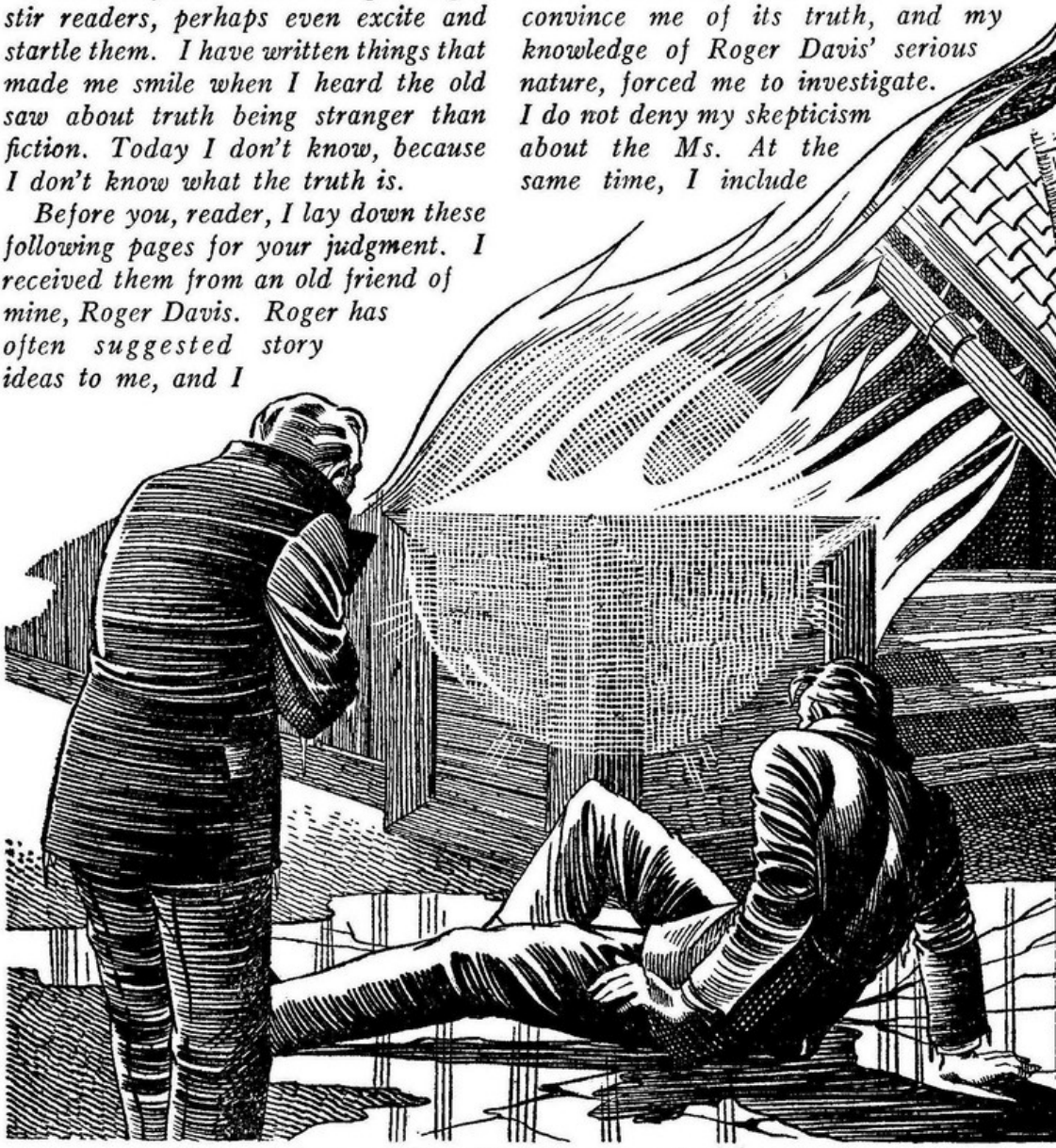
Where Is ROGER DAVIS?

By David V. Reed

IN my work as a writer, I have often written fiction which I hoped might stir readers, perhaps even excite and startle them. I have written things that made me smile when I heard the old saw about truth being stranger than fiction. Today I don't know, because I don't know what the truth is.

Before you, reader, I lay down these following pages for your judgment. I received them from an old friend of mine, Roger Davis. Roger has often suggested story ideas to me, and I know he has a fertile imagination. Its evident sincerity and desperation to convince me of its truth, and my knowledge of Roger Davis' serious nature, forced me to investigate. I do not deny my skepticism about the Ms. At the same time, I include



Cold flame licked out, and Cherry Street became a raging holocaust of fire

Weird, invisible Martians come to New York. Discovering their secret, Roger Davis is faced with an awful responsibility to Earth.

here, in the form of footnotes, the results of my investigation. They constitute practically my only contribution to these pages; I have divided the Ms. into sections and clarified the dialogue.

Let me add one thing. I have said I don't know what the truth is. But, if truth is that which corresponds to all other known facts, then you, reader, are about to begin a true story which has no parallel in man's experience.

D. V. R.

CHAPTER I

Roger Davis Begins His Story

I AM writing this account of the events of the past weeks from a little hotel in Hayman's Corners, Vermont. It was midnight an hour ago. The countryside is hushed and a summer breeze comes through my window. In all this peace, it is difficult to believe that a few miles from here, deep in the woods on the north shore of Lake Towanda, there still smoulder the embers that have burned my life away. I can still hear the thunder that shook the forest.

When I have finished these pages, I

will leave them sealed for delivery to you. I have addressed this to you for the sake of our old friendship, in spite of the fact that I know from every sensible point of view, you are the last person I should have sent this to. You are a fiction writer, and I have too many times aided you in the manufacture of your synthetic thrills. Because of that you may doubt me now. I beg you to believe me. At no time in my life have I ever wanted someone to believe me as much as I do now. Somehow, in these last hours, it seems terribly important for someone to know this and believe. I swear to you by everything holy that I am telling the truth.

But I must hurry. There are only a few brief hours until dawn, and then I must leave. . . .

TONIGHT makes a month and two days since it began. You may remember that I wrote you about the job I had taken with Jim Hendrix. When college let out for the summer, Jim went to New York, where he got a job as a barker for a sight-seeing bus. He would have taken anything, desperate as he was for money.

You know that I learned long ago that it was useless trying to get him to borrow from me, useless and stupid to offend his bitter pride and self-reliance. Here I was living easily on my inheritance, while he faced a relentless struggle to make ends meet. You know how uneven his temperament was, how he alternated between periods of hilarity and deepest gloom.

But for me there was nothing like his company; a continuation of those nights when we would sit awake in our dorm until morning, settling the world's ills as only young students can. When you graduated from school two years ago, Jim became my closest friend.

So when he got this job of his, I went along and managed to get hired by the same company as a reserve driver. Even then, Jim could not hide his resentment, feeling that I had taken the job as a lark, while he hated it. And then the pendulum swung back again, and the old Jim was there, the Jim who could have no enemies, and we got along very well.

On this night that I speak of, we had been working together for some two weeks. We had our bus parked along Forty-fourth Street just a few feet off Broadway. It was a Saturday night, early in the evening, and the mad rush of a New York week-end was just beginning. Already the twilight sky blazed with neon, the roar and rumble of automobiles and taxis was a steadily increasing din, people from all over the city were beginning to stream into Times Square. I stood with Jim while he called out for customers. He made an unusual picture of a barker. Tall, blonde, with lean features and somewhat cold eyes, his cultured voice added to his restrained portrait of a Broadway go-getter.

Pretty soon we had a customer, an out-of-towner who looked much the worse for a few drinks. I took him to the bus and sat him down in the last row. About ten minutes later I escorted two ladies to the bus. But the drunk was now sitting in the front seat, singing to himself. That was all it took; the women glanced at him and executed a neat about-face, deaf to my pleas.

