

# One Touch of Terra

Hannes Bok

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*Title:* One Touch of Terra

*Date of first publication:* 1956

*Author:* Wayne Francis Woodard (as Hannes Bok) (1914-1964)

*Date first posted:* June 28, 2020

*Date last updated:* June 28, 2020

Faded Page eBook #20200629

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines

[Source: Fantastic Universe, December 1956]

*Hannes Bok, who has been part of the world of Science Fiction and Fantasy for so many years, tells the touching story of Trixie and her dandelions, in the little mining camp on Venus, and how one of them th'ar Martians tried to do her—and the citizens of Finchburg—wrong.... Of course Goreck was just giving Trixie the runaround. All he was really after was her dandelions ... as you would have been.....*

**one  
touch  
of  
terra**

*by ... HANNES BOK*

**Maybe they *had* been bad mannered—  
accepting things of her—but who was to guess  
the Martian would interfere?**

"Listen, Elmer!" Horseface Smith told his gwip. "What's that racket ahead—yellin', shooting or both?"

Elmer obediently stopped and cocked his duck-head in the direction of Finchburg, then nodded sagely, if somewhat ambiguously. He was a pack animal of the sort commonly used by psithium-prospectors on Venus, now that interplanetary travel was commonplace, and he was almost as intelligent as a human.

Despite his size—he was nearly as large as a terrestrial horse—he must have had a dash of flying-squirrel blood, since when in a hurry gwips were apt to bound off the ground, flattening their plump bodies in a flying-squirrel glide which took them thirty to fifty feet per jump.

But at present Elmer wasn't able to do any bounding. His saddlebags were sagging with samples of ore, and he had all he could do just to walk.

Horseface clunked his heels on Elmer's sides, urging him up the stony hillside. They gained the summit and craned down at Finchburg, only half a mile below. Like most of the mining-settlements scattered sparsely over the vast Venus deserts, it consisted of scarcely a dozen buildings, none of them new, but all in reasonably good repair. If it is true that a town speaks for its inhabitants, Finchburg plainly declared that while its people might be down on their luck, but they hadn't lost hope.

"Looks like Trixie is blowing her jets," Horseface speculated, and Elmer dipped his broad bill in agreement "Wonder what's eating her? She ain't acted human for months!"

Elmer cocked an inquiring eye on his master as if asking whether Trixie's behavior could possibly be considered gwippish. He decided not, and clucked sympathetically. He knew all about Trixie's idiosyncrasies. But then, who—or what—didn't?

Trixie O'Neill was the only woman within a thousand miles of the Venus Flats, and furthermore, the only terrestrial woman. She wasn't young nor beautiful. She was in her middle fifties, gaunt, coarse, and had a wooden leg.

She'd come to Finchburg thirty years ago at the height of the psithium rush. She'd been young and pretty then, and desperately in love with her prospector-spouse Mike O'Neill. Mike had been a roistering giant, but he hadn't lasted long on Venus. The acid dust had eaten his lungs away, and in less than a year he'd been laid to rest down in an abandoned mine.

Almost immediately the veins of psithium had petered out. The mine-owners closed the shafts and took away their expensive equipment imported nut-by-bolt by rocket from Earth. Finchburg became a ghost-town. All the miners except for die-hards like Horseface had moved far away to the more promising strikes of Satterlee, Guzil Banks and Storington.

But Trixie remained at Finchburg, "My Mike's buried here, ain't he? Awright—where he stays, I stay!"

And she went on doggedly doing Mike's work until a cave-in crushed one of her legs, after which she set up a hostelry which was a one-woman service bureau—she

washed the miners' clothes, served their meals, kept their books, sold supplies to them and most of all kept up their morale. She provided the woman's touch, and the men adored her.

But the touch which they worshiped abjectly was of Terra itself—half of a blistered blast-tube filled with Terrestrial soil and growing genuine Terrestrial dandelions, rather scrubby and colorless ones, but from good old Terra just the same.

