



Sharon clawed and scratched wildly, but to no effect as she was born helplessly on the broad shoulder of her captor.

THE OUTCAST

by S. M. TENNESHAW

Hell broke loose in the Venusian Jungle when Jack Bradley found out he wasn't really an outcast — and set out to get his revenge!

HIS MACHETE strokes had weakened to the point where they were little more than futile swipes at the heavy Venusian foliage. His arms, working ceaselessly for days, seemed to hang from his shoulders like leaden weights. And his mind echoed the green, buzzing confusion of the jungle around him.

Two days. Two days that seemed like two years. Hack, and stumble. Hack, and stumble through the opening his machete had cleared. And always ahead there was the seemingly impenetrable wall of the jungle, pressing down upon him with its heat, a buzzing enemy of insects adding to his misery.

Wearily he slashed again and stumbled on. Somewhere ahead, he knew, lay Tellus Spaceport. Somewhere a hundred miles away beyond the mountain range he glimpsed at rare intervals at the horizon's end. He slashed his way toward that goal. For he knew his only chance lay in reaching it alive.

A rotting log jutted in his path and he sank

down upon it wearily, wiping the sweat from his forehead. Almost mechanically his mind turned back to what he left behind there in the jungle. And the thought was not a pleasant one.

For years Earthmen had been attempting to colonize Venus and stretch forth the frontiers of Tellus beyond the Moon. And he knew they had succeeded to a degree. But every step gained had been won with an equal amount of blood. For the savages who inhabited Venus did not like the idea of Earthmen taking over the planet. But Earthmen doggedly fought on.

He thought of the colony he left behind him. And of the subsequent events that had happened almost too fast for him to grasp.

Old Borden Farnsworth had struck a rich vein a month ago. And the Farnsworth colony boomed. Ore trains were bringing in record hauls of platinum. And the old man had been a wreath of smiles.

"Bradley," he had said one morning after Jack

Bradley brought in the weekly ore train, "I've looked forward to this day for over fifty years. Used to be a time when every colony had to fight to bring the ore trains in. But it begins to look like the Venusians are finally learning they can't stop us."

But a few days later the old man had changed his tune. Men were disappearing. And when they were found, there wasn't much left to recognize them. The answer was all too clear. The Venusians had attacked again. But even that wasn't the worst.

Bradley's ore train had been massacred. The Venusians had been drunk and armed with automatic rifles. Bradley's men hadn't a chance. It had been a miracle that he and a few scattered colonized native supply carriers had escaped with their lives. The old man had fairly flown into a rage.

"I might have known it!" he exploded. "Somebody's deliberately running guns and liquor to these savages! Some dirty outcast Earthman! If I ever lay my hands on him!"

SUSPICION fell for awhile on Jason Brail and his colony fifty miles west. But Brail was in no position to know the Farnsworth ore train schedule, so he had to be ruled out.

Things kept getting worse. Every ore train Jack Bradley led was attacked. And blood ran free. The old man was nearing apoplexy.

And then one day things reached a climax.

Bradley had just reported the loss of his latest train to armed drunken savages, when Mandel Craig, assistant engineer to old Farnsworth, and a group of others strode into the old man's office.

Craig walked up to Bradley.

"Lost another train, eh, Bradley?"

Jack Bradley nodded wearily but noticed the strange gleam in Craig's eyes. Craig turned to the old man.

"For about a month now we've been losing men and shipments to armed savages. And in that time I've learned a few things." His eyes played on the tense features of Jack Bradley. The old man was leaning forward, listening. Craig continued.

"It seems mighty peculiar that the only ore trains to get attacked are those led by Bradley—"

"What the hell are you driving at!" Bradley demanded, his face growing angrily perplexed.

"Just this," replied Craig. "It seemed strange to me that you should always come back from these attacks when most of the others didn't. And two

nights ago I learned something to make my suspicions right." He paused and gazed over at Bradley, a hard smile pulling at the corners of his mouth. Then:

"Two nights ago I saw Bradley here steal out of the stockade and meet a group of Venusians. He was probably telling them of the ore shipment he was leading back in a day. Luckily these others," he motioned to the silent group of men standing behind him, "saw Bradley, too. It seems pretty obvious now who's been selling us out!"

