

ORIGIN OF SPECIES

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illustrated by MORROW

He traveled millions of years into the past to explore his own future.

I

The woolly mammothmobile lying on its side in the pinaster grove was a dead ringer for the one Farrell was driving — slightly larger than life, gleaming of tusk guns; authentic down to the minutest detail. Even if he hadn't followed its well-defined trail all the way from the entry-area he would have known at once that it was the property of the two IPS employees he had returned to the Upper Paleolithic to find.

Frowning, he drove his own woolly mammothmobile deeper into the grove, opened the ear-hatch, extended the Jacob's ladderette, and climbed down to the ground. After making certain that his numb-gun was riding properly on his right hip, he approached the fallen paleethnologicvehicle warily. The heavy woollike material covering its thick steel skin was torn in several places and there was an ugly hole the size of a silver dollar in the region of its right hip. The ear-hatch had been forced open from the outside and hung forlornly on one hinge.

Farrell clambered up the flexible trunk-cannon to the temple and peered down into the cockpit. As he did so, a pungent odor touched his nostrils. Only one thing could be responsible for it — a burned-out powerpac. Clearly, whatever it was that had burned the hole in the mammothmobile's hip had found its mark.

His bewilderment mounting, he lowered himself into the cockpit. The control board, the automatic retro-co-ordinate calculator, and the lumillusion panel had been smashed beyond repair, apparently with a blunt instrument of some kind. The upholstery covering the two bucket seats had been torn to shreds. He crawled through the hatch behind the seats into the compact cabin.

The couch-bed had been stripped of its coverings, the food locker had been forced open and robbed of its contents, and the spare-parts bin had been overturned. The clothes cubicle had been broken into and mangled clothing — most of it women's — was scattered everywhere.

Stone Age teenagers?

Farrell didn't think so. He would sooner believe it was the work of adults — Cro-Magnon adults, in all likelihood. There were still a few Neanderthals around, but they were well on their way toward extinction.

None of which explained the hole in the paleethnologicvehicle's hip.

He had activated his pocket torch in order to view the interior of the cabin; now he directed its beam into the posterior compartment, where the powerpac was housed. The unit was burned out all right — burned out beyond repair. So intense had been the heat to which it had been subjected, in fact, that some of its parts had fused.

He returned to the cockpit, climbed through the ear-hatch, and used the temple as an eminence from which to survey his surroundings. The pinaster grove constituted part of the flora of a vast tableland that

would someday be known as the south central plateau of France. In the east, young mountains showed. To the south and west, the plateau stretched verdantly away into the mists of distance. To the north, although he could not see it at the moment because of the trees, lay the glittering whiteness of the retreating glacier. He could smell the clean sweet coldness of ice and snow.

He peered deeper into the grove. Was that a man's booted foot protruding from those shadows over there?

He climbed down from the massive head and moved forward to investigate. Careful now — old saber-tooth might be around. Or *Cam's dirus*, the wild dog. Or the giant sloths, *Mylodon* and *Megatherium*. Perhaps even Mr. Woolly Mammoth himself.

The foot was attached to a leg, the leg to a torso, the torso to a head. The back of the head had been bashed in and the brains had been scooped out.

Farrell recognized the dead man as Professor Richards from a photograph the IPS official in charge of rescue operations had showed him. Lord! he hoped Miss Larkin, the professor's secretary, hadn't suffered a similar fate. He explored the rest of the grove, but saw no sign of her. Maybe the mammothmobile's attackers had taken her prisoner.

He had never seen Miss Larkin in person, but the same IPS official who had showed him the photograph of Professor Richards had let him view the job-resume tape that Miss Larkin had filed with the International Paleontological Society's employment division and which had resulted in her being hired on the spot. The tape showed her babysitting for her neighbor's children, doing house-work, skiing down a chaste white mountain slope, walking to work in a neat blue suitdress, typing in a big busy office, addressing a business women's club, going to church — showed her, in short, engaging in just about every commendable activity there was to engage in, and proved conclusively that she was a nice, clean-living red-blooded American girl. On the desperate seas long wont to roam, Farrell had been looking for a nice clean-living red-blooded American girl all his life; consequently, the thought of losing one just as he was on the verge of finding her was unendurable.

Lord! he hoped that if they had taken her prisoner the Neanderthals hadn't harmed her. For Neanderthals they were — no doubt about it. Granted, Cro-Magnons hunted the woolly mammoth too; but bashing in a man's skull and devouring his brains was exclusively a Neanderthal custom.

Presently he found impressions of her pointed shoe-boots among the grotesque trappings of the hunting party's trail. They had taken her prisoner all right — though for what reason, he couldn't imagine. Miss Larkin was stacked, and a beauty to boot; but a man's taste in women is arbitrarily determined by the size and shape of the females he has been brought up with, and the average Neanderthal was probably as susceptible to the charms of a twenty-first century American goddess as Farrell was to those of a she-ape.

He knew of course that he was dealing with someone besides Neanderthals. The Mousterian Culture Stage had given the world fire, the cudgel, and the stone-tipped spear, but so far as he knew it had never come up with a weapon capable of felling a woolly mammothmobile. Unquestionably there was a third party on the scene, either from Farrell's own time period or from a period beyond. In all probability they were responsible for Miss Larkin's having been taken prisoner.

Before leaving the grove, he dug a quick grave for Professor Richards and said a few words over it. Then he sent back news of the mishaps to IPS via his mammothmobile's one-way time radio. Owing to the time stream's resistance to potential paradoxes, three hours had been as close as he'd been able to get to the first mammothmobile's arrival time; hence, assuming that he'd lost no time since leaving the entry-area and that the hunting party hadn't remained very long in the grove, his quarry was about two hours ahead of him. He glanced at his self-adapting timepiece. 3:10 P.M. He ought to be able to overtake them easily before dark.

