





Their fairy grace defends this place of Beauty, calm and couth.

"Bone-tired the race that raised the Towers, forgotten are theirlores ,  
Long gone the gods who shed the tears that lap these crystal shores.  
Slow heats the time-worn heart of Mars beneath this icy sky;  
The thin air whispers voicelessly that all who live must die --

"Yet still the lacy Spires of Truth sing Beauty's madrigal  
And she herself will ever dwell along the Grand Canal!"

--from The Grand Canal, by permission ofLux Transcriptions, Ltd., London and Luna City

On the swing back they setRhysling down on Mars atDrywater ; the boys passed the hat and the skipper kicked in a half month's pay. That was all -- finish -- just another space bum who had not had the good fortune to finish it off when his luck ran out. He holed up with the prospectors and archeologists at How-Far?for a month or so, and could probably have stayed forever in exchange for his songs and his accordion playing. But spacemen die if they stay in one place; he hooked a crawler over toDrywater again and thence toMarsopolis .

The capital was well into its boom; the processing plants lined the Grand Canal on both sides and roiled the ancient waters with the filth of the runoff. This was before theTriPlanet Treaty forbade disturbing cultural relics for commerce; half the slender, fairylike towers had been torn down, and others were disfigured to adapt them as pressurized buildings for Earthmen.

NowRhysling had never seen any of these changes and no one described them to him; when he "saw" Marsopolis again, he visualized it as it had been, before it was rationalized for trade. His memory was good. He stood on the riparian esplanade where the ancient great of Mars had taken their ease and saw its beauty spreading out before his blinded eyes -- ice blue plain of water unmoved by tide, untouched by breeze, and reflecting serenely the sharp, bright stars of the Martian sky, and beyond the water the lacy buttresses and flying towers of an architecture too delicate for our rumbling, heavy planet.

The result was Grand Canal.

The subtle change in his orientation which enabled him to see beauty atMarsopolis where beauty was not now began to affect his whole life. All women became beautiful to him. He knew them by their voices and fitted their appearances to the sounds. It is a mean spirit indeed who will speak to a blind man other than in gentle friendliness; scolds who had given their husbands no peace sweetened their voices to Rhysling .

It populated his world with beautiful women and gracious men. Dark Star Passing , Berenice's Hair , Death Song of a Wood's Colt , and his other love songs of the wanderers, thewomenless men of space, were the direct result of the fact that his conceptions were unsullied by tawdry truths. It mellowed his approach, changed his doggerel to verse, and sometimes even to poetry.

He had plenty of time to think now, time to get all the lovely words just so, and to worry a verse until it sang true in his head. The monotonous beat of Jet Song --

When the field is clear, the reports all seen,  
When the lock sighs shut, when the lights wink green,  
When the check-off's done, when it's time to pray,  
When the Captain nods, when she blasts away --

Hear the jets!  
Hear them snarl at your back  
When you're stretched on the rack;







Out, far, and onward yet--"

The ship was safe now and ready to limp home shy one jet. As for himself, Rhysling was not so sure. That "sunburn" seemed sharp, he thought. He was unable to see the bright, rosy fog in which he worked but he knew it was there. He went on with the business of flushing the air out through the outer valve, repeating it several times to permit the level of radioaction to drop to something a man might stand under suitable armor. While he did this he sent one more chorus, the last bit of authentic Rhysling that ever could be:

"We pray for one last landing  
On the globe that gave us birth;  
Let us rest our eyes on fleecy skies  
And the cool, green hills of Earth."