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Thy Name Is WOMAN

By Kenneth O'Hara

Illustrated by Zimmerman

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There wasn't a woman left on earth. They had just packed their bags and left.

After the Doctor gave him the hypo and left the ship, Bowren lay in absolute darkness wondering when the change would start. There would be pain, the Doctor had said. "Then you won't be aware of anything—anything at all."

That was a devil of a thing, Bowren thought, not to be aware of the greatest adventure any man ever had. He, Eddie Bowren, the first to escape the Earth into space, the first man to Mars!

Women of earth had finally attained their objective: a new world all their own and—without men! But was it?

He was on his back in a small square steel cubicle, a secretly constructed room in the wall of the cargo bin of the big spaceship cradled at the New Chicago Port. He was not without fear. But before the ship blasted he wouldn't care—he would be changed by then. He would start turning any minute now, becoming something else; he didn't know exactly what, but that wouldn't matter. After it was over, he wouldn't remember because the higher brain centers, the cortex, the analytical mind, would be completely cut off, short-circuited, during the alteration.

The cubicle was close, hot, sound-proofed, like a tomb. "You will probably make loud unpleasant noises," the Doctor had said, "but no one will hear you. Don't worry about anything until you get to Mars."

That was right, Bowren thought. My only problem is to observe, compute, and get back into this dungeon without being observed, and back to Earth.

The idea was to keep it from the women. The women wouldn't go for this at all. They would object. The women would be able to bring into effect several laws dealing with spaceflight, among them the one against stowaways, and especially that particular one about aberrated males sneaking into space and committing suicide.

A lot of men had tried it, in the beginning. Some of them had managed it, but they had all died. For a long time, the men's egos hadn't been able to admit that the male organism was incapable of standing the rigors of acceleration. Women had had laws passed, and if the women caught him doing this, the punishment would be extreme for him, personally, and a lot more extreme for Earth civilization in general. If you could call it a civilization. You could call it anything, Bowren groaned—but it didn't make sense. A world without women. A birthrate reduced to zero.

A trickle of sweat slid past Bowren's eyes, loosening a nervous flush along his back that prickled painfully. His throat was tense and his heart pounded loud in the hot dark.

A sharp pain ran up his body and exploded in his head. He tried to swallow, but something gagged in his throat. He was afraid of retching. He lay with his mouth open, spittle dribbling over his lips. The pain returned, hammered at his entrails. He fought the pain numbly, like a man grappling in the dark.

The wave subsided and he lay there gasping, his fists clenched.

"The pain will come in increasingly powerful waves," the Doctor had said. "At a certain point, it will be so great, the analytical mind will completely short-circuit. It will stay that way enroute to Mars, and meanwhile your body will rapidly change into that of a beast. Don't worry about it. A

catalytic agent will return you to normal before you reach the planet. If you live, you'll be human again."

A male human couldn't stand the acceleration. But a woman could. Animals could. They had experimented on human males and animals in the giant centrifuges, and learned what to do. Animals could stand 25 "G" consistently, or centrifugal forces as high as 120 revolutions a minute. About 10 "G" was the limit of female endurance. Less for men.

It had never been thoroughly determined why women had been able to stand higher acceleration. But human females had the same physical advantages over men as female rats, rabbits, and cats over males of the same species. A woman's cellular structure was different; her center of gravity was different, the brain waves given off during acceleration were different. It was suspected that the autonomic nervous system in women could function more freely to protect the body during emergency situations. The only certainty about it was that no man had ever been able to get into space and live.

But animals could so they had worked on it and finally they decided to change a man into an animal, at least temporarily. Geneticists and biochemists and other specialists had been able to do a lot with hormones and hard radiation treatment. Especially with hormones. You could shoot a man full of some fluid or another, and do almost anything to his organism. You could induce atavism, regression to some lower form of animal life—a highly speeded up regression. When you did that, naturally the analytical mind, the higher thought centers of a more recent evolutionary development, blanked out and the primal mind took over. The body changed too, considerably.

Bowren was changing. Then the pain came and he couldn't think. He felt his mind cringing—giving way before the onslaught of the pain. Dimly he could feel the agony in his limbs, the throbbing of his heart, the fading power of reason.

He retched, languished through flaccid minutes. There were recurring spasms of shivering as he rolled his thickened tongue in the arid cavity of his mouth. And then, somewhere, a spark exploded, and drowned him in a pool of streaming flame.

Consciousness returned slowly—much as it had gone—in waves of pain. It took a long time. Elements of reason and unreason fusing through distorted nightmares until he was lying there able to remember, able to wonder, able to think.