Bradley leaped forward.

"That's a lie!" he roared, and dove at Craig, his eyes flaming. But the others stepped in and held him back. Then the old man stepped forward. His eyes had grown hard.

"Is this true?" he demanded. "Did you see Bradley do that?"

They nodded affirmation. Farnsworth turned to Bradley.

"I never thought you'd do such a thing! But I've been wrong before."

"I tell you it's a lie! I never left my quarters that night!"

"You're forgetting, Bradley," Craig cut in, "that you were seen. You can't lie out of that!"

Old man Farnsworth faced Bradley.

"All along something told me that this was an inside job. But I didn't want to believe it. This only confirms my suspicions. If I had more proof of your damned outcast dealings with those savages I'd run you back to Tellus Spaceport myself for trial. But as it is I want you to clear out of here and if you ever show your face around this country again you'll be shot on sight! And I'll see to it that the word's spread along the line. You'll find out that gun-running outcasts aren't wanted on Venus!"

NOW AS Jack Bradley sat on the rotting log, brushing a swarm of noisome insects from his face, these thoughts made his mind numb. It had been a rotten frame-up, and he had had no way of proving it. But what was the reason behind it? Why had those men vowed they'd seen him talking to Venusians?

Angrily he swiped at the buzzing horde of insects that swarmed about him. It seemed to him the buzzing was getting louder every second.

Then suddenly he jumped to his feet. The buzzing was getting louder. But it wasn't the buzzing of insects. It was a heavy sputtering drone

coming closer. Bradley strained his ears. The staccato drone grew louder. Then he recognized it; it was the sound of a rocket plane approaching!

Bradley searched the cloudy sky through a cleft in the jungle foliage and then he saw it. It was a small Hartford V47 rocket, and it was in trouble. Its blasts were silencing. He could see the ship knife toward the ground.

Bradley tensed, bracing himself for the crash. The jungle shook with it, and then silence.

He gripped his machete and slashed hurriedly forward toward the wreck.

Sweat was pouring down his face when he reached the small clearing in which the rocket had crashed. As he ran forward he saw someone stir amid the wreckage.

It was the figure of a girl.

Consternation twisted Bradley's face as he pulled her from the ship. He poured out a cup of water from his canteen and held it to her lips. A small cut trickled blood down her temple and dyed the copper hair around it red. The water brought her around presently and she stared dazedly up at him.

He propped her up against the smashed hull of the rocket.

"Feel better now?" he asked.

The girl passed a hand feebly over her forehead and mechanically began to replace a number of coppery tresses that had become undone in the crash.

"Much better, thanks. I couldn't do a thing when those rockets quit!"

She got to her feet and surveyed the wreckage. "Not much left of it, is there?"

"It'll never fly again, if that's what you mean," he said.

Suddenly, as the situation began to register upon her, she stared about wildly.

"How far am I from Tellus Spaceport?"

Bradley thoughtfully replaced the cap on his canteen.

"About a hundred miles, in the middle of nowhere."

"Is it that bad?" she asked apprehensively.

"Well, not quite. There's a colony about twenty miles from here: they get back to civilization pretty often."

"You mean the Farnsworth colony?" the girl asked excitedly.

"Yes," Bradley answered. "How did you know? You don't seem like a person who's been on Venus

very long."

"I haven't. But that's where I was heading. You see, I'm Sharon Farnsworth."

Bradley started, nearly dropping the canteen. But the girl didn't seem to notice. She continued:

"I've always wanted to see what a colony is like, and when we received word on Earth a few days ago that something was wrong up here, well, I hopped the first liner to Tellus Spaceport. There I chartered this ship"—she gazed at the twisted remains of the rocket plane—"and here I am. It's a good thing I carry heavy personal insurance!"

She paused, noting the strange look on Bradley's face. "Is there anything wrong?"

Bradley forced a smile. "No, I can't say that there is." Then he added: "Right now."

The girl looked frowningly at him. "By the way, you haven't told me who you are!"

