

# PLANET STORIES



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# THE NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES

By JOHN AND DOROTHY DE COURCY

**It was one thing to heave an unwanted girl out into the great black grave of space. But tough old pirate Captain Brace balked at making his own soul walk the plank with her!**

THEY STOOD, SILENTLY, SIDE by side, in the crude shelter that passed for a bar on Titan. Its corroded metal walls rang hollowly to the boisterous, animal humor which flowed as freely as drink. Lewd sketches adorned the walls, staring down at the two men, the lewdity of five races to please the lechers of five planets. But all of this was lost on Brace. He was begotten in sin and knew no other life.

The thin-faced man beside him shifted uneasily. "Buy you a drink, Brace?"

"CAPTAIN Brace!" the ape snapped. It was too true to be funny. He looked like an ape. His face was ugly and concave, the nose flattened. His back and shoulders sloped and his arms hung slightly before his body.

"Captain Brace," the other said quickly.

Brace laid one of his paws on the bar, hairy, grotesque. He sniffed loudly and grunted, "Borl!"

The complacent bartender poured three fingers into a glass and Brace's lips quivered slightly over his protruding teeth in humorous pride. No man he knew could drink the stuff straight, this caustic liquor often used to add a poisonous garnish to the drinks of the frail men on earth.

The thin-faced man murmured, "Whiskey," and the bartender poured this with equal nonchalance.

Brace stared at the glass in his hand, prolonging the moment, for he knew many curious eyes watched him. Blood brother to sulphuric acid, someone had called it; Borl, distilled from the roots of a poisonous tree, the touch of whose leaves burned flesh through to the bone.

It was a show worth seeing—and Brace knew it. He knew it hurt, seared his

throat, and made his chest ache, that once he had crushed a glass in his hand in pain afterward. It had hoarsened his voice and burned his lips and tongue so they were like the palm of a workman's hand. But no other man could do it.

He raised the glass to his lips and poured the contents down. The men who were watching drew in their breath but not all of the spectators were men. Some were aliens who expressed surprise or tension in other ways. Venusians' long-unused gill slits rustled. The armadillo-like Saturnians made crackling sounds by shifting their bodies in a slight circular motion. The Martians, almost man-like, made nasal squeeks with the second set of vocal cords behind their palates. The downy-skinned Ionians, pale white in the gloom, made little clicking sounds with their fingers like miniature castanets. Then Brace laid the empty glass on the bar and life resumed in this sump where collected the residue of five races.

The thin-faced man tossed off his whiskey in one gulp, then coughed. Brace threw back his head and roared with laughter, long and loud. The room joined him, but the thin-faced man didn't mind. He laughed too. It was safer.

A PAIR of stained curtains suddenly separated on a little raised platform and all eyes turned toward it, including Brace's bloodshot ones, still jumping from the effect of the drugging Borl. A girl came out, scantily clad, and a spotlight from somewhere centered on her. Two Ionians played rhythmic melodies on a heavy stringed instrument and the girl began to dance.

Men yelled the age-old cry, "Take it off!"



*The sand suddenly bubbled and spat behind him.*

And she, twirling, smiled, but her face turned pink under the cries and jests.

Followed by the thin-faced man, Brace waddled forward until he stood at the edge of the platform. There was something different here which he sensed rather than saw through the caustic fumes of the Borl. She was young, not a burned out, haggard wreck, heavily daubed, such as he always saw in places such as this. Her limbs were lithe, straight, her face was not pretty, but it was youthful and not a debauched, revolting mask.

As Brace was taking all this in, another man staggered slightly and jabbed him

with an elbow. Without hesitation, Brace's hand caught him on the face, the chopping edge of his ape-hand landing with the crack of a hammer. There was no resentment. The man staggered back, his oft-broken face bleeding from the abrasion on his cheekbone, and Brace kept on watching the girl.

She was slim, almost skinny, which accentuated her pointed, elfin face and high cheekbones. The blue draperies whirled in her wake, as did her shining, black hair. Her brown eyes seemed to be expressionless holes and her full red lips remained fixed, pinned in a professional smile.

Brace's hands now rested on the platform, almost chest high, and sweat tickled down his concave mask unnoticed, his eyes darting after the girl, relentlessly.

**T**HEN, as suddenly as they had opened, the curtains swung closed and the spotlight died. Immediately, Brace vaulted to the platform and ducked through the slit in the curtain. He heard no voices cheering him on and he wondered if in the sudden gloom he had been unseen.

Unhesitatingly, he rolled ahead across the now darkened platform and around the askew backdrop and almost ran into the girl. She gasped and shrank back as Brace reached for her. A door opened and a young man came out, a blond, earth man. Brace looked at him, no more, just looked, and then the young man lunged at him. He didn't throw himself like an animal, he raced in like a panther, his young, small fists cocked professionally.

It was all a blur to Brace, the flying fists, the thudding blows, as he waved his long arms. He stumbled into the backdrop but its cloth surface muffled any sound. Half blind, he clutched the fabric with one hand, then reached with the other and dragged the young man to him.