One dead, one to go, he reflected bitterly as he drove out of the grove in the direction of the mountains. What made people like Professor Richards tick, anyway? Why had the damn fool had to come running back to the Upper Paleolithic just because he'd dug up an artifact that didn't rhyme with the Aurignacian Culture Stage? Farrell had examined the artifact in question before leaving for the past, and he was willing to admit that neither the subject matter nor the quality of the workmanship made Aurignacian sense; but he still couldn't see why a statuette, however exquisitely it might be carved, was worth going 30,000 years back in time to investigate.

He supposed he shouldn't be complaining, though. After all, if it weren't for paleoethnological idiots like Professor Richards, professional pastfinders like himself wouldn't be working.

II

Spring had dressed the lower slopes of the distant mountains in new bloom, but on the summits winter still held sway. It was as though the glacier in withdrawing northward had left part of itself behind, and in a sense of course it had.

The green of the Pleistocene plateau was enlivened by sporadic populations of oaks, firs, chestnuts, beeches, and pinasters, and the Alice blue gown of the Cenozoic sky was embroidered with wispy motifs of scattered clouds. The "Stone Age -Late-Old-Middle—Excursion" paleoethnologic vehicle that IPS had issued to Farrell was a brand new one, and, thanks to its classification, lent itself nicely to the name of "Salome". He had already fallen in love with "her". She lumbered over the plateau with deceptive awkwardness, the one-way transparency of the neo-alloy that constituted her "skull" affording him an almost unlimited view in all directions. Riding in her cockpit was very much like riding in a howdah, except that the cockpit was an integral part of the conveyance and rested on a bed of gyro-bearings that cancelled out the slightest lurch.

He saw a herd of musk oxen; he glimpsed a pack of wild dogs. A giant glyptodont shuffled out of sight behind a stand of hardy oaks. A Pleistocene condor winged by overhead, mighty twelve-foot wings cunning lofty columns of spring air. He passed the remnants of two musk oxen which the hunting party had killed, and knew that when he and Salome were far enough away the condor would descend and dine. But he saw no sign of *Smilodon*. Old saber-tooth was almost extinct in this day and age, having grown tusks so long it could no longer open its mouth wide enough to devour its prey.

Hills appeared in the distance, grew closer. Salome took them in her stride. Cliffs were everywhere in evidence.

Caves . . . "Easy now, old girl — we should be almost on their tail."

The trail was less distinct now, owing to the rockiness of the terrain, but still easy to follow. Presently a small plain began, flanked on the right by a pinaster forest and on the left by a sparkling river. Far up ahead, a cliff far wider and higher than any of the others Farrell had seen took shape. The trail pointed directly toward it. Hundreds of cave mouths pockmarked its surface, leaving little doubt that it was his quarry's destination. By this time, they had already arrived. At least there was no sign of them on the plain.

He guided Salome into the pinaster forest and approached the escarpment behind a concealing fringe of outlying trees. When he was halfway there he saw a column of figures leave the sanctuary of the cliff and begin marching westward across the plain. He brought Salome to a halt behind a screen of coniferous foliage and watched it pass. Having assumed that it comprised another Neanderthal hunting party, he was astonished when it turned out to be made up of both Neanderthals and Cro-Magnons. The latter constituted the column proper and consisted of both men and women, all of them naked and unarmed. He estimated them to be about thirty in number. They marched two abreast, and flanking them on either side were about a dozen Neanderthals armed with stone-tipped spears.

He stared after the column long after it had passed. There was a great deal he did not know about his

prehistoric ancestors, but there was one thing he did know: Cro-Magnon hadn't been in the habit of call-ing on Neanderthal, and Neander-thal hadn't been in the habit of pro-viding Cro-Magnon with protection.

Was it possible that the thirty men and women were prisoners and the Neanderthals were guards?

He shelved the mystery for the moment and continued on his way. The forest grew to within a stone's throw of the southern flank of the escarpment. He halted Salome in a well of late-afternoon shadows and, breaking out a chicken 'n biskit vacuumpac and a vacuumjug of cof-fee, surveyed the base of the cliff while he dined.

All along it, cook-fires burned, tended by hirsute women appareled in shaggy animal skins. Squat and hairy men were cutting chunks and strips of meat from the musk-ox quarters the hunting party had brought in. Dirty children were dashing here and there, getting in everyone's way and making general nuisances of themselves. The scene was highlighted by late-afternoon sunlight, darkened by shadows creep-ing in from the plain; softened by a strange haziness which Farrell at-tributed to the smoke rising from the fires.

He saw no sign of Miss Larkin. No doubt she had been consigned to one of the caves—either that, or she was lying bound somewhere, and blended with her background. There was yet another possibility, but he didn't care to consider it. As long as there was no evidence to the contrary, he would continue to be-lieve she was still alive.

The Cenozoic sun descended be-hind distant hills and trees and the eastern sky adorned itself with the twinkling earrings of night. Far-rell had two courses of action: he could approach the cliff openly in Salome or leave her behind in the forest and effect Miss Larkin's res-cue through stealth alone. After due deliberation, he chose course num-ber two, not because he preferred it but because he knew that the sight of Salome would send the cave men scurrying into their caves from the safety of which they would loose their spears, and if Miss Larkin were in the open she might be hit, and if she weren't he'd never be able to find her, or get to her if he did.

He backed Salome deeper into the woods and psyche-programmed her to withdraw the Jacob's ladderette after he reached the ground and to reclose her ear-hatch. Then he typed GRANITE OUTCROPPING on her lumillusion panel and turned the dial to On. Night had completely supplanted day when at last he crept from the forest and began making his way toward the cliff, and all the stars were out. Fortunately, there was no moon.

