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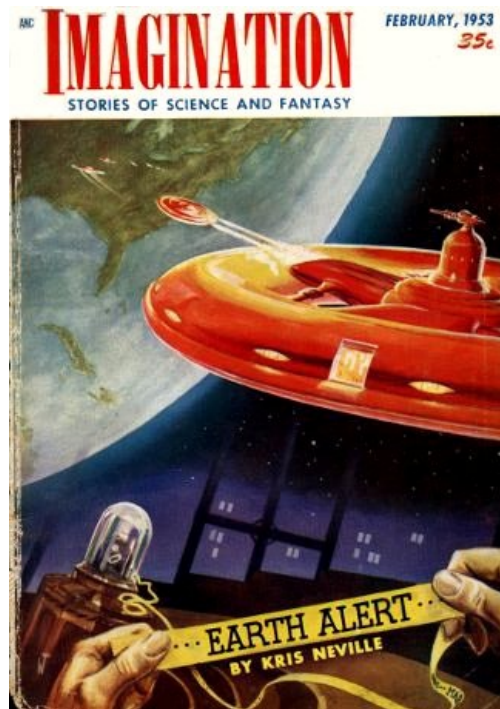
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ELEGY ***



ELEGY

By Charles Beaumont

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"Would you mind repeating that?"

"I said, sir, that Mr. Friden said, sir, that he sees a city."

"A city?"

"Yes sir."

Captain Webber rubbed the back of his hand along his cheek.

"You realize, of course, that that is impossible?"

"Yes sir."

It was an impossible situation: an asteroid in space where no asteroid should have been—with a city that could only have existed back on Earth!

"Send Mr. Friden in to see me, at once."

The young man saluted and rushed out of the room. He returned with a somewhat older man who wore spectacles and frowned.

"Now then," said Captain Webber, "what's all this Lieutenant Peterson tells me about a city? Are you enjoying a private little joke, Friden?"

Mr. Friden shook his head emphatically. "No sir."

"Then perhaps you'd like to explain."

"Well, sir, you see, I was getting bored and just for something to do, I thought I'd look through the screen—not that I dreamed of seeing anything. The instruments weren't adjusted, either; but there was something funny, something I couldn't make out exactly."

"Go on," said Captain Webber, patiently.

"So I fixed up the instruments and took another look, and there it was, sir, plain as could be!"

"There *what* was?"

"The city, sir. Oh, I couldn't tell much about it, but there were houses, all right, a lot of them."

"Houses, you say?"

"Yes sir, on an asteroid."

Captain Webber looked for a long moment at Mr. Friden and began to pace nervously.

"I take it you know what this might mean?"

"Yes sir, I do. That's why I wanted Lieutenant Peterson to tell you about it."

"I believe, Friden, that before we do any more talking I'll see this city for myself."

Captain Webber, Lieutenant Peterson and Mr. Friden walked from the room down a long corridor and into a smaller room. Captain Webber put his eye to a circular glass and tapped his foot.

He stepped back and rubbed his cheek again.

"Well, you were right. That *is* a city—or else we've all gone crazy. Do you think that we have?"

"I don't know, sir. It's not impossible."

"Lieutenant, go ask Mr. Milton if he can land us on an asteroid. Give him all the details and be back in ten minutes." Captain Webber sighed. "Whatever it is," he said, "it will be a relief. Although I never made a special announcement, I suppose you knew that we were lost."

"Oh yes, sir."

"And that we ran almost entirely out of fuel several months ago, in fact shortly after we left?"

"We knew that."

The men were silent.

"Sir, Mr. Milton says he thinks he can land us but he can't promise exactly where."

"Tell Mr. Milton that's good enough."

Captain Webber waited for the young man to leave, then looked again into the glass.

"What do you make of it, sir?"

"Not much, Friden, not much. It's a city and that's an asteroid; but how the devil they got there is beyond me. I still haven't left the idea that we're crazy, you know."

Mr. Friden looked.

"We're positioning to land. Strange—"

"What is it?"

"I can make things out a bit more clearly now, sir. Those are earth houses."

Captain Webber looked. He blinked.

"Now, *that*," he said, "*is* impossible. Look here, we've been floating about in space for—how long is it?"

