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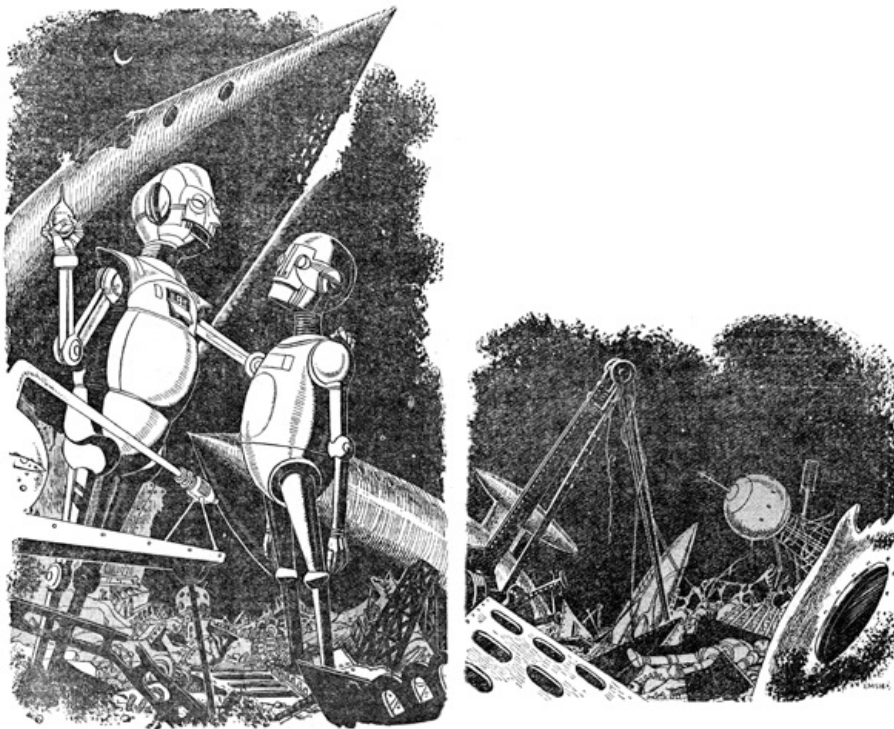
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK B-12'S MOON GLOW ***

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B-12's MOON GLOW

By CHARLES A. STEARNS

Among the metal-persons of Phobos, robot B-12 held a special niche.

He might not have been stronger, larger, faster than some ... but he could be devious ... and more important, he was that junkyard planetoid's only moonshiner.

I AM B-12, a metal person. If you read *Day* and the other progressive journals you will know that in some quarters of the galaxy there is considerable prejudice directed against us. It is ever so with minority races, and I do not complain. I merely make this statement so that you will understand about the alarm clock.

An alarm clock is a simple mechanism used by the Builders to shock themselves into consciousness after the periodic comas to which they are subject. It is obsolescent, but still used in such out of the way places as Phobos.

My own contact with one of these devices came about in the following manner:

I had come into Argon City under cover of darkness, which is the only sensible thing to do, in my profession, and I was stealing through the back alleyways as silently as my rusty joints would allow.

I was less than three blocks from Benny's Place, and still undetected, when I passed the window. It was a large, cheerful oblong of light, so quite naturally I stopped to investigate, being slightly phototropic, by virtue of the selenium grids in my rectifier cells. I went over and looked in, unobtrusively resting my grapples on the outer ledge.

There was a Builder inside such as I had not seen since I came to Phobos half a century ago, and yet I recognized the subspecies at once, for they are common on Earth. It was a she.

It was in the process of removing certain outer sheaths, and I noted that, while quite symmetrical, bilaterally, it was otherwise oddly formed, being disproportionately large and lumpy in the anterior ventral region.

I had watched for some two or three minutes, entirely forgetting my own safety, when then she saw me. Its eyes widened and it snatched up the alarm clock which was, as I have hinted, near at hand.

"Get out of here, you nose old tin can!" it screamed, and threw the clock, which caromed off my headpiece, damaging one earphone. I ran.

If you still do not see what I mean about racial prejudice, you will, when you hear what happened later.

I continued on until I came to Benny's Place, entering through the back door. Benny met me there, and quickly shushed me into a side room. His fluorescent eyes were glowing with excitement.

Benny's real name is BNE-96, and when on Earth he had been only a Servitor, not a General Purpose like myself.

