IT'S GREAT TO BE BACK

Robert A. Heinlein

Robert A. Heinlein was generally regarded as the best science fiction writer working in the field between 1939 and his death in 1988. His early works, particularly the stories and novels in his "Future History" series, collected in *The Man Who Sold the Moon* (1950), *The Green Hills of Earth* (1951), *Revolt in 2100* (1953) and others, are one of the principal pipelines through which the literary techniques developed by H. G. Wells in his early novels and stories (especially *When the Sleeper Wakes* [1899]) for portraying the world of the future as palpably different from the world of the present flowed into the tropes and conventions of Modern science fiction. His first novel in book form, *Beyond This Horizon* (1942 serial, 1948 hardcover), was widely considered as the single best Modern science fiction novel from the time of its serial appearance until the mid-1950s. Locutions from that work, such as "the door dilated," became paradigms of technique for most other sf writers of the period.

Heinlein was one of the few Golden Age writers who identified emotionally with the Cambellian prescription that good science fiction should attempt to be predictive. Heinlein had a knack for prophetic utterance in his work and felt pleased and proud when devices described in his work, the manipulator devices which compensate for the congenital weakness of the central character of his novella, "Waldo" (1942), were invented in the real world (to handle radioactive material at a distance by a human operator) and named "waldoes." Of all the Campbell discoveries of the Golden Age, Robert A. Heinlein was the most popular.

Ironically, after World War II, Heinlein only wrote a few stories for Campbell, breaking into the slick fiction markets and hardcover publishing (notably beginning a series of young adult sf novels for Scribners, and publishing adult sf with Doubleday, while all the specialty sf presses vied to reprint his classic work from his prewar flowering). There was no question in the 1950s that Heinlein was the dean of science fiction writers, in the decade in which most of his influential juveniles were published (from *Farmer in the Sky* [1950] to *Have Space Suit—Will Travel* [1958]); four major adult SF novels were written (*The Puppet Masters*, 1951; *Double Star*, 1956; *The Door into Summer*, 1957; and *Starship Troopers*, 1959—this last originally drafted as one of the juveniles); and every piece of sf he had written in the previous decade was collected and reprinted. And as an active member of the sf community, Heinlein defended the special virtues of science fiction and of science-fiction readers as the avant-garde of the human race, those who stand for science, reason, change, progress, the future. His prestige was second only to Campbell's, and by the early sixties his influence was perhaps even stronger, when he published the most popular of all his novels, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) and in 1966, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, perhaps the pinnacle of his hard sf novels.

Ironically, since it is principally social satire and not hard sf, *Stranger* became his most popular work, read by millions in the two decades after its publication.

It signaled a move away from hard sf in his later works, into speculative fiction on a broader scale than his hard sf and attained worldwide popularity extending far outside the sf genre. He is still considered the greatest master of hard science fiction, which he always defended as the only true and real science fiction. For the next twenty years, although his in-genre prestige slipped somewhat under the pressure of new styles of sf introduced in the New Wave period and due to the more overt political agendas of his later works, Heinlein remained the single most influential hard science fiction writer, both upon readers and on their ideas of the nature of hard sf, and upon his peers and younger writers. This was true even though nearly all of the younger generations of genre writers, starting in the mid-sixties, began to look to others (for example Alfred Bester, Theodore Sturgeon, Philip K. Dick) as their models, turning away from hard sf.

The affect of hard science fiction is, then, to a certain extent the affect of Robert A. Heinlein, ex-navy officer and gentleman, engineer and commercial writer, libertarian anarchist, intellectual pioneer, patriot. He was devoted until his death to the Social Darwinist position that the evolution of humanity demands and depends upon the exploration of space. Most of the character types common in hard science fiction, including the pioneer/explorer, the good manager, the inventor/entrepreneur, the visionary businessman, the military officer with a technical education, the hard-boiled high-tech woman, and many others, were popularized, if not developed, by Heinlein. He also claimed to have recognized the principal innovation of sf as literature, the new archetypal story of "the man who learned better." To say that Heinlein influenced hard sf is, perhaps, to understate: hard science fiction from the late thirties to the early eighties is Heinleinesque fiction. The only other writers of comparable direct influence in this century are H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon (and Stapledon's influence is nowhere near so direct, a distant third). His literary techniques and attitudes are only in the eighties and nineties beginning to seem peripheral to the main course of hard sf now, to the majority of contemporary writers, if not readers, a process that has taken two decades to jell.

