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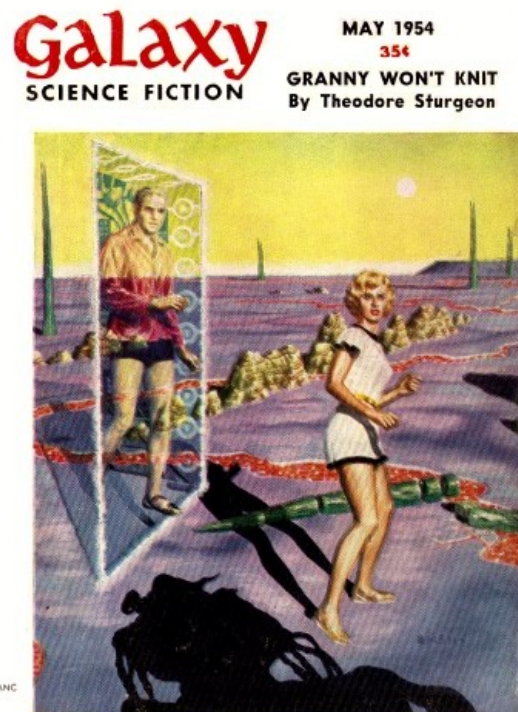
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## BEDSIDE MANNER

By WILLIAM MORRISON

Illustrated by VIDMER

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She awoke, and didn't even wonder where she was.

First there were feelings—a feeling of existence, a sense of still being alive when she should be dead, an awareness of pain that made her body its playground.

After that, there came a thought. It was a simple thought, and her mind blurted it out before she could stop it: *Oh, God, now I won't even be plain any more. I'll be ugly.*

Broken, helpless, she had to trust an alien doctor to give her back her body and mind—a doctor who had never seen a human before!

The thought sent a wave of panic coursing through her, but she was too tired to experience any emotion for long, and she soon drowsed off.

Later, the second time she awoke, she wondered where she was.

There was no way of telling. Around her all was black and quiet. The blackness was solid, the quiet absolute. She was aware of pain again—not sharp pain this time, but dull, spread throughout her body. Her legs ached; so did her arms. She tried to lift them, and found to her surprise that they did not respond. She tried to flex her fingers, and failed.

She was paralyzed. She could not move a muscle of her body.

The silence was so complete that it was frightening. Not a whisper of sound reached her. She had been on a spaceship, but none of a ship's noises came to her now. Not the creak of an expanding joint, nor the occasional slap of metal on metal. Not the sound of Fred's voice, nor even the slow rhythm of her own breathing.

It took her a full minute to figure out why, and when she had done so she did not believe it. But the thought persisted, and soon she knew that it was true.

The silence was complete because she was deaf.

Another thought: The blackness was so deep because she was blind.

And still another, this time a questioning one: Why, if she could feel pain in her arms and legs, could she not move them? What strange form of paralysis was this?

She fought against the answer, but slowly, inescapably, it formed in her mind. She was not paralyzed at all. She could not move her arms and legs because she had none. The pains she felt were phantom pains, conveyed by the nerve endings without an external stimulus.

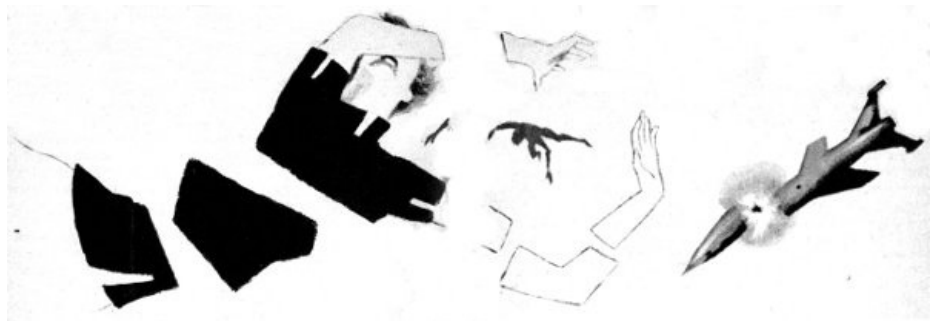
When this thought penetrated, she fainted. Her mind sought in unconsciousness to get as close to death as it could.

