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NOT QUITE HUMAN

By EMIL PETAJA



Guy was completely a creature of Dorcas' slightest wish, now.

DORCAS OREN never allowed herself the luxury of day-dreaming. Her time was of infinite importance, her potential ability the subject of science-gossip now in the twenty-second century. The end products of her genius were known to the ends of the universe and as far as man had reached beyond it. And yet here she was at the rear

She was losing Guy, Dorcas found, and now that it was too late, she realized she wanted him for herself. But...there was a way whereby Guy would never be lost...only...

Machines have cut-off points, and, in this respect, they are completely reliable so long as the mechanism doesn't go out of order. Human beings have cut-off points, in certain respects, too—but you just can't depend upon any particular one in a given instance!

window of the top floor of Robot Research, gazing out over the rooftops with the blank wistfulness of a school-girl.

After a while her eyes found a target. A child and its nurse, on the playroom just below. It might be that some spark of yearning motherhood flared at sight of the little girl in the playsuit. Yet it was the nurse that gained her full attention in the end. The nurse had a kind face, a typical B1-47 face. Blue eyes that twinkled; buxom figure—but muscular enough to fulfill her destined duties. Pleasantly unpretty, and without the idiotic smile that had formerly stamped the servant robot.

The little girl was playing with a ball; the nurse was helping her play.

Dorcas was full of angry thoughts. That was why she was here at the window and not back in her laboratory exploiting the power in her mind, creating even more wonderful creatures than this nurse B1-47. Dorcas Oren was a mother, too; she need not envy this child's mother. She was the mind-mother of billions. Her genius had done much to intensify the subtlety of the subtle science of producing not-quite-human progeny.

Guy is a fool. A fool...

As she watched the child and nurse playing, some of her exasperation wilted; she, Dorcas Oren, had created this creature. She had made it possible for a human nurse to expend her life in other more important tasks than minding this child.

"No, no—Nanny!" the child cried, in a temper. "Throw the ball *there!*"

The nurse smiled and obeyed.

Then, when the child irrationally changed her mind, the nurse fell in with her whim without a murmur.

But there was more to it; the robot nurse did something no human nurse

could have done. She anticipated the child's wishes, obeying them even before the auditory command could reach her receptors. The little girl only *wished* for a cookie from the table at the far end of the playroom and the nurse amiably trotted over and fetched it, but side-glancing as she did so, to reassure herself that the child came to no harm. The nurse, of course, was conditioned to consider this child's safety the most important thing in her mechanical life.

But it was the wish-fulfillment device which Dorcas had contributed. Nor was it anything alarmingly mysterious. It was a simple thing, basically; this robot's mind was tuned to the child's. The robot's mind reacted like a mirror in that when the impulse told it to, the robot's sponge of a mind absorbed the contents of the little girl's. The child's thoughts were transferred to this mirror-mind, and then the mechanical muscles hastened to obey the commands in it.

MIND-REFLECTOR robots could be tuned in to any human mind, and readjusted as desired. They made perfect servants. Magic servants. A housewife, on waking up in the morning, had only to *wish* for her daily chores to be done, then roll over and sleep some more. By the time she re-awakened the magic servants had cleaned the house, cooked, laundered, everything. Dorcas' robots had revolutionized industry. Intricate instructions to robot workers had only to be sketched out in the mind and instantaneously they were imprinted on a hundred robot-minds in the minutest detail. Of course there were limits...

If Guy Trellis had only...

Below, the child tossed the ball too far—beyond the safe zone. There was a heavy wire netting to protect the

two from the roof's edge, but by some curious chance the ball squeezed its way through one of the holes and bounced gayly on the danger side until it struck the low roof-lip, a scant foot from disaster.

The child scrambled to the wire netting, stared, then called to her nurse imperatively. The nurse produced another ball, like magic. The child looked at it and screamed. She didn't want the new ball; she wanted the old one. She yelled and gestured for the nurse to put her over the netting. The nurse approached, doubtfully. The child screamed at her in a rage, and made efforts to climb the netting herself.

"Put me over! Put me over!" she cried.

Finally, hesitantly, the nurse took hold of her and lifted. . .

A cough behind her made Dorcas turn; it was Guy. His handsome face was wearing the fatuous glow she had come to associate with his afternoons off. That sheepish grin used to have Dorcas herself as its target. Not so these days.

Dorcas felt her lean body stiffen. Her grey eyes went dark but nothing else about her even, slightly narrow features, betrayed her. "Well?" she asked tartly.

"Thanks, boss-lady. Thanks for letting me have my two hours off this afternoon." He grinned gratefully.

