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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TROUBLEMAKERS ***



THE TROUBLEMAKERS

By GEORGE O. SMITH

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

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***What did Genetics and Hansen's Folly have
in common? Why, everything ... Genetics
was statistical and Hansen's Folly impossible!***

I

The living room reflected wealth, position, good taste. In size it was a full ten feet by fourteen, with nearly an eight-foot ceiling. Light was furnished by glow panels precisely balanced in color to produce light's most flattering tint for the woman who sat in a delicate chair of authentic, golden-veined blackwood.

The chair itself must have cost a fortune to ship from Tau Ceti Five. It was an ostentation in the eyes of the visitor, who viewed it as evidence of a self-indulgent attitude that would certainly make his job more difficult.

The air in the room was fresh and very faintly aromatic, pleasing. It came draftlessly refreshed at a temperature of seventy-six degrees and a relative humidity of fifty per cent and permitted the entry of no more than one foreign particle (dust) per cubic foot.

The coffee table was another ostentation, but for a different reason than the imported chair of blackwood. The coffee table was of mahogany—terrestrial mahogany—and therefore either antique, heirloom, or both, and in any combination of cases it was priceless. It gave the visitor some dark pleasure to sit before it with his comparison microscope parked on the polished mahogany surface, with the ease of one who always parked his tools on tables and stands made of treasure woods.

There were four persons. Paul Hanford swirled brandy in a snifter with a series of nervous gestures. Mrs. Hanford sat in the blackwood chair unhappily, despite the flattering glow of the wall-panels. Their daughter, Gloria, sat in such a way as to distract the visitor by presenting a target that his eyes could not avoid. Try as he would, his gaze kept straying to the slender, exposed bare ankle and the delicate, high-arched foot visible beneath the hem of the girl's dress.

Norman Ross, GSch, was the visitor, and he subvocalized his tenth self-indictment as he tore his gaze away from Gloria Hanford's ankle to look into Paul Hanford's face. Ross was the Scholar of Genetics for the local division of the Department of Domestic Tranquility and he should have known all about such things, but he obviously did not.

He said, "You can hardly blame yourselves, you know," although he did not really believe it.

"But what have we done wrong?" asked Mrs. Hanford in a plaintive voice.

Scholar Ross shook his head and caught his gaze in mid-stray before it returned all the way to that alluring ankle. "Genetics, my dear Mrs. Hanford, is a statistical science, not a precise science." He waved vaguely at the comparison microscope. "There are your backgrounds for seven generations. No one—and I repeat, *no one*—could have foreseen the issue of a headstrong, difficult offspring from the mating of characteristics such as these. I checked most carefully, most minutely, just to be certain that some obscure but important conflict had not been overlooked by the signing doctor. Doctors, however, do make mistakes."



Gloria Hanford dandled her calf provocatively and caused the hem of her skirt to rise another half-inch. The scholar's eyes swung, clung, and were jerked away again.

"What's wrong with me, Scholar Ross?" she asked in a throaty voice.

"You are headstrong, self-willed, wild, and—" his voice failed because he wanted to lash out at her for her brazen and deliberate display of her bare ankle; he struggled to find a drawing-room word for her that would not wholly offend the hapless parents and ultimately came up with—"meretricious."

Gloria said, "I'm all that just because I enjoy a little fun?"

"You may call it fun to scare people to death by flying your aircar below roof level along the city streets, but the Department of Air Traffic says that it is both dangerous and illegal."

"Pooh!"

Paul Hanford said, "Gloria, it isn't that you don't know better."

Mrs. Hanford said, "Paul, how have we failed as parents?"

Scholar Ross shook his head. "You haven't failed. You can't help it if your daughter is a throwback —"

"Throwback!" exclaimed Gloria.

"—to an earlier, more violent age when uncontrolled groups of headstrong youths formed gangs of New York and conducted open warfare upon one another for the control of Tammany Hall. Those wild days were the result of unregistered, unrestricted, and uncontrolled matings. Since no attempt was made to prevent the unfit from mating with the unfit, there were many generations of wild ones—troublemakers. It is not surprising that, with such a human heritage, an occasional wild one is born today."

The scholar took another surreptitious (he hoped) glance at the bare ankle and said, "No, you are not directly to blame. We know you wouldn't spawn a troublemaker willfully and maliciously. It's just an unfortunate accident. You must not despair over the past—but you *must* spend your efforts to calm the troubled future."

"What should we do, Scholar Ross?" asked Paul Hanford.

"I have to speak bluntly. Perhaps you'd prefer the ladies to leave."

"I'll not go," said Mrs. Hanford firmly, and Gloria added, "I'm not going to let you talk about me behind my back!"

"Very well. As Scholar of Genetics, I am head of the local Division of Domestic Tranquility. I would prefer to keep my district calm and peaceful, without the attention of the punitive authorities, and I'm sure you'd all prefer this, too."

"Absolutely!" said Paul Hanford.

"Now, then," said Scholar Ross, "for the immediate problem, we'll prescribe fifty milligrams of dociline, one tablet to be taken each night before retiring. This will place our young lady's frame of mind in a receptive mood to suggestions of gentler pursuits. As soon as possible, Mr. Hanford, subscribe to *Music To Live By* and have them pipe in Program G-252 every evening, starting shortly after dinnertime and signing off shortly after breakfast. Your daughter's dinnertime and breakfast I mean, and the outlet should be in her bedroom. It is not mandatory that she heed the program material all the time, but it must be available to set her moods. Finally, upon awakening, a twenty-five milligram tablet of nitrolabe will lower the patient's capacity for anticipating excitement during the day."

He paused for a moment thoughtfully, and added as if it were an aside, "I'd not go so far as to suggest that you—her parents—make a conscious effort to avoid listening to periods of Program G-252, but I'd definitely warn you not to fall into the habit of listening to it."

He eyed the ceiling thoughtfully, then consulted his notebook. "Come to think of it, I'll also give you a prescription for Program X-870 which you can use or not as you desire. Have this one piped into your bedroom, Mrs. Hanford, and try to strike a somewhat reasonable balance. Say no greater imbalance than about two of one to one of the other and if you, Mr. Hanford, spend any time listening to your daughter's program material, you should also counteract its effect by listening to an equal time of the program prescribed for Mrs. Hanford."

He turned back to Gloria and shook his head.

She smiled archly at him and asked, "Now what's wrong?"

"You," he told her bluntly. "If this delinquency weren't a mental disorder, I'd prescribe a ten milligram dose of micrograine to be taken at the first quickening of the pulse prior to excitement. I don't suppose you really regret your wildness, though, do you, Miss Hanford?"

She shook her head. "No, and I don't really enjoy the whole program you've laid out for me."

"I'd hardly expect anybody to approve of a program that is calculated to change their entire personality and character," said Scholar Ross. "But a bit of common logic will convince you that it is the better thing. Miss Hanford, you've simply *got* to conform."

"Why?" she demanded.

"We live in a free world, Miss Hanford, but it is a freedom diluted by our responsibility to our fellow-man. The density of population here on Earth is too high to permit rowdy behavior. Laws are not passed simply to curtail a man's freedom. They are passed to protect the innocent bystander—who is minding his own business—from the unruly, headstrong character who doesn't see anything wrong in disposing of empty beer bottles by dropping them out of his apartment window, and justifying his behavior by pointing out that it is a hundred-yard walk down the corridor to the trash chute. When we live so close together that no one can raise his voice in anger without disturbing his neighbor, then we have the right to pass laws against such a display of temper. It works both ways, Miss Hanford. By requiring people to behave themselves, we ultimately arrive at a social culture in which no one conducts himself in such a way as to anger his neighbor into violence. Have I made myself clear?"

"In other words," said Gloria, "if it's fun, hurry up and pass a law against it!"

"Well, hardly that—" the scholar began.

"Tell me," she interrupted. "How long am I going to be on this pill-and-lullaby diet?"

"It may be for a long time. In severe cases, it is for the rest of the patient's life. On the other hand, we have quite a bit of evidence that your urge to excitement may dwindle with maturity. Oh, we do not propose to make a pariah out of you. Marriage and motherhood have settling effects, too."

"My baby—!" cried Mrs. Hanford.

"Your baby," commented Paul Hanford in a very dry voice, "is a college graduate, twenty years old."

"Nobody's asked my opinion," complained Gloria, swinging her leg and hiking the hem of her skirt another half-inch above the slender ankle.

"Nobody will. However, Miss Hanford, I shall place your card in the 'eligible' file and have your characteristics checked. I'm sure that we can find a man who will be acceptable to you—and also to the department of Domestic Tranquility."

"Humph!"

"Sneer if you will, Miss Hanford. But marriage and motherhood have taken the 'hell' out of a lot of hell-raisers in the past."

was snappy as he announced himself.

Commander Breckenridge looked up at the young spaceman without expression, nodded curtly, and then looked down at the pile of papers neatly stacked in the center of his desk. Without saying a word, the commander fingered down through the pile until he came to a thin sheaf of papers stapled together. This file he withdrew, placed atop the stack, and then he proceeded to read every word of every page as if he were refreshing his memory about some minor incident that had become important only because of the upper-level annoyance it had caused.

When he finished, he looked up and said coldly, "I presume you know why you're here, Mr. Reed?"

"I can guess, sir—because of my technical suggestion."

"You are correct."

"And it's been accepted?" cried the junior spaceman eagerly.

"It has not!" snapped the superior officer. "In fact—"

"But, sir, I don't understand—"

"Silence!" said Commander Breckenridge. Almost automatically, his right hand slipped the top drawer open to expose the vial of tri-colored capsules. His hand stopped short of them, dangling into the drawer from the wrist resting on the edge. He looked down at the pills and seemed to be debating whether it would be better to conduct this painful interview as gentlemen should, or to let his righteous anger show.

"Mr. Reed," he said heavily, "your aptitudes and qualifications were reviewed most carefully by the Bureau of Personnel, and their considered judgment caused your replacement here, in the Bureau of Operations. You were *not*—and I repeat, *not*—placed in the Bureau of Research. Is this clear?"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Mr. Reed, I cannot object to the provisions in the Regulations whereby encouragement is given both the officers and men to proffer suggestions for the betterment of the Service. However, a shoe-maker should stick to his last. The benefit of this program becomes a detriment when any officer or man tries to invade other departments. This works both ways, Mr. Reed. There is not an officer in the whole Bureau of Research who can tell me a single thing about organizing my Bureau of Operations. Conversely, I would be completely stunned if any Operations officer were to come up with something that hasn't been known to the Bureau of Research for years."

"Yes, sir. I see your point, sir. But if the Bureau of Research has known about my suggestion for years, why isn't it being used?"

"Because, Mr. Reed, it will not work!"

"But, sir, it's *got* to work!"

"And you feel so firmly convinced of this that you had the temerity to bypass my office?"

"Sir, you yourself make a point of professing to know absolutely nothing about scientific matters."

"All right, we'll table this angle for a few minutes. Just what makes this notion of yours so important, Mr. Reed?"

