

Astounding

SCIENCE FICTION

Novelettes

- Ministry of Disturbance, *H. Beam Piper* . . . 8
 The Queen Bee, *Randall Garrett* 70

Short Stories

- Triggerman, *J. F. Bone* 47
 Pieces of the Game, *Mack Reynolds* 56
 Seller's Market, *Christopher Anvil* 97

Serial

- A Bicycle Built for Brew, *Poul Anderson* . 111
 (Conclusion)

Readers' Departments

- The Editor's Page 4
 In Times to Come 46
 The Analytical Laboratory 69
 The Reference Library, *P. Schuyler Miller* 151

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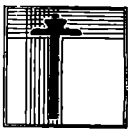


THE
QUEEN
BEE

BY RANDALL GARRETT

Elissa was intransigently determined to be the Queen Bee. And... you know, she got exactly the role she demanded!

Illustrated
by Freas



HE problem was, what were they going to do with Elissa Krand?

She was one of the seven people who had managed to get to the pilot boat of the interstellar liner *Generatrix* before the heat from the great engines rendered the main body of the ship unlivable. As soon as the situation had become perfectly clear to her, she had gone into hysterics and Peter Branson, now ex-navigator of the *Generatrix*, had reluctantly felled her with a right cross to the jaw.

The only trouble was, the floor of the pilot boat was rapidly getting hotter. If the others left her there, she'd likely wake up full of first- and second-degree burns—if, considering the area of contact with the floor, she woke up at all.

Cray Folee, the civil engineer from Dornax, looked strong enough. He was standing a little to one side, his eyes looking down at his hands. He didn't see his hands, though; if he had, he wouldn't be twisting them around each other that way. He had nerves, but he was controlling them.

Branson made up his mind. "Mr. Folee, I can't hold up this Krand girl and watch the instruments of the pilot boat at the same time. Would you take over?"

Folee looked up from his hands. "What? Oh. Sure."

He walked over to Branson and the girl, crouched a little to get his arms around her thighs, then stood up. She collapsed over his right shoulder, and he held her there, en-

tirely unconscious, like a sack of sand.

That would do for now, Branson thought. If it became much hotter in the pilot boat, he'd have to think of something else. Folee couldn't hold her that way if the evaporation of perspiration became absolutely necessary on every square centimeter of skin surface.

Dr. Greeth, the hard-nerved, white-haired, little surgeon was watching the instrument board as Branson stepped over to it. The others were standing well back, watching Branson.

"The velocity is still hyperbolic," said Dr. Greeth coolly. "How much longer, do you think?"

Branson looked at the hyperbola traced in glowing white across the violet screen. "Not long. Minutes."

"Why can't we leave now? It's getting hot in here!" said a voice behind Branson.

Branson didn't bother to turn around; he recognized Rob Darren's voice.

"The *Generatrix* is circling too fast," he said. "The only thing that's keeping us going around that planet down there is the gravity anchors that lock the ship to the center of the planet. The actual gravitational field of the planet isn't great enough to keep us in an elliptical orbit at this velocity." He tapped the face of the orbit screen. "See that dot, just at the bend of that line? That represents the planet. The line represents the path the ship would take if the gravity anchors weren't holding us."

Keep talking, he thought. *Keep*

them interested. Keep their minds off the trouble we're in.

"In the past few minutes, it has changed from a nearly flat hyperbola to this." Again he tapped the screen. "It looks almost like a parabola now, because the engines are slowing us down."

Tina Darren, Rob's wife, cleared her throat. Her voice, when it came, was calm—almost cool. "I thought the engines had burned up. I thought that's what was causing the heat."

"Not exactly," Branson said, angry because the girl had brought up the subject of heat again. He'd have to twist it back away somehow. "It's simply that the engines are converting their energies into heat instead of velocity. Even working at minute fraction of their normal output, that adds up to quite a lot of heat—but not enough to burn out an interstellar engine. Not yet, at least." He realized that he still hadn't changed the subject and cursed himself.

"What will the screen show when we've slowed enough?" Dr. Greeth asked suddenly.

Branson threw him a grateful glance. "Theoretically, the line would go from hyperbola to parabola to ellipse. Actually, the parabolic orbit is so critical that the ship will pass that velocity before it can register on the screen. It will simply change from a sharply curved hyperbola to an ellipse."

"But what's that got to do with this pilot boat?" Darren asked. There was a faint quaver in his voice. "Do

we have to follow the path of the big ship?"

"Yes. If we cut loose now, it would be—" Branson paused. "Ever whirl a weight around on a string? If the string breaks, the weight flies away on a tangent. If we cut loose now, the same thing would happen to us. And these pilot boats don't have enough power to correct an orbit like that. We can land from a near-circular orbit, but not from a hyperbolic one."

"My God, it's hot." That was Del-La Thorn, the blonde.

Branson kept his eyes on the screen. He could feel the perspiration flowing underneath his clothing.

"We'll have to strip," he said. "Otherwise, this heat will broil us. We need the evaporation."

There was silence around him as he began to peel off his own jumper.

"Tina!" It was Rob Darren's shocked voice. "You can't—"

"You heard what he said," Tina Darren said calmly.

More silence.

Then: "Get away from that wall! You want to burn?"

It was Folee's voice. Branson jerked his head around. Della Thorn was huddled against one corner, her eyes wide with fear.

"I won't take my clothes off," she said. "You can't make me!"

"Get away from that wall!" Branson snapped.

Then Dr. Greeth's voice crackled through the hot air.

"Branson! The screen!"

Branson looked back quickly.

While his head had been turned, the parabolalike hyperbola had become a near-circular ellipse.

Without another word, Peter Branson punched the launching button.

"Lucky!" said Folee exultantly. "Just plain lucky! You wouldn't find a planet like this once in a dozen tries!"

The pilot boat had landed in a forest of remarkably Earthlike trees. Branson was the only one of the seven who had been to Earth, but Earth's fauna and flora were to be seen, to a greater or lesser degree, on every civilized planet of the galaxy.

The trunks of the trees were marked with vertical ridges of corklike bark, giving them a corrugated appearance. Each tree seemed to have two or three times as many leaves as an Earth oak, and each leaf was punctured with a pattern of holes, making them look like like small lace doilies or big, green snowflakes.

The arrangement allowed plenty of diffuse light to seep through to the forest floor, which was covered with a carpet of soft, wide-bladed grass.

The filtered, greenish illumination gave the impression that the whole forest was underwater.

The air was cool, but not cold, and it felt wonderful after the awful heat of the *Generatrix*. Even after the pilot boat had pushed itself away from the mother ship, the little refrigerators hadn't been able to do better than drop the tiny craft's temperature a few degrees. The cool air of the new planet felt wonderful-

ly soothing against their bare skins.

Peter Branson sat on the trunk of a fallen tree and began to pull on his jumper. Dr. Greeth, who had already put his clothing back on, came over and sat down next to Branson.

"If we're careful," he said, "and if we eliminate as much inbreeding as possible, we can have this planet populated within a few centuries."

"We?" said Branson thoughtlessly. Then he clamped his lips together as though he wanted to bite his tongue out. Dr. Greeth was an old man—very old. No man can live forever.

The surgeon smiled wryly. "Yes, *we*. Perhaps I'm not biologically capable of being a father, but I *can* teach. Maybe I can be a sort of foster father."

