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Title: World Without Women

Date of first publication: 1939

Author: John Russell Fearn (as Thornton Ayre) (1908-1960)

Date first posted: June 19, 2021

Date last updated: June 19, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210637

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WORLD Without WOMEN

By

John Russell Fearn

Writing under the pseudonym Thornton Ayre.

First published *Amazing Stories*, April 1939

Perry Mills patterned a synthetic body in Kay Wanclyffe's image. But he could not make it live. Extinction faced mankind. Then, incredibly, the lifeless body spoke . . .

CHAPTER I

“We Are Facing Extinction . . .”

A solemn hush brooded over the mighty Chamber of Deputies in the new White House at Washington. The innumerable seats, rising tier on tier to the granite walls, were lined with grave, anxious faces. Men’s faces, of every age and hue. All eyes were directed toward the small rectangle of dais in the center of the vast place.

A voice boomed out suddenly over concealed loudspeakers.

“Gentlemen, Kindon Gregory, President of the Americas!”

There was a shuffle and scrape of countless feet as everybody rose. Then seats were resumed as the small, compact figure of the President arrived at the dais. He surveyed the radio television transmitters around him, then gazed round on the great assembly.

“Gentlemen . . .”

His voice was somber and colorless, so different from the fierce, commanding tone he had used at his election campaign in 2016, four years previous. Now it was the voice of a man who has little left for which to live.

“Gentlemen—deputies of every science from every land. I need hardly elaborate the circumstances of the terrible crisis that faces us. Unless science can master the present conditions, humanity and all life as we know it must pass from the earth! At the very most, human beings cannot be present for much longer than eighty years. All of us have experienced the biting sting of tragedy, have seen our womenfolk die around us, subtly and mysteriously, from an unknown malady which medical science utterly failed to diagnose.

“In 2015 we had a happy, prosperous world. War had been banished; prosperity reigned everywhere. Then—if I may be permitted this harrassing resume—in the Christmas period of that year, the blight started. Women, young and old, rich and poor, began to die. Not only women, but everything female in every branch of life. The blight was all inclusive, was in every country almost simultaneously. Wherever a female child was born it died almost instantly, despite all efforts to keep it alive, until . . . Until by the end of 2018, two years ago, there was not a woman left in the world!”

The President’s voice was quiet for a moment. He gripped the sides of his desk with obvious emotion. When he spoke again his voice was suddenly desperate.

“Gentlemen! Men of science the world over, wherever my voice reaches you, I beg of you to use your abilities to master this horrible thing which has come upon us! Maybe it is selfish to regard a woman as a necessity to the continuance of life, but I do state that in cold truth. Throwing aside all love and natural human longings, the cold biological fact remains that without women in the world mankind must perish. And, my friends, we *shall* perish unless some woman can be found who has escaped the trouble. That, I know, is utterly improbable. The earth has apparently been swept clean. If we fail in that search there is only one other course—Synthesis!”

“Synthetic life?” cried a voice from the back of the hall.

The President shrugged slender shoulders. “What else? I appeal to you scientists, particularly the biochemists, to give every ounce of your knowledge to the problem. The natural means of creating life has gone—there remains only synthetic womanhood. If not that, then synthetic life itself, either man or woman. But obviously a synthetic woman is simpler

and demands less material. Even one alone can start a race once more. That has got to be done. If not, humanity is finished!”

“But synthetic life is impossible!” cried Jonathan Hale, the famous British chemist.

“Nothing,” answered the President quietly, “is impossible. To science least of all. Gentlemen, I urge you—”

Perry Mills reached out a languid hand and switched off the small televizor by his bedside. The speech and face of President Gregory disappeared.

For a long time Perry lay in silence, listening to the faint, drowsy sounds of the great New York nursing home. Occasional coughs, the sound of rubber soled feet. Men in white drifting to and fro. Men, men, men. . . . Everywhere men! Perry sighed deeply, lay staring up at the white enameled roof.

“Queer,” he muttered, “to pull a guy back from double pneumonia when the human race is finished anyway. If they haven’t eliminated pneumonia germs after all this time they’ve got slim hopes of producing synthesis!”

He closed his eyes, only to shortly open them again at the awareness of somebody near to him. He beheld a neatly dressed young man with close cropped black hair and keen gray eyes, carrying a pile of magazines under his arm.

“Hi’ya, Perry!” he laughed, saluting. “Any room for Bill Tanner around here?”

“I’ll say!” Perry exclaimed eagerly, sitting up. “I can just do with some company . . .” He glanced at the magazines. “What? More stuff to read?”

Tanner shrugged as he sat down. “Afraid they’re pretty old—four years old, in fact. All sorts of periodicals. I had a clean out of my cupboards yesterday and thought maybe you’d like to read through them until you get out of this place.”

“Be out in another week, so the doctor says. . . . Thanks, old man; I’ll be glad to have them.” Perry stopped and frowned, his blue eyes thoughtful. “Hear the President’s speech?” he asked briefly.

“Most of it. It was relayed to the street televizors. . . . I guess things look pretty bad, Perry. Since woman vanished from the earth things have gone to pot. Only to be expected, of course.”

There was a moody silence for a moment, then Tanner spoke again.

“You know, Perry, I don’t see why you can’t do something about all this. You’re a first class biochemist. You’ve got all the degrees and you’ve got the money, too. If you hadn’t been ass enough to get pneumonia through making a tomfool experiment in the rain, I guess you’d have been invited to the Chamber of Deputies.”

“Mebbe,” Perry shrugged moodily. “I’m not so hot.”

“Oh, snap out of it, Perry. This is no time for false modesty. Some of your chemical inventions have advanced science a hundred years, and you know it. Sure, you don’t like publicity, and keep in the background for that very reason, but more things have come out of that laboratory of yours than all the concentrated efforts of fifty bearded experts. Look at the money you’ve piled up! Governments don’t pay huge sums like that unless you’ve given them something worth while.”

“So what? Oh, I get it! You’re suggesting I should turn my attention to synthesis of life?”

“Sure I am. You’ve got the brains to solve it if anybody has.”

“Perhaps so, but synthesis is something just beyond science. There’s a missing element which makes all the difference between inert clay and living, breathing humanity. . . . Oh, I

admit I've thought about the idea as I've lain here convalescing. I've read several medical textbooks on human structure, have made a pretty thorough study of the stuff that makes up a human being, but. . . . No, Bill! I guess synthesis of life is right outside the pale."

Tanner sighed and got slowly to his feet. "Well, you're the scientist, not me. I'm sure you could do it if you only had some incentive." He paused and glanced at his watch. "Sorry I can't stay any longer, but I haven't your ability to be independent. The Bureau of Statistics don't like their experts to be late, you know. See you again."

"Oke! And thanks for the magazines." Perry waved a cordial hand and watched Tanner's lithe form disappear down the long ward.

For a long time he lay pondering, then picked up the topmost magazine and glanced idly through it.

Being an issue of the pre-Blight era, its social pages were filled with color photographs of men and women celebrities. Somehow, Perry found it gave him a queer sensation to gaze on women of all ages and types. They had been rather attractive, at that, had done an enormous lot to make the world decorative—far different from this new coldly masculine, harshly designed world of men alone.

He turned the page of social celebrities and found a full length color portrait of a young and decidedly good looking girl staring back at him. Her eyes were very blue, her hair the color of well ripened corn. Her dress of pale blue with pink whatnots and ribbons was a masterpiece of feminine allure.

Perry's gaze dropped to the caption under the picture.

Miss Kay Wancliffe, daughter of Dr. Elroid Wancliffe, the famous scientist and engineer. Kay will be twenty-one next month. Congratulations, Kay!

"Oh boy, oh boy!" Perry whistled, staring at the picture again. "What a girl! Elroid Wancliffe, eh? Seem to have heard of him somewhere in connection with a rare metal. If only . . ."

