

DUMB
MARTIAN

JOHN WYNDHAM

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DUMB MARTIAN

By

JOHN WYNDHAM

When Duncan took Lellie for company he knew it might help preserve his sanity. But what got him wasn't the upkeep—it was the cost!

When Duncan Weaver bought Lellie for—no, there could be trouble putting it that way—when Duncan Weaver paid Lellie's parents one thousand dollars in compensation for the loss of her services, he had had no intention of paying so much. Everybody in Port Clarke that he had asked about it assured him six or seven hundred would be a fair price. But when he got up-country, it hadn't turned out quite as simple as the Port Clarkers seemed to think.

The first three Martian families he had tackled hadn't shown any disposition to part with their daughters at all. The next wanted \$1500, and wouldn't budge. Lellie's parents had started at \$1500, too, but they came down to \$1000 after he'd made it plain that he wasn't going to stand for extortion.

On the way back to Port Clarke with her, when he came to work it out, he found himself not so badly pleased with the deal, after all. Over the five-year term of his appointment, it would cost him only \$200 a year at the worst—that is to say, if he were not able to sell her for \$400, maybe even \$500, when he got back. Looked at that way, it wasn't really at all unreasonable.

In town once more, he went to explain the situation and get things all set with the Company's agent.

"Look," he said, "you know the way I'm fixed with this five-year contract as wayload station superintendent on Jupiter IV/II? Well, the ship that takes me there will be traveling light to pick up cargo. So how about another reservation on her?" He had already taken the precautionary step of finding out that the Company was accustomed to grant an extra passage in such circumstances, though not compelled to.

The Company's agent was not surprised. After consulting some lists, he said that he saw no objection to an extra passenger. He explained that the Company was also prepared in such cases to supply the extra ration of food for one person at the nominal charge of \$200 per annum, payable by deduction from salary.

"What? A thousand bucks?" Duncan exclaimed.

"Well worth it," said the agent. "It *is* nominal for the rations, because it's worth the Company's while to lay out the rest for something that helps to keep an employee from going nuts. That's pretty easy to do when you're fixed alone on a wayload station, they tell me—and I believe them. A thousand's not high if it helps you avoid a crackup."

Duncan argued a bit, on principle, but the agent had the thing cut and dried. It meant that Lellie's price went up to \$2000—\$400 a year. Still, with his own salary at \$5000 a year, tax-free, unspendable during his term on Jupiter IV/II, and piling up nicely, it wouldn't come to such a big slice. So he agreed.

"Fine," said the agent. "I'll fix it, then. All you'll need is an embarkation permit for her, and they'll grant that automatically on production of your marriage certificate."

Duncan stared. "Marriage-certificate? Me marry a Mart?" The agent shook his head reprovingly. "No embarkation permit without it. Anti-slavery regulation. They'd think you meant to sell her—might even think you'd bought her."

"What, me?" Duncan said indignantly.

"Even you," said the agent. "A marriage license will only cost you another ten dollars—unless you've got a wife back home, in which case it'll likely cost you a bit more later on."

Duncan shook his head. "I've got no wife."

"Uh-huh," said the agent, neither believing nor disbelieving. "Then what's the difference?"

Duncan came back a couple of days later, with the certificate and the permit. The agent looked them over.

"That's okay," he agreed. "I'll confirm the booking. My fee will be one hundred dollars."

"Your *fee*?"

"Call it safeguarding your investment," suggested the agent.

The man who had issued the embarkation permit had required one hundred dollars, too. Duncan did not mention that now, but he said, with bitterness: "One dumb Mart's costing me plenty."

"Dumb?" asked the agent, looking at him.

"Speechless plus. These hick Marts don't know they're born."

"H'm," said the agent. "Never lived here, have you?"

"No, but I've laid-over here a few times."

The agent nodded. "They act dumb, and the way their faces are makes them look dumb. But they were a mighty clever people, once."

"Once could be a long time ago."

"Long before we got here, they'd given up bothering to think a lot. Their planet was dying and they were kind of content to die with it."

"Well, I call that dumb. Aren't all planets dying, anyway?"

"Ever see an old man just sitting in the Sun, taking it easy? It doesn't have to mean he's senile. It may, sure, but very likely he can snap out of it, and put his mind to work again if it really becomes necessary. But mostly he finds it not worth the bother. Less trouble just to let things happen."

"Well, this one's only about twenty—say ten and a half of your Martian years—and she certainly lets 'em happen. And I'd say it's a kind of acid test for dumbness when a girl doesn't know what goes on at her own wedding ceremony."

And then, on top of that, it turned out to be necessary to lay out yet another hundred dollars on clothing and other things for her, bringing the whole investment up to \$2310. It was a sum which might possibly have been justified on a really *smart* girl, though on Lellie...

But there it was. Once you made the first payment, you either lost on it, or were stuck for the rest. And, anyway, on a lonely wayload station, even she would be company—of a sort.

THE First Officer called Duncan into the navigating room to take a look at his future home.

"There it is," he said, waving his hand at a little world shown on the watch-screen.

Duncan looked at the jagged-surfaced crescent. There was no scale to it. It could have been the size of Luna or of a basketball. Whatever size the place proved to be, it was still just a lump of rock, turning slowly over.

"How big?" he asked.

"Around forty miles mean diameter."

"What'd that be in gravity?"

"Haven't worked it out. Call it slight, figure there isn't any, and you'll be near enough."

"Uh-huh," said Duncan.

On the way back to the mess-room, he paused to put his head into the cabin. Lellie was lying on her bunk, with the spring-cover fastened over her to give some illusion of weight. At the sight of him she raised herself on one elbow.

