

# STARTLING STORIES

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BY LEIGH BRACKETT

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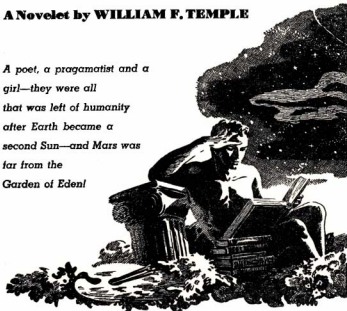
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# THE TWO SHADOWS

A Novelet by **WILLIAM F. TEMPLE**

*A poet, a pragmatist and a  
girl—they were all  
that was left of humanity  
after Earth became a  
second Sun—and Mars was  
far from the  
Garden of Eden!*



*THE idea that the world may someday and quite literally be blown up is scarcely a new one. Most of the ancient religions had it. However, of recent years, the doomsday legend has taken on new form and entirely new impact. For, according to the sundry tenets of yore, it was the Gods who led the world to its final ruin through their own folly—usually a result of meddling in mortal conflicts.*

*Nowadays the vision of world's end is all too clear—and man himself is the agent. Having abandoned the superfolk of Olympus and Valhalla, we have only ourselves to blame.*

*However, lingering as stubbornly as man's belief in an individual life-after-death is an insistent thread of hope that*

*such destruction will not be complete—that somewhere, on or under Earth or perhaps upon one of the planets, some humans will somehow survive to create a more equable cosmos for themselves. Mr. Temple in this story gives vivid presentation to how such survival might be accomplished.—THE EDITOR.*

## CHAPTER I

### Survivors

**B**LESSED Necessity!" cried Leonardo da Vinci, in his day, knowing that it was the prime incentive. Man had to be driven to work his best mira-



cles. Creditors at one's heels were a sharper spur to the artist than his own inspiration.

The first voyage from Earth to Mars was certainly not the fruit of a hunger for knowledge—or of technicians in love with their work—or even of pride seeking power upon which to fatten.

It sprang from the starkest of all necessities—preservation of the species.

A divided Earth, struggling with a divided mind to preserve itself, had fallen into the desperate error of preventive war. The disease germs, as thick as clouds in the atmosphere, were prov-

ing to be the conquerors of both sides. Earth, quivering under the impacts of countless atomic missiles, many darted into its side by its own satellite and human colony, flung out a seed.

The seed was styled the *Nuova Vita*—as a sign that the Earth really knew better than it had behaved—and it was a rocket-ship five times the size of the Lunar vessels. It had both atomic and chemical drives. It had come straight off the drawing board. Its size and power were unprecedented. There was no time for real tests. In effect it was a tissue of theory, launched naked into

cold space, carrying twenty-six souls and the hope of the human race—at least the Anglo-American part of that race.

The gamble, it seemed, had come off. The seed missed the stony places—it was landing on the comparatively fertile soil of Mars. It was a thousand feet above that soil, sitting on its tail of braking chemical jets, descending with beautifully slow deliberation.

The pilot said happily, "We've done it!"

Fate never likes to be anticipated. A second later came a great light and a great heat. The habitually almost motionless atmosphere of Mars was scorched and stung into agitation. The heated air expanded almost like an explosion, tearing the concentrated gas-jets of the ship into long tenuous streamers.

The *Nuova Vita* tilted irrevocably off balance. It became a bone of contention between gravity and the upstreaming air. Its majesty had departed. It was a straw tossed by forces it had lately controlled.

They tossed it into a grassy area two Earth-miles from an ice-blue channel. But the soil was thin. There was hard rock beneath it and the rock broke the back of the *Nuova Vita*. It broke the backs of many of the little humans within and others died through the sheer concussion.

The wind howled over the wreck, under the sun—and under the small newborn companion to the sun.

**T**HOMAS JEFFERSON JOHNS ran for his life among the firs. Luckily, the snow hadn't come yet but the bitter wind, driving against his face, was the herald of it. There was plenty of snow on the saw-edged peaks of the Rockies distant behind him.

Unhappily, not so far behind him, came the grizzly bear.

He looked back fearfully over his shoulder to see who was gaining. He never saw because he ran his head against a branch and was knocked off his feet. Flat on his back he went and

the ground seemed to be rocking like a boat beneath him. One side of his head felt as though it were bursting open. Much more of this and he would be sick.

The great head of the grizzly, with its small eyes and licking red tongue, loomed over him. He felt too ill to care now. The beast put its paws on his shoulders, began to shake him.

"Don't, don't—you're hurting my head!" John cried foolishly.

The bear seemed to go misty at the edges, become a mere dark form that was shaking him. Then it stopped and was still and he lay back, his eyes gradually refocusing it.

It wasn't a bear now. It was a big dark man with an olive skin and contemptuous brown eyes—John Malatesta.

Malatesta! The real world returned to him now. Malatesta, Schultz, Martin, Haywood, Liza, Pinky, Kilpatrick, Danby, Foster. . . .

There had been twenty-six of them including himself. The big business man, the chemist, the engineer, the agriculturist, the physician, the geologist, the cook, the bacteriologist, the artist—and the rest. All hand-picked, albeit hastily, by a harassed Government for their qualifications to start a new growth of mankind and yet preserve some of the knowledge and culture from the main stem which was dying.

He, Johns, had been picked, not merely because of his fame as a poet or because he was a Nobel Prize winner for literature but because also he had once been a teacher and a noteworthy educationalist.

How far Malatesta had been picked and how far he had pulled strings to force his election into the chosen few was not known to anyone on the ship but Malatesta himself. He had qualifications, of course. He was the chief of a huge organization in the States. With his organizing ability went toughness of mind and body and immense drive. He was the man to get things done. The only drawback was—the things had to be done his way.

