

The Golden Egg (full text)

by Theodore Sturgeon

Here's a nice classic story from the Golden Age" of Science Fiction literature. It was written by one of the "greats" of the genre, Mr. Theodore Sturgeon and this work is classic. I hope that you read it and enjoy it as much as I have. It's a great story for a nice lazy afternoon day.

THE GOLDEN EGG

WHEN time itself was half its present age, and at an unthinkable distance, and in an unknowable dimension born.

He left his world so long before he came to earth that even he did not know how long he had been in space. He had lived so long on that world that even he could not remember what he had been before his science changed his race.

Though we can never know where his world lay in space, we know that it was in a system of two mighty suns, one blue and one yellow. His planet had an atmosphere and a great civilization and science beyond humanity's most profound visions. He spoke little of his planet because he hated it.

Too perfect. Their sciences fed them, and controlled the etheric currents that gave them comfort, and carried them from place to place, and taught them, and cared for them in every way. For many aeons there were members set apart to care for the machines, but in time they died out, for they were no longer needed. There was no struggle and no discomfort and no disease. There were therefore no frontiers, no goals, no incentives, and even-

tually no possible achievements, save one—the race itself, and the changes possible to it.

Step by step the thing was done. Limbs were not and wasted away from long-lived, lazy bodies, and were replaced, redesigned, or forgotten. And as the death of an inhabitant became more rare, rarer still became the advent of new life. It was a mighty race, a powerful race, a most highly civilized race, and—a sterile race.

The refinement went on endlessly, as occasional flashes of initiative appeared down through the ages. What was unnecessary was discarded, and what could be conceivably desirable was attained, until all that was left was a few thousand glittering golden ovoids, supermental casings, functionally streamlined, beautiful and bored. It was life of a sort. The beings could move as and if they wished, through air or time or space. Everything was done for them automatically; each was self-sufficient and uncooperative. Brains they were, armored in a substance indestructible by anything less powerful than the heat of the mightiest of suns or by the supercosmic forces each could unleash at will.

But there was no will. There was nothing for them. They hung in small groups conversing of things unimaginable to us, or they lay on the plains of their world and lived within themselves until a few short aeons buried them, all uncaring, in rubble and rock. Some asked to be killed and were killed. Some were murdered by others because of quibblings in remote philosophic discussions. Some hurled themselves into the blue sun, starved for any new sensation, knowing they would find there an instant's agony.

Most simply vegetated. One came away.

He stopped, in a way known to him—stopped in space so that his world and so-

lar system and corner of the cosmos fell away from him and left him free. And then he traveled.

He traveled to many places and in many ways, as his whims dictated. He extended himself at times around the curve of curved space, until the ends of him were diametrically opposite; and then he would contract in a straight line, reforming countless millions of light years from the point of his extension; and his speed then was, of course, the speed of light cubed. And sometimes he dropped from his level in time to the level below, and would then lie poised and thoughtful during one cycle, until he was returned to the higher level again; and it was thus he discovered the nature of time, which is a helical band, ever revolving, never moving in its superspace. And sometimes he would move slowly, drifting from one gravitic pull to another, searching disinterestedly for the unusual. It was in such a period that he came to earth.

A goose found him. He lay in some bushes by a country road, distantly observing the earth and analyzing its elements, and the goose was a conventional one and blindly proud of its traditional silliness. He ignored it when it approached him and when it rapped his shell curiously; but when it turned him over with its beak he felt that it was being discourteous. He seized it with a paralyzing noose of radiations, quickly read its minuscule mind for a way to annoy it, and then began pulling its tail feathers out to see how it would react. It reacted loudly.

Now, it so happened that Christopher Innes was on that country road, bringing the young'un home from Sunday school. Chris was an embittered and cynical mortal, being a normal twelve-year-old who had just learned that increasing age and masculinity made for superiority, and was about to be a teen-ager and find out differently. The young'un was his five-year-old sister, of whom he was jealous and protective. She had silly ideas. She was saying:

"But they *tol'* me in school last week, Chris, so it mus' be so, so there. The prince came into the palace an' everyone was asleep, an' he came to the room where *she* was, an' she was asleep, too, but he kissed her an' she woke up, and then everyone—"

"Aw, shut your fontanel," said Chris, who had heard that babies shut their fontanels when they started to grow, though he didn't know what one was. "You believe everything you hear. Ol' Mr. Becker tol' me once I could catch a bird by putting salt on its tail, an' then whaled me for loadin' up a twelve-gauge shotgun with rock salt and knockin' off three of his Rhode Island Reds. They tell you that stuff so they'll have a chance to hit you afterward."