She was small, not much over five foot. Her face and hands were delicate; they had a fragility which was not simply a matter of frail bone-structure. To an Earthman, her eyes looked unnaturally round, seeming to give her a permanent expression of innocence surprised. The lobes of her ears hung unusually low out of a mass of brown hair that glinted with red among its waves. The paleness of her skin was emphasized by the color on her cheeks and the vivid red on her lips.

"Hey," said Duncan, "you can start packing up the stuff now."

"Packing up?" she repeated doubtfully, in a curiously resonant voice.

"Sure, pack," Duncan told her. He demonstrated by opening a box, cramming some clothes into it, and waving a hand to include the rest. Her expression did not change, but the idea got across.

"We are come?" she asked.

"We are nearly come, so get busy on this lot."

"Yith—okay," she said, and began to unhook the cover.

Duncan shut the door, and gave a shove which sent him floating down the passage leading to the general mess and living room.

Inside the cabin, Lellie pushed away the cover. She reached down cautiously for a pair of metal soles, and attached them to her slippers by their clips. Still cautiously holding on to the bunk, she swung her feet over the side and lowered them until the magnetic soles clicked into contact with the floor. She stood up more confidently.

The brown overall suit she wore revealed proportions that might be admired among Martians, but, by Earth standards, they were not classic. Because of the thinner air of Mars, her chest was big. But only her chest. That, of course, was to

accommodate her greater lung capacity. The rest of her was almost childishly slender.

Still ill at ease with weightlessness, she slid her feet to keep magnetic contact with the metal floor as she crossed the room. For some moments she paused in front of a wall mirror, contemplating her reflection. Then she turned away and began packing.

"ONE hell of a place to take a woman to," Wishart, the ship's cook, was saying as Duncan came in.

Duncan did not care a lot for Wishart, chiefly because, when it had occurred to him that Lellie ought to have some lessons in weightless cooking, Wishart had refused to give the tuition for less than fifty dollars, and thus increased the investment cost to \$2360. Nevertheless, it was not Duncan's way to pretend to have misheard.

"One hell of a place to be given a job," he amended grimly.

No one replied to that. They knew how men came to be offered wayload jobs.

It was not necessary, as the Company frequently pointed out, for superannuation at the age of forty to come as a hardship to anyone. Salaries were good, and the Company could cite plenty of cases where men had founded brilliant subsequent careers on the savings of their space-service days.

That was all right for the men who had not been obsessively interested in the fact that one four-legged animal can run faster than another. But this was not even an enterprising way to have lost one's money, so when it came to Duncan's time to leave crew work, they made him no more than the routine offer.

He had never been to Jupiter IV/II, but he knew just what it would be like—it was the second moon of Callisto, which was the fourth moon, in order of discovery, of Jupiter, and would inevitably be one of the grimmer kinds of cosmic pebble.

The Company had offered no alternative, so he signed up at the usual terms: \$5000 a year for five years, and board and lodging, plus five months waiting time on half-pay before he could get there, plus six months afterward, also on half-pay, during "readjustment to gravity."

It meant the next six years taken care of; five of them entirely without expenses, and a nice little sum at the end.

The problem was: could you get through five years of isolation without cracking up? Even when the psychologists had okayed you, you couldn't be sure. Some could: others went to pieces in a few months and had to be taken off, gibbering. If you got through two years, they said, you'd be okay for five. But the only way to find out was to try.

"What about my putting in the waiting time on Mars? I could live cheaper there," Duncan had suggested.

They had consulted planetary tables and ship schedules, and discovered that it would be cheaper for them, too. They had declined to split the difference on the saving thus made, but they had booked him a passage for the following week, and arranged for him to draw, on credit, from the Company's agent there.

The Martian colony in and around Port Clarke was rich in ex-spacemen who found it more comfortable to spend their rearguard years in the lesser gravity, broader morality, and greater economy there. They were great advisers. Duncan listened, but discarded most of it. Such methods of occupying oneself as learning the Bible or the works of Shakespeare by heart, or copying out three pages of the Encyclopaedia every day, or building model spaceships in bottles, struck him not only as tedious, but probably would drive him insane more quickly. The only one with sound practical advantages, in his opinion, had led him to picking Lellie to share his exile, and he still thought it was a sound one, in spite of its costing \$2360.

He was well enough aware of the general opinion about it to refrain from adding a sharp retort to Wishart. Instead, he conceded: "Maybe nobody ought to take a *real* woman to a place like that. But a Mart's different."

"Even a Mart—" Wishart began, but he was cut short by finding himself drifting across the room as the arrestor tubes began to fire.

Conversation ceased as everybody turned to on securing all loose objects.

JUPITER IV/II was, by definition, a sub-moon, probably a captured asteroid. The surface was not cratered, like Luna's; it was simply a waste of jagged, riven rocks. The satellite as a whole had the form of an irregular ovoid, a bleak, cheerless lump of stone splintered off some vanished planet, with nothing whatever to commend it but its situation.

There had to be wayload stations, for it would be hopelessly uneconomic to build big ships capable of landing on the major planets. A few of the older and smaller ships had actually been built on Earth, and so had to be launched from there, but the very first large, Moon-assembled ship established a new practice. Ships became truly spaceships and were no longer built to stand the strains of high gravitational pull. They began to make their voyages, carrying fuel, stores, freight, and changes of personnel, exclusively between satellites. The newer types did not put in even at Luna, but used the artificial satellite, Pseudos, exclusively as their Earth terminal.