"Sir," said Reed, "the maximum range for our most efficient spacecraft is only a bit over seventeen light-years to the point of no return. My suggestion deals with a means of extending that range a hundred times. Perhaps more. If it were my decision, sir, anything that even hinted at extending the cruising range would receive a maximum-urgency priority."

"In other words, you feel that anything we can do to extend our operations is the most important thing in the whole Space Service?"

"Well, sir, perhaps not *the* most important, but—"

"Your modesty is gratifying. I presume this modesty would prevent you from accepting any more than the Letter of Commendation from the Office of the Secretary?"

"I don't understand, sir."

"You don't? Mr. Reed, was your desire to improve the efficiency of Operations a simple desire to improve the Service—or did you hope that this brilliant suggestion would, perhaps, provide you with a better assignment?"

"I still do not understand."

"Oh, you don't? Mr. Reed, why did you join the Space Service in the first place?"

"Because, sir, I hoped that I could be instrumental in helping mankind to spread across the Galaxy."

"Mr. Reed, have you sand in your shoes?"

"Sir?"

The commander sighed. "You hoped to go along on the voyage, didn't you?"

"Well, sir, I did have a hope that I'd become a real spaceman."

"And you're disappointed?"

Howard Reed's face was wistful, torn between a desire to confide in his commanding officer and the fear of saying what he knew to be a sharp criticism of the Space Service.

Then Reed realized that he was in a bad pinch anyway, and so he said, "Sir, I'm commissioned as a junior spaceman, but in three years I've only made one short test flight—and only to Luna! I am competent to pilot—or at least that's what the flight simulators say in my checkout tests. I'm a junior spaceman—yet every time I apply for active space duty, I'm refused! Three years I've spent in the Service, sir, solving theoretical and hypothetical problems in space operations. But aside from one test flight to the Moon, I have yet to set a foot inside of a spacecraft, let alone stand on the soil of another world!"

"You must learn patience, Mr. Reed."

"*Patience*, sir? Look, sir, I took this sedentary duty until I'd had it up to here, and then I began to pry into the question of why we have a Space Force, complete with spacecraft, and still do so little space traveling. I found out. We're limited to a maximum range of seventeen light-years to the point of no return. Even a trip to Eden, Tau Ceti, our nearest colony, is eleven-point-eight light-years, and that takes prodigious power."

"Granted," said the commander.

"But now, sir, if we could increase our range by one hundred times, this does not necessarily mean that we must actually power the spacecraft for that point of no return. It also means that we could charge the ship with one one-hundredth of its former banks for the short trip to Eden, Tau Ceti—which would leave a *fantastic* amount of storage and cargo and passenger space. Sir, we could start real commerce!"

Commander Breckenridge gave no reaction.

"And you hoped to be among them."

"Yes, sir! As a kid, I read about mankind's first exploration of space two hundred years ago, sir. Of course, I couldn't hope to set foot on a new planet, since every possible planet within the seventeen-light-year range has been looked over. But I wanted to see space myself, sir—and I did hope that I might extend Man's frontier beyond our rather small limit."

"Yes, I can understand the impatience of youth," said Commander Breckenridge. "For that, I can forgive you. But for trying to do the other man's job, I cannot."

"Sir, you're as much as saying that no one can have a good technical idea but the technical people at the Bureau of Research."

In answer, the commander flipped over several pages of the file. He said: "Mister Reed, this is what resulted in your abortive attempt to gain a scientific ear instead of forwarding your suggestion through the standard channels. I'm going to quote some pertinent parts of a letter from Commander Briggs, head of the Bureau of Research. Listen:

"—young genius has rediscovered the line of mathematical argument known here at Research as 'Hansen's Folly' because it was first exploited by young Spaceman Hansen about a hundred and fifty years ago. Hansen's Folly is probably to be expected of a young, ambitious young officer with stars in his eyes. I'd be inclined to congratulate him—if it weren't for the fact that Hansen's Folly turns up with such regularity that we here at Research hold a regular pool against its next rediscovery. You'll be happy to know that you, your young genius, and your department have 'won' for me the great honor (?) of buying dinner for the crew at the Officers Club on Saturday next.

"Don't be too hard on young Reed; the rediscovery of Hansen's Folly takes a rather bright mind. However, Breck, I *will* congratulate your bright young man if he can—without any further clue—go back over his own mathematics and locate the flaw. I'll—"

"There's more of this, but it isn't germane," said Breckenridge quietly. "This is enough."

"Enough, sir?" repeated Reed blankly.

"Enough to let you know what goes on. Now, Mr. Reed, you've committed nothing but a brash act of bad taste in bypassing the standard channels. Such an indiscretion demands some form of punishment, but if I were to attempt to outline punishment officially, it would be unfortunately easy for some legal eagle to point out that your behavior was, to the best of your knowledge, intended for the betterment of the Service. And furthermore that I was wreaking vengeance upon your hapless soul for having made my name the brunt of jokes at the Officers Club."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"Being sorry is not enough, Mr. Reed. But I have a plan that will gratify everybody concerned. You want to become an active spaceman? Very well, your next tour of duty will be at the Space Force Station on the planet Eden, Tau Ceti. It will terminate when you have finally succeeded in locating the flaw in Hansen's Folly and can show the error to the satisfaction of Commander Briggs. Have I made myself clear, Mr. Reed?"

"Yes, sir, and thank you, sir. You're really doing me a favor, sir."

"Mr. Reed, despite the age-old platitude, it is wise to look the gift horse in the mouth, at least before saying thanks."

III

Scholar Norman Ross smiled at his host's statement. "Yes, indeed, Mr. Harrison! Arranging these things so that we can maintain the Norm is often a delicate and arduous task. There are restrictions, and there are many variables involved, the most sensitive of which are the feelings of the people involved."

"Your job must call for the ultimate in diplomacy," said Mrs. Harrison.

To his host's wife, Scholar Ross nodded. "Yet," he said as an afterthought, "of even greater value is a high regard for the perfect truth. This includes the self-discipline of admitting it when one has been wrong, and being able to state precisely how, where, why, and, most important, to what degree."

"I don't understand," said his hostess.

"Mrs. Harrison, let's consider Bertram."

She cast a glance at her son. In an earlier age, he would have been called "indolent." During dinner, Bertram had employed the correct fork, plied his knife properly, conversed with his partners on both sides—yet she knew something was wrong.

"Bertram," she said, "haven't you been forgetting your pills?"

"Sorry, Mother," replied the young man tonelessly.

Bertram arose and left, and Scholar Ross said, "This is what I mean, Mrs. Harrison. Genetics is not a precise science; it is statistical. We can consider highly favorable the mating of two well-balanced people, and we can predict that this union will produce well-balanced children. Unfortunately we cannot guarantee the desired results. Hence we have anomalies such as Bertram, whose problem is simply a lack of drive. Now this is no fault of yours, Mrs. Harrison, nor of yours, Mr. Harrison. It may be the fault of Genetics, but if it is our 'fault,' then the fault lies in the lack of total knowledge; but not in the misuse, or lack of use, of what knowledge we do already have."

"I see what you mean, Scholar Ross."

"You'll also see the opposite when the Hanfords arrive. Here we have parents as stable as you two. You'll pardon me if I say that if all four of your characteristic cards were dropped at once and I had been expected to render a considered opinion as to their most favorable mating combination, I could render no preference, so equal are you. However, your union has produced Bertram. Conversely, their mating has produced a girl who is wild, headstrong, willful."

Bertram returned, seated himself quietly, and when Scholar Ross stopped talking, Bertram said apologetically, "I took a double dose, Mother."

"Is that all right?" she asked Scholar Ross.

"Probably won't do any harm," he said.

Mr. Harrison cleared his throat. "I'm not sure that I approve of Bertram marrying a headstrong girl, Scholar Ross."

Mrs. Harrison said, "William, you know it's best."

"For Bertram?"

"Now here," said Scholar Ross, "we must cease considering the welfare of the individual alone and start thinking of him as a part of an integrated society. No man is an island, Mr. Harrison. In a less advanced culture, Bertram would have been permitted to meet contemporary personalities. Perhaps might have met someone who—as he does—lacks drive and initiative, and the result would have been a family of dull children. Had he been unlucky enough to marry a woman with drive and ambition, their children might have been normal, but the entire home life would have been an emotional battlefield. And that—"

"Isn't that what you're about to achieve?" asked Mr. Harrison.

"Not at all. We shall achieve the normal, happy children who will undoubtedly grow into fine, stable adults. To gain this end, of course, their home life must be happy and tranquil. We'll prescribe for them—allowing for the emotional change that results from marriage and—"

The doorbell interrupted the scholar's explanation. "Allow me," he said, rising and heading for the apartment door. The Harrisons followed him at a slight distance. It was the Hanfords.

There was the full round robin of introductions and small talk: "You had no trouble?" "No, the intercity beacon was running clear—" "Lovely apartment, Mrs. Harrison." "Mrs. Hanford, here in Philadelphia we feel that we're almost in the suburbs." "Got a treat for you, Hanford—been

saving a bottle of natural bourbon!" "That'll be a treat, all right!" "This is a real event. Scholar Ross." "You know, Mrs. Hanford, the vidphone hardly does you justice!" "Why, thank you!"

"Miss Hanford, may I present Bertram Harrison?" "How do you do?" "I do as I please. What's your excuse?" "Huh?" "*Now, Gloria!*" "Bertram, show Gloria the flower room. Go on, now!"

Scholar Ross watched the young couple walk through a French door to an outside terrace. He turned to Harrison and said, "Everything set?"

Harrison nodded. "Had a little trouble with the Music people till I used your priority. They said they'd have Program R-147 piped into the flower room. Frankly, I think R-215 is better."

Scholar Ross laughed gently. "Probably happy association."

"Wife and I still have it piped in for our anniversary," Mr. Harrison admitted.

"Good for you! But R-215 is for normal, happily well-balanced young people who'd probably fall in love without it. R-147 is sure-fire for emotional opposites."

"Well, we finally got the program piped in, so what do we do now?"

Scholar Ross smiled quietly. "We wait. We get acquainted, because there is a very high probability that you two families will be united through the marriage of your children. Then I shall enter a new file in the Genetics Bureau of the Department of Domestic Tranquility. We shall watch through the years as your grandchildren grow, and make periodic checks, and thereby advance mankind's knowledge of genetics."

"Doesn't this sort of master-minding ever give you a God complex?" asked Mr. Hanford.

"Not at all. Were I God, I'm sure I could arrange things a lot better."

"In what way?"

"By Man's own laws, we are prevented from doing active genetic research on the human race. We apply what happens to mice and fruit flies to the human family tree. We've known for centuries how to breed blue-eyed or brown-eyed people, or, if we wanted, we could make the race predominantly fat or thin, tall or short. However, our main aim is not the ultimate purity of any physical characteristic. Our goal is to produce a stable, happy people by eliminating the lethargic personality below and the excitable types above."