"It's Great to Be Back" is a virtuoso example of Heinlein at work. It's a sales pitch for the future in space, witty, ironic, slick extrapolation, involving the reader in a story that confirms what all superior intelligences (such as the reader) already know, that the future in space is better for you, unless you are an ignorant, lazy, evolutionary reject. Hard science fiction is a literature of, and for, survivors.

Home—back to Earth again! Josephine MacRae's heart was pounding. She said, "Hurry up, Allan!" and fidgeted while her husband checked over the apartment. Earth-Moon freight rates made it silly to ship their belongings; except for the bag he carried, they had converted everything to cash. Satisfied, he joined her at the lift; they went on up to the administration level and there to a door marked: Luna City Community Association—*Anna Stone, Service Manager.*

Miss Stone accepted their apartment keys grimly. "Mr. and Mrs. MacRae. So you're actually leaving us?"

Josephine bristled. "Think we'd change our minds?"

The manager shrugged. "No. I knew nearly three years ago that you would go back—from your complaints."

"By my comp— Miss Stone, I don't blame you personally, but this pressurized rabbit warren would try the patience of a—"

"Take it easy, Jo!" her husband cautioned her.

Josephine flushed. "Sorry, Miss Stone."

"Never mind. We just see things differently. I was here when Luna City was

three air-sealed Quonset huts, with tunnels you had to crawl through." She stuck out a square hand. "I honestly hope you'll enjoy being groundhogs. Hot jets, good luck and safe landing."

Back in the lift, Josephine sputtered, " 'Groundhogs' indeed! Just because we prefer fresh air and our own native planet—"

"You use the term," Allan pointed out.

"But I use it about people who have never been off Terra."

"We've both said more than once that we wished we had had sense enough never to have left Earth. We're groundhogs at heart, Jo."

"Yes, but—Allan, you're being obnoxious. This is the happiest day of my life. Aren't you glad to be going home? Aren't you?"

"Sure I am. It'll be great to be back. Golf. Skiing."

"And opera. Real live grand opera. Allan, we've simply got to have a week or two in Manhattan before going to the country."

"I thought you wanted to feel rain on your face?"

"I want that too. I want it all at once, and I can't wait. Oh, darling, it's like getting out of jail." She clung to him.

He unwound her as the lift stopped. "Don't blubber."

"Allan, you're a beast," she said dreamily. "I'm so happy."

In bankers' row, the clerk in Trans-America had their transfer of account ready. "Going home, eh? I envy you. Hunting, fishing."

"Surf bathing is more my style. And sailing."

"I," said Jo, "simply want to see green trees and blue sky."

The clerk nodded. "I know. Well, have fun. Are you taking three months or six?"

"We're not coming back," Allan stated flatly. "Three years of living like a fish in an aquarium is enough."

"So?" The clerk's face became impassive. "Well, hot jets."

"Thanks." They went on up to subsurface and took the crosstown slidewalk out to the rocket port. Its tunnel broke surface at one point, becoming a pressurized shed; a window on the west looked out on the surface of the Moon, and, beyond the hills, the Earth.

The sight of it, great and green and bountiful, against black lunar sky and harsh, unwinking stars, brought quick tears to Jo's eyes. Home—that lovely planet was hers! Allan looked at it more casually, noting the Greenwich. The sunrise line had just touched South America—must be about eight-twenty; better hurry.

They stepped off the slidewalk into the arms of waiting friends. "Hey, you lugs are late! The Gremlin blasts off in seven minutes."

"But we aren't going in it," MacRae answered. "No, siree."

"What? Not going? Did you change your minds?"

Josephine laughed. "Pay no attention to him, Jack. We're going in the express instead. So we've got twenty minutes yet."

"Well! A couple of rich tourists, eh?"

"Oh, the extra fare isn't bad. Why make two changes and sweat out a week in space?" She rubbed her bare middle significantly.

"She can't take free flight, Jack," her husband explained.

"Well, neither can I; I was sick the whole trip out. Still, I don't think you'll be sick, Jo. You're used to Moon weight now."

"Maybe," she agreed, "but there is a lot of difference between one sixth gravity and no gravity."

Jack Crail's wife cut in, "Josephine MacRae, are you going to risk your life in an atomic-powered ship?"

"Why not, darling? You work in an atomics laboratory!"

"It's not the same thing. In the lab we take precautions. The Commerce Commission should never have licensed the expresses."