Freight between the wayload stations and their primaries was customarily consigned in powered cylinders known as crates; passengers were ferried back and forth in small rocket ships. Stations such as Pseudos, or Deimos, the main wayload for Mars, handled enough work to keep a crew busy, but in the outlying, little developed posts one man who was part handler, part watchman, was enough. Ships visited them infrequently. On Jupiter IV/II one might, according to

Duncan's information, expect an average of one every eight or nine Earth months.

The ship continued to brake, coming in on a spiral, adjusting her speed to that of the satellite. The gyros started up to give stability. The small, jagged world grew until it overflowed the watch-screens. The ship was maneuvered into a close orbit. Miles of featureless, formidable rocks slid monotonously beneath her.

The station site came onto the screen from the left—a roughly leveled area of a few acres, the first and only sign of order in the stony chaos. At the far end was a pair of hemispherical huts, one much larger than the other. At the near end, a few cylindrical crates were lined up beside a launching ramp hewn from the rock. Down each side of the area stood rows of canvas bins, some stuffed full to a conical shape, others slack, partly or entirely empty. A huge parabolic mirror was perched on a crag behind the station, looking like a monstrous, formalized flower.

In the whole scene, there was only one sign of movement—a small space-suited figure prancing madly about on a metal apron in front of the larger dome, waving its arms in a wild welcome.

Duncan left the screen and went to the cabin. He found Lellie fighting off a large case which, under the influence of deceleration, seemed determined to pin her against the wall. He shoved the case aside and pulled her out.

"We're there," he told her. "Put on your spacesuit."

Her round eyes ceased watching the case and turned toward him. There was no telling from them how she felt, what she thought. She said, simply:

"Thpacethuit. Yith—okay."

STANDING in the airlock of the dome, the outgoing superintendent paid more attention to Lellie than to the pressure dial. He knew from experience exactly how long equalizing took, and opened his faceplate without even a glance at the pointer.

"Wish I'd had the sense to bring one," he observed. "Could have been mighty useful on the chores, too."

He opened the inner door, and led through.

"Here it is—and welcome to it," he said.

The main living room was oddly shaped by reason of the dome's architecture, but it was spacious. It was also exceedingly, sordidly untidy.

"Meant to clean up, never got around to it," he added. He looked at Lellie. There was no visible sign of what she thought of the place. "Never can tell with Marts," he said uneasily. "They kind of non-register."

Duncan agreed: "I figured this one was astonished at being born, and never got over it."

The other man went on looking at Lellie. His eyes strayed from her to a gallery of pinned-up terrestrial beauties, and back again.

"Sort of funny shape Marts have," he said, musingly.

"This one's considered a good enough looker where she comes from," Duncan told him, a trifle shortly.

"Sure. No offense, bud. I guess they'll all seem a funny shape to me after this spell." He changed the subject. "I'd better show you the ropes around here."

Duncan signed to Lellie to open her faceplate so she could hear him, and then told her to get out of her suit.

The dome was the usual type: double-floored, double-walled, with an insulated and evacuated space between the two, constructed as a unit and held down by metal bars let into the rock. In the living quarters there were three more sizable rooms, able to cope with increased personnel if trade should expand.

"The rest," the outgoing man explained, "is the regular station stores, mostly food, air-cylinders, spares of one kind and another, and water. I guess you'll have to watch her on water; most women seem to think it grows naturally in pipes."

Duncan shook his head. "Not Marts. Living in deserts gives 'em natural respect for water."

The other picked up a clip of store-sheets.

"We'll check and sign these later. It's a nice soft job here. The only freight now is rare metalliferous earths. Callisto hasn't been opened up a lot yet. Handling's easy. They tell you when a crate's on the way; you switch on the radio beacon to bring it in. On dispatch, you can't go wrong if you follow the tables."

He looked around the room. "All home comforts. You like to read? Plenty of books." He waved a hand at the packed rows which covered half the inner partition wall.

Duncan said he'd never been much of a reader.

"Well, it helps," said the other. "Find pretty well anything that's known somewhere in that lot. Records there. Fond of music?"

Duncan said he liked a good tune.

"Better try the other stuff—tunes get to squirreling inside your head. Play chess?" He pointed to a board, with the men pegged into it.

Duncan shook his head.

"Pity. There's a fellow over on Callisto who plays a pretty hot game. He'll be disappointed not to finish this one. Still, if I was fixed up the way you are, maybe I wouldn't have been interested in chess myself." His eyes strayed to Lellie again. "What do you think she's going to do here, besides doing the cooking and amusing you?"

It was not a question that had occurred to Duncan. He shrugged. "She'll be okay, I guess. There's a natural dumbness about Marts—they'll sit for hours on end, doing nothing at all. It's a gift they got."

"Well, it certainly should come in handy here," said the other.

THE regular ship's-call work went on. Cases were unloaded, the metalliferous earth hosed from the bins into the holds. A small ferry rocket came up from Callisto carrying a couple of time-expired prospectors, and left again with their two replacements. The ship's engineers checked over the station's machinery, made renewals, topped up the water tanks, charged the spent air-cylinders, tested, tinkered, and tested again before giving their final okay.

Duncan stood outside on the metal apron where, not long ago, his predecessor had performed his fantastic dance of welcome, to watch the ship take off. She rose straight up, with her under jets pushing her gently. The curve of her hull became an elongated crescent shining against the black sky. The main driving jets started to gush white flame edged with pink. Quickly she picked up speed. Before long she had dwindled to a speck which sank behind the ragged skyline.

Quite suddenly Duncan felt as if he, too, had dwindled. He had become a speck upon a barren mass of rock which was itself a speck in the immensity. The indifferent sky about him

had no scale. It was an utterly black void wherein suns flared perpetually, without reason or purpose.