"I don't care, so there," pouted the young'un. "My teacher wouldn't hit me for b'lieving her."

"Somebody will," Chris said darkly. "What's all that racket, I wonder?"

Sounds like a duck caught in a fox trap. Let's go see."

Chris stopped to pick up a piece of stick in case he had a trap to pry open, and the young'un ran ahead. When he reached her he found her jumping up and down and clapping her hands and gurgling, "I told you so! I told you so!" which is the most annoying thing any woman can say to any man.

"You tol' me whut?" he asked, and she pointed. He saw a large white goose digging its feet into the ground, straining to get away from its invisible bonds, while behind it lay a glittering ovoid. As they watched, a tail feather detached itself from its anchorage and fell beside two of its prototype on the ground.

"Chee!" Chris breathed.

"They tol' me that story, too!" chortled the young'un. "About the goose that laid the golden egg. Oh, Chris, if we take that goose home an' keep um, we'll be rich an' I can have a pony an' a hundred dolls an'—"

"Chee," Chris said again and gingerly picked up the golden egg. As he did so the goose was released suddenly, and its rooted claws shot it forward face first into the earth, where it lay stunned and quonking dismally. As only a farm child can, the young'un caught its legs together and picked it up in her arms.

"We're rich!" breathed Chris and laughed. Then he remembered his assertions and frowned. "Aw, it didn't lay no egg. Someone lost it an' this ol' goose jus' found it here."

"It's the golden-egg goose! It is too!" shrilled the young'un.

Chris spat on the egg and rubbed it with his cuff. "It's sure pretty," he said half to himself, and tossed it into the air. He must have stood there open-mouthed for two full minutes with his hands out, because it never came down. It vanished.

They found out later that the goose was a gander. Neither of them ever quite got over it.

"It might be interesting," thought the armored brain to himself as he lay in the stratosphere, "to be a biped like that for a while. I believe I will try it. I wonder which of the two is the more intelligent—the feathered or unfeathered ones?" He pondered a moment over this nice distinction and then remembered that the boy had armed himself with a stick, while the goose had

not. "They are a little ungainly," he thought, then shrugged mentally. "I shall be one of those."

He plummeted down to earth, braked off, and shot along just over the surface until he came to a small town. A movement in a tiny alley caught his attention; a man there was leveling a gun at another across the street. Unseen, the being from space flashed between them, and his path intersected that of the bullet. It struck his smooth side and neither left a mark nor changed his course by a thousandth of a degree as it spun into the street four feet below him. The intended victim went his way unharmed, and the man in the alley swore and went to his room to take his gun apart wonderingly. He had never missed a shot like that before!

Just outside the town the brain found what he had been looking for—a field under which was a huge mass of solid rock. He came to rest in the field and dropped from sight, sinking through sod and earth and granite as if it had been water; and in a matter of minutes he had cut himself a great underground chamber in the rock, with high arched walls and a vaulted ceiling and a level, polished floor. Hovering for a moment in midair, he tested the surrounding countryside for its exact chemical content, sending out delicate high-frequency beams, adjusting them fractionally for differences in molecular vibrations. The presence of a certain fine harmonic at any given frequency indicated to him the exact location of the elements he needed. There were not many. These bipeds were hardly complex.

"A type—a type," he thought. "I must have something to work from. I gather that these creatures are differentiated from each other in certain ways."

He slipped up through the roof of his chamber and went back to the town, where he found a busy corner and hid up under an eave, where he could watch the people passing.

"Those smaller ones must be the males," he ruminated, "the ones that strut and slink and apparently do little work and wear all those blatant colors

and so ridiculously accentuate the color of the oral orifice. And the larger, muscular ones, I suppose, are females. How drab.''

He projected a beam that would carry thought impulses to him. It touched the mind of a young man who was mooning after a trim blonde just ahead of him. He was a hesitant and shy young man, and a passionate one, and the battle he fought within himself, between his inclinations and his diffidence, almost dislodged the creature in the eaves.

