

## Boy Meets Dyevitza

A thrilling news bulletin, dated September 11, 1996, was recently handed to me by an assistant who is too young to remember the star over Moscow, and it is toward him and others like him that the following history is directed. If it resembles fiction more than it does fact, the similarity is wholly intentional, for it is only through fiction that the past can be brought back to life.

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When Gordon Andrews first saw the girl, he took it for granted that she was a Venusian—a natural enough assumption in view of the fact that he was on Venus. She was kneeling beside a small brook, humming a little tune and washing out a pair of stockings, and so intent was she on her tune and her task that she did not hear him when he stepped out of the forest behind her. Her bobbed hair was the color of horse chestnuts, and her clothing consisted of gray culottes, a gray blouse, black leather boots and a small gray kepi. The tune she was humming was a passage from Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

Thus far, Gordon had taken Venus pretty much in his stride. The data supplied by the Venus probes during the early 60's, while obscure with regard to her cloud-cover, had conclusively disproved former theories to the effect that she lacked a breathable atmosphere and possessed a surface temperature of more than 100 degrees Centigrade, and had prepared him for what he had found—an atmosphere richer in oxygen content than Earth's, a comfortable climate, and a planet-wide sea, unbroken as yet save for an equatorial land mass no larger than a modest island. The data, by its very nature, had also prepared him for the possibility of human life. It had not prepared him, however, for a Venusian maiden on humming terms with *Swan Lake*. Small wonder, then, that he gasped.

The girl dropped her stockings and shot to her feet so fast that she would have toppled into the brook if he hadn't leaped forward and caught her arm. She had a heart-shaped face, and her eyes were the hue of harebells. At the moment they were filled with alarm. Presently, however, the alarm went away and recognition took its place. "Oh, it's you," she said, freeing her arm.

He took an involuntary step backward. "Me?" he said.

"Yes. Captain Gordon Andrews, of the United States Space Force, is it not? You look quite a lot like your photograph."

He could only stare at her. "I do?"

"Yes. I saw it in one of your materialistic capitalistic magazines." She stood up a little straighter—an act that brought her harebell-blue eyes on a level with the topmost button of his fatigue-alls. "I am Major Sonya Mikhailovna, of the Soviet Space Force, and my ship is in the next valley. I arrived here yesterday."

He got the picture then, and he felt sick. He should have known from her too-correct, slightly stilted English, from the military cut of her clothing. He should have known in the first place, for that matter. It was the same old humiliating story. The manned Venus shot had been publicized for months before the actual launching, and he had been written up in every newspaper and magazine in the country. Articles had paid homage to his suburban upbringing, saluted his record at the Shepard Space Academy, praised his career as an orbital pilot, romanticized his bachelorhood, described how he liked his eggs, and inferred what a good catch he would be. Meanwhile, the Russians had gone quietly and systematically about their business, and at the precise psychological moment had pulled their usual unexpected coup. First it had been Laika, then Zvezdochka, then Gagarin, then Dymov, the first "Man in the Moon." Now it was Major Sonya Mikhailovna.

But why a woman? And why one so seemingly delicate that you marvelled at her ability to withstand the acceleration of take-off? Suddenly he got the whole picture, and he really felt sick. He could see the humiliating headlines—or rather, their English counterparts—in *Pravda*: SOVIET SPACE GIRL BEATS CAPITALIST COSMONAUT TO VENUS! USSR TRIUMPHS AGAIN!

"I suppose you picked up my ship on your radar while I was coming in, and fixed the time and location of my landing," he said bitterly.

Sonya Mikhailovna nodded. "My own arrival-time has already been officially recorded, but the announcement of my success had to be withheld until I could establish your arrival time and the exact time-difference could be computed. Soon now, the news of our glorious new victory will be released to the world."

She bent down, retrieved her stockings from the brook and wrung them out. Straightening, she hung them on a low-hanging branch of a nearby tree. They were cotton, he noticed, and there was a hole in one of the toes.

Suddenly she gave a start. Following the direction of her gaze, he gave one too. So did the man and the woman who had just emerged from the forest.