"Synthesis . . ." he breathed, eyes closed. "Make a woman. . . . If only I had the incentive! Carbohydrates, phosphorus, lime—Hell! Incentive! Who says I haven't got incentive?" He sat up with a jerk and snatched the magazine again. "By all the saints, I have!" he whispered, "If it *can* be done, I have the model right here. Get all the dope I can concerning her. Yeah, that's it! Make a woman! Just like this one. One of the nicest girls I've ever seen! It's possible, perhaps—"

He stared into space, tugging at his underlip. Already his keen brain was racing far ahead, hurdling natural difficulties. His whole horizon was filled with a view of Kay Wancliffe. Kay, the inspiration. A girl he had never known or seen in the flesh, now dead.

An hour later Perry was still staring into space, was positively rude when the male nurse came around and ordered him to lie down.

CHAPTER II

“I Have Created Her Body . . .”

Tanner was agreeably astonished when next day he received a telephone call from the nursing home and heard Perry’s clipped, eager voice at the other end of the wire.

“Say, Bill, I’ve been thinking over what you said—and I guess there is something in your ideas at that. Listen! You’re in the Bureau of Statistics: can you get me all possible details on a girl named Kay Wancliffe, daughter of Elroid Wancliffe, scientist? She’d have been twenty-one in July, 2016. I think she lived in New York here. I want her exact age as it would be today, her dimensions, coloring, every darned thing about her. A complete record of her entire life, her medical record, and all photos you happen to have. According to the new world census law of 2007 there ought to be as much detail about her and her family as there used to be about wanted criminals. Even to the finger prints. Get it?”

“All the facts will certainly be tabulated—everybody’s are,” Tanner answered. “But what the devil do you want it all for?”

“I think I’ll make a woman. . . . Tell you more later. How long will it take you to rush through those details?”

“I’ll ring you back in an hour. That do?”

“O.K.”

In the intervening hour Perry occupied himself making a skeletal design of Kay Wancliffe’s head and face from her photograph. Then the phone rang again.

“Perry? Here’s the low down. Kay Wancliffe would now be twenty-five years old—July 6. She didn’t die from the Blight. Her body, and that of her father and mother, were found dead in rather curious circumstances a year before the Blight came. The bodies were discovered in the private surgery of Doctor Danver Hall, the famous American neurologist. He too was dead. All four were buried in the Fourth Precinct Cemetery. Since all relatives of the Wancliffe’s were women there are of course no living witnesses to explain matters.”

“Hmmm . . .” Perry grunted. “Any photographs or records?”

“Sure. There are six good photographs you can have, some from the family possessions and others taken professionally for census reasons. I’ll send them around if you want.”

“Of course I want!” Perry snorted. “Bring them around the moment you get the chance. And thanks.”

But it was next morning before Tanner found the time to come around; and then Perry became so absorbed in the prints it was impossible to get a word out of him. Tanner gave it up at length and departed. Thereafter, excess of work kept him busy for several days. The next time he met up with Perry he found him in his old laboratory once more, a tattered smock covering his spare form, a pipe clenched resolutely between his teeth.

Denham, Perry’s old retainer, closed the laboratory door gently. Tanner stood staring across at his friend over a wilderness of benches and bottles, wrinkling his nose in disfavor at the variety of unsavory odors curling round him. Slowly he walked forward, stared down into an oblong bath of highly polished metal, at the bottom of which floated and stirred a mass of pungent compounds.

Perry's only greeting was an abstracted nod. His eyes were on the bath. Facing it, on the opposite wall, was a tremendous life size chart of a woman, fenced around with all available enlarged photographs of Kay Wancliffe.

"So you're back on the job?" Tanner asked at length. "What this time? What was there about Kay Wancliffe that suddenly turned you into a dynamo?"

"Everything," Perry answered briefly. "That's the second Kay Wancliffe in the bath there."

"Huh?" Tanner stared blankly at the weird mess.

"The world wants synthetic life," Perry went on slowly, his brows down. "It wants a woman—the first of a race of synthetic women. I'm going to do my best to fill that need. The first woman will be the image of Kay Wancliffe. If I were the marrying sort, Bill, she's the one I'd go for. Queer, perhaps, to fall in love with a photograph, but there it is. She's the posthumous inspiration of my work. . . . Even as a sculptor models from real life, so I am modeling from a photo and records. Every measurement will be identical with Kay Wancliffe. Then, maybe, I can make the model live. . . ."

He became silent, hands thrust in his smock pockets. After a while he spoke.

"This stuff in the bath is only the beginning—it's a mixture of glycerols, albumens, hydrocarbons, sugars, and so forth, all the elements that go to make up a human being. These compounds have to be formed, moulded cell by cell. Every scrap has to be syntheticized, until at last comes the time when I must try and infuse life into the whole. There will lie the biggest problem."

"How long do you imagine it's going to take you?" Tanner asked quietly.

"How can I say? Many months, certainly. Not a single detail must be overlooked. In order to live, everything about this model must be correct. What does it matter if it takes me a lifetime, so long as I succeed in the end?"

Tanner remained silent. The last thing he could picture was the mess in the back turning into a desirable woman. That was where his limitation came in. He had not the vivid imagination or the genius of Perry Mills. To Perry, the end of the experiment was known while he was still at the beginning.

While the scientists and political leaders of the world wrangled and argued and experimented, Perry Mills worked. Day in, day out, ceaselessly, regardless of everything—through the weeks and the months. He never left his home, frequently toiled all night, deaf to all the exhortations of both his retainer and Tanner to give himself a rest or take some exercise. . . . No, he'd have none of that! More important things to do than take exercise.

A year passed. Perry's terrific mental endeavors kept him in good health. He was as lean and energetic as ever, clear minded, steeped in the profound technique of his task. Tanner, visiting him constantly, keeping all he knew entirely to himself to prevent a flood of newshounds, had seen that original mess of compounds undergo amazing changes.

Little by little, Perry had built up masses of bone, muscle and nerve tissue, forming them under the influence of needle fine electric radiations. Cell by cell he had arranged the whole incredible structure, producing the outline first, then gradually shifting and positioning the syntheticized parts into their right formations. He had linked up the nerves, socketed the joints, created the flesh. The first mass of elements had formed at last into the recognizable shape of a woman.

He labored for another six months, working with ever increasing skill as his knowledge expanded. He made wax moulds and created synthetic flesh impressions from them. He spent

days on the fingers, on the hair roots, precisioning every detail—until at last he had produced a perfect female body, now removed to a glass case, a body that had everything, except eyes.

Tanner surveyed the alabaster whiteness of the pseudo-girl in the tube, then turned to look at Perry. The young chemist's face was set and resolute, a little more lined than at first, more than a trifle anxious.

"Certainly she's Kay Wanciffé over again," Tanner muttered. "Those empty eye sockets aren't so good. But everything else—The hair even! You've made that grow, anyhow."

"Simple," Perry growled. "Hair is only vegetable growth, anyway, and the class of pigment makes the color. I simply stimulated vegetable compounds with mitogenetic radiations. Any fool could do that. A gooseberry does it naturally, anyway."

He eyed the flawless body in silence for a while. "The eyes are hardest," he muttered. "Iris and pupil, retina and cornea, nerve connections. Going to be difficult—but I'll master it finally."

He did—three months later. Tanner found himself summoned urgently from the Bureau of Statistics on the evening of December 7, 2020, to see the finished work.

As usual, he found Perry in the laboratory, gazing thoughtfully at the silent figure in the case. The eyelids were closed, but they had beneath them the soft roundness of eyeballs. Perry raised one of the lids gently, revealed a flawless but vacant blue eye.

"See?" he smiled. "I made it! I used a photo iris diaphragm for my example and used contractor muscles sensitive to light. I constructed two eyes identical to those of a natural human being." He rubbed his slender hands slowly together. "I sent for you, Bill, because I want you to be the sole witness when I infuse life into this lovely creature. I'm all set to go."

"You really believe you *can* create life?" Tanner asked quickly.

Perry slowly nodded, waved his hand to the massive electrical machines banked around him.

"This apparatus, I hope, will duplicate the effects that must have been present at the beginning of the world when the earth was born. It was chemical fusion; science admits that much. Life could only have happened through one agency—solar radiation. Life is basically carbon, mixed with the right proportions of hydrogen, Oxygen, nitrogen, and so forth, such as we have here in this completed figure. At the dawn of time all those elements existed, but what changed them from merely atoms to atoms *plus* life? Only one thing, as scientists like Jeans, Eddington, and others have freely admitted—a radiation which was present at the dawn of the world but which was finally lost as the sun cooled and grew older.

