

PLANET STORIES



STRANGE ADVENTURES ON OTHER-
WORLDS—THE UNIVERSE
OF FUTURE CENTURIES

SPRING, 1944

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WANDERERS OF THE WOLF-MOON
AN AMAZING NOVEL OF THE SARGASSO SPACEWAYS
By **NELSON S. BOND**

PLANET STORIES



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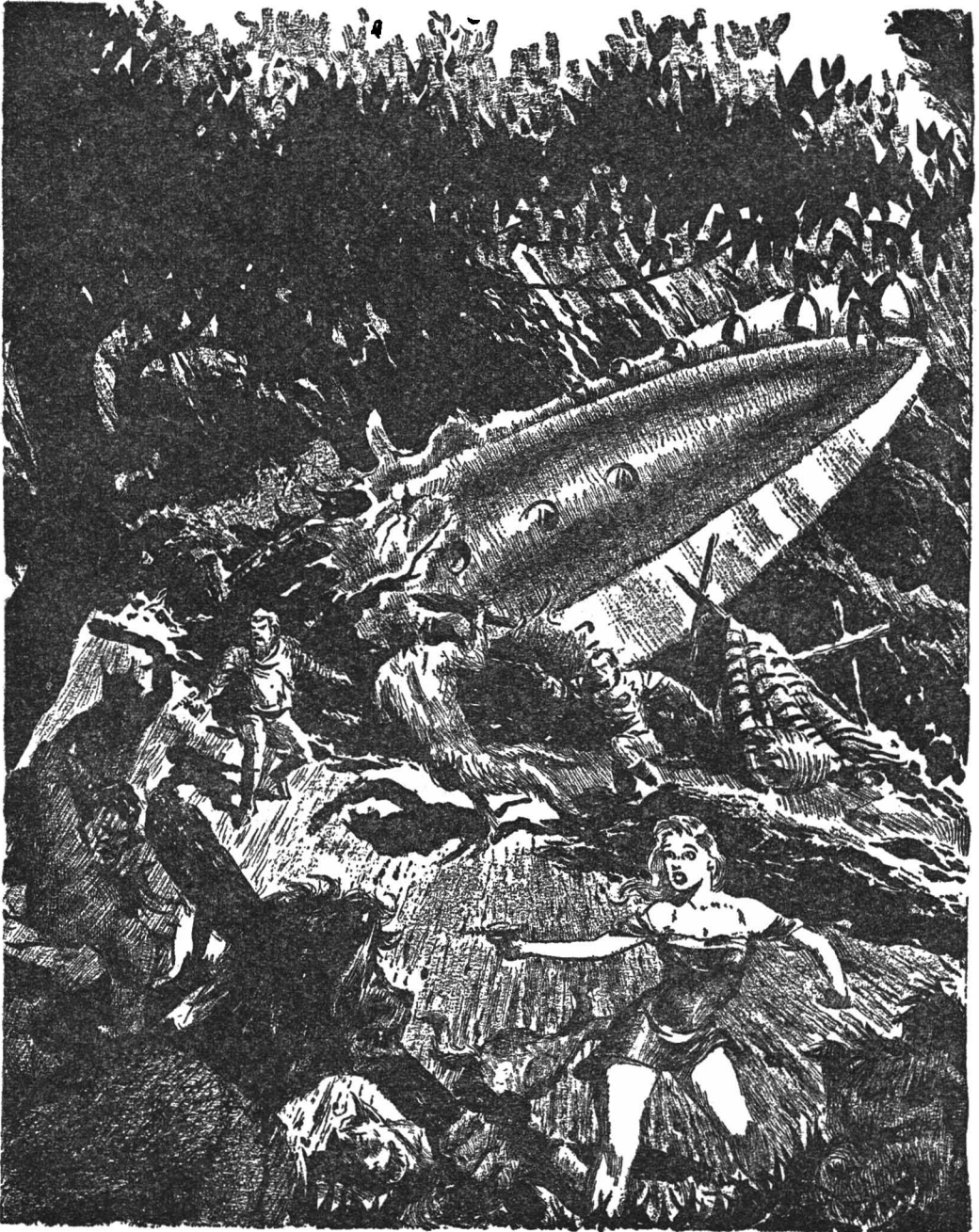
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Wanderers ^{OF} THE Wolf Moon

By NELSON S. BOND

They were marooned on Titan, their ship wrecked, the radio smashed. Yet they had to exist, had to build a new life on a hostile world. And the man who assumed command was Gregory Malcolm, the bespectacled secretary—whose only adventures had come through the pages of a book.



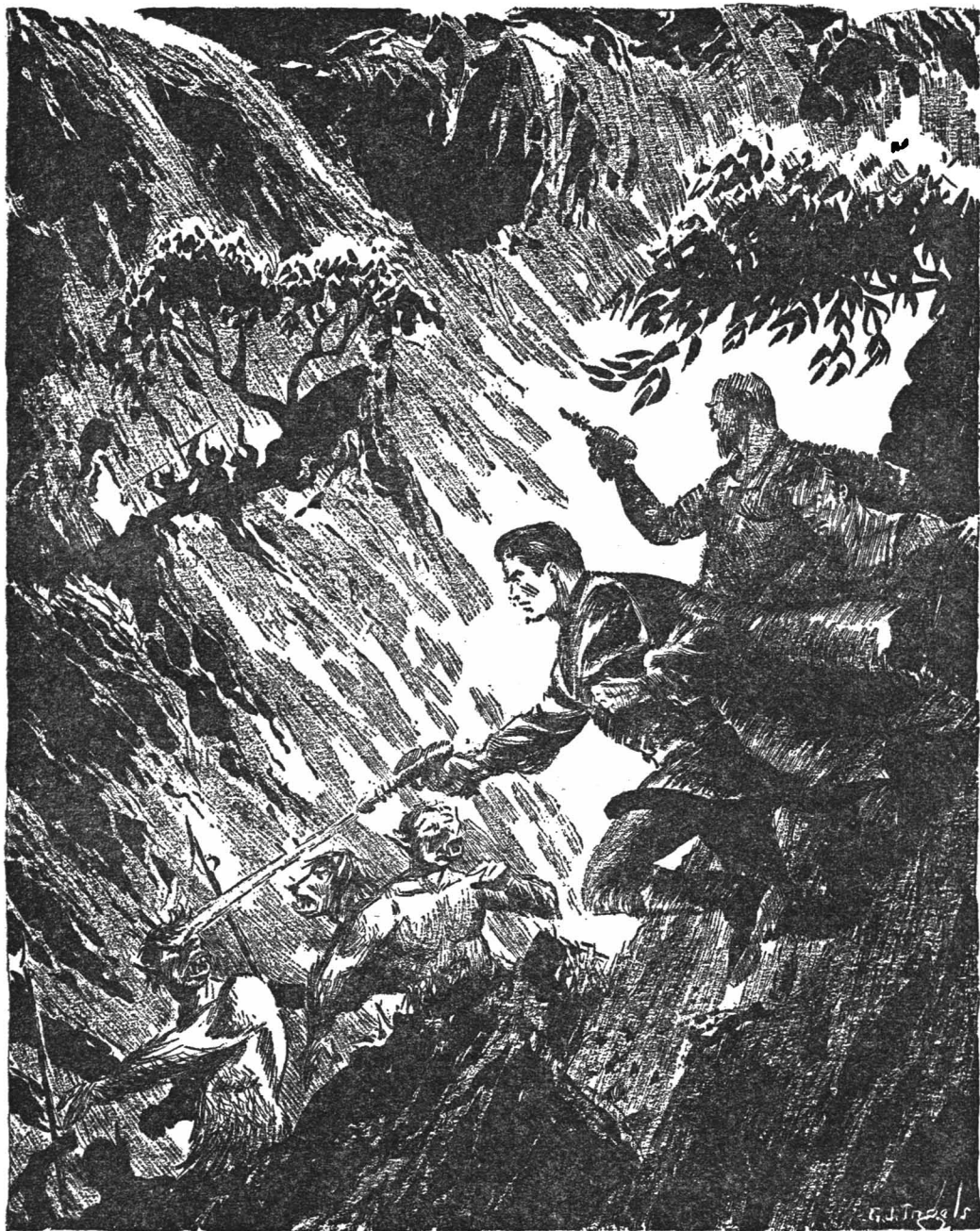


Illustration by Ingels

SPARKS snapped off the switches and followed him to the door of the radio turret. Sparks was a stunted, usually-grinning, little redhead named Han-nigan. But he wasn't grinning now. He laid an anxious hand on Greg's arm. "If I was you," he said, "if I was you, Malcolm, I don't think I'd say nothing to the boss about this. Not just yet, anyhow."

Greg said, "Why not?"

Sparks spluttered and fussed and made heavy weather of answering.

"Well, for one thing, it ain't important. It would only worry him. And then there's the womenfolks, they scare easy. Which of course they ain't no cause to. Atmospheric don't mean nothing. I've rode out worse storms than this—plenty of times. And in worse crates than the *Carefree*."

Greg studied him carefully from behind trim plasta-rimmed spectacles. He drew a deep breath. He said levelly, "So it's *that* bad, eh, Sparks?"

"What bad? I just told you—"

"I know. Sparks, I'm not a professional spaceman. But I've studied astrogation as few Earthlubbers have. It's been my hobby for years. And I think I know what we're up against."

"We hit a warp-eddy last night. We've been trapped in a vortex for more than eight hours. Lord only knows how many hundreds of thousands of miles we've been borne off our course. And now we've blasted into a super-ionized belt of atmospherics. Your radio signals are blanketed. You can't get signals in or out. We're a deaf-mute speck of metal being whirled head-long through space. Isn't that it?"

"I don't know what—" began Sparks hotly. Then he stopped, studied his companion thoughtfully, nodded. "O.Q.," he confessed, "that's it. But we ain't licked yet. We got three good men on the bridge. Townsend . . . Graves . . . Langhorn. They'll pull out of this if anybody can. And they ain't no sense in scaring the Old Man and his family."

"I won't tell them," said Greg. "I won't tell them unless I have to. But between you and me, what are the odds against us, Sparks?"

The radioman shrugged.

"Who knows? Vortices are unpredictable. Maybe the damn thing will toss us out on the very spot it picked us up. Maybe it will give us the old chuckeroo a million miles the other side of Pluto. Maybe it will crack us up on an asteroid or satellite. No way of telling till it happens."

"And the controls?"

"As useless," said Sparks, "as a cow in a cyclone."

"So?"

"We sit tight," said Sparks succinctly, "and hope."

Malcolm nodded quietly. He took off his spectacles, breathed on them, wiped them, replaced them. He was tall and fair; in his neat, crisply pressed business suit he appeared even slimmer than he was. But there was no nervousness in his movements. He moved measuredly. "Well," he said, "that appears to be that. I'm going up to the dining dome."

Sparks stared at him querulously.

"You're a queer duck, Malcolm. I don't think you've got a nerve in your body."

"Nerves are a luxury I can't afford," replied Greg. "If anything happens—and

if there's time to do so—let me know." He paused at the door. "Good luck," he said.

"Clear ether!" said Sparks mechanically. He stared after the other man wonderingly for a long moment, then went back to his control banks, shaking his head and muttering.

GREGORY MALCOLM climbed down the Jacob's-ladder and strode briskly through the labyrinthine corridors that were the entrails of the space yacht *Carefree*. He paused once to peer through a *perilens* set into the ship's port plates. It was a weird sight that met his gaze. Not space, ebony-black and bejewelled with a myriad flaming splotches of color; not the old, familiar constellations treading their everlasting, inexorable paths about the perimeter of Sol's tiny universe, but a shimmering webwork of light, so tortured-violet that the eyes ached to look upon it. This was the mad typhoon of space-atmospherics through which the *Carefree* was now being twisted, topsy-turvy, toward a nameless goal.

He moved on, approaching at last the quartzite-paned observation rotunda which was the dining dome of the ship.

His footsteps slowed as he composed himself to face those within. As he hesitated in the dimly-lighted passage, a trick of lights on glass mirrored to him the room beyond. He could see the others while they were as yet unaware of his presence. Their voices reached him clearly.

J. Foster Andrews, his employer and the employer of the ten thousand or more men and women who worked for Galactic Metals Corporation, dominated the head of the table. He was a plump, impatient little Napoleon. Opposite him, calm, graceful, serene, tastefully garbed and elaborately coiffured even here in deep space, three weeks from the nearest beauty shop, sat his wife, Enid.

On Andrews' right sat his sister, Maud. Not young, features plain as a mud fence, but charming despite her age and homeliness simply because of her eyes; puckish, shrewdly intelligent eyes, constantly aglint with suppressed humor at—guessed Greg—the amusing foibles and frailties of those about her.

She gave her breakfast the enthusiastic

attention of one too old and shapeless to be concerned with such folderol as calories and dietetics, pausing only from time to time to share smidgeons of food with a watery-eyed scrap of white, curly fluff beside her chair. Her pet poodle, whom she called by the opprobrious title of "Cuddles."

On J. Foster's left sat his daughter, Crystal. She it was who caused Gregory Malcolm's staid, respectable heart to give a little lurch as he glimpsed her reflected vision—all gold and crimson and cream—in the glistening walls. If Crystal was her name, so, too, was crystal her loveliness.

But—Greg shook his head—but she was not for him. She was already pledged to the young man seated beside her. Ralph Breadon. He turned to murmur something to her as Greg watched; Greg saw and admired and disliked his rangy height, his sturdy, well-knit strength, the rich brownness of his skin, his hair, his eyes.

The sound of his own name startled Greg.

"Malcolm!" called the man at the head of the table. "Malcolm! Now where in blazes is he, anyhow?" he demanded of no one in particular, everyone in general. He spooned a dab of liquid gold from a Limoges preserve jar, tongued it suspiciously, frowned. "Bitter!" he complained.

"It's the very *best* Martian honey," said his wife.

"Drylands clover," added Crystal.

"It's still bitter," said J. Foster petulantly.

His sister sniffed. "Nonsense! It's delightful."

"I say it's bitter," repeated Andrews sulkily. And lifted his voice again. "*Malcolm!* Where are you?"

"You called me, sir?" said Malcolm, moving into the room. He nodded politely to the others. "Good morning, Mrs. Andrews . . . Miss Andrews . . . Mr. Breadon. . ."

"Oh, sit down!" snapped J. Foster. "Sit down here and stop bobbing your head like a teetotum! Had your breakfast? The honey's no good; it's bitter." He glared at his sister challengingly. "Where have you been, anyway? What kind of secretary are you? Have you been up to the radio turret? How's the market today? Is Galactic up or down?"

Malcolm said, "I don't know, sir."

"Fine! Fine!" Andrews rattled on automatically before the words registered. Then he started, his face turning red. "Eh? What's that? Don't know! What do you mean, you don't know? I pay you to—"

"There's no transmission, sir," said Greg quietly.

