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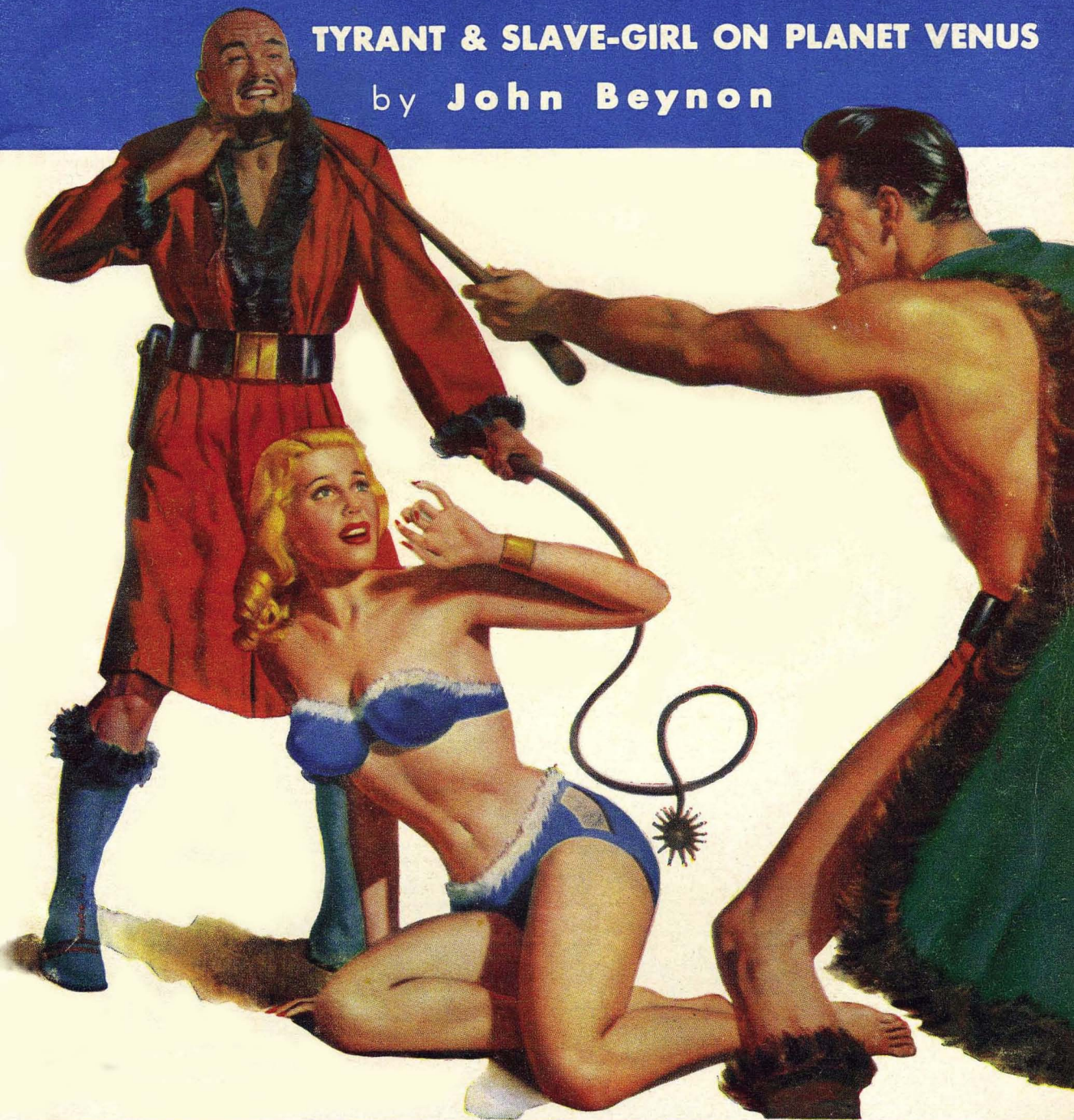
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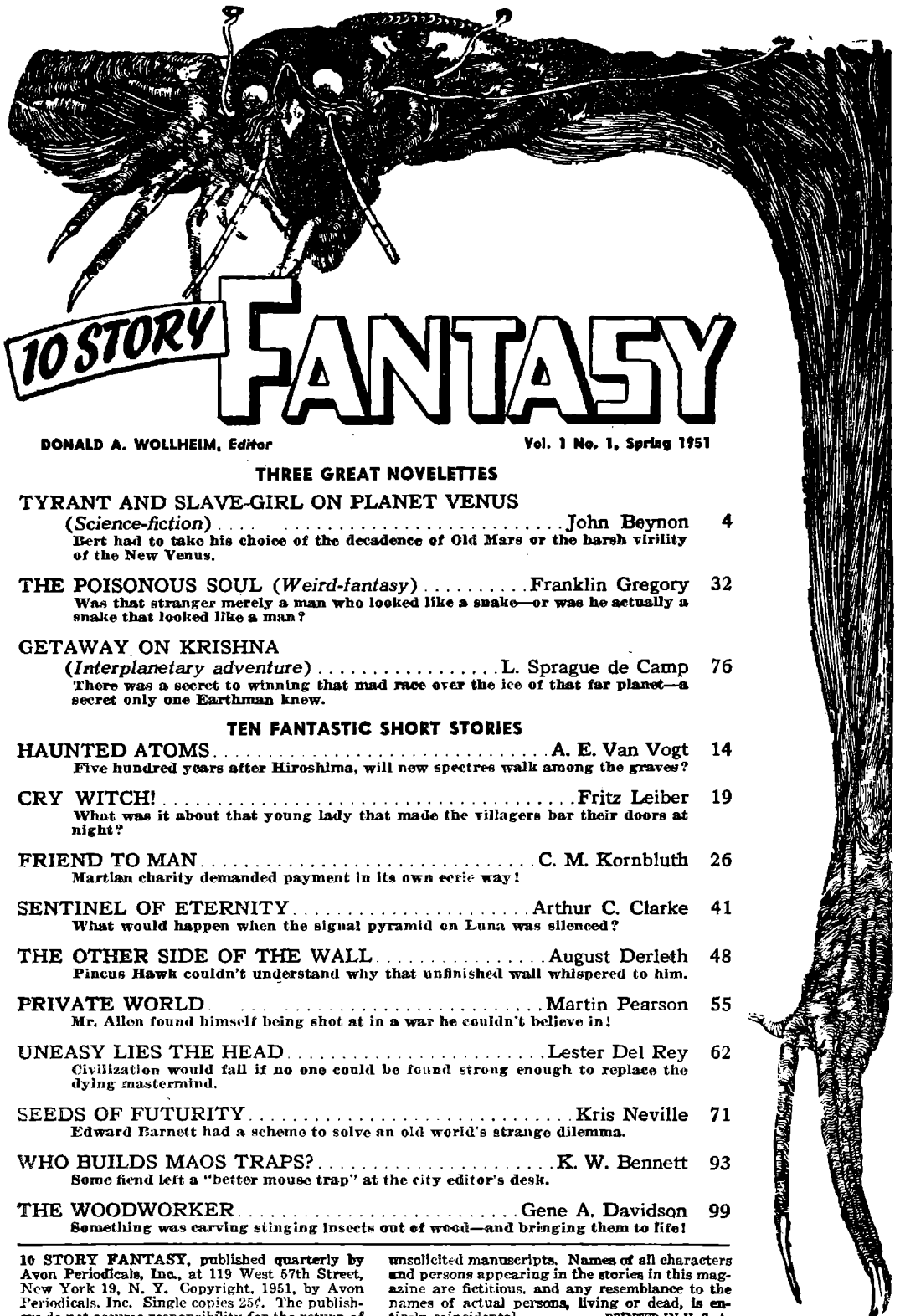
FANTASY