Inside the tiny compartment were supplies. A hypo, glucose, a durolene suit neatly folded which he put on. He gave himself a needle, swallowed the tablets, and waited until energy and a sense of well-being gave him some degree of confidence.

It was very still. The ship would be cradled on Mars now. He lay there, relaxing, preparing for the real challenge. He thought of how well the Earth Investigation Committee had planned the whole thing.

The last desperate attempt of man to get into space—to Mars—a woman's world. At least it was supposed to be. Whatever it was, it wasn't a man's world.

The women didn't want Earth anymore. They had something better. But what? There were other questions, and Bowren's job was to find the answers, remain unobserved and get back aboard this ship. He would then hypo himself again, and when the ship blasted off to Earth, he would go through the same transition all over again.

He put on the soft-soled shoes as well as the durolene suit and crawled through the small panel into the big cargo bin. It was empty. Only a dim yellow light shone on the big cargo vices along the curved walls.

He climbed the ladders slowly, cautiously, through a gnawing silence of suspense, over the mesh grid flooring along the tubular corridors. He wondered what he would find.

Could the women have been influenced by some alien life form on Mars?

That could explain the fact that women had divorced themselves completely from all men, from the Earth. Something had to explain it.

There was one other possibility. That the women had found human life on Mars. That was a very remote possibility based on the idea that perhaps the Solar system had been settled by human beings from outer space, and had landed on two worlds at least.

Bowren remembered how his wife, Lora, had told him he was an idiot and a bore, and had walked out on him five years before; taken her three months course in astrogation, and left Earth. He hadn't heard of her or from her since. It was the same with every other man, married or not. The male ego had taken a beating for so long that the results had been psychologically devastating.

The ship seemed to be empty of any human being but Bowren. He reached the outer lock door. It was ajar. Thin cold air came through and sent a chill down his arms, tingling in his fingers. He

looked out. It was night on Mars, a strange red-tinted night, the double moons throwing streaming color over the land.

Across the field, he saw the glowing Luciferin-like light of a small city. Soaring spherical lines. Nothing masculine about its architecture. Bowren shivered.

He climbed down the ladder, the air biting into his lungs. The silence down there on the ground under the ship was intense.

He stood there a minute. The first man on Mars. Man's oldest dream realized.

But the great thrill he had anticipated was dulled somewhat by fear. A fear of what the women had become, and of what might have influenced their becoming.

He took out a small neurogun and walked. He reached what seemed to be a huge park that seemed to surround the city. It grew warmer and a soft wind whispered through the strange wide-spreading trees and bushes and exotic blossoms. The scent of blossoms drifted on the wind and the sound of running water, of murmuring voices.

The park thickened as Bowren edged into its dark, languid depth. It seemed as though the city radiated heat. He dodged suddenly behind a tree, knelt down. For an instant he was embarrassed seeing the two shadowy figures in each others arms on a bench in the moonlight. This emotion gave way to shock, anger, fear.

One of them was a—man!

Bowren felt the perspiration start from his face. An intense jealousy surrendered to a start of fearful curiosity. Where had the man come from?

Bowren's long frustration, the memory of his wife, the humiliation, the rejection, the abandonment, the impotent rage of loneliness—it all came back to him.

He controlled his emotion somehow. At least he didn't manifest it physically. He crept closer, listened.

"This was such a sweet idea," the woman was whispering. "Bringing me here to the park tonight. That's why I love you so, Marvin. You're always so romantic."

"How else could I think of you, darling," the man said. His voice was cultured, precise, soft, thick with emotion.

"You're so sweet, Marvin."

"You're so beautiful, darling. I think of you every minute that you're away on one of those space flights. You women are so wonderful to have conquered space, but sometimes I hate the ships that take you away from me."

The woman sighed. "But it's so nice to come back to you. So exciting, so comfortable."

The kiss was long and deep. Bowren backed away, almost smashing into the tree. He touched his forehead. He was sweating heavily. His beard dripped moisture. There was a hollow panicky feeling in his stomach. Now he was confused as well as afraid.

Another couple was sitting next to a fountain, and a bubbling brook ran past them, singing into the darkness. Bowren crouched behind a bush and listened. It might have been the man he had just left, still talking. The voice was slightly different, but the dialogue sounded very much the same.

"It must be wonderful to be a woman, dear, and voyage between the stars. But as I say, I'm glad to stay here and tend the home and mind the children, glad to be here, my arms open to you when you come back."