"No trans-nonsense! Of course there's transmission! I put a million credits into this ship. Finest space-yacht ever built. Latest equipment throughout. Sparks is drunk, that's what you mean! Well, you hop right up there and—"

MAUD ANDREWS put down her fork with a clatter. "Oh, for goodness sakes, Jonathan, shut up and give the boy time to explain! He's standing there with his mouth gaping like a rain-spout, trying to get a word in edgewise! What's the trouble, Gregory?" She turned to Greg, as Jonathan Foster Andrews wheezed into startled silence. "*That?*"

She glanced at the quartzite dome, beyond which the veil of iridescence wove and cross-wove and shimmered like a pallid aurora.

Greg nodded. "Yes, Miss Andrews."

Enid Andrews spoke languidly from the other end of the table.

"But what is it, Gregory? A local phenomenon?"

"You might call it that," said Greg, selecting his words cautiously. "It's an ionized field into which we've blasted. It—it —shouldn't stay with us long. But while it persists, our radio will be blanketed out."

Breadon's chestnut head came up suddenly, sharply.

"Ionization! That means atmosphere!"

Greg said, "Yes."

"And an atmosphere means a body in space somewhere near—" Breadon stopped, bit his lip before the appeal in Malcolm's eyes, tried to pass it off easily. "Oh, well—a change of scenery, what?"

But the moment of alarm in his voice had not passed unnoticed. Crystal Andrews spoke for all of them, her voice preternaturally quiet.

"You're hiding something, Malcolm. What is it? Is there—danger?"

But Greg didn't have to answer that question. From the doorway a harsh, defiantly strident voice answered for him.

The voice of Bert Andrews, Crystal's older brother.

"Danger? You're damn right there's danger! What's the matter with you folks—are you all deaf, dumb and blind? We've been caught in a space-vortex for hours. Now we're in the H-layer of a planet we can't even see—and in fifteen minutes or fifteen seconds we may all be smashed as flat as pancakes!"

The proclamation brought them out of their chairs. Greg's heart sank; his vain plea, "Mr. Andrews—" was lost in the medley of Crystal's sudden gasp, Enid Andrews' short, choking scream, J. Foster's bellowing roar at his only son.

"Bert—you're drunk!"

Bert weaved precariously from the doorway, laughed in his father's face.

"Sure I'm drunk! Why not? If you're smart you'll get drunk, too. The whole damn lot of you!" He flicked a derisive hand toward Greg. "You too, Boy Scout! What were you trying to do—hide the bad news from them? Well, it's no use. Everybody might as well know the worst. We're gone geeses . . . geeses . . . aw, what the hell! Dead ducks!" He fell into a chair, sprawled there laughing mirthlessly with fear riding the too-high notes of his laughter.

J. Foster turned to his secretary slowly. His ire had faded; there was only deep concern in his voice.

"Is he telling the truth, Malcolm?"

Greg said soberly, "Partly, sir. He's overstating the danger—but there *is* danger. We are caught in a space-vortex, and as Mr. Breadon realized, the presence of these ionics means we're in the Heaviside-layer of some heavenly body. But we may not crack up."

Maud Andrews glanced at him shrewdly.

"Is there anything we can do?"

"Not a thing. The officers on the bridge are doing everything possible."

"In that case," said the older woman, "we might as well finish our breakfast. Here, Cuddles! Come to momsy!" She sat down again. Greg looked at her admiringly. Ralph Breadon stroked his brown jaw. He said, "The life-skiffs?"

"A last resort," said Greg. "Sparks promised he'd let me know if it were necessary. We'll hope it's not—"

But it was a vain hope, vainly spoken in

the last, vain moment. For even as he phrased the hopeful words, came the sound of swift, racing footsteps up the corridor. Into the dining dome burst Hannigan, eyes hot with excitement. And his cry dispelled Greg's final hopes for safety.

"Everybody—the Number Four life-skiff—*quick!* We've been caught in a grav-drag and we're going to crash!"

II

THOSE next hectic moments were never afterward very clear in Greg Malcolm's memory. He had a confused recollection of hearing Sparks' warning punctuated by a loud, shrill scream which he vaguely identified as emanating from Mrs. Andrews' throat . . . he was conscious of feeling, suddenly, beneath his feet the sickening, quickening lurch of a ship out of control, gripped by gravitational forces beyond its power to allay . . . he recalled his own voice dinning in his ears as, incredibly, with Sparks, he took command of the hasty flight from the dining dome down the corridor to the aft ramp, up the ramp, across girdered beams in the superstructure to the small, independently motored rocket-skiff cradled there.

He was aware, too, of strangely disconnected incidents happening around him, he being a part of them but seeming to be only a disinterested spectator to their strangeness. Of his forcing Maud Andrews toward the door of the dome . . . of her pushing back against him with all the weight of her body . . . of her irate voice, "Cuddles! I forgot him!" Then the shrill excited yapping of the poodle cradled against her as they charged on down the corridor.

J. Foster waddling beside him, tugging at his arm, panting, "The officers?" and his own unfeigned assurance. "They can take care of themselves. It's a general 'bandon ship." Enid Andrews stumbling over the hem of a filmy peignoir . . . himself bending to lift her boldly and bodily, sweating palms feeling the warm animal heat of her excited body hot beneath them . . . Crystal Andrews stopping suddenly, crying, "Tina!" . . . and Hannigan's reply, "Your maid? I woke her. She's in the life-skiff." Bert Andrews stopping suddenly, being sick in the middle of the corridor, his drunkenness

losing itself in the thick, sure nausea of the ever-increasing unsteadiness beneath their feet.

Then the life-skiff, the clang of metal as Hannigan slammed the port behind the last of them, the fumbling for a lock-stud, the quick, grateful pant of the miniature hypos, and a weird feeling of weightlessness, rushingness, hurtlingness as his eardrums throbbed and his mouth tasted brassy and bloody with the fierce velocity of their escape.

Sense and meaning returned only when all this ended. As one waking from a nightmare dream, Greg Malcolm returned to a world he could recognize. A tiny world, encased within the walls of a forty-foot life-skiff. A world peopled too scantily. Andrews, his wife and sister, his son and daughter; Tina Laney, the maid; Breadon, Hannigan, young Tommy O'Doul, the cabin-boy (though where he had come from, or when, Greg did not know). And himself. In a life-skiff. In space.

Somewhere in space. He looked through the *perilens*. What he saw then he might better never have seen. For that shimmering pink-ochre veil had wisped away, now, and in the clean, cold, bitter-clear light of a distant sun he watched the death-dive of the yacht *Carefree*.

Like a vast silver top, spinning heedlessly, wildly, it streaked toward a mottled gray and green, brown and dun, hard and crushing-brutal terrain below. Still at its helm stood someone, for even in that last dreadful moment burst from its nose-jets a ruddy mushroom of flame that tried to, but could not, brake the dizzy fall.

For an instant Greg's eyes, stingingly blinded and wet, thought they glimpsed a wee black mote dancing from the bowels of the *Carefree*; a mote that might be another skiff like their own. But he could not be sure, and then the *Carefree* was accelerating with such violence and speed that the eye could see it only as a flaming silver lance against the ugly earth-carcass beneath, and then it struck and a carmine bud of flame burst and flowered for an instant, and that was all. . . .

And Greg Malcolm turned from the *perilens*, shaken.

Hannigan said, "It's over?" and Greg nodded.

Hannigan said, "The other skiffs? Did

they break free, or were they caught?"

"I don't know. I couldn't see for sure."

"You must have seen. Are we the only ones?"

"I couldn't see for sure. Maybe. Maybe not."

Then a body scrambled forward, pressing through the tightness of other huddled bodies, and there was a hand upon his elbow. "I'll take over now, Malcolm."

IT WAS Ralph Breadon. Gregory looked at him slowly, uncomprehendingly at first. His hand was reluctant to leave the guiding-gear of the small ship which was, now, all that remained to them of civilization and civilization's wondrous accomplishments. He had not realized until this moment that for a while . . . for a short, eager, pulse-quickenning while . . . on his alertness, in his hands, had depended the destinies of ten men and women. But he knew, suddenly and completely, that it was for this single moment his whole lifetime had waited. It was for this brief moment of command that some intuition, some instinct greater than knowledge, had prepared him. This was why he, an Earth-lubber, had studied astrogation, made a hobby of the empire of the stars. That he might be fitted to command when all others failed. And now—

And now the moment was past, and he was once again Gregory Malcolm, mild, lean, pale, bespectacled secretary to J. Foster Andrews. And the man at his side was Ralph Breadon, socialite and gentleman sportsman, trained pilot. And in Malcolm the habit of obedience was strong. . . .

"Very well, sir," he said. And he turned over the controls.

What happened then was unfortunate. It might just as well have happened to Malcolm, though afterward no one could ever say with certainty. However that was, either by carelessness or malfortune or inefficiency, once-thwarted disaster struck again at the little party on the life-skiff. At the instant Breadon's hand seized the controls the skiff jerked suddenly as though struck with a ponderous fist, its throbbing motors choked and snarled in a high, rising crescendo of torment that lost itself in supersonic heights, and the ship that had been drifting easily and under control to

the planet beneath now dipped viciously.

The misfortune was that too many huddled in the tiny space understood the operation of the life-skiff, and what must be done instantly. And that neither pilot was as yet in control of the ship. Breadon's hand leaped for the Dixie rod, so, too, did Malcolm's—and across both their bodies came the arm of Sparks Hannigan, searching the controls.

In the scramble someone's sleeve brushed the banks of control-keys. The motors, killed, souged into silence. The ship rocked into a spin. Greg cried out, his voice a strange harshness in his ears; Breadon cursed; one of the women bleated fearfully.

Then Breadon, still cursing, fought all hands from the controls but his own. And the man was not without courage. For all could see plainly, in the illumined *perilens*, how near to swift death that moment of uncertainty had led them. The skiff, which an instant before had been high in the stratosphere of this unknown planet . . . or satellite or whatever it might be . . . was now flashing toward hard ground at lightning speed.

ONLY a miracle, Greg knew, could save them now. An impulse spun his head, he looked at Crystal Andrews. There was no fear in her eyes. Just a hotness and an inexplicable anger. Beside her was the other girl, the maid, 'Tina; she was frankly afraid. Her teeth were clenched in her nether lip, and her eyes were wide and anxious, but she did not cry out.

Only a miracle could save them now. But Breadon's hands performed that miracle; his quick, nerveless, trained hands. A stud here . . . a lever there . . . a swift wrenching toss of the shoulders. His face twisted back over his shoulder, and his straining lips pulled taut and bloodless away from his teeth. "Hold tight, folks! We're going to bounce—"

Then they struck!

But they struck glancingly, as Breadon had hoped, and planned for, and gambled on. They struck and bounced. The frail craft shivered and groaned in metal agony, jarred across harsh soil, bounced again, settled, nosed over and rocked to a standstill. Somewhere forward something

snapped with a shrill, high *ping!* of stress; somewhere aft was the metallic flap-clanging of broken gear trailing behind them. But they were safe.

Breath, held so long that he could not remember its inhalation, escaped Greg's lungs in a long sigh. "Nice work, Mr. Breadon!" he cried. "Oh, nice work!"

But surprisingly, savagely, Breadon turned on him.

"It would have been *better* work, Malcolm, if you'd kept your damned hands off the controls! Now see what you've done? Smashed up our skiff! Our only—"

"He didn't do it!" piped the shrill voice of Tommy O'Doul. "You done it yourself, Mr. Breadon. Your sleeve. It caught the switch."

"Quiet!" Breadon, cheeks flushed, reached out smartly, stilled the youngster's defense with a swift, ungentle slap. "And you, Malcolm—after this, do as you're told, and don't try to assume responsibilities too great for you. All right, everybody. Let's get out and see how bad the damage is."

Instinctively Greg had surged a half step forward as Breadon silenced the cabin boy. Now old habit and common-sense halted him. He's overwrought, he reasoned. We're all excited and on edge. We've been to Bedlam. Our nerves are shot. In a little while we'll all be back to normal.

He said quietly, "Very well, Mr. Breadon." And he climbed from the broken skiff.

HANNIGAN said, "Looks bad, don't it?"

"Very," said Malcolm. He fingered a shard of loose metal flapping like a fin from the stern of the skiff. "Not hopeless, though. There should be an acetylene torch in the tool locker. With that—"

"You ought to of poked him," said Hannigan.

"What? Oh, you mean—?"

"Yeah. The kid was right, you know. He done it."

"His sleeve, you mean. Well, it was an accident," said Greg. "It could have happened to anyone. And he made a good landing. Considering everything. Anyhow—" Again he was Gregory Malcolm, serious-faced, efficient secretary. "Anyhow, we have been thrust into an extremely precarious circumstance. It would be silly

to take umbrage at a man's nervous anger. We must have no quarreling, no bickering—"

"Umbrage!" snorted Sparks. "Bickering! They're big words. I ain't sure I know what they mean. I ain't exactly sure they mean *anything*." He glanced at Greg oddly. "You're a queer jasper, Malcolm. Back there on the ship, I figured you for a sort of a stuffed-shirt. Yes-man to the boss. And then in the show-down, you come through like a movie hero—for a little while. Then you let that Breadon guy give you the spur without a squawk—"

Malcolm adjusted his plasta-rimmed spectacles. He said, almost stubbornly, "Our situation is grave. There must be no bickering."

"Bickering your Aunt Jenny! What do you call that?"

Sparks jerked a contemptuous thumb toward the group from which they were separated. Upon disembarking, only Greg and Sparks had moved to make a careful examination of their damaged craft. The others, more or less under the direction of Breadon, were making gestures toward removing certain necessaries from the skiff. Their efforts, slight and uncertain as they were, had already embroiled them in argument.

The gist of their argument, so far as Greg Malcolm could determine, was that everyone wanted "something" to be done, but no two could agree as to just what that something was, and no one seemed to have any bursting desire to participate in actual physical labor.

J. Foster Andrews, all traces of his former panic and confusion fled, was planted firmly, Napoleonicly, some few yards from the open port of the life-skiff, barking impatient orders at little Tommy O'Doul who—as Greg watched—stumbled from the port bearing a huge armload of edibles.

Tina, the maid, was in a frenzy of motion, trying to administer to the complaints and demands of Mrs. Andrews (whose immaculate hair-do had suffered in the frenetic minutes of their flight) and Crystal Andrews (who knew perfectly well there were sweaters in the life-skiff) and Miss Maud (who wanted a can of prepared dog-food and a can-opener immediately, and

look at poor Cuddles, momsy's 'tittle pet was *so* hungry)!

Bert Andrews was sulkily insisting that it was nonsense to leave the warmth and security of the skiff anyway, and he wished he had a drink, while the harassed, self-appointed commander of the refugee corps was shouting at whomever happened, at any given moment, to capture his divided and completely frantic attention. His orders were masterpieces of confusion, developing around one premise that the castaway crew should immediately set up a camp. Where, how, or with what non-existent equipment, Breadon did not venture to say.

"You see what I mean?" demanded Sparks disgustedly.

