Blind Man's Lantern

Lang, Allen Kim

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Walking home in the dark from an evening spent in mischief, a young man spied coming toward him down the road a person with a lamp. When the wayfarers drew abreast, the play-boy saw that the other traveler was the Blind Man from his village. "Blind Man," the youngster shouted across the road, "what a fool you be! Why, old No-Eyes, do you bear a lantern, you whose midnight is no darker than his noonday?" The Blind Man lifted his lamp. "It is not as a light for myself that I carry this, Boy," he said, "it is to warn off you fools with eyes."

—Hausa proverb

The Captain shook hands with the black-hatted Amishman while the woman stood aside, not concerning herself with men's business. "It's been a pleasure to have you and *Fraa* Stoltzfoos aboard, Aaron," the Captain said. "Ship's stores are yours, my friend; if there's anything you need, take it and welcome. You're a long way from the corner grocery."

"My Martha and I have all that's needful," Aaron Stoltzfoos said. "We have our plow, our seed, our land. Captain, please tell your men, who treated us strangers as honored guests, we thank them from our hearts. We'll not soon forget their kindness."

"I'll tell them," the Captain promised. Stoltzfoos hoisted himself to the wagon seat and reached a hand down to boost his wife up beside him. Martha Stoltzfoos sat, blushing a bit for having displayed an accidental inch of black stocking before the ship's officers. She smoothed down her black skirts and apron, patted the candle-snuffer *Kapp* into place over her prayer-covering, and tucked the wool cape around her arms and shoulders. The world outside, her husband said, was a cold one.

Now in the Stoltzfoos wagon was the final lot of homestead goods with which these two Amishers would battle the world of Murna. There was the plow and bags of seed, two crates of nervous chickens; a huge, round tabletop; an alcohol-burning laboratory incubator, bottles of agar-powder, and a pressure cooker that could can vegetables as readily as it could autoclave culture-media. There was a microscope designed to work by lamplight, as the worldly vanity of electric light would ill suit an Old Order bacteriologist like Martha Stoltzfoos. Walled in by all this gear was another passenger due to debark on Murna, snuffling and grunting with impatience. "*Sei schtill*, Wutzchen," Stoltzfoos crooned. "You'll be in your home pen soon enough."

The Captain raised his hand. The Engineer punched a button to tongue the landing ramp out to Murnan earth. Cold air rammed in from the outside winter. The four horses stomped their hoofs on the floor-plates, their breath spikes of steam. Wutzchen squealed dismay as the chill hit his nose.

"We're *reddi far geh*, Captain," Stoltzfoos said. "My woman and I invite you and your men to feast at our table when you're back in these parts, five years hence. We'll stuff you fat as sausages with onion soup and Pannhaas, Knepp and Ebbelkuche, shoo-fly pie and *scharifer* cider, if the folk here grow apples fit for squeezing."

"You'll have to set up planks outdoors to feed the lot I'll be bringing, Aaron," the Captain said. "Come five-years' springtime, when I bring your Amish neighbors out, I'll not forget to have in my pockets a toot of candy for the little Stoltzes I'll expect to see underfoot." Martha, whose English was rusty, blushed none the less. Aaron grinned as he slapped the reins over the rumps of his team. "Giddap!" The cart rumbled across the deck and down the ramp, onto the soil of Murna. Yonnie, the Ayrshire bull, tossed his head and sat as the rope tightened on his nose-band. He skidded stubbornly down the ramp till he felt cold earth against his rear. Accepting fate, Yonnie scrambled up and plodded after the wagon. As the Stoltzfooses and the last of their off-worldly goods topped a hillock, they both turned to wave at the ship's officers. Then, veiled by the dusty fall of snow, they disappeared.

"I don't envy them," the Engineer said, staring out into the wintery world.

"Hymie, were you born in a barn?" the Exec bellowed.

"Sorry, sir." The Engineer raised the landing ramp. Heaters hummed to thaw the hold's air. "I was thinking about how alone those two folks are now."

"Hardly alone," the Captain said. "There are four million Murnans, friendly people who consider a white skin no more than a personal idio-syncrasy. Aaron's what his folks call a *Chentelmaan*, too. He'll get along."

"Chentelmaan-schmentelmaan," the Engineer said. "Why'd he come half across Creation to scratch out a living with a horse-drawn plow?"

"He came out here for dirt," the Captain said. "Soil is more than seed-bed to the Amish. It feeds the Old Order they're born to. Aaron and Martha Stoltzfoos would rather have built their barns beside the

Susquehanna, but all the land there's taken. Aaron could have taken a job in Lancaster, too; he could have shaved off his beard, bought a Chevie and moved to the suburbs, and settled down to read an English-language Bible in a steepled church. Instead, he signed a homestead-contract for a hundred acres eighty light-years from home; and set out to plow the land like his grandpop did. He'll sweat hard for his piece of Murna, but the Amish always pay well for their land."

"And what do we, the government, I mean, get from the deal?" the Exec wanted to know. "This wagon of ours doesn't run on hay, like Aaron's does."

"Cultures skid backwards when they're transplanted," the Captain said. "Murnan culture was lifted from Kano, a modern city by the standards of the time; but, without tools and with a population too small to support technology, the West African apostates from Islam who landed here four hundred years ago slid back to the ways of their grandparents. We want them to get up to date again. We want Murna to become a market. That's Aaron's job. Our Amishman has got to start this planet back toward the machine age."

"Seems an odd job to give a fellow who won't drive a car or read by electric light," the Engineer observed.

"Not so odd," the Captain said. "The Amish pretty much invented American agriculture, you know. They've developed the finest low-energy farming there is. Clover-growing, crop-rotation, using animal manures, those are their inventions. Aaron, by his example, will teach the natives here Pennsylvania farming. Before you can say Tom Malthus, there'll be steel cities in this wilderness, filled with citizens eager to open charge accounts for low-gravs and stereo sets."

"You expect our bearded friend to reap quite a harvest, Captain," the Engineer said. "I just hope the natives here let him plant the seed."

"Did you get along with him, Hymie?"

"Sure," the Engineer said. "Aaron even made our smiths, those human sharks bound for Qureysh, act friendly. For all his strange ways, he's a nice guy."

"Nice guy, hell," the Captain said. "He's a genius. That seventeenth-century un-scientist has more feeling for folkways in his calloused left hand than you'd find in all the Colonial Survey. How do you suppose the Old Order maintains itself in Pennsylvania, a tiny Deitsch-speaking enclave surrounded by calico suburbs and ten-lane highways? They

mind their business and leave the neighbors to theirs. The Amish have never been missionaries—they learned in 1600 that missionaries are resented, and either slaughtered or absorbed."

"Sometimes digestively," the Engineer remarked.

"Since the Thirty Years' War, back when 'Hamlet' was opening in London, these people have been breeding a man who can fit one special niche in society. The failures were killed in the early days, or later went gay and took the trappings of the majority. The successes stayed on the farm, respected and left alone. Aaron has flirted with our century; he and his wife learned some very un-Amish skills at the Homestead School. The skill that makes Aaron worth his fare out here, though, is an Amish skill, and the rarest one of all. He knows the Right Way to Live, and lives it; but he knows, too, that your Truth-of-the Universe is something different. And right, for you. He's quite a man, our Aaron Stoltzfoos. That's why we dropped him here."

"Better him than me," the Engineer said.

"Precisely," the Captain said. He turned to the Exec. "As soon as we've lifted, ask Colonel Harris to call on me in my cabin, Gene. Our Marines had better fresh-up their swordsmanship and cavalry tactics if they're to help our Inad Tuaregs establish that foundry on Qureysh."

"It sometimes seems you're more Ship's Anthropologist than Captain," the Engineer remarked.

"I'm an anthro-apologist, Hymie, like Mr. Kipling," the Captain said. "*There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays. And—every—single—one—of—them—is—right!*" Bells rang, and the ship surged. "Aaron and Martha, God keep you," the Captain said.

