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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE SCARLET PLANET
By Don M. Lemon 150
Through the hostile civilization of this strange world three men moved on the strangest quest that the secret order had ever given.

THE MAN OF BRONZE
By A. L. Fierst 206
The scientist revealed—at his best and at his worst . . . the conflict of nations behind the scenes . . . torture and triumph for some . . . disaster for others . . .

THE MARK OF THE METEOR
By Ray Cummings 220
Three desperate humans fight off the death of suffocation and starvation in interplanetary space. Adrift . . . alone . . . they struggled on . . .

PITHECANTHROPUS ISLAND
By I. R. Nathanson 228
Marooned, they faced death from every side . . . besieged they felt the merciless savagery of the ape-man . . . but then strategy took a part . . .

THE MARTIAN NEMESIS
By George B. Beattie 238
Famed . . . honored everywhere, he thought he had escaped from the dreadful secret of his past. But the seeds from Mars grew and flowered . . . and at last the Nemesis came . . .

THE HOUR THE CONQUEROR CAME
By Edsel Newton 252
Like a deluge the "multiple" poured down upon the unsuspecting city . . . while from the hills the cohorts of the Legion watched and waited . . .

THREE WORLDS TO CONQUER
By D. D. Sharp 262
Pulled from the earth, they floated in space, satellites of water . . . a grim battle for preservation was being fought on this lifeless world . . .

OUR COVER ILLUSTRATION

taken from Ray Cummings' thrilling story, "The Mark of the Meteor" we see the gigantic meteor just after it has plunged through the bow of the doomed space ship. Shooting vertically upward in a vain effort to change the course of the ship, the rocket exhausts flame furiously. Mars in the background gleams green and gold.

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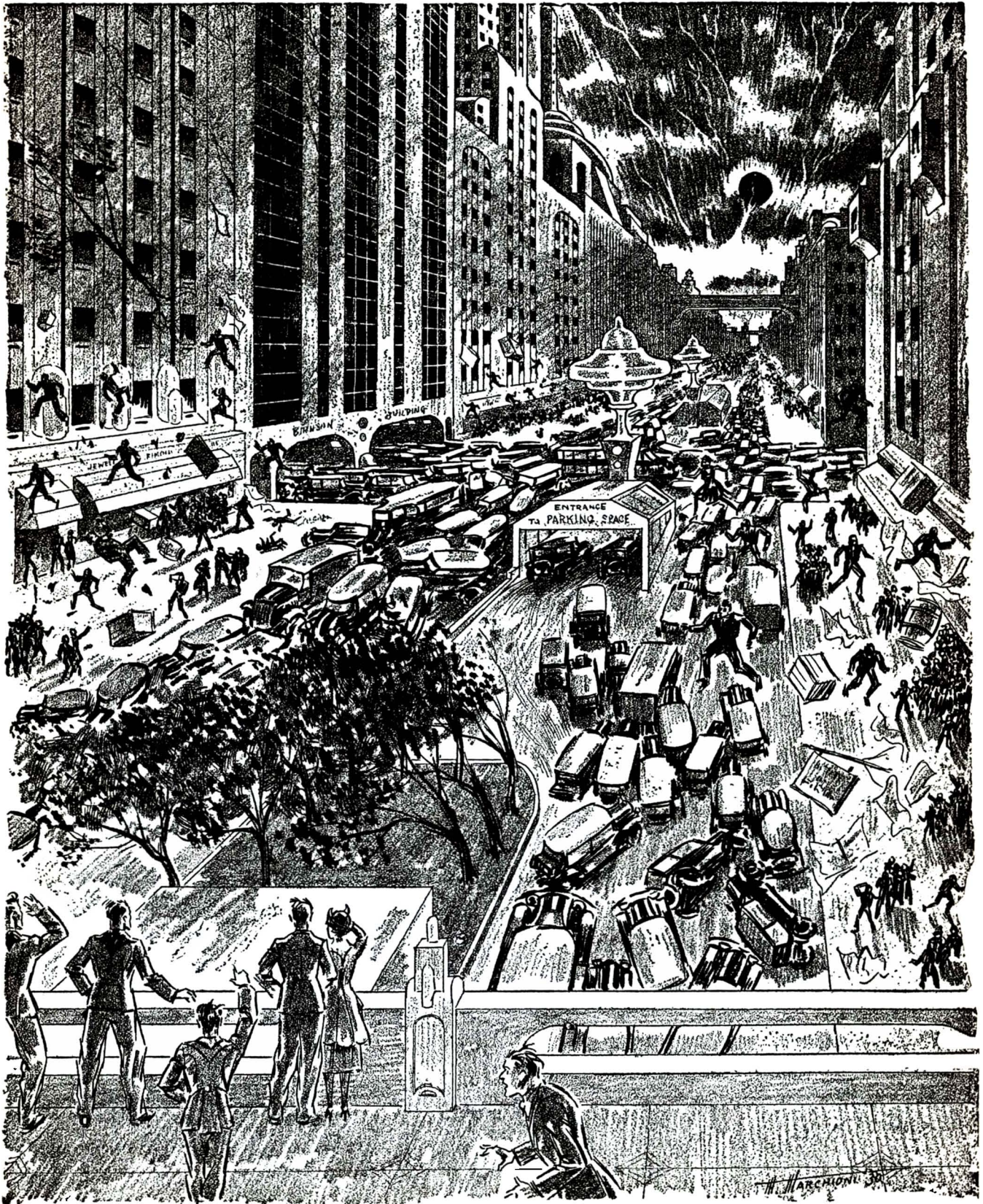
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Three Worlds to Conquer

by D. D. Sharp



As the sphere drew nearer a band of bluish light spread above the earth. The band widened and narrowed with pulsing regularity.

RICHARD Holt looked up from the photographic plates as Virginia Stewart skipped across the tile floor.

"What on earth, Dick?" she cried with anxiety gathering in her face.

He regarded her soberly a long moment and then decided she should know the truth.

"Virginia," he began with a calmness in his tone he was far from feeling, "The earth is facing a cataclysm. Look!" He placed a long white finger near a tiny white dot on one of the plates. She leaned forward, watching his face more than the plate.

"A strange star is approaching," he continued earnestly: "A little fellow, dark, but tremendously dense and heavy. For some reason I can't explain, our astronomers never detected it, or never told us about it. I don't know how near it will come to us, but it seems probable there will be some kind of a major catastrophe."

She gave him a frightened look. He smiled but there was no mirth in his eyes.

"That plate was taken a year ago," he went on; "Now look at this." He showed her another and another. "See how it grows. It will soon appear as large as a baseball."

She looked, her slim figure rigid, her hands clenched.

"Have you told anyone?" she asked, facing him.

"Yes, I phoned the papers. They laughed and ignored me. But I think the scientific authorities will have to admit what they know today.

There will probably be headlines tonight."

"What are you going to do?" she demanded.

"I thought of a sealed ship, one that could be supplied with oxygen, water and food, which might afford protection should we be drawn away from the earth. But survival would depend on a number of things including a habitable condition of the other planets."

"An ark?" she asked dubiously.

"A modern one," he bit his lips self consciously, "It does sound ridiculous, but there is no other help I can imagine. We haven't time to build one either, my hope is to find something

I can remodel to meet the unusual requirements." He laid the plates aside.

"Take me home, Dick," she begged after a little while.

"Sure," he acquiesced and followed bareheaded to her car.

Later that afternoon he went down to the docks to look at a space ship which had been made for an inventor who hoped to make a flight beyond the earth's gravitational pull. The long gray vessel looked good at first sight. It seemed to be a cross between an airplane, a dirigible, and a submarine. It had wings of corrugated steel, a cigar-shaped body, and a periscope.

The inventor explained that it was fitted with sun engines, water, oxygen and provisions for a long voyage. It was watertight, airtight, well insulated and was propelled by tri-motors, the power derived from gasoline for the take-off only, further power to be supplied by the action of the sun on solarite.* It would be possible,

the inventor explained, to carry aboard enough gasoline to propel the ship through our atmosphere or the atmosphere of any planet on which landing was made. The sun engines would be able to work continually after the ship was out of the earth's atmosphere and in the sun's glare and no other power would be needed.

In the hold of the vessel were two great gates through which water could be admitted to sink the vessel and there were giant pumps to empty it

in record time. This, the owner explained, was to provide every possible protection on other planets against hostile attacks of other forms of life. Granting of course there were oceans on that planet.

Dick wondered a bit at some of the equipment and ideas the inventor had worked into his ship, but none of them were very objectionable, and many would serve to good advantage under unusual circumstances.

* Solarite discovered just before the year 1968, was an unstable compound that decomposed under the concentrated rays of the sun and released tremendous stores of energy.



D. D. SHARP

MR. Sharp's stories always stand out because his characters are so real and living. No stilted professors, or god-like heroes walk through his pages; instead there are men and women whose feelings we can perceive and understand.

We have heard much about what would happen if the moon ever approached close to the earth. We are assured by scientists that a terrific cataclysm would occur, perhaps to wipe out a goodly portion of the earth. Certainly the moon would be split asunder by the tremendous strains exerted on it.

But suppose that a duplication occurred of a condition that caused the creation of our solar system. We know that our planets came into existence by the great tides raised on the sun's surface by a star that passed near it aeons ago. If now a new disaster were imminent, there would be needed a new Noah to save his race from extinction. Mr. Sharp tells us about it in a story filled with thrills and excitement.

