

A GLASS OF MARS

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Illustrated by MORROW

He longed for a world that was thousands of years dead—and sacrificed to it all of today's!

I

Alonzo Shepard, Supervisor of Geologic Records, made a final entry on the Deucalionis Regio data sheet, replaced the sheet in the D.R. folder, and shoved the folder across the records desk to his secretary. "File this, Miss Fromm, and we'll call it a day—it's almost midnight."

Miss Fromm was a Martian—that is to say, she was a member of the first generation to be born on Mars. And thought of herself as a native. Shepard, whose residence on the planet fell considerably short of one terrestrial year, thought of himself as a trespasser.

Despite her so-called Martian lineage, he also thought of Miss Fromm as one. Watching her as she walked across the records room and slipped the folder into the file-o-matic cabinet, he compared her with the exquisite women who had lived on Mars millennia ago during the heyday of its glorious civilization and who were immortalized in the renovated paintings that hung in the Martian section of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tall, stacked—in her own words, "a veritable sex-machine"—she suffered horribly from the ordeal and he enjoyed every minute of her pain. The Martian vineyards he had come to Mars to help cultivate were never going to bear fruit, and Miss Fromm was one of the little foxes who had spoiled the vines.

Her chore completed, she returned to the desk and regarded him across its expanse of electronic recording equipment. She exhibited none of the tiredness that should have been hers after the long stint of overtime she had put in. As always, her dark and lustrous swept-back hair was neatly in place; as always her gray eyes were a gleam with energy and excitement. As always, her cheeks displayed the roseate glow of a female who is as healthy as a horse.

"Shall I get your coat for you, Mr. Shepard? You look bushed." Annoyed, he got it himself. He hated to be fussed over, especially by Miss Fromm. After turning out the records-room lights, he accompanied her to the lift, and they dropped swiftly to the ground floor of the Edom I Geology Building. Presently they stepped into the deserted street.

Shepard hesitated. This was the first time Miss Fromm had ever worked overtime with him. For that matter, it was the first time they had ever left the building together. Should he offer to escort her home or not? Crime wasn't exactly rampant in Edom I, but the hour was late and there were bound to be drunks abroad.

He attacked the problem obliquely, hoping to outflank it. "Will it be safe for you to go home alone, Miss Fromm?"

She laughed, displaying a slight hiatus between her front teeth. "My apartment is only two blocks away—I'm not like you, Mr. Shepard, who puts living in the country above convenience and common sense."

No, she wasn't like him—and he wasn't like her, either, and he was damned glad of it. Nevertheless, her remark irked him. "Convenience and common sense aren't everything, Miss Fromm."

She ignored the observation. "Why don't you walk home with me anyway? That way, you'll be sure I get there safe, and we can have beer in my apartment and watch TV."

It was what he had been afraid of. "If I did that, I might miss the last tube car."

"Tube' car-smube car—why should you want to go home when you can sleep with a veritable

sex-machine like me?"

He was accustomed to Miss Fromm's forthrightness, having had her as his secretary ever since she had come to work for the Bureau of Geologic Research three Martian months ago; but this time it seemed to him that she was going too far. "That's no way for a respectable girl to talk, Miss Fromm."

"It is when she's a Martian and the man she's talking to is going to marry her."

"I've told you before that I'm never going to marry anyone!"

"When you realize what a bargain you're getting in me, though, you'll change your mind. I'm thirty-eight, twenty-seven, thirty-nine. I'm five feet, eight inches tall, and I weigh one hundred and twenty-eight pounds. Stripped."

He sighed. She had told him her measurements before. It was customary on Mars for girls to do such things, and after his initial shock he had managed to take the custom in his stride. Nevertheless, he was still diametrically opposed to it.

"Don't you see, Miss Fromm, that when you break your body down into Arabic numerals, you're demeaning it? Don't you see that when you approach sex by the numbers, you're robbing it of its last vestige of romance?"

Again she laughed, showing the slight gap between her front teeth. It was almost as though she were proud of the imperfection. "What do *you* know about romance, Mr. Shepard?"

"I know that it's dead on Mars, and has been for millennia! I know that supervisors who concern themselves about their secretaries' safety have rocks in their heads the size of the Martian moons. Good night, Miss Fromm!"

He turned and walked away. For a while there was no sound behind him; then he heard the *clack-clack* of her high heels as she set forth in the direction of her apartment. Presently the sound faded away.

The nerve of her, he thought, implying that *he* didn't know anything about romance! Still upset by her remark, he continued on in the direction of the Edom I Tube Terminal. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm.

He halted when he came opposite one of the fenced-off stands of Martian ruins around which Edom I had been built. Maybe a brief exposure to beauty would soothe his ruffled feelings. Beyond the plasticket fence delicate fluted columns stood palely in the starlight. A poignant tower fragment seemed to be reaching for the bright blob of the farther moon which hovered high above the transparent pressurized dome that enclosed the city and held the cold at bay. The flagstones of a millennia-old courtyard lay like silver fronds upon the hallowed ground.

Invariably, when he looked at the ruins of Marltan buildings, Shepard saw the Martians who had lived in them. Presently he saw the Martians who had lived in these. Tall, graceful, their noble faces reflecting their noble thoughts, they strolled sedately in the light of the stars and the moon, blissfully unaware of the ugly terrestrial structures that had sprung up like weeds in the garden of their glorious city. Some of them carried metallic books, and read as they strolled. Others had formed into groups, and were conversing in low melodic voices. Some stood apart, looking at the heavens in silent meditation. None would ever know in his pursuit of lofty ideas of the ugly domed metropolises that had mushroomed up from the sites of the original archaeological bases; of the hordes of men and women who had come from Earth to collect artifacts and compile data and live off the bones of a civilization whose feet they were unfit to kiss; who got drunk in cheap cafes in the shadows of ancient halls of learning and who broke through fences and made love in the once-sacrosanct aisles of ancient temples; who in a thousand other ways defiled, sullied, contaminated, and desecrated the sad and shining memories of Mars.

II

There was a cafe just down the street. Leaving the ruins behind him, Shepard walked past it rapidly, trying to ignore the bawdy laughter that came from within; the clink of glasses and the inane chattering of

cheap machines; the whine and whir of handbandits on the walls.

