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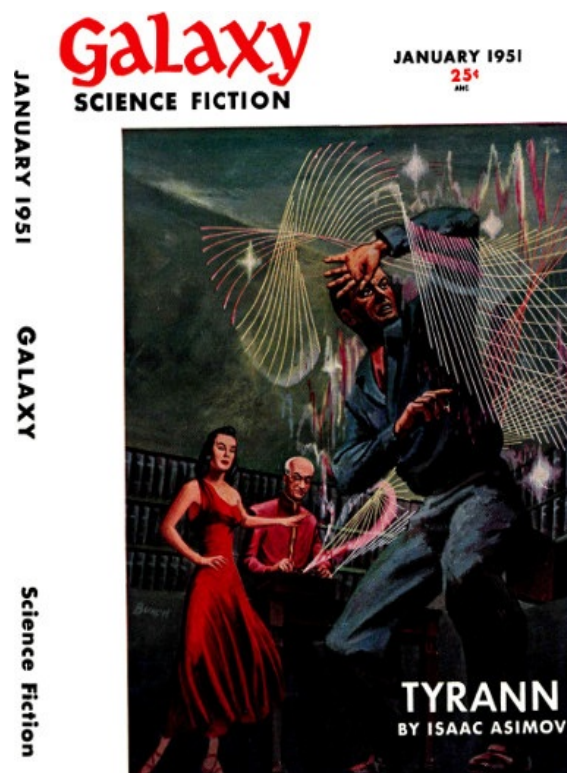
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MADE TO MEASURE ***



Made to Measure

By WILLIAM CAMPBELL GAULT

Illustrated by L. WOROMAY

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**Somewhere is an ideal mate for every man
and woman, but Joe wasn't willing to bet
on it. He was a man who rolled his own!**

The pressure tube locks clicked behind them, as the train moved on. It was a strange, sighing click and to Joe it sounded like, "She's not right—she's not right—she's not right—"

So, finally, he said it. "She's not right."

Sam, who was riding with him, looked over wonderingly. "Who isn't?"

"Vera. My wife. She's not right."

Sam frowned. "Are you serious, Joe? You mean she's—?" He tapped his temple.

"Oh, no. I mean she's not what I want."

"That's why we have the Center," Sam answered, as if quoting, which he was. "With the current and growing preponderance of women over men, something had to be done. I think we've done it."

Sam was the Director of the Domestic Center and a man sold on his job.

"You've done as well as you could," Joe agreed in an argumentative way. "You've given some reason and order to the marital competition among women. You've almost eliminated illicit relations. You've established a basic security for the kids. But the big job? You've missed it completely."

"Thanks," Sam said. "That's a very small knife you've inserted between my shoulder blades, but I'm thin-skinned." He took a deep breath. "What, in the opinion of the Junior Assistant to the Adjutant Science Director, was the *big* job?"

Joe looked for some scorn in Sam's words, found it, and said, "The big job is too big for a sociologist."

Sam seemed to flinch. "I didn't think that axe would fit alongside the knife. I underestimated you."

"No offense," Joe said. "It's just that you have to deal with human beings."

"Oh," Sam said. "Now it comes. You know, for a minute I forgot who you were. I forgot you were the greatest living authority on robots. I was thinking of you as my boyhood chum, good old Joe. You're beyond that now, aren't you?"

"Beyond my adolescence? I hope so, though very few people are." Joe looked at Sam squarely. "Every man wants a perfect wife, doesn't he?"

Sam shrugged. "I suppose."

"And no human is perfect, so no man gets a perfect wife. Am I right, so far?"

"Sounds like it."

"Okay." Joe tapped Sam's chest with a hard finger. "I'm going to make a perfect wife." He tapped his own chest. "For me, just for me, the way I want her. No human frailties. Ideal."

"A perfect robot," Sam objected.

"A wife," Joe corrected. "A person. A human being."

"But without a brain."

"With a brain. Do you know anything about cybernetics, Sam?"

"I know just as much about cybernetics as you know about people. Nothing."

"That's not quite fair. I'm not sentimental about people, but it's inaccurate to say I don't know anything about them. *I'm* a person. I think I'm—discerning and sensitive."

"Sure," Sam said. "Let's drop the subject."

"Why?"

"Because you're talking nonsense. A person without faults is not a person. And if—it or he—she were, I don't think I'd care to know him or her or it."

"Naturally. You're a sentimentalist. You've seen so much misery, so much human error, so much stupidity that you've built up your natural tolerance into a sloppy and unscientific sentimentality. It happens to sociologists all the time."

"Joe, I'm not going to argue with you. Only one thing I ask. When you—break the news to Vera, break it gently. And get her back to the Center as quickly as you can. She's a choice, rare

number."