Since his arrival four hours ago, Gordon had been wondering—among a host of other things—whether the ultra-violet rays of the sun could penetrate the planet's thick cloud-cover. He saw now that they not only could, but did. The man and the woman were unquestionably members of a white-skinned race, and both possessed suntans so deep and golden that in contrast their dark blue eyes seemed even darker and their bright blond hair even brighter. Their white knee-length tunics augmented the effect, and in co-operation with their handsome faces, supplied them with a god-and goddess-like aspect. Unfortunately, this aspect was somewhat marred by their one concession to personal adornment—gleaming neckbands forged from a copper-like metal.

As neither native appeared to be armed, Gordon saw no cause for alarm, and after his initial surprise, he regarded them quite calmly. So did Sonya Mikhailovna. This time, however, the two Venusians did not reciprocate. Their eyes had grown wide, and now an unmistakable expression of disbelief settled upon their handsome faces. At length the man touched his own neck and then the woman's; then he pointed, almost accusingly, it seemed, toward Gordon and Sonya, and demanded something in an intelligible tongue.

Gordon proceeded to touch his own neck. Next he touched Sonya's ever so lightly of course. "Gordon," he said. "Sonya."

He was rewarded for his perspicacity by two horrified stares and a pair of hoarse gasps. Then before he could utter another word, the two Venusians turned and vanished into the forest.

He stared after them. So did Sonya Mikhailovna. "Did you know," he asked presently, "that Venus was inhabited?"

"Our scientists suspected that it might be." She shrugged. "Anyway, what does it matter now? By your stupid action you destroyed whatever chance we had of establishing friendly relations."

Gordon felt his face grow hot. "When you meet aliens, the first thing you always do is exchange names with them," he said. "Everybody knows that!"

"Everybody who reads your stereotyped science-fiction knows it, you mean. And after you find out their names, you say, 'Take me to your leader,' and their leader turns out to be a big, beautiful blond who is stacked. Well, I think I will be getting back to my ship."

"I don't see anybody stopping you," Gordon said.

She gave him a long look. In the roseate radiance of the Venusian afternoon, her face had a pink-checked little girl aspect. "In imperialistic idiom, that means, I suppose, that it is a matter of complete indifference to you what I do."

"It sure does," Gordon said. "Well, I'll be seeing you."

Leaving her standing by the brook, he re-entered the forest and struck out over the little hills that rolled back from the littoral like green inland waves to break riotously against the high ridge that encompassed the island's interior. In his initial enthusiasm, he had wandered farther from his ship than he had meant to, and he had been about to turn back when he had seen the girl. Now he had another reason for returning: a dark cloud was due to arrive over Washington in the very near future, and it was up to him to send out a bad-weather warning.

Multicolored flowers carpeted virtually every square inch of the forest floor; finch-like birds of rainbow hues darted overhead, leaving exquisite wakes of song; squirrel-like mammals spiraled tree

trunks so swiftly that they were barely visible. Venus had turned out to be the Venus of the romantics, rather than the Venus of the scientists, and Gordon, who, for all his scientific training, was a romantic himself, found the eventuality exhilarating, even in his present doldrums. Perhaps when man reached Mars, he would find blue canals after all, no matter what the scientists said to the contrary, and fragile glass cities tinkling in cinnamon-scented winds.

The day was nearly done when he reached the cove, near the shore of which his spaceship stood, and darkness was upon him by the time he climbed the metal Jacob's ladder and stepped through the lock. (In blithe disregard of learned opinion, Venus's rotation period approximated Earth's; however, her cloud-cover brought about an abrupt and early departure of daylight.) In his haste, he did not bother to close the lock, but headed straight for the radio alcove and beamed the news of his historic meeting with Major Sonya Mikhailovna across the immensities to Space Force headquarters at New Canaveral, appending it with the information that the peoples of Earth could no longer consider themselves the sole inheritors of the solar system.