"It's so wonderful to know that you care so much. I'm so glad you never let me forget that you love me."

"I love you, every minute of every day. Just think—two more months and one week and we will have been married ten years."

"It's so lovely," she said. "It seems like ten days. Like those first thrilling ten days, darling, going over and over again."

"I'll always love you, darling."

"Always?"

"Always."

The man got up, lifted the woman in his arms, held her high. "Darling, let's go for a night ride across the desert."

"Oh, you darling. You always think of these little adventures."

"All life with you is an adventure."

"But what about little Jimmie and Janice?"

"I've arranged a sitter for them."

"But darling—you mean you—Oh, you're so wonderful. You think of everything. So practical, yet so romantic ... so—"

He kissed her and ran away, holding her high in the air, and her laughter bubbled back to where Bowren crouched behind the bush. He kept on crouching there, staring numbly at the vacancy the fleeing couple had left in the shadows. "Good God," he whispered. "After ten years—"

He shook his head and slowly licked his lips. He'd been married five years.

It hadn't been like this. He'd never heard of any marriage maintaining such a crazy high romantic level of manic neuroticism as this for very long. Of course the women had always expected it to. But the men—

And anyway—*where did the men come from?*

Bowren moved down a winding lane between exotic blossoms, through air saturated with the damp scent of night-blooming flowers. He walked cautiously enough, but in a kind of daze, his mind spinning. The appearance of those men remained in his mind. When he closed his eyes for a moment, he could see them.

Perfectly groomed, impeccably dressed, smiling, vital, bronze-skinned, delicate, yet strong features; the kind of male who might be considered, Bowren thought, to be able to assert just the right degree of aggressiveness without being indelicate.

Why, he thought, they've found perfect men, their type of men.

He dodged behind a tree. Here it was again. Same play, same scene practically, only the players were two other people. A couple standing arm in arm beside a big pool full of weird darting fish and throwing upward a subdued bluish light. Music drifted along the warm currents of air. The couple were silhouetted by the indirect light. The pose is perfect, he thought. The setting is perfect.

"You're so wonderful, darling," the man was saying, "and I get so lonely without you. I always see your face, hear your voice, no matter how long you're away."

"Do you? Do you?"

"Always. Your hair so red, so dark it seems black in certain lights. Your eyes so slanted, so dark a green they seem black usually too. Your nose so straight, the nostrils flaring slightly, the least bit too much sometimes. Your mouth so red and full. Your skin so smooth and dark. And you're ageless, darling. Being married to you five years, it's one exciting adventure."

"I love you so," she said. "You're everything any woman could want in a husband. Simply everything, yet you're so modest with it all. I still remember how it used to be. Back there ... with the other men I mean?"

"You should forget about *them*, my dear."

"I'm forgetting, slowly though. It may take a long time to forget completely. Oh, he was such an unpleasant person, so uninteresting after a while. So inconsiderate, so self-centered. He wasn't romantic at all. He never said he loved me, and when he kissed me it was mere routine. He never thought about anything but his work, and when he did come home at night, he would yell at me about not having ordered the right dinner from the cafelator. He didn't care whether he used hair remover on his face in the mornings or not. He was surly and sullen and selfish. But I could have forgiven everything else if he had only told me every day that he loved me, that he could never love anyone else. The things that you do and say, darling."

"I love you," he said. "I love you, I love you. But please, let's not talk about *him* anymore. It simply horrifies me!"

Bowren felt the sudden sickening throbbing of his stomach. The description. Now the slight familiarity of voice. And then he heard the man say, murmuring, "Lois ... darling Lois...."

Lois! LOIS!

Bowren shivered. His jowls darkened, his mouth pressed thin by the powerful clamp of his jaws. His body seemed to loosen all over and he fell into a crouch. Tiredness and torn nerves and long-suppressed emotion throbbed in him, and all the rage and suppression and frustration came back in a wave. He yelled. It was more of a sound, a harsh prolonged animal roar of pain and rage and humiliation.

"Lois ..." He ran forward.

She gasped, sank away as Bowren hit the man, hard. The man sighed and gyrated swinging his arms, teetering and flipped backward into the pool among the lights and the weird fish. A spray of cold water struck Bowren, sobering him a little, sobered his burst of mindless passion enough that he could hear the shouts of alarm ringing through the trees. He turned desperately.

Lois cringed. He scarcely remembered her now, he realized. She was different. He had forgotten everything except an image that had changed with longing. She hadn't been too impressive anyway, maybe, or maybe she had. It didn't matter now.

