

# STARTLING *stories*

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Illustrated by FRANK KELLY FREAS

# Double Date

By WINSTON MARKS

*This is a date with  
a difference . . .  
one guy and two gals!*

**S**MITTY had barely begun his six-hour shift in the white, tunnel-like chamber, and he was already arguing with himself. He was suffering from a malady common to young bachelors who were too broke to marry, yet too virile to let it go at that. For a whole week he had

stayed away from Honica Jones on the dimly conceived theory that the fever in his blood would diminish if he saw her less.

But it only made him start muttering to himself every time he was alone in the algae chamber where he worked. He was stationed at the up-stream end of the cat-walk. A sheen of perspiration glistened from his body, which was naked except for a loin-cloth and deeply tanned from the ultra-violet overhead lights.

"What's a percentage?" he demanded angrily, glaring at the algae flowing through the transparent cylinder at his side. "Two more years of waitin' and I'll go clear nuts. It's better this way. Cut her off right now. Forget her!"

Brave words they were, but without conviction. Honica's golden, blonde head tossed defiantly in his mind's eye, and the silken yellow of her hair floated across his vision in rippling, tantalizing wisps.

His pulse throbbed in his temples.

Suddenly a faint tinge in the algae caught his eye. Was the tinge yellow or brown? Or was it there at all? He couldn't be sure.

Stifling the impulse to cry out into his breast microphone, he began moving down the walk parallel to the rotating cylinder through which 50,000 gallons per minute of growing algae and nutrient solution flowed slightly faster than a man could walk with comfort.

Blinking twice, Smitty stared at the blinding-white porcelain walls for an instant to "bleach" his vision, then looked again through the transparent wall of the cylinder. The rotating baffles, sloshing the pale, green liquid and urging it along, sometimes played tricks on his eyes. He must be sure.

*Very sure.*

There it was again! Just the faintest off-hue taint. Was it an incipient *brownout* that would contaminate a whole shift's production? Or was it Smitty's fortune to witness one of the rare "bonus-mutations"?

*He mustn't call it wrong.*

TROTTING along the ramp he realized he was almost to the end of the hundred-meter inspection chamber. Conscientiously he strained all 78 units of his I. Q. to the decision. In another 20 meters the cylinder would discharge the discolored mass into the harvest vats. If he yelled, "brown-out!" the outlet would swing instantly to the sewer discharge. But if it were not brown, but the lighter, golden—

"Mutation!" he bellowed into the mike as his highly sensitive eyes caught a positive, yellow tinge—a trace so faint that the most delicately attuned photo-electric cell could not have detected it among the flickering, changing densities and shadings of the foaming green mixture.

With the sound-off, Smitty leaped straight up without looking, caught the safety-bar in his strong hands and swung himself onto the higher escape ledge. He had almost missed the mutation because he was so busy thinking about Honica, and he silently thanked his good luck.

His luck wasn't all good this day, however. When they shot the emergency shut-off at the exit, the great cylinder chose to rupture just under the point where Smitty fumbled for a handhold. In the instant before the plastic cylinder split along its whole length of the inspection chamber, the pressure sent a gout of the tepid fluid surging up and flushed Smitty from his precarious perch.

He cascaded into a violent maelstrom of churning liquid, expecting each moment to feel the tearing gash of the jagged plastic fragments. "Oh, no!" he groaned as something grazed his leg. "The bonus! I'll never get to spend my—"

But it was only the dull edge of the submerged cat-walk. Seconds later they fished him out with a sling, dripping with warm slime and gouging algae from his eyes.

Showered and dressed, he reported to personnel, his heart pounding with excitement.

"Inspector Smith," the man at the pay-window said, smiling, "you have done well. You are promoted to tax-bracket 42, and you may have the rest of the afternoon off."

Smitty didn't reflect that the time off was no gratuity, but merely represented the time necessary for the biologists to salvage the golden mutation strain and for the techs to replace the ruptured cylinder.