Brace hadn't meant to hurt him. He had only wanted to drive him away. But he stood there, rubbing his aching knuckles, staring down at the crumpled figure on the floor. There was a big dent in the young man's skull where his head had struck a pipe. Brace was shocked. He hadn't meant to kill him. But he knew he was dead.

The girl knelt quickly beside the young man, her small, trembling hands touching his white face. Brace knew she was going to scream and immediately, his hand closed over her mouth. She struggled but he hardly noticed it. This was bad, very bad, especially here on Titan. The S.P. would like something better than just suspicions in his direction. Sure, the kid had asked for it, but how would it look? He hadn't meant to kill him, but—

His barrel chest heaved while he held the struggling girl and tried to think. He had killed other men. It wasn't remorse.

It was perhaps only a vague instinct which forbade him to kill the young or the weak. He had to get back to the ship. That was it! Once in space, they'd never know. But the girl—the girl— He could kill her too but—

With a grunt, he heaved her figure over his shoulder and moved down the gloomy hallway to a metal door. With the toe of his shoe, he opened it, glanced outside into the darkness, then heaved himself and his burden through the opening, pulling the door shut with his foot.

They were on the edge of the settlement. That was a break. He carefully skirted lighted buildings. The air, thin and cold, barely rustled his garments as he ran steadily on.

There was just one more place to pass, another bar. Brace hesitated in the gloom, holding his burden tightly. A man emerged from the bar, paused, then began walking toward them. Brace shrank back into the shadows. The man's footsteps drew closer. Brace tried to withdraw himself further but the girl began to struggle. The footsteps stopped, Brace heard a shuffling sound, then the footsteps receded. Brace peered around the corner just in time to see the man re-enter the bar.

Tensely, Brace walked toward the lighted area. If someone should come out— He came abreast of the bar and through the grimy, plastic portholes, he saw the faces of men, brief, fleeting images. Then he was past, running, and the darkness closed about them again. He ran until he was out in the sandy wastes, beyond the settlement. Then he stopped.

"If you scream, I'll kill you," he grunted into the girl's ear. He dropped his hand from her mouth, set her on her feet, but kept a firm hold on her wrist. He couldn't make out her features in the gloom but he could hear her panting.

"Let me go!" she gasped.

"Shut up!" The snarl was deadly, vicious, and it choked off the words that were bubbling up in her throat. "Now listen, you! I killed him and that's that. I didn't mean to but that doesn't make him any less dead. The S.P. doesn't like me and I think they might like to line me up in front of a jet."

**A**BRUPTLY, the girl began to cry and sank down onto the sand. Brace was annoyed and didn't know what to do. If he'd had any sense, he would have killed her back there. Then he could have come back in the front way and had another drink. The boys on the ship would swear they had met him outside, gone with him to the ship, then walked back with him. Sure, there would be two bodies, but he would have been in the clear. He couldn't turn her loose now. He couldn't kill her either.

Resignedly, he realized he had to take her with him. "Come on!" he grunted, pulling her erect.

Her sobbing died away to a muffled sniffing as he pulled her along relentlessly after him. They were far enough from the settlement so her scream wouldn't carry. Their feet crunched on the sand, though the sound was thin and wispy, the ghost of the sound of earth feet trodding earth sand. Brace noted a vague yellowness before him in the sky. It would be getting light soon. He had to get to his ship. The S.P. might already be nosing around.

The lightness was more distinct when they reached the place where the ghostly hulks of space craft lay like sleeping whales, inert leviathans that could in an instant become flaming dragons, leaping and screaming into the darkness. Brace threaded his way through them until he caught a glimpse of his own scarred ship, neither larger nor smaller than the average, its blunt nose pointing slightly away to his left. He stopped suddenly when he saw a shadowy figure standing near it.

"If you scream now—" Abruptly, he made a short, chopping motion with his fist and the girl slumped unconscious. He shouldered her and began a careful approach. There was still a hundred feet to cover, the sky was growing lighter every minute, but the shadowy figure by his ship remained motionless.

Brace stood in the shadow of the fin of a neighboring ship and turned plans over in his mind. It was no use. During that whole hundred feet he would be outlined against the sky. Then a sound tensed him, the whine of a sand car behind him. He crouched low, prepared to duck. This

was it. Nobody on Titan had sand cars but the S.P. The miners used big attractors.

**B**RACE lunged around the edge of the fin to shield himself from the oncoming lights. The sand car whizzed past him and hissed to a smooth stop. -

They had seen him. Brace spun and ran, sand spurting behind him. He skidded under the huge belly of one ship, scrambled across to another—

Something crackled in the air—dust motes or insects caught in the S.P. ray—and suddenly-molten sand bubbled and spat behind him.

But the blast was not followed by a closer one and Brace realized they were only shooting at random; he heard the ray hissing in another direction. He hurtled down the next alley and then forced himself to slow down to a shuffling run as he neared his own ship. His sprinting feet would leave too obvious tracks.

Near the stern of his ship he stopped, his fingers fumbling over the smooth side, at last finding the knob. He shoved it inward. If the port squeaked—if one of the S.P. men came around the side of the ship— But the port didn't squeak. It opened silently. And Brace stepped in. He pressed another button, and the port closed. He was in.