He expected to smell the caves, but he didn't. Nor did he smell the smoke from the dwindling cook-fires. He was on his hands and knees now, creeping through tall coarse grass. Suddenly his head collided with an invisible barrier. When he reached out and touched it, his fingers came away tingling.

A force-field yet!

He shouldn't have been surprised, he supposed. Nevertheless, he was. Getting cautiously to his feet, he ex-plored the invisible barrier further. It rose to a height higher than he could reach and appeared to extend in a semi-circle from the southern-most section of the cliff to the northernmost. Back on his hands and knees again, he began creeping along the base of the barrier. Presently, to his relief, he saw Miss Larkin. She was lying bound hand and foot near one of the cook-fires, and appeared to be unharmed.

Making himself as comfortable as possible in the tall grass, he with-drew a numb-gun cartridge from his ammo belt, removed the tiny ampli-fier, and emptied the electro-crystals into the palm of his hand. After emptying six more cartridges in a similar manner, he dumped the little pile of crystals into his handkerchief and tied the ends together. The ground was still damp from a recent rain—damp enough, at least, for his purpose. Digging a small hole, he placed the makeshift sack inside and covered it.

By this time, the evening meal had come to an end, and the cave men and women were retiring to their rocky bowers. He was afraid for a while that Miss Larkin would be dragged into one of the caves, but she wasn't. Her captors left her lying by the fire, guarded by one of their number—a bristly fellow

with a face that looked as though it had been stomped by a musk ox. Stupefied by the enormous amount of halfcooked meat he had devoured, the fellow was already beginning to nod, and presently his head dropped forward onto his craggy knees, which he had drawn up against his chest, fetus-fashion.

Farrell waited till he was reason-ably certain that the other members of the tribe—and whatever non-members who happened to be on the scene—were fast asleep; then he dug up his homemade piezoelectric cock-tail and tossed it against the force-field. There was a brief blue spark, an almost inaudible sputter, and a faint odor of ozone. So much for the force-field.

He crawled past the site of the vanished barrier on elbows and thighs. He could smell the caves now. And how he could! The girl was wide awake. When she saw him creep into the fading firelight, her eyes went wide. "Go back—go back!" she whispered hoarsely. "They left me here to lure you —don't you see?"

He saw only that her eyes were blue and that her sun-tanned face was like an angel's. Truly, it had never fallen to a man to rescue a fairer damsel in distress. He cut the gut-thongs that bound her wrists and ankles, and when her dark and lus-trous hair brushed his cheek as he raised her to her feet.

Loss of circulation caused her to stagger, and he picked her up. "You idiot!" she said. And then, "Run for it — maybe there's time!"

There wasn't, though. Three out-size Neanderthals came out of the shadows just as Farrell was about to take off for the forest. One of them wore a saber-tooth tigerskin and was clearly the leader. He had a mouth like a bear trap, and as Far-rel stared he opened it and out of it came a blue bolt that knocked Farrell silly and sent him sagging to the ground, Miss Larkin on top of him.

III

While Miss Larkin was anything but slight, she was far from being an unbearable burden. It was Farrell's head that was the un-bearable burden. It felt twice its nor-mal size and thrice its normal weight, and he could barely hold it high enough to view his three ad-versaries.

The one who had unleashed the blue bolt stooped down and relieved him of his numb-gun, his ammo belt his timepiece, his pocket torch, and his hunting knife; then he proceeded to examine each object in turn in the firelight. His eyes were large and strangely flat, and held not the faint-est glimmer of intelligence or any-thing else. At length he emitted sev-eral monosyllabic grunts, and one of his companions jerked the girl to her feet. The other one jerked Farrell to his, and he and Miss Larkin were hustled over to the mouth of a near-by cave and shoved inside.

When his legs went out from un-der him, Farrell thought at first that it was the result of the shock-charge he'd absorbed. It wasn't, though. It as the result of the twelve-foot discr-epancy that existed between the level of the ground and the level of the cave floor. The fall netted him a bruised ear and a skinned elbow, and cost him a lungful of air when Miss Larkin landed on top of him. She bounced off his back like a rubber ball. As soon as he got his breath back, he felt around for her in the inky darkness. "Ooh!" Miss Larkin said.

He jerked his hand away. "I'm sorry—I didn't mean to be fresh. Are you all right, Miss Larkin?"

There was a brief silence, during which he received the definite impression that she was adding up the little she knew about him thus far in an attempt to arrive at some kind of conclusion. Presently, "I—I guess so," she said. "Are you?"

"I'll be all right. My name's Alan Farrell—IPS sent me back for you and Professor Richards when you didn't report in."

"It was noble of you to try to rescue me, Mr. Farrell. I'm—I'm sorry I called you an idiot."

"Now, now, Miss Larkin—I'm a professional pastfinder. It's my job to rescue people." The words sound-ed corny even to him and he had a hunch he'd heard them before—probably on 3V. "In a moment I'll see about getting you out of here and back to the present," he went on, "but first, we'd better bring each ether up to date. You said when you first saw me that you'd been left out in the open to lure me. That means Blue Bolt and his buddies knew I was coming. *How* did they know?"

"I don't think they did know for sure," Miss Larkin said. "Probably they guessed that my disappearance would be investigated." Her voice caught a little. "I—I guess you know about poor Professor Richards."

Farrell wanted to find her hand in the darkness and give it a reassuring squeeze, but remembering his faux pas of a moment ago, he decided not to do any more fum-bling around in the dark. "I gave him a decent burial, Miss Larkin—it was all I could do."