"I have worked on those lines, studying solar phenomena and getting all possible clues and observations from the major observatories of the world. I have calculated backward to the sun's temperature at the earth's time of birth. Without doubt, there were several ultra short radiations in being at that time, produced by the great heat . . ."

Perry pointed to the machines again, grouped at either end of the case in which the body lay.

"When I release those machines," he said slowly, "a tremendous electric current will completely shatter a piece of iron in a specially constructed chamber. Iron is one of the basic elements of the universe. I shall release its atomic energy, but before that energy can escape it will go through converting chambers which will alter its wavelength to the one I require. That radiation wavelength will pass clean through this case and, I believe, will infuse inert atoms with that one basic electric reaction which we call life!"

Perry stood regarding Tanner eagerly, glanced once more at the motionless, exquisite being he had at last completed, then he seized the master switch of his bank of electric machinery and slammed it home.

Sparks flared, dynamos whined.

Amazing globes began to shift up and down on smooth pistons. Tubes flared through all the colors of the spectrum.

Tanner stood waiting tensely. Perry, a demon of activity, played like a pianist over a row of controlling keys, finished up with jamming home another switch and turning simultaneously to stare at the case. At either end of it massive electrodes glowed with the surge of power.

Seconds . . . Minutes . . . Perspiration rolled down Perry's face with the intensity of his emotion.

The figure in the case remained motionless.

"It's got to work!" Perry breathed. "It's *got* to!"

One minute—Three. Five . . . No motion. Only the glowing electrodes and whining dynamos. Very slowly Perry reached out and cut off the power. Silence fell, an awful silence in which Perry's hard breathing sounded unnaturally loud.

"I—I failed," he whispered dully. "I failed! I was wrong! My God, after all my work—" He looked round in bewilderment, his face ashy white in the glare of lights.

"Suppose—" Tanner began, but Perry cut him short with a shout of fury.

"Perhaps nothing!" he yelled. "Don't start making suggestions because I don't want 'em! Get out!"

"Now listen, Perry, take it easy—"

"Don't tell me what to do, Bill. Get out, before I do something I might regret!"

"O. K." Tanner nodded quietly. He could see his friend was at the breaking point with despair. Silently he left the laboratory.

Perry stared at the closed door, breathed hard, then hardly conscious of what he was doing he turned moodily and started to pace up and down with his hands locked behind him. Once or twice he gazed at the motionless form in the case, hesitated over tearing it out and destroying it with acids. Finally he thought better of it, went to the window and stared out on the calm beauty of the winter night. The stars, the rising moon in flecks of soft cloud.

"Where *did* I go wrong?" he muttered fiercely. "Where?"

He turned abruptly and snapped a switch. The lights went out. He sat down heavily in his well padded chair by the window and gave himself up to thought. With external impressions shut off and only the ghostly shadows for company he felt better able to concentrate.

But after a time he could feel reaction setting in. The crushing disappointment of it all. A drowsiness was upon him. His thoughts would not focus properly.

CHAPTER III

“I Am Not Alive . . .”

Perry jumped suddenly, and guiltily realized he must have fallen asleep. The laboratory was still unlighted, but the beams of the newly risen full moon were shining strongly through the window, glinting back from machines and glasswork, bathing the case of the synthetic woman in a silvery glow.

Perry yawned and stretched himself. His head felt clearer for the nap. Slowly he got to his feet, then paused in his forward movement and frowned. An alien sound was in the laboratory—a gentle scraping, tapping noise. Or so it sounded to be at first; gradually he realized it was a voice trying very hard to speak and croaking in the doing.

In spite of himself Perry felt his knees tremble. Though it was insane, incredible, there remained one stupefying fact—the sound was coming from the open end of the tube where lay the head of the synthetic woman! She was whispering, apparently to herself.

“If you hear me, come! If you hear me, come! Listen! Whoever you are!”

Perry came back to himself with a bang, switched on the lights. The woman failed to move in the slightest as the glare smote down on her. She remained motionless, her eyes closed. Perry stared down at her in blank bewilderment. Her lips were moving, her tongue was passing up and down between her teeth. He clamped a hand over her heart. It was beating with the steady rhythm of life! And yet despite her steady breathing not a trace of color came into her face. There seemed to be no circulation worth mentioning. Alive, yet dead? Trying to talk?

Perry tried hard to think straight, use the routine science demanded. He whirled round and snatched up a thermometer, jabbed it under her tongue; instantly it was pushed out again, smashed on the concrete floor. He took another one, thrust it in her armpit. It registered room temperature, nothing more. She was not alive!

“What the hell . . .” Perry groaned, clutching his hair, then he pulled the thermometer away and stooped closer to try and catch the incoherent babblings from that mouth. He fancied they were English words. Impossible, of course, but—

“Doesn’t make sense!” he muttered, driving his fist into his palm. “The electric current could not possibly have a latent effect. Either she would have come alive at that moment, or never. When the current stopped she ought to have remained inert clay.”

“Whoever you are, listen!”

There was no denying those words. They were pure English, and the living-dead girl had uttered them. Perry leaned forward in open mouthed amazement. His creation seemed suddenly to have got her tongue disentangled.

“You cannot be expected to understand the full implication of all this. I pray you know the English language and understand what I am saying. I can only assume you have made an image of Kay Wancliffe. I’m trying to tell you that although . . . No, I’ll try another way. I am Kay Wancliffe, and I am in a grim predicament; so are my father and mother who are with me. If indeed you have made an image of me, please understand that this image is not alive, is only a carrier for my thoughts.”

“Huh?” Perry stared fixedly as the low tones stopped for a moment. He lifted an eyelid; the eye beneath was glassy and lifeless.

“For various reasons I am not able to give the full facts now,” she resumed suddenly. “You have it in your hands to save three people from a desperate plight, and the world from certain doom. At least, so far as the death of humanity is concerned.

“Womankind was deliberately destroyed. Why, and how, I hope you will later learn. At the moment I can only ask that you do whatever this carrier of my thoughts tells you to. Obey implicitly!”

Perry nodded dumbly. This listening to a voice from a girl who had never lived—the voice of a girl who had been buried for four years!—was more than he could possibly figure out.

“You admit,” she resumed, “that the mind controls the body, and that the brain is the most sensitive organism for the conduction of thought? I will assume you do admit that. Through various means I can’t now explain, mind force is enormously amplified and operates through this body for only one reason, because its brain is identical to my own. It so happens that you must have made a perfect model of me, that’s why it responds so well. I presume it *is* a model. I cannot conceive of anything else. If I am right, I believe vocal organs will respond to my thoughts and enable me to speak to you.

“After all, is it so amazing that you have made a perfect model? Did not Jeans say long ago that six monkeys, given sufficient time, would be able to type off a Shakespeare sonnet?^[1] The law of chance, which in this case has operated first time. Not coincidence; science does not admit of coincidence. You must have made an exact model, even down to the right number of brain cells. I never expected anything so wonderful. I shall speak to you again soon. For now, I must say goodbye.”

[1] “The Mysterious Universe.”

Perry hesitated over saying something, then stared blankly as the girl’s lips ceased to move. Mechanically he felt her heart; it had stopped. Her breathing had ceased. The unknown motivating life force behind her had been removed.

“I can’t believe it,” he whispered. “It’s uncanny! Kay Wancliffe is dead and buried. This girl does not really live . . .”

He sunk his chin on his chest, moved slowly across the laboratory. In the course of his amblings he came into the glow of moonlight still streaming through the window. He looked up suddenly, gazed out on the serene, silvery orb.

“I wonder . . .” he breathed. “Is it possible? When the moonlight fell on that model it became alive! The moonlight alone could not do it, but it at least proves the moon and earth were in a direct line . . . But, can Kay Wancliffe be *on the moon*?”

He shook his head in bewilderment.

“What am I saying? How can she be? She’s dead and buried. She could not throw her mind over 240,000 miles. Buried,” he repeated slowly. “Sure the bodies were buried, all three of them, but what did those bodies contain? Suppose . . .”

