

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

JUNE-JULY 1953
Vol. 1, No. 1

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nightmare tower

by . . . Jacques Jean Ferrat

Lynne disliked the man from Mars on sight. Yet drawn by forces beyond her control she let him carry her off to the Red Planet.

LYNNE FENLAY HAD HAD a few headaches in the course of her twenty-four years. But she had never had a headache like this.

There had been one as a result of her first field-hockey practice at the seminar, when she was twelve and the hard rubber ball caught her squarely above the left eye. There had been another, five years later, when she had used a guided trip to Manhattan during the Christmas holidays to experiment with a bottle of crème de menthe in the unaccustomed solitude of a hotel room. There had been a third as the result of overwork, while she was adjusting to her job with the group-machine.

Each of them had been the result of an easily discovered cause. This headache had come out of nowhere, for no perceptible reason. It showed no signs of going away. Lynne had visited a health-check booth as soon as she could find the time after the discomfort became noticeable. The stamped response on the card had been as disconcerting as it was vague—*Psychosomatic*.

Lynne looked across the neoplast tabletop at Ray Cornell and wondered with mild malevolence if her fiancé could be responsible for her discomfort. His spoonful of Helth-plankton halfway to his mouth,

A new magazine should bring a new name to science fiction—and in this very novel and moving story we believe we are launching a career that will help make 1953 memorable.

Ray was smiling at something Janet Downes had said. In her self-absorption Lynne had not heard Janet's remark. Knowing Janet as she did, however, she was certain it had undertones of sex.

With his fair height and breadth of shoulder, his tanned good-looking features beneath short-cropped light hair, Ray wore all the outward trademarks of a twelfth-century Viking chief or a twentieth-century football hero. But inside, Lynne thought, he was a Mickey Mouse. His very gentleness, his willingness to adjust, made him easily led.

Lynne forced herself to down another spoonful of Helthplankton and thought it tasted exactly like what it was—an artificial compound composed of sea-creatures, doctored up to taste like cereal.

Mother Weedon looked down at her from the head of the table and said, "What's the matter, Lynne—don't you feel well?"

"I'm all right, Mother Weedon," she said. She felt a pang of fear that stirred the discomfort between her temples. If she were really sick, mentally or physically, Mother Weedon might recommend that she be dropped from the team. After therapy she would be reassigned to some other group—and the thought was insupportable.

"Don't worry about our Lynne." Janet's tone bore a basis of mockery. "She has the stamina of a Messalina."

Damn Janet! Lynne regarded the

other third of the team with resentment. Trust her to bring a name like Messalina into it. Even Ray caught the implied meaning and blushed beneath his tan. Mother Weedon looked at Lynne suspiciously.

"Better take things a bit easier," Mother Weedon suggested tolerantly. "After all, the team comes first."

"I know," Lynne said listlessly. She pushed her food away from her and waited sullenly while the others finished theirs. Unable to face the possibility of mental illness, she concentrated on Janet, wondered what the girl was trying to do.

There was always danger of conflict, she supposed, when two young women and a young man were set up as a team. Usually the members were balanced the other way or were all of one sex. But mentally at any rate Lynne and Janet meshed perfectly with Ray. So they had been assigned to live and work together on the group-machine under Mother Weedon's watchful eye. They had been together now for eleven months.

The trouble with Janet, Lynne thought, was that she wasn't the sort of girl who registered on men at first sight. She was tall, her lack of curves concealed by astute willowiness of movement, her half-homely face given second-glance allure by a deliberately and suggestively functional use of lips and eyes. Janet was competitively sexy.

Lynne, who was as casually aware of her own blond loveliness as any well-conditioned and comely young woman, had not considered Janet seriously as a rival when she had fallen in love with Ray Cornell. Now, rubbed almost raw by the discomfort of her headache, Lynne decided she had underrated Janet. She was either going to have to get Ray back in line or turn him over to the other third of their team. Either way promised complications for the future . . .

The three of them walked the thousand meters to the brain-station, avoiding the moving sidewalk strips that would have sped them there in three minutes instead of fifteen. Lynne, who usually enjoyed the stroll through the carefully landscaped urban scenery, found herself resenting its familiarity. Besides, her head still ached.

As they moved past the bazaar-block, halfway to their destination, Lynne found herself wincing at the brightness of the window-displays. Usually she found the fluorescent tri-di shows stimulating—but not today. Nor was her mood helped when Janet, nodding toward the plasti-fur coats in one of them said, "I wish I'd lived a century ago, when a girl really had to work to win herself a mink coat."

And Ray replied with a smile she could only interpret as a leer, "You'd have been a right busy little mink yourself, Jan."

Janet gurgled and hugged his other arm and Lynne barely re-

pressed an anti-social impulse to snap, "Shut *up!*" at both of them.

Lynne wondered what was wrong with her. Surely by this time she ought to be used to Janet's continuous and generally good-humored use of the sex challenge on any male in the vicinity. It hadn't bothered her much until the headache began two days ago. Nor had Ray's good-nature seemed such a weakness. Hitherto she had found it sweet.

On impulse she said, "You two go ahead. I'm going to have a colafizz. Maybe it will knock some of the beast out of me."

"You could stand having a little more of it knocked into you, darling," said Janet. This time Ray said nothing.

Lynne entered a pharmabar and pressed the proper buttons, sipped the stinging-sweet retort-shaped plastitumbler slowly. The mild stimulant relaxed her a little, caused the ache in her head to subside to a dull discomfort. She felt almost human as she took one of the moving strips the rest of the way so as not to be late to work.

Their studioff was situated halfway up the massive four-hundred meter tower of the brain-station. It was shaped like a cylinder cut in half vertically and contained a semicircular table with banks of buttons in front of each seat-niche. The walls were luminous in whatever color or series of colors was keyed to the problem faced by the team. At the moment it was blank,

a sort of alabaster-ivory in tone.

Ray and Janet were already in their places. Their conversation ceased abruptly as Lynne entered and slid into her lounger and slipped on the collar that keyed her to the machine. She wondered what Janet had been saying about her, what Ray had been replying.

I'm turning into a paranoiac, she thought, managed a smile of sorts and said aloud, "What's today's problem?"

"Feel better, honey?" Ray asked her. Lynne nodded.

Janet, obviously uninterested, said, "Disposal of waste-foods so as to be useful to highway construction in Assam—without disruption of traffic-loads in Patagonia."

"Another of *those!*" said Lynne with a sigh. But she got to work almost automatically, keying her impulses to fit those of Ray and Janet. For the time being personal and emotional problems were laid aside. They were a single unit—a machine that was part of the greater machine—that was in turn part of the administration of Earth. For this work they had been trained and conditioned all their lives.

Early in the century—some fifty years back—when the cybernetic machine had been regulated to their proper functions of recording and assemblage only, of non-mathematical factors, the use of human teams, working as supplements to the machines themselves, had been

conceived and formulated by the Earth Government.

No machine, however complex and accurate, could reflect truly the human factors in a problem of social import. For such functions it possessed the fatal weakness of being non-human. Hence the integration of people *and* atomo-electrical brains. Thanks to their collars the human factors received the replies of the machine-brains through mental impulses instead of on plasti-tape.

By means of the buttons before them they could key their questions to the portion of the machine desired. For specific requests and interkeying with one another they used, respectively, a small throat microphone attached to their collars and direct oral communication.

Janet was the analyst of the team—it was a detail job, a memory job, one which usually went to a woman. And she was good. She culled from the messages given her by the machine those which bore most directly upon the problem.

Assam—vegetarian culture—grain husks unused for plastics because of blight-weakness following second A-war—could serve as fifth-depth foundation for second-run non-moving byways . . . Patagonia first-line producer of non-weakened grain husks—transportation limited by seasonal deep-frost—atomic heat considered uneconomical for this problem—transportation limited to third-class surface vehicles—

Ray checked the stream of information selected by Janet. *Seek possibility of using synthetic mesh on temporary laydown basis . . .* Ray was team coordinator, who assembled the facts selected by Janet, put them in shape toward solution of the problem.

Then it was Lynne's turn. In a way, save that all three of them were vital to team-success, she was top-dog. It was up to her to listen to Janet's stream of information, to follow Ray's assembly job, to say, "This will work," or, "This will not work," or perhaps, "This will work if we do such-and-such, rather than thus-and-so."

There weren't many who could fill this job of synthesizer without too-wide variance from the judgments of the machine itself. Consequently there weren't very many teams actually at work—perhaps a score, give or take a few, at any one time. Such synthesization demanded a quality almost akin to intuition—but intuition disciplined and controlled to give results as often as needed.

She concentrated now, though her head was troubling her again, keying her whole being to Janet, then to Ray. And to her horror she began to get a picture—not of the problem of using waste matter to abet highway construction in Assam without disrupting the climate-limited transportation of Patagonia, but of the thoughts and feelings of Janet Downes.

It was frightening to realize that

she was reading everything Janet kept carefully concealed behind the sardonic mask of her personality. It was disturbing to discover how much she herself was resented and hated and feared by Janet. It was horrifying to learn how hungry was Janet, how she thirsted to smash Lynne's attachment to Ray, how she planned to use the problem of the headache to discredit Lynne, not only with Mother Weedon and the Mind-Authority but with Ray himself.

I must be going crazy, Lynne thought and became sickeningly aware that she had missed a query from Ray. She turned her attention toward him, found herself enmeshed in a confused jumble of thoughts in which Janet figured with shocking carnality, while she herself was fully clothed and placed on a pedestal resembling a huge and grotesquely ugly frog. *Why*, she thought, *Ray fears me—almost hates me!*

Once again she had lost the thread. Desperately she strove to catch up, found herself issuing an answer. *Suggest employment of sea-transport to solve problem.*

Where had that one come from? Lynne wondered. The ocean lanes had not been used for two-thirds of a century, save for fishing and excursions. But hundreds of the old double-hulled cataliners of the pre-atomic air-age were still in their huge cocoon-capsules in various nautical undertakers' parlors.

She watched the large indicator

breathlessly, wondering what the machine would answer. Almost certainly a 1.3 variation—which would mean the problem would be shunted to another team. An 0.2 variation was considered normal. Lynne's decisions, over the eleven months of her assignment, had averaged 0.13. Her best mark had been an 0.08.

She caught a flash of Janet's thoughts . . . *lucky SSG so-and-so! She wasn't even paying attention!* Rigorously Lynne forced herself to concentrate on the large indicator. It flashed a warning blue, then yellow, then red—and then showed a round single 0!

It was, Lynne thought, impossible. No team had ever, in the entire history of human-cybernetic integration, produced an answer without a single variance with the machine. The best on record was an 0.056 by Yunakazi in East-Asia Center. And he had never come close to it again.

Lynne nodded to the rest of them and unfastened her collar. She felt a little sick to her stomach. An 0-variant answer was supposed to be impossible. But she had attained one, and at a time when her mind had been wandering, thanks not only to her malaise but because of her shocking telepathic experience. She wondered dully if the two factors were integrated in her incredible result.

" . . . like the monkeys with fifty million typewriters composing a Shakespearcan sonnet, probability

ultimately favors it," Ray was saying. "Lynne, let's try another. What's the next problem, Jan?"

"Poor reaction of fifth age-group children in Honduras to gnomics during the months of July and August," Janet said promptly "Wanted—its causes and cure."

Lynne listened in a sort of stupor. When she felt telepathic messages impinging upon her mind she forced them out. She only half-heard Janet's smooth assemblage of facts. Ray's coordination and selection of those most relevant. And then she thought quickly, *Climate change to 42 per-cent lower humidity, expense contained by use in schools only and segregation of children during crucial months.*

Again the flashes from the indicator—again the zero.

Janet regarded Lynne with odd speculation in her hazel eyes, Ray looked a little frightened. Lynne said, "I don't know what's going on but my head is killing me. I'm going home and rest."

"What about our date tonight?" Ray asked quickly—too quickly.

She studied him a long moment. She *did* love him, she *did* want to marry him, she *did* want to bear his children—or did she? She was going to have to face the problem squarely and do it soon. She said, "I guess you'd better give me a rain-check, honey."

She walked out the door with a vivid picture of what Janet was thinking. Janet was going to do her damndest to take Ray away from

her that night by the oldest and still the most effective weapon a woman could use. And if Lynne tried to make trouble about it she intended to make trouble for Lynne.

As for Ray—he didn't seem to have any thoughts at all. He was a sort of Thurber male, cowering in his corner while the dominant females fought over him. The only hitch, Lynne decided, was that there wasn't going to be any fight. Janet could have him . . . in spades!

She took the moving sidewalk back to Mother Weedon's. For almost a year the trim white dome with its curved polarized picture windows and pink Martian vines had represented home and shelter and a prized individuality after the group-existence of school dormitories.

Now it looked like half an egg of some menacing unearthly bird, half an egg into which she must crawl and hide, unsure of how long it would afford her shelter. Even Mother Weedon, a shrewd and kindly widow of sixty whose strength and good-humor made her the ideal team-matron, looked alien and oddly menacing.

