"Survival Ship," back in 1951, had led JM into some explorations of sex-role behavior toward a novel that never got written entire, but some stories out of her future history appeared; e.g., F&SF—December, 1958.

Wish Upon a Star

I WISH, I WISH, I WISH . . .

Sheik sat under the shadow of a broad-leaf shrub, his head back, eyes closed against the glare from overhead, mouth open for a shout of protest he could never voice.

He stifled the thought with the sound, pushed it out of his head as he pushed his body backward, throwing his weight straight-armed on the flat palms of his hands behind him. Flexing his calves below bent knees, he pulled against the long thigh sinews and tightened the slanting muscles of his back, driving all tension from his mind into his body as he raised his buttocks up off the ground and hung suspended, arching from knees to elbows, hands and feet rooted to the soil. Wholly intent on the immedate physical effort, he stayed so till the blood rushing to his head choked in his throat, and arms and legs were trembling beyond control. Then with a last summoning of purpose, he flipped over and sprawled contentedly collapsed on chest and stomach, head turned so one cheek also rested on the resilient softness of the granular stuff that made the plant beds. With each great breath of air his nostrils sucked up the rich sweet damp aroma of the roots.

For a moment there was peace; and then, again, I *wish, I wish, I wish* ...

Tears filled his eyes. He sat up and angrily and brushed them off. He was too old for crying. Crying wouldn't help. He was too old to be sitting idle here, wasting time, wasting wishes on absurdities. Old enough not to be bothered by anything Naomi said or did . . . but not yet old enough (smart enough?) to know better than to try to tell her anything.

She had listened so meekly, watched so quietly, while he repaired the rootpack she had broken, holding the torn parts—just so—together, tamping the soil down—just so—around the fiber, explaining as he worked why it was just this way. He let her silence fool him; well, it was no one's fault but his own. He should have known better by now.

When he was finished, she smiled, very sweetly. "It', so *comforting* to know you'll be here, Sheik," she said, "when *I'm* in charge. You're so *efficient*." Then a quick glance at the chrono, which she must have been watching all the time from the corner of her eye, or she couldn't have timed it all so perfectly. "Oh-OOOh! I better run! I'm late for Sessions now . . ." And she was off, flashing a hand free of dirt or work, leaving him, trowel in hand, to realize he had just finished doing her job for her.

It wasn't fair. Naomi was twelve and a half, more than a year younger than he was. In Standard School she was behind him in almost everything; and never, never as long as she lived, would she be able to handle a plant, to feel it and *understand* it, as he did. But she was the one in Special Sessions classes now, learning the things he ought to know. They'd make her read all the books he wanted, whether she cared or not, and put her to learn in the lab, mastering all the mysteries and intricacies of advanced Bichem. While he, Yashikazu, would go on day after day, trowel in hand, taking her jibes now, and later—much later, when he replaced Abdur in charge of the plantroom—taking her orders as Ab took his orders from Lieutenant Johnson.

It just wasn't *fair*!

I wish, I wish I was ...

He stopped it, cut it off sharply. He was not going to think that way any more. *I wish Sarah was here*, he finished the thought instead. Tonight, maybe, she would ask him again. He had nursery duty, but if he told Bob . . . *if* she asked him, that was . . . well, if she did, he'd get off duty somehow ...

Without even closing his eyes, he could see her there now, as she had been the night before last, sprawled on the rootpacks beside him, her shining long legs golden under the ultras, her face in the shadow of the leafy shrub a deep dark brown, but somehow giving out the gold-glow, too. Her eyes were closed and her hand, smooth and cool, soft and small, lay inside his as he watched her in warm and

perfect comradeship.

For most of an hour, they had barely moved or talked: they just lay there together in the private shadow, sharing what had been his alone, thinking and dreaming silently but not separately at all.

