

SUPER-SCIENCE FICTION

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THE SEARCH FOR SALLY

by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

Sally was dead. They were all sure she was dead. But somehow Sally still survived. At least her mind had survived because he could sense her random thoughts

NOVELETTE

illustrated by EMSH

THEY SAT together on the settee in the waiting room, the man and the girl. Both were wearing spacesuits, but with the helmets and gloves on the floor at their feet. His suit was of the rugged Service pattern and carried Chief Pilot's stars on the shoulders. Hers was the lighter civilian model.

They sat together, as closely as the heavy, insulated clothing would allow. He held her left hand in his right, seemed to be savouring, with desperate intensity, this last,

slight contact. They looked out through the wide window to the slim, shining, wide-winged rocket standing on the scarred concrete, looked beyond the rocket to the ruddy bulk of Mars looming gigantic against the black sky with its bright, unwinking stars.

He looked away from the window suddenly, turned his head to study, for the last time (*But it's only au revoir, he told himself; it's only au revoir*) the thin, serious face of the girl; the brown eyes, the coppery glints in her hair, the



fine structure of facial bones and skull.

She turned to look at him.

"But it's only *au revoir*," she said.

"At times I wonder why we bother talking," he murmured.

"I like to hear your voice, my dear," she replied.

"And I yours," he said.

He looked again through the window.

He said, "It was a good planet leave. Thank you, my darling."

"It was good being with you this last few days on Phobos," she replied. "Even though you weren't as free as we would have liked."

He looked at her again. He thought, *It will be a long time. Twenty months Earth time.*

"Twenty months will soon pass," she said. "I hope."

"It'd better," he replied.

"And then you'll make your last voyage out here. And you'll be Captain of a little rocket like that..." She gestured towards the slim shape of the ferry. "Are you sure you aren't giving up too much?"

"Quite sure."

An amplified voice began to speak. "All passengers for

Flight Seventeen, Phobos to Mars, attention please. Put on your gloves and helmets. Leave the waiting room by the airlock."

THE spaceman picked up the girl's helmet, then put it down again. He took her hands in his, put his lips to hers. After the kiss he bent down, picked up the helmet once more, deftly screwed it into place. He helped her on with the heavy gloves, checked all the fastenings of her suit. He watched her walk to the inner airlock door, graceful in spite of the negligible gravity, the cumbersome suit. He stood by the window and watched her, together with the other dozen passengers, walk out to the waiting ferry rocket. He saw the passengers board the ferry.

He saw the crimson warning pyrotechnics soar and hang above the landing field, saw the blue incandescence flicker and flare from the rocket's main venturi—and then she was gone, gone; was no more than a tiny blue spark falling down the black sky toward the ruddy bulk of Mars.

He put on his own helmet and gloves then, left the waiting room by the airlock that opened upon the spaceport. He walked slowly towards the tall, ungainly construction of pressure spheres and latticework girders that was his own ship. He wished—as he had so often wished this time on Phobos—that he could have paid off here, that the Line had allowed him to break his Contract. *But I have to be fair*, he thought. *They couldn't replace me here, and the Second's too young and inexperienced. It was decent of them to promise me a working passage out. But... Twenty months!*

He felt her thoughts in reply. *It won't be long, darling. We won't let it be long.*

All right, he thought. *We won't let it be long.*

He stepped into the elevator cage, pressed the button that sent the flimsy structure climbing to the airlock door of the crew accommodation. Once through the lock he removed first his gloves, then his helmet. He saw that Wade, the Captain, was standing watching him.

"Seen your girl friend off,

Mr. Kent?" asked the Captain. "About time. Time you were taking some interest in the loading of this ship."

"The loading is progressing satisfactorily, sir," said Kent stiffly.

"Is it? *Is it?* I'm far from satisfied with the distribution of weight. I told you that I wanted a sixty-fifty-forty ratio between the three compartments..."

"And you'll get it, sir. The radio-actives are still to be loaded in 'A' Chamber, and with their mass and the mass of the lead shielding..."

"Oh, all right. But the ratio had better be the way I want it when we blast off. That's all."

Kent went to his cabin, busied himself with tally sheets, plans and sliderule. Suddenly he knew, without warning, that something was wrong, dreadfully, irrevocably wrong. It was two hours later that the news came over the radio that Flight Seventeen, Phobos to Mars, had crashed on Mount Kinsey and that there were no survivors.

“MAKE your mind up, Mr. Kent,” said Captain Travers. “First of all you want to resign and take a working passage out to Mars. Then you withdraw your reservation and ask for a transfer to the Venus run. And now you’re back to where you started, wanting to resign again...”

Kent looked across the desk to the stocky, white-haired Astronautical Superintendent.

“I’m sorry if I’ve caused any inconvenience, sir,” he said slowly.

“You have caused inconvenience, Mr. Kent, considerable inconvenience. Not only right now, but in the near future. However, it has always been our policy to be generous towards resigning officers, especially when by their resigning they are helping to swell the population of the colonies...” He made a steeple of his fingers, looked over them. “As I understand it from Captain Wade you met this girl on the last outward voyage of *Martian Queen*, fell in love with her and spent all of your planet leave with her. You decided to marry...”

“That is correct, sir.”

“You had a job lined up—pilot of one of the ferry rockets.”

“Yes.”

“And then...?”

“She spent the last few days on Phobos with me. She decided not to stay to see the ship blast off—apart from anything else she had to get back to her own job; she was secretary to one of the big shots in the Ministry of Immigration. I saw her go. The ferry rocket crashed on Mars.”

“A berth on the Venus run is still open,” said the Superintendent.

“Thank you, sir. But I want to get back to Mars.”

“But why, man, *why?* You’ll be better off away from the memories—far better off. You need never see Mars again...”

