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That's How It Goes

It's easy to get Aperdui. A phone call at the wrong moment—a meal too many—a screen star wearing too many clothes. It's easy. And it's fun...

By J. T. McINTOSH Illustrated by Ritter

I

THE four censors watched the takes in silence. When the lights came on in the small projection room, the Second Censor said to the First Censor: "You're quite right. It's not merely undesirably sexy, in fact obscene—there's not even an attempt at an excuse for it. Now if the subject of the film had been historical, or if the climate had been such that—"

"A clear case," said the Third Censor briskly. "I have the names of the actress, producer, director, script-writer and cameramen here. Shall I send them all on to the Transportation Board?"

"If you like," said the First Censor. "But the producer, director, script-writer and cameramen will wriggle out of it. They always do. I guess you'd save everybody trouble if you just send the actress to the Transportation Board."

"I guess so," the Third Censor agreed. "Okay, Sandra Kay goes before the Board tomorrow. I'll attend to the de-
tails. Now let's see that last take again."

The beautiful blonde in the transparent nightdress smiled seductively at them again, undulating even as she lay on a couch.

"Funny how movies used to be cut when the girls wore too few clothes," the Second Censor mused. "Obviously this is only obscene because she's wearing that promiscuous garment. When she takes it off later, the whole thing becomes perfectly respectable."

There was silence until Sandra Kay had finished cavorting about the screen. Then the Third Censor said: "Just to be quite sure we aren't making any mistake about this, let's see that again, huh?"

"YOU haven't even an excuse?" the overseer persisted.

Johnny Horne shrugged. "Well, it seems a little thing, working through the break. I've done it before, and knocked off early."

"Yes, but this time you didn't knock off early. A little thing, indeed! Do you realize that you produced three hundred pairs of shoes above quota? What are we going to do with those three hundred pairs of shoes? Don't you know that as it is we've got a million salesmen trying to increase demand so that we can unload our surplus stocks? And you casually produce an extra three hundred pairs of shoes just because you didn't feel like taking time off for a glass of milk and a smoke!"

"I like working," said Johnny naively.

The overseer went purple. "You like working! When the police bring in a man on a homicide charge, does it do him any good to say 'I like killing'? Sure, you like working! Haven't you ever heard that Earth's Balance Must Be Preserved? How can Earth's Balance be preserved if irresponsible youngsters like you insist on making three hundred pairs of shoes above quota?"

"I won't do it again."

"Darn right you won't. I like you, Johnny, but this isn't the first time something like this has happened. I'm sending your name to the Transportation Board."

Johnny was aghast. "You don't mean it? Just for making a few pairs of shoes above quota?"

The overseer raised his eyes to heaven. "Obviously you don't understand, Johnny, and never will understand. That's why you're going before the Board tomorrow."

"BBY BROOKS sighed contentedly. "That sure was a feed," he said. "Boy, do I like French cooking!"

Kate was draining the last drop of coffee. They were a
strange pair. They looked as if they could have nothing in common. Tubby weighed 230 pounds, and he was not quite five feet five. His little round face was almost hidden by folds of fat, but in the middle of the roundness could be discerned two little round eyes, a little round nose and a little round mouth. Kate weighed less than 100 pounds, and she was five feet eight. She was a broomstick with two small bumps on it.

The truth was they shared quite a lot, including a bed, although they had never got around to marriage. Principally they had gluttony in common. They had the same view of heaven—a place where it was possible to eat all day and most of the night.

Earth was not heaven. No fantastically crowded world could be rich in food. Though there was no actual rationing, Earth was no paradise for people who liked to top off a six-course meal with forty-two hamburgers for filling.

However, they coped with the situation fairly well.

They left the restaurant and Tubby hailed a cab. He didn’t give their final destination; he was too wily for that. He named a neutral, unimportant spot and paid off the cabbie when they reached it. Another taxi took them to Bertini’s.

“We haven’t been here for at least three weeks,” Kate murmured. “I’ve almost forgotten what Italian food tastes like. Let’s start with ham and melon, and then have spaghetti a la Bolognese.”

They couldn’t have dessert; nobody was ever supplied with more than two courses.

Twenty minutes later Tubby sighed contentedly. “That sure was a feed,” he said. “Boy, do I like Italian cooking!”

From Bertini’s they walked to the Metropole, Kate skipping like a bird as she always did. Tubby breasting the traffic like an aircraft carrier. It was a long way, and they were famished when they arrived.

“Chicken Maryland,” Tubby decided.

He never got it. Suddenly there were three cops around them. Tubby blinked at them doubtfully.

One had a notebook. “Okay, Buster,” he said. “Explain this. First you ate at the Grill. Then at the Paris Soir. Then at Bertini’s. Now you’re here. What do you think you are—two sacks of loot on legs?”

They couldn’t explain it. At least, Tubby did explain it, tearfully and sincerely, but the cops had no sympathy with the plain, unvarnished truth: “We were hungry.”

TOM CAMM added the fourth nutrient solution to the culture in the tank, watching it carefully. The culture
sometimes got sick, just like human digestion, and had to be drained promptly.

The phone rang. Tom looked at it, puzzled, shrugged and went over to pick it up. If a call was switched through to him while he was engaged in such critical work, it must be important.

"Tom?"

"Joan! How in hell did you get the girl on the switchboard to put your call through?"

"I told her it was a matter of life and death, which it is. Tom, we've got to get married right away!"

"You mean . . ."

