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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JAYWALKER \*\*\*



# JAYWALKER

BY ROSS ROCKLYNNE

Illustrated by DON DIBLEY

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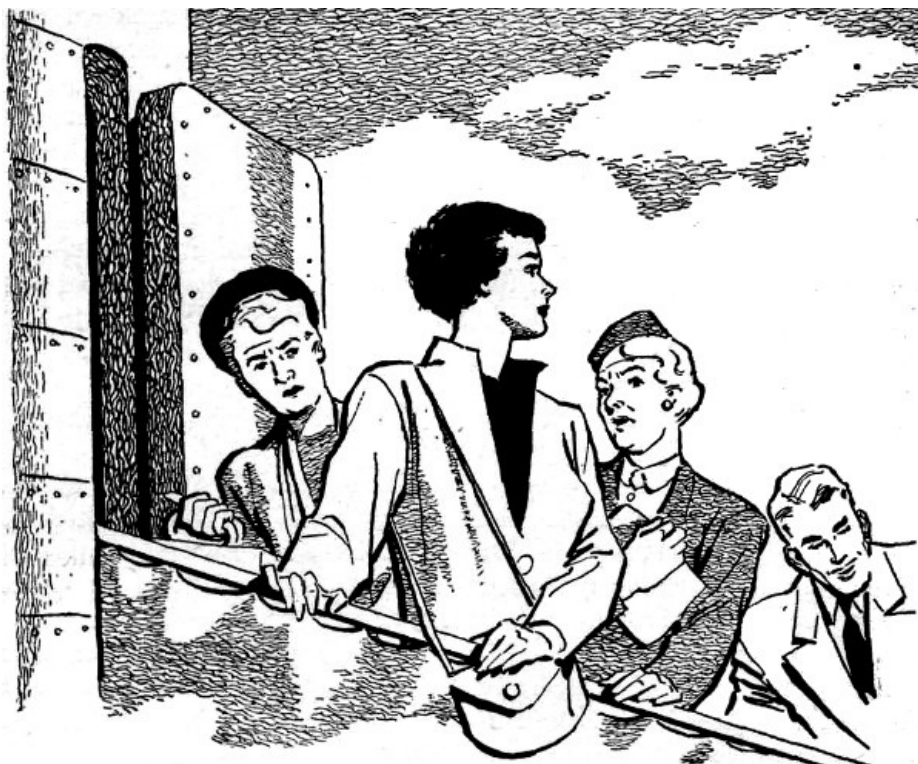
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**Women may be against progress because it means new pseudo-widowhoods. Space-widowhood, for instance....**

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At last she was on the gangplank, entering the mouth of the spaceship—and nothing could ever stop her now. Not unless she broke down completely in front of all these hurrying, Moon-bound passengers, in plain sight of the scattered crowd which clustered on the other side of the space-field barriers. Even that possibility was denied her when two gently insistent middle-aged ladies indicated she was blocking the way....

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Somehow, dizzily, she was at her seat, led there by a smiling, brown-clad stewardess; and her azure-tipped fingers were clutching at the pearl-gray plasta-leather of the chair arm. Her eyes, the azure of her nails, the azure (so she had been told) of Earth seen from interplanetary space, grew hot. She closed them, and for a moment gave herself up to an almost physical yearning for the Toluca Lake house—the comfort, the safety, the—the *sanity* of it.

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Stubbornly she forced herself back to reality. At any moment Jack, dark-eyed and scrappy, might come swinging down the long, shining aisle. Jack—Captain Jack McHenry, if you please—must not know, yet, what she was doing to patch up their marriage.

She turned her face away from the aisle, covered her cheek with her hand to hide it. Her gaze went out through the ray-proof glass port to the field, to the laboring beetle of a red tractor bearing the gangway on its busy back, to the low, blast-proof administration building. When her gaze came to the tall sign over the entrance, she hurried it past; it was too late to think about that now, the square, shouting type that read:

**CAUTION**  
**HAVE YOU PASSED YOUR PHYSICAL EXAMINATION?**  
***Avoiding It May Cost Your Life!***

"May I see your validation, please?"

