

# SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

CONTENTS • JULY 1953 • VOL. 1, NO. 5

## FEATURE NOVEL

LEGACY FROM MARS, by *Raymond Z. Gallun* . . . . . 6

## NOVELETTE

THE NEST, by *Poul Anderson* . . . . . 64

## SHORT STORIES

SEMANTIC COURTSHIP, by *Irving E. Cox, Jr.* . . . . . 48

LEAGUE OF LEFT-HANDED MEN, by *Russell Branch* . . . . . 91

LONG LIFE TO YOU, ALBERT, by *William Morrison* . . . . . 104

## SERIAL

POLICE YOUR PLANET, by *Erik van Lhin (Part Three)* . . . . . 125

## DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL . . . . . 4

COMING UP . . . . . 90

THE DISSECTING TABLE . . . . . 115

COVER BY SCHOMBURG • ILLUSTRATIONS BY EBERLE • SMITH • EBEL • FREAS • ORBAN

SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES is published bi-monthly by Future Publications, Inc., 89 Fifth Avenue, New York 11, N. Y. Copyright 1953 by Future Publications, Inc. All rights, including translation in foreign countries reserved. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. Subscription \$3.50 for 12 issues in the United States and Possessions; \$4.50 in Canada; \$5.00 elsewhere. All stories in this issue are new and have not previously been published. No actual persons are designated in works of fiction, either by name or character; any similarity is coincidental. Not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts or art work. All submissions must include return postage to expedite the return of manuscripts not acceptable.

PHILIP ST. JOHN • Editor  
BILL BRADLEY • Circulation Mgr.  
DAVID GELLER • Advertising Mgr.  
H. L. MITCHELL • West Coast Office

E. K. HARRISON • Associate Editor  
DAMON KNIGHT • Book Editor  
JOHN VINCENT • Associate Editor  
M. BERWIN • Art Director

# SEMANTIC COURTSHIP

BY IRVING E. COX, JR.

ILLUSTRATED BY SMITH

There are a lot of words that sound nice, but come out to be pretty hollow noises when you analyze them. And there are others so deeply rooted in Man's self-deception that they usually can't be analyzed. Like love, or freedom. . . .

Paula Ogden dropped the writing tube and pushed the paper aside. "It's going badly today, Friend Kraela," she admitted.

"You've been concentrating too much." His fragile face-scales quivered with distress. "Take the day off, Friend Ogden."

"Oh, I don't need a rest; I'm used to hard work. It's your language that creates the problem." Paula spoke in sing-song Venusian, because it had been easier for the Earth-expedition to learn that tongue than to teach the larger number of their hosts English.

"The others make the same complaint."

"Venusian is far simpler than English," Paula said. "At least in structure. It took us less than a month to learn to use it. But it's so different!" She gestured toward the page she had been writing. The language symbol was an unbroken, graph-like line wavering between parallels ruled across the page. The upper parallel was the highest note theoretically possible in the musical speech of Venus; the bottom, the lowest. As the written line danced between the two extremes, it indicated exact variations in sound. "You speak in terms of ideas," Paula explained. "You don't have names for things and actions, the way we do."



"It would cause confusion," Kraela said. "What is the value of a naming word to a language, Friend Ogden? If you speak, you intend to convey ideas."

Paula laughed. "In theory, yes. But translation from English into Venusian can be disastrous."

"In time it will come more smoothly, I'm sure." Friend Kraela moved through the sliding door in the gold-plated inner wall. Slim, green scaled, Kraela was a man-sized lizard with a peculiarly fragile and humanly expressive face.

As the Venusian departed, Curt Hallen entered Paula's cubicle. She felt the familiar annoyance. She reminded herself that Hallen commanded the expedition; she was expected to respect him and she tried to. But Paula considered that Hallen had gone native, because he had been the first to take a wife from among the women of the expedition, and he always spoke Venusian, even when he was alone with the Earth-people.

In the unchanging summer heat of Venus, Commander Hallen wore only the skin-tight trousers of his nylon flight uniform. He was a large, muscular, dark-haired man, naked above the waist. He had a belt of rusting cartridges slung over his shoulder and a rusting revolver

buckled to his waist. He stood by her writing table, his legs spread wide, his jet eyes smouldering with anger.

