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MURDER FROM MARS

Ray Carver, vacationing top-notch Earth detective, looks for the first interplanetary killer and finds a wife

RAY CARVER reached out from under the covers without opening eyes and groped for the jangling phone. It eluded him.

"Murphy!" he yelled. "Telephone! . . . Why do the damned things always have to go off in the middle of the night?"

A young Oriental slipped into the room and picked up the instrument.

"Al-lo?"

He listened for a moment.

"For you, Mr. Ray. Captain."

Carver opened an eye. "Captain? . . . What Captain?"

"Of ship. Ship Captain."

Carver sat up suddenly, and groaned. He held a hand to his head. "Gin," he said solemnly, "is Satan's own brew. Lay off the stuff, Murphy. . . . What ship? Are we on a ship?"

The Oriental nodded assent.

"We're not going to Europe, are we? I can't stand Europe. Full of balconies with dictators on them. Tell me we're not going to Europe, Murphy."

"Not to Europe, Mr. Ray. We go Mars."

"Mars! Of all the places! Why are we going to Mars? What went *on* last night, anyway?"

Ray Carver was aboard the *Barsoom*, the billion-dollar luxury liner, flagship of Cosmic Carriers, Ltd. It made monthly trips between Earth and Mars. Carver had heard of it, naturally, but he never expected to be traveling on it. There had been a wild party the night before to celebrate the conviction of a ring of saboteurs Carver had rounded up in his capacity as special investigator for the Inter-Asian

Corporation. With prodding, he remembered the beginning of it. A year's vacation was his, in recognition of valuable services, rendered, and he and his friends—by now in an advance state of inebriety—decided that the thing for him to do was to take a space-voyage. Carver had never gone on such a trip. He was an ardent believer in the phrase recently coined by the ocean-liners, airways and railroads: "*See Earth First.*" But, at that moment, the suggestion appealed strongly to him. Why not the *Barsoom*? It was leaving in three hours. So, unsteadily assisted by his enthusiastic friends, he was soon packed and speeding in his host's big car to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he managed—with the aid of a hundred-dollar bill—to persuade the uniformed gentleman at the gate that a reservation was a very old-fashioned business and not at all necessary.

THE telephone in Murphy's hand was making rumbling noises. "Give me that black devil-box," said Carver. "And get me a drink. . . . Hello!"

"Good morning, Mr. Carver. This is Captain Gerson speaking. I wonder if you'd mind stepping up to my office as soon as you're able. There's a little murd—ah, matter, I'd like to discuss with you."