"Hey," I turned to the drunk, annoyed. "Why didn't you stay put? Come on now, back you go."

"Who me?" said the drunk, happily. "Not me. S'too crowded back there."

There wasn't a soul in the bus except him. "You'll have to go back," I said. He looked at me unhappily, his eyes sad.

"Don' make me sit with'm," he said.

"They scratch me."

"All right," I responded wearily. I had handled his kind before. "I'll make 'em stop scratching you." Holding on to him, I led our first patron back to his seat. "Where are they?" I said. "Point 'em out and I'll give 'em hell." The drunk nodded his head agreeably and pushed his index finger forward. Seemingly in mid-air, he met with an obstruction. He pulled his finger back and put it into his mouth, and he looked unhappy enough to cry.

A little startled by what I took to be his skill in pantomime, I put my hand where the drunk had indicated. To my complete bewilderment I felt a hard surface, rough and glassy like rock salt, right there in midair! Again I put my hand there, and again. There was no mistaking it. The seat *looked* empty, its black leather upholstery completely . . . but . . . there was an indentation in it . . . as if something—

"Hey, Jim!" I yelled, swallowing hard.

IN a minute, Jim was beside me. "Put your hand here," I motioned. He looked puzzled, but when he put his hand where I had pointed, the expression he wore was absolutely ludicrous. As I had done, he put his hand back again, and looked at the empty seat. Then, from the way his eyes slowly began to open in a fixed stare, I knew he had seen the indentation.

The drunk rose to his feet. "I'm goin' up front," he announced. "Don't like to have people hiding and scratching me." And down the aisle he reeled.

Jim and I just stood there, looking at each other. I could count the beads of sweat that were forming on his forehead. My throat was suddenly dry. Finally, Jim said to me in a whisper, "You felt it too, Roger?" I nodded, forcing myself to look back at the seat.

"Don't be alarmed," said Jim, his voice quite hearty. "I hope you'll soon grow accustomed to it."

"What?" I jumped. But looking at Jim, and his mouth hanging open, I thought I must be going crazy. He was shaking his head slowly.

"No, you aren't going crazy," came a voice—and the voice was mine! But I hadn't said a word!

"I didn't say a single . . ." Jim began, but he couldn't go on.

"Of course you didn't. I said it." Jim's voice again! And his lips hadn't moved. But now we both turned to the back seat. The voices had come from there! "This is all very confusing," came Jim's voice from midair, "but it can be explained. Whenever I speak, unfortunately, it is in the voice that I last heard."

"Who are you?" I blurted at the air.

"A gentleman from Mars." My own voice answered.

That calm and simple statement took us a long time to comprehend.

"Why can't we see you?" I quavered finally, ready to accept anything.

"Please listen a moment. I arrived on your planet a short time ago, coming in a space ship from the Ganymede colony of Mars. I know nothing of your world, and I want to learn its ways, so I came to what appears to be your largest city. The strong gravity pull here fatigues me, and my few contacts with earthly people seems to, uh, perturb them somewhat. And since I want to see the city, what better way could I find than seeing it from one of these busses?"

Well, there it was—the most completely stupefying, insane situation imaginable: a man from Mars sitting invisible and composed in a sight-seeing bus on Broadway! All I could think of was, Lord, what an advertisement for the company! It is difficult to describe what I felt. One minute I was so exhil-

arated I wanted to shriek with laughter, the next I chained with such abject terror I could scarcely breathe. There was no denying the authenticity of the voices, our voices, we heard. You had to be there, to have felt that thing in air, to have heard it speak.

"And now, if you like," came that voice from mid-air, "I would have one of you move this vehicle. The other can stay here with me."

Beside me, Jim eased his stony fascination with a long sigh. His head wagged slowly as if he were floating in a dream world. "All right, Roger," he said, "take it. As far as I'm concerned, we've got capacity."

SO I took the bus to—of all places—Chinatown, wandering off course a dozen times. By the time I parked in the Bowery near the tiny winding streets of the oriental quarter, Jim came and sat down beside me. His iron tension had relaxed, and his customarily worried face wore a charmed smile. "Like a story book and a science lecture rolled into one," he declared, breathlessly. "What a night!" Together we went to the rear.

Before I could say a word, the Martian spoke in Jim's voice. "Roger Davis, quiet your fears. I mean no harm to you." All I did was to clear my throat, but the Martian, continuing, spoke in *my* voice. It was like listening to an echo that had its own will. "In due time," he said, and I jumped, because I had been on the verge of asking him how he knew my thoughts. "You asked why you cannot see me. I am enclosed in an envelope of glass which has the property of curving light rays around whatever it contains. Your own civilization has succeeded in bending light . . . " The voice paused. "I see you are less the student of science than your friend is. You do not even wonder how I am able to see, when all light rays curve around me. But if you will look here, an inch above the arm rest, you will see two small black dots. They are apertures in my envelope; some light enters there."

I looked and saw the dots, and an involuntary shudder swept through me. It was a peephole into nothing from my side, but on the other side, this invisible alien being was regarding us. There was something uncanny and evil about it. "I understand," came the soft voice. "We Martians have seen the Universe. To us a new life form is not odious."

"How can you read my mind?" I blurted. "It—it scares me."

"I stumbled across this little faculty of mine quite by accident. It seems that earthlings, using nervous energy for any purpose, create a tiny electrical discharge. Fortunately, the discharges of your mind impinge on me as intelligent thoughts and words. Otherwise, communication with you would have been a problem, for telepathy among Martians is unknown. . . . But I perceive you doubt my words. Why?"

I realized even at the time that the Martian's question was unnecessary. He was reading my mind and he knew. He knew that I was feeling as if something repellent was pawing me. It was as if something, far from reading my mind, was *absorbing* it. I didn't know why I doubted his words, why I felt a sudden chill pierce me, a deep foreboding for no coherent reason. But I knew that somehow this Martian knew my every thought, and even as I tried to reassure myself and think of something else, I knew that he knew that too, and that he knew that I knew that he knew —it was hopeless. I was playing poker with someone who knew every card I drew.

At that moment, we heard the drunk arguing with someone. That someone

proved to be Chuck Conners, the superintendent of the bus line. He stormed up the aisle. "You're fired, both of you!" he bellowed. "Where the hell do you come off to take out a wagon with one passenger in it, and that one a stew? I been standin' outside listenin' to you talkin' to yourselves, an' if you ain't drunk, you're crazy! Now get out!"

We walked out ahead of Conners with the drunk. As we stepped out of the bus, we heard Conners' voice inside, growling, "Get out of my way, you blubber-headed baboon." A second later, when Conners came tumbling out, a wild look in his eyes, we understood that it hadn't been Conners talking to himself, either.*

CHAPTER II

Hosts to the Martian

THAT was the way it began. Ridiculous? Sure it was, but I am telling it to you just the way it happened. It seemed funny as hell when it started, funny and unbelievable and a whale of a good time. Maybe that was why I couldn't see what was happening to Jim Hendrix and me—but that was later. As I said, we were having a good time.