She caught the older woman's thoughts as she entered the house. *What's happened to Lynne? Always thought that girl was too bottled up. She should have married Ray six months ago. He's not the sort of male even a girl as pretty as Lynne can keep on a string in-*

definitely—not with a harpy like Janet in the picture . . .

Mechanically Lynne ran her fingers down the magnezipped of her blue plastifleece jacket, deposited it carefully against the magnetic hook on the wall of the entry. She felt a renewed weakness, a sickness that made her head throb more severely than ever. All the way back from the brain-station she had been seeking reassurance in the probability that her sudden telepathic ability was caused by some stimulation of the machine, would vanish when she broke contact with it.

Now she knew better—and her panic increased. She almost ran to the escalator so she wouldn't have to exchange chatter with Mother Weedon. She literally had to be alone.

II

Lynne stirred uneasily on her plastomat. She knew she was there, felt sure she was not asleep. Yet the dream persisted, holding her in a grip that was tighter than reality.

She was alone in a strange crystalline chamber, high, high up in a strange crystalline tower. Thanks to the fact there was no metal in its construction, nowhere was there rust. Yet her chamber, like the tower itself, showed definite signs of age and ruin.

An irregular segment of one wall had been penetrated by a missile of some sort and patched with plastic spray to keep out the thin, chill, unending wind. On lower levels,

she knew, were larger scars of long-forgotten destruction. Just above the transparent arched ceiling what had been an elaborate tracery of gleaming flying buttresses, their functional purpose long since lost, stood precariously in a pattern of ruin.

Here and there about her, other surviving towers of the city rose in more serious stages of decay. And far below, on the windswept square, huddled the gleaming egg-shaped shelters of the Earthfolk. Beyond the city area the red desert and green oases stippled off to the dark horizon or advanced to invade the steep scarp of the fat bank of the great canal.

Lynne was alone in a tower on Mars. Instruments, strange to her eyes but stamped with the familiar patterns of Earthly design and manufacture, lined three walls of the chamber. She knew she should take the downlift and return to the tiny cluster of Earth-dwellings in the court below, that her tour of duty was ended.

Yet she could not leave. Voices whispered within her head and tugged at her emotions, voices whose owners she could not see, whose embodiment lurked ever just beyond the range of her eyes, no matter how quickly she rolled them. Voices that begged for her assistance, offering unheard-of pleasures as a reward, unthought-of torments as punishment for her refusal to cooperate.

They were strange voices, whose

message bore the corrupt cynicism of the very old, coupled with the naïve enjoyments of long deferred second childhood—alien voices. Or were they alien? Wasn't it rather that *she* was the alien, like those other Earthfolk who lived in the cluster of pathetic little huts below, who strove to reclaim the too-lean atmosphere of a planet, most of which had long-since escaped into the star-studded black-velvet backdrop of space.

Yes, it was *she* who was alien. And with the thought came another, a *human* picture, so horrible, so gruesome, that her mind refused to accept it. Yet she knew it was vitally important she see it clearly. But the others, the invisibles, kept derailing her concentration with their whispers of joys unknown before to mortal man or woman, their soft threats of torments beyond those conceived by Dante himself.

"Let us in," they offered softly, with the mischief of the very old. "Let us in and we shall romp and travel and find new uses for your bodies. We shall live side by side within you and lead you to pleasures no souls contained by bodies can ever know. We shall . . ."

There was something Lynne should ask them, an answer to their Saturnalian bribery—but like their visibility it refused to rise to the upper level of her consciousness. She felt sudden shame at not being able to speak, fear at her inability to marshal needed thoughts, fear

that grew quickly into terror while the all-important question struggled vainly to make itself uttered.

Laughing like rollicking imps, the whisperers closed in a hemisphere about and above her, dancing in weird joyous malicious rhythm and bottling up reason as effectively as a plastival. All at once she found herself holding her head and screaming at them to go away . . .

Lynne woke up. She discovered herself already sitting erect on the plastomat, supported by hands that dug into its pneumatic surface. She looked wildly around her, noted the familiar tri-di picture of Victoria Falls on the wall, the blank vidar-screen on its stand beside the magnicloset entry, the picwindow with its familiar vista of morning sunlight and greenery outside Mother Weedon's.

Only then did she become aware that her headache was worse. It seemed to grow with each successive morning. During the day it lapsed at times to mere vague discomfort, and with the aid of a couple of syntholaud pills she was able to sleep. But when she awoke each following morning it seemed a trifle worse.

She stepped into the bathostall, which performed all functions of cleansing and elimination simultaneously, felt briefly better and got into sandals, clout and bolero, polarizing them to a gaudy scarlet, which clashed with her fair coloring but expressed her mood of defiance, not only at her own ailments but

the personal treachery of Janet and the waverability of Ray Cornell.

Mother Weedon smiled approval of this gay gesture when Lynne took her place at the breakfast table. "I'm glad you're feeling better, Lynne," she said. "I've been worried about you lately."

"Really putting it on, aren't you, honey?" Janet asked with a trace of resentment. She had polarized her own costume to a soft pink, which was washed out by Lynne's bold color-scheme. Nor could she change it during the day without revealing her defeat.

"Delicious!" exclaimed Ray, ogling her with delight and pouring paprisal instead of sucral on his Helthplankton.

Lynne laughed as she hadn't laughed in days. She wondered why she felt so suddenly light-hearted and happy, especially after her waking nightmare. Then, suddenly, she realised she was utterly unaware of what the others were thinking. She was no longer telepathic. She was normal once more!

However, it required no telepathic powers to sense that Ray was in a sadly shattered state over whatever had happened between Janet and himself on their date the night before. Lynne surmised that her rival had enticed Ray into full courtship, that he was now suffering from remorse, revulsion and a resurgence of desire for herself.

She wondered why she didn't care, then realised that Janet was no longer her rival. Ray was a nice

boy, a highly trained and talented boy—but she wasn't in love with him any more. There were, she thought, probably half a billion unattached males in the world at any given moment, many of them far more interesting and attractive than Ray Cornell. All she had to do was look for them . . .

Headache and nightmare receded further with each mouthful of breakfast she ate. Her appetite was back and she kidded brightly with a miserable Ray and a rather sullen and suspicious Janet all the way to the brain-station. And then things began to happen that shattered her new-found adjustment.

She was barred from entry to the studioff. The electroscreen admitted Ray and Janet as usual but remained an invisible wall that refused her admittance. She was no longer keyed to the group-machine. Before she could try again a magnovox said, "Please report to Integration Chief on Floor Eighty. Please report to Integration Chief on . . ."

Ray looked scared. Disruption of a team during working hours was an emotional shock. Even Janet showed traces of fright. But she managed a grin and said, "Give him the old treatment, Lynne, and you can't lose." She accompanied the remark with a thoroughly carnal bump.

Lynne said nothing, being incapable of speech. She turned and made her way to the mobilramp, had a sudden vivid recollection of the older but far more efficient

lift on the Martian tower in her dream. She felt sick to her stomach and her headache was thumping again.

She had never been on the eightieth floor before—it was reserved for guiding geniuses, who had no time for mere group-machine members except in case of trouble. Lynne wondered what she had done as she entered a room with walls of soft rolling colors.

The man on the couch, a tall lean saturnine man with dark eyes that seemed to read right through her from out of a long lined white face, didn't leave her long in doubt. He said, "Miss Fenlay, I'm afraid I have bad news for you. As a result of your amazing performance yesterday your usefulness as a group-machine worker is ended."

"But I was right," she protested. "I had the first zero-variation in integration history."

"You needn't be so frightened," he said more gently. "I know this must be a severe emotional shock. You were right—by the machine. We need human factors in cybernetics to show us where the machines are wrong, not where they are right. To come up with two successive zero-variant answers implies some sort of rapport with the machine itself. We can't afford to take further chances."

Lynne sat down abruptly on an empty couch. She felt empty inside, said, "What am I to do?"

The tall dark man's smile was a trifle frosty. He said, "We've been

watching you, of course. About all I can tell you, Miss Fenlay, is that your—er—aberration is not exactly a surprise."

"You mean you've been spying on me?" Even though Lynne was thoroughly conditioned to accept her life as part of a complex mechano-social integration, she found the idea of being spied upon unpleasant.

"Not really," he told her. "And don't worry. We have no intention of letting your remarkable gifts go to waste." He paused, added, "I hope your headache is better soon."

"Thank you," she said. She was outside before the full implications of his parting shot sank home. How had he or anyone known she was suffering from headache? She had reported it to no one—and the health-check booth machine was not geared to give confidential evidence or to retain personality keys for checking.

It was a puzzle. She worked on it until she was almost back at Mother Weedon's, then realised the Integration Chief had given her no hint of a new assignment—had only suggested she was to be used. She began to wonder if laboratory test-animals suffered from headaches like the one which seemed to have led to her undoing.

There was no escaping Mother Weedon, who was enjoying a tri-di vidarcast in full view of the front door as Lynne came in. Well, the girl thought, she was going to have to be told anyway—if she

hadn't already got the news from the brain-station.

Evidently Mother Weedon had heard. She motioned the girl to sit beside her on her couch and said, "Don't worry, Lynne. You're going to be fine. The trouble with you is you've outgrown your job—yes, and Janet and Ray and me too. You can't help it. You're too good for us and that's that. They'll be moving you on."

"But I *like* it here," cried Lynne. "I like you and Jan and Ray and our work with the group-machine. I don't want it to change."

"But it will—everything changes," said Mother Weedon gently. "I'm glad you've been happy here. But your happiness has meant Janet's unhappiness and, more lately, Ray's."

"I—see," Lynne said slowly. She hadn't thought of things in that light before. But of course it was true. The first real home she had ever known was about to be taken from her and the experience was too personal to allow much detached thinking.

Like most genetically-controlled children whose double-birth had been successful, she had been brought up with functional rather than sentimental care. Not having known her parents, not having known her twin brother on Mars, she had never missed them. The teachers and matrons at the seminary had been carefully selected for their warmth and competence. There had always been plenty of

playmates, plenty of interesting things to learn.

Living at Mother Weedon's had been a new and emotionally opening experience, as had the blossoming of her romance with Ray Cornell, her now-fractured friendship with Janet Downes. It was not going to be easy to leave, to tear up only recently established roots, to set down new ones which might in time be as ruthlessly sundered.

She felt frightened and very much alone, as if she were again in the Martian tower of her nightmare with only alien and disembodied voices speaking to her. Mars—she wondered a little about it. Somewhere on Mars was her twin, Revere Fenlay, the brother she could not remember. She wondered if he too were having troubles. There were stories floating about of twins whose rapport spanned lifetimes separated by the distance between the planets. But she knew nothing of Mars.

She watched a vidarcast with Mother Weedon, an unreal historical romance of love and adventure in one of the vast sprawling industrial empires of the mid-twentieth century. There was, for twenty-second-century folk, a vast emotional appeal in the job-competition, the hard compulsory physical toil, the dangers of that exciting era. But Lynne was too wrapped up in her own problem to react as usual.

While she and Mother Weedon were lunching on pineapple soup and Bermudasteak with shadbacon

and lacticola, Ray and Janet came in. They pretended concern at what had happened to Lynne and the team but were obviously excited with one another and the prospect of integrating a new member of the team in Lynne's place.

After the meal Janet and Lynne were briefly alone in the vida-room. Janet eyed Lynne covertly and Lynne said, "It's all right, Jan. I'm not going to put up a fight for Ray. Under the circumstances it's only fair. I don't know what's going to happen to me and you and him—"

"Damn you, Lynne Fenlay!" Janet's sudden flare of hot emotion was almost frightening. "You *would* be like this. Don't you realise that by being noble you'll leave both of us with a guilt complex we'll never be able to shake?"

"Sorry," said Lynne sincerely. "I can't help it."

Janet regarded her narrowly, shook her head. "Hasn't anything ever touched you, Lynne?" she asked. "Haven't you ever wanted Ray or anyone as I want him? Haven't you ever hated anyone as I'm beginning to hate you? Haven't you ever been human?"

"Jan!" Lynne was shocked, then vaguely frightened. "I don't know—I guess maybe not," she said. "But Jan, I can't help it. That's the way I am."

Janet sighed and said, "In that case I'm sorry for you." She changed the subject quickly as Ray came wandering in, gave Lynne an unhappy look, then crossed the

room and turned on the vidar-screen. Peace of an uneasy sort reigned for the next hour.

"When are they assigning your new member?" Lynne asked as the picture, a documentary about solar heat, came to an end.

"Not for a day or so," said Ray. He looked at her piteously. "We—we're going to miss you, Lynne. I wish I understood . . ."

"You're going to be too busy," Lynn told him. "And don't worry about me, Ray. I've already talked to Jan."

"You mean you're not angry about us?"

Lynne shook her head, glanced at Janet, was again startled by the blazing hatred that was beamed her way. She wondered what it must feel like to hate in such thorough fashion. She was relieved when she heard Mother Weedon talking to someone at the door.

A moment later the widow entered and said, "This is Rolf Marcein, kids. He's going to be staying with us a little while." She introduced the three of them to the newcomer.

