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All Stories New and Complete

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COVER PICTORIAL ATOMIC POWER PLANT

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BY E. G. VON WALD

World Without War

*Cooperation was all right back in the dark ages but this was
an era of super culture and hi-psi intelligence.
And love was no laughing matter. People who cooperated,
even biologically, were unlawful and . . .*

MARK KNEW he shouldn't stop. He was already late for Jennette's birthday party, but the sight of three people out in the open like this was too much.

He pulled around and hovered over the undulating flow of glassy magma, frozen on its way to the long, dry Potomac river bed, with its shallow caverns and fascinating mile-wide potholes. Just under an overhanging cliff of half-vitrified soil were two cars, obviously damaged. The three men were standing beside them.

Mark laughed out loud. It was not often that one found three people at once. And so close to each other. The scene there, with the

long, slanting rays of milky sunlight glancing off the ribbing of the flats and sparkling through the million brittle shards of collapsed debris, filled him with a certain poetic exultation.

"By the stars," he murmured to himself happily.

Bubbling with good humor, he slipped down a little closer to the hole, staying up hard against the overhanging cliff. He was feeling too cheerful to use his rightful advantage over them, and decided to use a handgun, since they had nothing better.

This was a mistake, of course. He was only moving along at a hundred miles an hour now. Too

slow for safe shooting, particularly with the bumpy air in the hole. But he happily disregarded this, as he pushed open a view port and blazed away with a zuzz pistol.

Almost immediately the ship lurched in the uneven air, and he could see the tiny thin trace of violet as it swept up and away off the targets. One of the men went down, sliced cleanly in two. But the others had seen him.

Mark cursed mildly, some of his high good humor gone, and pulled the car about for another run. The chronometer pinged warningly at him, notifying him that he was now a full hour late for Jennette's birthday party, but the code required the second try.

There was nothing that required handweapons for this, however, and he slipped his strong young hands around the main gun control. A single burst of violet, and one of the men vanished in a puff of steam. Good and clean, he told himself with satisfaction. But the last man opened his pistol onto broad-beam, burning a red flare of general destruction at him.

Mark veered around and bore down sharply for the last burst. He had to get it over with and on to Jennette. But the deadly broad beam swept below the car, evacuating the air and throwing the vehicle momentarily out of control. Close behind, the cliff became suddenly alive as the beam engaged it, bubbling and spewing out huge goutts of molten rock. The aircar burst into a brief, brilliant, sodium-colored fire and fell, with Mark burning inside of it, yelling and screaming in pain.

It took almost five seconds before



Illustrated by Ed Emsh

the charred brain of Mark's body stopped functioning. Then it released him.

He was conscious of the humming of his transmitter. Almost immediately the remembered pain brought perspiration running down inside the helmet into his eyes. He reached up and removed the headpiece with unsteady hands, groaning softly.

It had been some decades since he had last been involved in trouble like this. Killed, yes—but in a painless, fair fight. Being burned to death was no joke. And that body had been one of his best, with the finest reflex sensory system manufactured.

The machine purred softly beside him. He thought suddenly and emptily of Jennette, and stood up.

"Damn," he muttered, crossing the floor, feeling the pleasant warmth of the soft plastic under his feet. "Damn, damn, damn." He stopped before the transparent cover of a storage cabinet, gazing sourly at its contents.

Eleven humanoid forms were stiffly erect behind the cover, all broadly resembling him in feature, and differing only in such minor things as height, hair, perhaps the color of the eyes. Each bore the scars of some past clumsiness or accident.

"Damn," Mark said again. "That was the only decent body I had to wear. Now what do I do?"

He went into the next room and bathed himself in the tepid perfumed mist that fell perpetually from its domed ceiling. If it were anybody but Jennette, there would be no problem. He just would have

to shoot off a quick RT, explaining the situation and excusing himself. Nobody would have minded, least of all himself. Particularly a no-fight affair like this one was supposed to be.

But not Jennette. Ohhh, Jennette.

