

PLANET STORIES



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LADY INTO HELL-CAT

By STANLEY MULLEN

Tracking her across black space-lanes and slapping magnetic bracelets on her was duck soup for S. P. Agent Heydrick. Only then did he learn what a planet-load of trouble he'd bought.

THE INSPECTOR OF SECURITY police dropped his shoes on the floor and put his feet on the desk where he could watch his toes wriggle.

"Sure we're sloppy here," he said beligerently. "You pretty boys of the Space Patrol don't know what it's like in a slime-hole frontier town like 9 Ganymede."

Lee Heydrick smiled grimly. "I guess you didn't catch my name. I earned these service bars of mine. I was one of four survivors of the first Trans-Plutonian Expedition."

The inspector suddenly became respectful. "Oh, you're that Heydrick?" He referred to the credentials on his desk: "What's a pirate-chaser like you doing on an assignment like this? Seems like picking up fugitive murderers for the dis-integrators is a job for the security police."

Heydrick grunted. "So it is. I don't like the job any better than you do. But this is no ordinary murderer. She's a red Martian. Killed Feyjak, third man in the Red Council. Worked in his laboratory. They suspect a Wilding plot."

"Feyjak, eh? They ought to give her a medal. I feel sorry for the girl—good-looker, too. Still sounds like a police job."

Heydrick growled. "Yes, it does. Just some more rotten politics. There's not supposed to be any politics in the Space Patrol. Hooey! The Red Scientists are in power, and my foster father, Tyko, is head man of the Blue. So I get assignments like this. Just so they can get a whack at Tyko. They hope I'll fail—that's all they want."

The inspector warmed noticeably. "So Tyko's your foster? I'm a blue myself . . . out of working hours. That's why I'm stuck in a last frontier hellhole like this. Anything I can do to help?"

Heydrick loosened up and sat down. "I don't know. It's a mean job any way

you look at it. The girl says she didn't kill him. They can't use scopolamine. She's a desert dweller of the old blood, and it doesn't work on 'em. Why would she kill Feyjak? He wasn't a bad sort. A bit dim, but that's all. Of course, if she's a Wilding, that would explain after a fashion. They're all fanatics, but why Feyjak? They could knock off a lot of others more important. We got a tip she's hiding out on Ganymede. A place called the Spacerat's Roost. Know anything about it?"

The inspector whistled. "Not much. Enough to stay clear of the place. It's a dive in the Interplanetary Quarter, a damn tough hole. Mostly Plutonium prospectors and fungi hunters hang out there. We suspect it's mixed up in the illegal Moondrug traffic, but can't prove anything. I never send my boys into that quarter unless it's necessary, and then only in squads of four. Sure you don't want help?"

Heydrick grinned sourly. "I wouldn't want your boys to get their pretty uniforms dirty. Do you think you could make me look like a Plutonium prospector?"

"Can do—that all?"

"Draw me a map of the district. I'll need to know my way around."

"I'd rather draw it than show you. I wouldn't go there alone. Not at night. They don't like cops."

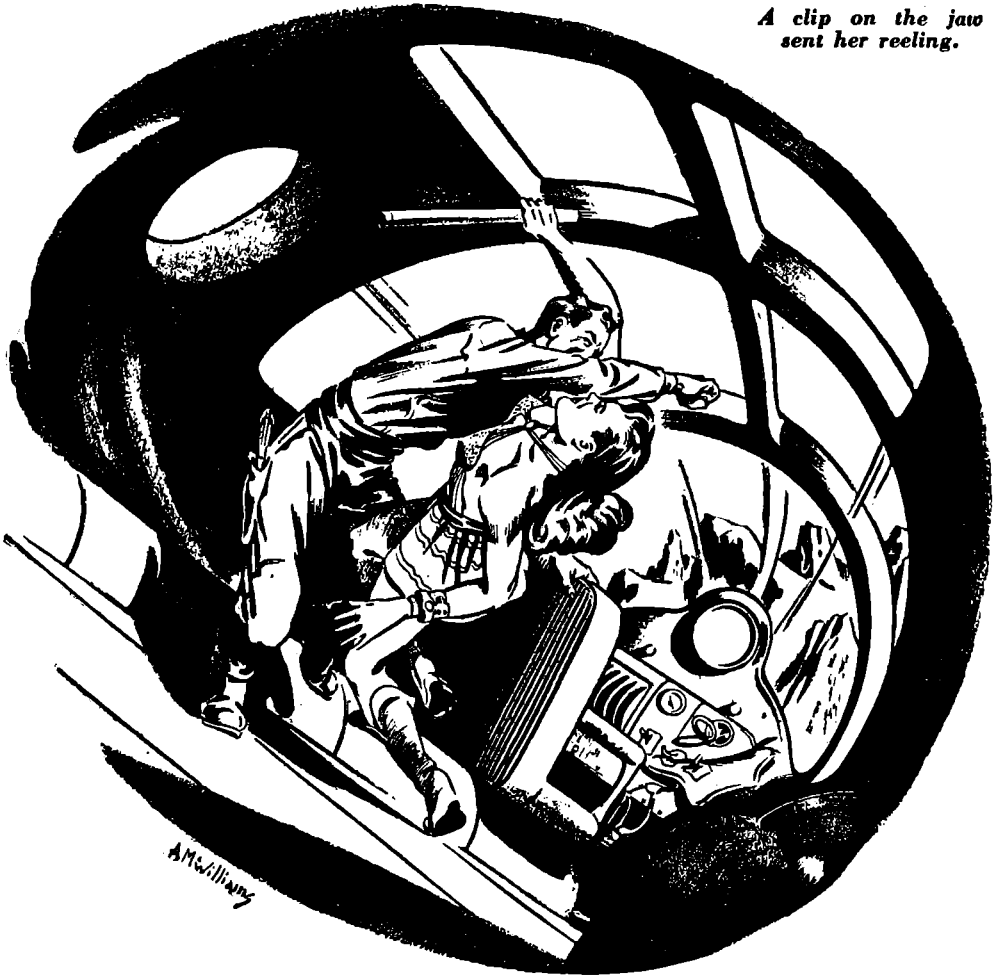
"Neither do I." Heydrick showed his teeth like an amiable wolf.