When you thought you'd choke on one more whiff of the bitter Venus-dust, when you remembered the green lushness of Terra and wished you were back there, knowing you could never find enough psithium to pay your passage—then you went to Trixie's place, looked at her dandelions and maybe touched your finger to the dirt in which they grew—and you went away feeling better somehow. You'd been home again for a little while.

And if anybody saw a tear in your eye, he looked the other way. Because maybe tomorrow he'd be doing the same.

Why, there hadn't been a Mercurian in camp for years. They were afraid to come here ever since the earthmen had run out of town that one who'd got drunk on *vhubi*, upset the tube and tried to trample the plants.

No man, you didn't treat Trixie or her dandelions lightly. They were sacred.

"Hey," Horseface asked Elmer, "is that a rocket down there? A rocket—in Finchburg?"

Elmer peered forward and said. "Wak, wak!" in a meshed-gears voice, meaning yes.

"A rocket!" Horseface marvelled. "Maybe it's visitors from Terra! Or maybe it's news of a new strike! Gee-jup, Elmer! Time's a-jettin'!"

They started down the hillside's hairpin turns. The shouting grew more strident, and at times Horseface heard the raucous yowl of blaster-guns.

Celebration!

"Yippity!" Horseface bellowed, firing his own gun in the air.

But it turned out to be anything but a celebration, Horseface rushed Elmer into the community stable, unhooked the saddle-bags, dropped the stall-bar, and ran toward Trixie's place, "The Pride of Terra".

Every man in the camp was waiting at the door, and waiting vociferously. The comments mingled into an indistinguishable babble. A few miners were loitering around the rocket, a small two-seater, like mice cagily inspecting a new and baffling trap. Horseface recognized it by the device emblazoned on one of its doors—a yellow sunburst on a grey square, the insignia of United Mars.

The rocket belonged to Thurd Goreck, the Martian. Goreck hadn't been in town for years. He and his fellows had their diggings over at Saturday Wells, "Saturday" for short, in the west. What, Horseface wondered, possibly could have brought him here?

Since Horseface was a little below average height, he couldn't see over the heads of the crowd. He raced up the steps of an old ruin opposite Trixie's establishment. A shrieking beam from a blast-gun fired at random just missed him and scorched the wood overhead.

He heard Trixie's bark: "Stop it, boys, do you hear me? Somebody's likely to get hurt!"

She was standing in her doorway, a big sculpturesque woman with her feet planted solidly wide and her red fists on her broad hips. Her face was square and rough-hewn as a man's, the skin leathery from years of weathering. She'd thrown her blue lace scarf around her shoulders, the scarf that Mike O'Neill had given her on their first anniversary. Her crystal earrings dangled under her cottony hair—a bad sign. Trixie never put on her shawl and earrings unless thinking of leaving town.

Thurd Goreck lounged against the door-frame beside her. Like most Martians, he was tall and spindle-legged, large-chested, big-nosed and equipped with almost elephantine ears. He displayed quite a paternal solicitude whenever he looked at Trixie, but he sneered openly at the yelping crowd.

"Don't do it, Trix!" somebody roared above the din.

"You'll be sorry!" another warned.

Still another waited to know, "Have you forgotten Mike?"

Then Horseface noticed that the other Martians from Goreck's settlement were ranged on either side of Trixie and Goreck, holding off the Finchburgers. It was they who were doing most of the firing—warning blasts over the crowd's heads.

"No," Trixie yelled, "I ain't forgotten Mike. He was a better man than the lot of you put together!"

Horseface whistled to Candy Derain, who turned and edged toward him. "What's up, Candy?"

"Man!" Candy reached at him. "You're just the one we need—Trixie's running away! You got to do something quick!"

"She's—huh?"

"Goreck's been lazing around town almost ever since you went out nugget hunting. He's taking Trixie to Saturday—going to set her up there in a new place. He was smart and waited till you weren't around, 'cause he knows you cut a lot of ice with Trix. You got to stop her—"

A roar from the crowd cut him short. It sounded as if all the men simultaneously had been jabbed with ice picks.

