

GALATEA GALANTE

by Alfred Bester

He was wearing a prefaded jump suit, beautifully tailored, the dernier cri in the nostalgic 2100s, but really too youthful for his thirty-odd years. Set square on his head was a vintage (circa 1950) English motoring cap with the peak leveled on a line with his brows, masking the light of lunacy in his eyes.

Dead on a slab, he might be called distinguished, even handsome, but alive and active? That would depend on how much demented dedication one could stomach. He was shouldering his way through the crowded aisles of

THE SATURN CIRCUS

50 PHANTASTIK PHREAKS 50

!!!ALL ALIENS!!!

He was carrying a mini sound-camera that looked like a chrome-and-ebony pepper mill, and he was filming the liv-ing, crawling, spasming, gibbering monstrosities exhibited in the large showcases and small vitrines, with a murmured

running commentary. His voice was pleasant; his remarks were not.

"Ah, yes, the Bellatrix basilisk, so the sign assures us. Black-and-yellow bod of a serpent. Looks like a Gila-mon-ster head attached. Work of that Tejas tailor who's so nitzy with surgical needle and thread. Peacock coronet on head. Good theater to blindfold its eyes. Conveys the conviction that its glance will kill. Hmmm. Ought to gag the mouth, too. According to myth the basilisk's breath also kills

"And the Hyades hydra. Like wow. Nine heads, as per re-vered tradition. Looks like a converted iguana. The Mexi-can again. That seamstress has access to every damn snake and lizard in Central America. She's done a nice join of necks to trunk-got to admit that-but her stitching shows to my eye

"Canopus cerberus. Three dog heads. Look like oversized Chihuahuas. Mastiff bod. Rattlesnake tail. Ring of rattlers around the waist. Authentic but clumsy. That Tejas woman ought to know you can't graft snake scales onto hound hide. They look like crud; but at least all three heads are barking.

.. "Well, well, well, here's the maladroit who claims he's my rival; the Berlin butcher with his zoo castoffs.

His latest spectacular, the Rigel griffin. 'Pa-daaa! Do him justice, it's classic. Eagle head and wings, but it's molting. Lion bod im-planting with feathers. And he's used ostrich claws for the feet. I would have generated authentic dragon's feet

"Now Martian monoceros; horse bod, elephant legs, stag's tail. Yes, convincing, but why isn't it howling as it should, according to legend? Mizar manticora. Kosher. Ko-sher. Three rows of teeth. Look like implanted shark's. Lion bod. Scorpion tail. Wonder how they produced that red -eyed effect. The Ares assida. Dull. Dull. Dullsville. Just an ostrich with camel feet, and stumbling all over them, too.

No creative imagination!

"Ah, but I call that poster over the Sirius sphinx brilliant theater. My compliments to the management. It's got to be recorded for posterity: THE PUBLIC IS RESPECTFULLY RE-REQUESTED NOT TO GIVE THE CORRECT ANSWER TO THE ENIGMA POSED BY THE SPHINX.

"Because if you do give the correct answer, as Oedipus found out, she'll destroy herself out of chagrin. A sore loser. I ought to answer the riddle, just to see how they stage it, but no. Theater isn't my shtick; my business is strictly crea-tive genesis

"The Berlin butcher again, Castor chimera. Lion head. Goat's bod. Looks like an anaconda tail. How the hell did he surgify to get it to vomit those flames? Some sort of cata-lytic gimmick in the throat, I suppose. It's only a cold corpo-sant fire, quite harmless but very dramatic-and those fire extinguishers around the showcase are a lovely touch. Damn good theater. Again, my compliments to the management.

.. "Aha! Beefcake on the hoof. Zosma centaur. Good-look-ing Greek joined to that Shetland pony. Blood must have been a problem. They probably drained both and substi-tuted a neutral surrogate. The Greek looks happy enough; in fact, damn smug. Anyone wondering why has only to see how the pony's hung

"What have we here? Antares unicorn, complete with grafted narwhal tusk but not with the virgin who captured it, virgin girls being the only types that can subdue unicorns, legend saith. I thought narwhals were extinct. They may have bought the tusk from a walking-stick maker. I know virgins are not extinct. I make'em every month; purity guar-anteed or your money back

"And a Spica siren. Lovely girl. Beautiful. She-But damn my eyes, she's no manufactured freak! That's Sandra,

my Siren! I can recognize my genesis anywhere. What the hell is Sandy doing in this damn disgusting circus? Naked in a showcase! This is an outrage!"

He charged the showcase in his rage. He was given to flashes of fury that punctuated his habitual exasperated calm. (His deep conviction was that it was a damned intran-sigent world because it wasn't run his way, which was the right way.)

He beat and clawed at the supple walls, which gave but did not break. He cast around wildly for anything destruc-tive, then darted to the chimera exhibit, grabbed a fire extin-guisher, and dashed back to the Siren. Three demoniac blows cracked the plastic, and three more shattered an es-cape hatch. His fury outdrew the freaks, and a fascinated crowd gathered.

He reached in and seized the smiling Siren. "Sandy, get the hell out. What were you doing there in the first place?"

<< . >>

"Where's your husband?"

44 4 99

"For God's sake!" He pulled off his cap, revealing pale, streaky hair. "Here, cover yourself with this. No, no, girl, downstairs. Use an arm for upstairs, and hide your rear elevation against my back."

"No, I am not prudish. I simply will not have my beautiful creation on public display. D'you think I-" He turned fiercely on three security guards closing in on him and brandished the heavy brass cylinder. "One more step, and I let you have it with this. In the eyes. Ever had frozen eyeballs?"

They halted. "Now look, mister, you got no-"

"I am not called `mister.' My degree is Dominie, which means master professor. I am addressed as Dominie, Domi-nie Manwright, and I want to see the owner at once. Immediately. Here and now. Sofort! Immediatamente! Mr. Saturn or Mr. Phreak or whatever!

"Tell him that Dominie Regis Manwright wants him here now. He'll know my name, or he'd better, by God! Now be off with you. Split. Cut." Manwright glared around at the enthralled spectators. "You turkeys get lost, too. All of you. Go eyeball the other sights. The Siren show is kaput."

As the crowd shuffled back from Manwright's fury, an amused gentleman in highly unlikely twentieth-century evening dress stepped forward. "I see you understand Siren, sir. Most impressive." He slung the opera cape off his shoulders and offered it to Sandra. "You must be cold, madame. May I?"

"Thank you," Manwright growled. "Put it on, Sandy. Cover yourself. And thank the man."

64 ~ 19

"I don't give a damn whether you're cold or not. Cover yourself. I won't have you parading that beautiful body I created. And give me back my cap."

"Women!" Manwright grumbled. "This is the last time I ever generate one. You slave over them. You use all your expertise to create beauty and implant sense and sensibility, and they all turn out the same. Irrational! Women! A race apart! And where the hell's 50 Phantastik Phreaks 50?"

"At your service, Dominie," the gentleman smiled.

"What? You? The management?"

"Indeed yes."

"In that ridiculous white tie and tails?"

"So sorry, Dominie. The costume is traditional for the role. And by day I'm required to wear hunting dress. It is grotesque, but the public expects it of the ringmaster."

"Hmph! What's your name? I'd like to know the name of the man I skin alive."

"Corque?"

"Cork? As in Ireland?"

"But with a Q U E."

"Corque?" Cor-kew-ee?" Manwright's eyes kindled. "Would you by any chance be related to Charles Russell Corque, Syrtus professor of ETM biology? I'll hold that in your favor."

"Thank you, Dominie. I am Charles Russell Corque, pro-fessor of extraterrestrial and mutation biology at Syrtus University."

"What!"

"Yes."

"In that preposterous costume?"

"Alas, yes."

"Here? On Terra?"

"In person."

"What a crazy coincidence. D'you know, I was going to make that damned tedious trip to Mars just to rap with you."

"And I brought my circus to 7Rrra hoping to meet and consult with you."

"How long have you been here?"

"°Iivo days."

"Then why haven't you called?"

"Setting up a circus show takes time, Dominie. I haven't had a moment to spare."

"This monstrous fakery is really yours?"

"It is."

"You? The celebrated Corque? The greatest researcher into alien life forms that science has ever known? Revered by all your colleagues, including myself, and swindling the turkeys with a phony freak show? Incredible. Corque! Un-believable!"

"But understandable, Manwright. Have you any idea of

the cost of ETM research? And the reluctance of the grants committees to allocate an adequate amount of funds? No, I suppose not. You're in private practice and can charge gigan-tic fees to support your research, but I'm forced to moon-light and operate this circus to raise the money I need."

"Nonsense, Corque. You could have patented one of your brilliant discoveries-that fantastic Jupiter III methophyte, for instance. Gourmets call it 'The Ganymede Truffle.' D'you know what an ounce sells for?"