GREG MALCOLM saw. He also saw other things. That their landing-spot, while excellent for its purpose, was not by any manner of means an ideal camp-site. It was a small, flat basin of sandy soil, rimmed by shallow mountains. His gaze sought these hills, looked approvingly on their greenness, upon the multitude of dark pock-marks dotting them. These caves, were they not the habitations of potential enemies, might well become the sanctuaries of spacewrecked men.

He saw, also, a thin ribbon of silver sheering the face of the northern hills. His gaze, rising still skyward, saw other things—

He nodded. He knew, now, where they were. Or approximately. There was but one planet in the solar system which boasted such a phenomenon. The apparent distance of the Sun, judged by its diminished disc, argued his judgment to be correct. The fact that they had surged through an atmospheric belt for some length of time before finally meeting with disaster.

"Titan," he said. "Hyperion possibly. But probably Titan."

Sparks' gaze, following Greg's upward, contracted in an expression of dismay.

"Dirty cow! You mean that's where we are?"

"I believe so. There's Saturn, our mother planet, looming above us as large as a dinner plate. And the grav-drag here is almost Earth norm. Titan has a 3,000 mile diameter. That, combined with the

Saturnian tractile constant, would give us a strong pull."

Sparks wailed, "But Titan! Great morning, Malcolm, nobody ever comes to Titan! There ain't no mines here, no colonies, no—" He stopped suddenly, his eyes widening get farther. "And, hey—this place is *dangerous!* There are—"

"I know it," said Greg swiftly, quietly. "Shut up, Sparks. No use telling the others. If they don't guess it themselves, what they don't know won't alarm them. We've got to do something, though. Get ourselves organized into a defensive community. That's the only way—"

Ralph Breadon's sharp, dictatorial voice interrupted him. "Well, Malcolm, stop soldiering and make yourself useful!"

And J. Foster, not to have his authority usurped, supplemented the order. "Yes, Malcolm, let's get going! No time for day-dreaming, my man. We want action!"

Sparks said, "Maybe you'll get it now, fatty!" under his breath, and looked at Malcolm hopefully. But his companion merely nodded, moved forward toward the others, quietly obedient to the command.

"Yes, sir," he said.

Hannigan groaned and followed him.

III

BREADON SAID, "All right, Tommy, dump them here. I have a few words to say." He glanced about him pompously. "Now, folks, naturally we want to get away from here as soon as possible. Therefore I delegate you, Sparks, to immediately get a message off. An SOS to the nearest space cruiser."

Hannigan grinned. It was not a pleasant grin. He took his time answering. He spat thoughtfully on the ground before him, lifted his head. He said, "A message, huh?"

"That's what I said."

"And what'll I send it with?" drawled Sparks. "Tom-toms?"

Breadon flushed darkly.

"I believe the life-skiff was equipped with a radio? And theoretically you are a radio operator?"

"Finest radio money can buy!" interpolated J. Foster Andrews proudly. "Put a million credits into the *Carefree*. Best equipment throughout."

Sparks looked from one to another of them, grinned insolently. "You're both right. I *am* a radio operator, and there *was* a radio. But we crashed, remember? On account of some dope's sleeve got caught in the master switch—"

"That will do!" snapped Breadon angrily. He stared at the bandy-legged little redhead. "You mean the radio was broken?"

"It wasn't helped none. The tubes was made out of glass, and glass don't bounce so good."

Greg Malcolm said thoughtfully, "Sparks, can't you fix it?"

"Well, mebbe. But not in five minutes. Maybe not in five years. I won't know till I get going on it."

Breadon frowned.

"I'll handle this, Malcolm," he crisped. Again to the radioman, "Well, you get to work on it immediately. And as soon as you get it fixed, send out an SOS advising the patrol where we are—"

"Speaking of which," insinuated Sparks, "where are we?"

Breadon glared at him wrathfully.

"Why—why on one of the satellites of Saturn, of course. Any fool can see that!"

"O.Q. But does any fool know which one? Or shall I tell you it's Titan? And when you know that, then what? Titan wasn't named that on account of it was a pimple. It's a big place. What'll I tell the Patrol? *SOS. Stranded in the middle of we-don't-know-where, somewhere on Titan, maybe.* They'll be hunting for us till we've got whiskers down to our knees."

Breadon's irate look vanished. He looked stricken. He said, "I—I don't know. We have a compass—"

Once again it was Gregory Malcolm who entered into the conversation. He had been toying, almost absentmindedly, with a funnel taken from the skiff's stores. Into this he had poured a small portion of water; his right forefinger was pressed to the bottom of the tube, closing it. He said, "I can answer part of that question now. Enough to cut the search in half, anyway. We're in the northern hemisphere of the satellite."

Maud Andrews looked at him sharply as if noticing him for the first time in her life.

"How," she asked, "did you know that, Malcolm?"

GREG SAID, "Watch this." He released his finger at the base of the funnel gently, carefully, taking care not to shake it. The captured water swirled and trickled through the opening. Greg said, "Notice the direction in which the water whirlpools? Clockwise. On the northern hemisphere of any normally revolving heavenly body, water released from a basin, funnel, container of any sort, swirls in that direction. In the southern hemisphere it swirls counter-clockwise. Maybe you've noticed in bathtubs, or—"

Breadon said impatiently, "Never mind the speeches, Malcolm. A very clever bit of reasoning—if it's true. Do you think you can figure out our exact latitude and longitude from that?"

Greg met his gaze levelly.

"Not from that," he said, "nor from anything else. Perhaps you've forgotten that latitude and longitude are artificial inventions of man's, based in one case on an imaginary 'equator,' and in the other on an arbitrarily appointed 'line,' like Greenwich.

"But I believe I can approximate our position and state it in such a way as to cut to a minimum the time of any search that might be made for us. That is, if a space patrol ever comes close enough to get within range of Sparks' radio."

"When," said Sparks, "and if I get it fixed."

"When," said Malcolm confidently, "you get it fixed."

Breadon gave in with as good grace as he could muster.

"Well, all right," he conceded grudgingly. "We'll let that rest for now. Meanwhile, it is apparent that we can't escape Titan—or wherever we are—immediately. That being the case, our first task will be to set up a camp. This is as good a spot as any. We'll stay right here by the ship. We'll use the ship to sleep in at nights—"

Greg coughed apologetically. "Mr. Breadon—"

"Well, what now? More funnels, Malcolm?"

"If you'll excuse me, sir—I don't believe it wise to make camp here. Nor to use the skiff for sleeping purposes."

"And why not, my man?" That was J. Foster.

"The conservation of what little fuel and power, we have, for one thing," said Greg. "Mr. Breadon's idea of using the skiff to sleep in was undoubtedly based on the plan of using the heating units. That we must not do. The time may come when we will need the skiff again, badly. We must save its fuel and electro-motors.

"And as for making camp here beside the ship—"

He hesitated. Crystal Andrews, her voice a trifle edged, as had been that of her father, prodded him for reply.

"Well?" she demanded. "Go on, Malcolm!"

"It wouldn't be safe, Miss. This is an exposed and vulnerable spot. Titan has—dangerous denizens." The words came reluctantly. "It would be much safer to take refuge in the hills. In one of those caves up there."

Crystal gasped, "Caves! Us—living in a cave! Ridiculous!" J. Foster echoed her words vehemently. Breadon laughed curtly; Mrs. Andrews made a gesture of repugnance with a slim, pale, exquisitely manicured hand. Bert Andrews snorted. Of the tycoon's family, only Maud Andrews showed any inclination to heed the secretary's suggestion. Her old eyes glinted shrewdly; her head made the ghost of a pleased nod.

BUT OTHERS more openly approved his plan. The maid, Tina, watching Malcolm with curious attentiveness, nodded and said, "That is wise. I have heard tales about Titan and its—its denizens." Tommy O'Doul grinned delightedly. He said, "Caves! Boy, caves! Old-time stuff, huh, Greg?" And Sparks Hannigan had said, "That's right, folks! And it's past noon now. Might as well get going right away so's we can get settled before dark. Right, Greg?"

And yet again there was the counterplay, the balance of Breadon's wealth, Breadon's name and Breadon's accustomed authority to the calm, sane logic of the slim young secretary. Breadon's curt laugh changed to something definitely antagonistic; his words sheered the muttering like a keen blade.

"Very interesting, Malcolm! But wholly impractical and completely absurd. We will remain here. And now—" He

glanced at the high-riding sun. "And now I think we should eat before setting up our camp. Tommy, Hannigan—bring the electro-stove from the skiff. 'Tina, prepare lunch. We'll pursue a more intelligent discussion of our situation on full stomachs. Malcolm, bring cases from the skiff. We'll build a rough table out here in the open."

He scowled impatiently, authoritatively about the strangely silent group.

IV

AT THAT MOMENT Gregory Malcolm realized what he must do. It was not a pleasant realization. Greg Malcolm was an easy-going, a peaceful, a placid man. The secretarial type. Sparks had called him a—what was it?—a "stuffed shirt." Never, save in rare moments of dreamful imagining, had Greg ventured to impress his opinions, his will, upon the desires of fellow men.

But he, of all those now surrounding him, seemed to understand, fully and completely, the crisis which now faced their refugee group. And he—it was made apparent to him by the pompousness of Foster Andrews, by the mulish petulance of Bert Andrews, by the aloof hauteur of Crystal and Mrs. Andrews, by the suicidal "orders" just given by Ralph Breadon—he alone was, in this moment of need, capable of deciding the destinies of the Earth-exiles.

J. Foster Andrews had the acumen and common-sense to lead them—but he had not the requisite knowledge. Breadon had the training, the space-experience—but he lacked solid horse-sense, and his decisions were too strongly flavored by his own savor of self-importance. Yet if they, ten humans, were to exist for a week . . . a month . . . a year . . . until help reached them, someone must command. And he, Gregory Malcolm, was the only one capable of taking into his hands the reins of rulership.

It was a knowledge at once heady, intoxicating and frightening. But—there it was! It had to be faced. And Greg moved, grimly but methodically, to the accomplishment of that which he deemed necessary. He halted the radioman with a gesture.

"Wait a minute, Sparks! Tommy, wait!

'Tina!" And he faced Breadon firmly. "We are not going to do that, Mr. Breadon," he said. "It would not be wise. We are not going to do it."

Breadon's brown features darkened with swift anger.

"What? What's this?"

And J. Foster Andrews waddled forward, puffing irate astonishment. "Here, here, Malcolm! What do you mean? This is—hrrumph!—blasted impertinence, sir! Insubordination!"

Malcolm held his ground, his pale cheeks oddly flushed.

"We are not going to do these things," he repeated slowly, definitely. "Breadon—" It did not occur to him that unconsciously he had abandoned the respectful, formal "Mr." which heretofore he had never omitted. "Breadon, your orders clearly indicate that you have not in any way grasped the full implications of our plight.

"I have already warned that we should not make needless use of our limited fuel and power reserves. Yet you've told Tommy to bring the electro-stove. I have hinted that there are dangerous antagonists on Titan, yet you wish boldly to tempt attack by cooking and eating here on this exposed plain in broad daylight. Common sense should advise you of the folly of eating what few food stores we hold in reserve, yet you calmly command the preparation of a full and wasteful meal."

He did not make mention of the other, perhaps irrelevant but nonetheless rankling detail. That never once had Breadon offered to help in these doings, nor had any member of the Andrews clan volunteered to assist; that the physical labor had arbitrarily been assigned to those of lesser caste—himself, Hannigan, young Tommy, 'Tina.

"Therefore," he continued doggedly, "I, for one, am refusing to obey your orders. I do so because I must. Call it 'insubordination' if you wish, Andrews—" The older man spluttered incoherently, mauve-jowled. "—but I would call it the 'will-to-exist.' The law of survival. I mean to survive on this unknown, hostile planet. That can't be done if we squander resources as Breadon apparently means to."

A MOMENT of tight silence answered his outburst. A slow, awkward movement stirred through the little group. It was, Greg sensed, a movement of alignment. He could sense, rather than see, the unconscious coalition of his sympathizers behind him; could see, without sensing, the outraged drawing-together of the Andrews husband and wife, *fille* and *fil*s, beside Breadon. One there was whose bright, intent eyes were clouded with uncertainty. Maud Andrews. Then, as if irresistibly drawn by the bonds of blood, she too looked to Breadon as her spokesman.

Breadon's voice was a thick flame of wrath.

"So that's the way it is, eh, Malcolm! Well, this had to come sooner or later. Might as well have it over with right now. Get the glasses off, my pale young friend! One leader is all we'll have around here!"

He stepped forward, bigger, browner, heavier than Malcolm. There was a rustle behind Greg; Sparks had stepped to his side, was pressing something into his hand.

"This'll make him behave, Greg."

"Put it away!" said Greg coldly. "We'll have better use for firearms later on. I'll handle this the way Breadon wants." Slowly, painstakingly, he removed his plasta-rimmed glasses, slipped them in a lucite case, slid the case into a pocket, removed his trimly cut double-breasted business coat, handed it to the grumbling little redhead.

"But look—" growled Sparks. Then stopped. There was a newness about Greg Malcolm that stopped him. With the goggles removed, he thought dimly, Malcolm's eyes looked different. Less soft and meeky-mosey. They were like—sort of like chunks of grey flint. And Greg wasn't as skinny as he had looked, now that you saw him with his coat off. He was lean, yes—but there was a greyhound whippiness to his leanness; a tight, spring-coiled sort of strength.

"Well?" said Greg. "You're ready, Breadon?"

Breadon's answer was a sudden, rushing charge. One of the women gasped; there came the whipping splat of flesh striking flesh, then all noises muted save the sound of two men meeting in face-to-

face conflict. Breadon's left jarred Greg back, his right swung wide and hard to put a swift end to the dispute—

But found no target. For leanly, deftly, with pantherlike swiftness, Greg was out from under the blow; his own left, probing sharply, flicked once . . . twice . . . again into his antagonist's face, jarring Breadon, shocking, stunning him, halting his bull-like rush and jolting him back on his heels.

Maddened, Breadon whirled, seeking this will-o-the-wisp whose jabbing lefts stung like salt in an open wound. He growled something that was never completed, for knuckles bruised the word against his lips. Blood sprang, saline and hot in his mouth; the taste of it edged his rage to inchoate blindness, he flailed out recklessly, forgetful of anything he had previously known about fighting.

And that was his undoing. Against his bulky charge, Greg could do nothing but fight the kind of fleeting defensive battle he had learned in long hours at the gymnasium. A maddened warrior like this was a different matter, though; he was a vulnerable fighter.

Calmly and with infinite assurance, Greg stepped inside Breadon's swinging arms, beneath his faulty guard. His right hand came up once, sharply, to Breadon's jaw. The big man spluttered pink spray, lifted his arms. Again Greg lashed out with his left, this time to the belly; Breadon gasped and his mouth remained open, sagging.

