

fantastic

ADVENTURES

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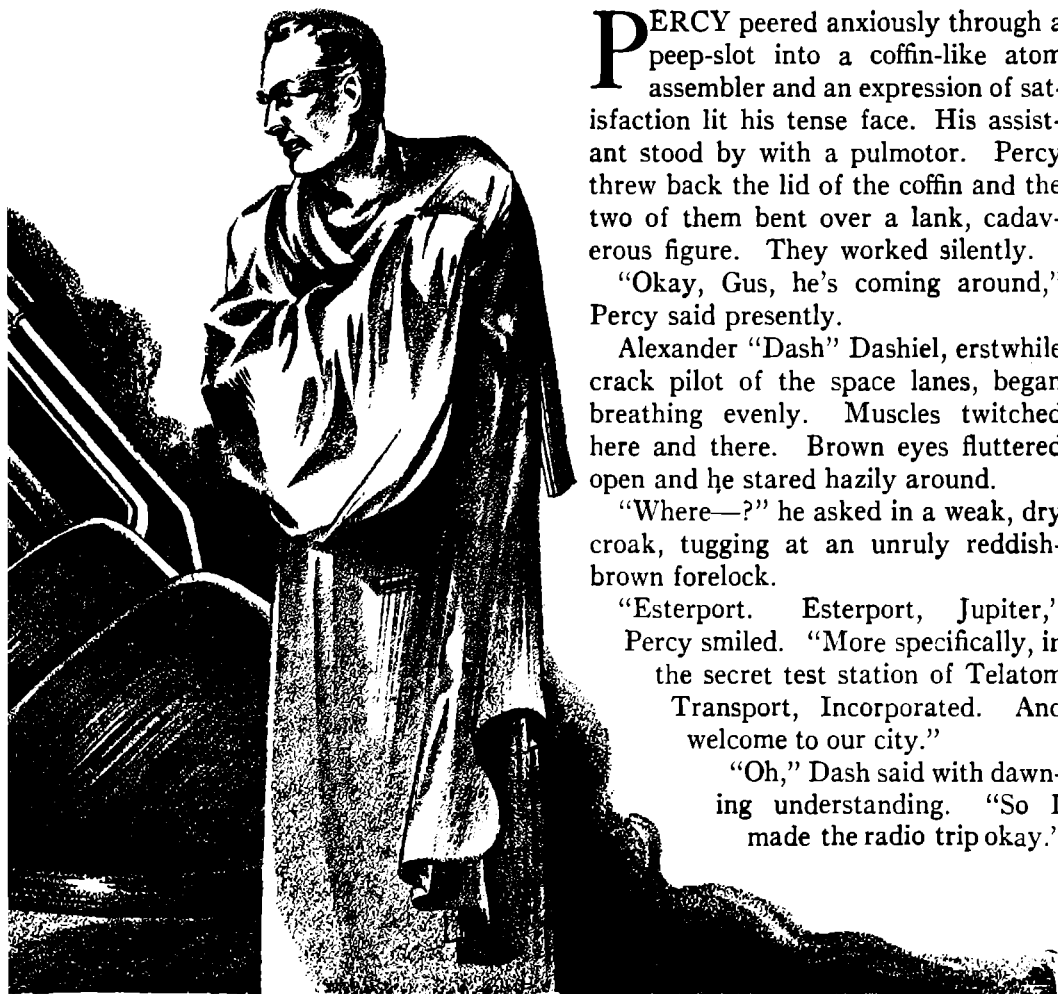


"Migod!" gasped Gus. "It's a little man—it's you in miniature!"

MURDERED— YET ALIVE

by Jep Powell

Dashiel traversed space via etherwave, and arrived twenty pounds underweight. Then a tiny Dashiel followed—and trouble began!



PERCY peered anxiously through a peep-slot into a coffin-like atom assembler and an expression of satisfaction lit his tense face. His assistant stood by with a pulmotor. Percy threw back the lid of the coffin and the two of them bent over a lank, cadaverous figure. They worked silently.

"Okay, Gus, he's coming around," Percy said presently.

Alexander "Dash" Dashiel, erstwhile crack pilot of the space lanes, began breathing evenly. Muscles twitched here and there. Brown eyes fluttered open and he stared hazily around.