Lynne barely acknowledged the greeting. She was too startled. The most recent addition to Mother Weedon's charmed circle appeared, in the semi-dark room, to be the man who had given her her walking papers that morning on the eightieth floor of the brain-station tower.

He was tall, dark, lanky, saturnine. His name was Marcein. At

least that was something Lynne hadn't known before. And then she noticed that this Marcein's face was not so pale, that his eyes were brighter, his manner and movements more athletically poised than the man on the eightieth floor. Mother Weedon pressed the polarizer to let more light into the room, since the vidarbox was not on. The stranger's tan, seen in the light, was startling, especially to Lynne, who had seen his pale double so recently.

His double—that meant his twin, she thought. And if his twin worked in the brain-station, then *this* man must be a Martian. Certainly that would account for his tan, caused by living under the thin atmosphere of the red planet—as it would account for an athletic poise acquired during the hardships of Martian existence.

You're right, of course. I am Dolf's twin and I am from Mars.

It took her almost a full second to realise the thoughts had not been spoken. She was telepathic again, aware not only of the newcomer's thoughts but of those of the others in the room—though not as much aware of theirs as of Rolf Marcein's.

She looked at him with something like panic, saw his brilliant dark eyes upon her, noted that he wore his clothes well, that there was something almost lupine in his grace, something almost overpowering . . .

You must know you're beautiful yourself, Lynne Fenlay—if soft and

unawakened. I have an idea I could turn the trick . . .

It was like a blow. Not only could she read *his* thoughts, Lynne realised—but he could read *hers*. She felt her face flame and a sudden surge of resentment toward his arrogance that forced her to leave the room lest she reveal the weakness it caused. And as she left his soft laughter rang like hailstones in her ears.

III

The days that followed Rolf Marcein's arrival at Mother Weedon's became, to Lynne, a period of waiting. It was a period of waiting games as well. No summons came from the eightieth floor of the brain-station to give her a clue as to the nature of her next assignment. For the first time in her life she found herself hung in a vacuum with nothing definite to do or to look forward to.

Naturally she wondered whether Rolf Marcein might not be the answer to this facet of her problem. But not even her growing telepathic abilities could pry a response out of his mind. He seemed to be visiting the home planet on the vaguest sort of business—something to do with development and transport of specially-bred plant and animal stock for the red planet.

It seemed absurd on the face of it that such an obviously able adjustee should be returned to Earth on such a mission, especially with every gram of interplanetary ship-

space at a premium. Yet either it was truth or Rolf had developed some method of screening his thoughts against telepathic probing—a frightening idea in itself.

He hung around Mother Weedon's most of the time. As a result Lynne saw a lot of him throughout the days and evenings, a fact which both pleased and alarmed her unreasonably. It was during the third night of his stay that he invaded, or tried to invade, her nights as well.

Before drifting off to sleep she found herself dwelling on him with relaxed reverie. Ray and Janet had had some sort of quarrel and the atmosphere that evening had been far from pleasant. It was a relief to lie alone, to let her thoughts roam and quest as they would.

Rolf had talked of Mars during a stroll to the bazaar-mart during the afternoon. He had described a boar-hunt on Earth's sister-planet during a night when both Deimos and Phobos were describing their rapid orbits across the cloudless sky.

The pig, as man's most adaptable food-animal, had been the first live-stock imported to Mars less than three decades earlier. Now, according to Rolf, the animals had in large measure reverted to their feral state and constituted a menace to man and his works alike.

"We used flashlights and small-arms paralyzers on that hunt," Rolf said. "We flushed a whole herd of them in an erosion-gully along the border of the Great Southern Canal

—didn't get so much as a smell of the brutes until we were right on top of them.

"At that we managed to nab a baker's dozen for de-tusking and redomestication. *Ferkab*, it was touch and go for a bit! One big brute slipped under my ray and if I hadn't been lucky enough to jam my flashlight tube into his mouth he'd have taken my leg off."

"What does *ferkab* mean?" Lynne asked, a little annoyed at feeling an atavistic thrill from the account of the primitive hunt.

To her delight Rolf actually blushed beneath his tan. He began with, "I don't think you'd appreciate its meaning," then recalled her telepathic powers and shut up and blushed more deeply.

At which it had been Lynne's turn to feel her face grow hot. The meaning of *ferkab*, an approximate translation of certain graphically illustrated ancient Martian runes, was explicit to the point of bawdiness. Yet on Mars, apparently, it was used in mixed company.

So, lying half asleep, Lynne not surprisingly visualised the boar hunt as Rolf had described it. She could see his weatherproof aluminum clothing gleaming in the pale light of the swift tiny moons, shining in the occasional ray of a flashlight as he and his shadowy companions worked their way along the eroded bank of the canal.

Then the sudden rustle and thump and grunting of the beasts as they came charging out of their

threatened shelter, their vast menacing shapes with huge tusks and little red eyes glittering in the confused crisscross of flashlight rays. She saw the paralyzers' brief glow, heard the thud of falling animal bodies, saw the sudden rush of one furious beast inside the protective sweep of Rolf's hand-weapon, saw his quick graceful evasive movement, heard the champ of savage tusks crushing the hard alloy of the metal tube.

Once, on the vidarscreen, she had watched a toreador do his dance of death with a furious bull, in an historical show. Rolf, she thought, was slim as a toreador, slim and graceful and equally accustomed to facing danger and death as an accepted part of life.

Then, she told herself scornfully, she was reverting to the primitive as if she were a Martian sow herself. She thought of the word *ferkab* and what it meant and felt her face grow hot in the darkness. For she could visualise Rolf and—herself—in a way she had never been able to think of herself with Ray Cornell.

It's not confined to Mars, darling, came the sudden probe of Rolf's thought over hers. *But it takes a Martian to be the best.*

Reverie was obliterated by rage. She sent back a string of thoughts that should have blistered Rolf's brains—if he had any decency. He withdrew before her counterattack and she wondered if he really did

have any decency—or if her rage were all she had pretended.

She was cool to him the next day—and the arrival of the new member of the group-machine gave her opportunity to avoid him. Her replacement was a dark stocky quiet young man named Alan Waters and he seemed quite smitten with her—a fact which made Janet visibly jealous. Lynne found herself quite enjoying her triumph.

But the day after, when the other three reported for work at the brain-station and Mother Weedon visited the bazaar-mart for some needed household supplies, Lynne found herself looking at a mischievously contrite Rolf across the breakfast table.

He said, "I'm sorry if I've offended you, Lynne. Apparently I made the mistake of thinking you had blood in your veins."

Lynne acted without volition for the first time since early babyhood. She picked up the plastisaucer in front of her and flung it across the neoplast tabletop at him. He ducked and for a moment his dark eyes blazed with laughter and then he sensed her distress and helped her with the atocleaner.

She tried to apologize but the words refused to come. And he never mentioned the incident afterward. Instead he took her for a walk through the park and talked to her of the more feral beauties of his own planet. "It's far wilder than this," he told her, gesturing at the neat clusters of trees and

flowers, the perfectly clipped hedges about them. "Wilder and deadlier and far more beautiful."

"This is perfection," she told him.

"And perfection is death," was his reply.

"I thought Mars pretty much a dead planet," she said.

"It's a vast mausoleum," he said, his eyes lighting. "A mausoleum visited by new life, a mausoleum in which the very souls of the dead themselves seem beginning to stir. It's raw new life burgeoning on the old."

He talked on and she felt the beginnings of small responses stir within her and frighten her. For she had been conditioned to Earth and to wish for Mars was wrong. Finally he stopped and faced her and captured both her hands in his incredibly strong ones.

"Lynne," he said. "I haven't much longer here. I want to take you back home with me. Will you come?"

"Home—on Mars?" she countered. The idea was impossible. Yet, somewhere within herself, she wanted to go. Then the reasons, the millions of reasons why she couldn't say yes, came flooding up within her. Surely Rolf knew them—or did he?

"You know the system and the reasons behind it," she reminded him. "You have a twin right here in the city. I've talked to him—it was he who gave me my walking papers from the group-machine."

"He told me," said Rolf quietly. "He told me a lot about you. Enough so I wanted to see you and get to know you. Now that I do know you I want you to go back with me. Can't you see, darling? There's little use for telepaths on Earth. On Mars we need them desperately. I think I can arrange a transfer."

"But my brother is already there," she told him a little desperately. "I—we—they can't leave two of us on one planet. And what right have I to ask him to come to Earth? He's not conditioned."

"But maybe he'd like to come back," Rolf suggested. "Maybe he's not happy on Mars."

"It's not just that," she said miserably. Nor was it. For the first time the entire system by which the Mars project was functioning seemed to her vastly unfair. Until that moment she had accepted it, considered it as immutable as the need for the sun itself.

The Earth Government, which was what the U.N. had evolved into after its first tortured half-century of birth, was determined not to repeat upon alien planets the mistakes of imperialism and colonization that had caused the home planet all but to tear itself to pieces during the twentieth century.

No convicts, no misfits, no refugee cultists were to be sent out to settle the newly-opened red planet—instead, the cream of Earth's best trained, most gifted and strongest young men and

women were to do the preliminary settling. For it would still be many years before the arid world would be able to support much humanity.

There had been protests—chief among them a group of eugenicists who felt that loss of such a large group of qualified young folk would cost the home planet more genetically and socially than it could afford. The answer had been genetically-induced twins on the part of parents qualified to pass a wide variety of mental, physical and psychiatric tests, open to all who wished to join the project.

One of each set of such induced identical twins was early selected to go to Mars, the other to remain on Earth. Thus Earth lost nothing, yet had its potential Martians, ready for conditioning and training in special seminaries for lifetime work on the red planet. When one of a pair of twins was a girl, the other a boy, the boy was the one sent out—since life on Mars was still a rugged affair. Thus it was that Lynne had been reared for an Earth-career while her brother, Revere, had been educated and coached for a Mars-life.

Lynne's entire twenty-four years had been passed for the purpose of integration into and work for the improvement of humanity on her native planet. The very idea of Mars was terrifying, as was the idea of traveling there through space. She simply *couldn't* endure the

wrench of the trip, the separation from all that mattered.

Rolf stood there quietly, letting her thoughts flow without interruption. Then he said, "I see—but it's not as bad as all that, darling. After all, I made the trip in reverse."

"But that's different—you're a man!" she protested.

"Nor is being a man as bad as you seem to think," he said and she sensed that he was teasing her and was grateful for the change in mood. Before she realized what she was doing she called him mentally a thoroughly bawdy Martian word.

"Where did you learn that?" he asked, startled.

"Where do you think?" she countered—and enjoyed seeing him blush again. They had a pleasantly innocuous time together the remainder of that day and evening.

The following morning Lynne awoke from another horrible nightmare of alien worlds to find her headache back in full force. So bad was it, in fact, that after making a half-hearted effort to get up she fell back on her plastomat, actually moaning a little. She felt as if she were undergoing some long-forgotten sort of Inquisition torture.

Rolf walked into her room within the hour and so sick was Lynne that she didn't even protest his presence. He said, "Lynne, darling, you've got to get over this. Believe it or not you're killing me."

"Then stay in your own mind." She managed a whisper of a smile.

"You're like a bad tooth," he said inelegantly. "You know it's going to hurt if you touch it but you can't stop running your tongue over it."

"Oh, shut up," she said rudely. "So now I'm an ulcerated tooth. I've never had one so I wouldn't know."

"Nor have I," he replied promptly. "But I've read about them. Come on. I'm going to take you to Centromed and get you fixed up."

"I'm too ill to move," she quavered, alarmed at the prospect.

But he simply moved in and took over, virtually forcing Lynne firmly but gently into her clothes, getting her downstairs and onto a moving strip, escorting her through the prophylactic entrance of the huge vertical cross of the Centromed, giving her in charge of a stern-faced but kindly physician in white, who put her in turn in the hands of a giant red-headed nurse in steropants and white cap.

Lynne never did find out what they did with her. She recalled lying down and looking up at a hypnotic ceiling, drifting quickly into merciful unconsciousness. When she recovered her headache was gone and she had a sense of having undergone an important experience.

"Miss Fenlay," the doctor said, "you're undergoing a period of mental growth and change that in your case seems to make such suffering periodic."

"What can I do about it?" she asked in panic.

"I believe your trouble is one of environment," he replied. "During this period of readjustment you find familiar surroundings unsufferable. In plain English, you need a change."

"But how am I to get it?" she asked.

"That is hardly our department," he told her. "You'll have to take it up with your Integration Chief, I'm afraid. Naturally we'll be glad to make a recommendation for transfer on medical grounds."

"Thanks—thanks a lot," she said uncertainly. She walked out of the building and discovered it was already late afternoon. Unsureness chewed at her for the first time in her well-ordered life. The headache was gone but it might return if she didn't make a change—and she didn't want to leave the only home she'd ever known.

Rolf rose from an alloybank on which he had been sitting and said, "Headache gone, Lynne? You look upset."

"Headache's gone," she replied. "But it may come back."

