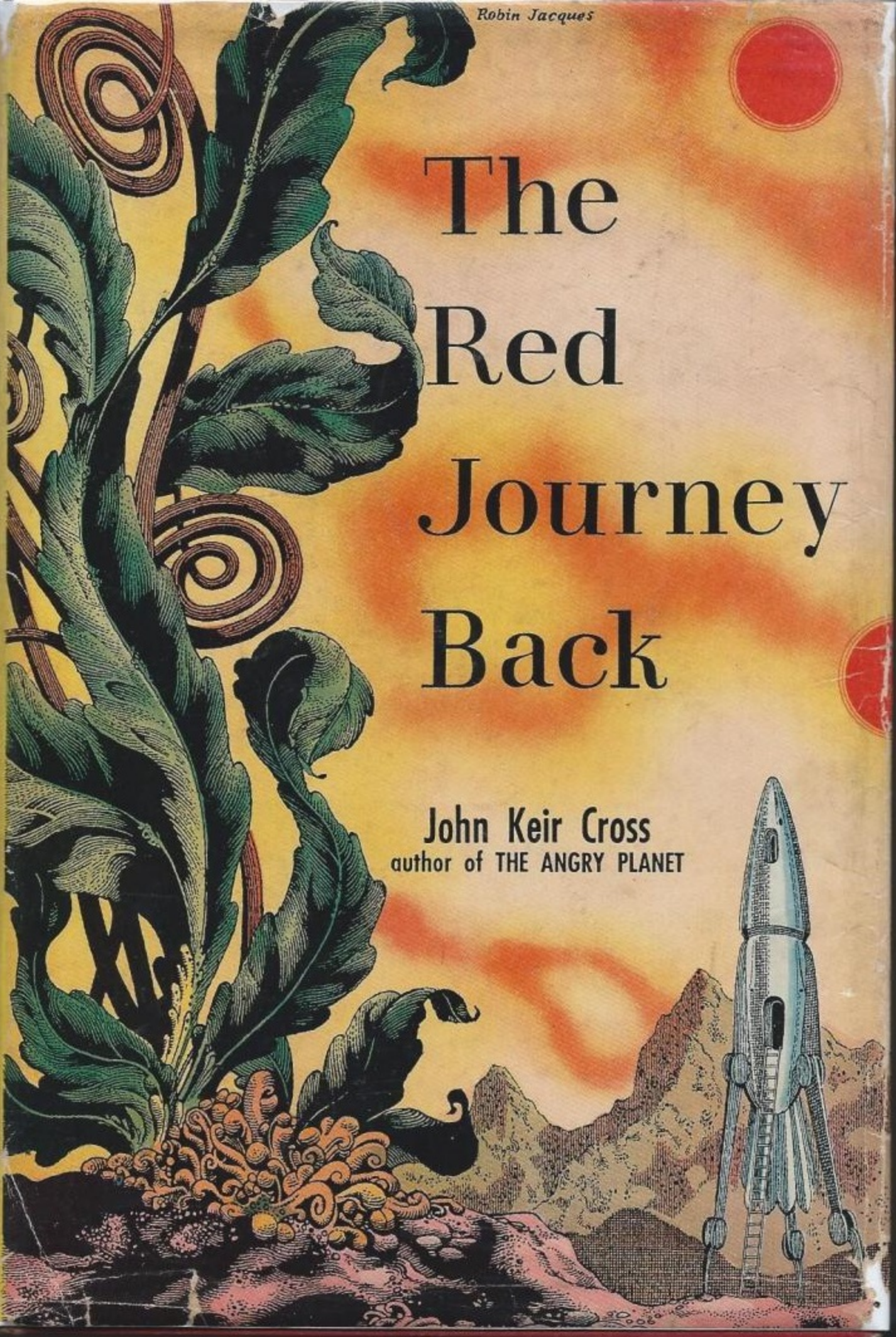
Robin Jacques
The Red Journey Back
John Keir Cross
author of THE ANGRY PLANET

THE RED JOURNEY BACK

A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF THE SECOND AND THIRD MARTIAN EXPEDITIONS, BY THE SPACE-SHIPS *Albatross* AND *Comet*, COMPILED FROM NOTES AND RECORDS BY VARIOUS MEMBERS OF THE EXPLORING PARTIES, THE WHOLE REVISED BY STEPHEN MACFARLANE AND NOW FULLY ASSEMBLED AND EDITED BY

JOHN KEIR CROSS

THE ILLUSTRATIONS ARE BY

Robin Jacques

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Red Journey Back *is a companion-story to the famous book* The Angry Planet, *published some few years ago in the United States of America, Great Britain, and Europe, and also broadcast as a radio serial play in the BBC Light Programme from London.*

But although some of the original characters reappear, and the adventures on Mars of the Albatross *explorers are continued in the old "authentic vein," this present tale is quite self-contained and can be read whether or not you have ever come across its predecessor.*

When sending us the manuscript from his home in Devon, England, the author-editor said in his covering letter: "As to a dedication, I feel I can do no better than to inscribe this new account of life and adventure in the Martian wastes to those friendly readers in all countries who not only wrote saying that they had enjoyed The Angry Planet, *but were flattering enough to a humble author to ask for more. There were far too many, alas, for me to have been able to send individual*

replies, as I should certainly have wished to do; and so this whole book is in the nature of a communal 'open letter' to those friends: I hope most sincerely that they will enjoy it too."

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THIS IS THE STORY of the second and last great flight of the little spaceship *Albatross* to the planet Mars—the Angry Planet, as it has been called, from its ferocious red color, and also from all that happened on it during the first visit of the *Albatross* travelers.

Now, I have no wish to embark on any complicated "summing-up" of everything that befell during that first adventure, which involved my friend and cousin Stephen MacFarlane, his colleague Dr. Andrew McGillivray, and the two young people Paul and Jacqueline Adam—to say nothing of *their* cousin, the irrepressible Mike Malone. But perhaps a few editorial comments right at the outset won't do any harm: hence this brief preface (which, Mike asks me to add, "You can easily skip if you want to push on to the real meat").

So:

At least most readers—old and new—should remember the immense excitement when it was

announced in the late 1940's that a small spaceship had succeeded in making interplanetary contact:

MAN'S FIRST FLIGHT TO MARS
Scots Professor and Well-known Writer Accomplish Spaceship Journey in Two Months!
THREE TEEN-AGE STOWAWAYS ON BOARD!

Following the first wild outcry—the newspaper interviews, the radio and television appearances, the scientific and popular articles—a secondary reaction set in. The story was doubted, was eventually ridiculed: Dr. McGillivray's obviously workable rocket might indeed have set off from the small Scottish town of Pitlochry, as he had claimed; but it surely achieved no more than a brief flight into the stratosphere, landing uselessly at Azay in North France . . . and for some unaccountable reason the five travelers in it had chosen to invent a tale of a visit to a planet 35,000,000 miles away *at its very nearest*—to embroider that tale with descriptions, fantastic beyond all measure yet curiously probable too, of mobile plant people living in gigantic glass bubble houses, of "thinking" trees and telepathic communication.

Set out thus, in its barest bones, the tale does seem, at the least, highly colored—perhaps it is no

great marvel that the world turned against the explorers. But two of them were profoundly hurt by the popular reception: the sensitive Dr. McGillivray himself, of Aberdeen University, distinguished alike in his achievements and his appearance, and Stephen MacFarlane, the "well-known writer" of the newspaper headlines, a man of thirty-six when last I saw him, thin, wiry, adventurous. And so these two, alone, went back across the skies, set off once more to meet the "Beautiful People," to explore the further mysteries of the dying red sphere which is our nearest true planetary neighbor in space.

"I leave and maybe lose the world," MacFarlane wrote to me before his second departure, "—and somehow, from all the enmity we have encountered in it, I consider it well lost. I can be assumed dead. By the time you read these words I shall be once more in outer space—I shall be, my dear John, on my way back to Mars!—and for the very good reason, among many others, that I prefer an Angry Planet to a Mean, Envious, Uncharitable Planet. . . ."

So they went back, then; and we who did believe —myself and the young people left behind—mourned the loss of two fine men. We looked longingly across the vast velvet spaces and speculated, dreamed, wondered. . . . The Red Journey Back, as we came to think of it in Jacqueline's brief poetic phrase: what had been its nature?—what had

McGillivray and MacFarlane found?—in what unimaginable adventures were they even now engaged?

The months, almost a year, went by; and it was as if, indeed, our friends had perished.

And then, out of the blue—literally out of the blue—came a coincidence so vast that I almost hesitate to use it as this book's true starting-off point; for authors are naturally chary of using coincidences in their works. "It could *never* happen that way," the reader cries. "It is too much, too much of a coincidence!"

Yet coincidences do occur—the newspapers every day are full of them. And so I must, in this factual account of all that happened, attempt to describe this single great coincidence of my own life. I do so in the only full chapter which I personally propose to contribute to this book—the chapter entitled *The Airstrip*. To it—the beginning of the adventure proper, however irrelevant it may at first seem—I now proceed without further delay.

A Footnote by Michael Malone. All I want to say right now is, thank heaven old J.K.C. has got on with it at last! I was all for starting straight away, you know—bang into Chap One and a bit of action—Steve MacFarlane and Doctor Mac and the new kind of Martians they met, called the *Vivores*—all that kind of thing. But you know what editors are, particularly

fussy ones, and old J.K.C. said, "No go," we had to have something to tie up the threads from that other book of ours, which was all about how we accidentally stowed away in the *Albatross* first time it went to Mars, etc.—that is, Paul and Jacky and me, the "three young people" old J.K.C. keeps referring to. (By the way, I just ought to emphasize that it doesn't matter in the least if you never read that previous book, which we called *The Angry Planet*—this one will still make sense in its own right, I hope!)

Anyway, the real reason why I wanted to add this postscript to old J.K.C.'s preface is just this: I reckon that one or two of you will maybe wonder as you go on reading just when we three "young people" are going to turn up in *this* adventure. I know we had bags of letters saying: jolly good show! How did you feel on Mars first time you went?—all that kind of thing; to say nothing of people wanting to know what happened to Malu after the eruption of the Martian volcano (Malu was the Prince of the Beautiful People we got so friendly with on the good old Angry Planet).

So you might say, "Here—when are Mike and the chaps coming in?"

O.K. Don't worry. We'll be there—even Malu, although he doesn't have much to do in this adventure—maybe not quite so much as in the last one, al-

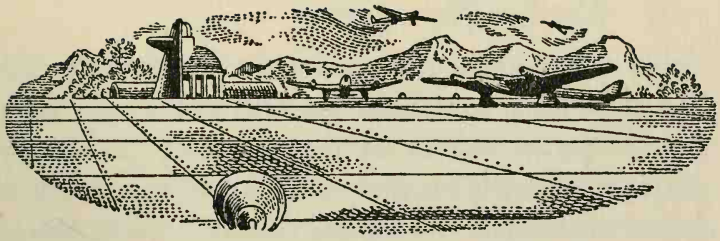
though what he does do sure is important. Oh, we'll be there all right—back on Mars!—only not for a little while yet. You'll see why as you go on. Hold your horses, that's all I say. There's all the stuff about Steve and Doctor Mac first—what happened to them when they popped off so suddenly without telling any of the rest of us; that's enough to be going on with, I reckon. What about the Yellow Cloud?—and the Canal Zone?—and Old Jellybags, eh? Have a sniff around Old Jellybags before you start worrying about us—Old Jellybags is something, I can tell you! Of course, that wasn't his real name—he didn't have any thing as simple and decent as a *Name*—oh no! Poor old Dr. McGillivray called him Discophora, and said he was "a hydromedusan or some similar coelenterate" (!)—all of which was fine and dandy (and I've copied the spelling out of one of Steve MacFarlane's notebooks), but it didn't alter the fact that . . . ugh! I prefer Old Jellybags for a name myself: it makes him *sound* a bit more comfortable at least—and he was one kind of Martian who was far from comfortable . . . !

Anyway, on with the washing: jolly old Chap One. We crop up in Chap Four or so—I mean Jacky and Paul and me. So we'll be seeing you then. All the best!

Yours,
Mike

P.S. What price Malone's Conducted Cosmic Tours Inc.?—Founder and President Michael Malone Esq., the Only Boy to have made the Interplanetary Martian Flight Twice before he was Fourteen! Join the Malone Stardusters, the Old Original Galactic Sports Club: Football, Baseball, Cricket Matches, etc., arranged between Planets: Founder and Captain, Michael Malone Esq., etc., etc., etc. Ah well . . . Better let old J.K.C. push on to Chap One before I get carried away!—M.M.

THE RED JOURNEY BACK



CHAPTER I. THE AIRSTRIP: A PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION BY JOHN KEIR CROSS

THE FIRST MARTIAN MESSAGE reached me late on a hot summer afternoon in the year 19—; and the impact of it was so fantastic as to make me indeed doubt my senses—to suspect at the least, and until I had proof positive, a miserable hoax by some misguided practical joker.

In the year in question my friend R—, of the Scottish Office of the British Broadcasting Corporation, had telephoned to my apartment in London asking if I could travel to the small village of Larkwell, near Prestwick Airport in Ayrshire, to attend and afterward report on the trials being held there of the revolutionary new Mackellar airstrip.

Roderick Mackellar himself was an old friend. He was a man of some eccentricity but remarkable

ability. I had in the past, as a radio commentator, reported at some length on his activities, which were always—partly because of the intriguing personality of the man, partly because of their own true worth—full of news value. Hence the invitation from R—to visit the site of the airstrip on which the inventor had been working for some time.

With Government backing Roderick had been experimenting with a new kind of surface for airplane landing fields. Not only was it of an almost adamantine hardness, thus requiring virtually no upkeep once it had been laid, but the metallic alloy of which it was constructed had certain remarkable properties: the whole surface was variably reactive to transmitted impulses from the planes themselves, so that, in darkness or fog, it was possible for a pilot to guide himself to a safe landing without recourse to any of the old unsatisfactory flare or chemical methods. There were many other virtues too in the Mackellar Compound —I have mentioned only these two as examples of its extreme usefulness.

The preliminary demonstrations had been totally successful. Now, near Larkwell, a full-length experimental strip had been built—a gigantic stretch of it measuring about a mile and a quarter by some 450 yards; and large-scale trials were to take place there.

I reached the village in the early morning. In this factual account I do not propose to say anything of

the excitement and color of the scene. Some two dozen publicists beside myself were present—a host of officials from the various Ministries—groups of hard-faced security men—a sprinkling of society notables and a Very Distinguished Personage Indeed, whose own interest in anything pertaining to aircraft development is well-known.

Mackellar was in a haze of delight, his round, smooth face beaming continuously, his whole person, it seemed, enveloped throughout the speeches and ceremonies with a perpetual brown cloud of the snuff to which he was a confirmed addict.

The trials themselves were spectacularly successful—so much so, indeed, that the whole occasion finished much earlier than had been anticipated. The gigantic silver ribbon of the airstrip sparkled in the sun as the planes zoomed, soared and looped above it; beyond, also sparkled the huge rolling sweep of the Atlantic; in the foreground were the groups of excited spectators, clustering around the inventor, applauding almost hysterically as test after test went through with triumphant rapidity. It was as if nothing could go wrong—the whole event was enshrouded in that rare magic of entirely successful achievement: our good, innocent Roderick was for a moment as glamorous, as popular, as idealized as the most romantic of movie stars!

In the early afternoon, after a brief picnic lunch

on the sand dunes beside the control hut, the speech-making began. The Important Personage paid glowing tribute to the snuff-covered eccentric and the snuff-covered eccentric himself stammered a few engaging words of thanks and gratification. One by one the limousines rolled northward as the distinguished visitors took their departures, until at last the only persons still at the airstrip were Roderick and me, with young Archie Borrowdale, his close companion and fellow-worker, and the celebrated Katey Hogarth, Archie's fiancée.

An air of unbelievable peace hung over the scene after the piling excitement of the day. The hot, sea-laden air was suddenly full of a great silence. We felt rested and languid, full of a lingering quiet glory—talked desultorily, and in low voices, of trivialities.

We had strolled out from the laboratory to the grassy edge of the great, lonely, shining airstrip itself. Archie, his young, thin face flushed and happy, had brought some drinks from the marquee which had housed the refreshments earlier. Katey, prettily contented, her gay summer frock a last lovely touch of color against the silver of the runway surface, sat close to the beaming inventor, her arm tucked in his.

"Let's have some music, K.C.," she said to me dreamily. "Don't let's talk any more—we've had enough talk to last us all our lives. Let's just sit here and think a bit, not very seriously, and listen to some-

thing quiet. There's bound to be something somewhere."

I unslung from my shoulder the small portable receiver I always carried with me on such outings. In itself it was a remarkable device, made for me by an amateur radio-fan friend. I am not competent to enter into technicalities, but briefly he had contrived a method whereby the casing, of a specialized material, acted as an aerial; and so reception was improved beyond all belief for a set so small. I placed this delicate instrument among us on the ground—found it difficult to balance on the tufty grass and finally established it evenly on the surface of the airstrip itself, some two feet from the edge.

"That's it," murmured Katey as I tuned. "Some Mozart—something quiet and nice. No—Schubert, isn't it?"

I had indeed, after rambling through some jazz and a quiz program, discovered a small Continental orchestra playing the *Rosamunda* overture and ballet music. The curious thing was that however delicately I tuned, and despite the perfection of the set, there was considerable distortion—and some irritating interference.

Katey hummed gently to herself, echoing the lovely Schubertian melodies.

"Dear, gentle Schubert," she said softly, breaking off for a moment. "If he could have foreseen that

we'd be listening to him in a place like this, after all we've known of marvels today! Strange, isn't it—to think how full the air always is of radio messages and music and voices talking—all the time, all around us . . . and it's only when you tap them with a little magic box like this that they come to life. I wonder what happens to old wireless waves?—I mean, after we *have* picked them up like this? I wonder if they go on and on—right out into space, perhaps. I wonder if there are people on Mars, maybe, who could pick them up too if they only had the right kind of apparatus—if they had huge, huge aerials and special kinds of radio sets . . ."

Her voice went on. But at the accidental mention of Mars, my own thoughts had suddenly flown to MacFarlane—to that lost friend of mine who had, so long before, gone off to Mars and was lost there to all human contact.

". . . I mean," said Katey, her voice a dreamy whisper in the heat and languor of the afternoon, "—I mean, if only the Martians *could*. You keep on telling us that there *are* Martians, K.C. There were those friends of yours who went there. For all we know the air all around might be full of messages from Mars—and if only we could tap them . . ."

Her voice trailed away at a sudden exclamation from Archie Borrowdale. I saw him leaning forward

intently toward the little portable, his hand raised, his head on one side.

"Wait, Katey," he said. "Listen—listen, Roddy. That interference of yours, K.C.—*listen* . . . !"

I did listen—to the continual interference rather than the music itself, the thin crackling running constantly behind *Rosamunda.* And there was an instinctive tightening around my heart, a flash of thought and understanding quite fabulous!

"Some amateur somewhere," said Mackellar, yawning. "It's Morse, of course. Some amateur somewhere —or a ship out there," with a nod toward the sea beyond the airstrip.

But I had a wild and different thought . . . ! Long, long before, when Stephen MacFarlane and I were boys together, we had experimented youthfully in wireless transmission and reception, had filled the attics of our house with primitive valves, crystals, transformers, to the despair of our parents. We had developed, as boys do, a private code call-sign in Morse. Now, on that lonely beach—as we leaned forward, all four, to listen more closely to the hazy, desperately weak "interference" behind the sweet Schubertian music—I heard, as I had not heard it for a quarter of a century, that ancient cryptic call-sign, mingling with the other chattering messages in Morse! No one, no one in all the world knew the se-

cret of that call-sign but MacFarlane and myself . . . and MacFarlane was not, alas, even in the world at all—was millions of miles away across the blue bright sky above us, if indeed he even lived. . . .

The gigantic thought choked me. I remembered Katey's casual words—no longer casual: ". . . if they had huge, huge aerials . . . for all we know the air all around might be full of messages . . . if there were *huge, huge aerials!*"

Before me, measuring a mile and a quarter by 450 yards, was a huge aerial indeed!—the metallic airstrip itself; and on it, picking up its messages through the casing, was that small specialized receiver . . . !

The air—the still quiet air of that desolate corner of our own revolving globe—*was* full of messages: from a man lost far in space, 35,000,000 miles away! The thought was enormous—too enormous to be grasped in that first flash of half-instinctive understanding: the coincidence was vast—too vast . . .

But—it had happened!—the coincidence that I, of all Earth's millions, should be *there*, at that one spot where contact with Mars was freakishly possible. It had happened indeed; and from its happening I came to a knowledge of what had befallen my two lost friends on that "Red Journey Back" of theirs. . . .

The first Martian message, as I have said, reached me on a hot summer afternoon in the year 19—. The

last came some two months later. And it was that final message which spurred us all to desperate action—which took the three young people of the Angry Planet adventure back across space. For the last message ran:

"Save us—in heaven's name try to save McGillivray and me from *them*—from . . ." (message broken—an angry wave of bad reception—a pause —then finally:) "The children . . . There is only one way in which you *can* save us. . . . Bring the children—somehow bring the children! Paul and Jacqueline and Michael . . . Ask no questions—no time, no time to answer; but *bring those three to Mars or we are lost* . . . !"

So the new adventure began, then; but before it did, another adventure had almost ended: the adventure of MacFarlane and McGillivray on their own second flight to the Angry Planet. It is described in the next few chapters—but I must first, I think, in bringing this personal contribution to a close, sketch out as briefly as possible the rapid sequence of events following that initial moment of contact on the Ayrshire coast.

The excitement among us, of course, was immense. With the utmost delicacy we tuned and retuned the set—until long after dusk had fallen,

when we worked on by the light of flares. When we removed the receiver from the airstrip the messages ceased; when we tried replacing the receiver on other parts of the runway, they came back in varying degrees of strength. On that first occasion the best reception was achieved on a spot some two yards to the west (nearer the sea) than the original point of contact.

Even then it must be said that the messages were desperately indistinct—a few isolated words and phrases mingling with the music which still continued from the small Continental station. We made out words like: ". . . establish contact . . . find . . . try to communicate . . ." Once, startlingly clear, there was the phrase: ". . . find John Keir Cross . . . author . . . tell him, tell him . . ." And at periodic intervals there was repeated the cryptic call-sign which I have mentioned—the one index we had at this stage that the whole business was not a hoax.

The messages stopped abruptly just after eight o'clock; and from the few fragments coherently received before the cessation, we were able to gather that the sender would transmit again two days following at the same time and for the same period—from "six until eight"—and the curious postscript phrase thereafter: "Earth time, British Summer Time, as far as we are able to calculate it here."

We were stunned—utterly dazed indeed as we stood there regarding each other in the yellow flare light. Both Archie and Mackellar were believers in the previous history of McGillivray and MacFarlane; and it was the inventor who cried, "Depend upon it—if it's the last thing I do we explore the thing further! We can research, Archie—you and I both. If it can work one way it can work the other! We can improve the reception—we can let MacFarlane know that he has established contact and find out how he is transmitting—and so perfect our own methods. Whatever happens we'll pursue this thing to the end!"

And they did. When I returned from my broadcast in Edinburgh, I found that my two technical friends had already devoted much time to the problem—were confident that the reception the following night would be improved. Alas for our hopes! On that occasion, although we placed and replaced the receiving apparatus on various parts of the runway, results were poor: at only one moment was there any definite sign that MacFarlane was transmitting as he had promised, and even then the messages were broken repetitions of what we had heard on the first occasion.

But Mackellar and Archie continued their experiments. We enlisted the help of the friend who had made the portable for me—found out from him something of the composition of the metallic sub-

stance of its casing. We established a small secondary laboratory close to the runway, devoted only to research work on the radio problem. We made contact with the Continental station using the original wave band we had tuned to and persuaded them to stay off the air for brief periods during the hours mentioned by MacFarlane in his messages as forthcoming transmission hours.

And gradually, as the days went on, we achieved success. It will be known, of course, even to those of you not deeply versed in radio mechanics, that Katey's original idea was quite wrong: the reception we achieved had little to do with the actual size of the airstrip aerial. It was not only because of its sheer *dimension* that we obtained results, but because of its particular composition in relation to the composition of the smaller receiving aerial in the original portable set—that, and the fact that it was an exposed and directional surface (moved by the very rotation of the Earth) of some area, capable, therefore, of receiving beam transmission with a greater likelihood of success, over such enormous distances, than a smaller but equally powerful aerial. (I am sorry if this seems muddled—it may even be scientifically inaccurate in my attempt to put it all into lay language! The truth is that I must plead indulgence in being lamentably inexpert at any kind of technical explanation. Readers who are curious about this and

other technical aspects of the experiments may find enlightenment in the full scientific account of them now being prepared by Mackellar himself, with Archie Borrowdale's assistance.

In the end, we succeeded in isolating the Martian messages. We built a transmitter with which (through the airstrip again) we hoped to make reverse contact; and toward eight o'clock one magic evening, almost three weeks after the first freak reception, there came one excited chattering sentence in Morse across the vastnesses of space to proclaim that MacFarlane knew, at last, that his own long patient endeavor had met with success—that we could receive him, could converse with him. . . .

In the next few days we went from strength to strength. It was possible now to arrange more convenient times for communication; and in periods ranging from an hour to two hours at a stretch, and mostly in the early mornings, we "spoke" from world to world. From first to last—and again for technical reasons which I am not competent to describe—communication from MacFarlane to us was clearer than it ever was from us to MacFarlane: he told us that he could hear us only imperfectly, even at the best of times—enough only to comprehend that we were listening and had understood his own communications.

Whatever all the final scientific judgments and

conclusions, I only know, myself, that we established beyond every shadow of doubt that the Martian messages were genuine—I was convinced of it myself from a hundred and one small evidences long, long before our rescue expedition set out across space and found confirmation in the shape of MacFarlane and McGillivray themselves.

I know only that, indeed; and that as the weeks went by in the remote small hut beside the airstrip, we gradually pieced together the narrative which follows in the next chapter. Katey Hogarth, who once had studied shorthand-typing before embarking on a stage career, sat solemnly by our sides through the hours, noting down and transcribing every word and phrase which reached us—gave up all her professional engagements to do so.

"I was in at the birth," she announced grimly, on one occasion when Archie commented on her pale looks after many, many sleepless nights. "I was in at the birth, my boy, and I'll be in at the death or my name isn't Katey Hogarth!"

She hardly knew how right she was!

So, then, I make my own bow, with apologies for having taken up so much time and space with what is, after all, no more than a prelude to the main adventure, although interesting enough, I hope, in its own right. Apart from an occasional editorial com-

ment and some words of final summing up when all the tale is told, I pass the task of authorship to other hands.

May I say only, as a concluding comment, that although in due course MacFarlane himself worked over and even rewrote the chronicle built by Katey, I reproduce it here, in Chapter Two, almost exactly as it was revealed to us in the little hut in Ayrshire before there was any thought of a possible rescue expedition.

The Red Journey Back, then; how it was achieved and the strange creatures encountered at its end; among them—

Old Jellybags! I told you—just wait!—M.M.

CHAPTER II. MacFARLANE'S NARRATIVE: THE BROKEN RADIO MESSAGES RECEIVED ON TWENTY-SEVEN CONSECUTIVE NIGHTS BUILT TO A CONTINUOUS CHRONICLE BY CATHERINE W. HOGARTH

Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more!—

—ONCE MORE INDEED: once more unto the breach—the vast eternal breach of outer space itself!

As we had experienced it twice before (less powerfully on the return from Mars, because of the smaller gravity pull), my companion and I felt the swift helpless plunge into blacked-out unconsciousness as the powerful rocket jets—the *tuyères*—of the improved *Albatross* screamed into action that day long ago, when we left earth for the second time.

And as the intolerable pressure eased, as I instinctively adjusted myself to the violent rush of speed which had forced the black-out, and swam back to

life through a red throbbing of pain, it was to find myself exulting in a wild triumph. We had proved, again we had proved the splendor of Andrew McGillivray's achievement in designing the gleaming *Albatross*—we had demonstrated to a doubting world that man could leave the very world, release himself forever from its bonds. And if the world itself knew nothing of the occasion, that somehow intensified the triumph's savor!

To a casual passer-by, a wanderer in the Pitlochry hills that day, it would have seemed as if the shining fishlike shape of the great projectile had poised itself for a moment above the launching ramp in the stockade near Dr. McGillivray's house—had lingered tremblingly, spouting fierce fire; and then had vanished into the empyrean in a dispersing trail of white vapor raggedly drifting across the bright summer scene. With no other trace than that thin cloud, we were gone. Behind—already far, far behind—were all bitternesses, all jealousies, all unworthy doubts; before us the deep blue-black immensity of the void where all human weakness—all human strength and glory, even—dwindle to meaninglessness . . . !

As this great thought smoothed away the unworthiness of my first sense of triumph, I lay

languidly on the soft mattress which had protected me from the immense first shock of the start-off and watched McGillivray at work.

He had plainly recovered consciousness a little before I had—had already pulled himself forward to the instrument panel. Through the perspex of the automatic oxygen mask which had been pumping life into our lungs during our period of helplessness, I saw his eyes in a bright gleam of excitement—no doubt a lingering triumph comparable to my own. He watched the instrument panel closely—and suddenly, with a swift energy, threw over the small lever which would release the secondary fuel . . . then fell back again himself on the absorbent mattress.

I closed my eyes—and steeled myself for the second bout of brief unconsciousness. A powerful, dangerous-seeming shuddering ran through all the ship. You will know, of course, the great principle on which the *Albatross* operated. To achieve the fabulous speed necessary to escape from Earth's gravity pull, so much power would be required as to strike dead in the very moment of take-off any human travelers in the spaceship—to say nothing of subjecting the outer envelope of the rocket itself to an intolerable friction from the atmosphere belt. The Doctor had therefore designed two separate sets of *tuyères* to come into operation—two separate types

of fuel were used. The first was a highly concentrated essence of acetylene gas to effect the initial great "leap" at a speed powerful enough to remove us from Earth, but not so powerful as to destroy life in the travelers—only to render them unconscious, as I have described it. Then, at some distance from the Earth's surface, when everything—including the human body—is very much lighter, a second fuel was touched off, a fuel of the Doctor's own development (an adaptation, as I understand it, of the highly dangerous atomic hydrogen). By the time the Earth's atmosphere had been left behind, at a distance of some 200 miles from the surface, the total desired speed could be reached without discomfort—a speed well above the pull of gravity (seven miles per second). At this point the motors could be shut off altogether, leaving the rocket to go on traveling for as long as was necessary—until, in short, the *tuyères* had to be brought into operation again either for steering or braking purposes.

The second bout of black-out was shorter than the first—was hardly more than a momentary swimming giddiness, coupled with a bewildering sense of utter lightness. By the time it had passed it was possible for us both to rise from the sorbo mattresses—indeed, it was almost impossible for us *not* to rise from them!—For by this time we were virtually without

weight—could float in the little living cabin in any direction in which we cared to push ourselves—had to contrive all movement by means of foot straps and magnetic boots.

And even as I did float clear of the mattress—grabbed chucklingly at Doctor Mac to steady myself, thence levering my way to the "floor" and a point of comparative stability—even at that moment I saw (in my mind's eye only, of course) the floating, astonished shapes of the three young people who had accompanied us on the first voyage. I glanced at the massive metal door of the food store in which they had concealed themselves on that occasion—half expected it to waver open as it had done then and the three young bodies come drifting, plunging, soaring toward me! But on the second Martian flight of the good ship *Albatross* there were no stowaways—we had checked on that most carefully before our departure. Paul, Jacqueline and Michael were already many hundreds of miles away from us—somewhere beyond the milky mistiness we could see through the portholes. And so the first amused thought was followed by the wistful reaction: would we ever see our three first traveling companions again?—would we ourselves ever return through the white milky mist?—would we even reach the lost planet toward which we aimed . . . ?

