

THIRTY-TWO ADDITIONAL PAGES IN THIS ISSUE!

# THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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## Featured Complete Novelet



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By LEIGH BRACKETT

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***Roses are red,***

***Violets are blue—***

***The robots are lovely,***

***And so are you!***

**T**HE *Starling* skidded down out of space toward Mars. It was the first ship ever to reach Mars.

It was the first man-made and Lunar-Base-constructed spaceship ever designed to reach Mars! It was the first attempt, and the first leg of that first attempt looked successful. They were getting where they had to go.

Now all they had to do was once around the wheelhouse and get back!

It was a long, gleaming, torpedo-shaped craft, fully one thousand feet of compact, completely attuned technology from stem to stern—twenty-five hundred Earthweight tons of it. It had taken the short trip, when Mars

was adjacent on her orbit to Earth, and had taken six months of accelerating, gliding through space, gyroing around heads-to-tails, and decelerating.

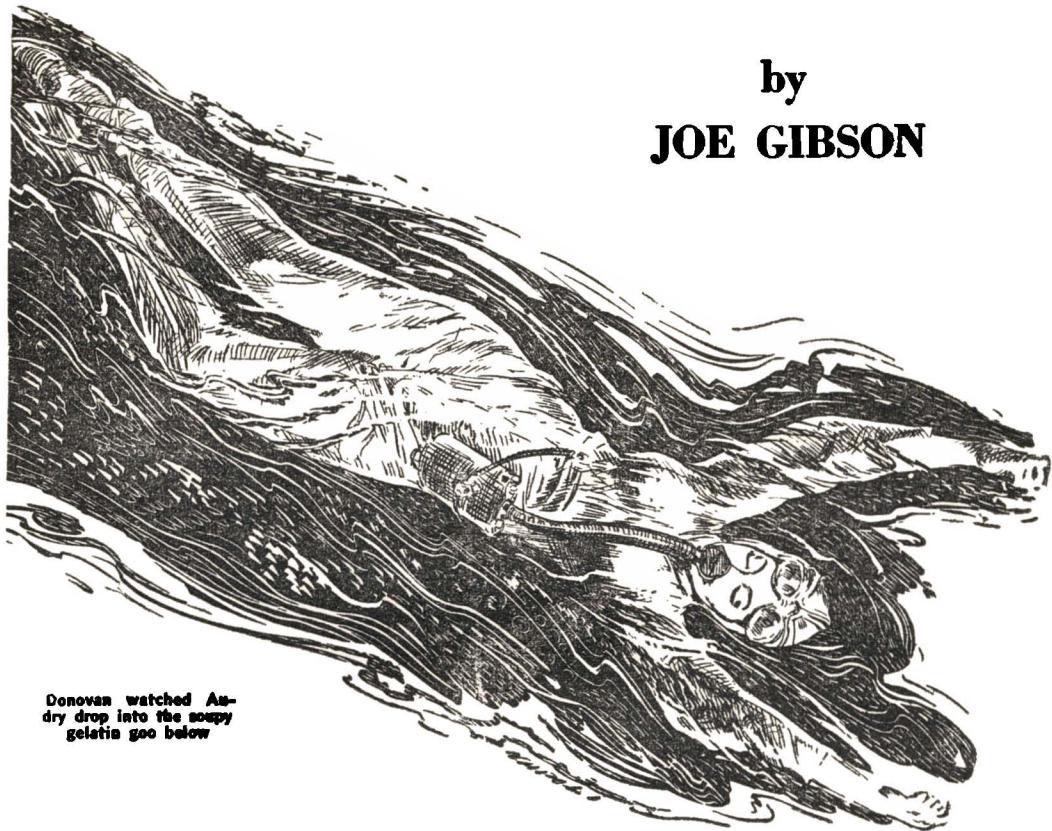
A second object also was dropping toward Mars, now, ahead of the ship as she barrelled along her orbit, sliding past her and feeling the heavy tug of her gravitational field, to assist them in a swinging, cometlike trajectory back around and upward—Sunward—toward Earth. The object came trailing down out of the star-sprinkled heavens like a long, slender needle, its tail jets spewing feathery blue streamers of blazingly raw energy ahead of it—decelerating—slowing—

And the radar alarm set up a ringing, in-

**When Their Rocket Ship Crashes, Chazz and Audry**

# "I Like You, Too—"

by  
**JOE GIBSON**



Donovan watched As-  
dry drop into the soupy  
gelatin goo below

sistent clangor through the gleaming catacombs within! Meteor!

Jennings, the eight-to-four watch pilot and ship's space jockey, was on the bridge. He saw the meteor coming and he knew what to do. Or he should have known—

Automatically, the meteor's trajectory was recorded and computed against the ship's trajectory. Automatically, direct interception was registered. It was a meteor, not a meteorite. It was heavy. Carefully, various jets were dampered—just the slightest. The *Starling* swerved on its course, a long, curved line in space. Completely automatic.

They plunged toward Mars!

Evans rode as eight-to-four astronaut.

This wasn't his domain. This was "approach," not space trajectory. So he manned the speakers, shouting the emergency through the cramped compartments and narrow ladderwells to the ship's personnel:

"Our nucleonic field simply could not take a 'head-on' with that meteor without drastically, fatally, shoving the ship off course! We're plunging into Mars—we'll have to! Jennings has a reckoning on our trajectory, now. We'll skim Mars! Smack through the atmosphere and on out into space! Looks like our only chance—velocity ten times too high for landing, and Jennings believes our nucleonic field can take that atmospheric pressure while it can't take the meteor! But

**Find Out If It's True What They Say About Mars!**

it's going to be close and it's going to be hot outside! Jennings says to hang onto your hats."

CHARLES DONOVAN rolled off his bunk and slithered onto the cold metal deck. He was on four-to-twelve watch, and had been sleeping fitfully in his shorts in the hot air of his tiny cubicle and the laboring drag of 3-g deceleration. Now they were doing 5 g's!