"Whoa!" Aaron shouted. He peered back toward the ship, floating up into grayness, the cavitation of her wake stirring the snow into patterns like fine-veined marble. "*Gott saygen eich*," he said, a prayer for his departing friends.

His wife shivered. "It's cold enough to freeze the horns off a mooley-cow," she said. She glanced about at the snow-drifted little trees and clutched her black cloak tighter. "I'm feared, Stoltz. There's naught about us now but snow and black heathen."

"It's fear that is the heathen," Aaron said. "*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and the host of them by the breath of His mouth.*" He kissed her. "I welcome you to our new homeland, wife," he said.

Behind them Wutzchen—"piglet"—grunted. Martha smiled back at the giant porker, perched amongst the cases and bags and household goods like the victim of some bawdy chiavari. "I've never heard a pig mutter so," she said.

"If he knew that his business here was to flatter the local lady-pigs with farrow, Wutzchen would hop out and run," Aaron said.

"*Dummel dich*, Stoltz," Martha said. "I've got to make your supper yet, and we don't have so much as a stove lit in our tent."

Stoltzfoos slapped the team back into motion. "What we need for our journey home are a few of the *altie lieder*," he said, reaching back in the wagon for his scarred guitar. He strummed and hummed, then began singing in his clear baritone: "*In da guut alt Suumer-zeit* …

"… *In da guut alt Suumer-zeit*," Martha's voice joined him. As they jolted along the path through the pine trees, heading toward Datura-village, near which their homestead stood, they sang the other homey songs to the music of the old guitar. "*Drawk Mich Zrick zu Alt Virginye*," nostalgic for the black-garbed Plain-Folk left at home. Then Aaron's fingers danced a livelier tune on the strings: "*Ich fang 'n neie Fashun aw*," he crowed, and Martha joined in:

"A new fashion I'll begin," they sang,

"The hay I'll cut in the winter;

"When the sun-heat beats, I'll loaf in the shade.

"And feast on cherry-pie.

"I'll get us a white, smearkase cow,

"And a yard full of guinea-hen geese;

"A red-beet tree as high as the moon,

"And a patent-leather fence.

"The chickens I'll keep in the kitchen," they sang; whereupon Martha broke down laughing.

"It's a new world, and for now a cold world; but it's God's world, with home just up ahead," Aaron shouted. He pulled the wagon up next to the arctic tent that was to be their temporary farmhouse, beside the wagon loads of provision he'd brought before. He jumped down and swung Martha to earth. "Light the stove, woman; make your little kitchen bright, while I make our beasts feel welcome."

The Amishwoman pushed aside the entrance flap of the tent. Enclosed was a circle some twelve feet wide. The floor was bare earth. Once

warmed by the pump-up "naptha" lantern and the gasoline hotplate, it would become a bog. Martha went out to the wagon to get a hatchet and set out for the nearby spinny of pines to trim off some twigs. Old Order manner forbid decorative floor-coverings as improper worldly show; but a springy carpet of pine-twigs could be considered as no more than a wooden floor, keeping two Plain Folk from sinking to their knees in mud.

The pots were soon boiling atop the two-burner stove, steaming the tent's air with onion-tangy *tzvivvele Supp* and the savory pork-smell of *Schnitz un Knepp*, a cannibal odor that disturbed not a bit Wutzchen, snoring behind the cookstove. Chickens, penned beneath the bed, chuckled in their bedtime caucus. The cow stood cheek-by-jowl with Yonnie, warming him with platonic graciousness as they shared the hay Aaron had spread before them. Martha stirred her soup. "When the bishop married me to you," she told Aaron, "he said naught of my having to sleep with a pig."

"Ah, but I thought you knew that to be the purpose of Christian marriage, woman," Aaron said, standing close.

"It's Wutz I mean," she said. "Truly, I mind not a bit living as in one of those automobile-wagons, since it's with you, and only for a little while."

"I'll hire a crew of our neighbors to help with the barn tomorrow," Aaron said. "That done, you'll have but one pig to sleep with."

After grace, they sat on cases of tobacco to eat their meal from a table of feed sacks covered with oilcloth. "The man in the ship's little kitchen let me make and freeze pies, Stoltz," Martha said. "He said we'd have a deepfreeze big as all outdoors, without electric, so use it. Eat till it's all, *Maan*; there's more back."

Yonnie bumped against Aaron's eating-elbow. "No man and his wife have eaten in such a zoo since Noah and his wife left the ark," Aaron said. He cut a slice of Schnitz-pie and palmed it against the bull's big snout to be snuffled up. "He likes your cooking," he said.

"So wash his face," Martha told him.

Outside the tent there was a clatter of horse-iron on frozen ground. "What the die-hinker is that?" Aaron demanded. He stood and picked up the naphtha lantern.

Outside, Aaron saw a tall black stranger, astride a horse as pale as the little Murnan moons that lighted him. "*Rankeshi dade!*" the visitor bellowed.

"May your life be a long one!" Aaron Stoltzfoos repeated in Hausa. Observing that his caller was brandishing a clenched fist, the Amishman observed the same ambiguous courtesy. "If you will enter, O Welcome Stranger, my house will be honored."

"Mother bless thee, Bearded One," the Murnan said. He dismounted, tossing his reins to one of the four retainers who remained on horseback. He entered the tent after Aaron; and stared about him at the animals, letting his dark eyes flick across Martha's unveiled face. At the Amishman's invitation, the visitor sat himself on a tobacco case, revealing as he crossed his legs elaborately embroidered trousers and boot tops worked with designs that would dazzle a Texan. Martha bustled about hiding the remains of their meal.

The Murnan's outer dress was a woolen *riga*, the neckless gown of his West-African forefathers, with a blanket draped about his shoulders, exactly as those ancestors had worn one in the season of the cold wind called harmattan. Aaron introduced himself as Haruna, the Hausa version of his name; and the guest made himself known as Sarki—Chief—of the village of Datura. His given name was Kazunzumi. Wutzchen snuffled in his sleep. The Sarki glanced at the huge pig and smiled. Aaron relaxed a bit. The Islamic interdict on swine had been shed by the Murnans when they'd become apostates, just as Colonial Survey had guessed.

Stoltzfoos' Hausa, learned at the Homestead School at Georgetown University, proved adequate to its first challenge in the field, though he discovered, with every experimenter in a new language, that his most useful phrase was *magana sanoo-sanoo*: "please speak slowly." Aaron let the Chief commence the desultory conversation that would precede talk of consequence. Martha, ignored by the men, sat on the edge of the bed, reading the big German-language Bible. Aaron and Kazunzumi sang on in the heathen tongue about weather, beasts, and field-crops.

The Sarki leaned forward to examine Aaron's beard and shaven upper lip, once; and smiled. The Murnan does not wear such. He looked at Martha more casually now, seeing that the husband was not disgraced by his wife's naked face; and remarked on the whiteness of her skin in the same tones he'd mentioned Wutzchen's remarkable girth.

Aaron asked when the snows would cease, when the earth would thaw. The Sarki told him, and said that the land here was as rich as manure. Gradually the talk worked round to problems involving carpenters, nails, lumber, hinges—and money. Aaron was pleased to discover that the natives thought nothing of digging a cellar and raising a barn in midwinter, and that workers could be easily hired.

Suddenly Sarki Kazunzumi stood and slapped his palms together. The tent flap was shoved open. Bowed servants, who'd shivered outside for over an hour, placed their master's presents on the sack table, on the twig floor, even beside Martha on the bed. There were iron knives, a roast kid, a basket of peanuts, a sack of roasted coffee beans, a string of dried fruit, and a tiny earthware flask of perfume. There was even a woolen riga for Aaron, black, suggesting that the Survey had said a bit to the natives about Amish custom; and there were bolts of bright-patterned cloth too worldly for aught but quilts and infant-dresses, brightening Martha's eyes.

