

SURVIVAL

JOHN WYNDHAM

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SURVIVAL

A Novelet by JOHN WYNDHAM

The odds were eight to one, eight men and a lone girl on the stranded spaceship--but which proved to be the stronger sex?

I

AS THE SPACEPORT bus trundled unhurriedly over the mile or more of open field that separated the terminal buildings from the embarkation hoist, Mrs. Feltham stared intently forward across the receding row of shoulders in front of her. The ship stood up on the plain like an isolated silver spire. Near its bow she could see the intense blue light which proclaimed it all but ready to take off. Among and around the great tailfins dwarf vehicles and little dots of men moved in a

fuss of final preparations. Mrs. Feltham glared at the scene, at this moment loathing it, and all the inventions of men, with a hard, hopeless hatred.

Presently, she withdrew her gaze from the distance and focussed it on the back of her son-in-law's head, a yard in front of her. She hated him, too.

She turned, darting a swift glance at the face of her daughter in the seat beside her. Alice looked pale; her lips were firmly set; her eyes fixed straight ahead.

Mrs. Feltham hesitated. Her glance returned to the spaceship. She decided on one last effort. Under cover of the bus noise she said:

"Alice, darling, it's not too late, even now, you know."

The girl did not look at her. There was no sign that she had heard, save that her lips compressed a little more firmly. Then they parted.

"Mother, please!" she said.

But Mrs. Feltham, once started, had to go on.

"It's for your own sake, darling. All you have to do is to say you've changed your mind."

The girl held a protesting silence.

"Nobody would blame you," Mrs. Feltham persisted.
"They'd not think a bit the worse of you. After all, everybody

knows that Mars is no place for—"

"Mother, please stop it," interrupted the girl. The sharpness of her tone took Mrs. Feltham aback for a moment. She hesitated. But time was growing too short to allow herself the luxury of offended dignity. She went on:

"You're not used to the sort of life you'll have to live there, darling. Absolutely primitive. No kind of life for any woman. After all, dear, it is only a five years appointment for David. I'm sure if he really loves you he'd rather know that you *are* safe here and waiting—"

The girl said, harshly:

"We've been over all this before, Mother. I tell you it's no good. I'm not a child. I've thought it out, and I've made up my mind."

MRS. FELTHAM sat silent for some moments. The bus swayed on across the field, and the rocketship seemed to tower further into the sky.

"If you had a child of your own—" she said, half to herself. "—Well, I expect someday you will. Then you will begin to understand...."

"I think it's you who don't understand," Alice said. "This is hard enough, anyway. You're only making it harder for me."

"My darling, I love you. I gave birth to you. I've watched over you always and I *know* you. I *know* this can't be the kind of life for you. If you were a hard, hoydenish kind of girl, well, perhaps—but you aren't, darling. You know quite well you aren't."

"Perhaps you don't know me quite as well as you imagine you do, Mother."

Mrs. Feltham shook her head. She kept her eyes averted, boring jealously into the back of her son-in-law's head.

"He's taken you right away from me," she said dully.

"That's not true, Mother. It's—well, I'm no longer a child. I'm a woman with a life of my own to live."

"Whither thou goest, I will go..." said Mrs. Feltham reflectively. "But that doesn't really hold now, you know. It was all right for a tribe of nomads, but nowadays the wives of soldiers, sailors, pilots, spacemen—"

"It's more than that, Mother. You don't understand. I must become adult and real to myself..."

The bus rolled to a stop, puny and toylike beside the ship that seemed too large ever to lift. The passengers got out and stood staring upwards along the shining side. Mr. Feltham put his arms round his daughter. Alice clung to him, tears in her eyes. In an unsteady voice he murmured:

"Goodbye, my dear. And all the luck there is."

He released her, and shook hands with his son-in-law.

"Keep her safe, David. She's everything—"

"I know. I will. Don't you worry."

Mrs. Feltham kissed her daughter farewell, and forced herself to shake hands with her son-in-law.

A voice from the hoist called: "All passengers aboard, please!"

The doors of the hoist closed. Mr. Feltham avoided his wife's eyes. He put his arm round her waist, and led her back to the bus in silence.

AS THEY made their way, in company with a dozen other vehicles, back to the shelter of the terminal, Mrs. Feltham alternately dabbed her eyes with a wisp of white handkerchief and cast glances back at the spaceship standing tall, inert, and apparently deserted now. Her hand slid into her husband's.

"I can't believe it even now," she said. "It's so utterly unlike her. Would you ever have thought that our little Alice....? Oh, why did she have to marry him....?" Her voice trailed to a whimper.

Her husband pressed her fingers, without speaking.

"It wouldn't be so surprising with some girls," she went on. "But Alice was always so quiet. I used to worry because she was so quiet—I mean in case she might become, one of those timid bores. Do you remember how the other children used to call her Mouse?"

"And now this! Five years in that dreadful place! Oh, she'll never stand it, Henry. I know she won't, she's not the type. Why didn't you put your foot down, Henry? They'd have listened to you. You could have stopped it."

Her husband sighed. "There are times when one can give advice, Miriam, though it's scarcely ever popular, but what one must not do is try to live other people's lives for them. Alice is a woman now, with her own rights. Who am I to say what's best for her?"

"But you could have stopped her going."

"Perhaps—but I didn't care for the price."

She was silent for some seconds, then her fingers tightened on his hand.

"Henry—Henry, I don't think we shall ever see them again. I feel it."

"Come, come, dear. They'll be back safe and sound, you'll see."

