

The Lady Goes Wild

by Richard Elam

“Beat you into the pool,” Patch called a little while later.

He dashed out of the dressing room and dove, with hands outstretched, into the water. Garry followed right behind, tumbling into the spray left by Patch’s dive.

“Say, this is nice and warm!” Garry said. “And we’ve got it all to ourselves!”

A little way back from the pool’s edge, Mac and Isaac were lifting weights. This exercise was to help them keep in good physical trim.

Garry and Patch swam and splashed to their hearts’ content. It was the most fun they had had in a long time. They knew no one would ever believe their story of swimming in a pool in deep space! It was almost too difficult for them to believe themselves. But they did not care if they were never believed.

They frolicked in the water for about an hour and then climbed up on the pool’s edge to catch their breath for a few minutes.

“Boy, I could spend twenty-four hours a day in there,” Patch said, flicking water from his face.

“I could too, almost,” Garry agreed. “But I would be satisfied if I could spend twenty-four hours a day aboard the *Carefree* doing anything. Gee, it’s going to be hard leaving here to go back to the orphanage.”

“Yeah,” Patch said sourly. “Gee whiz, Garry, why can’t they let a couple of guys live the way they want to?”

“We can someday, when we are old enough,” Garry said. “But the only way we could get around having to go back now would be for Captain Eaton to adopt us.”

“Say, that’s the answer!” Patch replied excitedly. “Why don’t we ask him?”

“I don’t think it’s as easy as that, Patch. In the first place, I don’t think *we* should ask *him*. He knows how much we like the *Carefree*, and he may have thought of adoption. But he should be the one who suggests it.”

“Maybe we could drop a hint or something,” Patch said.

“I don’t think they’d let him adopt us, Patch. Don’t forget, when they find out where we are, they’ll think we stowed away aboard the *Orion*, and that would ruin any chances we might have had.”

“But we didn’t deliberately stow away!” Patch protested.

“I know that, but how can we get them to believe us? I don’t think they’d even consider

adoption at this time, and I think Captain Eaton must feel that way too.”

Patch sighed. “Maybe later, then. Maybe someday Captain Eaton will want us back. Gosh, I hate to leave here, though.”

“Life won’t be the same any more,” Garry said. “Nothing can ever be as exciting as the adventure we’ve had.”

They heard footsteps approaching and looked up to see Captain Eaton coming their way. Missing now was his usual sunny smile. He carried a piece of paper in his hand.

“Well, fellows, the answer has come,” Captain Eaton said, and his voice was laden with dejection. “I radioed that you two had been picked up, and they’ve already replied.”

Garry hated to ask, “Wh—what did they say?”

“Just as I suspected. We must return to the Von Braun Space Station.”

“I was hoping we had a *few* more days at least,” Patch groaned.

“I think that the sooner we straighten this matter out, the better it will be for everyone,” Captain Eaton replied. “And another thing, you boys are still A.W.O.L. from the orphanage, you know. However, it will take a couple of days for us to work out a navigation plan and get a clearance approach to the station. Sorry, fellows. I wish you could have stayed on with us indefinitely, but....”

As the captain’s voice trailed off, Garry had a flicker of hope. The captain was looking at them as if debating something in his mind. Would he bring up the subject of adoption?

But, saying nothing further, the captain turned and began walking toward the outer door of the gym.

Then he seemed to think of something else and came back. The boys held their breath hopefully. Would he mention adoption now?

“There’s something else they told me that I thought you’d want to know,” the captain said. “I told them the story of your being stowaways accidentally, just as you told me. They checked back and found that the elevator attached to the *Orion* was defective, as you said, and they are convinced of the truth of your story. As a result, Officer Mulroy has been cleared of any negligence.”

“I’m glad to know that, Sir,” Garry said.

Once more the captain left them, but this time for good.

“Well, that’s that,” Patch commented unhappily. “No adoption. When he came back I thought he....”

“I was hoping too,” Garry replied, “but we’ve got to go back, and that’s all there is to it.”

Mac and Isaac came over, still breathing hard from their exercises.

