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QUEST

by

Manly Banister

(illustration by FREAS)

The robots were no help at all when it came to assembling human beings, so Helsing's only way of finding company was to find a planet where human beings existed. But . . . what was this about humans being made in two models?

"I HAVEN'T the slightest idea how a human being is put together," said Alur, the robot. "I don't recall ever having assembled one."

Helsing scowled down at his personal robot, about half his own size, grotesquely anthropomorphic. The bright sheen of its rustless alloy shell contrasted with Helsing's pink, muscular nudity.

Raised in the automatic, temperature-regulated cities of Voranamor, he needed no clothes for protection; as the only living human being among a world full of robots, he didn't need them for reasons of modesty, either.

"I've read more books than you have parts," he growled.

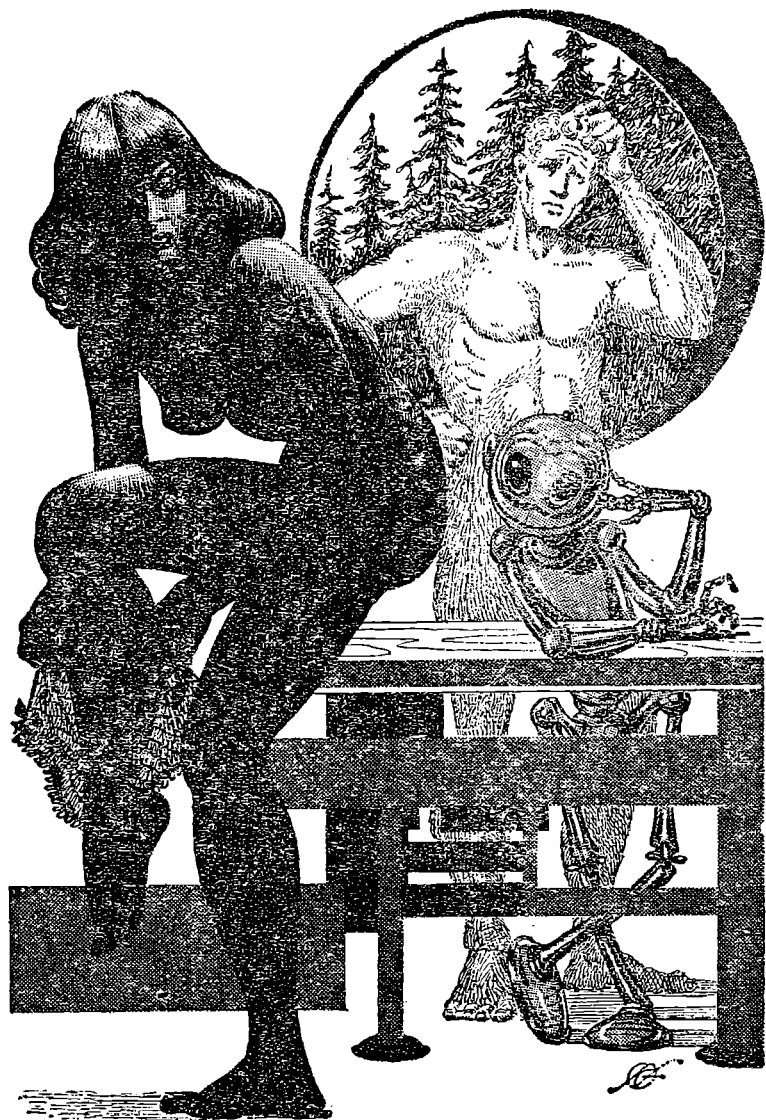
"All on the same subject. What I'm looking for is there, but made so tantalizingly mysterious, I don't understand it."

"You just missed the right one," suggested the robot. "You could go back and read some more."

"Go back to Voranamor? Give up the quest?" Helsing's sharp blue eyes clouded with outrage. He tossed long, pale yellow hair away from his intelligent, broad face. "I should say not!"

