fantastic

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JACK WILLIAMSON · MARION Z. BRADLEY
GORDON DICKSON · ROG PHILLIPS

THE ABNORMALS

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fantastic

APRIL 1959

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Editorial

ONE of the nice things about editing a magazine of fantasy is that you can let your mind wander in all sorts of strange directions, and everyone else in the shop has to agree that you are working. For instance, while some of our esteemed contemporaries were bedeviling themselves about getting pictures to go with stories, or worrying about meeting deadlines, we were idly thinking the other day about whether—if given the choice—we would prefer to be a werewolf, a ghoul or a vampire.

You'd be surprised how involved the making of such a decision gets to be. At first glance, we thought that being a werewolf clearly was the best idea. You are fierce and powerful, snuggly warm in your fur coat, you can change back to human shape more or less at will—you are, in fact, almost a respectable monster.

By contrast, a ghoul, as a friend of ours puts it, is "a real nothing." Traditionally filthy, frightened of shadows, and existing on a dull diet of corpses (which you cannot charge to your Diners Club account), he scarcely seems a monster to aspire to.

Vampires have a large following.

"I wouldn't mind being a vampire," said our art director, who has strong, white teeth, and cannot be found alive in his office until sunset any night. "Vampires are usually noblemen, they travel in good company—not like werewolves, who are always shlepping around with gypsies. Besides, a man needs a drink now and then."

(Continued on page 19)

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The ship carried pure horror. But the terror really started only when the undefiled ones came from Earth. Why would they want a favor from . . .

THE ABNORMALS

By HARLAN ELLISON

BEDZYK saw Riila go mad, and watched her throw herself against the lucite port, till her pin-head was a red blotch of pulped flesh and blood. He sighed, and sucked deeply at his massive bellows chest, and wondered how *he,* of all the Discards, had been silently nominated the leader. The ship hung in space, between the Moon and Earth, unwanted, unnoticed, a raft adrift in the sea of night.

Around him in the ship's salon, the others watched Riila killing herself, and when her body fell to the rug, they turned away, allowing Bedzyk his choice of who was to dispose of her. He chose John Smith—the one with feathers where hair should have been —and the nameless one who chittered instead of talking.

The two of them lifted her heavy body, with its tiny pea of head, and carried it to the garbage port. They emptied it, opened it, tossed her inside, re-dogged and blew her out. She floated past the salon window on her way out. In a moment she was lost.

Bedzyk sat down in a deep chair and drew breath whistlingly into his mighty chest. It was a chore, being leader of these people.

People? No, that was certainly not the word. These Discards. That was a fine willowy word to use. They were scrap, refuse, waste, garbage themselves. How fitting for Riila to have gone that way, out the garbage port. They would *all* bid goodbye that way some day. He noted there

was no "day" on the ship. But some good *something*—maybe day, maybe night — each of them would go sucking out that port like the garbage.

It had to be that way. They were the Discards.

But people? No, they were not people. People did not have hooks where hands should have been, nor one eye, nor carapaces, nor humps on chests and back, nor fins, nor any of the other mutations these residents of the ship sported. People were normal. Evenly matched sets of arms and legs and eyes. Evenly matched husbands wives. Evenly distributed throughout the Solar System, and evenly dividing the goods of the System between themselves and the frontier worlds at the Edge. And all evenly disposed to let the Dirty Discards die in their prison ship.

"She's gone."

He had pursed his lips, had sunk his perfectly normal head onto his gigantic chest, and had been thinking. Now he looked up at the speaker. It was John Smith, with feathers where hair should have been.

"I said: she's gone."

Bedzyk nodded without replying. Riila had been just one more in the tradition. They had already lost over two hundred Discards from the ship. There would be more.

Strange how these—he hesitated again to use the word *people,* finally settled on the they used among themselves: creatures — these *creatures* had steeled themselves to the death of one of their kind. Or perhaps they did not consider the rest as malformed as themselves. Each person on the ship was different. No two had been affected by Sickness in the same way. The very fibers of the muscle had altered with some of these creatures, making their limbs useless; on others the pores had clogged on their skin surfaces, eliminating all hair. On still others strange juices had been secreted in the blood stream, causing weird growths to erupt where smoothness had been. But perhaps each one thought he was less hideous than the others. It was conceivable. Bedzyk knew his great chest was not nearly as unpleasant to look upon as, say, Samswope's spiny crest and twin heads. *In fact,* Bedzyk mused wryly, *many people might think it was becoming, this great wedge of a chest, all matted with dark hair and heroic-seeming. Uh-huh, the others were pretty miserable to look*

at, but not myself, especially. Yes, it was conceivable.

In any case, they paid no attention now, if one of their group took his life. They turned away; most of them were better off dead, anyhow.

Then he caught himself.

He was starting to get like the rest of them! He had to stop thinking like that. It wasn't right. No one should be allowed to take death like that. He resolved, the next one would be stopped, and he would deliver them a stern warning, and tell the Discards that they would find landfall soon, and to buck up.

But he knew he would sit and watch the next time, as he had this time. For he had made the same resolve before Riila had gone.

Samswope came into the salon—he had been on KP all "day" and both his heads were dripping with sweat — and picked his way among the conversing groups of Discards to the seat beside Bedzyk.

"Mmm." It was a greeting; he was identifying his arrival.

"Hi, Sam. How was it?"

"Metsoo-metz," he gibed, imitating Scalomina (the one-eyed ex-plumber, of Sicilian descent), tipping his hand in an obvious Scalomina gesture. "I'll live. Unfortunately," he added the last word with only a little drop of humor.

Morbidity ran knee-deep on the ship.

"Riila killed herself a little bit ago," Bedzyk said carelessly. There was no other way to say it.

"I figured as much," Samswope explained. "I saw them carrying her past the galley to the garbage lock. That's number six this week alone. You going to do anything, Bed?"

Bedzyk twisted abruptly in his chair. He leveled a gaze at a spot directly between Samswope's two heads. His words were bitter with helplessness and anger that the burden should be placed upon him. "What do you mean, what am *I* going to do? I'm a prisoner here, too. When they had the big roundup, I got snatched away from a wife and three kids, the same as you got pulled away from your used car lot. What the hell do you want me to do? Beg them not to bash their heads against the lucite, it'll smear our nice North view of space!"

Samswope wiped both hands across his faces simultaneously in a weary pattern. The blue eyes of his left head closed, and the brown eyes of his right head blinked quickly. His left head, which had been speaking till now, nodded onto

his chest. His right head, the nearly-dumb one, mumbled incoherently — Samswope's left head jerked up, and a look of disgust and hatred clouded his eyes. "Shut up, you—you dullard!" He cracked his right head with a full fist.

Bedzyk watched without pity. The first time he had seen Samswope flail himself—would flagellate be a better term?—he had pitied the mutant. But it was a constant thing now, the way Samswope took his agony out on the dumb head. And there were times Bedzyk thought Samswope was better off than most. At least he had a release valve, an object of hate.

"Take it easy, Sam. Nothing's going to help us, not a single, lousy th—"

Samswope snapped a look at Bedzyk, then catalogued the thick arms and huge chest of the man, and wearily murmured: "Oh, I don't know, Bedzyk, I don't know." He dropped his left head into his hands. The right one winked imbecilically at Bedzyk. Bedzyk shuddered and looked away.

"If only we could have made that landing on Venus," Samswope intoned from the depths of his hands. "If only they'd let us in."

"You ought to know by now, Sam," Bedzyk reminded him bitterly, "there's no room for us in the System at all. No room on Earth and nowhere else. They've got allocations and quotas and assignments. So many to Io, so many to Callisto, so many to Luna and Venus and Mars and anyplace else you might want to settle down. No room for Discards. No room in space, at all."

Across the salon three fish-men, their heads encased in bubbling clear helmets, had gotten into a squabble, and two of them were trying to open the petcock on the third's helmet. This was something else again; the third fish-man was struggling, he didn't want to die gasping. This was not a suicide, but a murder, if they let it go unchecked.

Bedzyk leaped to his feet and hurled himself at the two attacking fish-men. He caught one by the bicep and spun him. His fist was half-cocked, before he realized one solid blow would shatter the water-globe surrounding the fish-face, and killing the mutant. Instead, he took him around and shoved him solidly by the back of the shoulders, toward the compartment door. The fish-man stumbled away, breathing bubbly imprecations into his life water, cast-

ing furious glances back at his companions. The second fishman came away of his own accord, and followed the first from the salon.

Bedzyk helped the last fishman to a relaxer, and watched disinterestedly as the mutant let a fresh supply of air bubble into the circulating water in the globe. The fish-men mouthed a lipless thanks, and Bedzyk passed it away without affectation. He went back to his seat.

Samswope was massaging the dumb head. "Those three'll never grow up."

Bedzyk fell into the chair. "You wouldn't be too happy living inside a goldfish bowl yourself, Swope."

Samswope stopped massaging the wrinkled yellow skin of the dumb head, seemed prepared to snap a retort, but a blip and clear-squawk from the intercom stopped him.

"Bedzyk! Bedzyk, you down there?" it was the voice of Harmony Teat up in the drive room. Why was it they always called *him?* Why did they persist in making him their arbiter?

"Yeah, I'm here, in the salon. What's up?"

The squawk-box blipped again and Harmony Teat's mellow voice came to him from the ceiling. "I just registered a ship coming in on us, off about three-thirty. I checked through the ephemeris and the shipping schedules. Nothing supposed to be out there. What should I do? You think it's a customs ship from Earth?"

Bedzyk heaved himself to his feet. He sighed. "No, I don't think it's a customs ship. They threw us out, but I doubt if they have the imagination or gall to extract tithe from us for being here. I don't know what it might be, Harmony. Hold everything and record any signals they send. I'm on my way upship."

He stood quickly out of the salon, and up the cross-leveled ramps toward the drive room. Not till he had passed the hydroponics level did he realize Samswope was behind him. "I, uh, thought I'd come along, Bed," Samswope said apologetically, wringing his small, red hands. "I didn't want to stay down there with those—those freaks." His dumb head hung off to one side, sleeping fitfully.

Bedzyk did not answer. He turned on his heel and casually strode updecks, not looking back.

There was no trouble. The ship identified itself when it was well away. It was an At-

taché Carrier from System Central in Butte, Montana, Earth. The supercargo was a SpecAttaché named Curran. When the ship pulled alongside the Discard vessel and jockeyed for grappling position, Harmony Teat (her long gray-green hair reaching down past the spiked projections on her spinal column) threw on the *attract* field on that portion of the hull. The Earth ship clunked against the Discard vessel, and the locks were synched in.

Curran came across without a suit.

He was a slim, incredibly tanned young man with a crewcut clipped so short a patch of nearly-bald showed at the center of his scalp. His eyes were alert, and his manner was the brisk, friendly manner of the professional dignitary in the Foreign Service.

Bedzyk did not bother with amenities.

"What do you want?"

"Who may I be addressing, sir, if I may ask?" Curran was the perfect model of diplomacy.

"Bedzyk is what I was called on Earth." Cool, disdainful, I-may-be-hideous-but-I-still-have-a-little-pride.

"My name is Curran, Mr. Curran, Mr. Bedzyk. Alan Curran of the System Central. I've been asked to come out and speak to you about—"

Bedzyk settled against the bulkhead opposite the lock, not even offering an invitation to the Attaché to return to the salon.

"You want us to get out of your sky, is that it? You stinking, lousy . . ." he faltered in fury. He could not finish the sentence, so steeped in anger was he. "You set off too many bombs down there, and eventually some of us with something in our bloodstreams react to it, and we turn into monsters. What do you do . . . you call it the Sickness and you pack us up whether we want to go or not, and you shove us into space."

"Mr. Bedzyk, I—"

"You *what?* You damned well *what,* Mr. System Central? With your straight, clean body and your nice home on Earth, and your allocations of how many people live where to keep the balance of culture just so! You *what?* You want to invite us to leave? Okay, we'll go," he was nearly screeching, his face crimson with emotion, his big hands knotted at his sides in fear he would strike this emissary.

"We'll get out of your sky. We've been all the way out to

the Edge, Mr. Curran, and there's no room in space for us anywhere. They won't let us land even on the frontier worlds where we can pay our way. Oh no, contamination, they think. Okay, don't shove, Curran, we'll be going."

He started to turn away, was nearly down the passageway, when Curran's solid voice stopped him: "Bedzyk!"

The wedge-chested man turned. Curran was unsticking the seam that sealed his jumper top. He pulled it open and revealed his chest.

It was covered with leprous green and brown sores. His face was a blasted thing, then. He was a man with Sickness, who wanted to know how he had acquired it—how he could be rid of it. On the ship, they called Curran's particular deformity "the runnies."

Bedzyk walked back slowly, his eyes never leaving Curran's face. "They sent you to talk to us?" Bedzyk asked, wondering.

Curran re-sealed the jumper, and nodded. He laid a hand on his chest, as though wishing to be certain the sores would not run off and leave him. A terror swam brightly in his young eyes.

"It's getting worse down there, Bedzyk," he said as if in a terrible need for hurrying. "There are more and more changing every day. I've never seen anything like it—"

He hesitated, shuddered.

He ran a hand over his face, and swayed slightly, as though whatever memory he now clutched to himself was about to make him faint. "I—I'd like to sit down."

Bedzyk took him under the elbow, and led him a few steps toward the salon. Then Dresden, the girl with the glass hands—who wore monstrous cotton-filled gloves—came out from the connecting passage leading to the salon, and Bedzyk thought of the hundred weird forms Curran would have to face. In his condition, that would be bad. He turned the other way, and led Curran back up to the drive room. Bedzyk waved at a control chair. "Have a seat."

Curran looked collegiate-boy shook-up. He sank into the chair, again touching his chest in disbelief. "I've been like this for over two months . . . they haven't found out yet; I've tried to keep myself from showing it. . ."

He was shivering wildly.

Bedzyk perched on the shelf of the plot-tank, and crossed his legs. He folded his arms across his huge chest and looked at Curran. "What do

they want down there? What do they want from their beloved Discards?" He savored the last word with the taste of alum.

"It's, it's so bad you won't believe it, Bedzyk." He ran a hand through his crewcut, nervously. "We thought we had the Sickness licked. There was every reason to believe the atmosphere spray Terra Pharmaceuticals developed would end it. They sprayed the entire planet, but something they didn't even know was in the spray, and something they only half-suspected in the Sickness combined, and produced a healthier strain.

"That was when it started getting bad. What had been a hit-and-miss thing — with just a few like yourselves, with some weakness in your bloodstreams making you susceptible—became a rule instead of an exception. People started changing while you watched. I—I" he faltered, again shuddered at a memory.

"My, my fiancee," he went on, looking at his attaché case and his hands, "I was eating lunch with her in Rockefeller Plaza's Skytop. We had to be back at work in Butte in twenty minutes, just time to catch a cab, and she—she—*changed* while we were sitting there. Her eyes, they, they—I can't explain it, you can't know what it was like seeing them water and run down her ch-cheeks like that, it was—" his face tightened up as though he were trying to keep himself from going completely insane.

Bedzyk curbed the hysteria sharply. "We have seven people like that on board right now. I know what you mean. And they aren't the worst. Go on, you were saying?"

Such prosaic acceptance of the horror stopped Curran's hysteria sharply. "It got so bad everyone was staying at their homes, no one going out it was so horrible. Then some quack physician out in Cincinnati or somewhere like that, came up with an answer. A serum made from a secretion in the bloodstreams of—of—"

Bedzyk added the last word for him: "Of Discards?"

Curran nodded soberly.

Bedzyk's hard-edged laugh rattled against Curran's thin film of calm. He jerked his eyes to the man sitting on the plot-tank. A furious expression came over him.

"What are you laughing at? We need your help! We need all you people as blood donors."

Bedzyk stopped laughing

abruptly. "Why not use the changed ones from down there," he jerked a thumb at the big lucite viewport where Earth hung swollen and multicolored. "What's wrong with them—" and he added with malice, "— with you?" Curran twitched as he realized he could so easily be lumped in with the afflicted.

"We're no good. We were changed by this new mutated Sickness. The secretion is different in our blood than it is in yours. You were stricken by the primary Sickness, or virus, or whatever they call it. We have a complicated one. But the way the research has outlined it, the only ones who have what we need, are you Dis—" he caught himself, "—you people who were shipped out before the Sickness altered."

Bedzyk snorted contemptuously. He let a wry, astonished smirk tickle his lips. "You Earthies are fantastic." He shook his head in private amusement.

He slipped off the plot-tank's ledge and turned to the port, talking half to himself, half to a non-existent third person in the drive room. "These Earthies are unbelievable! Can you imagine, can you *picture* it?" Astonishment rang in his disbelief at the proposal. "First they hustle us into a metal prison and shoot us out here to die alone, they don't want any part of us, go away they say. Then when the trouble comes to them too big, they run after us, can you help us please, you dirty, ugly things, help us nice clean Earthies." He spun suddenly, "Get out of here! Get off this ship! We won't help you.

"You have your allotments and your quotas for each world—"

Curran broke in, "Yes, that's it. If the population goes down much more, they've been killing themselves, riots, it's terrible, then the balance will be changed, and our entire System culture will bend and fall and—"

Bedzyk cut him off, finishing what he had been saying, "—yes, you have your dirty little quotas, but you had no room for us. Well, we've got no room for you! Now get the hell off this ship. We don't want to help you!"

Curran leaped to his feet. "You can't send me away like this! You don't speak for all of them aboard. You can't treat a Terran emissary this way—" Bedzyk had him by the jumper, and had propelled him toward the closed companionway door before the At-

taché knew quite what was happening. He hit the door and rebounded. As he stumbled back toward Bedzyk, the great-chested mutant picked the briefcase from beside the control chair and slammed it into Curran's stomach. "Here! Here's your offer and your lousy demands, and get off this ship! We don't want any part of y—"

The door crashed open, and the Discards were there.

They filled the corridor, as far back as the angle where cross-passages ran off toward the Salon and galley. They shoved and nudged each other to get a view into the drive room; Samswope and Harmony Teat and Dresden were in the front, and from somewhere Samswope had produced an effectively deadly little rasp-pistol. He held it tightly, threateningly, and Bedzyk felt flattered that they had come to his aid.

"You don't need that, Sam —Mr. Curran was just leav—"

Then he realized. The rasp was pointed not at Curran, but at himself.

He stood stock still, one hand still clutching Curran's sleeve, as Curran bellied the briefcase to himself.

"Dresden overheard it all, Mr. Curran," Samswope said in a pathetically ingratiating tone. "*He* wants us to rot on this barge," he gestured at Bedzyk with his free hand as the dumb head nodded certain agreement. "What offer can you make us, can we go home, Mr. Curran . . .?" There was a whimpering and a pleading in Samswope's voice that Bedzyk had only *sensed* before.

He tried to break in, "Are you insane, Swope? Putty, that's all you are! Putty when you see a fake hope that you'll get off this ship! Can't you see they just want to *use* us? Can't you understand that?"

Samswope's face grew livid and he screamed, "Shut up! Just shut up and let Curran talk! We don't want to die on this ship. *You* may like it, you little tin god, but we hate it here! So shut up and let him talk!"

Curran spoke rapidly then: "If you allow us to send a medical detachment up here to use you as blood donors, I have the word of the System Central that you will all be allowed to land on Earth and we'll have a reservation for you so you can live normal lives again—"

"Hey, what's the matter with you?" Bedzyk again burst in, trying vainly to speak over the hubbub from

the corridor. "Can't you see he's lying? They'll use us and then desert us again!"

Samswope growled menacingly, "If you don't shut up I'll kill you, Bedzyk!"

Bedzyk faltered into silence and watched the scene before him. They were melting. They were going to let this rotten turncoat Earthie blind them with false hopes.

"We've worked our allotments around so there is space for you, perhaps in the new green-valleys of South America or on the veldtland in Africa. It will be wonderful, but we need your blood, we need your help."

"Don't trust him! Don't believe him, you can't believe an Earthman!" Bedzyk shouted, stumbling forward to wrest the rasp-pistol from Samswopes' grip.

Samswope fired point-blank. First the rasp of the power spurting from the muzzle of the tiny pistol filled the drive room, and the smell of burning flesh, and Bedzyk's eyes opened wide in pain. He screamed thinly, and staggered back against Curran. Curran stepped aside, and Bedzyk mewed in agony, and crumpled onto the deck. A huge hole had been seared through his huge chest. Huge chest, huge death, and he lay there with his eyes open, barely forming the words "Don't . . . you can't, can't t-trust an Earthmmm . . ." with his bloody lips. The last word formed and stayed forever.

Curran's face had paled out till it was a blotch against the dark blue of his jumper. "Y-y-y . . ."

Samswope moved into the drive room and took Curran by the sleeve, almost where Bedzyk had held it. "You promise us we can land and be allowed to settle someplace on Earth?"

Currant nodded dumbly. Had they asked for Earth in its socket, he would have nodded agreement. Samswope still held the rasp.

"All right, then . . . get your med detachment up here, and get that blood. We want to go home, Mr. Curran, we want to go home more than anything!"

They led him to the lock. Behind him, Curran saw three mutants lifting the blasted body of Bedzyk, bearing it on their shoulders through the crowd. The body was borne out of sight down a cross-corridor, and Curran followed it out of sight with his eyes.

Beside him, Samswope said: "To the garbage lock. We go that way, Mr. Curran."

His tones were hard and uncompromising. "We don't like going that way, Mr. Curran. We want to go home. You'll see to it, won't you, Mr. Curran?"

Curran nodded dumbly again, and entered the lock linking between ships.

Ten hours later, the med detachment came up. The Discards were completely obedient and tremendously helpful.

It took nearly eleven months to inoculate the entire population of the Earth and the rest of the System—strictly as preventive caution dictated—and during that time no more Discards took their lives. Why should they? They were going home. Soon the tug-ships would come, and help jockey the big Discard vessel into orbit for the run to Earth. They were going home. There was room for them now, even in their condition. Spirits ran high, and laughter tinkled oddly down the passageway in the "evenings." There was even a wedding between Arkay (who was blind and had a bushy tail) and a pretty young thing the others called Daanae, for she could not speak herself. Without a mouth that was impossible. At the ceremony in the salon, Samswope acted as clergy, for the Discards had made him their leader, in the same, silent way they had made Bedzyk the leader before him. Spirits ran high, and the constant knowledge that as soon as they had the Sickness halted, they would be going home.

Then one "afternoon" the ship came.

Not the little tugs, as they had supposed, but a cargo ship nearly as big as their own home. Samswope rushed to synch in the locks, and when the red lights merged on the board, he locked the two together firmly, and scrambled back through the throng to be the first to greet the men who would deliver them.

When the lock sighed open, and they saw the first ten who had been thrust in, they knew the truth.

One had a head flat as a plate, with no eyes, and its mouth in its neck. Another had several hundred thousand slimy tentacles where arms should have been, and waddled on stumps that could never again be legs. Still another was brought in by a pair of huge empty-faced men, in a bowl. The bowl contained a yellow jelly, and swimming in the yellow jelly was the woman.

Then they knew. They were not going home. As lockful after lockful of more Discards came through, to swell their ranks even more, they knew these were the last of the tainted ones from Earth. The last ones who had been stricken by the Sickness—who had changed before the serum could save them. These were the last, and now the Earth was clean.

Samswope watched them trail in, some dragging themselves on appendageless torsos, others in baskets, still others with one arm growing from a chest, or hair that was blue and molding growing out all over the body. He watched them and knew the man he had killed had been correct. For among the crowd he glimpsed a bare-chested Discard with huge sores on his body. Curran.

And as the cargo ship unlocked and swept back to Earth—with the silent warning *Don't follow us, don't try to land, there's no room for you here* — Samswope could hear Bedzyk's hysterical tones in his head:

Don't trust them! There's no room for us anywhere! Don't trust them!

You can't trust an Earthman!

Samswope started walking toward the galley slowly, knowing he would need someone to seal the garbage lock after him. But it didn't matter who it was. There were more than enough Discards aboard now. **THE END**

EDITORIAL

(continued from page 5)

Personally, despite the social implications of vampire-dom, I wouldn't care to be one. I like garlic in my salami too much.

No, I'm afraid that for me personally, the decision is: werewolf. After all, some of the gypsy girls are rather nice.

What would you rather be? Choose from among the entire eerie cast of fantasy characters, and let's hear your decision, and your reasons.

Only one thing is no fair. You can't be a silver bullet.—NML

AFTER THE FUNERAL

By GORDON DICKSON

She thought his philandering love was dead. But she was wrong. It was only buried.

AS THEY left the cemetery gates behind them, he shoved the car's heater controls all the way up, but the blasting warmth merely nibbled at the shell of cold encasing him.

"Can't you drive a little faster?" his wife said. "I want to get home and have a drink."

"All right, Helen," he said, numbly. "It's the traffic, slowing us."

"Really, Henry!" She tucked the collar of her fur coat around her thinning neck. Above it, her sharp-boned face would now be turned to him with that look as if he had been one of her former pupils, back in the days before their marriage, who had failed again to learn some simple fact of word. "I think we could have left a little earlier than we did."

"No," he said.

"These graveside services! Louise *would* specify a graveside service for her funeral. If that isn't just like her!"

"Little enough," he said. "After all these years." His words went out in a cloud of thin steam against the frosty windshield. He did not return Helen's gaze, which nonetheless he could feel, her eyes like two chill spots of pale gray shadow on his cheek. The street was frozen iron-hard, but the new coat of light snow upon it made it slippery; and the cars ahead of him moved creakily and with caution, as if their very joints and bearings were stiff with the cold. "She wanted us with her—to the end."

"Perhaps." He heard his wife sniff. "And maybe Louise just wanted us to suffer for it. You don't know women like I do. I wouldn't put it past her."

"She's dead," he said.

"Oh, stop it, Henry! You act as if she was one of your own family—or one of mine, for that matter. Instead of some little graduate student we've taken care of for nine years."

The cars ahead were beginning to turn off the direct route from the cemetery. He was able to speed up and he thought to himself that they would be back, in their own home, soon.

"Oh, I liked her, all right," his wife was saying. "—as well as anyone could. You have to admit yourself she was more than a little odd. Hardly a fit subject for your telepathy experiments and such, otherwise. Still, you never heard me complain about your bringing her into our house to live."

"No," he said, thickly, "you never complained."

"I understood from the first what an odd little piece she was. But I resigned myself to having all sorts of characters around when I married you. Though why you couldn't just teach psychology without going into research on mind-reading and psychokinesis and clairvoyance, and all the rest—well, I resigned myself to associating with freaks. You turn here."

"I know," he said. "I know it."

"Of course," she went on. "I never expected to have you bring home one of them like a prize pig and install her under my own roof for nine full years."

"She was very gifted," he said. "She had no place else to go."

"For God's sake, Henry! The city takes care of people with no place to go, nowdays. Or the government, or someone. Besides, she wasn't so sick as all that. Just a bad heart."

"Bad enough to kill her—at the end."

"Well, goodness—home at last!" Helen leaned forward and he saw her nose, sharp in profile against the windshield. He swung in to the curb before their large old house. The snow was drifted high and frozen hard against the dull brown brick of the walls. "Henry! Aren't you going to put the car in the garage?"