He crawled painfully across the gleaming metal, gasping for breath with each effort to lift his 750-pound bulk and shove it along the deck. Gradually, he made his way to the round, open valve leading into the ladderwell. He stared out at the wide metal rungs in desperation, breath wheezing through his lips beneath the snug emergency oxygen mask that cupped against his nose. Didn't that fool Jennings know beans?

Jennings knew, and acted—finally—like a balky motorist in heavy downtown traffic. It was much against his hard-earned training as space jockey, but this case was different. They weren't landing—they couldn't! They were taking a slice out of the planet's atmosphere—an incredibly hot slice!

The sooner they got through it, the better. He cut deceleration. The jets' bluish fire dimmed. Thrust dropped from 5 g's to one! They seemed to spurt straight down toward the planet like a bullet from some godly rifle! He had to fight his every instinct to keep from slamming the jets on again, full-thrust.

Donovan winced as his insides heaved sickeningly within him. Then his vision cleared and his breathing became more regular, deeper. With a thankful sigh he climbed to his feet. He grasped the side of the open valve, swung out into the ladderwell, and began climbing.

Audry Gilgannen lifted herself painfully from her bunk and staggered to the wash basin. Confound Jennings anyway, changing thrust from 3 g's to five to one, without warning! She opened the faucet, let the water run into her palm, and dashed it against her blood-streaked nose.

Emergency, eh? They might need her forward. Williams and Carol knew their radar, but they weren't such a good team. She wiped her face with her hands, stumbled back to the bunk to grab her nose mask from its hook, and pulled its rubber straps over her soft brunette hair, clamping its tube to the airtank on her belt.

She buttoned the valve-lock into its slot and stepped into the corridor. Her trim coverall whispered around her legs as she strode toward the ladderwell. It fitted her nicely, hugged her curves, and it was a relief not to have it crawling up her in free-fall or dragging like a suit of armor.

Then she saw Donovan, climbing up the ladderwell rungs ahead of her. Clad only in brief jockey shorts and nose mask and ascending as though the Devil were after him! Her curiosity mingled with amusement, she swung into the ladderwell and followed.

The great red globe of Mars rolled ponderously toward them. Downward they shot, skimming out from the star-studded blackness like a needle into the proverbial haystack. Their jets breathed a blue-hot wash into the void before them.

Donovan climbed upward frenziedly, sweat trickling down his bare, tanned skin. One g! Why one g? Was Jennings crazy? Why didn't they go free-fall?

And suddenly he knew! Jennings knew, too! He was just hoping—probably praying that his space jockey's instinct wouldn't turn loose of that one-g deceleration! That might spell the difference between life and death. Donovan scrambled upward with a renewed vigor.

Below him, Audry shook her lovely head in bewilderment, and mounted faster. It all seemed so curious.

The *Starling* skimmed into Mars' atmosphere like a white-hot beacon. Waves of intense fire boiled around her, but away from her, in a blazing cone against her nucleonic field. Like a flaming white comet, she shot down into the Martian sky.

Weight remained the same, one gravity, straight toward the tail jets. Their velocity was too swift to feel more than a slight, tinging uneasiness from the planet's gravitational drag.

DONOVAN swung out of the ladderwell with an explosive sigh. He staggered across the narrow deck toward a bulging outer bulkhead, dodging around the compact pump mechanisms with their protruding banks of dials and thermostats. He reached the steps, climbed up them to the top of the bulkhead, and tackled the dogs on a round metal cap. Gulping great lungfuls of air, he heaved the cap off its mouth, dropping it back on its hinges with a loud, metallic clang.

And stared downward.

There hadn't been time to warn the others—

He stared down into the vast water tank. It was a "water" tank almost in name only. It was filled with a thick, gelatinlike stuff. When it was run through the pumps and heated, it stretched three ways from Sunday and came out a thin, syrupy liquid. He had another name for it—"goo"! But it was the best the biochemists could do.

The sudden clatter of magnetic boots brought him around. Audry Gilgannen stood below him, gazing up at him with her full lips curved in an impish grin. He squatted on the round hump of the bulkhead, his near-naked body glistening with sweat and his eyes staring at her wildy from beneath his tousled, raven-black hair. She gurgled a soft, mocking laugh.

He thought, Thank God at least one more of us is safe!

"Get up here quick!" he snapped.

"Why?" she called back teasingly. "What on Earth are you doing, Chazz?"

He scrambled back on the steps and swung grimly down to her. "This isn't Earth and there's but little time. I said get up there!"

"Charley!" She backed away, slightly. "Whatever are you doing? We're in an emergency, Charley—an *emergency!* Do you understand?"

Give a woman a string of college degrees and that's what you get! Donovan pressed his lips together tightly, stepped forward in a lithe, pantherlike motion.

He was a spatial engineer. Being a spatial engineer meant you were something between a star-blessed sorcerer and a rule-of-thumb nuclear physicist. He had gotten his training from a neurotic old graybeard out at the old Lunar Atomic Warfare Base before interplanetary flight had even been heard of by the United Nations. His fist connected with the point of her small, pert chin and she spread-eagled out on the hard metal deck. *Splat-splat!*

He grasped her wrists together, heaved her up on his back, and carried her back up the steps. Laying her beside the open metal mouth, he snapped on her air tank. Then he picked her up, shoved her over the side, and watched her drop into the soupy gelatin goo below.

His hand grasped the screw on his own air tank, twisted it open, and he dropped his legs over the mouth's edge. Quick reflection

turned his gaze toward the small speaker bolted against the ceiling nearby. Then he ducked his head, shoved, and hurtled downward.

The shrill, piping scream of the Geigers rattled from the speaker, stinging his ear-drums an instant before the goo closed over his head.

