

PLANET STORIES



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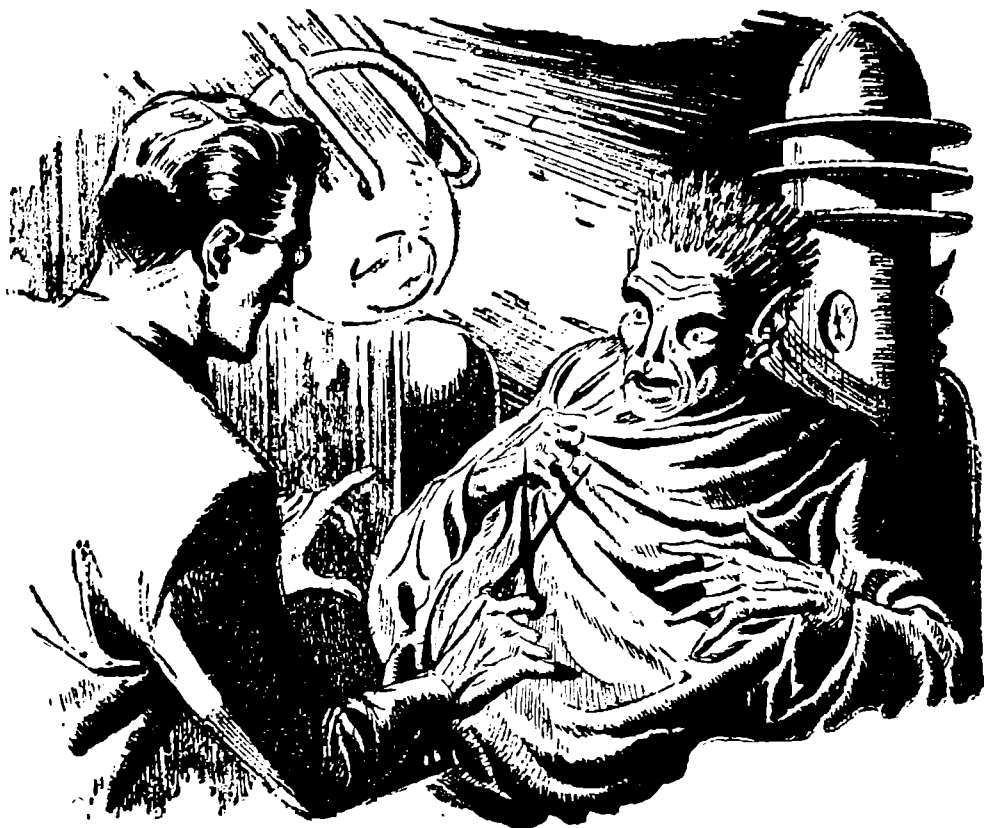
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Goma gave a scream of terrible agony.

GOMA'S FOLLICLES

By JOHN and DOROTHY de COURCY

Illustrated by MARTIN

New planets—new conditions . . . unforeseeable, difficult and dangerous to overcome. Granted. Still, who'd have thought getting a haircut on Procyon IV could be a matter of life and death?

THE *FRANKLIN* WAS the newest and best ship of the Morgan Interstellar Transportation Corporation. It was plain from the Captain's pouter-pigeon stance that he too was aware of this fact. The only jarring note in Captain Webster's mind was the unscheduled stop at Procyon IV. He glanced again at the yellow blank in his hand, his lips moving slightly as he re-read it.

"Captain Webster, Commanding *S. S. Franklin*, enroute to earth. Make contact with Procyon IV. Passenger for earth waiting at Iridium City. Necessary time will be allowed on your schedule. Chief Dispatcher."

Captain Webster crumpled the message into a ball and threw it on the floor.

"Whistle stop!" he growled. His anger was motivated by the fact that he had hoped to set a new record with the *Franklin* and the last thing he desired was time added to his schedule. "If he isn't ready and waiting when we land," the Captain muttered, "he can walk to earth!"