Owing to the distance involved, over five minutes elapsed before he received a reply. He was informed that the USSR had already released the news of the new space victory and that the Soviet premier had declared a national holiday in honor of the occasion. New Canaveral also provided him with an unsolicited thumbnail-biography of Major Sonya Mikhailovna. Her father Petr, was a famous Russian pianist, she was twenty-three years of age, unmarried, spoke six languages fluently, had a nodding acquaintance with eleven more, held a doctor's degree in anthropology, was an accomplished ballerina, and in the last Olympic games had won the gold medal in the gymnastics competition. She had been chosen for the Venus shot from a group of one hundred trained women volunteers, and the rank of major had been bestowed upon her in honor of her service to her country. Also—

Gordon heard the footsteps then, and whirled around. But the three Venusians who had crowded into the little control room were upon him before he could draw his pistol. They relieved him of it quickly and tossed it to one side; then two of them held him while the third covered his nose and mouth with a wet cloth that reeked of a cloying perfume. He blacked out in a matter of seconds.

A new day was dawning when he climbed out of the deep well of drug-induced unconsciousness and opened his eyes. His wrists and ankles were bound, and he was lying on a stretcher fashioned of lashed-together saplings. It was being carried by two gold-skinned Venusians, one of whom was the male member of the couple who had come upon him and Sonya the previous afternoon.

He raised his head. Apparently the perfume he had inhaled possessed only part of the properties of chloroform—in any event, he felt no ill effects. Turning his head, he discovered that his captors consisted of about two dozen natives, all told, and that every one of them wore a metal collar. Half of them were women, and one of the women was the one he and Sonya had seen the day before.

There was another stretcher just behind his own. Sonya Mikhailovna's face was hidden, but he could see her horse-chestnut colored hair. "Are you all right?" he called.

She did not answer. Clearly their captors had used the same drug on her that they had used on him, and she was still under its influence. A number of other things were also clear: the two original Venusians had been part of a larger group—an excursion party, perhaps—and after vanishing into the forest, they had rejoined the main body and reported his and Sonya's presence. The decision to capture them must have been made shortly afterward.

The trees thinned out on Gordon's right, providing him with a glimpse of distant blue-misted hills and gray-blue sea and bringing home the realization that he was being borne along the lofty inland ridge that circled the island's interior. For the first time since he had opened his eyes, fear touched him. In less than two months, Venus would approach to within thirty million miles of Earth—the distance which the Space Force technicians had used in computing his return trajectory and in estimating the amount of fuel he would need. In all probability, Sonya's return trajectory and fuel-supply had been similarly computed and estimated, and if so, she was in the same boat he was. If they were kept captive for any length of time, they might not be able to return to Earth for another year, and while it was conceivable that they might be able to live off the land after their supplies gave out, it was far from likely.

Maybe, though, eating wouldn't be a problem. Dead people are as unable to eat as they are unable

to tell tales.

The trees thinned out again—on his left, this time—and he saw a bowl-shaped valley far below. There were green fields and blue lakes, and scattered clusters of white buildings. Villages, no doubt. They weren't large enough to have registered on his viewscope during his orbit, but they were large enough to register on his retina now.

The faint trail which the Venusians had been following began zigzagging down the side of the ridge, and the going became more difficult. They kept glancing uneasily at the sky as though they momentarily expected it to fall down upon them. Gordon could discern no cause for their concern; as far as he could see, the sky was the same hazy pink it had been yesterday—but then, he was not a Venusian and consequently knew nothing about such matters.

At the foot of the ridge, the procession was joined by other natives, indicating that a courier had been sent ahead to herald its approach. All of the newcomers wore metal collars, and all of them looked at Gordon and Sonya briefly, then quickly glanced away. Sonya, Gordon saw, turning his head, had awakened, and was regarding her surroundings with eyes that seemed to have even more harebell-blue in them than before. "Are you all right?" he called again.

"Yes," she said, after a pause. "I am all right."