Nothing Naomi said or did ought to matter now, because things-as-they-were had given him this special thing, a place and a significance, to share with Sarah. Never before had he told anyone about the shadows—how he felt about them. (No one but Ab, of course, but that was different; Ab *knew*.) She had seen them, naturally, most every day of her life; everyone in the ship had. The nursery-age children spent at least an hour each day hullside, for ultra exposure and exercise as well as their basic fichem. When they started with Standard School class-work, they were required to spend a half-hour of play-ti me every day under the lamps. But it was the light they came for; the shadows belonged to Sheik.

When he was just old enough to be allowed to go about alone, he started coming down hullside every chance he had; the shadows drew him. Later, the plants became important, too, and now he knew that they would be his work all his life. That was good in itself, but better because the shadows were part of the plants.

Nowhere else in the whole ship was there anything like it. Once in a while, the floorlight or one of the walls in the regular living and work rooms would go out of whack, and for a brief time the diffusion would be distorted and patches of dark-and-bright showed when people moved. But only here, where the thick rootpack lined the whole inner shell of the ship's hull, where then were only struts instead of walls, and the great ultra lamps glared day and night overhead, only here were there real *shadows*, under the plants, stationary, permanent, and shaped.

The ultras were never dimmed. They shone, Sheik thought, with the same brilliant fixity of time and purpose as the pinpointed stars on the black satin of the lounge viewplate. And in the center of this same clump of shrubbery where he lay now there was a hollow spot where some of the oldest, tallest plants grew so thick no light could penetrate, where it was dark, *black*, almost as black as the space between the stars: the way, he thought, a planet's night must be.

And this spot, where he had taken Sarah, was—depending where you held your head—a moonlit planet night, a "twilight," "morning," or "afternoon" . . . all words in books, until they took on meaning here where the leaves and lights produced an infinitude of ever-changing shades and combinations of black, gray, green, brown, and gold.

He had never told anyone how he thought about that. Not Abdur; not even Sarah, yet. But if she asked him to take her here again, he thought, he could tell her; she would really understand.

He sat up sharply, the faint rustling sound like an answer to a prayer. *Sarah*?

Two plant stalks parted cautiously and a small, round, brown face stared into his own.

"What are *you* doing down here now?" Sheik demanded. How had the fool kid found him here?

"I *told* 'm I'd find you," Hari said triumphantly. "I told 'm I could. You better hurry. Ab's mad at you. He has to work onna mew-tay-shuns," the small boy said the new word carefully, "an' you're supposed to be our teacher this time."

Sheik scrambled to his feet. Nursery class here already? *That* late? He'd spent half the afternoon doing nothing, dreaming . . . Ab must be mad, all right!

"You forgot about us," Hari said.

He hadn't forgotten; he had just forgotten time. "Come on, shrimpy," he told Harendra gruffly. "Better hop on if you want to get back *quick*." He squatted and Hari climbed on his shoulders—a rare and special treat; it would make up for his seeming to forget. He started for Abdur's workroom at a trot.

Harendra was three years old now, almost four, but he was Yoshikazu's favorite in the nursery still. He had been Sheik's first full-charge baby; sometimes he didn't seem too sure himself which one was his father, Abdur or Sheik. Certainly he didn't care; he loved them both with the same fierce intensity. And it upset him if Ab was angry with the Sheik.

Abdur had been spending all his time the past few days struggling to save a planting of mutant seedlings newly developed in the Bichem lab. It was a high-protein lentil with a new flavor, but some mysterious lack in root-pack nourishment—the kind of thing that showed up only in actual growth conditions—made it essential to nurse each plant with extra care while the lab techs tried to find the

cause of the trouble.

The intricate, patient skill with which Abdur tended the delicate young plants was fascinating to Sheik. And the young children, he thought, would be interested in the luminous unfamiliar yellow of the sickly leaves.