"You don't really believe that, Henry. You're just trying to cheer me up. Oh, why, why must she go to that horrible place? She's so young. She could have waited five years."

Why is she so stubborn, so hard—not like my little Mouse, at all?"

Her husband patted her hand reassuringly.

"You must try to stop thinking of her as a child, Miriam. She's not; she's a woman now and if all our women were mice, it would be a poor outlook for our survival...."

II

THE Navigating Officer of the s/r *Falcon* approached his Captain.

"The deviation, sir."

Captain Winters took the piece of paper held out to him.

"One point three six five degrees," he read out. "H'm. Not bad. Not at all bad, considering. South-east sector again. Why are nearly all deviations in the S.E. sector, I wonder, Mr. Carter?"

"Maybe they'll find out when we've been at the game a bit longer, sir. Right now it's just one of those things."

"Odd, all the same. Well, we'd better correct it before it gets any bigger."

The Captain loosened the expanding book-rack in front of him and pulled out a set of tables. He consulted them and scribbled down the result.

"Check, Mr. Carter."

The navigator compared the figures with the table, and approved.

"Good. How's she lying?" asked the Captain.

"Almost broadside, with a very slow roll, sir."

"You can handle it. I'll observe visually. Align her and stabilize. Ten seconds on starboard laterals at force two. She should take about thirty minutes, twenty seconds to swing over, but we'll watch that. Then neutralize with the port laterals at force two. Okay?"

"Very good, sir." The Navigating Officer sat down in the control chair, and fastened the belt. He looked over the keys and switches carefully.

"I'd better warn 'em. May be a bit of a jolt," said the Captain. He switched on the address system, and pulled the microphone bracket to him.

"Attention all! Attention all! We are about to correct course. There will be several impulses. None of them will be violent, but all fragile objects should be secured, and you are advised to seat yourselves and use the safety belts. The operation will take approximately half an hour and will start

in five minutes from now. I shall inform you when it has been completed. That is all." He switched off.

"Some fool always thinks the ship's been holed by a meteor if you don't spoon it out," he added. "Have that woman in hysterics, mostly likely. Doesn't do any good." He pondered, idly. "I wonder what the devil she thinks she's doing out here, anyway. A quiet little thing like that; what she ought to be doing is sitting in some village back home, knitting."

"She knits here," observed the Navigating Officer.

"I know—and think what it implies! What's the idea of that kind going to Mars? She'll be as homesick as hell, and hate every foot of the place on sight. That husband of hers ought to have had more sense. Comes damn near cruelty to children."

"It mightn't be his fault, sir. I mean, some of those quiet ones can be amazingly stubborn."

The Captain eyed his officer speculatively.

"Well, I'm not a man of wide experience, but I know what I'd say to my wife if she thought of coming along."

"But you can't have a proper ding-dong with those quiet ones, sir. They kind of feather bed the whole thing, and then get their own way in the end."

"I'll overlook the implication of the first part of that remark, Mr. Carter, but out of this extensive knowledge of

women can you suggest to me why the devil she is here if he didn't drag her along? It isn't as if Mars were domestically hazardous, like a convention."

"Well, sir—she strikes me as the devoted type. Scared of her own shadow ordinarily, but with an awful amount of determination when the right string's pulled. It's sort of—well, you've heard of ewes facing lions in defense of their cubs, haven't you?"

"Assuming that you mean lambs," said the Captain, "the answers would be, A: I've always doubted it; and, B: she doesn't have any."

"I was just trying to indicate the type, sir."

The Captain scratched his cheek with his forefinger.

"You may be right, but I know if I were going to take a wife to Mars, which heaven forbid, I'd feel a tough, gun-toting Momma was less of a liability. What's his job there?"

"Taking charge of a mining company office, I think."

"Office hours, huh? Well, maybe it'll work out someday, but I still say the poor little thing ought to be in her own kitchen. She'll spend half the time scared to death, and the rest of it pining for home comforts." He glanced at the clock. "They've had enough time to batten down the chamber-pots now. Let's get busy."

HE FASTENED his own safety-belt, swung the screen in front of him on its pivot, switching it on as he did so, and leaned back watching the panorama of stars move slowly across it.

"All set, Mr. Carter?"

The Navigating Officer switched on a fuel line, and poised his right hand, above a key.

"All set, sir."

"Okay. Straighten her up."

The Navigating Officer glued his attention to the pointers before him. He tapped the key beneath his fingers experimentally. Nothing happened. A slight double furrow appeared between his brows. He tapped again. Still there was no response.

"Get on with it, man," said the Captain irritably.

The Navigating Officer decided to try twisting her the other way. He tapped one of the keys under his left hand. This time there was response without delay. The whole ship jumped violently sideways and trembled. A crash jangled back and forth through the metal members around them like a diminishing echo.

Only the safety belt kept the Navigating Officer in his seat. He stared stupidly at the gyrating pointers before him. On the screen the stars were streaking across like a shower of

fireworks. The Captain watched the display in ominous silence for a moment, then he said, coldly:

"Perhaps when you have had your fun, Mr. Carter, you will kindly straighten her up."

The navigator pulled himself together. He chose a key, and pressed it. Nothing happened. He tried another. Still the needles on the dials revolved smoothly. A slight sweat broke out on his forehead. He switched to another fuel line, and tried again.

The Captain lay back in his chair, watching the heavens stream across his screen.

"Well?" he demanded, curtly.

"There's—no response, sir."