Miss Larkin sighed. "He was such a dear sweet old man. Twenty of those terrible creatures attacked our mammothmobile and that horrid one in the tigerskin burned a hole right through it with that same bale bolt he hit you with, only a thousand times stronger. They grabbed Professor Larkin first and then they grabbed me. I—I thought they were going to do the same thing to me that they did to him, and they would have, too, if Blue Bolt and those two others hadn't stopped them. They're the leaders, I think, only Blue Bolt has the most to say. Are they from the future, do you think, Mr. Farrell?"

"They must be. Thieves, probably, who looked enough like Neanderthals to begin with to pass themselves off as the real thing with the help of a little perma-make-up. I can't imagine, though, what they expect to steal in this time period. Maybe they're from *our* future. That would explain the oral energy beam." Farrell got to his feet. "Well Miss Larkin, we're wasting time. I said I'd get you out of here, and I will."

"Mr. Farrell, I'm glad you showed up. You're the answer to a lonely girl's prayer."

It made him feel big and strong to know that she trusted him implicitly, and the feeling of tenderness which she had already evoked in him became more profound. He began exploring the cave, working his way along the walls with only his fingers to guide him. His head was still heavy from the effects of Blue Bolt's blue bolt, but no permanent damage had been done, and after a while the heaviness went away.

The cave proved to be a natural dungeon, circular in shape and some fifteen feet in diameter. He went over every inch of the vertical walls, or at least every inch within reaching distance, and finally he found what he was searching for—a crevice. As the cliff was honeycombed with caves — its pockmarked facade would admit of no other conclusion—any crevice could very well indicate the presence of a thin partition.

This one was wide enough at one point for him to work his arm into. Less than a foot beyond the wall, the fissure spread outward, and his groping hand encountered nothingness. He was certain that it spelled an adjacent cave and equally as certain that he could work his way through. "Miss Larkin," he whispered, "give me a hand, will you? I think I've found a way out of here."

She joined him, and together they began widening the crevice. The rock was loose for the most part, but working it free was slow work and the need to proceed quietly made the job even slower. He became consciously aware of Miss Larkin's perfume. He'd been unconsciously aware of it all along. It was the evocative-association type, and all the while he worked he kept seeing apple orchards in springtime bloom, and meadows clad with buttercups and daisies. Lord! It was wonderful being with a nice girl for a change. He'd never frequent another ecdysiast dive or another Easter Rabbit Club as long as he lived!

Hours passed. They rested now and then, sitting side by side in the darkness. Faint drafts of fresh air wafted sporadically through the opening they were working on, proving that whatever else it might be, the cave beyond wasn't a dead end. Finally—long after midnight, Farrell estimated—the aperture was wide enough for them to crawl through. "I'll go first, Miss Larkin," he said, "In the interest of safety. When I give the word, you follow."

The cave into which he presently crawled was a disappointment. In fact, it brought to mind an outsize burrow more than it did a cave. At best, it could be classified as a narrow tunnel. But it was better than nothing. "All right, Miss Larkin," he said over his shoulder. "Keep just behind me."

As nearly as he could determine, the tunnel ran parallel to the face of the cliff. As the faint drafts of

fresh air seemed to be coming from the left, he set out in that direction, crawling on his hands and knees, Miss Larkin just behind him. For an interminable time, conditions did not improve. The tunnel grew narrower, if anything, and turned first this way and then that. Farrell began to be worried. "If this keeps up," Miss Larkin said cheerfully, "I shan't have to go on a diet for at least another year."

Fortunately, it didn't keep up. The tunnel, after slanting sharply upward for several dozen feet, grew suddenly wider, and Farrell found he could stand upright. Miss Larkin stood up beside him. "I — I think we'd better hold hands," he said. "There may be drop-offs."

It was her hand that found his. He gripped it tightly. Oh, how he yearned to tell her how wonderful it was to be with her—how sick he was of ecdysiast dives and Easter Rabbit Clubs; of girls who thought no more of taking off their clothes than they did about smoking a cigarette. But he held himself in check. She probably didn't even know there were such girls.

The tunnel continued to turn this way and that. They felt their way slowly along its walls. Farrell had a hunch they were in a labyrinth rather than in a single tunnel, but he didn't say so. There was no point in alarming Miss Larkin, and anyway, the drafts of fresh air he had pinned their hopes upon continued to fan his face.

Presently the tunnel — whether it was the original one or not, he had no way of knowing—narrowed and took on an upward pitch. It wasn't long before he and the girl were crawling again. "I—I think the ground's trembling," Miss Larkin said after they had proceeded for about a hundred feet. "May—maybe we should go back."

IV

Farrell felt the trembling himself. A moment later he heard a faint humming sound which he recognized as the muffled throbbing of a powerful generator. Clearly, the cliff housed more than a Neanderthal community—an eventuality for which the presence of the force-field should have prepared him.

"It's all right, Miss Larkin," he said over his shoulder. "We're on the right track. We should be out of here in no time."

He wormed his way around a bend, discovered that he could dimly make out the walls of the tunnel. After worming his way around two more, he saw, far up ahead, an uneven circle of wan light. "Chin up, Miss Larkin," he whispered. "We're almost there."

He slowed his pace as he neared the opening and cautioned her to move as silently as she could. The humming sound was much louder now, the trembling of the ground more pronounced. At length he crawled out onto a wide ledge that looked down into a mammoth semi-natural cavern, one whole wall of which was given over to a huge gleaming machine.

Miss Larkin crawled out on the ledge beside him. There was a smudge of dirt on her right cheek, her dark hair hung in damp wisps over her forehead, her khaki blouse was torn in several places, and her once immaculate culottes were a mess. But her eyes were no less heavenly than they had been before and her face still had the aspect of an angel's. Farrell was more certain than ever that she was the Girl for Him.

