

# THRILLING Wonder STORIES

VOL. XLIV, NO. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION WINTER ISSUE

## A COMPLETE NOVEL

- NAME YOUR PLEASURE**.....James E. Gunn 10  
*"Let joy be unconfined," they cried, and made happiness their first and most important duty—ecstasy a basic requirement of their law*

## A SCIENCE FANTASY

- CRESCENDO**.....Margaret St. Clair 72  
*How could Floyd love his neighbor—when she kept sending him dead cats? He hated Nina's verse and her dead cats till one Hallowe'en*

## SHORT STORIES

- THE PORTABLE STAR**.....Isaac Asimov 54  
*Holden made love to his friend's wife. Because he couldn't help it*
- THE FEMALE**.....Robert Crane 65  
*"I am only a woman and my heart is full of pity for the strangers"*
- COUNTERFEITER**.....Winston Marks 81  
*They duplicated lettuce which was of the garden, not banknote, type!*
- MY FUZZY COUSIN, REAMER**.....Charles A. Stearns 90  
*Blood is thicker than anything—even if you have Martian relatives!*
- BACKLASH**.....Guy DeAngelis 100  
*They'd laugh him out of the service if he dared to reveal the truth*

## FEATURES

- THE READER SPEAKS**.....The Editor 6
- A PAGE FROM ISAAC ASIMOV'S NOTEBOOK**.....Special Feature 63
- THE OLDEST BOOK ON MEDICINE**.....Bess Ritter 89

Also See Cartoons on Pages 31, 64 and 69

Cover Painting by EMSH—Illustrating "Name Your Pleasure"

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"I am only a woman, and  
my heart weeps . . ."



Illustration  
by EMSH

# THE FEMALE

By ROBERT CRANE

**T**O THE Prince L'a was given the task of guarding the strangers.

I SAT in the garden of the palace in the evening, playing long-shadow music on the little bells, and my lord came to me and put his hand upon my heart and I knew that he was filled with sadness. He said, "It is decided," and I said, "Sit, my lord, and tell me what is decided and

why your spirit is so heavy."

He said, "Quieten the bells," and I quietened them, and all the birds in the garden ceased singing.

My lord sat beside me and said without words, "We met in the Circle outside the Temple of the Trees, all the elders and all the princes, to talk of the strangers who fell from the sky in the shining disk. This is how the talk went: the elders, none excepted, were agreed that

the strangers must lose the joy of their bodies without any delay. Of the princes three spoke up, I among them, and prayed that the strangers should live and dwell among us as if they were our own kind."

I said in anger, "Ah, the elders are cruel. Their hearts have grown small."

"It was not easy to answer their speech," my lord said. "When the strangers descended we went out to greet them and they replied to our greetings with fire and noise, and twelve of our family fell in redness and the joy went out of their bodies. Therefore, the elders argued, clearly this is a sign that the strangers are mad, like the wild beasts in old stories, and before any further misfortunes overtake us let us destroy them swiftly, and the shining disk also, so that the day of their coming may be forgotten for ever like an evil dream. But the three of us spoke differently, and we said, For a thousand years we have not destroyed any living thing, and these strangers—ill-favored as they are—still are like ourselves, the blind dream of the great Creator. Therefore, let us not molest them in any way, and when they are ready to leave let them leave in peace, bearing the knowledge of our quietness so that they will not disturb us again."

I said, "That was justly spoken."

My lord went on without words, silent in the silence of the evening, "We argued each against each until we were weary, and then the strangers were brought in so that we could listen to their thoughts and their hearts. But their thoughts were like a million fish swimming in a small pool, and their hearts were wild with fear; and we learned nothing from listening to them except that the shining disk can no longer fly, its wings are crippled, and the strangers cannot return to the place from which they came. Then they were led out again, and the elders said, *See, they cannot leave here, and what shall be done with them since they are mad and dangerous.*

"But I believe the elders were ashamed

of wanting to destroy them, and after I had spoken again they looked at each other and one rose up and said, *The Prince L'a speaks fine words: therefore let him have charge of the strangers, let him house them and feed them and let him prove to us that they deserve to live in our land.* And I said, *Gladly.* And another elder rose up and said, *Let it be understood that one further act of madness shall mark the end of our tolerance. If they harm any others of our family they shall go instantly.* And I said, *This is understood.* And a third elder rose and said, *The Prince L'a shall be held to a full accounting of all that happens while these strangers are in his charge.* And I said, *I shall be held to the accounting."*

When my lord had finished speaking he put his arms around my body and held me, and I could feel his sadness. I kissed him and comforted him, and said, "There is nothing to fear, oh my lord. The strangers will live with us in peace, and the stars will be brighter for your kindness." And I started the little bells ringing, and all the birds in the garden began to sing again. I said, "My lord, what can I do to set your heart at peace?"

