

# BEYOND FANTASY FICTION

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## CONTENTS

### NOVELETS

THE WALL AROUND THE WORLD	2	by Theodore R. Cogswell
THE DREAM MAKERS	64	by Robert Bloch
THE KING OF THE ELVES	142	by Philip K. Dick

### SHORT STORIES

WIRE-HAIRED RADICAL	30	by Joseph Shallit
CAN SUCH BEAUTY BE?	43	by Jerome Bixby
TALENT	56	by Theodore Sturgeon
A LITTLE PILE	91	By M. C. Pease
HOW DO I DO?	99	by John Wyndham
AND NOT QUITE HUMAN	113	by Joe L. Hensley
KID STUFF	121	by Isaac Asimov
THE GODDESS ON THE STREET CORNER	134	by Margaret St. Clair

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By JOHN WYNDHAM

## ***How Do I Do?***

*Very romantic: a girl falling in love with her husband at first sight . . . but after they've been married for years?*

Illustrated  
by CAVAT

**F**RANCES paused to look into the showcase fastened to the wall between the pastry-cook's and the hairdresser's. It was not a novelty. Passing it a hundred times, she could not fail to be aware of it, and of the open door beside it, but until now it had never really impinged. There had

been no reason for it to impinge. Hers was a future that seemed, in its main outlines at least, and insofar as any woman's is, pretty well charted.

Nor did the carefully worded leaflets behind the glass refer to the future directly. They offered Character Delineation, Scientific

Palmistry, Psychological Prognosis, Semasiological Estimates, and other feats just beyond the scope of the Witchcraft Act or the practical interest of the police, but the idea of the future somehow showed through. And, for the first time, Frances found herself interested; for it is not every day that a girl sends her ring back and looks out upon a suddenly futureless world.

And yet, of course, and unlikely as it seemed at the moment, a future of *some* kind must lie ahead of her . . .

She read about Mastery of one's Fate, Development of one's Personality, Guidance of one's Potentialities, went through a number of testimonials from persons who had been greatly helped, valuably guided, spiritually strengthened, and generally rendered more capable of managing themselves by the sympathetic counsels of Señora Rosa.

It was the word "guidance" occurring several times that set up the most responsive echo. Frances did not exactly imagine that she could go to this perfect stranger and extract a plan for living a neatly readjusted life, but the world, since she had handed that small registered package across the post office counter, had become a place for which she had no plans of her own, and she felt that an improved acquaintance with her potentialities might be an aid.

She turned. She glanced along the street both ways, with the air of noticing and approving the freshness of the early-summer day. Then, having observed no one whom she knew, she edged into the doorway, and climbed the dusty stairs.

"**M**ARRIAGE, of course," said Señora Rosa, with the slightest trace of a hiccup. "Marriage! That's what they all want to know about; it's all they *do* want to know about. Want to know what he looks like—'s if that mattered. Don't want to know if he'll beat 'em, or leave 'em, or murder 'em. Jus' what he looks like—so they'll know where to throw the lash—the lasso."

She took a drink from the glass beside her, and went on: "Same with babies. Not interested to know if they'll turn out to be gangsters or film shtarsh. Jus' want to know how many. No 'riginality. No 'magination. Jus' like a lot of sheep—cept, of course, they want a ram each." She hiccuped discreetly again.

Frances started to get up. "I think, perhaps—" she began.

"No. Sit down," the Señora told her. While Frances hesitated, she repeated, not loudly but quite firmly: "*Sit down!*"

Against her inclinations, Frances sat down rather to the front of the chair.

She regarded the Señora across

the small table which held a crystal and a lamp, and knew that she had been a fool to come into the place at all.

With her swarthy skin, glittering dark eyes, and glaringly unnatural red hair, the Señora was difficult to visualize in the role of sympathetic counselor at the best of times. Slightly drunk, with the high comb which supported her torn mantilla listing to the right, an artificial rose sagging down over her left ear, and her heavy eyelids half-lowered against the trickle of her cigarette's smoke, she became more than displeasing. It was, in fact, absurd not to have turned back at the very first sight of her, but somehow Frances had lacked the resolution then, and had not been able to gain it since.