"I know, and there are discovery rights and royalties. Enormous. But you don't know university contracts, my dear Dominie. By contract, the royalties go to Syrtus, where"-Professor Corque's smile soured-"where they are spent on such studies as Remedial Table Tennis, Demonica Orientation, and The Light Verse of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch."

Manwright shook his head in exasperation. "Those damned faculty clowns! I've turned down a dozen university offers, and no wonder. It's an outrage that you should be forced to humiliate yourself and- Listen, Corque, I've been dying to get the details on how you discovered that Gany-mede methophyte. When will you have some time? I thought-Where are you staying on Terra?"

"The Borealis."

"What? That fleabag?"

"I have to economize for my research."

"Well, you can economize by moving in with me. It won't cost you a cent. I've got plenty of room, and I'll put you up for the duration, with pleasure. I've generated a house-keeper who'll take good care of you-and rather startle you, I think. Now do say yes, Corque. We've got a hell of a lot of discussing to do and I've got a lot to learn from you."

"I think it will be the other way around, my dear Domi-nie."

"Don't argue! Just pack up, get the hell out of the Bo-realis, and-"

"What, Sandy?"

(Musical Note)

"Where?"

(Musical Note)

"Oh, yes, I see the rat-fink."

"What now, Manwright?"

"Her husband. I'll trouble you to use restraint on me, or he'll become her late husband."

An epicene hove into view-tall, slender, elegant, in flesh-colored SkinAll-with chest, arms, and legs artfully padded to macho dimensions, as was the ornamented codpiece. Manwright juggled the extinguisher angrily, as though grop-ing for the firing pin of a grenade. He was so intent on the encounter that Corque was able to slip the cylinder out of his hands as the epicene approached, surveyed them, and at last spoke.

"Ali, Manwright."

"Jessamy!" Manwright turned the name into a denuncia-tion.

"Sandra."

"

11 11

And our impresario."

"Good evening, Mr. Jessamy"

"Manwright, I have a bone to pick with you."

"You? Pick? A bone? With me? Why, you damned pimp, putting your own wife, my magnificent creation, into a damned freak show!" He turned angrily on Professor Cor-que. "And you bought her, eh?"

"Not guilty, Dominie. I can't supervise everything. The Freak Foreman made the purchase."

"He did, did he?" Manwright returned to Jessamy. "And

how much did you get for her?"

"That is not germane."

"That little? Why, you padded procurer? Why? God knows, you don't need the money"

"Dr. Manwright-"

"Don't you `Doctor' me. It's Dominie."

"Dominie-"

"Speak."

"You sold me a lemon."

"What!"

"You heard me. You sold me a lemon."

"How dare you!"

"I admit I'm a jillionaire."

"Admit it? You broadcast it."

"But nevertheless I resent a rip-off."

"Rip! I'll kill the man. Don't restrain me. I'll kill! Look, you damned minty macho, you came to me and

contracted for the perfect wife. A Siren, you said. The kind that a man would have to lash himself to the mast to resist a la Ulysses. Well? Didn't you?"

"Yes, I did."

"Yes, you did. And did I or did I not generate a biodroid miracle of beauty, enchantment, and mythological authenticity, guaranteed or your money back?"

"Yes, you did."

"And one week after delivery I discover my Pearl of Perfection sold to the distinguished Charles Russell Corque's obscene freak show and displayed naked in a bizarre show-case. My beautiful face and neck! My beautiful back and buttocks! My beautiful breasts! My beautiful mons veneris! My->>

"That's what she wanted."

"Did you, Sandy?"

w

"Shame on you, girl. I know you're vain-that was a glitch in my programming-but you don't have to flaunt it. You're a damned exhibitionist." Back to Jessamy: "But that doesn't excuse your selling her. Why, did you do it, dammit? Why

"She was tearing my sheets."

"What?"

"Your beautiful, enchanting Pearl of Perfection was tearing my monogrammed silk sheets, woven at incredible cost by brain damaged nuns. She was tearing them with her mythologically authentic feet. Look at them."

There was no need to look. It was undeniable that the beautiful, enchanting Siren was feathered from the knees down and had delicate pheasant feet.

"So?" Manwright demanded impatiently.

"She was also scratching my ankles."

"Damn you!" Manwright burst out. "You asked for a Si-ren. You paid for a Siren. You received a Siren."

"With bird feet?"

"Of course with bird feet. Sirens are part bird. Haven't you read your Bulfinch? Aristotle? Sir Thomas Browne? Matter of fact, you're lucky Sandy didn't turn out bird from the waist down. Ha!"

"Very funny," Jessamy muttered.

"But it wasn't luck." Manwright went on. "No, it was ge-nius. My biodroid genius for creative genesis, and my deep understanding of the sexual appetites."

"Don't be impudent, girl. I have sexual appetites, too, but when I guarantee a virgin, I - No matter. Take her home, Jessamy. Don't argue, or I'll kill you, if I can find that damned brass thing I thought I had. Take Sandra home. I'll refund Professor Corque in full. Got to support his brilliant

research. Sandy, trim your talons, for God's sake! Sense and sensibility, girl!. Corque, go pack up and move in with me. Here's my card with the address. What the devil are you do-ing with that silly-looking fire extinguisher?"

"And that's the full shmeer, Charles. I'm sorry I haven't any work in progress to show you, but you can see I'm no tailor or seamstress, cutting up mature animals, human or otherwise, and piecing parts together, like you see with those show-biz monsters in your circus. No, I macrogenerate 'em, pure and whole, out of the basic DNA broth. Mine are all test-tube babies. Florence-flask babies, as a matter of fact, which is where I start 'em. Biodroids need womb space like any other animal."

"Fascinating, my dear Reg, and quite overwhelming. But what I can't fathom is your RNA process."

"Ali! The RNA messenger service, eh?"

"Exactly. Now we all know that DNA is the life reser-voir-" .

"All? We all know? Ha! Not bloody likely. Some time I'll show you the abuse I get from the Scripture freaks."

"And we know that RNA is the messenger service deliver-ing commands to the developing tissues."

"Right on, Charles. That's where the control lies."

"But how do you control the controls? How do you direct the RNA to deliver specific commands from DNA to em-bryo? And how do you select the commands?"

"Penthouse."

"Wh-what?"

"Come up to the penthouse. I'll show you."

Manwright led Corque out of the enormous crimson-lit cellar laboratory which was softly glowing with ruby-col-ored glassware and liquids ("My babies must be insulated from light -and noise") and up to the main floor of the

house. It was decorated in the Dominie's demented style: a hodgepodge of Regency, classic Greek, African, and Renais-sance. There was even a marble pool inhabited by iridescent manic fish, which gazed up at the two men eagerly.

"Hoping we'll fall in," Manwright laughed. "A cross be-tween piranha and golden carp. One of my follies."

Thence to the second floor, twenty-five by a hundred. Manwright's library and study: four walls shelved

and crammed with tapes, publications, and software; a rolling ladder leaning against each wall; a gigantic carpenter's workbench center, used as a desk and piled with clutter.

Third floor divided between dining room (front), kitchen and pantry (center), and servants' quarters (rear, overlooking garden).

Fourth floor, enjoying maximum sky and air, bedrooms. There were four, each with its own dressing room and bath, all rather severe and monastic. Manwright regarded sleep as a damned necessity which had to be endured but which should never be turned into a luxury.

"We all get enough sleep during our nine months in the womb," he had growled to Corque, "and we'll get more than we'll ever need after we die. But I'm working on regenerative immortality, off and on. Trouble is, tissues just don't want to play ball." He led the professor up a narrow stair to the penthouse.

It was a clear plastic dome, firmly anchored against wind and weather. In the center stood a glimmering Rube Goldberg, Heath-Robinson, Da Vinci mechanical construct. If it resembled anything it would be a giant collapsing robot waiting for a handyman to put it together again. Corque stared at the gallimaufry and then at Manwright.

"Neutrinoscope," the Dominie explained. "My extrapolation of the electron microscope."

"What? Neutrinos? The beta-decay process?"

Manwright nodded. "Combined with a cyclotron. I get particular particle selection that way and acceleration up to ten Mev. Selection's the crux, Charles. Each genetic molecule in the RNA coil has a specific response to a specific particle bombardment. The way I've been able to identify and isolate somewhere in the neighborhood of ten thousand messenger commands."

"But-but-My dear Reg, this is positively fantastic!"

Manwright nodded again, "Uh-huh. Took me ten years."

"But I had no idea that- Why haven't you published?"

"What?" Manwright snorted in disgust. "Publish? And have every damned quack and campus cretin clowning around with the most sacred and miraculous phenomenon ever generated on our universe? Pah! No way!"

"You're into it, Reg."

Manwright drew himself up with hauteur. "I, sir, do not clown."