But perhaps I should explain.

We metal people are the children of the Builders of Earth, and later of Mars and Venus. We were not born of two parents, as they are. That is a function far too complex to explain here; in fact I do not even understand it myself. No, we were born of the hands and intellects of the greatest of their scientists, and for this reason it might be natural to suppose that we, and not they, would be considered a superior race. It is not so.

Many of us were fashioned in those days, a metal person for every kind of task that they could devise, and some, like myself, who could do almost anything. We were contented enough, for the greater part, but the scientists kept creating, always striving to better their former efforts.

And one day the situation which the Builders had always regarded as inevitable, but we, somehow, had supposed would never come, was upon us. The first generation of the metal people—more than fifty thousand of us—were obsolete. The things that we had been designed to do, the new ones, with their crystalline brains, fresh, untarnished, accomplished better.

We were banished to Phobos, dreary, lifeless moon of Mars. It had long been a sort of interplanetary junkyard; now it became a graveyard.

UPON the barren face of this little world there was no life except for the handful of hardy Martian and Terran prospectors who searched for minerals. Later on, a few rude mining communities sprang up under plastic airdromes, but never came to much. Argon City was such a place.

I wonder if you can comprehend the loneliness, the hollow futility of our plight. Fifty thousand skilled workmen with nothing to do. Some of the less adaptable gave up, prostrating themselves upon the bare rocks until their joints froze from lack of use, and their works corroded. Others served the miners and prospectors, but their needs were all too few.

The overwhelming majority of us were still idle, and somehow we learned the secret of racial existence at last. We learned to serve each other.

This was not an easy lesson to learn. In the first place there must be motivation involved in racial preservation. Yet we derived no pleasure out of the things that make the Builders wish to continue to live. We did not sleep; we did not eat, and we were not able to reproduce ourselves. (And, besides, this latter, as I have indicated, would have been pointless with us.)

There was, however, one other pleasure of the Builders that intrigued us. It can best be described as a stimulation produced by drenching their insides with alcoholic compounds, and is a universal pastime among the males and many of the shes.

One of us—R-47, I think it was (rest him)—tried it one day. He pried open the top of his helmet and pouted an entire bottle of the fluid down his mechanism.

Poor R-47. He caught fire and blazed up in a glorious blue flame that we could not extinguish in time. He was beyond repair, and we were forced to scrap him.

But his was not a sacrifice in vain. He had established an idea in our ennui-bursting minds. An idea which led to the discovery of Moon Glow. My discovery, I should say, for I was the first.

Naturally, I cannot divulge my secret formula for Moon Glow. There are many kinds of Moon Glow these days, but there is still only one B-12 Moon Glow.

Suffice it to say that it is a high octane preparation, only a drop of which—but you know the effects of Moon Glow, of course.

How the merest thimbleful, when judiciously poured into one's power pack, gives new life and the most deliriously happy freedom of movement imaginable. One possesses soaring spirits and super-strength.

Old, rusted joints move freely once more, one's transistors glow brightly, and the currents of the body race about with the minutest resistance. Moon Glow is like being born again.

The sale of it has been illegal for several years, for no reason that I can think of except that the Builders, who make the laws, can not bear to see metal people have fun.

Of course, a part of the blame rests on such individuals as X-101, who, when lubricated with Moon Glow, insists upon dancing around on large, cast-iron feet to the hazard of all toes in his vicinity. He is thin and long jointed, and he goes "creak, creak," in a weird, sing-song fashion as he dances. It is a shameful, ludicrous sight.

Then there was DC-5, who tore down the 300 feet long equipment hangar of the Builders one night. He had over-indulged.

I DO not feel responsible for these things. If I had not sold them the Moon Glow, someone else would have done so. Besides, I am only a wholesaler. Benny buys everything that I am able to produce in my little laboratory hidden out in the Dumps.

Just now, by Benny's attitude, I knew that something was very wrong. "What is the matter?" I said. "Is it the revenue agents?"

"I do not know," said BNE-96 in that curious, flat voice of his that is incapable of inflection. "I do not know, but there are visitors of importance from Earth. It could mean anything, but I have a premonition of disaster. Jon tipped me off."

He meant Jon Rogeson, of course, who was the peace officer here in Argon City, and the only one of the Builders I had ever met who did not look down upon a metal person. When sober he was a clever person who always looked out for our interests here.

