



Illustrated by Wil McCarthy

Wyatt Earp 2.0

Wil McCarthy

He comes forward into the light—half stepping, half falling. All around him is white.

“Is this heaven?” he blurts, and it’s a logical question, because he remembers dying. Waking from a jagged sleep, fighting for breath, sitting up in his bed, panicking for a moment or two. Then slumping back, the burst of energy fading. It wasn’t like going back to sleep; he knew what was happening to him. Lights out.

But it’s funny: He doesn’t feel like he *just* died. The memory isn’t fresh. And he feels . . . good. Hell, he feels *great*. The pain is gone and gone, like it happened a long time ago. Like it happened to someone else.

“Please state your full name,” says a woman’s voice. Calm, soothing, impersonal.

He’s wearing some sort of lightweight robe, ivory colored. The floor under his feet is warm and gray. The light is from the walls, close around him like a telephone booth. It doesn’t look like heaven.

“Please state your full name,” the voice repeats.

Impatient, he says: “Wyatt Berry Stapp Earp.” And then, for no fathomable reason, he adds: “Two Point Oh, Faxborn.”

Ahem.

“What’s going on here?” he tries. “Where am I?”

And the voice answers: “Welcome, Mr. Earp. Apologies for any disorientation. You are a class A historical resurrectant, freshly printed in the assayer’s office of Dawes Crater City, Arabia Terra, Mars.”

“Mars? Mars? You mean the planet?”

“Correct.”

“I’m on the planet Mars?”

“Yes.”

“Am I dead?” He’s unsteady on his feet now, wishing for a chair or a bed to fall back into.

“No,” the voice tells him, “But you are based on a historical figure who is.”

“Oh. Oh. I see.” And just what in the hell can he say to *that*?

The booth opens into a larger room, where he is allowed to sit, encouraged to pick “appropriate clothing” from some sort of movie screen. After affirming that yes, he prefers to dress himself (what exactly is the alternative?), he watches the items slide out through a solid piece of wall. A “print plate,” the voice calls it, though it doesn’t look like any sort of printing process Wyatt has ever seen, and there are no markings on the clothes when he examines them.

From some rather strange options, he selects a pair of heavy blue trousers, leather boots, a yellow button-down shirt, a ribbon tie for his neck, and the least ridiculous of the available hats. The walls turn into mirrors now while he pulls them on, and almost as soon as he’s done, there is a knock at the door.

“Come in,” he says, expecting the woman whose voice he’s been hearing. But the person who comes inside is a young man, half Chinese by the look of him.

“Mr. Earp,” the man says, waving a fist in a kind of salute, “Welcome, welcome! It’s a real pleasure to meet you! I trust your . . . journey was a pleasant one.”

Hmm. There are two chairs in the room; Wyatt tries to shake the man’s hand, receives a blank stare in return, and finally motions for him to sit. “Your name?”

The man seems surprised for a moment, then abashed. “Oh, sorry. I’m Tomasa Clady, lead security technician for the mining facility.” He sits. “You can call me Tom, if you like.”

“That’ll do fine,” Wyatt says.

Wyatt’s not an easily flappable man, but all this is just too strange, and he’s having a hard time keeping his composure. He’s on Mars. He’s “based on” a person who is dead. That person is Wyatt Earp, meaning he, himself, is somehow *not* Wyatt Earp, although he certainly feels like he is, and always has been. He remembers his childhood, his adulthood, his old age, his many travels and many, many mistakes. Someone else’s mistakes? But these people are treating him like an Earp, and he doesn’t know who else he could be. So maybe he’s who and what he thinks he is—a Wyatt if not *the* Wyatt. This makes as much sense as anything else he can come up with, and he wonders for a moment why it isn’t more upsetting.

“Mining facility,” he says, latching onto a familiar element in all this strangeness. “What are you mining?”

“Everything,” Clady says, nodding vaguely. “Iron is our biggest output by volume and mass, but of course there’s not a lot of money in that. Our highest revenues come from rare earth metals—particularly cerium and samarium—but we do a fair business in gold and platinum group metals as well.”

That catches Wyatt’s attention; gold mines have a way of making people crazy—a particular kind of crazy that he used to spend a lot of time around.

“Why am I here?” he finally thinks to ask. “You bring a man back from the dead, I expect you have a reason. Who needs Wyatt Earp? On Mars?”

Clady shifts in his chair, looking slightly embarrassed. “You’re correct, sir. Resurrection licenses aren’t easy to obtain; one has to demonstrate an urgent problem that no living person can resolve.”

Wyatt digests that. “What sort of problem? I mean, why me specifically? Why not Julius Caesar?”
 “It may be easier to show you, sir. A walk through town, and the question likely answers itself.”
 “Ah.”

And just like that, the whole thing clicks into place. The look in Clady’s eyes is one Wyatt has seen many times, on the faces of mayors and sheriffs, judges and coach line managers, barkeepers and, yes, mining company officials. He sighs, already weary with the thought; this man wants his town cleaned up. Or his shipments protected, or claim jumpers faced down, or some such. Wyatt’s been a lot of things in his life—his former life—from farmer to logger to horse trainer to boxing promoter. He’s owned hotels and saloons and gambling halls, speculated in boom-town properties, and even worked some mining claims of his own, always a natural capitalist. He was *good* at those things (well, decent at some of them), but it never seemed to matter. In the end, all anyone ever wanted him to do was pick up a gun and *enforce*.

Damn.

In a good year he’d be wearing a private security badge—riding shotgun on a stagecoach, or guarding a train or—in later years—a truck full of bullion and currency. In a bad year, the badge would be county-issued or federal or—God help him—one of each. All that meant was dirtier work for a lot less pay. In a really bad year—like Alaska for example—people would simply rise up and beg him for help, in which case the pay was zero and the work . . . well, the work never really seemed to change, no matter how far he ran. And if he did his job too well—if the cleanup got a little too close to the people doing the hiring—then he *needed* to run. God, he’d had a belly-ful of lawing even before California. Even before Arizona! But peace was elusive; those lazy days in San Diego, with a hammock strung between a couple of date palms, fading like smoke. Sooner or later, he always ended up back with Wells Fargo, or riding posse with a county sheriff who just couldn’t rest until he had *Wyatt Fucking Earp* at his side for the day.

He eyes Clady critically: not exactly a small man, but there’s something . . . tentative about him. He may be “lead security technician,” but he’s no real fighter. Clean-shaven, well-groomed, and dressed quite a bit fancier than the stuff Wyatt has picked. His shirt is silk or something, shiny white and textured with whorls upon whorls that seem to move when you aren’t quite looking at them. But there’s bulk under the shirt, maybe some kind of breastplate, and some sort of weapon at his side that Wyatt hasn’t gotten a good look at. If he has to guess, this is a man who’s been to college, maybe boxed or played football there, and got picked for his current job because he was the toughest man the mining company could find that they could also talk to and control.

But in any town Wyatt has ever seen, there are people tougher than Clady, and that’s the problem. To his credit, Clady apparently knows he’s overmatched and has tried to do something about it. To bring in muscle—*historical* muscle—to smooth things over. A lesser man might have gotten himself killed or broken or run out. Or coopted as a puppet of the local thugs, whoever they are.

Wyatt clucks his tongue and says, “I reckon your employers did a good job picking you. I’ve seen your type: sincere, full of hope. This town means something to you. That’s good. Now I just have one question.”

“Sir?” Clady asks, and Wyatt can hear the uncertainty blooming all through his tone. Here he’s woken up some rough-and-tumble old-timey lawman—not an actor, not a picture from a book—and he knows right away that for good or ill, better or worse, he’s set something unpredictable in motion. He’s abdicated, and whatever happens next is *on his neck* but not actually under his control. Again, it’s a look Wyatt knows well enough.

“Am I your prisoner? Or slave? I expect you paid good money to print me out. How much do I owe you for a second shot at life? Or do I really have one? Maybe I just disappear when the job is done. Puff of smoke, something like that?”

Clady looks puzzled for a moment and then offended. “There are eight hundred million people on this planet, Mr. Earp, and adding one more is a greater issue than you might suspect. We don’t enslave them, and we certainly don’t kill them. The idea! Look, under local authority I can print out a dozen robots—mechanical men who’ll do anything I say, any time I want, and

happily deconstruct themselves when I'm done. You *are* expensive, yes, but it's because you're a real person, with all the rights and responsibilities thereunto. And technically speaking, *legally* speaking, I'm actually your father and responsible for your well-being. How much do you owe me? Legally, nothing. You can walk out of here and go anywhere you like."

"I might do," Wyatt says. He feels a smile twitching at the corners of his mouth, because Nicholas Earp, Wyatt's *real* father, would have had little use for a man like this. It was men like this who'd tried him for bootlegging, and foreclosed the farm in Monmouth, and all the other things Nicholas had raged about to the end of his days. On the other hand, while whiskey wasn't against the law in Illinois, tax evasion most certainly was, and Nicholas had been a constable at the time. He'd done wrong, and the consequences were something Wyatt and his brothers never forgot and really never stopped paying for. In fact, Wyatt had stolen a horse once, as a very young man, and the fancy men had come for him, too. He'd escaped and headed west, but he'd never hated the people he was running from. They were right, he was wrong, and those consequences were even harder to forget; he never set foot in Missouri again.

Moving on is something Wyatt has always been good at.

"But first, let's have that walk around town. Dad. As far as I can recall, I've never been to Mars before, and I believe I'd appreciate someone showing me around. What year is it, anyway?"

* * *

It isn't long before Wyatt suspects he's not altogether authentic. For one thing, they have not resurrected Sadie, his darling wife of near fifty years. She apparently outlived him by a decade and a half—almost a whole second lifetime of her own—but she was at his side when he died. In some sense, he's only just left her. In some sense, it's as though *she* just died, while he lives on. He should be mad with grief—crippled!—but instead it feels like something he's made peace with a long time ago.

Second, he's as light on his feet as the wispiest ballerina. Every step, every hop, carries him much higher off the ground than it should, and takes him longer to alight. And yet, he somehow knows it's because Mars is a smaller planet than Earth and has lighter gravity. And how would he know a thing like that?

And finally, he should want to catch his breath. In his old life, he was a long time retired from useful work. Even the Hollywood people hadn't paid him real wages when he'd moved there in the '20s to consult for their movie actors, and he'd never asked them to. Now these men from Mars have made him young again—he feels thirty-five if he feels a day—and there's a whole new world here for him to explore. And yet, if he feels any urge at all, it's a tug of curiosity about the problem at hand, right here and now, and a vague itch to see what he can do about it.

All this makes him suspicious, and yet there doesn't seem, at this particular moment, to be any right thing to do other than follow Tom Clady outside and have a look around.

"It looks a lot like Arizona," he says, once they're out in the dusty street. Then adds, "At sunset." The sun is high and bright, but not *that* bright. The sky is pale purple, streaked with wispy rainbow cirrus clouds, and the ground is a mix of red-orange clay and black, gritty sand. The town sits in a sort of elongated bowl surrounded by rocky hills with mountains in the distance, and what vegetation Wyatt can see is sparse and scrubby and a darker shade of green than he's used to seeing. If he were a painter, he could capture the essence of this landscape without using a single dab of white or blue.

The buildings are another story. They're gaudy—an explosion of colors and patterns, some of the shapes actually moving like the images on a movie screen. He staggers for a moment, overcome with wonder. But on closer inspection, it's all superficial, like the gold-and-satin veneer of the red light district in San Francisco, and he can see that the underlying structures are blocky and functional, uniformly spaced on their lots, and the streets have a crisp, laid-out quality he associates with boomtowns. The town was put up in an orderly hurry, and, stylistic details aside, it could be Deadwood or Tombstone in their respective heydays. Or Dodge City or San Diego, before the railroads arrived.

The people in the streets are familiar as well: men with unkempt hair and dirt under their fingernails. Truck drivers shouting and waving at the people in their way. Painted ladies of

questionable character, and stern, elegant ones moving deliberately and disapprovingly through the crowd. And other women, too, with dirt under their nails—softer and smaller than the men, but otherwise nearly indistinguishable. And yes, the fancy men—outnumbered and ill at ease, even though they're probably the official and supposed runners of this place, the owners of all the best real estate and the proprietors of vital businesses.

The town is strange, yes, but so is every frontier town Wyatt has ever seen. And really, in a lot of ways he feels more at home here than in Hollywood or Chinatown, or the lobby of some too-fancy hotel. On Earth.

"That's the dance studio," Clady says, waving an arm at one of the buildings. "Over there is one of the neural stim parlors. Behind it, past the salvage yard and fuel depot, are the fax store and the commissary. Three meals a day, free of charge to all employees and their families. Non-employees pay a nominal fee or take their meals at home. Workers' dormitories there and there, and some nicer apartments back the other way."

"And actual houses for the town fathers, yes, I get it. This is a company town, with entrepreneurs at the margins. Any whores? Any gambling?" Wyatt asks.

"Not officially," Clady says, with no particular emphasis. "Those activities are legal under interplanetary law, but banned by the Provincial Authority."

And that's not smart. Unless the miners and teamsters and cowboy-equivalents of Mars are a different species than the ones he'd known on Earth, you could not build a town around them and then withhold basic necessities.

"Detailed simulations are available at the neural stim," Clady adds lamely. "Or on home rigs anyone can buy."

"Uh huh." Wyatt doesn't know what that means, exactly, but he knows what it implies. "And every man is issued a right hand."

They walk down the street a ways, and since the town isn't that big, the view of the mountains improves as they go. Soon Wyatt can see a big scar down the side of the nearest peak—layers of chocolate-brown rock exposed beneath the red-and-black topsoil. Here and there, plumes of dust are kicking up from some sort of digging machines. From here, Wyatt can't get a good sense of their size or shape, or hear more than a whisper of their rumbling progress, but even so, he begins to feel a sense of the scale of the operation.

"Three hundred men?" he guesses.

Clady nods. "Two-fifty on the ground, yes, for each of two shifts. Another eighty in support services, and fifty-odd administrators. Only five in security, and that's part of the problem."

"Like hell."

Clady looks surprised. "Excuse me?"