"But Reg -"

"But me no buts, professor. By heaven, if Christ, in whom I've never believed, ever returned to Terra and this house, I'd keep it a secret. You know damn well the hell that would break loose if I published. It'd be. Golgotha all over again."

While Corque was wondering whether Manwright meant his biodroid techniques, Christ's epiphany, or both, there was a sound of a large object slowly falling upstairs. Manwright's scowl was transformed into a grin. "My house-keeper," he chuckled. "You didn't get the chance to see him when you moved in last

night. A treasure."

An imbecile face, attached to a pinhead, poked through the penthouse door. It was followed by a skewed hunchback body with gigantic hands and feet. The mouth, which seemed to wander at will around the face, opened and spoke in a hoarse voice.

"Mahth-ter . . ."

"Yes, Igor?"

"Should I thteal you a brain today, mahth-ter?"

"Thank you, Igor. Not today"

"Then breakfahtht ith therved, mahth-ter."

"Thank you, Igor. This is our distinguished guest, the cel-ebreated Professor Charles Corque. You will make him com-fortable and obey him in everything."

"Yeth, mahth-ter. At your thervithe, thelebrated Pro-fethor Charlth Corque. Should I thteal you a brain today?"

"Not today, thank you."

Igor bobbed his head, turned, disappeared, and there was a sound of a large object rapidly falling downstairs. Cor-que's face was convulsed with suppressed laughter. "What in the world-?"

"A reject," Manwright grinned. "Only one in my career. No, the first of two, if we count Sandy, but I do think Jes-samy will keep his Siren. Anyway," he continued, leading Corque downstairs, "this client was absolutely hypnotized by the Frankenstein legend. Came to me and contracted for a faithful servitor, like the Baron's accomplice. Returned five months later, paid like a gent, but said he'd changed his mind. He was now on a Robinson Crusoe kick and wanted a Friday. I made him his Friday, but I was stuck with Igor."

"Couldn't you have dissolved him back into the DNA broth?"

"Good God, Charles! No way. Never. I generate life; I don't destroy it. Anyway, Igor's an ideal housekeeper. He does have this brain-stealing hang-up-that was part of the original model-and I have to lock him in a closet when there's thunder and lightning, but he cooks like an absolute genius."

"I hadn't known that Baron Frankenstein's henchman was a chef."

"To be quite honest, Charles, he wasn't. That was an error

in programming-I do glitch now and then-with a happy ending. When Igor's cooking, he thinks he's making mon-sters."

The card came in on the same tray with the Tomato-On-ion Tart (ripe tomatoes, sliced onions, parsley, basil, Gruy-ere, bake in pastry shell forty minutes at 375°F), and Manwright snatched the embossed foil off the salver.

"What's this, Igor? `Anthony Valera, Chairman, Vortex Syndicate, 69 Old Slip, CB: 0210-0012-036-216291'?"

"In the waiting room, mahth-ter."

"By God, Charles, a potential client. Now you may have your chance to watch my genesis from start to finish. Come on!"

"Oh, have a heart, Reg. Let the chairman wait. Igor's monster looks delicious."

"Thank you, thelebrated Profethor Charlth Corque."

"No, no, Igor. The thanks go from me to you."

"Pigs, both of you," Manwright snorted and dashed for the stairs. Corque rolled his eyes to heaven, grabbed a slice of tart, winked at Igor, and followed, chewing ecstatically.

One would expect the chairman of a syndicate with a sev-enteen-figure CB telephone number to look like Attila the Hun. Anthony Valera looked and dressed like a suave Span-ish grandee; he was black and silver, including ribboned pe-ruke. He was very much au courant, for as Corque entered he smiled, bowed, and murmured, "What a happy surprise, Professor Corque. Delighted. I had the pleasure of hearing you speak at the Trivium Charontis convention." And Mr. Valera considerately offered his left palm, Corque's right hand being busy with the tart.

"He wants an ideal executive secretary." Manwright refused to waste time on courtesies. "And I told him that my biodroid talents are damned expensive."

"To which I was about to respond when you most happily

entered, Professor Corque, that Vortex is criminally sol-vent."

"Then it's to be a company contract?"

"No, Dominie, personal." Mr. Valera smiled. "I, also, am criminally solvent."

"Good. I hate doing business with committees. You must know the old saw about camels. Let's discuss the specs and see whether we understand each other. Sex?"

"Female, of course."

"Of course. Physical appearance?"

"You don't take notes?"

"Total recall."

"You are lucky. Well, then. Fair. Medium tall. Endowed with soft grace. Soft voice. Blue eyes. Clear skin. Slender hands. Slender neck. Auburn hair."

"Mmm. Got any particular example of the type in mind?" "Yes. Botticelli's Birth of Venus."

"Ha! Venus on the Half-shell. Lovely model. Character?" "What one would expect of a secretary: sterling, faithful, devoted . . . to my work, of course."

"To your work, of course."

"And clever."

"D'you mean clever or intelligent?"

"Aren't they the same?"

"No. Cleverness requires humor. Intelligence does not."

"Then clever. I'll provide the intelligence. She must be able to learn quickly and remember. She must be able to acquire any skill necessary for my work. She must be perceptive and understand the stresses and conflicts that make a chairman's life one constant battle."

"So far you could hire such a girl," Manwright objected. "Why come to me?"

"I haven't finished, Dominie. She must have no private life and be willing to drop everything and be instantly availa-

ble at all times."

"Available for what?"

"Business luncheons, dinners, last-minute parties, client entertainment, and so forth. She must be chic and fashion-able and able to dazzle men. You would not believe how many tough tycoons have been charmed into dubious deals by a seductive secretary."

"You've left out an important point. On what salary will she be seducing?"

"Oh, I'll provide the money for the wardrobe, the maquillage, and so forth. She must provide the taste, the charm, the wit, the entertaining conversation."

"Then you want a talker?"

"But only when I want her to talk. Otherwise, mum."

Corque whistled softly. "But you're describing a paragon, my dear sir."

"I would say a miracle, Professor Corque, but Dominie Manwright is celebrated for his miraculous creations."

"You married?" Manwright shot.

"Five times."

"Then you're a chaser."

"Dominie!"

"And easily landed."

"Really, you're extraordinarily blunt. A chaser? Well . . . let's say that I'm attracted, occasionally"

"Would you want your executive secretary to be respon-sive-occasionally? Is that to be programmed?"

"Only unilaterally. If I should happen to desire, I would want a beautiful response. But she is not to make demands. Nevertheless she will, of course, be faithful to me."

"These parameters are preposterous," Corque exclaimed indignantly.

"Not at all, Charles, not at all," Manwright soothed. "Mr. Valera is merely describing what all men desire in a woman:

an Aspasia, the beautiful femme galante who was the ador-ing mistress and adviser to Pericles of ancient Greece. It's wishful fantasy, but my business is turning fantasy into real-ity, and I welcome the challenge. This girl may be my mag-num opus." Again he fired a shot at Valera. "And you'll become very bored."

"What?"

"Within six months this adoring, talented, dedicated slave will bore you to tears."

"But how? Why?"

"Because you've left out the crux of a kept woman's hold over a man. Don't protest, Valera. We know damn well you're ordering a mistress, and I make no moral judgment, but you've forgotten the drop of acid."

"Dominie, I do protest, I -"

"Just listen. You're contracting for an enchanting mis-tress, and it's my job to make sure that she remains enchant-ing, always. Now there are many sweet confections that require a drop of acid to bring you the full flavor and keep them enjoyable. Your Aspasia will need a drop of acid for the same reason. Otherwise, her perpetual perfection will cloy you in a matter of months."

"You know," Valera said slowly, "that's rather astute, Dominie. What would you advise? I'm all anticipation!"

"The acid in any woman who can hold a man: the unex-pected, the quality that makes it impossible to live with them or without them."

"And what would that be in my . . . my secretary?"

"How the devil can I tell you?" Manwright shouted. "If you knew in advance, it wouldn't be unexpected, and any-way I won't know. I can't guarantee surprise and adventure with a woman. All I can do is program a deliberate error into the genesis of your perfect Aspasia, and the discovery of that kink will be the charming drop of acid. Under-

stood?"

"You make it sound like a gamble."

"The irrational is always a gamble."

After a pause Valera said, "Then you're challenging me, Dominic?"

"We're both being challenged. You want the ideal mistress created to your specs; I've got to meet them to your complete satisfaction."

"And your own, Reg?" Corque murmured.

"Certainly my own. I'm a professional. The job is the boss. Well, Valera? Agreed?"

After another thoughtful pause, Valera nodded. "Agreed, Dominic."

"Splendid. I'll need your Persona Profile from the syndicate."

"Out of the question, Dominic! Persona Profiles are Inviolable Secret. How can I ask Vortex to make an exception?"