Nor did he reflect bitterly upon the fact that his basic wage had been increased not a whit—and likely never would be. Like all workers of the 21st century, Smitty accepted the fact that a man's I. Q. was a just and equitable standard of his earning ability. Four years before, he had started with Algae-Culture, Incorporated, at the modest wage of \$10,000 a year and in the accustomed 35% tax bracket—meaning that he was allowed to retain 35% of his wages, or \$3,500 per year.

Last month he had accrued his fourth annual percentile increase in tax bracket, bringing him up to the 39% mark. Now, with this wonderful break, he forged ahead three whole percent to a fat figure of \$4,200 per year.

*Incentive management*, the company called it.

*Earned tax relief*, the government named it.

*A raise in pay*, Smitty sang happily to himself as free men in capitalistic republics have sung since the American dollar was invented.

**H**E WENT back to the locker-room and made a call from a pay-booth. The screen grayed, then it burst into the golden-haired image of Honica Jones. Her blue eyes peered at him expectantly, saw who it was, then tightened. Her carmine mouth pouted. "It's you. Inna week, a whole week, where ya been? I'm your girl? Am I your girl or not? All I wanna know is what is this, the run-around?"

"Listen, sweetie, I got the big news. A raise, yet," Smitty told her.

"Where ya been? Inna whole week,

I got nothing to do but sit around and wait for you to—to—a raise, yet?" Her eyes opened widely again. "A raise again, already?"

Smitty bobbed his massive head and watched Honica's expression with pleasure as she came to the realization that Smitty had leaped headlong into the traditionally eligible marriage bracket, income-wise. At 41% a man was supposed to be able to afford his first wife.

The glorious dawn of understanding barely touched Honica's beautiful face before suspicion clouded down again. "How many a the others you called before me to tell 'em about it?"

"Just Mabel and Gwendolyn, honest!" he lied. True, the two brunettes were in his little black book, but he hadn't seen any of his other female contacts for months now. Honica was his favorite, but he had no intention of letting her know it just yet. Ever since they had met he had been rationing dates even to her, hoping to save enough money to hurry up the day when he could take her out of circulation for good. But Honica was funny. Let her get the upper hand and life became miserable.

"Okay, okay, go celebrate with Mabel or Gwen, the big fat blackheads, see-if-I-care! I got lotsa dates. Only—"

"Only what?" Smitty demanded.

"Only—if—if you did want to go out I could fix up a double date, and we could have a lot of fun."

"Double date?" He tried to keep his voice casual, but his disappointment crept into his tone. "Since when we gotta have another couple around to have fun?"

"Not that kind of a double date, silly." She laughed. "I got this cute girl friend, see? You'll really go for her, and now that you can afford it, with your big raise and all—"

She rattled on and on, but Smitty was hardly listening. For a long time he had been fighting the suspicion that Honica was just playing along with him for dates. After all, she was his intellectual superior by 22 I. Q. points. It was safe

enough for her to date him alone when he had too little income to ask her to marry him, but now that he was in the chips—yeah, that was it! She was still willing to help him spend his money, but she felt she needed protection. Double dating! The hell with that noise!

"No!" he said flatly. "It's me and you alone, or should I call up Gwendolyn, maybe?"

Honica's lids dropped half closed, but not before a flash of distilled jealousy escaped them. She smiled sweetly. "Invite her, too, if you want," she said softly. "But I'm sure you'll like this little girl friend of mine."

Now Smitty *was* confused. Honica's momentary betrayal of possessive jealousy set the throb beating in his temples again, like the mammoth algae pumps at the plant. "I'll be over," he said thickly. Honica smiled at the surrender in his face.

**I**NSIDE the hour his cab nosed onto the ledge of the 47th story of Honica's apartment building and kissed the portal with pneumatic lips. Honica opened the panel to her tiny apartment and welcomed Smitty with a hug. She turned to another female, a brownette of rather plain features, delicately-boned and obviously timid.

