

The physician, we are told, should bed himself; and the anthropologist examining the sexual mores of alien races might do well to consider the state of his (or her) own sex life.

Report on the Sexual Behavior on Arcturus X

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

ALISON BENNETT, WHO WAS ALWAYS alluding to the Men in Her Life, and Hubert Harrington, who had yet to find the Woman in His, were far from being the most compatible team Galactic Research Headquarters could have selected to collaborate on a study of the sex life of the Notantanawites; but Galactic Research Headquarters had never been noted for its acumen in pairing male and female anthropologists, and the present instance was the rule rather than the exception.

Hubert brought the baby to rest in the middle of a large clearing, and he and Alison stepped down from the lock into waist-deep meadow grass. It was mid-morning, and the local sun beat warmly on their faces.

It was a rather pleasant sun, Hubert thought, and the deep blue sky it traveled through was certainly congenial enough. So was the gentle breeze breathing up from the south. Hubert's mood, which had been lackluster ever since he'd left the mother-ship, brightened somewhat. A seventy-two hour- sojourn on so halcyon a planet might turn out to be endurable after all, even if he was burdened with a man-crazy brunette.

Alison Bennett nipped that thought in the bud. Placing her hands on her flared hips, she surveyed her domain with a cynical eye. The forested hills and dales, dew-wet and glistening, spread out like tossed endive to a range of mountains the hue of angel food cake; but if any of the delectable splendor got through to the little safety deposit box where she kept her heart, she gave no sign.

Presently she lowered her gaze to the meadow grass that eddied round her waist. "Looks like hay," she said. She leered at Hubert. "Ever sleep on hay?" she asked.

While Hubert was blessed with the body of a football hero, he was burdened with the sensitive soul of a poet. Association with Alison on the long voyage out had blunted his sensibilities somewhat with respect to her risqué reminiscences, but there was one aspect of ultra-civilized communication to which he was particularly susceptible—the *double-entendre*. He winced quite visibly and his face turned red.

"Well, did you?" Alison asked aggressively.

"Once or twice," he said. "When I was a kid."

"A kid! Ha!"

Damn her! Hubert thought. Then, aloud: "If we're going to visit the village today, we'd better get started. We may have trouble finding the place."

"No we won't." She pointed. "See, we've got an escort."

Turning, he saw the thirteen natives approaching them across the clearing. They were Notantanawites beyond the shadow of a doubt. Hubert had never met one face to face before, but he had studied enough photographs of them to enable him to recognize one in a London fog.

While humanoid, they still managed to differ from humans in a number of startling ways: their bright red hair grew in the form of a scalp-lock, beginning just above their wide noses and terminating halfway down their backs; their eyes were located on the sides of their heads, giving them 360° vision; and their naked bodies were so heavily covered with freckles that, from a distance, their skin seemed almost as red as their hair.

But, despite their outre racial characteristics, they were a friendly people—or so it said on p. 22 of the *Advance Report on the Various Races Inhabiting Arcturus X*. However, the present baker's dozen of them gave no such reassuring impression. Watching them approach, all Hubert could think of was a band of red-headed American Indians on the warpath.

He noticed how white Alison's face had become. "Take it easy," he said. "They won't hurt us. If the *Advance Report* said they're peaceful, then they're peaceful. Besides, you don't think Galactic Research Headquarters would have forbidden us to carry small arms if there was any danger, do you?"

"Shut up!" Alison Bennett said.

That made him mad. Risque repartee was one thing, but a contemptuous rejection of his attempt to console her was another. He opened his mouth with the intention of telling her just what he thought of her; then he noticed how badly her hands were trembling and how wide and staring her eyes were, and he changed his mind. He only hoped she wouldn't lose her nerve completely and run away.

She did not. She stood tautly beside him while the foremost Notantanawite approached to within several feet of them and brandished his spear. According to the *Advance Report*, this seemingly hostile action was merely Notantanawite S.O.P. for getting acquainted, and Hubert, who invariably believed everything he read, responded to the moment. Pointing to his chest, he addressed the native in galactic *beche-de-mer*: "Name belong this fella—Hubert." He pointed to Alison. "Name belong mary—Alison." Then he pointed at the native. "Name belong you?"

The spear was lowered till the point touched the ground. "Name belong this fella—Teetantotum," the Notantanawite said. "This fella big chief. . . . You bring big fella chief presents?"