"Five men can police a lot bigger town than this," Wyatt tells him. "If it's run correctly. If people feel like they're all on the same side, laws are just harder to break. Hays, Kansas, now there was a sensible town! Down the road in Dodge City, different story. You pretty much had your residents and your seasonal migrants. Couldn't survive without each other, but there was no love lost between 'em. I told Brick Bond, man, you keep charging five cents a drink and ten cents a dance, and they'll keep shooting up your ceiling and smacking your girls. And I told those cowboys, more than once, don't spend all your money in one place, and for God's sake don't bring your guns into town if you plan on drinking. You'll just upset the entrenched interests. But Sam Colt made them equal, and who's going to give that up? Place never did settle down until His Majesty Governor Glick moved the quarantine line and shut down the cattle drives, back in '85 or thereabouts."

Wyatt thought for a moment and then said, "Around here, the managers get paid a lot more than the workers."

"Well," Clady says, "they have more . . . Well. Yes, that's correct."

"The prices in town are high, and there's nowhere else to shop."

"No, that's not right. Anyone can hop in a fax gate and go anywhere they like, in the blink of an eye."

That should be surprising to Wyatt, but it isn't. "Anywhere? Earth?"

"Certainly."

“And is that free?”

“Um. No. The cost depends on distance and gravity, so a trip to Earth would cost more than . . . Well. I take your point. Yes, the miners do most of their spending here in town, and they’re not always happy about it. The deck is stacked against us there.”

“Us? Tom, the deck is stacked against *them*, and they know it. Do you? Come on, you can’t keep the peace without understanding *that*.”

* * *

After determining that alcohol is in fact available in Dawes Crater City, Wyatt has Tom Clady lead him to one of three saloons, a place called Power Drain. Although it’s midafternoon, the inside of the place is dark, full of flashing lights and raucous music. Hired female dancers are up on the stages, mostly naked.

“I can’t hear my own mind in here,” Wyatt says, so they move on to a quieter establishment, The Rat’s Tail Pub and Fax. Only a dozen people in that one, mostly men.

Clady is smiling faintly as they sit down. “What did you drink in the Old America? Whiskey, straight?”

In fact, Wyatt rarely drank alcohol in “the Old America,” and never when he was on duty. He spent a lot of time in bars and gambling parlors but drank mostly coffee and the occasional ice cream soda. But he was back from the dead, living on Mars, and most definitely not on duty since he had yet to accept or reject Clady’s offer of employment, or even hear out the terms.

“Not usually,” he says. “But I suppose I’ll have a sip.”

The barkeep is a heavysset man, maybe thirty years old and very handsome. Everyone seems to be handsome here. “Two whiskeys,” he says, sounding amused. “Any branding preference? We don’t serve chemogenics here.”

Clady ponders for a moment and says, “Something timeless. The oldest recipe you have. This man here is Wyatt, and he’s new in town, and today is kind of his birthday. He’s much older than he looks.”

“Hmm. Isn’t everyone?”

Expecting a shot glass, Wyatt receives a highball instead, filled halfway to the lip. Goodness. With a frown he raises it, clinks it against Tom Clady’s, and takes a sip. It’s okay. Strong.

“I’ll tell you this much for free,” he says, to both Clady and the barkeep. “Smaller drinks and more of ‘em. Miners will knock back what you put in front of them. Space the liquor out without being stingy, and they’ll be happier.”

For the second time, he looks Clady up and down, trying to really size him, see what makes him tick. To his credit, Clady notices the scrutiny and does not seem fazed or offended.

“What do you see?”

Wyatt shrugs. “I dunno. An honest man in a difficult spot. Good-hearted, maybe a little naïve. Why, what do I look like to you? Something out of a picture book?”

Clady thinks about that for a moment before answering, “Yes, I suppose so. There’s something ancient and solid about you. It’s not so much the way you look, though, as the way you . . . walk?”

Like a man, Wyatt thinks, then feels a little guilty about it. He’s been in more scrapes and fights and armed confrontations than he can count. He can handle them in his sleep—and has done on some occasions—and that’s most likely why the machineries of Mars have chosen him over literally every single living human, to settle whatever needs settling here. It’s hardly Tom Clady’s fault if he came up in a softer world.

Hell, even the people of Los Angeles had seemed kind of feeble to Wyatt. By the time he moved there, after the Great War, there were kids old enough to vote who’d never seen a weapon raised in anger. And even the veterans . . . oh, they were tough all right, but charging German guns was not the same thing as facing down an angry mob, or a single drunken gunman out for revenge. The Great War veterans were nothing like the ones from the Civil War. On the street they’d mostly stepped aside for Wyatt, not because they knew who he was (nobody in Los Angeles knew or cared who this bald old man used to be), but because they sensed something in him. An enforcer, yes, a billy club in a world of china plates.

He says to Clady: “Sometimes, a weak man starts walking like a strong one, just because he’s hired some muscle. I hope that’s not the case with you, Tom. Legal ‘father’ or no, you don’t get to live through me. Right? I’m not here to puff up your ego. In fact, if I take the job it could be rather embarrassing for you, the contrast before and after. You understand?”

“Sir, I do, yes.” Clady looks sincere, like he’s ready to take his medicine. “If I can’t do the job I was hired for—and sadly, apparently, I can’t—I should at least see that it *gets* done and move on if necessary, with a clean conscience.”

“Mmm. Fair enough,” Wyatt says, mildly impressed. Over all the years of his life, very few of the men who’ve engaged his services have had any real sense of honor about it. Clady is no Bat Masterson, but he’s no Wild Bill either, causing trouble where he should be settling it. He has a head on his shoulders, and with seasoning, he could probably turn out a pretty decent lawman.

They drink in silence for a minute or so, Wyatt really just sipping at his. He doesn’t care for the taste of whiskey or the way it gets you drunk so much faster than wine or punch. Hell, some of the rotgut they served in his day had “seasonings” like tobacco and embalming fluid and could potentially burn your intestines straight through. He prefers a good Merlot if he’s drinking at all, and even then he’ll leave half the glass unfinished. Clady is not shy about his own drink, though, and it doesn’t seem anyone else around them is, either. Back in Dodge City, Wyatt had been surprised by the bottomlessness of nearly everyone’s thirst for liquor. Even the town fathers were drunks by any reasonable standard. Even the town mothers and daughters! He never saw anything like it before or since, but it surely looks like Dawes Crater City has them beat.

“You shouldn’t drink on duty,” Wyatt says, “or let your men do it. It sets a bad example. Now tell me about your problem.”

“I don’t drink on duty,” Clady says.

“All right.”

“No, really. No intoxicants of any kind. Me or my staff. Today is my day off.”

“I believe you.”

Clady takes another large pull on his whiskey—it’s nearly empty now—and says, “It’s the miners. They’re out of control. I’ve had almost a third of them in custody at one point or another, and that’s—”

“I know all about the miners,” Wyatt says. “They work hard, they get drunk or noodle-steamed or whatever, they get angry, they get into fights. There aren’t enough women here to keep them occupied, and the ones there are aren’t allowed to sell their services to all that need ’em. Of course, some do it anyway, driving the whole trade indoors, but that’s a separate issue.”

“I think you have the wrong idea,” Clady says. “Some of the diggers are women.”

“Okay, yeah, I got that. But not enough of them. And I doubt they’re the ones doing the fighting. None of that is your actual problem, it’s just life. Why is it so much worse here than anyplace else?”

Clady thinks about that, finishes his drink, waves for another, and says, “The mining company doesn’t like their labor pool being reduced. Despite what you seem to think, the diggers are well-paid, and most of them have special training of various kinds, so they’re not easy to replace. Only so many people are interested in mining as a profession, fewer still are good at it, and only so many people can endure the hideous discomforts of life on Mars.”

The sarcasm is evident in his voice here, and Wyatt chuckles. Places like Hays and Dodge and Tombstone had prided themselves on having all the comforts of civilization. Music, theater, ice, tile floors, you name it. But the people back east had their own ideas, and once the West was tame and dead, the misconceptions only seemed to get worse. By the time of Wyatt’s death, movies and dime novels had painted over the wonderful richness of the era—the very thing that had pulled people west in the first place—leaving only a dry-washed landscape of clapboard and Russian thistle, with gunfights on every corner.

“So you’re paid to be lax,” Wyatt prompts.

Clady nods. “Exactly, yes, up to a point. *You’re security officers, not the vice squad.*’ But they also expect things to be orderly. When it gets too *disorderly*, which has happened several times

now, the Provincial Authority faxes in a dozen whitecaps and shuts the whole place down, which is bad for business and worse for morale. And the last time *that* happened, the miners took offense about something—I'm still not sure what—and a whole mob of them beat the whitecaps senseless. The next day, the Royal Constabulary came in and hauled away thirty men. Management was furious, and told me if it happened again—if the Constabulary set foot in this crater even one more time—they'd oust every human on site and replace them all with robots. As if that would even work! Oh, and oust me, of course. That was ten days ago."

Wyatt digests all of that. Some of it goes over his head, but it does sound like a mess, and he feels a surge of empathy for Clady's position. Damned if he does or does not, the man has been doing his best to walk a line that fundamentally doesn't exist. And rather than keep trying and keep failing, he's begged for money—a lot of it, apparently—to bring in professional help. His pride was sacrificed the moment he put in that request; the only remaining question is whether he'll have anything to show for it.

Now, that by itself does not oblige Wyatt to help him. Jurisdiction problems like Clady's are familiar enough, but Wyatt is brand new in this world, without resources of any kind, and he can't afford to get off to the wrong sort of start.

And sure enough, Clady adds to his story, saying, "I went to the assayer's A.I. for help, and it recommended you, so I submitted the request. I read about your adventures in a city called Tombstone. A series of gunfights, very dramatic. To be honest, I'm not quite clear how that helps us in our current situation, but—"

Wyatt can't help slamming his glass down on the bar, sloshing out whiskey and ice shavings. He's been living Tombstone down for half a century; has it followed him even here? What's the point of a second life, if he's still dogged by the mistakes of the first?

"That's not how I handle things," Wyatt says, a little too loudly. "The Cowboys gang declared war on the U.S. Marshalls Service, plain and simple. They were Confederates, you understand? Cattle rustlers gone west to escape, still fighting the war in their minds. There was no law to enforce; we were attacked and fought back, and attacked again and fought back with everything we had. One of my brothers was killed, another crippled, but we finished it. Yes, I shot some people—that's the only reason I'm still alive—but if you needed a real Kansas gunfighter they would have sent you John Holliday or Bat Masterson or, God help you, Wild Bill Hickok."

In point of fact, the Earps and Holliday *had* crossed a line in Arizona; on the Vendetta Ride, they made no pretense of legal due process. The Cowboys gang was just too dangerous, too mobile, drifting back and forth across the Mexican border like smoke. But afterward, the Earps had fled the territory as wanted men, leaving Sheriff Behan and the surviving Clantons and McLaurys to invent all manner of stories, often accusing Wyatt and James and Virgil Earp of the very crimes for which the Cowboys had been collared.

More softly he says, "Later days, the word 'cowboy' came to mean almost anyone who could ride a horse, but back then it was a slur, like 'thief' or 'ne'er-do-well.' They called *themselves* by that name; it meant they were rustlers, and didn't care who knew it. Walking tough, thinking the law couldn't touch them, and really they were right. Now, my friend Holliday made them afraid, and in the end we had to become like him. Too much like him."

Wyatt takes another sip from what remains of his whiskey. "The law couldn't touch Holliday either, for purely physical reasons. Too fast. That man was the fastest and deadiest shot I've ever seen. Even crazy men were afraid of him, you think sane men weren't? Him and Hickok were both mean as snakes if you got 'em angry, which believe me was not hard to do. Hickok lived and died by the sword, no surprise, and Holliday really wanted to follow his example—he really did. But the tuberculosis finally got him, because no man ever could. He was only God's to take."

Here he finally does take a stiff pull on his whiskey, raising the glass to Holliday's memory. "God, I miss that man. But don't go thinking I'm like him. I'm nothing like him."

Clady touches him on the shoulder, looking troubled. "Sir, I sincerely apologize if I've given offense."

Wyatt shrugs him off. "It's all right. You don't know how it was. You have no idea."

"No," Clady agrees. "I don't."

"My brothers and I weren't like that. Gunfights? I spent my life avoiding 'em. Hell, if you needed a real lawman they'd've sent my brother Virgil; he was sheriff in more towns than I have fingers. But I'm not like him either. I'm not like anyone. I survived that whole era, the whole time and place, right there in the thick of it. How many men can say that?"

"Your qualifications are not in doubt, Mr. Earp. Truly."

"I told you to call me Wyatt!"

That comes out much louder than he'd intended, and Wyatt is mulling an apology when there's commotion on the other side of the room. A man standing up, shaking a fist.

"Shut up, suitcase! Out of town! Security fuck! We know how to deal with your kind. Come over here and learn some manners!"

It's one of the miners, clearly, seeing a stranger with the head of security and getting understandably riled about it. *Oh, great, what now?* From his tone, he's just making noise, showing off to his chums, expecting Wyatt to back down. Harmless, really, except in the context of a town already deep in trouble.

Wyatt turns to Tom Clady, holding out his hand, and says quietly, "Give me your weapon."

"Excuse me?"

"Your weapon! Give it to me! Come on!" He speaks quietly but forcefully, brooking no question or delay.

But Clady says, also quietly: "You're not certified—", so Wyatt simply reaches over and snatches the thing out of its holster. It's black and lightweight, made of bakelite or something, and shaped more like a candle lighter than a pistol. In place of a trigger, there are three raised tabs along the top surface.

Clady, hissing: "It's not coded to your hand; it won't even fire!"

"If you say so."

The miner looks alarmed as Wyatt marches over to him, and with good reason; Wyatt draws back the lightweight weapon and unceremoniously cracks the miner across the face with it. Then, without a word, he grabs the guy by the ear and drags him toward the exit. Everyone in the room is frozen with shock; the miner himself doesn't even have time to process what's happening to him. People never do. Wyatt grew up on the receiving end of this tactic, buffaloed by an embittered father and a house full of older brothers, and has used it all his life to take control of troublemakers, well before the trouble gets made.

As he passes Tom Clady, he says, "I'll take the job, but I want a 1 percent stake in the output of your mine. Not negotiable. Now show me where the damn jail is."

* * *

Wyatt laughs when Clady insists on a week's training in the use of a "tazer," the standard armament of this age. Instead, Wyatt takes the final exam that afternoon and passes it on the first try. As for his stake in the mine, Clady passes the offer along through something like a telephone, and comes back with a counteroffer of 0.05 percent, plus a nominal salary for as long as Wyatt remains in town.