"You've got to make up your mind, Paula," he said. "They were quarreling again this morning."

"I've given you my answer, Commander Hallen." Her voice was cold; but her blood was pounding. "I won't be tied down."

"The old standards don't apply, Paula. You have to take Collins or Jergensen. If you settle it between them, I think I can keep the other three under control."

"I don't have to do anything, Commander. I'm a free woman; I mean to keep it that way."

"Even if you split the expedition wide open?"

"Why blame me?" She stood and looked down through the transparent wall into the crowded, gold-paved square in front of the Institute Building. Hallen joined her, clenching his fists.

"There are only twelve of us, Paula."

"Twelve or twelve billion—what difference does the number make? I don't want a husband, Commander Hallen."

His hand clamped down hard on her wrist and he jerked her roughly away from the wall. "We're eight men and four

women stranded in an alien world—perhaps for the rest of our lives. Paula, you can't put it off any longer. We have to stop this childish competition for your attention."

"What the men do hardly concerns me."

"It concerns all of us! We can't survive if we're splintered into factions!"

"Give your advice to the men, then; I'll look after myself."

"I've never heard such blind, egocentric nonsense!" His hand came up and struck the side of her face. She reeled away from him, her eyes blazing with fury. Paula reached for the rusting revolver strapped to her hips; but her hand drew back when the door in the gold-plated wall slid open. Kraela stood on the threshold, his face-scales trembling.

"Friend Hallen! We've just received a report from the southern islands. Our men there believe they have located the ore-rock you need. They've sent samples; perhaps you'd like to see them?"

"Of course, Friend Kraela," Hallen replied. *Friend* was the only title of courtesy used among the Venusians. Sometimes Paula found it insipid and annoying, as she did their whole elaborate social ritual.

Paula was left alone. She stood for a long time looking down into the streets and canals of the Venusian capital. In the transparent wall, built from the hardened sap of the Venusian ivy-tree, she saw the dim reflection of her face—thin, hollow-cheeked, serious and scholarly. Her black hair was pulled into a tight bun at the back of her head; thick glasses glittered over her pale eyes.

Her body, in the frayed nylon uniform, was appealingly feminine, with the inviting curves of youth. But her face destroyed the illusion. The mouth was too large; the teeth were too prominent. And her long, blunt nose gave her a faint resemblance to a horse.

The reflection awoke bitter memories. She looked into the face of herself as a hatchet-faced schoolgirl, forever buried in a mountain of textbooks. The boys had never asked Paula for a date; and Paula revenged herself on her loneliness by winning recognition as a scholar. In college the same pattern persisted. She had deliberately and defiantly emphasized her plain appearance, flaunting it like armor.

Grimly she turned back to her writing table. She read through the idea she had been setting down when Friend Kraela had first interrupted her.

"Beyond the Endless and Eternal Mist of Venus is a condition of no-air, no-heat, no-cold, a great emptiness in which an infinite number of light-sources and living-globes—"

It was crudely expressed. Paula wondered if the idea symbols which she had used were accurate. Was "light-source" a correct referent for a star? Or "living-globe" a proper generalization for all the numberless satellite planets? The translation of the science she knew into Venusian ideas exposed a host of terms which Paula had always used as if the name-words were, in fact, the things-named. It had been a subtle psychological shock for her to discover the extent of her verbal dependence.

She doggedly blotted out the half-sentence and began again.

For six months the twelve survivors of the stranded Earth-expedition had been housed by the Venusians in the sprawling Institute Building, the center of Venusian science. The Earth-people had occupied the time sampling the Venusian accumulation of scientific knowledge, and trying to explain their own. It was a fair exchange in theory, but difficult to implement, for the cultures were as alien as the reptilian evolution of Venus was different from the anthropoid

human descent. The only common meeting ground was an equivalent concept of rationality.

The door in the golden wall slid open and Thor Jergensen came into Paula's cubicle. Like Commander Hallen, he was naked except for nylon flight trousers. He was a huge man; a tangled mass of yellow hair curled above his round, earnest, undistinguished face; his arms bulged with a farmer's muscles.

"Have you heard the news, Paula?"

"What news? I've been working here all morning, Thor."

"The Venusians have found an ore with traces of silver in it!"

"Traces!" she repeated with disgust. "We've had false alarms before."