TYRANT & SLAVE-GIRL ON PLANET VENUS

by **John Beynon**



Franklin Gregory • August Derleth • A. E. Van Vogt • F. Leiber • and others



10 STORY FANTASY

DONALD A. WOLLHEIM, Editor

Vol. 1 No. 1, Spring 1951

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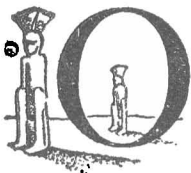
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Tyrant and Slave-Girl



A NOVELETTE



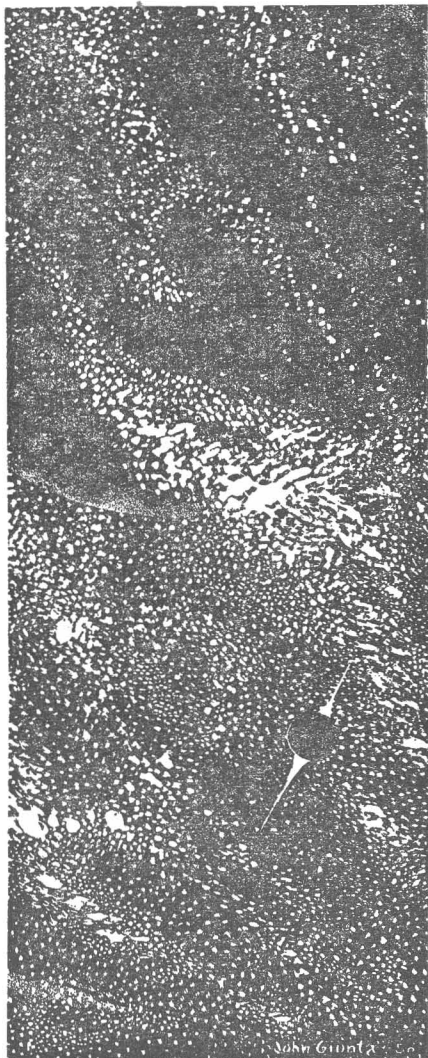
ON THE LEFT bank lay the ruins of a great city. According to the Martians it was called something like Thalkia.

It was unlike any waterside city, unlike indeed, any city that Bert had seen on Earth. There were no vestiges or signs of quays. Instead, half a

dozen stone paved roads, ramps with low walls, ran from the land into the water. Looking over the side of the boat one could follow them down into the murky depths. From them Bert had deduced that the Great Ones who had built the city had employed some kind of amphibious craft able to run from the canal into the market-places or wherever it was that the cargoes

on Planet Venus

By JOHN
BEYNON



Bert wanted to rebuild his proud lost world. To achieve this end, he had to take his choice of either the decadence of Old Mars or the whip-wielding virility of the New Venus.

•

of the place. Out of it protruded pillars and walls of the darker red stone, and, between them, the corners of fallen blocks. Here and there great lintels, architecturally fantastic, and structurally impossible on Earth, still stood. It could be seen that the Great Ones had abhorred the straight line, delighted in the subtle curve, and had had a particular penchant for a gently swelled three-sided pillar. And, too, that there was nothing ephemeral in their building notions. Allowing for the different gravity, there was a massiveness which nothing on Earth, save possibly the Egyptian pyramids, had employed. It awed Bert quite a deal to be standing in the remains of the oldest structural work anyone had ever seen. The civilization of Earth seemed by contrast like a quickly blown and burst bubble. He doubted whether Thalkia had looked much different at the time when men's ancestors were leaving the trees for the ground. Each time he had come away humbled by antiquity, and with the desire to dig there one day and find out more about the Great Ones.

were needed. It was just another of those hints about the Great Ones that, put together, added up to practically nothing.

Several times Bert had stopped there, and made his way among the ruins. They told him practically nothing: he could not deduce even the size or nature of the Great Ones. Pale red sand had crept across much

Yet this time as his boat chugged past Thalkia he almost failed to notice the place. His arm was over the tiller, and he steered without thinking. The eyes under his battered hat's brim were not even conscious of what they saw.

Many miles behind him, beside a

smaller canal than this, stood a ruined tower that had changed from its obscure original purpose to become the home of a Martian family, and it was there that his mind was lingering. The family sustained itself on the produce of a few fields irrigated by the usual wheel beside the canal. It was to keep the wheel turning and to repair such domestic objects as confounded the limited local talent that Bert had the family on his schedule of calls.

Of seven Martian years (which would have been something over thirteen Earth years had the disintegrated Earth survived as a measure of time) Bert had spent more than six wandering the canals in his boat, leading a tinker's life from which he returned occasionally to base at the Settlement to pick up metal, make a few pots, and collect such supplies as he could conveniently remove. The small farms and scarce villages on his route had become used to him, and to putting broken objects aside for him to mend when he called. And he had grown to know and to like the people who lived in them.

At first, to his Earth-raised mind, they had been too quiet, and ineffective, and fragile-looking, so that like most of the Earthmen he had thought them decadent. But in time he began to see himself and the other Earthmen with something like Martian eyes—as neurotic, acquisitive, and with values which were sometimes suspect. He had begun to wonder whether 'drive' was always the virtue he had been taught it was—whether it might not sometimes be the expression of instability or poor integration. Though that was not a thought one would mention to another Earthman.

"To us it seems," a Martian had once told him, "that a sense of guilt lies on each of you Earthmen. You all of you think that you ought to be better men, or bigger men, or at least different men in some way. We won-

der why a whole race should have the inferiority complex which makes it base its virtues on the assumption of its own inadequacy. To us that seems strange."

IT SEEMED strange to Bert, too, and not very palatable when put in that way, so that he had disputed it. Nevertheless, as time went by, he had found himself understanding Martian views better, and Earthmen's views less well.

It was disagreeable to realize, too, that the Martians mattered more now, for the Earthmen were finished. The 'drive' of the Earthmen, which was something superimposed upon the normal will to live, had brought them to the end. By accident, carelessness or irresponsibility it had torn the Earth into the millions of fragments which now circled the sun as an inner asteroid belt.

The few hundreds of men left stranded here and there were of no account any longer. It made little difference whether they died off from drink or illness, or waited for old-age to take them. In less than thirty Martian years the last of them would have gone, and the brief disturbance of their incursion would gradually drop out of Martian memory, leaving no sign but some admixture in the Martian blood—which brought Bert back to considering the family that lived in the ruined tower.

There, as in other places, he had been accustomed to tell tales to the children as he worked. He had been only half aware that they were growing up. Mars was a world so spent, so far into old age, that younger generations still growing up there seemed not only incongruous, but pointless to an extent where he scarcely admitted to himself that they were doing so. His last visit, however, had left no doubt about it, for the youngest daughter, Zaylo, whom he thought of as a little girl, had

suddenly become transformed into a young woman. The realization had disquieted him in a way that was quite new. . . .

BERT HAD come to some sort of terms with the conditions thrust upon him. He was not interested in the few Martian girls who hung around the Settlement. Occasionally he came across one of the Earthmen who had settled down with a Martian girl. Sometimes it seemed a qualified success, more often it didn't. In the early days some such idea had tentatively entered his own head, but he had dismissed it, rather as he had dismissed the idea of an alcohol-soaked life in the Settlement. The indications were, he decided, that it did not work well.

