

Dune: Paul's Women, Chapters 20 and 21

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Dune: Paul's Women, Chapters 20 and 21

by [Wodric](#)

Summary

These two chapters follow the structure of the original book but with some necessary changes and additions to maintain a coherent narrative. These changes and additions can lead to significant changes in the following chapters.

Chapter's summary:

Chapter 20

Yueh faces his destiny. Shadoout Mapes finds Iphigenia. Alia meets Anirul Corrino.

Chapter 21

The Dr. Yueh meets the baron and Piter. The baron finally speaks with duke Leto. The Bene Gesserit take the duke's body.

See chapters 18 and 19: <http://archiveofourown.org/works/12265326>

See chapter 22: <https://archiveofourown.org/works/14169348> (Book I - last chapter)

Paul's Women

Book One: DUNE

Chapter 20

Arrakis teaches the attitude of the knife—chopping off what's incomplete and saying: "Now, it's complete because it's ended here."

- from "Collected Sayings of, Muad'Dib" by the Princess Irulan

A man in Harkonnen uniform skidded to a stop at the end of the hall, stared in at Yueh, taking in at a single glance to the Bene Gesserit sister dead body, the sprawled form of the Duke, Yueh standing there. The man held a lasgun in his right hand. There was a casual air of brutality about him, a sense of toughness and poise that sent a shiver through Yueh.

Sardaukar, Yueh thought. A Bashar by the look of him. Probably one of the Emperor's own sent here to keep an eye on things. No matter what the uniform, there's no disguising them.

"You're Yueh," the man said. He looked speculatively at the Suk School ring on the Doctor's hair, stared once at the diamond tattoo and then met Yueh's eyes.

"I am Yueh," the Doctor said.

"You can relax, Yueh," the man said. "When you dropped the house shields we came right in. Everything's under control here. Is this the Duke?"

"This is the Duke."

"Dead?"

"Merely unconscious. I suggest you tie him."

"Did you do for these others?" He glanced back down the hall where the Bene Gesserit sister body lay.

"More's the pity," Yueh muttered.

"Pity!" the Sardaukar sneered. He advanced, looked down at Leto. "So that's the great Red Duke."

If I had doubts about what this man is, that would end them, Yueh thought. Only the Emperor calls the Atreides the Red Duke.

The Sardaukar reached down, cut the red hawk insignia from Leto's uniform. "Little souvenir," he said. "Where's the ducal signet ring?"

"He doesn't have it on him," Yueh said.

"I can see that!" the Sardaukar snapped.

Yueh stiffened, swallowed, if they press me, bring in a Truthsayer, they'll find out about the ring, about the 'thopter I prepared—all will fail.

"Sometimes the Duke sent the ring with a messenger as surety that an order came directly from him,"

Yueh said.

"Must be damned trusted messengers," the Sardaukar muttered.

"Aren't you going to tie him?" Yueh ventured.

"How long'll he be unconscious?"

"Two hours or so. I wasn't as precise with his dosage as I was for the woman and boy."

The Sardaukar spurned the Duke with his toe. "This was nothing to fear even when awake.

When will the woman and boy awaken?"

"About ten minutes."

"So soon?"

"I was told the Baron would arrive immediately behind his men."

"So he will. You'll wait outside, Yueh." He shot a hard glance at Yueh. "Now!"

Yueh glanced at Leto. "What about..."

"He'll be delivered to the Baron all properly trussed like a roast for the oven." Again, the Sardaukar looked at the diamond tattoo on Yueh's forehead. "You're known; you'll be safe enough in the halls. We've no more time for chit-chat, traitor. I hear the others coming."

Traitor, Yueh thought. He lowered his gaze, pressed past the Sardaukar, knowing this as a foretaste of how history would remember him: Yueh the traitor.

He passed more bodies on his way to the front entrance and glanced at them, fearful that one might be Paul or Jessica. All were house troopers or wore Harkonnen uniform.

Harkonnen guards came alert, staring at him as he emerged from the front entrance into flamelighted night. The palms along the road had been fired to illuminate the house. Black smoke from the flammables used to ignite the trees poured upward through orange flames.

"It's the traitor," someone said.

"The Baron will want to see you soon," another said.