Marcia McHenry stiffened. Had she read the sign aloud? She turned startled eyes up to the smiling stewardess, who was holding out a well-groomed hand. Marcia responded weakly to the smile, overcame a sudden urge to blurt out that she had no validation—not her own, anyway. But her stiff fingers were already holding out the pink card with Nellie Foster's name on it.

"You're feeling well, Mrs. Foster?"

*Feeling well? Yes, of course. Except for the—usual sickness. But that's so very normal....* Her numb lips moved. "I'm fine," she said.

Miss Eagen (which, her neat lapel button attested, was her name) made a penciled frown as lovely as her machined smile. "Some day," she told Marcia, "we won't have to ask the passengers if they're well. It's so easy to come aboard on someone else's validation, and people don't seem to realize how dangerous that is."

As Miss Eagen moved to the next seat, Marcia shrank into a small huddle, fumbling with the card until it was crammed shapeless into her purse. Then from the depths of her guilt came rebellion. It was going to be all right. She was doing the biggest thing she'd ever done, and Jack would rise to the occasion, and it would be all right.

It *had* to be all right....

After this—if this didn't work—there just would be nothing else she could do. She wasn't a scheming woman. No one would ever know how difficult it had been for her to think up the whole plan, to find Nellie Foster (someone Jack had never met) and to persuade Nellie to register for the trip and take the physical for her. She'd had to lie to Nellie, to make Nellie think she was brave and adventurous, and that she was just doing it to surprise Jack.

Oh, he'd be surprised, all right.

The flash walls on the field were being raised to keep the blow-by from the ship's jets from searing the administration building and the area beyond. Marcia realized with crushing suddenness that the ship was about to blast off in seconds. She half-rose, then sank back, biting her lip. Silly ... Jack had said that—her fear of space was silly. He'd said it during the quarrel, and he'd roared at her, "And that's why you want me to come back—ground myself, be an Earth-lubber—so I can spare you the anguish of sitting home wondering if I'll come back alive!"

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And then he'd been sorry he'd shouted, and he sat by her, taking her chin in his hand. "Marcia, Marcia," he'd said gently, "you're so *silly*! It's been nineteen whole years since your father died in the explosion of a Moon-rocket. Rocket motors just don't explode any more, honey! Ships travel to the Moon and back on iron-clad, mathematical orbits that are figured before the ship puffs a jet—"

"The *Elsinore*?" She'd said it viciously, to taunt him, and something in her had been pleased at the dull flush that rose to his face. Everyone knew about the *Elsinore*, the 500-foot Moon-ferry that almost missed the Moon.

"That," he said bitterly, "was human damnfoolishness botching up the equations. Too many lobbyists have holdings on the Moon and don't want to risk not being able to go there in a hurry. So they haven't passed legislation to keep physically unfit people off spaceships. One of the passengers got aboard the *Elsinore* on somebody else's validation—which meant that nobody knew he was taking endocrine treatments to put hair on his brainless head and restore his—Oh, the *Jaywalker*!" Jack spat in disgust. "Anyway, he was the kind of idiot who never realizes that certain glandular conditions are fatal in free fall."

Even now she distinctly recalled the beginnings of the interplanetary cold that always seeped into the warm house when he talked about space, when he was about to leave her for it. And this time it was worse than ever before.

He went on remorselessly, "Once the *Elsinore* reached the free-fall flight, where power could be shut off, the skipper had to put the ferry into an axial spin under power, creating artificial gravity to save the worthless life of that fool. So of course he lost his trajectory, and had to warp her in as best he could, without passing the Moon or crashing into it. And of course you're not listening."

"It's all so dull!" she had flared, and then, "How can I be interested in what some blundering space-jockey did?"