Aaron stood to accept the guest gifts with elaborate thanks. Sarki Kazunzumi as elaborately bemeaned his offerings. "Musa the carpenter will appear on tomorrow's tomorrow," he said. "You will, the Mother willing, visit me in Datura tomorrow. We will together purchase lumber worthy of my friend-neighbor's barn-making. May the Mother give you strength to farm, Haruna! May the Mother grant you the light of understanding!"

"*Sannu, sannu!*" Stoltzfoos responded. He stood at the door of his tent, holding his lantern high to watch the Sarki and his servants ride off into the darkness.

"*Er iss en groesie Fisch, nee?*" Martha asked.

"The biggest fish in these parts," Aaron agreed. "Did you understand our talk?"

"The heathen speech is hard for me to learn, Stoltz," Martha admitted, speaking in the dialect they'd both been reared to. "While you had only the alien speech to study, I spent my time learning to grow the buglets and tell the various sorts apart. Besides, *unser guutie Deitschie Schproech, asz unser Erlayser schwetzt, iss guut genunk fa mier*." (Our honest German tongue, that our Saviour spoke, is good enough for me).

Aaron laughed. "So *altfashuned* a *Maedel* I married," he said. "Woman, you must learn the Hausa, too. We must be friends to these *Schwotzers*, as

we were friends with the English-speakers back in the United Schtayts." He pushed aside the bolt of Murnan cloth to sit beside his wife, and leafed through the pages of their *Familien-Bibel*, pages lovingly worn by his father's fingers, and his grandfather's. "Listen," he commanded:

"*For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord they God for the good land which He hath given thee.*" Aaron closed the big book reverently. "Awmen," he said.

"Awmen," the woman echoed. "Aaron, with you beside me, I am not fretful."

"And with the Lord above us, I fear not in a strange land," Aaron said. He bent to scrape a handful of earth from beneath Martha's pine-twig carpet. "*Guuter Gruundt*," he said. "This will grow tall corn. Tobacco, too; the folk here relish our leaf. There will be deep grasses for the beasts when the snow melts. We will prosper here, wife."

The next morning was cold, but the snowfall had ceased for a spell. The Stoltzfooses had risen well before the dawn; Martha to feed herself, her husband, and the chickens; Aaron to ready the horse and wagon for a trip into Datura. He counted out the hoard of golden cowries he'd been loaned as grubstake, did some arithmetic, and allowed his wife to pour him a second cup of coffee for the road. "You may expect the Sarki's wives to visit while I'm gone," he remarked.

"I'd be scared half to death!" Martha Stoltzfoos said. Her hands went to the back of her head, behind the lace prayer covering. "My hair's all strooby, this place is untidy as an auction yard; besides, how can I talk with those dark and heathen women? Them all decked out in golden bangles and silken clothes, most likely, like the bad lady of Babylon? Aaron Stoltz, I would admire a pretty to ride into town with you."

"Haggling for hired-help is man's *Bissiniss*." he said. "When Kazunzumi's women come, feed them pie and peaches from the can. You'll find a way to talk, or women are not sisters. I'll be back home in time for evening chores."

Bumping along the trail into Datura, Aaron Stoltzfoos studied the land. A world that could allow so much well-drained black soil to go unfarmed was fortunate indeed, he mused. He thought of his father's farm, which would be his elder brother's, squeezed between railroad tracks and a three-lane highway, pressed from the west by an Armstrong Cork plant, the very cornstalks humming in harmony with the electric lines strung across the fields. This land was what the old folks had sought in America so long ago: a wilderness ripe for the plow.

The wagon rumbled along the hoof-pocked frozen clay. Aaron analyzed the contours of the hills for watershed and signs of erosion. He studied the patterns of the barren winter fields, fall-plowed and showing here and there the stubble of a crop he didn't recognize. When the clouds scudded for a moment off the sun, he grinned up, and looked back blinded to the road. Good tilth and friendship were promised here, gifts to balance loneliness. Five years from spring, other Amish folk would come to homestead—what a barn-raising they'd have! For now, though, he and Martha, come from a society so close-knit that each had always known the yield-per-acre of their remotest cousin-german, were in a land as strange as the New York City Aaron, stopping in for a phone-call to the vet had once glimpsed on the screen of a gay-German neighbor's stereo-set.

Datura looked to Aaron like a city from the Bible, giving it a certain vicarious familiarity. The great wall was a block of sunbaked mud, fifty feet tall at the battlements, forty feet thick at its base; with bright, meaningless flags spotted on either side of the entrance tower. The cowhide-shielded gate was open. Birds popped out of mud nests glued to the mud wall and chattered at Aaron. Small boys wearing too little to be warm appeared at the opening like flies at a hog-slaughtering to add to the din, buzzing and hopping about and waving their arms as they called companions to view the black-bearded stranger.

Aaron whoaed his horse and took a handful of *anenes*, copper tenth-penny bits, to rattle between his hands. "*Zonang!*" he shouted: "Come here! Is there a boy amongst you brave enough to ride with an off-worlder to the Sarki's house, pointing him the way?"

One of the boys laughed at Aaron's slow, careful Hausa. "Let Black-Hat's whiskers point him the way!" the boy yelled.

"*Uwaka! Ubaka!*" Damning both parents of the rude one, another youngster trotted up to Aaron's wagon and raised a skinny brown fist in greeting. "Sir Off-Worlder, I who am named Waziri, Musa-the-

Carpenter's son, would be honored to direct you to the house of Sarki Kazunzumi."

"The honor, young man, is mine," Stoltzfoos assured the lad, raising his own fist gravely. "My name is Haruna, son of Levi," he said, reaching down to hoist the boy up beside him on the wagon's seat. "Your friends have ill manners." He giddapped the horse.

"Buzzard-heads!" Waziri shouted back at his whilom companions.

"Peace, Waziri!" Aaron protested. "You'll frighten my poor horse into conniptions. Do you work for your father, the carpenter?"

"*To*, honorable Haruna," the boy said. "Yes." The empty wagon thumped over the wheel-cut streets like a wooden drum. "By the Mother, sir, I have great knowledge of planing and joining; of all the various sorts of wood, and the curing of them; all the tools my father uses are as familiar to me as my own left hand."

"Carpentry is a skillful trade," Aaron said. "Myself, I am but a farmer."

"By Mother's light! So am I!" Waziri said, dazzled by this coincidence. "I can cultivate a field free of all its noxious weeds and touch never a food-plant. I can steer a plow straight as a snapped chalk-string, grade seed with a sure eye; I can spread manure—"

"I'm sure you can, Waziri," Aaron said. "I need a man of just those rare qualifications to work for me. Know you such a paragon?"

"Mother's name! Myself, your Honor!"

Aaron Stoltzfoos shook the hand of his hired man, an alien convention that much impressed Waziri. The boy was to draw three hundred anenes a day, some thirty-five cents, well above the local minimum-wage conventions; and he would get his bed and meals. Aaron's confidence that the boastful lad would make a farmer was bolstered by Waziri's loud calculations: "Three hundred coppers a day make, in ten day's work, a bronze cowrie; ten big bronzes make a silver cowrie, the price of an acre of land. Haruna, will you teach me your off-world farming? Will you allow me to buy land that neighbors yours?"

"*Sei schtill, Buu*," Aaron said, laughing. "Before you reap your first crop, you must find me the Sarki."

"We are here, Master Haruna."

The Sarki's house was no larger than its neighbors, Moorish-styled and domed-roofed like the others; but it wore on its streetside walls designs

cut into the stucco, scrolls and arabesques. Just above the doorway, which opened spang onto the broadway of Datura, a grinning face peered down upon the visitors, its eyes ruby-colored glass.