"Damn it, can't you understand?" Manwright was infuriated by this intransigence but controlled himself and tried to speak reasonably. "My dear chairman, I'm shaping and conditioning this Aspasia for your exclusive use. She will be the cynosure of all men, so I must make sure that she'll be implanted with an attraction for your qualities and drawn to you alone."

"Surely not all, Dominic. I have no delusions of perfection."

"Then perhaps to your defects, and that will be your charming drop of acid. Come back in twenty-one weeks"

"Why twenty-one specifically?"

"She'll be of age. My biodroids average out at a week of genesis for every physical year of the creation's maturity. One week for a dog; twenty-one weeks for an Aspasia. Good day, Mr. Valera."

After the chairman had left, Manwright cocked an eye at

Corque and grinned. "This is going to be a magnificent experiment, Charles. I've never generated a truly contemporary biodroid before. You'll pitch in and help, I hope?"

"I'll be honored, Reg." Suddenly, Corque returned the grin. "But there's one abstruse reference I can't understand."

"Fear not, you'll learn to decipher me as we go along. What don't you understand?"

"The old saw about the camel."

Manwright burst out laughing. "What? Never heard it? Penalty of spending too much time on the outer planets. Question: What is a camel? Answer: A camel is a horse made by a committee." He sobered. "But by God, our galling girl won't be any camel. She'll be devastating."

"Forgive the question, Reg: Too devastating for you to re-sist?"

"What? That? No way! Never! I've guaranteed and deliv-ered too many virgin myths, deities, naiads, dryads, and so welter. I'm seasoned, Charles: tough and hard and impervi-ous to all their lures. But the breasts are going to be a prob-lem," he added absently.

"My dear Reg! Please decipher."

"Her breasts, Charles. Botticelli made 'em too small in his Venus. I think I should program 'em fuller, but what size and shape? Like pears? Pomegranates? Melons? It's an aesthetic perplexity."

"Perhaps your deliberate error will solve it."

"Perhaps, but only the Good Lord, in whom I've never believed, can know what her mystery kink will turn out to be. Selah! Let's get to work on our perfect mistress, Charles, or, to use an antique expression that's just become a new vogue word, our perfect Popsy"

The Dominie's program for a devastating Popsy who was to be enchanting, trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, cour-

teous, kind, obedient, cheerful, clever, chic, soft-spoken, beautiful, busty, eloquent on demand, and always available to entertain, began as follows:

A 12-1 0 0 (scald)

B 12-2 1 1

C 12-3 2 2 (VS.O.P)

D 12-4 3 3

E 12-5 4 4

F 12-6 5 5 (~e dram)

G 12-7 6 6

H 12-8 7 7 (crimped)

I 12-9 8 8

J 11-1 9 9 (/z scruple)

K 11-2 (garni)

L 11-3 If 8-3

M 11-4 ! 11-8-2

N 11-5 1 8-4 (eau)

O 11fi \$ 11-8-3

P 11-7 % 0-84 (MSG)

Q 11-8 £ 12-8-2

R 11-9 & 12

S 0-2 • 11-8-4 (only a dash)

T 0-3 + 0-8-3

U 0-4 12-8-3

Und so wgiiter for 147 pages. Und good luck to the com-puter software for creative biogenesis, which couldn't possi-bly interest anyone.

"Anyway, there's no point in reading the program, Cha-rles. Numbers can't paint the picture. I'll just describe the sources I've used for the generation of our Popsy. You may not recognize some of the names, but I assure you that most of them were very real and famous celebrities in their time."

"What was your lecture to Igor the other day, Reg? `A chef is no better than his materials.' "

"Right on. And I'm using the best. Beauty -Botticelli's Venus of course, but with Egyptian breasts. I thought of us-ing Pauline Borghese, but there's a queen in a limestone re-lief from the Ptolemaic period who's the ideal model. Callipygian rear elevation. Maidenhair frontispiece, delicate and fritillary. Did you say something, Charles?"

"Not I, Reg."

"I've decided not to use Aspasia for the virtues."

"But you said that was what Valera wanted."

"So I did, but I was wrong. The real Aspasia was a damned premature Women's Rights activist. Too strong for the chairman's taste."

"And yours?"

"Any man's. So I'm using Egeria instead."

"Egeria? I haven't had an education in the classics, Reg."

"Egeria, the legendary fountain nymph who was the de-voted adviser to King Numa of ancient Rome. She also pos-sessed the gift of prophecy; which might come in handy for Valera. Let's see. Fashion and chic-a famous couturiere named Coco Chanel. Subtle perceptions-the one and only Jane Austen. Voice and theater sense-Sarah Bernhardt. And she'll add a soup4;on of lovely Jew."

"What on earth for?"

"It's obvious you haven't met many on the outer planets or you wouldn't ask. Remarkable race, Jews;

freethinking, original, creative, obstinate, impossible to live with or without."

"That's how you described the ideal mistress, wasn't it?"

"I did."

"But if your Popsy is obstinate, how can she respond to Valera's desires?"

"Oh, I'm using Lola Montez for that. Apparently, she was

a tigress in the sex department. Hmmm. Next? Victoria Woodhull for business acumen. La Pasionaria for courage. Hester Bateman -she was the first woman silversmith-for skills. Dorothy Parker for wit. Florence Nightingale for sacrifice. Mata Hari for mystery. What else?"

"Conversation."

"Quite right. Oscar Wilde."

"Oscar Wilde!"

"Why not? He was a brilliant talker; held dinner parties spellbound. I'm giving her dancer's hands, neck and legs, Dolley Madison hostessing, and-I've omitted something . . ."

"Your deliberate mistake."

"Of course. The mystery kink which will catch us all by surprise." Manwright flipped through the software. "It's programmed somewhere around here. No, that's Valera's Persona Profile. Charles, you won't believe the damned in-transigent, stubborn, know-it-all conceited egomania concealed beneath that polished veneer. It's going to be hell imprinting our girl with an attraction engram for such an impossible man. Oh, here's the unexpected in black and white."

Manwright pointed to: $R=LxVN$

"Wait a minute," Corque said slowly. "That equation looks familiar."

"Aha."

"I think I remember it from one of my boyhood texts."

"Oh-ho."

"The . . . the most probable distance . . ." Corque was dredging up the words ". . . from the lamppost after a certain number of . . . of irregular turns is equal to the average length of each track that is-"

"Straight track, Charles."

"Right. Each straight track that is walked, times the square root of their number." Corque looked at Manwright with a mixture of wonder and amusement. "Confound you, Reg! That's the solution to the famous 'Drunkard's Walk' problem from The Law of Disorder. And this is the deliberate uncertainty that you're programming? You're either a madman or a genius."

"A little of both, Charles. A little of both. Our Popsy will walk straight lines within my parameters, but we'll never know when or how she'll hang a right or a left."

"Surely she'll be aiming for Valera?"

"Of course. He's the lamppost. But she'll do some unexpected staggering on the way." Manwright chuckled and sang in an odd, husky voice, "There's a lamp on a post, There's a lamp on a post, And it sets the night aglowin'. Boy girl boy girl, Boy boy girl girl, But best when flakes is sno-win'."

Regis Manwright's laboratory notes provide a less-than-dramatic description (to put it politely) of the genesis and embryological development of Galatea Galante, the Perfect Popsy.

GERMINAL

Day 1: One hundred milliliter Florence flask. Day 2: Five hundred milliliter Florence flask. Day 3: One thousand milliliter Florence flask. Day 4: Five thousand milliliter Florence flask. Day 5: Decanted.

(E & A charging too damn much for flasks!!!)

(Baby nominal. Charles enchanted with her. Too red for my taste. Poured out of the amnion blowing bubbles and talking. Couldn't shut her up. Just another fresh kid with a damn big mouth.)

"Reg, Gally must have a nurse."

"For heaven's sake, Charles! She'll be a year old next week."

"She must have someone to look after her."

"All right. All right. Igor. She can sleep in his room."

"No, no, no. He's a dear creature, but hardly my idea of a nursemaid."

"I can convince him he made her. He'll be devoted."

"No good, Reg; he isn't child oriented"

"You want someone child oriented? Hmmm. Ah, yes. Got just the right number for you. I generated The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe for the Positively Peerless Imitation Plastic company to use in their genuine plastics sales promo-tion."

"She had so many children she didn't know what to do'?"

"The same." Manwright punched the CB keyboard. "Seanbhean? This is Regis."

The screen sparkled and cleared. A gypsy crone appeared with begging hand outstretched for alms.

"How's everything going, Seanbhean?"

"Scanruil aduafar, Regis."

«Why?»

"Briseadh ina ghno e."

"What! PPIP gone bankrupt? That's shocking. So you're out of a job?"

"Deanfaidh sin!"

"Well perhaps I have something for you, Seanbhean. I've just generated-"

"Cut off, Reg," Corque broke in sharply.