"Blun—Marcia, you really don't realize what that skipper did was the finest piece of shiphandling since mankind got off the ground."

"Was it?" she'd yawned. "Could you do it?"

"I—like to think I could," he said. "I'd hate to have to try."

She'd shrugged. "Then it can't be very difficult, darling."

She hadn't meant to be so cruel. Or so stupid. But when they were quarreling, or when he talked that repugnant, dedicated, other-world garble, something always went cold and furious and—lonely inside her, and made her fight back unfairly.

After he'd gone—for good, he said—her anger had sustained her for a few weeks. Then, bleakly, she knew she'd go to the ends of Earth for Jack. Or even to the Moon....

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Sitting rigid in the tense stillness of a rocket ship that was about to leap from Earth, Marcia

started as an officer ducked his head into the passenger compartment from the pilot room's deep glow. But it wasn't Jack. The officer's lips moved hurriedly as he counted over the seats. He ducked back out of sight. From the bulk-heads, the overhead, everywhere, came a deep, quiet rumble. Some of the passengers looked anxious, some excited, and some just leafed casually through magazines.

Now the brown-clad Miss Eagen was speaking from the head of the aisle.

"Those of you who haven't been in a rocket before won't find it much different from being in an airplane. At the same time—" She paused, quiet brown eyes solemn. "What you are about to experience is something that will make you proud to belong to the human race."

*That* again! thought Marcia furiously; and then all emotion left her but cold, ravening fear as the rumble heightened. She tried to close her eyes, her ears against it, but her mind wouldn't respond. She squirmed in her chair and found herself staring down at the field. It looked the way she felt—flat and pale and devoid of life, with a monstrous structure of terror squatting in it. The scene was abruptly splashed with a rushing sheet of flame that darkened the daytime sky. Then it was torn from her vision.

It was snatched away—the buildings, the trees, the roads surrounding the field seemed to pour in upon it, shrinking as they ran together. Roads dried up like parched rivers, thinning and vanishing into the circle of her horrified vision. A great, soft, uniform weight pressed her down and back; she fought it, but it was too big and too soft.

Now Earth's surface was vague and Sun-splashed. Marcia's sense of loss tore at her. She put up her hands, heavily, and pressed the glass as if she could push it out, push herself out, go back, back to Earth and solidity. Clouds shot by like bullets, fell away until they were snowflakes roiling in violet haze. Then, in the purling universe that had grown around the ship, Earth was a mystic circle, a shallow dish floating darkly and heavily below.

"We are now," said Miss Eagen's calm voice, "thirty-seven miles over Los Angeles."

After that, there was scarcely room for thought—even for fear, though it lurked nearby, ready to leap. There was the ascent, the quiet, sleeplike ascent into space. Marcia very nearly forgot to breathe. She had been prepared for almost anything except this quality of peace and awe.

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She didn't know how long she had been sitting there, awestruck, spellbound, when she realized that she had to finish the job she'd started, and do it right now, this minute. It might already be too late ... she wished, suddenly, and for the very first time, that she'd paid more attention to Jack's ramblings about orbits and turn-over points and correction blasts, and all that gobbledegook. She glanced outside again and the sky was no longer deep blue, but black. She pressed herself up out of the soft chair—it was difficult, because of the one-and-a-half gravities the ship was holding—and plodded heavily up the aisle. Miss Eagen was just rising from the chair in which she sat for the take-off.

"Miss Eagen—"

"Yes, Mrs. Fos—why, what's the matter?"

Seeing the startled expression on the stewardess' face, Marcia realized she must be looking like a ghost. She put a hand to her cheek and found it clammy.

"Come along," said Miss Eagen cheerfully. She put a firm arm around Marcia's shoulder. "Just a touch of space-sickness. This way. *That's* it. We'll have you fixed up in a jiffy."

"It isn't s-space sickness," said Marcia in a very small and very positive voice. She let herself be led forward, through the door and to the left, where there was a small and compact ship's hospital.