The power unit of the gigantic vessel was little more than an unmoderated atomic pile. Pu-239. It kicked the fuel out of the jets in a raw, blazing byproduct of energy. It powered the intense nucleonic field.

They struck the planet's atmosphere at a velocity which likened it to shoving a cold bar through hard rock. The rock got hot—incredibly hot—but in this instant the bar didn't melt. The nucleonic field took the punishment. But a nucleonic field takes only so much.

The field is, basically, no more than a microwave projection of the nuclear reaction of the pile. It came out radiation and it came out heat. Meteorites, cosmic dust, small particles didn't have much chance. As in a Heaviside layer, they volatilized. Bigger stuff could be detected—and dodged. A planet's atmosphere was thick—definitely thick at the velocity they were traveling—but it also had a high degree of dispersion. It grew hot—and the nucleonic field lashed back at the heat with more heat of its own, plus a strong radiation pressure. It could take that.

But they were "passing" on the "forward" side of Mars! The planet was rolling toward them—and a planet's orbital velocity is something to reckon with. They not only skimmed through the atmosphere—they skimmed the *surface* of the planet. That, the field couldn't take! It backlashed!

A projection of nuclear energy is, considerably, just a lot more nuclear energy. It backlashed into the pile, or toward the pile, with much the same effect as if another hunk of Pu-239 was dropped on the fire. The exponential curve of the reaction head for Pluto. Things got hot. Things volatilized—especially the pile! But it wasn't a case of dispersion into maximum volume at minimum concentration and distillation. This was a spaceship, not Earth. The volatilized Pu-239 built up pressure. There wasn't a nuclear explosion. But it exploded.

The fuel tanks—great drums of frozen hydrogen behind the jets—exploded.

All Hell exploded.

They stopped.

**D**IMENSIONS of the *Starling* were gigantic. The hull was one thousand feet long and the water tank stretched through five hundred feet of that. Eighty-three fathoms. Goo!

Blood stopped slamming against Donovan's temples. There was a hard, rough surface under his fingertips. Like rock. It was rock!

He pushed himself upward in the thick muck. He kept his eyes closed, tightly. His hand brushed against something soft, smooth—warm. Breath whistled into his nose mask with a sigh of gratitude. He felt slowly—leaning over in the thick soup—along a slender form, brushed a shoulder, followed it out along an arm.

He grasped it. He pushed his way forward, hand outstretched. He touched a wall. He plowed along it, touched ladder rungs. He dragged the still form up against him, slid his arm down around its waist before it could keel over in the muck. He began climbing, one-handed.

He climbed for centuries until he reached the deck.

After a while Audry Gilgannen stirred, moaned, and sat up on the deck. Her head spun dizzily and her nose felt tender, like a knob of raw beef. A pert and attractive knob, to be sure. But still like raw beef. She unglued her eyelids and stared about in a dazed way.

They were still in the pump room. Pump room! The thought tickled her and she laughed. Good old humor, back after all. But what had happened?

Donovan stood over her, bare feet spread apart, gazing down at her. It wasn't a nice way to gaze at any girl, and something tightened inside her. His eyes were hard, cold gimlets in hollow sockets, and his face, square, tanned, handsome, was deeply cut with enough lines to advertise eighty years of hard living! Then, as she stared up at him, her expression changed slowly from dazed horror to puzzled, tense shock.

It—it couldn't be—she couldn't be that dissatisfying! It couldn't be that bad—for him! Not for him to look like *that*! It was—it must be—*something else*!

Then she noticed that his naked chest was streaked with blood. Blood was dropping from his nose.

"Hi!" he said. "You feel all right now?" She moved her lips with effort. "What—" "You were out for a while. Morphine."

He turned, and strode over to a squat pump cylinder. He turned back, and sat down. "We were lucky," he said. "No internal hemorrhages."

"Wh-whu-what ha-happened?" she repeated. Her nose stung fiercely.

"We crashed on Mars," he said.

She stared at him, her mouth gaping open, quivering. "The others? Were they saved?"

He shook his head slowly. "Nobody. Just us."

She stared at him.

Just us!

Then, as memory and realization dawned feebly she jerked her head around toward the round bulge of the bulkhead. At the wrinkled, twisted bulkhead and the warped steps. And the wet, glistening, sticky trail that led from the open metal hole down the steps and across the buckled deck to where she lay. Gradually, then swiftly, the harsh realization mounted within her.

She pillowied her head in her arms on the cold metal deck and wept.

He kept her moving and working. That was all he could do. The ship was a total wreck. There was little more than a third of the hull remaining, and that had buckled beams and cracked bulkheads. The seams were leaking air. All intricate, fragile mechanism, or almost all of it, was a mess. There were other messes of wet blood and splintered bone and—and smell.

They checked air. They closed off badly leaking compartments. They checked supplies. Foodstuffs, for the most part, were stored just forward of amidships. There had been a crew of twenty, supplies for a fifteen-month cruise through space. He made her list what they found, add it up, and calculate how long it would last them. They could eat for three years!

**T**HEY checked equipment. Most of the electronic control and lab apparatus was forward near the bridge in the ship's nose. They had all that. A lot of it was good scrap. But there were tubes in storage and a good deal of the equipment, while fragile, had withstood the crash with simple, yielding, tensile strength. Radar seemed intact, which was a miracle. Space radio was gone. The nucleonic field control mechanism simply had ceased to exist. They had spectro equipment and pressure suits and enough of the analytical labs and machine shop to fashion about anything else they needed.

But there wasn't much tanked oxygen!  
"We need air, and we haven't got it!" Donovan mused apprehensively. They stood in the twilight hush of the bridge. The huge scanner screens loomed before them, cracked, broken. "We'll have to save all the air we've got, as much as possible. We might—just might—find a way to purify it and use it again."

"Fine chance," Audry snapped bitterly.

