# **Half-Breed**

Isaac Asimov

Jefferson Scanlon wiped a perspiring brow and took a deep breath. With trembling finger, he reached for the switch-and changed his mind. His latest model, representing over three months of solid work, was very nearly his last hope. A good part of the fifteen thousand dollars he had been able to borrow was in it. And now the closing of a switch would show whether he won or lost

Scanlon cursed himself for a coward and grasped the switch firmly. He snapped it down and flicked it open again with one swift movement. And nothing happened-his eyes, strain though they might, caught no flash of surging power. The pit of his stomach froze, and he closed the switch again, savagely, and left it closed. Nothing happened: the machine, again, was a failure.

He buried his aching head in his hands, and groaned. “Oh, God! It should work-it should. My math is right and I’ve produced the fields I want. By every law of science, those fields should crack the atom.” He arose, opening the useless switch, and paced the floor in deep thought.

His theory was right. His equipment was cut neatly to the pattern of his equations. If the theory was right, the equipment must be wrong. But the equipment was right, so the theory must... . “I’m getting out of here before I go crazy,” he said to the four walls.

He snatched his hat and coat from the peg behind the door and was out of the house in a whirlwind of motion, slamming the door behind him in a gust of fury. ‘

Atomic power. Atomic power! Atomic power!

The two words repeated themselves over and over again, singing a monotonous, maddening song in his brain. A siren song! It was luring him to destruction; for this dream he had given up a safe and comfortable professorship at M.I.T. For it, he had become a middle-aged man at thirty-the first flush of youth long gone,-an apparent failure.

And now his money was vanishing rapidly. If the love of money is the root of all evil, the need of money is most certainly the root of all despair. Scanlon smiled a little at the thought-rather neat.

Of course, there were the beautiful prospects in store if he could ever bridge the gap he had found between theory and practice. The whole world would be his-Mars too, and even the unvisited planets. All his. All he had to do was to find out what was wrong with his mathematics-no, he’d checked that, it was in the equipment. Although- He groaned aloud once more.

The gloomy train of his thoughts was broken as he suddenly became aware of a tumult of boyish shouts not far off. Scanlon frowned. He hated noise especially when he was in the dumps.

The shouts became louder and dissolved into scraps of words, “Get him, Johnny!” “Whee-look at him run!”

A dozen boys careened out from behind a large frame building, not two hundred yards away, and ran pell-mell in Scanlon’s general direction.

In spite of himself, Scanlon regarded the yelling group curiously. They were chasing something or other, with the heartless glee of children. In the dimness he couldn’t make out just what it was. He screened his eyes and squinted. A sudden motion and a lone figure disengaged itself from the crowd and ran frantically.

Scanlon almost dropped his solacing pipe in astonishment, for the fugitive was a Tweenie-an Earth-Mars half-breed. There was no mistaking that brush of wiry, dead-white hair that rose stiffly in all directions like porcupine-quills. Scanlon marvelled-what was one of those things doing outside an asylum?

The boys had caught up with the Tweenie again, and the fugitive was lost to sight. The yells increased in volume, Scanlon, shocked, saw a heavy board rise and fall with a thud. A profound sense of the enormity of his own actions in standing idly by while a helpless creature was being hounded by a crew of gamins came to him, and before he quite realized it he was charging down upon them, fists waving threateningly in the air.

“Seat, you heathens! Get out of here before I-” the point of his foot came into violent contact with the seat of the nearest hoodlum, and his arms sent two more tumbling.

The entrance of the new force changed the situation considerably. Boys, whatever their superiority in numbers, have an instinctive fear of adults,-especially such a shouting, ferocious adult as Scanlon appeared to be. In less time than it took Scanlon to realize it they were gone, and he was left alone with the Tweenie, who lay half-prone, and who between panting sobs cast fearful and uncertain glances at his deliverer.

“Are you hurt?” asked Scanlon gruffly.

“No, sir.” The Tweenie rose unsteadily, his high silver crest of hair swaying incongruously. “I twisted my ankle a bit, but I can walk. I’ll go now. Thank you very much for helping me.”

“Hold on! Wait!” Scanlon’s voice was much softer, for it dawned on him that the Tweenie, though almost full-grown, was incredibly gaunt; that his clothes were a mere mass of dirty rags; and that there was a heart-rending look of utter weariness on his thin face.

“Here,” he said, as the Tweenie turned towards him again, “‘Are you hungry?”

The Tweenie’s face twisted as though he were fighting a battle within himself. When he spoke it was in a low, embarrassed voice. “Yes-I am, a little.”

“You look it. Come with me to my house,” he jerked a thumb over his shoulder. “You ought to eat Looks like you can do with a wash and a change of clothes, too.” He turned and led the way.

He didn’t speak again until he had opened his front door and entered the hall. “I think you’d better take a bath first, boy. There’s the bathroom. Hurry into it and lock the door before Beulah sees you.”

His admonition came too late. A sudden, startled gasp caused Scanlon to whirl about, the picture of guilt, and the Tweenie to shrink backwards into the shadow of a hat-rack.