"Now, Emma," Crail objected, "they've worked the bugs out of those ships."

"Humph! I may be old-fashioned, but I'll go back the way I came, via Terminal and Supra-New-York, in good old reliable fuel rockets."

"Never mind," Allan interrupted. "It's done, and we've got to get over to the express-launching site. Good-by, everybody! It's been grand knowing you. If you come back to God's country, look us up."

"Good-by, Jo. . . . Good-by, Allan!" "Give my regards to Broadway!" "Be sure to write!" "Aloha, hot jets!"

They showed their tickets, entered the air lock and climbed into the pressurized shuttle used between Leyport proper and the express-launching site.

"Hang on, folks," the driver called back over his shoulder; Jo and Allan hurriedly settled into the cushions. The lock opened to the airless tunnel ahead. Six minutes later they climbed out twenty miles away, beyond the hills shielding Luna City's roof from the radioactive splash of the express.

In the Sparrowhawk they shared a compartment with a missionary family. The Reverend Doctor Simmons seemed to want to explain why he was traveling in luxury. "It's for the child," he told them, as his wife strapped their baby girl into a small acceleration couch rigged between her parents' couches. They all strapped down at the warning siren. Jo felt her heart begin to pound. At last—at long last!

The jets took hold, mashing them into the cushions. Jo had not known she could feel so heavy—much worse than the trip out. The baby cried all through acceleration, in wordless terror and discomfort. After a weary time they were suddenly weightless, as the ship went into free flight. When the terrible binding weight was free of her chest, Jo's heart felt as light as her body. Allan threw off his upper strap. "How do you feel, kid?"

"Oh, I feel fine!" Jo unstrapped and faced him. Then she hiccuped. "That is, I think I do."

Five minutes later she was not in doubt; she merely wished to die. Allan swam out of the compartment and located the ship's surgeon, who gave her a hypo. Allan waited until the drug had made her more comfortable, then left for the lounge to try his own cure for spacesickness—Mothersill's Seasick Remedy washed down with champagne. Presently he regretted having mixed them.

Little Gloria Simmons was not spacesick. She thought being weightless was fun, and went bouncing off floor plate, overhead and bulkhead like a dimpled balloon. Jo feebly considered strangling the child, if she floated within reach, but it was too much effort.

Deceleration, logy as it made them feel, was welcome relief after nausea—except to little Gloria. She cried again, while her mother tried to explain. Her father prayed. After a long, long time came a slight jar and the sound of the siren.

Jo managed to raise her head. "What's the matter? Is there an accident?"

"I don't think so. I think we've landed."

"We can't have! We're still braking—I'm heavy as lead."

Allan grinned feebly. "So am I. Earth gravity, remember?"

The baby continued to cry.

They said good-by to the missionary family and staggered out of the ship, supporting each other.

"It can't be just the gravity," Jo protested. "I've taken earth-normal weight in

the centrifuge at the Y, back home—I mean back in Luna City. We're weak from spacesickness."

Allan steadied himself. "That's it. No food for two days."

"Allan, didn't you eat anything either?"

"No. Not permanently, so to speak. Are you hungry?"

"Starving."

"How about dinner at Keen's Chop House?"

"Wonderful. Oh, Allan, we're back!" Her tears started again.

After chuting down the Hudson Valley and into Grand Central Station, they glimpsed the Simmonses again. While waiting at the dock for their bag, Jo saw the reverend doctor climb heavily out of a tube capsule, carrying his daughter and followed by his wife. He set the child down carefully. She stood for a moment, trembling on her pudgy legs, then collapsed to the dock. She lay there, crying thinly.

A spaceman—a pilot, by his uniform—stopped and looked pityingly at the child. "Born in the Moon?" he asked.

"Uh? What? Why, yes, she was, sir."

"Pick her up and carry her. She'll have to learn to walk all over again." The spaceman shook his head sadly and glided away.

Simmons looked still more troubled, then sat down on the dock beside his child, careless of the dirt. Jo felt too weak to help. She looked around for Allan, but he was busy; their bag had arrived. He started to pick it up, then felt suddenly silly. It seemed nailed to the dock. He knew what was in it—rolls of microfilm and color film, souvenirs, toilet articles, irreplaceables—fifty pounds of mass. It couldn't weigh what it seemed to. But it did. He had forgotten what fifty pounds weigh on Earth.

