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SUPER SCIENCE STORIES



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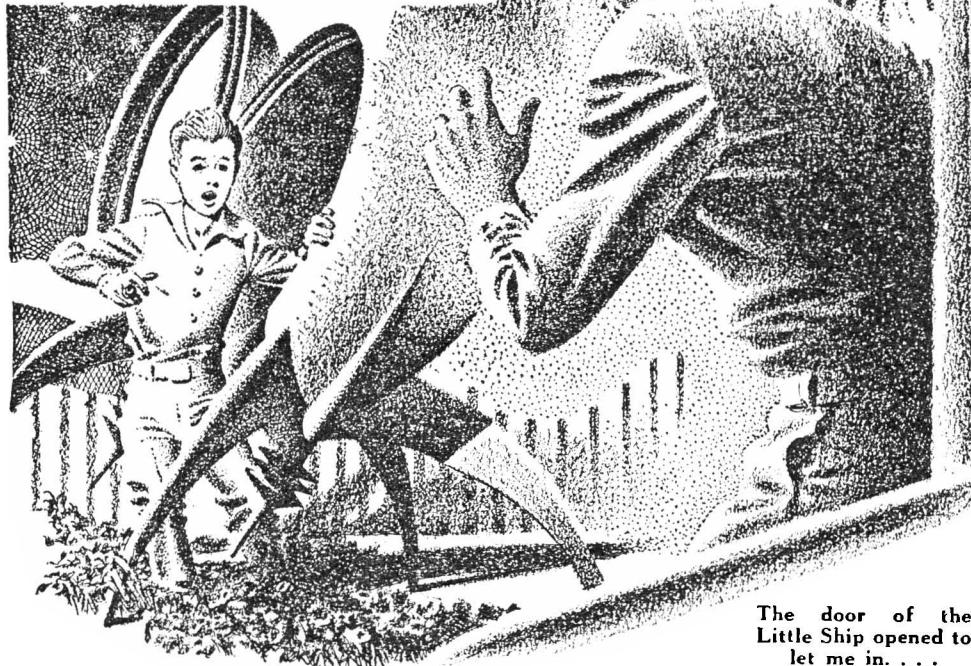
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FIRST LIFE

*Not till his last son disowned him
did he know for what he had
built, for whom he had fought—
for whom he would finally die—
this heir of the ages—who hated
the thing he begat!*

By ROGER DEE



The door of the
Little Ship opened to
let me in. . . .

I WAS pretending to study Chapter XIV of Hill's Fourth Grade Geography when the Little Ship landed in our front yard. I wasn't really studying, because I had leafed through Hill's Geog-

raphy at school one afternoon and I knew it by heart—but I couldn't tell my mother and father that, any more than I could tell them I knew Carmig was sending the Little Ship tonight. They'd have thought

I was imagining things again, the way they used to think before I got old enough to hide the difference between us.

My father was reading a book and Mother was watching a telemovie when the roar and blue flash came, just outside our living room windows.

"*What was that?*" my father said, and dropped his book. My mother turned off the telescreen and looked at me. "Donnie, are you all right?"

I put down the geography book and went to her, and for a minute I almost wished the Little Ship hadn't come. It was the first time I had guessed, really, how hard it was going to be.

"It looked like a meteor," my father said. He went to the window, and his eyes got round. "No, it's a ship, a little ship no bigger than a copter. Edna, it's landed in your petunia bed!"

He didn't mistake it for a bomb or anything like that. You couldn't think of bombs and of the Little Ship at the same time, because it was too beautiful, too sleek and shiny and trim, almost like a toy but not a toy either. I couldn't see it yet, but I knew how it looked because Carmig had described it often when he came at night from Out There. It was a real ship. It was small because it only had to be big enough.

It only had to be big enough to hold *me*.

It had come for me tonight, and I was going to get in it and let it take me away from my mother and father and Corky, our brown spaniel, because I didn't belong with them any more.

I was growing up. I was Adolescent, Carmig said, and that meant I couldn't stay around regular people any longer. They'd find out about me if I did, and then they'd hate me. I belonged with Carmig and the Others now, Out There among the stars.

* * *

My father and mother went out on the

front porch to look at the Little Ship, and I went with them.

They didn't call the police, because they were not the kind of people to need police. My father taught psychology at the University, and he was smarter and quieter than most men. My mother was like him, never bothering much with things outside her home and family. Those were the things that mattered, she said, so why worry about other things that can't be helped?

They stood on the porch and watched the Little Ship cool, my father smoking his pipe and letting the moon gleam on his glasses. It never occurred to either of them to be afraid, because they were not ordinary people. If they had been, I'd never have been what I was, and then I'd never have known about Carmig and the Others and about the great things They were doing Out There.

"It's a lovely thing," my mother said. "But so *small!* Howard, do you suppose—"

I knew what they were thinking. They were wondering if the Little Ship held little people from one of the planets, maybe Mars, and if the passengers would look more like spiders than like men. They couldn't know that there were no people in the Little Ship, nor that it hadn't come from our system at all. It came from a soft green world that swung around a bright yellow sun out in the Milky Way, a sun nobody here ever saw because it was lost in the great star-whirl of the *Eta Carinae* nebula.

My father didn't answer. He must have been more like me, and so more like Them, than I had thought, for he seemed to understand something of what I felt when I looked at the Little Ship.

"You're all excited, Donnie," he said. "Does it frighten you, boy?"

My mother put her arm across my shoulders. "Donnie, I never saw you look so *strange!* Perhaps we'd better go inside

with Corky until we know more about this thing."

