

Chapter 1

The girl came toward him across the silent room. She was young. She was beautiful. Her red hair curled like a flame round her eager, heart-shaped face. Her arms reached for him. Her hands touched him. Her eyes were alive with the light of pure love. I am yours, the eyes kept saying. Do with me as you will.

Forrester watched the eyes with a kind of fascination.

Now the girl's mouth opened, the lips parted slightly, and her husky voice murmured softly: "Take me. Take me."

Forrester blinked and stepped back.

"My God," he said. "This is ridiculous."

The girl pressed herself against him. The sensation was, Forrester thought with a kind of awe, undeniably pleasant. He tried to remember the girl's name, and couldn't. She wriggled slightly and her arms went up around him. Her hands clasped at the back of his neck and her mouth moved, close to his ear.

"Please," she whispered. "I want you... ."

Forrester felt his head swimming. He opened his mouth but nothing whatever came out. He shut his mouth and tried to think what to do with his hands. They were hanging foolishly at his sides. The girl came even closer, something Forrester would have thought impossible.

Time stopped. Forrester swam in a pink haze of sensations. Only one small corner of his brain refused to lose itself in the magnificence of the moment. In that corner, Forrester felt feverishly uncomfortable. He tried again to remember the girl's name, and failed again. Of course, there was really no reason why he should have known the name. It was, after all, only the first day of class.

"Please," he said valiantly. "Miss—"

He stopped.

"I'm Maya Wilson," the girl said in his ear. "I'm in your class, Mr. Forrester. Introductory World History." She bit his ear gently. Forrester jumped.

None of the textbooks of propriety he had ever seen seemed to cover the situation he found himself in. What did one do when assaulted (pleasantly, to be sure, but assault was assault) by a lovely girl who happened to be one of your freshman students? She had called him Mr. Forrester. That was right and proper, even if it was a little silly. But what should he call her? Miss Wilson?

That didn't sound right at all. But, for other reasons, Maya sounded even worse.

The girl said: "Please," and added to the force of the word with another little wriggle against Forrester. It solved his problems. There was now only one thing to do, and he did it.

He broke away, found himself on the other side of his desk, looking across at an eager, wet-lipped freshman student.

"Well," he said. There was a lone little bead of sweat trickling down his forehead, across his frontal ridge and down one cheek. He ignored it bravely, trying to think what to do next. "Well," he repeated at last, in what he hoped was a gentle and fatherly tone. "Well, well, well, well, well." It didn't seem to have any effect. Perhaps, he thought, an attempt to put things back on the teacher-student level might have better results. "You wanted me to see you?" he said in a grave, scholarly tone. Then, gulping briefly, he amended it in a voice that had suddenly grown an octave: "You wanted to see me? I mean, you—"

"Oh," Maya Wilson said. "Oh, my goodness, *yes*, Mr. Forrester!"

She made a sudden sensuous motion that looked to Forrester as if she had suddenly abolished bones. But it wasn't unpleasant. Far from it. Quite the contrary.

Forrester licked his lips, which were suddenly very dry. "Well," he said. "What about, Miss—uh—Miss Wilson?"

"Please call me Maya, Mr. Forrester. And I'll call you—" There was a second of hesitation. "Mr. Forrester," Maya said plaintively, "what is your first name?"

"First name?" Forrester tried to think of his first name. "You want to know my first name?"

"Well," Maya said, "I want to call you something. Because after all—" She looked as if she were going to leap over the desk.

"You may call me," Forrester said, grasping at his sanity, "Mr. Forrester."

Maya sidled around the desk quietly. "Mr. Forrester," she said, reaching for him, "I wanted to talk to you about the Introductory World History course."

Forrester shivered as if someone had thrown cold water on his rising aspirations.

"Oh," he said.

"That's right," Maya whispered. Her mouth was close to his ear again. Other parts of her were close to other parts of him once more. Forrester found it difficult to concentrate.

"I've *got* to pass the course, Mr. Forrester," Maya whispered. "I've just *got* to."

Somehow, Forrester retained just enough control of his faculties to remember the standard answer to protestations like that one. "Well, I'm sure you will," he said in what he hoped was a calm, hearty, hopeful voice. He was reasonably sure it wasn't any of those, and even surer that it wasn't all three. "You seem like a—like a fairly intelligent young lady," he finished lamely.