I took off the oxygen mask—suffered a moment's sense of suffocation as my lungs adjusted themselves to breathing in the synthetically air-filled cabin.

"We've done it, Mac," I gasped—articulating with difficulty at first as my "weightless" tongue seemed to waver helplessly in my mouth. "We've done it, heaven be praised!"

He nodded brightly, maskless himself now; then turned his attention once more to the control panel and pushed forward the lever to shut off all means of mechanical propulsion.

And instantly there was silence—a silence so intense as for a moment to seem nightmarish. We traveled at a speed far, far beyond that of gravity; yet in the little close cabin of the spaceship it was as if everything was still, more still and tranquil than it is possible to describe. (I have always believed that we, on Earth, even in our quietest moments, are strangely aware, deep within ourselves, of the constant swift movement of the great globe which we inhabit. Now, in the rocket, it was as if that very knowledge had gone, so that the stillness and silence were beyond all comparison to you who have never left your mother world. . . .)

Behind—there are, of course, no directions in space, and so I use such terms as "before" and "behind" only comparatively—behind, the milky mistiness had resolved and seemingly dispersed. It was as

if there hung in the sky above us a gigantic relief map in brilliant color, in startling greens and blues, vivid yellows . . . a map constantly shrinking, elongating, flattening itself out as if reflected in a huge distorting mirror: a map first—recognizably—of Scotland, the ragged West Coast outflung into the green-blue sea, the Lion's Head of the far north cut off from the main body by the straight silver knife line of the Caledonian Canal . . . then, later, as the whole curving surface seemed to wheel and steady itself, a map of the whole of Britain, the whole of Europe as more and more recognizable outlines came into view: then Norway, the white gleam of Greenland, the brilliant sweep of northern Canada—the immense but shrinking bulk of the United States (New York as a dark vague clustering at the start, growing smaller and smaller to a veritable pin point and lost at last altogether in the whole sparkling panorama of the curving globe) . . . all, all merged and flowed to a blinding, moonlike phosphorescence, a great ball hung in the dark luminous velvet of the void. . . .

I had seen it all before—have attempted to describe it before; yet I was awed, moved to very tears by the gigantic spectacle all over again. *What should such creatures as I do, crawling between heaven and earth?* What signified now all human pride and wretchedness?

Far, far beyond, farther and still farther from the

huge stark orb of the ever-burning sun—one little star among the myriads clustering brilliantly against the pall—lay the world we sought to revisit. As we went on into space, all thoughts of Earth herself were gradually left behind—we thought only of the marvels that perhaps were waiting for us, the old friends and enemies from our first brief sojourn whom perhaps we would re-encounter, the new mysteries to be explored in those remoter corners of the Angry Planet we had not had time to reach.

We remembered the last great battle between the Beautiful People and the Terrible Ones—the slim shapes of the delicate plant people overwhelmed under the brutish attack of their subterranean enemies —who were also a species of plant, according to Dr. McGillivray's theory, but of a different nature: squat and fungoid—descendants, he believed, of an earlier group of carnivorous plants which had flourished in the long-dead days when Mars had supported animal as well as vegetable life.

We remembered the violence of the great volcanic eruption and earthquake which had forced us to leave the battlefield ourselves on our first Martian visit, lest the *Albatross* be swamped by the seething lava, be shattered by the falling red-hot boulders from the blazing mountain above us. . . . We remembered it all indeed—the crumpling, melting domes of the immense glass bubble houses in which the

Beautiful People passed the cold Martian nights and long bitter winters; the final mortal duel between the leaders of the two great species—the creature we knew as the Center slicing with his long crystalline sword at the vestigial jaws of the malignant chief of the Terrible Ones; above all, the last heroic gesture of Malu, our first and last friend in all that alien world, as he leaped to save Mike Malone from destruction at the very moment of the take-off.

His "voice" had come to us through the raging din of conflict—that thin strange "sound" we heard within our very minds as a manifestation of the telepathic communication we had formed with the Martians (so that creatures of all languages, or even none, could understand each other on the dying planet—the very static plants on the red sandy plains themselves, in some primitive measure).

"Farewell, strangers!" So Malu's thoughts had come into us in that last moment. "Farewell—and good journey! Remember Malu the Warrior—Malu the Tall, Prince of the Beautiful People. . . ."

His slender shape had fallen back then—back to the edge of the saucer which seethed with the lava. He had moved swiftly around on the long rootlike tendrils at the base of his trunk by which the plant people achieved movement—had swung up in his side tendrils the great silica sword which that day had wrought such havoc in the ranks of the Terrible

Ones. Our last glimpse of him had been of two more of the monsters advancing toward him, their great white crouching shapes aglow from the flames surrounding.

Had he survived? Would we see him again?—now?—at the end of our new journey?

So we wondered as the days sped on—and yet there were no "days," only such calculations of days as we were able to make from the revolutions of the rapidly diminishing sphere which had been our world and on which, hard as it was to believe, our friends, our enemies, our millions of human brothers and sisters labored, fought, died, were happy or miserable—ate, drank and were merry (at least we knew that that was what the indomitable young Mike Malone was doing—eating and being merry!).

Throughout the journey, as we came so closely into contact in the small cabin of the *Albatross*, I found myself nearer to Andrew McGillivray as a person than I had ever been before. We had shared much adventure in the past, it is true; but then we had been accompanied by Jacky and the others. Now, in our joint sense of exile so many millions of miles away from all we had ever counted as home, we came to know each other in a way that few men do. He still was young, for one who had achieved so much. His

mind was swift and alert, but gentle and with much wisdom in it. He was brave: a man of action and decision when the occasion required, yet reserved and modest—a dreamer as well as a warrior. And I choose the word quite deliberately: he was indeed a warrior —a veritable crusader, his lofty ambitions realized as we sped across the void. He was a leader indeed for such an enterprise as we were now engaged in—the stuff of which great discoverers have always been made.

So we traveled. The world receded—grew to as tiny a pin point of light as Mars had been at the journey's beginning. The smaller planet, in its turn, waxed as Earth waned—grew to a diminutive red disc, then recognizably became a sphere. As we drew closer, we saw the two small moons, Phobos and Deimos, each barely more than ten miles in diameter, circling rapidly around it, Phobos in some seven hours, Deimos in a little over thirty—and Phobos, the closer of the two, busily engaged in its circuit in an opposite direction from its twin, so that it rose in the west and set in the east.

One by one the familiar outlines grew clearer: we saw the two brilliant polar caps, the great red patches of the continents, the splashes of darker green we had taken before to be seas or sea beds. On this occasion,

it seemed, we were approaching at a slightly different angle to the planet's axis—our view of the dark green areas was subtly different: they seemed less concentrated—ran occasionally in long straight narrow lines —broke off—began again—continued . . . until, at one moment, as we neared the atmosphere belt, they formed a perfect intertwining network, strangely symmetrical in its design.

Mac, as he watched, his hand poised over the controls which would force the nose *tuyères* into life and so brake our fall ready for a landing, breathed quietly, "The Canals, Steve—great glory, the famous Martian Canals themselves! We saw nothing of them on the last trip—I had meant to try to find out the reason for the old legend—if there was anything at all in it. . . . This time we will find out!"

"But surely the old Canal theory has been exploded long ago." I smiled, thinking he was joking.

"Ah, not quite! In its original form, yes. It was Schiaparelli the Italian who first proclaimed the Canals in the 1870's. He called them 'canals,' meaning only channels—lines, in his own tongue. But the idea caught the popular fancy—the suggestion that if there were Canals there was active intelligent life. Lowell, the American, developed the whole notion—he drew fantastic maps of the Canals and showed them to be sometimes single, sometimes double—he even claimed that the positioning of them

changed from time to time. Other observers who saw the marks declared that they were only marks—they were optical illusions, because of the imperfect conditions under which Mars is ever observed from earth. Then the theory was advanced that at least they *might* be waterways—but narrow waterways; and what we saw as straight shadowy lines were not the 'Canals' themselves, but the belts of vegetation on each side of the Canals. . . . No one has ever known the truth; but, by heaven, we will before we're much older!"

As he spoke, he threw over the lever; and within a few moments, as we rushed toward the surface, there was a brief return of the old black-out sensation—but, as I have said, this time less potent because of the smaller gravity pull of the Angry Planet itself. My last conscious thought as I sank into the throbbing pain of the moment was that the surface toward which we raced at such appalling speed was less *red* after all than I remembered it—was a deep misty yellowish color, almost sinister . . . then I swam deep into the blackness of utter insensibility. I remembered one thing more through the moment's sharp pain: the quiet gentleness of our previous landing—the twilight of the early Martian dawn—the soft cool breeze which had assailed us as we opened the rocket entrance port—the peaceful glory at last of the bright clear sunlight as we stepped

for the first time in all human experience on the alien soil. . . .

We were confident: too confident!

We landed on Mars indeed—as successfully as on the previous occasion. The two stocky landing wings shot out from the back of the rocket at a point near the nose, and with their help we coasted gently through the sparse atmosphere to a final standstill.

Again, as on the first occasion, there was a deep twilight in the little cabin as we struggled to our feet, adjusting ourselves to the sensation of having weight once more—less weight than on Earth, but still weight.

"The dawn," breathed Mac triumphantly. "The dawn, Steve! Exactly as it was last time. Home again —home!"

He stumbled blithely toward the double air-lock door in the cabin's side. I stood unsteadily for a moment, aware once more—and uneasily, for some reason—of the strange *yellow* tinge which intershot the dusk surrounding. I recalled a conversation with an astronomer friend back on Earth, who had asked me half-jokingly (for he was one of the doubters who plagued us after the first trip) if, during our sojourn on the Angry Planet, we had encountered any of the strange phenomena known to Earth observers as the

"Yellow Clouds"—great blankets of some kind of yellowish mist sweeping rapidly across the Martian surface, plainly visible even on photographs taken in infra-red light.

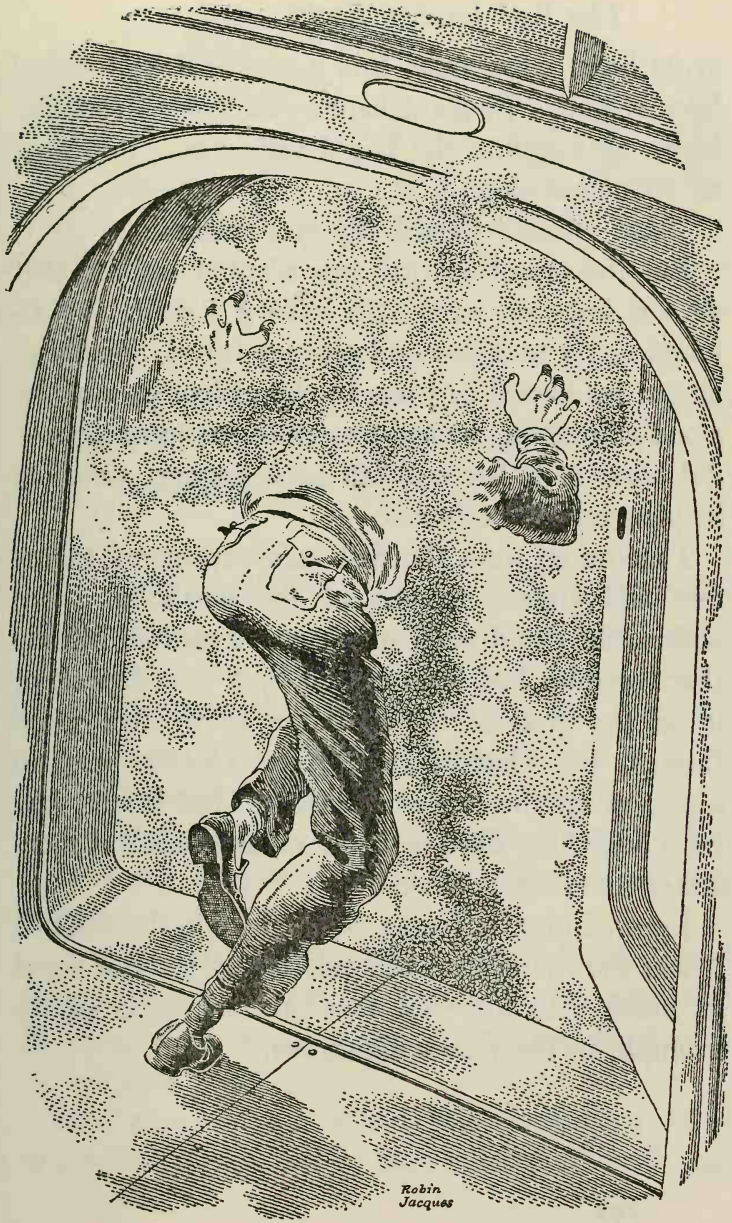
An instinctive fear made me raise my hand to restrain my adventuresome companion. But with the memory of our previous successful landing still bright in him, he was already at the double doors and tugging them open.

The first door swung back with a metallic crash—Mac, in his enthusiasm, had forgotten his increased Martian strength. An instant later the second door also swung open—outward; and even allowing for Mac's strength it was as if it had been ripped away from the rocket's side by a giant swift hand the instant the lock was released. . . .

We landed on Mars—but not quietly and serenely as we had landed last time!

For one moment—one nightmare moment—I saw my dear friend Andrew McGillivray outlined against a thick swirling screen of brilliant yellow. He screamed—I heard him scream. I rushed forward in a panic. As I approached the door I felt my lungs bursting, my eyes smarting, my whole skin in a violent irritation from the few wisps of the raging Yellow Cloud which penetrated the double doors.

I stretched out my hands desperately to assist my poor friend, in the midst of the typhoon while I was


Robin
Jacques

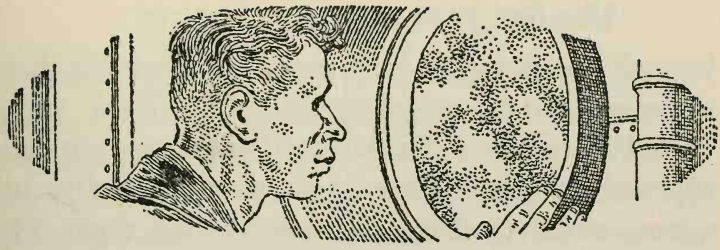
at its bitter edges only. But it was as if he too had been snatched by giant hands—he seemed veritably to fly, to soar into the bright yellow horror swirling all about our ship.

"Mac—Mac!" I cried, my eyes streaming.

But the monstrous pall was silent. I realized that all was lost—we were both lost—if I made any attempt as yet to follow and save my friend. Somehow, almost maddened as I was by the violent pain of the cloud's irritation, I fought to close the inner door—did close it at last and fell back gasping, weeping, helpless into the cabin.

I recovered from the first pain—staggered to my feet and crossed to one of the portholes. From within, the cloud was darker—and I realized bitterly that the dusk had been caused by a thin deposit of it on the glass of the portholes as we had raced through the Martian atmosphere. Outside was no night, as on the previous occasion, but bright day; yet a bright day filled with the monstrous silent menace of that hideous Cloud!

I peered into its depths. Somewhere in the thick of it was the friend who had traveled so far and dared so much with me—lost now, at the height of his triumph, in the yellow nightmare.



CHAPTER III. MacFARLANE'S NARRATIVE CONTINUED

I FOUND HIM. There is little point in delaying the announcement of the fact, in building an atmosphere of suspense for the sake of creating a cheap dramatic effect. You know full well, from the messages we have already exchanged, that he is by my side now—and therefore I found him.

But I did not find him without difficulty. And there was a bittersweetness in the success of my long search.

Andrew McGillivray, by a desperate stroke of irony, has seen none of the marvels of the new world he traveled so far to explore. From that day to this he has been blind.

And worse—much worse. The great clear mind which had brought us so far, achieved so much, has

been shadowed over a little from the agonies of that moment when he was snatched into the Cloud.

As I sit here now, in the small enclosure near the approaching Canal from which we do not dare to remove ourselves, it is to see him at some slight distance away from me, quietly staring with his unseeing eyes toward the great dark swamps which contain (to me, who *have* seen) so much nightmare. He sways a little—forms his lips occasionally in silent words and phrases.

There are moments—many, many moments—when his mind is as clear as it ever was, when he is normal and healthy; almost the old Doctor Mac I knew in the Pitlochry days. But there are other moments when he seems to sink into a deep indifference —to forget where he is and even who he is.

And it goes deeper—much deeper. There is even a fear in me that I too . . . but no—not yet—and a thought not to be faced. But if once I do yield to the strange, awesome creature now confronting us, whom yet I have to describe—

But not yet; there is much else to be recounted. . . .

On that first hopeless morning of our landing I stayed for a long time by the porthole staring out into the swirling yellow fog. I saw now, clearly, that

it was no ordinary mist as we might know it upon Earth, but a great seething mass of diminutive scurrying particles, seed shapes—million upon million of them, hurtling forward in one direction. And I had the impression too, recollecting the period when the door had been open, that they were not wind-borne; there had been no sound of hurricane—no shrill scream—as one again might have heard it on Earth; the spores (I use the word now, since we established later that they were indeed a kind of spore) traveled nightmarishly *of their own volition!*—and silently, devilishly silently, as all else on Mars. . . .

And also—can I confess it?—it was as if there came to me, even through the thick perspex of the window, an emanation of unutterable wickedness. In the strange Martian telepathic medium of communication it was as if the very spores were *wishing us ill.* There were no articulate words from them in my mind—no definable thoughts as such; no more than a deep uneasiness—a malevolent hypnotic *sense* from those trillions of rushing particles of living dust.

The Cloud swept on—for hours and many hours. But at last I had an impression that it was thinning a little—the very lessening of the pressure of the evil thoughts was an indication that the storm was passing.

Rapidly I set to exploring our clothing store for some kind of protective garments. I found water-

proofs and thick hip-boots—an asbestos helmet, even, and a complete suit of a similar fireproof material packed by Mac in case we should ever encounter another volcanic eruption on the Angry Planet.

I swathed myself—wore also my oxygen mask with the gas itself switched off from the cylinder—found fireproof gloves and bound my head around with cloths.

And by this time, indeed, the yellowness outside had almost gone. I was able to distinguish, beyond the slight saucer in which the spaceship lay, a vast extending plain of the Martian type familiar to us: a great level stretch of reddish sandy soil with distant mountain ranges beyond—high, conelike mountains, since in their formation in the far depths of Martian history the planet's gravity pull was less than Earth's, and so threw the ranges more narrowly upward.

I saw even the tall clustering shapes of the old familiar cactuslike plants, in their groups of varying sizes, the long fleshy fingers upstretched to the sky; and at the spectacle much of my fear departed. They were veritably like a glimpse of home.

I waited a little longer. On the plain outside there still hovered an occasional drifting wisp of Cloud, speeding low-lyingly. One or two of the big cactus plants were yellowly tinged for a moment; but gradually the clinging spores seemed to detach themselves and make off. The same had happened to the thin-

ning film of them which had clung to our rocket windows—as if they were spies, indeed, peering inward—exploring the mysteries of the strange shape on the plain.

So at last—very cautiously at first, lest there might be a trap, lest even some poisonous effect from the Cloud still lingered—I prepared to leave the rocket. I lowered myself slowly down the small metallic rope ladder, my free hand ready at the oxygen-control switch of my mask, if there should be any breathing difficulty. But all was well. On the ground I very gently exposed for a moment a small skin area at my wrist—waited for any sign of irritation—then joyously, when I felt no effect at all, took off both gloves and ventured to remove my mask altogether.

For a moment I stayed silent, then called out, "Mac—Mac—where are you, Mac?"

And my voice went thinly, dispersingly, across the vast silent plain.

I called again, took a step forward—and found myself instantly rolling clumsily over the shifting red soil a good twenty feet from the rocket. I had forgotten again the weaker gravitational pull! (The actual ratio to the Earth's gravity pull is in the nature of .38), as I remember from our previous experiments: thus,

a man weighing 150 pounds on Earth would weigh only 57 on Mars, yet be muscularly equipped to move his full 150. . . .

I steadied myself—called again—ventured farther and farther from the rocket in the direction I assumed Mac might have taken when he seemed to have been snatched into the Cloud.

Then suddenly, as I stumbled forward, still unaccustomed a little to the different gravitational conditions, I became aware—more and more powerfully aware—of a strange *urge* to change direction, to move obliquely to the right. It was as if I *knew*, entirely confidently, that I would find him there; and, at the very moment of turning in my tracks, the solution broke over me: the plants—the clustering groups of the cactus plants on all sides—*they* were guiding me!

We had landed on a different part of the planet, many, many miles from the site of our previous landing. In spite of all our careful calculations, our attempt to revisit the home territory of the Malu group of the Beautiful People, that had been inevitable. But nevertheless, as we afterward discovered, the plants here knew us—or knew of us; for we had grown, it seemed, in the interval between the two trips, to some kind of *legend* among these strange sentient creatures: we were the "strangers from across

the skies"—the friends of the plant masters, the Beautiful People.

You will know that the static, leathery cactus plants of the Martian plains are too primitive to be capable of coherent *thought*. From them, either to us or to the Beautiful Ones, there come only general impulses of a telepathic nature—broad messages of danger, of discovery, of disturbance and the like. The Beautiful People themselves are much more highly developed. They had, in the distant past, uprooted themselves from the enchaining soil—and so are capable of movement on the clustering tendrils at the base of their slender trunks, in a broad resemblance to walking or shuffling. They had also developed their original sensitivity to light. (Many Earth plants are noticeably sensitive to light—the sunflower, for an example—and many can move on detached root tendrils—the iris, the convolvulus, even the humble vegetable marrow.) So, after many years of evolution, certain cellular areas near the "flower" on the top of the Martian trunk stem have become virtually "eyes." And the smaller side tendrils, like the snaky "arms" of an octopus, have been developed so as to be able to grasp and hold external objects, like weapons. Thus, the Beautiful People have a physical resemblance, although only distantly, to the human frame itself; and, like us, they have a tradition,

a *science*—they have a whole way of life not without its alien beauty. . . .

But this is an unwarranted digression. Now, under the impulse of the crude directions from the more primitive cactus plants, I leaped and ran joyously across the plain; and found my friend at last—broken, sick unto the very death.

I thought at first that he *was* dead when I saw him huddled in the shelter of one of the taller plant clusters. I had the impression, as I leaped forward, that he had positively been sheltered there—had been caught in his flight in the Cloud by the great writhing fingerlike leaves of this group of Martian plants, and so had fallen to the ground and been protected from the evil onslaught of the yellow spores. And this I later found to be correct. . . .

I carried him back to the *Albatross*—it was an easy enough task with my increased strength and his diminished weight.

I tended him—brought him back to life. For many, many days—I lost all count—he lay motionless in the little cabin, staring sightlessly straight ahead. Once or twice he talked incoherently, and in a soft, barely audible voice. And as time went on I formed the impression that he was reliving a kind of dream, a kind of communicated *vision* which had come into

his mind as he had been swept along enwrapped in the evil spore cloud. The one word that kept recurring was: *Discophora*. Over and over again he muttered it, shudderingly. It was as if a coherent picture of some kind had built itself up within his head, communicated by the trillions of hurrying spores—for they too, like all else on Mars, perhaps had certain broad telepathic powers. He might even have "seen," in his mind's eye, something of the source of emanation of the Cloud itself.

"Discophora—discophora . . ."

And one day—suddenly—it recurred to me that as a scientific man he always thought and spoke in scientific terms. We had even joked about it in the past—his habit of referring even to the simple rabbit of the Pitlochry Hills as *lepus cuniculus*, for example.

Hastily I searched through his small library of scientific books in the cabin.

I found it—yet it made little sense, except for one small particular.

Discophora: the common jellyfish; a hydromedusan or some similar coelenterate; sea-jelly; sunfish. They consist of a whitish, translucent, jellylike substance. Their tentacles bear stinging cells, *the effect of which is to benumb, if not kill, any living creature which they touch. . . .*"

It made little sense indeed—except for that one strange particular. Before me, on the mattress

on which he had slept during the long interplanetary journey, was a living creature indeed benumbed—blinded—stunned to mental helplessness by some deadly stinging agency. And I remembered my own brief physical sufferings from the flying particles before I managed to close the cabin doors. . . .

I shuddered and set the book aside. And for a moment it was as if I too had a sudden vision, conveyed to me perhaps from the obsessed mind in the cabin with me, of a gigantic nightmare white jelly, swaying and quivering against a dark tortuous background of . . . of what?

One word more Mac uttered in those first days of his illness. One day he raised himself suddenly, his blinded eyes staring in sudden awe and terror—but with a strange triumph in them too, a triumph I had seen in his healthy eyes many times before when he had made some startling, half-instinctive discovery.

"The Brain," he cried. "Discophora! The Brain—the *Brain!*"

There is no way in which I can describe the potent menace he managed to convey in his tone.

The time went on. We had enough food in the cabin for many months if necessary. Gradually, as the days passed, my patient came back to physical health at least, if not yet full mental awareness. But there

were signs of improvement even in this direction too.

I seldom ventured outside the rocket—there was no purpose in doing so until Mac should be capable of full movement with me. You who listen to me across the interminable void can have no far notion of the desolate loneliness of those long, long weeks of utter isolation. I was alone in an alien world with a sick, a desperately sick man. The very silence was a source of nightmare—I longed even for one of the rare Martian storms to break it, for at least an eruption, however dangerous, from one of the great volcanoes in the distant mountain ranges.

It was at this time, while I mooned haplessly in the little cabin, that I formed the first wild idea perhaps to make contact with you, my dear John, on distant Earth. The notion was not so fantastic as it may at first appear. It was something that Mac had been contemplating quite seriously, even at the time of our first Martian visit. In the course of his researches among the foothills, he had discovered vast seams of a curious kind of mineral deposit which he suspected to be radioactive in a manner not known upon Earth—in no way dangerously, as in the case of atomic radioactivity. . . . It is not possible—or even necessary—for me to explain more in the course of the present narrative; we can discuss it later—we may even, if we ever meet again (God grant that it may be so!), be able to talk about it face to face. For

the moment, the fact remains that we *have* achieved contact, as you know; at our end here, through the agency of one of those very exposed mineral seams I have mentioned—a great directional aerial, as it were, beaming our messages to you—and picked up by its equivalent, your friend Mackellar's airstrip.

It was, as I say, in those early days of our return that I first had the notion to explore further the possibilities of such communication—of experimenting at least with some of the complex radio mechanisms which Mac had brought with us in the rocket. I realized that I would have to wait until he himself had further recovered from his illness before any true attempt could be made, for he knew infinitely more of such scientific subjects than I . . . but I did at least spend much time in research among the books of his small library, and even studied his own fairly comprehensive notes on the subject.

And it was one morning when I was sitting in the sunshine beside the rocket, examining those notes, that our long period of loneliness came to an end.

Poor Mac was beside me—he had recovered sufficiently to be able to descend the ladder and take the sun in the little hollow in which the *Albatross* rested. He had been sitting very quietly for a long time, staring as always straight ahead of him; but suddenly he gave a small strange cry—rose up to his feet with an

expression of pleasure such as I had never hoped to see on his face again.

I rose also—followed the direction of his sightless gaze. His arms were outstretched as if in welcome—he moved forward unsteadily across the sandy floor of the saucer.

I saw nothing—was aware of nothing beyond a curious inner excitement in my mind, a sense of *waiting*—of forthcoming pleasure indeed.

For a long moment nothing happened. I prepared to mount to the rim of the small hollow—to seek out across the plain for any sign of unusual disturbance there.

But before I had progressed more than a few steps, a figure appeared on the sky line above us—a figure slender and familiar for all its strangeness.

It stayed for a moment motionless. The smooth greenish trunk quivered slightly—the bifurcated tendrils at its base were still and poised. Then, swiftly, it came down the sandy slope toward us; and into my head there came the thin, friendly, telepathic "voice" I knew so well.

"Malu," I cried. "Malu—*Malu!*"

And the Voice came: "Malu the Tall, Prince of the Beautiful People! Welcome—welcome, O Strangers! Welcome again from the skies! You have come, as we knew you would come. Welcome—oh, welcome!"

In the Voice itself there was no expression—it was one of the features of telepathic communication that there never was. But accompanying the impersonal "words" was such a wave, a sense, of utter warmth and affection as to fill our very hearts with joy after all we had suffered.

So, at last, we came home to Mars!

CHAPTER IV. IN THE MEANTIME . . . A CONTRIBUTION BY VARIOUS HANDS

1. Michael Malone

WELL!—here goes! I said that we three "young people" would turn up in Chap Four, and here we are.

I reckon myself it's high time we had something to cheer us up at this point. I mean, I'm all for Steve MacFarlane—don't think for a moment I'm not. But these professional writing chaps do fuss on a bit when they get going; and by the time J.K.C. has edited Uncle Steve's own stuff, well, it's grand, I know, and I daresay there are chaps who will come along and read it all and say, "Whizzo, this is Literature this is—big words and commas and all that," and I won't say there hasn't been any action either, for there was the Yellow Cloud, and Malu turning up that way, just at the right minute (trust old Malu), but all the same, we could do with a change, and besides, it's all a bit sad-making about poor old Doctor Mac, so there will be no harm in a chapter stuck in here mainly by Paul and Jacky and me, just to let you know how we were

getting on at the time when Steve's messages were coming in from Mars, and old J.K.C. was sitting up there in Scotland as excited as an old hen (I wish I'd seen him—Paul said he was so fussed and pompous you'd think it was him and Marconi had invented wireless between them, with Marconi as the little fellow holding J.K.C.'s jacket while he got on and did the important work).*

So here we are—Paul and Jacky and me. And I'm starting off with a few comments to remind you all about us (except you'll know already that we were the stowaways—quite by accident—when the *Albatross* first went to Mars).

Well then: I'm Uncle Steve's nephew. (Of course! I can hear you say—but what I mean is that the others only called MacFarlane Uncle Steve, whereas he actually *is* my uncle: my mother is his sister Marian.)

Paul and Jacqueline are kind of distant Cousins of mine. Their family name is Adam. Paul is the oldest of the three of us, and I'm the youngest. They live in Dorset and I live in London—some of the time at least: my father's a Business Man, and he has to do a lot of traveling about, sometimes all over the world, and sometimes Mother and I go with him. Got it?

* Throughout, I leave the various ambiguous comments from the younger contributors entirely untouched, since they are inevitably part of their style. The discerning reader will, I trust, take them with the proverbial pinch of salt.—Editor

Right. So now I pass over to Jacky and Paul for a bit, 'cos they were in on the messages part with old J.K.C. up in Scotland. I wasn't, worse luck—or rather worse luck only in one way—jolly good luck in another. You'll see why in a minute, when I start in again myself later on in this Chapter. Cheerio for now.

2. Jacqueline Adam

In taking up my poor pen once more, on the invitation of our genial editor, to inscribe some thoughts and impressions connected with the period before our return to the Angry Planet, I do so indeed in all humility.

If I may quote the Immortal Bard of Avon, this brief essay will be "a poor thing—but mine own." I trust it will be received in that spirit of kind condescension we know to have been exercised by our readers toward our previous efforts in the field of literary composition.

Almost a year had elapsed since our return across limitless space; and my brother P— and myself had once more accustomed ourselves to our normal mode of existence after the many excitements attending our adventure.