Captain Winters unfastened his safety-belt and clacked across the floor on his magnetic soles. He jerked his head for the other to get out of his seat, and took his place. He checked the fuel line switches. He pressed a key. There was no impulse: the pointers continued to turn without a check. He tried other keys, fruitlessly. He looked up and met the navigator's eyes. After a long moment he moved back to his own desk, and flipped a switch. A voice broke into the room:

"—would I know? All I know is that the old can's just bowling along head over elbow, and that ain't no kind of a way to run a bloody spaceship. If you ask me—"

"Jevons," snapped the Captain.

The voice broke off abruptly.

"Yes, sir?" it said, in a different tone.

"The laterals aren't firing."

"No, sir," the voice agreed.

"Wake up, man. I mean they *won't* fire. They're packed up."

"What—all of 'em, sir?"

"The only ones that have responded are the port laterals—and they shouldn't have kicked the way they did. Better send someone outside to look at 'em. I didn't like that kick."

"Very good, sir."

The Captain flipped the communicator switch back, and pulled over the announcement mike.

"Attention, please. You may release all safety-belts and proceed as normal. Correction of course has been postponed. You will be warned before it is resumed. That is all."

Captain and navigator looked at one another again. Their faces were grave, and their eyes troubled....

CAPTAIN WINTERS studied his audience. It comprised everyone aboard the *Falcon*. Fourteen men and one woman. Six of the men were his crew; the rest passengers. He watched them as they found themselves places in the ship's small living-room. He would have been happier if his cargo had consisted of more freight and fewer passengers. Passengers, having nothing to occupy them, were always making mischief one way and another. Moreover, it was not a quiet, subservient type of man who recommended himself for a job as a miner, prospector, or general adventurer on Mars.

The woman could have caused a great deal of trouble aboard had she been so minded. Luckily she was diffident, self-effacing. But even though at times she was irritatingly without spirit, he thanked his luck that she had not turned out to be some incendiary blonde, who would only add to his troubles.

All the same, he reminded himself, regarding her as she sat beside her husband, she could not be quite as meek as she looked. Carter must have been right when he spoke of a stiffening motive somewhere—without that she could never have started on the journey at all, and she would certainly not be coming through steadfast and uncomplaining so far. He glanced at the woman's husband. Queer creatures, women. Morgan was all right, but there was nothing about him, one would have said, to lead a woman on a trip like this....

He waited until they had finished shuffling around and fitting themselves in. Silence fell. He let his gaze dwell on each face in turn. His own expression was serious.

III

"MRS. MORGAN and gentlemen," he began. "I have called you here together because it seemed best to me that each of you should have a clear understanding of our present position.

"It is this. Our lateral tubes have failed. They are, for reasons which we have not yet been able to ascertain, useless. In the case of the port laterals they are burnt out, and irreplaceable.

"In case some of you do not know what that implies, I should tell you that it is upon the laterals that the navigation of the ship depends. The main drive tubes give us the initial impetus for take-off. After that they are shut off, leaving us in free fall. Any deviations from the course plotted are corrected by suitable bursts from the laterals.

"But it is not only for steering that we use them. In landing, which is an infinitely more complex job than take-off, they are essential. We brake by reversing the ship and using the main drive to check our speed. But I think you can scarcely fail to realize that it is an operation of the greatest delicacy to keep the huge mass of such a ship as this perfectly balanced upon the thrust of her drive as she descends. It is the laterals which make such balance possible. Without them it cannot be done."

A dead silence held the room for some seconds. Then a voice asked, drawling:

"What you're saying, Captain, is, the way things are, we can neither steer nor land—is that it?"

Captain Winters looked at the speaker. He was a big man. Without exerting himself, and, apparently, without intention, he seemed to possess a natural domination over the rest.

"That is exactly what I mean," he replied.

A tenseness came over the room. There was the sound of a quickly drawn breath here and there.

The man with the slow voice nodded, fatalistically. Someone else asked:

"Does that mean that we might crash on Mars?"

"No," said the Captain, "If we go on traveling as we are now, slightly off course, we shall miss Mars altogether."

"And so go on out to play tag with the asteroids," another voice suggested.

"That is what would happen if we did nothing about it. But there is a way we can stop that, if we can manage it." The Captain paused, aware that he had their absorbed attention. He continued:

"You must all be well aware from the peculiar behavior of space as seen from our ports that we are now tumbling along

all as—er—head over heels. This is due to the explosion of the port laterals. It is a highly unorthodox method of travelling, but it does mean that by an impulse from our main tubes given at exactly the critical moment we should be able to alter our course approximately as we require."

"And how much good is that going to do us if we can't land?" somebody wanted to know. The Captain ignored the interruption. He continued:

"I have been in touch by radio with both home and Mars, and have reported our state. I have also informed them that I intend to attempt the one possible course open to me. That is of using the main drive in an attempt to throw the ship into an orbit about Mars.

"If that is successful we shall avoid two dangers—that of shooting on towards the outer parts of the system, and of crashing on Mars. I think we have a good chance of bringing it off."

WHEN HE stopped speaking he saw alarm in several faces, thoughtful concentration in others. He noticed Mrs. Morgan holding tightly to her husband's hand, her face a little paler than usual. It was the man with the drawl who broke the silence.

"You *think* there is a good chance?" he repeated questioningly.

"I do. I also think it is the only chance. But I'm not going to try to fool you by pretending complete confidence. It's too serious for that."

"And if we do get into this orbit?"

"They will try to keep a radar fix on us, and send help as soon as possible."

"H'm," said the questioner. "And what do you personally think about that, Captain?"