He swung round and snatched up the telephone. In a moment he had awakened Bill Tanner from heavy slumber at his home.

“Well? What?” Tanner growled sleepily.

“Shut up, and listen,” Perry said briefly, then he shot off the whole story with a bewildering disregard for details. Poor Tanner was obviously too baffled to speak straight. He could only gulp and ask what he could do about it.

“Plenty,” Perry answered crisply. “You’ve got one of those new Z-ray machines at your Bureau, haven’t you? One of those things that emit a ray capable of penetrating earth but which kicks back when it comes to flesh and blood structure?”

“Sure. We use it for examining buried people instead of the old messy business of exhumation. Why?”

“At the earliest possible moment I want you to examine the graves of Kay Wancliffe and her parents, get me a report on their bodies. They’ve been buried a long time, but in those new type lead coffins there’ll still be some traces of structure left. I believe,” Perry finished absently, “that they were buried without their brains! Kay, in particular, had no brains.”

“Huh, she wasn’t the only one!” Tanner grunted; then he sighed. “Well, I think you’re screwy, but I’ll do it.”

“Only by being buried without her brain could Kay Wancliffe be alive right now,” Perry snapped. “Quit making cracks and get busy the moment you get the chance . . . Oh, sorry to have disturbed you. Good night!”

He put the telephone down thoughtfully.

“If I’m right, how the devil did Kay get to the moon without her body?” he muttered. “How does she . . . ? Oh, hell, what’s the use. I’ll go nuts if I think round a prop much longer.”

He gave the motionless body a final glance, switched off the lights and left the laboratory. In an hour he was asleep.

Tanner wasted no time following out Perry’s request. Though work prevented him from coming personally the following morning, he sent the proofed plates by special messenger.

The moment Perry studied them, blurred in details though they were from the inevitable decomposition of the bodies concerned, he knew his shot in the dark had been right. There were no brains in those three bodies! For some reason they had been removed, and the only man who could ever have explained it, Doctor Danver Hall, was also dead.

“Do you hear me? Are you there?”

Perry swung round as the soft voice reached his ears. In a moment he had put the plates down and hurried to the side of the girl in the case. She was ephemerally alive once again.

“I shall have to speak quickly. I have only time for absolute details, nothing more. Get a notebook, please. . . . Now, I am going to reveal to you the secret of space travel. I place you on your honor as a scientist not to reveal the secret to anybody else until given permission. It is still the secret of its original discoverer, Elroid Wancliffe, my father. You are ready?”

Perry nodded automatically, began to scribble in shorthand and scientific jargon as the girl spoke steadily, her eyes closed and body motionless.

Perry’s wonder increased as he wrote. The space traveling system revealed to him was utterly unlike anything he had expected. No suggestion of rocket control entered into it. Instead there was described to him a system of screens, exactly covering one half of a theoretical ship. The screens were ordinary beryllium steel, but the ship itself was composed of a highly radioactive metal, Element 105, which in itself was totally impervious to gravitational attraction, even as glass is transparent to light.

At a given temperature in manufacture the stuff went through a mutation, flew away from normal sources of attraction instead of toward them, and could only be prevented from so doing by the insertion of a beryllium shield immediately beneath it. *Wanthorium*, the girl called the stuff—made from elements which any advanced chemist could easily compile. The essential secret lay in the temperature ranges.

“You will construct a ship to suit yourself for size,” the girl concluded. “See that it has weapons of defense, and also that it is equipped with all possible surgical instruments, such as you must have used to make your model. When you are finally ready you will leave for the moon.

“When you reach the moon give a radio signal; I will pick it up. Also bring with you the model, through which I will direct your actions. How we got to the moon you’ll discover later; it is too involved to explain now. I can only speak to you when the moon is at the full. Whether it be on your side of the earth or not is of no consequence. The radiations I am using for thought transmission pass through the solid mass of the earth.

“I shall not be able to speak again until the next full moon—and not then unless matters here are very favorable. I am surrounded by dangers. One thing I beg of you—hurry! Hurry!”

The girl’s lips closed. Again she was lifeless clay.

CHAPTER IV

“We Have Reached the Moon . . .”

The girl did not speak again. She lay passive through the weeks as Perry manufactured a sample piece of *wanthorium* and found it did all that was claimed of it. At the stated temperature in its cooling it vanished from its sandbed, smashed a hole through the roof of the laboratory and disappeared into space, destined to travel the eternal deeps forever.

Tanner came at intervals, said little, stood watching the workmen Perry had engaged as they labored on the skeleton of a metal ship in a newly added section to the big laboratory. Perry had little time to talk; his explanations were brief in the extreme. Neither did he pay any attention to the screamings of country leaders as they demanded action by the scientists to save the human race.

Time and again President Gregory had spoken to the world, usually giving the same speech as on the first occasion—but each time now it was charged with increasing anxiety. As the death rate went steadily on, as men the world over died from either natural or violent causes, the expectation of life for the human race correspondingly shortened. Science had confessed itself beaten, knew nothing of the lone biochemist struggling with might and main to sort the mystery out.

Exactly six weeks after the girl's initial instructions the vessel was finished. The workmen had constructed the skeleton only; Perry himself manufactured and fitted the *wanthorium* plates, placing them in position before it reached its critical temperature and afterward covering it with beryllium shields. In this way he had no difficulty in handling it.

“When do you figure on going?” Tanner asked, surveying the gleaming ovoid in the floodlights. He had braved a particularly beastly winter night to come over and see the thing at Perry's request.

“Right now,” Perry answered briefly. “Everything's ready. The girl's inside. On a hunch I've put some clothes on her; my own. I'm loaded up with provisions, guns, surgical instruments. I've given Denham an indefinite holiday, so . . .” He shrugged. “Only the hop to be made, I guess.”

“Wish I was coming with you,” Tanner sighed enviously.

“What's stopping you?”

“My work, of course. I can't just walk out and do as I like.”

Perry smiled twistedly. “Try a bit of logic, old man. In a little while men will start fighting each other when it is fully realized—as far as they know anyhow—that humanity is finished. Men always like an excuse for a fight; they're a vile breed you know. Ordinary business like yours will go to pot. Only the toughest will survive to the end. You'd do much better to take a chance and come with me.”

Tanner pondered for a few moments, then he suddenly nodded.

“O. K., I will. I don't need much persuading. I've made private arrangements for a vacation, anyway. Let's be going.”

He led the way through the airlock into the vessel's small and compact interior, stood regarding the roughly clothed girl on the specially designed bed by the curved wall. Perry

stopped only long enough to shift the switch that opened the workshop roof, cut out the lights, then he came into the control room and slammed home the heavy operculum.

He settled down before the switchboard.

“Grab yourself a seat and strap yourself into it,” he ordered curtly. “This *wanthorium* stuff is mighty powerful and achieves a terrific acceleration. Once we’re clear of these storm clouds the moon will be visible. She’s at the full again, anyway.”

Tanner nodded and seated himself. Then he felt as though the bottom had dropped out of everything as Perry closed the switch actuating the beryllium shields. The moment the shields moved to the top of the ship the *wanthorium* exerted its weird powers, lifted the ship like a feather and hurled it into the night at terrifying speed. The sensation was one of headlong, terrible falling into nothing.

Perry gave a gasp and struggled mightily with his weighted hands to close the shield switches. Tanner was held motionless, his heart laboring mightily, the room swimming before his eyes. He fought desperately for breath, reeled into darkness.

The stinging taste of brandy was in his mouth as he recovered consciousness to find Perry bending over him. Perry himself was white and strained, had obviously been through considerable physical stress.

“Sorry, old man,” he panted, as Tanner got unsteadily to his feet. “I underestimated the power of *wanthorium*. It gets up speed at an incredible pace. I’ve cut it down now so that our acceleration is equal to earth gravity. We’re O. K. now.”

“Thank Heaven for that!” Tanner rubbed his aching head, slowly moved to the outlook port and stared outside. In a moment Perry had joined him.

Right ahead of them, seeming far larger than ever before, was the full moon, bulging and globular, shedding its brilliant silver light into the utter black of star ridden space. Tanner narrowed his eyes and stared at it.

