



June 2001: And the Moon Be Still as Bright, Ray Bradbury

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It was so cold when they first came from the rocket into the night that Spender began to gather the dry Martian wood and build a small fire.

He didn't say anything about a celebration; he merely gathered the wood, set fire to it, and watched it burn.

In the flare that lighted the thin air of this dried-up sea of Mars he looked over his shoulder and saw the rocket that had brought them all, Captain Wilder and Cherokee and Hathaway and Sam Parkhill and himself, across a silent black space of stars to land upon a dead, dreaming world.

Jeff Spender waited for the noise. He watched the other men and waited for them to jump around and shout. It would happen as soon as the numbness of being the "first" men to Mars wore off.

None of them said anything, but many of them were hoping, perhaps, that the other expeditions had failed and that this, the Fourth, would be the one. They meant nothing evil by it.

But they stood thinking it, nevertheless, thinking of the honor and fame, while their lungs became accustomed to the thinness of the atmosphere, which almost made you drunk if you moved too quickly.

Gibbs walked over to the freshly ignited fire and said, "Why don't we use the ship chemical fire instead of that wood?"

"Never mind," said Spender, not looking up.

It wouldn't be right, the first night on Mars, to make a loud noise, to introduce a strange, silly bright thing like a stove. It would be a kind of imported blasphemy. There'd be time for that later; time to throw condensed-milk cans in the proud Martian canals; time for copies of the

New York Times to blow and caper and rustle across the lone gray Martian sea bottoms; time for banana peels and picnic papers in the fluted, delicate ruins of the old Martian valley towns. Plenty of time for that. And he gave a small inward shiver at the thought.

He fed the fire by hand, and it was like an offering to a dead giant. They had landed on an immense tomb. Here a civilization had died. It was only simple courtesy that the first night be spent quietly.

“This isn’t my idea of a celebration.” Gibbs turned to Captain Wilder. “Sir, I thought we might break out rations of gin and meat and whoop it up a bit.”

Captain Wilder looked off toward a dead city a mile away. “We’re all tired,” he said remotely, as if his whole attention was on the city and his men forgotten. “Tomorrow night, perhaps. Tonight we should be glad we got across all that space without getting a meteor in our bulkhead or having one man of us die.”

The men shifted around. There were twenty of them, holding to each other’s shoulders or adjusting their belts. Spender watched them. They were not satisfied. They had risked their lives to do a big thing. Now they wanted to be shouting drunk, firing off guns to show how wonderful they were to have kicked a hole in space and ridden a rocket all the way to Mars.

But nobody was yelling.

The captain gave a quiet order. One of the men ran into the ship and brought forth food tins which were opened and dished out without much noise. The men were beginning to talk now. The captain sat down and recounted the trip to them.

They already knew it all, but it was good to hear about it, as something over and done and safely put away. They would not talk about the return trip. Someone brought that up, but they told him to keep quiet. The spoons moved in the double moonlight; the food tasted good and the wine was even better.

There was a touch of fire across the sky, and an instant later the auxiliary rocket landed beyond the camp. Spender watched as the small port opened and Hathaway, the physician-geologist—they were all men of twofold ability, to conserve space on the trip—stepped out. He walked slowly over to the captain.

“Well?” said Captain Wilder.

Hathaway gazed out at the distant cities twinkling in the starlight. After swallowing and focusing his eyes he said, “That city there, Captain, is dead and has been dead a good many thousand years. That applies to those three cities in the hills also. But that fifth city, two hundred miles over, sir—”

“What about it?”

“People were living in it last week, sir.”

Spender got to his feet.

“Martians,” said Hathaway.

“Where are they now?”

“Dead,” said Hathaway. “I went into a house on one street. I thought that it, like the other towns and houses, had been dead for centuries. My God, there were bodies there. It was like walking in a pile of autumn leaves. Like sticks and pieces of burned newspaper, that’s all. And fresh. They’d been dead ten days at the outside.”

“Did you check other towns? Did you see anything alive?”

“Nothing whatever. So I went out to check the other towns. Four out of five have been empty for thousands of years. What happened to the original inhabitants I haven’t the faintest idea. But the fifth city always contained the same thing. Bodies. Thousands of bodies.”

“What did they die of?” Spender moved forward.

“You won’t believe it.”

“What killed them?”

Hathaway said simply, “Chicken pox.”

“My God, no!”

“Yes. I made tests. Chicken pox. It did things to the Martians it never did to Earth Men. Their metabolism reacted differently, I suppose. Burned them black and dried them out to brittle flakes. But it’s chicken pox, nevertheless.

So York and Captain Williams and Captain Black must have got through to Mars, all three expeditions. God knows what happened to them. But we at least know what they unintentionally did to the Martians.”

“You saw no other life?”

“Chances are a few of the Martians, if they were smart, escaped to the mountains. But there aren’t enough, I’ll lay you money, to be a native problem. This planet is through.”

Spender turned and went to sit at the fire, looking into it. Chicken pox, God, chicken pox, think of it! A race builds itself for a million years, refines itself, erects cities like those out there, does everything it can to give itself respect and beauty, and then it dies.

Part of it dies slowly, in its own time, before our age, with dignity. But the rest! Does the rest of Mars die of a disease with a fine name or a terrifying name or a majestic name? No, in the name of all that’s holy, it has to be chicken pox, a child’s disease, a disease that doesn’t even kill children on Earth!

