

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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the
white
rain
came

by . . . Jacques Jean Ferrat

There was need on Mars for folly half sublime and a man's delight in recklessness. But a woman's steadfast gifts were needed more.

HAD LYNNE FENLAY been less proud, she would have wept, openly and unashamedly. Standing before the altar, directly in back of her twin, Revere Fenlay, and his bride, Lao Mei-O'Conneli, she felt acutely homesick for Earth. Intellectually, of course, she understood and accepted the need for multiple marriages on Mars. But she could not evade a sense of emotional outrage at the assembly-line method of marriage which circumstances had made mandatory on the alien planet that was now her home.

The marrying officer, who trebled in brass as a circuit judge and an electronics expert on the thinly settled Red Planet, wore only a shabby-looking, round-cornered apron. Although it bore the twin-worlds insignia, emblem of his high office, it was tucked with a careless lack of dignity into the top of his well-worn clout, and everyone could see that one of the tie-strings was missing.

A bald-headed little man with an incipient paunch and knobby knees, he intoned the brief ceremony from

Do you remember Jacques Jean Ferrat's NIGHTMARE TOWER? We're sure you do if we had the privilege of numbering you among our earliest readers, for the story appeared in the very first issue of FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, and its swift, unusual plot and brilliant characterization were so astonishingly vital as to make it quite unforgettable. Since then demands for a sequel have been so insistent that when Mr. Ferrat walked into our office with this exciting lead novelette in his briefcase our joy was unconfined.

rote, never glancing either at the book in his right hand, or at the faces of the four couples standing directly in front of him.

" . . . and to be mutually faithful during the period of enforced separation, to work honorably for one another and for the planet upon their reunion, to provide a home for the sons and daughters of their union. For these purposes, by the virtue of the power embodied in my . . ."

He mumbled on, running the words together in his haste to conclude the ceremony which would unite the four couples from far Barkutburg, and enable him to get on with the marriages from New Walla Walla, Cathayville, Zuleika and the other major settlements of Mars. A few kilometers away, a spaceship was waiting to take the brides of the Red Planet home to Earth to bear their children—a function which was not possible of fulfillment in the light gravity of Mars.

All of the brides were pregnant. In tacit accord with the dictates of expediency in frontier settlements all through man's history on Earth and, more lately, on Mars, a marriage was not a marriage until offspring were on the way. When a couple decided to mate, it was only necessary for them to sign a register and share quarters as provisional husband and wife. The arrangement would remain in force as long as it gave satisfaction to both parties. If it failed divorce

became merely a matter of signing another registry.

But once a child had been conceived, casualness vanished, for the bringing of Martian children back to Mars was a major factor in the effort to populate the planet. Such children were its hope, its future, against the time when man should have conquered his new environment, and child-bearing no longer necessitated a hasty return to Earth.

For the rest, Mars was populated by expert technicians, officials and the halves of genetically induced identical twins—of which Lynne and Revere Fenlay were unusually gifted examples. The purpose of this plan was to give the new planet Earth's hereditary best without stripping the home planet of its most promising young folk. One twin, conditioned for Earth, stayed at home—the other, carefully trained from infancy to endure and triumph over the hardships of life on the Red Planet, went to Mars.

Lynne was one of the few Earth-trained twins ever sent to Mars to join her brother. Her telepathic genius, of a range and sensitivity almost unknown on the home planet, with its dense atmosphere and other inhibiting factors, had been urgently needed in a desperate crisis when the telepathic lateral communications of Mars had been threatened with destruction by strange electronically-revivified survivals of the original Martians. She had been needed, and once the crisis had been conquered, she had

stayed on to aid in new telepathic research. She had stayed on, and now—she was rebellious and homesick.

There was a gaunt, stripped-down, machine-shop look to the great hall. In New Samarkand, the planetary capital where the ceremonies were being conducted, the established ritual never varied. The marrying officer stood on a low platform, and at his back rose a portable altar surmounted by the symbol of universal faith. This consisted of a cross for Christianity, in a circle representing the "wheel of life" religions, and outside its circumference smaller crosses with their ends bent at right angles to represent the symbol of still older faiths.

It had been battered by constant usage, and one of the tips was rudely broken off. Recalling the symbolic beauty of the ritual that still enhanced marriage ceremonies on Earth, and contrasting it with the crude matter-of-factness of Martian multiple weddings Lynne wished, and not for the first time, that she had not permitted Rolf Marcein to talk her into coming to Mars.

She cast a quick sidelong glance at Rolf. He stood almost directly behind the second bride, a lean, sun-bronzed figure towering over the other guests, a sensually suggestive smile on his lips which was anything but reassuring. He winked as he returned her glance. Even less reassuring was her certain knowledge that Rolf was drunk. The

monthly, multiple marriages on Mars accompanied as they were by the prospects of incipient parentage and immediate long separation, had degenerated into one big farewell carnival.

This one, as far as Lynne was concerned, had begun three Martian days earlier when the settlers of the Barkutburg station—the residence of Lao, Revere and, until recently, of Lynne—had thrown a thirty-six hour wingding for the departing bride. Lynne had attended, of course, out of devotion to her twin and his wife. But since her neuro-emotional makeup was too fine-tuned to enable her to enjoy alcohol in quantity, she had been something of a spectre at the feast.

The journey to New Samarkand had been a brief interlude between binges, followed by another revel on the eve of the official wedding. This time, Rolf had been on hand and, under his prompting, Lynne had taken a little too much and was suffering the inevitable after-effects. Rolf, apparently, was just getting up a full head of steam. She wondered if the travesty of a ceremony was ever going to end.

" . . . and so I now pronounce you men and wives," the marrying officer finally finished. Ushers hastily escorted the couples and their attendants to a vestry, where the record books were signed, while another group of brides, grooms and attendants, came forward to be joined in wedlock.

Ceremony, Lynne thought, *by*

courtesy only. Travesty would have been a far more accurate term. She glanced at Rolf again as he signed his name with a flourish in the book, wondering what *her* wedding would be like—if she ever married. At the moment, the idea was thoroughly repugnant to her.

"Come on, *vinral*," said Rolf, using the Martian term of endearment as he gathered her in with his huge left hand. "Sign here—and then over here, in this book. *Crebut*, I thought old Bretinslov would never finish that blah-blah of his."

Signing dutifully, Lynne said, "That blah-blah, as you call it, legalizes the serious vows of a marriage ceremony." It seemed a little incredible to her that she should find herself defending a ritual which she had decried mentally only moments before. But Rolf's attitude somehow infuriated her.

Rolf, whose eyes seemed pinker and foggier than usual, ran his tongue between his teeth and said, "Come on, *vinral*, my mouth is drier than desert dust. Let's get over to the reception room and kiss the brides and get a drink. They're serving some of the new champagne-lichenwasser the bio lab has synthesized, to its everlasting credit and glory."

Lynne, unable to adjust herself to the recklessly riotous spirit of Mars on a binge, said, "Rolf, dear, don't you think you've had enough? After all, there's a limit to—"

"Enough?" Rolf interrupted her, with an incredulous grimace.

"Lynne, this party's just getting started. After we see off the brides, we're going to settle down to some real drinking." So saying, he pinched her, hard, where men have pinched women since time immemorial.

To her horror, she found herself on the verge of tears. She was glad she could cover her weakness by struggling with an outward display of assurance into the aluminum-fabric coverall that was uniform protection against the chill Martian outdoors, and the oxy-respirator worn for occasional revivifying whiffs against the thinness of the atmosphere.

She sat on somebody's lap, securely wedged with the others into a land-runner for the half-kilometer trip to the reception hall. Around her, Rolf and the rest, joined in the rousing, ribald first chorus of *The Farmer's Martian Daughter*, making her head ring with a volume of sound which was almost unbearable inside such a confined space. At that moment, she hated them all.

Nor was her dislike merely a matter of personal pique. She had felt the malaise for some time, felt it so gradually, so far below the level of her conscious mind, that she had been unaware of its creeping progress. Like the *ping* of an antique radar, a subconscious thought from the mind of her twin, Revere Fenlay, registered. He was thinking of his bride, Lao Mei-O'Connell, and his thought ran,

I'm glad she's going to be away from Mars for the next ten months. There's bound to be trouble and I don't want her in danger—especially while she's carrying our child.

Lynne stifled an impulse to probe Revere's mind with a telepathic inquiry as to the nature of the danger. She decided there would be time for that after Lao Fenlay and the other brides of the season were safely on their way to the home planet. But with awareness of Revere's awareness, Lynne realized that some of her unhappiness was rooted not in homesickness but in unaccepted telepathic fears of her own—fears whose nature she could not pin down.

She probed Rolf's mind carelessly and received a wholeheartedly carnal picture of Rolf and herself that caused her to drop that line of inquiry instantly. She was not in the mood for—what did he call it?—such *ferkab* canoodling. At the moment she hated the man—and not the least of her hatred's causes lay in the very inevitability of her ultimate surrender to him. The *marlet*.

Watch your language, you ZWIRCHY VINRAL," came his answering thought. Lynne sealed her mind as tightly as her lips the rest of the way to the reception hall.

Here, beneath a girdered ceiling adorned with the stunted evergreens grown by Earthmen on Mars, a table had been set up for the marriage parties of each city, according to tradition. Accustomed

to the fabricated foods of Earth, Lynne was astonished at the lavish display of barbecued boar, Mars-apples and other delicacies, including plump forty-pound capon-turkeys, the pride of the husbandry labs.

She told herself she was not hungry. But she ate notwithstanding—while Rolf and the other men went right on drinking. Thanks to the small, closely interrelated population of the Red Planet, there was much intermingling of the groups, and Lynne, to her surprise, found herself facing a grinning, strapping, dark-skinned girl who said, "Welcome, Lynne Fenlay. Try some of the food at our table."

It was the young animal husbandry girl — Joanna Wheatley — who had shared a cabin with her on the spaceship during the journey from Earth the year before. Joanna seemed to have entered into the festivities with all the vitality of her youth and her uninhibited mixture of Caucasian, Oriental and Hamitic blood strains. But when Lynne asked her how her work was going, Joanna's face fell.