"Fair return. That's my rule, an' no one's going to say I break it," announced the Señora. "Fee in advance, an' fair return. Mind you, there's nothing against a bit more for special satisfaction given. But fair return you shall have."

**S**HE switched on a small, pink-shaded lamp close to the crystal, crossed the room a trifle uncertainly to draw the curtains, and returned to her chair.

"Cosier," she explained. "'S easier to concentrate, too."

She stubbed out her cigarette, drank off most of the remaining contents of her glass, gave her

comb a push towards the vertical, and prepared to get to work.

"'S *on* me today," she observed. "Some days it's *on* you; some days it's not—never can tell till you start. But I can feel it now. Tell you pretty near anything today, I could—I wouldn't, of course. Something special you'd be wanting to know, beyond husbands, babies, an' the usual?"

The low lighting worked quite a change in the Señora. It made the lines of her face more decisive, and modified the redness of her hair; it glinted fascinatingly on her long brass earrings swinging like bell clappers, and glistened even more brightly in her dark eyes.

"Er—no," said Frances. "As a matter of fact, I think I've changed my mind. So if you—"

"Nonsense," the Señora told her shortly. "You'll only be back in a day or two if you do, an' then it might not be *on* me the way it is today. We'll start on your future husband."

"No. I'd really rather not—"

"Nonsense," said the Señora, again. "They all want that. Jus' you keep quiet now. Got to concentrate."

She leaned forward, shading the crystal with one hand from the direct light while she gazed into it. Frances watched uncomfortably. For a time nothing happened, except that the earrings swung slowly to a stop. Then:

"H'm," said the Señora, with a suddenness that made Frances jump. "Nice-looking young feller, too."

Frances had a vague feeling that such pronouncements, whatever their worth, were usually made in a more impressive tone and form, but the Señora went on:

"Nice tie. Dark blue an' old gold, with a thin red stripe in the blue."

Frances sat suddenly still. The Señora leaned closer to the crystal.

"Couple of inches taller than you. 'Bout five foot ten. Smooth fair hair. Nice mouth. Good chin. Straight nose. Eyes sort of dark gray, with a touch of blue. Got a small, crescent-shaped scar over his left eyebrow, an old one. He—"

"Stop it!" Frances snapped.

The Señora looked up at her for a moment, and then back to the crystal.

"Now as to children—" she went on.

"Stop it, I tell you," Frances said again. "I don't know how you found out about him, but you're *wrong*. Yesterday I'd have believed you, but now you're quite *wrong*!" The recollection of putting the ring with its five winking diamonds into its nest of cotton and closing the box became unbearably vivid. She was exasperatingly aware of tears starting to well up.

"There's often jus' a bit of a

tiff—" began the Señora.

"How dare you! It's not just a tiff, at all. It's finished. I'm never going to see him again, so you can stop this farce now."

The Señora stared. "Farce!" she exclaimed, incredulously. "You call my work farce! Why you—I'd have you know—"

Frances was angry enough for tears to wait.

"*Farce!*" she repeated. "Farce and cheating! I don't know how you find out about people, but this time it hasn't worked. Your information's out of date. You—you—you're just a drunken old cheat, taking advantage of people who are unhappy. That's what you are." She stood up to get herself out of the room before the tears came.

The Señora glared back at her. She snatched across the table and caught her wrist in a grip like a steel claw.

"Cheat!" she shouted. "Cheat! Why, you silly, ignorant little ninny! Sit down!"

"Let me go," Frances said. "You're hurting my wrist."

The Señora leaned closer. Her brows were lowered angrily over eyes that glittered more than ever. "*Sit down there!*" she ordered again.

**F**RANCES suddenly found herself more scared than angry. She stood for a moment, trying to

outstare the woman; then her eyes dropped. She sat down, partly because the grip on her wrist was urging her, but more from nervousness.

Señora Rosa sat down again, too, but she continued to hold Frances' wrist across the table.

