My Fair Planet

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As Paul Lambrequin was clambering up the stairs of his rooming house, he met a man whose face was all wrong. "Good evening," Paul said politely and was about to continue on his way when the man stopped him.

"You are the first person I have encountered in this place who has not shuttered at the sight of me," he said in a toneless voice with an accent that was outside the standard repertoire.

"Am I?" Paul asked, bringing himself back from one of the roseate dreams with which he kept himself insulated from a not-too-kind reality. "I daresay that's because I'm a bit near-sighted." He peered vaguely at the stranger. Then he recoiled.

"What is incorrect about me, then?" the stranger demanded. "Do I not have two eyes, one nose and one mouth, the identical as other people?"

Paul studied the other man. "Yes, but somehow they seem to be put together all wrong. Not that you can help it, of course," he added apologetically, for, when he thought of it, he hated to hurt people's feelings.

"Yes, I can, for, of a truth, 'twas I who put myself together. What did I do amiss?"

Paul looked consideringly at him. "I can't quite put my finger on it, but there are certain subtle nuances you just don't seem to have caught. If you want my professional advice, you'll model yourself directly on some real person until you've got the knack of improvisation."

"Like unto this?" The stranger's outline shimmered and blurred into an amorphous cloud, which then coalesced into the shape of a tall, beautiful young man with the face of an ingenuous demon. "Behold, is that superior?"

"Oh, far superior!" Paul reached up to adjust a stray lock of hair, then realized he was not looking into a mirror. "Trouble is—well, I'd rather you chose someone else to model yourself on. You see, in my profession, it's important to look as unique as possible; helps people remember you. I'm an actor, you know. Currently I happen to be at liberty, but the year before last—"

"Well, whom should I appear like? Should I perhaps pick some fine upstanding figure from your public prints to emulate? Like your President, perhaply?"

"I—hardly think so. It wouldn't do to model yourself on someone well known—or even someone obscure whom you might just happen to run into someday." Being a kind-hearted young man, Paul added, "Come up to my room. I have some British film magazines and there are lots of relatively obscure English actors who are very decent-looking chaps."

So they climbed up to Paul's hot little room under the eaves and, after leafing through several magazines, Paul chose one Ivo Darcy as a likely candidate. Whereupon the stranger deliquesced and reformed into the personable simulacrum of young Mr. Darcy.

"That's quite a trick," Paul observed as it finally got through to him what the other had done. "It would come in handy in the profession—for character parts, you know."

"I fear you would never be able to acquisition it," the stranger said, surveying his new self in the mirror complacently. "It is not a trick but a racial ableness. You see, I feel I can trust you—"

"—Of course I'm not really a character actor; I'm a leading man, but I believe one should be versatile, because there are times when a really good character part comes along—"

"—I am not a human being. I am a native of the fifth planet circulating around the star you call Sirius, and we Sirians have the ableness to change ourselves into the apparition of any other livid form—"

"I thought that might be a near-Eastern accent!" Paul exclaimed, diverted. "Is Lebanese anything like it? Because I understand there's a really juicy part coming up in—"

"I said *Sirian*, not *Syrian*; I do not come from Minor Asia but from outer space, from an other-where solar system. I am an outworlder, an extraterrestrial."

"I hope you had a nice trip," Paul said politely. "From Sirius, did you say? What's the state of the theater there?"

"In its infanticide," the stranger told him, "but—"

"Let's face it," Paul muttered bitterly, "it's in its infancy here, too. No over-all planning. No appreciation of the fact that all the components that go to make up a production should be a continuing totality, instead of a tenuous coalition of separate forces which disintegrate—"

"You, I comprehend, are disemployed at current. I should—"

"You won't find that situation in Russia!" Paul went on, pleased to discover a sympathetic audience in this intelligent foreigner. "Mind you," he added quickly, "I disapprove entirely of their politics. In fact, I disapprove of all politics. But when it comes to the theater, in many respects the Russians—"

"—Like to make a proposal to our mutual advanceage—"

"—You wouldn't find an actor there playing a lead role one season and then not be able to get any parts except summer stock and odd bits for the next two years. All right, so the show I had the lead in folded after

two weeks, but the critics all raved about my performance. It was the play that stank!"

