

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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THE WOMAN YOU WANTED

by ROBERT
SILVERBERG

THE CASE FOR EARTH

by ERIC FRANK
RUSSELL



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FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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● NOVELETS

- THE SILVER CUBE** *Mark Hellington* 44
It came from nowhere, suddenly appearing in the depths of space, a strange, shrinking trap where men were tested . . .
- PROBLEM IN ECOLOGY** *Don Berry* 89
It was a "we must be cruel only to be kind" theory behind the operation — but can one ever be sure?

● SHORT STORIES

- THE WOMAN YOU WANTED** ((illustrated on cover)
..... *Robert Silverberg* 6
Men could not live years in space alone, but it was essential that a man have the right woman with him. So . . .
- THE CASE FOR EARTH** *Eric Frank Russell* 24
Would it balance the case against Earth, when other beings had to decide if Earthmen would be permitted to find them?
- THE ZOET SPACE** *Earl Goodale* 37
The success of my invention was breath-taking, in more ways than I ever dreamed . . .
- THE NIGHT THE TV WENT OUT** *George H. Smith* 75
Consternation, obfuscation, and hysteria followed . . .
- JUST EVIE AND ME** *Ron Smith* 87
We knew what to expect, of course — but we were wrong . . .

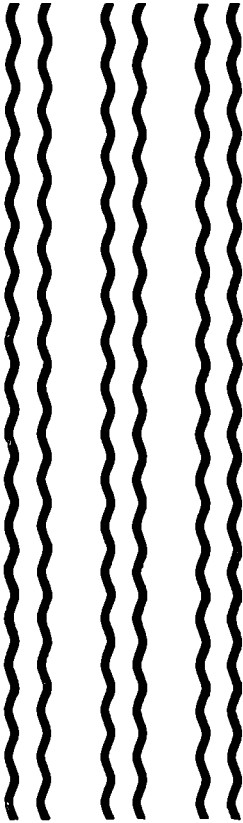
● FEATURES

- AUTHOR, AUTHOR** (a rundown on contributors) 5
- THE EDITOR'S PAGE** *Robert A. W. Lowndes* 21
Looking at "Yesterday's World of Tomorrow: 1928".
- READIN' AND WRITHIN'** 43
Jay Tyler reports on Gardner's "Fads & Fallacies".
- THE RECKONING** (Your report on Issue #34) 110
- SCIENCE FICTION ALMANAC** 111
- AND NOW THE NEWS** (Important Announcement) 113
- DOWN TO EARTH** (Letters and Comment) 115
- READERS' PREFERENCE COUPON** (For your votes) 130

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the woman you wanted

by Robert Silverberg

illustration by EMSH

He'd go into the Interstellar Survey Commission, make good money, and be accompanied by the woman of his dreams! But Bradmire wasn't entirely convinced...

THE OFFICES of the Interstellar Survey Commission were on Greek Street, just off Soho Square. The day that Bradmire decided to sign up for a Commission post was a warm, almost muggy one—unusual for London in late August—and he felt strangely clammy

as he left his Bayswater flat and waited opposite Hyde Park for the Number Seventeen bus.

He thought of all he was giving up. Not much, was it, really? A handful of friends, all of them at loose ends much like himself. Books—well, he could take some with him.



The other girls gathered bewilderedly around Bradmire's choice . . .

Music—that, too. No more concerts at dear shabby old Royal Festival Hall, but he could take musicdisks with him on the trip. The Commission were very good to the young men who signed up. The eight-year tour of duty was worth fifteen thousand quid, tax-free; that was good pay, all things considered, and the work was fascinating.

A lot better than living in an archaic London flat and scribbling poetry. A lot better than spending afternoons in the British Museum and evenings writing critical essays for ephemeral little magazines. Bradmire was slowly coming to the realization that the London literary life was not for him. In the Cambridge days, it had been fine to look forward to London—but now he was here, and it was merely hollow and irritating to him.

So he would go to space. He would become a planet-rover, and record data as a minion of the Survey Commission; and perhaps when he returned he would write a best-seller and live in peace and plenty in some Cornwall town.