He had had great dreams for Mars, Shepard had.

In his mind he had seen the peoples of Earth building a shining new civilization on the ruins of the old and using the long-extinct race as an exemplar and lifting themselves up to a higher plateau. He should have known better. He should have known that inferior peoples do not try to lift themselves up to the level of superior ones—they try to pull the superior ones down to their own. And he should have known that wherever there are vineyards there are little foxes too. But he hadn't known these things, and he had come to Mars with stars in his eyes, and now the stars had turned to cinders and his bitterness knew no bounds.

The Tube Terminal was just up ahead. He walked toward it with long strides. Like most of the other buildings that constituted Edom I, it was a monstrous glass slab of an edifice rising half a dozen stories above the street. Unlike the other buildings, however, it also extended half a dozen stories below the street. These latter stories were the levels from which the subterranean pneumo-tubes extended to the four other domed cities on Mars, and to the domed commuti-towns that had sprung up in between them. The cities approximated Edom I's 15,000 population, and the nearest—Edom II—stood less than seventy-five miles to the west. The others—were located far to the south, west, and north respectively, and, like Edoms I and II, bore the place-names of the regions in which they stood. Shepard lived midway between Edom I and Edom II in Sands, one of the domed commuti-towns that served both communities.

He could have obtained comfortable rooms within walking distance of his job, but he had chosen not to do so. There wasn't much to see on the oxygen-starved surface of Mars, but what little there was to see could be seen far better from a small town than it could from a small city.

The Terminal was almost deserted. Most of the people who worked for the euphemistically labeled companies that were systematically sifting the red sands of Mars for artifacts and precious stones and anything else that could be turned into a big buck, were home by this time watching canned terrestrial garbage on their TV screens; and most of those who weren't were touring the cafes and the other entertainment oases.

After picking up an evening paper at the concourse newsstand, Shepard descended the stairs to level 6. He was chagrined to find that the last Edom I-Edom II express had already departed and that he'd have to take the local. A glance at the electronic schedule board informed him that the local in question was a double one, that the first section — no. 29-A — left from Berth 8 at 12:20 A.M., and that the second section — no. 29-B —left from Berth 8 one hour later. A glance at the level-clock informed him that he had less than sixty seconds to get on board.

He dogtrotted down the line of berths, fed the turnstile in front of no. 8, shoved through it, and ran for the doorway of penumo-car no. 29-A. "Red Rock, Sunset, Sands, Acreage, Moraine, Arroyo, and Edom II," the electronic A.P. intoned as he dashed through the opening. The air valves hissed then, and the door closed and the car began to move.

He had known he was the last passenger to get on at the Terminal. Now, glancing down the aisle, he saw that he had also been the first; the two long seats that ran the length of the air-tight, windowless vehicle were empty. He sat down on the one on the right and unfolded his paper. The car accelerated rapidly, leveled off well below maximum safety speed. There was no sound save for a faint hiss now and then of escaping air.

Idly, he glanced at the front page. It contained the usual abracadabra. The Department of Automotive Engineers was on the verge of perfecting a hydro-carbon filter that would enable Martians to drive automobiles without asphyxiating themselves and their fellows. The Bureau of Hydroponics was putting a new line of synthi-meats on the market. The Cost of Martian Living was up 1.2 percent. The New United Nations had adopted a resolution to set Earth's moon aside as a burial ground for Great

Earthmen. Shepard yawned, and laid the paper on the seat.

"Red Rock," intoned the A.P. "All out for Red Rock."

The car slowed, and came to a smooth stop. The door opened; valves hissed. Then the door closed, and the car moved on, Shepard still its sole passenger.

He yawned again. When the car began to slow down mere seconds after it attained its former velocity, he thought at first that he'd dozed. There was a slight lurch. Then, "Kandzkaza," the A.P. shrilled. "Kandzkaza."

Shepard sat up straight on the seat. The Terminal schedule listed no such place-name as "Kandzkaza". Moreover, Sunset was supposed to have been the next stop. Then Sands, Acreage, Moraine, and Arroyo.

The door opened, the valves hissed, and a girl got on.

Simultaneously, a strange yet tantalizingly familiar fragrance filled the car. If Shepard hadn't known better, he would have sworn that it was fresh air.

The girl was quite tall — though not by Miss Fromm's Junoesque standards—and lithe and graceful of figure. Her hyacinth hair was parted in the middle and fell to her shoulders, throwing off evanescent glints of blue. Her face was oval, and delicate of nose, mouth, and chin— in a word, exquisite. Her skin had a faint reddish cast.

Her apparel intrigued Shepard almost as much as she herself did. The main item was a filmy blue skirt that fell—or rather floated — halfway to her knees. It was patterned with tiny stones that coruscated as she walked and lent the effect of a small but dazzling snowfall. A garment of similar material and decor covered her breasts, outlining but not emphasizing their fullness, and attached to it just below her left shoulder was an iridescent brooch. Her shoes — or rather, sandals — were golden, and were held firmly on her feet by filamentous golden laces that climbed all the way to the gentle curve of her calves. Hanging on a leathern strap from her left shoulder was a small leathern bag that could have been a briefcase or a purse— or both.

III

The single startled glance she accorded him as she sat down on the opposite seat suggested strongly that he failed as utterly to fit into her scheme of things as she did into his. Then the door closed, and the car started up again, and the strange fragrance that had entered with her was swiftly dissipated by a flow of sterile air from the ceiling vents. "Artificial air", Shepard called it. Wherever you went on Mars it was what you breathed and all you breathed, and it was as alien to real air as man could make it.

He had taken his eyes from the girl out of common courtesy, and now he began to wonder whether he had really seen her — whether she had actually boarded the car at Kandzkaza or whether she was a wish-fulfillment figment he had created out of the mists of his unconscious. But when he looked across the aisle again, she was still there, and at length he concluded that she had come from a masquerade party of some kind.

But *what* kind? And what had she gone as? — a princess of ancient Mars? And why in the world hadn't she brought a coat along to keep her warm on the way home and to cover her near nakedness?

The car was slowing again. "Wistaria" shrilled the A.P. "Wistaria." Wistaria?