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When she awoke, it was against her will. She sought desperately to close her mind against thought and feeling, just as her eyes and ears were already closed.

But thoughts crept in despite her. Why was she alive? Why hadn't she died in the crash?

Fred must certainly have been killed. The asteroid had come into view suddenly; there had been no chance of avoiding it. It had been a miracle that she herself had escaped, if escape it could be called—a mere sightless, armless and legless torso, with no means



of communication with the outside world, she was more dead than alive. And she could not believe that the miracle had been repeated with Fred.

It was better that way. Fred wouldn't have to look at her and shudder—and he wouldn't have to worry about himself, either. He had always been a handsome man, and it would have killed him a second time to find himself maimed and horrible.

She must find a way to join him, to kill herself. It would be difficult, no doubt, without arms or legs, without any way of knowing her surroundings; but sooner or later she would think of a way. She had heard somewhere of people strangling themselves by swallowing their own tongues, and the thought cheered her. She could at least try that right now. She could—

No, she couldn't. She hadn't realized it before, but she had no tongue.

She didn't black out at this sudden awareness of a new horror, although she desperately wanted to. She thought: *I can make an effort of will, I can force myself to die. Die, you fool, you helpless lump of flesh. Die and end your torture, die, die, die...*

But she didn't. And after a while, a new thought came to her: She and Fred had been the only ones on their ship; there had been no other ship near them. Who had kept her from dying? Who had taken her crushed body and stopped the flow of blood and tended her wounds and kept her alive? And for what purpose?

The silence gave no answer. Nor did her own mind.

After an age, she slept again.

When she awoke, a voice said, "Do you feel better?"

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*I can hear!* she shouted to herself. *It's a strange voice, a most unusual accent. I couldn't possibly have imagined it. I'm not deaf! Maybe I'm not blind either! Maybe I just had a nightmare—*

"I know that you cannot answer. But do not fear. You will soon be able to speak again."

Who was it? Not a man's voice, nor a woman's. It was curiously hoarse, and yet clear enough. Uninflected, and yet pleasant. A doctor? Where could a doctor have come from?

"Your husband is also alive. Fortunately, we reached both of you at about the time death had just begun."

Fortunately? She felt a flash of rage. *You should have let us die. It would be bad enough to be alive by myself, a helpless cripple dependent upon others. But to know that Fred is alive too is worse. To know that he has a picture of me like this, ugly and horrifying, is more than I can stand. With any other man it would be bad enough, but with Fred it's unendurable. Give me back the ability to talk, and the first thing I'll ask of you is to kill me. I don't want to live.*

"It may reassure you to know that there will be no difficulty about recovering the use of the limbs proper to you, and the organs of sensation. It will take time, but there is no doubt about the final outcome."

What nonsense, she asked herself, was this? Doctors had done wonders in the creation and fitting of artificial arms and legs, but he seemed to be promising her the use of *real* limbs. And he had said, "organs of sensation." That didn't sound as if he meant that she'd see and hear electronically. It meant—

Nonsense. He was making a promise he couldn't keep. He was just saying that to make her feel better, the way doctors did. He was saying it to give her courage, keep her morale up, make her feel that it was worth fighting. But it *wasn't* worth fighting. She had no courage to keep up. She wanted only to die.

"Perhaps you have already realized that I am not what you would call human. However, I suggest that you do not worry too much about that. I shall have no difficulty in reconstructing you properly according to your own standards."

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Then the voice ceased, and she was left alone. It was just as well, she thought. He had said too much. And she couldn't answer, nor ask questions of her own ... and she had so many.