"Will you terminate the monologue and hearken unto me!" the alien shouted.

Paul stopped talking. His feelings were hurt. He had thought Ivo liked him; now he saw all the outworlder wanted to do was talk about his own problems.

"I desire to extend to you a position," said Ivo.

"I can't take a regular job," Paul said sulkily. "I have to be available for interviews. Fellow I knew took a job in a store and, when he was called to read for a part, he couldn't get away. The fellow who did get that part became a big star, and maybe the other fellow could have been a star, too, but now all he is is a lousy chairman of the board of some department store chain—"

"This work can be undergone at your convention between readings and interviews, whenever you have the timing. I shall pay you beautifully, being abundant with U.S.A. currency. I want you to teach me how to act."

"Teach you how to act," Paul repeated, rather intrigued. "Well, I'm not a dramatic coach, you know; however, I do happen to have some ideas on the subject. I feel that most acting teachers nowadays fail to give their students a really thorough grounding in all aspects of the dramatic art. All they talk about is method, method, method. But what about technique?"

"I have observed your species with great diligence and I thought I had acquisitioned your habits and speakings to perfectness. But I fear that, like my initial face, I have got them awry. I want you to teach me to act like a human being, to talk like a human being, to think like a human being."

Paul's attention was really caught. "Well, that *is* a challenge! I don't suppose Stanislavsky ever had to teach an extraterrestrial, or even Strasberg—"

"Then we are in accordance," Ivo said. "You will instruction me?" He essayed a smile.

Paul shuddered. "Very well," he said. "We'll start now. And I think the first thing we'd better start with is lessons in smiling."

Ivo proved to be a quick study. He not only learned to smile, but to frown and to express surprise, pleasure, horror—whatever the occasion demanded. He learned the knack of counterfeiting humanity with such skill that, Paul was moved to remark one afternoon when they were

leaving Brooks Brothers after a fitting, "Sometimes you seem even more human than I do, Ivo. I wish you'd watch out for that tendency to rant, though. You're supposed to speak, not make speeches."

"I try not to," Ivo said, "but I keep getting carried away by enthusiasm."

"Apparently I have a real flair for teaching," Paul went on as, expertly camouflaged by Brooks, the two young men melted into the dense charcoal-gray underbrush of Madison Avenue. "I seem to be even more versatile than I thought. Perhaps I have been—well, not wasting but limiting my talents."

"That may be because your talents have not been sufficiently appreciated," his star pupil suggested, "or given enough scope."

Ivo was so perceptive! "As a matter of fact," Paul agreed, "it has often seemed to me that if some really gifted individual, equally adept at acting, directing, producing, playwriting, teaching, et al., were to undertake a thorough synthesis of the theater—ah, but that would cost money," he interrupted himself, "and who would underwrite such a project? Certainly not the government of the United States." He gave a bitter laugh.

"Perhaps, under a new regime, conditions might be more favorable for the artist—"

"Shhh!" Paul looked nervously over his shoulder. "There are Senators everywhere. Besides, I never said things were *good* in Russia, just *better*—for the actor, that is. Of course the plays are atrocious propaganda—"

"I was not referring to another human regime. The human being is, at best, save for certain choice spirits, unsympathetic to the arts. We outworlders have a far greater respect for things of the mind."

Paul opened his mouth; Ivo continued without giving him a chance to speak, "No doubt you have often wondered just what I am doing here on Earth?"

The question had never crossed Paul's mind. Feeling vaguely guilty, he murmured, "Some people have funny ideas of where to go for a vacation."

"I am here on business," Ivo told him. "The situation on Sirius is serious."

"You know, that's catchy! 'The situation on Sirius is serious'," Paul repeated, tapping his foot. "I've often thought of trying my hand at a musical com—"

"I mean we have had a ser—grave population problem for the last couple of centuries, hence our government has sent out scouts to look for

other planets with similar atmosphere, climate, gravity and so on, where we can ship our excess population. So far, we have found very few."

