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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NO STAR\'S
LAND ***

No star's land

By William Morrison

*When cosmic giants wage war man
becomes a fly-speck in space. But
a single atom can shatter a sun!*

*William Morrison is a past master of
the 'mistake' story. We don't mean to
imply that Mr. Morrison made a
mistake in writing this story—quite
the contrary! The 'mistake' story is
simply a tale that in relentless
documentary fashion shows how
foolish people are to confuse size
with power, or make the error of
underselling the indomitable spirit
of man.*

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It was ridiculous and incredible. It was against all reason. But it had happened. The ship was marooned in free space.

They had been squabbling again, and this time the arguments on both sides had become as hot as the two blazing stars which hemmed them in on both sides, making them feel like dust motes in a vacuum. Karin, her eyes darting sparks, had summed it up neatly.

"It's hopeless, Jan. Only a divorce can solve it!"

"I can't think of anything I want more," Jan said, his face tight with anger. By the light of the green star, which illuminated his features, he must have made, he realized bitterly, a ghastly picture.

Karin regarded him with distaste. "Fine—splendid! The minute we get back to Earth."

"Why wait that long?" Jan protested. "There's a court on Ganymede. We can get one there."

He was bitterly contemplating the ruin of his honeymoon when he noticed that the ship had lost headway. The differential screen, which depicted the change in the star picture from second to second, was barely illuminated. They were practically stationary with respect to every star in the local galaxy.

In view of the fact that they had been traveling at one-half light speed, and that neither the green nor the yellow star was more than thirty-five million miles away, the result seemed to Jan outrageous. The positions of both stars should have been changing rapidly. His first thought was that the differential screen was no longer working.

Both stars, however, were stationary on the direct view screen as well, glowing with unsurpassed steadiness, and filling the space around them with a flood of radiance. The direct view screen was plainly operating properly. Somehow, the unwilling conclusion forced itself upon him that they had been braked to a stop.

Karin noticed his agitation and demanded, "What's wrong?" And then she stared herself, realizing what had happened. Her lips trembled and she gave a startled exclamation: "But that's impossible!"

"Of course it's impossible," he agreed, the green and yellow beams cascading over his face as he crossed to the other side of the ship. "Not only that we should have decelerated so rapidly, but that we failed to notice what was happening. I remember that it was just a half-hour ago that I checked the screens, and you made that brilliant remark about my ability as a navigator."

His tone made clear all over again how much he had resented her criticism. "We were going full speed, over ninety thousand miles a second on initial drive alone. Thirty minutes later, our velocity is reduced to zero."

The differential screen, he noted, was now completely dark. "We've been subjected on an average to a negative acceleration of fifty miles per second," he went on quickly. "More than seven thousand gravs! It should have torn both us, and the ship apart. But the ship shows no strain, and we haven't felt a thing."

There was a moment's silence. Then Karin said huskily, "Our instruments are all wrong."

"They're not." Jan insisted. "A direct view through the visiplates proves they're not." Karin didn't reply, and he added angrily. "Go ahead and say it again. You're thinking it, anyway. I'm a lousy navigator. I'm the one who insisted on passing *between* the stars."

"I wasn't thinking that at all," she said slowly. "I was wondering. What could have caused this to happen? Offhand, I couldn't even make a reasonable guess. Shall we try using our power?"

"What would be the use?" Jan said. "Even with the degravitizer on to protect us, we can't get up more than one hundred g's. We can't overcome a reverse acceleration of seven thousand."

"Suppose we reverse direction."

Jan nodded, and said, "We'll try that."

Slowly and carefully he swung the ship around, and began to build up speed. The maneuver claimed his full attention, giving him no time to look

at Karin, and wonder whether or not she was frightened.

It was a stupid situation to be caught in, and from beginning to end Jan had no one to blame but himself. It was a few years before that Intergalactic Exploration had started a new practice, thought up apparently by some elderly Romeo in his second childhood. It was a special service for honeymooners.

What did honeymooners, from time immemorial, want for themselves? Privacy, isolation—freedom from intrusion by the outside world. What did Intergalactic have to offer the intrepid volunteers who did its exploration? Just that—complete privacy in space. It was all in the way you looked at it. The isolation most people hated was precisely what the honeymooners sought.