She gasped when she peered below. Farrell had already taken in the scene. The machine consisted of multicolored banks of computers, glowing mazes of coils, and weird complexities of gleaming wires. At the base of the wall opposite the ledge was the source of the humming sound—a giant generator. As nearly as he could ascertain, it was powered by gasoline, distilled probably by Blue Bolt & Co. from a local petroleum deposit. Illumination was provided by a battery of super-fluoros suspended some twenty feet below the stalactitic ceiling (and some ten feet below the ledge) and aligned in such a way that their radiance bathed the machine and its immediate foreground in unadulterated brightness, leaving the rest of the huge chamber in relative darkness. In the wall opposite the machine a wide archway gave access to a natural corridor that led, if the freshness of the air was a dependable index, to the outside world.

There were fifteen Neanderthals present. Three of them were Neanderthaloids—i.e., Blue Bolt and his buddies. The rest were of the ordinary garden variety. The latter were armed with stone-tipped spears which they carried slung on their shoulders, and were lounging here and there about the room. The former were facing a twinkling control panel at the base of the machine. Inset in a maze of wires next to the panel was what looked at first glance like a full-length looking glass. The trouble was, it didn't reflect light; instead, it absorbed it—or seemed to. The result was a sort of abysmal blackness that transcended ordinary blackness and gave the viewer a queasy feeling.

It dawned on Farrell finally that the looking glass was the focal point of the entire machine—the *raison d'être* for the whole fantastic scene they witnessed.

"Look," Miss Larkin said, pointing. "There's a way we can get down."

Sure enough, the edge of the ledge nearest the exit gave onto a series of stone steps that had seen cut in-to the cavern wall. The crude stair-way curved down to a point on the cavern floor that was less than ten feet from the archway, and, dimly lit as the wall was, would have made an ideal avenue of escape if it hadn't been for the three Neanderthals lounging near the exit and for the force-field which awaited beyond the cliff-face. (There was no question in Farrell's mind that by this time the barrier had been repaired.)

"Do you know what I think?" Miss Larkin said brightly. "I think that this was once a ceremonial chamber of some kind. It was practically on this very spot that Professor Richards dug up the Chateau du Bois artifact." Abruptly she frowned. "But that doesn't add up at all, does it? The experts estimated that the artifact originated sometime this year, which means that it couldn't possibly have played a part in the past ceremonies. Anyway," she went on blithely, "this still could have been a ceremonial chamber and Blue Bolt could have converted it for its own purposes, and this ledge here could have been where the witch doctor presided over the sacrifices, and that passage we came through could have been his secret hideout."

Farrell looked at her. She didn't sound as though she knew beans about paleoethnology. But then, you had to remember that she wasn't paleoethnologist. Still and all, though, as a secretary for IPS she ought to have learned *something*. But he was being unfair. "I think you're right, Miss Larkin," he said loyally. "One hundred per cent right. Gosh," he went on, unable any longer to hold himself in check, "it's wonderful talking to a girl like you for a change. I saw your job-resume tape and knew what a warm and wonderful girl you were even before I came back to rescue you; but gosh, I didn't realize you were *this* warm and wonderful."

She blushed the way a pretty girl should. "Now you've gone and put me on a pedestal, Mr. Farrell. You wouldn't do that to a girl, you know, unless you're willing to pick up the pieces after she falls off and put them back together again." For some reason she seemed eager to change the subject. "Did IPS equip you with a palee—palee—with a means of transportation?" she asked.

He nodded. "A woolly mammothmobile. She's hidden in the woods about a hundred yards from the cliff, lumillusioned to look like a granite outcropping. If we can get to her, we'll be all set. Trouble is, how do we do it?"

He returned his gaze to the scene below. It had changed somewhat since his last surveillance. Blue Bolt was stabbing home buttons on the control panel and the two other Neanderthaloids had stationed themselves on either side of the looking glass. The ordinary garden variety had unslung their spears and formed a staggered aisle between the looking glass and the archway. It was clear from their determined mien that they meant business.

"It looks like some kind of a reception committee," Miss Larkin observed.

And in essence, that was what it turned out to be. Farrell couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the first Cro-Magnon step out of the looking glass. But they must have told him the truth, because presently a second one emerged from the blackness and stood beside the first. They were tall and tanned, and wore

neither clothing nor ornaments. The brightness of the radiance in which they stood gave their faces a distinctness that carried all the way to the ledge. Farrell suffered a second shock. The faces were typically Cro-Magnon—strong of chin, aquiline of nose, and deep set of eyes—but they were overcast, disfigured almost, by expressions of evil that were almost tangible.

Were *these* his ancestors?

One of the two Neanderthaloids stationed beside the looking glass made a gesture with his left arm and the two Cro-Magnons walked down the aisle of Neanderthals and halted several feet from the exit. Two more stepped out of the looking glass—a man and a woman, this time, and no less malignant of countenance than their two predecessors—and the process was repeated. Farrell realized then that he was witnessing the forming of a column similar to the one he had seen the previous afternoon. He also realized something else. "Why," he gasped, "the machine's a matter transmitter! We're watching a migration from another planet!"

Miss Larkin's blue eyes were round. "But why another planet, Mr. Farrell? Couldn't they be migrating from a different part of this one?"

"But this is where Cro-Magnon originated, Miss Larkin." Didn't she know anything about paleoethnology? "This is where he spread out from. It all adds up, don't you see? His sudden appearance on the prehistoric scene. His marked difference from any of the other races. Everything."

"Well it doesn't add up to me," Miss Larkin said. "If they're from another planet, Blue Bolt and those other two creeps must be from the same one. So why don't they look like each other?"