I must get to the 'thopter, Yueh thought. I must put the ducal signet where Paul will find it. And fear struck him: If Idaho suspects me or grows impatient – if he doesn't wait and go exactly where I told him – Jessica and Paul will not be saved from the carnage. I'll be denied even the smallest relief from my act.

The Harkonnen guard released his arm, said "Wait over there out of the way."

Abruptly, Yueh saw himself as cast away in this place of destruction, spared nothing, given not the smallest pity. Idaho must not fail!

Another guard bumped into him, barked: "Stay out of the way, you!"

Even when they've profited by me they despise me. Yueh thought. He straightened himself as he was pushed aside, regained some of his dignity.

"Wait for the Baron!" a guard officer snarled.

Yueh nodded, walked with controlled casualness along the front of the house, turned the corner into shadows out of sight of the burning palms. Quickly, every step betraying his anxiety, Yueh made for the rear yard beneath the conservatory where the 'thopter waited—the craft they had placed there to carry away Paul and his mother.

A guard stood at the open rear door of the house, his attention focused on the lighted hall and men banging through there, searching from room to room.

How confident they were!

Yueh hugged the shadows, worked his way around the 'thopter, eased open the door on the side away from the guard. He felt under the front seats for the Fremkit he had hidden there, lifted a flap and slipped in the ducal signet. He felt the crinkling of the spice paper there, the note he had written, pressed the ring into the paper. He removed his hand, resealed the pack.

Softly, Yueh closed the 'thopter door, worked his way back to the corner of the house and around toward the flaming trees.

Now, it is done, he thought.

Once more, he emerged into the light of the blazing palms. He pulled his cloak around him, stared at the flames. Soon I will know. Soon I will see the Baron and I will know. And the Baron—he will encounter a small tooth.

The drug effect was dissipating in her body. Iphigenia almost didn't needed to support herself in Mapes anymore, she could almost walk one her own.

“What is happening here?”

They leaved the liner. The Spaceport was still in a chaos. But there were Harkonnen troops everywhere.

“We are being attacked by the Harkonnen... come on... hurry up... do you know how to use that?” Asked Mapes pointing to the lasgun that Iphigenia had picked from the bedside table before they leaved the cabin.

“Yes. Lady Jessica and Ducan Idaho trained me. I was not only Alia’s wet nurse, I was also her bodyguard. She just couldn’t knew...”

“You didn’t guard her very well” said Mapes in a dreary tone. “Why should the Bene Gesserit kidnap her?”

“You don’t know Alia! She wasn’t kidnapped, she was the one that drugged me. She was on her will. She knew that I would try to stop her.”

“Where did they go?”

“I heard something... they are going to Arrakeen. I heard them talk about a house. The Bene Gesserit must have a safe house in the city. They knew of the attack, they were prepared for it.”

“The Harkonnen already control huge parts of the city. We must avoid them. The Bene Gesserit also would want a safe house that wouldn’t be destroyed by the invasion force. That means far from any possible military target.”

Alia Atreides was scared by the first time in her life. Scared but also excited. When that woman approached her by the swimming pool, in common area of the Liner ship, she understood immediately that she had been discovered.

The woman was beautiful. A stunning face and a well proportioned figure. She approached her in a two pieces golden brown bikini, a perfect match to her short bronze-brown hair. Her moves where confident and inspired security.

When she sit down in Alia’s sun lounge her naked hip touched Alia’s leg. Alia desired that contact. Alia had hunger for more. Alia bended her knee and almost all her leg made contact with the warm skin of the woman’s back. The skin was so smooth.

“Hello, Alia!” the woman smiled, it was a seductive smile “I am Anirul Sadow-Tonkin Corrino.”

“You are a Bene Gesserit!”

“Yes, I am a Bene Gesserit, like your mother.”

“I recall your name! You were the emperors’ concubine!” for a moment Alia saw the other women frowning her eyes, but she promptly smiled again. This time it was a sad smile.

“Yes. I was the emperors’ concubine... and... wife.”

“How did you found me?”

“The Bene Gesserit have their ways. If something happens in the Empire, the Bene Gesserit are the first to know. But your mother made a good job hiding you from us. And I discovered you almost by accident. You must know that I am not the only one looking for you among the Bene Gesserit. Your grandmother, the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam, doesn’t know about your existence. If she knew, she would find you...”

“The Reverend Mother, the Emperor's Truthsayer and concubine, is my grandmother?”

