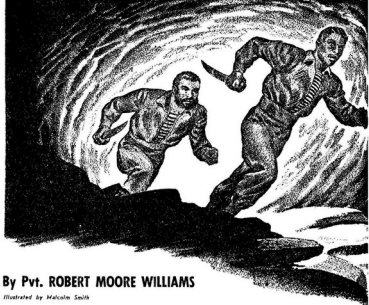


MARTIAN



By Pvt. ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

Illustrated by Malcolm Smith

**Born into a land of forgotten men,
Harden lived only to escape. Then, with
that accomplished, he fought to go back again**

"CRIPES, it's Harden!" Keogh gasped.

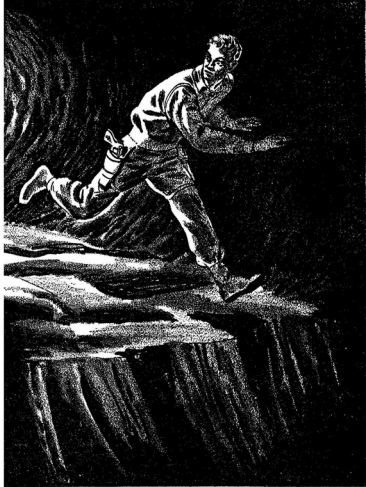
"Yeah," Harden said. "But take it easy. I didn't know you were boss of this outfit, and besides I'm here on business—"

He got no farther. Keogh, in a manner surprising for his bulk, lifted himself from behind the desk and darted

through the door at the back. As he moved, the Martian glow lamps, reacting to his mental command, flickered and went out. The room was plunged into darkness.

As Harden turned, he was reaching inside his coat for the gun nestled in its holster there. The gun slid smoothly into his hand, a flat, compact little

ADVENTURE



Panic-stricken, he plunged along the tunnel, heedless of what lay in his path

weapon that fired a tiny sliver of steel much like a phonograph needle of the old days. The gun was actuated by a powerful spring and was almost silent in operation, a tiny *ping* being the only noise when it was fired. As to what happened when one of the needles hit you, that depended on the charge the needle carried. It might be anything from sudden death to unconsciousness within ten seconds. The needles in the magazine of the gun that Harden carried were loaded with thirty minutes of blissful sleep.

"Open!" he said.

The door did not budge. When he had entered, it had opened to his command. Or that was what he thought when he entered. He realized now that Keogh, hearing his voice, had ordered the door to open. The sensitive operating mechanism was tuned to Keogh's mental commands.

"Damn!"

He dropped into a crouch, intending to drive his shoulder at the door. The knife whistled as it passed over his head, hit the door with a metallic clang. If he had been standing erect, it would have hit him between the shoulder blades.

Harden fired without moving, aiming at the back door through which Keogh had made his hasty exit. One thing was certain: Keogh had not thrown that knife. A Martian had done that. The Martians were experts with knives, preferring them to any other weapon. Too often Harden had seen them bring down small game with a thrown knife for him to doubt their expertness with a stiletto. He held his breath and waited.

There was a sigh and a soft thump. "Sleep tight!" Harden thought grimly. He turned again to the door. Something that flew through the air like a great bird hit him in the middle of the

back, sent him sprawling blindly, almost knocking the breath out of him.

As skinny, leathery arms went around his neck and a six-fingered hand began to search hurriedly for his throat, he knew what had happened. There had been two Martians. The needle from his gun had got one of them. The other had calmly waited, then had launched himself at Harden in the darkness.

Harden had been trained in a hard school. There had been more rough and tumble fighting in his life than books, more death and danger than afternoon teas. He could not remember a time when anything except the keenness of his wits and the quickness of his hand and eye stood between him and death. The Martian was on his back, feeling for his throat. He lifted himself to his feet, fell backward heavily. The Martian clawed like a cat, trying to get out from under. He didn't quite make it. With satisfaction Harden heard the Martian grunt heavily. With more satisfaction he felt the fingers relax around his throat. A second later the Martian was discovering how it felt to be strangled.

WHEN the Martian was quiet, Harden felt for his gun, dropped in the struggle. The feel of the cool little weapon was reassuring. He sat on the floor, the gun trained on the back door and waited. The Martian that he had throttled breathed heavily, grunted as air and consequent consciousness began to return. Harden took careful aim at the sound. The little weapon *pinged*. The Martian grunted again, then sighed. He would be all right in half an hour. In the meantime sleep was the thing for him.

Harden listened. Oddly, the rat warren of a house was quiet. The normal noises of the streets, the cries of

the sandnut venders, the shrill yells of the perfume hawkers—Martians loved perfume—did not penetrate here. Harden did not like this quietness. It was likely to break with explosive violence at any second.

The silence broke. But not with violence. The front door squeaked gently and swung open. The glow lamps in the hall were burning. Light from them streamed into the room.

A girl stood there in the door. And what a girl! She had red hair and green eyes. A white fur was around her throat. She was clutching a large white purse in two firm little hands.

She peered into the darkened room.

"Keogh?" she said.

"He went fishing," Harden said.

"Fishing? On Mars?" She could not see who had spoken.

"Yes," Harden said. "And if you will take my advice, you will go fishing, too, pronto!"

"Who—"

"Please stand to one side," Harden said. "The rush around here is likely to be terrific at any moment."

He stepped forward, intending to pass her and get to hell out of this place. For the first time she saw the Martian on the floor. Apparently she thought the Willie was dead. She uttered a frightened little squeak and her hand dived into her purse.

Gently but firmly Harden took the spring gun out of her hands. "Tut, tut," he said. "This is Mars. Mustn't shoot people here or the Willies will kick you—kerplunk—into what they call the land of serenity."

"But—"

"Nice day," Harden said. "Glad to have met you and all that. But really I must be on my way. If you care to stick around, I'm sure Keogh will show eventually, but I can't guarantee what kind of a humor he will be in. He was

pretty jumpy, the last I saw of him."

She did not attempt to keep him from passing through the door. He stepped into the short hall. It was jammed almost full of packing cases. To the left, it took a tortuous turn and dived out of sight. If you went that way you would eventually reach the street, after you had passed through several rooms. Harden turned to the left.

The lights went out.

"Uh huh," he said. "I was afraid of that."

THE place was as black as a tunnel in a coal mine. Mentally he cursed all Martians forever for building their houses without windows or skylights. He knew the cold and the dust accounted for this method of construction and he recognized the necessity for it, but it was damned inconvenient for a human who was trying to get out of one of the places, especially when the darned lighting system was responsive to a wish—somebody else's wish, in this case. He was aware that the girl was clutching his arm.

"Sister," he said, "I don't know who you are or what you're doing here, but I know you're in damned bad company."

"I came here to talk to Keogh," she snapped. "Is there anything wrong with that?"

"The company I am referring to is myself," Harden said. "If Keogh finds you with me, he is not likely to ask questions."

"Oh! Are you and Keogh enemies?"

"Well, we're not exactly friends."

"Then how did you happen to be here?"

"I didn't know the man I was coming to see was Keogh," Harden explained. "He didn't seem to know that the man who was coming to see him was me, either, but he recognized me

fast enough. After that, things sort of started to happen. But enough of this. If it can be conveniently arranged, I would like to get out of here alive."

Her grip tightened on his arm.

"Is it as bad as that?" she questioned. "I mean, will you be killed if you're caught?"

"I'm not planning to be caught."

"I mean— Listen, there is no reason why Keogh won't let me out. He doesn't know me. All I have to do is go to the front and yell who I am. I'm sure I won't be bothered. Then, when I get outside I can call the police to rescue you."

It was a good plan, presuming she was telling the truth and presuming Keogh would actually let her out. There was only one thing wrong with the plan.

"It's nice of you to offer to help, but I'm afraid I am not very anxious to be rescued, by the police."

"Why not?"

"There are several reasons," Harden said. "One reason is that the police would take my fingerprints."

"Oh, I see. It's like that, is it?"

"Sort of like that," Harden admitted.

"Are you a criminal?"

"The police think I am. But, as I said before, enough of this. I'm going to try to get out of this joint. You can come with me or you can stay here and finish your business with Keogh, when he returns; whatever," he delicately hinted, "your business was."

He could not see her but he could hear her breathing in the darkness. He felt her take her hand from his arm. She had made her decision then. She was going to remain here. Well, that was good sound sense. If she went with him, she was taking a chance of getting killed, but if she remained here Keogh would probably not harm her. Harden was a little sorry she was not

going with him. There was something about this girl that he liked. He moved silently toward the rear.

"Wait a minute," she whispered.

"Why?" he questioned.

"I'm going with you!"

"Good girl," Harden said. "Here's your gun." He pressed the little weapon into her hand. "You'll probably need it."

LIKE two mice in a house full of hungry cats, they slipped silently to the rear. Here Harden had noticed a stairway leading to the second floor. Somewhere up on that second floor there ought to be a ladder leading to a trapdoor through the roof. The Martians always built their houses this way. Harden was hoping to reach the roof, then either drop to the ground or jump across to the roof of the neighboring structure. He got one foot on the first step when it happened.

Willies seemed to boil out of everywhere. All along Harden had known that the dark was no protection for the reason that the Martians could sense the presence of a human being near them. The knife whistled as it went past his ear, thudded home in the wall. He jerked the girl down, fired blindly into the darkness. He heard her gun pinging away beside him. They were shooting at every sound they heard. They didn't hear the three Martians come down the stairs, because the Willies, sensing the presence of the two humans on the steps, jumped down feet first. The girl squealed.

Simultaneously other Martians came charging from the darkness. Keogh was apparently not risking his valuable skin, at least while he had Willies to do the dirty work.

Harden struck out with his fists. In the darkness a Martian grunted as the bare knuckles somehow went home. He

tripped over Harden, fell headfirst into the group at the foot of the steps. They gave him a royal welcome.

"Are you all right?" Harden hissed.

"Y-yes," the girl answered doubtfully.

"Then upstairs, quick, before Keogh thinks to turn on the lights."

