

SUPER SCIENCE STORIES

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THE ULTIMATE ONE

By
JOHN D.
MacDONALD

CLAIRE and Andy had a very special date, an early date, and their sitter wasn't able to show, so Claire came across the hall to my apartment and asked me if I wouldn't watch the kids, "just this once?"

As I saw no point in reminding her that it was probably the fortieth time, and as there is usually beer in their icebox, and as their video set is better than mine, and as I like their two brats anyway, I agreed.

Fifteen minutes later Claire and Andy left. I was sprawled out in the best chair in the room. Andy Junior, commonly known as Bugs, is five and a half and Marilyn is close to eight.

I heard them hurrying through the last of their meal and then they came in and piled on me, yapping about how glad they were to have "Uncle" Ed instead of that blank-blank sitter.

Marilyn hollered for a story and Bugs chimed in. I said, "Look, kids. All you got to do is turn that dial and you'll get kid stories put together by experts."

Marilyn said, "But they're for *everybody*. Your stories are just for us."

"Roboman, roboman," Bugs screamed. "Tell us about the first roboman."

"I've told you that one twenty times," I complained.

"And we want to hear it twenty times more," Marilyn said firmly.

I promised and they let me go get my-

It was the strangest bedtime story ever told—told when all Earth's children were asleep—in a night that held no dawn!

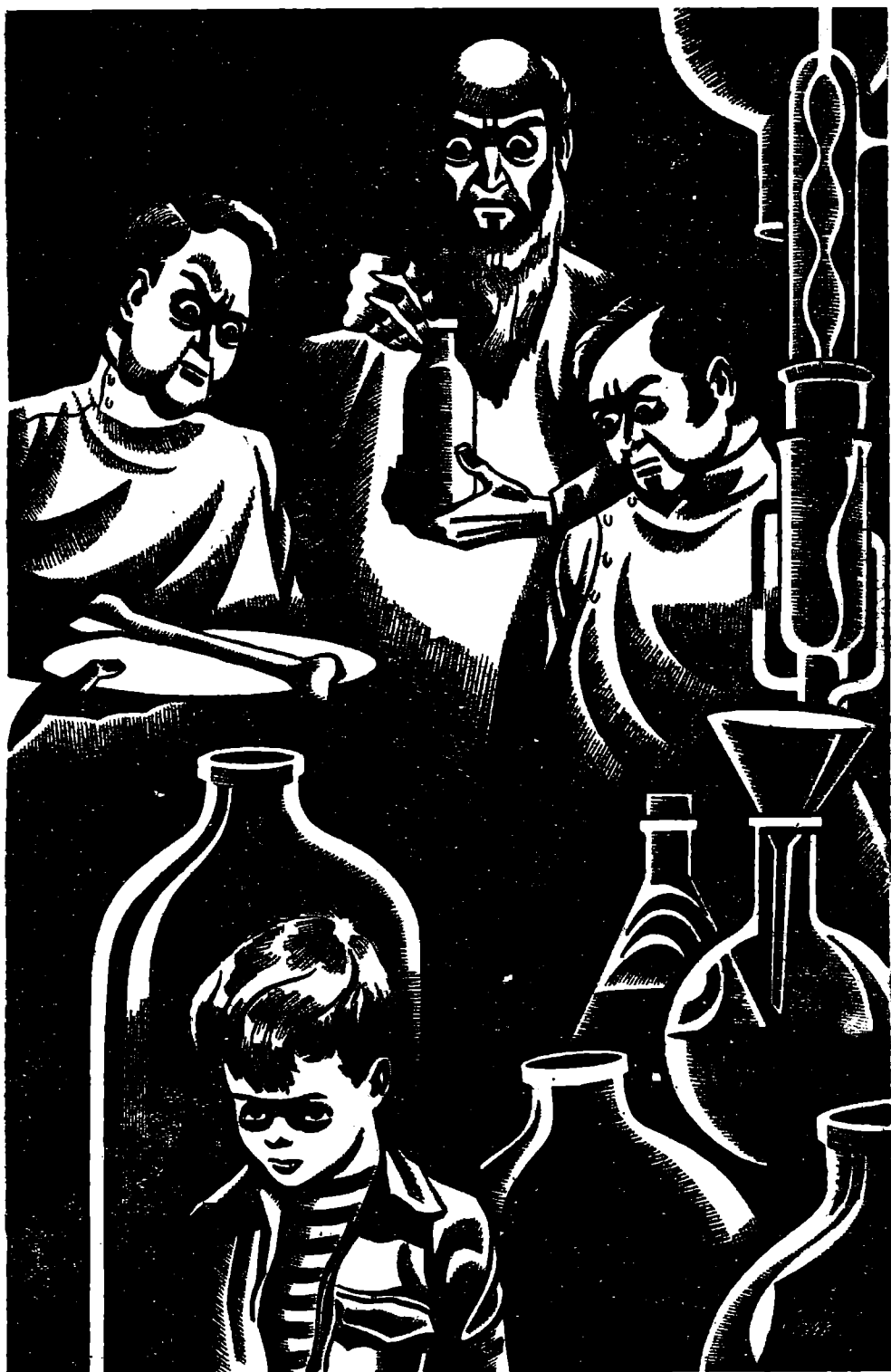
self a bottle of beer. Bugs sat in my lap and Marilyn sat on the floor and leaned her head against my knee.

"Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, there was a very rich man who had a sickly son. This was back in the days long ago when airplanes had propellers and the automobiles were made of metal."

"How silly," Marilyn said with a superior sniff.

"They didn't know any better, honey. Anyway, this son had a good mind, but his body was weak and soft and sick. The father had about half the money in the world and he sent messages all over the world, and he said in those messages, 'Send me the best doctors.'

"When the doctors came, the rich man said, 'They tell me my son will soon die. I do not wish that to happen. You will please save him.' So the wise doctors looked at the son and they found he had a disease of the bone which was very serious. At that time diseased bone was being replaced in small areas by stiff, rustless metal. This disease could not be stopped. So they began to operate on the boy, very cleverly. They started at his



One doctor claimed that he could make a better skin for the boy. . . .

feet and, in two years, they had removed every last bone and replaced each one with steel. Permanent lubricant was sealed into every joint, and the muscles were cleverly attached so that the boy had a better body than before."

"But his heart," Marilyn said.

"Please don't get ahead of me, honey. You're right. The hundreds of operations had so weakened the boy's heart that once again he was in danger of dying. The last operation, removing the skull, resetting his eyes in the steel skull case, had been the worst of all. One of the doctors said that, after all, the heart was only a pump, and not a very good one at that. Within six months they had devised a tiny plastic pump, half the size of the heart, which would perform all the functions of the heart and do them better. They made nerve grafts in such a way that exertion would speed up the heart, just the way the old one had worked. Better yet, the pump was so small that they made a dual hookup and installed, in the boy's chest cavity, a standby pump, just in case.

"The boy still lived, but he couldn't move outside the electrical field which transmitted power to the heart pump. His father blanketed their vast estate with the power field, so that the boy could roam the fields like a normal boy."

"And his skin," Bugs said.

"Bugs, you're getting as bad as Marilyn. The boy's body was further weakened by all these changes that had taken place, and the doctors found that whenever the boy cut himself or scratched himself, he was very slow to heal. In fact, he had two cuts that didn't seem to heal at all. Again they conferred, and they decided that the boy's skin was pretty inefficient. One doctor claimed that he could make a better skin for the boy. It took him nearly two years because he had to solve the problems of senses as well as cooling for the body. At last he worked out a nerve

graft which would enable the boy to feel heat and cold and pressure, but not pain. And, by planting thermostatic devices in the skin, moisture would be released in proper quantity to serve as a cooling agent. Best of all, the new skin was a beautiful tan color, and only the sharpest knife could make the tiniest cut in it. Seventeen operations over a whole year were needed before the boy had his new and perfect skin. It was applied in such a way that, if the boy had cut himself badly, a new section could be installed."

I saw Marilyn open her mouth to interrupt again, so I hurried along. "And all the doctors watched this boy for two more years, and he was a man instead of a boy, though, of course, he grew no taller. Then they went to the boy's father and they said, 'Your son will have a long life.' The father was satisfied and he rewarded them greatly, but ever after that the father was uncomfortable in the presence of his son, because the father was made of the crude materials of life itself, whereas his son had the strong, proud body of the first robotman."

Both Marilyn and Bugs sighed deeply. "It's such a *good* story," Marilyn said dreamily.

"Yah," said Bugs.

I had a revolt on my hands when I tried to get them to bed. But when I was about worn out, they consented and I took them back to the bedroom. They washed, with many complaints.

When they were at last tucked in, I turned out the lights and stood there in the warm half-darkness, looking down at them.

At times like that you wish you had kids of your own.

Good strong healthy kids like Marilyn and Bugs, with the very newest kind of Gro-Form metallic bone, Extensio-Plasticon skin, Double-Force hearts, Lense-Rite eyes and the best bottled blood that money can buy.