"It's a good deal," Clady says. "In a typical month you'd be making four to five times what I do."

"Uh huh," Wyatt answers. He knows how these things work, knows he'll be lucky to clear a tenth of that by the time the accounting is done. Still, he was mostly bluffing about the whole thing, and he's frankly surprised to get a cowfart beyond the bare-bones salary. They must really need his help!

So, accepting the offer is the first transaction of his new life. There's nothing to sign or seal or thumbprint; Clady doesn't even offer to shake his hand.

"The walls have eyes," he says cryptically. "The deal is made, and (as you would say) that's that."

For his second economic endeavor, Wyatt takes a lightly furnished apartment in one of the company dormitories. The sun has set by this time, and the dusk is gathering quickly; he'll need a place to lay his head where he can also set about befriending the miners. He'll need to work

their bosses as well—at least the ones who deign to live and work here at the job site. As both a former miner and a current shareholder, he can claim some kinship with both groups. Still, first things first.

Clady shows him to his doorway in a third-floor hallway. There's no visible lock on the door, or even a knob.

Seeing him pause, Clady says: "Just walk through it, like a curtain. The apartment is yours; it knows you."

Wyatt tries this, and it works; the door folds aside as he approaches and rolls back into place when he backs up again. Huh.

From a neighboring door, a bearded man emerges, carrying a trumpet.

"Hello," Wyatt says to him, holding out a hand.

The man stares at it, apparently unsure what it means. Doesn't anyone shake hands anymore?

"My name is Wyatt Earp Two Point Oh. I'm new here."

There's that name again! These Martians have gotten inside his head and changed his actual name! What else have they changed?

The man is eyeing Wyatt suspiciously. "I'm Etien Huang. I heard what you did to Glenn Abbott in the Rat's Tail Pub."

"He had it coming," Wyatt says simply.

Huang doesn't reply, or really do anything at all, so Wyatt points to the trumpet and asks, "You play that thing?"

"Yeah."

"Any good?"

Huang snorts at that. "Not really."

"I'd like to hear you play sometime. I expect I will, through the walls."

"Yeah? Why's that?"

"The walls don't transmit any sound," Tom Clady says to Wyatt. "Or vibration, or residual heat images. It's quality construction; you'll have your privacy."

"Ah. Well, I suppose I'll hear it some other time then."

Huang looks at him for a second and finally says, "Well, I'm on my way out. It's nice to meet you."

"And you."

Huang leaves the scene, but later that night when Wyatt heads back to the Rat's Tail Pub, it turns out Huang is there, playing his trumpet up on stage with a group of other musicians. The place is certainly louder at night! Wyatt orders a soda water and drinks it slowly, watching everything. Wild Bill Hickok never sat anywhere unless he could put his back to the corner, but Wyatt has never seen the point in that. It didn't stop old Bill from getting killed at a card game, but it did make him look like an ass and a provocateur while he was alive. Wyatt prefers to sit at the bar and mingle. Tom Clady isn't here, which suits Wyatt just fine; when the band's set is done, he'll get Etien Huang to introduce him around. That's how he did it back in the West; that was his whole secret. Just move in, become a part of the town, and the rest would take care of itself.

* * *

Not all of the townspeople hang around in saloons, and that makes them harder to meet. Wyatt is not an actual policeman and has no official standing or pretext to visit with them, so he settles for roaming the streets the next morning, popping into various businesses to look around, nod at people, become a familiar face.

There don't seem to be any stores as such, or workshops. Apparently the "fax machine" takes care of all that, printing out whatever clothing or other articles people may need and disposing of the remains when they're done. However, there's a bank, three barbers, a couple of lawyers' offices, and a whole slew of esoteric shops with names like "Angel Skin and Body Art," "Fashion Consultants of Sinus Sabaeus," and "Personality Adjustment LLC—NOT a SURGERY." The proprietors are a familiar breed, not as coarse as the miners themselves but frontier people nonetheless, like the smiths and pimps and card dealers of Tombstone, catering to the tastes and whims

of the labor pool. Wyatt is not at all sure he'd want any of them adjusting his personality or advising him how to dress, but for the most part, they seem decent enough.

"Welcome to town," a man named Fuzzy says to him, from behind the counter of a "neural stim parlor."

"Thanks."

"My opinion, we can use a little extra security around here. My front door's been broken three times this season, people coming in after hours to steal machine time."

"Hmm," says Wyatt. "You know who?"

"I have my suspicions. Surveillance sensors always bypassed, and there's a short list of people know how to do that."

"Well, I'm listening."

Fuzzy suggests five names, and Wyatt writes them down. There won't be any evidence against them, but he won't need any. A couple of stern-eyed visits should settle some of them down, and draw the others—the ringleaders—out to defend their tough-guy reputations around town. *You're damn right I broke into Fuzzy's—the guy ripped me off.* Give 'em enough rope, and they'll hang themselves sure enough.

Word seems to have gotten around that Wyatt's a historical construct, an "Old Modern" from the wilds of The America, and unfamiliar with civilized custom. Fuzzy is at least polite about it, offering to let Wyatt come in the back room and try the neural stim "so you'll at least know what it is." Which is fair enough.

Wyatt's expecting something like an electrical opium den, but instead it's more like a dirty movie theater, where the movie is jolted directly into your brain, and you can't tell what's real and what's projected. So really there *is* a sort of officially sanctioned prostitution here, and other stuff—bullfights and river rafting to get the heart pumping lively. It isn't real, though, and people don't exactly seem to be mobbing in to partake of it. Not really all that satisfying, Wyatt thinks, though it'll probably do in a pinch.

One thing the town seems short of, though, is government. There's a cluster of offices that people refer to as "city hall," but since it's located *inside* the headquarters of the mining company, it's not clear who they think they're fooling. Tom Clady's security men work out of the same building, and the jail—actually known as "administrative holding" or simply "admin"—is located in the basement. There's no judge, no courtroom—any offense serious enough for that will get the person hauled to the provincial capital at a place called Sabeeta—so the length of detention is pretty much at the discretion of the arresting officer.

That's a slipshod arrangement, and Wyatt doesn't like it, but for the moment there's nothing much he can do, so around midmorning, he stops in to release Glenn Abbott, the loudmouthed miner. A stern warning seems unnecessary; Abbott is visibly afraid of Wyatt and does his best to stay out of arm's reach as he saunters for the exit.

"Goodbye, Lawman. I'll miss you."

"See that you do."

The only real government official Wyatt can find is the Provincial Assayer, a woman named Lita Harmon who works out of the same building where Wyatt was born. Yesterday, actually. The thought makes him smile as he waves a greeting at Lita, careful not to offer his hand.

"You must be the cowboy," she says, grinning.

"You must be the most hated person in town," he says back. Unless Mars is really different from Earth, the assayer's job is to weigh and measure and value what the miners dig up. The value is never as high as the aspiration, and bribes have little appeal for the sort of people attracted to the job, so Wyatt has actually known assayers who needed bodyguards to get around safely. To be fair, though, Lita Harmon doesn't appear to be one of them.

"I guess I owe you my life," he tells her. "I came out of that fax machine, right over there."

"I don't own it," she says, "but you're welcome. Tomasa didn't want to use company assets due to conflict of interest, and this is the only Provincial fax in town. It's where the whitecaps instantiate, too, when they decide to take an interest in town affairs."

Grasping the gist of that, Wyatt says, "That must help your popularity."

“Immensely, yes.” She studies him for a few seconds before adding, “I haven’t had a lot of trouble myself. The diggers are paid by the hour, so they don’t really care how much they find. The *company* doesn’t love me, but the element cartels need to know their prices are fair, and they’re who the provincial authority needs to please. So I don’t get invited to the Shareholders’ Ball, but there haven’t been death threats or anything.”

“Well, that’s good to hear. But you do know how much the company is making, yes?”

She nods.

“Is it a lot? Compared to what the diggers take home?”

“Yes. Quite a lot.”

“Are there any kind of bonuses? In a good month, maybe?”

“No. Never. But sometimes their pay is docked in a bad one.”

“Ah.”

Well, there might be some outright criminals here in Dawes, people unashamed to commit assault and burglary, or incite others to do it for them. But even if Wyatt identified all of them and ran them out of town, a new crop of troublemakers would arise. How could they not?

“What are you thinking?” asks Lita.

And Wyatt answers with a sort of poem, something that just pops into his mind at that moment: “Poison the root, poison the fruit. This town is a rotten tree.”

“Hmm. I think you’re right—in fact, I know you are—but can an ancient cowboy fix that? Really, I’m not sure what the A.I. was thinking. It sounds a little beyond your pay grade.”

“It is,” Wyatt tells her. “But that’s never stopped me before.”

* * *

“Tell me about your bosses,” Wyatt says to Tom Clady over lunch in the company cafeteria.

Clady looks immediately uncomfortable. This is the kind of question that could very easily lead to big trouble for him. “What about them?”

“I dunno. Hobbies, habits? Do they travel a lot? Are they betting men?”

“Um, not especially. And they’re not all men.”

“Sports?”

“Well, yes, naturally. They enjoy a slaughterball game as much as anyone.”

“Playing, or watching?”

“Are you kidding?”

“No, I’m not kidding. How the hell would I know?”

Unhappily, Clady forks in a mouthful of fried potato, chews, swallows, and finally says, “Watching. It takes insane reflexes and years of training to play slaughterball, even badly. I suppose a few of them might do a little practice in the batting cages.”

“Hmm. Okay. But there’s nothing like that *here*, right?”

“Uh, right.”

“There are no churches, either. That’s a problem.”

Clady mouths the word—churches—like he’s not entirely sure what it means. “You mean worship nodes? Most people who use them go with the Polydenominational Congreave, which is technically a reformist commercial chiosque, not that you could tell from the—”

Wyatt cuts him off. “I don’t care what it’s called. Hell, I don’t even care if people *go*. But it does need to be here. Everyone needs the option to repent as well as sin. Talk to your bosses, have something done about it, and I mean right away.”

“Um . . .” He’s barely audible above the crowd, a hundred people all eating and talking, bussing tables and faxing hot lunches.

“Trust me. I’ve seen a dozen towns like this, and not one was ever harmed by the arrival of clergy. And once it’s here, you and I need to participate actively. I don’t mean being seen there once a week, I mean donating money and time to help the place thrive. Serving as deacons if they’ll have us. Got it?”

It looks to Wyatt as though the words “repent,” “sin,” and “clergy” are foreign to Clady as well, and maybe even “donate,” but the gist has gotten through. Clady doesn’t particularly like it, but he nods. “Yeah, okay. Got it. Anything else?”

“Yes. I need to meet your staff today, all of them. We have to go over basic procedures, and, well, something else. Here, stand up for a minute.”

Uncertainly, Clady stands. Wyatt rises from his seat as well, and then, without warning, hauls his hand back and drives it hard into Clady’s unsuspecting kisser.

Bam!

Clady staggers, nearly falls. The room goes silent, all eyes on Wyatt for the second time in as many days. Clady looks stunned for half a second, then straightens angrily. “What was that for?” He throws a return punch, which Wyatt blocks, then throws another, and another.

“Okay, stop.”

But Clady keeps throwing them, and Wyatt keeps deflecting, and finally he can’t help laughing. “Stop. Stop it, Tom! All right, look, you can hit me back. Go ahead—”

The retaliation is a surprise hit to the gut, not the face. Wyatt doubles over, coughing, his eyes watering. A hundred miners are still looking, which is good; they need to know their security guys can take a punch as well as give one. Wyatt is not particularly fond of getting hit, but he’s never understood why other people fear it so much. The crowd noise is returning, though, people commenting to each other about just what the hell is going on here with these two.

“Why did you do that?” Clady demands.

“Just . . . oof. Just wanted to see what would happen. I get the feeling you don’t do a lot of actual fighting. Or not enough.”

“I have black armbands in four separate militant arts!”

“Yeah? Well, I could kick your sorry tail from here to the edge of town, and there isn’t a thing you could do about it. So could about half the people in this room. No offense.”

Clady just stares, waiting to see where this is heading.

“We’re going to start a boxing league,” Wyatt says. “All of us, the whole security team, pounding each other in the ring while the townspeople bet on outcomes. It doesn’t matter who wins. We all win.”

“Boxing? Really?”

“Really. Bare knuckles and everything. I’ll train the men and officiate the matches. We’ll even charge admission, split the proceeds six ways, with a little bonus for whoever takes home the sash.”

Clady is just shaking his head. “I thought you were a policeman.”

“Not here,” Wyatt assures him. “I’m just a consultant to the shareholders. But I’m a lot of other things, too, and there’s no harm in a little side business.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

Clady slams him hard in the ribs. “Here’s your side business. In the side! You want your face business next?” He looks angry, but now he’s also holding in a laugh. “I’ll give you the business in your pill sack if you’re not careful.”

Wyatt—who grew up in a house full of older brothers—can’t resist slapping Clady across the cheek, and in another moment, the two of them are beating the crap out of each other, throwing food and trays, giggling like schoolboys while the miners look on in astonishment.

Who knows? Things might just work out here in Dawes Crater City after all.

* * *

The first boxing practice is no great thing. The other four officers are cut from the same basic pattern as Clady—serious and practical, light on experience. In the basement of the town hall, in front of the empty Admin, Wyatt lines them up in their fussy green uniforms and slaps them all, one by one, this time explaining why he’s doing it.

“We’ve got to toughen you boys up. You’re all soft inside, shy about pain, what we used to call ‘yellow.’ The miners are yellow, too, or this town wouldn’t be standing at all, but we should have standards to uphold. We *should*. You think a tazzar commands respect? My grandmother could use one. Now look alive, all of you.”

The first one, a slightly heavyset Chinaman with the improbable name of Wing Wing, takes it well enough when Wyatt swats him across the mouth. Doesn't flinch much, doesn't make a sound, doesn't really react at all. Stoic, this one.

"Good."

The second man, Jory Pobla—short and swarthy and full of vinegar—gets a little teary-eyed and resentful at the contact, looking right away like he wants revenge. The muscles in his neck are pulsing.

"I like your spirit," Wyatt tells him, "Use that anger, but keep your head. Win or lose, the idea is to impress the crowd."