He tried to run, tried to get away. He heard Lois' voice, high and shrill. Figures closed in around him. He fought, desperately. He put a few temporarily out of the way with the neurogun, but there were always more. Men, men everywhere. Hundreds of men where there should be no men at all. Well-groomed, strong, bronzed, ever-smiling men. It gave him intense pleasure to crack off a few of the smiles. To hurl the gun, smash with his fists.

Then the men were swarming all over him, the clean faces, the smiling fragrant men, and he went down under the weight of men.

He tried to move. A blow fell hard and his head smashed against the rocks. He tried to rise up, and other blows beat him down and he was glad about the darkness, not because it relieved the pain, but because it curtained off the faces of men.

After a time it was as though he was being carried through a dim half-consciousness, able to think, too tired to move or open his eyes. He remembered how the men of Earth had rationalized a long time, making a joke out of it. Laughing when they hadn't wanted to laugh, but to hate. It had never been humorous. It had been a war between the sexes, and the women had finally won, destroying the men psychologically, the race physically. Somehow they had managed to go on with a culture of their own.

The war between the sexes had never really been a joke. It had been deadly serious, right from the beginning of the militant feminist movements, long before the last big war. There had always been basic psychological and physiological differences. But woman had refused to admit this, and had tried to be the "equal" if not the better of men. For so long woman had made it strictly competitive, and in her subconscious mind she had regarded men as wonderful creatures, capable of practically anything, and that woman could do nothing better than to emulate them in every possible way. There was no such thing as a woman's role unless it had been the same as a man's. That had gone on a long time. And it hadn't been a joke at all.

How ironic it was, there at the last! All of man's work through the ages had been aimed at the stars. And the women had assumed the final phase of conquest!

For a long time women had been revolting against the masculine symbols, the levers, pistons, bombs, torpedoes and hammers, all manifestations of man's whole activity of overt, aggressive power.

The big H-bombs of the last great war had seemed to be man's final symbol, destructive. And after that, the spaceships, puncturing space, roaring outward, the ultimate masculine symbol of which men had dreamed for so long, and which women had envied.

And then only the women could stand the acceleration. It was a physiological fact. Nothing could change it. Nothing but what they had done to Bowren.

All of man's evolutionary struggle, and the women had assumed the climax, assumed all the past wrapped up in the end, usurped the effect, and thereby psychologically assuming also all the thousands of years of causation.

For being held down, being made neurotic by frustration and the impossibility of being the "equal" of men, because they were fundamentally psychologically and physiologically different, women had taken to space with an age-old vengeance. Personal ego salvation.

But they hadn't stopped there. What had they done? What about the men? A man for every woman, yet no men from Earth. That much Bowren knew. Native Martians? What?

He had been transported somewhere in a car of some kind. He didn't bother to be interested. He couldn't get away. He was held fast. He refused to open his eyes because he didn't want to see the men who held him, the men who had replaced him and every other man on Earth. The men who were destroying the civilization of Earth.

The gimmicks whereby the women had rejected Earth and left it to wither and die in neglect and bitter, bitter wonderment.

He was tired, very tired. The movement of the car lulled him, and he drifted into sleep.

He opened his eyes and slowly looked around. Pretty pastel ceiling. A big room, beautiful and softly furnished, with a marked absence of metal, of shiny chrome, of harshness or brittle angles. It was something of an office, too, with a desk that was not at all business-like, but still a desk. A warm glow suffused the room, and the air was pleasantly scented with natural smelling perfumes.

A woman stood in the middle of the room studying him with detached interest. She was beautiful, but in a hard, mature, withdrawn way. She was dark, her eyes large, liquid black and dominating her rather small sharply-sculptured face. Her mouth was large, deeply red. She had a strong mouth.

He looked at her a while. He felt only a deep, bitter resentment. He felt good though, physically. He had probably been given something, an injection. He sat up. Then he got to his feet.

She kept on studying him. "A change of clothes, dry detergent, and hair remover for your face are in there, through that door," she said.

He said: "Right now I'd rather talk."

"But don't you want to take off that awful—beard?"

"The devil with it! Is that so important? It's natural isn't it for a man to have hair on his face? I like hair on my face."

She opened her mouth a little and stepped back a few steps.

"And anyway, what could be less important right now than the way I look?"

"I'm—I'm Gloria Munsel," she said hesitantly. "I'm President of the City here. And what is your name, please?"

"Eddie Bowren. What are you going to do with me?"

She shrugged. "You act like a mad man. I'd almost forgotten what you men of Earth were like. I was pretty young then. Well, frankly, I don't know what we're going to do with you. No precedent for the situation. No laws concerning it. It'll be up to the Council."