"Mister Branson!"

At the sound of his voice, which had come from directly behind him, Branson flicked his gaze over the scene in front of him. Darren and his wife were holding each other tightly a few yards away; they were looking at the forest, but they obviously had no eyes for the beauty of the alien landscape.

Folee was standing near them, pointing at something in the trees while Della Thorn, still cringing in spite of the fact that she was again fully clad, watched his hand.

That left only one.

"Yes, Miss Krand?" said Branson without turning.

She knew that he would not turn, so she stepped over the log and stood in front of him.

She was tall for a woman—a full six feet. Her long jet-brown hair fell to her shoulders, and her gray-green eyes glistened like gems.

"You hit me," she said, her voice icy.

Branson looked up at her. She was lean and muscular—not beautiful, but somehow terribly, magnetically attractive.

Branson nodded and started to say something.

Too late. "You *hit* me," she repeated. "How *dare* you?"

Branson sighed. "I had no choice, Miss Krand. You had lost control of yourself. You had—"

Again she cut him off. "I? I lost control of myself?" She laughed harshly. "A man—a big, strong man—strikes a girl with his fist and then has the temerity to say that it was *she* who lost control." Her eyes narrowed. "May I ask why you hit me?"

Peter Branson looked at her steadily for a moment, then he took a deep breath and grinned. "Sure. Go ahead and ask, sweetheart."

She opened her mouth to say something, but this time it was Branson's turn to interrupt. "When I told you that you would have to spend the rest of your life on this planet, you erupted like a Trigevvian volcano. You tried to get out of the pilot boat. You tried to run, to put it bluntly.

"And," he grinned even wider, "you had no place to run to. If I hadn't clobbered you, you'd have opened the air lock to the ship, and—"

Branson stopped. "What's the mat-

ter, Miss Krand?" He couldn't tell whether the look on her face meant shock, hatred, anger, or actual physical illness.

"You're still trying to insist on this stupid lie?" she asked. There was both arrogance and fear in her voice.

Branson folded his hands carefully. "Lie?"

She shook her head—not in negation, but as though she were trying to shake off something unpleasant but sticky.

"Do you honestly mean we are really marooned here?" she asked huskily. "Forever?"

Branson smiled. "Not forever. Only for the rest of our lives."

"Is there no chance that we'll ever leave here?"

Branson thought for a minute before answering. He decided that brutality was best, right from the start. There was, he knew, a small—a vanishingly small—chance of being rescued. There was no recorded instance of it in the history of the galaxy, but it *could* happen. But he felt that not even a faint glimmer of hope should be held out for this girl.

"None whatever," he said firmly. "No one else in the whole galaxy knows where we are. They couldn't know. And they won't even bother to look for us."

"Can't they . . . can't they follow the flight path of the *Generatrix*?"

"They could," Branson said, "but they won't. That would mean searching a skewed cylinder of space about ten light-years in diameter and over eight thousand light-years long. And

in this part of the galaxy, that would include far too many suns to investigate one by one. Some one of these days, some high-caliber genius is going to invent a near-instantaneous method of communication between stars—but until that day comes along, a marooned group will stay marooned until they are accidentally rediscovered. That usually takes from two to seven centuries. We'll be here the rest of our lives."

Elissa Krand's eyes blazed. "You can't do this!" she stormed. "Do you know who I am? Do you think you can push me around like this?"

Branson blinked. How do you answer a silly question like that? He would have blazed back at her, but the sudden pressure of Dr. Greeth's grip on his arm made him decide to take the cautious course.

"The answer is *no* and *yes*. No, I don't know who you are, and yes, I do think I can push you around. Haven't you ever heard of Brytell's Law?" He kept his voice level.

She just looked at him for a long time. Then, calmly, she said: "I know it." And she turned and walked toward the grounded pilot boat.

"We're going to have trouble with that girl," said Dr. Greeth softly, watching her retreating back.

Branson furrowed his brow and made a small *moué*. "I know, I know. But I have a hunch that we'll have even more trouble with the Darren couple."

"How so?" Dr. Greeth didn't sound as though he disagreed; he

didn't even sound as though he really wanted an answer, except to find out Branson's thoughts.

Branson broke off a small bit of rotting bark from the tree trunk they were sitting on, and crumbled it in his fingers before answering.

"Darren and his wife aren't going to fall in with any rotation plan easily," he said, dropping the broken grains of wood to the ground, sifting them thoughtfully through his fingers.

"That can wait," said Dr. Greeth, shrugging casually. "Give them six months; they'll fall in line. They know Brytell's Law. It's the cultural heritage of half the planets of the galaxy."

"I wasn't thinking of both the Darrens," Branson said in correction. "That Tina seems to be a pretty competent woman. But Rob Darren—" he spread his hands—"I don't know how to phrase it. He seems a little adolescent, maybe."

"I watched him aboard ship," Greeth said. "In some ways, your diagnosis is correct. What do you think of the Thorn woman?"

Branson glanced at the blonde, who was standing across the glade with Folee—near him, but not too near. "As a snap judgment, I'd say she was an androphobe."

Dr. Greeth raised an eyebrow. "So? Could be. I remember seeing her a couple of times on shipboard, and she was always by herself. Well, we'll have to see how she gets along with Folee."

Branson slowly turned his head until his eyes met those of the old

surgeon. Greeth looked back calmly.

Eventually, a smile came across Branson's face. "So you have us all paired off, eh? And I get the Krand girl? I thought you liked me."

Dr. Greeth smiled back. "I do. But, more than that, I respect you. You could handle Della Thorn, sure; but so can Folee. But you're the only one who could handle Elissa Krand—if she can be handled."

"We're going to have a great old time here," said Branson resignedly. "A great old time. I can see that already."

There was never any question as to who would be the policy-maker of the group. As the only ship's officer present, as well as by virtue of his own natural ability, Peter Branson would easily have won an election if anyone had bothered to suggest a vote.

Just as obviously, Cray Folee came second. He was a quiet man, a strong man. Only by the barest margin, by the indefinable lack of some essential quality of leadership, did he lag behind Branson.

The position of Dr. Greeth, while equally tacit among the seven, was far more subtle. Only Branson—and, possibly, Folee—recognized the fact that he was the *grand vizier* of the group. Not a leader—he could never be that—but a man who could be relied upon to think a problem through and give sound advice.

Elissa Krand viewed the whole thing with a tolerant smile. She looked at the entire proceedings as

though it were childish play-acting by a group of mental incompetents.

The only time she looked even faintly disturbed was when Tina Darren repeated, from memory, the text of Brytell's Law.

. . . Article IV.: In such case as illustrated in the foregoing, the women must be isolated. All precautions must be taken to prevent any confusion as to parenthood.

Article V.: In the ideal situation, each female would produce at least one female child and one male child by each male. Since this will not occur in the majority of situations, it is recommended that . . .

They were seated in a small circle on the wide-bladed grass that made up the forest floor. Folee, who claimed to be an expert with a Markheim, was holding the rifle in his hands and sitting somewhat uncomfortably on the top of the four-foot stump of a native tree that had been broken off long before. The engineer kept his eyes moving around the surrounding forest, but he was listening to every word that was said.

Branson, too, was watching. Not the forest, but the faces of Darren, Elissa, and Della.