“But I must,” said Kent simply. He leaned forward over the desk, his elbows on the polished wood, his hands gripped together, the knuckles white. Travers noticed suddenly the grey hairs scattered thickly over the head that at their last meeting, less than a

year ago, had been black; noticed the new, deep lines in the strong face.

"Yes," he said. "Why?"

"We were always telepatic," said the Chief Pilot slowly. "Sally would transmit and I would receive, or I'd transmit and she would receive. Oh, we never got around to sending any reports in to the Rhine Institute or anything like that. If she'd lived, we might have done..."

"Anyhow—I *knew* when that ferry rocket crashed. I knew that something had happened to Sally. I knew that she was dead. That's when I requested the withdrawal of my resignation and asked for a transfer to the Venus run. Where Sally should have been in my thoughts there was... *nothing*."

"Then why have you changed your mind?"

"Sally's alive. I *know* it. I can feel her. She wants me."

"But you said she was dead."

"I *thought* she was dead. This must have been the way of it. When that ferry rocket crashed there was a...mess. And there was a fire. They

were never able to identify any of the dead—what little was left of them. It must have been like this. Sally was hurt—concussion, perhaps. She got out of the wreck. She wandered away. She was an amnesiac. Have you ever been out to the Kinsey Range? Solid rock, it is. No sand. Nothing to take footprints. Nobody would know, until now, that anybody had escaped from the ferry.

"But Sally's memory is coming back now. She's beginning to remember who she is. She's beginning to remember me. She wants me—and she knows that I'll be coming to help her."

"But where would she be?" asked the superintendent.

"I don't know. That's the worst of it. I get a confused vision of confining bars, of gigantic, vague shapes. She may have wandered into one of the ruined cities—and, as you know, there are persistent rumours to the effect that a handful of the old Martians still survive. And they were...big."

"So you want to resign," said Travers. "You want a

working passage out to Mars..."

"I can pay my own fare," said Kent.

"You'll want money to live on while you're scouring the Martian deserts on your wild goose chase. I don't believe your story, Kent. I can't believe it. But—you'd never have been an officer in the Line if there'd ever been the slightest doubt of your sanity. I'll tell Captain Wade that you'll be coming along, one way passage, as Supernumerary. Get ready to hand over to Mr. Grant. And..." he got to his feet, held out his hand. "Good luck. You'll need it."

"Thank you, sir," said Kent.

THE next ten months dragged. Ten months of free fall, ten months cooped up in a tiny, man-made world, would have been bad enough with the certainty of Sally at the end of them. But there was no certainty.

That was the trouble—there was no certainty. He *knew* that Sally was, somehow, somewhere, alive—but he did not know if he would find her. The telepathic messages

that he received were too vague to give him any clues as to where she was. There was, always, the impression of confinement, of dimly seen giant beings that moved around her. There was the impression of helplessness—and, above all, the impression of loneliness.

Even so—Time, no matter how it may drag, passes. At last came the day when the ship, her rockets flaring fitfully, dropped to the Phobos spaceport. It was a strange experience for Kent—to be strapped into his acceleration couch, a mere passenger, during landing stations. It was a strange—and rather shattering—experience. It was the final proof that he was not indispensable.

However, the ship managed to land, somehow, without his having taken an active part in proceedings. She landed—and Kent, together with the other passengers, went through the usual formalities—medical inspection, examination by Customs and Immigration authorities. He did not walk with the other passengers to the waiting ferry rocket—he was having a farewell drink with Captain

Wade and Mr. Grant. The rocket was only two and a half minutes late in blasting off.

During the trip between Phobos and Mars he sat silently, not joining in the conversation of the passengers. He was concentrating, trying, by effort of will, to throw his mind open to any messages emanating from Sally. It seemed to him that the messages were stronger now, much stronger—but they were no clearer. Sally was alive. Sally was on Mars. Comforting as the knowledge was, it was not enough. It would never be enough until, once again, he held Sally in his arms.

HE was first out of the rocket when she set down at the New Essendon airport. He hurried at once to the administration building, asked the receptionist, as soon as he had removed his helmet, for the Captain Superintendent of the ferry service. He was known to Captain Dale, of course, and was not kept waiting for more than a few minutes.

Dale got to his feet as Kent entered his office.

"Glad to see Kent! How soon do you want to start?"

"Want to start, sir? Oh, that pilot's job. I forgot... I'm sorry, sir, I shan't be available for a while. I called in to make some inquiries."

"I thought you made them all last time you were on Mars."

"Not about the job, sir. About that crash you had almost a year—an Earth year—ago."

"Let me see, now... *Falcon* it would have been... On Mount Kinsey..." He lifted a telephone from his desk, spoke into it. "Miss Davis—bring in the *Falcon* file, will you?" The competent, middle-aged woman brought in the thick folder of papers. "Thank you. That will do." He turned to Kent. "I remember, now. I heard that a friend of yours was among those lost."

"There were no survivors?" asked Kent.

"No."

"Tell me this, sir. Were all the passengers accounted for?"

"No identification of bodies was possible," said Dale.

"Never mind the identifica-

tion. How many people were in the rocket—crew and passengers?”

“Twenty three,” said the Captain Superintendent.

“And did the salvage party,” asked Kent, “find twenty three skulls? Or forty six thigh bones?”

“What are you driving at?” demanded Dale. “As a matter of fact—it’s all in here—it seems that at least seven of the bodies must have been completely destroyed. What are you driving at?”

“I have reason to believe,” said Kent, “that at least one of those passengers survived. I have reason to believe that she wandered away from the wreck—dazed, possibly insane. I have reason to believe that she is alive still—s o m e w h e r e among the canyons, among the caves. And I am going to find her.”

“But there were no survivors.”

“How do you *know*? You don’t. Everybody blandly assumed that there weren’t any—and there’s not an atom of proof for the assumption...”