There were still two Willies on the stairs but they did not know exactly what was going on. They could sense the presence of the humans but they could not tell exactly where the man and the woman were. They hesitated. Harden grabbed one of them by the legs, swung him in a somersault over his head. He hit with a thud in the middle of the conflict raging below. The girl's gun pinged sharply. Harden caught the third Willie as he fell. One of the needles from the girl's gun had got to him and he was already starting his siesta. He added fresh confusion down below.

The two groups of Willies, those coming down the steps and those charging from the first floor, had not recognized each other quick enough. It was a mistake they would not long continue to make, but by the time they had discovered their error, Harden and the girl were up the stairs.

A dim light was burning on the second floor. They dived through the first door they saw, the hidden control mechanism of the door reacting to Harden's mental command to open.

Two minutes later they were on the roof. The white stars of Mars were above them. The cool wind drifting in from the deserts blew past them.

"Are you all right?" Harden questioned.

"Well, I wouldn't say I'm all right," the girl answered. "But I'll do." She was blushing and he saw the reason why. Her skirt had been torn straight down the middle.

"Think nothing of it, lady, think nothing of it."

Half an hour later, in a little cafe ran by a wanderer from earth, with two glasses of the sparkling wine of the Red Planet before them, Harden said:

"And now, lady, if you don't mind my asking, why in the devil did you ever go to see Ben Keogh?"

CHAPTER II

The Girl from Earth

SHE looked him in the eyes, mentally estimating him, weighing him, judging him. She saw a face browned and burned by the hot sun of space, gray eyes that could laugh with you or look through you, as the owner chose. The eyes were laughing now. There was a scar along the left cheek, an old scar.

"Who are you?" she said.

He laughed. "Ladies first. Who are *you*?"

"Marion Gray," she answered promptly, so promptly that he knew she was not telling the truth.

"And what are you doing on Mars?"

"I landed on the last liner from earth."

"Ah. Purpose?"

"I'm a sociologist working on my Ph.D from Chicago University. I'm doing a thesis on Martian customs and I came here to get material. Is that sufficient?"

Harden laughed. He was enjoying this girl. She had an answer for every question. The trouble was, she had the answer right on the tip of her tongue.

"Don't you believe me?" she demanded.

"Sure," he answered. "Joe! Bring the telephone."

THE Martian radiotelephone, a complicated little gadget, was brought

to their table. He consulted the directory, punched the proper buttons. A voice speaking with the nasal twang of Mars answered. Harden answered in the same language, waited while the clerk on the other end of the connection hunted for the information he wanted. Eventually he got a reply. Punching the shut-off button, he sat silently regarding the instrument.

"Well, are you satisfied?" the girl demanded.

"That was the space port," Harden said. "They keep careful records of such things. They said that the last ship from earth brought a Marion Gray, who was here to do research on Martian customs." He grinned at her. "What," he asked, "is a Ph.D.?"

"You mean you've never heard of a Ph.D.?"

"Nope."

"Where did you go to school?"

"The mining camps of Ganymede," Harden answered. "The stink holes of Venus."

"But—" she said doubtfully, "do they have schools in those places?"

"That's the catch," Harden said. "They don't."

She did not seem to be satisfied with his answer. "But, when you were a boy on Earth, didn't you go to school?"

"I've never been on Earth."

"You've never been on Earth! You're kidding me now."

"Am I?" Harden answered.

"Who are you?"

He hesitated. There was such a thing as talking too much, especially to a woman. But, he liked this girl. He wondered if she had ever heard his name before. "Bruce Harden," he said.

He watched her closely. Her face showed nothing. If she recognized his name, she was a clever actress and could keep herself under complete control.

"You still haven't told me," he said, "why a person looking for material for a Ph.D. would be going to see Ben Keogh. He's not a Martian, you know."

WHY had she gone to see Keogh?

That was the important question. Keogh was not openly a crook but that was because he managed to keep his activities secret. He was one of the vast numbers of adventurers from earth who operated on the shady side of the law, who, when space travel had been invented, had invaded the worlds of space, seeking loot from conquered peoples. To their annoyance they found that Mars had not been conquered, that earthmen were tolerated there, and nothing more. Mars was run by the Martians, very much so. The Red Planet was ruled by Martian law, and while earthmen were welcome whether they came to trade, to visit, or just to look at the strange wonders of the world in the sky, the horde of get-rich-quick artists who had descended here had not found the Martians easy pickings. If any looting was to be done, the Martians felt perfectly competent to do it themselves. Keogh and his kind had found the competition tough.

"I'll tell you why I went to see him if you will tell me what the fight was about," Marion Gray said.

"Touché!" Harden wryly answered.

"Well, what were you fighting about?" she demanded, when he showed no signs of answering.

"I told you—because Keogh recognized me."

"Um. That doesn't say anything."

"I didn't intend for it to. The truth is, I knew Keogh on Ganymede three years ago. We had a difference of opinion about certain matters. After he left Ganymede, I forgot all about him. I didn't know he was on Mars and I

certainly didn't know he was the man I was supposed to see about—ah—"

"About what?"

"You are a very curious person," Harden observed.

"My feminine instincts account for it. Why were you fighting?"

"I don't know why Keogh was trying to do me in. Personally, I was only trying to save my own neck."

"But it doesn't seem reasonable that he would try to kill you like that. Murder is a serious offense. Keogh must have had some reason for his actions."

"How right you are!" Harden said. Ever since the fight had started he had been wondering why Keogh had tried to kill him. Their previous relations had not been pleasant but there had been nothing between them to justify murder. Meeting, they might pass each other like stiff-legged dogs growling at each other, but that ought to have been all. "Personally, I think Keogh is working some kind of a lucrative racket. When he saw me, he thought I was trying to horn in. Therefore—"

"Are you the kind of person who would declare yourself in on a racket?"

"Keogh would think so because that is what *he* would try to do if he was in my place."

"Oh. But you still haven't told me why you went to see him."

"Nor do I intend to tell you," Harden answered. This was his secret. It had brought him back to Mars from Venus, across the wide stretches of space. It had brought him to a planet where he was in mortal danger. For years he had dreamed of the time when he might come back here and do what he was resolved to do. "Secrets are only secret when no one else knows them," he said lightly.

"Then if you won't tell me what you

were doing there, I won't tell you." Her chin set at a stubborn angle.

"So you have secrets too?" he queried.

"Well, you are wise to keep them tucked away in your pretty little head. But I am curious about you. If you came here to see Keogh, why this elaborate disguise of a student seeking material for a thesis?"

SHE smiled at him but beneath her smile she sensed the glitter of a steel will. Somewhere, somehow, this girl had learned to keep her mouth shut.

"May I escort you to your hotel?" he asked.

"Certainly."

They chose to walk rather than to trust the skittish Martian taxicabs. Overhead the nearer moon was hurtling through the sky and the black vault of the heavens was bright with the light of a million glittering stars. The eternal night wind, blowing off the desert, souged through the streets of the silent city. Harden pointed to the brightest star in the sky.

"What's it like, there?" he asked.

The star to which he was pointing was Earth. She was willing to talk about that—a green planet beyond the frozen miles of spaces, a world of green forests, of blue seas, of snow-capped mountain ranges, of great cities pointing glittering spires at the sky. Listening, Harden was aware of an intense desire to visit Earth. His grandparents had come from there. It was home, his home, the home of the human race, and, like the folk memory of a golden age, to him it was somehow a dream of heaven.

"When you talk about it, it sounds very beautiful," he said.

"Why don't you go see for yourself?" she asked.

"No. Not yet."

"Why?"

"I'm going to, some day, but first I have a job to do here on Mars."

"Oh."

As they walked along, he was aware that she was almost flirting with him. At least, she was being very nice. Since the world began women have had ways to show men that they like them. Harden knew that this girl liked him. And he liked her. But—

"Good night," he said, at the door of her hotel.

Smiling, she thanked him for escorting her. He watched her as she went out of sight into the building, then turned away. There was a job waiting to be done here, a most difficult job. It involved rescuing the girl he had loved for years from what the Martians called the land of serenity.

Earthmen who had been long enough on Mars to know anything about the real conditions there had many names for what the Willies called the land of serenity. There was no touch of serenity about any of the names. Earthmen who knew called the land of serenity, the *world of lost hopes, never-never land*, or, more simply, *kell*.

The land of serenity was a vast walled-off area, shut off from the rest of the planet by a most cunningly contrived barrier. There was no capital punishment on Mars. There were no prisons on the planet. Murderers, thieves, robbers, those convicted of breaking any of the more serious Martian laws, were sentenced to the land of serenity. Kicked through the barrier, dumped beyond the walls, those sentenced to this place were permitted to live out their lives in any way they saw fit. In the land of serenity the murderer could kill, the robber rob, the arsonist burn, to his heart's content. It was a place where the only law was the strength of the strong.

Harden knew all about the land of serenity.

He had escaped from it.

Now he had returned to Mars to rescue the girl he loved from it.

HARDEN had not been sentenced to the land of serenity because of any crime he had committed. He had been born in the place. His parents had also been born there. His grandparents had made the mistake that sentenced them and their descendants forever—in accordance with strict Martian law—to the world of forgotten men. His grandparents—his grandfather as an atomic engineer and his grandmother as a dietician—had been members of the crew of the first space ship from Earth to Mars. Their mistake had been two-fold. One, in coming down they had made the error of damaging the ship beyond repair. Their second error had been in landing in the land of serenity.

Because they had landed there, they had had to stay. Their ship had been damaged beyond repair so they couldn't fly away. The fact that they were the first visitors from another planet did not matter a damn to the Martians. Immemorial custom dictated that no one should be permitted to leave the land of serenity. Once there, you stayed there, or else. Later arrivals from Earth had made strong protests to the Martian government, with no results. Earthmen might have discovered space travel but the Red Planet was ruled by the Martians; the strict laws of Mars did not permit anyone to leave the land of serenity. If the prisoner had gotten there by accident, that was his tough luck. He had to stay there. Eventually the unhappy explorers had been forgotten. Finding escape almost impossible, they had made the best of the situation.

