

ROBERT F. YOUNG

Robert F. Young (whose "Adventures of the Last Earthman in His Search for Love" appeared in our June, 1973, issue) is back with a brief and pointed story about a tomorrow in which the by-word is—

*NO DEPOSIT*NO REFILL*

SHE CAME INTO the bedroom and sat down beside him on the bed. "Do you want to have sex with me, Max? Is that why you rang?"

"No. Not right away. I wanted to talk to you."

"Why?"

"Partly, I guess, because I feel alone."

"I feel alone too."

"You're merely reflecting my mood."

"Isn't that one of my functions? To reflect the way you feel?"

"I suppose so. Your hair looks lovely tonight. Have you been combing it again?"

"Yes."

"I like the way that little lock falls over your forehead. Like a sun shower."

"I didn't know there were showers on the sun."

"There are. Beautiful golden ones. Evidently the fact wasn't included in your data banks."

"Lots of facts weren't included in my data banks."

"But they contain everything you *need* to know. You don't need to know about showers on the sun."

"What was it you wanted to talk to me about, Max?"

"Something important. I feel like talking anyway, and there's something I should tell you."

"Tell me then, Max."

"I don't really have to tell you ahead of time. I don't really have to tell you at all. I'm not bound to by law, or even by a moral code. But somehow I feel compelled to. I guess living with you all these months has caused me to feel, well, obligated toward you."

"That's silly, Max. You don't owe me anything."

"I know. I guess I must be growing old. Or maybe I belong back in the twentieth century—way back in the first half. In this day and age, men are supposed to be ultra-sophisticated. They don't get sentimental about printed circuits and talk-back tapes, no matter how attractive the package is they're wrapped in."

"Am I a nice package, Max?"

"The nicest I ever had."

"What's so special about me?"

"A lot of things. The way you walk. That look that sometimes comes into your eyes. The way you smile sort of slyly when it's time to go to bed. As though you'd thought up a new way to do it. A way a real girl never could."

"Whatever became of real girls, Max?"

"Nothing became of them. They're still around."

"Then how come I've never seen one?"

"You have seen one. The girl living in the next apartment is real. You've seen *her*."

"Yes, but I didn't know she was real. How *can* she be real? She sleeps with a real man, just like I do."

"You've got it turned around, Jane. He's the pseudo—not her. It works both ways. Haven't you ever noticed it's her, not him, who gets up in the morning and goes to work? Watch: he'll vanish from the scene one of these days, and there'll be a different one living there. That's the best way to tell for sure."

"Is that the way you tell for sure?"

"Generally. There are other ways, of course."

"But if there are real girls, why don't men live with *them*? How did it ever come about that they don't?"

"That inbuilt curiosity of yours is certainly working overtime tonight."

"I didn't even know I had one. Why should they put something like that in me, Max?"

"To make you more personable. If you weren't curious, you wouldn't ask questions—even conversational ones like 'How do you like my new paper dress?' and 'Aren't I a nice piece?' If you didn't ask questions, we wouldn't be able to talk back and forth so easily."

"I did ask a question, and you didn't answer it. How did it ever come about that real men and real girls don't live together?"

"Partly because real girls sort of phased themselves out. They got it into their heads that all differences between the sexes, except physical ones (which they couldn't do anything about anyway) should be abolished. They wanted to be treated like men and to have the same rights as men and to be free from the sexual domination of men. In a way, they wanted to *be* men. Whether or not they were justified in taking such an attitude is beside the point: the point is, underneath their immaculate veneer most modern heterosexual males think of themselves as garbage cans, and the last thing in the world any of them wants to make love to is another garbage can."

"So all the men walked out on all the women—was that the way it happened?"

"It wasn't that simple. And it didn't happen that fast. Possibly it wouldn't have happened at all if breakthroughs in the fields of genetics and robotology hadn't taken place shortly after the Movement attained its goals. Once it became possible to accomplish reproduction more efficiently by artificial than by natural methods, and once child-rearing became the province of professionals, the prime function of the ordinary woman became obsolete. Her ace in the hole vanished, and all she had left was the Queen of Hearts, which she was too proud—or too stubborn—to play. What really buried her once and for all, though, was the appearance on the market of a reasonably priced substitute."

"Pseudo-girls, you mean. *We're* why men walked out on her."

"It goes, deeper than that, and a lot farther back. It's highly improbable that most men would have preferred pseudo-girls over real girls regardless of how mixed up the real girls were, *if the pseudo-girls hadn't comprised a quality real girls lacked*—a quality perfectly attuned to the preconditioned attitude of the customer."

"I only asked a simple question, Max. Why can't you give me a simple answer? I don't even know what a preconditioned attitude is."

"It's a way of looking at something before you know what the something is. The attitude I'm talking about was the natural byproduct of a runaway technology that had made manufacturing the new less expensive than repairing the old. It—the attitude—took root around the middle of the twentieth century, and grew and grew and grew. It had already reached maturity when Ani-Mates, Inc. brought out the first pseudo-girls. Thanks to it, pseudo-girls (after the inevitable court-battles) became the rage, and real girls found themselves in freedom up to their necks."

"But that was what real girls wanted, wasn't it, Max? To be free. And if there are pseudo-men available as well as pseudo-girls, there's certainly no reason for them to be lonely."

"Sure they wanted to be free, and no, they're not lonely. But they didn't want to be free from men entirely. They wanted to have someone to take care of them while they were exercising their equality. And pseudo-men don't work."

"They're like pseudo-girls, huh? They stay home all day and do the housekeeping and get dinner ready and—and things like that."

"Right. Things like that. They're nice to have around, but they're a far cry from a hard-working husband."

"I still don't understand what a preconditioned attitude has to do with it."

"It's not necessary that you should, Jane. I just felt like talking—that's all."

"There was something you were going to tell me. Something you called me in here to tell me. Are you

going to tell me now, or shall we have sex first?"

"I'll tell you first, and then we'll have sex. But like I said, I'm not duty-bound to tell you ahead of time, or for that matter to tell you at all. I'm going to have to turn you off, Jane. Do you know what I mean by 'turning you off'?"

"Yes."

"And you don't mind?"

"Why should I mind?"

"Well, you shouldn't, as far as that goes—you're guaranteed not to. It's just that when the time comes I always hate to do it. It doesn't seem fair somehow. Most men don't feel this way—most men are glad when the time comes. Some of them don't even wait. With them, the preconditioned attitude I told you about works full-time. With me, it doesn't. Like I said, I guess I belong back in the first half of the twentieth century. I won't pretend that doing it will have any lasting effect on me—it won't. I'm not that much out of tune. It's just that I hate to do it. But I can't put it off any longer because if I don't do it pretty soon I'll have to watch you die. And I wouldn't want that. You wouldn't want that either, would you, Jane?"

"No, I guess I wouldn't."

"So we'll have sex one more time, and then I'll turn you off and everything will be all right."

"Are you going to try a redhead next?"

"Probably. Here, let me help you with your bra."

HAVING SEX FIRST made it easier. It always did. He carried the deactivated body into the kitchen and laid it on the floor. It was too big to go through the mouth of the disposal chute, and he had to dismember it first. He used the hack saw which he kept on hand for the purpose.

Afterward he watched 3V for a while, and had a few drinks. Then he went to bed. In the morning he threw away his throwaway pajamas and broke out a new throwaway business-suit. He drove to work in his throwaway car. On the way, he stopped off at the local branch of Ani-Mates, Inc. and put in an order for a custom-built redhead. A deluxe one.

—ROBERT F. YOUNG