"It's your quest," said the robot resignedly. "Personally, I prefer Voranamor to this stuffy space ship. But don't let me tell you your business."

"Go away," said Helsing.



Helsing wasn't entirely sure that this was a human being—or did humans come in more than one model? It was very strange.

"Get aft and inspect the engines. Inflict yourself on Control!"

RESPONDING to orders, Alur retreated aft and inflicted himself on the Control robot. Control said they hadn't deviated from their course in umpteen days; hyperspace was sure a pretty sight when you were equipped to view it, and how much longer did they have to put up with that machine driver in the foreward compartment?

Alur said, disgruntled, "Be charitable. Helsing is only human."

"He must think he'll live forever," grumbled Control, "if he plans to scour every planet in the galaxy in *his* lifetime. Besides, I'm getting tired of doing nothing but steer the ship. I had more to think about when I was a kitchen robot in the home of an old couple..."

"That was a thousand years ago," interrupted Alur. "There aren't any more old couples on Voranamor; or young ones, either. Helsing is the last of his kind. We took you out of mothballs for this trip. You ought to be grateful."

"I am...to a point. I guess there are few enough of us robots in active service."

"Only what are needed to keep the basic mechanical levels of the cities going," Alur agreed. "It isn't so bad,

now that the humans are all gone. We've more time for leisure."

"Where did they go?" Control wanted to know.

"Nowhere. They just fell over, one by one; they called it 'dying'. The human beings died off. It's something like being mothballed; somebody pulled their fuses and put them away. After Helsing stops, we'll be on our own."

"It would be lonely, being the only robot in the universe," said Control.

"Or the only human being," added Alur. A sudden hum developed in the little robot's thorax and grew loud. "That gear! I'll have to get it out of there and put in a new one. It's the third thoracic angle-of-stance adjustment; the worm is worn. Notice how I tilt a trifle to the right as I walk?"

Alur walked up and down, demonstrating. Control was sympathetic.

"I'll have a new gear turned out for you, when I get around to it. Maybe if Helsing could change a few gears in himself, he wouldn't be such a machine driver. You'd think we were witless."

"If he could, he doesn't know how. They made us with built-in knowledge of self-repair. They didn't seem to care so much about themselves."

Alur paused, thoughtful. "No, human beings were never like robots. How they were

manufactured was always beyond me, I never could figure it out. They made them real little, no bigger than my brain-case. They grew as time went on; got big as Helsing. Would you believe it?"

HELSING had his own quarters on the space ship, commodious enough, but confining. The voyage had already been long. He had looked in on bare, creatureless worlds, worlds of bizarre population, worlds of all kinds. Creature comforts and entertainment devices had long ago ceased to help assuage the ache inside him.

The ship was his idea; the voyage was his project. He was captain and passenger at the same time. The robots ran the ship, and very well, too.

Helsing knew nothing of his parents, or of any other human being. He could remember only the robots, who had nursed him, reared him, taught him, and fed him. In his heart was deep affection for these personalities in metal, which his people had created, long, long ago; but he could understand them no better than they could understand him.

He knew he was different from the robots, but he didn't know how or why. He was a human being; they were robots. When he was very young, he had thought that perhaps he had been the re-

sult of a mistake on the assembly line. Alur often assured him that this was not so.

He had sought enlightenment in the pictures and pages of the books that crammed Voranamor's deserted libraries. Libraries by the hundred thousand; books by the billion! How could he hope to read them all? No, if he were something different from the robots, he was at least not unique. There had been others like him before on Voranamor—there might now be others of his kind elsewhere in the universe.

All he had to do was find them.

He had never questioned the immediate response of the robots to his slightest wish, nor wondered why it was so. He had told them what he wanted, and they had produced it—the great ship that now flung itself across the void among the stars...so that he could search out another world where possibly...just possibly...

EVERY SYSTEM they approached was a new beacon, ablaze with the fire of hope. No matter that each time, so far, the hopeful glow had dimmed to the dull ashes of disappointment. Helsing still lived...and Seeing had located another solar system...dead ahead...