He wasn't human? Then what was he? And how did he come to speak a human language? And what did he mean to do with her after he had reconstructed her? And what would she look like after she was reconstructed?

There were races, she knew, that had no sense of beauty. Or if they had one, it wasn't like a human sense of beauty. Would he consider her properly reconstructed if he gave her the right number of arms and legs, and artificial organs of sight that acted like eyes—and made her look like some creature out of Hell? Would he be proud of his handiwork, as human doctors had been known to be, when their patients ended up alive and helpless, their bodies scarred, their organs functioning feebly and imperfectly? Would he turn her into something that Fred would look at with abhorrence and disgust?

Fred had always been a little too sensitive to beauty in women. He had been able to pick and choose at his will, and until he had met her he had always chosen on the basis of looks alone. She had never understood why he had married her. Perhaps the fact that she was the one woman he knew who *wasn't* beautiful had made her stand out. Perhaps, too, she told herself, there was a touch of cruelty in his choice. He might have wanted someone who wasn't too sure of herself, someone he could count on under all circumstances. She remembered how people had used to stare at them—the handsome man and the plain woman—and then whisper among themselves, wondering openly how he had ever come to marry her. Fred had liked that; she was sure he had liked that.

He had obviously *wanted* a plain wife. Now he would have an ugly one. Would he want *that*?

She slept on her questions, and waked and slept repeatedly. And then, one day, she heard the voice again. And to her surprise, she found that she could answer back—slowly, uncertainly, at times painfully. But she could speak once more.

"We have been working on you," said the voice. "You are coming along nicely."

"Am I—am I—" she found difficulty asking: "How do I look?"

"Incomplete."

"I must be horrible."

A slight pause. "No. Not horrible at all. Not to me. Merely incomplete."

"My husband wouldn't think so."

"I do not know what your husband would think. Perhaps he is not used to seeing incomplete persons. He might even be horrified at the sight of himself."

"I—I hadn't thought of that. But he—we'll both be all right?"

"As a medical problem, you offer no insuperable difficulty. None at all."

"Why—why don't you give me eyes, if you can? Are you afraid—afraid that I might see you and find you—terrifying?"

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Again a pause. There was amusement in the reply. "I do not think so. No, that is not the reason."

"Then it's because—as you said about Fred—I might find myself horrifying?"

"That is part of the reason. Not the major part, however. You see, I am, in a way, experimenting. Do not be alarmed, please—I shall not turn you into a monster. I have too much knowledge of biology for that. But I am not too familiar with human beings. What I know I have learned mostly from your books, and I have found that in certain respects there are inaccuracies contained in them—I must go slowly until I can check what they say. I might mend certain organs, and then discover that they do not have the proper size or shape, or that they produce slightly altered hormones. I do not want to make such mistakes, and if I do make them, I wish to correct them before they can do harm."

"There's no danger—?"

"None, I assure you. Internally and externally, you will be as before."

"Internally and externally. Will I—will I be able to have children?"

"Yes. We ourselves do not have your distinctions of sex, but we are familiar with them in many other races. We know how important you consider them. I am taking care to see that the proper glandular balance is maintained in both yourself and your husband."

"Thank you—Doctor. But I still don't understand—why don't you give me eyes right away?"

"I do not wish to give you eyes that see imperfectly, and then be forced to take them away. Nor do I want you to watch imperfect arms and legs developing. It would be an unnecessary ordeal. When I am sure that everything is as it should be, then I shall start your eyes."

"And my husband—"

"He will be reconstructed in the same way. He will be brought in to talk to you soon."

"And you don't want either of us to see the other in—in imperfect condition?"

"It would be inadvisable. I can assure you now that when I have completed your treatment you will almost exactly be as you were in the beginning. When that time comes, you will be able to use your eyes."

She was silent a moment.

He said, "Your husband had other questions. I am waiting to hear you ask them too."