"Now, now," said Miss Eagen briskly, "just you lie down there, Mrs. Foster. Does it hurt any special place?"

Marcia lay down gratefully. She closed her eyes tightly and said, "I'm not Mrs. Foster. It doesn't hurt."

"You're not—" Miss Eagen apparently decided to take one thing at a time. "How do you feel?"

"Scared," said Marcia.

"Why, what—is there to be scared of?"

"I'm pregnant."

"Well, that's no—You're *what*?"

"I'm Mrs. McHenry. I'm Jack's wife."

There was such a long pause that Marcia opened her eyes. Miss Eagen was looking at her levelly. She said, "I'll have to examine you."

"I know. Go ahead."

Miss Eagen did, swiftly and thoroughly. "You're so right," she breathed. She went to the small sink, stripping off her rubber gloves. With her back to Marcia, she said, "I'll have to tell the captain, you know."

"I know. I'd rather ... tell him myself."

"Thanks," said Miss Eagen flatly. Marcia felt as if she'd been slapped. Miss Eagen dried her hands and crossed to an intercom. "Eagen to Captain."

"McHenry here."

"Captain McHenry, could you come back to the hospital right away?"

"Not right away, Sue." *Sue! No wonder he had found it so easy to walk out!* She looked at the trim girl with hating eyes. The intercom said, "You know I've got course-correction computations from here to yonder. Give me another forty minutes."

"I think," said Sue Eagen into the mike, "that the computations can wait."

"The hell you do!" The red contact light on the intercom went out.

"He'll be right here," said Miss Eagen.

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Marcia sat up slowly, clumsily. Miss Eagen did not offer to help. Marcia's hands strayed to her hair, patted it futilely.

He came in, moving fast and purposefully, as always. "Sue, what in time do you think you—*Marcia!*" His dark face broke into a delighted grin and he put his arms out. "You—you're here—*here*, on my ship!"

"I'm pregnant, Jack," she said. She put out a hand to ward him off. She couldn't bear the thought of his realizing what she had done while he had his arms around her.

"You *are*? You—we—" He turned to Miss Eagen, who nodded once, her face wooden. "Just find it out?"

This time Miss Eagen didn't react at all, and Marcia knew that she had to speak up. "No, Jack. I knew weeks ago."

There was no describable change in his face, but the taut skin of his space-tanned cheek seemed, somehow, to draw inward. His eyebrow ridges seemed to be more prominent, and he looked older, and very tired. Softly and slowly he asked, "What in God's name made you get on the ship?"

"I had to, Jack. I had to."

"Had to kill yourself?" he demanded brutally. "This tears it. This ties it up in a box with a bloody ribbon-bow. I suppose you know what this means—what I've got to do now?"

"Spin ship," she replied immediately, and looked up at him pertly, like a kindergarten child who knows she has the right answer.

He groaned.

"You said you could do it."

"I can ... try," he said hollowly. "But—why, *why*?"

"Because," she said bleakly, "I learned long ago that a man grows to love what he has to fight for."

"And you were going to make me fight for you and the child—even if the lives of a hundred and seventy people were involved?"

"You said you could handle it. I thought you could."

"I'll try," he said wearily. "Oh, I'll try." He went out, dragging his feet, his shoulders down, without looking at her.

There was a stiff silence. Marcia looked up at Miss Eagen. "It's true, you know," she said. "A man grows to love the things he has to defend, no matter how he felt about them before."

The stewardess looked at her, her face registering a strange mixture of detachment and wonder. "You really believe that, don't you?"

Marcia's patience, snapped. "You don't have to look so superior. I know what's bothering *you*. Well, he's *my* husband, and don't you forget it."

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Miss Eagen's breath hissed in. Her eyes grew bright and she shook her head slightly. Then she turned on her heel and went to the intercom. Marcia thought for a frightened moment that she was going to call Jack back again. Instead she dialed and said, "Hospital to Maintenance. Petrucelli?"