"Oh, no," she said. "I'm sure I won't be able to remember all those old-fashioned dates and things. Never. Never." Suddenly she pressed herself wildly against him, throwing him slightly off balance. Locked together, the couple reeled against the desk. Forrester felt it digging into the small of his back. "I'll do anything to pass the course, Mr. Forrester!" she vowed. "Anything!"

The insistent pressure of the desk top robbed the moment of some of its natural splendor. Forrester disengaged himself gently and slid a little out of the way. "Now, now," he said, moving rapidly across the room toward a blank wall. "This sort of thing isn't usually done, Maya. I mean, Miss Wilson. I mean—"

"But—"

"People just don't do such things," Forrester said sternly. He thought of escaping through the door, but the picture that arose immediately in his mind dissuaded him. He saw Maya pursuing him passionately through the halls while admiring students and faculty stared after them. "Anyhow," he added as an afterthought, "not at the *beginning* of the semester."

"Oh," Maya said. She was advancing on him slowly. "You mean, I ought to see if I can pass the course on my own first, and *then*—"

"Not at all," Forrester cut in.

Maya sniffed sadly. "Oh, you just don't understand," she said. "You're an Athenian, aren't you?"

"Athenan," Forrester said automatically. It was a correction he found himself called upon to make ten or twelve times a week. "An Athenian is

a resident of Athens, while an Athenan is a worshipper of the Goddess Athena. We—"

"I understand," Maya said. "I suppose it's like us. We don't like to be called Aphrodisiacs, you know. We prefer Venerans."

She was leaning across the desk. Forrester, though he supposed some people might be fussy about it, could see no objection whatever to the term Aphrodisiacs. A wild thought dealing with Spheres of Influence strayed into his mind, and he suppressed it firmly.

The girl was a Veneran. A worshipper of Venus, Goddess of Love.

Her choice of religion, he thought, was unusually appropriate.

And as for his... .

Chapter 2

It was hard to believe that, only an hour or so before, he had been peaceful and calm, entirely occupied with his duties in the great Temple of Pallas Athena. His mind gave a sudden, panic-stricken leap and he was back there again, standing at the rear of the vast room and focusing all of his strained attention on it.

The glowing embers in the golden incense tripods were dying now, but the heavy clouds of frankincense, still tingled with the sweet aroma of balsam and clove, hung heavily in the quiet air over the main altar. In the flickering illumination of the gas sconces around the walls, the figures on the great tapestries seemed to move with a subtle life of their own.

Even though the great brazen gong had sounded for the last time twenty minutes before, marking the end of the service, there were still a few worshippers in the pews, seated with heads bowed in prayer to the Goddess. Forrester considered them carefully: average-looking people, a sprinkling of youngsters, and in the far corner a girl who looked just a little like ...

Forrester peered more closely. It wasn't just a slight resemblance; the girl really seemed to be Gerda Symes. Her long blonde hair shone in the dimness. Forrester couldn't see her very clearly, but his imagination was working overtime. Her magnificently curved figure, her wonderful face, her fiery personality were as much a part of his dreams as the bed he slept on.

If not for her brother ...

Forrester sighed and forced himself to return his attention to his duties. His hands remained clasped reverently at his breast. Whatever battle went on in his mind, the remaining few people in the great room would see nothing but what was fitting. At any rate, he told himself, he made rather an imposing sight in his robes, and, with a stirring of vanity which he prayed Athena to chasten, he was rather proud of it.

He was a fairly tall man, just a shade under six feet, but his slight paunch made him seem shorter than he was. His face was round and

smooth and pleasant, and that made him look younger than he was: twenty-one instead of twenty-seven. As befitted an acolyte of the Goddess of Wisdom, his dark, curly hair was cut rather long. When he bowed to a departing worshipper, lowering his head in graceful acknowledgment of their deferential nods, he felt that he made a striking and commanding picture.

Though, of course, the worshippers weren't doing him any honor. That bow was not for him, but directed toward the Owl, the symbol of the Goddess embroidered on the breast of the white tunic. As an acolyte, after all, he rated just barely above a layman; he had no powers whatever.

Athena knew that, naturally. But somehow it was a little difficult to get it through his own doubtless too-thick skull. He'd often dreamed of power. Being a priest or a priestess, for instance—now that meant something. At least people paid attention to you if you were a member of the hierarchy, favored of the Gods. But, Forrester knew, there was no chance of that any more. Either you were picked before you were twenty-one, or you weren't picked at all, and that was all there was to it. In spite of his looks, Forrester was six years past the limit.