"I don't like it," she said. "We must irrigate to support any sort of animal life, and irrigation is draining the moisture from the atmosphere table faster than we can create it. But you must know the problem, Lynne. It's the *farbisch* curse of all Mars."

"I know," said Lynne, trying to encourage the girl. "But one of these days we'll have it licked and,

if I know farmers, you'll all be complaining because too much rain is spoiling the crops."

Joanna failed to smile. She said, "I'd give my right arm for that day to come tomorrow. If we hadn't been able to install a transmuter to feed a small pond recently, our cattle would be dead. And our farm—Woomera Station—has the most fertile soil on Mars. Right next door, it's so radioactive we've had to fence it off."

"Radioactive?" said Lynne, wondering why she hadn't heard of such a deposit.

"Maybe that's not the exact word," said Joanna. "*Crebut*, I'm no geologist—I'm in husbandry. But it has remarkable health-giving qualities—and some deadly ones as well. Still, it's not solving the moisture problem for us."

"You really feel it's serious?" asked Lynne, sensing the deep concern in the girl's mind, the fright.

"Unless some new factor can be found that will increase moisture, it will defeat us," said Joanna solemnly. Then, actually shaking herself out of her despondency, the dark girl went on, "But this is not the time for care. My best friend has just married and will soon be off for Earth to have her baby. You come and see our farm as soon as you can, will you, Lynne? I think you'd be interested."

"I know I shall be," Lynne said, pressing the girl's hand. "As soon as I can."

She joined Joanna in a toast to

her friend and groom, then brought the girl to the Barkutburg table to meet Revere, Lao Mei-O'Connell and Rolf.

Rolf leered at Joanna and said, "I'll be out to see you the first time Lynne's not looking."

And Joanna threw back her head and laughed, revealing twin rows of flashing white teeth.

Lynne knew the amorously mocking banter was harmless enough in itself. Rolf worked tirelessly, conscientiously for months on end, and surely he had a right to make love lightly with his eyes. But her Earth indoctrination would not permit her to approve of such uninhibited revelry as was the custom on Mars when the bars were let down. She thought of Rolf's thousand women subordinates in his post as Communications Coordinator, and wondered how many of them. . . .

Watch yourself, VINRAL, came his mocking thought.

Lynne felt herself blush. She turned away and took a beaker of lichenwasser and downed it quickly. But it didn't intoxicate her—it merely increased her physical discomfort and spiritual irritation. She said farewell to Revere's bride, elected leader of the Barkutburg center, and then, when the others took off, roistering, for the spaceport, she stayed behind in the cloakroom. Though it was what she wanted, her wretchedness was not lessened by the fact that apparently no one missed her. Especially Rolf . . .

She decided to return to Nampura Depot alone, to reassure her ego by being of some practical use to somebody. It was, she thought miserably, beginning to look as if the only real happiness and fulfillment she was ever to achieve lay in her work alone. The growth of her telepathic talent had been responsible for the breakup not only of her engagement to a young man on Earth, but for the loss of her job as coordinating member of one of the highly specialized human brain-teams that, operating in conjunction with electronic computers, solved the more difficult and intricate material and mechanical problems of the mother planet.

It had been her job, as coordinator, to obtain problem solutions that humanized and made realistic the sometimes over-abstruse answers that emanated from the machines, in response to the data fed into them by her human teammates. As her telepathic talent improved, her answers had become too perfect, which meant she had fallen into rapport with the computer rather than the human elements of the team—a psychological maladroitness which had led to her dismissal. It was a desperate need for telepaths on Mars that had brought her to the Red Planet.

Climbing aboard one of the bi-hourly transports for Nampura Depot, Lynne faced the fact that her entire life, up to her transfer to Mars, had been planned and lived with the single aim of enabling her

to adjust to the manners and mores of a densely populated, highly civilized, almost effete Earth. On Mars, with its vast open spaces and free-wheeling pioneer anarchy and virility, she was a misfit.

As the transport jetted upward through the paper-thin atmosphere, soaring above the miracle medley of towering, lacy, ancient Martian ruins and rough, utilitarian Earthman-built structures alongside the old canal, Lynne wondered unhappily what she was going to do about Rolf.

She adored his every pore, his every muscle, but whether she could long endure the strain of living with him in Martian wedlock was something else again. There was a wild, undisciplined streak in Rolf that violated her ultra-civilized Earth-bred restraint. It could be exciting—marriage to Rolf—but it would be distasteful, too.

Lynne opened her mind to exchange thoughts with him when another, more powerful, more urgent message reached her from the teleteam on duty at Nampura Depot. Its combination of two telepathic minds in unison was overpowering. It said, *we're in touch, we've finally found it, we're about to make contact—*

Then came a brain-wrenching flash, and—nothing at all.

II

Something had happened at Nampura Depot and the resultant con-

fusion was frightening. Lynne tried vainly to sort out the welter of disorganized and often completely unintelligible thoughts that radiated from the recently set-up telepathic laboratory of Mars. The team on duty—plump, delicate Rana Spinelli and lanky, awkward Juan Olsen—had been stricken from some mysterious source. Juan was dead, Rana mentally erased by whatever had happened. That much a suddenly depersonalized Lynne Fenlay clearly understood.

But the rest was telepathic bedlam. ". . . *simply working on Problem Outpost . . . and I had a date after dinner with Juan . . . as if he'd been mashed flat . . . can't understand how it happened . . . Rana's not breathing . . . yes, but she's in coma—almost catatonic . . . after lunch, she told me she and Juan were going to try . . . and Rolf Marcein would be at the weddings . . . Fenlay, too, and his sister . . . we've got to . . .*"

The Nampura Depot transport hit an atmospheric dead spot and the messages faded out. In her anxiety to join her fellow-telepaths and help them in whatever emergency had arisen, Lynne's malaise, her revulsion toward Rolf in his cups, vanished. She was needed—and that was all that mattered at the moment.

The transport moved swiftly toward the reddish sun, enlarged almost to Earth-size as it sank toward the western horizon. Below, the red-and-green desolation that

was most of Mars seemed to stretch endlessly toward the horizon. A vast ruined city, running parallel for twenty-seven miles with the left bank of one of the great dry canals, lifted its filigree spires above the purple dusk to trace patterns of breathtaking beauty in the sunset. This was Mars, a vast mausoleum stirring faintly with new raw life breathed into it by the colonists from Earth.

Moving uneasily in her seat as she smoked a cigarette of excellent canalside leaf, Lynne felt her homesickness vanish. This was the real world, the real job—restoring to life a long-dead world. Compared to it the constricted existence of overcrowded, static Earth seemed artificial, even a trifle inhuman.

She was glad Rolf had let himself go at the weddings. At least he had had more to drink and had concealed it better than anyone else at the ceremony. If you lived as hard as Rolf and the other Martians lived—as they had to live to make headway against the cruel remorseless environment—you had a right to get drunk on occasion, she told herself vehemently. Cola-fizzes were for children, or the puling neurotics of Earth. Lynne slipped a coin into the dispenser-slot by her seat, and drank the cup of lichen-water she received in return. This time, she felt no discomfort—the Martian distillation sang its happy song through her veins.

Mars, she thought, silently toasting the Red Planet, you may have

destroyed your own species, but you won't destroy us!

Sobering a little, Lynne considered the fact that Mars had not totally destroyed all native forms of existence. Outside of the lichens and other flora, there were still the ugly czanworms that burrowed ceaselessly beneath the planet's arid surface and were the despair of cable layers.

And there had been the disembodied descendants of the aboriginal subject species which, revived by the Earthmen's use of the electricity upon which they thrived, had for decades made open-circuit electronic communication impossible, and had then sought possession of the telepaths with which the colonists had supplanted mechanical means of talking over long distances around the Red Planet's surface.

Might there not be still other life-forms, unseeable, unapproachable by Earthmen, surviving on Mars? That was one of the problems Nampura Depot T-teams were trying to solve. Had Spinelli-Olsen found something to their sorrow? Had they left records? Probably not. Lynne cursed the competitive instinct that flourished on Mars and, at times, made the cooperative sharing of knowledge so difficult.

Yes, there were problems. She recalled, somberly, what Joanna had told her about the necessity of improving irrigation methods if domestic animal life was to be maintained and developed. There were

the black, short-tusked boars, of course—fiftieth-generation descendants of pigs imported by Earthmen, who had, as always, adapted themselves to their environment and run wild.

But you couldn't live on pork alone. Lynne looked into the sunset and, by its soft light, at the endless aridity around her. Until the atmosphere was re-thickened — it would take many decades and a miracle of human accomplishment through slow mechanical processes—there could be no rain on Mars. And until there was rain there could be no regular plant-growth cycle with its symbiotic animal relationships.

If the miniscule amount of animal husbandry on Mars used up the atmosphere too rapidly, the entire Earth settlement project, which already numbered almost a million human beings, would be imperilled. You couldn't feed a million men and women on what could be brought from the home planet in space cargo vessels. But how could you get rain when there was no moisture in the atmosphere, almost no atmosphere to moisten?

It was, Lynne decided, the most frighteningly disheartening of vicious cycles.

The ship came out of the atmospheric dead spot and the fear and confusion of Nampura Depot encroached alarmingly on Lynne's thoughts again. So difficult was it to follow the babel of minds that she gave up and waited impatiently

while the transport described its slow downward parabola to come to rest, in the violet dusk, on the flare-lit airfield of the Depot. She thanked the captain for his courtesy and hopped a supply truck to the Depot proper.

As the newest of official structures built by Earthmen on Mars, the Depot represented the most advanced attempts to develop an architectural blend between terrestrial utilitarianism and the eclectic delicacy of ancient Martian building wizardry. In daylight, it looked to Lynne like a Quonset hut with flying buttresses. She was grateful for the darkness, as the supply truck rolled up to its service gate.

Tony Willis, the non-telepathic, stout, bespectacled communications wizard who served as Depot Seneschal, greeted Lynne with a hug and a "*Crebut*, I'm glad you're here, angel. Something pretty ugly has happened. Where's Rolf?"

"Something happened to him, too—he got drunk at the weddings," said Lynne, stepping out of her coverall. "But I'd like to know just how serious the situation here is, Tony. I got some pretty mixed-up flashes on the transport. Am I right in believing that poor Juan is dead—and Rana still unconscious."