The rocks of the satellite, rising up in their harsh crests and ridges, were without scale, too. He could not tell which were near and which were far away: he could not, in the jumble of hard-lit planes and inky shadows, even make out their true form. There was nothing like them to be seen on Earth or Mars. Their unweathered edges were sharp as blades; they had been just as sharp as that for millions upon millions of years, and would be for as long as the satellite existed.

The unchanging eons seemed to stretch out before and behind him. All life was a speck, a briefly transitory accident, utterly unimportant to the universe, a queer little note dancing for a short moment in the light of the eternal suns. Reality was just globes of fire and balls of stone senselessly rolling along through emptiness, through time unimaginable.

Within his heated suit, Duncan shivered a little. Never before had he been so alone, never so much aware of the vast, callous, futile loneliness of space. Looking out into the blackness, with light that had left a star a million years ago shining into his eyes, he wondered: "What the heck's it all about, anyway?"

The sound of his own unanswerable question broke up the mood. He shook his head to clear it of speculative nonsense. He turned his back on the Universe, reducing it again to its

proper status as a background for life in general and human life in particular, and stepped into the airlock.

AS his predecessor had told him, the job was soft. Duncan made his radio contacts with Callisto at pre-arranged times. Usually it was little more than a formal check on one another's continued existence, with perhaps an exchange of comment on the radio news. Only occasionally did they announce a dispatch and tell him when to switch on his beacon. Then, in due course, the cylinder crate would make its appearance and float slowly down. It was quite a simple matter to couple it up to a bin to transfer the load.

The satellite's day was too short for convenience, and its night, lit by Callisto, and sometimes by Jupiter as well, was almost as bright; so they disregarded it and lived by the calendar clock which kept Earth time on the Greenwich Meridian setting. At first, much of the time had been occupied in disposing of the freight that the ship had left. Some of it went into the main dome—necessities for themselves, and other items that would store better where there was warmth and air, some into the small, airless, unheated dome. The greater part was stowed and padded carefully into cylinders and launched off to the Callisto base. But once that work had been cleared, the job was certainly soft, too soft...

Duncan drew up a program. At regular intervals he would inspect this and that, he would leap almost weightlessly up to

the crag, check on the Sun motor there, and so forth. But keeping to an unnecessary program requires resolution.

Sun motors, for instance, were built to run for a long time without attention. The only action one could take if theirs stopped would be to call Callisto for a ferry rocket to come and take Lellie and himself off until a ship arrived to repair it. A breakdown there, the Company had explained very clearly, was the only thing that would justify him in leaving his station, with the stores of precious earths, unmanned (and it was also indicated that to contrive a breakdown for the sake of a change was unlikely to prove worthwhile).

One way and another, the program did not last very long.

There were times when Duncan found himself wondering whether bringing Lellie had been such a good idea, after all. On the purely practical side, he would not have cooked as well as she did, and probably have pigged it quite as badly as his predecessor had, but if she had not been there, the necessity of looking after himself would have given him something to do. And even from the standpoint of company—well, she was that, of a sort, but she was alien, queer; kind of like a half-robot, and dumb at that; certainly no fun.

There were times—increasingly frequent times—when the very look of her irritated him intensely. So did the way she moved, *and* her gestures, *and* her silly pidgin-talk when she talked, *and* her self-contained silence when she didn't, *and* her remoteness, *and* all her differentness, *and* the fact that he would have been \$2360 better off without her.

Nor did she make a serious attempt to remedy her shortcomings, even where she had the means. Her face, for instance. You'd think any girl would try to make her best of that—but did she? There was that left eyebrow again; it made her look like a drunken clown, but a lot she cared...

"For heaven's sake," he told her once more, "put the cockeyed thing straight. Don't you know how to fix 'em yet? And you've got your color on wrong, too. Look at that picture—now look at yourself in the mirror: a smear of red all in the wrong place. And your hair, too, getting like seaweed again. You've got the things to wave it, so stop looking like a damned mermaid, I know you can't help being a dumb Mart, but you can at least *try* to look like a real woman."

Lellie studied the colored picture, and then compared her reflection with it, critically.

"Yith—okay," she said with compliant detachment.

Duncan snorted, "And that's another thing. It's not 'yith,' it's 'yes.' Y-E-S, yes. Say 'yes.'"

"Yith," said Lellie, obligingly.

"Oh, for—Can't you *hear* the difference? S-s-s, not th-th-th. Ye-sss."

"Yith," she said.

"No. Put your tongue further back like this—"

The lesson went on for some time. Finally he grew angry.

"Just making a monkey out of me, huh? You'd better be careful! Now, say 'yes.'"

She hesitated, looking at his wrathful face.

"Go on, say it!"

"Y-yeth," she tried, nervously.

His hand slapped across her face harder than he had intended, The jolt broke her magnetic contact with the floor and sent her sailing across the room in a spin of arms and legs. She struck the opposite wall and rebounded, to float helplessly, out of reach of any hold. He strode after her, turned her right way up, and set her on her feet. His left hand clutched her overall in a bunch, just below her throat, his right fist raised.

"Again!" he told her.

Her eyes looked helplessly this way and that. He shook her. She tried. At the sixth attempt she managed: "Yeths."

He accepted that for the time being.

"You *can* do it, you see, when you try! Well, you're damn well going to try!"

He let her go. She tottered across the room, holding her hands to her bruised face.

A number of times, while the weeks stretched so slowly into months, Duncan found himself wondering whether he was going to hold out. He lingered over what work there was as long as he could, but it left still too much time hanging on his hands.