"You were entitled to it," she said; "I granted no special favors."

"You could have said no."

"Why should I?"

"We're damn busy these days. The Interplanet Council sent another checker-upper around this morning; they want that new formula bad. The new mind-reflector robots might prevent another space war. Nobody knows what the Gannymen are up to, but it is nothing good. You are the all-important cog in the cosmic-wheel these days, boss-lady. If our new robots can make a landing on Ganymede and then by transferring the Gannymens' thoughts to their minds—"

"It is not necessary for you to brief me on interplanetary conditions, Mr. Trellis," Dorcas interrupted.

"Hardly." Guy ran his fingers nervously through his brown locks. "Not when the Council sends their top man trundling down here to beg you to hurry." He bowed with ironic gravity.

DORCAS brushed past him down the corridor; he hurried alongside. She smouldered inside with emotion and she hated herself for it. She wanted to deny it, to cast it to the winds. Perhaps that was why she had lingered by that open window. But she did not, could not. After five years of side-by-side association Guy Trellis now took her for granted. Oh, he stood in awe of her, and that used to amuse her; but now that she couldn't have it, she wanted more.

"You used to call me Guy," he said reproachfully.

"That was B. L." There was bitterness in her quip.

"B. L.?"

"Before Lillian; she might not like it."

"Why shouldn't she? I mean, you're my boss-lady, aren't you?"

"Will you please stop using that imbecillic title?"

"Okay, okay."

"Anyway, since I presume you will be marrying Lillian at any moment, it might be best if you were to have your duties at RR transferred to another division. I will find another assistant. Mark Gill, perhaps."

"Mark Gill!" Guy stared at her, stricken. "What on earth has my marrying Lillian to do with my work? Sure, I'm marrying her; so what?"

"Our work is too intimate," Dorcas said, with a touch of old-fashioned archness. "Too much night-work together. People gossip; Lillian is too—too feminine to take it."

"That's nonsense! Lillian can take it; why, she thinks you're wonderful!"

"I'll bet she does."

Guy put his masculine charm to work. He went into an impassioned

appeal, citing their five years in close association, how he had learned to interpret every trick of her mind and how long it would take anyone else to reach this point of *en rapport*. As for Mark Gill, he spat upon Mark Gill. Then he overworked the theme of how much Lillian thought of Dorcas, how she idealized her, stood in rapt awe when her name was mentioned. To reinforce this point he crowed about Lillian. How wonderful she was, how understanding, how sweet.

But he forgot one thing.

He forgot Dorcas was, after all, a woman.

"Sorry, Guy." She smiled, then became to all appearances her brisk self. "As you said a moment ago this reflector-robot is of vast importance. Too important to allow any petty squabbles to interfere. I can't allow myself to worry about what Lillian would think if I asked you to stay until midnight three nights in a row. It might easily happen, you know. No, it will have to be Mark, I'm afraid." She turned away quickly, then looked back over her shoulder. The hurt in Guy's brown eyes made her shiver a little. It was as if he couldn't bear working in some other division, mechanics perhaps. As if his old feeling for her wasn't completely dead, after all. But she knew it was.

"By the way, Guy, congratulations."

"Eh?"

"On your wedding. Lillian is—ah—just what you said. Sweet. Sweet as sugar."



SHE LET the door of her inner sanctum slam behind her. But that was all she allowed herself. No tantrums; no tiny hands pressed against temples while the tears flowed like wine. She went frigidly back to her work. It was there, inside of her, but nothing showed.

When Guy first came to work for RR, even before she selected him as

her first assistant, he was smitten. No doubt about it. But Dorcas' iron credo allowed for no such foolishness as love; she was busy, important, married to science. She was mildly amused at the calf glances that escaped him, but she remained aloof, unaware of elementary biology.

Then Lillian came into the picture. Sweet, blonde, adoring Lillian. Dorcas found herself picking at Guy, criticizing his work. Then, analysing her motives, she began to inescapably realize why. Still she clung to the fantasy that Guy's preoccupation with Lillian was disturbing his work, slowing him up. Endangering fulfillment of their monumental task. Such a concept wasn't true. Guy's happiness, particularly after five years of frustration, spurred him on to the point where some of his ideas superseded her own.

Dorcas refused to accept this; she reasoned thus: Guy had loved her before. Inspired by her, he had done his best work. He no longer loved her, but a wheat-headed snip without enough brains to mention, who looked up at him adoringly. Lillian did have a pretty face and was not ill-favored in other departments. But how important was this compared to the fate of planets?