Still, he was in a minority and could be curbed. There were other tough people on the ship, particularly Judge Hackman.

Johns struggled to sit up. There was a thin cold wind blowing.

"That's better," said Malatesta. "But take it easy. There's no hurry. We've got all the time there is."

Johns held his aching head—very lightly because it was painful to touch.

"What hit me?"

"Mars. Want to hit it back?"

Johns shook his head and wished he hadn't. More carefully he turned it to look around. Again he wished he hadn't.

This crazy tangle of broken alloy, with sharp swords of steel bristling from it, had been the main cabin. Once, he had seen a car wreck in which the two vehicles had met head on at the aggregate speed of a hundred and twenty miles an hour. This was worse, and bigger and there were a lot more bodies—and parts of bodies.

"Oh," he said and suddenly the nausea he had dreamed of returned and was made actual.

Gasping for breath afterwards, he turned red wet eyes on Malatesta.

"Tender stomach, eh?" said Malatesta with cynical amusement. "I'll break it to you gently, son. You and me are the only two left alive. And I'm not too sure about you."

Johns could only stare at him. Schulta, Martin, Haywood, Liza, Pinky, Kilpatrick, Danby, Foster. . . . All those who had become his friends, sharing this unparalleled adventure—carrying the torch for humanity together—full of a sense of nobility and responsibility—kindly and tolerant, indeed loving toward one another because they had a common aim in life, a great aim, and were there to help each other toward it.

All killed on the march by one senseless blow? Their aspirations mocked by fate and thrown on this ghastly scrapheap?

All—except himself and Malatesta, the one man he had regarded with antipathy and avoided?

He laid his head on his arm and cried, like a child who has suddenly discovered that the entire family has gone out and left him alone in the house—except for the big rough dog he dislikes and fears.

"Good," said Malatesta. "Keep it up. We're short of water. The tank got busted and it's all gone into the ground."

**P**RESENTLY Johns looked up and found he was alone except for—He got dizzily to his feet and scrambled out of that horrible place and away from the broken ship. It was surprisingly easy. He seemed to flutter in long jumps like a goose. Of course, the lesser gravitation . . .

This was Mars—just a lot of thin sick-looking grass, spreading in all directions. The sky was a very dark blue, almost black overhead, where faint stars twinkled. There was a singing in his ears which he had noticed at high altitudes in the Rockies. It came from the low air density.

Then he noticed that springing at thirty degrees from each other, from his feet across the grass, were two shadows, one fainter than the other. And despite the chill breeze there was warmth on the back of his neck.

He turned. There were two suns hanging in the sky, bright and white. Both were considerably smaller than the Sun he had known on Earth and one of them was appreciably smaller than the other.

He was no astronomer but he realized there was something definitely out of order here. However, before he could think about it much, Malatesta came up in long floating strides from somewhere along the great length of wreckage.

"Since you're up," he said, "you can give me a hand with things. Well, what do you think of Mars?"

Johns gestured toward the two suns. "I don't get that."

Malatesta said, "Perhaps you're not quite awake yet. It's obvious enough. I told you—you and me are the only two left alive—*say* here."

Johns grappled with his incredulity.

"You mean?"

"I mean that smaller sun up there is the Earth we left three months ago. I don't know who threw the bomb that started the chain reaction or whether it was too many bombs at once. I don't even know who won the war. I guess we did—we're the only survivors."

Johns gave a long sigh. The immense tragedy of it seemed to come pressing down from the sky onto his shoulders. He felt like Dante gazing into the Inferno—abandoned by Virgil, left utterly alone, not knowing the way out. He was the last of his kind. Malatesta didn't count. Malatesta was an insensitive ape.

He felt the tears trying to come again and he fought to keep them back. Malatesta would sneer. Then he thought, "What the hell do I care what he thinks? Why should I accept his judgment on what is right behavior? He's no more than a half-educated hoodlum."

Nevertheless he turned his face away and bowed his head, lest Malatesta should see.

"What are you doing—composing an epic poem about it?" said Malatesta sarcastically. "You're wasting your time. There's no one left to read it—except me. And I'm tone-deaf. Snap out of it. We're going to live. Therefore, we shall want living quarters. Come back to the wreck and help me."

## CHAPTER II

### *The Curio*

**M**ALATESTA'S idea of being helped meant that when he said, "Carry that outside" or "Bring that here" Johns was to do it immediately and alone. Whenever Johns found a thing too heavy to lift Malatesta would, grumbling and impatient, take one end of it with a vigor which made it plain that he could have carried the whole thing himself without effort.

But it was mainly by Johns' labor

that the rough shack, with its table, chairs and couches, was built from suitable portions of the wreckage.

"Right," said Malatesta, surveying it. "That's good enough for now. It'll keep this damned wind off anyway. Now for a meal. It's lucky the cook's galley wasn't too badly burnt—even though the atomic heaters are no good. The whole system is smashed.

"But the food-store and the refrigerator vault stood up to it. There's plenty of grub in them. Go get a couple of loaves, a can of beef, some butter and cheese and crackers—we'll find ways of cooking some other time. Here are the keys."

"What about doing a bit of work yourself?" Johns broke in angrily. "Do you think I'm the maid-of-all-work here? I've done enough—far more than my share. You go and get the food."

Malatesta looked at him searchingly. He tossed the little bunch of keys in the air, caught it on its slow descent.

"Right," he said again. "If that's the way you want it."

"It's only fair—" began Johns in a high protesting voice but Malatesta turned on his heel and went.

He returned presently with the food and made a pile of sandwiches on the table. He drew up the couch alongside, lay back on it comfortably and reached for the top sandwich. Johns watched him eat two, then put his hand out tentatively for the third.