"I suppose you're right," he admitted. "We may never find enough metal to make an alloy of gold. We're stuck on Venus until the Earth sends out another expedition." He paused, licking his lips. "Then we have to face the situation squarely, Paula, and make the best of it."

"I am, Thor." Casually she drew her revolver and scraped at the thick coating of rust, caressing the handle significantly. She was not sure how much longer the weapon would remain in working order. Perhaps the oxidation had already destroyed

the firing mechanism. But the revolver still represented a symbolic threat and a symbolic security.

"Paula, do you find all of us so very unattractive that—"

"I have no need for a man, Thor."

"None of us is self-sufficient; we need each other. I—I want you, Paula."

She laughed. "Because I'm the only unmarried woman on Venus?"

"Because you're a woman, Paula."

She lashed at him with scalding sarcasm, "Your proposal, Thor, simply vibrates with romance! You sweep me off my feet!"

"Under other conditions, I might try, Paula; this is too important for that. The words we would use on Earth have other connotations; I'm trying to say exactly what I mean. We have a duty as human beings to build a successful Earth colony on Venus and survive until—"

"I have only one duty, Thor—to myself, to my integrity as a person. I won't be shackled to any man."

"Marriage is a working-together, a mutual sharing."

"Not love, Thor?"

"What else is love, except that?"

"Oh, come now, Thor! You've

been around. Love's an illusion. Men talk of love, but after marriage the sharing is all one-sided. They don't care what a woman knows, what her mind is like—"

"That sometimes happens on the Earth, Paula; it couldn't happen here."

"Men want their women to be pretty and empty-headed. They surround us with machines that do all our work, and give us nothing to occupy our leisure time. They're jealous if we try to use our abilities."

"Possibly, Paula; in some cases. But no one can make a general statement about the behavior of a sex." He paused, waiting for her reply. When she said nothing, he continued emotionlessly, "Hallen asked me to call you, Paula. The others are leaving for the southern islands immediately, so we can make the first survey of the diggings before nightfall."

Paula closed her writing table and walked toward the door. Jergensen slipped his arm awkwardly through hers. "Will you ride with me, Paula?"

"I'll ride where I like, Thor. I'm free; I've told you that; no man can claim me."

Twelve Earth-people and eight Venusians gathered by the parking lagoon behind the In-

stitute Building. They were indiscriminately divided among the three official Governing Council gliders which stood in the gold-paved landing trough. As always, there was a jockeying among the five unmarried men for the privilege of traveling with Paula.

Paula had never become used to it. She always said—with considerable vehemence—that their unending argument disgusted her. Yet, in an indefinable way, she enjoyed it; she liked being the focal point for so much attention. She would not examine her mind for logical reasons that would explain such opposing reactions; she was vaguely afraid to pry too closely for the truth.

At first the competition had been phrased in terms of general good humor. But the expedition had been stranded on Venus for half a year and the gentility had slowly vanished as the men faced the fact that escape was improbable. The shuttle rocket was gone. The only abundant metal on Venus was pure gold. Unless the expedition could find a sufficient quantity of another metal to make a gold alloy strong enough to withstand the strain of flight, they could not build another rocket.

There were five unmarried

men, but only two, Thor Jergensen and Dale Collins, offered any serious competition for Paula's affection. Thor Jergensen approached her with reason and self-restraint. She considered him a bungler, crude and inept. Dale Collins appealed to her with a supreme ego-confidence in his own youth and virility. It both excited Paula and frightened her. At first he had said:

"You'll have me, Paula, when you've given yourself time to look over the field."

But recently his phrasing had changed:

"I'm going to take you, Paula; understand that. I've waited just about long enough."

"You consider your feelings, Dale," Paula had reminded him once. "But what about mine?"

He had thrown back his head and roared with laughter. "You get a man out of the deal. You've no right to ask for anything else."

Paula and Thor Jergensen left the Institute Building together. Dale Collins joined them and tried to insinuate himself between them. Jergensen deftly side-stepped the maneuver. Despite his size, his movements were smooth and quick; he was as graceful on his feet as a prize fighter.

Collins smiled faintly and slipped Paula's free arm over



his. He was a smaller man than Jergensen, thin, lithe and suave. His dark hair was plastered close to his skull. The sharp angles of his face were emphasized by a pointed beard. All the men had grown beards since the expedition had been wrecked, for the cutting edges of scissors and razors had long since rusted into blunt uselessness.