“We couldn’t help but overhear the bad news,” Mac said. “We’re going to hate to see you fellows go.”

“Yes, that’s right,” Isaac added.

“Thanks,” Garry replied. “We were getting to like this old ship.”

“In a way I’d almost like to go with you,” Mac said, with a faraway look in his eyes.

Garry guessed that the Scotsman was a little homesick. His hunch proved correct, because Mac began to reminisce about his homeland. He described the heather on the hillsides, the flowing streams, and the green vales. And yet, Mac admitted finally that space was still a good second home to him, and he enjoyed his life in the deeps.

Isaac had no home he would rather live in than the *Carefree*. As he talked about his good friends aboard ship and the kindly captain, Garry noticed the softness of the big man’s eyes.

Garry had heard that Isaac was really quite a sentimental fellow. Whenever he learned of a tragedy over the TV, it would depress him. Later, the boys were to learn that Isaac had a secret liking for good poetry.

Both Mac and Isaac seemed genuinely sorry that the boys were having to leave. It made Garry and Patch feel good that they were so popular, but it made them a little sad, too.

The next morning Garry and Patch woke earlier than the others and were heading toward the washroom.

Suddenly Garry stopped and caught Patch by the arm. “Patch, do you hear that? There’s noise coming from the laundry room up ahead!”

Patch listened and heard the sound of splashing and a machine laboring hard.

“Yeah,” Patch said. “Let’s see what’s going on!”

Running, Garry led the way into the laundry room. But then he wished he had not been coming so fast. His feet skidded on the floor, that was covered with thick soapsuds, and he skated several feet forward on his bottom. Patch, coming right behind, could not help laughing at his friend’s misfortune. But then he too went down and skidded alongside Garry.

“Hey, what goes on here!” Garry gasped, trying to get to his feet. The entire floor was a miniature sea of soapsuds.

In his efforts to get up, Garry’s feet slid apart, and he hit the floor again. Patch had no better luck than Garry. When this happened, both boys broke into laughter.

They struggled several times to their feet, half playing all the while, but did not succeed in keeping their feet until the fourth attempt. Then they held onto one another to steady themselves. Only now did they see what was causing the strange disorder.

They looked over at the big washing machine against the wall and saw Katrinka standing over the open tank, pitching clothes right and left out of the machine and into the air! It was as if she were having the time of her life.

“Look, Patch—Katrinka!” Garry burst out laughing once more. “She’s gone crazy! Something must have flipped in her mechanism again.”

The machine was still making mountains of suds, and they were flooding out of the top like a flow of white lava. Katrinka’s metal wrists clanged against the edge of the machine as she went up and down with her flinging motion, making a rhythmic clatter.

“Hey, can’t we give her some words to make her stop this?” Patch spoke loudly to be heard over all the noise. “She’ll wreck the place!”

“I remember one of the commands,” Garry said. Then loudly he called out: “Attention! Attention!”

“She’s not paying any mind!” Patch said.

“She must be short-circuited again,” Garry said. “Let’s go for Captain Eaton!”

“I hate to wake him up after the hard day he had yesterday,” Patch said, as he returned along the corridor with Garry, “but this is an emergency.”

It turned out that they did not have to wake the captain. He met them, clad in his robe, at the door of the dorm, having already been aroused by the commotion going on down the corridor.

Captain Eaton yawned. “It’s Katrinka, isn’t it? Ben set her for laundry duty this morning, but I guess her wires got crossed again.”

The boys cautioned Captain Eaton to be careful about going into the slippery room. The captain promised he would be careful and promptly fell down as soon as he walked through the door. Garry and Patch tried to help the captain to his feet, but only succeeded in falling again themselves. They scrambled around, slipping and sliding. Then slowly learning how to become expert at moving about in soapsuds, they finally managed to stand up and stay up.

Carefully, the three made their way toward the washing machine where Katrinka was still merrily flipping clothes through the air. But by now she was out of ammunition and was merely flailing her metal arms. The captain used the command, “Attention!” several times, trying to stop Katrinka’s wild actions, but he had no better luck with this than Garry had had.