Bert was not analytical in the matter. It had not occurred to him that the chief factor in a Martian marriage would be the temperament of the man concerned—his ability, or lack of it, to adapt. Nor had he looked closely at the motives of his decision. He was aware that he resisted something, but had anyone told him that in his heart he was sentimentally preserving a useless loyalty to a world and a race that had finished, he would not have believed it. If his informant had gone further, and told him that the Earth he revered was an idealistic, romantic conception with little likeness to the vanished Earth of reality, he would not have understood.

What he did understand was that the sight of Zaylo had somehow pulverized in a moment a philosophy which had hitherto been adequate enough, and that the placidity of his existence had been torn to shreds. In his mind he could hear the voice of Annika, Zaylo's mother, saying: "Life is not something which you can stop just because you don't like it." He did not want to believe that. There had been a poet once back on Earth who wrote:

*I am the Master of my Fate,
I am the Captain of my Soul.*

That was what Bert believed—or hoped.

EVER since the day when he had accepted the grim fact that he was stranded on Mars for the rest of his life he had steered his own course. He had shown the Greater Fate that it could not get him down, and he intended to go on showing it. Zaylo was a trap—a beautiful trap, like a fly-eating orchid. The sight of her and the sound of her voice had pierced through all his defenses. He ached from the resulting wound. He knew perfectly well that if he were to stay near her he could no longer hold that Captaincy undisputed. He was jealous of her power to move him, angry with her for revealing to him the dry sawdust within his life. And so he had run away. . . .

He was now in the process of discovering the paradox that it takes a very strong mind to run away really efficiently, and that if the mind is that strong it probably doesn't run at all. Certainly he had been unsuccessful in his efforts to leave Zaylo behind. She stood between him and everything.

When his eyes were on the massive ruins of Thalkia, what he was seeing was Zaylo. Zaylo in a deep-yellow skirt stencilled with a pattern in warm brown, with her hair held high on her head by three silver pins; the delicacy of her hands and arms, the unhidden beauty of her young breasts, the curve of her shoulder, her skin like copper woven into satin, dark eyes looking depthlessly back into his own, red lips trembling on a smile. . . .

BUT HE did not want to see Zaylo. Deliberately he banished her. "Those," he told himself aloud, "are the ruins of Thalkia, one of the great-

est cities of Mars. That means only five or six miles now to Farga's place. Take the waterway forty-five degrees right at the junction. Let's see, Farga. . . ." He consulted his notebook to refresh his memory regarding Farga's family and household. Farga's son, Clinff, would be pretty well grown up now. A useful boy, more mechanically minded than. . . . And then somehow he was thinking of Zaylo who was also pretty well grown up now. He was watching her moving with the grace of a young Diana on delicate feet that seemed to caress the ground, noticing the carriage of her head, the rhythm of her walk, the—

Bert shifted, and muttered. He brought a determined gaze to the water ahead. Yes, Clinff had a better mechanical sense than most of them. One might be able to teach him. . . . It was queer how difficult it was for Martians to grasp the simplest mechanical principles. . . . Take the lever. When he had tried to explain it to Zaylo there had been a delightfully earnest little furrow between her brows. . . .

Farga walked down to meet him as he ran the prow ashore on the shelving bank. The Martian was smiling, and holding out his hand in welcome—it was a custom which he had picked up, and punctiliously observed with Earthmen. Bert had a first impression that he was slightly surprised by the visit, but in their greeting he forgot it. He slung a sack of belongings and tools over one shoulder. Farga laid hold of a smaller bag, but failed to lift it. Bert reached down one hand, and raised it easily. The Martian shook his head, with a smile.

"On the moons of Jupiter I, too, would be considered a strong man," he observed.

"If I could go back to Earth now, I guess I'd be as weak as a kitten," Bert said.

"As a what?" inquired Farga.

"As a—a bannikuk," Bert amended.

Farga grinned broadly. "You a bannikuk!" he said.

They ascended the bank and made their way through the fringe of clinking tinkerbells which crowned it.

BERT was glad, and a little surprised, to see that Farga's house was still standing. After Farga himself had built the walls of flat, uncemented stones, Bert had selected suitable roofing slabs from the Thalkian ruins and ferried them down. When he hoisted them into place he had doubted the strength of the walls to support them, but Farga had been satisfied, so they had left it. Even after years on Mars Bert still found his judgments of weight and strength fallacious; Farga was probably right, and the structure had no weather to contend with, only heat and cold.

The place was the ordinary pattern of Martian homestead. A few fields strung along the canal bank, a wheel to irrigate them, and the house—which was part shed and granary, and part human habitation. Meulo, Farga's wife, appeared in the doorway of the dwelling part as they approached. Other interested but much smaller faces showed at the mouths of burrows close to the house, then the bannikuks came scampering out, filled with their usual insatiable curiosity. They began to climb Bert's trousers the moment he stopped. He discouraged them gently.

The inside of the house was clean. The floor was paved with a jigsaw of flat stones. There was an immovable stone table, its top polished by use; a set of stools carved from soft rock. In one corner stood a simple loom—an object of some value for several parts of it were of wood—and in another was the bed with a mattress of dried, strawlike stalks. No one could say that Martians were sybaritic. On the table Meulo had set out a dish of what the Earthmen called potapples, for they looked like

potatoes, and tasted, with the help of imagination, very slightly like apples.

Bert dropped his burdens and sat down. Four bannikuks immediately raced up the table sides to gather in an interested group immediately in front of him. Meulo shooed them off. Bert picked up a potapple and bit into it.

"Things going well?" he inquired.

He knew what the answer would be. A farmer's living on Mars was sparse, but not hazardous. No vagaries of weather, few pests. Trouble usually arose through the few simple tools wearing out and breaking. Farga recited a brief list of minor calamities. Meulo added one or two more. Bert nodded.

"And Clinff?" he asked. "Where's he?"

Farga grinned. "You know what he is—interested in machines, almost like an Earthman. Nothing would hold him when he heard the news. He had to go off and see the ship for himself."

Bert stopped in mid-munch.

"Ship!" he repeated. "Ship on the canal?"

"No, no. The rocket-ship." Farga looked at him curiously. "Haven't you heard?"

"You mean they've got one to work again?" Bert asked.

FROM WHAT he recalled of the dozen or so ships lying on the Settlement landing-ground it did not seem likely. The engineers had early reported that all the remaining fuel if pooled would leave little margin over one take-off and one landing—so no one had bothered. Perhaps someone had succeeded in making a satisfactory fuel. If so, they must have been mighty quick about it, for there had been no talk of any such thing when he had left the Settlement half a Martian year ago. And why try, anyway? There was no Earth to get back to. Then he recalled that during the

first years there had been a number of rocket rumors which turned out to have nothing in them. The Martian grapevine wasn't any more reliable in its information than other bush-telegraphs.

"When was this supposed to be?" he asked cautiously.

"Three days ago," Farga told him. "It passed south of here, quite low. Yatan who is a friend of Clinff's came and told him about it, and they went off together."

Bert considered. All but three of the ships at the settlement had been stripped or broken up. The three had been kept intact because—well, someday, somehow there might be a use for them that nobody really believed in.

"Which ship was it? Did he see her name or number?"

"Yes, she was low enough. Yatan said it was a long name in Earth letters—yours, not Russian—and then A4."