Dorcas twisted a key in a cabinet so secret that even Guy, her first assistant, was ignorant of its contents. Then she stopped; she froze. So, in this moment she was admitting to herself that she loved Guy. Now that he didn't love her any more, she loved him.

That was bad stuff.

Even if his work didn't suffer, hers would. Her concentration was already impaired; here she had wasted two hours mooning at the back window, a thing that had not happened in years. It was awful. It was intolerable!

Something had to be done and quickly.

HER HANDS, part of Dorcas' mind, went to work on her. But the rest of her mind remained

clouded with vexation with Guy and the elementary facts of biology. What to do?

Ganymede. The sudden threat. They had always posed a problem, but only recently sudden strides in scientific warfare made it evident to the Council that this problem was growing deadly serious. And there seemed no way of reaching them. Gannymen ideologies and concepts baffled the civilized universe—concepts that made the ancient American-Russian difficulties seem like a Sunday-School picnic. Not two nationalities with ancient prejudices and mores, but two planets whose inhabitants had utterly different bodies, different emotions, different minds.

Operation Robot Research was to create Gannymen robots with reflector-minds—not humanoid robots but Gannymenoid robots. Robots capable of transferring Gannymen ideas and concepts to their own. Hence these Gannymen robots must be capable of retrieving and retaining in detail all the complex thoughts and desires buried deep in Gannymen's minds.

These robots would be secretly planted on various parts of Ganymede, with specific instructions as to how to behave. Should they be destroyed, others would be sent. Some would "die", of course, but it was hoped that at least a few would return to Earth when their instructions had been completed. These robots, imbued with Gannymen's thoughts and desires, would be allowed to proceed under the impetus of these thoughts and desires—but under careful surveillance. When their Gannymen desires began to endanger Earth, then they would be stopped. This whole intricate plan was fraught with danger, of course, but there seemed to be no other way of "getting with" Gannymen's intentions. Their iron curtain was air-tight.

Dorcas' part in the plan was next to impossible. She was supplied with every scrap of scientific data regarding the Gannymen available; she was provided with biological specimens;

she was given free rein, an unlimited expense budget. The only limit was—time.

All of this was extremely secret. The Gannymen were highly intelligent, quite capable of having sent their own spies to Earth or even of hiring Terrans to spy for them. But Dorcas was not to concern herself with such problems; these were out of her scope. She was to keep her energies devoutly to the core of the problem—creating a Gannymenoid reflector-mind.

Guy? Or Lillian?

Her personal problem resolved itself by degrees into a question as simple as that. Something had to be done; one of them must go. Dorcas' all-important task must not be interrupted by anything or anyone—or by personal emotion. So—one of them must go...

But which one?

Lillian seemed the logical one. It would be child's play to eradicate Lillian. Dorcas could devise some small feminine party. She had chemicals by the dozens at her disposal, any of which would destroy Lillian with neatness and dispatch. Or a lethal germ could be administered. Lillian would die of natural causes.

For that matter, Guy could be disposed of as easily.

But there were arguments in disfavor of both. If she killed Lillian, Guy would be upset, his work would suffer. And if Dorcas killed Guy—

Yes. *She* would be upset. Horribly upset. For Dorcas did love him, she admitted it to herself at last. She couldn't destroy the man she loved and then go calmly on with her work. She could sacrifice herself, but not him.

She stared down into the microscope. This substance in the slide was the essence of her most secret secret. Even Guy knew nothing of *this*.

Even Guy...

She drew a deep breath. Then quickly she stepped back into the other larger laboratory and called Guy in.



"THEN YOU'RE sure, Guy? You are positive that the success of our research means more to you than your own life?"

Guy looked at her and nodded.

"And—Lillian?"

"I'll take the chance; you said this test was essential. But I still don't understand what good it will do to try it out on a Terran. Hadn't you better ask the Council to get you a Gannymen prisoner or—"

Dorcas thought fast. Now that she had made up her mind, her instinct for perfection placed glib lies on her tongue. "Listen, Guy. You know that while the robots are basically Gannymen they must also be capable of obeying their original Council instructions, otherwise they might stay there and never come back? You know that, don't you?"

He looked at her and the blind faith in his eyes made her look away and almost drop the hypodermic needle she held. "Right. I get it. And if anything happens, tell Lillian that I—"

"Nothing's going to happen," Dorcas broke in. "That is, I don't think so. You may have headaches or—something. But the chances are way up. No, Guy, I think I'll have my first assistant around for a long, long time."