"I'm sorry, Doctor ... I wasn't listening. What did you say?"

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He repeated his remarks, and she said, "I do have other questions. But—no, I won't ask them yet. What did my husband want to know?"

"About me and my race. How we happened to find you in time to save you. *Why* we saved you. What we intend to do with you after you are reconstructed."

"Yes, I've wondered about those things too."

"I can give you only a partial answer. I hope you do not find it too unsatisfactory. My race, as you may have gathered, is somewhat more advanced than yours. We have had a head start," he added politely.

"If you can grow new arms and legs and eyes," she said, "you must be thousands of years ahead of us."

"We can do many other things, of which there is no need to talk. All I need say now is that I am a physician attached to a scouting expedition. We have had previous contact with human beings, and have taken pains to avoid coming to their attention. We do not want to alarm or confuse them."

"But all the same, you rescued us."

"It was an emergency. We are not human, but we have, you might say, humanitarian feelings. We do not like to see creatures die, even inferior creatures—not that you are, of course," he added delicately. "Our ship happened to be only a few thousand miles away when it happened. We saw, and acted with great speed. Once you are whole again, we shall place you where you will be found by your own kind, and proceed on our way. By that time, our expedition will have been completed."

"When we are whole again—Doctor, will I be exactly the same as before?"

"In some ways, perhaps even better. I can assure you that all your organs will function perfectly."

"I don't mean that. I mean—will I look the same?"

She felt that there was astonishment in the pause. "Look the same? Does that matter?"

"Yes ... oh, yes, it matters! It matters more than anything else."

He must have been regarding her as if she were crazy. Suddenly she was glad that she had no eyes to see his bewilderment. And his contempt, which, she was sure, must be there too.

He said slowly, "I didn't realize. But, of course, we don't know how you did look. How can we make you look the same?"

"I don't know. But you must! You must!" Her voice rose, and she felt the pain in her throat as the new muscles constricted.

"You are getting hysterical," he said. "Stop thinking about this."

"But I can't stop thinking about it. It's the only thing I *can* think of! I don't want to look any different from the way I did before!"

He said nothing, and suddenly she felt tired. A moment before she had been so excited, so upset; and now—merely tired and sleepy. She wanted to go to sleep and forget it all. *He must have given me a sedative*, she thought. *An injection? I didn't feel the prick of the needle, but maybe they don't use needles. Anyway, I'm glad he did. Because now I won't have to think, I won't be able to think—*

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She slept. When she awoke again, she heard a new voice. A voice she couldn't place. It said, "Hello, Margaret. Where are you?"

"Who ... Fred!"

"Margaret?"

"Y-yes."

"Your voice is different."

"So is yours. At first I couldn't think who was speaking to me!"

"It's strange it took us so long to realize that our voices would be different."

She said shakily, "We're more accustomed to thinking of how we look."

He was silent. His mind had been on the same thing.

"Your new voice isn't bad, Fred," she said after a moment. "I like it. It's a little deeper, a little more resonant. It will go well with your personality. The Doctor has done a good job."

"I'm trying to think whether I like yours. I don't know. I suppose I'm the kind of guy who likes best what he's used to."

"I know. That's why I didn't want him to change my looks."

Again silence.

She said, "Fred?"

"I'm still here."

"Have you talked to him about it?"

"He's talked to me. He's told me about your being worried."

"Don't you think it matters?"

"Yes, I suppose it does. He told me he could do a good technical job—leave us with regular features and unblemished skins."

"That isn't what I want," she said fiercely. "I don't want the kind of regular features that come out of physiology books. I want my own features. I don't care so much about the voice, but I want my own face back!"

"That's a lot to ask for. Hasn't he done enough for us?"

"No. Nothing counts unless I have that. Do—do you think that I'm being silly?"

"Well—"

"I don't want to be beautiful, because I know you don't want me to be."