"Not if I can help it," he told her and she took his arm in hers and squeezed it to show her appreciation. Rolf might be a barbarian, she thought, but he *had* been kind and helpful.

"Thanks for the crumb anyway," he told her and her confusion grew almost to tears. They rode back to Mother Weedon's in silence.

Because of her fear at finding herself becoming so dependent on

Rolf she flirted outrageously with Alan Waters, the team replacement, after dinner. When he followed her out into the garden and told her he was madly in love with her she didn't exactly discourage him. Just then her soul and body alike craved appreciation.

A furious Ray Cornell interrupted their third kiss. He strode through a gap in the hedge-wall and pulled Waters from her roughly and said, "They *told* me I'd find you two out here."

"What right have you to interfere?" countered Waters.

"*This!*" snapped Ray, throwing a clumsy punch at his rival, who threw one back in return.

Lynne let out a gasp of alarm and tried to move between them but was brushed rudely to the ground. So hard did she land that for a moment the world seemed to swim.

She shook her head to clear it, felt the alarm gongs she had come to know preceded a return of her headache. Then she saw a third taller male figure take Ray in one hand, Alan in the other and pull them apart by the collars of their bolo packets as if they were a couple of dogs squabbling over a bone.

"You men are supposed to work together," he said quietly. Then, his voice rising a half-tone and increasing in force, "Why in *farb* don't you?" With which he cracked their heads together with stunning force, tossed them to the turf like

a pair of sacks and came over to help Lynne gently to her feet. She collapsed into his arms, for the first time let his lips seek hers, responded to them.

Later—how much later she didn't know, for during that day and evening she seemed destined to lose large chunks of time—she looked up at him, reveling in his controlled strength and leanness.

"Rolf," she said, "I'm sorry—that was my fault."

"You'd have been less than a woman if you hadn't done something like it to put me in my place," he whispered.

"But it seems so cheap now," she said. "And my head . . ."

"It wasn't cheap because you didn't know," he told her. "As for your head, you need a change. You're going to get one. You're leaving with me for Mars tonight."

"But, Rolf—" she began.

"Come on, honey," he told her. "It's all arranged. We've only got a couple of hours to make the ship."

She walked back to Mother Weedon's with his arm around her, stumbling a little from time to time like a blind woman. She was going to Mars and the mere idea scared her almost to death.

IV

Lynne, who had been largely brought up on stories of pioneer space-flights in which the passengers had to endure tremendous initial acceleration, was pleasantly surprised by the takeoff. She prob-

ably would have known better had her conditioning and training not geared her to such complete uninterest in anything beyond the atmosphere that she seldom thought of the stars except as pretty lights in the sky.

She did have to strap herself to her bunk before the immense silver teardrop rose slowly upward toward space—but as the stewardess explained in routine tones the strap was a mere precaution against a possible lurch caused by brief failure of one of the launching jets. And within five minutes after takeoff a tiny sign lit up over the cabin door that read UNFASTEN BELTS—SMOKING PERMITTED.

She sat up and loosened the strap and swung her feet to the deck, noted her roommate was doing likewise. In the turmoil of catching the Mars-ship Lynne had had little time to notice her. She managed to recall that her name was Joanna—something and that she was an expert in animal husbandry. She was a handsome immense South African girl whose dark complexion wore traces of both Caucasian and Oriental, as well as Hamitic ancestry. She offered Lynne one of the new skinless cigarettes.

"You on Integration business?" she asked.

Lynne, who knew nothing of affairs on Mars, probed quickly and discovered what the girl had in mind was a coordination trip by an Earth Government executive. She shook her head, said, "No, I'm

going for good. I understand there's a job there for me."

The African girl regarded her curiously, then said, "I don't want to sound rude but aren't you a bit old to be going home?"

"I guess maybe I am." Looking more closely at her cellmate Lynne saw that for all her evident maturity she was still a girl in her late-middle teens. "They came after me."

As the girl nodded uncomprehendingly Lynne wondered if what she had uttered as a polite brush-off lie might not be the truth. There was a definite pattern of continuity to events following her first headache and her non-variant answers at the brain-station.

"Let's go to the saloon and see the stars," Joanna suggested.

It seemed like a good idea—besides, Lynne wanted to talk to Rolf, to discover if there actually *was* considered motive behind her apparently aimless emigration to the red planet.

She said, "How long does this trip take anyway?"

Joanna's jaw dropped and her black-satin hair gleamed with liquid highlights as she shook her head. "Crest, you are green!" she exclaimed. Then, assuming sociability with an effort, "You're mighty pretty though. The trip takes a little more than one Earth-day."

"Thanks—I see," replied Lynne. She felt she was beginning to see a lot of things. Along with her archaic ideas about the rigors of a

space-ship takeoff, she had apparently retained some mighty obsolete theories about the speed of space-travel, at least on the Earth-Mars run. In her mind it was a matter of weeks if not months, depending upon the relative positions of the two planets.

A little over one Earth-day—if her growing feeling that she was the victim or core of some vast unseen conspiracy were correct, then there would have been plenty of time for Rolf to be summoned from Mars after her non-variant answers had given the brain-station bosses the clue to her newly-developed telepathic powers.

But why all the secrecy? It didn't take her long to find an answer. Had she been asked immediately to come to Mars she would have refused point-blank to make the trip. Her conditioning, her whole life would have forced her to reply in the negative.

So Rolf Marcein had been sent for with orders to make her want to leave Earth with him, by fair means or foul. And he had not hesitated to employ the foul. She felt her whole body blush as she recalled some of the brazen suggestions he had made, some of her responses, especially to his embraces earlier that evening.

It was going to be a very interesting session, she decided, as she followed the girl into the single small but beautifully compact central lounge or saloon that space requirements permitted on the

Mars-ship. She looked around but failed to see his tall figure and saturnine face—treacherous face, she thought—among the half-dozen passengers already reclining in plastoulouges, watching the amazing panorama projected on the ceiling from the viewplate recorders in the prow and stern of the huge space-vessel.

She followed Joanna to a chair, tried to share the girl's tremulous excitement. After all, she thought, she had felt much the same on emerging from the seminary to take her first position as a data-recording supplement for the biggest of all cybernetics machines, the "brain" that occupied six thousand acres of the Sahara Desert.

"Look!" the girl whispered enthusiastically. "There's X-Three, the last of the derelict space-stations."

Lynne watched the oddly complex structure, that resembled a pair of unrooted pyramids fastened point to point, as it revolved slowly across and out of the plane of vision.

"What do they use it for now, Joanna?" she murmured.

"Nothing," the girl said with a trace of scorn.

Lynne knew she should have known about that. She recalled now a vidar newscast in which the abandonment of the last of the space-stations had been mentioned. In the years before A-engines were finally perfected space-stations were vitally necessary as change-over stops for

interplanetary rocket flights. But once fuel ceased to be a problem they had been used merely as meteor-warning points and weather stations.

In the first function they had proved useless—in fact one of them had been destroyed by a large space-missile—and weather forecasting and control were practised far more efficiently by electronic mastery of the Heaviside Layer. Lynne shouldn't have forgotten—but when she heard it the matter of space stations had been utterly unimportant in her life.

A steward in space-black bolo and clout offered them vari-flavored colafizzes from a rack strapped about his waist. Lynne wondered at this mode of serving the drinks while she sipped hers but decided not to ask Joanna. She didn't want to appear a total numbskull to a girl whose whole life had consisted of conditioning for Mars.

She found out soon enough when Rolf Marcein walked into the saloon before she had finished sipping her drink. She rose to greet him, to haul him off somewhere so they could talk alone—and as she did so she automatically dropped her colafizz in the receptacle ready to receive it in one arm of her plastolounge.

Joanna made a grab for it as it bounced off and rose lazily in the air and turned slowly over. The African girl caught it before it released any of the liquid remaining in it, pushed it firmly down into

the hollow space reserved for it, where it was magnetically held.

But Lynne was not paying much attention. She was having enough trouble holding herself upright as her feet displayed an astonishing reluctance to keep on the floor while the rest of her wanted to describe a lazy parabola across the saloon. She did an off-to-Buffalo and wound up against Rolf's chest with his arms about her.

Embarrassed she whispered fiercely, "Put me down, you *marlet!*"

He grinned at her infuriatingly, replied, "I'm no *marlet*—that's a very nasty word on Mars and most of these people understand it. Don't you know you're in space?"

He set her gently back on her feet, holding her steady with one hand gripping an upper arm. She knew she looked like an idiot, left certain everyone in the saloon was laughing at her. "I thought they had artificial gravity on these ships," she said.

"They do," he told her. "But it's nothing like Earth-gravity. It would use up all power if it were. You'll learn to navigate. Come on, I'll show you how." He led her unprotesting into one of the corridors outside the saloon.

She pulled herself free, promptly smacked her head none too gently against the corridor wall. "I don't want a lesson now," she told him angrily. "Besides, why aren't I sick?"

"You would be," he informed

her with what she interpreted as a smug expression, "if you hadn't been given your full quota of shots in the Centromed this afternoon. You don't think they'd have allowed you aboard otherwise, do you?"

"You had it all figured out, didn't you?" she snapped at him angrily. "I'll give odds you even said something to Alan and Ray tonight that got them involved in that horrible brawl!"

"It was nothing," he said with false modesty, flicking a non-existent speck of dust from a bare forearm. "Just a bit of premeditated Machiavelli. Anyone could have managed it."

"What are you trying to do to me?" she asked him desperately. "I'll even bet my headaches were induced. Why pick on *me*? I don't want to go to Mars—I never wanted to go there."

"Maybe because I'm in love with you," he said simply.

She ignored the intensity of his dark eyes, said, "You're not in love with me. You didn't come to Earth until that twin of yours at the brain-station sent you a message I was telepathic. You've only made love to me to get me to Mars—for some selfish purpose of your own. Try and deny it."

"In view of your current mood," he replied quietly, "I'd be seven kinds of a sand-lurtonk to try. You seem to have things all figured out yourself. Very well, it's your privilege to look at my actions any way

you choose. But my purpose is not selfish!"

Something in the ring of his voice, in the determined set of his lower face, told her he was speaking the truth. She said, "All right, what purpose gives you the right to come to Earth, to violate everything I cherish, to make me a voluntary kidnapee, to wreck my life and drag me off to a planet I haven't even been trained for? What's to prevent me from reporting it and having you arrested?"

"Nothing," he replied, "except that I'd probably be released as soon as we reached Mars. If you still feel like this when we get there tomorrow I shan't stand in the way of your returning." There was a new sag in his shoulders, a weariness to the lines about his mouth.

"Oh, great!" she retorted. "Smash my job, my personal life, then say you won't try to stop me from going back to it. How *can* you go around with so few ethics? What sort of person are you anyway?"

"A very serious one—a very worried one," he told her quietly and her quick probe of his thoughts revealed him again to be speaking the truth. He captured both her arms again, held her gently against the wall, and so great was the hypnotic force of his personality that despite her anger toward him she made no move to break away.

"You have a right to know—*now*," he told her. "I'm a Martian, a third generation one, even though I was born and trained on Earth.

Conditions out there are only just beginning to be fit for human infants. We're building the biggest thing Man has ever accomplished on Mars—making a barren ruined planet live again, making it fit for men and women and babies to inhabit.

"Right now we're up against the greatest danger we've faced since the first few desperate years—maybe an even greater threat. We can't see it, we don't even know what it is. But men and women on Mars are going mad. Only a few of us can reach them—and thanks to a condition of the planet we're all too overloaded to do the psychiatric work we should do. We need telepaths."

A flash of something she had heard or read somewhere about the red planet occurred to her. She said, "But doesn't the atmosphere or something of Mars encourage telepaths? *You're* one. Why come to Earth for them? Why pick on me?"

"Because," he told her with the patience of exasperation, "we need at least to maintain those telepaths we have—which aren't nearly enough. You don't seem to realise that a genuine two-way telepath, even among fourth generation Martians, occurs only about once in eleven thousand six hundred births. And we need more than the few we have for communications alone."

"Communications!" Lynne was honestly shocked. "Do you mean to tell me that Mars has no—"

"No form of lateral electronic

communications functions reliably on Mars," he told her bluntly as if admitting a fact he hated to mention about the planet he loved. "Don't ask me why—it's just so, that's all. *Crobot*, do you think our best scientific brains haven't tried? They believe the thinness of the atmosphere and the resulting weakness of the Martian Heaviside Layer has something to do with it. We get messages from Earth and the other planet-stations clearly and, with the ato-reduced time lag, in a matter of seconds."

"And you have to use telepaths to transmit and receive?" She was almost incredulous but her mind informed her he was telling the truth without reserve.

"Whatever we can't heliograph or send over wire cables," he said unhappily. "And the climate of Mars is rough on cables. Above the ground the winds snap 'em. Underground they rot or the *czanworms* eat through them. Now do you begin to understand?"

"A—little," she replied hesitantly, unable to maintain her entirely justified anger against his sincere appeal. "But what about this threat—this madness? What is it?"