"I—well, it isn't going to be easy. But we're all in this together, so I'll tell you just what they told me. At the very best we can't expect them to reach us for some months. The ship will have to come from Earth. The two planets are well past conjunction now. I'm afraid it's going to mean quite a wait."

"Can we—hold out long enough, Captain?"

"According to my calculations we should be able to hold out for about seventeen or eighteen weeks."

"And that will be long enough?"

"It'll have to be."

He broke the thoughtful pause that followed by continuing in a brisker manner.

"This is not going to be comfortable, or pleasant. But, if we all play our parts, and keep strictly to the necessary

measures, it can be done. Now, there are three essentials: air to breathe—well, luckily we shan't have to worry about that. The regeneration plant and stock of spare cylinders, and cylinders in cargo will look after that for a long time. Water will be rationed. Two pints each every twenty-four hours, for *everything*. Luckily we shall be able to draw water from the fuel tanks, or it would be a great deal less than that. The thing that is going to be our most serious worry is food."

He explained his proposals further, with patient clarity. At the end he added: "And now I expect you have some questions?"

A small, wiry man with a weather-beaten face asked:

"Is there no hope at all of getting the lateral tubes to work again?"

Captain Winters shook his head.

"Negligible. The impellent section of a ship is not constructed to be accessible in space. We shall keep on trying, of course, but even if the others could be made to fire, we should still be unable to repair the port laterals."

He did his best to answer the few more questions that followed in ways that held a balance between easy confidence and despondency. The prospect was by no means good. Before help could possibly reach them they were all going to need all the nerve and resolution they had—and out of sixteen persons some must be weaker than others.

His gaze rested again on Alice Morgan and her husband beside her. Her presence was certainly a possible source of trouble. When it came to the pinch the man would have more strain on account of her—and, most likely, fewer scruples.

Since the woman was here, she must share the consequences equally with the rest. There could be no privilege. In a sharp emergency one could afford a heroic gesture, but preferential treatment of any one person in the long ordeal which they must face would create an impossible situation. Make any allowances for her, and you would be called on to make allowances for others on health or other grounds—with heaven knew what complications to follow.

A fair chance with the rest was the best he could do for her—not, he felt, looking at her as she clutched her husband's hand and looked at him from wide eyes in a pale face, not a very good best.

He hoped she would not be the first to go under. It would be better for morale if she were not the very first....

SHE WAS NOT the first to go. For nearly three months nobody went. The *Falcon*, by means of skilfully timed bursts on the main tubes, had succeeded in nudging herself into an orbital relationship with Mars. After that, there was little that the crew could do for her. At the distance of equilibrium she had become a very minor satellite, rolling and tumbling on her circular course, destined, so far as anyone could see, to

continue this untidy progress until help reached them or perhaps forever....

Inboard, the complexity of her twisting somersaults was not perceptible unless one deliberately uncovered a port. If one did, the crazy cavortings of the universe outside produced such a sense of bewilderment that one gladly shut the cover again to preserve the illusion of stability within. Even Captain Winters and the Navigating Officer took their observations as swiftly as possible and were relieved when they had shut the whizzing constellations off the screen, and could take refuge in relativity.

For all her occupants the *Falcon* had become a small, independent world, very sharply finite in space, and scarcely less so in time.

It was, moreover, a world with a very low standard of living; a community with short tempers, weakening distempers, aching bellies, and ragged nerves. It was a group in which each man watched on a trigger of suspicion for a hairsbreadth difference in the next man's ration, and where the little he ate so avidly was not enough to quiet the rumblings of his stomach. He was ravenous when he went to sleep; more ravenous when he woke from dreams of food.

Men who had started from Earth full-bodied were now gaunt and lean, their faces had hardened from curved contours into angled planes and changed their healthy colors for a gray pallor in which their eyes glittered unnaturally. They had all grown weaker. The weakest lay on their couches torpidly. The more fortunate looked at them from

time to time with a question in their eyes. It was not difficult to read the question: 'Why do we go on wasting good food on this guy? Looks like he's booked, anyway.' But as yet no one had taken up that booking.

The situation was worse than Captain Winters had foreseen. There had been bad stowage. The cans in several cases of meat had collapsed under the terrific pressure of other cans above them during take-off. The resulting mess was now describing an orbit of its own around the ship. He had had to throw it out secretly. If the men had known of it, they would have eaten it gladly, maggots and all. Another case shown on his inventory had disappeared. He still did not know how. The ship had been searched for it without trace. Much of the emergency stores consisted of dehydrated foods for which he dared not spare sufficient water, so that though edible they were painfully unattractive. They had been intended simply as a supplement in case the estimated time was overrun, and were not extensive. Little in the cargo was edible, and that mostly small cans of luxuries. As a result, he had had to reduce the rations expected to stretch meagerly over seventeen weeks. And even so, they would not last that long.

The first who did go owed it neither to sickness nor malnutrition, but to accident.

JEVONS, the chief engineer, maintained that the only way to locate and correct the trouble with the laterals was to effect an entry into the propellant section of the ship. Owing to the tanks which backed up against the bulkhead separating the sections this could not be achieved from within the ship herself.

It had proved impossible with the tools available to cut a slice out of the hull; the temperature of space and the conductivity of the hull caused all their heat to run away and dissipate itself without making the least impression on the tough skin. The one way he could see of getting in was to cut away round the burnt-out tubes of the port laterals. It was debatable whether this was worth while since the other laterals would still be unbalanced on the port side, but where he found opposition solidly against him was in the matter of using precious oxygen to operate his cutters. He had to accept that ban, but he refused to relinquish his plan altogether.