Like the whipping length of a python, Malcolm threw that lean, deadly-sure right again—this time squarely to the other man's jaw at the spot where jawbone meets the ear. The blow cracked in the dull, astonished silence like the chunk of a heart-biting axe on timber. Breadon straightened slowly, numbly, in a meaningless reflex. The fire went out of his eyes; their brownness dulled like sun-faded velvet. Then he fell. As a tall building might fall. Crumpling . . . the knees folding first, the body sagging, the shoulders, the head helpless and rolling. In sections. He rolled once and lay still.

Sparks Hannigan said, "Gawddle-mighty!" His voice was feeble, awestruck.

Greg Malcolm's fists, falling to his sides, uncoiled reluctantly. As if they had gripped the fiery baton of his anger, the

battle-urge slipped from him with their unclenching. He drew a deep breath to steady his ragged breathing, nodded to the wide-eyed 'Tina.

"Take care of him," he said. "Water. He'll be all right in a minute." He faced the others, his manner an odd mixture of apology and aggressiveness. "Breadon said there could be but one in command," he said. "Let us hope that is definitely settled. For all time. And now I will ask all of you to help. Our first step will be to strip the skiff of the equipment we may need and carry it into the hills. In one of those caves we will make our headquarters."

But the fight was to have its aftermath. Crystal Andrews it was who burst from the little knot before him to kneel at her fiancé's side, taking Breadon's head in her arms, glaring rage and hot defiance at Greg.

"With you?" she cried. "With *you*, you—cheap, upstart bully? Not in a million years! Ralph—Ralph, dear, are you all right? Did he hurt you?"

She jerked the water-soaked handkerchief from the maid's hands, pressed its coolness to Breadon's sand-bruised forehead. Breadon's eyes opened, dazed at first, then full of awareness, sultry, indignant, incredulous. He moved to get on his feet again. Greg stared at him coldly.

"Get up if you want to, Breadon. But don't get up fighting!"

Hannigan chuckled. "He ain't hurt much. Just his conceit. It's punched full of right and left hand wallops."

"That will do, Sparks!" snapped Greg. He looked at the others, replacing his glasses carefully, a vague sorrow in his eyes, defeat in his voice despite his victory. "You all feel that way? You still refuse—?"

Crystal Andrews' cried out, "Talk! Talk! Will you stop talking and go? Go to the hills if you want to. Leave us in peace. We don't want you and don't need you. Go to the hills—and good riddance to you!"

The tiny gimlet of hurt that lay somewhere deep inside of Greg twisted once more at her words, snapped, became suddenly cold and bitter. His jaw set. He nodded to Sparks.

"Very well. If that's your desire.

Sparks, there are four of us, six of them. Take an inventory of all equipment and supplies in the skiff. We will take exactly four-tenths of everything . . . fuel, power units, food, water . . . everything. Get going. I'll help you directly."

Sparks said, "The radio?"

"We'll take that. You're the only one capable of repairing it. We'll save them in spite of themselves. If we can."

Sparks said, "Aye, sir! Come on, Tommy. 'Tina." He started toward the crashed skiff. Greg hesitated, feeling the desire to say something, to make one final plea, not knowing what to say or how to say it, restrained by the yet cold anger etched on his heart by Crystal's scorn. Then he too turned to help. A strident voice halted him.

"Just a moment, young man!"

"Yes, Miss Andrews?"

Maud Andrews, Cuddles firmly cradled to her ample bosom, left her brother's side and marched toward the life-skiff.

"Tell Sparks to make that a fifty-fifty division," she said. "There will be five of us in the hills."

ENID ANDREWS bleated faintly. Crystal, still kneeling, stared at her aunt incredulously. J. Foster Andrews vented his indignation in a sudden, blustering roar. "Maud! Don't be a blasted idiot! Come back here this minute!"

Maud Andrews continued to surge inexorably forward.

"I'm not," she grunted, "being an idiot! It's you who are, my dear, fat, dimwitted brother! I'm a selfish, pampered old fool, but I know common-sense when I hear it, and I know a man when I see one. Furthermore, silly as you may think it, I have a ridiculous desire to keep on living. I may have to *work* to do that, and I'm not overly fond of work, but if Mr. Malcolm will have me—?"

"Just plain 'Malcolm,' Miss Andrews," said Greg gravely, gratefully. "And I'm happy you see it my way."

"Tut! I'm not doing you a favor, Malcolm! I'm just looking out for myself, as I always do. Well, Sparks, don't stand there yawping like my thick-pated brother! What can I do to help?"

She waddled away. Greg glanced hopefully at those still waiting, immobile.

"Won't you—" he began, "Won't the rest of you—"

The eyes that met his were glacial. Bert Andrews, thick-lipped and bridling, snarled disdain. "The hell with you, Malcolm! The sooner you get out of here, the better!"

Greg said, "We'll let you know where to find us. If you should—should need us, just call."

"We won't need you." That was Crystal, coldly.

"I hope you won't," said Greg. "I sincerely hope you won't. . ."

V

SPARKS HANNIGAN came out grinning. He said, "This one looks like the business, Greg. Plenty of room. Dry and warm. It's even got a natural flue-vent so's we can have a fireplace inside."

Greg nodded, pleased.

"Sounds good. I was beginning to think we'd never find a suitable cave. This one's within easy reach of that spring, too; that solves the fresh water problem. Well, we might as well get settled. Getting toward evening."

"Tina glanced at the sky, surprised. "So soon? I didn't know it had taken us so long. It seems as if only a few hours ago it was noon."

"It was," grinned Greg. "Titan's days are shorter than Earth's. Its diameter is only about 3,000 miles. By Earth measurements you'd say Titan had a sixteen hour day."

"And the 'day,'" grumbled Sparks, "ain't none too bright at that. On account of we're so far from the Sun."

"You haven't seen the worst of it. Right now we're on the Sun side of Saturn. We revolve about our primary once every 500-odd hours. Since Saturn is so large, when we are to the lee of it, it eclipses us entirely. So for about five days every Titan 'month' we suffer a complete blackout.

"And that—" Greg sobered. "That is another reason the others should dig into a good warm cave. It gets plenty cold during that eclipse period. An open camp on an exposed plain—" He shook his head.

Maud Andrews said, "I can't understand why this satellite is habitable at all.

I was under the impression that Saturn is a frozen planet."

"It is. Its surface temperature is approximately 300° below zero, Fahrenheit. But the warmth of its numerous satellites is one of the astonishing discoveries made by the early space explorers, fifty or sixty years ago. Scientists have not yet explained the matter satisfactorily. Some say the tremendous mass of Saturn, the waves of atmospherics set up by its swirling motion and the 'grindstone' of its ring, form an electronic barrier-shield for the satellites. Still others believe that frigid Saturn acts as a gigantic mirror or solar reflector for its children."

"But Greg—" That was Tommy O'Doul. "Why ain't there any colonies here if the climate's O.Q.? Men live on Venus, where it's hot as billy-be-hanged, and on Uranus, which is nothing but a ball of ice, and on a bunch of cold, airless asteroids—"

"Economics, Tommy. The simple, single dictator of mankind's every venture. Venus has valuable vegetation, Uranus and the asteroids have important metals that can't be duplicated in Earth's laboratories, the asteroids have rare ore deposits. There is not—or at least there has not as yet been discovered—anything native to Titan that cannot be mined or made elsewhere more cheaply, more easily. Some day man's ever-expanding frontiers will claim this satellite as a colony, too. But now that the entire universe is open to man, the human race can increase a millionfold and still allow every soul more *lebensraum* than he can possibly use."

Sparks Hannigan gazed at him admiringly.

"It's stoo-pondous!" he said.

"Titan? Not any more so than—"

"Not Titan. You. You know everything, don't you? Pal—" Sparks shook his head. "I sure had you figured wrong. I thought you was a soft-soaping dope. So then you got us off the *Carefree* onto the skiff, cooled Breadon like a herring, declared yourself *It* and made us like it—"

Greg said, "Nonsense! I just happened to—Oh, nonsense! Shall we go into our new home?" But he flushed.

By evening—Titan's short, grey shadowed evening, the only logical unit of duration by which they could live so

long as they remained captive here—their new cave home began to take on some semblance of lived-inness.

Vegetation was abundant on the hill-sides. Sparks and Tommy had gathered heaps of dry faggots while Greg built a crude stone fire place underneath the flue-vent Sparks had reported; shortly thereafter the women had a cheerful blaze crackling on the hearth, and mingled with its grateful warmth was the odor of a savory stew, welcome scent to the nostrils of five who had worked long and hard in gathering the vegetables that had gone into that potage.

"Eat nothing," Greg had warned, "dig nothing that does not show signs of having been eaten, dug or picked by wild animals. Later we can make chemical analysis of dubious foods to determine their edibility. For the present we will depend on the most certain test, the acceptance by other flesh-and-blood creatures."

He had also permitted that a single can of bouillon concentrate be used in the stew. "For flavoring. There is so little food in reserve that we must save it against the cold, dark days when we can't get out to gather supplies. Later on we'll have fresh meat."

He looked thoughtfully at Cuddles, sniffing, yapping excitedly by the fireplace, and Maud Andrews, with a swift, maternal gesture, swept the poodle into her arms and glared at him belligerently.

"Oh, no you don't! You'll eat *me* first!"

"I wasn't thinking of that," said Greg indignantly. "I had something else in mind. A poodle, eh? Hmmm!"

Tina and young Tommy came into the cave, arms full of fresh and fragrant ferns which they dumped beside a wall. Greg, glancing at them, could not curb his astonishment at the overwhelmingly sudden change that had come over Tina. During the *Carefree's* cruise, during the years he had worked for old J. Foster, he had seen the girl a thousand times—but never, he discovered now, really *seen* her before! Always she had been a dim, dusty figure in the background. A foil for the spoiled, immaculate perfection of Enid Andrews, the glittering, heart-stopping beauty of Crystal.

Now, viewed as a woman and a com-

rade, he was aware that she was lovely herself. Slim as a rush, and yielding-strong as that same wild water-flower; dark-eyed; hair as the Martian midnight with live lights glinting in it, too, as the stars glinted over the Martian deserts; soft, white hands, graceful but capable—

But here! he thought, what nonsense was this? He had work to do. And this was no time for weaving poetic cadences about a girl who was practically a total stranger!

Now she laughed, gaily, her very laughter seeming to burst from a heart happy with newfound freedom. And she said, "It was just as you said, Greg. We found the ferns down by the spring. Did we bring enough of them?"

Greg said, "Enough for tonight. They'll make comfortable beds. Later on Sparks and I will build real beds for all of us. Thank goodness there was a tool-chest on the skiff. You folks ready to eat?"

Hannigan lifted his nose from the fireplace.

"Ready! I been ready for a half hour, and my stummick's been ready for a week!"

And somehow it didn't seem at all surprising to Greg that Maud Andrews should be the one who, sleeves rolled up, face flushed with hearth-heat, warmth and good fellowship, seized the ladle, beat on the side of the pot vigorously and bawled, in what was far from a wealthy socialite's cultured tone, "Come and get it! Come and get it!"

SO, SOMEHOW, the first day was over . . . and the second day, too . . . and a week of Titan's sixteen hour days slid past so quickly that Greg could not truly say where they had disappeared.

Duties, chores, at first chaotic became matters of mere routine as one or another of the little band took them on his own shoulders. Maud Andrews, who on the second day bluntly and surprisingly startled everyone with the pronouncement that henceforth there would be, "—no more of this 'Miss Andrews' stuff; call me 'Aunt Maud'; I'm old enough to have mothered every last one of you!", set herself up as cook, thus freeing Tina to take care of the multitude of other household—

or cave-hold—duties. And an excellent cook she turned out to be, performing miracles with the odd, variegated samples of produce brought to her by the rest of the group.

Her once-aroused suspicion flared again when Greg casually requested, one day, permission to take Cuddles for a little run in the woods. She clucked to her pet, turned him over to Greg, but watchfully.

"I don't know what you have in mind, Greg Malcolm. But if you come back here with any sinister looking pieces of meat and no Cuddles—"

"I'm hoping to come back," confessed Greg, "with both meat *and* Cuddles. He's a poodle, isn't he? Well, he's always been a lap-dog to you, but I have an idea maybe his heritage will overcome his habits when I get him out into the woods. The poodle, in its earliest beginnings, used to be a hunting dog, you know. It was bred and trained especially for that purpose. Of course his nose may have been ruined by being pampered, but—"

"My Cuddles," exclaimed Aunt Maud, "a hunting dog!" She looked horrified.

Greg said slyly, "I hope so. He wouldn't be the first member of this party to prove his true worth beneath a thin veneer of civilization."

Aunt Maud's cheeks were red, but it might have been the warmth of the fire. And maybe the wood-smoke made her eyes shine like that, too. She pushed Greg roughly.

"Oh, run along!" she ordered. "But mind you bring him back unchanged!"

"Okay, Auntie," Greg said.

Greg brought him back, but not unchanged. For the poodle had, amazingly, reverted to type, once set on the trail of wild game. Greg carried back to the dinner table two small creatures, one vaguely resembling a squirrel, one definitely allied to the rabbit family, plunked them proudly before his companions.

"Don't give me credit. It was the purp. He's a humdinger. You should have seen him tree that squirrel—or whatever it is! And that rabbit-thing—he went scrambling halfway down a warren after it! Didn't you, Slewfoot?"

The dog yeped happily. Aunt Maud moaned.

"Slewfoot! Oh, my gracious! Cuddles, come here to momsy-womsey wight away! Did nassy-mans call him—"

Cuddles made no move to obey. Greg whistled, and the dog looked up. "Okay, Slewfoot. Go to momma!" And the dog pranced over to Aunt Maud. Greg grinned. "I think he likes his new name better," he said.

Slewfoot yeped again in an ecstasy of approval.

AND SO, gradually, life became easier and smoother and happier for the quintet of cave-dwellers. Beds took the place of piled ferns, the woodpile towered toward the cove roof against the days of dark and cold which, according to Greg's computations, might be expected within the next week or so, food was varied and plentiful, and a needed food was supplied when Tommy O'Doul marched triumphantly home with a bawling kid in his arms.

Sparks glared at him.

"Hey, youngster, what did you tote that home for? We ain't got no room for pets. And that thing ain't ripe to be et yet."

Tommy said, "I had to bring it. It was the only way I could make its mom follow me. See?"

And sure enough, a few yards away, anxiously eying its captive offspring, was a mother goat. Or something like a goat, anyway. Sparks caught on them. A flying tackle and the camp had corralled its first head of livestock. And from then on there was milk.

And there were songs in the evening, and card games and stories and compensations for the long, hard tasks of the daytime. Sparks labored on his radio set, though without too much hope. "Smashed to hell and gone, Greg. The tubes is the wust part. I could jockey the wires around. But glass—"

Greg looked thoughtful. "I wonder," he said. "I wonder? Well—do what you can with the metallic parts."

So they waited and worked, and in some dim corner of their minds continued to hope for the release which all in some vague fashion expected might come "some day." And their camaraderie was great and wholesome, but there was a single subject they never mentioned. The other quintet on the plain below. From their

hillside eyrie they could see the other camp, but by common consent they made no effort to approach Breadon's followers. They had offered assistance and it had been refused. They could do nothing more, now, unless—

The unless came sooner than they expected. In the still of the night it came in the dark, multi-mooned Saturnian night, when Greg and his comrades were all asleep in their bunks.