Abdur agreed with evident satisfaction to having the children visit the sick patch. He rebuked Sheik only briefly and without heat for his forgetfulness, and set out immediately for his plants, taking the way cross-ship, through the central living section, to reach the area on the other side of the hull without further delay. Yoshikazu took his troupe of six around by the huflside route, routinely replying to the inevitable routine questions at each step: why was this plant taller, the other stalk thicker, a leaf a darker green or different shape. To most of the grown people on board, the endless rows of plants covering the whole inner surface of the ship's hull were monotonous 'and near identical. Abdur knew better; so did Sheik; and the nursery kids noticed things sometimes that Yoshikazu hadn't seen himself.

But this time he didn't want to stop at every plant. It was a slow enough trip with their short legs, and he hurried them past spots where he might otherwise have tried to show them something new or slightly changed. Then Dee, silly dimpled shrieking Dina, who, at barely two, should not (in Sheik's opinion) have come into the nursery class as yet, sat herself down on the rootpacks and refused to budge.

Yoshikazu bent to pick her up. He'd carry her, rather than waste time coaxing now. But she pointed to one root, growing wrong, malformed and upended, and stopped progress completely by-spilling out a spurt of only half-coherent but entirely fascinated inquiry.

Well, he had been wrong; she *was* old enough. Sheik sat down beside her and got to work, framing his answer, to her questions carefully, trying to give her a new mystery each time to provoke the next useful question. He pulled packing away from around the upended root, dug down, and placed the root where it belonged, giving all the children a chance to see how the other roots lay in the pack before he covered it. He explained how the roots drank nourishment from the soil, and floundered attempting to explain the action of the ultraviolet lamps.

All the while, Hari hung over his shoulder, watching the boy had seen it all before, when Dina was too little to care, but he drank in every sight and every word as if it were the first time for him, too.

"It's like being tucked in," he broke in suddenly, offering his own level of lucidity in place of Sheik's complications. "Like when your daddy tucks you in at night and kisses you and you feel warm and good all over you and you grow in your sleep."

Dina's black eyes were shining with excitement. "I know," she said. "Every night when I sleep I grow." She lifted a hand to prove the point. "*Way* up!"

"Well, that's how it is," Hari nodded commendation to his pupil. "Only the lights don't have to go out for the plants to sleep, because they're asleep all the time. Underneath there. *That's* why they never go anyplace."

His voice lost some confidence at the end. He looked to Yoshikazu for approval, and Dina looked for confirmation.

Sheik hesitated, failed to find words for a more adequate explanation, and decided Hari had probably put across more than he could for right now. He nodded and smiled at them both. "Come on, now, or we won't have time to see the new plants." They all ran after him.

Lieutenant Johnson was on duty at the children's supper that evening. She strolled casually from one of the four tables to another, listening to a scrap of conversation here, answering a question there, correcting a younger child somewhere else, reminding Fritzi—who at eleven had just become a table leader—to keep her group quieter.

At Sarah's table she paused only briefly; the officer on duty never had to stop there except for a greeting. Sarah and Sheik had seven in their group, more than anyone else, but they never had trouble. They were a good combination; Sheik glowed inwardly with his awareness of this, and with the feeling that the same thought was passing through Johnson's mind as she looked from one end of the table to the other. He didn't need any smiles from Johnson to keep him happy tonight, though. In the lounge, just before, Sarah *had* asked him. As soon as he could swap his evening duty, he was to meet her and take her down hullside again.

He caught her glance across the table as the Lieutenant walked away and saw her wink at him. With astonishment he thought, *She's as happy as I am! She wants to go, too!*

He knew, though he could not see as she bent over the carving, how her breasts had begun to swell under her shirt, and he knew by heart, though they were hidden behind the table, the long clean curves of those golden legs. Mechanically he added lentils to carrobeet top and passed a plate down, reminding Adolph Liebnitz that there was a fork at his place, and he should use it. He answered a question of Irma's without ever knowing what she asked, filled another plate, kept his eyes off Sarah thinking, *This time . . . this time I'll ...* Added a little extra greens to Justin's plate, skimping on the carrobeets the kid hated . . . *This time I'll . . .* Looked up, caught Sarah's eye again, felt himself going hot and red, and dropped the thought.