Waziri pounded the door for Aaron, and stepped aside to let his new employer do the speaking. They were admitted to the house by a thin, old man wearing a pink turban. As they followed this butler down a hallway, Aaron and Waziri heard the shrieks and giggles of feminine consternation that told of women being herded into the zenana. The Amishman glimpsed one of the ladies, perhaps Sarki Kazunzumi's most junior wife, dashing toward the female sanctuary. Her eyes were lozenges of antimony; her hands, dipped in henna, seemed clad in pale kid gloves. Aaron, recalling pointers on Murnan etiquette he'd received at Georgetown, elaborately did not see the lady. He removed his hat as the turbaned butler bowed him to a plush-covered sofa. Waziri was cuffed to a mat beside the door.

"*Rankeshi dade!*" the Sarki said. "May the Mother bring you the light of understanding."

"Light and long life, O Sarki," Stoltzfoos said, standing up.

"Will the guest who honors my roof-cup taste coffee with his fortunate host?" the Sarki asked.

"The lucky guest will be ever the Sarki's servant if your Honor allows him to share his pleasure with his fellow-farmer and employee, Waziri the son of Musa," Aaron said.

"You'd better have hired mice to guard your stored grain, O Haruna; and blowflies to curry your cattle, than to have engaged the son of Musa as a farmer," Kazunzumi growled. "Waziri has little light of understanding. He will try to win from the soil what only honest sweat and Mother's grace can cause to grow. This boy will gray your beard, Haruna."

"Perhaps the sun that warms the soil will light his brains to understanding," Aaron suggested.

"Better that your hand should leave the plowhandle from time to time to warm his lazy fundament," the Sarki said.

"Just so, O Sarki," the Amishman said. "If Waziri does not serve me well, I have an enormous boar who will, if kept long enough from wholesomer food, rid me of a lazy farm-hand." Waziri grinned at all the attention he was getting from the two most important men in town, and sat expectantly as the turbaned elder brought in coffee.

Stoltzfoos watched the Sarki, and aped his actions. Water was served with the coffee; this was to rinse the mouth that the beverage could be tasted with fresh taste buds. The coffee was brown as floodwater silt, heavy with sugar, and very hot; and the cups had no handles. "You are the first European I have seen for many years, friend Haruna," the Sarki said. "It is five years gone that the white off-worlders came, and with a black man as their voice purchased with silver the land you now farm."

"They bought well," Aaron said; "the seller sold justly. When the fist of winter loosens, the soil will prove as rich as butter."

"When the first green breaks through, and you may break the soil without offense, you will do well," Kazunzumi said. "You are a man who loves the land."

"My fathers have flourished with the soil for twenty generations," the Amishman said. "I pray another twenty may live to inherit my good fortune."

"Haruna," the Sarki said, "I see that you are a man of the book, that volume of which Mother in her grace turns over a fresh page each spring. Though your skin is as pale as the flesh of my palm, though you have but one wife, though you speak throat-deep and strangely, yet you and I are more alike than different. The Mother has given you light, Haruna, her greatest gift."

"I thank the Sarki for his words," Aaron said. "Sir, my good and only wife—I am a poor man, and bound by another law than that of the fortunate Kazunzumi—adds her thanks to mine for the rich gifts the Chief of Datura presented us, his servants. In simple thanks, I have some poor things to tender our benefactor."

Waziri, perceiving the tenor of Aaron's talk, sprang to his feet and hastened out to the wagon for the bundles he'd seen under the seat. He returned, staggering under a seventy-pound bale of long-leaf tobacco, product of Aaron's father's farm. He went back for a bolt of scarlet silk for the Sarki's paramount wife, and strings of candy for the great man's children. He puffed in with one last brown-wrapped parcel, which he unpacked to display a leather saddle. This confection was embossed with a hundred intricate designs, rich with silver; un-Amish as a Christmas tree. Judging from the Sarki's dazzled thanks, the saddle was just the thing for a Murnan Chief.

As soon as Kazunzumi had delivered his pyrotechnic speech of thanks, and had directed that Aaron's gifts be placed on a velvet-draped dais at the end of the room, a roast kid was brought in. Waziri, half

drunk with the elegance of it all, fell to like any other adolescent boy, and was soon grease to the armpits. Aaron, more careful, referred his actions to the Sarki's. The bread must be broken, not cut; and it was eaten with the right hand only, the left lying in the lap as though broken. Belching seemed to be *de rigueur* as a tribute to the cuisine, so Aaron belched his stomach flat.

Business could now be discussed. Aaron, having no pencil, traced with a greasy finger on the tile floor the outlines of the barn and farmhouse he envisaged. The Sarki from time to time demanded of young Waziri such facts as a carpenter's son might be expected to know, and added lumber-prices in his head as Aaron's bank-barn and two-story farmhouse took form in his imagination. Finally he told the Amishman what the two buildings would cost. Better pleased by this figure than he'd expected to be, Aaron initiated the long-drawn ceremony required to discharge himself from Kazunzumi's hospitality.

As the Stoltzfoos wagon jolted out the gate of Datura, bearing the cot and clothes trunk of Waziri together with the owner of those chattels, the boys who'd jeered before now stared with respect. The black-hatted *Turawa* had been to visit the Sarki; this established him as no safe man to mock. Waziri gave his late playmates no notice beyond sitting rather straighter on the wagon seat than was comfortable.

There was light enough left when they got back to the farm for Aaron and Waziri to pace out the dimensions of the barn and house. The bank-barn would go up first, of course. No Christian owner of beasts could consent to being well-housed while his animals steamed and shivered in a cloth-sided tent. Waziri pounded stakes into the frozen ground to mark the corners of the barn. Aaron pointed out the drainage-line that would have to be ditched, and explained how the removed earth would be packed, with the clay dug for the cellar, into a ramp leading to the barn's second story in the back. Come next fall, the hayladder could be pulled right up that driveway to be unloaded above the stalls. Aaron took the boy to the frozen-solid creek to show him where a wheel could be placed to lift water to a spillway for the upper fields. He introduced his new helper to Wutzchen, and was pleased to hear Waziri speak wistfully of pork chops. Waziri didn't want to meet Martha yet, though. As a proper Murnan boy, he was not eager to be introduced to the boss' barefaced wife, though she bribed him with a fat wedge of applecake.

When Waziri set out with the lantern to tend to the final outdoor chores, Aaron inquired of his wife's day. The Sarki's Paramount Wife, with two servants, had indeed visited, bringing more gifts of food and clothing. Somehow the four of them had managed to breach the Hausa-*Pennsylfawnisch Deitsch* curtain. "What in the world did you talk about?" Aaron asked.

"First, not knowing what to say, I showed the ladies a drop of vinegar under the microscope," Martha said. "They screamed when they saw all the wriggly worms, and I was put to it to keep them from bundling back home. Then we talked about you, Stoltz, and about the farm; and when would I be giving you *Kinner* to help with all the work," she said. Martha fiddled with the cloak she was sewing for her husband. "It was largely their heathen speech we used, so I understood only what they pointed at; but they ate hearty of anything without vinegar in it, and I laughed with them like with friends at a quilting-bee. My, Stoltz! Those *Nay-yer* women are lovely, all jeweled like queens, even the servant girls; even though they have no proper understanding of Christian behavior."

"Did they make you feel welcome, then?" Aaron asked.

"*Ach, ja!* They pitied me, I thought," Martha said. "They said you must be poor, to have but one wife to comfort you; but they said that if the crops be good, you can earn a second woman by next winter. *Chuudes Paste!*"

"I hope you told the Sarki's woman we've been married only since haying-time," Aaron said, "and it's a bit previous for you to be giving me little farmhands."

"I did that," Martha said. "I told them, too, that by the time the oak leaves are the size of squirrel's ears—if this place has oaks, indeed, or squirrels—we'd have a youngling squalling in our house, loud as any of the Sarki's."