He said with words, looking with love at me, "The strangers are now in the palace. We shall go together and welcome them and make them contented to live among us."

I said, "Rest, my lord, and I will go. Rest here, my dear lord, and listen to the long-shadow bells and close your eyes."

He smiled, and I smoothed the soft hair of his mane and left him.

THE wife of the important politician said, "Jim, here comes another of them. Oh my God, it's a *she*. I swear it's a *she*. Jim, don't let her come near me—"

The important politician said under his breath, "Control yourself, Marva. Think of the position we're in. We can't afford to offend these people. Give her a

smile. Act friendly."

The beautiful girl-friend of the celebrated gambler said, "Did you ever see a dream walking, Mike? You should enter her as a filly at Hialeah—"

Mike Postellano, the celebrated gambler, said, "Shut up. They probably have this place wired for sound. You want to ruin our chances?"

The wife of the captain of the disk said, "Darling," in a whisper, and held tightly to her husband's hand.

The captain of the disk, whose name was David Llewelyn, looked at the strange creature who had come into the room. He observed the long bony head, the huge soft laterally-set eyes, the short delicate arms held forward from narrow shoulders, the long mane, the hoofed feet; and he said nothing.

I SAT among them and strove to open my heart to them, since they were strangers far from their own lands, but my skin wrinkled with fear at the sight of them and my nostrils quivered at the odor that came from their bodies. Their faces were small and round like fallen fruit, and their limbs long and thin like spiders; their eyes were squeezed together, and they had small beaks with tiny nostrils and small mouths like wounds that have not healed; their necks were skinny, and the hair grew *above* their heads like the leaves of a pineapple. The sight of their deformities frightened me, and the odor of their bodies frightened me even more, like the feathers of an old arrow; and it was hard for me to sit and not to run from their presence.

I played the gentle bells of welcome for them and tried to listen to what their hearts had to tell me, but it was as my lord said: they spoke of nothing except fear and confusion. I called my sisters and my handmaidens, and they brought fine grasses for them, delicate herbs from our emerald garden, red and yellow apples and bowls of our clearest waters; but the strangers cried out loudly when these were placed before them and were

afraid to eat or drink. My sisters brought our sweetest birds to sing and lit the butterfly lanterns for them; but they were still afraid, and I pitied them.

I saw that three of the strangers were males. One was old, with swollen intestines from drinking too much water. One was harsh and cruel with hard fingers. One was young, and he regarded me quietly; and this one I marked for friendship.

I saw that three of the strangers were females, and they wore strange garments. One was old, with swollen intestines from drinking too much water and blue hair like the nest of a bluebird. One was younger, with yellow hair and with two pointed humps upon her chest; and it might have been that she dwelt formerly in a desert, where food and water are scarce at certain seasons. The third was young and quiet, and shrank from me. And I could not understand how any of them could conceive.

After I had sat with them for some time I left them and returned to my lord. He perceived the shadow in my eyes, and he held me in his arms until all the coldness and the quivering went from me. His breath was like perfume, and the sun shone from his eyes driving my shadows away, and I was glad.

I said to him, "My lord, three of the strangers are females, and they wear strange garments, and I cannot understand how they could conceive."

And my lord said, "Hush, the great Creator achieves his ends in many mysterious ways."

THE captain of the disk thought, *Funny little thing with a face like a horse. Cute, though. Feminine.*

*—What do we call these characters? Hippographs? Hippians? Can we live here among them in peace? God knows. They're obviously intelligent, highly-developed, civilized. But then, so are we. Highly. Look how we escaped from Earth.*

*—The ship will never fly again. We're stuck here. The end of the line*

for six who had to be saved.

—*There were two hundred ships despatched from our territory. Each one carried six who had to be saved, whose primary function was to perpetuate the human race, its ideas and its ideals, its deathless spirit. Who could expect priority in these circumstances? Poets, scientists, philosophers? No, sir. Mr. Big gets priority, Honest Jim Callaghan. Musicians, engineers, doctors, architects? No, sir, Mr. Big's shadow is ahead of them all, Mike Postellano, the celebrated gambler, to whom Honest Jim owes so much. In this way we preserve and perpetuate the deathless spirit of the human race, with Mrs. Callaghan and the gorgeous blonde girlfriend who giggles all the time.*

—*And when we landed, Mike Postellano in his typical humanitarian way had to mow down the first group of hippians that we saw. Bang-bang-bang. Demonstrating his superiority to these characters. Very human. It was a miracle that they didn't slaughter us after that.*

—*My wife. Poor kid.*

—*Perhaps we should have stayed on Earth and taken our chance like the others who stayed behind.*

—*It's too late, now.*

I SAID to my lord the Prince L'a, "I have been three days with the strangers and they are still strangers to me and I have no knowledge of their hearts. Except the young male, whose words are without meaning but gentle."