Harden had grown up in the land of serenity. With him always, his faithful shadow and constant companion, had been a yellow-headed, freckle-faced girl—Marcia Groner. At the age of seventeen Harden had been lucky enough to escape and because he did not want the Martians to have any clue to his identity, he had assumed the name of Harden. He had fled Mars, stowing away on the first outbound spaceship. He had been discovered and kicked off at the first port of call—Venus. He was safe there but always there had remained with him the memory of Marcia Groner, still living in the Martian equivalent of hell.

To rescue her, he had returned to Mars. He had gone to Keogh because underworld rumor had advised him that Keogh had discovered a way to escape from the land beyond the barrier, and, for a price, was aiding Martian criminals to escape. Keogh had been his big hope of rescuing Marcia. He had not known this was the same Keogh he had known on Ganymede.

"Damn Keogh!" he thought. "I'll rescue Marcia in spite of him."

In his heart he knew he had set himself an almost impossible task.

His task speedily became more nearly impossible. He did not hear the ping of the needle gun in the dark alley but he felt the sting of the needle in his arm. He knew instantly what had happened. His hand dived for his own gun.

When one of those needles struck you, it was ten seconds to oblivion. Harden drew his own gun, fired blindly up the alley. He tried to run. Waves of blackness swept over him. He staggered, fell, got up, fell again. This time he did not get up. Vaguely he saw the dark figures swarm out of the alley but he was completely unconscious before they dragged him off the street and

back into the alley from which they had come.

CHAPTER III

The Land of Serenity

HARDEN'S first dazed impression was that of extreme cold. He was freezing to death. An icy wind was blowing over him, chilling him to the bone. He thought he was in bed and the covers had slipped off. He reached for them, intending to pull them up. The covers evaded his grasp. He reached for them again. No blankets, no wooly fur quilts, no nothing. He got a handful of sand for his pains. Not until then did he remember the dart from the needle gun that had struck him. He sat up.

Dawn, cold, windy, and bitter, was breaking on Mars. The sun was just peeping over the edge of the horizon, but its rays, shining across the sand, had no warmth in them.

"Where the hell am I?" Harden thought.

Then he saw the wall. It told him where he was. There was only one wall like this on the Red Planet. Something like the wall of ancient China, it stretched away and away into the distance, a wall of solid stone fifty feet high, its top broken at regular intervals by guard houses.

"Where the hell am I?" Harden thought. "Where else but in hell?"

He was in the land of serenity, the Devil's Island of Mars. He had spent too many years gazing at that wall, wondering what was on the other side of it, not to recognize it. It was the wall that circled the horrible forbidden world.

He had come to Mars to rescue a girl from this world. Instead he had been hurled back into it himself.

"Why didn't they kill me?"

He did not doubt that Keogh was responsible for this. The reason why Keogh had not killed him was obvious: murder on Mars was punished by imprisonment here. But there was no penalty for capturing a man and dropping him over the wall. Martian custom held that every man should look out for his own neck. If he was so careless as to let an enemy capture him and drop him over the wall, that was his tough luck. Martian authorities, operating on the theory that it was better to punish ten innocent men than to let one guilty man escape, would do nothing about it.

Harden heard the footsteps of the guard on the wall making his regular morning rounds.

"Hey," he yelled. "Hey! A mistake has been made. I'm not supposed to be here."

The guard looked down. He was a Martian, with a stupid, sadistic face. "That's too bad," he said with mock sympathy in his voice. "But since you're there, I guess you'll just have to stay, unless you can sprout wings and fly over the wall."

"But listen," Harden protested. "I tell you there's been a mistake—"

"Sure. And you made it."

Laughing he continued his march along the wall. Harden sank down on the sand. He was still weak from the effects of the drug the needle had released into his bloodstream. Worse than anything else was the knowledge that he was again a prisoner behind the barrier. He had tasted freedom. Now that freedom was gone forever.

This was the lowest moment of his life. Nothing mattered now. Nothing.

HE WAS aroused by the sound of footsteps approaching across the sand. Three Willies were coming from

a low collection of buildings about a quarter of a mile away. The shout of the guard on the wall had attracted their attention. Seeing them coming, Harden got grimly to his feet. He knew what was going to happen next. The guards on the wall had drawn together to witness it.

Harden felt in his pockets. The needle gun was gone. He had no weapon of any kind. The Martians broke into a run. Harden kept his hand in his pocket.

"Well!" he said.

The three Willies stopped. They eyed him thoughtfully. The hand in the pocket worried them. Clad in odds and ends of clothing, they looked like three grim scarecrows. Each one had a knife ready drawn in his hand.

"If you come a step closer, there will be three dead Willies," Harden observed. The hand in the pocket was bluffing them.

The Martians looked hungrily at him, undecided about what to do. Harden knew what they wanted. He had spent too many years in this land to be uncertain about that. They weren't going to get what they wanted, if he could help it.

"We saw you and came to see if we could help you," one of them said.

"I don't need any help."

"We mean no harm."

"No. We are quite friendly. We really came to welcome you." They spoke in the Martian language, all nasals and harsh sibilant sounds. Each one added his bit and each one smiled to show his good intentions. The smiles did not extend to their eyes, which remained cold and calculating.

"Beat it!" Harden said. "Before I start shooting." He made an aggressive motion with the hand he was holding in his pocket.

The Willies drew back. They did not

understand this man. What they saw of him, they did not like. Usually persons inside the wall were easy prey. Newcomers here did not know the customs of the land and by the time they learned the customs, it was usually too late. The Martians fidgeted. On the wall the guards showed signs of disappointment.

"I'm going to count three," Harden said. "After that, I'm going to start shooting."

"One."

"Two."

He needed to go no farther. The Martians backed hastily away.

Harden sighed with relief. He had bluffed them. He had won this fight without having to fight.

"Keep moving," he said.

"Hey!" a guard on the wall yelled.

Harden and the three Martians looked up.

"He's bluffing you," the guard shouted to the three Martians. "He hasn't got a gun."

Harden swore silently. Damn that guard! Damn him anyhow!

"Are you sure?" one of the Willies called.

"Of course!" the guard said emphatically. "No one would be fool enough to leave a gun in the possession of a man he was going to drop over the wall, would he? He's bluffing you. Go get him."

Harden knew what would happen now and he knew what he had to do—fast. The only law in this place was the law of the strong and the knives of the Martians made them stronger than he was. Like lightning, he stripped off his jacket, his trousers, shoes and socks, shirt, everything he was wearing, down to his shorts. That was what the Willies wanted—his clothes. They would take anything of value he possessed but they really wanted his clothes.

"Here," he said, flinging the garments at them. "You want them so badly. Take them."

Clad only in his shorts, he turned and walked away. Would they follow him? He thought not. He had nothing of value left, except his skin, and even a Martian could not use that.

THEY didn't follow him. Dividing his clothes between them, they went back to the cluster of low buildings from which they emerged. Harden followed them. He had no other place to go. In the land of serenity, it did not matter where you went. One place was as bad as any other place.

The buildings formed a rude village. Here, if anywhere, Harden had to find food, clothing, shelter—and a weapon. Whatever happened from now on was strictly up to him. Whether he lived or died would depend on his wits—and his strength.

Most of the houses in the village were falling to pieces. Little attempt was ever made at repairs here. What was the point in repairing a house? Somebody would only take it away from you if it looked too good. Only one structure seemed neat and orderly. Harden went here first.

A giant of a man was lounging in the doorway. He had a great bushy beard and a heavy head of red hair that was shot through with streaks of gray. A broad belt circled his waist. Hanging from the belt on his right was a needle gun and on his left was a long knife. He looked competent, but most of all, he was human. He watched Harden approach.

"By gad! You're human!" were his words of greeting. "I saw the Willies take your clothes but I thought you were a Martian." He paused, looked Harden over closely. What he saw must have satisfied him. He opened

the door and stood to one side.

"Come in," he said.

"Thank you," Harden answered.

"My name is Ambrose," the giant said. "Known hereabouts as Red Ambrose."

"My name is Harden."

"Sit down, Harden."

No questions were asked, no information was volunteered. Ambrose set food upon the table. Harden knew that this courtesy was strictly because he was a human and men from earth had a habit of sticking together. Because he was starving and cold, Ambrose would feed him. That much the red giant would do for any men. He would do nothing more. Everything else was up to Harden.

Harden ate slowly and carefully. Strength flowed back into his body. The food warmed him, took the chill out of his bones. He reached for a cigarette, realized then that he had no cigarettes. Red Ambrose saw the gesture, silently offered a smoke. The cigarette was made of Martian tobacco, strong and dry, but it was soothing to the nerves. They smoked in silence. When the cigarette was finished, Harden carefully snubbed it in the tray.

"Will you lend me a knife?" he said.

Red Ambrose looked him over then, carefully weighing and measuring him. In silence he rose, walked to a wall cabinet, unlocked it.

"Take your pick," he said.

THE cabinet was full of knives.

Harden selected one, tested the edge on his thumb, felt the heft and the balance of it. It was a good knife, it balanced well, it felt right in the hand.

"Thank you," Harden said.

"Want a scabbard?"

"No, thanks. I won't need it."

"Okay. It's as you say."

Harden walked to the front door, opened

it, and went out. Red Ambrose gathered up the dishes, took them to the kitchen, began to wash them. He hummed softly as he worked. Carefully drying each plate, each cup and saucer, he put them in their places. Then he returned to the living room, lit a cigarette, and sat down. There was a thoughtful look on his face and he seemed to be listening for some sound that was slow in coming. He finished one cigarette, lit another one.

There was a knock on the door.

Ambrose went to open it.

Harden stood there. He was fully clothed now. He was holding a knife, hilt foremost, toward Red Ambrose.

"I'm returning your knife," he said. "Thank you for lending it to me."

The blade of the knife was bright and clean but there was a stain on the hilt. Ambrose looked at it, looked at Harden. In the coat Harden was wearing there was a slit. It was just over the heart. There was a stain around it. Ambrose's eyes fixed on the slit.

"One of the Willies was wearing the coat," Harden explained.

"Ah—."

Red Ambrose began to grin. The grin spread all over his face.

"Come in, Harden," he said. "Come in and tell me about yourself."

