

THE HIGH-TENSION MAGAZINE

INSPIRED BY THE CBS RADIO AND TELEVISION PROGRAM SERIES SUSPENSE

MYSTERY

- Not a Leg to Stand On.....Don Mardick **72**
 You Can't Run Away.....Philip Weck **62**

SCIENCE ADVENTURE

- Dear Automaton.....A. E. van Vogt **35**

DREAD DILEMMA

- The Saboteur.....William Sambrot **2**
 Wall of Fear.....Will F. Jenkins **84**
 The Seventh Man.....Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch **94**

THE FANTASTIC

- Love Ethereal.....Horace L. Gold **16**
 How Can You Be Reading This?.....Charles H. Gesner **80**

THE MACABRE

- The Thing on the Snow.....Waldo Carlton Wright **28**

CRIMINALS AT LARGE

- My Favorite Corpse.....Dorothy F. Horton **13**
 Rip Tide.....Russell Branch **45**
 Terror in the Sun.....Talmage Powell **82**
 Pattern for Dying.....Morris Cooper **104**

NOVELETTE

- Dark Vengeance.....Fritz Lieber, Jr. **108**

Publisher: TOM FARRELL

Managing Editor: R. B. WILLIAMS

Circulation Director: HERBERT C. HAUPTMANN

Editor: THEODORE IRWIN

Associate Editor: N. R. De MEXICO

Art Director: FRANC L. ROGGERI

SUSPENSE Magazine is published quarterly by the Farrell Publishing Corporation at 260 East 32nd St. Chicago, Ill. Editorial and general offices at 420 Lexington Ave., New York 17, N. Y. Tom Farrell, president; Paul Thurlow, treasurer; Edwin J. Harrigan, secretary. Entry as second class matter applied for at also post office at Chicago, Ill., under the act of March 3, 1879. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office and in Canadian Trade-Marks Office, Fall, 1951 edition. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction, in whole or in part, in any form. Subscriptions \$1.00 a year, in the United States and its possessions and Canada. Not responsible for unsolicited material. Copyright 1951 by Farrell Publishing Corporation. Printed in U. S. A., Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall, 1951.

H. L. GOLD

LOVE

BEING Livy Random wasn't easy. It meant having a face a little too long, a figure a little too plump, brown hair brushed and brushed yet always uncurling at the ends. It meant not being able to make herself more than passably attractive. Worse than that, being Livy Random meant being Mrs. Mark Random, the wife of that smug lump asleep in the other bed.

Mark wasn't snoring; he was too neat for that. He was always making even stacks of things, or putting them in alphabetical order on shelves, or straightening rugs and pictures, or breathing neatly in the other bed.

Livy closed the bedroom door with a bang. Mark didn't stir; he could fall asleep in one infuriating minute, and wake up, eight hours later to the second, in exactly the same unlovely position and disposition. Her high-heeled shoes didn't bother him when she kicked them off, and neither did scraping the chair back against the wall—he hated chair marks on walls

Most editors, they say, are disappointed writers. Not so with the Gold boy, whose editorship of the magazine Galaxy has made it a leading contender in the science fiction field. He sold his first story at twenty, has since placed more than five million words of slick, pulp and radio literature—chiefly science and fantasy stuff. Life, in a recent issue, accused him of a pessimistic turn. If so, don't blame it on any tinge

—when she sat down to take off her stockings. And Livy Random wanted, venomously, to bother her husband.

Mark Random had married her because he had been made sales manager of the electric battery factory, and he'd had enough of eating in restaurants while he had been a traveling salesman. Besides, it looked better for a man in his position to be married. Livy had accepted him because she was past thirty and nobody else might ask her; besides, she needed someone to support her. So

*How can a girl defend
herself when an invisible
visitor makes passes?*

ETHEREAL

of blue in the Gold. His faith in humanity is attested by the unique job he once held—that of casting himself upon the waters twice daily, to be rescued by lifeguards who wished to demonstrate to seaboard municipalities that they kept busy enough not to be fired. Besides, what could be more optimistic than the cure for wifely repressions proposed in this story?

she cooked for him. She cleaned for him. She even tried to keep a budget for him, though that was his idea. He gave her a meager household allowance and nothing else.

