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By R. W. Krepps and H. L. Gold

ILLUSTRATED BY DON ANDERSON

When



STRANGE BEINGS, the Owen and the Emily.

They came in a silver globe from a place called Earth.

They were like the trees, with five little roots at the ends of their arms and legs.

They gave us curious things to eat

the Earlings came

WHEN THE silver globe came down from the clouds and settled to rest beside Beautiful Water, everyone in the world went to see it.

Some people, they that lived beyond the rocks, did not hear of the globe for nearly fifty days. They were, after all, at the limits of the world, and Beautiful Water is near the centre; it is a large placid green pool whose surface is medicinal, because to contemplate it under the moons' rays induces splendidly lofty thoughts. When word of the silver globe was brought by messengers to the people beyond the rocks, it happened very fortunately that the Senior was living with them. So everyone put aside work and followed him to Beautiful Water.

It took them sixty days to reach it. The Senior is the kindest of men of course that is a truism—and he did not travel at his top speed, because the less hardy members of the vast group would have died on the way, trying to keep up with him. The rocks took a dreadful toll as it was. One woman had three of her legs broken in a fall, and thousands of vowels were received in the thorn tract. Nevertheless, everyone was extremely happy, and singing filled the pale red air from dawn till moons' rise.

When the Senior topped the last hill and locked out toward Beautiful Water, he saw that all the other folk in the world were already gathered there, their orderly masses stretching out to cover half the plain. The sight of the silver globe roused him to leap and shout with amazement. It was entirely new in his experience. Its symmetry was heart-warming, its color made his fore-eyes water with pleasure. Even at this distance, to look on the silver globe was to experience tonic thoughts. He raised his arms in the air and waved the people behind him to push on at his best speed.

The terrain being safe now, he felt it would be selfish to run ahead; so he dropped all his legs and dashed down the glassy slope, reveling in the velocity. He had not gone at full gallop since he became the Senior. He was gratified to find he could go as fast as ever.

I remember the first race I ever entered, he thought. I was the fastest man in the games. All my opponents were faint with joy when I distanced them so easily; they felt how fine it was to cover the ground that swiftly, each imagining himself to be me, and we all rolled together afterward and thrust our arms about one another, hissing with delight. What a shame it is that as Senior I cannot enter the races. How everyone would hiss! But the ancient laws are wise and I must not even think of breaking them.

In a short time he had come to the fringes of the quiet throng. He stopped and was welcomed by a number of the world's centre, whom he had not seen in a year,

Food was pressed on him and he was lifted up by two men so that as many as possible could see him eat. He ate for nearly half a day, while everyone milled about changing places and desiring to those who were blind what gusto the Senior brought to his feeding. At last he could eat no more, and was lowered to earth. Then the local Juniors, most of them very old men with great bunches of yellowing hair between their eye-rows, began to tell him about the silver globe.

"It is a *ship*," they said.
"What a strange word!" the Senior exclaimed. "Did the folk of the plain make it up? There have been no new words since three Seniors' time ago, but of course there has been nothing new to name."
"No," they said, "it is what the *humans* call it."

He blinked his fore-eyes at them. What are the *humans*? he thought, but good manners prevented him from asking it aloud, because that would have suggested impatience with the Juniors. So he merely nodded and hissed a little with approbation. "Ship," he repeated, memorizing the word.

"The humans are two in number," they went on. "They are very strange and lovely beings, made like the roots of thorn trees. Their legs are each as thick as all eight of ours, and very long and knobby,

"With natures as all-loving as theirs, what will they become after we have given them some civilization?"

and each human has but two. Their bodies are even thicker, and of bright colors, sometimes green as Beautiful Water and sometimes red and white and moon-colored."

Then the Senior laughed loudly. "You are inventing tales for me," he said, gurgling. "I have never heard finer. Who is the man with such an imagination?"

But then they told him quite seriously that they were speaking the truth, and of course he had to believe them, although it was baffling to try to picture these humans, realizing that it was not a tale.

"They have two arms, somewhat smaller than their legs. There are little closed tubes on the ends of each, like short heavy rootlets; but at the extremities of their legs they have no such things, only large flat-bottomed growths shaped like stones."