Beulah, Seanlon’s housekeeper, scurried towards them, her mild face aflame with indignation and her short, plump body exuding exasperation at every pore.

“Jefferson Scanlon! Jefferson!” She glared at the Tweenie with shocked disgust. “How can you bring such a thing into this house! Have you lost your sense of morals?”

The poor Tweenie was washed away with the flow of her anger, but Scanlon, after his first momentary panic, collected himself. “Come come, Beulah. This isn’t like you. Here’s a poor fellow-creature, starved, tired, beaten by a crowd of boys, and you have no pity for him. I’m really disappointed in you, Beulah.”

“Disappointed!” sniffed the housekeeper, though touched. “Because of that disgraceful thing. He should be in an institution where they keep such monsters!”

“All right, we’ll talk about it later. Go ahead, boy, take your bath. And, Beulah, see if you can’t rustle up some old clothes of mine.”

With a last look of disapproval, Beulah flounced out of the room.

“Don’t mind her, boy,” Scanlon said when she left “She was my nurse once and she still has a sort of proprietary interest in me. She won’t harm you. Go take your bath.”

The Tweenie was a different person altogether when he finally seated himself at the dining-room table. Now that the layer of grime was removed, there was something quite handsome about his thin face, and his high, clear forehead gave him a markedly intellectual look. His hair still stood erect, a foot tall, in spite of the moistening it had received. In the light its brilliant whiteness took an imposing dignity, and to Scanlon it seemed to lose all ugliness.

“Do you like cold chicken?” asked Scanlon.

“Oh, yes!” enthusiastically.

“Then pitch in. And when you finish that, you can have more. Take anything on the table.”

The Tweenie’s eyes glistened as he set his jaws to work; and, between the two of them, the table was bare in a few minutes.

“Well, now,” exclaimed Scanlon when the repast had reached its end, “I think you might answer some questions now. What’s your name?”

“They called me Max.”

“Ah! And your last name?”

The Tweenie shrugged his shoulders. “They never called me anything but Max-when they spoke to me at all. I don’t suppose a half-breed needs a name.” There was no mistaking the bitterness in his voice.

“But what were you doing running wild through the country? Why aren’t you where you live?”

“I was in a home. Anything is better than being in a home-even the world outside, which I had never seen. Especially after Tom died.”

“Who was Tom, Max?” Scanlon spoke softly.

“He was the only other one like me. He was younger- fifteen-but he died.” He looked up from the table, fury in his eyes. “They killed him, Mr. Scanlon. He was such a young fellow, and so friendly. He couldn’t stand being alone the way I could. He needed friends and fun, and-all he had was me. No one else would speak to him, because he was a half-breed. And when he died I couldn’t stand it anymore either. I left”

“They meant to be kind. Max. You shouldn’t have done that You’re not like other people; they don’t understand you. And they must have done something for you. You talk as though you’ve had some education.”

“I could attend classes, all right,” he assented gloomily. “But I had to sit in a corner away from all the others. They let me read all I wanted, though, and I’m thankful for that.”

“Well, there you are. Max. You weren’t so badly off, were you?”

Max lifted his head and stared at the other suspiciously. “You’re not going to send me back, are you?” He half rose, as though ready for instant flight.

Scanlon coughed uneasily. “Of course, if you don’t want to go back I won’t make you. But it would be the best thing for you.”

“It wouldn’t!” Max cried vehemently.

“Well, have it your own way. Anyway, I think you’d better go to sleep now. You need it. We’ll talk in the morning.”

He led the still suspicious Tweenie up to the second floor, and pointed out a small bedroom. “That’s yours for the night I’ll be in the next room later on, and if you need anything just shout.” He turned to leave, then thought of something. “But remember, you mustn’t try to run away during the night”

“Word of honor. I won’t”

Scanlon retired thoughtfully to the room he called his study. He lit a dim lamp and seated himself in a worn armchair. For ten minutes he sat without moving, and for the first time in six years thought about something besides his dream of atomic power.

A quiet knock sounded, and at his grunted acknowledgment Beulah entered. She was frowning, her lips pursed. She planted herself firmly before him.

“Oh, Jefferson! To think that you should do this! If your dear mother knew...”

“Sit down, Beulah,” Scanlon waved at another chair, “and don’t worry about my mother. She wouldn’t have minded.”

“No. Your father was a good-hearted simpleton, too. You’re just like him, Jefferson. First you spend all your money on silly machines that might blow the house up any day-and now you pick up that awful creature from the streets. . . . Tell me, Jefferson,” there was a solemn and fearful pause, “are you thinking of keeping it?”

Scanlon smiled moodily. “I think I am, Beulah. I can’t very well do anything else.”

A week later Scanlon was in his workshop. During the night before, his brain, rested by the change in the monotony brought about by the presence of Max, had thought of a possible solution to the puzzle of why his machine wouldn’t work. Perhaps some of the parts were defective, he thought. Even a very slight flaw in some of the parts could render the machine inoperative.

He plunged into work ardently. At the end of half an hour the machine lay scattered on his workbench, and Scanlon was sitting on a high stool, eying it disconsolately.