THEY WOULD make a fuss over him as he signed the contract. Others had told him how it was. They gave you a fistful of pound notes and told you to go out and enjoy yourself for a week; they clucked over you as they found out what you would

want by way of comforts on the trip; and they psych-tested you for your android companion—

Who would be the woman of his dreams. The tests were infallible; they always gave you the woman you wanted, synthetic of course, to aid you in stability-maintenance during the long trip. Bradmire was slightly doubtful about making love to an android, but one of his more decadent friends had already tried it and said it was almost like the real thing—and after a while, no doubt, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference.

He wondered. There was a grim, almost fatalistic smile on his face as he spied the Number Seventeen bus topping the rise in the hill. Lowslung, a humming teardrop, it came toward him and stopped as he waved his hand at it. He clambered aboard.

"Wardour Street," he told the robot-conductor.

"Sixpence," said the blank-faced metal being.

Bradmire dropped one of the shiny little copper coins into the slot, entered the passenger section of the bus, and tumbled into his seat. The bus sped along down Bayswater Road toward Marble Arch, and thence into the archaic hodgepodge that was London's West End.

HE EXAMINED his money. Two copper sixpences, one of the old silver

kind; a florin; a pair of pennies, and a bright gold guinea. Twenty-four shillings and eightpence, of which one of the pennies—the battered old large-size Charles III piece—was his good-luck coin, and therefore unspendable. It wasn't very much cash at all. And there wouldn't be any money forthcoming from the publishers for at least a week, by which time he would be very hungry indeed.

His back was to the wall. He had no choice but to sign up.

Let Marian and John and Kenneth and the others chide him for selling out, he thought doggedly. *Let* them. He was tired of bohemianism—and with all of the universe waiting to be explored, it was hopelessly provincial to remain in London.

HE GOT OFF the bus at Wardour and walked east along Oxford Street, turning south and taking a twisting route through Dean onto Greek Street. The Commission building was one of the new ones, tall and gleaming, fronted with glossy plastic, that had been erected in Soho in the last decade; the architect had inscribed a glittering gold "2129" on the facade for the benefit of future historians.

Bradmirer fingered the card in his pocket. It bore the name of Sir Adrian Laurence, Recruiting Chairman, Suite

1100. He moistened his lips nervously.

The double doors swung open at his approach. A robot waited inside, seven feet tall and mirror-bright. Bradmirer felt unutterably shabby. He straightened his tattered frock coat and said, "Suite 1100, please."

Of course, the robot's expression did not change, but it seemed to Bradmirer that it had smiled condescendingly as it said, in suave Oxford tones, "Naturally, sir. The grav tube on your left."

"T-thank you," Bradmirer stammered. He had never been sure whether robots were entitled to politeness.

He stepped into the grav tube and drifted upward to the eleventh floor; there he was deposited in a shining corridor. A vast door loomed above, with an immense 1100 inscribed on it. Bradmirer went forward.

THE DOOR rolled back when he was within a foot of it, and he found himself confronted by a blonde receptionist of quite unnerving proportions. He wondered whether she, too, were an android.

"May I help you?" she asked sweetly.

"I'm—looking for Sir Adrian Laurence," he blurted. "I want to sign up. I mean..."

"I understand," she said, and it seemed to Bradmirer

that she did. "Come this way, please?"

She led him down a brightly-lit foyer; he followed, studying her construction avidly, and deciding that if she were a sample of Commission androids he wouldn't object to getting one. "May I have your name, please?" she asked as they reached a broad oak door.

"Bradmiré. David H. K. Bradmiré."

She inclined her head toward a minute speaker-grid set into the rich oak and said, "Mr. David Bradmiré to see you, Sir Adrian."

The door opened. Bradmiré stared at a man of his own height, fiftyish, with a baronet's yellow wig and a strikingly modern blue-and-red dress suit. "Won't you come in, Mr. Bradmiré?"

The office was furnished in the best of taste. Bradmiré took a seat in a quivering web hammock facing Sir Adrian's desk and said, "You know why I'm here, of course. I want to sign up for a Commission post."

"Excellent! Drink?"