She giggled. "No, I don't mean that. I mean we're getting a two-room flat. We move in before next Tuesday!"

"Joan, that's great! Most couples have to wait years. How did you . . ." Sudden suspicion sharpened his voice. "You didn't . . .?"

"No, I didn't, and you should be ashamed of yourself for thinking such a thing. I guess it must be a mistake, but they won't put us out if we get married and move in right away. So we've got to get married the moment you leave the laboratories tonight."

"Sure, Joan. Gee, this is great news! This must be my lucky day."

He wasn't quite so sure about that half an hour later, on the carpet before his boss.

"It's incredible, Camm, absolutely incredible. It wouldn't have surprised me if a young technician had done it, but that you should stand casually talking on the phone to your girl friend while behind you a whole vat of culture died . . . Camm, I can still hardly believe it."

"What Joan had to tell me, sir, was—"

"It doesn't matter one tenth of a damn what the girl was telling you! The moment you realized a private call had been switched to you at a critical stage in the process, you should have hung up. If you'd done that, it would have been possible to save the vat."

Tom considered making another appeal, but he knew it was no good. Finally he said simply: "Yes, sir. You're sending me to the Transportation Board?"

"Not only you, Camm, but the girl on the switchboard who let that call through and the girl who made it. I'm sorry Camm. But on a world as overcrowded as Earth is, a vat of synthetic food is worth more than the same vat filled with gold, platinum and uranium."

"Yes, sir," said Tom. He was resigned.

It was the end of everything, of course. If Joan agreed, they'd spend this night together and then kill themselves before the interview with the Board.
II

THE next morning seven people collected in a gloomy waiting-room at Transportation House.

There was Sandra Kay, the young, beautiful but not yet famous actress who had offended the censors by wearing too much.

She would never become famous now.

There was Johnny Horne, who liked work so much that he had made three hundred pairs of shoes above quota. If he didn’t know by now that the Balance Must Be Preserved, Earth had no further use for him.

There were Tubby Brooks and Kate Rimmer, who had tried to get more than their fair share of an overcrowded world’s most vital commodity—food.

There was Tom Camm, whose negligence had resulted in something just as serious—the destruction of food. Joan Liverage, his accomplice in crime. Sylvia Oliver, another accomplice in the same heinous crime.

Joan, who had not agreed to commit suicide with Tom, kept well out of the switchboard girl’s way. She might easily become violent.

The middle-aged secretary looked them over indifferently and sent Sandra Kay in first. Her boss would never forgive her if she delayed his making the acquaintance of a gorgeous creature like that by as much as a second.

Sandra Kay looked at the little brown-faced man behind the desk, threw off her fur cape and sat down, crossing her legs so that from where he was sitting he couldn’t see her skirt at all. Inwardly boiling with anger, she knew it would do her no good at all to show it.

“Mr. Rawlings?” she said, smiling dazzlingly.

Rawlings had brightened the moment she entered the room. He scrabbled among the papers on his desk. Ah, yes, this must be the actress, Sandra Kay.

“Miss Kay,” he said, “the charge against you is that you appeared in an obscene film. More particularly, that you wore erotic and unnecessary garments.”


“You admit the charge, then?”

“I admit I wore a nightdress, yes. What’s wrong in that?” She smiled dazzlingly at him again, but this time her smile was wasted, for he was looking at the sheet in front of him.

“As an experienced actress, Miss Kay, you know what is permissible and what is not. I understand that it would have been all right if you wore a respectable, opaque nightdress or nothing at all,
but the kind of garment you wore has been ruled dangerously provocative.” He looked her up and down. “This I can well imagine to be the case.”

“Why, thank you, Mr. Rawlings.”

Rawlings coughed. “You have been sent here because you—”

“Now, just a minute, Mr. Rawlings. There has been no criminal charge against me, and if I were to stand trial I guess I’d have a chance of getting off. Why shouldn’t I just tell you to go to hell?”

“Because you might not get off, Miss Kay. In that case you would be sent to a tough, inhospitable, sparsely-populated criminal world such as Roc. Worlds like Roc will never be developed, except as criminal settlements. If you were sent there, you—even you—would have nothing to look forward to but a tough, unpleasant life and an early, unpleasant death. On the other hand, if you accept transportation here and now, you will go to Aperdui, a pleasant world right at the top of the list for development.”

“Not Verdan or Mistan?”

“Ah, Verdan.” Rawlings suddenly became wistful. “I spent twenty-five years in Verdan, and I can’t wait to get back. Most Transportation officials are colonists, you know, Miss Kay. I tell you honestly, I can’t wait for my term of duty here on Earth to be over so that I can return to Verdan.”

“But I can’t go there?”

“I’m afraid not. Verdan is now fully self-supporting, fully developed, able to populate itself without further need of immigrants. It’s off the list of Transportation worlds. So is Mistan. But Aperdui is a grand world.”

“Population?”

“Only a few thousand at the moment, but—”

“A hick world. No radio, television, cars, trucks, hospitals, cinemas, theaters, washing machines, books, magazines, newspapers—”

“Now there you’re wrong, Miss Kay. There is a small emergency clinic, and a mimeographed newspaper is published twice a week.”

“Huh,” said Sandra. She caught Rawling’s eye and held it. “If I went for trial, tell me frankly, what would be my chances?”

“Frankly, Miss Kay, you probably wouldn’t get Roc. But you wouldn’t be allowed to stay on Earth either. You’d get Aperdui anyway.”

“I see.” Sandra stood up. “I believe you.”

