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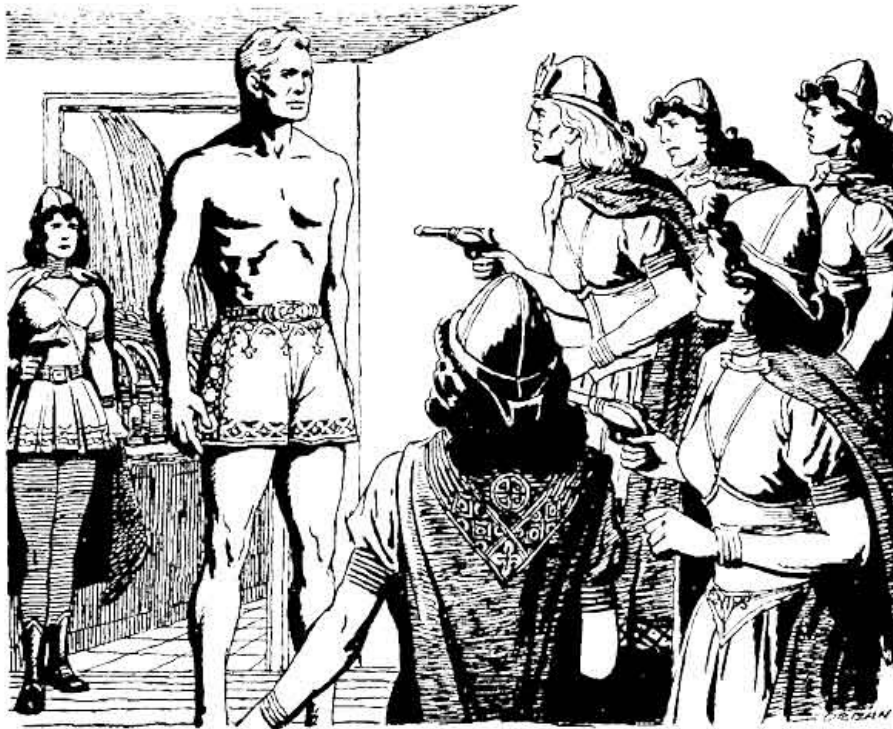
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## *love story*

**BY IRVING E. COX, JR.**

*Illustrated by Paul Orban*

*Everything was aimed at satisfying the whims of women. The popular cliches, the pretty romances, the catchwords of advertising became realities; and the compound kept the men enslaved. George knew what he had to do....*

**T**he duty bell rang and obediently George clattered down the steps from his confinement cubicle over the garage. His mother's chartreuse-colored Cadillac convertible purred to a stop in the drive.

"It's so sweet of you to come, Georgie," his mother said when George opened the door for her.

"Whenever you need me, Mummy." It was no effort at all to keep the sneer out of his voice. Deception had become a part of his character.

His mother squeezed his arm. "I can always count on my little boy to do the right thing."

"Yes, Mummy." They were mouthing a formula of words. They were both very much aware that if George hadn't snapped to attention as soon as the duty bell rang, he risked being sentenced, at least temporarily, to the national hero's corps.

Still in the customary, martyr's whisper, George's mother said, "This has been such a tiring day. A man can never understand what a woman has to endure, Georgie; my life is such an ordeal." Her tone turned at once coldly practical. "I've two packages in the trunk; carry them to the house for me."

George picked up the cardboard boxes and followed her along the brick walk in the direction of the white, Colonial mansion where his mother and her two daughters and her current husband lived. George, being a boy, was allowed in the house only when his mother invited him, or when he was being shown off to a prospective bride. George was nineteen, the most acceptable marriage age; because he had a magnificent build and the reputation for being a good boy, his mother was rumored to be asking twenty thousand shares for him.

As they passed the rose arbor, his mother dropped on the wooden seat and drew George down

beside her. "I've a surprise for you, George—a new bidder. Mrs. Harper is thinking about you for her daughter."

"Jenny Harper?" Suddenly his throat was dust dry with excitement.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you, Georgie?"

"Whatever arrangement you make, Mummy." Jenny Harper was one of the few outsiders George had occasionally seen as he grew up. She was approximately his age, a stunning, dark-eyed brunette.