BRADMIRÉ accepted a cognac and a cigar as if he were fully accustomed to such luxuries before noon every day. He leaned back comfortably. He felt fully at ease, now, with no lingering doubts.

"What is your profession, Mr. Bradmiré?"

Bradmiré grinned. "I'm a poet and essayist, Sir Adrian. Came down from Cambridge in '29. Average income, 2129-2132, three hundred fifty pounds per annum. So I'm throwing in the towel."

Sir Adrian's face darkened. "You know that's not really so, of course. You aren't giving up your ambitions. You're merely—shall we say—*postponing* them until you're more mature. How old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"Ah. You'll return from the stars at age thirty-four, still a young man in today's world. You'll be wealthy—fifteen thousand pounds, plus accrued interest. You'll have a vast store of experience; you'll have seen dozens of bizarre alien worlds, gone places and done things few of your poetic contemporaries have done. And you'll have the comforting knowledge that you have done something valuable for society. *Then* you'll be able to create, David! You'll have something to say to humanity—and humanity will listen, and reward you!"

BRADMIRÉ admitted to himself that Sir Adrian made it sound remarkably attractive—desirable, in fact. Not at all the hopeless last-resort gesture he had seen it as. He felt adrenalin surging through his body.

He said, "I'm roughly fa-

miliar with the terms, but would you run through them again...?"

"Of course." Sir Adrian knotted his hands together, smiling. "You sign on for an eight-year term, of which the first three months is spent in preliminary instruction. We supply you with a small two-person scoutship which is equipped with an automatic course computer. There'll be nothing for you to do but wander from star to star and beam reports to us on planetary systems, possible life forms, and so forth. We need thousands of men to do this work, which is why the terms are so attractive.

"Your pay is fifteen thousand pounds, placed on deposit for you at Lloyd's and collectible on the day of your return. It's tax-free. You'll also be supplied with whatever books, musicdisks, or other recreational equipment you desire." He paused. "And also, our laboratories will furnish you with a female android companion who will be as close to your desired specifications as modern science can manage."

"It *has* to be an android, sir? I mean, I couldn't take any human girl I happened to know..."

THEORETICALLY, you could, of course. But the requirement is that she must come within .0001 of your subconscious specifications,

and we find in practical application that such women are *extremely* rare. But the manufactured synthetics are—ah—highly desirable, and fully human in all but their origin."

"Suppose I—don't want any companion. What if I want to go it alone?"

"Impossible, I'm afraid. Our ships are expensive, and we can't take the risk of losing any. Solitaries are inherently unstable. The sort of man we want is mentally alert, gregarious, well-balanced, and—ahem—normally heterosexual. It's been our experience that other types don't provide satisfactory performances."

Bradmire chuckled. "I don't know how well-balanced I am, but I can testify to the heterosexual part."

"I hope so. If you accede to our terms, we can test you in a matter of seconds to judge your suitability. Another drink?"

"Don't mind if I do," Bradmire said.

THREE HOURS later, and quite some miles away, Bradmire finished what he had to say with, "...so I signed up." It was early in the afternoon; he sat in The Kenya, one of London's cozy old *espresso*-houses, in South Kensington near Exhibition Road. He sipped his cappuccino and smiled at the little group of friends around the table.

"And they gave you fifty pounds expense money?" John Ryson asked incredulously. He was a slim, pale lad, down from Cambridge like Bradmire, who had been working intermittently on an immense narrative poem for the past four years. "Fifty pounds just to throw away in a week?"

"You saw the notes," Bradmire said. "Ten crisp little green fivers. Ten pretty little portraits of Queen Diane." He scooped three gold guinea coins from his pockets and stacked them on the table. They represented change from his first purchase, a box of cigars for his friends. He tapped the gleaming profile of Henry X and grinned in cheerful commerciality. "I hope you'll pardon this rather vulgar display on my part, chums. But it's been years since I last had three of these little things all at the same time, and I feel like crowing about it."

"Fifteen thousand when you get back," Bert Selfridge muttered. He was thirty-two, going prematurely gray, with a sharp little beard. He taught Remedial Grammar at University College. "A fortune! And for what? Chasing around from star to star, looking for little green men."