The scholar thought for a moment, and then, remembering Bertram's error in forgetting to take his go-pills, said, "But we are blocked by law. I can prescribe medication and therapy, but I have no power to force the patient to take the treatment. This is a most difficult problem, believe me."

"In what way?" asked Mrs. Harrison with some interest.

"The lethargic types are very apt to forget, or to dismiss the medication or the therapy as too much trouble. The overactive type is more likely to be water skiing on Lake Superior than sitting and listening to the tranquilizing strains of prescribed music, and the medication dumped down the drain instead of taken."

"You do have your problems, don't you?" said Mrs. Hanford sympathetically.

"Ah, yes. But our greatest problem is the overactive young female. Young males can be siphoned off in one way or another—work to be done that, unfortunately, females, can't also do." Scholar Ross smiled at Mr. and Mrs. Harrison. "So we actually are grateful for the lethargic types. They provide us with a fine sobering influence upon the—"

The scholar was interrupted by a wordless cry from beyond the French windows.

The Harrisons, the Hanfords, and Scholar Ross leaped to their feet and started for the terrace. They did not get all the way to the French doors, for Gloria Hanford came stamping in. Her eyes were bright, and she was dusting one palm with the other.

"What—?"

Gloria snapped, "Someone been feeding that oaf red meat?"

"But what *happened?*" asked Mr. Harrison.

"Oh, I could stand the big dummy acting as if he'd never been alone with a girl before in all his life. But to *ask* me for a kiss!"

"Is that what caused the eruption?" said Scholar Ross.

"When he *asked* me for a kiss, I told him that I was saving my kisses for a *man!*"

"And then?"

"Then he decided that I meant a man big enough to wrestle." Gloria laughed and then looked thoughtful.

"What's so funny—and not so funny now?"

"I just realized that *I like men!*"

"But Bertram?"

"Darned if it isn't the first time I've ever resented being pawed," said Gloria in a matter-of-fact tone, as if it were her hair-do rather than her virtue that was the subject of discussion. "So I grabbed a hand, hung the arm over my shoulder with the inside upward, and hip-tossed the big oaf over the railing into that silly little fish pond."

"Gloria!" exploded her mother.

"Poor Bertram!" exclaimed his mother.

Scholar Ross sighed. "These things often go awry at first. Bertram shouldn't have taken a double dose of his medication. And I'd guess that Gloria hasn't been meticulous about hers, either. Now —"

He was interrupted by the arrival of Bertram Harrison, who looked as if he'd just waded home across a mud flat at low tide. He stepped toward Gloria purposefully; the girl crouched in a judo position and said, "Want some more? Come and get it!"

"Now wait a moment," said Scholar Ross. "Gloria, where did you ever learn such brutal, belligerent tactics?"

Gloria faced him, but kept one eye on Bertram. "Out of a book—where else in this calm old world?"

The scholar said, "You see, Miss Hanford, the results of your outrageous behavior? You've committed an act of physical violence. You've—"

The girl gave one sharp bark of laughter. "Who started it with whose caveman technique?"

"I think," said Scholar Ross to the four parents, "that this meeting should be resumed at a later date. Bertram must *not* overdose himself in a misguided effort to make up for omitted medication. Gloria must *not* avoid hers—and, Mrs. Hanford, you'll not only have to watch closely to see that she does take her pills; you'll also have to make sure that Gloria doesn't counteract them by surreptitiously acquiring some agitators to neutralize the tranquilizers."

"And suppose I call the whole thing off?" demanded Gloria. "Suppose I don't agree to share bed and board with this souped-up sardine?"

The room grew quieter until the background sounds were gone and from the patio came the faint, sweet strains of romantic music: Program R-147.

Finally Scholar Ross said, "Miss Hanford, we cannot force you to do anything, but we can make your life extremely uncomfortable if you do not comply with what we believe to be best for society. You will find—if you care to look it up—that there is a drastic shortage of eligible young women on the planet Eden, Tau Ceti."

"You mean—migrate—to the *colony*?"

"I mean just that."

Gloria Hanford's face went white. She understood that if Scholar Ross decreed Eden, Tau Ceti, for her, then she would end up on Eden, Tau Ceti, and it made no difference whether by force, coercion, or gentle persuasion.

Mrs. Hanford took a step forward and opened her mouth to speak. But before she could protest, her husband put out a hand and stopped her. His act was an admission that not money, position, nor logic would overrule such a decision.

"Eden, Tau Ceti," breathed Gloria. She turned and faced Bertram Harrison. "Junior," she said in a dry, strained voice, "if you'll wear mittens and handcuffs, let's go back in the garden and get acquainted."



Her father exhaled a full breath.

Mr. Harrison tapped him on the shoulder. "How about a sample of that bottle of natural bourbon?" he suggested.

"Not," Mrs. Hanford said shakily, "without me!"

IV

Man's first sally across the gulf of interstellar space had been more fruitful than his first fumbling exploration of the Solar System by a score of one to nothing. Of all the celestial real estate that orbits around old Sol, only the Earth will support life—at least as we know it. Survival elsewhere depends upon taking enough of Earth environment along to last of the trip. From the scientific standpoint, the first exploration of space was a brilliant operation, but before finding a place to accept the teeming millions of Earth's exploding population, the patient nearly died. For it was a quarter of a century until Murray, Langdon, and Hanover cracked the Einstein barrier.

By careful design, and then by counting the last gram and striking a mathematically adjusted balance between power bank and crew space, the range of a spacecraft was found to be slightly more than seventeen light-years to the point of no return.

Within seventeen light-years of Sol, there are forty-one other stars.

Of these forty-one stars, three are triple-sun systems, and twelve are doubles, which eliminates fifteen of them. Of the remaining twenty-six single stars, one is the blinding-blue giant Altair, two are white dwarf stars, and nineteen of them are the faint red dwarf stars of Spectral Class M, and that eliminates all but four of the original forty-one. Of this remaining four, Epsilon Eridani, Epsilon Indi, and Groombridge 1618 fall into the orange Spectral Class K, which is not too far away from Sol's Spectral Class G. But K is only close; it is no bull's eye when the combination of all the factors must add up to produce a planetary environment that will support human life.

And so, having eliminated forty out of the forty-one stars in Sol's neighborhood, only Tau Ceti remains. Tau Ceti is also a Spectral Class G star and therefore Tau Ceti was voted the star most likely to succeed, long before Man had the foggiest notion of how to cross the light-years, long before instruments sensitive enough to ascertain that Tau Ceti possessed a planetary system were developed.

Tau Ceti's planetary system can be used as an example of the brilliance of logic and reasoning. The second planet in the family of Tau Ceti is the planet Eden.

Eden supports life.

Or perhaps it is more proper to say that Eden's environment permits life to support itself. Voltaire, through the mouths of his characters Candide and Pangloss, had a lot to say about Earth being the best of all possible worlds, both pro and con. He had never been to Eden. Eden was christened by the rules of real estate that dictate that a housing development situated on a tree-bald plain in central Kansas shall be called "Sylvan Heights."

Junior Spaceman Howard Reed went through a brief period of excitement and then settled down to boredom. The excitement came from his first experience in space travel, and the thrill of standing on soil almost twelve light-years from home base. This thrill faded as soon as he discovered that the people on Eden, Tau Ceti, were far too busy to be bothered with the reactions of a junior spaceman.

If his duties had been demanding, Reed might have gone on for some time without becoming bored. But as a junior officer in the Space Service, Reed had no roots, no property, no basic interests on Eden.

The Space Service had been born out of interservice rivalry during a tense period of international competition. There had been a strong upsurge during the early years of the initial interstellar exploration. The leaders of the Space Service were quite willing to featherbed themselves into permanent positions of high authority. They discovered the best method lay in exploiting every method of scaring the public with the bogey of meeting some warlike culture "Out There." Then the years passed with neither sight nor evidence of any other form of life but Man and the creatures he carried with him. The Space Service found itself with little to do.

It did not stop the clamor for money, men and materiel. But the job of the Space Service was not hunting space pirates. The only place where the power banks of a spacecraft could be restored was in the hands of the Space Service itself, and it was an installation vast enough to tax the wealth and ingenuity of a whole continent to create. The job was not fighting interstellar wars with fierce, super-intelligent interstellar aliens with a taste for human flesh—not, at least, until human and alien met.

So, in a desultory manner, the Space Service maintained a perimeter of lookout and detection stations that could have been completely automated ... if it hadn't been that there were more Space Service Personnel than the Service could find work for.

The whole situation gave Junior Spaceman Howard Reed a lot of time to think.

The culture of Eden, Tau Ceti, completed the process.

Eden used old-fashioned telephones because its people were too widespread across the face of the planet to make the use of the vidphone practical. Radio broadcasting was maintained by the government as a public service information agency. It had to be. There were not commercial enterprises enough to support radio broadcasting on a profit-making basis. For there simply were not enough people. And if simple radio broadcasting could not be supported, there was not yet room for even the old flat-faced television, much less trivideo.

Theirs was a culture in a mixed state. They had the know-how for a highly technical, closely-integrated urban civilization, but lacked the hardware necessary to construct it. They were an aircar people, but they used horses. Horses can be raised. Aircars have to be fabricated. It would not have been prohibitive to trans-ship the basic tools and dies for aircar assembly from Earth, Sol, to Eden, Tau Ceti. But it would have been economic suicide to attempt to keep the voracious maw of an automated assembly plant satiated with raw material shipped from home base. And then, one week's run would have saturated the Tau Ceti market. They were a people who played their own musical instruments because they were faced with the very odd economic fact that the first phonograph record from the die costs five thousand dollars. Nobody makes a dime until fifty thousand of its brothers are sold. The population to buy fifty thousand did not exist.

In simple fact, Eden, Tau Ceti, was far from a flourishing colony. It was a classic example of the simple economic truth that a fully integrated mechanistic society can not be supported by a sparsely populated region.

Ambition has many origins. The urge to return home became a drive. The result was Junior Spaceman Howard Reed's complete preoccupation with the mathematics known as Hansen's Folly.

As the months went by he exhausted his original knowledge. He took to the library, to the local schools, and to self-study to improve his grasp. He approached the basic mathematics of the space drive from several different angles, even going back to the old original Einstein Equations and learning their fault in the hope that this study might point the way.

Then, as the months began to grow into the close of his first year, Reed took advantage of the casually informal operation at the Space Service Base. He began to experiment with hardware on the theory that he would have a better grasp of the problem if he tried some empirical work as well as the academic approach.

Junior Spaceman Howard Reed had been on Eden, Tau Ceti, for eighteen terrestrial months before his superior officer, making a tour of inspection, opened the office reserved for him at the Administration Building. On the eighth day of his visit, Commander Breckenridge summoned the junior spaceman to his office. He asked, "Mr. Reed, have you been successful in solving the flaw in Hansen's Folly?"

"Well, sir, not exactly."

"Have you improved your grasp of the facts of life?"

"Sir? I don't quite understand."

