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*Illustrated by H. W. McCauley*

A killer, and a young girl still in her teens; and both were running away. Born to a world of controlled climate and domed cities, what chance had they for happiness—or even survival—on this raw, untamed wilderness planet?

## BABES IN THE WOOD

*By*

*Gordon Dickson*

THE dyed lips, the carefully coiffed hair, and the elaborately patterned cloak made a brave showing; but the plain fact of her youth shone through like light through a curtained window. Jory Swenson swung away from her in a rage and cursed the hook, a thin little man who licked his lips nervously and

squirmed under the tongue-lashing, but would not back down.

"You gutted fool!" stormed Jory. "Are you trying to get me vaporised for abduction? She's just a child."

The hook's little eyes jumped nervously from Jory to the girl.

"What of it?" he husked. "You're going off-planet. Nobody knows. No-



*Jory's fist  
still clutching change,  
came out of his pocket, swiftly . . .*

body'll care."

"What if we get picked up before we get to the spaceport?" snarled Jory. He swung abruptly back to the girl. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen," she said, in a small, thin voice.

"Aaah," said Jory, "don't lie to me." He half-raised his hand, threateningly. "You're lucky if you're fifteen."

She shrank a little, her eyes watchfully on his hand, but her voice was firm in answer.

"I'm eighteen."

"I tell you!" burst out Jory "Don't give me that. When did you run away from home?"

"Last week," she said.

"And your people have been looking for you for a week then," said Jory. "That's fine."

"Oh no," interrupted the girl quickly. "They sent me to my aunt's to live. But my aunt—she's dead. She died about a month ago but nobody ever told them and she'd already said in a letter I could come."

"Oh?" said Jory. "Oh?"

"And I'm eighteen," she spoke rapidly, as if afraid he would silence her before she had done speaking. "I've got a work card with my age on. I can prove it."

"Sure," said Jory, sarcastically. The hook tugged impatiently at his arm.

"How long you going to stand here?" he demanded. "The ship lifts in two hours. I tell you this is all the woman I could find you. You take her or you don't get anything."

"Woman!" spat Jory. Then shrugged. "All right. I'm done for anyway if I miss the ship."

The hook went to the door and whistled in his witness, a man as scrawny and unprepossessing as himself. The marriage ceremony was conducted in the hurried chatter of the hook's high voice and the papers signed in a sober silence. Jory paid the little man and turned to his new bride.

"Here we go," he said. "Pick up your bag."

Without a word she lifted the battered clothing box that held her possessions, and followed him out. They stopped under the night lights of the almost deserted street and Jory rang one of the automatic curb signals for a taxi. It came almost immediately and they rode to the spaceport in silence. It was only when they stepped out at their destination and Jory was reaching into his pocket for money to pay the fare that the taxi driver spoke.

"Say," he said, leaning out the window and squinting up at Jory's face in the pale, all-pervading glow of the landing lights, "aren't you the passer that Little Tommy's looking for?"

Jory's fist, still clutching change, came out of his pocket swiftly, and he hit the taxi driver with all his force on the point of his exposed jaw. Coins sparkled and danced ringingly on the concrete; and the man slumped backwards on the seat. Jory whirled to run, but the girl stood frozen, wide-eyed and blank-faced, staring at the unconscious driver.

"No you don't!" snarled Jory. "You don't quit on me now!" And, grabbing her by one wrist, he jerked her away after him in a stumbling run for the looming bulk of the waiting ship.

THEY lay strapped in their cradles in a two-place cabin, waiting for the takeoff. Jory lay stiffly, his face upturned to the metal ceiling, listening to the girl cry. The sound infuriated him, the more so because he could do nothing about it, could not reach out to slap her into silence because of the straps that bound him in the cradle; and he dared not loosen the straps for fear of being caught unprotected at the takeoff.

"Shut up!" he said tightly through clenched teeth. The girl continued to sob.

"I didn't know—" she moaned. "I didn't know—"

"Didn't know what?" Jory grinned grimly, sarcastically, at the dull ceiling. "That I was a bad man? A nasty criminal?"

There was no answer but the sobs.

"Well I am," said Jory, still talking to the ceiling. "But you could have done worse, Kiddie. Believe me, you could have done a lot worse." There was still no answer and suddenly anger flamed up inside him and he felt an abrupt, furious need to justify himself.