"We don't know." His face was shadowed. "There may still be life-forms on Mars of which we know nothing—or perhaps manifestations of those we thought safe that are dangerous. But something apart from atmosphere or weather or diet or drink is creating insanity. And it

seems to be affecting our telepaths rather than others. Maybe our telepathic minds are more open to whatever the influence is. I don't know." His expression turned grim. "I've never allowed them—it—to affect *me*."

All at once she remembered the nightmare, the being alone in the crystal tower, the crowding in upon her of unseen things that whispered dreadful alluring suggestions, the sense of panic. She began to understand it with growing certainty.

Lynne said, "My brother—Revere—he's one of those who's been affected, isn't he?"

He hesitated, evidently felt the probe of her questing brain, nodded reluctantly. He said, "Your brother is one of them. The *part* of it is we don't dare send him back to Earth."

"I understand." She shuddered, felt a reassuring hand on her shoulder, added, "He's mad, isn't he." It was statement, not query.

"I'm afraid so—at least part of the time," he replied. "But don't worry. We have marvelous clinics on Mars. Once we get him to one of them there's a good chance of a cure."

"You mean he isn't getting care now?" she asked, shocked.

Rolf shook his head, replied, his voice low, "Not yet—not until you replace him. That's how short-handed we are. We've lost too many the last few months. And there simply aren't any replacements. That's why I rushed to Earth when I heard about you, why perhaps I

used unscrupulous methods to get you to come. There are less than a million people on all of Mars."

She understood his unspoken analogy. Less than a million people—less than a hundred telepaths, to maintain communications over the entire planet. Then she thought of something else, said, "My headaches—they're telepathic, aren't they? Caused when my brother has one of his attacks?"

"That's right as nearly as we can judge," he told her. "You seem to have an intense sympathetic affinity. It's not unusual between identical telepaths."

"And there aren't many of those," she said idly. She looked at him. "How about your brother, Rolf. Isn't he . . . ?"

"Unfortunately not," he replied. "He has some tendency toward E.S.P. but insufficiently strong to be reliable."

Lynne sensed his thoughts shifting to his brother, then to hers—and was astounded by the depth of dislike he suddenly projected. It came as another shock and she said, "You hate my brother, don't you, Rolf? If you didn't you'd have managed to get him the care he must have to survive."

"I don't hate your brother," he said wearily and she realised he spoke the truth. What he felt for Revere Fenley was the rather arrogant dislike and distrust toward a weaker man that is so frequent among the strong. Lynne resented it, resented him, bitterly.

She said, "Then why haven't *you* replaced him? You're a telepath—why haven't *you* given him relief?"

Again he looked defeated and, with feminine illogic, her heart went out to him. He said, "I wish I could—unfortunately I'm not permitted to go out in the field alone."

Annoyed by her heart's betrayal she let herself think, *Ah, an arm-lounge admiral, a user of men who saves his own skin!* She watched anger wash defeat from his face, for a moment felt fear at its intensity. Then, without a word, he turned and left her alone in the corridor.

She felt a cheap victor as with difficulty she made her way back to her cabin. Nor was her self-esteem lifted when Joanna, sitting up in her bunk, said, "You must be real *zuirch*, Fenlay, if Marcein came for you. He's Communications Integrator for the whole ruddy planet—a real big bomb. How about introducing me before we land?"

V

To her considerable surprise in view of her emotionally upset condition, Lynne slept like the proverbial top. It took the combined efforts of Joanna and the stewardess to get her awake and up and dressed in time for the landing outside of New Samarkand. After a momentary breathless hovering pause the big ship set itself down so gently there was a hardly perceptible jar as it touched ground.

Feeling cumbrous in cold-resistant parkaed coverall and curiously alone despite the cluster of passengers that waited with her in the airlock foyer, Lynne looked about her for Rolf Marcein. She felt a certain residue of guilt for her treatment of him during their last session, despite the justification of her anger. Here, on the threshold of an alien planet—*his* planet—she needed him.

He might have betrayed her and her brother, kidnapped her, all but seduced her—yet he was the sole human being she knew here. Her eyes sought him desperately, finally saw him working his way through the waiting passengers toward her.

He thrust an oddly-shaped little packet toward her, said, "Here—fasten it on. It's an oxyrespirator—you'll need it. Use it whenever you feel faint."

His manner was gravely polite and his thoughts were carefully masked. He hadn't, she decided, forgiven her for that *armlounge admiral* insult of the night before. She sent her apologies mentally, received only a curt acknowledgement. She began to feel miserable.

Then, abruptly, the port was opened. With his arm steadying her Lynne stepped out onto the escarpment platform, a couple of hundred meters above the flat blast-scarred surface of the field. A thin chill wind cut her face, a wind from out of a sky darker than that of Earth.

Her first reaction was of gauntness, of barrenness beyond anything

she had known on her home planet. The grounds around the Sahara brain-center in which she had served her apprenticeship had been lush with tropical growths—and even the desert around them had been warm. But the vast reddish expanse of the spaceport looked cold and uninviting—even the row of oddly shaped metal buildings at its edge had a shabby eroded untended appearance.

Her second reaction, as she rode the ramp down was of breathlessness. The icy air stung the insides of her nostrils, as it did her face, but failed to fill her lungs. Panic swept over her and she clutched at her breast. Then Rolf's arms were around her from behind, his long strong fingers were adjusting the oxyrespirator.

Lynne breathed deeply and felt a sudden surge of exhilaration. No wonder, she thought irrelevantly, the Martians were more volatile than Earthfolk. They must be constantly high on oxygen. She suppressed an impulse to giggle as she reached the bottom of the moving ramp.

Her third reaction, as she took her first step on Mars, was of weightlessness. Not the unhealthy weightlessness of the space-ship but a buoyancy comparable to that of swimming in the Great Salt Lake or the Dead Sea. Lynne sat rigidly on an urge to discover how high and far she could jump, even encumbered by the aluminum coverall. She realised her hair was blowing in

the wind, pulled the parka over it.

"You'll do." Rolf looked her over disinterestedly, added, "Unless you still want to go back to Earth."

It must have been the oxygen that made her reply, "What for? Now that I'm here I might as well give it a run." Irresponsible or not, it was worth it to see the softness that came into his dark eyes.

He took her arm and said gruffly, "Come on. We've got things to do. I'm turning you over to Tony Willis. He'll brief you. He promised to be here . . . There he is, by the Administration Building."

There was no doubt about the warmth of Tony Willis' greeting—outwardly or telepathically. He gave Rolf a bearhug, then turned quickly to Lynne, pumped her right hand, said, "*Crebut*, I'm glad you got here! But Rolf didn't warn us he was bringing a tearing beauty."

"Tearing mad most of the way," she said, unable to remain unresponsive to Willis' warmth. He was a tubby bespectacled young man with an irresistible grin. From him she felt no probe of her thoughts, knew sudden overwhelming relief. Despite Rolf's assurance that there were fewer than a hundred telepaths on Mars, subconsciously she had been expecting to land on a planet where her innermost thoughts were open to everyone. She was almost pathetically grateful that it was not so.

"Old Rolf must be losing his touch," said Willis, grinning. "He's our ace-in-the-hole when it comes

to—personal management. Has a thousand lovely ladies eating right out of his hand."

"Shut up, you *czanworm!*" Rolf's thoughts revealed acute distress and Lynne felt a little glow of triumph.

She said, "Well, one way or another he got me here."

"And do we need you!" Willis led the way toward a pharmabar.

"Thank you, sir." Lynne turned on the charm, enjoying the inner growls of resentment from Rolf. Well, he'd played a game with her, she thought. He had no right to resent her playing a few herself.

But I wasn't playing for fun! The message was sharp and resentful. *I was playing for the safety of my planet.*

You mean one little girl like me can save a great big world like this? It must be the oxygen, she decided, that was making her behave so giddily. Or perhaps she couldn't help tormenting him a little—a very little.

"Hey, cut it out!" Tony Willis looked aggrieved. "It's bad enough having one of you telepaths around—but with two of you together anyone else is out in the cold. What do you want for breakfast?"

They apologized and kept their special talents under wraps. Lynne felt a certain disappointment at the prosaic familiarity of the food and drink they were served. She didn't know exactly what she had been expecting but there was no trace of the exotic.

Nor was the aircar in which

Willis drove them from the spaceport to New Samarkand any different from similar vehicles on Earth—save that it seemed somewhat battered and in need of a refinish. She and Rolf rode in silence, letting Tony do the talking.

They traveled at about five hundred meters altitude toward a low range of reddish hills, sprinkled here and there with green. The sky was cloudless, the ground beneath them innocent of roads, of cultivation, of homes. For the first time Lynne began to appreciate the immensity of the task these emigrées from Earth had undertaken, the rehabilitation of a near-dead planet.

And then, when they crested the hill, there were rectangular patches of vegetation on its lee side. But she gave this man-made miracle only the briefest of glances—for beyond lay the vast bank of the canal, stretching as far as the eye could see, in a straight line from horizon to horizon. And beyond the canal lay the city.

Here, on the far bank of the incredible dry ditch, men had built well. Plastic half-domes and metallic towers, spare and functional, rose from the newly-buttressed escarpment for a good two kilometres. Beneath the buildings, on the bank itself, were broad terraces upon which passenger and freight-craft and landing engines made a busy and familiar pattern, kaleidoscopic with movement.

And behind the man-made city, its incredible soaring half-ruined

spires and obelisks cutting a jagged rampart across half the sky, lay the once-vast Martian metropolis. Crystalline minarets, revealing materials and a beauty of design unknown as yet to Earthmen, reflected the rays of the distant sun in prismatic showers of color, coruscating, almost blinding, yet so weird and beautiful that they brought tears to Lynne's eyes.

I'm glad you can capture their beauty. Rolf's thought shared the excitement of her own. *So many of us see nothing but ruin.*

"Quite a sight, isn't it?" said Tony Willis complacently. "We get a *farbisch* howl from the archeological boys whenever we have to clear any of it away."

"It seems a shame," said Lynne with feeling.

Willis shrugged. "Can't be helped. We haven't the time or resources to build from scratch in the sand. Besides, there's oceans of ruins left for them to poke around in."

He brought them in with practised skill to a landing on one of the terraces, where Rolf was quickly gobbled up by a waiting group of men and women. Before they led him off he said to Lynne, "I'm sorry if I've seemed unfair, Lynne. But I think you'll understand in time. This is a frontier world and we can't always take time out to observe the niceties."

Some inner emotion she refused to recognize caused her to ask, "When will I see you again, Rolf? You aren't leaving me . . ."

"Tony can take care of you as well as I," he informed her. "I'd like to get you started myself but I'm way behind in my work. I'll be paying you a visit at the post—perhaps sooner than you expect."

"I see." She felt frozen. Now that he had her here he was discarding her like an old clout. She recalled what Tony Willis had said at the spaceport about his having a thousand women eating out of his hand, how eagerly Joanna had expressed a desire to meet him the night before. She was glad there had been no opportunity to perform that introduction. Why make it a thousand-and-two?

As he walked slowly away, with the reception committee dancing attendance about him, she received a faintly mocking thought projection from him, became aware that he was enjoying her jealousy. She felt her face flame again, said, "*Ferkab!*"—all but stamped her foot.

"What was that?" Tony Willis asked politely.

"Nothing—my clout slipped," she replied, embarrassed.

Lynne was taken to a gaunt office whose chief piece of furniture was an immense Martian globe, upon which all the chief Martian cities, all the human settlements, all the communications posts were marked. She began to understand, from looking at it, how very different conditions upon the red planet were from the Earth norm.

The home planet, heavily over-

populated, was skilfully disguised to appear roomy. Virtually every inch of its land surface was devoted to giving crowded humanity the illusion of privacy. Aloneness was one of its most prized cultural assets.

On Mars, with its scant million humans and solitude ever-present, all cultural efforts were bent the other way—to create the illusion of a large number of people that did not exist. Instead of seeking privacy the inhabitants gratefully crowded close together in their small communities, seeking strength through numbers.

"We're making progress—tremendous progress," Tony told her seriously, tapping a point on the globe. "The more ground we get under cultivation the more atmosphere we reclaim through the plant-breathing process. What we actually need is a few hundred million more people—but the planet will barely support those we have. It's a slow and laborious process."

"Operation bootstrap," said Lynne, wondering how she could even briefly have found this dedicated young man ridiculous.

"Exactly," he told her. "I take it Rolf has briefed you a little about your job here."

"A little," she said. "I'm to relieve my brother—right?"

"Right." He nodded. "We can short-cut your training because you are his twin. Ordinarily we take a couple of weeks fitting each communications worker to his or her

post—finding in just which their telepathic sensitivity will work the best. But since, in a way, we *know* about you through Revere, we can save time."

"Revere," she said, "what about him? Is he very sick?"

Tony Willis shrugged. "It's periodic," he told her. "This whole business is so new and so sudden it hit most of them without warning. Since you know the score you ought to be able to fight it."

"But mightn't I have my brother's weaknesses?" Lynne asked.