You may judge of our surprise, therefore, when the postman one morning delivered into our hands a bulky envelope bearing a Scottish postmark!

With ill-concealed curiosity we set to an examination of its contents; and you can judge of our further surprise when they were revealed as a letter from our friend Mr. John Keir Cross in which he apprised us of the remarkable train of circumstances which had led to the establishing of communication with our erstwhile companion, Mr. S— MacF—: *viz*, the circumstances already known to the reader concerning the wireless messages received *via* Mr. Mackellar's airstrip. (What a piece of work is a man! How infinite in faculties, etc.—W. Shakespeare.)

We acquainted our parents at once with the turn events had taken; and passed on to them the request embodied in the author's epistle, namely, that if they were agreeable, and since in any event the school holidays were imminent, my brother and myself should travel to Scotland to participate at first hand in the latest stage of the adventure. He argued that in view of our previous association with Mr. MacF—we might indeed be interested in hearing from him; and added that, as a purely practical consideration, we would, by being "on the spot," so to say, be in a position to verify the authenticity of the messages received.

I need hardly say that with their usual understanding, our parents instantly expressed their agreement; our mother adding only the injunction that "we were to take care not to be carried away once more to Mars

ourselves in the event." (Little did she know the subsequent course the adventure would take! so that indeed we were, for a second time, involved in a voyage through space. But I anticipate.)

Thus it was, then, that one sunny day in the year 19—, my brother and I traveled to Scotland and there made the acquaintance of Mr. Mackellar, his assistant Mr. Archibald Borrowdale, and the distinguished performer of stage and screen, Miss Catherine Hogarth.

No words of mine can hope to convey the deep emotion which assailed us when first we heard the faint whispering messages in Morse. It was "The voice, the very voice!" (RLS)

It was with feelings equally profound that we read the narrative so carefully built by Miss Hogarth from the disjointed fragments of Mr. MacF—'s communications. The messages went on, of course, from the point that you yourselves have reached; and so gradually the narrative was built further—as you will see in due course. And they finally broke off, while we—even we—were listening to them one night, with the high dramatic announcement which took us once more across the starry wastes ourselves, on a mission of rescue.

What happened thereafter will be related in its proper place. For the moment, I feel I have performed the initial function outlined to me by our

editor: *viz*, to reintroduce ourselves into the chronicle and so prepare the way for all that lies ahead. With this thought I momentarily suspend composition, and will ask my brother P— to add any brief comments of his own before the resumption of the Martian narrative as transcribed from the "Mackellar Messages."

May I say then, for the moment, *au revoir;* and permit myself the concluding classical reflection: *magna est veritas et praevalebit* (truth will prevail).

3. Paul Adam

I just want to say that you're not to think dear old Jacky is half so stuffy as she sounds when she sits down to write. I know she's my sister, but all the same she is really a bit of all right, as I think she showed right through everything that happened to us. It's just that when she gets a pen in her hand she suddenly seems to go all long-winded, somehow, as if she were writing school essays all the time, and puts in those bits of Latin just to impress people.

The main thing is that we did go to Scotland. It was where the last adventure started, so it was only right that it should be where this one started. The whole setup was marvelous, of course—I mean, the airstrip and Uncle Steve's messages. I don't mind confessing that I took a great liking to Mr. Mackellar and Archie—to say nothing of Katey (Jacky wants

me to call her Miss Hogarth, but I'm for none of that —we always called her Katey to her face, by her own request, and so that's how I'll refer to her here).

So there it was—the setup, as I say; and in spite of all that Mother said before she let us go to Scotland at all, we did in the end go off to Mars again. You'll see how it all happened as you go on: this is just to let you know that we were all poised and waiting. That is, Jacky and I were, at least, for, as she has said, we were actually there, in the wireless shed beside the airstrip, when the fatal final message came through from Uncle Steve. As for Mike, for once he *didn't* have his nose in things! Except—

4. Michael Malone

—except that Mike did, so there! He had his nose far more deeply in things than anyone else after all, only in a different way, as you'll see.

The reason I wasn't at Larkwell at the time when the others were listening to the messages was that I wasn't available. It was all very well for old J.K.C. to send for Paul and Jacky—but he couldn't very well send for me.

I was in America!

I told you, didn't I, that my Dad often took Mother and me on business trips with him? Well—that's just what had happened this time. There I was —in America!—which is more than had ever hap-

pened to Paul and Jacky, for all that they'd been to Mars.

Oh yes—that's where *I* was. And I'll tell you something else: Do you know which *part* of America?

Chicago.

And where does that tie up, I hear you ask?

I'll tell you.

Somebody lived in Chicago who'd had quite a bit to do with us when we came back from Mars last time.

Does the name Kalkenbrenner mean anything to you? It probably will if you read our last book—and it probably will, too, if you're what old J.K.C. would call "a student of the press."

It was Dr. Kalkenbrenner of Chicago who was Dr. McGillivray's friendly rival in the days when he was first building the *Albatross*. In fact, Dr. Kalkenbrenner had almost succeeded in building a rocket of his own—it was that that gave Doctor Mac the final spurt to invent his own patent fuel, so that he would be first to leave Earth (you know what rival scientists are).

When we came back from Mars that first time, Dr. K. was a bit snooty—he was one of the ones who first started to say we'd all been making it up and that it hadn't really happened. But that was only professional jealousy, as they say—he knew perfectly well that we had been to Mars. And when he went back to his own

country after visiting Doctor Mac in England, before Steve and Doctor Mac set off for their second trip, what do you think he did?

What would you have done? He got a spurt on himself—went on more furiously than ever with his own experiments. *And*—take my word for it—he'd been pretty successful too, oh yes! *He was almost ready!* His rocket was all ripe for a flight!

How do I know all this? For the very simple reason, dear friends, that when I was in Chicago I went and called on Dr. K. It was only natural after all, wasn't it?—after all that had happened.

And he wasn't in the least like the ogre we'd all thought him when he was doubting our word after the first trip. Now that he was in sight of triumph himself, he was a perfectly decent chap, and I had a simply swell time with him in his lab, telling him all the little ways the *Albatross* was different from his own rocket. Oh yes—I saw it! I was shown all over it; and if I couldn't go into all the technical details, at least I could tell him the little things, like how we'd stored our food in the old toothpaste tubes, and so on. His rocket was much bigger than the old *Albatross*—a great huge lovely shiny job—just the thing.

Oh, we got on like a house on fire, old Kalkers and me (I was even allowed to call him that, so that shows you). I reckon one of the reasons was that I grew to be real friendly with his niece Maggie—Maggie Sher-

wood, and an orphan—Kalkers had brought her up from the time her father and mother had died (Maggie's mother was Kalkers' sister, you see). And he was very fond of her.

And so was I, I don't mind admitting right now. She was an American, of course, but she was all right—she sure was. Just my own age, you see—and more of a tomboy even than Jacky. I hardly noticed she was a girl at all.

It was Maggie and Kalkers who showed me all over the *Comet*, which is what he called his rocket. And when I got the first long air-mail letter from old J.K.C. in Scotland, with enclosures from Paul and Jacky, telling me the whole story of the airstrip messages, why, what would you have done but show the whole thing to Kalkers and Maggie too?—which is just what I did do.

And this time there wasn't any doubt at all from Dr. K.—no sir! And it's just as well, as you'll see.

So I did have my nose in after all. Well and truly in. If I hadn't, things mightn't have been so easy to arrange when, about a couple of weeks after the first air-mail letter, I got a second "communication" (as Jacky would call it) from the folk in Scotland.

This one was a cablegram—a very long cablegram. And when I read it I showed that to old Kalkers too. And when *he* read it he said, "Phew!" (If that's how you spell the kind of excited whistle he gave).

"Phew!" he said. "You know what this means, Michael, don't you?" (I hated being called Michael —always have—much prefer Mike; but it was what Dr. K. always called me.)

"Phew!" says he, "you know what *this* means, Michael?"

And I nodded. I sure did. And I winked at Maggie —and then nudged her and nodded over to the great shiny *Comet*, all stuck up on its launching field, ready for a take-off.

And Maggie Sherwood winked back . . . !

5. The Editor

All in due course. For the moment, and until it is made clear why "Maggie Sherwood winked back," we must return to MacFarlane himself and the continuation of the narrative built by Miss Hogarth from those lonely messages from across the skies.

To Chapter Five, then—entitled: *The Canals.*

CHAPTER V. THE CANALS: MacFARLANE'S NARRATIVE CONCLUDED

Editor's Note: From now on, in our original reception of them, the Martian Messages were more disjointed than in the earlier stages of MacFarlane's continuous chronicle. Although they have been edited and remolded since by their original sender, I leave them here with some flavor, at least, of their fragmentary nature, so that readers will understand something of our own mystification as we listened to them at Larkwell.

. . . IT WAS, I firmly believe, the reappearance of Malu which brought back to health my old friend Dr. McGillivray. As you know, he never fully recovered—there were long lapses into lethargy

and forgetfulness; and certainly his blindness never left him; but at least he retrieved some of his old verve—has been, among other things, sufficiently his old self to help me in the construction of this method of radio communication to you on Earth.

Nothing I can say can describe our joy at Malu's appearance. It was a strange reunion—his silent thoughts of welcome contrasting with our own noisy exclamations, as our feelings were expressed in our own less delicate way.

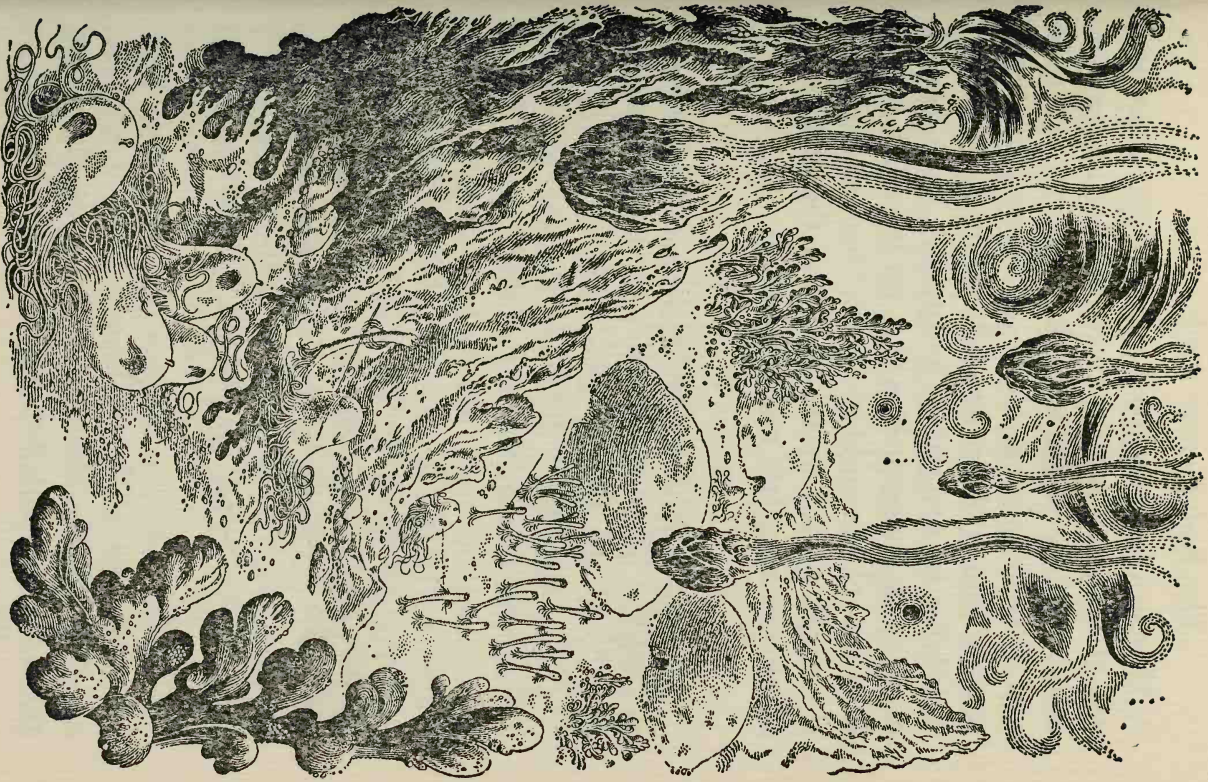
As we "talked" together beside the gleaming *Albatross* on the plain, we learned what had happened in the course of the last great battle before our previous departure—the battle which formed the climax to our book *The Angry Planet*, my dear John. Indeed, we more than "learned"; for side by side with the words translating themselves inside our heads as Malu's thoughts flowed into us, there came a full communicated *vision* of all that had befallen that day.

It seemed that the blast of the *Albatross*' take-off had momentarily stunned the attacking Terrible Ones. Malu himself was thrown clear of the group surrounding him; and with his greater rapidity of movement was able, on recovery, to escape around the rim of the great seething saucer of lava in which lay the dying city of his tribe.

By now, the force of the volcano had almost spent itself. The Terrible Ones were in confusion and rout, their great clumsy egg shapes slithering back toward the hills. By the time Malu had organized his scattered troops into a striking force, the last remnants of the invaders had dispersed; and so the battle ended, barely an hour after we ourselves had left the fearful scene of it.

"And oh, my friends," said Malu, "the desolation in our poor dwelling place when all was done! Only a few of our homes of glass remained unruined, the floor of our valley lay littered with the dead from the battle itself and from the lava poured down upon us from the angry mountain. Sadly, we who were left set to gathering together as many of our friends as we could find. Among them, let there be praise!—lying helplessly under the dead form of the Chief of the Terrible Ones—was our Leader, the great intelligence controlling us, known to you as the Center. He was sorely wounded, but alive, and able to direct us in our work of rescue.

"We left our shattered city—it was beyond all mending. We pushed southward, toward other centers of our race among the hills. In one of them we found refuge for a space, but then moved on again, until at last, in another small hill valley, we came upon some uninhabited glass bubbles, and there took to dwelling. . . ."



Thus they built again their peaceful and benevolent way of life; until one day there came—no more than faintly at first, as the telepathic impulses weakened over the distances involved—an *impression* that a strange shining object had fallen from the skies and rested far to the south. Eventually, Malu himself came to an understanding that his legendary friends from the remote world of "Earth" had returned; and so set off, guided by the plants on the plains . . . and found us at last, and succored us. . . .

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I hasten—I must hasten; there may be little time to complete my story. Already I am desperately aware of . . . of—an *attempt* to control, to control . . .

(*This single brief disjointed message here broke off; and for two anxious nights there was no further communication from MacFarlane—despite the arrangement he had made to broadcast at regular periods. Toward dawn on the third night the Morse began again—somewhat hastily in its transmission now, as if the sender were in some fear; yet he made no references to the source of such disturbance for some further nights. And then—however, to proceed in order:*)

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—The Canal. The Canal has crept closer and grown all around us. And the Vivore, the Vivore . . .

(This message too broken off—with a disjointed repetition over and over again of the single word, "Vivore." On this night reception was extremely faint and difficult—we were not even sure of the word . . . and this, as will be seen, was a contributing factor toward christening the terrible new Martian creatures encountered by the explorers "Vivores.")

☆ ☆ ☆

—the Center. His agitated explanation . . . and so a first glimmering of the nature of the Cloud. But this came later—I can resume now the account of our progress from the time of Malu's discovery of us on the plain: there is less attempt tonight at control. . . .

We traveled with him to the new community established in a range of mountains far to the north of our landing place. Because of the lesser gravitational pull I was able to carry sufficient food to last the Doctor and myself for many months and, as will be known, this store could be augmented from the edible leaves of the foothill trees.

So once more we entered into the life of the Beautiful People; re-encountered the tall, Malu-like shape of the Center himself—were welcomed solemnly as he sat (crouched, rather) on his great

central humus pile in the largest of the bubble houses.

I had brought a small tent with me from the *Albatross*—the identical tent in which we all had lived on our last visit. And so we dwelled through the long months of Mac's gradual recovery, contentedly enough in our communication with our old friends—bathed once more in that strange sense of quiet benevolence we all had experienced and commented on before as being a quality of life among the Beautiful People. In the long balmy summer season we restored our faith; once more, as time passed and Mac came back to normal, the unaccustomed fragrance of his pipe went drifting in the rare Martian atmosphere and, lying back by his side, I watched the two little moons go circling above our heads . . . and described to him as well as I might the alien but familiar scene surrounding us as the quiet slender shapes of the Martians went gently about their business.

Yet I hardly needed to interpret to him in this way after a time. Except for the occasional lapses into lethargy, it was as if, in his blindness, he had developed the art of telepathic contact with Malu and the Center to an extent which I, imperfectly equipped because I *had* all my usual senses, could never achieve. The immense mass of knowledge

gained in this way by McGillivray will become available in due course to humanity, when once we return to the Earth—if indeed, from our present impasse, that will ever be possible! I pray to heaven that it will; for now that we confront the Vivore —now that it surrounds us, makes veritably to swamp us . . . the children, perhaps the children—

(*Message broken. This irrelevant reference to the children—MacFarlane always thought of Paul, Jacky and Mike as "children"—kept recurring from now to the end. What it meant we did not know—the reference invariably followed a spell of fragmentary reception, broken messages. And sometimes there were periods in MacFarlane's account which made no sense at all—were frankly a kind of gibberish. Thus on one occasion, after some further nights of silence, a message came which, literally transcribed, ran as follows:*)

"—No—not . . . pera—requuullian . . . jeje jeje . . . but the children—if children children—cont att at cont . . . will try but try but trrry buuttt —chil—chiiilll . . . save save save . . ."

(*One more night of comparatively uninterrupted reception followed—a long session lasting almost four hours, all at high speed. It will be noted how abrupt MacFarlane's narrative style had become; as if, as the Vivore approached—whatever the Vivore*

might be—a sense of growing panic swamped all other considerations, forcing him to be straightforward, even brusque in his manner of delivery.

The narrative continues, therefore:)

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And so once more, as on the last visit, the *Albatross* was dragged across the plain by the willing Martians, to rest as closely as possible to the Center's headquarters without being in any danger from possible further volcanic eruptions. She was little worse after her months of isolation in the long mild summer, but with winter now nearer, and bitter as we knew, she had to be brought to shelter in a small range of foothills. She was needed moreover for living accommodation for Mac and me, who could not stand the overheated dampness of the bubble houses.

Mac now almost himself again. His long "conversations" with the Center; and at last the hint of danger.

Mac had spoken with the Center on one occasion for a long long time; and when he and I, later, were settled together for the night in the cabin of the *Albatross*, his expression grew serious. For my part, less skillful in communication with the Center than he was, I had not fully understood the significance of the session. I knew only that at last Mac had been

trying to find out the nature of the Yellow Cloud where it came from and what it was.

"And there came from him," said Mac slowly, referring to the Center, "—there came from him, Steve, such a wave of fear as I have never known these creatures to express before!"

"What was it?" I asked. "What *was* the Cloud, Mac?"

"I don't know—even yet I don't know. The Center did not know—not fully. It was as if—and you must realize that I am only groping here, Steve, for the Martians plainly cannot communicate anything of which they themselves have had no experience—it was as if the Cloud were some kind of legend among them. It's something deeply feared that lingers on only as a race memory—and even then only in such highly intelligent creatures as the Center himself. You find the same thing on Earth, among certain primitive tribes—a lingering something that their ancestors knew and feared and passed on to them in the form of myths through the years."

"But what *kind* of myth, Mac? There must have been *something*—some kind of image from the Center?"

"There was! A very strange one. I hardly dare to think of it, Steve, for it connects with a dreadful kind of . . . *vision* I had when I was snatched into the Cloud—something that comes back to me now

only imperfectly, although I have the impression that I understood it better then, when my mind was gone, than I do now. . . . There were two images from the Center—rather three. The first was a picture, transmitted from his mind to mine, of the Yellow Cloud itself, as we saw it—sweeping at immense speed across the plains. The second image was vaguer—less understandable—and the only words that came into my mind to express it were, 'The lines —the creeping lines . . .' "

"The *lines?*"

"The only words, Steve, except that in my mind they had a double translation. You remember I told you during the flight about the Italian astronomer, Schiaparelli—his discoveries in the 1870's—"

"The Canals," I said. "It was Schiaparelli who discovered the Canals—"

"Quite so—but he used the word *canali* to mean only lines or markings—veritable *channels* on the Martian surface which he thought he saw. That was the other word which came into my head during my session with the Center: *canali*, Steve—the creeping *canali.*"

"But Mac, it doesn't make sense!"

"It might—it might make devilish sense before we're done! Steve, tell me—you can see, old friend, and I cannot—as you look out across the plain sometimes—"

He broke off—a look of bewilderment came across his face. I recognized the symptoms too well. The old lethargy was returning, the lingering effect of his immersion in the deadly Cloud—perhaps in the association between his conversation with the Center and his terrible experience. Desperately I tried to bring his thoughts back to the moment.

"Mac—Mac! The third image—you said there was a *third* image from the Center—"

But all that came from him was the one word from his old nightmare: *Discophora* . . . and a sudden impression in my own mind once more of something monstrous—white—jellylike . . .

I looked out through a porthole in the dying evening light. Did I imagine it? Or was there, far out on the plain, verily on the horizon, a new strange tinge of darker green—a kind of *ridge* . . . ?

☆ ☆ ☆

So little time, so little time! When morning came I saw indeed that there was, on the far plain, a belt or band of some dark green substance—and that it was larger a little than I had supposed the night before.

Mac's illness worse—no sign of recovery from the new bout that had assailed him. Two days . . . and in those two days, before he did recover, and I could tell him, the darkness on the horizon had intensified

—was something that *moved*—and moved nearer and nearer toward us. . . .

Among the Beautiful People a rising sense of uneasiness—a continuing quivering fear from the cactus plants nearby.

Mac's recovery at last; and an intensification of our experiments to contact you on Earth. The exposed seam of mineral deposit in the foothills: our hastily rigged transmitter here in the cabin of the *Albatross*, the leads going down to the seam . . . night after night—my messages into space, as always and always the menace approached across the plains. At last the first imperfect return messages—the fabulous coincidence of the airstrip . . . and so I have told you our story as always *It* has drawn nearer . . .

We have not dared to move from the ship. Malu now with us—but Malu is able to move outside on occasions, through the double air-lock door, for the yellow spores have no effect upon him other than in an attempt to control him mentally. The others gone —the city in the hills abandoned. Only Malu and ourselves . . . only—The Creeping Canal! The dark green, viscid line approaching across the plain, nearer and nearer! They control—*they* control it: the Vivores . . . !

The Canal—the long serpentine line of it, the waving traveling swamp . . . closer and closer and finally surrounding us. And at last, the first of *Them*

. . . the swamp now all around, all around, and we dare not move from the cabin. As it has been this past ten days while I have struggled to continue contact with you. I dare not relax, dare not. They control —*they can control* . . . !

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I saw the first—some days ago I saw the first. There, in the swamp surrounding, in the hot steam of it . . . white, monstrous. *Discophora!* The great white monstrous jelly—and waiting, waiting for us, waiting for us, waiting . . .

I will not—*will not!*—the children, the children . . . !

(*Message broken, and nothing for four nights; then some further disjointed gibberish, quite unintelligible; and at last, suddenly clear, one final desperate cry across the silent void of space, the broken, helpless message as I have already described it in my own first chapter:*)

☆ ☆ ☆

. . . Save us—in heaven's name try to save us! There is one way—one way only. We are lost—you must save us. Somehow—come somehow. Bring the children—the three children. It is the only way to save us. I cannot, cannot, cannot explain. Only bring the children, somehow. That will save us, that alone.

It does not matter how long. We are safe, safe, for many months, years perhaps. But we will perish at the last if you do not bring them. Do not ask why. Find some way—some way. Kalkenbrenner—try perhaps Kalkenbrenner. Bring Paul and Jacqueline and Michael. Ask no questions—no time, no time to answer; but *bring those three to Mars or we are lost . . . !*

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Then silence. From that moment onward, silence absolute. Never again did our small receiver by the airstrip chatter its thin rare messages from across the void.

In the chill of the early dawn we regarded each other, white-faced—Mackellar and Archie, Katey and myself, the two young people who had joined us and attended the few final sessions when the broken messages were coming through.

We regarded each other, the silence filled by the low sullen roar of the Atlantic beyond the moonlit airstrip. Our thoughts were full of indefinable nightmare—a sense of intolerable danger to our friends so many millions of miles away. And of resolution. We did not understand—how could we?—what could it mean that only the presence of the three young people could save MacFarlane and McGillivray? But we knew that the desperate message would never

have come unless indeed, in some alien manner connected with the unutterable strangeness of life on the Angry Planet, it was the only way.

We trusted MacFarlane; and therefore we had to act—somehow we had to act—so that the travelers might be saved from whatever monstrous creatures menaced them—of whose nature we had no true conception.

And MacFarlane had given us the hint himself as to how the impossible journey might be achieved a third time in human history.

Dr. Kalkenbrenner.

CHAPTER VI. THE COMET: A CONTRIBUTION BY PAUL ADAM

WELL, it's my turn. I don't know why—they always seem to saddle me with tricky chapters, with a lot happening in them, and the thing is, of course, that I'm not a writer at all, really. Still, maybe that's just as well—I can get on with things without bothering about descriptions and atmosphere and "style" and all that. The way I do it is to try to imagine I'm simply writing you a letter and telling you out straight. So here goes:

Dear Reader: I'd better start, I think, at the point when we were all stuck there in Scotland when Uncle Steve's messages broke off.

You can imagine the excitement. We didn't understand things in the slightest bit (it's maybe just as well, in view of all that happened afterward); all we knew was that somehow we had to get back to Mars—Jacky and me, that is, and Mike, who was in America. And the only hope was to contact Dr. Kalkenbrenner, for we knew he'd been working on a rocket too, and it might be almost ready for the trip.

I can't begin to tell you the tremendous amount of to-ing and fro-ing that went on. J.K.C. went into a kind of frenzy. He wrote letters and sent them whizzing across to America, and the place was thick with cablegrams and telegrams, and talk about the telephone!—I got to the stage when I was hearing it in my sleep. Calls to our mother and father, calls to travel agencies to book flight passages for all of us to go to the U.S.A., trans-Atlantic calls to Mike's mother and father and Dr. Kalkenbrenner himself that must have cost a fortune.

And, of course, the pay-off was when J.K.C. did finally contact Dr. K., that he knew a great deal about it all already! For as you know, there was old Mike, in his usual way, spilling the beans and nosing in! We'd known he was in America, of course, but not that he'd actually reached Chicago and had looked up Dr. K. (he would!) and was right in the thick of it all.

Well, to cut a long story short, as they say in books (although this *is* a book, so I might as well say it), we got everything taped as far as we could in Scotland, and then we set off for the south—the whole crowd of us.

And in London we met our own mother and father, who had come up specially, and there were tremendous scenes in a big hotel.

"No, no," said poor old Mum, "my children my

poor children! etcetera—I can't let them go all that dreadful distance again, and so on, oh dear, I shall worry terribly, I worry if they go off for an afternoon by the sea themselves. Oh dear, to think of them all the way up there on Mars, etcetera."

"But what about Mr. MacFarlane?" says J.K.C.

"Yes, what about him?" I chime in myself, and Jacky doesn't say very much at all, for although she wants to come, of course, there's another part of her that doesn't want to leave Mother either, and she's almost in tears too. . . .

Anyway, talk, talk, talk, and in the end, with Father joining in on our side, it's all agreed—although maybe not just quite as easily as perhaps I've made it seem: it was, in fact, a real fight to get permission.

"Only," says Mother, "I do hope they are looked after this time. Miss Hogarth, do please promise that you will go too to look after them—they need the Woman's Touch."

And of course Katey was all for going—had been from the start; and she nodded; and then all three women (I mean Katey and Mother and Jacky) dissolved into floods of tears, floods and floods of them, and all us men went off to the lounge and had something to drink.

Now of course it'll maybe seem crazy, but even though we'd been to Mars and through all those

marvels, Jacky and I were really just as excited at the notion of flying to America! We'd never been, you see; and there was Mike, nearly two years younger than me, and *he'd* been—we could just picture him boasting and swaggering about the place thinking he'd put one over on us.

So wham!—off we go: zoom!

I wish I'd time to tell you all about this part of it—I mean the flight to America, and America itself. But it isn't part of the story, really, so I'll have to keep that for another time. Suffice it to say etc., etc. (as they put it in books), that we got there without any trouble—that is, the whole bunch of us except Mr. Mackellar, for he wasn't coming. We had to leave him behind in England for he was all tied up with the airstrip job for the Government. The last we saw of him he was standing on the runway with Mum and Dad as we went out to the big American plane at Northolt, and he was positively stuffing himself with snuff, clouds and clouds of it, and offering some to Dad and Mum, and Dad was even absent-mindedly taking some and then sneezing like mad, but I think it was just a good excuse to pretend that that was why there was just a hint of tears in his eyes, and I don't mind confessing (off the record) that I could have done with a small pinch of snuff myself for the same reason.

Ah well.

We got there—I mean America—and we met Dr. Kalkenbrenner, and there was Mike, beside him, strutting about like a young peacock! You'd think he'd invented Dr. Kalkenbrenner. (It's an awfully long and queer name to write down every time, and I refuse to be as vulgar as Mike and call him "old Kalkers," so I'll simply say "Dr. K." from now on and you'll know who I mean. His other names were "Marius Berkeley," so taking it all in all he was a bit of a mouthful—but a really decent chap all the same: about forty-five, and very tall and distinguished-looking, with a little pointed beard and a deep voice and a nice friendly smile. We took back all we had ever thought about him in the days when he wasn't "on our side" after we came back from Mars last time. . . .)

As for the *Comet* . . . !

I've got to confess that fond as I was of the old *Albatross*, it really wasn't a patch on Dr. K.'s job. Of course, it's understandable enough—Dr. K. had had much longer to work on it than poor old Doctor Mac had had, and he had bags more money. There were what are called "Very Big Interests" behind Dr. K., and he had much of Doctor Mac's research to build on and improve on. We know all that, and it doesn't take away one whit of poor old Mac's achievement, but the *Comet* really was something all the same. If you can picture the *Albatross* as, say, a good solid

seagoing tramp, with just a bit of a homemade touch about it, then the *Comet* was almost a full-fledged liner.

To begin with, it was a different shape altogether from our old craft. The *Albatross* had a kind of bulbous nose, then tapered away to the tail—we used to say it was like a fish, and so it was, of course, but maybe it would be better to compare it to a kind of gigantic tadpole. The *Comet* wasn't a bit like that: it was very long and slender, and went to a most delicate point at the nose end, then bulged out very slightly in the middle and went to another long slope-away at the back—like a cigar, really. In fact, it was much more like the usual idea of a rocket than the *Albatross* ever was, and with three huge fins, set like arrow feathers, which had enormous extending *brackets*, I suppose you could call them, which folded out when you weren't in space, and made it possible for the whole affair to stand up on end on a kind of gigantic tripod.