"This is Betty."

Smitty nodded. "Hi. Where's ya lad? Not here yet?"

Betty crimsoned, a rare phenomena which Smitty had never witnessed before. Honica said, "Get brainy, lover! Didn't you follow me? Double-date. A boy and two girls."

Smitty tried, but something seemed to elude him. "Yeah, but where's *her* fella?"

"Look, sweetie." Honica was very patient. "She's a P. U. like me. You know, classified *permanently unemployed*. E. Q. under 75. Sweet kid, but trying to stretch a pension like I am."

"But you got a hundred I. Q.," Smitty reminded her proudly. "How come?"

"So I never explained it? How I goofed off and lost my employment

rating? We P. U.'s are all in the same boat. Our only chance is to hook a—to make a suitable marriage. Now, don't get me wrong. I got plenty a offers, only—you know how I feel about you."

"How is that?" Smitty grinned broadly.

Honica closed in with a firm, wet kiss to demonstrate. A strange, sweetish scent filled Smitty's nostrils. His tongue retreated from the taste surprise, then moved forward again to investigate this new thing. But Honica's lips peeled away quickly. "Get our things, Betty. That cab is eating up Smitty's spending money."

Betty came back in a moment with their light summer wraps, and all three entered the cushion-lined air-cab with Smitty in the middle. "Coney," he told the driver. Then he explained, "They got a exposition out there on the algae-food industry I wanta look over. A lot of other science junk, too. I hear it's real interesting."

"Coney!" Betty said softly beside him. "I've never been to Coney."

Smitty turned to look at her. A girl who had never been to Coney hadn't been dated much, if any. Which brought up *the* point again: What was she doing along on this date, anyway?

"Honica," he asked, "tell me about this double-date business again?"

The blonde hauled his head down to her red lips and whispered in his ear, "Will ya stop sounding off? You'll hurt her feelings. I thought I was doing something nice for you."

"I don't get it. Nice?" he mumbled.

"Yeah, nice. A guy that can afford a couple girl friends at once is a BTO. I just wanted to make you feel good. You know, with your raise and all."

"You mean—she's my girl friend, too, on this date?"

Honica nodded.

"And I can—I mean, you won't be jealous if I—?"

"Jealous?" She laughed in his ear. It was a harsh, humorless laugh that he didn't like. "You don't get the idea at all. Where ya been the last year?"

Double-dating's all the thing now."

"How come we never did before?"

"You couldn't afford it before. Now you can afford it."

Smitty wasn't sure he wanted to afford it. Paying double for what? To have two girls to show off—and kiss? You could only kiss one at a time. Besides, who'd want to kiss Betty when Honica was around?

**T**HE thought made him sit upright, and Honica's arm slipped from his shoulder. Leaning the other way he decided to test a couple of theories at once.

Betty raised her face so slowly to meet his lips and then performed so inexpertly that Smitty found himself deeply puzzled. Another distraction was the same, peculiar sweetness of breath and lip that he had found with Honica. A new lipstick?

He felt a tremor pass through Betty, and when he opened his eyes and withdrew she was breathless and more flushed than ever. Smitty turned to check on Honica. She was gazing unconcernedly out the window, one hand absently patting his knee.

This was double-dating.

He admitted a gradually increasing prickle of emotion, but it was a silly thing, a feeling of naughtiness, an embarrassed curiosity about Betty and her trembling, a confused emptiness at Honica's lack of reaction, a bitter-sweet, torn-in-two-directions-feeling that was at once mildly exciting and distinctly uncomfortable.

Was this something other men went for? Maybe it took a higher I.Q. than his to appreciate it. After all, most men who could afford to double-date had higher mental ratings. Smitty's job, he knew, was rated well above what his meager 78 points justified. It was his keenly color-sensitive eyes that held it for him and made them waive his 30-point deficiency in brain-power.

