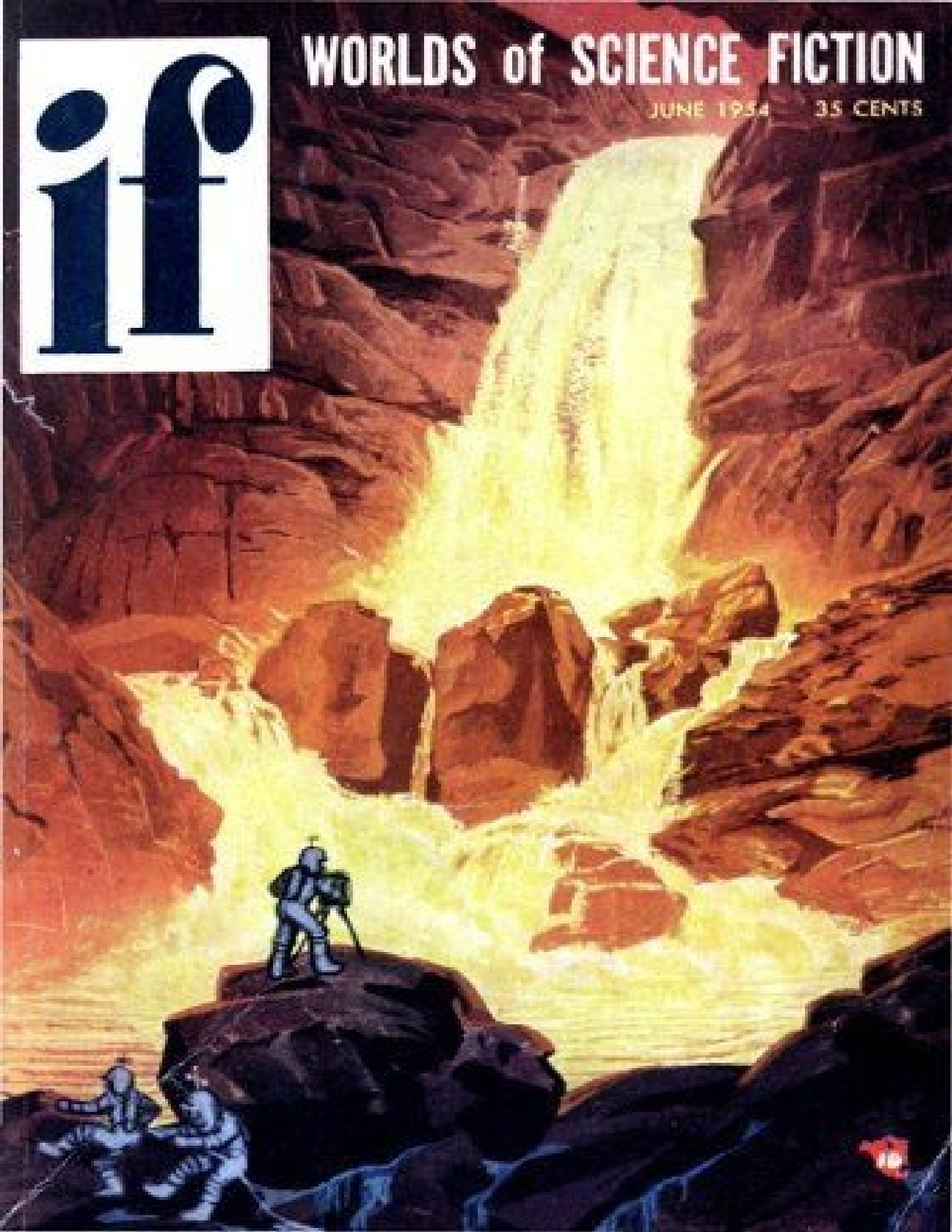


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# WORLDS of SCIENCE FICTION

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# **THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING**

**By Mari Wolf**

**Illustrated by Ed Emsh**

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*Here is a love story of two young people who met under the magic of festival time. One was Trina, whose world was a gentle make-believe Earth. The other was Max, handsome spaceman, whose world was the infinite universe of space....*

The First Day of spring, the man at the weather tower had said, and certainly it felt like spring, with the cool breeze blowing lightly about her and a faint new clover smell borne in from the east. Spring—that meant they would make the days longer now, and the nights shorter, and they would warm the whole world until it was summer again.

Trina laughed aloud at the thought of summer, with its picnics and languid swims in the refilled lakes, with its music and the heavy scent of flowers and the visitors in from space for the festival. She laughed, and urged her horse faster, out of its ambling walk into a trot, a canter, until the wind streamed about her, blowing back her hair, bringing tears to her eyes as she rode homeward toward the eastern horizon—the horizon that looked so far away but wasn't really.

"Trina!"

His voice was very close. And it was familiar, though for a moment she couldn't imagine who it might be.