THE inventor admitted frankly that his ship was a great blunder, for he had never been able to taxi it across the trial grounds with enough velocity to lift even the huge weight from the earth. But that did not worry Dick at all, for he would have no need of the ship, unless our terrestrial gravity was so disturbed that not only the ship but much more stable structures would go hurtling up toward the strange star.

The man sold it very cheap, for he was hard pressed for money and disgusted with his scheme. Before buying Dick made known his plans, telling the inventor of the impending danger and offering free passage in the ship. The man raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders. But he made the bill of sale with no reservations for any contingency such as Dick mentioned.

For several weeks Dick was busy overhauling the ship and hiring a crew. The tinned stuff was in good shape, the oxygen tanks full, and the machinery well oiled and new. The more he inspected it the more fortunate he felt.

The day after his purchase the city got the news of the impending calamity in a convincing way. The dark star itself could be seen by low powered telescopes close down against the horizon an hour behind the morning sun. Each morning the streets were full of men and women as Dick left for the ship yard. The crowds moved along with a stolid air or resignation, incredulity, or indifference, but here and there small, silent groups stared gloomily at the visitor.

One day a short way up the Avenue he met Kris Dillinger, a local banker.

"Headed this way," Dick warned, "Looks bad!"

"Bosh," Kris ejaculated, and walked away.

Dick hurried on to his ship.

No one knew the name of the strange star. Some one called it *Nera* and the name stuck. Newspapers belittled the danger. There was a statement broadcasted, which was signed by Professor Miller, in which the noted scientist stated that in all probability the dark star or planet as it might be, was travelling in an orbit which had brought it close to the earth in ages past and would bring it back in the ages to come. There was nothing to indicate that the last trip had affected the earth materially, unless indeed the story of the flood might be connected up with it in some way.

Calm natured folk went about their usual duties, the excitable ones displayed some panic, and some of the less serious played with the growing influence of the star's gravity. As the star came closer and closer, a good many very active young men vied each other for high leaps, and eventually some could jump as high as the second story of the National building. Traffic congested the streets, for tires had poor grip on the pavement and speed was dangerous. The weather became unusually clear, no haze, no film of cloud obscured the oncoming stranger as it swelled larger and larger in the heavens. And then one day *Nera* cut the outer disc of the sun. Dick took this as a signal to get Virginia aboard the ship. The crew had been living there for two days now. He called her by phone, but

something in the close proximity of the cosmic visitor caused such a buzzing and pounding in the phone as to make conversation impossible so he hung up and started for her house.

Nera hung low toward the west, for the sun was almost down, and Dick found he could make unbelievable speed. He sensed the gravitational pull of the passing star and sometimes his leaps carried him sixty feet at a jump. He vaulted along, passing large crowds of frightened men and women, who stood dumbly staring helplessly at the ominous shadow in the heavens.

As the sphere drew nearer a band of bluish light spread above the earth, a kind of corona which grew in brightness and sharpness until it became that vivid electrical green which is sometimes seen when high-voltage wires are shorted. The more Dick watched it and the more dazzling it became, the less he was able to account for it. Though he did have an idea that it might be caused by strange electrical phenomena set up by the two bodies. After a few minutes the great band widened and narrowed with pulsing regularity and once a long twisting bolt of fire slipped free and streaked outward to burst far out in the cosmos sprinkling that sector of the heavens with tiny blue and yellow stars.

Then another band of light gathered from nowhere, to spread fanwise closer above the earth. Flames of red and bluish green played about its edge, while zigzag bolts of lightning flashed between the band and the earth. Crashing thunder followed crash with incessant rolls. Terrified mobs milled about like frightened cattle as the earth trembled under their feet.

The Storm Breaks

DESPAIRING at the puny strength he could pit against such forces, Dick hurried ahead. He reached Grand Avenue in a daze at the sight of these cosmic storms. Every detonation was more thunderous than the last, every flash more brilliant and terrible.

He passed through the stone gates of Virginia's home and ran up the walk just in time to see the towering whiteness of the National Building split by a dazzling bolt of fire. The gigantic structure writhed drunkenly. Granite and debris poured downward into roil of smoke and dust, baring twisted ribs of structural steel.

He took the steps at a leap and flung open the front door. Inside he stood a moment calling loudly, his voice all but drowned by the roar outside. Blinded by the electrical flares, the house seemed very dark. He opened the library door and peered about the room. The tall windows glared blues and greens. Walls and floors quivered. Pictures swung violently. Books tumbled from their shelves. No one was in the room.

He turned back to the hall, and shouted mightily, but the mad whine of sirens, the frightened screams of men and women, the moaning whistle of a new born gale and the incessant peal of thunder howled him down.

In the hall he met Kris. The banker's long mane of yellow hair was disheveled, his bulging

eyes were wide and wild, and his long face had the greenish hue of stained wax.

"Where? Where?" he chattered.

"I don't know," Dick gasped, "She's gone!"

"Lost?"

"Yes. I can't imagine what happened to her."

Kris stood dumbly with his jaws working in spasms of terror. Finally words came, vague and shrieking, smothered in the roaring bedlam from the sky and streets.

"You lie!" he screeched loud enough to override the pealing thunder and the rising whine of the ungodly wind. "You're trying to ditch me!"

"She is nowhere around here. Let's look upstairs!" Dick shouted back.

Kris blinked his bloodshot eyes as though trying to unravel a puzzle in his bewildered brain. He seemed insane, with the green and blue fires glittering upon the big whites of his bulging eyes.

"Great Lord," he gasped at last, "You mean the girl?" His wildly distorted expression showed a measure of relief, "I've been following you to find the ship!"

Dick had no time to give to the man, crazy as he was with terror and anxiety for some kind of refuge. He left Kris in the hall and sprang upstairs, clearing the broad flight at a single leap, turned at the landing and leaped into the upstairs hall and rushed to Virginia's room. That too was empty with a forsaken and disordered appearance of hasty flight. Drawers and clothes closets were open with garments scattered on bed and chairs. She must have gone to the ship. He had missed her on his westward flight.

He ran into the hall and dropped downstairs. The windows were awash with water as he passed them and a shattered window was allowing the waves to drench the lower hall.

A door crashed, and through it rammed the wheel of a flying truck. Disregarding the peril of the hurtling debris outside the house, Dick tore open a trembling door and plunged into the yard. He was blinded and almost taken from his feet by the wash of angry waters which ripped along on the wings of the violent wind. About him hurled a chaos of tumbling barrels, boxes, autos, trucks and men. Everything not securely anchored was skidding and bounding before the wind, like tumble weeds feeling the first vigor of a winter gale. Lack of gravitation, or rather the neutralizing pull from Nera, put all loose objects as playthings for the gale.

The sky above was clear as a bell, except of course for that quaking, crackling band of electric blue.

He tasted brine. The sea? Then that was the answer to the puzzle of a clear sky and the drenching flood. The wind was sweeping up the sea and pouring it upon the city. This gave him new concern for the girl. Anxiety became acute. It was a dull dead ache from which hope had almost gone. Unless Virginia had left long before, she would have little chance as she tried to cross the narrow neck of land on which the ship was housed.

Out there she would meet the full force of wind and sea. Strong as he was, he was having a hard time keeping on the ground where there

were buildings and trees to break the wind. Desperately he started for the ship. This time his way across town was harried and obstructed. Nera was pulling against him, the wind was against him, and the air was full of flying things.

CHAPTER II.

The Tomb of Silence

ONLY by clinging to fallen wires and hugging the shelter of swaying buildings could he make progress at all. Often he would gain a yard to be lifted and carried back fifty feet or more. As the storm increased he abandoned hope of walking upright and got down on hands and knees. Battered, discouraged, almost whipped, he came at last to the twelve-foot fence which surrounded the ship.

Fifty yards beyond the fence was the great iron shed which housed the ship. It was banging and roaring to the pulse of the storm. Its windows were black holes from which the sash had been torn away. Its iron plates still held, but they shook and howled as the building itself swayed giddily.

Dick grabbed the mesh of wire and got to his feet. That building was sure to go. It couldn't last many minutes in the claws of the wind. He had to hurry. There wasn't a second to lose. Hand over hand he worked his way along the fence until he came to the west gate. There he found a gap where the big gates had been torn off. Kris was there clinging to a post. Dumb terror and despair was worked into every feature as he cringed beside that impassable gap in the fence.

Dick shouted at him, but Kris clung to his post and gave no sign whether he could hear or not. Dick crouched and tried to devise some plan, but it was quite plain it would be impossible to reach the shed from this side of the yard. The howling wind, burdened with spray, drove across the narrow peninsula with a velocity no man could hope to combat. There was only one thing to do, to go back and work around to the east gate so that he could have the wind to his back.

With tight jaws he turned about and fought back the way he had come. Often his whole length was straightened before the force of the wind. Increasing floods of salt water rolled over him for so long he thought he must surely drown, and every minute that crackling detonating lightning burst nearer and nearer, until it seemed certain his courageous flight would be cut short by it.

But he did gain the east gate and released his hold on the wire as he leaped into the wind. He was bowled over and over, lifted and shot across the hundred yard enclosure with such force as to bang him against the iron shed with his breath taken away. He gasped for air and leaned drunkenly against the iron walls, trying to rally his shattered wits.

