

The Cupids of Venus By WILLIAM MORRISON

AS the men filed into the lecture room out of the fog, Makin looked around, but there was no sign that any of the women had been here. In fact, there was nothing to indicate that the women were on the same planet. His heart dropped but he hid his disappointment. As Colonel Galchek strode into the room, he assumed the same cool look of indifference the others showed.

The Colonel stared at them, and the men quieted down. The Colonel had an idea, thought Makin ironically, that he knew how to impose discipline with a glance, but it was more probable that on this last lap of their training before the great adventure the men were anxious to learn what lay ahead of them. At any rate, they listened attentively.

Colonel Galchek was brief. "Gentlemen," he said, "your stay on Venus will be a short one—less than ten days. You will be forced to undergo in this brief period, hazards of the same kind you would normally face on Cygnus Beta Two in the course of years. I need hardly say that this sort of training will be invaluable. It is possible—even probable—that of the sixty men here, one or two will not survive the rigors of the course." He looked at them coolly, as if wondering which one or two would not survive. "We shall regret all casualties, of course."

"The dirty liar," thought Makin. "He wouldn't regret a casualty if it was his own grandmother."

"Nevertheless, *some* casualties are unavoidable. And it is far better to suffer them here, where you can reveal your weaknesses while there is still time to correct them, than on a planet in Cygnus. We don't want any unpleasant surprises *there*. Of the fifty couples finally selected to make the trip, we intend to have every one survive. We want the Cygnus colony to get off to a good start. We must prove that it's livable, and that it can take the overflow of the System's population."

HE paused as the men stirred restlessly. "You're picked men and you've already been through severe training. Your wives have been selected just as carefully as you have. They will be fit mates for you in every respect."

"Are the women," asked Makin, "undergoing the same sort of training in the final stage?"

"Naturally. On Cygnus they'll face the same conditions as you do. They'll need the same preparation."

"Are they on Venus too?"

The Colonel frowned. "They are, but that doesn't concern you. You will have no contact with them until the time for departure. I should like to suggest, gentlemen," he added acidly, "that you confine your questions to matters that concern this group as a whole. Individual problems will be taken up during your interviews this afternoon and tomorrow."

The men shrugged. One man opened his mouth to ask a question and then closed it, the question unasked.

"You'll receive your detailed schedules tomorrow afternoon, after you have all been interviewed. That is all."

The men broke up and went to their rooms. Makin was not tired, but he could have slept if he had wanted to, for he had conditioned himself to fall into a sound slumber upon the mental repetition of a simple nursery rhyme. And from all indications, it would be well to rest up as much as possible for the ordeal ahead of him. All the same, he preferred to stay awake and think.

He had met the girl he knew as Women's Group Member 47, or W 47, for short, accidentally a mere two weeks before, on completion of his space flight. She had been sent in to see her own superior officer at the time he had gone up for a psychological recheck. The elevator signal had been set for the wrong floor, and he had met her in the waiting room.

He had known even at the time that it was hopeless, for the matings were being arranged on a scientific basis, but he had fallen in love with her completely, even, in a manner of speaking, before first sight. He had fallen in love with the shape of the back of her head, of her neck and shoulders, before she had turned her head so that he could see her face. The sight of her clear eyes, and the strong yet delicate chin had merely strengthened his feelings. He had been able to say only a dozen words to her before an attendant had discovered that he was in the wrong place, and firmly escorted him out. But in that time he had heard her voice, and the sound was part of his own existence. He was in love, and he would have one chance in sixty of getting her.

The chance had been long, but not impossible; unfortunately, it had not come through. He had been informed only the day_ before that he had been paired with W-24, and that no change in arrangements was possible.

The men in charge were not idiots, but they could be guilty on occasion of idiotic behavior. He would have died for W 47, and he was being assigned to W 24; some man who wouldn't have crossed the street to save her life was going to get the girl he loved and to live with her for the rest of her life. It was stupid, it would inevitably cause trouble in the new colony, but the men in charge were not concerned with his feelings. They had their rules, and they were going to see to it that they were carried out.

Makin cursed softly to himself. He had volunteered for colonization duty of his own accord, out of a spirit of adventure, and he had up till then accepted discipline with the belief that it was for his own good. Now he refused to accept it further. He hoped they wouldn't force him to do it, but if necessary he would drop out of the colony. They wouldn't like it, but it wouldn't really hurt their plans, for of the sixty men they had certainly calculated on losing one or two. Whatever happened, however, he was going to get that girl.