Brytell's Law had been formulated centuries before—presumably by a man named Brytell—as the rule for human survival on an alien planet. Survival, not for the individual, but for the race.

Tina Darren's voice went on. As

she approached Article XIV, Branson watched carefully.

Della Thorn's face had not changed since the recitation had begun. There was fear behind the rigid mask of her beautiful face. It showed in the eyes and in the faint trembling of her chin. Even the Fourteenth Article didn't cause any change in that mask.

Rob Darren had been looking at the ground while his wife recited, but the Fourteenth Article made him look up. There was pain on his face, and a faint, seemingly undirected anger.

Elissa Krand had been looking irritated, as though the whole recitation had been too boring to waste time with, and Article XIV did nothing except cause her to flick a glance in Branson's direction. Branson couldn't quite fathom the expression in that glance.

Theoretically, three men and three women (Dr. Greeth could be excluded from the computations) could produce eighteen children—one male and one female from each possible pair.

If the ideal situation worked itself out, there would be the maximum possible variation in the genetic heritage of the second generation. Careful pairing of that generation



would insure the maximum possible variation in the race that would inherit the planet.

But during that time, the standards of monogamy, of marital fidelity, would have to be temporarily shelved. When the survival of the race is at stake, individual comforts and morals have to be pushed aside.

Article XIV of Brytell's Law covered that area in detail—the timing, the planned rotation, and the choices.

When Tina Darren had finished her recitation of the whole Law, she simply nodded and then went over and sat down by her husband.

(I've got to quit using that word, Branson thought. There are no husbands and no wives here. The marriage was dissolved when the Generatrix blew her guts.)

Branson stepped to the center of the circle.

"You all know it, I'm sure," he said firmly. "It's the Law that has populated the galaxy. It applies to First Colonists and shipwreck survivors alike. No one—I'll repeat that—*no one* is exempt from it.

"We're a small group—very small. We'd have better chances if there were thirty of us or more. But we'll have to do the best we can with the genetic material we have to work with."

He looked around at them, watching their expressions.

"In a larger group, lots would be drawn for pairing. With us, that procedure is neither desirable nor necessary. At least, not until the first Switch Time. Tina and Rob will

have their chance; I see no point in breaking up that combination before the two of them have had their opportunity to produce.

"That only leaves two possible sets of pairing for the remaining four."

"What about Dr. Greeth?" asked Tina suddenly.

Greeth smiled his old smile. "I am as susceptible to feminine wiles as the next man, my dear," he said dryly, "but I'm well aware of my limitations."

Tina flushed. "I'm sorry."

Greeth's smile became even wider. "Believe me, my dear, so am I. Pardon me—go ahead, Mr. Branson."

Branson suppressed a grin. "As to the other pairs, I think—"

Elissa Krاند said: "Just a moment. Are we to have no choice in the matter? Are we cattle?"

"Just whom do you mean by 'we,' Miss Krاند?" said Branson.

"Why . . . why, me, and . . . Miss Thorn."

Peter Branson took a calculated risk. "Let's hear from Miss Thorn on that. Della, if you had a choice between Mr. Folee and myself, which—"

"Now wait!" Elissa shouted. "I have a right to pick, too!" Suddenly, she leveled a finger at Branson. "And I pick you!"

Branson looked at her sternly. "Let Miss Thorn finish! Della?"

She had buried her face in her hands. A tremor shook her body. "It doesn't matter," she said in a muffled

voice. "It really doesn't matter."

Elissa Krand smiled her infuriatingly arrogant smile. "That settles it, then?"

Branson sighed. "Miss Krand, for your information, it was settled hours ago. You just happened to make the right choice."

There were, of course, other things to decide, other matters to attend to, other things to do.

Folee was a construction engineer, so the designing and construction of shelters was up to him. Wood, in spite of its antiquity as a construction material, was still used in one form or another throughout the galaxy. And Folee was familiar enough with it to be able to estimate its strength merely by flexing smaller branches with his powerful arms.

According to law, the planet was automatically named *Generatrix*, so that any later expedition could trace back and find out what ship had carried them. Once named, the planet would become a part of whatever dialect eventually evolved in the coming centuries, and thus be preserved. Branson thought it would be fitting to hold a dedication ceremony, giving the planet its name officially.

Afterwards, the individual duties of each member were assigned. Dr. Greeth and Folee had their work cut out for them already. Surprisingly, Della Thorn announced that she had as much knowledge of wood as anyone—she had been an interior decorator on *Aljebr III*—and insisted on helping Folee work the native

material. She would make chairs and tables and beds.

Tina Darren could cook well enough to make palatable food out of the concentrated synthetics in the emergency ration locker of the pilot boat, so Branson appointed her head chef.

Darren simply said: "Give me a gun. I'm going hunting."

"Hunting?" Branson lifted an eyebrow. "Do you know anything about it?"

"I know how to handle a gun," he said. "Aside from that, I know nothing more about the native fauna than you do. But we'll have to have protein eventually."

"What planet are you from?" Branson asked suddenly.

"Cordex."

Branson nodded and gave him one of the *Markheims*. *Cordex* was one of the newer worlds. That accounted for Tina's knowing *Brytell's Law* so well, and her ability to cook. And it accounted for Darren's queerly conflicting actions.

The others had started planning their work—Folee got out the power cutters to show Della Thorn how to use them on the trees; Tina helped Darren get into the single suit of space armor on the pilot boat, helping him adjust the size so that it was reasonably comfortable and would protect him from anything that might decide he was good eating; Dr. Greeth began checking the medical supplies, laying them out and making an inventory.

Elissa Krand was leaning back

against the big log, looking at the sky. She had produced a perfumed cigarette from somewhere and was smoking it lazily, watching the white plume of smoke drift up in the still air.

She hadn't volunteered a thing. Branson had suspected she wouldn't, so he had waited until the others were busy before he approached her.

"Well, Elissa? What can you do?"

She looked up at him in annoyance. "Who gave you permission to use my first name?"

"I did." Branson kept his voice level. "You're my woman from now until the first Switch Time. I won't call you Miss Krand."

"I'm not your wife!" she blazed. "You have an almighty arrogance! I'm not used to being spoken to in that fashion!"

Branson fought down a desire to boot her. "All right. You're not my wife. Whatever you are, I'm going to call you Elissa, in preference to a lot of other things I could call you. Meanwhile, I asked what you can do? Or do you feel that you need make no contribution to our survival?"

Her jaw muscles tensed for a moment, then relaxed. She looked away from him. "I was trained in manipulative economics. I run corporations. Want to help me organize one here?"

Branson ignored the sneer in her voice. "Later. We may have need of that eventually." He didn't really think so, but he wanted to placate her. "Meanwhile, there are more

immediate problems. Know anything about fabrics?"

She looked up at him again, and this time, there was an almost pathetic and very childlike expression on her face.

"I used to design clothing," she said. "Just for fun, but I was very good at it. Of course, I didn't do the actual work, but I made the patterns."

Branson nodded. "Good. You've got yourself a job. The clothes we have aren't going to last forever. I'll be willing to bet that Tina knows something of the sewing end of the job. Get together with her and see if you can come up with some ideas."

The arrogance came back into her face. "That little barbarian? What would a girl from Cordex know?"