Brace walked swiftly to his cabin, opened the door and dropped the unconscious girl on his bunk. Quickly, he stripped off his coat and shirt and mussed his hair. The catch on one of his shoes stuck and he cursed as he ripped it off. Breathing rapidly, he waited for the sound of the buzzer, and when it came, he snatched up his heavy coat and threw it over his shoulders. As he stepped into the companionway, another cabin door opened and another figure, hastily coated stepped out.

"I'll get it!" Brace growled.

The other, startled, looked at him and said, "Yes, sir."

Brace pushed past him, turned into another companionway and walked to the main fork. He pressed a stud and the inner door opened. Stepping into the compartment, he pressed another stud, watched

the inner door close and the outer one open. He gulped to equalize the change in air pressure in his ears.

**A**N S.P. man flicked on a light and shined it full in Brace's face. Brace touched a button and flooded the entire port with light. "What do you want?" he snapped. "I'm not blasting off for two hours! Come back in an hour!"

"Is this him?" one of the S.P. men asked the other. The other nodded.

The first man who had spoken turned back to Brace. "We're not looking into your take-off, Captain. We're investigating a killing."

"What do you want me to do? Solve it for you?"

The S.P. man took the insult but stiffened a little. "No, sir. We'd like to examine your ship. There's a girl missing."

"Oh!" Brace shouted sarcastically. "Then she **MUST** be on my ship! It's just swarming with kidnapped women! It **COULDN'T** be any other!" He waved his ape-like arm toward the collection of hulls.

The S.P. man's lips tightened into a thin line.

Brace ran his thick fingers through his hair, studying them for a moment, then asked, "Do you have a search permit?"

"No sir," the S.P. man replied, "but we thought, under the circumstances, your courtesy might—"

Brace snorted. "You could get one in half an hour—but—it would interrupt my breakfast." He scowled. "All right—come on!"

The two S.P. men stepped into the port and Brace jabbed the closing button viciously. "Now have a good look, because it's going to be your last look at anybody's ship!"

"You're going to file an objection?" the S.P. man asked.

Brace threw back his head and roared with laughter. "Am I going to file an objection!" he gasped. "Why, I'm going to ground my ship and personally stay here until they yank the shields off you!"

"Well, sir, if that's the way you feel, Captain, we'll not search your ship until we have an official permit."

"You're in my ship now!" Brace snapped.

"So come on! Have a good look!!"

"Sir, if you'll accept our apologies . . . we don't wish to intrude on your legal status . . ."

Brace motioned toward the companion-way. "Do you want to search it or not?"

"Captain Brace," the S.P. man said stiffly, "it's only a routine search. We're quite convinced that a man of your standing wouldn't jeopardize his ship and, if you'll consider the incident closed, I'll be glad to see that no further trouble is given you."

The S.P. men had made a mistake by stepping in the ship of course, and Brace could make much out of it. He grinned to let them know that he'd like nothing better than to make much of it.

"Would that be satisfactory, sir?" the S.P. man asked.

Without taking his eyes off the man, Brace jabbed the opening button. His face was not distorted, yet it carried the feeling, the hint of a snarling, savage animal. In the atmosphere of such unspoken animosity, the S.P. men stepped out as the outer port opened. Brace watched them climb into the sand car and back away, then he thumbed the air-lock control, waited for the inner door to open, and entered the ship.

**H**IS mate was standing inside, a tall, heavy man with beetling brows, a man who obviously tried hard to emulate his Captain.

"Well?" Brace demanded.

"None of my business," the mate answered, shrugging, "but I think you should have given it to them. What crust! 'May we look your ship over?' I'd have let them look over the end of my fist!"

Brace bared his teeth in anticipation of the effect of his words. "I couldn't," he growled. "The girl's in my cabin." Then he pushed by the astonished mate, turned in the companionway and burst into a roar of laughter. "Fouled 'em up again!" he shouted.

The mate stared dumbly at Brace for a moment, then shrugging, went off in the other direction.

Brace stood outside his cabin door, spec-

ulating. What should he do now? Finding no answer to his question, he opened the door and stepped in.

The girl was sitting on the edge of his bunk. She looked at him, then down at her hands, as though the sight of him was repulsive to her. When she looked up at him again, her level eyes made Brace wince. She didn't seem afraid like he expected her to be. She was defiant.

"I see you're awake," Brace said. He hadn't meant to growl that way, but he couldn't help it.

She clenched her hands and glared at him. "Why didn't you kill me like you did my brother?"

"I'm sorry," Brace replied. "I didn't mean to kill anyone. Not that I have any objection to killing if it's necessary. In this part of space, you kill when you have to—but—well your brother was an accident."

He watched tears come to her eyes and scowled. "What's done is done! I didn't mean to kill your brother, but he's dead, and there's nothing anyone can do about it!"

She cried softly for a few moments, then sighing, brushed the tears from her eyes. Brace leaned against a wall and stared at the deck, sorting through plans and discarding them.

"I believe you," she said quietly, and it startled Brace. "I believe you when you say it was an accident. I promise not to tell anything about it to anyone. Now will you let me go?"

Brace shook his head. "I can't."