Manwright was so startled by Corque's tone that he obeyed and looked up perplexedly. "Don't think she'll do, Charles?"

"That old hag? Out of the question."

"She isn't old," Manwright protested. "She's under thirty."

I made her look like that according to the specs: Seventy-year-old Irish gypsy. they call 'em `tinkers' in Ireland. Speaks Irish and can handle kid actors who are a pain in the ass. And I delivered, by God."

"As you always do; but still out of the question. Please try someone else."

"Charles, has that damn infant got you enthralled?"

"No."

"Her first conquest, and she's just out of the flask! Can you imagine what she'll do to men in another twenty weeks? Be at each other's throats. Fighting duels. Ha! I am a ge-nius, and I don't deny it."

"We need a nurse for Gally, Reg."

"Nag, nag, nag."

"Someone warm and comforting after the child has en-dured a session with you."

"I can't think what the man is implying. All right, cradle-snatcher, all right. I'll call Claudia." Manwright punched the CB. "She's warm and maternal and protective. Wish she'd been my nanny. Hello? Claudia? It's Regis. Switch on, dar-ling." The screen sparkled and cleared. The magnificent head and face of a black mountain gorilla appeared.

"!!!" she grunted.

"I'm sorry, love. Been too busy to call. You're looking well. How's that no-good husband of yours?"

"And the kids?"

.6!ti»

"Splendid. Now don't forget. You promised to send them to me so I can surgify them into understanding our kind of speech. Same like you, love, and no charge. And speaking of kids, I've got a new one, a girl,

that I'd like you to-

At this point the stunned Corque collected himself enough to press the cutoff stud. Claudia faded.

"Are you mad?" he demanded.

Manwright was bewildered. "What's wrong, Charles?"

"You suggest that terrifying beast for the child's nurse?"

"Beast! She's an angel of mother love. She'll have the kid climbing all over her, hugging and kissing her. It's interest-ing," he reflected, "I can manipulate the cognition centers, but I can't overcome muscular limitations. I gave Claudia college-level comprehension of spoken and written com-munications, but I couldn't give her human speech. She's still forced to use Mountain, which is hardly a language of ideas. Damn frustrating. For both of us."

"And you actually want her to mother Gally?"

"Of course. Why not?"

"Your Claudia will frighten the daylights out of the in-fant."

"Ridiculous."

"She's hideous."

"Are you mad? She's beautiful. Pure. Majestic. And a hell of a lot brighter than your Remedial Table Mnnis bums 7, at Syrtus University."

"But she can't talk. She only grunts."

"Talk? Talk? For God's sake. Charles! That damn red Popsy was poured out talking sixteen to the dozen. We can't shut her up. She's filling the house with enough of her jab-ber as it is. Be grateful for some silence."

So Claudia, the black mountain gorilla, moved into the Manwright menage, and Igor was furiously jealous.

The first morning that Claudia joined Manwright and Corque at breakfast (while Igor glowered at his massive ri-val), she printed a message on a pad and handed it to the

Dominie: R DD YU GV G TLT TRG IN YR PRGRM?,

"Let's see if I remember your abbreviations, darling. Did you . . . that's me . . . give Galatea . . . yes, toilet training

in your program? My God, Claudia! I gave her the best of 47 women. Surely at least one of them must have been toilet trained."

BY DPRS

"By what, Claudia?"

"Buy diapers, Reg."

"Oh. Ali. Of course. Thank you, Charles. Thank you, Claudia. More coffee, love? It's frustrating, Charles. Mus-cular dyspraxia again. Claudia can manage caps in her writ-ing but she can't hack lower case. How many diapers, Claudia?"

1 DZ

"Right. One doz. Zu Befehl. Did you bring your kids to play with the baby?"

TO OD

"Too odd for what?"

TOO OLD

"Your kids?"

G

"What? Galatea? Too old for your boys? And still in dia-pers? I'd best see for myself."

One of the top-floor bedrooms had been converted into a nursery. The usual biodroid cellar accommodations weren't good enough for Manwright's magnum opus. When the Dominic entered with Claudia, the red infant was on the floor, flat on her belly, propped on a pillow, and deep in a book. She looked up and crawled enthusiastically to Claudia.

"Nanny dear, I've found the answer, the old linear short-hand. Just slashes, dots, and dashes, and you won't have to worry your hand and head over cursive abbreviations. It's a simple style, and we can practice together." She climbed up on Claudia and kissed her lovingly. "One would think this might have occurred to that egotistical know-it-all whose

name escapes me." The infant turned her auburn head. "Why, good morning, Dominic Manwright. What an un-pleasant surprise."

"You're right, Claudia," Manwright growled. "She's too damned old for your kids. Diaper her."

"My sphincter will be under control by tomorrow, Domi-nie," Galatea said sweetly. "Can you say the same for your tongue?"

"Guh!" And Manwright withdrew with what he hoped was impressive dignity.

Of course, she shot up like a young bamboo plant and filled the house with joy as she entertained them with her es-capades. She taught herself to play Manwright's Regency harpsichord, which was sadly out of repair. She convinced Igor that it was a monster in the making, and together they refinished and tuned it. The sound of concert-A on the tun-ing fork droned through the house with agonizing penetra-tion. The others were forced to eat out because she gave Igor no time for cooking.

She studied linear shorthand with Claudia and then trans-lated it into finger language. They had glorious

raps, silently talking to each other until Manwright banned the constant finger wagging, which he denounced as a damned invasion of vision. They simply held hands and talked into each other's palm in their secret code, and Manwright was too proud to ask what they were gossiping about.

"As if I'd get an answer anyway," he growled to Corque.

"D'you think that's her mystery surprise, Reg?"

"Damned if I know. She's unexpected enough as it is. Rot-ten kid!"

She stole liquid licorice from Igor's sacred pantry and tarred herself; phosphorous from Manwright's sacred laboratory and irradiated herself. She burst into Corque's dark bedroom at three in the morning, howling, "ME

METHOPHYTE MOTHER FROM GANNYMEEDY!

YOU KILL ALL MY CHILDERS, ALIEN INVADER FROM OUTSIDE SPACE! NOW ME KILL YOU!"

Corque let out a yell and then couldn't stop laughing for the rest of the day. "The beautiful shock of the apparition, Reg!" Manwright didn't think it was funny.

"That damned child is giving me real nightmares," he complained. "I keep dreaming that I'm lost in the Grand Te-ton mountains and Red Indians are chasing me."

She sneaked up into the sacred penthouse and decorated the robotlike neutrinoscope with items stolen from Manwright's wardrobe. The construct assumed a ludicrous resemblance to the Dominie himself.

The innocent child fast-talked E & A Chemical delivery-"My Daddy forgot to order it. So absent-minded, you know"-into an extra gallon of ethyl alcohol which she poured into the marble pool and got the piranhas disgustingly drunk. Then she jumped in and was discovered float-ing with her plastered pals.

"Doesn't know the meaning of fear, Reg."

"Pah! Just the Passionaria I programmed."

She stole two hundred meters of magnetic tape from the library and fashioned a scarecrow mobile. The gardener was enraptured. Manwright was infuriated, particularly because art-dealer friends offered huge amounts for the creation.

"But that's her charming unexpected, Reg. Gally's a born artist."

"Like hell she is. That's only the Hester Bateman I gave her. No L x / N yet. And the nightmares are continuing in sequence. Those damned Red Indians have cut me off at the pass."

Claudia took Galatea to her home, where the girl got on

famously with Claudia's two sons and brought them to Manwright's house to demonstrate a new dance which she'd devised called: "The Anthro Hustle." It was performed to a song she'd composed entitled: "Who Put the Snatch on Go-rilla Baby?" which she banged out fortissimously on the harpsichord.

"Bring back the tuning fork," Manwright muttered.

Corque was applauding enthusiastically. "Music's her sur-prise kink, Reg."

"Call that music?"

Corque took her to his Saturn Circus, where she mesmer-ized him into letting her try riding bareback and leaping through burning hoops, acting as target for a knife thrower, trapeze aerobatics, and thrusting her auburn head into a li-on's mouth. He couldn't understand how she'd persuaded him to let her take such horrifying risks.

"Perhaps cajolery's her mystery quality," he suggested. "But she did miraculously well, Reg. My heart was in my mouth. Gally never turned a hair. Pure aplomb. She's a magnificent creation. You've generated a Super-Popsy for Valera."

"Guh."

"Could her unexpected kink be psychic?"

"The redskins have got me surrounded," Manwright fret-ted. He seemed strangely disoriented.

What disturbed him most were the daily tutoring sessions with the young lady. Invariably they degenerated into bick-ering and bitching, with the Dominie usually getting the worst of it.

"When our last session ended in another bitch we both steamed for the library door," he told Corque. "I said, 'Age before beauty, my dear,' which you must admit was gra-cious, and started out. That red Popsy snip said, 'Pearls be-fore swine,' and swaggered past me like a gladiator who's wiped an entire arena."