Joe said nothing to that. Sam looked miserable. They sat there, listening to the swishing, burring clicks of the airlocks, two friends—one who dealt with people and had grown soft, the other who dealt with machines and might not have grown at all.

As the car rose for the Inglewood station, Sam looked over, but Joe's eyes were straight ahead. Sam got up and out of the seat.

There was a whispering sigh of escaping air and the sunlight glare of the Inglewood station, synthetic redwood and chrome and marble.

Sam was out of the cylindrical, stainless steel car and hurrying for the Westchester local when Joe came out onto the platform. Sam was annoyed, it was plain.

Joe's glance went from his hurrying friend to the parking lot, and his coupe was there with Vera behind the wheel. It was only a three block walk, but she had to be there to meet him, every evening. That was her major fault, her romantic sentimentality.

"Darling," she said, as he approached the coupe. "Sweetheart. Have a good day?"



He kissed her casually. "Ordinary." She slid over and he climbed in behind the wheel. "Sat with Sam Tullgren on the train."

"Sam's nice."

He turned on the ignition and said, "Start." The motor obediently started and he swung out of the lot, onto Chestnut. "Sam's all right. Kind of sentimental."

"That's what I mean."

Joe was silent. The coupe went past a row of solar homes and turned on Fulsom. Three houses from the corner, he turned into their driveway.

"You're awfully quiet," Vera said.

"I'm thinking."

"About what?" Her voice was suddenly strained. "Sam didn't try to sell you—"

"A new wife?" He looked at her. "What makes you think that?"

"You're thinking about me, about trading me in. Joe, haven't I—darling, is there—?" She broke off, looking even more miserable than Sam had.

"I don't intend to trade you in," he said quietly.

She took a deep breath.

He didn't look at her. "But you're going back to the Center."

She stared at him, a film of moisture in her eyes. She didn't cry or ask questions or protest. Joe wished she would. This was worse.

"It's not your fault," he said, after a moment. "I'm not going to get another. You're as ideal, almost, as a human wife can ever be."

"I've tried so hard," she said. "Maybe I tried too hard."

"No," he said, "it isn't your fault. Any reasonable man would be delighted with you, Vera. You won't be at the Center long."

"I don't want a reasonable man," she said quietly. "I want you, Joe. I—I loved you."

He had started to get out of the car. He paused to look back. "Loved? Did you use the past tense?"

"I used the past tense." She started to get out on her side of the car. "I don't want to talk about it."

"But I do," he told her. "Is this love something you can turn on and off like a faucet?"

"I don't care to explain it to you," she said. "I've got to pack." She left the car, slammed the door, and moved hurriedly toward the house.

Joe watched her. Something was troubling him, something he couldn't analyze, but he felt certain that if he could, it would prove to be absurd.

He went thoughtfully into the living room and snapped on the telenews. He saw troops moving by on foot, a file of them dispersed along a Brazilian road. He turned the knob to another station and saw the huge stock market board, a rebroadcast. Another twist and he saw a disheveled, shrieking woman being transported down some tenement steps by a pair of policemen. The small crowd on the sidewalk mugged into the camera.

He snapped it off impatiently and went into the kitchen. The dinette was a glass-walled alcove off this, and the table was set. There was food on his plate, none on Vera's.

He went to the living room and then, with a mutter of impatience, to the door of the back bedroom. She had her grips open on the low bed.

"You don't have to leave tonight, you know."

"I know."

"You're being very unreasonable."

"Am I?"

"I wasn't trying to be intentionally cruel."

"Weren't you?"

His voice rose. "Will you stop talking like some damned robot? Are you a human being, or aren't you?"

"I'm afraid I am," she said, "and that's why I'm going back to the Center. I've changed my mind. I want to get registered. I want to find a *man*."

She started to go past him, her grip in her hand. He put a hand on her shoulder. "Vera, you—"

Something flashed toward his face. It was her slim, white hand, but it didn't feel slim and white. She said, "I can see now why you weren't made *Senior* Assistant to the Adjutant Science Director. You're a stupid, emotionless mechanic. A machine."

He was still staring after her when the door slammed. He thought of the huge Domestic Center with its classes in Allure, Boudoir Manners, Diet, Poise, Budgeting. That vast, efficient, beautifully decorated Center which was the brain child of Sam Tullgren, but which still had to deal with imperfect humans.

People, people, people ... and particularly women. He rose, after a while, and went into the dinette. He sat down and stared moodily at his food.

Little boys are made of something and snails and puppydogs' tails. What are little girls made of? Joe didn't want a little girl; he wanted one about a hundred and twenty-two pounds and five feet, four inches high. He wanted her to be flat where she should be and curved where she should be, with blonde hair and gray-green eyes and an exciting smile.