"But what do you intend to do with me?" she demanded.

"I don't know!" Brace paced the floor. "I can't let you go. That's certain. I can't even leave your body." He looked at her steadily, his jaw tightening. "I'll be frank with you, miss. I made a mistake. I meant no harm but I killed a man. You saw me do it. I'm in bad with the S.P., everyone here is, and they'd like nothing better than a charge against me. You are that charge. It would mean my life, the lives of my mate and officers, and my crew would be imprisoned, if I let you go." He paused. "I may have to chuck you out in space."

She said nothing, just stared at him, and Brace went back to his pacing.

"But—but—I won't tell," she said, falteringly. "I promise not to say a thing."

Brace shook his head. "The S.P. would make you tell anything they wanted you to tell."

HER lips quivered and her head dropped. Brace didn't feel good about it. She was just a kid. He'd have felt much better if she was a man. What was a girl like her doing in Titan anyway? She had no business being in this hole. There was never anything but trouble on Titan.

Brace sat down. "You said he was your brother."

She nodded.

"Well, what were you two doing here? You don't look like the people who usually land here, especially stay here for any length of time."

She sighed and bit her lip. "My—my brother and I were members of a traveling theater. He got into a fight with the manager—my brother is—was—very temperamental and he insisted on being left off at the nearest port. The ship came here and—I decided to stay with my brother. It was only after the ship had gone that we discovered we only had enough money for one passage back to earth. So—I—"

Brace got up suddenly. "Never mind," he said, bruskiy. He didn't want to hear any more. He straightened. Well, that's the way life was. Some people got the breaks, some didn't. It wasn't his fault. At least, it would be a quick death. He'd see to that.

"I'll have some food sent to you," Brace said, opening the door. She didn't look up, nor did she answer, and Brace hesitated a moment before stepping out of the cabin. It was just momentary, then he closed the door behind him and walked on down the companionway.

There was some strange humor, he reflected, in the fact that a thin, almost skinny girl was the greatest danger he'd ever faced, his greatest threat. The S.P. might return at any time. There were still two hours almost and he didn't dare blast off early. If he could only get— He

realized abruptly that the mate was standing in the companionway, staring at him.

"Barrows!" Brace grunted. "Get the men together in the mess room."

**T**ABLEWARE lay in mute rows and the only sound was the humming ventilator. Brace sat down in a chair to wait until the men had all filed in. They were cast in the same mold, and forged to the same temper as their Captain, brittle, hard, unyielding. When they had assembled around the table, Barrows closed the door.

"The ship's locked, Captain," Barrows said. "The girl can't escape."

Brace nodded, got up, and stared at his men, one by one, seventeen of the fiercest toughest men ever baptised in the maw of space and all threatened by a stupid girl. Brace's hoarse voice resounded in the room as he told about the night before, chronologically, neither adding nor detracting. They listened without comment.

"There's an out for some of you," Brace finished. "I can give you your papers and a note to Captains of ships which happen to be here now. They'll sign you on and the S.P. won't be able to find you guilty of anything. They won't even be able to prove you're my men. As for you, Barrows, you can sign on with Grant and he'll doctor it up so that it'll look like you signed on a couple of days ago."

"Naw, not me!" Barrows said, disgustfully.

A chorus of rejections went up at once. It wasn't loyalty to their Captain, just a mutual hatred for the S.P.

The second cook, however, walked toward Brace. "I'll take my papers, Captain," he said quickly.

The Chief Cook took one step. No one actually saw the fist land, but they watched the second cook slide across the deck and come to rest in a limp heap. Then the Chief Cook grinned at Brace, revealing two missing teeth.

"The second cook has changed his mind, Captain," he said.

The men laughed.

"All right, men," Brace said, sobering quickly. "We've got about an hour and a half to wait. That gives us enough time

to eat, and then we'll see if we can get into space."

"First watch on duty!" Barrows shouted.

Several men left and the others straggled out after them. The Chief Cook disappeared into the galley, dragging his assistant after him.

When the men had gone, Barrows turned to Brace. "Goin' a chuck her out in space?"

Brace rubbed his chin. "I don't know. I'll figure it out after we blast off."

The port buzzer rang hollowly through the ship. Tensing, Barrows looked at the Captain, then his hand slid inside his jacket and he pulled out a large atoblast and hefted it.

"Put away the toy," Brace grunted. "I'll bluff 'em. If I can't, you get 'em from the companionway and we'll blast off."

Barrows nodded and followed Brace into the companionway. The big mate stopped at the corner, waiting just out of sight with his gun held level.

**B**RACE waddled down the short companionway and stepped into the port. A moment later, the other port opened and Brace exhaled sharply when he saw the thin-faced man he'd met in the bar standing before him. His feet shifted uneasily in the sand under the Captain's unflinching gaze.

"Well!" Brace bellowed.

"I want to talk to you, Captain Brace."

In answer, Brace jabbed the closing button.

"Or shall I talk to the S.P.?" the thin-faced man shouted through the closing crack.

Brace jabbed the opener and stood impassively as the portal swung wide.

"That's better," the man on the ground said, smiling.