That was the other thing, you see: the old *Albatross* had rested at an angle on a huge launching ramp, but the *Comet* stood right up on its tail, as it were—straight up into the air. On Earth, when we first saw it, it was held in a kind of framework of steel girders—a kind of scaffolding. But Dr. K. explained that that was only for additional strength—it was quite possible, because of the smaller gravity pull on

Mars, for the *Comet* to take off from its own resting position on the tripod for the return journey. You see, the beauty of it all was that as you were approaching Mars (or anywhere else for that matter —the Moon or Venus or what have you), you could turn the whole rocket around in space and land on the surface very gently (braking like mad, of course, with the jets) *tail first.*

One other thing I ought to say (without being technical, for I don't know enough—it's only that I couldn't help being kind of interested), and that is that the *Comet* used the idea, same as Doctor Mac had, of two separate fuels, but in a rather different way. In the *Albatross,* the two fuels were fired off through the same sets of *tuyères,* with one auxiliary set of *tuyères* to start off the second fuel, of course, once you were out a bit in space, but then everything going through the main set once the first fuel had cut off. In the *Comet* there were really two distinct rockets altogether. Fixed to the tail, on top of the *Comet's* own jets, and underneath the tripod, was a huge "booster" rocket, as Dr. K. called it. This could be fired off by remote control from the spaceship's cabin—and it was this that whipped up the colossal power to make the *Comet* rise from the ground—and even quite slowly, at first, again unlike the *Albatross,* which whizzed off zoom from the word go. Then, when you were well away from Earth's surface,

and the booster fuel had burned itself out, in one operation the whole contrivance fell away from the *Comet's* tail and back down to Earth, and the *Comet's* own jets came into action and there you were—on your way.

I should maybe add, lest you're worrying about a great chunk of spent booster rocket coming wham out of the sky one day and biffing you on the head (R.I.P.), that as the spent booster fell away a special mechanism released a fairly sizable parachute, so that the whole thing *floated* down and there were no chances of serious accidents—at least you had time to see it, I mean, and could jolly well get out of the way pronto!

And the other thing was—just to complete the whole picture—that the *Comet* carried inside her all the component parts of a second booster, so that when you landed on Mars and were happily perched up on the tripod, the very first thing you did was fix this whole prefabricated contrivance onto the tail again, and there you were—all set for a take-off the moment you wanted to. And since it was Mars we were going to on this trip, and it had the smaller gravity pull, this booster didn't have to be anything like as big and powerful as the one needed to shift us from Earth, so that was all right, and cut down on the weight the *Comet* had to carry.

So that's that. (Phew! my hand's all tired and

cramped from writing all this—the trouble is that you get carried away and go on for longer than you first meant. I'd better stop now and pick up again later on. . . .)

Here we are, then—next day, and in fine fighting trim, all ready for another spell at the desk.

You know all about the *Comet* now—at least, maybe not *all* about it, but enough to be going on with: later on, Dr. K. will be publishing a book of his own going into all the real technical details. He's also going to explain how it was that just about the time when we were due to set off, Mars was fortunately coming around toward one of its "nearest-to-earth" positions. We were jolly lucky in this, I must say—otherwise the journey would have taken much longer than the one in the old *Albatross*, even allowing for the improvements in the *Comet*. As it was, it still was a *little* longer, because of all kinds of complicated difficulties about the orbits of Earth and Mars being elliptic and not absolutely circular, and things like "aphelions" and "perihelions" nosing in to mess things up a bit. . . . Anyway, I don't really know anything about all this, except that I've heard Dr. K. and the others talking about it and seen them working the whole business out with adding machines and such (and I looked up the words them-

selves in a scientific dictionary, so the spelling's all right at least).

We had a hectic time getting ready. There were endless conferences and sessions with Dr. K., who had, of course, agreed wholeheartedly to the rescue expedition idea, once all the facts had been put before him, and was almost as excited as old J.K.C. himself, both by the thought of seeing his rocket in full blast and by the thought of going to Mars for the first time. For our part, we were desperately keen to get started for the sake of Uncle Steve and poor old Doctor Mac: it wasn't as if we knew what was what up there in Mars, you know—we had simply no idea; except, of course, that something pretty serious was afoot, and that somehow we were the only ones who could do anything about it. Maybe it was even too late—we didn't know that either: we just felt we had to get going.

And because we were all so eager, things were arranged in double-quick time. We had barely a week in Chicago before the whole business was cut and dried and we were ready to start. Dr. K.'s men had been working all around the clock on the last touches to the *Comet*—the place was such a den of activity as I'd never seen in my life before. Of course, because of the rush and turmoil, there were a hundred and one little improvisations—Dr. K. didn't have

time, for instance, to complete his own apparatus for feeding us on the journey (he'd worked out a real master plan for dealing with this side of things), so we had simply to make do again with Doctor Mac's old "toothpaste" method—that is to say, normal food being impossible to handle in a spaceship because of the lack of weight, we had to feed from concentrates which were made up into paste form and packed into plastic tubes, just like toothpaste tubes, and you simply put the nozzle thing into your mouth and squeezed . . . ! Still, we didn't mind this in the least: it was like old times for one thing, and for another it made us feel that Doctor Mac was somehow with us in spirit at least on this bigger job than his own old pioneering effort.

So everything was somehow arranged at last. For the last few days before the take-off we all moved out of Chicago altogether—went to live in the workmen's huts miles out in the open country, close to where the rocket itself was.

I ought to say at this stage who exactly was going, I suppose.

Well, naturally, there was Dr. K.—that was an absolute must. And ourselves—another must, because of Uncle Steve's last message, the whole reason for the voyage at all (I mean Jacky and Mike and Yours Truly, of course). Then there was Katey—

Katey Hogarth; for our parents had made her promise to go, to look after us (as if it made a pennyworth of difference!). Dr. K. wasn't very keen on the idea—quite charming and all that, full of old-world courtesy and such; but you could see that women in spaceships just wasn't his idea of what was what—it wasn't, as he put it, "a true feminine occupation, my dear." But when Mike's mother and father joined in, and said that *they* wanted Katey to go too, or they'd hold back on permission for Mike to go, well, there was nothing else for it, and Dr. K. had to give in.

We wanted one more. Dr. K. half considered taking one of his assistants; but most of them were married men, with vast families, and besides, if anything *did* happen to us in space, someone had to be about who could carry on Dr. K.'s research work back home in Chicago.

Of course, there was only one answer, and that was—

Archie Borrowdale!

He was exactly right—had all the technical qualifications because of his work with Mr. Mackellar, and so would be a great help to Dr. K. on the journey. And he was an expert shot, as it happened—he'd spent his student holidays in the Scottish Highlands after the stags, and was terrific with a gun; and you never knew, maybe the Vivores would have to be

dealt with by guns—maybe they were different from the old Terrible Ones, which weren't in the least affected by bullets.

And to crown all, of course, he was Katey's fiancé, which was a bit of all right for her, and for him too, for he wouldn't have liked her to go tearing off forty or fifty millions of miles away while he stayed biting his fingernails at home. Besides, we three—Jacky and Mike and me—we thought he was all right as well!

So there we were. In the last two days there was an odd sort of "slowing up" of things. We had lived at such a pace for so long that when everything was virtually over except the shouting we hardly knew what to do with ourselves.

Dr. K. had gone off somewhere or other to make some last-minute contacts and arrangements. All the work on the rocket had been done—the fuels were loaded, all the stores were packed aboard. We had plenty of food, of course, for we had to consider that Doctor Mac and Uncle Steve would be with us on the return journey—and besides, Dr. K. was a very careful man, and had loaded up plenty of additional supplies for "unforeseen emergencies," as he put it.

So it only remained to wait for the moment of the set-off as it had been fixed according to certain weather conditions and other technical whatnots by Dr. K.—and that moment was still two days ahead

(and at something like five o'clock in the morning—brrrr!).

So—we moped; we simply moped and moped. We were, in fact, nearly bored stiff—if you can believe that—on the very eve of setting off on a trip to Mars! Every now and again, of course, if we stopped to think of it, we'd get a queasy kind of falling-away feeling in the pits of our stomachs, like going down in an elevator suddenly; but for the most part we just *didn't* think of it, somehow—there was a queer kind of numbness in us and even (in Jacky, I mean) a hint of tears. . . . Ah well! the way of the world, you know. Nothing ever does work out quite the way you think it will. . . .

What really saved the situation—kept us going in those last two strange days of suspense and waiting—was Miss Maggie Sherwood. Maybe I should say a word or two about her—Dr. K.'s niece, you know, as Mike has already mentioned.

She had come out to the launching site with us and was living in one of the huts, same as we were. She and Mike were as thick as thieves—they'd struck up a real friendship as soon as they had met in Chicago, and I must say they suited each other well. Maggie was about the same age as Mike, and her hair had a tinge of red in it (his was bright carrot). She was a big strong kind of girl, always leaping

about—never still for a moment; tremendous fun, really—plenty of energy about her. Not very pretty—I can't say that; but a nice sort of squashed-in face* that looked just swell when she smiled—and she was nearly always smiling.

Anyway, that was Maggie more or less, and as I say, she pulled us through those last two days. She was as lively as a cricket—always hatching up some scheme or other to amuse us. When she wasn't in the thick like that she was off for hours on end with the bold Mike, the pair of them with their heads close together, and whispering, as if they were planning something. Once, I remember, they both were missing for several hours—nobody had any idea where they were. We searched everywhere—all over the camp; and it was Archie who spotted them at last, clambering stealthily down the long metal ladder that led up to the tiny entrance hatch in the side of the *Comet*.

When we asked Mike what the pair of them had been doing for so long in the rocket's cabin, when it was strictly speaking out of bounds till we went into it on business as it were, he just shrugged.

"Oh, nothing. Just taking a last look around, you know—at least Maggie was. Don't forget she mightn't ever see it again—or her uncle either for

* Thanks, pal! What about Jacky's freckles? And your ears stick out, if I may say so!—M.S.

that matter—or even any of us. You never know. We might blow up before we ever leave Earth at all—or we might be hit by a meteor in space—or there are always the Vivores when we do touch down on Mars, whatever they might be."

"Cheerful, aren't you," sniffed Jacky (but there was just a little shake in her voice—for any of these things *could* easily happen to us on a job like this: it's no simple trip to the seaside, shooting off to Mars, you know . . .).

But at last the time did pass, and it was the final night of all. Dr. K. had returned from his trip into Chicago and we all had a kind of solemn supper together before going to an early bed. Mike's mother and father were there, of course, and J.K.C., and all of us who were going—us three and Katey and Archie. And—needless to say—the inevitable Maggie.

We'd meant to have speeches—some kind of celebration, almost; but you know, when the time came it just couldn't be done—just couldn't. Even Maggie was subdued; and for the first time, just before we all parted for bed, I saw that she wasn't all just bounce and energy after all—there *was* a softer side.

She went close up to Dr. K., and her eyes were very wide and a little bit starry, the way Jacky's always go when tears aren't all that far away. And she whispered—perhaps I shouldn't really have been lis-

tening, but I couldn't help it, I was so close to Dr. K. myself.

"Berkeley," said Maggie, very softly (it was the ridiculous name she always called him), "Berkeley, I wish you'd say right now that I could come with you tomorrow—I wish I could have your permission."

He shook his head.

"You're all I have in the world, Berkeley," she went on, "and I'm all you have. We really ought to be together. There's plenty of food in the rocket—and plenty of spare air from the breathing apparatus—and you're well under the weight complement, even allowing for Mr. MacFarlane and Dr. McGillivray on the way back. . . . Won't you say yes?"

"I can't, my dear," he answered, with a saddish kind of smile. And she shrugged.

"Oh well. I gave you the chance at least. In that case I guess I won't be around tomorrow morning—you know I don't like partings, even for a little time; I always hated railway stations. I'll just stay out of sight somewhere. . . ."

She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. And his eyes were a bit starry too—in fact, all our eyes were when she came around us one by one and told us she wasn't coming out in the morning.

"I'll say my so-longs now," she said, "and we'll leave it at that. O.K.? Be seeing you. . . ."

And that was it. We all trooped to bed, feeling very subdued. I remember, after I'd undressed and put the lamp out, standing for a long, long time by the window of my bedroom, looking out to the tall slim shape of the *Comet*, almost a mile away. It gleamed a little in the moonlight—gleamed silver; like the strange far spire of some cathedral of the future, maybe, in a shadowy city all huddled in the drifting ground-mist which wreathed the tripod base.

I looked beyond—into the star-clustered sky. In a few hours we ourselves would be up there too—hurtling into the unknown—or, at least, to some of us, the partly known. Would we ever find Steve and Doctor Mac even if we did reach Mars? Would they be alive if we did find them? Would we ourselves ever return?

My gaze came back to Earth, attracted by a slight movement around the corner of one of the encampment huts. A small figure was moving stealthily forward in the direction of the rocket; and I recognized the unmistakable features, in a sudden glint of moonshine, of Maggie Sherwood.

I thought I understood her feelings. She, who was being left behind—left *alone*, separated from her friends, her only relative—was going out across the silent field for one last forlorn look at the great rearing structure of the *Comet*. Then, in the small hours, perhaps, she would creep back desolately to bed—

would waken in the morning to the great explosive roar which would tell of our departure—would see the vast, silvery cigar shape rise slowly, spouting fire, gaining speed, more and more speed, until at the last, when it was no more than a tiny pencil against the pale blue of the morning sky, it would disappear suddenly in one last little spurt of drifting smoke . . . and she would cry a little, perhaps, and then leave the encampment for Chicago, to take up normal life in the boarding school there, as had been arranged.

I felt very sorry for her as I crept into bed; and so lay for a long time, just thinking and dreaming—and waiting; until, in spite of everything, I dozed off to sleep. . . . (I hope you'll forgive this bit of "fine writing," by the way, as J.K.C. calls it: I did feel it all rather strangely that night. Ah well.)

It was cold—terribly cold—when we drove next morning to the ship. We shivered, in spite of the warm clothing we wore. We assembled in the reinforced concrete hut close beside the base of the gigantic machine that was to be our only home for so many, many weeks.

We said our farewells—to Mike's mother and father, to Dr. K.'s assistants, to dear old J.K.C., who was in a pale kind of awe at last, and silent for once, now that the moment of climax had come.

One by one we mounted the long swaying ladder and went through the little dark entrance hatch in the *Comet's* gleaming side. We took our places—still in silence, following out the instructions that had been dinned into us at a dozen conferences.

Katey was very white—her lip trembled a little. I saw Jacky take her hand and squeeze it comfortingly—after all, she had been through it all before. . . .

Archie took up his position beside Dr. Kalkenbrenner at the control panel. The Doctor looked around inquiringly and we all nodded from the bunks in which we lay—to which, indeed, we were strapped, in readiness for the tremendous impact when the *Comet's* own jets should come into use after the release of the booster.

Twisting my head around on the sorbo pillow, I could see J.K.C. and some half-dozen assistants on the ground, close to the door of the concrete hut. J.K.C. waved once, then he and the others trooped inside for shelter from the terrific blast there would be.

A long silence. I heard Dr. K. counting slowly to himself: "Seven—six—five—four—three—two—ZERO!"

And instantly there was an immense explosion, seeming almost to shatter our eardrums. Far beneath, the ground seemed to rock and tilt—then the concrete hut seemed to reel and steady itself—receded

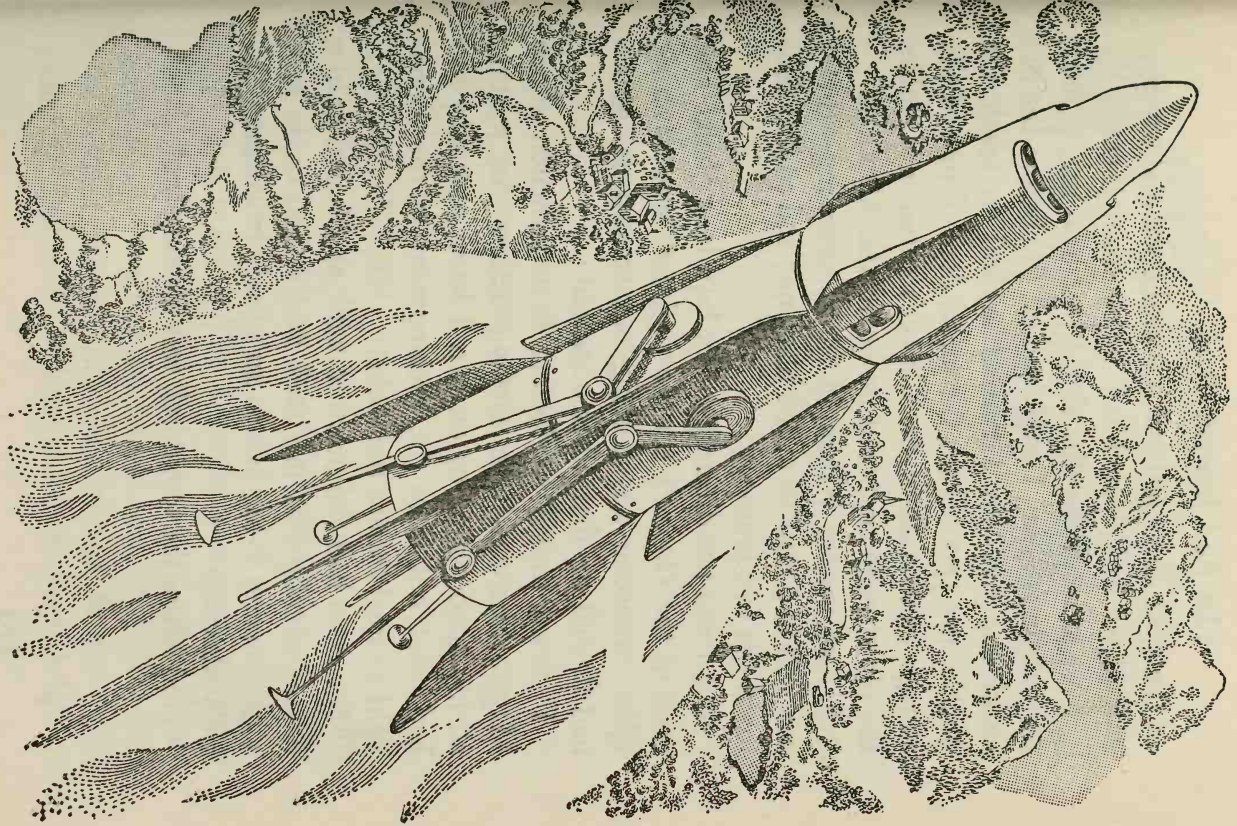
—grew smaller, smaller and smaller . . . and with the danger from the blast now gone, J.K.C. and the others—tiny, tiny black figures—rushed out once more, waving ecstatically after us as, in full triumph, the *Comet* rose higher and higher into the pale sky. . . .

The speed of our ascent increased—the figures, the hut itself—all were lost to view. Dr. Kalkenbrenner, by the instrument panel, cried out to us in warning as he prepared to release the booster and set the *Comet*'s own jets into action.

A second explosion—even more gigantic-seeming than the first. An immense hand seeming to press me down and down into the soft mattress . . . and everything swam before my eyes and went black. . . .

When I came back to consciousness—slowly at first—all was quiet. We were in full flight—were already many, many hundreds of miles away from Earth, heading toward the Angry Planet we knew so well—and yet so slightly too.

I looked around. Some of the others had already recovered also—others were still blacked out. In the confusion of the moment it was as if we were still in the dear old *Albatross;* and I remembered with a chuckle the bewilderment we had seen then on the faces of Doctor Mac and Uncle Steve when the door



of the store cupboard had wavered open and we three stowaways had floated out to confront them.

I set to loosening the straps that held me, so that, for old times' sake, I could sail off the bed in the old weightless way. As I twisted around to reach the buckle, my eyes fell on the metal door of one of the storage cupboards in the *Comet*'s cabin, not unlike the old storage cupboard on board the *Albatross*.

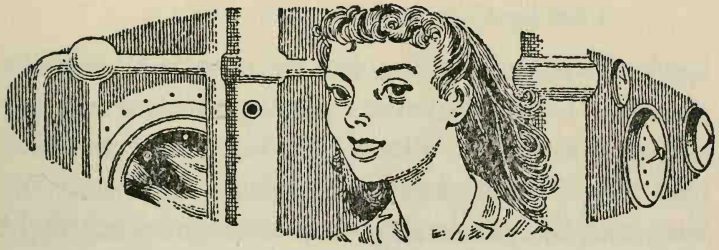
For an instant I thought I was dreaming—that I was still in a mist from the black-out and so had confused the two journeys.

But I was not dreaming! Not by a long chalk! The door of the *Comet*'s storage cupboard was wavering open—someone *was* floating out toward us, as we had floated on that other occasion!

I cursed myself for feeling so sentimental about Maggie Sherwood the evening before—for wasting all my good sympathy on her. I knew now why she had crept out from the encampment in the moonlight to steal toward the rocket!

She even had the nerve to wink at me now as she floated silently past my bunk and drifted on to give a patronizing flying kiss to an utterly bewildered Dr. Kalkenbrenner!

And Mike, the scoundrel, was winking too!



CHAPTER VII. THE THIRD MARTIAN EXPEDITION

1. A Personal Impression
by Catherine W. Hogarth

Up in a balloon, boys,
Up in a balloon. . .

HELLO, FOLKS!

Don't pay any attention to the way I write—it's just me, can't help it after years and years in show business.

I think it was Eddie Wheeler put up the money for that old show I was in—sure it was, for he'd just sold his new *Roses* number for a wad, so he and dear old Freddie Salmon took the *Princess*. It was called *Stardust Follies of Whatever-it-was* (was it '48 or

'49?)—anyway it was a few years ago. It was the year that Danny Kaye was playing the London Palladium—or was it Sinatra? Anyway, it was sometime about then), and Billy Billiter and I were the stars, and the whole show was all about space flight and so on, with the girls all as Martians and Venusians and such. (Not the real thing, of course, just Eddie's idea—plenty of spangles all over their tights, and Iris Morley was a Moon maiden in one number, all over silver.) Anyway, what I was really building up to was that there was one spot that I had myself where we began way back in Victorian times—huge cycling bloomers and straw hats and everything—and I sang that old-time number:

Up in a balloon, boys,
Up in a balloon!

and then there was a marvelous transformation scene, and the balloon changed into a rocket, you see, and I did a quick change in the wings and came on again in the cutest little space suit, and we changed the words to:

Who'll come up
In a rocket to Venus
With me, with me, with me?

and the girls did a ballet all over the solar system, with everything whirling around and around and around, you know, and the sun in the middle, and

suddenly the sun burst open and there was Iris again, this time as a *sun* maiden. . . .

What a pity that show never ran! Came off after two weeks. Just lets you see. Public never knows, does it? "All a bit too futuristic," was what the press said, but of course *they* don't know much either, 'cos here I was in a real rocket after all, so it wasn't all *that* futuristic—in fact, that show must have been running, now I think of it, just about the time when Stephen MacWhatsit and the poor old Doctor were off for the first time in the *Albatross* (or was that the year Bing Crosby was at the Palladium?).

Of course, I don't want you for a moment to think the real thing was anything *like* that show of dear old Eddie's, I mean it simply wasn't in it, the show wasn't—couldn't hold a candle to the real thing. What a set! What a back cloth! What lighting! You've got to hand it to old Mother Nature when it comes to decor. It's no use poor little me even trying to tell you what it was like, for I'm no script writer, no sir—and besides, it's all been done already in this book. There was all the stuff I took down in shorthand by the airstrip and then typed out (it just lets you see again, doesn't it?—I'm not really as dumb as you'd think, not from all this, but it's the way I go on when I'm just being myself, and it can't be helped).

So I won't waste much time on *that*, for it really

was much the same inside the *Comet* as it was in the *Albatross*, even though we were so much bigger. Just take it for read and I'll try to say something instead about how we all got on together inside—and I won't even waste much time on that either (trust me! I'm the kind of authoress to have—no padding), for we really ought to be pushing on to the way we landed and everything that happened afterward and what that impossible boy Mike called Old Jellybags and the way that—ugh! don't let me think about it!

The biggest scream was young Maggie Sherwood, of course. Really and truly! You could have knocked us all down with a feather when she turned up, if you'd had one handy—and you could too, for of course we didn't have any weight. I must say that right at the start there were the beginnings of a row—from our revered captain Dr. M. Berkeley Kalkenetcetera. Well, can you blame him?—when he'd made all his plans and so forth and suddenly, bang! there was Maggie to upset 'em all? But on the other hand, can you blame *her*?—when you consider that M. Berkeley K. was her O.L.R. (Only Living Relative), and there he was nosing off into space without her?

Of course, she and young Mike had cooked up the whole thing between them. He'd told her all about

the time when he and the others had stowed away on the *Albatross*, and nothing would do for Our Maggie but that *she* should pull the same thing off on *this* trip, so there was all the biz about not coming out to see us off that morning, couldn't bear it, etc. (what an act), so that we wouldn't be surprised when she *wasn't* there, and all the time she'd sneaked out in the middle of the night and all aboard the lugger and the girl was ours . . . !

Mind you, I must say that she'd checked to be absolutely sure there was enough spare food and equipment for her, even allowing for Stephen MacF. and Dr. McG. on the way back; and she also said she'd even *told* the bold M. B. Kalkenbrenner that she *was* coming—given him due warning and such when he didn't give her permish to come openly; and I must say that when you look back on all she said that night before we left, it *could* be read like that, if you stretch the point a bit. . . .

Anyway, we just had to lump it. By the time M. Berkeley K. had done his duty as captain and given her a mild spanking (in a manner of speaking), he beamed all over and had to confess he was secretly delighted, for I know he'd been worried about what would happen to her if he Never Came Back, whereas now we were all in it up to the neck and if worse came to the worst we all sank or swam

together, as the bishop said to the actress when it started to rain the day she was opening the garden party.

Heigh-ho! It certainly added a bit to *my* troubles, for of course the reason I was in the *Comet* at all was supposed to be to look after the whole impossible flock (ha-ha). So now I'd four of them instead of three—and Maggie was the biggest handful of the lot, I can tell you. Anyway, we managed somehow. You'd be surprised at all the strange chores there were to do. There wasn't any cooking or washing up or anything like that, of course, for we had our "wittles," as Eddie Wheeler used to call them, out of those itsy-bitsy tube things (what wouldn't I have given for just one two-inch steak all smothered, but *smothered,* in onions after months of spinach paste and vitamin juices—just *one!*), but there were all kinds of other things that needed doing, and mostly, believe it or not, it was a matter of sheer *entertainment!* Oh yes sirree, if you can actually believe it, the real trouble was, after a while, that we were pretty nearly bored stiff in the dear old *Comet,* even *with* the solar system and all to look at night and day! We had practically no exercise, you see, and there were seven of us all cooped up together, and four of us natural healthy youngsters, so what could you expect but a fight or a quarrel every now and then?

And besides (and let's drop all the nonsense for a minute, darlings—off with the dear old motley for a change) you see, when it really came to the pinch, there wasn't one of us, not one, who didn't remember way, way deep down just what we were there for, and it wasn't just a matter of romping off through space, but somewhere at the other end of the journey there were two decent men in some kind of terrible danger, and somehow we had to save them, whether or not we saw much of Mars in the process. Somehow Mike and Co. had to save them, and though I'd racked and racked my brains (the few I've got, darlings—O.K., wait for the laugh) I couldn't see *how* they could save them, except that that was what the last message had said, and we had to take it on trust: "Bring the children—ask no questions—*bring the children . . .*" and then silence, and those two in mortal trouble. And we *had* found a way—we were bringing the children. *But what were we bringing them to?*

I tell you, it was behind everything we thought and did, that nightmare. And it wasn't any wonder, surely, if it did get on our nerves a bit, and we had to find ways and means to pass the time so that we wouldn't think about it more than we could help. Heigh-ho. Laugh Punchinello and all that. I think I went through every song routine I'd ever learned—

and all the scripts I'd had to learn by heart since ever I started in rep in Walthamstow, before I even went into Vaudeville at all!

Well, never mind—it was all worth it, I suppose. Who'd ever have thought it all the same? Katey Hogarth, Sparkling Star of Stage, Screen and Radio, the way the credits used to put it, doing her poor little stuff in the middle of Space, in magnetic boots and all! There were times . . . well, never mind, dears, never mind.

Soft lights and sweet music—angel voices on the sound track. No sir. This isn't what I meant—not it at all. Best sign off. I'm no script writer. Now we're getting serious this is where I exit singing and dancing. I'll be surprised if they put this in the book at all—not what they'd counted on, I reckon; I was supposed to be bright and cheerful when things were beginning to get tough—and here I am, muffing my cue and making 'em more serious than ever.

Anyway, we made it—there's that much that must be said. We had almost three months of it, but we did touch down at last. We got to Mars, darlings—we got to Mars!—but when I think of some of the things that happened there I almost wish we hadn't, even though we did do what we set out to do—or at least part of it.

But those Canals—those devilish *Canals!*

Well, cue for exit—and I'm not going to muff this

one. I hope they *don't* print this. It's time someone else took over, and I've an idea that K.C. has contracted my fiancé Archie for the job. Archie always did fancy himself as something of a writer as well as a scientist—and I don't mind admitting that he's done not badly at it in the past (he wrote some sketches for old Salmon once, under a different name, and old S. thought the world of them) . . . .

So we made it—that's as good a line as any for me to end on. We made it. And it was barely two days after we did make it that we found the *Albatross* and were right in the thick of things, heaven help us all.

Oh yes—we found them. Dr. Livingstone, I presume! But oh my suffering Sam, the things, the things we saw!

Up in a balloon, boys—
Up in a balloon! ! !

Cue for Curtain. Bye, darlings. Love and kisses. Bye.

2. A Technical Note
by Dr. Marius B. Kalkenbrenner

In this, my only contribution to the present sketchy volume, I will be brief to the very point, perhaps, of baldness.

I am not, myself, concerned in any way with the narrative part of this anthology; indeed, if anything, my own tendency (it must be said in all frankness) would be to avoid putting upon the market any such romanticized account of the Third Martian Expedition as this is in some danger of becoming; for although each contributor is undoubtedly speaking the truth as he or she sees it, the over-all effect is, surely, to give the impression of little more than an adventure tale, and this ill accords, in all conscience, with the basic scientific nature of the entire project.

It seems, however, that my companions are intent upon the compilation of this abstract, and while I will not connive at the solecism by contributing any lengthy personal "piece," I will go along with them so far as to inscribe these few purely factual notes at this juncture, so as to add some authority to their (if I may say so) somewhat sentimental lucubrations.

The facts, then, and *only* the facts, are:

The duration of the Third Martian Expedition was precisely eleven weeks, four days, twenty-three hours, thirty-one minutes, calculating from the specially prepared chronometers with which I had equipped my ship.

Throughout the journey there were no unexpected developments; I was more than pleased with the performance of my craft.

The "turning around" of the rocket (if I may in-

dulge in lay language to suit the occasion) took place some thirty hours before the moment of landfall; and, like all else on the journey, went exactly according to plan.

Thus, we approached the Martian surface without a jar—came quietly to rest almost precisely on the spot I had already chosen for the event.

As to the choice of that spot itself, I will say only this, in elucidation of a matter which perhaps has exercised the more discriminating readers of this compilation:

When my colleague Roderick Mackellar, in Scotland, succeeded in making contact with the lost explorers on Mars, he had the foresight (being a scientific man) to endeavor to discover from MacFarlane the exact whereabouts of his transmitting station. Unfortunately, as is known, the more scientifically minded of the two space travelers (Dr. McGillivray) was incapacitated, and MacFarlane himself was not fully equipped to give Mr. Mackellar the information in as accurate a form as might have been desirable. However, working from the data he was intermittently able to supply, and from the observed facts compiled by Mackellar himself (the times of transmission and reception, the known opposition of the two planets during these periods, etc.), it had been possible to form a fairly shrewd idea of the situation of the *Albatross*.

It was from this information I worked when plotting our own course; and I was fairly confident that the spot I had chosen for landing was, if not the very spot on which my predecessor's ship rested, one sufficiently in the vicinity to make discovery almost certain.