Hubert nodded. "Bring big fella chief many presents from big fella chief in sky. Come visit village belong you, You savvy?"

"Me savvy. You bring presents, come along us."

"I'll get them," Alison said. She turned and climbed back into the ship. Teetantotum's eyes followed her closely, or so it seemed to Hubert; but it was difficult to tell for certain because he could only see one eye at a time.

"Mary belong you?" Teetantotum asked presently.

"No belong me. Belong expedition."

Teetantotum looked puzzled for a moment. He regarded Hubert earnestly, first with one eye, then with the other. Suddenly a grin—or was it a leer?—curved his thin, yet sensuous lips. He said something in Notantanawite over his shoulder, accompanied the remark with a shrill laugh. Instantly, grins leaped to the lips of the other natives and shrill laughter resounded throughout the clearing.

Hubert was both mystified and disconcerted. He was even more mystified and disconcerted when Alison returned with the suitcase containing the trinkets, for Teetantotum proceeded to give her the same searching look he had given Hubert, and again said something over his shoulder to his compatriots. Once more the clearing served as a sounding board for a chorus of shrill laughter.

Apparently Alison had recovered from her fright. "Looks like the joke's on us," she said with her usual flippancy.

"I'd give a credit to know what it is," Hubert said.

"Two to one, it's a dirty one. I can tell by the way they're laughing. . . . Come on, they want us to go with them."

Teetantotum had raised his spear above his head and was beckoning to them with his free hand. Hubert relieved Alison of the suitcase, and both of them stepped forward. Immediately the Notantanawites grouped around them, three in front, three in the rear, and three on each side. Teetantotum took the lead, and the march to the village began.

"They act as though they're afraid we'll run away," Hubert said nervously.

"Nonsense!" Alison said. "They are only protecting us."

"Protecting us from what? There aren't any dangerous animals on Arcturus X. On page one eleven of the *Advance Report*, it says—"

"The *Advance Report*, the *Advance Report*!" Alison's hazel eyes were flashing. "Is that the only thing you've ever read? Why, there was an impurgated edition of Kinsey in the ship's library and I'll bet you never even looked lit it!"

"And what do the depraved mating habits of a bunch of materialistic ancients have to do with our present culture study?" Hubert asked stiffly.

"Don't you ever read for pleasure?"

Hubert didn't answer.

"There was a real hot one about this small town housewife," Alison continued. "It seems her husband couldn't—"

"I don't want to hear it," Hubert said.

"All right, I won't tell it to you then!" Alison lapsed into a sullen silence and Hubert, grateful for the temporary reprieve, began to take in some of the surrounding scenery.

The way led through field and forest, along a winding, well-worn trail. Some of the fields were cultivated and the new sprouts of what ever vegetables the Notantanawites had planted were breaking into green awareness in the rich, dark earth. It was a fresh young world, Hubert thought sadly; a virgin world, waiting innocently for the first immigrants to despoil it; waiting, like a young and tender girl, to be picked up on the stellar street and sold into galactic prostitution.

He sighed. He was an idealist, and the hard cold facts of life, both the economic and the biological ones, had always bruised his sensitive integument. There were, he was sure, finer and nobler things in the galaxy than souped-up agriculture and souped-up sex.

Instinctively he glanced at Alison. Why, he wondered abruptly, had such a warm-blooded female become an anthropologist?

He noticed the defiant way she swung her hips—as though daring some man *not* to notice her. For a woman nearing 30, she still had plenty to offer; but that was insufficient justification for her to be exhibiting her body *all* the time. Take the present instance, for example: why, on a world as primitive as Arcturus X, should she wear khaki shorts two sizes too small for her? Why should she wear a sweater tight enough (almost) to restrict her breathing? And why, when there was no one but him and the Notantanawites to take cognizance, did she persist in using lip rouge and mascara? . . . No, not mascara, Hubert realized suddenly; mascara wasn't responsible for the shadows around her eyes. They were real. .

Come to think of it, why had she never married?

Well, perhaps a legal romance lacked some of the appeal of a clandestine one. But Hubert was out of his depth by now, and he hurriedly returned his attention to the landscape.

They had come to the lip of a small valley, and the village lay below them. By Notantanawite standards, it was a good-sized village, consisting of perhaps sixty dwellings, constructed of pink clay, scattered haphazardly around a central square. In the middle of the square stood a circular structure different, both in design and material, from the other buildings.