The big iron shed groaned and rumbled—protesting that it could not stand the strain another second. The world about had grown darker ex-

cept for the interminable flashing of that band of light and the zigzag bolts of fire. The black limb of Nera was edging further across the sun, and in the settling darkness those electric flares were ghastly and unreal.

Virginia must have seen him coming, for she darted from the east door of the shed and was dashed against the wall by the paw of the wind. She tried to reach him as he gathered himself together. He shouted for her to go back, but she came on, pounded and battered by the wind. He struggled along the wall and reached her, picked her up and with the remaining strength in his big body, succeeded in getting back through the open door.

Slowly the black disk closed out the sun. A ghastly wounded night flooded the unprepared earth.

Dick pulled Virginia into the ship and stood a moment looking across the seething ocean as it came rolling in toward the land. It seemed some kind of titanic monster, springing from its lair, than only a regularly breathing expanse of water. It was doubling into itself, sweeping in with increasing velocity. It swelled into titanic ranges, one towering behind the other until it bewildered the eye and the senses.

VIRGINIA got to her feet. Dick cut the switch which closed the door, just as Kris struggled into the shed ahead of a wash of tide. Dick hesitated, glanced at Virginia for approval, and opened the switch. He was risking their lives by the delay in closing the door, but he had no heart to bar Kris from refuge. Kris pushed through the open door just as a great wave caught the shed, collapsed it and tilted it off of the space ship. Water poured into the small entrance room before Dick could get it closed.

Everything loose in the room was tumbling back and forth as Dick turned to Virginia and got her into a belt which would hold her when the ship turned turtle, which it was threatening to do with every wash of the tidal wave. There was no time to warn the crew who were already in the engine room. They would know what to do by this time. And then one of the big ranges of water must have hit the ship for it stood on end, its tail skyward as it spun around and around with a suck of the current.

Dick clung to the controls and buckled himself in. The gauges showed that water pressure was increasing with every second, though he had no idea how they could be diving deeper and deeper here on the solid earth.

The thunder and whistle of the wind were now displaced by a dead quiet. Whatever wash there was to the waves did not sound through the insulation of the ship. Dick glanced at the port hole. On it was green water lighted by long flashes of vivid light. He cut a switch which slipped steel protectors over the glass. The entire room became inky dark. He switched on the lights. Kris growled about being cold and wet. Virginia shivered visibly but made no complaint.

Dick had no way of heating the room in such a storm. He must conserve his power for un-

known emergencies; and the ship rolled and tossed about so that any kind of fire was out of the question. The three loose chairs in the control room were flung wildly about, banging against walls, ceiling and floor with such violence as to break and splinter.

Dick was alarmed as one struck close to Virginia, but again there was nothing he could do but censure himself for lack of forethought in leaving them in the room. He swung about in his belt and waited for a chance to grab any that came near him. He knew, should he unbuckle his belt and attempt to reach the flying chairs, he would but add the bulk of his own body to the menace.

This chaotic condition lasted for a while and then he noticed that the chairs landed with less violence, and he had a queer sense of losing weight, as though his bulk was somehow flowing away. Then he realized suddenly there was no sense of weight at all. A dead silence had followed the chaos of the storm. He could not tell which was straight up or down. He unbuckled his belt and pushed himself out of his chair. With a bit of surprise he found himself floating to the ceiling. He braced himself for a blow, but he landed as lightly as a toy balloon.

Close to the ceiling he hung suspended, amused at the incredulous expression upon the faces of Kris and Virginia. Then he gave another push which sent him back to the chair before the controls. Satisfied with his attempt to explore the new influences, he buckled himself back in his belt and joked with Virginia about his air flight. He knew that conversation was forced and unnatural, but the dead quiet of the room, the strange weightlessness, the wild journeys of his unfettered imagination when it considered what might be taking place upon the earth, were unpleasant companions. Conversation, ridiculous and out of place as it was, was a sedative both he and the girl needed. Kris took no part, but hung sullenly onto his belt, swearing now and then at the increasing cold.

Hours passed. Dick's artificial garrulity wore itself out. The deadening silence was becoming unendurable, with not even the wash of waves nor the tick of a clock to count it out.

An Unbelievable Situation

AFTER a while Dick began a song. A song of the humming bees down on the old plantation, and of negroes happy in their work upon the levees. Its melody was soothing, and his voice, a bit uncertain at first, gathered enthusiasm, and started another and then another, rising into the stirring airs of his school days, and drifting along into love songs which held the peace of balmy nights and moonlight on full blown roses.

Even Kris responded to the mood and forgot to swear at the uncomfortable cold. And Dick, feeling that in some way his songs were giving hope and courage, sang on and on. The tense, expectant hours crept by and brought them nearer and nearer to the crisis—the denouement whose nature none of them dared even to try and guess.

When at last a semblance of weight seemed to seep back into his oddly vacant body, Dick heard a faint wash against the hull. He stopped singing and listened. Waves were beating softly but soon increased their babble until they were like thunder on the steel.

To the tune of the growing noise was the heave and roll of the ship. Again the chairs juzzed and flew about the room as first one wall and then another seemed transposed into the floor.

Dick started the engines and gave the motors quarter speed. The ship wallowed about and ploughed through them bucking stem and stern, but with a fairly even keel. He pulled the switch which opened the steel protectors over the porthole glass. The glass was blurred with spray, but later when it cleared he left the controls and looked out.

Wave rode by swiftly from the rim of an endless sea!

"Why there's no sight of land!" Virginia exclaimed.

He turned to find her beside him. She stood very slim and erect, a bit pale and fatigued, but with no hint in her face of the apprehension which might lie deep behind her blue gray eyes. She stood so stiffly erect Dick thought she might be afraid to unbend, afraid that she might not so bravely defy the unknown menace of that vast vacant sea. Her searching, unflinching gaze seemed to read some dire verdict in the unending circle of water beyond the porthole.

Dick wanted to say something to comfort her, but he could find no sincere hope to offer. He felt the answer to their predicament was even more serious than Virginia might guess. Her friends, her home, her kind were gone. Only the space ship and its crew, of all that had lived on earth, could be alive. So what could he do, more than cling to her cold trembling hand and offer the companionship of one helpless human being to another caught in the swirl of relentless cosmic force.

As he stood silently wondering what he should say, the crew burst into the room. Still he waited, ignoring their excited, rumbling questions. His whole thought was of her who stood so mutely beside him, and he tried to think of some way of softening the ache of her iron resignation. She had meant much to him in the peaceful days before the catastrophe. She meant much more now. Yet what was there he could do? All the old factors of their lives were wiped away like pretty scrawls upon a schoolgirl's slate. Every thing they had loved and planned was buried eternally, deep as the angry yellow sea outside.

Not that those waters flooded the earth, far from it? A strange thing had happened, indeed, it was so strange, so unreal, and improbable as to leave him bewildered by the facts which thrust themselves upon him.

Earth was far, far away, so far he doubted that any of them would ever step upon its solid, comfortable soil again. *Nera had stripped the oceans away from it, and made of them spheres of water, and spun them in space, a thousand miles away.*

How did Dick know this? Easy enough. There up at the zenith was the earth, big and

radiant, yellow and glowing, like an open umbrella upside down high above the ship!

Nera was far above it, a dull ashy balloon ascending into the sky. There was no sun, but the sea was flooded with a golden luminosity from the earth, which gave the waves a copperish cast, and caught Dick's thoughts into fantastic channels. Put him to wondering just where was the line between fact and fancy. For the earth was not the only strange body in the heavens. Close against the horizon, was a silver ball of extreme brightness. It was far more brilliant, for its size, than the earth, and it puzzled him for a while.

VIRGINIA leaned against him wearily, as though she had at last yielded to the weight of the appalling tragedy. As though it had bent the iron of her resolution. He put an arm about her and stared silently at the silver ball.

The crew had sensed that some unusual calamity had befallen them, and they stood in a little semi-circle, grimy, overall-clad men, as though bowed to the presence of the angel of death. In that strange interlude of quiet it came to Dick, almost as a revelation, what the silver ball was. Two spheres of water had been formed by the passing of the dark star. They had been ripped away, but had not, in the short peak of Nera's influence, been able to attain a velocity sufficient to follow her, and so had been left to form satellites of the earth!

"Hey!" Kris broke in, "Think you are at a funeral? Somebody turn on the heat, I'm cold!"

Dick turned slowly about and thrust his long white hands into water-soaked pockets. He was cold too, and he knew that Virginia must be also.

"Better go and change your things, Virgie," he said gently.

She left silently.

Dick turned on Kris.

"Listen," he said a bit belligerently, "You'd better borrow some clothes and get dry. Cook's about your size."

"Cook?" Kris sniffed, "I'd rather dry out."

"It may be a long time before there is enough heat in the vessel for you to dry out," Dick answered tersely.

"Why?" Kris demanded.

"Just this, but it's for you and the crew, I don't want Virginia to know. This ship was built for space flying."

"Yeah? What's that got to do with turning on the heat?"

"Just the simple little fact that sun engines won't run in the shadow. They work fine with sun on the reflectors, but it happens we are on the dark side of this sphere. We'll have to wait until sunup to start the sun engines, and the joker is that I have no idea how long that will be."

Kris stalked over and looked through the porthole. Stared dumbly with a pucker between his brows.

"Am I a cuckoo?" he gasped, wiping a hand across his forehead, "or am I just plain drunk?"