Nothing, in this case, must be understood as the complete and humiliating absence of everything. When Livy was particularly incensed about her marriage, which was generally, it was some comfort to know that she could have it easily annulled. And Mark couldn't do a thing to stop her. He hadn't, at least, and there was no sign that he intended

to, cared to, or even thought of it.

Pulling her slip over her head, Livy wondered about this. She had heard, at least as often as any other girl, that all men were beasts. Mark was, of course, a beast in a way—in his special, primly exasperating way. But he wasn't a beast in the usual sense. With Livy, anyway. Maybe some woman in a back street hovel thought he was. But that wasn't likely; he would have wedded the lady and saved the cost of this apartment.

What was wrong with Mark? It wasn't Livy, because she had known her duty and had been grimly prepared for it, though God knew this tall and pudgy person inspired nothing at all in her.

"Short and pudgy," she thought, reaching around back for the snaps. "Why doesn't somebody put snaps in front where they belong and where a body can get at them, and make a fortune? Short and pudgy is bad enough, but Mark's got to be

tall and pudgy, with a stomach that pulls his shoulders down and caves in his chest. And those black-rimmed glasses—some oculist must have been stuck with them for years. That hair of his—thick, oily, wavy and yellow. Like butter starting to melt—”

She looked at him again. What had made her think that marrying him was better than not being married at all? She could have got at least a housekeeper's job somewhere. With the possibility that some man in the household would fall in love with her.

Livy stopped. She crossed her arms over her breasts. It was the oddest sensation.

Somebody was staring at her as she undressed.

Mark? It didn't seem possible, but she held her slip in front of her and flipped the switch and looked. He was on his side, one arm under his head, and his back was to her. He never looked at her in the light, so why should he stare at her in the dark?

Livy peered under the window shades. They reached the sills; nobody could see beneath them or around them. She felt like a fool bending to glance under the beds, poking warily among the dresses and suits in the closets, and searching behind the furniture.

The light aroused Mark; that was something. He twisted around to face her blurrily.

“What's the matter?” he asked, his thin voice fuzzily peevish.

“Somebody was watching me undress,” she said.

“Here?”

She tightened her lips. “I haven't undressed in the street in years,” she said. “Of course it was here!”

“You mean somebody's in the room with us?” He reached out for his glasses on the night table. “I don't see anyone.”

“I know,” she said flatly. “I searched the place. It's empty. Or it might as well be.”

He stared at her. He wasn't, of course, looking below her face, though she still had her slip clutched in front of her. He was staring at her face as if she had a smudge on it.

“Do you often have these ideas?” he asked.

“Go on back to sleep,” she said. “If you want to act like a psychiatrist, your own case would keep you busy for years.”

He was still looking at her face, so she turned off the light. She held the slip until she heard him turn heavily, then grunt as he spread himself in the same position as before.

Livy hung up her slip and began peeling off her girdle. There it was again—hungry eyes peering out of the dark, touching her body with ocular caresses.

It wasn't imagination. It couldn't be. She'd been mentally undressed as often as any other not too attractive girl, and she knew the shrinking, exposed feeling too well to mistake it.

No use turning on the light again. She wouldn't find anyone in the room.

“Let's be reasonable,” she thought, fighting an urge to leap into bed

and scream. "I'm tired. Pooped, if you want to know. That dreary little Mrs. Hall made a hash out of the bridge game. Why do I always draw town idiots as partners? Is it some curse that was put on my family back in the Middle Ages? That's all I need; it's not enough playing house with this inspecting officer searching for dust under the furniture.

"All right, I'm exhausted and jumpy. I'm normal, or what passes for normal. If anybody mentions Freud to me, I'll start swinging this girdle like a night-stick. I'm not losing my mind. I'm not having a wish-fulfillment either, if that's what you're thinking. Livy dear, it's just time I went to bed—and don't go twisting *that* statement around."

Her eyes did ache a bit; all that smoke. Maybe she should cut out cigarettes. Aching eyes could make you see things that weren't there. This wasn't exactly seeing, but maybe it was connected somehow.