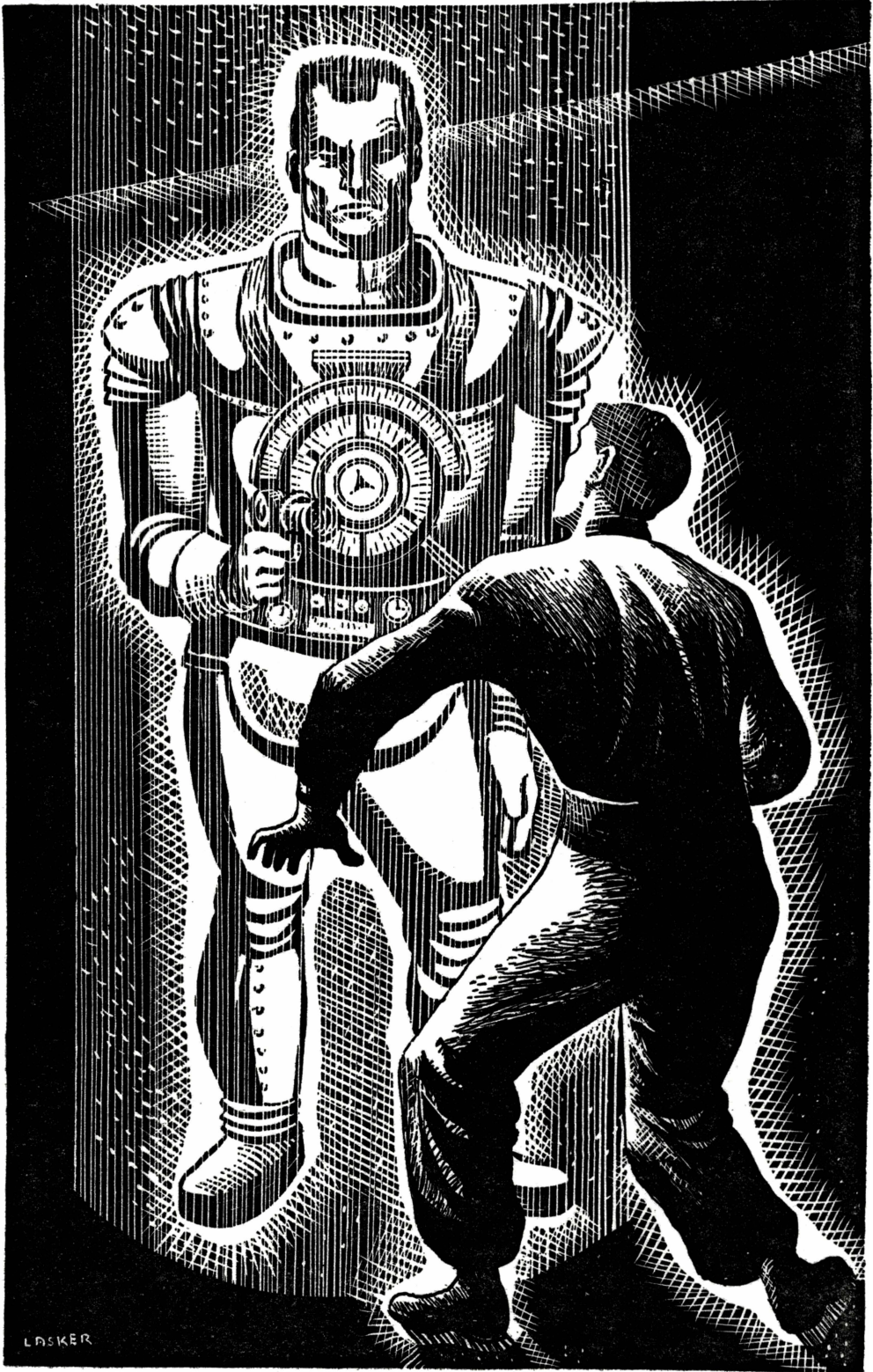
"Be over in half an hour."

Ray Carver hauled his six feet of bronzed, muscled body out of bed. "Bath ready, Murphy?"

"All ready, Mr. Ray. Cold like ice."

Murphy had been retained by Carver during one of his numerous jaunts around

By Richard Wilson



LASKER

the world. He had engaged him as a guide in Algiers several years previously. Although he was decidedly of Oriental cast, his nationality was uncertain. Murphy, of course, wasn't his real name. *That* sounded vaguely like a Welsh railway station, but if one disregarded several consonants, it might easily be mistaken for "Murphy." So Carver called him that, soon thereafter—his services proving of exceptional merit—giving him steady employment as his manservant.

Bathed and shaved, and having breakfasted on a cigaret and a scotch-and-soda, Ray Carver knocked at the captain's door.

Captain Gerson himself answered and invited him to have a chair. The captain was a tall, lank man who wore a Menjou mustache and looked as if he had never been outdoors in his life. Carver contrasted the extreme paleness of his face and hands with the ruddy, healthy complexions of captains of old, who had piloted ships of wood and canvas across raging seas. Captains had deteriorated, he thought. Nowadays they had nothing better to do than push buttons and wake people out of bed.

"I'll get right to the point," said Gerson, pushing a box of cigars across his desk.

"Do," said Carver, pocketing half a dozen for Murphy, who doted on them, smoking furiously when he thought his master wasn't within smelling distance.

"There seems to have been murder—"

"How exciting," murmured Carver. "May I play?"

GERSON looked annoyed. "Murder is a serious business, sir. Especially when it occurs aboard a ship like this one."

"Nasty publicity, eh?"

"Yes. And more especially when the murdered man is Count Paolo di Spiro." He paused impressively.

"Ah!" Carver raised an eyebrow. "My

old pal di Spiro. Spy, murderer, thief, and all-round heel. Did he die horribly?"

"He looks very peaceful. But the flesh surrounding his heart is charred to a cinder."

"Tch-tch. Ashes all over his clothes I suppose. And di Spiro was such a fastidious person, too."

The captain cleared his throat. "Have a cigar," he said.

Carver took another handful.