"What are they like?" I asked in some fear, for I had six vials of Moon Glow with me at the moment.

"I have not seen them, but there is one who is high in the government, and his wife. There are half a dozen others of the Builder race, and one of the new type metal persons."

I had met the she who must have been the wife. "They hate us," I said. "We can expect only evil from these persons."

"You may be right. If you have any merchandise with you, I will take it, but do not risk bringing more here until they have gone."

I produced the vials of Moon Glow, and he paid me in Phobos credits, which are good for a specified number of refuelings at the Central fueling station.

Benny put the vials away and he went into the bar. There was the usual jostling crowd of hard-bitten Earth miners, and of the metal people who come to lose their loneliness. I recognized many, though I spend very little time in these places, preferring solitary pursuits, such as the distillation of Moon Glow, and improving my mind by study and contemplation out in the barrens.

Jon Rogeson and I saw each other at the same time, and I did not like the expression in his eye as he crooked a finger at me. I went over to his table. He was pleasant looking, as Builders go, with blue eyes less dull than most, and a brown, unruly topknot of hair such as is universally affected by them.

"Sit down," he invited, revealing his white incisors in greeting.

I never sit, but this time I did so, to be polite. I was wary; ready for anything. I knew that there was something unpleasant in the air. I wondered if he had seen me passing the Moon Glow to Benny somehow. Perhaps he had barrier-penetrating vision, like the Z group of metal people ... but I had never heard of a Builder like that. I knew that he had long suspected that I made Moon Glow.

"What do you want?" I asked cautiously.

"Come on now," he said, "loosen up! Limber those stainless steel hinges of yours and be friendly."

That made me feel good. Actually, I am somewhat pitted with rust, but he never seems to notice, for he is like that. I felt young, as if I had partaken of my own product.

"The fact is, B-12," he said, "I want you to do me a favor, old pal."

"And what is that?"

"Perhaps you have heard that there is some big brass from Earth visiting Phobos this week."

"I have heard nothing," I said. It is often helpful to appear ignorant when questioned by the Builders, for they believe us to be incapable of misrepresenting the truth. The fact is, though it is an acquired trait, and not built into us, we General Purposes can lie as well as anyone.

"Well, there is. A Federation Senator, no less. Simon F. Langley. It's my job to keep them entertained; that's where you come in."

I was mystified. I had never heard of this Langley, but I know what entertainment is. I had a mental image of myself singing or dancing before the Senator's party. But I can not sing very well, for three of my voice reeds are broken and have never been replaced, and lateral motion, for me, is almost impossible these days. "I do not know what you mean," I said. "There is J-66. He was once an Entertainment—"

"No, no!" he interrupted, "you don't get it. What the Senator wants is a guide. They're making a survey of the Dumps, though I'll be damned if I can find out why. And you know the Dumps better than any metal person—or human—on Phobos."

So that was it. I felt a vague dread, a premonition of disaster. I had such feelings before, and usually with reason. This too, was an acquired sensibility, I am sure. For many years I have studied the Builders, and there is much to be learned of their mobile faces and their eyes. In Jon's eyes, however, I read no trickery—nothing.

Yet, I say, I had the sensation of evil. It was just for a moment; no longer.

I said I would think it over.

SENATOR LANGLEY was distinguished. Jon said so. And yet he was clumsily round, and he rattled incessantly of things into which I could interpret no meaning. The she who was his wife was much younger, and sullen, and unpleasantly I sensed great rapport between her and Jon Rogeson from the very first.

There were several other humans in the group—I will not call them Builders, for I did not hold them to be, in any way, superior to my own people. They all wore spectacles, and they gravitated about the round body of the Senator like minor moons, and I could tell that they were some kind of servitors.

I will not describe them further.

MS-33 I will describe. I felt an unconscionable hatred for him at once. I can not say why, except that he hung about his master obsequiously, power pack smoothly purring, and he was slim limbed, nickel-plated, and wore, I thought, a smug expression on his viziplate. He represented the new order; the ones who had displaced us on Earth. He knew too much, and showed it at every opportunity.

We did not go far that first morning. The half-track was driven to the edge of the Dumps. Within the Dumps one walks—or does not go. Phobos is an airless world, and yet so small that rockets are impractical. The terrain is broken and littered with the refuse of half a dozen worlds, but the Dumps themselves—that is different.

