

# SUPER-SCIENCE

## FICTION



APRIL  
1967

### PARIAH GIRL

by BOYD ELLANBY

### THE RIM OF ETERNITY

by KOLLER ERNST

### ONE WOMAN FOR VENUS

by WISTON MARKS

### INVULNERABLE

by HARLAN ELLISON

35c

## IMMORTAL

For the cover of this, the third issue of SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION, we assigned Kelly Freas to do a painting illustrating life-after-death, immortality, the science of rejuvenation. And he came through with a breathless illustration of that split second we wanted.

The split second when a woman three-hundred and seventy-eight years old, wrinkled like a prune, gasping for breath and condemned to the Hole, was brought back to vibrant, proud youth.

On our cover you see Jane Doe of 3866 A. D. having undergone her fifth rejuvenation. They carried her in, laid her down on the light stage of the Rejuvenall and gave it the juice. They said she was dead, doomed to wither. But the bright men of the labs knew better.

So there she is, getting to her feet without help, standing there healthy and full of life, as her grey, matted hair changes to flaming red, as her brittle bones take on new life, as her body fills out and her head rises. She is no longer Jane Doe the old crone, she is now Jane Doe the desirable, beautiful woman, ready to live another two hundred years without aging.

The reason we assigned this subject to Kelly was that this issue contains a sprinkling of stories in that vein, stories and articles on immortality, life-after-death, the structure of TIME and SPACE.

We hope you will enjoy them as much as we did.

W. W. SCOTT

# SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION

Vol. 1 — No. 3

April, 1957

## CONTENTS

### NOVELETTES

- BRINK OF MADNESS** *by Arthur Sellings* ..... 50  
The whole set-up of his life seemed to be phony
- INVULNERABLE** *by Harlan Ellison* ..... 90  
Eric was indestructible, immortal—and unhappy

### SHORT STORIES

- ONE WOMAN FOR VENUS** *by Winston Marks* ..... 2  
The governor was conditioned against all temptation
- THE RIM OF ETERNITY** *by Koller Ernst* ..... 22  
He had one quick glimpse of the fourth dimension
- PARIAH GIRL** *by Boyd Ellanby* ..... 36  
The native girl seemed to have a criminal record
- GALACTIC THRILL KIDS** *by Robert Silverberg* ..... 72  
Outer space is no place for cowardly killers
- BRIGHT FLOWERS OF MARS** *by Curtis W. Casewitt* .... 113  
He wanted to be the first man on the planet
- HOMETOWN** *by Richard Wilson* ..... 120  
Nothing, nothing can take the place of home

### FEATURES

- NUCLEAR NEWS** *by Steven Rory* ..... 21
- LOOK TO THE STARS** *by Scott Nevets* ..... 49
- TIME AND SPACE** *by Allen R. Evans* ..... 85
- SCIENCE SHORTS** *by Edgar P. Straus* ..... 123
- THE MAIL BAG** ..... 124

**OVER** *by Kelly Freas*

**ILLUSTRATIONS** *by Freas, Emsh and Orban*

W. W. Scott — Editor

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION is published bi-monthly by Headline Publications Inc., at 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial office at 1790 Broadway, New York 14 N.Y. Application pending for entry as second class matter at the post office at Holyoke, Mass., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copy, 35¢. Subscription rates: \$4.00 for 12 issues. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts, and all such material must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. All stories printed in the magazine are fiction, and any similarity between the characters and actual persons is coincidental. Copyright 1956 by Headline Publications Inc. All rights, including translation, reserved under International Copyright Convention and Pan American Copyright Convention. Printed in the U.S.A.

# ONE WOMAN FOR VENUS

by WINSTON MARKS

*Illustrated by KELLY FREAS*

The governor of Venus must be celibate. Fuller had been conditioned by experts against all women. But things can happen in space that upset conditioning

**T**HE Governors of the Territory of Venus got younger and younger each five-year term. Ruling the sand-blasted empire of bubble-huts and unbreathable air, the Earth Council discovered, was not a job for age. It did require dignity, poise, and self-control which one normally associates with experience, but, regrettably, experience brought gray hairs and a fragility of body and mind that cracked under the mental, moral and physical

buffeting that Earth's outpost gave its nominal rulers.