"If you're not back in two days, we'll come in after you."

"I'll be back."

THE air in the Spacerat's Roost was thick with Fung-weed smoke. Heydrick mingled with the crowd inside the doorway and noticed men from every inhabited world in the Solar System. He

*A clip on the jaw
sent her reeling.*



spotted a vacant table and elbowed his way to it. A drug-soaked horror from Venus, obviously the bouncer, looked dubiously at the newcomer in his scuffed prospector's leather. Heydrick pounded on the table for service.

The waiter was a Jovian octopus man with five tentacles and three eyes. He came and hovered over the table, blinking sadly, as if life was a burden to him.

"What'll you have?"

"What've you got?"

The waiter waved a tentacle airily. "Anything you can name — Snow-grape Champagne from Mars, Deimos rice-nectar, Toad's-eye brandy and Banana-beer from Venus . . ." he paused dramatically, leaned close and whispered, "even a bit of Blue Moonfoam from Callisto for special customers."

Heydrick winked. "I'm a special customer."

"You must have more money than sense," the waiter observed. "It'll be twenty vikdals, Martian."

Heydrick flicked a hundred vikdal platinum coin on the table. The octopus man uncoiled a tentacle and snatched it up, tested it for weight, then shambled off. He returned with a dusty bottle and the change. Heydrick let the change lie.

"Would you like to earn the rest of it?"

The octopus creature clucked somewhere within the unholy cavern which served him as mouth. "I'd kill anyone on Ganymede for half of that," he observed. "What'ya want me to do?"

Heydrick drew a deep breath. "You've a singer here who calls herself the *Red*

Leopard of Mars. When does she go on?"

The waiter consulted a wrist-chron. "Anytime now. She's temperamental."

"When she's finished her turn, ask her to come to my table." The Jovian shrugged and moved off.

The houselights dimmed suddenly. A shower of colored lights played upon the raised stage. Soft nostalgic music poured from an unseen source. Soundlessly, a series of colored crystal screens slid back. At the back of the stage was a shadowy figure half-concealed by clouds of gossamer stuff blown wildly by concealed fans. Slowly, with infinite insolence, the figure moved to the point of the triangular stage. She stood motionless, waiting, while the babel of unearthly tongues died away in silence. The music grew louder. Veil by veil she flung off the filmy draperies until she stood revealed. Klathgar . . .

She wore the conventional garb of a woman of the ancient desert dwellers, jewelled copper breast-plates, a circlet of beaten bronze binding her wealth of red-violet hair, her eyes glittering like emerald fire; and the long divided skirt concealed little of her shapely body. Leashed, beside her, was the restless, slithering shadow of a red sand-leopard.

Against the wavering, eerie melody, and a patterned off-beat throb of tomtoms, she began to sing. Her voice was rich, throaty, and the song a poignant love-song of the ancient desert people. For a moment Heydrick forgot where he was and who *she* was. The hopeless yearning and infinite tragedy of the music played unpleasantly with his soul-memories. The weird denizens of the Spacerat's Roost sat enthralled.

The song ended upon a note of earth-sick despair, a haunting melancholy for things that will never again be as they were, never, if the planets swing round a dead sun in an empty sky.

The singer bowed, half-contemptuously, to the storm of applause, then retired.

Heydrick drew the identification space-photo from his pocket and studied it. There was no doubt. Despite the heavy make-up, the features were the same. Ria Tarsen and Klathgar were the same.

