

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

FEBRUARY, 1956

Vol. 5, No. 1

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for
men
must
work—

by . . . F. B. Bryning

Until the stars grow pale and
valor wears a safety-belt the
wife of a spaceman must grieve.

FERRY *Rocket Nine* pointed her needle prow back along the orbit of Satellite Space Station Commonwealth Two, with which, for the time being, she circled Earth every ninety minutes. A silver torpedo, winged like a schoolboy's paper dart, with a high, vertical tail fin, she hung apparently motionless against the star-spotted blackness of space, three chains to starboard of Vehicle 18, Space Terminal.

Suddenly her main jet sputtered flame, and she shot rapidly astern of the Station. For seconds only she blasted, but when cut-off came she was invisible in the distance and the darkness. Stern first, she still trailed after SSSC2, but she no longer had velocity enough to stay in orbit. She had entered the long spiral that would take her down into the earth's atmosphere, five hundred miles below.

Barbara Loney, aboard *FR9*, sighed with relief as Vehicle 18 disappeared from her viewport, and with it her contact with the Space Station. To her the limitless, black, star-studded void was harsh and menacing. She had been unable to

Few indeed are the writers who do not strive to surpass themselves at times by becoming just a trifle over-dramatic. But F. B. Bryning never does. He writes always with an assured convincingness, and as a spectator at the events he chronicles—a spectator so carried away by what he has seen and heard that his one overmastering desire is to come up with a faithful recording. And that makes for refreshing and unusual science fantasy entertainment, as witness this exciting documentary portrayal of space hazards daringly surmounted.

see in it the wonder, the beauty, the ever-beckoning adventure, the great pioneering opportunity, her husband saw there. His work, as Chief Maintenance Engineer, Rockets, for all his high-sounding title, special rate of pay, spaceman's bonuses, and long earth-furloughs, had become for her a nightmare of hazardous escapades.

When Jim was on duty she would be either distracted from her own work as Librarian-Records Clerk in Vehicle 7 — Residential-Recreation—or would stay cooped up in their comfortably equipped but none-the-less prison-like quarters, worrying and agonizing about his safety.

In short, as she had told herself for the hundredth time, she was not cut out to be a spaceman's wife. She could not think of any space-going quarters as a home, even though she and Jim should cohabit there. She had finally told him so—and hated herself for the hurt it gave him.

She yearned for a bright blue sky every twelve hours instead of black and star-glitter all the time. She wanted the solid earth and the green grass underfoot instead of metal and plastic decking. She wanted constant, if heavy, earth-gravity instead of the centrifugal pressure which, according to how near you were to the centre of the spinning R-R Vehicle, varied from one gravity to absolute weightlessness. She wanted fresh, earth-scented, if germ-laden, sun-and-rain-cleared air instead of the aseptic, machine-washed and precipitron-cleared oxy-

gen-helium mixture. She longed for a small cottage with windows to open and shut, a garden, and—of all things—a picket fence. She wanted a *real* home.

So she had persuaded Jim to apply for the position of Superintendent, Rocket Maintenance, Woomera—a job for which he was well qualified although little inclined.

"Time enough when I've served my full stint out here and we've piled up more money in the bank," he had protested. "And I'll be better able to handle such a job when I've had more experience with operating conditions in space."

"'For men must work, and women must weep,'" she had quoted rather bitterly in reply. "More important that you survive your stint in space. And the surest way to do that is not to stay too long! And it's time we had a home we can call a home!"

In the end she had had her way, and Jim was even now one hour ahead of her, in *FR5*, First Division of the Station-Woomera-Station Ferry for the day. By the time she landed he would, no doubt, be leaving their hotel room for his personal interview with the Appointments Board. Perversely, tears welled into her eyes in the midst of her hopes and rosy dreams, for she felt remorseful still at having forced Jim's hand. If only she could be strong, and confident, as a spaceman's wife should be! If only she were not the worrying kind . . .

"I think it was very mean of them to separate us from our husbands," complained newly-wed Jean Urquhart, placing a hand on Barbara's arm.