"You don't? Well, perhaps you need some help. For instance, Mr. Reed, can you give me an estimate of the useful land area of Eden, Tau Ceti?"

"Sir, the total land area is about fifty million square miles. Perhaps about half of that is useful, or could be."

"Ah. You said 'could be'. Why, Mr. Reed?"

"Let's put it this way, sir. Whether a given acreage is useful often depends upon how badly it is needed. For instance, a plot of wooded land might well be ignored for centuries by a sparsely populated agrarian culture who had a lot of open plain to cultivate. At a later date, an increasing pressure of population might make it expedient and sensible to clear vast areas of tree stumps, boulders and all sorts of hazards."

"And here on Eden?"

"Well, sir, at the present time the population of Eden is about a hundred thousand. Fertile plains are growing wild with weeds because the land isn't needed yet. That is—er—"

"That is what?"

"Maybe I shouldn't have said 'wild with weeds' sir. After all, they have been encouraged. I'm told that the atmosphere smelled a lot stronger when Man first arrived."

The commander sniffed and said, "It's pretty strong right now."

"You don't notice it after a couple of months," said Reed.

"I don't propose to be here that long," said the commander curtly. "Let's get back to your grasp of the overall picture." Commander Breckenridge leaned back in his chair and said, "No doubt you were exposed to Early North American History. You will recall that there was a strong pioneering drive in the human race that went on almost from the date of the discovery of North America until the opening phases of the so-called 'Industrial Revolution'—that is, beginning of the electro-mechanical era. Am I not correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, young man, what has become of this strong pioneering drive? How did it ooze out of the human race? Where did it go, and why? Why are six billion people living in crowded conditions on Earth, while here upon Eden, Tau Ceti, a mere hundred thousand people occupy—by your estimate—some twenty million square miles? Why haven't the crowded millions of Earth clamored for all this extra space?"

"Perhaps because space travel is so expensive."

"Only in terms of cash. To be sure, it might take practically everything that a man has to buy passage. I now ask you to estimate how many men and their families sacrificed everything they had, packed a few treasured possessions into a Conestoga wagon and headed for the West."

"I have no way of knowing, sir."

"No, of course not. Let me tell you what happened. In that glorious phase of Early North America, men, women, and even their children toiled from sunrise to sunset to scratch out their living. From the dawn of history, luxury and leisure belonged to the landed baron. Since wealth went with acreage, any man who could stake out a claim to acreage could also claim wealth. It was a matter of finding the unclaimed acreage first."

The commander leaned forward to press his point. "Then came the industrial revolution and the age of automation. Industrial slavery ended in a clank of gears. Your little man no longer starved to death nor toiled twelve hours a day. The finest automobile that the wealthy man could buy was only three or four times as expensive as the car driven by the average workman. Therefore the idea of staking out arable land as a means to wealth became less and less desirable. Automation hit the farm. The landed baron changed into the elected presiding officer over a stock-secured corporation.

"Today," said the commander, "the man who leaves his home to migrate is not abandoning squalor and sorrow in the hope of finding something better. He's leaving luxury, culture, and leisure. For what? For the privilege of scrabbling for a bare existence. Now, Mr. Reed, are you beginning to understand?"

"I think so, sir."

"Good. Then you'll begin to revise your opinion as to the importance of extending the cruising range of our spacecraft."

Reed blinked, "Sir?"

"Be sensible, young man. A colony is a waste of effort unless it becomes more than self-sufficient."

Until Eden, Tau Ceti, has become populated to the point where Eden can support her own highly technical culture, it is an economically unsound proposition." The commander glared at the young spaceman. "Must I be blunt? Every effort must be spent in raising the culture-level of Eden, Tau Ceti. That means increasing the population, Mr. Reed, until the numbers are high enough to pay for industrialization. Once the cities of Eden, Tau Ceti, offer the culture opportunity of the cities of Earth, then we'll have migration on a social level instead of the malcontents, rugged individualists, and petty lawbreakers who've been given the alternative of migration instead of incarceration.

"Now, Mr. Reed, do you see what I'm driving at? It would be far wiser of you to spend your time enhancing the aspect of Eden, Tau Ceti, than trying to figure out ways and means of getting to more distant stars and locating other distant planets—to which the human race wouldn't migrate."

"But sir—"

"Mr. Reed, I recognize in you the admirable spirit of adventure. But we must remember that this same spirit that once drove men to land on Earth's moon in a multi-stage chemical rocket was not enough to establish a tax-paying colony there. Now, about this project of yours. You say that you have not yet located the flaw in Hansen's Folly?"

"No, sir, but—"

"Mr. Reed, you realize that you'll stay here on Eden until you do?"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"And the longer it takes you, the more ridicule will be directed at you, at me, and the Bureau of Operations?"

"But, sir—"

"Mr. Reed, I'll also point out that there will be no promotion until your assignment is complete."

"I'm aware of that sir, but—"

"But what, Mr. Reed?"

Reed said, "Sir, may I speak without annoying you?"

"If you've something to say, go ahead. I can hardly promise not to be annoyed before I hear what the subject is."

"Thank you, sir. In trying to solve Hansen's Folly I engaged in some physical experiment and measurement because I couldn't find any flaw in the mathematical argument on the abstract scale. As you know, sir, one of the ways to find out why something won't work is to try it. It isn't often the easiest or the simplest, but it is often the only way."

"So go on. What happened?"

"Sir, my hardware works. So far as I can see, sir, there is no flaw! I was right!"

"Commander Briggs of Research—"

"Sir, there must be some mistake."

"Silence! I'm not through! Commander Briggs seems to know more about my personnel than I do."

"Sir?"

"First, he offered to bet me a dinner at the Officer's Club that you wouldn't locate the flaw in Hansen's Folly by the time I made this tour of inspection. Knowing that you'd probably have no other ambition than to leave Eden, Tau Ceti, I snapped at this wager like a starving dog latching onto a piece of steak. I have lost, it would appear, which is only one dinner. But, Mr. Reed, when I accepted this wager, Commander Briggs compounded it by offering to bet me a dinner for the whole Bureau of Research that after not finding the flaw by means of the academic analysis, you'd resort to experiment in hardware. Knowing full well that you'd not have the temerity to divert Service Material for your own tinkering, I accepted that wager also. Then to top it off, Briggs added a bet of champagne and corsages for the officers' wives that you'd complete your hardware and still not locate the flaw, and that when I arrived you'd be firmly convinced that you'd proved your point in theory and practice and that therefore you were right and the rest of the known universe was wrong."

The commander took a deep breath under which he swore gently but feelingly. Then he went on: "And so, Mr. Reed, I am going to be 'Guest of Dishonor' at the Officers' Club. I will, according to custom, be served the plate of baked synthetic beans whilst my contemporary officers and their wives partake of a gourmet's banquet of natural foods."

"Sir, I'm sorry."

"Being sorry is hardly enough!" The commander pawed through his attache case until he came to

a file-folder which he looked through meticulously for several minutes as if justifying a carefully considered opinion. Finally he made a lightly pencilled note on the margin of one page and said, "Lalande 25372!"

Junior Spaceman Howard Reed gasped and blurted, "Flatbush, sir?"

Commander Breckenridge nodded curtly. "You will man the perimeter alien-spacecraft detection station and the astrogation beacon distance and direction equipment located on Flatbush, Lalande 25372. And you will stay there until you have Hansen's Folly completely solved. Do you understand?"

Junior Spaceman Howard Reed nodded unhappily.

Lalande 25372 was close to the maximum range, the seventeen-light-year point of no return. Any enjoyment in knowing that he would have to be commissioned one of the finer, more efficient little spacecraft in order to get there in the first place was completely wiped out in the knowledge that once there, it would have to stand inert awaiting his return, because there would be no power to spare on side trips. One did not, with subatomic power, carry a spare can of fuel for emergency.

VI

Mrs. Hanford opened the door and saw Scholar Ross. She smiled uncertainly at him as she invited him in. In the Hanford living room, in the presence of Mr. Hanford, the scholar of genetics looked around cautiously and questingly. Hanford said, "Gloria is not here. She's out."

"Then I may speak openly."

"Of course. Is there some trouble—again?"

"Frankly, I'm not certain," said the scholar of genetics slowly. "I'd like more information if you'd be so good as to help."

"Of course we'll help!" exclaimed Mrs. Hanford. "What's bothering you?"

"How is your daughter getting on with Bertram Harrison?"

"Why, I'd guess they're getting along about as well as any other young pre-marriage couple. That's what the engagement period is for, isn't it? I mean, it's been that way historically."

"Yes, you're right," nodded Scholar Ross. "Did they rent the usual pre-marriage apartment?"

"Oh yes. They were quite the conventional young lovers, Scholar Ross."

The man from the Department of Domestic Tranquility smiled. "And you, of course, were the conventional parents of the affianced bride?"

"Of course. We were so pleased that we could hardly wait for Twelfth Night."

"And during that visit, were the appointments of the apartment proper?"

"Why, Scholar Ross!"

"No, no, Mrs. Hanford, you misunderstand. I implied no moral question. I really meant to ask if you knew whether Gloria and Bertram each and separately were properly continuing their therapy."

Mr. Hanford grunted. "As parents of the affianced bride," he said, "we're paying for it!"

Mrs. Hanford blushed. "I—er—snooped," she said.

Scholar Ross looked at Mrs. Hanford with an expression that indicated that snooping was an entirely acceptable form of social behavior. "And what did you find?"

"Everything entirely right." Then she looked doubtful and bit her lower lip. "Scholar Ross, I'm no authority in these matters. In Gloria's bathroom were the same-*looking* kind of bottles and pills that we got when you prescribed, and when I turned on the speaker in her bedroom it sounded like the same kind of music as I'd heard in her bedroom when she was living at home. It—frankly—depressed me."

"And Bertram's?"

"I know less of his medication. But I did listen to his music outlet. It removed the feeling of depression I'd gotten from Gloria's program material."

"That's quite right. It sounds reasonable."

She blushed again and looked at her husband. "Only one thing," she said very slowly.

"What's that?"

"I—er, hardly know how to put it. You see, when Gerald and I were affianced, neither one of us were undergoing any kind of corrective therapy and so I don't know how these things work out."

"What are you driving at?"

"Why, Scholar Ross, with neither of us undergoing corrective therapy, it didn't matter which one of the bedrooms we used."

Scholar Ross considered for a moment and then nodded. "Of course," he said with an air of complete finality. "That's it!"

"What's it?" asked Mr. Hanford.

"The situation becomes a simple matter of reduction to the law of most-active reaction. Look," he said, "we have one personality that requires an environment of stimulation to bring him up to normal, and another personality that requires a tranquil atmosphere to normal. Place them both in the tranquilizing environment and he is driven deeper into his lethargy, probably to the point of complete physical and intellectual torpor. Place them both in the stimulating atmosphere and he becomes normal while she goes into transports of sensuous excitement. This explains it!"

"Explains what?" demanded Mr. Hanford.