One of the nearer villages proved to be their captors' destination, and after passing between several neatly laid-out fields, the principal crop of which appeared to be a Venusian form of sweetcorn, the procession started down a narrow thoroughfare in the direction of a large circular stone building surmounted by a steeple-like chimney from which smoke arose in a tenuous blue-white column. The buildings on either side of the street were plain to the point of bleakness, the facades featureless save for oval windows and narrow doorways. Villagers were everywhere, and all of them, men and women alike, sported metal collars. Children, however, were noticeably absent, though once Gordon caught sight of a round, wide-eyed face in one of the oval windows. He had to look fast to see it, though, because an instant later a woman appeared and yanked the child back out of sight.

He was more bewildered than ever. Obviously, judging from their reactions, the Venusians considered him and Sonya to be guilty of some manner of immoral crime; but the only crime they had committed that he could think of was trespassing—and certainly trespassing couldn't be construed as *immoral*. What in the world *had* they done then?

The procession had reached the large circular structure and was filing through its vaulted entrance. Terraced tiers of stone benches encircled a small, flagstone-paved arena in the center of which were two altar-like stone blocks, placed about five feet apart. Just behind the blocks stood a primitive forge, and beside the forge stood an even more primitive anvil. A gold-skinned blacksmith was busily operating a pair of crude bellows.

Gordon and Sonya were placed on the blocks and strapped down by means of leather thongs. The tiers of benches filled rapidly, and an air of expectation rapidly permeated the smoky atmosphere. Gordon began to sweat—a reaction due partly, but not wholly, to the heat thrown off by the forge. Sonya's face was white. He tried to think of something reassuring to say to her, but for the life of him, he couldn't. Quite by accident, his eyes met hers, and to his consternation her cheeks changed from white to pink, and she turned abruptly away.

The audience began to chant, and presently a man of noble mien appeared, bearing two strips of copper-like metal. He handed them to the blacksmith and then stepped back and took up a position equidistant from each block, after which he proceeded to look sternly down first into Gordon's face and then into Sonya's. Gordon couldn't see what the blacksmith was doing in the meantime, but judging from the sounds the man was making, he was busily occupied. Bellows wheezed and coals crackled, and metal clanged on metal as though a Venusian tarnhelm was in the works. Gordon knew perfectly well, however, that one wasn't and he wasn't particularly surprised when, a little while later, a water-soaked cloth was wrapped around his neck and was followed by one of the two metal strips. Steam rose from the wet cloth as the blacksmith held the two ends of the strip together until they fused, and even more steam arose when he tempered the resultant seam with a container of water. The job completed to his satisfaction, he removed the cloth and let the still-warm collar settle against Gordon's neck.

The other strip was similarly fused around Sonya's neck, after which the man of noble mien went into action. Raising his hand in a signal for the audience to cease its chanting, he launched a long sonorous speech, part of which he directed at Gordon and part of which he directed at Sonya. After a ringing peroration, during which he seemed to threaten each of them, he produced a pinch of white powder and sprinkled some of it over each of their heads. Finally he drew a long double-edge knife.

Well, this is it, Gordon thought. But it wasn't. The man of noble mien merely used the knife to cut their bonds; then, after untying the thongs that secured them to the stone blocks, he raised both arms in a gesture for them to stand up. Gordon massaged his legs before putting his weight on them, and Sonya followed the same precaution. He could hardly believe that they were still alive, but seemingly they were. And healthy too—if the pinkness of Sonya's cheeks was an accurate criterion.

The man of noble mien nodded his noble head in the direction of the entrance, and they accompanied him outside. Gordon did a doubletake when they stepped into the street. It was strewn with freshly picked flowers of every hue and description and lined by little children waving green twigs that resembled olive branches. He came to a staring stop. "Won't someone please tell me what's coming off?" he said.

Sonya stopped beside him. "Don't you really know?" she asked, her eyes fixed on a flower at her feet that was almost as red as her face had become.

"I know we're the focal point of some kind of ceremony—but what kind of a ceremony is it?"

Slowly Sonya raised her eyes. "It's a wedding ceremony," she said. "They—they married us."