"A tribute to our petite figures, my dear," she replied comfortingly, "and to the solid worth of our husbands. They always pass a few pounds of mass from one Division to another at the last minute to even up the loads, and the easiest way is to exchange a few light-weight passengers for some heavy-weights."

"But since we're all weightless, out here, I don't see that it matters."

"We'll weigh plenty when the atmosphere drag is braking the ship," said Barbara. "That's when it counts—during deceleration and landing."

"Well, they might have picked some of the unmarried ones."

"They did with Beryl Sanders, over there—she's not married. But of course they do it by arithmetic and not by sentiment. At such times, dear, you and I and our hefty husbands are only entries in the 'Mass' column on the passenger list."

Jean grasped Barbara's arm again as a gentle vibration began to make itself felt throughout the Ferry. "What's that?" she gasped.

"Just the steering jets—swinging the nose of the ship around to point the way we are going. It wouldn't do to enter the atmosphere tail first."

It was about fifty minutes after leaving the Station and FR9 had gone nearly half way around the Earth when Barbara detected a slight tendency to slide forward against her seat belt.

"Better tighten your seat belt, Jean, and put on your chest belt," she said, tapping her companion's arm. "We're entering the atmosphere now. The ship is beginning to feel the drag."

Jean gave Barbara an almost worshipful look a minute later when the notice screen lit up with the message, "*Please fix chest belts,*" and the co-pilot came into the passenger cabin to check on every belt.

Soon the murmur of the rushing air outside pervaded the ship, minute by minute increasing in volume as they planed into the denser strata. The pressure of the belts grew greater, holding them back.

Wide-eyed, and gripping the arms of her seat, Jean strove to remain calm as the wind grew stronger, its rushing sound mounting to a roar as the ship tensed, with minor creakings and crepitations, all about her. Her tendency to slide forward off her seat drove her ever harder against the belts, and convinced her that she was no longer weightless.

It was her first trip down from the Station, planing, unpowered, through the atmosphere, and more trying than the short, fully powered rocket trip up, with all its muscle-

wrenching acceleration. Later, when the roar became a howl, she watched with wary fascination the leading edge of the starboard wing grow cherry-red, and the color slowly spread over all that part of the wing visible through the port.

Through darkness and daylight and darkness again they went in something more than two hours between leaving SSSC2 and gliding in over Western Australia to touch down at Woomera in mid-morning.

"I don't see Harry," complained Jean Urquhart a moment later, as they came out through the still warm hull into the desert air which Barbara sniffed with pleasure. Barbara had not expected to see Jim, who would be even now on his way to his interview.

Laboring a little in the full earth gravity they reached the public lounge of the spaceport, where Jean's questing for her husband was cut short by the public address system.

"Paging Mrs. James Loney and Mrs. Henry Urquhart! Mrs. James Loney and Mrs. Henry Urquhart—please come to the Traffic Manager's office. Paging Mrs. . . ."

They were shown in at once, to be received by the young-middle-aged Traffic Manager as if he were handling eggshell china. Both girls began to feel alarmed as he moved the chairs under them with great solicitude. Behind his desk he remained standing. He buttoned his coat nervously, and placed his

hands on the back of his swivel chair.

"I am afraid," he began, "I must give you ladies some rather disturbing news. The fact is—well, I have to inform you that *Ferry Rocket Five*, which left the Station before your rocket, has not yet landed."

"Harry!" cried Jean. "My husband—"

Too late! came the bitter thought to Barbara as a sick feeling hit her like a blow in the stomach. *Too late! It has happened before we could get away!*

Suddenly she realized that Jean was in her arms, sobbing, and kneeling on the floor. She, herself, had been sitting tense and unheeding for a long minute. The Traffic Manager was saying something unheard by Jean or herself. He was looking embarrassed. Barbara made an effort.