Mark grinned and rubbed the pleasant fluid over his well-cared-for skin. Oh yes, Jennette. There was something about Jennette that he could not quite put his finger on, but it was good. It was wondrously good. Like the bodies she wore. No matter what it was, it was always perfect. She just had the knack of dressing well.

Idly he wondered what her protobody was like. There must be some resemblance, of course. That was the law. Identification was very important, and few manufacturers would violate that, even as a simple matter of good taste. But there still would be considerable difference.

As he thought about it, he got a strange wistful feeling that he did not quite understand. There was a sort of sadness about it. Jennette seemed oddly different from other people. He liked her much too much.

Guiltily he brushed the thoughts aside. Anyway, it didn't matter, he told himself. Due to his carelessness in that last fight, he probably wouldn't even see her tonight, since he had nothing to wear.

He stalked out of the shower and gazed again at the bodies in the store room. The only halfway decent one there was that six foot black fellow with the little ears. It used to be his favorite, until he got it smashed one night during a

party at his nearest neighbor's. A half smile tugged at Mark's lips as he recalled the incident. That had been a no-fight party, too; but he had managed to smuggle in a small bomb, and set it off right in the middle of the main bedroom. There were at least ten couples there, since it was a big party, and none of them lived. The trouble was, Mark had been pretty badly smashed up himself, and just managed to get away without losing his body.

Now the thing was all scarred up and practically useless for anything except manual labor.

Mark shook his head disgustedly. There was nothing to do but send off the RT to Jennette.

But this was her birthday—

He caught a glimpse of himself in the reflection from his transmitter housing and automatically straightened his shoulders a little, then laughed at his image.

Then he stopped and contemplated himself further. There was one thing he could do. Many years before, he had an exact duplicate of himself produced, when the vogue for copper colored bodies was at its height. Since then the fashion had changed back to the pink, but that old job must still be around somewhere.

He hated to do it, though. He had never liked that body. It had been just too accurate, and every time he wore it, it embarrassed him. It had been almost as if he were going outside in his protobody. Which, of course, nobody did. People used their own bodies hundreds of years ago, but it was most uncivilized. Besides, it was tiring, and dangerous, too. Yet—was it more

fun? He wondered.

He simply had to make Jennette's party. Otherwise he wouldn't see her for months at least, and the thought of that made him feel funny in his stomach.

Mark grinned again, admiring her image in his mind, and set about his catalogue to find the fundamental frequency of that old copy of himself. Fuse it, he told himself resolutely. Nobody would know it was an exact duplicate.

He located the data and set it up in the transmitter. He had no idea where the body was, but that would take care of itself if it were still in good shape. Placing the helmet on his head, he punched the controls and relaxed back on the table.

TWO LEVELS below, under a pile of dust-covered trash, the body became suddenly conscious. Mark opened his eyes and looked around, recognition slowly returning. He had forgotten all about this old room, but then—one could hardly remember everything about a full shelter system, what with the hundreds of compartments, endless automatic equipment and innumerable connecting passages. Whoever it was who built this one sure had liked complexity.

He bathed and carefully braided the long, blueblack hair, simulating somewhat the fashion of the day, and spent some time adjusting a purple scarf over his left shoulder. The purple scarf was sort of a trade mark with him, and Jennette always admired it. Purple was her favorite color. He made a joke out of it and called it Their color,

which was typical of the strange, dangerous behavior she engendered in him.

Mark was a little worried as he plunged up toward the stratosphere in his extra car. This time he kept clearly in his mind the fact that this was his last serviceable body, and he could take no chances with it getting ruined. Even if he saw a whole multitude of people, all clustered together, he would ignore them, he told himself.

Halfway there, however, he spotted a peculiar marking on the scope, and detoured. The peculiar marking followed him.

Anxiously, he looked out a clear view panel, but could see nothing in the cold, mist-laden night. The marking grew more definite as he hesitated. It was another car, and there could be no question what it was after. A shot at Mark.