A middle-aged man who had read nothing longer than an occasional magazine article, Duncan did not take to books. He tired very quickly of the popular records, as his predecessor had prophesied, and could make nothing of the others. He taught himself the moves in chess from a book, and instructed Lellie in them, intending after a little practice with her to challenge the man on Callisto. Lellie, however, managed to win so consistently that he suspected he did not have the right kind of mind for the game. Instead, he taught her a kind of double-solitaire, but that didn't last long, either—the cards always seemed to run for Lellie.

Occasionally, some news and entertainment were to be had from the radio. But with Earth somewhere around the other side of the Sun just then, Mars screened off half the time by Callisto, and the rotation of the satellite itself, reception was either impossible or badly distorted.

So mostly he sat and fretted, hating the satellite, angry with himself, and irritated by Lellie.

Just the phlegmatic way she went on with her tasks infuriated him. It seemed unfair that she could take it all

better than he could simply because she was a dumb Mart. When his ill-temper became vocal, the look of her as she listened exasperated him still more.

"For God's sake," he told her one time, "can't you make that silly face of yours *mean* something? Can't you laugh, or cry, or get mad—anything? It's enough to drive a guy nuts, looking at a face like a doll that just heard its first dirty story. I know you can't help being dumb, but get some expression into it."

She went on looking at him without a shadow of a change.

"Go on, you heard me! Smile, damn you! *Smile!*"

Her mouth twitched very slightly.

"Call that a smile? Now, there's a smile!" He pointed to a pin-up with a smile like a piano keyboard. "Like that! Like this!" He grinned widely.

"No," she said. "My face cannot wriggle like Earth faces."

"Wriggle?" he repeated incensed. "Wriggle, you call it?" He freed himself from the chair's spring-cover and came toward her. She backed away until she was pressed against the wall, "I'll make yours wriggle. Go on, now—smile!"

He lifted his fist.

Lellie put her hands up to her face.

"No!" she protested. "No—no—no!"

IT was on the day Duncan marked off the eighth completed month that Callisto relayed news of a ship on the way. A couple of days later, he was able to make contact with her himself and confirm her arrival in about a week.

He felt as if he had been given several stiff drinks. There were preparations to make, stores to check, deficiencies to note, a string of nil-nil-nil entries to be made in the log to bring it up to date.

He hustled around as he got on with the job. He hummed to himself while he worked, and even ceased to be annoyed with Lellie. The effect of the news upon her was imperceptible—but, then, what else could you expect?

Sharp on her estimated time, the ship hung above them, growing slowly larger as her upper jets pressed her down. The moment she was berthed, Duncan went aboard, with the feeling that everyone in sight was an old friend.

The captain received him warmly and brought out the drinks. It was all routine—even Duncan's babbling and slightly inebriated manner was regular procedure in the circumstances. The only departure from pattern came when the captain introduced a man beside him.

"We've brought a surprise for you, Superintendent. This is Doctor Whint. He'll be sharing your exile for a bit."

Duncan shook hands with the man. "Doctor?" he said, surprised.

"Not medicine—science," Alan Whint told him. "The Company's pushed me out here to do a geological survey—never can tell when you'll strike something important. I'll be here about a year. Hope you don't mind."

Duncan said conventionally that he'd be glad to have some company. Later, he took Whint over to the dome. The geologist was surprised to find Lellie there; clearly, nobody had told him about her. He interrupted Duncan's explanations of the surroundings to say:

"Won't you introduce me to your wife?"

Duncan did so, without grace. He resented the reproving tone in Whint's voice; nor did he care for the way the geologist greeted Lellie just as if she were an Earth-woman. He was also aware that Whint had noticed the bruise on her cheek, which her makeup did not altogether cover.

In his mind, he classified Alan Whint as one of the smooth, snooty type, and hoped that there was not going to be trouble with him.

On the other hand, he reflected, trouble was better than boredom.

IT was a matter of opinion who made the trouble when it boiled up some three months later. There had already been several occasions when it had lurked uneasily near. Very likely it would have come into the open long before, had Whint's work not taken him out of the dome so much. The moment of touch-off came when Lellie lifted her eyes from the book she was reading to ask:

"What does 'female emancipation' mean?"

Alan started to explain. He was only halfway through the first sentence when Duncan broke in:

"Listen, pal, who told you to go putting ideas into her head?"

Alan shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Why shouldn't she have ideas? Why shouldn't anyone?"

"You know what I mean."

"I never understand you guys who apparently can't say what you mean. Try again."

"All right, then. Right from the start, you began shoving your nose into things that aren't your business. Treating her, for instance, as if she was some classy dame back home."

"I'm glad you noticed it."

"And you think I didn't see why?"

"I'm quite sure you didn't. You think, in your simple way, that I'm out to get your girl, and you resent that with all the weight of \$2360. But you're wrong; I'm not."

"My *wife*," he corrected. "She may be only a dumb Mart, but she's legally my wife and what I say goes."

"Yes, Lellie is a Mart, as you call it. She may even be your wife, for all I know to the contrary. But dumb, she certainly is not. For one example, look at the speed with which she's learned to read—once someone took the trouble to show her how. I don't think you'd show up any too bright yourself in a language where you only knew a few words, and which you couldn't read."

"It was none of your business to teach her. She didn't need to read. She was all right the way she was. And why? So you'll get her thinking you're a better man than I am."

"I talk to her the way I'd talk to any woman anywhere—only more simply, since she hasn't had the chance of an education. If she does think I'm a better man, then I agree with her. I'd be sorry if I couldn't."

"I'll show you who's the better man—" Duncan began savagely.