"I'm sorry," she said, through set teeth. "I—we didn't hear what you—"

"I didn't mean to frighten you," he said. "Please don't assume the worst. *FR5* is disabled, but no one is injured—yet. She has been hit by a meteorite and is out of control in a new orbit between the orbit of the Station and the fringe of the atmosphere. Help is on the way from the Station. We hope it may be in time."

FERRY Rocket Five was tumbling raggedly through space with half her starboard wing and part of her tail fin torn away. She had a cork-

screwing motion, the result of a tail-over-nose rotation about her short axis, but she was also spinning slowly around her long axis.

Fortunately the impact of the meteorite, which had been from behind and below on the starboard side, had accelerated her again, canceling out much of the deceleration by which she had begun her journey down to Earth. Fortunate it was, for now there would be more time before she would enter the atmosphere—and in that time she might be saved.

Imperatively, if she were to be saved, it would have to be in that time. If, with her airfoils torn and distorted, and her outer skin breached as it was, she were to enter the atmosphere, she would go more wildly out of control. She would be tossed about with tremendous violence, and almost inevitably be torn apart.

If, by some miracle, she should hold together long enough to reach the denser air strata at a velocity between four and five miles a second, the hull would be heated to a dull red, and both her disrupted thermal insulation, and her refrigeration system, if still functioning, would be unable to keep the heat at bay.

These hazards had been promptly recognized by everyone as soon as *FR5*'s Captain had reported his predicament by jury-rigged radio. Help could come, in the time, only from SSSC2, and all the Station's personnel who could help in the

rescue were going all-out to do so. Particularly were they busy aboard Vehicles 16 and 17, Maintenance.

A warning buzz from the wall near his desk informed the Traffic Manager to cut in the speaker.

Satellite Space Station Commonwealth Two was reporting that *FR5* had been located by radar and two space tugs were on their way to assist her. *Moon Rocket 8* had just arrived at Vehicle 18, Space Terminal, from the Moon, and was being re-fueled and cleared of cargo to follow the tugs and take off passengers from *FR5*, if possible.

On *FR5* a man had gone outside in a space suit to weld an air leak—a precarious feat with the ship tumbling and writhing as she was.

At this last item of news Barbara's hands clenched and her lips drew into a tight line. She knew who that hero would be! James Loney, Chief Maintenance Engineer, Rockets, and trouble-shooter extraordinary!

When the radio confirmed her guess a few seconds later she accepted the near-homage of Jean as graciously as her mixed fear, pride, and desperate hope permitted. But down inside her she felt stark terror such as she had never felt when "out there" on the Station on similar occasions when she had known Jim was running special risks.

It felt very different, here, on the ground—remote and excluded from any sense of contact with Jim. She was, in fact, no longer "with"

him, either in space or, it seemed, in spirit. She found herself, in her turn, clutching Jean.

And at that same instant James Loney was clinging like a limpet to the plunging hull of *FR5* as he finished off sealing the air leak. Down on magnetic knee-pads he held himself rigid by straining up against the two short lines fastened to the belt of his space suit and hooked into recessed hand-holds in the hull.

He kept his eyes on the skin of the ship, for space-hardened though he was, he could not look for long without getting dizzy at the wildly spiraling stars and the huge, greenish balloon of Earth, filling half the sky, and looming unpredictably past from any direction.

Beneath him, at one moment, the hull drove upwards, carrying him before it as it swung over like the sail of a windmill, and he had to brace himself against it or sprawl on his face. A few seconds later, as the sideways spin slowly turned the ship on its long axis, he was carried around behind the "windmill" movement and dragged after it, so that only the lines held him against the hull. Between thrust and drag and thrust again he had to hold the pressure on knees, toes, and the lashings to resist slipping sideways.

He was clawing his way back to the airlock, to stow the welding kit, when the searchlights of the two tugs flooded the hull of *FR5* with light. By space-suit radio he made

contact with them. The three men aboard each tug were of his own crew and all were ready in space suits. By tacit consent he took charge.

"Here's the situation," he told them. "We can't take passengers out until we stop this ship flinging about. If we do that in time we won't need to trans-ship passengers at all. You tugs can take her back to the Station.