It’s not right and it’s not fair. It’s like saying the Greeks died of mumps, or the proud Romans died on their beautiful hills of athlete’s foot! If only we’d given the Martians time to arrange their death robes, lie down, look fit, and think up some other excuse for dying. It can’t be a dirty, silly thing like chicken pox. It doesn’t fit the architecture; it doesn’t fit this entire world!

“All right, Hathaway, get yourself some food.”

“Thank you, Captain.”

And as quickly as that it was forgotten. The men talked among themselves.

Spender did not take his eyes off them. He left his food on his plate under his hands. He felt the land getting colder. The stars drew closer, very clear.

When anyone talked too loudly the captain would reply in a low voice that made them talk quietly from imitation.

The air smelled clean and new. Spender sat for a long time just enjoying the way it was made. It had a lot of things in it he couldn't identify: flowers, chemistries, dusts, winds.

"Then there was that time in New York when I got that blonde, what's her name?—Ginnie!" cried Biggs. "That was it!"

Spender tightened in. His hand began to quiver. His eyes moved behind the thin, sparse lids.

"And Ginnie said to me—" cried Biggs.

The men roared.

"So I smacked her!" shouted Biggs with a bottle in his hand.

Spender set down his plate. He listened to the wind over his ears, cool and whispering. He looked at the cool ice of the white Martian buildings over there on the empty sea lands.

"What a woman, what a woman!" Biggs emptied his bottle in his wide mouth. "Of all the women I ever knew!"

The smell of Biggs's sweating body was on the air. Spender let the fire die. "Hey, kick her up there, Spender!" said Biggs, glancing at him for a moment, then back to his bottle. "Well, one night Ginnie and me—"

A man named Schoenke got out his accordion and did a kicking dance, the dust springing up around him.

"Ahoo—I'm alive!" he shouted.

"Yay!" roared the men. They threw down their empty plates. Three of them lined up and kicked like chorus maidens, joking loudly. The others, clapping hands, yelled for something to happen. Cherokee pulled

off his shirt and showed his naked chest, sweating as he whirled about. The moonlight shone on his crew-cut hair and his young, clean-shaven cheeks.

In the sea bottom the wind stirred along faint vapors, and from the mountains great stone visages looked upon the silvery rocket and the small fire.

The noise got louder, more men jumped up, someone sucked on a mouth organ, someone else blew on a tissue-papered comb. Twenty more bottles were opened and drunk. Biggs staggered about, wagging his arms to direct the dancing men.

“Come on, sir!” cried Cherokee to the captain, wailing a song.

The captain had to join the dance. He didn’t want to. His face was solemn. Spender watched, thinking: You poor man, what a night this is! They don’t know what they’re doing. They should have had an orientation program before they came to Mars to tell them how to look and how to walk around and be good for a few days.

“That does it.” The captain begged off and sat down, saying he was exhausted. Spender looked at the captain’s chest. It wasn’t moving up and down very fast. His face wasn’t sweaty, either. Accordion, harmonica, wine, shout, dance, wail, roundabout, clash of pan, laughter.

Biggs weaved to the rim of the Martian canal. He carried six empty bottles and dropped them one by one into the deep blue canal waters. They made empty, hollow, drowning sounds as they sank.

“I christen thee, I christen thee, I christen thee—” said Biggs thickly. “I christen thee Biggs, Biggs, Biggs Canal—”

Spender was on his feet, over the fire, and alongside Biggs before anyone moved. He hit Biggs once in the teeth and once in the ear. Biggs toppled and fell down into the canal water. After the splash Spender

waited silently for Biggs to climb back up onto the stone bank. By that time the men were holding Spender.

“Hey, what’s eating you, Spender? Hey?” they asked.

Biggs climbed up and stood dripping. He saw the men holding Spender.

“Well,” he said, and started forward.

“That’s enough,” snapped Captain Wilder. The men broke away from Spender. Biggs stopped and glanced at the captain.

“All right, Biggs, get some dry clothes. You men, carry on your party! Spender, come with me!”

The men took up the party. Wilder moved off some distance and confronted Spender. “Suppose you explain what just happened,” he said.

Spender looked at the canal. “I don’t know. I was ashamed. Of Biggs and us and the noise. Christ, what a spectacle.”

“It’s been a long trip. They’ve got to have their fling.”

“Where’s their respect, sir? Where’s their sense of the right thing?”

“You’re tired, and you’ve a different way of seeing things, Spender. That’s a fifty-dollar fine for you.”

“Yes, sir. It was just the idea of Them watching us make fools of ourselves.”

“Them?”

“The Martians, whether they’re dead or not.”

“Most certainly dead,” said the captain. “Do you think They know we’re here?”

“Doesn’t an old thing always know when a new thing comes?”

“I suppose so. You sound as if you believe in spirits.”

“I believe in the things that were done, and there are evidences of many things done on Mars. There are streets and houses, and there are books, I imagine, and big canals and clocks and places for stabling, if not horses, well, then some domestic animal, perhaps with twelve legs,

who knows? Everywhere I look I see things that were used. They were touched and handled for centuries.

“Ask me, then, if I believe in the spirit of the things as they were used, and I’ll say yes. They’re all here. All the things which had uses. All the mountains which had names. And we’ll never be able to use them without feeling uncomfortable.