"Where—?" he asked in a weak, dry croak, tugging at an unruly reddish-brown forelock.

"Esterport. Esterport, Jupiter," Percy smiled. "More specifically, in the secret test station of Telatom Transport, Incorporated. And welcome to our city."

"Oh," Dash said with dawning understanding. "So I made the radio trip okay."

It had been a long chance, and a desperate one, for Dash. Once a famous pilot of the spaceways, he had been demoted and finally grounded forever because of his weakness for the insidious Saturnian loco-berries. He had gravitated to a point where no space ship would sign him on, not even the most disreputable old tramps. Washed up—though he was just beginning his middle thirties.

A few days ago he was a hopeless bum. Then came the weird offer from Telatom. It promised rehabilitation—or death. He had snatched at the offer; agreed to make the secret test flight by atomic projection. No publicity attended his departure from Earth. As a part of the plan, he firmly dated himself by becoming conspicuously drunk in several familiar Chicago hangouts. Then he was whisked secretly to Toledo, where he silently bade the world goodbye and stepped into the awesome atomizer. Now he was sitting on top of the world.

He was the first to travel from Earth to Jupiter—anywhere, for that matter—by electric beam. He was to receive a tidy little fortune from Telatom for his perilous venture. An even bigger fortune would come from personal appearance tours, advertising testimonials and in other ways.

“Well, what are you staring at?” he demanded. He was as naked as a peeled, hard-boiled egg. “Where are my clothes?”

“Right through that door.” Percy pointed. “You’ll find suit, shoes, shirts, everything. We got them as soon as your sizes were flashed to us.”

Gus cocked an attentive ear and hopped to the receiver controls.

“Say, there’s something else comin’,” he declared.

“Impossible!” Percy said. “They wouldn’t dare shoot anything else this

soon.” He stopped and listened to a hissing, crackling sound. “Well, damn their crazy souls! Probably testing again with a rabbit or something. A couple of minutes sooner, and they would have gummed up everything. If Frank Hoyt was here he’d get them told. Where the hell is Hoyt?”

DASH stormed into the room in a suit that swallowed him.

“What kind of prank is this?” he demanded.

“It’s the size you ordered,” Percy declared.

Dash glowered up at Percy.

“How tall are you?”

“Five-eleven.”

Dash swallowed hard and paled.

“Then—then I’ve shrunk. Shrunk at least two inches. I was an even six feet.”

“Hey, Perce!” Gus shouted, eyes glued to the peep-slot in the assembler. “This ain’t no rabbit. It’s a human bein’. A brat.”

A few minutes later a tiny man sat up in the assembler and blinked in bewilderment into three equally bewildered faces.

“Holy Moses!” Gus gasped. “He’s a spittin’ image of the other’n.”

“Wh—who are you?” Dash gulped.

“Dash Dashiell,” the little fellow piped with some misgiving as he stared at the larger Dash Dashiell. He fingered a stray forelock.

Frank Hoyt strutted in with the air of a man trying to look like a busy executive. He was a paunchy, beady-eyed, middle-aged man who smiled only with his mouth—the left side of it.

“Dashiell!” he greeted. “Congratulations! I knew it couldn’t fail. Telatom is made! We’re all made. Wait’ll old Billy Smith hears about it. I’d like to see his face. The old walrus. Thought he had a strangle-hold on atomic travel,

did he? We'll relegate his shiny fleet of space ships to the limbo of the ox-cart. We'll put the old coot out of business. We'll—er, what's the matter?"

Wordlessly, Dash pointed to the naked little Dash.

"He says he's me," Dash muttered weakly.

"I am!" little Dash chirped.

Slowly Hoyt's astonishment changed to consternation.

"Dammit to hell!" he blared. "I've done everything but pray to have you projected safely through space—and what do I get? Two of you! Two are as bad as none. Space travelers aren't going to patronize our projector if there's danger of arriving as twins. What am I going to do, cancel all the personal appearances and the publicity I've got lined up?"

He slumped into a chair.

"How did it happen?"

"God knows," Percy sighed. "Maybe something went wrong back in Toledo; or possibly some elemental disturbance interrupted the beam. But how he arrived in two installments, identical except in size, is too much for me."

"I've got to talk with Russell in Toledo," Hoyt decided. "Connect me from my private office." He strode out of the room.