Brace's paw reached down and jerked him into the portal by the front of his tunic. They stood there as the portal closed, face to face, Brace's eyes burning into the livid terror of the other man.

"You aren't going to talk to anybody," Brace muttered, throwing him into the companionway.

"I got friends who are watching!" the



little man yelped. He slithered away. "It won't do any good to kill me!"

Barrows came around the corner. He took one look at the cringing figure and disgustedly tucked the atoblast back into his tunic. Then he reached for the thin-faced man.

"Wait!" Brace snapped.

The little man, shaking violently, got to his knees, then to his feet. "Now Captain, I want you to understand I didn't come here to threaten you. I've got a business proposition. Strictly business!" He drew a long breath and some of his confidence returned. "And, I may be able to do you some good.

Brace glared at him, then turned to Barrows. "Check on the cargo!" he growled.

Barrows nodded and started in the direction of the Captain's cabin.

"Come on!" Brace grunted when Barrows was out of sight. He led the thin-faced man forward to the tiny chart room, let him in, then closed the door. "All right, what have you got to say?"

"Well—ah—first of all, Captain, I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Gartland. I'm a trader."

Brace studied him. "I've heard of you."

"Well, in that case, you know I'm an honest man—always seeking good business—both for a little profit and—to give others a helping hand."

"Get to the point!" Brace snapped.

Gartland's face lost its smile and became hard. His eyes gleamed brightly and Brace half expected him to hiss like a snake. "I—I—came to discuss your cargo. Now, you realize that it's a dead loss to you. In fact, it will be hard to get off your hands."

Gartland waited, but Brace didn't speak, didn't move.

"I'll be frank with you," Gartland continued. "I had my eye on that item and you—sort of beat me to it. Actually though, you've taken a lot of risk, gone to a lot of work, and that's something I'm willing to pay for."

**B**RACE still studied him, meditating. Out here, he knew there were places where a woman, almost any woman would

bring a fair price, if you dealt in that sort of thing.

"You see, you'll be saving yourself a lot of trouble—and me too." Gartland hesitated, eying Brace. "The price is a hundred units."

Brace sniffed.

"Or shall we say a hundred fifty units. That's the most I can go. And you realize, of course, that I'm throwing in a certain amount of protection. Besides, what else can you do with the—ah—cargo?" Gartland waited for an answer, then shrugging, he rose. "My men may be getting a little nervous, Captain." He looked at Brace again, speculatively. "Think it over. I'll have one of my ships contact you in space."

Gartland paused and pulled a small notebook from his pocket. Taking an elaborate stylus, he scribbled a note on it. "Just give this to the man who contacts you and he'll take care of everything."

Brace took it and motioned toward the companionway. He had no intention of admitting anything. Gartland turned and walked ahead. Silently, they entered the port and the inner door swung closed.

The outer portal opened on the sandy waste, brightly lit, chilling. The vast crescent of Jupiter lay on the horizon ahead, reflecting brilliant light across the glistening sand. The sun, like a giant star, lay close near the horizon, forty five degrees from the half illumined bulk of Jupiter. The huge planet, however, radiated warmth, while the sun seemed cool and distant and somehow removed.

Gartland stepped onto the sand, his feet making the weird and wispy crunches characteristic of Titan, and Brace touched a button and re-entered his ship.

"Did you throw the scum out?" Barrows asked.

Brace looked up. The tall mate was standing impassively beside the port. Brace grunted.

"I suppose he wanted to buy 'er," Barrows said, "but from what I've heard, it's taking more than a chance to deal with him."

Brace walked up the companionway toward the mess room.

"Well, it's none of my business," Barrows growled, following him, "except that

he talks. Any deal you make with him—"

Brace scowled. "I didn't make any deal. One of his ships is supposed to meet us."

Barrows snorted. "I say, chuck her out! It's a cleaner way to die, anyway."

"Shut up!" Brace barked. He tucked the folded paper in his pocket and entered the mess room. Why should he care, he wondered. The Gorgon III was only a tramp. The men on it were space-rats. And the waste port had taken many a body and expelled it with an explosive poof of air into the velvet tranquility of space. He'd watched unemotionally as a spotlight had followed many lifeless hulks of men, sometimes moving straight like an arrow, other times rotating or turning slowly, end over end. Some day, he might do it himself; begin that long, gradual fall toward the sun, or perhaps his body would answer to the cosmic law of the planets, his lifelessness immortalized in a great circle about the sun.

**B**RACE looked at the food laid before him and stirred it with a fork. The weight of the food on his fork was slight and he pictured the lightness of the girl's fragile form. With only one hand, he could place her in that chute and close the door to the port. In his mind, he pulled the release lever, heard the dull thump of escaping air, saw her wheeling away, pinioned in the glare of light, spinning around and around like a ballet dancer, just as he had seen her spin around and around on the stage.

She wouldn't resist. She would accept death. But she'd go spinning, pirouetting into the lordly sun, or perhaps the sun would be pleased by her dance and would bid her dance forever around it.

Abruptly, Brace's big paw smashed his cup on the table and it shattered. The men looked at him curiously, watched him rise, the broken handle still in his clenched fingers, brown droplets of coffee sinking into his tunic. Then he turned and walked out of the mess room.