In moments the girl was back. She had shed her glamor-costume and was nearly naked in the briefest of skirts, legs shimmering in painted stockings, high-breasts caught in a tight sheen of semi-translucent material. This time she sang a bawdy song, "If Asteroids were Asterisks," about a girl who went for a rocket-ride with an octopus man, and had to hitch-hike home from the Moons of Jupiter.

The crowd went wild. The number finished with a rowdy burlesque dance which went considerably beyond the bounds of good taste, but was screamingly funny.

THE girl ducked out the wings, and Heydrick nodded to the waiter. The octopus man winked one of his three eyes and vanished. He came back through the door to the dressing rooms, and the girl was with him. He pointed to Heydrick. Klathgar looked at him insolently. A puzzled frown wrinkled her face.

Lithe as a sand-leopard, she moved among the crowded tables, still clad in the gaudy costume of her last number.

Heydrick looked closely at her. Could this be the same girl who sang the love song so full of fiery passion that it was madness set to music? The uncanny warble of flutes and the triple throb of bone-drums still echoed in his ears. But this girl was tired; strain and unutterable weariness lurked behind her eyes.

"Why did you send for me?" she asked.

"I wanted to talk to you—is that so unusual?"

"Men always want to talk to me," she said, sneering. "I don't have to associate with the customers—not even those who can buy Moonfoam."

Heydrick noticed suddenly that the sand-leopard was with her. The animal's tail swished savagely back and forth. Its lips curled and a snarling burr of sound came from the ugly rows of teeth. It seemed like an echo of the girl's sneer. Klathgar put down one hand to stroke the beast's spade-shaped head. It rubbed against her in silent ecstasy.

"Perhaps I can change your mind,"

suggested Heydrick. "Won't you sit down?"

"You flatter yourself," she snapped. "I can hear what you have to say standing up."

"I wonder if you can," Heydrick mused aloud. "First, who are you?" The ghost of fear trembled behind her mask.

Klathgar laughed. "Ask anybody who I am. Klathgar. The Red Leopard."

Heydrick threw Ria Tarsen's dossier card on the table, face up. Klathgar glanced at it without a flicker of emotion.

"Is that supposed to mean something to me?" she asked contemptuously.

"It should—it's yours."

Her laugh was shrill. "At least you have a new approach. In either case, you're mistaken. What's your racket?"

"Heydrick, I. P. S. If you're not Ria Tarsen, who are you? May I see your ident-card?"

The girl was growing angry. "It's in my dressing room; I'll get it."

Heydrick was on his feet. "If you don't mind, I'll go with you."

"I do mind."

"I'll go anyway."

The girl shrugged and led the way among the crowded tables, the leopard padding silently beside her. Curious glances went with them. Suddenly Klathgar turned. "On second thought, I have it here," she said. She knelt quickly and unsnapped the leopard's leash. Heydrick's hand reached for his gun, but the girl was holding a card out to him. Even as he took it, he wondered if the gesture were a trick to occupy his gun hand.

One glance at the card was enough. "I hope you didn't pay too much for this," he told her. "It's a clumsy forgery."

Klathgar muttered a low word to the leopard, then slipped through the sliding door of plastic. A bundle of furred muscle launched itself at Heydrick. It was touch and go for a minute. Deadly talons raked through the leather tunic like razors. The man got a grip on the jewelled collar and twisted savagely. He wrenched the great cat away long enough to get out a paralysis gun and fire it. The drugged needle went into a soft spot behind one furred

ear. Instantly the beast let go and crumpled.

Heydrick leaped for the door. Someone tried to trip him, but he got through and slammed the plastic door shut.

Cutting down the intensity of his blaster, he ran the blunt muzzle up and down the joint where the heavy slab of plastic fit, sealing it tightly as the plastic flowed and fused. "That should hold them," he thought. Something crashed against the door.

In the dim passageway, Heydrick could see several doors, all shut. Which door?

He tried three, then saw one marked with a glittering star. It was locked, but he put his shoulder against it and shoved violently. The thin screen buckled.

The girl was rummaging in a drawer. She turned and lunged at him with an ornamental dagger. Heydrick wrenched it away from her.

"Nice try, Ria."

She leaped on him, kicking and scratching. Locked together they crashed into the mirror. All three went down in a smash of glass. The girl lay still.

Heydrick took a needle from the paralysis gun and scratched her lightly. Her breathing steadied and she lay relaxed, while he opened the window and looked out. Below him, bathed in eerie Jupiter-light, lay the rooftops of the city. He could just make it to the next roof. Ria was lighter than she looked.

AT security police headquarters, Heydrick sat back for a quiet smoke. He had changed back into the crisp silvery grey of the Space Patrol. The inspector was in an official mood. He had his shoes on.

"What's the quickest transportation back to Mars?"

The inspector grinned. "Anxious to get her off your hands, eh? I don't blame you. The Martian Express is the quickest—you can get it at City 1. It doesn't stop, of course, but they pick up ore-lighters as they go past Ganymede."

