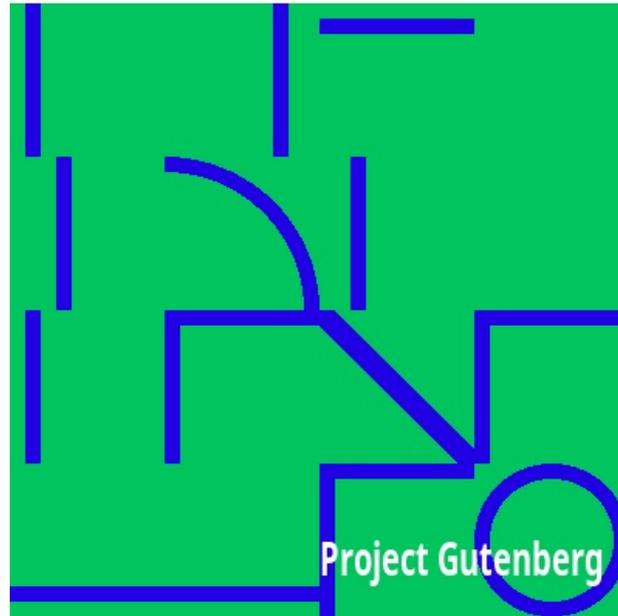

The Big Tomorrow

Richard S. Shaver



The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Big Tomorrow, by Paul Lohrman

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THE BIG TOMORROW

BY PAUL LOHRMAN

There are certain rare individuals in this world who seem bereft of all common sense. These are the people who set their eyes upon an objective and immediately all intelligence, logic, good advice, unsolvable problems, and insurmountable obstacles go completely by the boards. The characters we refer to are obviously just plain stupid. What they want to do, just can't be done. The objectives they have in mind are unachievable and anyone with an ounce of brains can tell them so and give them good reasons. They are usually pretty sad cases and often land in the funny house. But then again, some of them go out and discover new worlds.

HE hadn't gotten any work done that morning. He'd spent most of the time pacing the floor of his small back office, and the rest of it at the window—hands clasped behind his somewhat bowed back—staring up into the cloudless sky.

At ten-forty, the intercom buzzed. He snapped the switch.

"Yes?"

"I've got those figures, Mr. Lake. We have nine—"

"Maybe you'd better come in and tell me personally, Lucy."

"All right, Mr. Lake."

The intercom snapped off and a few moments later a girl entered the office—if the prim little wisp that was Lucy Crane could be so generously classified.

Joshua Lake stared at the elongated bun of black hair on the top of her head as she came toward his desk. There was an odd streak of rich imagination in Joshua Lake and he always felt Lucy Crane's bun was a symbol of disapproval. "Sit down, Lucy. You use up too much energy."

"I try to do my job, Mr. Lake."

"You do that—and more. What are the figures, Lucy?"

"We're in desperate shape. We have nine thousand, four hundred and twenty dollars in the payroll account. That leaves it over five thousand short. There is only about two thousand in General Disbursements, but that isn't enough to cover invoices due tomorrow. I'm afraid—"

"Don't be afraid, Lucy. That's negative. If we waste our time sitting around shivering, we won't make any progress at all."

"I didn't mean it that way, Mr. Lake. I'm not shivering. I was merely stating that we haven't got enough money."

"Then I'll go to the bank and get some more."

"Of course, Mr. Lake. Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all, Lucy. You run on to lunch."

"You aren't going out?"

"No. I'm not hungry today."

Her bun bobbed in disapproval as she left the office. Joshua Lake stared at the closed door and sighed. Lucy knew exactly how things were. She wasn't one to be fooled. But Joshua hoped the rest of the personnel were not so perceptive. The engineers and the draftsmen particularly. They could all walk out at noon and be working somewhere else by one o'clock, what with the huge current industrial demand.

He walked again to the window; an old man; bone-weary, with the weight of his sixty-odd

years bending his shoulders like a brick-carrier's hod.