"Transmutation," he replied, grinning down at her. "I'm a spatial engineer, remember? Nucleonic stuff. We still have the power units in the nose jets."

"Darned little that is!" She swung about and stamped toward the yawning valve entrance. "You'll need equipment, mister, and plenty of it! Going to mail-order Earth for it?"

He padded after her on his bare feet. "We've still got to save air. These seams are leaking like a sieve, Audry. We'll have to find some way to seal 'em up."

She turned back to him impatiently. "Better list that on your mail-order, too." Her voice shook, ever so slightly. "But then you're the Robinson Crusoe, aren't you? I'm just your Man Friday!"

His grin returned. At her, you *had* to grin! "Don't underrate yourself. Why do you think I dumped you into the water tank with me, *hmmmm!*?"

Her eyes widened at that, and some mischievous imp seemed to dance in them.

"Do you know what I thought," she asked seriously, "when I woke up back there?"

He frowned. "Uh-uh. What?"

"Never mind." She turned quickly, stepping through the valve.

She pulled at her coverall. It clung to the supple curves of her body, stickily.

"I need a bath!" she commented absently. "Oh, how I could use a bath!"

"Not in the water I drink!" he called after her. She looked back over her shoulder and wrinkled her nose at him, and wished she hadn't. Her nose was still sore.

"In here!" Donovan called, grasping her shoulder and steering her into a compartment.

He led the way over to the wall cabinets, which had torn loose from their fastenings and were lying on the deck. He unsnapped one, opened it, and pulled out a pressure suit.

"Climb into this and I'll adjust it."

"You climb into it and I'll adjust it," she

shot back at him. "I'm not taking off my clothes."

He looked up with such an expression of incredulous surprise that she couldn't help laughing.

"All right, Charley," she gasped mirthfully, "step outside and I'll wriggle into the thing!"

The pressure suits were like thick, cumbersome second-skins of metal mesh and rubbery lining. They kept body pressure from expanding in vacuum or near-vacuum conditions. Mars' atmosphere was thin. A thick quartzite shell fitted over their heads, fastening by step-down clamps to their shoulders. Bulky tanks on their backs held air. They looked like two oversized figures in long metal underwear, but Audry was still noticeably tantalizing.

They shuffled through the remaining forward airlock and crawled outside.

The ship towered like a protruding thumb from a vast, rolling desert of fine, sifting, yellow sand. Its broken, smashed end was buried deeply, its pointed nose rising gauntly against the dim, red sky. The hull was a crisp, sooty black.

They had the hour-hand on their wrist chronometers for compasses and the tiny white-hot ball of the Sun for reference. It was presumably some hour of mid-morning.

**H**E HAD no sextant, but Donovan had learned previously that Mars was in its Spring-Autumnal season. He could check the Sun at midday and figure their general "longitude" by dead reckoning. He said as much to Audry, standing silently beside him. His voice sounded flat in his earphones. He gazed blankly at the broad, flat yellow plain around them.

But it dipped, seemingly, into a sort of valley off to the east of them! He thought fleetingly about mirages—but no, there wasn't enough moisture in this air to wet the back of a stamp!

They struck off toward the "valley," plodding doggedly along in the ankle-deep sand. They talked—and walked—

And stood, stunned!

It was a canal. But what a canal! Straight down from their feet for a full fifteen miles its sheer wall dropped. Not a crack, not a blemish, not a scar of erosion. Straight down.

And on the canal floor below were straggling patches of green. And something flat

could be seen segregated into narrow, winding strips which twisted and snaked through the patches. Like a highway!

Audry's voice shrilled in his earphones. "Charley—Martians!"

He just stood still and breathed, deeply, until it sank in. Then, "We've got to get down there. How?"

She was pointing suddenly. "Over there! Look—a tower! Up the wall. Perhaps an elevator or—or a watch tower!"

"Watch for what?" he asked. But then he was leaping after her, running nimbly along the wide, hard-surfaced wall of the canal—running easily in the slight gravitation.

It was a tower, all right, and there was something that looked like an elevator shaft. And stairs. Winding down, down an open stairwell for fifteen miles. The rooms were bare, empty chambers, constructed seemingly of some hard-baked porcelain. It was smooth, polished, and there were sand drifts in all the rooms, sometimes three feet deep. It looked—deserted.

Donovan shook his head. "Dead world!" "What?"

"Dead world," he repeated. "Dead civilization. Stories written about it—"

"You read too much! Let's get down there!"

Fifteen miles of winding stairway. Downward. Donovan thought, often, of the climb back upward. But gravity was less than Earth's. And there was the winding ribbon of the "highway" below, beckoning. And the thought of leaking seams and meager supplies of oxygen. Downward. Fifteen miles.

They reached the "highway," if it were a highway. Each ribbon was wider than they had thought, a good 3000 feet wide. Each ribbon was separated from the other by a low, narrow wall. They were made of some rubberlike substance, but hard, cracked. Dried up.

It was past noon. Donovan looked at the Sun. Darned near the Equator, he guessed. Summer. They checked their air tanks.

"We've got enough for a good forty-eight hours," Donovan said. "Martian day is around twenty-four hours long, so our chronometers will be fairly close on that. Let's follow this road."

They followed its winding course down the canal. Twenty-five miles wide, the canal floor was the same fine yellow sand as the upper desert. Darker maybe. Almost brown.

Scattered clumps of green, leafy shrubs crouched on the gritty soil. The "highway" was the only hard surface on the floor. They followed it for miles.

The sky was darkening when they came to the city. Turning a deep, shaded red. Fading from scarlet to crimson to dark, blackish maroon. Like blood from an intestinal wound.

Tall, polished, slender towers, gleaming in the sunset. Thousands of them, crammed into a vast bowl carved into the surface of the planet. Three great canals converged upon it.

Deserted.