Having made up his mind about that, he said to himself, "The little birds upon the moon/ Are sad as sad can be/ There is no air,/ And that's unfair/ To bird or bug or bee." With the last word, he was asleep.

His interview with the Colonel took place the following morning, and it settled things for him. The Colonel said, "You were interested in the women's group, Mr. Makin. Is one of them on your mind?"

"Very much so. I want to marry her."

"You are not satisfied with the mate assigned to you ?"

"I haven't met her, and I don't know anything about her. I don't want to know."

"Her number, I understand, is W 24. I have her photograph here. You might care to look at it."

Makin looked, and said, "She's a pretty girl. Under other circumstances, I might have liked her."

"She has excellent qualities. Qualities any man would like to see in his wife."

"Sorry, Colonel, I'm not interested. I want to marry W 47."

"This one?"

Again the Colonel showed a photograph, and suddenly Makin was conscious that his heart beat faster.

"That's the one, sir."

"She's been assigned to someone else."

"I think she's in love with me too."

"Love? The word's absurd. You'll both of you change your minds before long."

"I don't think we will."

THE Colonel said testily, "Your psychological pattern shows that you are best suited to W 24. We know what's best for you, Makin."

"Psychology is not yet an exact science, Colonel. I prefer the girl of my own choice."

"You will take the one we choose for you. And incidentally, Makin, there is no backing out. You understand that, I think. Unless you fail to pass the tests, in which case your future is not very bright, you will be a member of the colonizing expedition. And you will be married to W 24 before leaving."

"Do you think that is wise, sir? I tell you frankly that I am in love with W 47. And if she is to be married to another man in the same colony of fifty couples—"

"We have thought of that, Makin.'" The Colonel smiled pleasantly. "I may have neglected to tell you that there will be not one colony in Cygnus, but two. Another group of fifty couples will be going, to Cygnus Sigma Three. At the end of this present training period, you and your mate will be shipped to one colony, W 47 and her mate to the other. There will be no transport between them. You and W 47 will never see each other again."

"I understand, sir," said Makin quietly. He saluted and went out, leaving the Colonel still smiling behind him.

Down the corridor he received his training schedule and had time to study it. They were starting the men off on individual jungle trips. Each man would be supplied with a map and instruments, with enough food for a week, and with weapons that would enable him, if he were sufficiently strong and active, to cope with the fauna and flora he might be expected to encounter.

He pored over the map, and drew certain conclusions that were not in line with the task that had been assigned him. He was expected to travel from point A to point B in seven days. The distance was short, no more than a hundred miles as the Venusian equivalent of a crow flew, but detours might be necessary and the map covered far more than a narrow strip of territory between the two points.

If the women were undergoing the same kind of training, it was possible that they were being sent through the same jungle in an area alongside. Their starting point might be expected to be not too far away. And if he moved rapidly, not from A to B, but to the side, he might get on her trail.

The only question to be decided was in which direction to move, right or left. He studied the map again, and noted that the jungle at the right was a little less dense. In consideration of the lesser physical strength of the women, it was possible, although far from certain, that they had been given the easier route.

Makin made up his mind. He would move to the right and try to locate her as rapidly as possible. If he made a mistake, he would be losing much valuable time, and be forced to retrace his steps, but there was no other course open to him.

He set off at once to the right. The sun glared down, its disc vague and enormous through a thick lens of semitransparent clouds, its rays hot and active. Some of the bluish vegetation in his path could actually be seen to grow as he looked at it, but the stalks bent away from him as he approached, repelled by the ST in which his clothes and equipment had been soaked.

Overhead, great bird-like insects soared. One or two of them caught sight of him, swooped down and then zoomed upward in sudden fright as a sound ray from his ultra-frequency projector hit them.

Within the first half-hour he came across a colony of the much-feared traveling fungi, which his guide book assured him were relatively rare. The entire colony began to crawl toward him when he was still a hundred feet away, and he had to destroy its cohesion with an aerosol pellet. A faintly sweetish odor filled the air, and the colony broke up into countless numbers of individual fungi, each growing and dividing, growing and dividing aimlessly, to end up an hour after he had gone as enfeebled and dying individuals, no longer capable of joining together as a super-organism which had been the terror of the animals in his path.

He didn't turn back to look. Five hours after the start, he stopped to eat and rest. The eating took ten minutes, the resting five. By the beam compass and path tracer on his left wrist, which gave him his position at a glance, he saw that he had covered almost twelve miles. The going was not rapid, but he was untired, and he knew that he could keep it up for a long time. He moved on.