"Then I'll go to the bank and get some more." He hadn't even fooled himself this time. His chances at the bank were nil. Less than nil. His very presence there could tip the balance of their decision. Loans could be called; the doors locked before nightfall.

At the window, he lowered his eyes from the sky and looked to the gate that led into the horseshoe sweep of low buildings and back to the great, bulking hangar where precious work was being done.

A man and his dream, Lake mused.

He could see only the back of the sign hanging over the gate, but he was quite familiar with the other side. *Lake Interstellar Enterprises* in bold, brave letters; and in the lower right-hand corner—barely discernible—*Joshua Lake—President*.

A visitor looking closely at the sign could see that it had been done over—that a discarded legend lay beneath a coat of white paint. The old name of the firm was still faintly visible: *Lake and Gorman—Castings and Extrusions*.

It wasn't difficult for Joshua to conjure up Lee Gorman's craggy, hostile face. Nor his words. Lee had a voice like gravel being ground to powder. A voice to remember....

"Of course I won't go along with this damn-fool idea of yours! Turn a perfectly sound, entrenched business into a blue-sky factory? You've gone crazy, Joshua."

"But it's feasible, Lee! Entirely feasible. All we need is a little imagination. I've investigated. I've hired the best brains in the world. I have all the necessary preliminary data. A rocket *can* be built that will take three men to the Moon and bring them back!"

"That's idiocy, Joshua!"

"Don't you believe it can be done?"

"I don't care whether it can be done or not!"

"But open your eyes, man! This is an age of development. An era of movement. We're on the threshold of the big tomorrow, and we can't let it pass us by! We can't let the honor and the glory go to others while we sit on our hands and hoot from the gallery! Come alive, Lee! The world is passing us!"

"I don't want honor and glory. All I want is a sound going business. Suppose we could put a rocket on the Moon and bring it back? Where would that leave us? Broke and famous. And laughed at probably in the bargain."

"Nothing of the kind. We could write our own ticket. We'd control the gateway to the greatest mineral deposits within reach of Man! Think of it, Lee. Use your imagination."

"I won't go along with you, Joshua. That's all there is to it."

More of the same; days of it, and finally: "You can have the customers then, Lee. I'll keep the plant—the physical properties."

"But that's not fair."

"Perhaps not, but it's legal."

"How can I service them—from my basement?"

"I offered you an alternative only a fool would have turned down—"

"That only a fool would accept!"

"—so now I'm going ahead and nothing can stop me. I've got a dream, man—a dream of a big tomorrow. I'm going to make that dream come true."

"Name it right, Joshua. You've got an obsession."

The end of *Lake and Gorman*....

Joshua turned from the window, then paused and looked again into the sky. The Moon was up, a round, white will-o'-the-wisp in the clear blue afternoon sky. He stared at it and the old feeling of affinity swept over him, stronger than ever. The Moon was, for him, both a goal and a tonic. Sight of its illusive form could always sweep away his doubts; straighten his shoulders.

The intercom buzzed. Joshua went over and snapped it. "Yes?"

"Mr. Coving to see you, sir."

"Send him in."

Rayburn Coving was probably the best rocket-fuel man in the world. He had a little of his sandy hair left, not much, and his forehead was permanently creased from frowning. "I'm afraid that new benzoic derivative is a failure, Chief. It piles up corrosion in the tubes too fast. They'd be clogged halfway through the trip."

One hundred and twenty thousand dollars up the spout. Joshua sighed. "Well, I suppose the chance of success was worth it. The added power in relatively smaller space would have solved so many other problems."

"I'm sorry it failed."

Joshua smiled. "To paraphrase a certain American inventor—we're finding any number of ways you can't go to the Moon. What now, Coving?"

"Back to the old method—and the other problems. None of them are insurmountable, though. A little more time—"

"Yes—a little more time." Joshua grimaced inwardly. He was talking to Coving as though they had years—not as though their time had run out. He was even in debt for Coving's labor; overdrawn on it without enough money to pay.