Apparently the villagers had been awaiting Teetantotum's return with considerable eagerness, for they met the party on the outskirts. That was when Hubert obtained his first glimpse of a Notantanawite female. Simultaneously he remembered that the album that accompanied the *Advance Report* did not contain a single photograph of the Notantanawite weaker sex.

He blushed as he had never blushed before in all his life. All he could think of was watermelons. What in the world held them up, he wondered, and why in the world had the *Advance Report* neglected so unprecedented a mammalian phenomenon?

He glanced surreptitiously at Alison Bennett to see how she was taking this new and startling development: He had expected to see amazement in her eyes, wonderment, at least. He saw nothing of the sort. Instead, he saw indignation. No, not indignation. Envy.

For the first time in weeks, Hubert began to enjoy himself. But not for long. No sooner had the party gained the village proper than Teetantotum pointed at the two Terrans, said something (the phrase was beginning to sound familiar by now) to the curious villagers; whereupon every man, woman and child burst into the shrillest and most delighted laughter that Hubert had ever heard.

"You'd think we had two heads or something," Alison said lightly. But the little crow's-feet at the corners of her eyes denoted that she was worried.

Hubert was worried too, the more so when he noticed that the attitude of their escort had changed. There was amusement on the freckled faces surrounding him, but it was a grim amusement now, a purposeful amusement. Since entering the village he had slowed his pace. Tentatively, he slowed it even

more. Abruptly he felt a slight pinprick in his posterior. He gave a little jump. So did Alison Bennett.

"Now wait a minute!" Hubert said. "We're Terran citizens. You can't—" Suddenly he jumped again.

There was nothing for it but to walk—and keep on walking. Hubert was furious, not so much with the Notantanawites as with Galactic Research Headquarters for forbidding him and Alison to carry small arms. Concern over native life was one thing, but common sense was another.

They were escorted down a winding street to the circular building in the middle of the square. Seen from the lip of the valley, the building had looked harmless enough, but from the lip of the valley you couldn't see the bars in the windows. They were wooden bars, of course, but their thickness precluded any thought of breaking them.

Teetantotum wasted no time on explanations. The door of the building was flung open and Hubert and Alison were shoved into the dim interior. The door slammed shut behind them and, a moment later, they heard the thud of a heavy bar being dropped into place.

Hubert was stunned. So, apparently, was Alison. Laughter still reechoed in the street and a number of the Notantanawites were peering through the barred windows. In the center of the single room there was a large round dais covered with dried grass. Hubert set the suitcase on the dirt floor and went over and sat down. After a moment, Alison joined him.

"Just wait," Hubert said.

"Wait for what?"

"Till I get my hands on the two jokers who prepared that *Advance Report*! 'A friendly people; a simple kindly people living out their idyllic lives on the exotic green pastures of a planet, loving, laughing and lying beside still waters—' How could anybody write such, idiotic claptrap and have the nerve to pass it off as accurate information!"

"I told you you were wasting your time. You'd have been further ahead if you'd read Kinsey, like I did. Why, do you know what he said about how many times a—"

Hubert pounded on his knee in exasperation. "For heaven sakes! Can't you ever be serious?"

"All right, I'll be serious then! And since we're being serious, suppose you tell me what we're supposed to do now. Did it say anything in the *Advance Report* about breaking out of a jail made out of pink mud?"

"That's the point," Hubert said.

"What's the point? Maybe I'm dense, but I'm afraid I don't quite follow you."

"About this being a jail, I mean. Did you notice the way the natives looked at us, the way they laughed? It was hardly the way you'd expect a primitive race of people to react to someone they considered dangerous, someone they hated. And since we're not too physically different from them, it could hardly have been because of the way we look."

"Well, there's certainly *something* different about us," Alison said. "So if it isn't physical, it must be—"

"Exactly. And this isn't a jail. They think we're crazy. . . ."

"All right," Alison Bennett said. "We've gone over all the possible ways in which we might obviously deviate from Notantanawite normality, and we don't fit into a single category. Now what do we do?"

"Keep right on thinking," Hubert said. "We've missed a deviation somewhere. . . . And stop pacing up and down!"

"I will not!"

But she did. After a moment she came over and sat dejectedly down beside him, rested her elbows on her knees and stared gloomily at the floor.