"Hands off!" snapped Malatesta. "No work, no eat. That's how it is. That's how it's going to be. That's how it always was—I didn't run a soup kitchen, you know. My workers had to work for their grub."

Johns stared at him. Then he said with quiet acidity, "You're wrong with both your facts and your analogy. Firstly, I have worked—hard. Secondly, I'm not one of your employees. On that ship we all had equal standing. Half that food is mine."

"No it isn't," said Malatesta with his mouth full. "You're wrong with your facts. We all had equal standing on the ship—yes. There were twenty-six of us.

That makes your share of the food one twenty-sixth, not a half. The second thing to understand is—we're not on the ship now."

"That's a childish kind of sophistry. The others are dead. They have no use for food."

"How do you know? Did you ask them? No—you just want to take it because they're helpless to stop you. That's all right. I agree with your philosophy and I'll underwrite it. I take the food, not only because they're helpless to stop me but because you are also."

"I see, Malatesta," said Johns, deliberately. "Might is right with you, eh?"

"You've got it, son." Malatesta helped himself to another sandwich. "That's what I believe because it's the truth."

"It isn't," flashed Johns. "You know it isn't. That's what you believe but only because it suits you to."

"Everybody believes what they'd like to believe. You only believe in a system of equal shares for all because you're weak—too weak to fight for your share. So you invent this thing you call social justice to get your share for you, so that you don't starve. You believe in social justice because it suits you to. I'll take the survival of the fittest—that suits me."

"Then I take it that you intend to starve me to death?"

"Mr. Johns, you take a very pessimistic view of things. The food is yours—all of it—if you can take it from me. Of course, I could break your neck with one hand—that's a risk you'd have to take. Or you could kill me if you could think of a method. Again you'd be at a slight disadvantage. I have this, you see—and you haven't."

HE pulled an old-fashioned automatic pistol from his pocket and held it balanced on his palm.

"A curio," he said, "but lethal. It was my grandfather's. He was an Italian who went over to the States to set up business—in nineteen twenty-four, it was. He ran a gang of bootleggers and

made a pile. When Prohibition was repealed he went into legitimate business. It became the family business. I owe much to him."

"Including your ideas on morality, no doubt, you filthy hoodlum."

Malatesta was off the couch in a bound. The pistol butt caught Johns on the bridge of his nose. He went over backward with a yelp of surprise and pain. The blood ran thickly from his nostrils. He blew and spluttered.

"Oh, stop squawking," said Malatesta. "That was only a love tap. I doubt if it's even broken your nose-bone. Regard it as a warning. I don't resent your insult as such—they're just words. What I don't like and won't have is your acting as though you're superior to me. You're not in any way.

"People learn from life, my friend, not from books. Experience is the only teacher—maybe you think you are. You've taught a lot of kids a lot of nonsense in your time. But you've nothing to teach me. You don't know anything. You don't even know that your college education and Nobel Prize don't qualify you as a superman—or even as a man."

Johns was holding a bloody handkerchief to his nose. His head still hurt from the landing crash and now it hurt in another place. But the worse hurt was to his sense of dignity. He had been caught by surprise and yelped like—

He had yelped like one of his own pupils many years ago. Somehow, he always remembered coming up silently that day behind young Perkins, who was absorbed in a comic when he should have been absorbed in Euclid. He remembered the joyous little spasm of power-feeling as he twisted the boy's ear and pulled his head around—to face his master.

He had been the master then.

It wasn't nearly so good being the pupil. He resented it fiercely. He hated Malatesta. If there was a way to kill him he would—

No, he mustn't think that. That was giving way to blind passion. He was

above that now. One could never be a master if one couldn't control his own passions. *He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.*

Detachedly he wondered if young Perkins had felt like killing him on that far-off day.

He must control himself with this roughneck. He must feel himself superior but not make a parade of it. But he must never, never allow himself to feel inferior, certainly never act as one.

"You want to earn a cup of coffee?" asked Malatesta suddenly.

Johns, still holding his handkerchief to his nose, nodded. He would not trust himself to say anything. He might be too sarcastic.

"Right. Take that bucket. There's a water channel about two miles off in that direction. I saw it just before the smash. Bring back the bucket full and you can have your coffee and—I'll be generous—a couple of sandwiches."

Johns picked up the bucket and went off slowly over the long thin grass, his two shadows moving ahead of him.

This first sally into unexplored Mars should have been a great moment. Instead it presented itself as a wearisome task. It was Malatesta's fault, of course—his brutal materialism was death to all poetry and wonder and beauty. He poisoned romance. He belittled the really big things of life and magnified the pin-pricks. He'd have to be careful not to adopt his stunted values.

Damn his nose—would it never stop bleeding? His handkerchief was like a red flag. His face seemed to be little but a throbbing proboscis. He had never been struck before in his life. It seemed to have knocked his sense of values spinning.

**I**T was all wrong. He should be overwhelmed by the tragedy of the sudden end of homo sapiens. But he had seen that coming for too long. It had happened at last, that was all.

He felt a certain sense of loss but it was for the Acropolis, for the Uffizi Galleries, the Louvre, the Sistine Chapel,

the Taj Mahal—not for the lately living people of Earth. The hills that Shakespeare had walked on around Stratford-on-Avon, the City of London, redolent with history . . .

He had had no living relatives. As for the rest of his fellows, he had known few, respected fewer, loved none. None except his traveling companions on the *Nuova Vita*. That had been his real world. That was where he belonged, where he had found himself at last, among the élite. The loss of those people was a far greater tragedy than the loss of Earth.

The voice of one of the élite bellowed after him. "What are you trying to do—walk backwards? I want that coffee today. Get a move on."