"You don't need to. I knew when I came here that you'd be a waster or you wouldn't be on this job—and it didn't take long for me to find out that you were a lousy bully, too. Do you suppose I haven't noticed the bruises? Do you think I've enjoyed having to listen to you bawling out a girl whom

you've deliberately kept ignorant and defenseless when she has potentially ten times the sense you have? Having to watch a clod like you lording it over your 'dumb Mart'? You emetic!"

In the heat of the moment, Duncan could not remember what an emetic was. Trying to remember gave him a chance to realize that he was older, less agile, not as fit as the geologist ... that he'd probably get hurt more than he could hurt. Besides, Lellie was his wife. What was he getting so angry about?

Both of them simmered, but nothing happened. Somehow the occasion was patched up and smoothed over.

Alan continued to make his expeditions in the small craft which he had brought with him. He examined and explored other parts of the satellite, returning with specimen pieces of rock which he tested and arranged, carefully labeled, in cases. In his spare time he occupied himself, as before, with teaching Lellie.

That he did it largely for his own occupation, as well as from a feeling that it should be done, Duncan did not altogether deny. But he was equally sure that, in continued close association, one thing leads to another, sooner or later.

So far, there had been nothing between them that he could complain about—but Alan's term still had some nine months to go, even if he were relieved in time. Lellie was already hero-worshipping. And he was spoiling her more every day by this fool business of treating her as if she were an

Earthwoman. One day they'd come alive to it—and then they would see him as an obstacle that would have to be removed. Prevention being better than cure, the sensible course was to see that the situation should never develop. There need not be any fuss about it...

There was not.

One day Alan Whint took off on a routine flight to prospect somewhere on the other side of the satellite. He never came back. That was all.

THERE was no telling what Lellie thought about it, but something seemed to happen to her.

For several days, she spent almost all her time standing by the main window of the living room, looking out into the blackness at the flaring pinpoints of light. It was not that she was waiting or hoping for Alan's return—she knew as well as Duncan himself that, when thirty-six hours had gone by, there was no chance of that. She said nothing. Her expression maintained its unchanged exasperating look of slight surprise. Only in her eyes was there any perceptible difference: they looked as if she had withdrawn herself still further behind them.

Duncan could not tell whether she knew or guessed anything. There seemed to be no way of finding out without planting the idea in her mind—*if* it were not already there.

He was, without admitting it fully to himself, too nervous to turn on her viciously for the time she spent vacantly mooning out of the window. He had an uncomfortable awareness of how many ways there were for even a dimwit to contrive a fatal accident in such a place.

As a precaution, he took to fitting new air-bottles to his suit every time he went out, and checking to see that they were at full pressure. He also took to placing a piece of rock so that the outer door of the airlock could not close behind him. He made a point of noticing that his food and hers came straight out of the same pot, and watched her closely while she worked.

He still could not decide whether she knew, or suspected. After they were sure that Alan was gone, she never once mentioned his name...

The mood stayed on her for perhaps a week. Then it changed abruptly. She paid no more attention to the bleakness outside. Instead, she began to read, voraciously and indiscriminately.

Duncan found it hard to understand her absorption in the books, nor did he like it, but he decided for the moment not to interfere. It did, at least, have the advantage of keeping her mind off other things.

Gradually he began to feel easier. The crisis was over. Either she had not guessed, or, if she had, she had decided to do nothing about it. Her addiction to books, however, did not abate. In spite of several reminders by Duncan that it was for

company that he had laid out the not inconsiderable sum of \$2,360, she continued, as if determined to work her way through the station's library.

By degrees, the situation retreated into the background. When the next ship came, Duncan watched her anxiously in case she had been biding her time to hand on her suspicions to the crew. It turned out to be unnecessary. She showed no tendency to refer to the matter.

When the ship pulled out, taking the opportunity with it, he was relievedly able to tell himself that he had really been right all along—she was just a dumb Mart. She had simply forgotten the Alan Whint incident, as a child might.

AS the months of his term ticked steadily away, he found that he had, bit by bit, to revise that estimate of dumbness. She was learning from books things that he did not know himself. It even had some advantages, though it put him in a position he did not care for. When she asked, as she sometimes did now, for explanations, he found it unpleasant to be stumped by a Mart.

Having the practical man's suspicion of book-acquired knowledge, he felt it necessary to explain to her how much of the stuff in them was a lot of nonsense, how they never really came to grips with the problems of life as he had lived it. He cited examples from his experience.

In fact, he found himself teaching her.

She learned quickly, too—the practical as well as the book stuff. Of necessity, he had to change his opinion of Marts even more. It wasn't that they were altogether dumb, as he had thought, just that they were normally too dumb to start using the brains they had.

Once started, Lellie was a regular vacuum-cleaner for knowledge of all sorts. It didn't seem long before she knew as much about the wayload station as he did himself. Teaching her was not at all what he had intended, but it did provide more occupation than the boredom of the early days. Besides, it had occurred to him that she was an appreciating asset...

Funny thing, that. He had never before thought of education as anything but a waste of time, but now it seriously began to look as if, when he got her back to Mars, he might recover quite a bit more of that \$2,360 than he had expected. Maybe she'd make quite a useful secretary to someone.

He started to instruct her in elementary bookkeeping and finance—as much, at least, as he knew about it, which wasn't a great deal.

The months of service kept on piling up, going faster now. During the later stretch, when one had acquired confidence in his ability to get through without cracking up, there was a comfortable feeling about sitting quietly out there with the knowledge of the dollars gradually piling up at home.