"Whew!" thought the golden ovoid. "An emotional monstrosity! And it appears that I was a little mistaken about males and females. How very quaint!

"I shall be one of the males," he decided at length.

Wisely, he searched about until he found a girl who was suffering from every "osis" in the advertisements, as well as an inferiority complex, acne, bunions, and tone-deafness, knowing that her idea of an ideal man would be really something. Inserting gentle thought tendrils into her mind, he coaxed her to dream a lovely dream of her ideal man as she walked along, and carefully filed away all the essentials, disregarding only the passion the dream man showered on the poor starved creature. Enveloped by the dream he had induced, she walked into the path of an automobile and was rather badly hurt, which was all right, because she later married the driver. The brain sped back to the laboratory, nursing his mental picture of a muscular, suave, urbane, sophisticated, and considerate demigod, and began to assemble his machinery.

Now the brain had no powers, as such. What he had was *control*. The engineer of a twenty-car train would be stupid even to dream about hurling such a train at a hundred and twenty miles an hour along a track if he had to do so himself with his own physical powers. But with his controls the thing is

easy. In the case of the brain, his controls were as weak compared with the final results of it as is a man's arm compared with the two thousand horsepower delivered by a locomotive. But the brain knew the true nature of space: that it is not empty, but a mass of balanced forces.

Press two pencils together, end to end. As long as the pressure is even and balanced the effect is the same as if the pencils were just resting their ends together. Now get some tiny force to press on the point where the pencils come together. They snap out of line; they deliver a powerful resultant, out of all proportion to the push which upset the equilibrium, and you probably break a knuckle. The resultant is at right angles to the original equalized forces; it goes just so far and then the forces come together in equilibrium again, knuckles notwithstanding.

We live in a resilient universe; the momentary upset is negligible, since the slack is taken up to infinity. Such a control had the brain from space. Any and every form of energy –and matter is energy–was his to control, to any degree. The resultant from one tiny upset balance could be used to upset another; and a chain like this could be extended *ad infinitum*.

Fortunately, the brain knew how not to make mistakes!

He made his apparatus quickly and efficiently. A long table; tanks and small bins of pure elements; a highly complex machine with projectors and reflectors capable of handling any radiation that can be indicated on a circular spectrum, for compounding and conditioning the basic materials. The machine had no switches, no indicators, no dials. It was built to do a certain job, and as soon as it was completed it began working. When the job was done it quit. It was the kind of machine whose perfection ruined the brain's civilization, and has undoubtedly ruined others, and will most certainly ruin more.

On the surface of the table appeared a shadow. Cell by cell appeared as the carbon-magnesium-calcium mixtures were coordinated and projected by the ma-

chine. A human skeleton was almost suddenly complete—that is, an almost human skeleton. The brain was impatient with unnecessary detail, and if there were fewer vertebrae and more but finer ribs, and later, a lack of appendix, tonsils, sinal cavities, and *abductors minimi digiti*, then it was only in the interest of logic. The flesh formed over the skeleton, fiber by perfect fiber. Blood vessels were flat, their insides sealed to each other until the body was complete enough to start distributing blood. The thing was “born” with a full stomach; it began its functions long before it was complete enough for the brain’s entry.

While it was forming, the brain lay in a corner of the room reasoning it out. He knew its construction and had carried it out. Now he asked the reasons for its being this way, and calculated its functions. Hearing, sight with light, communication by vibrating tissues, degree of telepathy, organs of balance, possible and probable mental and physical reflexes, all such elementary things were carefully reasoned out and recorded on that fathomless brain. It was not necessary to examine the body itself or to look at it. He had planned it, and it would be as he had planned. If he wished to study any part of it before it formed, he had his memory.

The body lay complete eventually. It was a young and strong and noble creature. It lay there breathing deeply and slowly, and under its broad, intellectual forehead its eyes glowed with the pale light of idiocy. The heart beat firmly, and a tiny twitch in the left thigh developed and disappeared as the cells adjusted themselves to each other. The hair was glossy and black and was in a pronounced widow’s peak. The hairline was the line separating the two parts of the head, for the top part was a hinged lid which now gaped open. The white matter of the brain was formed completely and re-laid to make room for the metal-encased creator.