"Three months, sir."

"Exactly. For three months we've been bobbling aimlessly, millions of miles from earth. No hope, no hope whatever. And now we're landing in a city just like the one we first left, or almost like it."

Friden, I ask you, does that make any sense at all?"

"No, sir."

"And does it seem logical that there should be an asteroid where no asteroid should be?"

"It does not."

They stared at the glass, by turns.

"Do you see that, Friden?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"A lake. A lake and a house by it and trees ... tell me, how many of us are left?"

Mr. Friden held up his right hand and began unbending fingers.

"Yourself, sir, and myself; Lieutenant Peterson, Mr. Chitterwick, Mr. Goebelin, Mr. Milton and...."

"Great scott, out of thirty men?"

"You know how it was, sir. That business with the Martians and then, our own difficulties—"

"Yes. Our own difficulties. Isn't it ironic, somehow, Friden? We band together and fly away from war and, no sooner are we off the earth but we begin other wars.... I've often felt that if Appleton hadn't been so aggressive with that gun we would never have been kicked off Mars. And why did we have to laugh at them? Oh, I'm afraid I haven't been a very successful captain."

"You're in a mood, sir."

"Am I? I suppose I am. Look! There's a farm, an actual farm!"

"Not really!"

"Why, I haven't seen one for twenty years."

The door flew open and Lieutenant Peterson came in, panting. "Mr. Milton checked off every instruction, sir, and we're going down now."

"He's sure there's enough fuel left for the brake?"

"He thinks so, sir."

"Lieutenant Peterson."

"Yes sir?"

"Come look into this glass, will you."

The young man looked.

"What do you see?"

"A lot of strange creatures, sir. Are they dangerous? Should we prepare our weapons?"

"How old are you, Lieutenant?"

"Nineteen, Captain Webber."

"You have just seen a herd of cows, for the most part—" Captain Webber squinted and twirled knobs—"Holsteins."

"Holsteins, sir?"

"You may go. Oh, you might tell the others to prepare for a crash landing. Straps and all that."

The young man smiled faintly and left.

"I'm a little frightened, Friden; I think I'll go to my cabin. Take charge and have them wait for my orders."

Captain Webber saluted tiredly and walked back down the long corridor. He paused as the machines suddenly roared more life, rubbed his cheek and went into the small room.

"Cows," said Captain Webber bracing himself.

The fiery leg fell into the cool air, heating it, causing it to smoke; it burnt into the green grass and licked a craterous hole. There were fireflashes and firesparks, hisses and explosions and the weary groaning sound of a great beast suddenly roused from sleep.

The rocket landed. It grumbled and muttered for a while on its finny tripod, then was silent; soon the heat vanished also.

"Are you all right, sir?"

"Yes. The rest?"

"All but Mr. Chitterwick. He broke his glasses and says he can't see."

Captain Webber swung himself erect and tested his limbs. "Well then, Lieutenant, has the atmosphere been checked?"

"The air is pure and fit to breathe, sir."

"Instruct the others to drop the ladder."

"Yes sir."

A door in the side of the rocket opened laboriously and men began climbing out: "Look!" said Mr. Milton, pointing. "There are trees and grass and—over there, little bridges going over the water."

He pointed to a row of small white houses with green gardens and stony paths.

Beyond the trees was a brick lodge, extended over a rivulet which foamed and bubbled. Fishing poles protruded from the lodge window.

"And there, to the right!"

A steel building thirty stories high with a pink cloud near the top. And, separated by a hedge, a brown tent with a barbeque pit before it, smoke rising in a rigid ribbon from the chimney.

Mr. Chitterwick blinked and squinted his eyes. "What do you see?"

Distant and near, houses of stone and brick and wood, painted all colors, small, large; and further, golden fields of wheat, each blown by a different breeze in a different direction.

"I don't believe it," said Captain Webber. "It's a *park*—millions of miles away from where a park could possibly be."

"Strange but familiar," said Lieutenant Peterson, picking up a rock.

Captain Webber looked in all directions. "We were lost. Then we see a city where no city should be, on an asteroid not shown on any chart, and we manage to land. And now we're in the middle of a place that belongs in history-records. We may be crazy; we may all be wandering around in space and dreaming."