"Next you will tell me that they have only ten eyes," the Senior said, amazed. And they said no, not ten, *two*. And the Senior hugged himself with astonishment and made no more rash predictions.

"They came from within the ship," said the old Juniors. "We were startled at their exotic beauty. At first they had heads of silver, but after bringing out various large and small things and staring at them intently, they removed these heads—"

"They *what*?" said the Senior. Wonder was making him quite forget his manners.

"They removed the round silver heads and within them were secondary heads, each with two eyes and a tummy pink surfaces topped by hair of their color. There was no hair between the eyes."

Impossible, thought the Senior; but naturally he had not lost his breeding enough to let him say that aloud.

"When they had been out of their ship for about half a day, we came close enough to let them see us. One of them advanced to greet us, but the other put its rootlets over its eyes and gave a wail which, we have since learned, indicates fear and disgust."

"What is this you are telling me?" roared the Senior. "One fears only the wild waters beyond the world, and one has disgust for nothing but ugliness, which exists solely among the predatory cave beasts. Even in them," he added judiciously, "I have always felt that the only ugliness is their inexplicable desire to eat people, and that if this were gone, their forms would be recognized as comely and harmonious." He went on speaking of his theory, while the others waited patiently until he had finished. Unfortunately night fell while he was still exploring possibilities, and when the moons rose everyone settled to the ground and fell asleep.

At dawn food was passed around. The people ate and then the Senior was raised so that his consumption could be enjoyed by all. After this, the Juniors began to teach him the language of the two humans, which they had learned in the hundred and ten days since the alighting of the silver globe, or ship.

"They could not seem to pronounce the simplest words," said the Juniors. "So we tried to imitate their sounds, and finding shortly that the noises they made were actually a form of speech, another language, we were delighted to absorb it."

"Another language," said the Senior, nodding. After the business of the fear and disgust, nothing could amaze him further.

"You need both brains to absorb this language," they said. He at once awakened his second brain, which made him physically uncomfortable but increased his happiness, as he was enabled thereby to please the Juniors by learning the human's language.

In three days he had memorized nearly a thousand words. During this period he did not ask any questions, but a number of alien concepts were opened to him, and the reason for the human's ship coming down out of the clouds was incidentally made plain.

Continued on page 39

When the Earthlings Came

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

On the 114th day after the landing the Senior was ready to communicate directly with the humans. He had not looked toward the silver ship since coming down to level ground. Anticipation had warmed and stimulated him in the interval. Now he brought all of his eyes to bear on the magnificence, and a rapture shot through his body at the sight. It was like a moon dropped to earth, shedding rays of frosty brilliance all around as the sun glanced from its sleek surface.

Before a large hole in its side were placed several marvelous devices of unconceivable purpose. Two of those were spindly constructions somewhat like badly gnarled and twisted thorn bushes, but without leaves and having a shiny look to them. The third device

was tall, as tall, indeed, as the Senior himself; it was square, as symmetrically square as the globe was round, and of a brown hue. He saw that there was a large square hole in one side of it, like a shallow cave. The Senior hissed with awe.

The humans were nowhere in view. All the folk of the plain now beat an orderly retreat from the vicinity, and the people who lived beyond the rocks came forward and grouped themselves in neat rows so that they might admire the alien objects to their hearts' content. Many of them were still bleeding slowly, their fibres not having knitted over the wounds which they had sustained on the journey through the thorn tract and over the rocks. In time, in a few weeks, they would be whole again; meanwhile their pain was overshadowed by their zest in seeing the ship.

SOON the humans appeared. The Senior's banks of eyes flew wide. Mere description had not prepared him

for the splendor of these beings. Their lumpy faces, crowned by thick dirt-colored hair, the five orifices visible in their heads, the arctic clamminess of their heavy limbs as they moved toward the waiting people, the resplendence of their bodies which were of several shades and had rough, eddy textured skin fibers falling in irregular folds and bulges, all these appalled the Senior with their unsymmetrical charm. Both of his brains working in concert for a year could not have imagined such an aggregation of strangeness and exhilarating oddities. He lifted himself to his full height, which was almost half their own, and began to sing.

One of the humans, turning its eyes toward him, gave a low hoarse sound, evidently a word which he had not been taught.