They wandered along the ghostly, echoing streets as twilight broke across the sky. A great red blanket seemed to roll away and the sky turned a smoky, dense black. Then faded before a soft, pale light, and the stars came through in a sparkling flood. And they found machines.

**C**ARS, obviously. Small, three-wheeled affairs, flat and streamlined. Elfin lamp-posts along the corners. Plate glass windows staring blankly, emptily. Plentiful, machined metals and hard plastics; very little that even resembled wood. Nothing broken. Nothing damaged. Just deserted.

They halted in the stygian darkness, somewhere in the center of that vast metropolis, and suddenly, nervously began to wonder where they were.

Lost!

Donovan sat down on a curb, leaned back against a slender lamppost, and grinned up faintly from within his helmet.

"Sit down and rest awhile," he ordered wearily. "My dogs are killing me."

"But Charley!" Her voice edged on hysteria.

"Sit down," he spoke sharply, "before you fall down!"

She sat down on the curb and huddled next to him, her eyes darting fearfully about the night-swallowed street. Starlight picked them out dimly in what appeared to be a long, black canyon.

"This dump has me vexed," he admitted casually. "Did you notice those super-deluxe jobs back there?"

"What—"

"Those hopped-up and sleek-lined Rolls Royces we've seen over-parking all over the place," he drawled quietly. "Did you look in 'em?"

She looked up, grinning. "I think I'm going to like you after all, Charles Donovan!"

He looked back. "Ahhh—what I wouldn't give for a cigarette right now! But did you look in 'em?"

"Y-y-yes. The cushions had decomposed. Just the frames on the seats. Anything else?"

"No controls."

She gasped. "No steering wheels!"

"No steering wheels, no gearshift, no pedals. No instruments, no dashboard clocks, no cigarette lighters. I wish I had a smoke!"

She giggled. "I am going to like you! But did you notice that none of the doors have handles or knobs or buttons, and there haven't been any wires or cables of any sort anywhere?"

"Yeah. Vexing."

"Am I?"

"Later, baby. This is upsetting."

She giggled again. "Okay, Mr. Spatial Engineer. So they don't drive their cars. They just climb in and go where the car wants to go!"

"I don't know—What's that?"

Something—*something*—was grinding and squeaking and trundling down the street toward them!

**L**IKE a flash they were on their feet, stumbling back across the curb until they were flat against the building, clinging to each other. Or—or was it on the sidewalk, coming after them? Donovan stared into the darkness as hot beads of sweat broke on his forehead. Light! If they only had light—

They had light!

A squat, turtle-backed machine rolled down the street on its three tiny wheels, lifted its front apron and climbed up on the sidewalk, and rolled up in front of them. It flicked open a panel on its rounded metal top and a long, jointed arm snaked out toward them. The arm stopped, poised directly before Donovan's helmet.

And in its jointed metal digits was—a cigarette!

Made to order. Everything. The elfin street lamps glowed brightly along the street. The little robot machine squatted complacently before them, holding out the cigarette.

Donovan stared at it. He moved his lips. No sound. Then he grinned, and a curious flame began flickering in his eyes.

"Not now, thanks," he said casually.

The arm retreated into the metal shell, the

panel clicked shut, and the disgruntled little robot sung off the sidewalk and went trundling, squeaking on back down the street.

"Pinch me!" Audry's voice suddenly squawked in his earphones.

"Now, look here—"

"I said pinch me!"

He pinched. Through the thick layers of the pressure suit it was quite a job. It was also quite a pinch. Audry yelled.

"Stop! All right, I'm not dreaming!" But she still clung to him. "Charley darling, if we're going mad, I think this is wonderful."

"Repeat!"

Her helmet clicked against his and her voice came through. "I think this is wonderful."

"We got light."

"So we have. And you got your cigarette." She wriggled free, then. "But I'll bet I can think of something that'll have em—"

"Don't!"

His sharp tone made her tense. "Charley, what is it—"

"I think I know," he said slowly. "Psychomechanics!"

"You mean—they controlled them by thought?"

He nodded. "You know what that means? That means a civilization—"

"Far greater than ours—" she finished, murmuring. There was awe in her tones. "Charley, where did they all go?"

"I don't know. Maybe something happened. They apparently had quite a social order, to have all this. Everything at the tip of their minds! Everything at the slightest desire. Food, clothes, luxury. Nobody could have been needy! Civilization. Then something happened. Maybe all thought stopped!"

She was back in his arms. "Charley, please. Not that! Say something else."

He held her close, gazing down at her. "I'd like to take you for a long, moonlight ride—"

It was just a faint murmur. He waited. Then added, insistently, "On a Greyhound bus!"

And it came!

They were hugging each other and laughing as the monstrous vehicle rumbled up and stopped at the curb beside them. It wasn't a bus, but it was probably as near and as big as the Martians could come to those specifications. It was, actually, a giant, open-topped moving van.

"Once around the park, Jeeves!" The thought bounced gleefully into his mind as he shoved Audry toward the van. It waited patiently until they had clambored up to the seats, squatting on the low metal frames that had once boasted cushions. Then it was off.

Audry gasped in surprise. "Where's it taking us?"

Donovan told her.

THEY rode through a park, somewhere in the midst of the great city. They rode through the streets until dawn. Everywhere they went, they wished the lights on, until the entire metropolis seemed alive with light. They gazed up at the dark, mute towers—and wished lights to appear scatteringly up their steep walls. Lights appeared.

"Like lamplighting along old Broadway!" Donovan howled joyously. It was fun!

They entered buildings through obligingly opening doors, ascended obliging lifts into the towers, explored offices, apartments, stores. They imagined all the vast, glittering wealth that must once have existed.

Dawn peeped over the lip of the great, deep cup of the city.

"I wonder where it gets its power!" Donovan gazed back at the wide bed of the van as it swung gaily along the avenue. He turned back to Audry, seated beside him, with a frown.