Alur plodded about Hel-

sing's quarters, picking up the things the man had carelessly dropped. "Perhaps this will be it," said the robot. "There are planets and the right kind of sunlight. Control says we will put on the brakes very soon."

Helsing was nervous. He paced the floor.

"I had such a nice time, talking to Control," Alur went on. "I should visit back there more often. Control told me about its dream."

"I didn't know you could dream," said Helsing. "You never sleep."

"We dream, just the same," asserted Alur. "We don't spend all our time thinking about rational things, any more than you do. Control dreamed that we were married."

"Don't be silly. Only human beings married. It means they lived together."

"Just so," said Alur. "We lived together, Control and I. We had a family of little robots."

"Are you making fun of me?" asked Helsing.

"Of course not. I'm telling you Control's dream."

Helsing frowned in puzzlement. "Did...?" He hesitated. "Did Control say—uh—how you came by the—uh—little robots?"

"We had an assembly line in the basement," said Alur. "We made them ourselves. Wasn't that splendid?"

Helsing looked ferocious.

"I want to know if you learned anything that would help me!"

"Of course not. Human beings are not robots."

HELSING continued to walk up and down. "Tell me about this new solar system coming up. What's it like?"

Alur began to spout galactic co-ordinates, spatial counter-positions, and inter-continua relationships, expressed in fourth degree mathematical logic.

"Never mind all that," Helsing said crossly. "When do we land?"

"We've already landed," replied the robot cheerfully.

"What!" Helsing sprang to the view screen. It stared at him blankly.

"Control!" Alur sang out sweetly. "Do turn on the juice in this screen, will you? Helsing wants to look outside."

Helsing looked eagerly upon a world of forest and blue mountains that hazed away in steps to a misty horizon. Control had landed them on a mountainside, and far below, a blue lake twinkled in the golden flood of light from a yellow sun. Helsing was too moved to speak.

"Surely," he breathed at last, "there *must* be human beings here!"

"As a matter of fact," said Alur, affecting boredom, "the place crawls with them. Control set us down where we

would be least likely to run into any."

"What for? I want to see some people!"

"In good time," replied Alur wisely. "It is better to study them at a distance, first."

"Let me out, then," Helsing grumbled. "I want to breathe some fresh air."

"Oh— oh!" Alur was alarmed.

"What's the matter? Tell Control to let me out!"

"I don't think," said the robot, "that Control was careful enough."

"Stop talking and open the ship!"

Alur pointed at the screen. "There is a human being out there."

HELSING'S heart leaped. He looked and beheld the creature, a long way off, lurking in the shadow of the forest. It was disappointing to make nothing of it but a spotty kind of colored movement.

"Your eyes must be better than mine," he said bitterly. "That could be anything."

"You might go out and call it over," suggested the robot.

Alur spoke gently again to Control. The wall split down the middle and drew apart. Helsing stepped out on the surface of the planet, emotion leaping within him. Human beings—*real* human beings at last! Gladness possessed him, joy, the intoxication of the moment. He did an impromptu dance on the weathered-

brown pine needles covering the ground. Pink toes flashed, contacted a bit of gray rock protruding into the open.

Helsing danced on one foot, clutched the other and yelped with anguish.

"Now you've done it!" protested Alur. "You've scared it away. What are you making like that for, anyway?"

Helsing frowned fiercely; it did no good to tell the robot about pain. He turned toward the whispering, wind-stirred forest, peering. The sunlight glinted on the fresh green of waving needles, made sepia shadows of the forest depths.

Helsing called out. "Hey! Come here!" He turned to Alur. "Where did it go?"

"It's hiding in the brush," said Alur. "I can sense it. Shall I fetch it?"

"Please do," said Helsing, feeling inferior.

THE ROBOT disappeared into the woods. Presently, there came a piercing shriek, followed by a thunderous trampling and breaking of brush that diminished into faint noise in the distance. Alur came out, lugging a limp form.