And somehow the mountains will never sound right to us; we’ll give them new names, but the old names are there, somewhere in time, and the mountains were shaped and seen under those names. The names we’ll give to the canals and mountains and cities will fall like so much water on the back of a mallard. No matter how we touch Mars, we’ll never touch it.

And then we’ll get mad at it, and you know what we’ll do? We’ll rip it up, rip the skin off, and change it to fit ourselves.”

“We won’t ruin Mars,” said the captain. “It’s too big and too good.”

“You think not? We Earth Men have a talent for ruining big, beautiful things. The only reason we didn’t set up hot-dog stands in the midst of the Egyptian temple of Karnak is because it was out of the way and served no large commercial purpose.

And Egypt is a small part of Earth. But here, this whole thing is ancient and different, and we have to set down somewhere and start fouling it up. We’ll call the canal the Rockefeller Canal and the mountain King George Mountain and the sea the Dupont Sea, and there’ll be Roosevelt and Lincoln and Coolidge cities and it won’t ever be right, when there are the proper names for these places.”

“That’ll be your job, as archaeologist, to find out the old names, and we’ll use them.”

“A few men like us against all the commercial interests.” Spender looked at the iron mountains. “They know we’re here tonight, to spit in their wine, and I imagine they hate us.”

The captain shook his head. “There’s no hatred here.”

He listened to the wind. “From the look of their cities they were a graceful, beautiful, and philosophical people. They accepted what came to them. They acceded to racial death, that much we know, and without a last-moment war of frustration to tumble down their cities. Every town we’ve seen so far has been flawlessly intact.

They probably don’t mind us being here anymore than they’d mind children playing on the lawn, knowing and understanding children for what they are. And, anyway, perhaps all this will change us for the better.

“Did you notice the peculiar quiet of the men, Spender, until Biggs forced them to get happy? They looked pretty humble and frightened. Looking at all this, we know we’re not so hot; we’re kids in rompers, shouting with our play rockets and atoms, loud and alive. But one day Earth will be as Mars is today. This will sober us. It’s an object lesson in civilizations.

We’ll learn from Mars. Now suck in your chin. Let’s go back and play happy. That fifty-dollar fine still goes.”

The party was not going too well. The wind kept coming in off the dead sea. It moved around the men and it moved around the captain and Jeff Spender as they returned to the group. The wind pulled at the dust and the shining rocket and pulled at the accordion, and the dust got into the vamped harmonica.

The dust got in their eyes and the wind made a high singing sound in the air. As suddenly as it had come the wind died.

But the party had died too.

The men stood upright against the dark cold sky.

“Come on, gents, come on!” Biggs bounded from the ship in a fresh uniform, not looking at Spender even once. His voice was like someone in an empty auditorium. It was alone. “Come on!” Nobody moved.

“Come on, Whitie, your harmonica!”

Whitie blew a chord. It sounded funny and wrong. Whitie knocked the moisture from his harmonica and put it away.

“What kinda party is this?” Biggs wanted to know.

Someone hugged the accordion. It gave a sound like a dying animal. That was all.

“Okay, me and my bottle will go have our own party.” Biggs squatted against the rocket, drinking from a flask.

Spender watched him. Spender did not move for a long time. Then his fingers crawled up along his trembling leg to his holstered pistol, very quietly, and stroked and tapped the leather sheath.

“All those who want to can come into the city with me,” announced the captain. “We’ll post a guard here at the rocket and go armed, just in case.”

The men counted off. Fourteen of them wanted to go, including Biggs, who laughingly counted himself in, waving his bottle. Six others stayed behind.

“Here we go!” Biggs shouted.

The party moved out into the moonlight, silently. They made their way to the outer rim of the dreaming dead city in the light of the racing twin moons. Their shadows, under them, were double shadows.

They did not breathe, or seemed not to, perhaps, for several minutes. They were waiting for something to stir in the dead city, some gray form to rise, some ancient, ancestral shape to come galloping across

the vacant sea bottom on an ancient, armored steed of impossible lineage, of unbelievable derivation.

Spender filled the streets with his eyes and his mind. People moved like blue vapor lights on the cobbled avenues, and there were faint murmurs of sound, and odd animals scurrying across the gray-red sands.

Each window was given a person who leaned from it and waved slowly, as if under a timeless water, at some moving form in the fathoms of space below the moon-silvered towers. Music was played on some inner ear, and Spender imagined the shape of such instruments to evoke such music. The land was haunted.

“Hey!” shouted Biggs, standing tall, his hands around his open mouth.

“Hey, you people in the city there, you!”

“Biggs!” said the captain.

Biggs quieted.

They walked forward on a tiled avenue. They were all whispering now, for it was like entering a vast open library or a mausoleum in which the wind lived and over which the stars shone. The captain spoke quietly. He wondered where the people had gone, and what they had been, and who their kings were, and how they had died.

And he wondered, quietly aloud, how they had built this city to last the ages through, and had they ever come to Earth? Were they ancestors of Earth Men ten thousand years removed? And had they loved and hated similar loves and hates, and done similar silly things when silly things were done?

Nobody moved. The moons held and froze them; the wind beat slowly around them.

“Lord Byron,” said Jeff Spender.

“Lord who?” The captain turned and regarded him.

“Lord Byron, a nineteenth-century poet. He wrote a poem a long time ago that fits this city and how the Martians must feel, if there’s anything left of them to feel. It might have been written by the last Martian poet.”