Waziri, crouched near the tent to pick up such talk as might pass inside concerning himself, was at first dismayed by Aaron's whoops of joy. Then Martha joined her husband in happy laughter. Since her tiny-garments line had been delivered in Low Dutch, the young Murnan chose to believe that the enthusiastic sounds he heard within the tent reflected joy at his employment.

It was cold the week the barn was raised, and the mattocks had heavy work gouging out frozen earth to be heaped into the bank leading up the

back. The Murnan laborers seemed to think midwinter as appropriate as any other time for building; they said the Mother slept, and would not be disturbed. Martha served coffee and buttermilk-pop at break-time, and presided over noontime feasts, served in several sittings, in the tent. Before the workers left in the evening, Aaron would give each a drink out back, scharifer cider, feeling that they'd steamed hard enough to earn a sip of something volatile. There are matters, he mused, in which common sense can blink at a bishop; as in secretly trimming one's beard a bit, for example, to keep it out of one's soup; or plucking a guitar to raise the spirits.

When the fortnight's cold work was done, the Stoltzfoos Farm was like nothing seen before on Murna. The bank-barn was forty feet high. On its lee side, Aaron had nailed thin, horizontal strips of wood about a foot apart, hoping to encourage the mud-daubing birds he'd seen on the wall at Datura to plaster their nests onto his barn, and shop for insects in his fields. Lacking concrete, he'd constructed a roofless stone hut abutting the barn to serve as his manure shed. The farmhouse itself was a bit gay, having an inside toilet to cheat the Murnan winters and a sunporch for Martha's bacteriological equipment. As the nearest Amish *Volle Diener*—Congregational Bishop—was eighty light-years off, and as the circumstances were unusual, Aaron felt that he and Martha were safe from the shunning—*Meidung*—that was the Old Order's manner of punishing Amischers guilty of "going gay" by breaking the church rules against worldly show.

A third outbuilding puzzled the Murnan carpenters even more than the two-storied wooden house and the enormous barn. This shed had hinged sidings that could be propped out to let breezes sweep through the building. Aaron explained to Musa the function of this tobacco shed, where he would hang his lathes of long-leafed tobacco to cure from August through November. The tobacco seedlings were already sprouting in Mason jars on the sunporch window-sills. The bank-barn's basement was also dedicated to tobacco. Here, in midwinter, Aaron and Martha and Waziri would strip, size, and grade the dry leaves for sale in Datura. Tobacco had always been a prime cash-crop for Levi, Aaron's father. After testing the bitter native leaf, Aaron knew that his Pennsylvania Type 41 would sell better here than anything else he could grow.

Martha Stoltzfoos was as busy in her new farmhouse as Aaron and Waziri were in the barn. Her kitchen stove burned all day. Nothing ever seen in Lancaster County, this stove was built of fireclay and brick; but

the food it heated was honest Deitsch. There were pickled eggs and red beets, ginger tomatoes canned back home, spiced peaches, pickled pears, mustard pickles and chowchow, pickled red cabbage, Schnitz un Knepp, shoo-fly pie, vanilla pie, rhubarb sauce, Cheddar cheeses the size of Waziri's head, haystacks of sauerkraut, slices off the great slab of home-preserved chipped beef, milk by the gallon, stewed chicken, popcorn soup, rashers of bacon, rivers of coffee. In the evenings, protecting her fingers from the sin of idleness, Martha quilted and cross-stitched by lamplight. Already her parlor wall boasted a framed motto that reduced to half a dozen German words, the Amish philosophy of life: "What One Likes Doing is No Work."

For all the chill of the late-winter winds, Aaron kept himself and his young helper in a sweat. Martha's cooking and the heavy work were slabbing muscle onto Waziri's lean, brown frame. Aaron's farming methods, so much different to Murnan routines, puzzled and intrigued the boy. Aaron was equally bemused by the local taboos. Why, for example, did all the politer Murnans eat with the right hand only? Why did the women veil themselves in his presence? And what was this Mother-goddess worship that seemed to require no more of its adherents than the inclusion of their deity's name in every curse, formal and profane? "Think what you please, but not too loud," Aaron cautioned himself, and carefully commenced to copy those Murnan speech-forms, gestures, and attitudes that did not conflict with his own deep convictions.

But the soil was his employment, not socializing. Aaron wormed his swine, inspected his horse-powered plow and harrow, gazed at the sun, palpated the soil, and prayed for an early spring to a God who understood German. Each day, to keep mold from strangling the moist morsels, he shook the jars of tobacco seed, whose hair-fine sprouts were just splitting the hulls.

The rations packaged in Pennsylvania were shrinking. The Stoltzfoos stake of silver and gold cowries was wasting away. Each night, bruised with fatigue, Aaron brought his little household into the parlor while he read from the Book that had bound his folk to the soil. Waziri bowed, honoring his master's God in his master's manner, but understood nothing of the hard High German: "*For the Lord God will help me: therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know I shall not be ashamed. Awmen.*"

"Awmen," said Martha.

"Awmen," said Waziri, fisting his hand in respect to his friend's bearded God.

The Murnan neighbors, to whom late winter was the slackest season in the farm-year, visited often to observe and comment on the off-worlder's work. Aaron Stoltzfoos privately regarded the endless conversations as too much of a good thing; but he realized that his answering the Murnan's questions helped work off the obligation he owed the government for the eighty light-years' transportation it had given him, the opportunity he'd been given to earn this hundred acres with five years' work, and the interest-free loans that had put up his barn and farmhouse.

With Waziri hovering near, Aaron's proud lieutenant, the neighbors would stuff their pipes with native tobacco, a leaf that would have gagged one of Sir Walter Raleigh's Indian friends, while the Amishman lit a stogie in self-defense. Why, the neighbor farmers demanded, did Aaron propose to dust his bean-seeds with a powder that looked like soot? Martha's microscope, a wonder, introduced the Murnans to bacteria; and Aaron tediously translated his knowledge of the nitrogen-fixing symbiotes into Hausa. But there were other questions. What was the purpose of the brush stacked on top of the smooth-raked beds where Aaron proposed to plant his tobacco-seedlings? He explained that fire, second best to steaming, would kill the weed-seeds in the soil, and give the tobacco uncrowded beds to prosper in.

Those needles with which he punctured the flanks of his swine and cattle: what devils did they exorcise? Back to the microscope for an explanation of the disease-process, a sophistication the Murnans had lost in the years since they'd left Kano. What were the bits of blue and pink paper Aaron pressed into mudballs picked up in the various precincts of his property? Why did those slips oftentime change color, from blue to pink, or pink-to-blue? What was in those sacks of stuff—no dung of animals, but a sort of flour—that he intended to work into his soil? Aaron answered each question as best he could, Waziri supplying—and often inventing—Hausa words for concepts like phosphorous, ascarid worms, and litmus.

Aaron had as much to learn from his brown-skinned neighbors as he had to teach them. He was persuaded to lay in a supply of seed-yams, guaranteeing a crop that would bring bronze cowries next fall in Datura, the price of next year's oil and cloth and tools. The peanut, a legume

Aaron had no experience of beyond purchasing an occasional tooth-ful at the grocery-store, won half a dozen acres from Korean lespedeza, the crop he'd at first selected as his soil-improver there. He got acquainted with a plant no Amishman before him had ever sown, a crabgrass called fonio, a staple cereal and source of beer-malt on Murna, imported with the first Nigerian colonists.

Aaron refused to plant any lalle, the henna-shrub from which the Murnans made the dye to stain their women's hands, feeling that it would be improper for him to contribute to such a vanity. Bulrush millet, another native crop, was ill suited to Aaron's well-drained fields. He planned to grow corn, though, the stuff his people called *Welsch-karn*—alien corn. Though American enough, maize had been a foreigner to the first Amish farmers, and still carried history in its name. This crop was chiefly for Wutzchen, whose bloodlines, Aaron was confident, would lead to a crop of pork of a quality these heretics from Islam had never tasted before.