"She can cook," snapped Branson. "And keep it in mind that we're all barbarians now, as far as our living conditions are concerned."

Again her jaw muscles tightened, and she ground the cigarette savagely into the grass. "You're not a barbarian, *Mister* Branson—you're an uncouth savage."

She got up and walked away toward Tina.

Rob Darren came over to him, leaving Tina to talk with Elissa. Darren was clad in the space armor, which gave a certain stiffness to his movements, but he could move in it easily enough.

"I think this will do, Chief," he said. "If something too big comes at me, I'll be squashed, but I don't think any claw or tooth can get at me."

Branson nodded absently. "It'll keep the smaller pests out, too. By the way, what's this 'chief' bit?"

Darren looked puzzled for a moment, then grinned. "Oh. We use it on Cordex. It just means that you're the head man—the boss. Do you mind? I mean, is it all right?"

Branson grinned back. "Not at all. It's an honor." He looked toward the west, where the orange ball of the primary was moving toward the horizon. "It's getting late. We'll all have to be in the pilot boat by nightfall. You won't be going hunting for several days yet; we have to get things straightened up here, first. Tomorrow, we'll start building houses and a stockade."

Darren nodded. "If Folee will show me how to wield one of those cutters, we can get things done fast. But I want to get out in that forest as soon as possible."

"You will," said Branson. "You will."

The question of food came up early. Were the native proteins and polysaccharides edible? Some of them weren't, that was a statistical certainty; some would sicken and some would kill. But were *any* of them food?

Dr. Greeth appointed himself a one-man testing lab. In the first few days, while the houses and the stockade wall were going up, the doctor prowled around in the nearby forest, picking berries and digging up roots. He came into the kitchen of the pilot boat one morning with a load of

purple, melonlike globes in his arms.

Branson was sipping hot tea from a cup while Tina was fussing over something at the stove.

"These are for breakfast tomorrow," said Greeth.

Branson looked at the purplish things and then frowned a little. "Aren't you running the chance of poisoning us all?"

Greeth smiled a little and shook his head. "I ate part of one two days ago. Yesterday, I ate two whole ones, just to make sure."

Tina laughed. "I wondered why you weren't hungry at lunch."

"Why'd you take the chance?" Branson asked.

"Somebody had to," said Dr. Greeth. "I'm pretty much expendable."

Tina sniffed. "If you ask me, I think we ought to try the native stuff on Elissa. Nobody'd miss her."

"What's the matter now?" Branson asked.

Her laugh was sharp. "She thinks she's a clothing designer."

"Isn't she?"

"Oh, sure. That is, if you gentlemen feel like strolling about Generatrix in filmy party dresses. That's all she knows how to make. I asked her about something a little more practical, and all I got was a sneer. The woman is impossible."

"Not impossible," corrected Dr. Greeth. "Not even highly improbable. Just neurotic."

"That's no excuse," said Tina. "Della's neurotic, too. Men—all men—scare her." She flashed a grin.

"But being neurotic doesn't keep me from liking her."

"There's one difference," said Dr. Greeth. "Della knows she's neurotic; she doesn't blame her troubles on others. Elissa is convinced that all her troubles are someone else's fault."

"Is she still designing party dresses?" Branson asked.

"I don't know," Tina said. "After I spoke to her this morning, she called me an uncivilized little snot and walked off."

Branson finished his tea and stood up. "I'll go talk to her," he said with a sigh. He went out looking for Elissa Krand.

Wonder of wonders, she was working. Well, not exactly working; she was holding a basketful of pegs while Folee and Darren were driving them into the siding of one of the new buildings. None of the three saw Branson approaching, and he stopped a little ways off to watch.

She was posing, looking as seductive as possible in the thin silon dress she was wearing. Folee and Darren were grinning at her and holding an animated conversation. The scene was just a little too amiable to suit Peter Branson.

"Elissa, come here a minute," he called. "I've got some work for you."

She looked around, but didn't move. "I'm busy," she said. "I'm working."

Folee and Darren became silent and gave their attention to their work.

Branson's eyes narrowed. "Come here," he repeated.

An expression of anger crossed her face. It passed rapidly, but there was still hostility in her eyes as she walked toward him.

"Just who do you think you're pushing around?" She asked in a taut voice as she came up to Branson.

"I'm not pushing anyone around—yet," Branson said. "I want to talk to you."

"I haven't time for idle chitchat," she said. "I'm not the head loafer around here." She turned and started back toward the partly finished house.

Branson reached out a brawny arm, grabbed her shoulder, and spun her around. "Now, you listen here, Miss Snotty," he said through clenched teeth, "I'm not averse to slapping some sense into that head of yours."

"How brave of you," she said coldly. "All right. You wanted to talk. Talk."

"I have a job for you," Branson said tightly. "It's one I know you can handle. Even a simpleton like you can learn it. Get out of that silly dress and put on a jumper."

She just stood there, glaring.

"Come on," he said, "get dressed. We're going to get you a spade. The waste apparatus in the pilot boat takes too much power; we're going to shut it off and dig slit trenches."

For a moment, the shock in her eyes covered everything else. Then the hostility returned. "You're *crazy!* Do you think I'm a common digger robot? Do you? When the rescue ship comes, I'll make you sorry you ever suggested such a thing!"

"We don't have any digger ro-

bots," said Branson hotly. "And there isn't going to be any rescue ship. Get that stupid idea out of your mind. Now go get on a jumper and do as I say!"

"I'll do as I please, when I please!" she snapped.

Even Branson wasn't absolutely sure how it happened. Something triggered in his brain, and a flood of adrenalin surged into his blood. His left arm came up of its own accord, and his open palm cracked against the girl's cheek. The force of the blow threw her off balance, and she fell to the ground.

Branson looked down at her, his brain clearing rapidly.

She was dazed at first, then tears came into her eyes, and she shook with barely controlled emotion.

She didn't protest when he helped her to her feet; she didn't say anything. The shaking stopped, and she just stood there, her tear-streaked face looking waxy in the greenish light.

"You didn't have to do that," she said at last.

"The hell I didn't," said Branson coldly. "Now go get that jumper on; we have work to do."

Elissa Krand worked. She had to be driven and watched, as though she were a work animal, but she did what was required of her.

At last, the houses were finished. There were three small cabins for the couples, and a smaller one for Dr. Greeth which doubled as clinic and first-aid station.

In addition, there was a storage shed where Folee had put up some lumber for aging. He had warned everyone that the green wood from which the sheds had been built would likely warp eventually, and he wanted seasoned wood to replace the green.

Della Thorn had done wonders with the furniture. Instead of using green wood, she had made use of fallen branches. Each cottage was furnished completely with rough-hewn, but tightly made chairs and tables that had a rustic beauty of their own.

On the evening of the day the houses were finished, Branson ordered a celebration. All of them had slept in the pilot boat up to that time. The party was a sort of wedding supper.

It was to be a real occasion, so Dr. Greeth presided. He even mixed a small amount of medical alcohol with a little fruit juice concentrate from the rapidly diminishing supplies that had been stored in the pilot boat.

"It may not taste like wine," he said, "but it'll have to do. A toast, ladies and gentlemen, to our new village!"

"What'll we call it?" yelled Folee. "A village has to have a name, you know."

"How about 'Greeth'?" asked Della Thorn in a small voice. She looked frightened, but she was putting on a good face.