Dick strode back to the control board and

glanced at the thermometer which marked the temperature outside the ship. The short dark line of mercury had caused him much anxiety since he had first noticed it after the steadying of the ship. It had crawled steadily down into itself and every degree mark it shrank put a new depression into his heart. Now it was steady.

That puzzled him, too, although he was glad the drop had halted. He did not understand the freezing temperature on the surface of the sea. The trip through space could not account for it, for the sphere had brought along an envelope of atmosphere, which the instrument board indicated was much warmer than the water.

The crew had noticed him watching the glass and crowded about him. They plied him with questions which he tried to answer encouragingly. He wanted to instil hope into these men who looked to him for leadership, but in truth there was little he could offer that would not depress. He had no idea what caused the chilling of the water, nor how long it would take the tiny planet to turn on its axis. Night might last only a few hours, as on Earth and Mars, or it might last nearly half a month, as it did on the Moon.

He glanced at the thermometer again. Kris noticed his worried look.

"What makes it so cold outside?" he asked.

"I can only guess," Dick answered, deciding to hide nothing from them. "I was very frightened as long as the drop was rapid, but you will notice that it is falling very slowly; now it is almost steady at 30 degrees Fahrenheit. It indicates that whatever caused the warm waters of the summer sea to become frigid, has expended its action, at least whatever caused the rapid drop."

"Well, what's the guess?" Kris demanded.

"It's the churning and mixing of all the waters of the oceans. Although the water at home was quite warm when we took to the ship it has been mixed up in the great swirl which took it from the earth. You have enough experience at sea to know that even in the torrid zones where the surface water is quite warm, deep sea dredges found freezing temperatures in the samples brought to the surface. That seems to me the likely explanation."

"Fine," Kris growled, "but that don't help keep us from freezing, I'm cold."

"Give us some heat," the ship's cook demanded.

"Let me light an oil heater, Dick," McGregor, one of the navigators, suggested. "It will make it more pleasant and burn but a wee bit of fuel."

"Right, MacGregor," Dick answered, glad to do anything he could for the shivering men.

CHAPTER III.

Adrift

WHEN McGregor had gone after the heater Dick went back to the porthole. He was not surprised to find hoar frost upon the glass. He opened the port. A blast of chill air swept into the room. Kris yelled out a demand to close

the glass, but Dick gave him no attention. He stuck head and shoulders far out the hole and surveyed the strange heavens. His breath left his mouth in long vaporous gusts of white mist.

High up were thick clouds, black and heavy with moisture. They gathered swiftly as they scudded across the yellow face of Earth. With a chill in his heart not accounted for by the low temperature, Dick speculated upon the unchanged position of Earth still at the zenith. Upon its yellow surface was the vague outline of mountain ranges, and depths which had once been the sea. It had turned perceptibly on its axis since he had last regarded it.

By all rights its position in the heavens should have shown some change. Beyond an angry fringe of cloud the stars twinkled dimly. Luna was nowhere to be seen, probably hidden by some bank of cloud. Nera and the other ball of water were also out of sight, but the Great Dipper and the familiar North Star were still in plain view.

It was the position of these stars which served to puzzle him still more. Instead of remaining close down against the horizon, they had risen toward the zenith. The dipper handle was near the bright limb of the Earth. He was convinced by then that the world they were on would keep the same face always toward the earth, just as the Moon did. That meant that the night would be much longer than twelve hours. How much longer he had no idea at the moment. Neither did he have any idea how low the temperature on the dark side of the planet would reach before sun up. From the spread of the horizon and his knowledge of the amount of water on the earth's surface before the cataclysm, he knew it could not be many hundred miles to the sunny side of the sphere, but he did know that the small amount of fuel in his tanks would not carry them even within a hundred miles of daylight. However he determined to make the try and meet the sun as far around the sphere as he could. When the sun did come up his sun engines would easily keep him moving at the rate of rotation of the sphere, so that he could keep the sun always in sight.

Deep in thought and puzzling over the responsibilities upon him, he heard nothing going on in the room. The first hint he had of any treachery was a quick powerful shove upon his hips. He felt himself propelled viciously through the porthole. He clutched at the window sills and clawed desperately at the narrow strips of steel, but his fingers found no hold and he slid out and down, head first—struggling, spinning, yelling, straight toward the frothy yellow sea.

Even as he fell he was conscious that his drop did not have the old earth vigor to it. He felt as though he were the victim of a slow motion picture. He hit the sea with small force and his struggles brought him immediately back to the surface. He collected his wits and found that a lazy stroke now and then kept him well above the water—there was no danger of drowning as long as he could stay awake. The danger was in the cold. The water was frigid. His flesh

burned with the sting and the whips of spray put threads of ice into his hair.

Close against the gray hull of the space ship he made out a big bridge timber floating high out of the water. He gained it with a few swift strokes and sat chattering as he tried to make some plan of regaining the ship. The steel hull of the space ship was glazed with ice as far up as he could see. The nearest entrance was far above and it was impossible to climb that swelling ice-coated steel.

He was worried no little about Virginia. He could imagine her terror and helplessness. He hadn't known Kris very long, but he had seen many traits in the man which indicated that he would not give the girl a chance. He would dump her overboard if she did not obey in every particular; and Virginia would never stand submissive with him down there in the sea.

For a long time as he sat there dazedly, the yellow reflection of the earth was high up in the port hole glasses, like dull stupefied eyes watching him with no concern. Then they blazed with a white brilliancy. Kris had closed the big switch which lighted the vessel, wasting the current which would be badly needed during the long night ahead.

Dick began to shout with all his might, calling to Virginia, MacGregor, and the others, and as minutes passed and no answer came, his wet garments froze stiff like boards where they flapped in the wind. He hardly knew why he waited, for certain death could only be beaten by lucky chance and a hard fight. Perhaps he hoped that Virginia would be pushed from the ship. Certainly she would be no worse off, and it might be they could find some shelter in the wreckage upon the sea. In truth he was a little stupefied with the cold. His throat was already hoarse, and it took all of his energy to keep his senses.

HE began to beat his arm about to whip circulation through his body and with the returning sting of the sluggish blood moving faster in his veins and as he called again and again he tried to reason out what probably lay ahead. After all there was no fear of anything lower than arctic temperatures—for this sphere was enveloped in air. His first fright at the possibility of absolute cold had been induced by his knowledge of the temperatures which probably prevailed on the dark side of the moon, but he had overlooked the fact, in his anxiety, that the low temperatures on the moon were possible only by the total lack of an atmosphere.

If the night here lasted no longer than two weeks he could surely prepare to weather it. Even if it lasted six months, as long as the arctic night on Earth, he should be able to gather enough stores and build himself some kind of shelter on the ice which would soon form. He made up his mind to get food and shelter and then get Virginia from the ship. When daylight came they could then devise some way of future existence on the unfriendly sphere.

Using a bit of plank for an oar he paddled his log along the side of the space ship, intending to

look about for a larger craft. Again he glanced at the strange, moonlike sphere which had once been their home. The bowl of the Great Dipper was close against it, the handle already eclipsed behind the sphere. Surely that was strange!

Everything was new and strange on this water sphere. The unusual lightness of his body, the yellow hazy light, the dark clouds which seemed so heavy and yet floated so high, the ease with which he could swim about the sea. At every turn he seemed to meet with phenomena which was hard to admit and difficult to accustom himself to its laws, but the next discovery was driven home like a blow. It almost unnerved him, for it took away his returning assurance, and robbed him of any hope of surviving outside of the ship.

The puzzle of the ascending Great Dipper was solved. This Marine sphere revolved not west to east, but south to north! Upon this benighted hemisphere there would never be sunrise! The increasing cold would bite deeper and deeper. Ice would coat the entire sea, thicken and burst under the intolerable pressure. The ship itself would be gripped, wrenched about and ripped into slivers. The only hope was for him to regain control of the ship and in some way make a race to the other side of the sphere.

Far above came the awakening sputter of starting motors. He turned his raft and paddled out from under the overshadowing hull, alarmed—wondering what fool thing Kris might do next. The sputter broke into a roar, as first one engine and then another was warmed up. Dick cleared the overhanging hull and caught the glisten, the propellers being let out of their enclosed pocket. They began to turn and gathered speed. The big ship moved and circled into the wind. It raced across the waters, a gray phantom under the yellow radiance of the half-observed Earth, leaving Dick in the backwash of its waves.

The space ship, unworkable on Earth, sped forward at the apex of a long gleaming trail of rippling water, and rose gracefully. He saw the water under the bottom of its hull, saw the low stars between the gray ship and the water. It gathered speed, circled and winged its flight over him, its shadow whipping by like a giant bird that had brought him and abandoned him upon this strange cosmic sea. It grew vague and small against the high clouds, it swooped across an unclouded limb of Earth circling higher and higher.

Dick gazed helplessly,—overwhelmed by the stark unbearable feeling of being utterly alone—as the man-made bird grew smaller and smaller against the Earth. It circled higher and higher, fighting up and up, until it became certain Kris was attempting to fly back.

"You big fool!" Dick shouted a little insane from the shock, "Don't try that,—don't! Virginia! Good God—he'll kill her."

Alone!

CERTAINLY Kris must have known that Earth could no longer support life since it had been stripped of its protecting envelope of air. Helpless with rage, Dick could only head his timber into the wash of the higher waves left by the

speeding ship. He was bowled over by a towering wave and carried into the water. He struggled up, flung the icy brine from his eyes and saw the ship again, quite tiny now, as still it circled and circled up and up toward the big Earth. It completely disappeared, came in sight again with the light quick and brilliant upon its ice-clad hull and disappeared finally.