Greg woke with a strained feeling that he could not at first identify. He only knew, as a newly awakened sleeper dimly knows, that something was amiss.

Then, as he listened, he heard it again. The sound of a firing rifle. And the thin, muted whisper of a cry from the clearing below. A voice lifted in dismay.

With a start he was on his feet.

"Sparks!"

Hannigan bounced from his blankets like a redheaded ball of rubber. He was on his feet, scrubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands, even before he knew he was awake.

"Smatta? Whuzzup, Greg? Smatta?"

"Below!" roared Greg. "The party in the valley—they're in trouble of some kind! Get your gun and come on!"

VI

THE OTHERS were awake now. Young Tommy was aquake with excitement. He made a headlong dash for the dry niche wherein were stored the arms of the cavedwellers, came back dragging three rifles, handed one to Greg and another to Hannigan.

"Let's get going, Greg!" he yelled. "Golly Moses, what do you think it is? Animals, maybe? Or people? Gosh, let's get going!"

Greg took the spare rifle from him firmly.

"We'll go; you stay." Then, in swift contrition as the lad's face fell measurable inches. "Someone must guard the cave while we're gone, Tommy. 'Tina, build up the fire and put a kettle on. Aunt Maud—"

The old woman nodded grimly.

"I know. We'll have hot water ready. And bandages if you need 'em. Run along!"

How they ever got down that mountain-side so quickly was ever afterward a mystery to Greg. It was not exactly a painless descent; their progress was a series of runs, falls and buttock-bruising slides. The footing, in broad daylight, was precarious at best; with only sallow Saturn and the aura of the Rings to illumine their way, it is a wonder they ever reached the plain whole, in a single piece.

To add to their frenetic haste, in their ears there rang the constant challenge of gunfire. Crimson flashes lit the flatsward below, once a whining slug, miserably aimed, made both of them duck instinctively as it shrilled somewhere over their heads, *spanged!* against a rock behind them, went ricocheting off into the darkness.

For now they were on level ground, and mingled with the rattle of arms there was another sound, the purling whimper of tongueless, inhuman things astir and hungry. Greg had once heard, on Earth, the furtive night-passage of a jackal tribe; the soft, half plaintive mewlings, the incessant scrape of scrabbling paws, the ammoniac stench of unwashed bodies. He thought of this now, sharply, as he heard these mutterings, smelled these rank odors, strained his eyes to determine contours in the darkling night.

Hannigan complained, "You see 'em, Greg? It's dark as a whale's gut. I can't see nothing. What'll we fire at? Are our folks out in the open or in the skiff? We might hit *them* if—"

Greg said, "We'll know in a minute." As they moved forward he tugged from his belt the weapon he had been holding in reserve; the one such weapon found amongst the stores of the life-skiff; one he dared use but infrequently because once its charge was exhausted he had no way of replenishing it. "We should be near enough now. Spot 'em quick and fire while there's light!"

He jerked the trigger of the Haemholst flame pistol. A writhing streamer of ochre speared from its muzzle, lighting the plain with a hot and eerie effulgence. Like a fiery dart it blazed into the heart of the pack surrounding the life-skiff. By its lingering gleam Greg saw, with stomach-churning repulsion, the creatures which attacked.

Neither men nor wolves were they, but

a cruel parody on each. Lean, hair-matted beast-things running on four legs, semi-human of feature but with loose lips snarling back from yellow fangs; fingered paws long-clawed; indescribably evil and filthy; the more inhuman because they embodied so many physical attributes of Man.

Their pack must have numbered three score, ranging from gray-pelted old ones to skinny, ragged pups. Apparently they had surprised the plateau party in the open, allowing them no time to remove their precious campstuffs, because the ground about, around and before the skiff was littered with a refuse of clothing, blankets, supplies and equipment, cases and scraps of food.

It was for this last that the wolf-men had attacked, because even as the ochre beam found their midst, they were scrambling hungrily about the campsite, avidly gobbling all edible scraps they could nose out. A few more aggressive ones scented richer victuals; these it was who, despite the sporadic fire from within the skiff, snuffled, clawed and clamored at the port.

UNTIL the heat-beam struck them. That put an end to their hunger and their blood-lust. Like any wild woodland animal, they had no fear of firearms; they had no experience with them. Bullets that struck, killed; wolf-men untouched by bullets had no way of associating hurt with a sharp burst of sound and a strange, unfamiliar powder-scent.

But light—light that burned the hair and scorched the flesh; light that spared not one of them, but spread to dose all with its heatful pain—that was something different! As the beam struck and spread, snuffings changed to bestial screams of fear and pain. Those nearest the beam's focal point felt no pain; they died instantly, charred hulks that crisped and sank, shapeless, to the ground. And from these strangely altered, swiftly dead companions the others fled, howling in shrill alarm. Their footsteps were the dry patter of leaves on shale; they broke and ran wildly for the nether hills, tonguing shrill ululations of hurt.

Then the door of the skiff opened cautiously; dim light was a sliver, a crack, an oblong. And the voice of J. Foster Andrews quavered through the darkness to

their ears. It sounded shrill and afraid.

"Malcolm—is that you?"

Sparks snorted derisively. "Ain't that awful?" he demanded. "Is that you!" He raised his voice. "Hell, no, it ain't him! It's the Gray Lensman. Who'd you think?"

"Shut up, Sparks!" Greg said, "Hold your fire, the wolf-things are gone. We're coming in!"

A few moments later, he and Hannigan were standing within the life-skiff.

GREGORY MALCOLM was twenty-six years old. For more than eight years he had been training himself to undergo any and all emotions without change of expression. That was, in his opinion, a prime requisite for a man whose vocation lay in a subordinate position. Now he was grateful for learning that self-control, and hoped his features were as granitelike as he tried to make them. He hoped his eyes did not mirror the astonishment, the shock, the numb dismay he felt when he first glanced about the interior of that cabin, and at those who stood before him.

It was incredible that in one short week—one very short Titanian week—so great a change could have been wrought in this haughty quintet. His followers were weathering the storm of catastrophe without faltering, without any relaxation of civilized standards. But Breadon's—

He studied them, his quietude concealing the sudden heartsickness he knew, his spectacles hiding the swift light of horror in his eyes. The men had not shaved, it was clear, since their crash-landing. Five day stubble lay frostily on the jowls of J. Foster Andrews, blackly on the cheeks of his son and son-in-law to-be.

Nor did slovenliness end there. Beneath the beard-growth, the skin of the men looked dirty, dingy, sallow, as if they had not washed for days. Their clothes were equally soiled and sorry. Greg saw that J. Foster's nails were dull and broken and grubby as the nails of a stevedore.

He rallied himself with an effort. These were men. They had been working hard, laboring. They could not stay immaculate. They had been in a fight.

Then he looked at the women, and knew that he made excuses vainly. It was even more disillusioning to see what had hap-

pened to Mrs. Andrews and Crystal in so short a time.

Enid Andrews, fashion-plate of two continents, one of Earth's smartest-dressed women, thrice-named by fashion authorities as Best Dressed Woman in the Solar Confederation, hobbled sloppily about on scuffed slippers, the heel of one of which had broken off and not been replaced, so that her posture sagged like a bag of meal, split at a side-seam and sifting awkwardly away. Her once elaborate coiffure was a bird's-nest of tangled braids which hung unbraided, curls that sagged limply; hastily adjusted pins and combs clung insecurely to locks that, once pearl-silver, were now clay-crust-ed gray.

Crystal—glamorous, pulse-stirring Crystal—was in no better plight. Her gorgeous ash-gold hair was pulled severely back from a forehead which, Greg discovered, was not nearly so broad and smooth and high as he had imagined; the artificial color had rubbed from her cheeks, leaving them lustreless and sullen; her lips—ever rich, ripe, full—were pale and harsh-thin and her mouth had tight, argumentative lines at the corners. Her eyes were dark-rimmed, weary, haggard. She was, thought Greg with shocked comprehension, a tired girl.

They were all tired. Tired and beaten and dejected. All but Breadon who, even now, was eyeing Greg defiantly, as if challenging him to comment on their condition. He said, bitterly, "Thank you, Malcolm. It was a most magnanimous gesture, coming down from your hilltop castle to rescue us."

GREG said nothing. He was looking about the interior of the cabin, noticing with incredulous disfavor the way it had been abused, littered, left uncleaned. Ashes, dirty dishes, scraps of cloth and paper, fragments of cartons and dirt tracked in from outside. . .

But Hannigan was not bound by Greg's compunctions. He spoke his mind frankly, staring at the five skiff-dwellers with obvious contempt in his eyes.

"If you'd ask me," he said, "it's damn near time somebody come down and rescued you. Not from wolves, neither. From yourselves. You all look like you'd been drug through the butt end of a wringer."

"Well, we have," began Bert Andrews savagely. "We have been through—"

"Shut up, you fool!" Breadon cut short his plaint viciously; blustered defiance that was in itself an apology. "We've been busy making a camp around here. We haven't had time to—"

Sparks drawled, "Bud, we been busy making a camp, too, in a place which wasn't already equipped with furnishings, like your'n. And I think we done a better job of it. And in between times, we found time to shave and bathe once in a while."

Andrews flushed and said stiffly, "There is a need of being provident with water. Our supply is limited—"

Greg said, "What? You mean you've been using the water reserve from the life-skiff?"

Enid Andrews answered. Excitedly. Volubly. Almost at the point of tears. She wrung her hands, and Greg could not help noticing the anomaly of those at once dirty and gem-bedecked fingers.

"We have. Oh, we have. There's no other water anywhere around here. Nor food. We've been living on concentrates . . . sickening, horrible stuff. . ."

"That's not true!" flamed Breadon. "We did have other food. I made bread. I caught small game. I put out traps. There would have been plenty of food except for the wolf-men who raided tonight. They broke our stove . . . stole my reserves. . ."

"Which," mocked Sparks, "you conveniently left out for them to sniff and come a-running after? Why don't you call it a day, Breadon? Admit you're nothing but a cocky Earthlubber at heart and—"

"Why, you little whippersnapper!" Breadon took a swift step forward. But Greg had heard enough. He laid a restraining hand on the socialite's arm. His voice was as soothing, as pleading, as he could make it.

"Haven't we had enough of that already? Look here, Breadon, let's let bygones be bygones. We've had our little quarrel, now let's act like sane and sensible humans.

"You're not situated here any too well. You've admitted you're not near a water supply. The terrain is open to attack, as is proven by tonight's incident. You've been, well—let's say 'unlucky.'

"On the other hand—we've been lucky.

We've got a nice, warm cave large enough to house all ten of us easily. We have soft beds and good food and fresh milk; safety and good fellowship. With some of the things you have in here—those upholstered chairs, for instance; what remains of your equipment and supplies, we could make a veritable paradise of our cave.

"So what do you say? Let's cast in our lots together. Make it one big, happy family?"

J FOSTER looked at him thoughtfully. Enid Andrews began to cry softly. Crystal glanced at Ralph, then at Greg, than at Breadon again. Bert Andrews stroked his chin. He said, "It sounds good—"

Breadon interrupted.

"There's just one thing, Malcolm," he said curtly. "We'll accept your—your overtures of friendship on one condition. That you'll step down from the high horse you've been riding lately, come to the realization that you're not cock-o'-the-walk around these parts."

Greg said gravely, "If you mean that our community shall be a society in which all share and share alike, I am in complete agreement with you."

"That's what I mean," said Breadon. "Of course, we all recognize that there must be leadership. As our oldest man, our most important member, Mr. Andrews is that logical leader. I can assure you, acting as his lieutenant—"

"No!" said Sparks loudly. "It's the same old thing in a different package, Greg. He wants to be boss, else he won't play. The answer is—comets to you, Breadon. We're doing all right the way we are; you're making a mess of your affairs. As far as I'm concerned, you can stay here and stew in your own gravy!"

He turned toward the door. Greg said, "Wait, Sparks. I'll be right with you." And he, too, nodded at Breadon. "I fear Sparks is right, Breadon. You haven't learned your lesson yet. We're going back where we belong. We're glad to have been of some small service to you. If you ever need us again, just call. Meanwhile, my offer remains open. If you should ever decide to join us on *our* terms—"

A loud and cheerful voice interrupted him. A voice from outside, bellowing gay

greeting, "Ahoy, you in there! Open the door!"

Sparks said, "Aunt Maud! What's she—?" and pulled the door open. In the oblong, against the slow gray dawn now crawling above the hilltops, stood Aunt Maud, a huge grin on her face, a tremendous bowl in her stalwart arms. From the bowl rose a tantalizing aroma. She waddled in, plunked it on the nearest desk.

"Thought you folks might be sort of hungry after a scrap," she grinned. "Watched it from the cave. Nice, cozy place to watch a fight from. Saw morning was coming on, so I brought you down some breakfast.

"Sister—" She glanced at the sallow-cheeked Enid shrewdly. "You look sort of peaked. You too, Crystal. You look older, honey. Well, Greg—ready? We'd better be running along. 'Tina's got our breakfast almost ready. Fruit juice and porridge and pancakes with butter and sugar-syrup. Sounds good, eh? Well, 'bye, folks!"

And by main force she herded the two men swiftly out of the skiff. Outside, moving toward the hill, Sparks turned on her pettishly.

"Now, what did you go and do that for, Aunt Maud—you've gummed up everything! Greg was telling 'em off; just beginning to make 'em listen to reason—"

Aunt Maud grinned and winked broadly at Greg.

"Sparks, are all radiomen as dumb as you, or do you hold the championship? Greg could talk from now to doomsday and not get anywhere with that outfit. I *know*. They're my own haughty, independent, pigheaded flesh and blood.

"But that stew I brought them—" She chuckled and rolled her eyes delightedly. "Now, that's a *real* argument. The best their bellies ever listened to. Just wait and see!"

VII

THE TRUTH of her statement was exhibited very soon. That very afternoon, in fact. The dim Titanian sun was settling toward the westward hilltops, and Greg was just putting the finishing touches to a crude grist-mill he was rigging for the women, when there came the scrape of

hesitant footsteps up the rocky pathway.

Hannigan had been away since breakfast time, making a survey of the natural resources within easy distance of their cave. Greg thought it was the radioman returning.

"Hi!" he shouted over his shoulder, without looking back. "Any luck? What did you find?" Then, as no voluble, profane, fantastic answer was forthcoming, he turned around. His eyes momentarily betrayed his astonishment. "Oh! Hello, Andrews!" he said.

Bert Andrews shuffled uncomfortably. His gaze held a curious mixture of wistfulness, reluctance and expectancy. He said, in a voice that was a trifle too breathlessly nonchalant, "Hello, Malcolm. Just taking a little stroll, so I thought I might drop up and see—see how you're making out." He glanced about him, obviously impressed. "Not so bad," he said. "Not bad at all! That's the cave, I suppose? See you have things pretty well straightened out. What's that?"