Bert stared at him.

"I don't believe that. He must have made a mistake."

"I don't think so. He said it was different from all the ships at the Settlement. Shorter and wider. That is why Clinff and he have gone to see it."

Bert sat quite still, looking back at Farga without seeing him. His hand began to tremble. He did his best to control his excitement. A4 would, he knew, be one of the new atomic-drive ships—at least, they had been new thirteen Earth years ago. There had been a few in more or less experimental service then. Everybody had said that in a few more years they would replace the liquid fuel ships entirely. But there had not been one of them among those stranded on Mars. Perhaps the boy had been right. . . . What he had said about the shape would be true. Bert could remember how squat they had looked in pictures compared with the lines

of normal space-ships. He got to his feet unsteadily.

"I must go to the Settlement. I must find out," he said, speaking as though to himself.

MEULO made as if to protest, but her husband stopped her with a movement of his hand. Bert did not notice either. His eyes seemed to be focused on something far away. He started towards the door as if in a dream. Farga said:

"You're leaving your tools."

Bert looked round vaguely.

"My—? Oh, yes—yes."

Still without seeming to know what he did, he picked them up.

They watched him go, with the bannikuks scampering unnoticed round his feet. He trudged on, brushing through the tinkerbells, setting a thousand little leaves clinking and chiming as he passed, and disappeared over the rim of the bank. Presently came the familiar sound of his boat's engine, then it speeded up, greatly beyond its usual phut-phut. Farga put his arm round Meulo.

"I feel I ought not to have told him. What hope can there be for any of these Earthmen? Their world has gone. Nothing can bring it back to them," he murmured.

"Someone else would have told him," she said.

"Yes, but then I should not have had to be the one to see such loneliness suddenly in a man's face—and such an empty hope," he told her.

When the night made its sudden fall Bert switched on his light and kept travelling. For the first time he wished that he had built his boat for more speed. On the third night he fell asleep at the tiller and grounded on the gradual bank with just enough impact to awaken himself to his need of proper sleep. On the fifth day he reached the Settlement.

In all that journey Zaylo troubled only his dreams. When he was

awake his thoughts continually brought back pictures of Earth. That was stupid, he knew. Wherever the rocket had come from, it certainly could not have come from the swarm of circling asteroids which now represented Earth. Yet the association of ideas was unavoidable. It was as if an old locked box in his mind had been opened, letting scenes and reminiscences spring out as the lid was raised. And he made no honest attempt to force them back.

For the last few miles he might have been upon an ocean. The body of water formed by the junction of several important canals, the curvature of Mars, and his own lowly position took him out of sight of land. But presently he was able to make out the slender spire of the useless radio mast dead ahead. An hour or so more, and he had driven the boat ashore at her usual berth. He jumped out, drove the grapple into the sand to hold her there, and strode off towards the Settlement.

The moment he set foot inside the fence he was aware that the place felt different. On previous visits its spiritlessness had closed around him like a blanket that became a little thicker each time. But now that sensation was missing. The few men he saw on his way to the central clubhouse did not drift in the old way. They looked as if they had received an injection which made them walk with a purpose.

In the clubhouse bar-room the transformation was a little less complete. A number of the habitués sat at their usual tables, too alcohol-logged and sunk in cynicism to change much. When he had helped himself to a drink he looked round for someone who might be coherent and informative. A group of three talking earnestly at a table by the window caught his eye. He recognized the two bearded men as out-of-settlement men like himself. He crossed the floor to

join them. The man who was doing most of the talking was pale and sal-low beside the others, but he had the more decisive manner. As Bert came up he was saying:

"You put your names down now, that's my advice. I'm willing to bet you get chosen for the first batch—You, too," he added, glancing round as Bert pulled up a chair. "We want men like you. Half of them here have gone rotten. They'd never pass any physical examination, or stand the change. I'll put your names up right now, if you like—with a priority mark to 'em. Then once the doc's looked you over, you'll be all set. How about it?"

The two agreed without hesitation. The man wrote down their names, and glanced interrogatively at Bert.

"I'm only just in. What's it all about?" Bert asked with an effect of calmness. He was rather pleased with the way he was managing to control the excitement thumping in his chest. "All I've heard is that a ship is said to have come in," he added.

"It's here now," said one of the bearded men.

"From Venus," added the other.

THE PALE MAN talked. The other two listened as eagerly as if all he said was fresh to them too. There was a gleam in their eyes and a look of purpose on their faces. Bert had not seen a look like that for a very long time.

"Ever been to Venus?" asked the pale man.

Bert shook his head.

"The trip here was my first," he said.

"There's a future on Venus. There's none here," the pale man told him. "Things are going ahead there. We'd have let you know that long ago, but for that static layer over the place that cuts the radio out."

He went on to explain that it had been clear from the time of the first

landings there that Venus could be given a future.

"Here on Mars," he said, "conditions were far better than anyone had expected. The atmosphere was a great deal denser and higher in oxygen content than anyone had estimated, and the temperatures more tolerable. It was thought that only lichens or similar low forms of life could exist. Well, we were wrong about that. All the same, it is pretty nearly finished here now—well on the way out. There are the useful deposits of minerals which for some reason the Great Ones never bothered to work, but that's about all. It had gone too far to be worth a serious attempt to colonize. As for the moons of Jupiter—well, anybody who's content to spend his whole life in a heated spacesuit might live there, but no one else. But Venus was something different. . . ."

In a rather elementary manner he went on to explain why Venus was different. How the conditions on the younger planet could be considered as approximating roughly—very roughly—to those on Earth some millions of years ago. How the density of the atmosphere helped to offset the increased heat of the sun so that, though the tropics were impossible, conditions at the poles were tolerable if not comfortable. How, in fact, it was possible to consider colonization of limited areas.

"And we were still doing that—just thinking about it, that is. We had got as far as establishing an exploring and shipping base on the island of Melos not far from the northern pole, when we found out more or less by chance that the Slavs had sent out two loads of emigrants and actually established a colony on an island near the South Pole."

"I never heard of that," Bert put in.

"You weren't meant to. The Slavs kept quiet about it. They were kind of pathologically prone to secrecy,

anyway. We kept quiet because we didn't want a first-class international row on our hands. We'd have had to do something about it—and we knew that if we started we'd be in for some full-scale nastiness. The best thing we could do seemed to be to start our own colony, pronto.

"Well, the Slavs had the drop on us there. They'd done a bit of criminal transportation on simple, old-fashioned lines—the way we used to do ourselves on Earth. But nowadays we had to get recruits for it. That wasn't easy. Maybe you'll remember a lot of blarney on pioneer lines. Bands, flags, receptions and all that? A lot fell for it. But there had to be other incentives, too, and as decent conditions as we could manage when they got there. And in that we did score over the Slavs. They'd just sent their lot out with as much equipment as they thought strictly necessary—and it's wonderful how little that can be in a tough, well-ordered state. But then, the Slavs are a tough people.

"Still, with all the start we could give 'em our first lot wasn't stuck on the place—but they'd signed for a minimum of five Earth years, and a pension at the end of it. There were twenty-five families in that first lot. Another twenty-five families were in space on their way there when whatever it was that happened at home did happen."

Bert nodded. "I remember. They were due for take-off about a week after we left."

"They made it, too. Several other ships came in, as well. But a good many just vanished. They tell me that two ships that were on the Venus-to-Earth run managed to divert here. They hadn't a chance to turn back, of course. Deceleration and acceleration again would have left them with no fuel for landing. The most they could risk was expending some fuel on making the diversion.