He had a medical degree, among his others. The nerves, muscles, flesh, circulatory system could be made—and better than they were ever made naturally. The brain would be cybernetic and fashioned after his own, with his own mental background stored in the memory circuits.

So far, of course, he had described nothing more than a robot of flesh and blood. The spark, now—what distinguished the better-grade robots from people? Prenatal heat, that was it. Incubation. A mold, a heated mold. Warmth, the spark, the sun, life.

For the skin, he went to Pete Celano, the top syntho-dermatologist in the Department.

"Something special?" Pete asked. "Not just a local skin graft? What then?"

"A wife. A perfect wife."

Pete's grin sagged baffledly. "I don't get it, Joe. Perfect how?"

"In all ways." Joe's face was grave. "Someone ideal to live with."

"How about Vera? What was wrong with her?"

"A sentimentalist, too romantic, kind of—well, maybe not dumb, exactly, but—"

"But not perfect. Who is, Joe?"

"My new wife is going to be."

Pete shrugged and began putting together the ingredients for the kind of skin Joe had specified.

They're all the same, Joe thought, Sam and Pete and the rest. They seemed to think his idea childish. He built the instillers and incubator that night. The mold would be done by one of the Department's engravers. Joe had the sketches and dimensions ready.

Wednesday afternoon, Burke called him in. Burke was the Senior assistant, a job Joe had expected and been miffed about. Burke was a jerk, in Joe's book.

This afternoon, Burke's long nose was twitching and his thin face was gravely bleak. He had a clipped, efficient way of speaking.

"Tired, Joe?"

"What do you mean?"

"Not hitting the ball, not on the beam, no zipperoo."

"I'm—yes, I guess you're right. I've been working at home on a private project."

"Scientific?"

"Naturally."

"Anything in particular?"

Joe took a breath, looked away, and back at Burke. "Well, a wife."

A frown, a doubtful look from the cold, blue eyes. "Robot? Dishwasher and cook and phone answerer and like that?"

"More than that."

Slightly raised eyebrows.

"More?"

"Completely human, except she will have no human faults."

Cool smile. "Wouldn't be human, then, of course."

"*Human, but without human faults, I said!*"

"You raised your voice, Joe."

"I did."

"I'm the Senior Assistant. Junior Assistants do not raise their voices to Senior Assistants."

"I thought you might be deaf, as well as dumb," Joe said.

A silence. The granite face of Burke was marble, then steel and finally chromium. His voice matched it. "I'll have to talk to the Chief before I fire you, of course. Department rule. Good afternoon."

"Go to hell."

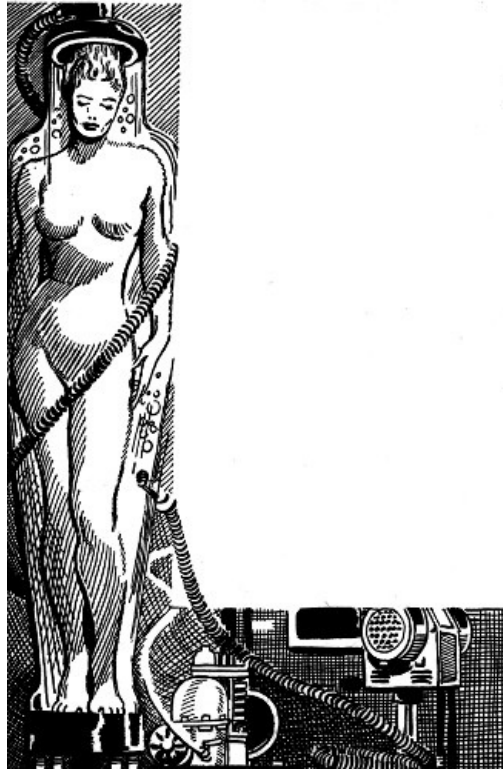
Joe went back to his desk and burned. He started with a low flame and fed it with the grievances of the past weeks. When it began to warm his collar, he picked up his hat and left.

Click, burr, click went the airlocks. Very few riders, this time of the afternoon. The brain would go in, intact, and then the knowledge instiller would work during the incubation period, feeding the adolescent memories to the retentive circuits. She would really spend her mental childhood in the mold, while the warmth sent the human spark through her body.

Robot? Huh! What did they know? A human being, a product of science, a *flawless* human being.

The rise, the big hiss of the final airlock, and Inglewood. Joe stood on the platform a second, looking for his car, and then realized she wasn't there. She hadn't been there for a week, and he'd done that every night. Silly thing, habit. Human trait.

Tonight, he'd know. The flesh had been in the mold for two days. The synthetic nerves were plump and white under the derma-ray, the fluxo heart was pumping steadily, the entire muscular structure kept under pneumatic massage for muscle tone.



