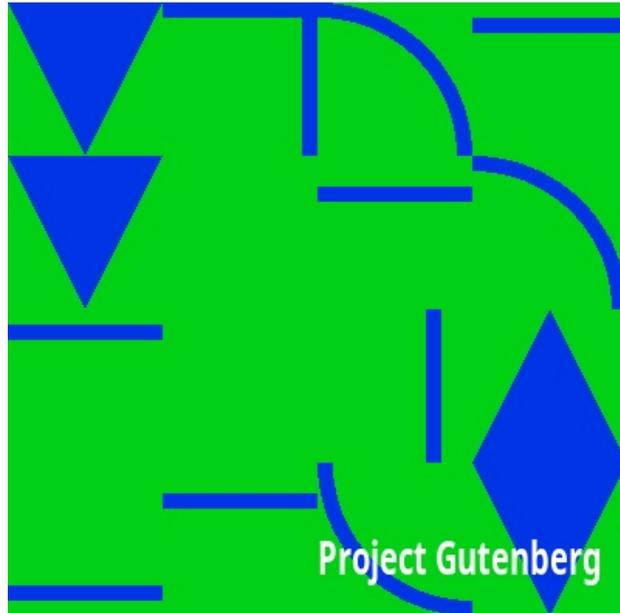

Spies Die Hard!

Arnold Marmor



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Earth's espionage ring was a headache, so the Martian Security Chief offered ten thousand credits for a key agent. But even for a price—

SPIES DIE HARD!

By Arnold Marmor

"**T**HIS man is a spy for Earth," a voice droned, as the telecaster vibrated and a photo of Harry Horn flashed on the screen. "Ten thousand credits for this man, dead or alive. Contact Lazar of the Security Police. Harry Horn. Thirty-four, five feet, eleven inches, one hundred and seventy-two pounds."

Lynn Brickel snapped off the humming machine. She frowned. Horn had been high in the Martian Security Police, one of Lazar's top men. Now Horn turned out to be a spy for Earth. Why hadn't she been told? Was Green losing his trust in her? Hadn't she helped McLean and Sanderson escape from Mars?

Her short tunic shimmered as she began to pace the floor. She stopped short as a hum splashed through the room. She went quickly to the door and pressed a red button on the wall.

But the vibration of the elevator did not reach her ears. Puzzled, she opened the door, stepped into the marble hall. She shrugged, started to return to her apartment when the sound of footsteps on the stairs halted her. She waited.

He came into view. Harry Horn. There was no mistaking his face. It had flashed on and off the telecaster throughout the day.

"Brickel?" he said, coming up to her.

His white coveralls were spotted with grime. There was a dark bruise on his right cheek.

"Yes," she said.

"I'm Harry Horn."

"I know."

"You've got to help me." His voice was urgent, pleading. He brushed past her, into her room. She walked in after him, shut and locked the door, leaned her back against it.

"You can't stay here," she said.

"Are you alone?"

"Yes," she said. "I'm alone."

He went through the apartment, returned to the front room. "I had to make sure." He sank into the low divan, covered his face with his hands.

She walked toward him. "You can't stay here," she repeated.

He looked up at her, his eyes frightened. "Do you have any idea of what Lazar will do to me once he gets his fat hands around my throat? He won't kill me right away."

"Why come to me?"

"You can help me."

"What can I do?"

"You can help me get away. A turbo-engine space ship. That's all I need. It's small and fast."

"But why come to me? You haven't explained."

"You helped McLean and Sanderson."

"How do you know this?"

"We're both in the same organization but not in the same unit. The leader of my unit instructed me to go to you."

"I see. Who is your leader?"

"I can't tell you. You know that. I wouldn't ask you your leader's name."

L YNN shrugged slim shoulders. "It wouldn't make any difference. He is not stationed on Mars."

Horn jumped to his feet. "You will help me?"

"If I can."

"Can you get me the ship?"

"I suppose. But we'll have to wait for night. It is dangerous to do anything now. Ten thousand credits. Lazar wants you awful bad. He offered five for both McLean and Sanderson."

"I was very close to Lazar in the Security Police. I know too much."

"We all make mistakes."

"I envy your logic. But I can't see it that way. I was considered too good an agent to make a mistake."

"It's too late to cry over it now. When it is dark I'll contact—a friend—and have the space ship ready."

Horn grinned. "You're still not sure of me?"

"It isn't that. But you don't belong to my unit. We can't name names to outsiders."

"You're right, of course. You've been well trained."

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes."

She set food in front of him and watched him eat.

"What is Lazar like?" she asked. "I have heard of him."

"Cruel," he said. "A sadist. Death is the easy way out when you're in Lazar's hands."

"It will soon be dark," she said.

He stood up, his hunger satisfied. "Tell me," he said, "was it difficult getting Sanderson and McLean out of Mars?"

"No," she said. "Not difficult at all."

"Good." He went to the interphone. He dialed, spoke, "You may come up now."

"What are you doing?" her face paled.

He turned to her, smiling. "Lazar was wondering how Sanderson and McLean escaped. You were on the master list of suspects. I was waiting for you to confess."

Lynn stiffened. "It—it was a trick."

"That's right, Brickel. Too bad. You're too pretty to die."

"That—that was a message to Lazar."

"Yes. He'll be here shortly."

Lynn slipped her hand in the pocket of her tunic, brought out a small blaster.

"Don't be a fool," Horn said. "Maybe you'll be spared. Why take your life? Just tell all you know?"

Lynn smiled. "I wasn't thinking of taking my life. But yours."

Horn frowned. "Don't be an idiot." He advanced toward her.

Lynn shook her head slowly. "Now it's my turn to be clever."

Horn's face went wild. "You can't escape Lazar! Listen to me—"

She blasted him.

LYNN opened the door.

Lazar stood there, fat and ugly. There were two men of the Security Police with him.

"Come in," she invited.

They came in. She shut the door. Lazar looked down at the dead Harry Horn.

"You said dead or alive," Lynn reminded Lazar. "You owe me ten thousand credits."

"What happened?" Lazar snapped at her. His flesh-bedded eyes studied her.

"He came to me for help. I had to bide my time. I told him I'd help him. I was waiting for the chance to get to you. He was by the interphone a few minutes ago. It was the chance I needed. I pulled my blaster, covered him. He made a dash for freedom so I had to kill him."

"This is crazy," one of the men said. "Horn must have had her confession. But now what do we do for evidence?"

"Shut up!" Lazar snapped.

"Your word is good, isn't it, Lazar?" Lynn said.

"What do you mean?"

"The ten thousand credits. As a loyal citizen I've earned them."

"You'll get your credits," Lazar snarled, frustration in his eyes.

"I know I will," Lynn said, smiling.

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