"Your position, Mr. Carver, is well known to me. Your success as investigator for the Inter-Asian Corporation prompts me to ask whether you would consider handling this case for us. Situations such as this, you realize, are rarities aboard the *Barsoom*. As a matter of fact, this is our first murder."

"How sad."

"We have had no need for facilities for the apprehension of criminals—especially murderers. Therefore, if you would do us the favor of interesting yourself in this unfortunate occurrence, we should be greatly obliged."

Carver covered a yawn. "You must remember, captain, that I'm on my vacation. Or at least so I've been told. And I've always abhorred extra-curricular activities."

Gerson frowned. "I'm sure the owners will make it worth your while."

"Let us hope so. It has always seemed to me that fifty thousand dollars is a hell of a lot of money to pay for a jaunt to Mars—especially when one doesn't even remember leaving for the place. You might play around in that direction."

Captain Gerson stood up and rubbed his hands.

"I think we understand each other. Shall we repair to the stateroom of the deceased?"

"Where the deceased is happily beyond repair, eh?"

Carver smiled at the captain's pained expression.

THE body hadn't been touched. Di Spiro's remains were quite naturally sitting up in bed, his back propped up with pillows, a book in his right hand, his left holding a cigaret which had burned down and singed his fingers before going out. A monocle was still jauntily stuck in his right eye. The left breast of his rather loud pajama-jacket was a mass of blackness. Carver detected, without much trouble, the odor of burned flesh.

"'Marianne, a Candid Biography.'" Carver had bent down to read the title of the book. "Seemed to have a lurid taste—both in pajamas and literature."

He prowled about the room, humming to himself, mentally photographing its contents. He went through di Spiro's clothes, folded neatly over a chair, discovering a perfumed handkerchief, a wallet and a red address-book.

Carver said "Aha!", winked at the captain, who was standing uncomfortably in the doorway, and settled back in an easy-chair. He thumbed through the book. "Fast worker." He nodded at di Spiro. "Only a few hours on the boat, and—Listen to this: 'Lois. Cabin 17C. Ext. 165.' Who occupies 17C, captain?"

"I don't know, but I can find out for you."

"Please do. And don't let me keep you if our friend on the bed annoys you."

Gerson thankfully excused himself.

Carver sat in thought for some moments. His eyes wandered to a small bit of white on the floor near di Spiro's trunk, at which he had been staring without recognition. At length he reached down and picked it up. It was roughly triangular in shape, and seemed to be a corner ripped from a larger sheet of paper. He could make out the words:

"... erty of U. S. Govt.' Department of ..."

He pocketed the bit of evidence and looked further. A thorough search of the baggage revealed nothing. A television set

standing in the corner of the room held his attention a second. He turned away and seemed to be studying the murdered man, pulling thoughtfully at his lower lip.

Carver left the room, carefully locking the door with the key the captain had given him, and walked slowly down the passageway.

HE had taken perhaps a dozen steps when he was overtaken by a prim-faced matron who led a yapping Pomeranian behind her and gestured excitedly with a lorgnette.

"I beg your pardon, but you're Mr. Raymond Carver, aren't you?"

Carver admitted the fact, looking distastefully at the dog that was sniffing suspiciously at his trousers.

"How do you do, Mr. Carver. So happy to know you. My name is Lucinda Snarve. Being fellow passengers, as you might say, I thought it would be a good idea if we became acquainted. These long trips are tedious affairs, unless one makes friends to help pass away the time, don't you think?"

Carver supposed so.

"I've heard quite a bit about you, Mr. Carver—quiet, Fifi! Leave the nice man alone! Perhaps you've heard of me: I'm president of the Southport Spiritual Society. Do you believe in ghosts, Mr. Carver?"

"I'm afraid not, Miss Snarve. But if you'll excuse me now, I have some very important business to attend to. I hope to see you again." He sincerely hoped *not*.

"But, Mr. Carver, I have something I want to tell you—"

"Some other time, perhaps. Good-bye." And he fled around the corner.

MURPHY, I've got a job for you. Take this key and dash over to 24B. Take your fingerprint outfit along and see what you can get. There's a man in the room. but don't let him bother you.

He's dead." Carver knew it took much more than a corpse to unnerve Murphy.