"I want to get inside."

They got out; and the iciness of the gray afternoon wrapped itself around them,

slipping in through the little crannies and gaps of their winter clothing, even in the short time it took to hurry up the front walk and up the three concrete steps through the big oak front door into the house.

"Whew!" cried Helen, taking off her scarf and shaking her dark hair out. "That's finally over! I'll light the fire in the living room. And you make us that drink, Henry. A couple of stiff ones."

He was slower removing his coat and hat. He hung them up mechanically and walked to the kitchen. Opening the refrigerator, he took out a tray of ice cubes. His chilled fingers shuddered away from its freezing metal as he set it down on the sterile white enamel of the kitchen table. He broke the cubes free into a glass bowl, filled a pitcher with water, and carried them to the living room.

The fire was already beginning to crackle up. Helen stood before it, her tweed skirt stretched over the rather lean line of her hips, warming her hands.

"No ice for me," she said at the sound of its tinkle in the bowl. "I'm cold enough already, thank you. Just scotch and water."

He made two drinks without ice and carried one to his wife.

"Skoal!" she said, taking and lifting it. He turned away. The fire was no help to him. He turned and walked away from her, over to the window; and looked out at the car. A new little snow was beginning to dust down; and already its dark top and hood were powdered.

"What's the matter, darling?" she said behind him. "Can't you enjoy the wake?"

"The wake," he muttered.

He stood staring out the window. Behind him, Helen's voice took on a new note.

"You know the girl was in love with you, don't you?"

"She was?" He looked down at the glass in his hand. His fingers were curled around it so tightly they seemed frozen to it.

"Why, of course. I knew it from the first. The only reason I never objected or said anything to you about it was because you were so blind to it, yourself." She laughed. "And you were blind, weren't you, Henry? Nine years with your nose in your papers and she following you around with her sad sheep's eyes."

"You," he said between stiff jaws, clumsily, "are a sadist."

"No, just a woman. Tell me,

Henry. Was she really any good at telepathy—and all those things? Was she really enough of a success to justify to yourself having her around?"

"Yes," he said.

"No, I mean it. Did you really get into each other's minds? Really in? I know you said you did; but did you?"

"I told you so." The words were thick.

"Because, Henry, I'll tell you why I ask. I watched you too close for anything physical to happen between you. But if there was something else—something on this mental level—" she paused. "Turn around. I want to look at you."

He turned awkwardly and felt the weight of her eyes on his face, although he would not look up to meet them.

"—there'd be a special hell for a man who'd cheat on his wife like that," he heard her voice, softly, "a man who'd live with his wife; and all the time—under the same roof—" her voice sharpened. "Well, don't just stand there! Answer me!"

"Answer—" his tongue stumbled, "what?"

"What I'm saying. Say it wasn't true."

"It—wasn't—true."

"That's my good Henry." She moved and he heard her going over to the table with the scotch, and the sounds of refilling her glass. "—and a little ice this time," her voice came gaily over the chink of cubes in the glass. A sound of stirring. "All right, love, it's all over now. Let's relax. Make small talk for me, Henry. Isn't the cold terrible?"

"Terrible," he said.

"—And that awful cemetery. I thought I'd freeze to death. Weren't you freezing too, pet?"

"Freezing too, pet," his numb voice said. "It's cold in the coffin."

"What?" her voice sharpened again. "Henry, are you taking picks on me? I said, let's relax! What's that you said, supposed to mean?"

He did not answer. She came furiously around to stand before him. He saw her face pale and two-dimensional, like a bobbing face on a movie screen.

"Henry!" she screamed. "What do you mean—cold in the coffin? Answer me!"

It was a great effort, but he obeyed.

"I'm cold," he said, between ice-glued jaws, "—cold. So cold. Here in the coffin."

THE END

SECOND MAN TO THE MOON

By JACK WILLIAMSON

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

It takes team work to get to the moon and back again. Doesn't matter at all if you hate the other guy on your team.

Rescue Rocket to Search for Lost Spaceman

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. —General Otto Hahn, commander of the new United States Space Corps, announced at noon today that the giant rocket *America IV* will take off within a few hours in an attempt to rescue Captain Dan Slavik, space hero who carried the American flag to the moon.

Civilian space experts were quick to predict disaster for Captain James West, who will pilot the rescue rocket. They point out that the Space Corps has failed to find and remove the mechanical "bug" that has already destroyed three of the four American moon rockets.

Captain Nick Emilani was only eighty miles above Cape Canaveral when his *America I* exploded into a green fireball visible from New Orleans to Havana. Captain Carlos Prieto was killed when his *America II* went out of control, six hundred miles above the Earth, and collided with the satellite stage that held his fuel for the actual moon trip.

Captain Dan Slavik, who took off from the rocket base here only eight days ago, was reporting unexplained control difficulties as he approached the moon. His radio transmissions were suddenly interrupted, as he prepared to fire a marker missile containing a shaped charge designed to spray powdered pigments through the vacuum of space to the surface of the moon. Slavik was at first believed to

Stumbling at first, Jim slowly learned to cope with the moon's tricky gravity.

have died like Emilani and Prieto.

Only forty-eight hours ago, however, observers saw the missile explosion which painted an enormous American flag across the sunlit side of the moon. Although Slavik's radio has not been heard again, this spectacular signal from the moon is proof that he is still alive. Fearing that he is trapped in his damaged rocket on the moon, in danger of being cooked alive by the two-hundred degree temperatures of the lunar day, General Hahn has taken personal charge of the final preparations for West's rescue flight.

At his press conference today, Hahn refused to answer his civilian critics, who attribute all these disasters to the military choice of a solid fuel for the moon vehicles—

Waiting on the windy high platform of the gantry, two hundred feet above the scorched concrete firing pad at Cape Canaveral, Jim West looked up from that newspaper item, with a quick grin at General Hahn.

"Maybe they're right." Worry seamed Hahn's lean face. "Maybe we should call it off."

Leaner and younger than Hahn, West answered with only a shrug. Moving clumsily in the sagging fabric of his uninflated spacesuit, he crumpled the newspaper and tossed it into the wind.

"You know the odds are a thousand to one that you'll lose your own life without helping Slavik," the general insisted. "Even if he is your buddy—"

"He's no buddy of mine," West's easy grin creased into a brief scowl of trouble. "In fact, I have personal reasons to dislike him. But he's on the team. I intend to bring him back—even if I have to punch him on the nose when we land."

"If you're all that determined—good luck!"

Silently, West shook the general's hand. He turned slowly to look back at the long empty beach and the sprawling buildings of the base, and then calmly climbed the steel ladder to the door in the blunt, bright nose cone. Moving stiffly in the pressure suit, he ducked into the narrow door of the ship.

"Watch your head—"

The general's warning came an instant too late. He rubbed his bruise and made a face at the heavy fire extinguisher clamped just inside the door. Painfully, he grinned at Hahn.

"Couldn't you find a better place for that?"

"Look inside." Hahn waved toward the yellow oxygen tanks and black-cased electronic gear that filled every spare inch of space in the nine-foot metal ball that nestled in the nose cone. "Keep it where you can reach it," he warned. "We've got just one clue to that bug in these beasts. Emilani had time to yell fire—"

"Minus two hours!" a rasping speaker in the rocket interrupted him. "Ground control to pilot," another voice cut in. "Final instrument check will now begin. Pilot, are you ready?"

"Pilot ready."

Lying on the crash pad, two feet beneath the knobs and dials of the intricate electronic gear that would really pilot the rocket, he began the elaborate checking procedure —the last search for the undiscovered "bug" that had got *America I* and *America II* and *America III*.

Two hundred miles from Cape Canaveral, Miss Victoria Hill came home to her rooming house from the Smithwick Junior High School. She found a letter waiting for her, on the table in the hall. Two minutes later she was on the telephone, calling Jim West.

"You're too late, Miss," a brisk official voice informed her. "He's sealed in the rocket, and the final countdown has already started. We can't interrupt the firing procedure."

Vicky Hill had red hair, however, and a very stubborn chin. Twenty minutes later she was talking to General Hahn himself, begging him to delay the take-off.

"Because of a horrible misunderstanding!" she gasped into the phone. "You see, I met them both last year—Jim and that Captain Slavik—when I brought my ninth-grade science class to see Cape Canaveral. Slavik—well, he wasn't very nice. But Jim was wonderful! Jim and I almost got engaged. But then he didn't call—didn't call me any more—"

Her voice cracked, and she had to stop.

"Please, Miss Hill. I'm extremely busy—"

"But I've got to talk to Jim." She was frantic now. "Because I just got his note—his farewell note. Now I know why he didn't call me. He believes I'm in love with Slavik —I guess Slavik told him something that wasn't altogether true. I think he's try-

ing to rescue Slavik for my sake—"

"I doubt that," the general broke in. "I know West and Slavik aren't exactly friends. But they're fellow spacemen, both devoted to our great task —which is blazing a trail from Earth to the planets. I'm very sorry you're upset, but nobody here at Cape Canaveral has time just now to waste on any trivial romance—"

"It is not trivial," she interrupted desperately. "Not to me! Not to Jim—"

The telephone clicked in her ear.

Back in her room, she tried doggedly to grade a stack of algebra papers, but x wouldn't equal anything. She snapped on the portable television set that Jim had given her—while she still thought they were almost engaged.

"—Clem Peabody, bringing you the moon flight." The hawk-faced announcer was holding a little globe, pocked with the craters of the moon and marked with a tiny flag. "It is minus five minutes, here at Cape Canaveral, as we bring you General Hahn in a taped interview."

General Hahn looked almost as lean and hard and young as Jim.

"Now, General, can you tell us how a rocket moves, out into empty space?"

"The same way you do—by pushing back on something else."

"Out in space, what has it to push against?"

"Its own jet of burning fuel," the general said. "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction, as Newton proved. The expanding gases move backward, and the rocket is driven forward. To get away from Earth, you need a take-off velocity of about seven miles a second. That means the moon rocket must be nearly all fuel. Captain West is sitting on a small mountain of solid high explosive."

The rocket ship flashed on the screen, a round white tower standing tall beside the spidery gantry crane, with the flat sea wide as space beyond. Staring at it, Vicky Hill clenched her hands and shivered as she listened.

"The pilot's sphere weighs only four tons. The fuel in the ground stage weighs five hundred tons—and that's just enough to put the sphere into orbit, six hundred miles up. There West must pick up the satellite stage. That's another eighty tons of solid fuel—enough to take him out to the

moon, and get him back to his rendezvous with the re-entry vehicle that is already waiting in orbit to carry him down to Cape Canaveral again."

"Thank you, General Hahn!"

Clem Peabody's excited hatchet face was back on the screen.

"The time is minus one minute, here at Cape Canaveral!" His voice was authentically breathless now. "Captain West is strapped to his crash pad, ready to go. His only duty now is to monitor the instruments. Ground control will guide the rocket for him, so long as he's in range of their beam.

"Minus thirty seconds! Here's the official countdown!"

"Twenty seconds!" twanged a thin nasal voice. "Ten seconds! . . . Five! Four! Three! Two! One! *Zero!*"

For a moment Vicky thought nothing was going to happen, after all. But then a great sudden cloud of white smoke exploded from the rocket, with a rumble like thunder. At first the smoke was all she could see. Then the rocket rose slowly out of it, standing on a tail of fire. It lifted faster, faster, till the buildings and the sea were gone and it was only a faint gray blur fading on the little screen.

The first roar of the rockets came only faintly to West, for their driving fire was nearly two hundred feet beneath his insulated sphere. He felt a slight vibration. Then a gentle pressure thrust his body down against the crash pad, and steadily grew.

"Ground to pilot!" It was General Hahn himself. "Jim, you're on the way! But don't forget to watch for fire!"

"I'll — watch — " West's muscles tightened, fighting that growing acceleration thrust. "And I'll bring—" He had to stop and gasp for breath. "Slavik back!"

His breath was all crushed out again. As the fuel burned, the total mass of the rocket grew less. Since the thrust remained the same, the acceleration mutliplied. Its gigantic power ground him into the crash pad. His chest hurt. His eyeballs ached. Blackness fogged the instruments above him. Somewhere, he heard a shattering crash.

"Ground to pilot!" General Hahn's anxious voice seemed faint and distant. "Was that a meteor?"

He had no breath for an answer. Anyhow, he didn't know.

"Hang on, Jim!" the general's voice was cheering him. "Ten more seconds, and you'll have orbital velocity. This is it. *Motors off!*"

He waited for that crushing hand to lift. Instead, it grew heavier. The rocket motors kept roaring in his ears, their fire nearer now. He struggled to reach the manual controls, but his arms were pinned down with their own pitiless weight. Blackness was drowning him—

But suddenly then he was weightless, floating in a silent bath of air. He gasped and gasped, fighting to fill his empty, burning lungs.

"Ground to pilot!" Hahn's sharp voice crashed into that sudden quiet. "What went wrong?"

"The rockets burned—" He struggled for his breath again. "Burned five seconds too long."

"Try to locate the trouble, while you can."

He stirred his bruised body gingerly. His legs floated off the pad, and held themselves up. His arms drifted. He turned his head to find the dials above him, and the movement made the whole rocket spin insanely.

"If I can," he whispered. "But I feel—I can't tell you how I feel—"

He loosened the straps and swam toward the door. Beyond the little plastic panel, it was dead black night. He snapped off his instrument lights, and the stars came out. They were hard sharp points of unglittering fire. As his eyes adjusted to the dark, their frozen, many-colored splendor stopped his breath again.

He watched them, fighting his vertigo, till a violet veil was slowly drawn across them. Behind it came a long misty curve of dazzling light, that blotted out the stars. He saw the cloud-blurred shape of Florida—above him, somehow, not beneath. He clung with a desperate sick longing to the great, blazing crescent Earth, until at last the crazy spinning of the rocket ceased.

"Pilot to ground," he called hoarsely. "Now I'll look for that bug—"

Sitting huddled before the television set that he had given her, Vicky Hill followed him out toward the moon. She chewed her nails when she learned that he had failed to run down the trouble. She held her breath while Clem Peabody told how he was trying to pick up the tons of high explosive in the satellite stage, without colliding with it. She

prayed silently as the tracking telescopes followed the two small sparks drifting together in space, and breathed her thanks when they met without explosion. Her tired body tensed again, when she heard Clem Peabody announcing that West was ready at last for the real moon trip.

"The rocket is still under remote control, from the great electronic computers here at Cape Canaveral," Peabody said. "The motors should burn for exactly one hundred and twenty-eight seconds, to boost West into his new trajectory."

The gray spark on the screen exploded, then, into a long plume of fire. She leaned to watch it, counting off the seconds. Her count passed one hundred and twenty-eight, and still the long plume burned. Terror had taken her breath and stopped her count, long before something snuffed it out.

She relaxed a little then, half relieved, trying hard to convince herself that she had simply counted too fast. She sat staring at the fading speck on the tiny screen, trying blankly to imagine what Jim was doing and thinking and feeling, out there all alone.

"Here's General Hahn, with his latest official report on the lunar flight." Clem Peabody was with the general on the screen; they both looked almost as worn and anxious as she thought Jim must be. "General, by now I suppose you must be ready to admit that West has met the same space gremlins that got Emilani and Prieto and Slavik?"

"I wouldn't put it quite that way." Hahn's tired face tightened. "But West's motors did fire out of control again—for twenty-one seconds, this time —on his boost from the orbit out toward the moon."

"How do you account for that?"

Hahn frowned and shook his head.

"Couldn't it be the fuel?" Peabody's voice turned harsh with accusation. "The solid propellant? Aren't liquid fuels more powerful and safer?"

"But they don't store so well," Hahn said quietly. "They corrode pipes and valves and pumps. We had to use something stable enough to be stored in the satellite stage, and safe enough to be carried all the way to the moon."

"Your safety record is not impressive." Clem Peabody grinned sarcastically. "Would you mind telling us how you

attempt to control a fire in five hundred tons of high explosive?"

"We form it into thousands of separate charges," the general told him patiently. "We pack each charge in a separate insulated cell. An electrical ignition system fires each cell, as its thrust is needed. Each one should burn without setting off the next."

"Then how do you explain these accidents?"

"I don't." Hahn looked grim. "I can't."

Clem Peabody nodded, with a certain satisfaction.

"Now what about Captain West?" he demanded. "I think you'll have to admit that he's in a bad spot now."

The general wet his stern lips before he answered. "It's true that he's in an extremely distressing situation. Those twenty-one seconds of uncontrolled thrust burned approximately four tons of fuel, and pushed the rocket dangerously out of its computed trajectory."

"And now what?"

Vicky Hill held her breath, leaning desperately to hear.

"Captain West has a choice to make." The general paused, scowling into the camera, until Peabody prompted him. "He can go into orbit around the moon, instead of attempting to land. That should save fuel enough to get him back alive."

"Assuming the gremlins don't strike again! But what's his other choice?"

"He can carry out his original mission." The general's drawn face furrowed severely. "He can reach his assigned target area, in Copernicus crater. He can radio back a scientific report on the moon. Perhaps he can even tell us what happened to Slavik—and to all of our rockets!"

"Well?" Peabody's sharp hawk-face jutted toward the general. "Which decision will you advise?"

"I've already talked to West. I advised him to take the safe orbit around the moon, to observe what he can from a few hundred miles, and come on home."

"What was his decision?"

"He seemed badly shaken up. He asked for time to think."

Bruised from the mauling power of the runaway rocket, Jim West felt unfit to face any decision. When he had painfully completed his report to General Hahn, he snapped the radio off. It left a deathly stillness. He sucked water out of a plastic tube to wash the dry fear from his throat, and

floated limply in his tiny pool of captive air.

The lack of weight, which had made him ill at first, was strangely restful now. Somehow, shooting out across the long quarter-million miles to the moon, he went to sleep. The harmless ping of a micrometeor woke him. He felt strong and fit and suddenly hungry. He ate a sandwich and then amused himself with an orange, letting it spin in the air beside him like a tiny yellow planet, before he ate it and gathered the drifting debris of his meal into the disposal bag.

Floating loosely moored in his narrow space between the crash pad and the electronic astrogation gear, he manipulated the telescope to pick up the hazy, cloud-clotted Earth, and then the cold little globe of the waxing moon. They were bright and strange against the bottomless blackness of space, somehow unreal. It was hard to remember how much they mattered.

Drifting there, free from the old rule of gravity, remote from all the human calls of the living world behind him and the inhuman menace of the dead satellite ahead, he methodically monitored his instruments. Once again, painstakingly, he tested every circuit of the electronic pilot —and still he found no cause for its fatal misbehavior.

Resting, he pondered the actions of Dan Slavik—whose reckless hunger for what was not his own seemed oddly unimportant now. Lingeringly, he thought of Vicky Hill. Closing his eyes, trying vainly to see her gay red head, he saw instead what he had to do. Calmly, at last, almost lazily, he snapped on the radio transmitter and called Cape Canaveral.

Somehow, toward the end of each endless night, Vicky Hill got an hour or two of sleep. Each morning, somehow, she got up and drank her coffee and got to school on time. She even escaped from the wearing anxious strain for a little while each day as she taught her science classes, building new study units out of the scientific and mathematical problems of the trip to the moon. As early as she could, each afternoon, she rushed back to her room and the television set. For four long nights she sat watching and waiting for news of Jim, before she heard Clem Peabody's hoarse-voiced announcement:

"Folks, he's falling toward the moon!

"General Hahn has just reminded him that landing on the moon is in some respects more difficult and more dangerous than landing on the Earth, because he will meet no atmosphere to help cushion his fall. His rocket is now tail-down, so that he can burn the motors to brake his descent. General Hahn warned him that the slightest pilot error, or the smallest mechanical failure, could leave him a dead man on the moon. He replied that he was proceeding with the rescue operation."

Vicky Hill waited through a dark blankness of time that was blurred with Clem Peabody's breathless speculations, and punctuated with meaningless commercials, until she saw General Hahn's tired face beside Peabody's on the screen.

"Folks, he made it!" Peabody was rasping. "Here's General Hahn, to tell you all about it."

"Actually, we don't know much about it." Hahn shook his head, with a tired frown. "Radio transmission at that distance isn't good. West's faint signals were interrupted by interference from the sun. But we know that he is down on the moon—"

"And apt to stay there," Peabody broke in. "Because he's fresh out of fuel."

"That's not quite true," Hahn protested mildly. "We have computed that the fuel he has left would lift him back into orbit around the moon—"

"Where he would be a moon of the moon for the next million years," Peabody said. "But tell us, General—has he found Captain Slavik?"

"Not yet. He searched the target area in Copernicus crater from space, as he came down. He failed to locate Slavik's rocket. But the sun is just rising there, and half the crater is still in the dark. He is going outside in his spacesuit to make a surface search of the dark half of the crater."

"And what are the odds?"

"Not good." Hahn looked bleak. "His spacesuit was designed for brief emergency repair work, not for extended exploration. Besides, he'll soon be in danger from the sun. Slavik's flight was timed to put him on the target area at night, but now—"

He saw Peabody's puzzled frown.

"The moon's day," he explained, "is a whole month long—with two weeks of sunlight. With no air or clouds to moderate it, the rocks get

scorching hot. I reminded West of that. He replied that he understood the risks and, anyhow, he hadn't much to lose."

Down on the moon, West unstrapped his crash harness and wriggled to the bulging plastic door. Outside, he found a strange sea of liquid blackness, scattered with towering islands of fire. No air softened the sun; every shadow was frozen ink; every sunlit surface blazed. On his right, a curving mountain barrier stood jagged and black against the blacker sky. That would be the ringing wall of Copernicus, and those blazing peaks marked the center of the crater. The sun lay on the crater floor to his left—a sheet of fire that hurt his eyes.

He'd have to hurry.

Hastily, he coupled the portable air tanks to his pressure suit. He fitted and locked the helmet. He sealed the closures, and inflated the suit to test them. He pumped the air out of the sphere, back into the tanks. He unsealed the little door at last, and climbed down the flimsy ladder to the surface of the moon.

Whatever the coming day might bring, the long lunar night had left its cold in the black shadow of the cliffs. He reached gingerly down to pick up his first small sample of the moon, and the savage cold of the dark little rock bit into his fingers, even through his insulated glove. Here, he knew, a thermometer would read two hundred degrees below zero, Fahrenheit.

Yet that cold was no real threat. Thermometer readings had little meaning here. There was no air to have a temperature—nothing to stop heat radiation from the shadows, and no shield against the cruel sun. His insulated suit gave protection from the cold, but heat was a more troublesome problem. His own body was a source of heat—deadly, unless it could be dissipated. In the shadows, his own radiation would cool him fast enough. In the sunlight, he would die.

Aware of that, he tried to be deliberate. A thousand unknown dangers watched him, from the frozen shadows and the incandescent cliffs. No man had learned to cope with them. One tiny mistake could be too many. He had to be deliberate.

Holding to the ladder, he lifted on his toes in the clumsy, weighted boots, and then jumped cautiously up

and down, trying to get the feel of the lighter gravity. He looked carefully around, trying to memorize the cliffs and craters that could guide him back to the rocket. His dazzled eyes could see no stars to guide him. The sky was a roof of suffocating darkness pressed down upon the moon—until he found the Earth.

It was almost overhead, and hard for him to see, but he stood a long time leaning back in his cramping suit, gazing at it with wonder and regret. It was an immense bright crescent, four times as long as the moon he remembered. The polar ice made a diamond dazzle at one horn, and the storms were small white flakes scattered over the steel-blue curve of the sea. At the edge of the sunlight, he could make out the faint brown bulge of western America. Florida lay in the dark, invisible. Vicky Hill, he thought, would be asleep.

Thinking of her, he released the ladder and turned his back to the rocket. The high Earth would be his compass and his clock. He would have a dozen hours, he estimated, before the sun caught him. With all that vast black moonscape to search, he would need it all.

Stumbling up a stony slope in the pale light of Earth, he slowly learned to cope with the moon's tricky gravity. Even in the bulky suit, with all his load of oxygen tanks, he weighed less than forty pounds. At first he imagined that he should be able to make huge, soaring leaps, but he found that his suit was too stiff and too vulnerable to damage. He fell twice, sprawling in slow motion into the fine, dry lunar dust, before he learned a spread-legged hop that took him safely but slowly across the crater-scarred crater floor.

The bright Earth guided him. Following the black, ragged curve of that Himalayan mountain ring, he jumped the bottomless cracks that moonquakes had made. He inched himself up knife-bladed ridges where molten stone had splashed and frozen. He toiled to the tops of a dozen lower peaks, to search the smaller cups inside the vast one.

All he found was the naked moon.

Yet he didn't turn back. Beyond each empty pit were a hundred more where Slavik might be. He went on until he was slow and awkward with fatigue. He misjudged a jump, and fell into a narrowing black crevasse. Hampered

with the cramping suit, he came down on his back. The fall hurt.

He lay half dazed for a long time. He realized dully that something was wrong with his breathing. Vaguely, he knew that his oxygen equipment must have been damaged, but it didn't seem to matter much. His pain from the fall was fading, and he felt too tired to move, and he didn't care—

"Jim!" He thought he heard Vicky Hill, calling urgently through the dark fog in his brain. "Can't you find Dan Slavik?"

Slavik didn't matter, but Vicky did. He sat up to look for her. All he could see was the black rock walls of the crevasse, and the bright crescent Earth in a thin strip of blacker sky. Vicky was a long quarter-million miles away.

But the movement had cleared his head a little. Before the fog came back, he reached to switch the reduction valve to his last oxygen tank. His fingers fumbled and slipped. He set his jaw and fought the tiny valve. He had to turn it—to find Dan Slavik.

Stiffly, stubbornly, it turned. Air hissed softly, and he could breathe again. Life came back. He got to his feet on the rubble and dust in the bottom of the pit. His raw skin burned where the stiff suit had rubbed it, and his bruised bones ached. But he could move again.

He climbed out of the crevasse, out of icy darkness into hot white fire. The rising sun had caught him. Its hot blaze burned his face inside the plastic helmet, and its first flash blinded him.

When sight came back to his stinging eyes, he climbed another dead moon peak. The mountain-shadow had been retreating far too fast, while he searched and while he lay in the crevasse. All around him, the hot sun burned on dark moon rock and dry moon dust. He turned to search that fiery desert, and saw a silver gleam.

A rocket!

It stood shining in the sun on a far moon slope. For a moment he thought he had found Slavik. But then he glanced at the turning Earth, and recovered his sense of direction. Slowly, he began to recognize the peaks and pits that the white tide of fire had changed. The rocket was his own—too far away.

He estimated the life he had left, in that last oxygen tank, and adjusted the valve to the most economical setting that

he thought he could endure, and started back toward the distant vehicle.

The numbing cold of the crevasse vanished quickly from his tingling hands and feet. He was suddenly too warm. Useless to cool him, his own sweat merely stung his blisters and trickled blindingly into his eyes. A savage thirst parched his throat. He stumbled on as far as he could go, and collapsed into the cooling shelter of a solitary boulder.