"Don't scream that way, Emily," said the second human. Its voice was even deeper and thicker than the other's.

"But the size of it!" said the first,

plucking at its speech orifice with its rootlets. "I—I'm sorry, Owen, but I cannot grow used to their unknown word forms. They (unknown word) me."

The Senior realized that for some reason the humans had not pleased by his singing. He stopped, and said courteously, "Greeting, Owen and Emily," which were, he had been told, the names of which the Senior had just addressed. "I am the Senior," he said.

"We've heard of you, sir," said the Owen, "but your voice is so hoarse with low little hissing, and no popping at all; and yet it seemed friendly. You know our purpose in coming to your planet?"

"I am told you are cultural missionaries," said the Senior, pronouncing these words with some difficulty. "That's true. We are here to teach you something of our world, and in turn learn what we may of yours. This is my wife, Emily."

Life, ah yes, *person who accompanies one*, thought the Senior. "These are my wives," he said, indicating the masses of those who had come with him from the country beyond the rocks. "Polygamy!" said the Emily. "Owen, they are shamelessly polygamous. Ugh! (Unknown word)."

"I do not understand this word," said the Senior. "Polygamy?"

"Polygamy means having more than one wife," said the Owen. "We do not approve of it."

How strange, always to travel with a single companion. "We say, the more the merrier," the Senior murmured deprecatingly. The Emily emitted one of its hoarse cries. "They are impossible!" The Senior, confused, said, "No, we exist." Then harking back a little, he said, "Your world; what do you mean by your world?" for *useful* meant the world, certainly, and therefore the human's phrase was gibberish.

"You live on this world, on a comparatively small island on a large planet studded with many similar islands in a rough sea. We live on another planet, in a distant unknown world."

"Of course," said the Senior, waving his rear feet and popping politely. He did not pursue the subject, fearing to be rude. "You have come from, ah, your world, to tell us of yourselves. How beautiful of you!" All the people within sound of his voice hissed approvingly. Gratitude swelled in their hearts. Several women fainted with pleasure.

"Ships from our planet," went on the Owen, "on their way to more distant worlds, have paused briefly to analyze the atmosphere and physical features of our planet, and found them quite like those of our own. We have therefore been sent by our society to contact you, if you existed; which you do."

"That is hardly an easy sentence for this (unknown word) you understand, Owen," said the Emily.

"I disagree. They are of astonishing intelligence, even though they appear to be of a very low culture indeed."

The second human abruptly collapsed in the middle and came to rest on one of the spindly constructions. The Owen moved to the other, likewise fell onto it, and thrust its two legs into the square hole in the large device.

"Desk," it said, pointing. The Senior hissed. The Emily jumped, evidently

with surprise. "I shall never accustom myself to them," it said. "Never!"

"Take hold of yourself, Emily," said the Owen severely.

Now it began to speak to the people, while the Senior translated its more difficult terms; and it told them strange and astonishing tales to which they listened with much concentration. Sometimes the things it said were impossible to understand, and then the folk hushed with awe, sometimes the tales were plainly fabricated for their enjoyment, and they fell to the ground in transports of ecstasy. This went on for some hours. The Owen instructed them on acts they should perform, devices they should build, and as it was obviously doing its best to amuse them, the plain rippled with glee. "The Emily retired into the globe."

When the sun was nearly to the horizon, the Senior took advantage of a pause in the human's speech to ask a question which had been disturbing him with its implications. "Is it possible, Owen, that your wife the Emily is not pleased with me? I hope I am misinterpreting sounds and actions, but—" remembering that the Emily's first reaction had been explained as fear and disgust, he halted, embarrassed for the Owen, apprehensive of its answer.

"Your bodies are, er, somewhat, ah, um, startling to her," said the Owen. "They, uh, are not quite what she, hmmm, anticipated." Its rootlets fringed on the desk. "I mean no offense," it said, "but your high speaking voices irritate her nerves, while the hrumph, popping and hissing you emit from time to time are, that is, I mean, well, are not pleasing to her."