"It won't be pleasant for me," he said, "I can be safe in assuming that."

She shrugged again and crossed her arms. He managed to control his emotions somehow as he looked at the smooth lines of her body under the long clinging gown. She was so damn beautiful! A high proud body in a smooth pink gown, dark hair streaming back and shiny and soft.

It was torture. It had been for a long time, for him, for all the others. "Let me out of here!" he yelled harshly. "Put me in a room by myself!"

She moved closer to him and looked into his face. The fragrance of her hair, the warmth of her reached out to him. Somehow, he never knew how, he managed to grin. He felt the sweat running down his dirty, bearded, battered face. His suit was torn and dirty. He could smell himself, the stale sweat, the filth. He could feel his hair, shaggy and long, down his neck, over his ears.

Her lips were slightly parted, and wet, and she had a funny dark look in her eyes, he thought. She turned quickly as the door opened, and a man came in. He was only slightly taller than Gloria and he nodded, smiled brightly, bowed a little, moved forward. He carried a big bouquet of flowers and presented them to her.

She took the flowers, smiled, thanked him, and put them on the table. The man said. "So sorry, darling, to intrude. But I felt I had to see you for a few minutes. I left the children with John, and dashed right up here. I thought we might have lunch together."

"You're so thoughtful, dear," she said.

The man turned a distasteful look upon Bowren. He said. "My dear, what is *this*?"

"A man," she said, and then added. "From Earth."

"What? Good grief, you mean they've found a way—?"

"I don't know. You'd better go back home and tend the yard today, Dale. I'll tell you all about it when I come home this evening. All right?"

"Well I—oh, oh yes, of course, if you say so, darling."

"Thank you, dear." She kissed him and he bowed out.

She turned and walked back toward Bowren. "Tell me," she said. "How did you get here alive?"

Why not tell her? He was helpless here. They'd find out anyway, as soon as they got back to Earth on the cargo run. And even if they didn't find out, that wouldn't matter either. They would be on guard from now on. No man would do again what Bowren had done. The only chance would be to build secret spaceships of their own and every time one blasted, have every member of the crew go through what Bowren had. It couldn't last. Too much injury and shock.

As he talked he studied the office, and he thought of other things. An office that was like a big beautiful living room. A thoroughly feminine office. Nor was it the type of office a woman would fix for a man. It was a woman's office. Everything, the whole culture here, was feminine. When he had finished she said, "Interesting. It must have been a very unpleasant experience for you."

He grinned. "I suffered. But even though I've failed, it's worth all the suffering, if you'll tell me—where did all the ah—men come from?"

She told him. It was, to say the least, startling, and then upon reflection, he realized how simple

it all was. No aliens. No native Martians. A very simple and thoroughly logical solution, and in a way, typically feminine.

Hormone treatment and genetic manipulation, plus a thorough reconditioning while the treatment was taking place.

And the women had simply turned approximately half of their number into men!

She paused, then went on. "It was the only way we could see it, Mr. Bowren. Earth was a man's world, and we could never have belonged in it, not the way we wanted to. Men wouldn't stand it anyway, down there, having us going into space, usurping their masculine role. And anyway—you men of Earth had become so utterly unsatisfactory as companions, lovers, and husbands, that it was obvious nothing could ever be done about it. Not unless we set up our own culture, our own civilization, our way."

"But meanwhile we die down there," Bowren said. "Logic is nice. But mass murder, and the death of a whole world civilization seems pretty cold from where I'm standing. It's pathological, but it's too late to think about that. It's done now."

"But we're happy here," she said. "For the first time in a long, long time, we women feel like ourselves. We feel truly independent. The men around us are the kind of men we want, instead of us being what they want us to be, or even worse, the men being what we want them to be but resenting it and making life unbearable for both. All through the process of being changed into men, our women undergo such a thorough conditioning that they can never be anything else but model men in every sense. Their attitude as women with which they started treatment helped. They knew what they wanted in men, and they became what we wanted them to be, as men."

"Very logical," Bowren said. "It smells to heaven it's so logical." It was purely impulse, what he did then. He couldn't help it. It wasn't logical either. It was emotional and he did it because he had to do it and because he didn't see any reason why he shouldn't.

He put his arm out suddenly, hooked her slim waist, and pulled her to him. Her face flushed and his eyes were very wide and dark as she looked up at him.