Livy closed her eyes experimentally, and the effect was more startling than the skin sensation.

In the dark, with her eyes shut, she could see who was staring at her. It gave her a shock until she realized that she could *imagine* it, rather; she couldn't see unless her eyes were open, could she? She tried it, and the image disappeared. She closed them again and there it was.

As long as it was her imagination, she studied the imaginary owner of the imaginary eyes. She stared at him just as intently as she imagined he was staring at her.

"Stunning," was her first verdict,

and then, "What a build! I must have been peering unconsciously at those physical culture magazines on the newsstands. That long blue hair and those wide blond eyes and a cute little straight nose—I always *did* love a man with a cleft in his chin! Heavens, did you ever see such *muscles*? And—wait a minute!"

She opened her eyes quickly. A girl had to have some modesty, even if her imagination didn't. And then something jarred her sense of logic.

Long blue hair and wide blond eyes? It must have been a twist of her subvocal tongue. She meant long blond hair and wide blue eyes. Of course.

She closed her eyes and re-checked. The hair was blue and the eyes were blond, or close enough to it. That wasn't all, either. It wasn't really hair. It was feathers. Long, very fine, like bird-of-paradise plumage; but feathers. As long as they were sort of combed flat, she could never have guessed. But her stunning imaginary man frowned as she stared at him, and the frown lifted his—well, feathers, into an attractive crest. Very attractive, in fact. She liked the effect much better than hair. . . .

Peculiar. The dazzling creature was blushing under her stare, and turning his head away shyly. Was it possible to blush a beautiful shocking pink? And to have pointed leprechaun ears much handsomer than the regular male clam-shell variety? And since when does a mental image turn bashful?

"Who cares?" thought Livy.

"You're a gorgeous thing, and any psychiatrist cures me of this particular delusion over my dead body! Now go away or I won't get a wink of sleep all night."

With her eyes shut, she saw the unearthly vision walk dutifully toward the bedroom door, open it and close it behind him.

"That you, Livy?" asked Mark from his bed.

"Is what me?"

"Opening the door."

"I haven't budged from this spot."

She heard him roll over and sit up again. "I'm a practical man with both feet on the ground," he said. "I don't hear things unless there's something to hear. And I heard the door open and close."

Livy pulled on her nightgown over her head—warm, thick flannel because texture and sheerness didn't matter. "All right, you heard the door open and close," she said, falling back luxuriously on her soft mattress and dragging the heavy blankets up. "You can't get me to argue with you this time of the night."

"Something's wrong with you," said Mark. "We'll find out what it is tomorrow."

As far as she was concerned, there was nothing whatever wrong with her. Why shouldn't an unhappy woman imagine a handsome, thrilling man admiring her? Maybe there was some hidden and sinister significance in the blue plumage and pointed ears, but she didn't care to know about it.

* * * *

She knew Mark wouldn't risk one of her tempers by waking her up to talk, so she firmly pretended to be sleeping while he dressed, made his own breakfast, and drove away. Then she got out of bed and took off the nightgown.

Sure enough, her flesh shrank. She felt as if she were being spied on.

"Look," she said testily to her subconscious, or libido, or whatever the term was, "not the first thing in the morning. Let me at least brush my teeth and have some of that black mud Mark calls coffee."

Anyway, it was ridiculous, right in broad daylight. Phantasms are for the dark. Any decent neurosis ought to know that.

Nevertheless, Livy closed her eyes to test her memory. The exciting dreamboat with the blue plumage, blond eyes and gay ears was exactly the same—staring hungrily at her from somewhere near the vanity. Certainly she saw the vanity; she knew it was there, didn't she? She tried staring back, to see if her imaginary loverboy would blush and turn away again. He didn't, which probably meant that some quirk in her mind had grown bolder, for he grinned becomingly and his blond eyes smiled up and down her body.

"I never would have believed it," she muttered moodily, opening her eyes and proceeding to dress. "Rainy evenings I can understand, but I usually feel so nasty in the morning."

She was washing the dishes after breakfast when she felt the first physical symptom of her delusion. It was

a light, airy kiss on the back of her neck. Goosebumps bloomed, her spine went sirupy, her knees came unhinged.