"Her recent behavior. Or rather escapade."

None of them heard the gentle snick of the lock in the front door.

"Escapade?" exclaimed Mrs. Hanford.

"We didn't know that she was in any trouble," said Mr. Hanford.

"That's just the point," said Scholar Ross. "Your daughter has the infuriating habit of indulging in outrageous behavior under the name of brilliant intellectual accomplishment."

Gloria Hanford said, "Why, thank you, sir!"

She dropped the scholar a deep curtsey, displaying several inches of slender ankle.

"Gloria!" demanded her mother. "What have you been up to?"

Gloria Hanford smiled at her mother in an elfin, yet superior manner. "I am the affianced bride of Bertram Harrison," she said softly. "Therefore my behavior, whether good, bad, or indifferent, is no longer the problem of my parents."

Her father said, "Gloria, I happen to be big enough in both the physical and intellectual departments to overrule both you and your husband-to-be. So you'll answer your mother."

"Why," said Gloria quietly, "I've done nothing wrong."

Mr. Hanford said to Scholar Ross: "What's your side of this?"

Scholar Ross said, "Last week the Westchester Young People's Club gave a costume ball. The young ladies were to attend this affair adorned in the authentic fashion of some period in the past, and a prize was to be awarded to the most novel, yet completely authentic costume."

"And," said Gloria with a smile, "I won!"

"Your daughter won because she has a talent for performing the most shocking deeds under a cloak of intellectual achievement."

"Do go on, Scholar Ross. What did Gloria do?"

The scholar smiled wryly. "Style and fashion ceased to be logical when clothing was designed for sly provocation rather than as a protection against a harsh environment," he said. "We live in a mixed-up social world. We encourage communal swimming and sun bathing in the nude—and yet after five o'clock it is considered shocking to display more than the bare face and hands.

"So in order to combine the maximum shock-effect with the cloak of utter authenticity, Miss Hanford researched the styles and fashions until she located a brief period of a few scant months late in the Twentieth Century. Her costume consisted of a many-fold voluminous skirt of semi-transparent material that draped in graceful folds from waist to mid-calf. She was completely nude above the waist! To prove her point, she offered fashion stereotypes of the period from style magazines."

Gloria chuckled. "I might have researched back to the Old Testament," she said.

Scholar Ross shook his head. "As I say, her shocking behavior could not be criticized. She could justify it according to the rules."

Mr. Hanford shook his head and asked, "Gloria, what did Bertram think of all this?"

"Bertram carried the style stereotypes," said Gloria. "There wasn't any pocket in my costume."

Abruptly, Scholar Ross said, "Miss Hanford, how are you and Bertram getting along?"

"As well as could be expected."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning that each of us lives our own life. Berty likes his sedentary, torpid existence. In fact, he'd like to be more of a vegetable than he is. It started with his taking my pills and that was all right, I guess. But when he started sleeping in my bedroom so that he could estivate under the tranquilizing music program you prescribed for me, that was too much!"

Scholar Ross looked unprecedentedly astonished. "So?" he demanded.

"What do you mean 'so'? What would any red blooded woman do? I moved out and into his bedroom, naturally."

"And then started taking his medication?" asked Scholar Ross curtly.

"Natch!"

"Oh, my God!" exploded Scholar Ross. He eyed Gloria intently. "How do you manage to get Bertram awake far enough to attend things like your costume ball?" he asked.

"Well," she said with a smile, "I am really strong enough to sling a hundred and eighty-five pounds of loosely-stuffed sausage over my shoulder in a fireman's carry and tote the inert mass back to its own bedroom so that its own music will rouse it enough to reach for its bedside bottles of medication. Nature then takes its course until the awakening. Then he goes along with my desires—because he knows that if he doesn't, I won't let him dive back into his complete inertia. It's very simple. Of course, it isn't much fun."

Scholar Ross said, "Gloria, do you intend to continue this sort of self-centered, artificial life after you and Bertram are married?"

"I've given the future very little thought."

"You always have," said Scholar Ross unhappily. "That's been a lot of your trouble."

"So what am I supposed to do? Do you really expect me to marry that vegetable? I've got a life to lead too, you know. It may suit your overall program of genetics to breed a batch of normal children, but the same Book of Laws grants me the right to seek my own level of happiness."

"Granted—"

"Well, scholar, I can tell you that my idea of happiness is not a husband who comes into my bedroom walking like a somnambulist just barely able to cross the room before collapsing like a loosely-packed sandbag."

"What you need," said Scholar Ross firmly, "is a man who is strong enough to tell you what you're going to do."

"And where are you going to find one?"

Scholar Ross turned from Gloria to her parents. "Obviously," he said regretfully, "this proposed marriage between your daughter and Bertram Harrison is not going to culminate in a happy union."

"Did you expect it to?" asked Gloria.

"I had hopes. I can only propose a course of action. Were you willing to embark upon your prescribed program of corrective therapy, and so become a normally active and emotionally stable woman, then the marriage might work out very well indeed."

"It's all my fault, of course?"

"Yes. Of course. The decision was yours to make."

"And how about that lump of lard you've foisted off on me?"

"Bertram Harrison's willing retreat into total lethargy is, of course, his own decision. But it, too, is only another aspect of the usual case. The strong-willed personality makes its own way. The weak one follows."

"I see," sneered Gloria. "It's all my fault!"

"Of course it is," snapped Scholar Ross. "Were you willing to correct yourself, you'd also have been willing to correct Bertram since yours is the stronger personality."

"So what's the next move? Do I get to try another dolt?"

"Hardly. You'd do the same with any of them."

"So what is it? Am I going to be exported to Eden, Tau Ceti as an incorrigible?"

Scholar Ross was silent.

Mr. Hanford said, "Certainly there must be another way?"

Mrs. Hanford said, "Must I lose my daughter?"

Scholar Ross said regretfully, "There is another way, of course, but either way is essentially a loss of your daughter, Mrs. Hanford."

Mr. Hanford said, "And what is this other course, Scholar Ross?"

"It's called re-orientation."

"Brain-washing!" exclaimed Gloria.

"That's a harsh, colloquial term."

Mrs. Hanford said, "How does this re-orientation work?"

Coldly, as if he were discussing the repair of some inanimate engine, Scholar Ross said, "It starts with corrective surgery on the pituitary and thyroid glands. Next comes some very complicated neuro-cerebral surgery, somewhat resembling the crude, primitive process once called 'Prefrontal Lobotomy'. Nowadays it produces the desired effect without all of the deleterious side-effects. Then, once the patient is completely disoriented, the process of re-education takes place. The patient is extremely docile and highly impressionable. All decisions carry the same weight—"

"How do you mean that?" asked Mr. Hanford.

"Why, the decision to use blue or black ink in your fountain pen becomes as important as the decision of whether to cling or jump from a damaged aircar."

"Oh. And then?"

"Why, since the patient is docile and impressionable, we can mold the patient's appreciation of people, places, and events into conformity. Events of the former life are not erased, but they are viewed as if the patient had seen a trivideo drama instead of having been that person. The entire list of friends and acquaintances is changed because the patient's personality is so different that the former friends no longer have anything in common with the patient. It will be," said Scholar Ross, "exactly as if your daughter left you, never to return, and then next year you are introduced to a strange woman who bears a complete resemblance to your daughter. To whom," he added, "you eventually become emotionally attached because of your daughter's memory."

"It sounds pretty drastic."

"I shall not fool you. It is drastic, indeed."

"I don't like it," Gloria snapped.

"Yes," pleaded Mrs. Hanford. "What is the alternative?"

"Eden, Tau Ceti. I'll arrange transportation under the migration act, and she'll be permitted two hundred pounds of gross." Scholar Ross smiled thinly. "You can diet a few pounds off and thus increase the net weight of your allowable possessions," he said. "But, on the other hand, if you diet down to rail-skinny no one will take a chance on you."

Gloria demanded belligerently, "What am I, a raffle prize?"

"Why, that's no better than white slavery!" cried her mother.

"Oh, come now!" said Scholar Ross. "Miss Hanford will receive a home and a hard-working husband on a fine new world with unlimited opportunities."

Gloria Hanford snorted. "The term, 'unlimited opportunity' is just the optimist's way of describing a situation that the pessimist would call, 'lack of modern conveniences.'"

"Well, Miss Hanford, you have your choice. One of three. Corrective therapy and marriage with Bertram Harrison; total re-orientation; or migration to Eden, Tau Ceti. I'll not ask for your decision now. Give me your answer within thirty days."

"You can't force me!"

"No. I can't. All I can do is to point out your three avenues of future travel—and then point out that I do have the means of making your life so very inconvenient that you'll have no recourse but to make your choice from among the three desirable possibilities. Desirable, I must admit, means that which is most favorable to the furtherance of domestic tranquility!"

VII

Lalande 25372 is a Spectral Class M star, a faint red dwarf not visible to the naked eye from Earth, Sol. Lalande 25372 lies fifteen point nine light years from Sol, about fifteen degrees north of the celestial equator and not quite opposite the vernal equinox. It has planets, but this does not make Lalande 25372 unique. Like most of the planets found in space, neither mad dogs nor Englishmen would have anything to do with them—willingly. They are suitable only for the hapless wight whose erring foot has unhappily landed on the tender official toe.

The planet Flatbush, Lalande 25372, received its name from an obscure medieval reference to a form of punishment known as "Walking a beat in Flatbush," if we are to believe MacClelland's authoritative volume *The Origin of Place Names*.

Observed through the multipane window of the Station, Flatbush, Lalande 25372, was a pleasant enough planet, provided one could ignore the fact that there was not a sign nor trace of vegetation from the Installation Building to the horizon. A couple of hundred yards from the building there was a pleasant looking lake. The lake was indeed water, but it contained dissolved substances that would have poisoned a boojum snark. The warm wind of Flatbush rippled the surface of the lake, but no square yard of sail would be hoisted until someone first built a gas mask that would filter out the colorless gases that turned silver black. Fluffy clouds floated across the sky, but they rained down a mess that etched stainless steel.

Out There, near the perimeter of Man's five-parsec range of operations, subelectromagnetic

detector beams scoured the sky. Taking the most pessimistic standpoint—the least possible combinations of Nature's infinite variety of environment—Nature's own profligacy with life-forms still demanded that somewhere, Out There, another race was plying the spaceways.

Someday this hypothetical race was certain to touch wings with mankind.

When that took place it was the duty of the Bureau of Operations to detect them, to intercept them, and to warn the men of Earth, Sol, that Mankind was no longer alone. The fact that the subelectromagnetic detecting beams had been sweeping space for a couple of hundred years without detecting anything had no bearing on the future. The beams must be maintained so long as a human man remained alive in space.

In addition to the detector beams, the outlying planets carried astrogation beacons. They were subelectromagnetic lighthouses, so to speak, that rang across space with known direction and ranging telemetered signals. Someday, Man hoped to fill the space lanes with spacecraft and the planets with interstellar commerce.

