf and the hungry raven.’ That’s rather good, for him, I mean. I wonder where he lifted that phrase from.”

“He goes on and on and on,” said Father. “Just tell me what he wants.”

“He rambles on,” I said, scanning through the long letter. “There are some anecdotes here about effeminate men insulting you and the Lady of Flowers. He put those in here to anger you. Oh, this is good; he says some ex-slaves who are currently pimps are calling you a coward because you haven’t declared yourself emperor. Here’s the nub: ‘If you allow Selin to take the throne uncontested, you will lose more than an opportunity; you will lose your life. We are all slaves in this world, my lord Black, everyone except the emperor. Chrysalis is a weakling and may be allowed to live, but Selin will never allow a slave as powerful as you to serve him.’ Then there are some more words of praise for you, and that’s the end of it.”

“That is everything?” asked Father from his cot.

“May I say, master,” said Mica, “that the gentleman is a most interesting writer?”

“The gentleman would agree with you,” said Father. Of me he asked, “Is Lord Pretext really dead?”

“So Mr. Golden says,” I replied. “And John Chrysalis seems to be the new emperor. We will have to make inquiries.”

“Explain again how that mongrel Selin is mixed up in this,” said Father.

“He himself, or someone in Garden City, wants Selin to be emperor after this Chrysalis is dead,” I said. “Selin, according to the letter, is marching on the capital as we speak. He would have the largest army.”

“And Golden wants me to become emperor instead of Selin?” said Father. “I was a sergeant first grade, Justa. Served in the ranks for most of my life. Now this rich fool wants me to stand for emperor? Me? The man is insane. We never should have formed a connection with him.”

“I expect, sir,” I said, “that Mr. Golden has sent a similar letter to every provincial general, offering each of them aid and money. Selin himself probably has a letter from him.”

Father got up from his cot. The governor of Mars Station looked an old man on his skinny, blue-veined legs as he paced the floor wearing only his tunic and his underclothes. He stopped and peered out the window for a long time, though I doubted he could see anything outside in the darkened tunnels very clearly. He was not frightened. Father had been through too much to fear anything any longer. Not even the prospect of his own death frightened him anymore. He was upset because he still cared for his distant family in Garden City and for the Empire, although both his family and the Empire had taken much from him and had never given him much in return.

“There is one true thing in this letter that windbag has sent us,” he said. “Should Selin become emperor, if he marches on Garden City and kills this pretender Chrysalis, then the days of my life are numbered. Selin will suffer no other army commanders. He’ll purge the generals and the provincial governors and install members of that dreadful family of his in most of the dead men’s places. He won’t kill just me. He’ll take my wife, my sons, all my relatives. Selin will do the same to anyone unwilling to carry water for him. I may not know these politicians in Garden City, those senators who want to be rulers of the world and the whispering rich men, but I do know the generals, and Selin is the worst of the lot.”

“We don’t know anything definitely, sir,” I said. “You need not worry yourself over something Mr. Golden has written. You know what a liar he is. Lie down and let Mica massage your legs some more. We will know the

full story in a few days. There will be merchants in the marketplace who will tell us. Big news like this always travels with the tradesmen now that broadcast communications are compromised.”

He did as I bade him, and Mica’s soothing hands soon had Father asleep and snoring loudly. When the lights in the great dome over the military camp were being dimmed, he awoke and had a simple dinner of cold polenta cakes and dehydrated vegetables. Father had gone to sleep another time when we in the household heard the soldiers outside chanting his name. Mr. Golden’s messengers had spread their other letters throughout the entire camp, and now everyone knew of the events in Garden City. Thousands of people—Pan-Polarian troops, merchants from the tunnel communities, camp followers from outside the walls of the military post, and some of the now drunken scrap traders—were marching around our little house, proclaiming in a dozen different languages that General Peter Black was the new lord of the Pan-Polarian Empire. Father was completely befuddled. He stood at the window and shouted at the disorderly crowd to be quiet. To every officer he saw tramping past he barked an order to the effect that the men should be gotten back inside their barracks. “Make them stop!” he told his commanders. “I’m not of royal blood! I’m not even one of the Anthony family! I’m a common soldier!” The officers were busy till long after dark getting the soldiers to return to their quarters. After that had been accomplished we could still hear the civilians shouting “Black, Black, Peter Black!” outside the limits of the camp.

“All I wanted to do today was buy some uninfected scrap,” said my father as he lay back down and put an arm over his forehead. “Now I have a camp full of idiots eager to have me declare myself emperor! We have to have a better plan tomorrow, Justa.”