"Or 'Branson'," chimed in Tina.

Greeth started to say something, but Branson stood up. "Wait a second! I've got an idea! We'll call the planet Generatrix so that future ex-

plorers who find our remote offspring will know what ship we came from. By that time, we'll have cities all over the place. I suggest we call this place 'Landing', so they'll know where we landed. What do you think?"

Darren laughed. "How do we know there'll be a city here by then?"

"There will be," said Folee positively. "We're only a little ways from the river, and it's definitely navigable. This is a pretty good site for a city. Anyway, I second the motion."

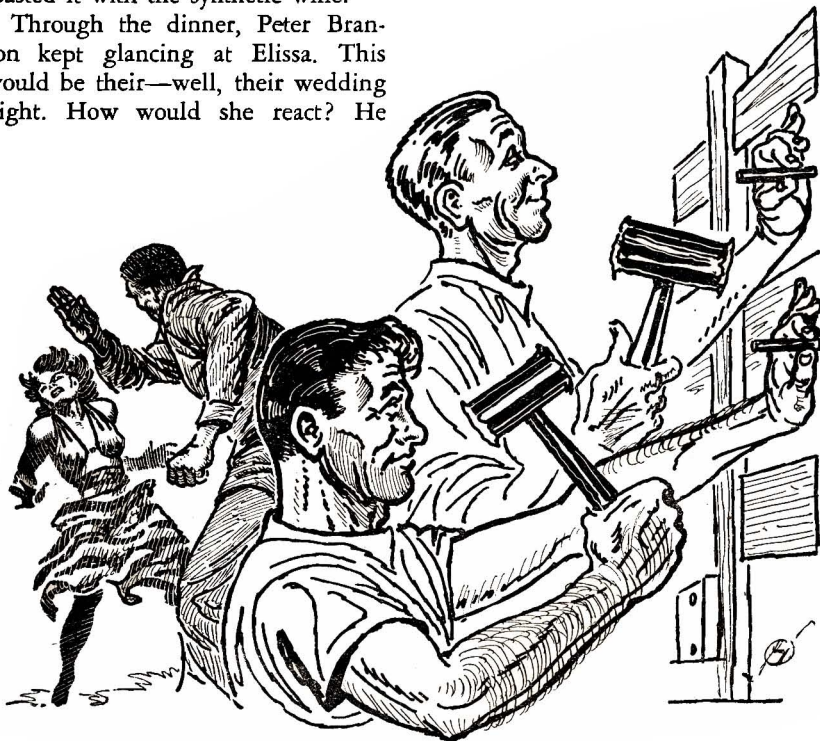
So they called it Landing, and toasted it with the synthetic wine.

Through the dinner, Peter Branson kept glancing at Elissa. This would be their—well, their wedding night. How would she react? He

hadn't been kind to her, he knew that. He'd slapped her hard once, and cuffed her around a couple of times since. And whenever she looked at him, there was hostility in her eyes.

He wasn't the only one who'd fought with her. Both Della and Tina had engaged in hair-pulling, clawing rows with her over relatively minor incidents.

It didn't seem to bother her, though. At the party, she was absolutely charming. She knew how to handle herself in a situation like that.



It was as though being at a party cut in a mental circuit that made her behave as a gracious hostess should behave. She was especially pleasant to Branson, and he hardly knew how to react, except to retaliate in kind.

Actually, the only jarring note in the party was the all-pervading fear in the eyes of Della Thorn.

The following day, Rob Darren went out hunting. All of them had seen the heavy-footed herbivores that occasionally wandered through the forest. The animals ignored the humans for the most part, but they never came too close to the clearing.

"It's time we got some fresh protein in," he said as he climbed into his armor. "There isn't a bit left in the locker."

"Yes, there is," Tina said as she helped him close the magnetic clasps. "I've been saving it."

"You mean we've been going without when there was plenty?" he asked in mock anger.

"I didn't say there was plenty; there's enough for one more meal. Now go out and get us a roast."

Branson who had been listening to the repartee with a grin on his face, handed Darren the Markheim. "I'll keep in touch over the radio. If anything happens, yell. We'll have someone monitoring the receiver at all times, and we'll record everything you say, so watch your language."

"I will. Gimme my lunch basket, cutie-pie." Tina loaded the provisions pack on his back. He shrugged a little to make the harness more com-

fortable, then trudged off into the forest.

"Remember," Branson yelled after him, "be back within twenty-four hours."

Darren turned and waved. "I'll remember, Chief. So long." And then he disappeared in the green depths of the forest.

Nearly eight hours later, Branson was sitting at the communications desk of the little pilot boat, listening to the noises coming over the speaker. There was almost a dead silence now; Darren was lying in wait for something. He'd found an animal path, and he wanted to see what sort of brute used it.

Tina came in, anger blazing in her eyes, her mouth thin and tight with fury.

"Has Rob eaten yet?" she asked.

Branson looked down at the log. "Yes. Once. About two hours ago; Dr. Greeth was listening then."

"Can I talk to Rob?"

"He's busy now. What's it all about?"

Tina took a deep breath. "Someone took the last of the frozen steaks. I put one of them in a sandwich and put it in Rob's pack; I was just wondering if he'd found it."

"How many steaks were there?" Branson asked.

"Five, counting the one I gave Rob. Not big ones, just small sandwich steaks. But they were the last. I was going to make a hash out of the remaining four and split them among the six of us. Now they're gone."

Branson clamped his lips together tightly, then thumbed the switch on the voice pickup. "Darren."

"Yeah?" A whisper. "What is it?"

"Was there a steak sandwich in your lunch?"

"Steak?" The whisper was puzzled. "No. Why? What a thing to bother me with now! I've got one of those big lubbers almost in my sights, but if he hears me, he just might decide to head for the hills."

"O.K. Forget it. Nail that beast."

"O.K., Chief."

Branson cut off the voice pickup so that Darren couldn't hear what was being said.

"Take over listening, Tina," Branson said tiredly. "I'll go take a look around."

Somehow, he had known he wouldn't have to look far.

Elissa was sitting at the desk in the cabin they shared together, sketching fluffy, impossible dresses. She didn't look up when he came in; she kept sketching until he spoke.

"Elissa."

Her eyes looked at him and widened in innocence, and a soft smile came over her face. "Yes?"

He kept his voice steady, his face free of emotion. "Do you know anything about the steaks in the food locker?"

An angry frown came over her face. "I certainly do. I was going to speak to you about them. We haven't had any steak for days now. That little snippet, Tina, has been holding out on us. And then, this morning,

she sneaked one out and made a sandwich for her husband."

Branson nodded slowly, trying to find words. Maybe she was right, in her own twisted way. Maybe she really couldn't understand why Tina had been stretching out the protein. Maybe she couldn't understand why Rob needed and deserved a little extra something.

"She ought to be punished for a trick like that," Elissa continued hotly. "Feeding her stupid husband and herself the best food while we have to get by on pap."

"Do you know what happened to the steaks, Elissa?" Branson asked. "Did you hide them, or something?"

She smiled a little. "No. I ate them. They were very good."

Branson reached out and grabbed her.

Six more days passed. Darren came back empty-handed from his first attempt to hunt the big beasts. Something—a blue-furred carnivore of some kind—had scared off the one he had been stalking, and he hadn't been able to find another.