Johns made a noise between a groan and a growl. "Shut up, you slimy thug!" he hissed in sick hatred. But he knew that Malatesta was too far away to hear him. Nevertheless he quickened his pace.

His handkerchief had become a sodden useless ball. Irritably he threw it to the ground. It alit on what had seemed to be a small gray stone half-hidden in the grass. The stone came alive with a leap and bounded off like a rabbit, giving a back kick with its rear legs. It was like an earless rabbit with the smooth gray skin of a mouse.

He watched it until it had vanished in the distance. So there was animal life on Mars after all. An irrational hope sprang within him. Were there somewhere intelligent Martians who could paint and sculpt and build, make music and write, think and discuss?

The great telescopes on the Moon, their magnification unhampered by any blurring atmosphere, had raked the planet for signs of intelligent life and seen none. Empty deserts of red dust, yes, and vast green plains. But not a town anywhere.

Most of the mapped canals were there but it seemed that the regularity of them had been an optical illusion. They were no straighter than any river. There was no more plan to them than to the Grand Canyon. So people had dropped



the description "canals" and called them what Schiaparelli had really called them—channels.

Ahead of him now he could see the line across the broad strip of green that was one of these channels. Despite the lift given by the lesser gravity it seemed an age before he reached it.

There wasn't much to it then. The grass was longer and greener at its banks and that was about all. Compared with some of the other channels it was but a thread—fifty feet across. The water was pale blue, clear and cold. He could see where the soil ended and the rock-bed began. There was moss on the rocks at the bottom and he could have sworn that he saw one green rock move—a crustacean, surely.

The banks were just earth and rock—without trace of any Martian engineering. The water seemed to have worn its own channel. He tried to put the silly hope out of his head.

He drank, then washed the blood from his face. His nose had stopped giving but not hurting. He filled the bucket and took a last look around. The channel went waveringly from horizon to horizon. The other bank looked the same as the one he was standing on.

The long grass waved silently in the wind. There was nothing else to see. He turned his back on it and set out for the great ragged shape of the wreck under the two small bright suns. It was the only prominent feature in the flat landscape.

Presently he trod on something that rolled beneath his foot. He stumbled and spilt about a third of the water. Then he picked up the object. It was a knob of rock, twice the size of a man's fist.

As he inspected it his heart began to quicken. That irrational hope returned. Surely, surely, it had been consciously shaped? There were deep eye-sockets, a jutting nose, the suggestion of a mouth and chin. A primitive attempt at a human head or a badly weather-worn but comparatively modern one? Or—was it just his own wishful thinking?

Perhaps—there could have been very

little erosion in this climate. But it looked as good as many museum pieces he had seen. He put it in his pocket and resumed his journey.

When he got back all the sandwiches were gone and Malatesta said, "Why the hell didn't you fill the bucket?"

However, Malatesta had got some utensils from the ship and started a fire with splintered bookshelves. Johns went and got some more bread from the food-store.

### CHAPTER III

#### *And One Makes Three*

**A**FTER they had finished the coffee they lay back and smoked. Johns got out the stone head and looked it over closely.

"What's that?" said Malatesta lazily.

Johns told him what he thought it might be. Malatesta was merely amused. He gave the thing a rough examination and tossed it back.

"Meteorite," he said. "You can see where it's pitted by the friction."

"But the shape?"

"Have you ever been to the Garden of the Gods, near Colorado Springs? The place is—was—lousy with chunks of rock that look like heads. You're just superimposing a pattern subjectively, like Lowell peering at this planet from Flagstaff a century ago and making neat little maps of the canals. Or like a patient of Rorschach's—the gink who started the psychiatrists playing the ink-blot game.

Johns looked at him with surprise. Malatesta then was not wholly a throwback to his gangster grandfather despite his brutality and his deliberately coarse and ungrammatical speech. Sometime, somewhere, he had read books and some of it had stuck.

"I prefer to think it's the work of an intelligence," said Johns, shortly.

"Naturally. You believe what you want to believe like I said. You hope somewhere you'll find intelligent com-

panionship—not like mine. Me, I don't go for poetry or anything else that ain't any good to me."

"Your disapproval doesn't destroy the value of poetry," said Johns. "It's an eternal and indestructible value, far above your or my criticism. The same goes for any of the art forms—and Truth and Beauty and Goodness."

He breathed the last words so that the capitals were almost visibly apparent.

Malatesta, on the couch, regarded the glowing end of his cigarette. Then he said, slowly, thinking it out, "The sonnet form was a human invention—and it died with humanity. So did any standards of art form whatsoever. They were pretty unstable even when they existed—yesterday's art is today's laugh.

"Most of the naked Venuses of the so-called Old Masters are fat, unsightly lumps by the Two Thousand and Three A.D. standards of feminine beauty. Beauty is a matter of fashion, nothing more. If Mona Lisa had tried to get a job in the New York TV studios as an actress she'd have been told to go home and find her eyebrows."

"And how do you dispose of Goodness?"

"Just another matter of custom. Cannibalism was evil in America. In Polynesia not so long ago your grandmother's shade would have felt horribly slighted if you hadn't eaten her corpse and so absorbed her good qualities.

"I could give you a thousand examples of the same act being thought good in one place and evil in another. And you can kill people with kindness, you know. As for truth—no one's answered Pilate yet."

Johns stared at him. "I'm darned if I can make you out," he said. "One minute you talk like a thick-eared mugg and the next like a university graduate."

Malatesta laughed a fat laugh of self-satisfaction. "I've been both. And I'm schizophrenic."

"You're all wrong anyway. We try to superimpose patterns on material, certainly. But these patterns are eter-

nal standards which we glimpse through our imagination and try to record so that others may see them more clearly."