“Poor child!” Anirul caressed tenderly Alia’s cheeks. “You didn’t knew! Probably Jessica also doesn’t know that her mentor was her own mother!”

“Will you tell her about me?”

“Why should I?! Gaius Helen Mohiam is an ambitious woman. She wanted to become the emperor’s concubine, even if that was my task. I gave the emperor five daughters. Irulan, the eldest, has your age! She took my place beside the emperor. I don’t owe her nothing.”

Alia looked to her uncovered figure, her perfect small and firm round breasts, her flat tummy, her narrow waist and her full buttocks.

“You don’t seem to have five daughters!”

“We, the Bene Gesserit, have a few tricks about women’s beauty... and how to seduce a man... or a woman...”

“With those words, I begin to think that you are trying to seduce me...” Alia rose up, breaking the skin contact. For a moment she seemed relief. She adjust her bikini top, projected her breasts forward trying to make them bigger under the fabric. The other women stared at her chest and smiled. Than Alia gave two steps and dove into the water. She needed the cold water enveloping her skin. And she needed time. She needed to think!

That night, in the dining room, the woman was there again, sited in a near table, with two other women that seemed Bene Gesserit and two nobles from minor houses.

Iphigenia sensed Alia’s nervousness stare.

“Who is that woman, Alia?” asked the wet nurse. “She was with you at the pool!”

“No one...”

Paul’s Women

Book One: DUNE

Chapter 20

There is a legend that the instant the Duke Leto Atreides died a meteor streaked across the skies above his ancestral palace on Caladan.

- the Princess Irulan: "Introduction to A Child's History of Muad'Dib"

The Baron Vladimir Harkonnen stood at a viewport of the grounded lighter he was using as a command post. Out the port he saw the flame-lighted night of Arrakeen. His attention focused on the distant Shield Wall where his secret weapon was doing its work.

Explosive artillery.

The guns nibbled at the caves where the Duke's fighting men had retreated for a last-ditch stand.

Slowly measured bites of orange glare, showers of rock and dust in the brief illumination—and the Duke's men were being sealed off to die by starvation, caught like animals in their burrows.

The Baron could feel the distant chomping—a drumbeat carried to him through the ship's metal:

broomp... broomp.

Then: BROOMP-broomp!

Who would think of reviving artillery in this day of shields? The thought was a chuckle in his mind.

But it was predictable the Duke's men would run for those caves. And the Emperor will appreciate my cleverness in preserving the lives of our mutual force.

He adjusted one of the little suspensors that guarded his fat body against the pull of gravity.

A smile creased his mouth, pulled at the lines of his jowls.

A pity to waste such fighting men as the Duke's, he thought. He smiled more broadly, laughing at himself. Pity should be cruel! He nodded. Failure was, by definition, expendable.

The whole universe sat there, open to the man who could make the right decisions. The uncertain rabbits had to be exposed, made to run for their burrows. Else how could you control them and breed them? He pictured his fighting men as bees routing the rabbits. And he thought: The day hums sweetly when you have enough bees working for you. A door opened behind him. The Baron studied the reflection in the night-blackened viewport before turning.

Piter de Vries advanced into the chamber followed by Umman Kudu, the captain of the Baron's personal guard. There was a motion of men just outside the door, the mutton faces of his guard, their expressions carefully sheep-like in his presence.

The Baron turned.

Piter touched finger to forelock in his mocking salute. "Good news, m'Lord. The Sardaukar have brought in the Duke."

"Of course they have," the Baron rumbled.

He studied the somber mask of villainy on Piter's effeminate face. And the eyes: those shaded slits of bluest blue-in-blue.

Soon I must remove him, the Baron thought. He has almost outlasted his usefulness, almost reached the point of positive danger to my person. First, though, he must make the people of Arrakis hate him.

Then—they will welcome my darling Feyd-Rautha as a savior.

The Baron shifted his attention to the guard captain – Umman Kudu: scissors- line of jaw muscles, chin like a boot toe—a man to be trusted because the captain's vices were known.

"First, where is the traitor who gave me the Duke?" the Baron asked. "I must give the traitor his reward."

Piter turned on one toe, motioned to the guard outside.

A bit of black movement there and Yueh walked through. His motions were stiff and stringy.

The mustache drooped beside his purple lips. Only the old eyes seemed alive. Yueh came to a stop three paces into the room, obeying a motion from Piter, and stood there staring across the open space at the Baron.