The *Franklin* came out of sub-space drive. The navigator had no difficulty finding Procyon's fourth planet, but it took much studious peering to find the tiny earth colony. It turned out to be a dot about three miles in diameter, a mining settlement. In a few minutes, the giant ship

settled gently into a rickety landing cradle. A spaceman pressed the unlocking studs and the passenger port opened with a hiss. The gangway slid neatly out and made contact with the shaky steps.

With obvious distaste, Captain Webster gathered his dignity about him like a cloak and started across the gangway. His feet had no more than touched the plastic tread when he stopped abruptly. A wild apparition came charging up the stairway, long, unkempt hair streaming in the wind. Down the gangway it ran and propelled the Captain violently backward into his ship.

Puffing and gasping for air, the Captain half lay in the arms of two spacemen who had caught him just before he reached the decking. Nothing of what the Captain said was understandable except the word "outrage" which he repeated often and vigorously.

"Now, now, now, please Captain," the long haired apparition pleaded. "Compose yourself. Don't get excited. I can explain everything. I'm Mr. Thurwinker of the Office of Colonial Development."

"Oh, oh," the Captain grunted. "The OCD, huh?" His anger evaporated and he struggled to his feet trying to look dignified again. "Well—I'm sure—ah—that is—no doubt you have a good reason for your actions, sir—ah—"

"Oh yes, indeed," Mr. Thurwinker replied, hastily, "but I can't stop now. I must impress on you, Captain, the urgency of your ship leaving as soon as possible. Yes, yes it's imperative! And you must remain out of sight. Don't show yourselves under any circumstances! I'll get your passenger now." Without another word, Mr. Thurwinker scurried out of the ship. He turned at the end of the gangway. "Remember Captain, don't let anyone see you. Keep out of sight. Yes indeed, out of sight!"

The open-mouthed Captain watched the OCD man scramble down the steps and reappear a moment later carrying a suitcase. He was followed by another man whose hair was also streaming down over his shoulders. The Captain's mouth sagged open an additional half-inch as the strange looking pair entered the ship.

Mr. Thurwinker set the bag down and

shook hands with his companion. "Good-bye, Mr. Purcell. Have a nice trip home. We all regret seeing you go, yes indeed, regret it very much." He darted out of the ship for the second time. At the end of the gangway, he turned to face the Captain. "Oh yes, Captain. I must tell you! It's imperative—"

"I know!" the Captain roared. "And don't worry, Mr. Thurwinker! We're leaving this asylum immediately!"

Mr. Thurwinker jumped off the gangway as it began to roll into the big ship. He waved cheerily to his friend just before the port closed. The *Franklin* began to lift almost at once.

SAM PURCELL brushed his hair out of his face and extended a friendly hand to the Captain. "How do you do, Captain. I'm Sam Purcell, your new passenger."

Captain Webster stared at the outstretched hand as though it were a specimen from an anatomical laboratory. "Procyon IV's gain is my loss!" he snarled.

As the Captain stomped away, Sam turned his hand over to see if anything was wrong with it. "Unfriendly cuss," he observed to the spaceman beside him.

The spaceman smiled. "Just be thankful he isn't your boss."

Sam nodded. "I see what you mean," he replied.

"Shall I take your bag to your stateroom?" the spaceman asked.

"I'd be much obliged," Sam answered. "Is there a barber on this tub? I want to get rid of this mop as soon as I can."

"Yes sir," the spaceman said. "But wouldn't you like to go to your cabin first?"

Sam smiled. "No. I've been dreaming about this haircut for ages. Just tell me where my cabin is and take me to the barber shop!"

The spaceman nodded and picked up Sam's bag. Sam followed him down the companionway to the barber shop.

"Your stateroom is L-14, sir," the spaceman said. "It's the last cabin on the left at the end of this companionway."

"Thank you," Sam replied as he stepped into the shop.

The barber closed the book he was reading and jumped up. "Yes sir. What can—"

He broke off in mid-sentence and gawked stupidly.

"I don't want a manicure," Sam chuckled as he slid into the chair.

The barber smiled sickly. "Ah—no, of course not," he agreed. He busied himself bundling Sam up in a transparent apron and then stepped back to view his client artistically. "Shall—I take—a little off the top?" he asked, hesitantly.