It had seemed like a bright idea to combine a boon to the honeymooners with a favor to Intergalactic. Intergalactic had offered ships—shiny, beautiful ships of the latest exploratory model, capable of a sub-speed of half-light, and for stellar travel with a secondary range up to a hundred light years. Each was completely supplied with food, and furnished with all the gadgets that made shipboard housekeeping a pleasure. And all this was free of charge to properly trained couples possessed of a reasonable mental stability, and a suitably technical background.

There was no salary, of course—after all, the ship itself was reward enough. In return, each couple was given a restricted section of a galaxy to explore. The task was not difficult. Professional explorers could have carried out their assignments in three months. The honeymoon couples were allowed twice that time.

As the man who had suggested the idea observed, their scientific interests were likely to be somewhat impaired for a short period, and they might be expected to waste many hours in non-productive pursuits.

If they hadn't been so much in love with each other, Jan and Karin wouldn't have been such fools as to take on a double assignment. They had accepted a sector of twice the usual size, and they had explored it well, but in leisurely fashion. A year had passed, and in that year they had learned to know each other *too* well.

It was too long to be together, isolated from the rest of the human race. Even for honeymooners, far too long. Jan was aware of every one of Karin's weaknesses—and he realized only too well that she was aware of his.

They had, moreover, developed new weaknesses they had never before exhibited. Stubbornness, impatience, a tendency to find incessant fault—these were the beginning of a process of falling out of love.

In Karin's eyes, he knew he was no longer the tall self-reliant man in whose slightly ugly face she had found the good looks that appealed to her. And to Jan, Karin was no longer the warm-hearted pretty girl who, he had been so pleasantly surprised to learn, was so ready to understand him.

During the past month they had become bored with each other. During the past week they had been in an almost continuous state of open hostility.

It was the desire to keep their trip from dragging out even more intolerably that had induced Jan to take a short cut. The most direct path home lay between the yellow and green stars, bright twins which were separated from each other by a distance of forty million miles.

Each star was of the same approximate sun-mass, and the radiation was strong. But their radiation shield was effective. Their possible acceleration, along with the momentum they had already acquired, should have been sufficient to keep them from falling victim to either star.

All that was needed was a steady hand at the controls. With careful navigation they should have been able to pass midway between the two massive bodies without suffering any ill effects.

Karin, whether from caution or from a mere feeling of opposition to everything that Jan suggested, had vigorously opposed the idea. She preferred to swing wide of both stars, even though it meant a serious time loss—not so much because of the added mileage, but because of the need for transverse acceleration, followed by careful maneuvering to get back to their course again. But her opposition hadn't been quite vigorous enough, and Jan had succeeded in winning her over.

They had never expected what happened next. Their path had neatly bisected the line joining the two stars, and they had begun to put both glowing masses behind them. Unexpectedly, as if they had reached the end of a great rubber band to which they had been attached, they had stopped

dead in space. The rubber had stretched as much as it was ever going to stretch.

Then, as Jan reversed direction, it seemed as if the band were contracting once more. They picked up speed, and the differential screen glowed green and yellow while their position with respect to the twin stars underwent a change. But the glow quickly dimmed and vanished. Once more they had come to a full stop.

"Road blocked at both ends," said Jan, with grim finality.

"Suppose we cut off at right angles," suggested Karin.

"Naturally," he agreed. "We can't afford to miss a bet."

But the road was blocked above and below as well. Jan said, "I'm afraid, darling, that our divorce is going to be held up."

"Indefinitely."

She looked a little pale and frightened. Even the ghastly lighting could not conceal the beauty in her face, and at that moment he loved her again. He said, "Go ahead and say it. Tell me I should have listened to you. It's true, you know."

"I'm not reproaching you, Jan," she said quietly. "Don't joke about it. It's too serious."

"We're unharmed. We should be thankful for that, I guess."

"How long will we be safe? We can't move."

"Strictly speaking," he said, "we can. We can't get away, but we can wriggle around a bit. Apparently we can travel a few million miles in any direction perpendicular to the line joining the stars. We could probably also travel directly toward either star, although I'd hate to get any closer to them. Unfortunately, the stars won't *let* us get away."

"Are you sure it's the stars? There might be planets with intelligent living creatures on them."

"That's out!" said Jan firmly. "Take a look at some of the three-dimensional views I snapped, both as we approached, and as we were wriggling around."