"First, though, we must get about four bottles of oxygen into this airlock to keep them supplied inside. She's lost too much air, and there might be a few smaller leaks than the one I've just sealed. Stacy and Adams—you break out that oxygen and bring it over. Acknowledge please."

"Stacy acknowledging — four bottles of oxygen—coming."

Adams, in turn, repeated the words.

"Don't try to come aboard yet," said Loney. "Jet over and wait alongside at the pole of the short axis around which we're rotating. I'll meet you there."

Stacy and Adams acknowledged together.

"Get started . . . Hobday?" Jim asked.

"Hobday acknowledging."

"You break out one Mark Four reaction motor, with full fuel tank, and bring it to me at the short axis of rotation. Right?"

Hobday repeated his instructions.

"Go ahead . . . Miles?" Jim asked.

"Yes, Jim. Miles speaking."

"You break out a full reserve fuel tank for Hobday's Mark Four," said Jim. "Also break out two Mark One reactors, fully fuelled. Stand by to bring them when asked for."

As Miles repeated his instructions Loney took two coiled lines from the airlock. Clipping one to his belt he fastened the other just outside the airlock hatch, and, trailing it after him, worked his way from hand-hold to hand-hold thirty feet or so along the hull to the short axis about which the nose and tail of the hundred-and-twenty-foot ship were rotating.

There he clung for a few moments, clipping his short belt lines on and adjusting himself to the motion, which here was much less violent than up near the nose where he had been welding.

Facing forward he got carefully to his feet, placing his magnetic oversoles firmly on the steel hull and keeping his belt lines—one in front and one behind—taut. Thus braced and guyed he stood like a stubby mast on the back of the *Ferry Rocket*.

As it somersaulted he went with it, and because it also spun slowly on its long axis, his upright figure followed a skewed and complex spiral which was compounded of two circular motions at right angles to one another; and the orbital path of the ship.

By the time Stacy and Adams had come alongside, and adjusted

their relative motions so as to hang stationary in relation to the short axis, they found that Loney's head would swing diagonally past them at about fifteen-second intervals. First from one side, then from the other, he would come at them and swing away, passing sometimes within arm's length and sometimes up to twenty feet away.

"Stacy," said Loney as he swung past, "give your oxygen to Adams, and prepare to come aboard. Next time round I'll throw you a line."

Stacy was ready as soon as Loney's head came into view again. At the same moment the line came at him like a white whiplash in the light from the tugs.

"Take a turn around your wrist and hold on," said Jim Loney, taking in the slack as he came close.

When he began to recede he pulled gently, letting the line run a little through his heavily gloved hands to ease the initial strain.

Stacy came aboard like a game fish, striking the hull about ninety degrees around its circumference from Loney.

"Guy yourself with a line front and back, like mine," instructed Loney. "Cast off my line as soon as you're fast."

Four circuits later Loney threw the line to Adams, who quickly clipped it into the hand-hold of one oxygen bottle. Loney led this like a kite until it floated gently alongside Stacy, who unhooked it.

Seeing Hobday approaching with

the heavy reaction motor, Loney announced a change of procedure.

"Stand by, Adams, while we get that reactor aboard. Stacy—you get that bottle of oxygen inside the ship. They'll be able to wait for the others if you give them that. We'll get the rest aboard easier when we stop this spin. Leave your guy lines there."

Stacy unhooked his lines and struggled with the oxygen bottle along the line Loney had laid down to the airlock.

At Loney's direction Hobday relinquished the reaction motor to Adams, and was brought aboard to take Stacy's place. Loney threw the line again to Adams, who hooked it on to the massive reaction motor. This was a much more sluggish item than either a man or an oxygen bottle, and Loney kept a short line on it until he had it moving.

The strain on his arms and body and belt lines almost tore him off the ship, but he had to prevent the motor swinging about and perhaps injuring Hobday. When he had it following nicely he eased off the line and let it come within Hobday's reach.