The van swung off into a wide boulevard. Ahead of them, the street separated, curving out around what seemed to be a large, gaping hole. The van rolled up to the wall at its edge and stopped. They stared downward into a deep shaft that seemingly vanished into the very bowels of the planet. Great tubes sprouted from the walls and plunged downward out of sight. Faint, white streamers of steam wafted upward.

"Steam!" Donovan snorted with disgust. "Steam for power. And maybe transmission on a communal power-wave system similar to ours. Only we use nucleonics and nuclear energy."

"Charles!"

He jerked back, startled.

"Chazz that's it!" Her voice was alight with sudden inspiration. "I knew there was something missing! No engines, no power units—just masses of electronic tubing. Nothing recognizable as a mesonic transformer or atomic plant anywhere! Chazz, they didn't have nuclear energy!"

"Lucky for us!" Donovan mused wryly.

"As it is, we came here!"

"Maybe."

"Something else I've noticed, cupcake. They didn't have television—or even radio! Remember the apartments? No sets!"

"Do you suppose—" Then she was staring, with suddenly bright gaze, across the great chasm. "Look! Isn't that a resort of some sort? It—it looks like a *pool*!"

Donovan swung his gaze to follow hers. It did look like a resort! Take Earth standards, apply them to a low, sprawling, five-story structure amidst rolling lawns and a wire-fenced court and a rectangular hole between tile-flagged walks and what do you get?

Pool! Lawns! On Mars?

"Get over there!" he yelled to the van. But it was already moving.

"Do you suppose it isn't harmful?" Audry stared, aghast, as cool, green water gurgled into the pool.

"Distilled from volcanic gasses, maybe," Donovan ventured. "Apparently they've got grass somewhere on Mars, too. Maybe in the 'seas.' These lawns—" He turned toward them, toward the streamlined villa rising before them. "I'm going to have a look around!"

He stalked off purposefully. Audry remained by the pool, staring wistfully at the cool, green water lapping at its sides. Donovan vanished through the wide doorway of a sun porch.

Moments later, she turned to gaze about her warily. She glanced back at the villa, then at the pool, now full. She glanced at the doorway where Donovan had disappeared. Then she glanced down at the fastenings to her quartzite helmet and frowned with disgust.

Something came flying out of the air and struck her helmet. She had a fleeting glimpse of a chunk of reddish stone and pieces of quartzite sailing past her head and then she was tumbling, head over heels, into the lapping green water.

Donovan came tearing out of the villa as her howls rent the air. He could barely hear them through his helmet and it didn't occur to him in the slightest that they were hers. But somebody was howling!

Then he saw her, in the pool, struggling in the water. Her broken helmet was visible on the bottom of the pool, beneath her. She was fighting out of the last folds of her pressure suit, thrashing nudely in the clear

green water, gasping and gurgling as her head went under, shrieking like a banshee when it came up.

"Chazz—Chazz! Get that mean rock thrower—" Blub!

He flipped open the speaker on his helmet and yelled. "Audry! The air! Your helmet is gone."

**S**HE wrung free of the last vestiges of garment, dog-paddling on the surface of the pool, and her face was flushed with anger. "Air be hanged! You go catch the dirty skunk who smashed my helmet! He nearly scared the wits out of me!"

Donovan stared, speechless. Then he sat down and, in spite of the lovely, pink nymph treading water so delightfully before him, roared with laughter.

She came up out of the pool like an avenging angel, stalked grimly over to him and hauled off and kicked him squarely in his padded chest. He fell back on his airtanks, gasping.

"Audry! Audry, you're—"

"—good and mad! You no-good, worthless, lazy—" Suddenly, her expression changed. Then she was on her knees, beside him. "Chazz darling, the water's fine."

And they gazed into each other's eyes for a couple or three of eternities . . .

Mars was like Earth, only different. Earth was two-thirds under water, one third dry land. Mars was two-thirds stratospheric, one third under atmosphere. Breathable atmosphere.

They fished Audry's pressure suit from the pool that evening, bundled the two suits under their arms, and climbed onto the van. No more was said about the—something—that had shattered her helmet, and then vanished completely. She hadn't even caught a glimpse of it, whatever it was. But Donovan had taken the effort to wrench a light, strong metal bar from a railing on the fenced court. It was long and straight, and made a good spear.

Mere recollection of their hike up the canal seemed enough for the van. It swung into the highway unerringly, selecting a specific lane, and whisked them back toward the spot where they had descended into the canal.

The elevator shaft in the tower was just large enough to accommodate the van. Donovan took it up—the lift worked—and returned to the broken hulk of the *Starling*. Audry waited at the foot of the tower, spear

in hand. He returned with supplies, equipment and an extra pressure suit. Audry surprised him with an extra van.

"I just wished it up, and here it was!" she exclaimed happily. "Maybe these machines have just gotten used to having us around!"

They found a small, cozy residence farther down the canal. What was more, there was a small, warm lake at its gateway, fed by deep artesian springs. The surrounding canal floor was lush with greenery. They made further trips to the *Starling*, stripping it of supplies, equipment, and whatever pieces of wreckage they might need for improvising.

They immediately set about making tests. Of radiation, atmosphere, water, soil, and vegetation. The air was all right, as far as their knowledge of elementary biochemistry went. Maybe it wasn't. Ditto for the water in their artesian lake. Humidity was a thing to dream about. You just didn't find it. They cleaned out the bungalow, set up house-keeping, got the ventilation running and constructed a small heating unit.

They lived cozily, happily in their little bungalow for a full six months.

Occasionally they would take a run along the canals, exploring, in the sleek little run-about they had commandeered. But most of their time was spent working, planning, studying, figuring, and working some more. And one other thing—toward the last, Donovan began to notice that he was going to become a father.

