

PLANET STORIES



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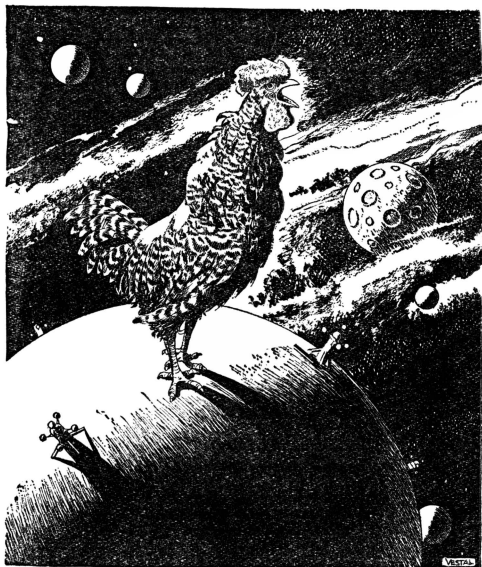
Parade of the wordy legions.

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CHICKEN FARM

By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

JUST in from a long haul searching for asteroid juncture points, Harvey entered the lobby of the Hotel de Mars and went straight to the registration desk. The woman at the desk, who was blond, and blue-eyed, and inclining to chubbiness, looked at him, smiled. The smile was of such quality that Harvey's singed brown face

set into a mold of utter attention.

Finally he let out his breath.

"I want a room," said he, "on the Deimos side."

He attentively studied the cheerful face while she made out slips, accepted his signature, accepted his money. After he had the key, after he had his change, after

Harvey was a most unusual little man. A Cosmos-minded man with great singleness of purpose. He could discover asteroid-juncture faults with the greatest of ease, and "perp" planets, too. . . .

But could he find Anna from Oregon who doubted his greatest discovery of all?

everything was taken care of, he still stood there. The woman smiled into his seamed eyes.

"Was there something else?"

Harvey said, noting the emptiness of her chubby ring-finger, "Ma'am, I'm an abrupt, outspoken man. I have no sense of humor. Some people like me; some people don't. I make my living moving around the solar system. I've never been rich, but I never have any trouble making money, as much as I want. Now what was your question again?"

Her fingers slowly caressed a yellow pencil.

Her smile was a little strained. She said cautiously, "I thought you wanted something else. What you want to do is talk, isn't it? You're in from a long space-haul, it's lonely out there, men get so they have to talk to a woman, don't they? So you'd like to take me out to dinner? And take me to a show? And take me up to your room to watch Deimos, which happens to shine only into the windows of your room?"

He looked at her.

"I have no sense of humor," he repeated with great patience. "As you grow to know me, you will understand that. It will be no deterrent to our romance, however; I have other qualities."

"Romance?"

"Yes. What I want is you. I'm an abrupt man. My mind makes itself up quickly. In space, one must learn to make quick decisions. That's what I want. You. We'll discuss this at dinner. Please be ready."

He went up to his room, refusing to let the bell hop touch his scarred suitcase. A little man. A man with great singleness of purpose. The blond woman, who was nice, and blue-eyed, and inclining to chubbiness, looked after him blinking. She took care of the next guest. She thought deeply. She decided to go to dinner with the lost, lonely man from outer space.

They ate in the main dining room of the Hotel de Mars (the 'de' being rather a fancy touch.) He did not talk. He ate. Great quantities of Martian food with strange, exotic names. He ordered straight shots of whiskey afterward. Then he talked.

"Now, we were discussing something of importance at the registration desk, ma'am. What was it?"

"Me."

"Fine. I'm glad you remember."

She burst into laughter, then stifled the laugh in horror.

He shook his brown, leathery head. "Laugh, please. Laugh as much as you please. I have no sense of humor, but I think other people should have the opportunity of exercising theirs. I often say things which are funny to others. As for myself, I never laugh. This you will become accustomed to. I'll order you some champagne. Do you enjoy Terra-Frenault '97?"

"Love it," she said, having never had any. She leaned forward, her eyes sparkling. "I'm enjoying myself so much. Everything is so unorthodox. I was brought up in Oregon, on my father's chicken ranch. The town people were so orthodox. I came to Mars all alone just to get away from people orthodox. Now that I've become unorthodox myself, one of these days I'm going back to Oregon and teach them to be unorthodox. And of course I'll own a chicken ranch."