I may add that as we landed we naturally "kept a lookout" for any signs on the terrain below—particularly for something in the nature of a "dark-green ridge" with, perhaps, the gleaming hull of the spaceship in close proximity to it (for we landed, I should perhaps explain, in daylight).

We saw no gleam—no sign of the *Albatross* itself. *But*—we did see, even in the imperfect conditions of the landing (it was extremely difficult to keep the *Comet* entirely steady as we approached the Martian surface, because of the different nature of the gravity pull of which, despite my careful calculations, I had had no previous practical experience)—we did see, may I repeat, a long, an interminably long line or *ridge* of an unmistakable deep olive-green color stretching across the vast plain beneath.

When we came to rest, we were close to a range of mountains—as, indeed, I had intended. From our ground-level viewpoint the ridge was no longer visible. But, if it were indeed the mysterious ridge to which reference had been made in the MacFarlane messages, we knew it lay some distance to the south.

Toward it, making full use of the protective measures I had had the foresight to carry with us, we proposed to travel, after the necessary attention to certain details connected with preparing the *Comet* for a return journey to Earth—perhaps even a hasty one.

In the event, as will be discovered in due course, my calculations had been as nearly accurate as one could hope for in such conditions.

What had not been foreseen—what no reasonable man *could* have foreseen—was the terrible, the truly terrible *nature* of the Ridge!

I thank heaven that we did make all due preparations for a hasty departure in the *Comet*. Alas that that departure befell so soon after our arrival—far, far too soon for any satisfactory scientific exploration of the planet Mars.

But—*I shall return!* And when I do I will be equipped at every point to deal with the unspeakable horrors of those Living Canals, as I must, as I only *can* call them. It is a subject to which I have given much thought; and when I feel myself ready to surmount the last intolerable difficulties—

I SHALL RETURN!

3. A Final Editorial Interlude

So, then, we have followed out the story of that desperate *Red Journey Back*. For my own part at this stage of the adventure (J.K.C. now writing), I can only say that back once more in Britain, I was in a continuous state of almost unbearable suspense. I fear that I made myself extremely troublesome to the good Roderick Mackellar for, needless to say, although he was engaged in his further work on the airstrip as an airstrip, we still continued in our endeavors to use the vast metallic surface as a means of contact with Mars. Every available moment that either of us could spare was spent in the small wireless hut beside the main laboratory; and when we were both engaged elsewhere we still kept the apparatus manned by trustworthy assistants. Night and day the receiver was switched on in readiness for possible messages from across the void; at periodic intervals we sent out a call sign on the beamed transmitter—that ancient code signal which Stephen MacFarlane and I had used in our boyhoods.

But the void was empty. Only once—and then perhaps only illusorily—did I hear, or fancy I heard, a thin remote chattering which might have been Morse. And the message, if it was one, made little

sense: it consisted of two words, received very imperfectly, with some letters missing, thus:

G U I — — A P — G S

The only thing I could make of it, after much bewildered thought, was the quite impossible: "Guinea Pigs." Plainly, I felt, we had been deceived —had picked up somehow a cross message from a ship, or, even more probably, from one of the many amateur radio stations operating all over the globe.

The nerve-racking months went by—the suspense continued through all the summer. All I knew—and the knowledge haunted me day and night—was that millions and millions of miles away two separate groups of my friends were lost and wandering—if indeed the rescue party had reached Mars at all through the hazards of interplanetary flight. My friend and cousin MacFarlane, with his blind, enfeebled companion, McGillivray, were at the mercy of the mysterious creatures known as the Vivores; and toward them moved the little group of young people who alone, in all the universe, could save them . . . yet how? *How* could only those three save them?

I learned the truth at last—the fabulous truth, and also, alas, the tragic truth. There came a day—the events of it to be related in due course—when, more

than six long months after its departure, I learned of the *Comet's* return. With thankfulness—but also sorrow—in my heart, I sped to greet my friends. And so, when all the first flurry of welcome was over, I came to a knowledge of everything that had befallen.

It was plain to me, as the various contributions reached me, that in order to do full justice to the last long part of the adventure, it would be necessary to change somewhat the method of presentation. The narrative of the Rescue is so continuous that it would lose much of its flavor and atmosphere split up into successive viewpoints. I therefore set out to choose one member of the party to set down, in as detached a manner as possible, the whole strange tale; and, after some consideration, decided upon Mr. Archibald Keith Borrowdale as the likeliest to accomplish the task. He had had some previous literary experience—moreover was, as a scientist (yet perhaps not quite so "scientifically minded" a scientist as Dr. Kalkenbrenner, if I may say so), more likely to be able to take up the necessarily impartial point of view.

I consequently asked Mr. Borrowdale to undertake almost single-handed the telling of the last part of the story. I am happy to say that he consented. Until the last chapter of all, therefore—the final summing up—the tale of the Living Canals of Mars is told by Mr. A. Keith Borrowdale in a continuous narrative, commencing upon the next page. The one

interpolation from another pen has been kept to a minimum.

For purposes of dramatic convenience Mr. Borrowdale's narrative has been split into chapters: the first of them (Chapter Eight in the over-all pattern of the book, of course) follows herewith, under the title—

*CHAPTER VIII. LOOMINGS, BY A. KEITH BORROWDALE**

OUR FIRST STEP when we landed on Mars (as Dr. Kalkenbrenner has already said) was to set about attaching the prefabricated booster rocket to the under part of the *Comet*, so as to be prepared for a departure at any moment. The work was comparatively simple—every detail had been carefully worked out beforehand; and even allowing for the extreme haste with which all our final preparations had to be made on Earth, there were no undue complications.

As the *Comet* stood on its gigantic tripod undercarriage, extending from the three great fins at its tail, a secondary and wider entrance hatch was opened in its side, giving access to what I may call the "hold," beneath the main living cabin. From this, a small but powerful derrick lowered the component parts of the booster, then swung them into position and held them firm for assembly.

While this work was going forward, the young folk, needless to say, were having the time of their lives. After the long period of near-imprisonment in the

* As, indeed, are all subsequent chapters until further notification.—E.

small cabin of the spaceship, they were like puppies —leaped, skipped and ran with a complete happy abandon. Katey, I may add, was as delighted as any of them to be free. Like Maggie, she was being introduced for the first time to the extraordinary sensation of being almost three times as *strong* (or as light, rather) on Mars as upon Earth. She went sailing twelve and thirteen feet in the air in huge jumps, and—

"Look—*look*, Archie," she cried, as she glided serenely above my head while I worked at the booster assembly, "what wouldn't I give to be able to do this back home! I'd make my fortune as an act at the Palladium! And the *air!* It's like bubbly—dear old bubbly!"

And she soared past me again, with the others beyond, like so many figures in a presentation of *Peter Pan*. . . .

On all sides of us as we worked and played, stretched the vast reddish plain, extending to the high-upthrusting mountains for which we had roughly aimed in our descent. And although I was seeing a Martian landscape for the first time, there was something truly familiar in it all, from the descriptions I had heard from the others during the journey: the loose sandy soil, the clustering groups of the "cactus plants" with their great fleshy fingers thrust up into the unbelievable bluish-mauve sky.

And I was particularly interested, indeed, in these plants, remembering all I had heard of their primitive *thinking* faculties: I wondered, as I looked out from the working cradle, if even at that moment strange messages were rustling among them toward the distant hills—messages telling of the arrival of yet another uncanny shape from the skies; and the thought for a moment was even a little eerie, for all I knew of the fundamental friendliness of the creatures.

I saw at one moment that Jacky, the most serious of the young people, had crossed toward one small cluster of cacti, colored with bright spots of red and orange on the darker green, and was standing solemnly before it with a most intent expression on her face; and I had the notion that she was, as it were, trying to . . . send a message, almost—perhaps to that old friend of hers, Prince Malu.

And one strange thing was that, as I gazed down from my perch at the alien scene, I had, myself, for the first time, a sudden *picture* of the physical appearance of the Beautiful People. Of course, we had talked about them endlessly too—about Malu himself, and the Center: these creatures—and the squat-shaped Terrible Ones—had been described a hundred times to Maggie and Katey and the Doctor and me. Jacky—who was good at drawing—had made sketches of them, so that, from all that had been said and seen, we had an excellent idea of

what they looked like. But quite apart from this, there was an added *awareness*, almost, that first day of our Martian landing: I had a clear kind of *vision* inside my head of Prince Malu—of his slender trunk, a little more than five feet high perhaps, with its gentle colorings of pale green and patchy yellow and the flaming "flower" surmounting the bulbous upper end . . . and the thought came into me that for the first time I was experiencing—in a broad and general way as yet—true Martian telepathy. It was as if, as Jacqueline *thought* toward the plants, they *thought* back toward her, and the whole concentrated image from those myriads of primitive "minds" came strangely into *my* mind. . . .

I saw too, in the same way, a vision of the other species of Martian encountered by the previous expedition: the creatures known (in the "language" of the Beautiful People) as the Terrible Ones: great egg shapes, each the size of a small ox, spotted yellow and red, moving also on detached root tendrils but, unlike the Beautiful People, with the appearance at least of faces, caused by the two huge "jaw petals."

I saw it all indeed before Jacky moved back from the plant cluster in front of which she had been standing. And I saw, fleetingly, something else—but less perfectly: a confused image of something white and yielding—a great vibrant, pulsating *something*, against a thick background of dark, dark green. . . .

The vision lasted for only a moment—but it was a moment charged with a sense of intolerable menace. I saw from Jacky's face that she too had seen the vision—it was why she had moved away from the friendly cluster of the cacti.

I returned more soberly now to my work. It was almost complete—the unexpected lightness of the materials I handled made it possible to assemble the booster much more quickly than we had reckoned. With the Doctor I descended at last to the ground to complete the work on our other equipment; and then my spirits were restored by the sight of the excellent meal which Katey had prepared after her exuberant jumping game.

Bacon and eggs!—brought all the way from distant Earth. Dehydrated eggs and salt bacon—but bacon and eggs!—and our first solid meal for almost three months. And coffee—fresh coffee, its fragrance rising strangely in the brisk evening air. . . .

We sat back when the meal was over, sighing contentedly, and suddenly weary from the concentrated bout of exercise. Above us the little moons revolved —almost comically in their unusual haste, to our Earth eyes. All was still—unutterably still. And in the mood of the moment, in our relaxed weariness—the anticlimax to all our weeks of tense endeavor and strain in the spaceship—there came over us a strange

melancholy; and—in me at least—a sudden misery of doubt and apprehension: would we survive the nightmare lying perhaps ahead?

And what *was* the nightmare? What *were* the creatures we knew only as the Vivores? How did they differ, as Martians, from the Beautiful People—even from the Terrible Ones? I recalled the thin chattering we had heard—so long before, it seemed—from Roddy Mackellar's airstrip; the despairing voice from great space: "The Creeping Canals—Discophora—the Vivores—in heaven's name try to save us from them . . . !"

We had, throughout our approach to Mars, made many attempts to contact MacFarlane, wherever he was. We knew, from our calculations, his rough position—we knew the general nature of his transmission equipment. Message after hopeful message we sent as we speeded toward the Angry Planet. But silence—always silence. Only once, as we journeyed in the rocket, was there anything distantly resembling one of the old Morse messages. On this occasion, after we had been tuned for some hours—at a distance of barely three hundred thousand miles from the Martian surface—we had received, imperfectly, desperately imperfectly, a few broken impulses—so faintly and confusedly as indeed to be uncertain as impulses at all. If they spelled anything they spelled the irrele-

vant and impossible words—*Guinea pigs;* and so we dismissed them as freaks—as illusions.*

The Yellow Cloud . . . As we sat there so quietly, on our own first peaceful Martian evening, I remembered the bitterness of Dr. McGillivray's experience—his landing so different from our own. From the first, as we had come in to landfall, we had watched for any sign of the mysterious Yellow Cloud. As Dr. Kalkenbrenner and I had worked, while the others played, we both, I know, had turned anxious eyes across the whole wide plain, ready for instant action if, even for a moment, we should see anything presaging trouble. But the blue-mauve, cloudless sky was empty—all was clear.

Now, as the mauve tint deepened to pink and then to smoky red with the fall of evening, we gazed again along the vast horizon, in particular toward the south, where, if our guess was accurate, the *Albatross* lay—if indeed she still existed.

Was it only imagination? Was there, hovering above a low outjutting line of foothills, a thick ochreous . . . mist, almost? A mere coloration of the evening sky?

I glanced uneasily toward the Doctor. He too remained with his gaze fixed in the same direction. He turned to me and shook his head a little. And a moment later, before the others had a chance to see any-

* See my own previous comment at the end of Chapter Seven.—Ed.

thing, he gave, as captain of our expedition, the word to retire.

We mounted the long ladder one by one, ready indeed to rest after the unaccustomed excitement, the sheer physical weariness of our first few hours on the Angry Planet.

The Doctor and I lingered by the thick plastic windows of the *Comet* long after the others had drifted to sleep. We stared apprehensively southward, until, with a swiftness comparable to the swiftness of tropical nightfall upon Earth, the whole sky darkened. The little moons shone forth with an intense silvery light across the immensity below us, and all was still.

When we woke in the bright morning, after a night no shorter- or longer-seeming than a night on Earth (the Martian day is very nearly equal to our own, being 24 hr. 37 min. 22.6 sec. in duration, compared with Earth's 23 hr. 56 min. 4.1 sec.), it was to find that the sky was empty once more of any tinge of yellow.

We breakfasted substantially and in a mood of mounting tension; for immediately afterward we proposed to embark on our mission of rescue—to face, with what courage we could muster, whatever horror it was that threatened our gallant colleagues.

CHAPTER IX. THE GOLDEN JOURNEY, BY A. KEITH BORROWDALE

I HAVE little enough space, alas, to describe in full detail the extent of our preparations for combating the mysterious menace of the Vivores. Much will emerge as my tale proceeds; for the moment, I touch broadly on the general appearance of our "caravan" as it set out across the Martian wastes—as it might have been observed, perhaps, by some alien eye scanning the sandy desert from the distant mountains.

All of us (needless to say) wore heavy suits of protective "armor"—heavy, that is to say, upon Earth, although on Mars we hardly noticed the weight—certainly welcomed the warmth of the strange garments against the undoubted chill of the long bright Martian autumn. The suits resembled diving suits,

tunic and trousers (for both sexes) in one piece, the material a compound of asbestos and flexible plastic —water-, gas- and fire-proof. The helmets were large transparent globes of unbreakable "kalspex," a variant on perspex patented by our leader some years before. When not in position they could be folded back over the shoulders to admit of free breathing. Pulled into place, they automatically locked on an aluminum rim at the neck, and this process also automatically brought into operation the oxygen-breathing apparatus carried partly on the wearer's back, partly on his chest. It was possible, for air-conservation purposes, to switch off this apparatus, in which case breathing the free external atmosphere was achieved through a valve.

With the helmets in position, the members of the party could communicate with each other by means of small microphones and short-wave radio receivers mounted close to the mouth and ears. It was a matter simply of speaking quite normally within the globes. Additional microphones and loudspeakers, mounted externally, made it possible to communicate with any outside parties not wearing the garments.

Thus we garbed ourselves then—and must have seemed a group of strange, amorphous creatures, indeed, as we clustered around the rocket ready to depart. Both the entrance hatches had been closed, of course, and locked by a special method also devised

by Dr. Kalkenbrenner. In addition, an ingenious invisible barrier—an arrangement of photo-electric cells —had been contrived to encircle the whole ship. Any unauthorized approach to it was made known by an immediate radio danger signal, transmissible into the helmets of the rescue expedition up to a distance of some eighty miles.

As to transport: we had carried with us in the *Comet*, and assembled in readiness the afternoon before, the component parts of a small but extremely powerful caterpillar tractor—virtually a light tank. It was large enough to carry three—even more if necessary; for the rest (and for MacFarlane and McGillivray once we had rescued them—even Malu) there was ample room in the trailer attached—space also for our necessary concentrated food supplies, first-aid gear and (in some instances considerably bulky) weapons.

The tractor was equipped with a complete cabin, again of kalspex, which could be levered into position in a matter of seconds, thus affording a double protection to the asbestos-suited occupants. And the trailer could also very rapidly be shrouded in a complete "tent" of treated canvas with kalspex windows —this also to serve for sleeping quarters, together with another small collapsible tent carried in the tractor's spacious boot.

So then we departed, in solemn array. Behind us

the immense silvery spire of the *Comet* receded, its outlines wavering delicately in the bright, the almost intolerably bright, sunshine. The sound of our engine —an alien sound indeed across the Martian wastes— dispersed, died flatly over the soft yielding sand of the plain and in the rare ozone-charged atmosphere. And fabulously, even ridiculously, as our caravan advanced across that arid desert, Katey declaimed, half-seriously, remembering the verses as she had learned them years before at the start of her career—when, as a child actress, she had appeared in a revival of the old play of *Hassan* . . . she declaimed:

We are the Pilgrims, master; we shall go
  Always a little further; it may be
Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow
  Across that angry or that glimmering sea,
White on a throne or guarded in a cave
  There lives a prophet who can understand
Why men were born: but surely we are brave,
  Who take the Golden Road to Samarkand.

Then Michael began to whistle raucously: "Tramp, tramp, tramp, the boys are marching," with Maggie pompomming solemnly at an imaginary tuba, and the tension in us broke at once, and out across the plain went the sound of our laughter—as alien on silent Mars, in its different way, as the throb of our engine.

We pushed constantly southward, weaving among the groups of the cactus plants. Was it once more only fancy, or was there, occasionally, a kind of *shrinking*, as it seemed, from those strange sentient growths?—a shrinking away from us, not fully expressed in actual movement but somehow in attitude. They "reared," as it were, as startled horses might have done, but not physically—in thought only.

The mountains—on our right as we advanced—loomed ever closer. Jacky and Paul scanned their slopes and valleys with powerful binoculars for some sign, perhaps, of Martian habitation. Once Jacky cried out, pointing excitedly; and when I leveled my own binoculars it was to see, in a small hollow, a bright shining from a brilliant reflecting surface of some kind. As my eyes grew accustomed to the glare, I could make out a group of immense dome shapes—huge bubbles, inverted bowls, the largest of them seeming veritably as grand in outline as the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

"The bubble houses," called Jacky from the trailer.

"There's no sign of life near them," I said, still scanning the hillside.

"There wouldn't be, if they're the ones I think they are," said our captain briefly. "If it's the settlement MacFarlane mentioned in his messages, it was

deserted, you'll remember, as the Vivores danger increased."

"And if it *is* that settlement," murmured Katey, "it means that the *Albatross* is near at hand—they dragged her across the plain, near to the village."

"Beyond those very foothills, my dear," said Kalkenbrenner grimly. "If my bearings are accurate—if the ridge we saw in landing was *the* Ridge—MacFarlane and McGillivray are barely two Earth miles ahead of us!"

As he spoke, he brought the little tractor to a halt. We had been traveling now for some time—the sun was high in the almost white sky. The nature of the terrain had changed: the clustering cactus plants had grown sparser on the first slopes of the foothills—had eventually disappeared altogether, their place being taken first by small leathery shrubs, then, among the hills proper, by occasional trees, slender-trunked and with heavy, fleshy leaves.

"You can eat them, you know," cried Michael, jumping up for a handful as we halted. "I lived on nothing else that time I was captured by the Terrible Ones on the last trip. They're like melon flesh, but with a kind of salty taste about them too. Very good —try some."

We set to nibbling—tentatively at first, but in truth the leaves did have a strangely attractive flavor.

"Don't anyone move any distance away from the tractor," said Dr. Kalkenbrenner. "In fact, we had better stay aboard together, Michael—no more leaves, if you please. I have stopped so that we can prepare ourselves. As far as my reckoning goes, we shall be face to face with MacFarlane's 'Canals,' whatever they may be, the moment we mount that hill immediately ahead there. We had best have something to eat—some of the biscuits and cheese Miss Hogarth prepared for us; it may be long enough before we can eat again. And when we go forward afterward, I want you to wear your helmets, with the air valves open, but be ready to switch over to oxygen the moment I may give the word."

The very brusqueness of his manner sent a chill through us. In the interest of the journey we had forgotten momentarily how closely danger loomed. I saw that Jacky had gone white—that even Mike trembled a little as he held out his hand for the eatables Katey had unpacked and was handing around.

For my own part, I switched my gaze to the sky above the line of the small hillock facing us. I sought for the faintest tinge of possible yellow—the least shadow. But I sought in vain. From the journey's start we all had scanned the southern sky for an appearance, however sparsely, of the Cloud. But from first to last there had been not even a far hint of it.

So we ate in silence. I will confess to little appetite.

A slight sense of empty sickness afflicted me. I was, in truth, afraid.

I watched Dr. Kalkenbrenner as, with white set face, he made a few final adjustments to the small cannon and machine gun mounted on the front superstructure of the tractor. I myself checked over the powerful flame thrower ready to my hand—saw that Paul, Katey and Michael were looking to their own hand weapons, rifles and revolvers. Maggie furtively polished a small automatic she had somehow smuggled with her from the rocket—for it had been agreed that the two girls should be unarmed, and no arrangements had been made by the Doctor to equip them.

Then, at a word from our leader, we set our helmets in position and switched on the communication apparatus within them. Through the exterior microphones we heard the powerful revving of our engine as, once more, we went forward, climbing the gentle slope which separated us from . . . what?

The tension mounted as we proceeded. My hand, I realized, was trembling on the control of the flame thrower, and in fear of accident I withdrew it. Close in my ears was a low strange whispering moan; I saw Katey's lips moving through the transparency of the kalspex and understood that her excited, apprehensive breathing was being transmitted through the little microphone so close to her lips.

Higher and still higher we climbed. Ahead, the sky

was still clear. And a moment later we were over the top and descending; and saw, and saw, and saw—

A plain, a vast extending plain, entirely similar in its red expanse to that which we had left behind.

But cutting across it in a straight wide line, to the remotest horizon, was a great ridge of dark, dark green—a confusion of tumultuous growth, lush, prodigal. A mile, perhaps, in width—perhaps, at its farther reaches, even wider. And swelling, at the end now near us, to an immense circumference, enclosing in its vernal depths—

"The *Albatross*—the *Albatross!*"

It was Jacqueline's voice, thin in my ears through the reedy diaphragm of our communication apparatus, yet charged with profoundest feeling.

The great ship lay on a slight incline, gleaming in the sunlight, a silvery contrast to the monstrous fronds surrounding it. I recognized her from the photographs I had seen—I saw her very name across the swelling brow of her.

Over all—over all the silent scene—there hung an air of unutterable strangeness. All was still, all peaceful—no sign, no hint of danger. And yet something, *something*—

Kalkenbrenner, bewildered, drew to a long slithering downhill halt, small reddish clouds rising from our tracks. And I heard Jacqueline's voice once more:

"Uncle Steve—oh, Uncle Steve! And *Doctor Mac . . . !*"

Standing close to the looming spaceship, unbelievable after all we had known, all we had expected, were two human figures. One—the older—held his head inclined a little away from us, as if uncertain of our true direction. But the other gazed at us—and waved in all cheerfulness, beckoning us forward.

I had seen neither before; but again I knew them both from photographs and descriptions. They were the men we had come so far to find—alive, alive and well, unharmed—awaiting us!

And MacFarlane still waved us forward—was shouting, as we could see, yet stood at too great a distance for us to hear his words. And all about were peace and utter stillness—no menace, no danger after all. . . .

Slowly we crawled forward again, in lowest gear. Nearer and nearer to the great forest of silent green growth. And at last MacFarlane's voice came, rare and distorted through the exterior microphones: "Come closer, closer! Why do you hesitate? There is nothing to fear—nothing, nothing!"

There was nothing to fear indeed—nothing in all that extending scene—and the two men stood beckoning us on, the men we had thought to find besieged and in uttermost peril.

There was nothing to fear as we crept forward, always forward.

And yet, and yet—*and yet . . .*

Something lingered: over all that peaceful scene, in the very silent air itself: *something lingered!*

CHAPTER X. "DR. LIVINGSTONE, I PRESUME," BY A. KEITH BORROWDALE

I SHALL NEVER FORGET—never, never —the unutterable strangeness of that first Martian scene with MacFarlane and McGillivray. . . . How best to describe it, even? The almost nightmare bewilderment as we still advanced, slowly, slowly, toward them—toward the gleaming *Albatross* and their two quiet figures beside it.

The whole moment was fabulously different from anything we had expected. We had prepared for danger, we had equipped ourselves to face an incalculable horror: and we saw only two quiet men—two friends of our own kind in that alien place—who smiled and beckoned us on.

And all about them, vast and silent, lay the great forest of the Ridge. The plants which constituted it were different from any we had seen on Mars before. They were not trees, nor yet were they kin to the cactus plants of the plains. They sprouted from squat, white bulbous bases in huge sheaths, great broad and sword-shaped leaves, like iris leaves or lilies upon

Earth, yet towering high above our heads—as high as poplars in some instances. Enclosed in the outer flushy sheaths, which were all of the deep, dark olive-green color we had noted from the start, were half-glimpsed stems—long *rods*, as it seemed—of a yellowish tinge, the first real hint of the much-feared color in all the peaceful scene; and these were curled over at the top in smaller and smaller convolutions, like ferns in spring. (I am, alas, no botanist, and so I forbear any attempt to describe these various parts of the Ridge plants, as we called them, by their proper terms.)

The forest of the Ridge plants stretched, as I have said, as far as we were able to see across the plain. The verge formed an immense straight line—a barrier, almost; and so thick were the growths in this great "tail," as I might call it, that indeed it seemed at first glimpse like a *ridge*. We saw at once how, in his descriptions of it across space, MacFarlane had come to use the word. At the end that was near us, the plants, as I have already said, spread out to form an immense enclosure around the rearing spaceship. Here they were more sparsely spaced—at least in the part of the enclosure immediately facing us; indeed, directly ahead of us, they opened out altogether so as to form a clear line of approach for us to the *Albatross*.

One other thing I noticed in those first few mo-

ments of our encounter with the Ridge plants: Whereas the cacti on the plains were surrounded entirely by the loose and extremely dry Martian soil, these growths seemed to have found—I had a strange and half-instinctive notion that they had veritably *created*—much moisture. The deep red soil about their white bases was oozy and soft. I had even the impression, as I glanced more deeply into the forest's thick heart, of a positive vapor rising—a tenuous steam. The great damp leaves of the more distant plants—spongy and yielding—seemed to quiver a little, as if in a heat haze. . . .

But there was little time for anything other than a cursory glance at the massive Ridge plants as we crawled forward. I remember only reflecting, as I glanced along the great line of the forest, that here indeed was the answer to the age-old problem of the Martian Canals. Suppose there were many more of these great ridges, stretching straightly over the reddish plains of the Angry Planet?—ridges rather wider even than this one, perhaps, so as to be visible to terrestrial observers?—but then on the instant I remembered something else: the strange and awesome adjective which had been applied to the Canals in MacFarlane's messages: the *Creeping* Canals. I remembered how the *Albatross* had plainly been lying, after the time of its removal to the foothills, in a clear and exposed position. Somehow this tremendous bur-

geoning of green growth had *approached* so as to surround it. I recalled some lines from a nightmare poem I once had learned on distant Earth:

> And look! behind without a sound
> The woods have come up and are standing round
> in deadly crescent . . .

and I recalled, as well, in the same brief moment of time, a strange fact that had always occasioned ironical comment, even mirth, among terrestrial astronomers: that Lowell, the brilliant American scientist of the early 1900's, had always claimed that the so-called Canals *did* move. Under the perfect observing conditions of the high Arizona desert, he had *seen* them move, had seen the remote spidery lines of them form and reform, break slowly away from each other, run parallel, intercross—literally (in his own word) "geminate. . . ."

I had a vision of the whole vast forest before me somehow *crawling*, somehow *edging forward*, somehow veritably *marching* over the expanse of the plain. . . .

The woods have come up and are standing round!

And in the vision (which had about it, as we subsequently found, a strange counterpart in reality) there was fear again—an intensification of the subtle fear which, in spite of all the peace, the silence, the smiling faces of our friends as they waved us on, per-

meated everything we saw before us as we rolled steadily toward the *Albatross*. . . .

"Hurry, hurry," called MacFarlane again. "Why do you hesitate? Come forward, forward!"

We now had halted once more. Dr. Kalkenbrenner, his face still a study of bewilderment through the kalspex of his helmet, had braked the tractor hard a few paces from the outer rim of the great Ridge plants. He stood up in his seat and I saw his hand on the switch which would bring into operation the exterior speaker on his suit.

It should have been, heaven knows, an historic moment—a moment equivalent (in Katey's previous irreverent quotation) to H. M. Stanley's celebrated, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume." But somehow, in the unnatural bewilderment of the occasion, all fell strangely flat; there was even an irresolute tremor in our leader's voice as he called out:

"This is Kalkenbrenner—Kalkenbrenner. I take it that all is safe? I mean, your messages . . . ?"

MacFarlane waved again. He smiled more blandly even than before. He was weirdly—how shall I put it? —*boyish*, somehow, irresponsible-seeming; as if the whole event were some kind of immense *caper*, as we say in Scotland. And I remember thinking how strange it was that neither he nor McGillivray made

any movement toward us, as might have been expected: they stood beside the *Albatross* like people on a railroad platform, waiting for us to "come in," as it were.

"All safe, all safe. Of course it's safe," cried MacFarlane. "Come along. Everything's fine—all fine."

The very words seemed unnatural, unduly trivial for such a meeting after all that had gone before. But there was no mistaking the sense of them, the complete cheerful conviction of the explorer's tone.

Our leader switched off the exterior speaker for a moment.

"There's something uncanny," I heard his whisper in my ear, "something devilishly uncanny, Borrowdale! But there's nothing we can do—we must trust him. We go forward—but be ready, each one of you, to switch on the oxygen breathing at the first sigh of trouble, if there is one."

Throughout, the young people in the trailer had said nothing. I saw the bewilderment on their faces too—particularly on Jacky's. It was she who now called out, through her own exterior speaker:

"Doctor Mac—Doctor Mac! It's us—it's Paul and Jacky and Mike. *Is* everything all right? Really and *truly* all right?"

The frail figure of Dr. McGillivray had, all this time, remained inclined a little away from us. Now, at Jacky's urgent cry, he turned his pale strained face

completely in our direction. I saw his lips moving soundlessly for a moment; but then his expression changed to one as cheerful and innocent as MacFarlane's, and his voice came:

"Certainly—certainly, child! Come forward—all is well."

And in the final authority from the distinguished scientist, we did indeed roll forward again—past the outer rim of the Ridge plants and so within the enclosure. In a last lingering of the ineffable sense of nightmare, it was as if we were plunging deep into one of the old mysterious enchanted forests of the ancient fairy-tales: such forests as had grown up overnight to encircle the castle of the Sleeping Beauty. . . .

We drew nearer, always nearer, the two smiling figures waiting patiently. Again it seemed strange to me that they made no move forward to greet us. They stood quite still until, in the damp and marshy soil now, the tractor slithered to a final halt a few paces away from them.

And once more the words seemed inadequate as Dr. Kalkenbrenner, with one precautionary look around and a warning nod of the head to me, leaped out of the driving seat and strode forward to wring McGillivray's hand.

"Dr. McGillivray. A proud moment, sir—a proud moment indeed! I hardly know what to say, sir—how to express my deep feelings . . ."

The explorer smiled—smiled and smiled.

"Welcome, Dr. Kalkenbrenner. A strange occasion truly. It makes me happy, very happy."