"Very well," he said, grimly. "We're like rats in a trap, but Bowman and I aim to do more than just keep the trap going, and we're going to try, even if we have to cut our way into the damned ship by hand."

Captain Winters had okayed that; not that he believed that anything useful would come of it, but it would keep Jevons quiet, and do no one else any harm. So for weeks Jevons and Bowman had got into their spacesuits and worked their shifts. Oblivious after a time of the wheeling heavens about them, they kept doggedly on with their sawing and filing.

Their progress, pitifully slow at best, had grown even slower as they became weaker.

Just what Bowman was attempting when he met his end still remained a mystery. He had not confided in Jevons. All that anyone knew about it was the sudden lurch of the ship and the clang of reverberations running up and down the hull. Possibly it was an accident. More likely he had become impatient and laid a small charge to blast an opening.

For the first time for weeks ports were uncovered and faces looked out giddily at the wheeling stars. Bowman came into sight. He was drifting inertly, a dozen yards or more outboard. His suit was deflated, and a large gash showed in the material of the left sleeve.

The consciousness of a corpse floating round and round you like a minor moon is no improver of already lowered morale. Push it away, and it still circles, though at a greater distance. Someday a proper ceremony for the situation would be invented—perhaps a small rocket would launch the poor remains upon their last, infinite voyage. Meanwhile, lacking a precedent, Captain Winters decided to pay the body the decent respect of having it brought inboard. The refrigeration plant had to be kept going to preserve the small remaining stocks of food, but several sections of it were empty....

A day and a night by the clock had passed since the provisional interment of Bowman when a modest knock came on the control room door. The Captain laid blotting-paper, carefully over his latest entry in the log, and closed the book.

"Come in," he said.

The door opened just widely enough to admit Alice Morgan. She slipped in, and shut it behind her. He was somewhat surprised to see her. She had kept sedulously in the background, putting the few requests she had made through the intermediary of her husband. He noticed the changes in her. She was haggard now as they all were, and her eyes anxious. She was also nervous. The fingers of her thin hands sought one another and interlocked themselves for confidence. Clearly she was having to push herself to raise whatever was in her mind. He smiled in order to encourage her.

"Come and sit down, Mrs. Morgan," he invited, amiably.

She crossed the room with a slight clicking from her magnetic soles, and took the chair he indicated. She seated herself uneasily, and on the forward edge.

It had been sheer cruelty to bring her on this voyage, he reflected again. She had been at least a pretty little thing, now she was no longer that. Why couldn't that fool husband of hers have left her in her proper setting—a nice quiet suburb, a gentle routine, a life where she would be protected from exaction and alarm alike. It surprised him again that she had had the resolution and the stamina to survive conditions on the *Falcon* as long as this. Fate would probably have been kinder to her if it had disallowed that. He spoke to her quietly, for she perched rather than sat, making him think of a bird, ready to take off at any sudden movement.

"And what can I do for you, Mrs. Morgan?"

ALICE'S fingers twined and intertwined. She watched them doing it. She looked up, opened her mouth to speak, closed it again.

"It isn't very easy," she murmured apologetically.

Trying to help her, he said:

"No need to be nervous, Mrs. Morgan. Just tell me what's on your mind. Has one of them been—bothering you?"

She shook her head.

"Oh, no, Captain Winters. It's nothing like that at all."

"What is it, then?"

"It's—it's the rations, Captain. I'm not getting enough food."

The kindly concern froze out of his face.

"None of us is," he told her, shortly.

"I know," she said, hurriedly. "I know, but—"

"But what?" he inquired in a chill tone.

She drew a breath.

"There's the man who died yesterday. Bowman. I thought if I could have his rations—"

The sentence trailed away as she saw the expression on the Captain's face.

He was not acting. He was feeling just as shocked as he looked. Of all the impudent suggestions that ever had come his way, none had astounded him more. He gazed dumbfounded at the source of the outrageous proposition. Her eyes met his, but, oddly, with less timidity than before. There was no sign of shame in them.

"I've *got* to have more food," she said, intensely.

Captain Winters' anger mounted.

"So you thought you'd just snatch a dead man's share as—well as your own! I'd better not tell you in words just where I class that suggestion, young woman. But you can understand this: we share, and we share equally. What Bowman's death means to us is that we can keep on having the same ration for a little longer—that, and only that. And now I think you had better go."

But Alice Morgan made no move to go. She sat there with her lips pressed together, her eyes a little narrowed, quite still save that her hands trembled. Even through his indignation the Captain felt surprise, as though he had watched a hearth cat suddenly become a hunter. She said stubbornly:

"I haven't asked for any privilege until now, Captain. I wouldn't ask you now if it weren't absolutely necessary. But that man's death gives us a margin now. And I *must* have more food."

The Captain controlled himself with an effort.

"Bowman's death has not given us a margin, or a windfall—all it has done is to extend by a day or two the chance of our survival. Do you think that every one of us doesn't ache just as much as you do for more food? In all my considerable experience of effrontery—"

She raised her thin hand to stop him. The hardness of her eyes made him wonder why he had ever thought her timid.

"Captain. Look at me!" she said, in a harsh tone.

He looked. Presently his expression of anger faded into shocked astonishment. A faint tinge of pink stole into her pale cheeks.

"Yes," she said. "You see, you've *got* to give me more food. My baby *must* have the chance to live."

The Captain continued to stare at her as if mesmerized. Presently he shut his eyes, and passed his hand over his brow.