The clouds began to thicken and the jungle became dank and gloomy, a vast dismal cavern beneath the heavy arch of vapor. Twice he saw other men of his group, and they passed each other quickly, with the shortest of greetings, each intent upon his own problem.

Now, if his guess was correct, he must be coming close to the area where the women would be forcing their way through the jungle. The vegetation was already more sparse and occasionally he could catch a glimpse of a large form slinking silently in the distance past the moving trunks of trees which snapped desperately at it in an attempt to secure much-needed protein.

He turned on the walkie-talkie on his right wrist, and broadcast a signal. If he were lucky, she would be close enough to hear him and reply. But no one answered. He continued to signal from time to time

for short intervals, but it was another six hours before he received a signal in return. W 34 wanted to know whether he was hurt and calling for help.

He told her that he wasn't, and asked if she could give him any information about W 47. She couldn't, and he switched off once more, changing direction so that he would cut across W 34's path without meeting her. The incident was a definite bit of encouragement. It showed that he had chosen the correct direction for the women's test area, and that in cutting across to the right he had not dropped far enough behind to be out of contact distance.

He had stored up enough sleep to keep going for a good twenty-four hours without getting too tired, but he did not omit necessary precautions. He stopped to eat again after the normal five-hour period, and this time he rested for twenty minutes.

WHEN he started again, night had fallen. But he strode ahead as confidently as before, a beam from his cap casting a daylight glow around him. And at the end of the third hour, he received in response to his own signal the word he had awaited.

W 47 said softly, "I've been expecting to hear from you."

"You cut across to the left to meet me?"

"As fast as I could."

"What's your position now?"

She told him, and he looked at the map and clenched his teeth. Between them ran a river, a mile in width. Near the center it was several hundred feet in depth. There were deadly water-creatures hidden beneath its surface, and there was no ford where a crossing could be attempted. Nor would it be feasible to build a raft. The large vegetation was heavier than water, and could not be cut down and hollowed out so that it would float except at the cost of more time than they could spare.

Nevertheless, they were within talking distance of one another, and that was the main thing. An hour later, they were at the river, he on his bank and she on hers. But his beam would not cut through a mile of darkness, and he knew that he would have to wait for daylight before catching sight of her.

Colonel Galchek would have enjoyed their conversation. Makin asked gently, "Are you tired, darling?"

"Not very."

"You should go to sleep. But I'd like to give myself five minutes of talking to you."

"Is that all?"

"That will keep me going until morning. What's your real name?"

"Lona. Darling, are your eyes really green, or was it just the light in which I saw you?"

"They're supposed to be greenish-blue."

"I love them. Darling, let me hear you say my name."

The conversation, as Colonel Galchek might have observed derisively, degenerated into an interchange of fairly senseless, but satisfying sounds. But Makin limited himself strictly to five minutes. At the end of that time they wished each other good night and each retired to a clear spot in the middle of a clump of trees.

The fronds recoiled desperately from their ST'd clothing and thrashed around in impotent anger. Any of the larger animals lured by hopes of a human meal would receive a ferocious welcome from these vegetable guardians.

Makin varied his rhyme slightly, using the version that would insure awakening at the end of six hours.

He whispered softly, "The little creatures on the moon/ Are sad as sad can be/ There is no air/ And that's unfair/ To things that fly or flee."

His sleep was as sound as ever. But it did not last for a full six hours. Shortly before the awakening time he had set for himself, a shrill howling from the trees around him brought him to his feet. A long, thin constrictor plant had wrapped itself around the fronds of one of his tree-guards, and the tree was whipping back and forth in a vain effort to escape. The other end of the constrictor slipped through the space between the trees and came at him.

His knife was out at once, and he slashed at it vigorously. But the supple bark had the toughness of steel and even the tempered blade left no more than a shallow scratch. The constrictor curled around his right arm, and from that, as he dropped the knife, slid to his body. But his other hand had already secured his heater, and the blinding flame sliced through the thin strangler with startling ease.

The two halves of the constrictor dropped from their victims and slithered away in panic. Soon the charred ends would slough away and then, if the plant-creature were lucky and didn't die at once, they would embed themselves in the soil and slowly grow again.

Meanwhile, Makin rubbed his right arm, which felt paralyzed, and left the clump of trees. He turned on his walkie-talkie, and at once received her signal.