He hesitated before the door of his cabin. His fingers relaxed and the broken handle fell to the deck. The hand which rested on the knob came away and he rapped on the door with his knuckles.

"Come in," she called.

He opened the door, stepped into the room and straightened himself, his face perhaps being more ferocious in his attempt to cover his disturbed mind. Idly, he noted the tray of untouched food. She was still sitting on the edge of the bunk, her face pale and drawn.

"Everything all right?" Brace asked evenly.

She nodded.

"We'll be blasting off soon," he said. "Better stay in the bunk." He turned, opened a small door and drew out a one piece uniform. Without looking at her, he picked up a pair of boots, a cap, and took his log book from a drawer. "I'll leave you my cabin," he murmured.

She didn't answer.

Brace thumbed through his log, unseeing. There was no sound in the room for a long time except his heavy breathing and the swishing of the leaves of the log. Finally he looked up and said, "I'm not doing this because I want to." The words seemed empty and hollow. "Kid, these are the breaks!" He wished desperately she wouldn't look at him that way. He hesitated, then said, "If you had your choice—that is—you could die, quick and clean—or—well—you could live—but not so clean—"

She stared at him blankly for a moment. "I—I—guess we all have to die sometime. It's much better to die quickly, instantly—than—to drag it out. Nobody wants to die—but when you have to—maybe it's not so bad."

"Yeah, I knew you'd want it that way." Brace turned and opened the door. "You're a nice kid," he murmured. "Wish I'd never seen you."

**I**N the control room, Brace waited by his acceleration chair until the pilot and the mate entered. The signal man closed and dogged the entrance, then settled into his chair. He threw some switches and droned into a microphone, "Gorgon III, Clearance No. 13749. Out of Titan, Sullivan City to Mars. Cargo as inspected."

There was a short pause, then a mechanical voice said, "Clearance, Gorgon III. Luck."

Brace cinched the webbing tighter across his chest and nodded.

"Raise 1.8 G's," Barrows ordered.

Immediately, the ship jarred and Brace sank into his chair. The sustained roar from the jets thundered through the ship, making the panels and bulkheads rattle.

Minutes passed, then the pilot called, "Atomic Height!"

"Cut in the atomics!" Barrows ordered. "2 G's."

The atomic converter's whine ran through the metal structure of the ship and the roar of the jets died away to the deeper boom of the atomic drive. Brace sank a little further into the cushions.

"3 G's!" Barrows ordered.

Brace sank still further into the cushions, the pressure holding him firm. Breathing was more of an effort. Barrows rested his head on the cushion of the acceleration chair and closed his eyes. The pilot watched down his nose at the dials before him, his leaden hands resting on the soft arms of his chair.

Already, the small ports in front showed the purple blackness of the fringe of space and then the purple deepened to a solid charcoal black.

Brace wondered how the girl was taking the acceleration. This was no kid-glove passenger liner, yet three G's wasn't so bad. He hoped she'd stayed in the bunk. Thinking was hard. The pressure seemed to drag thoughts from his mind. He didn't want to think about the girl and he tried to shake his mind free.

There were millions of women in the system, billions! So she disappeared! She wouldn't be the first. So she'd end up in a brothel on a pleasure asteroid! What difference did it make? She'd eat well! Or maybe it would be the pleasure palace of some earth man or Martian. It was a soft life. And it was *life*. But it made him angry that he should care. At least, Gartland had given him a way out.

The voice of Barrows intruded on his thoughts. "We're in clear space now. Let's get rolling!"

"Wait!" Brace barked. He hated himself for speaking. Any space man worth the name could take six or seven G's, but he thought of the girl. She looked fragile,

and not too well fed. Suppose she died? So what? So he wouldn't have to think about Gartland or her ever again. Chuck her in the waste port! Again, he saw her pirouetting through space, cast off by the scum of the universe and received by the lord of the universe, the great, flaming orb.

"Cut the acceleration!" Brace snarled. "Make it one and a half G's!"

The springs of his chair whispered their release as the acceleration eased. Brace unsnapped the safety belt and heaved himself out of the chair and to a hand hold. The deck was straight up and down.

"Adjust for floor gravity!" Brace ordered.

Obediently, the pilot cut the stern jets and for an instant, they were in free fall. Then the under jets cut in and Brace was pressed to the deck. Prostrate, he watched the stars wheel before the front port, slow down in their movement, and stop.

"One G.," Brace said, rising. He stood upright, straightened his cap, and walked to the port.

**B**RACE walked slowly down the companionway, his eyes fixed straight ahead. "Chuck her out!" he muttered. "Chuck her out!" It was a clean, swift, merciful death. There was nothing clinging about it, none of the sickness that he felt when he thought of putting her into Gartland's hands.

"It isn't her," he murmured. "I just can't stomach scum like Gartland." He wished he'd killed him, taken a chance on dodging the S.P. Maybe Gartland had been bluffing. Maybe he'd been alone. Brace toyed with the idea of returning to Titan. No, that was too risky. Besides, the girl . . . "Well, might as well get it over with," he muttered.