"Haven't I?" Bradley studied his hands, his face hardening. "The name's Bradley. John Bradley."

Her eyes were uncomprehending.

"I said, the name's *Bradley*."

"I heard you the first time," she answered.

BRADLEY WAS at a loss for what to do or say. He had expected anything to happen when he told her his name. That is, anything but *this*. Could it be she didn't know?

"Did that message you received on Earth say what had happened up here?" he asked, pulling a cigarette from his pocket and lighting it.

The girl frowned. "No, it didn't. Do you know what it's all about?"

Bradley pulled in thoughtfully on his cigarette. She had to find out sometime anyway. . . .

"I suppose I know as much as anyone," he said.

The girl waited expectantly Bradley leaned against the smashed metal hull of the rocket plane and flicking away his cigarette, told her in blunt words.

Amazement spread over the girl's face as Bradley unfolded the events leading up to their meeting in the jungle. And when he finished she remained silent for a few minutes. Then:

"You didn't do it—did you?"

"What difference does it make," Bradley snorted. "I'm branded an outcast, and as far as Venus is concerned, damned!"

"But there must be some way you can prove . . ."

"The only way I can prove anything is to get the real person behind this."

The girl looked steadily into his eyes. "Well?" she said.

"Well what!"

"Well, why are you running away? You won't find the person behind this in Tellus Spaceport!"

Bradley didn't answer. He couldn't. He felt the girl's steady gaze burn his face and his jaw hardened.

"I wasn't running away," he said slowly. "Although it might look like it. But I've got just enough supplies to reach Tellus Spaceport."

The girl brightened.

"If that's all you need, I can help. My rocket plane carried a full regulation supply of tablets."

It began to dawn on Bradley that the girl was urging him to return to the Farnsworth colony. And with the realization he suddenly knew something else. She believed him!

He moved away from the ship.

"Would you be willing to help me get to the bottom of this?" he asked. "Being on the inside, you could keep an eye on things and let me know."

"Of course I will," she answered. Then a frown creased her forehead. "But how could I get in touch with you? If you are seen, Dad may carry out his threat."

Bradley rubbed his jaw thoughtfully.

"During the day I'm going to watch the Venusian camps for anything funny, but at night I could get pretty close to the stockade unseen, and if you want me you can flash a light from the west wall and sneak out through the side entrance."

"Good!" she answered. "And if anybody on the inside is responsible, I'll find out!"

Bradley smiled and turned to the wrecked ship. "I'll need those supplies you spoke of," he said, rummaging in the crushed confines of the after compartment. Finally he drew out a small metal box. The girl meanwhile stood gazing around at the borders of the dense Venusian jungle.

"It certainly is beautiful from a scenic viewpoint," she said.

Bradley lifted his head and stared about him.

"What's so beautiful about it?"

The girl pointed. "All those white flowers. What are they? They look something like the Earth poppy, only these are much larger."

Bradley nodded. "They're practically the same thing. Venus is overrun with them. But when you have to cut your way through miles of them they sort of lose their novelty."

She smiled and gathered up her things from the ground where he had put them along with the supply case.

"I suppose we had better get started."

Bradley nodded and drew his machete from his belt. Somehow the thought of cutting his way through miles of jungle didn't seem half as difficult now as it had a few hours before.

HE LAY tense in the hedges that bordered the jungle around the Farnsworth colony stockade. The night was phosphorescently lit by radioactive deposits in the mountain ranges to the north. By the diffused light he watched the close proximity of the colony. Three days had passed since he left Sharon Farnsworth. And in those three days he had found out many things. Foremost was the startling fact that the Venusians were being banded together for some mysterious purpose. Bradley had seen five hundred natives gathered in a single camp, and they were all armed with the latest automatic rifles.

And for three nights he had waited around the Farnsworth colony for the single flash signal from Sharon Farnsworth. But each night had passed without result.

Bradley shifted his position and for the hundredth time gazed across at the west wall of the stockade.

A ray of light suddenly sprang into being, followed by two more quick flashes. Bradley frowned amid his excitement. Why the three flashes?