"Cheat!" she muttered. "*You call me a cheat!*"

Frances avoided meeting her gaze, but: "Somebody must have told you about me and Edward," she said, stubbornly.

"*That told me,*" said the Señora, pointing her free hand at the crystal. "*That, an' nothing else. Tells me a lot, that does. But you don't believe it, do you? Think I'm a liar as well as a cheat, don't you?*"

"I didn't really mean—"

"Don't give me that. 'Course you meant it. No respect. No respect at all. Ninnies like you need lesson to teach 'em respect. Sh'll I tell you when you're goin' to die, an' how? Or when your Edward's goin' to die?"

"No—no, please," said Frances.

"Ha! Don't believe me—but you're afraid to know."

"I'm sorry. Really I am. I was upset. Please let me—" Frances began, but the Señora was not to be so easily mollified.

"Farce! Cheat!" she muttered. "*Ninny!*" she added forcibly, and fell silent.

The silence lengthened, but the grip on Frances' wrist did not

relax. Presently, curiosity drove her to a swift upward glance. She had a glimpse of a quite different expression on the Señora's face—more alarming in some indefinite way than her former anger. She appeared to have had some kind of inspiration. Her hand clutched Frances' wrist more tightly.

"*Show you, that's what,*" she said, decisively. "*Sick of ninnies. Jus' show you. Look in the crysh—crystal!*"

Frances kept her eyes down. The hand on her wrist twisted painfully.

"*Look in the crystal!*" commanded the Señora.

UNWILLINGLY, Frances lifted her head a little and looked at it. It was a quite uninteresting lump of glass, showing a number of complicated and distorted reflections.

"This is silly," she said. "I can't see anything. You've no right to—"

"Be quiet! Jus' look!" snapped the Señora.

Frances went on looking, wondering at the same time how she was going to get herself out of this. Even if she could pull free, it was impossible in the small room for her to reach the door without coming within the Señora's grasp—and there'd be delay in getting the door open, too.

Then her thoughts broke off as

she noticed that the crystal was no longer clear. It seemed to have become fogged in some way, as though it had been breathed upon. But the foggy look grew thicker as she watched until it was like smoke wreathing inside it. Queer! It was some sort of trick of the old woman's, of course . . . Some kind of hypnotic effect which made it seem to grow bigger and bigger.

It appeared to widen out and out as she watched it, until there was nothing at all anywhere but convolving whorls of fog . . .

Then, like a flash, it was gone, and she was sitting in her chair, looking at the clear crystal.

The grip on her arm was gone, too; and so, when she looked up, was the Señora.

Frances snatched up her bag and made for the door. No sound came from the inner room as she tiptoed across. She opened the door carefully, closed it quietly behind her, and skipped swiftly away down the stairs.

A very unpleasant experience, Frances told herself, walking briskly away. In fact, being held there like that against her will was the sort of thing one ought to tell a policeman about; it was probably assault, or something quite serious, really . . . Still not quite certain whether she actually wanted to see a policeman or not, she emerged from her thoughts and looked about her.

In the very first glance she made a discovery which drove such frivolous subjects as policemen right out of her mind. It was that everyone else in sight who had decided that the time for cotton had arrived was clad in a frock very much shorter and very much narrower than her own. She stared at them, bewildered. She must have had an inconceivable preoccupation with her own affairs not to have realized that there had been such a radical change of style.

She paused for a moment in front of a shop window to observe the reflection of the blue and white striped cotton frock that she had thought good for another summer. It looked terrible, just as if she had been upholstered. Another glance from it to the other frocks made her go hot with embarrassment: they must all be thinking she had come out wrapped in a large bedspread.

There was clearly one thing to be done about that, and done at once.

She started to walk hurriedly in the direction of Weilberg's Modes.

**W**HEN Frances re-emerged into the street half an hour later, she felt considerably soothed. The congenial occupation of shopping, and the complete clearing of mental decks required for concentrating on the choice of a creation in an amusing pattern of palm trees

and pineapples—plus the relief with which she had seen her old frock borne off to be sent to her flat—had helped to put Señora Rosa into proper perspective. Considered calmly over an ice-cream soda, the affair dwindled quite a lot—and her own part in it came to seem curiously spineless.