"Yessir. Captain call while you gone. Say call him back. About Lois person." He smiled broadly. "You catch lady-friend so soon, Mr. Ray?"

"Never mind, you slant-eyed Cupid. Just run right over and do as I said. Do a good job."

Fifteen minutes later Carver and Captain Gerson were again closeted in the latter's office.

"Well, captain?" asked Carver. "What have you found out about the lady in the little red book?"

"Her name is Lois Clarke. She gave her occupation as buyer for a Park Avenue dress concern."

"Hmm. Have you spoken to her yet?"

"Only socially. I thought you'd like to do the grilling."

"Yes. You might arrange to introduce me at dinner tonight, in the dining-room," said Carver.

"Of course. Have you any idea how the Count was killed? That—er, scorched spot—"

"I've seen wounds like that—always fatal wounds, mind you—that had been inflicted during the Balkan uprising. The weapons had been smuggled to Earth. One of the more unsocial achievements of Martian culture. . . . Captain, I noticed a television set in di Spiro's room."

"Naturally. There's a set in each state-room. There's nothing unusual about that."

"There is about this one. Its not a receiving set, you see. It's a broadcaster."

"Impossible! There isn't room," said the captain unhesitatingly.

"This one," said Carver, "seems to be a new type. A great improvement upon the method now in use. It's ingeniously compact; no larger than a cigar-box. And it's been set into the base of the set already installed there; it's barely noticeable."

THE captain showed his astonishment. "Who could have put it there? The murderer?"

"I hardly think so. I should imagine it was placed there some time before the murder. In order for the 'person or persons unknown' to spy on di Spiro."

"You don't say!"

"I do, indeed." Carver produced the bit of paper he had found. "This, unless I am very much mistaken, is a part of the plans for some Government device or other that was stolen from our dear departed."

"You mean the Count was an American secret service operative?"

Carver smiled. "Hardly. It is more likely that *he* stole the plans before someone followed his lead. The United States doesn't hire di Spiro's type of mercenary."

"Whom do you suspect?"

"We have a whole shipful of people to choose from. There's no particular miscreant I have in mind."

Gerson passed Carver a booklet. "I have the passenger-list here. Perhaps you'll find something helpful in it. This is the confidential office copy. It lists the passengers by name and occupation."

"I scarcely think anyone would register as 'Butch Jones, Assassin', do you? However, I'll borrow this, if I may, and study it later."

"Certainly," the captain nodded. "What about the—ah—corpse? Have you finished with it?"

"Quite. You may have him to do with whatever you *do* do with such things. Feed them to the space-sharks, perhaps?"

"We have a licensed mortician aboard to care for any such cases. Not murders, of course; people will occasionally die en route. It's a long journey, you know. . . . The doctor has made his inspection, and his report, together with yours, will be handed to the Martian authorities when we arrive at Lugana."

"Together with di Spiro, All done up in a very fitting coffin."

"Ah—yes. What about fingerprints? Have you found any?"

"My invaluable assistant is working along that line. We'll have a complete set on file in case they're needed. That is to say: in case we happen to snaffle on to a sufficiently guilty-looking suspect.

"Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll dress for dinner. It's at seven, isn't it?"

RAY CARVER had left the captain's office and was strolling briskly down the observation deck toward his room when a feminine voice hailed him.

"Yoo-hoo! Mr. Carver!"

He looked around, unwisely, and saw that it was Miss Lucinda Snarve. His doom was sealed, he sighed, slowed his pace and made a brave attempt at a smile.

Miss Snarve, pulled by a leashful of Fifi, arrived, puffing.

"How fortunate to meet you again so soon, Mr. Carver. It must be Fate—Karma, as the Hindoos call it. Do you believe in Fate, Mr. Carver?"

"I think I do, Miss Snarve. It seems that every time I venture out on deck I meet you. What else but Fate?"

She chose to interpret this as a compliment. "How nice of you to think so! You said before that you had no belief in ghosts—Fifi, stop!" Fifi had spotted a canine friend down the deck and had left off eating Carver's shoelaces to begin growling and tugging at the leash.

"Well," went on Miss Snarve, jerking about involuntarily, "I think I can change your mind for you. You see, I saw a ghost only last night. A big, tall, glowing thing it was—"

"May I relieve you of Fifi, Miss Snarve? She seems to be giving you a bit of trouble."

