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NEVER MARRY A VENERIAN

by CHARLES L. FONTENAY

The Casanovas of Venus had reputations that were system wide, but still how could a girl resist such a super-dreamboat!



LASSA met Tobi at one of the sidewalk cafes in Lotus, the most cosmopolitan metropolis of Venus, and it was not until much later that she realized,

with an amused shock, that she had permitted herself to be "picked up."

Tobi, tall and dark, waved away the waiter who ap-

proached when Lassa gave him smiling permission to share her table.

"Nothing," said Tobi. "I just wish to sit and watch the passers-by, and perhaps amuse this charming young lady with my idle conversation."

He did amuse her. He fascinated her. He knew more about Venus and things Ven-erian than anyone else she had met on this extended vacation. His knowledge went far beyond common things, too. He was brilliant and understanding.

Lassa was surprised to learn they had been talking for three hours, when Hal appeared beside their table.

"Miss Virdo, your mother sends word that you should be getting dressed for the party tonight," said Hal.

"Thank you, Hal," she said. "Tell Mother I'll be up right away."

Hal bowed slightly and left them.

"A very gracious gentleman," remarked Tobi, and Lassa read into his tone a faint reproach for not having introduced Hal. She smiled.

"Hal is a robot," she explained. "The Virdo family robot. A remarkable likeness to the human, don't you think?"

"I'm surprised he is still a servant," said Tobi. "On Venus, you know, robots have equal rights with humans."

"Hal's loyalty is built into him," she said. "We had him built on Luna especially for this trip. No broadcast power here, you know, so we have to plug him in every night to recharge his generators. And now I'm sorry, but I really must go."

They saw each other often after that, dancing, driving through the colorful sand hills, swimming in the artificial lake north of Lotus.

"You are the first really intelligent woman I have ever known, Lassa," Tobi told her soberly. "Most women are all body and no brains."

"But don't you like my body too, Tobi?" she asked, a little piqued.

"Your face and body are perfect," he assured her. "I admire perfection, but it is very rare."

So the time came when, Tobi having said nothing about it, she asked him to marry her.

"Are you sure it's me you admire, Lassa, and not just a strong, handsome body?" he asked. There was anxiety in his tone.

"You are strong and handsome, Tobi," she said, patting his arm. His muscles were like iron. "But I think most of all I love you for your mind. You are the most brilliant and talented person I have ever known."

Of course, Rico raised tearful objections to the engagement, as Lassa had expected. Rico was from Earth, and there had been an understanding between them.

"It wasn't so much for my sake, Lassa," Rico implored. "But at least choose an Earthman to marry. Don't you know Venerian law? Don't you know that on Venus a wife becomes her husband's slave and cannot divorce him?"

"Please, Rico," she said stiffly. "I certainly am not marrying Tobi with the idea of divorcing him."

The wedding, in the great Cathedral of the Golden Lotus, went off like clockwork. The bride and groom fled in a shower of real Terrestrial rice, and by nightfall were established in a room of the beautiful Hotel Venus de Milo, on the far side of the lake.

They passed up supper, though Lassa objected that "I've never sat across a table from you since the day we

met." But Tobi was tired. His shoulders drooped and his movements were slow. It made her wonder if he was as young as he looked.

They retired to the bridal suite. In the tub, Lassa relaxed in a bubble bath and luxuriated in delicious trepidation.

"How many brides," she wondered, "go through this range of emotions on their wedding nights? Do all of them wonder if they have made the right choice? Do all of them think, all at once, 'I don't really know the man I married at all?'"

Clean and soft, she emerged into the bedroom in filmy negligee. Tobi had removed his shirt, but that was all. He was sitting in the big easy chair, waiting for her.

"Is something wrong, Tobi?" she asked in alarm. "You aren't ill, are you?"

"Nothing's wrong," he said. As she approached, he lifted his hand and held out to her the plug end of an electric cable.

"What's this?" she asked.

He turned his back to her. Horrified, she saw the socket between his shoulder blades.

"Plug me in," he ordered.

THE END