Taking all the pictures into consideration, I must have covered all the space for at least a billion miles from either star. There are no planets."

Together they stared at the photographs. Karin suggested: "There might be small ones, little bigger than asteroids. Let's put the pictures under the analyzer."

They did. The analyzer showed an asteroid belt four hundred million miles out from the center of the double star system. But none of the asteroids was apparently more than five miles in diameter.

"No planets," Jan reiterated. "And if there are any living creatures on those asteroids, I doubt whether they'd be close enough to affect us. It's pretty obvious that the forces holding us together come from the stars themselves."

"Then you think the forces are natural? I've never heard of anything of the kind before."

"The forces would *have* to be natural."

"How about living things on the stars themselves?" asked Karin.

"I don't believe it. Not for a moment. I know there's been talk about flame creatures living at temperatures of millions of degrees centigrade. But nobody has ever met them."

"Jan, what do we do?"

"You tell me. We have an excellent radiation shield system. But we can't keep it going indefinitely. And sooner or later, our food concentrates will run out."

"So we're stuck here. Hopelessly marooned."

"Right. Too bad we're so bored with each other."

Karin said nothing, and once more Jan turned to the controls, hoping against hope. But no matter in which direction he made his attempt, the ship was quickly brought up short. The rubber band had not weakened.

The hours passed, while the two stars continued to blaze at them, watchful and unwinking. Jan adjusted the radiation controls, permitting some of the heat that escaped direct reflection from the polished sides to get past the shielding screen, and warm the ship.

On the whole, as it took some of the load from the screen and lengthened the system's useful life, it was a wise move. But it did make the ship uncomfortable. Karin, he noted, was bearing up well. There were no complaints from her, and it was she who suggested that they put themselves on emergency rations.

It was at the end of thirty hours of their strange imprisonment that they began to be aware of dangers other than those from radiation and hunger. Both the green star and the yellow, as Jan had observed, possessed fairly small coronas. Quite unexpectedly, the green star flared up, and tongues of garish flame licked out for a distance of several million miles. Its action set off a silent uproar in space.

The yellow star answered with flame of its own, and Jan was forced to get into the act, and turn on his radiation shields at full capacity. A half-hour later, both coronas subsided to normal, and he cut down his shield capacity once more.

"It's damnably disturbing," said Jan. "If only natural forces are involved, why should one star reply to the other in such deliberate fashion?"

"Perhaps the green star set the other one off, like a neutron from an exploding atom setting off the next atom," Karin suggested.

"Or perhaps there are living creatures on them," Jan muttered.

Karin said, "It's beginning to seem possible. And I'm afraid that if we stay here long enough, we'll find out."

"I'm afraid so too," Jan conceded. "We both wanted living companions—but not unknown shapes of fire."

Seventeen hours after the end of the corona explosions, they noticed activity on the yellow star. What took place resembled the formation of sunspots, but the eruptions were like none they had ever seen. As they grew, they darkened, and began to rotate with increasing speed, so that soon the

surface of the yellow star was covered with black, whirling specks. The specks drew together, and then shot out abruptly toward the green star.

Once more Jan acted. As the black objects raced toward him, he sent the ship full speed ahead to get out of their way, and as he did so the now elongated spheres of spinning blackness sailed straight past the ports. They were in the vacuum of space, but even so Jan noted that the ship rocked as if battered by the waves of an ocean.

From the green star came answering black objects, which grew like sinister soap bubbles. The bubbles caught the attacking spheres, and wherever defenders and attackers made contact, a blinding flash of light was followed by a quick burst of high-energy radiation.

"Rule out natural forces," said Jan decisively.

Karin nodded. "Each star is either alive, or has living things on it. They're fighting a war." She repeated the word. "A *war*. It seems incredible—terrifying."

"I'm afraid you've forgotten our own past. Haven't you studied your history? We had wars once too."

"But so long ago, Jan! It seems impossible to believe that half the human race ever tried to destroy the other half."

"Well, they didn't succeed. There's no use moralizing. Now, at least, we have something pretty definite to go on. When the creatures of one star launched a force field, those of the other star defended themselves with a force field of their own. Directly between the stars, the fields balance pretty well, permitting us to move. But toward the rim of the region where they collide, the forces work in the same direction, and keep us from breaking free."

"Now that we know that—what can we do?"