The flower-carpet stretched all the way to the outskirts of the village, and so did the two lines of little children. Gordon stumbled along at Sonya's side, hopeful that he would wake up any second in the bachelor's barracks at New Canaveral. But the street stubbornly refused to dissipate, and so did the little children and the man of noble mien. As for Sonya, much less than dissipating, she took on added detail, and the metal collar around her neck seemed to throw off flame after lambent flame, and each one was brighter than its predecessor.

The man of noble mien escorted them outside the village, then turned his back on them as though they no longer existed and returned the way he had come. After his passage, the little children broke ranks and began playing in the flowers. Gordon faced Sonya. "Now maybe you'll tell me *why* they married us," he said.

"I will tell you on the way back to our ships."

She did not speak again till they reached the top of the ridge. Then, after she got her breath back, she said. "They married us because, underneath their demigod exteriors, they are nothing more than bronze-age puritans. Yesterday, when the man and woman saw us standing together by the brook, they were bewildered because neither of us was wearing what to them is a universal symbol of marriage—a metal collar—and when you touched me, they were shocked. You see, in their society, no man and woman can be alone together unless they are married, and it is unthinkable for a man to touch a woman unless she is his wife, or some immediate member of his family."

"We could have been brother and sister," Gordon pointed out.

"Do I look like your sister?"

He had to admit that she didn't.

"Anyway," Sonya went on, "their trailing us to different houses must have convinced them and the rest of their party that we are not. In the eyes of the Venusians, you see, our spaceships are just that. Houses. Odd ones perhaps, by their architectural standards, but houses just the same. How else could a simple bronze-age culture interpret them?"

Gordon ducked beneath a blossom-laden bough. "How did you know they're puritans?"

"I didn't—at first. I merely assumed, from their reactions to us, that they must be. And then I got to thinking about how neither the sun nor the moon can be seen through the cloud-cover, and it occurred to me that their concept of one god must have come much earlier in their civilization than would have been the case on earth, owing to the fact that there could have been no intermediate phase of sun- or moon-worship. Perhaps, somewhere along the line, they had a Christ whose teachings they misinterpreted, and no doubt they have a version of Genesis similar to the Judaeo-Christian one—except that in theirs, the problem of creating the sun and the moon and the stars never arose. Anyway, now that

they have married us, they are no longer interested in us. All that concerned them was our moral welfare ... It seems to be growing dark."

"It can't be," Gordon said. "It's only a little past noon. Which reminds me—I skipped breakfast, and supper too." He pulled two concentrated food biscuits out of his fatigue-all pockets. "I suggest that we stop for lunch."

They sat down side by side beneath a tree with blue blossoms shaped like Dutchman's-breeches hanging from its boughs. They were halfway down the opposite slope of the ridge now, but Sonya's ship was still many hours away, and his was an hour farther yet. They ate silently for awhile.

Then, "There is one thing that puzzles me," Sonya said. "Yes?"

"Why did they marry us so soon? Why was there such a need for haste?"

"You made it clear enough. They misinterpreted our behavior and were shocked out of their self-righteous puritanical skins."

She shook her head. "Shocked, yes—but not enough to have rushed us through a ceremony that under ordinary circumstances would have required days of preparation. There must have been another reason." Suddenly she glanced up through the foliage at the sky. "It *is* growing dark."

There was no longer any denying the fact. The roseate radiance of the youthful afternoon had transmuted to a sort of gray murk; moreover, the air had grown appreciably colder. Gordon stood up. "I think we'd better be on our way," he said. "It's going to rain."

A good three hours passed, however, before he felt the first drop. He and Sonya were in the hills now, and the ridge was far behind them. The rain was gentle, but it was persistent too, and both of them were soaked before another hour had gone by. "We will go to my ship," Sonya said, brushing back a rain-wet strand of horse-chestnut colored hair from her forehead. "It is much closer than yours."