He scarcely heard the door softly open and close. It wasn’t until the intruder had coughed twice that the absorbed inventor realized another was present.

“Oh-it’s Max.” His abstracted gaze gave way to recognition. “Did you want to see me?”

“If you’re busy I can wait, Mr. Scanlon.” The week had not removed his shyness. “But there were a lot of books in my room. . .”

“Books? Oh, I’ll have them cleaned out, if you don’t want them. I don’t suppose you do,-they’re mostly textbooks, as I remember. A bit too advanced for you just now.”

“Oh, it’s not too difficult,” Max assured him. He pointed to a book he was carrying. “I just wanted you to explain a bit here in Quantum Mechanics. There’s some math with Integral Calculus that I don’t quite understand. It bothers me. Here- wait till I find it.”

He ruffled the pages, but stopped suddenly as he became aware of his surroundings. “Oh say-are you breaking up your model?”

The question brought the hard facts back to Scanlon at a bound. He smiled bitterly. “No, not yet. I just thought there might be something wrong with the insulation or the connections that kept it from functioning. There isn’t-I’ve made a mistake somewhere.”

“That’s too bad, Mr. Scanlon.” The Tweenie’s smooth brow wrinkled mournfully.

“The worst of it is that I can’t imagine what’s wrong. I’m positive the theory’s perfect-I’ve checked every way I can. I’ve gone over the mathematics time and time again, and each time it says the same thing. Space-distortion fields of such and such an intensity will smash the atom to smithereens. Only they don’t.”

“May I see the equations?”

Scanlon gazed at his ward quizzically, but could see nothing in his face other than the most serious interest He shrugged his shoulders. “There they are-under that ream of yellow paper on the desk. I don’t know if you can read them, though. I’ve been too lazy to type them out, and my handwriting is pretty bad.”

Max scrutinized them carefully and flipped the sheets one by one. “It’s a bit over my head, I guess.”

The inventor smiled a little. “I rather thought they would be. Max.”

He looked around the littered room, and a sudden sense of anger came over him. Why wouldn’t the thing work? Abruptly he got up and snatched his coat “I’m going out of here. Max,” he said. “Tell Beulah not to make me anything hot for lunch. It would be cold before I got back.”

It was afternoon when he opened the front door, and hunger was sharp enough to prevent him from realizing with a puzzled start that someone was at work in his laboratory. There came to his ears a sharp buzzing sound followed by a momentary silence and then again the buzz which this time merged into a sharp crackling that lasted an instant and was gone.

He bounded down the hall and threw open the laboratory door. The sight that met his eyes froze him into an attitude of sheer astonishment-stunned incomprehension.

Slowly, he understood the message of his senses. His precious atomic motor had been put together again, but this time in a manner so strange as to be senseless, for even his trained eye could see no reasonable relationship among the various parts.

He wondered stupidly if it were a nightmare or a practical joke, and then everything became clear to him at one bound, for there at the other end of the room was the unmistakable sight of a brush of silver hair protruding from above a bench, swaying gently from side to side as the hidden owner of the brush moved.

“Max!” shouted the distraught inventor, in tones of fury. Evidently the foolish boy had allowed his interest to inveigle him into idle and dangerous experiments.

At the sound, Max lifted a pale face which upon the sight of his guardian turned a dull red. He approached Scanlon with reluctant steps.

“What have you done?” cried Scanlon, staring about him angrily. “Do you know what you’ve been playing with? There’s enough juice running through this thing to electrocute you twice over.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Scanlon. I had a rather silly idea about all this when I looked over the equations, but I was afraid to say anything because you know so much more than I do. After you went away, I couldn’t resist the temptation to try it out, though I didn’t intend to go this far. I thought I’d have it apart again before you came back.”

There was a silence that lasted a long time. When Scanlon spoke again, his voice was curiously mild, “Well, what have you done?”

“You won’t be angry?”

“It’s a little too late for that. You couldn’t have made it much worse, anyway.”

“Well, I noticed here in your equations,” he extracted one sheet and then another and pointed, “that whenever the expression representing the space-distortion fields occurs, it is always referred to as a function of x\* plus y’ plus z”. Since the fields, as far as I could see, were always referred to as constants, that would give you the equation of a sphere.”

Scanlon nodded, “I noticed that, but it has nothing to do with the problem.”

“Well, I thought it might indicate the necessary arrangement of the individual fields, so I disconnected the distorters and hooked them up again in a sphere.”

The inventor’s mouth fell open. The mysterious rearrangement of his device seemed clear now-and what was more, eminently sensible.

“Does it work?” he asked.

“I’m not quite sure. The parts haven’t been made to fit this arrangement so that it’s only a rough set-up at best. Then there’s the constant error-”

“But does it work? Close the switch, damn it!” Scanlon was all fire and impatience once more.

“All right, stand back. I cut the power to one-tenth normal so we won’t get more output than we can handle.”

He closed the switch slowly, and at the moment of contact, a glowing ball of blue-white flame leaped into being from the recesses of the central quartz chamber. Scanlon screened his eyes automatically, and sought the output gauge. The needle was climbing steadily and did not stop until it was pressing the upper limit. The flame burned continuously, releasing no heat seemingly, though beside its light, more intensely brilliant than a magnesium flare, the electric lights faded into dingy yellowness.