"How can I get to City 1?"

"I'll lend you a patrol flier. They're all old crates, rocket drive. If it gets you there, you can leave it; we'll pick it up.

If not, maybe we'll get some decent equipment."

Heydrick walked down the dim passage-way to the cell in which he had deposited Ria Tarsen. She glowered at him.

"Did you kill my leopard?"

"He's all right. Be stiff a couple of days, that's all. I used the paralysis gun. How d'you feel?"

The girl did not answer. Heydrick went on. "I'm sorry, Ria. I'll have to take you back now." He unlocked the cell, and the girl strode into the corridor. She was still arrogant and glared at him with cold insolence.

"You must feel proud of yourself," she said icily. "You'll never get me back to Mars."

"I thought of that." He took a metal bracelet from his pocket. "Try this on for size."

"That's a funny handcuff; it's not chained to anything," she said as he clasped it on her wrist.

"Try running away," he suggested. Ria darted down the corridor, then stopped as if she had run smack into a dur-steel wall.

"Magnetic," he explained. "Can be set for distances up to fifty feet. Once that's on you, and the mate to it's on me, we're linked together to the end of the trail. It's sealed with a coded beam of light. I don't have the combination. I just don't want you to try anything silly, that's all."

"I'll kill you for this," Ria promised, her green eyes glowing with ugly light.

"Seems you've killed one man too many now," Heydrick commented. "Even if you were lucky enough to kill me, we'd still be linked together; you couldn't escape with a corpse."

"I didn't kill Feyjak 9," she shrieked. "I didn't kill him. It was an accident. I don't know anything about it."

Heydrick looked at her soberly. "I don't believe you, Ria. And, if I did, it wouldn't matter. You were tried and sentenced. I'm sorry for you, but it's my job to take you back to the—to your punishment."

"I won't go back to the disintegrators," Ria stated, her face pale but tearless. "You'll never get me there alive."

IN the antiquated patrol flier, Heydrick set the auto-pilot for City 1. The girl was sleeping quietly under the effects of the paralysis drug. Heydrick went back to the galley and opened a can of hot coffee. A sudden tug at the metal cirlet on his wrist sent him racing to the controls.

It was too late. The girl held a heavy bar of dur steel ready to crash it down on the maze of keys and switch-bars. The bar descended in a glittering crescent. Blue flame shot through the tiny cabin. Rocket jets fused and exploded at the tail of the rocket-flier.

The shock knocked Heydrick to his knees. He scrambled to the control board and reached for the girl. In one movement, she turned and struck at him with the bar. It missed his head, but a numbing jar went through his shoulder. A clip on the jaw sent her reeling.

Frantically Heydrick worked at the wrecked controls, splicing burnt wires, bending keys back to position. Sick nausea clawed at his insides. The ship was going down in a free fall, spinning. The thin atmosphere of Ganymede went round the hull with a crescendo, whistling scream. A jagged wilderness of saw-toothed rock and volcanic ash whirled up at the flier.

The slight gravity of Ganymede was bad enough, but if they struck at full rocket velocity, the hull would crumple like an eggshell. With a length of wire, Heydrick burned his fingers shorting the switches to the forward tubes. It was too late to do much. If he could only slow the fall.

A series of explosions forward jarred through the ship. Deceleration flung Heydrick on top of the girl.

The flier buried her nose in soft ash and skidded thirty yards in a choking shower. A sharp needle of jagged rock reached up through the dust to catch her. With a shriek of riven metal the flier rose on end. The fused quartz port-holes bulged and gave way.

Supercharged air whistled out of the cabin. As the artificially heavy air blew itself out, Heydrick felt his head swell as if it were going to explode. His eyes seemed to be squeezing out of his head.

Dazed, he groped to the locker and got out the space-suits. The cold bit into him like needles of ice till he struggled into his suit. He set his atmosphere control, then fought his way through the shattered wreckage to Ria. She was in no condition to resist as he forced the bulky space-suit on her. He set the controls on her suit, then talked into his microphone.

"You are a problem child," he said. "How'd you manage it?"

Ria was sick and dizzy. She staggered on her feet. "I had some benzedrine—stole it from the emergency kit. Your paralysis needle barely scratched me anyhow."

She fell weakly against the bulkhead. Heydrick seized her and dragged her through the riven shell of the control room into the shelter of a gaunt outcropping.

"The forward rockets are building up. They'll go any minute."

A bellowing geyser of dust-shrouded flame roared up. Flying metal clattered brutally on their shelter.

"Just in time," he said. Ria lay on the ground, retching weakly. "Well, the security boys get a new ship. They'll be happy. From here on, we walk. I hope you're satisfied."

The upper limb of an immense crescent rose above the horizon. Jupiter. Its sombre light revealed a savage wasteland of barren rock and volcanic ash.