Work wasn't everything. One Sunday, after he and Martha had sung together from the *Ausbund*, and Aaron had read from the *Schrift* and the *Martyr's Mirror*, there was time to play.

Sarki Kazunzumi and several other gentlemen who enjoyed City Hall or Chamber of Commerce standing in Datura had come to visit the Stoltzfooses after lunch; as had Musa the carpenter and his older son, Dauda, Waziri's brother. Also on the premises were about a dozen of the local farmers and craftsmen, inspecting the curious architecture the off-worlder had introduced to their planet. Aaron, observing that the two classes of his guests were maintaining a polite fiction, each that the other was not present, had an idea. He'd seen Murnans in town at the mid-winter festival, their status-consciousness forgotten in mutual quaffs of fonio-beer or barley-brandy, betting together at horse-races and wheels-of-fortune. "My friends," the Amishman addressed the Murnans gathered in his barn, inspecting Wutzchen, "let's play a game of ball."

Kazunzumi looked interested. As the local Chief of State, the Sarki's approval guaranteed the enthusiasm of all the lesser ranks.

Aaron explained the game he had in mind. It wasn't baseball, an "English" sport foreign to Amishmen, who can get through their teens without having heard of either Comiskey Park or the World Series. Their game, *Mosch Balle*, fits a barnyard better.

In lieu of the regulation softball used in the game of Corner Ball, Martha had stitched together a sort of large beanbag. The playing-field Aaron set up with the help of his visitors was a square some twelve yards on a side, fence-rails being propped up to mark its boundaries and fresh straw forked onto it six inches deep as footing.

Aaron's eight-man team was chosen from the working-stiffs. The opposing eight were the Brass. To start the game, four of the proletarians stood at the corners of the square; and two men of Kazunzumi's team waited warily within.

Aaron commenced to explain the game. To say that the object of *Mosch Balle* is for a member of the outer, offensive, team to strike an inner, defensive man with the ball is inadequate; such an explanation is as lacking as to explain baseball as the pitcher's effort to throw a ball so well that it's hittable, and so very well that it yet goes unhit. Both games have their finer points.

"Now," Aaron told his guests on the field, "we four on the corners will toss the ball back and forth amongst ourselves, shouting *Hah*,*Oh*,*Tay*, with each pitch. Whoever has the ball on *Tay* has to fling it at one of the two men inside the square. If he misses, he's Out; and one of the other men on our team takes his place. If he hits his target-man, the target's Out, and will be replaced by another man from the Sarki's team. The team with the last man left on the straw wins the first half. *Des iss der Weeg wie mir's diehne*, O.K.?"

"*Afuwo!*" the Sarki yelled, a woman's call, grinning, crouched to spring aside. "Hah!" Aaron shouted, and tossed the ball to Waziri's older brother, Dauda. "Oh!" Dauda yelled, and threw the ball to the shoemaker. "Tay!" the cobbler exulted, and slammed the ball at the lower-ranking of the two men within the square, the village banker. The shoemaker missed, and was retired.

The Daturans were soon stripped down to trousers and boots, their black torsos steaming in the cold air. Aaron removed his shirt—but not his hat—and so far forgot his Hausa in the excitement that he not only rooted for his teammates in *Pennsylfawnisch Deitsch*, but even punctuated several clumsy plays with raw *Fadomm*'s.

Aaron's skill won the first half for his team. Blooded, the Chamber of Commerce Eight fought through to win the second half. A tie. The playoff saw the Working-Man's League pummeled to a standstill by the C-of-C, who took the laurels with a final slam that knocked Waziri into the straw, protesting that it was an accident.

Sweating, laughing, social status for the moment forgotten, the teams and their mobs of fans surged into the farmhouse to demand of Martha wedges of raisin pie and big cups of strong coffee. As the guests put their rigas and their white caps back on, and assumed therewith their game-discarded rank of class, they assured Aaron that the afternoon at the ball game had been a large success.

The next day was crisp and cold. With nothing more to be done till the soil thawed, Aaron took Waziri down to the creek to investigate his project of irrigating the hilltop acres. The flow of water was so feeble that the little stream was ice to its channel. "Do you have hereabouts a digger-of-waterholes?" Aaron asked the boy. Waziri nodded, and supplied the Hausa phrase for this skill. "Good. *Wonn's Gottes ville iss*, I will find a spot for them to dig, smelling out the water as can my cousin Blue Ball Benjamin Blank," Aaron said. "Go get from the barn the pliers, the hand-tool that pinches."

Waziri trotted off and brought back the pliers. "What are you up to, Haruna-boss?" he asked. Aaron was holding the bulldog pliers out before him, one handle in each hand, parallel to the ground.

"I am smelling for the well-place," the Amishman said, pacing deliberately across the field. The boy scampered along beside him. "We will need at least one well to be safe from August draught. Cousin Benjamin found the wet depths in this fashion; perhaps it will work for me." Aaron walked, arms outstretched, for half an hour before his face grew taut. He slowed his walking and began to work toward the center of a spiral. Waziri could see the sweat springing up on the young farmer's brow and fingers, despite the cold breeze that blew. The bulldog pliers trembled as though responding to the throbbing of an engine. Suddenly, as though about to be jerked from Aaron's hands, the pliers tugged downward so forceably that he had to lift his elbows and flex his wrists to hold onto them. "Put a little pile of stones here, Waziri," he said. "We'll have the diggers visit as soon as the ground thaws."

Waziri shook his head. "Haruna, they will not touch soft earth until the first grass sprouts," he said.

"Time enough," Aaron said. He looked up to satisfy himself that his prospective well-site was high enough to avoid drainage from his pig-yard, then left the Murnan boy to pile up a cairn for the diggers. It would be good to have a windmill within ear-shot of the house, he mused; its squeaking would ease Martha with a homey sound.

Alone for a few minutes, Aaron retired to the workshop in the cellar of the barn. He planed and sanded boards of a native lumber very like to tulipwood. Into the headboard of the cradle he was making, he keyhole-sawed the same sort of broad Dutch heart that had marked his own cradle, and the cradles of all his family back to the days in the Rhineland, before they'd been driven to America.

Martha Stoltzfoos was speaking Hausa better than she'd spoken English since grade-school days, and she kept busy in the little bacteriological laboratory on her sunporch, keeping fresh the skills she'd learned at Georgetown and might some day need in earnest; but she still grew homesick as her child-coming day drew nearer. It was wrong, she told Aaron, for an Amishwoman to have heathen midwives at her lying-in. For all their kindness, the Murnan women could never be as reassuring as the prayer-covered, black-aproned matrons who'd have attended Martha back home. "Ach, Stoltz," she told her husband, "if only a few other of *unser sart Leit* could have come here with us."

"Don't worry, Love," Aaron said. "I've eased calves and colts enough into the world; man-children can't come so different."

"You talk like a man," Martha accused him. "I wish my Mem was just down the road a piece, ready to come a-running when my time came," she said. She put one hand on her apron. "*Chuudes Paste!* The little rascal is wild as a colt, indeed. Feel him, Stoltz!"

Aaron dutifully placed his hand to sense the child's quickening. "He'll be of help on the farm, so strong as he is," he remarked. Then, tugging his hat down tight, Aaron went outdoors, bashful before this mystery.

The little creek had thawed, and the light of the sun on a man's face almost gave back the heat the air extorted. Waziri had gone to town today for some sort of Murnan spring-festival, eager to celebrate his hard-earned wealth on his first day off in months. The place seemed deserted, Aaron felt, without the boy; without the visitors he'd played ball and talked crops with, striding up in their scarlet-trimmed rigas to gossip with their friend Haruna.

Between the roadway and the house, Aaron knelt to rake up with his fingers a handful of the new-thawed soil. He squeezed it. The clod in his hand broke apart of its own weight: it was not too wet to work. Festival-day though it was to his *Schwotzer* neighbors, he was eager to spear this virgin soil with his plow blade.