"Jenny and her mother are coming to dinner to talk over a marriage settlement." Speculatively she ran her hand over the tanned, muscle-hard curve of his upper arm. "You're anxious to have your own woman, aren't you, George?"

"So I can begin to work for her, Mummy." That, at least, was the correct answer, if not an honest one.

"And begin taking the compound every day." His mother smiled. "Oh, I know you wicked boys! Put on your dress trunks tonight. We want Jenny to see you at your best."

She got up and strode toward the house again. George followed respectfully two paces behind her. As they passed beyond the garden hedge, she saw the old business coupe parked in the delivery court. Her body stiffened in anger. "Why is your father home so early, may I ask?" It was an accusation, rather than a question.

"I don't know, Mother. I heard my sisters talking in the yard; I think he was taken sick at work."

"Sick! Some men never stop pampering themselves."

"They said it was a heart attack or—"

"Ridiculous; he isn't dead, is he? Georgie, this is the last straw. I intend to trade your father in today on a younger man." She snatched the two packages from him and stormed into the house.

Since his mother hadn't asked him in, George returned to his confinement cubicle in the garage. He felt sorry, in an impersonal way, for the husband his mother was about to dispose of, but otherwise the fate of the old man was quite normal. He had outlived his economic usefulness; George had seen it happen before. His real father had died a natural death—from strain and overwork—when George was four. His mother had since then bought four other husbands; but, because boys were brought up in rigid isolation, George had known none of them well. For the same reason, he had no personal friends.

He climbed the narrow stairway to his cubicle. It was already late afternoon, almost time for dinner. He showered and oiled his body carefully, before he put on his dress trunks, briefs made of black silk studded with seed pearls and small diamonds. He was permitted to wear the jewels because his mother's stockholdings were large enough to make her an Associate Director. His family status gave George a high marriage value and his Adonis physique kicked the asking price still higher. At nineteen he stood more than six feet tall, even without his formal, high-heeled boots. He weighed one hundred and eighty-five, not an ounce of it superfluous fat. His skin was deeply bronzed by the sunlamps in the gym; his eyes were sapphire blue; his crewcut was a platinum blond—thanks to the peroxide wash his mother made him use.

Observing himself critically in the full-length mirror, George knew his mother was justified in asking twenty thousand shares for him. Marriage was an essential part of his own plans; without it revenge was out of his reach. He desperately hoped the deal would be made with Jenny Harper. A young woman would be far less difficult for him to handle.

When the oil on his skin was dry, he lay down on his bunk to catch up on his required viewing until the duty bell called him to the house. The automatic circuit snapped on the television screen above his bunk; wearily George fixed his eyes on the unreeling love story.

For as long as he could remember, television had been a fundamental part of his education. A federal law required every male to watch the TV romances three hours a day. Failure to do so—and that was determined by monthly form tests mailed out by the Directorate—meant a three month sentence to the national hero's corps. If the statistics periodically published by the Directorate were true, George was a relatively rare case, having survived adolescence without serving a single tour of duty as a national hero. For that he indirectly thanked his immunity to the compound. Fear and guilt kept him so much on his toes, he grew up an amazingly well-disciplined child.

George was aware that the television romances were designed to shape his attitudes and his emotional reactions. The stories endlessly repeated his mother's philosophy. All men were pictured as beasts crudely dominated by lust. Women, on the other hand, were always sensitive, delicate, modest, and intelligent; their martyrdom to the men in their lives was called love. To pay for their animal lusts, men were expected to slave away their lives earning things—kitchen gadgets, household appliances, fancy cars, luxuries and stockholdings—for their patient, long-suffering wives.

*And it's all a fake!* George thought. He had seen his Mother drive two men to their graves and trade off two others because they hadn't produced luxuries as fast as she demanded. His mother

and his pinch-faced sisters were pampered, selfish, rock-hard Amazons; by no conceivable twist of imagination could they be called martyrs to anything.

That seemed self-evident, but George had no way of knowing if any other man had ever reasoned out the same conclusion. Maybe he was unique because of his immunity to the compound. He was sure that very few men—possibly none—had reached marriage age with their immunity still undiscovered.

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George was lucky, in a way: he knew the truth about himself when he was seven, and he had time to adjust to it—to plan the role he had been acting for the past twelve years. His early childhood had been a livid nightmare, primarily because of the precocious cruelty of his two sisters. Shortly before his seventh birthday they forced him to take part in a game they called cocktail party. The game involved only one activity: the two little girls filled a glass with an unidentified liquid, and ordered George to drink. Afterward, dancing up and down in girlish glee, they said they had given him the compound.