For the first time in his life Smitty felt self-conscious about his intelligence rating. Why, he couldn't explain, because, after all, no one was to blame for

the abilities a man was born with. Modern education carefully instilled the power to adapt in each child, and the great network of government-subsidized businesses and industries that set the pay-scales mostly according to I.Q. was careful never to mismatch a man and a job.

Socially, men and women sought their own mental-economic level. There were no rules or caste-systems other than this self-seeking instinct.

Once Smitty had pondered briefly about dating Honica because of her 100-point rating, but he was not one to be worried with abstract barriers. Her mode of life was similar to the other P. U. girls he had dated, and her quicker mind had, until today, stimulated more than annoyed him.

Another thing, Smitty loved kids. Not only was Honica a fine specimen physically, but she could bear him children smarter than himself; children, he reflected wistfully, he could be proud of. After all, he might not pass on his sharp color-vision to his offspring, and then, if he were mated to a female of his own I. Q. or lower, his youngsters would be job-rated near the bottom of the scale.

His thoughts turned to Betty. She was sort of sweet at that. He liked the way she kissed, kind of frightened and thrilled like a high school girl, yet she must be all of 22 years. But with an I. Q. of less than 75! A man who liked kids would think twice—

The cab dipped, and Betty gasped, "Oh, it's beautiful. Oh, we'll have fun."

"Let's find something to eat," Honica said boredly. "I'm famished." She was always hungry. Smitty supposed that her \$2,000 P. U. pension, diminished by her extravagance on clothes, junk-jewelry and cosmetics, didn't leave her too much for the costly foods she liked.

The cab settled to the cab-ramp, and while Smitty paid the driver Betty ohed and ahed some more over the surrounding trees and flowers. The foliage and bright blossoms were, indeed, a rarity in the Greater New York Area, but somehow Smitty found himself enjoying them more than usual, as Honica tugged

them down the path toward the nearest restaurant.

"I had a poinsetta once." Betty said. Smitty felt her drag on his right arm as reluctantly she left the park behind. When she turned to face the Midway there were sparkles of moisture in her eyes. "I—I'm not hungry. Can't I stay in the park while you two eat?"

Smitty found himself squeezing her hand under his arm. "You'd better stick with us, kid. We'll come back this way, and you can look some more."

**T**HE moving concourse was only lightly crowded. It was a weekday and early in the afternoon. Smitty found himself pointing out the familiar buildings, thrill-rides, side-shows and permanent arts and sciences expositions. Since Honica had been here as often as he, suddenly he realized it was all for Betty's benefit.

She was soaking it all in, wide-eyed and fascinated. This part of double-dating wasn't unpleasant at all, he decided. You sort of got a new look at things through another pair of eyes. It made him feel foolishly important, a girl on each arm, discoursing learnedly upon the recreation park that almost everyone in New York knew as well as their own apartments.

He spotted the science-exhibition building. "There's where I want to go," he said.

"And there's where I want to go," Honica interrupted firmly, pointing across the moving ramp to a restaurant. "Look, honey, why don't you go take in your sideshow while Betty and I chowdown. You said you ate just before you left."

"Yeah, I ain't very hungry," he admitted. "But, Betty, don't you want to see the new stuff?"

Betty looked from one building front to the other. "Well, I am—kind of hungry."

Disappointed, Smitty said, "All right, all right, go eat, you two. Wait there. I'll be over inna little."

They parted, and he strode nimbly

across the differential walks, stepping from the last moving strip just even with the entrance. He paid his quarter and wandered among the industrial-science exhibits half-heartedly. Not even the flashing, ozone-emitting RCA-General-Electric display of the latest electronic weather-control held his interest.

He paused in front of the new-products section where a long-legged, nude red-head was demonstrating a bubble-bath attachment for the shower. As the colorful rainbow of fragrant bubbles cascaded over her, Smitty wished the girls were here. Of course, the attachment was well beyond their means, but he visualized the look on Betty's face. It would be nice, he thought, to be able to buy a gadget like that for one's wife. Even Honica would go for that.