Hoyt was gone several minutes. When he returned he found the two Dashes arguing over the matter of identity. Little Dash was wearing a large towel, Indian blanket fashion.

"Quit wrangling," Hoyt ordered. "I think I've got a solution. Now, listen, Dash—"

Both Dashes answered as one.

HOYT bit his lip, then a slow smile curled it. He addressed the smaller one.

"To avoid confusion, we'll call you Dot. How's that? Dash and Dot. Dot-Dash. Get it?" He seemed to enjoy his cleverness.

"All right, Dash," he continued. "You'll go on with the personal appearances as I had planned. We'll get you a new outfit. Shoes with built-up heels to make your height about right. I'll get the mayor to greet you here. You'll ride with him behind a police escort to City Hall. You'll make a speech there and receive the key to the city. Tomorrow night you'll be honor guest at the Explorer's Club. I'll get busy with the arrangements. We'll keep Dot out of sight and—"

"The hell you will!" Dot screeched. "What about my contract?"

Hoyt was thoughtful for a moment. Then,

"Write your signatures on separate pieces of paper. Get two pens, Gus." Their signatures were identical.

"All right, I give up," Hoyt sighed with a gesture of resignation. He brooded a minute and a shrewd smile played at the corner of his mouth. "I'll figure a way out by tomorrow. Meanwhile, you fellows can sleep in a room here at the station. But right now you need some food, I guess. And something for Dot to wear till the stores open tomorrow. I'll have my chauffeur take you to a restaurant and he'll dig up some clothes for Dot. Call Lefty, will you, Gus?" He peeled two large bills from a fat roll, handed one to each Dashiell.

"What about the twenty-five grand?" they chorused.

"Which of you gets it?" Hoyt snapped. "I told you I would take care of all that tomorrow."

Lefty pushed his cap backward in what may have been a salute, and stood slouchily in the door. He was a large man with arms that dangled like an

ape's. He had the scarred face of a sparring partner in a heavyweight champion's camp. The face split into a smile of toothy gold.

"Lefty, these gentlemen are Mr. Dashiel," Hoyt said. "Figure that one out for yourself. You are at their service."

As they turned to look at Lefty, Hoyt drew a forefinger across his throat and pointed at Dot. Lefty nodded.

"**B**BETTER keep off the main stems," Dash told Lefty as they climbed into the sleek uranium sedan. "We can't afford to spoil the publicity set-up. Some of the space flyers may recognize me if we go around any of the regular hangouts."

"Me, too," Dot added.

"Don't worry," Lefty grunted.

The streets grew narrower and darker. Dot glanced into the rear-view mirror and caught an ominous leer from Lefty.

"Where you taking us?" Dot quavered suspiciously.

"You wanted to stay off the main stems, didn't you?" Lefty retorted. "It won't be long now," he added significantly.

Squalid, unlighted houses now were spaced farther and farther apart. Dim street lights shone only at intersections. The streets were deserted. Dot shivered and wrapped his towel closer around him, although the temperature in the domed city was quite comfortable.

The car slid by what seemed acres of gloomy junk-yard. Lefty stopped in the shadows of a deserted building. He stepped out of the car and there was a clank as he lifted a manhole cover. He snatched open the car door and peered in.

"C'mere, you!" he growled, reaching a long arm into the car and seizing Dot by the foot. He yanked Dot from the

seat and clapped a hand over his mouth to smother a shriek of terror.

Dash sallied out of the car and lit on Lefty's shoulders like a lioness defending her cub. His 160-odd pounds equalled nearly a quarter of a ton in the heavy Jovian gravity and Lefty went down under the weight. He dropped Dot. Dash hammered his fists into Lefty's scarified visage. Lefty's big arms closed in a bear-like hug and he rolled over, pinning Dash helplessly to the pavement. Dot was scurrying around looking for a stone to use on the chauffeur's egg-shaped head.

"Hold your hosses, fella," Lefty panted almost apologetically. "I'm just doin' you a favor. I could drop the little gink down there and slide the cover over 'im and nobody'd ever miss 'im. Then he couldn't crab your act."

Dash squirmed under Lefty's weight and shook his head.

"I've sunk pretty low," he admitted, "but murder's out."

"He ain't nothin' to you, is he?" Lefty demanded.

"No!" Dash snorted. Then, "Hell, I don't know."