"You little fool," he gritted. "You're lucky you got on a ship at all. There's half a dozen places that hook might have worked you into, instead—don't you know that? Do

you think that just because you asked him nice to fix you up with a husband so you could get free emigrant passage, that he was obligated to just that, and not something a hell of a lot worse, but that would make him more money? At least you got what you wanted and you'll have a chance on a new world. That's more than half the Kiddies he contacts get.

"Sure, sure," he went on, calmed a little by the explosion of his own violence, and talking half to himself, now, "I was a passer, peddling weed to dopes in the spaceport clubs; and you were a baby going to school. I've done my share of cutting with the gangs and the most you ever did was sprinkle insect powder for crawlers. But there's no more of either for you or me. We're Mr. and Mrs. Jory Swenson, neither good nor bad, but emigrants with free passage to Mical V and a government bonus to get us started in the new life." A siren moaned suddenly through the ship, warning of takeoff. Jory's lips twisted in a final grin. "Look on the bright side of it, Kiddie."

Beneath them a vibration began to grow. It mounted and mounted until the ceiling began to blur before Jory's eyes, and the sudden thunder of the rockets cut loose. A giant leaned his weight on Jory, pressing him back into the padding of his cradle; and the breath came wailing from his throat as black specks danced before his eyes. The weight on him grew, grew, and grew until the whine of the gyroscopes cut through the din, tilting the ship to escape angle. The wall

tilted and the cradle moved on its tracks, slamming to a new position. Unconsciousness took Jory.

HE floated in a haze of unreality and sickness. There was something wrong with him—with *him*, Jory; but he could not seem to do anything about it. Vaguely he was aware that the takeoff was over. That the changeover to second order flight was over; and that other passengers moved freely about while he still lay in his cradle. But something was wrong; for half the time he was not on the ship at all, but back on Calezo, running away from Little Tommy.

He was back on Calezo, peddling a package in the Sherwood Club and Pani had come up to drag him away from his prospect, to pull him into a dark corner of the club and tell him to get out. Pani was a muscle for the same outfit that Jory belonged to and a straight sort of man. He didn't have anything to gain by warning Jory—as a matter of fact, he was sticking his neck out to do it, but they'd known each other ever since Jory had been old enough to be in business, and they got along. Cook was dead, Pani had told Jory, and Little Tommy had taken over his outfit—which meant everybody but Jory was now working for him. Jory, he didn't like; and now, with no outfit to protect him, Jory was due for it. In the gloom of the corner, the sweat had rolled down Jory's back as he listened. A long time ago he had cut Tommy bad in a gang fight and the

spidery little man remembered what the spindly child had suffered.

Besides, now that he no longer belonged to an outfit, the uniforms would be after him. There was no choice. He had to go off-planet—unless he wanted to hit the woods, and for a city child like Jory, that was unthinkable.

So, in the depths of his delirium he ran again and hid, dodging and ducking through the great rabbit-warren of the city, whose depths and shadows now spelled danger instead of safety; ran and hid until a hook that wanted money more than he feared Little Tommy had found him the wife he needed to get himself passage on an emigrant ship where Government authority would be his protection.

And in his delirium, the running and hiding went on and on.

IT passed eventually. He awoke at last to a spaceship cabin that was made of the stuff of solid reality and did not dissolve away into the fantasies of his nightmare. The girl was seated on her cradle, which had been dogged down and converted into a sort of couch, even as his had been flattened into a bed, and reading. She did not notice the new sanity in his eyes.

"How long have I been like this?" he said—and realized that he had not said it, but merely thought the words. He tried again; forced air from his chest with tremendous effort, opened his mouth, and moved lips.

"How long—" he croaked.

Her head jerked up, she dropped the book and bounced to his bedside.

"Oh, you're better!" she gasped—then, hurriedly—"Don't move. I'll get the doctor." She was out the door and gone from the room before he could force out another word.

He felt a momentary flash of irritation that she had not answered his question but he was too weak to hang on to his anger. She did not return immediately, and he drifted into a light doze from which he emerged to find the ship's doctor standing over him.

"Better, eh?" said the doctor. He was a stocky, ruddy little man and he placed one set of fingertips on Jory's wrist, counting his pulse.