The little man with the thin hair who had just stepped briskly from a treeclump said, "Well, well," and the men jumped.

The little man smiled. "Aren't you a trifle late or early or something?"

Captain Webber turned and his mouth dropped open.

"I hadn't been expecting you, gentlemen, to be perfectly honest," the little man clucked, then: "Oh dear, see what you've done to Mr. Bellefont's park. I do hope you haven't hurt him—no, I see that he is all right."

Captain Webber followed the direction of the man's eyes and perceived an old man with red hair seated at the base of a tree, apparently reading a book.

"We are from Earth," said Captain Webber.

"Yes, yes."

"Let me explain: my name is Webber, these are my men."

"Of course," said the little man.

Mr. Chitterwick came closer, blinking. "Who is this that knows our language?" he asked.

"Who—Greypoole, Mr. Greypoole. Didn't *they* tell you?"

"Then you are *also* from Earth?"

"Heavens yes! But now, let us go where we can chat more comfortably." Mr. Greypoole struck out down a small path past scorched trees and underbrush. "You know, Captain, right after the last consignment something happened to my calendar. Now, I'm competent at my job, but I'm no technician, no indeed: besides, no doubt you or one of your men can set the doodad right, eh? Here we are."

They walked onto a wooden porch and through a door with a wire screen; Lieutenant Peterson first, then Captain Webber, Mr. Friden and the rest of the crew. Mr. Greypoole followed.

"You must forgive me—it's been a while. Take chairs, there, there. Now, what news of—home, shall I say?" The little man stared.

Captain Webber shifted uncomfortably. He glanced around the room at the lace curtains, the needle-point tapestries and the lavender wallpaper.

"Mr. Greypoole, I'd like to ask some questions."

"Certainly, certainly. But first, this being an occasion—" the little man stared at each man carefully, then shook his head "—ah, do you all like wine? Good wine?"

He ducked through a small door.

Captain Webber exhaled and rose.

"Now, don't start talking all at once," he whispered. "Anyone have any ideas? No? Then quick, scout around—Friden, you stay here; you others, see what you can find. I'm not sure I like the looks of this."

The men left the room.

Mr. Chitterwick made his way along a hedgerow, feeling cautiously and maintaining a delicate balance. When he came to a doorway he stopped, squinted and entered.

The room was dark and quiet and odorous. Mr. Chitterwick groped a few steps, put out his hand and encountered what seemed to be raw flesh; he swiftly withdrew his hand. "Excuse," he said, then, "Oh!" as his face came against a slab of moist red meat. "Oh my!"

Mr. Chitterwick began to tremble and he blinked furiously, reaching out and finding flesh, cold and hard, unidentifiable.

When he stepped upon the toe of a large man with a walrus mustache, he wheeled, located the sunlight and ran from the butcher shop....

The door of the temple opened with difficulty, which caused Mr. Milton to breathe unnaturally. Then, once inside, he gasped.

Row upon row of people, their fingers outstretched, lips open but immobile and silent, their bodies prostrate on the floor. And upon a strange black altar, a tiny woman with silver hair and a long thyrus in her right hand.

Nothing stirred but the mosaic squares in the walls. The colors danced here; otherwise, everything was frozen, everything was solid.

Even the air hung suspended, stationary.

Mr. Milton left the temple....

There was a table and a woman on the table and people all around the woman on the table. Mr. Goebelin did not go a great distance from the doorway: he rubbed his eyes and stared.

It was an operating room. There were all the instruments, some old, most old, and the masked men and women with shining scissors and glistening saws in their hands. And up above, the students' aperture: filled seats, filled aisles.

Mr. Goebelin put his other hand about the doorknob.

A large man stood over the recumbent figure, his lusterless eyes regarding the crimson-puce incision, but he did not move. The nurses did not move, or the students. No one moved, especially the smiling middle-aged woman on the table.

Mr. Goebelin moved....

"Hello!" said Lieutenant Peterson, after he had searched through eight long aisles of books, "Hello!"

He pointed his gun menacingly.

There were many books with many titles and they all had a fine grey dust about them. Lieutenant Peterson paused to examine a bulky volume, when he happened to look above him.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

The mottled, angular man perched atop the ladder did not respond. He clutched a book and looked at the book and not at Lieutenant Peterson.