Imagine, if you can, an endless vista of death, a sea of rusting corpses of space ships, and worn-out mining machinery, and of those of my race whose power packs burned out, or who simply gave up, retiring into this endless, corroding limbo of the barracks. A more sombre sight was never seen.

But this fat ghoul, Langley, sickened me. This shame of the Builder race, this atavism—this beast—rubbed his fat, impractical hands together with an ungod-like glee. "Excellent," he said. "Far, far better, in fact, than I had hoped." He did not elucidate.

I looked at Jon Rogeson. He shook his head slowly.

"You there—robot!" said Langley, looking at me. "How far across this place?" The word was like a blow. I could not answer.

MS-33, glistening in the dying light of Mars, strode over to me, clanking heavily up on the black rocks. He seized me with his grapples and shook me until my wiring was in danger of shorting out. "Speak up when you are spoken to, archaic mechanism!" he grated.

I would have struck out at him, but what use except to warp my own aging limbs.

Jon Rogeson came to my rescue. "On Phobos," he explained to Langley, "we don't use that word 'robot.' These folk have been free a long time. They've quite a culture of their own nowadays, and they like to be called 'metal people.' As a return courtesy, they refer to us humans as 'builders.' Just a custom, Senator, but if you want to get along with them—"

"Can they vote?" said Langley, grinning at his own sour humor.

"Nonsense," said MS-33. "I am a robot, and proud of it. This rusty piece has no call to put on airs."

"Release him," Langley said. "Droll fellows, these discarded robots. Really nothing but mechanical dolls, you know, but I think the old scientists made a mistake, giving them such human appearance, and such obstinate traits."

Oh, it was true enough, from his point of view. We had been mechanical dolls at first, I suppose, but fifty years can change one. All I know is this: we are people; we think and feel, and are happy and sad, and quite often we are bored stiff with this dreary moon of Phobos.

It seared me. My selenium cells throbbled white hot within the shell of my frame, and I made up my mind that I would learn more about the mission of this Langley, and I would get even with MS-33 even if they had me dismantled for it.

Of the rest of that week I recall few pleasant moments. We went out every day, and the quick-eyed servants of Langley measured the areas with their instruments, and exchanged significant looks from behind their spectacles, smug in their thin air helmets. It was all very mysterious. And disturbing.

But I could discover nothing about their mission. And when I questioned MS-33, he would look important and say nothing. Somehow it seemed vital that I find out what was going on before it was too late.

On the third day there was a strange occurrence. My friend, Jon Rogeson had been taking pictures of the Dumps. Langley and his wife had withdrawn to one side and were talking in low tones to one another. Quite thoughtlessly Jon turned the lens on them and clicked the shutter.

Langley became rust-red throughout the vast expanse of his neck and face. "Here!" he said, "what are you doing?"

"Nothing," said Jon.

"You took a picture of me," snarled Langley. "Give me the plate at once."

Jon Rogeson got a bit red himself. He was not used to being ordered around. "I'll be damned if I will," he said.

Langley growled something I couldn't understand, and turned his back on us. The she who was called his wife looked startled and worried. Her eyes were beseeching as she looked at Jon. A message there, but I could not read it. Jon looked away.

Langley started walking back to the half-track alone. He turned once and there was evil in his gaze as he looked at Jon. "You will lose your job for this impertinence," he said with quiet savagery, and added, enigmatically, "not that there will be a job after this week anyway."

Builders may appear to act without reason, but there is always a motivation somewhere in their complex brains, if one can only find it, either in the seat of reason, or in the labyrinthine inhibitions from their childhood. I knew this, because I had studied them, and now there were certain notions that came into my brain which, even if I could not prove them, were no less interesting for that.

THE time had come to act. I could scarcely wait for darkness to come. There were things in my brain that appalled me, but I was now certain that I had been right. Something was about to happen to Phobos, to all of us here—I knew not what, but I must prevent it somehow.

I kept in the shadows of the shabby buildings of Argon City, and I found the window without effort. The place where I had spied upon the wife of Langley to my sorrow the other night. There was no one there; there was darkness within, but that did not deter me.