JEALOUS, ART? Why don't you sign up, then? Surely what I'll be doing is just as valuable to humanity

as teaching the rudiments of our language to a bunch of rebellious would-be chemists and engineers."

"Aren't you giving up too much, though?" Ryson wanted to know. "Eight solid years..."

"But there's no reason why I can't write during that time. And I'll have no room and board problems, and no yammering landladies or squalling back-alley tomcats. And the company of my perfect woman."

"Perfection can get tiresome," Selfridge said half to his beard.

"Have you tried it?" Bradmire retorted.

"When are you leaving, David?" asked Marian Hawkes.

Bradmire glanced across the table at her. She was a quiet girl with a deep, soft, easy-to-listen to voice—but she rarely spoke. She was either terribly shy or terribly arrogant, Bradmire had decided earlier; either way, the effect was the same.

"At the end of this week," he said. "I passed the first battery of psychological tests this afternoon. All they do is strap a funny hat on your head and throw a switch, and *bzzz!* A meter ticks, and you're either in or out. I was okayed."

WHAT ARE the qualifications?" Marian asked.

"Not very much," Bradmire told her. "Good health, sound mental outlook, general stability. And heterosexuality."

"They didn't have to test you for that," Tyson said. "We could have given them affidavits for you."

Bradmire chuckled. He had always had a reputation as a ladies' man—and, as is usually true in such cases, the reputation was far in excess of actuality, through little fault of his own. "They insisted on doing it their way." He smiled. "In two days I go back to—ah—get fitted for my android light-o'-love. At the end of the week, it's off to indoctrination camp in Scotland for three months, and then into the great beyond. Eight years from now I return, rich, muscular, space-bronzed."

"And we can come to you for loans," Selfridge said. "You won't forget your poor old arty friends."

"Not if they're still arty and hungry," Bradmire said. "But I suspect I won't find any of you here when I get back. You'll all have taken the same route I did."

"All except Marian," said Ryson. "She isn't eligible. Or is she?"

Bradmire shook his head, grinning. "Women aren't wanted for this job. Men only—with a plastoprotein girlfriend built to specs." He rose and glanced at his watch. The time was 1400.

"Gentlemen—and lady—I'm tired of drinking coffee, and no doubt so are you. I move we adjourn next door to the *George and Dragon*. We've got an hour till closing time—and the drinks are on me!"

HE WOKE with quite a head the next morning, but he had invested half-a-crown in some anti-hangover tablets; and after he popped one of the little green lozenges back of his tongue he felt much better about things. He depolarized his window and stared out. The sun—*imagine it*, he thought, *the sun shining in London!*—poured through the opening. The streets were damp, though; it had been raining. He wondered whether they would ever manage to get London's weather under control, the way they had done in—say, New York. Probably not. But it would be nice to come home, eight years hence, to a London in which the damnable rain fell on a neat predictable schedule that could be published in advance each day in the *Times*.

He donned his clothes and fumbled through his pockets for his cash. He found four crumpled five-pound notes and a handful of guinea pieces and small change—all that was left out of his fifty quid expense-money. He realized he had spent as much last night as he had in the whole last month, practically.

BOOKS LITTERED the room, and some new music-discs, and a few empty wine-bottles. He saw that at some time during the previous day he had acquired a new cravat—*whatever for*, he wondered, *where I'm going?*—and that he had stained his clothes with what might have been spilled champagne.

Well, the Commission had intended him to have a good time, and he had certainly succeeded. He had scattered the shillings like a new Maecenas; and though he scarcely remembered what had happened, he imagined it must have been a grand night for all. John had been there, and Art, and Kenneth, and Marian Hawkes, and that other little slip of a girl with the improbable figure, and two or three others. The word had gone round London that Bradmire had had a windfall, and all his friends had gathered round to join in the fun.

He remembered arguing Yeats versus Synge bitterly with a verse playwright named Buxton; he remembered swilling barley wine with a blubbery Celtic bard from Glasgow—or was it Dublin? And he remembered kissing someone under a table; Marian Hawkes, maybe, or else that girl Joanne. Well, it didn't matter which one, or why. Come the end of the week, nothing much of his past life would matter at all.