Max opened the switch once more and the ball-of flame reddened and died, leaving the room comparatively dark and red. The output gauge sank to zero once more and Scanlon felt his knees give beneath him as he sprawled onto a chair.

He fastened his gaze on the flustered Tweenie and in that look there was respect and awe, and something more, too, for there was fear. Never before had he really realized that the Tweenie was not of Earth or Mars but a member of a race apart. He noticed the difference now, not in the comparatively minor physical changes, but in the profound and searching mental gulf that he only now comprehended.

“Atomic power!” he croaked hoarsely. “And solved by a boy, not yet twenty years old.”

Max’s confusion was painful, “You did all the real work, Mr. Scanlon, years and years of it. I just happened to notice a little detail that you might have caught yourself the next day.” His voice died before the fixed and steady stare of the inventor.

“Atomic power-the greatest achievement of man so far, and we actually have it, we two.”

Both-guardian and ward-seemed awed at the grandeur and power of the thing they had created.

And in that moment-the age of Electricity died.

Jefferson Scanlon sucked at his pipe contentedly. Outside, the snow was falling and the chill of winter was in the air, but inside, in the comfortable warmth, Scanlon sat and smoked and smiled to himself. Across the way, Beulah, likewise quietly happy, hummed softly in time to clicking knitting needles, stopping only occasionally as her fingers flew through an unusually intricate portion of the pattern. In the corner next the window sat Max, occupied in his usual pastime of reading, and Scanlon reflected with faint surprise that of late Max had confined his reading to light novels.

Much had happened since that well-remembered day over a year ago. For one thing, Scanlon was now a world-famous and world-adored scientist, and it would have been strange had he not been sufficiently human to be proud of it. Secondly, and scarcely less important, atomic power was remaking the world.

Scanlon thanked all the powers that were, over and over again, for the fact that war was a thing of two centuries past, for otherwise atomic power would have been the final ruination of civilization. As it was, the coalition of World Powers that now controlled the great force of Atomic Power proved it a real blessing and were introducing it into Man’s life in the slow, gradual stages necessary to prevent economic upheaval

Already, interplanetary travel had been revolutionized. From hazardous gambles, trips to Mars and Venus had become holiday jaunts to be negotiated in a third of the previous time, and trips to the outer planets were at last feasible.

Scanlon settled back further in his chair, and pondered once more upon the only fly in his wonderful pot of ointment Max had refused all credit; stormily and violently refused to have his name as much as mentioned. The injustice of it galled Scanlon, but aside from a vague mention of “capable assistants” he had said nothing; and the thought of it still made him feel an ace of a cad.

A sharp explosive noise brought him out of his reverie and he turned startled eyes towards Max, who had suddenly closed his book with a peevish slap.

“Hello,” exclaimed Scanlon, “and what’s wrong now?”

Max tossed the book aside and stood up, his underlip thrust out in a pout, “I’m lonely, that’s all.”

Scanlon’s face fell, and he felt at an uncomfortable loss for words. “I guess I know that. Max,” he said softly, at length. “I’m sorry for you, but the conditions-are so-”

Max relented, and brightening up, placed an affectionate arm about his foster-father’s shoulder, “I didn’t mean it that way, you know. It’s just-well, I can’t say it but it’s that-you get to wishing you had someone your own age to talk to- someone of your own kind.”

Beulah looked up and bestowed a penetrating glance upon the young Tweenie but said nothing.

Scanlon considered, “You’re right, son, in a way. A friend and companion is the best thing a fellow can have, and I’m afraid Beulah and I don’t qualify in that respect. One of your own kind, as you say, would be the ideal solution, but that’s a tough proposition.” He rubbed his nose with one finger and gazed at the ceiling thoughtfully.

Max opened his mouth as if he were going to say something more, but changed his mind and turned pink for no evident reason. Then he muttered, barely loud enough for Scanlon to hear, “I’m being silly!” With an abrupt turn he marched out of the room, banging the door loudly as he left.

The older man gazed after him with undisguised surprise, “Well! What a funny way to act. What’s got into him lately, anyway?”

Beulah halted the nimbly-leaping needles long enough to remark acidly, “Men are born fools and blind into the bargain.”

“Is that so?” was the somewhat nettled response, “And do you know what’s biting him?”

“I certainly do. It’s as plain as that terrible tie you’re wearing. I’ve seen it for months now. Poor fellow!”

Scanlon shook his head, “You’re speaking in riddles, Beulah.”

The housekeeper laid her knitting aside and glanced at the inventor wearily, “It’s very simple. The boy is twenty. He needs company.”

“But that’s just what he said. Is that your marvelous penetration?”

“Good land, Jefferson. Has it been so long since you were twenty yourself? Do you mean to say that you honestly think he’s referring to male company?”

“Oh,” said Scanlon, and then brightening suddenly, “Oh!” He giggled in an inane manner.

“Well, what are you going to do about it?”

“Why-why, nothing. What can be done?”