And so it was that at 26, Governor-Elect Raymond Fuller, fresh out of diplomatic school, found himself aboard the freightor *Sullivan II*, outward bound as an emergency replacement for 34-year-old Thomas Cottinghouse, the latest gubernatorial casualty to fail to complete his term. Cottinghouse had returned via the last passenger flight, eschewing the \$50,000 bonus for



finishing his fifth year of Tenure.

Fuller was wrestler-built, narrow-hipped, cold-blooded and confident. To fortify his high I. Q. and emotional stability, the "psychers" had rushed him through a special fortnight of mental and physical conditioning. So confident were they after the final tests, Fuller noted, that they didn't even demur when it was found that he must share the limited passenger accommodations with one Ramona Waverly, a female exile of considerable demoralizing potential.

Fuller, himself, gave her scarcely a thought until well after blast-off. The heavy acceleration had diminished to the essential-to-well-being *one gee* that pushed gently from the deck in perfect simulation of Earth's gravity, and his inner-ear mechanism and stomach responded quickly to normality. He arose from his couch in the cramped stateroom, pleased to find that his resiliency had overcome in minutes the blast-off effects that so often left passengers exhausted and nauseated for hours after depar-

ture. He was feeling fine.

Sliding his stateroom door-panel back he stepped into the low-ceilinged box of a ward-room upon which his quarters opened directly. A cloud of faintly perfumed tobacco smoke assailed him, and his stomach stirred uneasily.

He addressed the only other occupant, "I believe smoking is forbidden aboard." He was firm and authoritative, and there was no trace of response in his voice to the rather startling sight that met his eyes.

Ramona Waverly lounged supine on one of the two padded couches, a knee carelessly bent up throwing her single, translucent garment into a provocative dishabille. She was what? Nineteen? Twenty-nine? They had told Fuller, but it hadn't seemed important enough to remember, and certainly the smooth narrow lines of her face and neck gave no hint.

Her wide eyes, black as the tightly swept-back hair, moved leisurely over him. She dropped the offending knee and sat up drawing the filmy garment down to her ankles with an ex-

aggerated, prim gesture.

"So you don't even smoke!" The words and tone of voice told Fuller that she knew all about him, knew that he was a graduate cum laude of the school of iron will, clean living and let's-not-be-messing-around. The tone was a soft contralto to match her olive skin, and it was metropolitan and bored, inviting and contemptful, passionate and gelid, admiring and scornful. There was a trace of French accent.

**FULLER** examined her with academic interest. On Venus she would be only one more female constituent of his pioneer colony, cooking, minding and solacing one of the 80,000 hard-bitten males who had ventured into space to wrest a mineral fortune from the inhospitable planet. But at the moment she represented the product of the odd method of recruiting found necessary to provide the Venusian immigrants with wives.

Fuller seated himself opposite her, fanning a wisp of perfumed smoke away from his nostrils. "You were conditioned out of the nicotine habit. Why

did you smuggle cigarettes aboard? On Venus there is enough to corrupt the lungs."

She shrugged a bare shoulder. "It was a habit I cherished. Like all my—vices. No, it does not give me satisfaction now, but only the pleasure of a last defiance."

Typical, Fuller thought. "And which of your cherished vices got you exiled?"

"Ooooooh," she puckered her dark eyebrows, "hardly a vice. I fed my ol' 'usband bismuth for his ulcers."

"But bismuth is a common remedy for stomach trouble."

"Radio-active bismuth?" she replied with a grimace. "He died *tres* painfully and expensively."

Fuller remembered now, a self-made widow. And the vast fortune she had inherited before the insurance company gained an indictment had corrupted two judges and six juries. A conviction had been secured against her only after her money ran out.

"Why did you kill him?" Fuller asked curiously.

"He was a sadist. Would you like to see my scars?"

"Thanks, no. Why did you marry him in the first place?"

"He was handsome— —like you. And wealthy. Ah, *mon cherie*, so wealthy he was! But those lawyers! If they had gotten me a stay of execution of a single month more I would have been free. Such publicity! Such *grande responce* from my public!"