He spoke with a curious mechanical simplicity. I recalled MacFarlane's accounts of his occasional lapses, and wondered if at this very instant he was in the grip of such an aberration. But MacFarlane himself seemed as innocent, as he also spoke—spoke to our companions, who had, by now, clambered down from the trailer.

"Well, you came," he smiled. "I'm glad. It's different from before, isn't it? Much different."

He shook hands solemnly with the young people, one by one. In all that had gone before, I would have expected Jacky at least to run forward—to throw her arms around these old companions of hers; I would have expected an ebullient display of some kind from Michael, a quieter warmth of greeting from Paul. But they held back—each of them held back a little; it was as if an instinctive reserve, even fear, had grown up in them. They still distrusted something—something intangible in the whole alien scene; something expressed, almost, in the very incessant smiling of the two lost men we had come to find. *They smiled too much . . . !*

We were introduced—we who had not known the explorers before: we were lamely and inadequately *introduced,* with handshakes and muttered ineffectualities, as if at some trivial social event upon Earth! And it was at the height of this last unexpected folly that the impetuous Katey burst out: "In Glory's name, it's impossible! There's something wrong—there's *something,* and it's no use denying it! What have we come all this way for? What did you mean by those messages, Mr. MacFarlane? This isn't what we expected! What's the meaning of it all?"

There was a moment, an empty moment when something seemed to encircle us all—again nothing tangible: a sense, a veritable breath of menace. The two men facing us seemed to hesitate. The smiles for an instant left their strained faces—on Dr. McGillivray's face particularly there was a fleeting expression of . . . what?—of suffering, perhaps, of intense concentration. But it passed, and both were smiling again—smiling and smiling.

"It's nothing, Miss Hogarth," said MacFarlane smoothly, "nothing at all. We can very easily explain. You took us all rather too seriously, perhaps—"

"Too *seriously?*" (Katey again—and her voice now openly impatient, even indignant.) "You mean it was a joke—it was all some kind of *joke?*"

"Well, perhaps, perhaps. A kind of joke, perhaps."

It was too much indeed. It was absurd, impossible.

MacFarlane still smiled, shaking his head a little, his eyes round and bland. A joke—after all we had experienced! A *joke!*

In the immensity of my bewilderment I heard Dr. Kalkenbrenner's voice—and it was suddenly quiet, suddenly quiet and authoritative.

"Mr. MacFarlane, you will forgive us if we seem a little strained and impatient at this curious welcome. We have dared much, sir—from the moment your messages were received, we have dared much. We have many questions to ask—many explanations must indeed be made. Will you come with us now—back across the plain to my own ship? Perhaps you are a little overwrought—a little distracted after all you have gone through yourselves. If the danger you mentioned has passed, as it seems to have—"

McGillivray interrupted, his voice now slow and somber, the expression of concentration once more fleetingly across his face.

"No. No—we . . . we do not want to come. Not yet. Not . . . yet."

He struggled for a moment for words—struggled strangely.

"Come . . . come with us instead. Come into the rocket. Come in with us." (This last with the words out-spaced and ponderous.)

We looked at each other in dismay. His tone was so charged with—with pleading, almost. There was

something desperately wrong indeed. I glanced at MacFarlane. For a moment he seemed to hesitate again.

"No—no," he began. "Not after all—not into—" He broke off, his features working. Then he added, with a sudden irrelevant brightness, "Yes, all right! But you haven't, over there—" with a wave of the hand to the tractor, "—you haven't, I say, any . . . chocolate, perhaps? —something like that—something from Earth? You see we haven't tasted anything of the kind for so long, so long . . ."

His voice trailed away forlornly—yet he still smiled. It was the final absurdity: chocolate, at such a moment! Katey, with an expression of anger and even contempt through the kalspex, strode rapidly across to the tractor for some slabs of the candy which indeed we had stored there; and Maggie trotted along to help her. Meanwhile, we others were going forward toward the short ladder which led up to the entrance hatch in the side of the *Albatross* above. Dr. McGillivray groped blindly, and it was Jacky who stepped forward and set his hand upon the metal rail. One by one, in a daze of bewilderment, we mounted.

We reached the top—we entered. I saw the little cabin, so familiar to me from descriptions, in which the children and the two strange men now confronting us had made the first Martian flight so long before.

As we entered, it was to see Dr. McGillivray standing in an attitude of curious abstraction. MacFarlane stood by the inner metal door of the entrance hatch —we all filed past him into the cabin. Below, I was aware of Katey and Maggie approaching from the tractor toward the ladder's foot.

There was a moment's silence again. My eyes were on McGillivray. I saw a sudden sweat upon his brow —I saw his face in a torment.

Once more nightmare seemed to fill the atmosphere surrounding. I had an intense impression of danger; at last, and overpoweringly, of *real* danger.

And on the instant the nightmare seemed to mount to a climax and burst upon us—menace and terror swirled all around. I heard, first, a sudden strange cry from Jacqueline:

"Of course! I knew, I *knew* there was something wrong! Malu—*where is Malu?*"

It was as if the words were some kind of signal. Looking back, I feel I can hardly recollect the true sequence of events in that crowding, desperate moment. I was aware of a swift movement behind me —a high gasp of effort from MacFarlane; and with a cry he slammed shut the great metal door of the entrance hatch.

Simultaneously Dr. McGillivray, still confronting us, contorted his whole frail body—seemed gripped by an extreme biting agony. His voice rang out—dif-

ferently now, clearly and with a desperate conviction in it:

"In God's name believe nothing, nothing we have said! Bind us—restrain us!—do nothing, nothing we tell you to do! It is false, *all false!*"

He fell back, cowering against the wall of the cabin —yet still blindly raised his hand and groped for the handle of a doorway above his head—the doorway, as we subsequently discovered, of the small food store in which the young people had once concealed themselves.

It swung open—the doorway swung open as McGillivray, after the gigantic effort, slithered sideways and collapsed. Within, swaying limply, but moving forward toward us, was the unmistakable figure as so often described to us—as I recognized it from my own "vision" on the plain—of Malu.

I saw all this in one flashing moment. Then something made me turn, made me swing rapidly around toward the door. MacFarlane, his face twisted in a mingled expression of rage, grief and strange effort, was hurling himself forward toward me, his arms outstretched to grapple. I heard Kalkenbrenner's voice, suddenly imperative:

"Hold him—in heaven's name, Borrowdale! *I understand it all!*—hold him, hold him!"

MacFarlane was upon me, struggling desperately. With all my strength I gripped him, fought with him;

and even in the instant saw something else in a wild confusion of horror, my ears filled with the shrill terrified screaming of Jacqueline as she too stared beyond MacFarlane through the great glass window in the cabin's wall.

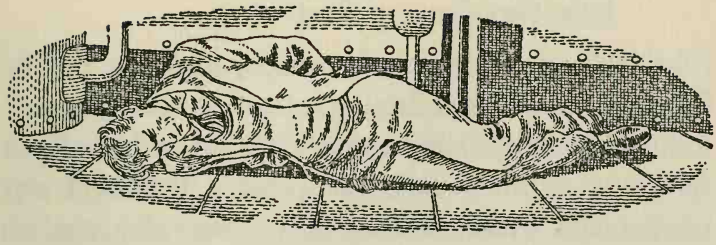
Below, Katey and Maggie Sherwood had almost reached the base of the ladder. But all about them the scene was no longer quiet and peaceful. The great menacing Ridge plants seemed convulsed with an unholy life—the swordlike leaves writhed away from the inner stems. Those stems themselves were quivering—the coiling, fernlike tips had unfolded; and out into the air from them poured a thick yellowness, swirling toward our companions on the ground —the Yellow Cloud at last.

Two things more I saw before all was blotted away. In the thickest part of the forest, straight ahead, in the direction of the gigantic "tail," the Ridge plants were swaying sideways in a more violent movement. In the depths beyond, in a coiling of steamy vapor, was something vast and white and jellyish—a great shapeless mass, tremulous, loathsome.

And closer to us, in another parting of the fronds, I saw a group of gigantic egg shapes, squat and hideous, shuffling forward on forked tendrils toward Katey and Maggie. I recognized them also, even before I heard Jackey's scream again:

"The Terrible Ones!"

The Cloud thickened. In a moment all outside was hidden in a thick ochreous swirling. And still I fought with the fanatic figure of the man we had taken as our friend, who *was* our friend, indeed, but possessed —quite literally possessed—by demons.



CHAPTER XI. SIR GALAHAD, BY A. KEITH BORROWDALE

I OVERPOWERED HIM. It was comparatively easy, although I hesitate to imply any undue superiority of strength. MacFarlane was in poor condition—in an unnatural state of nervous exhaustion. His tackle was furious enough, but soon spent; and although it went against the grain—for he was, after all, the man we had come to save—I managed to twist his arm behind him in a judo hold I had learned long before at school. He stayed for a moment perfectly still, his face, close to mine, a mask of bewildered effort; then he slewed sideways with a little moan and I saw that he had fallen insensible.

"Bind him," ordered Kalkenbrenner peremptorily. "You, Paul—somebody—find some cords, wires—anything. Bind him, Borrowdale—it's the only hope."

I saw that Kalkenbrenner himself had torn wire

from some apparatus in the cabin and was rapidly binding the unconscious figure of Dr. McGillivray. I did not understand—was still dazed and confused from the rapid crowding of events. Besides, I was increasingly aware, bearing in on me, of a curious *pressure*. Nothing physical—a mental pressure; it is the only way in which I can describe it. A strange languor was in me—it was as if a voice repeated, over and over again, within my mind: "Do nothing, nothing. Do *not* tie up this man—all is well. Do *nothing* . . ."

Our leader was regarding me sharply.

"Borrowdale," he said, "pull yourself together, man! Trust me. I cannot explain now—there is little time. But keep hold—keep hold! There are things out there—" and he waved toward the swirling yellow mist outside the windows, "—there are *things* which can control—which will try everything they can to possess you mentally, as they possessed these two poor devils. There are things with *brains* out there! Whatever happens, use every ounce of your will power to defeat any attempt they make to control your brain!"

I saw on the instant what he meant—I felt the truth of what he was saying. A thousand things became clear: why MacFarlane and McGillivray had acted as they had—what, in fact, MacFarlane himself had already hinted at a thousand times in the old

Morse messages. My mind was suddenly filled with the image of the great white jellyish shape I had seen in the parting of the Ridge plants, chiming with all the nightmare visions I had had in the past of such a shape. *Discophora!* It was clear at last: *Discophora!*

I struggled to shake off the sense of oppression; and with a gigantic effort, by concentrating all my powers, succeeded.

I looked around. Kalkenbrenner had finished binding the still form of Dr. McGillivray. Supported by Mike and Jacky—swaying a little, his slender trunk limp and seemingly out of control of his own efforts —was Malu. I saw from Jacky's face that something was being conveyed to her mind from his—something which she, more accustomed to conversing with the Beautiful People than I was, could understand, for she nodded seriously. At the same moment Paul came toward me with a coil of thin strong cord he had found, and helped me to bind tightly the still unconscious MacFarlane.

"What can we do?" I asked as we worked. "In heaven's name, sir, what can we *do*?"

"Nothing here," said Kalkenbrenner. "We must get outside—we must get beyond the whole influence of these things, whatever they are. You young people —listen to me: you heard what I said just now to Mr. Borrowdale: something in this evil place is trying desperately to make you do what *it* wants you to

do. It made these men behave in the strange way they did behave—so that we could be brought within its sphere of control. The process is plainly gradual, or they would be controlling us already. It—will certainly intensify its effects now—but we may have time to escape. I want you to resist, with every fiber of your beings, whatever thoughts come into your heads which seem opposed to this thought: *We must get out of here, and quickly!* Keep that firmly implanted in the forefront of your mind. No matter what happens, follow that course of action. It may be that even we—even Borrowdale or myself—will be forced to issue orders to you which seem to contradict that line of action. If we do, pay no attention—it means that we have been duped, as MacFarlane and McGillivray were. Jacqueline, stay beside Malu—help him; for clearly he is less likely to be influenced—that was why MacFarlane and McGillivray were compelled to lock him up. . . . Now, is all understood?"

We nodded. Yet I was consumed too, even in the moment, by another vision, its implications wringing my heart: the vision of Katey and Maggie as I had seen them before the swirling Cloud hid them from view—with the squat, evil shapes of the Terrible Ones bearing down upon them. Paul plainly had the same thought, for he said quietly, "But the others, sir—the others outside . . . ?"

Kalkenbrenner's face twisted for a moment. For all

his hardness, all his seeming scientific detachment, there still was the deep, deep core of the man, holding Maggie Sherwood in truest affection.

"We will do what we can," he said brusquely. "With heaven's help, we shall find a way to rescue them, if they have not been overwhelmed utterly. But even in that we can do nothing unless we can get away from here—we must gather our resources, save McGillivray and MacFarlane. Borrowdale, do you remember the messages when MacFarlane was describing his own first venture into the Yellow Cloud in search of McGillivray? He said something about protective clothing—asbestos material not unlike our own, perhaps. . . ."

Paul and Michael, both familiar with the layout of the spaceship's interior, set to searching in the various storage lockers and cupboards, and in a few moments had dragged forth two crude asbestos helmets and a pair of shapeless tunics of a similar treated material, together with some rubber hip boots and massive leather gauntlets.

Working rapidly, we swatched the two helpless men in the clumsy garments, so that no parts of their bodies were exposed. All the time I was, for my own part, still aware of a constant attempt going on to make me stop the work I was doing. A "voice," as it were, kept pounding incessantly in my brain: "Do nothing, nothing. What can you achieve? Do noth-

ing, *nothing. . . .*" I fought with all my will power to defeat it—concentrated all my efforts toward carrying out Kalkenbrenner's instructions.

In the intolerable heat from the swamp outside, the sweat was starting on my brow, pouring down my neck within the great asbestos collar. I longed, longed to tear away the helmet encumbering me—yet knew that it would be fatal; but suffered too, as the very thought came into my head, an almost irresistible temptation to undo the fastening and throw the great globe aside—a desire, I understood, with yet another part of my mind, also inspired by the malevolent force outside. . . .

Our salvation lay in the increased lightness of all objects upon Mars. Between us, Kalkenbrenner and I were able to carry both McGillivray and MacFarlane. Mike and Jacqueline still supported Malu—and I saw, with a sudden apprehension, that he alone was now exposed and naked, wore no kind of protective covering from the swirling Cloud. It was as if Jacky had read my thoughts. "He doesn't need it," she said rapidly. "He has told me—and you remember Uncle Steve said so too in the messages. The spores have no effect on him."

At Dr. Kalkenbrenner's instructions we switched on the oxygen breathing apparatus inside our helmets. Then our leader nodded to Paul, who swung open the great entrance door. Instantly we were sur-

rounded by the swirling yellow mist—saw clearly, as it wreathed about us, that indeed it was composed of trillions upon trillions of diminutive seed shapes. And my whole being was filled with a sense of unutterable *hatred*—as if (and I recalled MacFarlane's own memorable phrase) as if these tiny creatures, the spores, were *wishing us ill*. . . .

We struggled forward—somehow we struggled forward. We could not see—had to feel helplessly for the steps beneath and, when we reached the ground, grope vaguely in the direction in which we believed the tractor lay. Our terror was that a group of the Terrible Ones would somehow know of our efforts and move to frustrate us. But the journey was short —a few paces only. In a momentary parting of the Cloud we saw the dim outline of the tractor; and an instant later had heaved our burdens aboard and, ourselves, were clambering into position.

The young people and Malu were in the trailer, Paul and Jacky struggling to pull the asbestos tent covering into position. Kalkenbrenner and I were in the tractor, with the two rescued explorers; and, as the Doctor pressed the engine starter, I set to adjusting the kalspex cabin over our heads.

The engine spluttered for a moment, then roared into life. Kalkenbrenner swung the wheel, so that we might move around in our tracks, retreat in the direction from which we had entered the enclosure.

The tossing, writhing fronds of the gigantic Ridge plants were all about us, glimpsed dimly through the mist. We jerked uncomfortably, slithering in the marshy soil; then plunged forward toward safety.

But in that one instant there was a high wild cry from the trailer behind. I swung around. Paul and Jacky had succeeded in hoisting the tent covering halfway into position. But Michael, the incorrigible, the undefeatable, was on his feet, staring into the forest we were rapidly leaving.

I glanced in the direction in which he gestured. The Yellow Cloud had parted in a vast swathe. Clearly visible in the green depths of the Ridge plants were the two figures of Katey and Maggie Sherwood. Surrounding them were some half dozen of the Terrible Ones—beyond, glimpsed imperfectly for one fleeting moment, the great white shapeless mass of one of the Vivores—of Discophora. Maggie and Katey were held in the tendrils of two of the largest of the Terrible Ones—held spread-eagled against the trunks of two gigantic Ridge plants. They struggled —were plainly alive.

I instinctively started to leap to my feet. But the kalspex cabin was in position. Michael, behind, repeated his great war cry; and leaped out and away from the trailer, in a huge curving arc, before the tent fell finally into position. His superior Martian strength carried him twenty feet at the least; and

when he had recovered his balance he went forward in a series of gigantic jumps toward the captives. He flourished a revolver—but we knew, from the experiences of the previous expedition, that guns were of little use against the yielding plant-flesh of the Terrible Ones.

So we glimpsed him for one brief moment, a diminutive, impossible Galahad. Then the cloud swirled over all the alien scene again as the tractor gathered speed. Thirty seconds more and we were in the free open air, heading across the plain in a glimmer of startling sunshine, the Ridge, a tumultuous seething of dark green and yellow, far behind us.

CHAPTER XII. DISCOPHORA, BY A. KEITH BORROWDALE: BEING A TRANSCRIPTION OF A NEW THEORY, BY DR. ANDREW McGILLIVRAY

LOOKING BACK on our adventure, now that all is done, the scene I recollect as most unreal, somehow, in the whole long dreamlike sequence of our story's tragic climax, is that in the trailer a mile or more from the great menacing bulk of the Ridge.

We had come to rest there, at a distance judged by Dr. Kalkenbrenner to be relatively safe, if only for a moment or two. We knew, from what we had heard of the Cloud—from what we had seen of it within the forest itself—that it could sweep across the intervening desert in a matter of seconds to encompass us. We had half expected, indeed, that it *would* pursue us—would swirl about us as we traveled, impotent though it was to harm us through the treated materials of our coverings. But the air was clear and bright as we went forward; and when we did halt and peered back toward the forest, it was to see no more than a lingering yellow nimbus in the atmosphere

above it. The long stretch of the Ridge was silent again, the massive fronds swaying slightly as if in a gentle breeze, although on that whole vast plain there was no breeze.

So we halted, and set to reviving the two unconscious men we had carried so strangely with us. We were able to breathe freely now, through the air valves in our helmets—yet, on Dr. Kalkenbrenner's strict command, were prepared at a second's notice to reconnect the oxygen apparatus and retire to shelter if we should see any sign of attack.

At one moment, as we toiled, it was as if danger did loom. There was a cry from Paul and we saw his pointing arm outflung along the line of the Ridge's long straight "tail." Far, far to the south and west (as we calculated it in later recollection), an immense convulsion seemed to shake the straight forest wall; and out across the sky, at a terrifying velocity even at so remote a distance, there went a great yellow arrowhead, as it were, of the poisonous mist. It seemed for an instant to writhe toward us, and we prepared our defenses; but then it turned and swept obliquely across our path, a seething and awesome spectacle, the vast Cloud itself in full flight, as McGillivray and MacFarlane must have seen it at the moment of their landing—as, imperfectly, it has been glimpsed and recorded in motion across the far-off Martian surface by terrestrial astronomers: as we

have veritably seen it ourselves since our return, through Earth's most powerful telescopes.*

We worked on, transferring our helpless comrades to the trailer and fitting them with suits and helmets like our own. And there enclosed, when weakly they spoke to us as their own true selves at last after all their nightmare experiences, we heard the truth—as much of the truth as could be deduced from what MacFarlane had seen and McGillivray and Malu had instinctively comprehended.

A mile away, in the green depths of the Ridge, were Katey, Maggie and the indomitable Michael. Our deepest desire was to help them—somehow to help them, if it was not too late for any help. But it was only wise, as our leader quietly assured us, to know something at least of our enemy's nature before we made any further efforts toward rescue.

So we lingered then, in the last long lull before the climax: we lingered there on the plain, in silence, confronting the two men who had suffered so much since they had set out across limitless space in search of adventure on the Angry Planet—and, most bitterly, had found it. They spoke hesitantly, almost in-

* For a description of the baffling "Yellow Cloud" phenomena as seen from Earth, see the authoritative monograph *The Planet Mars* by the distinguished French savant, Gérard de Vaucouleurs, D.Sc., F.R.A.S., Attaché de Recherches à l'Institut d'Astrophysique de Paris. The monograph was published by Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1950, in a translation by Patrick A. Moore, F.R.A.S., of the British Interplanetary Society.

coherently at the outset, until they were able, after so long, to marshal their troubled thoughts. I cannot attempt to reproduce their conversation in its original form, and so I transcribe here only a continuous version of it. If it seems that we lingered unduly with our companions in such danger to hear the history of the Vivores, reflect that that is partly due to the way in which I must set down the facts on paper. In its actual progress the scene in the trailer took little time enough. But reflect also on the wisdom of Dr. Kalkenbrenner's utterance—that it was indeed well for us to learn something of our enemy's nature; otherwise, as I must assure you, our own tragic attempt at escape might never have been possible.

And even the facts, as I array them here, are imperfect and fragmentary: we still know little enough, in all conscience, of the true nature of the Creeping Canals—Discophora remains a half-glimpsed nightmare to all of us; and will continue so until, with the help of Providence, we once more set out on a voyage of scientific discovery. . . .

"They control," began Dr. McGillivray. "These creatures can *control*. They controlled *us*, against every instinct in us. They made us welcome you as we did, with no hint of danger to you. We tried—God knows we tried to warn you! But we were be-

witched—the old word is the best one. We were possessed by them—the Martian telepathic principle was carried to its last conclusion."

"Yet you broke the spell at last," said Kalkenbrenner quietly—and I saw that he realized to the full, from his own instinctive guess at the nature of the enemy, exactly how much effort of will power it had cost.

McGillivray nodded and smiled a little ruefully, his blind eyes turned slightly away.

"We had to. We simply had to. I fought with every ounce of control until I could make that one short speech *as myself* and tell you to pay no heed to all we had said, to restrain us somehow, to bind us—destroy us if necessary."

"As the good Archie Borrowdale almost did," said MacFarlane, also with a rueful smile, fingering a bruise on his jaw where I had been compelled to strike him. "Still, it was the only way—and there are no hard feelings, Borrowdale—and no fear of a return bout, I hope! They had me even worse than they had the Doctor. I managed to get the door shut, so that they couldn't send in that devilish Cloud; but it was all I could do—they had me again a moment later and made me attack you, until you mercifully knocked me out. Thank heaven you did—otherwise, if I'd had a chance, I'd have opened the door again—that was what they wanted to make me do. You

would have been all right, in those suits of yours, but it might have been the end after all for poor old Mac and me. . . ."

"We had no remote suggestion during the first trip that there were such creatures," McGillivray continued. "You young people know that—we met only the Beautiful People and the Terrible Ones. Malu has told me that far back in Martian history, as it has been remembered by such rulers as himself and the Center, there were shadowy legends and recollections of the Creeping Canals, the deadly long lines of them spreading across the planet's surface; and that in the Canals were creatures of some kind, even stronger in their power of enmity than the Terrible Ones. The Terrible Ones were enemies indeed—we also know that; but they were plants like the Beautiful People themselves, and could be dealt with in combat—could be hacked and destroyed by means of the long silica swords perfected by Malu and his friends. These other beings were different altogether: they caused no physical harm to the plant-folk—but they enslaved them mentally. That is why, long, long ago, the various groups of the Beautiful People tended to migrate northward and, without ever fully knowing why, to confine themselves to certain well-defined tracts of territory. The legendary Canal Creatures were known to concentrate mainly in the south, once they had made their initial journeys from

the polar caps, as I shall explain later. But you see, when the volcano destroyed Malu's settlement, at the end of our first Martian visit, his people were forced to travel, as we told you in the messages; and they traveled south, farther and farther south, in search of uninhabited bubble houses. What they did not fully understand, until almost too late, was that the bubble houses they did eventually find were empty only because they bordered on one of the deadly Canal zones."

"But they escaped?" said Paul, half-questioningly. And it was Malu who answered—the "voice" came into my head as he reclined strangely in the trailer with us, close to Jacqueline.

"My people went north as the great Canal crept forward toward the hills and the spaceship," he said. "It was better so, in order to preserve our young ones. Where they are I know not—except that I have understood, from the plain plants, that they are far away and in safety. I alone remained to help my friends; for the people you know as Discophora are not able to control such as Malu, Prince of the Beautiful People, in so great a measure as they can control such as you from across the skies."

"It's true indeed," nodded McGillivray. "They *can* control Malu, of course—they can control the Beautiful People just as you saw they had controlled

a group of the Terrible Ones, to act as their slaves or soldiers, as it were; but to nothing like the extent they can control us—and for a very good reason, as you shall hear. It meant that they forced us to lock Malu up when you were approaching. With him concealed in that way, they were able to influence him just sufficiently for his thoughts not to reach you. It was when Jacky suddenly and intensely *thought* of Malu in the *Albatross* that his thoughts were able to break through, and so gave *me* the strength to speak. . . . It seems so strange—so complex a mechanism, and difficult indeed to explain. You must only take it that that is how the influence of these creatures operates. Someday we may know more about them and so be able to comprehend how their telepathic impulses do work in practice. In the meantime, as far as Discophora is concerned—"

It was Paul, the practical Paul, who interrupted quietly at this stage, to ask the question which indeed engaged us all—which had lain behind all other questions as the great jigsaw fitted together.

"In the meantime, sir," he said, leaning forward a little toward the sightless man, "what *is* Discophora? What *are* the Creeping Canals?"

Dr. McGillivray hesitated for a long, long moment before he replied.

"In a word—" he said very gravely, "in a word,

boy, and in so far as I understand the great inscrutable mystery of Martian nature, they are . . . Survivors!"

And on the instant, in my own questing mind, one more small fragment of the jigsaw fitted. Again I remembered the airstrip messages—the first, the only occasion, on which MacFarlane had tried to tell us something of the nature of the enemy attacking the *Albatross*. I remembered the distorted reception that night—how, imperfectly, we had picked on one word and had used it ever afterward, ourselves, to describe the whole phenomenon. The Vivores! That one word, so compelling and mysterious—so suggestive indeed of living beings vastly, vastly different from ourselves in all their aspects. The *Vivores* . . . ! The imperfect translation, amid the interference, of the word which had truly been sent to us across space: the *Survivors*!

And Dr. Kalkenbrenner, himself after all a scientist, his mind operating along the same lines as McGillivray's, nodded seriously.

"Yes—yes," he said. "I guessed—I almost guessed. I had a notion from the start, but too instinctive and shadowy a notion to warrant expression. Survivors . . . from the ancient days of Martian prehistory—"

"When there was indeed an animal as well as a plant life upon the planet," went on McGillivray. "We knew, even on the last trip, that it must have

been so, thousands, possibly millions of years ago. We knew that the Terrible Ones were descendants of a species of plant, like our insect-eating plants on Earth, which had lived on flesh. . . . Someday, long, long ago, there must have been animal life to provide the forebears of the Terrible Ones with such food. As the countless ages went on, it died away, this animal life—as the reptiles died on Earth, the great hordes of the diplodoci, the pterodactyls, the dinosaurs. All, all perished—evolved to a point of development where they became extinct. The plants like the Terrible Ones adjusted themselves to the new conditions—contrived a method of survival which made them independent. . . . I merely sketch it all, of course—I cover, in these few words, a million years and more. I only speculate that indeed it happened—although there is, as I see it, no other possible answer to Discophora."

"And what were these . . . animals who once lived on Mars?" asked Jacky hesitantly. "What were they *like*, sir?"

"Some of them, I believe," said McGillivray slowly, "some of them, my dear, were very like ourselves. Perhaps not in physical appearance, although that too is possible; but at least in that they had brains—most powerful brains. It was long ago, long, long ago. What I tell you now is only a gigantic guess I have made, I sketch a mighty vision I have

had; but I feel it to be near the truth, and I see it thus:

"There were, in those far times, among all other animals on Mars, some animals as highly civilized as we are upon Earth. What the nature of that civilization was it is impossible to say—there may be traces of it somewhere, somewhere: we shall someday see. But these beings, whatever they looked like, had intelligence to a high degree. They evolved, as the centuries went on—as we on Earth evolved as our centuries went on. They, however, developed their intelligences to a pitch where their bodies shrank and dwindled, where their nobler feelings, if they had ever had any, decayed and died. They became thinkers—only *thinkers*. The power of their brains was such that they could control all other sentient beings near to them. But their bodies were so emaciated, as the centuries marched past, that in a purely physical way they could hardly survive. They fell victim to creatures stronger than themselves, despite the power of their brains. They solved a million problems by *thinking*—and at last, and inevitably, they solved this one. Do not necessarily believe what I say—only take it as a speculation; but reflect whether there *is* any other answer to the problems with which we are now confronted.

"You know that as Mars, as the very planet itself began to die, there was an inevitable drying up of

the surface. Moisture grew scarce and scarcer—and moisture is necessary for the survival of animal life. The plants solved the problem by developing as our terrestrial cacti have developed—with fleshy leaves and long, long tuberous roots, capable of finding sparse moisture in the depths of the desert soil. Malu and his people feed *through* these cactus plants, as we know. But for animal life there was no hope without more moisture than that; and so the creatures we know as the Discophora—those few who had survived all other ravages of nature—had to turn their great intelligences toward this single vital issue.

"In the centuries long gone by, when Mars was as lush, as fertile, as tropical Earth is, there was, as I conceive it, a species of gigantic marsh plants, rich and fecund—something equivalent, I should fancy, to our homely *alisma plantago*." (He smiled for a moment at his own incurable habit of using Latin names for common objects.) "These massive water-plantains, as tall as trees upon Earth, came under the cultural control of the last intelligent survivors of Martian animal life. You will know how we, in our human way, have cultivated many plants for our own vital purposes—have evolved the useful cabbage from the small ornamental cliff plant *brassica*, for an example. In similar ways, the old Martians cultivated *alisma plantago*. They developed two characteristics of the plant to fantastic extents: first, its ability to

find moisture; second, its extraordinary reproductive capacity. In its natural state *alisma*, as we might call it for brevity, reproduced itself at the speed of our own little garden plant known as mother-of-millions. Under the guidance of the Martians, this ability was intensified even further: the yellow seeds, or spores, of the plant were multiplied by careful selective breeding—the plant itself was trained to eject these spores in cloudy millions. More—more than that even. *Alisma*, like all Martian plants, was equipped with crude thinking abilities. It was a simple enough matter for the old Martians, with their powerful intelligences, to control the activities of primitive *alisma;* and this had several results. As the years went on, not only did the Martians produce a *blend*, as I might call it, of flying spores which were not only seeds but tiny stinging cells, as a protection no doubt against any other surviving animal life at the time, but they also equipped these very seeds with some small intelligence—not in their own right, but so that they could *carry messages* for the Martians themselves as they sped through the air . . . !