"Where are you?" She had reined the horse in abruptly and now looked around her, in all directions, toward the north and south and east and west, toward the farm houses of the neighboring village, toward the light tower and the sun tower. She saw no one. No one else rode this early in the day in the pasture part of the world.

"I'm up here, Trina."

She looked up then and saw him, hovering some thirty feet off the ground in the ridiculous windmill-like craft he and his people used when they visited the world.

"Oh, hello, Max." No wonder she had known the voice. Max Cramer, down from space, down to the world, to see her. She knew, even before he dropped his craft onto the grass beside her, that he had come to see her. He couldn't have been on the world for more than the hour she'd been riding.

"You're visiting us early this year, Max. It's not festival time for three months yet."

"I know." He cut the power to the windmill blades, and they slowed, becoming sharply visible. The horse snorted and backed away. Max smiled. "This world is very—attractive."

His eyes caught hers, held them. She smiled back, wishing for the hundredth time since last summer's festival that he were one of her people, or at least a worldling, and not a man with the too white skin of space.

"It may be attractive," she said. "But you always leave it soon enough."

He nodded. "It's too confining. It's all right, for a little while, but then...."

"How can you say that?" She shook her head sadly. Already they were arguing the same old unresolvable argument, and they had scarcely greeted each other. After all his months in space they met with the same words as they had parted. She looked past him, up and out, toward the horizon that seemed so many miles away, toward the morning sun that seemed to hang far, far off in the vaulted blue dome of the sky.

"How can you even think it? About this?"

His lips tightened. "About *this*," he repeated. "A horizon you could ride to in five minutes. A world you could ride around in two hours. A sun—you really call it a sun—that you could almost reach up and pluck out of that sky of yours." He laughed. "Illusions. World of illusions."

"Well, what do you have? A ship—a tiny ship you can't get out of, with walls you can see, all around you."

"Yes, Trina, with walls we can see."

He was still smiling, watching her, and she knew that he desired her. And she desired him. But not the stars.

"You have nothing like this," she said, knowing it wouldn't do any good. She looked past him at the light tower, one of the many that formed the protective screen about her world, that made it seem great and convex, a huge flattened sphere with the sun high above, and not the swift curving steel ball that it actually was.

This was her world. It was like Earth, like the old Earth of the legends of the time before the radiation wars. And even though her mind might know the truth about the screens that refracted light and the atomic pile that was her sun, her heart knew a more human truth. This was a world. As it had been in the beginning. As it must be till the end—or until they found a new Earth, somewhere, sometime.... Max sighed. "Yes, you have your world, Trina. And it's a good one—the best of its kind I've ever visited."

"Why don't you stay here then?"

A spaceman, she thought. With all the dozens of men in my world, why did it have to be a spaceman? With all the visitors from New France and New Chile and New Australia last festival, why did it have to be him?

"I have the stars, Trina."

"We do too!" Last festival, and the warm June night, heavy, druggedly heavy with honeysuckle and magnolia, and the hidden music from the pavillions. And Max Cramer, tall and strong boned and alien, holding her in his arms, dancing her away from her people, out onto the terrace above the little stream, beneath the full festival moon and the summer stars, the safe, sane, well ordered constellations that their ancestors had looked upon from Earth.

"My stars are real, Trina."

She shook her head, unable to argue with him. World-woman and spaceman, and always different, with nothing in common between them, really, except a brief forgetfulness at festival time.

"Come with me, Trina."

"No." She gathered up the reins and chucked at the horse and turned, slowly, for the village.

"You wouldn't come—for me?"

"You wouldn't stay, would you?"

She heard the windmill blades whir again, and a rustling of wind, and then he was beside her, skimming slowly along, barely off the ground, making her horse snort nervously away.

"Trina, I shouldn't tell you this, not until we've met with your councilmen. But I—I've got to."

He wasn't smiling now. There was a wild look about his face. She didn't like it.

"Captain Bernard's with the council now, giving them the news. But I wanted to see you first, to be the one who told you." He broke off, shook his head. "Yet when I found you I couldn't say anything. I guess I was afraid of what you'd answer...."

"What are you talking about?" She didn't want to look at him. It embarrassed her somehow, seeing him so eager. "What do you want to tell me?"

"About our last trip, Trina. We've found a world!"

She stared at him blankly, and his hand made a cutting gesture of impatience. "Oh, not a world like this one! A planet, Trina. And it's Earth type!"

She wheeled the horse about and stared at him. For a moment she felt excitement rise inside of her too, and then she remembered the generations of searching, and the false alarms, and the dozens of barren, unfit planets that the spacemen colonized, planets like ground-bound ships.

"Oh, Trina," Max cried, "This isn't like the others. It's a new Earth. And there are already people there. From not long after the Exodus...."

"A new Earth?" she said. "I don't believe it."