"But that didn't apply to an atomic-

drive ship. The *Rutherford A4* had left Venus two days before, and she did have the reserve of power necessary for a stop, start and land, so she got back—with not a lot to spare. As far as we know, the other atomic ships all bought it. *A1* was smashed in a crash on Jupiter, you remember. *A2*, *3* and *5* are thought to have been on or near Earth when it happened.

"SO YOU SEE our position was a lot different from yours here. We had about the same number of space-port personnel, but we didn't have a whole flock of miners and prospectors—just a few explorers, botanists, chemists, and the like. And we had a colony containing some fifty women, and nearly a hundred children. Also we had a planet with its best years yet to come. We've got something to work with and to work for. This time the human race has got hold of a planet where it really is in on the ground floor. But what we need right now is as many men as we can get to help us. We'd be getting along a lot faster if we had more to oversee the work."

"Oversee? What, one another?" said Bert.

"No. We've got the griffas working for us."

"I thought—"

"You thought griffas were only good for making fur-coats? That's what everyone thought. On account of the price the furs brought nobody bothered to get nearer to them than shooting range. But that's not so. They've got quite enough intelligence to do useful work, and they can be trained up to more tricky stuff when we've got the time. Of course, they're small, but there's any amount of them. The thing is they've got to be watched all the time. There has to be a man in charge—and there's our chief limitation."

"So what you're offering is a kind of foreman job?"

"That's about it—to begin with. But there's opportunity. It's a place that's going to grow. One day it's going to grow mighty big, and have all that Earth ever had.

"Maybe the climate's not too good, but there are decent houses to live in, and already there's getting to be something that looks like civilization. You'll be surprised. Here on Mars there's nothing to do but rot. So how about it?"

"You took a long time finding out you needed us," Bert said.

"No, we knew that all right from the start. Trouble was the getting to get here. That took time. Fuel. To fuel a rocket you've got to produce fuel on the big scale. It takes a lot of labor and time that we couldn't afford for the returns. Just building the plant was too expensive for us to think of. But when we ran across fissile material we could spare the time refining that to get the A4 into use. We want radioactive material anyway, so it became worth doing.

"Now we can take forty-five men this trip, picking the fittest first. You'll make it, easy. You've not let yourself go to seed like most. So how about putting your name down?"

"I'll think about it," Bert said.

All the other three stared at him.

"God Almighty!" said the pale man. "A chance that's almost a miracle to get off this sandheap—and you'll think about it!"

"I was twenty-one when I came here," Bert said. "Now I'm thirty-four, Earth reckoning. You kind of grow into a place in that time. I'll let you know."

HE WALKED OFF, conscious of their eyes following him. Without noticing where he was going, he found himself back at the canal bank. He sat down there among the tinkerbells, and stared across the water.

What he was seeing again was a ruined tower beside another canal.

A life that went on there placidly, harmoniously. A group of people content to live simply, to enjoy what life offered without striving restlessly for some undefined end. People who were quite satisfied to be part of a process, who did not perpetually itch to master and control all around them. It was true that Mars was close to dying. But the whole solar system, the whole universe was in the process of dying.

Was there really so much more virtue in battling for thousands of years to subdue a planet than in living for a few centuries in quiet content? What was it the Earthmen imagined they sought with all their strife, drive, and noise? Not one of them could tell you that ultimate purpose. For all one knew there was none, it might be just a nervous tic. All their boasts need not be more than the rationalizations of a dominating egoism imposed upon a kind of transcendent monkey inquisitiveness. . . .

The Martians were not like that. They did not see themselves as arbiters, as men to be made gods. But simply as a part of life.

Some lines from a poem came into his mind. Whitman had been speaking of animals, but it seemed to Bert to apply very well to Martians:

*They do not sweat and whine
about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark
and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick dis-
cussing their duty to God,
Not one is dissatisfied—not one is
demented with the mania of
owning things. . . .*

The image of Zaylo stepped into his thought's sight. About her like an aura was a sense of peace to soothe his mind and heart.

"Time to rest, Earthman," her mother had said.

(Continued on page 111)

TYRANT AND SLAVE-GIRL ON PLANET VENUS

(Continued from page 13)

But he had fled because to rest, to settle down, to make a home there seemed like a betrayal of all that the vanished Earth had taught him. The act of surrender to Mars at last, and against which the voice inside him still protested: "I *am* the Captain of my Fate."

And now there was the chance to join others who thought that way. A pitiful few, but determined to rise again above the catastrophe which had all but finished them.

A vision of Earth as it had been replaced Zaylo in Bert's mind. Cities full of life, wide farmlands rich in crops, the music of great orchestras, the voices of crowds, the liners on the seas, and the liners in the air. The world made fit for man by man—the glorious dream of the composite mind of man come true. None who were living now would ever see Earth's genius on its pinnacle again. But it *could* climb there in time. The spirit still was there. One day there would be recreated on Venus everything that had seemed lost with Earth—perhaps it would be a creation even more magnificent.

What he was being offered was a chance to help raise civilization again out of disaster. That, or to stay on in puny futility on Mars. . . .

The image of Zaylo stood before him again, lovely, gentle, like balm for a bruised spirit, like heaven for a lonely soul. . . .

But there beside her shimmered the spires and towers of new cities springing into Venusian skies, great ships cleaving Venusian seas, myriads of people laughing, loving, living, in a world that he had helped to build.

Bert groaned aloud.

The echo of a puritan ancestor said: "The hard way must be right: the easy way must be wrong."

The murmur of another mocked it: "The way of vanity must be wrong: the way of simplicity must be right."

No help there.

Bert sat staring into the water.

A sound came from the Settlement behind him. He did not hear it start. He was suddenly aware that men's voices were singing. Occasional drunken bawling was familiar, but men singing lustily, cheerfully, with hope in their hearts was a thing he had not heard for a very long time. He raised his head, listening:

"Oh! There's lots of gold so I've been told

"On the banks of the Sacramento. . . ."

It floated across the sands like an anthem. Shades of the forty-niners, ghosts of covered wagon-trains crawling, crawling across prairies and deserts, over mountains, forging on against hardships and hunger. With not much gold at the end, perhaps—only an arid land. But a land which their sons would make to bloom like a garden there beside the Pacific. . . .

Bert stood up. Decision poured into his blood like strong drink. He felt a glow of comradeship for the men who sang. He turned, squaring his shoulders. He carried himself like a man refreshed as he strode towards the Settlement again. Throwing back his head, he let it go with the rest:

"Oh-h-h! There's lots of gold so I've been told

"On the banks of the Sacramento. . . ."

BERT WAS gazing out of the window as the narrow-gauge electric train pulled away. The perpetual clouds which allowed never a glimpse

of the sun, hung grayly over the landscape. The grasslike growth on the cleared ground looked pale, insipid, and scarcely green at all. The forest beyond rose like a woven wall of much the same ghostly tint. The details of the distance were blurred, of course, for it was raining—the way it did nine-tenths of the time on Venus.

On one side the line ran close to the landing-field. Hulks of spaceships lay about there like half-flensed whales. They had been gutted of all useful instruments and parts long ago, and huge slices had been cut from the sides of many to supply the need for hard metals. Only the small *Rutherford A4* stood intact and shipshape, ready to take off in a day or two on a second trip to Mars. Figures were still busy around her. It was reckoned that she would be able to make three trips during this conjunction, after that she would have to lay off for a while until the next.

