

Gault turned over the sheets one by one—slowly, patiently—reading here and there, and knew that his power was crumbling away, as a dream melts at sunrise. That dream had been the mastery of the world. It may be that some day this planet will awaken after the great big dream of life, and be once more a lonely mite wandering—a speck in a ray of sunlight icily cold.

There was no sound in the room save the slow turning of pages, one by one. Had there been an explosion of rage to face, Brand would have been glad of that; had there been fighting to do, it would have warmed his blood. But the triumph seemed such a poor thing—the man overthrown so great—the fall so terrible. Gladly would he have gone back to the beginning of the fight; gladly even failed, because the silence of his enemy was not broken.

At last he knew that Gault was reaching across the desk to his speaking-tube. "I have broken that," he said, without looking round. "I have cut all the wires, blocked the ventilator shaft, and locked the doors. You and I are alone."

And then he turned to face his adversary, wondering, because Gault was changed—no longer in the prime of life, but old—so old! Deep lines scarred his face; his coal-black hair was visibly streaked with grey; his eyes were sunken in impenetrable shadow. Then, quietly, almost below his breath, he spoke, while every scornful word struck like the lash of a whip.

"You! You! What have you done? You, one of the puppets I played with, one of the pawns upon my board, fed with my bounty, a starveling from the streets, the Revolversburg fool given bread to eat as a favour to Miss Gault—you, with your lofty airs and your small treachery, what have you done?"