He sounded amazed. "Whoever told you that?"

"Do you think that after living with you for two years, I don't know? If you had wanted a beautiful wife, you'd have married one. Instead, you chose me. You wanted to be the good-looking one of the family. You're vain, Fred. Don't try to deny it, because it would be no use. You're vain. Not that I mind it, but you are."

"Are you feeling all right, Margaret? You sound—overwrought."

"I'm not. I'm being very logical. If I were either ugly or beautiful, you'd hate me. If I were ugly, people would pity you, and you wouldn't be able to stand that. And if I were beautiful, they might forget about you. I'm just plain enough for them to wonder why you ever married anyone so ordinary. I'm just the kind of person to supply background for you."

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After a moment he said slowly, "I never knew you had ideas like that about me. They're silly ideas. I married you because I loved you."

"Maybe you did. But *why* did you love me?"

He said patiently, "Let's not go into that. The fact is, Margaret, that you're talking nonsense. I don't give a damn whether you're ugly or beautiful—well, no, that isn't strictly true. I do care—but looks aren't the most important thing. They have very little to do with the way I feel about you. I love you for the kind of person you are. Everything else is secondary."

"Please, Fred, don't lie to me. I want to be the same as before, because I know that's the way you want me. Isn't there some way to let the Doctor know what sort of appearance we made? You have—had—a good eye. Maybe you could describe us—"

"Be reasonable, Margaret. You ought to know that you can't tell anything from a description." His voice was almost pleading. "Let's leave well enough alone. I don't care if your features do come out of the pictures in a physiology textbook—"

"Fred!" she said excitedly. "That's it! Pictures! Remember that stereo shot we had taken just before we left Mars? It must be somewhere on the ship—"

"But the ship was crushed, darling. It's a total wreck."

"Not completely. If they could take *us* out alive, there must have been some unharmed portions left. Maybe the stereo is still there!"

"Margaret, you're asking the impossible. We don't know where the ship is. This group the Doctor is with is on a scouting expedition. The wreck of our ship may have been left far behind. They're not going to retrace their tracks just to find it."

"But it's the only way ... the only way! There's nothing else—"

She broke down. If she had possessed eyes, she would have wept—but as it was, she could weep only internally.

They must have taken him away, for there was no answer to her tearless sobbing. And after a time, she felt suddenly that there was nothing to cry about. She felt, in fact, gay and cheerful—and the thought struck her: *The Doctor's given me another drug. He doesn't want me to cry. Very well, I won't. I'll think of things to make me happy, I'll bubble over with good spirits—*

Instead, she fell into a dreamless sleep.

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When she awoke again, she thought of the conversation with Fred, and the feeling of desperation returned. *I'll have to tell the Doctor all about it, she thought. I'll have to see what he can do. I know it's asking an awful lot, but without it, all the rest he has done for me won't count. Better to be dead than be different from what I was.*

But it wasn't necessary to tell the Doctor. Fred had spoken to him first.

*So Fred admits it's important too. He won't be able to deny any longer that I judged him correctly.*

The Doctor said, "What you are asking is impossible."

"Impossible? You won't even try?"

"My dear patient, the wrecked ship is hundreds of millions of miles behind us. The expedition has its appointed task. It cannot retrace its steps. It cannot waste time searching the emptiness of space for a stereo which may not even exist any longer."

"Yes, you're right ... I'm sorry I asked, Doctor."

He read either her mind or the hopelessness in her voice. He said, "Do not make any rash plans. You cannot carry them out, you know."

"I'll find a way. Sooner or later I'll find a way to do something to myself."

"You are being very foolish. I cannot cease to marvel at how foolish you are. Are many human beings like you, psychologically?"

"I don't know, Doctor. I don't care. I know only what's important to me!"

"But to make such a fuss about the merest trifle! The difference in appearance between one human being and another of the same sex, so far as we can see, is insignificant. You must learn to regard it in its true light."