"Nothing, I'm afraid," admitted Jan. "Neither star will relax its field for fear of falling victim to the other. That leaves us in the middle, exactly as before."

He said thoughtfully, "Karin, did I ever tell you of that ancient history book I once saw? It actually depicted our barbaric ancestors on a battlefield? There were long rows of trenches on either side, apparently as a protection

from the primitive missiles they were capable of launching. And sitting on the blackened limb of a tree that had been shot almost to bits, in what was called 'No Man's Land', sat a bird.

"Well, we're that bird, Karin—on a battlefield we never made. We're right in the middle, in no star's land. And sooner or later, some of the weapons being used are going to finish us off, precisely as one of those ancient shells was sure eventually to destroy the bird."

"I didn't realize I had married a philosopher," said Karin sharply. "If the bird had any brains, it would have flown away. And if we have any brains, we'd find a way to move the ship."

"We seem to lack the necessary mental equipment," said Jan tartly. "What would you suggest?"

"That we go over the entire ship, make an inventory of all our instruments, and resources, and see if we can use them to get us out of here. Once we're headed for home we can philosophize as much as we please."

"You're right, of course," said Jan. "I don't see what we can possibly do on an effective scale. But, let's go!"

They put on a great show of activity, cataloguing the different varieties of storage products, instruments, and fuel. The list, Jan pointed out, was not impressive.

"We could, if we had the proper equipment, convert all our atomic fuel into a bomb," he said. "What effect that would have on a star that can radiate a billion times as much energy as we could throw at it, I don't know. I do know that it would leave us without fuel."

"And the creatures themselves—if there are any. How about them? Would they be destroyed?"

"They're used to tremendous gravity, incredible pressures and temperatures way up in the millions," Jan said. "Maybe the only way to harm them would be to *lower* those high values. That overgrown corona we saw might have been a pressure reducer. The black things were probably heat absorbers."

"Our radiation shield—" suggested Karin eagerly.

"Something like that *might* do the trick—if it were a trillion times as large. It would absorb the energy they need and scatter it as low frequency radiation. But a small shield system like this one wouldn't amount to more than a single drop of water thrown on a fire. We're too small, Karin. On this battlefield, we're *out-classed*."

"Then all we can do is wait to be picked off?"

"I'm sorry, Karin. If I have to go, this isn't the way I'd like it to end. I dreamed of sacrificing my life for you, so that you'd always remember me as a man of courage and integrity. As it is—" he shrugged.

"Don't be silly," said Karin, moved in spite of herself. "I have no desire to outlive you."

They were reduced to waiting again. Jan wondered whether, in all the time they had hovered between the opposing battle lines, the star-dwellers had been conscious of their existence. Even whether they had spared the time to note the bird so hopelessly trapped on their battlefield. Each side, if it was alert to its enemy's moves, must have recorded the ship's presence, and possibly speculated on what it was doing in this section of space.

When the surface of the green star began to heave, Jan returned to his controls again, ready to maneuver out of the way of whatever weapon might be used. But this time, apparently, the change on the green star presaged no attack. A section of the surface moved slowly out, and then broke up into wriggling fragments that exhibited a peculiar order. Curiously, the figures reminded him of some of the primitive alphabets of early human civilization.

"Sky writing!" exclaimed Karin.

"Space writing," he corrected. "Intended for us, or for the enemy?"

"Not for us. They must realize that we can't read it."

"That's right. But if it's for them—it may be a suggestion for a truce!"

"Whatever it is, the yellow star's not answering," said Karin anxiously.

"Give them time, Karin. They have to make up their minds."

An hour later, the light from the yellow star died slowly away, and its size shrank. Then the star blazed up again, and expanded to twice its previous

diameter.

As the yellow star swept through the phases of its powerful pulsation, Jan felt as if every bone and muscle of his body was in the grip of a giant hand, being twisted and wrenched without mercy. Karin's body stiffened, and he heard her cry out. The next moment, her body crumpled, and she sagged to the deck in a dead faint.

Jan started to crawl toward her, felt the giant hand close on his own brain, and blacked out.

When Jan awoke again, both stars seemed normal once more, blazing as steadily as when he had first seen them. Karin was awake too—sitting up with her hands pressed to her temples.

"Truce rejected," Jan said bitterly. "They don't care what happens to the bird on the battlefield, apparently."

"Perhaps we should edge closer to the one that wanted the truce," Karin whispered shakily.

