Of the thirty or so prisoners were being transported on board the spacecraft *Hyperion* to the Jovian moon Ganymede, Claude Knickerbocker was the youngest. He believed he
would die on Ganymede and never return to his home on earth.

The idea of mutiny came about when some of the prisoners stopped taking the behavior-modifying drugs that were supposed to keep them docile. The plan at first was to crash-land the spacecraft somewhere—into an asteroid if need be. They would all die, but on their own terms and not as prisoners on Ganymede.

“Why not take control of the ship and go to Mars instead?” Claude said to the small group of prisoners who had become his friends. They had whispered conversations late at night in their sleeping quarters in the bowels of the spacecraft, where the only sound was the thrum of the powerful engines vaulting them through space.

“Why Mars?” asked Leonhardt, the prisoner with the luminous glass eye.

“It’s better than dying, isn’t it?”

“What do we do on Mars?” Helmut asked. He was just a little older than Claude; with his white-blond hair and startlingly blue eyes, he had the look of a frightened child.

“We live. We blend in. They don’t ask questions there.”

Tommy Gumm was the oldest among them and a midget. “Do
we kill the crew?” he asked with a grin.

“Only if they don’t cooperate.”

Tommy Gumm, who in his younger days had been an expert at opening doors that were meant to stay closed, revealed that he knew how to get into the arsenal. He had been keeping the information to himself until the right moment to tell the others.

The next night, when it was naturally assumed that everyone was sleeping, eighteen of the prisoners went quietly up to the bridge. The walls of the passageway were electrically charged to be shining white, but a gray cast had come over it – possibly reflecting the mood of the prisoners. Armed with guns and knives, they intended to use the element of surprise to overtake the crew.

None of the prisoners had ever been to the bridge before but they knew where it was. They went to the deck above their sleeping quarters, which was deserted and unsecured; from there they had access to the entire ship. The crew seemed to be lulled into false security due to a belief that the prisoners would stay where they were supposed to stay because they had always done so before. Security throughout the ship was surprisingly lax.

Led by Claude and Leonhardt, the prisoners went into the control room as if they belonged there. Only two members of
the crew were on duty. The others, including the captain and the ship’s doctor, were sleeping.

“What is this?” said the navigator, standing up from his position. “You’re not authorized to be here. Get back to your own quarters!”

“I think you’d better wake the captain,” Claude said calmly. “We’re taking over the ship.”

“You’ll do no such thing!”

“I’ve got a stun gun here,” Tommy Gumm said with a grin. “I don’t think you want to be on the receiving end of it.”

When the captain arrived, disheveled from sleep, and saw what was happening, all the color drained from his face. “This is a serious offense,” he said levelly. “Things will go very bad for you.”

He pulled a gun from the bathrobe he was wearing and pointed it at the prisoners. They would never know if he meant to fire it because Tommy Gumm shot him with the stun gun. When he fell to the floor in convulsions, Tommy Gumm kicked him in the ribs.

The prisoners charged the remaining crew members, brandishing guns in their faces.

“You’re taking us to Mars,” Leonhardt said.

“That’s not possible,” the navigator said. “We’re on course for Ganymede.”

“You’re taking us to Mars,” Leonhardt said again, “if you want to go on living.”

The navigator said in a quavering voice that it would take several hours for him and the other crew members to redirect the spacecraft. They would have to reprogram the computers
for a different destination. He wasn’t sure if they knew how.

“I wouldn’t mind killing all of you!” Claude said, obviously enjoying the position of power. He fired his weapon into the floor for emphasis. Tommy Gumm did a little dance to show his approval; he whirled around three times and threw a knife that landed in the wall just above the navigator’s head.

Hours later, after the spacecraft had been successfully redirected, Claude and Helmut lay in their bunks. They would take turns with the other prisoners to stand guard over the crew and shoot them if necessary, but for now they would rest.

“Do you think we’ll ever make it to Mars?” Helmut asked softly in the dark.

“I don’t know,” Claude said. “Whatever happens, it will be better than Ganymede.”

“Even if we all die?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have family back home?”

“Yes,” Claude said. “A father, an ersatz dog and a couple of domestic robots who practically raised me. My mother is dead.”

“Your father is sure to hear about this.”

“I don’t think he’ll be surprised.”

At the mention of his family, Claude felt a little pang of sadness. It already seemed that he had been away for a very long time. Perhaps he had never really appreciated his home and only did now that he had lost it.

For as long as Claude could remember, he knew he was
different. He wasn’t content to just take his pills and do the things that everybody else was doing. He wanted to be different. He had to follow his own path, no matter what that meant. When he stopped taking his pills, Reginald, his father, noticed a difference in him. He was pale, his hands shook and he avoided looking anybody in the eye.

“Are you taking the pills?” Reginald asked Claude one day when he came home in the middle of the afternoon and found Claude asleep when he was supposed to be doing his training exercises.

“Yes, daddy.”

“You know how important it is to all of us that you take them.”

“Yes, daddy. I know, daddy.”

Marvel, the ersatz dog, was whimpering at their feet to be noticed. Claude was thankful to Marvel, and not for the first time, for diverting attention away from a subject that was distasteful to him.

“Has Marvel been a good boy today?” Reginald asked Selma, one of the domestic robots, who had just come into the room to take his attaché case and hang up his coat and hat.

“There’s no better dog than that one,” Selma said. “Beatrice and I have taken to him as much as Claude has.”

Reginald beamed whenever anybody praised Marvel. He remembered from his own youth the pleasures of owning a dog. Marvel wasn’t a real dog but, as the advertisements stated, he was the next best thing—everything except the fleas.

While eating dinner in the transparent dome that made them feel they were suspended among the clouds, Claude turned
to Reginald and said, “I had a letter today from Persimmon.”