"Petrucelli here."

"Come up with a crescent wrench, will you, Pet?"

Another stiff silence. A question curled into Marcia's mind and she asked it. "Do you work on all these ships at one time or another?"

Miss Eagen did not beat around the bush. "I've been with Captain McHenry for three years. I hope to work with him always. I think he's the finest in the Service."

"He—th-thinks as well of you, no doubt."

Petrucelli lounged in, a big man, easy-going, powerful. "What's busted, muscles?"

"Bolt the bed to the bulkhead, Pet. Mrs. McHenry—I'm sorry, but you'll have to get up."

Marcia bounced resentfully off the cot and stood aside. Petrucelli looked at her, cocked an eyebrow, looked at Miss Eagen, and asked, "Jaywalker?"

"Please hurry, Pet." She turned to Marcia. "I've got to explain to the passengers that there won't be any free fall. Most of them are looking forward to it." She went out.

Marcia watched the big man work for a moment. "Why are you putting the bed on the wall?"

He looked at her and away, quickly. "Because, lady, when we start to spin, that outside bulkhead is going to be *down*. Centrifugal force, see?" And before she could answer him he added, "I can't talk and work at the same time."

Feeling very much put-upon, Marcia waited silently until he was finished, and the bed hung ludicrously to the wall like a walking fly. She thanked him timidly, and he ignored it and went out.

Miss Eagen returned.

"That man was very rude," said Marcia.

Miss Eagen looked at her coolly. "I'm sorry," she said, obviously not meaning sorry at all.

Marcia wet her lips. "I asked you a question before," she said evenly. "About you and the captain."

"You did," said Sue Eagen. "Please don't."

"And why not?"

"Because," said Miss Eagen, and in that moment she looked almost as drawn as Jack had, "I'm supposed to be of service to the passengers at all times no matter what. If I have feelings at all, part of my job is to keep them to myself."

"Very courteous, I'm sure. However, I want to release you from your sense of duty. I'm *most* interested in what you have to say."

Miss Eagen's arched nostrils seemed pinched and white. "You really want me to speak my piece?"

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In answer Marcia leaned back against the bulkhead and folded her arms. Miss Eagen gazed at her for a moment, nodded as if to herself, and said, "I suppose there always will be people who don't pay attention to the rules. Jaywalkers. But out here jaywalkers don't have as much margin for error as they do crossing against a traffic light on Earth." She looked Marcia straight in the eye. "What makes a jaywalker isn't ignorance. It's a combination of stupidity and stubbornness. The jaywalker does *know* better. In your case...."

She sighed. "It's well known—even by you—that the free-fall condition has a weird effect on certain people. The human body is in an unprecedented situation in free fall. Biologically it has experienced the condition for very short periods—falling out of trees, or on delayed parachute jumps. But it isn't constituted to take hour after hour of fall."

"What about floating in a pool for hours?" asked Marcia sullenly.

"That's quite a different situation. 'Down' exists when you're swimming. Free-fall means that everything around you is 'up.' The body's reactions to free-fall go much deeper than space-*nausea* and a mild feeling of panic. When there's a glandular imbalance of certain kinds, the results can be drastic. Apparently some instinctual part of the mind reacts as if there were a violent emergency, when no emergency is recognized by the reasoning part of the mind. There are sudden floods of adrenalin; the 17-kesteroids begin spastic secretions; the—well, it varies in individuals. But it's pretty well established that the results can be fatal. It kills men with prostate trouble—sometimes. It kills women in menopause—often. It kills women in the early stages of pregnancy—*always*."

"But how?" asked Marcia, interested in spite of her resentment.

"Convulsions. A battle royal between a glandular-level panic and a violent and useless effort of the will to control the situation. Muscles tear, working against one another. Lungs rupture and air is forced into the blood-stream, causing embolism and death. Not everything is known about it, but I would guess that pregnant women are especially susceptible because their protective reflexes, through and through, are much more easily stimulated."