The third is named Andrew Smith-Pfennig, and he's as proper a gentleman as Wyatt can ever remember slapping. Wyatt hits him harder than he needs to, then fights down the urge to apologize while Smith-Pfennig rubs the handprint off his cheek. He grins instead.

"You want another?"

"Thank you, no," Smith-Pfennig allows. "Do you?"

The last security puke is Bard Mapes, a Negro with muscles on his muscles and a clean-shaven head that makes him look rather fierce, despite the uniform.

"Ready when you are," he says in a deep voice, somewhat snidely.

Wyatt actually hesitates a heartbeat or so before hitting him, and flinches when Mapes raises a hand in return. Then, mindful of his image—with the town in general and the security staff in particular—he relaxes and offers his cheek.

"Go ahead, Mapes. Have at it."

"You sure about that?"

Then, without waiting, Mapes smacks him hard enough to spin him fifteen minutes on the clock.

"Wow," Wyatt says, shaking it off. "I stand corrected. You show people more of *that*, and we won't have a law and order problem for long."

And then, for good measure, he offers his other cheek. It's what Jesus would have done, and Wyatt has always been a big admirer. Mapes hits him even harder this time, which he probably deserves, but the point is made: he's their new role model and not afraid of getting hurt.

Once that's over with, he forms the men into two lines and has them start hitting each other, which they do with great reluctance and little force. All right for now, but they're going to have to work on it. Finally, ten minutes into the lesson, he starts showing them some basic stances. Fists up, legs apart, feet firmly planted on the concrete floor.

"Not much to this, just protect your center and throw a lot of punches. Block-jab-block. Bap-BapBap! I know, I know, you're all gigantic experts in the 'militant arts,' but this is boxing. It isn't an art, it isn't a science, it's a *bra wl*. Two men trying to hurt each other, for the amusement of a mob. A *paying* mob. We'll control this town through sheer entertainment. Wing: hit Mapes."

Wing does so, but it's another open-hand slap.

"Wing! What are you, a little girl? Hit him! Hard! Knock him down! Oh, for crying out loud."

Wing dances on his feet for several seconds, then finally throws a couple of decent punches, but Mapes basically just stands there and swats them aside.

Wyatt shouldn't be disgusted. It's only their first attempt, and it could be worse. These men are like lumber, raw and sturdy, waiting to be cut into something useful. But really? It's like they're not even trying. He pushes Wing aside, hauls an arm back, and piles it over Mapes' guarding fists and straight into his jaw. Then he hits Wing in the same spot, then Pobla, his hand stabbing with pain and probably sprained already. He's about to hit Smith-Pfennig as well, but suddenly Mapes and Clady are hitting *him*, left-right-left-right from two directions at once, and he's down on the cement and his ears are ringing and he can't get a breath.

"Good," he tries to say, but nothing comes out.

The men are all standing around, breathing hard.

Gasping, Wyatt slowly manages to refill his lungs, then gets unsteadily to his feet. "Boxing is mental, not physical. You want it bad enough, you don't mind the punishment, you'll win every

time. Small guys can wear a big guy out, sting him, grind away his strength and his patience. That's what draws people in: anything can happen."

Jory Pobla sticks a hand in the air. "Sir? Is this mandatory?"

"Only if you want to keep your job," Wyatt tells him. He runs the fingers of his left hand up and down on the bones of his right, feeling for breaks. He might have been a little overexuberant. "That's all for now. Next time we'll tape our hands, so it won't hurt quite as much. But in the meantime I want all of you to practice. Mentally. Start thinking of yourselves not only as security professionals, but also as boxers, as *men*. See if that doesn't make a difference in your lives."

And then, with unhurried movements, he draws out his tazer and shoots all five of them. With looks of alarm and astonishment they fall, groaning and writhing on the cement.

"Hurts, right? I shot myself a few hours ago, so I'd know what it feels like."

He waits, watching them suffer.

"I read through the past year's arrest reports. You boys have fired the tazer in over a third of your detentions. It's rather impersonal, don't you think? When you gather your wits, I want you to hand over your battery packs for the rest of the week. And yes, Pobla, that's mandatory too."

* * *

Sunset finds Wyatt on a hilltop overlooking the town—overlooking the mine and the dusty ruts that serve as roads, leading in an out of the valley, leading out over a horizon he never imagined he'd see.

Mars.

But is it really him seeing it? Or rather . . . yes, it's him. He exists; he's here. But is he really Wyatt Earp? What does that even mean?

A shadow falls across his face and is gone almost as quickly. Dusk happens *fast* around here. There aren't many clouds, and once the sun has slipped down beneath that tantalizing horizon, the light fades quickly into a sort of pink glowing dome overhead. Like the whole world has curled up under its mother's skirts to sleep. And then even the pink begins to fade.

Darker, darker. Wyatt knows, somehow, that Mars' thinner atmosphere simply can't support as much water vapor, or as much dust, as Earth's, and that means there's less material for the sunset to illuminate. He doesn't know why that should make it happen faster, though. He doesn't suppose it matters; since when has the world cared what one man understood of it?

Darker still.

And now a figure approaches, coming uphill from the edge of town, following more or less exactly in his own footsteps. Damn. He's come up here for peace and quiet, to think, but this planet isn't making it easy.

"Hello?" the figure calls out in the distance. Sounds don't travel as well either, but he can make the voice out well enough, above the faint rumble and clatter of the town itself. A woman's voice. "Mr. Earp, hello?"

"Hello," he calls back, his voice halfway between curiosity and dismissal. But this is his home now, and he oughtn't be dismissing anyone out of hand. Particularly a woman, unaccompanied in the dark.

"Am I disturbing you?" she asks.

And in a friendlier tone he replies, "No, not at all. I've just forgotten my manners. Please, come on up."

Who is he to refuse anyone? It's more their planet than his, more their hilltop than his, and anyway he recognizes the voice now; it's Lita Harmon, the town's assayer. And he can see she comes better prepared than he did: a blanket rolled up under her arm, and a heavy-looking backpack that gives off metallic clunks as she step-step-steps her way up the hill.

For a minute, there's nothing to do except watch her approach and listen to the sound of her breathing as she climbs. And then he's getting up, brushing off, removing his hat in respect.

"Well, aren't you charming?" she says, with perhaps a tinge of condescension. And that's nothing new to Wyatt either; California was like that a lot of the time, a rude place surprised by manners, and slightly suspicious of them, and yet charmed all the same.

He takes the blanket from her, spreads it out neatly on the dusty ground, and watches from a respectful distance as she settles down onto it. Then he settles down himself: trousers against bare dust.

"The coverlet is for both of us," she chides, and right away Wyatt knows what kind of thing this is. A man and woman can be friends—real friends, without lust or jealousy between them—but not at night, not if their bodies are close enough to exchange heat.

"I'm a married man," he almost says. But it isn't true. His Sadie passed away hundreds of years ago, mingling with the dust of a different world altogether. He *feels* that distance somehow, that tremendous gulf of time and space. And anyway, she wasn't *his* Sadie. If she was anyone's, it was that other fellow, the real Wyatt Earp.

Not moving, Wyatt looks up at the darkening sky as the stars begin showing themselves. They don't twinkle as much here. "Which one is Earth?" he asks.

Lita looks around and shrugs. "I don't know. I don't think it's out right now. Down there, I guess." She points at the horizon, just below where the sun has set.

"Hm. Figures."

"That one over there is Phobos. One of the moons, the closer one."

"Huh. Doesn't look like much."

* * *

All at once, Wyatt is overtaken by memory. A night like this, out beneath the stars as the last of the sunset faded. Not with a woman but with a man, a telegraph operator named Rainer Busfelt. And not on a hill, because there are no damn hills in Kansas. And standing, not sitting, and beset by insects, but otherwise very much like this, yes.

Busfelt is drinking Merlot and gesturing with the bottle, saying, "There are seas on the Moon, Earpy old boy. Go fishing there one day—who knows what you catch? And canals on Mars. It's been proven! To move the water around, because there are no seas on Mars. Just ice caps at the poles. Doctor Schiaparalli says that's where they get their water."

The Moon is there in the sky, nearly full, hanging over the prairie like a big round lantern. A red dot next to it like an unblinking eye.

"Where who gets their water?" Wyatt asked him.

"The Martians. Obviously. You want a drink? 'S good wine. Surprisingly excellent."

"Sorry, I'm on duty."

"Well, more for me. And here's to the good people of Mars, Earp! Here's to 'em! Go fishing those canals one day. Who knows what you catch."

"I think you may have had too much, Rainer. I think maybe I should walk you home."

"I hope you're not implying I need police escort? With the god of war staring down upon us? If I'm forced to take umbrage, it could go poorly for one or both of us."

Wyatt laughed at that. "You're the smartest man in town, and no coward, I'll give you that. Let's just say I'd enjoy the walk."

"Oh, well. If we're enjoying ourselves."

They began to walk, and Busfelt said, "There's a telescope in Arizona that stares at Mars all the time, watching the seasons change, watching the vegetation move north and south. Can you imagine? It's looking there right now, right this very minute. I'd like to go there some time."

"To which?"

"Eh?"

"To which one? The telescope or the planet?"

"Ho. Hmm. Both, I suppose. But Arizona's a shorter walk!"

And they shared a laugh at that.

* * *

The memory is sharp, immediate. And suspect. There is nothing else like it in the attic of Wyatt's mind; he was never much interested in the stars and planets. Never much interested in smarty-pants telegraph operators. But how could the fax machine know that? How could it know any of his memories? Answer: it couldn't. It had made them all up. Oh, it surely used biographical detail where it could; Wyatt 1.0 was a famous man, and a lot had been written about

him. But even there, how could a machine know what all the moments in his life had sounded like, smelled like, felt inside his mind?

It couldn't.

Wyatt was not stupid. This memory was fabricated, to soften the blow of his actually arriving on Mars. His other memories were fabricated, too—did each one have such a perfect symbolic meaning? To make him think and feel the way they wanted him to?

"I'm not a man," he says to Lita Harmon.

"You look like one," she says, eyeing him in the gloom. He can see her teeth, hear the smile in her voice.

"I'm a cleverly written poem. Nothing more. I'm a carefully constructed pile of bullshit."

"Oh, don't start down *that* road," Lita chides, taking his meaning. "In the first place, you probably created most of your own memories. I think they start with a generic template and add the bare historical facts, and you fill in the rest yourself. Who better? In the second place, everyone's a pile of bullshit. All memory is bullshit; we've known that since your time, almost. We're the sum of the lies we tell ourselves over and over. Do you think the real Wyatt Earp was any different? At least you know why you're here!"

"You don't understand," he says, although she clearly kind of does.

She touches his arm lightly, then pinches it hard. "Does that feel real enough? If you're not the man you thought you were, fine. Be something different. Be whatever you want. Throw the bullshit back in our faces. Or you could just do the job you were literally born to do. What's going to make you the happiest?"

He doesn't answer.

"You were married," she says.

"Yes."

"A long time ago."

"Yes."

"Good woman?"

"Oh, my God. The best."

She chuckles at that. "Already I can't compete. Wyatt, do you know what it's like to be stuck in a place like this? I mean, I'm glad to have a job at all—most people don't—but seriously? I spent thirty years in school, studying biostructural chemistry and nanomotics, and they have me surrounded by apes and troglodytes. Weighing rocks! I'm not exactly bored—this place is never boring—but I am . . . lonely?"

Wyatt doesn't know what to say to that. Finally, he says, "How do you know I'm not an ape?"

"Oh, you are. But such a perfect one!"

Again, Wyatt is silent. Speechless.

"I'm really bad at this," Lita says, sounding embarrassed. "You're supposed to want to kiss me."

"I hardly know you, ma'am," he says, retreating to the comfort of manners. Part of him certainly wants to kiss her—she's smart and alarmingly good-looking, and probably funny if you're in the right sort of mood. But he supposes he's bad at this, too. Decades out of practice, or centuries, or else maybe he's never kissed a woman at all. He wasn't created for this; he has to invent it himself, right here. Or try and fail. Or not try at all. "I'm sorry, Lita, that wasn't kind. This is all very complicated."

"Yeah," she agrees. "That's how you know you're real."

She rummages around in the backpack beside her, pulling out something that looks exactly like a bottle of wine, and shaking it slightly for emphasis.

"Drink?"

"I don't. No. Hardly ever."

"You mean, *he* didn't."

Wyatt thinks about that but can't bring himself to do more than grunt noncommittally.

"Well, more for me," she says, and Wyatt is struck by the terrible thought that he might not be experiencing this moment at all, that it might be just one more bullshit memory planted by machines.

And on the heels of that thought comes fear, and anger. He didn't ask for this! He was *dead*, for God's sake. And then, on the heels of that, comes a curious sense of freedom. Because *this* moment might also be false, and this one, and this one, and so he might as well do as he pleases.

Grabbing Lita by the back of the head—careful not to pull her hair—he draws her toward him and says, “If it's all the same to you, ma'am, I believe I will have that kiss after all.”

* * *

Fight training goes a lot faster once Wyatt figures out they can do the whole thing in neural stim. That doesn't teach courage, or anyway he doesn't see how it could, but it's fine for basic mechanics, and it can get them used to fighting in front of an audience and used to pain without actually piling up injuries that might interfere with their actual work. Besides, it lets Wyatt refine his designs for the ring and the bleachers before the commitment of swinging a hammer.

“Eyes up,” Wyatt tells them. “Watch his center, not his feet. Strike anywhere you see an opening. Keep your elbows down and your fists up. Form a shield, and then punch from it.” He has to repeat the same advice over and over; for a group of supposedly skilled fighters they still seem awfully timid, even in imaginary fights. But they do surprise him sometimes.

Anyway, all this has gotten Wyatt used to visiting the neural stim, and at this particular moment, he's using it for a different purpose altogether: learning history. Apparently, a little over six hundred years have gone by since the time of his death. What a span! Enough to encompass the Black Death, the discovery and settling of America, *and* the Great War!

Alas, that war did not in fact end all wars—only an idiot could think it would—and in the time since then there had been wars aplenty: World War Two; The Cold War; The Great Spring War, followed closely by the Drone and Proxy; Space Wars One and Two; The Light Wars; The Fax Wars; The War of Restoration, followed closely by the Martian Uprising. And those were only the big ones! There were dozens of other feuds and skirmishes over God knew what. People would fight about almost anything.