And so he'd become an acolyte. Sometimes he wondered how much of that had been an honest desire to serve Athena, and how much a sop to his worldly vanity. Certainly a college history instructor had enough to do, without adding the unpaid religious services of an acolyte to his work.

But these were thoughts unworthy of his position. They reminded him of his own childhood, when he had dreamed of becoming one of the Lesser Gods, or even Zeus himself! Zeus had provided the best answer to those dreams, Forrester knew. "Now I am a man," Zeus had said, "and I put away childish things."

Well, Forrester considered, it behooved him to put away childish things, too. A mere vanity, a mere love of spectacle, was unworthy of the Goddess he served. And his costume and bearing certainly hadn't got him very far with Gerda.

He tore his eyes away from her again, and sighed.

Before he could bring his mind back to Athena, there was an interruption.

Another white-clad acolyte moved out of the shadows to his right and came softly toward him. "Forrester?" he whispered.

Forrester turned, recognizing young Bates, a chinless boy of perhaps twenty-two, with the wide, innocent eyes of the born fanatic. But it

didn't become a servant of Athena to think ill of her other servants, Forrester reminded himself. Brushing the possibility of a rude reply from his mind, Forrester said simply: "Yes? What is it?"

"There's a couple of Temple Myrmidons to see you outside," Bates whispered. "I'll take over your post."

Forrester responded with no more than a simple nod, as if the occurrence were one that happened every day. But it was not only the thought of leaving Gerda that moved him. As he turned and strode to the small door that led to the side room off the main auditorium, he was thinking furiously under his calm exterior.

Temple Myrmidons! What could they want with him? As an acolyte, he was at least immune to arrest by the civil police, and even the Temple Myrmidons had no right to take him into custody without a warrant from the Pontifex himself.

But such a warrant was a serious affair. What had he done wrong?

He tried to think of some cause for an arrest. Blasphemy? Sacrilege? But he found nothing except his interior thoughts. And those, he told himself with a blaze of anger fierce enough to surprise him, were nobody's business but his own and Athena's. Authorities either less personal or more temporal had no business dealing with thoughts.

Beyond those, there wasn't a thing. No irreverence toward any of the Gods, in his private life, his religious functions or his teaching position, at least as far as he could recall. The Gods knew that unorthodoxy in an Introductory History course, for instance, was not only unwise but damned difficult.

Of course, he was aware of the real position of the Gods. They weren't omnipotent. Their place in the scheme of things was high, but they were certainly not equal with the One who had created the Universe and the Gods themselves in the first place. Possibly, Forrester had always thought, they could be equated with the indefinite "angels" of the religions that had been popular during his grandfather's time, sixty years ago, before the return of the Gods. But that was an uncertain theological notion, and Forrester was quite ready to abandon it in the face of good argument to the contrary.

Whatever they were, the Gods were certainly the Gods of Earth now.

The Omnipotent Creator had evidently left it for them to run, while he went about his own mysterious business, far from the understanding or the lives of men. The Gods, omnipotent or not, ran the world and everything in it.

And if, like Forrester, you knew that omnipotence wasn't their strong point, you just didn't mention it. It would have been impolite to have done so—like talking about sight to a blind man. And "impolite" was not the only word that covered the case. The Gods had enough power, as everyone knew, to avenge any blasphemies against them. And careless mention of limitations on their power would surely be construed as blasphemy, true or not.

Forrester had never even thought of doing such a thing.

So what, he thought, did the Temple Myrmidons want with him?

He came to the anteroom and went in, seeing the two of them at once. They were big, burly chaps with hard faces, and the pistols that were holstered at their sides looked completely unnecessary. Forrester took a deep breath and went a step forward. There he stopped, staring.

The Myrmidons were strangers to him—and now he understood why. Neither was wearing the shoulder-patch Owl of Minerva/Athena. Both proudly sported the Thunderbolt of Zeus/Jupiter, the All-Father himself.

Whatever it is, Forrester told himself with a sinking sensation, *it's serious*.

One of the Myrmidons looked him up and down in a casual, half-contemptuous way. "You're William Forrester?"

"That's right," Forrester said, knowing that he looked quite calm, and wondering, at the same time, whether or not he would live out the next few minutes. The Myrmidons of Zeus/Jupiter didn't come around to other temples on unimportant errands. "May I help you?" he went on, feeling foolish.