George had seen the love stories on television; he knew how he was expected to act. He gave a good performance—better than his sisters realized, for inside his mind George was in turmoil. They had given him the compound (true, years before he should have taken it), and nothing had happened. He had felt absolutely nothing; he was immune! If anyone had ever found out, George would have been given a life sentence to the national hero's corps; or, more probably, the Morals Squad would have disposed of him altogether.

From that day on, George lived with guilt and fear. As the years passed, he several times stole capsules of the compound from his mother's love-cabinet and gulped them down. Sometimes he felt a little giddy, and once he was sick. But he experienced no reaction which could possibly be defined as love. Not that he had any idea what that reaction should have been, but he knew he was supposed to feel very wicked and he never did.

Each failure increased the agony of guilt; George drove himself to be far better behaved than he was required to be. He dreaded making one mistake. If his mother or a Director examined it too closely, they might find out his real secret.

George's basic education began when he was assigned to his confinement room above the garage after his tenth birthday. Thereafter his time was thoroughly regulated by law. Three hours a day he watched television; three hours he spent in his gym, building a magnificent—and salable—body; for four hours he listened to the educational tapes. Arithmetic, economics, salesmanship, business techniques, accounting, mechanics, practical science: the things he had to know in order to earn a satisfactory living for the woman who bought him in marriage.

He learned nothing else and as he grew older he became very conscious of the gaps in his education. For instance, what of the past? Had the world always been this sham he lived in? That question he had the good sense not to ask.

But George had learned enough from his lessons in practical science to guess what the compound really was, what it had to be: a mixture of aphrodisiacs and a habit-forming drug. The compound was calculated to stir up a man's desire to the point where he would give up anything in order to satisfy it. Boys were given increased doses during their adolescence; by the time they married, they were addicts, unable to leave the compound alone.

George couldn't prove his conclusion. He had no idea how many other men had followed the same line of reasoning and come up with the same answer. But why was George immune? There was only one way he could figure it: it must have happened because his sisters gave him the first draft when he was seven. But logically that didn't make much sense.

Bachelors were another sort of enemy: men who shirked their duty and deserted their wives. It seemed unreasonable to believe a man could desert his wife, when first he had to break himself of addiction to the compound. George had always supposed that bachelor was a boogy word contrived to frighten growing children.

As a consequence, he was very surprised when the house next door was raided. Through the window of his confinement cubicle, he actually saw the five gray-haired men who were rounded up by the Morals Squad. The Squad—heavily armed, six-foot Amazons—tried to question their captives. They used injections of a truth serum. Two of the old men died at once. The others went berserk, frothing at the mouth and screaming animal profanity until the Squad captain ordered them shot.

George overheard one of the women say, "It's always like this. They take something so our serum can't be effective."

Later that afternoon George found a scrap of paper in his mother's garden. It had blown out of the bonfire which the Morals Squad made of the papers they took out of the house next door. The burned page had apparently been part of an informational bulletin, compiled by the bachelors for distribution among themselves.

"... data compiled from old publications," the fragment began, "and interpreted by our most reliable authorities." At that point a part of the page was burned away. "... and perhaps less than

ninety years ago men and women lived in equality. The evidence on that point is entirely conclusive. The present matriarchy evolved by accident, not design. Ninety years ago entertainment and advertising were exclusively directed at satisfying a woman's whim. No product was sold without some sort of tie-in with women. Fiction, drama, television, motion pictures—all glorified a romantic thing called love. In that same period business was in the process of taking over government from statesmen and politicians. Women, of course, were the stockholders who owned big business, although the directors and managers at that time were still men—operating under the illusion that they were the executives who represented ownership. In effect, however, women owned the country and women governed it; suddenly the matriarchy existed. There is no evidence that it was imposed; there is no suggestion of civil strife or...." More words burned away. "However, the women were not unwilling to consolidate their gains. Consequently the popular clichés, the pretty romances, and the catchwords of advertising became a substitute for reality. As for the compound...."