The moment of weakness—of deep-down weariness—passed. Joshua Lake stiffened as he had stiffened so many times before. As he had stiffened when Zornoff's alloys had flunked out and the first trip to the bank had been made necessary. The first trip to the bank. Joshua smiled wryly. The bank people had been cordial then. Even servile. Later it had been different. Now—

"You were saying, Mr. Lake—?"

"Have you seen Morton lately? What's the latest on the radar relay equipment?"

"No major bugs, I think. It's coming along famously."

"Good!" For two hundred odd thousand it certainly should, Joshua felt. "Let me know how you make out, Coving."

"I will, Chief. I'll get the order in for the new chemicals immediately."

"Eh—oh, yes. Do that. Do that by all means."

Coving left. Joshua Lake put his head against the back rest of the chair and closed his eyes. He dozed, drifting into a haze from weariness. *It's been so long—so very long. Seven years—eight—ten. Ten years. Good heavens! Was it possible? It didn't seem that long. Ten years to make a dream succeed.*

Or fail.

Joshua slept and again—as in the past—his rest was plagued with visions. The torment of his days took many forms in an alert subconscious too taut to relax. He had seen before him mountains too steep to cross—chasms too deep and wide to bridge. Often, when a great problem was solved, he would look back, nights later, to see the mountain or the chasm from the other side.

Now his vision was different. No mountain before him, but a face—the stern craggy face of an obstacle in his path.

Lee Gorman.

The face was of clay—yet it lived. The eyes were cold, disdainful. And a weird, green creation of Joshua's own mind was sketching Gorman in the numbers, signs, and symbols of a rocket that would never reach the Moon.

Joshua awoke with a start and found Lucy bending over him. "You didn't answer the buzzer, Mr. Lake. I was worried."

"I must have dozed off, Lucy. Sorry."

"I'm going home now—if there's nothing else."

"Nothing else. I'm going home myself. Good night."

Joshua paused beside his car in the parking lot to stare at the lighted windows of the big hangar. The second shift had come on. They would work all night; then, tomorrow, they would line up with the others at the pay window. But there wouldn't be any money. The next night the hangar windows would be dark.

He got into the car and drove home.

Myra was waiting for him. She took his hat. After he kissed her, she said, "Your eyes are red, dear. You've been working much too hard. Shall we have dinner in the patio?"

"That would be nice."

Joshua had little to say during the meal, and Myra was quiet also—adjusting herself, as she had always done, to his mood. Finally, she said, "That will be all, Bertha. Leave the coffee pot."

The maid left. A slight chill was coming in off the desert. Joshua shivered and said, "We're through, Myra."

"Through? I don't understand."

"The Moon trip. I can't swing it. The money's run out. There's no place I can raise another dime."

"But you've worked so hard—and so long! And you are so close to success."

"We've made a lot of progress, but the rocket isn't ready yet. Now it's too late."

They were silent for a time. Then Myra said, "In a way, I'm glad. You should have stopped long ago. You aren't strong enough to stand this pace forever. Now we can go away—get a small place somewhere. That Moon rocket was killing you, Joshua."

Joshua pondered the point. "Killing me? No, I don't think so. I think it has been keeping me alive."

"Don't say that, dear! You make it sound so—so brutal! Year in and year out. Fighting disappointment—failure. Aging before my eyes while I sit here night after night!"

Fighting disappointment—failure. Yes. That was the kind of fight it had been. How many failures? The first big one had come six years before....

"Acceleration, Monsieur, must be achieved in the first two thousand miles of flight. After that, the speed of the ship remains constant. You follow me?" Tardeau, the half-mad French genius had explained it so logically. And Joshua had believed in him. That's where you made your big gamble in a project of this kind. You selected your men and then believed in them. Others dissented, of course. There are always dissenters. And always points that could not be proven or disproven on the drawing boards or in the test pits....

"I follow you, Henri. The booster units will be in three sections."

"Exactly, Msieu. The primary—ah, booster, as you say, breaks free at twelve miles. That one, and the secondary, we control with radar. We touch a button and Voila! they are free!"