"Cut it off!" Sam snorted. "I want to look human again!"

The barber set to work chopping off great chunks of hair. Several times he opened his mouth to say something but the situation seemed to him beyond the range of normal conversation.

"I bet you're wondering how I got like this," Sam chuckled.

"Why—yes," the barber murmured. "That thought did occur to me. Ah—I don't suppose—ah—there are many barbers where you come from."

"That's the funny part of it," Sam replied. "We used to have a barber, a darn good one, too. Yup, he was one of the best in the business. I guess that was Roy's trouble. He was too good."

"But—but—how?" the barber interrupted.

"The hair?" Sam asked. "I was coming to that. It all started three years ago when we first landed on Procyon IV. A meteorite had plowed in there some time in the past and that was what were after. The original survey had found fragments of nearly pure iridium in a crater and you know how hard that stuff is to get. The survey figured that the whole meteorite was composed of iridium and, as it turned out, they were right."

"Mr. Thurwinker, the government agent," Sam continued, "started out right away dickering with the natives. It wasn't too hard to do cause they look a lot like us, considering what most of the inhabitants of other planets look like. Anyway, Thurwinker traded off half a ship load of gew-gaws and we got the crater."

"Our supplies started coming in and on the first ship was Roy, the barber. We built up a little town, the typical mining settlement, and got things pretty much underway. It took us about two months to get our soundings all lined up and then we found that the meteorite had struck

the planet at quite an angle. It hadn't gone too far down but it had gone so far to one side that the thing was completely outside the crater. Mr. Thurwinker tried to bargain with the natives for the ground directly over the meteorite, but he didn't get very far. They didn't like him much and I can't say as I blame them. The natives let him know that they wanted to be left alone so we stayed in our little town.

"Well, there wasn't much of anything to do, so most of us just sat around, waiting for Thurwinker to make some kind of a bargain. He finally persuaded the Chief of the natives to talk the situation over with him."

GOMA growled deeply in his barrel chest. "You have land. Why want you more?"

Thurwinker hesitated, trying to phrase the proper answer in Goma's language. "This land not good," he said, pointing to the crater. Then turning, "this land, good. We want good land."

"You cannot have land," Goma replied with classic simplicity.

"I gave you many things for bad land," Thurwinker answered. "I will give you more for good land."

"I not want things," Goma stated. "I keep land."

Thurwinker reverted to English. "My stars! How does the government expect me to bargain with creatures like this! Sometimes I think I was better off in the office. Yes indeed, much better off."

Goma regarded him with a unwinking stare. "You make noise like infant."

Thurwinker's lips compressed a little. "You give us land. We make you Big Chief. Chief of all you see."

"I am now Chief of all I see," Goma said.

Thurwinker made several more suggestions without any sign of success.

Goma stood up. "I go now," he announced.

"But, Chief!" Thurwinker protested.

Goma brushed him aside and strode out of the hut. He was joined by his retinue which closed in about him, rudely shoving Thurwinker to one side. In silence, the procession marched up the street, apparently ignoring everything. They were near-

ly past Roy's barber shop when one of the natives let out a screech and froze with one foot slightly off the ground. The others turned to look through the barber shop window and, as they did, emitted groans, yelps and gasps.

Roy stopped his cutting and looked at the natives. He studied them for a moment and then went back to snipping his customer's hair. As the scissors closed on a lock of hair, a simultaneous groan went up from the assembled natives. The expressions of horror became more and more intense as the man's hair fell to the floor in little tufts. A tall, muscular native quietly fainted. None of the others paid any attention to him. Their eyes were riveted in terrible fascination on the gleaming shears.

Soon the man stepped out of the barber chair and smiled at Roy as he slipped on his jacket. He stopped at the door and stared at the natives curiously. They fell back as he approached and a low mutter ran through the group.

Thurwinker had drifted up sometime during the performance and stood scratching his head. The man looked at Thurwinker with a puzzled frown. "What are they doing here?" he asked.

Thurwinker shrugged. "I don't know."

Low mumbling ran through the group of natives.

"What are they saying?" the man asked.

"They say you are very brave," Thurwinker replied. "They seem to think you're a big hero."