There the fragment ended. Much of it George did not understand. But it gave him a great deal of courage simply to know the bachelors actually existed. He began to plan his own escape to a bachelor hideout. He would have no opportunity, no freedom of any sort, until he married. Every boy was rigidly isolated in his confinement cubicle, under the watchful eye of his mother's spy-cameras, until he was bought in his first marriage.

Then, as he thought more about it, George realized there was a better way for him to use his immunity. He couldn't be sure of finding a bachelor hideout before the Morals Squad tracked him down. But George could force his bride to tell him where the compound was made, since he was not an addict and she could not use the compound to enslave him. Once he knew the location of the factory, he would destroy it. How, he wasn't sure; he didn't plan that far ahead. If the supply of the drug could be interrupted, many hundreds of men might be goaded into making a break for the hills.

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**T**he duty bell rang. George snapped to attention on the edge of his bunk. He saw his mother waving from the back door of her house.

"I'll be down right away, Mummy."

His mother was waiting for him in the pantry. Under the glaring overhead light he stopped for her last minute inspection. She used a pocket-stick to touch up a spot on his chest where the oil gleam had faded a little. And she gave him a glass of the compound to drink.

"Jenny really wants to marry you, George," she confided. "I know the symptoms; half our battle's won for us. And my former husband won't be around to worry us with his aches and pains. I made the trade this afternoon."

He followed her into the dining room where the cocktails were being served. Aside from the Harpers, George's mother had rented two handsome, muscular escorts for his sisters. In the confusion, George saw Jenny Harper's mother stealthily lace his water glass with a dose of the compound. He suppressed a grin. Apparently she was anxious to complete the deal, too.

George found it almost impossible to hold back hilarious laughter when Jenny herself shyly pressed a capsule of the compound into his hand and asked him to use it. Three full-size slugs of the drug! George wondered what would have happened if he hadn't been immune. Fortunately, he knew how to act the lusty, eager, drooling male which each of the women expected.

The negotiations moved along without a hitch. George's mother held out for twenty-eight thousand shares, and got it. The only problem left was the date for the wedding, and Jenny settled that very quickly. "I want my man, Mom," she said, "and I want him now."

Jenny always got what she wanted.

When she and her mother left that evening, she held George's hand in hers and whispered earnestly, "So they were married and lived happily ever after. That's the way it's going to be with us, isn't it, George?"

"It's up to you, Jenny; for as long as you want me."

That was the conventional answer which he was expected to make, but he saw unmasked disappointment in her face. She wanted something more genuine, with more of himself in it. He felt suddenly sorry for her, for the way he was going to use her. She was a pretty girl, even sweet and innocent—if those words still had any real meaning left after what his mother's world had done to them. Under other circumstances, George would have looked forward with keen pleasure to marrying Jenny. As it was, Jenny Harper was first a symbol of the fakery he intended to destroy, and after that a woman.

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**F**ive days later they were married. In spite of the short engagement, Mrs. Harper and George's mother managed to put on a splendid show in the church. George received a business sedan from his mother, the traditional gift given every bridegroom; and from Mrs.

Harper he received a good job in a company where she was the majority stockholder. And so, in the customary pageantry and ceremony, George became Mr. Harper.

"Think of it—Mr. Harper," Jenny sighed, clinging to his arm. "Now you're really mine, George."

On the church steps the newlyweds posed for photographs—George in the plain, white trunks which symbolized a first marriage; Jenny in a dazzling cloud of fluff, suggestively nearly transparent. Then Mrs. Harper drew Jenny aside and whispered in her daughter's ear: the traditional telling of the secret. Now Jenny knew where the compound was manufactured; and for George revenge was within his grasp.

George's mother had arranged for their honeymoon at Memory Lodge, a resort not far from the Directorate capital in Hollywood. It was the national capital as well, though everyone conscientiously maintained the pretense that Washington, with an all-male Congress, still governed the country. George considered himself lucky that his mother had chosen Memory Lodge. He had already planned to desert Jenny in the mountains.

George knew how to drive; his mother had wanted him to do a great deal of chauffeuring for her. But he had never driven beyond town, and he had never driven anywhere alone. His mother gave him a map on which his route to the lodge was indicated in bright red. In the foothills George left the marked highway on a paved side road.

He gambled that Jenny wouldn't immediately realize what he had done, and the gamble paid off. Still wearing her nearly transparent wedding gown, she pressed close to him and ran her hands constantly over his naked chest, thoroughly satisfied with the man she had bought. In the church George had been given a tall glass of the compound; he acted the part Jenny expected.