"You think it's insignificant because you don't know anything about men and women. To Fred and me, it's the difference between life and death."

He said in exasperation, "You are a race of children. But sometimes even a child must be humored. I shall see what I can do."

But what could he do? she asked herself. The ship was a derelict in space, and in it, floating between the stars, was the stereo he wouldn't make an attempt to find. Would he try to get a description from Fred? Even the best human artist couldn't produce much of a likeness from a mere verbal description. What could someone like the Doctor do—someone to whom all men looked alike, and all women?

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As she lay there, thinking and wondering, she had only the vaguest idea of the passage of time. But slowly, as what must have been day followed day, she became aware of strange tingling sensations all over her body. The pains she had felt at first had slowly diminished and then vanished altogether. What she felt now was not pain at all. It was even mildly pleasant, as if some one were gently massaging her body, stretching her muscles, tugging at her—

Suddenly she realized what it was: New limbs were growing. Her internal organs must have developed properly, and now the Doctor had gone ahead with the rest of his treatment.

With the realization, tears began to roll down her cheeks. *Tears, she thought, real tears—I can feel them. I'm getting arms and legs, and I can shed tears. But I still have no eyes.*

*But maybe they're growing in.... From time to time I seem to see flashes of light. Maybe he's making them develop slowly, and he put the tear ducts in order first. I'll have to tell him that my eyes must be blue. Maybe I never was beautiful, but I always had pretty eyes. I don't want any different color. They wouldn't go with my face.*

The next time the Doctor spoke to her, she told him.

"You may have your way," he said good-naturedly, as if humoring a child.

"And, Doctor, about finding the ship again—"

"Out of the question, as I told you. However, it will not be necessary." He paused, as if savoring what he had to tell her. "I checked with our records department. As might have been expected, they searched your shattered ship thoroughly, in the hope of finding information that might contribute to our understanding of your race. They have the stereos, about a dozen of them."

"A *dozen* stereos? But I thought—"

"In your excitement, you may have forgotten that there were more than one. All of them seem to be of yourself and your husband. However, they were obviously taken under a wide variety of conditions, and with a wide variety of equipment, for there are certain minor differences between them which even I, with my non-human vision, can detect. Perhaps you can tell us which one you prefer us to use as a model."

She said slowly, "I had better talk about that with my husband. Can you have him brought in here, Doctor?"

"Of course."

---

She lay there, thinking. A dozen stereos. And there was still only one that she remembered. Only a single one. They had posed for others, during the honeymoon and shortly after, but those had been left at home on Mars before they started on their trip.

Fred's new voice said, "How are you feeling, dear?"

"Strange. I seem to have new limbs growing in."

"So do I. Guess we'll be our old selves pretty soon."

"Will we?"

She could imagine his forehead wrinkling at the intonation of her voice. "What do you mean, Margaret?"

"Hasn't the Doctor told you? They have the stereos they found on our ship. Now they can model our new faces after our old."

"That's what you wanted, isn't it?"

"But what do *you* want, Fred? I remember only a single one, and the Doctor says they found a dozen. And he says that my face differs from shot to shot."

Fred was silent.

"Are they as beautiful as all that, Fred?"

"You don't understand, Margaret."

"I understand only too well. I just want to know—were they taken before we were married or after?"

"Before, of course. I haven't gone out with another girl since our wedding."

"Thank you, dear." Her own new voice had venom in it, and she caught herself. *I mustn't talk like that*, she thought. *I know Fred, I know his weakness. I knew them before I married him. I have to accept them and help him, not rant at him for them.*

He said, "They were just girls I knew casually. Good-looking, but nothing much otherwise. Not in a class with you."

"Don't apologize." This time her voice was calm, even amused. "You couldn't help attracting them. Why didn't you tell me that you kept their pictures?"

"I thought you'd be jealous."

