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MALE REFUGE

by Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

The war of the sexes is one struggle that no amount of disarmament, treaties, or scientific advancement will ever solve. Witness the case of the unexpected visitor in Harry Jennings's garage!

HARRY JENNINGS twisted miserably on the sofa, and fumbled for the light blanket that persisted in sliding off onto the floor. He hunched his shoulders to escape the upholstery button that gouged him so tenaciously, and then swore softly as the sofa sections began to slide apart under the weight of his heavy haunches. Sadly he pushed himself erect, and stared at the elongated shadows cast by the small night light.

He thought wryly about Christine, shapely, satin-skinned and devilish, snoozing comfortably in her downy double bed upstairs. She'd know, of course, that he wouldn't try to break down the door, even if she had only barricaded it with a light dressing table. A wealthy man, he reminded him-

self, should never allow a woman to marry him for his money —unless he has some talent for remaining wealthy. Harry Jennings did not.

He gathered up his blanket and gave the sofa a disgusted kick before he stretched out on the floor. As he struggled uncomfortably with the blanket, for the first time he became aware of a faint humming noise.

He lay quietly and listened as the noise grew louder. It changed from a hum to a wildly pulsating wail that filled the room and rattled dishes in the china cabinet, and still it grew louder. Jennings got to his feet and hesitantly advanced to a front window. The sweep of lawn seemed lazily serene in the soft moonlight. The country road beyond was deserted.

Violent scraping noises

sounded above him as Christine frantically unbarricaded her door. "Harry!" she shouted. "Harry Jennings! What are you doing?"

"Nothing!" he shouted back.

"Don't you nothing me. You leave that TV set alone!"

Jennings cast a rueful glance at the TV set, which he had been threatening to fix himself ever since their repairman had rudely informed them that their credit was no longer good. The noise became an ear-splitting howl, and then cut off abruptly.

"That's better," Christine announced. Her door slammed, and he heard the scraping noises as she reconstructed her barricade. He walked into the dining room and stared out of one window after another. Trees rustled gently in the spring breeze. The moonlight blurred the scragly contours of his unkept garden. In the distance, a Diesel locomotive uttered a long, disdainful snort.

He continued his circuit of the house, shuddering as his bare feet padded across the cold linoleum of the kitchen floor. From a kitchen window he gazed out affectionately on his not—yet—repossessed Cadillac. Then he stared, and backed nervously away.

The Cadillac, which had been comfortably tucked away in the garage when he went to bed, was now parked in the driveway. Not exactly parked, either—it was *placed* there, crossways, and the garage doors were closed.

JENNINGS hurried back through the living room, and tiptoed up the stairs.

"Christine!" he hissed.

She bellowed angrily. "Go soak your head!"

"Didn't you leave the car in the garage when you came home?" he called guardedly.

"Of course I left it in the garage," she shouted. "What'd you want me to do with it—put it in the hall closet?"

He turned his back on the torrent of abuse she flung at him, and tiptoed down the stairs. He had reached the bottom and taken two steps along the hallway when he realized that someone was standing in the living room.

Someone—or was it something? The shadow swayed grotesquely, and vanished from sight as heavy footsteps advanced on Jennings. A figure came into view, enormous in the uncertain light, the head blocked out by the living room arch. Another giant stride, and

the head bent down to pass through into the hall. Petrified, Jennings stared up at a seven foot man who was studying him gravely. Jennings studied him in turn, his fright mingling with astonishment.

In the darkened hallway the stranger's pale face and hands were faintly luminous. Dark blue veins traced oddly visible patterns across his skin. The face was handsome, with dignified, statuesque features, and the fine blond hair seemed almost artificial in its precisely undulating waves.

The stranger cleared his throat and said, in a matter-of-fact way, "Oh hell."

Haughtily Jennings drew himself up to make the most of his five feet seven inches. Even if he was broke, he didn't have to tolerate strangers who swore at him in the sacred confines of his own house. "Go to hell yourself," he snarled.

The stranger frowned, and said again, hesitantly, "Oh... hell..." His face brightened, and he corrected himself. "Hell-o."

"Who are you?" Jennings demanded.

"Who... are... you?" the stranger repeated thoughtfully. "Who..." He smiled, and his head bobbed forward in a

slight bow. "Garn. Who... are... you?"

"Jennings."

"Jen-inks," the stranger repeated. His head bobbed forward again. They stood facing each other, the stranger smiling and Jennings looking curiously at the glimmering fabric of the close-fitting robe that reached to his knees. His legs were bare, and on his feet were plain-looking sandals.