He glowed at that. "Okay, boss-lady!" He held out his bare arm and grinned. "Go ahead, shoot the works!"

The whole thing had its basis in that most secret research, which was an offshoot of the reflector-mind. If a mechanical mind could be devised which would receive instructions from a human (or other intelligent) mind, and then unquestioningly fulfill these instructions—why not a human mind?

The Council had an ace up its sleeve. Should their initial plan—the Gannymen reflector-mind proxy idea—fail, they would reluctantly put into effect another plan. For some time now Dorcas had been secretly working on a formula which would in effect transform a natural mind into a reflector-mind. This formula would be somehow administered to the entire

satellite of Ganymede and the Gannymen would be incapable of following through any sinister plan they had been cooking up. They would be subject to absolute control, inasmuch as their minds would mirror the thoughts and desires of the Council.

Why Dorcas' formula was so secret is understandable; the pitfalls are all too apparent. In the hands of a dictator-minded intelligence it could soon turn the universe into a universe of slaves.

Even the Council's top-man did not know that Dorcas had perfected her formula, and had now tested it.

On Guy Trellis....



THE CHANGE was undetectable, even to Guy. His behavior was much the same as always. While he seemed to remain an individual, with his own mental activities, that part of his mind which controlled his own will-power was subject to Dorcas' desires. To all intents and purposes nothing had happened to him—nothing except that whenever Dorcas exerted the slightest pressure his desire became hers and he did what she wished without the possibility of disobedience.

Dorcas told no one, although she did leave certain notes and instructions for the Council, should anything happen to her.

As for Lillian, she faded out of the picture as surely as if she had been rubbed over with bleaching solution. Of course Dorcas was subtle. At first Guy found himself unaccountably bored when he was with Lillian, restless. As the weeks sped by this boredom deepened into active dislike. Finally he could not bear her; he wanted to be back at RR with Dorcas. Dorcas was part of him, *all* of him.

They were married. It was actually ideal; the little aggravating quarrels that make up an inevitable portion of any married couple's lives simply didn't exist for them. Dorcas always had her way. Guy never disagreed

with anything she wanted, big or small. Never, never. She didn't even have to mention her desires aloud. Her wishes were Guy's. Always, always.

Perhaps it was this "always-always" monotony which eventually began to tear at her nerves. Guy's lack of individuality. This, closely tied in with Dorcas' conscience. Dorcas was not wicked; she had done what she thought right for the civilized universe. But now as the first flush of absolute necessary began to fade she began to wonder if she had done right after all. Was it right to have done what she did—to have repossessed a man's mind and soul? Or was it just womanly weakness?

For he was hers. Completely. But it was not the moon-june song lyric thing. It was cold science; he was hers by scientific formula.



THE GANNYMAN reflector-mind was finished. The mechanical divisions of RR had provided bodies for them, and the robots were even now speeding on their secret missions.

Those who were in the know waited—and prayed.

Dorcas was one of them, and Guy joined her because it was impossible for him not to. Dorcas told herself again and again that what she had done was vital. It *had* to be done if the universe was not be plunged into chaotic war. And if Guy's mind reflected any of these thoughts, he agreed with her. What else?

But Dorcas had to live with her creation and it became hell; she had dreadful nightmares. The strain of those long months of concentrated effort, coupled with the pangs she inflicted on herself every time she looked at Guy, began to tell. One night she woke up screaming. Guy bolted up, inquiringly, but before he could ask her what was wrong her angry desire that he should go back to sleep sent

him plummeting against his pillow and snoring.

Her great work was over. There was nothing to press her down, to keep her mind fully occupied night and day. The cause for what she had done to Guy was removed, but what she had done could not be undone. A human mind, unlike a machine mind, cannot be tinkered with and readjusted to suit a whim; Dorcas knew the results would probably be disastrous if she tried.

But she did try. She worked furiously on an antidote for her formula, and he helped her without knowing. But in the end she had to give up; it was hopeless.

Guy's constant obedience had long since ceased to be a thing to be desired. It had become an annoyance, and now it was a horror that set her nerves to screaming. She tried to prevent herself from requiring anything of him. Sometimes she pretended he didn't exist, but it was no good. Their minds were so in tune that any small thing she inadvertently wanted was provided. Guy was there at her side, eagerly adoring. Her emotions tumbled, her nerves shrieked "murderess" at her. "Murderess of personalities!"

Finally she sent him away—far away.

It was better for a time, but then she began to fret. Was he all right? Would he be able to take proper care of himself? Would he brood? What if somebody should get a hint of the truth, and the Council were to find out? Could she trust him—what he might do away from her?