A new find opened up on Callisto, bringing a slight increase in deliveries to the satellite. Otherwise, the routine continued unchanged. The infrequent ships called in, loaded up, and went again. And then, surprisingly soon, it was possible for Duncan to say to himself:

"The ship after the next and I'll be through!"

Even more surprisingly, there soon came the day when he stood on the metal apron outside the dome, watching a ship lifting herself off on her under jets and dwindling upward into the black sky, and was able to tell himself:

"That's the last time I'll see that! When the next ship lifts off this dump, I'll be aboard her!"

He stood watching her, one bright spark among the others, until the turn of the satellite carried her below his horizon. Then he turned back to the airlock—and found the door shut.

Once he had seen that there was going to be no repercussion from the Alan Whint affair, he had dropped his habit of wedging it open with a piece of rock. Whenever he emerged to do a job, he left it ajar, and it stayed that way until he came back. There was no wind or anything else on the satellite to move it.

He laid hold of the latch-lever irritably and pushed. It did not move.

Duncan swore at it for sticking. He walked to the edge of the metal apron, and then around the side of the dome so that he could see in at the window. Lellie was sitting in a chair

with the spring-cover fixed across it, apparently lost in thought. The inner door of the airlock was standing open, so, of course, the outer could not be moved. Besides the safety locking device, there was all the dome's air-pressure to hold it shut.

Forgetful for the moment, Duncan rapped on the thick glass of the double window to attract her attention. She could not have heard a sound through there, so it must have been the movement that caught her eye and caused her to look up. She turned her head and gazed at him, without moving.

Duncan stared back at her. Her hair was still waved, but the eyebrows, the color—all the other touches that he had insisted upon to make her look as much like an Earthwoman as possible—were gone. Her eyes looked back at him, set as hard as stones in that fixed expression of mild astonishment.

Sudden comprehension struck Duncan like a physical shock. He tried to pretend to both of them that he had not understood. He made gestures to her to close the inner door of the airlock. She went on staring back at him, without moving. Then he noticed the book she was holding in her hand, and recognized it. It was not one of the books which the Company had supplied for the station's library. It was a book of verse, bound in blue.

It had once belonged to Alan Whint.

PANIC suddenly jumped out at Duncan as he looked down at the row of small dials across his chest. At least she had not tampered with his air supply; there was pressure enough for thirty hours or so. A touch on the jet sent him floating back to the metal apron, where he could anchor his magnetic boots and think it over.

The dirty Mart! Letting him think all this time that she had forgotten all about it. Nursing it up for him. Letting him work out his time while she planned. Waiting until he was on the very last stretch before she tried her game.

Some minutes passed before his mixed anger and panic settled down and allowed him to think.

Thirty hours! Time to do quite a lot. And even if he did not succeed in getting back into the dome in twenty hours or so, there would still be the last, desperate resort of shooting himself off to Callisto in one of the cylinder crates.

Even if Lellie were to spill over later about the Whint business, what of it? He was sure enough that she did not know how it had been done. It would only be the word of a Mart against his own. Very likely they'd put her down as space-crazed.

All the same, some of the mud might stick. It would be better to settle with her here and now. Besides, the cylinder idea was risky, to be considered only in the last extremity.

Duncan jettied himself over to the smaller dome. In there, he threw out the switches on the lines which brought power

down from the main batteries charged by the Sun motor, then sat down to wait. The insulated dome would take some time to lose all its heat, but not very long for a drop in the temperature to become perceptible, and visible on the thermometers, once the heat was off. The small-capacity low-voltage batteries that were in the place wouldn't be much good to her, even if she did think of lining them up.

He waited an hour, while the faraway Sun set, and the bright arc of Callisto began to show over the horizon. Then he went back to the dome's window to observe results. He arrived just in time to see Lellie fastening herself into her spacesuit by the light of a couple of emergency lamps.

He swore. A simple freezing out process wasn't going to work, then. Not only would the heated suit protect her, but her air supply would last longer than his—and there were plenty of spare bottles in there, even if the free air in the dome froze solid.

He waited until she had put on the helmet, and then switched on the radio in his own. He saw her pause at the sound of his voice, but she deliberately switched off her receiver. He did not; he kept his open, to be ready for the moment when she would come to her senses.

DUNCAN returned to the apron and reconsidered. It had been his intention to force his way into the dome without damaging it, if he could. But if she wasn't to be frozen out,

that looked difficult. She had the advantage in air, and though it was true that in her spacesuit she could neither eat nor drink, the same, unfortunately, was true for him. The only way seemed to be to tackle the dome itself.

Reluctantly, he went back to the small dome again and connected up the electrical cutter. Its cable looped behind him as he jetted across to the main dome once more. Beside the curving metal wall, he paused to think out the job—and the consequences.

Once he was through the outer shell there would be a space, then the insulating material—that was all right; it would melt away like butter, and without oxygen it could not catch fire. The more awkward part was going to come with the inner metal skin. It would be wisest to start with a few small cuts to let the air-pressure down—and stand clear of it. If it were all to come out with a whoosh, he would stand a good chance, in his weightless state, of being blown a considerable distance by it.

And what would she do? She'd very likely try covering up the holes as he made them—a bit awkward if she had the sense to use asbestos packing. It'll have to be the whoosh then.

Both shells could be welded up again before he re-aerated the place from cylinders. The small loss of insulating material wouldn't matter. Okay, better get down to it, then...

He made his connections and contrived to anchor himself enough to give some purchase. He brought the cutter up and

pressed the trigger-switch. He pressed again and then swore, remembering that he had shut off the power.

Pulling himself back along the cable, he pushed the switches in again. Light from the dome's windows suddenly illuminated the rocks. He wondered if the restoration of power would let Lellie know what he was doing. Hell with it. She'd know soon enough.