For instance, there was that incident you may have read about, the one that happened in the Paramount Theatre. Jim and I went there with the Martian, buying three tickets as a sort of private joke. That was the week they had the famous radio ventriloquist, making a public appearance. It wasn't difficult to arrange having the Martian throw back the ventriloquist's voice. It kept flitting out from everywhere, aisles, balconies—and though the audience enjoyed it tremendously, Jim and I got more of a kick out of it than anyone, because we knew the performer's consternation wasn't a fake. We just sat there and howled, watching the expression on the poor fellow's face. He declared the next day that he knew as much about it as the man in the moon. He was wrong by millions of miles, but he was warm at that.*

In spite of the fun, and the intensely interesting discourses we held with the Martian, I was possessed by uneasiness. On the third or fourth night of the Martian's stay with us, for inevitably he came to our place, I lay awake in bed quietly, unable to sleep. Constantly the question kept recurring: why was he, if it was a he, here? And the answer that I had gotten when I had thought of asking came back . . . "all in due time . . . " I knew my every doubt was known, and it gave me a sort of fatalistic freedom to think what I liked. After a time, when sheer mental fatigue had lulled me, and I had almost fallen asleep, in the corner of our room I saw lights! They were tiny flashes, barely visible, but they kept flashing off and on for several moments, and emanating from more than one spot.

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* (Following is a transcript of the Record of Employment. I copied it from the files of the Metropolitan Sight-Seeing Corporation.—D. V. R.)
Davis, Roger. Reserve Driver. Employed 7/9/38. Discharged 7/25/38. *Reason:* Intoxication and neglect of duty.
Hendrix, James J. Announcer. Employed 7/7/38. Discharged 7/25/38. *Reason:* Intoxication and neglect of duty.
(Note: The Chuck Conners referred to is still in the employ of the M.S.-S.C. He refused to make any statement regarding the events of the night of July 25, 1938. He admitted only that he remembered it well, for reasons of his own.—D. V. R.)

* From *Variety,* July 27, 1938.
Gift of Gab Goes Ga-Ga!
Yesterday's Paramount audience, three thousand weak, with laughter, are scattered around New York today, swearing they saw America's ace one man dialoguer made to look like his dummy. Every time he tried to throw his voice a foot, somebody smashed it back to him from fifty yards away or further. They say that voice just materialized out of thin air. Sounds like hot air. A hearty huzzah for some smart press agent. What won't they think of doing with concealed loudspeaker systems next?—D. V. R.

The sight snapped me awake, and before I could think better of it, I sat up in bed. From that instant the lights stopped. What had it been? In that corner of the room our Martian guest was supposedly quartered. A possible explanation struck me even as I realized that if I was right, I had lost all hope of proving it—merely by thinking about it. And there was no way to stop my mind. In desperation, I took a large dose of sleeping tablets, and even then it was some time before I found sleep.

In the morning I made up my mind. Doggedly, because I knew my plans were not private, I went ahead. While looking over the humorous accounts of the occurrence at the Paramount in the newspapers, I said to the Martian, "How is it that you are able to speak as we do?"

That was when I began to notice what was happening to Jim. He looked up from his coffee, flustered. We had spoken a good deal about and with the Martian, but somehow we had never thought of asking that simple question, nor others which stemmed from it. The obvious lapse was even more surprising to Jim. "Yes, that is a question," he said, wrinkling his brow the way he always did when he was puzzled. "From what we know of Ganymede, or even Mars, there isn't atmosphere enough to carry a sound wave. I seem to recall you said there is no telepathy among Martians. Yet you must have a means of communication, and sound appears to be out."

"I speak because I have adapted my body to form a larynx. I have no specialized organs as you know them." The answer came soft and low now as it continued. "As to how I communicate with other Martians, the answer is simple: by light rays."

I almost jumped out of my skin at the words. Jim didn't know what to make of my action, and I waited. The Martian spoke on. "My 'voice' is composed of waves of light, most of them of a frequency too low to affect the human eye."

More and more! The Martian was saying just the things I needed to confirm a suspicion now painfully obvious. But proof was no longer possible. My plan was useless.

"The one of you known as Roger Davis," came the voice, "is at a loss. He wanted to get an instrument called a camera, and with it, to make photographs of my speech."

"What?" said Jim, incredulous. "Is that so, Roger?" I nodded. "But what for?"

"Because the Martian's voice of light rays, if it falls into the ultra-violet range, will photograph," I answered. "I know enough science to know that."

"But why?" said Jim.

"Let me answer that, please," came Jim's voice. "To you, Jim Hendrix, the question of my communicating is an academic one. But to Roger Davis, it appears to be vital. Last night, when I believed he was asleep, he saw my voice. Sometimes, as he correctly surmised, it does leave its ordinary range for a wavelength visible to humans as brief flashes."

"Yes," I said, determined to see it through, "and if that is so—"

"You are quite right," interrupted the Martian. "It means that I am not alone. There are three Martians in this room."

THIS was Jim's time to jump. He lifted his six feet of spare frame out of his chair and sank back limply, his gaze traveling from me across the emptiness of the rest of the room. There was a peculiar lack of luster in his eyes then, as if he was sleepy. The voice

continued. "It occurred to Roger Davis that he could not prove his contention, for since we knew it, we could merely refrain from communicating whenever he used this camera. That I have admitted the presence of three of us here is a compliment to you. We are convinced by now that there is no danger here for us."

"Danger?" I said.

"Yes," said the Martian, *but he answered using Jim's voice!* "We came to this planet not knowing what to expect. We might have found a race that would have destroyed us. Your world is old enough to have evolved a civilization much higher than its present one. At least six times has mankind started the upward climb; the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Babylonians, Chinese, Greek, Roman—all have perished, their brief hour futilely spent, achieving no permanence. But knowing nothing in advance, we hid our number in invisibility, so that if the one known were destroyed, two would remain to give our signal of failure. For that reason, also, we adopted the plan of answering in the same voice that addressed us, since it gave no clue of our number or whereabouts of the other two. You have noticed that I am using what you consider the wrong voice at present; I can use any I choose."

It was a moment before I spoke again. "Why do you stay with us now? Why not cast off this invisible guise and make yourselves known? We are two obscure and inconsequential people. Why don't you go to our statesmen, our scientists?"

"We find there is little to choose among you."

"But why are you here?" I asked, groping vainly for a clue. "You seem to have a purpose in coming here. And this signal of failure—"

"All in due time."

What an ominous ring those words had. In spite of every evidence of sincerity on the part of the Martians, a feeling of impending doom overwhelmed me, a tormenting foreboding I could not shake off. Was what I took to be sincerity, I thought, merely an evidence of the Martians certainty that they could not now be hindered? Did they confirm my suspicions because they knew I could do nothing to alter their plans, whatever they were? Or could none alter them?

"You are quite right," said a Martian calmly, in my voice.

CHAPTER III

Amazing Developments

FROM that moment on, things began to move swiftly, and more important to me, from that day Jim Hendrix and I began to grow apart, in spite of everything I could do to heal the widening breach. Some of the things which I mention from here may be familiar to you from newspapers. But it is what you have not read, what you cannot, any more than the rest of the world, possibly imagine, that you will find here.

As I say, Jim and I started quarreling. Our first argument was over money. It had occurred to us that while we were having an experience which was magnificent and thrilling and incomparable, that at the same time, there was an embarrassing shortage of funds due to the loss of our jobs. Jim wouldn't touch my money and I had resolved to live on what I could earn while I was with him. This cruel, matter-of-fact thought, striking Jim out of the clouds where he had been for days, angered him.

He paced the floor, his eyes burning with the old inner torture. "It isn't

right," he kept repeating, over and over. He seemed to be in the throes of an emotional upheaval. But there was a subtle difference in his attitude, and it was not lost on me. Where he had usually worried about himself, now he seemed to be dragging the whole world into it, the political system, economics, mankind.

In the midst of a long harangue, the door opened—and a pile of banknotes floated in through the air! Both of us gasped. "We trust that this is what you were so concerned about," came Jim's voice from mid-air.

"What is this?" Jim managed to say. We knew it was one of the Martians, but the money. . . .