My lord said, "Be patient with them. Understanding comes with every hour."

I said, "My lord, if I were as they are, far from my own land, I too should be afraid. I beg of you, speak to the elders and ask if we may not build a house for them so that they may be free of our eyes and not held like prisoners, and so that they may observe their own customs and prepare their own food privately."

"The elders will not listen."

"Tell them, my lord, that we are not

barbarians who take birds from a tree and lock them in a cage."

My lord said, "It is useless to speak to the elders."

But afterwards my lord came to me and said, "I spoke to the elders as you requested, and they said Nay because the strangers harmed so many of our family when we went to greet them."

I said, "My lord, let me speak to the elders," and he answered, "They will not listen to you since you are a female." We talked for many minutes until he said, "Go, go then, leave me in peace," and I sought out the white-maned elder and pleaded with him. He said, "Nay," but I pleaded with him again, and he said, "Go, go then, build the house, and when the house is finished we will listen anew to your request."

So we called together all the princes and others of our family to talk about what manner of house we should build, and they all listened to me; and in the evening I went to the strangers to tell them what had been agreed.

But the confusion still remained, there was no understanding between us even though I marked the shape of the house on the floor for them to see. The old male with the swollen intestines made noises at me like dead leaves rustling in the night, and he touched my arm and it was like the touch of a drowned serpent. Then the young male walked with me into the garden, and suddenly in the cool air there was speech between our hearts and I was filled with joy. We conversed without words, very gently.

I told him, "Now be glad, for the princes and others of our family will build you a house where you may be private and do as you wish."

And he smiled at me.

Then I said, "What brings you to our land?"

His spirit went far from me, and then he said, "In the world from which we came we could not live any longer. There were great fires and great winds, and it was the end of all joy for our people."



I asked, afraid, "Why? Did a comet approach?"

He said, "No, it was done by the inhabitants themselves, quarreling. This was their last quarrel, and they flew in shining disks and hurled pieces of the sun at each other until nothing good was left. The lands were covered with ashes and bitter salts, the grasses withered and the streams from which we drew our water turned to acid, and the air burned our lungs as if fire was in it. Even the birds fell from the trees in sickness and the fishes died."

I said, trembling, "How could this be?" and he was silent.

I said, faltering at his side, "Is this true?" and he said, "It is true but it is

and he was silent.

I said, "Is there love between you and your female, the dark-haired one?"

He answered, "Yes," and I left him and hid alone in the garden and wept, pitying him.

THE captain's wife said, "Darling, I keep thinking about the damndest things." She sighed.

"Like what, for example?"

"Oh, how you were going to take me to Mexico for a vacation, because I'd never been there. Now I'll never see it."

"This is much more exciting than Mexico."

"I guess so—and on the Wednesday before everything happened I saw such

over now. There is no cause to tremble."

I said, "What of the six of you who are now among us? Is there any quarrel between you?"

He said, "The noblest and the wisest were chosen to fly from the desolation, to find new worlds and make new lives. How could there be any quarrel between us?"

I said, "Is there love between you?"

a pretty dress in Saks Fifth Avenue. I keep wishing that I'd bought it."

"You have plenty of clothes—"

"They're all in the ship, darling. And we aren't allowed to go near the ship."

"In a few days, when they realize they can trust us, they'll let us get anything we need."

"Mike Postellano says if he wants to go nobody's going to stop him."

The captain walked over to the corner of the room where the celebrated gambler and the important politician were whispering together, and said, "Look, Mike, the ship is out of bounds. You'd better stay away from it."

Mike stood up and said, "Who are you talking to, kid?"

The captain said, "They have guards on that ship day and night."

Mike said, "You think I'm scared of those goddam horses?"

Honest Jim Callaghan said jovially, "Now, boys. No arguments, fellers. We're all in this mess together."

The captain said, "Mr. Callaghan, keep this goon of yours under control, or we'll all be in a hell of a worse mess."

Mike hit him in the face and said, "Who's a goon, kid?"

**MY LORD** found me in the garden, in the darkness, and said, "Why do you weep?"

I said, "Leave me, my lord, let me remain here awhile."

He stayed near me, and I was glad. I said, "Go, my lord, leave me," but he stayed, and I crept close to him and was glad of his stubbornness. He held me in the silence of love, and the stars were over us; and when I was comforted he said, "Now tell me why you wept."