Someday there might be another *Marie Celeste* plying its course with its crew inexplicably missing. But if this ever happened, it was not going to happen without the Space Service knowing precisely how many and which spacecraft were operating through that volume of space before, during, and after D-for-Disaster Day and M-for-Mysterious Minute.

The equipment, of course, was automated to modern perfection, with multi-lateral channels that would take over in case of component failure. Its factor of reliability was well above six or seven nines of perfection. But to admit that this perfection was adequate would have deprived the Space Service of a convenient minor penal detail to take care of brash junior officers. Manning such a station provided the junior officer with a wealth of time to contemplate his sins, and to mend his evil ways.

In the case of Junior Spaceman Howard Reed, this process consisted of locating the flaw that prevented Hansen's Folly from being Hansen's Analysis.

Now, from the time of Alexander Selkirk, romantic history has been dotted with accounts of men who have been cast away with nothing more than their hands and their brains. And with these, they have succeeded in raising their caveman environment up to the level of modern technical conveniences.

Like them—having been unable to locate the flaw in Hansen's Folly by the theoretical approach during his tour of duty on Earth, Sol, and having similarly failed to locate the error in experimental hardware during his tour of duty on Eden, Tau Ceti—Junior Spaceman Howard Reed began to experiment on the spacecraft that stood parked on its launching pad two hundred feet from the Installation. There was plenty of equipment to work with. The Space Service did not stock its perimeter stations in a slipshod manner.

Furthermore, Junior Spaceman Howard Reed had plenty of time.

The account of his life and adventures is hardly worth telling. He had no distractions. He worked. The months passed one after the other.

Flatbush, Lalande 25372 was so far out that there was no provision made for a regular tour of inspection. Nobody bothered to drop in on Junior Spaceman Howard Reed. Gabbling on the official communication channels was strictly forbidden, so the young junior officer was denied even contact by voice. No one had come up with an economically sound means of producing entertainment programs from Earth, Sol, on the subelectromagnetic beams and so he—like his fellows in the other perimeter stations—received neither news nor music from home.

He could terminate this tour of duty only by solving the riddle of Hansen's Folly, and then notifying his superiors on the official communications channels—or by tucking a note in the once-a-year supply drone that came laden with enough of Earth's environment to keep the young expatriate alive for another year.

The set-up was wholly conducive to work. There was time and there was equipment; his orders were to remain there until he had studied his way through the problem.

With nothing else to do, Junior Spaceman Howard Reed was deep in his investigation ... when the drone spacecraft came down along the subelectromagnetic beacon and made its landing a dozen yards away.

The drone was standard spacecraft size, an unmanned hull laden with the necessities of life that would support him for a year.

It was the first one that he had ever seen. This was the first time that Junior Spaceman Howard Reed had had to face the problem of Supply. Packed in that dronship was enough earth environment to last a man a year. The perishables and expendables, as well as replacement for the lost fractions of the recyclables, were all there. They were dehydrated and deep frozen after all waste had been removed, then compressed into cubes of identical size for the most favorable packing fraction. Even so, it was a prodigious amount of stuff. Supply would have been impossible on a once-per-year basis, if the foul water of Flatbush, Lalande 25372, hadn't been distillable with ease.

The junior spaceman eyed the dronship with a sudden burst of pride in his fellow man's accomplishment. Given a pre-programmed flight along telemetered beacons originating at either terminus, the running equipment within the drone would bulk much less than the same mass and size as a human and his needs. Until flight-decisions were necessary, the hardware pilot was as good as the human pilot—and far less subject to headache, tantrum, disappointment at not getting the Saturday night pass and resentment over being passed by at promotion time.

Then his pride gave way to sudden, prolonged thought.

The range of a spacecraft is computed from point of takeoff to point of no return. There was no way of restoring the powerbanks of a spacecraft except on Earth, Sol.

Now, of course, it is entirely possible to take off and just keep going until the powerbanks are depleted.

That will cover twice the stated range to the point of no return. Ships have gone out and off and away and have never been heard of again. It is possible that one or more of these have succeeded in locating an Earth-like planet beyond the point of no return, but the Earthmen at home will never know about it until the range is extended. The possibility of such a planet favoring human life and ultimately harboring a culture of technical competence enough to create and maintain the power restoring equipment is extremely remote.

For spacecraft that carry women are few and far between.

And it takes more than one man's lifetime to make use of the know-how.

Junior Spaceman Howard Reed knew that away back in the Twentieth Century, the average engineer could make a guess, count on his fingers, and come up with a pretty shrewd estimate of the horsepower per cubic inch that could be stored by the various ways and means available to the age.

Removing the human pilot and his needs did give the dronship quite a bit more space for cargo and power. But, as he looked at the dronship standing there, it became plain to Junior Spaceman Howard Reed that there was not room in that size of hull for both the necessary powerbanks and the full year's store of supplies for one man.

Whereupon Junior Spaceman Howard Reed dropped his tools. He donned his space suit and crossed the intervening space to the dronship.

He began to examine the ship's running gear with a critical and suspicious eye.

He was examining hardware that was familiar to him. It took him no more than two hours to determine beyond a shadow of a doubt that the dronship's drive was built along the theories and mathematical analysis that he had been told simply did not work!

Someone had reduced Hansen's Folly to practice!

He paused again. Hansen's Folly had been called a failure about two hundred years ago, but what did that really mean? He considered his history.

In 1724, Stephen Gray and Granville Wheeler made the proud announcement that they had succeeded in transmitting an electrical phenomenon along a wire for a distance of 682 feet. Two hundred years later the entire Earth was girdled with telegraph, telephone and cable wires and linked with the invisible bonds of radio waves.

In about 1904 the Wright Brothers made their first powered airplane flight. Forty years later men were flying in airplanes that carried a wingspread greater than the distance of the Wright's first flight.

Einstein's Barrier was accepted scientific dogma for a hundred years; but he, Howard Reed, was now standing in a spacecraft that had crossed the gulf between the stars at a speed that not only exceeded the velocity of propagated light—but exceeded this speed by a few hundred orders of magnitude.

So? So maybe they were right. Maybe Hansen's Folly was a failure.

But the running gear in this dronship was designed to the analysis produced by Junior Spaceman Howard Reed, and it worked. Furthermore, he had only the scornful word of Commander Briggs of the Bureau of Research that his arguments had been parallel to those of the hapless Hansen.

It would hardly be the first time in the history of the human race that some bureaucrat got fat on the work of his underlings who not only received no credit for their work, but were often hushed, hidden, or otherwise prevented from proving their right to the fame and fortune.

Angrily, Howard Reed stood up and cursed. They were not going to smother him in a peg-whittling job on a single-man post sixteen light years from home base, denied of all but official communications.

He was going to find out about this very strange business!

Junior Spaceman Howard Reed did not even bother going back to the Station. Its Outside detectors had been sweeping deep space for a couple of hundred years without detecting anything; its astrobeacons were employed once each year when the dronship arrived.

Furthermore, both equipments were automatic, on the trips, set up to bypass the one-man crew of the Station by transmitting the information on the regular Channels. So, there in the droneship, the junior spaceman merely disconnected the pre-programmed autopilot, clamped his hands around the manual gear, and took off for far-off Earth, Sol.

VIII

Gloria Hanford opened her apartment door, made a double take when she saw the living room lights were on, toted up the list of unexpected guests, and assessed the situation in one brief moment. She stopped short on one high heel, pivoted, and said to her escort, "Not tonight, Joseph!"

"But—"

"I've guests," she said, placing a hand flat on her escort's chest.

"But—"

"My guests mean trouble," she finished, shoving. Her escort disappeared—walking backward and still trying to protest.

Gloria closed the living room door with a gesture of finality, then turned to lean back against it. She faced her unexpected guests with an air of exasperated patience, as if by her silence she was inviting them to hurl the first bolt and by her attitude confident that she could turn it aside with ease.

She did not have long to wait.

They all started to talk at once. The resulting babble was unintelligible and the sound of the others' voices made each one of them stop without finishing. Silence fell again, and in the calm, Scholar Ross spoke up:

"Under the circumstances, Miss Hanford, I think we have the right to ask that you explain your actions."

Mr. Harrison grunted. "I say this is a waste of time. Let's get along with it."

Mrs. Harrison added, "Yes indeed, Scholar Ross. If you'll call the authorities, we'll sign the complaint."

Mrs. Hanford snapped, "I resent the implication that my daughter is wholly and solely in the wrong."

Mr. Hanford said, "In my opinion, Bertram Harrison isn't bright enough to come in out of the rain, let alone being smart enough to know what's good for him. Now—"

Mr. Harrison growled, "We come calling this evening and find our son deep under the influence of tranquilizers and the catalytic action of the mood music prescribed for this philandering young hussy—"

"I'm no philanderer!" cried Gloria. "I'm not married to your cold lump of lard!"

Scholar Ross spread out his hands in a gesture of supplication, as if he were pleading with the gods for a return to sanity. "Stop it!" he cried. "Stop it!"

He turned to Mrs. Hanford with a shake of the head. "I am sorry. Your resentment of the fact that this affair is your daughter's responsibility is not going to change it."

"But he's—"

"Please, Mrs. Hanford. This engagement is not a matter of the personal choice of the participants. It gravely concerns Society. Now, insofar as the Department of Domestic Tranquility is concerned, it is the excitable, headstrong, unruly, willful personality that is dangerous to social stability. The calm and placid ones do not commit acts of violence. Indeed, Mrs. Hanford, were it not for the quiet, phlegmatic personality like Bertram Harrison, we in genetics would have a hard time finding a useful niche for belligerents such as your daughter Gloria."

Gloria Hanford said something under her breath. Scholar Ross eyed her suspiciously and demanded that she repeat.

"Cliche Sixteen," she retorted. "It pertains to the problem of leading horses to water."

He nodded. "Yes. The horse is laudably exercising as much free will as his equine position permits him. The same platitude can also be employed to point out that blind stubbornness may prevent him from doing something that is really a good idea even if someone else did think of it first."

"I say enough of this nonsense!" snapped Mr. Harrison. "Let's get this debate over with!"

"Now, just a moment," said Scholar Ross. "You have no legal standing. Miss Hanford is Bertram Harrison's affianced wife. Under law, any difficulties between them are strictly a civic matter. Bluntly, sir, only the party being damaged can sign a complaint, and after making a complaint it

is up to the complaining party to prove that he is being damaged at the will of the accused."

"Scholar Ross, you and your Department of Domestic Tranquility may know how you hope to maintain a calm and stable social structure, but you don't know much about the law," said Mr. Harrison slowly and carefully. "One only need go back to the early days of common law to find a rather terse discussion of the proposition of maintaining an attractive nuisance. The owner of the attractive nuisance has a responsibility to the gullible citizens who are attracted."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning," said Mr. Harrison, "that Miss Hanford in this pre-marriage apartment did maintain a series of attractive nuisances. Tranquilizer pills. Soothing mood music. A person of calm tendencies would find them most attractive. It was therefore her responsibility to protect the other party. Now—when Bertram has been properly treated and is able to testify—I think we'll find that Miss Hanford not only failed to protect Bertram, but indeed encouraged him to help himself to her pills and sleep in her bedroom under the soothing influence of the mood music prescribed for her."