Honica.

Was he really going to ask Honica to marry him? He was sure now that she'd say yes. After all, look what she'd done today trying to please him! Was a time when he had to almost beg for a date, but he'd cured her of that by taking out Gwen and Mabel a few times.

Gwen and Mabel weren't even in Honica's class, though—body, face or brain. Yeah, he had a good thing in Honica. He'd better latch onto her tonight when they got rid of—of Betty.

"And in the next booth may I draw your attention to an almost incredible triumph of bio-engineering," the barker was saying. He was an energetic little fellow with an old-fashioned tie knotted under his bobby Adam's apple. As the small crowd moved to follow his gestures Smitty turned to leave. A faint scent reached his nostrils and stopped him. Following his nose he discovered it came from the little booth before which the lecture was continuing.

A banner over the concession announced: TELEPATHY, AT LAST!

**T**HE word had no recognition value for Smitty, nor did he make sense from much of the lecture, but the sweetish smell from the booth piqued his curiosity. It was the third time he had en-

countered it this day.

"What the electroencephalographers have sought for over a century is now a reality," the little man was saying. "Pharmacologists have developed a new tool for the psychiatrist and a fascinating new field of direct mental communication for mankind."

Smitty looked about the booth for a gadget of some kind. He saw nothing but a bank of narrow shelves holding uniform rows of tiny blue bottles.

"Recently, the physiologists discovered that the brain did, indeed, develop enough radiation power to transmit thought impulses on a tremendously high frequency. This radiation was discovered to be impressed as a modulation on the well-known Alpha waves of the brain, those slow-pulsing waves that occur most strongly when the eyes are closed. We had thought of them as 'scanning' waves, but it developed that another function was to transmit information from one lobe of the brain to another.

"True, the power of the modulation was so weak as to be virtually undecipherable with ordinary mechanical-electronic equipment. The crux of the matter was this: In the bloodstream they isolated a metallic salt which absorbs these waves, preventing their escape. This substance seems to serve no other purpose than to shield a man's thoughts, so the problem was clear at last. The pharmacologists developed a neutralizer which, taken orally—" he held up one of the little blue bottles, "—is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream and affords effective neutralization."

Several persons in the crowd murmured in amazement. A man asked, "You mean a shot of that stuff makes you so you can read minds?"

The lecturer nodded, apparently startled that someone grasped his memorized technical terminology. "To a limited extent, yes," he said. "Of course, both communicating parties must have taken the neutralizer, since both transmission and reception are hindered by the blood absorption mineral. Furthermore, I must

add, that only *strongly verbalized* and *directly-expressed* thoughts can be transmitted effectively, and even these, over the distance of only a few feet. The brain signal is quite weak, so the old saying, 'Let's get our heads together,' will be most apt when attempting direct mental communication."

"Let me get this straight," the man in the crowd demanded. "You mean, my wife and I each have only to swallow a pill, then we can talk with our brains? It's that simple?"

"That's it! A single dose is good for some eight or ten hours. Then the body compensates—"

The crowd pressed in eagerly when sample bottles were offered. One lady said, "I read about this in the papers last week, but it said the drugstores got \$5.00 a bottle for the stuff. I can't wait to try it on that rattle-headed husband of mine."

"Don't get your hopes up, madame," the dispenser told her. "You can't actually read any thoughts except those your husband *verbalizes strongly* in his mind. You may sense moods, but it takes elaborate electronic equipment in the hands of medical men to probe the reflective mind processes and the subconscious."

Smitty uncorked his bottle, and instantly the heavy fragrance, reminiscent of Honica's and Betty's lips, flooded his nostrils. It was so strong that it had escaped from the capped tubes and drawn him to the booth originally.