"We're hoping not," was the reply. "In most cases women resist better than men. The suggestions these creatures make are so *swackably* lewd they clash with the feminine propriety-barrier."

"While men, being Casanovas, give in," she said, thinking again of Rolf and his thousand-and-two women.

"Something like that," he replied, went on to tell her how telepathic messages were keyed and directed and addressed to reach the proper destinations. "You'll be here"—tapping a spot on the globe, a third of a world away from New Samarkand—"at Barkutburg, within mentarange of Zuleika, New Walla Walla and Cathayville. So here will be the code-keys for you to remember . . ."

The final briefing took sixteen hours. If Lynne, through her years of coaching for and year of work on the integration-team, had not been trained to complete concentra-

tion over long periods, she would never have been able to absorb all the new knowledge Tony Willis and other communications experts pumped into her.

At the end of that time he looked at her with red-rimmed but admiring eyes, shook his head and said, "My hat is off to you, Lynne. You're the quickest study I've ever met."

"Thanks—most of it's a matter of training," she replied modestly. She was glad he was not telepathic or he would have read the bright glow of far-from-modest pride that ran through her. *Wait till Rolf hears about it*, she thought. *Maybe he won't think I'm such a marlet after all*. With this went added pride in that she was obviously less exhausted than her mentor.

When it was over she was fed real meat for the fourth or fifth time in her life—ham from lean Martian-bred hog, basted in some curious alien sauce. With it went real potatoes and non-processed vegetables, raised on the red planet. Rugged or not, Lynne decided as she was bundled into a planetcar, life on Mars had its compensations.

When the ship landed at Barkutburg a tearose-pale Martian dawn was lighting the dark eastern sky. Lynne felt a tingle of anticipation, mixed with dread, a stir of *déjà vu*—the I've-been-here-before feeling—as she alighted with her strangely light bag in hand and paused to sip sparingly of her oxyrespirator.

For here was her nightmare city,

though seen from the ground. Here were the widely-spaced transparent towers, similar to yet oddly unlike those of New Samarkand. Here were the scant human dwellings, clustered like alien mushroom growths amid the towering demi-ruins.

Two aluminum-covered figures were awaiting her at the rim of the airport. One was tiny, feminine, despite the bulk of her costume, her exotically delicate Eurasian features roughened by wind and sunburn. She was Lao Mei-O'Connell, qualified and elected leader of the pioneer settlement. The other was—Revere Fenlay.

It was odd to see oneself mirrored in the features of another human for the first time in one's life, Lynne decided. She noted her brother looked unexpectedly healthy, that his handclasp was firm, his eyes probably clearer than her own sleep-puffed ones.

His thought was warningly clear. *Don't be fooled by externals, Lynne. These creatures can move in on me every time I open up my mind to receive a message. They're murder!* Aloud he said, "Lord, I had no idea my counterpart was a beauty."

Quite naturally she linked arms with Revere as they walked toward the cluster of Earth-dwellings. It was, she thought, a rare event for twins, separated by the gulf between planets, ever to meet after incubation—except of course on such rarified levels as those trod by Rolf Marcein and his brother.

She sensed a discomfort, a reserve, behind the routine welcome of Lao Mei-O'Connell, decided swiftly there was some sort of guilt feeling there.

As swiftly her twin replied telepathically, *Of course she has feelings of guilt. Thanks to her I was given the coldwrap treatments—even when I was not under Their control. There was no need for them and they made me feel my head would burst. Thank farb you're here!*

When did you receive these treatments? she thought sharply. And the answering thought confirmed her sudden suspicion. Revere had been placed in coldwrap restraint each time a headache had assailed her on Earth. He had been deliberately tortured as part of the campaign to get her to come to Mars and replace him.

That Rolf—that marlet! Fury assailed her, fury and frustration. But Revere's grip tightened on her forearm.

I don't mind—now, he informed her. *We need you here.*

It was pathetic but she managed to still the thought aborning. With Revere, as never before in her life, she felt as if she belonged to someone, as if someone belonged to her. But she had not been with him an hour when he said good-bye. He was returning to New Samarkand on the planet-ship for treatment, perhaps ultimately to Earth to replace her.

"Don't worry," he told her. "You'll do great, Lynne. Wring

their *farbish* invisible necks."

She checked the thrill of panic that caused her, managed a *Look up Ray Cornell when you bit Earth. And ruin Janet just for me.*

Don't be too rough on Rolf was his farewell thought. *You'll understand him better—later on.*

She watched the takeoff, walked back with Lao Mei-O'Connell in silence. And, twenty minutes later, she stepped off the uplift platform and found herself alone in the patched tower-room of her nightmare.

VI

Sitting there alone, waiting for something to happen, Lynne for the first time since becoming aware of her telepathic powers began to get a sense of direction along with the thoughts that came to her from outside. Heretofore she had only been conscious of the thoughts themselves, varying in power according to the strength of the thinker.

Perhaps because of the altitude of the tower-room, perhaps because her own power was increasing with practise, perhaps because telepathy was easier in the thinner Martian atmosphere than on Earth—perhaps through a combination of all these factors, Lynne was aware of tremendous mental strength.

Her on-duty periods consisted of two daily shifts, each of about two Earth-hours. In case of an emergency message reaching her during any other time, she was to report

at once to her tower-post and remain on duty for the duration. And this was her first shift.

She wondered how long it would take the Martians that had possessed Revere to seek her out and test her defenses. Apparently these invisible creatures operated upon a time-scale of their own, making themselves felt without semblance of rhythm or regular schedule.

Shutting out the meaningless scramble of thoughts that reached her from the Earth-village below, Lynne considered Revere and the odd constraint that had prevailed between them during their brief single meeting. Somewhere beyond the gaunt reddish Martian hills to the southeast, the planet-ship was carrying him swiftly toward New Samarkand—and, she hoped, toward rehabilitation.

Revere had had a rough deal on this outpost world. Although he seemed not to resent it Lynne found herself trembling with indignation at thought of the needless torture he had undergone—merely to give Lynne the induced headaches that had undermined her Earth-conditioning. She thought of Rolf and his thousand-and-two women.

And from somewhere, half a planet away, came a quick mocking thought from the Svengali who had led her to a planet she had never had the slightest desire to visit. It said, *Don't bother me now, Lynne—can't you see I'm busier than farb?*

So thrilling was the experience,

so magnificent the surge of power which swept through her, that Lynne actually forgot to be angry at receiving such a quick brush-off. Even a half-world away, she thought, she could key in on Rolf, learn what he was doing.

A thousand-and-one other women? She sipped sparingly at her oxyrespirator, felt reinforced exhilaration. With her new-found ability she was going to be able to check up on his alleged love-life. She actually gloated as she sat there alone amid the spare Martian landscape.

Then, feeling somewhat ashamed, she thought of her twin again. Evidently he was keeping his mind closed for she could not reach him. She wondered what he was really like, what—say—Lao Mei-O'Connell felt about him. And all at once she knew, for the Eurasian woman's mind was an open book.

The Barkutburg leader was almost physically sick at Revere's departure. Her thoughts of love, of desolation, were so strong that Lynne found herself sharing them, even though she had seen her twin but a scant few minutes since attaining an age of reason.

Yet there were strength and determination and a strong sense of duty holding Lao Mei-O'Connell to her important tasks of seeing that her share of reclaiming a planet continued. The frail-looking Martian woman was, Lynne realised, a person of vast character.

She thought of her having de-

liberately to torture the man she loved, through drugs that opened his already sick mind to the invaders, and wondered if she herself would be capable of such behavior, no matter how urgent the circumstance, to—say—Rolf Marcein.

It was then that her first message came through—so unused was she to receiving telepathically impersonal thoughts that she all but missed her code signal. The Zuleika operator had to repeat it three times before Lynne came to with a start and keyed her own thoughts properly—*Ess-two. Barkutburg. Ess-two, Barkutburg. Come in.*

The message itself concerned a supply of chemilamps, which had arrived at Zuleika from Cathayville and was ready for transshipment, if they were needed at Barkutburg. Lynne repeated the message, pressed the hand-buzzer for ground-communication, relayed the news to Lao Mei-O'Connell in her office below. She was told to notify Zuleika to send the chemilamps on at once, as they were sorely needed.

Lynne got the message through, after which the Zuleika telepath flashed, *You're new on the job. How is Fenlay?*

This is Fenlay here, she replied. *Revere's twin, Lynne. He's been sent to New Samarkand for treatment.*

Welcome, Lynne Fenlay—and good luck, came the answer. *Met any of our unseen friends yet?*

Not yet, thought Lynne, *when are they apt to hit me?*

There's no telling. Lynne received a definite impression of a shrug. The Zuleika operator gave his name, which was Zachary Ramirez, then signed off for the time being. Thanks to this brief personal conversation Lynne no longer felt so alone. At least, when the invaders attacked her, she'd have someone to reach for—or would she?

There was a message from New Walla Walla direct, about an hour later, concerning some point of bookkeeping. Lynne handled it, then sat out the rest of her first tour of duty alone. The Martian sun was high in the sky when at last she took the downlift to the ground.

She found herself ravenously hungry. Either through some effect of the alien atmosphere and climate or the knowledge the food she would get was real rather than fabricated, Lynne found herself thinking about dining in an almost animal fashion.

Nor was the mess disappointing. All residents of Barkutburg shared a single dining hall, since such a method represented great economy of time, labor and food supplies. It was, to Lynne, rather like a greatly enlarged and much more volatile Mother Weedon's. The other residents of the settlement wore the uniform ruddiness of unmistakable good health. To Lynne, accustomed to the more pallid countenances of Earth, they seemed almost vulgar.

Yet the good humor, the ca-

maraderie, were unmistakable—as were the animal spirits. Lynne, as a pretty girl and new arrival, got more masculine attention than ever before in her life. She was plied with offers to see the Martian ruins, to visit the nearby mountaintops, to take long excursions through the vast dry canal-beds.

To her relief the other girls and women, unless their thoughts lied, showed very little resentment at her presence. In fact most of them were as eager as the men to question her about the home planet—though their questions were cast in more feminine mould. Yet Lynne played her welcome cautiously, accepting no dates for the present on the plea that mastery of her new job demanded all her time and strength.

A few days later Lao Mei-O'Connell suggested the two of them go for a walk. When they were well out of earshot of the others she said, "You're handling yourself very well, Lynne. So far so good."

Lynne eyed her, carefully avoiding a probe of her mind—she had no wish to make an enemy of this woman and the basic situation was emotionally delicate to begin with. She said, "Then you anticipate trouble, Miss O'Connell?"

"Lao, please," she said. "There's scant room for social formality in a settlement like Barkutburg. You'll have some trouble, of course—you're bound to on an alien planet. I hate to think of what I'd have to go through to adjust to Earth."

"Fair enough," Lynne said gratefully. She wanted to ask Lao about Revere, what sort of man he was, some of his little habits. She also began to understand better why Earth-Mars twins were kept so rigorously apart as a rule. The relationship was a complex and deep one and she found herself almost as homesick for her twin as was Lao.

"Life is hard here," Lao said. "but not unhappy. It isn't even particularly earnest, save for necessary jobs. Work hard, play hard, rest hard—that's the rule of Mars."

"It sounds good," said Lynne sincerely. "Tell me, Lao, just what is the status of electricity on Mars? I was a little worried when you wanted the chemilamps so urgently. But we have the communicator phones and electric cooking . . ."

"It's a strange problem," said the other woman. "Everything works as long as we can use a closed circuit on this planet. But the minute we open one up—for lateral broadcasting, say—it is dissipated—like *that!*" She snapped thin fingers sharply.

Then she added, "But nature seemed to have compensated in our favor when we were able to develop telepaths." She eyed Lynne speculatively, added, "You must have tremendous powers. No other Earth-person has ever been able to make the grade. From what Rolf Marcein told me you were outstanding the moment Revere reached you."

"I don't pretend to understand

it," said Lynne. "As far as my first few sessions on duty, it seemed to be all right."

"You weren't bothered?" The question was softly urgent.

"No." Lynne shook her head. "But I'm expecting to be."

"You will be, I'm afraid. Every telepath on Mars has been at least once. Revere had the bad luck to be the first—before the presence of these beings was even suspected. Hence he was surprised and his resistance was unprepared. Once they've gained possession it becomes progressively more difficult to keep them out."

"I suppose," said Lynne, "they pick on telepaths because they can only enter minds opened for message-reception."

"Probably," Lao informed her. "We can't be certain of anything until we know more about them and their motives. But you can see what a threat it has become. Thanks to the paralysis of lateral electronic communication, the survival of humanity on Mars depends almost entirely on telepaths. When these zombies or whatever they are take possession no telepath is worth a damn. Nor can any of them receive messages while the aliens are threatening them. If they do . . ."

Lao's silence was eloquent. Lynne took a sip of oxygen as her breathing became difficult. They were approaching one of the semi-ruined structures, a vast edifice, squatter and broader than the slim pinnacle which contained the broadcasting

room, whose lower facade was a mass of friezes in high-relief.