"Total blackout," said Willis grimly, escorting her to the cubicle that served as his office, a windowless, brightly-lighted room decorated with the wiry, brown-skinned maidens that passed as pinup girls

on Mars. Seated behind a desk across from her, he said, "You know I'm a mess on this TP stuff. But Juan and Rana were on to something. They've been thick as the proverbial thieves, waiting for you and Rolf to get away so they could do some experimenting on their own. Then, about an hour ago—" He looked at her, and his lips tightened—"Juan was flattened as if a 'dozer had passed over him and Rana was blasted against the wall of the Rec Room and hasn't come out of it since."

"An explosion?" Lynne asked swiftly, anxiously.

Tony Willis shook his sandy head. "Not the way you think," he told her. "Oh, there was an explosion, all right. It blew the Rec Room all to hell and gone. *But it had no mechanical origin!*"

Somehow, in his grimness, tubby Tony looked gaunt. Lynne probed his mind swiftly, and got a vivid picture of the shattered room, of Rana lying crumpled at the foot of a wall, and—she shuddered and clenched her fists tightly as the vision became almost unendurable. She asked, "Any records, Tony?"

He shrugged his shoulders in despair, and thrust a folder toward her. It contained a single sheet of paper on which Rana had drawn a crude self-portrait, depicting her face in caricature, with her tongue out and her eyes crossed. Beneath it she had scrawled, *This is what you get for snooping.*

Silently cursing the Hindu-Italian

girl's immaturity, Lynne sat frowning, elbows on Tony's desk, trying to recall what she could of Problem Outpost and the role of the Spinnelli-Olsen team in the project. The concept of telepathy actually bringing physical destruction was so shocking that she found it kept impinging on her thoughts, and she was forced to make three false starts before she began to make any sort of orderly progress on the problem.

Nampura Depot was primarily a research unit. When the abolishment of the electrophagic aborigines released Martian telepaths from their jobs as planetary communicators, Rolf and other top-level Martian authorities had decided to set up the Depot to enable TP workers to develop their gifts, individually and collectively, in an effort to discover new and advanced uses for their talents.

Thanks to her work as a brain-team coordinator on Earth, Lynne had become almost indispensable to the project. For part of her education had entailed a thorough grounding in the theory of relays and relay hookup alignments which was the basis of all computer-work on the mother planet. Every computer was a relay of calculators, aligned according to their nature in relation to the problem which was to be solved. It was the same with the human teams, or relays, which supplemented and complemented the work of the computers on Earth.

On Mars, where heavy and complex computer machinery was as rare as it was unneeded, Lynne's training and knowledge had proved invaluable. As Rolf had told her, shortly after the project was commenced, "Sure, we're all bright enough here. We *farbly* well have to be. But you have the teamwork integration picture imbedded in that *zwirchy* little head of yours. You can put two and two together and get ninety."

The trouble was, she had been putting two and two together by testing first this pair, then that, in every conceivable combination of telepathic teamwork, and she had been getting precisely nowhere.

For a while, it had seemed exciting to be able, working in proper tandem, to receive and probe minds on Earth, some forty million miles away. But when Lynne discovered that many of her teams were amusing themselves by tapping the pleasure-houses for their own ribald entertainment, she had asked Rolf to put a stop to that branch of the project—although she suspected the ban was far from totally effective.

She had, gradually, come to type telepaths much as blood donors had once been typed on the mother planet. There were three basic types of telepaths: A—those who could *receive* mental messages as delivered from all directions and distances, B—those who could not only *receive* but grade the thoughts that came to them directionally and tune in or out selected thought waves as

they chose, and, C—those who were capable of *projecting* their own thoughts and impulses into the minds of others and possessed as well the capabilities of groups A and B.

A types were almost a norm on Mars, Lynne had learned. In the sympathetic environment of the Red Planet, latent telepathy was at least faintly active in eight out of ten Earthfolk. The B's were less common—only about three in a thousand Martians could *tune* the messages their minds received. And only one in a hundred thousand was a C type.

All in all, there were two hundred and seventeen telepaths at the Depot—two hundred and sixteen now that Juan Olsen was dead—and the variations among them was what complicated the problem. Curiously enough, the A's could *receive* from the greatest distances, even though they couldn't *tune* the messages unaided. But a B, linked with an A, could tune in from a further distance than a B working alone. Similarly, a C lined up with an A, could broadcast almost infinitely. On record was one contact with a spaceship far out beyond Pluto's orbit.

But human contacts were not the main purpose of the Depot. What the investigators were seeking was contact with alien life-forms, either on, or beyond Mars. If telepaths had been able to make contact with the aborigines that had so nearly destroyed them, it seemed reason-

able to suppose that they should be able to make contact with other alien intellects.

Apparently, judging by what had happened, they had done so. But what monstrous life-form had they contacted—and where was it located?

For more than a Martian month, Lynne had been aware of a force—strangely stimulating—lurking just beyond range of her probing. She had, on two occasions, felt a sudden surge of power while working with Revere or one of the others, a power that flared up and faded quickly, leaving irritation in its wake.

There had been a restlessness in the Depot atmosphere, a restlessness that had shown itself in such lapses as poor Rana's childish drawing in the folio. Other C types had reverted now and then to basic nature—to ill-temper, to ridiculous practical jokes, to fits of melancholy, even to overindulgence in lichenwasser.

"Angel, how about a drink? You've been sitting in a brown study for two hours now—and the color scheme of this room is baby-blue." It was Tony, bless him, bringing her out of it.

Involuntarily Lynne began to shake her head in refusal, telling herself that Tony had chosen a very poor time to urge indulgence in lichenwasser. Then it occurred to her that her recent primness might have had something to do with the mysterious restlessness that seemed

to be affecting all the members of the Depot.

She said, "All right, Tony," and drained the plastic tumbler. With the warmth of the drink she felt a soaring triumph. She was sure now that she had solved the problem of what was happening to the personalities of Nampura Depot. They *were* in contact with some alien intellect, or mind, or personal force that reduced their complex human impulses to a few basic impulses and to basic impulse fulfillment. She said, "Tony, have you noticed anything peculiar going on around the Depot the last few weeks?"

He thought it over, then nodded. "Two or three times I considered inveigling you into the supply room and making violent love to you, Lynne. I've had the impulse ever since I first met you at the *Now* Samarkand Spaceport. But, *Crehut*, it was never like this."

"Give me another," said Lynne, holding out her tumbler. "I forgive you for your candor. We should have kept behavior charts on everybody here, instead of just on the experiments. You'd better get psycho on it tomorrow, Tony. I've a feeling we're in contact with that alien mind-force we've been looking for, and that it's making like a psychological poltergeist."

"It's just barely possible." Tony looked thoughtful behind his spectacles. Then he said, "But if you're right, and if Juan and Rana actually found it, *it can kill.*"

Lynne looked somberly at the lichenwasser in her plastic tumbler. Then she said, "Yes, it can kill," and drained it.

III

Lynne and Tony Willis were still discussing the problem when a somewhat haggard Rolf Marcein came in. Characteristically, he gave them no more than a perfunctory personal greeting. "I hopped the first transport after I got the flash, Tony. Lynne, what have you managed to find out about this ghastly mess?"

"Nothing for the record yet," Lynne told him, admiring and detesting simultaneously Rolf's ability to dismiss all other relationships when a work problem arose. "But I've got a pattern of sorts."

"All right. Let's hear it."

She went on to tell him, as concisely as she could, what she had figured out since her arrival. Rolf listened attentively, without comment, until she had finished. Then he frowned.

"Tony, tell operations to set up the necro-recorder with the new psycho-muffler attached," he said quietly. "We're going to have to probe Rana's mind while she's still in shock. Otherwise, some of these Navajos will be trying their own *farbish* experiments—and we may have a lot more corpses to worry about, or something even worse."

"Sure you feel up to it, chief?" Tony asked as he flipped a switch

on his desk, preparatory to giving the orders.

Rolf grunted and rubbed a hand across his brow. Lynne offered him a tumbler of lichenwasser, but he shuddered and turned away from her.

"You *marlet!*" he said rudely. "Can't you be serious for once?"

Lynne repressed a smile. She had not had a hangover since one school holiday, when she had consumed an entire bottle of *crème de menthe* alone in a hotel room on Earth—but thanks to their telepathic rapport she knew how Rolf felt. Furthermore, in view of her discovery, she understood what had happened to make him so boisterously uninhibited of late, just as she understood her own increased primness. Both of them had been in telepathic relay contact with the mysterious new entity that had caused the restlessness at Nampura Depot and, ultimately, had killed Juan Olsen.

Although Lynne had been in spasmodic telepathic touch with her twin brother, Revere, when the necro-recorder was used on him, shortly after her arrival on Mars, it was the first time she had been present at an actual demonstration of the dangerous instrument that had, until the psycho-muffler was discovered, either killed or driven permanently insane the persons on whom it had been employed.

Its original purpose had been to present visualization, as on an old-fashioned colored television screen,

of the thoughts of a man or woman about to die—to reveal them and make it possible to record them. In bygone years it had been a police-force stand-by, one of the miracle gadgets that had all but wiped out crime on Earth and Mars.

She sat in a chair against a wall of the infirmary operating room, while the unconscious Indo-Italian was wheeled in on an operating wagon, her dusky face ash-white above the cloth that covered the pronounced curves of her tiny body. She watched while Rolf, abetted by the Depot practitioner, deftly applied the electrodes behind the girl's ears, just over the sensitive mastoid areas, and then went to the grid-screen tuner and said to the practitioner, "Ready, Hambri?"

"Ready, Rolf," said the practitioner quietly. "Try to tune fast. This girl is in a dangerous state of shock and we don't want to expose her to any needless added risks."

"We don't want to—but we have to," said Rolf grimly. Watching him, Lynne felt her fingernails dig into the palms of her hands. She was in perfect telepathic rapport with him and understood the tension, the very real emotional concern and sense of responsibility toward the girl that underlay his ruthlessness. And she knew she had never before understood or loved him so deeply and well.

Almost before she had savored the thought, the grid-screen was flashing a kaleidoscope of wild color. Purples, deep reds, turquoise

blues, ivory, yellows, rolled aimlessly around the screen, superseding one another in erratic sequence. Rolf cursed and worked with the tuner but only the vaguest shapes emerged. Lynne felt herself grow taut.