He lay there, half-drowned in his own perspiration and gasping for his life, but he knew he couldn't stay. There were still a thousand spots unsearched inside Copernicus, pits that meteors had dug and cracks where the hard moon had split. And he might come out to search again, when the long blazing day was over, if he lived to reach the rocket.

Calmly, he resolved to live. He set the oxygen valve again, stretching the minutes of life it measured. He shaded his face to study the blazing moonspace, planning his path, searching out every cliff and pit that still offered shelter.

Grimly, he went on again. He made the most of every shrinking shadow. He stumbled desperately through each inevitable barrier of fire. He came at last to the blazing rocket, and hauled himself up the hot metal ladder, and fell through the little door.

Feebly, he struggled to seal the door. He opened the main reduction valves. With air around him in the sphere, he fought to get out of his suffocating helmet. The locking lever slipped out of his fingers, and slipped again, until he had no will to try any longer. He was slipping down into a shapeless dark haze as deep as space, when he saw Vicky watching. Her look of sick reproach made him clutch at the lever once more—

The helmet was unlocked, when he was conscious again, and he was breathing. Engineered against the solar heat, the sphere was not intolerably hot. He unsealed the seams of his suit, and relieved himself into a plastic bottle, and lay a long time resting.

At last he was able to try the radio.

"Space pilot—" His hoarse voice stuck, and he had to try again. "Space pilot West, calling Cape Canaveral ground control."

He waited for the answer. Three long seconds for his signal, flashing at the speed of light, to reach the far-off

Earth and bring its answer back. They passed. They stretched to half a minute. He heard no answer.

Perhaps his signal had been drowned in interference from the sun. Perhaps his power pack had failed. Perhaps some electronic bug had got into the communication gear. He checked the switches, and tried again.

"Space pilot West, on the moon, calling—calling anybody! Get word to Cape Canaveral that I've failed to find Captain Slavik—"

"West!" This reply was strangely loud, and it rapped back with no delay at all. "You've found me now!"

"Slavik!" He knew that brittle voice. "Where are you? I've been looking all over Copernicus—"

"The wrong place, you fool! I'm two hundred miles over your head right now, and moving a mile a second. I'm stuck in an orbit around the moon!"

"Then you never landed, after all?"

That brought no reply.

"Slavik?"

"Sure I landed," the cocky voice came back suddenly. "In the same area where I dropped the marker shot—eight hundred miles from Copernicus. I made my observations and got up into orbit again, but some mechanical bug that I can't locate has wasted so much fuel that I can't get home. I've been waiting for you to pick me up."

"It won't be quite so simple as that," West answered. "You see, that same bug has bitten me. We're both out of gas."

"Can't you get up into orbit?"

"Just a minute." West made a quick computation. "If I toss out my radio, and the fire extinguisher, and the automatic cameras and cosmic ray counters, and everything else I can knock loose—I might barely make it."

"With no fuel left for me?" Slavik blunted the instinctive sharpness of that, almost apologetically. "I mean, I thought we might have fuel enough, between us—"

"Then you have some fuel?"

"About enough to blow my nose," Slavik said. "It would boost me into a return trajectory—with nothing left to slow me down for a safe rendezvous with the re-entry vehicle. Personally, I don't care to be a dead hero. I prefer to sit it out, here in the cool of my orbit."

Vicky Hill was grading a

tall stack of geometry papers, late the next week, when her landlady came gasping to her room.

"Quick, Miss Vicky! They have found Captain Slavik, and they're on the way home!"

"Huh?" Her red pencil fell. "I—I'd stopped hoping—"

"Listen! Here's General Hahn."

Hahn's lean face looked ten years older since ten days ago, but he was grinning hopefully now as he answered questions for Clem Peabody.

"—just established radio contact with the re-entry vehicle," he was saying. "West and Slavik are both aboard. They're gliding down into the atmosphere now. We expect them here at the cape within a few hours."

"So they both came back in the same rocket?"

"That's the only way they got back at all." Hahn nodded grimly. "Neither could have survived alone. West found Slavik in an orbit around the moon—stranded there. West himself, by that time, was entirely out of fuel. But Slavik had a little fuel left, and West knew how to make the most of it."

"How was that?"

"Here's their problem," the general said. "Falling all the way to Earth from the distance of the moon, a rocket arrives moving seven miles a second. The re-entry vehicle —which is a separate rocketplane waiting in its own orbit to bring the passengers down through the atmosphere—is moving only five miles a second. Our original flight plan had called for the moon ship to return with several tons of fuel left, to slow it down to that velocity. Their problem was to get rid of that surplus two miles a second, without using any fuel."

"A tough problem!"

"Together, they solved it."

"I'd like to know how!"

"West steered the returning rocket into a grazing trajectory—"

"A grazing what?"

"That means he came around the Earth in a path just close enough to graze the upper atmosphere—which required a nice bit of astrogation. The rocket was slowed down, but not incinerated. A second pass slowed it more. After the third grazing pass, it rose back to meet the re-entry vehicle, moving at near enough the same velocity—"

"That was indeed a neat bit of astrogation! And thank you, General Hahn!"

Clem Peabody was smiling

from the screen, as toothily as if he had been the returning astronaut.

"Keep tuned, people! We're ready to bring you the landing ceremony—and I promise you that our home-coming heroes are going to receive the biggest ovation ever!"

Vicky Hill saw them land. The re-entry plane came in very fast, with a big white parachute blooming out suddenly behind it. A door opened in the nose, and by that time the cameras were near enough so that she could recognize Dan Slavik, grinning smugly as he came up. She had one glimpse of Jim West, just behind him — looking pinched and tired and bent. West was following toward the door, but Slavik slammed it in his face.

"I made it!"

Slavik had somehow shaved, and slicked back his hair. He looked trim and jaunty in his queer space gear. He strutted toward the cameras, shaking his own hand like a winner in the ring.

"First man to the moon—and first man back!"

Vicky Hill made a face at the screen. Not listening to Slavik and Clem Peabody, she sat watching the little door that Slavik had slammed. It opened slowly. Jim's drawn, black-stubbled face looked out at Slavik, with an expression she couldn't understand. Slowly, then, the door closed again.

Late next morning, West was sitting alone in a bar, nursing a glass of beer and watching a television interview between Clem Peabody and the moon hero.

"How does it feel?" Peabody was asking. "How does it feel to be the first man on the moon?"

"It feels just grand to be the first man back." Slavik showed the cameras his teeth. "I had to squeeze through some pretty tight spots, but this is worth it all—"

West nodded to himself, and turned to sip his beer.

"Thank you, Captain Dan Slavik!" Peabody's voice boomed through the bar. "Now, people, here's General Hahn. General, I want to congratulate you personally on the dazzling success of the solid-propellant rockets, which I believe you have always advocated."

The general said nothing, though his lips twitched slightly.

"Now, General, what's the exact significance of these flights to the moon. What do they mean, to all of us?"

"West and Slavik report that the moon itself is just what we expected—a dead and airless rock. Though they had to abandon all their cameras and scientific instruments, West brought back a small sample of the moon. Analysis shows that it is very ordinary rock."

"Do you mean to say they have risked lives for only that?"

"For the moon!" Hahn protested sharply. "That's a step we had to take, on our way out to the planets and the stars. These men took that step. And they did discover something more important to us, right now, than the moon. They located the mechanical bug that has been wrecking our space rockets."

"What was that?" The camera swung to Slavik. "Captain Slavik, what was that discovery?"

"Uh—" Slavik hesitated, momentarily flustered. He caught his breath. "Meteors," he announced loudly. "In my own opinion, the uncontrolled ignitions were set off by micrometeors. Or possibly by cosmic rays."

The camera swung back to Hahn's hard face.

"If meteors and cosmic rays are so dangerous in space, don't you doubt that men will ever reach the stars?" Peabody's voice had a sting of accusation. "General, doesn't this demolish your own pet theory that the trouble in space was all due to fire?"

"It wasn't fire," Hahn frowned at Slavik. "But it wasn't meteors, either. Captain West found the bug—and it was just a deadly little engineering error. I heard Captain Emilani gasping 'fire,' with his last breath. What he was trying to say was 'fire extinguisher.' "

"What do you mean, sir?" Slavik looked angry and unbelieving. "How could a fire extinguisher set off uncontrolled fuel ignition?"

"Our four moon rockets were all alike," Hahn explained. "The chemical fire extinguisher was clamped where the pilot could reach it, just above the door—and, unfortunately, just above the junction box on the main ignition cable. It did no harm at all, until the rocket took off. But when the acceleration reached nine gravities, its twelve pounds of weight was multiplied by nine. That force tore it out of the clamp, and smashed it into the junction box. The resulting short circuits were the cause of all those premature ignitions."

"When—when did West discover that?" Slavik stuttered.

"While he was on the moon. An odd circumstance. He had left the rocket to look for you. When he climbed back aboard he noticed that he didn't bump his head on the extinguisher, which should have been just over the door."

"Thank you, General Hahn. Any comment, Captain Slavik?"

Slavik glared into the camera, speechless for a moment.

"I'll give West the credit for that," he muttered at last. "But I don't think he'll care to deny that I beat him to the moon—and then provided the fuel and the rocket that got him home alive. Not that he didn't help. We were both of us trapped out there. We discovered that neither could get back alone. We had to make a bargain."

Slavik squared his shoulders, defiant again.

"Sure, West was on the moon. But he won't say that he was first. He won't deny that I've just done the biggest thing that any man has ever done. Now I'm out to claim my just rewards. One of them is a cute little red head named Vicky Hill—if she happens to be listening!"

Vicky Hill happened to be listening. She was standing in the entrance to the bar, behind Jim West. She glanced at the screen for just an instant, when she heard her name. Contempt stiffened her face, and melted quickly into pity.

Then her searching glance found Jim. She ran across the room to him. He sat staring at a small fragment of dark rock lying on the polished wood beside his half-finished beer, and at first he was not aware of her.

"Jim!" she whispered. "I've been looking everywhere—"

"Vicky?" He looked around at her uncertainly, and gave her a wry, tight-lipped smile. Didn't you hear Slavik asking for you?"

"But I was looking for you."

He slid quickly off the stool, and looked into her eyes.

"What he told me—it was not true?" His first uncertainty faded into pure delight. "Here—here's a little gift!" Impulsively, he handed her the dark rock fragment. "Something Slavik couldn't give you. It's a piece of the moon."

She started to thank him, and stared at him suddenly.

"You mean—you mean he wasn't there? You mean he

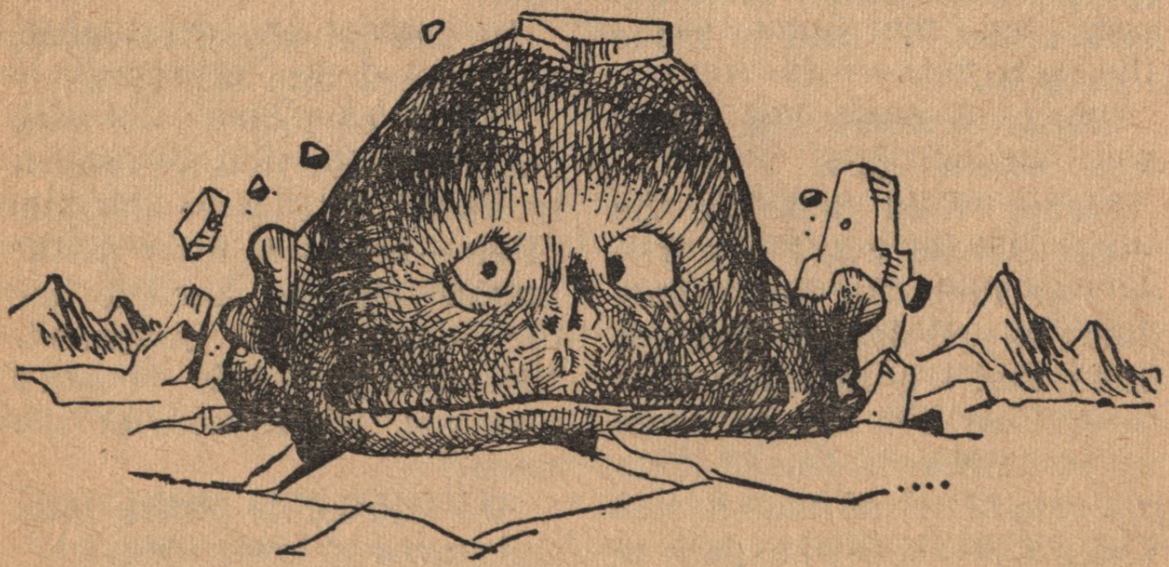
just parked in that orbit, like General Hahn wanted you to do, without ever touching the moon?"

"That's what I think." West nodded slowly. "I think those premature ignitions got his nerve. That marker shot was fired from out in space. He had nothing to prove he ever got to the moon. No samples, no pictures, no records of any observation. I computed his orbit back to the time he says he took off from where the marker missile fell—and he couldn't have been within a thousand miles of the spot. Besides, if he had really landed, he'd have noticed what had happened to his fire extinguisher!"

"Then why are you letting him lie—" Staring at him, she caught a gasping breath. "If you really were the first!"

He looked down at the dark bit of moon rock, and soberly back at her.

"We made a bargain," he told her quietly. "We had to pool our resources, to survive at all. I promised Slavik that I would not dispute his glory, and he helped me get back with my report about that bug for General Hahn. I intend to keep my word." **THE END**



HEAR A PIN DROP

By EDWARD WELLEN

How many angels, asked the theologians, can dance on the point of a pin? For Buz, the question should have been rephrased: How many devils?

BUZ was born, which is the greatest opening of all, but They kept closing him in, closing him in. Out of the dream in the womb he reared smack up against the reality of the outside world.

His folks lived and worked on a farm, which is an openness, but the farm wasn't theirs. His father was a sharecropper; his share was mostly working the plow. When Buz was still a child they shook off the red clay and moved North. That should've been an openness, of another kind, but Buz learned fast there were places he could not go and things he could not do.

That would've driven him back on his family but even in the closeness of the family there were things his father and mother shut him out of and shutting out is the same as shutting in. And then, too, he got less attention as the family grew.

When his first baby brother came along Buz said, "What for you want a new baby? I ain't wore out yet."

His mother and his father eyed each other and laughed.

Buz closed his face and from then on didn't outward his feelings in talk. But shortly after that they caught him beating the baby over the head.

His father gave him a shove that knocked him off his pins, made sure the baby was all right, and then tanned Buz good and shut him in the closet for the longest time.

So Buz learned it was best not to outward his feelings like that again. Closing him in,

closing him in. Instead, he gazed at his father steadily, in a burning silence, his eyes glowworms except they didn't flicker. This kind of quietness was disquieting and sometimes his father took the strap to him out of a feeling of helpless rage, until Buz learned to fog over the cold light in his eyes.

He got in with a gang of kids, the Green Rovers. But there was very little green in their territory and they couldn't rove far without stirring up a rumble with one of the surrounding gangs.

Even within the gang Buz was circumscribed. He was way down in the pecking order. He didn't have the cunning to spur his way up. So he fought. He fought many times, always stubbornly but vainly, weariness at last quieting his struggling when reason could not. So that limits of physical strength were another circumscribing factor.

He closed his mind to schooling and the overworked teachers didn't have the time for the understanding and patience that alone might've drawn him out. So he didn't find escape in good reading or good listening or creating in the arts.

If his lack of certain virtues circumscribed him, so did his lack of certain vices. He could not find escape in drinking, doping, smoking, gambling, tomcatting. There seemed to be lasting satisfaction in nothing.

Not even in hate. He watched his father with fogged over eyes and seemed to be waiting his chance. But his chance never came. His father died in an accident in the plant where he worked. Buz felt an emptiness. Death's door had shut him out. It wasn't only that. For the first time he realized that time was closing in on him, Buz.

Now his mother was working hard and late to make a living for them all. She was paying higher rent—and getting much less in the way of housing — than most of the folks who lived in the fine apartments in the resricted parts of the city. She couldn't see to it that Buz and the others were making the most of their schooling. All she could do was tell them she was pinning her hopes on them.

The younger children were docile. But much of the time Buz was supposed to be in school he spent roving with the gang or picking up movie money by setting up pins in a bowling alley or by glomming small items and selling them. He liked to watch the shadows

unreel. They opened his eyes to new worlds. But as he grew to know that these were worlds he could never enter the time came when he could not sit still and watch the shadows unreel.

Late one night—likely the stars were out but the buildings and the vaporings of the city baffled his view of the sky—he was simply out walking to escape the closeness of the room he shared with the other children.

A man barred his way. The man asked Buz where he was going and what he was doing.

Buz got flip. Only when the man flashed the tin did Buz realize this was a cop. By then it was too late to back down. Buz stood mute.

The cop raised a hand with a heavy ring on it. Buz tried to slip by. The cop caught him and pinned his arms to his sides. Buz kicked out frantically. The cop swore and landed a fist on Buz's jaw.

The cop got worried when he saw the quiet prone form and the blood and he planted one of the switch-blade knives he carried for such an emergency in Buz's limp hand.

That was the first rap They pinned on Buz. The later ones he earned, having picked up a few pointers at the reformatory.

The reformatory had been confining enough, the three times he was there, but the walls of the state prison promised far more cramping of the body and the spirit. From the moment he entered, the new fish had go-go in his eyes. He had to learn the hard way that in trying to make a break he only piled time upon time, raising those walls higher and higher. Closing him in, closing him in.

Then They really closed him in. And it had to happen just when he was coming downhill. He was suffering from shortitis, crossing off the days and hours in his mind, and he was on pins and needles.

He was waxing wood in the prison furniture shop. The shop screw told him to stop staring out at the sky—a baffled sky—and to put some beef into his job. Buz turned with a preoccupied smile.

The screw told him to wipe the smile off his face and said it in a way that was hard to swallow.

Buz had tried to desensitize himself to these pinpricks but, even while he was telling himself he had to hold on only a little longer, he let go. He grabbed a stick and went for the guard.

They finally clubbed Buz

senseless. They flung him into solitary.

When he came out he waited and secretly sharpened a spoon and waited. It was a long wait, because he had lost his place in the shop, and it was an uncertain wait, but if there was one thing Buz had it was time and in time he and the guard crossed paths.

The screw lived. So Buz lived, too. But now They flung him into solitary for good.

His cell was windowless and unlit. The door was solid but for a sliding panel they opened to shove food at him. His bed was a shelf bolted to the wall. There was a slop bucket in one corner. And that was all.

He knew he would never get out. If he wasn't stir crazy now this would shove him over the line. He would go mad if he simply sat thinking of it. He could escape into sleep for only so long, then he would have to wake and face the close darkness. He had to find something to do, something to take him out of himself.

He fanned himself but his pockets were empty. He could twist the buttons off his shirt and pants and work loose the eyelets in his shoes to serve as checkers; he could scratch squares on the floor. But what was the good of that? He couldn't see and he couldn't keep the moves straight by feel alone.

There was so little he had to work with. They had narrowed him down. They thought he might hit himself out, so he had no belt, no shoe strings. With shoe strings he might have made a cat's cradle.

What was this embedded in the sole of his shoe?

A pin. A straight pin.

"See a pin and pick it up,
And all the day you'll have good luck."

What good would it do him, he wondered.

A Catholic boy told him there was once a big fuss about how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. Or was it on the point? "If I had the wings of an angel." One thing, he wouldn't waste time dancing on a pin. If he knew the Lord's Prayer he could scratch it on the head. But to do that he would have to break the pin in two. And he would need light and a magnifying glass.

What else could he do with a pin?

He could mold a figure of dirt or of bread crumbs, give it the screw's name, or that first cop's, and stick the pin in it where it would do the most bad.

He smiled and shook his

head. Hate, it had come home to him, was no out.

He threw the pin over his shoulder.

Almost at once he was sorry. He still didn't know what use he might make of the pin but it was one of his few possessions. He wanted it.

He began hunting for it feverishly. Then he laughed at himself and sat back on his haunches. He said—but not aloud, for he was not mad—that he had time if not space. He was doing not only a stretch but a cramp. The very limiting of space narrowed the time it would take him to find the pin. But he took his time. It was a game now. *Found it!* Found more.

He had found something to do that would keep him sane.

Before he threw the pin again he made sure he would not lose it to the slop bucket. He could aim the toss so the slop bucket was in the far corner but the corners weren't that far apart. You couldn't tell what bounce the pin might take. So he tore off the tail of his shirt as a cover for the slop bucket. Now he played the game.

He would throw the pin over his shoulder and then hunt it in the dark. Some times took longer than other times but he always found it in the end. It could not escape either. It was somewhere in the cell. He would find it. Neither of them had anywhere to go.

His ears got so they could pin it down within a hand span even when he bounced it off two walls or ceiling and wall. Too easy was no game. To make it harder he tossed the pin while spinning himself around; that way he couldn't orient himself by the sound.

He was careful not to play the game when They came with his food or for the slop bucket. If They knew about it They would take the pin away from him. They wanted to drive him mad. They had shut out the world and now They wanted to drive him farther and farther within himself. They wanted to narrow him down, squeeze him into one brain cell and then pin him down to one smallest part of one atom of that cell.

He lost track of time. But never—for long—of the pin. He laughed to himself. He was fooling Them.

He laughed too soon. There was a terrible instant when he realized he could not find the pin.

He hunted the cell over and over again, every inch of the floor; the shelf, the cover on the slop bucket, too, because it

had landed on them more than once. He could not find the pin.

He kept telling himself not to get panicky. The pin had to be there. It had nowhere else to go. Still he was becoming panicky.

Then he relaxed. Sure! There was always the chance the pin had stuck its point into a crack in a wall instead of bouncing off to the floor.

But he felt every speck of surface, including the door, over and over, without coming upon the pin.

Then a sickening thought hit him. They had found out about the game. They were playing a trick on him. Had They let down a magnet through the ceiling and stolen the pin?

The thought enraged him. He beat his hands raw on the walls. But then he grew cunning. He stopped. That was what They wanted, to drive him mad, to drive him into a tiny corner of his brain, close him in all the way.

Standing on his shelf he was able to run his fingers over fully half the ceiling. What he could reach of it was smooth, unbroken. Was the opening then in the other half? How could he reach that half to find out? He tested the slop bucket in its corner, where his balancing on its rim would not overturn it, but it was too low.

He paced the pinless floor until the panel slid and the trusty passed a piece of bread and a metal bowl of watery soup through the opening. The panel closed. Buz crammed the bread in a pocket and dumped the soup in the slop bucket.

He ripped off a sleeve and polished the inside of the bowl. He waited. When the panel slid open again Buz used the bowl as a reflector, playing light from the corridor over the ceiling.

Buz let the trusty holler for the bowl until several sweeps of light convinced him there was no hole, no trap door, in the ceiling. He yielded the bowl with numb fingers.

In the dark he sat on the edge of his shelf thinking about where the pin could have gone. He had to admit it was not in the cell. Then it wasn't in the here and now. So it must've gone some otherwhere and/or some otherwhen.

It was foolishness to suppose the pin had given up whatever ghost a pin gives up, ascended to pin heaven, become pin angel. Pins were made of atoms and atoms did not vanish in space, like that, without a scientist changed them into energy, like the Bomb.

But suppose the pin had vanished not in space but in time? He knew he had lost track of time. Had he been playing the game so long that the pin had rusted to nothing and he had been throwing an imaginary pin out of habit for some time and only now had a moment of lucidity that he mistook for madness?

He felt the flesh of his face, his limbs. No, he was still young.

The pin must've gone into another, he remembered the word dimly, dimension. He shivered. He shivered again, but now with exultation, not fear. He would follow into that other dimension. He would escape.

He tried to think how he might do that. He closed his eyes and put himself back to the instant the pin had vanished. He saw himself spinning, felt the pin fly over his shoulder, heard it hit the wall and—

And that was all. It never hit the floor. It had flown into that other dimension.

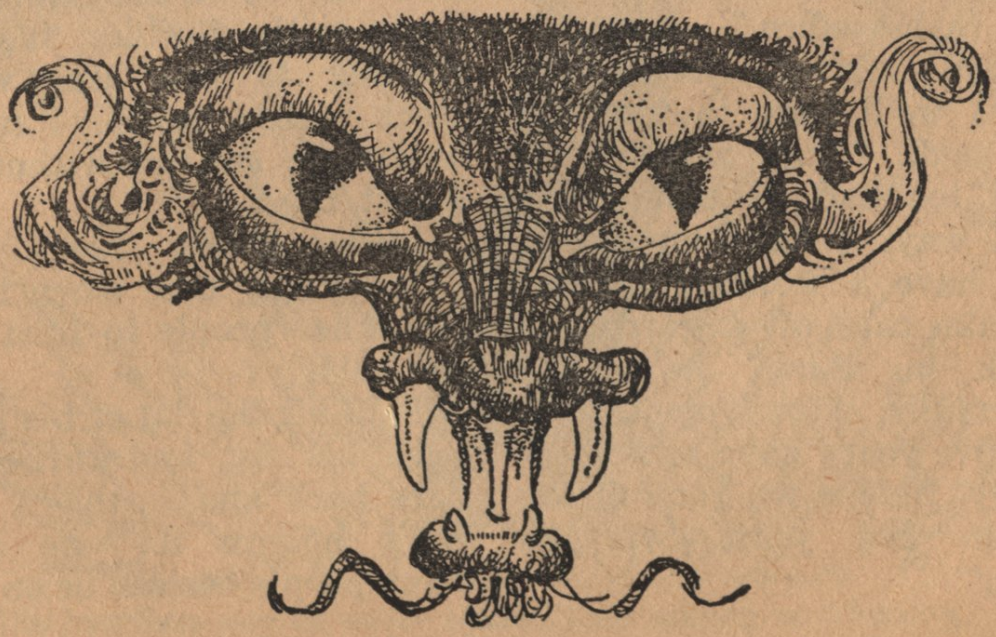
Invisible lightning dazzled him and he trembled joyously to a silent thunder. And the walls came tumbling down. He shouted for joy and there was nothing to give off a jeering echo.

It was real.

This was freedom. This was freer than even his earliest memory of the farm. Here he could see no noose of horizon. Everywhere was openness. It was wonderful, wonderful.

He was in the open. Everywhere it was open. Openness opened upon more openness. It was dizzying and he laughed.

THE END



KEEPERS IN SPACE

By ROG PHILLIPS

ILLUSTRATOR FINLAY

Some people simply do not know when it is time to leave. The farewell party, the handy space-cab waiting just outside in orbit—nothing works. Does it?

IRENE CARTER said, "That's quite all right. I understand," and slowly replaced the phone. "I still can't believe it," she said. She turned around to face Paul, her husband. Her lips trembled. She was close to tears. "I thought at least Dr. Hanly and his wife would accept. He seemed so friendly that day in his office."

Paul sighed deeply. "I guess we'll have to face it," he said. "And actually, it isn't too bad. It just seems that way. I have my work, you have a wonderful home to take care of, a garden to work in. And," he added cheerfully, "four months of the five years have passed already. Before we know it the whole five years will be over."

"I wish you hadn't said that, Paul," Irene said. "Four years and eight months of it to go. Do you suppose this is why your predecessor's wife killed herself and he became a homicidal maniac?"