There was no Wistaria on the Edom I-Edom II run, any more than there was a Kandzkaza. Moreover, there was something wrong with the A.P.'s "voice". The compact electronic mechanism was supposed to recite the station stops— not call them out like a fishwife summoning her husband to supper.

The door opened; valves hissed; the girl got up to go. Again, fragrance filled the car. There was a hint of sweetness in it— a nostalgic sweetness ...Suddenly he knew what it was. It was the sweetness of vineyards in autumn— the sweetness of grapes ripening on the vine.

Did the inhabitants of Wistaria grow grapevines beneath their stereotyped dome?

They certainly grew beautiful girls.

He experienced a poignant sense of loss as she passed through the doorway and out of his sight. He felt as though he had been proffered a magic cup, and that if he had had the presence of mind to raise it to his lips he would have found it brimming with the simple delights he had always dreamed of but had never been able to find. Then he saw the iridescence on the seat where she had sat and knew that it wasn't too late to raise the cup to his lips after all, nor to quaff its magic contents.

He stepped across the aisle and picked the iridescence up. It was the brooch that she had worn above her heart. Reds, yellows, greens, and icy blues leaped up into his eyes and dazzled him, and in the rainbow mist he saw her hyacinth hair, her classic face ... and he ran through the doorway into the station, calling "Wait!"

She was nowhere to be seen.

He paused. Behind him, valves hissed. The door closed, and the car moved on.

He felt like a fool. Now he'd have to wait God alone knew how long for the next car, and might not get home until morning.

The fragrance was all around him now, and it was like the land-smell sailors used to talk about when they raised a tropical island after long weeks at sea — a smell you never knew existed till you came back and found that it was there; a smell you swore you would never let slip through your fingers again ... and then forgot about because its omnipresence cancelled out your newfound sensitivity.

But *I* haven't been to sea, Shepard thought. And even if I had been, this station is a far cry from an island. It's a cellar beneath a commuti-town — a cellar where people who have never been to sea get on pneumocars and get off them, and never raise an island in their lives.

He became aware of how cold the air was. Cold and clean and fresh. He raised his eyes, unwittingly bringing the station sign into his line of vision. It was trapezoid in shape, and it said,)-(/(—/)-).

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Shepard swallowed. It was a weird way to spell Wistaria, if you asked him.

Now that he noticed it, the rest of the station didn't quite add up either. It looked like an ordinary station, but everywhere there were nuances of difference. For instance, the turnstile was an ornately carved gate in an ornately carved wall, and the floor, instead of being concrete, was crystal. And there were no stairs. Where they should have been, a railed ramp spiraled upward through a well-like opening in the ceiling.

Grimly, Shepard passed through the gate and approached the ramp. He began ascending it to the next level, alert for any sign of life.

There was none.

The next level turned out to be the surface, and he emerged in starlight. A wind blew against his face—a cold wind. He shivered, not because the wind was cold but because Wistaria had no dome.

By rights, he should have been dead for five minutes already—his lungs ruptured, blood freezing on his lips, his body turning blue. But he wasn't dead. He had never more alive in his life.

In the distance to his left where the dome of Edom I should have been, a strange city stood. He saw towers — hundreds of them, thousands. Pale in the starlight they stood. Argent in the light of the farther moon. Stately towers, rising out of a mass of buildings that were undoubtedly no less architecturally inspiring than they, but which both distance and darkness obscured. And surrounding this exotic city that had no right to be were still other buildings — smaller, for the most part, than those of the city proper, and blending together to give the illusion of a wide, circular patio.

Facing in the opposite direction, he saw another, more distant city — this one standing where Edom II should have been. It was a twin — or, if not a twin, a cousin — of the first.

He was standing on the outskirts of a little village. Wistaria — yes, it had to be Wistaria. There were about a dozen structures altogether, all, save a few, in darkness. Six on one side of the street, six on the other.

The street was a road, really — a road that emerged from vineyards, ran through the town, and then entered other vineyards. The vineyards were everywhere as far as his eyes could see. Row after row after row of them spread out beneath the star-bedight sky. The perfume of their ripe and ripening fruit was almost overwhelming. In the distance, the wide ribbon of a river gleamed. No, not a river—a canal.

Shepard swayed in the starlight. It was all an illusion or a dream. It had to be. Nothing had grown on Mars for millennia. The only water was at the poles or in the pipelines that conveyed it to the domed cities and the domed commuti-towns. And the only cities were Edom I, Edom II, Cydonia, Aeolis, and Pandora. There were no villages at all.

Phobos was rising in the west and commencing its race across the sky. Now the buildings of the little village that had no right to be had two shadows.

He had two shadows also.

A girl was walking down the village street carrying a pocket torch and shining its light on the ground. *The* girl. Looking for her brooch, no doubt, not knowing she had lost it in the car. He held it before his eyes and stared at it in the shifting moonlight.

He ran his finger over the strange unearthly stones. They were real all right. And so was the night and the stars, the distant cities and the vast vineyards, and the girl walking down the village street. He moved toward her in the starlight, his shadows drifting on the ground. She gave a slight start when she heard his tread, and shone the light into his face.

IV

He handed her the brooch. "You left this on the seat." She took it from him and lowered the light. She said something in a language he couldn't remotely understand. He shook his head. "I speak English, Spanish, and French." Then he said something in each—to no avail.

There was puzzlement on her starlit face. She spoke again in the same language, and again he shook his head. At length she resorted to signs. Pointing to the well that gave access to the subterranean tube station, she shook *her* head and held the palms of her hands a considerable distance apart, and he understood that she was telling him there would be no more cars coming in for a while. Next, she touched his arm and pointed up the street in the direction she had come, and he understood that she wished him to accompany her.

Why not? He walked beside her up the little thoroughfare, wondering how she could endure the chill night air with practically nothing in the way of clothing to combat it. In a way, the climate reminded him of Japan in autumn. It was cold there too after the sun went down, and damp—very damp. But that was because of the nearness of the sea and the mountains, and there were no mountains here, nor was there a sea either—at least he did not think there was. There was a canal, though—and hills. He could see them beyond the town—low, with little trees growing on them. The wind blew against the trees, and they swayed in the cool starlight, in the shifting patterns of the moons... And there were the stately cities and the verdant vineyards and the sweet scent of ripe and ripening grapes, and the girl walking beside him in the enchanting Martian night.