He was in a warm daze still when Lieutenant Johnson mounted the rostrum to conclude the meal with the evening prayer. Sheik chanted the familiar words of thanksgiving, suddenly meaningful, and looked directly at Sarah as they finished, saying to her and her alone, "Survive in Peace!"

The Lieutenant read off the cleanup assignments, and then, just as casually as if she were making a routine announcement instead of delivering a stomach punch, added, "There will be gameroom play for Classes Three and Four till bedtime. Special Sessions girls are invited to attend a staff meeting in the wardroom immediate!' after senior supper."

Sarah threw him a look of mild disappointment. "Tomorrow?" she mouthed. He didn't answer, pretended not to see. Tomorrow? Sure. What difference did it make to her?

And then he was angry at himself. It wasn't Sarah's fault. And you couldn't blame her for being excited about a wardroom meeting. It had to be something big for the Sessions to get asked in to wardroom. He tried to meet her eye again, but everyone was getting up; people were moving; he caught a glimpse of her back, and then couldn't see her at all. Desultorily, he drifted with the other older children to the lounge and stood staring at the big screen.

The sun was big now, filling one whole sixteenth sector Maybe the meeting . . . ? He couldn't get excited. There'd been too many false alarms when they began decelerating almost a year ago, rumors and counter rumors and waves of excitement about how the tapes were coming out of the calckers, how it was the planet . . . No, it was poisonous, ammonia atmosphere . . . No, it was just a barren sun . . . It was the right one after all; it had a perfect earth-type atmosphere, one-third the mass . . .

Meaningless words, after all, to those who had been born on board *Survival*; words out of books. The older people had been more excited than the kids. "Earth-type meant something to them.

But that was a year ago, and every day since, the sun had grown bigger on the plate, and no day had brought any real news, except somewhere along the way it had been confirmed officially that there were planets —type as yet unknown. Bob said he thought it would be four or five more months before they came in close enough to give the calckers anything to work on.

Last year, when they first been decelerating, Bob had talked a lot to Sheik, times when they were by themselves in quarters, the little ones napping or asleep for the night. It was the first time, really, since Sheik's nursery years that he and his father had been close. From the time he was six, when he was assigned for training in the plant rooms, Abdur had grown to fill the role of father-advisor more and more. But when the bright sun started to grow faintly brighter on the viewscreen, Bob's excitement was uncontainable; he poured it out on his son, a boy incredibly grown to where, by the time a landing was likely to take place, he would be in effect one of the men.

And the men, Bob told him, would have to work together when that happened. Things on a planet would not be quite the same as on board ship. For weeks, Bob reminisced and daydreamed, talking about Earth and its homes and families and governments, about the launching of the ship, *Survival*, and how and why things were set up on board ship as they were.

Some of it Sheik had heard in class; other parts he was cautioned to forget except in private. Everyone knew that the Survival was Earth's first starship, a colonizing expedition sent to find a planet—*if* there was one—suitable for the spillover of the world's crowded billions. Everyone knew the voyage might take years or decades; the ship was completely self-contained; the ion drive made it possible to carry fuel enough for a hundred years. There were living quarters on either side of those now in use that

had never been unlocked; if a third or fourth generation grew up on board ship, they'd be needed.

But if it took that long, it would do Earth no good. If the ship could not return with news of an established colony within fifty years, then it was under orders not to return at all, but to remain and start over altogether in the new place.

This much was common knowledge, and one further fact: that the original crew of twenty-four had included twenty women and four men for obvious biological race-survival reasons.

What they didn't tell in classes was why all of the men were subordinates, none of them trained for astrogation, electronics, communications, or any of the skilled jobs of ship control; why all the officers were women. The children took it for granted as they grew; the ship was the way things were and always had been; the readers that spoke of families and pets and churches, towns and villages and lakes and oceans, aircraft and weather, were fascinating, and in a quaint way, true, no doubt; but reality was the ship with its four family units, domestic fathers, energetic women, school dorms, communal meals.