"Ah-h-h, Dr. Yueh."

"M'Lord Harkonnen."

"You've given us the Duke, I hear."

"My half of the bargain, m'Lord."

The Baron looked at Piter.

Piter nodded.

The Baron looked back at Yueh. "The letter of the bargain, eh? And I..." He spat the words out:

"What was I to do in return?"

"You remember quite well, m'Lord Harkonnen."

And Yueh allowed himself to think now, hearing the loud silence of clocks in his mind. He had seen the subtle betrayals in the Baron's manner. Wanna was indeed dead—gone far

beyond their reach. Otherwise, there'd still be a hold on the weak doctor. The Baron's manner showed there was no hold; it was ended.

"Do I?" the Baron asked.

"You promised to deliver my Wanna from her agony."

The Baron nodded. "Oh, yes. Now, I remember. So I did. That was my promise. That was how we bent the Imperial Conditioning. You couldn't endure seeing your Bene Gesserit witch grovel in Piter's pain amplifiers. Well, the Baron Vladimir Harkonnen always keeps his promises. I told you I'd free her from the agony and permit you to join her. So be it." He waved a hand at Piter.

Piter's blue eyes took a glazed look. His movement was catlike in its sudden fluidity. The knife in his hand glistened like a claw as it flashed into Yueh's back.

The old man stiffened, never taking his attention from the Baron.

"So join her!" the Baron spat.

Yueh stood, swaying. His lips moved with careful precision, and his voice came in oddly measured cadence: "You... think... you... de... feated... me. You... think... I... did... not... know... what... I... bought... for... my... Wanna."

He toppled. No bending or softening. It was like a tree falling.

"So go ahead and... join her, even if you have to wait for her," the Baron said. But his words were muttered. The poor fool thought that she was dead! Yueh had filled him with a sense of foreboding. He whipped his attention to Piter, watched the man wipe the blade on a scrap of cloth, watched the creamy look of satisfaction in the blue eyes.

So that's how he kills by his own hand, the Baron thought. It's well to know.

"He did give us the Duke?" the Baron asked.

"Of a certainty, my Lord," Piter said.

"Then get him in here!... and free the doctor's woman, give her to Feyd-Rautha!"

Piter glanced at the guard captain, who whirled to obey.

The Baron looked down at Yueh. From the way the man had fallen, you could suspect oak in him instead of bones.

"I never could bring myself to trust a traitor," the Baron said. "Not even a traitor I created."

He glanced at the night-shrouded viewport. That black bag of stillness out there was his, the Baron knew. There was no more crump of artillery against the Shield Wall caves; the burrow traps were sealed off. Quite suddenly, the Baron's mind could conceive of nothing more

beautiful than that utter emptiness of black. Unless it were white on the black. Plated white on the black. Porcelain white.

But there was still the feeling of doubt.

What had the old fool of a doctor meant? Of course, he'd probably known what would happen to him in the end. But that bit about thinking he'd been defeated: "You think you defeated me."

What had he meant?

The Duke Leto Atreides came through the door. His arms were bound in chains, the eagle face streaked with dirt. His uniform was torn where someone had ripped off his insignia.

There were tatters at his waist where the shield belt had been removed without first freeing the uniform ties. The Duke's eyes held a glazed, insane look.

"Wel-l-l-l," the Baron said. He hesitated, drawing in a deep breath. He knew he had spoken too loudly.

This moment, long envisioned, had lost some of its savor.

Damn that cursed doctor through all eternity!

"I believe the good Duke is drugged," Piter said. "That's how Yueh caught him for us." Piter turned to the Duke. "Aren't you drugged, my dear Duke?"

The voice was far away. Leto could feel the chains, the ache of muscles, his cracked lips, his burning cheeks, the dry taste of thirst whispering its grit in his mouth. But sounds were dull, hidden by a cottony blanket. And he saw only dim shapes through the blanket.

"What of the woman and the boy, Piter?" the Baron asked. "Any word yet?" Piter's tongue darted over his lips.

"You've heard something!" the Baron snapped. "What?"

Piter glanced at the guard captain, back to the Baron. "The men who were sent to do the job, m'Lord— they've... ah... been... ah... found."

"Well, they report everything satisfactory?"

"They're dead, m'Lord."

"Of course they are! What I want to know is—"

"They were dead when found, m'Lord."