“Funny thing about those bright streaks and rays,” Perry murmured. “See them? From Tycho, Copernicus, and other craters? Always visible at full moon when the sun is directly overhead on the moon’s surface. No man really knows what they are, how formed, or anything about them. They travel over all parts of the moon’s surface, independent of mountain ranges and everything else.”

Perry paused, frowning.

“Something wrong?” Tanner asked at length, not quite recovered from the breath taking beauty of the view.

“Mebbe; I don’t know. Just struck me as queer that Kay Wancliffe gets busy on her double at full moon, at the same time as the streaks and rays. Don’t suppose there’s any connection, but it’s queer.”

“Like lunacy at full moon?” Tanner chuckled.

“Yeah; and that isn’t so preposterous as it sounds. Such things do happen. And by the way,” Perry went on musingly, “the death of women started at full moon and recurred at every full moon after that, until—until there wasn’t a women left in the world. Say! That looks like more than coincidence!”

“You’re not trying to connect up the death of womankind and interstellar telepathy with the bright streaks and rays, are you?”

“Perhaps . . .” Perry relapsed into silence. It was clear the matter interested him. At last he shrugged and turned aside, sat down at the controls.

From then on he said but little. Hours passed. He and Tanner took turns at the controls, losing all count of time. They realized finally that several ordinary days and nights must have elapsed and the moon was nearing her third quarter when she loomed below them—no longer a globe, but a black plain embraced in the utter cold of the lunar night.

Perry stared through the window fixedly as he brought the ship curving down into the raven shadows of the lunar Appenines. He clicked on the short wave radio, spoke a few brief sentences.

“We’ve reached the moon. What do we do next? Awaiting your instructions . . .”

He slowed the ship’s speed and circled around, waiting. The Earth, huge and magnificent, disappeared behind the mountain range. The sky was naught but brilliant stardust.

CHAPTER V

“My Life Is in Your Hands . . .”

Tanner gave the slightest of shudders. For the first time the utter weirdness of it all struck home to him. This commonplace journey to the moon, when it should have been an event of world shaking importance; the tomb-like silence outside; the girl who had never lived lying motionless on the bed in Perry’s old suit. Tanner turned to study her, then he started as he saw her lips moving.

“Perry!” he whispered tensely. “The girl! Look!”

Perry gave her a brief glance, then nodded. “Good—she’s going to communicate . . .” He turned back to the controls, more accustomed than Tanner to the girl’s strange moments of ephemeral life.

“You have reached the moon,” she stated impassively, and this time her voice was much stronger. “From the direction of your radio wave you are apparently on the eastward side of the Appenines. Before long, if you proceed northwards, you will reach a crater some four miles in diameter, easily distinguishable because it is elliptical and not circular in shape. Descend into it. Deep down, nearly at the core of the moon you will find me. I will tell you how to do that when you arrive.”

The girl became silent again. Perry glanced at Tanner, then he squared his jaw, swung open the floor window and looked down keenly. The searchlights flooded the starlit blackness of the lunar night. He slowed down the ship’s speed still further, juggling with the shields. Gradually the vessel passed over an infinity of rills, gullies, and pits, until at last he detected the crater the girl had mentioned standing alone in the middle of a dead sea bottom.

He altered the controls, pushed the ship’s nose down and dropped into the cavernous hole, searchlights blazing into the darkness. The terrific width of the natural shaft made it impossible to see the sides. All Perry could do was work with half opened shutters and lower the ship inch by inch.

One mile, three miles, five . . . Ten, fifteen . . . Then Tanner gave a shout.

“Look below! Some kind of illumination!”

Perry nodded. He had already seen a pale lavender light, increasing in intensity as the ship went down, until finally they burst into a titanic cavern and beheld the source of the illuminant. At opposite ends of the huge natural hole were two monstrous metal bars, remarkably like electrodes, from each of which streamed an unwavering flood of lavender light concentrated on a glowing ball, invisibly supported between them.

“Energy of some kind,” Perry muttered, frowning. “Plenty of science behind the idea too. They’ve figured out a way to make positive and negative power mate together at a given point and produce a flood of light. Nice going . . .”

“And machinery . . .” Tanner breathed, screwing up his eyes and staring amazedly. “Look at it! As far as the eye can see. Machines upon machines, of all sorts and sizes. So much so it looks like—It *is*!” he whistled. “A city of machines instead of buildings! Say, what do you know about that?”

“Nothing—yet.”

Perry tightened his hands on the controls and flew swiftly over the vast reaches of the machine city. There was no doubt about it. There were no recognizable buildings, no people, no sign of anything except the machines—small, squat, and in flawless condition. What was more, they were working! Every one of them, their wheels and cogs spinning steadily. Each one of them was working out some individual destiny.

“This has got me licked,” Perry muttered at last. He glanced at the instruments connecting with the ship’s exterior. “Anyway, there’s no air here,” he grunted. “Only explanation is that the moon’s a rock sponge, open right through to the cold and air-lessness of the void. Won’t affect machinery, of course, but it will certainly affect living matter like us. If we go outside we’ll need space suits—”

“What’s that?” Tanner interrupted him, pointing. “Looks like some kind of guardian machine.”

Perry stared ahead at a monstrous object on four heavy metal legs, standing alone in the center of a circle of machines. Slowing speed to minimum he crawled toward it, flew round it, studied the queer design of the thing. Somehow, it had the outlines of a human being; it even had arms fitted with vast pincer hands. Clumsy four-pronged feet, too, providing a means of solid, unsliding foundation. It stood perhaps thirty feet high, dominating the smaller machines around it. Apparently it was motionless. The weird quasi-human effect was further accentuated by two projecting lenses on the cannonball-like head, creating the appearance of projecting, many-faceted eyes.

“Gosh!” Perry yelped suddenly, as he flew round the back of it once more. “I just caught sight of an indented name on one of the metal plates. It said ‘Fowler Incorporated.’ They’re the biggest engineers in New York. This thing belongs to Earth—”

“Stop your ship!”

Perry and Tanner both swung round at the command. It was the girl speaking. Perry glanced back at the monstrosity through the window, then he slowly brought the ship down in front of the colossus.

“Is—is Kay Wancliffe inside that?” Tanner whispered.

Before Perry could make a response the girl spoke again.

“Listen to instructions! Inside this metal robot are three brains in air conditioned cases, floating in a life preserving fluid which produces all the essentials of life away from the body. The three brains are my own, my father’s, and my mother’s. Of course you followed my wishes to bring surgical instruments? Listen very carefully. At the top of the jeweled globe my brain lies inside its special section of the case. Remove the glassy case and sever the connecting wires on the side of the green jewel. Afterwards, subject the brain in that third-section to anaesthesia and place it inside the skull of the woman you have made. It should exactly fit in the place of the one you have already made, which of course can now be discarded. You will connect up all the synapses, ganglions, neurons, and so forth. You can do it. You made that model without flaw; the rest will not be difficult. Remember, my life is in your hands. Once I recover, I can explain. There is not the time now.”

Perry stood in thought as the girl’s lips ceased moving; then he turned to the cupboard and dragged out a space suit and a small portable extension ladder.

“Then you’re going to do it?” Tanner demanded.

“Sure I am. What the hell do you think we came for? I can do what she wants all right. I learned all there is to know about surgery when I made this woman. You’re going to help me.

Grab that other space suit from the closet.”

Tanner nodded rather reluctantly, followed Perry outside as he opened the airlock. For a while, now they came to walk, they had to flex their legs to accustom themselves to the lesser gravity, far more noticeable outside than in the vessel.

Then at last Perry went slowly forward, planked his ladder in front of the monstrosity and climbed slowly up to the head, stopping when he was above the massive compound lens that formed the green “eye” of the thing.

He found the proper section of the brain compartment easily enough, pulled various tools from his belt and got to work. In fifteen minutes he had cut through a maze of wires and lifted out a transparent section containing a gray organism floating in yellowish fluid. Two other sections remained.

Tanner eyed it doubtfully, even with repulsion. He was no biologist. Perry’s face did not seem in the least perturbed behind his helmet glass. He descended the ladder slowly with the precious braincase in his gloved hand. Only when he had his space suit off and the airlock closed did he expel a huge sigh of relief.