"I've saved a place for you in our glider," Collins said to Paula.

She answered him as she had Jergensen, "Where I ride, Dale, is one thing I'll decide for myself."

"Sure, Paula—so long as you go with me."

"I'm neither your slave nor your wife, Dale. I'm a free—"

"You will be."

"—a free agent, free to think and act as I please."

He laughed and locked his arm hard over hers. She tried to pull away. Thor Jergensen swung past them, barring their way, his hand resting on his revolver.

"She said she'd make up her own mind, Dale."

Collins eyed his opponent in enigmatic silence. His fingers strayed toward the holster strapped to his hips. Jergensen quietly drew his gun and held it leveled at Collins' chest. Slowly Collins relaxed.

"You make an impressive display of romantic nobility," he said to Jergensen.

"Paula has a right to make her own choice."

"Only a civilized society can afford the luxury of female rights, Thor. We've slipped back to the day of the caveman. A smart man catches on to that pretty fast; a fool keeps up the pretenses of chivalry. Paula will understand the truth one of these days." He turned toward her with a mocking bow. "And when you do, my dear, I'll be waiting for you. The trappings of sentiment, you'll find, are a poor substitute for a man."

He pulled her suddenly into his arms, grinding his lips savagely against hers. The fire of the kiss left her weak, trembling with fury and excitement.

Ironically, the brief quarrel determined Paula's place in the gliders for her. The others were already aboard the boats. Only three empty spaces remained. Paula rode to the southern islands with Collins on one side of her and Jergensen on the other.

During the trip the Earth-people lay flat on the slick decks, clinging to the improvised safety ropes which the Venusians had installed for them. The lizard-men of Venus stood in the

sterns, riding the boats like aquaplanes.

The gliders were the chief form of transportation used on Venus. Made from chip-like sections cut out of the giant ivy-trees, the boats were driven forward by large, web-footed reptiles, the Venusian horse, which bore a faint resemblance to an enormous, green scaled duck. As soon as the gliders were in the open water beyond the crowded city canals, the animals were whipped up to a speed of more than ninety miles an hour.

A warm, misty spray splashed into Paula's face, drenching her uniform. When she raised her head, she could see the perpetually cloud-filled sky of Venus reflected in the quiet mass of sea water. Occasionally they passed suburban islands. Paula saw villages and cities and scattered homes, gleaming yellowly in the gray light. The most widely used building material on Venus was gold, held in place by a sturdy structural skeleton made from the hardened sap of the ivy-tree.

They reached the southern islands late in the afternoon. The gliders slid to a stop in gold-lined landing troughs and the reptiles were turned to graze in pasture lagoons. While there was still light, Commander Hal-

len took the men to inspect the shallow diggings.

If the deposit appeared to be large, the Earth-people would have to build their own mine and carry on the mining operation without Venusian help, for the lizard-men had phenomenally weak forearms. Their six-fingered hands were capable of the most delicate kinds of fragile line-work, but they had no strength to hold or use heavy tools.

While the men inspected the ore, the women built cooking fires and prepared a typical Venusian meal of boiled fish and water-grown salad greens. Except for the barest exchange of necessary talk, the other three women avoided Paula. She had come to expect such isolation. She had been used to it before she came to Venus and, in a way, she was proud of it. She was not like other women, she told herself; she had never moved with the herd. Neither fashion nor fad had ever aroused her interest. What good would it have done? Nothing she did would improve her appearance.

Paula built her fire and relaxed against a moss-covered boulder while the water in the gold pots came to a boil. Friend Kraela brought her a basket of fish, cut and ready for cooking. He sat beside her, curling his

thick tail beneath his legs and caressing the pet snake coiled around his arm.

"If this deposit of ore is large enough," he asked, "how long will it be before you can build another sky ship?"

"I don't know, Friend Kraela; we'll have to make a gold alloy, so we'll have a metal strong enough for a shuttle rocket. Then we'll have to cast and build the engines and the rocket tubes. Why do you ask? Are you so anxious to be rid of us?"

"By no means, Friend Ogden! You came as our guests; you have become our friends. You have brought us your science of machines and metals; you have taught us about the unknown universe that lies beyond our Endless and Eternal Mists."

