



No Charge for Alterations

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If there was one thing Dr. Kalmar hated, and there were many, it was having a new assistant fresh from a medical school on Earth. They always wanted to change things. They never realized that a planet develops its own techniques to meet its own requirements, which are seldom similar to those of any other world. Dr. Kalmar never got along with his assistants and he didn't expect to get along with this young Dr. Hoyt who was coming in on the transfer ship from Vega.

Dr. Kalmar had been trained on Earth himself, of course, but he wistfully remembered how he had revered Dr. Lowell when he had been Lowell's assistant. He'd known that his own green learning was no match for Dr. Lowell's wisdom and experience after 30 years on Deneb, and he had avidly accepted his lessons.

Why, he grumbled to himself on his way to the spaceport to meet the unknown whippersnapper, why didn't Earth turn out young doctors the way it used to? They ought to have the arrogance knocked out of them before they left medical school. That's what must have happened to him, because his attitude had certainly been humble when he landed.

The spaceport was jammed, naturally. Ship arrivals were infrequent enough to bring everybody from all over the planet who was not on duty at the farms, mines, factories, freight and passenger jets and all the rest of the busy activities of this comparatively new colony. They brought their lunches and families and stood around to watch. Dr. Kalmar went to the platform.

The ship sat down on a mushroom of fire that swiftly became a flaming pancake and then was squashed out of existence.

"I'm waiting for a shipment of livestock," enthused the man standing next to Dr. Kalmar.

"You're lucky," the doctor said. "They can't talk back."

The man looked at him sympathetically. "Meeting a female?"

"Gabbier and more annoying," said Dr. Kalmar, but he didn't elaborate and the man, with the courtesy of the frontier, did not pry for an explanation.

Livestock and freight came down on one elevator and passengers came down another. Slidewalks carried the cargo to Sterilization and travelers to the greeting platform. Dr. Kalmar felt his shoulders droop. The man with the medical bag had to be Dr. Hoyt and he was even more brisk, erect and muscular than Dr. Kalmar had expected, with a superior and inquisitive look that made the last assistant, unbearable as he'd been, seem as tractable as one of the arriving cows.

Dr. Hoyt spotted him instantly and came striding over to grab his hand in a grip like an ore-crusher. "You're Dr. Kalmar. Glad to know you. I'm sure we'll get along fine together. Miserable trip. Had to change ships four times to get here. Hope the food's better than shipboard slop. Got a nice hospital to work in? Do I live in or out?"

Dr. Kalmar was grudgingly forced to say rapidly, "Right. Likewise. I hope so. Too bad. Suits us. I think so. In."

He got Dr. Hoyt into a jetcab and told the driver to make time back to the hospital. Appointments were piling up while he had to make the courtesy trip out to the spaceport, which was another nuisance. Now he'd have all of those and a talkative assistant who'd want to know the reasons for everything.

"Pretty barren," said Dr. Hoyt, looking out the window at the vegetationless ground below. "Why's that?"

He'd known he was going to Deneb, Dr. Kalmar thought angrily. The least he could have done was read up on the place. *He* had.

"It's an Earth-type planet," Dr. Kalmar said in a blunt voice, "except that life never developed on it. We had to bring everything—benign germ cultures, seed, animals, fish, insects—a whole ecology. Our farms are close to the cities. Too wasteful of freight to move them out very far. Another few centuries and we'll have a *real* population, millions of people instead of the 20,000 we have now in a couple of dozen settlements around this world. Then we'll have the whole place a nice shade of green."

"City boy myself," said Dr. Hoyt. "Hate the country. Hydroponics and synthetic meat—that's the answer."

"For Earth. It'll be a long time before we get that crowded here on Deneb."

"Deneb," the young doctor repeated, dissatisfied. "That's the name of the star. You mean to tell me the planet has the same name?"

"Most solar systems have only one Earth-type planet. It saves a lot of trouble to just call that planet Deneb, Vega or whatever."

"Is *that* clutch of shacks the *city*?" exclaimed Dr. Hoyt.

"Denebia," said Dr. Kalmar, beginning to enjoy himself finally.

"Why, you could lose it in a suburb or Bosyorkdelphia!"

"That monstrosity that used to be New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts? I wouldn't want to."

He was pleased when Dr. Hoyt sank into stunned silence. If luck was with him, that stupefaction might last the whole day. It seemed as though it might, for the sight of the modest little hospital was too much

for the youngster who had just come from the mammoth health factories of Earth.

Dr. Hoyt revived somewhat when he saw the patients waiting in the scantily furnished outer room, but Dr. Kalmar said, "Better get yourself settled," and opened a door for his immature colleague.

"But there's only one bed in this room," Dr. Hoyt objected. "You must have made a mistake."

Dr. Kalmar, recalling the crowded cubicles of Earth, gave out a proud little dry laugh. "You're on Deneb now, boy. Here you'll have to get used to spaciousness. We like elbow room."

The young doctor went in hesitantly, leaving the door open for a fast escape in case an error had been made. Dr. Kalmar had done the same when he'd arrived nine years ago. Judging by his own experience, it would take Dr. Hoyt a full six months to get used to having a room all to himself. There would be plenty of time to start showing him the ropes tomorrow, and in the meantime there were the backed-up appointments to be taken care of.

Dr. Kalmar went to his office and had his nurse, Miss Dupont, send in the first patient.