He cursed and sucked in his breath, making quick calculations. There was a rolling billow of cobalt fog off to one side, a whole bank of the stuff. Somebody apparently had been having a little game nearby. It was still hot enough, according to his indicators, to discharge anything the other car sent after him, and he would have the added advantage of being invisible to the other man's instruments. The only trouble was, once in the fog, he couldn't see anything either, and could be ambushed without difficulty on the way out.

The marking on the scope became more definite, and the question settled itself as the other car came between Mark and the cloud. Growling with irritation, Mark swung around and sent a wide angle beam in the direction of his

pursuer, watching nervously as the indicators described the pitiful short range of his fire at this setting.

The assailant veered off, however, scurrying into the cobalt cloud. Mark grinned. He knew the man would expect him to wait for him to come out, so he swooped down at max acceleration toward the surface. In five minutes he was signaling into Jennette's shelter for permission to enter.

There were servants everywhere—mechanical things, controlled by electronics and not alive, although they looked it. This was Jennette's specialty. She owned a factory that manufactured them for mining on the scalding plains of Mercury, and these had been superficially remodelled to act as servants. There was the usual government man there, too, running the party. He strutted around under his official sash with ill-concealed self-importance.

"Hey you, there—wait a minute," he called to Mark, waving a zuzz pistol in his direction.

"Yes?" Mark hesitated, eyed the pistol, and obeyed.

"That scarf—get it off," the man ordered sternly as he approached. The zuzz pistol was level and steady.

"Why?" Mark demanded. "It's just a scarf. I always wear one."

"You know why," the other man said coldly. "This is a tetotal party. If I let somebody slip a weapon or something in, it would be an awful brawl in no time. You know how people are."

The man was right, of course. You can conceal a lot of things in the fabric of a sheer scarf. Reluctantly, Mark undid the catch and

handed it over.

"Okay. You can pick it up at the entrance when you leave." The officer's amused eyes wrinkled as he looked Mark up and down. "Say, that's a pretty nice job you've got there, man. Mind if I ask who made it?"

"It's pretty good." Mark said cautiously. "It's custom made to a private specification."

The officer grinned goodnaturedly. "Sure, I understand. That's all right. I'm not from the revenue department. I don't have to do anything about bootlegging."

"I don't mean that," Mark protested. "There's nothing illegal—"

The man waved his disregard anyway. "Forget it. It's a nice one, though. And that copper color is coming back soon, too. These fashions run in cycles, you know."

"Yes," Mark murmured diffidently. "I thought so, too."

"Sure." The officer eyed it speculatively for a moment. "Two point oh one centimeter naval, isn't it? They're the best, of course." Mark nodded shortly, looking away from the talkative officer, hoping he would stop. But the man went on. "And I don't have any use for these new non-feeders they've been coming out with recently."

"No," Mark mumbled.

"It's all right to fix it so that the food is not necessary, and it really is a bother to have to feed those old models whether you want to or not. But sometimes you like to eat something just for the fun of it, and with the non-feeder models there's no receptacle for it."

Mark nodded, his eyes searching the huge anteroom, gazing hopefully between the moving ranks of

robot servants. Then he saw her and caught his breath.

JENNETTE. His lips formed a low whistle in time-honored acclamation of excellence. The officer followed his gaze and agreed.

"Yes," he said in a low voice, "that girl is really something. Private spec for everything, and she sure knows how to use it. Take that little golden job she's wearing tonight. Nothing to it. But with her, it's terrific."

He was right. Jennette was wearing a slender, soft-looking golden little body that Mark had never seen before. But it was a real prize. Being hostess, she could have clothes on, and sported a half dozen little bracelets and a jet black bandana around her throat. The thing was draped down over her left breast, and the whole effect was really quite stunning.

"Oh Mark!" she exclaimed, running up with an odd sort of breathlessness. "You're late."

"Sorry Jennette," he replied. "Ran into a little trouble and had to go back for another body."