"You're nuts," Lefty grumbled. "I got my orders and I'm gonna keep 'em. I'll take care of the little shrimp and you won't even have to see it, or know anything about it."

"Listen, you cold-blooded ape," Dash grated. "If you harm him, I'll have you and Hoyt and the whole crew behind bars."

Lefty eased his embrace slowly.

"Okay, mister," he said finally, "if you feel that way about it. If you want to let a shrimp spoil your act, that's your business. You fellas get back in the car and we'll get some grub and some clothes for the runt."

FFRANK HOYT paced his office in restless rage. Dot Dashiel, a syn-

chromy in brown attire obtained from the children's department of an Esterport store, sat sullenly in a big leather chair, feet dangling half way to the floor.

"A whole day gone and we haven't moved an inch," Hoyt groaned. "All because you had to turn up."

"What's a day?" Dot reported. "It's only ten hours up here."

Hoyt almost strangled.

"What's a day?" he sputtered. "It's—it's precious. Every hour counts. Dash was seen in Chicago on Saturday night—"

"Sure I was," Dot interrupted.

"All right," Hoyt continued impatiently. "—seen in Chicago Saturday night. Drunk and disgusting around several familiar haunts. That was the last time Earth saw him—"

"Me!"

"Well, you, damn it! Now Dash Dashiell, whoever he is, is here days sooner than any space ship could bring him, yet we can't cash in on it because you want to tag along like a shadow." Hoyt released a deep, quivering sigh. "Now listen, runt, as soon as I hear from Toledo, I'll have a reasonable proposition to offer you. You'll take it, or—" He crooked his thumbs into hooks and gestured toward Dot's throat.

Dash swaggered into the room in a new brown outfit. He stopped, twisting a recalcitrant brown lock and glaring at Dot.

"You would get brown," he snorted.

"I always liked brown," Dot declared.

"And I suppose you like dark blue with a chalk stripe."

"Yeah," Dot admitted. "I got one like that. Did you?"

A choking noise came from Dash's throat.

An evil glint lighted Hoyt's eyes.

Identical tastes would breed hatred between them, he mused. Give them enough rope, that's all. Soon either could enjoy seeing the other murdered—tortured in the bargain. Give them more rope. But hurry!

"Now, fellows," Hoyt said unctiously. "You both have good taste. Remind me of, er, twins."

"Wha-a-a-t?" they blared.

Hoyt chuckled.

"You're so alike. It's distressing to see you quarrel. But I was just saying to Dot, er, I expect to hear from Toledo right away and I think we can get everything ironed out. While I'm waiting, why don't you go out and enjoy yourselves? Get in a better humor. Go to some obscu—, er, quiet little night spot where you won't be recognized. Lefty will know where to—"

Dot shivered.

"Lefty was a little, er, hasty last night," Hoyt continued in his oily tone. "But now that you fellows are sticking together, he wouldn't dare try anything. And he has my orders not to. Congenial chap, Lefty."

INTERASTRAL CLUB was a high-sounding name for the tawdry backstreet honkytonk where Lefty dined the problem guests of Telatom Transport. But the brochetted swamp-moles were done to a king's taste and the excellent teka wine warmed their insides to a pleasant glow. Lefty heaved a prodigious sigh and patted his stomach. His other hand guided a toothpick between his 18-karat molars. Then he reached into a pocket and pulled out a handful of shriveled locoberries. He swirled them in his palm and eyed his guests cunningly.

Involuntarily Dash and Dot reached toward the dried berries, then halted their hands. Dash wet his lips with

his tongue.

Lefty selected a berry, put it in his mouth and chewed tantalizingly. He dropped the other berries on the table.

Dash's hand inched forward.

"No!" Dot cried. "Don't touch 'em! You know what they did to you—to us—before. Don't—"

"Shut up!" Dash growled. He scooped up several of the berries, popped them into his mouth and chewed avidly.

The Callistonian twist band played with a frenzy that would make a Harlem jam session seem like a chamber musicale by comparison. One of the hostesses, a willowy, honey-blonde Earthgirl, paused questioningly at the table.

"M-m-m-m!" Dash and Dot said in unison.

She gave a provocative little twitch.

Dash bolted out of the booth and swept her away. Dot sulked in silence as he watched them gliding gracefully across the floor in long, sweeping strides. He'd have to use stilts to look down into her violet-blue eyes as Dash was doing.