Dick still gazed helplessly, blinking at the place in the sky where he had seen it last, feeling the loneliness of the empty sea, feeling the grip of terror for the fate of the girl he loved. Then he set mechanically about the business of trying to survive. Why, he did not reason out. There was really nothing to live for, no hope of future comfort, or friends, or of her he loved so much.

His new world was more forbidding and desolate than anything he had imagined. All about stretched the restless, forsaken sea, and beyond it the limitless confines of the bare, sterile cosmos, and the only surviving companions were being steered across it by a fool who had no idea of the new laws with which he experimented.

He was the only living thing in all the Universe, at least the chances were great that this was so. He could not last long unless some miracle came to give him means to escape the cold creeping slowly into the lair of unending night.

So this was to be the end of man? The defeat of the logical, constructive fitting of nature's laws to human ends. Cold, death, silence, all the immutable weapons with which space was arrayed, had invaded the strongholds of purpose and laid them to waste. He was not bitter, there was only a despondent, resigned fatalism against which every hope and desire of his heart rebelled but against which but did not know how to fight.

Doggedly, tenaciously, unreasonably it commanded him to carry on, to refuse to admit defeat. He watched until black haze blurred his sight, and then the gathering clouds slowly covered the last bright beam from the Earth's limb, curtained it away as a stage that is darkened, as a scene that is played—as a thing that is done.

The cloud banks hurried on down toward the horizon, tucked in the sea as with a gray wool blanket. Still he waited, listening, half believing he caught the hum of motors, still hoping Kris would turn back. But the only realities were the gathering cloud, the wind, the biting cold.

After a while the wind died. The waves quieted with an unreal startling suddenness. The dead sea was even more desolate and invidious. He paddled here and there hunting some more favorable refuge. He did not analyze that search, did not try to understand why, hopeless and whipped as he admitted himself to be, he kept up the farce of trying to prolong his wretched life.

After a while he came upon a big iron tank floating lazily upon the glasslike surface. It was half submerged and surely contained something. He paddled close and examined it. The screw caps and pipes were all intact and tightly shut. Under the big numerals "39" was lettered, "Airplane gasoline."

What irony! What a slap for Fate to give a man already down and taking the count. Gaso-

line! An hour before it would have meant salvation for him and Virginia, and the crew. Then he could easily have filled his tanks and made a run for the sunny side of the sphere. Now, it mocked him, ridiculed his desire to live, his desire that Virginia might live. Gasoline, and the ship gone forever!

He wanted to slump down, bury his head in his hands and cry like a broken-hearted boy. Instead he grimly climbed up the iron ladder which was fastened to the side of the tank.

Wet and cold he paced about the ice clad top, whipping his arms against his chest and kicking life into his numb feet. Under him was fuel enough to warm a thousand men if he could only use it. He had no matches, but even if he devised a way to gain a spark of fire, there was the problem of doing it without an explosion.

Now he must have a bucket and some dry wood. The sea was littered with debris of all kinds, boxes, barrels, auto tires, furniture, myriads of floating things which had been sucked up in the vortex of churning water as it swept the city. Most of the stuff was broken into bits by the force of the water, but here and there a box or barrel rode intact left unharmed by freaks of the storm. As he stood regarding the wreckage, his teeth chattered and his body ached with cold, but his wits devised no solution.

HIS dumb gaze shifted skyward as he wondered again what had happened to Virginia. Something was peculiar about the clouds. He hadn't noticed it at first, lost in the vagaries of his wandering thoughts, but it soon demanded his attention. A white canopy was trailing below the cloud banks, hiding them in places. It hung above him far flung, motionless, like a great white veil. He watched it with the unconcern of one who can no longer be surprised. Prepared for any strange phenomenon on this weird place, he shrugged his wet shoulders and began a quest for dry clothing and something which would keep life in his body.

A huge box caught his attention. It rode high out of the water, its wet sides glowing in the Earthlight. He leaped into the water and with considerable effort, despite the slight gravitational pull, he managed to reach it and pull it to the top of his iron island. There he pried loose the boards, finding to his delight that under it was a solid covering of aquatite.* Using a bit of wreckage as a lever, he dragged out the contents. There were dozens of suits of underwear, all fat men's sizes, and dry! Union suits, BVD's, shorts and longs of all types. Unmindful of the incongruity of this attire, he stripped off the watersoaked garments and chattering to the naked wind, he crawled into three union suits, one over the top of the other.

Dry at last, he felt better, and tore up some of the garments and rigged out a rope with a wide noose, so that he could lasso other wreckage without having to leave his refuge.

Busy with his scheme, he did not look skyward for a long time, not until the gathering

*A composition paper impervious to water.

gloom called his attention to the descending veil which he had first thought quite stationary.

It hung lower like a creamy, misty pall over the whole sea. He frowned, but gave it little more attention. He wanted food. The rigorous cold had roused a gnawing hunger and despite his dry clothes he was chilled and uncomfortable. For half an hour he cast his noose with varying success, but nothing edible yielded to his cast. Shirts, overalls, and sheets were the sum of his salvage.

Discouraged he piled up the shirts, underwear and sheets to make a fairly comfortable bed and crawling down into them he lay quiet and tried to sleep. He did succeed in dozing a little, but the cold crept in and what sleep he did get was fitful and restless. Finally he gave it up and crawled out from under his pile of dry goods to light a fire and make use of the store of gasoline under him.

Outside the cover he surveyed a new world. Something had happened to the earth glow. It was blanketed in haze. He looked about a bit startled by the thick murk. The whole sea was swaddled with a white canopy, which floated just above his head. None of it fell or touched the sea. It was much as though it had settled down upon a great skylight of glass. Not motionless exactly for it was descending evenly, very, very slowly—like shadows creeping into a valley—settling slowly down to the face of the sea.

Dick knew what danger lurked in that descending veil. When the curtain fell everything would be obscured. If he was to find refuge from the long night ahead he had to strike out at once. He slid from the tank onto his beam and paddled ahead. He went in a straight line for several minutes to look about for any possible boat. There was only the same general litter as he had found about the gasoline tank. Again he paddled for several minutes more and repeated the search. Now the white veil was so close as to reach to his head. It was like a vast circus top being let down upon him. It had an oppressive nearness that reminded him of a time long ago when he was a little boy caught under the floor of a great house.

He tried to move away from it. It mocked him, it set him into an insane fury. He put greater effort into his strokes. His improvised paddle swept up great swirls of water which left ripples far back and started bits of wreckage to bobbing all about. His one hope was a ship that might some way have weathered the chaos. He felt that one must be waiting for him. That much was only fair, since everything else had failed. Surely one of the hundreds that had been in the harbor when the dark star passed, had wallowed up with its bulkheads unbroken. Yet his frantic search went on and on without any sign of success.

He passed great islands of peculiar looking flesh, broken and fissured, either by the churning waters or the release from the great pressure which had been at the lower depths of the oceans. They were weird, grotesque things, some of them still phosphorescent. Many with wide, leaf-like

flippers, some with long hoselike tentacles. He paddled away from the unsightly masses, threading the litter of boxes, barrels, auto tires, carcasses of horses, cows, and now and then birds and wild animals. Bodies of dead people were here but not many considering the number of those on earth who must have been swept away with the flood.

And as he paddled, disregarding all small salvage, in his search for some kind of cover, the great white tent fell slowly about him, until it rested squarely upon the sea.

He was trapped!

CHAPTER IV.

No Longer a Savage!

ONLY the sheerest chance would take him within sight of a derelict ship, if there was such a thing on this ungodly sphere. He wished himself back upon the iron tank. Desolate and open as it was, it was much better than the rigorous sea.

He paddled feverishly, and stood up to look about. All he could see was a hazy circle of calm water; a sad, weird, yellowish world, spotted with snowflakes which did not fall. The long, inert body of a woman, blurred, but unmistakable, with head hung down into the transparent water, floated into the narrow circle of his vision. Of course she was dead, but with her face down she seemed searching the depths for a companion, someone she had lost and could not rest without. It was ghastly, unnerving.

He paddled away, leaving her bobbing in the ripples of his retreat. Somehow that frightful thing had awakened a new anxiety about Virginia. He could not give up. He had to believe that the space ship would come back. Virginia would manage it some way. She would make Kris turn back. Even now she might be somewhere out there in the gloom. She was daring and resourceful and would be more than a match for Kris's strong body and dull wits.

He would find her, board the ship and conquer Kris. And yet even as he hoped, he knew there was little chance of his finding the ship if Kris suddenly decided that he was necessary even if it returned to the Marine sphere. Even in the safety of the vessel there was little probability that the man could ever steer it back to a safe landing here. The ship's compass had been unbalanced by the new magnetic fields, and the sky was filled with that snow curtain which would confuse the most skillful navigator. And Kris was only an amateur airplane pilot. And still Dick paddled on, refusing to give up hope.

That white veil fretted him. It dragged at his courage. It was baffling, mysterious, disquieting. Great stationary flakes of it packed the air, like tufts of cotton hung thickly upon invisible threads. A fake snow storm of vast proportions, and yet it was intangible. It gave before his advance and evaded his grasp. A motion of his hand set it all aflutter. It swirled and fled at the slightest breath of air.