"She's wonderful!" Corque laughed.

"Oh, you're insanely biased. She's been twisting you around her fingers since the moment she was poured."

"And Igor and Claudia and her two boys and the CB re-pair and the plumber and the electronics and the gardener and the laundry and E & A Chemical and half my circus? All insanely biased?"

"Evidently I'm the only sanity she can't snow. You know the simple psychological truth, Charles; we're always accus-ing others of our own faults. That saucebox has the impu-dence to call me intransigent, stubborn, know-it-all, conceited. Me! Out of her own mouth. QED."

"Mightn't it be the other way around, Reg?"

"Do try to make sense, Charles. And now that the Grand Teton breastworks are making her top-heavy (I think maybe I was a little too generous with my Egyptian programming) there'll be no living with her vanity. Women take the damned dumbest pride in the thrust of the boozalums."

"Now Reg, you exaggerate. Gally knows we'd all adore her even if she were flatchested."

"I know I'm doing a professional job, and I know she has too much ego in her cosmos. But next week we start schlep-ping her to parties, openings, talk-ins, routs, and such to train her for Valera. That ought to take her down a peg. The Red Indians have got me tied to a stake," he added gloomily.

"Canapes?"

"Pa evah so. Lahvely pahty, Ms. Galante."

"Thank you, Lady Agatha. Canapes?"

"Grazie, Signorina."

"Prego, Commendatore. Canapes?"

"A dank, meyd'l. Lang leb'n zolt it."

"Nito far vus, General. Hot canapes, dear Professor Cor-que?"

"Thank you, adorable hostess. Igor's?"

"Mine."

"And perfection. Don't be afraid of the Martian consul. He won't bite."

"Canapes, M'sieur Consul?"

"Ah! Mais oui! Merci, Mademoiselle Gall6e. Que pensez-vous du lumineux Dominie Manwright?"

"C'est un type tres competent."

"Oui. Romanesque, mais formidablement competent."

"Quoi? Manwright? Romanesque? Vous me genez, mon cher consul."

"Ma foi, oui, romaneseque, Mademoiselle Gallee. C'est justement son cote romaneseque qui lui cause du mal a se trouver une femme."

"These damn do's are a drag, Charles."

"But isn't she wonderful?"

"And they're making my nightmares worse. A sexy Indian squaw tore my clothes off last night."

"Mi interesse particolarmente ai libri di fantascienza, ma-gia-orrore, umorismo, narrativa, attualita, filosofia, so-cialogia, a cattivo, putrido Regis Manwright."

"Charles, this is the last literary talk-in I ever attend."

"Did you see how Gally handled those Italian pub-lishers?"

"Yes, gibes at my expense. She put iron claws on her hands."

"My dear Reg, Gally did no such thing."

"I was referring to that sexy squaw."

"Entao agora sabes dander?"

"Sim. Danqo, falo miseravelmente muchas linguas, es-

tudo ciencia a filosofia, escrevo uma lamentaval poesia, es-toirome com experiencias idiotas, egrimo como un louco, jogo so boxe como up palhaco. Em suma, son a celebra bioroid, Galatea Galante, de Dominie Manwright."

"She was magnificent dancing with that Portuguese prince, Reg." "Portuguese ponce, you mean." "Don't be jealous." "She's heating the claws in a damned campfire, Charles."

"Didn't you ever fight back, Sandy?" r-3-

"Yes, I know, he's a bully. But all bullies are cowards at heart. You should have fought him to a standstill, like me. Did he ever make a pass at you?" r 3 -,

"Uh-huh. Me neither. He's an arrogant egomaniac, too much in love with himself to love anyone else."

_T s _-fi-=-

"What, Sandy? Me? Give the come-on to that dreadful man? Never! Did you?"

"Uh-huh. And he didn't even have to lash himself to the mast. Iceberg City. Ah, Mr. Jessamy. So sweet of you to give us your box for the concert. I've just been comparing notes

with your adorable wife on our common enemy, whose names escapes me. He's the gentleman on my right, who slept through the Mozart."

"And dreamed that she's torturing me with her burning claws, Charles, all over my bod."

"Man nehme: zwei Teile Selbstgefälligkeit, zwei Teile Selbstsucht, einen Teil Eitelkeit, and einen Teil Esel, mische kraftig, füge etwas Geheimnis hinzu, and man erhaalt Dom-inie Regis Manwright."

"Especially my private parts."

"Dominie Manwright's biodroid esta al dia en su manera de tratar los neologismos, palabras coloquiales, giro y mo-dismos, clicWs y terminos de argot, Senor. Yo soy Galatea Galante, la biodroid."

"Thank you, madame. I am not Spanish; I merely admire and respect the old Castilian style."

"Oh. Scuse me, chorley guy. You tollerday donsk?"

He burst out laughing. "I see you're very much with the classics, madame. Let me think. Yes. The proper response in that James Joyce litany is 'N.' "

"You talkatiff scowegian?"

"Nn."

"You spigotty anglease?"

"Nnn."

"You phonio saxo?"

"Nnnn."

"Clear all so. 'Tis a Jute. Let us swop hats and excheck a few strong verbs weak oach eather yapyazzard."

"Brava, madame! Bravissima!"

She tilted her auburn head and looked at him strangely.

"Against my will," she said slowly, "I'm compelled to invite you to a dinner party tonight."

"More classics, madame? The Beatrice and Benedict scene from Much Ado About Nothing?"

"No, it's the Galatea and-I don't know your name."

"Valera. Antony Valera."

"It's the Galatea and Valera scene. Can you come?"

"With delight."

"When this bash is finished I'll give you the address."

"I know it, Galatea."

"My friends call me Gally. How do you know my ad-dress? We've never met."

"I contracted with-I'm acquainted with Dominic Manwright. Gally. Tonight? Eight o'clock?"

"Eight tonight."

"Dress party?"

"Optional." She shook her head dizzily. "I don't know what's got into me, Valera. The moment I saw you at this clambake I knew I had to see you again, intimately. I'm pos-sessed!"

The rest of the household was dining in The Gastrologue, and their moods were not compatible.

"Thrown out," Corque kept repeating. "Thrown out with-out a moment's notice by that ungrateful tyrant!"

"Naturally. She wants to be alone with Valera, Charles. Instant, devoted attraction, as per my brilliant

program-ming. I tell you, I'm a genius."

"She athed me to make month-terth for her to therve, mahth-ter."

"Quite right, Igor. We must all pitch in and abet Valera's romance. He was so turned on meeting her at that bash this afternoon that he sent his check by messenger. Payment in full . . . to protect his claim on my Perfect Popsy, no doubt."

"Thrown out! Thrown out by that tyrant!"

"And good riddance to her very soon, Charles. The house will be back to normal."

"But she didn't order a brain, mahth-ter."

"Not to worry, Igor. Tell you what; we'll order cervelles de veau au beurre noir, and if Gastrologue doesn't have any calves' brains you can go out and steal some." He beamed and bobbed his pale, streaky head.

"Thank you, mahth-ter."

"Evicted!"

The silent Claudia printed: PLANTAINS FR ME PLS RENELLOS DE AMARILLO.

At one minute past eight Valera said, "It's fashionable to be a half-hour late, but I-Is it all right to come in?"

"Oh please! I've been biting my nails for a whole minute." "Thank you. To tell the truth, I tried to be chic, but it didn't take as long as I thought it would to walk up from Old Slip."

"Old Slip? Isn't that where your office is? Were you work-ing late, poor soul?"

"I live there too, Gaily. A penthouse on top of the tower." "Ah, A la Alexander Eiffel?"

"Somewhat, but the Syndicate complex is no Tour Eiffel. What a fantastic place this is. I've never done more than peep beyond the waiting room."

"D'you want the full tour?"

"I'd like nothing better."

"You've got it, but drink first. What would you like?"

"What are you serving?"

"My dear Valera, I-"

"Tony. "

"Thank you. My dear Tony, I share this house with two and a half men and a mountain gorilla. We have everything

in stock."

"Stolichnaya, please. Half?"

"Igor, our housekeeper," Galatea explained as she brought a tray with a bucket of ice, a bottle, and shot glasses. She opened the vodka deftly and began revolving the bottle in the ice. "A biodroid replica of Baron Frankenstein's accom-plice."

"Oh yes, I've met him. The lisping hunchback."

"A dear, dear soul, but only half with it."

"And a gorilla?"

"That's Claudia, my beloved nanny. She's beautiful. This vodka isn't chilled enough yet, but let's start anyway." She filled the glasses. "Russian style, eh? Knock it back, Tony. Death to the fascist, imperialist invaders from outer space."

"And their Conestoga star-wagons."

They knocked their shots back.