"Let's see your ID card, please," the Myrmidon said in the same tone as before. That puzzled Forrester. He doubted whether examination of credentials was a part of the routine preceding arrest—or execution, for that matter. The usual procedure was, and probably always had been, to act first and apologize later, if at all.

Maybe whatever he'd done had been so important they couldn't afford to make mistakes.

But did the Myrmidon really think that an imposter could parade around in an acolyte's tunic in the very Temple of Pallas Athena without being caught by one of the Athenan Myrmidons, or some other acolyte or priest?

Maybe a thing like that could happen in one of the other Temples, Forrester thought. But here at Pallas Athena people took the Goddess's attribute of wisdom seriously. What the Dionysians might do, he reflected, was impossible to say. Or, for that matter, the Venerans.

But he produced his identity card and handed it to the Myrmidon. It was compared with a card the Myrmidon dug out of his pouch, and the thumbprints on both cards were examined side by side.

After a while, Forrester got his card back.

The Myrmidon said: "We—" and began to cough.

His companion came over to slap him on the back with bone-crushing blows. Forrester watched without changing expression.

Some seconds passed.

Then the Myrmidon choked, swallowed, straightened and said, his face purple: "All this incense. Not like what we've got over at the All-Father's Temple. Enough to choke a man to death."

Forrester murmured politely.

"Back to business—right?" He favored Forrester with a rather savage-looking smile, and Forrester allowed his own lips to curve gently and respectfully upward.

It didn't look as if he *were* going to be killed, after all.

"Important instructions for you," the Myrmidon said. "From the Pontifex Maximus. And not to be repeated to any mortal—understand?"

Forrester nodded.

"And that means *any* mortal," the Myrmidon said. "Girl friend, wife—or don't you Athenans go in for that sort of thing? Now, up at the All-Father's Temple, we—"

His companion gave him a sharp dig in the ribs.

"Oh," the Myrmidon said. "Sure. Well. Instructions not to be repeated. Right?"

"Right," Forrester said.

Instructions? From the Pontifex Maximus? *Secret* instructions?

Forrester's mind spun dizzily. This was no arrest. This was something very special and unique. He tried once more to imagine what it was going to be, and gave it up in wonder.

The Myrmidon produced another card from his pouch. There was nothing on it but the golden Thunderbolt of the All-Father—but that was quite enough.

Forrester accepted the card dumbly.

"You will report to the Tower of Zeus at eighteen hundred hours exactly," the Myrmidon said. "Got that?"

"You mean today?" Forrester said, and cursed himself for sounding stupid. But the Myrmidon appeared not to have noticed.

"Today, sure," he said. "Eighteen hundred. Just present this card."

He stepped back, obviously getting ready to leave. Forrester watched him for one long second, and then burst out: "What do I do after that?"

"Just be a good boy. Do what you're told. Ask no questions. It's better that way."

Forrester thought of six separate replies and settled on a seventh. "All right," he said.

"And remember," the Myrmidon said, at the outside door, "don't mention this to anyone. *Not anyone!*"

The door banged shut.

Forrester found himself staring at the card he held. He put it away in his case, alongside the ID card. Then, dazed, he went on back to the acolyte's sacristy, took off his white tunic and put on his street clothes.

What did they want with him at the Tower of Zeus? It didn't really sound like an arrest. If it had been that, the Myrmidons themselves would have taken him.

So what did the Pontifex Maximus want with William Forrester?

He spent some time considering it, and then, taking a deep breath, he forced it out of his mind. He would know at eighteen hundred, and such were the ways of the Gods that he would not know one second before.

So there was no point in worrying about it, he told himself. He almost made himself believe it.

But wiping speculation out of his mind left an unwelcome and uneasy vacancy. Forrester replaced it with thought of the morning's service in the Temple. Such devotion was probably valuable, anyhow, in a spiritual sense. It brought him closer to the Gods... .

The Gods he wanted desperately to be like.

That, he told himself sharply, was foolishness of the most senseless kind.

He blinked it away.

The Goddess Athena had appeared herself at the service—sufficient reason for thinking of it now. The statuesquely beautiful Goddess with her severely swept-back blonde hair and her deep gray eyes was the embodiment of the wisdom and strength for which her worshippers especially prayed. Her beauty was almost unworldly, impossible of existence in a world which contained mortals.