When Paul's attention was focused, he could be as quick as anybody to put two and two together. "But Earth is already occupied. In fact, when I was in school, I heard something about our having a population problem ourselves."

"The other planets we already—ah—took over were in a similar state," Ivo explained. "We managed to surmount that difficulty."

"How?" Paul asked, though he already suspected the answer.

"Oh, we didn't dispose of *all* of the inhabitants. We merely weeded out the undesirables—who, by fortunate chance, happened to be in the majority—and achieved a happy and peaceful coexistence with the rest."

"But, look," Paul protested. "I mean to say——"

"For instance," Ivo said suavely, "take the vast body of people who watch television and who have never seen a legitimate play in their lives and, indeed, rarely go to the motion pictures. Surely they are expendable."

"Well, yes, of course. But even among them there might be—oh, say, a playwright's mother—"

"One of the first measures our regime would take would be to establish a vast network of community theaters throughout the world. And you, Paul, would receive first choice of starring roles."

"Now wait a minute!" Paul cried hotly. He seldom allowed himself to lose his temper, but when he did … he got *angry*! "I pride myself that I've gotten this far wholly on my own merits. I don't believe in using influence to—"

"But, my dear fellow, all I meant was that, with an intelligently coordinated theater and an intellectually adult audience, your abilities would be recognized automatically."

"Oh," said Paul.

He was not unaware that he was being flattered, but it was so seldom that anyone bothered to pay him any attention when he was not playing a role that it was difficult not to succumb. "Are—are you figuring on taking over the planet single-handed?" he asked curiously.

"Heavens, no! Talented as I am, there are limits. I don't do the—ah—dirty work myself. I just conduct the preliminary investigation to determine how powerful the local defenses are."

"We have hydrogen bombs," Paul said, trying to remember details of a newspaper article he had once read in a producer's ante-room, "and plutonium bombs and—"

"Oh, I know about all those," Ivo smiled expertly. "My job is checking to make sure you don't have anything really dangerous."

All that night, Paul wrestled with his conscience. He knew he shouldn't just let Ivo go on. Yet what else could he do? Go to the proper authorities? But which authorities were the proper ones? And even if he found them, who would believe an actor offstage, delivering such improbable lines? He would either be laughed at or accused of being part of a subversive plot. It might result in a lot of bad publicity which could ruin his career.

So Paul did nothing about Ivo. He went back to the usual rounds of agents' and producers' offices, and the knowledge of why Ivo was on Earth got pushed farther into the back of his mind as he trudged from interview to reading to interview.

It was an exceptionally hot October—the kind of weather when sometimes he almost lost his faith and began to wonder why he was batting his head against a stone wall, why he didn't get a job in a department store somewhere or teaching school. And then he thought of the applause, the curtain calls, the dream of some day seeing his name in lights above the title of the play—and he knew he would never give up. Quitting the theater would be like committing suicide, for off the stage he was alive only technically. He was good; he knew he was good, so some day, he assured himself, he was bound to get his big break.

Toward the end of that month, it came. After the maximum three readings, between which his hopes alternately waxed and waned, he was cast as the male lead in *The Holiday Tree*. The producers were more interested, they said, in getting someone who fitted the role of Eric Everard than in a big name—especially since the female star preferred to have her luster undimmed by competition.

Rehearsals took up so much of his time that he saw very little of Ivo for the next five weeks—but by then Ivo didn't need him any more. Actually, they were no longer teacher and pupil now but companions, drawn together by the fact that they both belonged to different worlds from the one in which they were living. Insofar as he could like anyone who existed outside of his imagination, Paul had grown rather fond of Ivo. And he rather thought Ivo liked him, too—but, because he couldn't ever be quite sure of ordinary people's reactions toward him, how could he be sure of an outworlder's?

Ivo came around to rehearsals sometimes, but naturally it would be boring for him, since he wasn't in the profession, and, after a while, he

didn't come around very often. At first, Paul felt a twinge of guilt; then he remembered that he need not worry. Ivo had his own work.