Something loomed ahead. Something dark

and big, like the turret of a gunboat. He paddled toward it, his heart pounding excitedly. He recognized it with astonishment and disappointment. He had been moving in a circle. It was the gasoline tank!

With a bit of gratitude, even in his disappointment, he crawled to the top again and exchanged his wet garments for dry ones. Then sliding under the folds of his shakedown bed, he lay shivering until he could no longer endure the inactive submission to the cold and gloom. He got up now, with a plan. From the dry goods box he secured a piece of fairly dry wood. Next he got his pocket knife from the wet trousers he had dropped upon the tank. They were frozen stiff, but he managed to extract his knife.

From the wood he made a bow and strung it with string improvised from a shirt. Next he made a wheel of wood and punctured it at the center. Through this hole he passed a lancelet of wood and around the lancelet he gave a twist of the bowstring. This completed his firestick. He placed the point of the lancelet upon a block of wood and against it he laid a circle of cloth which he had soaked in gasoline.

Now he began to saw upon the bow, as he held the lance against the block by another upon its head. The lance revolved swiftly as he worked his bow back and forth, and the wood began to scorch. He worked faster as he smelled the delicious scent of hot pine. Faster and smoke began to turn . . . faster, a spark glowed red! He dropped his stick and blew upon it. The gasoline soaked cloth burst into flame.

Fire! He was a savage no longer!

He leaped to his feet and wadded up some underwear and crawled down to the petcock to soak it in gasoline. Back at his fire he dropped the dripping garment into the blaze. Flames roared up into the veil of snow. He put on more fuel and was soon warm and comfortable for the first time since he had left the earth.

His next task was to find something to eat. He piled new fuel upon the fire, and again boarded the big timber. The snow still wrapped his entire world within its mysterious draperies, but he knew the fire would make a beacon to lead him back to his iron island. Mounting his "craft" again he paddled boldly away.

Half a mile or more from his tank, he was rewarded. A barrel of cookies was his first find. The cakes were soaked with water, but he pulled them up on his log and turned about toward the light. As he paddled he ate his fill of the sweet, soggy cakes.

AN hour later beside his fire with thirst tormenting him he wished he had left the cookies where he had found them. The snow tantalized him. He walked about the tank touching his tongue to flake after flake. They melted like goldfish food in the mouth of a shark and with as little relief. Not a trickle reached his throat.

In spite of his thirst his mind was on Virginia. Hours had passed since the ship took off and it must either have broken away from the Marine's gravitation or had failed again and was somewhere out there in the night. Yet the more he

thought of it the more certain he became that Kris would turn back.

He put more fuel upon his fire. He shouted loudly into the desolate waste which spread all about. Determined to find out if Virginia could be anywhere near he returned to his raft. A mile from his beacon it appeared as a dim star of light. That was as far as he dared go at first, so he started a wide circle, calling out every few strokes, but no answer came to him, not even an echo of his own voice. It was lost in the hazy veil as much as he was on the Marine sphere.

After a bit he felt a vaporous cold as though ice was near. A soft breeze blew in freshly chilled as though it had passed over an ice field. The temperature was cold, but it was not the dry cold of falling temperature nor yet the feel of cold air across the sea. Ice was the only answer to it. And yet he knew there could be no ice, for he was on the midnight pole and the water had not frozen around him as yet. He set the whole business down to his upset imagination and then he saw that there was ice. A great berg lifted almost in front of him. He had to paddle swiftly to keep from ramming his log into it. It swelled and grew, heaving up from beneath until it caught him and his log and lifted them high above the water. He stood upon its glassy surface and endeavored to get his log back into the water, but all around him came upon cake of ice wallowed up to cover the entire surface.

He abandoned the idea of the log. It was useless in that field of ice. He could leap from cake to cake and get back to his fire. Even as he surveyed the bewildering miracle he wondered where it had come from. And the more he pondered the more mysterious it seemed, for it thickened and grew amazingly.

Soon he became alarmed. His beacon was weaving and jumping weirdly as though some phantom had plucked it from the tank and was using it in a ghoulish dance. The ice was toying with the gasoline tank. He leaped from cake to cake, making unbelievable speed, but he did not run far. There came a burst of flame-lined smoke, a scattering of spluttering blaze, a thundering roar. Dick stopped, sick at heart. His tank had exploded. The pressure of the gathering ice must have opened its seams.

He walked slowly onward toward the fire. A warm heat reached him. The snow flakes faded away. The blaze burned a conelike hole up through the snow. It penetrated up to the slate-like cloud far above, which yielded to the heat to let down a spot of Earthlight, pale and wan in contrast with the lurid glimmer on the ice.

The flame spread, in a widening circle about the ice. The heat grew until it was unpleasant even where he stood. All about him ice crystals glittered and winked. Thirst became acute. Remembering that sea ice ejected four-fifths of its salt as it froze, and hoping it might assuage his thirst, he picked up a sliver of ice and sucked at it. It tasted good. He rolled his tongue over it in astonishment. There was no saltiness at all!

Snow ice or fresh water ice, surely! But

where had it come from? Another mystery of that strange watery sphere.

Then he found something flat and black. A seal! The Arctic? Of course that was the solution. As the water left the earth it had carried with it the vast ice fields of the north and south seas, and now that the churning of the water was quieted, it was rising to cover the entire sphere. It would soon pack down and thicken. A new menace threatened Virginia and the ship if they had been lucky enough to come back. The space ship must already be surrounded wherever it might be on the watery sphere, and with escape cut off it would soon be frozen in and crushed.

Warfare!

HE sat disconsolately upon an ice cake and watched the gasoline burn itself out. A stark, dead silence was all about except for the crunch of rising ice cakes, and that too was dead like the thud of spaded dirt. Eternal night had brought its companion, eternal silence, to bed with it. It was a lifeless place. Even death has its semblance of life. On Earth it meant the ending of that which had been. It had beauties and joys which were not without solace to the bereaved. But here everything was lifeless. This frigid hemisphere grew nothing, nurtured nothing, bred no good nor lovely thing. He alone was sentient in the vast graveyard of ghoulish things. His iron nerve was near the break as he stared bewildered into the maze of snow.

He was Adam thrust from the Garden. The last man instead of the first!

How long he remained staring into the haze he never recalled. But sometime later his dejected mood was broken by a distant stuttering rattle like rifle fire!

The ship! Then Virginia was back! A miracle—a resurrection!

Tossing an auto tire on the fire, he put vim into his legs as he leaped from ice cake to ice cake in the direction of the sound. Ahead of him the mysterious night, the murk, the hazy, empty loneliness no longer was a thing of horror. Virginia was there to fire his courage. He dashed on fearing no penalty the desolate waste could exact.

After several hundred yards of swift running he stopped and shouted. The gunfire had stopped with the first scattering volley. Now dead silence hovered all about again. No one answered him.

He looked over his shoulder. His beacon had failed or he had covered more ground than he thought. Surely he must be quite near the ship. He shouted again. There was no answer. Only silence followed his cry. An intense hush that was broken only by the crack and crunch of ice.

Perhaps he had again travelled in a circle. Perhaps he was lost?

He smiled a bit ironically, his cheeks wrinkling painfully, they were so chilled. One spot of this nightmare was about like another. Lost from what? His fire? It would do him little good when the extreme cold settled. Earth? It

was probably as desolate and barren as this icy sphere.

Virginia! The cracked lips drew thin. She was all he had to lose. All that could make life on this place bearable at all. After all it was something of this kind which had made Earth itself bearable. Men had lived, worked, planned, and accomplished—with the knowledge that they were but spawn that would perish—all because their lives held the leaven of love. He must find her. A little of the panic he had fought so stoically seeped into his heart and he cried out frantically, shout after shout, running about here and there until he was entirely confused as to which direction the ship might lie.

There it came again, volley upon volley, no signal surely—there was fighting? Virginia was in danger! Perhaps she was making a stand against Kris!

With his concern for her life, his own panic died. He was his old calm, assured self again. He hurried forward but plans of attack were drumming through his head. He had no gun, but he was sure he could outwit Kris by his superior knowledge of the phenomena existing on Marine.

A bullet whinged past his ears. Despite the warning Dick ran straight toward the report. The ship towered into the snow veil, only vaguely defined. Its lights were out but now and then a spurt of orange flame burst from a port high up in its bulk.

DICK saw a dark form upon the ice. He ran to it and stooped down. The cook was sprawled out sticky with blood, warm but certainly dead. Dick grabbed the gun which had dropped near an out-flung arm and crept forward more cautiously. A few feet further he came upon a great barrier of ice. It was at least ten feet high and probably twenty or more wide. Wondering the why of it he crawled over it and found the ship floating in a narrow pool of water. Evidently the crew had been working to keep the ship free of ice, but no one was about although here and there cakes were rising and skim ice glowed palely on the narrow circle of open water.

"Hello the ship!" he shouted, taking any risk to find Virginia.

High up against the dark hull flashed an oval of light, and O'Malley's disorderly mop of red hair pushed through the port hole as a blade of light dipped here and there, as though searching for him. Fifteen or twenty feet beyond it glinted upon steel. It whipped down a rifle barrel to reveal Kris sprawled against the ice. An orange flash burst from the rifle. The flash fell, slowly, twirling round and around as though let down by a string, as though it were one of those slow motion pictures. A beam of it caught O'Malley's big Irish face. He was sliding slowly backward into the ship. The flash wallowed into the green water, until its light was drowned.