“That’s a fine way to speak of our ward, when you’re rich enough to buy five hundred orphan asylums from basement to roof and never miss the money. It should be the easiest thing in the world to find a likely-looking young lady Tweenie to keep him company.”

Scanlon gazed at her, a look of intense horror on his face, “Are you serious, Beulah? Are you trying to suggest that I go shopping for a female Tweenie for Max? Why-why, what do I know about women-especially Tweenie women. I don’t know his standards. I’m liable to pick one he’ll consider an ugly hag.”

“Don’t raise silly objections, Jefferson. Outside of the hair, they’re the same in looks as anyone else, and I’ll leave it to you to pick a pretty one. There never was a bachelor old and crabbed enough not to be able to do that.”

“No! I won’t do it. Of all the horrible ideas-”

“Jefferson! You’re his guardian. You owe it to him.”

The words struck the inventor forcibly, “I owe it to him,” he repeated. “You’re right there, more right than you know.” He sighed, “I guess it’s got to be done.”

Scanlon shifted uneasily from one trembling foot to the other under the piercing stare of the vinegar-faced official, whose name-board proclaimed in large letters-Miss Martin, Superintendent.

“Sit down, sir,” she said sourly. “What do you wish?”

Scanlon cleared his throat. He had lost count of the asylums visited up to now and the task was rapidly becoming too much for him. He made a mental vow that this would be the last-either they would have a Tweenie of the proper sex, age, and appearance or he would throw up the whole thing as a bad job.

“I have come to see,” he began, in a carefully-prepared, but stammered speech, “if there are any Twee-Martian half-breeds in your asylum. It is-.”

“We have three,” interrupted the superintendent sharply.

“Any females?” asked Scanlon, eagerly.

“All females,” she replied, and her eye glittered with disapproving suspicion.

“Oh, good. Do you mind if I see them. It is-.”

Miss Martin’s cold glance did not weaver, “Pardon me, but before we go any further, I would like to know whether you’re thinking of adopting a half-breed.”

“I would like to take out guardianship papers if I am suited. Is that so very unusual?”

“It certainly is,” was the prompt retort. “You understand that in any such case, we must first make a thorough investigation of the family’s status, both financial and social. It is the opinion of the government that these creatures are better off under state supervision, and adoption would be a difficult matter.”

“I know, madam, I know. I’ve had practical experience in this matter about fifteen months ago> I believe I can give you satisfaction as to my financial and social status without much trouble. My name is Jefferson Scanlon-.”

“Jefferson Scanlon!” her exclamation was half a scream. In a trice, her face expanded into a servile smile, “Why of course. I should have recognized you from the many pictures I’ve seen of you. How stupid of me. Pray do not trouble yourself with any further references. I’m sure that in your case,” this with a particularly genial expression, “no red tape need be necessary.”

She sounded a desk-bell furiously. “Bring down Madeline and the two little ones as soon as you can,” she snapped at the frightened maid who answered. “Have them cleaned up and warn them to be on their best behavior.”

With this, she turned to Scanlon once more, “It will not take long, Mr. Scanlon. It is really such a great honor to have you here with us, and I am so ashamed at my abrupt treatment of you earlier. At first I didn’t recognize you, though I saw immediately that you were someone of importance.”

If Scanlon had been upset by the superintendent’s former harsh haughtiness, he was entirely unnerved by her effusive geniality. He wiped his profusely-perspiring brow time and time again, answering in incoherent monosyllables the vivacious questions put to him. It was just as he had come to the wild decision of taking to his heels and escaping from the she-dragon by flight that the maid announced the three Tweenies and saved the situation.

Scanlon surveyed the three half-breeds with interest and sudden satisfaction. Two were mere children, perhaps ten years of age, but the third, some eighteen years old, was eligible from every point of view.

Her slight form was lithe and graceful even in the quiet attitude of waiting that she had assumed, and Scanlon, “dried-up, dyed-in-the-wool bachelor” though he was, could not restrain a light nod of approval.

Her face was certainly what Beulah would call “likely looking” and her eyes, now bent towards the floor in shy confusion, were of a deep blue, which seemed a great point to Scanlon.

Even her strange hair was beautiful. It was only moderately high, not nearly the size of Max’s lordly male crest, and its silky-white sheen caught the sunbeams and sent them back in glistening highlights.

The two little ones grasped the skirt of their elder companion with tight grips and regarded the two adults in wide-eyed fright which increased as time passed.

“I believe. Miss Martin, that the young lady will do,” re-» marked Scanlon. “She is exactly what I had in mind. Could you tell me how soon guardianship papers could be drawn up?”

“I could have them ready for you tomorrow, Mr. Scanlon. In an unusual case such as yours, I could easily make special arrangements.”

“Thank you. I shall be back then-,” he was interrupted. by a loud sniffle. One of the little Tweenies could stand it no longer and had burst into tears, followed soon by the other.

“Madeline,” cried Miss Martin to the eighteen-year-old. “Please keep Rose and Blanche quiet This is an abominable exhibition.”

Scanlon intervened. It seemed to him that Madeline was rather pale and though she smiled and soothed the youngsters he was certain that there were tears in her eyes.