"Well," Jennings said, "come in and sit down." He walked hurriedly back into the living room, hoping to arm himself with the revolver he kept in a desk drawer. But the stranger followed him closely, so he gestured towards the sofa and flipped on the light.

He spun around quickly as he heard the stranger's gasp of pain. Caught in the act of lowering himself cautiously onto the sofa, he stood in a half crouch, hands over his eyes, and spoke rapidly in a language Jennings did not understand. But there was no mistaking the urgent, pleading note in his voice. Jennings turned off the light, and as the stranger recovered and settled himself on the sofa, Jennings noted that he even blinked uncomfortably at the dim night light.

"Excuse me a moment," Jennings said.

He walked into the kitchen, and armed himself with a flashlight. Back in the living room, he confidently dropped into an easy chair. "What can I do for you—Garn, was it?"

"Zo," he said. "Garn."

"What can I do for you?"

Garn hesitated. "Stay," he said finally, his gesture unmistakably taking in the house.

"You want to stay here?"

"Zo—yes."

Jennings looked at him suspiciously. "Where do you come from?"

Garn pondered the question. "Mars?" Jennings suggested.

Garn's dignified face was suddenly contorted by a most undignified spasm of laughter. Jennings waited stubbornly until he had his visitor's attention again. "Venus?" he said.

"Come..." Garn began. He looked about the room, and pointed. Jennings looked searchingly in the indicated direction, and saw only his desk. Puzzled, he turned back to Garn, and found the giant intensely serious and still pointing. "Come..." he said again.

Jennings got to his feet—one hand carefully grasping the flashlight—and walked towards his desk. Understanding came

like a clap of thunder. Garn was pointing at a calendar.

JENNINGS awoke early the next morning on the living room floor, and lay for a moment flexing his cramped muscles before he tried to rub the circulation back into one arm. His ear caught an angry buzzing noise emanating from the basement. If Garn was merely an hallucination, he was an extraordinarily material one, and busily at work. Jennings walked into the kitchen and jammed some bread into the toaster.

In the driveway, The Cadillac reposed with headlights pointed in the proper direction. Garn had been humbly apologetic about the misalignment, and promised to correct it. How he had done that, Jennings had no idea.

Jennings battled his hunger pangs by munching on a piece of dry toast while he rummaged through refrigerator and pantry. His search brought to light a single egg and an empty coffee can. He returned to the living room to hastily pull on his clothes, and then he strode resolutely towards the basement door.

"The time has come," he muttered, "to talk of many things, but mainly of money."

He expected to find the basement transformed, but there was no change except for the illumination. Garn had sealed off the windows with a dark substance, and he had thoughtfully applied the same substance to the light bulbs. At the foot of the stairway a softly glowing tube diffused the entire basement in a weird illumination—light that was not light, darkness where all was visible. Jennings went back to the top of the stairway and flipped the light switch. Garn's blackout worked perfectly.

Halfway along the basement wall, Jennings found a metal door of a dull red substance. In the center of the door was a button, which he pressed firmly.

A moment later the door opened and Garn stood beaming at him as he briskly brushed a powdery grey dust from his hands. Jennings caught sight of a half dozen steps leading downward, and another door, before Garn stepped into the basement and carefully closed the door.

"Oh hell," Garn said warmly.

"Hello," Jennings said. "I have a problem."

"Pro-blém?"

"In our agreement of last

night there was mention of a—a reward. I wouldn't bother you if it wasn't urgent, but we can't eat without money."

"Mo-ney?" Garn mused. He looked inquiringly at Jennings. "See mo-ney?"

Jennings found a few coins in his pocket, and handed a half dollar to Garn. "Got anything like that?" he said.

Garn inspected it carefully. "Do I," he said.

"Do you what?"

Garn reconsidered. "Make I," he said. He glanced about the basement, pounced upon a paper bag, and disappeared through his door. Jennings paced about impatiently. Ten minutes later Garn was back.

"Kilo," he said proudly, handing the bag to Jennings.

Startled by the weight, Jennings dropped it. The bag broke, and coins rolled recklessly about the basement floor. In ten minutes, Garn had manufactured a kilogram of half dollars.

"Hey, you can't do that!" Jennings exclaimed. "That's counterfeiting!" He studied a coin, found the mysterious light frustrating, and took it up to the kitchen for detailed examination. It looked genuine: a bona fide 1944 half dollar, reasonably clean and bright, but

showing the normal wear and tear imparted by rubbing pockets and clutching fingers. Baffled, Jennings returned to the basement.