"Why, Mr. Carver, how thoughtful of you!" She passed over the leash. "As I

was saying, he was a big, tall—Fifi! Fifi!"

As soon as was convenient, Carver had let the dog loose to follow its own inclinations. It immediately took advantage of its opportunity to race down the deck toward its friend, with Miss Snarve in undignified pursuit.

"I'm *so* sorry," Carver laughed, and walked rapidly in the other direction.

He reached his cabin and collapsed in a chair, mopping his brow. Murphy arrived soon afterward.

"What news, O Sherlock?" asked Carver. "Have you tracked the foul murderer to his lair?"

"Find five sets fingerplints, Mr. Ray. One yours. *You* maybe kill Mr. Dispirro, hah?"

"I'm afraid it isn't as simple as that, Mr. Chan. You'll probably find that one of those sets belongs to the captain, another to the doctor, and the other two to di Spiro and the steward who discovered the body."

"Yessir. I go fix 'em up."

"Not so fast! What's that you have under your arm? Robbing the dead, eh?"

Murphy shamefacedly handed over "Marianne, a Candid Biography." "Think maybe catch up on reading. This look good. Hot stuff."

Carver grinned. "All right. But you'd better not read it in bed. Remember what happened to its previous owner."

ATTIRED in his dinner-jacket, Carver entered the immense dining-room of the *Barsoom*. A waiter bowed and led him thru the scores of people seated at richly-laden tables to the Captain's table, where he was seated at Gerson's right. At his own right was a remarkably pretty girl, petite and blonde, who, however, looked as if she might at any moment cry into her soup. Carver was late, as usual.

Gerson nodded. "Good evening, Mr. Carver. Miss Clarke, may I introduce Mr.

Ray Carver? Mr. Carver, Miss Clarke."

She acknowledged the introduction with a wan smile. Suddenly she apologized and walked quickly from the room. Carver excused himself and followed her, unmindful of the eyes that turned to watch them.

He found her on the observation deck, sitting in one of the scattered armchairs and morosely watching the pinpoints of light that were stars glittering against the curtain of perpetual night. He drew a chair close to hers and sat down.

"Had I known I was going to be such a shock to you, I'd have sat at another table tonight."

She looked at him; he saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"Please forgive me," she said. "I was very rude."

"Quite all right. You'll have your turn to forgive me in a moment, if I step verbally on your toes. Did you happen to know Count Paolo di Spiro?"

"Yes. He was my uncle. Captain Gerson told me about the, the—his death."

"I'm awfully sorry. . . . You loved him?"

"I hated him! I know what sort of a person he was, Mr. Carver. He was utterly unscrupulous. I also know he was a spy. He—I don't know why I'm telling you this."

"Please go on. You can trust me."

She smiled gratefully. Carver listened, entranced, as she told him of her life. Her mother was Italian, her father English. How, when she was but a child, her parents were killed in an automobile accident. Di Spiro, her only living relative, took care of her, sent her to exclusive schools in Switzerland. He was very kind—at first. When she left finishing school, however, he realized of how much value her charm and beauty could be to him. She began to travel about the world with him, gradually being inducted into espionage and intrigue. She had no choice.

"I HAD no one else. And he didn't care for me—I was merely a useful tool. He'd have had no compunctions about getting rid of me if I betrayed him—as I thought of doing more than once. He was merciless." She shuddered.

Carver remembered patting her hand, thrilling at her touch, saying "There, there," and feeling very silly about it.

Tears glistened on her cheeks. He passed her his handkerchief.

"You're kind, Mr. Carver."

"Make it Ray."

"Thank you—Ray. . . . The night before last, in New York, I remember waiting at a hotel for him, with our baggage packed and standing about the room. He returned late, and in a hurry. We got the bags down to the airport and took off for Albuquerque, where we boarded the *Barsoom*. I found that he'd stolen the Government's plans for its new robot bomber. He was going to sell them to the Glora—you know of them?"

Carver knew of them. The Glora—dreaded secret revolutionary society of Tuloni, one of Mars' states.

"The plans were in two parts. He kept one and gave me the other."

"What? You have part of the plans!"

"Yes. They're in my cabin. I'm—I'm frightened."

"You have good reason to be. Lois—May I?"

"Please." Her smile enchanted him.

"Lois, you're in very grave danger. Whoever killed your uncle isn't going to be satisfied with half a loaf."

