

IMAGINATION

*Stories
of Science
and Fantasy*

Stories

| | |
|---|-----|
| THE FIST OF SHIVA (Novel—35,000 words) By Daniel F. Galouye..... | 6 |
| MILK RUN (Short—3,700 words) by Robert Donald Locke..... | 92 |
| EARTH CAN BE FUN (Short—5,400 words) by John W. Jakes..... | 102 |
| DOOM SATELLITE (Short—4,300 words) by A. Bertram Chandler..... | 118 |
| LESSON FOR TODAY (Short—2,500 words) by Joel Nydahl | 130 |
| THE BIG CHEESE (Short—1,500 words) by Edward Wellen | 138 |

Features

| | |
|--|-----|
| CHICAGO SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION SNAPSHOTS | 2 |
| THE EDITORIAL | 4 |
| SAUCERS ON THE SCREEN!..... | 91 |
| SPACE SIGNALS | 116 |
| BRAIN MACHINE | 137 |
| NATURE'S EQUATION | 143 |
| FANDORA'S BOX | 144 |
| BERTRAND RUSSELL PROPHECIES..... | 153 |
| LETTERS FROM THE READERS..... | 154 |
| TOMORROW'S SCIENCE | 164 |

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William L. Hamling
Editor

Frances Hamling
Managing Editor

Malcolm Smith
Art Director

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She was beautiful, the kind of girl Joe could love. But she had been raised on Mars and never heard of the word; so he had to show her how—

Earth Can Be Fun

By John W. Jakes

SHE had a nice figure, a nicer face, and she was mad. "How did you get in here?" she said angrily.

Joe Bergman leaned against the door of the suite and dangled the key in front of her face, grinning. "Pass key. Friends."

"You're a newspaper man," she said with contempt. She walked to the window and stood with her back to him, staring out at the buildings and the windows like plates of molten gold, catching the late afternoon sun.

"That's right," Bergman said,



closing the door. "My name is Joe Bergman. I don't wear a hat at my desk, I don't drink heavily, I am unmarried, I am a generally nice guy, and I want to talk to you."

"The Foundation said no newspaper men," she told him, turning around.

"The Foundation does not have friends with keys to hotel suites. I want to get your story because it'll mean a nice fat bonus. When the first woman born on Mars comes to Earth for the first time, that's news."

"I didn't come here because I wanted to," she said quickly. "I only came back because I'll collect the trust fund left me by my father when I'm twenty-three. That'll be tomorrow. Then I can take the first rocket back to Mars and resume work."

"What kind of work?" Joe said, taking out a small notebook and writing things down.

"Zoology. I'm currently studying the relationship between one of the recently classified Martian phylums and the Terran crustaceans."

"My my," Joe said gently. "Sounds like fun. You like it, eh?"

"Yes. Very much. It's my life and my work. It's the only thing I've ever known, and I like it."

"Don't get so excited," he said. "By the way, is your first name

really Amanda?"

"Well of course it is!" She flounced down in a chair, angrier than ever.

He shook his head. "Amanda Williams. What a name for a girl like you."

"Look," she said a bit harshly, "you're in. You want a story. It'll save me a lot of trouble if I give it to you. I don't want any more publicity than is necessary, and a story is better than a brawl. I'd have to have you thrown out otherwise, wouldn't I?" she finished, studying him.

"You sure would." He tried to smile brightly, but he kept getting disturbed by her face, her soft-looking brown hair, by her softly rounded body molding the severe plastic uniform. "Well," he said finally, "just exactly what is your opinion of Earth?"

She laughed. "You ought to be able to guess. I dislike it intensely. The people are dull and noisy and emotional. That's the worst part. I've learned that science is the only thing that can be trusted, Mr. Bergman. Out there on Mars, the air is cool and clean. You can think clearly. You can sift your feelings and discard those generated by the emotions. You get into far less trouble."

"Agreed," he said. "But you don't have any fun. Have you ever

had what you might call an . . . emotional experience?"

"Of course not."

"You ought to try one sometime. The reaction might be pleasant."

She shrugged, moving to the phonograph. Joe winced at the thing. It was angular and functional and somewhat hideous. The music was even worse.

"What *is* that noise?" he asked.

"Beautiful, isn't it? Norkell's Mechanical Symphony. He's a biochemist at Marsport, but he's trying to develop new musical ideas on the side. I love his work. It has all the precision of a machine."

"It also has all the soul of a wet cabbage," Joe commented.