Aaron strode back to the barn. He hitched Rosina—the dappled mare, named "Raisin" for her spots—to the plow and slapped her into motion.

Sleek with her winter's idleness, Rosina was at first unenthusiastic about the plow; but the spring sun and honest exercise warmed her quickly. Within half an hour she was earning her keep. Though Aaron was plowing shallow, the compact soil broke hard. Rosina leaned into the traces, leaving hoofprints three inches deep. No gasoline tractor, Aaron mused, could ever pull itself through soil so rich and damp. *Geilsgrefte*, horsepower, was best exerted by a horse, he thought.

The brown earth-smells were good. Aaron kicked apart the larger clods, fat with a planet-life of weather and rich decay. This land would take a good deal of disking to get it into shape. His neighbors, who'd done their heavy plowing just after last fall's first frost, were already well ahead of him. He stabled Rosina at sundown, and went in to sneak a well-earned glass of hard cider past Martha's teetotaling eye.

Musa the carpenter brought his son home well after dark. Waziri had had adventures, the old man said; dancing, gambling on the Fool's Wheel, sampling fonio-beer, celebrating his own young life's springtime with the earth's. Both the old man and the boy were barefoot, Aaron noticed; but said nothing: perhaps shoelessness was part of their spring-festival.

Waziri a bit *geschwepst* with the beer, tottered off to bed. "Thanks to you, friend Haruna, that boy became a man today," the carpenter said. He accepted a glass of Aaron's cider. "Today Waziri's wallet jingled with bronze and copper earned by his own sweat, a manful sound to a lad of fifteen summers. I ask pardon for having returned your laborer in so damaged a condition, brother Haruna; but you may be consoled with the thought that the Mother's festival comes but once in the twelve-month."

"No harm was done, brother Musa," Aaron said, offering his visitor tobacco. "In my own youth, I sometimes danced with beer-light feet to the music of worldly guitars; and yet I reached a man's estate."

Offered a refill for his pipe, Musa raised a hand in polite refusal. "Tomorrow's sun will not wait on our conversation, and much must be done, in the manner of racers waiting the signal, before the first blade breaks the soil," he said. "Good night, brother Haruna; and may Mother grant you light!"

"Mother keep you, brother Musa," Aaron murmured the heathen phrase without embarrassment. "I'll guide your feet to your wagon, if I may."

Aaron, carrying the naphtha lantern, led the way across the strip of new-plowed soil. Set by frost into plastic mounds and ridges, the earth bent beneath his shoes and the carpenter's bare feet. Aaron swung Musa's picket-iron, the little anchor to which his horse was tethered, into the wagon, noticing that it had been curiously padded with layers of quilted cloth. "May you journey home in good health, brother Musa," he said.

"*Uwaka!*" Musa shouted, staring at the plow-cuts.

Aaron Stoltzfoos dropped the lantern to his side, amazed that the dignified old man could be guilty of such an obscenity. Perhaps he'd misheard. "Haruna, you have damned yourself!" Musa bellowed. "Cursed be this farm! Cursed be thy farming! May thy seedlings rot, may thy corn sprout worms for tassles, may your cattle stink and make early bones!"

"Brother Musa!" Aaron said.

"I am no sib to you, O Bearded One," Musa said. "Nor will I help you carry the curse you have brought upon yourself by today's ill-doing." He darted back to the farmhouse, where he ordered half-wakened Waziri to pad barefoot after him to the wagon, rubbing his eyes. "Come, son," Musa said. "We must flee these ill-omened fields." Without another word to his host, the carpenter hoisted his boy into the wagon, mounted, and set off into the night. The hoofs of his horse padded softly against the dirt road, unshod.

Martha met the bewildered Aaron at the door, wakened by Musa's shouting. "*Wass gibt*, Stoltz?" she asked. "What for was all the carry-on?"

Aaron tugged at his beard. "I don't know, woman," he admitted. "Musa the carpenter took one look at the plowing I did today, then cursed me as though he'd caught me spitting in his well. He got Waziri up from bed and took him home." He took his wife's hand. "I'm sorry he woke you up, Liebchen."

"It was not so much the angry carpenter who waked me as the little jack rabbit you're father to," Martha said. "As you say, a *Bun* who can kick so hard, and barefoot, too, will be a strong one once he's born."

Aaron was staring out the window onto the dark road. "*Farwas hot Musa sell gehuh?*" he asked himself. "What for did Musa do such a thing? He knows that our ways are different to his. If I did aught wrong, Musa must know it was done not for want to harm. I will go to the village tomorrow; Musa must forgive me and explain."

"He will, Stoltz." Martha said. "*Kuum, schloef.* You'll be getting up early."

"How can I sleep, not knowing how I have hurt my friend?" Aaron asked.

"You must," Martha urged him. "Let your cares rest for the night, Aaron."

In the morning, Stoltzfoos prepared for his trip into Datura by donning his Sunday-best. He clipped a black patent-leather bow tie, a wedding gift, onto his white shirt: and fastened up his best broadfall trousers with his dress suspenders. Over this, Aaron put his *Mutzi*, the tailed frock coat that fastened with hooks-and-eyes. When he'd exchanged his broad-brimmed black felt working-hat for another just the same, but unsweated, Aaron was dressed as he'd be on his way to a House-Amish Sunday meeting back home. "I expect no trouble here, Martha," he said, tucking a box of stogies under his arm as a little guest-gift for the old carpenter.

"Hurry home, Stoltz; I feel wonderful busy about the middle," Martha said. There was a noise out on the road. "Listen!" she said. "Go look the window out, now; someone is coming the yard in!"

Aaron hastened to lift the green roller-blind over the parlor window. "Ach; it is the *groesie Fisch*, Sarki Kazunzumi, with half the folk from town," he said. "Stay here, woman. I will out and talk with them."

The Sarki sat astride his white pony, staring as Aaron approached him. Behind their chief, on lesser beasts, sat Kazunzumi's retainers, each with a bundle in his arms. "Welcome, O Sarki!" Aaron said, raising his fist.

Kazunzumi did not return the Amishman's salute. "I return your gifts, Lightless One," he announced. "They are tainted with your blasphemy." He nodded, and his servants dismounted to stack at the side of the road Aaron's guest-gifts of months before. The bale of tobacco was set down, the bolt of scarlet silk, the chains of candy, the silver-filigreed saddle. "Now that I owe you naught, Bearded One, we have no further business with one another." He reined his horse around. "I go in sadness, Haruna," he said.

"What did I do, Kazunzumi?" Aaron asked. "What am I to make of your displeasure?"

"You have failed us, who was my friend," the Sarki said. "You will leave this place, taking your woman and your beasts and your sharp-shod horses."

"Sir, where am I to go?"

"Whence came you, Haruna?" the Sarki asked. "Return to your own black-garbed folk, and injure the Mother no longer with your lack of understanding."

"Sarki Kazunzumi, I know not how I erred," Stoltzfoos said. "As for returning to my own country, that I cannot. The off-world vessel that brought us here is star-far away; and it will not return until we are all five summers older. My Martha is besides with child, and cannot safely travel. My land is ripe for seeding. How can I go now?"

"There is wilderness to the south, where no son of the Mother lives," the Sarki said. "Go there. I care not for heathen who are out of my sight."

"Sir, show us mercy," Aaron said.

Kazunzumi danced his shoeless horse around to face Aaron. "Haruna, who was my friend, whom I thought to stand with me in Mother's light, I would be merciful; but I cannot be weak. It is not me whom you must beseech, but the Mother who feeds us all. Make amends to Her, then Sarki Kazunzumi will give his ear to your pleas. Without amends, Haruna, you must go from here within the week." Kazunzumi waved his arm and galloped off toward Datura. His servants followed quickly. On the roadside lay the gifts, dusted from the dirt raised by the horses.