Within the airdrome which covers Argon City the buildings are loosely constructed, even as they are on Earth. I had no trouble, therefore, opening the window. I swung a leg up and was presently within the darkened room. I found the door I sought and entered cautiously. In this adjacent compartment I made a thorough search but I did not find what I primarily sought—namely the elusive reason for Langley's visit to Phobos. It was in a metallic overnight bag that I did find something else which made my power pack hum so loudly that I was afraid of being heard. The thing which explained the strangeness of the pompous Senator's attitude today—which explained, in short, many things, and caused my brain to race with new ideas.

I put the thing in my chest container, and left as stealthily as I had come. There had been progress, but since I had not found what I hoped to find, I must now try my alternate plan.

Two hours later I found the one I sought, and made sure that I was seen by him. Then I left Argon City by the South lock, furtively, as a thief, always glancing over my shoulder, and when I made certain that I was being followed, I went swiftly, and it was not long before I was clambering over the first heaps of debris at the edge of the Dumps.

Once I thought I heard footsteps behind me, but when I looked back there was no one in sight. Just the tiny disk of Deimos peering over the sharp peak of the nearest ridge, the black velvet sky outlining the curvature of this airless moon.

Presently I was in sight of home, the time-eaten hull of an ancient star freighter resting near the top of a heap of junked equipment from some old strip mining operation. It would never rise again, but its shell remained strong enough to shelter my distillery and scant furnishings from any chance meteorite that might fall.

I greeted it with the usual warmth of feeling which one has for the safe and the familiar. I stumbled over tin fuel cans, wires and other tangled metal in my haste to get there.

It was just as I had left it. The heating element under the network of coils and pressure chambers still glowed with white heat, and the Moon Glow was dripping with musical sound into the retort.

I felt good. No one ever bothered me here. This was my fortress, with all that I cared for inside. My tools, my work, my micro-library. And yet I had deliberately—

Something—a heavy foot—clanked upon the first step of the manport through

which I had entered.

I turned quickly. The form shimmered in the pale Deimoslight that silhouetted it.

MS-33.

He had followed me here.

"What do you want?" I said. "What are you doing here?"

"A simple question," said MS-33. "Tonight you looked very suspicious when you left Argon City. I saw you and followed you here. You may as well know that I have never trusted you. All the old ones were unreliable. That is why you were replaced."

He came in, boldly, without being invited, and looked around. I detected a sneer in his voice as he said, "So this is where you hide."

"I do not hide. I live here, it is true."

"A robot does not live. A robot exists. We newer models do not require shelter like an animal. We are rust-proof and invulnerable." He strode over to my micro-library, several racks of carefully arranged spools, and fingered them irreverently. "What is this?"

"My library."

"So! *Our* memories are built into us. We have no need to refresh them."

"So is mine," I said. "But I would learn more than I know." I was stalling for time, waiting until he made the right opening.

"Nonsense," he said. "I know why you stay out here in the Dumps, masterless. I have heard of the forbidden drug that is sold in the mining camps such as Argon City. Is this the mechanism?" He pointed at the still.

Now was the time. I mustered all my cunning, but I could not speak. Not yet.

"Never mind," he said. "I can see that it is. I shall report you, of course. It will give me great pleasure to see you dismantled. Not that it really matters, of course—now."

There it was again. The same frightening allusion that Langley had made today. I must succeed!

I knew that MS-33, for all his brilliance, and newness, and vaunted superiority, was only a Secretarial. For the age of specialism was upon Earth, and General Purpose models were no longer made. That was why we were different here on Phobos. It was why we had survived. The old ones had given us something special which the new metal people did not have. Moreover, MS-33 had his weakness. He was larger, stronger, faster than me, but I doubted that he could be devious.

"You are right," I said, pretending resignation. "This is my distillery. It is where I make the fluid which is called Moon Glow by the metal people of Phobos. Doubtless you are interested in learning how it works."

"Not even remotely interested," he said. "I am interested only in taking you back and turning you over to the authorities."

"It works much like the conventional distilling plants of Earth," I said, "except that the basic ingredient, a silicon compound, is irradiated as it passes through zirconium tubes to the heating pile, where it is activated and broken down into the droplets of the elixir called Moon Glow. You see the golden drops falling there.

"It has the excellent flavor of fine petroleum, as I make it. Perhaps you'd care to taste it. Then you could understand that it is not really bad at all. Perhaps you could persuade yourself to be more lenient with me."

"Certainly not," said MS-33.