"I know. That's why I wondered if you'd help me."

Help her! Carver would have given his immortal soul, if he had one, just to be near her.

"Look: you've got to get those plans to me. I think I can make the murderer walk into a trap, if everything goes off correctly. Did any of your uncle's clients know you were helping him?"

"No. I was always introduced, where necessary, as his niece and secretary."

"Fine! . . . Do you have a television set in your cabin?"

"No. They don't have them in the smaller rooms."

"Better and better. Just the same, I think we'd better go down and see. There was a television sending-set in your uncle's room—which I suspect is how they found where he was keeping the plans. . . . Do you mind?"

"Of course not."

They left the observation deck arm-in-arm. Carver was afraid he'd fallen in love.

LOIS' cabin, on C Deck, was about large enough to hold a bed, a chair, a dressing-table and trunk and not much else. Di Spiro was a rat, Carver thought. While he traveled in luxury, his niece was cooped up in a cave. He went over the room carefully, looking for a counterpart of the sending-set in the murdered man's stateroom. He found nothing, and breathed a sigh of relief. Lois rummaged around in her trunk and brought out a fur muff. She unzipped a compartment in it and withdrew a sheaf of papers. Carver riffled through them and stuffed them in his breast pocket.

"You stay here for the rest of the evening. Don't let anyone in. I'm going to play counter-spy. See you first thing in the morning. Good-night, Lois."

"Good-night, Ray. Do be careful."

He reluctantly dropped her hand and left for his room.

Murphy was waiting for him with a glass of scotch. Carver drank appreciatively.

"I want you to be very attentive, Murphy. I'm going to indulge in a bit of skullduggery and sleight of hand tonight and I shall have need of your excellent services. Also, possibly, of your butcher-knife, which you may stick up your sleeve. We are going to di Spiro's and steal these

papers which I have in my pocket. The wielder of the charred spot of death will be watching everything carefully through his television set. That's where you come in. When he sees me remove these plans from di Spiro's trunk, he'll attack me. See that you get him first. Understand?"

Murphy was grinning widely. "Good stuff, Mr. Ray. I understand."

"Fine. We'll wait a bit longer—till the revelry dies down. About eleven will be time enough."

A few minutes past eleven Ray Carver let himself into di Spiro's cabin with his key. Murphy remained as lookout in the corridor. Carver noticed a scarcely audible humming and a faint glow coming from the direction of the supplementary television set. Neither would have been noticeable had he not known about them in advance.

He walked straight to di Spiro's trunk, using a flashlight in preference to the lights of the room. He wanted his watchers to think him acting without authority and in his own interests. He poked around in drawers, ostensibly searching for something. At length he whistled softly and pretended to take the sheaf of plans from a compartment in the trunk—in reality removing them from his breast pocket. He looked them over, making certain that the beam from his flashlight fell upon them, then stuffing them back in his pocket and left the room.

AS he walked swiftly down the corridor he noticed a pillar of light that seemed to be taking form in front of him. It began to assume the shape of a man. It looked like a ghost.

A ghost! Of course! Why hadn't he listened to Lucinda Snarve, the spiritualist? What was it she had said? "A big, tall, glowing thing it was—" The wavy outlines of the thing became defined. It was a man—a Martian, Carver would say, from pictures he had seen and from Mars'

occasional visitors to Earth. He was about seven feet tall, broad in proportion, and dressed in a sort of metallic uniform. He wore no helmet. His blue-gray hair was short and stood upright on his head. His face was ruggedly handsome. Upon his chest was a box which, Carver thought, would be a miniature television receiving set. About his waist was a wide belt, fashioned of the same material as his uniform, upon which were buttons and levers. Carver noticed that he had pushed one of the buttons when he took corporeal shape. In his left hand he carried a snub-nosed weapon, no larger than an automatic, but with a very wide barrel. This was possibly the gun that had killed di Spiro.

The apparition spoke . . . in English!

"Good evening, Mr. Carver. I trust you are well. I also trust you will see fit to retain that health by giving me those plans you have in your pocket."

"Why all the formality?" Carver smiled. "Why not shoot me down as you did di Spiro."