He settled himself down beside the dome once more. This time the cutter worked. It took only a few minutes to slice out a rough two-foot circle. He pulled the piece out of the way and inspected the opening. Then, as he leveled the cutter again, there came a click in his receiver.

"Better not try to break in," Lellie said, "I'm ready for that."

He hesitated, checking himself with his finger on the switch, wondering what counter-move she could have thought up. The threat in her voice made him uneasy. He decided to go around to the window and see what her game was, if she had one.

She was standing by the table, still dressed in her spacesuit, fiddling with some apparatus she had set up there. For a moment or two he did not grasp the purpose of it.

There was a plastic food bag, half-inflated, and attached in some way to the table top. She was adjusting a metal plate over it to a small clearance. There was a wire taped to the upper side of the bag. Duncan's eye ran back along the wire

to a battery, a coil, and on to a detonator attached to a bundle of half a dozen blasting-sticks.

He was uncomfortably enlightened. If the air-pressure in the room fell, the bag would expand; the wire would make contact with the plate; up would go the dome...

LELLIE finished her adjustment and connected the second wire to the battery. She turned to look at him through the window. Duncan found it was infuriatingly difficult to believe that, behind that silly-surprise frozen on her face, she could be aware of what she was doing.

He tried to speak to her, but she had switched off and made no attempt to switch on again. She simply stood looking steadily back at him as he blustered and raged. After some minutes, she moved across to a chair, fastened the spring-cover across herself, and sat waiting.

"All right, then," Duncan shouted inside his helmet. "But you'll go up with it, damn you!" Which was, of course, nonsense, since he had no intention whatever of destroying either the dome or himself.

He had never learned to tell what went on behind that absurd face. She might be coldly determined, or she might not. If it had been a matter of a switch that she had to press to destroy the place, he might have risked her nerve failing her.

But this way, it would be he who operated the switch, just as soon as he made a hole to let the air out.

Once more he retreated to anchor himself on the apron. There must be *some* way of getting into the dome without letting the pressure down...

No, there was no way that he could think of. It would have to be the cylinder crate to Callisto.

He looked up at Callisto, hanging huge in the sky now, with Jupiter smaller, but brighter, beyond. It wasn't so much the flight, it was the landing there. Perhaps if he were to cram it with all the padding he could find... Later on, he could get the Callisto crew to ferry him back, and they'd find some way to get into the dome, and Lellie would be a mighty sorry girl—*mighty* sorry.

Across the clearing there were three cylinders lined up, charged and ready for use. He didn't mind admitting he was scared of that landing; but, scared or not, if she wouldn't even turn on her radio to listen to him, that would be his only chance.

He made up his mind and stepped off the metal apron. A touch on the jets sent him floating across the clearing toward the cylinders. Practice made it easy to maneuver the nearest one onto the ramp. Another glance at Callisto's inclination helped to reassure him: at least he would reach it all right. If their beacon was not switched on to bring him in, he ought to be able to call them on the communication radio in his suit when he got closer.

He fetched more padding from the other cylinders, and packed the stuff in. While he paused to figure out a way of triggering the thing off with himself inside, he realized he was beginning to feel cold. As he turned the knob up a notch, he glanced down at the meter on his chest. The cold became a chill of horror.

Lellie hadn't tampered with the flasks of air—she'd known, damn her, that he would check them. Instead, she must have shorted the battery or the heating circuit in the suit. The voltage was down so low that the needle barely kicked. Another few minutes and he might as well be naked in the cold of space, for the suit, without its heating unit, would be no protection whatever.

After its first stab, the fear abruptly left him, giving way to fury. She'd tricked him out of his last chance, but, by God, he could make sure she didn't get away with it! One small hole in the dome and he wouldn't die alone...

The cold was lapping at him icily through the suit. He pressed the jet control and sent himself scudding back toward the dome.

His feet and fingers were going first. Only by an immense effort was he able to operate the jet which stopped him by the dome.

He struggled to press the control that would jet him down to it, but his fingers would no longer move. He wept and panted with the attempt to make them work.

There was an agonizing, searing pain in his chest. He gasped—and the unheated air rushed into his lungs and froze them.

IN the dome's living room, Lellie stood waiting. She had seen the spacesuited figure come sweeping across the clearing at an abnormal speed. She understood what it meant. Her explosive device was already disconnected; now she stood alert, with a thick rubber mat in her hand, ready to clap it over any hole that might appear. She waited one minute, two minutes...

When five minutes had passed, she went to the window. By putting her face close to the pane and looking sideways, she was able to see the whole of one armorclad leg and part of another. They hung there, horizontally, a few feet off the ground. She watched them for several minutes.

She left the window, pushing the mat out of her hand so that it floated away across the room. For a moment or two she stood thinking. Then she went to the book-shelves and pulled out the last volume of the encyclopedia. She read long enough to satisfy herself on the exact status and claims which were connoted by the word "widow."

She found a pad of paper and a pencil. She hesitated, trying to remember the method she had been taught. Then she started to write down figures, and became absorbed in them.

At last she lifted her head and contemplated the result: \$5,000 a year for five years, at 6% compound interest.

But then she paused again. Very likely, a face that was not set forever in a look of surprised innocence would have frowned, because, naturally, there was a debit of \$2,360.

Being incapable of both, Lellie neither smiled nor frowned. She gravely entered the \$2,360 as a capital investment and the balance as profit.

It was quite a fortune for a dumb Mart.

—JOHN WYNDHAM

[The end of *Dumb Martian* by John Wyndham]