He drifted up to the head of the table and settled into the open skull. A moment, and then it snapped shut. The young man—for such he was now—lay quiet for a long while, as the brain checked the various senses—temperature, pressure, balance, and sight. Slowly the right arm raised and lowered, and then the left, and then the legs rose together and swung over the edge of the table and the young man sat up. He shook his head and gazed about with his rapidly clearing eyes, turned his head stiffly, and got to his feet. His knees buckled slightly; he grasped the table spasmodically, not bending

his fingers because he hadn't thought of it yet. His mouth opened and closed, and he ran his tongue over the inside of his mouth and lips and teeth.

"What an awkward way to get around," he thought, trying his weight on one leg and then the other. He flexed his arms and hands and hopped up and down cautiously.

"Agh!" he said waveringly. "A-a-a-gh-ha-agh!" He listened to himself, enchanted by this new way of expressing himself. "Ka. Pa. Ta. Sa. Ha. Ga. La. Ra," he said, testing the possibilities of linguals, gutturals, sibilants, palatals, labials, singly and in combination. "Ho-o-o-o-owe-e-e-e!" he howled, trying sustained tones from low to high pitch.

He tottered to the wall, and with one hand on it began padding up and down the room. Soon the support was no longer necessary, and he walked alone; and then he went faster and faster and ran round and round, hooting strangely. He was a little disgusted to find that violent activity made his heart beat fast and his breathing harder. Flimsy things, these bipeds. He sat panting on the table and began testing his senses of taste and touch, his muscular and oral and aural and visual memories.

Chauncey Thomas was an aristocrat. No one had ever seen him in patchy pants or broken shoes. They would, though, he reflected bitterly, if he didn't get a chance to steal some soon. "What de hell," he muttered. "All I ast is t'ree meals a day and good clo'es, an' a house an' stuff, an' no work to do. Hell!. An' dey tell me I can get t'ings by workin'. It ain't worth it. It just ain't worth it!"

He had every right to be bitter, he thought. Not only do they throw him down three flights of stairs in the town's most exclusive apartment house

just because he was sleeping on the landing, but they stick him in jail for it. Did he get a chance to rest in jail? He did not. They made him work. They made him whitewash cells. That was hardly right. Then they gave him the bum's rush out of town. It was unfair. What if it was the ninth time they had booked him? "I got to find me another town," he decided. He was thinking of the sheriff's remark that next time he was run in the sheriff would pin a murder on him if he had to kill one of his deputies to do it. Chauncey turned his slow, unwilling feet onto the Springfield Turnpike and headed away from town. The night was two hours old and very warm. Chauncey slouched along with his hands in his pockets, feeling misunderstood. A slight movement in the shadows beside the road escaped his attention, and he never realized that anyone was there until he found himself picked up by the slack of his trousers and dangling uncomfortably from a mighty fist.

"I ain't done nothin'!" he squalled immediately, resorting to a conversational reflex of his. "Le's talk this over, now bud. Aw, come on, now; you got nothin' on me. You-*awk!*"

Chauncey's mouthings became wordless when he had managed, by twisting around in his oversize clothes, to see his captor. The vision of a muscular giant, at least six feet five, regarding him out of fathomless, shadowy eyes as he held him at arm's length was too much for Chauncey Thomas. He broke down and wailed.

The naked Apollo spun the bum about in midair and caught him by the belt. He plucked curiously at the worn jacket, reached down and tore a piece of leather out of the side of an outsize sport shoe as if it had been made of blotting paper, studied it carefully, tossed it aside.

"Lemme go!" shrieked Chauncey. "Gee, boss, I wasn't doin' nothin', honest I wasn't. I'm goin' to Springfield, I'll get a job or somethin', boss!" The words burned his mouth as he said them, but this was an emergency and he had to say something.

"Gha!" grunted the giant, and dropped him on his ear in the middle of the road.

Chauncey scrambled to his feet and scuttled off down the road. The giant stood watching him as he slowed, made a U-turn, and came running back under the influence of a powerful hypnotic suggestion emanating from that great clean body. He stood awed and trembling before the new-born one, wishing he were dead, wishing he were away from there—even in jail.

"Who—who are you?" he faltered.