Somehow her offering him shelter in a Soviet ship did not strike him as being in the least incongruous. And when, a moment later, he slipped his arm around her waist, that didn't seem incongruous either. And when she permitted it to remain there, even *that* didn't seem incongruous. For some crazy, mixed-up reason life seemed singularly devoid of incongruities all of a sudden. And amazingly forthright and simple. The rain was extremely penetrating—so penetrating, in fact, that it penetrated his skin as well as his clothing. And it had a curious lulling effect. No, that wasn't the word. A curious soporific effect. No, that wasn't the word, either. Well, what word was it, then?

He couldn't call it to mind till after they reached Sonya's ship and were standing at the base of the Jacob's ladder. By then it was too late. By then he was gazing softly down into her eyes, and she was gazing softly up into his, and the world was well on its way toward being well lost.

He tried to force himself to step back and regard the situation with the cold and objective eye of a scientist, to evaluate this strange and wondrous quality that fell in the form of rain and to tie it in with the Venusians' motivation in marrying him and Sonya posthaste. In vain. All he could think of was the tune she had been humming by the brook and the hole he had seen in one of her cheap cotton stockings. And then she was in his arms and he was kissing her rain-wet lips, and Washington and Moscow were forgotten place-names on a map that had no more meaning than the paper it was printed on.

The rain continued to fall. Softly, gently. Insistently. It sang soft songs in the leaves. It murmured; it whispered. It laughed.

It did not cease till morning. After starting back to his ship, Gordon mentally rehearsed the report which he and Sonya had agreed to send to their respective headquarters. It described briefly how they had been captured and released, but discreetly made no reference either to the wedding ceremony or to the rain. They had unanimously agreed that the situation was complicated enough without complicating it further.

He had gone less than half a mile when his collar began to press against his throat. Thereafter the pressure increased with every step he took, till finally he came to a semi-strangled stop. It was as though he had reached the end of an invisible leash.

The pressure lessened after he backed up a few paces, went away altogether after he backed up a dozen more. There was only one explanation. The metal from which his and Sonya's collars—as well as those of the Venusians—had been forged, possessed magnetic properties unknown to terrestrial metals,

and the attraction between objects fashioned from it grew progressively stronger as the square of the distance between them *increased*. Either the Venusians had disciplined this attraction so that it was limited to objects fashioned from the same stock, or the ore from which the metal was processed was naturally subdivided into small magnetically independent veins. Gordon did not know which was the case, but there was one thing he did know; when the Venusians married you, they meant business.

He began retracing his steps back to Sonya's ship. Halfway there, he saw her running toward him. Her white face told him that her collar had been giving her a hard time too, and that she had arrived at a conclusion similar to his own. "Gordon, what are we going to do?" she gasped when she came up to him.

"We'll get them off some way," he reassured her. "Come on—I've got the necessary tools in my ship."

He tried all morning before he gave up. The collars were impervious to his best shears, and his hardest file failed to scratch their surface. Using his acetylene torch was out of the question.

He sat disconsolately down on the ground several feet from one of the landing jacks. Sonya sat down beside him. "We won't be able to go back at all now," she said. "Neither your ship nor mine can carry us both, and there's no way we can occupy more than one of them at a time."

Gordon sighed. "I suppose we could radio for help," he said presently. "But if we did, we'd have to tell them everything that happened. I'm afraid they'd be sort of skeptical about the rain. Of course, we could leave that part out—but I'm afraid they'd be skeptical about the collars too. In fact, I don't think they'd even believe us. They'd simply jump to the conclusion that we've fal—that we don't want to return and would order us back on the double the minute maximum juxtaposition occurred. No, if we radio for help, we've got to have a good concrete reason for doing so—one that they'll be able to understand and believe."

Sonya managed a wan smile. "I—I can just see myself standing before the Council of Ministers, blaming what happened on the rain," she said.

Gordon laughed, "And I can just see myself standing before a congressional investigating committee, explaining about the collars." He began to feel better. A situation that could lend itself to humor could not be wholly hopeless. "Here's what we'll do for now," he went on. "We'll radio back the report we agreed upon, and then we'll go on with our work as though nothing is wrong. Sometimes problems solve themselves; but just in case this one shouldn't, and we can't go back, we'll build a cabin so we'll have some place to live."