Lefty gulped down a goblet of teka and looked the place over for another Earthgirl. They were scarce, not one was available. A plump little Jovian half-breed caught his eye and skipped up to the table. With the pert brunette wig that covered the nut-like shell of her head, false eyebrows and lashes, and expert make-up, she resembled an Earthgirl closely.

"Not ba-a-a-d," Lefty announced after a brief scrutiny. He stumbled out of the booth and towered over her. They shuffled off.

A blue-skinned Venusian cutie sidled into the booth with an undulating movement.

"Leth danth, Honee," she lisped through her forked tongue.

"Ugh!" Dot said, avoiding her round, fishy eyes. "Go away."

The evening was young but the fun was in full sway. Nights are short on Jupiter and frolics begin in high gear. There is no time for warming up. Gaiety threatened to lift the roof of the Interastral Club but it only added to Dot's misery as he sat alone in the booth. Dash and his blonde whirled past and Dash flung back a tormenting sneer.

Dot shrank deeper into his gloom. He eyed the loco-berries longingly. His fingers drummed nervously near the berries. He withdrew his hand with a supreme effort.

Dash and the blonde Earthgirl came to the booth for a drink of teka.

"O-o-o-o-o," the girl said, flashing a dazzling smile at Dot. Then to Dash, "Your little boy?"

"Hell no!" Dot shrieked.

"Oh, brothers," she assumed.

Dot grunted an unintelligible answer.

"I think you're awful cute," she cooed. "Come sit on Mimi's lap and let's make a loving cup of this goblet."

Dot bristled, changed his mind, accepted.

Dash glowered. Dot grinned at him evilly and made a noise like the ripping of canvas.

Mimi did a giggle that ran up the scale.

"Little mans got great big kiss for Mimi?" she asked teasingly.

Dot buried his lips in the highly-rouged pucker proffered.

DASH leaped to his feet, upsetting the table with a clatter of dishes and silverware. Four shell-headed Jovians sprang from nowhere and propelled the furious Dash speedily to the door. Brawls were frequent in the Interastral and capable bouncers knew how to nip them in the bud.

Lefty deserted his wriggly Jovian dumpling, caught Dot up under an arm, tossed a banknote to the cashier on the way out and joined Dash outside the door.

"Whatcha tryin' to do, attract attention?" Lefty growled. "Can't you take it if your gal plays up to the little gink?"

Dash shot Dot a poisonous glance through dilated pupils. Dot backed away uneasily.

"Where to now?" Lefty asked with mock politeness as he opened the car door. "Like to just catch a little air?"

The Dashiels doubled sat in strained silence as Lefty piloted them around the city. Occasionally he pointed out something of interest.

The car slowed down suddenly.

"Say, there's a street carnival," Lefty announced. "I ain't been to one in a coon's age."

"To hell with it," muttered the Dashes.

Ignoring them, Lefty swerved to the curb. He jumped out and opened the door. Childish excitement shone on his face.

"I like to throw baseballs at them shell-headed Jovian dodgers," he grinned. "Hope they got a dodger concession. I used to be a pretty good fireballer back in the Three-Eye League."

Unenthusiastically they followed him to the carnival lot.

Dot stopped short in front of a freak show. The barker was pointing to a pretty blonde midget on a platform. He called her Princess Teeny. She was smiling into the multitude of gaping faces but a wistful expression lurked in her large hazel eyes.

"Ain't she darlin'?" a red-headed Earthwoman cried.

Dot agreed silently.

"She is a cute little trick," Dash mut-

tered. "I could go for her if she was bigger."

"Come on," Lefty urged. "Let's find them dodgers."

Dot stood firmly and gave him an appealing look.

"Ho-ho!" Lefty hooted. "He's fallin' for the dwarf. Ouch!"

Dot had given him a vicious kick on the shin.

"Okay, pee-wee, you can go in an' see her," Lefty chuckled. "We'll all go in."

Inside the tent, instead of following the spieler who led the crowd on the round of freaks, Dot marched straight to Princess Teeny's little section. Lefty kept an eye on him.

TEENY was seating herself at a miniature desk to autograph postcard photos. She looked up and saw a small but tense face peering through a flap in the four-foot-high cheap plush curtain that surrounded her.