She reminded Forrester, ever so slightly (and, of course, in a reverent way), of Gerda Symes.

There seemed to be a great many forbidden thoughts floating around this day. Resolutely, Forrester went back to thinking about the morning's service.

The Goddess had appeared only long enough to impart her blessing, but her calm, beautifully controlled contralto voice had brought a sense of peace to everyone in the auditorium. To be doggedly practical, there was no way of knowing whether the Goddess's presence was an appearance—in person, or an "appearance" by Divine Vision. But that really didn't matter. The effect was always just the same.

Forrester went on out the front portals of the Temple of Wisdom and down the long, wide steps onto Fifth Avenue. He paid homage with a passing glance to the great Owls flanking the entrance. Symbolic of Athena, they had replaced the stone lions which had formerly stood there.

The street was busy with hurrying crowds, enlivened here and there by Temple Myrmidons—from the All-Father, from Bacchus, from Venus—even one from Pallas Athena herself, a broad-beamed swaggerer whom Forrester knew and disliked. The man came striding up the steps, greeted Forrester with a bare nod, and disappeared at top speed into the Temple.

Forrester sighed and glanced south, down toward 34th Street, where the huge Tower of Zeus, a hundred and four stories high, loomed over all the other buildings in the city.

At eighteen hundred he would be in that tower—for what purpose, he had no idea.

Well, that was in the future, and he ...

A voice said: "Well! Hello, Bill!"

Forrester turned, knowing exactly what to expect, and disliking it in advance. The bluff over-heartiness of the voice was matched by the gross and hairy figure that confronted him. In some disarray, and managing to look as if he needed simultaneously a bath, a shave, a disinfecting and a purgative, the figure approached Forrester with a rolling walk that was too flat-footed for anything except an elephant.

"How's the Owl-boy today?" said the voice, and the body stuck out a flabby, hairy white hand.

Forrester winced. "I'm fine," he said evenly. "And how's the winebibber?"

"Good for you," the figure said. "A little wine for your Stomach's sake, as good old Bacchus always says. Only we make it a lot, eh?" He winked and nudged Forrester in the ribs.

"Sure, sure," Forrester said. He wished desperately that he could take the gross fool and tear him into tastefully arranged pieces. But there was always Gerda. And since this particular idiot happened to be her

younger brother, Ed Symes, anything in the nature of violence was unthinkable.

Gerda's opinion of her brother was touching, reverent, and—Forrester thought savagely—not in the least borne out by any discoverable facts.

And a worshipper of Bacchus! Not that Forrester had anything against the orgiastic rites indulged in by the Dionysians, the Panites, the Apollones or even the worst and wildest of them all, the Venerans. If that was how the Gods wanted to be worshipped, then that was how they should be worshipped.

And, as a matter of fact, it sounded like fun—if, Forrester considered, entirely too public for his taste.

If he preferred the quieter rites of Athena, or of Juno, Diana or Ceres—and even Ceresians became a little wild during the spring fertility rites, especially in the country, where the farmers depended on her for successful crops—well, that was no more than a personal preference.

But the idea of Ed Symes involved in a Bacchic orgy was just a little too much for the normal mind, or the normal stomach.

"Hey," Ed said suddenly. "Where's Gerda? Still in the Temple?"

"I didn't see her," Forrester said. There *had* been a woman who'd looked like her. But that hadn't been Gerda. *She'd* have waited for him here.

And—

"Funny," Ed said.

"Why?" Forrester said. "I didn't see her. I don't think she attended the service this morning, that's all."

He wanted very badly to hit Symes. Just once. But he knew he couldn't.

First of all, there was Gerda. And then, as an acolyte, he was proscribed by law from brawling. No one would hit an acolyte; and if the acolyte were built like Forrester, striking another man might be the equivalent of murder. One good blow from Forrester's fist might break the average man's jaw.

That was, he discovered, a surprisingly pleasant thought. But he made himself keep still as the fat fool went on.

"Funny she didn't attend," Symes said. "But maybe she's gotten wise to herself. There was a celebration up at the Temple of Pan in Central Park, starting at midnight, and going on through the morning. Spring Rites. Maybe she went there."

"I doubt it," Forrester said instantly. "That's hardly her type of worship."

"Isn't it?" Symes said.