The men stood motionless, their shadows under them.
The captain said, “How does the poem go, Spender?”

Spender shifted, put out his hand to remember, squinted silently a moment; then, remembering, his slow quiet voice repeated the words and the men listened to everything he said:
“So we’ll go no more a-roving

So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.”

The city was gray and high and motionless. The men’s faces were turned in the light.

“For the sword outwears its sheath,

And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself must rest.

“Though the night was made for loving,

And the day returns too soon,
Yet we’ll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon.”

Without a word the Earth Men stood in the center of the city. It was a clear night. There was not a sound except the wind. At their feet lay a tile court worked into the shapes of ancient animals and peoples. They looked down upon it.

Biggs made a sick noise in his throat. His eyes were dull. His hands went to his mouth; he choked, shut his eyes, bent, and a thick rush of fluid

filled his mouth, spilled out, fell to splash on the tiles, covering the designs. Biggs did this twice. A sharp winy stench filled the cool air.

No one moved to help Biggs. He went on being sick.

Spender stared for a moment, then turned and walked off into the avenues of the city, alone in the moonlight. Never once did he pause to look back at the gathered men there.

They turned in at four in the morning. They lay upon blankets and shut their eyes and breathed the quiet air. Captain Wilder sat feeding little sticks into the fire.

McClure opened his eyes two hours later. "Aren't you sleeping, sir?"

"I'm waiting for Spender." The captain smiled faintly.

McClure thought it over. "You know, sir, I don't think he'll ever come back. I don't know how I know, but that's the way I feel about him, sir; he'll never come back."

McClure rolled over into sleep. The fire crackled and died.

Spender did not return in the following week. The captain sent searching parties, but they came back saying they didn't know where Spender could have gone. He would be back when he got good and ready. He was a sorehead, they said. To the devil with him!

The captain said nothing but wrote it down in his log. . . .

It was a morning that might have been a Monday or a Tuesday or any day on Mars. Biggs was on the canal rim; his feet hung down into the cool water, soaking, while he took the sun on his face.

A man walked along the bank of the canal. The man threw a shadow down upon Biggs. Biggs glanced up.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Biggs.

"I'm the last Martian," said the man, taking out a gun.

"What did you say?" asked Biggs.

“I’m going to kill you.”

“Cut it. What kind of joke’s that, Spender?”

“Stand up and take it in the stomach.”

“For Christ’s sake, put that gun away.”

Spender pulled the trigger only once. Biggs sat on the edge of the canal for a moment before he leaned forward and fell into the water. The gun had made only a whispering hum. The body drifted with slow unconcern under the slow canal tides. It made a hollow bubbling sound that ceased after a moment.

Spender shoved his gun into its holster and walked soundlessly away. The sun was shining down upon Mars. He felt it burn his hands and slide over the sides of his tight face. He did not run; he walked as if nothing were new except the daylight. He walked down to the rocket, and some of the men were eating a freshly cooked breakfast under a shelter built by Cookie.

“Here comes The Lonely One,” someone said.

“Hello, Spender! Long time no see!”

The four men at the table regarded the silent man who stood looking back at them.

“You and them goddamn ruins,” laughed Cookie, stirring a black substance in a crock. “You’re like a dog in a bone yard.”

“Maybe,” said Spender, “I’ve been finding out things. What would you say if I said I’d found a Martian prowling around?”

The four men laid down their forks.

“Did you? Where?”

“Never mind. Let me ask you a question. How would you feel if you were a Martian and people came to your land and started tearing it up?”

“I know exactly how I’d feel,” said Cherokee. “I’ve got some Cherokee blood in me. My grandfather told me lots of things about Oklahoma Territory. If there’s a Martian around, I’m all for him.”

“What about you other men?” asked Spender carefully.

Nobody answered; their silence was talk enough. Catch as catch can, finder’s keepers, if the other fellow turns his cheek slap it hard, etc. . . .

“Well,” said Spender, “I’ve found a Martian.”

The men squinted at him.

“Up in a dead town. I didn’t think I’d find him. I didn’t intend looking him up. I don’t know what he was doing there. I’ve been living in a little valley town for about a week, learning how to read the ancient books and looking at their old art forms.

And one day I saw this Martian. He stood there for a moment and then he was gone. He didn’t come back for another day.

I sat around, learning how to read the old writing, and the Martian came back, each time a little nearer, until on the day I learned how to decipher the Martian language—it’s amazingly simple and there are picture-graphs to help you—the Martian appeared before me and said, ‘Give me your boots.’

And I gave him my boots and he said, ‘Give me your uniform and all the rest of your apparel.’ And I gave him all of that, and then he said, ‘Give me your gun,’ and I gave him my gun. Then he said, ‘Now come along and watch what happens.’ And the Martian walked down into camp and he’s here now.”

“I don’t see any Martian,” said Cherokee.

“I’m sorry.”

Spender took out his gun. It hummed softly. The first bullet got the man on the left; the second and third bullets took the men on the right and the center of the table. Cookie turned in horror from the fire to receive

the fourth bullet. He fell back into the fire and lay there while his clothes caught fire.

The rocket lay in the sun. Three men sat at breakfast, their hands on the table, not moving, their food getting cold in front of them. Cherokee, untouched, sat alone, staring in numb disbelief at Spender.