He'd thought of omitting the frowning muscles, but realized it would ruin the facial contours. They weren't, however, under massage and would not be active.

And the mind?

Well, naturally it would be tuned to his. She'd know everything he knew. What room was there for disagreement if the minds were the same? Smiling, as she agreed, because she couldn't frown. Her tenderness, her romanticism would have an intensity variable, of course. He didn't want one of these grinning simperers.

He remembered his own words: "Is this love something you can turn on and off like a faucet?" Were his own words biting him, or only scratching him? Something itched. An intensity variable was not a faucet, though unscientific minds might find a crude, allegorical resemblance.

To hell with unscientific minds.

He went down to the basement. The mold was 98.6. He watched the knowledge instiller send its minute current to the head end of the mold. The meter read less than a tenth of an amp. The slow, plastic pulse of the muscle tone massage worked off a small pump near the foot of the mold.

On the wall, the big master operating clock sent the minute currents to the various bodily sections, building up the cells, maintaining the organic functions. In two hours, the clock would shut off all power, the box would cool, and there would be his—Alice. Well, why not Alice? She had to have a name, didn't she?

Warmth, that was the difference between a human and a robot, just warmth, just the spark. Funny he'd never thought of it before. Warmth was—it had unscientific connotations. It wasn't, though.

He went upstairs and fried some eggs. Twice a day, for a week, he had fried eggs. Their flavor was overrated.

Then he went into the living room and snapped on the ball game.

Martin was on third and Pelter was at bat. On the mound, the lank form of Dorffberger cast a long, grotesque shadow in the afternoon sun. Dorffberger chewed and spat and wiped his nose with the back of his glove. He looked over at third and yawned.

At the plate, Pelter was digging in. Pelter looked nervous.

Joe said, "Bet that Dorffberger fans him. He's got the Indian sign on Pelter."

Then he realized he was talking to himself. Damn it. On the telenews screen, Dorffberger looked right into the camera and nodded. He was winding up, and the director put the ball into slow motion. Even in slow motion, it winged.

"Ho-ho!" Joe said. "You can't hit what you can't see."

Pelter must have seen it. He caught it on the fat part of the bat, twisting into it with all his hundred and ninety pounds. The impact rattled the telenews screen and the telescopic cameras took over. They followed the ball's flight about halfway to Jersey and then the short-range eyes came back to show Pelter crossing the plate, and Martin waiting there to shake his hand.

Joe snapped off the machine impatiently. Very unscientific game, baseball. No rhyme or reason to it. He went out onto the porch.

The grass was dry and gray; he'd forgotten to set the sprinkler clock, Vera's old job. Across the street, Dan Harvey sat with his wife, each with a drink. Sat with his human wife, the poor fish. They looked happy, though. Some people were satisfied with mediocrities. Unscientific people.

Why was he restless? Why was he bored? Was he worried about his job? Only slightly; the Chief thought a lot of him, a hell of a lot. The Chief was a great guy for seniority and Burke had it, or Joe would certainly have been Senior Assistant.

The stirring in him he didn't want to analyze and he thought of the days he'd courted Vera, going to dances at the Center, playing bridge at the Center, studying Greek at the Center. A fine but too well-lighted place. You could do everything but smooch there; the smooching came after the declaration of intentions and a man was bound after the declaration to go through with the wedding, to live with his chosen mate for the minimum three months of the adjustment period.

Adjustment period ... another necessity for humans, for imperfect people. Across the street, the perfectly adjusted Harveys smiled at each other and sipped their drinks. Hell, that wasn't adjustment, that was surrender.

He got up and went into the living room; fighting the stirring in him, the stirring he didn't want to analyze and find absurd. He went into the bathroom and studied his lean, now haggard face. He looked like hell. He went into the back bedroom and smelled her perfume and went quickly from the house and into the backyard.

He sat there until seven, listening to the throb from the basement. The molecule agitator should have the flesh firm and finished now, nourished by the select blood, massaged by the pulsating plastic.

At seven, she should be ready.

At seven, he went down to the basement. His heart should have been hammering and his mind expectant, but he was just another guy going down to the basement.

The pumps had stopped, the agitator, the instiller. He felt the mold; it was cool to the touch. He lifted the lid, his mind on Vera for some reason.



A beauty. The lid was fully back and his mate sat up, smiled and said, "Hello, Joe."

"Hello, Alice. Everything all right?"

"Fine."

Her hair was a silver blonde, her features a blend of the patrician and the classical. Her figure was neither too slim nor too stout, too flat nor too rounded. Nowhere was there any sag.

"Thought we'd drop over to the Harveys' for a drink," Joe said. "Sort of show you off, you know."