The council wouldn't either, she thought. Not after all the other new Earths, freezing cold or methane atmosphered or at best completely waterless. This would be like the others. A spaceman's dream.

"You've got to believe me, Trina," Max said. "And you've got to help make the

others believe. Don't you see? You wouldn't live in space. I wouldn't live here—on this. But there, on a real planet, on a real Earth...."

Then suddenly she felt his excitement and it was a part of her, until against all reason she wanted to believe in his mad dream of a world. She laughed aloud as she caught up the reins and raced her horse homeward, toward the long vista of the horizon and the capital village beyond it, ten minutes gallop away.



Max and Trina came together into the council hall and saw the two groups, the roomful of worldmen and the half dozen spacemen, apart from each other, arguing. The spacemen's eyes were angry.

"A world," Captain Bernard said bitterly, "there for your taking, and you don't even want to look at it."

"How do we know what kind of world it is?" Councilman Elias leaned forward on the divan. His voice was gentle, almost pitying. "You brought no samples. No vegetation, no minerals...."

"Not even air samples," Aaron Gomez said softly. "Why?"

Bernard sighed. "We didn't want to wait," he said. "We wanted to get back here, to tell you."

"It may be a paradise world to *you*," Elias said. "But to us...."

Max Cramer tightened his grip on Trina's hand. "The fools," he said. "Talking and talking, and all the time this world drifts farther and farther away."

"It takes so much power to change course," Trina said. "And besides, you feel it. It makes you heavy."

She remembered the stories her father used to tell, about his own youth, when he and Curt Elias had turned the world to go to a planet the spaceman found. A planet with people—people who lived under glass domes, or deep below the formaldehyde poisoned surface.

"You could be there in two weeks, easily, even at your world's speed," Captain Bernard said.



"And then we'd have to go out," Elias said. "Into space."

The worldmen nodded. The women looked at each other and nodded too. One of the spacemen swore, graphically, and there was an embarrassed silence as Trina's people pretended not to have heard.

"Oh, let's get out of here." The spaceman who had sworn swore again, just as descriptively, and then grinned at the councilmen and their aloof, blank faces. "They don't want our planet. All right. Maybe New Chile..."

"Wait!" Trina said it without thinking, without intending to. She stood speechless when the others turned to face her. All the others. Her people and Max's. Curt Elias, leaning forward again, smiling at her.

"Yes, Trina?" the councilman said.

"Why don't we at least look at it? Maybe it is—what they say."

Expression came back to their faces then. They nodded at each other and looked from her to Max Cramer and back again at her, and they smiled. Festival time, their eyes said. Summer evenings, summer foolishness.

And festival time long behind them, but soon to come again.

"Your father went to space," Elias said. "We saw one of those worlds the spacemen talk of."

"I know."

"He didn't like it."

"I know that too," she said, remembering his bitter words and the nightmare times when her mother had had so much trouble comforting him, and the winter evenings when he didn't want even to go outside and see the familiar, Earth encircling stars.

He was dead now. Her mother was dead now. They were not here, to disapprove, to join with Elias and the others.

They would have hated for her to go out there.

She faltered, the excitement Max had aroused in her dying away, and then she thought of their argument, as old as their desire. She knew that if she wanted him it would have to be away from the worlds.

"At least we could look," she said. "And the spacemen could bring up samples. And maybe even some of the people for us to talk to."

Elias nodded. "It would be interesting," he said slowly, "to talk to some new people. It's been so long."

"And we wouldn't even have to land," Aaron Gomez said, "if it didn't look right."

The people turned to each other again and smiled happily. She knew that they were thinking of the men and women they would see, and all the new things to talk about.

"We might even invite some of them up for the festival," Elias said slowly. "Providing they're—courteous." He frowned at the young spaceman who had done the swearing, and then he looked back at Captain Bernard. "And providing, of course, that we're not too far away by then."

"I don't think you will be," Bernard said. "I think you'll stay."

"I think so too," Max Cramer said, moving closer to Trina. "I hope so."

Elias stood up slowly and signalled that the council was dismissed. The other people stood up also and moved toward the doors.

"We'd better see about changing the world's course," Aaron Gomez said.

No one objected. It was going to be done. Trina looked up at Max Cramer and knew that she loved him. And wondered why she was afraid.



It was ten days later that the world, New America, came into the gravitational influence of the planet's solar system. The automatic deflectors swung into functioning position, ready to change course, slowly and imperceptibly, but enough to take the world around the system and out into the freedom of space where it could wander on its random course. But this time men shunted aside the automatic controls. Men guided their homeland in, slowly now, toward the second planet from the sun, the one that the spacemen had said was so like Earth.

"We'll see it tomorrow," Trina said. "They'll shut off part of the light tower system then."

"Why don't they now?" Max Cramer asked her. It was just past sunset, and the stars of a dozen generations ago were just beginning to wink into view. He saw Venus, low on the horizon, and his lips tightened, and then he looked up to where he knew the new sun must be.