"Porter, mister?" The speaker was gray-haired and thin, but he scooped the bag up casually.

Allan called, "Come along, Jo," and followed him sheepishly.

The porter slowed to match his labored steps. "Just down from the Moon?" he asked. "You got a reservation?"

"Why, no."

"Stick with me. I got a friend on the desk at the Commodore." He led them to the Concourse slidewalk and into the hotel.

They were too weary to dine out; Allan had dinner sent up. Afterward, Jo fell asleep in a hot tub and he had trouble getting her out and into bed—she liked the support the water gave her.

She woke up, struggling, about four in the morning. "Allan!"

"Huh? What's the matter?" He fumbled for the light switch.

"Uh . . . nothing, I guess. I dreamt I was back in the ship. The jets had run away with her. What makes it so stuffy? My head is splitting."

"Huh? It can't be stuffy. This joint is air-conditioned." He sniffed the air. "I've got a headache too," he admitted.

"Well, do something. Open a window."

He stumbled up and did so, shivered when the outer air hit him, and hurried back to bed. He was wondering whether he could get to sleep with the roar of the city pouring in through the open window, when his wife spoke again, "Allan, I'm cold. May I crawl in with you?"

The sunlight streamed in the window, warm and mellow. When it touched his eyes, he woke and found his wife awake beside him.

She sighed and snuggled. "Oh, darling, look! Blue sky! We're home. I'd forgotten how lovely it is."

"It's great to be back, all right." He threw off the covers.

Jo squealed and jerked them back. "Don't do that!"

"Huh?"

"Mamma's great big boy is going to climb out and close that window while mamma stays under the covers."

"Well, all right." He found he could walk more easily, but it was good to get back into bed. Once there, he faced the telephone and shouted at it, "Service!"

"Order, please," it answered in a sweet contralto.

"Orange juice and coffee for two—extra coffee—six eggs, scrambled medium, and whole-wheat toast. And please send up a *Times* and *The Saturday Evening Post.*"

The delivery cupboard buzzed while he was shaving. He answered it and served Jo in bed. Breakfast over, he put down his paper and said, "Can you pull your nose out of that magazine?"

"Glad to. The darn thing is too big and heavy to hold."

"Why don't you have the *stat* edition mailed to you from Luna City? Wouldn't cost more than eight or nine times as much."

"Don't be silly. What's on your mind?"

"Climb out of that frowsty little nest and we'll go shopping."

"Unh-uh. No. I am not going outdoors in a moonsuit."

"'Fraid of being stared at? Getting prudish in your old age?"

"No, me lord; I simply refuse to expose myself in six ounces of nylon. I want some warm clothes." She squirmed farther under the covers.

"The perfect pioneer woman. Going to have fitters sent up?"

"We can't afford that—not while we're living on our savings. Look, you're going anyway. Buy me any old rag, so long as it's warm."

MacRae looked stubborn. "I've tried shopping for you before."

"Just this once, please. Run over to Saks and pick out a street dress in a blue wool jersey, size twelve. And a pair of nylons."

"Well, all right."

"That's a lamb. I won't be loafing; I have a list as long as your arm of people I've promised to call up, look up, have lunch with."

He shopped for himself first; his sensible shorts and singlet felt as inadequate as a straw hat in a snowstorm. It was really quite balmy, but it seemed cold after Luna City's unfailing seventy-two degrees. He stayed underground mostly or stuck to the roofed-over stretch of Fifth Avenue. He suspected that the salesmen were outfitting him in clothes that made him look like a yokel. But they were warm. They were also heavy, adding to the pain in his chest and making him even more unsteady. He wondered when he would regain his ground legs.

A motherly saleswoman took care of Jo's order and sold him a warm cape for her as well. He headed back, stumbling under his load, and trying futilely to flag a ground taxi. Everyone seemed in such a hurry!

He got back, aching all over and thinking about a hot bath. He did not get it; Jo had a visitor. "Mrs. Appleby, my husband. . . . Allan, this is Emma Crail's mother."

"Oh, how do you do, doctor—or should it be professor?"

"Mister."

"When I heard you were in town I just couldn't wait to hear all about my poor darling. How is she? Does she look well? These modern girls—I've told her time and time again that she must get outdoors. I walk in the park every day, and look

at me. She sent me a picture—I have it here somewhere; at least I think so—and she doesn't look a bit well, undernourished. Those synthetic foods—"

"She doesn't eat synthetic foods, Mrs. Appleby."