She made inquiry. It was as she might have expected; away from her Guy behaved like a dead thing. He was miserable without her, and he would do nothing but sit and stare blankly, like an inactive servant robot awaiting the call to duty.

She scribbled a hasty note for him to come back.



IT WAS some days later. She was standing at the open back window, looking down at the playroof below.

"Dorcas Oren," a respectful voice murmured.

She turned. It was Abel, the Council's top man. The gleam in his usually impassive features indicated something had happened. To Guy? For a moment her heart stopped. Then Abel smiled and she knew the news was good.

"What is it?"

"We've won, Dorcas! We've won!"

In her joy everything else was forgotten. The universe was safe from war!

"Your reflector-minds did it," he murmured reverently. "Only two returned, but both of them were successful in their missions. One was to have sought out a political leader; the other was geared to find a Ganymede economist. The former, reflecting a war-leader's mind, told us exactly how they intend to wage this war of theirs. The actual devices they intend to use—and when. Of course this will enable us to prepare an overwhelming resistance. We'll stop them cold at the very outset should that be necessary; hardly a life will be lost, perhaps none!"

"And—?"

"The other gave us even more important news. The economist robot revealed by his actions *why* the Gannymen want war. In truth they don't, being sensible people, but there are certain resources which they require and which the Council has forbidden them. They are suspicious, afraid that this lack will weaken them and that they will be exploited. Their requests were turned down by the Council for security reasons, but now that we know what they intend to use these minerals for, our own suspicions are gone. Right now the Council is preparing a document which will reassure them. In all likelihood this war may end before it even starts, thanks to you, Dorcas Oren."

DORCAS flushed, but there was something that was cold and unresponsive to happiness, deep inside her. She didn't move, or speak.

"Well," Abel smiled. "Have you nothing to say?"

"I—I'm happy, of course. Very happy."

Abel nodded. "By the way, that other matter."

"Which other matter?"

"The secret experiment. I know nothing of it, of course; merely that there is one afoot. But now it is the Council's decree that you shall cease work on it at once. You shall destroy all your records and evidences of its existence—erase it from your own mind as well. The Council has had psychologists probing into its possible value, and their report is negative. They agree it has nothing to offer that is not harmful; you are to destroy it and forget that you have ever worked on it."

Dorcas shut her eyes and leaned hard against the wide window railing.

"You will do as they request?" Abel prompted.

"Of course."

Abel bowed, thanked her again, and withdrew. Dorcas clung to the railing and turned blurred eyes downward. Down on the sixtieth-story playroof that same little girl was chattering and shrieking as she played ball with her B1-47 nurse. The nurse would trot about the enclosure obediently, smiling cheerfully at everything the child said.

"No! Not there—*here!* You silly old fool! Silly old fool!"

Inasmuch as the nurse had done exactly as the child commanded, the girl was in effect calling herself names. The nurse's mind was a reflection of hers. The child had changed her mind, but too late to revise the nurse's mechanical actions. Split-seconds too late.

Dorcas leaned against the open window railing and wept.

What had she done? What terrible thing?

The Council decreed: destroy all evidences of the secret experiment. Forget it! But how could she forget it when the man she loved was forever doomed by it, doomed to obey her slightest whim as long as they both lived.

Every time she looked into his eyes that utter obedience was there to accuse her. "*Murderess! Murderess of personalities!*" And it would always be there until—

Until she was dead.

"I wish I was!" Dorcas cried in a frenzy. "I wish I was dead now!"

THERE WAS a shadow behind her, then a figure darted forward and seized her. Dorcas saw him in a vague blur as she went over the window ledge. Guy. Returned. But there was no time to change her mind. . . .

"Forgive!" she tried to say.

And while the word itself was lost in the wind that streamed past her dropping body, the thought clung. Dor-

cas plummeted almost a hundred stories to oblivion, and above her Guy looked down, uncertain, questioning, adoring. She had wanted it. She *had*; the desire had been strong, very strong.

For only a moment Guy clung there in an agony of almost-knowing, then suddenly his eyes burned out. A shadow crossed over his face. He stood there unmoving, an empty husk.

It happened again.

The rubber ball squeezed through the safety fence and the child on the playroof below screamed for her nurse to lift her over the fence so that she could retrieve it. The nurse, obedient to the restrictions built into her mechanical brain and body, lifted her. But she lifted her *away* from the fence, not over it. And she allowed the child to cry and scream until the new ball she produced captured her interest.

The nurse, luckily, had had a stopping point built into her. Unlike Guy Trellis, she was not quite human.