"It doesn't fit her. That kind of—"

"I know. Gerda's like you. A little stuffy."

"It's not being stuffy," Forrester started to explain. "It's—"

"Sure," Symes said. "Only she's not as much of a prude as you are. I couldn't stand her if she were."

"On the other hand, she's not a—"

"Not an Owl-boy of Owl-boys like you."

"Not a drunken blockhead," Forrester finished triumphantly. "At least she's got a decent respect for wisdom and learning."

Symes stepped back, a movement for which Forrester felt grateful. No matter how far away Ed Symes was, he was still too close.

"Who you calling a blockhead, buster?" Symes said. His eyes narrowed to piggish little slits.

Forrester took a deep breath and reminded himself not to hit the other man. "You," he said, almost mildly. "If brains were radium, you couldn't make a flicker on a scintillation counter."

It was just a little doubtful that Symes understood the insult. But he obviously knew it had been one. His face changed color to a kind of grayish purple, and his hands clenched slowly at his sides. Forrester stood watching him quietly.

Symes made a sound like *Rrr* and took a breath. "If you weren't an acolyte, I'd take a poke at you just to see you bounce."

"Sure you would," Forrester agreed politely.

Symes went *Rrr* again and there was a longer silence. Then he said: "Not that I'd hit you anyhow, buster. It'd go against my grain. Not the acolyte business—if you didn't look so much like Bacchus, I'd take the chance."

Forrester's jaw ached. In a second he realized why; he was clenching his teeth tightly. Perhaps it was true that he did look a little like Bacchus, but not enough for Ed Symes to kid about it.

Symes grinned at him. Symes undoubtedly thought the grin gave him a pleasant and carefree expression. It didn't. "Suppose I go have a look for Gerda myself," he said casually, heading up the stairs toward the temple entrance. "After all, you're so busy looking at books, you might have missed her."

And what, Forrester asked himself, was the answer to that—except a punch in the mouth?

It really didn't matter, anyhow. Symes was on his way into the temple, and Forrester could just ignore him.

But, damn it, why did he let the young idiot get his goat that way? Didn't he have enough self-control just to ignore Symes and his oafish insults?

Forrester supposed sadly that he didn't. Oh, well, it just made another quality he had to pray to Athena for.

Then he glanced at his wristwatch and stopped thinking about Symes entirely.

It was twelve-forty-five. He had to be at work at thirteen hundred.

Still angry, underneath the sudden need for speed, he turned and sprinted toward the subway.

"And thus," Forrester said tiredly, "having attempted to make himself the equal of the Gods, Man was given a punishment befitting such arrogance." He paused and took a breath, surveying the twenty-odd students in the classroom (and some, he told himself wryly, *very* odd) with a sort of benign boredom.

History I, Introductory Survey of World History, was a simple enough course to teach, but its very simplicity was its undoing, Forrester thought. The deadly dullness of the day-after-day routine was enough to wear out the strongest soul.

Freshmen, too, seemed to get stupider every year. Certainly, when *he'd* been seventeen, he'd been different altogether. Studious, earnest, questioning ...

Then he stopped himself and grinned. He'd probably seemed even worse to his own instructors.

Where had he been? Slowly, he picked up the thread. There was a young blonde girl watching him eagerly from a front seat. What was her name? Forrester tried to recall it and couldn't. Well, this was only the first day of term. He'd get to know them all soon enough—well enough, anyhow, to dislike most of them.

But the eager expression on the girl's face unnerved him a little. The rest of the class wasn't paying anything like such strict attention. As a matter of fact, Forrester suspected two young boys in the back of being in a trance.

Well, he could stop that. But ...

She was really quite attractive, Forrester told himself. Of course, she was nothing but a fresh, pretty, eager seventeen-year-old, with a figure that ...

She was, Forrester reminded himself sternly, a student.

And he was supposed to be an instructor.

He cleared his throat. "Man went hog-wild with his new-found freedom from divine guidance," he said. "Woman did, too, as a matter of fact."

Now what unholy devil had made him say that? It wasn't a part of the normal lecture for first day of the new term. It was—well, it was just a little risqué for students. Some of their parents might complain, and ...

But the girl in the front row was smiling appreciatively. *I wonder what she's doing in an Introductory course*, Forrester thought, leaping with no evidence at all to the conclusion that the girl's mind was much too fine and educated to be subjected to the general run of classes. *Private tutoring ...* he began, and then cut himself off sharply, found his place in the lecture again and went on:

"When the Gods decided to sit back and observe for a few thousand years, they allowed Man to go his merry way, just to teach him a lesson."