This, you see, is the explanation of the disappearance of five thousand dollars from the Exchange Bank of Fifth Avenue, and the tellers who said that the money had just drifted away were not lying. The Martians had listened to

The money disappeared into thin air

Jim and gotten him the money—simply by going into a bank and taking it! *

"Jim," I said, when we knew the answer, "it's got to go back."

But Jim's face had a peculiar expression on it, something that was halfway between poorly concealed satisfaction and a slow, brooding cunning. He stood there, fingering the crisp bills and shaking his head. I knew what he was thinking; how simple it was for me to say the money had to go back. It didn't mean much to me. I hadn't had to fight the world for every penny I owned. There was a far away look on Jim, and it frightened me.

"No," he said. That was all. He wanted to keep the money.

We argued for a while, until my bitterness penetrated his trancelike state. Finally, with a touch of malice, he held the money out to me. "All right," he said. "Take the money back. What are you going to say?"

The argument went no further. Here was a situation with no solution. Even mailing the money back would have pointed the finger of guilt at the tellers. But the incident, despite the possible harm that might come to innocent men, was the least of my worries. More disquieting than the theft were the somber undertones that accompanied it. Jim Hendrix had glimpsed, as I had, the

* (Excerpt from the *New York Herald Tribune,* August 4, 1938. Page 3.)

BANK TELLERS HELD IN DISAPPEARANCE OF $5,000.00

Three senior employees of the Exchange Bank of Fifth Avenue were taken into custody yesterday as the Police Dept. and State banking officials prepared to investigate the disappearance of $5,000 in small notes, in the early hours of yesterday's business. Held in secret were the men's names, all of whom are reportedly men of excellent records and long experience. What puzzled the Police was the fact that all three declared that the money, lying in a pile, had "disappeared into thin air." They would not budge from that statement, after admitting the manifest absurdity of their story. Commissioner MacReady of the Twelfth Precinct . . .—D. V. R.

awful power that the Martians commanded. This was just a childish sample, an inadvertent, fumbling beginning.

FOR the next week, there was comparative peace between Jim and myself. At his insistence, we left our walk-up flat and moved into a luxurious apartment, and from there we made our trips about the city. Little by little we became intimate with the Martians. For the first time, we learned elementary things about them, things which as before, we had not thought of asking. I wondered about that, about the chances of the Martians being able not only to read minds, but to influence the way they thought.

What they told us, however, was unimportant. They ate prepared food pellets that they had brought with them; they breathed our atmosphere easily enough; they walked by means of pedicules that they formed from their viscuous tissues that seemed to have no definite shape. At least, there was no way of knowing if they had a shape or not; they never discarded the envelopes that shrouded them. And they never mentioned the whereabouts of their space ship.

Yet often, as we took them about the city and the surrounding country, they compared our Earth with their own world. They had not expected to find such open and beautiful lands where nature's bounty yielded unasked. In all this, whenever they spoke of their own arid plains, their dark and barren world whose surface was inhospitable to any life, I often shuddered at what I imagined was the proprietary tone of their voices. It made me feel as if I was a real estate agent for another world.

But when I spoke of this to Jim, when I was alone with him, he would laugh. "Nonsense. Do you think they're planning on settling down here in their invisible pants, millions of miles from their own kind?" And then he snorted, adding, "It wouldn't be such a bad idea if one of them at least, did stay. Think what they could teach us."

"To what end?" I said. "I'm careful what I want to be taught."

Jim shrugged. "So is a savage when he meets a civilized person. He doesn't realize his own ignorance, his inability to judge."

That was the way he spoke those days. There was no meeting of our minds. There seldom had been, with his dour outlook on life, but usually the fruits of our divergent opinions had been long discussions. Now Jim didn't argue any more. When I asked a question, he answered, and his manner indicated that he had grown impatient with discussion. Sometimes, listening to him, I wondered if it was really Jim Hendrix speaking. His lips would be moving, but the thoughts seemed alien . . . otherworldly . . .

Then came the day that we went to the slums. Going there had been Jim's idea. He addressed the Martians while apparently speaking to me. Almost from the first, I was startled by what he was saying. "Here, in utter squalor and misery, a million beings called human manage to exist. These hovels are their homes, and in them breed enough disease germs to ravage a continent. The government has tried to wipe them out and set up new houses, but a government is slow, and the owners of the property jealously guard it, waiting for a chance to profiteer on human suffering." He went on like that, and then in the heart of that miserable district, he paused and delivered an eloquent, scorchingly bitter speech.

Suddenly I felt a numbing cold seize me, and my breath almost froze in my

throat. In front of me, a muddy puddle of water became ice at my feet while I watched. Then, from beside me somewhere, a small streak of flame hissed out, thin as a pencil, and it played directly on the houses before which we stood. Instantly, a mass of flames roared into life. The cold stopped and an inferno of crackling, leaping fire began to devour the old houses.

Moments later, safe at a corner where we had fled, Jim and I watched the fire engines pouring into the district. I remember catching Jim's eye, and seeing there the glance of comprehension. In my utter confusion, it wasn't until later that it struck me, more violently than any physical blow. On all sides there was panic. Whole blocks were going up in flames. No one knew how many people were trapped in those houses. I saw men and women hurling themselves from the smoke and fire, clutching children, dying on the pavements. It was a scene of indescribable anguish, each horrible moment more sickening than the one before. There was death on every hand, innocent death of infants and mothers and fathers and invalids. The hand of Death had risen to smash hundreds. It seemed as if the world was filled with the great wailing that rose up, as if the soul of that wretched, gutted neighborhood had, in dying, groaned an immense, unutterable, unforgettable groan.

WE were home when I pounded the truth out of Jim. For more terrible than all of it, I felt that Jim knew. He was as sick as I, but there was that look about him again. I grabbed him and pulled him close to me. "Tell me what you know about this!" I shouted, feeling every nerve in me tense to the breaking point, my head spinning dizzily.

"The Martians did it," he gasped.

I smashed him across the face. "You knew!" I screamed. "You knew!" Jim was my best friend, but in my fury I might have killed him then. I held his throat in my hands—and then it was as if my strength had been sucked from me, and a great weakness overcame me. I fell to the floor, crying like a baby.

After a time, when I had calmed, I heard the whole story. There was a fiendish twist to it, for the explanation came from a Martian in Jim's voice. ". . . the evil had to be removed. What I did was to draw together all the heat in the atmosphere, concentrate it, and discharge it at once. . . . "

I heard little else of the story. They had drawn the heat out of the air! Was this so very different from the thoughts they drew from human minds, from the strength I had felt leave me a short while before—from the change in Jim, where his whole being was seemingly being drawn from him. "This little faculty of mine . . . " the Martian had said, speaking of his ability to read minds. They were like sponges, inconceivably powerful sponges, *absorbing* what they wanted!

I remembered how I had felt the first time we met them. And in their own words, they had no organs, no shape; they formed them. They had known of our past civilizations, though we were the first humans they had encountered, and we had said not a word about it. They had known simply by pulling it out of my mind, because there was nothing I knew, let alone consciously thought, which they could not get. And so they had gotten Jim, knowing that

* Roger Davis evidently refers here to the Cherry Street fire, where more than four hundred perished. Almost three square blocks were completely burned on that black Friday of August 12, 1938. The files of any American newspaper carry the details. The newsreels and radio reported it extensively, and a New York paper started a relief fund for the victims. The investigation which followed at the time proved nothing.—D. V. R.

in that poor distraught boy there was fertile ground for their work. Jim was theirs; he had been certain he understood the fires even before he had known.

Slowly I realized that Jim himself was now speaking to me, his face pale and bloodless. "You're taking it too hard. Why don't you look at it from a broad view? It was a hellhole, and the people who lived there were lost. Their deaths were merciful releases from horrible lives. Where they died, a new world will spring up. . . . "

"Couldn't you wait until you had that new world to give them?" I said, dully. "Did you have to kill them first?"