"God in heaven. This is terrible," he murmured.

Alice Morgan said seriously, as if she had already considered that very point:

"No. It isn't terrible—not if my baby lives." He looked at her helplessly, without speaking. She went on:

"It wouldn't be robbing anyone, you see. Bowman doesn't need his rations any more—but my baby does. It's quite simple, really." She looked questioningly at the Captain. He had no comment ready. She continued: "So you couldn't call it unfair. After all, I'm two people now, really, aren't I? I *need* more food. If you don't let me have it you will be murdering my baby; So you *must ... must...* My baby has *got* to live—he's *got* to...."

V

WHEN she had gone Captain Winters mopped his forehead, unlocked his private drawer, and took out one of his carefully hoarded bottles of whiskey. He had the self-restraint to take only a small pull on the drinking-tube and then put it back. It revived him a little, but his eyes were still shocked and worried.

Would it not have been kinder in the end to tell the woman that her baby had no chance at all of being born? That would have been honest; but he doubted whether the coiner of the phrase about honesty being the best policy had known a great deal about group-morale. Had he told her that, it would have been impossible to avoid telling her why, and once she knew

why it would have been impossible for her not to confide it, if only to her husband. And then it would be too late.

The Captain opened the top drawer, and regarded the pistol within. There was always that. He was tempted to take hold of it now and use it. There wasn't much use in playing the silly game out. Sooner or later it would have to come to that, anyway.

He frowned at it, hesitating. Then he put out his right hand and gave the thing a flip with his finger, sending it floating to the back of the drawer, out of sight. He closed the drawer. Not yet....

But perhaps he had better begin to carry it soon. So far, his authority had held. There had been nothing worse than safety-valve grumbling. But a time would come when he was going to need the pistol either for them or for himself.

If they should begin to suspect that the encouraging bulletins that he pinned up on the board from time to time were fakes: if they should somehow find out that the rescue ship which they believed to be hurtling through space towards them had not, in fact, even yet been able to take off from Earth—that was when hell would start breaking loose.

It might be safer if there were to be an accident with the radio equipment before long....

"TAKEN your time, haven't you?" Captain Winters asked. He spoke shortly because he was irritable, not because it mattered in the least how long anyone took over anything now:

The Navigating Officer made no reply. His boots clicked across the floor. A key and an identity bracelet drifted towards the Captain, an inch or so above the surface of his desk. He put out a hand to check them.

"I—" he began. Then he caught sight of the other's face. "Good God, man, what's the matter with you?"

He felt some compunction. He wanted Bowman's identity bracelet for the record, but there had been no real need to send Carter for it. A man who had died Bowman's death would be a piteous sight. That was why they had left him still in his spacesuit instead of undressing him. All the same, he had thought that Carter was tougher stuff. He brought out a bottle. The last bottle.

"Better have a shot of this," he said.

The navigator did, and put his head in his hands. The Captain carefully rescued the bottle from its mid-air drift, and put it away. Presently the Navigating Officer said, without looking up:

"I'm sorry, sir."

"That's okay, Carter. Nasty job. Should have done it myself."

The other shuddered slightly. A minute passed in silence while he got a grip on himself. Then he looked up and met the Captain's eyes!

"It—it wasn't just that, sir."

The Captain looked puzzled.

"How do you mean?" he asked.

The Officer's lips trembled. He did not form his words properly, and he stammered.

"Pull yourself together. What are you trying to say?" The Captain spoke sharply to stiffen him.

Carter jerked his head slightly. His lips stopped trembling.

"He—he—" he floundered; then he tried again, in a rush. "He—hasn't any legs, sir."

"Who? What is this? You mean Bowman hasn't any legs?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"Nonsense, man. I was there when he was brought in. So were you. He had legs, all right."

"Yes, sir. He did have legs then—but he hasn't now!"

The Captain sat very still. For some seconds there was no sound in the control-room but the clicking of the

chronometer. Then he spoke with difficulty, getting no further than two words:

"You mean—?"

"What else could it be, sir?"

"*God in heaven!*" gasped the Captain.

He sat staring with eyes that had taken on the horror that lay in the other man's....

TWO MEN moved silently, with socks over their magnetic soles. They stopped opposite the door of one of the refrigeration compartments. One of them produced a slender key. He slipped it into the lock, felt delicately with it among the wards for a moment, and then turned it with a click. As the door swung open a pistol fired twice from within the refrigerator. The man who was pulling the door sagged at the knees, and hung in mid-air.

The other man still was behind the half-opened door. He snatched a pistol from his pocket and slid it swiftly round the corner of the door, pointing into the refrigerator. He pulled the trigger twice.

A figure in a spacesuit launched itself out of the refrigerator, sailing uncannily across the room. The other man shot at it as it swept past him. The space-suited figure collided with the opposite wall, recoiled slightly, and hung

there. Before it could turn and use the pistol in its hand, the other man fired again. The figure jerked, and floated back against the wall. The man kept his pistol trained, but the spacesuit swayed there, flaccid and inert.

The door by which the men had entered opened with a sudden clang. The Navigating Officer on the threshold did not hesitate. He fired slightly after the other, but he kept on firing....

When his pistol was empty the man in front of him swayed queerly, anchored by his boots; there was no other movement in him.

The Navigating Officer put out a hand and steadied himself by the doorframe. Then, slowly and painfully, he made his way across to the figure in the spacesuit. There were gashes in the suit. He managed to unlock the helmet and pull it away.