He stood out in the yard with his head towering up against the stars and let the cool night flow over him. That was all, just cool. Summer. No breeze, ever. Audry stood in the doorway watching him, the warm yellow light from within outlining her slender, bronzed figure.

It was good, here. Sun was weak, but more of it came through. And the gravity was light. It made you feel like jumping over Phobos, or working like a horse. Air was good, too—dry, sharp, exhilarating. It was fine.

He moved out across the yard, picking his way in the faint starlight. His bare feet were used to the warm, caressing sand. A square, dark form loomed suddenly ahead of him. The monument.

It had been constructed to commemorate something or other. There was a smooth metal plaque sunk into its side, covered with faint, queer wriggly lines. Martian lingo.

But the top had been sawed off, square, as if somebody hadn't liked the statue that had been there. It was wide and square, built to support a statue.

He stepped around it to the far side, where the marks he had made showed darkly. He counted them for the zillionth time, mused. Thirty days hath September, April, June, and—yeah, they had been here six Earth months! He picked up a darkish lump of rock at his feet, bent, and carefully scratched another mark for the day just past. He straightened to gaze at his work with satisfaction.

**A**S HE STEPPED around the monument, back toward the house, he saw Audry standing in the doorway. For a moment he gazed at her, thinking how wonderful it all had been—perhaps giving a small thought to how horrible it could have been. Then, on impulse, he stooped before the monument and, beneath the cold metal plaque, began scrawling.

Mars is red,  
And Earth is blue:  
You're lovely and sweet—  
And—

He straightened, then, looking down at his work with a shy, boyish guilt. A soft footfall sounded behind him. He whirled. And Audry, gazing at the dark scrawl leaped into his arms.

"Oh, Charley, Charley—"

"Heh! Here, now, Mrs. Donovan! Come, come!"

They walked slowly back toward the house. She lifted her head, glancing up at him with a frown, just once.

"What's bothering you, luscious?" he asked quietly.

"Honey, I'm afraid! I don't see how we can do it!"

"Why not? Nothing but a piece of old pipe missing."

"Not just any piece of old pipe, darling. You know that." Her frown deepened. "If only it hadn't been smashed—"

"Yeah," he agreed bitterly, "if only. One little piece of pipe in a radar apparatus. All we need is a shiny piece of tube, shaped just so, without the slightest, teensy-est scratch or blemish inside it. Otherwise—no radar! So we guess and fool around and maybe in two and a half years they'll land on Mars and maybe even find us with all the whole danged planet to explore."

"Maybe we should have spent our time planting—"

"Or finding something to plant!" he snapped irritably. "Vegetation, lots of it, but not a bite to eat! Think we're caterpillars?"

She stared at the ground as they approached the lighted doorway. "I don't know. Do you think they'll come?"

He heaved a mighty sigh. He tightened his arm around the slender girl beside him, and smiled down at her. Maybe for the multi-zillionth time.

"The second ship will have been on its way nearly six months by now. Almost here! They were going to make the landing expedition if we succeeded, remember? But the Lunar observatories would have seen our crash. They must have sent the second ship right on out—to do what we failed to do. We spacewise jakes are born that way, snookums! You know that."

Yes, by the Lord Harry, he thought, we spacewise jakes had better be born that way! It was cool at night. They always slept well . . .

The age-old creature lay flat upon the soft, caressing sand, the keen, sensitive impulse of its alien intelligence reaching out—probing the subconscious minds of the two sleeping Earthians! And it quivered and tensed as wave after wave of maddening terror swept through its being!

It knew its purpose, but it had not, could not have been adequately prepared to fulfill that purpose! Not with these Earthians! When they, the predicted Visitors from Beyond, had arrived, it had performed every feat possible that would assist them. Now it attempted to perform its final duty—to attune their minds telepathically to the great Recorders buried within the planet, where lay the knowledge and culture of a long-dead civilization.

Centuries before, a vast civilization had bloomed and thrived on the young red planet—the civilization of a race of super-intelligence, a race of beings who were in complete telepathic accord with one another and with everyone. Every thought, every experience, of each member of that race was engraved telepathically on the intelligence of the race.

They had been giants, mentally, their civilization developing steadily, peacefully along lines which utilized machines more mental than mechanical. And onward they climbed, until they solved the secret of the

Forces of the Stars, and the first mechanical adaptation of their discoveries had massacred millions. And they had gone mad!

**F**EAR! It struck them instantly, forcefully, with a built-up frenzy that left them completely, helplessly insane! And so they gibbered, and giggled—and died!

And they left behind them an ageless creature, more mental than physical, as the sole remaining key to the glory that once was Mars! And it quaked in terror!

What strange, terrible creatures these Earthians were! Savage, stubborn, proud. Proud of their freedom, their prowess, their strength of character. These, truly, were Beings of the Stars! Theirs was no integral, compact civilization, theirs was the savage life on the very edge of the Unknown.

They were frontiersmen, bred of frontiersmen. *Fear*, to them, was no racial insanity—it was a test to be met, *and conquered!* And so the creature, who had never before known that mysterious quality called "courage," shuddered and thrilled with a mixture of sheer ecstasy and gibbering madness as it probed the minds of the two sleeping humans.

And here, within their minds, was that secret which had destroyed the race of Mars. But it was a secret the Earthians, too, had met—and they had conquered. As its searching thoughts touched upon that knowledge, its huge form writhed and twisted in a hell of searing, mental pain. Trembling, twittering, it crept from its lair . . .

Donovan stirred restlessly in the early morning twilight. Finally, he got up. Audry watched him with quiet amusement as he tied the loincloth about his middle. An animal wouldn't have noticed it, of course. A female had no reason to notice it. But for the human male—well, there was some slight inconvenience.

He stepped out into the faint light of dawn.

He stood, breathing deeply. Then began a brisk walk around the yard, the thin film of ground-frost cool on his bare feet. He passed the monument, striding effortlessly. Then he skidded to a halt. Turned. Stared.