"Listen," he said. "The whole thing's insane. The lot of you are mad, and though I can't help it, I hate to see it happen this way. What kind of men are these? These smiling robots, these goons who are nothing else but reflections in a woman's mirror? Who'd want to be a man like that. Who would really want a man like that? And who would want a woman who was just what a man wanted her to be? Where's the fire? Where's the individuality? Where's the conflict, the fighting and snarling and raging that makes living. All this is apathy, this is death! You don't grow by being agreeable, but by conflict."

"What are you trying to sell now?" she whispered.

He laughed. It was wild sounding to him, not very humorous really, but still it was laughter. "Selling nothing, buying nothing." He pulled her closer and kissed her. Her lips parted slightly and he could feel the warmth of her and the quick drawing of breath. Then she pushed him away. She raised her hand and brushed it over his face.

She shook her head slowly. "It feels rather interesting," she said, "your face. I've never felt a man's face before, that wasn't smooth, the way it should be."

He laughed again, more softly this time. "Why reform your men? You women always wanted to do that."

"We don't reform men here," she said. "We start them out right—from the beginning."

She backed away from him. She raised her hand to her face and her fingers touched her lips. Wrinkles appeared between her eyes and she shook her head again. Not at him, but at something, a thought perhaps, he couldn't tell.

Finally she said. "That was an inexcusable, boorish thing to do. A typical thoughtless egomaniacal Earth-male action if there ever was one. Our men are all perfect here, and in comparison to them, you're a pretty miserable specimen. I'm glad you showed up here. It's given me, and other women, a good chance for comparison. It makes our men seem so much better even than they were to us before."

He didn't say anything.

"Our men are perfect! Perfect you understand? What are you smiling about? Their character is good. They're excellent conversationalists, well informed, always attentive, moderate, sympathetic, interested in life, and always interested in *us*."

"And I suppose they are also—human?"

"This is nonsense," she said, her voice rising slightly. "You will take that door out please. The Council will decide what's to be done with you."

He nodded, turned, and went through the door. There were two men there waiting for him. They were both blond, with light blue eyes, just medium height, perfectly constructed physically, perfectly groomed, impeccably dressed. They smiled at him. Their teeth had been brushed every morning. One of them wrinkled his nose, obviously as a reaction to Bowren. The other started to

reach, seemed reluctant to touch him.

"Then don't touch me, brother," Bowren said. "Put a hand on me, and I'll slug you." The man reached away, and it gave Bowren an ecstatic sensation to send his fist against the man's jaw. It made a cracking sound and the man's head flopped back as his knees crumbled and he swung around and stretched out flat on his face on the long tubular corridor.

"Always remember your etiquette," Bowren said. "Keep your hands off people. It isn't polite."

The other man grunted something, still managing to smile, as he rushed at Bowren. Bowren side-stepped, hooked the man's neck in his arm and ran him across the hall and smashed his head into the wall.

He turned, opened the door into Munsel's office, dragged both of them in and shut the door again. He walked down the corridor several hundred feet before a woman appeared, in some kind of uniform, and said. "Will you come this way please?"

He said he would.

It was a small room, comfortably furnished. Food came through a panel in the wall whenever he pressed the right button. A telescreen furnished entertainment when he pushed another button. Tasty mixed drinks responded to other buttons.

He never bothered to take advantage of the facilities offered for removing his beard, bathing, or changing clothes. Whatever fate was going to befall him, he would just as soon meet it as the only man on Mars who looked the part—according to Bowren's standards, at least—at least by comparison.

He thought of trying to escape. If he could get away from the city and into the Martian hills, he could die out there with some dignity. It was a good idea, but he knew it was impossible. At least so far, it was impossible. Maybe something would come up. An opportunity and he would take it. That was the only thing left for him.

He was in there for what seemed a long time. It was still, the light remaining always the same. He slept a number of times and ate several times. He did a lot of thinking too. He thought about the men on Earth and finally he decided it didn't matter much. They had brought it on themselves in a way, and if there was anything like cause and effect operating on such a scale, they deserved no sympathy. Man had expressed his aggressive male ego until he evolved the H-bombs and worse, and by then the whole world was neurotic with fear, including the women. Women had always looked into the mirror of the future (or lack of it), of the race, and the more she had looked, the more the insecurity. The atomic wars had created a kind of final feeling of insecurity as far as men were concerned, forced them to become completely psychologically and physiologically self-sufficient. They had converted part of their own kind into men, their own kind of men, and theoretically there wouldn't be any more insecurity brought on by the kind of male psychology that had turned the Earth around for so long.