“Excepting for the fact that *Falcon* struck hard enough to ~~not~~ both rock and metal.”

“You know, as well as I do, Captain, that there have been some fantastic accidents—cases of fragile humans surviving, unscratched, catastrophes that have shattered their stoutest constructions. This is one of those cases.”

“How do you *know*?”

“My friend was a telepath,” said Kent. “*Is* a telepath. So am I. Nothing spectacular, certainly not good enough to take up commercially—but we have the gift. For the first few months after the crash she was—telepathically—dead. Then she started coming through. She must have recovered from the...the blow on the head? She’s alive, a n y h o w. But where?”

“H’m,” grunted Dale. “I’m just an astronaut turned airman—I certainly don’t know enough to question the findings of the Rhine Institute. Even so...All right,” he said abruptly. “What can I do to help you?”

“You’ve already given me access to your files,” replied Kent. “With your permission I’ll borrow the reports for further study. I’d like a letter of introduction to the Chief of

Police, also one to the editor of the local rag. I shall be wanting to hire some sort of aircraft—preferably one of those turret drive Spurlings. You'll be able to help me there. . . ."

"Anything else?"

"Can you think of anything, sir?"

"Yes. I know an old boy called Wilberforce—he's a Fellow of the Rhine Institute. I'll give you a letter of introduction to him, too."

"He could help," said Kent.

"Good," said Dale. He spoke into his office telephone. "Miss Davis—send a girl in to take some letters, will you?"

KENT took the monorail from Essendon to Marsala, obtained a room at the Hotel Royal without any difficulty. By this time it was late afternoon, and although he rang as soon as he had registered he was unable to catch either Bradbury, the Editor of the *Martian Chronicle*, or Cope, the Chief of Police, in his office. Wilberforce's number he found in the book—the address tallied

with that on the envelope containing Dale's letter of introduction. Mr. Wilberforce, said a bad tempered female voice, was not in; furthermore, he had left no word as to what time he would be in.

Kent went up to his room, shed, with a feeling of relief, the cumbersome spacesuit. He showered hastily, dressed in a smart but comfortable suit of coveralls. He thought of ringing for a drink and sandwiches, then decided against it. He was neither hungry nor in need of stimulant. The feeling of Sally's presence was almost unbearably strong—her presence (but *where?*), her loneliness, her need.

He left the hotel. Looking up, he saw that the sky above the transparent dome covering the city was dark, almost black. Abruptly the street lights came on—the street lights and a sparse scattering of neon signs. One he noticed—a huge affair of pseudo Gothic lettering. *Martian Chronicle*, he read. He knew that he was being irrational, but he was pleased, regarded this as a good omen. He would not have far to search for the place

where he intended to start his investigation.

There was a bored receptionist on duty in the foyer of the building. She looked up from her magazine after he had coughed twice.

"Yeah? Whadya want?"

"The Editor."

"He's gone."

"The News Editor, then..."

"Gone. On holiday."

"I suppose you run to a Night Editor?"

"Yeah."

"Could I see him, please?"

The girl spoke into a telephone. "Mr. Gilbert—guy here t'see ya. Yeah. Spaceman I'd say...No, he's not in uniform...Yeah." She looked up at Kent. "What business, Mister?"

"A story," said Kent. "Tell him it's a story."

"Guy says he's a story for ya. Yeah. Okay." Then, to Kent, "Up stairs. 'Long corridor. End door."

She picked up her magazine again.

RAPIDLY Kent climbed the stairs, walked along the corridor. At the end, as the girl had told him, was a door la-

belled NEWS EDITOR. Kent rapped on this, opened it and walked through almost before the occupant of the room had time to say, "Come in."

The man behind the desk—thin, gangling, almost bald—got to his feet. He held out his hand, asked, "Mr. ...?"

"Kent," said the spaceman, shaking the proffered hand. "Late Chief Pilot in the Martian Mail Line."

"Sit down, Mr. Kent. What can we do for you? What can you do for us?"

"I want to make enquiries," said Kent, "about the *Falcon* disaster. I have reason to believe that one of the passengers is still alive..."

"Impossible," said Gilbert.

"No," said Kent flatly.

"If there should be a survivor," murmured Gilbert, "it'd make a story. A good one. But what grounds have you for your belief, Mr. Kent?"

Kent told him.

"H'm. Possible, but...You don't hold a Rhine Institute Diploma, do you?"

"No."

"A pity. Indeed a pity. You never mentioned this telepathic hookup between yourself and

your fiance to anybody else, did you? Never gave any demonstrations?"

"No. It was always... private."

"I see."

"But such cases aren't rare..."

"I know they're not. And I know, too, that the Rhine Institute goes gunning for any paper that supports any faker or charlatan."

"That shouldn't worry you."

"Shouldn't it? With old Wilberforce, who owns the Utility Stores, our biggest advertiser. Wilberforce is also the local Rhine Institute representative. Why don't you see Wilberforce, by the way?"

"I intend to. He wasn't in when I rang."

"Ah, let me see, now... Oh, yes. He was in here, four or five days ago, trying to talk us into giving him some financial backing. He'll never spend his own money when he can use somebody else's—I guess that's why he could buy up *The Chronicle*, stock and staff, without noticing it! He has quite a reputation as an archaeologist, and he's taken an expedition to explore the ravines

and caves around Mount Kinsey. He's convinced that one day he'll charge in here dragging a real, live Old Martian behind on a piece of string..."

"So he believes that the Old Martians are still living?"

"There're a few who do. If they ever do find one—it'll be NEWS!"

"I believe it myself."

"Do you, now? Well, if you ever find one, Mister—ask your own price for the story. Within reason, of course."