At the present moment, Wyatt is observing the pivotal battle in the Martian Uprising, as it seems most pertinent to his new circumstances. He stands upon a wide, flat plain—he's an invisible giant, almost a quarter of a mile tall—while below him, columns of Republican troops (who called their war the Oxygen Revolution) slither in the open air toward the fixed, domed positions of their monarchist adversaries. Blowing up and storming the gates against the gale of higher-pressured air whooshing out. In some cases, actually cracking the domes and bringing pieces of them down into the neighborhoods of ordinary people.

It's difficult for Wyatt to swallow the fact that he lives in a monarchy now, that the people he works for are monarchists who owe their fealty to a queen. By God, two of his great-grandfathers fought in the War of 1812, and one in the Revolutionary War, to prevent exactly that. To create and preserve the great American experiment! And so his sympathies lie naturally with the Republicans.

And yet . . . Despite watching this battle over and over again, despite watching the events leading up to it—as recorded and narrated by the Republicans themselves! —he really can't work out what they were rebelling against. Their grievances seem trivial: limitations in the type and quantity of free goods they received? The increase of regional representatives from six to nine, when they had asked for eleven? The central issue seemed to be something about breathable air, but this made no sense, because even then the air was breathable over 60 percent of the Martian surface, including all of the territory claimed by the Republicans, and the free goods they received included whole train cars full of compressed oxygen to use for whatever they liked.

Wyatt has spent half his life on the American frontier, among the armed and the restless—some of them veterans and lingering sympathizers of the Confederacy, others just pioneers with a love of novelty or a distrust of authority—and yet these people, these Martian Republicans strike him as extremists. Spoiling for a fight, on any excuse at all.

He watches them fracture the dome at Hellas Centrale. Backs the stim up, watches it again. Shrinks himself to get a better view, and watches it a third time. The six major gates—called “vehicular airlocks”—all detonate within moments of each other, and over the Southeast Approach,

the dome is instantly spiderwebbed with cracks. Two big triangular pieces break loose, rising for a moment and then falling slowly in the Martian gravity. But they're heavy, and they have a long way to fall, so they hit the ground like oversized locomotives, smashing shops and houses and the people sleeping inside them. A triumph for the Great Republican Strike Brigades.

Then the dust settles, and Wyatt speeds up the stim. From up high, nothing much seems to happen for a while. The Republican troops have won by sheer astonishment, shaking the monarchists out of their beds, seizing buildings, fax machines, and other important locations, then digging in and waiting.

They never stood a chance. They hold their positions for four and a half hours, before the Royal Constabulary puts a stop to it. Not even soldiers; police! Raining from the sky like hailstones, in something like airtight, armored diving suits. The actual battle is brief, even though the Constabulary seems at pains to bring in their suspects alive and intact, and without collateral damage.

Wyatt has watched these men (and women!) up close: not grim, not hostile, not nervous or whipped up into a state of high emotion like the rebels they're arresting. Just serious, efficient, professional, barely sweating inside their bubble helmets. *You, that way. The two of you, follow me.* The closest thing Wyatt has ever seen to them are the private security guards Wells Fargo used to hire to guard their coaches and train cars, back in the days when it wasn't safe to travel.

But those Fargo men were at least minimally afraid of getting shot, whereas the Royal Constabulary seem utterly fearless. True, their armor can absorb an amazing amount of damage—they're knocked over by impacts and explosions but get right back up again, time after time! But a few lucky Republican shots punch through and then explode, THUMP THUMP THUMP, splattering the insides with gore and leaving the suits—still mostly intact—to teeter over like papier-mâché statues in the light gravity. The other Constables ignore this, moving on with their jobs like nothing's happened at all.

What's more, these few Constables are the only casualties in this particular engagement; every single rebel is captured and led away in chains. This is meaningful, because even though it happened half a century ago and half a world away, a lot of the miners in Dawes Crater City still seem to have Republican sympathies and a vague but reflexive ire against all things royal. Which includes the leases and licenses held by the mining company. It doesn't help for Wyatt to take sides—he needs everyone on *his* side—but he can't help wondering, if he were there, whether he'd've been fighting alongside the monarchists.

Sighing, he turns the stim off. He's not going to watch this one anymore. It's depressing, and he's already learned about as much as he's going to. As he takes off the stim cap and struggles out of the pod, he's surprised to find someone there waiting for him.

Or rather, surprised by who it is: a woman in a crisp, sky blue uniform with a cap as white as noontime clouds.

"Hello," he says.

To his surprise, she holds out her hand for him to shake. "Good afternoon, Mr. Earp. I'm Captain Gonzales. Is this a bad time? Your associate said I could find you here."

He takes the hand. "I was beginning to think nobody knew what a handshake was anymore. Are you some kind of historian?"

"Protocol specialist," she corrects.

"Huh. Thirty years of school for that?"

She frowns. "No." And then, sensing that's not quite enough, "Law Enforcement is a ten-year study program, and you have to pick an elective. It was a while ago."

And that's all she seems to want to say about it.

Sighing, he escorts her out onto the street. Fuzzy probably won't mind if they chat in his waiting room, but it seems a little rude.

"All right," he says, "what can I do for you?"

"Well, the Provincial Authority has heard about you, and this area is under my jurisdiction, and I thought it would be good for us to meet informally, before the governor decides to order

me to do it. It's an interesting approach, I'll say that much for Tom Clady. High points for novelty. How would you say things are going here?"

"Rather well, I think. I don't really know what it was like before, but I'd say we have things running smoother now."

"I'm inclined to agree. Incident reports are down sharply, and well below expectation for a community of this type."

"Well, good."

It's a beautiful day except for the wind—Martian high summer, which is about like late fall in Arizona. The sky is purple, streaked with cirrus clouds, and the sun is warm but not hot. It didn't take Wyatt very long to abandon his hat here; it never rains, and the threat of sunburn is minimal. However, he does wear a scarf and wraparound eyeglasses, because the winds are unpredictable, and they carry a fine, stinging grit that he can't seem to get used to. Some places are like that: bad soil that won't grow anything, won't stay put, and burns in the eyes and nose.

Captain Gonzales is wearing heavy glasses as well; they seem to be part of the uniform. Her nose and mouth, however, are exposed to the dust, and she doesn't seem particularly bothered by it.

"I've gotten some assault complaints about you that I'm going to overlook," she tells him.

"All right."

"Fact is, we'd be just as rough if we got called in here again. At least as rough, because it'll keep the Constabulary out of Dawes Crater."

"Yeah, I guess people don't love them too much here."

She shrugs beside him as they walk. "Some don't. That's not really the point. The Queendom wants its mining communities productive, but it also expects adherence to certain cultural norms. We sound ignorant to them, and we don't hold our cups correctly if you see what I mean. That creates an inherent friction that we can't simply wish away. When you get right down to it, the Constables don't like Mars any more than Mars likes them."

Wyatt laughs. "People here in Dawes Crater say the same thing about the Provincial Authority."

"Yes, well, that's not surprising. Everyone likes to look down on someone, and no one likes to be looked down upon. But I do like what I hear about you, Mr. Earp; people chafe less against hyperlocal enforcement, and your resurgent status puts you outside every hierarchy and power structure. Whitecaps don't live here, and we wouldn't be welcome if we did, and resident security has no official power, so why should people listen? It's only the fear of losing their jobs that keeps the workers even marginally in line. But a crack across the mouth works wonders, doesn't it? And yes, people need distractions as well. I understand you're building a boxing stadium?"

The town is small enough that Wyatt can simply point to it, or at least the corner of it that's visible between buildings. "Doesn't look like much yet. We're financing it out of our own pockets and doing the labor ourselves, so it comes together a little bit at a time. We're building a worship node as well, the First Church of Dawes Crater. With our own hands."

"That's good!" she says. "That enforces the notion that the security detachment is part of the community, not something externally imposed."

"Really?" Wyatt says, sarcastically. "I never considered it."

"Funny, sir," she tells him, in a smooth, professional voice that betrays neither amusement nor irritation. It's a rebuke wrapped in a compliment wrapped in a cloak of unconcern, and it's really quite clever of her, like something Bat Masterson might've said. He can imagine that line putting all kinds of mischief to rest.

"So you're here to rub up against our success," he says. "If we're doing the right thing, and you're spending time here casually, then it must mean you're doing the right thing as well."

"Perceptive," she tells him in the same tone of voice, "but I think it helps you as well. If people see us together, then it raises your profile in their minds. Makes you look more official, less like a museum exhibit."

"Or it contaminates me," he says, "but fair enough. I appreciate your intentions."

“At any rate, we have common interests, and regardless of appearances I believe it’s important for the two of us to have a good working relationship. That’s something I never had with Tomasa. Part of his problem is, he’s allergic to the politics. But if I do have to fax a squad of whitecaps into town, it helps to have someone to report to besides the mine managers. Or just making arrests with no cooperation at all, which believe me, has happened.”

“Okay, okay. Let’s have a good working relationship.”

“Excellent!” she says. “Would you like to join me for dinner?”

This takes Wyatt by surprise, and his first impulse is that he needs to say no, or at least check with Lita about it. But that’s wrong, or out of date, because Lita has barely spoken to him in over a week.

He still wants to believe something more is going to happen there, not so much for his own sake, as for what it says about Lita herself. There were women who acted that way in his day, but they were not well thought of, and they rarely thrived. But things are different here; “Martian relationships tend to be short and shallow,” Clady has told him. And: “Women are as free as men, Wyatt. They have been forever, since before there were fax machines. Since before there were people on Mars!”

Wyatt pulls his scarf up higher, shutting out the stinging dust. Reminds himself that in this time and place, a man and woman can have dinner together without it meaning anything at all. In fact, it might be better if he simply thinks of her as a man; in voice and manner she bears little resemblance to the women of his time anyway.

He starts laughing.

“Mr. Earp?” she asks, because it is a little strange, what he’s doing.

He answers, “I’d be pleased to join you for dinner, Captain, but I’ll admit I’m at a loss, because if you were a man I might just take a swing at you right now!”

She frowns. “I think that would be quite inappropriate, sir, regardless of my gender. And let me further caution you, that the lowest grade of whitecaps could kick in the teeth of the best mine security any day of the week.”

“Well,” he admits, “So could my mother.”

* * *

Although the cafeteria can technically serve any food ever dreamed up by man, the sheer number of people that need to be fed there means the place needs to be efficient. At any given time, the choices are limited to three entrees, three side dishes, three desserts, and eight beverages. Furthermore, the faxes in the dormitories are equipped with “governors” that limit them to a fairly narrow range of snack foods, because otherwise the hallways would be crowded with people always trying to get their own special meal. Even in the private homes of the wealthy—generally built around a central fax machine that serves multiple household functions and is well stocked with all the “elements” needed to make stuff—meals and ambience are limited by the time and imagination of the inhabitants.

And thus, there is a place for restaurants in the economy of Dawes Crater City. There are two of them, and Gonzales selects the least expensive—a move Wyatt approves of. The Crater Bistro is dim and cozy, just slightly shabby, with real candles on the tables and real soot stains on the ceiling. In spite of the captain’s sky blue uniform, there are enough other customers here that they can feel somewhat anonymous. A few of them shoot suspicious glares in her direction, but they mostly have business of their own to attend to, or else why go out at all? Here a couple is quarreling, there a group of friends or coworkers are having a pointed discussion about repair work on something called a “cliff steamer.” Nobody is really paying attention.

So, Wyatt and Gonzales (her first name is Elizabeth) eat and talk for an hour—not about law enforcement or (thank God) the falsity of memory. Instead, she tells him about her family. It’s small, like everyone else’s, but it seems every bit as convoluted as the families of Wyatt’s own time, and rather more hilarious. There’s the mother who meddles too much in her daughter’s life, the father who meddles too little and seems always confused, the four grandparents always doling out money and presents as though she were a little girl. And then there are the

stepparents. The mother and father are divorced and remarried (or “repartnered” which amounts to the same thing), but bewilderingly, so are the grandparents. All four! So there being only one child and a couple of cousins, the family is nevertheless about a dozen strong, with all the intrigue and complication that implies.

“So I told step-granny I just can’t look the other way,” Gonzales is saying, “and I really will arrest her if it happens again. I mean, honestly: celebrity stalking, at her age! She used a telescope to hologram his apartment.”

Getting the gist of all that, Wyatt chuckles. “I hope it’s at least a good celebrity.”

“Oh, but it isn’t. It’s some awful sales telebard not half her age, singing about soap! Grandfather is furious about it, but what can he do?”

They laugh some more, and when the bill arrives, Gonzales picks it up. “Business expense,” she says cryptically. “Interdepartmental liaison.”

The Bistro has an old-fashioned door—the kind that swings open and slams shut, like doors ought to—and as the two of them are getting up from their table it bangs open, admitting a howling blast of wind and dust.

“Ugh,” she says. “The weather is turning. Just our luck.”

Outside, there appears to be a fight brewing. Two men facing off on the street corner, shouting and waving their fists, with a crowd of ten or twelve looking on to see how it turns out. But the wind is fierce, and men are having a hard time hearing one another.

“. . . blocky arse weed . . . it again.”

“What?”

“I said . . . arse weed . . .”

“I can’t hear you!”

Wyatt steps between them, touching each man on the arm. “Why don’t we all get inside and talk about this tomorrow?”

“What?”

“INSIDE! TALK TOMORROW!”

“OKAY!”

So the fighters separate, and the crowd melts away into the storm. Nature usually has the upper hand, but it’s only at times like this that people notice.

“I NEED TO HEAD BACK TO THE ASSAYER’S OFFICE!” Captain Gonzales tells him.

“OKAY! I’LL WALK YOU THERE!”

This is easier said than done; the walk is less than half a kilometer (Wyatt measures distance in kilometers now, apparently), but it’s against the wind. This is not like the winds of Earth; not quite. It isn’t strong enough to bowl you over, strong enough so you really have to lean into it. But it’s *cold*, and it carries a lot more dust than any wind Wyatt’s ever seen, and that makes it just as hard to march against. People have warned him about the dust storms of Mars, and he can see now what they’re talking about: it feels like he’s burning, or being picked apart by icy bugs. He pulls his scarf up to the very bottom of his goggles, while Gonzales covers her face with one gloved hand, holding the other ahead of her for balance.