The man shook his head and walked away bewildered.

Thurwinker turned back to the natives and all of them were looking at Goma. Goma glanced from face to face, fingering his shoulder length hair. He shuddered and looked pleadingly at the others. Faint lines of what Thurwinker thought was disgust began to appear on the group of faces.

Thurwinker smiled suddenly. "I think I know what they want," he mumbled to himself. "Chief," he called. "You want—" He paused trying to find the words. Then taking a piece of his own hair, he made cutting motions with his fingers.

Goma's beady eyes dilated and he shook visibly.

"Come," Thurwinker urged, opening the barber shop door.

Hesitantly, Goma took a step forward. "Come," Thurwinker urged again. "It won't hurt." He pointed to himself and asked, "I go first?"

"No!" Goma roared. He thrust Thurwinker aside and galloped to the barber chair. Roy looked questioningly at Thurwinker.

"It's all right," Thurwinker grinned. "Go ahead. This will put them at ease. Maybe this is just the thing we've been looking for. Yes indeed, just the thing. But be careful, Roy. Yes, yes, very careful."

ROY nodded and tried to run a comb through the Chief's matted hair. Each time Goma was touched, he shivered. The other natives watched through the window and shook whenever Goma did. Roy isolated a small section of hair and placing his scissors against the comb, he snipped it off. With a scream of terrible agony, Goma's body convulsed in the chair. He leaped upright, holding his head with one hand while he looked wildly about.

Roy started over to Goma to remove the apron but Goma backed away holding his hands before him as if to ward off a blow. Then he burst through the door and out into the street, running as though the hounds of hell were nipping at his heels. He didn't stop until he reached the brush at the edge of the crater.

The other natives watched him go with disgust. Two of them picked up rocks and threw them after the retreating figure. When Goma was at last out of sight, they assembled themselves in a group again and marched out of town.

Thurwinker watched the procession diminish in the distance. "Well, that's that," he muttered. He turned on Roy. "I told you to be careful!"

"I *was* careful!" Roy protested.

"Apparently you weren't careful enough!" Thurwinker snapped. "I don't know what you did to him, but you sure fixed our chances for getting any land."

"But I tell you I didn't do anything, Mr. Thurwinker," Roy answered hotly. "I hardly even touched him!"

"Well, if I were you, I'd cultivate a lighter touch!" Thurwinker cracked and, without waiting for Roy to reply, he turned and walked out of the shop.

During the next hour, Thurwinker com-



posed twenty-six messages to send back home explaining his failure. Twenty-six messages had been thrown in the wastebasket as unsatisfactory. There really wasn't anything to say. He knew that none of his excuses would be accepted. He was a failure and so he wrote out his resignation. It was a foregone conclusion that the Colonial Office would want it. Thurwinker groaned. He could see himself being held up before the students in the OCD schools as the horrible example.

He was halfway through with what was to be message number twenty-seven when the door opened quietly. Goma stepped in and walked unheard over to Thurwinker's desk.

"I Goma," he mumbled.

"Yaaaaaaaah!" Thurwinker let out a whoop and leaped to the top of his desk, quite convinced that Goma had come to destroy him. "Now, now, now, Chief. Ah—you and I are friends!"

Goma looked at him. "I am not Chief. I am called old female." He looked away from the amazed Thurwinker and sagged into a chair.

"What's the matter, Chief?" Thurwinker asked, climbing down off his desk.

"I am not Chief," Goma replied. "I will be Chief again soon when I . . ." Goma paused and made cutting motions with his fingers.

"You mean, when you get a haircut?" Thurwinker asked.

Goma shivered and said in a small voice, "Yes."

A crafty light came into Thurwinker's eyes. They bargained for half an hour at the end of which time Goma agreed to

give up a very small plot of ground in addition to the crater. It wasn't much, but it was something and Thurwinker accepted.

They arose and walked silently out of the hut. The miners gave the pair curious glances as they strolled up the street. When they reached the barber shop, they found a crowd of natives numbering about one hundred, men, women and children. Goma drew up in front of them imperiously. He stared at them for a full minute and then struck his shoulder with a closed fist in a gesture of bravado. The crowd watched him as he marched up to the barber chair and sat down.