The whole *Holiday Tree* troupe went out of town for the tryouts, and Paul didn't see Ivo at all for six weeks. Busy, happy weeks they were, for the play was a smash hit from the start. It played to packed houses in New Haven and Boston, and the box office in New York was sold out for months in advance before they even opened.

"Must be kinda fun—acting," Ivo told Paul the morning after the New York opening, as Paul weltered contentedly on his bed—he had the best room in the house now—amid a pile of rave notices. At long last, he had arrived. Everybody loved him. He was a success.

And now that he had read the reviews and they were all favorable, he could pay attention to the strange things that had happened to his friend. Raising himself up on an elbow, Paul cried, "Ivo, you're *mumbling*! After all I taught you about articulation!"

"I got t'hanging 'round with this here buncha actors while y'were gone," Ivo said. "They say mumbling's the comin' thing. 'Sides, y'kept yapping that I declaimed, so—"

"But you don't have to go to the opposite extreme and—*Ivo*!" Incredulously, Paul took in the full details of the other's appearance. "What happened to your Brooks Brothers' suits?"

"Hung 'em inna closet," Ivo replied, looking abashed. "I did wear one las' night, though," he went on defensively. "Wooden come dressed like this to y'opening. But all the other fellas wear blue jeans 'n leather jackets. I mean, hell, I gotta conform more'n anybody. Y'know that, Paul."

"And—" Paul sat bolt upright; this was the supreme outrage—"you've changed yourself! You've gotten *younger*!"

"This is an age of yout'," Ivo mumbled. "An' I figured I was 'bout ready for improvisation, like you said."

"Look, Ivo, if you really want to go on the stage——"

"Hell, I don' wanna be no actor!" Ivo protested, far too vehemently. "Y'know damn' well I'm a—a spy, scoutin' 'round t'see if y'have any secret defenses before I make m'report."

"I don't feel I'm giving away any government secrets," Paul said, "when I tell you that the bastions of our defenses are not erected at the Actors' Studio."

"Listen, pal, you lemme spy the way I wanna an' I'll letcha act the way you wanna."

Paul was disturbed by this change in Ivo because, although he had always tried to steer clear of social involvement, he could not help feeling that the young alien had become in a measure his responsibility—particularly now that he was a teen-ager. Paul would even have worried about Ivo, if there hadn't been so many other things to occupy his mind. First of all, the producers of *The Holiday Tree* could not resist the pressure of an adoring public; although the original star sulked, three months after the play had opened in New York, Paul's name went up in lights next to hers, *over the title of the play. He was a star.*

That was good. But then there was Gregory. And that was bad. Gregory was Paul's understudy—a handsome, sullen youth who had, on numerous occasions, been heard to utter words to the effect of: "It's the part that's so good, not him. If I had the chance to play Eric Everard just once, they'd give Lambrequin back to the Indians."

Sometimes he had said the words in Paul's hearing; sometimes the remarks had been lovingly passed on by fellow members of the cast who felt that Paul ought to know.

"I don't like that Gregory," Paul told Ivo one Monday evening as they were enjoying a quiet smoke together, for there was no performance that night. "He used to be a juvenile delinquent, got sent to one of those reform schools where they use acting as therapy and it turned out to be his *métier*. But you never know when that kind'll hear the call of the wild again."

"Aaaah, he's a good kid," Ivo said. "He just never had a chanct."

"Trouble is, I'm afraid he's going to *make* himself a chanct—chance, that is."

"Aaaah," retorted Ivo, with prideful inarticulateness.

However, when at six-thirty that Friday, Paul fell over a wire stretched between the jambs of the doorway leading to his private bathroom and broke a leg, even Ivo was forced to admit that this did not look like an accident.

"Ivo," Paul wailed when the doctor had left, "what am I going to do? I refuse to let Gregory go on in my place tonight!"

"Y'gonna hafta," Ivo said, shifting his gum to the other side of his mouth. "He's y'unnastudy."