"Is that a human being?" asked Helsing, poking at it.

It was somewhat smaller than himself, with a great deal of curled, yellow hair on its head. The eyes were closed, the mouth unnatural-

ly red. In its unconscious state, it looked somehow frail and delicate.

"What are those wrappings on it?" Helsing wanted to know.

"Clothes," said Alur. "People on Voranamor used to wear them. That's how I knew it was a human being."

"It doesn't look very human," said Helsing, doubtfully.

"Two arms, two legs," Alur pointed out. "Head, eyes, mouth, and so forth. Those are the marks of a human being. Moreover, it's intelligent, or approximately so. It was about to climb on a four-legged something and ride away when I surprised it. Did you hear the noise the creature made escaping?"

"I heard it," admitted Helsing. "Let's get this thing inside and take the wrappings off. Maybe it'll look more human."

A little later, with great disappointment, Helsing said, "It certainly isn't human! Take it back out and leave it in the brush."

"On the contrary," disagreed the robot, "it *is* human."

"It looks nothing at all like me," argued Helsing, stiffly.

"For your information," said Alur, "human beings are manufactured in two models. This is one of the other models. Wake it up and ask it what you want to know."

"It doesn't seem to be damaged," observed Helsing, look-

ing it over. "Before we wake it up, give it a shot with the hypno-learner, charged with Voranamorese. I'll talk to it."

ALLEN MORGAN awoke to a dim feeling of disorientation. Vague memories flitted through her mind, still fogged with shock. She recalled riding Star through the dappled light and shade of the pines, up and away from the ranch house at the lake. Had Star slipped and thrown her? Why had she been riding? Oh, yes. Joel. She and Joel had quarreled. He was such a bore. All he thought of was marriage. Wouldn't take no...

A feeling of urgency gripped her. Riding...riding...then...what? Where was Star? Where was she? Her eyes flew open, ranged wildly. What was this spacious room? Certainly, not the living room of her father's ranch house, nor any other room in it. Her glance passed over Alur, returned, froze. She started up.

The *Thing* in the forest! Memory came back in a stunning flood. The ship dropping down from the sky...

A pink, unclothed giant swam into distorted view. Alene choked on her fear.

"You're all right," Helsing said kindly. "Nobody will hurt you."

The syllables fell on her ears with strange sound and cadence, but she understood them. How could that be?

"Where... where am I?" she asked, in the same, alien sound and cadence. She was surprised. Talking it, too!

"You're in the ship. I want to talk to you."

Allene sat up, looked down at herself with startled horror.

"My clothes...!"

She grabbed riding breeches from the floor, scrambled into them, her back to the curiously observing giant. She gathered the rest of her clothes, flung them on, flaming with embarrassment. She knuckled the last button into place, whirled on them.

"Who are you? What do you want? You'd better let me go!"

"I am Helsing of Voranamor," he said, ignoring her outburst. "I came here in search of some human beings."

"Which ones?" she asked cautiously.

"Any!" he returned impatiently. "There are many human beings on this world. You are obviously not one yourself, but you could tell me where to find them."

Allene frowned. "Flattery will get you nowhere. I'm just as human as you are... if you are human."

SHE BACKED warily a little distance away, but, as the stranger made no overt move to harm her, her racing pulses quieted.

"Sit down," said Hel-

sing simply. "Let me tell you about myself."

He told her about himself, the robots, and Voranamor. Allene palmed yellow curls away from her round, pretty face. Her blue eyes quite matched Helsing's for alert intelligence.

He smiled happily at her understanding. "I have been so lonely, and I have come a very long way. The human beings of this world can give me the technical knowledge I seek, to take back to Voranamor."