The Amishman turned toward the house. Martha's face was at the parlor window, quizzical under her prayer-covering, impatient to hear what had happened. Aaron plodded back to the house with the evil news, stumbling over a clod of earth in the new-turned furrows near the road. Martha met him at the door. "*Waas will er?*" she demanded.

"He says we must leave our farm."

"Why for?" she asked.

"Somehow, I have offended their *fadommt* Mum-god," Aaron said. "The Sarki has granted us a week to make ready to go into the wilderness." He sat on a coffee-colored kitchen chair, his head bowed and his big hands limp between his knees.

"Stoltz, where can we go?" Martha asked. "We have no *Freindschaft*, no kin, in all this place."

Aaron tightened his hands into fists. "We will not go!" he vowed. "I will find a way for us to stay." He broke open the box of cigars that had been meant as a gift for Musa and clamped one of the black stogies

between his teeth. "What is their *heidisch* secret?" he demanded. "What does the Mother want of me?"

"Aaron Stoltz," Martha said vigorously, "I'll have no man of mine offering dignity to a heathen god. The *Schrift* orders us to cut down the groves of the alien gods, to smash their false images; not to bow before them. Will you make a golden calf here, as did your namesake Aaron of Egypt, for whose sin the Children of Israel were plagued?"

"Woman, I'll not have you preach to me like a servant of the Book," Aaron said. "It is not for you to cite Scripture." He stared through the window. "What does the Mother want of me?"

"As you shout, do not forget that I am a mother, too," Martha said. She dabbed a finger at her eye.

"*Fagep mir*, Liebling," Aaron said. He walked behind the chair where his wife sat. Tenderly, he kneaded the muscles at the back of her neck. "I am trying to get inside Musa's head, and Kazunzumi's; I am trying to see their world through their eyes. It is not an easy thing to do, Martha. Though I lived for a spell among the 'English,' my head is still House-Amish; a fat, Dutch cheese."

"It is a good head," Martha said, relaxing under his massage, "and if there be cheese-heads hereabouts, it's these blackfolk that wear them, and not my man."

"If I knew what the die-hinker our neighbors mean by their Mother-talk, it might be I could see myself through Murnan eyes, as I can hear a bit with Hausa ears," Aaron said. "*Iss sell nix so*, Martha?"

"We should have stood at home, and thought with our own good heads," she said.

"Let me think," Aaron said. "If I were to strike you, wife," he mused, "it could do you great hurt, and harm our unborn child, *Nee?*"

"Aaron!" Martha scooted out from under her husbands kneading hands.

"*Druuvel dich net!*" he said. "I am only thinking. These blackfolk now, these neighbors who were before last night our friends, speak of Light as our bishop at home speaks of Grace. To have it is to have all, to be one with the congregation. If I can find this Light, we and the Sarki and his people can again be friends." Aaron sat down. "I must learn what I have done wrong," he said.

"Other than drink a glass of cider now and then, and make worldly music with a guitar, you've done no wrong," Martha said stubbornly. "You're a good man."

"In the Old Order, I am a good man, so long as no *Diener* makes trouble over a bit of singing or cider," Aaron said. "As a guest on Murna, I have done some deed that has hurt this Mother-god, whom our neighbors hold dear."

"Heathenish superstition!"

"Martha, love, I am older than you, and a man," Aaron said. "Give me room to think! If the goddess-Mother is heathen as Baal, it matters not; these folk who worship her hold our future in their hands. Besides, we owe them the courtesy not to dance in their churches nor to laugh at their prayers; even the 'English' have more grace than that." Aaron pondered. "Something in the springtime is the Murnan Mother's gift, her greatest gift. What?"

"Blaspheme not," Martha said. "Remember Him who *causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth*."

"Wife, is the True God less, if these people call Him Mother?" Aaron demanded.

"We are too far from home," the woman sighed. "Such heavy talk is wearisome; it is for bishops to discourse so, not ordinary folk like us."

"If I can't find the light," Aaron said, "this farm we live on, and hoped to leave to our children, isn't worth the water in a dish of soup." He slapped his hands together and stood to pace. "Martha, hear me out," he said. "If a woman be with child, and a man takes her with lust and against her will, is not that man accursed?"

"Aaron!" she said. "*Haagott*, such wicked talk you make!"

"Seen with Murnan eyes, have I not done just such a cursed thing?" Aaron demanded. "The Mother-god of this world is *mit Kinndt*, fat with the bounty of springtime. So tender is the swollen belly of the earth that the people here, simple folk with no more subtle God, strip the iron from the hoofs of their horses not to bruise her. They bare their feet in her honor, treat her with the tenderness I treat my beloved Martha. And to this Goddess, swollen earth, I took the plow! Martha, we are fortunate indeed that our neighbors are gentle people, or I would be hanged now, or stoned to death like the wicked in the old days. *Ich hot iere Gotterin awgepockt*: I raped their Goddess!"

Martha burst into tears. When Aaron stepped forward to comfort her, she struck his chest with her balled fists. "Stoltz, I wed you despite your beer-drinking from cans at the Singing, though you play a worldly guitar and sing the English songs, though people told me you drove your gay Uncle Amos' black-bumpered Ford before you membered to the district; still, house-Amish pure Old Order though my people are, I married you, from love and youngness and girlish ignorance. But I do not care, even in this wilderness you've brought us to in that big English ship, to hear such vileness spoke out boldly. Leave me alone."

"I'll not."

"You'd best," she said. "I'm sore offended in the lad I'm wifed to."

"Love, *Ich bin sorry*," Aaron said. "The Book, though, says just what our neighbors told me: Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. I have found the truth, the truth of our dark-skinned friends. I did not want to wound the ears of *da Oppel fuun mein Awk*, apple-of-mine-eye sweet Martha; but I must speak out the truth."

"It is not good enough," Martha sobbed, "that you accept this brown-skinned, jewel-bedizzened woman-god; but you must make love to her; and I, wed to you by the Book, nine months gone with *Kinndt*, am to make no fuss."

"I loved the Mother-god with the plow, and accidentally," Aaron bellowed. "*Haagott!* woman; have you no funny?"

"I will birth our child in my lap from laughing," Martha said, weeping. "Aaron, do what you will. I can hardly walk home to my Mem to bear a son in my girlhood bedroom. We are like *Awduum uuu Ayf*, like you said; but the serpent in this Eden pleases me not."

"When I spoke of colts, and the borning of them," Aaron said, "I forgot me that mares are more sensible than human women. Martha, *liebe* Martha, you wed a man when you married me. All your vapors are naught against my having seen the light. If to stay here, on this land already watered with my hard sweat, I had to slaughter cattle in sacrifice to the Mother, I'd pick up the knife gladly, and feel it no blasphemy against our God."

"Aaron Stoltz," Martha said, "I forbid you to lend honor to this god!"

Aaron sat. He unlaced his shoes and tugged them off. "Woman," he asked softly, "you forbid me? Martha, for all the love I bear you, there is one rule of our folk that's as holy as worship; and that's that the man is

master in his house." He pulled off his black stockings and stood, barefoot, with callouses won on the black earth of his father's farm; dressed otherwise meetly as a deacon. "I will walk to Datura on my naked feet to show our friends I know my wrong-doing, that I have hurt the belly of the pregnant earth. I will tell Sarki Kazunzumi that I have seen his light; that my horses will be unshod as I am, that the Mother will not feel my plow again until the grasses spring, when her time will be accomplished."

Martha crossed her hands about her middle. "Ach, Stoltz," she said. "Our *Buu iss reddi far geh*, I think. Today will be his birthday. Don't let your tenderness to the earth keep you from walking swiftly to Datura; and when you return, come in a wagon with the Sarki's ladies, who understand midwifery. I think they will find work here."

"I will hurry, Mother," Aaron promised.

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