"May—may I see you?" the tense face stammered.

Her surprised look melted into a charming smile. She came to the curtain flap to greet him.

"Hello," she said, offering her hand. Her voice was a tiny golden bell.

"Ulp," was all Dot could say, but he said it eloquently. He tried again, but he was as tongue-tied as a flustered schoolboy. Suddenly he realized he was still holding her hand. He let go of it as he would a hot potato.

Teeny smiled reassuringly.

"Are you joining the show?" she asked. There was a hopeful tone in her voice.

"No, I—I just saw you out there." He jerked his thumb toward the entrance. "I—I thought you looked unhappy."

Her eyes dropped, then came up with that same wistful expression.

"I'm not very happy. It's—well, long hops, strange places, strange faces. People staring. Always people staring. And having to live and eat and travel with—with freaks. I used to be with a midget troupe. It was nice then. But I'm the only midget with this outfit."

Sympathy crept into Dot's eyes.

"But some day I'm going to get away from all this," she said with a far-away look. "I'm saving my money. Maybe I'll be able to buy a little home somewhere—somewhere away from people. I'd like to live in the country. Raise chickens." She smiled again. "Would you like my picture?"

She went to her little desk, nibbled pensively at the butt of her pen, smiled, then wrote: "Till we meet again—Teeny."

Dot dug into his pocket as she handed the card to him.

She shook her head.

"No. It's a present from me because I think I like you. And I autographed it 'specially for you."

The spieler was leading his mob their way. Dot glanced hastily at the autograph.

"Gee! Thanks," he breathed.

"And what is your name?" Teeny asked.

Dot's answer was drowned by the raucous voice of the spieler. He was swept aside by the mob without a chance to say goodbye.

L EFTY was in high glee as he drove back toward the hideout. He had bagged two of the shell-headed dodgers, sending one of them to the hospital with a cracked cranium. But his passengers were uncongenial. Dash was still grumbling about the night club episode. Dot was thinking about a pair of hazel eyes and a chicken farm.

Lefty also lapsed into silence. He

slumped in his seat and eased up on the accelerator. Suddenly he came to attention and snapped his fingers. A crooked smile split his unhandsome face and he drove furiously for the hideout.

"Say, Big Fella, I got a swell idea," Lefty said as he stopped in front of Telatom's secret station in a dilapidated warehouse. He twisted around in his seat. "I got a way to get rid of the little guy without harmin' hide or hair of him. You can 'arrive' tonight and the boss can get busy with all the publicity stunts. Everything'll be—"

"Hey, wait a minute!" Dot screeched. "You can't—"

"Shut up!" Dash barked. "What's the plan, Lefty?"

"We'll just turn 'im over to that freak show we was at."

"The hell you will!" Dot yowled.

Lefty lunged over the seat and his hairy hand closed over Dot's windpipe. Then he stuffed a dirty handkerchief into Dot's mouth. He snatched off his tie and completed an effective gag.

"That'll hold 'im for a spell," Lefty grunted, yanking Dot to the front seat and holding him in one arm. "Now you don't have to take no part in it, Big Un. I take 'im down to the carnival and turn 'im over to the freak collector. I ought to get a little piece of change out of 'im; and maybe the boss'll slip me a bonus. But I'll make the side show man agree not to show the runt till the outfit's away from Esterport, maybe off the whole planet."

Dash fumbled with a cowlick as he considered.

"He won't get hurt or nothin'," Lefty continued almost pleadingly. "He'll make a good living with the show. And, if he turns up a few months later and claims he's you, everybody will say he's a screwball. Sound okay?"

"Yeah," Dash said. "Sounds okay."

"Be still, pee-wee," Lefty muttered. "You'll get a chance to see plenty of that half-pint twist. You got nothin' to squawk about. And you, Big Un, you better call the boss and tell 'im everything's all set. You can get 'im at the Terra Arms. He'll probably hop right over here. I'll be back as soon as I put the runt in the show business."

Dash started toward the gloomy warehouse. He turned and came back.

"Good luck, punk. You brought it on yourself," he said to the squirming Dot. Then to Lefty, "Got a few of those berries left?"

FRANK HOYT'S fingers tapped an angry tattoo on his desk.

"You're crazy," he snapped. "You'll get what your contract calls for, and not another damned dollar."