"If the patterns are eternal why do they change so often?"

"They don't. It's our imperfect vision, bad guesses and fumbling execution. Truth is outside of us and eternal."

Malatesta said, "The pragmatists don't think so and I'm a pragmatist. All thought is personal and purposive. Abstracts are figments. A judgment which is not prompted by motives is impossible. The only test of a truth is—does it work? If it doesn't it's meaningless."

"The opinion of the majority is against you."

"What majority? Listen, son—wake up! There's just you and me and no one else. There ain't a majority. My belief is just as good as yours."

**J**OHNS was shocked into consideration. He looked at his feet, thinking—if there are only two people in the world and one is a paranoiac and the other a manic depressive, what are the tests of sanity? Where are the standards of rational behavior?

Then he said, "I don't mean to be offensive. I have had more training in these things. My greater experience can be regarded as the majority."

Malatesta gave him the Bronx cheer, for old tradition.

"Can be regarded—by whom?" he jeered. "Only you, of course. I'm two hundred pounds—or was on Earth—to your hundred and forty. I'll choose to regard that extra sixty pounds of me as the majority."

"On the other hand I'm taller than you," snapped Johns spitefully. He knew he was talking foolishness.

"But I'm the better pool player," said Malatesta suavely, completing the reductio ad absurdum.

"This is nonsense!" cried Johns, angrily. "You can't just ignore history and pretend that this is the beginning of the world. What about Buddha and Aristotle and Lao-Tsze and—"

Malatesta swung around and pointed violently upward, over the wreck, at the

sky. "What about them?" he flung back. "See that star? It's just a star among a billion other stars. There may have been saints and sinners on the others too—and where is their wisdom now? That's finished, written off."

"I'm not pretending this is the beginning of the world—it is the beginning of the world as far as I'm concerned—my world!"

And in that moment, as Malatesta sat rigid with his arm upflung, a form emerged slowly from the wreck. Both men stared at it. "A Martian!" thought Johns, suddenly flushing with a new excitement. "A *Martian!*"

Malatesta let his arm fall. He swore under his breath. "This certainly is the beginning of the world," he said. "And *how!* Johns, here comes our majority."

She was dazed and her white dress was barred with black dirt and her fingers were bleeding. She was small, brunette, rather plump and they didn't recognize her as first.

"It's the nurse," said Johns, suddenly, recalling the face when it wasn't smudged and tear-stained. She had been a quiet little thing, keeping well in the background, and her services had not been required during the voyage. He hadn't heard her exchange a word with anyone and he wasn't sure of her name though he had heard it.

While he stood there, remembering her, Malatesta walked out to meet her. Johns cursed himself for his slowness. Malatesta picked her up, carried her over the wreckage-strewn grass and laid her on the couch.

"Get her a drink of water, beautiful dreamer," he said.

Presently they got her story in a faint Nebraskan accent. It was short. She had been in the women's lavatory when the crash came. She didn't remember anything after that except awakening in darkness under a load of wreckage and fighting for hours, pulling and pushing at the stuff, to get out.

She recalled scarcely more of what happened before that. She had only the sketchiest memory of the ship and the

voyage. She remembered there were people. Just people—no names to them. She didn't remember Malatesta and Johns.

"I thought I'd gone right through what's left of the ship," said Malatesta. "Didn't think of the ladies' room. Maybe I've got loss of memory too. What's your name?"

She didn't remember. She knew she came from Ogallala on the south fork of Platte River and had been a nurse.

Malatesta said, "We'll have to call you something."

"What about just 'Nurse'?" suggested Johns.

Malatesta rubbed his dark bristly jowls. "Nope. We'll call her Madge."

"Madge?" echoed Johns.

"Short for Majority, wideawake. Do I have to explain everything?"

## CHAPTER IV

### *Rabbit on the Run*

**T**HE next morning, Johns was awakened by the clang of the bucket dropping beside him.

"More water," said Malatesta, standing over him. "I want breakfast."

Johns got up. "And a shave, too, no doubt," he murmured.

"Hell, no. I'm never shaving again. From now on I make my own social conventions."

"I'll come with you, Tom," said Madge.

As they walked side by side over the grass she said quietly, "He doesn't like you, does he?"

"The feeling is mutual. We haven't a thing in common. By the way, do you like poetry?"

"I—I think so. I don't know much about it."

"I could teach you if you're willing to learn. *He* isn't. You know, whether Art lives or dies depends wholly on you."

"Huh?"

"Art is the communication of feelings, ideas, standards. I am an artist in

a vacuum—with no one to communicate to. Actually an artist can't exist without an audience. No one ever writes or paints for himself alone. Those that pretend to were thinking of posterity. It's possible that we'll have no posterity. Will you be my audience, Madge?"

She smiled for the first time. She had nice teeth. "Sure, I'll try to be appreciative."

"Thanks a lot."

All the way to the channel and back he expressed himself to her—his moods, his ideas, his fancies. He didn't give her much chance to talk.

As he was explaining to her his own theory of what Picasso had been getting at she exclaimed suddenly, "Ooh! What's that?" She pointed to a moving object in the grass.

He broke off, rather irritated by her branching attention: he'd thought she was absorbing the whole of it.

"Oh, that," he said. "There's plenty of 'em about. I call 'em Martian rabbits."

"Wonder if they're good to eat?"

"One day we'll have to find out. That food-store isn't going to last forever. Perhaps we'll finish up eating grass, like Nebuchadnezzar."

"Neb—who's he?"

A bit wearily he explained.

Three more days passed and nothing much happened except that the wind died down and became almost imperceptible, and the heat of the two suns could be more strongly felt. Malatesta seemed content to lounge, sleep, smoke and be sarcastic at Johns' expense. His one other diversion was Madge. What irked Johns was that Madge didn't seem to mind. In fact it was becoming plain that she preferred Malatesta's company to his.