"Hold it down until it matches motion with the ship," he instructed. When this was done Loney drew the motor to him, and maneuvered it around him until its jet pointed at right angles to the long axis of the ship—that is, into the direction of the ship's spin. Then he switched on the powerful elec-

tro-magnetic grips and it snapped tight against the hull.

"Grapples too?" enquired Hobday, crawling up alongside.

"Four," agreed Loney. Then he called to Adams.

"Adams acknowledging."

"Stand clear of blast!" said Jim.

Hobday ran two pairs of grappling claws on chains out to the nearest hand-holds in front of the reaction motor and hauled them tight while Loney checked and adjusted his controls.

"All secure!" reported Hobday.

"Is Stacy inside the airlock?"

"Yes. Airlock closed."

"Adams standing clear?"

"Well clear."

"Stand by for blast!"

Just as they rolled out of the glare of the searchlights Loney pressed the firing trigger and a brilliant white flame shot twenty feet into the blackness of space. Beneath them the ship vibrated. But, through the emptiness around them no sound came from the flame which in an atmosphere would have roared like any rocket. There came instead a humming and a vibration through the substance of the motor, the hull, and their own flesh and bone.

Gradually Loney opened up the throttle, his eyes on the gauge. He held the needle steady, and then gave some attention to the alternation of light and darkness as the spin took them in and out of the searchlights.

"She's slowing down," called

Hobday. "Circuit about nineteen seconds now."

"We'll have a bigger fight with the tumbling," said Loney. "I'll take this reactor up to the tail. You get Miles aboard with the other charge of fuel and both Mark One reactors. Leave Stacy and Adams to get that oxygen inboard."

"Okay. I'll call Miles now."

"Getting slower," remarked Loney a short time later. "How long's the circuit?"

Hobday timed it. "Twenty-seven seconds."

Shortly after that Loney began to taper off the blast, until, slowly, with the dying out of the flame, the spinning of the ship had stopped altogether. Her motion was now the less complex but still powerful tumbling.

Hobday released the grapples and wound them in.

"You had better stand out at the end of the short axis," said Loney. "You'll turn about like a top but you'll stay in one position, and you'll get your men aboard easily."

"Don't you need a hand first?"

"No thanks. Now that she's not spinning I can stay in front of the swing all the time. The thrust will hold me on—and the reactor too. I'll slide it along . . ."

"OH!" exclaimed Barbara, jumping to her feet as the Traffic Manager cut off his radio speaker. "I had forgotten!"

"What's the matter?" pleaded Jean, alarm in her eyes.

"Jim's interview! He had an interview with the Appointments Board—" Barbara looked at her watch "it was for eleven thirty—seven minutes from now." She turned to the Traffic Manager. "Could I—I mean, I think I should inform the Board—ask them to— to postpone—"

The Traffic Manager took up his telephone. "I'll contact the Secretary of the Board now," he said. "You can speak from here."

"Thank you," said Barbara, inwardly amazed that she was able to concern herself with an immediate practical matter while Jim was out there fighting for his life. Yet she felt that it was all the more important now—for both their sakes, if he survived—that he should not lose his chance of getting that ground job.

"I would like to make my request in person, to the Board, if I may," she added.

Meanwhile, between the base of the tail fin and the damaged driving jet, Loney anchored his reaction motor with the magnetic clamps and the grapples. He swung the nozzle to point straight "upwards"—at right angles to the long axis of the ship and into the direction she was tumbling. Then he went to meet Hobday and Miles half-way from amidships. He took from them his refill tank of fuel.

"Hobday, take your Mark One out on the starboard wing, just two feet from the edge and aft as close as you can get to where the wing

is twisted. Clamp on and aim at ninety degrees. Miles, you do the same on the port wing, matching Hobday's position exactly. Lie down, both of you, with your feet towards the hull, and lash on."

By the time Loney had returned to his reactor and lashed down his reserve fuel tank, Hobday and Miles reported ready.

"Stand by to compensate in case she starts spinning again," Loney instructed. "Set jets at half throttle and be ready to fire when I tell you."