Branson's right hand was badly swollen for a day or two afterwards, but even on the sixth day, Elissa Krand was still being careful of how she sat down.

Branson had smoothed over the theft of the steaks as best he could, and the others realized that Elissa had been informed of the error of her ways in no uncertain terms, but no one was really satisfied, especially Peter Branson.

Damn it, what made the girl tick?

On the sixth day after the incident, Folee asked him a rather personal question.

"How are you getting along with that self-centered feline, Chief?" Folee had picked up the habit of calling him that from Darren.

They were standing in the middle of the clearing, building a pit out of rocks. The power in the pilot boat was dwindling; eventually, they'd have to cook over an open wood fire.

Branson heaved another rock into place and mopped his brow with a thick forearm. "She accepts me," he said.

"Is that all?" Folee looked incredulous. "She seemed to like you well enough to pick you out. Of course, the way you've been treating her might—"

"No, no," Branson interrupted. "It's not that. She's neither warm nor cool. I'm just something that has happened to her—like an act of God or something. That's all. How are things with you and Della?"

It was a full minute before Folee answered. At long last, the words came, as though a dam had broken. "Nothing has happened yet. Not a thing. I'm beginning to suffer from congenital frustration, if you follow me."

Branson allowed himself a look of surprise. "What seems to be the matter?"

"Scared."

Branson cursed softly. "We can't

have that. We can't. The only way a second generation can pan out properly is to get as many different genetic patterns as possible. You've got to do something."

Folee grinned suddenly. "Don't worry. I told her I'd give her a week to get used to the idea. That week is up tonight."

"Oh? Think she'll quit being stubborn?"

"If she doesn't," said Folee flatly, "I'm going to beat the daylight out of her."

Branson nodded and silently eased another stone into place.

Rob Darren came back that afternoon from his third hunting trip. This time, he was carrying a Markheim over one shoulder and a haunch of meat over the other. He looked tired, but happy.

The animal had been too heavy to drag all the way back to camp, so he had simply hacked off a rear quarter and suspended the rest of the carcass from a tree branch. If predators didn't get it, it might be possible to go back after the remainder with the little hand truck and some extra help.

"It looks as though I'll have steak tonight, Tina," said Dr. Greeth, smiling. "But please—make it a very small one, and very well done."

Tina Darren prodded the bloody haunch on her kitchen table with a dainty forefinger. "It looks a little tough. I'll chop it fine for you." She grinned at her husband. "Couldn't you have shot a tender one?"

"What did you want me to do? Pinch it first?"

"You might have tried."

The following morning, Branson sensed a faint uneasiness at the breakfast table. They were still eating in the pilot boat until the fireplace outside was finished.

It didn't take him long to spot the reason for the odd atmosphere. Folee had a placid look on his face as he cut into the purple melon on his plate, but when he caught Branson's eye, he flashed a grin that was both wry and rather sheepish. The side of Della Thorn's face was a trifle swollen and very faintly purplish, and she had an odd expression that Branson couldn't quite translate.

"Well," said Dr. Greeth, patting his small paunch, "unless I soon feel much worse than I do now, I can pronounce the swoose to be an edible animal."

"Swoose?" asked Folee.

"From the taste," Greeth explained. "Half swine, half moose."

"I didn't know you were acquainted with Earth animals," said Branson.

"Are they Earthies?" the doctor asked in some surprise. "I didn't know that. We have both of them on Viona. Imported early, I suppose. Viona's an old planet."

Branson frowned. "I can see importing hogs, but not moose. They're not a domestic animal."

They compared notes, and came to the conclusion that the swine on Viona were indeed imported Terres-

trial pigs, but the moose in question was a native animal that had been given the name because of a real or fancied resemblance to the Earth animal.

The conversation was only idle chatter, but it had served to keep everyone's mind off their more pressing problems.

Until, that is, Elissa Krand, said: "Must we discuss filthy animals at the breakfast table?"

No one said anything, but they all thought plenty.

That evening, swoose steak was the entrée, and Elissa Krand refused to touch hers.

"I don't think I care to watch you eating it," she said with distaste as she rose from the table. "You can have mine; I'll stick to food from the locker."

"I think she's dangerous," said Branson. "What's your opinion?"

"My opinion?" asked Dr. Greeth. "I'm not sure. She's hard to figure. I'm not a psych man; I'm a surgeon."

They were sitting in the small cabin that had been built for the doctor and his medical supplies. Branson was hunched up on the edge of the cot, while the older man was leaning back in one of Della Thorn's chairs.

"She stole some more food from the locker, you know," Branson said. "She refused to eat swoose, so I told her that was too bad, that she'd get no more than her share from the emergency rations. So she stole."

"Did you paddle her again?"

"No," said Branson dully. "It

doesn't help. All she does is threaten me with arrest when the rescue ship comes. She really doesn't believe one is coming, but she has to threaten. I wish I knew more about her background."

"I know a little," the doctor admitted. "Her father had money—plenty of it. Too much of it, maybe. He was a pretty big man on Ta-weetha, from what I hear. Elissa inherited it all when he died some years ago.

"The local government on Ta-weetha isn't too strong, and it isn't above corruption. With her money, Elissa could get away with almost anything."

"Spoiled brat?" Branson asked. "You'd think what she's been through here would have taken that out of her."

Dr. Greeth shook his head. "Not likely. She needs psych treatment, I should think."

"Just because she thinks she's Queen of the Universe?"

"Partly," agreed the doctor, "but that's not the whole picture. She wants to be admired and kowtowed to, and she wants to have her own way, but lots of little girls have thought that way during their adolescence. Most of them learn better."

"What about Elissa, then?"

"Well—" The old man smoothed a palm over the top of his thinning white hair. "Put it this way; you've punished her, haven't you? And so have the rest of us, in one way or another, eh?"

Branson nodded.

"Has she changed her attitude one whit?" the doctor asked. "Does she still give you back-chat, and still steal food, and heaven knows what else?"

Again Branson nodded. "There are times when I feel like popping her with a closed fist."

"So do we all," said Greeth. "But it won't do any good. Look at Della Thorn."

Branson looked surprised, and Dr. Greeth patted the air with a lean hand. "No, I'm not changing the subject; I'm trying to give you data to work with."

"All right; what about Della?"

"Della can learn. Folee clouted her a while back, and forced her to learn something she was psychologically incapable of learning by herself."

"You've talked with Folee?" Branson asked.

"I have. Della had to learn her lesson in the worst way possible—by force. Folee didn't cure her of her fear; don't ever think that. But he did help her to learn to live with it by giving her something to fear even more. She learned.

"But Elissa Krand won't—*can't*—learn. She accepted that blow from you as something that just happened. You are an outside force over which she has no control, therefore, it's not her fault if you hit her. Nothing is ever her fault. She can't do anything wrong, and if you think she did, it's because you are mistaken. Naturally, she's not responsible for your mistakes."

"How in the devil did she ever get along on civilized planets?" Branson

asked in amazement. "She couldn't have acted like she was here."

"Her behavior differs only in intensity, not in kind," said Dr. Greeth. "She didn't steal because she didn't have to. On Taweetha, she could get almost anything she wanted *without* stealing. She was continually surrounded by a buffer system of protectors and sycophants who made sure that nothing harsh ever came her way. Now all that's gone, but she can't even learn that it has gone; she expects *us* to toady now."