Her intention of informing the police faded. If there were a charge, and she had to give evidence, she'd scarcely be able to help exhibiting herself first as a fool for having gone to the place at all, and then as a nitwit for staying when she did not want to. Moreover, it would very likely be reported in the papers, and she'd hate that—so would Edward . . .

Which brought her back to thinking of Edward and to wondering whether she had perhaps behaved like a silly little fool there, too. After all, he had known Mildred for years and years—and just two or three dances. People said one ought to be careful about not feeling *too possessive*. All the same, just a few days after he had become engaged . . . No, it didn't do to look cheap or easy, either. Really, life could be difficult.

Though Frances decided that she would walk home, she did not consciously choose the route. That is to say, she did not tell herself: "I'll go by St. James's Avenue, past that house that we decided would just suit us." It simply was that her feet

happened to carry her that way.

Coming nearer to the house, she walked more slowly. There was a moment when she almost decided to turn back and go by another way. But she could not go around forever, avoiding every reminder; a person had to get used to things sooner or later. She walked resolutely on.

Presently she was able to see the upper floor of the house, above the hedges. A comfortable, sensible-looking, friendly house, not new, but modern without being modernistic. It gave her a little knot high in her chest to see it again now. Then, as more of it came into view, the knot gave way to a feeling of dismay.

There were curtains in windows that had been blank. The hedges had been trimmed. The board which had announced 'For Sale' was gone.

SHE paused at the front gate. An astonishing amount had been done to the place in the few days since she had last seen it.

The flower beds in the front garden were bright with tulips, the fig tree against the side wall had been cut and tied back, the windows shone. The doors of the garage were open, with a comfortable-looking car standing on the concrete driveway in front. The lawn had been closely mown. On it, a little girl of four or so, in a



blue frock, was conducting a tea party with earnest admonitions to the guests, consisting of three sizes of teddybear and a golliwog.

Frances was filled with a sharp indignation. The house had been almost hers. She had practically decided that it was the one her father was going to give them for a wedding present—and now it had been snatched away without a word of warning. It wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't somehow contrived already to look so aggressively *settled* . . . Not that it really mattered, of course, now that she had finished with Edward . . . All the same, there was a feeling of having been cheated in some way that she didn't quite understand.

The little girl on the lawn became aware of someone at the gate. She broke off from scolding the golliwog to look up. She dropped the miniature cup and saucer she was holding, and started to run toward Frances.

"Mummy!" she called.

Frances looked around behind her. There was no one there. Then she bent down instinctively as the small figure hurtled itself toward her. The little girl flung her arms around Frances' neck.

"Mummy," she said, with breathy intensity. "Mummy, you *must* come and tell Golly not to. He *will* talk with his mouth full."

"Er—" said Frances, out of the

sudden stranglehold. "I—er—you—I mean—"

The little girl relaxed the embrace, and tugged at her arm.

"Oh, *do* come along, Mummy," she said. "He's 'veloping bad habits."

**D**AZEDLY, Frances allowed herself to be led across the lawn to the tea party. The little girl improved the somewhat dissolute golliwog by propping him into a sitting position.

"There," she told him. "Now Mummy's here you'll have to behave. Tell him, Mummy." She looked at Frances expectantly.

"I—er—um—you—" Frances began, confusedly.

The child looked up at her, puzzled.

"What's the matter, Mummy?" she asked.

Frances stared back at her, recollecting photographs of herself at about the same age. A peculiar feeling started to come over her. The small, earnest face seemed to swim slightly as she looked at it. Its expression grew concerned.

"Aren't you feeling well?"

Frances pulled herself together.

"I'm—I'm all right—er—darling," she said, unsteadily.

"Then *do* tell Golly he mustn't. It's awf'ly rude."

Frances went down on her knees. She was glad to; the ground felt more solid that way. She leaned

toward the offending golliwog, who fell flat on his face and was hastily corrected by his mistress.