"Come on, Babe. You should enjoy this. It's thirty miles, and the walking's bad. But we like it that way, don't we?"

Sulkily, Ria got to her feet and followed him.

THE Martian Express Liner, *Phobos*, went into full gear with a velocity of 89 Martian gravities. After detouring the dangerous asteroid belt, the ship nosed down in a long curving glide to intercept the orbit of Mars. Far ahead was a blurred crescent of red, glowing with soft radiance against a star-sprinkled void. Lee Heydrick watched the planet swing slowly across the field of the glass. A deep unrest troubled him, but he refused to face the mask it might wear and tried to force it out of his mind.

"We should be there in fourteen hours," the co-pilot said.

"That'll be a relief. This is one job I don't like."

The pilot glanced at them sourly. "I thought you were through with the service," he shot at Heydrick.

"I am—it's my last job. I can't live on any of the inner planets after being exposed to the zero-rays of outer space. It takes six months for a resignation to go through in the Space Patrol. My time is up in two weeks and four days. After that, I'll have to stick to the places outside the asteroid belt or resign myself to a very brief life—18 months, at the outside."

"Too bad. What're you going to do?"

"I don't know. Maybe settle on one of the Moons of Saturn. They aren't too crowded. I'll be glad to be free again. Silly, isn't it—when you think of the way I used to look forward to being in Space Patrol! My folks were refugees from earth—lived in the icy marshes near the northern ice-cap of Mars. I ran away from home to go to Canal City 9 and study for the Patrol. My grades were good enough to impress Tyko. He took me into his home. My folks were proud of me. They're all dead now; Tyko's all I have left. I'll miss the old buzzard."

The co-pilot grunted. "What are you kicking about? I wish somebody'd handcuff me to a kitten like that one of yours. She looks hotter than a rocket tube. If you get tired of your work, I'll take over and spell you awhile."

Heydrick grinned with embarrassment. "You might regret it. She's tried to kill me twice already. She's full of ideas."

"I hope she knocks you off—you can will her to me."

The alarms through the space cruiser began to shrill in great bellows of sound. Heydrick ran along the passageway and tried the door of the stateroom where he had locked his prisoner. It was still locked. He used the key, but something heavy was jammed against the door. He drew his blaster gun and cut down the intensity. The door glowed cherry red, then flowed together. It gave as he crashed against it.

Ria was posed dramatically, metal stool

in hand, in the act of trying to smash the port-cover. The fused-quartz pane was already spiderwebbed, and air sucked out in a rising whine. Ria changed her mind and flung the stool at Heydrick. He lunged under it and caught her round the waist. In one movement, he flung her over his shoulder and whirled back out to the passage. Dropping her in a heap, he clawed shut the insulated emergency door and spun the wing-nuts. Waves of cold licked his eyelashes and his fingers stung with frost before he got the job done.

The girl's green eyes watched him warily, as a cat's might.

"I'm sorry you made it," she spat at him viciously. "I hate you—hate you!"

Heydrick spun the dials on the handcuffs. "Okay, kid, if you want to play rough, you'll sit out the rest of the trip on my lap. The interval is two feet, as of now."

"I hope you can take it." Then she snapped. Tears burst out. She raged and screamed and kicked, laughed and cried and choked at the same time. Heydrick slapped her out of it. She huddled on the floor, sobbing weakly.

The co-pilot came along the passage-way. "Oh, it's your pet? We thought it might be."

"Still want to trade jobs?"

"It might be fun to spank her, but I'll skip it. I've news for you. We can't land in City 4—trouble of some kind—sounds like a good row."

"Do you know what's wrong?"

"They didn't say. Orders are to take the ship on the Desert City 12. You two can go down in the lighters with the freight." The co-pilot patted Ria on the shoulder—she cringed away from him. "Tough luck," he said gently. "Too bad you're stuck with Bighead here. If you were dealing with me, we'd go off to some empty asteroid and camp out for the rest of your life."

BROODING over the immensity of the plain below was Canal City 4. Covering the entire city like a tremendous bubble was the iridescent dome of fused-quartz. The tiny fleet of ore-lighters nosed

through the valves of airlock after airlock and headed across town toward the sprawling terraces of the freight docks. Like a chain of brightly silvered pumpkin seeds, the clumsy craft wound in and out among the towers of the 7th level, down to the freight docks.

Heydrick took his prisoner through the airlock in the freight terminal to condition her and himself for street-level atmosphere, then went out on the huge platform again.

Pausing only long enough to ask a robot attendant for information, Heydrick pushed the button to stop a descending elevator.

"Labor trouble—the workers are picketing—riots have broken out at street level," droned the mechanical voice of the robot.

A crowded car stopped, signalling raucously. Heydrick showed his badge to the robot pilot. "Street level," he said crisply. "Space Patrol priority." The robot grunted. "We have orders not to stop unless it's vitally necessary."