The Senior allowed his top eye-row to sag with sadness. "We will go away into the rocks," he said, "so that we will not cause the Emily discomfort." A kindly sorrow rent his hearts. "We like you so well," he said, turning away. "Stay where you are, sir," said the human loudly. "This horror of my wife's will pass. We are here to bring you culture and light, and by heaven, we shall do so." It then vanished swiftly into the great silver globe, from whence its voice could be heard bellowing and roaring, mingling with the hoarse protesting cries of its comrades.

The Senior was faced with a terrible problem. If he remained with his people on the plain, the Emily would be caused pain and disgust (impossible, incredible ideas! but fact nonetheless). If he went into the rocks, on the other hand, he would be inflicting a perhaps greater injury on the Owen, which was obviously pleased and excited by the opportunity to speak to him and tell him its tales. The Senior unloosed the full power of both his brains upon the problem. So intensely did he concentrate that when he had reached his decision, he was amazed to see that the sun had gone and the moons were high in the night sky. His people slumbered all about him, and the silver globe's entrance was closed and still. The Senior sighed, piped a snatch of song to cheer himself, and fell asleep.

EVERYONE was eating when the hummer emerged next day. The Senior lustily put down his meal and rushed to the desk. "Owen," he said, "I wish to suggest to you that the Emily remain in the ship, in order that our forms and voices do not irritate it." The Emily said in a choked tone that it would do no such cowardly thing. "I am a cultural mission-ry," it said. "I cannot expat-ry."

The Emily then broke off and repeated the well-known throaty shriek. "Owen!" it cried. "Look at that creature by the ship! It's injured! It's bleeding!"

"Go back," said the Senior sternly to the man who stood in the front rank, his two left forelegs glowing lavender ichor from their gashed flanks. "You are annoying the human."

"No, no," said the Owen sharply. "Let me just look at those wounds." It knelt by the thorn-cut man. "Why," it said, "that's not too serious; we can fix that up all right. Emily, bring me the medicine chest." The Emily brought from the ship a small device like the desk, but without a square hole; when the top of this was raised, many shining and beautiful devices appeared. Everyone hissed with wonder, and the Emily jumped slightly. "This may hurt a bit, but you'll soon be as good as new," said the Owen happily to the injured man.

As the Senior watched, popping gently, the Owen picked a glittering thing and broke it in two, one part taking the form of a straight stick dripping with dark red liquid. This liquid the human smeared on the wounds. The hair of the man waved with excruciating pain, but he stood

ast, hissing brokenly with pleasure at the obvious happiness of the Owen; who proceeded to wind a white thing about each leg over the cuts. "That should heal them up nicely," said the Owen.

For the first time, the Senior felt great waves of true satisfaction beating out to him from the large visitor. The Senior is more receptive to emotion in others than anyone, even the most sensitive Junior; that is a truism, of course. He had already sensed an enormous good will in this human, a yearning to give pleasure that turned the Senior quite giddy at close quarters. Now the Owen stood there radiating a sweet and blessed gratification, which the Senior recognized as stemming from the things it had done for the wounded man. He began a song of sharing, swelling in the emphatic thrill, but recollecting himself, lowered his voice to a muted sizzle. He must not inflict anguish on the Emily.

"How did the poor fellow come by his hurts?" asked the Owen.

"The journey from beyond the rocks is dangerous," explained the Senior. "There are thorns which you cannot avoid if you are in a hurry."

"But there are others with wounds?" asked the Owen, its two eyes glittering with eagerness.

"Oh, yes," said the Senior happily. "There are probably enough wounds to occupy you for days and days."

"Emily," said the Owen, its voice charged with an elation that was like sunlight on the skin of the Senior. "Emily, my dear, you'd better bring out the large medicine chest. Now, sir," it continued, "if you will just have the creature—the people with wounds line up here in an orderly fashion, I shall do my small best to ease their suffering." It rubbed its rootlets together, buzzing through its teeth.

All day long the Owen did things which it identified to the Senior as "bandaging" and "applying medicine" and "puncturing." Rarely if ever had

the Senior experienced such vicarious relief. About midway he saw the Juniors scurrying out through the throng to explain to all, the extremities of pleasure which the Owen was deriving from this ecstatic behavior. The great plain vibrated to their joy. The Emily retired, looking curiously green.