"Of course not!" Paul said sharply. "You don't get that way because people cut you. You have to be unbalanced to begin with. Besides, it's beginning to look like we're stuck with a bunch of snobs. Snobs we can do without. I detest them."

Irene shook her head. "That's only true when there are other people to turn to," she said.

Paul hit the flat of his hand with his fist and turned to pace back and forth. "I just can't believe it!" he said. "Ten people besides us on this

The heartless women never ceased their jeering and baiting.

stinking star triangulation station, and they cut us out, make us a south-of-the-tracks population of two. Why? Is something wrong with us?"

"Of course not, darling," Irene said, putting her arms around him and kissing him. Maybe we just don't understand. Maybe, some way, they identify us with the other couple. Maybe, in time, they will accept us. After all, we don't know what they went through. That woman killing herself, then her husband going berserk and injuring the Director before he was subdued. That's why the Universe Mapping Commission picked us so carefully out of all the applicants, investigating our social activities and friends to make sure we were the best available couple to fit into community life out here between the stars."

"Yes, that's what Dr. Lind, head of the Commission, said," Paul said. "But it makes us more susceptible than the average to complete ostracism—and that's what we're getting. I'm beginning to think . . ."

"What are you beginning to think?" Irene said.

Paul ran his hand through his hair and laughed uncomfortably. "I'm beginning to think we are— It's crazy. Even thinking it, I start classifying myself as a schizo with a persecution complex. I'm beginning to think we are the fly and *they* are a spider, jointly, and they regard us as their prey, to paralyze with the poison of rejection, to weave round and round with thread of snobbish cutting, but never to kill. I'm beginning to picture space as their web, and we got caught in it. In fact, sometimes when I'm in the Hub where I can look out, even though I know there isn't a solid object bigger than my fist within five light years of us, sometimes I can almost see a web extending out, with the Station as its center—"

"Stop it!" Irene said. "Isn't it bad enough without—?"

The sound of distant voices came into the room from an open window. Paul and Irene looked at each other, the same question in each of their minds. They went to the window and parted the drapes enough to peek out.

The house next door was all lit up. A couple were going up the walk and calling cheerful greetings to another couple on the porch. The drapes and curtains were pulled back from a large win-

dow in the living room of the house, and a large table with trays of food spread out was plainly visible.

"They're having a party next door!" Irene gasped. "And that's Mrs. Hanly on the porch, who not five minutes ago told me on the phone she had a terrible headache. They're having it next door on purpose, just because *I* invited them all to come *here*!"

"A game of Bridge, darling?" Paul said firmly.

Irene pulled her eyes away from the house next door and looked up into the strong lean face of her husband.

"Let's," she said grimly. "And I do believe there's some salad and lunch meat tucked away in the refrigerator."

John Horstman, Director of Triangulation Station Alpha, was exactly six feet tall, broad shouldered and narrow hipped, with florid face, somewhat full lips, and a pink forehead that went up and over to the back of his smooth head, leaving a generous fringe of light brown hair that came around to cover the temples. He wore his clothes well, and even as a boy had been called distinguished looking. He was still distinguished looking, at fifty. He stood in the center of the room holding a cocktail in his left hand and his cigarette holder in his right, a benign smile on his lips.

"Have they peeked over, Martin?" he called out.

Martin White, the host, emerged from another room, a smugly triumphant expression on his thin, pale face which was made to seem more pale by his jet black hair.

"They peeked, all right," he said. "I saw the drapes part a little for a couple of minutes when Jerome came."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" John Horstman said.

"I would like to see her face," Maple Hanly said eagerly. "I waited until the last minute to call her up and tell her I had a splitting headache. And for her to peek through the drapes and see me come up on the porch!" The animation that lighted her features seemed somehow a desecration.

John Horstman smiled fatuously at his wife, Genevieve, a pale woman with straw colored frizzy hair, a quiet smile on a cruel mouth, and pale blue, lashless eyes.

"I wonder what they're doing now," Ida Blain, a brittle blond, said.

"What difference does it

make?" John Horstman said. "They know we are having a party. They aren't *invited.*" He rolled the sacred word in his mouth.

"John!" his wife Genevieve said in mock chastisement. "You're drooling!"

"Aren't we all?" Dick Blain, a computer coder with wedge shaped face and sand colored hair, said. "I wonder how long it will take? It took a year and a half for Francis Cole to kill herself . . ." He licked his lips and glanced from face to face.

There was an embarrassed silence.

"That," John Horstman said tactfully, "we couldn't help. It was a flaw in her. We can hardly be held responsible for that!"

"Of course not," Dr. Hanly said quickly. "She had a disposition for unbalance when she came here. All we are doing is playing a game, a little bit of fun."

"Of course that is all we are doing," John Horstman said. "A game. Under the aquarium condition. We have to do *something* to while away the time when we aren't working. Paul and Irene Carter are *it.* That is all."

"And Bill and Francis Cole were it before them," Martin White said. "The fact that the game can be dangerous only makes it more exciting!"

"Yes," Dorothy White said. "Why, Bill Cole might have killed you, John."

"Oh, I don't think so," John Horstman said. "It was a ticklish moment, but I handled it." He shrugged indifferently under the admiring glances.

"I wonder how long it will take for Irene Carter to kill herself?" Ida Blain asked excitedly.

"My dear!" John Horstman admonished, flicking the ash from the cigarette at the end of his cigarette holder, and sipping his drink fastidiously.

Irene Carter studied her reflection in the bathroom mirror. Paul had gone to work up in the Hub an hour ago. It was a month since Irene had taken the bull by the horns and invited everyone to a party, and everyone had accepted with great cordiality, then at the very last moment had called up to say they couldn't come because of a headache, and had gone to a party next door at the Whites.

Up until that evening Irene and Paul had kidded themselves into all sorts of rationalizations that would give

them hope. "People out here are slow to accept you," Paul had said. And Irene had said, "Maybe they identify us with that awful couple whose place we took." But the night of the party it had been too obvious, too viciously obvious.

It shouldn't bother her, Irene told herself. It was so absurd! Why—all over the galaxy were married couples who lived alone for years, and thrived on it! So why couldn't she and Paul just forget about the others and pretend they had no neighbors?

They had tried. It wasn't working. It was one thing to be alone together with no other creature within a hundred miles of you. It was something entirely different to be alone together and perpetually conscious of other people near you, looking down on you, excluding you from their group.

You told yourself, "I wouldn't be friends with any of them if they came to me on bended knee!" And a still small voice in you whispered, "Sour grapes, my dear. They don't *want* you . . ."

There were hollows in Irene's cheeks that hadn't been there a month ago. Her blue-green eyes seemed larger and farther apart because of it, as she studied her features. Nor was it all imagination. She had lost nine pounds in thirty days—unless the Station was rotating on the Hub slower, cutting down the centrifugal force which substituted for gravity. That was not likely, and anyway, if that were the case Paul would have said something about it. Even though nobody would speak to them socially, Paul's work as a coder for the computers demanded that the other men recognize his existence from nine to five every day.

The Universe Mapping Program had to go on. If it didn't, there would very shortly be a crew of investigators out here to find out what was going on in Triangulation Station Alpha.

Irene envied Paul his work. It gave him eight hours of escape each day—theoretically, at least. He claimed it didn't but she knew he loved his work and completely lost himself in it. She hadn't been permitted to visit Paul up in the Hub and see where he worked. That didn't matter too much—even though she knew the other wives visited their husbands up there whenever they wished to. But Paul had described things so

she could visualize them from the view of the Station when she and Paul had arrived.

They had had to float in across ten miles of space from the starship. It had taken two hours, and all the way she had kept her eyes on the Triangulation Station.

It was an immense wheel, fifteen hundred feet in diameter and five hundred feet thick, rotating fairly rapidly, for its size, around the Axle, which was held stationary by means of gyros. Either end of the Axle was a huge six hundred inch reflecting telescope, the "eyes" of the station, capable of resolving distant nebulae into individual stars and determining their direction in space down to one ten millionth of a degree.

Such precise measurement was impossible anywhere near a star system. The Stations were out between the stars where only the movement of the galaxy itself affected the steady drift of the station.

Paul worked alone in the computer control section, feeding data into the computers that was sent to him from the Axle by teletype. The room in which he worked had a centrifugal pull of two tenths of Earth gravity—just enough to give a vague sense of up and down to things.

Irene shifted back from her thoughts about Paul and the Station to see a wan smile on her lips in the mirror. What a starved life they were being forced to live! it wasn't at all like she thought it would be.

A despondency such as she had never before experienced settled over her. Tears welled out of her eyes, but she could not turn away from the mirror. While she wept for herself, her reflection wept for her.

It wasn't loneliness. How could she be lonely with Paul? No, it was something she could never have imagined possible. Something so terribly ironic. She and Paul had been selected to come here because of their outgoing personalities, their love of people, their ability to make lots of friends. Their *need* to have lots of friends.

And here that very need had been turned into a weapon against them.

Why?

To satisfy some meaningless streak of sadism in someone? She and Paul had talked it over and over, endlessly, without arriving at any real understanding of it.

How could they deal with

it? Surely there must be *some* way to deal with it!

Nothing had worked. Nothing had made a dent in things. She had called up each of the women and invited them over. Headaches were something these women seemed to always have! She had called on each of them and had not got inside the front door.

How can you make friends with people when the only way open is to knock them down and sit on them?

I wish I were dead!

The wish rose like a Neon sign in Irene's thoughts, and she drew back from it. *That* way led to suicide, the fate of her predecessor!

She drew back from the thought. *But over four more years of this . . .*

She knew, with a sinking feeling, that she could never survive it. She could stand it another week, perhaps a month or two. Maybe even a year. But over four more years of it?

No.

She would have to tell Paul. They would have to face it squarely. She—simply—could not—stand—it.

All right.

She would tell Paul when he got home from work.

The decision made, she turned away from the mirror. She started to leave the bathroom when she decided washing her face in cold water would help.

It was while she was bathing her face that the phone rang.

It couldn't be Paul because he had been ordered never to call home during working hours. But who else could it be? Maybe something had happened to Paul! Maybe he had been hurt!

She reached the phone. "Hello!" she said breathlessly

"Hello, Mrs. Carter," a woman's voice sounded, purring.

"Why, hello!" Irene said, finding it hard to believe her ears.

"This is Mrs. Horstman, Mrs. Carter," the voice said. "I was wondering . . . Would you like to come over and help me with some things?"

"When?" Irene asked, trying to keep the eagerness out of her voice.

"Why, right now would be best," Mrs. Horstman said.

"I'll be right over," Irene said.

Wait until Paul came home so she could tell him about this! She and Paul had been wrong wrong wrong—about everything. This was the proof! Mrs. Horstman had

called *her* instead of one of the other women. Oh how easy it was for misunderstandings to arise, and grow and grow to monumental proportions. But now everything would be all right! She dressed swiftly.

She decided to walk, mainly because she had never used the car belonging to her, and now was no time to break it in.

The air smelled clean and fresh. It was hard to believe that her house and the other houses were on the inside of a gigantic rim of a wheel five hundred feet wide and almost five thousand feet in circumference, and that the ceiling two hundred feet above things was translucent blue plastic instead of real sky.

She passed the White's house and couldn't resist glancing toward it. She could see Mrs. White at a front window watching her. Irene held her head high. *Let* the little snob watch her. *She was going to call on Mrs. Horstman at Mrs. Horstman's invitation!* Mrs. White was *left out* of this!

She had to pass the Blain's house a little farther on, and she saw Mrs. Blain watching her through a front window too. Irene couldn't resist tilting her nose up just the least bit. *She* was going to call on Mrs. Horstman, the wife of the Director!

She really shouldn't feel catty like this, but she could not resist. It was such a wonderful luxury to be *accepted* . . .

She sighed happily as she went up the walk to the Horstman residence, a rambling California style house much like her own. She pressed the button, and from inside came the sound of melodious chimes.

After a moment or two the speaker beside the bell came to life. "Would you come around to the back door, Mrs. Carter?" Mrs. Horstman's voice sounded.

"Of course!" Irene sang.

She followed the walk around to the back door. She knocked, and after a moment Mrs. Horstman opened the door.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Mrs. Horstman said. "Come in. I'm on the phone, but I do want to get my house tidied up. Here's an apron. Put it on, and you'll find the sponge mop in the utility closet. You can start in on the kitchen floor, and I'll be with you shortly." She took the apron off the back of the chair and held it out to Irene.

Irene hesitated, then took it. "Of course, Mrs. Horstman," she said, putting on her most winsome smile. "This will be fun. To tell you the truth, I've—"

"Yes yes," Mrs. Horstman interrupted impatiently. "I must get back to the phone. Try to work fast. There's a lot to be done. The whole house, top to bottom." She hurried from the kitchen. Her voice came, after a moment. "Where were we, Maple. I was interrupted. Mrs. Carter came, to clean the house for me. Oh I do miss having servants, and one can't very well impose on one's friends, can one." She dropped her voice to normal pitch then so that what she said came through the kitchen door only as a murmer. It was all too obvious she had intended Irene to hear.

Irene waited until after dinner to tell Paul about it. When she came to the part about the phone conversation he became almost apoplectic, and half rose from his chair, doubling his fists. As she went on, he slowly sank back, a sick expression on his lean face.

"It became rather fun, in a way," Irene said with forced lightness. "I discovered all sorts of tricks to get attention. I left some mop water on the kitchen floor in one corner, and when she discovered it she had to point it out to me. I moved a davenport out from the wall to clean behind it, and left it there, so she had to come and tell me to move it back."

"I'll kill that woman!" Paul whispered with sincerity.

"Wait until you hear the crowning touch," Irene said. "When she couldn't find another thing for me to do—oh yes! I forgot to tell you about lunch. At noon she asked me to fix her lunch, and added before I might get the idea it was to be for both of us that if I felt hungry I could take half an hour to go home, but not to take longer than half an hour. I really would have, too, but I couldn't bring myself to parade my humility before the eyes of Mrs. Blain and Mrs. White. So I didn't eat lunch."

Paul, his fists doubled, mumbled a string of words that Irene couldn't make out.

"But the crowning touch," Irene went on, "was when she couldn't find another thing for me to do. Then she said I could go, and just as I was going out the back door she told me to wait a moment.

She left the kitchen, and after a long couple of minutes she came back—and gave me five dollars."

"You took it?" Paul said. "That does it! I don't care what you say, I'm going over there right now and beat Horstman to within an inch of his life."

"You're going to do no such thing," Irene said. "They would lock you up as a homicidal maniac, and I would be left in this house all alone."

"I'm not going to stand for you to be humiliated this way," Paul said. "Those vicious little ghouls are probably getting together tonight to gloat among themselves about it. Probably they're cooking up some more schemes, too. Maybe at their next party they'll hire you as maid!"

"If they do I'll take the job," Irene said. "Don't you see? It's something — and anything is better than the complete vacuum they were keeping us in. If Mrs. Horstman hadn't called me today, Paul, I was going to have a completely different story to tell you tonight. I'd made up my mind to tell you, not five minutes before she called. I was going to tell you that I can't possibly live another few months, let alone the full five years, under conditions as they were. You would have to do something about it. Otherwise, maybe a month from now, maybe not for a year from now, I would become so despondent I would kill myself. That's why my predecessor, Francis Cole, killed herself. It's impossible for a completely social woman to survive, surrounded by a wall of total, active rejection, with no place to turn. It's better to be spit on than to be ignored. So let them spit on me. I'll take it and like it.

"Look at us right now! We have something to talk about, get excited about. I had a whole day of knowing someone was in the next room, of figuring little ways to get attention. Maybe I'm like a bum who has made a meal on scraps of food from an alley garbage can, but now that it's swallowed I have the contented feeling of a bum with a full stomach."

Irene smiled lovingly at Paul.

"So leave it alone, will you darling?" she said. "At least for now?"

"All right," Paul groaned. "But I'm telling you, before we leave here they're going to pay. *ALL* of them."

Irene showered hastily. In

front of the mirror as she dressed she looked at her face. It was almost the face of a stranger. The cheeks were hollow, with noticeable muscle lines, the cheekbones quite prominent now.

Strange, she thought, *how being a servant makes one eventually look like one.*

But the change in her appearance had been so gradual that Paul hadn't noticed it. At least, he *seemed* not to have noticed it . . .

She wondered how he was going to take what she had to say tonight. Should she tell him when he came home, or wait until after dinner? How could she convince him it had to be done?

Dressed, she hurried out to the kitchen to prepare dinner. The five dollar bill she had received from Mrs. Hanly and the ten dollar bill she had received from Mrs. Horstman were still laying on the edge of the sink where she had tossed them. She snatched them up and put them in the drawer with the rest of the money. It filled the drawer the same way trading stamps used to accumulate in a drawer back home, lifetimes ago.

Paul's quick step on the back porch made her stop breathing for a second, then she had mustered up a smile with which to greet him. The fear of how he would react stood out in stark nakedness in her eyes.

"Hi, Princess," Paul said carelessly as he came in.

A month or so ago he had started calling her that. She had asked him, finally, why he called her Princess. He had looked confused for a moment, then said, "I don't know. I guess it's because you're beginning to look like a picture of a gypsy princess I saw once in an old book."

"Paul," she heard herself say—and recognized with dismay that she had made up her mind to get it over with at once. She rushed on before she would have time to change her mind. "I want you to do something—for me."

"Okay," he said. "What is it?"

"It will be the hardest thing you ever had to do in your whole life," Irene said with quiet earnestness.

He blinked at her thoughtfully.

"Mrs. Horstman wants you to do some work for her Saturday," Irene said.

She put her arms around him, and it was like putting her arms around a statue of stone.

"You have to do it—for

me," she whispered. "We have three years to go yet. It's —very—hard—to keep going . . ."

He took her shoulders in his hands and held her away where he could look at her. "You know how this is all going to end, don't you?" he said. "I'm ready to end it now. I've been ready for months. I have it all planned out to the last detail. I know just how I'm going to kill each of them."

"I know that," Irene said. "So, don't you see? It really doesn't matter if you do some work for Mrs. Horstman Saturday, does it? You can let her insult you, berate you, and do what she wants you to do, all the time knowing what is going to happen to her."

"Hmm," Paul said. "Maybe you have something there at that. And maybe I'll kill her Saturday."

He crossed the kitchen to the cheery breakfast nook and sat down. "I'm going to have a lot of fun killing them," he said conversationally. The way I've planned it, no one will be quite positive it's me. It's going to look like someone else did it and tried to make it look like I did it. They'll lock me up, of course, but I have a perfect booby trap figured out for the second murder so that it will take place when I'm locked up."

"But you will do this one thing for me first?" Irene pleaded.

"All right," Paul said quietly. "For you." He grinned suddenly. "What's for supper?" he said.

"That isn't the way I told you to fix that trellis!" Mrs. Horstman said, quivering with indignation. "I thought your wife was the most stupid person imaginable, but you are worse. Oh, if I could only have some intelligent servant!"

"Yes, Mrs. Horstman," Paul said. "How did you want the trellis, Mrs. Horstman?"

John Horstman, tall, broad shouldered and slim waisted, came strolling across the lawn, puffing daintily on the cigarette in his long cigarette holder, his pink face radiant with joviality.

"Well, Genevieve," he said, ignoring Paul. "How are things progressing for the lawn party tomorrow in honor of our mapping the five hundred millionth sun's position?"

"I'm at my wits' end, John," Mrs. Horstman said. "I can't make this stupid dolt understand a thing."

John Horstman looked

down the length of his cigarette holder at Paul, his fleshy lips curving in disdain.

"Well, Genevieve," he said. "You'll just have to make the best of things. Out here between the stars we have to make do with what we have, you know. Possibly you're working him too hard. Give him a rest. Take him to the house and have him shine all my shoes." He turned and strode back toward the house, not looking back.

"Come along, Fred, or whatever your name is," Mrs. Horstman said. "Things have to be done, and you'll just have to keep working until they're done, even if it takes you all night. Everyone is attending the lawn party tomorrow. That is—except you and your wife. I would like to have you, of course, but I'm afraid you would be even more impossible as a butler."

White lipped, Paul followed Mrs. Horstman as she went toward the house . . .

"Mr. and Mrs. Richard Blain!" Paul Carter, resplendent in a butler's uniform announced in his most formal voice, standing at attention.

Out of the corner of his eye he caught Irene's covert glance in his direction, and winked at her. In a trim maid's uniform she had made herself, she was moving among the guests at the Dr. Jerome Hanly house party, serving them refreshments.

"Well!" John Horstman said, standing up with his cigarette holder in his right hand and a cocktail in his left. "We are all here now. So perhaps I should make my announcement now, then we can celebrate.

"I received a communication this afternoon from the Starship. It dropped out of hyperdrive this morning, and at ten o'clock Station time tomorrow morning it will be in position ten miles off, to take on board any of us who wish to quit, and send us replacement personnel. I know that none of us wish to quit yet. I believe that Martin and Dorothy White are the youngest of us in service, having been here only fifteen years. Martin has assured me that he and Dorothy plan to remain the full thirty years so that they can retire with a million dollars accumulated back pay and a pension of two thousand a month, like the rest of us. So the *Fermi* has brought no replacements—except, of course, for . . ." John Horstman turned with dramatic slowness to smile

benignly at Paul, then at Irene. His pale blue eyes glinted mockingly. A fleck of white froth was visible at the corner of his mouth. "Frankly," he added, "I am amazed that you managed to survive, Carter. Five years is a long time to someone so ill equipped. The tenacity of the lower forms of life has always amazed me."

Paul winked imperceptibly to Irene, who stood with a quiet smile beside the punch bowl on the buffet table. She was stirring the punch slowly, the tinkle of ice cubes giving a cool sound to the room.

He and Irene had worked it all out. This was to be their big moment — the moment that would make up for the five long years.

"John!" Mrs. Horstman broke the intense silence. "You're drooling again!"

"We all are!" Dick Blain spoke up, then tittered loudly. "I can hardly wait until tomorrow when the new replacements arrive!"

"But sir!" Paul Carter said, standing at respectful attention, his face an expressionless mask. *"There aren't going to be any replacements.* You see, my wife and I aren't leaving tomorrow. We're going to be with you five *MORE* years!"

"That's right," Irene said calmly, stirring the punch. "So now that that's settled, punch, anyone?"

John Horstman's face turned a brighter shade of pink. His cocktail glass slipped from his fingers, to crash to the floor.

"But but but!" he stuttered.

"You see," Paul said patiently. "We have to stay. We have to look after you, take care of all of you. You aren't quite right, you know, and someone has to look out for you, or what happened to Bill and Francis Cole will happen again and there will be an investigation.

"You have to have two strong people who are able to understand all of your little patterns of insecurity, and it would be a crime worse than the death of poor Francis for Irene and I to take the know-how we have gained in caring for you away from you, leaving you stranded again in your fears.

"Strangers, coming into the Station, wouldn't understand that you are all—you understand, don't you? We didn't, at first. The Coles, poor souls, never did see the truth.

"But now you no longer need be afraid. We will be

here to watch over you, and take the roles you want us to take in your little irrational games that keep your minds off of your insecurities. We will be with you, every day, taking care of you, for the next five years. Think of it! For the next five years you have nothing to fear, because we understand you."

"That's right folks," Irene said. "We aren't going to leave you. We understand you. So now let's all really celebrate."

The tinkling of the ice cubes floating in the punch was the only sound for a full thirty seconds. Then—

"Punch, anyone?" Irene's voice sounded in the silence born of horror beyond human endurance. **THE END**

Anything we might say up here about this defrightful story would be icing on the cake provided in . . .

A DOZEN OF EVERYTHING

By MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

WHEN Marcie unwrapped the cut-glass bottle, she thought it was perfume. "Oh, fine," she said to herself sardonically, "Here I am, being married in four days, and without a rag to wear, and Aunt Hepsibah sends me perfume!"

It wasn't that Marcie was mercenary. But Aunt Hepsibah was, as the vulgar expression puts it, rolling in dough; and she spent about forty dollars a year. She lived in Egypt, in a little mud hut, because, as she said, she wanted to Soak Up the Flavor of the East . . . in large capitals. She wrote Marcie, who was her only living relative, long incoherent letters about the Beauty of the Orient, and the Delights of Contemplation; letters which Marcie dutifully read and as dutifully answered with "Dear Aunt Hepsibah; I hope you are well . . ."

She sighed, and examined the label. Printed in a careful, vague Arabic script, it read "Djinn Number Seven." Marcie shrugged.

Oh, well, she thought, it's probably very chi-chi and expensive. If I go without lunch this week, I can manage to get myself a fancy negligee, and maybe a pair of new gloves to wear to the church. Greg will like the perfume, and if I keep my job for a few months after we're married, we'll get along. Of course, Emily Post says that a bride should have a dozen of everything, but we can't *all* be lucky.

She started to put the perfume into her desk drawer—for her lunch hour was almost

over—then, on an impulse, she began carefully to work the stopper loose. "I'll just take a tiny sniff—" she thought . . .

The stopper stuck; Marcie twitched, pulled—choked at the curious, pervasive fragrance which stole out. "It sure is strong—" she thought, holding the loosened stopper in her hand . . . then she blinked and dropped it to the floor, where the precious cut-glass shattered into a million pieces.

Marcie was a normal child of her generation, which is to say, she went to the movies regularly. She had seen *Sinbad the Sailor,* and *The Thief of Bagdad,* so, of course, she knew immediately what was happening, as the pervasive fragrance rolled out and coalesced into a huge, towering figure with a vaguely Oriental face. "My gosh . . ." she breathed, then, as she noticed imminent peril to the office ceiling, directed "Hey, stick your head out the window—quick!"

"To hear is to obey," said the huge figure sibilantly, "but, O Mistress, if I might venture to make a suggestion, that might attract attention. Permit me—" and he promptly shrank to a less generous proportion, "They don't make palaces as big these days, do they?" he asked confidentially.

"They certainly do not," gulped Marcie, "Are you—are you a Genie?"

"I am not," the figure said with asperity. "Can't you read? I am a Djinn—Djinn Number Seven to be exact."

"Er—you mean you have to grant me my wish?"

The Djinn scowled. "Now, there is a strange point of ethics," he murmured. "Since the stopper on the bottle is broken, I can't ever be shut up again. At the same time, since you so generously let me out, I shall gladly grant you one wish. What will it be?"

Marcie didn't even hesitate. Here was a chance to make a good wedding present out of Aunt Hepsibah's nutty old bottle, and after all, she wasn't a greedy girl. She smiled brilliantly. "I'm being married in a few days—" she started.

"You want an elixir of love? Of eternal beauty?"

"No, sir-eee!" Marcie shuddered, she had read the Arabian Nights when she was a little girl; she knew you could not make a magical bargain with a Genie — er — Djinn. "No, as a matter of fact, I just want—well, a household trousseau. Nice things to be married in, and that kind of thing —just to start us off nicely."

"I'm afraid I don't quite un-

derstand," the Djinn frowned, "Trousseau? That word has come in since my time. Remember, I haven't been out of this bottle since King Solomon was in diapers."

"Well—sheets, and towels, and slips, and nightgowns—" Marcie began, then dismissed it. "Oh, well, just give me a dozen of everything," she told him.