"Probably because they're representatives of two different races. And then, too, Blue Bolt and his two friends probably made a few changes in their appearance in order to pass themselves off as Neanderthals. Either before or after they were deposited on Earth to build the receiving end of the matter transmitter. They needed help, and what better way was there for them to get it than by ingratiating themselves with a local tribe of cave men by promising them safety and a constant supply of fresh meat. It takes man power as well as brains to establish a penal colony."

"A *penal* colony? You mean the Cro-Magnons are *prisoners*?"

"It certainly looks that way. Vicious criminals, if the expressions on their faces mean anything. Once they're escorted out of the immediate vicinity they're probably turned loose to shift for themselves, but to all intents and purposes, Earth to them is a planetary Devil's Island. That transmitter has probably been operating for months."

They watched as more Cro-Magnons emerged from the "looking glass". There were as many women as there were men, and all of them—men and women alike—looked as though they'd murder their best friend at the drop of a hat. At length the column was complete—Farrell estimated its number to be about thirty—and the Neanderthal guards escorted it from the chamber.

Abruptly he realized that there were no guards at the rear.

That was when the idea hit him. Right between the eyes.

Could Neanderthals count?

Would Miss Farrell, if circumstances demanded it, consent to taking off her clothes?

She was going to have to take them off, nice girl or no nice girl. Otherwise his plan wouldn't work. And he was going to have to take his off, too.

He hoped that she was tanned all over.

V

Blushing, he told her what he had in mind and the supreme sacrifice it would entail. She blinked

once; then her right hand strayed absently to the zipper of her blouse. "No, no — not yet, Miss Larkin!" he gasped. "Wait until the next col-umn's almost formed."

While it was forming he concen-trated on the machine. He didn't know whether he could psyche-pro-gram the computers or not, nor did he knew whether the time stream in this instance would brook interfer-ence. But he did know that at one time or another someone had thrown a monkey wrench in the works, be-cause in a planetary sense only a few Cro-Magnon prisoners had come through. That someone could very well have been himself.

First of all, he had to devise a time-unit. The amount of time con-sumed in forming a column would do. He visualized eight such opera-tions; then he visualized an over-load building up in the step-down transformer and spilling through the transmitter proper. Finally he pictured the transmitter bursting into flame, the coils disintegrating, and the computers belching black smoke. In effect, he instructed the machine to commit suicide some three hours in the future.

By this time the second column was two-thirds formed. Miss Larkin was fingering the zipper of her blouse. If he hadn't known better, he'd have sworn she was eager to take her clothes off. "Now?" she asked.

He nodded. "Now."

The ledge was wide enough for her to stand upright without being seen from below, and deep enough in shadow so that she probably couldn't have been seen in any case. After getting to her feet, she unzip-ped her blouse and slipped it slowly from her shoulders, gently rotating her hips as though in response to music only she could hear. Farrell stared.

The blouse floated down to the ledge, forming a little khaki hill. Her eyes were half closed by now, and there was a dreamy expression on her face. She moved a step to the right and a step to the left and kicked off her shoes. Her culottes were the next to go. Farrell tried to turn his eyes away, but for the life of him he couldn't. Off came her brassiere. She tossed it into the air and he caught it just in time to keep it from drifting down into the cham-ber below. Her hips were moving rhythmically now and the upper part of her body was turning first to the left and then to the right. Poor Farrell sagged down on the ledge. He felt like a fool.

Well anyway, she was tanned all over ...

So was he. He picked up his dis-carded clothes and hers too and tossed them back into the tunnel. Miss Larkin, eyes completely closed now, was still doing the bump and grind. She did it well, this chaste young damsel in distress — and how she did! He knew professional fin-esse when he saw it. He cleared his throat. "I hate to interrupt you, Miss Larkin," he said icily, "but the col-umn's nearly formed and we'd better be on our way."

She gave a little jump and opened her eyes. She seemed surprised to see him standing there, and she looked around the cavern as though she'd forgotten where she was. Then she looked at him again, and blush-ed. "I'm — I'm ready, Mr. Farrell."

He led the way, moving slowly and telling her to do likewise. They were almost invisible against the cavern wall, but any sudden move-ment might betray them. Farrell kept a watchful eye on both the Neanderthals and the Cro-Magnons, but the former were completely pre-occupied with their guard duties and the latter kept their eyes straight ahead. As for Blue Bolt & Co., they had eyes only for the machine.

When Farrell and the girl reached the floor of the chamber, the col-umn was already moving out. They waited till the last second; then, when the backs of the Neanderthal guards were turned, they slipped swiftly into line.

So far, so good.

Roomy to begin with, the corridor had been enlarged in many places to give it uniform height and width. Wan and fitful light was supplied by torches inset in the walls. Drafts of fresh cold air sent the flames to flickering every now and then and caused shadows to dance upon the walls. The Cro-Magnons spoke spor-adically to one another in a language that was millennia dead. Neither they nor the

Neanderthal guards were aware that the column was slightly longer than it was supposed to be.

"That was a dilly of a dance you did back there," Farrell said out of the side of his mouth.

Miss Larkin kept her gaze straight ahead. "I — I gave myself away, didn't I?"

"You sure did," Farrell said. "What ecdysiast dive did you strip in before you turned over a new leaf?"

"Big Bust Anna's in Old York. I can have my old job back any time I want."

"What I can't figure," Farrell said, "is why you quit it in the first place."

"A girl gets sick of — of certain things. And you needn't sound so pained. I told you you shouldn't put a girl on a pedestal unless you were willing to pick up the pieces when she fell off."

"Another thing I can't figure," Farrell said, "is what prompted you to give a professional performance just because I asked you to take your clothes off."

"Be — before I went to work at Big Anna's I used to practice nights in my room. I practiced so much that taking off my clothes and doing a professional strip-tease became one and the same thing, and now I can't do one without doing the other, it's such a habit. I — I wasn't even aware of what I was doing back on the ledge."