Greg's gaze followed his nod to the crosswork which was suspended directly above the cave-mouth; a latticework of steel, firmly wire-lashed, secured by a rope, the stretch of which dipped into the cave itself.

"Barrier-shield," explained Greg. "Hangs on a pulley. We can drop it from inside. In case of attack, you see. Slides down that groove into the channel cut in the ground, holds tight there." He grunted. "That's one of the reasons we don't have any honest-to-John furniture in our home. We had too many other important uses for the metal."

"Clever," said Andrews. "Ingenious. I—er—got to thinking over what you said this morning, Malcolm, after you left. You were right. For a group of civilized people we let ourselves get into sorry shape."

He rubbed his chin reflectively. Greg noticed for the first time that his face was no longer dark with beard; that though his clothes were still dirty, he had made an effort to straighten them, dust them. The skin of his face, though, was pink and sore; chafed.

Greg said, "What in the world did you shave with, Bert? A cross-cut saw?"

Andrews said defensively, "The electric razor won't work. The dry-cells are ex-

hausted, and we can't use D. C. without wasting fuel. There wasn't a honed blade aboard the skiff. I used my pocket-knife. It—" he confessed ruefully, "It wasn't very sharp."

Greg said, "Hannigan mounted carborundum sheets on a lathe wheel and put edges on a couple steak knives for us. I'll let you have one before you go back. Hey, there he is now! What's the story, Sparks?"

Hannigan came into the clearing at a trot. He was excited. He said, "Sweet Christmas cow, Greg, you know what I run across? A—What's this? Company?"

The eager, interested look fled from Bert Andrews' eyes. He said stiffly, "I—I guess I'll be running along now, Malcolm. See you again."

HE TURNED, his shoulders very stiff. Too stiff to be convincing. Greg glanced at him appraisingly, motioned the radioman to keep his mouth shut, called after the young Andrews.

"Don't go yet, Bert. We're just getting ready for dinner."

"Dinner?" The young man spun like a top. Then he recalled his dignity. "Oh—dinner! Why, I guess ours is almost ready, too. 'Bye—"

We'd be glad to have you stay," said Greg levelly, striving to keep the amusement out of his voice. "I think there's a roast tonight. Something that looks like a young suckling pig can't exactly tell, though, till we taste it. These Titanian animals are different. Then there's a salad and potatoes and beans, a fruit compote, and I think 'Tina baked a pie today."

Andrews' eyes widened as his lips twitched. "I—I wouldn't want to be any trouble," he said faintly.

"No trouble at all," said Greg. Then, unable longer to restrain himself, "But of course if you think they'll be expecting you—?"

"No, I'll stay!" blurted Andrews hastily. "Thanks. I can wash up somewhere?"

"Inside. Ask Aunt Maud for soap. She's the custodian of that." Then, as the young man disappeared into the cave hurriedly, Greg grinned at Hannigan. "One!" he said.

"You want to hear about what I seen?" demanded the redhead. "Listen, it was

terrific! Great big marsh, full of the damndest life-forms and craziest vegetation anybody ever met up with. Hot, too! Steamy, like the Grand Marshes of Venus, only not quite as stinking—"

He stopped, annoyed. "One what? You ain't listening to a word I'm saying. Don't you want to hear?"

"Later, Sparks," said Greg. "Right now I'm wondering how long it will take the others to fall in line."

IT DIDN'T take long. The citadel of stubbornness had been undermined the night of the attack, it toppled with Bert Andrews' "friendly visit"—from which, some time later, he staggered home glassy-eyed with an overdose of wild roast, hot vegetables, crisp greens and luscious fruits, succulent berry pie—and it crashed, violently, the next day.

Bert Andrews brought his dad up the hill, presumably to confer with Malcolm on a future mutual defensive system; the two of them lingered for lunch—and after lunch old J. Foster, with the blunt directness which accounted for his success in Earth's business world, sat back, grunted comfortably, and said, "That's the first meal I've enjoyed since I was a pup in Service! Malcolm, you win! I'm sick and tired of this squabbling, and of our hand-to-mouth existence down there. Is there room for me in this cave of yours?"

It was no moment for gloating triumph. Greg said, "Yes, sir."

"Then I'm moving in. And so is my wife. What do you want me to do?"

Greg said, "Hannigan and I were planning to break ground for a small farm this afternoon, but this is more important. We'll go down with you and help you move up your personal things. How about—" he hesitated briefly—"how about Crystal? And Breadon?"

"I don't know," said J. Foster unhappily. "But if they're smart, they'll quit kicking against the pricks, too."

They were smart. When Andrews and his son, accompanied by Hannigan, Tommy and Greg, appeared at the skiff to move the Andrews' property, when Andrews told them bluntly that he and Enid and Bert were casting their lot in with the cave-dwellers, there was a moment of sultry silence, fraught with reluctance, anger,

recrimination—then Breadon bowed to the inevitable. Not with good grace, but with grudging agreement he said, "Very well. If that's the way you want it, Mr. Andrews. If we're welcome up there, Malcolm—?"

Greg said, "You are welcome, Breadon. I told you that a week ago." And promptly forgot Breadon and Breadon's surliness as he realized that Crystal, too, had been shamed into a recollection of her feminine duty to herself. Somewhere she had found cosmetics, and somehow she had managed to clean and press out a fawn-colored desert sun-suit. Once again, ash-blond hair combed back to a shoulder-length veil of shimmering loveliness, pale golden skin fresh and creamy and fragrant beneath the sheer silk of her abbreviated costume, she was the glamorous, crystal-lovely Crystal of more leisured days. A woman at once lovely, challenging and—desirable.

Thus the nation divided against itself was united. And thus began the second phase of the refugees' struggle to exist against staggering odds on the lonely, hostile moon of Saturn.

VIII

AMAZINGLY, the period of readjustment was not long, nor was it arduous. It was accomplished briefly, surely, in a series of emphatic object lessons. There was Enid Andrews, for instance. On her first afternoon in the cave she called 'Tina to her side, ordered the beautification of her face, her hair, her nails, and with a sigh of relief surrendered to the ministrations of the younger girl.

Greg, witness to this, frowned. But he motioned for silence when Aunt Maud would have made some irate comment.

That evening, by former agreement, Enid washed the dinner dishes. When 'Tina stepped forward to dry them, Greg stopped her.

"Sit down, 'Tina. Mrs. Andrews will dry them."

Enid started, gasped, stared at the huge pile appalled. 'Tina said, "But there are so many of them, Greg. Ten of us—"

"You have done extra work today," said Greg suavely, "to earn your rest. Mrs. Andrews is in your debt. She must work out her obligation. We have," he con-

tinued pointedly, "no servants or masters here. Courtesies must be repaid in kind."

Only twice more did the lessons have to be repeated; once when Bert Andrews gluttonously devoured an entire berry pie and was made to spend the next lunch-hour picking fruit for another; again when Breadon carelessly fouled the spring by washing in it, and in penance was required to construct a clay-and-stone dam below the spring, that in the future the community might have adequate bathing facilities; after that everyone understood that he had his allotted share of work, that the work must be done, that meals, warmth, comfort and safety could be earned only by sweat and toil.

And gradually the rude cave dwelling began to take on the semblance of a home. During the short days at their disposal before Titan, pursuing its cosmic rounds, plunged into the umbra of its gigantic mother planet, every member of the refugee corps worked feverishly to prepare and fortify for the dark days to come.

It was well that they did so, for when the darkness descended, ensued a bleakness even more terrifying than Greg had anticipated. The eclipse of Titan by its parent was no mild, momentary phenomenon like the eclipsing of Earth by Luna; it was a five day cessation of all heat and light.

With the darkness came sweeping, icy winds, gales monstrously violent, and incredible cold. From a sky black and terribly came the snow, five inches of it in an hour, eight feet of it in a day. It was alarming at first. Then Greg and all of them realized that the very ferocity of the storm was their salvation! Were there to be this frightful cold *without* snow, not all the fires of Gehenna, not all the clothing and blankets in the universe, could have protected them. But the snow, dropping like a sodden, white blanket, choked and filled the mouth of their cave, piled thicker and thicker, enswaddling them in a fleecy comfort that kept out the bone-brittling blasts.

Then they thanked the foresight that had led them to build up a roof-touching fuel reserve, a store of fresh produce and game, for they could not leave their refuge. They were snowbound until Titan left the shadow of Saturn and the warth should again melt their prison walls.

But those days were not days of idleness; they were days of accomplishment. The women, under 'Tina's guidance, ripped apart unneeded goods salvaged from the skiff's stores—tarpaulins, extra bedding and napery, carpeting, drapes—and restitched them into more needed, more practical articles of wearing and household apparel.

BREADON and Greg, laying aside a mutely-acknowledged hostility, pooled their knowledge and ingenuity in an effort to ascertain their whereabouts on the satellite. Neither had studied mathematics closely, a fact each now bewailed. But they had a few books on astrogation, taken from the skiff, and they had determination and intelligence. Utilizing some of their precious, dwindling store of forged metal, they constructed a crude but—they believed—reasonably accurate sextant with which, when the darkness was gone, they hoped to take celestial readings that would aid their computations.

In the making of this, Greg was forced to sacrifice something that had been for almost ten years as much a part of him as his arms and legs. His spectacles. Strangely, he did not miss them much after the first day. Their purpose had been mainly to protect him from eyestrain and headaches in a confined vocation that required much reading. But here on Saturn's satellite, health improved by hard labor, Greg had experienced no headaches. He was, in fact, almost disgustingly healthy. He could tell by the straining of his clothes at throat and chest and waistband that he was gaining weight; his appetite had improved and when night came, he did not have to read himself to sleep.

Young Tommy took upon himself the task of chronicling their exile. His method, though extravagantly romantic as befitted his years and enthusiasm for this adventure, was nonetheless efficient. He laboriously scraped smooth a wide portion of the cave-wall; on this he inscribed a calendar, a log, and a map of such portions of the satellite as they had so far explored.

Meanwhile Sparks Hannigan fretted over his damaged radio set. An accomplished bug-pounder, he took little time to get the wiring rearranged. The replace-

ment of metal parts was a tougher problem, but it, too, he solved with the aid of their acetylene torch.

One final job, however, stopped him cold. He shook his head when he spoke of it to Malcolm.

"The tubes, Greg. It just ain't no use. We can't operate the radio less'n we got tubes, and ours is gone. I guess I'm just wasting my time."

Greg said, "Isn't there a type of radio that works without tubes? Operates on a crystal, or something?"

Sparks said, "Yeah. But it ain't got no power. We got to get a message plumb off the satellite, out into space where it can be picked up by a Space Patrol cruiser. Or the Saturn lightship."

"And that's impossible? Suppose you had glass?"

"Can you make it?" scoffed Sparks.

"Maybe," said Greg. "Glass was accidentally discovered in the first place, you know, by Phoenician sailors who built a fire on a sandy beach wherein was imbedded raw chunks of natron. We might be able to do the same."

Sparks shook his head glumly. "O.Q. So that gives us glass. We still got to blow it, and figger out some way of sucking the air out, and winding filaments. Oh, understand, I ain't saying we can't *do* it, Greg. But it'll take years."

Greg nodded soberly.

"Well, we'll overlook no bets. Sparks—tell you what to do. You go ahead and build one of those simple "crystal" sets, just in the event that someday a scout ship or exploration plane should come within our range. Andrews is an important man, you know. Earth won't dismiss him casually as 'Lost in Space.' We'll also, as soon as the Sun comes back, clear a wide swath in the plain below us and construct a huge SOS sign of wood and underbrush that will be visible by day and can be set afire by night.

"Then, if we should ever hear the signal of a scout ship, we'll hope they see our marker."

"If!" grunted Sparks.

"What's that?"

"Skip it!" said Hannigan. "I was just making book against myself."

SO GREG maintained an optimism before the others, an optimism he did not entirely feel himself. Always he talked of the day they would leave Titan, but sometimes he wondered if that day would ever come.

And truth to tell, there were periods when he almost hoped that day would not ever come! For here, a thousand million miles from the Earth that had borne him, Gregory Malcolm had finally come into the rulership that, on Earth, he could never win, but that here was his by right of greater strength and knowledge.

He gazed about him, musing, and saw a cavern bright with candles that *he* had taught the womenfolk to render from the fats of wild beasts, warm with a flame *he* had kindled and nurtured, comfortable with furnishings *he* had constructed to their purpose. He saw nine men and women, a half dozen of whom had been his "superiors" aforetime, but who now looked to him for guidance, protection and leadership.

His mind's eye pierced the rock walls of the cavern and gazed, marveling, at the cosmos as viewed from desolate Titan. When these snows melted he could stand upon the hillside beneath the flaming moons of Saturn, beneath the never-ending wonder of Saturn's massive, multi-colored Rings, and say with Defoe's ancient castaway that here he, indeed, was monarch of all he surveyed.

This was his ordained fate; this was his brave, new world; these people were his subjects. And he was, for howsoever brief or long a time, an Emperor. And the white, the whirling stars—these were his empire!

Perhaps he was not the only one of that group who saw this truth. For there was more than mere grudging lip-service in the changed attitude of Andrews and his wife and son. Bert Andrews was a changed boy. His wilfulness had vanished; his allegiance to Greg was ardent. Maud Andrews' affection for Greg was an obvious thing. She saw to it that he was first fed, first clothed, first taken care of in all things; hers was an attitude of fierce maternalism, springing from a breast that had never known motherhood.

And—and there was another strange

thing, too. A thing of singing glory that Greg could scarce believe, even though its truth was exhibited to him in a thousand little ways.

Crystal Andrews!

A great change had come upon Crystal Andrews since the loss of the *Carefree*. Of the old Crystal, only one part remained. Her blindingly radiant beauty. Her selfishness, her coldness, had fled, had been banished as her accustomed languidness had been banished by the obligation of labor.

Daily her attitude toward Greg grew more intimate. From aloofness she melted into acceptance, acceptance faded and became approval. Approval waxed as transpiring events proved time and again Greg's wisdom and his right to rule; there came upon the girl an eagerness to be the first to do whatever he suggested.

This was good, and as it should be. But there was something else, too; something deeper. At first Greg could not understand it, then gradually its meaning became clear even to his wholly-masculine mind. The sudden glance . . . the lingering touch of hand against hand as they chanced to pass one another . . . the host of unnecessary little questions that brought them into contact a dozen times a day . . . the sweeping flush when he, looking up unexpectedly, met her gaze. All these and other things. The lithe, sure, free, but overwhelmingly feminine allure of her body, shoulder brushing his as they sat before the fireplace in the long evenings. The slow caress of her voice when she spoke his name. The moment of swift alarm—a torpid snake that had somehow wriggled into the cavern, toward the warmth of the fire—and Crystal in his arms for all too short a moment. And drawing away reluctantly when the "danger" was past.

HE SHOULD have known from these things. Or from the amused glances of Sparks Hannigan, or the increased surliness of Ralph Breadon, or from the sudden loss of gaiety on the part of 'Tina.