Next morning, as more folk with cuts were lining up in front of the silver globe, the Senior stepped to the Senior at considerable speed.

"Your velocity enervates me," said the Senior.

"Thank you, sir. I swoon with delight at your glee over my haste," said the Junior. "The two of them sat together, the Senior yawning and hissing for some time. Then the Junior continued. "I have sad news, sir."

The Senior's eye-rows sagged with melancholy. "Tell me."

"The people who were bandaged and medicated by the human yesterday," said the Junior. "They have all died."

The Senior gave a high keening wail. "All!"

"Every last one. In pain."

"Oh, oh, oh!" groaned the Senior. "Allow me to think about this."

"Certainly. Still, I send away those who are here to be polluted and iodined today?"

"Of course not. You have experienced the capture of the Owen in this matter. Would you willingly terminate it?"

"No," said the Junior unhappily. "I suppose not."

"I must think," said the Senior. He closed his eyes, his second brain. The Owen came out and began to penicillin and Merthiolate. More people went away to perish, glowing with pleasure at the stranger's gusto.

The Senior could come to no conclusion.

ON THE third day of treatments, the Owen asked him, "How are the people of the rocks and scratches I have taken care of?"

"Well," said the Senior guiltily, having known that eventually this would come up, and dreading it without being able to make himself tell a falsehood, "well, I suppose you might say, as well as could be expected, considering that everyone has died."

"The Emily, who was seated at the desk, looked up sharply. "What do you mean?"

"I mean they have died."

"The p-p-people I treated?" said the Owen faintly, passing with a bandage dangling from its arm.

"Yes, sir," said the Senior. "There are many more," he said, brightening. "You can poltice and daub for days, yet."

The Emily had risen. Now it approached the Senior closely, a thing it had never done before. There was no disgust or fear in its voice, but a vast awe, and perhaps a sorrow. "You mean they would all die, just so my husband could help—could treat them?"

"Yes," said the Senior.

"But why?"

"If I give the Owen such satisfaction," said the Senior logically.

The Emily dignified this. Then it spoke, as to itself. "Good heavens! He is so good. The thing is whited on, out of a sheer joy in giving satisfaction! Hundreds more are waiting to be treated. The Emily is whited on its companion. "Put away that chest, you poor fool," it snapped. "Can't you understand that? How do these are allergic to our medicines? That they're deadly to them?" It shook its head. "It sounds like insanity, but it's—why, they proved their intelligence. It's—why,

Owen, it's kindness such as you and I never dreamt of!"

"Kindness," repeated the Owen numbly.

"Certainly! the absolute zenith of kindly indulgence."

"Oh, no," said the Senior modestly. The Emily reached out and touched one of his arms timidly. "Tell me why," it said. "Tell me exactly why."

So the Senior, glowing, told the humans of the Emily that everyone takes in giving happiness to others; a thing that is known to all, of course, but which seemed to be quite new and astounding to the strangers. He enlarged on it, hissing and popping now and again with irresistible delight, and it was fine to see the Emily shaking its head in amazement, unrepelled by the Senior, now all agog and not minding the sound of his voice at all.

"This is magnificent," it said at last. "This is beyond my wildest hopes, Owen. The natives of this planet present us with the most fertile ground for cultural cultivation that even our society could wish for. With natures as gentle and all-loving as theirs, what will they become after we have given them some civilization? The mind boggles at it."

"You have the wrong word in 'boggles,' Emily, but I see what you mean," said the Owen. "Let us begin at once. I will lecture them on the rudiments of house building today, and on cultivation of the earth tomorrow. By next week," it went on, peering the desk with ecstasy, "I'll be touching them the proper form of self-government. Emily, I know that the martyrs will not have died in vain!"

"I have a lot to make up to them for," said the Emily. "I was disgusted by them. Well, I know what I can do."

"What?"

"Woman's work," it said, making the grimace that was called smiling. "I'll apologize in a woman's way."

"Well, my dear," said the Owen, smiling too, "I shan't pry into your little surprises. I'll get on with man's work." It gurgled a little and then began to speak of strange, incomprehensible, but beautiful things to the Senior and to everyone else on the plain.

NOT LONG before nightfall the Emily came out of the ship. Its arms were laden with a gigantic flat piece of wood, on which were piled many large round whitish objects, exuding a rather disagreeable smell.