Another spurt of flame. That time a bullet seared Dick's thigh. He leaped into the air. He felt much as a sack of feathers trying to leap from earth. His leap was slow, but it carried

him high and far. It fooled Kris who expected him to fling himself upon the ice, for another bullet whinged close, sending up a shower of ice particles. But Dick had lost his gun.

He came down almost on top of Kris. The latter either heard or saw him for he yanked his gun about for a deadly shot. Dick lunged ahead and gripped the barrel ducking his head until it rested across his shoulder. Kris dragged it down inch by inch, until Dick could feel the muzzle edging down along his shoulder into his neck. Remembering the lightness of bodies he braced a foot in a crevasse of the ice and with a sudden upward swing brought Kris, rifle and all, up over his back.

Kris pulled the trigger and the exploding powder seared his coat and left little strings of fire in the cloth. But the gun came free and Dick flung it out into the night. Kris swore and charged with his head lowered to find its mark under Dick's ribs. The blow sent him reeling for ten feet, but he picked himself from the ice and rushed. He was getting angry now. Much as he realized that coolness alone would conquer the big blonde, the thought of all that Kris had done to repay their kindness gave him a burning desire to treat the man to some of his own medicine.

He rushed in with violent swings to the paunch and the jaw, swings which should have landed to knock out any ordinary man. Instead they seemed to have little effect. One right cut under the jaw lifted Kris entirely from his feet and pushed him up into the air as though he had mounted stilts, but when he dropped he was swearing but evidently unhurt. It became more and more certain to Dick that with the light weight the planet gave them both, he could never land a blow that would knock Kris out. The blows had nothing solid to back them up, one or the other of the men bounded away as though they were toy balloons. It was as though he were pounding a wind bag held by no string. That thought gave him the idea. Even a punching bag could be given a good hard wallop when held in one's grip.

CHAPTER IV.

Mutiny!

ON his next charge he locked and caught Kris by the scruff of the neck, and then swinging back with his right he brought in a smashing blow to the jaw.

Kris bellowed as Dick came with an even more violent blow to the paunch. Hitting below the belt was not Dick's code of fighting, but he was mixing it with a man who had shot down two of his crew and was trying to get him at any cost. He could not be scrupulous as to where he put his punches.

The last blow doubled Kris into a knot. Dick leaned over him long enough to lift his revolver and then made a swift run for the ship. Virginia was the one thought in his mind. He saw her in the light where he had last seen O'Malley. She too was whipping her flash about the ice trying

to discover him. When it did find him the flash snapped out and he saw her hands fling up in some kind of gesture where the dim light of the room revealed her in the port hole. He felt something rasp across his face. It was a rope!

He scrambled up with the agility of an ape but heard Kris grunting and scrambling for the gun. He shouted, warning Virginia from the light. Instead she poked a rifle barrel through the porthole and played such a tattoo of rifle fire about Kris that he was glad to spring back to the protection of the ice.

When Dick crawled into the ship he closed the steel shutters and drew Virginia into his arms. He felt as though the miracle of resurrection had given her to him again.

As they stood there a long while—unmindful of Kris banging away at the steel sides of the ship—Virginia told him briefly what had happened while he was alone upon the sea.

She had returned to the control room to find Kris at the controls. Upon demanding where Dick was, Kris had overpowered her and after binding her had buckled her into one of the belts. Then the fuel had given out and Kris had been forced to return to the water. The crew had protested at Kris's control; they were afraid Dick might not agree with the attempt to return to earth; and yet they were afraid for the weird phenomena of the Marine sphere. O'Malley and McGregor had remained firmly loyal, but attempted no interference hoping to find some way to outwit Kris who had the only weapons.

Back on the sea they found the rising ice. Knowing that should the ship freeze there would be no hope of getting away even after sunup, unless the ice melted during the daylight, Kris set the men to pushing the ice cakes clear of the ship and sent Dennison out to search with the hope that he might find a barrel of gasoline.

Dennison soon came back with the word that he had discovered a steel barrel of fuel about three hundred yards from the ship, but he needed a bar and axe to get it loose from the ice.

Kris sent him back and prepared another attempt to take off. Dennison came back with the barrel and there was a lot of excitement as the cap was unscrewed, but the fuel proved to be lubricating oil.

Kris sent out more men in search of fuel and became enraged as they returned empty handed. He cursed and swore and prodded the men working the ice, threatening to shoot every time a man complained of frost bites and asked time to warm himself inside the ship.

"Just as he was about to send three of the men out in another search for fuel," Virginia went on, "I saw a great flare spring into the snow veil. Of course we guessed it was you and begged Kris to let me go. He did not answer and left the ship. O'Malley got into the control room in some way while Kris was prodding the work outside and released me, but made me promise I would wait a bit and let him see what he could do. I slipped outside and lay waiting, watching your fire and wondering what I could do to help you.

"The men worked wearily, none of them had

had any sleep since the ship took off. The ice would not stay clear. The growing piles about the ship were unstable and broke up to crowd into the clear channel, until they froze to solid ledges. But more and more ice came up from under the water. Try as we did, we could keep no more than five yards clear about the ship. Finally the cook threw down his axe and swore. He had enough he said. Might as well try to bail out the water under the ship as pull out that flood of ice cakes.

"Get that scientist back on the job," he railed in conclusion, "He'll get us out of this, you big hunk of bologna!"

She shivered and pressed a white hand upon her eyes.

"Kris shot him in cold blood," she went on, "Then he shouted at the men who had paused to listen to the cook, for I believe each of them secretly believed what the cook had dared to say. 'Dig in you,' he roared, 'and the next that complains gets the same dose.'"

"This has gone far enough," Riggs shouted, and raised his axe. Kris aimed his gun, but did not fire. Something changed his mind, maybe it was his determination to take off. We were already unable to keep back the ice. If he had no care for a man's life, he did care for his muscles. There were left only Riggs, O'Malley, McGregor, Dennison and myself. I wasn't much at prying the ice, though I did all I could.

INSTEAD of shooting, Kris leveled his gun into aim and gave Riggs the count of three to change his mind. He stood stubbornly refusing to yield and yet not quite daring to go on against that levelled gun. Kris held his aim and ordered O'Malley and Denison to tie him up.

"O'Malley told Kris where he could go. Dennison said nothing at all, but stood with his two hands holding his axe. Kris called to McGregor, but he had slipped away into the night. I could see this worried Kris a lot and that he was becoming more and more desperate and angry. By that time he swore furiously and blubbered a little like a crazy man. Finally he shouted at me and ordered me to tie Riggs up.

"The awful night, the unreal motionless snow, the piercing cold, and the ghastly feeling of being lost in a freak world had upset all of us, and when Kris turned his eyes on me they were big and horrible. He wasn't sane, he was a frenzied, unreasoning animal! I picked up the wire. Riggs put his hands together and held them out to make it easier on me. His bravery made me ashamed. I turned on Kris. I laughed at him.

"You won't eh?" he bellowed, the more enraged that I dared to refuse. He swore. He cursed in a way that staggered me. But I defied him.

"I was about two yards from Riggs, with McNeil and Dennison making a short semicircle before me. Kris came forward, walking cautiously like a cat. His automatic covered the three men as he advanced until he could reach me. Then his hand shot out and he jerked me from my position between him and Riggs and flung

me far enough away to isolate me from the hesitating men.

"They were not afraid, that was plain by every posture and every line upon their faces. They could die, but they wanted to protect me, and that did not mean rushing the deadly menace of that automatic.

"Now you three," Kris commanded, "crowd up closer. Closer, now stand there and the first man that moves will get his."

"He backed over to where I lay a bit stunned upon the ice.

"Get up!" he bellowed. I tried but my foot had caught in an ice crevasse and was turned so that I was slow in doing what he demanded.

"Get up," he bellowed again, and that time he kicked me with his foot. It didn't hurt. I might have been too frightened to feel it, for I heard Riggs swearing, and I screamed at him, not wanting him to get killed. But he came on. Maybe he thought I was hurt. Kris brought him down at the second or third leap. O'Malley was a little apart from the group and stood there as long as I could see him.

"Then I felt myself picked up and found myself in McGregor's arms. He must have been waiting and watching out in the dark, for he and O'Malley seemed to be working hand in hand. As McGregor picked me up I saw O'Malley running and heard him shouting to attract Kris' fire. But McNeil and Dennison were also closing in and by that time McGregor had me inside the ship. Later O'Malley came in and shut the port hole. He wouldn't tell me what happened. McNeil and Denison never came up."

As she finished her story she stood breathing heavily from the excitement of her experience. Kris had stopped his senseless firing. But soon there came a hammering upon the steel, then a muffled voice from below.

"Let me in," it demanded, "I'll surrender."

Dick's eyes grew cold and hard. His jaws were set and his lips, usually so full and generous, were thin and determined.

"We'll have to do something soon," he said more to himself than the girl. "Ice is already closing the water and if we freeze fast we are done."

"What can we do?" she asked, "The engines died for lack of fuel. Kris left not a drop in the tanks."

Another pounding upon the metal side. "Hey, Dick. You can't do that way. I'll freeze out here. I give up. You can't leave me out here to freeze!"

"Are you going to let him in?" Virginia asked her eyes growing a bit wide.

"We've got to do something," he insisted hardly knowing he had spoken. He was thinking, thinking hard.

"Are you going to let him freeze, Dick?" Virginia asked again and there was half a plea in her terrified eyes.