Then, suddenly, she was in touch not only with Rolf but with the buried thoughts in the unconscious girl's mind, as released through the necro-recorder. Inexplicably, she understood the machine itself. She flashed a *steady the horizontal—give the vertical another turn*, and was rewarded when Rolf flashed her a silent *thanks*, VINRAL in return. Quickly he obeyed her thought-order and the screen flickered to clarity.

There were the two of them—Rana and Juan Olsen, sitting side by side, working in telepathic tandem in the blasted Rec Room. She felt the urgent excitement that had gripped them course through her. The room faded and again there was confusion—but this time it was in Rana's and Juan's thoughts, rather than in the machine.

There were pictures of love-making, of birth, of pain, of spiritual worship of a God that blurred between a celestial image and that of an eight-armed Hindu God. It was amazing, Lynne thought vaguely, how the supposedly long-buried religious symbols survived, leaving a technically enlightened humanity chained to the creations of its own early priesthoods. She felt a surge of such primitive belief herself.

They were in touch with something, through the mind of the unconscious girl, but what? Lynne glanced at Rolf, and saw that beads of sweat were studding his brow as he pondered the visual-grid. Then, suddenly, they were following the trail of a skyrocket through space—a rocket that sped endlessly out against the dusty brilliance of the Milky Way to a spot on a suddenly expanding globe, whose sky was blazoned with the bulk of a monstrous cloudy planet, like an immense bladder that filled the very heavens themselves.

Lynne was about to cry out with fear when she saw the immense red lozenge high up on the curve of the huge world and heard herself cry aloud, "*Jupiter!* It comes from one of the moons of Jupiter!"

"Callisto," said Rolf. The screen went blank and he flicked it off. Moments later, the girl was wheeled from the room by an anxious orderly, with the practitioner in watchful attendance. Rolf put the necro-recorder on *rerun* and played it back. When it was finished, he turned to Lynne and said, "*Vinral*, think you can be packed in an hour? We're going out there and run this down."

Lynne was horrified. She cried, "But, Rolf, darling—we can't go to Callisto. All traffic to the Jovian moons is strictly under Earth Interplanetary Administration. They aren't open to other traffic yet."

"*Ferkab* the E.I.A.," said Rolf rudely. His dark eyes blazed as

they glared at her. "We're going out there. At any rate, *I* am. If you think I'm going to sit around and wait while a lot of red tape is unwound and maybe some more of us get killed, you're full of *putt*."

Lynne's own reaction told the story. Even by coming in second-hand contact with the alien mind, they were reverting to their inner natures. She had turned into the convention-bound *E a r t h w o m a n* while Rolf, more than ever, was the determinedly reckless authority-hating man of Mars. But even awareness of the cause of their behavior was of little help.

She forced herself to say, "Very well, Rolf, I'll go to Callisto with you, but not until we're provisionally married."

Rolf said, "*Crehut, vinral*, how simple can you get? I've got news for you. We were married this afternoon at the weddings, when I had you sign the second book. Remember?" And, when she stared at him, stunned, "What did you think we were doing — playing moon-snaffle?"

Lynne felt as if she had been turned into some gelatinous substance, and dipped in a quick-freeze. She could barely manage to telepathize, much less speak. She thought, *And I suppose you think that makes everything intimately uninhibited between us?*

He was still playing the insensitive goon as he flashed back, *Well, it certainly makes everything legal.*

Lynne's chill melted in the sud-

den heat of her anger. She sent a bludgeoning stream of fierce thoughts at him, attacking his crude concept of marriage, the travesty of the entire Martian mating system, the antique crudity of the accompanying drunken parties, overwhelming his desperate efforts to temper her wrath.

It was a great fight while it lasted—but it didn't last long. Rolf simply lifted Lynne off her feet with one arm, pinioning her while he sealed her mouth with the other. "Okay—but shut up, little wife," he said, "or I'll take off on my own. And you wouldn't want that—remember, I can read your mind as easily as you can read mine." He deliberately broadcast a detailed vision of what he intended to do to her once they were alone in the privacy of the spaceship.

Lynne flashed back a vision of what she intended to do to him if he tried anything of the sort and, moments later, they were glaring at each other in a sort of uneasy armed truce. Lynne found herself seething with a hatred she had never believed herself capable of feeling toward any living creature.

Then, silently, she prepared herself for the journey ahead. Mostly, it was a matter of arranging for records to be kept properly during her absence. There was nothing to pack—not for an interplanetary journey in a two-man triple-drive.

As she stepped uneasily aboard, she saw that Rolf had been deceiving her with his thoughts of a

sybaritic interior. Instead of the pneumatic couches with cushions and soft carpets, instead even of the limited creature comforts of the big liner that had brought her to Mars, Lynne found herself in a tiny, cluttered cabin, surrounded by an incredible complex of instrument boards and machinery.

Frightened, she protested, "But what if something happens to you, Rolf? How am I supposed to run all this mixed-up machinery?"

"Use your woman's intuition," he growled at her. "And keep the monkey wrench away from my ear." But his thoughts revealed reassuring pictures of IBM hookups working smoothly and automatically, with the gauges and other indicators and buttons, merely for emergency use.

She sent him a silent okay, then said, horrified, "What's that?"

"That," came Rolf's answering thought, "is the plumbing."

Thus, he confirmed her worst fears. *It was amazingly, appallingly open, occupying as it did almost the center of the floor. Her thought was one of horror—I couldn't possibly. It's too undignified.*

To which Rolf, busily preparing for takeoff, flashed back, *So what, you little prig? We're married aren't we?*

In name only, she replied. *That was a real MARLET trick. Wait till we get back! I'll have it wiped off the books.*

"Meanwhile," he reminded her aloud, "it's a long way to Callisto—

and back. You're caught fair and square, *vinral*, so why not enjoy it?" He had the further ill-grace to laugh in her face as words failed her and she sank down with a desparing sob.

Minutes later, they were off on their unauthorized trip—and Lynne forgot her anger and outrage at Rolf's casual male high-handedness long enough to feel terror as her Earth-conditioning reasserted itself. This was no space-liner she had embarked in, no interplanetary hotel with its staff of experts and countless safety devices.

This was a two-place interplanetary spanner; a sort of hot-rod, a tiny non-seagoing submarine that was little more than an atomic power plant with operating instruments and a tiny cockpit stuck on top of it. She felt right out among the stars, even though vision-screens showing television pictures of their surroundings were the only instruments through which she could see out.

By the chronometer high on the instrument board, it took them exactly nine days, eleven hours and twenty-six minutes to cover the 360,000,000-odd miles between Mars and Callisto, but to Lynne the journey seemed to last a tedious forever. And, from the thoughts that occasionally leaked through Rolf's tight guard, she gathered it seemed even longer to him. She wanted him to suffer and she made him suffer.

It became a sort of game. She

would appear to relent for a while, and listen to him quite seriously. Then, when he would take her outer friendliness for encouragement, she would pull the switch and freeze him colder than Callisto itself. On the seventh day out, she found herself thinking, *I never knew I could be such a heel. I guess love can turn any girl into a witch at times.*

Rolf's quick answering thought, *Let's face it, Lynne, you mean all the time, don't you?* served only to stiffen her wavering resolve to make him pay through his aquiline nose for this second trick he had pulled on her. Of course she intended to marry him—but not by any such drunken, underhanded ruse as he had used on her. Nor did she intend to let him get away with it. *The marlet!*

His snicker at her thoughts did little to improve her temper.

Then Jupiter loomed up, increasingly, ominously, in the bow vision screen and, faced with the problem of tracking Callisto and making a landing in the proper location, Rolf forgot his outraged ego and concentrated on bringing the tiny spaceship in safely. Lynne, who admired his rough-hewn efficiency, watched him in adoration, some of which much have seeped through to warm his frozen id.

Once Rolf said, "A good thing this entity or whatever it is we're following seems to be located almost on top of the Earth Interplanetary Administration outpost. This

is supposed to be a frozen hell-hole." He added a silent, *You should feel right at home there, enchilada*, and anger once more reigned voiceless but supreme in the little ship.

But the terrifying splendor of Jupiter, seen from such close range, caused them again to forget their puny problems. Its sulphurous yellow cloud envelope was almost blindingly bright until, mercifully, they skirted its twilight edge and emerged into shadow, lit only by the large inner moons, Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto, the last two of them larger than the planet Mercury. A dazzling spectacle.

Then the frozen sweeps of Callisto were flattening out beneath them, its frozen air lying in great white drifts in the Moonlike chasms between the jagged peaks that splintered the horizon on every hand. It was, Lynne thought, the most desolate sight she had ever seen. She turned away, shuddering, from the screen, only to be recalled by an urgent thought-summons from Rolf.

They were over one of the satellite's few comparatively level surface areas—and approximately in its center was an unmistakable Earthmen's camp—or what had been an Earthmen's camp! It looked as if it had been flattened out by a tremendous blow with the heel of some giant hand. Only a pair of spaceships, sheltered behind a natural craggy embankment, seemed to have survived intact. And on the

frozen air of the planet, close alongside the desolation, the letters SOS were spelled out with empty fuel tins.

"Looks as though maybe I followed the right hunch coming out here after all—with or without E.I.A. authorization," said Rolf.

Lynne said nothing—she was too scared to talk.

IV

Rolf turned, tight-lipped, from the communicator panel and said, "*Crebut*, a video white-out. They're either crippled or dead!"

Lynne said, "What are you going to do?" In the confusion of bringing the ship in, she was unable to sort out the mental messages she was receiving. But she got a wild impression of thoughts and emotions, transcending anything human. It was like being inside some immeasurably vast, utterly lunatic cathedral.

"I'm going to land right beside those other ships—if I don't go crazy first," said Rolf. He had to speak aloud, just as Lynne did, because in the turmoil of telepathic disturbance it was impossible to select and tune personal thoughts.

It was a rocky landing, since the apparently level ground proved to be dangerously uneven as they settled down upon it. But although the ship rocked in heart-stopping fashion, he finally got it steady on its pintels and mopped sweat from his brow. For a long moment, he

sat before the control panel, letting the strain leave him.