The sun had set and the room was filling with shadows. Every so often a Notantanawite came up and peeked in one of the windows, but this had been going on all afternoon and Hubert no longer paid any attention. Instead, he concentrated on the enigma of his and Alison's aberrance.

Since the Notantanawites considered both of them abnormal, their abnormality, whatever it was, must be shared. But that meant nothing, for they could possess it in common with the entire human race. No, not necessarily. The Notantanawites' acquaintance with Terrans was limited, was, in fact, con

fined to the uncouth interstellar traders who had taught them galactic *beche-de-mer*, and to the reprehensible author and authoress of the *Advance Report*—Arthur Abercrombie and Louella Higgens. For the moment he glossed over the traders and concentrated on the two anthropologists. Obviously they had passed whatever sanity standards the Notantanawites upheld, and if he could discover in what way they differed from him and Alison, he might have the answer.

Trouble was, he had never met either of them personally, and knew absolutely nothing about them.

At this point his thoughts were interrupted by the delivery of the evening meal. A Notantanawite female was the bearer, and again Hubert found himself marveling at the adaptability of the pectoral muscles.

She handed the various edibles through the bars and he accepted them, though he had no intention of eating any of them (both he and Alison had dined earlier on the condensed food rations they carried in their belt-packs). He would have questioned her, but she turned and walked away before he got the chance. She had a rather intriguing walk ...

"The hussy!" Alison said. "You'd think she'd at least have enough decency to wear a bra!"

"But they're a simple, primitive people," Hubert objected. "They completely lack our sense of sin, our guilt-complex about our bodies—"

"Nonsense!" Alison snapped. "She's throwing sex all over the place. You can't fool *me*!"

Hubert opened his mouth, then closed it. Once again he was out of his depth.

He remained standing by the window but he returned to where he'd left off in his thinking. Arthur Abercrombie and Louella Higgens. . . . Now what could they have in common that he and Alison did not have in common?

He turned to Alison. "The authors of the *Advanced Report*," he said. "You wouldn't happen to know them, would you?"

"I went to school with Louella. That's why I read Kinsey on the ship . . . I knew the kind of report she'd write!"

Hubert was excited. "What was she like?"

"Just like the *Advance Report*, I imagine—unrealistic, uninteresting, unendurable—I never could understand why Arthur married her."

"Arthur?"

"The other author."

"But on the *Advance Report* it says 'by Arthur Abercrombie and Louella Higgens'," Hubert objected.

"Well, what of it? Lots of women writers retain their maiden names. More food for their egos."

Hubert was silent. Married, he thought. Maybe that was the answer. Then he shook his head. Surely, even a race as weird as the Notantanawites wouldn't expect every man and woman they came across to be husband and wife!

All right, then: what did married people have in common—other than the fact of their marriage—that unmarried people did not have? Or, to put it conversely, what did unmarried people have in common—other than the fact of their freedom—that married people did not have?

Somewhere, deep in the recesses of Hubert's brain, a little bell commenced to ring. He remembered the searching look Teetantotum had given him in the clearing, the vociferous laughter that had followed—

Was it possible? he wondered. Could a Notantanawite look into another person's eyes and *tell*?

Could the sole criterion for Notantanawite normality be sexual activity?

Hubert blushed. Violently.

Certainly, he had to admit, the Notantanawites, insofar as the distaff side went anyway, gave the impression of being a highly sexed species. Granted that the impression was true, they could hardly fail to place emphasis on sex. So, if they were confronted by someone who placed no emphasis on it whatsoever, who was, in fact, a—well, anyway, if they were confronted by such a person, would they not think him unusual?

Might they not consider him crazy?

And then he remembered Alison and the bell stopped ringing. As she shared his "psychosis,"

whatever he was, she had to be too. And whatever else she might be, she certainly was not a virgin.

Obviously his theory was worthless.

Hubert sighed, glanced sideways at the girl. She was staring fixedly into the village square. Following her gaze he was shocked to see that two stakes had been set into the packed earth, and that the villagers were busily engaged in piling twigs and branches around them.

At first he refused to accept the thought that flamed horribly in his mind. He saw Alison shudder and turn her face away. "It's not what you think," he said quickly. "They wouldn't dare—"

She met his eyes. "Wouldn't they? Stop and think for a minute. This building wouldn't be here if whatever is wrong with us didn't have precedence in their society in other words, we aren't the first inmates. Now what I'd like to know is what happened to the others?"