“Is that so?” Reginald knew what was coming but said nothing.

“He keeps telling me how wonderful life is on Mars. It’s nothing like living on Earth.”

“I believe we’ve heard all this before.”

“I want to go live on Mars. Uncle Cuthbert and Aunt Virgie say I can live with them. Uncle Cuthbert will give me a job.”

“Doing what, may I ask? You’re still a child.”

“I don’t like living on Earth.”

“What makes you so sure living on Mars is better?”

“Earth is the past; Mars is the future. They’re planting trees there. One day Mars will be like Earth used to be.”

“It sounds as if you’ve been thoroughly indoctrinated.”

“I don’t like school. I’m made to learn a lot of stuff that’s a waste of time.”

“Like reading and writing?”

“I already know how to read and write. I want to go live on Mars where there’s a future.”

An airship flew close to the dome and nearly stopped. Watching the maneuvering of airships was one of the advantages of living on the two hundred and seventy-second floor of the residential web. Reginald found it endlessly entertaining. Even Marvel became excited. He wagged his tail and waved his paws in the air as if to grab onto the airship.

“Look at that!” Reginald said, hoping to get Claude to talk about something other than Mars. “I wonder where they’re
off to."

“Who cares?” Claude said, refusing to look at the airship.

“If you left Earth and went to Mars,” Reginald said, “wouldn’t you miss your home? Wouldn’t you miss your friends at school?”

“I don’t have any friends.”

“I’ve heard there are some pretty nasty characters on Mars.” He hoped to get Claude to laugh but failed.

“That’s one of the reasons I want to go live there,” Claude said. “I’m a nasty character, too.”

“I’m all the family you have left. Wouldn’t you miss me?”

“I have Uncle Cuthbert and Aunt Virgie and Persimmon. And you could come and visit anytime you want.”

“Do you realize how far away Mars is?”

“Yes, I know, it’s a long way,” Claude said wearily. “The farther from Earth the better.”

“You’re a minor. The only way you can leave Earth and go live on Mars is if I give my consent and I won’t give it.”

“I know you won’t, but I’ll think of some other way.”

With nothing left to say, they finished dinner in silence. When Claude finished his dessert, an excellent apricot tart that Beatrice made especially because she knew he liked it, he went into his room and closed the door. The day was over.

The next morning Reginald watched Claude as he ate his breakfast and took his pill without being told. He left for school without having spoken more than a few words.
Claude’s school was the kind of school any boy would be fortunate to attend. The curriculum was the most up to date, the faculty made up of retired military officials who knew how to mold young lives; they were creating the future generation of civic and governmental leaders. Claude hated his school.

Claude had a shouting altercation with a teacher in a lecture hall. When the teacher told him to sit down and shut up, Claude threw a book at him, hitting him in the face and blooodying his nose. He threatened to kill the teacher in the hearing of fifty witnesses. He was placed in detention where it was discovered that he hadn’t been taking his pills. He was suspended from school for one week.

He was appropriately contrite. He promised to take his pills, to strive to adhere to every rule, and to stop wanting to be different from other people. He tendered a sincere apology to the teacher he injured. He wanted to resume his place in his class, he said, although it would be with a diminished scholastic standing.

When he returned to school, he was not the same boy he had been. He was sullen and uncommunicative. He seemed to not care whether he went to school or not, whether he took the pills or didn’t, whether he lived or died.

From there his troubles only became worse. He stole some books from the library that he didn’t approve of and burned them on school property. He stabbed a teacher in the arm with a penknife. He got into a fight with a boy his own age and beat him so badly that the boy lost an eye. He was deemed a danger to himself and to others. He was expelled from school and put in jail.

He was sentenced to five years working in the mines on Ganymede where his life would consist of a strict regimen of discipline and adherence to authority. He would become the
kind of man he was supposed to be, or he would die in the attempt.

The night before Claude was shipped out to Ganymede, Reginald was allowed to see him one last time in jail. He expected Claude to look ill and unbalanced, but instead he was clear-eyed and almost happy.

“I’ll be fine, daddy,” Claude said. “The bad part of my life is over and now the next part is beginning.”

“Make the most of it,” Reginald said. “If you’re a good boy, they’ll let you come home sooner.”

Claude laughed. “Don’t worry about me,” he said. “I’ll be home before you know it.”

“We’ll be waiting for you.”

After Claude had been gone for what seemed an age (but was in fact only about two weeks), Reginald was sitting at his desk, trying to work but unable to keep his mind on the dull figures before him. The wall screen was turned to a broadcast of the day’s events, but he wasn’t paying much attention to it. Suddenly certain words filtered through to his brain; he stopped what he was doing and turned his full attention to the announcer’s voice: “A spacecraft named Hyperion, on its way to Ganymede from Earth Sector 11, has been commandeered by the prisoners on board; they have overpowered the eight-man, five-robot crew and flown the spacecraft off-course. The ultimate intent of the prisoners or their destination is not known. More information will be passed on as it becomes available.”
Further news only confirmed that the story was true, but for days no additional information was made available. Reginald, Beatrice, Selma and Marvel waited to hear the fate of Claude and the others on board the *Hyperion*. They hoped for, but didn’t expect, a scrap of news that would make them feel optimistic.

On evenings when the sky was not obscured by clouds, Reginald took Claude’s telescope out on the little balcony high above the ground and, with Marvel at his feet, looked through it at the faint red glow in the sky that was Mars. He knew exactly where to look because Claude had shown him. And on the face of Mars he saw Claude’s face. He was still alive. A father knows in his heart. One day he would be coming home.

Write [www.planetarystories@gmail.com](mailto:www.planetarystories@gmail.com) and give us your comment.