With the thrum of the engines silent, Lynne became aware of another steady pulse of power—unheard, for its pitch was far too great for human eardrums. Her mind seemed to burst with visions of the planets, of the stars, of distant nebulae and galaxies, interspersed with unheard paeans of indescribably magnificent music, of concepts of such surpassing beauty, of such dread and terror and love and ugliness and sheer passion that, inevitably, Lynne found herself recalling Mr. Mole, in Kenneth Grahame's archaic but still-loved *Wind in the Willows*, when that little animal heard the magic Pipes of Pan and found their song beyond his limited ken.

"I must be mad," she told Rolf.

He said, "You and I both, *vinral*. But if we both get it, we must be sane. What in *put* do you suppose it is?"

Lynne tried to put it into words. "It's like—like—It's far beyond anything we've ever encountered."

Rolf got up and told her, "Come on—let's find out what's going on. This is like being caught inside an old-fashioned circus calliope going full blast."

He crossed the tiny cabin, almost floating in the light gravity of the satellite, opened a locker and got a couple of heavy-duty space-suits. It was the first time Lynne had seen such an outfit save in vidar entertainments and, by the time Rolf had

locked her into it, she felt like a cross between an Egyptian mummy and a deep-sea diver of several centuries before. It was hot and her nose itched and there was no way to scratch it. But the heavy composition of the suit mercifully blacked out some of the radiant alien messages that had been overwhelming her thoughts.

They rode lightly to the surface on the external elevator, and Lynne's impression of appalling desolation was reinforced when she looked at the scenery about her from ground-level. Callisto was a nightmare moon for anyone conditioned to the inner planets. The great curving bulk of Jupiter was shadowed but light reflected from its large inner moons made its appalling, ominous immensity all too evident. It looked as if it were going to fall on her and crush her to death.

A couple of heavy-space-suited figures emerged from one of the two big ships a half kilometer away and slowly descended on an exterior elevator. Rolf, speaking into his suit-mike, said, "Hello there—are you from Earth?"

Lynne staggered under the force of a mental blow that threatened to black her out as Rolf spoke. From the plain beyond the shelter of the rock revetment behind which they had landed, came a sudden lavender flash, followed by a rolling roar. The two space-suited figures beckoned to them and she found herself running clumsily toward them.

Moments later, they were being taken aboard the larger ship.

Inside, in the compression chamber, suits were removed and a coarse-haired, pale-faced, young-old man said, "Welcome to headache satellite. I'm Lieutenant Patrick Suzuki, commandant pro tem of what's left to Callisto Mission. Who are you?"

Rolf explained, adding "I must add that we are unauthorized."

The lieutenant swore amiably, and added, "Never mind the red tape. Thank the gods of my ancestors you're here." He went on to explain that they were completely cut off from communication with the outside. "If we put on any circuit, we draw another blast. One more and the revetment may go and bury us. We can't leave, we can't send for help. We wouldn't dare let anyone else land if we could get to them."

"What's the cause of your trouble?" Lynne asked him, glancing around her at the unshaven faces and informal attire of the Earthmen in the big ship's wardroom, to which they had adjourned after removing their heavy space-suits.

She received impressions of boredom, of controlled fright, of lust toward herself. For the moment, the overpowering entity, whatever it was, was not blanketing all thought, though the pulse of its power never ceased.

Suzuki told them. Callisto had been placed under strict E.I.A. restriction because of the discovery

upon that satellite, by geologists of the first expedition to reach her, of a rare new element whose properties promised to outdo any of the radioactives.

"It's right out there," he added, gesturing toward the plain. "Right on the surface. We didn't want to risk an interplanetary rush. So E.I.A. sealed off the satellite and sent Callisto Mission out to make further study and begin test mining operations."

Listening to him, Lynne wondered why so many otherwise human and reasonably slangy young officials fell into the jabberwocky jargon of government reports once they began discussing their business. It was, she decided, drilled into them during their schooling, a sort of illiterate but precise articulateness.

The element lay over most of the plain, an area of seven square kilometers, much of it right on the surface. It was, Suzuki said, "of a sort of opalescent yellow, soft to the touch despite the cold here. It looked like all we'd have to do was inaugurate operations, take samples and return to home base."

Proceeding methodically under the leadership of Wing Officer Arthur Mitropoulos, Callisto Mission had set up camp on the plane, right over the mine it intended to open. On the "morning" operations were to begin, Suzuki and the maintenance crew had been alerted to stand by to relay messages to base from the ships. Then had come

the blast—utterly destroying camp and machinery and all the men in it.

"We tried to send an S.O.S.," he concluded, "and were blasted again. Three more times it happened. So we put out the fuel cans and sat tight. Frankly, we're stumped. We don't know what to do next."

Within the metal skin of the ship, Lynne and Rolf could exchange telepathic messages, but it would be impossible to send one out through space with enough power to reach Mars or any possible rescue ship that might be winging its way toward Callisto. Lynne thought, *What about our suits? They didn't feel like metal.*

Rolf's reply came, *Good ZWIRCHY girl! Maybe we can do it.*

When they explained their plan to Suzuki, he shook his head in wonder and said, "I've heard of Martian telepathy but I never thought I'd be using it. Do you think it's safe?"

Rolf said, "We're following up a telepathic disaster on Mars, induced by this super-monster you've found. But as long as we don't beam our thoughts on it, I think we'll be all right. Besides, operating in relay, it's not likely to get both of us."

You hope, Lynne telepathed and received a mental image of fingers firmly crossed.

A half hour later, she and Rolf stood again on the frozen atmosphere of the big satellite. Again

Lynne's nose itched infuriatingly, but this time she soon forgot her discomfort and she and Rolf linked minds and began sending to Nampura Depot. Around them, the appalling crescendo of unearthly thoughts and dreams rolled disturbingly, making concentration next to impossible.

They tried and failed, then tried again—and again. And, finally, they got Nampura Depot, Mars, Fenlay. *Who are you?*

Callisto Mission calling, Marcein and Fenlay. Hello Revere.

They were through—and without being blasted. Rolf gave Lynne's telepathic twin brother the message, stating the conditions on the satellite and asking that rescue ships stand clear until the situation was remedied. He concluded with, *Relay to E.I.A. Headquarters. And stand by for further messages.*

'Signing off, Revere sent a, *Luck, Lynne—and Rolf. We'll be here, standing by. Over and out.*

They went back to Suzuki's ship, lest further message sending cause another blast. There, Lynne telepathed Rolf, *Did you feel it—something else, something not alien?*

CREHUT, *now that you mention it.* Rolf turned to Suzuki, said, "Did any of your power instruments survive the blast, Lieutenant?"

Suzuki looked at one of his technicians, a bearded, copper-skinned man called MacDougald. Macdougald scratched his head and said, "I don't see how—unless the Sodium generator escaped. They buried it

pretty deep. And they must have had it on. And once it's on, nothing but a flip of the switch will turn it off for centuries."

"Why do you ask?" Suzuki wanted to know.

Rolf and Lynne exchanged quick thoughts and Rolf said, "Because both of us received an impression that this element—this alien force—is suffering an unbearable irritation, which is amplified whenever any sort of power is turned on nearby. It's—well, it reminds us of some sort of vegetable poisoning that can be stepped up to agony."

"We've got plenty of vegetable poisoning on Callisto, unlikely as it sounds," said Suzuki. "The verdant stuff is latent all over the place. Goldberg nearly died of it." He nodded toward a red-headed man whose forearms were swathed in plastibands. "The heat of our operations restored some of the stuff to virulence."

"Preventive shots no good?" Lynne asked sympathetically.

Goldberg said, "They worked for the others, but not for me. It's the worst itch I've ever had." He winced.

Rolf brought the conversation back on the beam. He said, "This element you've discovered is definitely superhuman mentally and emotionally. And it can and does kill when irritated. The picture we get is that here on Callisto it's been left exposed on the surface and is sensitive to certain irritations. If your Sodium generator is an irri-

tation, it's got to be turned off before any of us can leave or any relief ship can land safely. Let me see a plan of the generator."

What do you mean—here on Callisto? Lynne telepathed. Do you think it exists anywhere else?

I don't know—and don't bother me, was the reply, as Rolf bent over the blueprint MacDougald produced from a cupboard. He scanned it, scowling, then flashed a picture to Lynne, showing the generator, where it was buried, where the switch was that alone could turn it off. *Lynne, do you feel strong enough to try it?* he asked silently.

Lynne knew what he meant. On Earth, with its dense atmosphere and metallic atmosphere vapors telepathy was almost unknown. On Mars, where the air was thinner and purer, it flourished but other telekinetic powers were weak and incapable of being controlled. Here on Callisto, with no atmosphere save what was frozen solid underfoot, there was just a chance . . . Perhaps, if they worked together, they could exert sufficient psychic power to turn the switch and put the super-entity out of its misery.

Why doesn't it turn the FARBISH thing off itself? Lynne telepathed.

Did you ever hear of any creature, however advanced, removing an alien object from its own brain? was the quick response. And somehow Lynne knew Rolf was right. It was going to be up to them.

We'll have to keep cover behind the revetment, she replied, *in case*

we fumble at first and our friend starts blasting again.

Rolf asked that they be left alone in the compression chamber for a bit. And there they practiced on small objects—a stencil-recorder, a gravity-weight, a set of ear-phones. It was the hardest kind of work but, even within the metal shell of the ship, they were able at first, by linking up in the tightest of combinations and willing as one, to move aimlessly, then to attain control over the objects and move them about at will, even to lift them briefly from the deck.

Exhausted, they rested, sitting close together on the floor of the chamber, their backs against the wall. And Rolf said, "We've got to do a lot better before we can risk a real trial. If we're wrong—or if we make a mistake . . ." He let it hang there.

Lynne nodded. Like him, she was too mentally exhausted for telepathy. She said, "I wish I weren't telepathic. I wish nobody were telepathic. Then none of this would have happened."

He nodded and told her, "I suppose Columbus wished he'd never tired to cross the Atlantic when his men threatened mutiny. I suppose Henry Condon felt the same way when his spaceship broke down on the first trip to the Moon. I know we've all felt that way at times on Mars when things looked bad. But feeling that way isn't going to save those poor devils upstairs. And it won't get us off Callisto."