She swiftly disposed of the thrill by blaming it on a loose end of hair. But she cautiously pinned her thatch all up under a kerchief; another few ethereal kisses there, whether uncurled hair or psychological, and she would climb the wall.

Next time she felt the kiss, it started at her neck and worked down to her shoulder, six distinct and passionate touches of warm, hard lips. Weakly she realized that her hair was still tightly bound and pinned up, and that left only one conclusion to be drawn.

"All right," she said, dizzily happy, "I'm going nutty. Wonder why I never thought of it before."

There were more kisses during the day, enough to keep her glowing. Hallucinations, of course, but wonderful ones, and she resolved to hang grimly onto them. So she left Mark his dinner and a note, and then went out to a movie.

In the theater, peculiarly, she felt more alone than she had at home. The picture was nothing to rave about, but she saw it three times to make sure Mark would be in bed when she returned.

He was, and breathing. She undressed in no great hurry, finally accustomed to the peeping sensation. But when she was under the covers, she screamed suddenly and scrambled out. Mark was awake by the time she turned on the light.

"Now what?" he grumbled.

She goggled at him in alarm. "It wasn't you?" she asked.

"What wasn't me?"

She sat tentatively on the edge of the bed and rubbed her arm. "Somebody—I thought it was you—I could feel his fingers on my arm just as plain—"

"Whom," Mark asked, confused, "are you talking about?"

She put her chin out. "Somebody tried to get into bed with me."

"M-mm," Mark nodded solemnly, acting not at all astonished. He put his plump, white, flat feet into slippers and wrestled into a bathrobe. He said anxiously, "Now don't get alarmed, Livy. We'll see this thing through."

"Don't bother," she said. "As long as I know it wasn't you, I'm satisfied."

"I am not in the habit of *slinking*."

"No," she admitted, looking at him appraisingly. "You haven't the physique. Then again, if you did have, you wouldn't have to slink." She gave her head a shake. "I don't know what to think." And she began to cry.

"Now, none of that," he said. "We'll have you all right in a jiffy."

She stood up, ready to run over the beds, if necessary. "Oh, no, not now, you're not."

"I don't know what you mean," he said, and he went to the telephone extension and called Ben Dashman. He agreed with Ben that it was rather late, but added, "It's urgent, Ben, and you're the only one I can turn to. It's Livy's nerves. They've—snapped! You'll have to get your

clothes on and come right over."

"Ben Dashman," said Livy scornfully. "Here's one consumer whose resistance that business psychologist can't break down. The two of you will just get to your offices all tired out tomorrow, and for what?"

"When there is a crisis, sleep is a secondary consideration," Mark said. "Ben and I are men of action. This will not be the first time we've worked through the night."

But Ben, when he arrived, sat on a chair at one side of her bed, and Mark sat on his own bed and explained to Ben, over Livy's indignant body, the little he knew of what he referred to as her case. Though the information didn't amount to much, it made her just as embarrassed as the first peeping incident.

If Mark Random was pompous and oratorical, and he was, Ben Dashman could claim the doubtful credit. Mark had modeled himself after that successful expert on business psychology, who had read his way up to the vice-presidency-in-charge-of-sales. Ben could quote whole chapters of inspirational and analytical studies, whereas Mark had mastered no more than brief sentences and paragraphs. The voice had a lot to do with Ben's sensational rise, however. Mark had a slightly petulant voice, about Middle C, while Ben had learned to pitch his a full octave below comfort and to propel his words like strung spitballs.

Physically, Ben was even less appetizing than Mark. He had a bigger stomach, wider hips, rounder shoulders, white hair split in the center

and stuck damply to his pink head, heavy lips that he loved to pucker thoughtfully, and pince-nez. Mark would have paid a lot for a pince-nez that would stay on him, but they either stopped his circulation or fell off.

"Well," said Ben when Mark was through. Livy won the bet she had made with herself that that would be his first response; it gave him time to think. "Do you have anything to add, Livy?"

"Sure. Go home, or take Mark out to a bar. I want to go to sleep."

"I mean about your—strange feeling," Ben persisted.