He picked up a book, neat

and bright in its jacket. A poetry anthology, thick and costly; he'd coveted it a long while, and now it was his—just for putting his name on a paper that promised away his next eight years. Someone had spilled a little champagne on the book, too. That was too bad, but in a way he liked the idea of having some tangible souvenir of last night's celebration.

THE PHONE rang. He snatched it off the hook before it had rung twice, and said, "Bradmiré here."

"David, this is Sir Adrian Laurence. Of the Survey Commission, you know."

"I haven't forgotten, sir."

"Good. I trust you've been enjoying yourself since yesterday morning?"

"Very much so," Bradmiré said, grinning. "It's a long time since I've had fifty quid all in one lump."

"Poverty's a thing of the past as far as you're concerned, son. But I wanted to remind you: you have an appointment with us tomorrow at noon. To select your companion, you remember."

"I haven't forgotten *that* either," Bradmiré said. "Do I report at your office?"

"That won't be necessary. Room 707's the place to go. I'll be waiting for you there."

IT HAD been Marian Hawkes he had kissed, and not the other girl, after all.

He found that out that evening, when the group assembled in a pub near Clerkenwell Road and Hatton Garden, and then wandered westward toward the Bloomsbury flat of publisher's assistant Kenneth Prior. By that time there were seven or eight in the group, and Bradmire—who was happily down to two guineas by this time—found himself walking along Theobalds Road with Marian.

"Do you still think Yeats' plays were all that good?" she asked. "Or was it just the barley wine that got you so enthusiastic?"

"What's that? Oh—yes." He chuckled wryly. "I guess I *did* get a little too passionate and lose some of my critical objectivity. But I hardly remember most of the things I did last night."

There was a sly tone in her voice as she said, "I wonder just how much of last night you've forgotten."

He smiled. They turned up into Great Russell Street, and he started walking a little faster so they could catch up with the rest of the group. He found himself liking this soft-spoken girl, and he knew that was dangerous; in four days he'd be departing, and this was no time to start any emotional relationships. Especially not after having ignored the girl for the year he had known her.

But somehow he found himself hoping that his synthetic

android would be rather like Marian Hawkes—tall, willowy, well built, with a soft deep voice and a sly sense of humor. He wouldn't mind spending eight years in a two-man spaceship with someone like that.

IN FACT, he found himself kissing her again that night. Some time after that, he argued Yeats versus Synge again, and landed a sound punch in Buxton's well-padded belly when words grew too hot. Sometime after that he had wandered across the city, not alone, into Victoria Embankment, and tossed a guinea piece into the Thames under the shadow of Scotland Yard. After that, he recalled crossing Waterloo Bridge and wandering round the slums of Southwark, and then doubling back over Westminster Bridge, watching the sun rise while walking by the Serpentine, and getting home to his flat just before 0700.

He slept three hours, waking at ten, and dressed and breakfasted. He surveyed his holdings and found that last night left him with the sum of seven and ninepence. Well, no matter, he thought; Sir Adrian had said he could have more expense money if he ran through the first fifty pounds.

He took the underground tube at Lancaster Gate, and got off at Tottenham Court Road. Precisely at noon, red-

eyed and weary but keenly anticipating what was to come, he presented himself at Room 707 in the Survey Commission building.

IT LOOKED like a very ordinary office. There was an attractive receptionist back of the desk, and a framed solido of King Henry on the wall. Sir Adrian was waiting for him, along with a smiling little man with disconcerting green eyes and a white smock.

Sir Adrian introduced him as Dr. Hammersmith, the Commission's Chief of Testing. Hammersmith stared at him with coolly-appraising eyes, as if giving him an on-the-spot psych-testing. Then he said, in clipped Scots tones, "Very good. Will you come this way please, Mr. Bradmire?"

He was led on into an inner office that was dark; Hammersmith nudged a stud and subtle electroluminescents fluttered into life, revealing a truly startling quantity of ponderous apparatus. It seemed to Bradmire that one entire wall of the big office was devoted to a monstrous pile of frightening gearwork: massive tubes and coils and strangely-throbbing lights, dials and meters, electromagnets and unidentifiable mechanisms.