"Gaily, what miracle are you wearing?"

"L1, sir!" She did a quick kick-turn. "Like it?"

"I'm dazzled."

"If I tell you, promise not to turn me in?"

"I promise."

"I copied it from a Magda."

"Who or what is a Magda? Oh, thank you."

"I'm afraid I filled it too high, but boys like big sand-wiches and big drinks. She's the vogue designer of the year. Down with countertenors."

"May they be heard only in Siberia. Why must I keep it a secret about your copy?"

"Good Lord! They hang, draw, and quarter you if you pinch a designer original."

"How did you manage?"

"I fell in love with it at one of her openings and memo-rized it."

"And made it yourself? From memory? You're remarkable!"

"You're exaggerating. Don't you remember complicated stock manipulations?"

"Well, yes."

"So with me it's the same damn thing. Oops! That's the tag of a dirty joke. Apologies to the chairman."

"The chairman needs all the dirty jokes he can get for cli-ent entertainment. What's this one?"

"Maybe someday, if you coax me nicely."

"Where do you get them? Surely not from Dominic Manwright."

"From Claudia's naughty boys. Another shot to the dam-nation of Blue Laws, and then the guided tour."

Valera was bewildered and delighted by the madness of Manwright's house, and enchanted by the high style with which Galatea flowed through it with equally mad com-ments. An old song lyric haunted him:

Hey, diddle-dee-dee,

I've found the girl for me.

With raunchy style

And virgin guile

She's just the girl for me.

"Never mind the polite compliments, Tony," she said, pulling him down on a couch beside her and refilling his glass. "I'll give you the acid test. Of all things in this house, which would you be most likely to steal?"

"You."

"I didn't say kidnap. Come on, man, steal something."

"I think I spilled my drink."

"It's my fault; I juggled your arm. Don't mop. So?"

"You're so sudden, Gaily. Well . . . don't laugh.... The scarecrow mobile in the garden."

"Oh, I love you for that! I made it, when I was a little kid months ago." She gave him a smacking kiss on the cheek and jumped up. "Like some music?" She turned on the hi-fi and a soft murmuring drifted through the house.

Valera glanced at his watch. "Your guests must be fright-fully chic."

"Oh?"

"You said eight. That was an hour ago. Where's every-body?"

"As a matter of fact, they came early."

"I'm the only one who was early."

"That's right."

"You mean I'm . . . ?"

"That's right."

"But you said a dinner party, Gaily."

"It's ready any time you are."

"The party is us? Just us?"

"I can call some more people if you're bored with me."

"You know that's not what I meant."

"No? What did you mean?"

"I-" He stopped himself.

"Go ahead," she bullied. "Say it. I dare you."

He capitulated. For perhaps the first time in his suave life he was overpowered. In a low voice he said, "I was remembering a tune from twenty years ago. Hey, diddle-dee-dee/ I've found the girl for me/With raunchy style/And virgin guile/She's just the girl for me."

She flushed and began to tremble. Then she took refuge in the hostess role. "Dinner," she said briskly. "Beef Stroga-noff, potatoes baked with mushrooms, salad, lemon pie, and coffee. Mouton Rothschild. No, not upstairs, Tony; I've made special arrangements for you. Help me with the table."

Together, in a sort of domestic intimacy, they arranged a

gaming table alongside the marble pool with two painted Venetian chairs. She had already set the table with Spode china and Danish silver, so it needed some careful balancing. Before she began serving, she drew the cork from the Bordeaux bottle and poured a few drops into Valera's goblet.

"Try it, Tony," she said. "I've never been able to decide whether the concept of 'letting a wine breathe' is fact or show-offey. I appeal to your sophistication. Give me your opinion."

He tasted and rolled his eyes to heaven. "Superb! You're magnificent with your compliments, Gaily. Sit down and try it yourself, I insist." And he filled her glass.

"Wait," she laughed. "The floor show first. I snowed electronics into bootlegging ultralight into the pool. That's why I wanted our table here. Wait till you see 20 Performing Piranhas 20." She ran to a wall, extinguished the living room lights, and flipped a switch. The pool glowed like lava, and the excited fish became a ballet of darting embers. Galatea returned to the table, sat opposite Valera, and raised her

goblet to him. He smiled back into her face.

"Hey, diddle-dee-" he began and then froze. He stared. Then he started to his feet so violently that he overturned the table.

"Tony!" She was appalled.

"You goddamn bitch," he shouted. His face was black. "Where's the CB?"

"Tony!"

"Where's the goddamn CB? Tell me before I break your goddamn neck!"

"Th-that table." She pointed. "B-but I don't understand. What's -"

"You'll understand soon enough." He punched buttons. "By God, you and this whole damn lying house will under-stand. Rip me? Play me for a patsy?" His rage was a terrify-

ing echo of Manwright at his worst. "Hello. Larson? Valera. Don't waste time with visual. Crash mission. Call full Secu-rity and comb the city for a son of a bitch named Regis Manwright. Yes, that's the pig. I give you a half hour to find him and-"

"B-but I know where he is," Galatea faltered.

"Hold it, Larson. You do? Where?"

"The Gastrologue."

"The bastard's in The Gastrologue Club, Larson. Go get him and bring him to his house, which is where I am now. And if you want to get rough with him I'll pay all legals and add a bonus. I'm going to teach that lying pimp and his bitch a lesson they'll remember for the rest of their lives."

The four were herded into the main floor of Manwright's house at the point of a naked laser which Larson thought advisable in view of the threat of Claudia's mass. They saw a grotesque: Valera and Galatea silhouetted before the glow-ing pool in the dark room. Valera was holding the weeping girl by her hair, for all the world like a chattel in a slave mar-ket.

In this ominous crise Manwright displayed an aspect of his character which none had ever seen: a tone of quiet com-mand that took obedience for granted, as if by divine right, and won it through its assurance.

"Mr. Larson, you may pocket that laser now. It was never needed. Valera, you will let Galatea go," he said softly. "No, dear, don't move. Stay alongside him. You belong to him, unless he's changed his mind. Have you, Valera?"

"You're goddamn right I have," the chairman stormed. "I want no part of this cheap secondhand trash. Larson, keep that gun handy and get on the CB. I want my check stopped."

"Don't bother, Mr. Larson. The check has not been depos-

ited and will be returned. Why, Valera? Doesn't Galatea meet your exalted standards?"

"Of course she does," Corque burst out. "She's brilliant! She's beautiful! She's perfection! She-"

"I'm handling this, Charles. I repeat: Why, Valera?"

"I don't buy whores at your prices."

"You think Galatea's a whore?"

"Think? I know."

"You contracted for the perfect mistress who would be faithful and loving and devoted to you."

Galatea let out a moan.

"I'm sorry, my love, you never knew. I'd planned to tell you, but only after I was sure you were genuinely attracted to him. I never had any intention of forcing him on you."

"You wicked men!" she cried. "You're all hateful!"

"And now, Valera, you think of a mistress as a whore? Why this sudden eruption of archaic morality?"

"It isn't a question of morality, damn you. It's a question of secondhand goods. I want no part of a shopworn woman."

"Must I stay here with him? Does he own me? Am I bought and paid for?"

"No, love. Come to us."

She dashed away from Valera's side and then hesitated. Claudia held out her arms, but Galatea surprised everybody by going to Manwright, who took her gently.

"All right, Valera," he said. "Go now and take your army with you. Your check will be returned first thing in the morning."

"Not until I know who it was."

"Not until who what was?"

"The goddamn lover-boy who knocked her up."

"What?"

"She's pregnant, you goddamn pimp. The bitch has been

sleeping around, and I want to know the stud who knocked her up. He's got plenty coming."

After a long pause, Manwright asked, "Are you under a psychiatrist's care?"

"Don't be ridiculous."

"No more ridiculous than your slander. Galatea pregnant? My lovely, tasteful young lady sleeping around with studs? You're obviously quite mad. Go."

"Mad, am I? Ridiculous? You can't see that she's pregnant? Turn her around and look at her face in this ultralight. Look at her!"

"I'll go through the motions only to get rid of you."

Manwright smiled at Galatea as he turned the girl around. "Just a gesture, love. You'll have your dignity back in a moment, and I swear you'll never lose it ag-"

His words were cut off, as if by a guillotine. In the ultra-light from the glowing pool there was no mistaking the dark pregnancy band across Galatea's face, similar to the banded mask of a racoon. He took a slow deep breath and answered the confusion in her eyes by placing a hand over her mouth.

"Go, Valera. This is now a family affair."

"I demand an answer. I won't leave until I know who it was. Your half-wit hunchback, Igor, probably. I can picture them in bed; the slobbering idiot and the-"

Manwright's interruption was an explosion. He hurled Galatea into Claudia's arms, drove a knee into Larson's groin, tore the laser away from the convulsed man, whipped Valera across the neck with the barrel, and held the staggering chairman over the edge of the pool.