"Look," she said again, walking up to him quickly, "if you don't want any ideas, don't come around unlocking doors and asking for them."

HE snapped his notebook shut. "Miss Williams, I make it a point to let people have their own opinions. But I don't like to see this planet run down. After all, I was born here, and I like it a lot."

"Isn't that nice," she said acidly.

"I'll bet you never had any fun in your whole life. Twenty-two years . . ."

"My pleasure . . ." she began coldly.

"... is in relating Martian bugs to Terran amoebas, or whatever. I know all about it. Tell me one thing."

"Yes?" Her voice made him see pictures of the ice caps at the poles of Mars.

"Do you live in a test tube?"

"See here, Mr. Bergman . . ."

"You see here, Miss Williams. I've gotten rather mad in the last couple of minutes. As I said, you wouldn't know a good time if you saw it. Why, if you were set down in the middle of an average Terran family eating dinner and enjoying themselves, you'd begin looking for different kinds of phylums in the soup. I'll bet you couldn't get a kick out of a shady joke, or even enjoy being in love, if you know what that is, at all. But I like Earth and I'm damned glad to be here."

"There isn't one single thing I could find entertaining," she replied.

He took a deep breath. "You want to bet?"

"W . . . w . . . what?"

"I said, do you want to bet? You'll have plenty of money by tomorrow morning. I won't. So I'll make you a special kind of bet. Give me until six a. m. tomorrow morning. Go out with me. I'll show you part of our city. The people here are pretty much like the peo-

ple all over Earth. If you don't enjoy yourself, okay. If you do enjoy yourself . . . and I don't see how you could help it, if you're the least bit human . . . then you pay me a hundred bucks."

"You're insane," she said, her eyes wide. "You're absolutely insane."

"Well, I may be. But I enjoy living. I don't think you do." He paused, waiting for her reply. It didn't come, so he said, "Are you scared?"

"Scared? What does science have to fear from the emotions?"

"Oh, can it," Joe said sourly.

"I'll go," she said softly with determination. "I'll go, Mr. Joe Bergman, but I won't have a good time."

He headed for the door. "I'll hold up the story for the time being and arrive back here at six this evening. Get some rest. We'll have twelve hours to defrost you." He closed the door as she said something not quite ladylike.

Riding down to the street in the lift tube, he began to wonder. He pushed his hat onto the back of his head. This was going to be a tough job. How did you go about convincing someone who had never been on Earth before that people did enjoy themselves? Maybe it was utterly impossible for her.

He walked out into the street

and the late yellow sunlight, remembering how pretty she was. Then he thought about the bet. It was sure as hell going to be a tough job.

THE big launch putted across the artificial lake, jammed with laughing people. Kids held hands with their girls, and a fat lady with three children tried to decide which one of them was going to get the largest piece of chocolate bar.

Ahead of the boat, Joy Island rose, a fantastic tangle of electric bulbs and searchlights and noise and music and laughter. Joe and Amanda sat in the center of the launch, not speaking.

"What is this place?" Amanda said at last.

"Amusement park," Joe replied glumly. "Best one in the country. Guess the best one on Earth." He was discouraged already. The ride from the hotel to the boat dock had been rather silent. Every comment of his, about the pleasant night air, the music from the copper radio, had been met with a cold little smile that was decidedly unfriendly.

"Do people do this often?" she asked.

"Yes. I come here once a year or so myself, to relax."

"Are you relaxing tonight, as

you so quaintly put it?"

"Nope," he said, "I don't think so."

The boat nuzzled the pier. Before the motor chunked into silence, the people were pouring onto the landing. Joe helped Amanda off. She drew her arm away from his hand. He settled his hands into his pockets and shook his head.

They went through the brightly lit gate into the magical world of the lights and the laughter. People rushed by them, hurrying, holding hands, laughing, eyes flashing back the electric glow. There were warm smells in the air, of popcorn and peanuts and a possible summer rain. Rockets from the city trailed red in the sky over the park like roman candles.

"Some of those ships may be going to Mars," Amanda said softly.

"Oh for pete's sake, don't be so melancholy. You'll be back in the test tube soon enough. We've got till six tomorrow morning. So don't give me any trouble."

She sniffed petulantly.

He said, "Do you want some popcorn?"

"What's that?"

Joe rolled his eyes to heaven and shelled out a quarter to the vendor. Amanda took the warm paper bag and put a few of the flowery white kernels into her mouth.