"Er—Golly," Frances told him. "Golly, I'm very shocked indeed to hear this about you. People who are invited to parties . . ."

So real! All of it!

Now that the lump in her chest which wasn't quite panic or scare, but a bit like both, had subsided, Frances found herself able to regard the situation a little more calmly. The classic certificate was to be obtained by pinching oneself. She had done that, sharply, but without changing any of it. She looked at her hand, flexed it; it was her own hand, all right. She plucked a little grass from the lawn; real beyond doubt. She listened to the sounds about her; they had an authentic quality difficult to deny. She picked up the nearest teddybear and examined it . . . no dream ever finished anything with that amount of detail.

She sat back on her heels, looking up at the house, noticing the striped chairs on the porch, the patterns of the curtains, the recent coat of paint . . . She had always thought that hallucinations must be vague, misty experiences, but all this had a solidity that was rather frightening.

"Mummy," said the little girl, turning away from her tea party, and standing up.

Frances' heart jumped slightly.

"Yes, dear?" she said.

"'Mportant business. Will you see that Golly behaves himself?"

"I—think he understands now, dear," Frances told her.

The small face in its frame of fair hair looked doubtful.

"P'raps. He's rather wicked, though. Back soon. 'Mportant."

Frances watched the blue frock as the child scampered away round the corner of the house on some mysterious errand. She felt suddenly forlorn. For some moments she remained on her knees, returning the shoe-button stare of the teddybear in her hands. Then the absurdity of the whole thing flooded over her. She dropped the bear and got to her feet. At just that point a man emerged from the front door of the house on to the porch . . .

He wasn't Edward.

He wasn't anybody she'd ever seen before in her life.

**H**E was tall, rather thin, but broad in the shoulders. His dark hair curled a little, and there were slight flecks of gray over his ears. He had been heading toward the car, but, at the sight of her, he stopped. His eyes crinkled at the corners and seemed to light up.

"Back so early!" he said. "New frock, too; and looking like a schoolgirl in it. How do you manage it?"

"Uh!" gasped Frances, caught in

a strong and entirely unexpected embrace.

"Look, darling," he continued, without loosening his hold. "I simply must tear off now and see old Fanshawe. I'll be back in less than an hour, though."

His hug brought the rest of Frances' breath out in another involuntary "Uh!" He kissed her soundly, slapped her behind affectionately, and dashed for the car. A moment later, it carried him out of sight.

Frances stood, getting her breath back, and staring after him. She found that she was shaking and filled with a most odd sensation of weakness, particularly in the knees. She staggered over to one of the chairs on the porch and subsided there. For a space, she sat motionless, her eyes set glazedly on nothing. Then, not quite accountably, she burst into tears.

With the decline of emotion to a sniff-and-dab, the unorthodoxy of Frances' situation began to trouble her. In whatever peculiar way it had come about, the fact remained that she had been "Mummy" to someone else's child, been warmly embraced by someone else's husband, and was now sniveling on someone else's porch. A convincing explanation to the someone else looked so difficult that the best way would be to get clear as soon as possible, and avoid it.

She gave a final dab and got up

with decision. She retrieved her bag from the medley of teddybears and teacups, and glanced at the mirror in the flap. She frowned at it and burrowed for her compact.

The sound of a step caused her to look up. A woman was coming in through the gateway, a moderately tall, nicely built woman, dressed in a light-green linen suit, and carrying it well. A woman a few years older than herself, though still . . . but at that moment the woman turned so that Frances could see her face, and all coherent thought expired.

Frances' jaw sagged. She gaped.

**T**HE other woman noticed her. She looked hard at Frances, but showed no great surprise. She turned off the path and came across the grass. There was nothing alarming about her. In fact, she was wearing the trace of a smile.

"Hullo!" she said. "I was thinking this morning that you must be due somewhere about now."

Frances' bag dropped from her fingers and spilled at her feet, but her eyes never left the other's face.