The other caught Chauncey's shifty eyes in his own deep gaze. The hobo's shaken mind was soothed; he blinked twice and sank down on his knees beside the road, staring upward into the inscrutable face of this frightening, fascinating man. Something seemed to be crawling into Chauncey's mind, creeping about there. It was horrifying and yet it wasn't unpleasant. He felt himself being drawn out; his memories examined; his knowledge of human society and human customs and traditions and history. Things he thought he had forgotten and wanted to forget popped up, and he felt them being mulled over. Within a few minutes the giant had as complete a knowledge of human conduct and speech as Chauncey Thomas had ever had.

He stepped back, and Chauncey slumped gasping to the ground. He felt depleted.

"Get up, bum," said the big man in Chauncey's own idiom.

Chauncey got up; there was no mistaking the command in that resonant voice. He cringed before him and whined: "Whatcha gonna do wit' me, boss? I

ain't—"

"Shut up!" said the other. "I ain't gonna hurt you." Chauncey looked at the immobile face. "Well . . . I . . . I guess I'll be on my way."

"Aw, stick around. Whatcha scared of?"

"Well . . . nothin' . . . but, who are you, anyway?"

"I'm Elron," said the giant, using the first euphonious syllables that came to mind.

"Oh. Where's yer clo'es? You been rolled?"

"Naw. Well, yeah. Wait here for me; I think I can—"

Elron bounded over the hedge, not wanting to astound the little tramp too much. From Chauncey's mind he had stolen a mental photograph of what Chauncey considered a beautiful outfit. It was a plaid suit with a diamond-checked vest and yellow shoes; a wing collar and a ten-gallon hat. Slipping into his underground laboratory, Elron threw back the casing of the complex projector that had built him his body and made a few swift adjustments. A moment later he joined Chauncey, fully clad in Chauncey's own spectacular idea of tailoring to taste.

"Hully gee!" breathed Chauncey.

They walked along the road together, Chauncey quite speechless, Elron pensive. A few cars passed them; Chauncey automatically and without hope flung a practiced thumb toward each. They were both surprised when a lavish roadster ground to a stop ahead of them. The door was flung open; Chauncey slid in front of Elron and would have climbed in but for Elron's grasping him by the scruff of the neck and hauling him back.

"In the rumble, lug," he ground out.

"Nuttin' good ever happens t' me," muttered Chauncey as he followed orders. He had seen the driver. She was lovely.

"Where are you bound?" she asked as Elron closed the door.

"Springfield," he said, remembering from something Chauncey had said that the town was on this road. He looked at this newest acquaintance. She was as tiny and perfect as he was big and perfect, and she handled the car with real artistry. Her eyes were deep auburn to match her hair. Judging her by human standards, Elron thought her very pleasing to look upon.

"I'll take you there," she said.

"T'anks, lady."

She looked at him quickly.

"What's up, babe?" he asked.

"Oh-nothing. Don't call me 'babe."

"Okay, okay."

Again she flashed him a look. "Are you-kidding me?" she asked.

"What about?"

"You look-oh, I don't know."

"Spill it, sister."

"Oh, sort of-well, not like the kind who calls girls 'babe.' "

"Oh," he said. "You mean-you'd say it different, like."

He was having trouble with Chauncey's limited vocabulary.

"Something like that. What are you going to do in Springfield?"

"Just look around a little, I guess. I want to see a city."

"Don't tell me you never saw a city!"

"Listen," he snapped, covering up his error by falling back on one of Chauncey's devices, "it ain't worryin' you any, is it? What do you care?" "Oh, I'm sorry," she said acidly. He sensed something strained about the silence that followed.

"Mad, huh?"

She looked at him scornfully and sniffed.

The trivial impasse intrigued him. "Stop here," he ordered her.

"*What?*" she asked furiously.

He leaned forward and caught her eye. "*Stop here!*"

She cut the ignition and the big car slid to a stop. Elron took her shoulder and turned her to him. She almost struggled but hadn't time.

Tendrils of thought stole into her brain, explored her memories, her

tastes, her opinions and philosophies and vocabulary. He learned why it was déclass   to address a woman as "babe," and that among civilized people ten-gallon hats were not worn with wing collars. He liked the language she used a little better than Chauncey's harsh inadequacies. He learned what music was, and a great deal about money, which, strangely enough, was something that almost never crossed Chauncey's mind. He learned something of the girl herself; her name was Ariadne Drew, she had a great deal of wealth she had not earned, and she was so used to being treated according to her station in life that she was careless about such things as picking up hitchhikers on the road.