For a minute her eyes seemed to

glow almost pleasantly, and then her mouth turned down. "Strange taste," she said.

Joe snatched the bag out of her hand, put a handful into his mouth and said between gulps, "I eat. I don't analyze."

They went on rides. *The Moon Rocket, The Twirlawhip, The Dimension Traveler, The Time Machine.*

They went through fun houses. *Mummy's Ruins, Caverns of Luna, House of a Thousand Terrors, Laugh Palace.*

Amanda's uniform was not designed to be elevated by gusts of air. Her face remained almost expressionless, except for its slight smile of boredom when they went through the tilting rooms and had the floor fall out from under them. They bumped down a long series of rollers, sitting down. Amanda was distinctly displeased.

WHEN they came out of the last fun house, Joe looked gloomily around the midway. Then he remembered that he, at least, should appear to be having fun. She was so damned pretty. If only she could laugh like some of the other girls around him, who weren't half so nice looking . . .

"No fun, eh?" he said. "Anywhere?"

"It all seems rather silly," she

said. "I don't see how people can enjoy being tossed around like that."

"Haven't you ever done anything besides think?" Joe asked her.

"No," she replied.

He looked around some more and said, "Let's go this way."

"What is that thing?"

"Ferris wheel. It's an old timer. Maybe the other rides were too modern. This one's basic."

Afterwards, Joe decided that it might have been basic, all right, but as an entertainment device for a female zoologist from Mars, it stunk. As a last resort, he tried the roller coaster.

The chain of cars creaked slowly up the long incline toward the first dip. The lights of the park dropped away below them, a wov-
en web of colored splashes, filled with the moving shapes of people.

"The air's nice up here," Joe said.

"Warm. I think there'll be rain."

Conversation, Joe felt, was not the right approach. The cars reached the top of the slope, hesitated, and began the first plunging fall. Feminine voices lifted in high-pitched screams. Amanda kept her lips tightly together.

When they hit the second dip, Joe put his arm around her and squeezed protectively. A moment

later he noticed that her mouth was moving.

"What?" he yelled above the wind and the female shrilling.

"I said please don't do that."

He removed his arm, folded his hands in his lap and sat for the rest of the ride feeling like the wet cabbage he had described to her earlier in the day.

Once out in the midway, he headed for the boat landing. His watch said twelve midnight. Something was needed, desperately. She hadn't enjoyed herself one bit.

"Really," she said as they walked toward the main gate, "this is all a bit silly. Why don't you take me back to the hotel?"

"Oh no. A bet's a bet. You're going to stick with me until six o'clock even if your intellect is completely degenerated. Come on." He pulled her by the arm, a trifle roughly, toward the launch.

On the way back to the city, the rain that had been threatening all evening arrived. The launch pilot moaned about the fact that he had no canopy. It had looked so nice early in the evening. Many of the passengers found the situation somewhat humorous, but Amanda stared straight ahead, refusing to say a word.

When they landed at the city pier, they were thoroughly soaked. The rain still came swishing down.

Joe headed for the copter station at a trot. Amanda walked calmly after him and Joe wondered if, through some prank of an unkind fate, he had been hexed at birth.

THE rain still drizzled down when they arrived at Mama Goldberry's. Only about a dozen diners still remained. Drying off in the copter had been a chilly process. Joe stood just inside the door, smelling the warm fragrant air, enjoying the soft lighting on the old wooden tables and the polished walls.

Mama Goldberry, with her round heavy face, greeted them at the door, as she did all customers. She wore a long checked dress and a big white apron and her smile showed that she loved food and cooking for people. Joe introduced Amanda, who replied with a polite greeting, and Mama Goldberry led them to a table.

"Joey," Mama said when they were seated, "you haven't come round for a long time."

"Busy, Mama."

"Busy busy busy. All the time people are busy. You shouldn't be so busy, Joe. You'll wear yourself out, in here." She smiled and tapped the left side of her ample bosom.

"I like to come here," Joe said. Amanda watched him, puzzled.

Mama clapped her hands together. "What to eat?"

"Three or four salami sandwiches, to begin with. On rye bread."

"Good," Mama said. "We just made some fine salami. And some of our wine?"

He nodded, feeling warm inside. "A bottle."

When Mama went out to the kitchen, Amanda asked, "Why do you like her so much?"

"Because she likes me, I suppose. She's a good woman, and she can make wonderful food. There are very few cooks like Mama Goldberry any more."

"With scientific cooking, things can be done much more efficiently."