All right, drop it right there then, he thought. It's about all over. It's all over but the requiem. Sometime later he was in a mood where he didn't mind it when an impersonal face appeared on the screen and looked right at him and told him the Council's verdict. It was a woman, and her voice was cold, very cold.

"Mr. Eddie Bowren. The Council has reached a verdict regarding what is to be done with you. You are to be exterminated. It is painless and we will make it as pleasant as possible."

"Thanks," Bowren said. A woman's world was so polite, so mannerly, so remembering of all the social amenities. It would be so difficult after a while to know when anyone was speaking, or doing anything real. "Thanks," he said again. "I will do all in my power to make my extermination a matter of mutual pleasure." By now he was pretty drunk, had been drunk for some time. He raised his glass. "Here's to a real happy time of it, baby."

The screen faded. He sat there brooding, and he was still brooding when the door unlocked and opened softly. He sat there and looked at Gloria Munsel for a while, wondering why she was here. Why she would look so provocative, so enchanting, so devastating, whatever other words you cared to dream up.

She moved toward him with a slight swaying motion that further disturbed him. He felt her long white fingers rubbing over the stiff wiry beard of his face. "I dreamed about the way that beard felt last night," she said. "Silly of me wasn't it? I heard of the way you smell, of the way you yelled at me, so impolitely. Why did I dream of it, I said this morning, so now I'm here to find out why."

"Get out and let me alone," Bowren yelled. "I'm going to be exterminated. So let me alone to my own company."

"Yes, I heard about that verdict," she said. She looked away from him. "I don't know why they made that choice. Well, I do in a way, they're afraid of you, your influence. It would be very disruptive socially. Several of our men—"

"It doesn't matter why," Bowren said. "What matters is that it will be as pleasant as possible. If

you're going to kill a man, be nice about it."

She stared down at him. Chills rippled down his back as her warm soft fingers continued to stroke his bearded chin and throat. He got up. It was too uncomfortable and it was torture. He said, "Get out of here. Maybe I'm not a conformist, but I'm damn human!"

She backed away. "But—but what do you mean?"

He got up and put the flat of his hands cupping her shoulder blades. Her eyes stared wildly, and her lips were wet and she was breathing heavily. He could see the vein pulsing faster in her slim throat. She had an exciting body.

He saw it then, the new slow smile that crept across her face. His left hand squirmed at the thick piled hair on her shoulders and he tugged and her face tilted further and he looked at the parted pouting lips. The palm of his right hand brushed her jaw and his fingers took her cheeks and brought her face over and he spread his mouth hard over her mouth. Her lips begged. Hammers started banging away in his stomach.

Music from the screen was playing a crescendo into his pulse. They swayed together to the music, her head thrown back, her eyes closed. She stepped back, dropped her arms limply at her sides. There was the clean sweet odor of her hair.

"I'd better go now," she whispered. "Before I do something that would result in my not being President anymore."

He wiped his face. Don't beg, he thought. The devil with her and the rest. A man could lose everything, all the women, not one, but all of them. He could live alone, a thousand miles from nowhere, at the North Pole like Amundsen, and it didn't matter. He could be killed pleasantly or unpleasantly, that didn't matter either. All that mattered was that he maintain some dignity, as a man.

He stood there, not saying anything. He managed to grin. Finally he said, "Goodbye, and may your husband never say a harsh word to you or do anything objectionable as long as you both shall live, and may he love you every hour of every day, and may he drop dead."

She moved in again, put her arms around him. There were tears in her eyes. She placed her cheek on his shoulder. "I love you," she whispered. "I know that now."

He felt a little helpless. Tears, what could you do with a woman's tears?

She sobbed softly, talking brokenly. Maybe not to him, but to someone, somewhere. A memory, a shadow out of a long time back....

"Maybe it's ... it's all a mistake after all ... maybe it is. I've never been too sure, not for a while now. And then you—the way you talked and looked—the excitement. I don't know why. But the touch of your beard—your voice. I don't know what happened. We've carried it to extremes, extremes, Eddie. It was always this way with us—once we were sure of our man, and even before, when he was blinded by new love, we tried to make him over, closer to *our* idea of what was right. But now I know something ... those faults and imperfections, most of them were men's, the real men's chief attractions. Individuality, that's the thing, Eddie, that's it after all. And it's imperfections too, maybe more than anything else. Imperfections.... Oh, Eddie, you're close, much closer to human nature, to real vitality, through *your* imperfections. Not imperfections. Eddie—your beard is beautiful, your dirt is lovely, your yelling insults are wonderful—and...."