He gulped whiskey. He looked at her searchingly from steel-colored eyes that had leather seams around them. "You like chickens?"

"Plymouth Rocks," she said. "They're the most beautiful bird alive. I'll raise Plymouth Rocks."

"Fine," he said. "I'm glad to know this. However, drop the idea of going back to Oregon. We'll be heading for the outer spaces, ma'am."

"Is this why I'm having dinner with you?"

"YES. To let you know my intentions." He called for the check. "I'm forty years old, ma'am. The time has come to make a permanent home for myself, with a wife and children. For several days I've toyed with the idea of falling in love with someone: What's your astrological sign?"

"Taurus." She looked at him over the champagne, her face wide with a smile that had an almost irrepressible giggle behind it.

"Fine, fine." He threw money on the table and got up. "I'm Pisces. Pisces and Taurus get along very well. This is the reason I fell in love with you, ma'am. What was your name?"

"I want to finish my champagne," she protested, not getting up. "My name is Anna Christina Morley."

He sat down. "Forgive me. I'm an abrupt man. I do things and then they're over. I never linger. As you grow to know me, this will become apparent. But finish your champagne. My kind of woman always speaks her mind. So your name is Anna Christina Morley. A very unusual name. A numerical breakdown would no doubt show you to be a strong, a firm, an idealistic woman. I am a fortunate man. Have you finished your champagne?"

"I guess so," she sighed. She got up and took her cape that had the twinkling little bells on it, and that changed color every five minutes on the second, and that told time. "Where are we going?"

"I'll take you back to your room," he said, "and say good night."

She was beautiful in the overhead sparkling lights of the dining room. Something caught her sharply in the solar plexus as he spoke.

"Why?" she said forlornly.

His singed eyebrows came up. "Why? My purpose is accomplished. You know my intentions. Now I must go out and prepare. I'll be leaving for outer space within the hour. I'll be back in ten months."

He took her to the door of her room. "Good night, Anna," he said.

She stopped him. Her heart was beating too hard. There was in her a sharp emptiness, a terrific sense of frustration. "Kiss me," she said wearily. "You said you were in love with me, so we might as well get

that much acquainted."

"I am in love with you," he said. He immediately took her into his arms, kissing her long and hard. Then he released her, looking strangely into her eyes. "Anna," he said, "I *shall* be back in ten months. I know you'll be here." He went down the stairs. She went into her room. She sat on the edge of the bed. Then she threw herself on the bed and cried, hard, angry sobs. Why had she allowed him to ruin what could have been such a splendid evening? She kicked her shoes off. They hit the wall with two walloping thumps. She lay on her back and laughed at the ceiling with tears coming out of her eyes. What an evening. An evening as strange, as abortive, as cruel as the man who had cut it off so suddenly.

Her eyes snapped open then. She felt something happen inside her, a longing as wide and deep as black space. "Oh no," she said in a tone that was low and explosive. She slowly turned on her side, sniffing.

She couldn't help it. He was nothing, but he was incredible. Ten months. . . .

FOR years the Asteroid Association had offered a flat rate of one thousand credits to anybody who gave them the location of genuine asteroid-juncture faults. They were engaged in a strictly scientific and commercially useless attempt to show that the asteroids once comprised a large planet between Mars and Jupiter. They needed evidences of lines of fracture showing where two separated asteroids once had been joined; the complete picture would finally give them a complete planet. Harvey had found fifteen such points. The money gave him leeway to pursue other activities.

Forty million miles above the plane of the ecliptic moved his small ship.

He was not looking for juncture points now. He was looking for a particular kind of planet, one, moreover, which had never been discovered before. Therefore he was hunting for a "perp" planet.

He searched two months. That most celestial bodies within the Solar System already had been discovered did not deter him. He found his planet and came to a landing. He got into his pressure suit, lugging his gravitic equipment with him. He immediately started taking readings.