"Maybe they were cured," Hubert said.

"Maybe *they* were. But we're not going to be." She pointed into the square. "Look."

Hubert looked. Teetantotum and four warriors were coming towards them.

Despite his mesomorphic body, Hubert Harrington had never been noted as a man of action. Rather, he was the sedentary type, preferring the armchair and a good book to the tennis court, the quiet bar to the boisterous cafe, the nook in the window seat to a game of catch. But there comes a time in most men's lives when they must step out of character and become, however briefly, something which they ordinarily are not.

He picked up the suitcase of trinkets, swung it tentatively. Then he motioned to Alison to get behind him. "We forgot to give them their presents," he said.

Outside, there was the scraping sound of the bar being lifted, and then the thud when it struck the ground. The door opened partway, and Teetantotum peered in. He turned his head first one way, then the other, but apparently the darkness was too great for either of his eyes, and, a moment later, he opened the door all the way. That was when Hubert threw the suitcase.

It struck Teetantotum in the chest, the force of the impact breaking the latch and sending him reeling back into the midst of his warriors. All of them went down beneath a glittering hail of glass necklaces, zircon rings, plastic bracelets and chrome-plated flashlights. Hubert seized Alison's hand, pulled her through the doorway. Snatching up one of the flashlights, he started running across the square, half-dragging the girl behind him.

None of the villagers tried to stop them and they were in the forest, running swiftly, before they heard any sound of pursuit behind them. The flashlight proved to be superfluous: Arcturus X's huge moon was rising in the east, and argent rain was sifting down through the branches, collecting in shimmering pools on the forest floor.

Alison was breathing hard when they reached the lip of the valley, but Hubert would not let her rest. They ran on, through field and forest, to the accompaniment of the shouts of their pursuers. Alone, Hubert knew, he could have made it, but Alison was holding him back. He was dismayed when, finally, she collapsed altogether. He picked her up, feeling the warmth of her thighs against his arms, and she fought him, squirmed wildly to get loose. At first he thought that she wanted him to go on by himself, to leave her behind; and then some of the words she was saying got through to his tumbled mind and at the same moment he staggered into a clearing of new-mown meadow grass, and all at once he understood everything.

He set her down in the moonlight. "—filthy beast!" she finished: "Don't you ever dare touch me again!"

The clues had been there all along, and he was amazed at his obtuseness in failing to recognize them: Her reaction when she had first seen the unclothed Notantanawite males, her outrage over the natural development of Notantanawite females, her boastful references to the "men in her life;" her determined absorption with the Kinsey report; her constant attempt to cheapen an experience she had never known, an experience that terrified her to the point where she would not permit a man even to save her life if saving it involved physical contact—

It was one thing to be a virgin, Hubert reflected, but it was quite another thing to be so ashamed of

your virginity that you tried to turn every reference to an act of love into a dirty joke, that you invented a series of risqué romances and alluded to them every chance you got, that you did everything in your power, short of taking positive action, to prove that you were the diametric opposite of what you really were ...

Hubert had read many books in which the hero had saved the heroine from a fate worse than death; but he had never read one in which the hero had saved both himself and the heroine from a death worse than fate. But there was no time for quibbling over details. There was barely enough time for explanations.

At first Alison would not believe him, and when he pulled her to him she fought him furiously. Then a sudden crescendo in the shouts of the pursuing Notantanawites reechoed through the forest, and she collapsed against him, sobbing.

They were escorted back to the village in style, and a huge wedding feast was laid out in the square (the real wedding would come later, they had agreed, as soon as Hubert got a chance to talk to the captain of the mother-ship). Teetantotum's face was beaming and he kept saying, over and over: "Always work. Earthman, Notantanawite, any man—see stakes, see firewood, see warriors come, Think hard. Run away. Makum mary belong him good!"

Hubert's face was beaming, too. He looked across the fire to where Alison was sipping wedding wine from a pear-shaped gourd. When his eyes touched hers, a blush suffused her face, softening the hard lines of bitterness and repression; a gentle blush that promised many blushes yet to come.

Hubert sipped wedding wine from his own gourd. The authors of the *Advance Report*, he reflected, had failed to record perhaps the most idyllic custom of this simple and kindly people of Arcturus X.