On the fourth morning the split became apparent.

"Get the water," said Malatesta, so tersely and contemptuously that Johns grabbed the bucket with the wild idea of swinging it at that bristling contemptuous face. But an anticipatory pain in the nose caused him to throttle the intention.

Instead he gripped the bucket firmly and said, "Isn't it about time we moved to the channel-side? Then we'd have water on tap. Anyway this is an unhealthy spot. That ship's beginning to smell."

"I don't mind the smell," said Malatesta, "and all the water I need is brought to me. I like it here. There's a convenient larder with a lock on the door. There's nothing like that along by the channel."

"There may be all sorts of things better than that if we look around. We've never tried to explore any of this planet. We've scarcely moved from the ship."

"I'll think about it when I have to," said Malatesta. "Not before."

"You're some organizer," said Johns bitterly. "You haven't done a thing."

"You're some writer. You haven't written a line."

"What's the use?" cried Johns. "There's no one left to appreciate it."

"Exactly. Why bother? We all do it to cut a figure, don't we? And if there's no one to applaud us . . ." Malatesta shrugged.

"You don't claim you were an artist?"

**M**ALATESTA regarded Johns with a queer look that combined derision and defense.

"In a way, yes. A better way than yours at that. Art is only expression. You express yourself merely in words. I in action. Try my way. You may get to like it. Begin now—go and get that water."

"To hell with the water!" exploded Johns and flung the bucket away violently. It landed, bounced slowly and rolled across the grass to where Madge sat. She got up and walked across to the two men.

"Don't hit him, Jack," she said.

"I'm not going to," said Malatesta. "It's impossible to teach this guy. He thinks he knows it all. I could see it would come to this. Here's your marching orders, Mr. Know-All. Clear off. Fend for yourself. I'm tired of keeping you. You don't belong in my world. You contribute nothing but belly-aching.

Scram out of here and don't come back."

Johns went a little pale and compressed his lips. "I was going anyway. I can't stomach this emperor and slave routine any more. You're mad and you're best left alone. Come on, Madge, we'll go start our own world."

Madge said, "I'm staying with Jack."

"What?" said Johns and looked appalled. "Why, for heaven's sake? He'll only make a slave out of you. He's impossible to live with. Is it because he's got the food? You don't have to worry about that. There's plenty of rabbits for us and shellfish and water. We might find edible vegetation somewhere."

"It isn't that," cut in Madge, irritably. "I'm staying with Jack because I prefer to. He's got the right ideas. And he's a man."

Malatesta grinned suddenly and put his arm about her waist. Johns felt a queer sharp pain. It was loneliness stabbing at him. It was as if he had been shut out of life, alone, unwanted.

"But—" he said weakly. "But I thought, Madge, you understood."

"You bore me sick," she said. "Yatter-yatter-yatter all the time about things that don't matter any more. Your feet don't touch the ground anywhere. I want a family. I want kids and a man who knows how to bring 'em up. Can you imagine what it'd be like for me with you, doing things your way?"

"I'd be doing all the man's work, while you'd be sitting with the kids, pumping 'em full of poetry and high-falutin' useless stuff, teaching 'em everything but how to look after themselves. That's the only important thing in this world—how to look after yourself. There's no college here to feed you just for lecturing."

"The majority, you see, Johns, is on my side," said Malatesta, his grin broadening.

All at once Johns hated them both with impotent fury. He turned away and walked toward the bucket.

Malatesta's grin vanished. "Leave the bucket!" he snapped. "That's my property. Leave everything except yourself."

Johns bent and picked up the stone shaped like a head.

"I trust you will allow me to take this?" he said with gritty mock-politeness.

"Sure. Start a museum with it. Now git!"

Without a backward glance Johns went. The world was against him. It seemed idiotic to think of one man and one woman as "the world" but factually it was very nearly true.

He had a mad impulse to smash things and there was nothing to smash except the weak bending grass-stalks. Then a "rabbit" crossed his path and instantly he smashed the stone down on top of it and broke the creature's back.

With that killing, the violence ebbed from his system, left him feeling weak and empty. He stared down at the broken mouse-skinned body. It looked pitifully small and lonely.

Unconsciously he identified it with himself and regretted his unplanned action. He might have caught the creature, tamed it, made a friend of it. If anyone ever needed a friend he did.

He picked up the stone thoughtfully and walked on. Presently he stopped, went back and picked up the rabbit. Perhaps a fellow couldn't help relapsing to childhood sometimes and feeling a need for pets and dolls to confide his troubles to. All the same he had to eat. He was on his own now. He must learn to be self-reliant.

He strode on, frowning, the stone in one hand and the rabbit in the other. What was it Emerson had said about self-reliance?

After a time he forgot Emerson, and by practise became expert in using the head as a throwing stone. He could hit a rabbit on the run at ten paces.

## CHAPTER V

### *The Bonfire*

**A** FORTNIGHT later Johns floated on his back in the channel, gazing up into the dark blue sky at the two

small suns and the faint stars. The air was still, the blue water placid. It was quiet and nothing disturbed the peace or threatened to.

And he felt like screaming.

Sometimes in the turmoil of Earth he had dreamed of life on a desert island. Once he had seriously thought of going into a monastery.

"Utter fool!" he said aloud. One thing he had learned—he was not by temperament a hermit. But then, Robinson Crusoe had had his Man Friday, his parrot, his goat. And the monks had fellow monks—and books.

How he longed for books! Even so they were only a substitute for the spoken word. Oh, for someone to speak to—even Malatesta! The man was not unintelligent although he was a brute. If he, Johns, had kept his temper they might have got along after a fashion.