The Baron's face went livid. "And the woman and boy?"

"No sign, m'Lord, but there was a worm. It came while the scene was being investigated.

Perhaps it's as we wished—an accident. Possibly—"

"We do not deal in possibilities, Piter. What of the missing 'thopter? Does that suggest anything to my Mentat?"

"One of the Duke's men obviously escaped in it, m'Lord. Killed our pilot and escaped."

"Which of the Duke's men?"

"It was a clean, silent killing, m'Lord. Hawat, perhaps, or that Halleck one. Possibly Idaho. Or any top lieutenant."

"Possibilities," the Baron muttered. He glanced at the swaying, drugged figure of the Duke.

"The situation is in hand, m'Lord," Piter said.

"No, it isn't! Where is that stupid planetologist? Where is this man Kynes?"

"We've word where to find him and he's been sent for, m'Lord."

"I don't like the way the Emperor's servant is helping us," the Baron muttered.

They were words through a cottony blanket, but some of them burned in Leto's mind. Woman and boy—no sign. Paul and Jessica had escaped. And the fate of Hawat, Halleck, and Idaho remained an unknown. There was still hope.

"Where is the ducal signet ring?" the Baron demanded. "His finger is bare."

"The Sardaukar say it was not on him when he was taken, my Lord," the guard captain said.

"You killed the doctor too soon," the Baron said. "That was a mistake. You should've warned me, Piter. You moved too precipitately for the good of our enterprise." He scowled.

"Possibilities!"

The thought hung like a sine wave in Leto's mind: Paul and Jessica have escaped! And there was something else in his memory: a bargain. He could almost remember it.

The tooth!

He remembered part of it now: a pill of poison gas shaped into a false tooth. Someone had told him to remember the tooth. The tooth was in his mouth. He could feel its shape with his tongue. All he had to do was bite sharply on it.

Not yet!

The someone had told him to wait until he was near the Baron. Who had told him? He couldn't remember.

"How long will he remain drugged like this?" the Baron asked.

"Perhaps another hour, m'Lord."

"Perhaps," the Baron muttered. Again, he turned to the night-blackened window. "I am hungry."

That's the Baron, that fuzzy gray shape there, Leto thought. The shape danced back and forth, swaying with the movement of the room. And the room expanded and contracted. It grew brighter and darker.

It folded into blackness and faded.

Time became a sequence of layers for the Duke. He drifted up through them. I must wait. There was a table. Leto saw the table quite clearly. And a gross, fat man on the other side of the table, the remains of a meal in front of him. Leto felt himself sitting in a chair across from the fat man, felt the chains, the straps that held his tingling body in the chair. He was aware there had been a passage of time, but its length escaped him.

"I believe he's coming around. Baron."

A silky voice, that one. That was Piter.

"So I see, Piter."

A rumbling basso: the Baron.

Leto sensed increasing definition in his surroundings. The chair beneath him took on firmness, the bindings were sharper.

And he saw the Baron clearly now. Leto watched the movements of the man's hands: compulsive touchings—the edge of a plate, the handle of a spoon, a finger tracing the fold of a jowl.

Leto watched the moving hand, fascinated by it.

"You can hear me, Duke Leto," the Baron said. "I know you can hear me. We want to know from you where to find your concubine and the child you sired on her."

No sign escaped Leto, but the words were a wash of calmness through him. It's true, then: they don't have Paul and Jessica.

"This is not a child's game we play," the Baron rumbled. "You must know that." He leaned toward Leto, studying the face. It pained the Baron that this could not be handled privately, just between the two of them. To have others see royalty in such straits—it set a bad precedent.

Leto could feel strength returning. And now, the memory of the false tooth stood out in his mind like a steeple in a flat landscape. The nerve-shaped capsule within that tooth—the poison gas—he remembered who had put the deadly weapon in his mouth.

Yueh.

Drug-fogged memory of seeing a limp corpse dragged past him in this room hung like a vapor in Leto's mind. He knew it had been Yueh.

"Do you hear that noise, Duke Leto?" the Baron asked.

Leto grew conscious of a frog sound, the burred mewling of someone's agony.

"We caught one of your men disguised as a Fremen, " the Baron said. "We penetrated the disguise quite easily: the eyes, you know. He insists he was sent among the Fremen to spy on them. I've lived for a time on this planet, cher cousin. One does not spy on those ragged scum of the desert. Tell me, did you buy their help? Did you send your woman and son to them?"