"Great Heavens!" Dick exclaimed leaping across the corridor to the gun case. Virginia looked at him puzzled, as though she thought he too had gone crazy with the rest of the world. He got out two rifles, two automatic 45's and

handed one of each to Virginia. Then he handed her a belt of cartridges as he buckled one about his own waist.

"You hold the ship," he commanded, "I almost forgot McNeil and Dennison. We can't leave them on the chance that they are dead. I've got to find them before we think of taking off."

"Kris?" she exclaimed as he opened the porthole. "I don't trust him, Dick!"

"I neither," he laughed as he flashed his light about over the ice, "but don't worry, I'll come back all right."

Her hand went to her mouth, doubled into a small white fist which pressed hard against her lips. Her eyes begged him to stay back, but she only said, "Oh, be careful, Dick, please!"

He picked up the lifeless body of O'Malley and shoved it through the porthole. There came a spurt of fire, the whine of a rifle shot and the dead plop of a bullet in flesh. Dick closed the port hole and ran hurriedly to one of the far side of the vessel. Opening it quickly he slid out into the night.

A New Phenomenon!

HE hit the ice skim with little force, but his weight, light as he was, ripped open the half inch crust and sent a shower of ice particles flying all about. Dick crawled upon an ice cake and lay very still. A dark shadow edged along the ice barrier from behind the ship. Was it Kris?

Dick pulled his automatic and waited cautiously. The shadow flipped from ice cake to ice cake, advancing steadily. Behind a large cake it disappeared and Dick waited. He was fairly positive it was not Dennison or McNeil and yet he could not be sure. One of them might be alive and have mistaken him for Kris.

Only the steady rhythm of his breathing marked the passing of time as he waited the attack he felt sure was coming. Every minute, every second was precious. The ice was thickening, freezing in the ship. Eternal winter was sinking its claws into the steel. He not only had to get the ship away but find some fuel to run the engines.

From behind the ice came the roar of a rifle shot, and there was a crackling and splintering of ice at his side.

"Is that you, Kris?" he called.

The answer was another shot. Neither McNeil nor Denison would have done that. It was Kris. But what had become of McNeil and Denison? He had to know before he left the ice and went back to the ship.

"Kris," he called compromisingly, "I wouldn't leave a snake to what is coming out here. Throw down your gun and I'll let you come aboard."

Kris laughed a harsh, uncompromising laugh, and fired again. Dick felt he had every reason to shoot Kris down. He believed he could end him with one shot, for a crack in the ice revealed a sector of the big body behind the cake. Yet he lay waiting. Something within him would not permit that deadly shot.

"Where are McNeil and Denison?" he asked after a bit.

Kris laughed with a tinge of triumph in his mirth. "Dead as mackerel," he came back, "You'll join them soon enough."

"You told me you'd surrender if I'd take you aboard."

"Too late," Kris snapped back, "I've got you where I want you now."

There was another wait. Finally,

"I'm going to kill you, Kris. I don't want to, but you make it so I can't do anything else."

The answer was another shot and a shower of ice particles right in Dick's face. Kris was getting his location. Cautiously he moved about for better shelter.

And all the time Dick was thinking of Virginia and the ship. The pool about the ship was freezing thicker and thicker. Dick knew their chances of surviving were being frozen with it.

And then he noticed that his breathing was ticking off the minutes with a faster beat. He was soon gasping as though he had been running. His lungs in some way could not get their fill of air. He noticed also that the snow veil was lifting. Already the bottom of it was three feet or more off the sea. It was going up, not with the imperceptible slowness with which it had come down, but swiftly like an elevator. The yellow light of earth was returning like the moon rising into a dark night. He flung himself upon his back to get a better view of that snow curtain.

Dick knew almost at once what was happening. The tiny sphere of water did not have gravitational influence enough to hold the atmosphere against the pull of the much larger earth. Soon Marine would be as barren of air as the moon. Life could not exist anywhere upon it. The cold would flood in quickly with its blanket pulled off. The sea would soon be cracking and exploding to the stab of the cold.

Kris was still firing at intervals, unaware of what was taking place. Dick slid softly away. He had to get into the ship at once. Virginia's life and his own depended upon it. McNeil and Denison were surely dead or they would be making some attack upon Kris, or at least shouting their whereabouts upon the ice.

He rounded the prow of the ship. The light was now that of a bright full moon on earth. As he rounded the ship he saw Virginia at the port hole looking for him. Again she tossed the rope, but he made one swift search about before he went up. The increased light revealed McNeil and Denison not far from where Kris had been when Dick reached the ship. Both were dead. He ran back to the rope and went up it quickly, his lungs breathless, blood trickling from his nostrils.

Inside he shut the port hole and opened the oxygen valves. But his problem was far from being solved. In but a few minutes the ship would be frozen tight. With a few days it would buckle and break to the exploding ice. The engines had no fuel and the lack of atmosphere forbade a search for any container of gasoline floating upon the sea.

He took Virginia by the hand. She smiled at him.

"YOU'RE a brave kid," he said a bit huskily, "You'll need every bit that's in you."

"We're lost?" she asked.

"Not a chance," he admitted. "But there is a fool stunt I'm going to try. It's fantastic, hardly what one would call a chance, but it's all we have and with your leave," he bowed low in mock courtesy, "Madam, I'll sink the ship."

"What?" she cried. "No, let's stick it out here, suicide is cowardly."

"That was farthest from my thoughts, Madam," he continued his mock role. He pulled the lever which opened the flood gates to the hold. He put his arm about her encouragingly. "This sphere is all water. I am going to let the ship sink to its center, head it up the other way, pump the water from the hold, and we will float up, up, up, until we are on the sunny side where our sun engines can do their bit. Earth will be livable with the air back on its surface and there should be enough underground water left to nourish us until the satellites fall."

There came the uneasy feeling of a settling vessel, the long sharp cracking and popping of ice which strained at its hull.

"But there is no fuel, Dick, none at all. Not even for the pumps. Kris drained it all!"

"I'll find a way," Dick assured her.

"How?" she demanded.

"It's a secret," he said trying to make light of the danger, "You'll promise not to give me away to the prohibition squad?"

"You mean?"

"Sure, why not? A few barrels of mash, it will sour nicely as we settle down and down. A home made still, and presto, chango, corn into fuel! Simple, no?"

"But the law," she retaliated, rising to his mood.

"Made under government supervision," he came back at her.

"You're great, Dick," she exclaimed.

He walked over to the port glass to take a last look at the queer world under which they were sinking. His face sobered the minute he turned away from her. Dick was in no wise fooled as to the dangers ahead.

Beyond the porthole he surveyed the queer world for the last time, and wondered what new horrors were in store. The ship was sinking slowly, but surely. The ice field below rose steadily to meet the level of the port. And as it sank the clouds rose higher and higher from the sea until the big Earth rode clean and glowing like a copper shield. The sea was brilliant, the ice radiant with golden fires, as though they had found themselves marooned on some fabled island of beryl and topaz. Again the ragged fields of ice seemed all aflame, changing hues with every foot the ship sank.

He took off his cap in salutation to the brave men he was leaving there. They had died loyal-

ly in defense of the ship and Virginia. The circle of his vision narrowed with the descent of the ship until only the ice barrier—yellow, luminous, beautiful, sparkled and glistened like a great yellow opal, evil as one in the magic light. He gave one last look at the heavens beyond, stars bright as electric bulbs, in spite of the startling brilliancy of the big yellow earth.

There he saw a strange ghost-like thing, something only simulated by a whirl of nebula far out in space. It was a long cigar-shaped vaporous mass, whirling with its point straight toward the big yellow earth. The envelope which protected men, the life-giving air they breathed, was made visible by the burden of moisture mixed with it. It was being drawn back, a mighty cyclone across the thousand miles of cosmos, to the earth from which it came.

He watched it go hopelessly. How long his oxygen tanks would last and what conditions they would meet on the far side, should they survive, he had no idea. Watching it he saw the ice barrier rise beyond the port, the green water washed the edge of it. He felt the uneasy movement of the vessel as though it were a freezing bucket there in the ice and some giant hand was slowly beginning to turn it around. All about the ice fields became restless, there was a crunching and grinding of the ice cakes. The sea was beginning to whirl about as though caught in a vortex of the storm. He closed the port shield and found Virginia beside him. He took her hand and put an arm about her, offering her his presence to sustain her courage. She must know what they were risking on that trip to the bottom of the sea. Tremendous pressures would increase at every mile, even though they were but a fraction of those at the same depth of water upon the earth. The vessel had been built for shocks and pressures, but could any man-made vessel endure that under fifty or a hundred miles of water? Dick had his doubts. He had heard of water being forced through cast iron balls when lowered to a great depth in the old Earth sea. Yes, he had his doubts; but still he tried to smile reassuringly as Virginia's penetrating look searched his face.

And then he felt a bucking and swaying of the ship, a lunging and pounding of ice against the hold. A churning and turning which caused him to buckle both Virginia and himself back into their belts. Gravity again became disturbed and played freaks with the furnishings of the room.

"Don't worry, Virgie," he shouted as he fastened her into her belt, "I understand now what is going on. The sea is falling back to earth in a spiral. It is following the trail of the air, but less swiftly. Our velocity keeps us from falling directly to the earth, but it is not enough to keep us from falling. We won't have to sink the ship now. If our provisions hold out, and I am sure they will, old mother earth will have us back. She will have a new Adam and Eve to start house-keeping within a year at the most."

The End.