And I can feel you, thought Kent, I can feel you wanting me. I can feel your loneliness and your fear—and I have to sit here bandying words with this Smart Aleck... Mount Kinsey, Sally, does it mean anything? Is that where you are? Is the hidden city of the Old Martians—those dimly seen giants of yours—there? In a ravine, or a cave...

"I said," almost shouted Gilbert, "that we're willing to go fifty-fifty on reasonable expenses, and that we'll buy your story—System Rights—if you find the girl."

"Sorry," said Kent. "I was... thinking. Well—you might be able to help. You will be."

I shall want a 'plane—one of those turret drive Spurlings—and supplies. . . .”

“Wilberforce uses camels,” said Gilbert.

“I can handle a Spurling,” said Kent, “but. . . .”

“Can't say that I blame you,” remarked Gilbert. “Tell me, are the brutes as bad-tempered back on Earth as they are here?”

THE following day was a busy one for Kent. He interviewed Cope, the Chief of Police, as early in the morning as possible, but was unable to learn anything more about the *Falcon* disaster than he already knew. Cope assured him, too, that during the past year there had been no unidentified persons, either living or dead, reported—all of which added up to mean that Sally, if she were indeed an amnesiac, had never succeeded in reaching any of the colony's cities or settlements.

Bradbury, the Editor, was helpful, assisted Kent to look through the files of back numbers for any information that might be of value. Regarding the crash itself there was

nothing new. The reports Kent had borrowed from Captain Dale were more comprehensive than those printed in *The Chronicle*. There were, however, some issues with articles by Wilberforce on the Old Martian ruins and artifacts. These articles were, as Bradbury pointed out, of a highly speculative nature, little more, in parts, than (possibly) inspired guesswork. Kent put these to one side.

It was Bradbury who arranged for the hire of the Spurling, who advised upon charts, food, clothing and other supplies. It was Bradbury who said, “I hope I get the story, Kent; but I hope even more that you find your woman.”

“Thank you,” said Kent.

He motioned to Doyle, the *Chronicle* photographer who was to accompany him, to climb into the cabin of the Spurling, shook hands with the fat little Editor and then pulled himself up and into the body of the aircraft. The door of the pressure cabin slid shut. Smoothly, rapidly, the plane lifted, almost vertically and then, her jets swinging to the horizontal, **s c r e a m e d** east-

wards towards Mount Kinsey and Wilberforce's camp.

DELIBERATELY, Kent had timed his arrival for a little after sunset. It would be difficult, he knew, to spot the encampment from the air by day—and it would be impossible to spot it from the air by night after the archaeologist had retired to his bed and extinguished his Solar battery powered lamps. As it was, the spaceman picked up the plastic pressure tent during his first circuit of the mountain, saw it shining in the shadows like a tiny, misplaced moon.

He swung the Spurling, then set her hovering on vertical jets while he and Doyle consulted their charts. These showed that Wilberforce had made his camp on a plateau jutting out, like a shelf, from the steep side of the mountain. It seemed to Kent that such a site would offer little, if any protection from the frequent sandstorms. He said as much, and Doyle agreed with him. They decided that a parachute flare would give them a better idea of the terrain beneath them.

They released the flare. Almost immediately the transceiver started an irritable buzzing. Doyle flipped the switch to TRANSMIT, said, "Spurling Number 143X speaking. Come in please." He switched to RECEIVE.

"Come in yourself, whoever you are. Either come in or bugger off back to where you came from. You're driving my camels frantic. Over."

"Is there a decent landing?" asked Kent. "All we can see is a mess of confused shadows. Over."

"Hang on," replied Wilberforce. "I'll put out a light for you. And land just to the east of it—not *on* it. Can you manage that? Over?"

They waited, saw the bright, steady light being carried out from the glowing bulk of the tent. They waited until Wilberforce told them that all was clear for their landing, then commenced a slow, cautious descent. Kent cut the drive as the Spurling landed. She creaked badly, tilting to starboard. She steadied then, and both men put on their suit helmets.

Kent was out first. He

looked around him. The bright rays of the portable lantern were reflected from huge boulders, standing all around them like sentinels. Wilberforce, he thought, need fear no sandstorms here. Doyle joined him.

"A nice landing," he said.

"Could have been worse," admitted Kent. He turned to meet the tall figure, thin even in the bulky Mars-suit, advancing towards them out of the black shadows.

"Who are you?" asked Wilberforce, a defective helmet diaphragm adding a rattle to the already unpleasant rasp of the voice.

"Doyle, Mr. Wilberforce," said the photographer.

"And who is this with you?"

"Mr. Kent," said Doyle. "He used to be Chief Pilot with the Martian Mail..."

"All right. Better come in, both of you. If you've a bottle, bring that too."

HE waited until Kent had returned to the plane for a bottle of whisky, then picked up the lantern and led the way over the rocky ground,

through the haphazardly placed boulders, to his camp. He passed far too close to the tethered camels for the peace of mind of either the spaceman or the photographer, both of whom jumped back as long, snaky necks and bared, yellow teeth reached out for them.

"Filthy brutes," muttered Doyle. "What always annoys me is that *they* can get by without suits or helmets, whereas we..."

"Even the *Martian Chronicle*," said Wilberforce sardonically, "could not popularise a measure to introduce selective breeding and controlled mutation for human stock."

Wilberforce was first through the sphincter airlock of the tent. Doyle followed him. Kent, still clutching the precious bottle, was last. The three men removed their gloves and helmets, shrugged off their suits. Wilberforce motioned briefly to a young, nondescript-looking man standing to one side, said, "My assistant, Bill Craddock. Get the mugs, Bill, will you?"

Craddock picked the bottle from the floor where Kent had left it, put it carefully on a folding table. He produced

from somewhere four plastic beakers, put them beside the bottle. He set out two folding chairs, two crates.