“Perhaps,” he suggested, “the young lady has no wish to leave the institution. Of course, I wouldn’t think of taking her on any but a purely voluntary basis.”

Miss Martin smiled superciliously, “She won’t make any trouble.” She turned to the young girl, “You’ve heard of the great Jefferson Scanlon, haven’t you?”

“Ye-es, Miss Martin,’ replied the girl, in a low voice.

“Let me handle this. Miss Martin,” urged Scanlon. ‘Tell me, girl, would you really prefer to stay here?”

“Oh, no,” she replied earnestly, “I would be very glad to leave, though,” with an apprehensive glance at Miss Martin, “I have been very well treated here. But you see-what’s to be done with the two little ones? I’m all they have, and if I left, they-they-”

She broke down and snatched them to her with a sudden, fierce grip, “I don’t want to leave them, sir!” She kissed each softly, “Don’t cry, children. I won’t leave you. They won’t take me away.”

Scanlon swallowed with difficulty and groped for a handkerchief with which to blow his nose. Miss Martin gazed on with disapproving hauteur.

“Don’t mind the silly thing, Mr. Scanlon,” said she. “I believe I can have everything ready by tomorrow noon.”

“Have ready guardianship papers for all three,” was the gruff reply.

“What? All three? Are you serious?”

“Certainly. I can do it if I wish, can’t I?” he shouted.

“Why, of course, but-”

Scanlon left precipitately, leaving both Madeline and Miss Martin petrified, the latter with utter stupefaction, the former in a sudden upsurge of happiness. Even the ten-year-olds sensed the change in affairs and subsided into occasional sobs.

Beulah’s surprise, when she met them at the airport and saw three Tweenies where she had expected one, is not to be described. But, on the whole, the surprise was a pleasant one, for little Rose and Blanche took to the elderly housekeeper immediately. Their first greeting was to bestow great, moist kisses upon Beulah’s lined cheeks at which she glowed with joy and kissed them in turn.

With Madeline she was enchanted, whispering to Scanlon that he knew a little more about such matters than he pretended.

“If she had decent hair,” whispered Scanlon in reply, “I’d marry her myself. That I would,” and he smiled in great self• satisfaction.

The arrival at home in mid-afternoon was the occasion of great excitement on the part of the two oldsters. Scanlon inveigled Max into accompanying him on a long walk together in the woods, and when the unsuspecting Max left, puzzled but willing, Beulah busied herself with setting the three newcomers at their ease.

They were shown over the house from top to bottom, the rooms assigned to them being indicated. Beulah prattled away continuously, joking and chaffing, until the Tweenies had lost all their shyness and felt as if they had known her forever.

Then, as the winter evening approached, she turned to Madeline rather abruptly and said, “It’s getting late. Do you want to come downstairs with me and help prepare supper for the men?”

Madeline was taken aback, “The men. Is there, then, someone besides Mr. Scanlon?”

“Oh, yes. There’s Max. You haven’t seen him yet,”

“Is Max a relation of yours?”

“No, child. He’s another of Mr. Scanlon’s wards.”

“Oh, I see.” She blushed and her hand rose involuntarily to her hair.

Beulah saw in a moment the thoughts passing through her head and added in a softer voice, “Don’t worry, dear. He won’t mind your being a Tweenie. He’ll be glad to see you.”

It turned out, though, that “glad” was an entirely inadequate adjective when applied to Max’s emotions at the first sight of Madeline.

He tramped into the house in advance of Scanlon, taking off his overcoat and stamping the snow off his shoes as he did so.

“Oh, boy,” he cried at the half-frozen inventor who followed him in, “why you were so anxious to saunter about on a freezer like today I don’t know.” He sniffed the air appreciatively, “Ah, do I smell lamb chops?” and he made for the dining-room in double-quick time.

It was at the threshold that he stopped suddenly, and gasped for air as if in the last throes of suffocation. Scanlon dipped by and sat down.

“Come on,” he said, enjoying the other’s brick-red visage. ‘Sit down. We have company today. This is Madeline and this s Rose and this is Blanche. And this,” he turned to the seated girls and noted with satisfaction that Madeline’s pink face was burning a fixed glance of confusion upon the plate before her, “is my ward. Max.”

“How do you do,” murmured Max, eyes like saucers, “I’m pleased to meet you.”

Rose and Blanche shouted cheery greetings in reply but Madeline only raised her eyes fleetingly and then dropped them again.

The meal was a singularly quiet one. Max, though he had complained of a ravenous hunger all afternoon, allowed his chop and mashed potatoes to die of cold before him, while Madeline played with her food as if she did not know what it was there for. Scanlon and Beulah ate quietly and well, exchanging sly glances between bites.

Scanlon sneaked off after dinner, for he rightly felt that the more tactful touch of a woman was needed in these matters, and when Beulah joined him in his study some hours later, he saw at a glance that he had been correct.

“I’ve broken the ice,” she said happily, “they’re telling each other their life histories now and are getting along wonderfully. They’re still afraid of each other, though, and insist on sitting at opposite ends of the room, but that’ll wear off-and pretty quickly, too.”