"Darling," she said, "I got up early to think about you, but I didn't want to disturb your sleep. Are you all right?"

"Perfect," he told her. "But don't do it again. You need the rest more than I need the time spent worrying about me."

"The mists are clearing. Shall we try to see each other?"

He stood at the edge of the river and looked across. On the other edge he could make out a small black spot which seemed to move oddly.

"Are you waving your arms?" he asked.

"That's right. You have wonderful eyes!"

"Just what I was going to say. But your face doesn't look as beautiful as it did the last time I saw you. Not at this distance."

"Why not use your field magnifier?"

"I'm getting it out." He focussed the lenses and grinned. "Are you angry at me, or is that expression natural?"

"It's perfectly natural. I'm sticking my tongue out at you."

"Because I can't think of a way to cross this river?"

"Not at all. Just because I love you."

"That's hardly logical," he said. "But it makes sense to me. What do we do next?"

"Continue upstream on our way to the designated points."

"Not quite. Besides, that's no solution to crossing the river. It doesn't narrow appreciably for fifty miles."

"What are a mere fifty miles?"

"Darling," he said, "don't talk like that, or I'll plunge in and try to swim across. And I'm saving that little trick for a last resort. Shall we start upstream, keeping each other in sight, and see what we can find in the way of ferries?"

"We may as well," she sighed.

IN the river, a creature that seemed to be all mouth and teeth broke the surface and turned toward him. It had no eyes, but it scented his presence as surely as any hound could have done. As he moved upstream, it kept pace with him like a faithful dog. After a mile, another of its kind joined it, and then another, and another. A few words from Lona confirmed the fact that she was being accompanied by a similar pack of hungry and hopeful river-beasts. His chances of crossing the river and joining her began to seem more remote than ever.

After eighteen hours of travel they slept as before in the center of groups of trees, and this time no incident disturbed the sleep of either one. But next morning the hungry packs were still there, faithfully awaiting what must have seemed to them like promised meals.

That day and the following passed eventlessly and hopelessly. For a few moments Makin had entertained the idea of cutting down one of the larger trees and hollowing it out to make a canoe, but even if he had taken the time, he realized that the craft would have been unstable, and that the waiting beasts would easily have tipped it over to get at him.

On the fourth day of their journey along the river, the jungle began to thin out. Here and there were spaces bare of the frond-trees and in these clearings more and more of the larger animals began to be

visible. Two or three attached themselves to his trail, and he could see them from time to time, fearful of the weapons that they knew human beings carried, but hopeful at the same time of a human meal. For the moment they were no more than shadowy dangers, but sooner or later they would attack.

A short conversation with Lona revealed that she too was accompanied by similar companions on land, as well as by the river-pack.

"Take care of yourself," said Makin casually, although his heart beat faster when he heard of her danger.

"Don't worry, sweetheart."

"The river narrows a bit just a little further on. Tomorrow I'm going to attempt a crossing."

"You'll try to swim?"

"Yes. I've thought of a way. It isn't foolproof, but I think I have a very good chance."

"You mustn't! What will become of me if I lose you?"

"I don't think you will. But don't worry, darling, we'll talk it over thoroughly before I start out."

The jungle thinned out until it was no longer jungle, and that night he had difficulty in finding a clump of trees to protect him. He was glad to hear that on her side she had less trouble. When, eventually, he fell asleep, the beasts crouched outside the range of the trees, panting expectantly at the thought of what would happen on the morrow.

In the morning he spoke to Lona again, and made ready. This time, when he left the protection of the trees, the hungry animals could hardly wait. They darted around him, each afraid to be the first to attack, each fearfully watching its fellows to make sure that it was not done out of a meal.

He made straight for the river bank. At sight of him apparently ready to enter the water and escape them, the hitherto soundless animals howled in desperation, while in the water, the mouth-like beasts quivered with eagerness.

The land-beasts attacked. But Makin had his weapon out and although they darted in swiftly, his gun was ready. He cut down four before they came close, and a fifth whose teeth were slashing at him. The animal died in mid-air, its jaws snapping and tearing at the skin of his arm before it hit the ground.

Two remained alive, and these fled. He turned his back to them and directed his gun upon the waiting river-beasts. When he had finished his slaughter, dead creatures floated on the water for a distance of a hundred feet down the river.

He tossed into the water the first animals he had killed, and ran upstream. At a spot where the scent of the dead had not yet reached, he plunged in. For a few moments at least, he would be safe, with the attention of the river's predatory creatures centered on the feast he had so kindly provided for them.