He let her go, snatching the memory of the incident from its place in her mind, so that she started the car and drove off.

"Now what an earth did I stop for?"

"So I could check up on that rear tire," he ad-libbed. He thought back about things he had discovered that might interest her. Clothes were a big item.

"I must apologize," he said to her, word for word in her own vernacular, "for this hat. It's just too, too revolting. I saw a cute little number the other day in a shoppe on the avenue, and I mean to get it. My dear, I *mean!*"

She glanced aghast at his noble profile and bulging shoulders. He chatted on.

"I saw Suzy Greenfield the other day. You know Suzy. Oh, she didn't see *me!* I took care of that! And do you know who she was *with?* That horrible Jenkins person!"

"Who *are* you?" she asked him.

"I hear that Suzy is— What? Who am I? Oh, yes; about Suzy. You've probably heard this awful gossip before"—she had!—"so stop me if you have. But she told her husband—"

"This is as far as I go," snapped the girl, wheeling the car over to the curb.

"Well, I—" Elron sensed that the right thing to do would be to get out of the car. He opened the door and turned to her.

"Thank you for the lift, darling. Let me know if I can do the same for you sometime." He stepped up onto the walk, and she slammed the door and rolled the window open.

"You've forgotten to polish your fingernails," she said nastily, and slammed the car into gear.

"Now what the hell did you do?" asked a voice at the side. Chauncey was looking longingly after the roadster.

"Don't swear," said Elron. "It's vulgar. You are very crude, Chauncey. I don't want to have you around. Good-bye, darling." Could Elron help it if Ariadne Drew called everybody "darling"?

The little bum stood open-mouthed, staring after the Greek god in his noisy plaid suit, and then followed slowly. "Dat mug'll bear watchin'!" he muttered. "Hully gee!"

Elron, with his new-found knowledge of human affairs, had little trouble securing a few dollars from a man he passed on the street—all he had to do was to demand it—and getting a hotel room for his body. From Ariadne's mind he had found out what handwriting was, and he signed the register and paid for a room without a hitch. Once his body was parked conventionally in bed, he popped the head open and slipped out. He felt that the body would relax a little better without him.

He drifted out of the window and hung for a while high above the town, searching for a familiar vibration—the impulses of Ariadne's mind. Freed from the cumbersome human body, Elron was far more sensitive to such things. He wanted to observe Ariadne now because he wanted to check up on his performance.

He caught it soon. It was to him as a gentle perfume is to us. He whisked over to the outskirts of the city and settled down toward a massive red brick pile surrounded by lovely landscaping. He circled it twice, finding her exact place in the house, and then dropped down the chimney. He hovered just above the artificial logs in the fireplace and began his eavesdropping.

Ariadne was sitting in her extravagant living room, chatting with—of all people—the redoubtable Suzy Greenfield. Suzy was a small-souled, graceless girl with the ability to draw a remark out of any given acquaintance, and by ardent agreement she could cull enough back-biting comment to keep her busy for weeks. She looked like a buck-toothed sparrow, dressed like a sweepstakes winner from Dubuque, and had a personality as soothing as the seven-year itch.

"Well, what have you *heard* today?" she asked expectantly.

Ariadne was gazing into far distances, and she only smiled.

"Oh, Ari," said Suzy, "come on! I know something must have happened today from the way you're acting. Please; you never tell me *anything*!"

Ariadne, being a woman, ignored this untruth and would have changed the subject had not Elron, in the chimney, gently stroked certain of her brain convolutions with his intangible tentacles. She stared up suddenly, turned to Suzy. Elron could have had her reaction directly, but he was interested in the way she would express it to another and in the way the other would receive it.

"If you must know," said Ariadne, "I met someone today, a man." She sighed. Suzy leaned forward happily. When she was not all mouth she was all ears.

"Where?"

"Picked him up on the road. Sue, you never saw such a pair as those two.

They looked like a couple of comedians. One was a tramp—at first I thought they both were. The little one got into the rumble and the nice handsome one rode in front."

"Handsome?"

"Darling, you don't *know*! I've never seen—"

"But you said they were comic!"