There was respect and warm regard in his voice. Harden entered. He had won the first round in the battle for his life in the land of serenity. He had won his clothes back, and he had a weapon. He had three weapons in fact, the knives he had taken from the three Martians who had robbed him of his clothes. But more than anything else—because in this place it was priceless—he had won a friend.

"Sit down. Have a cigarette. And tell me about yourself," Red Ambrose said. "Maybe we can work together in this hell hole."

"Thank you," Harden said. "As for working with you, nothing would suit me better. About myself—"

He told the story of his life, how he had been born in this place, how he had escaped, why he had returned, and what had happened to him. Red Ambrose listened in silence.

"Keogh, eh?" he said at last. "I happen to know the man myself." A grim note crept into his voice. "In fact, he is responsible for my being here."

"You too!"

"Yeah," Red Ambrose drawled. "And if you would like some help in cutting his throat, you've come to the right place."

"I would like nothing better," Harden said. "But," he wryly added, "cutting Keogh's throat will be difficult. He is out and we are in."

"Maybe not so difficult," Ambrose stated.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this. Not two weeks ago I saw Keogh. A lot of Willies were with him. He was right here, in the land of serenity, right here in this same hell-hole we're in."

"What?" Harden had risen to his feet. "Then that means—"

"It means Keogh has a way of getting in and out of this place. It means if we can find how he does it, maybe we can get out too."

"Lord!" Harden said. The word was a prayer. "If we could! If! But first—first I must find a girl."

"Naturally," Red Ambrose said. "While you are looking for her, I will be looking for the way Keogh gets in and out of the land of serenity."

CHAPTER IV

The Ship

"IT IS agreed," Red Ambrose said. "You will spend a week looking for

the girl. I will spend the same time seeing what I can discover about Keogh. In one week, we will meet here again."

"Right," Harden said. He walked out of the little village. The residents watched him go. They might have envied him the gun he carried at his hip—Ambrose had provided that—or the clothes he wore, but they kept discreetly out of his way and made no effort to molest him. They remembered what had happened to the three Martians who had taken this man's clothes.

"A good man to leave alone," the inhabitants had agreed among themselves. In the future Harden's possessions and Harden himself would be safe among them. There were other villages where he was not known, and there he would have to prove himself, but the gun and the knife swinging at his hips would go a long way toward providing him with a passport—in fact, they were the only acceptable passports in this vast forbidden world.

He had spent two days with Red Ambrose, resting, talking, planning. Red Ambrose had been an engineer on a space ship. Keogh had come to him, tried to bribe him to smuggle derjin* to earth. Ambrose had refused. He had been walking near the space port when—ping—a needle gun had got him. He had awakened in the land of serenity. "Because I knew too much," he had explained, "Keogh was afraid I might tell the authorities what I knew."

Ambrose had not been able to help him in finding Marcia Groner. He had been here only two years and had never heard of the girl. The land of serenity was a big place. Harden would have to find her. He had come here to rescue her, and if there was a chance of escaping, he wanted to take her with

* Derjin.—A drug of Mars. Importation to earth was forbidden.—Ed.

him. His plan was to visit the place where he had been born, the wreck of the old space ship, converted by its crew into living quarters and fortress. Marcia would be there. He wondered if she would remember him. What would she say when she saw him? What would he say when she saw her? He was thinking about Marcia but the face that kept coming into his mind was the face of Marion Gray.

He shrugged. Miss Gray was a very beautiful girl but Marcia had been loyal. In Bruce Harden's world, loyalty came first. In the harsh worlds of space, it was the loyalty of your comrade that counted most. It was just as simple as that.

On the evening of the second day, he reached the wrecked ship. It lay in a little valley near an oasis and he sighted it from the top of a nearby hill. His heart leaped at the sight. This was home, home! This was the world he had known as a kid, as a youngster just reaching manhood. Marcia would be here, and the kids he had known. There hadn't been but three children and only eight grown-ups — pitiful relic of the proud crew that once had landed here — but he would get to see them again. His own father and mother had died in an attack of criminals trying to raid the ship.

His heart leaped, then the exultation died. He looked at the ship and looked again. He went running down to the wrecked vessel, hoping that what he thought was true was not.

A hundred yards away he knew the truth. The ship was a wreck in reality. The carefully tended gardens in the oasis were overgrown with weeds and sand from the desert was drifting across them. The doors of the ship hung crazily open, the ports were broken, and the hull was smudged. Fire had raced through the hull.

THE ship was deserted. Harden went through it to make sure. It had been looted and burned, probably in another attack of the criminals of this vicious land. The humans who once had found refuge here were—gone. In the sand outside the entrance there was a skeleton.

Harden turned away. The ship had been deserted for years. As he walked away, he did not look back.

As he approached the hills, a figure darted out of a cave and lunged toward him. It looked like a walking skeleton. He drew his gun, then made no attempt to use it.

It was a man who had come out of the cave. He saw the gun, drew back.

"Don't shoot," he whimpered. "Don't shoot—"

Harden stared at this wreck of a human being. "By gad! It's Mr. Dorsey."

Dorsey was the son of the pilot of the first expedition. Harden remembered him perfectly. Dorsey had been an old man when Harden had left.

"You know me?" Dorsey whispered. "Do you know me?"

"Sure, I know you. Don't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt you."

Dorsey approached hesitantly, stared at Harden from rheumy, lack-luster eyes.

"Are—are you Jimmy Turner?" he whispered. "Jimmy Turner, who went away so long ago?"

"I'm Jimmy Turner," Harden answered.

"You—you've come back?" Dorsey faltered. "Why—why would anyone return to this place?" His voice was cracked and broken. Each word was a wheeze.

Harden did not attempt to explain. "I'm looking for Marcia Groner," he said. "Where—where is she? What—what happened to her? What hap-

pened back there?" He pointed toward the wrecked ship.

"The ship? Oh, yes, the ship. Something happened to it. Let me see. Now what was it that did happen? I know. I'm certain I know. If I can only *think* what it was. . . ."

HIS eyes wandered from the ship to Harden, then he looked at the hills. "I can't remember," he sighed. "Some Willies came. There were a lot of them. But what happened after that—I don't know—"

"Was—was Marcia killed?" Harden whispered the words.

"Marcia? Marcia? Who is she?"

"Marcia Groner. You remember Marcia. She had yellow hair and freckles."

"Oh. Yes! Yes, I remember her. She—" For a moment elation showed on the lined face. Dorsey had remembered something. How that pleased him! Then the elation was gone as fast as it had come. The face was blank and vaguely worried. "No, I don't remember. For a second, I had it, but it got away before I could say it. What was her name again?"

"Marcia Groner," Harden patiently repeated. "The girl with the yellow hair."

"Marcia—Marcia—" Like pebbles thrown into a bottomless pit, the words fell down the well of the old man's memory. But the pit was bottomless and no answering splash came back. "Did something happen to her?" Dorsey queried.

"That's what I'm asking you," Harden said. "Where is Marcia? Try to remember."

Dorsey tried. He was anxious to please. This young man had brought back vague echoes of happier days and he would like to help if he could. The trouble was, he couldn't.

"Maybe she is dead," he suggested blankly. "So many are."

The idea seemed to please him. "Yes. That's it. I remember a girl. And she's dead. Is that what you wanted to know?"

"No," Harden said. "No. That wasn't what I wanted to know."

The grimness on his face frightened Dorsey. "Don't hit me!" the old man was suddenly begging. "Don't hit me. I didn't do anything." He cringed.

Harden forced himself to smile. "I'm not going to hit you," he said.

"You look like you would," Dorsey accused. "I'm scared of you. I'm scared—" He was backing away. When he had reached a safe distance, he turned and scooted off like a frightened rabbit.

"Poor devil," Harden whispered. "Poor son-of-a-gun—"

For a moment he thought of following Dorsey and trying to do something for him. He had concentrated food tablets with him. Dorsey probably hadn't had a square meal in years. The old man would welcome the tablets. "Wait a minute," Harden called. "I've got something for you."

Dorsey either did not hear him or would not believe him. Harden knew if he tried to follow, he would only frighten the old man more. There was nothing that could be done anyhow. This place was home to Dorsey, the only home he had ever known. He would prefer to remain here. Leaving a tin of the tablets where the old man would find them, Harden walked away.

In his mind was a ceaseless refrain. "Yes, I remember a girl. And she's dead. Is that what you wanted to know?"

It wasn't what Harden wanted to know. It was the last thing he wanted to learn.

RED AMBROSE opened the door at his knock. "Back so soon, eh? I'm glad to see you, Harden. I've got great news. I've discovered the damnedest thing. I know how Keogh gets in and out of this place and what he is doing here. But that can wait. Come in. Come in. Come in. Hey!" He looked past the man at the door. "You're alone. I thought you were going after a girl. What—oh—"

He saw Harden's face. His voice changed. The gruff heartiness went out of it, was replaced with a non-committal bluntness. "What did you find?"

"She's dead."

"Oh." Ambrose held the door open, silently stood to one side while Harden entered and sat down. "Sorry," the giant engineer said then. "Sorry, old man. You have my sympathy."

"Thank you."

Nothing more was said. Nor would either of them under any circumstances ever reopen the subject. What was done, what had happened. The last chapter was written and the book was closed.

"About Keogh?" Harden said.

"Keogh? Yes, about Keogh. Harden, I've discovered the damnedest thing that ever happened on this or any other planet." Excited overtones were creeping into Red Ambrose's rumbling bass voice. Whatever it was he had discovered, just thinking about it made him excited. "Do you know the Martian legends about how the land of serenity came into existence?" he demanded.

Harden nodded. "It was the old idea of sanctuary, a temple or sacred plot of ground where anyone was safe. In this case it was the temple of the Little Lost God. A crook, chased by the cops, a traveler, running from bandits, could find safety in this temple. As long as

he remained within the temple grounds, he would not be harmed."

Such was the legend of the origin of the land of serenity. As the centuries passed, the area of safety had gradually grown in size. The place of sanctuary had expanded from the size of a temple courtyard to a section of land as big as a county. It was becoming too large. And—crooks were using it as a base from which to sally forth on raiding expeditions. Great gangs of bandits thronged in the place of sanctuary, raiding Martian cities and retreating at full speed to the temple area when the police got on their trail. The sanctuary of the Little Lost God was becoming a darned nuisance.