"To hear is to obey," the Djinn intoned. "Where shall I put it, O Mistress?"

"Oh, in my room," Marcie told him, then, remembering five-dollar-a-week hall bedroom. "Maybe you'll have to enlarge the room a little, but you can do that, can't you?"

"Oh, sure," said the Djinn casually. "A Djinn, my dear Mistress, can do anything. And now, farewell forever, and thank you for letting me out."

He vanished so swiftly that Marcie rubbed her eyes, and the little cut-glass bottle fell to the floor. After a moment, Marcie picked it up, sniffing at the empty bottle. A curious faint fragrance still clung to it, but it was otherwise empty.

"Did I dream this whole thing?" she asked herself dizzily.

The buzzer rang, and the other typists in the office came back to their desks. "Gosh," someone asked, "have you been sitting here all during lunch hour, Marcie?"

"I—I took a little nap—" Marcie answered, and carefully palmed the cut-glass bottle into her desk drawer.

That afternoon seemed incredibly long to Marcie. The hands of the clock lagged as they inched around the dial, and she found herself beginning one business letter "Dear Djinn—" She ripped it out angrily, typed the date on a second letterhead, and started over; "Djinntlemen; we wish to call your attention—"

Finally, the hands reached five, and Marcie, whisking a cover over her typewriter, clutched her handbag and literally ran from the office. "There won't be anything there—" she kept telling herself, as she walked rapidly down the block, "there won't be anything — but suppose there was, suppose . . ."

The hall of the roominghouse was ominously quiet. Marcie ascended the stairs, wondering at the absence of the landlady, the lack of noise from the other boarders. A curious reluctance dragged at her hands as she thrust her key into the lock.

"It's all nonsense," she said aloud. "Here goes—"

She shut her eyes and opened the door. She walked in. . . .

There was a dozen of everything, The room extended into gray space, and Marcie, opening her eyes, caught her hands to her throat to stifle a scream. There were a dozen of her familiar bed; a dozen gray cats snoozing on the pillow; a dozen dainty negligees, piled carefully by it; a dozen delicate packages labelled "Nylon stockings," and a dozen red apples rolling slightly beside them. Before her staring eyes a dozen elephants lumbered through the gray space, and beyond, her terrified vision focused on a dozen white domes that faded into the dim spaces of the expanded room, and a dozen tall cathedrals as well.

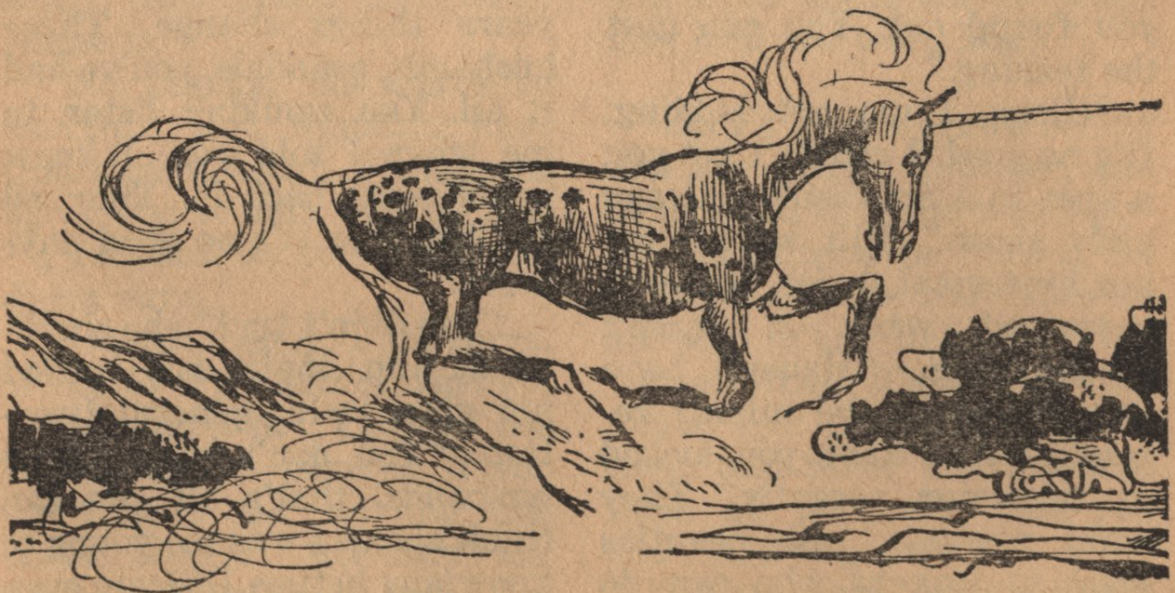
A dozen of *everything* . . .

"Marcie — Marcie, where are you?" she heard a man's voice shouting from the hall. Marcie whirled. *Greg!* And he was *outside* — outside this nightmare! She fled blindly, stumbling over a dozen rolled-up Persian carpets, grazing the edge of one of a dozen grand pianos; she screamed, visualizing a dozen rattlesnakes somewhere . . .

"Greg!" she shrieked.

Twelve doors were flung violently open.

"Marcie, sweetheart, what's the matter?" pleaded a jumble of tender voices, and twelve of Greg, pushing angrily at one another, rushed into the room. . . . **THE END**



John Keats said it best: "Truth is beauty, beauty truth..." And yet, where they were, beauty and truth seemed at war with each other. That is, unless you were dying of the strange disease.

THE ECSTASY OF IT

By KATE WILHELM

MILT! Are you kidding?" Glory stared at him incredulously for an instant. "I've got it, you're off your beam. You gotta be!" With an exaggerated, theatrical peal of laughter, she swept from the couch and poured herself a generous drink. "Now, get back on, man, and tell me what you found out. You can quit the teasing."

"Glory, I am not kidding. It's no good. I couldn't get you a spot in a Southside Chicago girly show." Milt waited for her hysterical shriek, and was surprised when it wasn't forthcoming. "Honey, have you looked in the mirror recently? And have you looked at television recently? They want newness, lush beauties good to look at who can do something besides look lovely." He frowned into his own drink and again waited.

She sighed. A very long, overdone sigh, "And I'm no good? Is that it, Milt?" She paused dramatically. "Ten years ago it wouldn't have mattered. I had my choice, remember?"

"Sure, honey. But in ten years things change. Three husbands, scandals, you've had it all. You wouldn't listen to me when I told you. I knew you'd want back in. They all do. And now it's no good anymore."

"You didn't try!" she shrilled at him finally and hurled her glass in his general direction. "You don't care. Three husbands, that's all you can think about. I was too young to know any better. Did you even try to make me understand

they all wanted my money? Did anyone? Glory Wilson, the great big, soft touch. That's all I was to any of you."

She forgot the gentility he had forced her to assume in the beginning, and her voice became the raucous street voice of mid-New York. Milt sighed and shifted his hand to get a glimpse of his watch. It would take her a good fifteen minutes to quiet down enough for the clincher, he knew. He nursed his drink along, knowing better than to move until she finished.

Eventually, she was calmer and fell back to the couch with tearless, smouldering eyes darting about the room in disbelief. "Milt, I have to work. I'll lose all this if I don't. I need the money."

"Glory, honey, I'm sorry." The lie came quickly, "Can I help? How much you need? Name it."

"No, thanks," she answered shortly. "You wouldn't have that kind of dough. Six months ago I was so sure that by now I'd be back on top. I was so damn sure."

"Honest, honey, I am sorry. Want to try another agent?"

"Of course not. The way you watch for the pennies, if you can't book me, no one else could either." Absently she added, "You're a heel, but you're the best agent in the business."

"Yeah, that's what Klary MacPherson, down at *Time* magazine, said. 'You're the best in the business, Milt. Get us a name, a big name, and you'll be lapping cream for years.' " He set his glass down with finality and arose grunting.

"What for, Milt? Something big, huh?"

"Honey, it's so crazy that I wouldn't even have thought of it. And you know I've come up with some pretty weird things in my time." He concealed his grin at her sudden interest and continued, "They're sending a crew to Mars and they want a couple of entertainers to go along. A beautiful name singer and a piano player. Already I've contacted half a dozen gals, and none of them will even invite me in when they hear the word Mars."

Glory's eyes weren't seeing him any longer, however, and he doubted that she was hearing his voice as he related the fictitious arguments. "They've all seen what happens to a 'name' when it's out of the public eye for even a short time, and three years scared them all to death. But you know how it goes."

"Three years? How much?"

"Not exactly three, forty days going, fifty coming back, seven hundred eighty waiting for the next opposition, or something. It comes to . . . let me see now . . ."

"What will it pay?" she rephrased it impatiently, halting his stumbling arithmetic.

"One million, on the nose."

Glory caught her breath sharply. "I want to do it, Milt. They'd let me do it. I know they would. All this mess with the tax people hasn't made news on Mars, has it? And those men have been there for about three years or more, haven't they? They'd remember me where a new name wouldn't mean a thing to them. Even three years ago crowds collected when I went out. You know that." She inhaled another long breath and said recklessly, "I wouldn't care if I had to stay ten years. What difference could it make to me if I can't work anyway? Milt, fix it. I know you can." She leaned toward him avidly, "You could have fifteen percent, Milt. I wouldn't care. And think of the money we'd make when I got back. There'd be personal appearances again, and television, and the movies. The works, Milt. I'd be right back up there again, and you'd be there with me."

Col. Hartlage watched the two men in the hospital ward with a frown cutting deeply into his forehead. They were big men, both of them, and curiously, both were blonds. They were chortling gleefully as they leafed through a magazine sharing the pictures, occasionally stopping, carefully tearing out one that took the fancy of either of them. There was a pile of such pictures on a nearby table. The colonel watched from outside the room, peering through a one-way glass set in the tightly locked door.

"No change in them at all?" He knew there was none.

"No. They're so blasted happy about the whole thing, it's sickening." Dr. Kerensky drew the colonel away. "Come on, let's have a drink."

"Andreo, what is it?" Karl Hartlage accepted the thick glass absently, his mind still on the incongruous figures in the locked room.

"I don't know. They are rational when I question them. They know me, you, anyone I take to them. They are willing to return to work—later. Now they want to look at the pretty pictures. I just don't know." The doctor motioned to the glass in Karl's hand, "Now you drink your medicine, no?"

"But there must be some-

thing. The tests, didn't they indicate anything at all?" Karl downed the whiskey quickly, as if it were indeed, medicine.

"Karl, listen to me. For seventeen years I thought myself to be a good doctor and a fairly learned psychologist. When this assignment came up four years ago, I was selected because of my outstanding qualifications, even as you, and every man among us, is the best, so was I the best in the rigid age limits they so arbitrarily set up. Psychoses, neuroses, inhibitions, exhibitions, nothing was too much for me. But now? Two well-adjusted men decide they'd rather look at the pretty pictures than do their work, and I am stymied. Nothing is indicated by any test; nothing is indicated by any method of psychoanalysis. They merely want to look at the pretty pictures."

Karl grinned suddenly, "It could be funny, Andreo, couldn't it? Swenson was the most belligerently hostile man to the arts I've ever known, and now a complete change about. He's like a child seeing the colors for the first time." The grin faded as quickly as it had appeared and he put his hand on Andreo's shoulder, "*They* will arrive in less than twenty-four hours now, you know that?"

"I know, my friend, I know. I don't think it's contagious, but on an alien world, who can say what is contagious and what is not? Those two shall remain in isolation."

"Lord!" Hartlage said feelingly, "I wish I could get my hands on that fat-brained idiot who okayed this jaunt."

"It is the idea of the women?" Andreo's question was purely rhetorical, however, and he mused quietly, "Two women and seventy-four men. It may prove to be an interesting two years. It is to be Miss Wilson, isn't it? I remember her. Blond, very blond. And buxom. I wonder why she agreed to come."

"Heaven knows, I certainly don't. They voted for her never dreaming she'd come. Almost by return contact we learned she was quite anxious to make the tour. Women!" he said expressively, not flatteringly, and departed.

Aboard the spaceship Glory stared in horror at the pallid face seemingly all eyes and scarlet mouth. She shuddered and turned from the mirror in disgust. Damn Milt. Damn him. Over and over the phrase returned to her mind, haunted her dreams. They had asked her, had wanted her above anyone else, and he had made

her pay through the nose thinking he had achieved the impossible when he finally broke the suspense and said she could do it. Everyone else had known, but she hadn't even suspected until one of the writers told her. Damn him. Sick, always sick. And afraid. She who had never been afraid of anything other than poverty in her life, she had been afraid since that first rumble and shiver that went through the ship preliminary to launching. Forty-two days with a lunatic piano player, a female question box and a bunch of poker-playing photographers and writers. Hell, plain hell. And the two years on Mars would be more of the same. She sighed as she patted her stomach, flat now without assistance from her fifty-dollar girdle. That was the only good thing that had happened to her.

"You've got the figure of a sixteen-year-old again." Madge drawled from the far end of the lounge. There wasn't a trace of rancor in her voice as if she hadn't been aware of the many private insults Glory heaped on her at every opportunity.

Madge was at home with the vile men from the *Times* staff, talked to them as one of them, gave as many good-natured insults as any of them and enjoyed herself thoroughly. She was one of the highest-paid writers of all time. Glory turned to look at her wrathfully. "You look the same way you did when we left New Mexico. Haven't you felt a bit bad at all?"

"Honey, I never feel bad. And I never brood about the past." It was impossible to say if she actually knew. She went on cheerfully, "I live to travel and I like it. After we land, you'll get your color back, don't worry. And who's going to notice anyway. Those men have not seen a woman in years, remember? I'll probably look good to them." She stretched and walked to the porthole. "Don't you want to watch the landing?"

Glory glanced toward the globe that hung over them. It seemed immense now, as if ready to fall on the tiny craft, burying it beneath tons and tons of blood-red dirt. With a muffled scream she ran from the lounge, back to the narrow bunk room she shared with Madge. She found herself praying for the first time in many years, praying through tears of self-pity and terror.

Madge watched her departure with an understanding grin curving her thin lips. She knew the feeling well, had ex-

perienced it herself once or twice. That feeling that you've gone to the end of the earth and there's nothing left but death. She glanced again at the ball that now filled the circle of the quartz window entirely, blotting out all else, destroying as it did so the awsomeness of it. Where before it had been a ruddy ball against a background of black velvet faintly glistening with God's tears, now it was just another landing on another world. She made a few notes in the small pad that was always in her pocket and turned to greet Heimrich Hilliard.

"Hi, you lunatic piano player," she said gaily.

"You are quoting Goldilocks, I hope," he answered easily and took a chair before the porthole.

"Very astute, Ricky. Did she tell you to your face that she thinks you are crazy?"

"Not exactly, but she'd just as soon be alone with a boa constrictor as with me." He indicated the rapidly growing landscape, "Better get yourself a seat and get tucked in." Then with complete un-self-consciousness he said,

"And they call this Mars, this bloody orb
That peers through dark reaches
And leers as it beckons
And challenges."

"That's partly why she's afraid of you," Madge said quietly and took an adjoining seat, reclining it, adjusting the belts and straps securely. After she was fastened, unable to move from her head down, she asked, "Why did you want to come, Ricky?"

"Ever since that first day we met, you've been asking me that. And every day I have been giving you reasons." His voice was pleasantly evasive. They fell silent as the ship drew nearer and nearer Mars.

Col. Hartlage was surprised at the clamminess of his own palms and quickly wiped them on his handkerchief. There was a momentary wry amusement with the realization that he had grown as anxious as the rest of the men during the last four hours since the ship had been sighted visually. Abruptly, he pushed back the papers he had been examining and gave in to the holiday mood that had swept the camp with the coming of daylight. No one would do anything today, he told himself apologetically and left his office for the domed park-like hydroponic room.

"Everything ready, Serge?"

he asked the fussy little man, holder of numerous, important titles, but preferring to be known as the man who could make anything grow. And Serge Gorky could. He was no idle boaster. The room was round, as were all the rooms of the camp. Actually, a camp in name only, since it was all one building connected with runways and halls, all sharing the same ventilation system and pressurization. The hydroponic room they called the Playland, appropriately enough. Foliage plants, evergreens, flowers, all carefully interplanted to create a scene from fairyland.

Serge smiled happily and gave one last loving glance at the pool in the center of the room with its constantly spraying center, a replica of Earth, revolving slowly, sending a spray of rose-hued mist to capture the pink light from the overhead immensity of glass. Mars' air, seen in the distance or overhead through the thin, sand-ridden atmosphere, had a distinct pink coloration. The men's complexions appeared more ruddy than they were, as though permanently sunburned; there was no clear, dead white to be seen anywhare that the natural light didn't convert to a rosy tinged pastel. Mars' light was a kind, gentle sort of light. The sparkling, pink spray cooled and humidified air, but had it served no purpose, no one would have thought to stop it.

"It's so beautiful," Serge said reverently, "they will think they are back home in a lovely garden."

It was here they were to be officially received. The room would easily contain the seventy-four men of the station along with the crew members and the writers and entertainers. Karl gave an appreciative glance about him and nodded. Familiarity hadn't dulled the edge of the room's real beauty for him as it appeared to have done for so many of the men. He turned again to Gorky and asked, "Where is the platform I'm to use? I thought Pawley said he'd already brought it in."

"Later. I told him later. I was too busy. Look, chief, did you ever notice how the petals of a gardenia overlap? Look. See this one on the outside, and the next one on the inside. So perfect. Beautiful, beautiful. Perfection." He was completely unabashed as he dropped to his knees and tenderly caressed the flowers, evidently forgetting the colonel's presence entirely.

Karl started to tap Gorky's shoulder impatiently when he felt a constriction in the muscles of his throat. Absurdly, he backed away from the kneeling figure, feeling a momentary dread of being too close. Then he said authoritatively, "Serge, I have something you must see. It's in my office. It's extremely important."

In a barely audible voice Gorky answered, "Later, if you don't mind, sir. I'm really very busy right now." He ended the remarkable statement on a note of rapture as his fingers closed about the bud of a rose plant. "Heavenly, such exquisite form," he murmured and fondled the glowing, swelling bud gently.

Karl waited no longer, but strode to the wall phone and called Kerensky. He felt a weariness settle on his shoulders as he watched the unprotesting Gorky being led away by the doctor under the promise of even more beautiful flowers for him to examine.

He hurried to the communication center where he composed a message to be rushed back to Earth. Then more reluctantly he put through the emergency order that all precautionary measures were to be strictly reinforced; no more by-passing the decontamination chamber, no more brief excursions outside without the pressure suits, no more unauthorized wandering about outside. Then he went to Kerensky's office.

"I feel that it must be my fault. I, as well as the rest of them, got so cock sure that Mars didn't have anything that could do us any harm," he said bitterly to the doctor. "That makes three now. Hope that's the end of it." He said it without much real hope, however. The three hadn't done anything the rest of them hadn't done also. If they had been in contact with anything that affected them so peculiarly then so had the rest. Much as he liked them, he found himself hoping the cases were individual psychoses, not virus, or spore, or something else caused illnesses.

"Karl, there is something that must be decided now, immediately. Those writers and those women, they must not be exposed to this, whatever it is." Andreo's normally placid features wore a worried expression. "It is my duty to quarantine Mars until this whole thing is cleared up. You realize that?"

"I've just come from talking to Sandy. He's sending the message back to Earth right now. They will be placed in

isolation until their ship can be inspected and refueled and charted for them." He paced the doctor's office worriedly, "But what I'm afraid of is that they might come in contact with whatever it is before they get to the decontamination chamber." He glanced at the doctor's face, but found no reassurance there.

"We may never find out what it is. I tell you there is no sign of anything. No blood changes, no warning symptoms, no changes of any kind except through the electrocephalograph." He shrugged, "Don't look so hopeful, my friend. Often in the case of disturbed persons the brain works too hard, or too fast, or too slow. Obviously, the brain is malfunctioning, or there would be no aberration." He smiled faintly then, "Now you had better go and break the news to your visitors that they will not be permitted to talk to or see the men of Mars. It will not be easy."

Karl met them personally, forcing a cheerfulness into his manner that he in no way felt. He eased over the matter of isolation vaguely, "I know this will come as a great disappointment to you, but as a matter of precautionary custom, you will have to remain in your quarters for a certain period of time. That way, if you harbor any germs among you, they will have the opportunity to make themselves known before they get a chance at these men. For several years now on Mars no one has been subjected to any Earth-type bacteria or virus, and it could be disastrous to all of us if you did bring anything we couldn't cope with."

He said much more in the way of a welcoming speech, noting their various reactions. Wilson couldn't care less. She was still too sick to be concerned with anything. The other woman was curious about it, probably didn't believe him. Sharp, scenting a story, she would be hard to deceive. He'd avoid her, if possible. Of the men, only one or two seemed to be skeptical. One, the piano player, was visibly amused, making no real effort to conceal his entertainment at the colonel's expense. He caught the colonel's eyes on him and saluted, more in intention than in actual gesture. It passed unnoticed by the others.

They went from the great anteroom to the decontamination chamber without demur and were led to their rooms. Only after the last of them had gone did Karl relax somewhat. They shouldn't have had

a chance to contact anything. The clothing worn by their guides was sterile, and they had been told to keep a discreet distance. The captain of the ship would have to be told. He had asked no questions, but his raised eyebrows were more eloquent than any words spoken would have been.

It wasn't the captain, however, who talked to him first, but Heimrich Hilliard. Sandy rang the colonel almost as soon as he returned to his office. "Chief, that piano player buzzed me. Says he has something he thinks you should know. And, chief, Raoul hasn't reported back to me yet."

"Look, Sandy, stall that music man as long as you can. He suspects something is up, and I don't want rumors started. I haven't decided what to tell them about sending them back, and I don't want to talk to him about it until after I hear from Earth. And about Raoul, keep trying to reach him. Let me know if anything comes through." Raoul Saigon, he frowned until he remembered. He'd gone to inspect the radiation level at the landing strip. Should have reported in before and after the ship landed.

Sandy's face was long as he remained on the screen. "Uh, Chief, maybe you'd better talk to that Hilliard. He was grinning like he invented how."

O.K., Sandy, connect us." Karl nodded, knowing Sandy wouldn't suggest it if he didn't think it important.

Ricky wasn't grinning when Karl asked him, "Well, Mr. Hilliard, is there something I can do for you?"

"Col. Hartlage," Ricky said seriously, "I think I inadvertently messed up your plan to keep us isolated. If you're afraid of us, it's too late." He leaned forward as if trying to get closer to the colonel than the screen permitted. "When we docked I forgot something and went back aboard the ship. Through the port in my quarters I noticed several men running in our general direction, and when I got back out they were pretty near. They weren't in pressure suits, just the face masks and tanks."

Karl groaned to himself. He said easily, "No real harm done, Mr. Hilliard. Everyone came in through the decontamination room. That should take care of anything that may have reached anyone."

"But, Colonel, when I saw that they didn't need the suits, I took mine off and talked to them for several minutes while everyone was getting loaded up. Someone yelled for me to

get it back on and I did just before we came here. It never was fastened until time for me to get the treatment in the showers. The captain fixed it then." His eyes remained fastened on the colonel's for a long, quiet minute, then he said soberly, "Whatever you have here, I probably have been exposed to by now. I think I'm the only one who was near them at all."

Karl searched the other's face for signs of worry or fear and found none. He, at least, had reasoned that with the quarantine period on Earth, plus the forty-odd days on ship, any disease would have long ago been manifested. Tiredly, he sighed, "Did you find out their names, Mr. Hilliard? My men?"

"Saigon, the Frenchman; a Japanese who said I should call him Figaro, and a giant redhead they called Mac. MacCombs, I think."

The three testing for radioactivity. They hadn't been in when he had issued the precautionary orders. "O.K., and thanks. Will you stay there for the present and not say anything to the others about it yet. There is trouble here, as you guessed, and we're still trying to find out how serious it is. I'll be in touch with you." Before he cut off, he added cautiously, "And, Mr. Hilliard, avoid the others for the time being, will you?"

He gnawed his lip while waiting for Sandy to locate any of the three men. His best atomic engineers. So sure by now that Mars couldn't harm anything or anyone. No pressure suits. Not that the pressure made a whole lot of difference, a man could be comfortable for long periods at the lowered atmospheric pressure, more so than he could be with the cumbersome suits on. But the composition of the suits was such that no bacteria or spores or virus, no matter how minute, could penetrate it. The fact that they had found no such harmful threats in the twenty-four years of exploration of Mars didn't mean they weren't there. After a wait of several minutes, Figaro appeared on his screen. The little Jap blinked in surprise at his question, "Sure, Chief, Raoul was all right. He said he had something else he wanted to check, that he'd be in later. Isn't he back yet? He certainly should have returned by now."

While the search was being made for Raoul, Karl alerted Kerensky. "I don't know that he isn't all right, only that he failed to report to Sandy and

he didn't return with the others."

"Sounds like it, doesn't it? Wonder what he will be enamoured of?" Andreo shook his head doubtfully when Karl muttered that everyone who had ventured out without his suit would likely catch "it."

"I don't think it will be that simple. Sure, there are viruses that we never detect until they begin doing something to the human being or his domesticated animals or his crops, but when they do begin activating, then we find them. Here? Nothing." He grinned cheerfully and waved Karl to a seat. "Relax, my friend. This is for me to worry about. You run the camp, I'll run the infirmary, yes? Now tell me about that piano player. He sounds very unusual for a musician."

"Heimrich Hilliard, but he goes by the name of Ricky. More commercial, I suppose. About forty, tall, rugged looking. Smart." He lifted his hands and let them fall again. "And that's all I know about him."

The doctor was thoughtfully pulling at his lip, "Heimrich Hilliard. Not a common name. A piano player, you say. How curious. There is a poet-philosopher of that name. Or was. I wonder, could it be the same man?" His bright eyes seemed to snap as he asked, "Why would such a man play piano for a poor singer?"

"Is she? I didn't know. But I do have a problem with this Hilliard, no matter who or what he is. If he was exposed, I can't send him back with the others, and if he was exposed, how long will we have to wait out an incubation period? And what do we do with the others during that time? Lock them up?"

They both raised their heads quickly then and listened. As a single unit they ran to the door and looked down the corridor. Glory was struggling hysterically with two of the camp men. She was screaming shrilly as she lashed her body about trying to free herself from them. Helplessly, they clung to her, unable to quiet her.

At the same time Kerensky and Karl reached the panicked woman, Ricky also reached her side. He reached between the struggling men and slapped her sharply. Abruptly, she ceased her wild, instinctive struggle and hung onto his neck. "Ricky, they're going to kill us! I know they are! That is why they locked us up like that." She was nearly incoherent as she whispered loudly, unaware of the tears that streamed down her eyes, or

her disheveled state. "Ricky, we have to get away! Now!"

Gently he led her toward the room the doctor indicated, soothing her with tender words of endearment, caressing her face as if she were a terrified child awakened by a horrendous nightmare. The colonel fell back and closed the door after the trio.

"Colonel, it was my fault." The younger of the two men said miserably, "I was so sure they'd do what you said and stay in their rooms, that when she came flying down the corridor, I couldn't get the wing door shut fast enough. She was running like four thousand devils were after her. Scared to death."

"O.K., Jackson. What about the others? Did you close them off?"

