

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 droneship 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 droneship 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 loving 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 pre-

scribed 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.

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"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 cor-

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roborates 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 sugges-

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tions. 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!"

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"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 —"

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"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.

X

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, *brainwashing*."

"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 'incom-

petent 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 touse 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

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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

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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

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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 Cross-town. 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 million-fold 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 Bu-

reau 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!"

— GEORGE O. SMITH

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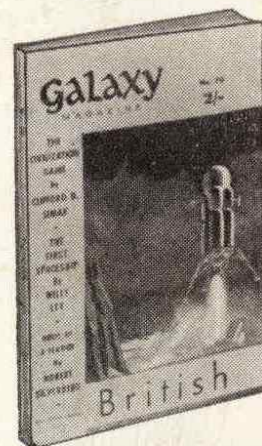
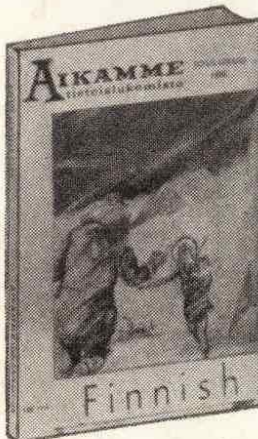
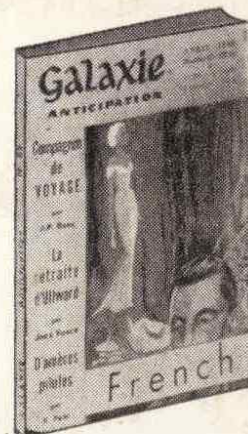
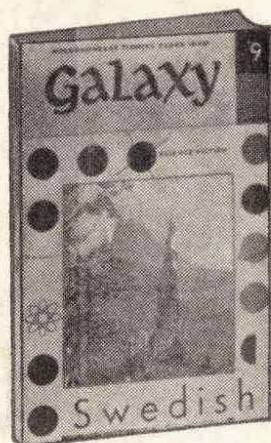
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