"I know," she said with an attempt at a smile. "Let's go on up and tell them we're making progress."

As Rolf helped Lynne to her feet, he said, "Actually, you know, we've done amazingly well."

Lynne lost track of time as she and Rolf slept and practiced, slept and practiced, sheltered from the wrath of the strange entity beyond the rock revetment by the metal skin of the E.I.A. ship. At times, especially when she was tired or distracted, it seemed as if they were never going to master telekinesis at a distance. Staying in the ship, they were sorely limited. But they dared not test outside lest their efforts add to the entity's irritation and cause it to strike back with renewed fury.

They did not even dare risk another message to Mars.

Finally, when Lynne found herself able to move objects about in the control cabin, abetted by Rolf's mind-power, she said, "Well, what do you think?"

Rolf nodded and directed a thought at her. *It's got to be after our next rest period, VINRAL. We can't just sit here forever.*

Upstairs, in the cabin, they worked out final plans with Suzuki. He and Goldberg and half the crew were to stay put, while MacDougald and the rest of the E.I.A. survivors were to move to the other expeditionary ship.

"That way," Rolf suggested, "your chances of getting one ship

back will be doubled in case something goes wrong."

"Got you," said Suzuki matter-of-factly. "Here, have some of the panktosteak. Cook's outdone himself on the sauce."

The atmosphere as they ate what might be their their final meal together was almost gay. After the long period of inactive confinement, the E.I.A. men were welcoming the prospect of a change of condition—even if the change were death. Reading their thoughts, Lynne felt proud to be a human. She had never quite believed in heroes before—they had seemed buried so far back in a pre-scientific human past—yet here she was, with a whole group of them.

Rolf's thought reached her. *You're not doing so badly yourself, VINRAL*—and she turned her face toward the wall as her cheeks grew hot.

To her surprise, she slept, and dreamt she was back on Earth, working at the brain-station with her teammates. And then Rolf was awakening her and, after a silent handshake with Suzuki, she was clambering into a heavy space-suit once more. Then, again, she and Rolf were treading on frozen atmosphere, the two of them alone this time, moving slowly along the base of the jagged revetment until they were a good kilometer away from the other ships. Again Lynne's nose itched unbearably, and this time the itching seemed to be spreading, to include other parts of her body.

She had to force herself to ignore it completely.

Good girl! Rolf approved her effort. *Here, I think we've gone far enough. Here goes . . .*

They stood clear of the gaunt rock wall, against the chance of falling fragments, and Lynne looked at the twin tall spires of the E.I.A. ships and at the shorter, stubbier vessel, a half-kilometer beyond them. Then they put their minds as one on the Sodium generator, lying beneath the surface of the plain amid the flattened E.I.A. sheds.

They concentrated with all of their newly-awakened telekinetic power on the switch a few centimeters to the left of the main control panel. And they thought fiercely. Lynne could feel a gathering storm of alien irritation. Thoughts of cathedrals were replaced by hideous concepts of suns exploding into novae, of planets burning to ash.

Then Lynne felt the switch move slightly under the force of the mental shaft she and Rolf were directing upon it. Instantly, she almost blacked out under the countering wave of black anguish that threatened to blanket her thoughts. She wavered, felt for Rolf's mind, found it. She drew strength from it, felt it push with hers against the switch, felt the switch move further, further, then all the way to *off*—just as a tremendous blast of leviathan outrage knocked her flat on the frozen atmosphere while the rim of the revetment above was

seared and shattered by an appalling blast of purple power.

Then the mental pressure was gone, and the pulsing retreated to a soft throb that was almost a purr. There was no gratitude. The entity, whatever it was, had far outgrown such puerile emotion. But the physical turmoil its reaction had created was far from over.

Even as Lynne watched, the rock revetment crumbled from the force of the blow it had received. She felt mounting horror as huge pieces of rock broke off in a mounting torrent that fell without sound in the airless void about them. She saw one of the E.I.A. ships struck and sent toppling on its side, the other's nose shattered by a grey, wedgelike piece of stone.

Then she and Rolfe were tumbling, leaping toward the ships. It was a time of terror, though the source of the terror was under control once more. Frantically, they tugged at the rocks about the toppled ship, seeking to clear the emergency doorway. *Poor Suzuki! Poor Goldberg!* she thought and Rolf's thoughts seconded hers.

"Here—let us use the instruments." The voice came through the earphones, not her mind. Shaken, she looked around to see a trio of space-suited figures behind her, carrying odd-looking instruments. It was MacDougald and the crew of the other E.I.A. ship.

A half-hour, Mars-time, and they had cut their way into the toppled ship. Lynne had to fight against be-

ing physically sick inside her space-suit at what they found. Suzuki and his four-man crew were dead. The ship had been splintered as she fell and their bodies had burst in the airlessness.

When the mess had been cleaned up and they were back at the other E.I.A. ship, MacDougald revealed his Gaelic practicality when he told them, "You did a good job—you licked it. I'm sorry about Suzuki, but he knew what the odds were. We all do. I had one of the men look at your little ship and she's all right. You'd better be getting the lady back to Mars, Mr. Marcein."

"But what about you? This ship of yours is in no shape to take off," Rolf protested.

"Thanks to you, help is on the way," said MacDougald. Then, eyeing Lynne keenly, "You'd better get the lady off Callisto."

V

It had never occurred to Lynne, in her wildest imaginings during the trip out to Callisto, that the little spaceship which had brought them, with its cramped cockpit and utterly inside plumbing, would feel like home. But once she and Rolf were in it together, on their way back to Mars, she curled up beside him in the warmth of the tiny cabin, grateful for the artificial gravity, feeling utterly relaxed, and basked in the warmth of his thoughts toward her.

Still sore at me, VINRAL? he telepathed.

Of course not, you FARBISH idiot, she replied silently.

He turned her around on the narrow, curving couch, so that she was facing him, in his arms, with her face close to his. She thought, *My husband! Maybe there are more important things than a ceremony.*

You're so right, my VINRAL, came his answering thought. And then, as a flicker of concern crossed his powerful features, *You're not seriously ill, are you, VINRAL?*

MARLET, she reproved him fondly, *I never felt better in my life. Just being alive—and off Callisto!*

But your face—your arms—they're all broken out!

She looked at her arms and it was so. Blisters—ugly, yellowish blisters—seemed to be rising on her skin even as she watched. She felt a thrill of panic that made her shudder. And then, as if waiting for a signal, the itching began. It started on her face, flowed through her arms, through her body, her legs, her feet.

Goldberg's poisoning! You poor ZWIRCHY VINRAL! His thought was clear and alarmed. Somewhere, somehow, on the frozen satellite, she had picked up the virulent vegetable poison. As she stripped and let Rolf daub her all over with antiseptic that gave only momentary and partial relief, an ancient song kept running through her head, a centuries-old lilt that went, *A fine*

romance, with no kisses—a fine romance, my dear, this is . . . And then she thought, *Poor Goldberg, poor Suzuki, poor . . .*

Thereafter, until a day before they landed back at Nampura Depot, Lynne was too sick to remember much of anything. The blisters broke and, with them, the fever that had made her delirious. But when they came away they took patches of skin with them, leaving her too miserable to move. Nor was her misery lessened by recollection that it was she who had spoiled the honeymoon on the outward voyage through injured vanity at her provisional husband's high-handed behavior. As if, when you loved a man, it made any difference *how* you got married . . .

Contact with the infinite, with the immensity of the alien intellect, had considerably widened her vision—even while Goldberg's poisoning had severely limited her sphere of physical action.

Revere came to visit her in the infirmary, which she shared with a convalescent Rana, and told her, telepathically, *You know, you and Rolf are both up for E.I.A. gong-ing. Officially, you violated a security regulation, but since you saved what was left of Callisto Mission, they're going to slip you a citation under the table.*

At the moment, I couldn't care less, Lynne replied. *What do you hear from Lei on Earth?*

Revere's bride, she learned, was doing fabulously well and a suc-

cessful, uninduced twin birth was prophesied by the doctors. Lynne felt a flash of pride for both of them, as well as a flash of envy. By the time she and Rolf got around to having babies, she surmised, they'd both be candidates for the geriatrics bureau. Discouraging thought. But she kept it from Revere. He was too happy for sadness.

When he had gone, she shared a skinless gasper with the tiny dark-skinned Rana and asked her about the fatal experiment that had put her into coma. After all, the necrorecorder could only take down thoughts over a very limited period of its subject's mental activity.

Rana told her, talking aloud, since she was still forbidden to overuse her telepathic qualities. She said, "I know now it was wrong, of course, but we were filled with the excitement of discovery. I don't understand why you and Rolf went to Callisto. We beamed our relay-thinking right here on Mars, somewhere in the Syrtis Major prairie, near Woomera Station. At first it was like being in some incredible temple. It was vast and awe-inspiring and—Lynne, I can't really describe it."

"I know," said Lynne. "What turned it sour?"

"That," said the dark girl, "is what I don't understand. We were receiving wonderful stuff—sort of soul-healing. But when Juan flicked on the recorder to take it down it vanished.

Lynne probed the girl's thoughts and found she was holding nothing back. She was heartsick at the tragic result, for her companion, of an experiment for which she felt herself responsible. Lynne lay back and did some thinking while the dark girl slept and had reached a number of conclusions by the time Rolf appeared that afternoon.

He, it seemed, had been terribly busy since their return to the Red Planet. All sorts of crises had come or were coming to a head. There had been a localized reappearance of the disembodied aborigines that had for so long threatened all communications on Mars—and a campaign had had to be organized to exterminate them.

There had been a squabble over efficiency credits between the communications crews of New Walla Walla and Cathayville which had had to be settled. Earth Interplanetary Authority was anxious for Rolf and Lynne to visit their Rio di Janeiro Headquarters as soon as possible to discuss the ramifications of the Callisto incident. And the problem of decreasing moisture in the Martian atmosphere table was becoming critical.

Which is why I have not been able to stay here at your side, VINRAL, he told Lynne silently. And now, I must leave you again.

Oh, Rolf! Lynne was desolate. I have so much to tell you. I think I'm beginning to understand a little about our—entity.