Kent studied Wilberforce. At first glance he was not impressed. The man was emaciated, a mere walking mummy. A few sparse strands of yellowish hair clung to a cranium that seemed to be bare bone rather than covered with flesh and blood and skin. The great jutting nose was out of place on that pallid skull—a ragged orifice would have been far more in keeping. Yet—there was a power in those deepset, yellowish eyes; power, and wisdom and, Kent noted with surprise, compassion.

“Sit down,” said the archaeologist.

He took his own seat—one of the folding chairs. Craddock stood back politely, waited until the guests were seated (each lowered himself carefully to one of the flimsy looking crates) then sat down himself.

Wilberforce’s long, skinny hands were already on the bottle. He tore the plastic away from the cap, removed the cap

itself and threw it into the corner. He half-filled each of the beakers, remarking to Doyle, “Your Editor owes me a drink.”

Kent gulped his whisky without waiting for the others. Sally, somehow, was very far away and he hoped that the alcohol, by the loosening of his inhibitions, would help to put him once more in touch with her. Wilberforce raised his own beaker, said with dry irony, “Your very good health, Mr. Kent.”

“This *was* my whisky,” said Kent.

“Was it? H’m... You could be right at that. It’s certainly better than the rotgut Bradbury keeps in his office.”

Sally, thought Kent, trying hard to project his thoughts. *Sally, I’ve come looking for you. I’ve come to find you, darling. Where are you?*

“What do you want of me, Mr. Kent?” asked the archaeologist.

“You, sir,” said Kent, “are the leading authority on the Old Martian civilisation. Do you believe the story that some of the Old Martians survive, that there are under-

ground cities in which they are still living?"

"Yes," said Wilberforce slowly. "Yes. There is evidence—not as definite as I would like—but still evidence. In this very area, for example... Oh, no, Doyle—don't go taking any notes. You'll have your story when there's a story to tell. I don't want any more *Mad Millionaire's Wild Goose Chase* headlines in your cheap little rag."

"I have reason to believe," went on Kent, "that one of the passengers in the *Falcon*—she crashed near here—survived the disaster, wandered away from the wreckage and fell into the hands of giant beings... I have reason to believe that she is a prisoner, and helpless..."

"What makes you think that her captors are giants?" asked Wilberforce.

"It's a matter of telepathy..." began Kent.

"*Telepathy!* Doyle—didn't your Editor promise not to send any more cranks and charlatans to get in my hair? I may be the local representative of the Institute—but that doesn't give any Tom, Dick or

Harry the right to bother me—neither does it give Bradbury the right to sic them on to me!"

"Mr. Wilberforce, I am neither a crank nor a charlatan. You should know that the rigorous psychological tests applied to all Space personnel makes the first impossible. As for the second—I have thrown up my job and come all the way to Mars. I was prepared to make my investigations at my own expense entirely. Mr. Bradbury's financial help was unsolicited—although it is, of course, deeply appreciated."

"H'm. Seems genuine enough. Suppose you tell me the whole story, from the beginning. I'm not promising that I *will* help you, but it's just possible... Go ahead, now."

WHEN Kent had finished, the archaeologist was silent for a few minutes. He said at last, "I believe you."

"Then you'll help?"

"My dear young man—it isn't a question of *will* I help—it's one of *can* I help? It's a great pity that you didn't think to get in touch with the

Institute before you left Earth. There's an instrument—Bladen invented it, Dinshaw developed it—analogue to the radio compass used by you people. It will give a bearing on any source of telepathic transmission. If we had one here now. . . .”

“We could send for one,” suggested Kent, conscious of the vast time lag between the transmission of the message and the arrival of the instrument.

“There's no need to,” said Craddock suddenly. “You are forgetting, sir, that the Institute is shipping one out to us, *has* shipped one out to us. It was to have been loaded aboard *Martian Queen*.”

“And *Martian Queen's* in now,” almost shouted Kent.

“You were the *Martian Mail*,” said Wilberforce. “When should the thing be unloaded?”

“I didn't look at the stowage plan,” admitted Kent. “After all, I was only a passenger this last trip. But it will, almost certainly, have been in one of the special cargo lockers and, therefore, among the first out, among the shipments on

the first freight ferry. If it wasn't delivered yesterday it will have been delivered today.” He got to his feet. “If Mr. Craddock or yourself would come with me, I could fly us back to New Essendon right away, and. . . .”

“Not so fast. You'll be using the thing—if it has come. You'll have to be alert mentally—which you won't be if you spend all night fluttering madly back and forth over the Martian desert. Furthermore—it may be that I shall be requiring more than this telepathic compass from my house. If it leads us into one of the cities, and if the city is, as you suggest, still inhabited, it may well be that the inhabitants will not give up their prisoner without a struggle. We'll finish this excellent whisky, Kent—and then you and Doyle will go back to your plane to sleep. Bill and I will make out a shopping list after you've gone—and then *we'll* sleep.”

KENT was surprised that he slept so well. The whisky helped, of course—and so did

the knowledge that at last he was *doing* something, that at last he could expect his reunion with Sally within a few days. He was still sleeping when Wilberforce and Craddock came and hammered on the fuselage of the Spurling. He got up, let them, one by one, through the little airlock.

"Here's the list," said Wilberforce, without preamble. "I've already been in radio touch with Marsala—all you'll have to do is pick up the things at New Essendon."

"What about breakfast?" asked Doyle sleepily.

"We don't..." began Kent.

"You do, Mr. Kent. I've already told you—I want you fit and fresh. You and Doyle get into your suits, then come across to the tent. We haven't finished all the coffee, and there're a couple or three eggs..."

The astronaut and the photographer followed the others back to the tent, sidestepping, on the way, the vicious camels. Kent ate and drank hastily, cursing the too leisurely Doyle. He had his gloves and helmet still on while the newsman was

still wiping egg from his chin, was through the sphincter lock of the tent while Doyle was still putting on his helmet.