That was what had troubled the court, she explained. Too much sympathy from the public. The judge had offered her the choice of exile or execution, and when she had chosen Venus, they had packed her off on this freighter before her ardent worshippers among the tabloid readers completed their fund campaign to finance and demand yet another appeal.

She changed the subject abruptly. "What kept you to your stateroom for so long? I've been perishing with loneliness."

A faint pique arose in Fuller, that she had recovered from blast-off even more quickly than he. Also, the roving look with which her eyes took possession of him made him wish vaguely that approved mascu-

line space-ship attire consisted of something more substantial than breech-clout and the sweatkerchief knotted loosely around his neck. No wonder the crew and even the officers were denied the wardroom for this particular trip. If Fuller had enjoyed a whit less faith in his rigorous moral conditioning, he should have been awash with misgivings.

As it was he arose with a slight grunt and moved to the stingy port to stare through his pale reflection into the black void just inches from his nose. The prickle of body hairs coming unstuck from his moist skin gave him the weird sensation that Ramona was still sweeping him with her gaze. Then the hard brilliance of the stars struck through to his consciousness, and the immense importance and dignity of his mission came back to him.

He was Raymond Thurston Fuller, youngest man ever to be appointed Governor of Venus. Calm. Incorruptible. A mountain of strength, physical and moral. Soon enough this poor girl would learn the rigors of her banishment to Venus. No

point in worrying over her obvious designs on his emotions. So she *had* snared herself a millionaire with her sinuous body and pouting lips! Fuller was no spoiled darling looking for diversion. He was secure behind the thickest armor that quiet political ambition plus psychological conditioning could give him. He was a rock, a cold, intellectual entity trained to deal with the personnel problems of a tempestuous colony. No mere woman could penetrate that armor.

He decided it, and the stars glittered back non-committally.

Turning, Fuller said, "Please remember, you are still under arrest. I have a full schedule of studying to complete before we arrive, so I'll have to request that you comport yourself with restraint or remain in your stateroom."

Ramona looked from his eyes to the door of her stateroom. The resolve in Fuller's eyes was unmistakable. She said subduedly, "Owi! With restraint. I would not like to be confined in that coffin. With restraint at all times, *mon chérie*." And she sounded as if she meant it.

FULLER sat before a small reading desk and opened to page one of a thick, handwritten book bound in durable alloy—it was the log, the Venusian chronicle of the seven governors who had preceded him—the day-by-day account of their struggle to maintain some semblance of justice and order in the gale-torn empire where man had ventured and still clung only precariously to sanity and civilization.

As he read of the first landings at the north pole, of the bitter, physical hardships and tragedies that attended the anchoring of a few air-tight bubbles of living space, the technological struggle to unlock the water of crystallization from the substratum rocks and recover oxygen from the mineral oxides, Fuller fell deeper and deeper under the spell of admiration for these heroic men. Unlike several recent governors, Fuller's political ambitions were genuine and loyal to the planet of his assignment.

He visualized not a five-year servitude and a return to earth to enjoy the considerable mon-

etary reward awaiting him. Instead, he dreamed of empire, of solving the thousands of problems that remained before him, of building a great oasis, a stronghold against Venus' tempestuous nature. He dreamed of erecting cities in the great pits of the mineral excavations, of roofing the pits so that man could move miles without the suffocating wrappings of a space-suit.

To date, man had the choice of burrowing underground—and this was not fitting for the dignity of man—or else trusting his life to the cramped, insecure bubbles which too frequently, in spite of all efforts to anchor them, came unstuck before the sand-blasting hurricanes and went jouncing off like grotesque tumble weeds to mash their hapless occupants against the nearest cliff.

After three hours of steady reading, Fuller looked up to rest his eyes. As his mind returned from the howling Venusian hell described in the chronicle, the sight of Ramona sitting quietly reading at the other desk fell incongruously upon his vision.

That fragile, seductive wench on Venus? The wife of a grizzled, tobacco-chewing miner? What would she look like after a year—a year of smothering, silt-like dust driven by the hot devil-winds? How well would she adapt to her five-gallon per week ration of water, which must serve for drinking, cooking, bathing and cleaning?