There was only the crescent of Earth's moon.

"Now?" Trina said. "Why should they turn the screens off now? We're still so far away. We wouldn't see anything."

"You'd see the sun," Max said. "It's quite bright, even from here. And from close up, from where the planet is, it looks just about like Earth's."

Trina nodded. "That's good," she said, looking over at the rose tints of the afterglow. "It wouldn't seem right if it didn't."

A cow lowed in the distance, and nearer, the laughing voices of children rode the evening breeze. Somewhere a dog barked. Somewhere else a woman called her family home to supper. Old sounds. Older, literally, than this world.

"What are the people like, out there?"

He looked at her face, eager and worried at the same time, and he smiled. "You'll like them, Trina," he said. "They're like—well, they're more like *this* than anything else."

He gestured, vaguely, at the farmhouse lights ahead of them, at the slow walking figures of the young couples out enjoying the warm spring evening, at the old farmer leading his plow horse home along the path.

"They live in villages, not too different, from yours. And in cities. And on farms."

"And yet, you like it there, don't you?" she said.

He nodded. "Yes, I like it there."

"But you don't like it here. Why?"

"If you don't understand by now, Trina, I can't explain."

They walked on. Night came swiftly, crowding the rose and purple tints out of the western sky, closing in dark and cool and sweet smelling about them. Ahead, a footbridge loomed up out of the shadows. There was the sound of running water, and, on the bank not far from the bridge, the low murmuring of a couple of late lingering fishermen.

"The people live out in the open, like this?" Trina said.

"Yes."

"Not underground? Not under a dome?"

"I've told you before that it's like Earth, Trina. About the same size, even."

"*This* is about the same size, too."

"Not really. It only looks that way."

The fishermen glanced up as they passed, and then bent down over their lines again. Lucas Crossman, from Trina's town, and Jake Krakorian from the southern hemisphere, up to visit his sister Lucienne, who had just had twins....

Trina said hello to them as she passed, and found out that the twins looked just like their mother, except for Grandfather Mueller's eyes, and then she turned back to Max.

"Do people live all over the planet?"

"On most of it. The land sections, that is. Of course, up by the poles it's too cold."

"But how do they know each other?"

He stopped walking and stared at her, not understanding for a minute. Girl's laughter came from the bushes, and the soft urging voice of one of the village boys. Max looked back at the fishermen and then down at Trina and shook his head.

"They don't all know each other," he said. "They couldn't."

She thought of New Chile, where her cousin Isobelle was married last year, and New India, which would follow them soon to the planet, because Captain Bernard had been able to contact them by radio. She thought of her people, her friends, and then she remembered the spacemen's far flung ships and the homes

they burrowed deep in the rock of inhospitable worlds. She knew that he would never understand why she pitied the people of this system.

"I suppose we'll see them soon," she said. "You're going to bring some of them back up in your ship tomorrow, aren't you?"

He stood quietly, looking down at her. His face was shadowed in the gathering night and his whole body was in shadow, tall and somehow alien seeming there before her.

"Why wait for them to come here, Trina?" he said. "Come down with us, in the ship, tomorrow. Come down and see for yourself what it's like."

She trembled. "No," she said.

And she thought of the ship, out away from the sky, not down on the planet yet but hanging above it, with no atmosphere to break the blackness, to soften the glare of the planet's sun, to shut out the emptiness.

"You'd hardly know you weren't here, Trina. The air smells the same. And the weight's almost the same too. Maybe a little lighter."

She nodded. "I know. If we land the world, I'll go out there. But not in the ship."

"All right." He sighed and let go his grip on her shoulders and turned to start walking back the way they had come, toward the town.

She thought suddenly of what he had just said, that she would hardly be able to tell the difference.

"It can't be so much like this," she said. "Or you couldn't like it. No matter what you say."

"Trina." His voice was harsh. "You've never been out in space, so you couldn't understand. You just don't know what your world is like, from outside, when you're coming in."

But she could picture it. A tiny planetoid, shining perhaps behind its own screens, a small, drifting, lonely sphere of rock. She trembled again. "I don't want to know," she said.

Somewhere in the meadows beyond the road there was laughter, a boy and a girl laughing together, happy in the night. Trina's fingers tightened on Max's hand

and she pulled him around to face her and then clung to him, trembling, feeling the nearness of him as she held up her face to be kissed.

He held her to him. And slowly, the outside world of space faded, and her world seemed big and solid and sure, and in his arms it was almost like festival time again.



At noon the next day the world slowed again and changed course, going into an orbit around the planet, becoming a third moon, nearer to the surface than the others.

The people, all of those who had followed their normal day-to-day life even after New America came into the system, abandoned it at last. They crowded near the television towers, waiting for the signal which would open up some of the sky and show them the planet they circled, a great green disk, twice the apparent diameter of the legendary Moon of Earth.