"And you have given us your knowledge of living things," she said, "which is far superior to ours."

"Mutual growth is a fair exchange; how else would different cultures of rational men meet?"

"It's sometimes very different on the Earth."

"So you have shown us in your history of your people. It seems inexplicable! Tell me, Friend Ogden, if you build your sky ship and leave us, will you ever return?"

"Some of my people will. They want to colonize your planet."

"And we have the room. This contact which we have established must not be lost!" He arose and glanced at the cooking pot. Satisfied that the water was ready, he dropped the chunks of fish into it, sprinkling them with a handful of dried herbs. When he turned toward Paula again, his face-scales shook with suppressed emotion.

"Does it mean a great deal to you, Friend Ogden, to go back to your own world?"

"I make a poor colonist."

"Suppose—" He hesitated, in distress. "Suppose the ore isn't what you need; suppose we can't—"

"Then we'll keep on searching. Friend Kraela, we must find it, somewhere!"

"It matters so much?"

"To me, yes. The others could make out, I think. But I don't belong here, Friend Kraela! I was assigned to the expedition because I'm a scientist, not because I would marry one of the men!"

"The customs of your people are different, but isn't it a natural thing for any species—"

"No, Friend Kraela; no!" Paula got up and began to pace the damp ground beside the fire. It was the first time she had seriously considered the possi-

bility that they might never escape from Venus. Eventually another Earth-expedition would come gliding out of the clouds, but that would be years in the future—perhaps generations. Paula's security was built upon her recognition as a scientist; in her own terms, she could compete and maintain her status. But here that counted less than the fact that she was a woman. The old pain swirled up to torment her mind—the memory of the ugly schoolgirl with the horse-face, of the college dances she had never attended. On the Earth men had rejected her; nothing was different now. Yet, if there were no escape, the mass pressure against her freedom would persist, a conspiracy against her security, a conspiracy to destroy her as a person.

The men returned from the diggings, walking slowly and thoughtfully. Dale Collins and Thor Jergensen dropped on the earth beside Paula's fire. She served them the flaking chunks of fish in silence. She hated even so minor an appearance of domesticity, but it was a duty she could not avoid. Commander Hallen had ordered each of the women to prepare food for two men. Paula considered it an indignity; once she had prided herself on the fact that she did not know how to cook. It was

menial work, a symbol of female servitude, a relic of primitive savagery!

Dale Collins set his bowl aside suddenly and snatched her hand, pulling her roughly to the ground beside him.

"Let me be the first to tell you," he said. "Relatively speaking, this is an enormous deposit of ore. We're going to sink a mine shaft in the morning."

"Then we—we'll get away, Dale?"

"Hallen estimates a pound of silver to the ton. It'll take us twenty years to recover enough to make our alloy."

"Oh, no!" She shrank from him, trembling; but when she looked up at Thor Jergensen, he nodded his head in confirmation.

"Twenty years," Collins repeated. "A generation, Paula. Our children ought to have enough metal to build a rocket. Our children, Paula, Yours and mine."

He pulled her close, kissing her on the lips. His body throbbed against hers. "I'm through waiting, Paula."

"No, Dale!"

She struggled to draw her revolver; she jabbed the rusting metal against his naked chest. He laughed through clenched teeth.

"I doubt that thing works any longer," he whispered. "Mine

was rusted through yesterday."

She glanced uncertainly at the gun. In the split-second that she was off guard, he slapped the weapon from her hand. She turned to run from him, but he caught her in his arms again. She fought and screamed as his hands tore at the fraying fringe of her nylon uniform.

Friend Kraela danced around them, wringing his hands in anguish. "We are civilized men!" he piped in his shrill, sing-song voice. "You are acting like forest beasts! Leave her, Friend Collins, I implore you!"

Suddenly Paula was free of the crawling hands. She fell back against the mossy boulder, sick with nausea. Dale Collins and Thor Jergensen faced each other beside the fire. In the yellow light, Paula saw the other Earth-people watching with fear and indecision.

Commander Hallen hurled orders at the two men; they ignored him, circling each other with swinging arms. In a flat, toneless voice, Jergensen whispered: "Paula said no, Collins; perhaps you didn't hear her."