He swam rapidly and steadily, at a pace the he knew he could keep up. From the other side of the river, Lona *was* keeping an eye on him, ready to warn him of danger that approached on the surface. After a quarter of a mile, her signal came. The animals he had killed had been eaten, and the different predators, especially those who had managed to get no more than a taste of the feast, would be seeking new victims. He crushed one of his two capsules of river-repellent as it rested in a pocket of his jacket.

He was barely in time. From the side, one of the mouth-like beasts darted at him, then stopped short, trembling with a sort of animal disgust as it caught the scent-taste of the repellent, diffusing slowly from his jacket into the water. To Makin himself, the chemical had a faint, not unpleasant fragrance, but to the river creatures it was intolerable. This one darted away again as rapidly as it had approached.

But it didn't go far. It returned once more, slowly this time, and followed him as he swam steadily toward the bank where Lona waited. He tried to twist around for a shot at it, but in the water the animal was too quick for him, and all he did was waste precious seconds, in which he could have advanced almost a dozen yards. He didn't make the same mistake again.

HE swam steadily until the increasing boldness of the waiting beast warned him that the supply of chemical in the capsule was near exhaustion. None the less, he kept his nerve. Before crushing his second and final capsule, he waited until the creature was actually darting in for the attack.

It swerved away again, but it had won a partial victory. Makin had hoped he would not have to use this second dose of repellent before covering two-thirds of the distance across the river. But he had been

forced to crush the capsule at least fifty yards before this goal. Now he knew that he would have to fight his way the last hundred yards out of the river. And he could gauge his hopes of success by the quickness of the waiting beast, which circled around him easily, and could flash in for the kill while he tried to twist around and raise his weapon.

His hopes were not improved at the three-quarter mark, where a second beast joined the first, and he knew that when the moment for fighting came he would have to keep an eye on both at the same time.

He had passed the deepest part of the river, and a hundred yards from shore he was able to touch bottom. But he continued to swim, for he could advance more rapidly that way than he could by wading. Only when both beasts, as if at a signal, closed in at the same time, did he stand and make the desperate fight that he had known was inevitable.

His first shot missed, and one beast's mouth loomed before him, the teeth sharp and frightening. He swung an arm in front of his face to keep the jaws from snapping at his throat, and the teeth ripped his sleeve to shreds. He had no time for the creature that would attack from the other side, and in the back of his mind he felt that he was doomed.

But it was not in his nature to give up. As the one in front of him twisted around and snapped again, he thrust his arm into its mouth and fired. The blast tore it apart as the teeth sank into his flesh.

He turned around. At his side, the other beast floated, dead, and Lona was trying not to sob.

"Darling, I came as quickly as I could, but I was too slow. You're wounded!"

"Not badly. Not too badly to do this."

He put both the injured and the unharmed arm around her and drew her close. For a second she allowed him to embrace her, then pushed him away.

"Let's get to the bank first."

He said unhappily, "I suppose that's sensible. What slowed you up?"

"The moment I saw you were having trouble, I came to meet you, as I had said I would before you entered the water. But my first capsule was faulty. The chemical in it seemed to have deteriorated, and the beasts came at me when I was no further in than my knees. Luckily, I could use my arm freely enough to fight them off. Then I used the other capsule, and came on. But I had lost time. A second later, and I wouldn't have been able to get the one coming at you from the other side."

SHE shuddered, but Makin said calmly, "You weren't too late. I knew all along that you wouldn't be."

They had reached shore, and this time the embrace was a long one.

Finally she pulled her lips away from his and gasped, "We're not out of the woods yet. Let me bandage your arm."

"The better to embrace you with."

"Let me do the talking. Darling, we still have a wonderful chance to get to Cygnus."

"Together?"

She nodded. "The man who interviewed me was called out of the room. He was out for five minutes, long enough for me to read one or two of the papers on top of his desk, and learn the procedure to be followed on the Cygnus colonizing expedition. We can get on that space ship and once we're on, they'll have to take us."

Makin smiled. "You were unscrupulous enough to meddle with papers that you had no right to touch, despite the code you've been taught, and the penalties with which you've been threatened?"

"Darling, I knew they meant to keep us apart. I wasn't going to let that happen, no matter what the risk."