He sat, fidgetting impatiently, at the controls of the Spurling while Doyle walked from the tent to the plane, took her up with a gut-wrenching acceleration before the photographer was through the inner airlock door.

With course set for New Essendon (speed Maximum) he cut in the automatic pilot, relaxed a little. He ignored Doyle's attempts at making conversation—just as he had ignored, early, the other man's annoyance at the hasty take-off. He sat in silence, trying hard to push a message through to Sally. He knew that she knew he was on Mars, he knew that she knew that he was trying to find her. But it was all so vague. He received, as he had done so many times before, the impression of bars, the impression of the huge, shadowy forms passing backwards and forwards. He found the list of equipment made by Wilberforce and Craddock, was pleased to see that it included heavy calibre automatic pis-

tols. He wondered, briefly, if the shooting down of the Old Martians would be regarded as murder or manslaughter.

But I mustn't shoot, he told himself. Not unless I have to. After all—they have cared for Sally when she was hurt and helpless... Even so— if they try to stop me...

"Essendon ahead," said Doyle briefly.

"Thanks," replied Kent.

He cut out the automatic pilot, took the controls himself. At the transceiver Doyle was in touch with the Control Tower.

"All clear for landing," he said.

Kent came in fast, swinging the turreted jets on a forward bearing when he was already over the field. The Spurling quivered, shuddered to a halt—then dropped slowly on her screaming, down pointing exhaust. Kent was in the airlock almost before the undercarriage had ceased to quiver and creak, was running towards the pile of bags and cases while, still in the Spurling, Doyle was adjusting his gloves and helmet.

"I'm from Wilberforce," he barked at a passing airport official. "That his gear?"

"Yes, but..."

"Top priority," snapped the spaceman. "Give me a hand to get it loaded, will you? Here, Doyle—shake the lead out of your pants! Take this end!"

The airport official muttered something about the clearance papers.

"Later," said Kent. "No time now... try it edgeways, Doyle—we have to get it through the door somehow."

"Where am I going to sit?" complained Doyle at last.

"You stand," said Kent, "or you stay. Take your choice." He took the sheet of paper thrust at him by the official, managed, his gloved fingers stiff, a scrawling signature with the stub of pencil. He pushed Doyle into the Spurling, heard him curse as he fell over the untidily piled cases and bags. Once in the pilot's seat he gave the official barely time to get clear of the jets, did not wait for authorization from the Control Tower. His take-off was more like the firing of a large piece of artillery than the

blasting off of either jet or rocket.

“THIS,” said Wilberforce, “is it.” He tightened the last screw, then stood back from the deceptively uncomplicated-seeming piece of apparatus on the table. Like a cage, it was, a spherical cage of fine, shining wire. There was another sphere suspended in its centre, a sphere of crystal, in which swirled, as though alive, a milky, opalescent fluid. On the outer sphere were connections, to which were made fast the leads of a pair of almost conventional appearing earphones (the shape was conventional enough, but they, too were made of crystal), the three leads running from a square, black box. There were straps on the lattice sphere, more straps on the box.

“You hang the sphere on your back,” said Wilberforce. “So. The box you wear on your chest. Yes, that’s it. Take off the lid, now.”

Kent took off the lid. He, together with Wilberforce, Doyle and Craddock stared down at the bowl inside the

box. It was like no meter that Kent had ever used, had ever seen. Under the flat transparency that covered the bowl was a greenish gas or liquid in which floated bright, flame-colored sparks, their motion seemingly as random as those of the molecules of a gas.

“Put on the headset,” ordered the archaeologist.

Kent obeyed him.

“Now—try to get in touch with your woman.”

Sally, thought Kent. *Sally. Come in, darling, come in. Sally. I’m here, my sweet. I’m here. I’m looking for you.*

“I’m trying,” he said.

“Then try harder. There’s nothing showing yet.”

... awakening from sleep, and loneliness, and darkness, and hunger, and cold... and hunger... and the huge, dim shape, dim and huge beyond the black bars... and the great hands (but soft, gentle, soft and gentle) outreaching and grasping... softness, warmth... softness, warmth, food... sleep...

Sally, he thought, desperately, *Sally, wake up! Wake up! They know, somehow, and*

they're drugging you!

"Look at the indicator," said Wilberforce.

Kent looked down, saw that the floating sparks had come together, had formed a tight, compact wedge, the point of which held steady on a bearing broad to his left. Automatically he turned so that the pointer was right ahead.

Sally, he thought. Stay awake. Stay awake! Keep sending.

*...loneliness, and darkness
...and loneliness...and the
dim, vague giants beyond the
bars...and the rhythmic, hyp-
notic chanting...*

"Quick, Craddock," ordered Wilberforce. "A compass bearing!"

*... darkness, warmth ...
warmth ... darkness ... soft-
ness ... warmth ... soft ...
soft ... so*

Kent stared down at the bowl, at the meaningless swirl of little sparks in the green fluid.

"I've lost her," he said flatly. "They drugged her, hypnotised her."

"She has to wake again," Wilberforce consoled him.

"Meanwhile, we have the bearing of wherever she is. Got the maps out, Bill?"

"Yes, sir," said Craddock. "I've laid the bearing off. It passes over Wyndham's Canyon..."

"A hopeful place," said Wilberforce. "I've always thought that there was something there. Get into your spacesuits, all of you."

"Do we walk?" asked Craddock. "Or take the camels?"

"Neither. Kent will fly us in his Spurling."

"Just a minute," asked Kent. "When Sally wakes again—how do we tell if we're close?"

"By the shape of the wedge," said Wilberforce. "The broader the wedge, the closer."

Carefully Kent undid the straps holding the apparatus to his body, carefully he put it into its box. He climbed into his spacesuit, helped the others to carry the necessary supplies and equipment to the Spurling.