"Oh, sure," he said, feeling resigned to his fate. "You won't like the salami and you won't like the wine. But I do."

He lit a cigarette and sat quietly, looking at her, wishing she could be the least bit friendly. From the outside, she was the kind of a woman he could fall in love with. But from the inside . . . statistics . . . list of alien phyla . . . *oh hell* . . .

Several couples moved on the dance floor. Papa Goldberry had waved at Joe between numbers. He and two other elderly men played soft melodious violins into the small hours of the morning for peo-

ple who liked a quiet place to eat good food and be alone.

Determining to make another try, Joe asked, "Do you dance?"

"I never have."

"Might as well learn." He took hold of her hand as they went to the dance floor. There was no response.

They walked to the bandstand. The musicians finished their number.

"Hello, Papa," Joe said.

"Hello, Joey. Good to see you again." Papa was round-faced like his wife, and a halo of bushy gray hair stood up around his skull. He wore a black coat and a tiny black tie, and his gnarled hands held the shimmering polished wood of the violin with great tenderness and affection.

"What would you like to hear?" he asked.

"I've got only one favorite." Joe grinned.

The other two musicians smiled and nodded, and the three of them began playing *My Heart Stood Still*.

AMANDA moved her feet rather stiffly, and she stayed a good distance away from him, but she caught on easily. Joe listened to the music and let it get the best of him, as it always did.

Deftly, he slipped his arm around her and pulled her close so that her

hair brushed his cheek.

"That's a real oldie," he said. "Almost sixty years." He began to hum softly.

"Please," she said, stiffening.

"You don't like dancing close?" he said, feeling rather malicious.

"No."

"Well, that's a shame."

And he kept right on dancing that way until the music stopped.

The food and the wine were waiting at the table. Amanda took only a small bite of the sandwich and winced. She sipped the wine.

"It's all new," she said. "Completely new."

"I like it," Joe said. He began to feel melancholy. "I guess I was wrong, trying to make you enjoy the things I do. People are different. You were born on Mars."

"It's all very strange," she admitted.

"And not scientific at all," he said. The wine made a pleasant warmth in the pit of his stomach. "I suppose you'll never be any different."

He watched her, a kind of sorrowful smile on his lips. Right then, he knew he could fall in love with her very easily. But she wasn't the kind to fall for anything but Martian bugs.

Well, he might as well have a good time. It was nearing three o'clock. Everyone else had gone home.

Papa and Mama Goldberry came over and sat down with them, and Papa played the violin and Mama talked about the old country and how they would never get her on a rocket, no, Earth was good enough for her. She never wanted to leave her cooking. The old man and woman laughed at one another, with one another, talking over small private jokes, sharing them with Joe and trying to share them with Amanda.

She sat straight and unmoved.

About four forty-five, Joe paid the check and said goodnight to the old couple. As they walked out into the street, Joe said, "They don't know anything about animal life on Mars, but they're happy."

Amanda didn't say anything.

The rain had gone, and the night air was sharp and cool.

"It isn't far to the hotel," Joe said wearily. "We might as well walk. I'll let you off an hour ahead of time."

He liked smelling the air at this time of night. A copter whirred somewhere above the buildings. In the gutters, rainwater ran, making rivers of bright gold.

"I like this time of night," Joe said, not caring a great deal about how she felt any more. He felt the battle was lost. "I like the air and being alone when it's cool."

They came to a corner and he

stopped and looked at her. "You know something."

"What?"

"I've never walked with a girl at this time of night before."

"I can see why. It's cold."

"Sure," he sighed. "It's cold. That's all you can think about. Temperatures and things."

"You've got to remember I was brought up that way."

"Well, somebody must have wanted to make you unhappy. They sure did a fine job."

THEY walked the rest of the way to the hotel in silence. At the entrance, he said, "I'll take you up."

"There's no need to, really."

"But a gentleman always does that. At least you'll be able to say you had one official date in your life." A lazy grin crossed his face. "I tried. I tried pretty hard, Miss Williams. I thought I could turn you into a human being in twelve hours, and it just didn't work."

"I'd like to tell you . . ." she began.

He waved aimlessly. "Save it. I know I lost the bet. I knew it when we started out tonight. I'll probably be very angry in the morning." He took a deep breath. "In fact, I'm getting angry right now."

"Why? Because I couldn't enjoy myself?"

"Yes. Because that damned scientific foundation locked you up on Mars and said, Amanda Williams, don't ever be a human being."