The conjecture was idle. She would survive, for that is the first qualification of an exile, a tough survival instinct, a raging lust for life under any conditions. Had the testing board found her remiss here, she would not have been offered the option of exile. She would now be dead in the monoxide chamber of New York County.

His muse was broken by the thud of the dumb-waiter and the clink of silver against the magnesium trays. Lunchtime. Fuller raised the sliding wall panel and took out his own tray. On the way to his desk he thought better of his boorish behaviour, swerved and deposited the tray before his companion.

Ramona raised her eyes. "I

am curious, Raymond. What made you change your mind?"

*Raymond!* It served him right. Not even common courtesy was in order, apparently. But had his action been that apparent?

"In payment for being quiet so long, *Miss Waverly.*"

"*Mrs. Waverly,*" she reminded him. "And why not *Ramona?*"

He returned from the dumb-waiter with his own tray and placed it carefully at his desk. "Because I wish no familiarity from you, *Mrs. Waverly,*" he said evenly. "For the remainder of the trip it will be better if we don't converse unnecessarily."

A course of civil formality had been his final decision. Ignoring such a female entirely would probably irritate her into overt hostility, and that could prove distracting.

"Then favor me by addressing me only as *Madame,*" she said. She answered his puzzled glance more fully, "The name of *Waverly* is not one which fits me comfortably."

So, she had sensibilities—even a conscience, perhaps! I have poisoned my husband, but

please do not remind me of it.

Idly he speculated upon her remark about *Waverly* being a sadist. Then he pulled himself up short as his imagination considered what might have ensued had his answer been yes when *Ramona Waverly* asked if he would like to see her scars.

Conditioning. Semantic discipline. The *cortical-thalamic pause* was instinctive. His mind drew back from the consideration like a night-crawler diving for its hole, the result of psychosomatic integration, a self-knowledge of the physical beast that lay caged behind the rigid bars of his mental censorship. They ate in silence, then he returned to his reading and she to hers.

THE elapsed-time dial on the chronometer showed 126 hours when the first intimation of engine failure presented itself. It was "night" by the clock, and Fuller came awake on his couch to listen and feel the uneven pulsation that disturbed the fine-grained vibration of the nuclear drive. He had been sleeping lightly as usual, and now he was sharply

awake, for the cycles of pulsation were growing deeper. The gravity of thrust was betraying its artificial nature by its inconstancy.

Surge. Ease off. Surge-surge-surge! Ease way off!

Fuller's stomach registered its disgust. The pulsation was worse than a roller-coaster, for there was no predicting it visually.

He rolled off the couch to his feet and staggered into the wardroom, the deck bucking underfoot like a jerkily ascending elevator. He buzzed the captain on the wall communicator. No answer. He mopped at his face with the sweatkerchief, and suddenly the heavy humidity to which he had become accustomed, grew stifling.

Staring out through the port did no good. The stars looked back unconsoling, for this hollow sliver of flotsam, this ridiculous intruder in their black domain was no concern of theirs.

Captain Thorn popped from the vertical transit tube that ran the length of the ship. His breech-clout and kerchief were soaked with perspiration,

but his features were placid enough. With barely a glance at Fuller he moved quickly to Ramona Waverly's door and shot the bolt locking her in. Then he seated his short, solid bulk on one of the chairs and regarded Fuller closely.

Before the Governor-elect could question this invasion of privacy and infraction of rules, ear-battering silence cupped glutinous fingers over the ship's hull, and the "gravity" vanished entirely.

Fuller's eyes seemed to jump in their sockets. Brain, heart, diaphragm and stomach, most of all stomach, rebelled at the kinesthetic outrage. The deck seemed to be dropping, dropping away beneath him. He was falling free like a ski-jumper. When the pressure left the soles of his feet, instinctively he reached "down" with his toes. The deck was still there, but the reflex action cast him upward. He raised his hands in time to fend off the low ceiling.

"Just relax," Thorn advised him quietly. "This is nothing serious."