"I don't think we can get away with this," he told Garn. "It looks all right, but there's bound to be a catch somewhere."

A frown clouded Garn's handsome features. Clearly he did not understand the difficulty. "Do I," he said again, and hurried away. Jennings found another bag, and started to pick up the scattered coins.

In ten minutes Garn returned, carrying a tray. "Kilo," he said. Heaped on the tray was another kilogram of half dollars.

JENNINGS drove to town, parked, and walked apprehensively towards the bank. He did not relish the thought of a prison term for counterfeiting. On the other hand, a man with assets totaling eighty-seven cents and unlimited liabilities could obviously not afford to be particular. He stoically awaited his turn at the teller's window, and counted out twenty of Garn's half dollars.

"Two fives, please," he said.

The teller recounted deftly, and handed him the two bills.

Emboldened by that success, he filled the car with nine of Garn's half dollars' worth of gasoline, and made a foray on a super market, where thirty-seven of Garn's half dollars gave him title to a staggering load of groceries.

Back home, he set about taking care of his gnawing appetite. The tempting aroma of ham and eggs aroused Christine, and she swept into the kitchen, blonde, shapely and beautiful. Her carelessly draped silk dressing gown called forth painful recollections of more affluent days.

"Food!" she yelped. "Last night you told me you were flat broke."

"I was, last night," Jennings said calmly.

She speared a slice of ham. "What'd you do—rob the bank?"

"In a way," Jennings admitted. "Now sit down. I want to talk to you."

"Nothing doing," she said, emptying the frying pan of ham. "From now on, I barricade my door."

"Sit down!" he snapped. Startled, she slid into a chair.

"Now look. We have a roomer. He moved in last night."

She tossed her head disdainfully. "That's a pretty state of

affairs. Harry Jennings taking in roomers. And where do we put him? This is a small house, and I'm not going to give up the bedroom."

"Believe me, he's no ordinary roomer," Jennings said. "He's going to live in the basement, and I want you to leave him strictly alone."

"He's entirely welcome to the basement," she said. "Who is he?"

"His name is Garn."

Christine took a large bite of ham, and sputtered, "Where is he from?"

Jennings winced. That question had to come up sooner or later, of course, but he would have preferred to deal with it later. He decided it would be best to tell her the truth. "As near as I can figure it out," he said, "he comes from about the year 6000 A.D. He arrived last night by time machine. That was the noise you heard. He has his time machine in the garage."

Christine sniffed. "One of you is a fugitive from the insane asylum."

"It's the truth."

"All right. He's from 6000 A.D., and I'm Cleopatra's mother-in-law, and he can mold down in the basement as long

as he likes—providing there's food on the table."

"He's not to be disturbed," Jennings said. "And neither is the garage. He's come to this century to live in peace and quiet."

"I won't go near the man," she said sweetly. "Fry me two eggs, sunny-side-up."

Jennings kept his misgivings to himself, and reached for the eggs. But he knew from bitter experience that asking Christine to stay away from a man was like lecturing a moth about a candle.

Buzzing and clicking noises continued to emerge from the basement until late afternoon. Jennings astutely left his new roomer undisturbed, and heard nothing more from Garn until midnight. Then, from his cramped position on the living room rug, he noted that the man from the future made a number of trips from the basement to the garage. Garn was moving in to stay.

THE FOLLOWING morning Jennings drove in to town, and for his five-dollar bills he acquired a creditable collection of silver dollars, half dollars, quarters, dimes and nickels of assorted years and mintages. He would have liked to start Garn

manufacturing five-dollar bills, but the matter of serial numbers troubled him. As a man in a position to amass a fortune, he didn't want to make any mistakes.

He also wanted to explore Garn's versatility. He could visualize himself as the sole proprietor of a glittering, tax-free hoard of gold, silver, diamonds and platinum, and for the first time in months he felt blissfully contented with himself.

When Jennings descended to the basement that evening, he found that Garn had furnished the space before his door with two quaint, circular divans and a mysterious looking cabinet. To Jennings this was a promising development—Garn evidently expected and desired human companionship.

Garn's "Oh hell" sounded almost affectionate, and he ceremoniously invited Jennings to seat himself, and from the cabinet he poured drinks in crystal-clear tumblers that somehow seemed to be metallic. The liquid tasted like overly-sweetened fruit juice of an unknown variety:

Jennings had spared uncertainly with Garn's limited English for a half hour when the basement door opened, and

Christine flounced down the steps. At the bottom she stopped, and looked intently at Garn. "Say," she exclaimed, "you're *big!*"

"Oh hell," Garn said politely.