The Martians, in accordance with their devious ideas of right and wrong, took what was to them the obvious solution. They said, "The temple of the Lost God is a sanctuary. All right, we'll let it be a sanctuary. But we will build a great wall around the whole area and all who are once inside, will have to stay inside."

SO THE wall was built. And eventually, as the centuries passed, the land of serenity came into being. The temple of the Little Lost God had become a sanctuary with a vengeance.

"No one is sure now whether there ever really was a temple," Harden said. "Or, if it existed, where it was located."

"There was a temple all right," Red Ambrose answered. "There is nothing left now but ruins but it once existed. And I know where it was located."

"So what?" Harden questioned. "Whas has that got to do with Keogh?"

"It has this to do with Keogh," Ambrose answered. "The temple was built on the surface. But it was either built over a vast series of underground caves or during the centuries the caverns were dug by the Martians. At any rate, the

caves are there. They extend for miles. They either extend naturally or have been dug out *under the wall*. I've discovered that it is through these caves that Keogh is getting in and out of the land of serenity!"

"Well, I'm damned!" Harden gasped in amazement.

"You haven't heard all of it," Ambrose grimly continued. "Remember that the temple of the Little Lost God was a sanctuary. Anyone might find refuge there and be safe from all his enemies. Naturally a person whose life was saved would be grateful. He would make a gift to the temple. For centuries past the counting, these gifts were made: gold, jewels, the art treasures of the whole planet. The priests took the gifts and hid them away in the caverns under the temple. Keogh is hunting this hidden treasure. That is why he is coming into the land of serenity—to find and loot the lost treasure hidden under the temple of the Little Lost God."

Harden stared in amazement at Red Ambrose. The man had done a marvelous piece of detective work. Keogh had sniffed out and was on the trail of a gigantic hoard of hidden treasure!

"No wonder he was so darned excited when I turned up in his hideout!" Harden gasped. "No wonder he started shooting before he asked any questions. He thought I was trying to cut myself in on his find!"

"Exactly!" Red Ambrose said grimly. "With so much at stake, the wonder is that you ever got away alive. And now, my friend, we've got a chance at two things—to get out of this darned place, and to make ourselves a modest fortune at the same time, if—"

"If what?"

"If we're lucky," Red Ambrose grimly finished. His expression amplified his meaning.

CHAPTER V

In the Caverns

"FAIR warning," Red Ambrose said. "Nobody know how far these caves run. If we get lost in here, we'll be likely to stay lost forever."

"Getting cold feet?" Harden queried.

"Nope," the engineer cheerfully replied. "If you ask me, we had just as well be dead here as dead up there." He nodded toward the surface.

Harden nodded grim assent. They were in the caves under the temple of the Little Lost God. Except for the beams from their torches, they were in total darkness. The fluorescent lighting system used in the Martian cities had been invented long after this temple and the caves under it had been forgotten. There was a real chance of getting lost in the gloomy caverns. Legend said that the temple had been built because a god had been lost here.

Their plan was to find Keogh, or the Willies working for him, and follow them out of the caverns, keeping out of sight in the meantime. Keogh and his men knew a path through the place. Once Harden and Ambrose knew the way out, then they would decide how best to investigate the treasure Keogh was hunting here. The treasure was important; escaping was more important.

Dust inches thick was on the ground. With each step they took, it puffed up in little clouds. Red Ambrose was in the lead. He was following a double-line of footprints in the dust. They were his own footprints, made when he had been running down the rumor about Keogh.

"Another hundred yards and we will come to a round chamber, with caves leading out from it in all directions.

That was as far as I went before. There were a lot of tracks leading into and out of this chamber. While I was there, Keogh and a bunch of Willies came through. I ducked out of sight and watched them. I figure if we follow the tracks they left behind them, they will lead us out of this place."

The chamber was just as Ambrose had described it. In some forgotten century it had been hollowed out of the solid stone. Radiating from it were six tunnels, also obviously artificial in origin. The dust here was thick with footprints. A path had been beaten from one tunnel, through the chamber, and out another tunnel on the opposite side.

"We'll follow the path," Ambrose said. "It will lead us somewhere."

"Yeah, but—*Lights out!*"

Coming down one of the side tunnels, Harden had caught a glimpse of a gleam of light. Turning out their torches, he and Ambrose ducked out of sight.

A GROUP of Martians filed into the chamber. There were at least fifteen of them, all armed. Apparently this was a rest point, for they all sat down and lit up cigarettes. They were so close that Harden could hear their voices. Suddenly one of them sat up.

"Humans!" he said.

He spoke in Martian but both Harden and Ambrose understood the language.

"There are humans near us," the Martian repeated.

The Martians possessed a strange sixth sense which enabled them to sense the presence of humans near them. Harden had seen them use their weird ability too often for him to doubt that they possessed it. "We better get moving!" he hissed.

"Wait," Red Ambrose cautioned.

"They're not certain yet. Even if they do sense us, they won't do much looking for us. They're superstitious about this place. They won't do much running around in here. They're too scared of ghosts."

There was sound sense in what the engineer said. The two men crouched in the darkness, watching.

"I sense humans," the Willie repeated.

His comrades laughed at him. "Now what would humans be doing in here?" one of them demanded.

"They are here," the Willie stubbornly repeated. He got to his feet and went sniffing round the chamber like a dog that suspects the presence of a dangerous animal but is not quite sure. His comrades watched him.

"See! Here are footprints. I told you there were humans here. These footprints prove it."

He was pointing at the footprints Harden and Ambrose had left on the dusty floor.

"Now it is time to be moving!" Red Ambrose gritted. "And damn it, no matter where we go, they'll be able to follow us. This dust is as bad as snow. We'll leave footprints in it every time we move. But maybe they won't follow us far. Come on."

Fifteen minutes later they knew they had underestimated the Martians. The Willies had not caught up with them—fear of an ambush made them go slowly—but they were hanging doggedly to the trail. Harden and Ambrose could not go very fast either. They could not show a light and in consequence they had to feel their way along. If they were not careful the tunnel might drop off into nothingness under their feet.

The tunnel did not drop off into nothingness. Instead it came to an abrupt end. Harden cursed softly as

his groping fingers met the obstruction.

"End of the trail?" Ambrose queried softly.

"I don't know," Hardtn answered. Behind, in the distance, he could hear the Martians. They were not in sight as yet. He dared to turn on his light.

"Turn that damned thing off," Ambrose hissed. "If those Willies get a glimpse of that light, our goose is cooked."

"This is not a dead end. It's a door!" Harden answered.

"A door? Are you sure?"

Harden was already at work. The light had revealed that the obstruction blocking their way was a door. Made of wood, it had been constructed long before the Martians invented the system of door they used in their cities, doors that opened at a wish or at a spoken command. This one had a heavy iron handle. Harden grasped it, turned.

"Get a move on," Ambrose urged him. "I can see the lights of the Willies."

"I'm doing the best—ah—" With a squeak of uncoiled hinges the door swung open. Harden and Ambrose leaped through. Harden started to close the door before he realized they had stepped into a lighted chamber.

TEMPORARY fluorescent lights had been rigged on the walls. They revealed a large room that had apparently served as a shrine at some time in the past. There was an altar with the state of a god in a niche behind it.

It was not the altar nor the statue that gripped Harden's attention. It was the person in the room.

Marion Gray! The girl he had met in Keogh's hangout, whom he had last seen as she walked through the lobby of her hotel, the girl who had come to

Mars to do research on Martian customs for a Ph.D. was here! She was here, in the caverns under the temple of the Little Lost God, in the land of serenity!

The squeak of the door had attracted her attention. She turned toward them. Simultaneously Red Ambrose went for the needle gun holstered at his hip.

Ambrose did not know this girl. He had never seen her before. So far as he knew, any person he met in these caverns was an enemy. In the land of serenity you didn't stop to think: you shot first. Otherwise you did not shoot at all.

"Drop that gun!"

It was not Red Ambrose who had spoken. He hadn't had time to open his mouth. It was the girl who had given the command. At the same time she swung up the weapon she was carrying.

It was not a needle gun she held in her hands. It was a snub-nosed sub-machine gun, for close quarters' work, one of the deadliest weapons ever invented by the human race. Ambrose took one look at the weapon. He hesitated, undecided whether to risk a shot from his own needle gun or to drop it. The needle gun was slow in its effect. Ambrose could shoot, if he chose, but even if his needle reached its target, there would be ten seconds before it took effect. In ten seconds the girl's gun could literally cut him in two with an almost solid stream of slugs.

Ambrose hesitated only an instant, long enough to compute the chances. Then he dropped his gun.

Harden had not attempted to draw. He did not want to shoot this girl. She was his friend. He had helped her out of trouble. There was a mistake somewhere. He turned to close the door.

A slug whistled through the air

within six inches of his head. The explosion of the gun was deafening in this restricted area.

"Hey!" he yelled.

"Loosen your gun belt and drop it to the floor," the girl ordered.

"But there is a bunch of Willies coming down this tunnel," he protested.

She seemed not to have heard him. He had turned again and was facing her. She looked straight through him. There was no hint of recognition on her face. The muzzle of the wicked little weapon she carried was centered on his heart.

"Drop your belt!" she commanded.

Her finger was on the trigger of the gun.

"Do what she says," Red Ambrose whispered. "She means to shoot."

Harden slowly loosened the belt, let it drop to the floor.

Yelping, the Willies who had been following them surged out of the tunnel. Harden did not know what to expect. He waited for the ping of the needle guns, the bite of the needles digging into his flesh. The girl would go down too. She had not believed him when he said they were being followed. More, she had not recognized him. She would pay for her lack of recognition with her life. The Willies would shoot her with no more compunction than they would display in shooting him and Ambrose.

The Willies did not shoot her. They came charging into the chamber, saw the two men, saw the girl.

"Tie them up," she ordered, in perfect Martian.

FOR a second, the Martians hesitated. Then they obeyed her order. Bruce Harden and Red Ambrose found themselves tied hand and foot and lying on the floor.

"Who are you men?" the girl demanded.