Leto felt fear tighten his chest. If Yueh sent them to the desert fold... the search won't stop until they're found.

"Come, come," the Baron said. "We don't have much time and pain is quick. Please don't bring it to this, my dear Duke." The Baron looked up at Piter who stood at Leto's shoulder.

"Piter doesn't have all his tools here, but I'm sure he could improvise."

"Improvisation is sometimes the best, Baron."

That silky, insinuating voice! Leto heard it at his ear.

"You had an emergency plan," the Baron said. "Where have your woman and the boy been sent?" He looked at Leto's hand. "Your ring is missing. Does the boy have it?" The Baron looked up, stared into Leto's eyes.

"You don't answer," he said. "Will you force me to do a thing I do not want to do? Piter will use simple, direct methods. I agree they're sometimes the best, but it's not good that you should be subjected to such things."

"Hot tallow on the back, perhaps, or on the eyelids," Piter said. "Perhaps on other portions of the body. It's especially effective when the subject doesn't know where the tallow will fall next. It's a good method and there's a sort of beauty in the pattern of pus-white blisters on naked skin, eh, Baron?"

"Exquisite," the Baron said, and his voice sounded sour.

Those touching fingers! Leto watched the fat hands, the glittering jewels on baby-fat hands—their compulsive wandering.

The sounds of agony coming through the door behind him gnawed at the Duke's nerves. Who is it they caught? he wondered. Could it have been Idaho?

"Believe me, cher cousin," the Baron said. "I do not want it to come to this."

"You think of nerve couriers racing to summon help that cannot come," Piter said.

"There's an artistry in this, you know."

"You're a superb artist," the Baron growled. "Now, have the decency to be silent."

Leto suddenly recalled a thing Gurney Halleck had said once, seeing a picture of the Baron: "'And I stood upon the sand of the sea and saw a beast rise up out of the sea... and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.'"

"We waste time, Baron," Piter said.

"Perhaps."

The Baron nodded. "You know, my dear Leto, you'll tell us in the end where they are. There's a level of pain that'll buy you."

He's most likely correct, Leto thought. Were it not for the tooth... and the fact that I truly don't know where they are.

The Baron picked up a sliver of meat, pressed the morsel into his mouth, chewed slowly, swallowed.

We must try a new tack, he thought.

"Observe this prize person who denies he's for hire," the Baron said. "Observe him, Piter."

And the Baron thought: Yes! See him there, this man who believes he cannot be bought. See him detained there by a million shares of himself sold in dribbles every second of his life!

If you took him up now and shook him, he'd rattle inside. Emptied! Sold out! What difference how he dies now?

The frog sounds in the background stopped.

The Baron saw Umman Kudu, the guard captain, appear in the doorway across the room, shake his head. The captive hadn't produced the needed information. Another failure. Time to quit stalling with this fool Duke, this stupid soft fool who didn't realize how much hell there was so near him—only a nerve's thickness away.

This thought calmed the Baron, overcoming his reluctance to have a royal person subject to pain. He saw himself suddenly as a surgeon exercising endless supple scissor dissections—cutting away the masks from fools, exposing the hell beneath.

Rabbits, all of them!

And how they cowered when they saw the carnivore!

Leto stared across the table, wondering why he waited. The tooth would end it all quickly.

Still—it had been good, much of this life. He found himself remembering an antenna kite updangling in the shell-blue sky of Caladan, and Paul laughing with joy at the sight of it. And he remembered sunrise here on Arrakis—colored strata of the Shield Wall mellowed by dust haze.

"Too bad," the Baron muttered. He pushed himself back from the table, stood up lightly in his suspensors and hesitated, seeing a change come over the Duke. He saw the man draw in a deep breath, the jawline stiffen, the ripple of a muscle there as the Duke clamped his mouth shut.

How he fears me! the Baron thought.

Shocked by fear that the Baron might escape him, Leto bit sharply on the capsule tooth, felt it break.

He opened his mouth, expelled the biting vapor he could taste as it formed on his tongue. The Baron grew smaller, a figure seen in a tightening tunnel. Leto heard a gasp beside his ear—the silky-voiced one: Piter.

It got him, too!

"Piter! What's wrong?"