“Whew! That was ticklish work.”

“I don’t like it,” Tanner grunted. “Something horrible about all this. It’s—it’s repulsive, Perry!”

“Repulsive be damned!” Perry retorted, rolling up his sleeves and washing his hands in disinfectant. “A brain’s a brain whoever it may belong to. I’ve rarely seen one better developed. Come on, give me a hand into this smock!”

He angled up his hands and slipped into the spotless white overall, snapped on rubber gloves and face mask.

“Better do the same,” he ordered briefly. “You’ve got to help me on this. Switch on those floodlamps.”

Tanner obeyed, washed and prepared himself as he watched Perry lift the limp model of the girl onto the long table under the lights. He slipped the brain case into the anaesthesia cabinet, broke the case away.

Tanner came forward, could not help but marvel at the incredible skill with which Perry worked, handling the living, anaesthetized brain with astounding delicacy, supporting it with surgical instruments which touched in spots where no harm could be done. Perry himself considered he needed no praise. This job, compared to the making of a woman from raw materials, was mere child’s play. His main anxiety was to finish the operation and bring life to this beautiful body which so far had only been a mouthpiece.

An hour passed as he labored on under the brilliant arcs, Tanner assisting tirelessly. The skull of the model was opened, and the useless brain replaced with the living one. With smooth efficiency, using electromagnetic beams and instruments of glittering immaculacy, Perry linked up the vital connections one by one, grafted back skin and bone onto the skull, wiped it with pungent ointments and finally left not even the trace of a scar. And, since the entire top of the skull had been removed for the purpose, not even the hair was shaved away. At the close of the operation only a thin pale line, rapidly disappearing, round the girl’s head over her eyebrows, was the only trace of the surgical miracle.

Perry stood aside, shaking now from reaction, mopping his perspiring face with a towel. The girl lay motionless, but as her brain at last began to clear of the anaesthetic her breast

began to rise and fall slowly. For the first time since her creation color crept into her dead white face.

Perry snatched up a stethoscope and held it to her heart.

“She’s alive—at last!” he whispered. “Sixty beats to the minute. By the time she’s fully recovered it will be hitting the normal seventy two. Reflexes O. K. . . .”

He turned aside, regarding the girl in silent wonderment, and not a little affection. But something was still puzzling him.

“Why should life just happen because a living brain is put inside a body that has never lived?” he asked in a low voice. “Has this girl solved the secret of life, or what? Is life purely in the mind. . . .?” He stopped reflecting, then with a sigh he sat down to wait.

An hour later he and Tanner were rewarded by seeing the girl’s blue eyes slowly open as she gazed in wonderment about her.

CHAPTER VI

“I’ll Tell You My Story . . .”

Immediately the two were at her side.

“You’re alive—at last!” Perry whispered exultantly, as her vivid eyes turned to him. Then he swung round to Tanner. “The restoratives, quick!”

“O. K.”

Between them, they raised the girl’s head and shoulders, forced the biting restoratives between her lips. She coughed and spluttered for a while, then rapidly began to gain full possession of her senses. Slowly she sat up and flexed her arms, wiggled her fingers in something like awe. Perry stood watching her in critical silence. She was more beautiful than ever now, she had come to life; yet still he couldn’t understand the miracle.

The girl turned to him at last and smiled a little.

“So *you* are the kind friend I have to thank for getting me back to life!” she exclaimed. Again she flexed her arms and fingers. “You can’t believe how wonderful it is to have a body again after spending several years having mechanical things do what your limbs ought to do.” She stood up slowly, accustomed herself to the gravitation, then walked to the mirror on the wall.

“It’s positively uncanny!” she exclaimed at last. “The law of chance certainly operated to the full when you modeled me, Mr.—?”

“Mills. Perry Mills is the name. This is my friend, Bill Tanner— And I might add, Miss Wancliffe, that neither of us know what’s going on. What’s the explanation of all this?”

“I’ll tell you . . .” The girl turned slowly from the mirror, her blue eyes grave and serious. She seated herself in the nearest chair and kept shifting her legs in bewildered delight as she talked.

“When father discovered *wanthorium*—which was quite by accident—all of us realized that space was open to us. Naturally, by ‘us’ I mean my father, mother, and myself. But we also realized that in visiting some planets we would of necessity meet up with some very hostile conditions—such as poisonous air, even no air at all, strange beasts and entities, all kinds of troubles. That worried father. He couldn’t see us trusting just to space suits if we wanted to make a thorough tour—so out of his doubts and plans grew the rather amazing idea of a spacial robot.”

“That colossus standing out there?” Perry asked quickly.

“That’s it, yes. There was also considerable doubt that a human body in its entirety would be able to stand the terrific speeds at which *wanthorium* travels, and unless we did move at a terrific speed it might take father far more than his lifetime would allow to make an extensive tour. Father finally came to a decision, and ultimately mother and I agreed with him. We got the cooperation of father’s friend, Dr. Danver Hall, and as an expert neurologist and surgeon he thought the idea was feasible. The idea was to remove our brains, a by no means difficult feat to the surgery of this twenty-first century, of course, and leave our bodies behind to be taken over on our return. The bodies would be charged with long period anaesthetic, enough to keep them in suspended animation for ten years or so. Dr. Hall would look after them.”

Perry smiled bitterly. “I see. Maybe you don’t know that they were all buried when Dr. Hall suddenly died?”

The girl shrugged. "I didn't know, but I had a suspicion something like that might occur. Not that it matters since you are a master of synthesis. Anyhow, our three brains were connected up by Hall to the monster spacial robot, and with the three of us working in unison the different controls responded flawlessly to our brain impressions, in fact far better than a natural body. We left the Earth secretly; father did not want a word to leak out until he'd brought back some proof. We crossed space at terrific speed, made the moon our first stopping place. We've never left here since."

The girl's face hardened a little. She got up from her chair and crossed to the window, gazed out over the wilderness of machines.

"Do you realize," she asked slowly, "that these machines are *alive*?"

"Alive!" gasped Tanner. "But—but they can't be! No machine can actually be—"

"Maybe I put it badly," Kay acknowledged, turning again. "What I really mean is that the last Selenites defeated extinction in a fashion remarkably similar to father's idea. In the years I've been here I've picked up enough to know what they did.

"When they found that their world was falling to bits and that space-cold and airlessness was coming, they transferred their brains to machinery which would withstand the ravages of ultimate cold, and so they gained for themselves something approaching a mechanical immortality. A brain housed in a machine does not easily die because there is nothing to rapidly deteriorate—except the brain itself—and with no blood stream or other sources of impurity to impair it, it can—and does—last for tens of thousands of years. That is, on the moon here. I doubt if it could be done on Earth.

"Well, when we arrived here these machine brains trapped us entirely; they put some kind of electrical current round us that prevented *wanthorium* from working."

"Incidentally, where do the Selenites get all their power to do these things?" Perry demanded, gazing out on the steady activity of the machines' rods, bars and pistons.

"From the sun. The moon is peculiar in many ways, but its biggest asset is its power to absorb the unveiled rays of the sun—electrical waves, various types of radiation, and so forth. The moon is really a gigantic storage battery. Certain veins of rock are purely magnetic; special oxides retain the currents received from the sun.

"Those two huge electrodes up there were made by the machine Selenites for utilizing the constant supply of stored energy. All power and light is derived from there. Only on certain spots on the moon is the absorptive effect missing; it turns into reflective instead through some rock faults. You might call them blind spots. Those blind spots are the source of the bright streaks and rays which are visible at high lunar noon—full moon—from Earth."

"By which means, unless I miss my guess, you directed thought across the void?" Perry asked slowly.

"Yes, but it wasn't quite so easy as that. Those bright streaks and rays are the source of natural carrier waves to Earth, the nearest neighbor. The sun hurls forth radio waves among other things, and of terrific power. They strike the moon and are reflected from the blind spots out into space again. Naturally, a host of them hit the Earth. They can carry any particular radiation or transmission the Selenites desire—and they do. I'll tell you exactly what in a moment. Right now I'd better explain how my thoughts reached Earth.