"Who are we?" Harden choked. "Who the hell do you think we are?"

"I asked you a question. Answer it."

"We're a couple of boy scouts on vacation," Harden bitterly answered. "I suppose you're one of the campfire girls and that pretty soon we'll all be roasting marshmallows around a jolly campfire."

Smack!

Her hand left white marks across the scar on his face as she slapped him. The slap made him furiously angry. "Why don't you kick me?" he raged. "You've got me tied up so it would be perfectly safe."

"A good idea," another voice said. "I'll just do that, since you suggest it."

Harden felt the pound of a boot against his ribs. It almost knocked the breath out of him. He turned over—and looked straight into the grinning face of Keogh.

It was Keogh who had spoken. He had come from an adjoining room and had entered silently. He looked down at the two men.

"Well, well," he said. "It's Harden. Like a bad penny you always turn up where you're not wanted. I knew I was taking a chance when I had you dropped over the wall instead of slitting your throat, which is what I should have had done."

"Why in the hell didn't you? Failing to have my throat slit was an oversight of your part—"

"An oversight that can be easily remedied," Keogh said grimly. "And who is this?" he asked, nudging Harden's companion. "Well, if it isn't Red Ambrose! My old friend Ambrose, the engineer who would rather be honest than be rich. What are you doing here in this dismal place?"

"I just came along for the ride," Ambrose gritted. "Damn you, Keogh, you've got us. Whatever it is you're going to do with us, get it over with."

"You may be certain I will think of something to do with both of you," Keogh said. "But first, I want to ask you some questions. How did you get here?"

How they had gotten into the caverns under the temple of the Little Lost God was bothering Keogh. What they had done, others might do. He did not want any uninvited visitors until he had finished his business in this place. Harden sensed his uneasiness.

"You'll find out soon enough what we were doing here," Harden said.

"I'll find out right now!" Keogh answered. He nodded to one of the Martians. This was important. If the prisoners in the land of serenity learned the caves under the ruined temple offered a way to escape, Keogh could anticipate an immediate invasion of hard-bitten criminals. Keogh meant to use torture to get the information he wanted.

"I give up," Red Ambrose said. Quietly he answered Keogh's questions.

HARDEN said nothing. If Ambrose wanted to talk to avoid torture, it was all right. There was nothing to be gained by defying Keogh, except slow death. Harden watched the girl.

She had drawn back. There was a strained sick look on her face but she made no effort to interfere. Only when the questioning had reached an end did she speak.

"What—what are we going to do with them?" she asked.

"They don't know anything," Keogh answered. "Ambrose claims not to have told anybody about this place. Do with them? There's only one thing to do with them!" He drew a thumb across his throat.

"You mean, kill them?"

"Of course. I left Harden alive once. I'm not going to make that mistake twice."

"But—" she started, in protest.

The grin left Keogh's face. His eyes drilled into the girl. "But what?" he questioned. "If you've got any silly ideas about leaving them alive—"

"I was thinking about the danger," she stated.

"What danger?"

"Well, if we kill them, and the Martian authorities ever discover it—"

"How will they discover it?"

Instead of answering, she glanced at the Martians surrounding them. Keogh got the idea. After all, one of his helpers might squeal. In that case, he might find himself suddenly entering the land of serenity. He hesitated.

"I've got a better idea," the girl suggested. "One that will not leave us in any danger."

"What is it?"

"I've studied the legends of this place. Here's what I suggest." She drew Keogh to one side, spoke in a low tone of voice. Harden could not hear what she had said but from the delighted grin on Keogh's face he knew that, whatever she was suggesting, it was bad news for them.

"Pick 'em up," Keogh shouted at the Willies, indicating the two men. "I've got a perfect place to put them."

CHAPTER VI

The Maze of the Temple

HARDEN looked at the candle. It would burn maybe five or six hours. No longer. He looked up. Overhead, in the ceiling of the chamber, was a round hole. He and Ambrose had been lowered down that hole on ropes. The hole was at least sixty feet deep and they were at the bottom of it.

"I wish," Red Ambrose said, "Keogh had cut our throats."

"We're alive," Harden said.

"Yeah? And where are we?"

"I know."

"—We're in the maze of the temple of the Little Lost God. We're in a place where a god got lost and died because he couldn't find his way out again. This is where the priests of the temple dumped their enemies. Right down here at the bottom of this hole is where they dumped them. And if one of them ever got out of this place—"

A note of hysteria had crept into the engineer's voice. He shook his fist at the hole.

"Damn that girl! Damn her, I say. Why didn't she let Keogh cut our throats? Why did she suggest to him that he have us dumped down here, where we will die of thirst and hunger? Why would she do such a thing?"

Harden said nothing. The girl had suggested to Keogh that the two men be dumped here. In forgotten centuries the priests of the temple up above had dropped their enemies here. Legend had a name for this place—The Maze of the Thousand False Hopes. It was a twisting, tortuous series of interconnecting tunnels, with one true exit, and a thousand doors that looked like exits, but weren't. It was as clever and as diabolical a method of torture as was ever designed by the devious Martian mind. There *was* a way out of the place. That was the catch about the whole business, that was the real torture. The poor wretch, dropped into the maze, knew that there was one way out—if he could only find it. The hope of escaping would force the victim to search until he dropped in his tracks. There were a thousand false exits and only one real way to get out.

"I know the odds are bad," Harden admitted.

"Bad? They're impossible. A thousand to one! What kind of a chance is that?"

The giant engineer seemed to be lost in despair. He had sat down, and holding his head in his hands was looking despondently at the floor.

"We're not dead until we give up," Harden reminded him.

"Poppycock."

"But there is a way out of here."

"That's what we're supposed to think," Ambrose said bitterly. "We're supposed to wear ourselves out hunting for the way to escape. That's what the Willies want us to do. I'm not going to do it. I'm going to sit right here."

"And wait?"

"And wait for the end," the engineer said sullenly. "To hell with trying. I'm whipped and I know it."

Smack! Harden's fist pounded against the jaw of the engineer. He didn't hit hard. He didn't intend to hit hard.

"Why, damn you!" Red Ambrose roared, leaping to his feet.

Harden ducked away. "Easy, Red," he grinned. "You were down in the dumps and I had to do something to rouse your fighting spirit. Keep away from me, you big gorilla. I socked you for your own good."

For an instant the engineer glared at him. Then the glare went out of his eyes and his fists, raised ready to strike, unclenched. "Okay, Harden. You win. We'll try to get out. But I'll bet you forty dollars that we end up right back here."

"I'll take the bet," Harden said. He picked up the candle. Keogh, in keeping with the tradition of the maze, had provided the candle. It was in reality only an added refinement of torture. It would soon burn out and when it did—

Four tunnels branched out from the chamber. Harden regarded them thoughtfully. "Enny, meeny, miny, mo, catch a Willie by his toe—" He shrugged, turned toward the nearest

opening. "One is as bad as another," he said.

As he entered the tunnel he stumbled over something lying almost buried in the dust. Looking down he saw what he had tripped over. A skeleton.

"He didn't make it out of here either," Red Ambrose said grimly.

THE maze was endless. Part of the caves were natural and had apparently been formed by an underground river that had flowed here during the long gone centuries when there were still rivers on the Red Planet. Water had dug this endless system of caverns but water flowed here no longer. The place was as dry as the desert and ankle deep in dust. They poked through gloomy holes that were just big enough to crawl through; they entered caverns where the roof was hundreds of feet over their heads. Here and there additional passages had been cut, connecting various branches of the caves. The Martians had improved on what nature had provided, and their improvements had been made with the idea in mind of adding confusion to the efforts of the poor wretch who was trying to get out of this place.

Which was the right turning?

When there were so many choices, there was no way of knowing which way to turn. Somewhere there was a right way. All other ways were wrong.

"We'll never make it," Ambrose grumbled. "We're damned fools for trying."

Harden kept silent. Logically the engineer was right. There was no real hope of escape. Harden kept going because the will to fight had been bred into his bones. He was the grandson of one of the space pioneers, the hardy breed that dared to venture into the deserts of space. *They* hadn't quit. *They* hadn't given up. Nor would he

quit while there was strength in his body to try. He stumbled again and looking down, saw another skeleton.

"Another one that didn't make it," the engineer said.

"I know," Harden answered. "There will probably be others—"

There were others. They found one tunnel where the floor was covered with bones. Harden looked at them, turned back. "This is not the way," he said.

Which was the way?

The candle in his hand burned lower and lower. Regarding it, he silently cursed Keogh for giving it to him. Without the candle, they would have had to fumble through the darkness. That would have been bad. But when the candle was gone—

It was going.

He thought of Marion Gray, somewhere overhead in another series of caverns. What was she thinking, knowing that she had sent two men to this place? What was in her mind?

"She was with Keogh all the time," he muttered. "She was working for him. When I ran into her in his hide-out, she sized up the situation and played me for a sucker, trying to find out what I wanted with Keogh. I wonder—"

The sudden thought struck him: When he had left her at her hotel, had she promptly phoned Keogh, telling him where Harden could probably be found? Had Keogh, acting on her information, planted thugs to wait for him? Was that the explanation of the shot from the alley?

Keogh hadn't been just lucky then. He had known where Harden would likely be.

"I could wring her neck!" Harden said.

"Whose neck?" Ambrose queried.

"The girl who suggested we be put here."

"You'll have to take your turn on that," Ambrose said.

They tramped on.

THE tunnels twisted and turned.

Where the ancient river had dug deep, the tunnels dipped. At other places they went up. Once they came to a place where a straight drop lay before them. Harden tossed a pebble into the darkness. No sound of it striking bottom ever came back.

"That hole goes down to the bottom of the planet," he said.

They turned back, retracing their steps, chose another tunnel at random.

The candle was burning shorter and shorter. Hot grease was running over Harden's hand. "An hour more," he estimated mentally.

One more hour and they would be without light. Before they had been dropped here, they had been carefully searched. Weapons, matches, flashes, had been taken from them.

The hour passed. All that remained of the candle was a tiny bit of the wick. It gave off a small smoky flame.

"When it's gone, we'll feel our way," Harden said grimly. "There is a way out of this place and we'll find it, even if we have to feel for it."