Mr. Hanford snapped, "If this attractive nuisance is as you say, Harrison, why can't we charge that Bertram did little to protect Gloria from his own therapy?"

Scholar Ross raised a hand. "Permit me," he said, "to reiterate that it is the hypertonic, overactive personalities that create social troubles. A Bertram Harrison lulled into a semi-cataleptic state by the wiles of a Gloria Hanford would hardly be expected to rise in a sudden burst of strength."

"So no matter what I do, I'm wrong?" the girl asked.

"Not at all," said Scholar Ross. "It is your direct responsibility—your *duty*—to do everything you can to establish a firm and stable family unit here with Bertram Harrison—"

"Sorry, Scholar Ross," said Mr. Harrison icily. "You haven't really heard me. Your notion that this affair is a civil argument between an affianced couple is not true. You imply that no laws have been broken. You are wrong. I am willing to sign a complaint right now that Miss Gloria Hanford deliberately induced my son to indulge in her therapy. It was her means of lulling him into a state of mind that would permit her to go gallivanting off on a date with another man."

"I am not married to Berty yet!" snapped Gloria. "Dating's still my right!"

"Oh," snarled Mr. Harrison angrily, "shut up or I'll sign a complaint that you administered medical treatment without a license! Insofar as the Harrison family is concerned, this engagement shall be terminated unfavorably. Come!" he said to his wife. She rose to follow.

Gloria stepped aside, but paused to ask, "Aren't you going to take Bertie with you?"

Mrs. Hanford said coldly, "He's already been taken to the hospital for treatment to bring him out of the trance you got him into. And so, Miss Hanford, will you please step aside and let me pass?"

And Mr. Harrison's parting shot was, "I shall sign my complaints in the morning—or if he is able, we'll make it thoroughly legal and have Bertram sign them."

He closed the door firmly.

Mrs. Hanford wailed, "Now what shall we do?"

Scholar Ross shook his head. "With this poor record, this non-cooperation," he said slowly, "it will be well nigh impossible to arrange another union, furthermore, if Harrison carries out his threat —"

Gloria said quickly, "If he wants to, he can talk Bertie into anything. Anything. Such as signing the most frightful complaints and being convinced of their absolute truth and justice."

Mr. Hanford said, "If that's true, he could also be talked back out of them."

Scholar Ross shook his head again. "That presupposes that you could arrange access to Bertram that couldn't be overcome by another talking-to by his parents. It won't work. The young man is a mental weathervane."

"So where do we stand?"

"As I say, we might as well prepare for the worst. If the case of Gloria Hanford ever comes under the scrutiny of the Law, she will be declared either a delinquent or an incorrigible, depending upon whether her escapades are ruled misdemeanors or felonies." Scholar Ross turned to Gloria Hanford. "I warned you. Now, where we of the Department of Domestic Tranquility have no power to force you into a proper course of action, you'll find that the Law most certainly has. Miss Hanford, the Law will decide just how dangerous you are to the civic peace. Upon that decision, the law will further decide what action it must take to protect that civic peace from you."

He paused. A silence followed his statements. He waited a few moments to let his words sink in. Then he walked to the door and said:

"As of now, the future of Miss Gloria Hanford is out of my hands."

Mr. Hanford said, "Scholar Ross, how bad is this likely to be?"

"A lot will depend upon how swiftly Bertram Harrison responds to the restorative treatment. With some luck and a brilliant attorney on your side the matter might not reach a major catastrophe. Tomorrow may tell."

IX

Junior Spaceman Howard Reed said plaintively, "But this is the Bureau of Justice. According to the Regulations you are supposed to listen to me, at least."

The space officer behind the desk wore the three wide stripes of the commander's rank, topped by the fasces that symbolized the law. He was Commander Hughes, chief of the Space Service Bureau of Justice. He smiled at the junior spaceman but shook his head. "You would place us in a most difficult position were we to heed your plea without having the matter referred to us through official channels."

With some exasperation, Reed said, "Look, sir, I've been subject to a severe injustice. Why can't I at least tell my problem to someone?"

"That would be cutting across channels. It simply is not done."

"Commander Hughes," said the junior spaceman earnestly, "you're not serving justice. You're obstructing it!"

"Now see here, young man—"

"Commander Hughes, you're insisting that I request my superior officer to forward through official channels a complaint against him. First, sir, I point out that he would refuse my request unless he were absolutely certain that my case against him was ridiculously weak. Second, I'm certain that the request would bring quick retaliation."

Commander Hughes shook his head. "The Regulation provides that any reasonable request be forwarded. And the Regulation further provides that there shall be no punitive action."

Reed snorted. "Fine. And if I do find myself punished, must I next forward my request for investigation through the same officer?"

"That is a serious charge, young man."

"I can substantiate it! Look, sir, quite a long time ago I made some scientific studies, and—"

"You're an Operations officer, Mr. Reed?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then you're not trained in science?"

"Let's not go on that rat-race right now," said the junior spaceman testily. "I've heard it before. That's why I'm here!"

"Very well."

Junior Spaceman Howard Reed took a deep breath and plunged into his long explanation. At the end, Commander Hughes nodded, his face in a non-committal mask.

"One moment now," he said. He turned to the working desk behind him and spoke into a telephone. It had neither visual plate nor amplified output; only the user could know what was being communicated, and with whom.

"Now we'll see," said the commander as he hung up the telephone.

With the awkwardness of a stopped trivideo drama they stood and sat there motionless and silently as the minutes dragged past. Ultimately there was a gentle alarm ring from one of the desk drawers. Commander Hughes opened it to extract a couple of yards of stereofac paper.

"Your service record," explained the commander, picking up a reading prism and starting at the top. "Just another moment."

Another half dozen minutes went past.

"Junior Spaceman Howard Reed," the commander read quietly at last, "'has an exemplary record.' That is Commander Breckenridge's opinion, if we are to believe what we read in this record. Oh, perhaps, he thought, a bit headstrong and mildly argumentative, factors which he considered balanced by a faculty for deep concentration."

"And how about my being transferred to Eden, Tau Ceti? And then to Flatbush, Lalande 25372?" Reed demanded.

"Reasons for transfer," read Commander Hughes from the record. "'Junior Spaceman Howard Reed is ambitious and overactive. In the considered opinion of Commander Breckenridge, he will make a fine superior officer once his duty-experience has the proper breadth.'" The commander looked up and waved a hand at the length of stereofac. The fasces wrought in gold above the stripes glittered in the light. "Were it not for the Regulations against permitting a junior officer to inspect his own service record," said Commander Hughes with a smile, "I'd let you see for

yourself that nowhere on this record is there a single word that corroborates your suggestion. Your tour of duty on Flatbush, Lalande 25372, and your earlier transfer to Eden, Tau Ceti, were merely the standard tour of duty, granted to satisfactory junior officers as a means of properly broadening their experience."

"In other words," snapped Reed angrily, "the fact that I have crossed space in a craft powered by a technical suggestion made by me some years ago does not prove a thing."

"Can you prove that you made any such technical suggestion?"

"Yes. Call Commander Briggs of the Bureau of Research. Call Commander Breckenridge of the Bureau of Operations. Demand that they state under oath, whether I did or did not make such suggestions. I was told my ideas were worthless."

"In other words, the Bureau of Research says it wouldn't work?"

"But look, sir! I drove a spacecraft all the way from—"

The Bureau of Justice officer held up a hand.

"Look," said the junior spaceman angrily, "all I want is justice!"

"And justice you'll get!" retorted Commander Hughes. "First, Mr. Reed, let me ask how you obtained permission to leave your post on Flatbush, Lalande 25372, so that you could come to the headquarters in person to state your plea? Or was this trip authorized?"

"Well, sir—the detector and beacon stations are completely automated and—"

"In blunt terms you are absent without leave?"

"Well, sir—"

"Junior Spaceman Howard Reed, you will consider yourself under personal arrest. We have no alternative but to place you in the custody of the Space Security Police. Remain as you were!"

Like the fabled case of the drowning man, Junior Spaceman Howard Reed reviewed his past in a single flash before his eyes. In the second blink, he covered his present. It wasn't to his liking.

Having covered his past and discarded his present, he next inspected his most probable future and came to the almost immediate conclusion that there wasn't very much in it for him. He had never heard Napoleon's statement that God was on the side with the heaviest artillery, but, in his own way, Junior Spaceman Howard Reed came to a parallel conclusion. Justice was on the side of the heaviest rank. Bitterly, he reflected that the reward for a technical suggestion of great merit was that they wouldn't make any trouble for him—so long as he didn't try to claim credit for it.

He came back to his dangerous present quickly. Commander Hughes was talking briskly into his secret telephone.

With a quick gesture, the junior spaceman leaned forward over the desk and snatched the instrument out of the senior officer's hands. He hauled in on the connecting cord until it came taut, and then he yanked, ripping the cord from its terminals. Brusquely, he dropped the telephone instrument into the commander's waste basket.



Then as bells began to ring and corridor horns began to sound, Junior Spaceman Howard Reed left the administration building of the Bureau of Justice on a dead run. Out in the street the wail of a siren began to climb from its throaty basso to its ear-splitting ululation.

Gloria Hanford awoke, as she always did, with full awareness, like the transition of a small animal from slumber to flight. It was not a languid hand that reached for the telephone that had awakened her but an alert one. It flipped the accept button up and the vidphone eye button down in a single twisting gesture of thumb and forefinger. It was not modesty that caused the turn-down of the vidphone eye. It was vanity. Gloria Hanford deemed unbrushed teeth, uncombed hair, and unwashed face both unacceptable and unattractive.

"Gloria Hanford here. Go ahead."

"Scholar Ross calling. Miss Hanford, you should know so that you can be prepared. Bertram Harrison has not yet responded to corrective therapy."

"Not—yet—responded," she repeated slowly. "Just how bad is this, Scholar Ross?"

"It is quite grave. It's possible there may be cerebral deterioration."

"You mean Bertram might even go from bad to worse?"

"Miss Hanford, will you cease treating this as if it were a comedy? You may be defending yourself against charges of criminal negligence. It might even get to the charge of homicide before it's done."

"Homicide? But he isn't dead!"

"Fifth degree homicide," said Scholar Ross, "comprises the process of causing by any means the loss of impairment of personality or intellect. In layman's terms, *brain-washing*."

"So?"

"So if I were you I'd dress and be ready for the authorities. Harrison forced a special session of court last night and had Bertram declared as invalid-incommunicado. Since your engagement was formally dissolved, this places Bertram's well-being under the discretion of his next-of-kin blood relations. Father Harrison is prepared to prosecute to the fullest extent. He's even petitioned for the right to take action against the Department of Domestic Tranquility for what he calls 'incompetent meddling.' So you see, it looks bad."