I told him, and he grew still. When I finished he said, "This is a dream you had through eating the coarse grasses of the forest," and I said, "No." He said, "You are a female, and your mind is filled with strange thoughts," and he scolded me. But later, when he should have slept, I knew that he was awake even though he did not move. I said, "Rest, rest, my dear lord," and he said, "It is the middle of the night, why are you not asleep, female?" And I said, "I am asleep."

Later, he went quietly away, and I lay in fear. Then as the dawn came, I heard loud noises like thunder, and I ran to the place where I knew my lord had gone, to the shining disk; and many of our people were hurt and some had

fallen in redness, but my lord was unharmed.

**MIKE POSTELLANO** said, "I don't understand how I got away. There was a thousand of these goddam horses round the ship. I thought they had me for sure."

The captain said, "I warned you. I told you not to go. How many did you kill this time?"

Mike said, "I didn't kill none. I fired in the air. I just tried to scare them."

The captain said, "I hope to God you're telling the truth."

Mike said, "I didn't have a chance to fire more than a couple shots. They snatched the gun away from me."

"You damned fool," the captain said.

The blonde girl friend of Mike Postellano said, "Blow, little man, before Mike beats your brains out."

Honest Jim Callaghan said, "Now, now, boys. Let's keep it friendly. After all, Mike was only trying to ensure our safety."

"With guns," the captain said.

"You're yellow down to your guts," Mike said.

The captain's wife called, "David, come here. Please come here."

Marva Callaghan said, "Jim, Jim, stop them from fighting."

Honest Jim said, "How can I stop them, dear? The boy asked for it, didn't he?"

Mike said, "That'll learn you who's boss around this place, punk."

**IN THE** morning the elders and the princes met in the Circle outside the Temple of the Trees, and my lord was among them, and I hid behind a cypress tree, where I could listen. The white-maned elder spoke, and said, "How many of our family were harmed in the night?"

My lord answered, "Seven."

"And of these seven, how many have lost the joy of their bodies?"

"Three. And another is hurt seriously."

"Was the stranger harmed?"

My lord answered, "We were careful to do him no harm."

The white-maned elder said, "It is for the Prince L'a to explain how this happened."

And my lord said, "It is beyond my understanding. But this I know. They must possess some sickness. For the strangers come from a place where they quarreled often, and in the end there was a great quarrel when all the inhabitants fought among themselves, hurling pieces of the sun at each other until nothing was left but a desolation. Their lands were destroyed, and they could not breathe the air. And from those that remained alive of the people the noblest and the wisest were chosen to find new worlds and make new lives. And the six strangers in my palace are six of these."

The white-maned elder said, "Since they arrived we have known no peace."

My lord said, "The sickness must still be in them, and their minds are disturbed after all the sorrow they have known. Their hearts are confused."

The white-maned elder said, "Let each prince speak, and each elder, so that we may decide what shall be done."

And I hid behind the cypress tree and listened, and there was none who spoke for the strangers, and when the speeches were done my heart grew big with fear for I knew what the white-maned elder would decide. And I sprang from my hiding-place and ran into the center of the Circle, and said, "Hear me, I pray of you."

The white-maned elder, who knew me well, said, "Who is this female?"

My lord said, "She is mine."

The white-maned elder said, "In the Council of the Circle there is no place for females. Remove her."

And my lord said to me, "Go."

But I stayed and said, "Oh, learned elders and noble princes, hear me. Let justice be done, but justice follows truth.

I speak for none except the young male whose heart I know, and who is kind and gentle." And I spoke on about the young male and about the young female, pleading for them; and all in the Circle listened in silence until I had finished speaking. Then the white-maned elder said, "We have heard you. Now go and do not return here."

I sat in the garden in the evening, and the bells were silent and the birds crouched low on the branches; and my lord came to me and put his hand upon my heart and said, "It is decided."

And I was afraid to speak to him.

He said, "Be not afraid, there is no punishment for you."

And I said, "I fear for the strangers."

He said, "All the elders and all the princes considered your words and this is what they said: When the strangers arrived they did harm to our people and we thought this was a sign that they were mad. But we did not destroy them instantly, we permitted them to live. Now again they have done harm to our people, and again we have a sign of their madness, and have they not brought their sickness with them? For they could not live among themselves, they destroyed their own lands and their own families, until they were forced to flee and come to this place. And in time, when they have multiplied, who knows what they will do? They will make a desolation of our lands also, and is this to be permitted?"

I said, "Oh my lord, what then was decided?"

He said, "You are a female, it is not for you to know."

I said, "My lord, my lord, what of the gentle young male and she who is with him?"

He said, "We must fear their seed."

And he left me and went alone to the house.

And I waited, and when he came out I washed his hoofs and comforted him, and he did not look at my tears.