He started answering me before he caught the import of my words. "One can't build on a rotten foundation," he began, and then, halting, he added, "but *I* didn't do it. *I* didn't kill anyone." He was troubled at the thought, and he looked to the empty air beside him as if for help.

"You agree with it," I said, hopelessly. "Your words were an invitation to destruction."

"Yes," came Jim's voice. Jim wasn't speaking. "His approach was direct. It is the only answer."

"But we are human!" I cried. "I don't expect you to understand that, with your mind of a—a—"

"A sponge?" came the taunting answer from mid-air.

"A sponge!" I hurled. "A damnable sponge from another world! We know our world and its problems. What does this mass murder do? There is suffering enough. . . . "

"There will be an end to suffering soon." It was Jim himself who spoke now. Feverishly I thought how little difference it made whether he spoke or was spoken for. "There has been muddling enough. If man is still a child, he must be taught. And he will be taught!" Jim rose as he spoke. The color had come back to him, there was something strong and resolute about him. He had no more misgivings about his own part in the tragedy. There was no more wavering in him. He seemed to be in a terrible state somewhere between sleep and waking, and his eyes were on an unseen horizon.

"You're mad!" I shouted, lunging for him.

Halfway toward him, I fell to the floor. Something had taken the power out of my legs. I was helpless. It seemed as if an eternity passed while I lay there, listening to voices debate over my life, and all the voices were Jim's. Then I heard, "No, he is my friend," and realizing that Jim had said it, and with those words saved my life, I wanted to die. Then, bit by bit, the world receded and I floated down into the black vault of a bottomless abyss.

CHAPTER IV

Martian Misdeeds

IT was toward evening when I regained consciousness. I was alone. Weakly I rose to my feet and stumbled to the table. A strange headline on a newspaper there gripped my attention. COUNCILMAN VELDON DIES ON FLOOR OF CHAMBER LEADING REVOLT AGAINST CHAIRMAN. I looked to the dateline, unbelieving. A week had passed! Impossible! *

Quickly I glanced through the story. Councilman Veldon had been struck down by heart disease while fighting against the Chairman of the Council, who for some reason of his own had tried to disband the session of the Council, which had run extraordinarily long

* *Note:* Roger Davis here quotes almost verbatim the headline on the *New York Times* for August 19, 1938.—D. V. R.

in a fierce taxation fight. The Chairman, Myron Clark, was quoted as denying having said any of the things attributed to him—in spite of the undeniable evidence of a packed Chamber gallery.*

Do you remember that? Of course you do. But did it strike you that there was a deadly parallel between this headline story and a humorous account of a ventriloquist who had also denied saying things attributed to him, an account published a few weeks previous? Was this ghastly similarity an accident? But what could one make of a Chairman denying the statements that so many had heard him make?

I heard the door of the apartment open, and turning, I saw Jim come in. His face was serious as he sat down on the other side of the table. There was something hurried about him. He was obviously a man with many things on his mind, and pressed for time. It was an effort for him to compose himself sufficiently to sit quietly while he spoke to me.

"I see you've guessed," he said, pointing to the newspaper. "You've been unconscious more than a week. That was five days ago." He turned his eyes away from me as he continued. "Next time I will be unable to save you. They want you out of the way."

"Out of the way—for what?" I whispered.

Jim rose and began to pace the floor, his words coming slowly, and then sometimes pouring from him. "Roger, the Martians are emissaries from their world. In a sense, they aren't even Martians. Eons ago, they were forced to leave Mars when the planet grew cold and lifeless. There was no planet near them with life enough to offer a haven for all, save ours, and they feared us because we were an older world, and as they thought, advanced enough to annihilate them. So they scattered about the universe in colonies. Always through the ages, wherever they were, whether deep under the icy fastness of Ganymede where these three are from or on the surface of the mighty seas of Uranus, they dreamed of the time when the Martians would be a united race again. Like most dreams, it seemed destined never to be realized.

"And then, from these dreamers rose three courageous souls, willing to risk their lives scouring the universe for a new place. They came here to determine once and for all whether it was possible for the Martian race to unite on our planet. So they came, as they said, fearfully. They found here an atmosphere they can breathe by thinning it a bit, the food they require, and in addition, vast elemental resources. And no danger."

He paused there and looked at me carefully. "I don't know how this will

* Following are several excerpts which I culled from leading New York newspapers, all commenting on the event which Roger Davis explains in the body of his Ms.

From Heywood Broun, in his column, *It Seems To Me*, in the *New York World-Telegram*, August 21, 1938.

". . . not only was I present throughout the session until Mr. Veldon's tragic death ended it, but I remained to speak with Chairman Clark afterward. I, among hundreds of others, distinctly heard Mr. Clark denounce the Council, call it a pack of fools, and then announce that the session was ended. That started the fight, which Mr. Veldon led. The issue of the tax, which precipitated the fight, is not important any longer. What is important is that a major official of the City of New York attempted to run roughshod over his opposition in a dictatorial manner. Most astonishing, and probably the death blow to Myron Clark's political ambitions, is the fact that he immediately denied having said any of the words attributed to him. He denied it with such vehemence as to prove a testimonial to his histrionic abilities. . . ."

From Arthur Krock's column in the *New York Times*, August 22, 1938. ". . . absurd for him to deny saying the things hundreds heard. . . ."

From an editorial in the *New York Post*, August 20, 1938. ". . . Clark's denials are the ravings of a lunatic. Only a lunatic would have tried ending the session in the first place. . . ."

hit you, Roger," he said, "but the truth of the matter is that they have decided to come here. They intend to send for the others, perhaps five hundred million of them. They're going to do things for us, make our world over, eliminate the weaklings, the unfit. . . . "

"NO," I said, in a stupor, "no, no." I couldn't understand what he was telling me. I sat there pounding the table with my fist, hammering the newspaper, trying to comprehend his insane words. This was August, 1938. The country was harvesting crops, getting ready for a football season, preparing to vote for new Congressmen soon. What was this talk of Martians coming from space to take over our world? I realized then that I had been talking out loud, for Jim answered me.

"They're going to take it over, as you put it," he said. "They'll make a great people of us." There was a fierce light in his eyes as he spoke, pointing to the newspaper. "This was a mistake. I warned them against it."

"So they killed Councilman Veldon?"

"The city had been standing on its head through these stormy sessions. One of the Martians, using the Chairman's voice, tried to end the bickering and disband the Council. A revolt broke out. They thought killing the leader would end it. It didn't."

"Of course it didn't! Did they think they'd find submission?"

"There will have to be submission sooner or later," said Jim, gravely. "The Martians can do what they like with us. But if we submit, they'll make us great. And you and I, Roger, we'll be mighty and rich and honored!"

"Puppet dictators of the real dictators! Great, perhaps, in our treachery, rich in the power bought with our people's blood, and honored by no one, not by thieves or murderers or traitors who would be noblemen by comparison."

"You're wrong," Jim said firmly. "What do I care for the lives of those unfit to live? History will be my judge!"

"And if history proves you wrong?"

"It won't." There was finality in his words. "Three Martians are not enough to do what we plan. We want to avoid these half-measures. They're going out to bring others and I'm going with them. Make your choice. Do you want to come? You can't remain behind . . . and live."