"Maybe there ought to be some thoughtful laws passed to protect we active ones from the dolts and dullards," said Gloria. "Okay, Scholar Ross, I'll take steps!"

In a flurry of expert motion, Gloria Hanford dressed, packed, and left.

The authorities who came for her hadn't had enough experience in dealing with the hypertonic, overactive, fast-thinking, anti-social type. They expected to find a slightly fuzzy-minded, still half-aslumber girl, unable to grasp both an idea and a dressing gown at the same time. They would not have equated their notion with the trim, alert, neatly and completely dressed young lady they passed on the stairs if it hadn't been for the standard, legal locks on all apartment doors. A tiny flag filled a small aperture only when the full bolt was cast home by a flip of the inside key.

Its absence meant that no one was inside.

The chief of the group forced his mental image through a mental photomontage that started with the original picture of the half-awakened young woman tossing a tousele of hair back out of one eye, passed through a much-abridged version of the process of female dressing, and concluded with the trim and striking number they'd passed on the stairway. Add important item: As an accessory, whistle-bait was also carrying an overnight bag in one formal-for-travelling, white-gloved hand.

Nudged, his memory was good.

He hauled his handset out while his men were still making dead certain that the little flag on the lock meant precisely what it said. By the time they were convinced that the apartment was truly empty and the lock bolted from the outside, he had unabashedly reported his failure, and was concluding a very excellent description of the fugitive Gloria Hanford.

XI

The average citizen, faced with an impressive uniform, falls into one of two very widely divided camps. One of these camps contains those of us who are impressed by the visible, exalted rank of the wearer.

So, by the simple process of snapping, "Official business!" at the driver of a skycab and simultaneously tossing the driver his official I. D. card in its ornate leather folder, Junior Spaceman Howard Reed succeeded in commandeering a skycab.

He took off, leaving the driver in a razzle-dazzle dream of collecting mileage from the Space Service whilst he spent the time comfortably relaxing in a pub. Protected from public gaze by the camouflaging skycab, the junior spaceman proceeded to cruise up the middle level of Ancient Fifth Avenue, driving a full eighteen inches below the legal altitude set for cruising skycabs.

He turned on his pocket set to listen to the details of the search that was being organized for him.

Above him, all around him, even in the subways below him, the vast and efficient organization of the Military Space Service was converging. This organization had the will and the manpower to

scour this city of twenty million people almost literally soul by soul if the need be, to locate a young officer in the uniform of a Junior Spaceman. He might be driving a Military Vehicle, but more likely would be found in one of the many public vehicles or public carriers that the city offered for civilian transportation. There was also the high possibility that Junior Spaceman Howard Reed might be located afoot on the static sidewalk or on one of the tramways.

And so, mentally clocking each time-point and making a careful note of the check-points, the junior spaceman built up a mental map of the city and its danger points. Until the laws of simple logic failed to operate, he was going to be exactly where they weren't.

He was, in the driver's seat of a skycab, precisely as invisible as The Purloined Letter. But now, if he were to drive his skycab away from the cruising level, he needed one more accessory. He had time. So long as the Military was looking for a Military man in Military surroundings and in a Military manner, he was as safe from detection as if he really owned the skycab he'd commandeered.

The civilian police were closer to success.

Called by the chief of the arresting party who'd arrived at Gloria Hanford's apartment too late by minutes, the minions of Law and Order converged in their civilian efficiency. Logistically, it was a simple matter of hare and hounds. The hare couldn't win. Only one question was important: Which of the hounds would?

Afoot and by jetcopter that englobed the area, they closed in. By the application of stored memory and studied information they erected invisible barriers at every exposed point along the most probable trail of their quarry, from the street outside of her apartment door to the garage stall in Monticello. Then, as a final clincher, they installed three men in Gloria Hanford's airscooter itself.

By virtue of the unexpected movement one can elude the cops for a time. Gloria, on the street before her apartment building, almost went into despair when she saw that there was no skycab within hailing distance. She almost took it as a personal affront.

But this was hardly the time to stamp her sandals on the hard pavement or to write letters to the Commissioner of Public Carriers.

She turned and disappeared into the tramway entrance heading North along Waterfront Avenue. Her coin had hardly hit the bottom of its slot when the mobile police converged to land on the spot she'd just vacated. The foremost of them saw her trim figure disappearing into the distance, eclipsed by the myriads of innocent souls whose only desire was to make use of the same Northbound Tramway.

The pursuit began to reshape its surface of detection from englobement to a cylinder, the axis of which lay congruent with the Northbound Tramway.

Again, she held the advantage of knowing her own decision whereas her pursuit had to divine her plans by analysis of her actions and making use of extrapolation. Gloria Hanford abruptly stepped off the Tramway at Fifty-third, walked briskly three long blocks to LaGuardia's Sixth, found herself facing a group of burly policemen, and stopped long enough to think. One of the cops shoved a galton whistle between his teeth and blew a supersonic blast that registered on every cop's detector within a quarter mile. Audibly a siren wailed. Inaudibly and invisibly the drawstring web of civic forces began to close in.

Once more Gloria stepped into the kiosk of a tramway, the Crosstown. She rode one more block to Ancient Fifth and stepped off. With a wave of her hand, and then the most startling process to be found in a woman, Gloria Hanford poked two fingers in her mouth and let go with a shrill, piercing whistle that made every skycab driver within a half mile come to the point of 'customer's alert!'

She made her point.

The one accessory that Junior Spaceman Howard Reed needed was a passenger, preferably a female passenger that could be identified as a female for a hundred yards through a high fog driven by a blinding gale. Old, beautiful, young or ugly didn't matter, so long as it was unmistakably woman. The Military wouldn't stop a skycab with a female passenger.

He needed his passenger because, until he could pull the taxi-meter flag—having filled the compartment with a customer—he was constrained by law to cruise. Cruising would get him nowhere; what he needed was the flag-down ticket of admission to the upper traffic levels.

The whistle shrilled at him; he looked; and then with his spaceman's skill, Junior Spaceman Howard Reed made a mad reverse spiral landing that nosed out a half dozen other cursing drivers. He hit ground zero at velocity zero on target zero and flipped open the skycab door so close that Gloria Hanford did not have to take a middle ground step to gain entry.

He took off with a rush that tossed his passenger into the deep seat and slammed the compartment door without human effort. Then he went into a cruel climbing turn that wore away twenty thousand flight miles of the engine bearings. He leveled off a thousand feet above Ancient Fifth Avenue's top-most fast traffic level, and set his homing and warning beacon to zero on the spaceport.

It did not bother him that his passenger hadn't taken the time to supply him with the destination she desired. After all, Junior Spaceman Howard Reed was not really a skycab driver. He didn't care.

Gloria Hanford rebounded from the soft cushions of the skycab compartment and struggled her way into a position that gave her a good look out of the broad rear window. Her driver's mad upward spiral made her dizzy, but from the higher levels it was definitely obvious that there was considerable concentration of movement down there below. Men and ground cars as well as jetcopters were closing down upon the spot they'd just left.

It did not bother Gloria Hanford that her driver hadn't waited to inquire as to her destination. She was just happy that he hadn't. Her destination consisted of swift flight along any vector in a solid sphere; hers was a reverse destination properly identified by the word "elsewhere."

Behind them the city erupted with a criss-crossing of radio-directed searchbeams, catching and identifying skycar after skycar. Up from the city's traffic levels came jetcopters and squad hoppers and some raid-gun carriers; personnel boats; even a sprinkling of mobile communications bases. To one side and almost behind them a flight of star shells burst in a fire-fall of gorgeous color. To their other side a stream of warning tracer streaked.

Howard poured on the coal.

Gloria made no protest; it was a most satisfactory agreement.

They buzzed across the Jersey Flats. He brought the skycab down on a flat slant landing that arrowed directly in and touched ground and skidded to a stop with all landing-gear brakes locked. They slid to within a few yards of the spacecraft.

Only then did the junior spaceman pause to speak to his passenger: "Sorry, but I'm in a jam. So long!"

He leaped out of the skycab, raced along the ground, went up the ladder on a dead run, flipped into the spacelock, snapped the "Close" switch as he passed the inner portal—and then, without waiting for any pre-flight checkout, Junior Spaceman Howard Reed resigned from the Space Force by slamming his controls into an emergency and unauthorized flight program that took him up and out of Earth's atmosphere in barely more than nothing flat.

When he was free and clear, he relaxed in his pilot's seat, swiveled it around ... and boggled, bug-eyed, at his passenger.

Gloria Hanford, still trim and shipshape in her white sharkskin suit, still carrying the overnight bag in her formal-for-travelling, white-gloved hand, sat in the spare seat.

She said: "I'm sorry about this, too, but it so happens that I'm also in a jam. Where do we go from here, Spaceman?"

He eyed her. "Where do you want to go?"

Gloria chuckled in a throaty voice. "Away," she said.

"Can you cook?" he demanded abruptly.

"Yes—why?"

"Then go rustle up some grub from the galley," he directed. "I'll have to keep an eye on this crate until we're free and clear. We can decide what to do next after we have time to think."

She looked at him strangely. Her own attitude puzzled her. It was the first time she'd been given an order that she hadn't resented, but then of course his direction made very good sense.

He looked upon her as she rose—and he found her fair.

She was. Gloria Hanford was an extremely attractive dish in her own right. Amplified a few millionfold by the spaceman's enforced isolation on Eden, Tau Ceti, and later upon Flatbush, Lalande 25372, she was a dream. Either locale would have the result of making Medusa the Gorgon look like Miss Universe of All Time, but Gloria Hanford didn't need any handicaps.

By some strange chemistry of non-material radiation that required no catalyst, there was no question between them.

Oh, they had a lot to find out about one another, but they had plenty of time for that.

That and other things....

XII

In the Officers' Club on Earth, someone said, "What's the latest report?"

Commander Breckenridge of Operations said, "Last detected by the station at Last Gasp, Ross 780, and going like hell wouldn't have them."

Commander Hughes of the Bureau of Justice said, "They're going at it rather early, aren't they?"

Scholar Ross of the Department of Domestic Tranquility waved at his comparison microscope and its data cards. "It would be hard to find two people better suited to one another." He looked at his watch and smiled. "I'd say that by now they've both forgotten completely that they were ever strangers."

Commander Briggs of the Bureau of Research refilled the glasses with the finest nonsynthetic vintage champagne that the cellar of the Officers' Club could provide. He held his glass high and said, "I toast the bride and groom and the ultimate colonization of the Galaxy—by subterfuge!"

But Scholar Ross pulled the hand down. With a shake of his head, he held his own glass high. "Sorry, Briggs. But this time we toast the reactionaries, the die-hards and the rule-ridden old guard who have to work like the very devil to pair off a deserving young couple, and then force them into finding a home of their own—on some other planet.

"Gentlemen. To the Troublemakers!

"*Ourselves!*"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TROUBLEMAKERS ***

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