Lynne, as part of her cultural training on Earth, had been taken on tours of the vast temples of India, Pakistan and Malaya—including Ankhov Vat. Yet not even the incredible and bizarre reliefs of those fabulous temples, with all of their grotesqueries and solemnly religious obscenities, prepared her for what she now saw.

The pantheocratic creatures of ancient Mars were far more diverse than their counterparts on Earth—and of course utterly exotic. Here were creatures with two, three and four heads, with innumerable appendages, with reproductive organs so weird as to defy comment or moral reaction.

One feature Lynne noted at once. Like their Asiatic counterparts on Earth, they seemed to belong to a theocratic rather than a scientific culture—yet the buildings themselves were utterly beyond the creative techniques of even an interplanetary human culture.

She said, "Are the other towers of Mars like this?"

"In general," replied the Eurasian girl. "The aborigines seem to have been mostly a philosophic sort. Perhaps they became so when their planet began to die. All that have survived are such low life-orders as the *czanuorm* and *sand-lurtonk*. Unless, of course, the invisible ones are natives. I for one am inclined to believe they are."

"So does Rolf Marcein," said Lynne.

"You love him, don't you?" Lao asked matter-of-factly.

"I'm beginning to be afraid so," said Lynne as frankly.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," replied the other. "I love Revere, you know—and I don't expect to see him ever again."

"I know," said Lynne, feeling her companion's unhappiness like a knife. She pulled the parka over her head although it was not the cool Martian afternoon breeze that was making her cold. She said, "It must have been very difficult for you—what you had to do to help get me here. I don't wonder if you hate me."

"I don't hate you, Lynne," said Lao. "But if you fail on this job I shall. I should not enjoy sacrificing Revere for nothing."

"I won't fail," Lynne told her with more assurance than she felt. "After all, I have Revere to think of—and you—and Rolf."

"I encourage myself with similar thoughts," said Lao. "Come—let us go on inside."

It was like entering a pagan cathedral. The tower in which Lynne's post was bore heavy overmarks of human habitation. Probably, she thought, it had long since been stripped by the archeologists of any objects of historical or cultural value. Save for its crystalline flying buttresses it might almost have been an Earth skyscraper.

But, outside of a few pieces of

scaffolding, where restoration work or study was evidently in progress, this immense building had been left untouched by the new inhabitants of the red planet. Thanks probably to the thinness and dryness of the atmosphere, brilliant murals had retained their coloring intact. Yet in numerous patches the colors seemed to fade into neutral tints at variance with the brightness of the rest.

"Here." Lao took from a table, on which tools and other instruments had been laid, an odd-looking stereoptical device, handed it to Lynne, adding, "Adjust it and you'll get the full effect. A lot of their work was done below the human color-scale, in the infra-red."

Lynne gasped when she studied the hitherto drab patches in the murals through the double-eye-piece of the viewer. She saw strange beings, hauntingly near-human, engaged in fantastic gambols. Multifaceted eyes leered out at her from the Capuchin heads of twin-bodied smaller creatures of a boldness that almost made her flinch. And there were endlessly varied poses of both sorts of beings . . .

"Rather disturbing, isn't it?" said Lao. "I didn't bring you out here just to see the sights, Lynne. From what little your brother was able to tell me, the odd little games those creatures are playing are very like those his invaders hinted at."

"You mean," said Lynne with a shudder, "that the zombies or what-

ever they are looked like that before they lost their bodies?"

"Or before they became invisible," said Lao quietly. "The near-humans seem to have been the dominant species. These others—the twin-bodied monkeylike things—seem to have been their pets."

"What disgusting games they played!" said Lynne. "They sound a lot like . . ." She hesitated, realizing she was about to repeat Lao's remark.

"Exactly," said Lao.

They walked back to the settlement in silence. Both girls had a great deal to ponder over. When they got there Lynne settled down to listen to some musicrolls in the recreation building and Lao left to tend to her various executive functions.

Lynne's new life on Mars passed without notable incident for another week, Earth-time. She was beginning to adjust to days and nights almost twice as long as those of her home planet, to the small cool sun, to the use of her oxyrespirator whenever her lungs felt empty.

She was even beginning to enjoy the give-and-take of the neo-pioneer society of Barkuttsburg. Yet loneliness continued to gnaw at her, loneliness for the twin she had known such a short time, loneliness for Rolf, at whose activities she could only guess. And some of her guesses were in lurid vidarcolor.

Late one afternoon, in the recreation building, the musicroll was

playing a fine concerto for theraharp by Liston-Lutz, the most important human composer yet to emerge on Mars. Back on Earth his music had seemed to Lynne to be both glaringly dissonant and a trifle decadent. Here on Mars she understood it. He was writing of the red planet itself, of a world that had all but died and was now having its life renewed through lusty Earth-pioneers.

"Like it?" one of the engineers enjoying an off-shift rest asked Lynne over a colafizz globe.

"Very much. It—fits," said Lynne. She was still smiling at him when the headache came back—with a sharpness and depth of discomfort she had never felt on Earth. For a full minute or two she thought she was going to be physically sick from the pain.

She managed to get up and move toward her quarters before anyone noticed she was feeling badly. It would never do to have them worried about *her*—after all, they had enough to worry about. Besides, she knew what was the matter. Revere was in New Samarkand and they were doing something to him, something that might easily either kill him or drive him permanently insane.

VII

Lynne lay down on her simple cot and tried to flash a personal message through to Revere. But all she got was an increase of agony that almost blacked her out.

Then she tried to reach Rolf Marcein. Although she lacked the advantage of being high in her tower-post, the emotional urgency of the moment more than compensated for this adverse factor. She got through to him quickly, discovered his mind was open. So intense was his concentration that he seemed momentarily unaware of her probing.

He was sitting in a hospital room, an operating room, and Revere lay in front of him, stretched out on a surgical table. Sight of him made Lynne feel another wave of nausea. An anestherator had been attached to his nose and mouth and an alert nurse stood by the regulator. Revere's temples had been slit by twin incisions, from which tubes were attached to an odd and complex piece of machinery that seemed to support a visual-grid.

Rolf Marcein was digging at her twin mentally, at the same time seeking to receive whatever messages came from his tortured brain. Lynne could read Rolf's thoughts clearly as he waved to her twin, *Their shape—you of all of us must have received some vision of their appearance. Crehut, Fenlay, we've got to know how they think of themselves!*

Then came a chaotic jumble of answering thoughts from Revere's damaged brain. And even as she suffered sympathetic anguish Lynne understood that with full anesthesia the mind itself would be dulled so

that no messages would be possible. It was a hideous moment.

I'm trying, Rolf—I'm trying . . . In spite of the agony he was undergoing Lynne's brother was beginning to formulate his thoughts. Little by little a picture was building itself on the screen. It was a wispy fragmentary picture, like a vidarscreen suffering from old-fashioned television "ghosts." The figures he projected looked wispy, blurred, repeated side by side in overlapping focus.

Lynne noted that Rolf and the alert attendants present were using stereoscopic devices, forced herself to see through the mind of one of them, to learn the impressions they were getting of the infra-red portions of the picture.

It was like some of the images Lynne had seen earlier on the Martian mural—but all balled up. It looked like one of the near-human dominant species, yet had the multiple body of one of their disgusting pets. Its antics were even more suggestive than the mural.

Lynne quickly re-transferred herself. She remembered all at once what Tony Willis had told her about women being better able to resist the aliens than men. They were incredible, impossible, she thought, yet there was a hint of intense pleasure in their . . .

All at once she lost the entire image in a flash of worry, confusion and finally frustration. Yet her headache persisted, grew worse, and she got a definite impression

that Revere was dying, that Rolf was mercilessly goading him on to destruction. Outraged, she tried to key furious thoughts in Rolf's direction—but so greatly was she herself suffering that she was unable to focus her powers.

Then, abruptly, the agony was over. Whatever had happened was finished, done with. Lynne sat up on her bed, feeling limp and sore all over, as if she had taken a physical beating. She ran an acti-comb through her blond hair, freshened up her looks generally, though she felt like the proverbial wrath of Satan, went out to the recreation room. At the moment she needed human company.

Through a window she saw that the sun was low in the west, looked in awe at the brilliant colors of the Martian sunset. Thanks to the thinner atmosphere and its high impregnation of dust, the brilliance far exceeded anything on Earth, even though the sun looked far-away and cold.

Someone offered her a colafizz, which she accepted gratefully. She tried to reach Revere but got only a wall of blankness. He was either unconscious—or dead, she decided. She didn't know whether to be relieved or grief-stricken at the prospect. True, Revere was her identical twin—yet she barely knew him, had no real close ties.

Then Lao appeared and under the artificial lighting of the chemilamps, Lynne was surprised to note how tired the Eurasio-Martian girl

looked. She appeared thin enough to be blown away by the first breeze and there were deep purple circles under her slightly tilted black almond-eyes—yet the fingers that gripped her skinless cigarette were rock-steady.

She said, "They've done something to Revere, haven't they?"

"I think so," Lynne replied. "How did you know?"

"I felt it—until just lately," said Lao. "Most of us are somewhat telepathic on Mars. In moments of emotional stress especially."

"I'm not sure what's happened," Lynne told her. "They were trying to get him to record the shape of the invaders on a grid."

Lao's already pale face turned ashy-white. She whispered, "I *knew* it! They've used the necro-recorder on him."

"What is it?" Lynne inquired.

"It's a Martian device—supposed to get impressions from the minds of dying men. It was used in the early days when we had more crime." There was sudden listlessness in her manner.

Lynne read her thoughts all too plainly. Lao Mei-O'Connell was stunned with grief. No one, it seemed, had ever survived treatment with this machine—survived to sanity at any rate. So Revere was dead—or as good as dead.

Lynne looked blankly at the Eurasian woman, utterly unable to think under the sudden shock of her words. And then, out of nowhere, came the fragment of a

thought. *Don't give up the spaceship, Lynne—tell Lao I'm not completely batty yet.*

It was Revere—unquestionably. Lynne tried to get him again but the blank wall was back. Only now, for some reason, it didn't seem so terrifying. She looked at Lao, who said, "You got something just now, Lynne. Was it . . . ?"

Lynne nodded. "It was Revere. He—he asked me to tell you he's okay—not completely batty yet was the way he put it."

For a moment doubt blanked Lao's face. Then she smiled and looked on the verge of passing out herself. She said, "I might not have believed you, Lynne. But that phrase—it's—well, it's the way he would have said it."

"It was Revere," Lynne repeated. She looked at the chronometer above the door of the room, realized it was getting late. "I've barely got time to eat dinner," she said. "I don't want to miss my shift."

"No, you don't," the other told her. "There might be a message."

"Why not share it with me?" Lynne offered. "I could use some company."

Lao shook her head regretfully. "I've got a million things to do here," she said. Then, with the ghost of a smile lighting her exotic features, "Besides, I'd be afraid it might be bad news."

"I'll send you a message via the ground-communicator the second I learn anything," Lynne told her.

Then the two women went in to dine at the head table. They were two islands of preoccupation amid the rough good-humored gaiety of the room. It was Saturday night at Burkutburg and there was going to be a dance.

Lynne found herself wondering at the morals of her new companions. They certainly didn't seem backward about sex—and the planet-wide dislike of privacy seemed to extend into even their most intimate personal relationships. Yet when Lynne thought about Janet Downes and certain other young men and women of the supposedly more civilized home planet, she decided the Martians were probably the nicer. At any rate they lived their emotional lives right out in the open.

For the first time since her first few days on the red planet she felt alone as she stepped off the uplift and entered her listening and message-post, high in the crystal tower. There was something frightening about sitting alone in this ruined building with the wind making its night sounds through the flying buttresses about her and what appeared like the whole of Mars stretched out in panorama before her.

It had looked desolate enough in the daylight. Now, with the stars blazing an enigmatic backdrop, it looked dark—and twice as desolate. Lynne found herself wondering what strange and fearsome caravans, what hideous battles and

frightful plagues, had passed within view of her post. She seemed to see again the strange capering figures of the murals and bas-reliefs, and of the vision-grid she had viewed telepathically that afternoon in the distant hospital room at New Samarkand.

She told herself she was getting the jams, sent a tune-up message through to Cathayville. Through the telepathic operator should have been on duty there was no response. She reached out further to locate Revere, could not get to him, found Rolf. He told her, *Lay off, you marlet. Lynne. You nearly jammed the works this afternoon.*

How is Revere? She was insistent.

In coma—and hereafter use the proper channels, Lynne. You're supposed to key all messages for New Samarkand through Cathayville.

Cathayville fails to answer, she informed him.

Cease sending at once! Cease sending at once, Lynne. If Cathayville is out it means . . . Cease sending at once!

What does it mean? Lynne was unused to Martian directness, unused to taking peremptory orders, especially from a man. She had no intention of obeying before she was good and ready and . . .

Suddenly they were there, all around her. Thanks to having viewed the murals and the scene on the visual grid that afternoon she was able to get some idea of their nature—or what had been their

nature before a dying globe had driven them to seek the refuge of pure thought and feeling-forms.