"Yes, sir. That Hilliard fellow did it while we held her. He said you'd understand, and we couldn't let her go or she would have run outside. But, sir, they all know now that they're locked in."

Karl sent them back to the wing where the others were and waited for the reappearance of the doctor. It was fifteen minutes later that he and Ricky came from the room.

"She's asleep now. The sedative I administered should hold her for twelve hours or more, depending on her state of exhaustion."

"Complete," Ricky said quickly, "she's been in a state of panic ever since we left home. She was scared silly during the whole trip."

The doctor nodded, then with twinkling eyes he examined Ricky. "Hilliard, it is the same man, isn't it? I thought the name wasn't that common. Well, if you weren't exposed before, you certainly are now. Come along, Hilliard, come along."

They were seated again in the colonel's office when the call came through that Raoul had been located, deliriously happy with the sight, and the texture, of the restless, red sand that covered most of Mars. The flashing red of the danger valve indicating his oxygen was nearing exhaustion had failed to rouse him from his contemplation of the wondrous sand. He was brought to the infirmary and Dr. Kerensky left.

"That's it, Hilliard. Four men have gone mad and we don't know why or how. I had hoped that we could keep your party in isolation until we could get your ship ready to launch again, and then send you home. Unfortunately, that no longer is possible, and the

original plan will have to be followed."

"Are you going to tell them about this . . . this disease?" Ricky's grin was on the surface only as he continued, "There are several of them who couldn't take the kind of fear that goes with contagious diseases. Glory, for instance, would really go to pieces if she thought she might become ill."

"I haven't decided yet. I'll have to talk to Kerensky about it. We'll let Earth know this latest development and ask for medical research from there also, of course." He terminated the interview then, "It would be foolish to order you back to your room now, but perhaps you'd like to bathe and rest. After dinner, I'll have my mind made up."

From the doorway Ricky looked back still smiling faintly and said softly,

"And they call this Mars, red mystery
That deludes and stupefies man,
Enchants and entraps
All reasoning."

It was seven weeks later when Madge first voiced her fears to Ricky, "I don't know why, there actually hasn't been anything said or done, but they're all waiting. And when I try to find out what for, they remember something they should have done yesterday, at the latest."

"Your reporter's instinct, or the womanly intuition making itself heard?"

"What difference does it make? One's as good as the other when there's a story about that no one wants uncovered. And it is a fact, pure and simple, that I can't get near the infirmary." She strode along as easily as a man, kicking up clouds of the red dust with her thick-soled boots. She was entirely encased in the light weight pressure suit, complete with tank of oxygen. The weight on Mars with its low gravity was negligible. Suddenly, she drew up sharply, "Ricky, for heaven's sake, what is that?"

Several hundred yards to their right the dust was being whirled about by the wind. Carried upward higher than their heads, it rose a crimson column that glistened and shone as if studded with brilliants. It seemed alive as it swayed and dipped and shimmered in the thin sunlight, a thing of pure beauty reflecting the constant pink light of Mars, fired with the deeper red of the sand particles, relieved by the diamond-like

flashing of the silicon from the ground. Ricky shut his eyes briefly, almost afraid to admit to himself that such incredible loveliness could be built from the dead sands of Mars. The wind was whipping itself higher and higher, losing most of its material as it thinned in the higher atmosphere, leaving behind an unbelievable column etched in rosy luminescence. The particles had adhered to one another, somehow, had grown into a tapering six-foot cone-like figure that flashed the sun back at them standing transfixed by the wonder of it.

"Ricky, I've never seen anything so beautiful!" Madge exclaimed huskily. "It's eerie, somehow."

"Let's get closer to it." He ran toward the strange object, anxious lest it disappear before his eyes had seen enough of it. Even as he neared it, there was a soft whispering sound from it and almost instantaneously it crumpled with a muted peal not unlike tiny melodious Swiss bells. Absurdly, he felt cheated as he checked his speed and waited for Madge to catch up with him. He didn't turn to look at her, wouldn't have been able to discern her features through the mask, but he knew she was weeping when she said quietly, "It died, didn't it?"

"And they call this Mars.
From her womb ejects
Fragile fairies, born in the whirlwind,
To surge for pristine splendor
And find tinkling death."

"Oh, shut up!" she said hotly, still sounding choked up, however. "This is stupid. Let's see if there's anything left of it."

They knew there wouldn't be, but they poked at the sands hopefully, nevertheless, seeking a trace of the phenomenon. There was no sign of it. The sand was the same as everywhere else, loose, dry, red and gray with the occasional clear grains making up the very ordinary Mars sands. They returned to the camp silently.

Glory was watching Madge through narrowed eyes as the woman began writing furiously in one of her innumerable notebooks. She closed her eyes hating the slender, dark-haired woman with an intensity that was frightening to her. Finally, she could stand the scratching of the pencil no longer and she grated through clenched teeth, "I wish you'd stop that. Why do you pretend there's so much to write about all the time. Who do you think you're fooling?"

"There is always a lot to

write about." Madge answered absently without pausing in her work or turning her head.

"You're a fraud! I know your type. You think they like you, don't you? Look at yourself. You're nothing. Flat, like a boy. Straight hair, like one of them. No make-up. What makes you think they like you hanging around all the time? Why don't you stop chasing every man here?" Glory's voice rose to a shrill pitch as her fury mounted. "They despise you, don't you see that in their eyes every time they look at you? There isn't a man out there who wouldn't give his entire five-year pay-check to have me, and you know it. That's why you hate me, isn't it? You are jealous of me. Admit it! I dare you to admit it!" She flung herself at the older woman, grabbing at her shoulders and shaking her back and forth with her words. "Admit it! You hate me because you're jealous!"

Madge's fist caught her just below her ribs. And again. She grunted and fell back clutching herself, gasping for breath. As if in a dream she heard Madge's level voice.

"You fool. You complete, utter fool. You are fat and lazy and self-centered to the point of not knowing that anyone else exists. You were hired to entertain these men on Mars. They needed a contact with Earth. They needed amusement and diversion and laughter and songs. Mostly they needed a sympathetic woman to talk to once in awhile. You have given them nothing." She sat down abruptly and started to return to her work.

"What do you mean, I've given them nothing? I sing. Lord knows how much I sing for them. Every night that crazy Ricky plays and I sing. What more am I expected to do? I sing for them and they ignore me. They just want you to write about them. They want to be famous and they think you can do it for them by writing about them. That's why they hang around you all the time."

"Glory Wilson, you're a disgrace to show people. I thought everyone in show business knew he had to prepare for the audience. You make no attempt to entertain. You sulk and pout and act the frightened little girl until everyone wants to smash your face in for you. For heaven's sake, grow up. Save your hate until we get back to Earth." She gathered her things as she spoke and gave one last glance about her, "I'm going back to the room the colonel assigned

to me. You can sleep alone until we get back to Earth."

Glory watched the retreating figure dully knowing the inevitability of the scene. She had been used all her life, had been manipulated and managed to the extreme as if she had never had a will of her own. As if she had no feelings, didn't matter one way or the other. She had known Madge would desert her just as her husbands had, as Milt had. He had tossed her all the way off Earth so he could enjoy the money she was earning for him. He had cheated and tricked her into ruining her life, wasting away unwanted and unloved on Mars. Hated was a better word, she decided. They hated her. She embarrassed them, somehow, and they always wanted away from her. Slowly, she went through the motions of making up her body for the evening show. It was too early, but she would have dinner in her room, anyway, a solitary dinner away from them and their almost complete silences when she drew near them. They wouldn't even talk to her, they hated her so much. Life had always been a rotten, fighting, scheming day-by-day battle. Step on or get stepped on and she'd always managed to get stepped on plenty. She finished the making up and surveyed herself with that old objectiveness she had managed to achieve when she was still clawing her way to the top.

Madge was right. She had grown fatter. Through narrowed eyes she drew herself in and tried to strike a svelte pose again. Sadly she rummaged in her drawer and found the hated girdle. It would show despite being advertised as invisible. She bulged over it and below it, but that was better than being too thick through the middle, she decided, and turned from the mirror in distaste. The filmy, transparent scarves that draped from her shoulders would help if she remembered to keep them in motion. She put the thought from her mind and began wondering what they would serve for dinner.

Ricky had gone directly to the colonel's office when he returned to the camp. The magical column had captured his imagination, making him impatient to find out what it was, and how. Karl had grinned at him understandingly when he asked about it.

"It gets everyone that way the first time. You've never seen anything so pretty in your life. It's like losing a dear

friend when it collapses. Probably some of the other men could explain the mechanics of it better for you, but I'll fill in a little. The air is extremely dry, as you know. And there is almost always a wind blowing. Temperatures of minus 95 at the poles and 50 around here on a world as small as Mars keep the air in a continuous turmoil. The air is charged by friction and sometimes it seems that everything else gets charged, too. Like the static electricity we get back home, only more of it. When the wind starts whirling like that, it lifts the sand from the desert floor and whips it around. That charges the sand more and creates a magnetic field inside the spinning electrical spiral. Since most of the red dust is rusted iron, it gets magnetized and attracts the other particles. They build up until they exhaust the amount of iron in that particular whirlwind and then taper off. The magnetism is actually quite slight and with the absence of the electrical field, it isn't renewed, so it breaks up." He seemed genuinely sorry about the crestfallen look on Ricky's face, and he added apologetically, "I know, it's a damned shame that's all there is to it. Putting it in simple words takes some of the magic out of it. It did for me. Now they're just like the rest of Mars, strange, but understandable. They're only found within ten degrees of the equator. Where the old camp was, up in the hills, none were ever reported being sighted. The hills break up the wind before it starts the whirling action."

Ricky said seriously, "I don't think it is quite that simple, Karl. There was something else there. I almost felt an affinity for that thing and felt compelled to get closer to it." As if thinking aloud he explained, "I felt the same sort of peacefulness that a symphony orchestra playing one of the old Mendelssohn concertos always brings. I merge with the music until I can't tell where it ends and I begin. That thing out there affected me the same way. I felt myself to be a part of it."

Karl squirmed uneasily in his own chair, momentarily embarrassed by the soul baring of the other man. "You probably would feel it deeper than most of us. A poet is expected to feel more deeply than a scientist or a soldier, isn't he? By the way, why are you playing such exquisite piano for such a poor singer? Andreo brought it up even before you

arrived, and I find myself wondering also."

Ricky seemed to break his reverie with a determined jerk before he answered. "I want to see Mars, I suppose. We've had a base here over twenty years now, but no civilian nonscientist could have a chance to get here. I'm a fairly competent pianist and I knew the *Times* people well enough to insist I would be better than another temperamental musician. Simple as that, but no one will believe it." He had wanted to see Mars, that much was true. But why, even he hadn't probed for that one. In one violent gesture he had thrown aside a life of quiet meditation and had turned to popular music. Music that, by its very deafening beat and sound, would dull all thought and allow him to exist in the same kind of mental vacuum that everyone else seemed to enjoy. His poetry had not been missed since it hadn't been read in the first place, and when read hadn't been understood. And philosophy had proven to be a dead subject in the enlightened age when men knew they had found their god and named him science, and his priests were the scientists. There was no more to be learned of the meaning behind meaning. Everything was founded on the hard core of realism where facts were empirically learned or ignored. The mind was the storehouse of knowledge handed down by the god, science, and anything based on premises unproven in a test tube was scorned and their author derided. Was he still searching? Leaving the well-known paths to carry on the search among alien worlds? There had to be more than science and technology to living, else hulking machinery was as alive as man.

He had almost lost the thread of the conversation when Karl said hesitantly, "Ricky, this is a touchy thing to have to do, but I wonder if you could speak to Miss Wilson. We hardly even know she is here most of the time." He coughed slightly and fell silent.

Ricky's face tightened about the mouth as he nodded, "She is not exactly what they expected, is she? I'll see if we can't work up a few routines for her to do. So far, she avoids me entirely until it's time for her to sing. Then she stands there like a statue and with about as much emotion and warmth as one, she mouths songs that have no meaning to her or to anyone else. I think she feels that we

were all in on a giant conspiracy to lure her out here, and she hates all of us for it." And, he added silently, *I'll make her exercise if I have to beat her.*

"Of course," Karl said, "Madge has done miracles for all of us. I suppose we should be grateful for one woman who is truly genuine and one who isn't."

Ricky looked at him thoughtfully. No one would have imagined that of the two women Madge would be the one to capture the hearts of the lonely men on Mars. Yet so many unusual and seemingly unexplainable things had been happening he did not dwell on it then. Later in the darkness of his room he would ponder the many unanswerables his mind refused to cease framing.

The weeks passed into months and numbered seven. Those infected with the strange disease gradually recovered after various intervals of time, making it as impossible to determine the length of the disability as a mean figure as it had been to determine the cause. Others were quietly led to take the place of those recovered. It was handled matter of factly, with dignity, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a man to put aside his work to stare in wonder at a beam of light supporting millions of dancing dust motes, or to sit listening rapturously as Ricky got in his daily practice sessions at the piano. They were gentle men, reasonable men, determined men. And in their determination, they refused to work, to care for themselves, to admit responsibilities. They became insane.

The effects once recovery had been made were negligible. The infected men seemed to awaken from a deep sleep in which they vaguely remembered lovely dreams, but with no sensation of having been sick. They all disclaimed having done, touched or seen anything out of ordinary preceding the illness. They were returned to active duty by the perplexed Dr. Kerensky. He and Ricky and Karl often made up a loquacious trio that spent the greater part of many nights in conversations that covered everything from women to art to abstract theology. Jointly and severally, they enjoyed those nights and grew to trust and respect one another profoundly.

Glory watched Ricky indicate the routine for the new dance he insisted she try and shook her head sullenly, "Yeah, Ricky, it looks easy, but I just can't do it. What if I fell in

the water. What kind of a climax would that make?"

"Glory," he said with that infinite patience she had grown to resent, "you haven't tried. You could do amazing things with the training you already have. I'm telling you the gravity is only 0.38 here compared to Earth's gravity. It just takes a little courage to try. Won't you please just try?" He smiled pleadingly at her.

Glory knew he was right. Since she had, grudgingly, agreed to take his suggestions, everything had been better. In the past three months she had actually become one of them. And the dance wouldn't really be hard for her. Alone she had been practicing in her room just the sort of jump Ricky wanted her to do, but she stubbornly held her ground. She didn't know she could do it with the water below her, and now that she was finally making some headway with the camp men, she wasn't going to risk losing the hard-won ground. She said flatly, "You'll have to dream up something different, Ricky. That's all." Tiredly, she sat at the edge of the pool and watched the revolving Earth globe. She felt a faint tinge of humor, but she determinedly ignored it and briefly fanned her hatred of Ricky for the weekly weigh-in he forced on her. She wished poignantly she were back on Earth. The globe turned so slowly that it almost escaped detection, like watching the hour hand on a clock. Green, tan, blue water. Beaches and waves. Breakers with frothy whitecaps riding the crests. Cool, green forests with trees so high you couldn't see the tops of them. Hot sands. Mountains of pure white snow, feet and feet thick. Warm autumn days and the smell of burning leaves and dying summer. She closed her eyes dreamily and dwelt on the wonders of Earth. It was the most beautiful thing in the whole universe. More lovely even than that thing that grew in the desert while she watched in fascination. Ice skating on real ice, and a huge fire roasting hot dogs, and tasting the salt water of the ocean, and popcorn, and silk and nylon scarves that kissed her skin . . .

She heard Ricky faintly as if he were a great distance from her. "Glory, I'm proud of you, honey. You've been great these past few weeks. Everyone loves you for it. We'll put off anything new for awhile. You rest for half an hour or so until they come."

She made no answer, not even hearing most of what he had said. She was thinking about the feel of a new dishcloth once when she had been a girl. It had felt soft and warm with the water and detergent. She remembered how she had squeezed it over and over reveling in the touch of it. And the feel of a bath, and the way smoke climbed into the blueness until you couldn't find it anymore, only your eyes must have thought they did because they kept going where it should have been. Pearly white smoke against the blue sky, and the hot sun on her body turning her into a golden girl, and . . .

"O.K., honey. Ready?" Ricky's fingers began picking out the opening song and the men stopped their stirring and waited for the girl to rise. They thought her graceful seated position gazing down into the water to be a pose, part of her act. Slowly, she lifted her head in response to the music and found it beautiful. Her head swayed slightly and her body arched as she reached toward the overhead window receiving the rosy light with the outstretched arms, bathed in the soft glow. Slowly, her body responded to the music. No one stirred while she danced. Ricky looked up in amazement when she started to sing, and he played and played. She went easily from one song to the next, using her body not seductively, but rather as if too enthralled by the melody and rhythm to be able to control its lithe twisting. When the time to break came and the piano was silent, still she sang. Only then did eyes grow anxious.

"Glory, let's get a drink. You were wonderful tonight." Ricky touched her arm when she appeared unaware of his presence. Only at the touch did she pause.

"Ricky, play some more. Listen to it, Ricky. It's beautiful. Listen." She sang and the tears stood in her eyes. She knew when Dr. Kerensky came. When he said he had something to show her, she went with him docilely, still humming under her breath. She was thinking about her mother's hair which had been natural blond, just as hers was. Golden with sunlight.

Ricky and Madge waited for the doctor in the bar. For the first time she learned about the sickness. "I suppose we'll all get it sooner or later. She didn't seem to feel bad at any time, did she?" Ricky's voice was very gentle as he spoke.

"Are you sure it's a sick-

ness? Glory was unbelievable tonight. She was the music and the songs. And the dances. I didn't know anyone could move like that." There was only bewilderment in Madge's voice and face.

Bitterly, then Ricky laughed, "But she doesn't know anything else but the beauty of it." Suddenly, he thought about his words and shook his head to retain a nebulous idea that had seemed to perch undecided on the brink of his consciousness. It was gone. He looked up as Andreo approached with a long face.

"Same as the others. She sings and hums and wants to talk only of Earth, the most beautiful thing in the universe."

"Will she suffer?" Madge asked in a very small voice.

"Suffer!" Andreo exclaimed indignantly, "Hell, woman, she's never been so happy! There isn't any hate or fear of anxiety left in her right now."

Ricky went out walking a lot the next month. With the men, with Madge, alone. Mostly alone. He went in search of the fairies Mars built. Occasionally, he found them, only to be mystified over and over by them. They didn't exist, the wind came and they grew out of the sand, and they died and returned to the sand.

He watched their birth and death, each one different and yet each the same. Incredibly fragile, they collapsed at the approach of a person or with a shift in the wind or simply because they had to. They whispered to themselves a sad good-bye and played their own funeral dirge with the tinkle of invisible bells. Some of the men said they never heard the tinkling sound, but on the other hand, most of them did hear it. All of them were immobilized when they saw one in the midst of creation.

"And they call this Mars. Unquiet spirits
Ride with the thin winds and seek
To fulfill themselves.
Final futility."

He stared at it unblinkingly as it seemed to melt away before his eyes and was gone again. Then with a new purposefulness he strode back to camp. There were things he had to find out.

It was a week later when he said intently to Karl and Andreo, "I want you both to listen to me, and don't start thinking about which room to place me in until I'm finished. First of all, you both know I've been almost obsessed with those columns of sand. Well, accepting

your own explanation of them, Karl, they are charged particles of sand and silicon. Right? Now, if my college physics doesn't fail me, to be charged, a particle must receive more electrons than it normally carries. So those fairy things are common, ordinary, red Martian sand particles that have an oversupply of electrons. Now where did the electrons come from? Created by the friction of the wind with the air and the sand." He paused a moment before he said smilingly, "This is the part where I expect all sorts of derision, but here goes anyway. There was a philosopher named Whitehead who stated that every entity regardless of size or complexity has a mental and a physical pole. And an electron is an entity. So is an army colonel or a doctor. To paraphrase Whitehead; although negligible the pole of an electron serves as an illustration of the fact that there are no clear-cut distinctions between dead and living matter. Now you, Doctor, have been trained to think of the life process as a matter of living, procreating and dying. Regardless of the interval of time it takes to fulfill those functions, that is the purpose of life. For some species of turtles, the life span may run several hundred years; for the May fly, one day is sufficient; for some bacteria, a minute may suffice. But each one fulfills his destiny. According to Whitehead, consciousness and life depend not on the microscopic actual entity, but rather on the macroscopic organization of entities. Each entity, accepted as such, has the uniqueness of grasping other components of the universe into a unity. When that is achieved, whether it be through the birth of a child or the splitting of an amoeba into two complete cells, satisfaction is attained. The entity is complete and perishes, but it transmits something of itself to the next occasion, or the next life, and the future conforms to the past." He looked from one to the other of the concentrating men and said slowly, "The electron is an entity. It has a purpose. Here on Mars where life as on Earth did not develop, something else did."

Restlessly, Karl shifted in his chair, "Then you suggest the electrons from those whirling sandstorms cause the sickness?"

"I am certain of it." Ricky felt the sureness that he knew he couldn't communicate alone. "When they recovered,

did any of the men act or feel any differently than they did before?"

"Not a one of them did. They didn't have an explanation for it any more than we do." Andreo answered sorrowfully, "It would be a lovely theory, but one that practical men just couldn't accept. There is no way to prove or disprove it."

Smiling slightly, Ricky suggested, "Call in Swenson and Laurins. They were the first, weren't they? They are now fully recovered?"

With a puzzled look Karl told Sandy at the communications center to give the message to Swenson and Laurins. They waited silently until the two men appeared. Swenson glanced nervously toward the doctor and seemed reluctant to be in his presence.

"Ralph," Ricky said to him pleasantly, "remember that book of poetry I showed you. I seem to have misplaced it. Have you seen it?"

Swenson blushed painfully and slowly reached into his inner pocket and pulled forth a slim volume. Wordlessly, he handed it to Ricky.

"Ralph, you were sick and I think I know what it was that happened to you and how it affected you. I'm afraid that you'll suffer from the after effects the rest of your life," Ricky said distinctly to the amazement of the doctor and the colonel.

"Is that right, Doc?" Swenson asked eagerly.

"Do you want to, Ralph?" Andreo asked in bewilderment.

Again Swenson seemed embarrassed and looked toward Ricky for help. "Of course, he does, Andreo. If you were blind for thirty years and then received sight, wouldn't you want to keep it? Ralph and Pete Laurins both received sight, didn't you?"

They nodded and the second of them, who had been silent until then, blurted, "I never even knew music was pretty until I got sick, then music and pictures and words . . . It's like seeing a rainbow for the first time. You feel like you want to cry inside because it's so lovely."

After they had gone, Ricky said apologetically, "I'm sorry I did it that way. I guessed at part of it and had some help with part. When Glory got it, she lost all that was ugly about her and really felt the beauty of the music. She never had a real voice before because she didn't feel the music. Same for her dancing. She learned the routines and she was spectacular to look at, and she had one

of the best agent-managers in the business, so she went places. But now when she dances, she's a visual extension of the music. She's almost forgotten how to hate anymore."

Andreo nodded in confirmation at that, "She admitted to me that perhaps you are not so very crazy, and that maybe Milt, whoever he is, did it for her own good."

Ricky shrugged, as if to say that proved it. He did say, "At first they are so numbed by it all, all they've missed before, that they don't have time for anything else, but have to give in to the beauty of being alive and able to see and hear and feel. Then, gradually, the rest of the brain begins working again and this part sinks back where it belongs. But it never again will be gone from the brain. The brain is like an electronic computer with short charges of electricity being the memory. As soon as one gets the message, it passes it along to the next, keeping it forever flowing, never normally stopping. The electrons enter the brain and achieve satisfaction with like entities. The person gets 'sick'. After the 'fever' of the new infection dies down, only the normal processes of memory storage remain and this accentuated beauty appreciation is one of them. Somehow, Martian electrons have evolved to experience the sensation of sound vibrations, thus the whispering and the tinkle they make. It is a pleasurable sensation connected with appreciation of beauty. The electron has no sense organs, and of all of ours only sound sends vibrations that can be felt by them. Our brain translates the vibration into sound for us, for them it must remain pure vibratory sensation. But once it penetrates our brain, it activates all of our sense organs, and we have a full range of them."

"Heaven help me, but I believe it," Karl said in a hushed tone.

"It will take a long time. The electron is so very, very tiny trying to find his kind, but eventually we will all become infected because who can stop an electron from entering where he chooses? And when we return home, we will in turn infect everyone on Earth." Andreo mused.

"And will that be bad?" Ricky leaned back and closed his eyes. He had his last verse.

"And they call this Mars. Beloved of God,
Unequaled, electrical ecstasy
Living only to share
His beauty."

THE END

Out in the alien desert, down in the caves, the creatures of legend spawned. But evil has many faces, many arms. The most horrible is . . .

THE ARM OF ENMORD

By JACK SHARKEY

THE colony on Arcturus Beta had been well-established for nearly a half-century before anyone paid any real attention to the legend. In any colonization of an alien planet, nervous tension ran high among the pioneers who had come there to live and build and flourish, and each of the Earth Colonies on the planets of Sol and the nearer stars had its complement of tales calculated to scare the pants off newcomers to the group. There were the so-called Fire Ferns of the Martian Desert, which early scouting parties swore they'd seen destroying the listlessly stolid scaly Martian fauna, or the Ocean Things of Venus, which defied all efforts to capture them, due to their uncanny (and fortuitous) power to become one with the water in which they slithered and coiled. Legends were easy to come by, when men's nerves neared the snapping point and alien winds threatened their flickering campfires. They were invented, spread by word-of-mouth communication, and soon became part of the "history" of a newly-settled planet. No one really believed them, but no planet was without them, either. Colonists were much like children who fear the bogeyman, yet force themselves to listen to any and all information they can glean about their nebulous nemesis, delighting in their own shiverings. And so legends were born, thrived awhile, then died into a kind of nostalgic notoriety.

Until Arcturus Beta.

The original landing had been made by a party of men mostly Teutonic in origin (Space Psychology insisted that the lesser the differences in a crew's makeup—and that included nationality — the greater the chances for success of an expedition.), and so the "creatures" in their legends were vaguely Viennese.

Had they been American, there would have been Devil Men.

The French would have chosen *Hommes Diaboliques,* or the Spanish decided upon *Los Hombres del Diablo.*

And so it was by merest chance they came to be called the *Teufel Menschen* . . .

". . . and that's why I insist there's more to this thing than mere legend," said Drake Talbot, smacking his fist into his palm.

Stacey laughed and shook her head at him, setting the golden curls flying at the back of her head. "Drake, darling, you're so intense!" she said, taking his hands and attempting to draw him down on the sofa beside her.

Drake pulled his hands away. "Even you think I'm a fool."

Stacey's smile faded. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it to sound quite like that, Drake. It's just that—well—*Everybody* knows about planets, and legends, and how they get started. And yet you're always so insistent about these Teufs!"

Drake's face, its frowning creases sharpened and highlighted by the glow from the fireplace, looked oddly sad and alone. "No one likes to admit there are things man doesn't understand, or can not control, Stace. *All* these legends have some basis in fact."