"Ego gratification, Joe?"

"Of course. I've some clothes upstairs for you."

"I'm sure they're lovely."

"They are lovely."

While she dressed, he phoned the Harveys. He explained about Vera first, because Vera was what the Harveys considered a good neighbor.

Dan Harvey said sympathetically, "It happens to the best of us. Thinking of getting a new one, Joe?"

"I've got one right here. Thought I'd drop over, sort of break the ice."

"Great," Dan said. "Fine. Dandy."

The event was of minor importance, except for the revelation involved.

The Harveys had a gift for putting guests at ease, the gift being a cellar full of thirty-year-old bourbon the elder Harvey had bequeathed them at the end of their adjustment period.

The talk moved here and there, over the bourbon, Alice sharing in it rarely, though nodding when Joe was talking.

Then, at mention of someone or other, Mrs. Harvey said tolerantly, "Well, none of us are perfect, I guess."

Alice smiled and answered, "Some of us are satisfied with mediocrities in marriage."

Mrs. Harvey frowned doubtfully. "I don't quite understand, dear. In any marriage, there has to be adjustment. Dan and I, for example, have adjusted very well."

"You haven't adjusted," Alice said smilingly. "You've surrendered."

Joe coughed up half a glass of bourbon, Dan turned a sort of red-green and Mrs. Harvey stared with her mouth open. Alice smiled.

Finally, Mrs. Harvey said, "Well, I never—"

"Of all the—" Dan Harvey said.

Joe rose and said, "Must get to bed, got to get to bed."

"Here?" Alice asked.

"No, of course not. Home. Let's go, dear. Have to rush."

Alice's smile had nothing sentimental about it.

He didn't berate her until morning. He wanted time to cool off, to look at the whole thing objectively. It just wouldn't get objective, though.

At breakfast, he said, "That was tactless last night. Very, very tactless."

"Yes, Joe. Tact requires deception. Tact is essentially deception."

When had he said that? Oh, yes, at the Hydra Club lecture. And it was true and he hated deception and he'd created a wife without one.

He said, "I'll have to devise a character distiller that won't require putting you back in the mold."

"Of course, dear. Why?"

"You need just a touch of deception, just a wee shade of it."

"Of course, Joe."

So she had tact.

He went to the office with very little of the absurdity mood stirring in him. He'd had a full breakfast, naturally.

At the office, there was a note on his desk: *Mr. Behrens wants to see you immediately*. It bore his secretary's initials. Mr. Behrens was the Chief.

He was a fairly short man with immense shoulders and what he'd been told was a classical head. So he let his hair grow, and had a habit of thrusting his chin forward when he listened. He listened to Joe's account of the interview with Burke.

When Joe had finished, the Chief's smile was tolerant. "Ribbing him, were you? Old Burke hasn't much sense of humor, Joe."

Joe said patiently, "I wasn't ribbing him. I took her out of the mold last night. I ate breakfast with her this morning. She's—beautiful, Chief. She's ideal."

The Chief looked at him for seconds, his head tilted.

Joe said, "Heat, that's what does it. If you'd like to come for dinner with us tonight, Chief, and see for yourself—"

The Chief nodded. "I'd like that."

They left a little early to avoid the crowd in the tube. Burke saw them leaving, and his long face grew even longer.

On the trip, Joe told his boss about the cybernetic brain, about his background and his beliefs stored in the memory circuits, and the boss listened quietly, not committing himself with any comments.

But he did say, "I certainly thought a lot of Vera. You wouldn't have to warm her in any incubating mold."

"Wait'll you see this one," Joe said.

And when she walked into the living room at home, when she acknowledged the introduction to the Chief, Joe knew the old boy was sold. The Chief could only stare.

Joe took him down to the basement then to show him the molecule agitator, the memory feeder, the instillers.

The old boy looked it over and said, quite simply, "I'll be damned!"

They went up to a perfect dinner—and incident number two.

The Chief was a sentimentalist and he'd just lost a fine friend. This friend was his terrier, Murph, who'd been hit by a speeding car.

The story of Murph from birth to death was a fairly long one, but never dull. The Chief had a way with words. Even Joe, one of the world's top-ranking non-sentimentalists, was touched by the tale. When they came to the end, where Murph had lain in his master's arms, whimpering, as though to comfort him, trying to lick his face, Joe's eyes were wet and the drink wobbled in his hand.

The Chief finished in a whisper, and looked up from the carpet he'd been staring at through the account.

And there was Alice, sitting erect, a smile of perfect joy on her face. "How touching," she said, and grinned.

For one horror-stricken second, the Chief glared at her, and then his questioning eyes went to Joe.