"You must have missed," she said with amused accusation. "I'm surprised at you."

"Aw, there were three of them," he protested. "And the last one used a broad bean."

"Never mind, I forgive you," she told him. "Come along. Let's go look at my garden."

Mark grinned happily. "Wonderful idea. But what about your guests? Are you just going to leave them like that?"

"This is my birthday," she said. "They can amuse themselves."

Then she pulled him down and put her lips to his ear. "Besides," she whispered. "I've got an identical copy with electronic works. No one will even know I've left, unless they get too friendly with it."

"Pretty clever," Mark admitted thoughtfully. "But I wouldn't always be so ready to break the law like that."

"Who's to know except you, Mark?" She looked up at him with burning, gold-flecked eyes. "You wouldn't tell anybody, would you?"

Mark shook his head uncomfortably.

"All right, then."

They entered the elevator that took them down another half mile to the central living quarters of the ancient shelter. It had been built early in the flux period and remodelled several times. It was one of the best equipped on the planet.

"Tell me," Jennette said, gazing appreciatively at the heavy bronze shoulders, "where on earth did you get that?"

"I—Oh, it was just lying around somewhere," Mark mumbled.

"I bet," she said. "But it's nice. I like it."

Mark just grinned at her, happy for the moment, secure in the knowledge that it would be impossible for her ever to know that it was really identical with his protobody. Not that it would matter, just so long as it was artificial. He listened to the humming of the elevator for a few minutes. When it stopped the door vanished, and the two of them moved out into a sea of wild, colorful beauty. High above them was a simulated sun that made as good a substitute for the real thing

as had been developed since the underground movement.

"Bright," Mark commented.

"Oh, that's right. I've been forcing some Venerian puffers and scent flowers, and raised the radiation level ten decibels. They always do well under a strong sun, you know." She left his arm and moved to a control panel beside the entrance to the elevator. She manipulated something and the sun dimmed a little. "There," she turned around. "Better?"

Mark looked at the landscape, then back to her. He grinned. "Too much light."

"Oh you—" she murmured. She touched the controls, and the sun disappeared, being replaced by a huge, mellow moon that sailed majestically on the simulated horizon. It was impossible to tell it from the real thing.

"How's that?"

"A little dark."

Ignoring his comment, she came back and took his arm, and they went strolling across the flowers and grass. "Don't you like my moon, Mark?"

"Sure. It's fine. Sort of aphrodisiac, of course, but—"

"Isn't that what it's for?" Jennette asked innocently.

"I dunno. I never had a moon."

"Let's sit down here," she said abruptly.

THEY WERE eating pomegranates, biting briefly into them and sucking on the sour juices. The moon had risen higher during the past hour, becoming a little smaller in appearance. It was a peaceful, contemplative scene. Jennette snug-

gled up against Mark, thoughtfully tracing a design with fruit juice on his arm.

"This is fun," she said softly. "So much more fun than the usual things a person has to do."

"Mmmmm?"

"Oh, you know. Checking reports from the factory, making sure there is plenty of ammunition all the time, pestering the body manufacturers so you'll always have something decent to wear. Always watching or somebody will sneak in and blow up part of your shelter."

"Yeah. Well, guess that's life."

Jennette sighed and picked up another fruit. "It gets so tiresome, always having to keep on the lookout and fighting people. Don't you get bored by it?"

"Sure, sometimes. It's gotta be done though. Otherwise you couldn't tell what might happen."

"Mark—" Jennette said hesitantly.

"Yes?"

"Mark, would you shoot me if you found me outside your shelter?" She looked coyly up at him.

"Well, sure, unless you had a proper, government-authorized permit to be there." Mark turned astonished eyes on her. "What else could I do?"

"Oh, but you *know* I wouldn't do anything to harm your place."

"Aw, Jennette," Mark said uncomfortably, "of course you would. Anybody would. If people started acting like that, the whole balance would be upset."

She gently stroked his arm where the fruit juice had dried. Her face crinkled up and she giggled. "Maybe you just don't know me."