He straightened and rapped at the door. Her answering voice was tremulous. Perhaps that deep essence of woman had told her that time had run out. Maybe men knew it too. Maybe everybody knew when their time came to die.

He thrust these thoughts aside and stepped into the cabin. The girl was still on the bunk. Its free floating gimbals had swung it back.

"The acceleration bother you?" Brace asked.

"No," she replied, quietly.

He walked over and stood by the bunk. The girl rose slowly and sat, staring up at him. "You're going to do it now?"

Brace looked down at his gnarled hands, clenched his fingers and studied them. "Would you like anything?" he asked slowly.

She looked up at him helplessly, frightened. Then she looked quickly around the room in frantic darts, as though grasping, groping for something. "I—I—don't know—I guess I'd like to see the stars—just once more."

Brace compressed his lips. "Yeah—sure." He took a deep breath and turned partly away. He stood there, awkwardly for a moment, then said, "Come on, kid."

His hairy hand closed over her small one as he helped her up from the bunk. The diaphanous dancing costume fluttered as she moved, and for some reason, he kept hold of her hand until they reached the cabin door. He opened it for her and she stepped through. He dared not to look at her face as they stood outside the cabin, smooth, youthful skin, dark brown eyes holding all of that deep hurt and reproach which men see in the eyes of a dying doe. He looked away quickly.

"This way," Brace said, walking ahead. He couldn't bring himself to look at those eyes again. Not yet, anyway.

They stopped in the companionway, even with the port, and Brace climbed a set of iron rungs set in the wall. His fingers fumbled with the dogs on a small hatch, then he threw it back. The girl climbed up after him and he leaned down to lift her into the astrogator's bubble. His strong, tough hands clasped her under the shoulders and lifted her into the small room whose top was a transparent hemisphere, large enough for a man to stand upright under it. She was warm, soft, yet firm to his touch and he hesitated an instant before letting her go.

Then terror clutched at him. He couldn't do it! He couldn't! Better Gartland's life than no life at all. She was too young, too much alive to die.

He kicked the hatch closed, shutting out

the light from beneath, and they stood alone, a man and a woman amid the stars.

Women are funny, Brace thought. They know things. She knows what I have to do. She isn't fighting. He swallowed with difficulty and looked at her. She was standing straight, looking up at the stars. There were millions of them in the black of space, myriads of lights in a sea of night.

"The night has a thousand eyes," she murmured.

A TINGLE RAN through Brace's nerves. *The night has a thousand eyes. The night has a thousand eyes.* Who had said that? The memory eluded him, played tag with him, then he caught it. It was so long ago—or did it only *seem* long ago?

It was the great Martian Central Spaceport and the night overhead, the bowl of heaven as infinitely far away, as infinitely contemptuous of man as it was now, yet somehow watching. He was fifteen. By day, he sweated, loading, stacking, clamping down great crates and bales in the hulls of giant ships, hating them, hating the sky, hating all things, a tough, space-rat kid, knowing no father or mother but work, sweat, and the fists of others.

Then the ship had landed, a great passenger liner which carried only the finest cargo. Its captain was so tall, so ramrod straight, as though he had not a backbone like other men but a bar of chilled steel. And the girl had come from that ship, the captain's daughter. She had no mother either and they had found a strange kinship.

They had sat by the towering hulk of that huge ship and she'd said it—*the night has a thousand eyes*—and he'd loved her with the love of a thousand hearts. Yet she was as forever removed from him as were the thousand eyes of night. But what was her name? Cecelia! And what came after *the night has a thousand eyes*? He didn't know, couldn't remember. Her tall, straight father had come out then and without hesitation, had struck him down and the night had ten thousand times a thousand eyes.

But he'd seen her again, through the steel fencing of the Spaceport. He was

on the outside. Her father had seen to that. Through scalding tears, he had seen her, and he swore that someday he would have a ship, that someday he would be a captain. And the young love had poured from his heart leaving an empty shell behind, and from that emptiness, he watched the ship rise and disappear, unashamed tears streaming down his homely face. She had said she would wait, that she'd wait forever, and then—

Brace stopped remembering and put one hairy paw over his face. He was a captain now, captain of a dirty, battered hulk that plied the spaces decent ships disdained. He had a crew, if you wanted to call it that, and he carried cargo, sometimes legal, most times not.

He fought against the memories that kept struggling back. He didn't want to remember the excited voices of the commentators, the descriptions of the crash in space, the long list of the dead. Only one name on that list had any meaning for the ragged, homely youngster. His heart and soul were burned and seared to one mass of scar. He would become a captain. He would fight the space that had taken his gem. He would fight it, and the men in it.

Brace sighed, and looked up at the stars. But was he fighting space? Or was he fighting a memory, the memory of a girl? And what about this girl—was he fighting her? Suddenly, he felt rotten, inside and out.

Brace looked down at the girl beside him. The kindly light of the stars mellowed the outlines of her face. It could have been the face of Cecelia. Starlight was kind, but no one could ever be so beautiful as Cecelia, never. No, she wasn't Cecelia, yet in one way they were the same, that same smallness and frailty against the backdrop of a cruel space ship and its even crueler Captain.