"Come down—I want to talk with you!"

The man on the ladder did nothing unusual: he remained precisely as he had been.

Lieutenant Peterson climbed up the ladder, scowling; he reached the man and jabbed with a finger.

Lieutenant Peterson looked into the eyes of the reading man and descended hastily and did not say goodbye....

Mr. Greypoole reentered the living room with a tray of glasses. "This is apricot wine," he announced, distributing the glasses, "But—where are the others? Out for a walk? Ah well, they can drink theirs later. Incidentally, Captain, how many Guests did you bring? Last time it was only twelve. Not an extraordinary shipment, either: they all preferred the ordinary things. All but Mrs. Dominguez—dear me, she was worth the carload herself. Wanted a zoo, can you imagine—a regular zoo, with her put right in the bird-house. Oh, they had a time putting that one up!"

Mr. Greypoole chuckled and sipped at his drink.

"It's people like Mrs. Dominguez who put the—the life?—into Happy Glades. Or do you find that disrespectful?"

Captain Webber shook his head and tossed down his drink.

Mr. Greypoole leaned back in his chair and crossed a leg. "Ah," he continued, "you have no idea how good this is. Once in a while it does get lonely for me here—no man is an island, or how does it go? Why, I can remember when Mr. Waldmeyer first told me of this idea. 'A grave responsibility,' he said, 'a *grave* responsibility.' Mr. Waldmeyer has a keen sense of humor, needless to say."

Captain Webber looked out the window. A small child on roller skates stood still on the sidewalk. Mr. Greypoole laughed.

"Finished your wine? Good. Explanations are in order, though first perhaps you'd care to join me in a brief turn about the premises?"

"Fine. Friden, you stay here and wait for the men." Captain Webber winked a number of times and frowned briefly, then he and Mr. Greypoole walked out onto the porch and down the steps.

Mr. Friden drummed his fingers upon the arm of a chair, surveyed his empty glass and hiccoughed softly.

"I do wish you'd landed your ship elsewhere, Captain. Mr. Bellefont was quite particular and, as you can see, his park is hopelessly disfigured."

"We were given no choice, I'm afraid. The fuel was running out."

"Indeed? Well then, that explains everything. A beautiful day, don't you find, sir? Fortunately, with the exception of Professor Carling, all the Guests preferred good weather. Plenty of sunshine, they said, or crisp evening. It helps."

They walked toward a house of colored rocks.

"Miss Daphne Trilling's," said Mr. Greypoole, gesturing. "They threw it up in a day, though it's solid enough."

When they had passed an elderly woman on a bicycle, Captain Webber stopped walking.

"Mr. Greypoole, we've *got* to have a talk."

Mr. Greypoole shrugged and pointed and they went into an office building which was crowded with motionless men, women and children.

"Since I'm so mixed up myself," the captain said, "maybe I'd better ask—just who do you think *we* are?"

"I'd thought you to be the men from the Glades of course."

"I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about. We're from the planet Earth. They were going to have another war, the 'Last War' they said, and we escaped in that rocket and started off for Mars. But something went wrong—fellow named Appleton pulled a gun, others just didn't like the Martians—we needn't go into it; they wouldn't have us so Mars didn't work out. Something else went wrong then, soon we were lost with only a little store of fuel and supplies. Then Mr. Friden noticed this city or whatever it is and we had enough fuel to land so we landed."

Mr. Greypoole nodded his head slowly, somehow, sadder than before.

"I see.... You say there was a war on Earth?"

"They were going to set off X-Bomb; when they do, everything will go to pieces. Or everything has already."

"What dreadful news! May I inquire, Captain, when you have learned where you are—what do you intend to do?"

"Why, live here, of course!"

"No, no—try to understand. You could not conceivably fit in here with us."

Captain Webber glanced at the motionless people. "Why not?" Then he shouted, "What is this place? *Where am I?*"

Mr. Greypoole smiled.

"Captain, you are in a cemetery."

"Good work, Peterson!"

"Thanks, sir. When we all got back and Friden didn't know where you'd gone, well, we got worried. Then we heard you shouting."

"Hold his arms—there. You heard this, Friden?"