The gravity was shallow, less than one-tenth of a gee. Far too little. There was no atmosphere. The ground was frozen, but upon submitting it to flame it gave off the lines characteristic of phosphorus, nitrogen, hydrogen. That pleased him. He made other readings, then he went into his ship and wrote in his diary:

There are many drawbacks. The planet is only 483 miles in diameter. It, at present, has no atmosphere. Being frozen, it will have to be thawed. Obviously, it cannot, at present, support Plymouth Rock chickens, much less human beings. I must now determine velocity, orbit, year, and day.

A month later he wrote in his diary:

Money will be needed. Much more than can be supplied by discovering juncture faults. Plymouth Rock chickens need worms; worms perhaps need Plymouth Rock chickens. One finds it necessary to grow corn also. Gravity lugs must be installed deep in the ground. Gravity lugs are expensive. An interesting fact is that in four weeks this planet will intersect the plane of the ecliptic. Something can be done with this information.

Harvey determined the major and minor apices of the "perp" planet. He determined its point of intersection with the plane of the ecliptic. Then he went to the planet Earth, and came into a sleek landing at the New York spaceport. He went to the information window, asking for and receiving the time-schedules of all lines sending freight or passenger ships between the planets. He studied them for a week in his hotel room. He went back to the information desk to confirm his findings.

The clerk was most helpful. Yes, the liner *Hermes* of the firm of Gramenger & Lewis would leave Venus at 7:17 Solar Standard time on a Wednesday three weeks from now bound for Titan of Saturn. The space coordinates Harvey had figured out were correct. Yes, the shipping firm of Gramenger & Lewis would not dare change the trajectory or the schedule on as little as three weeks notice. To do so would involve loss of prestige as well as of millions of dollars in contracts and passenger fees. Harvey thanked him and went to the Claims Registration Office on Luna.

"I wish," he told the official, "to register prior discovery and ownership of a planet whose orbit lies perpendicular to the plane of the ecliptic."

The official doubted very much that any

"perp" planets remained to be discovered, telling Harvey they were useless anyway. Harvey did not laugh.

THE official spent an hour poring over catalogues, showing increasing amazement. Finally he said, "You're in luck!"

At the end of an hour he had found Harvey's planet in numerous photographs, and had taken readings on the orbit which exactly coincided with Harvey's figures. He made out the necessary papers. Now Harvey owned a planet.

Harvey said, "I'm an abrupt man, sir. I speak my mind. I have no sense of humor, as you must realize by now. I want a tankful of fuel on credit."

The official shook his head. "I can't do it. I have no authority to give credit. This is the United States government you're talking to." He laughed.

Harvey did not laugh. "I am asking for personal credit."

"On what security?"

Harvey thought. "On no security. I am an honest man. My word is good enough. However, there will be a bonus when the loan is returned. Before Thanksgiving you will be in receipt of one dozen succulent, tender, meaty Plymouth Rock chickens as large as turkeys. May I ask what your astrological sign is?"

The official leaned back staring, and making a soundless whistle. He couldn't laugh. This man had no sense of humor. "He said, 'Well, I was born August 26—'"

"Fine, fine. A Virgo. You and I can do business, sir. Pisces and Virgo get along. I shall be leaving at 5:00 SST. I shall leave my vessel in your care. Good evening." He slept untroubled at the hotel connected with the Claims Office, and in the morning took off. The meter reading, which he did not even trouble to inspect, read Full.

He went to Venus, taking two weeks to get there. On the way he passed his planet which he was naming Plymouth, but did not trouble to open the port to look at it. Not much could have occurred to misplace it. On Venus, he docked his ship at the central spaceport, and went by tube to Venus Port. Five minutes after getting there he was talking to the secretary in the outer office of the firm of Gramenger

& Lewis. At first the secretary did not want to admit him to see Mr. Gramenger, but Harvey said:

"May I have your name, please?"

She gave it. He sat down with pencil and paper, and after five minutes looked up with a pleased smile. "Numerologically," he said, "we find a coincidence here. We are both 22's. This is an exceptionally strong number, denoting trust, idealism, and self-mastery. What is your astrological sign?"

"Pisces."

"Pisces! I, too, am a Pisces."

She gave him a look. "Pisces people are not noted for their diplomacy, or for subtlety. You're under the wrong sign."