Captain Eaton moved forward over the slippery floor and groped for the control knob on the robot’s back. But then, losing his footing, he hung on to the robot to keep from falling again. This brought Katrinka crashing down onto the floor along with the captain himself.

Garry and Patch each offered the captain a hand and presently managed to get him upright again. Garry had a hard time keeping a straight face. Captain Eaton’s face was red, and his beard was straggly and sudsy. His soggy bathrobe stuck to his thin legs, giving him the appearance of a saddened,

snow-covered elf.

In the meanwhile, Katrinka was still having her fun, swinging her arms gaily against the floor as she lay on her back.

“We’ve got to turn her over,” Captain Eaton said, crawling nearer the robot. “Be careful of her arms. She can knock you over with them.”

Garry thought he saw how the job could be done.

“Let’s both grab her right leg, Patch,” he said. “Then we’ll give a good heave-ho and flip her over on her stomach. Careful you don’t slip.”

They did as Garry had suggested, yanking fiercely on the robot’s leg and flipping the metal creature over, face down. But the motion also brought Garry and Patch down in the soap again, this time getting the suds all over their faces, causing them to make wry grimaces and blow away the froth from their lips even as they laughed.

But what was funniest of all to Garry was when he saw Captain Eaton suddenly see an opening and scramble furiously, on all fours, over to the flailing robot. He threw himself upon her back, fighting her as a cowboy would wrestle a steer. He finally subdued her with a turn of the switch on her back, which he was at last able to grab and twist.

Worn out by his exertions, the captain simply flopped back on his hands in the soapy billows, sighing heavily. Then the good-natured man caught Garry’s eye and smiled. The smile turned into laughter, and presently all three of them joined in.

The captain later determined what had happened. He found out that Katrinka, in doing her washing chores, had gotten water into her electronic parts, and this had caused trouble in her mechanism. Captain Eaton made the repair easily, and the robot maid was once more in proper working order.

The boys were with the captain while he was making the repairs on Katrinka in the workshop. When the captain had put away his tools, he sent the robot on her way. Then he looked at Garry, as he washed his hands at the sink, and said in a sad voice, “Fellows, I’ve received a docking date at the Von Braun Space Station. We’ll dock at 2100 tomorrow night. That isn’t much time left, is it?”

“No, Sir, it isn’t,” Garry replied unhappily.

The captain did not look up again.

Garry half expected him to say something else, but, instead, he remained silent. Garry tugged at Patch’s sleeve, motioning for them to go.

The boys made their way slowly toward the door of the workshop. As Garry pressed the button to open the sliding door, Captain Eaton spoke again.

“Wait—just a minute.”

The boys turned. Garry gulped. He could see the sadness in the elderly man's eyes.

"Boys, I haven't told you how much I've enjoyed having you with us for this short time," the captain said, holding his dripping hands over the sink, not bothering to dry them.

Garry had a lump in his throat. "We've enjoyed it too, haven't we, Patch?"

"Sure thing," Patch murmured.

Captain Eaton continued: "You two have been a great big lift in our lives. It's been so long since we've seen young fellows, and you've made us feel younger ourselves once more. I think you know how we feel about your leaving us. But I don't want to get sentimental about it and make you feel worse. So this won't be good-bye. We'll see each other again—I know we shall."

Garry cleared his throat, trying to dissolve that lump. "You'd better dry your hands, Sir."

Captain Eaton smiled, reaching for a towel. "Oh, of course," he said.

"We'll miss all of you very much, Sir," Garry said, before starting through the door. "The *Carefree* has been like a home to us."

The boys were silent as they went on to the dormitory. They were overcome by sadness at having to leave the ship and her friendly people.

As the boys were getting together the clothing and toilet articles they had been given, Patch remarked to Garry, "Maybe the captain doesn't like us enough for adoption. He may not care for the idea of being saddled with us permanently."

"I hope it's not that," Garry answered, "but I still can't think of any other reason, now that the stowaway business is straightened out."

Patch didn't answer. He had no explanation either.

Source:

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