"Is that thing—for me?" he asked in a hushed voice.

Hammersmith smiled. "It does look a little imposing,

doesn't it? Yes, that's our psych-tester."

He gestured toward a desk in the back of the office and said, "Would you sit there, please?"

Bradmire did so—and noticed that it was no desk, but rather an additional machine covered with dials and indicators. He lowered himself with some trepidation into the chair riveted to the floor in front of it, observing that a formidable array of devices seemed to be installed right behind him.

He grinned feebly. "What's going to happen?"

SIR ADRIAN said, "We're going to let you choose a mate. The Singestault Selector makes our job a good deal easier and quicker."

"What do you mean? How do you go about designing androids?"

Hammersmith said, "We keep fifty or sixty basic androids on hand in the building at all times. We're going to march them through this office while you analyze them with the Selector, and we'll pick out the one who most approximates your ideal. Usually it's possible to find one that has an index of correlation of, say, 77%. We earmark her for you and send the others back to storage. Then, by using the data the Selector has received from you, we make psychical and physical alterations in her until her

Selector score is 99.999%. Then she's yours—the woman you wanted."

Bradmiré felt strangely unnerved by Hammersmith's bland confidence. "Suppose," he said in a hoarse voice, "suppose there isn't any android in stock who correlates better than fifty percent. What then?"

Hammersmith shrugged. "Then we design one from scratch for you. But this takes much longer; it's far easier to begin with a standard model and custom-shape her. Sometimes we come quite close."

"A boy in here last week," Sir Adrian said, "found an android who was within 95% of his ideal. All we had to do was add an inch of bosom and give her a tape on famous cricket stars and she was perfect for him. Of course, it's rarely that simple. Shall we begin?"

"I—I guess so," Bradmiré said. His fingertips felt cold; he felt irrationally tense. "We might as well get started."

HAMMERSMITH lowered a sort of crown over his head—a recording instrument, some kind of electroencephalograph. There were other detectors attached to his wrists and ankles. He felt as if he were being prepared for execution, not for finding a perfect mate.

"Keep your hands on these

buttons," Hammersmith said. "They'll register changes in skin temperature. We'll also be picking up pulse alterations, adrenalin counts, and eighty or ninety other things. It's foolproof."

He stepped back and threw a master lever. Bradmiré heard a humming sound as all the complex machinery around him came to life. The needle on the Singestault Selector's main gauge fluttered momentarily and dropped back to zero.

In front of him and overhead a battery of lights flashed on, creating a hazy sort of field—with a woman's silhouette in the middle of the field. Quite a handsome silhouette too, Bradmiré thought.

A door opened. A girl stepped out and began to walk with measured steps toward the silhouette.

SHE WAS tall and dark of complexion, and she wore a skin-tight two-piece outfit that hid absolutely nothing of her long, curved legs and high bosom. Her hair was cropped short; her nose was a bit too long, and there was something faintly haughty about her eyes. She looked human, all too human, and Bradmiré would not have objected to having her.

She passed through the silhouette. She was a bit too tall and a trifle too narrow in the hips. Bradmiré glanced down

at the detector. It was registering only 58%. A long way from his ideal, evidently.

But the Commission had plenty of other girls, it seemed. Narrow-hips passed on through the field and out of the room, and already another was advancing—short, buxom, with a liquidly undulating way of walking. Bradmire had never cared much for short girls. This one rang up 32% on the gauge, and passed on.

There was a wide and varied assortment. Short ones, tall ones, blondes, brunettes, some with hair of no color he had ever seen. Some who came through the field brazenly nude, others prudishly concealed. Haughty ones, shy ones, farm-girl-type ones. Girls in evening gowns and girls in spacesuits and girls in nothing at all.

Dozens of them must have gone by. Sweat dribbled down Bradmire's face, and the apparatus strapped to him felt oppressively heavy. He had lost all count and had no idea which had scored what. An icy, regal-looking one had tallied the low score, 11%, and a slim long-haired brunette in tight rubberoid halter and tights had recorded 69%, the high so far. Bradmire wondered how long it would go on, and whether he would find anyone who outscored the 69-percenter. As far as he was concerned, the brunette would do, in a pinch.