“It’s a fine match, Beulah, eh?”

“A finer one I’ve never seen. And little Rose and Blanche are angels. I’ve just put them to bed.”

There was a short silence, and then Beulah continued softly, “That was the only time you were right and I was wrong- that time you first brought Max into the house and I objected -but that one time makes up for everything else. You are a credit to your dear mother, Jefferson.”

Scanlon nodded soberly, “I wish I could make all Tweenies on earth so happy. It would be such a simple thing. If we treated them like humans instead of like criminals and gave them homes built especially for them and calculated especially for their happiness-”

“Well, why don’t you do it?” interrupted Beulah.

Scanlon turned a serious eye upon the old housekeeper, “That’s exactly what I was leading up to.” His voice lapsed into a dreamy murmur, “Just think. A town of Tweenies-run by them and for them-with its own governing officials and its own schools and its own public utilities. A little world within a world where the Tweenie can consider himself a human being-instead of a freak surrounded and looked down upon by endless multitudes of pure-bloods.”

He reached for his pipe and filled it slowly, “The world owes a debt to one Tweenie which it can never repay-and I owe it to him as well. I’m going to do it. I’m going to create Tweenietown.”

That night he did not go to sleep. The stars turned in their grand circles and paled at last. The grey of dawn came and grew, but still Scanlon sat unmoving-dreaming and planning.

At eighty, age sat lightly upon Jefferson Scanlon’s head. The spring was gone from his step, the sturdy straightness from his shoulders, but his robust health had not failed him, and his mind, beneath the shock of hair, now as white as any Tweenie’s, still worked with undiminished vigor.

A happy life is not an aging one, and for forty years now, Scanlon had watched Tweenietown grow, and in the watching, had found happiness.

He could see it now stretched before him like a large, beautiful painting as he gazed out the window. A little gem of a town with a population of slightly more than a thousand, nestling amid three hundred square miles of fertile Ohio land.

Neat and sturdy houses, wide, clean streets, parks, theatres, schools, stores-a model town, bespeaking decades of intelligent effort and co-operation.

The door opened behind him and he recognized the soft step without needing to turn, “Is that you, Madeline?”

“Yes, father,” for by no other title was he known to any inhabitant of Tweenietown. “Max is returning with Mr. Johanson.”

“That’s good,” he gazed at Madeline tenderly. “We’ve seen Tweenietown grow since those days long ago, haven’t we?”

Madeline nodded and sighed.

“Don’t sigh, dear. It’s been well worth the years we’ve given to it. If only Beulah had lived to see it now.”

He shook his head as he thought of the old housekeeper, dead now a quarter of a century.

“Don’t think such sad thoughts,” admonished Madeline in her turn. “Here comes Mr. Johanson. Remember it’s the fortieth anniversary and a happy day; not a sad one.”

Charles B. Johanson was what is known as a “shrewd” man. That is, he was an intelligent, far-seeing person, comparatively well-versed in the sciences, but one who was wont to put these good qualities into practice only in order to advance his own interest. Consequently, he went far in politics and was the first appointee to the newly created Cabinet post of Science and Technology.

It was the first official act of his to visit the world’s greatest scientist and inventor, Jefferson Scanlon, who, in his old age, still had no peer in the number of useful inventions turned over to the government every year. Tweenietown was a considerable surprise to him. It was known rather vaguely in the outside world that the town existed, and it was considered a hobby of the old scientist-a harmless eccentricity. Johanson found it a well-worked-out project of sinister connotations.

His attitude, however, when he entered Scanlon’s room in company with his erstwhile guide. Max, was one of frank geniality, concealing well certain thoughts that swept through his mind.

“Ah, Johanson,” greeted Scanlon, “you’re back. What do you think of all this?” his arm made a wide sweep.

“It is surprising-something marvelous to behold,” Johanson assured him.

Scanlon chuckled, “Glad to hear it. We have a population of 1154 now and growing every day. You’ve seen what we’ve done already but it’s nothing to what we are going to do in the future-even after my death. However, there is something I wish to see done before I die and for that I’ll need your help.

“And that is?” questioned the Secretary of Science and Technology guardedly.

“Just this. That you sponsor measures giving these Tweenies, these so long despised half-breeds, full equality,-political,- legal,-economic,-social,-with Terrestrials and Martians.”

Johanson hesitated, “It would be difficult. There is a certain amount of perhaps understandable prejudice against them, and until we can convince Earth that the Tweenies deserve equality-” he shook his head doubtfully.

“Deserve equality!” exclaimed Scanlon, vehemently, “Why, they deserve more. I am moderate in my demands.” At these words. Max, sitting quietly in a corner, looked up and bit his lip, but said nothing as Scanlon continued, “You don’t know the true worth of these Tweenies. They combine the best of Earth and Mars. They possess the cold, analytical reasoning powers of the Martians together with the emotional drive and boundless energy of the Earthman. As far as intellect is concerned, they are your superior and mine, every one of them. I ask only equality.”

The Secretary smiled soothingly, “Your zeal misleads you perhaps, my dear Scanlon.”