"She can't frown," Joe explained. "The muscles are there, but they need massage to bring them to life." He paused. "I wanted a smiling wife."

The Chief inhaled heavily. "There are times when a smile is out of order, don't you think, Joe?"

"It seems that way."

It didn't take long. Massage, orientation, practice, concentration. It didn't take long, and she was so willing to cooperate. Golly, she was agreeable. She was more than that; she voiced his thoughts before he did. Because of the mental affinity, you see. He'd made sure of that.



She could frown now and she had enough deception to get by in almost any company. These flaws were necessary, but they were still flaws and brought her closer to being—human.

At the office on Saturday morning, Sam Tullgren dropped in. Sam said, "I've been hearing things, Joseph."

"From Vera? At the Center?"

Sam shook his head. "Vera's been too busy to have much time for the director. She's our most popular number." Sam paused. "About the new one. Hear she's something to see."

"You heard right. She's practically flawless, Sam. She's just what a man needs at home." His voice, for some reason, didn't indicate the enthusiasm he should have felt.

Sam chewed one corner of his mouth. "Why not bring her over, say, tonight? We'll play some bridge."

That would be something. Two minds, perfectly in harmony, synchronized, working in partnership. Joe's smile was smug. "We'll be there. At eight-thirty."

Driving over to Westchester that night, Joe told Alice, "Sam's a timid bidder. His wife's inclined to overbid. Plays a sacrificing game when she knows it will gain points. Our job will be to make her oversacrifice."

Sam's eyes opened at sight of her; his wife's narrowed. Joe took pride in their reaction, but it was a strange, impersonal pride.

They had a drink and some small talk, and settled around the table. It was more like a seance than a game.

They bid and made four clubs, a heart. Sam's wife got that determined look. With the opposition holding down one leg of the rubber, she figured to make the next bid a costly one.

She won it with six diamonds, and went down nine tricks, doubled. Sam started to say something, after the debacle, but one look at his wife's anguished countenance stopped him short of audibility.

Sam said consolingly, "I'm such a lousy bidder, dear. I must have given you the wrong idea of my hand."

Next time, Sam made up for his timidity. Sam, with one heart in his hand, tried a psychic. "One heart," he said firmly.

Sam knew there was a good chance the hearts were in the oppositions' hands, and this looked like a fine defensive tactic.

However, his wife, with a three-suit powerhouse, couldn't conceive of a psychic from Sam. She had need of only a second round stopper in hearts and a small slam in no trump was in the bag. She had no hearts, but timid Sam was undoubtedly holding the ace-king.

She bid six no-trump, which was conservative for her. She didn't want to make the mistake of having Sam let the bid die.

Joe had the ace, king, queen and jack of hearts and a three to lead to Alice's hand. Alice finished up the hearts for a total of seven tricks, and this time it was Mrs. Tullgren who opened her mouth to speak.

But she remembered Sam's kindness in the former hand, and she said, "It was all my fault, darling. To think I couldn't recognize a psychic, just because it came from you. I think we're overmatched, sweet." She paused to smile at Joe. "Up against the man who invented the comptin-reduco-determina." She added, as an afterthought, "And his charming, brilliant new wife."

Which brought about incident number three.

Alice turned to Mrs. Tullgren sweetly and asked, "Don't you really understand the comptin-reduco-determina?"

"Not even faintly," Mrs. Tullgren answered. She smiled at Alice.

The smile faded after about ten minutes. For Alice was telling her *all* about the comptin-reduco-determina. For an hour and nineteen minutes, Alice talked to this woman who had been humiliated twice, telling her all the things about the famous thinking machine that Mrs. Tullgren didn't want to know.

It wasn't until Alice was through talking animatedly that the entranced Joe began to suspect that perhaps the Tullgrens weren't as interested in the dingus as a scientific mind would assume.

They weren't. There was a strain after that, a decided heaviness to the rest of the evening. Sam seemed to sigh with relief when they said good night.

In the car, Joe was thoughtful. Halfway home, he said, "Darling, I think you know too much—for a female, that is. I think you'll have to have a go with the knowledge-instiller. In reverse, of course."

"Of course," she agreed.

"I don't object to females knowing a lot. The world does."

"Of course," she said.

She was a first model and, therefore, experimental. These bugs were bound to show up. She was now less knowing, more deceptive, and she could frown.

She began to remind him of Vera, which didn't make sense.

Alice was sad when he was sad, gay when he was gay, and romantic to the same split-degree in the same split-second. She even told him his old jokes with the same inflection he always used.

Their mood affinity was geared as closely as the comptin-reduco-determina. What more could a man want? And, damn it, why should Vera's perfume linger in that back bedroom?

The fumigators could do nothing. They left, after the third trip, shaking their heads. Joe stood in the doorway, insisting he could still smell it.