"How long—" repeated Jory.

"Eh?" said the doctor. "About a week and a half, ship's time. Looks like you're making this trip in bed, young fella."

"Got to get up," muttered Jory.

"No you don't," said the doctor. "You lie there and count your blessings, the chief of which is that you're alive at all. You must have been on the verge of collapse when you came aboard. How much sleep had you had during the thirty-six hours before takeoff?"

For a second the nightmare danced again just outside the range of Jory's vision.

"Don't know," he said numbly. "None."

The doctor snorted.

"Thought so," he said, with an air of satisfaction. "You listen to me and stick to your bed. Your wife can look

after you. Give her something to do." He turned to the girl.

"You heard what I told him. Keep him quiet. If he won't stay down, see me." And, with a brisk wave of his hand, he was gone.

Jory sagged in the bed. A wave of exhaustion was sweeping over him, smothering him, forcing him down into sleep; but there was one thing he had to do before he yielded. With a great effort he turned his head on the pillow to look into the girl's eyes, and the question came out in a husky whisper.

"What's your name? I don't remember."

She blushed, suddenly all child, and dropped her head.

"Lisa Kent," she answered.

Lisa Kent, Lisa Kent. He hugged the sound of it comfortingly to him as he sank like a stone into the deep, obliterating ocean of sleep.

HE recovered slowly, not quite understanding what had made him an invalid. From what little the doctor would tell him (for that individual was one of the uninformative sort) he gathered that the punishment of the takeoff had been not the straw, but the beam which had broken the camel's back, and that if his exhausted condition had been realized at the time of boarding, he would not have been allowed to take off. So much for that. The really important thing was that he was better now and on the way to regaining his strength. The thought that he might have faced landing on a pioneer world in a bed-

ridden condition touched him with a thrill of panic whenever he let himself think of it.

However, as time went on, he found himself thinking of it less and less. For some reason, possibly because he had dreamed so much of it in his delirium, the world of his past had acquired a strange unreality. It was as if the illness had set itself up as a barrier to the past and everything that he remembered during it and before were part of a half-forgotten fantasy. More and more he found himself thinking of the future from the viewpoint of the hopeful colonist that his papers proclaimed him to be. The vision of a new life painted itself in a hundred different colors for his recuperating imagination and he discovered the beginnings of a new emotion inside him—he was starting to think of the new planet as a home, his real home, the first he had ever known. The barren seed within him was yearning to put down roots.

There was a new factor, too, in the now unstrained atmosphere of the tiny cabin, in the relationship between himself and Lisa—he could no longer think of her simply as 'the girl.' Although he remembered nothing of her attendance on him while he had been ill, and although she, herself, never referred to it, both of them were forced to an acceptance of the fact that they had somehow become acquainted. It was just that, although there was no common experience which either wished to refer to, it was now ridiculous for them to

treat each other as strangers. Even if one or the other had wished it, his continuing dependence upon her in the intimacy of the small cabin would have denied it. And they found themselves standing on a neutral ground of neither like nor dislike, in the truce of mutual tolerance.

In the weakness and peace of his slowly mending body and spirit, Jory lay propped up on his bed for long periods of time, watching her, as a prisoner, floating in the vacuum of unlimited time, might watch a spider spinning a web. And she, indifferent as the spider, washed, dressed, brushed her hair, waited on him, or sat reading in a sort of happy unconsciousness of his gaze.

He found her fascinating. For the first time in his experience he was entering into the complete, all around the clock life of another human being; and the pageant of her actions was an unvarying source of entertainment to him. He found her responsive to things of the moment, passing suddenly from one emotion to the other with the flickering interest of the young. More child than woman, he found her; but, at the same time, more woman-child than child. She seemed to have walled off everything outside the cabin, all past and all future, and to be content in the womb-like security of the present. She was happy—the doctor had been right—with the job of caring for him. It was a happiness that he first attributed to the childish satisfaction of having a doll to play with; but in this he later found he had been



uncharitable. She, too, was experiencing the fascination of living a closely-knit existence with another human being.