Rawling’s eyes ran up her golden legs, caressed her hips, popped at her bust and finally reached her golden head, exhausted.

Although he was a colonist, automatically placing the colonies, any colony, before al-
most everything else, what difference did just one colonist make?

"In certain circumstances, Miss Kay," he said, not meeting her eyes, "I might be persuaded to recommend that you be allowed to stay on Earth."

She knew exactly what he meant. She knew what he meant better than he did. He meant that she could remain on Earth as his mistress until the relationship became tiresome, awkward or inconvenient for him, at which time easily the neatest solution would be to withdraw his protection and have her sent to Aperdui to be out of the way.

"Thanks, Mr. Rawlings," she said. "I sure appreciate that. I'll take Aperdui."

RAWLINGS interviewed the other six one by one. None of them had even as good a chance of escaping transportation as Sandra.

"I envy you," he told Tubby Brooks bracingly. "Aperdui will make a man of you, my boy. In a few months you'll be half your present weight. All that fat will drop off, and you'll become lean and hard and bronzed. If I were twenty-five years younger and didn't have friends and relatives on Verdan, I'd be delighted to change places with you."

"What's the food situation on Aperdui?" Tubby asked urgently.

"Food? There's enough, of course. Aperdui has good agricultural land, excellent grazing... but then, you see, with the population snowballing as immigrants from Earth arrive, naturally there's never any surplus. Every harvest has to provide for the present population plus the twenty thousand or so who will arrive before the next harvest. There's enough food, my boy. But there's never anything over."

Tubby groaned.

So did Kate when she heard this grim news. Rawlings didn't suggest to Kate that in certain circumstances he might be persuaded to recommend that she be allowed to stay on Earth. Too thin, he decided critically.

Tom Camm listened in silence. He was probably the most intelligent of the seven, the one best able to exploit any loophole that might have existed. He was also, however, the one with the strongest case against him. Carelessness with food production on a world as desperately overcrowded as Earth was more than a misdemeanor. He was lucky, indeed, to get the chance of going to Aperdui. He might easily have been sent to Roc.

Rawlings hesitated over Joan. She was thin too, and her mouth was too big. Her legs, however, were nearly as good as Sandra's. In the end, not caring much one way or
the other, he gave her the chance.

Joan considered it for quite a while.

She very much wanted to remain on Earth. Everybody knew that life on the new colonies was hell. Earth never seemed like heaven until suddenly you were faced with the prospect of leaving it for ever.

She would lose Tom if she stayed, of course. Nevertheless, she went on considering it. Finally she decided, however, that if she took advantage of Rawling's offer it probably wouldn't be long until she was before the Transportation Board again for something else. And if that happened she would have lost Tom for nothing.

She said she'd go to Aperdui.

Of the seven, only Johnny Horne could see anything in favor of Aperdui. "You mean I can work as hard as I like?" he said joyfully.

Rawlings nodded. "From what I know of you, my boy, and from my own experiences on a planet like Aperdui, I should say you'll probably become a very successful man. Not one of the richest men in the world, since as far as I can make out you're too honest for that, but pretty comfortable nevertheless. By the time you're forty, when the rough edges of Aperdui will be smoothed out a little, I guess you'll be a pretty important man out there."

"Maybe it won't be so bad at that," Johnny reflected.

"It makes sense, my boy, that a man who works too hard on Earth should be sent to the colonies. That's where a man who works hard ought to be. It'll be years before there are any unions in Aperdui, any upper-limit quotas, any problems of surplus production."

Johnny pondered. Already Sandra Kay, the kind of girl who would never have looked at him if they had both lived out their lives on Earth, was showing signs of interest in him. Sandra was a realist. It had taken her no time at all to readjust and see for herself, by more intuitive methods than Rawlings had used, that a strong, healthy, energetic, enthusiastic young man like Johnny Horne was liable to accomplish a lot more on Aperdui than he could ever have done on Earth.

"Maybe it won't be so bad at that," Johnny said at last.

The telephone girl, Sylvia Oliver, came last . . .

AFTERWARDS, Rawlings delivered a little sermon. It was always much the same. At first he had tried to say something a little different each time, but at the hundredth repetition of what was essentially the same speech the words came out in a treacly flow as if he had turn-
ed the spigot on a barrel of molasses.

"I don't want you to leave here laboring under a sense of injustice," he said earnestly. "The plain fact is, Earth has to get rid of at least ten million people every year. Less than a tenth of that number emigrate voluntarily, despite all the publicity campaigns."

Tom cast an ironical glance at the poster on the wall beside him.

EMIGRATE!
EMIGRATE NOW!
A NEW LIFE AWAITS YOU!
APERDUI IS A LAND OF PROMISE

The girl in the picture was nearly as pretty as that blonde actress. Her eyes invited. *Come to Aperdui and get me. See what's waiting for you if you come to Aperdui. How could anybody be dumb enough not to want to come to Aperdui?*

But there was still, fortunately or unfortunately, a free press. People could read about Aperdui and Roc and Verdan and Mistan. They knew that the worlds the Transportation Board sent settlers to were always frontier worlds where a farm could be a million square miles and the nearest cinema could be twenty light-years away.

Of course, if you were very lucky, you might be sent to a world like Verdan or Mistan just before transportation to that world stopped. Verdan was still sparsely populated—indeed, by Terran standards it was uninhabited. But Verdan was self-sufficient. That meant that Verdan had enough people on it to support factories that made cars, electrical appliances and even such luxuries as bottles and mirrors and shaving cream.