He frowned. "This I do not understand."

She smiled. "Never mind. You can see Mr. Gramenger in about five minutes."

"Thank you. Perhaps we can share dinner this evening."

"Well—"

"I have no money, you understand."

Her mouth fell open. She burst into laughter, and then clapped her hand over her mouth when she saw he was dead serious. She said quickly, "All right. I'll take you to dinner. I guess we poor fish have to stick together."

"Thank you," he said. "We can go to the Milo Club. In return for the favor, I can promise you that before Thanksgiving you will receive three large Plymouth Rock chickens of unusual tenderness and flavor." He picked up a magazine and read while waiting.

Gramenger, when he saw Harvey, leaned back in his chair scrubbing a meaty chin. He remarked he was pleased to meet Harvey, but he couldn't place the name, and did not understand how Harvey had got into the office without a prior appointment. Harvey said these details did not matter, but that what did matter was that he was here to make a financial settlement with the firm rather than, later on, to bring suit against the firm for a sum of one million dollars.

Gramenger's eyebrows went up. He smiled faintly, letting his glance rove over Harvey's stained leather space jacket and spotted denims.

"I'm sure I'd like to hear your story," he said. "I may as well inform you, how-

ever, that any claims against the company must be laid before the legal department."

Harvey stood at the desk looking down. "I'm an abrupt man, sir," he said. "I do things quickly, and then they're over. I have no liking for red tape or legal maneuvers. If my business is not settled before I leave this office within the next hour, you may expect to go to court and lose much more than the meager damages settlement I am asking."

"Damages for what?" Gramenger frowned irritably. His chair came down with a bang. "If you think you can pull a fast one with the firm of Gramenger & Lewis—"

Harvey broke in. He told Gramenger about his planet Plymouth. He showed his papers of ownership. He described the orbit. He showed where the planet would intersect the plane of the ecliptic in one week, seven hours, twenty-eight minutes, and some seconds. He showed the official seal from the Claims Office proving that this was so.

"Your liner *Hermes*," he said, will intersect the orbit of the planet Plymouth some 17,000 miles from Plymouth. The atomic wash from the *Hermes*' drivers will infect space for 100,000 miles around; this is standard knowledge and has been proved in court. Legal precedent has also established that nucleonic, gravitonic, or positronic infection of planetary farmlands constitutes a serious misdemeanor for which damages, both punitive and otherwise, may be sought."

Gramenger grinned. "Let me see those papers." He looked them over, chuckling. Once he looked up.

"PLANETARY farmlands, huh? And this planet is a hunk of rock out in space. Frozen. Only 483 miles in diameter. No atmosphere." He scooped up the inter-office 'phone. "Phil!" he said. "Get up here. I want you to prove something to a loco joking yokel I've got up here in the office." He hung up. "That's my lawyer," he said, leaning back and folding his hands over his capacious stomach. "Too bad. Maybe you'll learn a lesson from this."

"May I ask what your birthday is?" Harvey asked.

Gramenger told him. Harvey's jaw came

out. "Cancer. Yes, I can see we will have to fight this out."

The lawyer came in. He smiled a little when Gramenger explained. He looked at the papers. He shook a sleek head. He handed the papers to Harvey.

"You don't stand a chance, man. Have you looked into the definition of what constitutes planetary farmlands?"

"What is the definition?" said Harvey.

"Planetary farmlands, legally and simply, are the natural surface or portions of the surface of a planet of any size which could support vegetative growths of any kind. Your mistake here is that this planetoid, and every other such a body that has been discovered, *does not have a soil surface*. Ergo, it cannot support plant life."

"If it *did* have a soil surface," Harvey said.

The lawyer looked at him whimsically. "It couldn't," he said, in what was meant as a kindly tone. "These odd-sized bodies that wander through space have invariably been discovered to be crystallized, meteoric, inorganic materials from top bottom."

"But if it *did* have soil, natural, original surface soil."

The lawyer spread his hands, shrugging. "It can't be. But if it were, naturally, the company would—"

"Change the *Hermes'* trajectory?" Harvey said.

Gramenger glared. "Gramenger & Lewis has changed neither a schedule nor a trajectory in its career as the oldest shipping concern in the Solar System," he snapped.