It was a girl of 17, Avis Emery, who had been brought by her parents. She sat sullenly, dark-haired, too daintily pretty and delicately shapely for a frontier world like this, while Mr. Emery put the file from Social Control on the doctor's desk.

"We're farmers—" the man began.

Dr. Kalmar interrupted, "The information is in the summary. Avis is to be assigned her mate next year, but she wants to go to Earth and become a nightclub singer. She refuses to marry a boy who'd be able to help around the farm, and she won't work on it herself."

He looked up severely at the parents. "This is your own fault, you know. You pampered her. Farm labor is too valuable for pampering. We can't afford it."

"You can blame me, Doc," said Mr. Emery miserably. "She's such a pretty little thing—I couldn't work her the way Sue and I work ourselves."

"And then she started getting notions," Mrs. Emery added, giving her husband a vicious glare. Dr. Kalmar could imagine the nights of argument and accusation before they were at last forced to go for medical help to solve their self-created problem. "Singing in nightclubs back on Earth, marrying a billionaire, living in a sky yacht!"

"Avis," said Dr. Kalmar gently. "You know it's not that easy, don't you? There are lots and lots of pretty girls on Earth and very few billionaires. If you did get a job singing in a nightclub, you know you'd have to do some unpleasant things because there's so much competition for customers. Things like stripteasing, drinking at the tables and going out with whoever the owner tells you to."

The girl's face grew animated for the first time. "Well, sure! Why do you think I want to go?"

"And you don't love Deneb and your farm?"

"I hate both of them!"

"But you realize that we must have food. Doesn't it make you feel important to grow more food so we can increase our population?"

"No! Why should I care? I want to go to Earth!"

Dr. Kalmar shook his head regretfully. He pushed a button on his desk. It was connected to a gravity generator directly under the girl's chair. Four gravities suddenly pushed her down into it and a hypodermic needle jabbed her swiftly with a hypnotic drug. She slumped. He released the button and the artificial gravity abated, but she remained dazed and relaxed.

"You're not going to hurt her, are you, Doc?" Mr. Emery begged.

"Certainly not. But I suppose you know Social Control's orders."

They nodded, the husband gloomily, the wife with a single sharp jerk of her head.

"You go right ahead and do it," she said. "I'm sick of working my fingers to the bone while she primps and preens and talks all the time about going to Earth."

"Come, Avis," Dr. Kalmar said in a low, commanding voice.

She stood up, blank-faced, and followed him out to the Ego Alter room. He closed the door, sat her down in the insulated seat next to the control console, put the wired plastic helmet on her and adjusted it to fit her skull snugly.

Running his finger down the treatment sheet of her Social Control file, he set the dials according to its instructions. The psychic areas to be reduced were sex drive, competitiveness and imagination, while the areas of reproductive urge and cooperation were to be intensified. He regulated the individual timers and sent the varying charge through her brain.

There was no reaction, no convulsion, no distortion of features. She sat there as if nothing had happened, but her personality had changed as completely as though she had been retrained from birth.

Miss Dupont came in without knocking. She knew, of course, that any patient in the Ego Alter room would be incapable of being disturbed.

"Rephysical, Dr. Kalmar?" she asked.

"I'm afraid so. Will you prepare her, please?"

The nurse removed the girl's clothes. There was no resistance.

"Such a lovely body," she said. "It's a shame."

He shrugged. "Until we have enough people and farms and industries, Miss Dupont, we'll just have to get used to altering people to fit the needs of our society. I'm sure you understand that."

"Yes, but it still seems a shame. Bodies like that don't grow on trees."

He gently moved the girl into the Rephysical Chamber. "They grow in this machine, though. As soon as we can afford it, which ought to be only a few hundred years from now, we can make any woman look like this, or even better."

"And don't forget the men," Miss Dupont said as he started the mitogenetic generator. "We could use some Adonises around here."

"We'll have them," he assured her.

"Somebody will. None of us'll live that long."

Working like a sculptor with a cathode in one hand and an anode in the other, Dr. Kalmar began reshaping the girl who stood fixedly in the boxlike chamber. The flesh fled from the cathode and chased after the anode as he broadened the fine nose, thickened the mobile lips, squared the slender jaw and drew out carefully the delicately arched orbital ridges.

"I'll leave the curl in her hair," he said. "Every woman needs at least one feature she can be proud of."

"You're telling me," Miss Dupont replied.

"Synthetic tissue, please."

She drew out a tube with a variable nozzle and started working just ahead of him. A spray of high-velocity cells shot through the girl's smooth skin at the neck, shoulders, breasts, hips and legs, forming shapeless lumps that he guided into cords and muscles. The slim figure quickly broadened, grew brawny and competent-looking, the body of a woman who could breed phenomenally while farming alongside her man.

Dr. Kalmar racked up the instruments and helped Miss Dupont dress the girl in coveralls and sandals. He felt the pride of craftsmanship when he found that the clothing supplied for her by Social Control exactly fitted her. He injected an antidote to the hypnotic and gave her the

standard test for emotional response as her expressionless face cleared to placidity.

"Do you know where you are, Avis?"

"Yes. Ego Alter and Rephysical."

"What have we done to you?"

"Changed me to fit my environment."

"Do you resent being changed?"

"No." She paused and looked worried. "Who's taking care of the crops while I'm here?"

"They can wait till you and your parents get back, Avis. Let's show them the change, shall we?"