They did not talk at first, beyond the few words necessary for him to indicate his desires and she to satisfy them. The neutral ground on which they found themselves was an uncertain one and neither was willing to take the first step toward testing its solidity. Inevitably, however, incidents occurred at intervals to throw their speech outside the limits of bare necessity; and it was across the stepping stones of these incidents that they gingerly approached each other, the suspicious wolf to the timorous colt.

The first of these incidents came upon them suddenly, catching them both unprepared in a conversation where neither knew what to say. It came about when Lisa laughed suddenly and unthinkingly at something humorous in the book she was reading, and, looking up, found his eyes upon her; questioningly, she thought. She made a little gesture with the book, explainingly.

"It—it's funny," she stammered in explanation. The expression on his face did not vary, but she sensed in him a struggle for words equal to her own.

"Oh?" he said harshly. And—after a long pause. "What was it?"

"Oh—" she said, and stared at him helplessly. His words were an invitation to read him the passage she had laughed at; and she longed to do so, but her innate timidity made the

prospect seem appallingly dangerous.

"Oh—nothing much," she said, finally. He gazed at her for a moment longer, then closed his eyes, turning his head away from her. And she, like a rabbit relieved from the hypnotic stare of a snake, sank her attention gratefully back into the pages she had been reading.

However, the ice had been broken; and, when nothing more out of the way occurred during the next few days, she found herself hoping for a repetition of the brief conversation. Various plans flitted through her head but she shrank from their execution, afraid of the rebuff which she felt sure would follow. At last, when she had almost given up hope, Jory took the plunge she had been avoiding. He had been lying staring at the ceiling, following the 1800 hours meal, when abruptly, without warning, his voice shattered the silence between them.

"You don't get out enough," he said flatly.

Her heart leaped and thudded in her breast.

"You sit around the cabin here all the time," he went on, still without looking at her. "Why don't you go down to the recreation room now and then?"

"Why—" she stammered, "it's all right. I don't mind."

"You don't have to hang around here all the time," he retorted, his voice rising on a note of anger. "I don't need you that much."

Her mind hunted frantically for the proper thing to say and before

she knew it the truth came tumbling out.

"But I like it here better!" she cried. Her words seemed to hang in the air between them for a long time. Then the tension in the room snapped like an overstretched string and Jory's rigid figure sagged slightly in relaxation.

"Suit yourself," he muttered.

**I**T was not long after that that he woke in the night hours, and lay in his bed, wondering what had wakened him. For some moments he could not locate the cause; and then it came to him, a slight, steady, rhythmical noise, half-heard in the darkness.

Lisa was crying. Very quietly, very easily, in a reasonless childish way, she was sobbing to herself with her head half-buried in her pillow.

He lay staring into the blackness and listening to her. And gradually the emotional impact of the sound reached through to him. At first it was merely another noise, disturbing, but not greatly so. And then it began to take on greater meaning; a tinge of accusation seemed to grow in it, a lost and hopeless accusation to damn him for strange reasons that he was at a loss to understand, but could not deny. His own emotions twisted and writhed, growing and increasing in violence until the verbal reaction came tearing from his lips and he yelled at her.

"Shut up!"

She shut up. And the sudden silence left him a little frightened.

**W**HEN he woke the following morning, he noticed that she avoided his eye, and the emotions of the night before returned in full force. She moved about the cabin as usual, taking care of the few house-keeping tasks that were required, but on this particular morning he read a reproach in every expression of her face, in every movement of her body. It was a new sensation to him, a hot and uncomfortable one, and he struggled against the illogicalness of it, struggled in silence and in motionlessness, so that he lay stiff and tight on the bed, his jaw clenched and his eyes staring straight ahead of him.

What bothered him, although he did not know it, was the urge to apologize; for his shouting at her in the night, for his unvarying harshness of word and action, and for everything else in their association for which his new-born sense of guilt accused him. He labored under a complete ignorance, however, of the apology as a social mechanism. It was, quite literally, unknown to him. Child of the gutter, youth of the streets, for him a verbal expression of regret meant only a forced acknowledgment of inferiority. So, the welter of emotions boiled within him, blindly hunting and tearing for an undiscovered exit.

He fought. He fought himself until the sweat stood out in great shining drops on his forehead, driven by his own savage determination to find a solution. What he wanted to do, he did not know, but he would do it if

he had to tear himself apart in the process. Borne up on the red surge of his anger, he forced himself suddenly up into a sitting position and swung his legs over the side of the bed. A wave of dizziness shook him, but he grabbed the edge of the bed and held on tightly with both hands until it passed.