Sonya's eyes sparked like a little girl's. "Let's build it by that little brook," she said. "Where—where we first met."

"Fine," Gordon said.

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During the ensuing weeks, they spent their mornings gathering data and their afternoons working on the cabin. They took time out to analyze a sample of rain water, but it evinced no unusual qualities. Gordon was not surprised. Shortly after landing, he had tested a sample of Venusian water for drinking purposes, and with the same result. Clearly, the quality that had undermined their inhibitions originated in the cloud-cover, and evaporated soon after it reached the ground.

After the cabin was finished, they began going on afternoon-hikes into the hills, tramping through idyllic woods, talking and laughing, exclaiming now and then at unexpected patterns of flowers, starting at sudden rainbow-flights of birds. They saw but few Venusians, and the few they did see ignored them. One afternoon they found a fern-bordered pool beneath a white-skirted waterfall, and after that they came there everyday to swim. Sonya's skin darkened to a deep gold, and looking at her, Gordon sometimes found it hard to breathe. Every so often the sky darkened, and rain fell; but the rain was superfluous now. And as for the invisible magnetic chain that bound them together, that had been supplanted by another invisible chain that was ten times as strong.

And yet the original one still remained, and the problem it represented grew more and more acute as

their scheduled departure-times approached. They desperately needed a good practical reason to give their respective governments for not returning to Earth—and quite providentially at the very last moment (though it seemed anything but providential at the time) they discovered that they had one. Or rather, Sonya did. On the morning of the day she was scheduled to undergo the rigors of acceleration, she regarded Gordon shyly across the little breakfast table he had built. "I—I am going to have a baby," she said.

The news, when it arrived in Moscow, had something of the impact of a hydrogen bomb, and when it leaked through a hitherto unsuspected crevice in the Kremlin, there was a sort of chain-reaction throughout the entire Soviet Union. It was at this point in his political career that the Soviet premier discovered a universal truth: people the world over, whether they be communistic or capitalistic, have a very large soft spot in their hearts when it comes to babies.

That spring, Venus outshone herself, and hung in the evening sky over Moscow somewhat in the manner of the star over Bethlehem. The premier had a haunted look on his face when he appeared before the Council of Ministers. He was not alone. The Ministers had haunted looks on their faces too. What did you *do* when you had to cope with a forthcoming space baby who would be half capitalist and half communist and who was already adored by the whole world? The premier did not know. But there was one thing he did know; in the last analysis, any party is the people, and while you can con the people into believing that black bread is white bread and that caraway seeds are caviar, you cannot con them into believing that a child conceived on the Planet of Love by a Russian girl and an American boy is any thing other than a harbinger of peace.

So in the long run, what the premier did was the only thing he could have done. He arranged a summit meeting with the president of the United States and the prime minister of Great Britain, and for the first time in history, the East and the West really got together. The threat of war could not, of course, be totally eliminated at such short notice; but a number of aggravations that could precipitate a war could be eliminated—and were. This accomplished, the three leaders drew up plans for a super three-man spaceship to be built posthaste by the best engineers the three nations could supply, and unanimously agreed that the pilot would be English, the obstetrician, Russian, and the nurse, American.

It has been said that after the meeting, the Soviet premier and the president of the United States got together and began thinking up names. This is extremely doubtful. Anyway, if they did, they were wasting their time, for Sonya Mikhailovna and Gordon Andrews had already taken care of the matter. The name they chose is well-known today—except, perhaps, by those for whom this history has been recorded. Which brings us back to the aforementioned news bulletin. In common with most news bulletins, it has about as much poetry in it as an old shoe, but its message shines forth with a radiance that excels even the radiance cast by the star over Moscow.

*Geneva, Switzerland, September 11, 1996—The young Russo-American ambassador-at-large, Petr Gordonovitch Andrews, announced this morning that his peace plan has been accepted by all major and minor powers, and that the war that has threatened mankind for the past half century can no longer occur.*

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