IT was late afternoon when Kent set the Spurling down at the entrance to Wyndham's Canyon. For a while the three men—for Craddock, to his in-

tense annoyance, had been left to look after the camp and the camels—sat in the cabin of the plane, staring at the black, vertical fissure in the red cliffs. Outside, the thin, keen wind raised little, whirling dust devils, with particles of mica sparkling like powdered diamonds in the almost level rays of the westering sun.

"You'll have to try again," said Wilberforce. "The canyon's all of a thousand miles long."

"I am trying," said Kent. "Do you think that I'm not trying, you fool?" He said hurriedly, "I'm sorry."

"That's all right, Kent. I understand," said the archaeologist. "It's more important to you than to us."

"Quiet!" ordered Kent. He could feel her, could feel the vague thoughts that moved sluggishly through her mind as she half awakened. In the bowl the bright sparks shifted, aligned themselves into a sharp wedge, a pointer, indicating that the way lay through the canyon.

"You'll have to watch the bowl, Wilberforce," said the

pilot. "I shall have my hands full piloting the plane."

The Spurling lifted, moved slowly towards the red wall of the cliffs, towards the shadowed fissure. Kent switched on the landing lights before entering the canyon—a wise precaution, only a hundred yards inside they were in pitch darkness. To port and starboard he swerved, avoiding sharp pinnacles, rounding bends and corners. In normal circumstances the pilotage would not have been easy—but he was able to attend to the navigation of the aircraft with one part only of his mind—and that the smaller part. He was fighting all the time to maintain the tenuous mental contact with Sally, fighting all the time to stop her from falling back into the deep, warm blackness of sleep—sleep behind the bars beyond which moved the dim, looming figures of the guardian giants. Once or twice, flying along a relatively clear and straight stretch of the canyon, he was able to glance down at the bowl, saw that the wedge showed no signs of the broadening that Wilberforce had told him would be the sign of a

close approach to their objective.

He said suddenly, "I've lost her again."

Gently, he landed the Spurling. On either side of them towered the canyon walls, mineral crystals and the crystals of hoar frost glittering in the floodlights. Something small and dark scuttered out of the shadows, stared at them with ruby gleaming eyes for a few seconds, then turned and vanished. There was movement, too, in the pool that lay almost ahead of them—the black, glistening water swirled and eddied, breaking up the floating rafts of crystalline salt.

"There's room for two of us to sleep at the back," suggested Wilberforce. "You'd better sleep, Kent—but leave the headset on. It acts as an amplifier, as you've already found out. If she wakes up—*when* she wakes up—you'll wake too. Then we carry on."

"I'll stand watch," volunteered Doyle.

"Yes, it might be as well. And you can see if you can raise Craddock on the radio, to report progress."

KENT was sure that he would not be able to sleep—but sleep he did. When he awoke—urged into consciousness by the girl's waking thoughts—it was morning, although here, on the canyon bottom, the light was little better than early twilight. His mouth was dry and his eyes gummy and, thanks to his having worn the headset all night, he felt as though he had been brutally beaten around the ears.

Doyle was stretched out on the other seat, snoring heartily. Forward, Wilberforce was sitting in the pilot's chair.

Wilberforce turned his head. "You're awake," he said unnecessarily. Then—"Is she coming through?"

"Yes. Shift out of the pilot's chair. I'll take over again."

"Breakfast?"

"A waste of time. The way those devils are keeping her drugged, or hypnotised, we have to make the most we can of the short periods when she's awake. Move over."

The Spurling lifted slowly, drifted forward, but making better speed than she had during the hours of darkness. Wil-

berforce woke Doyle, told him to heat coffee and make sandwiches. He and Kent managed a meal of sorts without letting their attention stray too much from the controls of the aircraft and the telepathic compass.

"She came in clearly while I was eating," murmured Kent. "She got the taste of the coffee from me... And she wanted some, badly—just as she's longing for a cigarette now..."

"With any luck at all," said Wilberforce, "it'll not be long before she's enjoying coffee and cigarettes..."

"Are you sure that this instrument's correct?" asked Kent, a little later. "This wedge, this pointer... It shows no signs of broadening out..."

"It will do it quite suddenly when it does," said Wilberforce—but his voice was not sufficiently assured for Kent's liking.

They flew on until noon—and then, for a space of three hours, communications broke down. Kent disposed of a heavy meal, and then slept. He was awakened as before by the

amplified sensations of hunger and thirst and discomfort. He lifted the Spurling from the canyon floor, flew on.

For most of that night he flew, and for all of the following morning and afternoon. At sunset the Spurling emerged from the eastern entrance to the canyon, skimmed slowly over the featureless sands of Libya.

"SO much," said Kent, "for Wyndham's Canyon." his voice was almost gay; he had drawn his conclusions, made his decision, and he knew that this mood of strange, fey exhilaration would carry him through to the triumphant end of the search. "Have you got the charts out, Doyle? Now, sir—here is your camp on Mount Kinsey..."

Wilberforce, looking at the little, pencilled cross, nodded his head.

"And here..." Kent swiftly manipulated parallel rules and pencil... "is the original bearing, our course from the camp to the canyon. We extend the line of bearing—so! Where does it take us?"

"Marsala," said Wilberforce slowly.

"Yes. Marsala. And it's in Marsala—or *under* Marsala—that we find Sally."

"Impossible!" barked the archaeologist.

"No, it's not. Precious little is known about the old Martians—as you'd be the first to tell us. This much we *do* know—their science wasn't a patch on ours. The best they could do towards tackling the air and water problems was the Canals—and have you never been told by a civil engineer what a bungling, amateurish job *they* were? Anyhow—it's pretty obvious that a handful, at least, of the aborigines did survive, underground, until we came. For some reason they have never made contact. But... They have been smart enough to become parasites."