Jan shook his head. "Let's not give either side the idea that we have any sympathies at all. Taking sides in a fight too big for us is a sure way to commit suicide."

His lips tightened. "We'd better get as far away as we can from both of them without using up too much of our fuel fighting their force fields. That at least will spare our radiation shield from too much strain."

"I still think we should get closer to the green one. At least its creatures aren't as bloodthirsty as the others appear to be."

"Neither one is bloodthirsty. Just *flamethirsty*," said Jan grimly. "And personally, I wouldn't trust the green sun as far as I could throw it."

The uneasy silence of space surrounded them again. Green star and yellow star shone quietly, their coronas as thin and bright as supernatural haloes. Small sunspots whirled on their surfaces—as they did on the surface of every well-behaved star of reasonably large mass. And within the ship, Jan and Karin waited with dread impatience for the next move in the unearthly war.

Jan tried to occupy himself by arranging the data of the systems they had surveyed, but most of the work had been done long before. There were several thousand tiny spool books, part of the ship's standard supply, which neither of them had as yet touched. But unfortunately he wasn't interested in reading.

If there had been something important to discuss, they would have spoken to each other. But they had long since passed the stage where small talk was possible. Even their meals, which on Earth might have dragged out pleasantly for an hour or two, were here of little value in killing time. Synthetics took only a few seconds to prepare, and no more than a few minutes to eat. Besides, they were on short rations.

They had long used up the small supply of alcoholic drinks with which a thoughtful Intergalactic supplied its vessels in order to ease the strain that might be expected at first between two comparative strangers thrown into such close intimacy for the first time in their lives. There was nothing for it but to remain sober.

All the same, there came a time when Jan began to wonder if he might not be drunk after all, his mind thrown hideously off balance, by the strange forces to which they had been subjected. The things he saw had a nightmare aspect which chilled him to the core of his being.

But Karin saw them too. The yellow star was undergoing a change in shape. Slowly it was becoming longer and narrower, both ends maintaining the same distance from the green star. When a constriction appeared in the middle, it looked for all the world like a super-amoeba beginning to undergo mitosis, and he wondered if it was going to split, like the amoeba, into two bodies.

But the process came to a halt when the star had assumed the shape of a huge diabolical dumbbell, two great spheres of flame held together by a narrow connecting link a mere two hundred thousand miles in diameter.

The green star began to reply. It too grew longer, but the shape became that of a super-spindle, the middle thickened, the ends sharpened. Jan became aware of currents of flame that raced from one end out into space and then around to the other end, where they were absorbed into the body of the star

again. Two fantastic cosmic fencers were about to clash, one assuming the position of attack, the other apparently putting itself on guard.

"Wonder when the fun begins," Jan muttered.

"It won't be fun for us," said Karin grimly. Her hands clenched in sudden fury. "If we could only *do* something, instead of just standing here helpless, like—like—"

"A bird on a battlefield," said Jan helpfully. "But we've already gone over that, haven't we? They're too big for us. They have all the material advantages. They—" He broke off abruptly, his eyes narrowing. Startled, Karin waited for him to continue in sudden, desperate hope. "Material advantages," he went on slowly. "Yes, they have them. But spiritually—or rather, mentally—we're in the *same* boat. I think we can make something of that."

"I don't understand you," said Karin.

"I mean that they're as ignorant of us as we are of them. Perhaps they're even *more* ignorant. They know that we're small, and incapable of applying a force that could break out of the field surrounding us. They know we haven't been harmed by anything they've thrown at each other—so far. But I'll bet they can't examine the inside of this ship. I'll bet they can't tell what we look like, what intelligence we have.

"We know some of the things they can do, although not all. We know something of the fields of force they can exert. And we know that they must be creatures so different from us that any strange behavior on our part will seem to them potentially dangerous."

"You're philosophizing again," said Karin in disgust.

"No, I'm analyzing. Their ignorance of us will be our weapon. We're small, but there's no evidence we can't harm them. An atomic bomb is small too. And we're in a favorable psychological position. They're busy watching each other, waiting for each other's moves, with the initiative apparently on the side of the yellow star.

"If we act in any way to upset the present near-balance, they'll take us seriously. We may be the straw that breaks the camel's back, the tiny force that tips the balance one way or another."