"But what are we going to do with her?" Branson asked. "We don't know what she's going to pull next. I wish I could keep her locked up."

"Well," said Greeth with an impish smile, "you could begin by taking her shoes away from her."

The group had been on the planet for three months when Folee came with the news.

Branson was in the midst of a violent quarrel with Elissa when the knock came at the door. They both became silent, and for a moment all they could hear was the heavy patter of the rain on the roof. Then: "It's me! Folee!"

"Come ahead," Branson said.

Folee, dripping wet, pushed open the door. There was a wide grin on his craggy face. "Got news," he said.

Elissa gasped. "Rescue? Has a ship come?"

The grin on Folee's face faded a little. "Oh, no. We can give up on that, you know. No, this is even better news. Della's pregnant."

It was an event that called for a celebration. In spite of the rain, everybody trooped over to Folee's house as soon as the word was passed around. Dr. Greeth, having verified the diagnosis to the best of his ability, tapped the keg of medical alcohol and made a punch from the juice of a little green berry that grew prolifically in the nearby forest.

Della Thorn looked both pleased and proud. She was the first. Folee looked even prouder.

Dr. Greeth passed around the green-tinged punch and everyone toasted Della and her baby. Then she proposed a toast to Folee. Then everybody began proposing toasts to everything and everybody else.

Della was having the time of her life. In the limelight, she seemed to glow, which made her even more beautiful than she had been. She was at the peak of her life, the pinnacle of her existence. For that one night, she was ecstatically happy.

Two days later, she was dead.

There was never any question of who had committed the slaughter. Tina Darren was found at the edge of the forest, a knife wound in her back. Della Thorn was slumped over her bed in Folee's house; she'd been stabbed from the front, once in the abdomen, and once in the heart.

Elissa Krand had locked herself in the pilot boat with a Markheim rifle while four men stood outside, impotent with deadly fury, and murder in their eyes.

"I'll kill her," Folee kept saying

over and over again. "I'll kill her. I'll kill her."

Darren, too, was repeating himself. "Why Tina? Why did she kill Tina?"

"How did it happen?" Dr. Greeth asked Branson.

"I was in my shack," Branson said dully. "Folee and Darren were out picking melons. You were in the clinic cabin. Elissa must have lured Tina into the forest somehow, then gone after Della.

"Folee found Della first, then we all started looking for Tina and Elissa. We found them." His voice seemed to be drained of all emotion.

"There's no question of punishment, of course," Dr. Greeth said. "We'll have to tell her that she has nothing to fear from us."

Folee heard him and turned savagely. "Oh, no? I'll personally strangle the monster with my bare hands."

"Not," said Darren calmly, "if I get at her first."

Dr. Greeth shook his head slowly. "No. You can't do that. She's the only woman we have left." After a moment he added: "And she damn well knows it."

Elissa didn't come out of the pilot boat for twenty-four hours. There was no way of talking to her, not in the soundproof shell of what had once been a spaceship. For a full day, the four men fought it out among them. They buried Tina and Della and then argued some more.

"Brytell's Law!" Folee snarled jeeringly. "Who gives a damn about



that? You don't think *I'd* touch that inhuman killer do you? Or Darren? I say kill her. Kill her and let someone else populate the planet."

"Kill her and you'll kill yourselves," Branson said flatly. "Do you know what would happen? Four men—alone on a planet for the rest of their lives. How would we end up? What purpose would there be to our lives?"

"Sure," snapped Darren. "That's your idea. Because she's your woman."

Dr. Greeth said: "Let's go over to Branson's house and sit down and talk like sane men. We can leave the door open so we can see the pilot boat. I don't think she'll try to get away, but we can see her if she does."

All that night they argued. Only slowly did the immediate emotion fade from Folee's and Darren's minds, to be replaced with thoughts of the future. It wasn't a pretty picture, whether Elissa Krand lived or died, but it was obvious that she must live.

The next morning, she appeared at the air-lock door of the pilot boat, carrying a Markheim in her arms.

The men came slowly out of Branson's house, not taking their eyes from her for an instant.

"Well," she called, "have you made up your minds?" There was a haughty insolence in her voice.

Folee stopped walking.

"Careful, Folee," whispered Dr. Greeth. "Watch yourself."

"You don't dare kill me, you

know," she called in her cool voice.

"We know," Branson said. "Don't worry. You're safe."

"What are you going to do?"

Surprisingly, it was Darren who answered. "Nothing," he said in a dead voice. "There's nothing we *can* do. Nothing."

She smiled softly. "There's been no loss, really. I can have children—I know; I've had two already. If Branson isn't man enough to be a father, at least we know that Folee is."

None of the men said anything.

"But I want to warn you," she went on, "I don't intend to be treated the way I have been. I won't be locked up or pushed around. You'll treat me as I want to be treated. You'll have to."

"We know," said Folee. "We know."

"I know you do," she said. "I'm going to stay in here for a while. You can bring me food. I'll let you know when I want one of you." She smiled again. "And you can all behave yourselves." Then she went back in and closed the door.

She had them. They couldn't do a thing. They couldn't force themselves on her, and they couldn't do without her. If she mistreated them, they had to take it; if they mistreated her, she could easily abort any pregnancies—and she was perfectly capable of it.

A month later, Branson came back from the forest with a haunch of swoose over his shoulder and a bloody

pelt from one of the blue-furred predators that prowled the region.

Folee was hammering crosspieces into the stockade. He had started to strengthen it when one of the animals had begun sniffing around the doors at night.

"I think I got our pet," Branson said, holding up the blue pelt. "I baited a trap with part of a swoose and then waited. He walked right into it."

"Good," said Folee. "I wish we could get rid of all man-eaters that way."

"How's the Queen Bee?" Branson asked.

Folee spread his hands in a gesture of futility. "Same as ever. She said she misses you. You've been gone for three days."

Branson spat. "Is she pregnant yet?"

"No. Not yet."

"If she doesn't pan out as a prospective mother," Branson said slowly, "we may kill her yet."

"No," Folee said tiredly. "No we won't. We'll keep hoping. Besides—I don't think I want to kill her anymore. But I can't take much more of this."

"None of us can," said Branson.

Dr. Greeth, who up to now had said nothing, suddenly sucked in his breath sharply, and stood rigid. Folee and Branson reacted automatically, instantly sweeping the direction Greeth was facing with alerted weapons.

"What is it, Doc?"

Dr. Greeth relaxed and shook his head, and smiled slightly. "No!—No

attacker. Just an idea. The Queen Bee. I think . . . I know exactly how to give our Queen Bee precisely what she has been demanding, and has fully earned. She shall fulfill the role she selected—completely."

"She wouldn't fulfill anything; you know it, and you know we can't make her," Branson said harshly.

"This can't go on, you know. It just can't work out, no matter what Elissa may think."

"I know," Folee said, "and that's one thing that worries me. One of us is going to take a real poke at her one of these days."

"Worse than that," said Greeth tightly. "If she ever has any children, how are we going to protect them from her? She's killed twice, she can kill again."

"I know that," Branson agreed. "So . . . what can we do?"

Dr. Greeth told them.