"*Looked* comic, dear." In the fireplace the golden-armored brain gave the equivalent of a nod and sent a thought current out to Ariadne. As if answering a question, she said, "He would have looked so nice in a soft gray suit and a Homburg. And—I don't know what he is, but I think he should be an adventurer. A sort of poet-writer-adventurer."

"But what *was* he?"

Ariadne suddenly felt it possible to speak of other things. She got Suzy started on the peccadilloes of her long-suffering spouse and soon had completely eclipsed all thought of her volatile mystery man. Elron was gone.

Back at the hotel, the ovoid hovered over his sleeping body and thought bitter thoughts. He was ashamed of himself for underestimating the subtle nuances of human behavior. He had succeeded in making something ridiculous out of this biped he had created, and the fact annoyed him.

There was a challenge in it; Elron could control powers that would easily disintegrate this whole tiny galaxy and spread its dust through seven dimensions, if he so wished it; and yet he was most certainly being made a fool of by a woman. It occurred to him that in all the universes there was nothing quite as devious and demanding as a woman's mind. It likewise occurred to him that a woman is easy to control as long as she always has her way. He was determined to see how closely a man could resemble a woman's ideal and still exist; and he was going to do it with this man he had made himself responsible for.

It was a long and eventful three months before Ari Drew saw Elron again. He went away in his ten-gallon hat and his blatant plaids and his yellow shoes; and he took away with him his conversational variants and Chauncey the bum. He went to the greatest city of them all and sought out people who knew about the things that he must be to achieve the phenomenal status of a man good enough for Ariadne.

He found it a fascinating game. In the corridors of universities, in prize-fight training camps, in girls' schools and kindergartens and gin mills and honkytonks and factories he cornered people, spoke with them, strained and drained and absorbed what their minds held. Sorting and blending, he built himself an intellect, the kind of mentality that awed lightweights like Suzy Greenfield who spell Intellect with a capital I. Instead of trying to suit each man's speech by using each man's speech, he developed a slightly accented idiom of his own, something personal and highly original. He gave himself an earthly past, from a neatly photostated birth certificate to gilt-edged rent receipts. He sounded out the minds of editors and publishers, and through the welter of odd tastes and chaotic ideology therein he extracted sound and workable ideas on what work was needed. He actually sold poetry.

While his body slept in luxury, his mind hurtled over the earth, carried by its illimitably powerful golden shell. Elron could lecture a New York audience on the interesting people he had met in Melbourne, Australia, and the next day produce a cablegram from one or two of those people whom he had visited during the night. Scattered all over the earth were individuals who believed they had known this phenomenal young man for years.

It was at one of those pale-pink and puffy poetry teas that Ariadne saw Elron again. Suzy gave the tea as a current-celebrity show. Ari came gracefully late, looking lovely in something powder-blue, chastely sophisticated. Elron was scheduled to speak—something about “Metempsychosis and Modern Life.” Ari was scheduled to sing. But she—
He was watching for her. He was dressed in soft gray, and the Homburg awaited him by the door. Her entrance was as ever in the grand manner, and all

realized it; but for her it was that breath-catching experience of realizing that she was putting on the show for just one person in all that crowded room. She'd heard of him, of course. He was the "rage," which is a term used in polite society to describe current successes. Would-bes and has-beens are known as outrages.

But she had never seen him that she remembered. He rose and stood over her and smiled, and he wordlessly took her arm, bowed at the hostess, and led her out. Just like that. Poor Suzy. Her protruding teeth barely hid the tiny line of foam that formed on her lips.

"Well!" Ariadne said as they reached the street. "That was a terrible thing to do!"

"*Tsk, tsk!*" he said, and helped her into his new sixteen-cylinder puddle-jumper. "I imagine Suzy will get over it. Think of all the people she'll be able to tell!"

Ari laughed a little, looking at him strangely. "Mr. Elron, you're not . . . not the same man that—"

"That you picked up on the pike three months ago, dressed like a comedian?"

She blushed.

"Yes, I'm the man."

"I was . . . rude when I left you."

"You had a right to be, Ariadne."

"What happened to that hideous little tramp you were traveling with?"

"Chauncey!" Elron bellowed, and the trimly uniformed chauffeur swiveled around and nodded and smiled.

"Good heavens!" said Ariadne.

"He doesn't offend any more with his atrocious diction," said Elron precisely. "I found it possible to change his attitude toward work, but to change his diction was beyond even me. He no longer speaks."