Allene looked around at the sumptuous appointments of the ship, obviously awed. She chose the opportunity for some rapid thinking. She had ridden for about an hour that morning. Star, running in fright along the forest trail, would make it back to the ranch in a third of that time, or less. When the horse returned riderless, her father and the hands would ride out in search of her. Perhaps even Joel would come along. She contrasted her mental image of Joel with the magnificent physique of Helsing. Joel wasn't in it.

"We're pretty careful with technical knowledge nowadays," she said cautiously, "but maybe the President could help you."

"Who?"

"The President of the United States. He's sort of in charge of all the scientific and technical information in

this country, you know. Of course, he won't tell us about it, so I don't know why he would tell you."

She looked around, anxiously. "How do I get out of here? I really ought to be going. My folks will be worried..."

THE WAY she kept throwing in English words when Voranamorese had no equivalent confused Helsing. He understood, however, that she wanted to leave. After the initial shock of viewing Allene's appearance had worn thin, he had begun to think that she looked a little bit of all right. He was now willing to concede that she *did* look human, especially with her wrappings on.

But her words had him worried. The information he sought was so secret that only one man on this whole world knew it! He looked unhappily at Alur. The robot wagged its head in commiseration.

"I might as well warn you," Allene put in hastily, misconstruing the exchange of glances between the two for stubborn intent to hold her captive, "that my horse has let them know at the ranch that something has happened to me. My people will be coming to look for me."

"You should have caught that horse-thing, too," Helsing said to the robot.

"You don't know what you're saying!" protested Alur.

Helsing turned to Allene. "You may as well stay until your people get here. Tell me, you really are a human being, aren't you? Alur says there are two models. You obviously are not a *he*, like me."

"I believe you are the last man of your race!" said Allene. "Otherwise, you'd know I'm a *she*!"

Helsing nodded, glumly. "Just my luck...after I've searched half the galaxy for humans like myself!"

"Most men would be tickled to death to find a human like me, anywhere in the old galaxy!" snapped Allene.

A FLICKER of movement on the viewscreen attracted her attention.

"There's my folks, now!" She peered closely. A file of horsemen came trotting out of the woods. "Yep! That's Dad...there's Slim and Hank..." Her tone of excitement dropped to a dismal mutter. "And there's Joel!"

Helsing looked over her shoulder. "Those are your people?"

"Yes. The big one, on the bay in front, is my father!"

"What's a father?"

"You'll find out, if he thinks you've been improper." She shivered. "Boy, won't Joel be annoyed...when he finds I've spent the last hour with you!"

"Why should he be?" asked Helsing, puzzled. "Is Joel human?"

"Yes, and a jealous one. He wants to marry me."

"I know what that is," said Helsing naively. He regarded Joel's image on the screen with jealous interest. "Do you want to live with *him*?"

Woman's instinct sensed what Helsing did not even know he expressed. Allene shrugged, with an arch expression. "I don't know. I may!"

Helsing scowled. The men on horseback picked their way cautiously around the ship from Voranamor, looking it over, talking excitedly among themselves.

"You are the first human beings I have met in the galaxy," said Helsing, worriedly. "I must at least try to get the information I want."

"I would suggest," said Allene, "that you don't let anybody know you're here for a while. You would be mobbed! After you've learned your way around, we'll try to get you in touch with somebody who can help you. We can put you up at the ranch, if you'd like. Dad would be tickled to death...he's always been interested in the stars. And Mom would love to have you. You can come with me now..."

She stopped her mouth with the back of her hand, stared wide-eyed.

"Good heavens...you need clothes!"

"Wrappings!" groaned Helsing. "Must I?"

"Just let *me* out," she said

succinctly. "I'll send one of the boys back from the ranch with some duds."

HELSING had never known that life could have such spice, such peace and contentment. Living at the Morgan Dude Ranch, among other human beings, was an experience he reveled in...in spite of the rather tight-fitting overalls, shirt and shoes he had been outfitted with—extras of Dad Morgan's.

Helsing understood that the ranch entertained guests during the summer, but the season was early yet, and Joel was the only guest present. Joel wasn't really a guest, either; he merely hung around, hoping Allene would marry him. Somehow, Helsing was glad she wouldn't do it.