Mr. Friden was trembling slightly. He brushed past a man with a van Dyke beard and sat down on a leather stool. "Yes sir, I did. That is, I think I did. What shall we do with him?"

"I don't know, yet. Take him away, Lieutenant, for now. I want to think a bit. We'll talk to Mr. Greypoole later on."

Lieutenant Peterson pulled the smiling little man out into the street and pointed a gun at him.

Mr. Chitterwick blinked into the face of a small child.

"Man's insane, I guess," said Mr. Milton, pacing.

"Yes, but what about all *this?*" Mr. Goebelin looked horrified at the stationary people.

"I think I can tell you," Mr. Friden said. "Take a look, Captain."

The men crowded about a pamphlet which Mr. Friden had placed on the stool.

Toward the top of the pamphlet and in the center of the first page was a photograph, untinted and solemn; it depicted a white cherub delicately poised on a granite slab. Beneath the photograph, were the words: HAPPY GLADES.

Captain Webber turned the pages and mumbled, glancing over his shoulder every once in a while.

"What is it, sir?" asked Mr. Chitterwick of a frozen man in a blue suit with copper buttons.

"It's one of those old level cemeteries!" cried Mr. Milton. "I remember seeing pictures like it, sir."

Captain Webber read aloud from the pamphlet.

"For fifty years," he began, "an outstanding cultural and spiritual asset to this community, HAPPY GLADES is proud to announce yet another innovation in its program of post-benefits. NOW YOU CAN ENJOY THE AFTER-LIFE IN SURROUNDINGS WHICH SUGGEST THE HERE-AND-NOW. Never before in history has scientific advancement allowed such a plan."

Captain Webber turned the page.

"For those who prefer that their late departed have really *permanent, eternal* happiness, for those who are dismayed by the fragility of all things mortal, we of HAPPY GLADES are proud to offer:

"1. The permanent duplication of physical conditions identical to those enjoyed by the departed on Earth. Park, playground, lodge, office building, hotel or house, etc., may be secured at varying prices. All workmanship and materials specially attuned to conditions on ASTEROID K₇ and guaranteed for PERMANENCE.

"2. PERMANENT conditioning of late beloved so that, in the midst of surroundings he favored, a genuine Eternity may be assured.

"3. Full details on HAPPY GLADES' newest property, Asteroid K₇, may be found on page 4."

The captain tossed the pamphlet to the floor and lit a cigarette. "Did anyone happen to notice the date?"

Mr. Milton said, "It doesn't make any sense! There haven't been cemeteries for ages. And even if this were true, why should anyone want to go all the way through space to a little asteroid? They might just as well have built these things on Earth."

"Who would want all this when they're dead, anyway?"

"You mean all these people are dead?"

For a few moments there was complete and utter silence in the lobby of the building.

"Are those things true, that we read in your booklet?" asked Captain Webber after Lieutenant Peterson had brought in the prisoner.

"Every word," said the little man bowing slightly, "is monumentally correct."

"Then we want you to begin explaining."

Mr. Greypoole tushed and proceeded to straighten the coat of a middle-aged man with a cigar.

Mr. Goebelin shuddered.

"No, no," laughed Mr. Greypoole, "*these* are only imitations. Mr. Conklin upstairs was head of a large firm; absolutely in love with his work, you know—that kind of thing. So we had to duplicate not only the office, but the building and even replicas of all the people in the building. Mr. Conklin himself is in an easy chair on the twentieth story."

"And?"

"Well, gentlemen, as you know, Happy Glades is the outstanding mortuary on Earth. And, to put it briefly, with the constant explorations of planets and moons and whatnot, our Mr. Waldmeyer hit upon this scheme: Seeking to extend the ideal hereafter to our Guests, we bought out this little asteroid. With the vast volume and the tremendous turnover, as it were, we got our staff of scientists together and they offered this plan—to duplicate the exact surroundings which the Guest most enjoyed in Life, assure him privacy, permanence (a *very* big point, as you can see), and all the small things not possible on Earth."

"Why here, why cart off a million miles or more when the same thing could have been done on Earth?"

"My communication system went bad, I fear, so I haven't heard from the offices in some while—but, I am to understand there is a war beginning? *That* is the idea, Captain; one could never really be sure of one's self down there, what with all the new bombs and things being discovered."