"Well," said Harvey, "what *would* you do if it were proved that Plymouth has a natural soil surface?" He took a flat paper bag out of his pocket and emptied a pile of dirt onto Gramenger's desk.

The lawyer and Gramenger looked at the pile of dirt. Both men grew a little pale.

The lawyer licked his lips. "If you show that that dirt comes from Plymouth," he said, "Gramenger & Lewis will stand the expense of transforming the planetoid into a free-mover."

"This means," said Harvey, "that you would be forced to install gravitic machinery under Plymouth's surface, including plus and minus grids and controls that would make it possible to move the planetoid out

of the *Hermes'* way."

"Ycs. . . ."

"You would also install atmosphere-making machinery."

"If the claimant asked for it, it would be a simple matter."

"You would also provide a transmutator as an adjunct to the atmosphere-machine so that water could be provided?"

Gramenger was being very silent and small behind the desk. Unconsciously, he nodded his head. The lawyer, his amiable manner somewhat shattered, nodded slowly. "These and other things could be done and would be done in a hurry."

"Also," persisted Harvey, "there would be an inconsequential cash settlement of perhaps ten thousand code credits?"

The lawyer was silent. He looked at Gramenger. Gramenger said slowly, "That is a small matter, and would be agreed to. But there is a large matter, and that is to prove that this soil comes from Plymouth. For my money, it's still a hunk of rock—"

Harvey stopped him. He explained briefly his experience in discovering asteroid juncture faults for the Asteroid Association. He explained that once, according to theory and great evidence, a large planet existed between Mars and Jupiter. The planet exploded, forming the asteroid belt, and throwing out large, errant chunks of itself which moved in various peculiar orbits about the Sun.

"Plymouth is such a chunk, and," added Harvey complacently, "I will undoubtedly be paid one thousand credits from the Asteroid Association later on when I show that Plymouth comes from that shattered planet's surface. And I will prove also, for the first time, that that shattered planet contained a surface soil on which vegetable life was rampant. Plymouth is such a proof."

Gramenger writhed and sweated. He pointed to the pile of dirt. "But you haven't proved—"

Harvey turned to the lawyer. "May I ask your astrological sign, sir?"

The lawyer grimaced. "Why? I don't believe in astrology. I have been told it's Taurus."

Harvey smiled. "This is a fine coincidence. My fiancee's sign is also Taurus. I am Pisces. The two signs are especially in affinity with

one another. I believe you can trust me, sir." He looked straight into the lawyer's eyes.

THE lawyer grinned lopsidedly after a moment and turned to Gramenger.

"We can trust him," he said. "He's right all the way down the line. Anyway, we couldn't waste time in finding out."

"All right!" Gramenger rapped the words out half-angrily. "Take care of it, Phil. Get Parsons & Carey on the 'phone, and ask them to send all their engineers and equipment out. Pronto!" The lawyer nodded briefly at Harvey and left the room.

"As for you," said Gramenger. He gulped and stopped. With trembling fingers he began shoving the pile of dirt back into the paper bag. Harvey thought a minute.

"I wonder if I could use your 'phone?" he asked.

Gramenger growled an assent. Harvey sat on the edge of the desk. "Get me outside," he told the operator, who turned out to be a machine somewhere in the building. The mechanical voice told him to press the O key. He pressed the O key. "Get me Mars," he said. The mechanical voice changed to a human voice. "Get me the Hotel de Mars on Mars," he said. Gramenger was staring at him. A voice at the other end came through thinly. "Let me speak to Anna Christina Morley at the Registration desk," he said. Gramenger sat down, beginning to smile and staring at Harvey as if not only a new planet but a new type man had been discovered.

Harvey said, "Anna, dearest? I shall speak very plainly, very quickly. I am a man of few words—What?"

His leathery face lost a little color. "But you *are* my fiancee, you know."

"Am I?" she cried. "What makes you think so? What makes you think you can talk fifteen minutes with a girl, have her fall in love with you, assume she'll go crazy waiting for you, waiting ten months—when four months have already passed without hearing from you—"

"My dear Anna," he said. "If this is a joke—"

"You're a joke." She sobbed. She broke down. "I don't know what you did to me. Only fifteen minutes. How could you have done that to me in fifteen minutes?"