"Jim," I said, "can't you see what you're helping them to do? This world of ours is far from perfect, but it's ours to improve as we want, as we can. It never has been easy. Mankind progresses slowly, slips back, but goes on again. And he can go on, if only he has his liberty. No tyrant has ever been able to take away liberty for long. But these Martians, aliens, unable to understand humans and human frailty, what do we mean to them? They can't feel emotion or compassion. If they come, the world will have as its master a tyrant it can never overcome, a race whose power—"

"Power!" Jim echoed. "Power!" That word alone had found a responsive chord in him. Standing there, looking at me, he was a man apart from all mankind. The world that had misused him, as he had often claimed, had through an unbelievable arrangement of circumstances, bred in him a monster to destroy it. Jim Hendrix, my best friend, had been warped, pitifully mis-shapen into this semblance of a human being who would trade a world for his own gain. There was no conscience left in him. He knew so little of it that he thought to appease mine by babbling about bettering the world, while for him, only the lust for might remained.

"DO you want to come with me?" Jim had grown impatient. "You know the alternative."

"My death."

"Yes." There was scarcely any regret in his voice as he faced me vibrant and strong. I looked about me, and if I had found a weapon, I would have attacked him again before the Martians could stop me. But I didn't know where they were. "You needn't be afraid to speak," said Jim, mistaking the reason for my looking around. "We're alone." Then, as I rose quickly and stepped toward him, he pulled out a revolver. "Alone except for this," he said, waving the blunt end of the gun at me. "For the last time. With me or against me?"

There was only one answer. My death, little as it meant to me, would accomplish nothing. I had to play for time, to go along and pray that somewhere my chance would come. The Martians had been afraid of danger; they were not invulnerable. I nodded my resignation.

"Good," said Jim. He smiled at me grimly. "I have a deep affection for you," he added, "in spite of the fact that you're playing for time."

His divining words so startled me that I jumped, and Jim's laugh filled the room. Was he too able to read my mind? But no, it must have been an evident game I was playing, even to a madman. For he was mad; we would have had a learned name for him in college . . . and wildly, a possible solution flashed across my mind. Somewhere, somehow, I would have this last chance. But I needed time—a few hours.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Out into space for three days to give a signal."

"Into space? But how?"

"A space ship. How else?" Jim replied sarcastically.

A space ship. It was a story. It wasn't real. "Where is it?" I heard myself asking from the depths of that unreal world.

Jim Hendrix laughed. "Why?"

"I must have a few hours to myself," I said. "I want to put my estate in order. Something may go wrong." I held my breath. If Jim could read my thoughts, or if there was a Martian present somewhere—

He laughed again. "Nothing will go wrong. But you can settle that precious estate of yours. Meet me at midnight at Grand Central." He stepped toward the door, then held back. "I hope you appreciate the fact that any mention of this will land you securely in an observation ward. And we won't have any trouble finding you when we return." He was still laughing when he left.

CHAPTER V

A Signal in Space

PROFESSOR WORTH looked at me peculiarly, fingering his white moustache. "I don't think I understand you, Davis," he said, perplexed. "Is this a practical joke?"

"Did you ever know me to joke when I was a student in your classes? There isn't time to explain," I answered wearily. "It took me so long to find you, even knowing that you were to be at the hospital for the summer recess. You've got to believe me. I'm in dead earnest. If the money isn't—"

"No, no," he interjected, hastily. "You think money will do everything. It isn't the money at all." He furrowed his great brow and his deep black eyes were troubled. "You say that I've got to follow these instructions of yours implicitly?"

"Word for word as I've written them

here. One slip. . . ." I grinned wryly. "More than you know depends on this."

"I'll do it." Professor Worth pressed a desk button.

"Don't forget," I said. "When it's over, you're to follow me to Grand Central and go where I go. From then on. . . ."

"I wish you'd finish your sentences," said Worth, with a shrug. "You make it sound so dramatic. Too damned dramatic." His assistant entered. I forced a laugh and sat back.

I REMEMBER of what followed only that I found myself in a cab entering the Terminal when it was almost midnight. Jim was waiting for me. As we went through the gates, I noticed that he gave the station conductor three tickets for the two of us. Only too well did I realize why he laughed at the conductor's question; there was a Martian with us, and Jim was continuing the little joke we had started weeks before. I remember that I had a slight negative reaction, knowing there was a Martian with us, and then it passed.

On the train, Jim said to me, "I see you've come around a bit since we parted."

Sincerely, I answered, "It isn't easy, but I'm beginning to agree."

Jim smiled. "Our friend here says you're telling the truth. I'd advise you to continue."

At that moment, I saw Professor Worth come striding down the train. He nodded icily to Jim and me, and continued on.

"Did you see who that was?" Jim exclaimed. "Old man Worth. And didn't he appear cordial!"

"Maybe he's in some kind of trouble," I ventured. "He was supposed to be at Bellevue all summer, and here he is, heading north."

And so passed the two most critical moments of the weeks that had gone by—but I didn't know it! Every word I said was the truth. I spoke to Jim honestly, and the Martian was not wrong when he told Jim so. When Professor Worth appeared, I was as surprised as Jim, and as unable to explain his stand-offish attitude.

FROM then on we rode in comparative silence. Hours later, we got off the train at a little station in Hayman's Corners, Vermont. Soon Jim hired a car and we set off.

On the densely wooded northern shore of Lake Towanda, several miles from town, Jim stopped the car, obviously under directions which I could not hear, as I had not heard previous things the Martian had said to Jim. We got out of the car and began to make our way into the woods. In another few minutes we came on a clearing.

To one side of the clearing, well hidden under piles of shrubs and branches, was a ship. There is no other word for it. It was perhaps forty feet long and it tapered at both ends from a maximum height and width of twenty feet. That was all it was, a fat cigar made of a pale green metal that reflected hardly any light from the brilliant moon above.

"Welcome," my own voice called out from the clearing. "We see that the reluctant one has finally decided in his own favor." It may seem odd to you when I say that I was glad to hear those other Martians, and glad to see the ship. But it is the truth.

In what seemed to be the unbroken continuity of the ship's side, a small, triangular door opened, and falling, it formed a sort of gangplank. It was my first clue to the size of the Martians; they couldn't have been very large and used that small door with comfort. From the interior of the ship, a pleasantly dif-

fused light streamed out into the already graying night. Stepping over the branches, eagerly I entered the ship.

The whole interior was a confusing arrangement of machinery. There seemed hardly an inch unoccupied by wheels, levers, lights that gave off a luminescent glow, dials, meters, tubes. Jim echoed my own burst of admiration and amazement. Little as I understood it, it was plainly the work of engineers with a staggering amount of ability—if it was real. I always had to remind myself it was real; there was Jim and I, and voices which were ours and weren't ours, and a ship that might have been a dream.

"It isn't as complicated as it looks," said one of the Martians. "If one pressed down the blue lever on your right, and then in quick succession that whole board of keys, the ship would of itself tilt upward and then rise. It would go perhaps a million miles into space on that operation alone. We had planned to have everything ready in case of failure. One of us, surviving, could have brought the ship out far enough to give the signal of failure, and the quest would have been abandoned."

"And what was that signal?" Although the voice was the same, I saw that Jim had spoken.

"Once in space, we need all three to operate the ship," came the answer. "But one would be enough to throw in this large switch here. This one is green, and the natural color of the ship would have blazed like a miniature star in space, signaling our failure. But the one we will use tomorrow night, when we are scheduled to leave, is this red one beside it. Red for success, red to call other Martians. But I see that Mr. Davis pays us the compliment of marveling at our engineering."

And marveling I was, at their ingenuity, in spite of the fact that Jim, his body trembling at the thought, said to me, "All this you would have lost for a nebulous thing called freedom, for millions unfit for it. This is the way emperors dreamed of living!"

"Now," I heard my voice say, "you earthlings must leave. There remains work for us here. Outside you can make your beds and sleep, if your bodies require it."

At mention of the word sleep, something in me stirred, and I felt for the first time a heavy fatigue sweep over me. "I'd like to go back to town," I said wearily. "I'm much too tired to sleep out in the open. I'll take the car and stay at the hotel."