But it was far less a role he played than George wanted to admit. His body sang with excitement. He found it very difficult to hold the excitement in check. If he had been addicted to the compound, it would have been out of the question. More than ever before he sympathized with the men who were enslaved by love. In spite of his own immunity, he nearly yielded to the sensuous appeal of her caress. He held the wheel so hard his knuckles went white; he clenched his teeth until his jaw ached.

All afternoon George drove aimless mountain roads, moving deeper into the uninhabited canyons. Carefully judging his distances with an eye on the map, he saw to it that he remained relatively close to the city; after he forced Jenny to give him the information he wanted, he wanted to be able to get out fast.

By dusk the roads he drove were no longer paved. Ruts carved deep by spring rains suggested long disuse. The swaying of the car and the constant grinding of gears eventually jolted Jenny out of her romantic dreams. She moved away from George and sat looking at the pines which met above the road.

"We're lost, aren't we?" she asked.

"What's that?" he shouted to be heard above the roar of the motor.

"Lost!"

For a minute or two longer he continued to drive until he saw an open space under the trees. He pulled the car into the clearing and snapped off the ignition. Then he looked Jenny full in the face and answered her. "No, Jenny, we aren't lost; I know exactly what I'm doing."

"Oh." He was sure she had understood him, but she said, "We can spend the night here and find the lodge in the morning. It's a pity we didn't bring something to eat." She smiled ingenuously. "But I brought the compound; and we have each other."

They got out of the car. Jenny looked up at the sunset, dull red above the trees, and shivered; she asked George to build a fire. He tucked the ignition key into the band of his white trunks and began to gather dry boughs and pine needles from the floor of the forest. He found several large branches and carried them back to the clearing. There was enough wood to last until morning—whether he stayed that long or not. Jenny had lugged the seats and a blanket out of the car and improvised a lean-to close to the fire.

He piled on two of the larger branches and the bright glow of flame lit their faces. She beckoned to him and gave him a bottle of the compound, watching bright-eyed as he emptied it.

With her lips parted, she waited. He did nothing. Slowly the light died in her eyes. Like a savage she flung herself into his arms. He steeled himself to show absolutely no reaction and finally she drew away. Trembling and with tears in her eyes, she whispered, "The compound doesn't—" The look of pain in her eyes turned to terror. "You're immune!"

"Now you know."

"But who told you—" She searched his face, shaking her head. "You don't know, do you—not really?"

"Know what?"

Instead of replying, she asked, "You brought me here deliberately, didn't you?"

"So we wouldn't be interrupted. You see, Jenny, you're going to tell me where the compound's made."

"It wouldn't do you any good. Don't you see—" He closed his hands on her wrists and jerked her rudely to her feet. He saw her face go white. And no wonder: that magnificent, granite hard body, which she had bought in good faith for her own pleasure, was suddenly out of her control. He grinned. He crushed her mouth against his and kissed her. Limp in his arms, she clung to him and said in a choked, husky whisper, "I love you, George."

"And you'll make any sacrifice for love," he replied, mocking the dialogue of the television love stories.

"Yes, anything!"

"Then tell me where the compound's manufactured."

"Hold me close, George; never let me go."

How many times had he heard that particular line! It sickened him, hearing it now from Jenny; he had expected something better of her. He pushed her from him. By accident his fist raked her face. She fell back blood trickling from her mouth. In her eyes he saw shock and a vague sense of pain; but both were overridden by adoration. She was like a whipped puppy, ready to lick his hand.

"I'll tell you, George," she whispered. "But don't leave me." She pulled herself to her feet and stood beside him, reaching for his hand. "We make it in Hollywood, in the Directorate Building, the part that used to be a sound stage."

"Thanks, Jenny." He picked up one of the car seats and walked back to the sedan. She stood motionless watching him. He fitted the seat in place and put the key in the lock. The starter ground away, but the motor did not turn over.

He glanced back at Jenny. She was smiling inscrutably, "You see, George, you have to stay with me."

He got out of the car and moved toward her.

"I was afraid you were planning to desert me," she went on, "so I took out the distributor cap while you were getting the firewood."

He stood in front of her. Coldly he demanded, "Where did you put it, Jenny?"