Visibility drops to twenty meters, then five, then essentially zero. The two of them bounce between one sidewalk and the other, unable to hold a line down the street. Wyatt tries calling out to her again, but he can’t even hear himself. After five minutes of this, he’s about ready to walk uninvited into the nearest building, or break in if he has to. But Gonzales has found the right doorway—the words REGIONAL and ASSAYER intermittently visible through the dust—and she waves a hand so the door will curl aside for them.

For a moment, Wyatt can’t see anything at all. Then the doorway clears, revealing interior air of improbable clarity. They step inside, with little dust tornadoes whirling around them, and then the door closes, and it’s a different world entirely. A *quiet* world. Wyatt stomps his feet, shaking off the grit, but can barely hear a thing.

“Well, hello,” Lita says from behind her lab counter. It sounds like she’s about five times farther away than she really is. She looks intrigued.

Gonzales is businesslike: “Ma’am, is the fax machine clear? I’ve got to get back to Sabeeta.”

"It's clear, but the transmitter's not working," Lita replies. "The red light just came on. Actually, it's flickering on and off, but I would not advise you risk it."

"Static discharge?"

"No. No, not at all. Why would you think that?"

"Can't you reroute to a collapsiter on the other side of the planet? I'm on duty, and I need to treat this as a potential emergency."

Lita shook her head. "Nope. Can't help you. If one of the stations passes directly under our feet then yeah, maybe. But it's like waiting for the moons to line up; I wouldn't hold your breath."

"Can you at least get a transmission out?"

"Um, I don't think so."

"You don't have a hardlink?"

"To what? Sabeeta?"

Now Gonzales is exasperated. "To anywhere. It's a damn network, woman."

"I don't think so," Lita repeats. "You'd probably have to go to the company offices for that."

"I'm going back out there," Wyatt says.

"No one asked you to," Gonzales replies.

They stand around for a few seconds.

"Well, this is awkward," Lita says.

"Why is it awkward?" Gonzales asks her.

"Because . . . Well, you know. Because Wyatt and I have a history."

"Already?" That seems to amuse Gonzales. She takes her gloves off, then her goggles. "Mr. Earp and I are not romantically involved, Ms. Harmon. That would be a conflict of interest and a breach of professional ethics."

"Ah," Lita said, knowingly. "Professional ethics. So you *want* to involve yourself with him, but you can't. How delicious. Probably want to involve yourself with him ten different ways."

"Funny, ma'am."

"Wow, Beth, I forgot how scintillating your company can be. Listen, why don't I fax up some comfortable chairs? And refreshments. We might all of us be here a while."

Gonzales is shaking her head. "I have to get back, Ms. Harmon. May I have access to this building's program interface?"

Lita laughs at that. "Access! Ho! Yes, Beth, you may interface with the building. What are you going to do, shine lasers through the storm? I'm sure the city of Sabeeta can't function without one of its police captains for a few hours."

Gonzales answers with a glare. "We could be here for days."

"Even so. Look, I've got a fax machine, a three-eighths civic library, and a fully stocked element buffer. *You've* got two hundred silica particles per cubic centimeter, moving at forty meters per second and rubbing free electrons off on every insulating surface. But you do what you want."

* * *

Lita is right in the end. Like magic, Gonzales brings up glowing typewriter keyboards and number-filled movie screens all over the walls, and fusses with them for over an hour before finally giving up, sinking into one of the armchairs Lita has produced and grumpily accepting a tall glass of whiskey.

"Damn storms. Always come at the worst time."

"Oh, like there's a good time for you to miss work."

Wyatt looks out one of the windows; the light is fading now, not that it had done a lot of good while it lasted. The view is opaque, as though the glass were painted. "Do they always come on this fast?"

"Nearly always," Lita tells him. "I grew up in this region, about five hundred clicks from here, place called No Acheys. Sometimes you can see the storm front moving in, get a few hours' warning, but usually it just whips up out of nowhere, and you really never know how bad it's going to be. It might just spit for twenty minutes, or it might drop half the planet on you. It's a bit

different in the north, but then, they've got all the topography. Down here the wind's got nothing to stop it going where it likes."

"I grew up on Earth," Gonzales says.

"Did you *really*? I never guessed it from your stupid fake accent."

"I came here for the opportunity. On Mars I can be . . . more. I can exercise something close to my full potential."

"Same reason I moved west," Wyatt tells them both. "New country."

"And now you're on a whole new world," Gonzales tells him. "A whole new person. A shareholder in the mine, I hear! Good for you."

"Not so new," he says, a bit glumly. "I can't seem to get away from myself. Not in Hollywood, not on Mars. I was created special, to be exactly the same."

"So do something different," Lita suggests.

"You keep saying that. I don't think you know what you're saying."

"Give it time," Gonzales says. "Faxborn people often feel trapped by their circumstances, especially when they're newly printed. Goodness, how could they not? Once you've built up some authentic experiences all your own, you'll feel a bit more . . ."

"Real?"

She colors. "Real people" is a phrase Wyatt has heard a time or two, in reference to anyone other than himself. It seems to be an insult of sorts, or rather a term that casts a shadow on those not under it. He never paid much mind to things like that; who cared what people had to say? Still, here in Dawes Crater City he feels uprooted, or else entirely rootless, and has no other guide.

But even that feeling is familiar! He often felt that way in his old life, after fleeing Missouri, and maybe even before. That restlessness, that falsity, that sense that you haven't yet arrived in the place you belong. Kansas was entirely populated with men like that.

"You know," he tells the women, "the West wasn't everything I hoped it would be. I never did make my fortune. Didn't have the knack for it, I guess. I found the love of my life, but when you're young I think you take that for granted anyway. You don't realize how *hard* it's going to be, how life never does give you a chance to rest. Money problems and health problems and housing problems, and problems with the people you love. And finding out day after day that you're not the man you thought you were, that *nobody's as perfect as the man you thought you were*. And then still pushing onward, because what choice do you have? It's like a raspberry bramble that you just keep pushing through and pushing through, hoping to some day come out the other side. But the thorns keep tearing at you, and there is no other side, and so you just keep pushing on through. Even death can't protect you. Do you suppose the real Wyatt Earp is in heaven right now? Or hell? Or just turned to dust in a grave somewhere? Which one of us do you suppose is luckier?"

"You sound like a man in need of a strong drink," Lita says, with all the gravity of a doctor delivering bad news.

"You people drink too much," he tells her. "All of you."

"Eh? So what if we do? Who's harmed?"

Wyatt doesn't have an answer to that.

"You and I are not on duty," Gonzales tells him. "Not till morning at least. You look so tense, sitting there. Seriously, an occasional intoxicant might help you integrate a little better with your environment."

"Not just drinking," he says, "but *preaching* the drink. Oh, yes. I never met a drunk that didn't want to drag everyone else down with him. But fine, you win."

And so they end up spending the night drinking, taking pills, watching old holoplays on the walls, and occasionally breaking out into pointless laughter. And yes, it *does* feel better; the world swims and judders, flashes and swoons, and there is *no way* that Wyatt 1.0 would have done a thing like this, and no way that Sadie would have let him, much less done it alongside him. So there! When sleep finally overtakes Wyatt, he feels for perhaps the first time since arriving on Mars that if he dreams tonight, the dreams will be his own.

Morning finds him in an empty office. Sore all over from sleeping in a chair and with a taste in his mouth like old shoes. His stomach gurgles hello, and not in a good way. Harsh, bright light streams in through the windows, which have been tuned to full transparency. And there's a note in his lap, handwritten on some stiff, glossy paper, like the cover of a dime novel. He's rarely seen such terrible penmanship:

Our Dearly Wyatt,

We believed it would show good manners to write you a letter like in old times how are you? Elizabeth has business in Sabeeta of course and Lita that's I have gone to the Admin building will be there much of the day. There are hygiene facilities in the back and please fax yourself some breakfast change of clothes whatever you need but if my element buffers are low on anything important we will both track you down. Laughter. The door will lock when you leave so be sure you have everything Wyatt last night was enjoyable this is Gonzales it is a pleasure to know a person such as yourself that I look forward to working with. By the way you snore we agree you should see a Dentist! Laughter now get back to work you mangy cowpoke did I say that correctly?

Sincerely,

*Elizabeth Gonzales
And
Lita Lei-Harmon*

Wyatt snorts at that, then goes in back to wash his face. It occurs to him that the fax machine—the same one that birthed him, the same one that Captain Gonzales needed to transport her back to Sabeeta—can be used for his own transportation as well. Assuming he can figure out how to make it work.

The machine itself is complex: a central core with many fixtures attached, projecting into different rooms, as in the Martian houses he's seen. Wyatt knows the equipment well enough now to recognize the household goods orifice, which produces food and clothing, and the trash disposal hatch, which removes the leftovers of same. These could likely be the same hole, he thinks, but who would want that? Then there's the sanitary aperture in the back room, which is basically a toilet. It's a little disturbing to think that human waste is stored in the "element buffers" and then converted into food and clothing, but Wyatt has resolved in his mind that this is not so different from fertilizing a field and then growing cotton or sweet corn on it. More disturbing, yes, but not for any sensible reason. There's also a specialized aperture the size of a dinner tray that sits next to Lita's scales and microscopes. Presumably that one is for digesting any minerals the mining company brings by for analysis. And then of course, there is the transit booth.

"Hello?" he says, opening the booth. A lot of the equipment in this age is capable of speaking English, although it rarely seems to do so unless asked a direct question. "Hello? I would like to travel."

"Please state destination," says a female voice from nowhere in particular. It's flat, cool, emotionless but somehow still vaguely supportive. It's the same voice that first greeted him upon his arrival or birth or whatever you wanted to call it. His mother, in some sense.

"Where can I go?" he asks.

To which the voice says, "Your account holds funds sufficient for multiple round-trip passages to any destination in the Solar System. Please state destination."

"Anywhere? Can I go to China? Bethlehem? Paris? The Moon?" Wyatt has never been to any of those places, and they all sound exciting.

"The political construct known as China has not existed for two hundred eighty-two years. However, the territory remains intact, along with most formerly Chinese municipalities, and the

Han language is widely spoken. Greater specificity is required if a destination within the former China is desired.

“By ‘the Moon’ I presume you mean Earth’s moon, otherwise known as Luna. This is a valid destination, although greater specificity is required. Bethlehem and Paris are valid destinations.”

“Well, hell, let’s go to Paris!”

“Acknowledged. Do you wish to state a more specific destination within the city?”

“Down by the river Seine. Someplace with artists and coffee shops and, you know, wine and things. Paris.”

“Acknowledged. Please step into the transit booth.”

Wyatt does this, and the door curls shut behind him.

What is he expecting? A puff of smoke? A flash of light? The sensation is a bit like falling into warm water, or stepping through beaded curtains, or being hit with pillows from all directions. He finds himself on an open metal disc, in a sort of blind alleyway between two buildings. Street noises beckon him forward.

In his mind, he was expecting sunlight dappling through trees and horse-drawn carriages loaded with ice and fine gentlemen and ladies in fancy hats. In fact, it’s nighttime, and while there is traffic on the streets, it consists of pedestrians and . . . well, some things like bicycles and some things like delivery trucks and some other things for which he has no reference point at all. Wheeled platforms, carrying people of every color as though they were kings and queens, despite their less-than-regal attire. There isn’t a fancy hat in sight, and Wyatt is suddenly self-conscious about his own clothing, which looks nothing like what these Parisians are wearing. The fact that he slept in a chair probably limits his handsomeness too.

And yet: Paris! In the blink of an eye! He takes a moment to be grateful for the mere fact of his existence, and another to marvel at the age in which he finds himself. It’s a long way from Dodge, that’s for sure.

The streets are wide enough for his taste, but along the sides the stone buildings are close together and just tall enough to loom. The streets are made of brick, closely laid without mortar, sloping down toward a stone bridge that spans a perfect little river. It’s not wide and wild like the Mississippi or shallow and rocky like the Colorado. More like a gentler version of the Columbia: deep and authoritative as a dream. It’s absolutely perfect.

There are lights everywhere—candles, lanterns, streetlights, running lights on the sides of vehicles. Apparently, this is still the City of Lights, and they illuminate exactly the sort of bars and coffeehouses he was hoping for. And in the distance he actually does see a horse, pulling an open carriage!

Nobody seems to pay him much attention. It seems Paris is used to outlandish visitors.

“Bonjour!” he says to a knot of passersby. They glance his way but say nothing, just moving along on their own Parisian business.

He laughs to himself and wanders off down the street. He’s hungry, so his first order of business is to rustle up some food. This turns out to be easier said than done, however; he has no need of local currency (as he understands it, his invisible bankroll will follow him anywhere), but he’s already exhausted his knowledge of the language. He manages, with great difficulty, to negotiate the purchase of some pastries, but when he sits down at a coffeehouse patio to eat them, the proprietors shoo him away, muttering incomprehensible things.

“What did they say?” he asks the wind.

Astonishingly, it’s one of the stone walls that replies: “It is against health code to bring outside food or beverages into any culinary establishment.”

Wyatt is so surprised he actually drops his confections on the sidewalk. The voice is not female, nor quite devoid of emotion. It doesn’t sound like a man, exactly, but it’s warm and kind, like some mechanical uncle.

“You can talk?” he asks, though he wonders why anything should surprise him anymore.

“Indeed, yes, it is the easiest way to aid our city’s visitors without requiring its citizens to know all the languages of the world. Would you like a map?”

Before Wyatt can answer, the wall flattens and smooths, and a glowing screen appears within it, bright with swimming symbols.”

Now the people passing by do notice him, with looks that vary between humor, contempt, pity, and curiosity. Apparently, he has committed a *faux pas*. There, see, he does know a bit more French.

A man stops before him, clucking sympathetically. “Is this your first time in France?”

Wyatt pulls his eyes away from the screen to look at the man. Like everyone in this era, he’s not exactly formidable. But neither is he thin or obviously weak—in fact, this one seems to have a bit of muscle under his shirt, which is made of some fine, stretchy fabric. And he hasn’t shaved in a day or two, which Wyatt supposes adds a sort of strength or depth to his features. And yet, it isn’t hard to imagine a loud noise sending him cowering under a table, along with everyone else in the world. Yes, all of them, shivering and sniveling under the same table!

Wyatt laughs. “Is it that obvious?”

The stranger laughs with him and says, with the perfect amount of French accent, “Everyone has a first time. But it’s a tradition in our city that when a lost soul washes up on the banks of the Seine, one of us will step forward to assist. Today, apparently, that someone is me. Now do please tell me, strange man, where on *Earth* have you come from?”