There was silence for a moment, as the Martians evidently probed my mind. "Quite so," came the words, at length. "Return early."

With the voice of a Martian guiding, I started back to the car. In the morning light I saw that an immense swath had been cut through the thick woods, leading to the clearing. That was where the ship had come, leaving a trail. It must have come down in the dead of night, and making no noise, to have remained unmolested even in the mountains.

THE sun beat down warmly when I drove into town. For some reason, I inquired for the most expensive hotel in town. The man who answered me laughed. "Ain't but one," he said, "an' that's no hotel. I guess you'll have to go to Constable Jefferies' place right over there."

Constable Harry Jefferies proved to be a gaunt, kindly New Englander. With pleasant ceremoniousness, he asked me to sign an old register. It was fortunate he did so, for there on the page stood the name Harrison Worth. Immediately, remembrance flooded my brain, and hurriedly I found

Professor Worth's room and went in.

I saw at once he hadn't slept a wink. "Davis, what is this—"

I cut him off. "Did your assistant drive my car up here?" I asked.

"I phoned New York the minute I sneaked off the train. Your car will be here in several hours." I breathed easier. Worth regarded me speculatively. "I've half a mind to go to the police," he said. "My assistant phoned me back an hour ago. One of the cases in your car opened. He says it's full of carefully packed dynamite."

"True." I returned his gaze.

"I know it's true," said the old man in a voice of steel. "You don't have to say so as if you were revealing something. And if you're being honest, tell me what this is all about."

There was no way out of it. The old Professor was looking at me in silence, worried, sleepless. He had gone to great trouble to help me. But how could I begin? "Professor Worth," I said, "I'll tell you. But promise me one thing: whether you believe me or not, you'll continue helping me."

"I'll give no such promise," he said slowly. "But tell me, and perhaps I'll do it in spite of disbelieving you."

So I told him, as briefly as I could, and when I had finished, he rose and walked to the window. The warm summer sun came slanting through to play on the wrinkles engraved on his face.

"If you are lying," he said, after a time, "I have just heard the most complex and magnificent lie of all time."

"Don't you see?" I said. "That was why I asked you to hypnotize me, to submerge my feelings and make me believe the things I wrote down for you. I had to take that chance."

"These . . . these Martians of yours, who absorb minds—why couldn't they go deep enough to reach the things I buried in your subconscious?"

"I don't know," I said simply. "I gambled. I remembered that I had first seen them speak to each other when I was half asleep. Evidently there were states of mind which did not bring on a reaction in them. So I was willing to take a gamble. If they could read only the surface, the conscious mind, I was safe. If not, I just wouldn't have been here now."

"But what a delicate and ingenious chain," the Professor muttered to himself. "It might have miscarried at any point. First, I made you lose your objections to their plan; then I had you believe in another. Third, I had you forget ever having seen me at the hospital. Fourth, all thought of a violent plan of your own was removed from your mind. Fifth, I gave you two post-hypnotic suggestions: one, at the mention of the word sleep, you were to seek out the most expensive hotel in town; the other, when you saw my name on the register, all this was to return to your mind. . . ." He was speaking to himself. "Dear Lord," I heard him say, "let him be lying. Let this be a joke played on a gullible old man. . . ."

I WENT to him and took his arm. His aged eyes pierced me, and then he gripped my hand. "What if they followed you?" he asked.

"We wouldn't be alive now. They never doubted what they read in my mind." But despite myself, I turned slowly and surveyed the room, half expecting at any moment to hear my own voice materializing from nowhere.

I turned back to the Professor. "What next?" he said, quietly. "Where did you get the dynamite, and for what?"

"I got it figured out," I said. "Remember you said yesterday that I believed money could do everything. I'm going to attach a concussion cap, load it in my pockets and go back there a

living bomb. And you're going to set me off."

"How?" the old man whispered.

"First, you'll make me forget all this. Second, you'll tell me I have no pockets, and I won't have them—until I need them. When I hear the words that express their readiness to leave, let me immediately take the dynamite out of my pockets and throw it."

"But it means your death."

"Perhaps."

"And what of your friend Jim Hendrix? Is he too, to die?"

"No." I hadn't thought of that. I was ready to die because it was the only answer. But Jim had to leave here alive. In time this would be but a feeble memory to him, half believed. He would recover and forget. He had to live. "Let me first send him to the car on the road," I said. "He'll be safe there."

The old man nodded. "Soon my assistant will be here with your car," he said. Then he motioned me to the table, and we had breakfast brought up, all the while speaking to each other as if we hadn't a care in the world.

It was late in the afternoon when I left town, remembering only that I had slept for several hours, resting uneventfully in a little hotel. As I drove through the calm countryside with its little houses perched near the road, waving back at people, I had no misgivings about the momentous journey upon which I was soon to embark. I believed I was going, that I was in agreement with Jim at last.

Soon I came to a bend in the road that seemed familiar and I stopped the car. A moment later, Jim came crashing through the underbrush that lined the road.

"You're late," he said, guiding me back. His face was glistening with perspiration, and he hardly glanced at me. There were too many things on his mind. Already, I could see, he was living years ahead, envisioning the things that were to come after this incredible day.

The Martian ship lay where it had been the night before. Its pale sheen glittered in the sun, mingling its green with gold. There was no sign of life around it, and save for Jim and myself, the clearing was deserted and silent. Lackadaisically, I sat down under a tree. Then, near my feet, I saw the grass pressed down, and Jim turning to one side as if he were listening to someone.

"I can't understand you at all," he turned back to me, a pleased smile on his face. "The way you carried on at the beginning, and now look at you. I'm trembling with anticipation, excitement, call it what you like—and you're just sitting there. And it isn't just an act," he added, grimly, "I know that."

"You're in pretty thick with our Martian friends," I said.

He nodded and a flush mounted his face. "This is only the beginning, the very beginning," he said, looking past me as if I weren't there. "You don't know anything of the plans we made during the time you were unconscious back in New York. We traveled around then . . ." His voice died away and he had to clench his fists to control himself. I smiled, understanding the way he felt. We sat together quietly, saying nothing.

SOME time later, the triangular door in the space ship opened, and as if it had been a signal, Jim went into the woods and came out with a large paper box. "Food," he announced. "I had to go down the road to a house and buy it. Funny, isn't it, the way it slipped my mind that we'd have to eat?" I helped him gather dry brush for a fire.

Then, fumbling through his trousers, Jim called, "Got a match?"

For a split instant I stood there looking at him blankly. Now as I recall the moment, I realize how near the end I was. But at the time, all I did was stare at Jim. I couldn't look for a match—because I didn't remember having any pockets!

"Well, look, will you?" said Jim, regarding me. Then, suddenly I chilled and a brittle, frosted leaf floated down from the tree overhead. A little streak of flame burst from the air near the pile of brush, and the fire was started! Startled for an instant, Jim began to laugh the next minute, understanding that the Martian had performed the slight menial task for him. "Matchless would be a better word for it." And I laughed with him.

We were halfway through the meal when Jim, in the midst of our rather jolly conversation, happened to say, "Well, in a few hours it'll be night. We're almost ready to start."

For a reason I didn't understand at the time, my mind was all at once in utter confusion. My hands shot into my jacket pockets and stayed there, then slowly withdrew. What had happened, as I now see it, was that Jim had expressed the thought that was supposed to start me—but he had qualified it with an *almost!* I was neither here nor there!

"What's the matter?" said Jim. "You almost choked on your food."

"There's . . . something for you . . . in the car," I replied, lamely, beginning to react. "A letter for you . . ."

"Letter? Here?"

"It came in the city. I—I forgot to tell you."

"Where in the car is it?" said Jim, wondering what it was all about.

"On the seat."

"On the seat?" he echoed.