And then he tensed. There was movement in the hedges to his right! Dimly he caught sight of a group of Venusians stealing toward the outer fringes at the west wall.

And then he saw something else. A figure dropped from the east wall and began to circle into the bushes toward the west! But it was a figure that made Bradley's blood chill. *That figure was dressed exactly like him!*

He suddenly knew why the guards had sworn they saw him! Whoever was behind this was taking no chances. If there was to be any slipup the blame would fall on the outcast!

The figure disappeared into the bushes and a few minutes later reappeared opposite the west wall. Behind him the group of waiting Venusians stole out from their cover and moved in close to the Earthman. And then Bradley caught a glance at the

face of the imposter.

It was Mandel Craig!

His heart pounding, Bradley watched. The figures did nothing but stay out in the open. And suddenly it became apparent to Bradley that *they wanted to be seen from the stockade!*

Almost as the thought formed in his mind a shout went up from the stockade. They had been seen. And anyone who was watching would think Bradley himself was outside with a group of Venusians!

As the shout went up, Craig and the Venusians faded back into the jungle. Bradley watched them circle stealthily to the east and settle into the hedges around the east wall.

Bradley sunk lower into his retreat as a group of men stormed from the main entrance of the stockade, led by old man Farnsworth. Guns glistened in the radioactive night. Bradley dimly heard the old man's curses as he led his men into the bushes where Craig and the Venusians had been seen.

Bradley cursed softly to himself. Things were playing right into Craig's plans, whatever they were.

He half lifted himself from his hiding place to call out to the fading figures of Farnsworth and his men. But he fell back startled.

Someone else was stealing out of the stockade!

He strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of whoever it was and then his breath left his lungs in a puzzled sigh.

It was the girl—Sharon Farnsworth!

Unconsciously she was walking right into a trap. Bradley saw Craig turn suddenly and spot the girl. He heard a hoarse curse rip from his throat as he dove at her. The girl jumped backward and threw her hand to her mouth as if she were about to scream, but she was too late. Craig caught her and stifled the sound before it was born. Then Bradley acted.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw the Venusians stealing into the open gates of the stockade as he leapt forward. Dimly too he sensed movement behind him even as he sprang. But he didn't have time to turn. Something had crashed against the base of his brain and the world seemed to explode about him. . . .

HE CAME to with the sensation of rolling against the waves of a tumultuous sea. He

groaned slightly as his head cleared.

He was cradled on the shoulder of a huge Venusian. His hands hung down before him lashed at the wrists and his shirt sleeves hung open where the clasps had torn.

Bradley glanced quickly about him. The Venusian who carried him was bringing up the rear. Up front Craig was prodding forward a group of men with bound arms. Bradley barely suppressed a curse as he recognized the group Farnsworth had led into the jungle in search of Bradley and the Venusians! And beside them walked the girl.

And then Bradley saw something else. There was a dull gleam at the Venusian's waist beneath him. It was a short knife!

Slowly he eased the knife from its scabbard and turned the point upward, sliding it up into his sleeve. With one fist closed on the hilt it would remain unseen.

Minutes later they came to the Venusian camp. Bradley was prepared for what he saw.

Nearly five hundred Venusians were massed around blazing fires. Off to one side were stacked tiers of automatic rifles, and Bradley gasped as he saw a group of Venusians from the kidnapping party go over to the guns and dump nearly fifty additional weapons on the pile. His heart sank as he realized these were the guns of the colony. Craig must have sent the natives in to steal them.

On the other side of the clearing were stacked the plundered remains of the Farnsworth ore trains. He recognized the ore crates and the small hydraulic ore presses. Next to these stood great open casks of liquor.

But the sight of this wasn't what brought a gasp to Bradley's lips. It was the sight of a short, thick-set man standing on the far side of the camp.

It was Jason Brail!

And Brail smiled cruelly as the party brought up.

"The whole family—outcast and all!"

Borden Farnsworth's face was livid as he faced Brail.

"So it was you who planned all this! You—"

"That seems quite obvious," Brail cut in dryly. Then he motioned to Mandel Craig who stood off to one side smiling, still dressed as Bradley. "See that our guests are taken care of."