"In case of the men in the ship blacking out, I think you said."

"Exactly. But the third will be disengaged from within the ship and she will be free as a bird to fly to your most illusive Moon!"

"And the return?"

"There we have a much lighter ship, Monsieur. The smaller boosters will lift her easily. The return trip will be slower—much slower, but she will return!"

Michael Bernard was the dissenter. "The Frenchman's crazy! Mad as a hatter, Chief."

"You think it won't work, then?"

"Too damn complicated. A dozen units of time and mechanism have to mesh perfectly. The odds are against that happening. After all, you've got to remember, what we're attempting has never been done before."

"But if it did work—?"

"It would be a beauty."

"Better than your idea of a single booster?"

"If it worked—yes. The weight problem would be solved. Five men could ride the rocket. But —"

"Let's try it, Mike. Let's believe in our destiny."

"Okay—you're the boss. But destiny's a hard thing to lay out and analyze on a drawing board."

A man and his dream....

The radar equipment had failed. Burdened with the weight of exhausted booster sections, the rocket curved back into the clutches of gravity.

It crashed on the fringe of the Amazon jungles.

Five Moon pioneers dead. Three uninsured, dependent families. Joshua provided for them, but the critical newspapers overlooked that point. One editorial observed that Joshua Lake would get a rocket to the Moon and back if it took every able-bodied man in the country. The project would have died right there if Joshua had needed money. No bank in the nation would have loaned him a dime. Fortunately he was not yet broke. He started over.

Fortunately?

At times he had wondered. But always, his faith had returned to buoy him up....

Joshua reached out and took Myra's hand. He looked up into the sky. "You may be wrong, my dear. Possibly it's the other way. A man's ambition—" he smiled. "Lee called it an obsession once. A man's dream can keep him alive."

"But why does it have to be so hard? Why can't one of the big corporations help you? They'll profit from your success!"

"At least I had no competition in the fulfillment of my dream."

They were silent for a time; then Myra said, "But now you can rest. We'll go away. We don't need much money. We'll have a garden. You can lie in the sun."

He laughed softly; not with humor; rather from a quiet, new-welling courage. "We're talking as though it were all over—finished, done with. That isn't right."

She glanced at him quickly. "But you just said—"

"I know. But I didn't really mean it that way. We aren't through yet."

"You know where you can raise—more money?"

"I know where it is. I'm going to see Lee Gorman tomorrow."

"Lee Gorman! You aren't serious."

"There's no place else to go."

"You'll be wasting your time, Joshua. He'll—he'll humiliate you."

"He probably will. And I may not get the money. But there's no place else to go."

Tears came into Myra's eyes. "Don't do it, Joshua. Please don't do it."

"It won't be as bad as you think, dear. I guess Lee is entitled to crow a little."

Lee Gorman looked at the intercom on his desk as though it had snapped at him. "Who?" he barked. But there had been no mistake. Gorman sat in puzzled silence for a few moments. Then he said, "All right, show him in."

Joshua Lake entered the office with his hat in one hand and a briefcase in the other. He paused halfway to Gorman's desk. "You haven't changed much, Lee."

"You have," Gorman answered. "You look like the devil."

"I've been working hard." Joshua Lake covered the intervening distance and stood before the desk. Gorman surveyed him coldly—up and down. Joshua looked around the office as Gorman sat silent, not inviting him to sit down.

"You've done very well, Lee. This is the first time I've seen your plant."

"I've expanded a little since my basement days. You remember my basement days, don't you Joshua?"

Joshua winced. "Yes, I remember."

"And now you might tell me the purpose of this visit."

"I came to you because I need money."

Gorman's eyes snapped open—wide. He opened his mouth to speak. He failed, tightened his throat and tried again. "You came here after *what*?"

"Money. I'm broke, Lee. I haven't enough to meet my payroll."

"You expect me to bail you out—clean up your debts—put you clear?"

"I came after more than that. Merely bailing me out wouldn't help a bit. I need three hundred thousand to put my rocket in the air."