The houses reminded him of Japan too. They were one-storied and covered large areas of ground, and he suspected there were courtyards in their centers, with flowers growing along pebbled paths, and faerie-fountains twinkling in the starlight. They came to her house presently, and she put her finger to her lips in an unmistakable gesture for him to be quiet, and he assumed that her parents had retired for the night.

Then she unlocked a sliding door and they stepped into a large room that could have been a kitchen or a living room and that was probably both. Light emanated from blue globes suspended at regular intervals from the ceiling. The floor consisted of orange-colored bricks, and similar bricks formed a waist-high wainscoting along the walls. Three windows, all of them open, looked out into the street, and there was a fourth window in the upper section of the sliding door. This one was closed. The walls

proper consisted of dark-colored wood that had been left unpainted and was the better for it. In the center of the rear wall, a second door gave access to the back section of the house. In the center of the floor there was a rectangular stone table on either side of which a stone bench stood. The girl pointed to one of them, Shepard sat down on it, and brought him wine.

What wine was this? Certainly it was like none he had ever tasted before. It was cool fire in his throat afterward pleasant embers in his stomach. He knew a new keenness of perceptions, an unprecedented clarity of thought. His hostess had sat down opposite him, and now, by means of gestures, she asked him to take off his coat. He refused as politely as signs would permit: not only were windows open, there was no heat the house, and he was cold. He had already removed his hat. She picked it up and examined it curiously. Then she smiled and pointed the top of her head and said something that he was sure meant, "We Martians wouldn't dream of wearing such a ridiculous ornament!" He pointed to himself then and said, "Alonzo Shepard," and she pointed herself and said, "Thandora."

Thandora ... The name fitted the magic of the moment. The mere sound of it brought to mind those little moons up there in the sky; those exquisite towers standing in the purple distances, that shining carnal flowing through the verdant vineyards, that haunting fragrance of ripe and ripening grapes. The past ...

For it was the past. It had to be. This was the Mars of yesterday—the Mars his greedy contemporaries were digging up and exploiting for all it was worth. The Mars that should have inspired Earthmen to turn over a new leaf and to begin seeking loftier fields of endeavor.

The Mars that was responsible for the ruins he had looked upon, in one sense, a scant half hour ago. And somehow he had thwarted the barrier of time and traveled back through the ages to its nonpareil shore.

He remembered the slight lurch the pneumo-car had given just before it reached Kandzkaza; the change in the A.P.'s "voice". Perhaps in this age interurban travel had been accomplished by means of subterranean tubes also, and owing to a coincidence of the Kandzkaza-Wistaria tube-length of the past with the Sunset-Sands length of the present and a concomitant coincidence of schedules, a time warp had come into being and pneumo-car no. 29-A for the time being, now traveled in the past during part of the 12:20 Edom I-Edom II run and provided transportation for the inhabitants of two different ages. Or possibly there was a corresponding pneumo-car in the past, and the two cars became one for the duration of the coincidence. That would explain the variation in the A.P.'s "voice".

It was only a theory, and a tentative one at best; but Shepard had a hunch that it was as close to the truth as he would ever get. He would be able to strengthen it somewhat if he could leave by the same door as in he came, and if he could return, he would strength it still more. But it would still be a theory, and nothing more.

Thandora had filled his glass again. It was more like a flower than a glass—a crystal flower opening its petals to the cool elixir of the wine, dispensing it at his whim, and proffering more. I won't quibble about *how* I found this place, he thought. It's enough that I *have* found it—that I'm able to drink a glass of the glory that was Mars ...

The fragrance of the vineyards wafted through the open windows. He could hear the wind sobbing in the little trees that adorned the hills. He could hear it whispering in the foliage of the vines ...No, I won't quibble. And if I can't get back to when I came from, I won't cry.

But he had to try. He had to know one way or the other whether the feat could be accomplished. Perhaps the coincidence of schedules wasn't confined to no. 29-A alone — perhaps there was a car in the past whose schedule corresponded to no. 29-B's. If there was, he could find out the answer—or part of it, at least — right away. No. 29-B left the Edom I Tube Terminal at 1:20, and according to his wristwatch — a gaudy, diamond-studded affair that Miss Fromm had given him for his birthday—it was almost that time now.

It took some doing, but at length he managed to convey the information to. Thandora that he wanted to know when the next westbound pneumo-car would be in. She did not answer for a while, and he could tell from the expression on her face that she didn't want him to leave; then, reluctantly, she pointed

toward the station and held the palms of her hands a short distance apart. The message was as clear as though it had been spoken: *Soon*.

He finished his wine and got to his feet. She stood up too, and came around the table. Putting her left hand over her own heart and her right hand over his, she looked questioningly into his eyes. At length he understood that she wanted to know whether he would return, and he nodded emphatically, hoping that the gesture meant the same thing in her world as it did in his. Obviously it did, for she smiled and dropped her hands. Then she touched his watch, which she had apparently identified as a timepiece, and again looked questioningly into his eyes, and asked. *When?*

He would return the very next night at the very same time, he "told" her.

And he would, too— if the Good Fates pleased.

She bade him good night at the door, and he walked down the street toward the station. Phobos was already high in the sky, and the stars glistened like new-formed dewdrops. One of them was Earth. He found it presently. Blue and brilliant, it hung low over the horizon, by far the most beautiful body in the heavens. The realization that he was seeing it as it had been during the Upper Paleolithic Period stunned him. It was the day of the Cro-Magnon man—the time of the wild-horse massacres; of the flint-tipped spear and the stone knife. The stone-age forerunner of the electric can-opener — the burin—had been in use for some time and was considered by many to be the ultimate implement. The best of all possible worlds was, as it would always be, just around the corner.

V

His footsteps gave forth a hollow sound as he descended the ramp. Belatedly he wondered how he was going to get past the gate, but it opened to his touch. Apparently in this day and age true turnstiles were unknown. Presently a pneumo-car came abreast of the platform. He looked at it intently, but for the life of him he couldn't see anything in the least alien about it—or at least about that part of it that was visible to him. Finally, when no one, got off, he climbed aboard. The valves hissed then, and the door closed. The car moved out of the station and began to gather speed.