"It's not the answer I want, Thor."

"She can make up her own mind—in her own time."

Collins snorted with disgust.

"Still trying to win her with gallantry?"

"If I can, yes. If not, I'll try to help us both remember that we're civilized people."

"We were, Thor; not any more. She belongs to the man who can take her."

"She belongs to herself."

Collins lunged at Jergensen. The two men locked arms, rolling on the damp ground. No holds were barred; they fought like animals. Paula watched with a strange mingling of horror and fascination. An indefinable emotion surged deep in her soul, because these men were fighting over her. For an instant the idea pleased her, and then she rejected it with revulsion. She wanted neither of them; she would never become the possession, the property, of a man—the spoils of battle!

Cautiously she moved around the fighting men and stooped to pick up her revolver. Commander Hallen pulled her to her feet. She whirled toward him in fright, cradling the gun in her hand.

"Enjoying it, Paula?"

She tried to reply, but her voice caught in her throat, trapped by a confusion of emotions.

"It's your fault," he said.

"You've driven them back into savagery."

"It's their fault, Commander! Can't they simply leave me alone?"

"You've no right to ask that here, Paula. You're no longer Miss Paula Ogden, the eminent scientist. You're simply a woman—the last female either of these men will ever be able to possess."

"I won't be possessed! I'm free, Commander Hallen!"

"Not any more, Paula. I can't allow you to drive us at each other's throats. I'm settling this tonight. Whichever man wins."

"No!" she screamed. "I won't let you give me away like a lottery prize!"

"You had your chance to choose for yourself; you've lost it."

The sound of conflict stopped. Dale Collins lay motionless on the ground. Thor Jergensen got up slowly and staggered toward them. His body was streaked with blood and grime. His face was swollen with bruises.

"She's yours, Thor," Curt Hallen declared quietly. "You've won her by—"

"No!" Paula screamed again. "I won't take any man!"

Jergensen stopped in front of her.

"I fought for your privilege of saying that," he told her. His breath came in short, heavy gasps; it was edged with irony

as he added, "I decline the prize, Commander. I want a woman, not a neurotic egoist, a woman to share the pleasures and hardships of—"

"Share?" Paula repeated. "No man knows the meaning of the word!"

"You're under the impression that you're an adult, Paula, but you think with the feelings of a bad-mannered adolescent. If you can grow up, I want you for my wife, a sharing partner to bear my children, to help me build our kind of world here. Dale needs you for himself, because you're female and he's male. He sees neither your soul nor your mind. That's an egoism to match yours, Paula. Let him—"

Suddenly the inert Collins sprang to his feet and leaped at Jergensen. The brutal fighting began again.

"You could have prevented it!" Hallen said to Paula. "Do you intend to keep on talking—making excuses—until you drive them to murder?"

"Please," she whispered. All the ice was gone from her voice. She began to cry, and she hated herself for it. Tears she considered the worst kind of female weakness. "Don't, you understand, Commander? I'm free; I'm independent. I can't give up myself, my individuality—"

"Perhaps you should try to understand," he countered. "Your independence is a sham. This time you'll take one of them, Paula; there'll be no more bargaining and no more talk." He moved toward the fighting men to pull them apart. Paula glanced at the others, but they ignored the appeal in her eyes.

A hard core of determination solidified in her mind. They intended to force her to marry, because somehow they thought it would help them all to survive, preserve the security of the group. Paula's security as a person meant as much to her. She could sacrifice the group in order to save that, just as willingly as they would sacrifice her. She could look out for herself; she had no need for them.

She took her revolver and fled. She heard running footsteps behind her, and a babble of voices, but she maintained her distance. Her breath was nearly spent when she found a crevice among the rocks, protected like a natural fortress by an overhanging cliff. They could only approach her one at a time, through a narrow defile. She heard their voices again and she called out calmly:

"Stay where you are. I'll shoot the first man I see."

"Paula!" It was Curt Hallen's voice. "Don't act the child."

"Leave me alone, Commander. I won't come back. I won't—"

"And don't fire your gun. It's too badly damaged by rust. It might backfire and kill you."

"I'll take that chance."

There was a long silence before Hallen called out again.

"You're a fool, Paula; we can't desert you here."

"I can take care of myself; I always have."