"Let's talk about something else,"

Mark suggested.

"What's the matter? Do I shock you?"

Mark laughed and brushed his lips against her shoulder. "I'm pretty hard to shock. Especially by you."

"See?" she replied archly. "You're just as anti-social as I am."

Mark's face clouded. "It's nothing to brag about, though."

"I'm not bragging." She sighed again, and resumed her fruit. Eyeing it speculatively, she said, "I guess I'm just bored with life, that's all. Sometimes things seem so silly. Like all the times you have to get a new body. You'd think the manufacturers were giving them away free."

"Yeah. Not like it used to be. Guess business is pretty good."

"Something ought to be done about it."

Mark grinned mischievously. "What do you suggest? Build another factory?"

"Oh, you know you can't do that. Somebody is always blowing it up."

"Well, don't worry. In another hundred years or so, people will start dying off again. These prototypes aren't as serviceable as the manufactured kind."

"Yes, but if they keep producing new people in the Decanting Centers, what good is that going to do?"

"I dunno. Blow up the Decanting Centers, maybe."

"Maybe," Jennette said, glancing impishly at the man beside her, "we ought to just stop wearing these silly old manufactured bodies entirely."

"Yes?" Mark tasted a pomegran-

ate, made a face, and tried another. "Just what do you suggest people wear?"

"They could go around in their protobodies."

"What?" Mark looked swiftly and scarchingly at her, alarm on his face.

"Why Mark," she laughed disarmingly. "You're such a righteous beast, aren't you?"

"Great Atoms, Jennette," he said, gazing intently at her golden-flecked eyes, wondering what strange things went on inside that lovely head. "You mean go around all the time as if we were savages? Why that's illegal, immoral, and besides—besides, it's dangerous. Suppose somebody took a shot at you? You've only got one protobody, you know."

"A clever fighter like you shouldn't have too much trouble with that, if you're careful," she said gaily. "And I'm pretty good at that myself."

Mark took a slow deep breath as he decided that she was just teasing him. "I'm surprised at you, Jennette."

She shrugged. "I'm bored, I guess. I'd like to try something new, just for excitement. Personally, sometimes I think the whole social system we have is pretty silly, anyway."

"Atoms," Mark mumbled.

"No need to swear about it," she chided him. "Come on, Mark. Just think about it for a minute. And be consistent."

"Consistency is all right for a free psi," he said. "It sure doesn't do a protobody any good."

Jennette laughed scornfully. "I'll bet you believe all that stuff they

feed you in the Decanting Center about ancient history."

"Course not," Mark said defensively.

"All right then. Why follow all these rules of social conduct if there's no good basis for them?"

"Aw, but there is," he replied seriously. "There was a big war—way back centuries before we were decanted out at Center."

"Hah," said Jennette.

"Sure. And it was a whole lot of people who cooperated with each other in it. There must have been hundreds of them—it was an awfully big war. Hundreds of people, all on one side, all fighting together against the other side."

"I don't believe it."

"It's true, I tell you," Mark insisted religiously. "Hundreds and hundreds of people. Maybe even as many as a thousand, all dressed alike—with clothes, I mean. And they didn't shoot each other—they just killed the people they were fighting—the hundreds of people on the other side."

"Other side of what?"

Mark frowned. "Oh, I guess that is just an expression. But that's what happened, anyway. Before civilization got started, people cooperated like that."

"That's just a whole lot of theory," Jennette insisted. "Nobody's going to make me ever believe people used to act like that. Besides, there just aren't enough people around to have all those mythical wars."

Patience, Mark continued. "I'm telling you, Jennette, this is more than theory. There are still some records left from those days."

"Prove it."

"All right. That's not hard. Somebody had to build the factories, didn't they? And the Decanting Centers?"

"Robots."

"Who built the first robot factory?"

Jennette considered. Then she shrugged petulantly. "Oh all right. Maybe a few people did cooperate. But not hundreds of them. People just don't act like that."