It would be a long time before Aperdui reached such a state. No wonder, Tom thought, that only a million idealistic idiots were taken in by the posters each year.

"So more than nine million people have to be *made* to emigrate each year," Rawlings went on. "Preferably more. Twelve million would be best. It makes sense, doesn't it? The colonies need these people desperately; Earth desperately needs to get rid of them. So—"

"So I get sent away," Joan exclaimed, "for ringing up my fiancé to tell him some good news."

Rawlings nodded. "Exactly. What I'm trying to tell you is, it's *not* unfair. You haven't been badly treated, any of you. Only so many convicts can be sent to planets like Aperdui. You wouldn't want to live in a sparsely-populated world with murderers and thieves all around you, would you? So nine million people have to be found. Maybe
you’d rather it was settled by a lottery. The governments of the world decided it would be fairer this way, that’s all.”

HE looked at Tom. “You needn’t have been sent here. You knew that you were in sole charge of a complicated and vital process. The instant you found the phone call was only from—”

“I know,” sighed Tom. “I’ve had all that already.”

Rawlings’s gaze passed to Joan. “You’ve been told you mustn’t phone the laboratories. You chose to ignore that. You, Horne, disregarded clear labor regulations. You two took up more than your fair share of Earth’s supplies. And you, Miss Kay, knew perfectly well you were making an obscene film.”

“I didn’t think it was obscene.”

“But you knew the censors would, didn’t you?”

Rawlings sighed, knowing they were unsympathetic, and made one final try. “Twenty-five years ago I was in exactly the same position as all of you. I’d falsified a report in an attempt to get a flat. after waiting three years. When I was brought before the Transportation Board, I felt as you feel now. And I’ll be honest with you, Verdan seemed to me, when I got there, even worse than I expected. But now. twenty-five years later I—”

“We all know,” said Tom. “You envy us. Look, if I spent twenty-five years trying to give up dope and finally succeeded, I’d be glad I’d made it in the end. But that doesn’t mean I’d enjoy every minute of the twenty-five years. Cut the cackle — what happens now?”

When they had gone, Rawlings stared gloomily at the papers in front of him. For sheer frustration, this job took some beating. Satisfied settlers were always employed for these interviews, in the hope of sparkling off some enthusiasm in the disgruntled emigrants. But Rawlings hadn’t seen any enthusiasm in this bunch. The sooner his contract was up and he could get back to good old Verdan the better.

Then Rawlings brightened a little. At least there was Sylvia Oliver. The kiss she had given him to seal the bargain made his collar feel too tight when he thought about it.

And he needn’t feel he was selling out the colonies. A girl like that would be sure to land in trouble again within six months. The reflection salved his conscience.

His conscience didn’t bother him because he was cheating the other six, the six who were going to Aperdui. It bothered him because he was cheating Sylvia Oliver by keeping her here on Earth.

THAT’S HOW IT GOES
III

THEY hadn’t much time to get used to the idea of starting a new life on Aperdui. Since passengers were always kept in cocoons, the journey from Earth to Aperdui didn’t exist as far as they were concerned.

They were suddenly, very suddenly—too suddenly—just new settlers dumped in the middle of a prairie somewhere in Aperdui.

The tall man in check shirt and filthy breeches—he didn’t bother to tell them his name—pointed at the rough shelter and said: “Started your house for you. Always do that for new settlers. Guess there was some mistake about your group. Thought there was a spare woman. Bill Perkins will be mad as hell when he shows.”

Johnny found himself the spokesman for the group. “You’re not going? We know nothing about this place.”

Check Shirt didn’t pause on the way to his horse. Over his shoulder he said: “Bill Perkins will be here in a couple hours. No harm you can come to till then.”

They watched him ride off slowly in the afternoon heat. Then they looked around.

No Earthman of the eighteenth, nineteenth or early twentieth century would have been much perturbed by what they saw. The country was flat, consisting of grassland, bracken, black rock and occasional small clumps of trees. The scene wasn’t unlike early American prairie.

But there hadn’t been any American prairie left for a couple of centuries or so, and the three men and three women from Earth saw Aperdui as naked, terrifying wilderness. To them, ground was concrete, horizons were skylines, and the only open spaces were seas (now rapidly being covered with huge floating cities).

By elimination, the crude shelter fifty yards from them must be the “house” Check Shirt had said had been started for them. It consisted of four thick poles supporting a plaited-grass roof. A foot off the ground a rough wooden floor had been constructed. That was all.

There was no road. A truck had borne them across the prairie, jolting so much that they’d hardly been able to see the country.

It was hot, but not too hot. And no more than a hundred yards beyond the shelter was a broad, clear stream — the reason, no doubt, for the choice of site.

“Anyway, we can have a swim,” Sandra said, stripping off her clothes.

“There may be fish—crabs — water insects,” Tom warned.

“Well, we’ll soon find out.”

THAT’S HOW IT GOES
NAKED, Sandra dived into the stream. One by one, as nothing disastrous happened to her, the others peeled and followed her.

Johnny swam upstream after Sandra. He caught her in a clear pool and kissed her. She laughed, threw her hair out of her eyes and swam still further upstream at a rate he couldn’t match.

Sandra was still a realist. Although the matter hadn’t been discussed among them, they all knew that in conditions like those of Aperdui there would be no bachelors and spinsters except women who couldn’t get a man and men who couldn’t get a woman. Sandra had to take Johnny or somebody else, and pretty damn quick. She didn’t have to marry him — nobody would worry much about marriage during the next twenty years or so. Whether a man and woman living together were married or not didn’t matter until there were neighbors. And it would be a long time before there were any neighbors.