"Then—then why are you in here?" Fuller demanded, push-

ing off from the overhead and gripping the bolted down desk-chair.

"I—well, I just checked in to observe how it would hit you. Free-fall strikes people differently, something like marijuana. Some get dreamy, some scared, violent, sick—some even get affectionate." He glanced at the locked door. "My orders to protect my passengers supersede the ward-room ban. How do you feel?"

"Sick. Nauseated." Fuller gasped for breath with a diaphragm that wanted to keep exhaling. The reduced weight of his viscera, of course.

"You're pale enough," Thorn observed half to himself. "Usually the heavily muscled ones react that way. Over-developed muscle-tissue spindles. They amplify the effect." He kicked himself away from the chair with expert ease and floated toward the tube exit. "You'll be all right, I guess. But don't unlock the girl's door, understand? They need me down below. Be just a short while, probably. I suggest you drift back to your stateroom and stay close to the lavatory. There's no room service here to clean up

any messes."

Wherewith the captain disappeared into the tube. Two clicks indicated that he had double-locked the exit. He apparently wanted no berserk passengers adrift during the emergency.

Emergency was right! Thorn's words had reassured Fuller that no serious danger existed, but the emergency clanger of screaming nerves in his knotted muscles was tearing him apart. The waves of nausea gradually diminished as he focussed his eyes grimly upon the chronometer that wanted to keep slipping down the bulk-head.

THE sensation of falling refused to go away. When he tried to ease his grip on the chair-back he drooped limply in mid-air, and panic seized him. Without the familiar pull of acceleration-gravity his very sense of posture left him. He had to stare down at his partly bent knees to reassure himself that they were "below" him.

Faint, metallic "clunks" transmitted through the ship's hull told him that somewhere men were active in the engine

room. Then a nearer, demanding sound attracted his attention. Ramona wanted out.

*Don't unlock the girl's door!*

The hammering of soft palms against the metal panel continued, and Fuller pictured himself locked in his own tiny cubicle, floating free, agitated, wondering what was wrong. On impulse he pushed off from the chair and drifted over to the door.

"It's quite all right, Mrs. Waverly—I mean, Madame. Just a temporary shut down," he called loudly.

Weird, high-pitched sounds came through the door. "Let—let me out, please." More of the light, gaspy sounds. The girl was hysterical. Probably claustrophobia from floating about, bumping into walls and ceiling with every little move like a ping-pong ball in a jug.

What possible harm could come from releasing her? She was likely to dash her brains out in there. It might be well to keep an eye on her, since she was, ultimately, his responsibility.

Fuller flipped the bolt. Instantly, the panel slid back and Ramona pulled herself through

with a gliding motion that bounced her from his startled body. She twisted in the air, touched off from the bulkhead and floated the twenty-foot length of the wardroom.

"I can fly! I can Fly!" she cried happily, catching herself on her hands, tucking her feet down and pushing off again. She was a fairy, a dancer, a bit of gossamer criss-crossing the space about Fuller, face lightly flushed, her sheer gown waving about her ankles at one moment, then billowing over her head like a collapsing parachute as she touched a wall to reverse her direction.

"I—I thought you were—crying in there," Fuller stammered.

*"Merci, non! It is lovely! Such freedom, like a bird. So often in my dreams—"*

"Yes, lovely!" Fuller breathed softly. His vertigo was gone now, the queasiness forgotten. What a thing it would be to capture that incredible woman and hold her in one's arms!

He waited for the restraining counter-thought to blast the reckless notion, but it did not come. She floated close to him.

her perfume an ineffable radiation that caused him to reach out and touch the rippling hem of her garment like a man in a dream.

**S**HE caught herself at the far wall and looked back at him, aware of his action. Her smile was light and inviting. "You could not catch me," she taunted, eyes wide and luminous.

The challenge thrummed in his ears like a plucked violin string. Involuntarily he tried to step towards her. His foot pawed empty space, for he had allowed himself to drift away from deck and bulkhead.

Again a shivering, muscular reaction ran through him. His hands clutched air, and he worked his legs helplessly. Slowly he was up-ending, but was it he who was moving? Or was it the room, the whole ship, space itself—slowly revolving about him?