Bradley's jaw hardened. "What do you think you're going to do?"

"I don't think," Brail replied. "I know. There ain't room in this country for two colonies. From now on there'll be only one. Especially since the main vein of platinum seems to run directly into the Farnsworth outfit. By dawn the rest of the colony will be taken care of, and then—I'll attend to the rest of you."

The girl shook her head angrily.

"The least you could have done was to leave them their guns! You know they won't have a chance when these savages pour down on them!"

"That is the general idea," Brail agreed.

"And after it's all over," Craig supplied, "the outcast responsible will be handed over to the Tellus Spaceport Council."

Muscles bunched white on Jack Bradley's jaw and he almost drew the knife from his sleeve. But he caught himself in time. That could come later.

"It's easy to hide behind another man's name!" he said bitterly.

But Craig only continued to smile. And then Brail motioned to two Venusians. Bradley, the girl and old man Farnsworth were trundled into a low rambling hut. Inside, their feet were trussed. Brail and Craig looked in. Craig held a torch.

"You'll be comfortable in here for the time being," Brail smiled down on them.

THEN HE and Craig disappeared from the threshold and a huge Venusian parked in the entrance with his back slightly toward them. A rifle was slumped over one leg.

Beside Bradley, Borden Farnsworth squirmed in the darkness.

"I'm sorry, Bradley, about what's happened. Craig had me fooled. . . ."

"Forget it," Bradley replied. "He had all of us fooled."

Somewhere in the darkness Bradley knew that the girl was crying.

Borden Farnsworth sighed heavily. "If only we could warn the colony—all those men!"

"A lot of good it would do," Bradley gritted. "Even if they were armed with cannon they couldn't stop these savages once they get that liquor out there inside them."

Bradley cursed frustratedly to himself. Dawn was only a few hours away and by that time the Venusians would be raving drunk and Brail and Craig would lead them down on the defenseless colony. Bradley closed the ensuing picture from his

mind. What he foresaw was not pretty. He had seen his ore trains massacred before his eyes by these same savages.

His hands gripped the short keen blade in the dark, his mind speeding quickly over the possibilities. He could cut their bonds and dispose of the guard at the door—but then what? There was no way he could stop hundreds of raving Venusians maddened by drink! Or was there . . . Bradley's mind whipped back to a scene two days previous when he and the girl were standing in the jungle. For Bradley suddenly remembered something. Something that caused his pulse to leap.

He slashed at his bonds with the knife, watching the shadowed figure at the door out of the corner of his eyes as he did so. His wrists parted and he hacked the bonds from his legs. Beside him the girl and old Farnsworth sensed his movements and he heard their quick, indrawn breaths.

Then he slipped the knife beneath their bonds and slashed them. They were free.

"Quiet!" he whispered, and pressed the girl's hand reassuringly. Then he crept silently toward the door where the Venusian guard was intent in watching the preparations going on at the far side of the clearing. Bradley drew his arm back. The Venusian, sensing movement behind him, turned but too late. The cry that welled upon his lips died unborn. For the knife was suddenly buried deep in his throat.

With a rumbling rattle he slumped forward and Bradley felt warm blood flow down over his arm. Hastily he withdrew his knife and propped the dead Venusian up against the door. To any but a close scrutiny it would seem he were still on guard.

He felt the girl and Borden Farnsworth edge up close beside him. He gripped the girl's hand in the dark.

"We've got one chance in a million of getting out of here," he said slowly. "And we've got an even smaller chance of stopping Brail and Craig. I've got a wild idea that's worth a chance. But I've got to chance it alone. You can help best by staying here under cover." He passed the Venusian's rifle to the elder Farnsworth.

Mingling with the dense shadows around the doorway, Bradley stole from the hut. For a moment he surveyed the surrounding gloom. Dimly he made out Brail and Craig distributing guns to the crowded Venusians on the far side of the clearing. The glint of steel shone even in the dull glow of the

radioactive night.

Then Bradley saw what he was looking for. Softly he stole into the shadows and circled the clearing. He came up beside the piled remains of the Farnsworth ore trains. Risking detection, Bradley slunk forward and pulled a small rolled machine into the shadows. Then he faded into the jungle. . . .