"Impossible!" exploded Wilberforce.

"No. Not at all impossible. Look at it this way. Under Marsala, under the other cities, *They* have their warrens. They help themselves—oh, very discreetly—to the air and the water they aren't smart enough to

make for themselves. We carried Kernshaw—do you know him?—once as passenger in the old *Queen*, at the time he was City Engineer for Marsala. He was telling me about the unexplained losses of both air and water—not big, but too big to be accounted for by normal wastage, seepage and what have you. Perhaps *They* pilfer other things, too—food, scraps of cloth, pieces of metal..."

"Impossible," said Wilberforce again, but with less conviction.

"*They* know, too," said Kent, "that no archaeologist is going to hunt for them in a *modern* city."

Doyle said abruptly, "A scoop. *The* scoop of all scoops."

"It could be so," murmured Wilberforce. "It just could be so."

"Then what are we waiting for?" almost shouted Kent. He whipped off the headset, unbuckled the straps that held the apparatus to him. "We shan't be needing *this* again—until we get to Marsala."

WHEN reminiscing afterwards about the flight, Doyle would say that it was

only atmospheric resistance that prevented them from attaining Escape Velocity, that they left a trail of drops of molten metal from wings and fuselage all the way from Wyndham's Canyon to Marsala. He was, of course, exaggerating—but Kent did succeed in squeezing a far higher speed out of the Spurling than her designers would have dreamed possible. He came in to a screaming, spectacular landing just outside the Northern Airlock, smashing the plane's landing gear. He cursed with impatience as he, Wilberforce and Doyle waited for the outer doors to open to let them into the airlock. By this time the others had caught the infection—Wilberforce was agog to meet the Old Martians face to face, Doyle was itching to take what must be the pictures of the century.

There was more delay when they were through the airlock. Kent, the apparatus once more strapped about him, was pushing his thoughts out—his thoughts, his desires, his raw emotions.

"Wake up," he muttered.
"Wake up. Sally, wake up.

We're here, Sally, we're here. We want to find you."

Passers by looked curiously at the three men. One or two stopped to question Doyle, received non-committal answers from the photographer. Wilberforce frowned fiercely at others, made warning gestures as they approached.

"She's through," said Kent. "Look! The wedge *is* wider!"

Like a man sleepwalking he moved off, all his attention concentrated on the dimly-glowing compass bowl. Wilberforce and Doyle walked on either side of him, warily alert for approaching traffic. They crossed the road without incident, came to a brief halt on the other side.

"Hold on, Kent!" expostulated Wilberforce. "You can't walk through solid plastic! *This* way. . . get that door open, Doyle, will you?"

It was a private house that they walked through, ignoring the protests of the occupants. Doyle muttered something about a new technique of water divining, hastily opened doors for Kent and Wilberforce.

It was an area of cultivated

ground that they crossed next, trampling tender seedlings underfoot. Luckily there were no gardeners within sight.

The next house that they invaded was empty, and gave entry on to a crossroads. The telepathic compass indicated that their course lay along one of the roads.

Wilberforce clutched Doyle's arm.

"We may require gear for digging—we *shall* require gear for digging. And crowbars. Explosives, maybe. Nip into that public call booth; get hold of my office and tell them to send men and equipment."

"Where to?"

"How should I know? Tell 'em to have it all assembled ready."

Doyle hurried into the booth, made the call. He had to run to overtake the others.

"Are we getting close?" he gasped.

"Look," said Kent.

Doyle peered into the bowl, saw that the wedge was broad, was broadening as he watched, its base already three times the length of its sides. It was quiv-

ering, its outlines becoming hazy, indistinct.

"Cold..." said Kent. "Cold...hungry... frightened Darling, I'm here. I'm with you. I'm *with* you..."

"Almost..." whispered Wilberforce.

Here, thought Kent. *Here*. Suddenly he was drained of energy. Suddenly, at this moment of achievement, he was assailed by a sickening dread. What would he find? What maimed, almost witless survivor of the catastrophe? *But she needs me*, he told himself. *She needs me*.

"This house?" asked Doyle. "Under this house?"

"It must be," said Wilberforce. "Look at the compass. It must be."

His hands shaking, he flung open the door with a crash. From inside came the frightened wailing of a very young child.

A woman came running along the passageway. She was young, dark-haired, blazingly indignant.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded.

"Sally!" cried Kent, opened his arms, stepped forward.

Then his arms dropped to his side. "No," he muttered. "You're...not. But there's something..."

He brushed past her, stumbled into the room in which the child was crying. Wilberforce and Doyle followed.

With slow, tired fingers Kent unbuckled the apparatus, let it fall to the floor. He was weeping unashamedly.

"Kent!" shouted Wilberforce. "Kent! Do we dig? Here?" And to the woman, "I assure you, Madam, you will be handsomely compensated..."

"Dig?" echoed the spaceman. "What for?" He was kneeling beside the cot, and the woman, frantic, was trying to pull him away. "Dig? Oh, it was all so obvious—the time lag and everything else. The bars..." his fingers rattled along the upright rods. "The bars, and hun-

ger and helplessness." He let the woman pull him to his feet. "The giants..."

"What now?" asked Doyle, in a small, frightened voice. "What now?"

"I'm not sure," said Kent. "But I shall be. Soon." He went on, speaking more to himself than to the others. "Do I wait? Shall I wait? I *was* ten years older than you, Sally. If I wait for you... Or shall I take the chance? It'll make me two years, at least, younger..."

"Au revoir, Sally," he said to the whimpering baby. "Au revoir."

He straightened his back, squared his shoulders, walked towards the door.

"Kent!" shouted Doyle. "Kent! You can't..."

"Don't stop him," said Wilberforce.

THE END