"All right," she said. "I think they'll be proud of me. This is how they always wanted me to be."

"And you?"

"Oh, I feel much better. As if I don't have to try so hard."

"I'm glad, Avis. Miss Dupont, better have a sedative ready when her father sees her. I think he'll need it."

"And her mother?" asked the nurse practically.

"She'll probably want a drink to celebrate. Give her one."

Dr. Kalmar's prognosis was correct, only it didn't go far enough. His young assistant from Earth had come scooting out of his disquietingly large quarters and was jittering in the office when they entered.

"Is *that* the pretty girl who was waiting when we came in?" he yelped in outrage. "What have you done to her?"

Dr. Kalmar gave the sedative to him instead of Mr. Emery, who was shocked, but had known in advance what to expect. Miss Dupont prepared another sedative quickly, gave Mrs. Emery a celebration drink and moved the family toward the door.

"She looks fine, Doctor," the mother said happily. "Avis ought to be a big help around the house and farm from now on."

"I'm sure she will," he said.

"But she was so lovely!" wept Mr. Emery, though in a rapidly becalming voice as the sedative took effect.

The door closed behind them.

"You ought to be reported to the Medical Association back on Earth!" Dr. Hoyt said angrily. "Ruining a girl's looks like that!"

Dr. Kalmar sighed. He had hoped to be able to put off this orientation lecture until the following day, when there wouldn't be so many patients jamming his appointment book.

"All right, let's get it over with. First, I was also trained on Earth and know how Ego Alter and Reophysical are used there: Ego Alter to remove psychic blocks so people can compete better, and Reophysical so they'll be more attractive. Second, we're not under the jurisdiction of Earth's Medical Association. Third, we'd damn well better not be, because our problems and solutions aren't the same at all."

"You'd have been jailed for spoiling that girl's chances of a good marriage!"

"I didn't," Dr. Kalmar said quietly. "I improved them."

"You did nothing of the—" Dr. Hoyt stopped. "Improved? How?"

"I keep telling you this is a frontier world and you keep acting as if you understand, but you don't. Look, a family is an economic liability on Earth; it consumes without producing. That's why girls have so much trouble finding husbands there. Out here it's different. A family is an asset—if every member in it is willing to work."

"But a pretty girl like that can always get by."

"No Denebian can afford to marry a pretty girl. It's too risky. She can't work as hard as we do and still take care of her looks. And he'd worry about her constantly, which would cut into his efficiency. By having me make her a merely attractive girl in a wholesome, hearty way, Social Control guarantees more than just a marriage for her—it guarantees a contented married life."

"Sweating away on a farm," Dr. Hoyt said.

"Now that her anti-social strivings are gone, she'll realize that Deneb needs farmers instead of nightclub singers. She'll take pride in being a good worker, she'll raise as many children as she'll be capable of bearing, and she'll have a good husband and a prosperous farm. That wouldn't have satisfied her before. It will now. And she's better for it and so is Deneb."

Dr. Hoyt shook his head. "It's all upside down."

"You'll get used to it. Why not take today off and explore Denebia? You need a rest after all those months in space."

"Maybe I will," said Dr. Hoyt vaguely, slightly anesthetized.

"Good." Dr. Kalmar buzzed for Miss Dupont. "Send in the next patient, please. Oh, and Dr. Hoyt is taking the day off."

But the young assistant was stunned into staying by the huge size of the Social Control file that was carried by the next patient, Mr. Fallon, and his wife.

"I know just what you're thinking, Dr. Kalmar!" cried Mrs. Fallon distractedly, but with a nervously bright smile. "Those awful Fallons again! I don't blame you a bit, but—"

As a matter of fact, that was exactly what Dr. Kalmar was thinking, plus the defeated feeling that they were all he needed to make the day complete.

"Good Lord, what's in all those files?" Dr. Hoyt exclaimed.

Dr. Kalmar could have explained, but he didn't feel up to it.

Mr. Fallon, a wispy, shyly affable, poetic-looking chap, did it for him. "Papers," he said.

"I know that, but why so many?" Dr. Hoyt asked impatiently.

Miss Dupont seemed wryly amused as she watched his consternation.

"I guess you might say it's because I can't make my mind up," confessed Mrs. Fallon with an uneasy giggle. She was a big woman who might have gurgled over a collection of toy dogs on Earth, but here she was a freight checker and her husband was a statistician in the Department of Supply, though on Earth he might have been anything from a composer to a social worker. "No matter how often we rephysical Harry, I always get tired of his looks in a few months."

"And how often has that been done?" Dr. Hoyt demanded.

"I think it's eleven times. Isn't that right, dear?"

"No, sweet," said Mr. Fallon. "Thirteen."

Dr. Kalmar could have interrupted, but he considered it wiser to let his assistant learn the hard way. Miss Dupont was enjoying it too much to interfere.

"We've made him tall and we've made him short, skinny, fat, bulging with muscle, red hair, black hair, blond hair, gray hair—I don't know, just about everything in the book," said Mrs. Fallon, "and I simply can't seem to find one I'd like for keeps."

"Then why the devil don't you get another husband?"

Mrs. Fallon looked shocked. "Why, he was assigned to me!"

"Dr. Hoyt just came from Earth," Dr. Kalmar cut in at last, before a brawl could start. "He's not familiar with our methods."

"Let's hear the cockeyed reason," Dr. Hoyt said resignedly.