Jennings watched Garn apprehensively. He'd seen men spring to their feet and gape with tongues hanging out when Christine came unexpectedly into a room. Completely unperturbed, Garn casually poured Christine a drink and waved her to a seat. He disappeared into his own quarters, and returned with a seat for himself.

Conversation lagged. Garn looked inquiringly from one of them to the other. Christine sat Indian-fashion on the divan and studied Garn with a calculating boldness.

"Why," she said, "he has beautiful hair. And his eyes are like a cat's."

"Cat's?" Garn said.

"Small domestic animal," Jennings said.

"Domestic..."

Jennings impatiently waved the question away. "Not important," he said.

Christine shifted her position, artfully exposing a sensuously tapered leg. "It is too important," she said. "Look at his eyes—they're yellow!"

Cold anger clutched at Jennings. "Get out of here," he growled. "Get out of here right now!"

He waited for an explosion, but Christine meekly slid to her feet and flounced back up the stairway. Garn seemed as oblivious to her departure as he had been to her presence.

Jennings jingled the coins in his pocket, and decided to postpone business until the next morning. He finished his drink, had an awkward exchange of good-nights with Garn, and plodded back up the stairway. In the kitchen, he met Christine.

She wore only a sweeping, transparent negligee. She had applied her heavy makeup with artful precision, and her eyes glittered fiendishly. As Jennings faltered in amazement, she strode towards the basement door.

"My turn, now," she said wickedly.

"What are you up to?" Jennings demanded.

"What do you think?" she said. And as the door swung shut behind her, she called back, "It's nice, for a change, to have a *man* in the house!"

Jennings slumped into a chair, and stared glumly at the closed basement door. The

murmur of voices from below was barely audible—except for an occasional, tinkling laugh from Christine. Suddenly a scream stabbed through the night, and Garn bellowed angrily. Jennings leaped to his feet and raced down the steps.

A FRIGHTENED Christine huddled on a divan. Garn had retreated to the far side of the basement, where he stood glaring murderously at her. He glanced appealingly at Jennings, and pointed a trembling finger. "Female?" he demanded.

Jennings swallowed hard. "Why, yes. Of course."

"Male . . . female . . . same . . ." Garn gestured. "Same . . . house?"

"Why, certainly," Jennings said. "She's my wife."

Garn took two steps forward, and scrutinized Christine. "Female?" he said again.

"Of course she's a female. What did you think she was?"

"Look . . . male," Garn announced.

Christine leaped to her feet with a snarl of rage. "I'll show you I'm no male!" she shouted. She ripped off the negligee and stood before them in triumphant nakedness.

Garn shook his head. "Look . . . male," he said.

"You thought she was a male?" the amazed Jennings exclaimed.

"Zo—yes," Garn said. He moved towards Christine, walked completely around her, studying her nude form bewilderedly, and returned to Jennings. "Male . . . female . . . same house . . ." Garn shuddered, and turned away.

They watched dumbfounded as he carried his belongings back to the garage. Fabulous objects and oddly shaped pieces of furniture disappeared up the stairway. Finally Garn came for the furnishings he had placed in the basement, and he unceremoniously shoved Christine from the divan. He paused to take a friendly grip on Jennings' shoulder.

"Go," he said, a touch of sadness in his voice. "Must . . . go. Male . . . female . . . same house . . ." He shook his head, and muttered something that sounded not unremotely like *barbarians*.

At the foot of the stairway he paused for a last, bewildered glance at Christine. "Look . . . male," he said.

A few moments later the

time machine erupted with an explosive shriek that rattled the house and broke windows.

Jennings walked slowly up the stairs, examined a crack in the kitchen ceiling, and went out to look at the garage. The concrete floor was shattered, and still smouldering.

"Left in a hurry," Jennings observed ruefully.

He descended to the basement again, and went to inspect the empty sub-basement room Garn had fashioned for himself. Back in the basement, he looked at Christine where she lay sobbing on the concrete floor, and he laughed gleefully. It might have been worse. He was still broke, of course, but when Christine finally got around to divorcing him, she'd get next to nothing for alimony. And he had the best atomic bomb shelter in seven states.

"Just what do you suppose women will look like in the year 6000?" he said.

Christine's snarl was unintelligible, but the meaning was plain enough. As far as she was concerned, he could go there and find out for himself.

THE END