"It was blind chance, in the first place. The moment we realized we were trapped we tried to radio Earth, but the electric shield around our robot blocked the transmission. Finally we hit

on another idea. Thought waves, of far shorter length than radio, got safely through the shield. We converted our radio apparatus into a thought wave transmitter—not very difficult since thought and radio waves are almost identical except for length. We directed our combined concentrations to the natural carrier beam on the surface, occurring every full moon.

“We kept it up at every full moon, through the years. We hoped finally to effect a radio set somewhere on Earth and get a message through. Our only chance in doing that lay in a radio set somewhere having the exact reception coils necessary. A mighty slim chance! If we did strike one, our instruments would reveal quickly enough that we were in contact. For years nothing happened.”

The girl fell silent for a moment; then her eyes brightened.

“Then I suddenly realized that my particular concentrations had impacted on something and were being interpreted—but it wasn’t a radio because my father’s and mother’s thoughts were not being received at all. Finally I worked out the reason. Somehow, a brain had come into being, a brain identical with my own. My every thought was functioning through a body, just as if I were a living being. It could only mean that by some chance an exact duplicate of myself, with an exactly duplicate brain had been created. How, or why, I did not know. The impulse to speak reacted perfectly and my image spoke in sympathy. You understand now?”

“Clearly enough,” Perry nodded. “It was, in a sense telepathic remote control, the only difference in this case being that thought waves reacted instead of radio. Even though I can understand that, I do not understand why a brain alone should be the vital secret of life and living manifestation.”

“It isn’t!” the girl contradicted quickly. “A brain is the organ of thought interpretation. Thought is life; without it there can be no life. The actual source of thought is a mystery, unless it be the ether of space itself interpreted through individual brains—but the fact remains that so long as a brain can interpret thoughts it can make a body live. That was why your synthetic model of me did not live until it had a thinking brain inside it. You could not create thought, therefore not life. Remember the famous saying—‘I think, therefore I live.’”

Perry was silent for a long time when the girl stopped talking. Then at last he said slowly, “I don’t think I ever heard of a more ingenious way of sending for help.”

Kay shrugged. “Without that one chance of you forming molecules and atoms identical to my original body I could never have done it. I have you to thank for real life, a real body, and —” She paused and sighed. “But there I go! We’re not out of the woods yet by any means. From what I’ve learned of these Selenites, they are trying to get the Earth for their own uses. For generations they have tried to wipe out humanity with specially devised radiations. The only effect was, in certain cases, to produce lunacy among some individuals at full moon. That’s an acknowledged fact, of course.”

Perry smiled. “Of course. Hence the word ‘lunatic.’”

“Just after we got here the Selenites devised a new system of control, reacting directly on female brains, which are far more sensitive to ethereal changes than those of the male. Every living female, human, animal, insect, and so forth, was wiped out, was it not?”

“That was why I made you,” Perry said bitterly.

“Humanity will die because it cannot procreate,” Kay said pensively. “But the Selenites have still to conquer space travel. When we arrived here they realized the secret was in their grasp; but up to now we’ve resisted every attempt to make us divulge it. They undoubtedly hope to finally wear us out; that’s why they’ve held us here. They have hopes too of finding

some way to get hold of earthly bodies if they ever reach Earth. They want that more than anything else in the universe—to be rid of these encumbering machines they go about in. So as things stand, I guess it's stalemate.”

CHAPTER VII

“We’ll Give the Selenites Our Secret . . .”

A silence fell on the little control room. Perry stood with his chin sunk on his chest. Tanner finally spoke.

“Queer, isn’t it, that these machine people have allowed us to take Kay’s brain from the robot without attacking us?”

The girl laughed shortly. “You’ll probably find that they’ve got you here as firmly as the robot. Your controls will probably be dead.”

“What!” Perry gasped, and swung to the control board.

The girl was right. The *wanthorium* plates failed to respond as the beryllium shields slid to one side.

“There you are!” Kay sighed. “It’s a neat way of keeping a prisoner. Fortunately the electric current doesn’t affect flesh and blood; that’s why we’re all right—also why you could move me from the robot without any ill effects.”

Tanner gave a grunt. “Now that we know everything we’re no better off! The Earth is still devoid of women, and since it takes a living brain to give life to a synthetic model how the devil are we going to do it? In any case we’re stuck here, and these damned machines will probably attack us before long.”

“Only if you attack them,” the girl put in quietly. “Stay passive, and you’ve nothing to fear.”

“But we can’t stay passive! We want action.”

“Living brains— Synthetic models,” Perry said suddenly, starting to pace up and down. “Let’s get this thing straight. We have here a situation wherein two worlds are at loggerheads because they’re both driven by desperate necessity to need something the other possesses. Miss Wancliffe, as I see it these Selenites want to take over the Earth so they can devise ways and means of having natural bodies again on a young world, without recourse to mechanical aid. Right?”

“Just that,” Kay nodded.

“Hmmm. . . . Because they feared opposition they wiped out the female half of the human race, knowing the remainder would perish within a century?”

“Right again.”

“They are scientists of a high order,” Perry went on slowly, gazing thoughtfully in front of him. “Therefore they did not destroy through any vicious sense, but because it seemed to them the only method of gaining their end, even as a man might slay his favorite horse for meat if hunger drove him to it. That does not make him a devil at heart.”

“What the hell are you driving at?” Tanner demanded bluntly.

Perry smiled faintly. “Way back in 1980, Earthlings finally learned that the surest means of lasting security is gained by arbitration. You remember the friendship over the world, the study of different nations’ greatest needs? How there finally grew out of exchange and cooperation a bloodless and permanent world peace? Well, that taught every true man that violence is not the way to settle a difference. Cooperation is the secret. I’m trying to put those ideals into effect right here. Call me an ambassador or diplomat for Earth, if you like—but I think that right under my hands there lies the solution to both difficulties. It all depends how I

work. These people are not vicious, otherwise they would have slain, or somehow destroyed the three-brained robot long ago and learned its secret. Instead they prefer to wait until it is given up through sheer necessity—”

“More likely because it’s the only way they’ll get it,” Tanner snapped. “They’d never find that secret without being told, would they, Miss Wancliffe?”

“Unlikely,” she confessed; and looked at Perry queerly. “What are you getting at?”

“Just this. The Selenites can’t act without space travel. The human race cannot survive without female brains to be fitted to synthetic bodies. That isn’t a mathematical puzzle—it’s common sense. Suppose, in return for the secret of space travel the Selenites consented to have their brains—the female ones—fitted to synthetic earthly bodies? Our race would be saved.”

“You’re screwy!” Tanner shouted. “The Earth would be overrun with Selenites in no time. Lord! Think of the wars there’d be! It’s playing right into their hands. Superscientific Selenites versus the last men of earth? Not darn likely!”

“Wars? No!” Perry shook his head firmly. “The moon was once part of the Earth. At root, Earthlings and Selenites are of the same basic protoplasm. They’ve evolved differently because of different planetary states, that’s all. Superscience doesn’t beget war, but progress.”

“Yeah; like the slaughter of every woman on Earth, eh?” Tanner snapped.

“Science would call that necessary elimination.” Perry paused, looked at Tanner and the girl each in turn. “Can’t you *see*?” he demanded. “The Selenites will never discover *wanthorium* unless we give it to them, and we can’t escape either. On the other hand, the human race can’t survive unless Selenite brains are used. That’s the top and bottom of the matter.”

“Maybe you’re right,” admitted Kay, musing. “After all, they could advance Earthly knowledge enormously.”

“Exactly.” Perry was smiling strangely. Tanner had a queer inner conviction that Perry had not told everything that was in his mind. He knew that enigmatic smile too well.

Perry swung suddenly to the girl.

“How does one communicate with these machine folk?” he asked briefly.

Turning, she pointed through the window to one particular machine composed of an enormous cylinder supported on two side trestles. It looked remarkably like a gigantic dictaphone. At the moment the cylinder was motionless.

“That’s it, an electrical thought recorder,” she said quietly. “It takes the impressions of thought waves on the drum, then by some process I don’t propose to explain it changes your language into lunar by internal mathematical means, afterwards changing lunar back into English. That’s what we’ve used to communicate.”

“Do these machines read thoughts?” Perry asked anxiously.