The boys in the back of the room were definitely in a trance.

Forrester sighed. "And the inevitable happened," he said. "From the eighth century B.C., Old Style, until the year 1971 A.D., Old Style, Man's lot went from bad to worse. Without the Gods to guide him he bred bigger and bigger wars and greater and greater empires—beginning with the conquests of the mad Alexander of Macedonia and culminating in the opposing Soviet and American Spheres of Influence during the last century."

Spheres of Influence... .

Forrester's gaze fell on the blonde girl again. She certainly had a well-developed figure. And she did seem so eager and attentive. He smiled at her tentatively. She smiled back.

"Urg ... " he said aloud.

The class didn't seem to notice. That, Forrester told himself sourly, was probably because they weren't listening.

He swallowed, wrenched his gaze from the girl, and said: "The Soviet-American standoff—for that is what it was—would most probably have resulted in the destruction of the human race." It had no effect on the class. The destruction of the human race interested nobody. "However," Forrester said gamely, "this form of insanity was too much for the Gods to allow. They therefore—"

The bell rang, signifying the end of the period. Forrester didn't know whether to feel relieved or annoyed.

"All right," he said. "That's all for today. Your first assignment will be to read and carefully study Chapters One and Two of the textbook."

Silence gave way to a clatter of noise as the students began to file out. Forrester saw the front-row blonde rise slowly and gracefully. Any doubts he might have entertained (that is, he told himself wryly, any *entertaining* doubts) about her figure were resolved magnificently. He felt a little sweat on the palm of his hands, told himself that he was being silly, and then answered himself that the hell he was.

The blonde gave him a slow, sweet smile. The smile promised a good deal more than Forrester thought likely of fulfillment.

He smiled back.

It would have been impolite, he assured himself, not to have done so.

The girl left the room, and a remaining crowd of students hurried out after her. The crowd included two blinking boys, awakened by the bell from what had certainly been a trance. Forrester made a mental note to inquire after their records and to speak with the boys himself when he got the chance.

No sense in disturbing a whole class to discipline them.

He stacked his papers carefully, taking a good long time about it in order to relax himself and let his palms dry. His mind drifted back to the blonde, and he reined it in with an effort and let it go exploring again on safer ground. The class itself ... actually, he thought, he rather liked teaching. In spite of the petty irritations that came from driving necessary knowledge into the heads of stubbornly unwilling students, it was a satisfying and important job. And, of course, it was an honor to hold the position he did. Ever since it had been revealed that the goddess Columbia was another manifestation of Pallas Athena herself, the University had grown tremendously in stature.

And after all ...

Whistling faintly behind his teeth, Forrester zipped up his filled briefcase and went out into the hall. He ignored the masses of students swirling back and forth in the corridors, and, finding a stairway, went up to his second-floor office.

He fumbled for his key, found it, and opened the ground-glass door.

Then, stepping in, he came to a full stop.

The girl had been waiting for him—Maya Wilson.

And now here she was, talking about the Goddess of Love. Forrester gulped.

"Anyhow," he said at random, "I'm an Athenan." He remembered that he had already said that. Did it matter? "But what does all this have to do with your passing, or not passing, the course?" he went on.

"Oh," Maya said. "Well, I prayed to Aphrodite for help in passing the course. And the Temple Priestess told me I'd have to make a sacrifice to the Goddess. In a way."

"A sacrifice?" Forrester gulped. "You mean—"

"Not the First Sacrifice," she laughed. "That was done with solemn ceremonies when I was seventeen."

"Now, wait a minute—"

"Please," Maya said. "Won't you listen to me?"

Forrester looked at her limpid blue eyes and her lovely face. "Sure. Sorry."

"Well, then, it's like this. If a person loves a subject, it's that much easier to understand it. And the Goddess has promised me that if I love the instructor, I'll love the subject. It's like sympathetic magic—see?"

Her explanation was so brisk and simple that Forrester recoiled. "Hold on," he said. "Just hold your horses. Do you mean you're in love with me?"

Maya smiled. "I think so," she said, and very suddenly she was on Forrester's side of the desk, pressing up against him. Her hand caressed the back of his neck and her fingers tangled in his hair. "Kiss me and let's find out."

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