"Well, they did. And, of course, the obvious thing happened. Since they cooperated in some things, they cooperated in a lot of things, even fighting. That's how they could make war, you know—not the nice, social sort of fighting we do now. And you can imagine what happened. You can kill an awful lot of people awful fast, if a gang gets together on it like that. If they didn't have the artificial bodies and the psi transfer transmitters to make them come alive, there wouldn't have been anybody left after a while. That cooperation is rough stuff."

"Obviously," she commented dryly.

"Well, that's the reason for everything, then. Pretty soon the factories couldn't turn out hypnobodies fast enough and people had to fight in their protobodies sometimes. But after a few centuries, the leaders began to get civilized, and decided to put an end to all this cooperative killing. I guess they all got together and agreed not to cooperate with each other in anything in the future."

"It stands to reason," Mark concluded, "people had to learn to be civilized. They weren't just born that way. It's—it's culture."

"Pouf," said Jennette critically.

"All right," he growled, biting viciously into a pomegranate. "Let's hear your big story if it's so good."

JENNETTE stretched out her legs and contemplated her wiggling toes. "Oh, I don't know. I don't have any real ideas. But I know better than to believe that sort of nonsense. People just aren't like that, and you know it." She hesitated thoughtfully, then continued. "Maybe a few of them got together now and then for a party or something like this. But not hundreds of them."

When Mark did not reply, she laughed and said, "I guess I'm just feeling risqué tonight."

"You sure are," he mumbled.

"Of course there are parts of the old mythology that seem rather interesting—beautiful, even—"

"It's not mythology."

"Like the part that deals with marriage."

She waited. Mark dutifully echoed, "Deals with what?"

"Marriage."

Mark considered it. Then he shook his head. "What's that?"

"See? She taunted him. "You don't know everything like you think you do. Marriage," she explained, "was a sort of cooperative agreement that the ancient people were supposed to have entered into."

"Sure, just like I said," Mark stated with assurance. "Hundreds of people did it. They got involved in this marriage agreement, and made war on each other with it."

"What a dope. Marriage was an agreement between just two peo-

ple. And that much I might believe. Hundreds is too much."

"It was hundreds," Mark insisted.

"It was not. It was just two. And what's more, it was between a man and a woman. They lived together with their protobodies and agreed to cooperate together, and they made children and took care of them until they grew up."

"Why that's thirty or forty years," Mark exclaimed. "Even the wars didn't last that long. That's really nonsense. Besides, you can only make children in the Decanting Centers. And it's all done by machines."

"Well, maybe it is a little far fetched. But I think it's cute."

"Humph."

There was a few minutes silence. Then Jennette said softly, "Mark—"

"Yes?"

"Mark, you like me a lot, don't you?"

Mark squirmed uncomfortably, and stared at the artificial moon.

"Don't you?" she insisted. "More than you ever have anybody else?"

"Well, guess that's right," he admitted lamely. "A whole lot more than I should."

She reassuringly patted his hand with her little one. "That's all right, Mark. I won't tell anybody. Besides, I feel just the same way about you."

Mark nodded without speaking, worriedly studying the vague markings on the bright luminous disk in the simulated sky.

"Mark, don't you ever want to see the real me?" she inquired urgently. "Don't you sometimes feel kind of empty because you can never really have me—know

me, because all you ever see is a manufactured thing that only somewhat resembles what I am really like?"

Mark blushed. She had come a little too close to the uncomfortable truth. But he refused to admit it, at least to her. He mumbled an indistinct denial.

"Are you sure?" she said, grabbing his hands, gazing intently into his eyes, forcing him to look at her. "Wouldn't you sometime like to come down to my transmitter quarters?"

"But—"

"And see and touch my protobody—the thing I really am?"

"Aw—"

"Scared?"

"Maybe I am."

"That's silly."

Mark swallowed and said stiffly, "Just because there is a no-fight clause in your invitation tonight doesn't necessarily mean I have to follow it, you know. You don't need weapons. I could strangle your protobody easily."