He took a deep breath and straightened himself resolutely. "Wait here," he whispered hoarsely, and he quickly backed down the ladder to the companionway.

AS Brace entered the control room, Barrows looked up. "We've been stalling that space rat."

"Who?"

"Gartland!"

Brace stared at him blankly for a moment.

"Well, you shoved her out, didn't you?" Barrows asked, annoyed.

Brace pushed passed him and walked to the communication panel. "Put him on, Sparks."

The communication officer pressed the key before him several times. There was a pause, then the opaque panel lit up with the thin face of Gartland.

"Ah, Captain Brace. I thought you might miss our little rendezvous. We had quite a time finding you."

"Well, I'm here!" Brace snarled. He didn't like him. It even made him feel dirty to talk to him.

"I imagine you're a little surprised to see me."

"Hmmm," Brace murmured.

"Yes," Gartland continued, "I'm a little surprised myself. Well—the S.P. and I were going to have a little trouble so—I decided to move. If I'd known it, I could have—ah—removed your cargo on Titan."

Brace grunted at the face on the panel. "I'll bring it to you in a life craft."

"Oh that won't be necessary, Captain Brace."

"I WANT it that way!" Brace snapped.

Gartland shrugged. "All right, then. We'll hold our position. We're about a thousand kilos sunward. Maybe I'll offer you a drink, if we've got anything strong enough."

Brace cut the switch without answering and scowled. "Hold your position!" he snapped to the pilot. He then looked at the impassive face of Barrows, studying him. "You're in command," he said finally. Ignoring the mate's curious stare, he turned and left.

BRACE stood by the iron ladder in the companionway. "Come down, girl!" he called.

She came slowly down the ladder, then turned and faced him. He looked into those soft, brown eyes again. Cecelia's eyes had been brown. Slowly, his ape-like hand reached into his tunic. She closed her eyes, waited, then opened them

again, startled, when the hairy hand pressed a wad of money into her palm.

"W—w—what?"

"Come on!" he said roughly, and took her by the wrist. He led her down the companionway and stopped at the door of the mess room. "Put that stuff away!" he ordered.

Uncomprehending, she obeyed and put the money into the bodice of her costume. Then Brace opened the mess room door and motioned for her to enter.

The second cook saw them, started, and watched apprehensively. When Brace had closed the door, he turned to the second cook. "Come here, you!" he ordered.

Obediently, the cook came forward, eyeing the girl curiously.

"You're going to do something for me!" Brace said, quietly. He studied the man. He was younger than the rest of his crew, not quite as tough as he might be. "Do you want to get out of this with a whole skin?"

The cook touched his bruised jaw. "Yes sir," he muttered.

"Then take her, and get into number five lifeboat, and go back to Titan. Tell the S.P. you rescued her." He turned and glared at the girl. "And you tell them the same!" He turned back to the cook. "Is that clear?"

The cook nodded.

"Then MOVE!" Brace barked.

The cook jumped, motioned the girl out and followed.

Brace sank down onto a chair. "I should never have had that drink," he murmured. He reached over and slowly poured himself a cup of coffee. He drank it leisurely, quietly, staring at the table in front of him. When the coffee was half gone, he felt the thump of a lifeboat going free and he laughed softly. What would Barrows think when he felt a second thump?

He rose then, leaving his coffee, and walked swiftly down the companionway to an escape hatch. In a moment, he had sealed himself in a life craft and then he hesitated, his finger on the release lever.

No, he decided. The case was only

against him, no one else. The girl would tell them she'd never seen anyone but him. She couldn't give them a description of Barrows or the others even if they tried to trick her. Of course, the second cook had brought her breakfast. But he'd already taken care of that. That just leaves Gartland—and he wouldn't do any talking. He rammed the lever home and with a shock, the tiny craft swung away from the mother ship.

Viciously, Brace slammed the acceleration lever wide open and stared ahead through the transparent port at the stars. "The night has a thousand eyes," he murmured. His lips clamped tight over his bulging teeth. As his ship circled, the sun came into view, big, hot, and glaring, yet small against the backdrop, and the little ship screamed toward it. What was it? What was that other line? He'd almost had it then. She'd said that other line. Sun? Sun? No, but it was something like that.

His piercing eyes stared into the hot disk of the sun and Brace finally made out the tiny speck of Garland's ship. He had to remember. He HAD to. Automatically, his fingers adjusted the controls until the pointed nose lined up on the middle of the ship ahead. He muttered, repeating over and over, *the night has a thousand eyes—the night has a thousand eyes*. Gartland's ship loomed larger and Brace pounded the acceleration lever against the stop. As he screamed onward, Brace fought, struggled, strained to remember. He MUST remember. Then it came, and the tension in him snapped. *The night has a thousand eyes and the day has but one*.

"THE NIGHT HAS A THOUSAND EYES AND THE DAY BUT ONE!" he yelled.

The bulk of the ship ahead all but blotted out the sky and the homely face staring at it was laughing while tears poured down his face. That instant before eternity seemed to prolong itself as if unwilling to die, and Brace closed his eyes. His voice was young and clear as he cried, "Cecelia, Cecelia! I'm coming!"