“It does not. Why do you suppose I turn out so many successful gadgets-like this gravitational shield I created a few years back. Do you think I could have done it without my Tweenie assistants? It was Max here,” Max dropped his eyes before the sudden piercing gaze of the Cabinet member, “that put the final touch upon my discovery of atomic power itself.”

Scanlon threw caution to the winds, as he grew excited, “Ask Professor Whitsun of Stanford and he’ll tell you. He’s a world authority on psychology and knows what he’s talking about. He studied the Tweenie and he’ll tell you that the Tweenie is the coming race of the Solar System, destined to take the supremacy away from us pure-bloods as inevitably as night follows day. Don’t you think they deserve equality in that case?”

“Yes, I do think so,-definitely,” replied Johanson. There was a strange glitter in his eyes, and a crooked smile upon his Ups, “This is of extreme importance, Scanlon. I shall attend to it immediately. So immediately, in fact, that I believe I had better leave in half an hour, to catch the 2:10 strato-car.”

Johanson had scarcely left, when Max approached Scanlon and blurted out with no preamble at all, “There is something I have to show you, father-something you have not known about before.”

Scanlon stared his surprise, “What do you mean?”

“Come with me, please, father. I shall explain.” His grave expression was almost frightening. Madeline joined the two at the door, and at a sign from Max, seemed to comprehend the situation. She said nothing but her eyes grew sad and the lines in her forehead seemed to deepen.

In utter silence, the three entered the waiting Rocko-car and were sped across the town in the direction of the Hill o’ the Woods. High over Lake Clare they shot to come down once more in the wooded patch at the foot of the hill.

A tall, burly Tweenie sprang to attention as the car landed, and started at the sight of Scanlon.

“Good afternoon, father,” he whispered respectfully, and cast a questioning glance at Max as he did so.

“Same to you, Emmanuel,” replied Scanlon absently. He suddenly became aware that before him was a cleverly-camouflaged opening that led into the very hill itself.

Max beckoned him to follow and led the way into the opening which after a hundred feet opened into an enormous manmade cavern. Scanlon halted in utter amazement, for before him were three giant space-ships, gleaming silvery-white and equipped, as he could plainly see, with the latest atomic power.

“I’m sorry, father,” said Max, “that all this was done without your knowledge. It is the only case of the sort in the history of Tweenietown.” Scanlon scarcely seemed to hear, standing as if in a daze, and Max continued, “The center one is the flagship-the Jefferson Scanlon. The one to the right is the Beulah Goodkin and the one to the left the Madeline.”

Scanlon snapped out of his bemusement, “But what does this all mean and why the secrecy?”

“These ships have been lying ready for five years now, fully fuelled and provisioned, ready for instant take-off. Tonight. we blast away the side of the hill and shoot for Venus -tonight. We have not told you till now, for we did not wish to disturb your peace of mind with a misfortune we knew long ago to be inevitable. We had thought that perhaps,” his voice sank lower, “its fulfillment might have been postponed until after you were no longer with us.”

“Speak out,” cried Scanlon suddenly. “I want the full details. Why do you leave just as I feel sure I can obtain full equality for you?”

“Exactly,” answered Max, mournfully. “Your words to Johanson swung the scale. As long as Earthmen and Martians merely thought us different and inferior, they despised us and tolerated us. You have told Johanson we were superior and would ultimately supplant Mankind. They have no alternative now but to hate us. There shall be no further toleration; of that I can assure you. We leave before the storm breaks.”

The old man’s eyes widened as the truth of the other’s statements became apparent to him, “I see. I must get in touch with Johanson. Perhaps, we can together correct that terrible mistake.” He clapped a hand to his forehead.

“Oh, Max,” interposed Madeline, tearfully, “why don’t you come to the point? We want you to come with us, father. In Venus, which is so sparsely settled, we can find a spot where we can develop unharmed for an unlimited time. We can establish our nation, free and untrammeled, powerful in our own right, no longer dependent on-”

Her voice died away and she gazed anxiously at Scanlon’s face, now grown drawn and haggard. “No,” he whispered, “no! My place is here with my own kind. Go, my children, and establish your nation. In the end, your descendants shall rule the System. But I-I shall stay here.”

“Then I shall stay, too,” insisted Max. “You are old and someone must care for you. I owe you my life a dozen times over.”

Scanlon shook his head firmly, “I shall need no one. Dayton is not far. I shall be well taken care of there or anywhere else I go. You, Max, are needed by your race. You are their leader. Go!”

Scanlon wandered through the deserted streets of Tweenietown and tried to take a grip upon himself. It was hard. Yesterday, he had celebrated the fortieth anniversary of its founding-it had been at the peak of its prosperity. Today, it was a ghost town.

Yet, oddly enough, there was a spirit of exultation about him. His dream had shattered-but only to give way to a brighter dream. He had nourished foundlings and brought up a race in its youth and for that he was someday to be recognized as the founder of the superrace.

It was his creation that would someday rule the system. Atomic power-gravity nullifiers-all faded into insignificance. This was his real gift to the Universe.

This, he decided, was how a God must feel.