He shook his head to clear it, and felt Lisa's hands on his shoulders, pressing him back.

"You've got to lie down," her voice said, frightened.

"Let go," he said hoarsely, "sit down yourself. I'm going to talk." Her hands fell from his shoulders and as his vision cleared, he saw her back away and sit down on the edge of her bed.

"Listen," he said, "You were crying last night. You don't have to cry. Hear me?" She shrank slightly into herself.

"I'm sorry," she whimpered. He ignored her, going on talking, forcing the words from his lips by pure brute force, not knowing how to say what he wanted to say, but determined to express himself by pure weight and number of words.

"We got things to talk over. There's things you've got to understand. I'm not dumb—maybe I never learned much outside of gang stuff—but I'm not dumb, and I'm older than you. You and me—you and me—" he stalled, pawing the air for expression, "we aren't either of us what we were back there. And we aren't going to be what we were, either. Hear me? We're going to be different—

new, sort of, if you know what I mean. And we can't—won't—be new until we can get over being what we were. You know what I mean?" He glared at her; and she nodded, a little scaredly.

"So," he went on. "We got to get over it. You and me, we're going to land where there's hardly any real cities. Just little places. And we're going to have to do some kind of work to stay alive. Now you—what can you do?"

She looked down at her hands, lying limply together in her lap.

"Nothing," she said in a small voice.

"Look," he said, desperately, "you've been taking care of me. You suppose you could be some kind of a nurse?"

She shook her head.

"You must have had some kind of idea, when you first thought of getting married up and emigrating. You must have figured on doing something. What was it?"

Tears brimmed up suddenly in her eyes as she raised her head and looked at him.

"I was going to be somebody's wife."

"Cut it out!" he shouted defensively. "You don't have to cry. I told you that." She blinked back the tears. "All right, so you were going to be somebody's wife; and he'd take care of things like working. It's all right; I get it. I don't blame you. It's just that I got to find these things out. What else did you figure on?" She toyed with the blanket edge on

her couch.

"I thought maybe he could have some kind of a job—and we could have a house of our own—and—things," she ended vaguely.

"Didn't you think maybe you were a little young for stuff like that?"

"I'm eighteen."

"Don't lie to me!" he roared at her suddenly. "I don't care what you do, just don't lie to me." She shrank back from him, white-faced, but nodding her head.

"I don't care how old you are," he went on. "Just don't tell me you're eighteen when I know you're not."

Then suddenly—so suddenly that he could never after remember how it happened—she had thrown herself at him, and was kneeling, clutching at him, her head buried in the lap of his bedrobe and bawling with utter abandon.

"I will too cry if I want," she choked out in a muffled voice.

He stared down at her in complete bafflement and dismay.

"Hell—all right—cry then," he muttered, overwhelmed. She sobbed into his bedrobe; and, after a little while, he reached out gingerly and stroked her hair in a helpless fashion.

It was at this moment that the ship's doctor had the bad luck to open the door in the normal process of making his daily call. His head came in first, and he stared at the two of them.

"Get the God damn it out!" roared Jory and immediately felt better than he'd felt in a long time. The doctor's head disappeared, the door popping

to behind him.

Jory went back to stroking Lisa's hair. It felt surprisingly good beneath his hand; and, although he still had not said what he had wanted to say, for some reason he discovered that he was now conscious of a vast relief.

AFTER that, during the remaining days of the trip, they talked. And, after the first few conversations, the speaking was mainly done by Jory and the listening by Lisa. She preferred it that way; for her story was briefly told. Nothing had happened to her beyond the fact that she had grown up and run away from parents who were not too bright and were not interested in her. Simply that; not unkind, not overbearing, but just not interested. She had strangled in the thin atmosphere of their affection; and, having heard about the hooks that paired off single people wishing to emigrate, had seized her chance and run off.

But Jory—he, although his home life had been as barren as hers, had done a thousand interesting things. She listened to chance accounts of his past life as if they had been fairy tales and she a five year old; and it only puzzled her that he, himself showed little or no interest in them, preferring to talk about other strange things that she could not understand. However, no matter what he said, it was Jory talking, and she listened to all with the same impartial, happy interest.