Gorman collapsed gently back into his chair like a balloon mercifully relieved of some of its content. When he spoke, it was with a slow, controlled viciousness. "I've heard of guts, Joshua. I've heard of gall—plain unmitigated nerve. But this tops anything—why, man, you threw me out! You robbed me! You left me standing in the street with a bookful of names and addresses under my arm—nothing more. Now you come here and ask for money!"

"I'm glad you've done well, Lee. There was nothing personal in what I did. I'm glad you've gone on to even bigger things than we would have achieved together."

"You're glad I've done well! Why, you pious hypocrite! I ought to have you thrown through the window instead of merely ordering you out!"

"There is no reason why I should expect any better treatment, Lee. But I had to come here. You were my last hope. I had to ask."

Joshua turned slowly from the desk. He had taken but three steps when Lee Gorman said, "Wait a minute. I'm curious. Are you *really* still at it—beating your brains out against that stone wall?"

"It's my dream, Lee. I've got to be the first man to put a rocket on the moon."

"But now you're broke—washed up. What's with the dream now?"

"I guess it's finished." Joshua turned and took another step; but Gorman was loath to let him go.

"Tell me," Gorman said. "What have you got in that briefcase?"

"Progress reports. Plans. I wanted to show them to you."

Gorman grinned. "All right. I've got a few minutes. Come and do it."

Joshua Lake retraced his steps. He sat down in a chair next to Gorman's desk. He laid his hat on the desk and snapped open the case.

"No," Gorman said. "Stand here by my elbow. The chair is for people I meet on even terms."

Joshua got obediently to his feet and placed himself as directed.

"And your hat," Gorman added. "You'd better hold that. You might forget it when you leave."

"Of course, Lee."

It was a ludicrous, pitiful sight but, withal, a grim note ran through the scene. Joshua supporting the case against his thigh, got out a sheaf of papers. "These are the progress reports to date. These, the projected plans."

"And when these plans are carried out you expect success?"

"Yes. Great foresight has been used. They will carry us through."

"And you expect me to loan you money on the strength of this—this day-dreaming on paper?"

"It's far more than that, Lee. You'll find the plans sound."

Lee Gorman didn't give a tinker's hoot for the plans. He was only enjoying an interview—a vengeance—he was loath to terminate. "You haven't even begun to show me what I'd need before I even considered loaning you a dime."

"I'll bring you anything you want."

"Even if I promise to turn you down after I've gone over it."

"You're calling the dance, Lee."

"All right—I'll call it. Bring me your payroll records; your cost sheets; the background reports on the key men in your organization."

"As soon as I can get them. I need some money immediately to meet my payroll."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

"I'll be back this afternoon." Joshua was halfway out the door when Lee Gorman called. "And bring the deeds to your plant—the bills of sale to your machinery and equipment."

"Certainly."

Joshua left and Lee Gorman sat motionless staring at the surface of his desk. There was a Mona Lisa smile on his rugged face.

"It's not worth it, Joshua," Myra said, hotly. "You won't be able to take his brow-beating and badgering day after day. And that's his intention. That's what he's giving you the money for—for the pleasure of humiliating you day after day."

"Of course, my dear. I'm fortunate that Lee is that kind of a man. He wants his revenge and he's willing to pay for it. I was hoping it would be that way—praying for it. It was my last weapon. The last weapon I had with which to beat the Moon."

A man and his dream....

"I want you to sign these papers, Joshua." Lee Gorman held out a pen and pushed the papers across the desk.

"Certainly, Lee."

"Four copies."

Joshua pushed the papers back, looked at them and smiled.

"Do you know what you signed?"

"A power of attorney, I believe. And I've signed the plant over to you. There is a large mortgage against it, however."

Lee Gorman sat back, narrowed his eyes as he looked at the wizened little man with the giant obsession. "Joshua, I think you've worked beyond your time. You've slipped your gears completely. Do you realize that with these papers I can put you in the street? That all I have to do is raise my hand and you're done?"

"I realize that, Lee."

"Then why on earth did you sign them?"

"I had no alternative."