“You can come with me,” said Spender.
Cherokee said nothing.

“You can be with me on this.” Spender waited.
Finally Cherokee was able to speak. “You killed them,” he said, daring to look at the men around him.

“They deserved it.”
“You’re crazy!”
“Maybe I am. But you can come with me.”

“Come with you, for what?” cried Cherokee, the color gone from his face, his eyes watering. “Go on, get out!”
Spender’s face hardened. “Of all of them, I thought you would understand.”
“Get out!” Cherokee reached for his gun.

Spender fired one last time. Cherokee stopped moving.

Now Spender swayed. He put his hand to his sweating face. He glanced at the rocket and suddenly began to shake all over. He almost fell, the physical reaction was so overwhelming. His face held an expression of one awakening from hypnosis, from a dream. He sat down for a moment and told the shaking to go away.

“Stop it, stop it!” he commanded of his body. Every fiber of him was quivering and shaking. “Stop it!” He crushed his body with his mind until all the shaking was squeezed out of it. His hands lay calmly now upon his silent knees.

He arose and strapped a portable storage locker on his back with quiet efficiency. His hand began to tremble again, just for a breath of an instant, but he said, "No!" very firmly, and the trembling passed. Then, walking stiffly, he moved out between the hot red hills of the land, alone.

The sun burned farther up the sky. An hour later the captain climbed down out of the rocket to get some ham and eggs. He was just saying hello to the four men sitting there when he stopped and noticed a faint smell of gun fumes on the air. He saw the cook lying on the ground, with the campfire under him. The four men sat before food that was now cold.

A moment later Parkhill and two others climbed down. The captain stood in their way, fascinated by the silent men and the way they sat at their breakfast.

"Call the men, all of them," said the captain.

Parkhill hurried off down the canal rim.

The captain touched Cherokee. Cherokee twisted quietly and fell from his chair. Sunlight burned in his bristled short hair and on his high cheekbones.

The men came in.

"Who's missing?"

"It's still Spender, sir. We found Biggs floating in the canal."

"Spender!"

The captain saw the hills rising in the daylight. The sun showed his teeth in a grimace. "Damn him," he said tiredly. "Why didn't he come and talk to me?"

"He should've talked to me," cried Parkhill, eyes blazing. "I'd have shot his bloody brains out, that's what I'd have done, by God!"

Captain Wilder nodded at two of his men. "Get shovels," he said.

It was hot digging the graves. A warm wind came from over the vacant sea and blew the dust into their faces as the captain turned the Bible pages. When the captain closed the book someone began shoveling slow streams of sand down upon the wrapped figures.

They walked back to the rocket, clicked the mechanisms of their rifles, put thick grenade packets on their backs, and checked the free play of pistols in their holsters. They were each assigned a certain part of the hills. The captain directed them without raising his voice or moving his hands where they hung at his sides.

“Let’s go,” he said.

Spender saw the thin dust rising in several places in the valley and he knew the pursuit was organized and ready. He put down the thin silver book that he had been reading as he sat easily on a flat boulder.

The book’s pages were tissue-thin, pure silver, hand-painted in black and gold. It was a book of philosophy at least ten thousand years old he had found in one of the villas of a Martian valley town. He was reluctant to lay it aside.

For a time he had thought, What’s the use? I’ll sit here reading until they come along and shoot me.

The first reaction to his killing the six men this morning had caused a period of stunned blankness, then sickness, and now, a strange peace. But the peace was passing, too, for he saw the dust billowing from the trails of the hunting men, and he experienced the return of resentment.

He took a drink of cool water from his hip canteen. Then he stood up, stretched, yawned, and listened to the peaceful wonder of the valley around him. How very fine if he and a few others he knew on Earth could be here, live out their lives here, without a sound or a worry.

He carried the book with him in one hand, the pistol ready in his other. There was a little swift-running stream filled with white pebbles and

rocks where he undressed and waded in for a brief washing. He took all the time he wanted before dressing and picking up his gun again.

The firing began about three in the afternoon. By then Spender was high in the hills. They followed him through three small Martian hill towns. Above the towns, scattered like pebbles, were single villas where ancient families had found a brook, a green spot, and laid out a tile pool, a library, and a court with a pulsing fountain.

Spender took half an hour, swimming in one of the pools which was filled with the seasonal rain, waiting for the pursuers to catch up with him.

Shots rang out as he was leaving the little villa. Tile chipped up some twenty feet behind him, exploded. He broke into a trot, moved behind a series of small bluffs, turned, and with his first shot dropped one of the men dead in his tracks.

They would form a net, a circle; Spender knew that. They would go around and close in and they would get him. It was a strange thing that the grenades were not used. Captain Wilder could easily order the grenades tossed.

But I'm much too nice to be blown to bits, thought Spender. That's what the captain thinks. He wants me with only one hole in me. Isn't that odd? He wants my death to be clean. Nothing messy. Why? Because he understands me. And because he understands, he's willing to risk good men to give me a clean shot in the head. Isn't that it?

Nine, ten shots broke out in a rattle. Rocks around him jumped up. Spender fired steadily, sometimes while glancing at the silver book he carried in his hand.

The captain ran in the hot sunlight with a rifle in his hands. Spender followed him in his pistol sights but did not fire. Instead he shifted and blew the top off a rock where Whitie lay, and heard an angry shout.