Ahead of them the tunnel opened out into a round chamber.

"Maybe we've finally found the way out!" Harden said.

He stepped into the chamber, stopped. A sudden electric thrill shot through him.

"Footprints in the dust!" he whispered. "We've reached a part of the cave where the Martians have been. They know their way out. All we will have to do is follow them."

Red Ambrose eagerly ran forward and examined the footprints. When he looked up all hope had gone from his face.

"Martian footprints, hell!" he blurted out. "These are our own footprints. This is the chamber where we started. We've gone in a circle and are right back where we started from!"

The maze had brought them back to the same chamber where they had been dropped.

The flame of the candle burned Harden's hand and he did not feel it. Back where they had started from! There was the tunnel they had taken, the skeleton he had tripped over. There was no mistaking the chamber. It was the same place from which they had started.

Not quite the same. Something was different. For a second Harden could not determine that difference. Something was charged. He could not tell what.

Then he saw what it was.

A scarf, a piece of silk, was lying on the dusty floor.

He picked it up.

The four ends had been tied together to form a tiny parachute. Attached to the parachute was an instrument that looked like a compass.

"What the heck is this?" Harden whispered.

He turned the little instrument over in his hands. It wasn't a compass, yet it looked something like one. It was made of gold. Inside the top, behind a bit of glass, a tiny needle danced. He turned it in his hands. No matter how he turned it, the needle came back to point in the same direction.

"Let me see that thing," Red Ambrose demanded. "By the Lord Harry, it's—"

For the first time since they had been dropped in the maze, there was hope in the voice of the engineer. A man dying of thirst in the desert, coming suddenly and unexpectedly upon a spring of cool sparkling water, might cry out as Red

Ambrose cried out, and for the same reason.

"What do you mean?" Harden asked.

In a trembling voice, the engineer explained what he meant.

CHAPTER VII

In the Temple of the Lost God

KEOGH entered the chamber where the statue of the Little Lost God stood in its niche.

"Lights," he said.

The fluorescents began to glow, then leaped to full illumination. Keogh had had this lighting system installed here. He needed light to sort the loot the gangs of Willies brought to his place.

Loot was piled here now. For centuries, grateful Martians had brought gifts to this temple. These gifts the priests had hidden in the vaults below. Now Keogh and his gang were rooting them out of their hiding places.

Vases of delicate china, worth a fortune in the smart antique shops on Earth, tapestries, their colors faded, the cloth dried and rotted, golden ornaments, bracelets, jeweled combs made for the use of some Martian lady of the long ago, jugs of silver, golden plates, tiny figurines of the Little Lost God, made of gold and encrusted with jewels—the loot of centuries was here.

The Spaniards, looting the treasure vaults of the Incas, never made a richer haul than this. There was wealth here to tempt any pirate. And Keogh, though he did not sail under the skull and crossbones, was a pirate. When he saw the pile of loot that had been collected in his absence, he grinned from ear to ear.

"We're going to clean up," he said to the person who was following him.

Marion Gray did not answer. She glanced speculatively at the pile of treasure, then looked uneasily around the room.

"You don't seem very pleased," Keogh muttered.

This brought a swift smile to her face. "But I *am* pleased," she insisted. "I was just thinking—"

"—about those two fools we dropped into the maze?" Keogh questioned shrewdly.

"Well, yes."

"Forget about them. They're done for by now. It's been two days since we dropped them down that hole and if they haven't already blundered into some pit and gotten themselves killed, they've gone raving mad. To hell with them. They got exactly what they deserved when they tried to butt into my business."

The girl said nothing. Keogh looked keenly at her, then busied himself with something that interested him even more than she did—the sorting of the loot.

The tapestries he tossed contemptuously aside. "We can't ship this junk," he said.

"There are museums back on earth that would pay a very good price for them," the girl suggested.

"So what? The damned things fall to pieces if you touch 'em. We can't fool around with junk for some damned museum. What we want is the gold and the jewels."

He began sorting. The girl watched him for a few minutes, then laid aside the sub-machine gun she was carrying and began to help.

Keogh's round fat face beamed with jovial good humor as he put the golden ornaments in small packing cases. Wealth to ransom half a planet was here. Wealth was what he wanted. Wealth was what he had come to Mars to seek. He had what he wanted.

"When we return to Earth, we'll go places and do things, me and you," he promised.

"Yes," the girl answered. "But before we leave Mars, I must complete gathering the material for my thesis."

"Are you still thinkin' about that thing?" Keogh demanded. "Forget it. What the hell good is a thesis for some stuffy college when you can help me spend this?" He gestured toward the treasure.

"But that was the reason I came here. That was why I entered the land of serenity—to gather material on Martian customs. My school is expecting me to complete the thesis. It will have a great deal of value, to students of Mars."

Keogh laughed. "What the hell a cute little babe like you wants to monkey around with that educational stuff is beyond me. This college business is all the bunk anyhow. Me, I never went past the seventh grade and I can't see where it's hurt me. I've done a lot better than all right."

A FILE of Martians entered the room. Keogh greeted them joyously. They were bringing more treasure to be sorted.

"This load finishes everything found in the last hiding place," their leader told Keogh.

"That's fine," Keogh answered. "As soon as we get this back to my headquarters, we'll divide and pay off. After that, I'm shaking the dust of this place off my feet. I know when I've got enough. I'm clearing out."

The Willies squatted on the floor, resting, talking among themselves about what they would do with the money they would receive from this treasure. Suddenly one of them stood up.

"Humans!" he said.

Instantly every Martian eye was focused on him.

"What are you talking about?" Keogh demanded.

"I sense humans," the Martian said. "There are humans near us."

"Of course there are humans near you," Keogh answered. "Miss Gray and I both are human."

"I am not referring to you. There are other humans near by."

"Nonsense!" Keogh laughed.

But the Martian was not satisfied. He went snooping around the chamber, poking in corners, looking, feeling for something he thought he sensed. Only one place he avoided—the statue of the Little Lost God. Like all Martians, he was intensely superstitious. Evil might lurk in the statue. The Little Lost God might return here and blast these blasphemers of his sacred places. The other Martians watched the one who thought he sensed something.

A feeling of uneasiness seemed to run through them. One by one they stopped their talking, their hushed voices dropping away into silence. Their eyes followed their comrade who searched through the temple chamber. Marion Gray glanced up at them, then went on about her work. Keogh paid no attention. At their best, he regarded the Martians as dopey fools. At their superstitious worst, he thought they were little better than savages.

Then—it happened.

From everywhere and from nowhere, from the floor, from the ceiling, from the four walls of the temple chamber, especially from the niche where the statue of the Little Lost God stood, there came a burst of wild, mad laughter. If all the demons in hell laughed at the same time, they would make a sound like this. It roared through the temple.

The Martians leaped wildly to their feet.

"The Little Lost God!" one whispered.

"—is laughing," a second added.

THE sound struck fear to their hearts. They had dared to enter a place sacred to a god, to disturb the treasures that belonged to a god, and the god was laughing at them.

The laughter died. A voice came. It was a raging voice, hot with anger, and it spoke in tones of thunder. It spoke the language of Mars as only a native of the Red Planet could speak it.

"*Woe unto you!*" the voice said. "*You have trespassed within my sacred places; you have looted my temple of its treasure. Now the hour of my vengeance is come. Woe unto you!*"

The voice was a roaring torrent of sound.

"*I will strike you with my thunder. I will blast you with my lightning,*" the voice roared. "*Wherever you go, I will follow you. My vengeance will overtake you, no matter how far or how fast you run.*"

Terror gouged grooves in the superstitious minds of the Martians. They knew in their hearts that they had done wrong in entering this place. They had been afraid here, and it had taken the combination of Keogh's forceful persuasion and the lure of loot to get them into this vast system of caverns.

"It is the Little Lost God!" one whispered.

"He will destroy us."

"Run!"

"Halt!" This was Keogh speaking now. Keogh might be many things but he was not superstitious. He sensed a trick. "You damned fools!" he raged at the Martians. "Don't pay any attention to that voice. Somebody is fooling you. Here, I'll show you it's a trick, that somebody is hiding behind that statue."

He ran across the temple, leaped up to the alcove where the statue rested. Keogh was convinced somebody was hiding behind that statue. He did not

know who it might be, but the purpose of the voice was obvious: to scare hell out of his Martians.

The Martians saw him disappear behind the statue. A second later they saw him appear on the other side. There was a blank, bewildered look on his face. He had expected to find someone hiding here. He had gone all around the statue and had found no one. Except for the statue, the alcove was completely barren, without furnishings of any kind. Other than behind the statue there was absolutely no place for anyone to hide.

There wasn't anyone behind the statue. This fact bewildered Keogh. His bewilderment showed on his face.

"*Hah hah hah hah,*" the laughter rang through the temple. "*Hah!*" it abruptly ended.

Keogh was standing behind the statue. He was looking up at it, trying to understand what the hell was happening. The Martians below were watching him. They didn't know whether to run or to stay.

Keogh couldn't see what happened until after it happened. The Willies could see it. The sight drove hot irons of terror through their minds.

A great hand reached out from behind Keogh and grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Hah. Got you!" the statue roared.

The Martians saw the hand grab Keogh. That was all they needed to see. Keogh had defied the god and the god had grabbed him. They were scared to death already. A split second after the hand grabbed Keogh there wasn't a Martian left in the temple. If devils had been following them, they could not have run faster.

An ordinary attacker, they would have fought to the death, if necessary. But a god who laughed at them, and grabbed their leader—this, they could

not fight. They ran like drunken fools pursued by demons.

KEOGH must have suffered an awful shock when he felt that hand grab his shoulder. The soul-wrenching agony of that moment must have been terrific. Keogh was neither a coward nor a fool. But he had been behind that statue and he knew no one was there. Then a hand that could only have come from nowhere grabbed him. Even his shock-proof brain was not proof against this. He screamed, jerked free, leaped down from the raised alcove where the statue stood.

Panic struck him. Completely forgotten were the two needle guns in his pockets. In that mad moment, with wild, panicky fear raging through his brain, Keogh could think of only one thing—to run.