A light, stinging slap to his cheek dispelled his growing dizziness, but it increased his rate of longitudinal rotation. Now Ramona was flitting about him on the rim of the spinning vortex of his crazy universe. Her laugh was provocative.

"My strong, brave Governor," she chuckled, "at las' he is going 'round with me." She somersaulted from a wall slowly, trying to match her rotation to Fuller's. As she neared him he reached for her, but his arms flailed clumsily. Ramona touched a palm to his chest and pushed. They separated, and suddenly he felt a wall at his back. The rotation ceased, but now it felt as though the room had stopped and *he* were spinning. He pushed off with his feet, aiming at one of the desk chairs to which to anchor himself. He missed and came up hard against the hull.

Before he could turn, a warm kiss brushed the nape of his neck. "Tag! You are it!" Ramona's voice at his ear caused his head to whirl, but she was gone. Waves of sensation spread down his spine and radiated out his limbs to his fingertips and toes. What was happening to his fine, synthetic restraint?

Even as the question flashed in his mind his legs doubled under him and he launched himself to the far corner where Ramona was momentarily hud-

dled striving to pat the billowing gown away from her head, down to her thighs and knees where it belonged. This time his direction was better, and he captured her before she freed herself.

"Non, non! It is not fair," she squealed. "You 'ave taken advantage—"

But already he had released his grip on the warm arm, the incredibly soft shoulder. *What was he doing?* The little vixen wanted this. She wanted to trap him in his emotions, to make a slave of the animal inside that was tearing his resolve to shreds.

Now her face was before him, tilted at a crazy angle, eyebrows arched, lips full and pouting. "Ver' well, fly away, but I will catch you at once."

Fuller's pulse throbbed in his temples as he fought for control. So easy it would be to reach out slowly and draw those lips to his—

To his amazement the thought seized command. His arms extended and closed about Ramona. Gently, like touching a cloud, he narrowed the circle,

and she floated to him, turning to parallel his stance.

"Ramona!"

"Raymond! The game—it is over so soon?" The black pupils were dilated as though she were drunk.

IT was insane to compromise his position with this woman! What kind of moral force could he provide on Venus if mere propinquity with a beautiful female could shatter all his own restraints? How could he hope to bottle up his virility for even five years if this wench could dissolve it in five days?

Forget it, his fevered brain told him. This is not Venus. You are a man, and no indoc-trination can deny you this—this one last experience. Besides, there is no *rule*, no *law* about celibacy for Governors.

Of course not, his sub-consciousness echoed. No rule is needed with the conditioning you have. Your post is one of responsibility and self-sacrifice. 80,000 men exist on Venus, 80,000 men and fewer than a thousand women. No, there is no law, no rule, but tradition denies you even the right to en-

ter the lottery that will determine Ramona's husband. Perhaps some day there will be mates enough to go around, but not now. Not yet.

She's no child! She's a widow. And her new husband will never know—

Stop! Morality is the key to civilization, and your job is to build, not destroy. *She would know. And you would know.*

The cold logic of his indoctrination thrust icy fingers into his brain, but Ramona was a living flame in his arms. The icy fingers melted away as their bodies met, and passion surged through his great body. She was soft and firm in his arms, clinging to him and crying out with tears of relief.

"I want you," she sobbed. "I must have you! Don't let them put me on the lottery!" She hugged him with a strength born of desperation. "You will love me. I will make you love me, and I will love you. Oh, my Raymond, my Raymond!"

Yes, she wants you, a small cynical voice told Fuller. She want to be the Governor's Lady and escape the hardships—

The voice was lost, over-

whelmed by the pounding of the blood in his skull. The negative thoughts, inhibitions, both artificial and common-sensed, buzzed around in his head like a swarm of angry gnats—no, more like the fragments of a gyroscopic flywheel that has vibrated apart and lost all its stability; or the neat pattern of iron filings on paper held over a magnet, suddenly deprived of their polarity and scattered by a careless shake.