Johnny finally caught Sandra far upstream and pulled her to the bank. She let him kiss her but she didn’t let him do anything else, not yet. A girl had her pride. One manifestation of this was how long she kept him waiting. It might not be years, months, weeks. It might not even be days. But it had to be at least a few hours no matter what.

When Bill Perkins arrived they were sitting or lying in the sun beside the stream. All of them had put something on, just to prove they were still civilized, even in such a world.

Bill Perkins didn’t look civilized at all, though he wore a check shirt and fairly clean shorts. He was tall and lean, thirty or so, heavily tanned, slow-speaking and quick-moving. Johnny, at least, liked him on sight.

Perkins was philosophical about the absence of a spare woman. “Guess I’d better stick around till you’ve got the hang of things,” he said. “Have to move on then, though. Gather round, folks, and I’ll try to explain the set-up.”

“Do you have to talk like a cowboy?” asked Joan, irritated.

He looked her over for a few seconds before replying. “No,” he said mildly. “I could talk like an advertising copywriter, which is what I used to be. With an effort, I could talk like a college professor, considering I once went to college. But somehow there doesn’t seem to be much use for ten-dollar words out here. It’s surprising how many words I know and don’t have to use.”

“How’s the food situation?” asked Tubby eagerly.

Perkins looked him over too.
Tubby had lost thirty pounds on the trip, but he still looked like a balloon man, especially with his naked belly hanging over the towel which covered his loins.

When Perkins spoke, he didn’t answer Tubby’s question directly. “First, we get some ground cleared,” he said. “Guess we can borrow a horse and plough from the Rosenheims, ten miles thataway. We get the seed for free. And meantime we draw supplies in relation to the acreage we got planted, or intend to plant. The first load arrives by truck at sunset.”

“You don’t use cash yet?” Johnny inquired.

“Well, we do, but for new settlers it’s an abstraction. We’ll have to live on credit for a couple of years anyway, and nobody counts the pennies too accurately, any more than you will when another new group is set down ten miles to the east. That won’t happen for about five years, anyway. Won’t happen at all if you can show you can use more than ten miles of land. There’s plenty of land, if you can show it isn’t going to be wasted.”

“Sheep?” asked Johnny. “Can we stock with sheep?”

Perkins favored him with the same searching scrutiny. This time he seemed to like what he saw. “You could,” he said. “But a lot of other guys had heard of Australia before they got here. And, though you probably think you’re pioneers, you’re too late to make a fortune with sheep. Best bet would be wheat, I’d say. Soil’s right for it too.”

“Sometimes you say ‘we’ and sometimes ‘you,’” Johnny said. “How long are you staying, Bill?”

“Well, I thought there was an extra woman in this party. Might find one and bring her. If I don’t, guess I won’t wait any longer than I have to. Maybe a couple of months, to get you started. Any of you know anything about farming? Somebody must, or you wouldn’t have been left together like this.”

“I do,” said Tom. “Via hydroponics.”

Perkins gave him the usual slow examination. A good second-in-command, he thought. A man with brains but no drive. Johnny Horne would be the leader.

At last Perkins turned back to Tubby, whose question had never been answered. “We get the first load of supplies by truck at sunset,” he repeated. “There’ll be enough to keep us alive and healthy, sure. But by the look of you, mister, you’re going to be hungry for about thirty years. It’ll be that time before anybody around here will be able to eat until he busts.”

A groan escaped Tubby. At the same time Sandra jumped
and slapped her knee. "Something bit me!" she said.

Perkins scrutinized her, too. In white satin shorts and a green ribbon of a brassiere, she looked like a film star, which perhaps was hardly surprising. Above his reach, Bill decided without regret. Besides, Johnny seemed to have claims.

"Mosquito," he said. "It stings some, that's all."

"Didn't mosquitoes used to carry disease?" Joan asked sharply. "Malaria, or something?"

Bill Perkins shrugged. "Never knew of anybody getting sick after mosquito bites here."

"Insects, not only mosquitoes, used to be carriers," Tom said. "Unless there's something to carry, they're pretty harmless. Malaria died out on Earth before the carriers did. The last mosquitoes were clean."

"I thought there were no vehicles on Aperdui except carts," Johnny said. "But a truck brought us here."

"There's about ten trucks on this world, all assembled from parts brought from Earth. There's even a couple of helicopters. But they're for real emergencies. Aren't even brought out for straightforward things like maternity cases."

All the women had been thinking about this already. On Earth it was possible to have babies between television shows. They had already guessed that here things might be slightly different.

They talked about the arrangements for expectant mothers for a while, and then Kate suddenly said: "Where's Tubby? I haven't seem him since —"

The stream was in a slight hollow. When they climbed out of it and looked at the shelter, they saw Tubby right away, hanging from the rafters.

Apart from a few gasps from the women, there was silence. Nobody rushed to cut him down. He was too still for it to be worth while.

Besides, most of them felt that if that was what Tubby wanted, nobody ought to try to take it from him.

Bill looked around and for the first time surveyed Kate. She was thin and stringy. But he liked thin and stringy women, being lean himself.

"Guess maybe I won't be moving on after all," he said.

The first time the supply truck called it merely dumped supplies and left. The second time, however, it brought a supply officer, Harry Rinker.