"But the doctor said it would be weeks before I can get around again. Either Gregory'll take over the part completely with his interpretation and I'll be left out in the cold, or more likely, he'll louse up the play and it'll fold before I'm on my feet."

"Y'gotta have more confidence in y'self, kid. The public ain't gonna forgetcha in a few weeks."

But Paul knew far better than the idealistic Ivo how fickle the public can be. However, he chose an argument that would appeal to the boy. "Don't forget, he booby-trapped me!"

"Cert'ny looks like it," Ivo was forced to concede. "But watcha gonna do? Y'can't prove it. 'Sides, the curtain's gonna gwup in a li'l over a nour—"

Paul gripped Ivo's sinewy wrist. "Ivo, you've got to go on for me!"

"Y'got rocks in y'head or somepin?" Ivo demanded, trying not to look pleased. "I ain't gotta Nequity card, and even if I did, *he's* y'unnastudy."

"No, you don't understand. I don't want you to go on as Ivo Darcy playing Eric Everard. I want you to go on as Paul Lambrequin playing Eric Everard. *You can do it, Ivo!*"

"Good Lord, so I can!" Ivo whispered, temporarily neglecting to mumble. "I'd almost forgotten."

"You know my lines, too. You've cued me in my part often enough."

Ivo rubbed his hand over his forehead. "Yeah, I guess I do."

"Ivo," Paul beseeched him, "I thought we were—pals. I don't want to ask any favors, but I helped you out when you were in trouble. I always figured I could rely on you. I never thought you'd let me down."

"An' I won't." Ivo gripped Paul's hand. "I'll go on t'night 'n play 'at part like it ain't never been played before! I'll—"

"No! No! Play it the way I played it. You're supposed to be *me*, Ivo! Forget Strasberg; go back to Stanislavsky."

"Okay, pal," Ivo said. "Will do."

"And promise me one thing, Ivo. Promise me *you won't mumble*."

Ivo winced. "Okay, but you're the on'y one I'd do 'at for."

Slowly, he began to shimmer. Paul held his breath. Maybe Ivo had forgotten how to transmute himself. But technique triumphed over method. Ivo Darcy gradually coalesced into the semblance of Paul Lambrequin. The show would go on!

"Well, how was everything?" Paul asked anxiously when Ivo came into his room shortly after midnight.

"Pretty good," Ivo said, sitting down on the edge of the bed. "Gregory was extremely surprised to see me—asked me half a dozen times how I was feeling." Ivo was not only articulating, Paul was gratified to notice; he was enunciating.

"But the show—how did that go? Did anyone suspect you were a ringer?"

"No," Ivo said slowly. "No, I don't think so. I got twelve curtain calls," he added, staring straight ahead of him with a dreamy smile. "Twelve."

"Friday nights, the audience is always enthusiastic." Then Paul swallowed hard and said, "Besides, I'm sure you were great in the role."

But Ivo didn't seem to hear him. Ivo was still wrapped in his golden daze. "Just before the curtain went up, I didn't think I was going to be able to do it. I began to feel all quivery inside, the way I do before I—I change."

"Butterflies in the stomach is the professional term." Paul nodded wisely. "A really good actor gets them before every performance. No matter how many times I play a role, there's that minute when the house lights start to dim when I'm in an absolute panic—"

"—And then the curtain went up and I was all right. I was fine. I was Paul Lambrequin. I was Eric Everard. I was—everything."

"Ivo," Paul said, clapping him on the shoulder, "you're a born trouper."

"Yes," Ivo murmured, "I'm beginning to think so myself."

For the next four weeks, Paul Lambrequin lurked in his room while Ivo Darcy played Paul Lambrequin playing Eric Everard.

"It's terrific of you to take all this time away from your duties, old chap," Paul said to Ivo one day between the matinee and the evening performances. "I really do appreciate it. Although I suppose you've managed to squeeze some of them in. I never see you on non-matinee afternoons."

"Duties?" Ivo repeated vacantly. "Yes, of course—my duties."