"You see," said Jory, one day, sitting on the edge of his bed and ges-

turing excitedly at her, "you and me, we shouldn't be here at all. You understand? This emigration business is for the pioneers, people with itchy feet and the idea that the next planet is always a little better. They claim they're short of space back there, but hell, look at all the brush country that hasn't been touched yet. There's room for a thousand more cities; and the people that really want to settle are just going to stay there and build them, instead of shooting off like this.

"But there's new businesses going up like mad on the new planets and they need people. So the real pioneers, the people with itchy feet, claim overpopulation and draw free government transportation to where the need is, and everybody's happy. But not you and me, Lisa. Understand? We didn't have itchy feet. If you could've found some kind of a husband and I'd been all right with Little Tommy, you and me would never have thought of going off-planet. We'd have stayed where we were and what would have happened?"

He looked at her rhetorically.

"You probably would have ended up being miserable with a male you picked just because he was the first one that came along and sooner or later something would have gone wrong in the Clubs and I'd have been cut up or dragged by the uniforms.

"And instead—look what we fell into," Jory's eyes gleamed with an almost fanatic light, "we were just running away toward the first thing we could find, and we bumped into a

chance to wise ourselves up and really get something out of life. It's a miracle, Lisa, I tell you! Me, I'm going to find out what I want to do—what I really want to do—and when I find out I'm going to do it, even if it's hanging upside down from a tree limb and painting the sky green.

"And listen, Lisa—you're going to find out what you want, too. I'll take care of you until you've grown up enough to pick out the man you really want, and then we'll tear up this piece of paper and you can marry him. I'll just claim you're my daughter, or sister, or something and this fake marriage was the only way I could bring you along. It'll be all right, you'll—" he checked himself suddenly, noticing a sullen, set look on her face. "What's wrong now?"

"Nothing."

"Don't tell me 'nothing,'" he said. "I know you. What's wrong?"

"I don't want to marry somebody else."

Jory exploded.

"Are you crazy?" he stormed. "Do you want to tie yourself to me when I don't even know what I'm going to be, yet? Maybe it'll be something where I can't have a wife. What makes you think I'd want you, anyway? Oh, hell, it's just what I say. You're too young to know your own mind yet."

"I am not!" cried Lisa, turning on him with blazing face and clenched fists.

"Well, calm down," said Jory, somewhat taken aback. "I'm not going to shove you off on somebody

you don't want. But you sure don't seem to appreciate the luck of what's happened to you. I tell you it's a miracle."

But Lisa remained unconvinced.

**I**N the days that followed, he set himself to convince her; and, in a measure as his own mental image of the future sharpened and took on color, he succeeded.

"You never lived outside of a city in your life, did you?" he asked her once.

She shook her head.

"And neither did I," said Jory triumphantly. "But that's what we're going to do. Why, even back home, people who were willing to go out into the brush could pile up a fortune in no time—fur-farming or something like that—just because nobody else wanted to get their feet wet or do without taxis. There's always things to do if you're willing to go where other people don't like it."

"Was it really hard to live out there?" asked Lisa, fascinated.

"Sure it's hard," answered Jory. "But it's not impossible. You've got no weather dome, so the temperature goes up and down. We'll get rained on, maybe, or even snowed on. What of it? We can use our government settler's bonus to put up buildings and just stay in them when it's too bad out. And listen, Lisa—"

She had been fiddling with her hair. He reached out, took the comb from her hand and pulled her down on the couch opposite him to ensure her full attention.

"—Listen, Lisa, there's some good parts to it, too. When there's no grey weather dome, you can see the blue sky with clouds the way they have it in pictures. There'll be wild trees and things growing right outside our buildings and real breezes blowing through our windows. Hell, we'll even pick a spot of land with our own private creek running through it like they have in the parks and the big estates."

Lisa's face was one big expression of wonder.

"All these people, though—" she breathed. "They'll all be wanting something like that. Maybe there won't be enough to go around."

Jory laughed in happy scorn.

"You sure are a city kid," he said. "Why this planet won't be like the one we left. There probably won't be more than two or three cities on it all together."

Liza gazed at him, half-incredulously.

"How many creeks," she ventured, "are there on a whole world?"