"No!"

"They're stealing our Terra!"

"Trixie, you can't do this to us—you can't!"

"Ain't you got no heart at all?"

Horseface goggled, and groaned. Trixie and Goreck had stepped aside, making room for those Martians who were coming out with the blast-tube and its dandelions.

"Howling Gizzlesteins!" Horseface moaned. Then determinedly, "One side, Candy!"

He launched into the mob, shouldering, prodding and elbowing room for himself until he was out in front. A Martian significantly poked a blaster in his ribs.

"Trixie!" Horseface bawled, "what do you think you're doing?"

She scowled more fiercely than ever. "You!" she thundered, pointing a muscular arm for emphasis. "You're a fine one, asking me that! I'm clearing out of here, that's what. I'm sick and tired of all you useless loafers preying on my good nature! Ain't it so, Goreck?"

The Martian nodded, grinning.

"For years and years," Trixie cried on, "you've been bleeding me dry! Trixie will you do this for me? Trixie will you do that? And I been doing it 'cause I felt sorry for you hopeless free-loaders, like as if maybe you was my own Mike. But now I'm through with you—and why? 'Cause you

never treated me like no lady, that's why! You don't deserve a woman's kindness, Goreck says, and he's right!"

The uproar was dying down, no doubt keeping the miners' spirits company.

"Maybe I ain't no raving beauty," Trixie continued, "but that don't mean I ain't no lady, see?" In her next remark she used questionable words of interstellar origin—it is doubtful if they could have been said to have enriched any language. "Why, you frownzley glorfels, you even swear in front of me! So I'm clearing out. I've more than paid my debt to Mike, Lord rest him."

As the groans began, she gestured airily. "Put the flowers in the rocket, lads!"

"But Trixie!" Horseface called, pushing a step ahead. The Martian's gun dug a trifle deeper into his side.

"Eassy does it," the Martian admonished in his whistling accent.

Horseface cried, "We're your own people, Trixie! You can't ditch us for Martians!"

"My people are the people treating me with respect!" she retorted, and Horseface's long visage fell several inches longer.

Goreck's Martians slid the dandelion-container into the rocket's baggage compartment and stood back, forming a lane down which Goreck assisted Trixie with exaggerated

politeness. Surely she should have seen that his smirk was purely one of triumph!

But she didn't. She swung along on her wooden leg, thrilled to the core, beaming coyly at Goreck and actually blushing. He handed her into the rocket, let her arrange herself comfortably, then went to the other side of the flyer and swung aboard.

He slammed the door shut and reached for the controls. He treated the assemblage to one last sneer so poisonous that even a coral snake would have flinched from it. Trixie leaned across him to thumb her nose—after all, Emily Post and Amy Vanderbilt had been dead for a century.

The Martian with his gun in Horseface's midriff stepped back and away. Horseface would have rushed after him, but Mouse Digby caught him from behind.

"Hold it, Horseface!" And more softly, "We been up to something—"

Goreck pulled the rocket's power-lever with a grand flourish. Nothing happened. He smiled sweetly at Trixie, shrugged and dragged on the lever again. Nothing happened. On the third try he nearly wrenched the stick from its socket. From one of the rocket's jets, as though torn from its very heart, came two feeble sparks and a mournful burp.

"We busted their feed-line!" Digby chuckled.

Goreck, having gone this far, was not minded to stop now. He sprang from the rocket, called something in Martian to his men, and several of them raced away. The miners cheered perhaps a shade precipitately and bore down on the rest. The gun-toting Martians filled the air with frantic warning blasts and were swept down before they could turn their weapons to more practical use. The miners reeled around the rocket, swaying it as they clubbed the Martians with their own guns.

Goreck backed them away with well-placed blasts near their toes—what was known as "the quick hotfoot" since it turned the ground molten. He maneuvered himself with his back to his ship, his men breaking free and joining him.

Trixie chambered out seething with wrath. "You brakking chadouzes!" she howled brandishing a brawny fist. The men subsided sheepishly silent. She was accustomed to having her way, and they were accustomed to letting her have it. It had proved the best policy in the long run.