"It's necessary."

Jumbles of neo-plastic architecture, rising tier on tier above the series of terraces on which the city was built, whirled upward past the descending car.

On the street level, all was bustle and confusion. A polyglot crowd composed of every human and near human species in the universe jammed the streets. Stares followed the I. P. S. uniform as Heydrick pushed out of the elevator. A few people gave nods of respect, but in most faces burned a sullen hatred and resentment.

Ria followed him in stolid silence as the handcuffs tugged at her. The knots of angry people came suddenly in focus and she had a moment's desperate inspiration.

She jerked back heavily on the cuffs and began to scream.

Heydrick was caught off guard and spun sharply about.

"Help me, somebody," Ria cried wildly. "The cops are taking me in. I haven't done anything."

The mob clotted around the pair, snarling angrily.

Heydrick reached for his gun, just as somebody threw a spanner. He dodged, heard Ria's voice shout a welcome, "Thor-

san," and that was all. A sharp jab in his cheek as the paralysis needle went home was the last he knew. Darkness rushed over him in a smothering cloud.

SOMEONE kept slapping him. He felt as if he were trying to swim in thick syrup. The light on the desk shone blindingly in his eyes. He got his hand up to shield his eyes, then they struck it down. He blinked sharply awake.

Behind the desk sat a handsome man. Pale blue eyes that probed deeply, plump cheeks, thick blonde eyebrows, muscular shoulders. Heydrick had seen him before. Where? Oh, yes—the pieces clicked together. The Feyjak investigation. The man had testified against Ria Tarsen, reluctantly, the Visiphone News had commented. He had been Feyjak's assistant, Ria's friend.

Thorsan drummed the desk with his fingers. "Heydrick, you've given us a lot of trouble. You probably want to know where you are. You're in the underground galleries below Level 1. We have our headquarters here. I am the head man of the Wildings."

Heydrick's brain spun. He fought back the whirl and tried to think calmly.

Below the lowest inhabited level of Canal City 4 were endless mazes of caverns, galleries and abandoned mine-shafts.

Rumor said that bands of outlaws roamed among the savages, second and third generations of the outcast rebels who long-ago had been driven to the refuge of the city's ratholes. Banded together by their common hatreds, these outlaws had built up a strong organization known as the Wildings. There was some talk that numbers of them had infiltrated the City's government; men of dangerous ability, infinite cunning, and vicious philosophy, whose sole aim was the overthrow of the Government of Scientists.

Heydrick's heart turned suddenly to ashes as he realized that Ria Tarsen must have been a Wilding. Surely no group would have gone to the trouble of instigating riots merely to rescue an outsider, however innocent. It was all clear now, painfully clear.

Thorsan must have divined the nature

of Heydrick's thoughts. He laughed harshly, then turned to a subordinate.

"They're no use to us, either of them. The girl didn't know as much as I thought she did. Now they both know too much. We'll have to get rid of them. Put him in the cell with her while I figure out what to do with them."

Hands reached out of the darkness and dragged Heydrick roughly to his feet. He was thrust along a winding gallery that he realized must be part of an old mine. They must have given him a full dose with the paralysis needle. He kept stumbling, and his legs moved stiffly.

The group came to a halt before an old wooden-plank door. The room inside was damp, and smelled mouldy. It was evidently a chamber cut in the rock for storage of explosives. His captors thrust him inside. He bounced off a wall and fell heavily. The door bumped shut and a sound like a bar dropping in place came muffled through the planks.

"Well, tough guy, how do *you* like being pushed around?" A familiar voice came out of darkness.

"Who is it?" he asked needlessly.

"It's not your Aunt Sophie," the voice said acidly. "*You* should kick. You have better company than I have."

The two sat in moody silence for a while. "Are you all right?" the girl asked finally.

"Still stiff," he answered. "You should know what that's like."

"I do. You and your toy handcuffs. They only wanted me; Thorsan thought I knew he killed Feyjak. He was afraid I might give him away. They had to drag you along on account of your silly handcuffs. If you hadn't split my lip, I could laugh at you. They're going to kill us, you know."

"Yes, I heard him say that."

"What are we going to do? Any ideas?"

"Not so far. How about you?"

"Nothing definite. I still have the benzedrine tablets I swiped. They didn't find 'em when they searched me. I'll split with you. If we take it before they come for us, we may get a chance to make a break. It'll counteract the paralysis drug

if they're counting on that to make us dead pigeons while they haul us around."

Her hand found his in the dark and thrust six pellets into his open palm. Her fingers were wet and sticky.

"You're bleeding."

"It's nothing serious. That bracelet of yours cut my arm when they chiselled it off."

"I'm sorry about everything, Ria—"

"Skip it," she said harshly. "Of course you're sorry. Now shut up. I hate post-mortems. Besides, I think they're coming. Better get your benzedrine down."