The trial of Elissa Kränd was held the following day. Folee and Darren had been sent to get her after they'd heard what Dr. Greeth had to say. She didn't bother to struggle; she just laughed at first, and then told them that they'd better be good little boys—or else.

Darren floored her with a fist, and Folee had to hold him back to keep him from hitting her again.

Branson acted as presiding judge. It wasn't a trial in any sense of proving guilt, but it was necessary.

"This is ridiculous," Elissa said. "You're acting like a bunch of children. A trial! What a farce! You're

play-acting." But there was a touch of fear in her words.

Branson, sitting behind his desk, said: "Sit down, Miss Krand." He kept his voice even. "Sit over there. The sergeants-at-arms will watch you. And keep quiet."

"Sergeants-at-arms!" She laughed. "So you're taking titles already. I suppose I ought to address you as 'Your Honor'?"

"That's right," snapped Folee. "And His Honor said for you to keep quiet."

"The purpose of this trial," said Branson in a dry voice, "is to determine the guilt and, if any, the punishment of the defendant, Elissa Krand, who is accused of the double murder of Miss Della Thorn and Mrs. Tina Darren on the morning of the eighth day of Thirdmonth, Year 980, Galactic.

"The entire procedure is being recorded so that our descendants, if any, will know exactly what happened and how we handled it. It will be up to them to decide whether or not we have acted properly."

At the mention of the word "descendants" Elissa Krand relaxed a little. They weren't going to kill her.

Branson picked up the diary he had been keeping and opened it to the first page. Then he began reading from it in a careful monotone, keeping any emotion out of the words. The entire history of the colony, up to the day of the murders was read into the record. Then Branson stopped and looked at Folee.

"Mr. Darren, will you act as prosecutor?"

"I will," Darren said firmly.

"I realize that having an interested party act as prosecutor is not proper," Branson said for the record, "but we have no choice. Dr. Greeth will act as defense, because he has the only defense possible. And certainly neither Folee nor Darren could properly judge this case. Actually, none of us can. It will, as I said, be up to our descendants to judge, not only Elissa Krand, but this court and its proceedings."

He looked at Elissa. "How does the defendant plead?"

Elissa laughed again. "Don't be silly. If you're going to keep up this farce, go ahead, but—"

"How do you plead?" Branson repeated.

Another laugh. "Guilty. You know I'm guilty."

"Do you wish to make a confession to the court?"

The girl smiled insolently. "If you wish."

She gave it to them. The whole story. How she had walked into Folee's house and stabbed Della twice with a kitchen knife, how she had asked Tina to help her pick berries and had knifed her as soon as her back was turned. All of it.

And she enjoyed it. She was laughing at them. She glanced occasionally at Folee and then at Darren to see how they were taking it, but she got no satisfaction there; both men were calm and controlled now.

When she had finished, there was

a dead silence for a space of a full second. Then Dr. Greeth spoke.

"If the court please, I move that the defendant's plea be changed from 'guilty' to 'not guilty by reason of insanity.'"

"Insanity!" Elissa sounded shocked. "If anyone's insane around here, it's the four of you—not me."

"The defendant does not wish to so plead," said Branson, "but the court will take your request into account. Mr. Prosecutor, an unsubstantiated confession will not, in itself, suffice to convict the defendant. Have you any further evidence?"

"I call Mr. Cray Folee," said Darren. He was quite cool now.

Folee gave his evidence. He told how he had found Della, how he had called the others, how they had found Tina, how Elissa had acted and what she had said the next morning.

Then, in turn, Dr. Greeth, Darren himself, and finally Branson, gave their versions of the story. It wasn't proper court procedure, but they had no other way.

Through it all, Elissa sat calmly, a don't-give-a-damn smile on her face.

"It is agreed by all of us, including the defendant," Branson intoned, "that Elissa Krاند actually committed the murders. There is no question of that. The only question before the court is one of punishment."

"If it please the court," said Dr. Greeth, "the defense would like to state its case."

"Proceed," said Branson.

"Proceed," mimicked Elissa. "My! How stuffy can we get?"

"Shut up," said Folee.

Dr. Greeth ignored her and began speaking.

"I would like to point out that it must be obvious to every man here that the defendant, Elissa Krاند, is not emotionally sound. Her motivation alone shows that. Her confessed reason for this double murder . . ."

"Triple," Folee breathed softly.

". . . Is not that of a normal, sane person. Surely, then, we can not ask the death penalty." It was a purely formal statement, intended to lead into what Branson was going to say.

"On the civilized planets of this galaxy," Branson said, "the death penalty is never used. Psyching is prescribed, no matter what the motivation. Unfortunately, this is not yet a civilized planet. We have no psych men. We are only five people, alone on an uncharted planet.

"Normally, in that case, the judgment of this court would still have to be—death. We have no place here for the proper treatment of insanity.

"But this is not a normal case. For simple biological reasons, we can not—and we will not—mete out to this woman the normal punishment for her crime.

"However, there is another way. Dr. Greeth, would you explain?"

Dr. Greeth cleared his throat. "Let's just take a look at the basic tenets of this colony and of this particular case.

"Why can't we kill Elissa Krاند?"

Very simply, because we need her. We do not need her—or want her—as a person; the entity of Elissa Krand, warped and vicious as it is, is of no use to us. Indeed, it is a detriment to the group as a whole.

“But we *do* need her physically—as a biological engine. As a reproducing machine.”

The recording machine hummed as it's electronic memory caught and held every word, saving it for generations yet unborn.

“Therefore,” Greeth continued, “our object should be to find a method whereby we can destroy—kill—the entity known as Elissa Krand without destroying her body as our only instrument for reproducing the human race here on Generatrix.”

Elissa quivered. All the color had drained from her face. The man was serious! “It's not possible,” she said hoarsely.

“There is such a method,” said Dr. Greeth, ignoring her. “It hasn't been used for centuries, except on certain animals, and even there the effect is different. It is outlawed in every civilized planet of the galaxy. But, as the court has pointed out, we can hardly call ourselves a civilization.

“Even the most inhumane methods can have their uses when all else is impossible.”

“*What is it?*” Elissa screamed suddenly. “*You're crazy!* You can't do any such thing! *What is it?* How can you kill me without killing my body? How—”

Folee clapped a hand over her mouth. “Shut up and listen!” he snapped.

“The process,” said Dr. Greeth, “is an operation called a transorbital leucotomy. A small, thin blade—called a leucotome—is inserted into the prefrontal lobes of the brain by passing it behind the eyeballs of the patient and through the nerve and blood channels—into the brain tissue itself. By careful cutting, the nervous connections of the prefrontal lobes are destroyed in such a manner that the actual thinking part of the brain no longer functions.

“What remains is, to all intents and purposes, a robot. It can feed itself—clothe itself—perform small tasks that require no thought. But it can not think. The *ego*, to use an ancient term, is destroyed. Or, if not destroyed, at least isolated so that it no longer has any control over the body.

“Of course, the operation has no effect whatever on the genetic characteristics of any offspring of the patient.

“Such an operation, gentlemen, exactly fits the needs of this case.”

Branson didn't pause. He slapped the palm of his hand on the table. “This court so orders. Elissa Krand, you have heard the judgment of this court. Have you anything to say?”

Elissa Krand screamed.

One year later, the first child born on the planet Generatrix was a lovely baby girl, named Tina.