How could a man align his thoughts in a mad universe where there is no up or down? How could he orient his purposes when the only solid mass within reach was the half-naked woman in his arms? Or draw a rational breath with his lips crushed by a savage, wanton kiss? Or slow the tempo of his heart when it raced to match the wild beating in her breast?

**S**UDDENLY the very air took on a sub-sonic vibration, soft, then increasing in volume with a familiar frequency. Something touched his ankle, foot, knee, elbow. Something firm and unyielding—pressing more persistently. The

wall annunciator hissed then spoke.

"Now hear this: All hands and passengers, alert! Prepare for 22 minutes of double gravity. Thrust will rise to two gravities in ten seconds. Here is the count off: Ten, nine, eight, seven—"

With each tolling word the deck pressed harder at Fuller's side until at "five" the body in his arms was full-weight. The significance of the announcement ripped through his brain, and he staggered to his feet swinging Ramona into a two-arm carry. Through the stateroom door to her quarters—to her couch.

"Three—two—one—zero."

They collapsed together. He struggled to escape against the thrust that had run his weight from zero up to 450 pounds in ten seconds, but Ramona's arms were locked about his neck. "Don' leave me, darling," she cried. "I'm frightened! It was so beautiful—to be free as the air. This is ugly. I feel gross, like an elephant. Don't let me feel that way, Raymond. Hold me! Hold me tight!"

But the iron filings were in

place now. The gyroscope, solid and stable, spun in his brain with perfect alignment. Up was up, and down was down once more. The weakness of mind and muscle vanished, for now there was resistance, direction, purpose.

Gently he broke her frantic grasp and straightened to his feet like a man lifting an invisible load, but it was a good, honest burden, one which he could understand. Looking down at the crumpled body of Ramona Waverly a twinge of remorse shot through him.

He leaned over, drew her legs out straight and arranged her comfortably on her couch. Then he pulled her gown taut to her ankles. Instantly it plastered itself as if electrostatically to every slender, fragile line of her body and limbs, a virtually invisible sheath that enhanced the subtle voluptuousness of her lithe form.

The animal in him was caged once more, but it had scented the prey. It prowled in his heart and brain, and when he went to his own couch the image of Ramona was seared in his retina. He could not erase

the vision of the firm breasts unflattened by the acceleration, heaving over her sobs, and the look of reproach and terror in her eyes, the fear wrought mainly from the significance of his desertion.

Could an emotion born of propinquity, and desperation approach the meaning of love? The alarm circuits in his brain clanged raucously. The question was irrelevant and dangerous. Deliberately he forced himself to think objectively, to analyze the breakdown of his mechanistic protection. How could such elaborate psychological conditioning fail so miserably. Did this mean that any unusual stress could peel the armor from his naked emotions? If so, he was as vulnerable and unfit to administer as any bearded Venusian sandhog.

But no, this wasn't right. The one contingency they could not provide against on earth was a failure of gravity. All his conditioning was oriented, body, mind and senses, within the normal field-gravity of earth. Venus' gravity was essentially the same, so a repetition was highly unlikely.

This was important, for the governor could command the presence and personal service of any soul on Venus. And any woman would come flying to the relative comfort of the governor's quarters at the first summons.

IT was the subject of much soul-searching in the chronicles that Fuller had been studying, but not until now had he fully understood the aching emptiness of which these men had written—

"Abstinence is the lot of the majority," Cottinghouse had written, "and so the tradition has grown that the Governor shares it. And he must enforce the sanctity of Venusian marriages, for monogamy is the heart of our morality, even as the family is the stable unit of our culture. And he must prosecute all acts of adultery and prostitution, and he must hold himself as a public object of celibacy! What a fool I was to think I could fulfill this measure! And so I close this log and admit defeat a year before my term is ended.

"I leave with the tradition unbroken, but I am not proud.

My record speaks well only for the efficacy of my conditioning. The bitterness I cannot endure further is the fact that there is no possible conditioning against the loneliness, the heartaching desire for the sound of a woman's voice, the touch of her hand. I have reached the state of self-pity where I envy the other unmarried men the exhausting labor and incredible discomforts and hardships that sap their vitality. My body is still strong, my mind relatively clear, but my will to administer is gone. It is no longer within my ability to pronounce sentence for acts of immorality, and the women have discovered this—"

Fuller had read these words, and similar ones of earlier governors, with contempt. It had appeared a mere problem of sublimation. Now he wasn't so certain. He pondered deeply long after the 22 minutes extra-acceleration had passed and normal gravity had returned.