"We keep our population balanced," said Dr. Kalmar. "Too many of either sex creates tension, hostility, loss of efficiency; look at Earth if you want proof. We can't risk even a little of that, so we use prenatal sex control to keep them exactly equal."

"There's a wife for every man," Mr. Fallon put in genially, "and a husband for every woman. Works out fine."

"With no surplus," Dr. Kalmar added. "There are no floaters to allow the kind of marital moving day you have on Earth, where so many just up and shift over to new mates. We get ours for life. That's where Ego Alter and Rephysical come in."

"You mean people bring in their mates to have them done over?"

"If they're not satisfied and if the mates agree to be changed."

"I don't mind," said Mr. Fallon virtuously. "I figure Mabel will decide what she wants one of these changes, and then we can settle down and be happy with each other."

"But what about you?" asked Dr. Hoyt, bewildered. "Don't you want her changed?"

"Oh, no. I like her fine just as she is."

"You see now how it works?" Dr. Kalmar asked. "We can't have a variety of mates, but we can have all the variety we want in one mate. It comes to the same thing, as far as I can see, and causes much less confusion, especially since we need stable relationships."

Dr. Hoyt was striving heroically to stay indignant in spite of the sedative. "And do many ask to have their mates changed?"

"I guess we're a sort of record, aren't we?" Mr. Fallon boasted.

"I guess you are," agreed Dr. Kalmar. "And now, Dr. Hoyt, if there aren't any more questions, I'd like to proceed with this couple."

Dr. Hoyt stretched his eyes wide to keep them open. "It's all screwy to me, but it's none of my business. As soon as I finish my internship, I'm heading back to Earth, where things make sense, so I don't have to understand this mishmash you call a planet. Need help?"

"If you'd find out what Mrs. Fallon has in mind this time, it would let me run the patients through a lot faster."

"How would they feel about it?" Dr. Hoyt asked.

"It's all right with me," Mr. Fallon said amiably. "I'm pretty used to this, you know."

"But what are we going to make you look like, Harry?" his wife fretted. "I felt very jealous of other women when you were handsome and I didn't like you just ordinary-looking."

"Why not go through the model book with Dr. Hoyt?" suggested Dr. Kalmar. "There are still some types you haven't tried."

"There *are*?" she asked in gratified astonishment. "Would you mind very much, Dr. Hoyt?"

"Glad to," he said.

Miss Dupont brought out the model book for him, and he and Mrs. Fallon studied the facial and physical types that were very explicitly

illustrated there in three-dimensional full color. Mr. Fallon, contentedly working out math problems on a sheet of paper, left the choice entirely to her.

Meanwhile, Dr. Kalmar and Miss Dupont swiftly took care of a succession of other patients, raising the tolerance level of frustration in a watchmaker, replating the acne-pitted skin of a sensitive youth, restoring a finger lost in a machine-shop accident, and building up good-natured aggression in an ore miner whose productivity had slumped.

Mrs. Fallon still hadn't decided when the last patient had been taken care of. She said unhappily, "I don't know. I simply absolutely don't know. Couldn't you suggest *something*, Dr. Hoyt?"

"Wouldn't be ethical," he told her bluntly. "Not allowed to."

Dr. Kalmar, checking the Social Control papers with Miss Dupont, wondered if he should interfere. It would lower confidence in Dr. Hoyt, which meant that people would insist on Dr. Kalmar's treating them. Then, instead of having an assistant to remove some of the load, he'd have to do the work of two men. He decided to let the young doctor handle it.

But Dr. Hoyt stood up in exasperation, slammed the book shut, and said, "Mrs. Fallon, if you know what you want, I'll be glad to oblige. But I'm not a telepathy—"

"Is there anything I can do?" Dr. Kalmar interrupted quickly, before his assistant could create any more damage.

"He doesn't have to get huffy," Mrs. Fallon said indignantly. "All I asked for was a suggestion or two."

"Insult my wife, will he?" Mr. Fallon belligerently added.

"It's my fault," Dr. Kalmar said. "Dr. Hoyt just got in today from Earth and he's tired and he naturally doesn't understand all our ways yet—"

"Yet?" Dr. Hoyt repeated in disgust. "What makes you think I'll ever—"

"And I shouldn't have burdened him with this problem until he's had a chance to rest up and look around," Dr. Kalmar continued in a slightly louder voice. "Now, let's see if we can't settle this problem before closing time, eh?"

The Fallons subsided, Dr. Hoyt watched with a sarcastic eye, though he kept silent as Dr. Kalmar and Miss Dupont, working as a shrewd team, gave them the suggestion they had been looking for. It was all done very smoothly, so smoothly that Dr. Kalmar felt professional pride because even his stiff-necked assistant was unable to detect the fact that it *was* a suggestion.

Dr. Kalmar got Mrs. Fallon to reminisce about the alterations her husband had undergone, and Miss Dupont promptly agreed with her when she explained why each had been unsatisfactory. It took some time, but he eventually brought her back to what Mr. Fallon had looked like when she'd first married him.

"Now, isn't that the strangest thing?" she said, puzzled. "I can't remember. Can you, dear?"

"It's a little mixed up," Mr. Fallon admitted. "Let's see, I know I was taller and I think I had a long, thin face—"

"Oh, we don't have to guess," Dr. Kalmar said. "Nurse, we have the information on file, don't we?"