Bob's talk of men who "ran their own families" and ruled their homes, of male supremacy in the environment of a hostile world, of wives and husbands cleaving one to one faithfully, first intrigued Sheik, then excited him, while he regarded it as fairy-tale stuff. But when his father pointed out one day that there were just as many boys as girls among the children—a fact Yoshikazu somehow had not thought about before—everything the old man said struck home in a new way.

"Then *why* did they put the women in charge of everything?" he demanded for the first time.

Bob's answer was incoherent, angry and fantasizing. Later Sheik took his puzzlement to Ab, who explained, tight-lipped, that women were considered better suited to manage the psychological problems of an ingrown group, and to maintain with patience over many, many years, if needed, the functioning and purpose of the trip.

"Then when we land . . . ?"

"*When* we land, there will be time enough to think about it! Who's been talking to you about all this?"

"Well, I was asking Bob," Sheik said cautiously. "But . . ."

"But nothing," Abdur said sharply. "If you're smart, Sheik, you'll forget it now. If anyone else hears this kind of talk from you, your father will be in trouble. Or I will. Forget it."

And for the most part, he did. Bob never spoke of it again. And Ab spoke only as he always had, of sun and rain, forests and gardens, sunsets and hillsides and farmlands *outdoors* on a planet.

Sheik stared at the giant sun on the viewscreen; if they had found their planet, if they landed here, he was almost a man . . .

No. He was a man. He could do everything a man could do, and he was very strong, stronger than any of the girls. And Sarah, he thought, was very close to womanhood. She was the oldest of the girls; it would be natural. One man and one woman, Bob had said . . . the thought was exciting. There was no other woman he would want to have. Naomi or Fritzi or Beatrice, the other older girls, were *nasty*. As for the crew—Lieutenant Johnson, maybe, but—but when he thought of Sarah the idea of being at the call of four others besides was obscene somehow.

Sheik laughed abruptly and turned and left the lounge. He had spent enough time today dreaming fantasies. There was work to do.

Still, when the last of the little ones was tucked in bed, and the quarters were quiet, Sheik found himself pacing restlessly in the tiny pantry-service room. He had his schoolbooks with him, and had meant to study for the morning's class. But when he tried to read, plant shadows and Sarah's legs and all the things Bob had said raced through his mind, blurring the print. He wished Bob would come back from wherever he was. The kids were asleep; there was only one hour till he himself had to be in dorm, and he was obsessed with the need to go hull-side, to find his cool shadow-corner and lie there where peace was always to be found.

And obsessed, foolishly, with the idea that after the meeting Sarah might, just *might*, go down to look and see if he was there . . .

Bob didn't come. After a while Yoshikazu closed his book, wrote a quick note, "Hullside. Back in a minute," and went out.

He had never done such a thing before. He had broken rules, yes, but not when the children were in his care. But, really, what could happen? If one of them woke up, if anything went wrong, half an hour could not mean life or death. And ...

And he didn't care. He *had* to go.

Quickly and quietly, exhilarated beyond previous experience by the sense of his guilt, he went down cornpanionways towards the hull. He closed the last hatch behind him and stood on the top step looking down into the shadowed vastness of hullside. He was above the lamps. Beneath them was bright yellow light; then pale green, new leaves at the top of the plant stalks. Darker green below. Brownish-green stalks, some slender swaying things, some thick as his own arm. And underneath, the shadows. He started down, quietly still, but beginning already to feel more at ease.

Then he heard the voice. Bob's voice. Urgent, persuasive.

"I tell you it's *true*. This time it's true. I got it straight."

"Hell, Bob, every time they send in a tech to film something secret, you think that's it. You said the same thing six months ago, and how many times before that?" That was Sean, Sarah's father, who ran the livestock rooms.

"This time I know I'm right," Bob said quietly. His voice was convincing, even to Sheik.