Suddenly the captain stood up. He had a white handkerchief in his hands. He said something to his men and came walking up the mountain after putting aside his rifle. Spender lay there, then got to his feet, his pistol ready.

The captain came up and sat down on a warm boulder, not looking at Spender for a moment.

The captain reached into his blouse pocket. Spender's fingers tightened on the pistol.

The captain said, "Cigarette?"

"Thanks." Spender took one.

"Light?"

"Got my own."

They took one or two puffs in silence.

"Warm," said the captain.

"It is."

"You comfortable up here?"

"Quite."

"How long do you think you can hold out?"

"About twelve men's worth."

"Why didn't you kill all of us this morning when you had the chance? You could have, you know."

"I know. I got sick. When you want to do a thing badly enough you lie to yourself. You say the other people are all wrong. Well, soon after I started killing people I realized they were just fools and I shouldn't be killing them. But it was too late. I couldn't go on with it then, so I came up here where I could lie to myself some more and get angry, to build it all up again."

"Is it built up?"

"Not very high. Enough."

The captain considered his cigarette. "Why did you do it?"

Spender quietly laid his pistol at his feet. “Because I’ve seen that what these Martians had was just as good as anything we’ll ever hope to have. They stopped where we should have stopped a hundred years ago. I’ve walked in their cities and I know these people and I’d be glad to call them my ancestors.”

“They have a beautiful city there.” The captain nodded at one of several places.

“It’s not that alone. Yes, their cities are good. They knew how to blend art into their living. It’s always been a thing apart for Americans. Art was something you kept in the crazy son’s room upstairs. Art was something you took in Sunday doses, mixed with religion, perhaps. Well, these Martians have art and religion and everything.”

“You think they knew what it was all about, do you?”

“For my money.”

“And for that reason you started shooting people.”

“When I was a kid my folks took me to visit Mexico City. I’ll always remember the way my father acted—loud and big. And my mother didn’t like the people because they were dark and didn’t wash enough. And my sister wouldn’t talk to most of them. I was the only one really liked it. And I can see my mother and father coming to Mars and acting the same way here.

“Anything that’s strange is no good to the average American.

If it doesn’t have Chicago plumbing, it’s nonsense. The thought of that! Oh God, the thought of that! And then—the war. You heard the congressional speeches before we left. If things work out they hope to establish three atomic research and atom bomb depots on Mars. That means Mars is finished; all this wonderful stuff gone. How would you feel if a Martian vomited stale liquor on the White House floor?”

The captain said nothing but listened.

Spender continued: "And then the other power interests coming up. The mineral men and the travel men. Do you remember what happened to Mexico when Cortéz and his very fine good friends arrived from Spain? A whole civilization destroyed by greedy, righteous bigots. History will never forgive Cortéz."

"You haven't acted ethically yourself today," observed the captain.

"What could I do? Argue with you? It's simply me against the whole crooked grinding greedy setup on Earth. They'll be flopping their filthy atom bombs up here, fighting for bases to have wars. Isn't it enough they've ruined one planet, without ruining another; do they have to foul someone else's manger?"

The simple-minded windbags. When I got up here I felt I was not only free of their so-called culture, I felt I was free of their ethics and their customs. I'm out of their frame of reference, I thought. All I have to do is kill you all off and live my own life."

"But it didn't work out," said the captain.

"No. After the fifth killing at breakfast, I discovered I wasn't all new, all Martian, after all. I couldn't throw away everything I had learned on Earth so easily. But now I'm feeling steady again. I'll kill you all off.

That'll delay the next trip in a rocket for a good five years. There's no other rocket in existence today, save this one. The people on Earth will wait a year, two years, and then when they hear nothing from us, they'll be very afraid to build a new rocket. They'll take twice as long and make a hundred extra experimental models to insure themselves against another failure."

"You're correct."

"A good report from you, on the other hand, if you returned, would hasten the whole invasion of Mars. If I'm lucky I'll live to be sixty years old. Every expedition that lands on Mars will be met by me.

There won't be more than one ship at a time coming up, one every year or so, and never more than twenty men in the crew. After I've made friends with them and explained that our rocket exploded one day—I intend to blow it up after I finish my job this week—I'll kill them off, every one of them. Mars will be untouched for the next half century. After a while, perhaps the Earth people will give up trying. Remember how they grew leery of the idea of building Zeppelins that were always going down in flames?"

"You've got it all planned," admitted the captain.

"I have."

"Yet you're outnumbered. In an hour we'll have you surrounded. In an hour you'll be dead."

"I've found some underground passages and a place to live you'll never find. I'll withdraw there to live for a few weeks. Until you're off guard. I'll come out then to pick you off, one by one."

The captain nodded. "Tell me about your civilization here," he said, waving his hand at the mountain towns.

"They knew how to live with nature and get along with nature. They didn't try too hard to be all men and no animal. That's the mistake we made when Darwin showed up. We embraced him and Huxley and Freud, all smiles. And then we discovered that Darwin and our religions didn't mix. Or at least we didn't think they did. We were fools. We tried to budge Darwin and Huxley and Freud. They wouldn't move very well. So, like idiots, we tried knocking down religion.

"We succeeded pretty well. We lost our faith and went around wondering what life was for. If art was no more than a frustrated outflinging of desire, if religion was no more than self-delusion, what good was life? Faith had always given us answers to all things. But it all went down the drain with Freud and Darwin. We were and still are a lost people."