Over on the far side of the landing-field coils of black smoke poured from the metal mills and rolled away across country, sooting the pale alien trees.

Whatever else you might feel about it, you had to admit that a staggering amount of work had been put into the place in thirteen years.

Through the other windows which faced the inner side of the curve the line was taking, one could see the houses of the Settlement dotted about. Here and there among them magnificent pennant-trees had been deliberately left standing. Their immensely long leaves rippled in the wind, writhing like Medusa's hair. Crowning the central rise of the Settlement stood the massive palisades of the Seraglio. The upper part of the stockaded wall bristled with down-pointing stakes, and above a top fringed with sharp spines an occasional roof ridge showed.

Bert's neighbor noticed the direc-

tion of his gaze. "Pie in the sky," he observed, shortly. "Jam tomorrow."

Bert turned his head to look at him. He saw a man of middle height, perhaps ten years older than himself. As with all the Venusian colonists his skin was pale and had a softened, flabby look.

"Meaning?" Bert inquired.

"Just that," said the man. "The old dangling carrot. You're one of the lot from Mars, aren't you?"

Bert admitted it. The man went on:

"And you think that one day they'll say: 'Okay, you've been a good boy! and let you into that place?'"

"I've been examined," Bert told him. "They've immunized me against everything anybody ever heard of, and they've given me a certificate which says I'm healthy and fit for parenthood."

"Sure, sure," said the man. "We've all got 'em. Don't mean a thing."

"But it certifies—"

"I know. And what'd you have done if it didn't certify? You'd have raised hell. Well, they don't want guys raising hell around here, so they give you one. 'Seasy.'"

"Oh," said Bert.

"Sure. And now they've given you a job so that you can show you're a good, reliable type. If they're satisfied with your work you'll be granted full citizen rights. That's fine. Only you'll find that they can't quite make up their minds about you on this job, so they'll give you another, maybe one or two more before they do. And then, if you're very, very good and respectful you'll become a citizen—if you aren't, you can still go on trying to make the grade. Take it from me, it's a nice tidy kind of racket, pal."

"But if I do become a citizen?" asked Bert.

"If you do, they'll congratulate you. Pat you on the back. Tell you you're a swell guy, worthy to become one of the fathers of the new Venu-

sian nation. The old carrot again, pal. Unfortunately, they'll say, unfortunately there isn't a wife available for you just at the moment. So you'll not be able to set up house in the Seraglio for a little while. So sorry. But if you go on being a good boy— So you do.

"After a while you get restive and go to them again. They're sorry, but nothing doing just yet. In fact, there's a bit of a list ahead of you. Trouble is boys took to the climate here better than girls. Very unfortunate just at present. But it'll be better later on. All you have to do is be patient—and go on being good—for a few years, and the balance will right itself. Then you'll be able to move into nice comfortable married quarters in the Seraglio. . . . You'll have a sweet little wife, become the father of a family, and a Founder of the State. Jam tomorrow, pal. . . . If you should get sore, and tell 'em a few things, you lose your citizenship—like me. If you get to be a real nuisance around the place—well, you sort of disappear."

"You mean that all they tell you is phoney?" asked Bert.

"Phoney, pal? It stinks. Chris Davey took this place over the day after we heard about Earth cracking up. Since then he's let his buddies run it the way they like, so long as they produce the goods. The result is plenty of work for everyone, and no muscling in."

BERT LOOKED OUT of the window again. The Settlement was behind them now. The cleared ground on either side of the line was planted with unfamiliar, almost colorless crops. Here and there parties of the little yard-high griffas toiled between the rows with the rain dripping from their silver fur as they worked. Occasionally a man in a long waterproof coat and a shovel-shaped hat was to be seen striding from one group to another and inspecting progress. An-

other part of his uniform was a whip.

"Well, they've got some results to show," he said, looking back at the smudge from the metal mills, almost hidden now by rain and mist.

"Yes, they've got that," the man admitted. "That's the griffas mostly—the donkey-work, I mean. There's plenty of griffas—all you like to round up in the forests. Lucky for you and me."

"How?" asked Bert.

"On account of they need us to supervise. The griffas won't work without. So it's no good having unlimited griffas without men to look after them. That makes Chris Davey's buddies think twice before they wipe a man out. Take me. I'm what they call a subversive element—and I'd not be here now if they didn't need all of us they can get to look after the griffas. It was even worth bringing your lot from Mars."

"And what do the griffas get out of it?" Bert asked.

"The chance to live a little longer—if they work," said the man.

Bert made no comment on that. He sat looking out at the blanched landscape through the drizzling rain. Presently the train jerked itself aside on to a loop in the single line, and settled down to wait for a bit. His neighbor offered him a roll of the curious local bread. Bert thanked him and bit into it. For a time they champed in silence, then the man said:

"Not what you expected, eh? Well, it's not what any of us expected. Still, it's all we've got."

"Huh!" grunted Bert non-committally.

His mind had been wandering very far away. He had been back in his old ramshackle boat idling along the canal. In his ears was the friendly chug of the engine mingled with the tinkerbells chimes. The thin, crisp air of Mars was in his lungs again. Beyond the bank, red sands rolled on to

low mountains in the distance. Somewhere ahead was a water-wheel that would surely be needing attention. Beside it a ruined tower of carved red stone. When he walked towards it the bannikuks would come bounding out of their holes, clinging and squeaking, and pestering him for nuts. In the doorway of the tower Zaylo would be standing in a bright-colored dress, the silver pins shining in her hair, her eyes serious, her lips slightly smiling. . . .

"No," he added. "Not what I expected." He paused, then he added. "How did it get this way?"

"Well, the Administrator here was okay with authority behind him, but without it he was nothing. Chris Davey saw that right off and moved fast. The only serious opposition came from Don Modland who wanted a democratic setup. But Don disappeared quite soon, and that had a kind of discouraging effect all round. So Davey and his mob took over. They built the Seraglio stockade for the safety of the women and children—they said. If you're one of Davey's mob, that's where you live. If you're not, you never see the inside of the place. You only think you may, one day.

"Maybe it is true what they say about the birth rate and the death rate in there. Likely it's not. There's no way of checking. The place is guarded. It'd be hard to get in—harder still to get out, alive. If you're one of Davey's mob you carry a gun—if you're not, you don't. The long and the short of it is that as long as the results are coming along Chris does not trouble how his buddies get them."

"He's made himself kind of—king of Venus?" Bert suggested.

"That's about it. This part of Venus, anyway. He's sitting pretty, with everything the way he wants it. The doggone thing is that whether you like it or not, he's making a job

of it. He *is* building the place up, in his way.

"One of the things his buddies put out is that it's a race between us and the Slav lot down in the south. If they get ahead, and come beating through the tropics some day, it's going to be bad for us. So it's better for us to get ahead."

"And attack them, you mean?"

"That's the way of it—sometime, when we're ready."

A TRAIN CAME clattering past on the other loop. Small open trucks loaded with produce, others full of iron-ore, some travelling pens packed with silvery griffas, a couple of glass-windowed carriages on the end. Their own train started off again with a series of jolts. Bert continued to look out of the window. His companion's hand came down on his knee.

"Cheer up, son. We're still alive, anyway. That's more than you can say for most."

"I was alive on Mars," said Bert.

"Then why did you come here?" asked the other.