The woman's eyes were a little deeper and wiser than those she was wont to see in the mirror. There were the very faintest touches of shadows at their corners, and at the corners of the mouth. The lips favored a shade just a trace darker. Something as indescribable as the touch of dew

had been exchanged for a breath of sophistication. But otherwise . . . otherwise . . .

Frances tried to speak, but all that came was a croak, strangled in rising panic.

"It's all right," said the other. "Nothing to be scared about." She linked her arm into Frances' and led her back to the porch. "Now sit down there and just relax. You don't need to worry a bit."

Frances sank unresistingly into the chair and stared dumbly at her.

"Cigarette?" the other suggested. "Oh, no, of course. I didn't, then." She took one for herself and lit it. For what seemed a long time, they surveyed one another through the smoke. It was the other who broke the silence. She said:

"How pretty—and charming! If I had only understood more—still, I suppose one could scarcely have had innocence *and* experience." She sighed, with a touch of wistfulness. Then she shook her head. "No. Being young is very exhausting and unsatisfactory, really—although it looks so nice."

**F**RANCES swallowed with difficulty. "Er—I think I must be going mad."

The other shook her head. "Oh, no, you're not. Nothing like it. Just take it easy and try to relax."

"But this! I mean, you—me—as if—oh, I *am* going mad! I must be. It's—it's impossible!" Frances pro-

tested wildly. "Nobody can possibly be in two places at once. I mean nobody can be twice in the same place at once. I mean one person can't be two people, not at the same—"

The other leaned across and patted her hand.

"There, there, now. Calm down. I know it's terribly bewildering at first, but it comes out all right. I remember."

"Y—you *remember*?" stammered Frances.

"From when it happened to me, of course. From when I was where you are now."

Frances stared at her, with a sensation of slowly and helplessly drowning.

"Look," said the other. "I think I'd better get you a drink. I know you don't take it, but this *is* rather exceptional. I remember how much better I felt for it. Just a minute." She got up and went indoors.

Frances sat back, holding hard to both arms of her chair for reassurance. She felt as if she were falling over and over, a long way down.

The other came back holding a glass, and gave it to her. She drank, spluttering a little over the strange taste. But the other was right; she did immediately begin to feel somewhat better.

"Of course it's a shock," said the other. "And you are right about one person not being in two places

—up to a point. But the way I think it must happen is that you just *seem* to go on being the same person. But you never can be, not really. I mean, since the cells that make you are always being gradually replaced, you can't really be *all* the same person at any two times, can you?"

Frances tried to follow that, without success.

"Well—I suppose not *quite*," she conceded, doubtfully.

**T**HE other went on talking, giving her time to recover.

"Well, then, when *all* the cells have been replaced, every seven years or so, then you can't *any* of you be the same person any longer, although you still think you are. So that means that the cells that make up you and me are two quite different sets of cells—so they aren't really having to be in two different places at once, although it does look like it, don't you see?"

"I—er—perhaps," said Frances, on a slightly hysterical note.

"So that sets a sort of natural limit," the other went on. "I mean there obviously has to be a minimum gap of seven years or so in which it's quite impossible for this to happen at all—until all your present cells have been replaced by others, you see."

"I—I suppose so."

"Just take another drink of that.

It'll do you good," the other advised.

Frances did, and leaned back again in the chair. She wished her head would stop whirling. She didn't understand a word that the woman—her other self; whoever it was—had said. All she knew was that none of it could possibly make sense. She kept hanging on to the arms of the chair until, presently, she began to feel herself growing calmer.

"Better? You've more color now," the other said.

Frances nodded. She could feel the tears of a reaction not far away. The other came over and put an arm around her.

"Poor dear, what a time you are having! All this confusion, and then falling in love on top of it—as if that weren't confusing enough by itself."

"F—falling in love?" asked Frances.

"Why, yes. I remember so well. He kissed you, and patted you behind—and you fell in love."

**O**H, dear—is it like that? I didn't—" Frances broke off. "But how did you know about—? Oh, I see—of course . . ."

"And he's a darling. You'll adore him. And little Betty's a love, too, bless her," the other told her. She paused, and added, "I'm afraid you've rather a lot to go through first, but it's worth it.