"What are those?" asked the Senior politely, hiding his nausea with some difficulty.

"They are (unknown word)," said the Emily. "They are to eat. I've baked them for your people. Try one."

"Thank you," said the Senior, "but I wish my people to enjoy them first. That is a duty of the Senior, to try new things after everyone else." It had been many Seniors' times ago since the last new thing had been tried, but he remembered the ancient rule.

The human passed among the crowd, handing the white objects around. Some men broke theirs in half to share with the women and children. Others ate entire ones, waving their arms in transport. The plain shook beneath the appreciative hissing. "The Senior said to one of the Juniors, 'How do they taste?'" thought not in the human tongue.

"Horrible," said the Junior faintly. "But feel the jubilation of the Emily!"

"Well worth a bit of indigestion," agreed the Senior raptly.

In the morning, everyone who had eaten the queer evil-scented food was dead.

The Senior had the bodies removed

from the vicinity of the globe. He felt that the Emily might be discouraged at such a sight.

That day several hundreds of the round white things were baked and distributed by the ecstatic Emily. The Senior was ill at ease as he listened to the tales of the Owen. He could not concentrate on its discourse. He wondered if giving pleasure to the humans was worth so many deaths. The waves of satisfaction that bathed him when the Emily came near convinced him that it was worth it. He cast off his gloom and sang to the humans. The Emily beamed upon him.

The next morning both visitors came out of the globe very early, before all the corpses had been dragged away. They uttered harsh cries of horror. "What has happened?" asked the Owen.

"Nothing at all," said the Senior hurriedly. "A few people have died in the night."

"Died of what?"

"Well, now," said the Senior, "who can say of what?"

"Owen," said the Emily sharply, "have you been healing them again?"

"Of course not." Its roots fumbled in its dirt-bused hair. "It must be your cookies."

"Cookies," said the Senior, nodding. "I thought the word was cookies."

The Emily began to make a curious sound. It sounded happy. "You have baked more cookies for us?" asked the Senior eagerly, anticipating its joy.

"Oh, Owen!" it cried. "Let's get away from them! Let's leave this island before we kill the whole crazy wonderful lot in them with our misplaced help!" Evidently the sounds were not of happiness.

"Oh, come, Emily," said the Owen uneasily. "We can teach them things without poisoning."

"Don't dither, Owen. One way or another we'll murder them all, the poor sweet souls! Iodine and cookies and civilization—come on!" it screamed hoarsely.

"I suppose you're right," said the Owen. Together the humans wrestled the desk and chairs into the ship. The Senior saw, with a pang of fear, the

opening begin to close in the globe's silver side. "Wait!" he cried. "Do not leave us, Owen and Emily!"

"We must," said the Emily, unseen, her voice muffled. "We can't go on killing you in droves."

"But your pleasure has been so great—" began the Senior frantically, and then the opening had vanished. Numbly he watched the enormous ship rise with slow ease toward the sky; then there was a loud noise and it shot away over Beautiful Water and disappeared.

WHERE have they gone?" asked a Junior.

"Do not know," The Senior sizzled with surprise. "How could they leave when they were deriving such pleasure from helping and feeding us?" He thought a moment. "It must be that they don't understand," he said, "how great our joy was in them. When they have realized the truth of this, they will return."

"They must return," said the Junior. "I have never felt such intense empathic glee in my life, in all my long life, as I felt when the Emily passed among us with her loads of cookies."

"They will think of that," said the Senior reassuringly. "They will come back to iodine our cuts and bake us cookies. Let us all settle here on the plain and wait for them. We will not leave until they return."

Everyone squatted down comfortably. The Junior found a cookie-crumbs on the ground and ate it. "The Emily would like that," said the Senior approvingly. "I will speak of it when they return. You will not have died in vain."

"Thank you," said the Junior gratefully.

Everyone has been living on the plain for a long time. The Senior is an old, old man now. Every day he watches the sky for the silver globe. The pleasure he takes in normal everyday things seems dull and insipid beside the recollected ecstasy of the humans. But he awaits the return of Owen and Emily with a sure confidence. The humans will come back. That is, by now, a truism. ★