"Look at you, brawling and trying to keep me from having the one thing I want more than anything else—being treated lady-like! You think I got any sympathy for you when you act like this? You can't keep me here no longer, and you might as well realize it—and leave me go!"

They muttered angrily, but there was nothing to do except surrender. Horseface didn't bother to sheathe his gun—he threw it down in the dust. Mouse Digby, who'd been so elated over the stalling of the rocket, turned away and burst into tears.

The men were driven farther back as Trixie's supply-jeep snorted up to the rocket, driven by those Martians to whom Goreck earlier had shouted. They leaped down and assisted their fellow in transferring the dandelions from the rocket to the jeep.

"Dissable my sship, will you?" Goreck asked, grinning foxily. "Well, as we Martians say, there are plenty of ways to cook a gnorph!"

He snapped his fingers to one of his big-eared breed. "Phorey, you drive the jeep over to Ssaturday." Trixie started toward the jeep and he halted her—very courteously, of course. "No, my dear lady, we will let the jeep go firsst. Then we can be certain that nobody followss after it to rob you of your lovely flowerss. We will leave later."

The jeep chugged away. Trixie was very red-faced and unable to look at her erstwhile Finchburg admirers. Perhaps, Horseface hoped, she was relenting. But if she were, Goreck knew how to prevent it.

"Ssuch clods, to sstare sso at a lady!" he purred, and Trixie glared relentlessly at the men who had adored her so long—and apparently, so vainly.

Since Goreck's rocket was damaged beyond immediate repair, he rode off with Trixie on the town borer, a community-owned tractor equipped with a giant blaster and

used in boring mine-tunnels. It was not intended for general travel and rumbled away very slowly, kicking up a great deal of dust. The other Martians had come on gwips, which they now mounted, then made off in a hurry.

"You'll get your borer back when I get my rocket back!" Goreck called from the wake of dust.

The Finchburgers stayed as they were, every spine an S of dejection.

"With Trixie gone," Candy Derain mourned, "there ain't no use our staying here. We'll all starve!"

Baldy Dunn said, "Maybe we was bad-mannered accepting things off of her, but I always meant to pay her back as soon as I found me some psithium. If I'd of thought —"

Horseface said, "Of course Goreck is just giving Trixie the runaround. All he's really after is her dandelions, 'cause he knows what they mean to us. He'll keep 'em till we go to his diggings to work for him, that's what! He'll charge us real money every time we want to touch 'em—and where are we going to get money? It's like he's holding 'em for ransom!"

He set his jaw. "Well, we ain't going to let him get away with it! When Trixie finds out what a nopper he is, she'll be sorry, sure—but she won't never come back here on account of she's too proud! She'll just stay in Saturday being Goreck's slave, her poor heart meanwhiles busting—and I ain't going to let her!"

He started briskly for the stable, the others hesitantly trailing along, "I'm getting on Elmer and going after her. Dandelions be desubricated, I'm going to save Trixie in spite of herself!"

But it seemed that everybody was having that identical idea at once. Not all of them owned gwips, so the party of rescuers set off on a peculiar assortment of vehicles—Candy on his vacuum-cup bicycle meant for scaling precipices, Baldy Dunn and several others on pick-wielding ore-cars, some on the psithium-detectors, and Digby on the mowing-machine which cut and baled grasses for the feeding of the gwips. About a third of the expedition had to go afoot.

In no time at all, Horseface and the other gwip-riders had far outstripped the clumsy machines and the pedestrians. As Elmer soared toward Saturday in forty-foot bounds, Horseface called to the rider abreast of him:

"Wasn't that Martian driving Trixie's jeep Phorey Yakkermunn? Yeah? Kind of thought so! Remembered him from way back when the rush was on," he mumbled to himself. "Seemed a little crazy even then, and guess he had to be, to go and turn against us what used to be his buddies. Elmer, for the love of Pete, space your jumps—you're beating the breath out of me!"