The column was rounding a bend. In the distance, dawnlight showed. "Still another thing I can't figure," Farrell said, "is how you faked that job-resume tape."

"What world are you living in, Mr. Farrell? That sort of thing is done everyday. Almost any job agency will fix you up if you give them a big enough bribe."

"That was a real dill of a shot of you skiing down that mountain slope. All that clean chaste snow!"

"The trouble with you, Mr. Farrell, is you're a self-righteous pedes-tal pusher. I'm sorry to have to say such a mean thing after you risked your life to save mine and every-thing, but it's true. Do you know why Big Bust Anna and people like her drive Cadillettes? It's because men like you make them rich. You don't really like the girls you keep putting on pedestals — you just think you do. You keep wishing they'd fall off so you could have some fun, and when they don't you head for the nearest ecdysiast bar and make passes at some poor girl like me who's trying to make a living in the only way she knows how. It's be-cause of men like you that I made up my mind to become a secretary even if I had to lie to do it."

"I figured you'd get around to blaming me," Farrell said.

By this time the column was emerging into the light of early morning. Squatting by the cave mouth was a Neanderthal woman with an earthen bowl resting on her lap. Beside her was a large pile of pebbles and every time a pair of Cro-Magnons passed she dropped two pebbles into the bowl. It was what Farrell had been afraid of. Undoubtedly the transmitter was equipped with an automatic counter and in all probability the woman's job was nothing more than a sine-cure; nevertheless, if each batch of prisoners was numerically the same she might notice a discrepancy.

He watched her out of the corner of his eye as he and Miss Larkin came out of the cave. She picked up two more pebbles, started to drop them into the bowl — and paused. She stared at Farrell and Miss Lar-kin as though she didn't believe they were really there; then, apparently concluding that they must be, she added the two pebbles to the others. Farrell exhaled a sigh of relief.

A brisk wind was blowing down from the glacier. He realized how cold he was, and glancing sideways at Miss Larkin, he saw that she was covered with goose flesh. The Cro--Magnons, though, didn't seem to be in the least affected. They were lean and hard-bitten, both men and women. Probably they had been pri-soners for some time and were used to physical discomfort. He wondered how high on the ladder of civiliza-tion their race had climbed. A stag-gering incongruity existed between the weapons they would invent and the matter transmitter that had trans-ported them through space; but then, as criminals they probably weren't particularly conversant with the technical miracles of their age. With-out tools to work with there would be little they could accomplish in any case. They were doomed to be-come what in one sense they had become already — Stone Age sav-ages, far more capable and resource-ful than the savages who had come before them, but not a great deal higher on the evolutionary ladder.

It chilled him to think that modern man had descended from creatures such as they, but it didn't surprise him. He was glad that he'd tried at least to knock out the transmitter and bring the sordid practice to an end. And who knew — perhaps he'd succeeded.

The force-field had been temporarily deactivated and the column was now filing out onto the plain. The pinaster forest was temptingly close. In a few moments now he and Miss Larkin would be abreast of the spot where Salome was hidden. "Get ready," he whispered. "When I say `now', start running for the woods."

She nodded to show that she understood.

He was certain that they could easily outdistance the awkward Neanderthals and anticipated no difficulty in evading their spears, which were not primarily throwing weapons anyway. But the problem didn't prove to be quite that simple. He guessed what had happened when he heard a shout from behind and turned and saw Blue Bolt and his two confederates pounding toward the column: the pebble woman, driven by her suspicions, had turned her pebble in and the discrepancy had been discovered. A glance into the empty cave-dungeon had been enough to inform Blue Bolt who the two extra "Cro-Magnons" were.

"Now!" Farrell said, and seized Miss Larkin's hand, bowled over the nearest Neanderthal with a shoulder butt, and began running toward the forest.

Blue Bolt waved the guards back and gave pursuit with his two buddies.

Farrell was astonished at the trio's speed. They moved so fast, their legs were mere blurs. Abruptly a blue bolt shot out of Blue Bolt's mouth.

It missed by a mile, but its intensity left no doubt that he was all through taking prisoners.

Farrell upped his speed, forced Miss Larkin to do likewise by pulling her along beside him. Only their head start enabled them to reach Salome in time. He had to cancel out her lumillusion field to find her ear-hatch.

After psyching it open and psyching down the ladder, he and Miss Larkin clambered into the cockpit and he closed and secured the hatch.

Blue Bolt & Co. were less than twenty yards away now, streaking toward the woolly mammothmobile on blurred legs. Blue Bolt had his mouth open again. At such close range, he couldn't possibly miss, and Salome's shield-field hadn't been made to withstand such a weapon. There was only one thing to do, and Farrell did it: he time-jumped the massive paleethnologivehicle into the future.

VI

After the usual interval of grayness and the usual lurch, the forest came into view again, and, through its coniferous foliage, the plain and the cliff. Farrell had tried for one hour, and the position of the sun told him he'd obtained it. Apparently there were no potential paradoxes in the immediate future.

The plain was empty of both Cro-Magnons and Neanderthals. Blue Bolt and his buddies were no more.

Farrell retired to the cabin, got into a spare pair of self-fitting fatigues, and threw a similar pair up to Miss Larkin. By the time he crawled back into the cockpit carrying two pairs of sock-shoes, she was decent again.

Sitting in the two bucket seats, they slipped their feet into the shoes. "Now," said Farrell, "if they haven't set up an ambush, we've got it made. We'll —"

He paused, staring. Where a moment ago thin air had been, Blue Bolt and his buddies stood. Blue Bolt had his mouth open.