Bulging at the seams and pinching at the toes, he wandered over the ranch with Allene and the inseparable robot, marveling at everything he saw. He was unaware of the ludicrous figure he cut in the borrowed clothes; but he was sensitive enough to know how foolish he would look if he tried to ride one of the horses, as Allene suggested.

Even after a week of living with the family, of talking, asking and answering questions, Helsing still did not understand much about terrestrial social life. He tried to make friends with the hands, but Hank and Slim

acted nervous when he was around, tried to teach him to roll a cigaret, and failed. The ranch animals shied away from Alur, no doubt frightened by his shell of gleaming, rustproof alloy.

Joel was surly, and Helsing deliberately ignored him. Instinct raised a barrier between them that Helsing, for one, was willing to let it stand.

NONE OF the ranch people would allow themselves to be persuaded to enter the space ship for a turn at the hypo-learner. Therefore, Allene served as interpreter, doing valiant duty in the question-and-answer field between Helsing and her father. Helsing liked Dad Morgan, and answered his questions willingly. He also liked Mom Morgan. Allene's mother had a profusion of white hair, a kindly smile, and wide, candid blue eyes, very like Allene's. She went to no end of trouble to discover what foods Helsing favored and to prepare special dishes for him.

Helsing spent carefree days lounging in the shade of the blossoming apple trees with Allene, listening to the droning vibration of bees on the cool air. It was good to be alive, he thought—good to be with Allene. He told her about his childhood on Voranamor, how the robots had taught him and cared for him. She answered his ques-

tions about Earth, but the complex of her answers remained hazy to him. He could make little sense of so far-flung a culture on short notice.

Alur leaned boredly against my apple tree, humming softly in the thorax.

"I haven't said a word!" protested Allene.

"I was talking to Alur," said Helsing. He pulled a blade of grass and bit it. "Hear that hum? It's unusual."

"It's my stance control gear," said the robot apologetically. "I haven't got around to replacing it. I'm sorry if it bothers you."

"I can't get over it," murmured Allene. "*That's* a machine, yet it seems almost human!"

Helsing grinned. "I'll say so! I just found out robots can dream. Control dreamed it was married to Alur. They had an assembly line in the basement, where they made little robots."

Allene got up and started away. Helsing jumped up and followed.

"Where are you going? What did I do?"

She turned a cold glance on him. "Stranger to our world, or not, Mr. Helsing, I *don't* care for your insinuations!"

JOEL APPEARED, ducking under the limb of the apple tree. He looked sourly at Helsing said something to

Allene. The girl tossed her head in Helsing's direction and walked off arm in arm with the interloper.

Helsing sat down and glared at Alur. "Are you sure there are two models of humans?"

"Positive," asserted the robot.

Helsing puzzled the situation, wondering what had possessed Allene.

"If I am human," he said to Alur, "and Allene is human, there must be a reason for having two models. What is it? Did you see how angry she got? I mentioned little robots..."

"I was never one to snoop in human affairs," Alur defended. "I don't profess to understand them. I just do my duty, that's all."

"Why did people marry on Voranamor, Alur?"

"I don't know," the robot answered truthfully. "It was some kind of human institution. They all lived that way—a couple here, a couple there. Come to think of it—they had a word they used a great deal. Love."

"Love," murmured Helsing. "Do I love Allene? I would certainly like to marry her!"

"Talk sense," grumbled Alur.

"A lot of help you are," sneered Helsing. "How long did you hang around humans? You must have had five or six chassis before

this one. A thousand years? And you don't know the first thing about humans!"

"I didn't live with them," reproved Alur. "I just served them—as I do you."

"Ha!" said Helsing. "I've been doing better by myself. How did I know it wasn't proper for a grown man to be spoon-fed by a robot? You let me think it was all right. I learned different from Allene. Now I can feed myself, thank you."