Thor Jergensen added his plea:

"The fighting's finished, Paula; I've won. Come back with us. In your own time you can decide which of us—"

"No, thanks, Thor. Forget about me. Let me go my own way."

"We can't, Paula. Our group's too small. To lose you is to lose a part of our own identity; can't you see that?"

Another silence. Then Hallen shouted, "Will you let Friend Kracla come up there and talk to you, Paula?"

"A peace ambassador? Of course, Commander. It won't do you any good, but perhaps he can satisfy you that I mean what I say."

She had no fear of the Venussian. The lizard-men, with their abnormally weak forearms, were a defenseless people; they had never engaged in conflict among

themselves. In any case, Paula was armed.

Kraela slid into her hiding place, curling his tail around his legs as he crouched against the damp rocks.

"I want an explanation," he said in singing Venusian. "Your people have talked to me, but they do not make the situation clear. Perhaps you can. Why did you run away?"

"I will not be forced into mating," she answered in Venusian.

"Force is always wrong, but why do you run from mating? Is it not a custom among your people for a mutual mate-choice to be made?"

"I don't want a mate, Friend Kraela."

"But how else do you complete your life?"

"By giving to my whole society of my ability and talent, in my own way—"

"Giving and sharing: with us those are essential parts of mating."

"I will not belong to a man!"

"He would belong as much to you."

"I'm a—a person alone, by myself." It was an awkward translation of "independence" but it was the best Paula could do.

"Mating does not change that condition, Friend Ogden."

"Let me say it differently. I

do all things for myself; I think alone; I rely upon no other person for help or support."

Kraela made the trilling Venusian laugh. "But how can that be? No one is alone; we must rely upon each other. Consider how we have helped you Earth-people here; or consider how you have shared with us your scientific knowledge. Could you have survived on Venus without us? Could you survive without each other?"

She felt annoyed and vaguely frightened. "You speak of groups, Friend Kraela. I meant only myself, as a single person."

"But each of us is a part of a group; how can it be otherwise?"

The nebulous fear rose up in a strangling cloud; she felt cornered and trapped, and the only way out was to explain herself to him. If she could make him understand, she felt that she could justify herself to herself. And she knew she must justify her behavior; the integration of her life depended upon Kraela's understanding. "I take care of my own thinking. I'm a—a—"

She stopped. There was no direct way to translate "free woman" into the Venusian language. In rising panic she ransacked her mind for substitute expressions. How could she turn the phrase which seemed so



solidly meaningful in English into the idea-symbols of Venus? In her mind she came up against an enormous blankness, a void cluttered with words but empty of ideas. Somehow her bitter childhood frustrations were released again, and she said desperately.

"I am not pretty, Friend Kraela; no man wants me."

"Surely your people do not select mates on the basis of anything so superficial?"

"They do, Friend Kraela! You don't know—"

"Yet tonight, two of your males have fought over you."

"Only because I am a woman."

"Is there any other reason why they should quarrel?"

"I've made my life without men! I don't want it any other way! I'm a—" There it was again, that phrase, "a free woman." Her panic turned into terror. Her mind dissolved into chaos.

She could answer Thor, turn aside his quiet pleading, because she spoke to him in English. Her own language had made it possible for her to confuse word-symbols with ideas. But by questioning her, by driving her into a semantic corner, Kraela had forced her to admit her own lack of idea-referents. She could not phrase her argument in Venusian, because the argument

was a structure of symbols which had no specific meaning. Paula's comfortably secure universe fell apart.

The rising tide of dissolution pushed her close to the fringe of insanity, but the memory of a quiet voice held back the flood. "I want you for my wife, a sharing partner to bear my children, to help me build our kind of world here."

Paula staggered weakly against the rocks. She tried to smile, but her eyes swam with tears. Blindly she reached out and took Kraela's arm.

"You did a nice job, playing John Alden," she whispered.

"Alden? I do not know the name."

"But you understand the idea. You knew exactly what you were doing when you came up to talk to me."

They moved out of her hiding place.

"You'll return to them, now, Friend Ogden?"

"Yes. I want to tell Thor Jergensen that I've grown up." She clung to Kraela's clammy hand. "At least I think I have, with your help. If Thor still wants to marry me—"

"On your strange terms, Friend Ogden?"

"No. On our terms—his and mine together."