She tilted her lips toward his. "Kiss and tell—maybe."

"I haven't time for games. Where is it?"

His fist shot out. Jenny sprawled on the ground at his feet. Again he saw the pain and the adoration in her face. But that couldn't be right. She would hate him by this time.

He yanked her to her feet. Her lips were still bleeding and blood came now from a wound in her cheek. Yet she managed to smile again.

"I don't want to hurt you, Jenny," he told her. "But I have to have—"

"I love you, George. I never thought I'd want to give myself to a man. All the buying doesn't make any difference, does it? Not really. And I never knew that before!"

With an unconscious movement, she kicked her train aside and he saw the distributor cap lying beneath it. He picked it up. She flung herself at him screaming. He felt the hammer beat of her heart; her fingers dug into his back like cat claws. Now it didn't matter. He had the secret; he could go whenever he wanted to. Nonetheless he pushed her away—tenderly, and with regret. To surrender like this was no better than a capitulation to the compound. It was instinctively important to make her understand that. He knew that much, but his emotions were churned too close to fever pitch for him to reason out what else that implied.

He clipped her neatly on the jaw and put her unconscious body on the ground by the fire. He left the map with her so she could find her way out in the morning; he knew it was really a very short hike to a highway, where she would be picked up by a passing car or truck.

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He drove out the way he had come in—at least he tried to remember. Four times he took a wrong turn and had to backtrack. It was, therefore, dawn before he reached the outskirts of Hollywood. In any other city he would not have been conspicuous—simply a man on his way to work; only women slept late. However, Hollywood was off-limits to every male. The city was not only the seat of the Directorate, but the manufacturing center for the cosmetics industry. And since that gave women her charm, it was a business no man worked at.

George had to have a disguise. He stopped on a residential street, where the people were still likely to be in their beds. He read names on mail boxes until he found a house where an unmarried woman lived. He had no way of knowing if she had a husband on approval with her, but the box was marked "Miss." With any luck he might have got what he wanted without

disturbing her, but the woman was a light sleeper and she caught him as he was putting on the dress. He was sorry he had to slug her, but she gave him no resistance. A spark of hope, a spark of long-forgotten youth glowed in her eyes; before she slid into unconsciousness.

Wearing the stolen dress, which fit him like a tent, and an enormous hat to hide his face, George parked his sedan near the Directorate and entered the building when it opened at eight. In room after room automatons demonstrated how to dress correctly; robot faces displayed the uses of cosmetics. There were displays of kitchen gadgets, appliances, and other heavy machinery for the home; recorded lectures on stock management and market control. Here women came from every part of the country for advice, help and guidance. Here the Top Directors met to plan business policy, to govern the nation, and to supervise the production of the compound. For only the Top Directors—less than a dozen women—actually knew the formula. Like their stockholdings, the secret was hereditary, passed from mother to daughter.

George searched every floor of the building, but found nothing except exhibit rooms. Time passed, and still he did not find what he had come for. More and more women crowded in to see the exhibits. Several times he found new-comers examining him oddly; he found he had to avoid the crowds.

Eventually he went down steps into the basement, though a door marked "Keep Out." The door was neither locked nor guarded, but there was a remote chance it might lead to the production center for the compound. In the basement George found a mechanical operation underway; at first he took it for another cosmetic exhibit. Conveyor belts delivered barrels of flavoring syrup, alcohol and a widely advertised liquid vitamin compound. Machines sliced open the containers, dumping the contents into huge vats, from which pipes emptied the mixture into passing rows of bottles.

The bottles: suddenly George recognized them and the truth dawned on him, sickeningly. Here was the manufacturing center for the compound—but it might just as well have been a barn in Connecticut or a store window in Manhattan. No man was enslaved by the compound, for the compound did not exist. He was imprisoned by his own sense of guilt, his own fear of being different. George remembered his own fear and guilt: he knew how much a man could be driven to make himself conform to what he thought other men were like.

His revenge was as foolish as the sham he wanted to destroy. He should have reasoned that out long ago; he should have realized it was impossible to have immunity to an addictive drug. But, no, George believed what he saw on the television programs. He was victimized as much as any man had ever been.