"Hmm," said Captain Webber.

"Then too, Mr. Waldmeyer worried about those new societies with their dreadful ideas about cremation—you can see what that sort of thing could do to the undertaking business? His plan caught on, however, and soon we were having to turn away Guests."

"And where do you fit in, Mr. Greypoole?"

The little man seemed to blush; he lowered his eyes. "I was head caretaker, you see. But I wasn't well—gastric complaints, liver, heart palpitations, this and that; so, I decided to allow them to ... *change* me. They turned all manner of machines on my body and pumped me full of fluids and by the time I got here, why, I was almost, you might say, a machine myself! Fortunately, though, they left a good deal of Greypoole. All I know is that whenever the film is punctured, I wake and become a machine, do my prescribed duties in a complex way and—"

"The film?"

"The covering that seals in the conditioning. Nothing can get out, nothing get in—except things like rockets. Then, it's self-sealing, needless to say. But to get on, Captain. With all the technical advancements, it soon got to where there was no real work to be done here; they threw up the film and coated us with their preservative or, as they put it, Eternifier, and—well, with the exception of my calendar and the communications system, everything's worked perfectly, including myself."

No one said anything for a while. Then Captain Webber said, with great slowness, "You're lying. This is all a crazy, hideous plot." The little man chuckled at the word plot.

"In the first place, no cemetery or form of cemetery has existed on Earth for—how long, Friden?"

Mr. Friden stared at his fingers. "Years and years."

"Exactly. There are communal furnaces now."

Mr. Greypoole winced.

"And furthermore," continued the captain, "this whole concept is ridiculous."

Mr. Chitterwick threw down the pamphlet and began to tremble. "We should have stayed home,"

he remarked to a young woman who did not answer.

"Mr. Greypoole," Webber said, "I think that you know more than you're saying. You didn't seem very surprised when you learned we weren't the men you expected; you don't seem very surprised now that I tell you that your 'Happy Glades' and all the people connected with it have been dead for ages. So, why the display of interest in our explanations, why—"

The faint murmur, "A good machine checks and double checks," could be heard from Mr. Greypoole, who otherwise said nothing.

"I speak for my men: we're confused, terribly confused. But whatever this is, we're stuck, can't you see? All we want is a place to begin again—" Captain Webber paused, looked at the others and went on in a softer tone. "We're tired men, Mr. Greypoole; we're poorly equipped, but we do have weapons and if this is some hypnotic kind of trap...."

The little man waved his hand, offendedly.

"There are lakes and farms and all we need to make a new start—more than we'd hoped for, much more."

"What *had* you hoped for, Captain?"

"Something. Nothing. Just escape—"

"But I see no women—how could you begin again, as you suggest?"

"Women? Too weak; they would not have lasted. We brought along eggs and machines—enough for our needs."

Mr. Greypoole clucked his tongue. "Mr. Waldmeyer certainly did look ahead," he muttered, "he certainly *did*."

"Will we be honest now? Will you help us?"

"Yes, Captain, I will help you. Let us go back to your rocket." Mr. Greypoole smiled. "Things will be better there."

Captain Webber signaled. They left the building and walked by the foot of a white mountain.

They passed a garden with little spotted trees and flowers, a brown desert of shifting sands and a striped tent; they walked by strawberry fields and airplane hangars and coal mines; tiny yellow cottages, cramped apartments, fluted houses and Tudor houses and houses without description....

Past rock pools and a great zoo full of animals that stared out of vacant eyes; and everywhere, the seasons changing gently: crisp autumn, cottony summer, windy spring and winters cool and white....

The six men in uniforms followed the little man with the thin hair. They did not speak as they walked, but looked around, stared, craned, wondered....

And the old, young, middle-aged, white, brown, yellow people who did not move wondered back at the men with their eyes....

"You see, Captain, the success of Mr. Waldmeyer's plan?"

Captain Webber rubbed his cheek.

"I don't understand," he said.

"But you do see, all of you, the perfection here, the quality of Eternal Happiness which the circular speaks of?"

"Yes ... we see that."

"Here we have happiness and brotherhood, here there have never been wars or hatreds or prejudices. And now you who were many and left Earth to escape war and hatred, who were many by your own word and are now only six, you want to begin life *here*?"