You'll remember it's worth it all?"

"Yes-s-s," Frances told her, vaguely. She thought for a moment of the man who had come out of the house and vanished in the car. He would be— "Yes," she said, more emphatically.

She pondered for some seconds, and then turned to look critically at the other.

"I suppose one does have to grow old—er—older, I mean," she amended. "Somehow I've never thought—"

The other laughed. "Of course you haven't. But it's really very nice, I assure you. Such a much less anxious state than being young. Though, naturally, you won't believe that."

Frances let her eyes wander around the porch and across the garden. They came to rest on the teddybears and the delinquent golliwog. She smiled.

"But—I think I do," she said.

The other smiled, too, her eyes a little shiny.

"I really was rather a sweet thing," she said.

She got up, abruptly.

"You must go, my dear," she said. "You've got to get back to that horrid old woman."

Frances obediently got up, too. The other seemed to have some idea of what she was talking about, and what was necessary. Frances herself had little enough.

"Back to the Señora?"

The other nodded without speaking. She put her arms around Frances and held her close to her. She kissed her gently. "Oh, my dear!" she said unsteadily, and turned her head away.

Frances walked down the short drive. At the gate she turned and looked back, taking it all in.

The other, on the porch, kissed her hand to her. Then she put it over her eyes and ran into the house.

Frances turned to the right and walked back by the way she had come, toward the town and the Señora.

**T**HE cloudiness cleared. The crystal became just a glass ball again. Beyond it sat Señora Rosa, with her comb awry. Her left hand held Frances' wrist. Frances stared at her for some moments.

"You *are* a cheat," she burst out. "You were telling lies, too. It wasn't Edward. He wasn't a bit *like* Edward." She pulled her arm free with a sudden wrench. "Cheat!" she repeated. "You told me Edward and you showed me somebody else. It's all cruel silly lies and cheating. All of it."

Her vehemence was enough to take the Señora a little aback.

"There was jus' a little mistake," she admitted. "By 'n unfortunate—"

"Mistake!" shouted Frances. "The mistake was my ever coming

in here at all. You've just made a fool of me and I hate you!"

The Señora recoiled, and then rallied slightly. With a touch of dignity she said: "The 'xplanation's really quite shimple. It was—"

"No!" Frances shouted. "I don't want to hear any more about it."

She pushed the table with all her force. The edge of it caught the Señora in the middle. Her chair teetered backward. Then she, table, crystal, and lamp went down all in a heap, and Frances sprang for the door.

The Señora grunted and rolled over. She struggled stertorously to her feet, leaving comb and mantilla in the debris.

"You idiotic little duffer," she shouted. "That was your *shecond* marriage—an' I shay the hell with *both* of 'em."

But Frances was already out in the street, beyond earshot.

A VERY unpleasant experience—humiliating, too, thought Frances, as she pegged along with the jolting step of the outraged. Humiliating because—well, because she had nearly—no, she'd be honest, for a time she *had* fallen for it. It had all seemed so convincingly, so really real. Even now she could scarcely believe that she hadn't walked up that drive, sat on that porch, talked to . . . but what a ridiculous thing to think. As if it could possibly be.

All the same, to find herself facing that horrible Señora again, and realize that it had all been some kind of trick . . . If she weren't in the public street now, she could have kicked herself, and wept with mortification.

Presently, however, as the first flush of her anger began to cool, she became more aware of her surroundings. A number of the people she was passing were looking at her with curiosity—not quite the right kind of curiosity . . .

She glanced down at her frock, and stopped dead. It was not her familiar blue and white striped cotton, but an affair covered with a niggly pattern of palm trees and pineapples. She raised her eyes again and looked around. Every other cotton frock in sight was inches longer and far fuller than hers.

Frances blushed. She walked on, trying to look as if she were not blushing; trying, also, to pretend that the skimpy frock did not make her feel as if she had come out dressed in a rather inadequate bath towel.

There was, of course, clearly one thing to be done about that; and done at once.

She made haste toward Weilberg's Modes.