"Yes, Doctor," she said, and instantly produced a photograph. They evidently thought it was merely filing efficiency; they hadn't noticed her searching for the picture quietly while Dr. Kalmar had been leading them on. He had, in fact, delayed asking her until she'd nodded to indicate that she had found it.

Mr. Fallon frowned as if he'd recognized the face but couldn't remember the name. His wife gave a little shriek of admiration.

"Why, Harry, you looked perfectly wonderful!"

"Those deep dimples made shaving pretty hard," he recalled.

"But they're *darling!* Why did you ever let me change you?"

"Because I wanted you to be happy, sweet."

It was as simple as that—a bit of practical psychology based on knowledge of the patients. Dr. Kalmar wished wistfully that old Dr. Lowell had been there to observe. He would have approved, which might have made up for Dr. Hoyt's unpleasant expression.

"I hope this is the one you want," Dr. Kalmar said as he took them to the front door after the rephysical.

"Goodness, I hope so!" Mrs. Fallon exclaimed. She looked fondly at her husband, and this time had to look up to see his face. "I'm almost *positive* this is what I want Harry to be."

"Well, if it isn't, sweet," Mr. Fallon said, "we'll try something else. I don't mind as long as it makes you happy."

They closed the door behind them, leaving the hospital empty of all but the small staff.

"They're crazy!" Dr. Hoyt exploded. "He's not the one we should be changing. That idiotic female needs a good Ego Alter!"

"He hasn't asked for it," Dr. Kalmar pointed out patiently.

"Then he ought to!"

"That's his decision, isn't it? There's such a thing as ethics, you know."

"I've never seen anything more insane than the way you work," snapped Dr. Hoyt. "I can't wait to finish my stretch here and go home."

He stamped out, weaving slightly because of the sedative.

"Well, what do you think of our assistant?" asked Dr. Kalmar.

"He's cute," Miss Dupont said irrationally.

Dr. Kalmar glowered at her. He'd forgotten that she was due to have a mate assigned to her this year.

Routine at the hospital was anything but routine. Dr. Hoyt barely kept from yelping each time someone was treated, and his help was given so unwillingly that Dr. Kalmar, sweating under a double load and with Dr. Hoyt to argue with at the same time, was all for putting him on the ship and asking Earth for another intern. But Miss Dupont talked him out of it.

For no discernible reason other than loneliness, Dr. Hoyt was taking her out. She was pleased, even though he crabbed constantly about the shabby-looking clothes she wore, which were typical of Deneb, and the way they fitted her.

Either the two of them didn't talk shop, or she had no influence with him—his criticism and impatience grew sharper each week.

It bothered Dr. Kalmar more than he thought it should, and much more than Mrs. Kalmar wanted it to. She was a pleasant little woman who liked things as they were, which was why Dr. Kalmar had hesitated all this while to ask her to undergo a slight rephysical; he would have preferred her a little taller, more filled out, her slight wrinkles deleted and, while he was thinking about it, he wished she'd let him give her space-black hair instead of her indeterminately blondish mop. But he'd rather have her as she was than peevish, so he had never mentioned it.

"Don't let the boy upset you, she said. "It's only that he's so young and inexperienced. You can't expect him to adjust quickly to a new environment and a whole new medical orientation."

"But that's just what annoys me! Why, I used to hang onto every word of Dr. Lowell's when I came here! I never thought I knew better than he did."

"Well, dear, you're you and Dr. Lowell is Dr. Lowell and Dr. Hoyt is Dr. Hoyt."

He tried to think of an answer and couldn't. "I suppose so."

"Maybe you'd feel better if you spoke to Dr. Lowell about it."

"What could he do? This is really an internal problem that I should work out with Dr. Hoyt. I can't involve Dr. Lowell in it."

But it became intolerable when there was a young girl who wanted to be a boy and Dr. Kalmar and Dr. Hoyt got into the worst battle yet. Naturally, she had to be given an Ego Alter to make her happy about being a girl, whereas Dr. Hoyt argued that she should be allowed to be a boy if that was what she wanted. Dr. Kalmar explained angrily once more that the sexes were exactly balanced and Dr. Hoyt quoted the rule of personal choice. It was applicable on Earth, but not on Deneb, Dr. Kalmar retorted, to which Dr. Hoyt snorted something about playing God.

Dr. Kalmar confessed harshly to his wife that she was right. He had to bring old Dr. Lowell into the situation; it was out of Dr. Kalmar's control and was keeping the hospital in a turmoil. It was time for Dr. Lowell to inspect the hospital, the job he had taken in place of actual retirement. Dr. Kalmar needed help from Miss Dupont to bring the problem out into the open. But she became unexpectedly obstinate.

"I won't hurt Leo's career," she explained flatly.

Dr. Kalmar gave her a vacant look. "Leo?"

She blushed. "Dr. Hoyt. He's honestly trying to understand, but he finds it so different from Earth. Practically everything we do here is in reverse."

"But so is our environment, Miss Dupont. Earth is over-crowded and Deneb is under-populated, so of course our methods would be the opposite of Earth's. He has to be made to see that we must solve our problems our own way."

She studied his face suspiciously. "That's all you want?"

"Certainly. Damn it, do you think I want him fired and sent back to Earth before his internship's up? I know it would hurt his record. Besides, I need an assistant—but not one I have to bicker with every time I make a move."