"And the only thing that can be done about it is to supply gravity?"

"Or centrifugal force (or centripetal, depending on where you're standing, but why be technical?)—or, better yet, keep those people off the ships."

"So now Jack will spin the ship until I'm pressed against the walls with the same force as gravity, and then everything will be all right."

"You make it sound so simple."

"There's no need to be sarcastic!" Marcia blurted. "Jack can do it. You think he can, don't you? Don't you?"

"He can do anything any space skipper has ever done, and more," said Sue Eagen, and her face glowed. "But it isn't easy. Right this minute he's working over the computer—a small, simple, ship-board computer—working out orbital and positional and blast-intensity data that would be a hard nut for the giant calculators on Earth to crack. And he's doing it in half the time—or less—than it would take the average mathematician, because he has to; because it's a life-and-death matter if he makes a mistake or takes too long."

---

"But—but—"

"But what?" Miss Eagen's composure seemed to have been blasted to shreds by the powerful currents of her indignation. Her eyes flashed. "You mean, but why doesn't he just work the ship while it's spinning the same way he does when it isn't?"

Through a growing fear, Marcia nodded mutely.

"He'll spin the ship on its long axis," said the stewardess with exaggerated patience. "That means that the steering jet tubes in the nose and tail are spinning, too. You don't just turn with a blast on one tube or another. The blasts have to be let off in hundreds of short bursts, timed to the hundredth of a second, to be able to make even a slight course correction. The sighting instruments are wheeling round and round while you're checking your position. Your fuel has to be calculated to the last ounce—because enough fuel for a Moon flight, with hours of fuelless free-fall, and enough fuel for a power spin and course corrections while spinning, are two very different things. Captain McHenry won't be able to maneuver to a landing on the Moon. He'll do it exactly right the first time, or not at all."

Marcia was white and still. "I—I never—"

"But I haven't told you the toughest part of it yet," Miss Eagen went on inexorably. "A ship as massive as this, spinning on its long axis, is a pretty fair gyroscope. It doesn't want to turn. Any force that tries to make it turn is resisted at right angles to the force applied. When that force is applied momentarily from jets, as they swing into position and away again, the firing formulas get—well, complex. And the ship's course and landing approach are completely new. Instead of letting the ship fall to the Moon, turning over and approaching tail-first with the main jets as brakes, Captain McHenry is going to have to start the spin first and go almost the whole way nose-first. He'll come up on the Moon obliquely, pass it, stop the spin, turn over once to check the speed of the ship, and once again to put the tail down when the Moon's gravity begins to draw us in. There'll be two short periods of free-fall there, but they won't be long enough to bother you much. And if we can do all that with the fuel we've got, it will be a miracle. A miracle from the brain of Captain McHenry."

Marcia forced herself away from the bulkhead with a small whimper of hurt and hatred—hatred of the stars, of this knowledgeable, inspired girl, and—even more so—of herself. She darted toward the door.

Miss Eagen was beside her in an instant, a hard small hand on her arm. "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to stop him. He can't take that chance with his ship, with these people...."

"He will and he must. You surely know your husband."

"I know him as well as you do."

---

Miss Eagen's firm lips shut in a thin hard line. "Do as you like," she whispered. "And while you're doing it—think about whom he's spinning ship for." She took her hand from Marcia's arm.

Marcia twisted away and went into the corridor.

She found herself at the entrance to the pilot room. In one sweeping glance she saw a curved, silver board. Before it a man sat tranquilly. Nearer to her was Jack, hunched over the keyboard of a complex, compact machine, like a harried bookkeeper on the last day of the month.

Her lips formed his name, but she was silent. She watched him, his square, competent hands, his detached and distant face. Through the forward view-plate she saw a harsh, jagged line, the very edge of the Moon's disc. Next to it, and below, was the rear viewer, holding the shimmering azure shape of Earth.