"Perhaps you are right," I said after a moment of reflection. I took a syringe, drew up several drops of the stuff and squirted it into my carapace, where it would do the most good. I felt much better.

"Yes," I continued, "certainly you are quite correct, now that I think of it. You newer models would never bear it. You weren't built to stand such things. Nor, for that matter, could you comprehend the exquisite joys that are derived from Moon Glow. Not only would you derive no pleasure from it, but it would corrode your parts, I imagine, until you could scarcely crawl back to your master for repairs." I helped myself to another liberal portion.

"That is the silliest thing I've ever heard," he said.

"What?"

"I said, it's silly. We are constructed to withstand a hundred times greater stress, and twice as many chemical actions as you were. Nothing could hurt us. Besides, it looks harmless enough. I doubt that it is hardly anything at all."

"For me it is not," I admitted. "But you—"

"Give me the syringe, fool!"

"I dare not."

"Give it here!"

I allowed him to wrest it from my grasp. In any case I could not have prevented him. He shoved me backwards against the rusty bulkhead with a clang. He pushed the nozzle of the syringe down into the retort and withdrew it filled with Moon Glow. He opened an inspection plate in his ventral region and squirted himself generously.

It was quite a dose. He waited for a moment. "I feel nothing," he said finally. "I do not believe it is anything more than common lubricating oil." He was silent for another moment. "There *is* an ease of movement," he said.

"No paralysis?" I asked.

"Paral—? You stupid, rusty old robot!" He helped himself to another syringe of

Moon Glow. The stuff brought twenty credits an ounce, but I did not begrudge it him.

He flexed his superbly articulated joints in three directions, and I could hear his power unit building up within him to a whining pitch. He took a shuffling sidestep, and then another, gazing down at his feet, with arms akimbo.

"The light gravity here is superb, superb, superb, superb, superb," he said, skipping a bit.

"Isn't it?" I said.

"Almost negligible," he said.

"True."

"You have been very kind to me," MS-33 said. "Extremely, extraordinarily, incomparably, incalculably kind." He used up all the adjectives in his memory pack. "I wonder if you would mind awfully much if—"

"Not at all," I said. "Help yourself. By the way, friend, would you mind telling me what your real mission of your party is here on Phobos. The Senator forgot to say."

"Secret," he said. "Horribly top secret. As a dutiful subject—I mean servant—of Earth, I could not, of course, divulge it to anyone. If I could—" his neon eyes glistened, "if I could, you would, of course, be the first to know. The very first." He threw one nickel-plated arm about my shoulder.

"I see," I said, "and just what is it that you are not allowed to tell me?"

"Why, that we are making a preliminary survey here on Phobos, of course, to determine whether or not it is worthwhile to send salvage for scrap. Earth is short of metals, and it depends upon what the old ma—the master says in his report."

"You mean they'll take all the derelict spaceships, such as this one, and all the abandoned equipment?"

"And the r-robots," MS-33 said, "They're metal too, you know."

"They're going to take the dismantled robots?"

MS-33 made a sweeping gesture. "They're going to take *all* the r-robots, dismantled or not. They're not good for anything anyway. The bill is up before the Federation Congress right now. And it will pass if my master, Langley says so." He patted my helmet, consolingly, his grapples clanking. "If you were worth a damn, you know—" he concluded sorrowfully.

"That's murder," I said. And I meant it. Man's inhumanity to metal people, I thought. Yes—to man, even if we were made of metal.

"How's that?" said MS-33 foggily.

"Have another drop of Moon Glow," I said. "I've got to get back to Argon City."

I MADE it back to Benny's place without incident. I had never moved so swiftly. I sent Benny out to find Jon Rogeson, and presently he brought him back.

I told Rogeson what MS-33 had said, watching his reaction carefully. I could not forget that though he had been our friend, he was still one of the Builders, a human who thought as humans.

"You comprehend," I said grimly, "that one word of this will bring an uprising of fifty-thousand metal people which can be put down only at much expense and with great destruction. We are free people. The Builders exiled us here, and therefore lost their claim to us. We have as much right to life as anyone, and we do not wish to be melted up and made into printing presses and space ships and the like."

"The damn fools," Jon said softly. "Listen, B-12, you've got to believe me. I didn't know a thing about this, though I've suspected something was up. I'm on your side, but what are we going to do? Maybe they'll listen to reason. Vera—"

"That is the name of the she? No, they will not listen to reason. They hate us." I recalled with bitterness the episode of alarm clock. "There is a chance, however. I have not been idle this night. If you will go get Langley and meet me in the back room here at Benny's, we will talk."