He came to a fork in the road and turned left, following the borer's tracks. Then he halted, letting the other gwips overtake him. They had started after Trixie too late. A swathe of zip-flowers had moved in across the road.

"Might as well try to swim through space to Terra!" Horseface lamented. "Blast them zips!"

But it wouldn't have done him much good if he had blasted them.

The zips were pretty things, something like Terrestrial tiger-lilies—brilliant orange cups on tall green stems. They grew very thickly and had been named because of their incredibly swift life-cycle. In five seconds they would zip up from the ground as sprouts, attain full green growth, blossom, produce seed, fall withering and scatter the seed which in another five seconds would do the same thing over again.

Nobody possibly could wedge through their rank masses. If anyone tried, and were somehow to reach their midst, he would find himself being tossed up and down at five-second intervals as though being hazed on a blanket.

The zips traveled whichever way the wind carried their seeds—which happened right now to be away from Saturday. If the salt plains and chains of vertical peaks had not checked them, they might have choked the whole of Venus centuries ago.

Horseface blinked at them, dismayed. The other men also blinked, since the continual change from bare earth to green stems to orange blooms and back to bare earth again took

place in five snaps of the fingers, like the winking of an illuminated sign.

Elmer helpfully tried to eat them, but they vanished in decay even as his beak closed over them. And they stretched for miles and miles.

"Awrk!" He spat them out and shrugged discouragedly, almost hurling Horseface off the saddle.

"Guess we got to detour," Horseface sighed. They skirted the encroaching zips and ran smack into a sheerly perpendicular cliff. While they were wondering what to do next, Candy purred up on his vacuum-cup bicycle.

"At least I can ride up and over," he said, switching gear. He shot up the cliff and out of sight, the suction-cups popping like a string of fire-crackers.

"You fool, come back here!" Horseface bawled, but Candy was out of earshot by then. "He's forgot there's nothing but rock-spires for miles and miles on the other side. He'll ride up and down for hours and get no farther forward than a hundred yards!"

He thumped his heels on Elmer's sides. "Gee-jup, Elmer—we'll have to try the other end of the zips."

Digby hailed him from the mower. "Should I try cutting a path through 'em?"

"How can you, when they die before your blade turns, and grow up before it can turn again? They'll bounce you to

butter and shake the mower to bits."

"But we got to do something!"

By now the men on the detectors and ore-cars had caught up with the gwips, and the men on foot were within hailing distance.

"We're licked," Horseface mourned. "Ain't nothing we can do, except try the other end of the zips—and that's miles away. We're finished."

But they weren't. Elmer sneezed, exclaimed, "Yuk, yuk!" and jabbed his bill to indicate the cliffs.

Horseface sniffed. "Smells like rock-dust. If I didn't know better, I'd say somebody's been boring through the rock—hey! Trix and Goreck were riding on the borer! The zips must have cut them off the road like us! Come on, boys, look for the hole they made—boring a tunnel to cut past the zips!"

He didn't need to nudge Elmer. The gwip leaped toward the rocks, found the hole and slowed to a crouching walk into it. The passage was eight feet in diameter and reeking of blasted rock. After about a hundred yards it emerged into daylight but encountered zips *en masse* and so returned inward for several hundred yards more.

"That means Goreck wasted a lot of time tunneling," Horseface said happily. "Maybe we ain't so terrible far behind after all."

There was a shriek from the rear, and he reined Elmer.  
"What's that?"

"Dunno," the next man said, turning to look back.

They waited. One of the pedestrians came sprinting. "Hey, the detectors found a whopping vein of psithium—bigger than the one that started the old-time rush!"

"Huh, is that all?" Horseface demanded. "Forget it! We got to save Trixie!"

The borer had traveled faster than Horseface had imagined. He didn't come in sight of it until the party reached Saturday. It was just stopping in front of Goreck's tavern, "The Martian's Fancy". Goreck was handing Trixie down from it.

Saturday was a lot less of a ghost town than Finchburg. Maybe there were weeds in its main street, but every house had its occupants, and some had coats of paint besides.