"You'll pay me double," Dash insisted, "Or—"

"Or what?"

Dash's dilated pupils gleamed cunningly through narrow slits. He tugged nervously at a moist, reddish-brown ringlet. A corner of his mouth twitched.

"How would you like it if I spilled the story about arriving here double? How far back would that set the opening of Telatom's transportation service. I could locate the runt, and we would prove—"

"The old double-cross, eh?" Hoyt rasped.

"Who the hell are you to talk about double-crossing?" Dash spat at him. "You stole your atom projection secret from Old Man Smith when you were working for him, didn't you? And now you're using it to put him out of business. Maybe he'd be interested in my story, if you don't come across."

"You dirty, blackmailing louse!" Hoyt hissed. "We picked you up out of the gutter and gave you a chance to get on your feet again. Now you try

extortion. We should have known better than to pick a berry-munching hophead when reckless bums are a dime a dozen."

"Then hire yourself a bum," Dash goaded. "Hire a dozen. Even if all of them make the trip okay, people will still be skeptical about your service after what happened to me."

"No they won't, Dashiell," Hoyt said slowly. Rage faded from his face, replaced by calmness of grim decision. "They won't know anything about you." His hand came from under his desk. It held a snub-nosed automatic. His finger tightened on the trigger.

A SHORT, thin man with handlebar mustaches knocked at an office door of Telatom's dismal warehouse. He was flanked by two hulking, bull-necked men. Another person, hardly more than a yard tall, stood behind them.

The door opened and Lefty squinted into the darkness.

"I'm looking for Frank Hoyt," the mustached man announced.

"He ain't here," Lefty said after a moment's pause. He poked a revolver through the door. "Get the hell away."

A blackjack cracked Lefty on the knuckles and his pistol dropped. Another blackjack crashed down on his head in time to cut short his yelp of surprise. Lefty slumped silently to the floor. The mustached man kicked the fallen pistol out into the darkness. The four figures moved into the building and crept stealthily down a long, dimly-lit hall. They stopped at an open door.

Inside the room Frank Hoyt, Percy and Gus were crouched over the coffin-like atom assembler. There was a low humming in the coffin. The three were so engrossed in the business at hand they had not heard the scuffle at the warehouse front, the steps in the hall.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the mustached man said softly.

The three startled men swung around.

"B-Billy Smith!" Percy gasped.

Billy Smith, transportation tycoon whose space ships served every port in the Solar system, twirled his white mustaches with caressing fingers. A smile played on his lips but his grey-blue eyes were diamond hard.

Hoyt dived for his automatic that lay on a nearby chair.

"Better shoot fast and straight," Smith said coolly, folding his arms. "If you get me, Mumbo and Jumbo here will tear you to pieces—tiny pieces." He glanced at his gargantuan bodyguards.* "If you miss me, I'll take that gat and pistol-whip you to a pulp."

The cocky little old man strode calmly toward Hoyt.

Hoyt's hand wavered and he let the pistol drop to his side. "What do you want, Mr. Smith?" he asked sullenly.

Smith took the automatic and flung it scornfully into a corner.

"Is this the way to greet a competitor, Frank? Where's your hospitality?" Smith taunted in mock rebuke. "Receiving another test passenger?"

The humming in the coffin stopped and Hoyt breathed a fluttering sigh of relief. Smith's gaze fell upon Dash's bloody clothes beside the atom assembler. His eyes bore into Hoyt's.

"H-m-m-m-m," he murmured. "So

that's the way it is. First a little larceny, and now it's murder. That assembler can also serve as an atomizer. And you've just been using it to get rid of the corpus delicti; puff it out into space. Smart, eh?"

He worked his lips as if he had a bad taste in his mouth, then spat on the floor. He raised his voice to a thunderous bellow.

"But not smart enough, Rat! The whole gang of you are rats—dirty, sneaking, yellow rats!"

He eyed each of them with silent scorn, then grew calm again.

"Thought you could outsmart me, eh Frank? As my trusted employee, you knew I bought the secret of atomic projection and failed to patent it. You recognized it as the greatest advancement in the history of transportation, so you decided to steal it; make millions for yourself; put me out of business.