Max stood beside Trina in the crowd that pressed close about his ship. He wore his spaceman's suit, and the helmet was in his hand. Soon he too would be aboard with the others, going down to the planet.

"You're sure you won't come, Trina? We'll be down in a couple of hours."

"I'll wait until we land there. If we do."

Curt Elias came toward them through the crowd. When he saw Trina he smiled and walked faster, almost briskly. It was strange to see him move like a young and active man.

"If I were younger," he said, "I'd go down there." He smiled again and pointed up at the zenith, where the blue was beginning to waver and fade as the sky screens slipped away. "This brings back memories."

"You didn't like that other world," Trina said. "Not any more than Father did."

"The air was bad there," Elias said.

The signal buzzer sounded again. The center screens came down. Above them, outlined by the fuzzy halo of the still remaining sky, the black of space stood

forth, and the stars, and the great disk of the planet, with its seas and continents and cloud masses and the shadow of night creeping across it from the east.

"You see, Trina?" Max said softly.

The voices of the people rose, some alive with interest and others anxious, fighting back the planet and the unfamiliar, too bright stars. Trina clutched Max Cramer's hand, feeling again the eagerness of that first day, when he had come to tell her of this world.

"You're right," she whispered. "It *is* like Earth."

It was so much like the pictures, though of course the continents were different, and the seas, and instead of one moon there were two. Earth. A new Earth, there above them in the sky.

Elias let out his breath slowly. "Yes," he said. "It is. It's not a bit like that world we visited. Not a bit."

"When you're down there it's even more like Earth," Max said. "And all the way down you could watch it grow larger. It wouldn't be at all like open space."

At the poles of the planet snow gleamed, and cloud masses drifted across the equator. And the people looked, and pointed, their voices growing loud with eagerness.

"Why don't we land the world now?" Trina cried. "Why wait for the ship to bring people up here?"

"Landing the world would take a lot of power," Elias said. "It would be foolish to do it unless we planned on staying for quite a while." He sighed. "Though I would like to go down there. I'd like to see a really Earth type planet."

He looked at Max, and Max smiled. "Well, why not?" he said.

Elias smiled too. "After all, I've been in space once. I'll go again." He turned and pushed his way through the people.

Trina watched him go. Somehow he seemed a symbol to her. Old and stable, he had been head of the council since she was a child. And he had gone into space with her father....

"Please come, Trina," Max said. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

With both Max and Elias along, certainly it couldn't be too bad. Max was right. There was nothing, really, to be afraid of. She smiled up at him.

"All right," she said. "I'll go."

And then she was walking with Max Cramer toward the ship and trying not to remember her father crying in his sleep.



The ship rose, and Trina cried out as she felt the heaviness wrench her back against the cushions. Max reached over to her. She felt the needle go into her arm again, and then sank back into the half sleep that he had promised would last until they were ready to land.

When she awoke the planet was a disk no longer, but a great curving mass beneath the ship, with the mountains and valleys and towns of its people plainly visible. But the planet's sky still lay below, and around them, in every direction except down, space stretched out, blacker than any night on the world. The world. Trina moaned and closed her eyes, glad she hadn't seen it, somewhere tiny and insignificant behind them.

Max heard her moan and reached toward her. She slept again, and woke only when they were down and he was tugging the straps loose from around her. She sat up, still numbed by the drug, still half asleep and unreal feeling, and looked out about her at the planet's surface.

They were in a field of some sort of grain. Beyond the scorched land where they had come down the tall cereal grasses rippled in the soft wind, a great undulating sea of green, reaching out toward the far off hills and the horizon. Cloud shadows drifted across the fields, and the shadow of the ship reached out to meet them.

Trina rubbed her eyes in wonder.

"It is like the world," she said. "Just like it."

For a moment she was sure that they were back on the world again, in some momentarily unrecognized pasture, or perhaps on one of the sister worlds. Then, looking along the row of hills to where they dropped away into an extension of the plain, she saw that the horizon was a little too far, and that the light



shimmered differently, somehow, than on her home. But it was such a little difference.

"Come on outside," Max Cramer said. "You'll be all right now."

She stood up and followed him. Elias was already at the airlock, moving unsteadily and a little blankly, also still partly under the influence of the narcotic.

The lock opened. Captain Bernard stepped out and went down the ladder to the ground. The others followed him. Within a few minutes the ship stood empty.



Trina breathed the open air of the planet and felt the warmth on her face and smelled the scent of grass and the elusive fragrance of alien flowers. She heard the song of some strange, infinitely sweet throated bird.

"It's—it's Earth," she whispered.

Voices, eager, calling voices, sang out in the distance. Then, little cars rolled toward them through the field, mowing down the grass, cutting themselves a path to the ship. People, men and women and children, were calling greetings.

"This is where we landed before," Max said. "We told them we'd be back."