She looked at him for quite a while as the huge car rolled out into the country. "You're everything I thought you might possibly be," she breathed.

He knew that.

That was their first evening together. There were many others, and Elron conducted himself perfectly, as befitted a brilliant and urbane biped. Catering to every wish and whim of Ari's amused him, for she was as moody as a beautiful woman can be, and he delighted in predicting and anticipating her moods. He adjusted himself to her hour by hour, day by day. He was ideal. He was perfect.

So—she got bored. He adjusted himself to that, too, and she was furious. If she didn't care, neither did he. Bad tactics, and something that supercosmic forces could do nothing about.

Oh, he tried; yes, indeed. He questioned her and he psychoanalyzed her and he even killed off all the streptococci in her blood stream to see if that was the trouble. But all he got was a passive resentment of her. Half as old as time itself, he knew something of patience; but his patience began to give way under the pressure applied by this very human woman.

And, of course, there was a showdown. It was one afternoon at her home, and it was highly spectacular. He could read her mind with ease, but he could know only what thoughts she had formed. She knew he annoyed her. She also knew she liked him immensely; and for that reason she made no attempt to analyze her hostility toward him, and therefore he was helpless, tangled in her tenuous resentment.

It started with a very little thing—he came into the room and she stood at the window with her back to him and would not turn around. She did not speak or act coldly toward him, but simply would not face him. A very petty thing. After ten minutes of that he strode across the room and spun her around. She caught her heel in the rug, lost her footing, fell against the mantel, and stretched becomingly unconscious on the floor in a welter of broken gewgaws. Elron stood a moment feeling foolish, and then lifted her in his arms. Before he could set her down she had twined her arms around his neck and was kissing him passionately. Poor, magnificent thing, he didn't know what to do.

"Oh, Elron," she blubbered. "You brute! You struck me. Oh, darling! I love you so! I never thought you would do it!"

A great light of understanding burst for Elron. *That* was the basic secret of this thing called woman! She could not love him when he acted in a perfectly rational way. She could not love him when he was what she thought was ideal. But when he did something “brutish”—a word synonymous with “unintelligent”—she loved him. He looked down at her beautiful lips and her beautiful black eye, and he laughed and kissed her and then set her down gently.

“Be back in a couple of days, darling,” he said, and strode out, ignoring her cries.

He knew what to do now. He was grateful to her for amusing him for a while and for teaching him something new. But he could not afford to upset himself by associating with her any longer. To keep her happy he would have to act unintelligent periodically; and that was one thing he could not stand. He went away. He got into his huge automobile and drove away down the turnpike.

“It’s a pity that I’m not a man,” he reflected as he drove. “I’d really like to be, but— Oh, I can’t be bothered keeping track of anything as complicated as Ariadne!”

He pulled up at the outskirts of a small town and found his laboratory.

Once inside, he lay down on the table, popped open his skull and emerged. Going to the machine in the corner, he added and took away and changed and tinkered, and the glow began to form again around the still body. Something was happening inside the skull. Something took shape inside, and as it happened the skull slowly closed. In three hours Elron the man climbed off the table and stood looking about him. The golden egg flew up to his shoulder and nestled there.

"Thank you for this . . . this consciousness," said Elron.

"Oh, that's all right," replied the ovoid telepathically. "You've had it for some months, anyway. Only I've just given you what you needed to appreciate it with."

"What am I to do?" asked the man.

"Go back to Ariadne. Carry on from where I left off.

You. can—you're a man, perfect in every cell and gland and tissue."

"Thank you for that. I have wanted her but was never directed—"

"Never mind that. Marry her and make her happy. Never tell her about me—you have history enough to carry you through your lifetime, and brains enough, now, to do the work you have been doing. Ari's been good to me; I owe her this much."

"Anything else?"

"Yes. Just one thing; but burn this in your brain in letters of fire: A woman can't possibly love a man unless he's part dope. Be a little stupid all the time and very stupid once in a while. But *don't* be perfect!"

"Okay. So long."

"Be happy. . . er . . . son—

Elron the man left the laboratory and went out into the sunlight. The golden egg settled to the floor and lay there an hour or so. He laughed once within himself and said, "Too perfect!"

Then he felt terribly, terribly lonely.

The End

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