The rumbling voice was far away.

Leto sensed memories rolling in his mind—the old toothless mutterings of hags. The room, the table, the Baron, a pair of terrified eyes—blue within blue, the eyes—all compressed around him in ruined symmetry.

There was a man with a boot-toe chin, a toy man falling. The toy man had a broken nose slanted to the left: an offbeat metronome caught forever at the start of an upward stroke. Leto heard the crash of crockery—so distant—a roaring in his ears. His mind was a bin without end, catching everything.

Everything that had ever been: every shout, every whisper, every... silence.

One thought remained to him. Leto saw it in formless light on rays of black: The day the flesh shapes and the flesh the day shapes. The thought struck him with a sense of fullness he knew he could never explain.

Silence.

The Baron stood with his back against his private door, his own bolt hole behind the table. He had slammed it on a room full of dead men. His senses took in guards swarming around him. Did I breathe it? he asked himself. Whatever it was in there, did it get me, too?

Sounds returned to him... and reason. He heard someone shouting orders— gas masks... keep a door closed... get blowers going.

The others fell quickly, he thought. I'm still standing. I'm still breathing. Merciless hell! That was close!

He could analyze it now. His shield had been activated, set low but still enough to slow molecular interchange across the field barrier. And he had been pushing himself away from the table... that and Piter's shocked gasp which had brought the guard captain darting forward into his own doom.

Chance and the warning in a dying man's gasp—these had saved him.

The Baron felt no gratitude to Piter. The fool had got himself killed. And that stupid guard captain!

He'd said he scoped everyone before bringing them into the Baron's presence! How had it been possible for the Duke... ? No warning. Not even from the poison snooper over the table—until it was too late. How?

Well, no matter now, the Baron thought, his mind firming. The next guard captain will begin by finding answers to these questions.

He grew aware of more activity down the hall—around the corner at the other door to that room of death. The Baron pushed himself away from his own door, studied the lackeys around him. They stood there staring, silent, waiting for the Baron's reaction.

Would the Baron be angry?

And the Baron realized only a few seconds had passed since his flight from that terrible room.

Some of the guards had weapons leveled at the door. Some were directing their ferocity toward the empty hall that stretched away toward the noises around the corner to their right.

A man came striding around that corner, gas mask dangling by its straps at his neck, his eyes intent on the overhead poison snoopers that lined this corridor. He was yellow-haired, flat of face with green eyes. Crisp lines radiated from his thick-lipped mouth. He looked like some water creature misplaced among those who walked the land.

The Baron stared at the approaching man, recalling the name: Nefud. Iakin Nefud. Guard corporal.

Nefud was addicted to semuta, the drug-music combination that played itself in the deepest consciousness. A useful item of information, that.

The man stopped in front of the Baron, saluted. "Corridor 's clear, m'Lord. I was outside watching and saw that it must be poison gas. Ventilators in your room were pulling air in from these corridors." He glanced up at the snooper over the Baron's head.

"None of the stuff escaped. We have the room cleaned out now. What are your orders?" The Baron recognized the man's voice—the one who'd been shouting orders. Efficient, this corporal, he thought.

"They're all dead in there?" the Baron asked.

"Yes, m'Lord."

Well, we must adjust, the Baron thought.

"First," he said, "let me congratulate you, Nefud. You're the new captain of my guard. And I hope you'll take to heart the lesson to be learned from the fate of your predecessor."

The Baron watched the awareness grow in his newly promoted guardsman. Nefud knew he'd never again be without his semuta.

Nefud nodded. "My Lord knows I'll devote myself entirely to his safety."

"Yes. Well, to business. I suspect the Duke had something in his mouth. You will find out what that something was, how it was used, who helped him put it there. You'll take every precaution—"

He broke off, his chain of thought shattered by a disturbance in the corridor behind him—guards at the door to the lift from the lower levels of the frigate trying to hold back a tall colonel bashar who had just emerged from the lift.

The Baron couldn't place the colonel bashar's face: thin with mouth like a slash in leather, twin ink spots for eyes.

"Get your hands off me, you pack of carrion-eaters!" the man roared, and he dashed the guards aside.

Ah-h-h, one of the Sardaukar, the Baron thought.

The colonel bashar came striding toward the Baron, whose eyes went to slits of apprehension. The Sardaukar officers filled him with unease. They all seemed to look like relatives of the Duke... the late Duke. And their manners with the Baron!