A NEW GIRL was coming out; they moved in endless series. This one was a tall blonde, clad in rubberoid from neck to ankles—revealing thereby both a sense of modesty and a startlingly good figure. Her eyes were wide and clear, her smile elfin.

Bradmire felt an inward tingle. He looked down at the Selector. The needle was oscillating wildly and coming to rest someplace above the 98% level.

He looked back at the platform, at the girl. She was standing in the Selector field, and the silhouette framed her almost perfectly.

And something else was quite surprising. She was a perfect double for Marian Hawkes.

“HOLD EVERYTHING,” Bradmire said loudly. “This looks like the one. The Selector says she’s almost perfect—and I agree!”

The lights went on suddenly. Bradmire blinked and looked around. Sir Adrian and Hammersmith were paying no attention to him; a white-smocked technician had burst into the office.

He was shouting, “Dr. Hammersmith, there’s been a mistake! A human girl got in the android lineup by mistake! We were checking the potentials, and one of the last ones nearly blew out our board!”

So that explains it, Brad-

mire thought. *It isn't Marian's double at all. It's Marian. But how—and what—and why...?*

Confusion seemed to be ruling in the testing laboratory. The android girls had all re-entered, and were milling about in alarm. Hammersmith was swearing. Above everything else, Bradmire heard Sir Adrian's commanding voice: "How could something like that happen?"

The hapless technician shrugged. "She just slipped through, that's all. But it's easy enough to find out who it is. We just look for the one who has a navel, and that's our girl."

"Very well," Sir Adrian thundered. "Bradmire, I'm sorry about all this. We'll have to check."

"But look here, sir—I hit better than 99% on that last girl. She's obviously the one I want."

"Hmm." Sir Adrian and Hammersmith examined the selector gauge. "Most unusual, eh? Which girl was the one who got this score, Bradmire?"

"That one, sir."

He pointed to Marian, who stood gravely in the midst of the android girls, trying her best to look like one of them.

HAMMERSMITH removed the paraphernalia that bound Bradmire, and he crossed the room to her.

"All right, the rest of you!"

Sir Adrian snapped. "Let's see your stomachs. And there's trouble waiting for the one who isn't a laboratory product!"

At Marian's side, Bradmire whispered, "How the deuce did you get into that lineup?"

She smiled. "Last night you gave me ten guineas for a bottle of champagne. I put it to a better use, and bribed one of the technicians to let me in."

"But how did you know the machine would pick you?"

"It didn't take a machine, silly. Everyone knew it but you, all along. This was my last chance, wasn't it?"

Bradmire grinned at her and turned around. The android girls had formed into a line again, only now fifty bare and navelless feminine stomachs were revealed. It was a somewhat dazzling sight.

"Odd," Sir Adrian said. "They *all* seem to be synthetics, all right. But the detector-board said—ah. There's one other."

He looked at Marian. "Kindly unzip, young lady."

Bradmire stepped forward and said, "I don't think that will be necessary, Sir Adrian."

"What?"

"She may or may not be an android; I'm not sure myself. But the Selector plainly says she's the woman I wanted. I don't think we need to continue this session any further."

"But if there's been a violation..."

"Does it matter, if she's human?" Bradmire said. "The thing that counts is the compatibility index. And that's pretty close to perfect."

And I should have seen that a long time ago, he thought.

SIR ADRIAN looked puzzled; but then, he began to laugh. "I begin to understand. Very well; the Selector tells the truth—and we'll overlook any irregularities in the procedure. Dr. Hammersmith, the session's over. And if you two will follow me to my office,

we'll assign you to Indoctrination for Survey work."

As they left, Bradmire whispered to the girl, "You are Marian Hawkes, aren't you? Not just a clever android imitation? I mean..."

She giggled deliciously. "The only way to find that out is to look for my navel, isn't it?"

He reached for her belt. She slapped his wrist gently. "Not here, silly. Later. We'll have plenty of time for things like that on the way to Betelgeuse."