"I've never known any other life. Mars is everything. My work . . ."

"I know, I know!" he said loudly. He was getting damned good and mad now, at her, and at the Foundation that had made her stay on Mars and learn, so she could collect the fortune of her father and go back to Mars for more work.

His brain was functioning rapidly now, even a bit maliciously. "Since you're so damned hot for this science, and experiments, I think I'll conduct a little experiment of my own." He jerked her hand a bit roughly. "Come on."

He pulled her down the street. She struggled to keep up with him, almost running. He took determined, long-legged strides.

"Let me go!" she said ineffectually.

"Oh, no," Joe muttered darkly, "We're going to conduct a little experiment." They hurried on, through the dark shiny streets, for several more blocks. Finally, up ahead, a huge square building loomed.

Joe marched up the wide front steps, pulling her along, and halted before the wide glass doors.

"What . . . what is this place?" Amanda said, looking around in a

confused manner.

"City Library." Joe was pounding his fist loudly on the doors.

"But . . . it's late . . . we can't get in."

"Listen," Joe said threateningly, "I'll break the door if I have to. When I get mad, Miss Williams, I get dangerous."

She hung onto his hand while he flailed at the door with his other fist. He did not have to break it down. After about five minutes, a light began to bob, back in the caverns of darkness, and a short, balding, round-nosed little gnome of a watchman unlocked the door.

He held up the square cube of glowing plastic, illuminating Joe and Amanda in its white glow.

"You can't come in," the watchman said defensively, as if he was afraid to offend them. "It's too late. We don't open until nine . . ."

"Out of my way," Joe said.

"No, I can't," the watchman complained.

Rapidly, Joe fished his notebook from his pocket and waved it under the watchman's nose. "Press," he mumbled tersely, pushing by the little man with Amanda still hanging on.

"But Superintendent Lumpkin will have me fired!" the little man wailed.

"Just keep quiet and nobody'll ever know," Joe told him.

The watchman darted confused glances at the two of them and scuttled off into the shadows.

JOE lit a match and proceeded to rack his brain for knowledge of the Dewey Decimal System, Revised Semantic Version AD 1964. After much wandering through the darkened corridors, up and down stairs, he finally found what he sought, on a bottom shelf. Flipping a wall switch for light, he pulled out a book at random. When he opened the pages, a fine cloud of dust showered down on him.

"You know what this is?" he asked loudly.

"N . . . no . . ." Amanda replied.

"*A Study of Ecology on the Planet Mars, by V. V. Bundy.*"

"I know him," Amanda said.

"I'll just bet you do." Joe had the book open. "Now," he said, "here's the experiment. We'll see just how stone cold you are. Watch your own reactions. Study them!"

Sonorously, he began to read from the book.

"The ecological distribution of the Martian Gochi bird varies, strangely enough, from the frozen polar caps to the greensward plains. This is because the Gochi bird, through the differentiation of its three sexes, has a different structural adaptability in the matter of

epithelial covering and protection. The male and female Gochis have extra-heavy fur-like epithelial coverings, making life possible for them in the polar regions. The neuter Gochi bird, devoid of sex, is also devoid of a heavy epithelial covering and must content itself in the temperate plains regions." He slammed the book, and dropped it on the floor.

"Now," he said, advancing slowly, "that's what you get on Mars. Great, eh? Here's what you get on Earth."

Joe put his arms around her and kissed her, hard.

He kissed her for a long time, hoping that the old electric currents or whatever were transferring the old magnetism or whatever, and . . . oh hell . . . he stopped thinking and concentrated on kissing.

A couple of minutes later, he let her go. She gasped, sagging a bit against the racks of books.

"You're a scientist," he said loudly. "Examine the reactions. Which one was the most . . . pleasant?" He was afraid that he leered at her a bit too suggestively.

"Really," she said, a hint of indecision in her voice, "I don't know. I can't tell until . . . until . . ." She hesitated, a faint reddish tint coloring her cheeks.

"Forget it," he snapped. "If you don't know now, you never will!"

He grabbed her hand. "Come on."

Joe led her back out of the library. There was a portly gentleman waiting on the steps, standing next to the watchman who cringed. The portly man, Joe soon found out, was none other than the much-feared Superintendent Lumpkin, whom the gnomish watchman had summoned from his pleasant, scientifically-heated bed.

"I don't understand this, Mr. Bergman," Lumpkin said stiffly.