"What's the matter with you, 'Tina? Don't you feel well lately?"

Her eyes avoiding his. "I'm all right, Greg. It's nothing."

"But you don't sing any more. You've

sure you're well? There's nothing I can do for you?"

"No." Her voice low. "No, thank you."

"But I want you to be happy. Look, 'Tina—let's you and me play cribbage tonight like we used to? We haven't had a game for weeks. How about it?"

"Oh, Greg—would you like to? Really?"

Her dullness slipping away from her like a dropped cape; her voice throbbingly eager. Then another voice at his elbow, a throaty, heart-stirring voice. "Oh, Greg—me, too? May I play? Will you teach me the game?"

Greg turned, smiling. "Why, of course. We'll get Sparks and make it a four-handed game. Eh, 'Tina?"

But 'Tina drew back, her eyes hurt again and distant. Her voice faint. "N-no, Greg. You and Crystal. I don't think I want to. . ."

Which Greg could not understand. But gradually, out of his confusion and miscomprehension, one truth came clear. And with its coming there was a sudden singing in his heart, a fire in his veins. He loved Crystal Andrews. And Crystal Andrews loved him!

THEN one day they woke to find the floor of the cave glistening darkly with a pool of water. The snow was melting from the mouth of the cave. When they attacked the weakened snowbank with shovels and brooms, laughing and fighting their way clear of the white barrier, they discovered that the dark days had ended, that once again the sky of Titan was silver-blue and bright, that already the warmth had turned the snow mantle to chuckling rivulets that ran merrily down the hills, leaving fresh green in its wake. The miracle of Titan's "winter" had passed, and the land would again be theirs for three warm weeks.

Greg's brain was afire with a hundred projects. A viaduct to carry water into the cavern during the next cold period. They had had to depend on melted snow this time. A study of the stars with their new sextant. The clearing of ground for the gigantic signal. He turned to the others enthusiastically.

"We've got to work now, folks, as we never worked before! Tommy, I want you to get right to work on that new via-

duct we were talking about. Andrews, your first job will be to replenish the wood supply. Try the west woods, that's the best timber. 'Tina, see what these short 'winters' do to the vegetation, will you? I don't imagine they're dead. Nature has ways of counteracting its own excesses. I believe we'll find the vegetation here on Titan is phenomenally hardy. But see, anyway.

"Aunt Maud—you and Enid set out those traps we made during the dark spell. We'll have a hot stew tonight. Breadon, suppose you and Sparks and I go down to the plain and start planning our signal system? Crystal—"

Crystal was at his side, her hand on his arm. "I'm going with you, Greg."

"What? But they need you—Oh, all right!"

He smiled. Behind him Aunt Maud snorted and disguised the snort with a rattling cough. 'Tina looked at him oddly for a moment before she turned obediently toward where last week there had been a vegetable patch. Her eyes were hurt. Greg could not understand why.

It was not until he was halfway down the hill that he remembered he had promised to let her help with the sign project. Of course it was too late to do anything about it then. Besides, Crystal's feet were unsteady on the melting path. She needed his arm about her for support. And her hair had a tantalizing fragrance all its own. . .

IX

IT TOOK all of the men, working steadily from dawn to dusk every day, two full weeks to construct the signal. When it was done, Greg looking down upon it from their hilltop eyrie, gazed upon it with approval and found it good.

Across the mile-wide flatness of the plain they had heaped huge piles of branches, faggots, brush, forming the letters "S O S." Green, they stood out boldly; withered and faded, their brownness would be equally clear.

Hannigan was pleased with his share of the work, too.

"—wire," he finished, "from the bottom of the 'S' to the cave. We just about had

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enough, too. Anyhow, if the ship should happen to come at night instead of in the daytime, all we got to do is push the switch, and a spark'll jump in the tinder. Send the whole signal up in flame in less time than you can say 'integral calculus.'" He frowned. "If," he added, "a ship comes at all. Which of course I couldn't say yes or no."

"It will come," said Greg absently. He said it because it was the thing to say; as a matter of habit. He was not even thinking of his words. He was thinking, now that this project had been accomplished, of other things. Of a silo that must be built. They had nine head of livestock now, due to Tommy O'Doul's persistence. The beasts would have to be provided with winter quarters. One goat in the cave had not been so bad, last month. But nine goats— Perhaps, he thought, that small cave next to ours. If we could dig into it through the west wall . . . make a small opening. . .

His lack of concentration brought a false conclusion from the third man in the group. Ralph Breadon stirred restively.

"You should say," he insinuated, "if Malcolm *wants* a ship to come!"

The words penertated Greg's thoughts of the future slowly. He turned a blank, questioning look on the other.

"Eh?"

"I merely said," repeated Breadon, "that one could not condemn a man in your position for showing lack of enthusiasm in a rescue party."

Greg stared at him thoughtfully.

"Just what do you mean by that, Breadon?"

Breadon shrugged.

"Isn't it fairly obvious? Two short months ago you were a nobody. A secretary without background, position or authority. Today you're the demigod of Titan. Sir Boss. I don't complain; I merely comment. You have everything a man could ask for. Authority . . . security . . . a woman. . ."

The last jolted Malcolm out of his apathy. He took a swift step forward, gripped Breadon's lapels with a fist grown heavier, rougher, with labor.

"If you mean Crystal, Breadon—"

Breadon stood his ground. "Let go of me, Malcolm. I'm not going to fight you

again. Of course I mean Crystal. It's perfectly obvious that you and she—Oh, hell, man! Don't be a hypocrite! After all, when people live as intimately as we do, in one little cave. . ."

GREG felt dark anger welling up within him like a gall-tinctured flood. Rage not that Breadon should say this thing, but that there should be cause for his thinking it. He choked, thickly, "Damn you, Breadon—there's not a thing wrong between Crystal and me. I love her, yes. And Crystal loves me. We've only been waiting till this big job was finished—"

"Then if I were you," retorted Breadon wearily, "I wouldn't wait any longer. Or is it another case of the king being incapable of doing wrong? Anyhow, I think you understand what I mean now. Two months ago a marriage between you and Crystal Andrews would have been ridiculous. Today—"

He shrugged again. Greg glared at him wrathfully, impotently, for a long moment. Then he spun on his heel, led the way down the hill to the cave. Sparks scurried along behind him anxiously. "Now, look, Greg—don't do nothing you might regret—"

"Shut up! I'll handle this!"

At the cave he called all the settlers before him. They came from their tasks, surprised, wondering. He wasted no time. He broached the subject boldly.

"Because we ten are marooned here on a desert satellite," he said savagely, "without a clergyman, there is no reason we must abandon all the rights and privileges of civilized society. Human emotions have a habit of enduring. I think it is no secret that Crystal Andrews and I have fallen in love. I intend, therefore, to marry her as soon as it can be arranged.

"Crystal—" He turned to the girl. "Do I speak for you as well as for myself?"

The girl nodded and stepped forward into the circle of his arm. "You know you do, Greg."

J. Foster Andrews looked pleased. He said, "That's fine, son. But who's going to do the marrying?"

"You are. As owner of the *Carefree*, you were also its commander. I think the space code would permit your acting in capacity of justice." Greg's anger melted.

"I'm not being very formal about this, sir. Perhaps I should ask for your permission."

"You have it, my boy! And now—" Archly. "When will the —hrrumph!— happy event take place?"

Greg looked at Crystal questioningly. "Next week?" she said, "I'll have to have a little time, Greg."

"That's it, then," said Greg. "Next week. When the dark period comes."

THE LITTLE group broke up, then. One by one they murmured words of congratulation and approval to their leader and his bride-to-be and drifted away. Finally Crystal went back into the cave, and Greg was left alone with 'Tina, who alone of all the group, had so far said nothing. He went to her.

"You haven't told me you're happy, 'Tina."

She turned slowly.

"Shall I say so, Greg?"

"I want you to. Why do you act so strangely toward me, 'Tina? Do you dislike me? You used to—"

"I'm happy," she cried suddenly. "Now I've said it. You want me to. Are you satisfied? Why don't you let me alone, Greg? Must I like or dislike you? You have one woman? Must you—" She broke from his side, raced forward to the edge of the hill, stared blindly down into the plain. Greg moved after her, worried. "What is it, 'Tina? You're *not* happy! Are you lonely? Why don't you get married, too? Sparks . . . or Breadon . . ."

He stopped, his gaze over her shoulder settling on something in the valley beneath. A thing incredible to behold, but that was . . . yes, *was* . . .

"'Tina!" he gasped.

At the tone of his voice she spun swiftly, anxiously. "What is it, Greg?"

"Look! Down there! A—a human!"

X

"MORE GRUEL, Marberry?" asked Aunt Maud solicitously. "Can you eat another spoonful?" She glared at those who ringed the reclining spaceman belligerently. "Why don't you let him alone?" she demanded. "Greg Malcolm,

I thought you had better sense! The man's weak and sick!"

Marberry's eyes were like charred pockets, but he summoned a weak smile.

"I'm all right," he said. "There isn't much more to tell. We managed to cut free from the *Carefree* just before she crashed. Four of us. Lipstead, Hawkins, Craeburn and myself. Our skiff cracked up in a mountain gorge. Craeburn was killed, and Lipstead broke his leg. But we fixed it up in splints, and he got by.

"When the snow came—" He shut his eyes momentarily, as though to rid them of a persistently evil vision. "When the snow came we almost died. We ran short on fuel, and the skiff leaked. Then the electro-stove ran down, and we had to eat cold, canned food.

"Even so, we pulled through. But when it got warm again, Hawkins said we mustn't spend another winter in the skiff. We had to find a cave in the mountains, he said. So we abandoned the ship and started moving. It was then that they caught us."

Breadon, who had entered late, asked, "Who?"

"Natives of Titan," Greg capitulated briefly. "He described 'em to us before you came in. Savages. Cannibals. Humanoid, but no culture. Funny physical make-up, like the Uranians. Don't feel the cold at all. Murdering devils. From what he says, we're lucky they haven't found us before this."

Breadon said, "Cannibals!" and looked allow. The supine man continued weakly.

"We had to leave Lipstead behind. He couldn't run. He drew a gun on us, threatened to kill us all if we didn't leave him. We heard his gun afterward. He must have got a half dozen of them before—before they got him.

"Then Hawkins and me split up. It was the only way, he said. One of us might be lucky. I—I guess I was. They followed him instead of me. And all the time—" His voice raised feverishly. "And all the time, we was only about ten miles from here! If we'd only known—"

Aunt Maud would stand for no more. She bustled between the invalid and his listeners, shooed them away angrily. "Run along, now. This man needs sleep and quiet. Go 'way!"

BUT LATER, as Marberry slept the sleep of exhaustion, Greg called a council of war.

"Ten miles," he said soberly. "If those creatures are only ten miles from here, we can expect an attack almost any day. Or moment. From now on, we must keep a watch at all times. No one must leave the cave alone."

Hannigan said, "You reckon they'll find us, Greg? Titan's a big hunk of dirt."

"They're savages. Savages can follow the faintest trails of wild animals, let alone the spoor of a frightened, sick man. They'll be here."

Hannigan said, "There's one good hunk of news in the whole sorry mess. Marberry said him and his companions sent out radio SOS calls for three solid weeks. Till their radio run dry. Maybe somebody picked up one of them calls. Maybe there's help on the way right now."

"Radio. Speaking of radio, Sparks, how about that crystal receiving set you were working on? Is it finished?"

Sparks smiled sourly.

"Finished your sainted sandals! It's all washed up. Listen to this!"

He stepped to the hodge-podge of wires and coils on which he had been laboring, adjusted it. From its diaphragm came dismal sounds. Squawks, squeals, quavering vibrations.

"Static," said Breadon.

"Double it," gloomed Hannigan, "and add a thousand. The worst kind of static. An electrical disturbance field."

Greg frowned. "But that can't be, Sparks. There's no electricity around here. No generating plants or—"

"It can't be," snorted Sparks, "but it is. I don't know what makes it act that-away. Maybe it's the H-layer of this cockeyed satellite. Sun spots, maybe. Whatever it is, it sure gums up my machine." He stared at the tiny set helplessly.

Greg stirred himself.

"Well, then we'll have to look forward to fighting this battle without hope of assistance. Andrews, I want you and Tommy to inspect the cave-mouth barrier immediately, see that it's in perfect shape and reinforce it. Ralph, you and Sparks drive the livestock into the small cave so they'll be hidden. 'Tina, the fuel reserve?"

"Complete, Greg."

"Good! I'm going out to stand the first watch. If you need me, I'll be—"

At that moment a small figure, bristle-haired with excitement, came scampering into the cave.

"Greg!" cried Tommy O'Doul. "Greg—they're down there! On the plain. I seen them. And I—I think they seen me, too! They're heading up this way!"

A HALF HOUR later, Greg, flanked by a tight-jawed little band of compatriots, crouched in the bottle-mouth of an altered cavern.

The short time that had elapsed since Tommy O'Doul gave the alarm had been minutes of swift preparation. What little of water, food and supplies could be brought into the cave had been hustled in by eager hands. The stock had been herded into the small, adjoining cave, and boulders had been rolled against the cave mouth. The metal grill had been dropped before the mouth of their own cage; it was behind this they now crouched, through this that Greg looked out upon a lead-gray sky and green hills.

"There's one thing," said Greg. "One break in our favor. It's starting to get darker, and it's barely afternoon. We must be dipping into the penumbra of Saturn. In a little while the darkness should come, and the gales and the cold."

Hannigan said, "That ain't no break for us. Marberry said they didn't feel heat and cold."

"I know. But they can't prevent the snow falling. If it comes down like it did during the last dark spell, we will have an eight-foot fall of ice between us and our attackers."

Andrews looked at the sky anxiously.

"But until it snows, Greg?"

"We fight!" said Greg grimly.

Bert Andrews, who had wriggled forward on his belly to the furthest end of the bottle-neck, ducked back hastily, twisted his head over his shoulder.

"Then we fight now!" he rasped. "Here they come!"

It was then that the Earth-exiles saw, for the first time, the dominant race of Saturn's sixth satellite. To see was to marvel that Nature had once again—as on Earth, Mars, Uranus and Io—selected the

bipedal humanoid form in creating a ruling race. Except for the thick, downy pelts that covered these Titanian's bodies, the low, slanting, bestial foreheads, the depth of breast and rapacious mouth slits, these creatures were the counterparts of man.

But there were other unapparent differences, thought Greg. Marberry had reported the Titanians impervious to heat and cold, which argued a difference in normal body temperature and perhaps a difference in basic metabolism. There must be sharp differences between man's mentality and that of these man-like beasts, as well, else they would not come seeking their interplanetary guests as the huntsman seeks his quarry.

A long, queening, silver-pelted line, they climbed the hillside path to the flat clearing before the cave. They paused there, peering about them suspiciously, nostrils wide and eyes searching. Greg realized, suddenly, that these man-things were far down humanity's scale; so much of the animal was in them that they placed more dependence in their olfactory than in their visual sense. They seemed to catch the man scent, the spoor they had been following. Their leader moved forward to the grillwork. Hannigan's shoulder brushed that of Greg as he wriggled forward.