"Time passed and time passed. The moisture upon the Martian surface grew scarcer still. Yet, as you yourselves know, for you have seen them, there *are* two gigantic fields on Mars where moisture still exists in comparative abundance; and those are the two white polar caps, as we all observed them in our ap-

proach to the planet—as they can be observed even from Earth through powerful enough telescopes. Ice—or at least a heavy hoarfrost—exists on and near the two poles. And so the last survivors of the old Martians solved their final problem. By this time, as I believe, they themselves had evolved further—were physically almost helpless, so mightily had their actual intelligences developed. There were probably very few of them; but among all other problems solved was surely that also of longevity—those few were capable of survival for long, long years, even centuries perhaps, if once they could find warmth, moisture and a means of movement. They found all three—with the unwitting help of the cultivated *alisma* plants.

"They concentrated on the poles—and mainly, for some reason impossible as yet to guess, on the southern pole. There, for a space, as I see it in my vision, they reared huge colonies, huge nurseries of *alisma*. And from there, in a gigantic network over the entire Martian surface, they traveled!

"Yes—traveled! I have spoken of the power of *alisma* to reproduce its kind at a speed inconceivable to any plant, wild or cultivated, upon Earth. That, then, is how the few remaining survivors of those old animal Martians move—in the midst of what we have called the Creeping Canals, those immense green *channels* seen by Schiaparelli and

Lowell. They are borne forward in any direction in which they wish to travel by the crowded ranks of the gigantic *alisma*—the Ridge plants. With them, as they go, they carry—literally manufacture in vast morasses around *alisma's* thirsty roots—the moisture they need for survival. As for warmth, the warmth which is evident in the steamy vapor you have seen in the heart of the Canals themselves, that problem too has been solved. If *alisma* sprouts at fabulous speed, so also does it die and decay at fabulous speed; and in decay lies warmth!

"In their traveling dens the remaining Survivors of that ancient intelligent race still lurk. They push forward across the plains in any direction they may choose. Progress is maintained by an advance guard, as it were, of sprouting *alisma;* behind, the long forest consolidates itself—forms a marshy bed for the Survivors, warm and dank as the expended Ridge plants die. From time to time, the Survivors communicate with each other across the desert spaces by causing *alisma* to ejaculate great clouds of the messenger spores—which also act as spies, as it were, to bring back news of any unusual objects encountered on the flight—objects such as ourselves in the *Albatross,* toward which the particular Creeping Canal out there immediately directed its track of advance. From Canal to Canal these myriad yellow messengers travel to and fro. Within each Canal, as

I am convinced, there lives one—only one—of the Survivors; an intelligence controlling all things within its deadly range. They are not evil—not truly evil, as we conceive it; it is only, I believe, that in their long struggle for existence, those intelligences, once perhaps noble, are concerned now not with worthy thoughts, but with thoughts only for further survival in their extreme age. All things are subordinated to that—all objects encountered are considered only in relation to that: how can they help the Survivors still to survive? And it has become more imperative than ever that they should survive, these Vivores, as you call them; for now they are old and must find some method to replace themselves—to renew themselves. That is the final horror. And that is why—" he paused and sighed profoundly, "why you, my dears, are here!"

Silence—a long, long silence. The gigantic vision filled me. It was fabulous—impossible; yet it was the truth—I knew it for the truth as I looked out through the little kalspex window to the silent forest of the Ridge plants—of the *alisma*, as McGillivray had called them. Somewhere within it, in addition to our own lost friends, was . . . what? One single Survivor—one of the terrible *Vivores* indeed. I recalled the white jellyish nightmare I had glimpsed in the forest's deep heart: was that huge shapeless mass the very creature?

The question was asked—and answered—the moment I had formulated it.

"And the Survivors themselves?" asked Dr. Kalkenbrenner very quietly in the silence. "They are, I take it, from your descriptions, from the messages you sent us—"

Dr. McGillivray held up a hand to arrest the question, smiling sadly.

"When I myself was immersed in the Cloud," he said, "there was communicated to me, from that swirling horror, even as it stung me to insensibility, a vision of its master. As MacFarlane has told you, as I gradually came back to life, this vision haunted me. The creature—as you yourselves now know—is white and jellyish indeed. It had stung me almost to death. In my confusion of mind it was likened to the only creature I knew upon earth to be jellyish and to sting: Discophora."

"The jellyfish," cried Paul, jumping to his feet in his excitement. "We looked it up in the dictionary too. Discophora does mean jellyfish! A huge jellyfish! Is *that* what the Vivores are, sir?—monstrous jellyfish?"

McGillivray paused once more. His eyes, for all their blindness, seemed for a moment to penetrate deeply into the far-off forest. His voice was barely more than a whisper. "Monstrous—yes. And jellyish

—yes. But in no other respect does this white nightmare resemble our true Discophora after all. That great pulsating mass you saw—which *I* saw, in the days when I could see, if only with my inner eye—that bodiless Survivor of a race once splendid, is one thing and one thing only: a gigantic and decaying BRAIN!"

I thrilled with horror indeed—with a sudden horror unspeakable. I looked at the tense, set faces of my companions in the trailer tent, and saw reflected in them my own profound revulsion. I understood now, at last, the true power of the deadly Vivores—why it was that they could control other intelligences, and particularly human intelligences: because they themselves were truly nothing *other* than Intelligences, immobile and raw. . . .

A thousand other questions answered themselves in the few quiet moments remaining before the last piling climax to all the adventure. Now once more I find myself confused as I look back, for many things indeed happened almost instantaneously. I remember first, however, after our initial stunned silence, a host of rapid questions and answers.

"But the messages, sir? Why did you send the messages for us to come? You said we had to come—

that we were the only ones who could save you. Yet *how?* Of course we'd *want* to try to save you; but how was it that only we could?"

"Don't you understand, poor boy?" (It was Paul whom Dr. McGillivray addressed, and his voice was grave and quiet.) "There *were* no messages from us!"

"No messages, sir? But we heard them! There by the airstrip—"

"Of course! We established contact—you know that. We built our transmitter, using the mineral seam as an aerial—you know all that—and MacFarlane, night after night, sent out to you the story of our journey here. Yes, yes indeed! But as the Canal came closer, as it closed around us before we fully knew what its dangers were, so did the Brain within it begin to control our brains. The process is gradual —you know that from your own experiences. We fought to retain our own intelligences; but in the end the Brain defeated us. First it made it impossible for us to send you any warnings. Then it dictated, *it dictated* the message you have mentioned! Even as, with one part of our intelligences, we recognized and were horrified by what we were doing, with another part, subservient to the Brain, we were asking you to come!—to almost certain destruction!"

"The *Vivore* wanted us to come? But why—why, *why?*"

"Because you are young, dear Jacqueline! You are

youth and you are humanity! The Canal surrounded us—and the Brain within it probed our brains. We could keep nothing back; and so it came to understand what we were, we alien creatures from across the skies. And what we were, my dear, was what it, once, long ago, had been! But we had succeeded where the Vivores had failed: we had bodies as well as brains—we had managed to preserve both in our own fight for survival on distant Earth. They wrung from us all the secrets of human history—we felt the very thoughts flow out from us and were helpless to prevent it. And so that Brain—that single gigantic Brain—perceived a way in which not only it itself but all its fellows, scattered across the southern Martian wastes, might be renewed. If they could study humanity—could study at closest quarters every aspect of us—perhaps some day they would find out the whole secret of human life and would be able to reconstruct bodies for themselves equivalent to ours. The study would take a long, long time—and the study would have to embrace all aspects of human development indeed. We were two men of middle age, who would die before the secret had been discovered and a way evolved to manufacture bodies like ours to house those huge decaying Brains. They needed younger flesh to study—they had to bring to Mars some children of our kind, so that they could *watch them grow!* Through us—through our unwill-

ing agency—they sent for you! They forced us to use the one argument that would bring you: that only you, in some way we could not specify, could actually save us!"

"Guinea pigs!" cried Paul. "No more than experimental guinea pigs!"

"We tried to send a warning once—in those very words," said MacFarlane. "After the message had been sent which they believed might bring you, they kept us confined in the *Albatross* by sheer force of will power. They had with them a group of the Terrible Ones, picked up somewhere in the course of their journey across the desert, to act as agents, as it were—to do things for them, for as you will understand, without bodies themselves they cannot act in any way. This group of slaves, under their control, tore up with their tendrils the wire connection from our transmitter to the mineral seam aerial. It was the intention, I believe, to keep us alive until there was some sign that you were on your way; if you had not acted on our first message for help, I believe they would have forced us to send more and more, until at last you did come . . . However, one night, with Malu's help, and exercising all our control to combat the influence from the single Brain immediately before us, we managed to reconnect the wire for a few brief moments. I tried to send the message: 'The children are to be used as guinea pigs . . .' and was going on

to explain something of the situation. But the Brain found out and made me stop—and the Terrible Ones were sent again to disconnect the aerial. . . . And so you arrived at last, you see; and so we greeted you."

"They forced us to greet you," McGillivray picked up, "in the way you know. All the time we were desperate to tell you the truth, but in such close proximity to the Brain we could not. We watched you come closer and closer to certain captivity—and could do nothing! It was nightmare."

"Doctor Mac was better than I ever was, once he had completely recovered from his illness," said MacFarlane rapidly. "He was able to gain control for long enough to get you to come into the *Albatross*, in the hope that we might have Malu's help there. The Brain did not want that and tried to make me prevent it. I fought as much as I could against the influence, but it was too strong for me. In the end it conceded Mac's point about your getting into the rocket—the thought once planted in your minds would have been difficult to contradict without rousing too much suspicion before the Brain was sure you were within its net. So it made me hinder two of the party at least, so that it could be sure of some young victims if something went wrong with its major plan."

"The chocolate!" gasped Jacky. "That was why you asked for the chocolate—!"

"It was all I could think of to make some of you go back toward the tractor. Discophora *made* me think of some excuse, and in my weakness that absurd one was the only one! And then, of course, as you know—"

We did know—we knew it all now; and those questions not answered in so many words were answered automatically as we reflected on the whole vast horror of the situation. We saw how it was that once they had been carried beyond the immediate power of the Brain, our two friends had regained their own proper control and had been able to tell us all they had told —how it was, even, that while he had been under the influence of the Brain, through all the long months, Dr. McGillivray, in the lucid moments the Vivores permitted the captives on occasions, had been able to formulate his gigantic theory concerning the true secret of the Canals of Mars.

We saw it all; and we saw also why we had been, for a space, permitted to rest in peace on the plain. For the moment the Brain did not need us—because it had, already in its power, three humans of a different nature from McGillivray and MacFarlane: two children and a woman.

Impelled by the monstrous thought, Dr. Kalkenbrenner rose determinedly to his feet. He knew the truth at last: now, somehow, he had to contrive a plan of action—some way to combat the hideous

paralyzing intelligence lurking within the tumbling forest a mile away.

His face was set as he turned toward me. He opened his lips to speak. But no words ever reached me. In that one instant two things happened—and so the climax burst upon us.

Something, something unutterably compelling, made us turn our heads toward the distant Ridge—all of us. There, in the clear Martian air, even at the distance of a mile and more, we saw three diminutive asbestos-clad shapes emerge precipitously from the dark green forest wall—rush forward toward us. Katey was a little ahead of the other two—we recognized her taller figure. At a brief distance behind them, moving also at speed, were some half dozen of the Terrible Ones, their tendrils flailing the sandy soil.

All this we saw in one fleeting moment—saw too that although they must have known it would accomplish little, our companions fired frantically over their shoulders even as they ran—sent shot after shot from their revolvers into the yielding fleshy egg shapes of their pursuers.

Then all was lost in a violent swirling of the Yellow Cloud, outbursting from the Ridge to envelop the fleeing figures, swirling beyond them toward ourselves as we stayed motionless regarding the whole wild scene.

And simultaneously, even while we switched on the oxygen breathing apparatus at Kalkenbrenner's brusque command—simultaneously our ears were filled with a high menacing frequency hum, throbbing through and through us. For one brief second I hovered yet again upon an edge of nightmare bewilderment: then recognized a further danger threatening—for the frequency hum was the alarm signal transmitted to us from the barrier around the distant *Comet*. It too, remote and undefended, was being attacked—but by what?

CHAPTER XIII. FLASHBACK, BY A. KEITH BORROWDALE, WITH AN INSERTED CONTRIBUTION BY MARGARET K. SHERWOOD

WE PLUNGED FORWARD. The Yellow Cloud was all about us, veritably a typhoon. We could see little at first, but Dr. Kalkenbrenner had swung the tractor around in the direction at least which we knew Katey and the others to be taking—and suddenly there was unexpected help for us from Malu. He, with his highly developed telepathic powers—guided perhaps by the plants on the plain surrounding, perhaps by unconscious impulses from Michael, his old companion—he indicated the path we should take through the opaque yellow wall before us.

"The flame guns," cried Kalkenbrenner's voice within my helmet. "They can do no harm to Maggie and the others—but they can clear a path for us and deal with those other creatures."

I operated the controls at once, and out from the long nozzles mounted on the tractor's front part shot

two widening fans of flame. The typhoon swirled and dispersed in great swathes before them—my senses were full of a conveyed *impression* (how can I otherwise describe it?) of primitive agony: a myriad small tortured voices *from the spores themselves* seemed to scream within my head.

On and on. The distance was short enough—barely a mile—but despite Malu's general guidance we still had to grope, to hold back on our speed lest we should lose our friends in the yellow tempest. I looked around. In the cloud-free bubble in which we traveled, created by the flame throwers, I could see the lost explorers in the trailer with Jacky and Paul. MacFarlane peered desperately into the mist ahead, as did the two young people. But McGillivray, strangely, seemed to be *writing*—stooped over a leaf of paper on his knee, his expression remote and concentrated—and with, it seemed to me, an extraordinary (how shall I put it?) *sadness* in it. I saw him, at one moment, break off his writing to lean close to Malu, as if consulting him; then he set to writing again, guiding the pencil sightlessly across the page, oblivious, it seemed, to the whole wild moment.

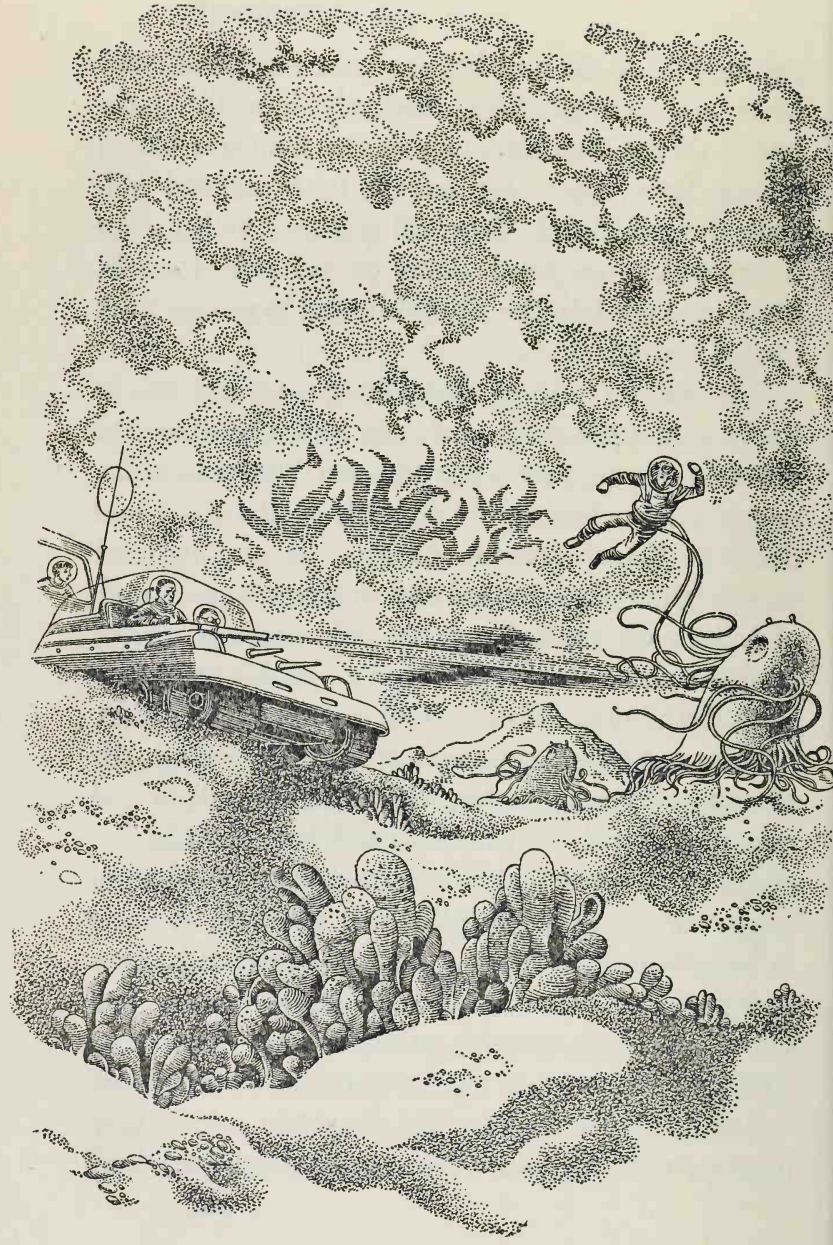
It was, perhaps, a full ten minutes before we came upon our friends. We began to fear indeed that we *had* passed them—that in their flight they had swung around from the track we pursued, that Malu's instinct had led us astray. But suddenly, in one vast

parting fold of the mist before us, we saw them—saw Mike and Maggie firing furiously into the great bodies of the Terrible Ones as the monsters closed around them. One—the largest, immense and hideous, the great blank "face" all spattered with useless bullet holes—encircled Katey in his side tendrils, lifted her high into the air and turned to plunge back toward the Ridge.

The tractor swung dangerously—rocked in its tracks across the loose soil; but Kalkenbrenner had achieved his purpose—the monster was within my range. I wrenched at the controls of the third and deadliest flame thrower—directed its searing blast in a bright ribbon toward the immense squat trunk of Katey's captor; and saw her fall unharmed to the ground as he writhed, releasing her—as his loose fungoid "flesh" gaped horribly and withered in the heat.

Mike and Maggie, answering our cries through the communication apparatus, had turned toward us and now sped rapidly to where we had halted. Mike lingered, to ascertain that Katey was unharmed—helped her to rise, stumbling a little, then thrust on, his arm in hers. Behind, as I swung the flame thrower to blast and rout the other attackers, Paul and Jacky had opened the tent covering of the trailer. A moment later and all three of our companions were aboard.

And in that moment—that desperate hurried moment—something else had happened, something



which, for all its gallant tragedy, was the saving of us indeed. What it was will be recounted in due and proper order; for the present, and to complete all aspects of the story as it progresses, I break the editorial rule and insert here a brief contribution by the one member of the expedition who has not so far set pen to paper. She claims to be no writer—and it has been, I confess, a task of the utmost difficulty to persuade her to take part at all in this compilation. But some account must be given of the adventures of the three members of our party who were, if only for a mercifully brief space of time, face to face with one of the Vivores themselves. The account begins from the moment when Katey turned back from the *Albatross* to fetch MacFarlane's fatal chocolate. Our contributor's language is her own, her method perhaps unique. The very title she has chosen for her short paper is characteristic, both of herself and her boon companion Michael. It is:

OLD JELLYBAGS

An Inserted Contribution to the Narrative of A. Keith Borrowdale

by

Margaret K. Sherwood

Kind folks and gentle people:

Shot One: mid-distance: self and K. Hogarth ambu-

lating across from Albiwalbibalbitross for chocowoco-bocolate. (Used to know a fellow in film business, so this is all film-script stuff: also, of course, anky ooyi eekspi ubbledi-utchdi?) Wham!

Shot Two: close-up self and K. Hogarth in the soup. Yessir. Thick soup. Pea soup. Yellow pea soup. Ellowyi-oudcli.

Dialogue: self and K. Hogarth:

"Guess this ain't so hot, Maggie."

"Guess it ain't, Katey."

"What do we do now, Maggie?"

"Guess we'd better try to get over to the Albiwalbi with the otherswi, Ateyki."

"Okey-dokey, Aggiemi. Ouch!"

This final exclamation (literary stuff now—leaf out of Jacky's book) was occasioned by the sudden looming appearance through the encircling fog of some creatures hitherto beyond our ken, but which we recognized instantly from previous descriptions as some of the celebrated Terrible Ones. (How'm I doing?)

Shot Three or Whatever-It-Is: self and K. Hogarth snatched up in arm tendrils of same and before we knew where we were, *there* we were, padding off into the orestfi.

Sound Track: plenty of excitement music: iddle-iddle-*pom*, iddle-iddle-*pom*, pom-pom-pom-pom-iddle-iddle-pom-pom.

Captured!

In this extremity what will befall our two heroines, swept off into the deadly Martian Forest by the hideous monsters known as the Terrible Ones? There they are, pinned to the trunks of two of the Martian Ridge plants, awaiting with fortitude whatever fate may now befall. Will they escape? See next week's exciting instalment. A Sherwood Production.

Installment Two:

Enter Two-gun Malone, the Boy Wonder of the Martian Wastes. Yippee.

Desperate Dan Malone leaps wildly across the forest floor. Hopalong Malone does his best, firing from all fifteen barrels. Destry Junior to the rescue! Will he make it?

O.K. folks. Answer very simple.

Destry Junior doesn't make it.

Destry Junior is one blamed three-star Fool.

Gesture much appreciated by self and K. Hogarth. Damsels in distress—welcome sight of gallant rescuer. But gallant rescuer ought to have known better.

Gallant rescuer is also captured.

Cut.

Scene Twenty-five: one hour later: self, K. Hogarth and Dead-eyed Dick Malone still prisoner.

Where are their friends—last seen on their way from spaceship with supine figures of Oldtimer Martian Settlers, Doc McGillivray and Hank MacFarlane? Nobody knows.

On all sides (literary stuff) there is an impenetrable wall of the deadly seed spores. Yet it is a curious aspect of the phenomenon that the intrepid captives are themselves in a space which has been kept clear, a bubble, as it were, in the surrounding ellowyi-oudcli.

Close-up: Old Jellybags himself.

Kind friends and gentle people: what do I say now? How do I go on from here?

There he was, plumb in the center of a great slob of marsh, and there was steam rising up all around him. He was white. He was big. And he wasn't no shape at all. He was all messy and throbbing all the time, and he was all over little smooth wet wrinkles, all over the kind of white jelly he was. No eyes, no nothing. Only just all over kind of *raw*-looking. . . .

I just don't like to think of Old Jellybags, kind friends. I just don't . . . !

And the thing was that he *had* us—he had us there; and there wasn't anything we could do. It was just as if you couldn't even *think*. The thoughts were

just drained right out of you, the way it maybe is if you are ever hypnotized, although I haven't ever been hypnotized, so I don't know, but I should think it *was* like that.

He was kind of *finding out about us*. It's the only way to say it. It was his thoughts that were all around us, and he was probing and peering into us with those thoughts of his, and he was trying to find out *what made us tick*.

Our chums the Terrible Ones were all standing back a bit by this time. They were just standing all around like slaves or something. After all, they didn't need to hold us any more. *We couldn't move.*

Well, what was the answer? How did we get away? 'Cos we did get away—you know that, else self wouldn't be writing all this.

Lordy knows how long he had us there, feeling kind of sick, all three of us. Lordy knows.

But we did get away!

How?

Kind friends, you won't believe it. But it worked. It worked for no more'n a split second or two, but it was all we needed. And the clue is what poor old Doc McGillivray said when he was telling the others about Old Jellybags: the Vivore couldn't *quite* "fool all of the people all of the time." No, sir. The process was kind of gradual. Once he had you, of course, he had you—the way he'd had Mac and Steve—but it

took a little time till it was all complete—that was why those two had managed to go on sending messages right till the end, and it was also why—

However.

You see, I began to notice something. I began to notice that Old J.B. was so intent to get to know things in a hurry, sort of, that over and above the gradual-control stuff, he kind of *took us in turn.* He kind of concentrated a bit more on Katey for a moment, and then he concentrated a bit more on Mike for a moment, and then he concentrated a bit more on me for a moment. If we'd stayed much longer he'd've managed all three at once, but right at the beginning that was the way it was. 'Course, when he wasn't concentrating on me, I still couldn't move much, but I could, I just *could* think *some* of my own thoughts.

And it had all just dawned on me, and I was kind of relaxing for a minute in one of those spells, when suddenly I heard a whisper. Yessir! Right in my ear. I'd forgotten all about the whatsit inside our helmets that could make us hear one another. And it was Mike's voice.

He says, "Maggie," he says.

And it was a minute or two before I really got it that it *was* Mike speaking, but I did. 'Cos you see he was talking in Double-talk himself—that's where the Double-talk comes in. It was really "Aggiemi" he

said. And I tried to answer back in the same way. But I couldn't, for all of a sudden Old Jellybags was concentrating right on me again, and there was no hope. But when he switched away from me onto Katey I managed it, 'cos there was Mike's voice again, and he says:

"Maggie," he says, very weak and faint, "can you hear me, Maggie?" (or rather: "Anci ooyi earhi eemi, Aggiemi?")

And this time self makes it.

"Yes," self says, "can hear you, Mike."

And Mike says, still in Double-talk:

"You get the idea? It's one of us and then another of us, and in the times between we can talk, the other two, just a little, not much, but enough."

And self says yes, that self had jumped to it, and Mike says he had spoken to Katey in this way the last time it was me was the one being hypnotized, and that maybe we could work out something, and self says fine and dandy only what? And Mike says he has an idea and it maybe sounds silly but it might work, and just at that moment Old Jellybags swings around to concentrate on Mike and he has to shut up —but of course self can talk to Katey now for a little bit, and self and Katey have some dialogue along same lines before self is under the influence again in her turn.

Get it?

It took hours. All in Double-talk. I don't really know why we did use Double-talk—except maybe it helped to make it all a bit more secret to *us*. We were all a bit dopey and it seemed a good idea at the time. 'Course, if Old J.B. had chosen to do a bit of concentrating on all of us together we'd've been caught out. He could have understood Double-talk just as easily as any other kind of talk—not that he could hear, of course, for he'd no ears, but it wasn't words that mattered to him at all, but the thought behind the words.

Still, luckily he *didn't* tackle us all three at once—and we took tremendous care right through only to talk when he wasn't looking, so to say.

Well then: Mike's idea for a way to escape seems just blamed silly when you set it down like this on paper—I'm almost ashamed to do it! But I told you we were very dopey when we were half under the influence, and it was all we could think of, and anyway it worked, kind friends.

Mike said (only it took a long time for him to say all this, partly to me and partly to Katey), Mike said: "You know back home," Mike said, "when you're with the gang, and you suddenly say to one of them 'Look out behind,' why you can be doggone sure that just for a split second he *will* look out behind. Well," says Mike, "suppose we did that with Old J.B. in front there? 'Course he can't *look* behind, we know

that, but if we all three all thought at the same time, as hard as we could, that there was *something* dangerous behind him, maybe just for the one moment he would switch *his* thoughts away from us. And we can move so quickly on Mars that if we all made one great jump over to the left it would take us twenty feet at least, and then Old Jellybags wouldn't be so strong in his power over us and we could jump again, and then again, and we might get away, right outside, and we would only have the Terrible Ones to cope with, and we could maybe outpace them if we took them by surprise."

Well, Mike said all that, bit by bit, and in the old Double-talk, to each of us, and Katey and I talked about it too, when Mike was under the influence. And so we built it all up. And even at the time it seemed silly, but we had to do something, and it was a long shot.

Once or twice, as we worked it all out, there was the notion that maybe Old Jellybags *was* wise to us. He started switching from one to the other more quickly. But we kept it hidden by only doing a little bit at a time. And at last we were all ready.

"Next time," says Mike, "—next time around and we'll do it. He's at Katey now. He'll switch to me next. Tell Katey to be ready. Then after me he'll switch to you. Now, you know there's just a moment when you feel it all coming on as he does his full

hypnotizing stuff? Well, just at *that* moment, when it's coming to you and leaving me, do everything you can to shout what we've agreed to shout. Katey can do it at the same time, and so will I, just when the 'fluence is leaving me, you see. He won't hear us, of course, but while we shout we'll all three *think* at the same time, and the thought behind the shout will get over to him, and with luck it might work—he might just switch away from all three of us at the same time, and the minute you feel free of him, *jump*, my girl, as hard as you can!"

We did it.

We built it all up.

We had worked out what to say, you see. Not that it mattered what we did say—it was the thought behind it that mattered. If we could only *believe* it strongly enough ourselves . . .

I got the signal from Katey while Mike was under the influence. Then I felt Old Jellybags beginning to switch to me. And I screwed up all my concentration, every single ounce of it, and we all *did* shout at the same time, with a *tremendous* effort, and we almost deafened ourselves inside the helmets. And you'll never guess what we shouted, and if it seems silly you'll remember that we were all dopey when we worked it out, and anyway as I've said it wasn't the words that mattered at all.

We shouted:

"Look out behind there! *Paul Revere!*"

It was all we could think of—it was all we could agree on. And we thought so hard, so hard. I know I thought so hard myself it was as if, just for the one quick second, I had a kind of vision behind Old Jellybags of that old hero we used to read about when we were very young, galloping to the rescue. There was a kind of shadow, very fleeting, in the forest beyond, of a great black horse and a man astride her, coming to save us. I thought so hard, you see.

And it was the thought that did it. There must have been, just for a second, a sudden sense of some kind of danger from all three of us to Old Jellybags. He didn't look around, of course—*but he did switch his thought away from us,* kind friends! I felt all of a sudden free—and I remembered to jump—and I was suddenly flying through the air with Mike on one side and Katey on the other!

And we landed right at the edge of the clear space in the Yellow Cloud. And at that moment Old Jellybags' thoughts were back on us, and he was as angry as angry as angry. But his thoughts weren't so strong this time, and we jumped again, right *into* the Yellow Cloud, and then again, and by now the influence had gone, and the next jump took us clear of the Forest altogether, and we were out in the open and running and jumping on the plain, and the air was all clear, and we could move and use our hands and our own

thoughts again, and we fired and fired at the Terrible Ones who were chasing us after the first surprise, and we saw the others in the tractor far, far away before the Yellow Cloud came swirling out again all around us, and we ran on and on and on and on, and suddenly the Cloud all cleared when the tractor came into it with the flame throwers working full blast and there you have it, kind friends, you know the rest!

Cut! Cut!

Triumphant music!

THE END.

Next Week: Another Sherwood Production, featuring Bing Malone and Marlene Hogarth.

Phew!

Phew indeed!

It is how I invariably feel when I finish reading Maggie's contribution here inserted—quite breathless, as she must have felt when she finished writing it.

So I resume then (Borrowdale writing again), with all threads in the narrative now tied, with the story's progress complete up to the point when we routed the pursuing Terrible Ones and swung open the trailer covering to admit our rescued friends.

May I add only this as a last parenthesis—as a postscript to Maggie's paper:

The method used to escape from the influence of

Discophora may seem indeed, set down in cold black and white, to be somewhat trivial, as Maggie herself has said. But it must be emphasized that the principle lying behind it is more than sound. Not only did it work in practice in this particular instance, but it has, we believe, shown us the way in which we might combat the Vivores when someday we return to renew our contact with them. They are Brain, all Brain. In close proximity to them one cannot help but fall beneath their gradual telepathic control. The one way in which release can truly be found is indeed to contrive some method to divert the intolerably intense attention of that gigantic living intelligence. Maggie and her companions did so by concentrating their own intense thoughts on imaginary danger—so powerfully, for one split second, as to release themselves from the spell long enough to effect an escape. They thought of Paul Revere, the ancient hero of American history, because he constituted, to them, something normal and safe. They might equally well have concentrated on King Arthur, of British legend, or on Charlemagne of French. The words, the image, were of no importance—it was the sudden *impression* that achieved results, the sudden diverting of Discophora's whole attention.