Hold it, VINRAL, was the reply.

Right now, I haven't even the farbish time to give it a thought. It will keep till I get back from New Samarkand. I've got to address a council meeting there tonight.

And he was gone. Resentfully, Lynne thought she might as well have gotten herself married to the legendary old-fashioned country general practitioner of nineteenth century America. She eyed her messed-up face in a hand mirror and wondered when, if ever, she was going to look like herself again. Goldberg's poison! Poor Goldberg . . .

The next day, with Rolf still in New Samarkand, she had the practitioner patch her up and, with the aid of makeup, managed to present a passable front to the world. She had made up her mind to get busy. According to Rana, there might be an entity in the New Woomera district, and New Woomera Station was where Lynne's one-time cabinmate, Joanna, had her home. And Joanna had invited Lynne to pay her a visit at the weddings. Lynne managed to get the use of a somewhat battered runabout and took off from the Depot, shortly before noon.

Mars might be considered a small planet, she thought as she sped low over its level plains and prairies, but it was a planet of vast distances. Without oceans, it actually had a far greater land surface than Earth. And its lack of real mountains added to the illusion of vastness. It was, she thought, like flying

over an ocean of land. Woomera Station, when she sighted it, looked like a small oblate bit of green and yellow, around a cluster of red-and-white farm structures, stuck like a postage stamp in the middle of an immense envelope.

Yet, as she walked from the landing field, she realized as never before what an imposing plant it was. Here were hundreds of hectares of hydroponic greenhouses, some five square kilometers in all of lush grassland for cattle raising, interspersed with long stretches of barns, barracks and storehouses. Here, wonder of wonders on Mars, was even a small pond where the pigs, long-staple mutton and musk-oxen could drink. Truly a man-made oasis, in the midst of desolation.

The pond was Joanna's special pride and joy. "We just got our atomic transmuter three months ago," she said, "and already it is turning the sand into drinking water for the cattle. Maybe someday, we shall all have swimming pools on Mars, quite as wonderful as those in Joberg or Rio on Earth."

Lynne said, "It's pretty expensive, isn't it? And aren't you afraid that the water may be radioactive and poisonous?"

The girl's face fell. She said, "I guess it *is* expensive. But it's better than draining the atmosphere of moisture. And in time, our scientists will learn to cut the cost drastically."

Lynne read the sternly suppressed

lack of assurance in the girl's mind. She had pinned her hopes on the transmuter, which was in truth a remarkable invention for turning dry mineral matter into water. But, as an ex-brain team coordinator, Lynne saw clearly that the expense must outstrip any real benefit which might accrue, except in special isolated instances. She kept her conclusion to herself, however, and said, "I'm awfully glad you asked me to visit you, Joanna. I'm tremendously impressed."

Joanna got a two-place tracto-scooter and took Lynne on a tour of the entire project. She admired the plump hogs and flocks of turkeys, the long-staple sheep and the small, furry musk-oxen, imported to endure the arctic cold of the Martian winters. She admired the artificial drinking pond, where the animals clustered to slake their thirst. Finally she asked, "How do you shield the transmuter?"

Joanna waved toward the north-eastern corner of the station. "The transmuter has its own shield on three sides," she explained. "We keep the open side facing away from the station. There are some odd sort of radioactive deposits out that way but our chief figures a bit more radiation isn't going to hurt anything. Come on, I'll show you the out-of-bounds markers. The whole area—about fifty square kilometers—is fenced off. A few years ago, a couple of prospectors went in there to dig. They were never seen again."

"Let's go," said Lynne a trifle grimly. A distant thrumming inside her head grew more intense as they neared the northeast corner of the grazing grounds. She opened her mind a little—and was once more in an unearthly cathedral, full of dread and love and clamor.

"Let's go back, Joanna," she said tightly. Her nerves were singing like guitar strings and it seemed impossible the black girl shouldn't feel it too. But Joanna's dark face remained amiably impassive. At the Station proper, Lynne said, "I'd like to talk to your chief."

Ultimately, to get him to turn off the transmuter, Lynne had to communicate with Rolf and New Samarkand, and tell him that she had discovered another deposit of the super-entity on Mars. In the end it was Agriculture Boss Radchev who ordered the disconnection. The worst of it was, she could not explain her reasons to Joanna and the Station chief in terms they were capable of understanding.

All the chief said was, "You know, without the pool, the Station will perish. We are no longer allowed to draw the water we need from the atmosphere."

"You keep that transmuter on much longer, and the whole Station will be wiped out—just as Callisto Project was wiped out," Lynne warned. "I'm not trying to wreck you. I'm trying to save your lives."

"I wish I'd never asked you to come here!" Joanna cried passion-

ately. "Why couldn't you have left us alone?"

Relations remained strained until Rolf and Radchev, a swarthy giant with an unexpected, and quite startling shock of corn-white hair, arrived on the scene. A gingerly magnetic-tracer investigation was conducted over the suspected area until the eroded entrance of the narrow mine-shaft the prospectors had sunk was located. Then Rolf and a couple of Station hands, leaving all electronic gadgets turned off, approached via tracto-scooter and went down the shaft. When they got back, Rolf nodded.

"It's sunk a lot deeper under the ground surface here," he said. "I'm becoming convinced there's at least one of them on every stable planet and satellite. In some frightening, inexplicable fashion, they're inter-related—which is why we got sent tracking off to Callisto."

Radchev said, "You think there's one on Earth then?"

Rolf nodded. "Probably buried far underground. The more eroded the area, the closer they lie to the surface. On Callisto, the creature was actually exposed. Here, it's buried just under the subsoil."

"Then why hasn't one been found on Luna?" Radchev asked. "I thought Earth's moon was completely charted for mineral elements."

Rolf hesitated, but Lynne came up with the answer. "I think it's because the creature needs the gaseous elements of an atmosphere to

survive. The atmosphere is thick on Earth, thin here. On Callisto it lies frozen on the ground. But it's there. The Moon has none—just as Deimos and Phobos have none. We know it doesn't exist on them."

"I think you're right," said Rolf, his face grim. "Somehow, this mysterious entity has to breathe. I have a hunch that otherwise it's nothing more than a sort of super-brain, which has long since surrendered all other physical properties."

"Then," said Radchev, puzzled, "why is it we haven't stumbled across a single one of the creatures. This one must have—"

"It has probably been here forever by our measure of time," Lynne interrupted eagerly. "Can't you see, Mr. Radchev, that it hasn't been discovered sooner because non-telepathic human mental processes were too far below its reception or broadcast level to make contact with it?"

The Agriculture boss shook his massive head. "That won't do, I'm afraid," he said. "The coincidence is too steep. Don't you think it remarkable to put it mildly that, almost to the moment when you discover your new life-form telepathically the non-telepathic E.I.A. should have stumbled into it on Callisto? I tell you—I'm not convinced."

"But you will be!" Lynne persisted. "We know it can be irritated by human physical and mental contact under some conditions, and

that when the irritation is sufficient, it strikes back at its tormentor. Think of the unexplained blasts and disasters that have killed men and destroyed their works all through known history. Isn't it possible, even probable, that some of those disasters were caused by our new friend under the stimulation of physical irritation?"

Radchev rumbled like an incipient Krakatoa, then subsided to a querulous, "But if this is so, how are we going to combat it?"

And Rolf and Lynne, thinking in concert, spoke in unison, "We aren't going to try to combat it. We're going to put it to use."

VI

Rolf flew back to Nampura Depot with Lynne in the runabout but they were unable to enjoy their brief respite alone together. In the first place, Lynne was still too severely bruised from her bout with Goldberg's poison to endure an embrace—and in the second, they were too preoccupied with her discovery of the entity and its possible consequences for even the lighter aspects of love-making.

Think we'll ever make it, VINRAL? Rolf projected wryly as the runabout settled down on the fluorescent-lit landing field.

You just wait till I get over this, Lynne replied.

Then they were in the restored Rec Room, with its translucent walls and recorder and amplification de-

vices and other aids to telepathic relay extension. Revere joined them there, as did Rana, for a long and intensive conference. After all, along with Lynne and Rolf they had had closer contact with the entity than any of the other telepaths in the depot. It was Lynne who summed the problem up for them, speaking aloud for the benefit of the recorder.

"What do we know about E-for-Entity and its properties?" she began quietly. "In the first place, since we have discovered that E exists and have made contact with it, Problem Outpost must be considered a success. It was set up to establish contact with life-forms hitherto unreached by mechanical means of communication. And certainly, we have learned enough to feel certain E is a life-form."

She paused to marshal her thoughts, then went on with, "Admitting that E exists and is a form of life, what do we know of its properties? We know that E exists on both Mars and Callisto and, by inference, on other planets and satellites throughout the universe. We know that its various units are in constant intercommunication with one another and that while it has taken a mineral form, it is highly sentient both mentally and physically.

"We know that it has a definite effect upon humans who attain even remote contact with it through the mind. It has an inhibiting effect upon the control centers of the hu-

man mind, causing the man or woman in contact with it to lose self restraint and become in some ways childish. If E effects non-telepaths in a similar way, we have no clear record to prove it. But, in view of human behavior throughout history, there is every reason to suspect that such effects can be ascribed to it.

"We know that E is sensitive to mental suggestion, beamed its way, especially when such suggestion is stepped up by electronic or atomic machines. We know that its sensitivity increases in direct ratio with its physical exposure to such impulses and stimuli. And we know that while E, in effect, seems to be some sort of super-brain in mineral form, it is highly sensitive to physical disturbance, such as attempts to dig into its substance."

She paused again, received encouraging thoughts from the others, and continued. "We know further that when E is irritated beyond endurance, it can and does strike back. To our knowledge, since the inauguration of Problem Outpost, it has killed one telepath, rendered another unconscious, and frustrated all efforts to mine its substance on both Callisto and Mars. It is probable that this killing is neither aggressive nor malicious—that it is rather like an elephant, stepping on an annoying insect."

She hesitated, said, "Well, from here on in, I think we'll do better off the record. We're flying by the seat of our clouts."

"*Crebut*, Lynne," said her twin brother. "Now that we've uncovered this interplanetary monster, what are we going to do about it? I know, I'm receiving you — so you're going to put it to work. But how do you propose to go about harnessing something we know almost nothing about?"