"Well, if it is, what do you want us to do, Bob?" Abdur, this time, also quiet. The voices were coming, Sheik realized, from Abby's little private room near the seedbeds.

"Just that I think it should have been announced. I want to know what they're up to, with that meeting. Ab, have you ever stopped to think that maybe when the time came, *the women wouldn't want to land*?"

Silence, shocked silence; Sheik stood like a statue on his step.

"Come off it, man." Sean. "They're not *that* crazy."

"It's not so crazy, Sean," Abdur said thoughtfully, and then: "But I don't see what we could do about it if they didn't. *And* I don't think they'd hold back, even if they wanted to."

"You got a lot of trust in human nature, Ab."

"No-o-o-o. Well, yes. I guess I do. But that's not why. Listen, Robert, what do you think kept you from going off your nut those first five years?"

"What do you want me to say?" Bob asked bitterly. "God?"

"Well, He may have helped. But that wasn't what I meant. You were in bad shape for a while. After Alice . . ."

"Watch yourself, Ab." Bob growled.

"Take it easy and listen a minute. After what happened—how come you didn't do the same thing?"

Sheik eased himself down to a sitting position on the top step and listened.

A lot of it made no sense. Alice had been one of the women, of course; there were nineteen now. Funny he'd never thought of that before! She must have died when he was still a baby. Most of the kids wouldn't even know the name.

And Bob, Bob had had something to do with Alice. The conversational scraps and fragmentary references were incomplete, but Sheik had a picture, suddenly, of something that had happened to his father, of something like what was, maybe, happening with him and Sarah, and wasn't *supposed* to happen.

He tried to think how he would feel, what he would do, if Sarah suddenly—were no more. He could not imagine it. Nobody ever died. Nobody on the ship was more than forty-five. If Bob had felt that way, and then Alice died, he could see why his father was—*funny*, sometimes. Why he imagined things and made up stories about the time on Earth.

The twin revelation—the knowledge that what he thought and felt for Sarah had happened to *other* people, often, and the shocked glimpse of grief inside his father —almost obscured the more immediate importance of what the men said down there.

"Indoctrination," Ab was saying.

Alice was the only one who hadn't had it. She had been the ship's doctor; "they," the planners, had

thought someone on board, the "stablest" one, should be free of "post-hypno." Words, some new, some old but out of context here. *Indoctrinated* . . . the women were indoctrinated, too; they *couldn't* refuse to land the ship. Ab said so.

The others agreed with him. Bob didn't, at first, but after a while, though he kept arguing, Sheik knew even Bob was convinced.

Gradually, the voices turned more casual; the conversation slowed. Sheik thought it must be getting close to dorm curfew. He raised the hatch above him cautiously, hoisted himself up through it and let it down with silent care. He reached his own family quarters again without meeting anyone.

Inside, he put his note down the disposall, checked on the sleeping children, and arranged himself in the galley with a book on his lap, his feet on the counter, and a yawn of boredom on his face. When Bob returned, he hung around hopefully a little while, but Bob was not feeling talkative.

Sheik had a few minutes till curfew still; without planning it, he found himself in the nightlit empty lounge, at the big screen, watching the giant sun, almost imagining he could see it grow bigger and closer against the dead black , of space, straining his eyes absurdly for the planet . . .

Planet!

Proofed to Here

The pieces began to come together.

Voices came down the corridor, and a far part of his mind remembered the wardroom meeting, Sarah, the evening's plans. Just coming out now? Maybe he could see her still. That was silly—curfew soon. Well, tomorrow . . . Just coming out now? That was some meeting ...

Meeting! And Bob said he knew for sure this time the tapes on the planet were through: It was a good one. They could land on it, and live.

Live on a planet.

His stomach felt funny for a minute, and he thought that was foolish, what was there to be *afraid* of?