Cross-breezes ruffled the men's hair.

"To *begin*, when from the moment of your departure you had wars of your own, and killed, and hurled mocking prejudice against a race of people not like you, a race who rejected and cast you out into space again! From your own account! No gentlemen, I am truly sorry. It may be that I misjudged those of you who are left, or rather, that Happy Glades misjudged you. You may mean well, after all—and, of course, the location of this asteroid was so planned by the Board as to be uncharted forever. But—oh, I am sorry." Mr. Greypoole sighed.

"What does he mean by that?" asked Mr. Friden and Lieutenant Peterson.

Captain Webber was gazing at a herd of cows in the distance.

"What do you mean, you're 'sorry'?" demanded Mr. Friden.

"Well...."

"Captain Webber!" cried Mr. Chitterwick, blinking.

"Yes, yes?"

"I feel queer."

Mr. Goebelin clutched at his stomach.

"So do I!"

"And me!"

Captain Webber looked back at the fields, then at Mr. Greypoole. His mouth twitched in sudden pain.

"We feel awful, Captain!"

"I'm sorry, gentlemen. Follow me to your ship, quickly." Mr. Greypoole motioned curiously with his hands and began to step briskly.

They circled a small pond where a motionless boy strained toe-high on an extended board. And the day once again turned to night as they hurried past a shadowed cathedral.

When they were in sight of the scorched trees, Mr. Milton doubled up and screamed.

"Captain!"

Mr. Goebelin struck his forehead. "I told you, I told you we shouldn't have drunk that wine! Didn't I tell you?"

"It was the wine—and we all drank it. *He* did it, *he* poisoned us!"

"Follow me!" cried Mr. Greypoole, making a hurried gesture and breaking into a run. "Faster!"

They stumbled hypnotically through the park, over the Mandarin-bridges to the rock.

"Tell them, Captain, tell them to climb the ladder."

"Go on up, men."

"But we're poisoned, sir!"

"*Hurry!* There's—an antidote in the ship."

The crew climbed into the ship.

"Captain," invited Mr. Greypoole.

Captain Webber ascended jerkily. When he reached the open lock, he turned. His eyes swept over the hills and fields and mountains, over the rivers and houses and still people. He coughed and pulled himself into the rocket.

Mr. Greypoole followed.

"You don't dislike this ship, do you—that is, the surroundings are not offensive?"

"No; we don't dislike the ship."

"I am glad of that—if *only* I had been allowed more latitude! But everything functions so well here; no real choice in the matter, actually. No more than the Sealing Film. And they *would* leave me with these human emotions! I see, of course, why the communications system doesn't work, why my calendar is out of commission. Kind of Mr. Waldmeyer to arrange for them to stop when his worst fears finally materialized. Are the men all seated? No, no, they mustn't writhe about the floor like that. Get them to their stations—no, to the stations they would most prefer. And hurry!"

Captain Webber ordered Mr. Chitterwick to the galley, Mr. Goebelin to the engineering chair, Mr. Friden to the navigator's room....

"Sir, what's going to happen? *Where's the antidote?*"

Mr. Milton to the pilot's chair....

"The pain will last only another moment or so—it's unfortunately part of the Eternifier," said Mr. Greypoole. "There, all in order? Good, good. Now, Captain, I see understanding in your face; that pleases me more than I can say. My position is so difficult! But you can see, when a machine is geared to its job—which is to retain permanence on HAPPY GLADES—well, a machine is a machine. Where shall we put *you*?"

Captain Webber leaned on the arm of the little man and walked to the open lock.

"You *do* understand?" asked Mr. Greypoole.

Captain Webber's head nodded halfway down, then stopped; and his eyes froze forever upon the City.

"A pity...."

The little man with the thin hair walked about the cabins and rooms, straightening, dusting; he climbed down the ladder, shook his head and started down the path to the wooden house.

When he had washed all the empty glasses and replaced them, he sat down in the large leather chair and adjusted himself into the most comfortable position.

His eyes stared in waxen contentment at the homely interior, with its lavender wallpaper, needle-point tapestries and tidy arrangement.

He did not move.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ELEGY ***

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