Elmer braked at the borer, his claws deeply furrowing the dust. Horseface called, "Trix, come on back! We come to save you in spite of yourself!"

Goreck whistled, and a flock of his boys materialised on the porch of "The Martian's Fancy."

"Trouble, boyss! Sstand ready!"

Then he smiled at Horseface and the other Finchburgers. It was a masterpiece of insult. "I don't like blast-play or dangerous fighting, but if necessary, I'll resort to it. You've no authority to argue, sso go before you get hurt. Trixie iss here because she wants to be here—no, my dear?"

He nudged her. She jumped, looked as though she was about to bat him one, then gulped and nodded. She couldn't look in the eyes of Horseface and his party.

Horseface laid his hand on his blaster-butt. "It don't make no particle of difference. Maybe you fooled Trix, but you ain't fooled us, so hand her over, see?"

Goreck twinkled jovially at his men in front of "The Martian's fancy". He said, "Horseface, I warn you—get back, and take your hand off your gun. As long as I have the dandelionss ssafe inside my headquarterss, I'm quite ssure that you won't dare try anything reckless—"

"Boss! Psst!" One of the Martians was beckoning nervously.

"What is it?" Goreck demanded testily, "Sspeak up! There'ss nothing to fear—we've got the whip hand."

"But, boss—"

Goreck dropped his own hand to his own gun. The Martian hastily piped, "The dandelionss! They didn't get here!"

"I—what—ulp!" Goreck spluttered, which made beautiful sense even if it wasn't coherent. He dived behind Trixie as though behind a rock, and whipped out his gun.

"Looking klambits!" Mouse Digby moaned. "The zips! They got Phorey and the jeep and the dandelions! Shook 'em to pieces!"

He pressed his mouth into a slit and started grimly forward. But Trixie's scream checked him.

"My dandelions! Gone! All gone! Just 'cause I wanted to be treated nice—"

Horseface said, "You see? That's what you get for being so foolish. And ain't us coming to fetch you kind of a compliment? It's sure took us a lot more effort than Goreck's sweet-talking did. You, Goreck, get out from behind a woman's skirts! That ain't no way for a gentleman to act!"

"Trixie, back up to the Fancy," Goreck snapped. "Hide me. Boyss," he squeaked, gesturing wildly, "let 'em have it!"

"No you don't! You ain't going to shoot my old pardners!" Trixie fumed, even as a number of rays from Martian blasters sang past. The Finchburgers ducked, not daring to shoot while Trixie was so near their targets.

She turned, swooped and had Goreck off the ground, high over her head and squawking. He didn't dare shoot her since she was his only hope of salvation, and the Martians didn't either.

They just stopped fighting.

Trixie walked Goreck over to Horse face and thumped him down on the dust. The rest of the Martians held a quick exchange of ideas limited strictly to gestures, and began to melt away from the scene.

"Fortune hunter! Deceiver!" Trixie bawled at Goreck who was already wretched enough with blasters poked in his face. "You promised me you'd do it all peaceful, and still you wanted to shoot my pardners! You treated me decent just to get my dandelions away from me! I been a fool," she sobbed at Horseface, grinding her fists in her eyes. She dropped her hands and snapped at Goreck, "And it was you what made me do it! I'll fix you for that! Out of my way, everybody!"

The Martians hiding in "The Martian's Fancy" and peeping from its windows let out a shriek as she started for the borer. They'd read her mind. They burst from the place like moths from an opened trunk, and instantaneously scattered all over the landscape.

"You boys watch Goreck," Trixie ordered the Finchburgers who had come on foot. "But you with the machines, come on—join the fun!"

The air not only was rent, but hamburgered as she turned on the borer's blast-ray full-strength and chugged it straight for "The Martian's Fancy". The mowing machine chopped up a few street weeds before it began to cut and bale the houses. The psithium detectors hopped like kangaroos against the flimsy walls, battering them down. Goreck's protests were

inaudible in the clangor of smashing dwellings and the crackle of crumbling masonry. His tears of frustration and fury made tiny mudpies in the dust.