He turned blindly toward the stairway, and from the shadows in the hall the Morals Squad closed in around him. With a final gesture of defiance, he ripped off the stolen dress and the absurd hat, and stood waiting for the blast from their guns. An old woman, wearing the shoulder insignia of a Top Director, pushed through the squad and faced him, a revolver in her hand. She was neither angry nor disturbed. Her voice, when she spoke, was filled with pity. Pity! That was the final indignity.

"Now you know the truth," she said. "A few men always have to try it; and we usually let them see this room and find out for themselves before—before we close the case."

Tensely he demanded, "Just how much longer do you think—"

"We can get away with this? As long as men are human beings. It's easier to make yourself believe a lie if you think everyone else believes it, than to believe a truth you've found out on your own. All of us want more than anything else to be like other people. Women have created a world for you with television programs; you grow up observing nothing else; you make yourself fit into the pattern. Only a few independent-minded characters have the courage to accept their own immunity; most of them end up here, trying to do something noble for the rest of mankind. But you have one satisfaction, for what it's worth: you've been true to yourself."

*True to yourself.* George found a strange comfort in the words, and his fear was gone. He squared his shoulders and faced the mouth of her gun. *True to yourself:* that was something worth dying for.

He saw a flicker of emotion in the old woman's eyes. Admiration? He couldn't be sure. For at the moment a shot rang out from the end of the corridor; and the Top Director fell back, nursing a hand suddenly bright with blood.

"Let him go." It was Jenny's voice. She was sheltered by a partly open door at the foot of the stairway.

"Don't be a fool," the old woman replied. "He's seen too much."

"It doesn't matter. Who would believe him?"

"You're upset. You don't realize—"

"He's mine and I want him."

"The Directorate will give you a refund of the purchase price."

"You didn't understand me. I don't want one of your pretty automatons; anybody can buy them for



a few shares of stock. I want a man—a real man; I want to belong to him."

"He belongs to you; you bought him."

"And that's what's wrong. We really belong to each other."

The old woman glanced at George and he saw the same flicker of feeling in her eyes. And tears, tears of regret. Why? "We have you outnumbered," the old woman said quietly to Jenny.

"I don't care. I have a gun; I'll use it as long as I'm able."

The Morals Squad raised their weapons. The Director shook her head imperiously and they snapped to attention again. "If you take him from us," she called out to Jenny, "you'll be outlawed. We'll hunt you down, if we can."

"I want him," Jenny persisted. "I don't care about the rest of it."

The old woman nodded to George. He couldn't believe that she meant it. The Director was on her home ground, in her headquarters building, backed by an armed squad of stone-faced Amazons. She had no reason to let him go.

She walked beside him as he moved down the hall. When they were twenty feet from the guard, she closed her thin hand on his arm; her eyes swam with tears and she whispered, "There truly is a love potion. Not this nonsense we bottle here, but something real and very worthwhile. You and this girl have found it. I know that, from the way she talks. She doesn't say anything about ownership, and that's as it should be. As it has to be, for any of us to be happy. Hold tight to that all the rest of your life. Don't ever believe in words; don't fall for any more love stories; believe what you feel deep inside—what you know yourself to be true.

"You men who learn how to break away are our only hope, too. Most of us don't see that yet. I do; I know what it used to be like. Someday there may be enough men with the stamina to take back the place of dominance that we stole from them. We thought we wanted it; for decades before we had been screaming about women's rights." Her thin lips twisted in a sneer and she spat her disgust. "Finally we took what we wanted, and it turned to ashes in our hands. We made our men playthings; we made them slaves. And after that they weren't men any more. But what we stole isn't the sort of thing you can hand back on a silver platter; you men have to get enough courage to take it away from us."

Her grip tightened on his arm. "There's a fire door at the end of the hall; if you push the emergency button, you'll close it. That will give you a five or ten minute start. I can't help you any more...."

They were abreast of Jenny. She seized Jenny's hand and thrust it into his. "Beat it, kids; there's a bachelor camp on the north ridge. You can make it.

"And from here on in, what he says goes," the old woman added. "Don't forget that."

"She won't," George answered, supremely self-assured.

He took Jenny's arm and, turning abruptly, they made their break for freedom. The Director managed to remain standing in the middle of the corridor, making a dangerous target of herself so that none of the Morals Squad could risk a shot at the fugitives. As the fire door clanged shut George looked back. He saw the old woman's lips moving in silent prayer.

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LOVE STORY \*\*\*

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