Alice said, "It's probably mental, dear. Perhaps you still—still—what's that word? Perhaps you still love her."

"How could you think that?" he asked. "How? How could you think that unless I was thinking it?"

"I couldn't. I love you, too, Joe, but you know why that is."

"What do you mean?"

"We both love you, Joe."

"Both? You and Vera?"

"No. You and I, we both love *you*."

"That," said Joe peevishly, "is ridiculous. If you could think for yourself, you'd know it was ridiculous."

"Of course," she agreed. And frowned, because he was frowning.

"You act like a robot," Joe said.

She nodded.

"That's all you are," Joe went on evenly, "a robot. No volition."

She nodded, frowning.

"I'm sick of it."

She said nothing, sympathetically looking sick.

And then he smiled and said, "I'm not stumped. Not the inventor of the comptin-reduco-determina. By Harry, I'll give you volition. I'll give you enough volition to make you dizzy."

And because he was smiling, she was smiling. And only a very perceptive person might notice that her smile seemed to have an intensity, an anticipation slightly beyond his.

He got to work on it that night. He would have to erase some of his mental background from her brain. He wanted her no less intelligent, no less discerning, but with enough of a change in background to give her a viewpoint of her own. He labored until midnight, and tumbled into bed with a headache.

Next morning, at breakfast, he told her, "We'll try it out tonight. After that, you'll be a person."

"Of course. And will you love me, Joe?"

"More coffee, please," he answered.

At the office, there was another note from his secretary: *Mr. Burke wants to see you. At your convenience.*

At your convenience? Was Burke going soft? Joe went right in.

Burke was smiling, a miracle in itself. Burke's voice was jovial. "The Chief's been telling me about the new wife, Joe. I guess I owe you an apology."

"Not at all," Joe said. "I had no right to be rude. I was a little overworked—at home. I wasn't myself."

Burke nodded smugly, soaking it up. "Beautiful, the Chief tells me. Am I going to meet her, Joe?"

"If you want. How about tonight, for dinner? I've got something new planned. I'm giving her volition. Maybe you'll want to watch."

"Volition?"

Joe went on to explain about volition, making it as simple as he could, to match Burke's mind.

"That," Burke said when he'd finished, "I want to see."

They went home in the crowded Inglewood tube. Sam was there, but Sam seemed to avoid them, for some reason. All the way home, Joe had the uncomfortable feeling that Burke didn't believe any part of this business, that Burke was making the trip only to substantiate his own misconceptions.

But when Alice came into the living room, smiling brightly, extending her hand to the Senior Assistant, Joe had a gratifying glimpse of Burke's face.

Burke was lost. Burke stared and swallowed and grinned like a green stage hand at a burlesque show. Burke's smile was perpetual and nauseating. Even in the face of Alice's cool reserve.

The dinner was fine, the liquor mellow.

Then Joe said, "Well, Alice, it's time for the volition. It's time for your *birth* as a person."

"Of course," she said, and smiled.

They went down into the basement, the three of them; she sat in the chair he'd prepared and he clamped on the wired helmet and adjusted the electrodes.

Burke said weakly, "It isn't—dangerous, is it?"

"Dangerous?" Joe stared at him. "Of course not. Remember how I explained it?"

"I—uh—my memory—" Burke subsided.

She closed her eyes and smiled. Joe threw the switch. She'd have knowledge; she'd have the memory of her past few days of existence as his alter ego. She'd have volition.

The contact clock took over. Her eyes remained closed, but her smile began to fade as the second hand moved around and around the big, contact-studded dial.

Joe was smiling, though she wasn't. Joe was filled with a sense of his own creative power, his own inventive genius and gratification at the worried frown on the face of the imbecile Burke.

Then the clock stopped and there was a buzz; the meters dropped to zero. Alice opened her eyes. For the first time, as a *person*, she opened her eyes.

Her smile was back. But she was looking at Burke. Looking at Burke and smiling!

"Baby," she said.

Burke looked puzzled, but definitely pleased. In all Burke's adult life, no female had ever looked at him like that.

Joe said tolerantly, "You're a little confused yet, Alice. *I'm* your husband."

"You?" She stared at him. "Do you think I've forgotten you? Do you think I don't know you, after living inside your brain, almost? You *monster*, you egocentric, selfish, humorless walking equation. You're not my husband and I'd like to see you prove that you are."

Now it was only Burke who smiled. "By George," he said, "that's right. There's no wedding on record, is there, Joe?"

"Wedding?" Joe repeated blankly. "I made her. I created her. Of course there's no—"

"Of course, of course, of course," Alice shrilled. "That's all you know. You're the original 'of course' kid. Things aren't that certain, Junior. I've known you just long enough and just well enough to detest you." Now she pointed at Burke. "*That's* what I want. That's my kind of man."