"I guess that'll show you how a lady ought to be treated," Trixie observed rather enigmatically, but with grim satisfaction, after having done to his town everything that the old Assyrian conquerers had bragged about—except perhaps the piling up of human heads. "Now give him a send-off, boys!"

But their blasts at his feet couldn't possibly keep up with him. Maybe it was merely dust, but he ran so fast he seemed to smoke from friction.

"I guess nobody's going to like me no more, after what I went and done—losing my dandelions," Trixie sighed. They had started homeward, and she was riding behind Horseface on Elmer. Most of the pedestrians were riding the borer.

Horseface said, "We love you more than ever, Trix. We had to lose you before we could see what fools we been."

Horseface went on, "Don't worry about the dandelions. For one thing, while we was going through that tunnel you and Goreck made, we found a whopping big vein of psithium—big enough to start another rush! Now we can all go back to Terra if we want to—or if we stay, you can build a whole blooming conservatory!"

Trixie stopped sobbing. Elmer rejoiced, because from her hiccoughs he had felt as if she and Horseface had been

dancing on his back.

Horseface said, "And anyway, your dandelions ain't lost. I knew it when I came chasing after you to the fork in the road. Phorey Yakkermunn the Martian was driving your jeep. Don't you remember what we used to call him? 'Ears', that's what—'Ears' Yakkermunn, 'cause being a Martian and coming from a planet with rarefied air like there is on Mars, his ears had to be extra big so they could catch sounds."

"What's that got to do with my dandelions?"

"Phorey never could get used to the heavy air we got here on Venus. It makes sounds too loud and hurts his ears. So he still does like he used to, he stuffs them with cotton. Goreck told him to take the dandelions to Saturday, didn't he? But with all that cotton in his ears, you know where he took 'em? To Satterlee!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive! After we took the fork in the road, we was following borer-tracks, not tire-marks!"

She threw her heavy arms around him, planting a kiss full on his lips. It not only made him squirm, but reminded him of Candy Derain's suction cup bicycle. Candy probably had traveled a hundred miles or so by now—straight up and down again—and actually couldn't have gained more than a hundred feet straightaway.

"You're so resourceful, Horseface," Trixie breathed, with constellations rather than mere stars in her eyes. "You remind

me of Mike. And I'm going to reward you for all you've done. I'm going to marry you!"

Horseface didn't dare to groan. While Trixie clamped a loving paw on his own hand almost squeezing it to pulp, he wished fervently that he was alone an the far hills—anywhere but here—looking for psithium nuggets.

But Trixie always had her way, and she wasn't going to stop having it now.

"You're so masterful!" she wheezed.

And even Elmer, looking back over his shoulder, hung his head and sighed.

### ***A COMMENT ON ONE TOUCH OF TERRA***

*I have read Dr. Hannes Bok's ONE TOUCH OF VENUS, which appears elsewhere in this publication, with understandable interest. While I may deplore, as a cultural anthropologist, Dr. Bok's obvious empathy towards these miners with their socially regrettable attitude towards the original inhabitants, I must say that Dr. Bok paints quite an effective picture of living conditions in these scattered communities.*

*I have been privileged, though, as I have said elsewhere, to visit with and spend considerable time with the natives*

*who withdrew to the hills soon after our ships first landed.*

*I have found these men and women extraordinarily hospitable, warm and friendly once they sense that you do not come among them as a tourist.*

*They have a very ancient culture, a rich language (with gradations similar to 20th century Javanese). Their chants are fantastic, long, mournful wails, whose shadings, whose tremolos, still inspire you and make you one with them. I hope to translate some of these chants in the near future, including one dedicated to the sacred sand-lillies, so erroneously called zips by the miners.*

Vithaldas Hattopadhyaya O'Quinn  
Lecturer in Venusian Antiquities

[The end of *One Touch of Terra* by Wayne Francis Woodard (as Hannes Bok)]