So—Honica and Betty were loaded with the stuff! Why? What were they up to?

He drifted uneasily to the exit and stared across at the restaurant. There was one way to find out. He opened the blue vial and popped the single little pill into his mouth. It dissolved and slipped down easily, leaving a cloying trail of saccharine sweetness on his tongue.

**H**E FOUND the girls at a table for three, sat down and ordered coffee. "Warm out," he remarked, gulping down Honica's water to wash the taste away. He glanced at the bill. No



planked plankton steaks for Honica! She had ordered and consumed a genuine, beef T-bone with real potatoes. Betty was finishing one of the more popularly priced "Chinese dishes" featuring Great Lakes rice, the one abundant natural crop, garnished with several varieties of fabricated algae products from Smitty's own firm.

When he was done with his coffee he suggested, "Now shall we all go look up that algae exhibit? I want to see some of the other golden mutants like I caught today. They say every one has a new taste possibility. Look alike but taste different."

Honica frowned, "Really, Smitty, can't you get your mind offa that filthy stuff for just one afternoon."

Betty looked up, folding her napkin neatly by her plate. "I'd—like to see it, I think."

*I'd like to see it! I'd like to see it! Why don't you keep your mouth shut? What's romantic about a stinking algae display? I tell you we got to work fast on this boy. That Gwendolyn will nail him down for sure if she gets her hooks into him!*

*Yes, Honica. I'm sorry.*

"What's the matter, Smitty? You look pale." Honica said aloud.

"I think I want a drink," he said. He needed one. The telepathic pill was working already, and the shock of the harsh thought-words tearing into his vulnerable brain was unsettling.

"Fine! Let's order liqueurs. I want cream dee cocoa."

Smitty dialed for a couple Alexanders and one double saki. He carefully kept his mind a blank to maintain telepathic silence. He didn't want the girls to know he could overhear their thoughts. However, he didn't have to try very hard at blanking his mind, because Honica was so full of food and optimism that she kept up a steady chatter. It would take a telepathic shout to get through her barrage of conversation.

Smitty sipped his drink and marveled that he'd ever thought Honica's guff was interesting. Also, in the bright lights,

the fine lines near her eyes and the slight sag to her chin made him wonder if she actually were only 26 as she had said.

Outside, the blonde took charge of the activities, choosing thrill rides that caused Betty to gasp and cling desperately to Smitty's muscular forearm. Always in the middle, he found himself clutching various portions of female anatomy with both hands as they swooped and dived, hung suspended, fluttered, vibrated and cork-screwed headlong through six dollars worth of rides.

In the middle of the Tunnel of Love, Honica released him and whispered, "Give the other little girl a break."

The "other little girl" was cooperative but hardly aggressive when Smitty reached for her.

*Honica, Honica, he's kissing me again! Oh, Honica, now he's—*

*Sure, he's getting excited. That's what double-dating does to a guy. Remember yer 6th grade Kinsey reader. Men are polygamous. Yer doing fine. Let him have his head.*

*It's not his head—it's his hands!*

Smitty could stand no more. He let go and sat rigidly in the middle of the seat for the rest of the trip.

*What did you do, you little fool?*

No answer. But when they emerged in the light Betty was crying silently. Smitty felt like a dog. Whatever the setup was supposed to be, something was phony. This telepathy stuff was confusing him more than ever. Why was Honica all the time coaching Betty to be nice to him? What was in it for either one of them?

Betty looked so sad that he tried to get her interested in the park flowers while they waited for a cab, but she paid no attention. She wouldn't look at him.