"The piranhas are starving," he murmured, "Do you go in or get out?"

After the syndicate had left, not without dire promises, Manwright turned up the house lights and extinguished the

pool ultralight and, with that, the pregnancy stigma banding Galatea's face. In a strange way they were all relieved.

"Not to play the district attorney," he said, "but I must know how it happened."

"How what happened?" Galatea demanded.

"Sweetheart, you are pregnant."

"No, no, no!"

"I know it can't be anyone in this house. Claudia, has she been promiscuous outside?"

NO

"How can you ask such questions!"

"Has Galatea been alone with a man in a possibly intimate situation?"

"You're hateful!"

NO

"Reg, we all know that. We've chaperoned Gally every moment outside, you, me, Claudia."

"Not every moment. Charles. It could have happened with this innocent in five minutes."

"But nothing ever happened with a man! Nothing! Ever!"

"Dear love, you are pregnant."

"I can't be."

"You are, undeniably. Charles?"

"Gally. I adore you, no matter what, but Reg is right. The pregnancy band is undeniable."

"But I'm a virgin."

"Claudia?"

HR MNS HV STOPT "Her what have stopped"

Corque sighed. "Her menses, Reg."

"Ah so."

"I'm a virgin, you wicked, detestable men. A virgin!"

Manwright took her frantic face in his hands. "Sweet-heart, no recriminations, no punishments, no Coventry, but

I must know where I slipped up, how it happened. Who were you with, where and when?"

"I've never been with any man, anywhere or anywhen."

"Never?"

"Never . . . except in my dreams."

"Dreams?" Manwright smiled. "All girls have them. That's not what I mean, dear."

R MAB U SHD MN

"Maybe I should mean what, Claudia?"

LT HR TL U HR DRMS

"Let her tell me her dreams? Why?"

JST LSN

"All right, I'll listen. Tlrll me about your dreams, love."

"No. They're private property."

"Claudia wants me to hear them."

"She's the only one I've ever told. I'm ashamed of them."

Claudia fingerwagged. "Tell him, Gally. You don't know how important they are."

"No!"

"Galatea Galante, are you going to disobey your nanny? I am ordering you to tell your dreams."

"Please, nanny. No. They're erotic."

"I know, dear. That's why they're important. You must tell."

At length, Galatea whispered, "Put out the lights, please." The fascinated Corque obliged.

In the darkness, she began, "They're erotic. They're dis-gusting. I'm so ashamed. They're always the same . . . and I'm always ashamed . . . but I can't stop

"There's a man, a pale man, a moonlight man, and I . . . I want him. I want him to . . . to handle me and ravish me into ecstasy, b-but he doesn't want me, so he runs, and I chase him. And I catch him. Th-there are some sort of friends who help me catch him and tie him up. And then

they go away and leave me alone with the moonlight man, and I . . . and I do to him what I wanted to him to do to me"

They could hear her trembling and rustling in her chair.

Very carefully, Manwright asked, "Who is this moonlight man, Galatea?"

"I don't know."

"But you're drawn to him?"

"Oh yes. Yes! I always want him."

"Just him alone, or are there other moonlight men?"

"Only him. He's all I ever want."

"But you don't know who he is. In the dreams do you know who you are?"

"Me. Just me."

"As you are in real life?"

"Yes, except that I'm dressed different."

"Different? How?"

"Beads and . . . and buckskin with fringe."

They all heard Manwright gasp.

"Perhaps like . . . like a Red Indian, Galatea?"

"I never thought of that. Yes. I'm an Indian, an Indian squaw up in the mountains, and I make love to the paleface every night."

"Oh. My. God." The words were squeezed out of Manwright. "They're no dreams." Suddenly he roared, "Light! Give me light, Charles! Igor! Light!"

The brilliant lights revealed him standing and shaking, moonlight pale in shock. "Oh my God, my God, my God!" He was almost incoherent. "Dear God, what have I cre-ated?"

"Mahth-ter!"

"Reg! "

"Don't you understand? I know Claudia suspected; that's why she made Galatea tell me her dreams."

"B-but they're only dirty dreams," Galatea wailed. "What could possibly be the harm?"

"Damn you and damn me! They were not dreams. They were reality in disguise. That's the harm. That's how your dreams lock in with my nightmares, which were reality, too. Christi I've generated a monster!"

"Now calm yourself, Reg, and do try to make sense."

"I can't. There's no sense in it. There's nothing but that lu-natic drop of acid I promised Valera."

"The mystery surprise in her?"

"You kept wondering what it was, Charles. Well, now you know, if you can interpret the evidence."

"What evidence?"

Manwright forced himself into a sort of thunderous con-trol. "I dreamed I was pursued and caught by Red Indians, tied up, and ravished by a sexy squaw. I told you. Yes?"

"Yes. Interminably."

"Galatea dreams she's a Red Indian squaw, pursuing, cap-turing, and ravishing a paleface she desires. You heard her?"

"I heard her."

"Did she know about my dreams?"

" "

No.

"Did I know about hers?"

" "

No.

"Coincidence?"

"Possibly."

"Would you care to bet on that possibility?"

"No."

"And there you have it. Those `dreams' were sleep ver-sions or distortions of what was really happening; some-thing which neither of us could face awake. Galatea's been coming into my bed every night, and we've been making love."

"Impossible!"

"Is she pregnant?"

"Yes."

"And I'm Valera's lover-boy, the stud responsible. My p

God! My God!" `

"Reg, this is outlandish. Claudia, has Gally ever left her bed nights?"

NO

"There!"

"Damn it, I'm not talking about a conventional, human woman. I didn't generate one. I'm talking about an other-world creature whose psyche is as physically real as her body, can materialize out of it, accomplish its desires, and amalgamate again. An emotional double as real as the flesh. You've pestered me about the deliberate unexpected in my programming. Well, here's the $R = L \times \text{N}$. Galatea's a succubus."

"A what?"

"A succubus. A sexy female demon. Perfectly human by day. Completely conformist. But with the spectral power to come, like a carnal cloud, to men in their sleep, nights, and seduce them."

"No!" Galatea cried in despair. "I'm not that. I can't be."

"And she doesn't even know it. She's an unconscious de-mon. The laugh's on me, Charles," Manwright said ruefully. "By God, when I do glitch it's a beauty. I knock myself out programming the Perfect Popsy

with an engram for Valera, and she ruins everything by switching her passion to me."

"No surprise. You're very much alike."

"I'm in no mood for jokes. And then Galatea turns out to be a succubus who doesn't know it and has her will of me in ' our sleep every night."

"No, no! They were dreams. Dreams!"

"Were they? Were they?" Manwright was having difficulty controlling his impatience with her damned obtuseness.

"How else did you get yourself pregnant, eh; enceinte, grav-ida, knocked up? Don't you dare argue with me, you impu-dent red saucebox! You know," he reflected, "there should have been a smidgen of Margaret Sanger in the program-ming. Never occurred to me."

He was back to his familiar impossible self, and every-body relaxed.

"What now, Reg?"

"Oh, I'll marry the snip, of course. Can't let a dangerous creature like Galatea out of the house."

"Out of your life, you mean?"

"Never!" Galatea shouted. "Never! Marry you, you dreadful, impossible, conceited, bullying, know-it-all,wicked man? Never! If I'm a demon, what are you? Come, Claudia."

The two women went very quickly upstairs.

"Are you serious about marrying Gally, Reg?"

"Certainly, Charles. I'm no Valera. I don't want a relation-ship with a popsy, no matter how perfect."

"But do you love her?"

"I love all my creations."

"Answer the question. Do you love Gally, as a man loves a woman?"

"That sexy succubus? That naive demon? Love her? Ab-surd! No, all I want is the legal right to tie her to a stake every night, when I'm awake. Ha!"

Corque laughed. "I see you do, and I'm very happy for you both. But, you know, you'll have to court her."

"What! Court? That impertinent brat?"

"My dear Reg, can't you grasp that she isn't a child any-more? She's a grown young woman with character and pride."

"Yes, she's had you in thrall since the moment she was poured," Manwright growled. Then he sighed and

accepted

defeat. "But I suppose you're right. My dear Igor!"

"Here, mahth-ter."

"Please set up that table again. Fresh service, candles, flowers, and see if you can salvage the monsters you created for the dinner. White gloves."

"No brainth, mahth-ter?"

"Not this evening. I see the Mouton Rothschild's been smashed. Another bottle, please. And then my compliments to Ms. Galatea Galante, and will she have the forgiveness to dine, a deux, with a most contrite suitor. Present her with a corsage from me . . . something orchidy. This will be a fun necromance. Charles," he mused. "Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme, alevai. Man and Demon. Our boys will be dev-ils, sorcery says, and the girls witches. But aren't they all?"