Goma turned to Roy and held up his hand making the cutting motion.

Roy looked at Thurwinker. "Is it all right?"

"Yes, yes indeed! The Chief isn't afraid any more. Go ahead, Roy, but be careful. Yes indeed, very careful!"

Roy cautiously combed out a few strands of hair and holding them gingerly in his hand, he snipped. A groan escaped from between Goma's clenched teeth. Roy hesitated but Goma held up his hand again, making cutting motions. Roy selected a few more strands of hair. As he cut, Goma's breath hissed in sharply and his hands clutched the sides of the chair. On the third cut, Goma's body relaxed and his eyes closed.

Thurwinker rushed to his side. He looked at him for a minute and then ran to the door. "Quick," he said to one of the miners. "Get Dr. Bowen!"

The natives outside began to mutter angrily. Thurwinker dashed back to the barber chair. "Go ahead," he hissed. "Keep cutting! Don't let the natives think anything's gone wrong!"

By the time Dr. Bowen arrived, Goma's hair was neatly trimmed. The Chief was still apparently unconscious and breathing heavily. Dr. Bowen made a hasty examination and then straightened smiling. "It's all right," he said to Thurwinker. "He's only fainted."

THURWINKER heaved a sigh. In a few minutes, Dr. Bowen brought Goma back to consciousness. The Chief stood up but his legs were a little shaky. Shoving away the helping hands, he reeled

toward the open doorway. The native stepped back with looks of awe and reverence. With pride, Goma strode away, the natives following at his heels like obedient and worshipful dogs.

"Now, Thurwinker," Dr. Bowen said, "what's this all about?"

Thurwinker explained the situation while Dr. Bowen listened intently.

"That's funny," the doctor muttered. "He didn't look like much of a coward to me."

"Well, you have to watch these natives carefully," Thurwinker babbled. "You never know what they're going to do next. Goma insisted on getting a haircut and I thought it was a good opportunity to get the land we need."

The doctor stirred a tuft of Goma's hair with the toe of his boot. "Just the same, Thurwinker, you may get into trouble over this. We want that land, but not if there's a war. You know what the Colonial Office would say if trouble started." The doctor bent over and picked up the bit of hair. "Hmmm. I wonder if this could be the reason."

"Reason for what?" Thurwinker asked.

"I don't know," Dr. Bowen replied, "but I'll make some tests." He dropped the hair into his bag. "If I find out anything, I'll let you know," he called as he started for the door, "and I advise you, Thurwinker, to stay out of trouble."

Thurwinker nearly wore a groove in the floor with his pacing. He was a nervous wreck by the time Dr. Bowen arrived. He practically jumped on him as he came in the door. "Now, doctor! What have you been doing? What kind of tests were you talking about and why all this mystery?"

"Calm down, Thurwinker," Dr. Bowen soothed. "There isn't any mystery—at least, not any more."

"What do you mean?" Thurwinker demanded.

"I mean, you've been misled by the appearance of the natives. They look like us except for that light orange color, but they've got at least one fundamental difference. That stuff on their heads isn't exactly hair."

"What!" Thurwinker exploded. "What is it, then? It looks like hair!"

"Under the microscope, there's quite a difference," Dr. Bowen explained. "It has



a hard covering just like our hair, the center is hollow and contains a little fluid, but floating in this fluid is a nerve."

"A what!"

"A nerve," the doctor answered, "just like in our teeth. I rather imagine their hair is some kind of a sensory organ. I don't know what kind, but I'm sending a sample back home and maybe they can find out."

Thurwinker was stunned. "You mean—it hurts—to have their hair cut?"

"It's just like pulling teeth," Bowen chuckled, "without an anesthetic!"

"Oh, no!" Thurwinker groaned. "What have I done!" He paced the floor again and stopped suddenly. "Still, we've got some land to work with. Yes, maybe it'll be all right after all."

But it wasn't all right. The engineers informed Thurwinker that they had to have more shafts. "You just can't drill through iridium!" they complained.