"Well, in that case—"

"Good girl. All you have to do is help me hold off the cases he'd argue about until Dr. Lowell gets here." He stared down glumly at his hands, which were gripping each other tightly. "God knows I'm no diplomat. Dr. Lowell is. He convinced me easily enough when I came here. Maybe he can do the same with Dr. Hoyt."

"Oh, I hope he can," Miss Dupont said earnestly. "I want so much to have you and Leo work together in harmony."

He glanced up, curious. "Why?"

"Because I'm in love with him."

He found himself nodding bitterly. Having Dr. Hoyt go back to Earth wouldn't be a fraction as bad as Miss Dupont leaving with him. So now there was something else to worry about.

Dr. Lowell came bouncing out of the jetcab a few days later. "The hospital better be spotless!" he called out jovially, paying off the hackie. "I'm in a mean mood. Liable to suspend everybody."

There was a strange lift to Dr. Kalmar's spirits as the old man entered the office. He wished without hope that he could inspire the same sort of reverence and respect. Impossible, of course. Dr. Lowell was great; he himself was nothing more than competent.

Dr. Kalmar introduced his young assistant to the old man.

"Young and strong," Dr. Lowell approved. "That's what we need on Deneb. Skill is important, but health and youth even more so."

"For those who stay," said Dr. Hoyt frostily. "I'm not."

Dr. Kalmar felt himself quiver with rage. The wet-nosed pup couldn't talk to Dr. Lowell like that!

But Dr. Lowell was saying cheerily, "You seem to have made up your mind to go back. No matter. Some decisions are like egg-shells—made only to be broken. I hope that's what you'll do with yours."

"Not a chance," Dr. Hoyt said. He didn't take the arrogant expression off his face even when Miss Dupont looked at him pleadingly.

"Then I say let's signal the next ship—" Dr. Kalmar began.

Dr. Lowell cut in quickly, "You two have patients to attend to, I see. Don't worry about me. I know my way around this poor little wretch of a building. Not much like Earth hospitals, is it?" He headed for the medical supply room, adding just before he went in, "A lot can be said for small installations. The personal touch, you know."

Dr. Kalmar enviously realized how deftly the old man had put the youngster in his place, whereas he would have stood there and slugged it out verbally. Lord, if he could only acquire that awesome wisdom!

"Well, back to work," he said, trying to imitate the cheeriness at least.

"Sure, let's ruin some more lives," Dr. Hoyt almost snarled.

"Leo, *please!*" whispered Miss Dupont imploringly.

Five minutes later the two doctors were furiously arguing over a very old man who had been sent by Social Control to have his eyesight strengthened.

"You have no right to let anybody dodder around like this!" Dr. Hoyt yelled. "What in hell is Rephysical for if not for such cases?"

"You probably think we ought to make him look like 25 again," Dr. Kalmar yelled back. "If that's all you've learned working here—"

"Now, now," said Dr. Lowell soothingly. He'd come in unnoticed by either of the men. "Dr. Hoyt is right, of course. We *would* like to make old people young and some day we'll be able to afford it. But not for some time to come."

"Why not?" Dr. Hoyt demanded in a lower tone, visibly flattered by Dr. Lowell's seemingly taking his side.

"Rephysical can't actually make anyone young. It can only give the outward appearance of youth and replace obviously diseased parts. But an old body is an old organism; it has to break down eventually. If we give it more vigor than it can endure, it breaks down too soon, much sooner than if we let it age normally. That represents economic loss as well as a humanitarian one."

"I don't follow you," Dr. Hoyt said bewilderedly.

"Well, our patient used to be a machinist. A good one. Now he's only able to be an oiler. A good one, too, when you improve his eyesight. He can go on doing that for years, performing a useful function. But he'd wear himself out in no time as a machinist again if you de-aged him."

"Is that supposed to make sense?"

"It does," said Dr. Lowell, "for Deneb."

Dr. Hoyt wanted to continue the discussion, but Dr. Lowell was already on his way to inspect another part of the hospital. Grumbling, the young man helped chart the optical nerves that had to be replaced and measure the new curve of the retinas ordered by Social Control.

But he fought just as strenuously over other cases, especially a retired freight-jet pilot who had to have his reflexes slowed down so he could become a contented meteorologist. Whenever there was a loud disagreement of this sort, Dr. Lowell was there to mediate calmly.

At the end of the day, Dr. Kalmar was emotionally exhausted. He said as he and Dr. Lowell were washing up, "The kid's hopeless. I thought you could straighten him out—God knows I couldn't—but he'll never see why we have to work the way we do."

"What do you suggest?" Dr. Lowell asked through a towel.

"Send him back to Earth. Get an intern who's more malleable."

Dr. Lowell tossed the towel into the sterilizer. "Can't be done. We're expanding so fast all over the Galaxy that Earth can't train and ship out enough doctors for the new colonies. If we sent him back, I don't know when we'd get another."

Dr. Kalmar swallowed. "You mean it's him or nobody?"

"Afraid so."

"But he'll never fit in on Deneb!"

"You did," Dr. Lowell said.

Dr. Kalmar tried to smile modestly. "I realized immediately how little I knew and how much more experience you had. I was willing to learn. Why, I used to listen to you and watch you work and try to see your reasons for doing things—"

"You think so?" asked Dr. Lowell.

Dr. Kalmar glanced at him in astonishment. "You know I did. I still do, for that matter."

"When you landed on Deneb," said Dr. Lowell, "you were the most stubborn, opinionated young ass I'd ever met."