He frowned. "I'm always certain of a situation before I leave it," he explained. "That is a common precaution that we men of space must take, an ordinary survival mechanism, I should say. Besides, you are a Taurus, and I am a Pisces and I computed that numerologically—"

"Bother your astrology and your numerology," she snapped.

There was silence, a long half minute of it stretching between Venus and Mars at a half-credit a second. Gramenger continued to get more and more amused.

"What do you want?" she asked. "When will you come back, if ever?"

His singed eyebrow went up in puzzlement. "I told you ten months, Anna. I meant ten months. As for what I want, please, at once, send a space-wire to your father in Oregon. Have him ship five hens and a cock by fast passenger express to the spaceport depot on Venus. Ask him also to include whatever special medicines, feeds, and instructions are necessary for the raising and nurturing of Plymouth Rocks—"

She gasped. "For heaven's sake, why?"

"Don't you want a chicken farm? I am building one on a planet I own."

A groan came over the 'phone, lasting long enough to cost Gramenger & Lewis a credit and a half.

"Dad won't send them. I know. It's hare brained. No one's ever tried to raise chickens any place except on Earth."

"That isn't the point," he said. "Send the wire."

"All right," she said in a small voice.

"Furthermore," he added, "inform your father this is a business venture. I shall keep him supplied, as middleman, with a new breed of Plymouth Rocks which are considerably larger than turkeys, are more succulent, more tasty and tender, lay larger eggs with possibly larger yolks—"

"How?"

"I have some knowledge of biology and pressure chemistry, Anna. Plymouth will be ideal."

"What's Plymouth?"

"The name of the planet."

Harvey cocked his ear at the silence. Then there were sounds of sniffles. "I have to take care of a registration, Harvey," Anna said. "I have to go. I'm very proud that

you love me, Harvey. I'll wait for you. And I'll convince Dad. Goodbye."

"Goodbye," said Harvey. He hung up. "She misses me," he told Gramenger. "Poor girl. Would you like me to take the ten thousand credits in cash or as a check?"

"A check," said Gramenger. He wrote it out. Harvey took it, and started toward the door. He called back:

"Thanks for the use of your 'phone," and walked out. Gramenger had nothing to say.

HARVEY went back to Plymouth some two weeks later. He now owned a much larger ship. It was crammed to the brim with chemical fertilizers to improve the soil. There were also seed grains such as oats, wheat and corn. There was lumber for building, plumbing fixtures, windows, doors, everything needed to build several sheds plus a long, low rambling ranch-type house. The hens and the cock were aboard. There were six men also who would do the building, and help in any other way necessary.

Plymouth was a beautiful, emerald planet as they hove in close to it. As they landed, a pleasant, sunny atmosphere swirled around the ship. The gravitic machinery kept the gravity at Earth normal. The ground was already thawed, and was surprisingly like the rich, life-filled loam found in Iowa cow country. An engineer was waiting for Harvey, showed him the gravitic controls, explained the planet had been moved a million miles out of its orbit so that the *Hermes* could plow past without harming it.

By shutting off gravitic energy from one side, he explained, pressing buttons on the control panel, the planet could be made to move in any direction.

Furthermore, the gravitation could be raised or lowered at will, on all of the planetoid or on any small portion of it.

"Fine, fine," said Harvey, much pleased. Before the engineer took off Harvey promised him several large Plymouth Rocks before Thanksgiving, and as an afterthought took a numerological reading on his name. Then he instantly started in to work.

The house went up. Saws whined. Sheds went up. Hammers hammered. Lawns were laid, ground fertilized, worm-eggs installed.

Some natural vegetation of a weird nature appeared, its seeds having been alive but frozen for a time measured in epochs. No doubt of it, the soil was alive. The fowl flourished in their fenced in yard, prone to no diseases, having no natural enemies, neither mice nor lice.

Harvey worked with three generations of chickens. He made his experiments with fluctuating gravity under the chicken house.

His employees were fascinated. Harvey explained, "I'm actually 50 years old," he said. "Don't tell my fiancée. She thinks I'm 40. But being out in space, virtually with no gravitational pull on my body for almost all of my life, my life expectancy has been pushed up to somewhere in the hundreds. I can pass for forty.