With this elementary but effective example before us, we have, since our return to Earth, been attempt-

ing to perfect a method operating on the same broad principle, which might help us to hold the attention of the Vivores for longer periods. It is, putting it briefly, an apparatus which should be able to oppose and annihilate the deadly thought-impulses from Discophora. We propose, in short, to counter the Living Brains of Mars with the noble Electronic Brain created by Man; and that will be a battle indeed!

It is a tale that is still to be told. This one must meanwhile be ended; and at its end, however we may come to control them in the future, the Vivores were our deadliest enemies.

We knew that most bitterly as we sped across the Cloud-swept plain toward our threatened *Comet*. In the excitement of our plunge forward in the tractor to rescue Katey and the others, we had, of course, ignored the danger signal transmitted to us from the photo-electric barrier apparatus set up around the rocket's base. We had switched off the receivers within our helmets so as to be free from the distraction of the high-pitched frequency hum. Now, with the rescue completed, we retuned—and heard the signal again, insistently. The *Comet* was indeed in danger—something had penetrated the barrier.

And we knew in our hearts, as we speeded forward through the mist, guided by the beamed signal itself—we knew what the danger was. We remem-

bered the arrowhead of Yellow Cloud we had seen from the plain, outthrusting from the "tail" of the Ridge. We knew it now for what it was: a messenger, sent out by our own Discophora to heaven knew how many of his fellow Vivores.

The great Creeping Canals had assembled—across the vast plain they had marched to surround our spaceship. They had reached the very base itself. To win to safety we would have to pass through the deadly controlling zone of them—somehow.

We went forward, always forward, our one hope to reach the *Comet* before, perhaps, she was entirely surrounded. We were all together again. And yet—and yet!—

We were not all together. Two members of our party were missing. The knowledge did not come to us for some time—until we were well on our way from the original Ridge. In the seething confusion of the moment when Katey and Mike and Maggie had clambered into the trailer, two figures had, unnoticed, slipped out into the swirling Cloud. We in the tractor thought they were in the trailer as we went forward toward the *Comet*—our friends in the trailer took them to be in the tractor.

They were in neither. We had gone too far to turn back when, through the communication apparatus, we heard a cry from Katey. She had come across a

folded note, the script on it spidery and uncertain, its corner held by the lid of one of the lockers.

It was addressed to Dr. Kalkenbrenner. He asked her to read it and we all listened to her voice in silence—and I, in my mind's eye, saw the stooping, writing figure of Dr. McGillivray during our long groping journey through the Cloud. . . .

Katey read:

My dear Kalkenbrenner, the danger signal from your ship can mean one thing only: that Discophora surround it, probably in considerable numbers. They will do all they can to prevent your reaching it. But you must reach it, you *must*. You must go back to Earth and take my dear young friends out of the terrible danger to which I feel I have been instrumental in exposing them.

I am blind and helpless. But there is a way in which I may be able to help you. I have discussed it silently with Malu. I need him as a guide in my sightless state, but also he wishes to assist me, and comes out with me in the true spirit which actuated Captain Oates.

I write this as we journey to rescue Miss Hogarth and the others. Malu and I will contrive to slip out of the trailer—with good fortune you may not notice our absence for some little time. Do not try to come after us. It is my last wish that you should go forward and win to safety.

My plan is wild. It may not succeed. But I shall try my best. You will know, when the time comes, what it is I have done.

God bless you all. Your true friend in the eternal cause of science—

Andrew McGillivray

The silence held as Katey finished reading. Her voice was very quiet, imbued with the strange solemnity of the words of McGillivray's enigmatic note.

"Captain Oates," said Jacqueline softly. "Captain Oates, Paul . . . ?"

And Paul answered gravely:

"Don't you remember, Jacky? In Captain Scott's last expedition. The one who went out from the tent into the blizzard to try to save the others—went out to his death. . . ."

Around us indeed, in the little moving "tent" in which we clustered, the yellow blizzard tossed and swirled.

"But how—*how?*" asked Michael. "*How* can he save us?"

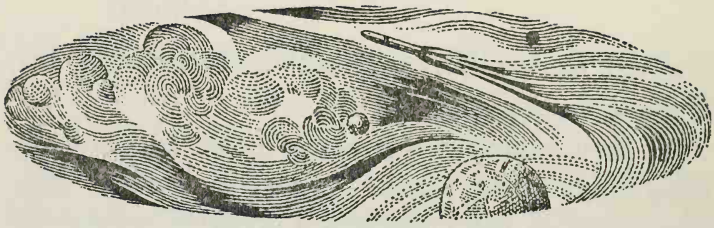
To that compelling question there was no reply. We knew nothing—not even where to look for McGillivray if there were any question of going back for him. We could do no more than obey the final wishes of our lost companion. We went forward, always forward.

Around us, as the distance from the Ridge grew greater, the Yellow Cloud was thinning and dispersing. There came a time at last when it was possible to steer visually. As the last wreathings of the mist

dissolved, we saw far, far ahead across the plain, the slender gleaming spire of the *Comet*.

We drew nearer. And it was as if, indeed, the great rocket stood at the center of a gigantic spider's web. Over the plain had converged a veritable network of the deadly green Creeping Canals, each housing, as we knew, in its steamy depths, a single member of the dying race of the Vivores.

The air was clear now—there were no further traces of Cloud. We still went forward, nearer and nearer. It was the one course possible. The throb of our engine was the only sound in all the vast and menacing scene. But, mingling with it in our heads, at one moment—faintly, infinitely faintly as he made the immense telepathic effort over the distance separating us, from wherever he might be—there came the "voice" of Malu: "Farewell, my friends. Again remember Malu the Tall, Prince of the Beautiful People. Farewell—this time a last farewell. . . ."



CHAPTER XIV. THE LAST JOURNEY, BY A. KEITH BORROWDALE

WE DREW TO A HALT at a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile from the base of the *Comet*. It was evening now, early evening. The silver of the rocket's slender hull glowed red and mauve in the long light of the dying sun. Beyond her spear-point tip the two little moons of Mars went circling, small Phobos joyous in her haste, contrasting strangely with the stillness of the scene confronting us.

The Canals converged to form one dense central enclosure around the *Comet*'s gigantic tripod. There were eight of them—eight Vivores, therefore, lurking close, to control and paralyze us with their concerted power. More, more perhaps were already on their silent creeping way across the plain.

The woods have come up and are standing round in deadly crescent . . .

Deadly indeed. Even more deadly-seeming in their patient stillness and silence. They waited—they only *waited.*

There was no hint of Cloud. The Vivores knew by now that we were impervious to its effect. There was no need even to attempt to use the yellow weapon: the combined intelligence of so many of those vast and living Brains was enough. There was no sign either in all the scene of any groups of the Terrible Ones. Perhaps the Vivores had had no opportunity in their rapid journey across the plains to collect within their orbit any of those ponderous slaves—again, in any case, they must have known that we could deal with the Terrible Ones with the flame-throwing weapons. They had nothing—nothing with which to combat us: except . . . *themselves;* immobile, bodiless, blind, deaf; but knowing everything and possessing an incalculable hypnotic power.

It was Michael who, at the thought of the flame throwers, suggested their possible use against the Vivores. But a moment's reflection showed us their uselessness.

"They might suffice indeed," said Dr. Kalkenbrenner drily. "They would destroy those living Brains, shrivel them up, if once—if *once*—we could get close

enough to use them! A bullet from a revolver might at least incapacitate—but you know yourself, Michael, that your own guns were useless when you confronted Discophora. They were in your hands all the time—yet what could you do with them?"

"The cannon, then," said Mike desperately, "the little cannon on the tractor—or even the machine gun?"

"I reckon," our leader answered very quietly, "I reckon, my friends, that where we stand now is as close as we can venture to the rocket without coming under the influence of those gathered Discophora. A quarter of a mile. There are so many of them—their orbit is immense, and their control will be less gradual than from a single Vivore. Tell me if the cannon would be effective at that distance, Michael, even if we knew where the Vivores are in those forests. Tell me if the machine gun could help us from here. We need larger weapons—larger than we have—larger than we could ever have carried. . . . As we approach to within firing range, so also do we approach within *their* range; and our fingers would refuse to obey us when we tried to fire!"

His tone was detached and cool. Its very calmness sent a shiver through us all as we realized fully, for the first time *fully*, exactly what we faced.

"It might even be worse than that, much worse," he added a moment later. "Our very guns might be

used against ourselves! Who knows, Jacqueline, but that as we go through that forest there, a power beyond your control might make you snatch your brother's revolver and turn it against him? Miss Hogarth is her own fiancé's deadliest danger—my own niece might aim at me! No—no. Our first step of all is to throw aside our weapons—to leave them here before we advance one further step."

We heard him in horrified silence—and watched him as he unbuckled his revolver- and cartridge-belt and sent it hurtling, with the weapons themselves, far, far behind, till it fell with a little puff of red dust in the sands of the desert. One by one, compelled by the nightmare image he had conjured, we followed suit.

His next step was to move to the front of the tractor toward the cannon and machine-gun mountings. We thought for a moment that he meant to disconnect them also, but instead we saw him jam the mounting in such a way that the weapons could point only forward—could not be swung backward to face into the vehicle. When he had completed the work he threw away the adjustment mechanism: the guns now pointed irrevocably away from the tractor, as also did the flame throwers when he had treated them likewise.

"These," he said, when he saw our questioning glances, "might help a little. As we go forward—

and we must go forward—we shall have set them in action, jammed them so that they stay in action. It might achieve something. One Brain may be put out of action if it comes into the tractor's path, and so lessen our burdens. At least the flames will clear a pathway through the Ridge plants. For the same general reasons I propose to set the tractor in motion when the time comes and remove most of its controls, so that even if we have an impulse to change direction or go more slowly, we shall be physically unable to do anything about it. The only mechanisms I shall leave untouched are the brakes and the ignition key. We must pray to heaven that I shall have sufficient will power to stop the tractor when we reach the rocket itself."

So then, laboriously, our plans were made. We saw, with every moment that passed, that our only hope lay, indeed, in ourselves—in our own ability to concentrate all our efforts toward success. All the time, as we went forward, we would be subject to an intolerable command *not* to go forward; our every instinct would be to defeat our own purposes.

We jammed our oxygen breathing equipment, so that we would be unable to act on any impulse to switch it off. We broke the latching mechanisms of our helmets, knowing that once we were aboard the *Comet*—if we ever reached the *Comet*—we would be able to find tools to disconnect them again. We

made other similar preparations; and all the time, as we worked, the sun sank lower and lower: the moment approached when the Martian night would fall with all its tropical swiftness. Whatever happened, we had to start our last long Martian journey before darkness enveloped us to add to our danger.

Swiftly, Kalkenbrenner disconnected the trailer. It was essential that we should travel through the forest at speed—the highest speed to which we could mount. Somehow, somehow, we would all have to crowd into the tractor itself—packed close, but with some measure of safety in that very closeness, since each of us could watch the others for any signs of weakness.

Always, as we worked, MacFarlane helped us with advice. He knew, more bitterly than any of us, the power of the controlling Brains. Only once, toward the end of our preparations, did he make mention of McGillivray and Malu. As the moment approached for our journey, he shook his head sadly, looking back across the wastes we had traveled toward the distant Ridge where lay the *Albatross*.

"If only," he said, in hardly more than a whisper, "if only *they* were with us!"

"We can do nothing," said Kalkenbrenner quietly. "We cannot go back—he would not even wish us to go back. Before heaven, MacFarlane, my own deepest desire is to stay! We have done nothing here

—achieved no single one of the scientific purposes I had hoped for. But until we can combat those creatures—" and he waved toward the silent forests ahead, "—we must only return to Earth. We have the young people to think of—we have our own very lives to think of. We cannot stay here, to be surrounded further by yet others of those monsters —to be utterly destroyed by them—and worse than destroyed, if it is their intention to use us as McGillivray once said: as living sacrifices toward their own need for survival. We must go—and we will go. I do not know—I know no more than any of you—what the end may be, what McGillivray intended in his effort to save us. He may already be dead back there, he and Malu. There is nothing we can do for them in the course they have chosen. *We must go on.*"

And so, at the last, our moment came. We steeled ourselves toward it. Each one of us knew his duty—each one of us knew the part to be played. We took our places in the little tractor, our faces pale, determined, our hearts as calm as we could make them.

Our leader, upon whom so much depended, gave one last look around at us, sketched over for confirmation the plan we had formed. Then he too mounted to his place. The tractor pointed straight across the plain toward the rearing *Comet*, ready for its own dying journey, for it too would have to be abandoned when we reached our destination.

Kalkenbrenner revved the engine, nodded to me to be ready to set the guns and the flame throwers into action at the moment when I first began to feel the influence of the Vivores stealing over me.

We went forward, gathering speed; and Providence alone knows the thoughts crowding in upon us as we approached the silent menace lying between us and safety.

We won through. You must know, you who read, that we did win through, or this account of our last strange journey would never have been written. Here, at the end, when all should mount to a final searing climax, I feel most my inadequacy as a writer. It is not possible—not in any way possible—for me to convey even the merest suggestion of the horror we encountered. I would face a thousand physical dangers—I would undertake to write, in all fullness, an account of them thereafter; but to describe the silent nightmare of our journey is beyond me forever.

I remember only, as we advanced, that I was filled at the first with an ineffable sadness—a sense, somehow, in spite of all that had been achieved, of strange failure. I thought of those we had abandoned—I thought of all that might have been done in the alien world to which we had traveled so long before, as it

seemed. I thought of our friends on distant Earth, toward which, with heaven's help, we might within the hour be speeding. I looked into the pale mauve sky—was overwhelmed, yes, even at such a moment, by a sense of the unutterable beauty of all the scene surrounding—yes, even of the dark green forest toward which we sped: the great olive sheaths of the plant we would always think of as *alisma*, the wonders of the sentient cactus creatures on all sides, the rearing distant line of the Martian hills, fretted against the last sky. . . . I saw all these things, felt all these things; and marveled at the infinite bounty of nature.

I felt Katey's gloved hand in my own—looked around to see her pale quiet face within the helmet, smiling a final salutation. Perhaps, perhaps we looked our last upon each other. I made to whisper some few inadequate words to her—then recollected, with a strange reserving foolishness, even then, even at such a moment, that whatever I said would be heard by all our companions; and so said nothing —only smiled, as she did. . . .

We all were silent—all silent. We clustered together in the speeding tractor, our eyes ahead. We waited, waited—as also waited the enemies before us. Never, never before in all human history was so strange a battle joined—so silent, so subtle a battle, with no other weapons than those of the mind, with

no other banner to carry us forward to the attack than simple human hope.

And suddenly—unexpectedly almost, even although we were prepared for it—the battle was joined, at the very moment when we were approaching the forest wall, the tossing barrier of the Ridge plants now writhing at last with life. They must have waited, the Vivores must have waited, until long, long after we had, in fact, entered their orbit of control, so that their attack, when it concertedly came, would be more powerful, more compelling than any gradual mounting of control would have been. I remembered only to set our little weapons into action—even then was assailed by a desperate wish *not* to touch and jam the controls; and the silence was broken by a harshness of sound, nightmarish in its alien impact on the silent battlefield.

And I recall little else than that—in all the circumstances I recall indeed little else than that. Not one of us is able to remember the detailed movement of the conflict—how could we, when our own minds were the veritable battlefield after all?—when our thoughts were a chaos, a confusion of conflicting impulses? We longed, longed to stop the tractor—to destroy the very tractor. We longed to defeat our own so careful plan—to surrender, to go forward quietly into the great swamps before us, to submit to the gigantic intelligences commanding us. Yet somehow,

fighting desperately to retain control—somehow we did go forward. The great soft tossing plants went down before us, crushed and blasted. Amid all other horrors possessing us was a sense of unbearable primitive agony from them as their tissue withered and died. Soft puffy wisps of the Yellow Cloud encircled us, no longer ejected as a weapon, but expired, as it were, by the dying plants as we fought our way through them. I saw Kalkenbrenner's face at one moment, twisted with an intolerable effort as he resisted the impulse to switch off the ignition, to apply the brakes before we had reached our goal. I saw the children huddled together, striving even physically, with desperate movements of the hands, arms, shoulders, to keep from attempting to tear off their jammed helmets, from leaping out from the tractor to what seemed, oh seemed, like safety in the hidden heart of the morass . . . !

From first to last there was no sign of any of the Vivores themselves: somewhere, somewhere in the steamy depths, they remained hidden, their thoughts alone encompassing us. But always and always, as we struggled, our minds were full of the gigantic images of them—the white loose nightmares that they were.

And now above us loomed at last the rocket—yet the bitterest stage of all was still to be faced. In a contortion of endeavor, our leader brought the tractor to a halt, the flame throwers still spouting, the

guns ablaze. Like creatures bewitched, our movements laborious and tormented, we left our places in the prearranged order, fought forward across the last small intervening space. Once Maggie turned—I heard a cry, a scream from her within my helmet; she made to run toward the forest. It was Michael who gripped her and held her until she had refound her strength and stumbled clumsily forward with the rest of us.

The ladder now—but the power of the Vivores stronger, always stronger. As I mounted, as I followed the children and Katey up the long, long extent of the last barrier, I bit my lips to blood in resisting the temptation to throw myself out and away—to fall into the soft lush comfort, as it seemed, of the clustering forest below. Behind me, at one moment, there was a soft moan from MacFarlane, who more than any of us was in torment from his own previous experiences; but an instant later, and at heaven knows what cost, there came a sharp, even brutal command from Dr. Kalkenbrenner to restrain him from the biting impulse to let go.

Our limbs half-paralyzed, our bodies scarcely obeying the last shreds of control left to us, we fell one by one across the threshold of the rocket's cabin. I heard, I recall, a last spluttering from the now empty machine gun far below; then I was crawling forward, crawling like an animal, one thought, one only in me

now: *to destroy the rocket launching mechanism before Kalkenbrenner could reach it.* In an ecstasy of hatred against myself I set to clambering over the instrument panel toward the master switch, to break, to shatter it utterly.

Our leader knew—he saw my intention. It must have burned also in him, that impulse; yet with a last gigantic effort he overcame it—and defeated me. In a gush of thankfulness I felt myself pushed aside—felt myself roll and fall against the wall. He had somehow, on entering the rocket, closed the great door of the entrance hatch. Now he too, with everything in readiness if only he could reach the master switch, he too went crawling and clambering toward the control panel as I had done—but with different motives.

His hand was outstretched. He fought. I saw from his white screwed face how hard he fought. His eyes burned out toward the master switch as he reached for it—closer and closer—his fingers trembling, quivering in the desire to touch it and yet not to touch it. I fought his battle with him—we all did, crouching helplessly in the cabin there: longed, longed for him to reach the switch—longed, longed for him not to reach the switch.

He failed. At the last he was defeated. I knew he was defeated. I saw his hand fall back, fall back. I knew that a moment more and all would be lost—

that we would be compelled, each one of us, to crawl across the cabin floor once more, this time to retreat from the rocket and eternal safety—to fall down into the green horror surrounding us. I saw MacFarlane, his expression a mingling of bitter shame and still more bitter relief, lift his own hand to release the catch of the door. I saw Kalkenbrenner fall still farther back from the panel, weak and helpless. . . .

And then, almost beyond the last, in that one moment when our salvation hung in the balance, my ears were filled with a strange far roaring sound. I I thought for a moment that Kalkenbrenner had reached the switch after all—that what I heard was the sound of the booster-rocket in action; but I knew that he had not touched the switch—that we were motionless still upon the Martian surface, that our ship would never rise at all, never.

Yet the sound I heard intensified—it filled my very being. I saw MacFarlane, his hand now no more than an inch from the door catch, look down toward the plain and his whole face transfigure in a moment, his whole expression change to one almost of exultation.

I knew nothing—nothing. Except that instantly, miraculously, the great burden lightened. All, all that had oppressed me fell away—I was suddenly free and myself again; at the very moment when, with a cry of triumph, a veritable scream of triumph, Kal-

kenbrenner leaped forward, a free man also, and threw over the switch.

The great ship rocked, then steadied herself. The mighty blast of the booster drowned all other sound. The others now were on their feet, their expressions ecstatic. I saw, outside, from where I lay, the darkening sky light up with a great outbursting of flame. We soared higher, still higher, the menace now far, far behind us. I saw MacFarlane, still motionless by the doorway, looking down through the little porthole in it; and his eyes were wet with tears. I rose and moved toward him; yet before I could reach him to see what he so strangely saw, the booster fell away, the great main engines of the rocket roared into life, and our senses all swam into blackness as we hurtled farther and farther into space, the Angry Planet, upon which we so nearly had met our deaths, already many thousands of miles away.

Beyond the velvet void, across the gigantic reaches confronting us, lay our own quiet Earth—lay safety. As we traversed those incalculable miles we learned and marveled at the truth—learned how it was, after all, that a desperate promise made had been fulfilled; how much had been dared by the man we had left behind and by his companion to bring us to safety; how, at that last moment, when all hung in the balance, the deadly influence of the Vivores had been

destroyed, so that Kalkenbrenner's hand could at last go forward to the master switch.

The story ends. My part in it is played. I set aside my pen.

Three months after that moment when the gallant action of Dr. McGillivray brought us to safety, we reached our Earth indeed, so concluding in triumph, but also in deepest sorrow, the Third Martian Expedition, the first full flight of the spaceship *Comet*. Much, much had been left undone—but also much had been achieved. We had at least returned safely —had fulfilled our own promise to bring back the young people and one, if only one, of the men we had gone to find.

The story ends; but beyond it lies another story, still to be told and to which also, with heaven's help, I may be permitted to contribute: the story of the projected Fourth Expedition to the Angry Planet, when, as it is hoped, once more under the leadership of Dr. Kalkenbrenner, we shall set out yet again to master the mysteries of our nearest true neighbor in space.

May I, then, in concluding my own task, say only, both to those who may believe and those who may not believe—the eternal doubters who see nothing more, perhaps, than a pleasant fiction in these patient pages of ours—may I say only, with my companions

of the Third Expedition: Dr. Kalkenbrenner, Catherine Hogarth, Michael Malone, Margaret Sherwood, Paul and Jacqueline Adam, Stephen MacFarlane: only *au revoir!* and so sign myself, in all sincerity—

A. Keith Borrowdale

AN EPILOGUE BY THE EDITOR, WITH SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS AND A FINAL SALUTATION BY STEPHEN MacFARLANE

THERE IS LITTLE I need add in my own person (J.K.C. writing). The story has been told and is ended: it ended on the day when I heard of the landing of the *Comet* in Scotland, and hurried by air, with the young people's parents (Mike's mother and father were also back in Britain by this time), from London to distant Pitlochry. It was a slight miscalculation on Dr. Kalkenbrenner's part, at the point of entering Earth's atmosphere, which guided the great vessel toward Britain rather than America, as had been his first intention; and when it grew apparent that a landing in this island would be preferable to an attempt to regain the original course, Dr. Kalkenbrenner wisely chose the reaches of the kingdom least inhabited, so that the risk of danger to our populace should be reduced to a minimum. Thus, then, the Scottish Highlands; with, in the event, that happy coincidence of landfall in reason-

able proximity to Pitlochry, the site of Dr. McGillivray's original experimental laboratory.

It will not be necessary, I fancy, to dwell upon the delight with which the young explorers were greeted by their parents, nor to describe the scene of reunion with Mr. Borrowdale and Miss Hogarth which was happily enacted when Roderick Mackellar arrived in the Highlands from Glasgow, pursuant on the telegram I had dispatched to him from London. It was a jovial party indeed which sat down to a communal meal that evening in Pitlochry's largest hotel. Will you believe me when I tell you that before the night was out, Dr. Kalkenbrenner and Mackellar were discussing the first tentative plans for a return journey to Mars?—in all seriousness, I assure you, with us others joining in in like spirit.

What shape that Fourth Expedition may take it is impossible as yet to foresee. It will suffice that while this book has been in active preparation, the distinguished American Scientist, back once more in his own country (with his ebullient niece), has been engaged in much research, not only into improvements on the design of his spaceship itself, but—as Mr. Borrowdale has already said—on methods likely to be of service in countering the dangers from the new types of Martian inhabitants met by the explorers. He is also, I am told, working on a

full technical account of the first great voyage of the *Comet*.

Until that volume appears—and these are my own concluding words—this brief book, for all its sketchy imperfections, must remain as the only account extant of the adventures encountered by the members of the Third Expedition. It is my own profound regret, as editor of all the contributed papers, that there has not been among these pages any true fragment from the pen of Dr. McGillivray himself. All others have been represented. He, alas, has not. I voice, in saying so, I think, only a fraction of the great sorrow with which, through all the passing months, we have viewed—have been forced to view—the fact of his tragic death. He went out indeed, that day, into the depths of the Yellow Cloud, like Captain Oates: to sacrifice himself to save his friends. Both he and the Martian Malu must have known from the start the fate awaiting them; but both still went out "like very gallant gentlemen" to embark on the only course possible to them to help their colleagues win back to Earth.

I will say no more: there is only one man fit to add, as it were, an epitaph in remembrance of a great adventurer. That man is the comrade who was closer to him than any other. Mr. MacFarlane has already made contribution of a kind to these pages, in the

shape of the transcribed messages constituting the early chapters of our book. Here, at the end, I have asked him to add some words entirely his own; and so I retire to permit him to do so. In them it will be disclosed how it was, after all, that Dr. McGillivray was able courageously to go out that day with Malu and, at the last desperate moment, release the travelers from the influence of the Vivores and so ensure their safety.

He had no weapons—nothing. The travelers have told me that they found even his pistol abandoned in the trailer, simultaneously with their discovery of his final enigmatic note.

And yet—and yet!—he did have a weapon: one single gigantic weapon. His use of it will be described now by his friend and helper through all the tribulations of his last sojourn upon distant Mars.

He had one weapon indeed. He had invented it himself, long before. It was the *Albatross!*

Mr. MacFarlane:

What I write first, in describing the last journey of my friend Andrew McGillivray, is conjecture only. Yet in my heart I know it to be truth. I see all things clearly from the moment when, blind as he was, with Malu, as gallant an adventurer as himself, to help him, he set out from the trailer during the confusion of

our rescue of Miss Hogarth and the two young people.

I see them both go forward into the Cloud; and he is sustained by an exaltation arising out of his great sacrifice. It gives him strength—the inconceivable strength he needs to combat the immense influence of the creature into whose sphere he must advance.

How long the journey took that day I do not know. Time mattered little—yet in another sense time mattered much. Looking back, and in a calculation based on the length of our own journey across the plain and all that subsequently befell, I believe that his progress was slow. Physically, it must have been slow, in his blindness—he required Malu's assistance for every step of the way. Mentally, it must have been slower still; for in another sense each step of the way must have been fought for most bitterly against the compelling power of Discophora as he neared the *Albatross*.

But he was sustained by his own faith, his own great strength of will. They conquered all things: he was inspired beyond all normal human ability by his tremendous purpose. He was able, in his exaltation, to resist Discophora in a way that neither of us had ever been able to resist before. I, who was with him in the early days of our subjection, who know the full power of that single creature in the Canal, I only have

any conception of the gigantic effort it must have cost to reach the spaceship.

He did reach her—at last he did reach her; and set laboriously to mount within her, again each step a battle and a conquest. Perhaps, who knows, Discophora was able to send against him those few of the Terrible Ones who may have survived our own attack with the flame guns on the plain. If so, he must somehow have defeated them. Perhaps Malu, armed throughout with his deadly silica sword, was able to help.

But whatever befell, they won to the ship as she lay there in the great enclosure. And so she too approached the moment of her last journey—she who had traveled so far, accomplished so much: the first ship in all human history ever to reach the Angry Planet.

She lay on her underside, flat upon the floor of the extending forest. We had had no time when, long, long before, we had dragged her across the plain, to erect beneath her, as we had intended, such an improvised launching ramp as we had built at the time of her first sojourn on Mars; and it will be recalled that, unlike the *Comet*, the *Albatross* required a launching ramp from which to leap forward into space.

I see my friend in the little cabin we both had known so well, had lived in for so long; and it

must have been, this moment, the very moment when we ourselves, so many, many miles away, were setting forward in the tractor on our journey to the *Comet*.

What his thoughts were I have no far knowledge. He had little time, perhaps, for thought at all, beyond the mighty thought of what he intended to do. Somehow, through a last incalculable effort of will, he was able to achieve what he and I had often talked of trying to achieve in our more lucid moments during captivity—yet had always, in our thraldom, been prevented from achieving.

As the *Albatross* lay on the forest floor, the forward *tuyère* nozzles pointed straight toward the marshy lair of the great Brain. In a conflict of intelligences far, far more bitter in such a moment than anything that we were experiencing on the plain, my friend reached out his hand to the control lever which would release a blasting of rocket fuel from those *tuyères* in the great ship's prow. He wrenched the lever down; and I hear the immense explosive rush of sound there must have been as that deadly sword of pure flame leaped out to scorch and annihilate our enemy. I hear, in nightmare, the shrill but silent scream of agony which must have filled the minds of our two lost friends as the monster before them shriveled and perished. I experience, with them, the great wave of desperate relief which must have swept over them when at last, after so long, so long, the thraldom ended

and the whole vast Canal before them veritably died at the moment of its mighty Brain's own death.

And now there still remained the last bright flaming voyage of the dying ship. They knew, our two friends knew, as they lingered there before her control panel, that she would never again plunge into open space: without a launching ramp she could not. But, in the driving impulse from the great reserves of her fuel-tanks, she could sear and scorch her way across the very surface of the plain, ripping herself open in the intolerable friction, destroying herself utterly in a wild outbursting of explosive effort.

With Malu again to guide, and in the freedom—the temporary freedom only—from control (for shortly he would again be subjected to the very concerted influence to which we, so far away, were being subjected), the master of the spaceship set to guiding her in a vast sweeping white-hot arc to where he knew the *Comet* lay. He guided her on the plain in exactly the way in which he was accustomed to guide her in space: by controlling the jetting force from the various *tuyères* in her prow, her stern, along her silvery sides.

Within, as they plunged and slithered forward at a speed beyond all imagining, the heat must have been an insufferable agony. Such a journey could not last —could not, could not; and none knew it better than

he did. But it could last long enough—just long enough—and upon that, at the end of all, he counted.

So then, as I stood by the doorway of the *Comet*, my eyes upon the vast extending scene below, I saw him at the end of all indeed—and realized on the instant what his plan from the first had been; as I have, in this brief final account, described it. My ears were filled with the great rushing explosion of the *Albatross'* mighty engines in that last great death plunge. I saw her searing fiery track across the plain —saw her plunge, plunge, *plunge* into the very heart below us of the deadly intelligences holding us from our own leap into space. She circled in a sparkling crescent through the growths beneath, ripped almost to pieces at the last, her hulk incandescent, life within her no longer possible—shriveled and destroyed as surely as she was shriveling and destroying the pulsing Brains controlling us.

And all, all burst at the end, burst up to the very sky in a gigantic rose of flame mingling with the flame from our own hot blast as the influence broke that held us back—as the great Brains, screaming, died beneath us and released us. All, all perished as we soared above the final immense convulsion, as the *Albatross*, and all within her, shattered to a million white-hot fragments.

My friend, my friend! I have looked out through many silent nights to that small dying star where you and your brave companion lie. I shall return—never fear. Someday, some distant day I shall return; if only to mark, before I die, your lonely gallant grave.

CROSS

THE RETURNED JOURNEY BACK

COWARD-
McCANN