Loney sat behind his reactor, one leg on either side wedged beneath a grapple chain. He took hold of the hand grips and sighted on the stars, which streamed up over the torn tail-fin like tracer bullets. He found the firing trigger with his forefinger.

"Stand by for blast!"

THE CHAIRMAN of the Appointments Board and his two fellow Members stood behind their table as Barbara Loney entered the room. After introductions the Chairman led her to a chair.

"Mrs. Loney," he said, his expression solicitous. "Permit us to offer our best hopes that your husband is even now winning his splendid battle to save *Ferry Rocket Five*. We feel that in these circumstances we could not refuse to see you, or to tell you personally that your request for postponement of his interview would certainly be granted, if he should wish it."

"If he should—," echoed Barbara. "I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, there is no doubt—"

"There, there! Don't let us rush things," said the Chairman, in a fatherly manner. "I am sure we understand exactly how you feel at a time like this." He had walked around the table to his own chair, and the three men took their seats. "This is not a formal meeting of the Board. Speak as freely as you like. We are glad of the opportunity to meet you."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman—and Gentlemen," replied Barbara. "I—I feel, at this moment, that all I can really be concerned with is my husband's safety. It's all I *should* be concerned with. But since he cannot keep his appointment with you—"

"We understand, Mrs. Loney. Your husband is a fortunate man to have a wife so resourceful. And in the circumstances, while he is fighting for the lives of himself and others, we could hardly fail to stretch a point, if necessary, on his behalf. However, the next Bulletin from Station Two is almost due. Please stay while we hear it."

At that moment the star stream began to slant from port to starboard, and the greenish curve of Earth bulged in. Loney cut off his jet.

"Hobday—short blast! Three seconds."

Flame spurted up from the starboard wing, and slowly *FR5* responded to the pressure. Loney

watched the shooting stars swing back towards the vertical, and Earth float away like a balloon.

"Two seconds more," he demanded. "Miles—stand by to compensate!"

As soon as the ship was trimmed she vibrated again under the heavy blast of Loney's reactor. After some seconds it seemed—from their tendency to float away from the ship "beneath" them, and the slowing of the star movements—that the rotation was being retarded. Again the stars swung off to starboard, and a sector of the earth came into view.

"Hobday—blast seven seconds! Miles—stand by!"

There was a brief static hum.

Loney fired again, opening up to the fullest. This time he did not cut off before his fuel petered out. Now their lashings had definitely been needed to hold them back with the ship as its lessening thrust beneath them made it clear she was slowing down. And the stars could now be seen as discreet dots, swinging this time from starboard to port.

"Miles—blast five seconds!"

Loney released his empty fuel tank and laid hold of the reserve.

"IT APPEARS, Gentlemen, that Chief Maintenance Engineer Loney has virtually succeeded in saving *Ferry Rocket Five*," said the Chairman of the Appointments Board. "In which case do you think it premature to inform Mrs. Loney,

unofficially, of course, of what we have in mind?"

"Quite the appropriate time, I should think," said the Member on Barbara's left.

The other nodded. "I agree. Since meeting Mrs. Loney I am more than reassured that we are making the right decision. She is undoubtedly the right kind of wife for a space-going officer."

"The fact is, Mrs. Loney," said the Chairman, "we had already decided not to appoint your husband Superintendent of Rocket Maintenance, Woomera, although he is well qualified. He is much too good a man in space to waste his talents in a ground job at his age."

"But Mr. Cha—"

"Now don't underrate what I have to tell you," pleaded the Chairman, hastily. "We have a much better post for him. He will outrank that ground job considerably—and we know it is something he will like much better. We have known his worth and his predilections for a long time, and his present valiant performance has confirmed to the hilt our estimate of him. We are going to appoint him Officer in Charge, Maintenance, Satellite Space Station Commonwealth Two!"

He beamed, and the rest of the Board smiled indulgently at Barbara's astonishment.