"The duty of a robot is to serve," murmured Alur religiously. "May I serve you with a suggestion?"

"If you think it has value, you may."

"Find out from that girl, or somebody, what you came here to learn; and let's get back to Voranamor. The climate here is too humid. I think I'm beginning to rust." The robot looked critically at its gleaming thorax of rustproof alloy.

"YOU SAW what happened when I tried to lead into the subject," Helsing pointed out. "She got up and flounced off with Joel. These people have turned all their science and technology over to one man, it seems, and it insults them when you try to talk about it."

"In your place," said Alur coldly, "I shouldn't have wasted so much time. When you had her in your power

in the ship was when you should have asked her."

Helsing hung his head and pulled at the grass. "I could have, couldn't I?" he admitted feebly.

He lifted his glance to the grandeur of the forested mountains ringing the ranch at the edge of the lake.

"As soon as I find out what I came here for, we'll have to go back to Voranamor, Alur, and get things started. I like it here. I... I thought I could put the question off... until I felt more like leaving..."

PERHAPS Alur was right, Helsing thought as the family gathered that evening in the long, heavily-raftered living room of the ranch house. He liked it here, no doubt about that, but it was high time he was leaving.

He brooded, while Allene translated the questions her father put to him and translated back the answers he gave. Finally, Dad and Mom Morgan excused themselves and went to bed.

Suddenly, it was all very dull and boring, and Helsing looked toward the robot, as if seeking in that creature of metal and subtle electronic currents a solution to the enigma he had come so far to solve.

"Ask her now," suggested Alur.

Joel still sat up with them, suspiciously alert and sullen. He was always around, Helsing thought with a trace of

rancor. Of course, Joel couldn't understand the conversation that went on between Helsing and Allene, so he doubtless thought they were talking about him.

Helsing drew a deep breath ordering his thoughts.

"Allene," he said. "It is time now I went back to Voranamor. But first I must get the information I came for. You must locate for me the person who can answer my question."

She glanced at him, startled. "Certainly...but what...?"

Helsing drew a deep breath and plunged ahead. "One thing I must know. How do you make little human beings?"

She drew back, astonished. In another moment, the real meaning of his earnest question might have penetrated. Joel filled the breach. "Is that lunk trying to get fresh?"

She whirled. "No! Joel—don't!"

Whatever had been going on in the frustrated Joel's consciousness while he sat there, Helsing would never know. A fistful of knuckles, connected to the end of Joel's long arm, slammed against the side of his head and knocked him sprawling from his chair. Helsing rolled across the carpet, scrambled to his feet.

"Command me to punish him for striking you!" cried Alur, incensed, all the little robot's radio-activated loyalty aroused by the deed.

"Never mind!" barked Helsing. He wiped a smear of blood from his cheek.

JOEL STOOD panting, glaring, arms akimbo. He swung again, and Helsing caught his fist. Seizing the other, he brought the two together, slung Joel like a sack over his shoulder. Anger, deep and terrible, churned inside him. He strode wordless from the house, Joel kicking and yelping on his back.

Helsing's lips were white and grim. He had never felt anger in his life before. Annoyed he had been, yes. Piqued. But burning, hateful anger—never!

Allene ran after them, pounding on Helsing's shoulder and ribs, pleading with him to release Joel. Helsing paid no heed. He was through, finished with Earth, he would go back to Voranamor and live out his life with the robots, alone, and better off for it. But first, he had to do what he was about to do.

Helsing strode across the ranch yard in the moonlight. At the horse trough by the corral, he paused, dumped Joel in, and wheeled toward the forest trail. Joel splashed and yelled.

Allene pulled at Helsing's arm. "Where are you going?"

"Back to Voranamor!" he growled stiffly. "If you people are human, I am a freak. I belong on my own world."

She hauled him around, furiously.

"What's the matter with you, you big ape?" He thought there were tears in her eyes, but the moonlight was not bright. He didn't know why there should be. He halted, a feeling of depthless vacancy inside him.