"Lona, you're wonderful—"

"No, don't kiss me again. Just listen. The space port is twenty miles from here. They don't expect trouble, so it isn't too well guarded. We can get married in the civilian center nearby, using the papers given us for the official mating. Then, if we can get on the ship shortly before it's scheduled to take off, they won't have time to find out that anything's wrong, and once it does take off, it certainly won't turn

back for our sake. The only difficulty will be getting on the ship."

"We'll bribe a guard."

"The guards may not be easy to bribe."

"Then we'll threaten them. Or we'll do both. Let's go, darling."

At the civilian center, each had a marriage test certificate ready, and the ceremony took place without trouble. But at the space port itself, there seemed at first little chance that they would be able to get to the ship.

The first guard to whom Makin spoke in private, refused bluntly and was about to raise an alarm, when Makin hit him and knocked him unconscious. Plastic ropes and a gag ensured his silence until take-off time.

With the second guard, a shifty-eyed individual who kept his gaze on the ground, they had more luck. He demanded all their money and their most valuable equipment before consenting to aid them, but finally he was satisfied.

The actual getting on the ship turned out to be simple enough. The guard consulted a register of those already checked through, accepted their identification tags, pretended to compare the numbers with those on his lists, and waved them forward. He would get into trouble later, thought Makin, but the bribe he had received would more than make up for it.

A half-hour after they had been given their compartment, the ship took off. But not until it had circled the planet and was setting a steady course for Cygnus' did they breathe freely. Then Makin took her in his arms once more. They were hurtling past Earth by the time he let her go.

IN the Colonization office, Major Crane saluted, and Colonel Galchek said dryly:

"What's the final record?"

"Fifty-one couples for Beta Two, fifty-two for Sigma Three. All on board in first-class condition or close to it. Nothing but such trifles as wounded arms and legs, wrenched backs, and so on."

"We've topped our quota," said Galchek with satisfaction. "Next time we'll do even better. What were the causes of failure?"

"Of the seventeen listed, there was one joint failure, in which neither man nor woman made the grade. Both physical and mental factors were involved."

Galchek grunted. "Separate them, cure them of what ails them, and give them nice non-adventurous jobs. Go on."

"Three cases of physical failure—two among the men, one among the women. Purely accidental factors involved. They refused to be separated. In each case, the uninjured member of the couple saved his or her partner. I suggest that they be kept together and sent on a later expedition."

"We'll do that. What of the remaining thirteen?"

"Primarily mental. There was slight differences among them, but in each case the pre-encounter suggestions did not work out properly."

"Whose fault?" asked Galchek. "The psychologists?"

"They're not perfect, Colonel, but I think we can blame primarily the human material. Consider the cases that did work, such as those of M 14 and W 47."

"I remember M 14. I think his name was Makin."

"Right. He and W 47 received thoroughly established pre-suggestions that they fall in love with each other, despite the nature of pretended official matings. Well, all he needed was a sight of the back of her neck, her hair and half of one ear, and the thing clicked. From then on, wild horses couldn't have separated them. In fact, wild beasts didn't."

"And in the other cases—the failures?"

"Some had even more protracted first meetings. Undoubtedly, they felt attracted to each other. But five were so thoroughly conditioned to taking orders that they refused to challenge the official matings. They would have allowed themselves to be mated to those they didn't like, rather than risk displeasure for those they loved."

Galchek said with contempt, "They'll make nice officials themselves some day. Old bureaucratic

style. They'll be separated?"

"Of course. Of those left, two of the women were so honorable that they refused to examine the papers on my desk when given the opportunity. Three of the men, after going through all the physical dangers, thought it was wrong to bribe a guard. Even that shifty-eyed guard we had placed there for the specific purpose of being bribed."

"The idiots. They'd never make the grade on Cygnus. And the remainder?"

"Danger separated them instead of bringing them together. They quarreled fiercely."

"For them, Cygnus would be death," Galchek said. "Talking about psychologists not being perfect—they're hardly passable. Every individual had a thorough psych-check. None of these things should have happened."

"We know they shouldn't. But they always do. That's why we can't afford to rely on tests alone, and have to put our couples through the mill."

"I still say it's wasteful," growled Galchek. "Of course, the fact that each couple has fought through dangers together and expects to receive punishment for breaking orders if it ever returned to the System, also helps keep them together on a tough job in Cygnus. But the whole thing is a nuisance. Imagine the Colonization Service having to serve as Cupid and arrange all those love matches!"

And the thought of Makin and Lona, and all the other couples now gazing so blissfully into each other's eyes, made him growl again. For it happened that Colonel Galchek, chief Cupid of Venus, had married for money instead of love.