"I recommend it to all women," she said. "If I knew how, I'd manufacture and sell these dream admirers on the installment plan, and give them free to the needy. It's made me ten years younger. Now go away. I've a date with my delusion."

"Listen," said Mark earnestly. "Ben got out of bed and came over here to help you. We both want to help you. Ben has read all there is to know about mental cases."

"I'm not a mental case," Livy said. "I was until now, but I'm not any more. If you both want to help me, you can develop amnesia and wander out of my life. For good. If I'm sick, it's of you."

Mark's face went purple, but Ben pacified him hastily: "Don't answer her, Mark. She doesn't know what she's saying. You know how it is with these things."

"The only reason he married me was to save money on a housekeeper," she said in a deliberate tone.

"That's right—" Ben encouraged her, patronizingly.

"Are you agreeing with her?" Mark shouted.

"I mean that's right—let her get things off her chest," Ben explained. "It releases tension."

So Livy kept talking and it was wonderful. She said the most insultingly true things about Mark and he didn't dare turn them into argument. She didn't know much about psychiatry, but she accused him of all the terms she could remember. It was the first time she had examined out loud the facts of her limitation marriage.

"Come to think of it," she concluded, "I don't know why I stayed here this long. As soon as I can get some money together, or a job, I'll let you know my forwarding address."

Then she went to sleep. Ben assured Mark that she seemed to have unburdened her grievances and should have no further disturbances. Her threat to leave he considered mere bravado. He advised rest and a sympathetic attitude.

Taking Ben to the door, Mark thanked him abjectly: "I don't know what I would have done without you."

"Forget it," said Ben. "If we didn't all pitch in and help each other when the footing gets rocky, there'd be no cooperation in this world."

"That's right," Mark said, brightening. "Wasn't it Emerson who pointed out that cooperation is the foundation of civilization?"

"It's always safe to give Emerson

the credit," Ben answered. "Now just don't worry about Livy. If she shows any alarming signs of tension, call me up, day or night, and I'll be glad to do what I can."

It was two months before Livy moved out, actually, and then only because she had no real choice. Finding a job had been harder than she anticipated. She had no experience and the best part of the day to go job-hunting had usually been taken up by cooking, cleaning, shopping, sending out the laundry, and reading. For she had begun consuming psychology books—both normal and abnormal—searching for a parallel to her condition.

She found roughly similar cases, some which were almost identical in unimportant respects. But the really significant symptom, which urged her on in her hunt, she found nowhere.

None of the systematically deluded women had ever had a baby by an imaginary sweetheart. And Livy, her doctor had told her after the usual tests, was indisputably pregnant.

"But that's impossible," she had protested.

"I thought so myself," the doctor, who was Mark's physician also, had confessed. "But, you see, the profession is full of surprises."

"That isn't what I mean," Livy said in a panic.

She asked for some aromatic spirits in water. She wanted a chance to rehearse her answer. It sounded absurd even to herself.

She and Mark had not changed the basis of her marriage. Mark

couldn't be the father of her child. He wasn't. It was impossible. Under the circumstances, it was absolutely impossible. Yet it was also impossible for her to be pregnant. She had an alibi for every minute of their marriage.

But these days, she realized numbly, when a doctor tells a woman she is going to have a baby, she can start buying a layette. So she shuffled out of the doctor's office, clutching her list of medical instructions, and that night she told Mark.

Mark didn't bark or howl; he called Ben Dashman instead. Ben understood the situation instantly.

"Livy's conscience caused those delusions," he said. "She has obviously been having an affair."

"There was nothing obvious about it," Livy said. "It was so *unobvious*, in fact, that I didn't know about it myself."

This time Ben Dashman's presence didn't stop Mark from losing his temper. "Are you denying," he yelled, "that you *have* been having an affair?"

"Certainly," said Livy. "I'd know about it, wouldn't I?"

"Well, that's a point, Mark," Ben said ponderously. "In the condition Livy's been in lately, she might not have been responsible."

"I'm not going to be responsible, and that's for sure," Mark said. "We'll find out who the man is if we have to dig clean through her unconscious and down to her pituitary gland!"