Bert tried to explain it. He did his best to convey his vision of an Earth reborn. The other listened sympathetically, with a slightly wistful expression.

"I know. Like the Old Man said: '—a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal—'."

"Something like that," Bert agreed.

"Son," said the other man, "you were very young when you left Earth."

"I was twenty-one," said Bert.

"Twenty-one's still trailing clouds of glory—for all it thinks it knows. It was a grand thing the Old Man said, but have you ever thought how many empires had to grow up and be knocked out, or how many billions of poor guys had to die in slavery before a man could get up and say that?"

"I hadn't," Bert admitted. "But it

has been said. So why can't this be a 'nation conceived in liberty?'"

"Well, I guess perhaps the Old Man didn't have quite the right phrase, maybe. You see, after a creature is conceived, it has to go through all the stages—kind of recapitulate its evolution before it can get born."

"That doesn't sound much like a subversive element talking," said Bert.

"You don't have to be in a hurry to be subversive. All you got to do is to say 'why?' when it ought to be 'yes'. If you keep on saying it you find yourself booked for another spell of managing griffas in the quarries, the way I am now."

"But there's no reason to go back to the primitive. What's been said and worked out is all there in the books—books that are here on Venus. What I've seen for myself and what you've told me goes against it all. The thing they've set up is something like an ancient slave-state. We all know there's a better way of life than that—so, for God's sake, what's happening? With all the knowledge from Earth behind them, and the chance to build a new Earth here, surely they aren't going to pour half of history down the drain?"

The other man looked at him for some moments before he answered, then he said:

"Son, I guess you've got it kind of wrong. Building a new Earth is just what they are doing. What you're complaining about is that they've not started in building a new heaven."

Bert regarded him more closely. "I don't get that. I can remember Earth, you know."

"Me too. The difference is, like I said, the clouds of glory. What did you do there?"

"I went to school, then to college, then to the School of Space-training."

"And me. I worked on buildings, in factories, in ships, on docks, in space-ports, on railroads. I bummed around

quite a stretch. Do you reckon I got to know what Earth was like my way—or was your way better?"

Bert sat silent awhile, then he said: "There were fine cities, happy people, music—and fine men, too."

"Ever seen an iceberg? The part you *do* see looks mighty pretty in the sunshine."

"There was enough to show the way a world might be, and ought to be."

"Sure, sure. We all know the way things ought to be. We all got our little heavens." He paused contemplatively. Looking at Bert again, he added: "Maybe—one day. We *have* come quite a way in a few thousand years, but we've still got to grow up. Takes time, son, takes time."

"But here things are *wrong*. They're going back. They seem to have forgotten all the things we've learned. We have to go *on*, not back. Now the people on Mars—"

"Sure. Tell me about Mars, son. That's one place I never was."

Bert went on telling him about Mars. About the place itself, about the way the people, for all the simple poverty of their lives, seemed to enjoy life as a gift in itself, not as a means to something else, and were happy that way.

The little train rattled along. A dim line of hills ahead became visible through the drizzle, but Bert did not see them. His sight was all nostalgic. It showed red deserts set with placid canals, green patches about little homesteads. Somehow he found himself telling the stranger about Zaylo. . . .

The stranger said nothing. Once or twice he made as if to ask a question, but let it go unspoken. Bert talked on, oblivious of the compassion in the listener's eyes.

They were almost at the end of the line before the other broke in on Bert's mood. He pointed out of the window at the hills now quite close.

In places the green-gray vegetation on the slopes was scarred with the dark marks of workings.

"There's where we'll be doing our jobs," he said.

Presently the train jerked to a stop. Bert stood up, heavily and wearily. He collected his gear and followed the other man into the drizzling rain. He felt bowed down by his load. His feet shuffled in a clumsy trudge. He wondered how long it was going to take his muscles to adapt to Venus. At present the place bore down as heavily upon his flesh as upon his spirit. . . .

BERT STOOD on the lip of a small quarry, surveying the scene beneath him. Because, rather remarkably, it was not raining he had an extensive view. But because it was likely to resume raining at any moment he still wore the long waterproof coat that was practically a local uniform. Beneath it his feet showed in large boots that were clumsy, but did keep out the wet. At his waist was a belt supporting a machete and a sheath-knife on the left. His other instrument, a whip, with its twelve-foot lash carefully coiled, was thrust into the belt on his right hand side.

Looking down almost between his feet he could see his party of fifty griffas at work. They were loading ironstone into small trucks which they would presently push on to the slope which led down to the terminus of the line, and later wind up again. Beyond the sheds and tangle of trucklines, at the terminus itself he could see the electrified line, flanked all the way by cleared and cultivated fields, stretching like a rather uncertain swathe cut to the horizon.

To either side the natural Venusian forest grew untouched. Mostly it was a monotone of the pallid and, to unaccustomed eyes, unhealthy looking gray-green. There was a little relief here and there from the pink flush of

the displeasing plant they called the mock-rose—it reminded Bert more of a spiky-petalled dahlia which had been swollen to some eight feet in diameter.

Even more scattered, but giving some relief were occasional streaks of true green, and blobs of slaty-blue. Pennant-trees reared their crests magnificently above the ruck with their ribbons streaming. Still higher rose the feather-tops, swinging in great graceful arcs even in so light a wind. With the rippling fronds of the tree-ferns they helped to give the illusion that the whole plain was in undulating motion. Bert, pensively regarding the span from the mist-hidden sea in the east to the shadowy mountains in the west, loathed each acre of it individually and intensely.

The only things in sight he didn't loathe were the griffas. For them he had a mixture of pity and fellow-being. They were intelligent little creatures, but the general opinion was that they were dead lazy. As Bert saw it, that just showed narrow thinking.

Laziness is a relative term to be measured against work. Nobody calls a flower or a tree lazy.

The point was that a wild griffa never had any conception of work. When it was caught and shown work, it didn't like it. Why should it? The captives netted by a drive in the forest came in as sad-eyed, bewildered little figures, of whom a number went promptly into a decline and allowed themselves to die. The rest had no great will to survive. Life in captivity was very little better to them than no life at all. The only thing that made them work was the desire to avoid pain.

They were intelligent enough to be taught quite complicated duties, but what no one had been able to instil into them was the sacred idea of duty itself. They could not be brought to the idea that it was something they owed to these human invaders of their

planet. It was Bert's job to keep them working by the only effective method. He loathed that, too.

There was also the uneasy feeling that his position in Venus society was not all that different from theirs. . . .

HIS WANDERING thoughts were brought back by the sight of the foreman-overseer climbing the path to the quarry. Bert descended to meet him.

The man gave him no greeting. He was dressed like Bert himself save for the sign of authority represented by the pistol on his belt. As he strode into the working it was plain that he was in a bad temper. His hard eyes looked Bert over with the full insolence of petty authority.

"Your lot's down on production. Way down. Why?" he demanded. But he did not seem to expect an answer. He glanced round, taking the place in at a sweep. "Look at 'em, by God! Your job here is to keep the little rats working, isn't it? Well, why in hell don't you do it?"

"They're working," said Bert, flatly.

"Working, hell!" said the overseer.

He drew his whip. The lash whistled. A female griffa screamed horribly and dropped where she stood. Her two companions, linked by chains to her ankles, stood quivering, with fear and misery in their dark eyes. The rest, after a startled pause, began to work very much more actively. Bert's hand clenched. He looked down on the fallen griffa, watching the red blood well up and soak into the silver fur. He raised his eyes to find the overseer studying him.