“The machines themselves can’t read thoughts—only the recorder can do that—and only then when you directly concentrate on your message.”

“Good!” Perry’s nod was distinctly relieved. He turned to the closet and took out his space suit. In a few minutes he was outside, standing before the strange machine. The drum was slowly rotating.

Tanner glanced at the girl by his side.

“I still don’t like it,” he muttered. “If you ask me anything, Perry’s sealing the doom of Earth more certainly than it’s sealed already.”

"I wonder if he is . . ." The girl's eyes were thoughtful. "I trust him. After all he's done for me I'd trust him to the ends of the universe."

Tanner said nothing. He was frowning in perplexity.

Perry spent an hour giving his message, and in the ensuing hour he did little save pace the control room anxiously, completely ignoring the meal Tanner had prepared for the three of them. Time and again he went to the window, until at last he saw the waited sign—a long roll of metal ejected from the strange cylinder.

In minutes he was outside and in again, only paused long enough to take off his space suit helmet, then unrolled the metal message eagerly. For a moment he stared wonderingly at the faultless spelling and execution of the stylus indented message, then gave a whoop of joy as he read, Kay and Tanner staring over his shoulder.

"They agree!" he shouted exultantly. "They agree! Read for yourselves!"

They didn't need telling. The answer stared up at them.

"Your message has been received with interest by our people. We have debated the matter and have decided to accept your proposition. We realize that it would be impossible for you to provide us with bodies such as we used to have because you have no knowledge of the anatomy of lunar beings. Further, we realize that our construction on earthly lines is the only way for us to achieve ease on your planet.

"We wish you no ill—only our own advancement and the possession of bodies instead of imprisoning machines. We shall place ourselves in your hands, but as a safeguard during our synthetic construction on Earth we propose that our numbers should stand guard to prevent any possible deception. We trust you, but you cannot be answerable for the rest of your race.

"All we need is *Wanthorium*. In our machine bodies we can fly through space without ships. The fact that we shall keep faith with you is self evident, because we need earthly bodies more than anything else in the universe. In return for this, the secrets of lunar science will later be yours."

Perry laid the metal sheet on one side.

"Phooey!" growled Tanner. "They're all soft soap at the moment, but once they know space travel and have earth bodies they'll move around and wipe humanity off the Earth."

Perry smiled very slowly; it had a touch of grimness in it.

"That," he said quietly, "remains to be seen. For the time being, I trust 'em."

Perry lost no time thereafter. He handed over the secret of *wanthorium* once he had gained the accordance of Dr. Wancliffe's imprisoned brain to his schemes. Thereafter, through several weeks, it was mainly a matter of watching the Selenites' incredibly advanced engineering machines manufacturing the stuff in infinite quantities, delicate machines fitting the stuff to the ten thousand Selenites present in the enormous underground cavern.

So far, the Selenites had kept faith. The time came at last to depart for Earth.

Perry himself led the exodus in his ship with Wancliffe's double brained robot immediately in the rear. Further behind, floating through the weird galleries of the moon, came the ten thousand Selenites in a disordered array of machinery.

Upward and outward into the blinding sunshine, into the depths of space, over the gulf to Earth and the American continent they went. The enormous Selenite army settled just outside New York, much to the consternation of Earthlings who imagined interstellar invasion was now added to their troubles.

Then Perry spoke over a world television hookup. Presidents, kings and dictators listened to him, scientists were on tenterhooks, surgeons were astounded.

“Upon the cooperation we can now give depends humanity’s last hope of survival,” Perry stated calmly to the battery of transmitters before him. “You have heard my plan, and it is the only feasible one. Every man with medical knowledge, every surgeon in the world, must come to New York. The Medical Institutes will be opened for our purposes. Men must be trained in the art of making synthetic beings—beings who will take on life when living lunar brains are transplanted into them. It may take years—years of grueling endeavor—but because so much hangs on it I know you will agree.”

Perry was right in that. Mankind agreed everywhere, and New York saw an influx of medical experts such as the world had never known. Even President Gregory, a one time doctor, offered his services. And an added spurt was given to endeavor as armies of Selenite machine brains floated overhead almost ceaselessly, waiting, watching, prepared to strike without mercy at the first sign of an attempt to break faith.

But Perry and his enormous army of ever growing workers did not break faith. They wanted humanity to survive as badly as the Selenites wanted living bodies.

Through the months, enormous surgical laboratories sprouted in all directions. The whole world was concerned only in the making of synthetic men and women from Perry’s original plans. Five thousand men and five thousand women—the women first by mutual agreement with the Selenites.

Perry himself concentrated first on re-creating the bodies of Elroid Wancliffe and his wife, was finally rewarded by seeing them living and well beside him, restored to the girl who had untiringly helped him through all his endeavors.

Tanner too had changed, was carried away with enthusiasm for the project, even though he still had inner doubts.

A year went by. Two years. . . . Five years. . . .

Synthesis was everywhere. Day after day more and more brains were transferred to waiting bodies and the corresponding number of alert Selenite machine watchers grew correspondingly less—

Until at last the day arrived when every brain had been given an Earthly body. The last Selenite man mingled with Earthly people, along with the lunar men and women who had gone before him.

“I can’t for the life of me understand it!” declared Dr. Wancliffe, as he stood in the surgical laboratories surveying the report on the synthetic people’s progress. “These men and women, virtually made from the test tube and possessing incredibly brilliant minds, are quite content to mate with each other. In several cases Earthmen have married lunar brained women—and the lunar women, though infinitely cleverer, have settled down to quiet domesticity. It beats me! You’ve restored the balance of the human race, Perry; it’s only a question of time before the race picks up again, but—”

Wancliffe stopped and frowned. “Why the devil don’t any of them try to seize power? That’s what I expected.”

“I thought the same,” growled Tanner. “I’m ready for them to launch something dastardly any minute.”

“So am I,” murmured Kay, glancing across at Perry.

Perry smiled slowly, surveyed the assembled surgeons.

“In a few months the world will be back to normal,” he said quietly. “Business will resume. Out there beyond New York is a vast field of machinery which contains all the secrets of lunar science we’ll ever need to know. They can easily be analyzed. Those machines formerly housed brains, which are now in the bodies of synthetic earth men and women.

“The moon is totally devoid of life; all chance of threat from there has gone. I took a long chance, my friends, and it worked. These Selenites never had the power to read thoughts, therefore they never knew my innermost ideas. Further, their destruction of womankind *was* dastardly, though I said otherwise at the time to drive home my argument. I’ve turned the tables on them by using their womankind to repair our deficit.”

“But *how?*” Wancliffe demanded. “They behave just like ordinary Earth women, and therefore—”

Perry held his hand up for silence, went on talking.

“The genius of a Selenite brain is only produced because the moon has a sixth of the Earth’s gravity. When the Selenites were flesh and blood the lesser gravity permitted a fuller, clearer bloodstream to nourish their brains. Their brains became brilliant because they were fed by a perfect circulation that had but little gravitational drag to overcome.

“*But*, when they were given Earthly bodies they naturally had an Earthly gravity to contend with, and also an Earthly bloodstream which is nothing like so smooth as a Selenite’s. The result is that the brains are not so well nourished, no longer capable of getting those vast ideas. They’ve been defeated by a biological fact. They’ll never be clever again; they’re *earthly!*”

“Good Heavens!” Wancliffe breathed, staring at Perry blankly. “You’re right! And to think nobody thought of it—”

“Why should they? It’s the obvious thing that escapes notice.”

Perry turned aside as the scientists gathered together to talk the matter over. He laid a strong hand on Kay’s arm.

“Funny thing,” he murmured. “I don’t quite know whether I ought to ask your father’s permission to marry you, or not. After all I created you. . . .”

“My body . . . yes,” she agreed softly, “and my love I gave you from the first moment these synthetic eyes of mine saw you. Nor do I think anyone will question your title to both!”

For answer he clasped her to him and she felt him shudder slightly.

“Perry!” she uttered anxiously, “what is it?”

He answered slowly, thankfully, “It’s just that I’ve realized for the first time how truly horrible is a world without women!”

THE END

[The end of *World Without Women* by John Russell Fearn (as Thornton Ayre)]