The Captain's face looked somewhat grayer than undernourishment had made it. His eyes opened slowly. He said in a whisper:

"Your job now, Carter. Good luck!"

The Navigating Officer tried to answer, but there were no words, only a bubbling of blood in his throat. His hands relaxed. There was a dark stain still spreading on his uniform. Presently his body hung listlessly swaying beside his Captain's.

"I FIGURED they were going to last a lot longer than this," said the small man with the sandy mustache.

The man with the drawl looked at him steadily.

"Oh, you did, did you? And do you reckon your figuring's reliable?"

The smaller man shifted awkwardly. He ran the tip of his tongue along his lips.

"Well, there was Bowman. Then those four. Then the two that died, that's seven."

"Sure. That's seven. Well?" inquired the big man softly. He was not as big as he had been, but he still had a large frame. Under his intent regard the emaciated small man seemed to shrivel a little more.

"Er—nothing. Maybe my figuring was kind of hopeful," he said.

"Maybe. My advice to you is to quit figuring and keep on hoping. Huh?"

The small man wilted. "Er—yes. I guess so."

The big man looked round the living-room, counting heads.

"Okay. Let's start," he said.

A silence fell on the rest. They gazed at him with uneasy fascination. They fidgeted. One or two nibbled at their finger nails. The big man leaned forward. He put a space-helmet, inverted, on the table. In his customary leisurely fashion he said:

"We shall draw for it. Each of us will take a paper and hold it up unopened until I give the word. *Unopened*. Got that?"

They nodded. Every eye was fixed intently upon his face.

"Good! Now one of those pieces of paper in the helmet is marked with a cross. Ray, I want you to count the pieces there and make sure that there are nine—".

"Eight!" said Alice Morgan's voice, sharply.

All the heads turned towards her as if pulled by strings. The faces looked startled, as though the owners might have heard a turtle-dove roar. Alice sat embarrassed under the combined gaze, but she held herself steady and her mouth, was set in a straight line. The man in charge of the proceedings studied her.

"Well, well," he drawled. "So you don't want to take a hand in our little game!"

"No," said Alice.

"You've shared equally with us so far—but now we have reached this regrettable stage you don't want to?"

"No," agreed Alice again.

He raised his eyebrows.

"You are appealing to our chivalry, perhaps?"

"No," said Alice once more. "I'm denying the equity of what you call your game. The one who draws the cross dies— isn't that the plan?"

"Pro bono publico," said the big man. "Deplorable, of course, but unfortunately necessary."

"But if *I* draw it, two must die. Do you call that equitable?" Alice asked.

The group looked taken aback. Alice waited.

The big man fumbled it. For once he was at a loss.

"Well," said Alice, "isn't that so?"

One of the others broke the silence to observe: "The question of the exact stage when the personality, the soul of the individual, takes form is still highly debatable. Some have held that until there is separate existence—"

THE DRAWLING voice of the big man cut him short. "I think we can leave that point to the theologians, Sam. This is more in the Wisdom of Solomon class. The point would seem to be that Mrs. Morgan claims exemption on account of her condition."

"My baby has a right to live," Alice said doggedly.

"We all have a right to live. We all want to live," someone put in.

"Why should you—?" another began; but the drawling voice dominated again:

"Very well, gentlemen. Let us be formal. Let us be democratic. We will vote on it. The question is put: do you consider Mrs. Morgan's claim to be valid—or should she take her chance with the rest of us? Those in—"

"Just a minute," said Alice, in a firmer voice than any of them had heard her use. "Before you start voting on that you'd better listen to me a bit." She looked round, making sure she had the attention of all of them. She had; and their astonishment as well.

"Now the first thing, is that I am a lot more important than any of you," she told them simply. "No, you needn't smile. I am—and I'll tell you why.

"Before the radio broke down—"

"Before the Captain wrecked it, you mean," someone corrected her.

"Well, before it became useless," she compromised, "Captain Winters was in regular touch with home. He gave them news of us. The news that the Press wanted most was about me. Women, particularly women in unusual situations, are always news. He told me I was in the headlines: GIRL-WIFE IN DOOM ROCKET, WOMAN'S SPACE-WRECK ORDEAL, that sort of thing. And if you haven't forgotten, how newspapers look, you can imagine the leads, too: 'Trapped in their living space-tomb, a girl and fifteen men now wheel helplessly around the planet Mars...'

"All of you are just men—hulks, like the ship. I am a woman, therefore my position is romantic, so I am young, glamorous, beautiful..." Her thin face showed for a moment the trace of a wry smile. "I am a heroine..."

She paused, letting the idea sink in. Then she went on:

"I was a heroine even before Captain Winters told them that I was pregnant. But after that I became a phenomenon. There were demands for interviews. I wrote one, and Captain Winters transmitted it for me. There have been interviews with my parents and my friends, anyone who knew me. And now an enormous number of people know a great deal about me. They are intensely interested in me. They are even more interested in my baby—which is likely to be the first baby ever born in a spaceship..."

"Now do you begin to see? You have a fine tale ready. Bowman, my husband, Captain Winters and the rest were heroically struggling to repair the port laterals. There was an explosion. It blew them all away out into space.

"You may get away with that. But if there is no trace of me and my baby—or of our bodies—*then* what are you going to say? How will you explain that?"

She looked round the faces again.

"Well, what *are* you going to say? That I, too, was outside repairing the port laterals? That I committed suicide by shooting myself out into space with a rocket?"

"Just think it over. The whole world's press is wanting to know about me—with all the details. It'll have to be a mighty good story to stand up to that. And if it doesn't stand up—well, the rescue won't have done you much good.