Rinker listened as Johnny outlined their plans. Bill Perkins stayed around, silent. Some things the new settlers had to find out for themselves. When Johnny was through, Rinker made quick mental
estimates and told them what he could supply on the basis of the plans presented to him.

It wasn't quite enough to keep the six of them alive.

From there Johnny went to the other extreme. He had presented his minimum aims first. Now he tried his maximum on Rinker.

The supply officer shook his head. The six of them just couldn't do that much, he said. A reasonable compromise was reached.

When Rinker had gone, Johnny turned to Bill, frowning. "I thought it was possible to build up from nothing here? On that basis, we'll be in debt all our lives."

"Well, you need to work pretty hard," said Bill judicially.

"I was transported from Earth for working too hard."

"Were you, now? That's interesting. You'll never be transported from Aperdui for anything like that. Well, look, Johnny, most people are too optimistic about what they can do. That's why Rinker has to be cautious. You can succeed here, like anywhere else, if you have the basic qualities."

"And what are the basic qualities? What's the basic quality?"

Bill thought for a moment. Then he said slowly: "I guess it would be knowing when to keep going and when to dig in. The cautious guys, the guys who aren't prepared to risk anything, don't do much better here than anywhere else. And the stop-at-nothing guys, the guys who won't give an inch no matter how badly the breaks run against them, they don't become Rockefeller's either. It's the guys who run the tide when things are going good, taking on twice, five times as much as they planned, and dig in the moment the tide starts turning—those guys are the guys who come out on top in a place like this."

Johnny nodded thoughtfully. "Another thing. Why are new groups left to fend for themselves like this, with only one fellow who knows the ropes to help them? Why aren't we mixed in with experienced farmers, who know the conditions and the climate and the planet itself?"

"Well, now, Johnny, new settlements have to be lands of promise. There's got to be something to work for, to live for. Suppose the six of us here did well the first year and better the next and even better the year after. Suppose we had the best goddam farm in the whole of Aperdui, and the best workers. How would we like it if somebody came along and split us all up, sending us in twos to work with new groups just out from Earth?"

"I get it. It's a chance of complete failure, but a chance
of making a big success too.”
“Sure.”
Johnny took a deep breath.
“Well, it’s not going to be failure,” he said definitely.

Weeks passed. Months passed. All the women were with child, but by sheer accident it was going to work out that they’d all be able to help each other when the time came.

Nobody was exactly happy, but then, nobody had any time to be miserable.

Aperdui had had a tiny ecology before the Earthmen arrived. There were a few insects, a few birds, a few small animals, chiefly marsupials. There were remains of many more species. No one quite knew yet why or how they had died out. It certainly didn’t seem to be because conditions had been too tough for them.

One theory was that one species had killed off most of the others, upsetting the balance so that its own food became extinct too. Even here, Tom realized, the Balance Must Be Preserved.

Certainly this left Aperdui a pretty friendly world for Earthmen, if there were enough of them.

That was the snag.

It wasn’t that things couldn’t be made on Aperdui. Of course they could, if enough people could and would buy them. But it was no use manufacturing a car and selling it, if a couple of years were going to pass before anybody else wanted a car and had the money to pay for it. And cars weren’t much good without roads. And there were no roads. And nobody wanted to go anywhere, anyway.

Tractors, now, everybody wanted tractors. It was still cheaper, however, to get them from Verdan, the nearest manufacturing world, than to make them on Aperdui. And tractors from Verdan cost too much.

On Aperdui, people like Johnny Horne learned the economic facts of life the hard way. A tractor from Verdan cost $65,000. With a tractor they could multiply their production several times, but the tractor would not have paid for itself by the time it had to be scrapped. Nevertheless, the work it had done before it died of old age would eventually pay for it.

Sandra had a son and Kate had a daughter. Joan lost her baby and went on doing the same thing with distressing regularity.

Apart from this and a minor flood there were no snags during the first year. The next year the floods were worse. The year after that, worse still. The people of Kayhorn had learned their lesson the first time, however, and while other farms were badly
damaged, Kayhorn lost little or nothing.

There were three houses and a barn now, primitive but solid. In the fourth year they even had running water and water closets—also primitive, but working most of the time.

The five people who had come from Earth looked very different now. Johnny and Sandra were lean and bronzed, twice as tough as they had been when they landed. Kate, surprisingly, had begun to run to fat after her first pregnancy. Joan was pale and moody. She was the one who took least to Aperdui (apart from Tubby), and frequently regretted that she hadn’t taken Rawlings up on his offer. If any of her babies had lived things might have been different. Tom was quiet and thoughtful these days. He was the one who did all the figuring.

Tom had always imagined, and so had Johnny for that matter, that in a closed group the natural, inevitable leader would be the most intelligent of them, the one who did the thinking and figuring. It didn’t work out that way. Both he and Johnny, not to mention the other four, acknowledged it.

From the beginning Johnny had taken the decisions. The farm had been called Kayhorn half jokingly at first, but it was soon accepted that Johnny was the boss. Bill Perkins had the experience; Tom Camm had the brains; and Johnny was the boss.

It wasn’t until the fifth anniversary of their arrival at Kayhorn— which also, by a strange coincidence, was the fifth anniversary of the three unlegalized marriages—that Sandra said to Johnny, in a tone of surprise: “You know, Johnny—we’re happy here.”

He grinned. “You and I—and Junior and Mary and Kit and Frances. We’re happy.”

“And the others too, surely?”