"You thought my failure to patent the secret was an oversight, didn't you, Frank? Well, it wasn't. I might have used it and made enough money to snap my fingers at junking my own fleet of ships. But the method is too revolutionary. The universe is not yet ready for it. I bought the secret to protect the transportation industry, to protect my employees, such as you, Frank, and even the employees of my competitors. That's something you couldn't understand, you self-centered skunk."

Hoyt's eyes darted toward the door, where Lefty stood gripping his recovered revolver.

"Let him have it!" Hoyt screamed.

MUMBO and Jumbo moved like twin bolts of lightning as Lefty's pistol roared. Lefty went down under Mumbo's titanic bulk. He fired again but the bullet went wild as a huge fist smashed into his face. Mumbo continued to belabor the already uncon-

* The inhabitants of Jupiter, in order to withstand the tremendous gravity of that world, have evolved by environmental influence to tremendous creatures with great density of body structure, and having bones as strong and unbreakable as steel. Earthmen on Jupiter must use anti-gravity shields in their dwellings, and wear gravity-repeller belts when out-of-doors. This is accomplished by a reversal of the force of gravity, associated with magnetism, to the extent of some 40%, which would make a 200 lb. man (Earth Standard) weigh only approximately 250 lbs. If he did not, he would weigh nearly five times as much, and the weight of his body would break his bones.—Ed.

scious chauffeur, battering his face into an unrecognizable mess.

Jumbo stood with his back to his master, stoically plucking at a slug that had flattened itself against one of his steely ribs.

"I've got some iodine in the car. We'll fix that up in a jiffy," Smith said to the silent Jumbo, slapping his shoulder in a grateful gesture that the giant understood.

"As I was saying, Frank," the old man continued evenly, as if nothing had happened, "you weren't so smart. Oh, you were smart enough not to steal the original secret. You copied it. But I suspected you; had you tailed ever since the day you left my employ.

"I knew 'Boss' Russell was backing you; knew you were building stations in Toledo and here in Esterport. I knew you were about ready for a test projection, so I rushed here. En route here, I was advised by my American office that Dashiell was to be your human guinea pig. He beat me here by a day—at least, they did," he corrected, glancing at Dot. "My spotters located them tonight at that cheap night club. I learned about your cowardly man-hole episode after we rescued the little fellow from that side show."

He paused for breath after his long speech. Hoyt started to speak, glanced at the gory Lefty, and shuddered. Neither Percy nor Gus had said a word. Dot was staring with frank admiration at the vigorous old shipping tycoon.

"Yes, Hoyt, you're sunk!" Smith declared.

"You—you haven't got anything on us," Hoyt whimpered.

"Oh, no? I couldn't do anything about the theft of my secret, because it wasn't patented. I had to wait for you to make a slip. And, without the corpus delicti, a murder charge probably would fizzle. Any way, it wasn't

a thorough murder because Dash Dashiell still lives." He pointed at Dot. "That's where I've got you. He'll be the prosecution's star witness on a kidnaping charge. The freak show man also will testify gladly because he lost the money he paid to your chauffeur. And a kidnaping rap is as serious here as it is back in the U. S. A."

He waited for that to sink in.

"Now you're going to send a message to Russell, telling him Telatom is washed up. Then you're going to sign a little confession, Frank—I won't ever use it unless I have to."

While Hoyt wrote with halting strokes, Billy Smith dictated the long confession involving Hoyt, Percy, Gus, the inert Lefty, "Boss" Russell, and each member of Telatom's Toledo crew.

A sniffle attracted attention toward the atomizer where Dot squatted over the little heap of Dash's bloody clothes. There were tears in his eyes.

"What's the matter, sonny?" Billy Smith inquired.

"I—he was my own flesh and b-blood," Dot gulped sadly.

"That reminds me, Hoyt," Smith said. "You and Russell can forget about Dashiell's contract. He is in my employ now. I'll pay what you agreed to pay—twenty-five thousand, wasn't it?—and put him on my payroll."

"Damn, Mr. Smith," Dot exclaimed. "You're sure a square shooter. You mean you'll give me a chance in your—?"

"Easy, Dash," the old man said. "You wouldn't exactly fit into a pilot's seat now, would you? You could buy some kind of business with the cash. Figure you could stay off the loco-berries and run a business?"

"Yes!" said a resolute Dash Dashiell, tugging thoughtfully at a stray forelock. "And the business is going to be a poultry farm."