"But he'll be asleep."

"Awaken him," I said. "Get him here. Your own job is at stake as well, remember."

"I'll get him," Jon said grimly. "Wait here."

I went over to the bar where Benny was serving the miners. Benny had always been my friend. Jon was my friend, too, but he was a Builder. I wanted one of my own people to know what was going on, just in case something happened to me.

We were talking there, in low tones, when I saw MS-33. He came in through the front door, and there was purposefulness in his stride that had not been there when I left him back at the old hulk. The effects of the Moon Glow had worn off much quicker than I had expected. He had come for vengeance. He would tell about my distillery, and that would be the end of me. There was only one thing to do and I must do it fast.

"Quick," I ordered Benny. "Douse the lights." He complied. The place was plunged into darkness. I knew that it was darkness and yet, you comprehend, I still sensed everything in the place, for I had the special visual sensory system bequeathed only to the General Purposes of a bygone age. I could see, but hardly anyone else could. I worked swiftly, and I got what I was after in a very short time. I ducked out of the front door with it and threw it in a silvery arc as far as I could hurl it. It was an intricate little thing which could not, I am sure, have been duplicated on the entire moon of Phobos.

When I returned, someone had put the lights back on, but it didn't matter now. MS-

33 was sitting at one of the tables, staring fixedly at me. He said nothing. Benny was motioning for me to come into the back room. I went to him.

Jon Rogeson and Langley were there. Langley looked irritated. He was mumbling strangled curses and rubbing his eyes.

Rogeson laughed. "You may be interested in knowing, B-12, that I had to arrest him to get him here. This had better be good."

"It is all bad," I said, "very bad—but necessary." I turned to Langley. "It is said that your present survey is being made with the purpose of condemning all of Phobos, the dead and the living alike, to the blast furnaces and the metal shops of Earth. Is this true?"

"Why you impudent, miserable piece of tin! What if I am making a scrap survey? What are you going to do about it. You're nothing but a ro—"

"So it is true! But you will tell the salvage ships not to come. It is yours to decide, and you will decide that we are not worth bothering with here on Phobos. You will save us."

"I?" blustered Langley.

"You will." I took the thing out of my breastplate container and showed it to him. He grew pale.

Jon said, "Well, I'll be damned!"

It was a picture of Langley and another. I gave it to Jon. "His wife," I said. "His real wife. I am sure of it, for you will note the inscription on the bottom."

"Then Vera—?"

"Is not his wife. You wonder that he was camera shy?"

"Housebreaker!" roared Langley. "It's a plot; a dirty, reactionary plot!"

"It is what is called blackmail," I said. I turned to Jon. "I am correct about this?"

"You are." Jon said.

"You are instructed to leave Phobos," I said to Langley, "and you will allow my friend here to keep his job as peace officer, for without it he would be lost. I have observed that in these things the Builders are hardly more adaptable than their children, the metal people. You will do all this, and in return, we will not send the picture that Jon took today to your wife, nor otherwise inform her of your transgression. For I am told that this is a transgression."

"It is indeed," agreed Jon gravely. "Right, Langley?"

"All right," Langley snarled. "You win. And the sooner I get out of this hole the better." He got up to go, squeezing his fat form through the door into the bar, past the gaping miners and the metal people, heedless of the metal people. We watched him go with some satisfaction.

"It is no business of mine," I said to Jon, "but I have seen you look with longing upon the she that was not Langley's wife. Since she does not belong to him, there is nothing to prevent you from having her. Should not that make you happy?"

"Are you kidding?" he snarled.

Which proves that I have still much to learn about his race.

Out front, Langley spied his metal servant, MS-33, just as he was going out the door. He turned to him. "What are you doing here?" he asked suspiciously.

MS-33 made no answer. He stared malevolently at the bar, ignoring Langley.

"Come on here, damn you!" Langley said. MS-33 said nothing. Langley went over to him and roared foul things into his earphones that would corrode one's soul, if one had one. I shall never forget that moment. The screaming, red-faced Langley, the laughing miners.

But he got no reply from MS-33. Not then or ever. And this was scarcely strange, for I had removed his fuse.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK B-12'S MOON GLOW ***

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