They were sunbronzed, country people, and except for their strange clothing they might have been from any of the worlds. Even their language was the same, though accented differently, with some of the old, unused words, like those in the legends.

"You've brought your people?" the tall man who stood in the forefront said to Captain Bernard.

"They're up there." Bernard pointed up at the sky, and the people looked up. Trina looked up too. One of the planet's moons was almost full overhead. But the world was invisible, shut off by the sky and the clouds and the light of the earthlike sun.

"They'd like some of you to come visit their world," Bernard said. "If any of you are willing."

The tall man nodded. "Everyone will want to go," he said. "Very few ships ever

land here. Until you came, it had been years."

"You'd go out in space?" Trina said incredulously.

Again the man nodded. "I was a spaceman once," he said. "All of us MacGregors were." Then he sighed. "Sometimes even now I want to go out again. But there've been no ships here, not for years."

Trina looked past him, at the women and the children, at the lush fields and the little houses far in the distance. "You'd leave this?"

MacGregor shook his head. "No, of course not. Not to live in space permanently. I'd always come back."

"It's a fine world to come back to," Max said, and he and the tall man smiled at each other, as if they shared something that Trina couldn't possibly understand.

"We might as well go into town," MacGregor said.

They walked over to the cars. MacGregor stopped beside one of them, his hand on the door button.

"Here, let me drive." The girl stepped forward out of the crowd as she spoke. She was tall, almost as tall as MacGregor, and she had the same high cheekbones and the same laughter lines about her eyes.

"Not this time, Saari," MacGregor said. "This time you can entertain our guests." He turned to Max and Trina and smiled. "My daughter." His face was proud.

They climbed in, Trina wedging herself into the middle of the back seat between Max and the planet girl. The car throbbed into motion, then picked up speed, jolting a bit on the rough country road. The ground rushed past and the fields rushed past and Trina leaned against Max and shut her eyes against the dizzying speed. Here, close to the ground, so close that they could feel every unevenness of its surface, it was far worse than in the windmill like craft the spacemen used on the worlds.

"Don't you have cars?" Saari asked.

"No," Trina said. "We don't need them."

A car like this would rush all the way around the world in half an hour. In a car like this one even the horizons wouldn't look right, rushing to meet them. Here,

though the horizons stayed the same, unmoving while the fence posts and the farmhouses and the people flashed past.

"What do you use for transportation then?"

"We walk," Trina said, opening her eyes to look at the girl and then closing them again. "Or we ride horses."

"Oh."

A few minutes later the car slowed, and Trina opened her eyes again.

"We're coming into town," Saari said.

They had climbed up over the brow of a small hill and were now dropping down. At the bottom of the hill the houses clumped together, sparsely at first, then more and more of them, so that the whole valley was filled with buildings, and more buildings hugged the far slopes.

"There are so many of them," Trina whispered.

"Oh, no, Trina. This is just a small town."

"But the people—all those people...."

They crowded the streets, watching the cars come in, looking with open curiosity at their alien visitors. Faces, a thousand faces, all different and yet somehow all alike, blended together into a great anonymous mass.

"There aren't half that many people on the whole world," Trina said.

Saari smiled. "Just wait till you see the city."

Trina shook her head and looked up at Max. He was smiling out at the town, nodding to some men he apparently knew, with nothing but eagerness in his face. He seemed a stranger. She looked around for Curt Elias, but he was in one of the other cars cut off from them by the crowd. She couldn't see him at all.

"Don't you like it?" Saari said.

"I liked it better where we landed."

Max turned and glanced down at her briefly, but his hand found hers and held it, tightly, until her own relaxed. "If you want to, Trina, we can live out there, in

those fields."

For a moment she forgot the crowd and the endless faces as she looked up at him. "Do you mean that, Max? We could really live out there?"

Where it was quiet, and the sun was the same, and the birds sang sweetly just before harvest time, where she would have room to ride and plenty of pasture for her favorite horse. Where she would have Max, there with her, not out somewhere beyond the stars.

"Certainly we could live there," he said. "That's what I've been saying all along."

"You could settle down here?"

He laughed. "Oh, I suppose I'd be out in space a good deal of the time," he said. "The ships will come here now, you know. But I'll always come home, Trina. To this world. To you."

And suddenly it didn't matter that the girl beside her chuckled, nor that there were too many people crowding around them, all talking at once in their strangely accented voices. All that mattered was Max, and this world, which was real after all, and a life that seemed like an endless festival time before her.



Evening came quickly, too quickly, with the sun dropping in an unnatural plunge toward the horizon. Shadows crept out from the houses of the town, reached across the narrow street and blended with the walls of the houses opposite. The birds sang louder in the twilight, the notes of their song drifting in from the nearby fields. And there was another sound, that of the wind, not loud now but rising, swirling fingers of dust in the street.