Dr. Kalmar's smile became an appreciative grin. "Damn, I wish I had that light touch of yours!"

"You were so dogmatic and argumentative that Dr. Hoyt is a suggestible schoolboy in comparison."

"Well, you don't have to go that far," Dr. Kalmar said. "I get what you're driving at—every intern needs orientation and I should be more patient and understanding."

"Then you don't follow me at all," stated Dr. Lowell. "Invite Dr. Hoyt, Miss Dupont and me to your house for dinner tonight and maybe you'll get a better idea of what I mean."

"Anything for a free meal, eh?"

"And to keep a doctor here on Deneb that we'd lose otherwise."

"Implying that I can't do it."

"Isn't that the decision you'd come to?"

"Yes, I guess it is," Dr. Kalmar confessed. "All right, how about dinner at my house tonight? I'll round up the other two and call Harriet so she'll expect us."

"Delighted to come," said Dr. Lowell. "Nice of you to ask me."

Miss Dupont was elated at the invitation and Dr. Hoyt said he had nothing else to do anyway. On the videophone Mrs. Kalmar was dismayed for a moment, until Dr. Lowell told her to put through an emergency order to Central Commissary and he'd verify it.

That was when Dr. Kalmar realized how serious the old man was. On a raw planet where crises were everyday routine, a situation had to be catastrophic before it could be called an emergency.

Dinner on Deneb was the same as anywhere else in the Galaxy. To free women for other work, food was delivered weekly in cooked form. A special messenger from Central Commissary had brought the emergency rations and Mrs. Kalmar had simply punctured the self-heat cartridges and put the servings in front of each guest; the containers were disposable plates and came with single-use plastic utensils. No garbage, no preparation, no cleaning up afterward, except to toss them all into the converter furnace. Dr. Hoyt was still not accustomed to wholly grown foods; he'd been raised on synthetics, of course, which were the staples on Earth.

"Well, that was good," said Dr. Lowell, getting up from the table with his round little belly comfortably expanded. "Now, let's have a few drinks before we start a professional bull session. Where do you keep your liquor? I'd like to mix my special so Dr. Hoyt can see we colonials are not so provincial."

"Good Lord, I haven't had your special for years!" exclaimed Dr. Kalmar. "Since about the time I came to Deneb, in fact."

"That's why it's a special. Reserved for state occasions, such as arrivals of colleagues from our dear old home planet."

"Oh, you don't have to go to all that bother," said Dr. Hoyt. "You'd have to make it twice—once now and once when I leave."

"That won't be for quite a while, will it?" Miss Dupont asked anxiously.

"As soon as I finish my internship. No more alien worlds for me. I like Earth."

Mrs. Kalmar got him to talk about it, which was much easier than getting him to stop, while Dr. Kalmar showed the old man where the liquor stock and fixings were kept. Watching him mix the ingredients with a chemist's care, Dr. Kalmar felt a glow of nostalgia. He recalled the celebration at Dr. Lowell's house, several months after he had come from Earth, when he'd enjoyed himself so much that he'd passed out. It was one of the pleasanter memories of his start on Deneb.

"Can't mix them all in a single batch," Dr. Lowell explained, bringing the drinks over one at a time as he finished preparing them. "Mrs. Kalmar ... Miss Dupont ... our gracious host, Dr. Kalmar ... and now Dr. Hoyt and myself." He lifted his glass at Dr. Hoyt. "Welcome to our latest associate—product, like ourselves, of the great medical schools of Earth. It's a forlorn hope, but may he learn as much from us about our peculiar methods as we learn from him about the latest terrestrial advances."

Dr. Hoyt, smiling as if he didn't think it possible, stood up when they'd downed their toast to him. "To Earth," he said. "May I get back in record time." He gulped it, said, "Delicious—for a colonial drink," and froze with his smile as fixed as if it had been painted on.

"Leo!" Miss Dupont cried, and shook him, but he stayed frozen.

"The man's allergic to alcohol!" said Dr. Kalmar, astonished.

"Do something!" Mrs. Kalmar begged. "Don't let him stand there like that! He—he looks like a petrified man!"

"Don't get panicky," said Dr. Lowell in a quiet, confident voice. "That's when you passed out, Dr. Kalmar. Right after your first taste of my special."

"But *we* haven't," Dr. Kalmar objected.

"Naturally. Your drinks weren't drugged."

"Drugged?" shrieked Miss Dupont. "You doped him?"

"That's rather obvious, isn't it?"

"But—what for?" Dr. Kalmar stammered.

"Same reason I slipped you a mickey not long after you got here. We can't take any chances that he'll ship back to Earth. You see?"

"I don't," raged Miss Dupont. "I think it's a cheap, dirty, foul trick and it won't work, either. You can't *keep* him drugged."

"I don't like you talking to Dr. Lowell like that," said Dr. Kalmar indignantly.

"You should be the last one to object," Mrs. Kalmar pointed out. "He said he drugged you, too."

"I know," Dr. Kalmar said blankly. "I don't understand—"

"You will," promised Dr. Lowell. "Just come along and don't interfere. Better give him the order; it'll keep things straighter."

Mrs. Kalmar was grimly disapproving and Miss Dupont was close to hysteria. Only Dr. Kalmar retained his awed respect for Dr. Lowell. If the old man said it was all right, it was, even if he couldn't see the reason.

"Go ahead," urged Dr. Lowell.