"—must be quite impossible, I'm sure, not to mention the taste. What were you saying?"

"Your daughter doesn't live on synthetic foods," Allan repeated. "Fresh fruits and vegetables are one thing we have almost too much of in Luna City. The air-conditioning plant, you know."

"That's just what I was saying. I confess I don't see just how you get food out of air-conditioning machinery on the Moon—"

"In the Moon, Mrs. Appleby."

"—but it can't be healthy. Our air conditioner is always breaking down and making the most horrible smells. Simply ghastly, my dears. You'd think they could build a simple little thing like an air conditioner so that—"

"Mrs. Appleby," MacRae said desperately, "the air-conditioning plant in Luna City is a hydroponic farm, tanks of green growing plants. The plants take carbon dioxide out of the air and put oxygen back in."

"But— Are you quite sure, doctor? I'm sure Emma said—"

"Quite sure."

"Well, I don't pretend to understand these things; I'm the artistic type. Poor Herbert often said— Herbert was Emma's father; simply wrapped up in his engineering, though I always saw to it that he heard good music and saw the reviews of the best books. Emma takes after her father, I'm afraid. I do wish she would give up that silly work. Hardly the thing for a lady, do you think, Mrs. MacRae? All those atoms and neuters and things floating around in the air. I read all about it in the Science Made Simple column in the—"

"She's quite good at it and she seems to like it."

"Well, perhaps that's the important thing—to be happy in what you do, no matter how silly. But I worry about the child, buried away from civilization, no one of her own sort to talk with, no theaters, no cultural life, no society."

"Luna City has stereo transcriptions of every successful Broadway play." Jo's voice had a slight edge.

"Oh! Really? But it's not just the plays, my dear; it's the society of gentle folk. Now, when I was a girl, my parents—"

Allan butted in, "One o'clock. Have you had lunch, my dear?"

Mrs. Appleby sat up with a jerk. "Oh, heavenly days! I simply must fly. My dress designer—a tyrant, but a genius. I'll give you her address. It's been charming, my dears, and I can't thank you too much for telling me all about my poor child. I do wish she would be sensible like you two; I'm always ready to make a home for her—and her husband, for that matter. Do come and see me often. I love to talk to people who've been on the Moon."

"In the Moon."

"It makes me feel closer to my darling. Good-by, then."

When the door closed behind her, Jo said, "Allan, I need a drink."

"I'll join you."

Jo cut her shopping short; it was too tiring.

By four o'clock they were driving in Central Park, enjoying the autumn scenery to the lazy clop-clop of horses' hoofs. The helicopters, the pigeons, the streak in the sky where the Antipodes rocket had passed, made a scene idyllic in beauty and serenity.

Jo whispered huskily, "Isn't it lovely?"

"Sure is. Say, did you notice they've torn up Forty-second Street again?"

Back in their room, Jo collapsed on her bed, while Allan took off his shoes. He sat rubbing his feet, and remarked, "I'm going barefooted all evening. Golly, how my feet hurt!"

"So do mine. But we're going to your father's, my sweet."

"Huh? Oh, damn, I forgot. Jo, whatever possessed you? Call him up and postpone it. We're still half dead from the trip."

"But, Allan, he's invited a lot of your friends."

"Balls of fire and cold mush! I haven't any real friends in New York. Make it next week."

" 'Next week.' H'm'm—look, Allan; let's go to the country right away." Jo's parents had left her a tiny, wornout farm in Connecticut.

"What happened to your yen for plays and music?"

"I'll show you." She went to the window, open since noon. "Look at that window sill." She drew their initials in the grime. "Allan, this city is filthy."

"You can't expect ten million people not to kick up dust."

"Luna City was never like this. I could wear a white outfit there till I got tired of it. Here one wouldn't last a day."

"Luna City has a roof, and precipitrons in every air duct."

"Well, Manhattan ought to have! I either freeze or smother."

"You wanted to feel rain on your face."

"Don't be tiresome. I want it out in the clean, green country."

"Okay. I want to start my book anyhow. I'll call your agent."

"I called this morning. We can move in any time."

It was a stand-up supper at his father's house, though Jo sat down and let food be fetched. Allan, as guest of honor, had to stay on his aching feet. His father led him to the buffet. "Here, son, try this goose liver. It should go well after a diet of green cheese."

Allan agreed that it was good.

"See here, son, you really ought to tell these folks about your trip."