She stopped a minute. Her hands ran through his hair. "When you get a man made over, he's never very nice after that, Eddie. Never—"

She sobbed, pulled his lips down. "Eddie—I can't let them kill you."

"Forget it," he said. "No one can do anything. Don't get yourself in a jam. You'll forget this in a little while. There's nothing here for a guy like me, and I'm not for you."

She stepped way, her hands still on his shoulders. "No—I didn't mean that. I've got to go on living in the world I helped make, among the men we all decided we would always want. I've got to do that. Listen, Eddie, how did you intend to get back to Earth?"

He told her.

"Then it's just a matter of getting back aboard that same ship, and into this secret room unobserved?"

"That's all, Gloria. That and keep from being exterminated first."

"I can get you out of here. We'll have to do it right now. Take that beard off, and get that hair smoothed down somehow. I hate to see it happen, but I've got to get you out of here, and the only way to do it is for you to be like one of the men here."

He went to work on his face and hair. She went out and returned with a suit like the other men wore. He got into it. She smiled at him, a hesitant and very soft smile, and she kissed him before

they left the room and cautiously went out of the City.

The way was clear across the moonlit field and under the deep dark shadow of the ship. He kissed her and then took hold of the ladder. She slipped a notebook of velonex, full of micro-film, into his hands. "Goodbye, Eddie," she said. "Take this with you. It may give you men down there a way out. I never thought much before of how mad it must be for you."

He took the folder. He looked up at the double moons painting the night a fantastic shifting wave of changing light. And then he looked down at Gloria Munsel again, at the glinting shine of her hair.

"Goodbye," he said. "I might stay after all—except that a lot of men on Earth are waiting for me to tell them something. They'll be surprised. I—" He hesitated. Her eyes widened. Warmth of emotion moved him and he said, or started to say, "I love you," and many other things, but she interrupted him.

"Don't please, Eddie. Anything you said now would sound just like what my devoted husband says, every day. I'd rather you wouldn't say anything at all now, Eddie, just goodbye."

"Goodbye then," he said again.

He looked back from the opened door in the ship's cargo bin. Her face was shining up at him, her lips slightly parted, her cheeks wet. It was a picture he would never be able to forget, even if he wanted to.

"When you forget to shave in the mornings, Eddie, think of me."

Bowren stood up and addressed the investigation committee which had sent him to Mars. He hadn't made any statements at all up to this moment. The ten members of the Committee sat there behind the half-moon table. None of them moved. Their faces were anxious. Some of them were perspiring.

Eddie told them what he had seen, what he had heard, his own impressions about the whole thing, about his escape. He left out certain personal details that were, to him, unnecessary to this particular report.

The Committee sat there a while, then started to talk. They talked at once for a while, then the Chairman rapped for order and stood up. His face had an odd twist to it, and his bald head was pocked with perspiration.

Eddie Bowren took the book of micro-film from under his arm, the one Gloria Munsel had given him. He put it on the table. "That has been thoroughly checked by scientists, and their report is included. I thought it surely was a false report, until they checked it. The first page there gives a brief outline of what the micro-film contains."

The Chairman read, then looked up. He coughed. He mopped at his head.

Eddie said. "As I saw it up there, this is the way it's going to stay. We'll never get into space, not without using the methods that were used with me. And they're too destructive. I've been examined. I could never go through it again and live. And that's the only way Earth men can ever get into space. The women aren't coming back to us. They have husbands of their own now. Believe me, those women aren't going to leave their perfect husbands. They've set up a completely feminine culture. It's theirs, all theirs. They'll never give it up to return to a masculine world, and that's what Earth will always be to them. There are only a few women left on Earth, and they're of such subnormal intelligence as to be only a menace to any possible future progeny. Our birthrate has stopped. We are living under extremely abnormal circumstances without women. I have, as I said before, but one recommendation to this Committee, and you take it for what it's worth. I personally don't care—much—and that isn't important either."

"What is your recommendation, Bowren?"

"I assure you that the formulas in that book will work for us, Mr. Chairman. Will you accept the reports of the scientists who investigated those formulas?"

"I will," the Chairman said hoarsely. "I'll accept it. Why not—?"

Bowren grinned thinly at the ten men. "There's the secret of doing what the women have done. It'll work for us too. Our only chance for survival is to follow their procedure. We've got to start turning at least a percentage of ourselves into women."

One man leaned forward and put his head on his arms. The others sat there, in a kind of stunned numb attitude, their eyes drifting vaguely.

The Chairman coughed and looked around the silent hall, and at the other ten men in it.

"Any volunteers?" he whispered.

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