BRAIL looked at his watch. "One hour till dawn," he muttered.

Beside him Craig grunted. "Those savages are drunker than I've ever seen them. They've emptied every last cask!"

"So what?" Brail snorted. "Liquor's cheap enough. You better get Grakh. It's about time he rounded up these devils. It'll take an hour to reach Farnsworth's colony. And we can't take a chance on any of them getting away."

Craig nodded and turned into the wildly milling savages. He searched their ranks until he found a towering Venusian, swaying drunkenly on his feet and clutching an automatic rifle in one taloned hand. Craig walked up to him and broke into the harsh Venusian tongue.

"Get your men together, Grakh. We're heading for the colony."

The Venusian stared stupidly at Craig and Craig noticed that the pupils of his eyes were much larger than usual.

"I said," Craig snapped, "get your outfit together, we're marching!"

But Grakh sat down.

Craig broke into a volley of curses. Around him Venusians were falling to the ground, voicing unintelligible phrases to themselves and with glassy stares in their eyes. Craig kicked the huge Venusian before him.

"What the devil's the matter with you?"

But Grakh's eyes stared sleepily up at him and he didn't move. Jason Brail came running up.

"What's happened?"

Craig ran his eyes over the clearing where hundreds of Venusians were slumping to the ground in trance-like stupors.

"I don't know!" he snapped. "There is something funny. . . ."

And then his eyes hardened. Out of the jungle hurtled a figure. It was Jack Bradley, a knife in his hand. Craig stooped and grasped a rifle from the arms of a prone Venusian. But he never fired it.

Bradley's arm flashed back and the knife flew from his fingers. Craig gasped and fell backward, the gun falling from his hands. Spasmodically he clutched at the hilt protruding from his chest. Then he sank forward to the ground, a red froth welling from his lips.

Jason Brail dove on the gun Craig had dropped. But Bradley was upon him as his fingers touched the butt. A smashing fist drove Brail's head back and he fell to his knees. Bradley dove on him and snapped a hard right to his jaw. Brail sagged forward limply.

Behind him, Bradley heard a slight scraping sound. He turned and found himself facing the herd end of an automatic rifle. One of Brail's men had his finger around the trigger. There was a loud crack. But not from the gun facing Bradley. The man slumped forward clutching at his chest. And from behind, Bradley heard old man Farnsworth curse. He and Sharon came running up. The old man's gun was smoking.

BORDEN Farnsworth's face was a wreath of smiles. His hand went out and gripped Jack Bradley's hard. Beside him Sharon Farnsworth's eyes were brightly lit.

Then a frown creased the old man's face.

"I can understand everything that's happened, Bradley, except how you licked these natives. They look like a plague struck them!"

He stared around the camp at the prone figures of the Venusians. Around him the rest of the men from the colony were taking possession of the guns.

"It was a wild hunch," Bradley explained, "but it worked. You see, I remembered that Venus is overrun with those white poppy flowers, similar to the Earth genus. Sharon remarked about them a few days ago and that was what gave me the idea. On Earth the juice of the poppy is used as a drug—opium. When I left the hut I circled the camp and stole one of the hydraulic ore presses and loaded it with those flowers. When the presses got through with it I simply mixed the juice in with the liquor casks while Brail and Craig were still handing out guns. After a few additions, that liquor was a poppy eater's paradise! And when the Venusians got enough of the stuff in them they passed out!"

Borden Farnsworth's face showed him astonishment. Then, as he suddenly turned to the trussed figure of Jason Brail, Farnsworth's voice

cut like a knife.

“I made a mistake—and I admit it. There was an outcast—but it wasn’t Bradley—it was you, Brail! And there won’t be any mistake about that when I get you to Tellus Spaceport. I’m only sorry that you didn’t get a good load of that stuff inside you like the natives did. —But you’ll have as good a

hangover at the end of a rope!”

Bradley let a smile tug at the corners of his mouth as his arm tightened about the girl.

“Speaking of hangovers,” he said, “this is one binge the Venusians around here will never forget!”