"And these Martians are a found people?" inquired the captain.

“Yes. They knew how to combine science and religion so the two worked side by side, neither denying the other, each enriching the other.”

“That sounds ideal.”

“It was. I’d like to show you how the Martians did it.”

“My men are waiting.”

“We’ll be gone half an hour. Tell them that, sir.”

The captain hesitated, then rose and called an order down the hill.

Spender led him over into a little Martian village built all of cool perfect marble. There were great friezes of beautiful animals, white-limbed cat things and yellow-limbed sun symbols, and statues of bull-like creatures and statues of men and women and huge fine-featured dogs.

“There’s your answer, Captain.”

“I don’t see.”

“The Martians discovered the secret of life among animals. The animal does not question life. It lives. Its very reason for living is life; it enjoys and relishes life. You see—the statuary, the animal symbols, again and again.”

“It looks pagan.”

“On the contrary, those are God symbols, symbols of life. Man had become too much man and not enough animal on Mars too. And the men of Mars realized that in order to survive they would have to forgo asking that one question any longer: Why live?

Life was its own answer. Life was the propagation of more life and the living of as good a life as possible. The Martians realized that they asked the question ‘Why live at all?’ at the height of some period of war and despair, when there was no answer. But once the civilization calmed, quieted, and wars ceased, the question became senseless in a new way. Life was now good and needed no arguments.”

“It sounds as if the Martians were quite naïve.”

“Only when it paid to be naïve. They quit trying too hard to destroy everything, to humble everything. They blended religion and art and science because, at base, science is no more than an investigation of a miracle we can never explain, and art is an interpretation of that miracle.

They never let science crush the aesthetic and the beautiful. It’s all simply a matter of degree. An Earth Man thinks: ‘In that picture, color does not exist, really. A scientist can prove that color is only the way the cells are placed in a certain material to reflect light.

Therefore, color is not really an actual part of things I happen to see.’ A Martian, far cleverer, would say: ‘This is a fine picture. It came from the hand and the mind of a man inspired. Its idea and its color are from life. This thing is good.’”

There was a pause. Sitting in the afternoon sun, the captain looked curiously around at the little silent cool town.

“I’d like to live here,” he said.

“You may if you want.”

“You ask me that?”

“Will any of those men under you ever really understand all this? They’re professional cynics, and it’s too late for them. Why do you want to go back with them? So you can keep up with the Joneses? To buy a gyro just like Smith has?

To listen to music with your pocketbook instead of your glands? There’s a little patio down here with a reel of Martian music in it at least fifty thousand years old. It still plays. Music you’ll never hear in your life. You could hear it. There are books. I’ve gotten on well in reading them already. You could sit and read.”

“It all sounds quite wonderful, Spender.”

“But you won’t stay?”

“No. Thanks, anyway.”

“And you certainly won’t let me stay without trouble. I’ll have to kill you all.”

“You’re optimistic.”

“I have something to fight for and live for; that makes me a better killer. I’ve got what amounts to a religion, now. It’s learning how to breathe all over again. And how to lie in the sun getting a tan, letting the sun work into you. And how to hear music and how to read a book. What does your civilization offer?”

The captain shifted his feet. He shook his head. “I’m sorry this is happening. I’m sorry about it all.”

“I am too. I guess I’d better take you back now so you can start the attack.”

“I guess so.”

“Captain, I won’t kill you. When it’s all over, you’ll still be alive.”

“What?”

“I decided when I started that you’d be untouched.”

“Well . . .”

“I’ll save you out from the rest. When they’re dead, perhaps you’ll change your mind.”

“No,” said the captain. “There’s too much Earth blood in me. I’ll have to keep after you.”

“Even when you have a chance to stay here?”

“It’s funny, but yes, even with that. I don’t know why. I’ve never asked myself. Well, here we are.” They had returned to their meeting place now. “Will you come quietly, Spender? This is my last offer.”

“Thanks, no.” Spender put out his hand. “One last thing. If you win, do me a favor. See what can be done to restrict tearing this planet apart,

at least for fifty years, until the archaeologists have had a decent chance, will you?"

"Right."

"And last—if it helps any, just think of me as a very crazy fellow who went berserk one summer day and never was right again. It'll be a little easier on you that way."

"I'll think it over. So long, Spender. Good luck."

"You're an odd one," said Spender as the captain walked back down the trail in the warm-blowing wind.

The captain returned like something lost to his dusty men. He kept squinting at the sun and breathing hard.

"Is there a drink?" he said. He felt a bottle put cool into his hand.

"Thanks." He drank. He wiped his mouth.

"All right," he said. "Be careful. We have all the time we want. I don't want any more lost. You'll have to kill him. He won't come down. Make it a clean shot if you can. Don't mess him. Get it over with."

"I'll blow his damned brains out," said Sam Parkhill.

"No, through the chest," said the captain. He could see Spender's strong, clearly determined face.

"His bloody brains," said Parkhill.

The captain handed him the bottle jerkingly. "You heard what I said. Through the chest."

Parkhill muttered to himself.

"Now," said the captain.

They spread again, walking and then running, and then walking on the hot hillside places where there would be sudden cool grottoes that smelled of moss, and sudden open blasting places that smelled of sun on stone.