"Now, Greg? Shall we let 'em have it?"

Greg whispered hurriedly, "When I give the word, all fire at once. Remember, we have very little ammunition. We must make every shot count. Ready?"

He glanced at his all-too-tiny fighting crew. Bert Andrews, old J. Foster, Bredon, Sparks, himself. "Tommy," he ordered, "go back into the cave!"

"Aw!" said Tommy—but obeyed. Greg glanced about him once more. Others of the Titanians had slunk to their leader's side now. Their voices, guttural and monosyllabic, carried plainly over the few intervening yards.

"Now!" cried Greg.

FIVE RIFLES spoke as one. Their conjoined thunder beat deafeningly upon the sweating cavern walls, echoed and re-echoed, ripping at Greg's eardrums. But another sound pierced the roar of gunfire. The shrill, pain-laden screams of stricken man-things. The inquisitive leader

fell without ever knowing the cause of his death. A Titanian behind him opened his slit-mouth in a flat, high scream, turned to run, tearing at his gaping chest with claws that crimsoned as he tore. He took three steps, toppled, crashed. Another body was beneath his own; still another fell upon his.

Old J. Foster's lips were white. He turned to Greg, sickened and trembling.

"We can't do this, Greg! It's slaughter!"

A weak voice cackled derision. "Don't feel sorry for 'em. If they get in here, they'll show you what a real slaughter looks like. Malcolm, have you got a gun for me?"

It was the sailor, Marberry. Greg said, "Go back and rest a while longer, Marberry. We have no more guns."

"I'll get Tommy's."

"Rest. This siege may last all day, all night or for a week. You'll get your turn."

Marberry disappeared. Greg said, "Fire! Keep on firing! They're bewildered. Maybe they'll break and run."

Again the salvo of gunfire rocked the corridor, and again foremost figures slumped to the ground, slicing the ranks of the attackers. But now, peering through the grill, Greg saw that he had underestimated the manpower of the attackers. They were not a dozen or two dozen . . . there were a hundred of them milling, now, in the small clearing, and the path was still clogged with the silvery bodies of others lumbering to the attack.

What happened in the next hour was such stuff as nightmares are made of. At first Greg cautioned himself each time he pulled the trigger of his rifle that he must make his shot count; later he fell into a dull, scarce-comprehending state of mon-existence wherein he was conscious only of the nerveless and repeated movements of his hands. Aim . . . load . . . fire! Aim again . . . load . . . fire . . . aim . . .

And at first there was little need for aiming. For the Titanians, savagely prodigal of life, knew only one way of fighting—to press forward in brute force, attempting to crush down the metal grill that stood between them and their vengeance. To fire into that thick press of bodies was sure havoc. The Titanians were weaponless save for the cudgels they whirled about their heads threateningly; nor could they

break down the barrier so long as the succeeding hands of all who gripped it became the limp, impotent hands of the dead.

Then at last even their dim, animal intelligence saw that this was a losing battle. A cry rose and was shuttled from mouth to mouth. The silvery figures, now gray in ever-gathering dusk, wisped away from the cave-mouth.

"Licked 'em!" cried Hannigan. "They're running, by Peter! Golly, Greg! Look at that pile out there!"

There was awe in his voice, distaste in Greg's eyes as he looked on the motionless mound heaped before the cave. But Greg said, "Don't get rash! They may be planning a new attack. Breadon—what's wrong with you, man?"

Ralph Breadon grinned wryly.

"Fortune's favored child, that's me! They didn't have any weapons to shoot me with, so I shot myself. Bounced a bullet off the grill. It came back and pinked my arm."

"Go get it dressed. There it comes!" cried Greg.

"The new attack?" Sparks whirled.

"The darkness. And the snow!"

He was right. The threatened period of darkness had descended at last. Once again Titan was within the shadow of its primary. And once again the vast winds were keening from the hilltops, the great flakes of snow were tumbling from a lifeless sky. Greg's voice was exultant.

"Now we're safe! In an hour or so we'll be behind a fortress of ice. And I don't think they'll lay siege to us in a blizzard for a solid week."

His triumph was short-lived. For even as he anticipated victory, disaster beat on the portals of their refuge. From the depths of the cave came a shrill scream, the shout of Marberry, and Tommy's frantic cry—

"Greg! Come a-running! They've found the back entrance!"

THE back entrance! Greg's heart lurched. He cursed himself, suddenly, for having tried to accomplish too much in making their cavern habitable. For by so doing, he had rendered them vulnerable in a spot where would be no barrier of ice an hour hence.

The back entrance. The archway they

had broken out between their large cave and the smaller one wherein Tommy's livestock was herded. Somehow the Titanians had found the other cave, rolled away the boulders, and were now attempting to get at their quarry from the rear.

Greg shouted, "Andrews, you stand guard here! One man will be enough. The rest of you—come on!"

The first of the Titanians was pushing through the cleft just as he reached the main chamber. There was a look of unholy glee on the manlike creature's thin lips as he attained the cave. But it died there, suddenly, frostily. It was not Greg who dropped him. It was young Tommy, staggering under the recoil of a rifle almost as tall as himself, firing pointblank, bouncing back to reload manfully, bawling with youthful glee, "Got him, Greg!"

THEN there was no time for speech, because the Titanians were pouring through the breach in a howling, flame-eyed mob. For a moment Greg, even as he fought, felt despair touch his heart with leaden fingers. There was no grill here to bar the enemy's passage; the cleft was wide enough to admit three at a time. He and his companions were outnumbered ten, twenty to one.

But he did not, could not, take into consideration two vital facts. The first was the indomitable gallantry of his fellow exiles. He had expected that, in defense of their lives, their possessions, their women, the armed men would fight to the last breath. And they did. Pressing forward on relentless feet. Breadon, Andrews, Bert, Hannigan. But Greg had not realized that the women, too, could fight. As in a smoke-veiled dream he caught glimpses of their activities. Aunt Maud and 'Tina, armed with huge ladles, dipping their weapons into a massive pot of boiling water, flinging the scalding liquid at the cold-impervious but heat-sensitive invaders. Crystal, no longer a serene and radiant beauty, but a flaming Balkyr whose ash-blonde hair tumbled about her, forgotten, gaining a vantage point at the very lip of the opening, slashing ferociously at the attackers with a monstrous cleaver. Enid Andrews racing to the wall, digging in Greg's duffle, pressing something into his hands.

"Your flame-pistol, Gregory!"

Greg grasped it eagerly. "Stand back, Crystal!"

She turned, and saw, and fled. And the ochre flame mushroomed into the heart of the still-charging Titanians. Their charge stilled, faltered, wavered, died. The stench of charred bodies was nauseous. Then there were screams of fear—and the Titanians were in rout!

Into the small cave they pursued them; from it but a handful of the silver-pelted savages escaped. And when the last living invader had disappeared, Greg turned to his exhausted followers with a smile of weary triumph.

"We'll see no more of them," he promised. "Already the snow is a foot deep. By morning both caves will be completely walled in. And I think we've taught them to fear us. What, 'Tina?"

For she was standing before him; her eyes were cool and positive . . . there was decision in her tone.

"I thought it was all over for us a moment ago," she said. "And I knew, then, Greg, that it was a mistake for me to die without having told you. I promised myself that if a miracle occurred . . . and we should live . . . I would tell you."

He said wonderingly, "But what, 'Tina? I don't—"

"I know you don't, Greg. That is why I must say it. I love you. Have loved you since that first day." Her eyes were grave. Greg's were embarrassed.

He said, "But you—you shouldn't say such things, 'Tina. Crystal—"

"She is a brave woman, Greg. But she is not your woman. She is his."

His gaze followed 'Tina's across the room, to where Crystal knelt beside the injured Breadon. She was cleansing his wound, which was as it should be. But there was a softness, a tenderness, to her motions . . . and a look in her eyes. Greg looked away, suddenly aware that even from the beginning he had felt this barrier between them. Perhaps Crystal had loved him, for a while and in a fashion. But she loved him for his strength, his power, his ability to rule. She was a woman of the ruling class; ever her conscious trend would be toward allegiance with those who led. But in the showdown . . . when instinct overcame logic . . .

Hannigan cried across the chamber, "What, Greg?"

"I didn't say anything," said Greg gruffly.

"But you did. I heard you say—*Omi-gawd!*" Sparks made a sudden leap toward the bench on which rested the forgotten crystal set. "It's this! *Listen!*"

STATIC still boiled through the speaker of the tiny set. But now, above the static, riding its vibrations, was superimposed the sound of a human voice. And the voice was calling, over and over again,

"Space Patrol Cruiser Orestes . . . calling survivors of the Carefree. We are looking for you. Where are you . . . where are you? Come in, Carefree survivors. Space Patrol Cruiser Orestes . . . calling survivors . . ."

Greg looked at 'Tina. Then once again at Crystal, whose face, upturned with sudden, speechless joy, was the radiant vision of unattainable perfection. Then at Sparks, whose gaze met his reluctantly. He said, "Sparks—press the plunger."

Hannigan's hand moved slowly toward the control that would set into flame the gigantic brush-signal on the plain below. With strange reluctance, everything considered. For certainly Sparks realized as plainly as he, Greg, that the snow was falling with increasing rapidity, that the cruiser must be almost directly overhead for its signal to penetrate the raucous interference of static, that if this opportunity were lost it might be years and years before . . .

Sparks voice was low in his ears.

"Are you sure, Greg?"

And suddenly there was deathly silence in the cave. Never until that moment had Gregory Malcolm realized how completely was he the ruler of this tiny clan. Here, where all life and the future of life and the future of these men and women were concerned, the last great judgment was relegated to him.

He looked about him uncertainly. And what he read in his comrade's eyes surprised him. For there was reluctance in the eyes of Bert Andrews . . . a vague regret in those of old J. Foster Andrews . . . hope and pleading in those of the girl 'Tina . . . frank disapproval in those of the woman they knew as 'Aunt Maud.'

Only the eyes of Crystal Andrews, who were he to let the cruiser pass might be his wife, was there mirrored fear and apprehension . . .

He shook himself. And with that small gesture he shrugged from his shoulders an ermine that had lain there all too briefly. Quietly he said the words that stripped him of his sceptre, that swept away his empire of the stars.

"Press it, Sparks!" he said.

"A REMARKABLY ingenious device, sir," said Captain Allengrove approvingly. "And you made use of it in the nick of time. We were just about to abandon the search when the snowy waste beneath us blossomed suddenly with that signal. I'm sorry we couldn't get here sooner, sir. But—" And he glanced about the cavern appreciatively. "But you appear to have had matters under control."

J. Foster Andrews said, "Well—er—Captain, as a matter of fact, it wasn't—hrrumph!—altogether my doing. Greg, here—"

Captain Allengrove dismissed Malcolm with a glance.

"Yes, yes, I quite understand. One couldn't expect you to take care of all the minor details. But I must say, Mr. Andrews, you are a fortunate man. Inasmuch as you established residence on Titan, the Federation will be forced to acknowledge your priority claim to the heretofore unknown ore deposit near your cave."

"The—er—ore deposit?" Andrews looked blank.

Sparks hollered, "Oh, my sainted tonsils! The swamp! Of course! Pitchblende! That's why there was so much static interference! Radium!"

The cruiser's commander frowned on him.

"Exactly. Of course, Mr. Andrews, you cannot file a full claim to the property. That requires a full year's residence. And a man as important as yourself—"

Greg Malcolm started. He had said nothing up till now. He had been given an opportunity to say nothing. The captain had addressed himself solely to the one "important" man in their party, the man for whom, primarily, the search had been made, the man to whose "genius"

was attributed the existence of the castaways.

Now he spoke up. He said, "But *I* am establishing residence, Captain Allengrove."

Allengrove permitted himself the luxury of a small smile.

"You, Malcolm? But really, my dear fellow, only a spaceman could undertake such a task. A *secretary*—"

Aunt Maud waddled forward belligerently. She said, "Secretary—pah! Fiddle-faddle, Captain! You don't know what you're talking about! And as for you, Brother Jonathan, I'm ashamed of you! Taking credit for all this—arragh!" She turned to Greg. "Gregory, I'm an old woman, and perhaps I'm an old fool, as well. But I've had more fun and excitement in the past month than I've had in the previous forty years. Be—be *darned* if I'll go back to Earth and piddle away my remaining years at operas and pink teas. I'm staying here with you!"

Enid Andrews, into whose shoulders had so quickly come the grace and ease of authority that was her charm, looked shocked. "Maud!" she exclaimed.

Sparks Hannigan breathed a sigh of relief. "Then that makes three of us," he said. "Any more takers?"

Tommy O'Doul pushed his way to Greg's side. "Can I stay, too, Greg? Can I, huh? Me, too?"

Greg said gratefully, "If you want to, Tommy. But, Bert—*you?*"

FOR Bert Andrews had also aligned himself with his aunt and Sparks. Now he said defiantly, "What Aunt Maud says is good enough for me. I'll stick!"

Tina was already beside Greg; her gaze was fiercely loyal. She did not need to say anything. Captain Allengrove looked stunned. "But really," he said, "but really, this is most unusual! I mean, we were sent to rescue you! I—er—I don't quite see how you expect to survive without leadership—"

Aunt Maud snorted belligerently. "Leadership! You just leave us supplies and

we'll have all the leadership we need! Mar-berry, you're staying, aren't you? Well, that's seven of us. A lucky number! I don't suppose there are any more?"

She glared at Crystal. Greg, too, was watching the girl. Now before the steadfastness of their combined gazes, her eyes dropped. Her cheeks colored faintly. But she did not move from Breadon's side. She said, "I—I'm sorry. I hope you understand, Greg."

Greg said, "I understand."

"Furthermore," declared Aunt Maud staunchly, "I'm warning you, Jonathan! I know you! If you go home bragging about your part in the colonization of Titan, I'll follow you, so help me! And if you fail to keep us equipped with supplies—"

J. Foster said hurriedly, "Now, Maud!"

Captain Allengrove looked at them all uncomprehendingly. It didn't make sense. But he was a Space Officer—it was not his place to engage in family quarrels; his duty was to rescue what few of this astonishing crew wished to be rescued. He coughed nervously. He said, "Well, Mr. Andrews—if you're ready now?"

"Yes," said J. Foster. "We're ready now. Goodbye, Greg," he said. "And—er—thanks, old boy!"

Greg said levelly, "That's all right. Goodbye." He said, less levelly, "Goodbye, Miss Andrews."

But Crystal and Breadon were already turning toward the portal, toward the cruiser that would carry them back to an easier, gentler world. So at the end, there were no last farewells. Just a single word, and silence.

Yet somehow, strangely, Greg Malcolm did not mind too much. For in losing one thing, he had found much more. He was bulwarked with greater, truer friends than most men ever know . . . he stood in a cave that was his home . . . on a new world that was yet his shining, unblemished empire.

And there was the touch of a warm hand on his own,