Stacey sighed, and began to refill their glasses with the red-gold wine that came from the soil of their adopted planet. So well did the vineyards thrive in that soil that someone had even nicknamed the place Arcturus Bacchus. "We've been over that so many times, dearest. The Fire Ferns actually *did* look like they swallowed up those Martian animals, and their orange-and-yellow fronds *did* look like they were on fire—Especially when a man had been out in the desert sun for a long time— But . . ."

"Let's not go over it again, Stace. The animals, it turned out, dug their burrows beneath these plants, and only seemed to be eaten by them when they were actually just wriggling down into the soil. I know all that. And I also

know that one-third of all ships that try to cross the Venusian Ocean are never seen again."

"Drake, there are storms, tidal waves, maybe even whale-like creatures who dote on boats, in that ocean," Stacey snapped.

Drake shrugged. "I see there's no point in even discussing it with you." He sat beside her, moodily watched the reflected play of the flames in the depths of his wine, and then began to sip at it, staring into the fireplace.

"But that's my point!" said Stacey. "You *don't* 'discuss' it. You argue, you browbeat, you rant and rave . . ."

Drake put down his glass. "It's getting late," he said. "I'll walk you home."

"Afraid to let me out alone after dark?" she goaded, reaching for her cloak. "Afraid the Teufs will get me?"

Drake took her by the shoulders and stared into her face, his eyes filled with pain. "If I say 'Yes', you'll only laugh."

Stacey's heart melted when she saw the hurt in his eyes. "No, Drake. I won't laugh. I don't believe it, but—" she kissed him softly on the lips, "—I appreciate it."

He helped her on with her cloak, drew on his own, and they walked to her house in friendly, hand-holding silence. At her door, she turned to face him once more.

"Thank you." she said, smiling, and kissed him once more.

"Goodnight, Stace." Drake said, softly, and vanished into the cool, green-blue night, his footsteps fading quickly out of earshot.

Stacey closed the door, and turned up the kerosene lamp upon the table. The colony had electricity, but its use was still restricted to the industrial end of their life on the planet. In time, the village would become a town, then someday a city. Right at the moment, it boasted of barely one hundred men and women, some married, all the rest engaged. In a colony, sent out from Earth to thrive, no bachelors or spinsters were allowed. Stacey felt quite fortunate in her bethrothal to Drake. They had had no say in the matter, themselves. All she'd known when she took the flight to Arcturus' second planet was that the man was the correct age, mental level, race, personality and state of health to match her own similar qualifications for an ideal marriage. The whole thing had been done by a

mechanical brain back in New Manhattan.

But something a brain could not compute had entered into the picture. Stacey had fallen in love with Drake at first sight.

She wouldn't have minded getting married right then and there. But the brain back on Earth had, wisely enough, decreed a three-month waiting period. It could afford no mismatches when the life of a colony depended upon it. They had to wait and see, and be sure. Had Stacey been even the least bit cool toward the idea, she'd have been flown back to Earth, and another girl sent in her place to be Drake's bride.

The thought of another sharing his love made her tremble. The waiting period still had three weeks to run, and then she'd be his forever. Stacey smiled, and slipped off her cloak, with a delicious shiver of anticipation.

"Hello, Stacey." said a voice.

She spun about, panicky, her heart fluttering wildly, her eyes seeking the source of the sound.

"Tymbel!" she said, suddenly angry.

Tymbel sat up lazily from where he'd been half-lying in her easy chair. "Greetings, dear cousin." he said, smoothly.

"If you don't leave here immediately, I'm going to sound the alarm!" she threatened, reaching for the door handle.

"Easy. Easy does it, Stacey," he cautioned her, grinning toothily. "This loyal citizen role suits you fine, but you're not turning me in, and you know it."

"And why not?" asked Stacey, her nostrils quivering.

"Because you're a woman, and you're dying to know where I've been. That's why."

Stacey drew herself up. "You think mere idle curiosity could make me forget my duty to the colony?"

"The alarm is in the center of the square, right outside your door." said Tymbell, gesturing dramatically. "Go ahead. Start ringing it."

Stacey shuddered with mixed anger and pride, then she sat down. "All right, Tymbel. Where were you? I was worried sick when you weren't here when I arrived."

"That's better. Much better." said Tymbel, leaning back once more in the confines of the chair.

Stacey fidgeted. If anyone should come— She knew the penalty for harboring a fugi-

tive was banishment, and that meant leaving Drake, forever, separated by millions of miles, for the rest of her life. She fought the sickness taking hold of her.

"You have one minute to tell me, and then, whether you've finished or not, I'm sounding the alarm!" she warned him.

The lazy grin left his face as he realized that she meant it.

"All right, then. I'll tell you." he said. "All my life, since I was just a kid, I dreamed of traveling to outer space. It was high adventure to me, then. To be a pioneer on alien soil, to fight off heaven knows what creatures that threatened the Earthmen, you know the story: The Flash Gordon type of existence. And so I signed for the Arcturus Colony, and came up here. And what was it like? The journey through space was boring. The ship flew entirely on instruments, had no portholes. I might as well have been inside a submarine for all the joy I got out of crossing the universe. And when I got here, it was just another job. The thrill of being on another planet wore off in a matter of days, and it was just like Earth all over again. Hard work, low pay, and not even another town to go to, to relieve the monotony. I got tired of it in a big hurry."

"Your letters had that whole story between the lines," said Stacey. "I could tell you hated it, as much as you tried to be cheerful about it."

"And when I knew you were coming—" said Tymbel, "well, that did it. Another member of the family to come and see me here was too much for me to take. By letter, I could at least live a false life of high adventure, and fool the people at home, partly, that I'd realized all my childhood dreams. But not once you came. You'd soon see that I was no one, just as I was back on Earth. Just another day laborer, building houses, factories, barns."

"I'm sorry, Tymbel," said Stacey. "I didn't realize . . ."

He waved her to silence, and shrugged. "Hell, Stacey, you couldn't know. No one's blaming *you*. But that did it. The day your name was on the incoming passenger list was the day I left my toolbox behind me and headed for the hills. I understand that Kathy—"

"She's remarried." Stacey nodded. "The village voted you out of your wife, and Henry

McCallister's wife had just died, so—"

"Spare me the gruesome details," said Tymbel, lightly, though a note of bitterness crept into his voice. "I hope she's happy with him. I know she wasn't really happy with me. Hell!" he shrugged, trying for nonchalance he didn't feel, "That's all water under the bridge, now, anyhow."

"Tymbel," said Stacey, "what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to let them capture me. There's no chance of survival outside the colony. It's a miracle I lasted these last few months. I had to hover around the rim of this place, stealing fruit and vegetables, now and then a lost lamb. I made out okay. But now I'm ready to go back."

Something in his tone twitched at Stacey's mind. The minute's grace she'd given him had already passed, but she had to know what he was up to. "You've always been a schemer, Tymbel," she said. "So I know you wouldn't give in without a fight. You *want* to be sent back. Why?"

"Have you read the regulations on deportees?" asked Tymbel, with a slow smile.

"I—I believe so. I couldn't quote them, though."

"The part I like goes: '. . . shall be sent back to Earth, along with his monies, chattels, and the like . . .' That's where I make my fortune, Stacey."

"But you have nothing but your tools, and some clothes . . .?" said Stacey, her interest kindling rapidly.

"Oh?" said Tymbel, raising his eyebrows in mock surprise. "*Is* that all I have? Perhaps not so, cousin."

"Don't play games with me," Stacey said, with sudden irritation. "You've found something. What?"

"I don't suppose you were on this planet two minutes before someone was playing on your hackles with the legend of the Teufs, Stacey. Am I right?"

A cold something clutched at her spine. It seemed odd, Drake discussing the legend, not so long ago, and now Tymbel. A strange uneasiness began to ooze through her veins. "Yes. I've heard all about it, with all its ramifications. Why?"

"Stacey . . ." Tymbel leaned forward in the chair till his face was inches from hers, his manner intense. "It's *not* a legend."

Her heart seemed to stop, then took up a faster throbbing. Two men, so completely dissimilar, to tell her the same

thing on the very same night. It was rather unnerving.

She managed a laugh, that rang falsely. "Drake was just telling me the same thing, tonight. I suppose you're going to tell me you've come upon their hideaway, and found your way through the labyrinth, to the treasure?"

"You don't believe the legend, do you!" he said, with a funny grin. "You think it's all a bunch of— Or maybe you don't *want* to believe it."

Stacey stood up. "Your time's up, Tymbel," she said, stiffly. "You'd better run. I'm going to give the alarm."

"Stacey, Stacey." Tymbel shook his head. "Is my 'crime' such a great one? It's not as though I'm a murderer, you know."

"Deserting a colony is one of the worst crimes in interstellar settlement," said Stacey, her voice shaking. "It can mean life or death to the other colonists. Fortunately," she said, with more scorn than she'd intended, "you were easily replaced."

"Then doesn't that," said Tymbel, easily, "somewhat lessen the heinousness of my deed?"

"Well—"

"Besides, I haven't told you why I've come here, tonight."

"Why *did* you?" asked Stacey, her curiosity getting the better of her.

"Because I need your help." Then, as she stiffened, he added hastily, "Oh, come now! Nothing like collusion with a criminal. I know you too well to even attempt that. No, I need your help in getting me my legal rights."

"In what way?" she asked.

"I need a witness that is above reproach, to see me get the treasure. I don't trust this village, and it doesn't trust me. I need someone who'll swear that *I*, and I alone, found the treasure."

"They'd never believe me." said Stacey. "They know you're my cousin. I haven't been here long enough to establish—"

"You?" said Tymbel, with genuine surprise. "Who's talking about *you?* I'm referring to that noble creature to whom you've become affianced."

"Drake?" said Stacey. "Why Drake?"

"Because he's on the Council. Because he was born and bred on this planet, and they all love and trust him. Because he's too much of a fool to lie and say that he discovered the treasure, and leave me out in the cold. That's why."

"You expect me to *use* him? For *you?*" The scorn in her

voice would have singed a more sensitive man's ears.

"And for him," said Tymbel.

"For him? How so?" Stacey asked, in puzzlement.

"He's forever insisting that the legend is true. Wouldn't he love to have proof of this? Can you think of a lovelier wedding present for the groom?"

Stacey's hand, which had been reaching for the door-handle once more, fell to her side. "As usual, Tymbel, you've succeeded." she said, softly. "How do you always manage to get your own way?"

Tymbel's forefinger tapped his temple, lightly. "Because I've got it up here, cousin," he grinned, content with his triumph.

"When?" asked Stacey, resigning herself to his plan.

"Tomorrow soon enough?"

Stacey nodded. "Tomorrow. And just how do I get Drake to go to the treasure? If he once sees you, he'll turn you in."

Tymbel pulled a ragged sheet of paper from within his sweat-soiled shirt. "I have a map that'll take you to the entrance of the labyrinth, cousin. Get him there, then leave the rest to me."

Stacey took the crudely-drawn map from him. "And if he asks where I got this map?"

Tymbel eased himself out of the chair and strode toward the door. He opened it, and poised there, silhouetted against the cool green-blue of the night. "You're a woman. You'll think of something. Fibbing comes easy to the weaker sex."

Stacey opened her mouth to reply, but his grin stopped her.

"Goodnight, cousin," said Tymbel. He closed the door and was gone.

The crowd screamed and gabbled in a tongue that Stacey could not fully comprehend. They pushed her and shoved her aside, to get to the man, his eyes rolling in his head, who staggered and stumbled down the cobbled street of the village. He mumbled a tale that was incomprehensible to Stacey's ears, yet his meaning found its way into her mind. His wife and child were taken, gone. His beautiful wife, and baby son had been taken. Over and over in Stacey's mind rang the phrase *"Teufel Menschen"*. And the scouting party had gone out, and had found no trace of any such cave as the man had described, nor had they found his wife. The wife

whom he claimed to have last seen being dragged down into the opening in the ground, screaming futilely at the Things that enfolded her with their glistening arm-structures as they hobbled and hopped away into the gloom. The scouting party had found his son, alive and well. But the man would not even look upon his son's face. He only buried his eyes in the crook of one arm, and pointed his other hand at the crib wherein the baby cooed and kicked its tiny pink legs, and sobbed out a single word, over and over: *"Enmord!"* Then Stacey saw the man wither, go into convulsions, and die, with his hair oddly gray, for he had been young. And she saw his son growing up, the idol of the village maidens, and saw his son leading a laughing girl by the hand, under the bright light of Arcturus at noon, across the plains toward the nearby hills. And she saw him take the girl unerringly to the mouth of a cave, and heard the laughter die on the girl's lips as the son *changed* . . . And reached out for her as she fell into a strange swoon. Then the son's eyes looked up greenly from the limp form of the girl he held in his arm-structures, and looked right into Stacey's own eyes.

"Tomorrow soon enough?" asked the Thing, in Tymbel's voice.

Stacey screamed and screamed, and woke up. She lay safe in her own bed, in the village on Arcturus Beta. The sheets were drenched with cold perspiration.

Drake, she thought desperately. I've got to tell Drake! I must go at once.

"I quite agree, darling," said Drake, holding her hand to prevent its trembling again. "It was more than a mere dream."

"I don't know what to think —what to believe anymore," she said in a low, quavering voice. "It was so real. So horribly real."

"I can well imagine," said Drake. "Parts of your dream are historically verified, in the log of the original colony here. That man was Carl Von Huber, and the wife was Machtilde Koner. Their son Franz *did* disappear, later in life, with one of the girls from the village. It was assumed they'd died in the desert beyond the hills."

"It was so real," she reiterated. "What are we to do?"

"We, darling, are to do nothing," said Drake, kindly.

She clutched at his hand.

"You're not going out there alone!"

"Stacey, darling, you should know better. According to the legend, these Things, the Teufs, as we call them nowadays, have no strength over a man. Only over women and children. Carl insisted, before he went mad, that had he not been so far from Machtilde when the Teufs attacked, she'd have been perfectly safe. They could not even have shown themselves had he been by her side. So you needn't worry about me."

"But why must you go?" she begged, suddenly in tears, her eyes pleading.

"It's been my long-felt desire to prove the truth of the Teufs' existence. That's one reason. And the other—"

"Tymbel was right," said Stacey. "You *are* a kind of noble fool. You'd risk your life so he'd come into what was rightfully his by discovery."

"There *is* no risk, I tell you," said Drake, irritably.

"Then if you go, *I* go," she said, her chin jutting stubbornly.

"No. That's out, completely!" said Drake. "I'd never permit you to venture out there."

"But you're a man. I'll stay close to you. Then I'll be safe. You said so, yourself!"

"I won't risk it!" said Drake. "You're staying here."

"Very well, then," said Stacey. "I won't let you have the map, then."

"Stace!" said Drake, exasperated. "That's not fair of you. Don't you know I'm only thinking of your safety?"

"Don't you think I care about yours?" she shouted. "You fool, if anything happened to you out there, I'd—I'd kill myself!"

"Don't say that!" he snapped, taking her by the shoulders and gripping till he hurt her. "You don't know the terrible risk—"

"Please, Drake, please!" she cried.

He released her and turned his back. "If you insist upon this folly, there's only one thing I can do."

"You'll take me?" she asked, hopefully.

His head moved slowly from side to side. "I'll stay here, too. You mean too much to me, Stace. I'd rather lose the way to the treasure than lose you."

Stacey looked at his back, the muscles of which had come all limp, in his disappointment. She couldn't bear the hurt she knew he was feeling. Numbly, she took out the map, and placed it upon the table. "All right, then, Drake," she

said. "I can't rob you of your dream. Take the map and go."

Drake turned, looked at her, then at the map. He took her face betwen his big strong hands, gently. "I'll come back," he promised.

"Be careful, darling," she said.

Drake kissed her, tenderly, then took the map and left the room. Stacey watched his form, handsome and broad-shouldered, as he moved up the cobbled street toward the village limits. She shut the door and then leaned against it, sobbing.

And all at once she had a thought. There was no time to lose. She grabbed up her cloak from the chair where it had been dropped, and hurried out into the street, keeping that distant figure in view . . .

"Drake. Drake Talbot!" called a voice.

Drake looked about him, squinting in the bright light that cascaded from the greenish skies over the hills. Then he saw the man, waving. "Tymbel?" he called back.

"Over there," Tymbel answered. Then, as Drake's long strides brought him nearer, "I thought you weren't coming, after awhile. . . . Where's Stacey?"

Drake frowned. "I wasn't fool enough to bring her out here. If the legend is true, you know the danger. I could kill you for even thinking of having her come near this place."

Tymbel shrugged. "She'd have us with her. The Teufs can't abide the near presence of a man, or have you forgotten?"

"I think you've forgotten what it is to *be* a man!" Drake spat contemptuously. "To risk her life so that you could get a little richer!"

A grin split Tymbel's face. He remained unsullied by the insult. "Not a *little* richer, Talbot old man. The rumors of the treasure were grossly underestimated. It's a fortune," he said, his eyes lighting up.

"So take it and be damned with it," Drake said.

Tymbel shrugged. "Come along, then. I'll need you as a witness. Or did Stacey explain everything to you?"

"Of course she did. We have no secrets from one another."

"That's what I figured she'd do. She's too simple to lie." said Tymbel, chuckling. "Just as well. I knew you'd come."

"All right, let's get it over with. Where is this cave you mentioned?"

"Follow me, if you will," said Tymbel, turning and striding away across the slope

of the hill. They vanished behind a curve of rolling, warm ground.

An instant later, from the opposite direction, Stacey appeared, looking about her in bewilderment. In her hand she clutched a copy of the map, drawn up before her visit to Drake that morning. She hadn't originally intended to use it to follow him. She'd assumed she'd be able to talk him into letting her go along. The copy had been for the sole purpose of leaving behind, in the event that anything should happen to the two of them. Something to let the town know the danger that was actual, not legendary, and exactly where it lay on the planet. But now she'd followed to the end of the map, and there was nothing in sight. No cave, no Drake, no Tymbel.

Stacey, whose movements had been quick until that moment, slowed her pace all at once, and the beginnings of fear started in her mind. This locale, if the map were to be believed, was the territory of the Teufs. It looked very much as she'd seen it in her dream, when young Franz had taken the laughing girl out to her doom. In fact—

Stacey halted her stride with a shudder. She *recognized* the place. That copse of shrubbery over to the right, the tall, tree-like thing that flourished all over Arcturus Beta, very like an elm tree of Earth, but too geometrically symmetrical in its division of shady branches. It was right where it had been in her dream. It was older, by nearly half a century, than as she'd seen it, but there was no mistaking its location. And, if her dream had been accurate in that respect, then the entrance to the labyrinth should lie just beyond the curve of the hill.

Forcing herself to ignore the cold dread in her heart, she trod the same path that the merry maiden of generations past had taken, toward the entrance to what might well spell her own destruction. But Drake was there, somewhere, and she had to go to him.

And as she came over the rim of the hill, she saw him. The recognition was too brief in duration for her to shout. And then he'd vanished, with Tymbel going before him, into a black hole in the earth. "Drake!" she called, finally finding her voice.

But either the hills muffled the noise, or the distance was too great, for he did not reappear. She hesitated for only

a moment, then hurried down the hillside toward the mouth of the cave.

It grew in size as she approached it, until she was at the very brink of the entrance, which she was uneasily surprised to find stood twice as tall as herself. Beyond the opening was only blackness and silence.

"Drake?" she called, into the darkness. "Drake, it's Stacey!"

The cave seemed to take the words from the air and bury them in its walls. There was no echo, not even that hollowness of sound which should have overcome her voice, on entering the hollow in the earth.

And then she seemed to hear Drake's voice, in the midst of an incalculable distance, calling back, "Stacey, Where are you?" But she couldn't be sure. They were the words she *wanted* to hear. And they'd been so very faint that they could very well have been supplied by her own mind. She called out again, but this time there was no trace of a response.

Stacey put one foot over the brink of the cave, and set it down, half-expecting hundreds of green Things to leap from the walls of the tunnel and carry her off. But there was no movement, no sound. She took another step, and was then standing within the cave itself. Nothing happened. She could detect only the sound of her own labored breathing.

It took great courage to take the next step, for still, etched in her mind, for the rest of her life, she saw the face of that terrified girl who had followed Franz to this very spot. But all at once, after that third step, it became easy. She hurried into the darkness, calling Drake's name.

And then she stopped. For, ahead of her, it was dark no longer. The walls of the cave glowed a pallid fluorescent blue, over a suddenly non-rocky floor. The floor of the lighted cave was made of sand, pale white sand, and felt soft and comfortable as she walked into the light.

She was at the start of the labyrinth. She could see the openings at odd intervals along the length of this strange tunnel, each opening onto a tunnel itself. Once she ventured into this place, she'd never find her way out unaided. Even if there were no Teufs to carry her off, she might well starve if she became lost in the maze. No,

she'd better go back and wait, and hope, out on the hillside.

Stacey turned around.

Behind her, the blue-lit tunnel continued backward, with no trace of the darkened section through which she'd entered. She looked around her, frantically, left and right and above and below, seeking the entrance. It was not to be found.

"It's *got* to be this way!" she said aloud, running back a few paces toward where it should be. It was not. And when she turned and looked back again, the section of tunnel which she'd just quit didn't look the same, somehow. As though she'd blundered into one of the cross-tunnels by mistake.

Her terror returned with full force, gripping her heart in a cold vise. *"Drake!"* she screamed.

There was no answer, no echo.

Stacey stumbled forward, trembling. Her hand fell upon the wall to her right, and she drew it away, with a sense of shock. The walls were warm, and soft, like—like bare flesh.

Stacey's mind flooded with icy panic. Yelling her lover's name, over and over, she began to run . . .

It seemed hours later that she first saw the golden light. She'd lost her cloak somewhere in the endless twistings behind her, and one of her shoes had fallen, and she'd kicked off the other one. But the change in lighting filled her with new hope.

"It must be the outside!" she muttered, half doubled over, trying to catch her breath. "It has to be the way out!"

She breathed deeply, to restore a little of her failing strength, and hurried toward the light across the sandy floor.

It was not the outside.

And she was no longer alone.

"Tymbel!" she cried, half-delirious with relief at seeing another human being.

He jumped to his feet from where he'd been crouching, a guilty look upon his face. "Stacey, how did you get here?" he asked, nervously.

Then she saw where he'd been crouching, and moved forward into the high-vaulted chamber that glowed with the golden light. The treasure of the Teufs lay before her in all its alien splendor. Her heart seemed to catch in her throat at the beauty of it all. Necklaces, rings, coronets, strange-looking weapons, loose gems, things that seemed to be uten-

sils for eating yet were odd in concept and design, everything glittering and gleaming and glowing in a riotous jumble of haphazard design, precious stones and precious metals piled here and there as though the bearers had just dumped them and let them lie where they fell.

"Then it's true!" she exclaimed. "It's all true!"

Then the thought that should have been foremost in her mind came to her, a little late. "Drake," she said to Tymbel, "Where's Drake?"

Tymbel looked abashed, and his eyes could not meet hers. "I—I don't know where he is," he answered.

"Don't *know*?" she said, moving toward him. "I *saw* you come into this cave together. He was with you. What's happened to him?"

Tymbel suddenly fell to his knees before her and began to whimper. "Don't. Don't be mad, Stacey. I didn't mean it. It was an accident."

Her voice surprised her, coming out so much steadier than she felt. "You didn't mean what, Tymbel? What have you done?"

Tymbel was sobbing, in misery, the remorse choking him while he spoke. "Stacey, I've always been afraid, always been a coward. You know that. I needed this money, this gold, this treasure. He— He wasn't going to let me take it."

"Wasn't going to? But Drake didn't care about—" The import of his words was sinking into her mind. "What did you do?"

"He heard you," said Tymbel, desperately. "He heard you calling to him. I didn't. I thought he was imagining things, until I saw you here, now. He wanted to go back. He blamed me for your coming here. He said I'd never have the treasure. He'd have me sent back to Earth a pauper. I couldn't stand it, Stacey, I—"

"What did you do?" she asked, with deadly calm.

"I hit him. He turned his back and I hit him. He fell and struck his head against the wall, and didn't move anymore. I got scared, then, and tried to wake him up. He— He didn't wake up."

"He's dead," said Stacey, in an empty voice. "You killed him."

"I didn't meant it. I didn't mean it." Tymbel sobbed, his face bent to the sand. "I'm sorry Stacey . . ."

Something stirred in Stacey's blood as she looked upon the craven creature that grov-

eled on the sand before her. A cold, mortal hatred overcame her. Without even being aware of moving, she found her right hand lifting, by its thick handle, one of the alien weapons. It was a short, deadly warclub, similar in use to a mace. Jewels glinted on the handle as she raised it.

Tymbel looked up, alerted by a sixth sense, and saw her, and the cold determination of her face, and screamed, "Don't kill me, Stacey. You need me! You can't get out of here without me! They'll get you!"

Stacey hardly heard him. There was a loud roaring in her ears, and a red haze before her eyes, and she felt a quiver go through her upraised arm as it fell. As in a vast distance, she heard a thud, and then another and another.

When the haze cleared, she was standing over what was left of Tymbel. His head was a bloody sponge. The weapon lay on the sand at her feet, dripping redly onto the absorbent white sand.

Then Stacey looked up and saw Enmord.

Either she'd not noticed before, when she entered the chamber, or it had not been there to notice. There was a niche, an alcove, in the far wall. Set into the aperture was a stone slab, a stained stone slab that was a sacrificial altar, and above it squatted the placidly evil stone face of Enmord. His thick, grotesque body was just human enough in shape to make the differences all the more horrible. Of his four arms, three met in front of the bloated torso in a strange sort of clasp of the long fingers. The fourth arm was pivoted, and raised above the center of the altar, a many-bladed dagger in its rocky grasp.

And then she saw the Things, sitting on their haunches, their eyes sparking greenly in their greenish faces. There were many of them, and they all squatted and looked at her, hungrily. Then one of them hopped in her direction, like a misshapen frog.

Stacey backed away, unable even to cry out, so great was her terror. Another hopped, and then another. One of them opened its mouth, and emitted a sound like a gurgling yawn.

Immediately, they all bounded toward her, leaping and plopping across the soft white sand. Stacey's mind sent out an alarm through her nervous system, and she turned about and fled, with the Things hopping resolutely after her.

There was nowhere to flee to, but she had to run away. They had only to wait until she dropped from exhaustion and then take her, without a struggle. Stacey pushed the thought from her mind, and ran, wildly, down the tunnel. Abruptly, ahead of her, she saw more of the hopping green Things come into the tunnel. She gave a weak cry, and veered into the tunnel on her right, hurling herself beyond her own endurance away from her hideous pursuers. And yet again they were before her, and not behind.

And the realization came to her. When she'd come into the labyrinth, and had turned about, the tunnel was before her, always. Might the way out not lie forward, but backward?

Gripping herself with the force of her will, she closed her eyes and made herself take a backward step. Then another.

And then she backed into something that gave, and took hold of her. Stacey screamed and spun about, her fists upraised to beat at her assailant. And then she saw that she was once more outside the mouth of the cave, and that the person who had taken her into his arms was none other than Drake.

"Darling!" she cried out, piteously, and sagged into his embrace. "I found the way out. And you're alive! You're all right!"

The mouth of the tunnel was suddenly crammed with the green Things, staring at her, but not moving beyond the brim of the blackness. She shuddered and clung to Drake, even more tightly.