Burke gulped and grinned, nodded. "To coin a phrase, you said it, kiddo." He smiled at Joe. "I'll run her right down to the Center and get her registered, and take out an intent option. I guess we can't fight fate, Joe, can we?"

Joe took a deep breath of air. "I guess not. I guess it's—kismet."

He was still standing there when he heard the front door slam. He kept staring at the machine, not seeing it, hearing instead all she had said. She knew him better than anyone who lived. Better, actually, than he knew himself, because she didn't rationalize, being outside his mental sphere now. You might say she'd been in his mind and detested what she had found there.

It was a crawling feeling, the knowledge that he had been guilty of rationalization himself, that he had faults his mind refused to acknowledge. He couldn't doubt that he was all the cold and gruesome things she had called him. The worst shock, however, was that he had studied psychology and honestly had believed he was an objective thinker.

But who, he realized, could be completely honest about himself?

He looked at the machine and saw the non-rationalization electrodes. He had used that on her and she had seen clearly what he still couldn't recognize. What he needed, apparently, was a good, objective look at his own mind.

He set the contact clock for objectivity maximum and clamped the electrodes on his head. He reached for the switch, had to close his eyes before he could throw it.



He didn't see the second hand going around and around the clock, but he felt the prejudice-erasing impulses, the objective-appraisal stimuli, revealing memories that had shaped him, humiliations that had twisted him and been forgotten, urgings and longings and guilts that he had never known existed.

He saw himself. It was highly unpleasant.

There was a final buzz and the clock stopped. Joe opened his eyes, both figuratively and literally. He unclamped the helmet with the electrodes and stepped from the chair, holding onto the arm, looking at the mirrored inside walls of the mold.

He had made an image of himself and it had turned on him. Now he had made—what? An image of his image's image of him? It was very confusing, yet somehow clear.

He went slowly up the stairs, smelling the perfume. It wasn't Alice's and that was peculiar, because she had practically swabbed herself with the stuff, knowing he liked it, and she had just left.

It was Vera's perfume.

He remembered her waiting at the station, making her ridiculous bids at the card table, gossiping witlessly with Mrs. Harvey, hitting her thumb when she tried to hang his pictures in the study.

Vera....

He prowled dissatisfiedly through the house, as though in search of something, and then went out to the car. He took the super-pike almost all the way to the Center. There were bright cards on posts every few hundred feet:

**IT'S NOT TOO LATE
TO GET A MATE
THE GIRLS ARE GREAT
AT THE DOMESTIC CENTER**

He pulled into the sweeping circular drive at the huge group of buildings. A troupe of singing girls came out, dressed in majorette costumes, opened the door, helped him out, parked the car, escorted him into the lavish reception room. Music came from somewhere, soft and moody. There were murals all over the walls, every one romantic. A dispensing machine held engagement and wedding rings with a series of finger-holes on the left side for matching sizes.

The matron recognized him and said, "Mr. Tullgren has gone home for the day. Is there anything I can do?"

He told her what he wanted and she thumbed through a register.

"Yes, she's still here," the matron said finally. "She's refused exactly thirty-two offers up to

yesterday. You were thinking of a—reconciliation?"

Joe nodded with a new humility. "If she'll have me."

The matron smiled. "I think she will. Women are more understanding than men, usually. More romantic, you might say."

Nine-tenths of the building was brightly lighted, one-tenth rather dim. In the dim tenth were the post-intent rooms, the reconciliation chambers.

Joe sat on a yellow love-seat in one of the empty reconciliation chambers, leafing through, but not seeing, a copy of a fashion magazine. Then there were steps in the hall, familiar steps, and he smelled the perfume before she came in.

She stood timidly at the archway, but Joe was even more unsure and weak in the legs and he had trouble with his breathing.

"Joe," Vera said.

"Vera," he answered.

It wasn't much, but it seemed to be what both had in mind.

"Was there something you wanted to tell me?" she asked. "Something important?"

"It's important to me, Vera," he said humbly. "I hope it's just as important to you."

She looked brightly at him.

"I find it very difficult to put into words," he stumbled. "The usual expressions of this emotion are so hackneyed. I would like to find some other way to say it."

"Say what?"

"That I love you."

She ran to him. The impact knocked the breath out of both of them, but neither noticed.

"Isn't the old phrase good enough, silly?" she scolded and kissed him. "I love you too, lover baby."

Behind them, at the key words, the sonic-signal closed the hidden doors in the archway and they were alone in the reconciliation chamber.

Joe discovered that Sam Tullgren, Director of the Domestic Center, had thought of everything to make reconciliations complete.

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