"But—but—Mr. Chairman! The whole idea—I don't know how—"

"Don't try, my dear," deprecated the Chairman. "No thanks are due

to us. Your husband has more than earned this promotion, although it is several grades upwards in one move, both in rank and pay. We anticipate that he will not only do the job superlatively well, but that because of his age he will be able to give it the continuity of tenure which has been lacking in the past."

"'Continuity of tenure'" echoed Barbara, aghast.

"Yes. Until now, as you may know, our appointees to that position have all been men within three, or at most, four years of the age of retirement from active duty in space. Your husband should have a good ten years ahead of him."

"Ten years!" gasped Barbara. "In space for *ten more years.*"

"By then, with yearly increments, you would be very nicely placed financially."

"I wasn't thinking of that, Mr. Chairman," said Barbara, faintly. "My husband's application for the position of Superintendent of Maintenance, Woomera, would not have been made at all if—"

"If he had had any idea that he was in the running for this position," the Chairman cut in. "You need not tell us. We know from his records and other sources that his main enthusiasm is for taking part in what is done out in space. If anyone knows that better than we do, that person will be you. Am I not right?"

Barbara looked at the three men

in turn. She saw no way out. She realized she could not win her battle here and now.

"Perfectly right," she acknowledged. "That is what he desires, above all."

"Would you like to be the bearer of the good news? The appointment is yet two months off—due at the end of the furlough you are just beginning. You and your husband can keep it to yourselves?"

He paused at sight of Barbara sitting rigid, eyes closed. When she opened her eyes he saw that they were glittering with unshed tears.

"We can keep the secret, Mr. Chairman," she promised. "May I say on my husband's behalf how delighted he—"

"Here is another Bulletin," said the Member on Barbara's right, and turned up the volume.

"*Ferry Rocket Five* has been stabilized by the efforts of Chief Maintenance Engineer Loney and his crew," announced the radio, from SSSC2. "All aboard are now safe and unharmed. Two space tugs are lashed to the Ferry and are accelerating back into the orbit of the Station. Passengers will be disembarked at the Station to await another Ferry.

"This fortunate outcome has been mainly due to the heroism and skill of Chief Maintenance Engineer James Loney, who, not a moment too soon, handed over *FR5* to his space tugs just as the first noticeable contact was made

with the atmosphere. As a result of damage to the Ferry's airfoils it began to yaw and plunge before the tugs had warped in properly and made fast. Quick work by Loney with the lines again saved the situation, but he suffered injury when his left leg and arm were momentarily jammed between a tug and the tail fin of *FR5*. He was quickly rescued and taken inboard a tug. It is reported that both the leg and arm have been broken . . ."

White-faced, her eyes closed, Barbara sat gripping the table.

*"But men must work, and
women must weep,
Though storms be sudden,
and waters deep,
And the harbor bar be moan-
ing."*

The lines drove into her mind again—to mock, and yet to steady her, with the reminder that she was one with all womankind. The poet Kingsley had not had space-going vessels in mind, and there was no harbor bar, this time—unless it were that fringe of atmosphere in which *FR5* had almost foundered. Yet the age-old axiom he had voiced held true on the new frontiers. And she and Jim were

caught up in the ancient dilemma . . .

"Vehicle Eleven, Medical, at the Station, is alerted and ready to receive Chief Maintenance Engineer Loney for immediate attention," continued the radio.

"Mr. Chairman!" Barbara had sprung to her feet. "Can you secure me a berth on this afternoon's Ferry back to the Station?"

"First Priority," agreed the Chairman, picking up his telephone. "No doubt, too, you will want to send a radio?"

FOR SOME moments Barbara—a resigned and defeated though not altogether unhappy Barbara—pondered with pencil in hand over the radiogram form.

MY HERO, she printed, with a wry twist to her mouth. AM RETURNING TODAY'S ROCKET. SEE YOU 1740 HOURS. LOVE. BARBARA.

Yet she signed with a frown, and remained clicking the pencil against her teeth. Somehow it did not quite convey all she wanted to say to him. Then the pencil came back to the paper. She heaved a big sigh.

After RETURNING she inserted the word HOME and passed the message to the waiting operator.