"You wouldn't," she said confidently.

"You sure don't think much of me, do you?"

"I think just the same of you as you do of me," she said simply.

With impulsive hunger, Mark threw his arms around her, holding her tightly against him, nuzzling her, smelling the perfume of her hair, incoherently mumbling into her ear. "Jennette, Jennette," he sang, "I think more of you than anything. I love you. I know it's wrong, but I would never even shoot you, because sometimes it hurts you, and I wouldn't want you to feel even the slightest dis-

comfort." He stopped, took a deep breath, and added meekly, "I'm sorry."

"But Mark," she whispered.

"Why is it really so wrong?"

"You know."

"Suppose I told you that this body is my protobody right now?" she asked earnestly.

"But it isn't."

"It is," she said faintly.

Mark's breath hissed as he gasped. Jennette was blushing all over her body, heightening the golden color of it. He let her go, and she slid off his lap onto the shadowed grass beside him. She bit her lip. "I didn't really mean to tell you—yet."

There was silence. Mark said quietly, "That's all right, Jennette."

"You aren't angry with me, are you?"

"No," he said slowly. "Not angry."

"Mark—"

"Yes?"

"Now that we're into this thing," she asked hopefully, "why don't we try this marriage agreement—you know, like the ancients did. It seems like such a beautiful thing to do when two people like us—you know."

"I don't know." Mark shook his head doubtfully. "I just don't know about it."

"Why not? You wouldn't have to really stay here. It could be just a secret agreement between us. And you could come and see me whenever you liked."

"It all seems so unreal," he muttered.

They lapsed into thought, both avoiding looking at the other. There was no sound except a faint

sighing of wind in the leaves of the well trimmed shrubbery.

"Suppose." Mark said finally, "suppose other people started doing this thing? This cooperative agreement? Lots of people must want to, just like we do."

"I suppose so," she admitted.

"I went through this once before," he went on absently. "About ninety years ago I met this woman—she was awfully nice. Clever. Understood things. Not like you, of course, but still she was very nice. I thought about it then."

"What happened to her?" Jennette asked numbly.

"She died after a while. She was pretty old. Oh, we didn't do anything," he hastened to add. "We kept it all on a perfectly moral and honest plane—never saw each other except at authorized government sex parties, like this, and all. Fought whenever we ran across each other outside. But I remember thinking at the time that some sort of agreement would be nice. We got along awfully well. I could never understand what she saw in me."

"I can," Jennette whispered.

"This is just the same, only a lot more so," Mark went on thoughtfully. "And it's wrong. You know it's wrong. Suppose a lot of people started it. First thing you know, whole groups of people would be cooperating with each other again. And when they got into trouble outside, or planned an innocent little raid on somebody's shelter, they would all work together on it. And pretty soon, there would be other groups cooperating in fighting back again. They'd have to."

"And that, of course, would be the end of civilization. Pretty soon, there would be nothing left, and everybody would be dead."

Jennette did not reply when he stopped. She turned her head away, but Mark could hear her uneven breathing.

"We have a responsibility toward society at large. We know it. We've been well educated and we aren't savages. Neither one of us can get away from it. It might be wonderful at first, but our conscience would come out sooner or later, and the whole thing would be ruined."

She rubbed her face with her cupped hands, shaking her head. "I suppose—" she murmured unhappily.

"You'd hate yourself for it after

a while," he said.

For a few minutes, Jennette stared at the grass before her feet, pulling up little blades of it one by one. Then Mark stood up, and she flashed him a small, wistful, damp smile. Together they walked back toward the elevator, stepping quietly and almost furtively on the soft ground. "If it weren't for that—" he started.

"I understand," she replied quickly. Taking hold of his arm, she said, "I'm sorry."

"Sure." Mark grinned affectionately at her. "Come on. Let's see if they've been having any good fights upstairs." They stepped into the elevator and disappeared. The artificial moon continued its regular motion through the simulated sky. . . .