"I sincerely hope that will not be necessary." The one in uniform was also smiling. "The count would not have been harmed if he had played fair with us. We were perfectly willing to pay him well for the plans. But when he tried—as you say—to double-cross us, we grew annoyed. It would not have done to have the documents fall into the hands of the Tulonian government. It might have prolonged our revolution indefinitely."

Carver was playing for time. "You are of the Glora?"

The other inclined his head. "Your servant, sir."

"Excuse, Mr. Glora—" (Good old Murphy!) thought Carver.)

The Martian whirled. The little Oriental, who had crept up unnoticed behind him, grabbed his left arm. He employed a bit of ju-jitsu and sent the gun clattering down the passageway. Carver sprang forward to seize the other arm.

"His belt, Murphy," Carver cried. "Unfasten it!" The Martian struggled with renewed fury, but, powerful as he was, he was no match for the two determined Earthmen. The metal belt followed the gun to the floor. Carver retrieved the weapon.

"You'll be very careful of your movements, you of the Glora," he said. "You know what this thing does to people."

"I know," the Martian was smiling again. "You are wise to aim it at my head. It would have no effect on the metal of my uniform."

CARVER grunted. He admired the man's nerve. Passengers and some of the *Barsoom's* officer's attracted by the scuffle, now ran up. The captain was among them.

"What's all this?" demanded Gerson. "What's *that*? Oh, hello, Carver. Who is this—this person?" He looked curiously at the Martian.

"I am Lan Yoral, Captain Gerson. Good evening. You may thank Mr. Carver and his brave saffron friend for my capture. Mr. Carver is very cunning. I congratulate him on his clever ruse."

"Here is your murderer, captain," said Carver, "though he deserves a better name. Treat him with respect. He's a gentleman. And don't forget that he killed di Spiro; therefore he's a friend of mine."

Ray Carver rose early the following morning, dressed with more than usual care, fastened a flower from the *Barsoom's* hothouse in his lapel and refused the drink that Murphy had prepared for him.

"Love," he said to his astonished servant, "is exhilaration enough," and went to call on Miss Clarke.

He found her dressed and waiting for him when he knocked.

"Oh, Ray, darling, I'm so glad you're all right. I didn't sleep a bit last night."

"The important thing is that *you're* all

right, O Angel. Are you prepared for a little breakfast? That spoonful of soup you had last night wasn't enough."

After breakfast the two of them entered the captain's office, to find him puzzledly examining the gun and metal belt that had been taken from the Martian.

He looked up as they came in. "Hello, you two. Carver, what the devil is this thing? The gun looks simple enough, but the belt has me buffaloed. And where did you find that Yoral fellow—was he a passenger?"

Carver picked up the belt. A section of it opened in his hands, revealing a small compartment filled with papers.

"The plans," he said. "Yoral was no passenger. He was a member of the Glora-Tuloni's underground revolutionary society. He operated from headquarters there, spying on di Spiro, as I suspected, through the television set his agents had installed in the room before you left Earth. The Glora, you know, has its own crop of very brilliant scientists working day and night for the sake of the Revolution. They probably have quite a few gadgets similar to these. The gun, as I said, is not unknown on Earth, but the belt is something else again. It's a unit of an ingenious piece of apparatus, the rest of which is no doubt back on Mars, in one of their headquarters."

"But what is it?"

"I'M coming to that. It works on the principle of high frequency sound waves. Atomic transportation, you might call it. A machine breaks down the atoms of the body, transports them instantaneously through space to any desired point, reassembles them again with the aid of that belt. Naturally, when we relieved Yoral of his belt, he was helpless. Teleportation, some people call it. He was the 'ghost' my spiritualist friend, Miss Snarve, saw. He must have been leaving after killing di Spiro when she noticed him. He probably materialized, at first, right in the room.

"How is the Martian, captain?" asked Lois. "I suppose you have him in irons?"

"We put him in a cell last night. But when we went down this morning he was dead. Poison. He'd killed himself."

"That's too bad."

There was silence for a moment. Then: "Go on, oaf, ask him," Lois whispered.

"What? . . . Oh—yes. Er, Captain Gerson, do you have authority to perform marriages aboard the *Barsoom*? We—that is . . ."

The captain chuckled. "So soon? Of course I have. Well, well, well." He beamed at Lois. "I hope you'll be very happy." To Carver he said "Congratulations! Have a cigar!"

Carver took half a dozen for Murphy, who would be best man.

THE END