He saw now why no one had got off. There had been no one to get off. He took advantage of his opportunity and examined the car's interior, but once again he saw no signs of alienness. Like all cars he had ever ridden on, it was utterly devoid of individuality, and perhaps therein lay the reason that two cars could become one without the passengers being aware of the fact.

Yes, but suppose there were passengers on *both* cars before the event took place. They would become aware of each other, wouldn't they?

Maybe, though, the paradoxical quality inherent in the coincidence ruled out such an eventuality. His presence on the first car when Thandora had got on could very well have been an accident an oversight on the part of Time. Certainly the absence of any other passengers would seem to indicate that such was the case.

But he was still theorizing. For all he really knew, car no. 29.-A bog been catapulted permanently into the past, in which case, far from bearing him back to the future, the present car was simply bearing him to another vineyard village or to the exquisite city that occupied the future site of Edom II.

There was a slight lurch. "Sunset," the A.P. intoned. "Sunset."

Shepard should have known relief, but he didn't. Instead, he knew disappointment, and when he left the car at Sands some fifteen minutest later and climbed the stairs to the street, he wished with all his being that he'd stayed in the past where he belonged. After the fragrance of the vineyards, the sterile air of the dome seemed stale. After the atmosphere-softened starlight of yesterday, today's starlight seemed cold and hostile. After the houses, of Wistaria, the apartment buildings of Sands seemed bleak and austere. Sadly he entered the one in which he lived. Morosely he climbed the stairs.

His mood passed as he prepared for bed. If he had gone back once, he could go back again. He had found the Magic Casement, and he held the key. Or had the whole thing been a dream? A glance at his watch assured him that it had not been— or that if it had, an hour was missing from his life. And he could account for that hour—every unforgettable second of it.

Before climbing into bed, he mixed himself a nightcap. After the glass of Mars he had drunk it tasted flat, but he drank it anyway, and turned out the light and slipped between the cool clean sheets. Sleep was a long time in coming, and when it finally came he dreamed of Thandora.

He awoke to Miss Fromm. Two months ago, after showing up late to work three mornings in a row, he had made a standing arrangement with her to call him on the video phone every weekday morning at ten o'clock. Miss Fromm had been a sergeant in the Martian Wacs before coming to work at the Bureau, and he had had cause to regret the arrangement many times, but in the interest of punctuality he had accepted it as a necessary evil. Now, he had cause to regret it again. "Time to hit the deck!" she cried when he snapped on the vp after the buzzer brought him out of a deep sleep. "Let go your—"

He bounded out of bed "That'll be all, Miss Fromm —I'm up."

Vps were precision instruments and when they transmitted an image of a person's face they did so with a vengeance, bringing to light wrinkles and blemishes that were immune to ordinary reality. Miss Fromm, clearly, had none of either, and despite himself and for the dozenth time, he couldn't help thinking of how vividly the freshness of her morning face brought to mind the freshness of a morning flower. This annoyed him no end, although he couldn't imagine why. "I said that'll be all, Miss Fromm. There's no reason for you to retain the connection any longer."

"I'm — I'm sorry for that mean remark I made last night, Mr. Shepard. You know— the one about you and romance. I didn't mean it —honest I didn't. I think you're the most romantic man that ever lived ... Especially in your pajamas."

"Miss Fromm!"

"Flash! — I've lost a pound. I now weight only one hundred and twenty- seven. Stripped." She severed the connection and the screen went blank.

He sighed. Then he stepped into the lavatory and turned on the water for his morning shower. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm.

She met him at the entrance of the Geology Building and rode up with him on the lift. "Overtime tonight, Mr. Shepard?"

Half of him was in Mars Present and the other half was in Mars Past. The cold light of morning had cast considerable doubt on the validity of his experience of the night before, but he was still convinced that it hadn't been a dream. "No. We'll be done by six."

"Good— you can take me out to dinner."

It was far from being the first time she had come up with the suggestion, and he was about to resort to one of his regular excuses when it occurred to him that if he was going to take the 12:20 local that night he was going to have a lot of time to kill. He could, of course, go home and then come back again; but somehow the prospect of whiling away the evening in his apartment seemed singularly unattractive all of a sudden. "All right, Miss Fromm — where would you like to go?"

She gasped— and her gray eyes filled up with microcosmic stars. "Are — are you *really* going to take me, Mr. Shepard?"

"Miss Fromm, I can't figure you out. First, you—"

"The Sundown Steppe, and I'll wear my new yellow gadress!"

She did, too. At least he assume that the clinging synthi-silk creation she had on when he called for her after killing an hour in the public library was a gadress. In any event, it did things for her—things that, in some cases, hadn't needed to be done.

The Steppe was on the roof of the Hydroponics Building. Shepard had been there on several previous occasions, but this was the first time he had dined there at sunset. The perfect transparency of the dome gave the impression that nothing lay between the roof and the sky, and the proximity of the

Hydroponics Building to the perimeter of the city provided a nonpareil view of the Great Thymiamata Plain. The distant sun was just beginning to dip beneath the horizon as he and Miss Fromm sat down at a choice table near the roof's edge, and the plain was pure gold, while the sky, immune to the dying light, was turning from lavender to deep purple. The intense cold and the thin air gave the colors a startling distinctness.

Miss Fromm regarded him radiantly across the table after tilt waiter took their order. "I did forty-seven pushups today. Formerly, my record was forty-three."

Shepard doubted whether he could do ten. "Now why should you want to do forty-seven pushups?" he asked.

"Good for the pectorals. See?" Miss Fromm took a deep breath and tensed the muscles in question. He had to admit that the results were startling—perhaps even a little terrifying. But he still didn't feel that he'd obtained a satisfactory answer to his question. "I still don't see why."

"Because I'm working for a thirty-nine — that's why."

He thought of Thandora. Thandora of the hyacinth hair, the classic face. You'd never catch *her* trying to emulate a milch cow. "I *still* don't see why."

"So you'll appreciate me more, of course."