"Dr. Hoyt!"

"Yes, Dr. Kalmar?"

"You will come with us!"

"Yes, Dr. Kalmar."

Dr. Lowell took them back to the hospital.

"Now what?" asked Dr. Kalmar.

"You actually don't know?" Miss Dupont demanded. "He wants to put Leo through the Ego Alter."

"That's absurd," Dr. Kalmar said angrily, "and an outright slander. Dr. Lowell wouldn't consider such a thing—the boy didn't ask for it and it wasn't authorized by Social Control."

Dr. Lowell smiled genially and opened the door to the Ego Alter room. "I hate to disillusion you, Dr. Kalmar. That's exactly what I have in mind—the same thing I did to you."

"That's absurd," Dr. Kalmar repeated, but with less conviction and more confusion than before.

"It worked. Tell him to sit down."

Dr. Kalmar did, and automatically fitted the wired plastic helmet to Dr. Hoyt's head.

"You can't!" cried Miss Dupont as he reached for the dials on the control console. "It's not fair!"

"Let's not get involved in a discussion on ethics," Dr. Lowell said. "Deneb can't afford to lose him; we need every doctor we have. If he goes back to Earth it may be years before we get a replacement."

"But you can't do it without his consent!"

"There's time for that later," the old man grinned. "Keep his eyes on you, Dr. Kalmar, while you build up his father image. Cut down on hostility, aggression and power drive. Boost social responsibility and adventurousness. But make sure he's looking at you constantly."

"I won't allow it," said Mrs. Kalmar flatly. "You won't make my husband violate his oath."

"I did it to him, didn't I?" Dr. Lowell replied jovially. "It got you a husband."

Miss Dupont grabbed at Dr. Kalmar's hand, but he had already turned on the current.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Well, he has to get married, of course," Dr. Lowell said. "Let him look at Miss Dupont—she's scheduled for this year, isn't she?—while you give him a shot of mating urge. Now, wipe out the memory of this incident and put him on a joy jag. We can validate that by liquoring him up afterward. When you're finished, bring him to."

Dr. Hoyt came out of it almost with a whoop. He lurched out of the insulated seat, stared at Miss Dupont for a moment with eyes that almost glittered, and seized and kissed her.

"My goodness!" she gasped.

"Now, what were you saying about ethics?" Dr. Lowell asked.

There was no answer. Both Miss Dupont and Mrs. Kalmar had frozen.

"You drugged them, too?" Dr. Kalmar weakly wanted to know.

"A bit slower-acting," admitted the old man. "All you have to do with them is wipe out the last half hour. Don't want any witnesses to an unethical act, you know. Oh, and put them on a jag also."

Dr. Kalmar followed instructions.

Finished, they left the three uproariously drunk in the waiting room and went to wash up. Dr. Kalmar went along bewilderedly. The old man was as unconcerned as if he did this sort of thing daily.

"I was as arrogant and belligerent as this squirt was?"

"Worse," Dr. Lowell said. "He was willing to finish out his internship. You weren't. Still worried about the ethics?"

"Yes. Naturally."

"All right, apply some logic, then. Are you happier on Deneb than you'd have been on Earth?"

"Well, certainly. I'd have been lucky to get a job doctoring in a summer camp. I wouldn't trade a roomy planet like this for the jammed cubicles of Earth. And I like our methods better than terrestrial dogma. But those are my preferences. I can't inflict them on anybody else."

"The hell they were your preferences. You bickered more about our methods and longed more loudly for the tenements of Earth than this lad ever did. All it took was a slight Ego Alter and you have a happier life than you would have had. Right?"

Dr. Kalmar felt his tension ease. If the old man said it was right, it was. He became momentarily resentful when he realized that that reaction had been installed by Dr. Lowell, but then he smiled. It really was right. A bit arbitrary, perhaps, but for the good of Dr. Hoyt and Deneb in the long run, just as it had been for himself.

"Look," he said, drying his arms. "I've been wanting my wife to go through a slight rephysical."

"Why don't you ask her?"

"The fact is that I'm afraid she'll think I'm dissatisfied and I don't want her to get resentful."

"Maybe she'd like you to do some changing, too."

"What for? I'm all right."

"She probably feels the same way about herself."

"But all I want are a few changes in her. She's as high as a space pilot now. It would be a cinch to—"

Dr. Lowell flung down the towel and gave him an outraged glare. "There's such a thing as professional ethics, Dr. Kalmar!"

"But you—"

"That's different. It was a social decision, not a selfish one. If you ask her and she agrees, that's up to her. But you can't take advantage of her in an egocentric, arbitrary way. You just try it and I'll have you sent back to Earth."

Dr. Kalmar felt his knees grow weak in alarm. "No, no. It's not that important. Just an insignificant kind of wish."

And it was, he discovered when they went out to the waiting room. Unused to jags, Mrs. Kalmar was more affectionate than she'd been since they were first married; he'd have to remember to go on them periodically with her. Miss Dupont, unwilling to budge out of Dr. Hoyt's tight arms, had glassily joyous eyes. Dr. Hoyt didn't let her go until he caught sight of Dr. Kalmar.

"Greatest doctor I ever met," he said enthusiastically. "Won'ful planet, Deneb. Just wanna marry Miss Dupont, stay here and learn at your feet. Okay?"

Dr. Kalmar's glance at the old man was no less worshipful. "It couldn't be okayer," he said.

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