

For my friend Jim Smith

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STARMAN JONES

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THE TOMAHAWK

"I guess that's right, sir."

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"THIS ISN'T A PICNIC"

Max kept to his room that evening and the next day, wishing neither to be questioned by passengers nor to answer questions about why he had been relieved of duty. In consequence he missed the riot, having slept through it. He first heard of it when the steward's mate who tended his room showed up with a black eye. "Who gave you the shiner, Garcia?"

"I'm not sure, sir. It happened in the ruckus last night."

"Ruckus? What ruckus?"

"You mean you don't know?"

"This is the first I've heard of it. What happened?"

Garcia Lopez stared at the overhead. "Well--I wouldn't want to say too much. You know how it is--nobody wants to testify against a mate. No?"

"Who asked you to peach on a mate? You don't have to mention names--but what happened?"

"They died."

"So they did. But we won't, not on--" She waved her hand at the lovely green and blue and cloudy-white globe. "--not on, uh, I'm going to call it 'Charity' because that's what it looks like."

Max said soberly, "Ellie, don't you realize this is serious?" He kept his voice low in order not to alarm others. "This isn't a picnic. If this place doesn't work out, it might be pretty awful."

"Why?"

"Look, don't quote me and don't talk about it. But I don't think any of us will ever get home again."

She sobered momentarily, then shrugged and smiled. "You can't frighten me. Sure, I'd like to go home--but if I can't, well, Charity is going to be good to us. I know it."

Max shut up.

"--OVER A HUNDRED YEARS--"

The Asgard landed on Charity the following day. Eldreth affixed her choice by the statistical process of referring to the planet by that name, assuming that it was official, and repeating it frequently.

Max called out softly, "Steady, Ellie! Get a grip on yourself, kid."

She answered faintly, "I'm all right."

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A FRIEND IN NEED

For the first time they were turned loose. Their master tickled their bonds, which dropped from their ankles. Max said softly to Ellie, "If you want to run for it, I'll keep them busy."

Ellie shook her head. "No good. They'd have me before I went fifty feet. Besides--I can't find my way back."

Max shut up, knowing that she was right but having felt obliged to offer. The chief centaur inspected them with the characteristic expression of gentle surprise, exchanged bugling comments with their captor. They were under discussion for some time, there appeared to be some matter to be decided. Max got out his knife. He had no plan, other than a determination that no centaur would approach either one of them with that electric-shock creature, or any other menace, without a fight.

The crisis faded away. Their captor flicked their leashes about their ankles and dragged them off. Fifteen minutes later they were again staked out in the clearing they had occupied. Ellie looked around her after the centaur had gone and sighed. "'Be it ever so humble . . .' Max, it actually feels good to get back here."

Max moved, gathering Ellie in one arm and urging her on. Behind them Sam Anderson turned to face his death . . . dropping to one knee and steadying his pistol over his left forearm in precisely the form approved by the manual.

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"--A SHIP IS NOT JUST STEEL--"

The cage hit the ground, four men swarmed out as Max stumbled inside and dumped Ellie on the floor. The door clanged shut behind them, but not too quickly for Mr. Chips. The spider puppy ran to Ellie, clutched her arm and wailed. Eldreth tried to sit up.

"You all right?" Max demanded.

"Uh, sure. But . . ." She shut up as Max whirled around and tried to open the cage door.

It would not open. It was not until then that he realized that the lift was off the ground and rising slowly. He punched the "stop" control.

Nothing happened, the car continued upward. About ten feet off the ground it stopped. Max looked up through the grille roof and shouted, "Hey! In the lock, there! Lower away!"

He was ignored. He tried the door again--uselessly, as its safety catch prevented it being opened when the cage was in the air. Frustrated and helpless, he grabbed the bars and looked out. He could see

"Come now! I hear that it was terribly _romantic_." She drawled the word and gave Ellie a sly, sidelong look. She looked back at Max with the eye of a predatory bird and showed her teeth. She seemed to have more teeth than was possible. "Tell us _all_ about it!"

"No."

"But you simply _can't_ refuse!"

Eldreth smiled at her and said, "Princess darling-- your mouth is showing."

Mrs. Montefiore shut up.

After dinner Max caught Walther alone. "Mr. Walther?"

"Oh--yes, Captain?"

"Am I correct in thinking that it is my privilege to pick the persons who sit at my table?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case--that Montefiore female. Will you have her moved, please? Before breakfast?"

Walther smiled faintly. "Aye aye, sir."

Max stood still and closed his eyes. The figures stood out clearly, in neat columns. He went to his phone and savagely punched the call for the control room. "Captain speaking. Is Kelly still there? Oh--good, Chief. We reposition for Nova Terra. Start work--I'll be up in a minute."

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THE TOMAHAWK

Max liked this time of day, this time of year. He was lying in the grass on the little rise west of the barn, with his head propped up so that he could see to the northwest. If he kept his eyes there, on the exit ring of the C.S.&E. Ring Road, he would be able, any instant now, to see the _Tomahawk_ plunge out and shoot across the gap in free trajectory. At the moment he was not reading, no work was pushing him, he was just being lazy and enjoying the summer evening.

A squirrel sat up near by, stared at him, decided he was harmless and went about its business. A bird swooped past.

There was a breathless hush, then suddenly a silver projectile burst out of the exit ring, plunged across the draw and entered the ring on the far side--just as the sound hit him.

"Boy, oh boy!" he said softly. "It never looks like they'd make it."

It was all that he had climbed the rise to see, but he did not get up at once. Instead he pulled a letter from his pocket and reread the ending: ". . . I guess Daddy was glad to get me back in one piece because he finally relented. Putzie and I were married a week ago-- and oh Max, I'm so _happy!_ You must visit