THERE was sound of the bar being withdrawn. A heavy foot kicked the door open. A man with a twisted face held the light and the gun while two others approached warily and jabbed needles into the captives. Coarse hands jerked them to their feet, and the two were dragged outside, feigning limpness.

"Now," said Ria. She thrust out her foot. The man with the gun tripped and went sprawling on the floor. Heydrick swung with all he had at the darkness where he remembered a chin and felt bone shatter beneath his fist. Then he was tangled in a savage knot with the third man, rolling and threshing about in deadly fury.

Ria was not idle. She salvaged the light, switched the radilume back on, and hunted for the dropped gun. In a matter of seconds, she brought the butt down on an exposed skull. The thug let go and sank to the floor.

Heydrick dusted himself off.

"I ought to let you have it, too," Ria mumbled, "but I always was a softy. Come on, sucker."

"Which way?"

"I think they brought me that way," the girl said slowly. "Let's try the other. Heaven knows where it leads."

Heydrick took the gun from her and thrust it through his belt. They struck off down the tunnel, taking forks at random, but going as cautiously as they could.

Luck was against them. They came suddenly round a turn and into a chamber

full of Wildings. It was the room where Heydrick had been questioned by Thorsan. The man still sat the desk. Heydrick drew the gun and pressed its trigger as Thorsan dived for a doorway. The desk glowed, then exploded. The room was choked with dust.

Heydrick remembered a nightmarish pursuit, running down a series of criss-cross galleries with endless side passages. The gallery ended abruptly. An open mine-shaft barred their way.

It was a double shaft, with space for two elevators, but neither lift was on their level. Sounds of pursuit came from the gallery behind them.

Heydrick leaned over and looked down the shaft. A floor below was the open-platform lift.

"Jump for the cable," he ordered. "Try to slide down it."

"You first," she said. "I'm a sissy." Heydrick jumped and his stomach wrenched with nausea. Then the cable was burning through his hands. His feet stung as they came down solidly on the metal flooring. The girl was right behind him. He found the control lever and jammed it all the way over.

The car dropped under them with sickening speed.

A blaster beam flamed briefly above them, and the discharge set a chorus of echoes bouncing back and forth in the old mine-shaft.

"Hang tight," he shouted. "I don't know how far down this shaft goes. If we hit bottom at this speed, we'll flatten out like saucers."

A mushroom of brilliant light expanded above them. The car jerked and grated on the rock walls, then went down in a free fall, the cable trailing slack above them.

Down the shaft hurtled the old lift, air whistling eerily round its edges.

"They've blasted the cable!" Heydrick cried. "Now we are in for it." He leaped to the brake lever and tugged at it. The bar was rusted fast. Ria tried to help. With their combined weight and effort, the bar gave a little. Inch by inch, it moved. The clamps started taking hold of the side walls and a shriek of protest

came from rock and metal. The elevator slowed slightly. Too late.

With a grinding rasp of smashed metal, it struck. Ria was hurled clear, but Heydrick was trapped.

The metal cable came down, coiling and snapping like a whip. A stiff spiral of it covered Heydrick, pinning him fast to the floor. He wiped a smear of blood from his face and tried vainly to lift the heavy strands. They refused to budge.

Ria knelt beside him and tried to shift the coils, but it was no use.

"You'd better go," he said roughly. "They'll be down as soon as they can get to the other elevator...to make sure of us."

Ria glared at him. "It's my maternal instinct," she said. "I can't leave you."

"You wanted a chance to escape. This is it."

Ria seized the broken brake lever and pried up part of the strands. Heydrick worked himself part way out, but the weight was too much for her strength. The bar twisted out of her hands. Down came the full weight again. Heydrick cried out in agony. She moved the bar and lifted again. This time, he crawled free.

LEANING on her, he was able to stand and walk along the old gallery, but it was a slow business. Deadly slow.

Behind them, they could hear the whine of a descending lift. "They're coming," he said. Crouching against an angle of the tunnel, they waited. It was useless to run. Heydrick cut the switch of his radilume and braced the blaster against cold stone. He felt better with the trigger nestling against his trembling finger.

The Wildings came cautiously, but they needed light to move at all.

Light splashed off the rock around the corner. Shadowy figures moved behind the light. Heydrick pressed the trigger, and a pale beam flicked the darkness. In the close confinement of the tunnel, the shattering blast stunned their brains.

The explosion stopped some of the pursuit, but a scuff of boots on rough rock warned Heydrick. Needles from paralysis guns snicked nastily from the naked rocks beside them. He and the girl turned and

fled headlong through the darkness. Pain forgotten, he thrust Ria ahead of him, pried up part of the strands. Heydrick and followed, stumbling and swearing.

In the darkness ahead, he heard Ria cry out. Unable to stop, he too collided with what seemed to be a solid wall of metal. Heydrick flicked the radilume switch. Light flooded an ore depot, with rusting electric cars.