ON THE way home, even Honica was silent. After they were airborne she snuggled under his arm and pressed his leg. *You can relax now, Betty. He's all mine.*

*What must he think of me?*

*What does it matter? I proved my*

*point about being broad-minded, and you proved your doctor's right. You didn't break down and scream even once.*

*If—if he were mine—I wouldn't want any other woman kissing him.*

*Oh, sister! You gotta get over that notion or you might as well give up right now.*

*I could find some other way to show him how much I loved him, Betty thought.*

*Love? Who's arguing about love? This joker's an investment. I got a friend in Algae-Products. This friend says Smitty tested the highest in this eye-color test of anybody in the industry. Not even Smitty knows it, but this friend said that if Smitty ever proved that he could handle himself properly in a brownout or a mutation emergency, A.-P. would double his basic to keep competitors from stealing him. Well, he proved out today. And that stinking little tax-bracket raise he got was just to keep him happy until they got government okay on the basic raise.*

The air was calm, but Smitty suddenly felt sick to his stomach. So that was why Honica was trying so hard to please him. The cramps of excitement from the news about his job mingled with a feeling of revulsion for this money-grubbing little blonde snuggling her over-perfumed hair in his face. Trying to show she was broad-minded so he would marry her . . .

Honica—

Yeah?

*He's wonderful. So strong and, and gentle. I'm afraid I'm in love with him.*

*Don't make jokes. You just met him, Honica thought.*

*I suppose I'm especially susceptible—after all that time in the sanitarium. And I know our I. Q.'s don't match so well, but—I—Take good care of him, Honica.*

*Make that vice versa and I'll buy it. I've taken care of enough slobs in my time. Let one of them take care of me for a big fat change.*

The cab levelled off at Honica's ledge and made contact. As the bump threw them forward slightly, Betty's hand

touched Smitty's impulsively and gave it one, small, farewell squeeze.

*I saw that, kid. Quit torturing yourself. You're just not his type.* "Well, here we are. Let's all have a drink." Honica unlocked her door and stepped into the apartment.

Smitty now had a firm grasp on Betty's hand and kept her from rising. He waved his other hand casually. "I'll call you up sometime, Honica. Be seeing you around." *If Betty's feeling broadminded,* he added telepathically. He kicked the back of the driver's seat. "Take off, skyboy."

Honica gasped and opened her mouth to reply, but the cab floated away from the ledge. Her telepathic comments made Smitty wince until he was out of range.

He looked down at Betty's puzzled, tear-streaked face. "Where do you live?"

"St—straight up. Six floors."

Smitty relayed the information to the driver who had let the cab drift away from the building, and they floated up to Betty's ledge. Smitty helped her unlock her door and pushed in after her, signalling the cab to wait.

They faced each other in the middle of the tiny living-room. "I want to apologize—"

They said it together, blurted it out in perfect unison, and then they both laughed nervously. Betty said, "Thanks for an interesting afternoon, Smitty."

"Sure, sure! Glad you came along." Smitty was all mixed up now. *It was too damned bad about her I.Q. There was something about her that made him wish—*

"What's wrong with my I. Q.?" Betty asked suddenly.

Smitty had started to turn away to the cab, but he stopped. "I didn't say nothing."

"Why, you did too. You said—"

"That was Honica. She said you was a P. U. Because your I. Q. was under 75."

"She said 'E. Q.,' my *emotional* quotient. I've had a complex about men all

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## DOUBLE DATE

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my life. Before I went to the sanitarium for treatment I'd scream if a man brushed against me. I must be cured now, because I—" her head dropped and that curious red coloring came into her pale cheeks again, "—I feel much differently now."

"But your I. Q.?" Smitty persisted.

"I'm not even sure. In the 120's somewhere. Is it so important?"

Smitty's face lighted up with a full grin. "Sure is if a man wants kids smarter than he is." He turned, paid off

the cabby and closed the door.

He wrapped his long arms around her fragile body. She began trembling again, and for a minute he was afraid she might scream, but then she quieted and turned her face up to him.

He said, "Funny, with all the talkin' we do, how mixed up we get sometimes. Maybe if we got our heads together and did more thinkin'—and less talkin'—"

He tried it. Then she tried it. And it worked. It worked fine. And they lived telepathically ever after.