"Let me give you some professional advice, though. Be more careful when you take off your makeup. There's still some grease paint in the roots of your hair."

"Sloppy of me," Ivo agreed, getting to work with a towel.

"I can't understand why you bother to put on the stuff at all," Paul grinned, "when all you need to do is just change a little more."

"I know." Ivo rubbed his temples vigorously. "I suppose I just like the—smell of the stuff."

"Ivo," Paul laughed, "there's no use trying to kid me; you are stagestruck. I'm sure I have enough pull now to get you a bit part somewhere, when I'm up and around again, and then you can get yourself an Equity card. Maybe," he added amusedly, "I can even have you replace Gregory as my understudy."

Later, in retrospect, Paul thought perhaps there had been a curious expression in Ivo's eyes, but right then he'd had no inkling that anything untoward was up. He did not find out what had been at the back of Ivo's mind until the Sunday before the Tuesday on which he was planning to resume his role.

"Lord, it's going to be good to feel that stage under my feet again," he said as he went through a series of complicated limbering-up exercises of his own devisement, which he had sometimes thought of publishing as *The Lambrequin Time and Motion Studies*. It seemed unfair to keep them from other actors.

Ivo turned around from the mirror in which he had been contemplating their mutual beauty, "Paul," he said quietly, "you're never going to feel that stage under your feet again."

Paul sat on the floor and stared at him.

"You see, Paul," Ivo said, "I am Paul Lambrequin now. I am more Paul Lambrequin than I was—whoever I was on my native planet. I am more Paul Lambrequin than *you* ever were. You learned the part superficially, Paul, but I really *feel* it."

"It's not a part," Paul said querulously. "It's me. I've always been Paul Lambrequin."

"How can you be sure of that? You've had so many identities, why should this be the true one? No, you only *think* you're Paul Lambrequin. I *know* I am."

"Dammit," Paul said, "that's the identity in which I've taken out Equity membership. And be reasonable, Ivo—there can't be two Paul Lambrequins."

Ivo smiled sadly. "No, Paul, you're right. There can't."

Of course Paul had known all along that Ivo was not a human being. It was only now, however, that full realization came to him of what a ruthless alien monster the other was, existing only to gratify his own purposes, unaware that others had a right to exist.

"Are—are you going to—dispose of me, then?" Paul asked faintly.

"To dispose of you, yes, Paul. But not to kill you. My kind has killed enough, conquered enough. We have no real population problem; that was just an excuse we made to salve our own consciences."

"You have consciences, do you?" Paul's face twisted in a sneer that he himself sensed right away was overly melodramatic and utterly unconvincing. Somehow, he could never be really genuine offstage.

Ivo made a sweeping gesture. "Don't be bitter, Paul. Of course we do. All intelligent life-forms do. It's one of the penalties of sentience!"

For a moment, Paul forgot himself. "Watch it, Ivo. You're beginning to ham up your lines."

"We can institute birth control," Ivo went on, his manner subdued. "We can build taller buildings. Oh, there are many ways we can cope with the population increase. That's not the problem. The problem is how to divert our creative energies from destruction to construction. And I think I have solved it."

"How will your people know you have," Paul asked cunningly, "since you say you're not going back?"

"*I* am not going back to Sirius, Paul—*you* are. It is you who are going to teach my people the art of peace to replace the art of war."

Paul felt himself turn what was probably a very effective white. "But—but I can't even speak the language! I—"

"You will learn the language during the journey. I spent those afternoons I was away making a set of *Sirian-in-a-Jiffy* records for you. Sirian's a beautiful language, Paul, much more expressive than any of your Earth languages. You'll like it."

"I'm sure I shall, but—"

"Paul, you are going to bring my people the outlet for self-expression they have always needed. You see, I lied to you. The theater on Sirius is not in its infancy; it has never been conceived. If it had been, we would never have become what we are today. Can you imagine—a race like mine, so superbly fitted to practice the dramatic art, remaining in blind ignorance that such an art exists!"