"You'll not have a chance in hell. You'll hang, or you'll fry, every one of you—unless it happens they lynch you first...."

There was silence in the room as she finished speaking. Most of the faces showed the astonishment of men ferociously attacked by a pekinese, and at a loss for suitable comment.

The big man sat sunk in reflection for a minute or more. Then he looked up, rubbing the stubble on his sharp-boned chin thoughtfully. He glanced round the others and then let his eyes rest on Alice. For a moment there was a twitch at the corner of his mouth.

"Madam," he drawled, "you are probably a great loss to the legal profession." He turned away. "We shall have to reconsider this matter before our next meeting. But, for the present, Ray, *eight* pieces of paper as the lady said...."

VI

"IT'S HER!" said the Second, over the Skipper's shoulder.

The Skipper moved irritably. "Of course it's her. What else'd you expect to find whirling through space like a sozzled owl?" He studied the screen for a moment. "Not a sign. Every port covered."

"Do you think there's a chance; Skipper?"

"What, after all this time! No, Tommy, not a ghost of it. We're—just the morticians, I guess."

"How'll we get aboard her, Skip?"

The Skipper watched the gyrations of the *Falcon* with a calculating eye.

"Well, there aren't any rules, but I reckon if we can get a cable on her we *might* be able to play her gently, like a big fish. It'll be tricky, though."

Tricky it was. Five times the magnet projected from the rescue ship failed to make contact. The sixth attempt was better judged. When the magnet drifted close to the *Falcon* the current was switched on for a moment. It changed course, and floated nearer to the ship. When it was almost in contact

the switch went over again. It darted forward, and glued itself limpet-like to the hull.

Then followed the long game of playing the *Falcon*; of keeping tension on the cable between the two ships, but not too much tension, and of holding the rescue ship from being herself thrown into a roll by the pull. Three times the cable parted, but at last, after weary hours of adroit maneuver by the rescue ship the derelict's motion had been reduced to a slow twist. There was still no trace of life aboard. The rescue ship closed a little.

The Captain, the Third Officer and the doctor fastened on their spacesuits and went outboard. They made their way forward to the winch. The Captain looped a short length of line over the cable, and fastened both ends of it to his belt. He laid hold of the cable with both hands, and with a heave sent himself skimming into space. The others followed him along the guiding cable.

They gathered beside the *Falcon's* entrance port. The Third Officer took a crank from his satchel. He inserted it in an opening, and began to turn until he was satisfied that the inner door of the airlock was closed. When it would turn no more, he withdrew it, and fitted it into the next opening: that should set the motors pumping air out of the lock—if there were air, and if there were still current to work the motors. The Captain held a microphone against the hull, and listened. He caught a humming.

"Okay. They're running," he said.

He waited until the humming stopped.

"Right. Open her up," he directed.

The Third Officer inserted his crank again, and wound it. The main port opened inwards, leaving a dark gap in the shining hull. The three looked at the opening somberly for some seconds. With a grim quietness the Captain's voice said: "Well. Here we go!"

THEY moved carefully and slowly into the blackness, listening.

The Third Officer's voice murmured:

*"The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills..."*

Presently the Captain's voice asked:

"How's the air, Doc?"

The doctor looked at his gauges.

"It's okay," he said, in some surprise. "Pressure's about six ounces down, that's all." He began to unfasten his helmet. The others copied him. The Captain made a face as he took his off.

"The place stinks," he said, uneasily. "Let's—get on with it."

He led the way towards the lounge. They entered it apprehensively.

The scene was uncanny and bewildering. Though the gyrations of the *Falcon* had been reduced, every loose object in her continued to circle until it met a solid obstruction and bounced off it upon a new course. The result was a medley of wayward items churning slowly hither and thither.

"Nobody here, anyway," said the Captain, practically. "Doc, do you think—?"

He broke off at the sight of the doctor's strange expression. He followed the line of the other's gaze. The doctor was looking at the drifting flotsam of the place. Among the flow of books, cans, playing-cards, boots and miscellaneous rubbish, his attention was riveted upon a bone. It was large and clean and had been cracked open.

The Captain nudged him. "What's the matter, Doc?"

The doctor turned unseeing eyes upon him for a moment, and then looked back at the drifting bone.

"That—" he said in an unsteady voice—"that, Skipper, is a human femur."

In the long moment that followed while they stared at the grisly relic the silence which had lain over the *Falcon* was broken. The sound of a voice rose, thin, uncertain, but

perfectly clear. The three looked incredulously at one another as they listened:

*"Rock-a-bye baby
On the tree top.
When the wind blows
The cradle will rock..."*

Alice sat on the side of her bunk, swaying a little, and holding her baby to her. It smiled, and reached up one miniature hand to pat her cheek as she sang:

*"...When the bough breaks
The cradle will fall.
Down will—"*

Her song cut off suddenly at the click of the opening door. For a moment she stared as blankly at the three figures in the opening as they at her. Her face was a mask with harsh lines drawn from the points where the skin was stretched tightly over prominent bones. Then a trace of expression came over it. Her eyes brightened. Her lips curved in a travesty of a smile.

She loosed her arms from about the baby, and it hung there in mid-air, chuckling a little to itself. She slid her right hand under the pillow of the bunk and drew it out again, holding a pistol.

The black shape of the pistol looked enormous in her transparently thin hand as she pointed it at the men who stood transfixed in the doorway.

"Look, baby," she said. "Look there. Food. Lovely food..."

[The end of *Survival* by John Wyndham]