Mark threw his glasses, the big black-rimmed ones, on the floor and

trampled on them. Livy felt a little proud. She had never seen him so angry before. She had never suspected that she could have such an effect on him, or she might have tried it long ago.

"Livy," Ben said gently, "you do know who the man was, don't you?"

"Sure," she said. "It was my dreamboat, my lover boy—the one who ogled me while I was undressing, the one who tried to get into bed with me. I didn't let him until you convinced me he wasn't real. Then I didn't see any reason to be afraid."

"You mean," said Mark, terrible in his self-control, "right here in the same room with me?"

"Why not?" she asked reasonably. "It was just a delusion. Do I go around censoring *your* dreams? Though heaven knows they're probably just about selling campaigns and how to make people battery-conscious!"

Ben waved Mark to silence. "Then am I to understand," he said, "that your only meetings with your so-called dreamboat have been here in your own bedroom, with your husband asleep in the next bed?"

"That's right," Livy said. "Exactly."

Ben stood up and pointed unpleasantly at Mark. "You," he said nastily, "are an ungrateful, inconsiderate, lying scoundrel."

"I am?" Mark asked, baffled out of his outrage. "How do you figure that, Ben?"

"Because for some obscure reason you're trying to blacken the name of

your wife, when it's perfectly clear that the only man who could be the father is you."

"Oh, no! I can prove it isn't!"

"I'll bet," Livy said, "he could at that. But he doesn't have to, Ben. I'll give him an affidavit that he isn't."

"You see?" Mark cried triumphantly.

Ben nodded. "I guess I do. Livy, I respect your gallantry, but it's a mistake to protect the guilty party."

"You don't catch me getting galling at a time like this," Livy said. "I can't tell you his name, because I don't know it, but I'll be glad to tell you who he is."

She described the phantom who loved her.

"Blue feathers!" yelled Mark. "Blond eyes! She isn't crazy, Ben. Oh, no, she thinks *we* are!"

Ben stood up. "Mark, I think we need a conference." Mark followed him unwillingly and when Livy opened the door carefully, a few moments later, she heard Ben say, "I've read about cases like this. It's a very grave, very deep disturbance—too deep for me to handle, though I'd love to try and I believe I'd do pretty well. But the first thing she needs is protection. From herself and this unscrupulous vandal she imagines has blue plumage and blond eyes."

And Mark asked, "Then you think she really believes this nonsense?"

And Ben said, "Of course, poor girl. She's batty. Use your head."

And Mark said slowly, "I never thought of that. But why would she claim he's invisible?"

Livy could picture Ben lifting his fat shoulders. "It might take months or years to find out, and the important thing right now is to protect her. That wouldn't hurt you either, Mark. Nobody puts any stock in what a patient at a rest home says."

There was more discussion, but Livy didn't stay to hear it. She had climbed out the kitchen window and over the low backyard fence. Finding a taxi took a while, but she got downtown and closed out her savings account.

Now all she had to do was find a place to live. She couldn't go back to Mark, of course, and she had some bad moments imagining that her description had been broadcast and that she would be picked up and sent to an asylum. She wasn't worried for herself. But lover boy might not find her, and she wouldn't be able to get out and search for him.

Among the classified ads she came across a two-room furnished apartment. It turned out to be across the street from a lumber yard, far enough away from Mark to be relatively safe; and the rental was low. She could live on her savings until the baby was born. What would happen after that didn't seem to matter much right now.

When she went to bed, she felt strangely alone. It wasn't Mark sleeping in the other bed that she missed. She had felt alone in the same room with him up until she thought up Dreamboat. Where was *he*? She squeezed her eyes shut and concentrated. No, he wasn't there. Mark's house must have been the

special habitat of that particular hallucination.

She disliked facing Mark again, and perhaps Ben too, but there apparently was no other way to bring back her blue-plumed, stunning mental phantom. She dressed and called a cab.

There was a light in the bedroom, but she saved investigating that for last. She let herself in with her own key and took off her shoes, then slid through all the other rooms with her eyes firmly shut. Establishing no contact, she opened the bedroom door—and there he was.