"Ore cars," he gasped. "Get in." He boosted the girl up and scrambled after her. Heydrick fumbled for the switch, found it. The car leaped ahead as a blaster beam licked the rails behind them. With shaking hands, Heydrick re-primed his blaster and fired wildly at the darkness behind them. Shadows danced. It seemed seconds before the blasts went off. Two in rapid succession.

Another car leaped from the dust cloud behind. It was pursuing them on the parallel tracks.

A blaster beam grazed the back wall of the ore-car. It was gone with a flash and a roar. The shock flattened Heydrick and the girl against the front wall. Heydrick re-primed his gun, but it was impossible to aim. The tracks went into a black maw and went up in a steeply climbing spiral. Flanges screamed wildly as the wheels bit into the curves. Up. Up. Up. The miles raced backward in a dizzy flow of darkness lit by faint reflections from the radilume.

Suddenly the track levelled off on a straightaway. Heydrick peered ahead. Heaven alone knew where the tunnel led or how far the tracks were good. The car was going like a runaway rocket.

Then they were out in the open, in daylight. The tracks came out of a tunnel-mouth on the banks of the dry canal.

The hurtling ore-car was half way across the bridge before Heydrick knew they were heading for the city.

Out of the tunnel-mouth across the canal shot the other ore car. Both cars raced toward the city.

Ten miles. Five. Three. One.

Weird lights flickered on the tremendous dome ahead, as if some infernal carnival was being held within the city.

Up a steep ramp to the air-lock shot

the cars. Seconds now. The airlock was closed.

A gate of metal and plastic loomed close. Glass, plastic, metal and quartz vanished in a thunderous melee of sound. The first lock. The city's automatic wall-magnets clawed at the racing car. It slowed rapidly. The deceleration pinned both of them flat against the front wall of the car. It went through the second gate like a knife through dough. The jar was agony.

The car rolled up to a dock and stopped.

Heydrick was out of the car and racing for a visiphone as a wobbling wheel came loose and romped down the track, smashing sheds to metal splinters.

"Get Tyko," he bellowed.

"Sorry," a robot said tonelessly. "No calls are going through till the end of the emergency."

Heydrick swore wildly. He and Ria ran through the building and out onto the huge terrace in front. The vast bowl of the city was in tumult. Fires were raging on all the lower levels, and several of the towers of the 7th level had crashed down in ruins. Mobs roared through the streets, killing, burning, and looting. It was revolution. Security police, trying to stem the outbreak, were caught in the maelstroms, overwhelmed, and submerged. The lower levels had gone mad with hate. Wildings were everywhere, organizing, leading, destroying.

Heydrick commandeered an empty flier, got Ria aboard and set the automatic pilot for Tyko's tower in West 21.

IN Tyko's tower, the old man stood watching the end of the grim spectacle in the streets below. Walls of white fire moved out in ever-widening circles from the experimental domes, moved through the city, quieting the mobs, herding them back to their homes. Dead lay in windrows.

A bell rang behind him. He turned. "Oh, come in," he said. It was Thorsan, Feyjak's assistant.

"It's almost over," Tyko told him. "Order is being restored now. After this, we'll keep the Blues in power and give

the people a government they can like. It's a sad thing, to govern people. Herding them about like animals. Men should be free. I'm an anarchist myself...out of hours."

"How about my people?" Thorsan asked, an odd expression on his face.

"Your people? Oh, the Red Scientists. Don't worry. We knew this revolt was coming, even if you Reds didn't. We've had our eye on the Wildings for some time. You Reds are safe enough. When order is restored, perhaps a joint government..."

Tyko stopped. He was looking into the muzzle of a blaster.

"I don't understand," he quavered.

"My people are the Wildings. We don't want any of your kind of governments," Thorsan said slowly. "With you out of the way, nothing can stop the revolution. I regret the necessity."

From the open doorway, Heydrick fired. The paralysis needle bit deep in Thorsan's neck. He crumpled silently.

Heydrick and Ria stood before Tyko.

"I see you've completed your mission," the old man said. He frowned as Heydrick put his arm around Ria.

Heydrick laughed. "When Thorsan comes out of it, give him scopolamine. He'll tell you who did kill Feyjak."

"I suppose you want my blessing? You have it."

"How's your war coming?"

"It's over by now. Nasty business, government. What are you going to do?"

Heydrick and Ria looked at each other.

"I think we'll find an empty asteroid and camp out for a while. The universe is getting too crowded. I'm glad she was innocent, Tyko. I could never have brought her in...for any reason."

"I wish I were young enough to go with you," Tyko sighed. "Not on your honeymoon, of course. I guess you won't be coming back. This is goodbye, then? Is there anything I can do for you?"

Heydrick started to reply but Ria cut in. "Yes, there is. I want another pair of those magnetic handcuffs."

Heydrick shrugged. "She has the maternal instincts of a buzz-saw."