I wanted her to hold me like that forever, but I shook her arm away because I was afraid I might weaken now, at the last minute. I wanted more than anything to get into the Little Ship and go sailing across space to Carmig and the Others, but I wanted to stay with my mother and father too. I had known it wouldn't be easy to go, but I hadn't understood how hard it could be to say good-by.

"Go inside with your mother, Donnie," my father said.

ABELL tinkled inside the Little Ship then, and I knew it was a signal that the hull had cooled enough to let me open the door. Carmig and the Others would be waiting for me to say good-by. They would know how I felt and They would be sorry for me, but They would be a little afraid too that I might not be strong enough to give up what I had here. I used to ask Carmig why They didn't just come for me in the night when everyone was asleep and it would be easier to get away, but Carmig explained that. It would be cruel, he said, and They couldn't endure cruelty. I had to go because I was one of Them, but They couldn't steal me from my parents. It wouldn't be right. And besides that They couldn't run the risk of meeting anyone, of letting people know about Them.

"I'm all right," I said, moving away when my mother tried to catch my hand. "Don't worry about me. I'll be all right, always. But Carmig has sent the Little Ship for me, and I've got to go now."

I went down the steps, and the door of the Little Ship opened to let me in.

I knew they would try to stop me.

"Wait, Donnie," my father called. He came down the steps after me, hurrying to catch me before I could reach the Little Ship: "You've dreamed of something like

this, and now you're imagining things again. Stop, Donnie!"

They couldn't believe me, of course. This was something that couldn't happen, something impossible.

"I'm sorry," I said, and put out the force-ring that Carmig had taught me to make. It stopped my father as if he had walked into a wall of glass.

His face went pale as ice, and his eyes stared. "Donnie," he whispered. "Donnie, what have you done?"

My mother went to him, and the fence stopped her too.

It hurt terribly to push them away like that, when I wanted instead to run and hold them tight. But I was afraid to trust myself, so I backed across the lawn toward the Little Ship.

"He's serious about this thing, Edna," my father said. "And God help us, I'm afraid he knows what he's doing!"

My mother began to cry. "Stop him, Howard—don't let him go!"

But they couldn't stop me.

I wanted to tell them where I was going, and why. I didn't want to go without a word and leave them there to lie awake at night wondering what had happened to me. But Carmig had warned me not to tell anyone. Carmig and the Others had their own world Out There, and men must never know about Them. Men would go on their own way, learning simple things slowly, and some day they would reach the stars themselves. But they must never know about the Others, or there would be trouble for everybody.

"I'd like to tell you everything," I said when I reached the door of the Little Ship. "But I can't. They've sent for me, and I have to go. And I can't come back, ever."

I was right when I said my father wasn't an ordinary man. A little more, I think, and he'd have been one of Them.

"You don't have to tell me everything,

(Continued on page 127)

FIRST LIFE

(Continued from page 105)

Donnie," he said. "I think I can guess. You're one of the new race, aren't you?"

"Yes," I said. "I'm one of Them."

My mother didn't understand. "New race? But you're our son, Donnie—you're not different!"

But there was a difference, and my father had guessed what it was, adding up all the little strangenesses I had shown before I got old enough to hide them. He drew my mother back from the forcing and put his arm around her.

"Poor old Pithecanthropus died out, Edna," my father said, trying to smile. "And the Cro-Magnons killed off the Neanderthalers. We've had our day—why should we complain when it's our turn to be dispossessed?"

He didn't have it just right, but still it gave me a little glow of pride to know that he understood so much of it. It eased a little the pain of going, too, because I knew he would understand why I went.

"But you're not being dispossessed," I said. "We are the ones being driven out. We can't live among men because men can't endure Us when We grow up, and because We can't endure danger and discord. That's what Carmig says. That's why We're building a new world Out There, where men can't go."

Still my mother didn't understand. "But you're a man, Donnie! Those Others may be mutants and freaks, but you—"

"They're not freaks," I said. "Only the radiation mutants are monsters, Carmig says. We are the *right* ones, who split naturally off the planet's parent stock. Some day there's going to be more of Us, a great many more, and then there'll be no limit to what We can do."

MY FATHER managed a smile then, but it wasn't his old, warm one. "I can see that, Donnie... God bless you, boy. Don't forget us."

I wanted to go back up the steps and tell them good-by the right away, but I knew I couldn't do it. I'd lose my nerve if I gave in that much.

"I'll remember," I said. "I won't forget. Not ever."

"Forget?" my mother said. "But we'll see you again, Donnie! You'll come back to us, won't you?"

"I can't come back," I said. I couldn't tell her why. It would have hurt her, and We can't endure cruelty.

Corky nosed the screen open and came out on the porch, wagging his silky tail and looking up at my father with soft, worshipping eyes.

"The dog would understand," my father said. "But it wouldn't matter to him. There's no question in Corky's mind of equality with *us*, is there? We could scold or strike him and he'd come back, cringing but still loving, still keeping his place. We're gods, to him."

He drew my mother closer, and for the first time I felt the bitterness in him. "That's why Donnie can't come back to us, darling, because there will be as great a gulf between an adult Donnie and us as there is between us and Corky."

There was pride in his bitterness, the pride of his kind that had made men strong enough to bear Us. And the pride and bitterness of men would keep them forever from meeting Us on common ground, even in the days to come when they finished their long, slow climb and spread out among the stars.

For by then We would be gone from the stars to some far universe where men could never come.

"No, it wouldn't work," I said, "because you are men and not dogs. And We are neither."

The door closed softly behind me when I stepped inside, and I could feel the Little Ship trembling eagerly as it lifted toward the stars.