His lips were grim, his cleft chin jutted, his blond eyes were savage, and he held his fists in uppercut position as he crouched like a boxer over Mark's raging face. He seemed to be rapping out some harsh words, but even Livy couldn't understand him.

"You stinker," she heard Mark snarl. "You hit me when I wasn't looking."

And Ben protested, "Don't be an idiot. Your unconscious is punishing you for the way you treated that sweet, troubled girl. I can show you cases just like yours—"

And Mark said, "Are you telling me I walked into something?"

Ben told him in a calm voice, "Every psychiatrist knows about the unconscious wish for punishment."

Mark yelled, "There's nothing unconscious about my wish to sock you on that fat jaw." And he did.

Lover boy looked past the battle and saw her in the doorway. His angry face brought forth a slow, un-

earthly smile, and he walked carefully around the fighting fat men and took her hand. It may have been her imagination, but she *felt* the passionately warm, hard flesh.

She had to open her eyes outside the house and on the way back to her apartment. But she held desperately to his hand.

It was after she came home from the hospital that Ben found her. He told her he had heard of mothers radiating, but that this was the first time he had seen it. She could feel the glow in her face as she showed him the empty crib.

"I know you can't see him," she said, "but I can when I close my eyes. He's a beautiful baby. He has his father's features."

"You caused a little stir at the hospital," Ben said. "That's how I found you."

She laughed. "Oh, you mean the doctor? I thought he'd order himself a straitjacket."

"Well, delivering an invisible baby is no joke, especially when you're called away from a stag party," Ben said soberly. "He was finally convinced that it was only the liquor, but he hasn't touched a drop since. They never did discover the baby, did they?"

"I had it in my room all the time. They were afraid I'd sue and give them a lot of bad publicity, but I said it was all right." She turned away from the crib. "I don't suppose Mark minded the Reno divorce, did he?"

"He knew he was getting off lucky. These kissless-marriage annulments can drive a man to changing

his name and moving to another state. But tell me, Livy, how did you arrange the second marriage?"

"By telephone," she said. "I guess you've heard the groom's name and birthplace."

Ben hissed on his glasses, wiped them meticulously. "There was some mention in the newspapers."

"Clrkxsdyl 93J16," she said gaily. "I call him Clark for short. And he comes from Alpha Centauri somewhere. I wouldn't have known that, except he learned to use a typewriter—we don't hear the same frequencies, he says."

Ben's eyes slid away from hers and looked around the shabby apartment. "Well, you do seem happy, I must say."

"There's only one thing that bothers me," she said. "Clark could have picked any woman on Earth. I'm about as average as you can get without being a freak. Why did he want me?"

"There's no explaining love," Ben evaded uneasily. He put his pudgy hand in his inside pocket and looked directly at her. "Let's not have any false pride," he said. "You haven't asked Mark for a cent, but you have no income and I'd be glad—"

"Oh, we're doing fine," said Livy, shaking her hair, which she had let grow long and straight with no sign of a permanent. "We're getting a raise soon."

"A raise?" Ben was surprised. "From where? For doing what?"

"I'm supposed to be working for Grant's Detective Agency. But it's

really Clark who's the operative—private eye, he calls it now, after reading all those mystery stories—and he types up the reports. All I have to do is correct his English now and then. Imagine, he's even learning slang. Grant can't figure out how we get information that's so hard to uncover, but it's easier than pie for Clark."

"Sure," said Ben, going to the door. "But what are you laughing at?"

"Those blue feathers. They tickle!"

Although Ben could have dropped the situation there, there was one thing you could say for him: he was conscientious. He made one more investigation.

"What do you want to know about her for?" Mr. Grant asked coldly and suspiciously.

"I'm a friend of hers," Ben explained, handing Grant his business card. "I just want to make sure she's earning a good living. She divorced a—well, somebody I used to know, and she wouldn't take any alimony. I offered to help out, but she said she's doing all right working for you."

Grant's professionally slitted eyes developed a glint of smug possession. "Oh, I was afraid you might want to hire her away from me," he said. "That girl is the best operative I ever had. She could shadow a nervous sparrow. Why, she's got methods—"

"Good, huh?"

"Good?" repeated Grant. "You'd think she was invisible!"