Rolf said, "Don't be a *czan-worm*, Revere. What do we actually know about electricity? Nothing. Yet men have harnessed and used electricity for centuries. If they hadn't, we'd still be Earthbound. In E, we have the greatest potential power-source in history. Are we going to sit around and call it out of bounds, merely because a few of us have been killed, or may be killed, in the process?"

"Yes," said Rana in her small voice. "But what are we going to do with it? All my impressions were of mighty ideas and themes."

"E is an entity of ideas," said Rolf. "In a way it is like a transmission cable—carrying thousands, perhaps millions, perhaps even more messages both ways from itself to its fellows on other planets and moons. It has the power to put its concepts to the test of reality should such a trifling idea appeal to it—which it probably won't. It is on far too high a plane to care about concrete application."

"And just how are we going to get it to care?" Revere Fenlay lit a skinless gasper and blew a nervous-looking smoke ring.

Lynne said, "Revere, we know

one thing—it is suggestible as well as suggesting. Given the elements of an atmosphere to exist in, it lives. We know it is suggestible because, when we irritate it sufficiently, it strikes back. We can make it feel our thoughts and our muscles and our machines, however trivially, however remotely."

"Rather destructively, I fear," said her twin looking doubtful.

"All right," said Lynne. "So all we can arouse is destructive force—but it is a response and a predictable one. Once Ben Franklin proved he could get a response from the lightning, however destructive. He was able to create the lightning rod. And Faraday and the others who put electricity to use were not far behind him."

"All right," said Revere. "I'm convinced. But how in *part* are we going to get our new friend to say uncle when we want it to?"

Something clicked in Lynne's trained coordinator's brain. She said, mentally scanning the notes and records they had been consulting during the meeting, "Revere—Rolf—Rana—what is the one thing that is common to each of E's destructive retaliations when irritated?"

Rana looked helpless. Revere scowled at the floor, then shrugged and gave up. Rolf studied the opaque ceiling of the Rec Room, then said suddenly, "Maybe this is fresh out of your mind, *vinral*, but as I get it there were two things—a flash of light and an impression

of enormous, sudden sound. Certainly I got those impressions when we were up against E or his cousin on Callisto. Am I right?"

"How about it?" Lynne asked the other two. Rana, looking scared in retrospect, nodded slowly, and Revere said, "It's on the record."

"Doesn't that particular combination of phenomena remind you of something? No, it wouldn't since you're all Martians. But as an Earthwoman, it makes me think of just one thing—a thunderstorm."

Revere looked incredulous, said, "But that's impossible. There isn't enough atmosphere on Mars yet for any rain, much less for a thunderstorm. And on Callisto, the air is frozen on the ground."

"Just a moment," said Rolf, his dark eyes gleaming. "I think I'm beginning to understand what Mrs. Marcein is driving at." Lynne reacted with a shaft of pure delight to his use of her new name and title, then forced herself to listen attentively as he went on with, "If E has the elements of an atmosphere around him—I call it 'him' by courtesy only—he is capable of transmuting them in any form he wishes for self defence. But, Lynne, there has been no sign of rain with any of E's blasts against his irritators."

"Let an Earth-girl speak on that," said Lynne quietly. "If E can create an atmosphere capable of thunder and lightning, however briefly, that atmosphere must be capable of rain. Our problem is to keep E irritated

long enough so rain will fall. Keep him irritated directionally so that he will harm no one and so localized that the area that needs moisture will receive the fruits of E's irritation."

"*Crebut!*" said Revere. "And how do you propose to do that?"

"By using the same techniques used to harness electricity on Earth," said Lynne. "Relays of batteries using telepathic playbacks for irritants. We can set up such a relay and shield it by placing it underground. We can give it direction by placing it well upwind of Woomera Station. And we can work it by remote video control."

Rolf looked at her and frowned. "Why put it so near the Station?" he asked. "Aren't you running the risk of its being damaged if your experiment proves successful, *vinral?*"

Lynne said patiently, "What does Mars need most, and where does Mars need it most? The answers are rain and at Woomera Station. Since there are no hills on Mars, there's no danger of a flash flood. And if it rains too much, we turn our gadget off. Simple?"

"No," said Rolf with a slow smile. "It's *farbishly* complex. But I'll fly to New Samarkand tonight and see what can be done about getting official permission. In the meantime, Lynne, you and Revere and Rana start getting the machinery set up. You have the full resources of the depot at your disposal."

The next morning, Lynne, Revere, Rana and a volunteer crew of Nampura Depot experts were busily installing the relay circuits Lynne had devised in a block of non-metallic instant-concrete on the far side of a gentle rise some twenty kilometers from E area, northwest of Woomera Station.

Rolf had flashed her message that, though they had as yet no official okay, he had won them sub-rosa permission from Agriculture boss Radchev and other interested authorities to go ahead. Rolf had promised to be there within the hour, when they set the switch that would prove their mastery of E or the reverse.

Lynne had to fight hard to maintain a semblance of assurance as the zero hour approached. She was checking the relays for the irritant playback for the forty-ninth time when a government planetplane, with its blue body and bright red disc markings, circled above them and came in to a smooth landing. When Rolf appeared, followed by Radchev and other high brass, she directed toward him a thought of relief.

Once again, before pressing the switch that would put the new E project into work, she was forced to explain its theory. Weather, a tall human skeleton named Krausemeier, was frankly worried. He said, "What if it works and this artificial storm of yours wipes out the moisture in the atmosphere?"

"It can't, and you know it,"

Lynne replied promptly and was aghast at her own temerity. "There isn't enough air around Mars right now to create a drizzle—so how can a rainstorm lessen it? It's got to *add* to the moisture if it works at all."

Shaking his head, Weather subsided. There were other arguments and discussions and final check-ups against anything going wrong with the relay. When, at 1131 Mars Time, Lynne pressed the button from the control station, two kilometers away from the power plant, it was almost an anti-climax.

For a long, nervous time, lasting some twenty minutes that seemed to Lynne like as many hours, nothing happened. Then, inside herself, she felt a stirring of angry forces, a gathering tension that rose and rose until it seemed past the breaking point. She gripped Rolf's hand tightly, and he returned the grip. Unease was evident on the faces of Revere and Rana and the other telepaths present from Nampura Station. But the rest—the non-telepathic—merely looked bored or restless or impatient or interested or hopeful as the case might be.

Lynne thought, *it has to work, it has to. I've made no mistake.*

And Rolf returned her thought with, *don't worry, VINRAL, it's working. I can feel something happening right now!*

A sudden, long-repressed *aaaaab* rose from a hundred throats as a blaze of light flashed on the horizon. It was followed by another,

and another, and another, until the sky resembled a vidar-image of one of the ancient atomic-war battles that had so nearly destroyed humanity two centuries earlier. The ground above the spot where the relays were planted in their concrete casing, seemed to shimmer and leap.

And then came the thunderclaps, rolling like drumfire over the flat Martian plain. The air shook around them and their eardrums hurt, even from two kilometers away. But the sky remained its usual dark, undisturbed blue, with the sun small and reddish-hued near the meridian.

"Where's your rain, young lady?" Weather wanted to know.

It was Rana who pointed in the direction of the irritated entity and cried in her small voice, "Look, here it comes."

Again there was a gasp of excitement from the assemblage as a moving barrier appeared, first low against the horizon, then rising higher and higher as it approached. To men and women who had spent all their adult lives under the cloudless Martian sky, it was a miracle—and like all miracles, terrifying.

Lynne could sense the thoughts of panic darting about her. A scientist, checking a barometer to make sure too much moisture was not being drained from the atmosphere, suddenly shouted, "Believe it or not, the moisture-table's rising!"

Panic faded before excitement and delight but Lynne, watching the approaching weather front, its edge ominous with the lightning

flickers, felt mounting disquiet. This didn't look like a rainstorm approaching to her. It looked at lot more like . . .

It *was*! As the sun was obscured, the snowflakes fluttered down upon them, first by ones and twos, then by dozens, then in countless armies that blotted out the far horizon. And Lynne laughed, laughed wholeheartedly for the first time since her brother's wedding. She laughed until she cried.

Why hadn't anyone thought of it? Of course, in the chill Martian climate, it would have to be snow, except in the tropics during the height of the brief summer season. But snow was merely crystalized rain and there was sufficient power on Mars to turn it back to water by heating the ground. And once the soil was watered, it would bloom again, as it had not bloomed in millions of years.

The snow fell for a solid hour, piling a good three inches of soft cotton wool on the gaunt ground. Then Lynne, with the agreement of the authorities present, turned off the device. They had harnessed the alien entity, put the super-brain to use for men. It would be irritated, of course, but so superior an entity could neither know nor care about the source of its irritation. It would merely seek to sweep it away—which it could not hope to do, any more than an Earthly elephant could hope to catch a fly.

There followed fervent congratulations and a hurried conference

of officials, all of them wreathed in smiles at the prospect of employing this unlooked-for source of moisture to speed up the reconstitution of the Red Planet's atmosphere.

Krausemeier, acting as spokesman, called Rolf and Lynne over and said, "The Governing Council of Mars offers you its gratitude, not only for what you have achieved but for the dangers you have undergone in accomplishing this invaluable feat. In view of these factors, we hope you will allow us to offer you a six-month visit to Earth with all expenses paid."

Earth! Lynne's heart sang the word. Her home planet—and six whole months. Yet, as she walked beside Rolf to their ship, she was glad their trip together was to last no longer. Here on Mars, there was so much to be done. And even though they had attained control

of a sort over the Entity, it could still kill. Juan, and the prospectors and the dead members of the Calisto expedition proved it. Perhaps it would be wiser if she and Rolf postponed . . .

Rolf cut in on her thoughts with a rude, *stow that bosh! Revere and Tony and some of these other MARLETS can carry the ball for a while. You and I, VINRAL, we're having ourselves a honeymoon, beginning right now. We're going to live it up—really live it up!*

In sheer jubilation, he did a little skipping dance and, before Lynne could warn him, he slipped in the soft snow and fell. Lynne read the thoughts of the physician who hurried to his aid, even before that worthy opened his mouth to say, "I'm afraid he's broken his leg."

It looked as if the honeymoon would have to wait.