Madge he still thought of with bitterness. She had not even troubled to argue with him. She had listened to him in silence, thinking only of him as a fool. It still hurt. But why should he consider her opinion worth anything? She was the fool, not he.

If only she had not at first seemed so pleasant. And if only she weren't so pretty. . . .

Why should she keep drifting into his mind's eye? Why should he bother to waste another thought on her? She was perfectly matched with Malatesta. A pair of pragmatists. They could, no doubt, raise a family of pragmatists, all of them unaware of the eternal truths because there was no poet to instruct them. A tribe without poetry.

He floated, with the water dulling his ears, quoting aloud the Caliph in *Hassan*. "Ah, if there shall ever arise a nation whose people have forgotten poetry . . . though their city be greater than Babylon of old, though they mine a league into earth or mount to the stars on wings—what of them?"

What had Hassan answered? "They will be a dark patch upon the world."

He tried to recall more of it and was impatient because he could not. He stared up at Earth, thinking of all the

literature that had perished.

Pater had advised the world to "burn with a hard, gemlike flame." Now it was doing it—literally. In Earth's dark history there had been many a "burning of the books." This, the last, could never be surpassed. It was a funeral pyre and no Phoenix would arise from the ashes.

Not unless he did something about it.

The gloom that sat heavily upon him seemed to form itself into as heavy a cloak of responsibility, a garment he had tried to ignore, had tried to pretend was something else.

There had been a good library in the *Nuova Vita*. Much technical stuff but also a fine selection of literature intended for preservation. How much of it had been destroyed in the smash? It was his duty to preserve what was left.

Probably it was the last remnant of culture in the Solar System. So far as he could judge from a fortnight's trudging up and down the channel-side, peering at the distances, there was no sign of any Martian civilization, old or new. Perhaps there had never been one.

He had spent hours examining the stone head and was still undecided about it. Perhaps Malatesta had been right—perhaps he was reading a pattern into the chance work of nature merely because he wanted to see that pattern. On the other hand he might be just as right himself.

Surely, here on Mars, the eternal values reigned and had been glimpsed by some sentient indigenous creatures? This carved head was a sign, a symbol, a reassurance of that. Sometimes he was sure of it and glowed with excitement. At those times life would flood with meaning again.

And then at others the stone became a lifeless lump in his hands, drained of significance, just a gray-black meteorite. Then everything, including himself, was purposeless and of no more account than the dead stone.

No, the only chance was the books. He must get them.

Spurred by the resolution, he swam to the bank.

EVERYTHING looked much as before around the wreck except that at a little distance from the shack a large bright fire burned, sending up a wavering column of black smoke. As he neared it he could see Malatesta sitting on his couch by the fire. There was a heap on the ground at his side and occasionally Malatesta reached out, took something from the heap, threw it into the fire.

Johns looked around hopefully for the small plump figure of Madge. She was nowhere in sight.

When he was close enough to see just what Malatesta was doing he gave something between a shriek and a shout and ran toward the fire.

"Stop that!" he yelled. "Stop it, I say!"

Malatesta looked up at him calmly. "Thought I told you to stay away from here."

"Don't put any more of those books on the fire. I warn you," said Johns, breathlessly.

"You're a bit late. We've had the fire going for over a week."

"You vandal!" Johns dropped his throwing stone and knelt by the fire. It was all burning books, a tangle of charring gilt edges, leather bindings, printed rice paper.

He raked out one that had not properly caught and burned his fingers slapping at the smoldering spine. He dropped the book. It fell open at a page that began complacently, *We can, I believe, take it for granted that in the world of 2200, which we are trying to foresee with our imagination, the present ideological conflicts will have resolved themselves and mankind will have united under a common liberal education. . . .*

In a spasm of bitter disgust he thrust the book back into the flames.

"Make up your mind," said Malatesta, sarcastically.

Johns glared at him. "There is no need for this sort of thing. The grass provides endless fuel. You've only got to pull it up and let it dry. As I've done."

"Ah, but you didn't have any books.

They burn longer than grass and give more heat. I prefer warmth to idealism."

"You'll have to make do with grass in future. I want those books."

Malatesta looked him up and down apprisingly.

"Your fortnight in the wilderness seems to have toughened you up. Nevertheless I could still beat you up with one hand. So quit talking that way."

"It won't always be like this," said Johns between his teeth. "You're too fond of that couch. You're running to fat and self-indulgence. I'm getting stronger."

"Come back when you think you're strong enough," said Malatesta with steel in his voice. "I'll be ready for you. So will my sons—there'll be a lot of 'em and they'll be tough—because I know how to bring 'em up."

"Brought up on your philosophy they'll be a generation of vipers."

Malatesta clenched his fist hard. In the same instant Johns grabbed his throwing stone and stood up. They regarded each other, frozen, tense. Then, slowly, Malatesta let his hand open.

"You still don't like my ideas, huh?"

"They're the quintessence of evil. You could build nothing from them but a soulless hell."

Malatesta gave a short, hard laugh. "That's funny. I've always regarded you as the serpent in this particular Garden of Eden."

"Your mistake. You're the serpent in these parts."

"As I recall it," said Malatesta, "the serpent made Eve eat of the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That's exactly what you tried to do with Madge. Haven't you discovered yet that knowledge and happiness are incompatible? I thought you knew your Greek philosophy. I'd rather be a happy pig than an unhappy Socrates. If we're ignorant, Madge and me, we're happy in our ignorance. You and your Truth!"

He spat and there was a confirmatory hiss from the fire.

He went on, "Why must your sort always interfere, always preach, thinking you know it all and that everyone

else has got to think the same as you? It was fanatics like you who brought our world to destruction. We're satisfied with making our own little truths to suit ourselves—no factory stuff.