“The kids, yes. Bill, yes. And one of these days Kate will admit that she’s getting used to the place. But Tom and Joan . . .”

“Sure, they keep saying this is a hell of a place and they’d give anything to get back to Earth. But people don’t always mean what they say.”

Johnny didn’t argue. He rarely did, and never with Sandra. That didn’t mean, however, that he agreed about Tom and Joan.

IV

The sixth year was the Year of the Tractors. At last the equation balanced. It became worth while making tractors on Aperdui.

Johnny managed not only to buy a tractor but also to put some money into the tractor business.

It was strange, yet typical,
that Tom had to explain to him how and why the busi-
ness was a good investment, how the profits would be so
small at first that Johnny could get a bigger and bigger
hold on the tractor business—and yet Johnny invested in it
and Tom didn’t.

As happiness had crept up on them, so wealth crept up
on them. Johnny was not yet thirty; Sandra was twenty-
seven. They worked as hard as ever. Yet one day Tom told
Johnny that the total value of their joint undertakings,
excluding Johnny’s tractor stock, was close on a hundred
thousand dollars.

Considering that three trac-
tors cost that much, it didn’t
seem riches beyond the dreams
of avarice. That meant that
each of the adults, not count-
ing the seven children, was
worth about half a tractor.
The achievement had to be in-
terpreted: from debt to sol-
vency to money-in-the-bank.

Seven years after farming
at Kayhorn began, a road was
built through it. And the road
actually led to a town. At the
moment the town consisted of
two farms, a store, a black-
smith’s shop and a hall, and
it was called, with the usual
originality of settlers, New
Chicago.

The next year Tom and
Joan left Kayhorn. They had
the chance of a nearby farm
which had failed through mis-
management, and they took it.

The parting was not acrimo-
nious; Johnny lent Tom the
money he needed. Both farms,
Kayhorn and “the Camm
place,” took on hired men.
There were immigrants from
Earth these days who prefer-
red working for a wage to
starting a farm of their own.
And there were people who
could afford to employ them.

TAXES started in Kay-
horn’s tenth year. Nobody
paid them with any great en-
thusiasm, but it was obvious
that what had been a frontier
world only interested in sur-
vival now needed schools, po-
lice, hospitals and even a gov-
ernment building somewhere.

On Johnny’s thirty-fifth
birthday he realized he was a
millionaire.

Of course, it was all very
theoretical. If he was sudden-
ly told he could go back to
Earth provided he sold out
within a week, he’d probably
not be able to realize much
more than a quarter of a mil-
lion. But that was theoretical
too. If he were told that, he
wouldn’t go.

It delighted him to be able
to make things easier for San-
dra now. At thirty-three, with
five children, she had lost her
twenty-two-inch waistline, but
with her magnificent bust and
hips a twenty-four-inch waist-
line was more appropriate,
anyway. She had worked like
a slave for nearly ten years,
and now freely acknowledged
that it hadn't done her any harm. Nevertheless, Johnny's greatest happiness these days was that when he came home from work, Sandra was waiting for him. In other words, she hadn't been working at his shoulder all day.

It delighted him to be able to add to the amenities of their home. There was the concrete walk all the way to the road, for example. No need to bring mud into the house any more every time you entered. And gradually the wood-and-grass house was becoming stone and tile. Johnny could have built an entirely new house, but he didn't want that and knew Sandra didn't want it either.

There came the day when the first radio programs started. Johnny and Sandra and the children listened with all the eagerness of the first crystal-set pioneers. The children couldn't understand it at all and, when told the radio converted electrical waves back into sound, went outside to see if they could see the waves in the sky.

Still Bill Perkins and Kate were with them. Kate now almost as fat as Tubby used to be. Kate and Sandra, who had never had anything in common in the old days, were coming closer together now. There was beginning to be a babysitting problem again, unknown for years because nobody ever went out for the evening, and Kate and Sandra knew each other's family quite as well as they knew their own. It couldn't be said any more that they had nothing in common. They had their whole lives in common. For the early years back on Earth now seemed as strange and baffling as any dream.

Bill had never changed. He had many chances to leave Kayhorn and take over a farm of his own, as Tom and Joan had done. He never even considered them.

Tom and Joan weren't doing very well. Kayhorn had given them inflated ideas of what could be achieved. They bit off far more than they could chew and, but for continued help from Johnny, the Camm place would have founded.

Once Sandra and Johnny nearly quarreled over the Camms. Johnny's affairs were not quite in their usual prosperous condition, owing to a storm which destroyed nearly a whole crop, when Tom called. Sandra said nothing when Tom was there, but when he departed with all Johnny's spare cash and a note addressed to the bank in New Chicago, Sandra found herself hotly pointing out that he'd said Junior's new bicycle would have to wait meantime, and now he'd given Tom Camm the price of thirty new bicycles — given — because
he'd certainly never see his money again.

"I know, Sandra," said Johnny. "Better not tell Junior. He might not understand."

"Well, I don't understand either. That storm cost you thousands, but you can stand it because you're prepared for such things. Tom can't stand it because he isn't. You know he'll never pay you back. How much more are you going to give him?"

"As much as he needs," said Johnny quietly.

And as Sandra drew a deep breath to tell him what she thought of such unrealistic altruism — for Sandra was still a realist — he added quietly: "It's not just friendship, honey. There's such a thing as gratitude."

"Gratitude?" said Sandra blankly.