A tap at his door roused him from his reverie. It was Ramona. She looked up at him with tear-rimmed eyes, but she managed a smile. "The—the

breakfast trays are here, and Captain Thorn just left. He wanted to know who in 'ell unlock my door?"

Fuller nodded gravely. "It was my error. I—I'm terribly sorry, Ramona."

"No, no! Don' say that!" She pressed her face to his chest and cried quietly. "I know how you feel now, but please don' hate me. I realize that what I want is impossible—I saw it in your eyes when you left me. But please, there is so little time left for me. Let me pretend."

Fuller put his hands on her shoulders. "That would only make it harder in the end," he said. "You must understand my position, Ramona."

"I do understand. It was stupid of me to think you would consider marrying a murderer—"

"Don't speak of that again," he said sharply. "When you marry a Venusian your debt is paid. You will never hear the word, 'exile', on Venus."

"But that does not diminish the fact. I may never return to Earth. And when your term is completed you will be free to

go back. So you would be a fool to marry me. In five years there would be children, and in that time you would love me for I would make you love me dreadfully." Her cheek against his chest was slippery with tears.

He shook his head. "You have the right answer but the wrong reasons. I do not intend to return to Earth, ever. I am dedicated to the colony and to my post as long as I can administer. But tradition demands that the governor not enter the lottery, and no free Earth-woman will willingly endure -" He broke off. It was cruel to remind her of the hardships ahead.

Now her small, lovely face was tilted up, her eyes searching his. "Forgive me," she said, "but I think you will fail like the others. Without a wife, without a family you will put down no roots. Sharing the men's bitter loneliness will not make you a better administrator—it will drive you back to Earth."

Fuller thought of Cottinghouse's entry in the log. They were silent for a long moment, and suddenly he became aware

that his arms somehow had slipped around Ramona and were holding her to him. Could the answer be as simple as this? Suppose Ramona were right and he, too, lost the will to administer when the ache grew too great to bear?

*The ache!* For the moment it was gone. Ramona's quiescent body in his arms filled the emptiness. This was no wild passion born of bewilderment. It was a completeness, and almost mystic feeling of security and fulfillment that all his careful conditioning had failed to give him—indeed, had failed to protect him against hungering for.

"The tradition be damned!" he said so loudly that she winced. "The council is wrong—"

"No, Raymond. Not wrong, just helpless," Ramona said. "As you told me, there is no law against Governors being married."

"But their ridiculous tradition—"

"How can it be avoided?"

"I'll tell you how. If you arrive as my wife they can't demand a lottery drawing."

"I don't see how—"

"The Captain. He can marry us. I'll call him right now."

"But Raymond—you must be sure, very, very sure this is what you want. The men will be resentful, perhaps. There will be trouble over it—"

"Whose side are you on?" he asked with a crooked smile, moving to the annunciator and pressing the button. "Besides, they'll get over it when they discover we are *both* permanent residents."

CAPTAIN Thorn concluded his conversation with his important passenger and broke the connection. What a crazy trip! Unexplained secret orders to kill the jets for 22 minutes, simulating engine breakdown, a last minute gift of a prayerbook from that slab-headed Thom Hogan, the dispatcher—whatever in hell that meant—and now a request for him to become the first space-freighter

captain in all history to perform a marriage ceremony.

Whoa! Maybe it did figure, after all!

He fumbled in his locker for the little black prayerbook and flipped it open. A hundred-dollar bill dropped out with a note attached:

"Dear Captain: What you need is on page 122 of this particular prayerbook, and just in case any fantastic explanations occur to you for certain incidents on this voyage, the attached money is to buy you enough whiskey in port to forget it. Don't thank me. The book and the money come from higher up. *Much higher up.*"

Thorn looked on page 122, chuckled and slipped a bookmark between the pages at that place.

It was the marriage ceremony.

THE END

---