“Not Earth,” Wyatt corrects. “I’m from a mining colony on Mars. Dawes Crater. I’m a policeman there.”

That’s a pale shadow of the truth, but he doesn’t figure this stranger has all day to hear his life’s story. Assuming any of it is even true. He reaches for his tazzar—the only tangible artifact of his status in Dawes—figuring he can show it the way some men might show a badge. But the tazzar is gone, and Wyatt knows somehow that he hasn’t dropped it, that the fax machine has simply deleted it in transit. Because he isn’t a policeman here? Because he isn’t a policeman at all?

But the stranger’s face lights up. “That’s wonderful, sir! That’s exciting! I’ve never met a Martian before. Tell me, were you born there?”

“Uh, sort of.”

“How splendid!” Then, eyeing the pastries on the ground, he says, “You look hungry. Everyone who comes to Paris comes hungry, if they’re smart. And you’re a smart man, ah? Please, come join me for a meal. My name is John.” The way he says it, it sounds like “jhohhghn.”

“I’m Wyatt.” Wisely, he does not offer to shake hands.

* * *

They find a little restaurant off the main thoroughfares—the sort of place the only a local would know, even though it’s in the heart of the city’s tourist district. Wyatt learns that John is a “community data analyst,” which seems to mean something about sorting names and numbers into different groupings and looking for patterns. In his case, specifically, identifying fraudulent transactions. Not money transactions, but interpersonal ones involving “reputation derivatives.”

“You think an AI would be better at finding the nonconforms, but it isn’t true. Oh, it finds a lot of them, but its methods are different, you see, and they need to be rechecked by a human. It has no soul; it doesn’t understand what drives a man to lie. Even less so what drives a woman. The AI sees no difference between a white lie told to spare someone’s feelings and a fib told to cover misdeeds, nor indeed a fraudulent statement told on a whim in order to make a man feel briefly better about himself. And no one checks, ah? But the patterns reveal themselves just the same. His movements alter, his spending patterns alter, and then ever so slightly, the derivative score drops.”

“You reap what you sow,” Wyatt says, vaguely grasping the gist of this.

John doesn’t appear familiar with that saying, but he nods. “A chronic liar’s associates know him for what he is. My job is to help, in a small way, make associates of us all.”

It’s hard for Wyatt to imagine how such a thing can exist, much less be a paying occupation, but he’s certainly heard stranger things. And other than that, John spends very little time talking about himself, preferring instead to talk about the city of Paris—its history and its landmarks, and the ways in which its citizens do and don’t conform to the expectations of visitors such as Wyatt.

"The Parisians are a very warm people if you make an effort to know them," he says earnestly, "and a very cold people if you treat their city like a . . ."

"Museum?"

"No, no, it *is* a museum, the world's most beautiful. No, what angers the Parisians is presumption, the idea that we are here as, I suppose, servants. We eagerly host those who behave as guests, because we *want* to. Because that is one of our great passions, you see? To cook and to pour and to display beautiful things, to speak the world's most beautiful language."

"Hmm," Wyatt says, thinking about that. It makes sense, but it's about as far from Mars—or the frontiers of America—as he can imagine. "But you must have your own lives, too."

"Of course! Our own lives first, or we'd make dull hosts in a pointless little city. I've never been to Mars; I don't know how it is there, but Paris has much business to conduct. We could block all the visitors and never lack for important things to do. But then, who would see the *Arc de Triomphe*?" John laughs and drinks his wine. "We're like a man showing holograms of his child. Never too busy for that."

Wyatt doesn't know what to say to that. He really doesn't know what to say about any of this. He always imagined that if he came to Paris, it would be with Sadie, and she would know what to do. But Sadie is a distant memory, belonging to someone else, and Wyatt is barely two months old.

"I'll show you beautiful things tomorrow," John says, sensing the shift in mood. "You seem a bit sad. But not alone, ah? That delicate flower of . . . of melancholy we all carry inside, we know it very well, here. Very well. Do you like paintings? Holosculptures? Programmable matter? They do things here with programmable matter that defy the imagination. Because it's beautiful, that's all. Do people come here because they're starved for beauty? Is that why you're here from Mars, Monsieur Wyatt? I imagine your planet's an exciting place, but ugly."

"Yes. It is. Both of those things." Wyatt's never particularly thought about it before. "I don't know why I'm here. I suppose you're right. It's not what I imagined, but I'm guessing there aren't many fistfights here. Or dust storms. I just stepped in a fax machine, and here I am."

"And here you are," John echoes.

Neither of them says anything for a few moments. And then John reaches across the table and puts his hand on Wyatt's own, the way a woman might, and says, "It's getting late."

And here, Wyatt's baseline faxborn identity comes into conflict with the man he thinks he is; he *knows* this is perfectly normal, and while most people don't do it, and a lot of people do it, and he should feel flattered, and if he's not interested the polite thing to do is to thank John and decline gracefully, and blah blah blah.

Fact is, Wyatt draws his hand back like it's touched hot coals, and it's all he can do to keep from overturning the table and beating the crap out of this sneaky Frenchman. Talk about presumption!

"I'm sorry," John says, looking shocked and hurt, but Wyatt is already in motion, leaving this place, probably sticking John with the bill as he bolts for the fax gate. For the relative familiarity of his own native planet.

* * *

Back in the assayer's office, Wyatt finally does fax up some breakfast. As he eats, he can't help wondering whether *he* has a reputation score, and if so, where it is and how people can look at it, and whether he's just damaged it by behaving . . . by behaving in a manner consistent with his character, but contrary to the standards of time and place. He has a lot to learn and a lot to practice; he was created specifically for Dawes Crater, and like a child wrapped up in his mother's bosom, he might not be ready to leave it yet. Maybe not for a while. And yet, how can a person know when they're ready for anything, except by trying? It's confusing, and this confusion annoys Wyatt, who prefers his life to be simple. Not boring, but simple. But has it ever been? He searches his memories—his bullshit made-up memories—for times when that might have been true, but he just isn't sure. And that annoys him even more.

And who is he annoyed at, really? Himself? Hardly. How can he be blamed for any of this? No, he's mad at Tomasa Clady, who created him (not raised him from the dead but *created* him, from rumors) without permission and without really thinking it through. Maybe Clady is

inexperienced at ordering historical resurrectants, but would it have killed him to research the topic a little? If there are experts at identifying minor social fibbers, then surely there must be experts at resurrection! There are so many rough edges inside of Wyatt Earp 2.0, so many poorly stitched seams that he's just now starting to notice. Or is that true for the nonfaxborn as well? Has it always been? He doesn't know. He has no way to know. And so his frustrations are ultimately futile, which does nothing at all to soothe them.

He tries to pray but finds it so alien—so far removed from the baseline template—that he's left staring at the flat expanse of the ceiling, emptily, sensing no divinity in the Universe at all. And this—this!—seems the grossest violation. Why should he remember prayer if he isn't capable of it? Or has *this* always been true as well? Did Wyatt 1.0 even believe in God? He can't remember. It's not that he *doesn't* remember; he simply can't, because he wasn't there.

And he wishes, for a moment, that men could cry.

* * *

Wyatt is getting ready to leave when he hears male voices in the outer room. Sighing, he goes out to investigate.

"You look like crap," says Tomasa Clady. Andrew Smith-Pfennig is there with him; both are in uniform and looking at least two kilograms more muscular than they had when Wyatt first met them.

"Trapped overnight by the storm," Wyatt mutters.

Clady's eyebrows shoot up in mock surprise. "By that little storm? Ha. The way I heard it, you spent the night with two women—one of them a Provincial Captain."

Several responses flit across Wyatt's mind, but he can't quite get his head together, so finally he just says, "What do you need, Tom?"

"I'm here as a humble messenger."

"Very humble," Smith-Pfennig adds.

"The site manager would like to see you."

Site manager? Wyatt thinks that over. He's been planning to meet with the bosses, but in his own time and on his own terms, and preferably when things in Dawes Crater are a lot farther along. Being summoned doesn't suit him. On the other hand, his curiosity is piqued, because what does a site manager need with a lowly security consultant anyway? If his interest were historical, he'd've met with Wyatt much earlier, and if it were contractual, he'd've met much later, when there were more results (or visible lack) to paw through.

"All right," Wyatt says. "But can I talk to you first? Alone?"

"All right. Can we walk and talk? The site manager seemed rather urgent."

"I suppose so."

"Well then," Smith-Pfennig offers, "I'll start my patrol early, shall I?"

"Yeah," say Wyatt and Tomasa at the same time.

They all step out of the building; the door curls shut behind them and latches with a heavy click, and then Smith-Pfennig goes one way while Wyatt and Tomasa go the other.

The streets of Dawes Crater City are technically paved, but usually coated with a layer of dust that has to be cleared off several times a week by sweeping machines. So they look like dirt roads, and they act like dirt roads as far as the traction of tires, to the point where Wyatt is surprised no pedestrian has been killed by a skidding truck. Which is why the security team has begun enforcing a strict—and actually quite popular—speed limit.

This morning, the dust is piled in ankle-high drifts like snow after a blizzard. Some of the buildings are coated with it as well, although they seem capable of clearing themselves; as they walk past, Wyatt hears one of them crackle, smells a thunderstorm reek coming off it, and sees the dust slide off like magic. Well.

"What's on your mind, son?" Tom says, only half sarcastically.

"I just want you to know, you did a rush job on me. I'm finding a lot of workmanship errors."

"Hmm. Okay. Anything serious?"

"Well, I nearly punched a Frenchman for touching my hand. There are . . . seams between the memories and the template. I'm not the man I remember being."

Tom laughs nervously at that. "I don't think any of us are, Wyatt. Really."

"Yeah, I figured you'd say that. You can take my word, I'm talking about something more."

"All right. Consider it taken. Do you want to see a personality surgeon? I mean, is it the memories or the template that's bothering you?"

That's not a question Wyatt's prepared for. His plan was simply to chew his father out, like every ungrateful son ever. It hadn't occurred to him that any of this was fixable. But he supposes he shouldn't be surprised; if they can fashion a man from photographs and newspaper clippings, why not from a man who's already nearly complete?

"I'm not sure," he says.

A truck rolls past, a big gray box of iron, kicking up dust with tires as tall as a horse. The trucks are weirdly silent when they obey the speed limit, with only a faint squeaking and creaking to mark their passage.

"Is the problem urgent?" Tomasa asks.

"Not sure about that either. Does this stuff ever get better by itself?"

"All the time, I think. People sometimes edit out memories they think they don't want anymore, and it's usually an exercise in butchery. But I think a lot of it grows back. I'm really not the person to ask; a surgeon can explain this to you better than I can. Do you want an appointment?"

"Huh. I don't know. Maybe."

"Well, I'm sorry for your trouble. You're right; I was in a hurry to solve my own problem. I wasn't thinking about you, about how it would be for you. I'll do what I can, all right? And I'll keep it private, just between us."

And here Wyatt really doesn't know what to say, because it's hard to ask more than that from any man. And yet, all this really does is take away the outlet for his frustrations. He lived eighty-one years in his original life, and came to Mars at the apparent age of thirty-five or so, as he'd been at the height of his Earthly fame. But he feels seventeen when he kicks at one of the red-brown dunes they're trodding through.

"Stupid sand. If not for the street sweepers, this town would disappear."

"True," Tom allows. Then: "It's the shape of the valley. Same reason the minerals are exposed; the wind carves straight through, bringing the land along with it."

Wyatt is expecting to arrive at the Admin building, but instead they stop in front of a little vehicle, like a smaller, sleeker version of the big ore-carrying trucks. Stubby wings project from the back of it.

"What's this?"

"Transportation. Site manager's waiting for us on the crater rim, about twenty kilometers from here."

"Huh. Do you know why he's there?"

"Nope." Tomasa opens the driver-side door. "Have you ever ridden in a truck before?"

Wyatt laughs then, suddenly in command of himself again. "Just how old do you think I am, Tom? Yes, I've ridden in a truck. I was afraid it was some kind of airplane."

* * *

It turns out the truck knows how to drive itself, so even though Tom has access to a set of controls, he folds them away and puts his feet up. Wyatt is content to ride shotgun, with the window open and a light, cold breeze in his face. The road up the crater wall is not paved, but it's lined with big stones on either side to mark the way, and the space in between these margins—wide enough to pass four trucks—appears well maintained. Martian soil—at least in the places Wyatt has seen—readily turns to concrete if wetted and compacted, and something like that seems to have been done here. The storm debris has already been cleared in one direction, *their* direction, so the ride is smooth as they follow the winding path up and up the side of the crater. Every few minutes, a vehicle passes them in the other direction, but for the most part the road feels deserted.

The view is nice: the town shrinking below them, the rocky, sparsely vegetated valley expanding. It looks like a flattened version of the badlands of South Dakota, painted only in red except for the occasional stripe of black boulders.

“Those are bits of basaltic tuff,” Tom tells him, “basically the bedrock of the valley, shattered and kicked up when the crater was formed. The layers above that are called rhyolytic tuff.”

“Where the minerals are?”

“Mostly, but there’s a vein of rare earth concentrates running through the whole region that the crater exposed.”

“You know a lot for a security guard.”

“I’ve been here five years,” Tom says, and leaves it at that.

Wyatt’s knowledge of mining is limited to gold, silver, copper, and lead. Back in his old life he knew people who went after things like molybdenum and tin, but he never saw the point; it took a whole mountain of the stuff to deliver a fortune. But there’s a whole mountain here, of all that and more, and as part owner he probably ought to learn more about it.

Down below and to the north, he can see the machines clawing their way through the crater wall. They’re not too mysterious; there’s a business end for digging and a process end for pooping out the tailings. Even the inside is something he can vaguely picture: a fax machine to disassemble the abraded rock, an element buffer to store anything of value, a screw conveyor for moving the rest of the material back and out, and a tamper to pack it all back down. Simple enough. It’s the same operation as any gold panning prospector, writ large and mechanical. The hard part of mining is knowing where to dig, and how to get the findings to a place that will pay fair price. Wyatt had tried his hand once or twice, and it was on those two points that he had fallen flat. Well, that and the fact that Alaska was a pile of shit to begin with. What a lousy, shitty venture that had been.