"Each man to his own belief and let the other guy alone. But that's not good enough for you. You've got to pretend that yours is the only truth and try to stuff it down our throats. Intolerant fool! What a hell you would make here if you had your way—as you made a hell upon Earth."

"You idiot!" said Johns, fiercely. "Earth went up in flames simply because of millions of people like you making themselves a law unto themselves. You undermined the belief in morals which was our only hope. When that code fell Earth fell."

**MALATESTA** seemed not to have heard him. He had picked up a book from the heap and was regarding its title.

"The Works of John Keats," he said. "Well, well. 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know.' On Earth. But this is *Mara*."

He tossed the book casually into the fire. An instant later the throwing stone crashed against his skull and killed him.

Johns stood over the body, fallen from its couch, not seeing it, not seeing anything but a red mist. When it cleared he was sick and the works of Keats had gone forever.

There came a cry, the thud of a dropped bucket, the wash of water over the grass. Then Madge came running and flung herself on the body, sobbing and crying, "*Jack! Jack!*"

Johns watched her dully for a moment. Then he went off a little way and lay on the grass, face downward, making a pillow of his arms. His head was whirling and he could get nothing straight.

Presently, she came and stood over him.

"You murderer!"

He half-turned his head, and mumbled, "He—" He stopped. What was the

use of trying to explain to her the loss of Keats or the chain of clashes which had led up to that last act of vandalism being the immediate pull on a hair-trigger? There must have been half-a-dozen mixed motives, which he had neither the ability nor the will to sort out now.

"He went for his gun," he said. "It was self-defense."

"That's a lie," said Madge, coldly. "He never had his gun. Because I had it. I've still got it and I'm going to use it. Turn around. Do you want to be shot in the back?"

Slowly he turned over and sat up. Madge's face was pale and tear-stained, but determined, and the automatic that pointed down at him was steady. Over her left shoulder burned the Earth—over her right the Sun.

"Every time I went to get the water, he would give me the gun—in case I met you and you tried anything. He didn't care about himself. He could have killed you with one hand."

"I guess he told you that himself," murmured Johns, wearily. "Okay, go ahead if you believe you ought to. I give up. Whatever you believe you're as right as I am. When I am gone you will always be wholly and absolutely right—until you die."

The gun began to tremble a little.

"I loved him," she said. "He was rough but—I loved that man. Now you've killed him. I'm going to kill you. That's justice."

"If you think so. But that's an abstract he didn't believe in, of course. If you kill me, thinking that, I win. But is your motive really justice? It might be revenge—or anger at being deprived of his attentions—and his children. Don't give it a name. Just act how you feel—that was his philosophy and yours. I'm not afraid. What have I to live for?"

"You killed him because you wanted me, didn't you?" she said.

"If you think so. What does it matter now? Shoot—get it over with."

"*Oh!*" she said, suddenly, and threw the gun away and burst into tears. "I don't want to be alone!" she sobbed.



"And I want so to have children."

He stared at her in amazement. Then he got up and took hold of her, swinging her half-around. He kissed her and she clung to him.

"Don't leave me alone!" she cried. "Don't ever leave me alone!"

He held her, tightening his grip. "It's all right, Madge. We'll keep together. We're all that are left—anywhere."

Over her shoulder he saw their united shadows slanting across the grass in a long V. Only two of them left but between them they had four shadows.

It was odd but it was Malatesta's materialistic philosophy, adopted by Madge, that had now saved his life. Madge had let him live only because she needed him, because of the practical outcome. If he had succeeded in imbuing her with his abstract ideals he would be as dead as Malatesta.

Had he been wrong? Would he ever really know?

Was there something symbolic in the double shadows or was he reading patterns into things again? Here a man cast one shadow by the light of the sinful suicidal Earth, another by the light of the life-giving Sun. Wherever you stood you could not escape the duality.

So long as there were the two sources you were bound to be affected by them both. You could not choose to stand only in the light of one.

"We are what we are according to our lights," he said, under his breath. Madge pressed herself even closer to him.

IT was some time later that he discovered that, though Malatesta's skull had been split open, it had been sufficiently hard to do the same to the missile which had struck it. The stone head was gaping apart, showing its own brain.

The cells of the brain were tight-packed in the cavity—thousands of

rolls of incredibly thin but tough metal tape, scarcely an eighth of an inch wide. He could just make out some of the little colored pictures on them. To those who had made them they must have been great banners, blazoning forth the history and knowledge of their race.

"Think of it, Madge!" he said, excitedly. "Of all the incredible luck! To stumble like this on the records they preserved for posterity. It was a head—humanoid, too. I wonder where the body is? We must look for it."

"There may be lots of 'em around," she said. "Our people were always doing that sort of thing, weren't they?"

"Who'd have thought the Martians were such tiny folk!" he said. "There was I, carrying this in my hand, scanning the horizons for man-sized relics. There must be plenty of traces but we'll have to look under the grass, not over it."

"Uh-huh," she said, more concerned with the fire, which was dying down just as the rabbit-stew was nearing the boil. She reached for a book and gave it to him to censor.

He glanced at it absently:

"Lord, no, not that one! We'll need it when we get down to work, making our instruments."

He laid *Microscopy and Optical Systems* on the grass beside him.

She handed him another. He looked at it, and smiled. "We'll need that, too." He laid *Obstetrics* on top of the other book.

Patiently she held up another for his inspection.

"Brrr!" he said. "Burn that."

She poked *Income Tax Accountancy* carefully under the pot and the flames gathered life. She peeped into the pot and was satisfied with what she saw. The stew was thickening nicely and they would have a rich supper. It seemed just about the most important thing in life to her at that moment.