"No speeches, dad. Let 'em read the *National Geographic*."

"Nonsense!" He turned around. . . . "Quiet, everybody! Allan is going to tell us how the Lunatics live."

Allan bit his lip. To be sure, the citizens of Luna City used that term to each other, but it did not sound the same here. "Oh, shucks, I haven't anything to say. Go on and eat."

"You talk, we'll eat."

"Tell about Looney City."

"Did you see the Man in the Moon?"

"Go on, what's it like to live on the Moon?"

"Not 'on the Moon'; in the Moon."

"What's the difference?"

"Why, none, I guess." There was no way to explain why Moon colonists emphasized that they lived under the surface, but it irritated him the way "Frisco" irritates a San Franciscan. " 'In the Moon' is the way we say it. We don't spend much time on the surface, except the staff at Shapley Observatory, and the prospectors, and so forth. The living quarters are underground, naturally."

"Why 'naturally'? Afraid of meteors?"

"No more than you are afraid of lightning. We go underground for insulation against heat and cold and as support for pressure sealing. Both are cheaper and easier underground. The soil is easy to work and its pores act like vacuum in a vacuum jug. It *is vacuum*."

"But, Mr. MacRae," a serious-looking lady inquired, "doesn't it hurt your ears to live under pressure?"

Allan fanned the air. "It's the same here—fifteen pounds."

She looked puzzled. "I suppose so, but it's hard to imagine. It would terrify me to be sealed up in a cave. Suppose it blew out?"

"Fifteen pounds of pressure is no problem; engineers work in thousands of pounds per square inch. Anyhow, Luna City is compartmented like a ship. The Dutch live behind dikes; down South they have levees. Subways, ocean liners, aircraft—they're all artificial ways to live. Luna City seems strange just because it's far away."

She shivered. "It scares me."

A pretentious little man pushed his way forward. "Mr. MacRae, granted that it is nice for science and all that, why should taxpayers' money be wasted on a colony on the Moon?"

"You seem to have answered yourself," Allan told him slowly.

"Then how do you justify it? Tell me that, sir."

"It doesn't need justifying; the Luna colony has paid its cost many times over. The Lunar companies are all paying propositions. Artemis Mines, Spaceways, Spaceways Provisioning Corporation, Diana Recreations, Electronics Research Company, Lunar Bio Labs, not to mention all of Rutherford—look 'em up. I'll admit the Cosmic Research Project nicks the taxpayer a little, since it's a joint enterprise of the Harriman Foundation and the Government."

"Then you admit it. It's the principle of the thing."

Allan's feet were hurting him very badly. "What principle? Historically, research has always paid off. Take it up with your senator." He turned his back and looked for more goose liver.

A man touched him on the arm; Allan recognized an old schoolmate. "Allan, congratulations on ticking off old Beetle. He's been needing it; I think he's some sort of a radical."

Allan grinned. "I shouldn't have lost my temper."

"A good job you did. Say, Allan, I'm taking a couple of out-of-town buyers around to the hot spots tomorrow night. Come along."

"Thanks a lot, but we're going out in the country."

"Oh, you mustn't miss this party. After all, you've been buried on the Moon; you need relaxation after all that monotony."

Allan felt his cheeks getting warm. "Thanks just the same, but— Ever seen the Earth-View Room in Hotel Moon Haven?"

"No. Plan to take the trip when I've made my pile, of course."

"Well, there's a night club! Ever see a dancer leap thirty feet into the air and do slow rolls? Or a juggler work in low gravity? Ever try a lunacy cocktail?" Jo caught his eye across the room. "Er—excuse me, old man. My wife wants me." As he turned away he added, "Moon Haven itself isn't just a spacemen's dive, by the way; it's recommended by the Duncan Hines Association."

Jo was very pale. "Darling, you've got to get me out of here. I'm suffocating. I'm really ill."

"Suits." They made their excuses.

Jo woke up with a stuffy cold, so they took a cab directly to her country place.

There were low-lying clouds under them, but the weather was fine above. The sunshine and the drowsy beat of the rotors regained for them the joy of homecoming.

Allan broke the lazy reverie. "Here's a funny thing, Jo. You couldn't hire me

to go back to the Moon, but last night I found myself defending the Loonies every time I opened my mouth."

She nodded. "I know. Honest to heaven, some people act as if the Earth were flat. Some of them don't really believe in anything, and some are so matter-of-fact that you know they don't really understand—and I don't know which sort annoys me the more."