"The Teufs!" she said. "It's all true. The Teufs, the treasture, and Enmord, the name from my dream. I saw him, Drake, the altar . . . and his arm!"

And still Drake had not spoken a word to her.

And then she realized that Drake didn't *feel* right . . .

She turned back her head and looked into his eyes, and saw the green glow therein.

"Darling," said Drake, "*I* am the Arm of Enmord."

THE END

The construction gang laughed at the old mad professor as they built their giant tower on the land he loved. But the old man's mind retained a touch of genius, and turned it into . . .

A TOUCH OF SUN

By ARTHUR and IRWIN PORGES

WHEN they wrecked his wooden shack to begin work on the steel tower, Professor Tincan's attitude suddenly changed. Until the actual razing, the old man had continued to wage a hopeless battle, a very vigorous one, although entirely verbal, as befits a slight man of sixty. But now, as they flung the sun-dried boards that had been his home to the foot of East Knoll, the professor became quiet and shrunken, a picture of bereavement.

The burly, competent steelworkers, stoical in the pounding desert heat, began their work ruthlessly; to them, Time was the only opponent. But they were not unsympathetic to the professor's sorrow. After all, the old man had lived in the wooden hut on top of the knoll for almost forty years. Not that he had any legal right to the ground; the owners of the vast Santa Teresa Ranch had merely ignored his existence from the beginning. If they thought of him at all, it was as a fixture of the property—like the stand of eucalyptus trees—and quite harmless to their interests, since this part of the ranch produced only ceramic clays and a few minerals.

Nevertheless, while they tolerated the solitary eccentric on their property, they had not the slightest intention of permitting sentiment to interfere with progress. So when Continental Electronics decided that East Knoll was an ideal location for one of the new remote-control television relay towers, the Santa Tere-

sa management cheerfully accepted a generous fee, and gave the word that displaced Professor Tincan forever.

One official of Continental, it is true, did remark casually to a Fourth Vice President that some old nut had actually been living on East Knoll alone for humpty-nine years, and that perhaps the company ought to make a gesture—you know, public relations, Walt—

"Nonsense!" was the Great Man's reply. "He hasn't a legal leg to stand on. Give that type any encouragement, and you're up against a nuisance suit. Just run him out of there, B. J.; that's my advice."

Since the fight seemed definitely lost, the professor grimly dragged the remains of his shack into a neat pile at the foot of the knoll. The heap of wood was dwarfed by one of metal, for there too was the huge collection of flattened tincans that had earned the professor his name. From the time he had settled down on the little hill, he had saved every tincan that came his way, removing the label and ends, stamping the resulting tube flat, and even scouring the metal bright with dry sand. The truckers, a genial, open-handed lot, passing the ranch on the government highway, half a mile west, always dropped off canned goods for the professor, gratis. If the old man had tasted any fresh food in the last forty years, there was no record of the event. Beans, corn, tuna, fruit—it was all welcome. And the great accumulation of tin-coated steel, alternate stacks of round end-pieces and mashed cylinders, covered fifty or more feet in orderly piles.

But now, sitting there day after day, too depressed apparently to rebuild the lumber into another shelter, the old man watched bleakly as the tower thrust its way two hundred feet into the cloudless sky.

There was something about his silent, inscrutable gaze that annoyed the Chief Engineer. Unlike the crew, he could not take heat philosophically; he was also a bully, using either fists or tongue as the occasion seemed to require.

For the moment, however, there was a truce between the tower—a metal giant standing arrogantly on four massive girders set deep into concrete—and the small sexagenarian with his fluffy white hair and mild blue eyes. It is even possible that hostilities might never have resulted if

another engineer had been in charge, for in his normal state of mind, the professor would never have dreamed of battling the great tower. Beside it he felt puny and helpless, and even had moments of perverse admiration for its utilitarian sturdiness.

But the job was Joel Hoffman's; he didn't like bums who took no part in the work of the world. There was so much to be done in the way of building, and he longed to have a share in all of it. Perhaps, too, he remembered his own father, shiftless and erratic, and the boy who was earning his way, unassisted, at sixteen. No, Hoffman had little patience with those who sat out the game.

"Hey, Professor," the engineer baited him each morning. "They're still waitin' on you at Harvard. Can I tell 'em it's okay?"

The old man would stare at him with cold-eyed detestation, his lips locked, but Hoffman knew all too well how to breach that wall of self-control, really a frail barrier.

"Got the letter right here, haven't I, boys?" he would add, waving an envelope, his face a picture of unselfish pleasure. "They've even raised the ante—you can get twelve thousand a year. They're not so dumb; they know you're the top man in this country for the job—Head of the big new Department of Tincanology! Yeah, Tincanology, how about that, gang! And they want that priceless collection of yours, too." Here he waved at the hundreds of metal sheets shimmering in the sun. "You know—for their museum."

At this the victim couldn't help wincing. He realized that saving tincans for forty years is at best a highly eccentric habit, but what could he do about it? Like people who feel they must step on every crack in the sidewalk, he simply had no choice. It was literally impossible for him to throw a single can away, although he knew there was no possible use he could ever make of them.

"Ah, I understand," Hoffman perisisted, looking concerned. "He ain't got enough dough to get there." He turned to the crew. "Or clothes, either. Say, is that a flour sack he's wearing? If so it's out of style, Grampa—discontinued brand. If only he was not so proud—he hates to cadge, right, boys? Lemme see. I got the solution for you. They tell me tin's in short supply again, so why not sell all this and go to Harvard in

style? Hey, Johnson, bring the torch over, and let's melt this down for Grampa."

Grinning, the steel-worker would tug at the wheeled welding equipment, and horrified, the professor would run to defend his precious cans.

"Never mind, Johnson. Harvard ain't offerin' enough. He's waitin' on Cal Tech." It was all very labored, and some of the men didn't find it funny, but J. H. was the boss, so what the hell.

What made it particularly hilarious was the old man's incoherence, for after half a century the nerve paths joining brain and vocal chords had almost atrophied through disuse. His voice, high-pitched and jerky, was like a rusty, neglected machine that ran feebly for a time, then grated to a halt. But a more perceptive man than the engineer might have found something to ponder in the professor's choice of words, which were out of keeping with the illiterate old derelict they thought him.

Once the old man became so angry that he hurled half a dozen of his cherished cans at Hoffman, scaling them in flat, dangerous trajectories with an accuracy that suggested a very good eye. But the engineer, light on his feet for a heavyweight, had merely dodged, laughing, and then with calm malice, despite the professor's stricken look, sailed them down into a brushy draw. It had taken the victim two hours to recover five; the sixth remained lost, although he searched until dark.

And always the tower grew, like some fabulous tropical tree, several feet daily; it squatted insolently where the weathered shack had been. Before long they were welding on the three horizontal cross-members which made the steel pyramid resemble a six-armed Martian giant. Soon the tower proper would be complete, and work could begin on the complex and immensely valuable electronic units it was built to house.

They finished the steel skeleton on schedule; Hoffman saw to that, driving the crew hard, ubiquitous himself. He gave them no time to reconstruct the professor's shack, as a few of the men had planned to do. They gathered their equipment in the heavy truck, and crawled down the unimproved road towards the highway. A lighter vehicle, with better springs, brought up the electronic assemblies.

Watching sullenly, the professor saw a fortune in cop-

per, silver, and germanium packed into the giant's cranium: tubes, transistors, huge crystals, all meticulously patterned two hundred feet above the sand. Then this phase, too, was done. After the week-end holiday, the lower components would be installed, and the relay tower ready for performance tests. Even then, if the engineer had not persisted . . .

"Hey, Professor," he barked, one dusty foot on the truck's hub-cap. The hunched figure by the stacks of tincans gave him a brief, cryptic glance. "I'm not sure our li'l ol' tower's safe alone with you until Monday. For two cents I'd run you out of here. He doesn't like us, not one damn bit. A sour old bird. A touch of the sun, that's his trouble. Suppose he gets really mad, and kicks over the whole job. Think of all our hard work wasted!" He pretended to plead. "I'm sorry, Grampa, if I've hurt your feelin's. Please don't wreck the tower the minute we leave. Costs over $200,000. Be a sport, Prof—promise me you won't hurt it."

"Why not, Hoffman?" one of the men demanded. "More time-and-half."

"Yeah, maybe for you, knucklehead — I'd get canned."

"You mean tin-canned, J. H."

Here the old man's head rose a little in a sharp, birdlike motion, and the engineer felt a sudden stir of alarm. Maybe it wasn't so funny; what if the guy—? His mind quickly reviewed technical details of the construction: the huge girders, four of them, set a full five yards into tough concrete — this was earthquake country. And the careful welds; Johnson was tops at those; they would be stronger than the original metal. No, it was absurd. Even if one of the supports failed—but who could injure a single girder, much less destroy it? The little old bum had nothing but a few hand tools to work with; certainly there was no heavy stuff within twenty miles—no torches, no explosives. As for the delicate parts that were all too vulnerable, they were two hundred feet up. Few able-bodied men could climb half that high. For a man of sixty or so—he must be crack-brained to entertain such a weird idea about the professor even momentarily. Imagine the guy wrecking a twenty-story, all steel, welded tower with just a hammer and a screwdriver!

The engineer gave the re-

cluse a derisive, valedictory wave, shouted "Stay in the shade, Grampa—your trouble's too much sun!" and climbed into the cab. In three minutes the old man was alone —he and his mighty, dumb protagonist, the six-armed, four-legged monster of steel.

Chief Engineer Hoffman was restless Sunday. He couldn't get Professor Tincan off his mind. Over and over he reviewed the situation. His mind said "impossible," but still a tiny alarm bell in his brain rang a peremptory, nagging warning. Finally, although he wasn't due back on the job until Monday morning at eight, Hoffman gave into the irrational impulse that wouldn't be quelled, and by noon Sunday was in his station wagon heading for the Santa Teresa Ranch.

He should have been able to see the top of the tower from the highway; thought he knew just where to look—he gulped at the sight of blank, glaring sky. Swearing, he jammed the accelerator to the floor, tooling the car up the rough road with a jolting, creaking disregard for his safety. What he saw at East Knoll made his stomach contract like a fist. The tower was down! Like the bones of some stricken titan the steel members strewed the arid ground.

Slamming on the brakes, he leaped out of the car and ran to the top of the knoll. He stood there aghast, uncomprehending. Obviously, two of the great girders had been cut, and the others unable to take the enormous, unbalanced stress, had failed. But cut how? It looked like a torch job, but that simply wasn't conceivable. How could the professor, without so much as a wheelbarrow, bring heavy equipment twenty miles or more? And who would lend valuable tools to a man in rags without a dime? Professor Tincan! Hoffman realized for the first time that the old man had vanished. Surely that meant guilt. Fuming, the engineer began to prowl the deserted camp, searching for some clue to the tower's destruction. Nothing but a hammer, boards—and the damned tincans all over the place. Furiously he scattered the stacks with his feet. He must know how the professor had done it. He'd have him put away for good.

Once more Hoffman ranged over the area, unable to spot a single lead. Why it was even obvious from the tire marks that no other vehicles had been near the site since the

crew left on Friday. That meant no heavy stuff could have been used at all. And yet the tower was down—surely no hammer was responsible for that grim fact. Nor were the few data any clearer—boards, tincans, some nails—and the shattered steel enclosing a frightful mess which hours earlier had been the finest electronic units in the state.

He was still trying, baffled but persistent, when night came.

On Friday evening, just after Hoffman and the crew had left for the week-end, the professor might have been found studying the tower with concentrated hate in his eyes, now a harder, more opaque blue. Right where one of its four girders was rooted had been his favorite spot, just outside the hut. He had always enjoyed sitting there with his back against the warm wood, watching the stars make their timeless circles across the sky. And now, as if in brutish contempt, this immovable titan stood with one great foot spurning that very bit of ground.

Consumed with sudden, blind fury, the professor snatched his hammer and struck repeated full-armed blows against the unyielding metal. The cracked, dull notes had neither melody nor sonority; rather they seemed to him like the witless, jeering laughter of an idiotic giant, utterly scornful of his impotence. Raging, the old man flung the tool aside. Here he was, alone with his enemy for more than forty-eight hours, and yet powerless to bring it down.

After a moment's brooding thought, he rummaged in a wooden box, and produced a hacksaw. He made a few tentative cuts—scratches, really—on a girder, then the blade snapped. Small wonder; it was twenty-seven years old. But the professor knew very well that even with an unlimited supply of new ones, all his remaining years of life would not be enough to topple so massive a structure that way. No, there was nothing he could do.

Following a typical meal—a pound of kidney beans, cold from a can, which he flattened and added almost mechanically to the smallest stack—the old man seated himself by the pile of boards and watched the red sun drop with ever increasing velocity behind the foothills. Distorted, but still hot, it rested for an instant on top of a cluster of live oaks,

changing them to fiery skeleton trees. Then it plunged behind the crest, and the desert night had come. But not before the professor had his inspiration.

When he stood up, his petulance had vanished, and the single stare he gave his steel adversary, towering so calmly invulnerable above him, was almost compassionate. Enemy it might be, this six-armed invader that had planted its metal feet on his home, but merely, after all, a creature of Continental Electronics, an organization he personified in Hoffman. A $200,000 lackey, the tower, soon to crash in ruins at the hands of an old man. Such was Professor Tincan's dream. An indemnity for his house and his pride. A blow at the Chief Engineer. Not full measure, but something.

It was hard to sit quietly, waiting for the bright desert moon, but he couldn't work in the dark, and had never used artificial illumination in the hut, going to bed with the sun on those nights when staying outside was unattractive. Thinking about details of his plan, however, helped the time to pass quickly, and after a while a silver light, strong enough for his purpose, threw the tower's shadow across the sand.

Hurriedly, but with a precision that would have intrigued the engineer, Professor Tincan began to build. Under his amazingly deft fingers, which seemed to have recaptured a facility untapped for decades, the old man put together, from the boards of his shack, thin and well-seasoned, a light, strong framework. It was shaped roughly like a bowl eight feet across, but scientifically skeletonized, so that its weight was moderate. With more wood and hinges from the doors and shutters, he mounted this hollow hemisphere on a stand so sturdy and ingenious that by swiveling a long counterweighted plank he could move the bowl to almost any position and keep it there with little effort.

There was a slight smile on his face now. This was like being back in the lab—1920, that would be—under the great Dr. Abbott. After that . . . but this was not the time for regrets.

With nails from the wooden chest the professor began to fasten bright, circular sheets of tin-plate to the frame, mounting each on a crude but workable pivot. Every now and then he paused to gaze at the tower, bulking black and

impressive against the moon. He became aware, for the first time, of the forces at play in that sky-flung, almost sentient structure. Triangles were the basis of its strength: tension versus compression, alternating; and scrutinizing the geometric lacework of steel, he saw formulas writing themselves endlessly on the fabric of his brain. Against triangles he meant to pit parabolas, and surely the figure superior in the hierarchy of mathematics must prevail.

It was almost eleven in the morning when the basic work was done, and there was still the most exacting part to come. Under the rays of the sun, the old man began to adjust the dozens of shiny tin reflectors on their nail pivots, at the same time bending each sheet to proper curvature. There was a remarkable agreement between the geometry of his mind and its physical realization in the device before him. As he meticulously joined the forces of the individual units, the bright spot of reflected sunlight which each contributed merged with the others to form a glowing patch on the sand—a roughly square inferno about three inches on a side: the exact focus of the whole compound parabolic reflector. Before half the metal discs were adjusted, there was a pool of glassy slag smoking and bubbling in the center of the focal spot.

The sun grew hotter, the mighty desert sun, unimpeded by clouds or dust, which squanders millions of kilowatts of energy on the tortured soil, and still the little man, leathery skinned as a lizard, toiled on, unmindful of the glare.

At one-thirty, the hottest part of the day, when the last unit was aligned, the professor watched the boiling silicates at the end of the beam, and grinning, pranced like an excited gnome. Then he gripped the controlling plank, and in letters of molten sand wrote on the earth: "Fiat justicia; ruat coelum." For the prodigy of forty years ago had read Latin—and other languages—as most people read their newspapers.

"Let justice be done, though the heavens fall," he translated aloud for the benefit of the waiting giant. "But it's not the heavens that are going to fall," he added meaningly.

Moving with short, careful steps, he wrestled his solar furnace up the gentle slope of East Knoll towards the tower. Did the monster tremble at his

approach? The professor felt sure that it did.

The man took a deep breath, gripped the counterbalance in grimy, blistered hands, and up from the vaporized sand, in a smooth, deadly arc, the fiery spot, well over 2500 degrees centigrade, rose to deal with one of the four girders sustaining the steel structure.

"A touch of the sun," the professor said, remembering, a mirthless grin on his face, determination in his eyes.

Where that dazzling patch caressed metal there was a hissing coruscation; no welding torch could have burned any faster. Moving deliberately, more to prolong his triumph than because additional time was needed, he swung the reflector ten degrees from left to right. White sparks showered down, and the great pyramid sagged. Overhead there was the tortured shriek of rending metal, and one of the cross members, tearing loose weld and all, fell with an earth-jarring crash twenty feet away.

The professor knew that he had won. A quarter of a million dollars in steel, electronic equipment, and man-hours of engineering lay crumpled on the hot sand.

Stepping up to the nearest fragment, and looking almost regretful, the professor put one tattered shoe on the chunk of steel in a vague gesture of victory.

Five minutes later the old man began breaking up his solar furnace. Never should the engineer have the satisfaction of knowing how a small, frail man of sixty, with no tools but a hammer and his brain, had leveled the magnificently constructed tower of steel.

When the tin sheets had been cunningly mixed with the others, in case the nail holes might betray his secret, the professor spread fresh sand over the Latin inscription and the pools of slag, gathered a few belongings, and headed for the Santa Ana hills. He was hardly aware that in laying low the tower he had abruptly lost his compulsion to save tincans, and was abandoning the collection of a lifetime without a single qualm. Let Chief Engineer Hoffman make of the deserted stacks what he could. Before he read this riddle, the old man thought cheerfully, as he made for the highway, Hoffman would spend twice forty years here himself. And the answer so simple. Just a touch of the sun! **THE END**

According to you...

Dear Editor:

Your writers make science fiction very enjoyable. Not the boring and detailed stories in other magazines.

The December, 1958 issue was my first and I enjoyed "Jungle In Manhattan" and "The Eleventh Plague." Keep it up.

Andrew Lessin
91 Lincoln Ave.
Tuckahoe 7, N. Y.

● You *keep it up—coming back for more and more* Fantastic, *that is. We'll do* our *part.*

Dear Editor:

Tonight, at my usual time for getting my usual evening papers, a copy of *Fantastic* literally fell into my hands. Being a bitter cold night and planning to spend the evening in front of very boring TV I bought the magazine for the best 35 cents I have ever spent!

I read the last story first and then I saw "According to You" and there I greeted an old friend. *Weird Tales* leaped out in front of me. My whole family read *WT* for years and I felt I had lost a friend when they stopped publishing. Who could forget H. P. Lovecraft! Am tickled to death to see Robert Bloch is still with us. I remember him well and many a night I used to shiver with delight and sit up till all hours reading his out of this world stories. Now I am going to go back to start all over again and thoroughly enjoy a new, yet old friend, *Fantastic.*

Elaine McIntire
90 Brainerd Road
Allston 34, Mass.

• *Thanks for a heartwarming letter that had all of us here "shivering with delight," too. Glad to have you back. By the way, Bloch has a powerful novelet coming up next month.*

Dear Editor:

I can see by the covers on the December, January, and the pictured cover for February that *Fantastic* is getting a more weird-fantasy effect, and I'm all for it.

Who is Phil Berry? Anyhow he is great in producing a beautiful color-effect on the January issue. Let's have more of him, and by all means more of Gabe Keith.

Although I do like *Amazing* better because of the monthly novel, *Fantastic* is moving up to the top spot with such enjoyable tales as "Jungle in Manhattan," "The Screaming People," "The Eleventh Plague," and "The Troons of Space." Although the latter is pure science fiction (I feel it will become science fact) I think about one science fiction story should appear in each issue.

What is the correct spelling of novelet? Or is it novelette?

Billy Eden
Box 62, Route #1
Lanham, Md.

• *The dictionary says "novelette" is preferred, but "novelet" is acceptable. We use the latter because it seems less old-fashioned, like "cigaret" instead of "cigarette." How would you like it if we called our magazine* "Fantastique"?

Dear Editor:

Let me be one of the first to praise wholeheartedly your idea of making *Fantastic,* really fantastic!

My husband and I have long been collectors of the weird and terrifying. Lovecraft is one of our favorites, along with the others you mention, Machen Poe and Bierce. Would love to see some of *their* work in future *Fantastics.*

We have bought *Fantastic* off and on and one of our main criticisms of it was that it was just not what one would expect of it from the title. How glad I am we picked up this last issue.

And as far as we are concerned there need be no "coyness," "cuteness" nor disguising in any way. Just make it out and out unhuman incredible, daemonical horror of a magazine and

we'll sign up for long long subscriptions as I'm sure will many other lovers of the macabre.

Mrs. Elaine Fielder
36 James Road
Hatboro, Pa.

• *As we said in one of our early editorials, real, honest-to-goodness fantasy is our goal. It is hard to get these days, with the many of the better writers of fantasy deserting the genre for other fields. But we'll keep trying.*

Dear Editor:

Three cheers for the February, 1959 issue of *Fantastic.* This issue is really worthy of its name, what with 4 out of 5 stories being fine fantasy, and I do mean fine. "The Creeper in the Dream" by Rog Phillips and "The Body Hunters" by Paul Fairman, were really "top drawer." The two shorts were good, too. And the cover was beautiful, reminding one of the covers of *Weird Tales* of beloved memory. The Finlay illo was super.

M. J. Miller
1348 Lakeland Ave.
Lakewood 7, Ohio

Dear Editor:

My letter in the October, 1958 issue of *Fantastic,* in which I criticized the trend in some current "science-fiction" toward the passing off as "science" of obsolete metaphysical rubbish, seems to have stirred up a bit of controversy over the question of religion and its relation to science and science-fiction. In this connection, the opinions expressed by Messrs Lacy and Preece in the December issue appear to warrant further exploration of the matter.

Science-fiction, of course, may legitimately deal with any subject matter, including religion in all its variations and ramifications. It usually does, in point of fact. But the term "*science-fiction,*" however, would reasonably seem to implicitly require that the *treatment* of the subject matter be at least somewhat consistent with the scientific spirit and outlook. Thus, such works as Gore Vidal's "Messiah" are legitimate science-fiction, while such religious preachments as C. S. Lewis' "Perelandra" are not in that their themes are clearly

antithetical to the scientific spirit and outlook. I believe that to label a story as "science-fiction" whose theme is rather antiscientific or pseudoscientific is, as Hermann Muller has pointed out, to play fast and loose with the meaning of words.

To answer the question raised by Messrs. Lacy and Preece as to the basic meaning of science and the relation between science and religion: first of all, the self-correcting scientific or operational method is clearly man's only trustworthy and reliable tool for the acquisition of "truth," if, for the sake of brevity, we define "true" as that label which we may attach to statements or formulae whose workability or congruence with observed "reality" has been empirically demonstrated to a satisfactory degree of statistical significance. The untrustworthiness of "intuition" and the general meaninglessness of "authority" and "revelation" have been adequately demonstrated by most twentieth century philosophers of science, as John Dewey and Bertrand Russell.

But perhaps even more significant is the fact that the historical and social sciences have adequately explained the wholly naturalistic nature, origins and development of all religious ideas and institutions, including those of the Judeo-Christian heritage. Thus the old conflict between science and religion has been resolved in favor of science, although the news and details of the decisive battles have yet to penetrate the dense pall of ignorance and superstition which still shrouds too large an area of our culture.

In conclusion, *I* would like to express my hope that science fiction will continue its fearless and uninhibited probings into both the known and the unknown, and that fantasy will continue to delight, amuse and thrill readers of such magazines as *Fantastic*. I only ask that editors and publishers refrain from merchandising as "science-fiction" products better described as fantasies, fables, fairy tales or sermons.

Ed Doerr
Associate Editor, the American Rationalist

• *Does anyone want to elaborate on the point that many scientists today are returning to some kind of religious faith as science advances toward awesome frontiers of knowledge? Are science and religon obverse sides of the same coin, perhaps?*

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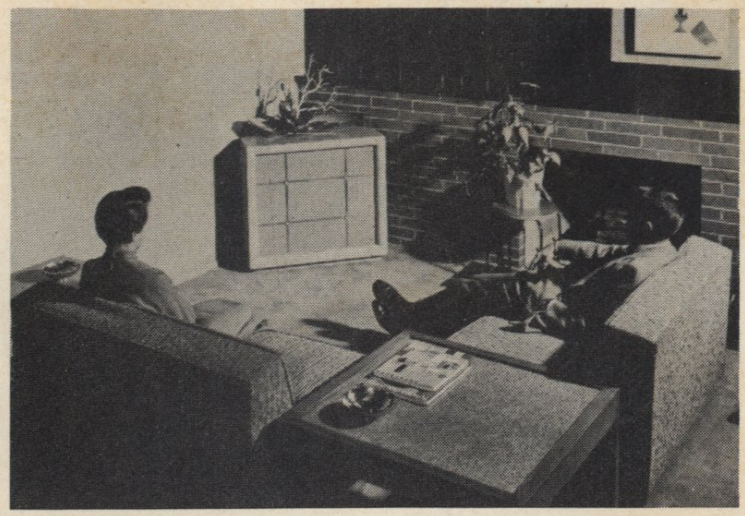

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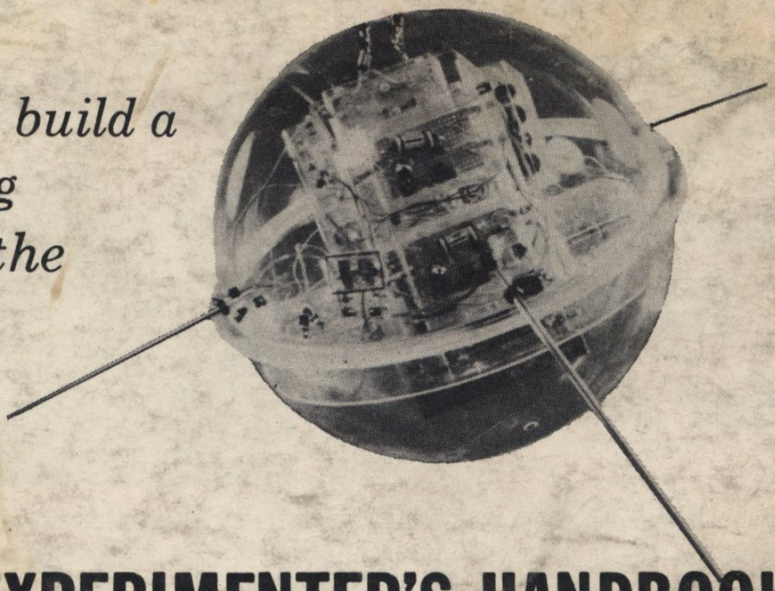

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