"But what kind of an alternative is this? Giving away everything you've got?"

Joshua sighed. "You haven't raised your hand yet, Lee. I can surmount my difficulties only as I come to them. I'll think about that one when it gets here."

"Well—I've got news for you. The time to think about it is—" Gorman stopped in mid-sentence. He studied Joshua Lake for a long minute. Then he took a checkbook from his desk and wrote rapidly. "There's money to meet your payroll. The exact amount. Take it to the bank. Then, I want you in this office every day at four-thirty with a complete report of what's gone on. Don't overlook a thing. And bring any bills with you that want paying, together with material orders and projected costs. Is that clear?"

"I understand, Lee." At the door, Joshua Lake turned for a moment. "And—thank you—thank you very much."

After Joshua had left, Lee Gorman pondered one of those last words. If they contained any bitterness, it was well hidden. "A strange man," Gorman muttered. "A very strange man."

If that constituted a weak moment on the part of Lee Gorman, his dikes were repaired well in time to present a hostile front....

"This twelve thousand to American Chemical—what are you doing—running an experimental laboratory on the side. I won't pay it."

"I've never questioned Coving's judgment in these matters, Lee. He's done brilliant work for us. The man has to have materials to work with."

"Well, you certainly should have questioned him. He's been satisfying every whim of curiosity that pops into his mind. Send the stuff back."

"But that would be fatal to the project. The fuel *must* be power-charged to safely handle the weight and time quotients. Coving can't work with salt and baking soda."

"I don't care what he works with. Cut three thousand off that bill."

"Very well, Lee."

A man and his dream....

"This payroll's out of all reason. Cut fifteen men off immediately."

"I'll see what I can do."

"Cut fifteen men off immediately."

"Of course."

"Here's a check for the interest on the last note. Take it over to the bank."

"Yes, Lee."

Joshua Lake came and went as directed. He stood with his hat in his hand, took orders, carried them out. His shoulders drooped a little more; his face became more pinched; he retreated deeper and deeper into himself.

But as the days went on, his eyes brightened and there was a breathlessness in his expression when he turned his face to the sky.

Some three months after the day Joshua walked into Lee's office, the latter said, "The four men who are going with the rocket. You've selected them?"

"Yes. They're waiting for the day. It was a long slow process, selecting the best equipped

men."

"Bring them here tomorrow afternoon."

"I'll check with them. If they all can't make it, would a later date—?"

"I said tomorrow. See to it they *can* make it."

"Yes, Lee."

Joshua brought the four young men to Lee Gorman's office the following day. Lee had a buffet table set up. He was the smiling, genial, expansive host. "Sit down gentlemen. I'm glad of this opportunity to meet you."

There were five chairs in the room. Gorman had already seated himself. The young men hesitated.

"Sit down, sit down."

They dropped into the chairs, glancing uneasily at Joshua Lake. Joshua turned and started toward the door.

"Don't go, Lake. I'm sure the boys would like a drink. You'll find the fixings on the buffet. Why don't you take their orders?"

The crowning insult, Joshua wondered. The last, crude insult? Lee Gorman's wounds must have been deep indeed. Joshua served drinks, brought sandwiches. Lee Gorman's geniality kept the awkwardness of the situation from bringing it to a complete standstill. "Well, Thursday is the day, I understand. How do you feel about it? Rocketing off into space. Becoming a part of the big tomorrow." Gorman's eyes caught those of Joshua Lake as he spoke the last sentence. There was laughter behind them.

The crew of the Moon rocket left shortly afterward. Joshua was the last to walk from the room. Just as he was going through the door, Lee Gorman whispered into his ear. "You can't be sure there'll be a rocket flight. I might stop it the last minute. I haven't made up my mind yet."

Joshua turned and looked at his tormentor in silence. The others had gone on down the hall. Gorman laughed and said, "I suppose that's a problem you'll face when you come to it?"

"Yes—when I come to it."