It was foggy when they landed, but the house was clean, the agent had laid a fire and stocked the refrigerator. In ten minutes they were sipping hot punch and baking the weariness from their bones.

"This," said Allan, stretching, "is okay. It really is great to be back."

"Uh-huh. All except the new highway." They could hear the big Diesels growling on the grade, fifty yards from their door.

"Forget it. Turn your back and you're looking into the woods."

They soon had their ground legs well enough to enjoy little walks in the woods during a long, warm Indian summer. Allan worked on the results of three years' research, preparatory to starting his book. Jo helped him with the statistical work, got reacquainted with the delights of cooking, daydreamed and rested.

It was on the day of the first frost that the toilet stopped up. The village plumber did not show up until the next day. Meanwhile they resorted to a drafty, spider-infested little building of another era, still standing out beyond the woodpile.

The plumber was not encouraging. "New septic tank. New sile pipe. Pay you to get new fixtures. Five, six hundred dollars. Have to calculate."

"That's all right," Allan told him. "Can you start today?"

The man laughed. "I can see plainly, mister, that you don't know what it is to get materials and labor today. Next spring, maybe."

"That's impossible, man. Never mind the cost. Get it done."

The native shrugged. "Sorry not to oblige you. Good day."

When he left, Jo exploded, "Allan, he doesn't want to help us."

"Well, maybe. I'll try for help from Norwalk or even from the city. You can't trudge through snow out to that Iron Maiden all winter."

"I hope not."

"You must not. You've had one cold." He stared morosely at the fire. "I suppose I brought it on by my misplaced sense of humor."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know we've taken a lot of kidding ever since it got around that we were colonials. Harmless, but some of it rankled. You remember I went into the village alone last Saturday?"

"Yes. What happened?"

"They started in on me in the barbershop. I let it ride at first, then the worm turned. I pitched some double-talk about the Moon—corny old stuff like the vacuum worms and petrified air. When they finally realized I was ribbing them, nobody laughed. Our rustic sanitary engineer was in the group. I'm sorry."

"Don't be." She kissed him. "I'm glad you paid them back."

The plumber from Norwalk was helpful, but rain, and then sleet, slowed the work. They both caught colds. On the ninth miserable day, Allan was working at his desk when he heard Jo come in the back door, returning from shopping. Presently he became aware that she had not come in to say "Hello." He went to investigate.

He found her slumped on a kitchen chair, crying quietly. "Darling," he said urgently, "honey baby, whatever is the matter?"

She looked up. "I did't bead to led you doe."

"Blow your nose. Then wipe your eyes. What do you mean, 'you didn't mean to let me know'? What happened?"

She let it out, punctuated by sniffles. First, the grocer had said he had no cleansing tissues; then, when she had pointed to them, had stated that they were sold. Finally, he had mentioned "bringing in outside labor and taking the bread out of the mouths of honest folk."

Jo had blown up and had rehashed the incident of Allan and the barbershop wits. The grocer had simply grown more stiff. " 'Lady,' he said to me, 'I don't know or care whether you and your husband have been to the Moon. I don't take much stock in such things. In any case, I don't need your trade.' Oh, Allan, I'm so unhappy."

"Not so unhappy as he's going to be! Where's my hat?"

"Allan, you're not leaving this house! I won't have you fighting!"

"I won't have him bullying you."

"He won't again. Oh, my dear, I've tried so hard, but I can't stand it here. It's not just the villagers; it's the cold and the cockroaches and always having a runny nose. I'm tired out and my feet hurt all the time." She started to cry again.

"There, there! We'll leave, honey. We'll go to Florida. I'll finish my book while you lie in the sun."

"Oh, I don't want to go to Florida. I want to go home!"

"Huh? You mean . . . back to Luna City?"

"Yes. Oh, dearest, I know you don't want to, but I can't help it. I could put up with the dirt and cold and the comic-strip plumbing, but it's not being understood that gets me. These groundhogs don't know anything."

He grinned at her. "Keep sending, Kid; I'm on your frequency."

"Allan!"

He nodded. "I found out I was a Loony at heart quite a while ago, but I was afraid to tell you. My feet hurt, too, and I'm sick of being treated like a freak. I've tried to be tolerant, but I can't stand groundhogs. I miss the civilized folks in dear old Luna."

She nodded. "I guess it's prejudice, but I feel the same way."

"It's not prejudice. Be honest. What does it take to get to Luna City?"