"You don't like that," the man told him, showing his teeth.

"No," said Bert.

"You've gone soft. Building this place up is a man's job. When you've been here a bit you'll learn."

"I doubt it," said Bert.

"You'd better," the overseer said unpleasantly.

"I didn't come here to help build a slave-state," Bert told him.

"No? You'd just like to start at the top—with none of the dirty work, wouldn't you? Well, it can't be done. You tell me one great nation or empire on Earth that didn't have this behind it at one stage?" He swung his whip with a crack like a rifle shot. "Well, tell me—?"

"It's *wrong*," said Bert, helplessly.

"You know a better way? Love and kindness, maybe?" the man said, jeering. "You've gone soft," he repeated.

"Maybe," Bert admitted. "But I still say that if there's no better way of building than driving these creatures crazy with pain and fear until they die, then it's not worth doing at all."

"Tchah! Where's your bible, Preacher? There's just one way to get the work that's got to be done, and this is it."

His whip whistled again. Another little griffa screamed, and another.

Bert hesitated a second. Then he drew his own whip. The lash sang through the air and wrapped itself around the overseer's neck. At that moment Bert yanked on the handle with all his strength. The man lurched towards him, tripped on a chunk of ironstone, and came down on his head. Bert dropped the whip, and dived to stop him drawing his pistol.

His leap was superfluous. The overseer was not in a condition where he would be able to use a pistol—or a whip—any more.

THE griffas had stopped work and stood staring as Bert got up and fixed the holstered pistol to his own belt. He raised his eyes from the man on the ground and stared back at them. He turned and went towards the toolshed. There he took down the long-handled pincers that were customarily used to cut a dead griffa

free from his fellows. Then he went back to them and got to work.

When it was over they stood round puzzled, with dark, sorrowful eyes blinking at him from silver-furred faces.

"Go on, you mugs! Beat it! Shoo!" said Bert.

He watched them scuttle away and disappear into the dense growth above the quarry, and then turned to reconsidering the fallen man. The overseer was heavily built. It was laborious to Bert's still unaccustomed muscles to drag him out of the quarry, but he managed it.

A short way down the path he paused a little to recover his breath. Then, with a great effort, he lifted the body, and heaved it into a mock-rose. The petal-like tendrils received the weight with a slow, engulfing movement like the yielding of a feather-bed. The large outer leaves began to close. Presently the thing was a hard tight ball looking like an enormous, etiolated brussels sprout.

Bert sat down on a stone for ten minutes, regaining his strength, and thinking carefully. Then he stood up, with decision. But before he left he went back into the quarry to fetch his hat, for it had started to rain again.

Once the acceleration was over, Bert emerged from his hiding-place and mingled with the rest. A full hour passed before someone tapped him on the shoulder and inquired: "Say, what the hell are you doing here?"

THE Captain and the Chief Officer regarded him uncertainly as he was brought before them. The pistol he wore was almost a badge of rank in itself.

"What's the trouble?" Bert inquired, blandly.

"You're not listed. How did you get here?" the Chief Officer inquired.

Bert looked surprised. "Not listed! Somebody must have slipped up. They only put me on this job yesterday.

But they said you'd been informed already, Captain."

"Well, I hadn't. And what is 'this job'?"

"It's—er—well, kind of recruiting-sergeant. You see I can speak four Martian dialects, and get along in several more."

"Recruiting Martians, you mean?"

"That's the idea. Spin 'em the yarn, and bring 'em along. They'll be useful managing griffas if nothing else."

He looked steadily back at the Captain as he spoke, hoping that it would not occur to either of them that a Martian transferred to Venus would only be able to crawl about, if he weren't actually pinned flat by the gravitation. It did not. Probably they had never even seen a Martian. The Captain merely frowned.

"I should have been informed," he said, stiffly.

"Bad staff work somewhere," Bert agreed, "But you could get radio confirmation," he suggested.

"Do you *know* anything of radio conditions on Venus?" inquired the Chief Officer shortly.

"No, but on Mars we—"

"Maybe, but Mars isn't Venus. Well, since you are here, you'd better make yourself useful on the trip."

"Aye, aye, sir," agreed Bert, briskly.

BY THE LOOK of it no one had touched the old boat since he had moored her. Bert patted the engine, and then primed it. A pull-up or two and she started. He laughed aloud. The old *phut-phut-phut* was like music to set his feet dancing. He cast off. With his arm over the tiller, he chugged out on the great canal.

Beyond the junction, and on a smaller canal, he stopped. From a locker in the cabin he produced old, patched clothes and a pair of the crude shoes that he was accustomed to make for himself. Overboard went

the clothes they had given him on Venus, and the heavy, laced boots with them. He hesitated over the pistol, and then threw it after them—nobody used or needed such a thing on Mars. He felt lighter as he watched them sink.

The miseries of the last few weeks on Venus, the long journey back from the quarries to the Settlement when he dared to move his weary body only by night for fear of being seen, the long wait in hiding close to the landing ground, the keeping alive on shoots and roots, the perpetual wet misery of the rain which scarcely ever let up, the anxious waiting for the return of the *Rutherford A4*, the delay while she was being made ready for her third and last trip of the conjunction, and, finally, the nervous business of smuggling himself aboard—all these began to become a bad dream.

He hitched his trousers, and tied them with a piece of cord. He was bending over the engine to re-start it when the sound of a sudden thunder came rolling across the desert.

Bert looked back.

Above the horizon a plume of black smoke rose and expanded. He nodded in a satisfied way. The *Rutherford A4* would not be taking part in any more slaving expeditions.

IT WAS the mind's eye picture come to life—even to the squeak pitched above the tinkerbell chimes telling that the waterwheel needed attention. As he walked towards the broken tower there was the familiar *thump-thump* of Annika, Zaylo's mother, at her work of pounding grain. The bannikuks scampered up, pestering—only this time he had no nuts for them, and they wouldn't seem to understand that. Annika rested her stone pestle as he approached.

"Hullo, Earthman," she said. Her eyes searched his face keenly. "You have been ill?" she added.

Bert shook his head, and sat down on a stone bench.

"I've been thinking," he said. "Remember last time I was here you said that if Earth was recreated now it would be stranger to me than Mars?"

"So it would, Earthman."

"But I didn't believe you."

"Well—?"

"I think I see what you meant now." He paused. "Back home," he went on, "we used to talk about men and women we called saints—the funny thing about them was that they never seemed very real. You see, once they were dead, people agreed only to remember the good things about them. Seems to me—well, it might be there never was a place like the Earth I remembered. . . ."

Annika nodded.

"A heaven behind you is no good," she said. "A heaven ahead is better. But to make a heaven around you is best."

"You understand things, Annika. I was like a rich man who had been cheated out of all his money—the only worthwhile thing seemed to be to get it all back."

"And now—?" asked Annika.

"Now, I've stopped fooling myself. I don't want it. I've stopped crying for the moon—or the Earth. I'll be content to live and enjoy living. So this time—" He broke off.

Zaylo, coming out of the door in the tower base, had paused there at the sight of him. She stood quite still for a moment, poised with the grace of a young goddess. The coils of her dark hair shone like lacquer, her misted-copper skin glowed in the sunlight. She put her hand to her breast, her eyes sparkled with sudden pleasure, her lips parted. . . .

Zaylo was not quite as he had pictured her. She was ten times more wonderful than anything memory could contrive.

"So this time," Bert repeated. "This time I have come to stay."