"Perhaps I would have been, but I'd have got over it. Anyway, Fred, is there any one of them you liked particularly?"

---

He became wary, she thought. His voice was expressionless as he said, "No. Why?"

"Oh, I thought that perhaps you'd want the Doctor to make me look like her."

"Don't be silly, Margaret! I don't want you to look like anybody but yourself. I don't want to see their empty faces ever again!"

"But I thought—"

"Tell the Doctor to keep the other stereos. Let him put them in one of his museums, with other dead things. They don't mean anything to me any more. They haven't meant anything for a long time. The only reason I didn't throw them away is because I forgot they were there and didn't think of it."

"All right, Fred. I'll tell him to use our picture as a model."

"The AC studio shot. The close-up. Make sure he uses the right one."

"I'll see that there's no mistake."

"When I think I might have to look at one of *their* mugs for the rest of my life, I get a cold sweat. Don't take any chances, Margaret. It's your face I want to see, and no one else's."

"Yes, dear."

*I'll be plain*, she thought, *but I'll wear well. A background always wears well. Time can't hurt it much, because there's nothing there to hurt.*

*There's one thing I overlooked, though. How old will we look? The Doctor is rather insensitive about human faces, and he might age us a bit. He mustn't do that. It'll be all right if he wants to make us a little younger, but not older. I'll have to warn him.*

She warned him, and again he seemed rather amused at her.

"All right," he said, "you will appear slightly younger. Not too much so, however, for from my reading I judge it best for a human face to show not too great a discrepancy from the physiological age."

She breathed a sigh of relief. It was settled now, all settled. Everything would be as before—



perhaps just a little better. She and Fred could go back to their married life with the knowledge that they would be as happy as ever. Nothing exuberant, of course, but as happy as their own peculiar natures permitted. As happy as a plain and worried wife and a handsome husband could ever be.

---

Now that this had been decided, the days passed slowly. Her arms and legs grew, and her eyes too. She could feel the beginnings of fingers and toes, and on the sensitive optic nerve the flashes of light came with greater and greater frequency. There were slight pains from time to time, but they were pains she welcomed. They were the pains of growth, of return to normalcy.

And then came the day when the Doctor said, "You have recovered. In another day, as you measure time, I shall remove your bandages."

Tears welled up in her new eyes. "Doctor, I don't know how to thank you."

"No thanks are needed. I have only done my work."

"What will you do with us now?"

"There is an old freighter of your people which we have found abandoned and adrift. We have repaired it and stocked it with food taken from your own ship. You will awaken inside the freighter and be able to reach your own people."

"But won't I—can't I even get the chance to see you?"

"That would be inadvisable. We have some perhaps peculiar ideas about keeping our nature secret. That is why we shall take care that you carry away nothing that we ourselves have made."

"If I could only—well, even shake hands—do *something*—"

"I have no hands."

"No hands? But how could you—how can you—do such complicated things?"

"I may not answer. I am sorry to leave you in a state of bewilderment, but I have no choice. Now, please, no more questions about me. Do you wish to talk to your husband for a time before you sleep again?"

"Must I sleep? I feel so excited.... I want to get out of bed, tear off my bandages, and see what I look like!"

"I take it that you are not anxious to speak to your husband yet."

"I want to see myself first!"

"You will have to wait. During your last sleep, your new muscles will be exercised, their tones and strength built up. You will receive a final medical examination. It is most important."

She started to protest once more, but he stopped her. "Try to be calm. I can control your feelings with drugs, but it is better that you control yourself. You will be able to give vent to your excitement later. And now I must leave you. You will not hear from me after this."

"Never again?"

"Never again. Goodbye."

For a moment she felt something cool and dry and rough laid very lightly against her forehead. She tried to reach for him, but could only twitch her new hands on her new wrists. She said, with a sob, "Goodbye, Doctor."

When she spoke again, there was no answer.

She slept.