"A ticket."

"Smarty pants! Not as a tourist, but to get a job there. You know the answer: Intelligence. It costs a lot to send a man to the Moon and more to keep him there. To pay off, he has to be worth a lot. High I.Q., good compatibility index, superior education—everything that makes a person pleasant and interesting to have around. We're spoiled; the human cussedness that groundhogs take for granted, we now find intolerable, because Loonies are different. The fact that Luna City is the most comfortable environment that man ever built for himself is unimportant; it's people who count. Let's go home."

He went to the phone—an antique, speech-only rig—and called the Foundation's New York office. While he waited, truncheon-like receiver to his ear, she said, "Suppose they won't have us?"

"That's what worries me." They knew that the Lunar enterprises rarely rehired personnel who had once quit; the physical examination was rumored to be much harder to pass the second time.

"Hello? Foundation? May I speak to the recruiting office? Hello. I *can't* turn on my view plate; this instrument is a hangover from the dark ages. This is Allan MacRae, physical chemist. Contract Number One-three-four-oh-seven-two-nine. And Josephine MacRae, One-three-four-oh-seven-three-oh. We want to sign up again. I said we want to sign up again. . . . Okay, I'll wait."

"Pray, darling, pray!"

"I'm praying. . . . How's that? My appointment's still vacant? Fine, fine! How about my wife?" He listened with a worried look; Jo held her breath. Then he cupped the speaker. "Hey, Jo, your job's filled. They offer you an interim job as a junior accountant."

"Tell 'em, 'Yes!' "

"That'll be fine. When can we take our exams? . . . Swell. Thanks! Good-by." He hung up and turned to his wife. "Physical and psycho as soon as we like; professional exams waived."

"What are we waiting for?"

"Nothing." He dialed the Norwalk Copter Service. "Can you send a cab? . . . Good grief, don't you have radar? Okay, g'by!" He snorted. "Grounded by the weather. I'll call New York for a modern cab."

Ninety minutes later they landed on top of Harriman Tower.

The psychologist was cordial. "We'll get this over before you have your chests thumped. Sit down. Tell me about yourselves." He drew them out skillfully. "I see. Did you get the plumbing repaired?"

"Well, it was being fixed."

"I can sympathize with your foot trouble, Mrs. MacRae; my arches always bother me here. That's the real reason, isn't it?"

"Oh, no!"

"Now, Mrs. MacRae—"

"Really it's not—truly. I want people to talk to who know what I mean. I'm homesick for my own sort. I want to go home, and I've got to have this job to do it. I'll steady down, I know I will."

The doctor looked grave. "How about you, Mr. MacRae?"

"Well, it's about the same story. I've been trying to write a book, but I can't work. I'm homesick. I want to go back."

Doctor Feldman suddenly smiled. "It won't be too difficult."

"You mean we're in? If we pass the physical?"

"Never mind that; your discharge examinations are recent enough. Of course, you'll go out to Arizona for reconditioning and quarantine. Maybe you're wondering why it's been so easy, when it's supposed to be so hard. It's simple: we don't want people lured back by the high pay. We do want people who will be happy and as permanent as possible. Now that you're 'Moonstruck,' we want you back." He got up and stuck out his hand.

Back in the Commodore that night, Jo was struck by a thought. "Allan, do you suppose we could get our own apartment back?"

"I don't know. We could send a radio. . . . No! We'll telephone."

It took ten minutes to put the call through. Miss Stone's face softened a little when she recognized them.

"Miss Stone, we're coming home!"

There was the usual three-second lag, then, "Yes, I know. It came over the tape twenty minutes ago."

"Oh. Say, Miss Stone, is our old flat vacant?" They waited.

"I've held it; I knew you'd come back. Welcome home, Loonies."

When the screen cleared, Jo said, "Allan, how did she know?"

"Does it matter? We're in, kid! Members of the lodge."

"I guess you're right. . . . Oh, Allan, look!" She had stepped to the window; scudding clouds had just uncovered the Moon. It was three days old and *Mare Fecunditatis*—the roll of hair at the back of the Lady in the Moon's head—was

cleared by the sunrise line. Near the right-hand edge of that great, dark sea was a tiny spot, visible only to their inner eyes—Luna City.

The crescent hung, serene and silvery, over the tall buildings. "Darling, isn't it beautiful?"

"Certainly is. It'll be great to be back. Don't get your nose all runny."