He said, bitterly, "I asked you a question. The answer to it means a great deal to me. I..."

Her look was incredulous. "Don't...don't you really know?" she whispered.

"If I knew," he ground out, "would I be here? I would have reepeople Voranamor long ago!"

"Sit down!" she said kindly.

HE SAT ON a nearby stone and looked at her. She knelt in front of him. Joel had pulled himself dripping from the trough and slunk off toward the house.

She said, "I must be just beginning to understand. Our human prudery, dear Helsing, sometimes confuses things terribly. You think human beings are manufactured like robots, don't you?"

"Aren't they?" he challenged.

She laughed, a silly little giggle. "Oh...forgive me, Helsing! I am not laughing at you...really!"

She looked up into his shadowed face. The moon was on her own, showing the mirth there...and something

else Helsing could not name.

"How can I make you understand, without a course in applied biology, Helsing? Do you know..." Her eyes sparkled, and she winked conspiratorially. "Joel is dreadfully jealous of you!"

"Jealous?" He was uncomprehending.

"He thinks you want to marry me!"

"I do," he replied simply. "What is wrong about that? But you want to marry Joel, and all I really want is..."

She put a cool finger against his lips. "I know, I know." She puckered her smooth forehead thoughtfully. "You must forget about going back to Voranamor, Helsing."

"Why must I?"

"DON'T YOU see, poor dear? You've been cared for so thoroughly by the robots, you are practically incapable of caring for yourself. Why, the thing even fed you with a spoon, until I taught you different! And, if you hadn't got very angry tonight—angry enough to fight your own battle—you might even have let Alur fight for you! I think it's the first time in your life you have been angry. I also think, if you *do* go back to Voranamor, you will die there... and that will be the end of your race, won't it?"

"Yes," he agreed miserably.

"I can see Voranamor now," she said dreamily, "just by

closing my eyes. Robots everywhere, thick as fleas. Haven't you any idea what made your race die out, Helsing?... Too much service! *They died of plain boredom!*"

He regarded her gloomily. "That is probably true. But dead though it is, Voranamor is my world. There is nothing here for me, except fighting... feelings I don't understand... anger!"

"Anger!" she cried. "Anger is good, Helsing! We of Earth are an angry people! Anger has built the world we know and love. Anger against terrorism made us band together into nations; and anger against oppression made us free! When man has nothing more to anger him, nothing more to make him rise up and fight... Well, we *Earthmen* aren't dying out, Helsing!" She paused. "We don't have robots, either."

Alur moved self-consciously, gleaming in the moonlight. "I think she wants you to stay, Helsing."

Helsing looked at the robot helplessly. "How can I do that?"

"Marry her and find out."

Helsing looked a question at Allene.

She nodded. "I think... Alur is right, Helsing."

Helsing turned back to the robot. "What are you waiting for?"

"Your permission to serve," said the robot humbly.

Helsing felt Allene's hand clasped in both of his. Her flesh was firm between his palms.

"Serve me then no longer," said Helsing. "Go back to Voranamor."

The robot turned. From the forest path came the humming of a worn gear, faint sound that diminished into silence. Helsing looked stricken. He started to his feet, took a step after Alur. He felt Alene's tug on his arm.

He said, looking down at her, "You couldn't have meant it!"

"But I did! Yes...I did, my dear. For a while, I didn't know. You were so helpless...so...I don't know what. I pitied you. Then...what you

did to Joel showed that your manhood isn't all on the surface. I know now you have the quality I want...in the man I love!"

Helsing didn't know what to do, so Allene did it for him. His first kiss was an experience, unexpected, unsought, vital, satisfying. Instinct helped. He put his arms around her and held her close.

He said, "Alur is gone, and I shall be sorry for it. But it does not matter, now that I have you, Allene. Not even the secret I was looking for matters..."

She squeezed him joyfully, happily. "We'll get around to that, too," she murmured, and kissed him again.