Trina sat in front of the town cafe with the planet girl, Saari. Max Cramer was only a few feet away, but he paid no attention to her, and little to Elias. He was too busy telling the planet people about space.

"Your man?" Saari asked.

"Yes," Trina said. "I guess so."

"You're lucky." Saari looked over at Max and sighed, and then she turned back to

Trina. "My father was a spaceman. He used to take my mother up, when they were first married, when the ships were still running." She sighed. "I remember the ships, a little. But it was such a long time ago."

"I can't understand you people." Trina shook her head. "Leaving all of this, just to go out in space."

The room was crowded, oppressively crowded. Outside, too many people walked the shadowed streets. Too many voices babbled together. The people of this planet must be a little mad, Trina thought, to live cooped together as the spacemen lived, with all their world around them.

Saari sat watching her, and nodded. "You're different, aren't you? From us, and from them too." She looked over at Max and Bernard and the others, and then she looked at Curt Elias, who sat clenching and unclenching his hands, saying nothing.

"Yes, we're different," Trina said.

Max Cramer's voice broke incisively into the silence that lay between them then. "I don't see why," he said, "we didn't all know about this world. Especially if more than one ship came here."

Saari's father laughed softly. "It's not so strange. The ships all belonged to one clan. The MacGregors. And eventually all of them either were lost in space somewhere or else grew tired of roaming around and settled down. Here." He smiled again, and his high cheekboned face leaned forward into the light. "Like me...."

Night. Cloudless, black, but hazed over with atmosphere and thus familiar, not like the night of space. The two small moons, the stars in unfamiliar places, and somewhere, a star that was her world. And Trina sat and listened to the planet men talk, and to the spacemen among them who could no longer be distinguished from the native born. Outside, in the narrow street, wind murmured, skudding papers and brush before it, vague shadows against the light houses. Wind, rising and moaning, the sound coming in over the voices and the music from the cafe singers.

It was a stronger wind than ever blew on the world, even during the winter, when the people had to stay inside and wish that Earth tradition might be broken and good weather be had the year around.

"We'd better get back to the ship," Elias said.

They stopped talking and looked at him, and he looked down at his hands, embarrassed. "They'll be worried about us at home."

"No, they won't," Max said. Then he saw the thin, blue-veined hands trembling and the quiver not quite controlled in the wrinkled neck. "Though perhaps we should start back...."

Trina let out her breath in relief. To be back in the ship, she thought, with the needle and its forgetfulness, away from the noise and the crowd and the nervousness brought on by the rising wind.

It would be better, of course, when they had their place in the country. There it would be warm and homelike and quiet, with the farm animals near by, and the weather shut out, boarded out and forgotten, the way it was in winter on the world.

"You're coming with us?" Captain Bernard was saying.

"Yes, we're coming." Half a dozen of the men stood up and began pulling on their long, awkward coats.

"It'll be good to get back in space again," MacGregor said. "For a while." He smiled. "But I'm too old for a spaceman's life now."

"And I'm too old even for this," Elias said apologetically. "If we'd found this planet the other time...." He sighed and shook his head and looked out the window at the shadows that were people, bent forward, walking into the wind. He sighed again. "I don't know. I just don't know."

Saari got up and pulled on her wrap too. Then she walked over to one of the other women, spoke to her a minute, and came back carrying a quilted, rough fabric coat. "Here, Trina, you'd better put this on. It'll be cold out."

"Are you going with us?"

"Sure. Why not? Dad's talked enough about space. I might as well see what it's like for myself."

Trina shook her head. But before she could speak, someone opened the door and the cold breeze came in, hitting her in the face.

"Come on," Saari said. "It'll be warm in the car."

Somehow she was outside, following the others. The wind whipped her hair, stung her eyes, tore at her legs. The coat kept it from her body, but she couldn't protect her face, nor shut out the low moaning wail of it through the trees and the housetops.

She groped her way into the car. The door slammed shut, and the wind retreated, a little.

"Is it—is it often like that?"

Saari MacGregor looked at her. Max Cramer turned and looked at her, and so did the others in the car. For a long moment no one said anything. And then Saari said, "Why, this is *summer*, Trina."

"Summer?" She thought of the cereal grasses, rippling in the warm day. They'd be whipping in the wind now, of course. The wind that was so much stronger than any the world's machines ever made.

"You ought to be here in winter," Saari was saying. "It really blows then. And there are the rainstorms, and snow...."

"Snow?" Trina said blankly.

"Certainly. A couple of feet of it, usually." Saari stopped talking and looked at Trina, and surprise crept even farther into her face. "You mean you don't have snow on your world?"

"Why, yes, we have snow. We have everything Earth had." But snow two feet deep ... Trina shivered, thinking of winter on the world, and the soft dusting of white on winter mornings, the beautiful powdery flakes cool in the sunlight.