He sighed. Take us the foxes, he thought. The little foxes. Miss Fromm was a big fox. She could spoil more vines in one day than an ordinary fox could in two. He looked at the sunset again. The sky was pure purple now, and eccentricities in the atmosphere had shattered the fading light and transformed it into a vast golden fretwork. If Miss Fromm was aware of the beautiful metamorphosis, she gave no sign. The waiter brought their synthisoup. While they were waiting for the entree he asked her what part of Mars she came from. Not that he really cared, but there was such a thing as being polite.

"I come from a little town near Aeolis. After I was discharged from the Wars, I decided to settle down as far away from my folks as I could get."

"Don't you like them?"

"Of course I like them. I love them. But it's the custom for Martian girls to go out on their own when they get to be twenty-two, and if you're going to do something you should do it right."

He let it go at that. The conduct of Martian girls when they reached the age of twenty-two was no concern of his. Neither he nor anybody else was going to remold the sorry Martian scheme of things at this late date.

He looked at his watch. 8:19. Four hours to go yet. Maybe he could have returned to the shores of yesterday on an earlier pneumo-car. Maybe the Magic Casement wasn't confined to the 12:20 local. Maybe it was open all the time.

And then again, maybe it had opened for the first and the last time, and tonight there would be no Kandzkaza, no Wistaria

No Thandora —

VI

There was a Kandzkaza, though. And a Wistaria ...He got off the car breathless, and breathed in the rich fragrance of the past. Then he climbed the ramp, shaking himself free from the memory of Miss Fromm. She had invited him in for coffee when he took her home after treating her to a recently released Earth tridi-extravaganza at the Edom Palace, and for a while he'd thought she wasn't going to let him leave until he kissed her. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm.

Both moons were on high, Deimos drifting daintily, Phobos plummeting across the wild starred sky. The distant cities were exquisite oases of light and lineation, and in them, probably, thinkers walked, weighing mighty matters and extrapolating the present; predicting, perhaps, the very day when the atmosphere would thin to a point where life would no longer be possible and their race would lose its place in the sun.

The little town of Wistaria slept beneath the stars, and no one was abroad on its single street. Would Thandora still be up? He came to her house presently. Yes, she was still up. He could see her through the window in the sliding door. She was sitting at the stone table writing something in a metallic book with a pen that brought to mind a miniature acetylene torch. Poetry, no doubt. Yes, he was sure that that was what she was writing. It virtually had to be. He breathed deeply of the sweetness of the ripe and ripening grapes and knocked gently on the door. She smiled warmly when she opened it and saw him. Then she put her finger to her lips and ushered him inside.

They sat down at the table and she poured him wine. Without further preamble, she began teaching him the language. He had no objections. On the contrary, he could hardly wait to learn the noble tongue. The wine quadrupled his powers of concentration and he assimilated with the greatest of ease the words she fired at him in machine-gun-like bursts, automatically cataloguing them and effortlessly memorizing their meanings. No wonder the Martians of old had developed so many great thinkers and built so many halls of learning. With such a divine elixir to stimulate their already hyper-developed faculties, the true nature of the universe must have seemed as uncomplicated to them as the Lueretian concept seemed to twenty-first century Earthmen.

Thandora poured him more of the wondrous stuff. He raised the flower-shaped glass and sipped, looking deep into her azure eyes. How pure and shining she seemed after Miss Fromm! How soft and sweet her voice! How becoming her gentle mien! *She* would never resort to pushups to build up her breasts. *She* would never brag about her measurements. *She* would never turn herself into a veritable sex-machine. Thandora was a *real* Martian.

On desperate seas long wont to roam, he thought—

*Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,
Thy Naiad airs have brought me home
To the glory that was Greece,
To the grandeur that was Rome.*

It came time for him to leave. Thanks to the magic properties of the wine, he had absorbed enough of the language to bid her good-by with words as well as gestures, and to tell her in a similar fashion that he would return on the following night—early in the evening, if possible. She nodded eagerly, and pressed her left hand to her own heart and her right to his, just as she had done the night before. Touched, he let himself out the door and walked humbly down the street to the station. Could he ever make himself worthy of so divine a creature? Could he ever elevate himself to the lofty plateau on which she lived and earn the right to win her love?

He would try.

The prospect of spending a whole evening with her lent him a euphoria that remained with him throughout all of the next day. It was still with him when he boarded the 6:18 Edom I-Edom II local after work, but its minutes were numbered. The pneumo-car proceeded directly from Red Rock to Sunset with no stops in between, and thence to Sands. Dejectedly he got off and filed up the stairs with the other Sands commuters. In his apartment, he showered and shaved; then, remembering that he hadn't eaten, he looked in the wall-fridge. There was plenty of cold air there, but that was about all. He thought for a moment. Sands had several restaurants, but none of them bothered to camouflage the synthi-food they served, and as a result their meals were singularly uninspiring. Somehow, after the events of the last few days, he couldn't bear the thought of an uninspiring meal; and besides, he had to return to Edom I sooner or later in order to catch the first section of the 12:20 Edom I-Edom II local, so why not fight his appetite for a while and enjoy a good Meal at the Sundown Steppe?

It wouldn't do for him to dine there alone, though. The Steppe was a place where you took your wife or your girl friend, and stags were frowned upon. And then, too, there would be several hours to kill afterward.

Had Miss Fromm eaten yet? he wondered. Not that she was his girl friend, of course; but he had to take someone. He gave her a buzz on the video phone. She must have just got out of the shower, because her dark hair had a damp aspect, and a series of moist ringlets had fallen down over her forehead and a little line of moisture glistened along her upper lip. Moreover, even though all he could see of her was her face, he received the distinct impression that she didn't have any clothes on.

He cleared his throat. "Have — have you had dinner yet, Miss Fromm?"

She was staring at his image as though she couldn't believe her eyes—or her ears either, for that matter. "No, Mr. Shepard—I was just getting ready to go out to eat."

"Then wait till I get there and we'll go out together—all right?"

"Well I guess, all right!"

She must have bought a new gadress. Anyway, when she opened her door in response to his ring, she had a blue one on instead of a yellow one. It did even more for her than the yellow one had. "Guess what?" were her first words. "I made it. Now I'm a thirty-nine!" Pushups, apparently, paid off. After dinner at the Steppe, he took her to a tridi-play at a little second-run theater just off Edom Avenue. She wanted to sit in the balcony, but he turned thumbs down on the idea. He couldn't very well say no, though, when she invited him in after he took her home. For one thing, it would have been rude, and for another he still had one more hour, to kill. She opened two containers of beer and made sandwiches, and they watched some canned garbage on TV, with him sitting on the sofa and her perched on the arm beside him. For some reason he had a hard time concentrating on the cliches.