First one of them came fluttering into the room, like some giant invisible moth, then came another and another and another until she lost count. They were gay for some reason and nibbled at her mind like moths nibbling at wool in a closet.

Worse, now that she had allowed them into her brain she was unable to drive them out. They darted away, amused, just beyond the reach of her questing probe. Then they came back, doing their strange dances and whispering outrageous suggestions. Alien or not they had definite erotic appeal, that awakened in Lynne responses she had never before suspected she possessed.

What kind of creature am I? she thought hysterically after a particularly ingenious lascivious mental embrace. And then, from some hidden source, she drew the strength to fight. She concentrated as never before in her life—even while working with the group-machine—and little by little began to win the battle with the aliens.

You'll regret it—just let us have the loan of your body and we'll show you joys you have never dreamt of. The thoughts pounded at her head with frail persistent powdery punches, that promised to win through sheer weight of numbers what they lacked in power.

But Lynne forced herself to think of kindly prosaic Mother Weedon. At once, seizing upon her thought,

the invaders suggested all sorts of indecent sports for that mature lady. And the very idea of Mother Weedon indulging in such pursuits was so absurd that Lynne was unable to resist laughing out loud.

At once the creatures were gone. They were unable to stand the brain waves of ridicule. Lynne wondered about it. For the moment she felt carried aloft on a wave of high excitement at her victory. She tried to code through a message to Rolf Marcein through the proper Cathayville channel.

Cathayville had been attacked earlier in the evening and for awhile the telepath on duty had been forced to keep his mind resolutely shut, lest he fall prey to the enemy. Repulsed, they had moved on to Barkutburg and Lynne. She gave the message for relay, received information to the effect that Rolf Marcein's current whereabouts were unknown and that he was maintaining a closed mind to all messages and was therefore not to be reached.

Lynne felt terribly alone at this message and the invaders chose that moment, while her mind was still open, to return in greater force. This time Lynne found herself in actual pain. Their promise was no longer mere physical pleasure—although their abandonment of bodies had unquestionably led them to overstress the joys of the flesh. Now they promised pain unless Lynne were to give way to them, the sort of pain, a thousand times

magnified, that she had felt sympathetically while Revere was enduring similar attack.

She tried to concentrate on Mother Weedon but the creatures were not to be fooled twice by the same ruse. This time it was their laughter that hurt. Lynne cast about wildly for help from any telepath within mental reach, lest she actually surrender body and mind to their control. She even tried to reach Lao Mei-O'Connell but the Eurasian woman was not telepathic enough to respond to the appeal.

Then, as she was about to give up, support reached her. Revere was sending to her, helping her to steady herself. She could sense his complete exhaustion, felt concern for him even while she accepted gratefully his mental powers of assistance. Only such a relationship as theirs, she realised, could cope with the blanketing torment of the invaders.

He was telling her something, that Rolf and the others had compiled some sort of error that afternoon from the vision-grid. The thought ran, *They think they know what the creatures are now but they don't. Even I don't. My images were mixed. They are not the dominant near-human species we thought but something else . . .*

Slowly his thoughts faded once more, unable to hold out against the fatigue that was plaguing him. But his hopeless message of defeat had sprung a fresh thought-train in Lynne's mind, one that so occupied

her attention she was able to hold the invaders at bay almost without effort.

She recalled the murals—the near-human looking dominants and their pets with the disgusting dual bodies and vile games and many-faceted eyes. She thought back to what Revere had just said via thought-waves—*They are not the dominant near-human species we thought but something else . . .*

She saw once more, in clear memory-vision, the telepathic picture that had come to her of Rolf and Revere and the visual-grid. No wonder the pictures had looked foggy and full of "ghosts." In his mind's eye, limited by the fixed belief of Mars that only the dominant species could have survived in invisible form, Revere had tried to project these near-humans onto the screen.

Inwardly, subconsciously, he had known better. The dominant species had *not* survived—on Mars at any rate. It was the horrid little creatures with the multi-faceted eyes and the capuchin-like heads and the dual bodies that had managed to shed their corporate existence and still maintain life of a sort. The masters had gone—the beasts remained . . .

Lynne felt a wave of delight at her discovery, realised it was more a result of her not having been inhibited by the traditions of Martian conditioning than through any genius of her own. For an instant she let down the bars of her mind—and the invaders, hovering unseen

about her in the tower-room, came swarming in for their third and fiercest attack. They knew she had guessed their nature, were determined to prevent Lynne from making the discovery clear to other humans. For they too were telepathic.

VIII

This time they actually knocked Lynne to the floor of the tower-room. It was greater torment than she had ever endured in her life. Somehow she could sense the pattern behind its intensity, even while she was in the grip of a mental confusion that seemed to be burning out the very fibers of her brain.

This was the showdown, the decisive battle. Her being imported to Mars had been a step in the dual between the invisible aliens and the Communications Integration of the red planet, headed by Rolf Marcein and his telepaths and other department workers.

Unless the aliens were stopped and stopped now there would be no holding them. Earthfolk on Mars were becoming increasingly telepathic and telepaths were the prey of the invisible foes. Lynne *knew* somehow, from the thoughts of the aliens, that they had been growing steadily in strength since the arrival of the Earthmen on their planet, that after a creepingly slow revival for decades they had finally snowballed to sufficient power to make open attacks upon human brains laid bare for telepathic communica-

tion. They longed to renew the lost pleasures of the flesh through possession of human bodies.

Rolf and the scientists had learned something that afternoon from Lynne's twin, something about the nature and life-form of the attackers that had hitherto been concealed from them. They were moving to the attack themselves—and it was of vital import to them that Lynne should now get through with the message that would reveal this true nature.

She tried desperately to reach Rolf—and when this effort failed to think of Mother Weedon or even plump Tony Willis engaged in amorous sports—but the keynote of the alien attack had been altered from suggestion of sensation to outright mental attack. Instead of bribery or blackmail through pain, she was being given sledgehammer treatment.

But she *had* to get her message through. Without her knowledge of the nature of the aliens Rolf would use faulty weapons against them, would lose precious time, time that might prove decisive for the survival of Earthmen on Mars.

Despairing, knowing she could not hold out much longer against the attack with her mind open, Lynne summoned reserve powers she did not know she possessed and swept the planet's surface with her thoughts, seeking Rolf. Her love for him, her fear for Revere's ultimate fate, her affection for her new comrades—all combined to help her

make a final superhuman effort.

Yet for awhile it seemed that even this despairing try was destined to defeat. The floor was beginning to swim before her eyes when at last she reached Rolf, got him, lost him, got him again. With darkness closing about her she poured out her information, her theory, her surmises.

Faintly at last she felt Rolf's Crehut! *The multiple bodies on the visual screen we thought were ghosts—of course they're the survivors, rather than the near-bumans! Thanks a million, boney, we'll know what to do now. Hold on out there—help is on its way.*

But Lynne could hold out no longer. She felt the invisible attackers come pouring through her weakened mental barriers—her last remembered vision was of the floor rising rapidly to strike her. She turned her face away just before it hit.

Lynne became aware of a lifting from her brain, of a cessation of pain that she had never actually felt. She opened her eyes, discovered she was still lying on the floor of the tower-room. But she was no longer surrounded by terror.

The patched portion of the wall had been smashed through and beyond it hovered the well-lighted outlines of a small aircraft. With her in the room was Rolf Marcein—and he was sweeping the apparently empty air about him with an odd-looking weapon. No flash or beam came from its squat muzzle

but briefly, all around her, Lynne was aware of alien anguish, alien drainage, alien flight.

"That should do it for awhile, honey," he told her, helping her to her unsteady feet. "Crehut! What a show those blasted *marlets* put on this time. They tried to knock out the whole system simultaneously. Check the other stations, will you, honey?"

Automatically she did it. Cathayville came in clearly, as did New Walla Walla and Zadeika. Save for a few stations on the other side of the planet the communications network was clear once again. Lynne informed Rolf of the fact.

"Good," he said, pulling a skinless cigarette from his pocket and letting it ignite itself. "I guess we're solid now. The *part* of it is they almost got us, before you could find out enough about them to knock them out for awhile."

"What sort of gun is that?" Lynne asked him. He had called her honey, he had saved her life, but so casually had he done it that she still felt definite constraint between them.

"We had to put it together in a hurry, once we got your message," he told her, patting it fondly. He held it up so that she could examine it better, added, "It isn't really a gun at all. We've been using the damned things for space and planet-ship external repairs for years now—you know how their outer skins pile up positive electricity . . ."

"I don't," she said. "Tell me."

He shook his head, put an arm around her, scowled at her fiercely. "How come I managed to acquire such an ignoramus?" he asked rhetorically. "I'm not going to explain it all now but space-ships *do* pick up positive charges on their outer hulls and this thing is an anion gun that attracts and discharges negative juice.

"Our unseen visitors with the gone bodies are mostly positive electricity in their present form, honey," he went on. "This blaster of ours gives them a negative charge that wipes them right out." Rolf put an arm about her, led her unprotesting to the hovering vehicle outside. "I imagine they're beginning to wonder what in *purt's* been going on, down below."

But before he pressed the buttons that lowered the hovering pinnacle to the planet's surface he drew her into the circle of his arms, kissed her, then said, "If you hadn't given us the clue to what these horrors were we'd never have had sense enough to know what to do. We couldn't conceive of the dominant species turning into this kind of force. But their pets, with the multiple bodies . . ."

Lynne and Lao Mei-O'Connell and most of the rest of the citizens of Barkutburg listened attentively while Rolf told them the full story. The trouble, it seemed, was caused by the fact that the Earthmen had brought electricity back to Mars.

"These creatures were forced to discard their corporeal bodies to

survive on a planet as dead as this one," he went on. "Their food is electricity and they'd been existing on a starvation diet for thousands of years, until *we* got here."

"It's strange they never tried space-travel," said Lynne.

"I don't believe their philosophy admitted to such a materialistic solution," Rolf replied. "They must have progressed like *farb* in the spiritual direction to be able to discard their bodies at all. Probably couldn't manage it both ways."

"That makes sense, Rolf." Lao nodded, looked at Rolf with an appeal she could not put into words.

He understood, told her, "Your Revere is going to be right as *purt*. I know what you must have thought when Lynne gave you the message she got about what we were doing to him. I tried to conceal it for that reason but this young lady is too *farbly* strong telepathically to shut her out. I'm sorry I had to make him suffer but he understood. And I wasn't going to damage him permanently.

"We—that is, some of Tony Willis' bright young men, have managed to improve the necro-recorder so that it is no longer destructive of the mind of the usee. They'd been working on it against time—and against just such a situation as arose recently, when we were finally able to get Revere off duty for a bit."

"Thanks." Lao Mei-O'Connell said the word gratefully.

"It's been rough on you," Rolf

told her, "but nothing like as rough as if our little friends got control of all the telepaths."

"What did they feed on that made them strong?" Lynne asked.

"Electricity," said Rolf. "Just because we couldn't make it work in open circuits doesn't mean we haven't tried. They got enough from our efforts partly to restore themselves—from such efforts and the leakage of our closed circuits. They were always sopping it up.

"But we didn't even know what they looked like, though we had our suspicions. They figured to be survivors of the dominant species on the planet before it dried up—but Revere's test this afternoon gave us our first doubts. We were still up a tree when Lynne got her message through. That *did* it!

"But it was touch and go. I grabbed a space-ship to get to Lynne, then took a pinnacle. If we hadn't managed to get the anion guns ready tonight I think we'd have been licked for all our knowledge. Now we've got *them* licked. They can still raid our electricity once in awhile, but it's going to cost them."

That was about it. Lynne got up and went outside in the chill Martian night to smoke a skinless cigarette. A little while later Rolf came out and joined her. He slipped an arm around her again, hugged her, said, "*Puff*, isn't it?"

"I guess so." The constraint she felt in his presence was strong upon her. And she had been through a

little too much too quickly. She said, "What about Revere?"

"He'll be back on the job in a little while," he said. "From what he told me before he went under this afternoon he wants to mate up with Lao Mei-O'Connell."

"That'll be fine," said Lynne, feeling suddenly very lonely. "But what happens to me?"

"One *zwirchy* guess!" he said, bringing his other arm into play.

"But if you drive off the aliens, why are you going to need telepaths?" She felt robbed of a fascinating new career before it was even begun.

"Don't you believe it," he told her. "Telepathy is going to be the keystone of the entire Martian culture. Now that we shan't have to confine people like you and Revere and me to communications we can use them a thousand other ways. Think of what telepathy will mean in education, in therapy, in sheer honesty and understanding!

"Besides . . ." He looked thoughtfully at the star-studded sky. "Man isn't always going to be limited to two puny planets. We've still to get a settlement working on Venus. And out there somewhere are the moons of Saturn and Jupiter. Think of how easy it will make the task if we have telepaths ready-made!"

He paused, forced her to look at him, said, "How about it, honey?"

She said, "You must be in love with your own voice—you didn't really have to *say* any of that. But watch what you think!"