"They have about a sixteenth of an inch of it," Max said. "And even that's more than some of the worlds have. It hardly ever even rains in New California."

Saari turned away finally, and the others did too. The car started, the sound of its motors shutting out the wind a little, and then they were moving. Yet it was even more frightening, rushing over the roads in the darkness, with the houses flashing past and the trees thrashing in the wind and the people briefly seen and then left behind in the night.

The ship was ahead. The ship. Now even it seemed a safe, familiar place.

"This isn't like Earth after all," Trina said bitterly. "And it seemed so beautiful at first."

Then she saw that Saari MacGregor was looking at her again, but this time more in pity than in surprise.

"Not like Earth, Trina? You're wrong. We have a better climate than Earth's. We never have blizzards, nor hurricanes, and it's never too cold nor too hot, really."

"How can you say that?" Trina cried. "We've kept *our* world like Earth. Oh, maybe we've shortened winter a little, but still...."

Saari's voice was sad and gentle, as if she were explaining something to a bewildered child. "My mother's ancestors came here only a few years out from Earth," she said. "And do you know what they called this planet? A paradise. A garden world."

"That's why they named it Eden," Max Cramer said.

Then they were at the ship, out of the car, running to the airlock, with the grass lashing at their legs and the wind lashing at their faces and the cold night air aflame suddenly in their lungs. And Trina couldn't protest any longer, not with the world mad about her, not with Saari's words ringing in her ears like the wind.

She saw them carry Curt Elias in, and then Max was helping her aboard, and a moment later, finally, the airlock doors slipped shut and it was quiet.

She held out her arm for the needle.



When she awoke again it was morning. Morning on the world. They had carried her to one of the divans in the council hall, one near a window so that she could see the familiar fields of her homeland as soon as she awoke. She rubbed her eyes and straightened and looked up at the others. At Elias, still resting on another divan. At Captain Bernard. At Saari and her father, and another man from the planet. At Max.

He looked at her, and then sighed and turned away, shaking his head.

"Are we—are we going back there?" Trina asked.



"No," Elias said. "The people are against it."

There was silence for a moment, and then Elias went on. "I'm against it. I suppose that even if I'd been young I wouldn't have wanted to stay." His eyes met Trina's, and there was pity in them.

"No," Max said. "You wouldn't have wanted to."

"And yet," Elias said, "I went down there. Trina went down there. Her father and I both went out into space." He sighed. "The others wouldn't even do that."

"You're not quite as bad, that's all," Max said bluntly. "But I don't understand any of you. None of us ever has understood you. None of us ever will."

Trina looked across at him. Her fingers knew every line of his face, but now he was withdrawn, a stranger. "You're going back there, aren't you?" she said. And when he nodded, she sighed. "We'll never understand you either, I guess."

She remembered Saari's question of the night before, "Is he your man?" and she realized that her answer had not been the truth. She knew now that he had never been hers, not really, nor she his, that the woman who would be his would be like Saari, eager and unafraid and laughing in the wind, or looking out the ports at friendly stars.

Elias leaned forward on the divan and gestured toward the master weather panel for their part of the village, the indicators that told what it was like today and what it would be like tomorrow all over the world. "I think I understand," he said. "I think I know what we did to our environment, through the generations. But it doesn't do much good, just knowing something."

"You'll never change," Max said.

"No, I don't think we will."

Captain Bernard got up, and MacGregor got up too. They looked at Max. Slowly he turned his head and smiled at Trina, and then he too stood up. "Want to come outside and talk, Trina?"

But there was nothing to say. Nothing she could do except break down and cry in his arms and beg him not to leave her, beg him to spend the rest of his life on a world she could never leave again.

"No," she said. "I guess not." And then, the memories rushed back, and the

music, and the little lane down by the stream where the magnolias spread their web of fragrance. "It's—it's almost festival time, Max. Will you be here for it?"

"I don't know, Trina."

It meant no; she knew that.



The weeks slipped by, until it was summer on the world, until the festival music sang through the villages and the festival flowers bloomed and the festival lovers slipped off from the dances to walk among them. There was a breeze, just enough to carry the mingled fragrances and the mingled songs, just enough to touch the throat and ruffle the hair and lie lightly between the lips of lovers.

Trina danced with Aaron Gomez, and remembered. And the wind seemed too soft somehow, almost lifeless, with the air too sweet and cloying.

She wondered what a festival on the planet would be like.

Max, with Saari MacGregor, perhaps, laughing in the wind, running in the chill of evening along some riverbank.

I could have gone with him, she thought. I could have gone....

But then the music swirled faster about them, the pulse of it pounding in her ears, and Aaron swept her closer as they danced, spinning among the people and the laughter, out toward the terrace, toward the trees with leaves unstirring in the evening air. All was color and sound and scent, all blended, hypnotically perfect, something infinitely precious that she could never, never leave.

For it was summer on the world, and festival time again.

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