"On a whole world?" Jory gestured expansively. "Millions!"

She sighed.

"Millions!" she echoed.

"Sure," said Jory. "And look—don't get the idea we're just going to live like woolies, either. As soon as we get the place set up and start making money, we'll get a flyer and we can drop into the cities any time we want to. We can stay in the hotels and with the money we'll be making out in the brush, we'll be able to hit the best clubs and see the best

pictures and everything."

Lisa's eyes misted over suddenly.

"Now what?" snapped Jory.

Lisa tried to stop. She did her best, but two large tears squeezed from under her tightly clamped eyelids and her throat moved convulsively.

"It's just too good to be true," she choked.

"Cut it! Cut it!" snarled Jory. "Every time I talk to you, you end up by flooding us out of here. Can't you do anything but cry?" And he glared angrily across the cabin at her.

But—it was a curiously gentle glare; and Lisa had gotten to know him in the past couple of weeks. So she paid no attention but put her head down on the couch and was just as happily miserable as she wanted to be for the next quarter of an hour.

**L**ANDING. For eighteen hours the passengers had been strapped in their cradles. Now they were being carried down the moving ladder of the ship's main corridor, which, now in landing position, had become a deep, vertical shaft. Jory, with Lisa, stood all ready at the bottom, waiting with the others of their passenger section to disembark.

"First group out!" boomed the loudspeaker. "Baggage delivery, information and equipment available in the Government Station at the edge of the field. First group out!"

They shuffled into a double line; and Jory felt Lisa tremble slightly as she pressed closely against him. Her

hand groped blindly into his and clung to it with nervous strength. Jory glanced around embarrassedly at the other passengers; but none of these seemed to notice, being fully concerned with their own luggage and selves. He leaned towards her.

"For God's sake! Relax!" he hissed in her ear. "Remember what I told you. There's nothing to get excited about; we're just coming home."

She nodded, obediently remembering that she had promised to think of this new world as the place where they belonged, instead of the old planet they had left. But the thought which had been so comforting in the familiar confines of their cabin before landing was not so much help now that they were actually standing at the head of the covered gangplank with the damp atmosphere of a strange planet blowing in their faces. She clung to Jory.

The immigrants went docilely, in line, down the steps of the gangplank and out onto the field. Beneath the feet of Lisa and Jory the steel steps rang. Then, abruptly, the noise was gone and they stepped forward on the flat cement surface of the field. Two steps more and they would be under the new skies.

"Here we go," muttered Jory cheerfully. They walked forward through the opening at the end of the covered gangplank, out into open air. . . .

. . . and stopped dead.

“**G**O on! Get moving!” The voices of the other passengers, crowding the gangplank behind them, beat on their ears. But Jory and Lisa stood frozen. Children of weather domes and crowded, dingy streets, they looked at the new world.

No past experience of theirs could match the immensity of it. Vast and far the great blue depths of the sky towered above them, reaching out to the far horizon. The golden sun threw dazzling reflections in their eyes from every shiny object, blinding their gaze, long used to artificial glow. The grass, the trees beyond the glittering white concrete of the field, were lush and rampant with green strength; and a crisp wind whipped their thin city clothes about them, blowing from the roaring empty, open spaces beyond the little town around them.

It was too big, too much, and for a second, Jory stopped, while Lisa turned from it, and shaking, clung to him. Children of narrow ways, they stood in terror before the mighty openness of the world they had come to; and for a second the urge was overwhelming to turn and run, run and hide, back into the close, and stuffy safeness, the metal womb of the ship that was like all places they had known.

For just a moment . . . and then, born on the brisk whip of the chill wind that knifed them, came something that entered into Jory's very soul. With a fierce surge it touched and took him—fed pride in to him, pride of place and being and a great

gladness. An exultant joy tore through him and he turned to Lisa, pulling her away from him, turning her about to face the waiting vastness.

“What's the matter with you?” he cried. “This is where we belong. This is our world! This is home!”

He took her hand and pulled her forward. For a second she held back, and then she came. Slowly at first, then faster, while behind them the jammed doorway cleared and the flow of colonists began again. Hand in hand, Jory and Lisa Swenson, they went down the gangplank, into their new world, with shoulders back and heads erect.

Like pioneers.