Mars is red,  
And Earth is blue;  
You're lovely and sweet—  
And—I LIKE YOU TOO

He swallowed, rubbed his eyes, and stared at it again. It was still there—scratched in big, painstaking block-letters.

I LIKE YOU, TOO!

Martians! By the great Judas, Martians! Or, the thought came teasing, Kilroy was here!

His trance was broken by a shrill feminine cry from behind. He whirled toward the house, saw Audry standing before the high bank of instruments beneath the looming, homemade umbrella of the radar antenna. She was yelling, beckoning to him frantically. He sprang across the sand.

"Charley, look! I came out, and right away I just saw it! Look—there, beside the cavity magnetron housing. The—the *connection!*"

A silvery, gleaming little hunk of pipe. Shaped just so. It was there.

I LIKE YOU, TOO!

Donovan tensed, stepped back, and stared at the sand critically. Rather deep tracks. Small, narrow, closely set. A three-wheeled vehicle had rolled up next to the machine, then rolled away toward the gate. Accompanying it was a strange, puzzling imprint, as though someone had dragged a heavy sheet of some sort through the sand. A robot, probably, and—and what? Something that dragged and didn't make footprints!

Of all the little red imps of Mars, this was the oddest!

They completed connections. They checked the apparatus painstakingly. They tested it on Deimos, which rode obligingly in the warm crimson sky. Everything checked.

They leafed through the *Starling's* star almanac, doubly rechecking their computations as to Earth's position. They had their longitude and latitude figured as close as could be expected. They had everything figured down to the dot over the last i. It was still early morning. There was still time for a run. They tried it.

They started from Earth's position and raked the heavens in a clockwise sweep along the ecliptic . . .

*On—onward it came, skimming out from the Great Unknown like a needle into the proverbial haystack!*

**I**T WAS no meteor. No meteor ever had the clutter of that nucleonic field, or those long streamers of raw energy blazing out in its fore. The ship was coming!

Donovan got out their sleek runabout. He climbed into the back seat and checked over the squat bulk of equipment installed there. Two great blocks of heavy insulation—Pu-

239. And between them, a small clockwork mechanism and radio receiver. He checked it thoroughly. Then he checked the small, portable transmitter lying on the front seat. Finally he got out, went into the house, and crawled into a pressure suit. Audry followed him and did likewise. "I've got their trajectory," she commented briefly.

"On true?"

She nodded. "Figured the time of their passage to the exact second. Deceleration timing and everything." She clamped down her helmet and grinned at him. "We'll have a five-minute leeway, at the most."

They took the little runabout down the canal to a tower lift, and thence up onto the wide, rolling desert. The flat, wide tires skimmed easily over the dry sands as they struck straight outward from the canal.

"Chazz," Audry's voice hummed into his earphones. He turned quizzically.

"I've often wondered why the Martians didn't have atomic energy."

"So have I," he replied. "But I think I've guessed the answer. They didn't need it!"

She gazed at him, puzzled.

"They must have had a completely different concept of science from ours," he went on, musingly. "Something so vastly different that we couldn't begin to comprehend it! Their machines—they were only *half* machines! Just a mess of electronic tubing—no engines or generators of any sort. Audry, they could direct those machines with thought, but they also made them run with thought! That's something so completely alien, that—well, a man might very well go crazy just trying to analyze it!"

He was silent for a while, as the sleek car rolled briskly across the smooth desert floor.

"And then suppose the Martians *had* developed atomic power! Do you realize what it would have done? What it could have done? What are the major byproducts of an experimental nuclear pile, honey? Radiation and *heat*! Consider the power of this little do-hickey we have in the back seat! Suppose we just ran down the canal and set it off? Wouldn't do much damage."

"It would do *some* damage," Audry contradicted vaguely.

"A great deal of damage, I'm afraid! Think a minute—heat! On Earth it wouldn't mean much. We have plenty of moisture, more than we'll ever need or have a care for! Heat dissipation, honey! Think of it in

terms of Martian atmosphere! Think of the small amount of moisture in that canal back there, just barely enough to be comfortable and breathable!"

"I—I think I see."

They stopped and unloaded the contraption from the back seat, then scooted back toward the canal, a good twenty miles away. They pulled up beside the tower, carried the portable transmitter out, and set it down in the sand. They scooped out a pit for themselves and waited . . .

**T**WILIGHT. The Sun was a blazing white mote in the vivid red sky to the West. They were swinging around to "night-side." The ship would skim past the "morning" side, plunging outward—decelerating—to swing back and skim past the "evening" side and on toward the Sun and Earth. And, meanwhile, would be photographing the planet's surface like mad!

That was their salvation. A signal! A signal that couldn't be missed.

"Ready!"

Donovan stopped twirling the transmitter's dials across its static bands, swung them back to a precise reading, and listened to the steady hum in his earphones. He watched Audry, lying beside him, hand upraised.

Waiting. She watched her chronometer, watched the little hand crawl around its dial.

"Now!"

Her hand dropped. He pressed the key on the small panel. A brilliant, intense, white flash! Then it was all over.

They scrambled to their feet, staring out across the sand.

Up—straight up in a slender white column it went. Slender, twisting, like a bean-stalk. Then high, very high, the top cloud began to form. Like a giant mushroom. Just the top cloud. No double-header, like on Earth.

And suddenly, from the canal wall behind them, came a shrill, piercing scream. They jerked around, gasped in startled horror.

It was just as if some giant sting ray had been lifted out of the shallows off the Florida Keys—some gigantic, pinkish-blue, batlike creature—and dropped out of the blood-red sunset to the edge of the canal.

It stood there, staring out at the towering mushroom cloud, flapping its great flippers like some huge monster besieged by all the invisible demons of Hell! And screamed!

Screamed!