"It does seem a terrible waste," Paul had to agree, although he could not be truly sympathetic just then. "But I am hardly equipped—"

"Who is better equipped than you to meet this mighty challenge? Can't you see that at long last you will be able to achieve your great synthesis of the theatrical arts—as producer, teacher, director, actor, playwright, whatever you will, working with a cast of individuals who can assume any shape or form, who have no preconceived notions of what can be done and what cannot. Oh, Paul, what a glorious opportunity awaits you on Sirius V. How I envy you!"

"Then why don't you do it yourself?" Paul asked.

Ivo smiled sadly again. "Unfortunately, I do not have your manifold abilities. All I can do is act. Superbly, of course, but that's all. I don't have the capacity to build a living theater from scratch. You do. I have talent, Paul, but you have genius."

"It *is* a temptation," Paul admitted. "But to leave my own world… ."

"Paul, Earth isn't your world. You carry yours along with you wherever you go. Your world exists in the mind and heart, not in reality. In any real situation, you're just as uncomfortable on Earth as you would be on Sirius."

"Yes, but—"

"Think of it this way, Paul. You're not leaving your world. You're just leaving Earth to go on the road. It's a longer road, but look at what's waiting for you at the end of it."

"Yes, look," Paul said, reality very much to the fore in his mind and heart at that moment, "death or vivisection."

"Paul, do you believe I'd do that to you?" There were tears in Ivo's eyes. If he was acting, he was a great performer. *I really am one hell of a good teacher*, Paul thought, *and with lots of raw material like Ivo to work with, I could… . Could he really mean what he's saying*?

"They won't harm you, Paul, because you will come to Sirius bearing a message from me. You will tell my people that Earth has a powerful defensive weapon and you have come to teach them its secret. And it's true, Paul. The theater is your world's most powerful weapon, its best defense against the universal enemy—reality."

"Ivo," Paul said, "you really must check that tendency toward bombast. Especially with a purple speech like that; you've simply got to learn to underplay. You'll watch out for that when I'm gone, won't you?"

"I will!" Ivo's face lighted up. "Oh, I will, Paul. I promise never to chew the scenery again. I won't so much as nibble on a prop!"

The next day, the two of them went up to Bear Mountain where Ivo's ship had been cached all those months. Ivo explained to Paul how the controls worked and showed him where the clean towels were.

Pausing in the airlock, Paul looked back toward Manhattan. "I'd dreamed so many years of seeing my name up in lights on Broadway," he murmured, "and now, just when I made it—"

"I'll keep it up there," Ivo vowed. "I promise. And, meanwhile, you'll be building a new Broadway up there in the stars!"

"Yes," Paul said dreamily, "that is something to look forward to, isn't it?" Fresh, enthusiastic audiences, performers untrammeled by tradition, a cooperative government, unlimited funds—why, there was a whole wonderful new world opening up before him.

"—In another ten years or so," Ivo was saying, "Sirian actors will be coming to Earth in droves, making the native performers look sick—"

Paul smiled wisely. "Now, Ivo, you know Equity would never stand for *that*."

"Equity won't be able to help itself. Public pressure will surge upward in a mounting wave and—" Ivo stopped. "Sorry. I was ranting again, wasn't I? It's being out in the open air that does it. I need to be bounded by the four walls of a theater."

"That's a fallacy," Paul began. "On the Greek stage—"

"Save that for the stars, fella," Ivo smiled. "You've got to leave before it gets light." Then he wrung Paul's hand. "Good-by, kid," he said. "You'll knock 'em dead on Sirius."

"Good-by, Ivo." Paul returned the grip. Then he got inside and closed the airlock door behind him. He did hope Ivo would correct that tendency toward declamation; on the other hand, it was certainly better than mumbling.

Paul put a *Sirian-in-a-jiffy* record on the turntable, because he might as well start learning the language right away. Of course he'd have no one to talk to but himself for many months, but then, when all was said and done, he was his own favorite audience. He strapped himself into the acceleration couch and prepared for take-off.

"Next week, *East Lynne*," he said to himself.

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