"Gravity," he said, "makes people grow old and probably hastens death. The muscles have to fight gravity, so do all the other organs. The muscles toughen, get stringy, the skin, the nerves, the arteries and the meat of the body get brittle and hard. This is what is known as 'old age.'

"Think what effect a lowered or fluctuating gravity could have on these beautiful gray white birds."

Harvey experimented a great deal as the weeks passed. He often adjusted the gravity lugs down to a point where they exerted just enough force to hold the atmosphere to the planet. The results were remarkable on the Plymouths.

The third generation of fowl were distinctly a fifth larger than their ancestors. The cocks, which normally should weigh 10 lbs., now weighed between 10 and 14. The hens in proportion kept a couple of pounds under this; they matured faster, they bred much more vigorously than any Plymouth Rock ever had. The eggs were consistently larger.

Harvey early decided against hatching incubators because the hens, untroubled by vermin or other influences such as bad weather which could make them neurotic, paid tranquil attention to their jobs. He did, however, have open electric brooders constantly going so that the chicks could go to them for warmth if necessary.

Lowering the gravity had a similar effect on his corn, oats and wheat crops. They sprang up, maturing in a remarkably short

time. There was plenty of feed for the fowl. Plymouth was rapidly becoming self-supporting.

Harvey was pleased. He explained again: "Pressure can be considered as a gravitational effect, and vice versa. Pressure chemistry causes certain chemical reactions to speed up others to slow down. I figure that by Thanksgiving I can find the correct variation of gravitational pressure that will give me a breed of Plymouth Rocks never seen in this universe."

BY THE time the fourth swift generation came along he had almost reached his goal. Furthermore, the flesh was tenderer than any of these men had thought possible. When the time came for Harvey to take them back to Venus, he promised them they would be well supplied by the time Thanksgiving rolled around.

Harvey was somewhat loath to leave the planet Plymouth alone. He had a certain fear in the back of his head that things would happen if he did. He intended to return as soon as he and Anna got married.

He showed up at the Hotel de Mars a week ahead of time. At Anna's place behind the Registration desk stood a white haired little old lady.

A chill started deep in his stomach when she told him Anna left a month—no, two months ago. She produced a letter Anna had left him. It was brief and pointed.

"Harvey," the letter read, "I know you lied to me. There isn't any planet called Plymouth. I looked it up in the star atlases. Nobody ever heard of it. I'm not going to stay here and be bitterly disappointed when you don't show up at the end of ten months. Goodbye."

Harvey threw the letter away. It had served its purpose.

"Ma'am," he said, "I'm a man of action and few words. What is Miss Morley's Oregon address?"

Nobody knew Anna's Oregon address. Harvey instantly left for Oregon. Landing there, he began looking. He had found juncture faults; he would find Anna. It took him over a month. He ran across her quite by accident behind the cigar counter in a drugstore.

"Anna," he said, "there's no time to lose; get your things; quit this job; come with me." He stopped anything she had to say. They were married in the next hour. An hour after that they were on the way to the planet whose existence Anna still doubted.

There was little room for doubt when that spot of entrancing green in an ocean of black was sighted. "It's beautiful," Anna breathed, squeezing his hand. "But what's the rush to get here?"

He explained without rancor. "Your lack of faith in me cost us far too much time. This is a new breed of chicken; they propagate vigorously. But they have no natural enemies. Every living thing needs a natural enemy. Our Plymouths have probably overrun the planet."

She gurgled, then put her hand over her mouth.

He took her hand away. "Anna, dearest, laugh. Laugh as much as you please. But I have no sense of humor. This you will discover as we move through life together. I see nothing funny in this situation. Living creatures need natural enemies."

When the ship landed, his meaning became obvious. Chickens flew in great squawking clouds through the air, walked and clucked in rivers at their feet. Feathers came down like heavy snow; the ground was covered with fluffy white mounds. From horizon to horizon there seemed to be little else but chicken.

Anna was appalled. Harvey was planning. A slaughter would be necessary. "We're their natural enemies," he explained. "Your chicken farm is ready to pay off."