"It's absurd," said Karin. "We're too small. We aren't big enough to be a straw. We're just a couple of molecules on the straw."

"But they don't know that! And even if they suspect it, they can't be sure. Because there's one material weapon we have that may be dangerous to them."

"Our radiation shield system!" Karin gasped.

"Exactly. If it absorbed enough energy, it might upset plans for either attack or defense."

"They must know it's too weak to make any difference. If it were really powerful, they'd expect us to have used it before."

"No," said Jan. "They probably realize that we use it for just one purpose—to protect ourselves. We mustn't subject it to excess strain. But suppose we're desperate, and decide we're finished anyway. Suppose we make up our minds to take one of our enemies with us. Suppose we try to commit suicide on a really heroic scale."

Karin stared at him, her lips whitening. "If you really want to, Jan."

"I *don't* want to. But I want them to get that impression. Suppose I aim the ship at the yellow star, start all the motors, and turn on the radiation shield system to the limits of its capacity. Remember the state of uncertainty they're in anyway. What do you think they'll do?"

"I don't know."

"They'll *have* to do something. They just won't let us plunge into them."

"But what—?"

"That," said Jan grimly, "we'll find out. Whatever happens, it'll be better than waiting."

"You said that before when you took a chance passing between the two stars. Don't be in a hurry, Jan."

But Jan was already maneuvering the ship around. The radiation shield was on, and the motors were blasting more and more rapidly. They picked up speed.

With grim deliberation he aimed the nose of the ship at the center of one of the yellow spheres. Swiftly, the yellow dumbbell-shaped star grew in the direct vision plate, spreading a saffron glow over the differential visor. Yellow blotted out all the other colors of space. The vision screen began to glow not only with light, but with a faint heat of its own.

But the air in the rest of the ship had become cool. The radiation system was working beautifully, and the creatures on the yellow star must know that. The system would be shattered in the corona, vaporized in the star itself. But what harm might it not do before it died?

Jan shivered, without knowing whether it was from the drop in temperature, or from the growing fear that was overwhelming him. From the yellow star there came no move. Another few seconds, and the screen would begin to falter and fail. When that happened it would be too late to reverse the direction of the ship. It would plunge straight into the fiery mass.

He turned to Karin, and said hoarsely, "I'm sorry, darling, you were right after all. We should have waited."

"No, I couldn't have stood it any longer. It's better this way, Jan—"

Something struck the ship a great blow. Something sent them whirling end over end away from the yellow star. With the motors blasting away as strongly as they could, the ship was describing a great erratic arc, like a toy jet set off by a child, and tossed high into the air.

But there was no air here, nothing to brake the crazy spin. Yellow and green flashed in and out of the viewing screens, fainter and smaller each time. They were being hurled away from the twin stars with a constantly mounting velocity, a terrifying lurching and swaying.

Jan began to drag himself toward the controls, saw that Karin had already reached them. The ship was straightening out. At times it wobbled so violently that he was afraid of the strain on the hull. But the wobbling never persisted, always being transformed, just in time into another form of erratic spin.

Slowly their energy of rotation died away, absorbed by the anti-spin gyroscopes. When they straightened out, they were far past the barrier. Eighty million miles separated them from the two stars. Streamers of

blackness were shooting from both ends of the green spindle toward the yellow dumbbell, which had contracted sharply in an attempt to defend itself.

Jan took a deep breath. "We were lucky," he cried. "They were both under so much tension, they took me seriously. The yellow star diverted some of its forces to defend itself from me, and the green star used the occasion to head off the attack with a counter-attack of its own."

"I know!" Karin breathed.

"Shall we wait to see what happens?"

"No, Jan. Let's get away fast."

Karin was smiling at him, and Jan could not help smiling back at her. But he was aware of a tenseness of his own as he asked, with seeming casualness, "Still want that divorce?"

Karin said slowly, "We've got at least two weeks to go before we reach our own System. By that time I'll want it. But don't give it to me. Do you understand, Jan? Whatever happens, *refuse me a divorce.*"

"Those are orders?"

"Absolute orders. When we land on Earth, I'll take a vacation from you for about a month. After that we'll spend the rest of our lives together. But always with other people around."

"Always?"

"Almost always. At moments like this, I admit, other people would be in the way."

Green star and yellow star faded into the distance. The bird, thought Jan, had escaped from the battlefield. It was only natural for it to burst into song.

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