Joe, feeling terrible, turned to Amanda. "You might as well go on home. The hotel isn't very far."

She started to say something, but Joe was wheedling the big man with talk of important research and a feature about him and the Library in the Sunday Supplement. Finally, he persuaded Superintendent Lumpkin to forget the matter and have a beer with him.

"I could get you arrested," Superintendent Lumpkin said.

"I know," Joe said glumly, noticing that Amanda was gone. "I need a friend. I need lots of friends."

"I could use a beer," the watchman offered.

"Come on," Joe said, "even if you did turn me in."

They had their beer, and finally Joe took a copter back to his apartment. He could have fallen in love with her, he told himself. Funny

things happened to people.

He threw his hat down on the floor and stepped on it. A hell of a fine spokesman he made for Mother Earth. But what could you expect from a machine? That's all she was. A machine with a beautiful exterior and nothing but cogs and wheels on the inside.

Before he went to bed, he kicked the pillow several times around the room, knowing he would be even madder in the morning.

HE was.

He yelled at people in the newspaper office. By ten o'clock he stormed out, grabbed a copter, and went stalking into the main room where the board of the Williams Scientific Foundation was meeting.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" the chairman said, as if he had the speech rehearsed for unwelcome visitors.

Several bald gentlemen, several thin gentlemen, several fat gentlemen and several gentlemen who were odd combinations of all three, turned to look at him.

"My name is Joe Bergman. I'm a newspaper man, and I'm going to write a nasty story about all of you."

"Young man . . ." the chairman said.

"You keep quiet. I went out with a girl last night. Amanda Williams.

The first woman born on Mars. So that's okay. That's fine and dandy. But if you ever again pull anything like you pulled on her, Lord help the human race. That girl isn't a woman in any sense of the word. She's a walking textbook on zoology."

"I fail to see where that should concern you," the chairman said archly. "Her father wished her to remain on Mars until her twenty-third birthday, which is today."

"I don't care if she's a scientist or a lady plumber. The point is, she's had one kind of an education and she's completely neglected learning anything about being human. And that makes me mad. Because I fell in love with her last night. Do you understand that? Is it possible for you to understand that? Love. El oh vee ee. Or do you think of that only as some kind of damned chemical process?"

"We have wives, young man. And there is no reason for you to come to us to rave and complain."

"Oh yes there is. If anything like this gets started on a wide scale, look out. Men won't have wives any more, they'll have . . ."

"Joe . . ."

"They'll have . . ."

He realized that someone had spoken to him. He turned around. Amanda stood in the tall doorway of the room. She was smiling at him.

It was a rather weak, half-hearted smile, but she was trying.

Joe almost fell over.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said hastily, pushing her through the door.

"How long have you been hanging around?" he demanded.

"I was upstairs, in the lab. One of the assistants heard you were down here. He told me."

"So?"

"So . . . well . . . last night . . . that experiment. I didn't get a chance to tell you . . ."

". . . that you liked the book. I know all about it!"

"Don't be angry, Joe."

"Why not?"

"Because . . . well . . . I tried to tell you last night. I just didn't have enough . . . experiments . . . to go on. I've read a lot of those books, but . . . well . . . that was the first time I'd ever been kissed."

"Did . . . did you like it?" Joe asked slowly.

"Oh yes." An almost impish light shone in her eyes. "But I really should have much, much more data to work with before I decide. I think it will take quite a while. I'll have to stay here, of course. We can do other things, too. I'd like to learn how to enjoy some of the things you enjoy. But we must keep up with our experiments." She laughed, wriggling her

shoulders. "That kiss was . . ." She wriggled her shoulders again and said in a tiny voice, " . . . nice."

He stared at her closely for a minute. "Do you really mean that?"

"Yes, Joe, I do."

He could tell that she did.

"Whoop!" He did a kind of impromptu soft shoe dance. "Listen, Amanda. I can coach you. It'll take a long time, but if you want to try . . ."

"I'll try."

"We'll go to movies, and to picnics, and back to Mama Goldbergy's." He was laughing out loud. "I'm not such a bad salesman after

all."

She smiled and nodded. "But we must keep up with the experiments."

He put his arms around her, then stopped.

"What's the matter, Joe?"

Joe put a finger to his lips and peeked around the edge of the door. The members of the board were craning their necks, watching expectantly.

"So long, boys," Joe said, and slammed the door.

He looked at Amanda.

"Happy birthday," he said. "In the interests of science."

And then he kissed her.

THE END