Live on a planet. He thought the words slowly and purposefully. Planet. Plants. Plants on a planet. On a planet, plants grew everywhere, by themselves, naturally. That's what Ab said. He said they grew all over, so you'd have to *tear them out* to make a place to build your house.

House. Family. Inside-outside. They were all words in the books. Hills, sunsets, animals. *Wild* animals. Danger. But now he wasn't afraid; he *liked* the thought. Wild animals, he thought again, savoring it. Houses, inside and outside; inside, the family; outside, the animals. And plants. The sunshine . . . daytime . . . and night ...

Shadows!

The light brightened around him. On a planet, there would be shadows all the time everywhere.

"Sheik . . ."

"Yes, ma'am." He turned. The response was automatic . . . "indoctrinated"; . . . even before his mind reoriented.

The room was daylit again. Five of the women were standing just inside the door. Lieutenant Johnson was smiling, watching him.

"Better hop, boy. Curfew."

"Yes, ma'am." He moved past the others. Johnson, closest to the doorway, reached out a hand and rumpled up his hair.

"Do your dreaming in bed, Sheik," she said tenderly, as if he were in the nursery still. But something was in her eyes that made him know she did not think he was a little boy. He felt better when he, got outside.

The girls' dorm was to the right; he could see the last of the senior class girls disappearing through the door. If he moved faster ...

He turned to the left, walked up to the boys' dorm, and almost missed hearing the sharp whispered noise from the cross-corridor beyond.

He looked back. No one in sight. Raced up the corridor, and she was there, waiting. Waiting for

him.

"Sheik! Shhh . . . I just wanted to make sure . . . Tomorrow night?"

"Sure," he said.

Her eyes were shining. Like the Lieutenant, she was looking at him *differently*. But it was a different kind of difference, and he liked it. Very much.

"Sure," he said again. "Tomorrow night for sure." But neither one moved. A gong sounded softly. Curfew time.

"You better get back," she said. "I have a pass." Even her whispering voice was different. She was vibrating with excitement. It was *true*!

"Okay," he said. "Listen, Sarah. Let's not wait. What about tonight?"

"Tonight?"

"After inspection."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Sneak down. It's easy," he promised out of the practice of an hour ago, and lied. "I've done it lots of times."

"Who with?"

He smiled. From inside the lounge they heard voices. "Listen, I got to get back. Right now. I'll meet you in Cargo G in half an hour. Then I'll show you how."

"But, Sheik . . ."

He didn't wait for her answer. He didn't dare. Johnson or one of the others would be out for inspection any minute now. He ran on his toes, silently, back down the corridor, tore off his clothes, jumped into bed, pulled covers up, and did not open his eyes even to peek and see what officer it was when she came in to inspect the row of beds. He just lay there, astonished at what he had said and what he was—beyond hesitation—going to do.

He thought of the times he had waited and wanted and hoped for Sarah to ask him, to notice him, to pick him to dance with or play with or for a work partner. Now, all of a sudden, he had thrown himself at her head, suggested ...

He began to be horrified. It wasn't the idea of breaking curfew rules. Yesterday, even this afternoon, that would have shocked him, but now—knowing about the planet changed all *that*. What bothered him now was the brazenness of it, the way he had practically begged her to come, and hadn't even waited to find out ...

He wouldn't go. She'd never go. He was crazy to think ...

She was laughing at him now.

I wish, he thought miserably, *I wish I was . . .*

Only he didn't. He didn't envy girls any more.

He lay very quietly in bed for fifteen minutes. Then he got up and pulled on his shorts. He looked at the six other beds in the schoolboys' dorm. Joel, the youngest, was nine, still a kid. The others were twelve, thirteen, eleven, eleven, twelve. Five of them who would soon be men. Like Bob and Ab, Bomba and Sean, and Sheik himself. He left the dorm, slipped down the corridor, thinking as he went of the words he had read somewhere, that he "moved like a shadow."

I wish, he thought, and turned round a corner to safety, *I wish that she comes*. And then: *I wish that we land on a planet very soon.*