Farrell punched out another hour on the automatic retro-co-ordinate calculator. There was a second gray interval, a second slight lurch; then the forest and the plain and the cliff again, illumined by a sun still higher in the morning sky. "*They* can time-jump too!" he gasped. "Worse, they've got a fix on us."

He threw Salome into gear, sent her charging straight ahead for thirty yards, halted her and turned her around. Then he aligned the trunk-cannon and waited. A minute passed.

Two. At length three tenuous forms took shape, solidified into Blue Bolt & Co. But this time the trio's backs were turned. It was kill or be killed. Farrell dispatched three shells just as the Neanderthals turned around. All of them found their mark. *Plugg! Plugg! Plugg!* they went, and three ragged holes appeared in three hairy chests.

But for some reason, the Neanderthals didn't go down. Instead, they remained standing where they were. Like statues. Presently smoke began pouring out of their mouths. Their noses. Their ears. And then, as Farrell and Miss Larkin stared, a little hatch opened in the side of Blue Bolt's head, a little foil ladder came down, and two tiny stick-men emerged and descended to the ground. They set out frantically in the direction of the cliff and a moment later they disappeared into the tall plain-grass.

Less than a second later, hatches opened in the sides of Blue Bolt's buddies' heads, and four more tiny stick-men took off for the cliff.

"Well I'll be damned!" Farrell said. "Here all the while we thought we were dealing with Cro-Magnon's fellow men and we were dealing with Lilliputian aliens riding around in paleoethnovehicles. This is a galactic operation—not a local one. I'll bet a Girl Scout cookie those stickmen are members of a galactic police force!"

Miss Larkin's angelic face was pink with excitement. "They're more than that, Mr. Farrell. They're dead ringers for that artifact Professor Richards dug up. It's stone, I know, but just the same I'll bet it's one of them. Somehow they looked like they were made of some kind of stone to me. Could they be?"

He nodded. "Probably not stone exactly, but a combination of elements that could become stone over a period of 30,000 years. Beyond a doubt, they're silica-based lifeforms. And those vehicles of theirs were more than mere vehicles—they were spacesuits, too. Special-built LEMs for Earth use. They probably can't live in an atmosphere like this one for more than a quarter of an hour."

"Let's try to find them," Miss Larkin said.

"We'd be wasting our time. They've probably reached the matter transmitter by this time and—"

He paused. A chorus of terrified screams had reached his ears, and looking toward the cliff, he saw black smoke and frantic Neanderthals issuing from the caves. The monkey wrench he had thrown in the works had borne fruit: the transmitter had responded to his psyche-programming and committed suicide.

He explained to Miss Larkin what had happened. "I don't know whether they built another one later on or not," he said, "but I doubt it." And then, "Apparently all of them got through in time except one, and since IPS already has that one, there's no point in our hanging around here any longer."

Miss Larkin looked wistfully out over the plain. "N— no, guess there isn't," she said.

By this time, flames had all but destroyed Blue Bolt's buddies, but Blue Bolt himself was made of sterner stuff. Probably he was a newer model. In any event, smoke had ceased issuing from his mouth, nose, and ears, and Farrell was able to strap him on Salome's back for later examination by IPS. Before doing so, he peered through the head-hatch. He saw two tiny bucket seats, a Lilliputian, unbelievably complex, control panel, a little loud speaker, and a small television screen. Mounted between the seats, its muzzle out of sight beyond an airtight partition, was a diminutive energy gun.

He climbed back into the woolly mammothmobile and sat down beside Miss Larkin. He threw the paleoethnovehicle into gear. "Come on, Salome, let's go."

A time-wave message from IPS was awaiting him in the entry-area. It registered on Salome's electronic bulletin board the moment she entered the time field. MISS LARKIN OBTAINED POSITION BY RE-COURSE TO FRAUDULENT MEANS, it read, AND HAS BEEN FIRED IN ABSENTIA. IPS ASSUMES NO FURTHER RESPONSIBILITY FOR HER WELFARE AND YOU ARE ORDERED TO RETURN PRESENTSIDE IMMEDIATELY.

Miss Larkin emitted a little sigh. "Well," she said, "I guess it's back to the ecdysiast mines." And then,

"I — I think I ought to tell you before it's too late, Mr. Farrell, that all ecdysiasts aren't — aren't — well, they just aren't what you probably think they are. She gave him a wistful look, and he saw that she was crying. "Ah — anyway, I hope you'll come to see me at Big Anna's."

Sure he'd go to see her. *Sure* he would. Like so much mud! Some damsel in distress she'd turned out to be! Leading him on with that nice-girl line of hers and building up his hopes and renewing his faith in womankind, and then, when he was half gone on her, doing a strip-tease right before his very eyes! That would be the day when he went to see *her!*

"Good-by," he said, when they arrived at the time-station, and walk-ed away without another word.

“**W**hat'll you have, sir?" asked the woman with the enor-mous bosom.

Haunted, Farrell sat down on an empty barstool. "Beer," he said. And then, "What time does Miss Larkin come on?"

"You mean Laurie? She'll be on any minute now," she answered.

Farrell sipped his beer and kept his eyes on the large dais at the end of the crowded bar. Presently the fluoros were dimmed and the plat-form was bathed in pale blue radi-ance from an overhead spotlight. A moment later Miss Larkin stepped into view. She was wearing a golden shift, cobweb stockings, and glass slippers. Taped music sounded, and she began to dance.

Farrell let her get as far as the first layer of underthings. Then he barged down the bar, reached up and grabbed her ankle, and pulled her down beside him. She gasped when she recognized him, and stop-ped kicking and biting, and a twin-kle came into her eyes. He slung her over his shoulder, cave-man style. "If you're going to dance for anybody, you're going to dance for me," he said, and carried her out of the bar and down the street to the nearest matrimonialmat.

END