Alone in his office, Lee Gorman strode angrily to the buffet. With a sweep of his arm, he knocked a liquor bottle across the room. The motivation of the act was hard to determine, however, from Gorman's outward appearance. It could have been bitter disappointment or a fierce joy.

Joshua Lake walked into Lee Gorman's office, removed his hat and said, "With your permission, this is the day."

"What time?"

"It translates into 4:07 and 30 seconds, Greenwich time."

Gorman scowled. "I suppose you've arranged quite a party."

"Nothing too spectacular. We'll leave for the blasting pits at 3:00 o'clock. I'd be honored if you'd ride with me."

"Do you still own a car?"

"A small one. Its value is negligible."

"We'll go in one of mine. Be here at five minutes to three."

"Certainly." Joshua put his hat on and walked out....

They rode across the Nevada desert in a black Cadillac with the chauffeur sitting at attention and staring straight ahead. Joshua stared straight ahead also. He asked, "Are you going to

stop the flight?"

Beside him, leaning forward, clutching with both hands the silver knob on a black mahogany cane, Gorman replied, "I haven't made up my mind yet."

A dot on the desert expanded into a pit, a tower, and some small buildings. The car followed the ruts of the tractors that had hauled the rocket to the launching site, and came to a halt. "That small, glass-encased platform," Joshua said. "We'll view the proceedings from there."

Gorman snorted. "I'll view them from where I please."

They were standing beside the car, Joshua slightly behind his benefactor. "From the platform."

Gorman scowled and half turned. "What are you doing?"

"I'm holding a gun against your back. It is a very small gun. No one can see it and it probably wouldn't kill you. Then again, it might. We will walk to the platform and stand together to watch the blast-off."

"You'd actually—*kill*, to get that ship into the air?"

"If I committed murder, I would certainly regret it the rest of my life, but the rocket must be launched."

They stood in the glass enclosure on the platform and no one came near them. Several people veered close and waved. Joshua waved back with his free hand and the people went on their way.

An hour passed. There was vast activity on the field. Gorman said, "I'm tired. I want to sit down."

"It was thoughtless of me. I should have provided chairs. It won't be long now."

It wasn't long. Five minutes later there was a roar, an explosion of color, and a silver rocket flash up into the sky almost faster than the eye could follow.

Gorman slammed the heel of his hand against the side of his head in order to restore hearing. "You can put that gun away."

"Of course. And you'll want to call the police."

Gorman growled like an annoyed bull. He jerked open the door and strode away.

Three hours later, Joshua and Myra Lake were seated in the small patio beside their home. They were seated very close together, and Myra was stroking Joshua's hand. "It's been a long time, dear; a very long time."

"Yes."

"Are you happy?"

"I'm—well, satisfied—at least partially. We've passed a big milestone. But it isn't over yet."

"You're sure this time, though?"

"Very sure."

"Thank heaven we won't have much longer to wait."

The wait was slightly less than ten minutes. Then Lee Gorman strode into the patio. Joshua sprang to his feet. "Any news?"

"Yes."

"Then they should have phoned me. I left word to be called."

"No one could get up the courage. The rocket crashed in Canada."

Joshua swayed. When he looked at Lee, his eyes were filled with a mute plea. "That is the truth?"

"It's the truth. The first flash said it appears the tail broke off in high space."

Joshua sank into his chair. "The crew—died?"

"Four more men sacrificed to your—" Gorman stopped and did not use the word *obsession*. There was too much agony in Joshua's face. "I'm taking the plant—I'm taking everything. I've got to. I've paid for them."

Lee Gorman walked from the patio. His steps echoed and died.

Joshua and Myra sat for a long time in silence. Myra was holding his hand. Finally she spoke. "Well, at least it's over. Now you can rest. Successful or not—you've earned it."

Joshua turned and looked into her face—looked at her as though she had just entered. "Oh no, my dear. You certainly don't expect me to—"

"Joshua!"

"Why, I'm only sixty-three. I never felt better in my life. I have a lot of good productive years ahead."

"Joshua! What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to be the first man to send a rocket to the Moon."

Transcriber's Note:

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