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This time, the awakening was different. Before she opened her eyes, she heard the creaking of the freighter, and a slight hum that might have come from the firing of the jets.

As she tried to sit up, her eyes flashed open, and she saw that she was lying in a bunk, strapped down to keep from being thrown out. Unsteadily, she began to loosen the straps. When they were half off, she stopped to stare at her hands. They were strong hands, well-shaped and supple, with a healthily tanned skin. She flexed them and unflexed them several times. Beautiful hands. The Doctor had done well by her.

She finished undoing the straps, and got to her feet. There was none of the dizziness she had expected, none of the weakness that would have been normal after so long a stay in bed. She felt fine.

She examined herself, staring at her legs, body—staring as she might have done at a stranger's

legs and body. She took a few steps forward and then back. Yes, he had done well by her. It was a graceful body, and it felt fine. Better than new.

But her face!

She whirled around to locate a mirror, and heard a voice: "Margaret!"

Fred was getting out of another bunk. Their eyes sought each other's faces, and for a long moment they stared in silence.

Fred said in a choked voice, "There must be a mirror in the captain's cabin. I've got to see myself."

At the mirror, their eyes shifted from one face to the other and back again. And the silence this time was longer, more painful.

A wonderful artist, the Doctor. For a creature—a person—who was insensitive to the differences in human faces, he could follow a pattern perfectly. Feature by feature, they were as before. Size and shape of forehead, dip of hairline, width of cheeks and height of cheekbones, shape and color of eyes, contour of nose and lips and chin—nothing in the two faces had been changed. Nothing at all.

Nothing, that is, but the overall effect. Nothing but the fact that where before she had been plain, now she was beautiful.

*I should have realized the possibility, she thought. Sometimes you see two sisters, or mother and daughter, with the same features, the faces as alike as if they had been cast from the same mold—and yet one is ugly and the other beautiful. Many artists can copy features, but few can copy with perfect exactness either beauty or ugliness. The Doctor slipped up a little. Despite my warning, he's done too well by me.*

*And not well enough by Fred. Fred isn't handsome any more. Not ugly really—his face is stronger and more interesting than it was. But now I'm the good-looking one of the family. And he won't be able to take it. This is the end for us.*



Fred was grinning at her. He said, "Wow, what a wife I've got! Just look at you! Do you mind if I drool a bit?"

She said uncertainly, "Fred, dear, I'm sorry."

"For what? For his giving you more than you bargained for—and me less? It's all in the family!"

"You don't have to pretend, Fred. I know how you feel."

"You don't know a thing. I *asked* him to make you beautiful. I wasn't sure he could, but I asked him anyway. And he said he'd try."

"You *asked* him—oh, no!"

"Oh, yes," he said. "Are you sorry? I hoped he'd do better for me, but—well, did you marry me for my looks?"

"You know better, Fred!"

"I didn't marry you for yours either. I told you that before, but you wouldn't believe me. Maybe now you will."

Her voice choked. "Perhaps—perhaps looks aren't so important after all. Perhaps I've been all wrong about everything I used to think was essential."

"You have," agreed Fred. "But you've always had a sense of inferiority about your appearance. From now on, you'll have no reason for that. And maybe now we'll both be able to grow up a little."

She nodded. It gave her a strange feeling to have him put around her a pair of arms she had never before known, to have him kiss her with lips she had never before touched. *But that doesn't matter, she thought. The important thing is that whatever shape we take, we're us. The important thing is that now we don't have to worry about ourselves—and for that we have to thank him.*

"Fred," she said suddenly, her face against his chest. "Do you think a girl can be in love with two—two people—at the same time? And one of them—one of them not a man? Not even human?"

He nodded, but didn't say anything. And after a moment, she thought she knew why. *A man can love that way too, she thought—and one of them not a woman, either.*

*I wonder if he ... she ... it knew. I wonder if it knew.*

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BEDSIDE MANNER \*\*\*

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