I hate being clever, thought the captain, when you don't really feel clever and don't want to be clever. To sneak around and make plans

and feel big about making them. I hate this feeling of thinking I'm doing right when I'm not really certain I am.

Who are we, anyway? The majority? Is that the answer? The majority is always holy, is it not? Always, always; just never wrong for one little insignificant tiny moment, is it?

Never ever wrong in ten million years? He thought: What is this majority and who are in it? And what do they think and how did they get that way and will they ever change and how the devil did I get caught in this rotten majority?

I don't feel comfortable. Is it claustrophobia, fear of crowds, or common sense? Can one man be right, while all the world thinks they are right? Let's not think about it. Let's crawl around and act exciting and pull the trigger. There, and there!

The men ran and ducked and ran and squatted in shadows and showed their teeth, gasping, for the air was thin, not meant for running; the air was thin and they had to sit for five minutes at a time, wheezing and seeing black lights in their eyes, eating at the thin air and wanting more, tightening their eyes, and at last getting up, lifting their guns to tear holes in that thin summer air, holes of sound and heat.

Spender remained where he was, firing only on occasion.
"Damned brains all over!" Parkhill yelled, running uphill.

The captain aimed his gun at Sam Parkhill. He put it down and stared at it in horror. "What were you doing?" he asked of his limp hand and the gun.

He had almost shot Parkhill in the back.

"God help me."

He saw Parkhill still running, then falling to lie safe.

Spender was being gathered in by a loose, running net of men. At the hilltop, behind two rocks, Spender lay, grinning with exhaustion from

the thin atmosphere, great islands of sweat under each arm. The captain saw the two rocks. There was an interval between them of some four inches, giving free access to Spender's chest.

"Hey, you!" cried Parkhill. "Here's a slug for your head!"

Captain Wilder waited. Go on, Spender, he thought. Get out, like you said you would. You've only a few minutes to escape. Get out and come back later. Go on. You said you would. Go down in the tunnels you said you found, and lie there and live for months and years, reading your fine books and bathing in your temple pools. Go on, now, man, before it's too late.

Spender did not move from his position.

"What's wrong with him?" the captain asked himself.

The captain picked up his gun. He watched the running, hiding men. He looked at the towers of the little clean Martian village, like sharply carved chess pieces lying in the afternoon. He saw the rocks and the interval between where Spender's chest was revealed.

Parkhill was charging up, screaming in fury.

"No, Parkhill," said the captain. "I can't let you do it. Nor the others. No, none of you. Only me." He raised the gun and sighted it.

Will I be clean after this? he thought. Is it right that it's me who does it? Yes, it is. I know what I'm doing for what reason and it's right, because I think I'm the right person. I hope and pray I can live up to this.

He nodded his head at Spender. "Go on," he called in a loud whisper which no one heard. "I'll give you thirty seconds more to get away. Thirty seconds!"

The watch ticked on his wrist. The captain watched it tick. The men were running. Spender did not move. The watch ticked for a long time, very loudly in the captain's ears. "Go on, Spender, go on, get away!"

The thirty seconds were up.

The gun was sighted. The captain drew a deep breath. "Spender," he said, exhaling.

He pulled the trigger.

All that happened was that a faint powdering of rock went up in the sunlight. The echoes of the report faded.

The captain arose and called to his men: "He's dead."

The other men did not believe it. Their angles had prevented their seeing that particular fissure in the rocks. They saw their captain run up the hill, alone, and thought him either very brave or insane.

The men came after him a few minutes later.

They gathered around the body and someone said, "In the chest?"

The captain looked down. "In the chest," he said. He saw how the rocks had changed color under Spender. "I wonder why he waited. I wonder why he didn't escape as he planned. I wonder why he stayed on and got himself killed."

"Who knows?" someone said.

Spender lay there, his hands clasped, one around the gun, the other around the silver book that glittered in the sun.

Was it because of me? thought the captain. Was it because I refused to give in myself? Did Spender hate the idea of killing me? Am I any different from these others here? Is that what did it? Did he figure he could trust me? What other answer is there?

None. He squatted by the silent body.

I've got to live up to this, he thought. I can't let him down now. If he figured there was something in me that was like himself and couldn't kill me because of it, then what a job I have ahead of me! That's it, yes, that's it.

I'm Spender all over again, but I think before I shoot. I don't shoot at all, I don't kill. I do things with people. And he couldn't kill me because I was himself under a slightly different condition.

The captain felt the sunlight on the back of his neck. He heard himself talking: "If only he had come to me and talked it over before he shot anybody, we could have worked it out somehow."

"Worked what out?" said Parkhill. "What could we have worked out with his likes?"

There was a singing of heat in the land, off the rocks and off the blue sky. "I guess you're right," said the captain. "We could never have got together. Spender and myself, perhaps. But Spender and you and the others, no, never. He's better off now. Let me have a drink from that canteen."

It was the captain who suggested the empty sarcophagus for Spender. They had found an ancient Martian tomb yard. They put Spender into a silver case with waxes and wines which were ten thousand years old, his hands folded on his chest. The last they saw of him was his peaceful face.

They stood for a moment in the ancient vault. "I think it would be a good idea for you to think of Spender from time to time," said the captain.

They walked from the vault and shut the marble door.

The next afternoon Parkhill did some target practice in one of the dead cities, shooting out the crystal windows and blowing the tops off the fragile towers. The captain caught Parkhill and knocked his teeth out.

The End