In theory, with the Dawes Crater Mining Company to handle all the details, Wyatt is free this time to simply rake in the profits, but he knows better than that. An ignorant man is easily fleeced, all the more so if he comes from six hundred years in the past.

The sky hazes over with white cirrus clouds and then clears again. The clouds move fast here, like restless travelers hurrying onward and onward. Like Wyatt himself. It seems like that thought should trouble him, but the rocking motions of the truck are soothing, and without realizing it he manages to slip off into a light slumber. He’s already had a long day.

He snaps awake when the vehicle pulls to a stop, with squeaking brakes and the crunching of gravel under the wheels.

He looks around. There’s no sign of the crater here; the ground is flat and rises sharply into jagged hills on one side. With the sun at noon, he can’t even tell what direction they are. And this area is the site of some trouble; a dozen trucks litter the area, along with a good thirty men in various states of distress.

“What happened here?” he asks Clady.

“I don’t know. They wouldn’t say over the wireless.”

He opens his door and gets out, and Wyatt follows suit. At first no one is paying attention to them, but then a knot of people detached from the crowd, led by a large-ish man with brown skin and thin, sandy-brown hair, wearing a set of mining coveralls fresh from the fax, far too clean to have ever been used.

“You can just go ahead and park there,” the man says to Clady. His accent is British, or something like it. Then, eyeing Wyatt, “Is this him?”

Wyatt sticks a hand out, then thinks better of it and pulls it back. “Wyatt Faxborn,” he says, having recently found a shortened version of his name that his reconstructed brain will actually let him say. “Pleased to meet you.”

The man looks him up and down in a gesture of appraisal that earns immediate respect from Wyatt. “Jonathan Adisa, Site Manager. What you’re about to see is strictly confidential, so I need you to go ahead and keep your mouth shut. Can you do that?”

“Yeah.”

“All right, come with me. Both of you. We ship the elements out of here by truck transport, right? Well, last week we had a truck raided by vandals. No one on board, and the sensor logs were scrubbed with a matter virus, so we don’t really know what happened.”

Tom Clady asks, “How much did they take?”

“Not much. I mean, it’s a rolling buffer with a hundred tons of refined matter on board. How much can they take? But they got all the sammy and gaydol, and I mean all of it. They knew what they were after. Probably 20 percent of the value in that truck, which means 20 percent of the crater’s economic output for the week.”

“Why didn’t I hear about this?” Tom asks.

“Because we wanted to keep it quiet, that’s why. Next truck out, I drove personally. Right into last night’s dust storm, as it turned out.”

“And?”

“And they raided it again while I was parked. Shot me, got away clean before the storm had even fully dissipated.”

Wyatt wonders what they shot him with; he looks all right. But a tazer wouldn’t keep him down for long and wouldn’t prevent him from seeing who they were and what they were up to.

The three of them walk up to what is clearly the raided vehicle; its tires are melted into the ground, and the access hatches have been pried off with what looks like considerable force. There is a burn mark along the side of the cargo hold, and the cockpit is riddled with tiny holes.

“Damnation,” Wyatt says.

“Yes,” Jonathan Adisa agrees. But when he speaks next, it’s to Tom Clady. “Now here’s what’s going to happen: we’re sending a decoy truck, hollow but rigged to pass diagnostics, and with the suspension cranked down to maximum preload so it looks like it’s running heavy. Right? And your entire security detachment—including this guy”—he jerks his thumb at Wyatt—“are going to be hiding inside. When they break in, you’re going to go ahead and slap the cuffs on them and bring them to me. To *me*, you understand? We’re not involving the Provincial Authority on this one, because piracy cases are automatically kicked up to the Constabulary, and I’ll go blind before I let those people back in my crater again. Understood?”

“How do you expect—” Wyatt tries, but Adisa simply cuts him off.

“Listen, you’re doing a good job in town. I had my doubts, but you’re saving us a lot more than you’re costing. Your methods are unorthodox and not always appreciated, but this is a damn frontier planet, and anyone who doesn’t like it can go ahead and fax their asses back to Earth. You comprehend? Now as it happens, I’ve read your dossier, and I know you have a lot of experience guarding valuables in transit. Including many instances when things went wrong and people got hurt. You don’t like my plan? That’s fine—come up with your own. You’re the expert. But you’re on the next truck, six days from now, and you *will* catch these hijackers. That’s happening. Understood?”

Wyatt understands the terms of his employment well enough to know he can’t be forced to do this. He suspects that none of the security team can; it’s extremely dangerous and well outside their job description. But he also knows it would be really unwise to refuse, and anyway Adisa is right; he does have experience in exactly this kind of thing. Probably more than anyone else on the planet. And he’s not afraid, just a little irritated at the man’s tone. And then again, it’s not like Adisa is asking Wyatt to do something he hasn’t already tried himself. The man’s no coward, no hypocrite. He would have done well in the Old America.

“Yeah, I’ll do it,” Wyatt says.

Tom Clady, beside him, opts for a much more formal, “Understood, sir.”

And that’s how that whole thing got started.

* * *

In the end, the plan is much like the site manager had envisioned; basically a Trojan Horse rolling into the robbers’ midst. Wyatt had insisted on posting a trio of civilian sentries on the crater rim, listening for radio chatter and poised to call back to town on a moment’s notice. Similarly, Tom had insisted on installing a fax machine directly inside the truck’s cargo bay, along with a modest element buffer that would let them print out any suddenly needed items, and also let them escape back to town if they decided they needed to. It was the escape aspect that seemed most to concern the men.

Now, they find themselves rolling back up and over the crater wall, crammed like sweaty pigs into a space in the back of the transport barely large enough for the whole security team. It smells of oil and metal and the unmistakable tang of gunpowder. Tom offered to drive the truck with Wyatt (literally) riding shotgun, but in the end, they bowed to popular opinion that that was simply too dangerous. Instead, they have a couple of robots up front—faceless mannequins of shiny metal, dressed in coats and hats to hide their identity. Wyatt asked why they couldn't just give shotguns to the robots, but that was apparently all kinds of illegal, and from the horrified faces of the men, you'd think he was offering to kill a baby.

Even the shotguns themselves were hard to procure; there were hastily expedited licenses and safety courses, and the Admin fax machine seemed genuinely baffled by the fabrication request, and needed layers upon layers of authorization to unlock its armory stores and even recognize the words: Shot. Gun. Well, no matter; the men are truly armed now, for the first time in their lives.

"And you've done this before?" Smith-Pfennig is asking Wyatt as the truck rocks and lurches around them.

"Many times," Wyatt assures him, without pulling his face away from the small portside window. "I spent practically my whole life doing this."

"Do the people on the same side ever shoot each other by mistake?"

Smith-Pfennig is nervous. All of them are—including Tom Clady—but Pfennig at least is not ashamed to let it show. And it's a sensible question for someone about to "see the elephant" for the first time. Hell, even Wyatt is a bit nervous. In his old life he'd had a lot of years to grow soft before death finally took him, and in his new life he's never held anything more menacing than a tazer and a glass of wine. And he's not sure he's ever trusted his life to a posse as green and ragtag as this one.

"I've never seen that happen," Wyatt says. "You generally don't ride out with idiots." Generally.

He rubs the window with his sleeve, for the third time in ten minutes. It's close and sweaty back here, but it's also cold; the walls of the cargo hold are not insulated, and the temperature outside is refusing to climb with the morning sun. With the flat ground outside the crater rim, the horizon is close—just a few kilometers away at the best of times—and Wyatt doesn't like it. If the bandits do return, there won't be a lot of warning.

"Do you see anything over there?" he asks Tom Clady, who is manning the window on the other side. "Dust plumes, anything like that?"

"No. But we also have the navigation radar and the satellite feed on alert."

"Uh huh." He lets his tone convey his skepticism. The range on the navigation radar is even less than the range of an eyeball, and Wyatt trusts the satellite feed not at all. He was initially impressed by the quality of the images and the automated motion alarms, but the coverage is so thin it does more harm than good to think it might be available when you need it. "Just keep your eyes peeled."

A nervous laugh runs through the men; another quaint phrase they haven't heard before. Just to fill the silence, he tells them, "They have to be coming in a truck of their own. Not as big as this one, but probably faster. I figure it's at least three men, with some kind of heavy loading equipment, and they're going to have to get out. When they do, we'll pop the sides, fire a couple of warning shots, and then move in."

"And they'll surrender, just like that?" asks Wing, although he knows the plan perfectly well.

"I'm not guaranteeing it," Wyatt snaps. "These men have already used violence to get what they want, so we may have to drop a few before the others get the idea. This load"—he waves one of the shotgun shells over his shoulder—"is light birdshot. The machines wouldn't let me order anything heavier, so if it comes to shooting, we're going to have to get in close."

"And fire rapidly," Clady adds.

"Right," Wyatt says, although that's not precisely true. Then: "I see a plume. Something's coming. Ready, everyone. This is no joke." And then, much too late, he thinks to ask, "What sort of weapon do you suppose made those holes in the transport cab?"

From that moment, things happen quickly and will be remembered only in pieces. The transport hits a bump that sends them all tumbling, and by the time they've gotten to their feet again, there's a loud metallic banging and tearing sound from the front of the transport.

"Drop the walls! Drop the walls!" Shouts Tom Clady, and one of the men hits the big red switch they've rigged up, and the roof of the transport blows off, and the walls fold outward like ramps, and the brakes of the transport lock, sending the men all tumbling again.

The bandits' vehicle isn't a truck at all, but some sort of low-flying airplane that moves faster than anything Wyatt has ever laid eyes on. It overflies the transport, raking the cab with fire from a weapon Wyatt has never seen but somehow recognizes: a wiregun. The airplane sets down on the Martian soil, skidding and spinning to a stop. Uselessly, some of the men fire birdshot at it, and the roar of the guns is *loud*. Wyatt has forgotten how loud. And then the sides of the aircraft fold up like the wings of a bird, and five men spill out.

At least, he thinks they're men, but they're very large and have transparent domes covering their heads, and dark hoods beneath that, like the battle armor from the Oxygen Revolution. These aren't stagecoach robbers at all; these are professional fighting men! Soldiers? Privateers? Does it matter?

At least this much of the plan has worked: the attackers seem to have no idea what's happening. They pile out of their vehicle on powerful, piston-driven feet, but they're expecting a transport full of rare metals, not a platform covered with security guards getting uneasily to their feet. And Wyatt, not knowing what else to do, fires a warning shot into the air.

The other security men aren't so generous; their plan has fallen apart and in a panic, most of them level their guns at the attackers and open fire. BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! And when the first blasts of birdshot hit them, the fighting men fall. Not because they're injured (the shot slides harmlessly off their armor) and not even because they're knocked over by the force of the blasts. It's just raw surprise. Three down, two still up.

And this is where it all goes wrong, because all five of them—the fallen ones and the ones still standing—have wireguns mounted to the forearms of their suits, and proceed to rake the entire area at knee and chest level.

Security men fall like sacks of rubble, screaming, bleeding, in some cases *bursting*, and this is about as bad a situation as Wyatt has ever seen, and in the confusion, Tom Clady tackles him hard, and the two of them roll straight into the print plate of the fax machine.

And disappear.

* * *

The two of them tumble out of the Admin fax machine, none the worse for wear. Jonathan Adisa is waiting there for them, along with a pair of functionaries Wyatt doesn't know.

"Are you all right?" Wyatt asks, after he and Tom Clady have had a moment to collect themselves.

"Of course," Tom says, climbing to his feet and brushing himself off. He doesn't ask the same thing of Wyatt, which is odd considering what just happened, but Wyatt puts it down to jangled nerves. That is, until the fax hums to life again and spits out each of the security men, one by one.

There isn't a scratch on any of them.

"What happened?" demands Smith-Pfennig, looking around. "Why am I here?"

"You've been restored from backups," Tom answers grimly.

"I died? In the robbery?"

Tom nods. "I'm sorry. All of you did."

"What happened?" asks the site manager.

"Professional hijacking," Tom tells him. "Well-armed, well-equipped. We *highly* underestimated this."

Jonathan Adisa is shaking his head. "You couldn't capture even one of them?"

Tom laughs at that. "No more than you could, sir. We were totally outgunned. Full battle armor!"

"Wait a minute," Wyatt says, finding his tongue after long seconds of spluttering astonishment. "Restored from *backups*?"

"Yeecess," Tom answers carefully, not understanding Wyatt's surprise.

And why should Wyatt be surprised? About anything, ever? If they can restore a man from newspaper articles and dreams and rumor, why not from a stored image of the entire man?

But that would mean . . .

That would mean none of them were ever in any danger. They had nothing to lose but the memories since their last backup. And maybe even those could be filled in, at least as well as Wyatt's own past.

And *that* would mean these Martians, these Men of the Future, were even more cowardly than Wyatt had supposed. There is chatter all around him, the men talking about their rotten luck and the "trauma" of knowing they've died, that it's possible for them to die. Oh, dear lord.

"Well," says Jonathan Adisa at a lull in the conversation, "We're going to have to call in outside help now. The Constabulary in Dawes Crater! It's the end of life as we know it."

"Like hell," Wyatt says.

Adisa turns to look at him. "Excuse me?"

"I said, 'like hell.' I *am* outside help. I've already been called, and I've spent my life solving problems like this. Let me do my job."

Adisa's resigned look gives way to grudging interest. "You have a plan?"

"Of course I have a plan. What I need is a *budget*, and detailed consultation with a personality surgeon. Time I'm done with these robbers, Mars won't know what hit it."

He rubs his hands together for a moment and then adds, "I can hardly wait."

A man comes forward into the light—half stepping, half falling. All around him is white.

"Oh, God, this isn't Heaven," he blurts, and it's a sensible thing to say, because he remembers dying. Coughing up sputum, unable to catch a breath. Then pain and darkness and nothing.

"Please state your full name," says a woman's voice. Calm, soothing, impersonal.

He's wearing some sort of light gray, lightweight robe. The floor under his feet is warm and gray. The light is from the walls, tight and close around him.

"Please state your full name," the voice repeats.

Impatient, he says: "Jonathan Henry Holliday." And then, for no apparent reason adds: "Two Point Oh, Faxborn."

Ahem.

"Is this Purgatory?" he tries, because it doesn't look like Hell either.

And a familiar voice answers. A male voice this time—the voice of his good friend Wyatt Earp.

"You're close," Wyatt says, laughing, curling open the door of the booth. "Welcome to Mars, Doc."