*"All Earth watches me when I work, but with your eyes."*

Jack had said that to her once, long ago, when he still loved her.

"... human damnfoolishness botching up the equations...." He had said that once, too.

Miss Eagen was standing by the hospital door, watching her. When Marcia turned away without speaking to Jack, Miss Eagen smiled and held out her hand.

Marcia went to her and took the hand. They went into the hospital. Miss Eagen didn't speak; she



seemed to be waiting.

"Yes, I know who Jack's spinning the ship for," said Marcia.

Miss Eagen looked an unspoken question.

Marcia said, painfully, "He's like the Captain of the *Elsinore*. He's risking his life for a—a stranger. A jaywalker. Not for me. Not even for his baby."

"Does it hurt to know that?"

Marcia looked into the smooth, strong face and said with genuine astonishment, "Hurt? Oh, no! It's so—so big!"

There was a sudden thunder. Over Miss Eagen's shoulder, through the port, Marcia saw the stars begin to move. Miss Eagen followed her gaze. "He's started the spin. You'll be all right now."

---

Marcia could never recall the rest of the details of the trip. There was the outboard bulkhead that drew her like a magnet, increasingly, until suddenly it wasn't an attracting wall, but normally and naturally "down." Then a needle, and another one, and a long period of deep drowsiness and unreality.

But through and through that drugged, relaxed period, Jack and the stars, the Moon and Sue Eagen danced and wove. Words slipped in and out of it like shreds of melody:

"A man comes to love the things he has to fight for." And Jack fighting—for his ship, for the Moon, for the new-building traditions of the great ones who would carry humanity out to the stars.

Sue Eagen was there, too, and the thing she shared with Jack. Of course there was something between them—so big a thing that there was nothing for her to fear in it.

Jack and Sue Eagen had always had it, and always would have; and now Marcia had it too. And with understanding replacing fear, Marcia was free to recall that Jack had worked with Sue Eagen—but it was Marcia that he had loved and married.

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There was a long time of blackness, and then a time of agony, when she was falling, falling, and her lungs wanted to split, explode, disintegrate, and someone kept saying, "Hold tight, Marcia; hold tight to me," and she found Sue Eagen's cool strong hands in hers.

*Marcia. She called me Marcia.*

More blackness, more pain—but not so much this time; and then a long, deep sleep.

A curved ceiling, but a new curve, and soft rose instead of the gunmetal-and-chrome of the ship. White sheets, a new feeling of "down" that was unlike either Earth or the ship, a novel and exhilarating buoyancy. And kneeling by the bed—

"Jack!"

"You're all right, honey."

She raised herself on her elbow and looked out through the unglazed window at the ordered streets of the great Luna Dome. "The Moon.... Jack, you did it!"

He snapped his fingers. He looked like a high-school kid. "Nothin' to it." She could see he was very proud. Very tired, too. He reached out to touch her.

She drew back. "You don't have to be sweet to me," she said quietly. "I understand how you must feel."

"Don't *have* to?" He rose, bent over her, and slid his arms around her. He put his face into the shadowed warmth between her hair and her neck and said, "Listen, egghead, there's no absolute scale for courage. We had a bad time, both of us. After it was over, and I had a chance to think, I used it trying to look at things through your eyes. And that way I found out that when you walked up that gangway, you did the bravest thing I've ever known anyone to do. And you did it for me. It doesn't matter what else happened. Sue told me a lot about you that I didn't know, darling. You're ... real huge for your size. As for the bad part of what happened—nothing like it can ever happen again, can it?"

He hugged her. After a time he reached down and touched her swelling waist. It was like a benediction. "He'll be born on the Moon," he whispered, "and he'll have eyes the color of all Earth when it looks out to the stars."

"*She'll* be born on the Moon," corrected Marcia, "and her name will be Sue, and ... and she'll be almost as good as her father."

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