He ran. The Martians had gone in one direction. Keogh did not follow them. He dived into the nearest tunnel.

Even as he started to run, he knew he was being followed. Before he was in the tunnel, he heard the footsteps start. Hot and furiously they were coming after him. For a short distance, the lights from the temple illuminated the tunnel. Before he was out of the glow cast by the lights, Keogh recovered enough from his panic to look back.

In the depth of his mind was the fear that he was somehow being followed by an angry god. What he saw frightened him even more than a god would have done.

Red Ambrose, great bushy beard thrust forward, was right behind him. Running beside Red Ambrose, head thrust forward, straining every muscle to overtake him, was Bruce Harden.

Two ghosts out of hell!

Unlike ghosts, they had knives, sharp pointed, keen edged, long bladed

knives, the terrible fighting knives of Mars, razor edged and deadly. Keogh saw the knives. He knew what the blades would do to him. He saw the fierce, resolute anger on the faces of the men who followed him. He knew he had wronged these men. From the look on their faces, he knew what they would do to him if they caught him.

He screamed, tried to run faster. The floor seemed to open up under him. He plunged down, down, down. His scream ended in a sudden thud. Then there was silence.

BRUCE HARDEN and Red Ambrose stood beside the round hole in the tunnel. They had barely managed to stop in time to keep from following Keogh. His scream had come back to them, and the thud that ended it.

"Well," Red Ambrose panted, "the dirty dog! He finally got exactly what was coming to him. He fell into the same hole that he had us lowered down, the hole that leads to the maze. And did he squash when he hit bottom!"

Like Lot's wife, Keogh had looked behind him and had run headlong into the hole that led to the maze of the temple of the Little Lost God. To the bottom of that hole was a long drop. Keogh had splashed to his death at the bottom of the hole.

"Well, that's that," Red Ambrose panted. "For a minute, when he came charging up into the alcove, I thought he had us spotted. After all, he might have known about the hidden door behind the statue, and the trick voice amplification system the old priests used to scare hell out of their followers. He might have known about that."

"He might," Harden admitted. "But he didn't. But darn you! Why did you open that door and grab him? If you had missed, we'd have been left

in a hell of a spot."

"I just couldn't help it," the engineer admitted. "When I looked through the peephole and saw how close he was and when I remembered all the suffering he had caused me, I wanted to cut his throat then and there. Which reminds me. There is another matter that needs our attention."

"I know," Harden said. "I'm going to attend to it right now."

SHE was still waiting in the temple.

Backed against the wall, sub-machine gun held ready, she was waiting for them. She had seen everything that had happened. Some of it she had understood. There was much she hadn't. The gun covered them as they entered.

Harden ignored the weapon. He walked straight up to her, took something from his pocket.

"Is this yours?" he asked.

It was a bit of gayly-colored silk, a scarf, such as a woman might wear to hold her hair in place. She looked at it.

"I'm so glad you found it," she said.

"I'm so glad. I'm so glad. I was afraid."

The four ends of the scarf had been tied together to form a small parachute.

"I told you it was her scarf!" Harden shouted to his companion. "I told you she was the one who had dropped the tell-tale down to us, so we could find our way out of that damned maze. Now, pig-head, admit you were wrong."

It was obvious there had been argument between them on this point. "Well, maybe she did drop that gadget down to us," the engineer admitted. "Maybe she did drop down the tell-tale the old priests used to find their way through the maze. But if that is so, why in the heck did she suggest we be put there in the first place?"

"To save our necks," Harden said.

"Keogh was going to have our throats cut. If she hadn't suggested we be put in the maze, he would certainly have had us killed. Isn't that right?" Harden demanded, turning to the girl.

She was smiling now. The tension was leaving her face. "That's right," she said. "I recognized you the minute you came bursting into this chamber. But—Keogh was in the next room. There were several Martians with him. If I tried to help you, he would overhear me. The only thing I could do was turn my gun on you."

"See!" Harden said to the engineer. "See!"

"Um," Red Ambrose rumbled in his beard. "I made a mistake. Well, I am glad to admit it. Lady, I had you figured wrong. I hope you will forgive me."

She did not know the name of this red-bearded giant, but that did not matter. She was more than willing to forgive him.

"Now," Red Ambrose said, looking at the piles of treasure, "what next? I don't mind admitting that I could use some of this stuff, if we can carry it out."

"We'll take what we can carry in our pockets," Harden said bluntly. "And get out. As for me, I'll be only too glad to get out alive."

"Take what you want," the girl said. "It belongs to anybody."

CHAPTER VIII

The End of Searching

HARDEN and Red Ambrose sat on the terrace of the best hotel in Mars City. Shaved, their hair cut, wearing new clothes, they looked like prosperous citizens from Earth visiting the Red Planet on vacation. They had eaten and slept and eaten again and

slept again. The hollows in their cheeks had filled out, their eyes had lost their fevered glaze.

Dusk was falling over Mars. It was the best time of the day on the Red Planet. Soon night would bring the chilly desert winds. But now the little heat of the day lingered, lending a pleasant warmth to the air.

Red Ambrose sighed. "Looking at us, you wouldn't think that three days ago we—" He gestured toward the horizon.

"Don't mention it," Harden said. "I don't want to ever hear of the place again."

"Oh, I wasn't going to mention it out loud," the engineer said. He raked a horny thumb across the head of a match, applied the light to the end of his cigar. Soon clouds of fragrant smoke were drifting through the thin air.

"Where are you going from here, Harden?" Red Ambrose asked at last. "With that hunk of stuff we found piled up in Keogh's hangout, all put into packing cases and everything, we got enough bucks to do what we please for the rest of our lives. What are you going to do with yours?"

The packing cases that Harden had seen in Keogh's place the first time he had been there had yielded a rich reward. Keogh had already managed to loot a vast hoard of treasure from the temple. He had carefully packed it ready for shipment. Harden and Red Ambrose felt they were logical heirs to it.

"What am I going to do?" Harden mused. "I'm going to visit Earth. I've never been there, you know, and I kind of want to see what the place is like."

There was yearning in his voice, and something of sadness. The green hills of Earth called to him across the depths of space. He would see them, see the

whole planet. There was pleasure in the thought. But there was another thought in his mind, and it brought sadness.

Red Ambrose sensed what his companion was thinking. It was something the engineer would never mention. Harden had come here looking for a girl. And had not found her.

"Ah, well—" Ambrose said. "Ah, well—" He looked up. Then rose hastily to his feet.

Marion Gray had come out on the terrace. Harden drew out a chair for her and she sat down. She lit a cigarette, looked silently out over the city to the desert.

"I suppose," she said at last, "you will soon be leaving for Earth?"

"Yes, yes," Harden answered. "That is my plan."

He liked this girl, he liked her better than any girl he had ever known, except one. He liked her for what she was. He liked her in spite of the fact that she had never chosen to explain what she was really doing here, why she had gone to Keogh in the first place. It was a delicate subject, one on which he did not feel justified in asking questions. If she chose to tell him, all right. If she chose to keep silent, all right.

"I don't suppose I could interest you in staying on Mars a little longer?" she suddenly asked.

"You might," Harden answered. "This is not exactly a healthy place for me, but you might interest me in staying a little longer, if you are good at persuading."

He SPOKE lightly, his voice a slow drawl in the gathering dusk. Leaning back in his chair, he took a slow drag at his cigarette, watched the girl from eyes that were careful not to let her know he was watching her.

She smoked in silence. "I've got a

job to do here," she said at last.

"A job?"

"Yes." She snubbed the cigarette in the tray. "A job. I need someone to help me do it." She looked straight at Harden. "Not just anyone can help. The man I need to help me must be trustworthy, and strong, and able to keep his mouth shut."

Red Ambrose, listening, rumbled in his throat, but said nothing. Harden kept silent, too. It was coming now. She was going to talk. She was going to tell him what she was doing here. He wanted to know. Knowing this was desperately important to him.

"I want a guide," she said suddenly. "That was one reason why I went to Keogh, because I wanted a guide."

"A guide?" Harden choked. "A guide?"

"Yes. A guide who will take me into the land of serenity!"

Harden sat up in his chair, his eyes darting around the terrace to see if anyone had overheard her. Red Ambrose dropped his cigar and his hand dived into his pocket. There were certain things you did not mention on Mars. The land of serenity was one of them. And you never under any circumstances expressed a desire to go there.

"Why," Harden whispered, "why, if I may ask, do you want to go there?"

It was the last place on Mars where anyone in his senses would want to go.

"I want to find someone who is there," the girl imperturbably answered.

"Someone who is there!"

"Yes."

"And who," Harden tried desperately to keep his voice calm, "and who is this person you are seeking?"

"A man," the girl answered. "A man

by the name of Turner."

Red Ambrose almost swallowed his cigar. "By gad, Turner! By gad, Harden. By the Lord Harry, Harden! Can it be possible? Can it be possible?" He was pounding on the table with his fist.

"I want you to guide me into—you know where—and help me find Jimmy Turner," the girl continued. "Will you do it?"

Harden forced himself to control his voice. "Marion Gray," he whispered. "Marion Gray. By gad, it fits! I wonder, I wonder, Miss Gray, if you were ever known by the name of Marcia Groner? The initials are the same and—"

Startled surprise showed in the girl's eyes. "Why, yes," she said. "But how—I escaped from the—from you know where myself. That's why I came back here, to find the man I love. The business about the Ph.D. was all fake. I was really trying to— But how—how—*how did you know my name?*"

Harden's fingers went along his cheek, feeling of the scar, wondering how much that had changed his appearance. And he wondered if blonde hair could not be dyed red, and if freckles could not be removed?

"It won't be necessary for you ever to go into the—you know where, Marcia. Not now. Not ever. I'm Jimmy Turner, and I came back to Mars to try to rescue you, just as you came back to try to rescue me."

There was wonder in her eyes. The wonder grew and grew. Harden would always remember the wonder in her eyes, and the bounding flip-flop of his heart as she came into his arms.

Red Ambrose looked at them. And grinned and grinned. And then stole quietly away.

A SOLDIER GIVES HIS LIFE—YOU GIVE ONLY MONEY!