At length he glanced at his watch and got to his feet. Promptly she positioned herself between him and the door. "From the way you're acting, anyone would think you've got a late date or something, Mr. Shepard."

"Maybe I have. Anyway, I've got to go."

He tried to walk around her. She stepped two swift paces to the right and blocked him. "Now see here, Miss Fromm—"

"You're not setting foot outside this apartment until after you've kissed me good night!"

He sighed. There was nothing for it, he supposed. Gingerly he put his arms around her waist and pressed his lips to hers. Immediately an acute weakness came into his knees and his mind started to pinwheel. It was what he deserved for drinking a whole container of beer. Her arms were around his neck, and he extricated himself with considerable difficulty. "I really have to go now, Miss Fromm."

She didn't say a word. She just stood there with her eyes half-closed, moaning softly to herself. He let himself out the door and hurried to the lift. He made it to the Terminal just in time.

Thandora was waiting for him at the door. She put her finger to her lips. "Zzzzzz!" she said. He apologized for having failed to arrive earlier, and they went inside. The metallic book was lying on the table and he could tell that she had been writing in it again. Beside it stood the flower-like glass brimming with wine. He raised it to his lips and took a delicious draught. Ever since he'd left Miss Fromm's apartment his hands had been trembling; now they steadied, and his mind became crystal-clear.

His clarity of thought was abetted immeasurably by his determination to learn the language as rapidly as possible. Once he was able to communicate fluently with the inhabitants of this classic world, he would obtain work of some kind and burn his bridges behind him and move there permanently. The sooner he left Mars Present, the better.

Thandora went outside with him when it was time for him to go. Standing on tiptoe, she kissed him good-by. It was a sweet maidenly kiss, and embodied the quintessence of the long-ago lovely world in which she lived. "Till tomorrow night," she whispered as they drew apart. "Yes," he whispered back, and floated down the starlit street

Miss Fromm had news for him when she video phoned him the next morning. "Flash! I measured wrong the other day —I'm a *forty*, not a thirty-nine! You should *see!*"

He regarded her blearily from his bed.

It seemed as though he'd just closed his eyes. "Miss Fromm, that's hardly a suitable subject to bring up the first thing in the morning."

He closed his eyes, was about to doze off again when she cried, "Time to hit the deck! Let go your —"

He bounded out of bed. "Miss Fromm!"

She grinned at him and severed the connection. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm. But that evening, confronted once more with the problem of what to do with himself till the first section of the 12:20 local departed for Mars Past and more loathe than ever to spend the intervening hours in his apartment, he- was forced to ask her out to dinner again and to take her to another second-run tridi-theater. Afterward, as they were passing one of the stands of ruins on their way back to her apartment, he was astonished when she suggested that they slip through one of the gaps in the flimsy fence and stroll thong the ancient structures and soak up, as she put it "some of the culture of the days of old."

He was delighted as well. Maybe he'd been misjudging Miss Fromm all along.

The ruins consisted of the walls of a caved-in hall of higher awning and the walls of the various laser buildings that had surrounded it.

In the light of the moons the walls looked like huge misshapen tombstones for the most part, but the grandeur was still there, and so was the glory, and Shepard saw Martians, just as he always did, strolling in the starlight and converging in groups and reading from large metallic volumes. Some of them wore flowing white robes and others were variously clad in pastel silks. The men were god-like of body and noble of countenance. The women were tall and cool and beautiful. One of them was Thandora. She was carrying the same book he had seen her writing in at the stone table and every now and then she paused long enough in her solitary walk to write something in it again. Yes, he was certain now. She had been to ancient Mars what Sappho had been to ancient Greece. *Ah, Psyche, from the regions which were Holy Land!*

Miss Fromm pointed to a small ruin that still retained three of its walls and most of its roof. "I wonder what's in there?"

He was curious, too. "Let's have a look."

They stepped into velvety shadows. Presently Shepard made out a stone shelf with a little niche just above it, and he gasped. "Why, this is a philosopher's apse! Whenever one of the great thinkers had a weighty problem to solve, he'd retire to a place like this, light a three-day candle, set it in the niche, and stand before it till it burned down. If, by that time, he hadn't found an answer he'd light another three-day candle, and so on, until he did. Those were the days, Miss Fromm!"

She was standing very close to him. "Brrrr! it's spooky in here! Hold my hand."

Absently, he complied; then he opened his mouth to continue his discourse. But for some reason, no words came. Miss Fromm was standing uncommonly close to him — so close, in fact, that her body was touching his. No, not touching it — pressing against it. He could feel her breath against his cheek, and when he turned his head her dark hair brushed his lips. It was as soft and fragrant as a summer's night, and the first thing he knew he was kissing her, and the whole cosmos was spinning like a kaleidoscopic pinwheel.

It was the last thing he knew for a long time. Objectively, that is. One second he was in the constellation of Pegasus and the next he was in the midst of the Horsehead Nebula. The Pleiades sped past his eyes ... Cassiopeia's Chair ... Berenice's Hair ... and all the while, someone kept saying, "Shep, Shep, Shep, Shep." He ended up way out in the middle of Messier 32. He thought he'd never get back to Mars, and when he finally did, he was horrified.

It was like desecrating someone's grave. When he and Miss Fromm made their way back through the ruins to the street, he saw no Martians. He had driven them all away. Now *he* was one of the little foxes.

Walking her home, he said hardly two words to her, and for once she, too, was uncommunicative.

After bidding her good night at the street door of her apartment building, he hurried away. He never wanted to see her again.

He proceeded directly to the Terminal. Fifteen minutes still separated him from the magic moment when the first section of the 12:20 Edom I-Edom II local departed for the past. Hounded by his self-contempt, he spent them wandering about the empty concourse like a lost soul.