Thurwinker shrugged his shoulders and resolutely set off to find Goma, but Goma had disappeared and none of the natives knew where he had gone. It was useless to try to bargain with them. Because of his haircut, Goma was absolute Chief now. Thurwinker came back to the crater after fruitlessly searching the surrounding country for six days. He opened the door of his hut and plunked himself resignedly down at his desk.

At that moment there came a thump on the door. Thurwinker arose and opened it. There stood Goma looking more down in the mouth than the last time he had visited Thurwinker. Thurwinker stuffed the resignation into his pocket and guided

Goma into the hut. "I am glad to see you, Goma!" Thurwinker exploded. "Yes indeed, very glad."

Goma didn't understand the words, but he knew from the expression on Thurwinker's face that he was welcome.

"I want to see you," Thurwinker began in Goma's tongue. "I want more land."

Goma stared at him sadly. "I keep land. You bad man."

"Huh?" Thurwinker asked, incredulously.

"Look." Goma pointed to his hair. "It grow. When the people see it grow they will not let me be Chief any more."

"You mean—you want another—"

"No!" Goma roared. He shuddered. "Not want haircut!"

"Well, what *do* you want, Chief?" Thurwinker asked, puzzled.

"I am Chief. I am brave. Bad man hurt me. People say I am not brave. I am not Chief any more. I am brave. I let bad man torture me. I am Big Chief." Again he pointed to his hair. "It grow. People soon see it grow and I will not be Chief unless I get haircut again."

"Oh," Thurwinker nodded. "When your hairs grows out you'll have to get another haircut or you won't be Chief. Is that it?"

"Yes," Goma mumbled. There was a silence. Then Goma asked, "Other—people—cut hair?"

"No," Thurwinker informed. "Just bar-ber."

"Bar-ber." Goma turned the unfamiliar word around on his tongue. "Bar-ber. I will fix," he grunted. "I kill bar-ber." He arose and started for the door.

"No, no, no! Wait, wait!" Thurwinker jumped to block Goma's way. After much persuasion, he got Goma back into his chair again. "Big Chief," he said, slowly. "You are right. Bar-ber is very bad man."

It was obvious that Goma agreed. "I kill?" he suggested, hopefully.

"No, no," Thurwinker replied, craftily. "You can not kill."

This puzzled Goma. "I can not kill?" he asked.

"No. Bar-ber would cut hair."

Goma closed his eyes and shook. "I can not kill," he agreed.

"Maybe bar-ber go away?" Thurwinker suggested. "Far away?"

Goma's eyes brightened. "You can make bar-ber go away?"

"Yes," Thurwinker said, triumphantly. "If you give land, I make bar-ber go away."

"Other bar-ber come?" Goma asked.

"No."

"Bar-ber go away. No more cut hair. I will still be Big Chief, but will not have hair cut. I will give land." Goma arose and marched out of the hut. He was his old, imperial self again.

THE ship's barber whipped the apron off Sam Purcell. "There, I cut hair. I mean, it's all done."

Sam glanced in a mirror. "Yup, and a good job too." He stood up and reached for his jacket. "Well, that's about all there was to the affair," Sam continued. "Thurwinker let the word leak out to the natives that Goma had captured Roy. This made Goma a bigger hero than ever. We marched Roy down to the first transport that came in as if he was a prisoner and kept our guns ready until they took off just to impress the natives. Of course, we had to let our hair grow but we got the iridium and that's what we were after. Just as long as the natives don't see anyone with a haircut, everything will be fine."

The barber laughed. "I wouldn't have believed your story if I hadn't seen your hair."

As Sam prepared to go, Captain Webster entered the barber shop and stared at Sam. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he asked.

"Maybe," Sam admitted with a hostile stare. "I'm one of your passengers, if that'll help you any."

"Of course," Captain Webster chuckled. "I don't believe I got your name, though."

"Purcell," Sam replied. "Sam Purcell."

"Well, well!" Captain Webster replied, jovially. "I'm certainly glad to meet you, Mr. Purcell. Webster's the name." He extended a plump hand to Sam.

Sam looked at the hand as though it were slightly decayed and walked out.