The colonel bashar planted himself half a pace in front of the Baron, hands on hips. The guard hovered behind him in twitching uncertainty.

The Baron noted the absence of salute, the disdain in the Sardaukar's manner, and his unease grew.

There was only the one legion of them locally—ten brigades—reinforcing the Harkonnen legions, but the Baron did not fool himself. That one legion was perfectly capable of turning on the Harkonnens and overcoming them.

"Tell your men they are not to prevent me from seeing you, Baron," the Sardaukar growled.

"My men brought you the Atreides Duke before I could discuss his fate with you. We will discuss it now."

I must not lose face before my men, the Baron thought.

"So?" It was a coldly controlled word, and the Baron felt proud of it.

"My Emperor has charged me to make certain his royal cousin dies cleanly without agony," the colonel bashar said.

"Such were the Imperial orders to me," the Baron lied. "Did you think I'd disobey?"

"I'm to report to my Emperor what I see with my own eyes," the Sardaukar said.

"The Duke's already dead," the Baron snapped, and he waved a hand to dismiss the fellow.

The colonel bashar remained planted facing the Baron. Not by flicker of eye or muscle did he acknowledge he had been dismissed. "How?" he growled.

Really! the Baron thought. This is too much.

"By his own hand, if you must know," the Baron said. "He took poison."

"I will see the body now," the colonel Bashar said.

The Baron raised his gaze to the ceiling in feigned exasperation while his thoughts raced.

Damnation! This sharp-eyed Sardaukar will see the room before a thing's been changed!

"Now," the Sardaukar growled. "I'll see it with my own eyes."

There was no preventing it, the Baron realized. The Sardaukar would see all. He'd know the Duke had killed Harkonnen men... that the Baron most likely had escaped by a narrow margin. There was the evidence of the dinner remnants on the table, and the dead Duke across from it with destruction around him.

No preventing it at all.

"I'll not be put off," the colonel bashar snarled.

"You're not being put off," the Baron said, and he stared into the Sardaukar's obsidian eyes. "I hide nothing from my Emperor." He nodded to Nefud. "The colonel bashar is to see everything, at once. Take him in by the door where you stood, Nefud."

"This way, sir," Nefud said.

Slowly, insolently, the Sardaukar moved around the Baron, shouldered a way through the guardsmen.

Insufferable, the Baron thought. Now, the Emperor will know how I slipped up. He'll recognize it as a sign of weakness.

And it was agonizing to realize that the Emperor and his Sardaukar were alike in their disdain for weakness. The Baron chewed at his lower lip, consoling himself that the Emperor, at

least, had not learned of the Atreides raid on Giedi Prime, the destruction of the Harkonnen spice stores there.

Damn that slippery Duke!

The Baron watched the retreating backs—the arrogant Sardaukar and the stocky, efficient Nefud.

We must adjust, the Baron thought. I'll have to put Rabban over this damnable planet once more.

Without restraint. I must spend my own Harkonnen blood to put Arrakis into a proper condition for accepting Feyd-Rautha. Damn that Piter! He would get himself killed before I was through with him.

The Baron sighed.

And I must send at once to Tleielax for a new Mentat. They undoubtedly have the new one ready for me by now.

One of the guardsmen beside him coughed.

The Baron turned toward the man. "I am hungry."

"Yes, m'Lord."

"And I wish to be diverted while you're clearing out that room and studying its secrets for me," the Baron rumbled.

The guardsman lowered his eyes. "What diversion does m'Lord wish?"

"I'll be in my sleeping chambers," the Baron said. "Bring me that young fellow we bought on Gamont, the one with the lovely eyes. Drug him well. I don't feel like wrestling."

"Yes, m'Lord."

The Baron turned away, began moving with his bouncing, suspensor-buoyed pace toward his chambers. Yes, he thought. The one with the lovely eyes, the one who looks so much like the young Paul Atreides.

With new toughs in mind, the Baron didn't see two female servants approaching Leto's body after the departure of the sardaukar. They covered the duke's dead body as they were preparing it to a funeral service. If the Baron had seen them, he could have recognized that they were Bene Gesserit. The baron also didn't see one of the female servants injecting the second doses of the antidote prepared by dr. Yueh. The women moved quickly, they still had to free Yueh's wife, Wonna Marcus.

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