At length he realized that he was standing before the electronic bulletin board, reading an announcement:

DUE TO A LACK OF COMMUTERS, BOTH SECTIONS OF THE RECENTLY INITIATED 12:20 EDOM I-RED ROCK-SUNSET-SANDS-ACREAGE -MORAINÉ - ARROYO-EDOM II RUN WILL BE PERMANENTLY DISCONTINUED AFTER TONIGHT.

VI

Stunned, he read the words again. They adamantly refused to modify their message.

The Magic Casement was on the verge of closing. When he returned after this visit, the Grand Past would be forever beyond his reach.

If he returned.

He thought of the Earth cities crowding around the noble ruins, demeaning them with ass-slab apartment buildings and cheap cafes. He thought of the hordes of pseudo-Martians capitalizing on an ancient civilization whose feet they weren't fit to kiss. He thought of kids someday playing baseball on fields where once Great Martian Games had been held. He thought of hot-dog stands someday being built on the worn flagstones of once-sacred courtyards, of blatant billboards someday eclipsing classic facades; of supermarkets someday rising on the erstwhile sites of halls of higher learning —

He thought of himself and Miss Fromm making a beast-of-two-backs in the sacred philosopher's apse. Shuddering, he stumbled down the stairs to level 6 and boarded pneumocar no. 29-A. When the door closed, he said good-by. To Mars Present, to Miss Fromm—and to himself, Again, Thandora was waiting for him at the door. She was carrying the metallic book and she had been writing in it again. When they sat down at the table this time, she did not sit down across from him, as had been her wont before, but next to him, as close as she could get. He could smell the heady fragrance of her hyacinth hair.

He thumbed through the metallic leaves of the book, gazing reverently at the poems she had written. Soon, he would be able to read them. Soon, he would have mastered the language sufficiently for him to be able to go to the city and get a job. Then he would come back for her, and ask her to be his. And when he married her, it would symbolize his marrying Mars Past, for he wanted Mars Past as much as he wanted her, and in a way they were one and the same thing.

She resumed his language lessons. She poured him wine. Time dreamed by. Suddenly he realized that he was holding her hand. He couldn't remember afterward exactly when it was she had climbed upon his lap but it must have been just a little while before the door at the rear of the room opened and the six sunburned men came in. By then, her arms were around his neck and he was kissing her.

She drew away, but she didn't get off his lap. One of the sunburned men was carrying a weird weapon that looked something like a shotgun. He pointed it at Shepard. "I guess you know what comes next, friend."

Shepard was furious. "Tell your brothers they don't have to *force* me to marry you, Thandora—I *want* to marry you!"

"They are not my brothers — they are my husbands. And it is up to you to tell them."

He got out from under her. Fast. "Why didn't —"

"We are short of help for this year's harvest and will be short for next year's too. Therefore, it was only natural that I should have used the customary method of acquiring an extra hand and lured you here

and involved you in a compromising situation. Help is very hard to get these days. If you work out all right, you will be given a small partnership in the farm. For the time being, you will receive a percentage of the market-value of every basket of grapes you pick. And you will have to pick very many of them. Already we have fallen far behind because you had to be taught, the language." Shepard was staring at her. Why, she wasn't even curious to know why he hadn't already known the language. Nor was she in the least curious about where he came from. She saw in him a field-hand and a part-time husband—and nothing else.

Far from being a high-minded poetess, she was a polygamous peasant. And that metallic book lying on the table—it wasn't a notebook in which she wrote verses: it was a ledger in which she kept accounts.

Horrified, he got to his feet. The room seemed sordid all of a sudden —sordid and mean and ugly. It had been said many times that the ruins of Rome were misleading because only those buildings that had been made of stone had endured. The rest—the common everyday structures — had been made of far less durable materials and had been gutted time and again by fire and had finally disappeared, from the face of the earth. Could the same be said for Martian ruins?

He knew suddenly that it could be. The Martians had brought out the best of themselves in stone, the worst, in mud and bricks. And for every one of their noble edifices that had endured, there were a thousand hovels that had not.

The same could be said for the rest of their civilization. For every philosopher they had produced, they had produced a thousand moneylenders. For every saint, a thousand sinners. For every poet, a thousand Peasants.

And that was the way it had to be. A civilization could stand in no other way. It had to have a footing, and the footing was its economy, and its economy was comprised, in the final analysis, of people like Thandora and her six husbands. Of people like Miss Fromm and himself. Of the proprietors of cheap cafes and the exploiters of new territories. Earth had halls of higher learning, too.

Perhaps so, but he was damned if he was going to pay for the flagstones upon which the Martian thinkers had walked.

He started edging toward the door. Promptly the man with the weird weapon ran over and blocked it.

Shepard did the only thing he could do—he jumped through the nearest window. Then he pounded down the street, Thandora's six husbands in pursuit. No. 29-B — or its ancient Martian equivalent—was just getting ready to pull out when he reached the station. He made it through the doorway just in time.

After he got off at Sands, he climbed wearily to the street and stood for a long time in the dome-filtered starlight. He felt like a fool. But far worse than that, he felt empty. He would never be able to look at the ruins now without thinking of the avaricious Thandora and her six fieldhand-husbands; without remembering the distant noble towers and the innumerable buildings that had stood among them and that had undoubtedly been even uglier than the bright new buildings that stood high among their remains.

Disconsolately he walked down the street to his apartment building. Dejectedly he climbed the stairs to his rooms. He removed his coat and fixed himself a potent nightcap.

While he was drinking it, the vp buzzed. He turned it on and found himself looking at the face of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He was at a loss to understand whose face it was until its owner smiled and showed the slight gap between her front teeth. "Hi, Shep."

"Hel —hello. You should be in bed."

"I couldn't sleep till I talked to you. Already, I've called you three times."

"I've —I've been out walking."

"You couldn't sleep either."

"N —no, I guess I couldn't."

"What time will you take me to dinner tomorrow? It's Sunday."

So it was. "I'll call for you at one."

"I'll be waiting. And Shep?"

"Yes?"

"Did you notice?"

"Notice what?"

"That I was still a vir —"

"Miss Fromm!"

She grinned at him. "Good night, Shep."

"Good night, Ruth."

He severed the connection. The screen went blank. He drank the rest of his nightcap, undressed, and got into bed. He turned off the light.

He lay there in the darkness. Thinking. He was going to have to do something about Miss Fromm.

And finally he did. He married her.

END