It was utter nonsense, you see. What I was saying didn't make sense, and I knew it as I said it, but I had to say something, anything that would get Jim away. For, from the moment he had mentioned starting, he had begun a cycle which would be completed in a few moments.

Perplexed, Jim started for the car. At that precise instant, from near the space ship his own voice called to him. "Don't be gone for any length of time. We are ready to leave."

And in the same instant, having heard the key words again, with Jim out of the way, I jumped to my feet, plunged my hands in my pockets and hurled the dynamite! All I remember of that horrible second is Jim's face staring at me as my arm swung down. He had turned back as the voice called, and started back a step or two—and he was almost directly in line with my aim!

The ground trembled at my feet, huge columns of dust and smoke rose, and an immense oak came tumbling down. That is my last recollection of the scene: the topmost branches of the oak spinning toward me, and my falling in their midst.

MY eyes opened on twilight. Not far away a fire was burning in the brush and licking against the trunk of the fallen oak. Then I became aware of a hand near me, and moving to one side, I saw Jim lying there. His face was covered with blood—blood that was slowly seeping from his chest. He had been torn apart by the blast. As I struggled to rise, I saw that I was no longer under the oak that had fallen on me. Someone had taken me out of the path of the fire.

I bent over Jim. He was dying. What little breath there was left in him came fitfully, and his face was contorted in pain. "Jim!" I cried, suddenly re-

membering everything. "You were at the car!"

Feebly, his head rolled to one side and he grimaced. The words would not come. Then suddenly I heard his voice, quite plainly, but looking at him, I knew it was the voice of a Martian!

"Your plan miscarried, admirable as it was."

"You live?" I cried.

"For a few moments more, perhaps. You were fortunate. All three of us were together."

"Fortunate!" I said bitterly, looking down at Jim.

"More than you know. We absorbed most of the shock, but it was enough to kill us. As for Jim Hendrix, had he survived, his life would have been worthless, as yours is now. In dying, while he fought for breath, he struggled to pull you clear of the fire. We never understood the relationship you call friendship, but now we know that to an earthling it is an admirable weakness. It is too bad it was wasted."

The words were coming more slowly, and they were calm, studied.

"It wasn't wasted," I answered. "You're gone, dead!"

"Death means nothing. Had we lived, we would have taken part in the remaking of your world. For us to die in the cause of the Martian nation is enough. You could not understand our plans. Even now you are thinking we were brutal, emotionless. No matter. Your world will be remade by others of our nation."

There was no rancor, no hatred in that voice. It came from the air, from a being I had never seen, like a brooding wind, filled only with a deep contempt. In their own way, these Martians had been creatures of lofty intellect. There was no revenge in them.

"No revenge," agreed the voice. "I am the last of the three, and I can kill you where you stand, even as I am disintegrating like the two who went before me. But there is no need to kill you. You must live to regret, and regret one day you will, when you see our miracles. For one thing you did not know. Our vessel stands here undamaged, but I am too weak to reach it. But we foresaw the possibility of our being unable to take it back into space. A bad landing would have disabled us even though there was safety here. When another of your earth days passes without any signal from us, a second expedition will take flight. Mars is not without its pioneers."

Jim was stirring, his lips parted. His hand lifted weakly on mine. His eyes opened for the last time, clear and shining. "Sorry," he whispered. His hand fell from mine, clutching at the earth he had been so ready to betray, and under which he would be buried. I wept like a child. A greater price than I had been willing to pay had been taken from me and I had failed.

I sat there until darkness came on, and then wearily I rose. "Are you alive?" I called out.

There was no answer. Jim's voice had been his own at the last. Somewhere nearby the Martian who had spoken to me had joined his fellows, disintegrating himself, leaving no vestige on this alien world. . . .

IT wasn't until I was driving back to this little Vermont village, numb with despair, that I thought of it. Out of my daze and disinterestedness in life, came that thought which had kept me going before. There were others.

When I got back to the hotel, Constable Jefferies asked me a lot of questions. The blast of the dynamite had been heard for miles, and a party would set out in the morning. My clothes were torn, my hands and face cut and

bleeding. I put him off. Professor Worth had left in the afternoon. I went up to this room of mine and began to write this account.

It is almost dawn now; I heard a rooster crow. The moon is already paling in the sky. These hours the thought has taken form.

There is only one thing to do. The Martian ship lies intact, ready to start its voyage to the heavens at a touch. I remember the directions. I am going back to the woods. There I will bury Jim. And then I will take the ship aloft, to give the signal of failure.

(NOTE: I have included here, at the end of the Ms., the rest of the corroborating notes. They follow. D.V.R.)

From the *Hayman's Corners Free Press,* August 27, 1938.

MYSTERY BLAST EXCITES COUNTY
Fresh Grave Found at Site
Police Hunt Roger Davis

Shortly before nine o'clock yesterday evening, a severe explosion on the north shore of Lake Towanda, in the woods owned by Amy Cargill, shook the countryside and was heard for miles. This morning, Constable Jeffries, leading a party, located the site of the blast. Over a hundred trees had been felled there. They looked more as if a hammer had knocked them over, a pretty big hammer to be sure, than an explosion caused by dynamite, as the Constable says. The ground around one portion of a clearing looked scorched, but there weren't any signs of a large fire.

To add to the mystery, a freshly dug grave was found on the spot. In it was the body of a man believed to have been James J. Hendrix, a college student. He had been seen in town by Tom Ellery, who hired out a car to him. The car was found in the road nearby. Also, Mrs. Stevens, who lives nearby, claimed to have sold the dead man some groceries during the day, but nobody believes Mrs. Stevens since she identified the governor's son as a bank robber two years ago.

Constable Jeffries declared that the hunt was on for another student named Roger Davis. This Davis spent the night under the Constable's nose, but the Constable doesn't believe in disturbing guests. He still has the autograph of the suspected killer in his register, as well as another name about which he is keeping mum. He is not saying a word about a large blue roadster parked in his stable. Said roadster was driven up yesterday by another mystery man, and it is supposed to be full of dynamite. Meanwhile the investigation goes on merrily, while the Constable wonders if it is legal to fill out the death certificate for James J. Hendrix.

From the *New Haven Courier,* August 30, 1938.

Professor Harrison Worth was visited today by Constable Harry Jefferies of Hayman's Corners, Vermont, in the Constable's effort to secure additional information about two of the Professor's former students who figured as principals in a murder mystery in the Constable's precincts. By a coincidence, the Professor was present at the same hotel where the suspected murderer, Roger Davis, spent the night. The murdered man was identified as James J. Hendrix, a friend of the man believed to have caused his death.

After emerging from Professor Worth's home, Constable Jefferies made the following statement: "I believe that both Davis and Hendrix came to Hayman's Corners knowing that Professor Worth was to be there. We can only guess at their reasons, but both boys were known to have been addicted to violent arguments, often staying up all night quarreling while at college. When Davis failed to interest the Professor in whatever he had come for, a friend of Davis brought his car, filled with dynamite. Then Davis returned to kill Hendrix. As Professor Worth refused to divulge the conversation he held with Davis, I realize that these conjectures must remain just that. We have nothing to go on in determining the immediate motive of the murder, but the hunt will go on and the killer brought to justice."

From the *New York Times,* August 28, 1938.

Astronomers from several sections of the country reported that a peculiar brilliance manifested itself in the heavens early yesterday morning. The radiance, believed to have been several million miles from earth, lasted too long to be a comet, and was of an unusual deep green in color. It was seen for an hour.

Here my presentation of this Ms. ends. I will add only that it has lain waiting for my return from Europe for several months. In all that time, not a sign, not a vestige has appeared of Roger Davis. It is as if he had disappeared from the face of the earth.

Where is Roger Davis?

THE END.