"Kayhorn owes a lot to Tom Camm. More than you'll ever believe. Sure, I made the decisions, and they were right decisions, most of them. Sure, without Bill we'd have been nowhere. But it was Tom who saw the way every time, who knew what was going to happen if we did this, and what would probably happen if we did that."

"Then why can't he make anything of his own farm?"

Johnny shrugged. "Tom's the kind of fellow who can't make even the decisions he knows must be made. And another thing. Joan. When Joan griped it didn't have the slightest effect on me. Tom could tell me what ought to be done, and what Joan thought about it didn't matter a damn to me. But it's got to matter to Tom. Think how different things were for Tom and me, honey. I have you. Tom has Joan."

There was a long silence. Then Sandra said: "Hell, why don't you hit me or something instead of making me feel a heel? It would be over quicker."

He caught her arm and pulled her down with him, laughing. "Honey, after all these years do I still have to keep telling you? I love you."

"Yes," she said. "You still have to keep telling me."

IN Kayhorn's twenty-first year immigration from Earth stopped. At least, transportation did. There were still a few volunteer immigrants, enough to supplement the news of Earth which the supply ships brought, not enough to affect the general situation one way or the other.

Aperdui still had a smaller population than Earth had had when the Pilgrim Fathers landed at Plymouth Rock. But at last Aperdui had enough.

The last transported colonists were in their twenties, thirties, and forties. The earliest colonists were in their thirties, forties, fifties, and th
sixties. And the oldest members of the second generation, the first natives of Aperdui, were as old as the youngest immigrants.

On Johnny and Sandra's silver anniversary, Sandra found her first gray hair.

She frowned at it, twitched it out, and in sudden alarm slipped straps from her shoulders and looked at herself in the full-length mirror. What she saw reassured her.

Still, with all her children married she was hardly a girl any more. Married . . . she suddenly realized that although her children were actually married, legally married, she and Johnny had never gotten around to it. Might be as well, one of these days. It might get to be a slur in little Johnny's later life that his grandparents had never been married.

Tom and Joan came to the party, naturally, but both Johnny and Sandra, not to mention Bill and Kate, were surprised to find them happy for the first time in years. Johnny was even more surprised when Tom took him aside and paid him back every last cent he owed him.

“I didn’t hear that the bank had been robbed,” Johnny said.

Tom grinned. “I won’t tell you about it now. You’ll hear soon enough.”

And they did, two days later. Tom had been offered an important government job and had sold the farm on better terms than he could have hoped. Land which had been anybody's for the taking twenty-five years ago was beginning to be quite valuable.

Tom and Joan were going back to Earth.

“No wonder Joan was pleased,” Sandra said, when they heard about this. “I wonder if they’ll be happy now?”

Johnny kissed her on the tip of her nose. “I lent Tom a lot,” he said, “but I could never lend him happiness.”

“Johnny,” said Sandra. “I’ve been thinking. Will you marry me?”

AFTERWARDS, Tom delivered a little sermon, always the same.

“I know you think you’ve had a raw deal,” he said, surveying the eight young men and women in front of him, “but you’ve got to realize that one way or another Earth has to get rid of at least fifteen million people every year. Would you rather have been shot or gassed?”

Nobody answered.

“Thirty years ago,” Tom said, “I was in exactly the same position as all of you. I’d done exactly the same as you. Jones. But now, thirty years later —”

“I know,” sneered the chemist. “You envy us. You wish

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27
you were in our shoes. So do we."

"Isn't there any chance, Mr. Camm," said the school-teacher, "of getting transferred to Aperdui instead of Thornton?"

"I'm afraid not. Aperdui is fully self-supporting now. It's off the list of Transportation worlds. It isn't a pioneer world any more. Of course, there's still plenty to be done there . . . ."

He sighed. Joan had been desperate to come back.

But on Earth you lived in a tiny room four levels down from the sky. If you went for a walk in the open air, it was on rooftops. The food was meager and always the same. The air was clean and odorless and antiseptic. Even if you had no claustrophobic tendencies, you were oppressed by the knowledge that there were people eating, sleeping, talking, making love, quarreling and dying within ten feet of you, north, south, east and west, above and below. And beyond them, in all six directions, more people, and beyond them . . .

The tragedy was that the eight bitter young people in front of him were such slaves to the little luxuries of life on Earth that they thought they were being condemned to a living death instead of being granted the boon of freedom, of open space, of discovery. And the frustration of his own position was that he never succeeded in communicating to them the sincerity of his own longing to get out of the sardine-can which was Earth. Even Joan wanted to get back to Aperdui. But he still had three years of his contract to fulfill.

"Thornton is a grand world," he began.

"Look, do we have to hear you talk?" the busted cop demanded. "Send us straight to the spaceport and get it over."

When they had gone, Tom stared gloomily at the papers in front of him. For sheer frustration, this job took some beating. God, how he wished he was back on Aperdui! Johnny would help him to get started again, he knew.

He brightened a little. At least there was the bubble dancer. When she had kissed him to seal the bargain he had suddenly felt thirty years younger, as if he were just setting out for Aperdui again.

And he didn't have to feel he was selling out the colonies by holding her back. A girl like that would be sure to land in trouble again within six months. The reflection salved his conscience.

His conscience didn't bother him because he was cheating the other eight, the eight who were going to Thornton. It bothered him because he was cheating the girl by keeping her here on Earth.

End

J. T. McIntosh
“Somehow I’d always thought of them as being small and green.”

“Men, the army promised you you’d see the world, and you will every ninety minutes.”